

The General Bernard Rogers Era

'Bernie' Rogers arrived at Fort Carson as a Brigadier General, but was promptly promoted to Major General, commanding Fort Carson AND the 5th - soon 4th - Mechanized Infantry Division.

He was a remarkable man and soldier. He was Class of 1943 at West Point, where he had become 'First Captain' - highest ranking cadet. He became a Rhodes Scholar, and he served in the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam as its Deputy Commander where he won his only combat medal - a Silver Star. And he did not follow the footsteps of many others by becoming Airborne or Ranger qualified, a distinction he and I shared. Before he was selected for command at Fort Carson and its Mechanized Division, he had been Commandant of Cadets at West Point.

It was that last assignment that prepared him for the challenge of Fort Carson and its great turbulence and soldier, even officer, problems

more than any other prior assignment.

That was because, even at West Point, by the late 60's he saw how the youth of American, even as incoming carefully selected cadets, had changed, had become resistant to arbitrary authority, traditional rules and regulations they thought irrelevant, and were more free spirited. He saw that they were a mirror of the changes going on in society - good and bad. They were from a different, newer generation of Americans.

Rogers was smart enough to apply that insight to the tough job of running both Fort Carson, with its several thousand Federal civilian employees, its specialized units like the 43d Logistical Support Group, the independent 52d Construction Engineer Battalion, separate Aviation Company with military helicopters and fixed wing aircraft, apart from the 16,000 man 4th Mechanized Infantry Division itself which had the largest number of returning draft soldiers who greatly reflected the societal

changes going on.

He brought two key officers to Fort Carson.

One was Brigadier General Dewitt Smith, a non West Pointer who even had an unusual background, having been a writer for the New York Times in his younger days. He was a quiet officer and an original thinker who would give his best independent advice to General Rogers. And he had served in Armored forces in Europe. So knew tracks.

Then Rogers had asked the Army Chief of Information to send him the best Public Information Officer he could find. For Rogers was acutely aware of how Fort Carson, its soldiers, and the Army were perceived in those dark and controversial days of the Vietnam War. That officer was Lieutenant Colonel George Barante, a non regular Army officer with a keen eye for public impressions, and with a williness to do original things to influence public opinions. He was an original tough minded New Yorker who also understood media and the

press.

Barante and I got along fine from the git go.

I liked General Rogers after my first meeting with him. He seemed to regard me as not only professional in my G-3 Duties, and one who, in Korea, had learned the hard lessons for Americans in combat, but also as one who could and would think 'outside of the box' to address problems - just as he did.

Just about the time he arrived on Post, the new Chief of Staff of the Army, General Westmoreland, (who had taken Harvard business school courses about 'management') decreed that on large Army Posts there should be just one integrated staff for both the Combat Units and the Post staff - i.e. the Deployable Military Unit, and the Permanent Post Staff.

So I suddenly found myself, as the senior Lt Colonel in the G-3 section for the Mechanized Division with its mission to get ready for European wars, but also making training plans

for all the Non-Divisional Units who had different missions. A Lt Colonel just junior to me - Dutch Nelson - did much of that work. If the Division had to ship out for Europe, and I had to leave with it, Dutch would stay and run the 'Hotel' operations so to speak, of Fort Carson, for the remaining-behind units.

It was going to be hard work for me to be on top of both as well deal with the Regional Army elements who were starting to modify and try to expand Fort Carson's training areas to accomodate the novel Mechanized Division.

General Rogers continued to retain for a few months, the prior Chief of Staff of both the Division and Post who had served Gleszer - an older, but experienced, Airborne, full colonel, to whom all staff officers reported.

But big changes were in the air, driven by General Rogers. In many ways the fact that the Commanding General of the Division - where the problems and serious war-missions were - and many of the social 'community' solutions

were - controlled both, was fortunate. Unity of Command, a profoundly important Principle of War - in both combat and in large peacetime organizations. The place the Buck Stops at the top.

I found myself right in the middle of the changes implemented by Rogers, while the 'integrated' staff and command structure made it a little easier to deal - from the top - with the totality of the large 'community' that was Carson.