

Sergeant Major of the Army George W. Dunaway (Ret.)

The Second Sergeant Major of the Army

SGM Michael G. Hawkins

“The American Soldier...is unbeatable in war. We cannot give the American Soldier too much credit...He deserves everything we can do for him and he deserves all the respect we can show him. They perform their duties magnificently and bravely. They don’t make policies, and they don’t declare war. But they fight, they bleed and they die. And they do it unhesitatingly.” – Former Sergeant Major of the Army George W. Dunaway in a 1990 interview with the Center of Military History on the American Soldier. (Sparks 33)

I met the 2nd Sergeant Major of the Army, George Dunaway in the fall of 2002 in Las Vegas, NV. He is a small man in stature, but he fills a room with his presence. I was there for a military conference as a member of the 104th Training Division. Dunaway lives in Las Vegas, and a member of my unit who knew him, asked if he would speak to the group, he readily agreed. He talked about his career and about the state of the army at that time. What really stood out to me was his commitment to taking care of the troops. For him it was not a mantra, but a way of life. Throughout his career, he has worked on building troop morale and has been very successful. The following is a brief summary of SMA Dunaway’s military career.

George Dunaway was born July 24, 1922 in Richmond VA. He was the third child out of six and was raised a Baptist by strict, loving parents, his father was a postal worker and his mother was a housewife. During high school he lettered in baseball and football, with baseball being his favorite sport. George Dunaway did not graduate high school, as he dropped out in the tenth grade to help support his family; he later completed a General Equivalency Diploma program while stationed at Ft Benning, GA, (Koehler 7).

At 17 years, six months of age, Dunaway joined the Virginia National Guard, A Company, 176th Light Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division. He did not join out of any sense of patriotic duty or national pride; he joined because he knew the soldiers of the unit, including the company commander. By being friends with many in the unit, he wanted to be part of the organization where everyone in town would come out and see them off on maneuvers.

Within six months of joining the National Guard, Dunaway's unit was activated and sent to Ft Meade, MD. It was at Ft Meade that SMA Dunaway got his first formal training as an Infantryman. For 18 weeks, his unit trained in basic combat skills, since most of the younger soldiers had only been trained by On the Job Training. All training was conducted by the Noncommissioned Officers (NCO) corps, Corporals and above.

After his Infantryman training, Dunaway's unit began training draftees using the knowledge they had just learned. He continued in this capacity until August of 1943 when he re-enlisted in the active army and volunteered for Airborne School (which began his illustrious career as an Airborne Soldier). While he was stationed at Ft Benning, Dunaway attended his first NCO Academy (the 18 week Noncommissioned Officers Leadership Course), holding the rank of Sergeant First Class (E-6). At that time, all NCO academies were local and the one he attended was a Regimental NCO Academy.

In 1950, Dunaway was involved in a special assignment mission. He, along with about a battalion's worth of men, were flown from Ft Bragg, NC to Las Vegas, NV to participate in an exercise named "Tower Blast," the explosion of an A-bomb. The selected soldiers were placed in a trench approximately 3 miles from ground zero. They were given dark glasses. After the test, the soldiers were returned to their units. Even though, he

personally, has experienced no known ill affects from the test, he is sure other soldiers have (Koehler, 55).

Dunaway was assigned to Airborne School as an instructor. After several other schools and over 75 jumps, Dunaway served his first combat tour in Germany and France in 1945, from January to November. It was during this tour that he received his first CIB and a Bronze Star.

Between June 1961 and June 1966, Dunaway was the Group Command Sergeant Major (CSM) for 1st Special Forces Group in Okinawa. Normally, when a soldier is assigned to a Special Forces unit, they must be a graduate of the Special Forces qualification (or “Q”) course. Dunaway had not been through any Special Forces training, but during his time with 1st Group, through additional training, he was given all the skills needed to be a competent SF NCO.

Dunaway was almost killed during one of these training sessions. He was on a water parachute training exercise and when he hit the water, his chute began to fill with water and drag him under. Since it was a training exercise, there were spotters in boats and one of them observed what was happening. The spotter jumped in the water and saved his life. If this had been a combat mission, or had he not been seen by the spotter, we would have had a different 2nd Sergeant Major of the Army.

His second combat tour was in Vietnam from June 1966 to June 1967. Dunaway was assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group as the Group Command Sergeant Major. Here he earned his second CIB.

While the CSM of 5th Special Forces Group, Dunaway became famous for two phrases used throughout 5th SFG, the “Dunaway Blazer” and “Bag and Baggage”. The first

refers to the blazer he introduced for all 5th SFG soldiers to wear. He did not require to any soldier to buy the blazer, never the less, all wanted one, because of the pride it stood for. The term “bag and baggage” was used when a soldier had messed up and was going to be transferred out of the unit. Everyone knew what was coming when Dunaway requested a soldier to report to him with “bag and baggage” (Koehler 65).

After leaving the Special Forces community, Dunaway was assigned as the division CSM of the 101st Airborne Division at Ft Campbell, KY. It was there that he served his third combat tour. This tour was also in Vietnam from December 1967 to July 1968. According to Dunaway, when he reported to the 101st Division Commander, Major General Olinto M. Barsanti, Dunaway was carrying a swagger stick that he had been carrying since becoming a Sergeant Major. MG Barsanti’s first words to were “You’ll need a bigger stick than that in this division.” (Koehler 34)

Dunaway’s first order of business when he became the 2nd Sergeant Major of the Army was to start visiting troops in the field. Although he was not able to visit all installations, he did visit a majority of them. During his tenure as Sergeant Major of the Army, SMA Dunaway either instituted or was instrumental in the institution of several policies. One was the policy where the Enlisted Personnel Director (EPD) would give all Command Sergeant Major assignments to the SMA for final approval. This policy came about when CSM Leon Van Autreve was overlooked for his next assignment after his tour in Vietnam. CSM Autreve asked SMA Dunaway to look into the matter. SMA Dunaway found out that it was an oversight and had it fixed, sending him to Alaska as the USARAL CSM. A Brigadier General, who worked in EPD, changed the assignment and told SMA Dunaway that EPD made assignments, not the SMA and that CSM Autreve was going to a

Battalion in Texas. Unfortunately for the BG, SMA Dunaway had the backing of the Army Chief of Staff, General Westmorland. Had General Westmorland not backed SMA Dunaway, CSM Autreve would not have become the 4th SMA as he would have ended up working for a Lieutenant Colonel at the battalion level and the one of the requirements for being the Sergeant Major of the Army is you need to have worked directly for a General Officer prior to being selected for SMA.

He also had the Department of the Army staff inform him of any proposed policy changes that would directly affect enlisted personnel. The SMA can make recommendations and influence these policies before they are approved. Another big change that was the direct result of SMA Dunaway's influence was the re-establishment of celebrating the Army's birthday every year. Before it was only being recognized every ten years.

In addition to the several accomplishments that Dunaway can point to in his military service, there are several that are not listed in his biography. During his military career, Dunaway taught Sunday school, managed a little league baseball team, was President of the local PTA, President of the Board of Governors of the NCO club system and was the supervisor of the Post Thrift Shop (Koehler 60).

On September 30 1970, after over 30 years of service, SMA Dunaway retired from the Army and moved with his wife to Las Vegas where he is still active in several military organizations. As he looked back over his stellar career, he had a couple of regrets. One being, that he did not truly understand the importance of the NCOES school system. Instead of sending the best and brightest, units would send soldiers they wanted to get out of the unit for a time (Koehler 119).

Works Cited

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