

Signal Corps general contributed to critical Army transitions



By Jeff Jurgensen

If you had been standing near the front gate at Fort Dix, N.J. on a warm August day in 1947, you likely wouldn't have noticed the arrival of a young Army recruit by the name of Emmett Paige, Jr.

After all, it was a time when thousands of new recruits attended basic training at Fort Dix and although smart, energetic and physically fit, Emmett Paige was only 16 years old and a recent high school dropout.

He probably seemed very much like many of the other young men to his left and right who were also taking the first step on their journey to become U.S. Army Soldiers. Moreover, the Army of August 1947 was an institution in the midst of great transition.

Emerging from America's victory in World War II, Army leaders were preparing for a very different future. Leaders and planners were also responding to the profound social and cultural changes occurring across the nation.

In particular, the Army of 1947 was still officially segregated by race. In fact, it would be almost another year before President Harry Truman would issue Executive Order No. 9981, directing the integration of the Armed Forces.

Young PVT Emmett Paige,

arriving at Fort Dix for his very first day as a Soldier, was African-American, and his life and future service would be shaped by his early experiences in an Army struggling to adapt to this new era.

A Signal Corps Legend

Although few may have noticed his arrival, over the course of the next 41 years, few would fail to notice the tremendous impact Emmett Paige would have across the U.S. Army.

He may have started his service at Fort Dix without a high school diploma, but while there he achieved a perfect score on the Army's Morse code exam which led to his assignment as a Signal Corps Soldier. That test score and the assignment decision which followed would benefit the Army for decades to come.

Within five years, Paige would be commissioned as a second lieutenant and would ultimately rise to become the first African-American Signal Corps officer in Army history to be promoted to the rank of brigadier general. He would later retire in 1988 as a lieutenant general and the commanding general, U.S. Army Information Systems Command.

Throughout his exceptional career, LTG Paige would command troops at every level – from a Signal Platoon at



LTG (Ret) Emmett Paige Jr.

Fort Bliss in 1952; to company command with Company B, 9th Signal BN at Fort Carson; to a combat tour as battalion commander with the 361st Signal Battalion in the Republic of Vietnam during 1968.

In addition, as a reflection of his recognized ability as one of the Army's most capable senior leaders, LTG Paige served over 12 years as a general officer – every day of it in command of large organizations with global communications responsibilities to include the former U.S. Army Communications Systems Agency and the Communications Research and Development Command – both then located at Fort Monmouth, N.J.

Beyond his extraordinary leadership skills, LTG Paige would also have a historic impact on the technical

development of the Signal Corps during an era of rapid advancement in both communications and computer technology.

As a major back in 1965, Paige was assigned to a colonel's billet as the program manager responsible for acquiring, developing, designing and engineering the Army's complete communications system for the entire Southeast Asian region. So successful were his efforts that the Army War College described his contribution as having "... laid the foundation of military communications throughout most of the world during the Vietnam War." The AWC's history of LTG Paige's career goes on to credit him with managing and directing the development of communications and information systems in a way that would forever change the way the Army did business.

Honoring LTG Paige's contributions

LTG Paige's legacy and unique contributions were most recently recognized at a dinner held in his honor in Washington, D.C. in June 2013. Attended by senior Signal Corps General Officers and Army leaders, the event was co-hosted by GEN Dennis Via, commanding general, U.S. Army Materiel Command and the first Signal Corps officer to achieve the rank of four-star general, along with his wife Linda.



BG (P) Emmett Paige promotes Danice Crosby to Specialist 4, April 20, 1979..

"Every Signal Corps Soldier, in fact every Soldier and service member is better and more capable because of LTG Paige's impact..."

- MG Robert Ferrell

"LTG Paige is one of the true heroes of our Army and our Signal Corps," said GEN Via. "He is a gifted leader, a Soldier's Soldier and an innovator whose service set conditions for the success of today's Army and the way we communicate. Our force owes LTG Paige a tremendous debt of gratitude for his many achievements and our current warfighters are able to communicate better, faster and more effectively as a result of his legacy."

Despite the impact LTG Paige has had on the Army's communications mission, he remains a humble leader who focuses on giving credit to those around him.

"I never tried to be a star," LTG Paige once said in an interview with the American Forces Information Service. "I just gave it my best... my troops and co-workers always worked hard to make me a success. They always wanted to be recognized as the best."

In addition to LTG Paige and his wife Gloria, other attendees at the dinner included MG Robert Ferrell, commanding general, U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command and his wife Monique, along with MG (R) Bob and Valerie Nabors; MG(R) Bill and Shirley Russ; BG (Ret) Velma Richardson and COL(R) Joseph and Marolyn Simmons. All of whom were positively impacted by LTG Paige.

"Everywhere I look in today's Army, I see evidence of LTG Paige's service and incredible leadership," said MG Ferrell. "I see it in the way

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our units communicate, I see it in the skill, ability and professionalism of today's Signal Soldiers who benefit from his contributions – and most of all – I see it in a generation of Army leaders who were mentored and developed by LTG Paige. He ranks as one of the most extraordinary leaders in the history of the Signal Regiment. He was always reaching out, always willing to do whatever he could to help another Soldier be better."

Breaking barriers

Because he served during the era when the Armed Forces were struggling with the challenges of racial integration, LTG Paige was often the only African-American officer in a unit or organization. As a result, he both witnessed and experienced the injustices of discrimination, along with the way the culture of the Army changed over time.

Early in his career, LTG Paige was told by a commanding officer that in the Army racial "... integration was wrong, it wouldn't work..." Determined to change his commander's mind, LTG Paige committed to becoming the best officer and leader in the unit.

"To be just as good would cause me to be

considered below average," LTG Paige once said. "So I worked harder. I studied harder. I tried to be sure that I knew my job and everybody else's job. I read everything I could get my hands on. I survived by being the best."

LTG Paige not only changed his commander's mind, that same commander would become one of LTG Paige's strongest supporters, even attending many of his subsequent promotions and change of command ceremonies. "When I retired from the Army, he was there," LTG Paige told an Army historian. "He was proud. Nobody could have been prouder."

Despite having to overcome the challenges of discrimination, LTG Paige always had strong praise for the attitude of the troops he was privileged to lead. "The color of my skin, my race was never a factor with my troops and the people on my team."

Success beyond the Army

Following LTG Paige's 41 years in Army uniform he maintained his commitment both to public service and to supporting and developing today's generation of service members.

He went on to serve as assistant Secretary of Defense for Command, Control and

On May 1, 1981, at CECOM Organization Ceremony, MG Emmett Paige, Jr. holds the staff of his command as CORADCOM CSM Matthew Alsmann furls the colors for the last time. The U.S. Army Communications Research and Development Command had responsibility for the development and initial acquisition of command, control and communications equipment and for the research that brought new data processing and communications technologies to the service of the U.S. Army. At GEN Paige's left is MG Donald M. Babers.





BG (P) Paige, commander, speaks to members of Neptune Junior High during their visit to U. S. Army Communications Systems Agency, Fort Monmouth, N. J., May 4, 1979.

Communications in the mid-1990s and has also served as a member of the University of Maryland University College's Leadership Circle. UMUC educates many military members and LTG Paige has been actively involved in furthering the university's military scholarship program. As a tribute to his role in mentoring Army leaders, LTG Paige was also named 'ROCK of Year' in 1992, by the ROCKS, Inc., an organization dedicated to

developing and expanding opportunities for Army officers.

"LTG Paige is one of the rare leaders who make a lasting contribution no matter what organization he is a part of," concluded MG Ferrell.

"Every Signal Corps Soldier, in fact every Soldier and service member is better and more capable because of LTG Paige's impact. It was a very proud moment for me, and for all of us, just to have the opportunity to recognize him and express our deepest thanks to this great leader for all he has done on behalf of our Army and our nation."

Jeff Jurgensen is a Department of the Army civilian who currently serves with the U.S. Army Communications-Electronics Command, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md.



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