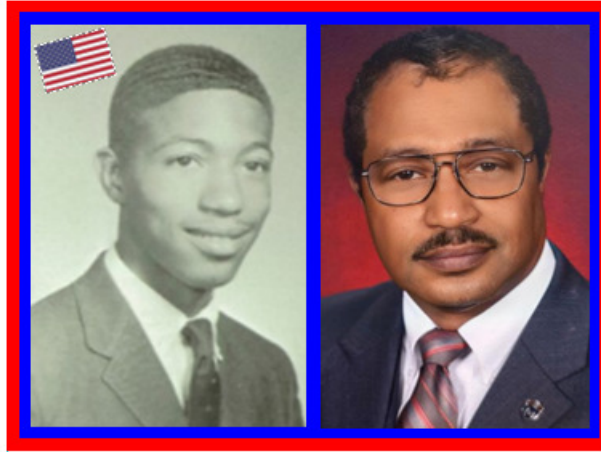


Ret. Colonel Leon A. Parker III

Class of 1968

April 15, 1950 - March 21, 2025



The Class of 1968 would first like to introduce Ret. Colonel Leon A. Parker III to the rest of the alumni by submitting his writing from the 1968 edition of the *junto*. He was a man with forward thinking, way beyond the times. Little did he know then his career, life and dedication to his country, were etched in stone.

FREEDOM vs. THE PEOPLE

In 1776, the United States fought for its independence and received it from England. A Declaration of Independence was written up assuring our freedom. Later the U. S. Constitution was written up and in 1866 the Civil Rights Bill was passed, granting even greater freedoms. When you read this in a history book, you may say that we should be proud of what we have, that we are lucky not to have lived through the hardships of our ancestors. But there is one nauseating factor which we have to face: "Our ancestors had only to fight for freedom, we have to live with it."

Freedom can be and is a dangerous concept and reality. That is, if you looked at the U. S. today, you can see great declines in morality; in cheating where there had been honesty, crime where once there was respect for the law. Everywhere, everything and everybody seems to be growing lax and indifferent, and definitely there is a mental, moral and physical softness about. The distorted concept of freedom leaves men free to be selfish, free to be lazy, free to be ignoble, and free to be weak.

The freedoms which we the people are now clamoring for, are freedoms from unpleasantness: from hardship, discipline, duty and from self-sacrifice.

There has been a popular belief that we are reaching the goal of becoming a completely free nation; it is this feeling of "ultrafreedom" that may be replaced by a climate of repression. And if we do not learn to guard and preserve our own best values, some form of tyranny will attempt to contract them from us.

If personal freedom of choice is our goal, and our ideal or policy as a nation; then our first and fundamental choice must be *not* to abuse that freedom.

—Leon Parker—

Leon graduated from Franklin High School in Reisterstown, Maryland. He had a long and distinguished career after receiving his Bachelor's of Science degree in Mathematics from Morgan State University (1974), but he was making history long before writing for the *junto* and completing his education. Leon's pathway to notoriety actually started at another Franklin; Franklin Elementary School.

Leon was the first black student enrolled at Franklin Elementary School in 1956. Integration was phased in throughout Baltimore County and Leon's parents were emphatic that he not go to a segregated school because they wanted him to learn in the same atmosphere of the world he would grow up in and live in. Throughout his life the person Leon always admired and who he said made a major impact on his life was Mr. Kenneth Mays, who was the first principal of the NEW Franklin Elementary. Leon said he accepted him into the school and told him he could be anything he wanted to be. He said that meeting stayed with him throughout his career. Leon was, in fact, the first black student to complete all 12 years at all three (3) levels of Franklin's schools.

In 2023 Leon was doing a lot of research of his family's history in the area and writing and recording much of his personal history for future generations. He titled a recent writing...*It's Your Turn Now* and it covered a great deal of his military career. Here's what he had to say,

"In Oct 1974, I attended the Infantry Officers Training Course at Ft. Benning, Ga., full of pride at what I was going to do for my country. After completing that course, it was on to Ranger School, Jump School, and Special Weapons School, and I would have gone to

flight school except I came down on orders to go to the Berlin Brigade to become a General's Aid. All things happen for a reason and orders got lost and I was delayed from leaving. They were finally found and I was on my way. Upon arrival in Germany, I was met by a Command Sergeant Major who said "sorry son you were late and West Pointer got your job. I was sent to reassign to where ever you want." I replied, "Send me somewhere I can make a difference". And so it began."

Leon served in many units while assigned in Germany. It was the 70's. Things were changing, but he still faced discrimination in some commands. He also served with many people who were coming out of Vietnam and saw many soldiers treated unfairly because they held positions that were no longer needed and they were trying to filter them out of the troops. Leon wrote of how once he found a comfortable assignment in German things settled down and the training was great. He felt like it was meant to be: my men, my mission, my beliefs. His troops performed many missions while in Germany, including rescuing a lost patrol in a blizzard that had mistakenly crossed the border and helping someone escape to the "Half-Way" house.....a house that was literally divided in half during the times of the East/West border. He also served with the British Army of Germany where he met the Queen of England, and more importantly, participated in the NATO exercise, which guaranteed an open route through Berlin.

Other assignments included:

- Design a Task Force while assigned in Germany and then being selected to lead this task force
- He was pulled from a school in 1978 to be briefed on a plane after being assigned as the logistic liaison to estimate ground requirements for the Jones Town Mission.
- Leon was involved in the 1st Cuban Flotilla, working for a General to supply military as interpreters, and surveying other sites for over flow.
- After attending automation school he returned to Ft. Lee, VA, where he developed the software to run on a Radio Shack System, TRS-80, to test the feasibility of computers at the lowest level of the supply chain – the motor pool. Shortly after that, the Army placed automation systems at various levels of the supply system. Once this was done they were directed to write and field one system that did it all.
- After an assignment to Korea, he became PM Standard Army Retail Supply System (PM SARSS) and was testing the system at Fort Bragg. One day the CORPS Commander asked could he return the Near Retime system -SARSS back to the old system in one day and he said and then had to prepare to brief the Commanding General of the Army in one hour on how he was going to deploy XVIII Corps to Saudi. This led to him having command of military and civilian technicians, to support the entire logistics system for the deployed units with SARSS, a prototype system.
- In 1996, he assisted General Wilson commander of the Army Material Command with Congressional issue. After doing so, he was assigned to stay in Washington, DC, to oversee the operation that he had created that included: three General Officers and over 460 PM I level systems, from the Black Hawk to the Black Beret and Pentagon Renovation. He was also given the Army Astronaut program, and the Civilian Engineers and Military Scientists workforce.

Leon served in the United States Army for over 27 years as an Airborne Army Ranger, attaining the rank of Colonel. His successful leadership organizing and leading highly successful, technically skilled and operational teams earned him the respect of his country and peers. He was offered the rank of Brigadier (1 Star) General, but instead decided to retire in 2001 at U. S. Army Material Command, Alexandria, Virginia. His boundless accomplishments helped shape our military and are still implemented to this day. One of his many accomplishments was to design the beret for the army uniform. He was also a great role model and supported the ROTC program, providing mentorship and leadership to future U. S. Armed Forces officers.

Leon retired on Sept. 2001, to spend time with his son before he graduated from college. On Sept 11, he received a call from a Colonel requesting his help in getting accountability of personnel who were in the Pentagon. It took hours and when the results were in it was a blessing that the attack had been the side of the building that had been reinforced, and the plane did not penetrate completely through the Pentagon. From 2001 through 2020 Leon was the VP for Operations, for the Logistics Solutions Group, Inc., a defense contractor supporting the military. The company had personnel in Germany at the headquarters, in Kosovo, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Djibouti and Iraq in the green zone. They had people at FT Lewis, Washington, Ft. Bragg NC, Ft. Knox, KY, Ft. Lee, VA, the Pentagon to name a few. The company also had people on the General's staff of ARCENT Command, AFCENT Command, and Special Operations Command. And then out of the blue, it came to a halt. The company was told, a small company could not perform to requirements, what they had been doing and the contacts were upgraded to Big business.

For all his travels Leon remained true to Maryland and locally to Baltimore, following the Orioles and the Ravens. He enjoyed his family and friends and was with his class at both the 50th and 55th Reunions. Leon is survived by his wife Barbara, who he met at Morgan State and his son, Leon. .