

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE CIVIL AFFAIRS REGIMENT



General Lucius D. Clay
U.S. Army, Retired, Posthumous

Inducted November 2, 2018



General (Retired) Lucius D. Clay was born in Marietta, Georgia, in 1897. He graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point, and was commissioned as an Engineer in 1918. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he served as an instructor at the Academy, on the staff of Gen. Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines and was known for his self-discipline, work ethic, ability to understand and influence across culture and language barriers and devotion to high standards. He became affectionately known as “the Great Uncompromiser.”

During World War II, he gained a reputation for bringing order out of chaos, and, in 1942, became the youngest Brigadier General in the Army. As the Director of Materiel under Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, his talents in engineering and organization contributed to the ultimate success of the European Campaign. His role in stabilizing the port city of Cherbourg after its liberation was crucial to maintaining the flow of men and materiel to Allied armies in Europe. In 1945, he was appointed to serve as Deputy to Gen. Eisenhower, and subsequently held the post of Deputy Governor of Germany during the interim Allied Military Government.

From 1947 to 1949, Gen. Clay succeeded Eisenhower as the Military Governor of the U.S. Occupation Zone in Germany. During that time, he oversaw the research and composition of A Report on Germany, a study which became one of the key source documents for “The Marshall Plan.” During these critical years at the beginning of the Cold War, he worked closely with German leaders to address the needs of the devastated civilian population under his care, and worked diligently to reshape U.S. policy toward defeated Germany. This policy, which was originally aimed at the de-industrialization of West Germany and the transformation of the occupied zones into an agrarian society that would render Germany incapable of invading neighboring countries. Gen. Clay, however, was one of the first to understand the indispensable role that West Germany would play against the emerging threat of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, and he argued ceaselessly for a policy that would result in a prosperous, stable and democratic West Germany.

His action to break the Soviet blockade of West Berlin in 1948, known as the “Berlin Airlift”, is considered to be one of the most important events of the Cold War, and was certainly a key test of American resolve to defend an independent and democratic West Germany. The 11-month logistical feat, initiated by Gen. Clay even before he received authorization from President Truman, occurred during a period of unprecedented tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, and its success is chiefly credited to the vision, organizational ability and force of will of Gen. Clay. From June 1948 through September 1949, more than 140,000 tons of supplies each month were flown to West Berlin via aircraft, with planes landing at Tempelhof airfield every four minutes.

Recognizing that the new war against communism would be fought in the hearts and minds of the German people, he co-developed the concept of a “cultural cold war” through which the USSR would be combated on a psychological and intellectual level. These, and other collaborative efforts in civil affairs, earned him the highest esteem of Germany’s people. A boulevard in the diplomatic quarter of Berlin is named Clay Alley in his honor.

Gen. Clay passed away in 1978. His two sons, Lucius D. Clay Jr., U.S. Air Force, Retired, and Frank Clay, U.S. Army, Retired, both were General Officers. His grave, at the United States Military Academy’s cemetery, is marked by a stone donated by the citizens of Berlin: “We thank the preserver of our freedom”.