

A Tribute to COL Herbert Kenigsberg

By COL Alan Beitler '77, Jewish Community Council President

The 1970's were a pivotal time for the West Point Jewish Community. Compulsory worship ended at the service academies and mandatory Jewish Sunday gatherings in the Old Cadet Chapel became a thing of the past. Services were moved to Friday nights in 420 Bartlett Hall, a chemistry lecture room "adorned" with a roll-away ark. Rabbi Avraham Soltes served the community on a part-time basis, but unlike today, there was no full-time member of the clergy to guide the Jewish community. As a result, the day to day leadership of the program fell to the Jewish Lay Leader and during the 1970's, the Academy was blessed with a string of extraordinary gentlemen. Two currently serve on the West Point Jewish Chapel Fund Board of Directors – President and CEO, Terry Bresnick and Colonel (Retired) Peter Gleichenhaus. From June 1975 through June 1977, the Jewish Community was expertly led by LTC Herbert Kenigsberg.

Colonel Kenigsberg and his wife Norma were instrumental in the success of the Jewish program during that period. Warm, gracious, highly accomplished and extremely humble, the Kenigsbergs worked tirelessly on behalf of the community. As a former cadet from that era, I have fond memories of LTC Kenigsberg leading services. His words were always insightful and extremely relevant for those of us wrestling with cadet life. Behind the scenes, his efforts were instrumental in a number of endeavors of great importance to the Jewish community. These included the ceremony that granted the rights of entry for construction of the West Point Jewish Chapel.

After leaving West Point in 1977, Colonel Kenigsberg went on to command at various levels, graduated from the Army War College and served in positions of great responsibility. A two-year stint in the military turned into thirty-years of selfless service. Along the way, he and Norma raised two wonderful sons while dedicating themselves to the military that they loved. Sometimes people look at doctors and see healthcare providers who happen to be in the Army. Make no mistake, Colonel Herbert Kenigsberg was a soldier - a true military professional and consummate leader who happened to also be a terrific dentist.

Sadly, this brave soldier passed away on 19 May 2014 after a prolonged struggle that followed surgery in 2009. Through it all, the entire Kenigsberg family maintained supreme dignity and grace despite considerable challenges. In the words of the West Point Alma Mater, "...may it be said, Well Done, be thou at peace." The biography in this edition of The Tablets is provided to honor a true friend of the Academy. May his memory be a blessing to all who were privileged to know him.



COL Kenigsberg introducing Emma Marcus (widow of COL David (Mickey) Marcus) to Superintendent LTG Sidney Berry at 1976 Passover Seder at the Jewish Chapel



COL Kenigsberg at the Right Of Entry Ceremony for the Jewish Chapel

Herbert S. Kenigsberg, D.D.S. (COL, Ret.) Biography

Colonel Herbert S. Kenigsberg was born on February 1, 1939 in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, New York. He died on May 19, 2014 and was interred at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors on October 28, 2014.

He received a Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy degree from Columbia University in 1960 and a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from New York University College of Dentistry in 1965. He married Norma Kay Schuker in August 1964 (and neglected to mention that he was slated to enter the Army – as a two-year man – the next summer after graduation). He came home one day and announced that he had received notice of his first military assignment.

His initial active duty assignment in 1965 was at Fort Knox, Kentucky where he served as a dental officer assigned to the Dental Detachment. He then was assigned as a dental officer to the 40th Medical Detachment (Dental Service) in Cu Chi, Vietnam. After providing care to the “tunnel rats,” he felt committed to military service and received Regular Army status. His other assignments include dental officer and Chief, General Dentistry, Dental Service Unit, Fort Dix, New Jersey; Chief, Cadet Dental Clinic, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York where he welcomed the first women cadets as patients; and Chief, Oral Surgery Section, Oliver Dental Clinic, U.S. Army Dental Clinic, U.S. Army Dental Activity, Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Colonel Kenigsberg served as Commander, 257th Medical Detachment (Dental Service), Fort Jackson, South Carolina; Commander, U.S. Army Dental Activity, Berlin, Germany – where he served as Rudolf Hess’s dentist at Spandau Prison, a story in itself; Commander, U.S. Army Dental Activity, Fort Belvoir, Virginia; Commander, U.S. Army Dental Activity, Fort Ord, California; Commander, U.S. Army Dental Activity, Fort Lee, Virginia; and Command Dental Surgeon, Headquarters, U.S. Forces Command, Atlanta, Georgia.

Colonel Kenigsberg’s military education included the AMEDD Officer’s Basic and Advanced Courses, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the U.S. Army War College. He also graduated from the two-year General Dentistry Residency Program at Fort Knox, Kentucky in 1973. He was a Diplomate of the Federal Services Board of General Dentistry and was awarded a Fellowship in 1976, a Mastership in 1980, and after military retirement the ABGD (American Board of General Dentistry) – the highest level – all from the Academy of General Dentistry. In 1990, he was awarded the “A” designator, The Surgeon General’s highest award for professional achievement. He was licensed to practice dentistry in the states of New York and New Jersey and the Commonwealth of Virginia and to practice pharmacy in the state of New York.

Colonel Kenigsberg’s decorations include the Legion of Merit, with one Oak Leaf Cluster; Meritorious Service Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters; Army Commendation Medal with one Oak leaf Cluster; Army Occupation Medal; National Defense Service Medal; Vietnam Service Medal with three Campaign Stars; Army Service Ribbon; and Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal. In addition, he received the Order of Military Medical Merit. Colonel Kenigsberg retired from the U.S. Army in 1995 after thirty years active duty, but he continued his service orientation. From 1996 until his retirement in 2009, he was Director of Clinical Affairs and Disease Intervention first with the New York City Department of Health and Hospitals Corporation and then, when the Oral Health Program moved, with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. He also was Adjunct Assistant Professor of Pediatric Dentistry at New York University College of Dentistry and a member of the NYU-led Cancer Consortium. In addition, he co-authored various journal articles, especially on oral cancer.

Colonel Kenigsberg and his family have special ties to West Point. He was Jewish Lay Leader from June 1975 to June 1977 and thoroughly enjoyed his relationships with the cadets and members of the Jewish War Veterans, some continuing far beyond his West Point years. He was honored to attend the ceremony at Secretary of the Army Martin R. Hoffman’s office in Washington, D.C. on May 27, 1976 when the Secretary presented the right-of-entry license for the Jewish Chapel.

He also hosted Emma Marcus, widow of Colonel David (Mickey) Marcus, at the April 1976 West Point community Seder. His father-in-law, Litman Schuker, along with his mother-in-law (Mildred) and his grandmother-in-law (Sadie Lehrer), drove Mrs. Marcus and her cousin to West Point from Brooklyn. Mrs. Marcus was thrilled to be invited – she had never previously been invited to a West Point Seder – and was made to feel most welcome by the cadets and Superintendent LTG Sidney Berry. In addition, Colonel Kenigsberg hosted CUNY’s City College Professor Seymour Weisman who gave a Shabbat Service address to commemorate our country’s 200th anniversary - and the old Chemistry lab, where Shabbat services then were held, was overflowing with attendees. And, a special connection, his first child, first son, Spencer, was born at West Point in the old hospital. His second son, Matthew, was born at Moncrief Army Hospital at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

As time passed after his military retirement, Colonel Kenigsberg found his knees getting stiffer, a not uncommon complaint of former soldiers. In his case, however, surgery for total right knee replacement in 2009 ended with debilitating results. His general medical condition worsened quickly as a result of the surgery, and he required complete hospitalization; he never recovered. Throughout the more than five years of his ordeal and the vain attempts to reverse or even mitigate his health issues, he was uncomplaining and his positive nature persisted to the end.

Colonel Kenigsberg - Herb - was a man of integrity, complete lack of ego, and great compassion toward others, not only toward his family, but toward his soldiers and his colleagues. Herb was a good soldier and a good man – a faithful friend of West Point - and shall be missed.