

## **LTG WILLIAM P. YARBOROUGH** **US Army, Retired (Deceased)**



William Yarborough was born in 1912 in Seattle, Washington, the son of Army Colonel and Intelligence Officer Leroy W. Yarborough and his wife Addressia. He graduated from West Point in 1936, and went on to serve 35 years in the US Army. Much is known about Yarborough's influence on airborne operations and Special Forces, but the "Father of the Green Berets" also had a significant role in Military Intelligence during a very contentious time in American history.

Yarborough's earliest impact on the US Army came in 1941 when, as Test Officer for the Provisional Parachute Group, he designed the paratrooper's boot and uniform and the parachutist's qualification badge. In July 1942, GEN Mark Clark selected Yarborough to be his Airborne Advisor and develop the initial plan for the

airborne phase of the North African invasion, known as Operation TORCH. Yarborough led paratroopers into battle in Algeria, Tunisia, Sicily, and Salerno and Anzio in Italy. He commanded the 509<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion which spearheaded the invasion into southern France.

Yarborough's next significant period of impact came in January 1961 when he was appointed Commander of the US Army Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. During his four-year tenure, he pioneered modern Special Forces tactics, oversaw the activation of four new groups of Special Forces, and established new courses of instruction for unconventional warfare and counter-terrorism. It was also during this period that he convinced President John F. Kennedy to authorize the Green Beret as the official headgear of the Special Forces.

Up to 1966, Yarborough had few direct connections with Military Intelligence, aside from a two-year tour as the Commander of the 66<sup>th</sup> Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) Group in Stuttgart, Germany from 1958-1960. He later stated that when he was chosen as the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (ACSI) in December 1966, "I was mystified at first as to why I had been moved into the ACSI position. I later surmised that it was because I had had intelligence experience in an operational way. I commanded the 66<sup>th</sup> CIC Group in Europe. There were some pretty active periods. They were catching a lot of spies and training. So I knew the mechanics of the sharp-end pretty well."

As the ACSI, he sat on the US Intelligence Board, chaired by Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence. Yarborough remembered that privilege: "Fantastic things were in the mill and the most brilliant people that I've ever been in contact with were evaluating and extrapolating and projecting requirements.... I was subjected to a steady stream of the most overpowering kind of intelligence that had to do with the very foundations of strategy of the country. To me this was like coming from the small corporation into the big one and I was suitably over-awed." It was at this time that US intelligence was beginning to piece together the size, shape, and capabilities of the Russian SA-5 Tallinn surface-to-air antiballistic missile system.

In addition to Cold War intelligence, Yarborough and his staff were immersed in collection efforts related to the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, he found that his West Point classmates in command in Vietnam, first GEN William Westmoreland and then GEN Creighton Abrams, did not want ACSI interference in their intelligence operations. Drawing on his Special Forces background, Yarborough lamented this later saying, "One of the things that concerned me the most was the failure to comprehend the scope, the nature, and the importance of the infrastructure.... It was fairly late in the game when the military began to recognize that the destruction of the infrastructure was of utmost importance but you had to know what it looked like first in order to do it."

Yarborough's most challenging and controversial activities in Army Intelligence occurred on the home front. His tenure as the ACSI from December 1966 to July 1968 coincided with a particularly violent period of civil unrest. Race riots and anti-war protests were growing in number. From 21 major civil disturbances in 1966, the number tripled in 1967; the National Guard was deployed in response to 25 of these disturbances. The following year, the National Guard was employed 107 times.

Yarborough remembered standing on the roof of the Pentagon looking down on the protesters in October 1967 and Chief of Staff of the Army Harold K. Johnson asking him: "Who are the ring leaders of this operation?" Yarborough responded that the Federal Bureau of Investigations had the job of collecting domestic intelligence. Not long thereafter, "instructions were transmitted to me to organize a counterintelligence system which would provide information and warning, if possible, on civil disorders" to give commanders of Federal troops better knowledge of local situations.

Yarborough expressed grave reservations about the directive. "Military intelligence or counterintelligence types are not competent to determine subversion on the part of American citizens. We can do this in overseas areas against alien infiltration into the US system. But to separate a legitimate American protester from an American subversive...was not possible. But I felt my orders were clear and I proceeded to organize, as best I could, a counterintelligence structure which could support the deployment of the Army in cases where it came to that."

As a result, the US Army Intelligence Command issued the Department of Army Civil Disturbance Information Collection Plan to increase the quantity and quality of information related to "potential and probable trouble areas and trouble makers." The

plan stressed that anti-war and racial movements were made up primarily of sincere Americans, but some individuals still meant to exploit these situations for violence. To ensure violence could be quelled rapidly, the plan authorized only the collection of information “needed to exercise honest and sound judgment of the measures to be taken” to ensure the fundamental rights of peaceful citizens were protected from those determined to violate them.

The Collection Plan was almost immediately called into question when, in 1970, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a suit against the US Army Intelligence Command for “spying on civilians.” The Army immediately stopped its collection activities, destroyed all civil disturbance and civilian biographical data, and rescinded the Civil Disturbance Information Collection Plan. Over the next two years, a series of Senate hearings on violations of civil liberties by government authorities resulted in the inactivation of three Army Intelligence groups and closure of 250 military intelligence offices in the continental US. All service-connected background investigations were centralized under the new civilian Defense Investigative Service (DIS) and control of criminal investigative files turned over to the new US Army Criminal Investigative Command. Only in overseas locations did Army counterintelligence personnel continue to perform personnel security investigations in support of the new DIS.

Looking back on his tumultuous 19 months as ACSI nearly 25 years later, Yarborough commented, “If during this period some mistakes were made in the use of Federal military resources to address domestic civil disorders, the reason can be traced to both the complexity of the situations and to individual human error—not to official policy. The very last thing that our people in the uniform of the United States Army wish to be called upon to do, is to become involved in internal security matters with our own citizens. It should be comforting to know, however, that they are available in national emergencies.”

After leaving the ACSI position, Yarborough was promoted to Lieutenant General and assigned first as Commanding General, I Corps (Group) in Korea and then Deputy Commander/Chief of Staff, US Army Pacific Command. He retired in 1971, but remained active as a guest speaker on military power and military history. He authored two books: *Bail*



*Out Over North Africa and So You Want a Volunteer Army.*

LTG Yarborough passed away in December 2005 at the age of 93. His contributions to Special Forces and Military Intelligence have been remembered: he was inducted into the MI Corps Hall of Fame in 1988 and as a Distinguished Member of the Special Forces Regiment in 2009. A bronze bust of the general was installed at the Airborne and Special Operations Museum in Fayetteville, North Carolina. In addition, the knife presented to every Special Forces Soldier who completes the Qualification course is named the Yarborough Knife.