

A Legacy of Service

by Mark Levy

During World War II, when Edwin L. Hobson (9th AMP) served in the U.S. Army's military planning division of the Office of the Quartermaster General, the division's motto was "Get it done." Still following that maxim fifty years later, Hobson organized a special reunion of his Quartermaster colleagues last summer with the intention of highlighting the accomplishments of his unit and of its wartime chief, the legendary HBS professor Georges Doriot.

The Quartermaster Corps obtains, transports, and distributes the equipment, supplies, and services needed by the army and its soldiers. Months before the attack on Pearl Harbor drew U.S. forces into the war, to prepare for any possible global conflict emerging from the fighting in Europe, the Quartermaster's military planning division was created to help mobilize and modernize the U.S. Army. Doriot, who was born in France but became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1941, was teaching industrial management at HBS when he was called to active duty in the army and assigned to the Pentagon. There, the Quartermaster General Edmund B. Gregory called on Doriot, his former teacher, to head the unit.

"Between 1941 and 1945, Doriot's unit redesigned virtually every piece of equipment used by U.S. troops," notes Steven Anders, command historian at the Quartermaster Corps School at Fort Lee, Virginia. "They created a research and development paradigm that is still with us today. They understood how to apply research to practical applications and how to move quickly into fullscale production." Doriot became a brigadier general in 1945 and returned to HBS to resume his distinguished teaching and business career after the war.

Aided by fellow Quartermaster veterans, including Edward L. Heller (MBA '39), now a volunteer

docent at the Smithsonian Institution, and Isabelle Pounder, Doriot's former administrative assistant, Hobson organized a reunion of twenty members of his unit and numerous guests who assembled in Washington, D.C., one weekend last August. The group participated in tours, lectures, and panel discussions at the Smithsonian Institution under the auspices of the Smithsonian's Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation.

Attendees recalled rappelling out of office windows to test synthetic fiber ropes, climbing Mt. McKinley to evaluate cold weather gear under realistic conditions, and journeying to the front lines in North Africa, Europe, and the South Pacific to evaluate firsthand how well newly developed equipment functioned in combat. High-impact plastic helmets, quick-release zippers, bullet-proof vests, and wind-chill tables are among the modern-day products whose origins can be traced to the work of this inventive group.

On the second day of the reunion, participants traveled to nearby Fort Lee, where the current Quartermaster General, Major Gen-

eral Robert K. Guest, served as host. In a ceremony that evening, Doriot was posthumously accepted as a "Distinguished Member of the Regiment." Rounding out the 50th anniversary celebration, the reunion group met again in November at the Army Research and Development Laboratory in Natick, Massachusetts, where the work begun by the Military Planning Division is now carried out.

Hobson, who first met Doriot in the Military Planning Division, and Heller, who had studied under Doriot at HBS before the war, both consider Doriot an inspiring leader with a knack for sidestepping regulations and red tape. "Doriot was the best manager I have ever met," recalls Heller. "His idea of management was to fill people in on the big picture and get them motivated to get things done." Now Doriot's World War II colleagues are channeling the momentum gained from the reunion behind their 1995 nomination of General Doriot for induction into the Quartermaster Hall of Fame. It is an honor they hope will keep the memory of his, and their, wartime service alive for future generations.



In July, 1943, Colonel (later Brigadier General) Georges F. Doriot (left) and HBS Dean Donald David welcomed Major General Edmund B. Gregory, Quartermaster General of the U.S. Army, to the HBS campus for a press conference and review of the HBS Quartermaster ROTC.

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