

From "obsolescent general" to our No. 1 soldier—here's an intimate glimpse of the pivotal man in the Pentagon

By JACK RYAN

to change this permanently and figured fate was on his side when he learned only 30 minutes separated them in age. ("A fact he never lets me forget," Mrs. Lydia Taylor says nowadays.) Nevertheless, fate took its time. Or as Mrs. Taylor puts it: "It was many boy friends and girl friends later before we married."

For many ambitious young officers, the Army of the '30s meant mostly slow promotions, unexciting posts, and seeming stagnation. But not for the Taylors. Mrs. Taylor recalls only one major disadvantage: "In 37 years, we made 31 moves. When our sons, Jack and Tom, were young, this was particularly bad. The younger, Tom, went to eight schools in four years."

Taylor waited five years for his first promotion, and it wasn't until 1935 that he was made captain. The years weren't wasted, though. The intellectual qualities recognized at West Point were being finely honed. Taylor became a postgraduate of several Army "think" schools, and military tours took him throughout the world. For relaxation, he continued studies in the classics.

World War II and the Big Action

In those years, he had held only one command post. When we entered World War II, however, Major Taylor lost no time in finding an outfit—and action.

As a division chief of staff and later a brigadier general, he helped develop our first airborne force and went into the Sicilian and Italian campaigns as artillery commander of the 82nd Airborne Division. On Sept. 7, 1943, he met a history-making test. The Italians had earlier signed a surrender, and within 48 hours some 2,000 American airborne troops were scheduled to seize Rome from the German garrison. One question plagued General Eisenhower: could this force take the Eternal City by surprise? The man sent to find out was Brig. Gen. Maxwell Taylor, accompanied by Col. William T. Gardiner of the Air Corps.

By corvette, PT boat, and curtained ambulance, the two were smuggled into Rome to confer with Marshal Badoglio about Italian support. Taylor realized now that help was imperative: he had seen the Germans strengthening the Rome garrison. But the Italians were uncertain. They wanted more time. Each procrastination brought the airborne troops closer to H-hour.

Even today Taylor says: "It was the toughest decision of my career. First, because I wanted to take the Eternal City with airborne troops. But second, because it was my decision alone—no advisers, reports, staff discussions. Mine alone."

The decision made, Taylor radioed two pre-arranged words to Eisenhower: "Situation innocuous." Within hours of take-off, Taylor had killed the daring plan, and 2,000 Americans had been saved from a disastrous drop.

General Eisenhower has said: "The risks (General Taylor) ran were greater than I asked any other agent or emissary to undertake during the war—he carried weighty responsibilities and discharged them with unerring judgment, and

every minute he was in imminent danger of discovery and death."

Eight months later, Taylor was the do-it-yourself commander of the 101st Airborne Division parachuting into France six hours before the main D-Day landings at Utah Beach. Fog and winds dispersed his men, and he found himself alone in black alien countryside. He recalls:

"After 20 minutes of prowling around and playing cops and robbers with the Germans, I heard someone moving on the other side of the hedgerow—German or American? Then I heard a little click-click (the division's recognition signal). I gave a click-click in return. We met at the corner of the hedge. No soldier ever looked more beautiful than that tough paratrooper private with his M-1 rifle, bayonet fixed."

Taylor soon rounded up about 70 men. Unfortunately, most were majors, colonels, and one general, McAuliffe. "We had a lot of rank but nobody to go out with M-1 rifles and chase Germans," Taylor says ruefully. "Never were so few led by so many." Nevertheless, by dawn this strange force was on the move; it took its first objective, Pouppeville, on schedule, and the 101st was on its way to one of the most outstanding divisional records of the war.

Mrs. Taylor recalls another momentous day. "The General had returned to Washington at General Marshall's order to see some new troop-carrying planes. It was Christmas, 1944, and we were looking forward to a family get-together. Then we heard that the 101st had been surrounded at Bastogne by the German breakthrough. The General became deeply distressed. 'I must rejoin them,' he kept saying. But because of the weather there was trouble getting a plane, and we reminded him about the family get-together. 'I have 10,000 sons over there,' he said."

A Simple Case of Bravery

Taylor wheedled a transatlantic flight, intending to parachute into the besieged 101st area. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith refused permission as "too dangerous," so Taylor commandeered a jeep and driver and found an open road through the battle lines. "It was a hairy drive," says one of his longtime aides. "Either side could have blasted him—but what the devil, if you can't do things like that, you shouldn't be in this business."

After the war, there was distinguished service in Berlin, West Point, and Korea. West Point remembers him as a commandant who recharged the academic atmosphere for cadets and trimmed down faculty fat. In the gymnasium, he had installed a scale and sign: "This scale is to remind the officers at West Point that a potbelly cannot lead the Corps of Cadets."

The sign is not visible at the Pentagon today, but the idea is, hence the crowded gym and the pack of dietary food near most desks.

In June, 1955, Taylor was appointed Army Chief of Staff, fought the continuous battle of Washington—and suffered his first defeat. On one side was a group, led by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, which advocated massive

retaliation as our best defense. The "big bang" philosophers believed that if we concentrated on building a huge nuclear arsenal, nobody would dare attack us. Taylor acknowledged the importance of nuclear weapons but felt we were putting all our eggs in one basket. What good was an A-bomb in guerrilla warfare? Or an H-bomb in brush-fire wars? If an ally asked our aid against a Communist revolution, were we going to drop a nuclear device on the country?

After four years of "the usual 4-to-1 split against me," Taylor quit the Joint Chiefs of Staff with this farewell to arms: "My success has been definitely limited. I can do only one more thing for the cause—withdraw an obsolescent general from the military inventory."

Today Taylor says, "I meant what I said then—under those conditions I was indeed obsolete. And if those conditions existed today, I would have to do the same. But the climate is different here now."

After retirement, Taylor put his views into the book, "The Uncertain Trumpet." They were read by an impressed Sen. John F. Kennedy. When, as President, Mr. Kennedy found himself in trouble over the aborted Bay of Pigs invasion, he appointed Taylor Special Military Adviser to the White House. Last October, Mr. Kennedy named



At home, the General watches Mrs. Taylor at her favorite hobby—raising African violets.

him Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, just in time to join the celebrated executive committee on the Cuban crisis. On a table in Taylor's home is a gift from the President, a sterling silver calendar of October, 1962, with the days of crisis in black.

The Taylors now live at Fort Myer, Va., in an old-fashioned red-brick building on the post. It is notable for a breathtaking view across the Potomac to the Capitol and for sunny rooms furnished with pieces collected from all over the world—and a simple portrait, too, that of the late Milton Davenport.

(Continued on page 10)