

## DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS REGIMENT



**BRIGADIER GENERAL  
CHARLES HERBERT KARLSTAD**

Inducted  
19 November 2015



Charles Herbert Karlstad was born 26 December 1894 in Castlewood, South Dakota, the middle child of seven of immigrant Norwegian parents. He earned a Bachelor of Science in General Agriculture in 1917 from South Dakota State College and entered service in April 1917 as a second lieutenant of Infantry.

Reporting to the 88th Infantry Division (ID) at Camp Dodge, Iowa, he organized a machinegun school, training hundreds of Army recruits. On 15 August 1918 then MAJ Karlstad deployed to France, commanding the 338th Machine Gun Battalion fighting in the Haute –Alsace Sector and then in the Meuse – Argonne Offensive. After the November 1918 armistice, MAJ Karlstad participated in the the occupation of Germany by performing constabulary functions.

MAJ Karlstad reverted back to captain in 1920. He spent the interwar period in a variety of command and staff positions throughout the U.S. and the Philippines. In 1933 CPT Karlstad was assigned to evaluate a new base organization and doctrine that the Chief of Staff directed that the 2nd ID test in field maneuvers. Based on his experiences, MAJ Karlstad asserted that the new triangular structure made it more “maneuverable and relatively [more] powerful” and that the greater use of noncommissioned officers in combat leadership roles gave the triangular unit greater sustainability in modern combat. In 1940 the Army detailed Karlstad as an umpire for the Third Army Louisiana Maneuvers, building on the triangular division tests of 1937. Later LTC Karlstad joined the G-3 in the War Department General Staff as Chief, Army Mobilization Branch, responsible for national conscription and integration of U.S. Army Reserves and National Guard into the wartime structure. For two critical years he managed the expansion of the Army from its small peacetime size of less than 300,000 to over 4 million soldiers.

In September 1942 COL Karlstad commanded the newly formed 62nd Armored Infantry Regiment at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas and command of Combat Command A (CCA), of the 14th Armored Division (AD). In October 1944, he spearheaded the Seventh Army armored assault across France and into Germany. In January 1945, his counterattack against the German 21st Panzer Division gained him a Bronze Star Medal for valor. His performance displayed during the drive through the Vosges Mountains added an Oak Leaf Cluster to Karlstad’s LOM. Finally, he personally led two armored combat commands in a well-coordinated assault on the Siegfried Line inflicting great losses on the enemy, opening a path into Germany and earning him the Silver Star. Karlstad was promoted to Brigadier General on 2 April 1945.

Karlstad’s most significant combat action took place in late April 1945 when his CCA, 14th AD successfully attacked and seized bridgeheads over the Isar River (east of Munich) near Moosburg. Upon finding that large numbers of Allied POWs were nearby, BG Karlstad acted immediately to free the prisoners, joining his lead tank battalion to break through the dug-in enemy position and quickly siezed the POW camp and freeing 110,000 Allied prisoners from twenty-five nations, including 30,000 Americans.

Following V-J Day, BG Karlstad reverted back to his permanent Regular Army (RA) grade of colonel. In November 1949 Karlstad became Chief of Staff of the Infantry Center at Fort Benning, Georgia. COL Karlstad became intimately involved in the creation of the Ranger Training Center (RTC) and activating the Ranger infantry companies (Airborne) during the Korean War. Karlstad provided highly creditable input in the Army's decision to operate the RTC after the deactivation of the Ranger companies in 1951 and was a key player in saving the Ranger School at Fort Benning. He also influenced the Army decision to transfer Ranger company personnel spaces to form the new 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) in 1952. Shifting those spaces to the U.S. Army Psywar Center proved critical. Karlstad maintained a constant dialogue with BG Robert A. McClure and his staff in the Pentagon.

In early 1952, BG McClure chose COL Karlstad to be the first commander of the new Psychological Warfare Center and commandant of the Psywar School (PWCS) on 27 May at Fort Bragg, NC. Karlstad's first major task was getting the Army to recognize the PWCS as a formal service school. To overcome Army resistance to PWCS, COL Karlstad insisted on the writing of innovative joint and combined POIs and adhering to strict criteria in assessing and selecting SF volunteers. By establishing high standards from the beginning, the Psywar School quickly earned a reputation for scholastic excellence. Simultaneously, Karlstad submitted solid staff actions to garner authority and proponentcy for developing doctrine, training plans, and educational standards for Psychological Warfare and Special Forces. Having achieved that standing, COL Karlstad then submitted to the Institute of Heraldry for a distinctive unit insignia (DUI) for PWCS. It seems fitting that Karlstad's DUI remains today, representing the PWCS's legacy to the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.

BG Charles H. Karlstad transformed the PWCS into a recognized formal service school. Karlstad insisted that quality POIs, backed by Army standard lesson plans, outlines, and handouts, be created for every course offered, elevating the level of professionalism within the center and removing any potential criticism that could have downgraded PWCS status. COL Karlstad fought hard for (and won) the manpower, money, and logistics support needed to provide the consistently high quality of instruction to Psywar and SF. He advocated that the Ranger Course at Fort Benning continue to function long after the companies had been disbanded in 1951. As the first PWCS commander and commandant, COL Karlstad elevated that organization to the same level of excellence as The Infantry School. Finally, he supported the effort to develop special operations doctrine and operational concepts, and he formalized the process to disseminate that information throughout the Army, educating future leaders on the emerging subjects of Psywar, SF, and UW.

The Army's first PWCS commander and commandant retired as a brigadier general on 31 July 1953. After a few years travelling around the world he settled in Hawaii. His retirement proved short-lived. BG Charles H. Karlstad died in an automobile accident in Honolulu on 22 December 1960 and was interred at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.