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Dedication ceremony

The Criminal Investigation Command dedicates its new building to one of its own

Story by Rona S. Hirsch, staff writer

Photos by Jeff Crawley

The inscription on the plaque dedicated to the memory of Harry F. Duket and his service here sums up his career with just two words: "Mr. CID."

The retired Chief Warrant Officer, who died in 1997, served for 44 years in the Army Criminal Investigation Command as a Criminal Investigation Division agent. Those four decades of service encompassed 27 years in the Army and another 17 years as a civilian. So it was only fitting that the installation's new CID building would be dedicated to Duket, who served at Fort Meade for 29 years.

"Today is the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream," said former colleague Larry Drayton, who represents the 1,500-member CID Agents Association.

"Harry Duket honored us with his service and life, more than we can honor him with words. There could be no more appropriate memorial commemorating Mr. Duket."

The dedication was held April 22 at Fort Meade, outside the CID Building located at 855 Chisholm Ave. Family, friends, former colleagues and the installation commander, Col. John W. Ives, attended the 60-minute event that included a buffet lunch under a tent. Larry Duket, the eldest of Duket's three children, unveiled the plaque together with retired Maj. Gen. Eugene Cromartie, a former supervisor of Duket at CID headquarters, 1st Region.

A bouquet of flowers was presented to Duket's wife, Stella, as a token of appreciation for her support throughout his career. "Everything was so nice," said the Severn resident.

"I'm still shook up."

Although CID relocated to its new building last July, the dedication was initiated more than two years ago by a five-member nominating committee.

"We suggested the building be dedicated in his honor because he was a wonderful man," said Rose Marie Dunlap, investigative operations assistant at Carlisle Barracks in Carlisle, Pa.

In addition to Dunlap, the committee included former CID agents James Mercer and Francis Robinson, and Robinson's wife, Dolores, an investigative operations assistant at CID here.

"He was a tremendous mentor to everybody; it didn't matter if you were an agent or support personnel," said Dolores Robinson, who began working for Duket in 1966. "He was a friend and very hard- working. And I never saw anyone smile as much as him."

Born in 1927 in Schuylerville, N.Y., Duket joined the Army in 1945 and was assigned to the Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Hancock, N.J. as a military policeman. Within months, Duket rose to the rank of staff sergeant and was later assigned as a platoon sergeant to a POW camp in Camp Shanks, N.Y. He then was selected to attend CID school in Texas. From 1948-1950, Duket served in Japan, where he earned the rank of master sergeant. After serving in Korea and Japan, Duket was promoted to Chief Warrant Officer in 1953. The following year, he was assigned to the Corps of Engineers Tech Service Detachment Element in French Morocco, Tripoli and Libya.

Duket arrived at Fort Meade in 1956, assigned for three years to the 39th MP (CI) Detachment. In 1959, he served in Orleans, France, and then returned in 1962 to Fort Meade through 1966. During that time, Duket attended the FBI Narcotics School, Arson Investigation Course and the FBI Sex Crimes Investigation Course.

In 1966, Duket served in Vietnam at CID headquarters in Saigon. He returned in 1967 to Fort Meade and served here until his retirement in 1972. But Duket continued working at CID as the civilian chief of the Field Operations Branch, Headquarters, 1st Region, until his second retirement in 1989. He died of cancer in 1997.

At the dedication, old friends hugged while some guests checked out the photograph display of Duket. Participants sat under a large tent as Lt. Col. Steven Lynch, Battalion Commander, Washington District CID, offered welcoming remarks.

Then Cromartie, deputy executive director and chief of staff of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, praised Duket's accomplishments.

"Harry Duket was a professional Soldier, a special agent, everyone's All-American and a very dear friend of ours," Cromartie said. "His bio speaks to a very long, distinguished career of service to this country, of service to the Army, and most certainly, of service to our beloved CID command."

Cromartie recalled that before taking on his first assignment at CID headquarters, 1st Region, he did some investigating. "You want to find out, 'what am I getting into?' "he said."And everybody I spoke to said one thing: 'You don't have to worry. You have a legend up there, Harry Duket. They said that you can trust him, you can listen to him, otherwise you're going to get into trouble. He will keep you on the straight and narrow path. He's dedicated, he's hard-working. But more than that, he will never ever let you down. I found all of that to be true and even more.

Drayton recalled the respect that Duket commanded at CID.

"We all know, with no disrespect to the fine field-grade officers who commanded 1st Region, that included you Gen. Cromartie, who really ran 1st Region," Drayton said.

"Harry was a consummate gentleman, level-headed staff officer and had a no-nonsense approach to problems and issues."

Speaking on behalf of his family, Larry Duket expressed appreciation for the dedication.

"A special thanks for taking the seed of an idea, fueled by a fond remembrance, and turning it into a mission," he said.

He then presented anecdotes attesting to his father's character. "It appears Dad must have been what we call a 'go-to guy,' the one you seek out to get that special blend of experience and intuition and analysis when other avenues maybe, just haven't panned out," he said.

But his father, he said, also was a devoted family man, a "compassionate conservative" who treated his children "firmly but fairly and with respect." ... He pretty much allowed

us to make our own mistakes, he allowed us to be ourselves but he was always there with a simple, conservative lesson. If there was an overarching theme it was, "The world doesn't owe you a living."

Although, he said, his father didn't like Elvis Presley, Duket never censored "what we read, what we watched, what we listened to or what we spent our money on," except for the TV show, "The Monkees" because the performers weren't really musicians.

Precise and patient, Duket was skilled at wood finishing and reloading bullets. The avid sportsman also taught his children hunting, fishing and camping and instilled values. "My father taught us that honesty was the best policy. He told us not to cry over spilled milk. He taught us to love and respect our nation, and he taught us that frugality was indispensable to making ends meet. ... He provided a well-rounded and secure environment in which we could grow."

Larry Duket then accepted the dedication on behalf of his family. "But if he were here today, I imagine that he would accept it on behalf of all CID agents," he said.

Mercer said they became instant friends after they met in 1965 at Fort Meade. "We had much in common," he said. "We were both dedicated CID agents and loved our work." They spent their leisure time camping and fishing with their sons. To ensure they would not lose contact after retiring, the pair formed an investment club with other former CID agents. Mercer recounted how he "volunteered" Duket for service in Vietnam. While Mercer was assigned to the CID field office in Maryland in 1965, he was contacted by the personnel office about volunteering for duty in Vietnam in 1966. "The colonel explained that if I volunteered he would give me a guaranteed reassignment upon returning to the States," Mercer said. "If I didn't volunteer, I would be going in May anyway."

The colonel, said Mercer, then "asked me if I knew of anyone else that might want to volunteer to go to Vietnam." Mercer suggested Duket. "I said that I'm sure he would just love to accompany me," he said.

Mercer then told Duket, who was his supervisor, that he will be heading to Vietnam and that he volunteered him to go with him.

"Well, I don't think it's appropriate to tell you what his remarks to that were," said Mercer. "I said to Harry, 'Look at the positive side. You get a guaranteed reassignment; you'll have the pleasure of my company on the trip over there and hopefully, while we're there. And then we can return together.'"

Although Duket decided to go along, "I don't think he ever really ever forgave me," Mercer said. "But I always felt if I could ever get a building named in his honor that he just might possibly forgive me. I know of no other person that is more deserving of this honor than Harry Duket."