

From the Regimental Historian & Archivist

Our history: From Engineer to judge advocate to engineer to judge advocate: The highly unusual career progression of Eugene Caffey

The career path of virtually all judge advocates, Legal Administrators and Paralegals is "linear" in nature---in the sense that once in the legal field, soldiers remain there for the remainder of their years in the Army. But not all career progressions are the same, and the judge advocate career of Major General (MG) Eugene M. Caffey stands out as the most unusual example. This is because Caffey began his career in the Corps of Engineers, transferred to the Judge Advocate General's Department (JAGD), returned to the Engineers, and then came back to our Corps---finishing his years on active duty as The Judge Advocate General (TJAG).

Born in Georgia in December 1895, Eugene Mead Caffey entered the U.S. Military Academy in 1915 and, as a result of the accelerated curriculum triggered by World War I, graduated three years later. On 12 June 1918, the day he graduated from West Point, Caffey was commissioned a second lieutenant, first lieutenant, and captain (temporary) in the Corps of Engineers. It was a busy day for young Caffey; he also married that same day in the Cadet Chapel.

When the war ended five months later, then Captain (CPT) Caffey was commanding a company in the 213th Engineer Regiment, 13th Division, at Camp Lewis, Washington.

In the 1920s, then 1st Lieutenant (1LT) Caffey (he reverted to his lower permanent rank in the demobilization that followed World War I) had a number of unusual engineer assignments. He served with the Panama Canal Department and deployed with General John J. Pershing to Chile as part of the Tacna-Arica Plebiscite Commission; this organization was charged with enforcing terms of an agreement made by Chile and Peru. When he left Chile, 1LT Caffey went to Nicaragua, where he took part in an expedition looking for an alternative canal route.

After returning to the United States, Caffey applied for detail with the JAGD and, after this was approved, he was sent to Charlottesville in 1930 to attend the University of Virginia's law school. 1LT Caffey passed the Virginia Bar exam and was admitted to practice in September 1932; he graduated from UVA with an LL.B. in June 1933.

After being promoted to captain, Caffey was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Bliss,

Texas. A few years later, he was posted to Washington, D.C., where he was assigned to the Insular Affairs Section in the Office of the Judge Advocate General. In this job, CPT Caffey represented the Government of the Philippines in U.S. courts.

In 1938, CPT Caffey was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, where he assumed duties as judge advocate at the Infantry School. He was promoted to major in early 1940. Apparently, Caffey's West Point class was the first since the Spanish American War in 1898 whose members spent more than twenty years as company grade officers. Compare that to today's relatively rapid promotion time from first lieutenant to major in the Corps.

In early 1941, Caffey traded his crossed-pen-and-sword insignia for Engineer brass. While one might think that he was returning to his original branch because MAJ Caffey knew that war was coming and he wanted to be where the action was, this was not the reason for Caffey's departure from our Corps. Rather, MAJ Caffey had experienced a rather tumultuous relationship with MG Allen W. Gullion, who served as TJAG from 1937 to 1941. Not only had Caffey 'crossed swords' with TJAG, but the latter had made his opinion of Caffey known by placing negative correspondence in MAJ Caffey's official military personnel file. Believing that his career as an Army lawyer had been irreparably damaged by MG Gullion, Caffey decided that his future was now back with the Corps of Engineers.

In February 1941, Caffey was assigned to the 20th Engineer Regiment. He first served as the unit's executive officer, but then took command of the regiment when it sailed for North Africa as part of Operation Torch. In early 1943, now Colonel (COL) Caffey participated in the Tunisian campaign; he was decorated with the Silver Star for gallantry in combat and also received the Purple Heart for wounds received after his jeep ran over a German land mine.

Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr., then commanding the I Armored Corps in North Africa, wrote the following about Caffey's duty performance in a 1943 efficiency report:

Forceful, experienced, aggressive leader who drives his men hard but with a sound sense of values ... requires a high standard of military appearance and performance and is a strict but fair disciplinarian.

From the Regimental Historian & Archivist, cont.

After his success in Africa, COL Caffey was given command of the 1st Special Engineer Brigade, and he led this unit in the amphibious landings on Sicily in 1943. The following year, on June 6, 1944, COL Caffey waded ashore on Utah Beach with the first wave of American troops. Still in command of the 1st Special Engineer Brigade, Caffey subsequently was placed in charge of all military engineering operations on the Utah and Omaha beaches in Normandy. Additionally, for his extraordinary heroism under fire on D-Day, COL Caffey was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. His citation for that award lauds his heroism---and coolness under fire---on the Utah beachhead.



Then COL Caffey in Normandy, June 1944.

In 1945, Brigadier General E. F. Koenig, the commander of the Normandy Base Section, wrote this assessment of Caffey in an efficiency report:

A real soldier. Gallant, fearless, honest, reliable. Gets remarkable results and has a high standard of ethics. General officer caliber. Tops in every way.

When World War II ended, COL Caffey had commanded a number of engineer districts and base sections in Europe. He returned to the United States to attend the National War College, where he also served on a committee that had been created to standardize U.S. amphibious doctrine. After graduating, Caffey was assigned to an engineer brigade on the West Coast and told---unofficially---that his chances for future promotion in the Corps of Engineers could not have been better.

In 1947, however, COL Caffey returned to the JAGD. His old nemesis, MG Gullion, had retired and, with the rapid demobilization that had followed the end of World War II, the JAGD was woefully short of qualified lawyers. Moreover, MG Thomas H. Greene, the new TJAG, was anxious to have a lawyer of

Caffey's caliber back in the Department. The result was that, despite his bright future in the Corps of Engineers, Caffey requested that he be transferred back to the JAGD. This request was quickly approved and COL Caffey was brought to Washington, D.C., where he was assigned as the Administrative Officer (and de facto Executive Officer) in the Office of the Judge Advocate General.

In August 1948, Caffey assumed duties as the 3rd Army Judge Advocate in Atlanta, Georgia. Five years later, in the summer of 1953, he was promoted to brigadier general and left Atlanta to return to the Pentagon to be the Assistant Judge Advocate General for Civil Law. Amazingly, it was just six months later---in January 1954---that President Dwight D. Eisenhower nominated BG Caffey to be TJAG. The following month, Congress confirmed the nomination, and MG Caffey took office as the top uniformed lawyer in the Army. He retired three years later, on 31 December 1956.

Despite the unusual progression of Caffey's career, there is no doubt that the Army's leadership appreciated his abilities as both a soldier and an attorney. But one has to ask whether his judge advocate contemporaries---uniformed lawyers who had remained in the JAGD during World War II and had wrestled with a multitude of complex legal issues---saw it the same way. What did they think about the officer who had missed those years and yet returned to the Corps---and then became TJAG?

**By Mr. Fred Borch,
Regimental Historian & Archivist**

