



J. W. Morris

JOHN W. MORRIS

1921–2013

Elected in 1979

“Leadership in the conduct of engineering programs of national significance.”

BY HENRY HATCH AND HANS VAN WINKLE

The nation lost a patriot and a great engineer with the passing of LTG(R) JOHN WOODLAND MORRIS, who died August 20, 2013, at the age of 91.

Born September 10, 1921, to John Earl and Alice Morris in Princess Anne, Maryland, Jack graduated from Charlotte Hall Military Academy and then attended Western Maryland College. In July 1940 he entered the US Military Academy at West Point, where he was a cadet captain and superintendent of Sunday Schools, and lettered in track, a sport at which he excelled. Because of World War II, his class was accelerated and he graduated June 6, 1943, a year early, as a second lieutenant in the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

He was assigned to Guam to oversee the construction of airfields for B-29 Superfortresses raiding Japan. At war's end, he was assigned to the Philippines where he met 1st Lieutenant Geraldine (Gerry) Ludwig, a flight nurse in the Army Air Corps and native of Wilmington, North Carolina. She had attended James Walker School of Nursing and was a registered nurse. They were married May 12, 1947, at St. John's Episcopal Church in Wilmington.

General Morris had highly successful assignments, in both the USACE and the Army. He commanded the 8th Engineer Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division in Korea, and 18th Engineer

Brigade during combat operations in Vietnam; and he served as a regimental commander and deputy commandant of cadets at the Military Academy. At the Pentagon he used his considerable skills as deputy chief of legislative liaison, a key position that links the military with Congress.

His USACE assignments were weighted heavily toward civil works. His first was as assistant district engineer in the Savannah District, Georgia. Later, as district engineer for the Tulsa District, he was highly instrumental in bringing navigation to Oklahoma through construction of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Waterway. While there he quickly developed the low-key, humor-laced, friendly and approachable personality that endeared him to citizens of the Southwest and their political leaders. Later, these skills served him well as the Missouri River division engineer in Omaha.

Subsequently assigned to the Corps Headquarters in Washington, DC, he became director of civil works, responsible for the Corps's construction, operations, maintenance, and regulatory functions throughout the United States. These functions included navigation, both deep channel and inland, flood control, and other water-related services such as recreational use and water supply.

The Army recognized his tremendous accomplishments and potential by first selecting him as deputy chief of engineers and then in 1976 as 44th chief of engineers, when he got his third star as a lieutenant general. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment in this role was convincing the Department of the Army to include USACE as one of its major commands. This increased the Corps's stature in the Department of Defense and helped pave the way for its leadership in military and national affairs.

As chief of engineers, Jack's service and accomplishments were crowned with multiple awards and widespread recognition. He was elected to the National Academy of Engineering, the National Academy of Construction, and Tau Beta Pi, the national engineering honor society. In 1996 he received the Carroll H. Dunn Award of Excellence from the Construction Industry Institute, its highest award, and was

selected by his NAE peers for the prestigious Founders Award (since renamed the Simon Ramo Founders Award). The Army Engineer Association chose him for its highest award, the Gold de Fleury Medal (1997), and he was elected a distinguished member of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). ASCE also selected him for its most prestigious individual award, the Outstanding Projects and Leaders (OPAL) award for lifetime achievement in government (2010). His many military decorations include the Distinguished Service Medal, the Army's highest noncombat decoration, and multiple awards of the Legion of Merit. In 1977 he was named "Construction Man of the Year" by *Engineering News-Record*, the same year he was recognized as Outstanding Engineer of the Year by both the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society—these simultaneous awards have never been replicated. Among all his honors, none was more cherished than his selection in 1989 as a Distinguished Graduate of the US Military Academy.

General Morris was creative and innovative. With the consent of and financial help from Congress he dispatched a venerable Corps workboat, the *Sergeant Floyd*, to carry the Corps story far and wide along the nation's vast inland waterways during the nation's bicentennial celebration. His campaign, "The Corps Cares," mobilized the Corps workforce, military and civilian, and energized and inspired them to expand and improve their proud performance. He had a new idea a minute—not all of them winners, but in total a list of massive importance.

He retired with full military honors in 1980 after 37 years of dedicated service. His selection of music to be played at the parade marking the conclusion of his military career tends to say it all. After the Ruffles and Flourishes and traditional military march music, the US Army Band, at General Morris' request, concluded by playing Frank Sinatra's "I Did It My Way." A simpler and more fitting tribute to his military service could not be imagined.

Desiring continued involvement in professional engineering, General Morris started his own consulting firm in Arlington, Virginia. He was so sensitive to even a hint of

impropriety that he rejected offers from companies in the industry with which he had dealt while in the Corps, hence his decision to go it alone. His decision was a good one and the firm prospered, providing consulting services to over 50 firms, many from overseas. Engagements were wide and varied; one of the most interesting was the firm's selection to develop and present the state of Oklahoma's proposal for design and construction of the Superconducting Super Collider in 1987. Texas got the job, but the Oklahoma proposal was praised for its quality.

Jack was active in the academic world as well. He wrote a course of instruction for a master's degree in construction engineering management and was its first chair at the University of Maryland. The university has since established an annual scholarship in his name for a graduate student in the Department of Engineering; it provides full tuition with preference for students who are active duty, reserve, or prior military service.

Active as he was, he found time to volunteer with the Boy Scouts of America Council and with other professional, civic, and charitable institutions. He was a member of the National Research Council's Water Science and Technology Board and the committees on Flood Control Alternatives in the American River Basin, on Architect-Engineer Responsibilities, and on Inspection for Quality Control on Federal Construction Projects, among others.

Jack, or "the general" as his friends referred to him, was devoted to his lovely wife, Gerry, and their children. Because of her failing health he moved in 2004 to Plantation Village Senior Living Community in Wilmington, North Carolina, where he remained active and engaged. He visited Gerry every day until her death in 2006, and felt the pain of her passing for the rest of his life. He was a member of All Saints Anglican Parish.

General Morris was buried at the US Military Academy on September 4, 2013. He is survived by daughter Susan M. Nelson (James A.); son John W. Morris III (Tamelia); grandchildren

John Nelson, Jessica M. Friley (James), Chelsea Morris, and John W. Morris IV; and great-grandson Damon Friley.

The Corps, the Army, and the nation lost one of their most distinguished military engineers.