

# LT. GEN. JAMES M. GAVIN, WORLD WAR II HERO, DIES AT 82

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By Richard Pearson  
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Retired Army Lt. Gen. James M. Gavin, 82, a former ambassador to France and an architect of the Peace Corps who was one of the greatest American combat leaders of World War II, died Feb. 23 at a Baltimore nursing home. He had Parkinson's disease.

During World War II, he served in and then led the legendary 82nd Airborne (All-American) Division. He made four combat jumps with the unit -- into Sicily, onto the beach of Salerno, behind enemy lines in Normandy on D-Day and into the Netherlands -- that are among the most dangerous and famous in airborne annals.

Along the way, Gen. Gavin was twice awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Army's highest award for valor after the Medal of Honor, two Silver Stars, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

Orphaned before the age of 2, he enlisted in the Army Coast Artillery at the age of 17, with only a grade school education. He then began a remarkable career. Entering the U.S. Military Academy at West Point by examination in 1925, he graduated four years later. In 1940, he was only a captain, but he became an apostle of the new airborne doctrine. By September 1943, he was a brigadier general, and the next year he became the Army's youngest division commander in the war.

After World War II, he held staff and command assignments in this country and Europe. He was promoted to lieutenant general in 1955 and named Army deputy chief of staff and chief of research and development. In those posts, he became a critic of the Eisenhower administration's defense policies.

He was critical of the Army's failure to pursue advanced missile technology and of over-reliance on advanced hardware, especially nuclear weapons, at the expense of conventional forces. He also said that inept Pentagon policies enabled the Soviets to launch the world's first orbiting satellite.

His disenchantment with the Army was such that he reportedly turned down a guarantee of a fourth star within 14 months, and a choice of interim assignments, to retire from active duty in 1958.

He then joined Arthur D. Little Inc., a worldwide Cambridge, Mass.-based industrial research and management consulting organization, as a vice president. He rose to executive vice president, board member, president, chief executive officer and, finally, board chairman. He retired in 1977.

Before 1960, he and then-Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey proposed the creation of what became the Peace Corps. In 1961, Gen. Gavin led the inaugural parade of his friend, President John F. Kennedy, then served a short time as

ambassador to France. He returned to the public eye in the mid-1960s as a persuasive and brilliant critic of the Johnson administration's Vietnam policies, based on his extensive World War II combat record.

In 1940, Gen. Gavin was assigned to West Point as a tactics instructor. While teaching that discipline, he also studied the new German panzer tactics. Combining armor, mechanized infantry and air support, the Germans had unleashed a seemingly unbeatable weapon that was in the process of overrunning much of Europe with little opposition. Gen. Gavin let it be known that airborne troops might be part of an answer.

After graduating from the Army Parachute School and the Army Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, he took command of the 82nd Airborne Division's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. His regiment spearheaded the invasion of Sicily when it jumped into the hills behind the beaches on July 9, 1943. Two days later, Gen. Gavin won his first Distinguished Service Cross, which cited him for his display of "cool, courageous leadership" and "inspiring his men by his heroic example." He personally led a small part of the regiment against a much superior German force of infantry and armor.

On Sept. 14, 1943, with the Allied invasion of Salerno, the first assault on mainland Europe was hanging by a thread. "Operation Avalanche," the invasion to secure the great port of Naples, had taken place on Sept. 9, and Allied troops were stalled on the beaches. An anxious Allied commander, Gen. Mark Clark, called for reinforcements. British battleships from Malta trundled up to give fire support from 15-inch guns, but Clark wanted infantry, and on the beaches fast.

A measure of Allied desperation was the attempt that airborne units, including Gen. Gavin and his regiment, made to turn the tide. Flying from bases in Sicily and North Africa, airborne troops flew over the Allied armada and parachuted directly onto the embattled beach, then advanced into the fight. Nothing of the kind had been tried before.

On Sept. 22, Gen. Gavin got his first star and was named assistant division commander. D-Day found him commanding the division's three parachute regiments as they dropped well behind the beaches to prevent German reinforcements and supplies from reaching Omaha and Utah beaches. Dependent upon air resupply, the 82nd fought, completely surrounded, until relieved by advancing Allied units.

Gen. Gavin received his second Distinguished Service Cross when, during a fight on June 9, he took command of a shattered battalion, reorganized its command, and then personally led it in a counterattack. The citation for this award, noting his command from an exposed position, cited his "courage, personal bravery and outstanding leadership."

On Aug. 15, 1944, he was named commander of the 82nd Airborne. The next month, the division participated in the huge, if ill-planned, drop near Nijmegen in the Netherlands. The division also fought in the Battle of the Bulge and in central Germany before becoming an early occupation force in Berlin.

During the war, the 82nd Airborne was recognized as one of this country's elite divisions. It had fought in what were probably America's greatest battles of the European war. And its last commander, Gen. Gavin, became

something of a legend of his own.

Known variously as "Jumpin' Jim" or "Slim Jim," he was remembered as a general who commanded from the front with a carbine in hand and as an officer renowned for his calmness in battle.

After leaving the Army, he became a very successful businessman in a highly technical game. The fighting general also was recognized as a thinking general. He was active in the Council on Foreign Relations and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and was a life trustee of Tufts University and a fellow of Harvard University's Center of International Affairs. He wrote such books as "Airborne Warfare," "War and Peace in the Space Age" and his 1978 memoirs, "On to Berlin."

As ambassador to France, a post he held from 1961 to 1962 and again from 1962 to 1963, he was not a notable success. Most critics pointed out that President Kennedy had managed to find an ambassador who could not speak French well and had appointed a former general. The French president, Charles deGaulle, was known to dislike non-Francophones and "military" ambassadors. And, as Gen. Gavin noted in retiring after a year, the ambassador to France had to be independently wealthy, and he was not.

Gen. Gavin was a leading architect of the successful helicopter-borne units and Army airborne tactics used in Vietnam, but he was an early critic of the conflict. He attacked the administration for fighting an unwinnable war, saying that the best military strategy to follow would be to withdraw American forces to "enclaves" in towns and along the coast that could be easily defended.

He toured Vietnam for 10 days in 1967 and returned to tell a group that "we are in a tragedy." He called for seeking negotiations "by every means available" and argued that the struggle in Southeast Asia could allow the Soviets to steal a march on us in the Middle East.

His first marriage, to Irma Gavin, ended in divorce.

Survivors include his wife, Jean Emert Gavin, of the homes in Winter Park, Fla., and Wianno, Mass.; their four daughters, Caroline Gavin of Weston, Conn., Patricia Gavin of Towson, Md., Aileen Lewis of Baltimore and Chloe Beatty of Riverside, Conn.; a daughter by his first marriage, Barbara Fauntleroy of New Canaan, Conn.; nine grandchildren; and a great-grandchild.

## JOHN PARKER HILLS

Lawyer

John Parker Hills, 54, a former Justice Department lawyer who specialized in pollution control and later established a private practice in Maryland, died of cancer Feb. 22 at his home in Annapolis.

Mr. Hills was born in Cambridge, Mass. He graduated from Brown University and earned a law degree at Washington & Lee University. He practiced law in Memphis before moving to the Washington area and joining the Justice Department in 1970.

A senior trial lawyer in the pollution control section of the land division at Justice, Mr. Hills tried a number of cases involving water pollution. In 1974, he was made senior staff attorney to the President's Council on Environmental Quality.

In 1975, he established a private law practice in Beltsville. He later moved his office to Upper Marlboro and then to Annapolis.

Mr. Hills was a member of the Beltsville Rotary Club, the board of the Arundel Hospice in Mitchellville, and the Shearwater Sailing Club of Annapolis. He also was a volunteer boating safety instructor for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Survivors include his wife, Pamela P. Quinn of Annapolis; two children, John Hills of Annapolis and Mary Alice Hills of Knoxville, Tenn., and his mother, Hilda Hills, and a sister, Mary Munroe, both of Tucson.

## JONATHAN S. JESSAR

### Public Relations Executive

Jonathan S. Jessar, 46, vice chairman of Cassidy & Associates, a Washington public relations firm, died Feb. 22 at Sibley Memorial Hospital after a heart attack.

Mr. Jessar, who lived in Washington, was a native of Philadelphia and a graduate of Temple University. He served in the Army from 1966 to 1969. He then did public relations work in New York until 1975, when he transferred to the Washington office of Hill & Knowlton Inc.

In 1980 he took a leave of absence and served as chief of staff of communications for the Reagan-Bush campaign. In 1981, he was a founding member of Gray & Co., a public relations firm. Two years later he became executive vice president and director of the Washington office of Burson-Marsteller. He joined Cassidy & Associates in 1989.

Mr. Jessar was a member of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, the Ward Foundation, the International Club and the Capitol Hill Club.

Survivors include his wife, Gayle Harrison Jessar of Washington; his mother, Betty Jessar of Philadelphia; a sister, Judy Stauffer of Edgewater Park, N.J., and two brothers, David Jessar of Dresher, Pa., and Philip Jessar of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

## LINWOOD E. SIMMONS JR.

### D.C. Police Officer

Linwood Edward Simmons Jr., 53, a D.C. police officer for 10 years before retiring in 1969 as a detective, died Feb. 22 at a hospital in Charleston, S.C., after a heart attack. He lived in Summerville, S.C.