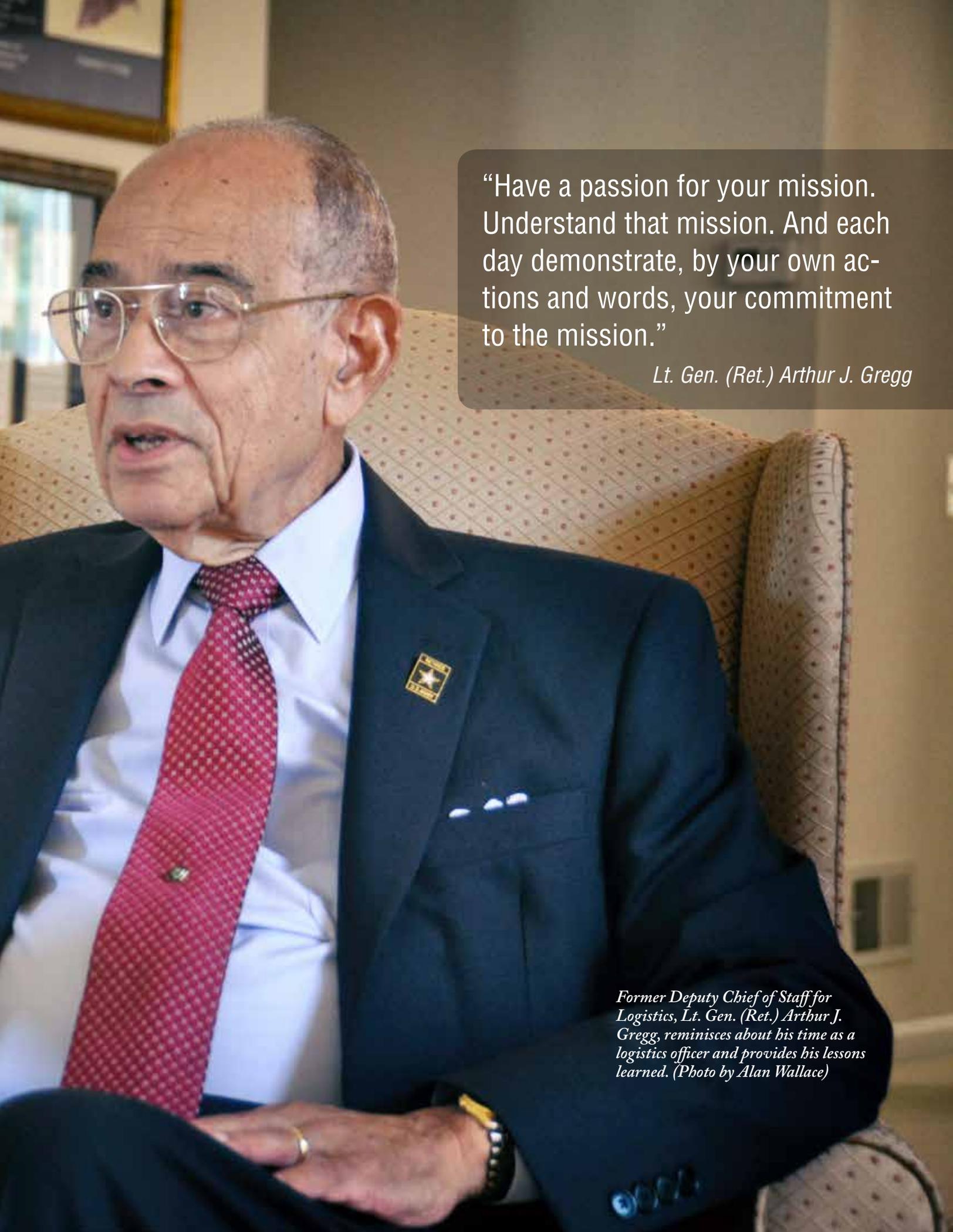




Leadership Lessons From a Former Logistics General

■ By Tom Johnson and Arpi Dilanian



“Have a passion for your mission. Understand that mission. And each day demonstrate, by your own actions and words, your commitment to the mission.”

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Arthur J. Gregg

Former Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Arthur J. Gregg, reminisces about his time as a logistics officer and provides his lessons learned. (Photo by Alan Wallace)

FEATURES

Having been a logistics officer during the Korean and Vietnam Wars and throughout the 1970s, Lt. Gen. Arthur J. Gregg provides his insights on leadership and the changing field of logistics.

Retired Lt. Gen. Arthur J. Gregg is one of the Army's great logistics leaders of the 20th century. Gregg entered the Army as a private in 1946 and rose through the ranks to become a three-star general. He retired in 1981 after serving as the Army's deputy chief of staff for logistics.

Gregg is well-known for exercising strong leadership without being a tyrant. During his career, he empowered his chain of command and was quick to recognize and reward excellence. We sat down with Gregg to get his views on leadership and to find out the lessons he learned while in the Army.

What is your philosophy on leadership, and in your opinion, what makes a great leader?

My philosophy is very simple and straightforward. I think a leader must always put the mission first and put himself or herself last.

A good leader strives to understand the mission and solicits the help of others in devising the best means of accomplishing the mission. A good leader always encourages and supports team members and becomes their cheerleader. Members of the team must always know that the leader is out there every day pursuing the mission with a passion and supporting their efforts and recognizing their good work.

What leadership lessons did you carry throughout your career?

I think certain things are expected from noncommissioned officers [NCOs], junior officers, and the most senior officers. You must perform in each assignment to the very best of your ability. And to do that, you have to understand what your mission is and have a good idea of what you need in order to execute the mission. You also have to influence others so that they join with you in developing a passion and drive to complete that mission successfully. No matter your

position, I think those same characteristics, those same motivations, will allow you to be successful and to have a successful team.

When did you know you wanted to serve in the military and why?

During my high school years I was in Newport News, Virginia, and there was a heavy presence of the military there. I was impressed, especially by all those NCOs with all of their stripes and then, of course, the commissioned officers. I liked their demeanor. Their personal conduct was just wonderful and fun to emulate. During that time, there were many movies that depicted the military and the splendor of doing the nation's duty. I left those movies with a high sense of patriotism, and from those experiences, I decided I wanted to be a Soldier.

What was one of your most rewarding early assignments?

From 1950 to 1953, I was an instructor at the Quartermaster Leadership School at Fort Lee, Virginia. I taught leadership and methods of instruction to junior enlisted Soldiers and officers and prepared them for assignments to the training companies of the regiment. We produced outstanding young leaders.

You were a battalion commander in Vietnam. How did that go?

When I reported to the [96th Supply and Service] Battalion in January 1966 at Fort Riley, Kansas, the unit was not ready to perform its mission and had serious deficiencies in all areas—personnel, equipment, and training. We received excellent support from the Army in getting personnel and equipment and were able to deploy on schedule.

We arrived by ship in Vietnam in May 1966. We worked with civilian contractors to build warehouses and unstuffed containers of repair parts and other supplies. Concurrently, we

started to automate our supply base using an early computer, the NCR 500. Initially operations were slow-going because we lacked experience in using the computer.

Our battalion grew from 500 to 3,600 to become one of the largest in the Army with 18 companies and eight detachments. Our mission also grew and included all aerial delivery, aerial delivery depot capability, bakery, and graves registration.

You served during racially turbulent times. Can you discuss that, and was it a problem in Vietnam?

During the early years, from 1946 to 1950, the Army was segregated, so assignments, promotions, and other opportunities for African Americans were limited. President Harry S. Truman signed the executive order to integrate the Army in 1948. But not much happened to change the Army until the Korean War in 1950. Then the need for manpower accelerated the integration of the Army, but that process was not completed until about 1952.

At Fort Riley, [as an African American] I was not able to get a haircut on post. I had to go into town to get a haircut. When I reported to duty at Fort Lee, I was assigned to an all-black company as an assistant platoon leader because there was no other assignment available. One could make the argument that if I had been a platoon leader rather than an assistant platoon leader that I would have developed more rapidly, and that may have been true. But I had the good fortune of being the assistant to an outstanding platoon leader who was much older and more experienced than I was, and I learned a great deal from him.

In Vietnam, we did not have one racial incident in our battalion during the time that I was in command. And there were several contributing factors: We had good leadership all the way down to the squad level, our officers and NCOs were out there every day and every

night with the troops, and the command climate was very healthy. The demands of our mission also contributed; we were busy 24/7.

What were some of the biggest issues leaders faced back then?

Discipline was a challenge. We were getting young recruits through the draft system. Our Soldiers tended to stay in one unit for a relatively short time. There was a tremendous amount of turnover. Deployments to Vietnam were frequent and many of them were repetitive assignments.

Then we had the introduction of drugs, and that played a major role beginning in the late '60s. One might ask why we saw a spike in drugs. You have to remember that the Army will always reflect society at large. We were drafting young men into the Army during that time who had experienced drugs before coming into the Army.

As a result of the rapid rotation, the introduction of drugs, and a decline in public support for the Vietnam War, discipline slipped. We started to have some serious discipline infractions, and that did not change dramatically until the '70s.

What do you feel is the biggest difference between the Army of today and the Army in which you served?

You have a higher degree of automation today. And this is especially important in the logistics community. You have information available to you at the click of a button that we simply did not have during my time. You are able to do more with fewer people now.

The constant is great leadership. The logistics community, going back to the very beginning of our Army, has been blessed with people like Nathanael Greene and others. That great leadership continues today with Gen. Dennis Via, commander of the Army Materiel Command, and Lt. Gen. Gustavo Perna, the Army G-4.

I also think the command sergeants major today play a bigger role than they did during my time. When I was the G-4 of the Army, I did not have a command sergeant major. There was not a slot for one. And today, I see the sergeant major playing a bigger-than-life role, and that's true throughout our Army.

What nugget of wisdom would you offer to current and future leaders?

Have a passion for your mission. Understand that mission. And each day demonstrate, by your own actions and words, your commitment to the mission. Also demonstrate your appreciation for your team and their efforts and accomplishments.

It is also important that we maintain public trust. I'm so proud that when you look at all of the professions of our country today, the military is on top in terms of trust.

This spring the Army will present the inaugural LTG (R) Arthur J. Gregg Sustainment Leadership Award, a new honor that recognizes Soldiers and civilians whose leadership is credited with making significant and measurable contributions by improving operating efficiencies and readiness levels or demonstrating fiscal responsibility. The first recipient is the award's namesake.

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