



“HE LEFT A LEGACY THAT WE WILL ALL REMEMBER”

By Kari Hawkins, USAG Redstone

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. — Husband. Son. Brother. Soldier. Leader. Patriot. Friend.

“Those simple but profound words are the essence of a man who left an indelible mark on all of us,” said retired MG Jim Cravens.

Cravens' description of his longtime friend and professional colleague, retired LTG Larry Dodgen, recalled a military leader who loved the Army and the Soldiers under his command. That theme resonated throughout a Feb. 25 memorial service at Bicentennial Chapel for Dodgen, 60, who died from a heart attack while playing tennis on Feb. 20.

Even as a young leader, Dodgen exhibited the “special leadership qualities that made him destined for great things to come in the future,” Cravens said. He first met Dodgen 30 years ago when the two served together.

Dodgen's leadership qualities took him through the ranks from second lieutenant to lieutenant general during a 34-year career that included serving in Korea and Germany as well as at Fort Hood and Fort Bliss, Texas, Fort McClellan and the Pentagon; leading the 8th Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery into combat in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm, and commanding both the Aviation and Missile Command from 2001 to 2003 and the Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command from 2003 until his retirement in January 2007.

After retirement, Dodgen joined Northrop Grumman in Huntsville as vice president of strategy for the missile systems business area. He served in other business areas and was

recently appointed to corporate lead executive for the company's Huntsville operations, serving as the principle point of contact for all Northrop Grumman business in the region and coordinating the company's local business and community interests.

“He was trusted with positions of complexity and responsibility,” Cravens said. “He made leading Soldiers look ridiculously easy. He was a natural-born leader with high standards who led from the front.”

Both personally and professionally, Dodgen “personified excellence” with a deep set of values, impeccable integrity, rock-solid credibility, well-reasoned decision making skills, an infectious personality and competitive athletic nature.

“He had an amazing ability to stay connected with those he knew and served with in the past,” Cravens said. “He was a fervent vocal champion for those he knew and those who served under his command ... He left a legacy that we will all remember ... He had an infectious personality and a jovial laugh with a unique gleam in his eyes. I, for one, will miss that laugh and miss that look in his eye.”

While his Army family was a source of pride for Dodgen, Cravens was joined at the podium by two others who represented the other significant aspects of Dodgen's life - former Huntsville Mayor Loretta Spencer, who spoke of his commitment to the community; and brother George Dodgen, who spoke of what Dodgen meant to his family.

“I have served with someone who gave his time and dedication to this city more than once,” said Spencer, who worked closely with Dodgen in the days following the 9/11 attacks.



LTG Larry Dodgen

(June 12, 1949 — February 20, 2010)

“In our community, he became a special friend.”

George Dodgen spoke of his brother's love for family, especially wife Leslie; the military and tennis. Dodgen was born in New Orleans and graduated from Louisiana State University. He met his wife, also an avid tennis player, on the tennis court.

Dodgen's brother recalled the interest he showed in the military when, in second grade, he participated in an elementary Ranger program with his two brothers.

“We all loved it,” George Dodgen recalled. “But Larry had a special and lasting attraction to the Rangers. I believe that was the seed to his career.”

Once his path was chosen, Dodgen's family knew he would go on to achieve success. “Larry was a rising star and we knew one day he would do great things,” George Dodgen said. “Our beliefs have been fulfilled many times.”

Dodgen's military awards and decorations include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal with oak leaf cluster, Legion of Merit (two oak leaf clusters), Meritorious Service Medal (four oak leaf clusters), Army Commendation Medal and the Army Achievement Medal.

George Dodgen described his brother's infrequent visits home as “filled with love and joy. It was always an event when he came home.

“We all looked up to Larry. But not for his achievements. We looked up to him because he was so filled with life and energy. His sunrises were spectacular. I'm sure he had many

burdens from his career, although we never saw them. Though he was not around often, his presence was always felt. To say we all looked up to him is too simple.”

During the service, Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Marvin Luckie read Psalm 23 and the congregation sang “Amazing Grace.” There was also a 21-gun salute and the sounding of taps prior to the casket being carried to the hearse by Soldiers of the 145th Aviation Regiment Honors Detachment from Fort Rucker.

“We are here to honor a great American and to mourn our loss,” Luckie said during the service. “We need to pause for a moment to catch our breath as death has caught us by surprise. Death always catches us off guard. Today reminds us that life is a gift.”

He reminded the congregation that death cannot take away memories and experiences and, although everyone has their own way of dealing with the loss of a loved one, they also have the ability to use the loss as a way to reflect on life and choose to make a difference in the life they are living.

“Faith is our source of strength,” Luckie said. “By putting our wounded souls in our Creator's hands we can do all things through faith and we can have hope ... It is your concern and presence that brings hope. Our coming together of hearts brings hope and love. Nothing can separate us from the love of our Shepherd.” 