

TUESDAY, APRIL 6, 1948

Gen. Gavin Leaves His Famed 82nd

(Associated Press)

Fort Braggs, N. C., April 6.—A hundred and fifty combat veterans of the Eighty-second Airborne Division stood waiting as the slender man with two stars on his shoulder stepped to the microphone.

They were survivors of "the Devils in Baggy Pants" who made four combat parachute jumps in Europe and helped turn back the German tide in the Battle of the Bulge.

They were gathered to hear the farewell address of their leader, Maj. Gen. "Slim Jim" Gavin, who has been promoted to chief of staff of the Fifth Army in Chicago.

"I'm not here to say 'goodbye,' because I'll really never leave the division," said General Jim. "I'll always be here in spirit."

And for about five minutes he told them in simple soldierly language what it had meant to him to be their leader. He said that their division "will never die," and that what they had done in its name gave them an immortality too.

I have met a number of generals who were liked personally by their men—and a number who weren't. But I never saw one who took their hearts more than "Slim Jim," who in 1944 became the youngest ground force general at the age of 37.

Gavin leaped first in combat. And, rifle slung over his arm, he roved always to the point where he was most needed. His neat quick grin and cheerful confidence made his men bolder than their natures. He gave them comradeship in battle—and that means more than rank.

At 41 he is now the army's recognized authority on airborne operations, which he feels will play a determining role in future warfare.

It was like Gavin that when the time came for his final review, he should think first of the veterans who had followed him out plane doors over Sicily, Italy, France and Holland. So the 150 who are still with the division shared the review honors, facing him in two formations as all their new comrades paraded by.

Later, after he told them farewell, some of the oldtimers came up to shake hands. Many had wives with them.

Two troopers started kidding each other about the jump they made in Italy, and Tech. Sgt. Samuel B. Bowen of Redvale, Colo., jeered:

"Man, if you'd dug a hole two feet deeper we could have tried you for desertion."