

# DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**MAJOR GENERAL  
ROBERT L. SHIRKEY**

Inducted March 2011



Robert L. Shirkey was born on April 26, 1924 in Holton, Kan. At the age of 15, he enlisted in the 137th Infantry, Kansas National Guard. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he was accepted for Infantry Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Ga. He graduated from Infantry OCS and was commissioned a second lieutenant at the age of 18; holding the distinction of being the youngest man to graduate from the institution during World War II. His first assignment was to the 158th Regimental Combat Team (Bushmasters), where he served as a platoon leader.

While serving in the Pacific area of operations, he volunteered to join the Alamo Scouts and served under General Walter Krueger. He graduated from the Alamo Scouts Training Center in 1945, and became one of only 21 officers to lead an Alamo Scout team on combat missions during World War II. Shirkey led his team on special missions on the island of Luzon, Philippines, through the summer of 1945.

On a mission of particular import to Gen. Krueger and Gen. Douglas MacArthur, then Lt. Shirkey and his team, moved 65 miles behind the Japanese lines to confirm the presence of Japanese General Yamashita on the island. The team captured a Japanese officer, and evacuated him back to American-held territory, where he confirmed to U.S. Army Intelligence that Gen. Yamashita was in direct command on the island.

Later that year, Lt. Shirkey was ordered to take his team and link-up with 200 Filipino guerrillas and then land the guerrillas on the beach in Palanan Bay with the help of the two U.S. Navy LCIs and two gunboats. When the ramp went down, the guerrilla leader balked at the idea. Shirkey moved past the guerrilla leader and led his team and the guerrillas in a successful combat beach assault. He then led the force inland where they engaged and eliminated the enemy.

He ultimately led six special-operations combat missions, including back-to-back deep-penetration missions around Bontoc and Atok, Luzon, that resulted in one of the longest periods spent behind Japanese lines of any Alamo Scout team. Later Lt. Shirkey returned to the 158th RCT (Bushmasters) to help spearhead the invasion of Japan. After the Japanese surrender, Lt. Shirkey landed on the Japanese island of Honshu.

At Utsunomiya in the Tochigi Prefecture, Japanese General Seiki, commander of the 6th Imperial Japanese Army, personally surrendered to Lt. Shirkey by presenting his centuries-old samurai sword to him. The sword is now on display in the World War II exhibits of the National Infantry Museum, Fort Benning, Ga. Major General Shirkey returned to civilian life at the conclusion of World War II, and earned a law degree, establishing a law office in downtown Kansas City, Mo.

He was called back to active duty during the Korean War and commanded an Infantry company of the 5th Regimental Combat Team on the front lines of Korea. Following his tour in Korea, Shirkey remained in the Active Reserve. He served as an instructor for the Infantry School, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. He later became deputy commander of the U.S. Army Military Personnel Center and later Commanding General of the 89th U.S. Reserve Command. Retiring in 1982, he was the last general officer on active duty who had fought against the Japanese.

Major General Shirkey was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star Medal, the Bronze Star Medal with V-Device and Oak Leaf Cluster, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, the Purple Heart Medal and numerous campaign medals and unit citation awards. He also earned the Combat Infantry Badge and was awarded the Special Forces Tab.

Major General Shirkey remains active in the community, taking every opportunity to, in his words, "tell what those men did" and to preserve their incredible acts of courage and sacrifice. On Nov. 10, 2010, he donated several of his military papers to the Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. He has also shared his experiences with special-operations students attending the Command and General Staff College.

He and his wife, Carol, reside in Kansas City. He is a member of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, the Special Forces Association and the Alamo Scouts Association.