Letters from Kansas

When I wrote about my 22 weeks in Georgia, attending Officers Candidate School (OCS) at Ft. Benning during the summer of 1951, I included only a brief summary of my Army service leading up to that assignment. Although that introduction to Army life (including basic training and leadership school) was not as exciting as my tour in OCS, it had its interesting moments and it provides some insight into the personality the Army had selected to become "an officer and a gentleman"—and how that personality adjusted to being an enlisted man in the military.

As the earlier narrative pointed out, I enlisted in the Army on October 2, 1950, with a civilian commitment to OCS. That is, the pathway my training would follow was already determined—and guaranteed—before I joined up. So, when I arrived at Ft. Riley, KS the next day, I knew pretty well what was in store for me. I just had to sweat out the details. Many of those details were included in letters home to my parents. As I pointed out in my OCS story, my mother kept all of my letters home from the service and I still have most of them to draw from in telling about those first seven months of my military service.

The first letter in my file from those days was written on October 10th, a week after I arrived at Ft. Riley. There was probably an earlier letter with details of my first few days, but it no longer exists, so I need to fill in those days from what I can still remember—and can glean from copies of the orders I still have. I was sworn into the Army with four other men at the recruiting station in Des Moines and given orders assigning me to the 10th Infantry Division at Ft. Riley. One of the other men sworn in with me was a guy named Jorgensen, who was also a civilian commitment for OCS. He was on the same travel order to Ft. Riley and we traveled together. I assume we went to Kansas City by train but I have no recollection of that leg of the journey. I do recall being in the Kansas City railroad station with Jorgensen and we probably had dinner there, as the travel orders authorized one meal ticket each. My most enduring memory of that stop in KC was the purchase of my first pack of cigarettes—a practice that followed me for the next two-and-a-half years. I had never smoked before and have no idea now why I decided to start then—except that perhaps at that time I somehow considered it to be a sign of maturity.

The train trip to Ft. Riley could not have taken very long because it was only about 120 miles. I suppose that Jorgensen and I went through initial processing together the next day, but I have no memories of him after our stopover in KC. I do have some faint recollection of the processing—particularly accumulating a massive mound of GI wearing apparel, including combat boots (size 9-1/2 EE) and olive drab undershorts with no elastic; just draw strings on the sides.

The 10th Inf. Div. was a training division. Like a division organized for combat, it had three regiments plus other supporting units—although those units (armor, artillery etc.) did not always serve the same functions as they would in a combat outfit. The three regiments were the 85th, 86th and 87th. My first assignment after processing was Company C, 86th Inf. Reg. Company C was a holding company, a unit for men waiting for a permanent assignment. Most of the other companies in the division were basic training companies. They conducted training in cycles, typically either eight or fourteen weeks—eight weeks for men that were not preparing for combat, and fourteen for those that were. So, new recruits were required to wait until a company was available to start a cycle of the required length. In my case, the prescribed course included fourteen weeks of basic and I would be in the holding company till a new cycle of that length became available.

You learn very early in your military career that assignment to a holding company is no picnic. The Army is a zealous proponent of the adage, "Idle hands are the Devil's workplace." It abhors seeing a GI with nothing to do. My brother liked to tell the story of a GI that broke his leg and, while he was lying waiting for the medics, his sergeant came along and said, "Don't just lie there. Do pushups." So, members of a holding company typically were required to fall out in the morning and wait to be assigned to various work details or close-order drill.

It did not take me many of those mornings to decide that an alternative strategy was called for. So, about the second or third morning in my assignment to C Company, when the first sergeant asked if anyone in the formation could type, my hand went up immediately. Both of my older brothers had been in the service during WWII and they had warned me not to volunteer for anything. However, when I look back on my military career, few decisions did more to ease my way through the rigors of training than that one. It set me on a pathway of avoiding those rigors that was the envy of my comrades.

The first sergeant called me out of the formation and directed me to the orderly room, which is the company headquarters. There, the company commander, the first sergeant and the company clerk have their offices. The company clerk is responsible for all the paperwork for the company, and in a unit full on transients, that can be a lot of paperwork. So, the clerk needed a body that could type, and by raising my hand in violation of my brothers' admonition, I became that body. No more work details for me. I was now an office person. Of course, my tenure in the holding company was only going to go on for another week or so, but if I played my cards right, it could become a springboard to some serious avoidance in the days and weeks to come.

That letter written on October 10th is the only one I have from when I was in the holding company. Here are some extracts from that letter:

> *Dear Folks,*
>
> *Spent another day typing while the rest of the company drilled. I like the work. In fact, I even offered to work tonight just for something to do. The boredom is what can drive a man crazy. Everyone is anxious to ship out and get going on something definite.*

The letter went on to explain that there had been robberies in a number of barracks the night before and that I had been selected to keep watch in our barracks this night, sitting in the latrine (on a board across a toilet) writing the letter. It went on to say:

> *I have to stay awake all night with my eyes and ears open. Sort of useless as far as I can see. Like locking the barn door after the horse is stolen. My reward is a promise from the first sergeant to be able to spend all day tomorrow in bed. Which brings us to my platoon leader Cpl. Irving who is pissed off. He is the man for whom I have been typing. He had some work for me to do tomorrow but since the 1st Sgt outranks the Cpl, I stay in bed.*
>
> *Yes, I lost $30 in the raid last night but don't worry. I have a couple of bucks till payday and they don't give any time to spend it so it will be sufficient.*

Clearly, I was learning fast how to work the system. And, that day, I began the practice of sleeping on my wallet, inside my pillowcase.

The second letter I have was dated October 19th. It was a short letter, obviously written from the company to which I was assigned for basic training, Company B, 85th Inf.—but the training cycle had not yet started. Here is a significant extract:

> *I'm back at the typewriter. I don't know whether it's a good deal or not. It's too early to tell. I'm assistant company clerk and from all indications (aside from the fact that I'm working my ass off) it could be a good deal. We'll see later.*

How I managed to move so smoothly from the orderly room at C-86 to the orderly room at B-85, I don't remember. Apparently my reputation had followed me. Here I was, assistant company clerk of my basic training company just two weeks after I joined the Army. With winter coming on, it was a situation with a lot of potential.

By October 1950, the U.S. had been fighting in the Korean War for less than four months and the draft was just being re-instituted. So the basic training cycle to which I had been assigned would be the first time draftees were included among the trainees. However, although the vast majority of the recruits in B Company were draftees, there was a significant contingent of guys like me who had enlisted with a civilian commitment for OCS. These were most of the guys I hung out with in basic and leadership school.

On October 24, the second day of the basic training cycle, I wrote:

> *…They've been keeping me busy. Been typing every day for the last week. Finally caught up today. I'll no doubt be going back whenever there's something to do. As it is, I've missed 2 days of basic but the fellows say I haven't missed much. I'm to receive private tutoring to catch up with the M-1 class they had this morning…*

The emerging pattern was one that was beginning to define me as indispensable. There were, of course, both positive and negative aspects to this pattern. On the positive side, I could often stir up a typing job when a field exercise was scheduled and the weather was lousy. The negative side was that I had to be available whenever any of the officers or cadre needed my typing skills. Most of the time I was able to make the most of the positive and minimize the negative. My ace in the hole was the Supply Sergeant. He almost always needed something typed. So, on those days when I wanted to avoid a particularly vicious day in the cold Kansas wind, I could usually go to the sergeant and volunteer to type his forms if he would tell the field first sergeant that I needed to be excused from training. It didn't happen often, but it did spare me an occasional day of misery.

Two extra duties that are impossible to avoid in basic training are guard duty and KP (kitchen police). I was assigned to guard duty twice in basic. The first time was in mid November, about seven weeks after I enlisted. I wrote about the experience in a letter home, dated November 19th:

> *Last Monday, I was in a group of 35 who pulled guard duty. 33 of these men walk posts. The 2 sharpest soldiers are 1. Regimental runner on the night of the guard duty and 2. Colonel's orderly for the next day. The colonel's orderly is the best job and goes to the sharpest of the two. The runner has an easy job and a warm one but he has to stay up all night. The colonel never needs an orderly, so the orderly goes back to the company and sleeps in his sack and reports to*

Regt'al Hq the next day and is promptly dismissed. I am a lazy man and entertained no desires to walk around with an empty rifle guarding empty buildings especially when it's cold—so I went on guard mount determined to become colonel's orderly. I "sir"'d the OD to death, replied very snappily, and give him the full blast of my flashiest manual of arms. As a result, I accomplished what I set out to do and slept a peaceful sleep in my own sack that night while 33 unlucky souls froze their asses. The next morning I reported to the colonel and was informed that he didn't need an orderly and was dismissed and returned to the company. The company was on the range so I rode out to the range (a hell of a ways) in a truck. All in all if you look at it in the right light, this guard duty is a cinch.

I still remember that inspection by the OD (Officer of the Day). Although I didn't mention it in my letter home, I have always been convinced that one thing I did (or rather didn't do) during that inspection guaranteed my being selected as the top member of the detail that day. We were assembled in three ranks for the inspection. As the OD came up to each man in the formation, the soldier would come to attention, bring his rifle smartly to "port arms" (held chest high in front of him) and slam the chamber open for inspection. The OD would take the rifle, inspect it and return it (all of this being done—as best as possible—as a precise mechanical ritual). Then the OD would typically ask a question—and that question was usually to recite one of the 12 (I think) General Orders. General Orders gave the rules by which members of the guard were to conduct themselves. They had to be memorized before you went on guard duty. However, when the OD handed me back my rifle, he asked simply, "What's my name?" Without hesitation, I barked, "I don't know, sir!" I believe that answer made me the colonel's orderly. Why? Because his name was plainly displayed on a tag on the front of his blouse. If I had looked at it, I would no longer have been at attention. Being at attention required that I not move a muscle—including my eyes.

The following week, we were scheduled to be on bivouac, but it was also the week of Thanksgiving. Bivouac is a field exercise that normally lasts a training week (five days). The troops typically walk to the site, engage in field training during the day and sleep in pup tents at night (irrespective of the weather) and walk back at the end or the week. However, as I explained in a letter home after Thanksgiving dinner (November 23), the holiday helped make that week a lot more tolerable:

We didn't have to walk far to the bivouac area (about 7 miles) but we made up for it while we were out there. They parked us up on a hill and when we went to and fro from camp to training and back we had to climb that hill—and it was a dilly.

The weather was very kind to us. It got up to about 60 one of the days—but it got down to 20 one night. We got a taste of the infiltration course and that also was a dilly…

Because the regimental football team was playing a championship game Wed. afternoon we got to ride back in trucks Wed. noon. We go back out tomorrow but we don't stay out any more.

We really had a feast today. They had the mess hall all decorated with crepe paper. The had just finished repapering the walls and painting, so it really

looked blitzed up. The regimental commander ate with us…We sat at the tables and a chaplain said grace. We were served by waiters. I ate like a hog.

A week later (November 30), I wrote a letter including details about some of the weapons training we were going through:

…Learning the tools of the trade. So far this week we've had assembly and disassembly of the Browning 30 caliber water cooled machine gun (this weapon was not scheduled for our basic as we're taking light weapons—but they say too may GI's in Korea don't know how to use it.) Then we fired it. Today we had assembly and disassembly of the sub machine gun. Tomorrow we fire the sub machine gun, the 3.63 rocket launcher (bazooka) and the rifle grenade. Next week we have the B.A.R. and the 30 cal air cooled light machine gun.

Along with news of my training experiences, my letters home were also beginning to be interspersed with scuttlebutt (rumors). At the time, probably because I was so intimately involved with my own part in it, I was not very aware of how much the things that were happening in the world were influencing what was going on in Kansas. The U.S. had not been mobilized for war since the end of WWII five years earlier, and the re-mobilization in 1950 went on with a lot of fits and starts. The Cold War had begun and the conflict in Korea was now only one front to which the U.S. military had to direct its attention. So, as the people in charge were trying to figure out how to apply their resources, things continued to change and rumors continued to abound—rumors about how long we were going to be in basic and what would become of the draftees that made up the majority of our company. Of course, those of us with commitments to OCS knew generally where we were headed, but even those plans were pretty tenuous and became the subject of a lot of scuttlebutt.

By the first week in December, we were starting our seventh week of basic and Christmas was only three weeks away, so my letters began to include tentative plans for going home on a Christmas leave. The following extract from a December 5 letter includes some of those plans, some more cold-weather avoidance and some scuttlebutt:

Unless things change radically between now and then I'll be home sometime the morning of the 23rd. This is providing I can get proper connections. So far I think I have a ride to K.C. early the morning of the 23rd and if I can get a plane out of K.C. early, things should work out O.K. I'll be able to tell a little more later.

Things remain the same around here. FUBAR (F— up beyond all repair). If I didn't fall into typing details on cold days things around here could become unpleasant. The weather has taken a turn for the worst. It's supposed to get down to -10º tonight. We're supposed to be outside most of the day tomorrow. I'm certainly glad Lt. Larkin needs his lessons plans typed tomorrow.

It's very possible that basic may not last 14 wks. After 6 wks under the present training system a trainee is perfectly qualified for combat. And all indications around here point to the conclusion that this outfit may cease training before the specified time.

In a letter the following week (December 13), I showed that if you can't always use ingenuity to avoid cold days in the field, sometimes you can just get lucky. I also included a bit about how I spent some of my spare time:

> *…I pulled a rather minor deal and while the rest of the company is out in the cold (and I mean cold) Kansas wind on the rifle range I am sitting here as barracks orderly. You see I was on KP today and the KP's were to get off at noon to fire on the range. But my rifle got locked up and I couldn't get it. So I was going to serve the rest of the day on KP. When we got back from feeding the company in the field I discovered that the barracks orderly had gone to the range and there was no one to relieve him. So I relieved him. All the barracks orderly has to do is see that everything here in the barracks remains undisturbed…*
>
> *There should be a lot for me to tell you but I just can't find anything of importance to say. I basically train all day and clean my rifle and shoot the bull till it's time for bed, then I sleep. Weekends we loaf around or go to Ft. Riley* [the Main Post] *or to a show. We got our first passes last weekend but I didn't use mine. As yet I haven't been off the post and from what I heard of the towns around I'm just as well off.*

Ft. Riley was divided geographically into three posts; the Main Post (the original Ft. Riley from the 19th century), Camp Funston (the home of the 10th Inf. Div. and where I was currently stationed) and Camp Forsythe (the home of the Army Officer Candidate School—what I call AOC in my letters). At this time, it was still assumed that I would be ending up my training at Camp Forsythe. So, the December 13 letter also includes the report of a venture to Camp Forsythe to learn a bit about what was in store for us:

> *Last Sunday we went over to the AOC service club and cornered us an officer candidate and got the scoop on OCS. It's a rough old grind. They say the physical part isn't bad—nor is the mental—but it's the way they mix them up that makes it rough.*

I mentioned earlier that I stood guard duty twice while I was in basic. None of the letters I have say anything about the second time, although one letter did mention that I would call home the first weekend in December if I didn't get guard duty—so I was probably scheduled about that time. In that letter I pointed out my intent to become colonel's orderly again. I don't remember as much about that guard detail, but I do recall that I had to be satisfied that time with serving as regimental runner—but I still didn't have to walk a post.

The next letter I have was a short note reporting that I had returned safely from my Christmas leave. Meanwhile, however, things had changed a lot at B-85 in the last few weeks of 1950. Essentially, my original basic training cycle no longer existed. The majority of the company, as I recall, was either sent to specialist schools or shipped to Germany. Those of us that were committed to a full fourteen weeks of basic (mostly OCS commitments) were transferred to another company that was in about the same place in the cycle as we were when we left B-85. Most remarkably, that company was a familiar one to my family, as I pointed out in a letter dated January 8, 1951:

I have a new address now. It's a familiar address and you have received mail from it before. In fact I'm the second member of the family to take basic training in the company. It's Co B – 87th Inf. Regt. I'll be here for the remainder of my basic training. About 3 or 4 weeks.

Up until this cycle this was a company for training ex-swabbies. This is undoubtedly the reason Don took his training here.

My brother, Don, was in the Navy during WWII. He was discharged after the war, but he had decided to join the Army at some time within the past year. Although he entered with a rank of staff sergeant, he still had to undergo Army training. As some comments in my letter home on January 11 indicate, Don still didn't have to sweat basic like a recruit:

…When I first came here I thought that we had had the shaft since we were a minority group shipping into a new company that had been together for 3 months. I underestimated the abilities of the boys from B-85. In less than a week we've just about taken over. All the trainees here are babbling idiots and the cadre are very little more. All the training we're having here this week we had over in the other company last week. As a result we've been telling the instructors how to teach classes. That's no kidding. I actually could give classes on the 57mm recoilless rifle with a greater degree of efficiency, accuracy and confidence than the fellows that have been teaching us. In fact, Fleming and I spent 2 hours this afternoon telling our platoon Sgt. what he should teach in his class tomorrow. As an added bit of brown nosing I'm going to type up his lesson plans for him tonight

The field first Sgt. was Don's platoon Sgt. when he took basic here. He was telling me what rip-roaring times they used to have together…

The following Monday (January 15) I sent the only letter I wrote that was typewritten. It was typed on both sides of an onionskin and was well populated with strikeovers. It's hard to imagine that I produced copy that bad for the cadre I typed for, but I'm sure that guys that could type and had experience with the way the Army did things were hard to find. Anyway, here are a couple of extracts from that letter:

It is Monday afternoon and I'm slaving away typing lesson plans for my platoon Sgt. The rest of the company is out going through <u>Rifle and Weapons Platoon Offensive and Defensive Tactics,</u> which, as near as I've been able to find out, is four hours of simulating crossing a simulated river in a simulated boat. Sounds very interesting, don't you think? Simulation is a big part of basic training in Ft. Riley…

I had a jolly time this morning. I was on the aggressor force during a class on combat patrols. All I did was lay in my little hidden position and throw firecrackers and shoot blanks at the patrols as they passed. Someone got careless with a firecracker and started a brush fire. (A very dangerous thing sometimes, in Kansas) While the rest of the company fought the flames and valiantly subdued the flames I crapped out in my cozy little fox hole. Later when someone asked me where I was during the fire I innocently responded, "Fire? What fire? You mean there was a fire? No wonder the patrols stopped passing by my position."

I have one letter with a date of "Wednesday eve" but it doesn't have an envelope so I don't know exactly where it fits into the chronology. It describes a tactical problem, so it probably was written in the latter weeks of basic:

> *Tomorrow night we'll have another farce. Night Problems. These things always start very systematically and end in utter chaos. It just wouldn't seem possible that just one company of men could spread itself over such a large area in such a short time. By the time the instructions get down to us meatheads in the ranks they make positively no sense. So we wander aimlessly over hill and down dale until you meet some other lost sole. When enough wandering boys group together—you group together and listen for some other lost sole to say, "Jones! Hey, Jones—Dammit Jones where the hell are you?" then head in that direction. When you have a sufficient number of wanderers banded together you wander aimlessly en masse until someone in charge finds us. Such is the usual routine of night problems.*

The last week of basic began on January 22 and was scheduled to be a full week of bivouac. On January 31, the week after we returned, I wrote a four-page letter that included some details of my experience on bivouac. Here are a couple of extracts:

> *We left Monday morning about 7 AM and walked about 8-10 miles thru the Kansas hills using back roads and trails. Aside from one air attack from an L-5 the walk out was dull.*
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> *We arrived and set up camp, tactically. That is we put our tents anywhere we wanted and camouflaged them. After chow they picked an aggressor platoon (of which I was one) and we took off. We dug in on a hill about ½ mile from the bivouac area and waited to be attacked. I was the machine gunner. Can't you just picture me with winter clothes, full field pack, steel helmet, an M-1 over one shoulder and a light machine gun over the other, climbing this very steep hill. The attack came off and the damn machine gun didn't work. Here I am slaving over that weapon trying to make it work so I can shoot the enemy who is charging up the hill very rapidly, and the next thing I know, I turn around and see Mike Murray charging down on me with fixed bayonet. I'd sure as hell hate to run into that situation in combat.*

The letter went on to describe subsequent days of bivouac training and concluded that description with an account of "a new kind of problem."

> *…It is a combat indoctrination course they're adopting. It was under the supervision of Gen. Bell, the division executive. The general was there all the time Thursday for the rehearsal and all day Friday. There was so much brass around there that a man had to be at least a major before I'd even speak to him.*
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> *We had two fires, caused by mortars, to fight that day (Friday) and we were so pooped after the last one that the general called for trucks to take us back into the camp after the problem. We were scheduled to walk.*

One thing I still remember from that bivouac happened at chow time one evening. Hot chow in the field is served into each soldier's mess kit, a pair of deep aluminum trays—each about half the size of a large dinner plate. They could be connected together for use or nested for easy storage. The mess line consisted of a series of very large aluminum kettles, each containing one dish in the meal; meat, potatoes, vegetable etc. This particular evening, the potatoes were mashed and the way they were typically served was by having the soldier place one tray of his mess kit under the closer edge of the aluminum kettle, whereupon the KP serving the potatoes would scoop up a spoonful and whack the stem of the spoon on the rim of the kettle, neatly propelling the serving into the kit. This particular evening, the server was a guy from the south side of Chicago and it didn't take him long to figure that the quicker he emptied that kettle of potatoes, the quicker he could get in out of the cold. Those of us who were toward the front of the chow line benefited greatly from his strategy. As we went by his serving station, he could be heard to say, "Anything I hates to see is a hungry troop," as he delivered massive blobs of spuds onto our trays. Those toward the end of the line went spudless that evening.

Also in the January 31 letter was my announcement that graduation from basic would take place three days hence, that leadership school would begin for us on February 12 and that, because AOC at Camp Forsythe was becoming overcrowded and they had recently re-opened OCS at Ft. Sill, OK, (Artillery) and Ft. Benning, GA, (Infantry), I would probably be doing my officer training in Georgia. The letter terminated with the further announcement that I had been promoted from Recruit to Private.

A brief letter on February 7 gave my new address (Class 89, Hq. Battery, 25th Field Artillery Battalion) and anticipated that I was in for a lot of homework and "the most strict inspections of anyplace in the Army." Then on February 19, I wrote:

> *Things here are still busy as hell, and with this cold (I'm afraid it's strep throat), it doesn't make it any easier. Lectures, giving classes and development of command voice are three things that are really stressed here, and right now I sound like a tubercular bullfrog. I'm keeping up with my work in spite of it. I'd go to the dispensary to have something done only they have only two cures. 1. Give you two pills and discharge you or 2. Send you to the hosp for 6-8 wks. They use the latter for head colds and similar illnesses and the former for pneumonia etc.*

On February 25 (Sunday) I wrote a long letter on stationary from the Hotel Wareham in Manhattan, KS. Manhattan is a short distance east of Ft. Riley. This letter described in some detail what we were doing in leadership school:

> *The first week was almost entirely devoted to MOI (Methods of Instruction). In MOI we covered such subjects as: principles of learning, methods of instruction (lecture, conference, demonstration), use of reference materials and a few others I can't think of right now. Then we gave our 10 min. talks. Also included in MOI is DD (Dismounted Drill) and PT (Physical Training) in which we must give a certain movement or exercise. All this instruction we give must adhere to certain requirements of presentation in order to get a good grade. I'll have all my notes (imagine me taking notes) when I come home and I can show you exactly what goes on here.*

In leadership training (2nd week) we covered such subjects as Intro. to Leadership, Psychological Aspects of Leadership, Personal Adjustment, Development of the Personality, Leader-subordinate Relations, Roles of the Army Leader and a few more. Very interesting. I gave my first 20-minute talk. Lt. Walsh critiqued my first 10-minute talk, but Lt. Sheldon (the Old Man – team chief) critiqued my 20 and was really pleased, particularly when he found out that I had only a high school education and had never done any platform instruction before. I have to give one more 20 and I'm really going to work on that one. The Old Man will have high expectations on my last one. I'll give it the last week…You must follow a certain method of presentation (you have to make a lesson plan according to a certain form) and you must give a good, clear, fluent presentation…The thing the Old Man was most pleased about in my talk was that I never looked at my lesson plan. It shows good knowledge of the subject he says…

Next week will be spent in the field. It's practical application of leadership training. Out there we will have such things as leading small units and the leadership reaction test (a test where they provide many adverse conditions while leading a small unit to see how you react). This is the week that separates the men from the boys…

The last week is just advanced stages of the first three…

This letter went on to include other aspects of life in leadership school, particularly details about the rigors of preparing for daily barracks inspections, which were meticulous:

…Your clothes have to be pressed a certain way and kept neatly pressed at all times. They must be hung in a certain way. Your mess gear must be shined so you can see yourself in it and your shoes and boots the same way. Your beds must bounce a quarter at all times, your floor must be immaculate constantly (we GI ours about every other nite and sweep and mop it every nite and every morning) and your cubicle must be devoid of even a particle of dust…

We each had two pairs of boots and were required to alternate them daily. They had to be laced differently, so the inspector would know that you weren't keeping one pair for inspection and the other for the field. Some guys went to real extremes to prepare for inspections. My friend Fleming even made up his bed with cardboard corners and slept on the floor.

The next letter with any significant news was written on March 17 and the news was that our class had graduated from leadership school (the first four weeks) the previous Saturday (March 10) and that " I had the distinction of being the honor graduate," which I acknowledged as "a questionable honor." Leadership school was carried out in two phases. The second phase was a period of four weeks serving as an "acting NCO" in a training company. This phase was probably also graded in some way, but I have no record of any such assessment and don't recall anything but serving my time in that phase as part of the cadre in a training company. There are obviously some letters missing from this period because the next letter I have, written March 27, says:

Please disregard the address I gave you last Sunday. I've moved again. Another company was crying for cadre, so 6 of us moved over to K company. However, just keep sending my mail to the school. That's about the only place that knows where the hell we are.

Whatever information I may have written about my activities during the second phase of leadership school, such letters no longer exist. Thus, given the dearth of communications, I'll describe a bit about what I was doing from what I can recall. By the time I wrote the letter on the 27th, we were already half way through phase two. I have no recollection of those two weeks. I do recall being part of the cadre of Company K of the 85th Infantry (part of the reason for those memories I'll explain a bit later).

Leadership students in the second phase of training (acting NCOs) were identified by blue arm bands adorned with six-pointed yellow stars. We slept with the regular cadre in the barracks (in rooms rather than with the recruits) and served alongside the other NCOs as the troops went through their training. We even became the principal instructor for certain classes. I can still recall my first assignment as an instructor; a class on Military Courtesy.

At the end of the second phase of leadership school, those of us scheduled for OCS had to wait for an OCS class to start. This meant that we were again transferred into a holding company to await those orders. And, of course, holding companies were convenient places to find bodies for disagreeable details. Our holding company was in the 62nd Tank Battalion. A couple of us that had done Phase II in K-85 (probably Doug Gill and me) began soon thereafter to engineer a transfer back to that company so that we could do our waiting there. On April 17 (Tuesday) I wrote:

We moved to the 62nd a week ago. They have 2 formations a day up there. One in the morning and one at noon for purposes of reading off orders and marching those who didn't get orders off for detail. We hit both formations last Wednesday and since we didn't get orders we were marched off for detail. Needless to say, we didn't remain in that formation long enough to get put on detail either time. We haven't hit a formation since then until this morning, and Wednesday night was the last night we even slept there. We've been sleeping, eating and spending all our time in "K" company since then; that is, except for Friday when we had KP at the 62nd, at which time we snowed the cook and sluffed off most of the time there, too. The only times we showed up there were to pick up our pass at night and turn it in in the morning, and lately we haven't even been doing that. We found that our orders sending us to "K" company were set for tomorrow, so we hit the formation at 62nd this morning and they read off our orders. First time in a week and we hit the right formation. They called us out of formation and told us we were on orders for "K" company…and a full week of goofing off will be complete.

Actually, in the strict sense of the term, we weren't goofing off when we escaped to K-85. We liked the work there and we liked the people we had been working with, so we just rejoined the cadre there that week until orders came down making it official. The Army got better work out of us than they would have if we had stayed on detail at the 62nd. Counting our week of "goofing

off," we spent six weeks at K-85 and they were probably our most pleasant and rewarding weeks since we joined the Army seven months earlier.

On April 30, I wrote my final letter home from Ft. Riley. In it, I recount one of my most memorable experiences as a cadreman at K-85:

> *Big 5th Army inspection for 3 days starting tomorrow. The whole damn division is going crazy…Preparing for the inspection the last 4 days including putting rocks around everything stationary and whitewashing them. Naturally the usual comments arose about having to do that. My detail had just finished making the volleyball court look like a rock garden when a carpenter came up, leaned a ladder against one of the buildings and ascended to the roof. With immediate action, my men gathered around the foot of the ladder. When they dispersed several minutes later, each leg of the ladder was decorated with very neat circle of freshly whitewashed rocks.*

The following week we got our orders and shipped out to Ft. Benning for our next adventure.

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Afterthought:

One other story occurred to me after I had finished writing this memoir. Its proper place would be on page six, but I didn't want to reprint half the document, so I'm putting it here. It's about one of the other guys in my company that was scheduled for OCS. Here is an extract from the December 13 letter:

> *"…I met a swell fellow named Bill Barker in my barracks. It would amaze you how much time we spend just talking…"*

Bill Barker, like many of the OCS-bound guys in my basic training company, was a college graduate. He was from a good family in San Antonio, TX, and the best adjective I can find to describe him is "genteel." Why he took a liking to me is hard to imagine.

One Sunday, he came out of the latrine looking most ruffled and told me in disbelief what had just happened to him. It was hard for me to keep from laughing, but he didn't consider it funny at all. A number of parents of the draftees had come to visit that weekend and it happened that while Bill was moving his bowels on a stool in the latrine (the stools were all out in the open), one of the farm kids from North Dakota brought his father up Bill and introduced them. Bill was absolutely mortified.