

# Before DSMC, There Was DWSMC

**From Tongue Point to Fort Belvoir — Chance Meeting with Kennedy-Johnson Era Executive, James N. Davis Sheds Light On DSMC's Origins**

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Those familiar with the establishment of the Defense Systems Management College (DSMC)<sup>1</sup> by Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard in 1971 might not be aware that the requirement for a school to ensure that future program managers had the necessary management skills to effectively acquire weapon systems for the Department of Defense was first conceived in 1963.<sup>2</sup> Then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara directed that a conference (New London Conference) be conducted on Program Management that led to the establishment of the predecessor to DSMC.<sup>3</sup>

## A Chance Meeting

How I became aware of this little known fact, even though I have been teaching at DSMC for over 13 years, is by meeting one of the original forces behind program management education and the DSMC.<sup>4</sup> It was a great day for golf, and since I was off from work I proceeded to the golf course without a tee time. The starter paired me with a nice couple and we were off to challenge our mental and physical capabilities. When I play with strangers, two questions inevitably come up: Where do you work and what do you do for a living?

It is not easy providing answers to these questions to people not familiar with weapon systems acquisition, which is the vast majority of the population. So I was pleasantly surprised by my playing partners' understanding not only of the acquiring of weapon systems, but also

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THEN: JAMES N. DAVIS, FORMER DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR WEAPONS ACQUISITION AND INDUSTRIAL READINESS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (INSTALLATIONS & LOGISTICS). PHOTO DATED MARCH 1964.

NOW: DAVIS IN A DECEMBER 1999 PHOTO.



The goals that Jim Davis established over 35 years ago are still followed at the Defense Systems Management College today.



to the education and training of the personnel that do the acquiring. As I later discovered, I was playing golf with James N. Davis, former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Weapons Acquisition and Industrial Readiness during the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations.

### A New Institution

The New London Conference, held in the summer of 1963, reaffirmed that the same management skills are necessary to manage programs regardless of Service affiliation. To ensure the necessary management skills would be developed by future program managers, the Deputy Secretary of Defense directed in September 1963, the establishment of a systems/project management education and training institution.

Davis assumed leadership for organizing a Defense Weapon Systems Management Center (DWSMC) to meet the needs for program management education. Political pressures at the time highly suggested that the new school be located in Oregon. So Davis and his exploratory team proceeded to Tongue Point, Oregon, a closed down seaplane training base, to assess its suitability. Fortunately, they found it unsuitable for several reasons:

- Not easily accessible for students.
- No readily available pool of faculty.
- No locally available guest speakers.
- Expensive to operate.
- Lack of sunshine.

However, they still had to cope with the politics of locating something in Oregon. Locating an Indian High School at the sea base, in lieu of an acquisition school, was recommended and accepted to the satisfaction of all parties involved.

Next – Where to put the new school? Davis and his team suggested Fort Belvoir, Va., because of its proximity to Washington, D.C. That idea was rejected because Fort Belvoir already had the Army Management School. The Air Force offered up facilities at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, which were accepted.

### Air Force Hosts Inaugural Class for DWSMC

In March 1964, Davis assigned the Air Force responsibility for establishing and

operating the DWSMC. The faculty was jointly staffed and included both military and civilians. The commandant was an Air Force colonel, with two deputies – one Navy and one Army. The school was the only joint school that addressed weapon systems planning, acquisition, and support from the frame of reference of a single managerial responsibility. The first class was composed of 18 students from each of the three military departments. That first class graduated in December 1964.

Davis conceived that the school would satisfy three goals:

- Teach students how to communicate effectively on a day-to-day basis with superiors and others throughout the acquisition community.
- Orient the student regarding the philosophy of complex systems acquisition, by explaining the inter-relationships of the many activities and pieces of a system that must be synchronized in work, test, and delivery if the entire system is to function in the field.
- Keep in close touch with actual practices in the military departments and industry for currency, and act as a change agent for identifying and explaining new methods and practices.

The goals that Jim Davis established over 35 years ago are still followed at the Defense Systems Management College today.

### ENDNOTES

1. The Defense Systems Management College was officially established at Fort Belvoir, Va., July 1, 1971.
2. Acker, David D., *A History of the Defense Systems Management College* (Defense Systems Management College, Fort Belvoir, Va., 1986).
3. Final Report of the Conference on Program Management (Department of Defense, 1963).
4. Interview with Jim Davis by Chip Summers, November 1999.