

OBITUARIES

Gen. Edwin Walker Dies; Stained by Controversy

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Edwin A. Walker, 84, a retired Army major general who was a decorated combat veteran of two wars and had commanded federal troops during civil rights struggles in Little Rock, Ark., in 1957 before his political beliefs and indiscretions ended his military career, died of a pulmonary ailment Oct. 31 at his home in Dallas.

In World War II, Gen. Walker commanded the 1st Special Service Force, also known as the "Devil's Brigade." It was an elite formation of 900 Americans and 900 Canadians. Soldiers in the unit were demolition experts, parachutists and skiers. A handpicked group that fought often in snow and on mountains, they served in Italy and southern France.

He commanded the 24th Infantry Division in combat in Korea, holding the center of the United Nations line, during some of the heaviest fighting of the Korean War.

In 1957, Gen. Walker led federal troops to force school integration in the public schools of Little Rock. Time magazine put him on its cover, and The Washington Post, in a 1957 editorial, hailed him for handling "the Arkansas situation with extraordinary tact and firmness."

It was later learned that he accepted command of the Little Rock forces only after President Eisenhower refused to accept his resignation. Historians now say the general did not believe in racial integration.

Gen. Walker returned to the news again in 1961 when it was learned he was passing out John Birch Society literature, which implied that President Kennedy was a traitor, to his troops in West Germany. The gen-

eral also had been denouncing such figures as former president Harry S. Truman, former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, former secretary of state Dean Acheson and secretary of state Dean Rusk, calling them "pinks" and worse.

Following an Army investigation of his conduct, Gen. Walker was relieved of his division command for "participating in controversial duties," which included trying to influence how soldiers would vote in elections. The Army officially "admonished" him. At this point, Gen. Walker resigned his commission.

He declared his candidacy for the 1962 Democratic nomination of governor of Texas. Denouncing the "anti-Christ" U.S. Supreme Court and maintaining that "we are at war with the Reds," he got nearly 150,000 votes, finishing last in a field of six. The winner was the future governor and Treasury secretary John Connally.

In April 1963, seven months before President Kennedy was killed by gunfire in Dallas, Gen. Walker was almost struck by a sniper's bullet that came through a window at his home. The Warren Commission, which investigated the Kennedy shooting and decided that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, had shot the president, also said Oswald was the gunman who had tried to kill the general.

Gen. Walker also figured prominently in a landmark 1960s libel case. After leaving the Army, he had participated in demonstrations against James Meredith's integrating the University of Mississippi. An Associated Press dispatch saying that he had "assumed command" of groups of anti-integration rioters at the University of Mississippi and that he "led a charge of students against federal marshals" drew his wrath. He also sued about a dozen other publications for similar accounts.

The Supreme Court, which ruled in 1964 that public officials cannot recover damages for reports about official duties unless they can prove actual malice, extended the ruling to public figures in general in 1967. The court reversed lower-court findings against the Associated Press, saying malice had not been proved.

Gen. Walker, a Texas native who grew up on a ranch, was a 1931 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He graduated 229th out of 296 cadets. He became an artilleryman.

In later years, he became active in the John Birch Society.

He leaves no immediate survivors.