

John B. Dubbelde '57

No. 21240 ■ 24 Apr 1935 – 3 May 2008 ■ Died in Seattle, WA
Interred in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA



John Burnham Dubbelde was born in the Philippine Islands to COL John J. Dubbelde and Josephine (Burnham) Dubbelde. Raised in a military family, he was profoundly influenced by the events of World War II. His family was among the first to be stationed in Germany after the war, and one of the few that remained in Berlin during the 1948–49 Soviet blockade of that city. All of these early experiences motivated John to follow in his father's footsteps as a career officer. He was fortunate to receive an appointment to West Point and in July 1953 became a member of the Class of 1957.

John spent four years with Company B of the 2nd Regiment. He was an academic whiz, graduating comfortably in the top quarter of the class. He wore the chevrons of a cadet corporal during Cow year and cadet lieutenant his First Class year.

Russ Harris, one of John's roommates, observed, "John was one of the most principled people I have ever met, and his strong commitment to a career of military service was evident. I admired him greatly and have always been thankful for the encouragement he gave me to stay at the academy at a time when I was considering resignation. I think all of us in the company considered John a model cadet."

Athletic competition between the companies further developed John's competitive spirit, which was clearly evident on the "fields of friendly strife." As a Plebe, John was on the B-2 boxing team and won the Corps boxing championship in his weight class. Later in his cadet career, John was a stalwart on the B-2 track team, having a

"catch me if you can" attitude. In all that he did, he strived to be a winner and succeeded.

The summer prior to entering West Point, John was introduced to Eleanor Johnson from Baltimore. John and Ellie were a constant twosome throughout his four years, and a year and a half after graduation they were married. Nearly 50 years of marriage and two wonderful children testify to a remarkable Army family.

John's early assignments were typical of newly minted Infantry officers, including the Basic Infantry Officer Course, as well as airborne training at Ft. Benning, GA. John was a forward-thinking officer who recognized the significance that Army Aviation would play in future conflicts. He was accepted into the Army's flight training program and received his pilot wings in 1958. Throughout his career he flew both fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. He considered flying helicopters more of a challenge, which he loved.

After flight school it was off to Berlin, Germany, for duty with an infantry brigade. Coincidentally, John and Ellie discovered that their new quarters in Berlin were just around the corner from where his family had lived nearly a decade earlier. During this assignment, John learned the value of being flexible; he got his first flying hours for pay in an Air Force C-47 rather than an Army aircraft.

Subsequent assignments included the Infantry Officer Career Course at Ft. Benning, GA. In 1964 John found himself in Washington State, assigned to Headquarters, X Corps. Here he served in the unique capacity of pilot and aide-de-camp to two generals.

John served two tours in Vietnam, during which he earned numerous decorations. John's skill as a combat leader, however, is best illustrated by the mission for which he received the Purple Heart. He had taken the place of one of his exhausted enlisted men who was a helicopter door gunner. During the mission, an enemy bullet came through the floor of the helicopter, striking John

in the back and missing his spinal cord by less than an inch. John led from the front.

During 1967–69, John was at Ft. Walters, TX, with the U.S. Army Primary Helicopter Center, where he led instructors conducting primary helicopter flight training for U.S. and Vietnamese officers and was the plans officer for the Army's Primary Helicopter Center.

John completed Command & General Staff College in 1973 and was assigned to ROTC Region IV until 1976. About this time someone discovered John had a natural affinity for numbers, and he became a comptroller, managing funds for Army Installations and Commands. He was recognized as running the best Resource Management Directorate within TRADOC.

John's loyalty to the Corps played out in various ways, but the event that memorably impacted his fellow Army comrades was when, 23 years after graduating from the Point, John upheld the cadet football tradition of standing the entire game as Army played Missouri.

John retired as a colonel from his last assignment as comptroller of the Armaments Research and Development Command, managing an annual budget of \$1.4 billion.

John joined the "Long Gray Line" after a lengthy battle with pulmonary fibrosis. He was a true soldier and fought hard to the end. He would quote GEN Douglas MacArthur, saying, "Old soldiers never die; they just fade away."

John built a career of positive leadership. He led by the belief that "a command is only as strong as its weakest link." He was described as being very approachable, humble, and always interested in hearing what others had to say. John was a true gentleman, respectful of others, highly disciplined, and displayed integrity, honesty, and loyalty. These characteristics and the example he set are what truly earned him honor.

—Bob Lamb, classmate
and the Dubbelde family