

John Somers Buist Dick

- Born 10 June 1913
- 12 June 1935: graduated USMA and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers
- Jul 1940-Aug 1943: Instructor Department of Mathematics, USMA
- Sep 1943-Sep 1944: G-3 Division, HQ Army Ground Forces, Washington, D.C.
- Oct 1944-Apr 1945: Commander, 3rd Engineers, 24th Division, Philippines
- Jan 1946-Aug 1948: Assistant Professor of Mathematics, USMA
- Sep 1948-Jul 1951: HQ Far East Command, Tokyo, Japan
- Feb 1952-Jan 1954: Commander 332rd Engineer Group, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri
- Jun 1958-Sep 1967: Associate Professor of Mathematics, USMA
- Oct 1967-Jan 1974: Professor of Mathematics, Head of the Mathematics Department, USMA
- Jan 1974-Aug 1974: Acting Dean of the Academic Board, USMA

John Somers Buist Dick was born in Atlanta, Georgia on 10 June 1913. His father, Colonel William W. Dick, a 1906 graduate of the Citadel, was the Commandant of Cadets at the Georgia Military Academy when John was born. Somers Dick entered West Point as a cadet in 1931 on an appointment from the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. As a cadet, Dick was an excellent student and an accomplished boxer. College boxing flourished in the mid-thirties when strong teams represented schools like Army, Penn State, Syracuse, Yale, Harvard, etc. Dick co-captained the team his senior year as he was good enough to win all of his bouts. According to classmates of Cadet Dick, his write-up in the 1935 West Point Yearbook (Howitzer) very succinctly described the individual, "Our memories of Somers will not be so much of his ability which, incidentally is not to be lightly passed by, as of his clear, whole-hearted friendliness, the equal of which we have seldom seen." On 12 June 1935, Cadet Dick graduated seventeenth in a class of two hundred seventy-seven. Upon graduation, he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers.

After graduation, Lieutenant Dick spent four of his first five years of commissioned service serving with various engineer units at Fort Dupont, Delaware and Fort Benning, Georgia. During these assignments, he commanded an engineer company. From June 1936 to June 1937, Lieutenant Dick was a student officer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, earning a Master of Science Degree in Civil Engineering. In July 1940, he was assigned to the faculty of USMA for the first of three tours, instructing in the Department of Mathematics. Captain and then ultimately Major Dick, remained at West Point for three years.

From September 1943 until September 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Dick was sent to Washington, D.C. to serve as the Assistant G-3 at Headquarters, Army Ground Forces. In October 1944, he took command of the Third Engineer Battalion, 24th Division and led them in the Leyte, Mindoro, and Mindanao Campaigns in the Philippines. He relinquished command in April 1945 and returned to his Headquarters, Army Ground Forces position in Washington, D.C. until he was once again assigned to West Point. In January 1946, he was appointed as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Mathematics, USMA.

Lieutenant Colonel Dick left the Academy for the second time in August 1948, for duty in Japan, assigned to General of the Army Douglas MacArthur's staff. He worked with the Engineer Section, Construction Branch of the Headquarters Far East Command in Tokyo for nearly three years. Following successful completion of the Armed Forces Staff College in early 1952, Colonel Dick was assigned to the Engineer Center at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where he served as an Engineer Aviation Group Commander, an Engineer Brigade Executive Officer, Commander 332nd Engineer Group, and Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3. In August 1954, Colonel Dick was ordered to Naples, Italy to work in the Logistics Division, Plans Branch, Headquarters, Allied Forces Southern Europe.

Colonel Dick returned to the United States in May 1957 to attend Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he earned a Master of Science Degree in Mathematics. Upon completion of his degree in May 1958, Colonel Dick was assigned to West Point as Associate Professor of Mathematics. In 1960, Colonel Dick was appointed Professor of Mathematics and Deputy Head of the Department. In October 1967, Colonel Dick was appointed Head of the Mathematics Department. He served in this capacity with distinction until 1 January 1974, when he was appointed Acting Dean of the Academic Board.

Colonel Dick was a strong believer in a broad undergraduate education. He wrote, "Specialization belongs to graduate school...I think the cadet is getting one of the best educations in the country, principally because it is well rounded and because the Academy allows him to select only a few electives after he has viewed many disciplines." It was Colonel Dick's conviction that "...it is the whole man who counts and that every member of the faculty must concentrate on molding all aspects of the cadet's makeup." This has been the essence of all of his guidance and direction in his services at West Point.

As Deputy Head of the Mathematics Department, it was Colonel Dick who supervised the introduction of several innovative and extremely successful Advanced Placement Programs that allowed qualified cadets to validate some mathematics courses. While serving as a Professor at USMA, Colonel Dick had the opportunity to serve on numerous committees concerned with the expansion of the Corps of Cadets and the curriculum. He was instrumental in the planning and development of Eisenhower Hall, a very modern cadet activities center, as he chaired the Cadet Union Subcommittee.

When elevated to the position of Head of Mathematics Department, his accomplishments were equally as noteworthy. "He placed great emphasis on the principle objectives of his Department. The goals he stressed were to assist the cadet in his character development, in his mastery of reasoning and in his understanding of the application of mathematics." Colonel Dick was known to be an excellent teacher in the classroom. He was able to stimulate much interest in mathematics by appealing to the cadet's affection for sports. Colonel Dick took a very active interest in the caliber and quality of students entering USMA. For many years he served as a member of the Admissions Committee. Colonel Dick's awareness and support of the importance of Army athletics led to his appointment to the Athletic Board in 1971. It was said that "...the excellence of Army sports over the years is certainly attributable in some measures to Colonel Dick's encouragement to cadets considering the West Point opportunity."

Colonel Dick retired on 31 August 1974 after spending more than thirty-nine years of active commissioned service in the Regular Army. He was the last man of the USMA Class of 1935 to retire from the Army. The twenty-one years he spent serving West Point was capstoned by his selection to fill the position of Acting Dean of the Academic Board from January 1974 until his retirement in August 1974.

References:

"Col Dick, Acting Dean USMA, Retires", Assembly, Volume 33, No. 2, September 1974, page 30.

Cullum's Register, Volume VIII, page 1089.

De Santis, Al, "Retiring Dick left mark as boxer", Middletown Record, 14 August 1974.

News Release, Information Office, USMA, 4 August 1974.

West Point General Orders Number 233, 6 August 1974.