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GENERAL JAMES A. VAN FLEET

The death of General James A. Van Fleet, on 23 September 1992 in Washington, D.C., is announced with deep regret. He was a distinguished combat commander in World War I, World War II and the Korean War.

General Van Fleet was an officer of the highest ideals. His courage, sound judgement, and superb leadership produced brilliant military achievements of the greatest value to his country. With his passing the nation has lost a faithful, valiant servant, and the United States Army, a commander of great stature.

General Van Fleet was born in Coytesville, New Jersey on March 19, 1892. He entered the United States Military Academy where he was a standout fullback on the undefeated football team of 1914. He graduated and was commissioned a second lieutenant of Infantry on June 12, 1915.

Upon graduation from West Point, he was assigned to the 3rd Infantry Regiment at Madison Barracks at Sackett's Harbor on Lake Ontario. In April 1916, Lieutenant Van Fleet was ordered, as a member of "The Old Guard" to Eagle Pass, Texas, to serve under General Pershing in operations against Pancho Villa. He was subsequently promoted to first lieutenant and then captain, commanding a company in the 3rd Infantry Regiment.

In July 1918, he went to France with the 6th Division and shortly afterward assumed command of the 17th Machine Gun Battalion, with which he saw action in the Gerardmer Sector and the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Van Fleet received two Silver Stars before being wounded in action on November 4, 1918, near Sedan, France. After the Armistice, he remained on occupation duty with his battalion until its return to the United States in June 1919.

After a year with the 6th Division at Camp Grant, Illinois, he was assigned to the Reserve Offices Training Corps at Kansas State Agricultural College, Manhattan, Kansas. In January 1921, he became Professor of Military Science and Tactics at South Dakota State College, but in September of that same year moved to the University of Florida. He was also the head football coach for the Gator team.

In February, 1925, General Van Fleet was assigned as battalion

commander with the 42nd Infantry in the Panama Canal Zone. After more than two years of extensive maneuvers in the Panama Canal Zone, he returned to the United States to become an instructor at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. In 1928, he entered the Infantry School's advanced course from which he was graduated in June 1929. He then returned to the University of Florida as Professor of Military Science and Tactics. In 1933, General Van Fleet was assigned to the 5th Infantry Regiment at Fort Williams, Maine. Two years later he became an instructor with the Organized Reserves headquartered at San Diego, California.

On September 1939, he returned to Fort Benning, Georgia, to become a battalion commander in the 29th Infantry Regiment. For two years, Van Fleet was in command of an outstanding battalion whose mission was to demonstrate for students of the Infantry School the correct way for Infantry to fight.

In June 1941, he assumed command of the 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He commanded this regiment for three years, conducting rigorous combat training, amphibious exercises and maneuvers at Fort Benning; Camp Gordon; Fort Dix, New Jersey; Camp Blanding, Florida; and many other stations in this country. The regiment deployed to the European Theater in January, 1944, and was selected to spearhead the landing of the 4th Infantry Division at Utah Beach on D-Day, June 6. After fierce combat from the beach to Cherbourg, General Marshall along with Generals Eisenhower and Bradley inspected the front. On the battlefield, General Eisenhower informed General Marshall that General Van Fleet deserved great credit for his leadership and successes and that for the past several years each commander over Van Fleet had recommended that he be promoted. He asked why Van Fleet had not been promoted. Marshall replied that he had been turned down because he was an alcoholic. Eisenhower informed Marshall that Van Fleet had always been a teetotaler. It turned out that Van Fleet had been confused with another officer. His promotions came rapidly thereafter. He was assigned as assistant commander of the 2d Infantry Division and promoted to brigadier general. When General Bradley was asked to describe Van Fleet's leadership he replied, Colonel Van Fleet's leadership was "best described by the rate at which he was earning Distinguished Service Crosses—about three a day." He soon was transferred to command, in turn, the 4th Infantry Division in the Siegfried Line in late September, and the 90th Infantry Division from October 1944 to February 1945.

The 90th Infantry Division spearheaded Third Army's attack to cut off the Fortress Metz, and the crossings of both the Moselle and Saar Rivers under extremely difficult conditions. General Patton stated that the crossing

of the Moselle was the classic river crossing of all time. Early in January, the 90th Division was moved to the Bastogne Area, where it spearheaded the Third Army's counter-offensive against the Ardennes Bulge. General Van Fleet was then sent to England to command the XXIII Corps which had under it all the field units then in the United Kingdom.

On March 17th, 1945, he was placed in command of the III Corps at the Remagen Bridgehead. Under his leadership, the bridgehead was rapidly expanded. On March 26, the III Corps spearheaded the First Army's advance deep into Germany and thence north to make possible the encirclement of the Ruhr pocket. Under his direction, the III Corps attacked the east face of this pocket, and by April 16th, had taken its assigned objectives and 105,000 German prisoners. The III Corps was reassigned to the Third Army on April 17, and during the last two weeks of the war, advanded rapidly across southeast Germany to the foot of the Austrian Alps.

General Patton, in briefing a congressional delegation in his headquarters in Bad Tolz, Germany stated that Van Fleet was the best of all combat generals who served under him.

With the cessation of hostilities in Europe, General Van Fleet, with his battle-tested III Corps headquarters, was deployed in June, 1945 for the Pacific through the United States. With the arrival of V-J Day, his organization remained at Camp Polk, Louisiana until February 1946. He then was assigned to command the Second Service Command, with headquarters at Governors Island, New York. On June 7, 1946, following a reorganization of the Zone of Interior into six Army Areas, General Van Fleet was appointed deputy commanding general of the First Army at Governors Island. In December 1947, he was assigned to headquarters of the European Command at Frankfurt, Germany, and two months later was transferred to the U.S. Army Group, American Mission for Aid to Greece, with station at Athens. On February 19, 1948, he became director of the Joint U.S. Military Advisory and Planning Group in Greece, whose function was to provide operational advice to the Greek military establishment down to and including divisional level. Under his guidance and inspiring leadership the Greek military defeated and drove the Communists out of Greece. A statue of the General stands in the town square of Kastoria in Northern Greece where he had an advance headquarters. A bust of the General made by Greece's foremost sculptor is on display in the III Corps Headquarters building, named "Van Fleet Hall," at Fort Hood, Texas.

General Van Fleet returned to the United States in August, 1950 to assume command of the 2d Army at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland.

On April 11, 1951, he was appointed Commanding General of the Eighth Army and U.N. troops in Korea. General Van Fleet drove the Chinese Army north. He was ordered to halt and to go on the defensive in order to achieve an armistice. Van Fleet, shortly after his arrival in Korea, instituted a tremendous program of retraining. In this regard, he established numerous military schools: Infantry schools, Artillery schools, small unit officers schools, staff schools, and even established a war college and most important of all for leadership, a Military Academy—the "West Point of Korea." The Koreans erected a life-size bronze statue of him in front of the Military Academy and refer to him as "The Father of the Korean Army."

General Van Fleet retired from active duty in 1953. In May, June, and July 1954, General Van Fleet conducted a survey of the military, economic, and political situation in the Far East, traveling with the rank of Ambassador, as special representative of President Eisenhower.

In 1961, President Kennedy recalled the General to active service to conduct a survey of National Guard and Special Service Forces units. He also represented the United States as Ambassador at the coronation of the Shah of Iran and at the Golden Jubilee of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia.

For his exceptionally meritorious and distinguished service, General Van Fleet's awards and decorations include the Distinguished Service Cross with two oak leaf clusters; The Distinguished Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters; The Silver Star with two oak leaf clusters; The Legion of Merit with one oak leaf cluster; The Purple Heart with two oak leaf clusters; The Combat Infantryman's Badge; The Army Commendation Ribbon; The Distinguished Unit Citation; and he has received decorations from Greece, Korea, Iran, Ethiopia, Thailand, The Philippines, The Republic of China, England, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Columbia.

Upon his retirement from the military, General Van Fleet continued his service to the nation as a diplomat, businessman, author, athlete, hunter, rancher, and Floridian. Until his death, he was the oldest living flag officer in the United States Armed Forces. He died at the age of 100.

General Van Fleet's life was characterized by courage, dedication, vision, patriotism, and "The Will to Win." These qualities earned him the respect of all who knew him. The grief caused by the death of General Van Fleet is deeply shared by all members of the United States Army.

General Van Fleet is survived by his two daughters, Helen Elizabeth (widow of Colonel Edward T. McConnell) and Dempsie Catherine (wife of Major General, USA(Ret) Joseph A. McChristian), 2 grandsons, 5 grand-

daughters, and 12 great grandchildren.

[DACS–DSP]

M.P.W. STONE
Secretary of the Army

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