Dedication

This work is dedicated to those American soldiers who served during the Vietnam War era and in particular to those who fought in the Vietnam War. It is especially dedicated to the memory of those who graduated from Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox and who, as a result of that conflict were killed in action, died of their wounds, or died from service related injuries.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost "The Road Not Taken" 1920 *

Between July 1965 and June 1968, the United States government expanded the Army by 375,000 men. This expansion was needed to meet America's worldwide military commitments at the height of the Cold War, and especially those related to the war in Southeast Asia. The expansion was largely accomplished by the draft, which increased dramatically during those two years.

An especially critical component of the expansion was the need for approximately 40,000 junior officers to lead the growing number of soldiers. These new officers had to be selected, evaluated for potential, and then assigned to duty stations.

The numbers of officers produced by the United States Military Academy and ROTC programs in the nation's colleges and universities fell far short of this requirement. Thus the only available means for acquiring most of these leaders was through a vast expansion of Army Officer Candidate Schools which would commission new officers from the enlisted ranks.

Experience indicated that the attrition rate for those entering Officer Candidate School (OCS) would be around 30 per cent. Thus, to produce the officers required, the Army needed 60,000 enlisted men to volunteer for the training and ultimate responsibility assumed by Second Lieutenants. The Army assigned about 10 per cent of those who volunteered for OCS to a new school at Fort Knox, Kentucky, beginning in October 1965.

The mission of Army Officer Candidate Schools was to prepare young men to lead their peers in combat. As a result, all the Officer Candidate Schools were demanding. All were challenging to those who entered them. The programs were difficult, the conditions were rigorous, the evaluation was strict, and the standards were high. Short of combat itself, most of those who completed OCS would rate their experience there as among the most demanding of their lives. Still, the volunteers persevered and the needed officers were produced.

The self-appointed committee responsible for this book unanimously decided that it should be dedicated to those who were killed in action, died of their wounds, or died from service related injuries. Still, everyone who graduated from Fort Knox OCS gave the proverbial "blank check" to the government, and many were injured, physically or psychologically, as a result. However, no living graduate of OCS at Fort Knox has forgotten his school experience, regardless of later service.

For the committee who did the research for this work, who made the contacts and who wrote the story, it has been a pleasure to find so many with similar memories. A few enjoyed OCS, many hated it, but more than 4,300 did at least the majority of their training at Fort Knox. No person who completed OCS training there would ever be the same as before. They each opted for the less followed road.

* Robert Frost, *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) 131.

Officer Candidate School:
Fort Knox, Kentucky

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Foreword
William O. Coomer

With humility and pride, I am responding to a request to provide a foreword to *When the Nation Called a Third Time: Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox, Kentucky: The Vietnam Era*. Upon assignment to the Officer Candidate Brigade in May 1966, I was initially the E Company executive officer and then the commander of G Company from August 1966 to July 1967. During that period, we commissioned two classes as new 2nd Lieutenants and began the training for another two classes. I have read the draft manuscript and believe it captures the essence of the Fort Knox OCS program to include the challenges of the program and the success of its graduates.

I wish to relate my personal experience while serving with the 3rd Squadron 4th US Cavalry 25th Infantry Division (an Armored Cavalry Squadron) during the period August 1967 through July 1968 in the Republic of Vietnam. During this period, the majority of the Squadron's lieutenant positions (armored cavalry platoon leaders and troop executive officers) were filled by OCS graduates. Your service was exemplary and in keeping with the highest traditions of service to our nation. As the A Troop commander, one of my executive officers and the three platoon leaders were graduates of the Fort Knox OCS program (to include one officer I had commissioned). Additionally, my forward observer had graduated from Artillery OCS at Fort Sill. All distinguished themselves during periods of intense ground combat. One of these fine soldiers has departed for Fiddler's Green. Fortunately, through our Squadron reunions, I have maintained contact with the other four. I am proud to have served with them, to have known them, and to consider them as my dearest friends.

As a member of the cadre given the awesome task of determining your ability to become commissioned officers and to lead soldiers in combat, I can attest to your success which validates that which we as cadre were trying to accomplish. I know that as former cadre, we are proud to have served in the OC Brigade and, hopefully, provided a positive contribution to your success. The service you provided our nation whether you went to Vietnam or elsewhere reflects great credit on each of you as individuals and to the Fort Knox OCS program.

If I am able to attend your reunion, I look forward to meeting you again and hope time will have dulled some of the unpleasant memories you may have. My best wishes to all and please know that you served your nation to the best of your abilities.

William O. Coomer
Colonel, Armor USA (Ret)

Foreword
Robert J. Familetti

It was my privilege to command C Company Armor Officer Candidate Brigade at Fort Knox, Kentucky, from January 1967 to December 1967 and, upon retiring its guidons, to serve as the Brigade Adjutant and oversee the Brigade's deactivation in 1968. After a passage of 44 years, I was surprised and pleased to be contacted and remembered by those associated with this magnificent and detailed history and, now, deeply moved and highly honored by the invitation to provide this introduction, which I dedicate to the memory of Eugene Vigelis and Chester "Chet" Dawson, former Commanders of Charlie Company and "F Troop," respectively. I succeeded Gene as C Company Commander and I served in Vietnam and in the Brigade with Chet; we wrote the Armor Officer Candidate Brigade After Action Report together, unfortunately since lost in the reorganization and relocation of the Armor School to Fort Benning.

My assumption of command of C Company followed my Vietnam service as Recon Platoon Leader 1/35 Infantry and XO B Company 1/69 Armor, 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division. My experience in both of these assignments was the center of gravity of my philosophy as an Officer Candidate Company Commander. I was dedicated to ensuring that those whom I was sending into the force as 2nd Lieutenants of Armor were prepared to lead and were imbued with the Army's values, which were my values. After all these years with many assignments in between, which involved mentoring and instructing at various levels of the Army's education system culminating as a faculty member at the Army War College, I am proud to say that one of my most cherished memories is that of my time in the Armor OC Brigade. We were at war. We were serious. We were mission oriented; and we were serving among some of the finest cadre the Army possessed. The young (and not so young) men we were training went on to achieve and excel. We did our job. Mission accomplished!

Thank you for allowing this old soldier to reminisce and to those responsible for this superlative tome. Above all, thank you to every Armor OCS Graduate for your subsequent myriad accomplishments and for your service to the Nation.

Robert J. Familetti
Colonel, Armor USA (Ret)
Cape May, New Jersey

Acknowledgments

"Cooperate and Graduate"- that is a familiar phrase to many who were in the Army Officer Candidate Course at Fort Knox, Kentucky, from September 1965 through February 1968, and it's the cooperation of many people that made possible the OCS at Fort Knox Project as well as this book which is a direct outcome of the project. To name every person who contributed in some way, whether large or small, is not possible. Many individuals were willing to contribute to the project in different ways but the following are acknowledged for the considerable time, enthusiasm and energy that made the project and this book possible.

Mr. Bill Hansen, former Director at the Armor School Research Library when it was located at Fort Knox, provided copies of the Officer Candidate School class rosters that were on file there. Without the rosters this project would not have been remotely possible. The late Elton "Duke" Widger of Class 9-66 A1, the first OCS class at Fort Knox since the Korean War, was one of the first graduates who responded to one of my many postings on various military unit websites and remained a vital reference to the Officer Candidate Program when it was first started in 1965. Charles Stutzman of Class 2-68 E2, graciously added several pages about OCS at Fort Knox to his business website that has resulted in contacts with an untold number of graduates looking for information about OCS at Fort Knox. Dan Leifel of Class 23-67 C1, eagerly accepted the daunting task of researching and serving as the author of the narrative about the Officer Candidate Course. Through several editings of his narrative he remained patient and a willing collaborator with the editing crew and their suggestions and recommendations. It's not easy to see what you have created and offered for input to be scrutinized by four other individuals you have never met in person. Charlie Titus of Class 13-67 G2, stepped up to take on the task of being the principal editor of the narrative with input from John Moore of Class 25-67 D2, and Hugh Preacher of Class 27-67 G1. John and Hugh took the compiled list of the graduates and cadre of the Officer Candidate Course who were casualties of the Vietnam War and expanded it to note the units with which those individuals served, their military awards, and where they are interred. John used his computer expertise to put together the photo section of the book and also set up the Facebook group that over 240 graduates and company officer cadre have joined. Hugh kept spreadsheet after spreadsheet current with names of the graduates, company officer cadre and brigade staff, as well as keeping track of all the loose ends that developed and needed to be taken care of. Hugh never found any information that wouldn't fit on a spreadsheet. "Thank you" to Paula Leifel, Becky Moore, and Jean Preacher just isn't enough for putting up with the many hours that Dan, John, and Hugh spent on the project. Elda Ueleke provided invaluable assistance to Charlie and the Project by applying her formatting expertise to the manuscript, class rosters, and other listings of names by manhandling Microsoft Word to manipulate text and create tables that have improved the final version of the book.

Ron Demery of Class 16-66 D1, one of the Phase I classes at Fort Knox, and later a graduate of Phase II OCS at Fort Lee, Virginia, provided me with a copy of the history of OCS

at Fort Lee that he authored and recalled the names of several company officer cadre who in turn recalled the names of other company officer cadre assigned to D Company. Steve Strawbridge of Class 27-67 G1, authored an article for *Inside the Turret*, the weekly newspaper at Fort Knox, when the Officer Candidate Brigade closed at the end of February 1968. With his permission that article is part of the book. The following company commanders recalled some of the names of the Executive Officers and Tactical Officers assigned to their company: John H. Dilley, Jr. and John Chomko of A Company; Daniel A. Willson and Terrence F. Alger of B Company; Robert J. Familetti of C Company; Edward R. Szeman of D Company; Thomas J. Canavan, Jr. of E Company, and whose Armor Officer Advanced Course paper "Let's Keep Armor OCS" is included in the book with his permission; Richard W. Flanagan and A. Edward Fitch of F Company and William O. Coomer of G Company. Unfortunately H Company Commander Richard E. Carter has not been located. Executive Officers were also instrumental in recalling names of those with whom they served. They are Cameron B. Sutherland of A Company; Walter M. Crotty, Jr. of B and G Companies; John W. Bossi of C Company; Ernest L. "Chet" Childs, Jr. and Ronald G. Thompson of D Company; A. Edward Fitch of F Company; and George T. Hiltebrant of H Company. Our Tactical Officers also stepped up and helped with names. With at least one hundred First Lieutenants and Second Lieutenants serving as Tac Officers, nearly every one contacted helped with names that now appear in the listings of the individual class company officer cadre. A typical day for an Officer Candidate was long and at the time many of us didn't realize that a Tac Officer's day averaged fourteen hours. No wonder they were so grumpy.

The Barr Memorial Library at Fort Knox provided Dan Leifel access to the 1966 digitized editions of *Inside the Turret*. The Red Feather Lakes Library at Red Feather Lakes, Colorado, procured volumes of the *U.S. Army Register* for me when my wife and I lived in the mountains forty miles northwest of Fort Collins, Colorado. Colorado State University's Morgan Library in Fort Collins has made available their archival holdings of the *U.S. Army Register* with a seemingly endless check-out period.

Matt Rector, a civilian contractor advising the Post Commander at Fort Knox on historical preservation at Fort Knox helped us with photos of Post buildings and with arranging access to the Post for Dan Leifel, as well as for the information in Matt's own book on Fort Knox. The old saying that "a picture is worth a thousand words" is indeed relative in helping the reader get a visual representation of life in OCS. Special mention goes to those who provided photos and illustrations that were chosen to be included in the book. In addition to Matt Rector they are: David Bell, Class 2-68 E2; George Bockius, Class 25-67 D2; Bradley Brittain, Class 21-67 F2; Larry Carnes, Class 31-67 C2; Ron Demery, Class 16-66 D1; Jim Desmond, Class 7-67 C1; Bob Forman, Class 1-68 E1; Bob Howard, Class 22-66 F1; Dan Hrabko, Class 5-68 B2; John Moore, Class 25-67 D2; Ralph Niskala, Class 22-67 A2; Hugh Preacher, Class 27-67 G1; Tom Preston, Class 1-68 E1; Lewis Ray, Class 22-66 F1; Claude Whittle, Class 25-66 D2; Elton "Duke" Widger, Class 9-66 A1; Steve Wilmeth, Class 10-67 A1; Ken Wilson, Class 31-67 C2; and the General George Patton Museum & Center of Leadership at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Ericka Loze-Hudson, Director of the Maneuver Center of Excellence Library at Fort Benning, Georgia, located the class rosters that were thought lost when they were transferred from Fort Knox to Fort Benning. Maureen Barefield, the Freedom of Information Act Officer at Fort Benning, quickly responded to my FOIA requests for the names of the honor graduates and winner of Military Stakes for seven of the eight classes that didn't have that information noted in articles of *Inside the Turret*. The *News-Enterprise* of Elizabethtown, Kentucky, the successor to *Inside the Turret*, and Lydia Leasor provided digitized copies of the 1966, 1967, and 1968 editions of *Inside the Turret*. These proved invaluable in determining the names of the honor graduates and winner of Military Stakes for nearly every class. Robert S. Cameron at the Armor School now at Fort Benning went to the extra effort to digitize information about the thirteen week and twenty-three week curriculums and provided other digitized information about the curriculum.

Thanks go as well to Karen Crusius and Kristy Blair at StarNet Digital Publishing, who worked closely with Dan Leifel as the book moved through the printing process.

Without the collective memories of those who completed OCS training at Fort Knox the story of OCS at Fort Knox would not be as complete as it is presented here. Lastly, without the unwavering and unselfish support of my dear wife, Sandra J., I would not have been able to "send this last round down range."

Forge the Thunderbolt

Doug Burmester
Class 1-68 E1

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Introduction

This book tells a story that until now has remained untold. It is the chronicle of the Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox, Kentucky, especially that period in the School's history between 1965 and 1968 when it prepared more than 4,300 young men for service as United States Army officers.

In the late 1990s a graduate of OCS at Fort Knox, Doug Burmester, Armor Officer Candidate Class 1-68, decided that the Fort Knox program and the men who ran it and taught in it and endured it deserved recognition and acknowledgment. This volume is a result of that dream and of his efforts and the efforts of other graduates and company officer cadre who worked in one way or another to help put it together.

When the nation called, the graduates of OCS at Fort Knox during those years answered that call. Following their time at Fort Knox, they were found on the frontiers of freedom around the globe. They served with courage in the jungles and rice paddies and highlands of Vietnam where 112 of them made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. They stood watch during long days and longer nights by an Iron Curtain that traced the border with threatening and hostile adversaries in Europe. They were stationed in Alaska and Panama and Korea and the continental United States and in countless other places in between. They were in tank brigades and mechanized infantry divisions. They were in armored cavalry regiments and air cavalry squadrons. They were in Ordnance companies or Transportation detachments or Quartermaster battalions. They were in basic training companies or were Tactical Officers at the Officer Candidate School that had produced them. They were in dozens of other kinds of assignments that met the myriad and varied demands of the Army.

But wherever they were assigned and whatever they did, they were Army leaders who put to good use the skills and knowledge they had acquired during those long and demanding months spent at the Armor School at Fort Knox. After commissioning and following completion of their initial obligation, some chose to remain in the Army as a profession. Others returned to civilian careers, many serving in Army Reserve or Army National Guard units for years after leaving active duty. In all of those venues, however, the discipline, the demands, the challenges, and the training endured in the crucible of Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox served them well.

Knowing what the policy of the country has been regarding a standing army and its professional officer corps is important, and will help readers understand why the United States military, and specifically the Army, established officer training programs.

The concept for Army officer training at officer candidate schools is now over one hundred years old, with roots in the early part of the twentieth century. Because of the successful record those early officer candidate schools achieved during World War One, when they quickly produced officers when needed, they were again activated during World War Two, the Korean War, and the war in Vietnam. To better understand the story of the Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox which operated when the nation called a third time for

young men to step forward to become Army leaders during the Vietnam War, this book first briefly explores the development of the Army's officer candidate schools.

But most of all it tells the story of OCS at Fort Knox during the Vietnam War. It has been written as a testament to the Officer Candidate School there, and to the service, dedication, and comradeship of those young men who, with only slight regard for the possible consequences, chose voluntarily to enter that school and to become officers in the nation's last draft-based Army, an Army that in many ways was the final one to reflect, as had been the case in World Wars One and Two and Korea, most of the face of America. This book is their story and the story of their OCS.

It is hoped our former company officer cadre, our fellow graduates, their friends, and their families will for many years to come enjoy reading this book - a book that provides a window through which to view the challenging, difficult, and demanding but ultimately rewarding experience of Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox.

Chapter 1

U.S. Policy and the Army

Americans take pride in the notion that when the country is threatened an armed citizenry will take the field and defeat its enemies. We pride ourselves in knowing that America fought a Revolutionary War against the most powerful nation in the world, and then repeated the feat in the War of 1812. We know too that the United States later won wars against regional powers such as Mexico and Spain, mostly with an armed militia and the help of a small professional Army. Even the Civil War and World Wars One and Two were fought largely by draftees and volunteers who joined the colors and then, like Cincinnatus, returned victorious to their homes. According to this tradition, we don't need a strong standing professional or regular Army. Unfortunately, this national understanding of our past is folklore bordering on myth.

Almost each time the British Army met the colonial militia, those embattled farmers celebrated in Emerson's "Concord Hymn", there was a Patriot defeat. The few Patriot victories achieved from Saratoga to Cowpens to Yorktown were accomplished not by the militia but mostly by a Continental Army that was never more than 30,000 strong and which worked with French allies or with plenty of foreign professional advice.

At Saratoga, for example, usually considered the "turning point" of the Revolution, the British became entangled in fortifications designed and constructed by the Polish engineer, Tadeusz Kosciusko, who is the real Polish hero of our Revolution. When the Continental Army achieved near professional standards following the rigors of Valley Forge, it was as a result of the leadership of another foreign officer, Major General Friederich von Steuben, actually a former captain in the Prussian Army. The Army had also profited from the efforts of General George Washington. Washington, who according to King George III, was the "greatest man of the Age," was, in the Continental Army at least, one of those who was the closest thing to a professional soldier.

Americans often view the War of 1812 through the same distorting lens. We remember the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans, fought after peace had been negotiated, and forget the defeat at the Battle of Bladensburg, where the militia fled before the British, and left the nation's capital open to capture and destruction. Even the Battle of New Orleans was fought by a veteran force seasoned by operations against the Native Americans of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida. American units were led by one of the most outstanding military/political figures of the first half of the nineteenth century, Andrew Jackson; an officer whose men may well have feared him more than the enemy.

During the Mexican-American War, Mexico, in near political chaos, was defeated by an American Army headed by a cadre of professionals, many of whom were products of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, which had been founded in 1802. These career officers led the small standing Army of the time, supplemented by volunteer regiments of varying quality. Some of these units were for a variety of reasons, unreliable and saw little service. Others performed garrison duty. Some, however, such as the Mississippi Rifles, led by the West Point trained Jefferson Davis, performed well.

In any event, the deciding factor in the battles in Mexico often was the professionally led artillery. Lieutenant Thomas Jackson brevetted to major and who, after First Bull Run in the Civil War, became known as "Stonewall", and Captain (brevet major) Braxton Bragg were among the artillery officers who saw combat in the Mexican War. Other Academy graduates who served as staff officers included Captain (brevet colonel) Robert E. Lee and Quartermaster Lieutenant (brevet captain) Hiram Ulysses Grant.

The supreme military and political test of the nineteenth century and arguably, the supreme test in the nation's entire history, came between December, 1860 and July, 1865 during the Civil War. The enduring myth that has emerged from that savage conflict is that volunteer soldiers on both sides fought each other until the North's will at last triumphed. In reality, however, it took two and one-half years of "on the job training" for the soldiers to learn how to fight the battles that became so important a part of the war.

The officers who led the Army also needed time to adapt to the massive formations that became common during the Civil War. At the outbreak of hostilities, for example, General Winfield Scott was one of the few who had commanded more than a regiment in battle. However by July, 1863, when two massive forces, one in blue, one in gray, met at Gettysburg, they may have been the two most powerful armies in the world. Still, by the middle of the Civil War, both North and South needed a draft of men to fill the ranks that had been depleted by the enormous numbers of casualties. Although not many men were actually drafted (about 35,000 in the North) the apprehension of the draft brought forth the required recruits. The Union cause was also aided by some 187,000 African Americans who, said President Lincoln, made the difference in winning the war.

The Spanish-American War, fought in the summer of 1898, involved combat both on land and at sea. That long ago war, if recalled at all by Americans today, is likely best remembered for one of its most famous land battles, the charge up the San Juan Heights. The bloody fighting there, on a sweltering July day, included several units, but perhaps the one lodged most firmly in American memory is the First United States Volunteer Cavalry Regiment or "Rough Riders." The San Juan Heights battle propelled the Rough Riders' Lieutenant Colonel, Theodore Roosevelt, into the Vice-Presidency and, ultimately, into the Presidency.

The nineteenth century ended with the United States as a world power but with a small Regular Army. There were many reasons why the United States with its small Army continued to feel secure in its militia myth. Of course budget considerations were important then (as they are today) but there were two primary reasons a peace time Army was held in

low regard. The first was a fear, carried over from English traditions and extending through the Revolutionary experience, which saw armies as instruments of repression. The second reason was the geographical luxury of the nation's "splendid isolation" afforded by the two oceans that separated the United States from other major powers.

The fear of a standing army dated from the colonial period. All British Americans knew and feared the type of military dictatorship imposed on England, Wales, and Ireland in the middle of the seventeenth century by Oliver Cromwell and his "New Model Army". Many leaders of the American Revolution were scholars of the classical period who knew that Greek and Roman tyrants had used the military to control their citizens. And, if classical examples were not enough, Americans recalled a more recent period when, following the French and Indian War, a standing British army had seemed to infringe on individual freedom.

In the years before the American Revolution British troops were quartered in Boston. While there, off-duty enlisted men often competed with Boston workers for menial jobs, thus breeding a resentment that helped lead to the so called "Boston Massacre", one of the precursors to the American Revolution.

The second reason, the reliance on the invulnerability of the nation, was pointed out by a famously anti-war lawyer in central Illinois. The future president, Abraham Lincoln, told his listeners that no combination of foreign armies, captained by the greatest generals in history could conquer the United States.

Of course, in 1838 Lincoln was correct. The nation's isolation allowed the country to rely on a partially trained militia, led by popularly chosen officers. Lincoln himself had been elected captain of his militia company during the Black Hawk War.

Not everyone shared Lincoln's view. Veterans of the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War recognized that poorly trained and indifferently led troops not only suffered unnecessary casualties but often failed to meet success. West Point was established in 1802, mainly to train engineers and artillerists. The fact that many of its earliest graduates became notable leaders of men was almost an afterthought.

The small classes at West Point initially produced few officers, and many of those who did graduate from the Academy soon left the Army for civilian life. An ironic example of this occurred when the cadet who graduated first in the West Point class that produced such officers as George B. McClellan returned to his farm in Iowa. McClellan, who was also to leave the Army to become a railroad executive before serving as a general during the Civil War, claimed he had "failed" by graduating second in his class. Many others, such as Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and Ulysses Grant also left the Army until they returned at the outbreak of the Civil War.

In 1819 the American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy, today's Norwich University, in Vermont, was founded to provide university level training in military science. Other similar private schools were established and in 1839 the first state-sponsored institution for that purpose, Virginia Military Institute or VMI, was formed.

Other institutions, many in the South, followed. These included the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning and Military Academy, now Louisiana State University, headed at the outbreak of the Civil War by William Tecumseh Sherman. Many of those trained by these colleges became the leaders of both armies in the Civil War. Because many were located in the southern United States, their graduates tended to favor the Confederacy, which may help explain why the South seemed to win more victories early in the war. Interestingly, when war finally came, the West Point products tended to split between North and South in about the same percentage as the country's population.

In July, 1862, Congress passed the Morrill Act, often called the Land Grant College Act. The Morrill Act provided for the establishment of universities where students were to study agriculture, industry, and science but, also "military tactics." While this program did not train officers for the Civil War, it laid the foundation for the production of officers to fight future wars.

Fifty-four years after the Morrill Act, on the eve of America's entry into World War I, Congress enacted the National Defense Act of 1916. The act created the Reserve Officers Training Corps or ROTC to prepare a pool of reserve officers who would serve the nation in time of need, though many continued to serve as career officers, "at the pleasure of the President." Since a traditional university education lasted four years, the first graduates could not be ready until 1920. With war clouds looming America needed to find a means of producing trained officers to lead the fight against the greatest military power in the world, the German Empire.

Chapter 2

World War One Officer Training Initiatives

The first well defined process for selection, training, and commissioning enlisted men as United States Army officers had its genesis in the 1913 summer military training camps held under the direction of Major General Leonard Wood. That year college students attended two vacation camps, one at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, for the eastern part of the United States, and one for the western part in Pacific Grove, California, near the Presidio of Monterey. There were no extra appropriations from Congress for these camps, nor did General Wood seek to obtain them. In addition to transportation costs to and from the camps, each young man paid a fee for uniforms and food.[1]

The idea of summer military training for civilians was not new. For years the militia had conducted camps of instruction. A War Department Annual Report recommended summer camps along with a proposed national reserve organization.[2]

The 1913 camps were so successful that the government scheduled four camps for the following year. The 1914 camps were located at Ludington, Michigan, near Lake Michigan; at Asheville, North Carolina, and in Vermont on Lake Champlain. The camp for the western United States remained in the Monterey area.

By August, 1914, the European continent was in the midst of war. Fighting there gave Americans a new urgency for the concept of military preparedness. This urgency was particularly strong in New York and other urban areas in the northeastern United States. Influential young executives and politicians there became so concerned that they led the effort to create what became known as the "Plattsburg Movement."

In 1915, two summer camps for business and professional men were held in New York and near Chicago. The graduates of these camps formed the Military Training Camps Association. This group and others worked to insure that an authorization for voluntary summer camps was included in the National Defense Act of June 3, 1916. Twelve camps, paid for by the United States government, were held in 1916.

In April, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. This led to the cancelling of summer camps for that year. But just as the small number of West Point graduates had been insufficient to meet the needs of America's first mass armies during the Civil War, the Academy again could not provide all the officers necessary for the enormous army being

[1] http://www.worldwar1.com/tgws/rel011.htm
[2] Ibid.

formed for America's participation in World War One. The Secretary of War converted the civilian camps proposed for 1917 into officer training camps. By August 1917, some 350 candidates had graduated and were commissioned as lieutenants in the U.S. Army. The Secretary of War indicated that this should be sufficient to meet Army needs. They were not.

The camps became known as Officer Candidate Schools and were held between early 1917 and November 1918, at various military installations across the nation. Officer candidates, after careful screening, received three months of intensive training in leadership and other subjects needed to prepare them to lead men in combat.

By June of 1918, almost 60,000 graduates from the first three series (or classes) of schools had been commissioned in the Army. At the time of the Armistice, signed on November 11 of that year, there were almost 50,000 candidates enrolled in the fourth and last series of schools.

Because officers of all grades were badly needed, commissions were granted up to the rank of colonel following each of the first two series of classes. Many graduates were commissioned as field grade officers (major through colonel). Still more graduates were commissioned as captains and first lieutenants. A number of the officers produced by OCS would, like their West Point educated peers, rise to high rank and lead the Army through the interwar period and during the much larger mobilization for World War Two.

Graduates of these quickly improvised World War One training programs were soon dubbed "90 Day Wonders" because of the three month length of each class. The graduates of the Officer Candidate Schools established later during World War Two, Korea, and Vietnam inherited this nickname, even though these later programs ran for as long as six months.

It was the experience gained in World War One that led to the program and methods used in OCS ever since. Since the early 1970's OCS has reverted to a 13 week program during which enlisted personnel, both male and female, are trained and evaluated at Fort Benning, Georgia, then commissioned and sent to branch schools for additional specialized training.

Chapter 3

The First Time: World War Two - 1941-1945

Some twenty years after the Armistice that brought the bloodshed of World War One to an end, another war, the most destructive in human history, erupted. This new conflagration was soon referred to as World War Two to differentiate it from the Great War as World War One was then known. The European part of that war began on September 1, 1939, and continued until May 8, 1945. The portion of the war fought in Asia had begun in the early 1930s with a Sino-Japanese conflict and continued until August, 1945. In retrospect it is clear that the period between November 11, 1918, and September 1, 1939, was actually only a cease-fire during which two of the major antagonists, Germany and the Soviet Union, prepared for the cataclysm both saw as inevitable.

At the end of World War One the United States was the strongest nation in the world and its greatest creditor. A short-lived arms race with Great Britain and Japan ended early in the 1920s with the Naval Treaties of London and Washington. In the meantime the American Army virtually disbanded after the war following a short occupation of a part of Germany and a brief intervention in the Soviet Union. At the same time a worldwide epidemic struck the Army. Known today as the Spanish Flu, it is now believed to have started in a Kansas military post.

By 1922 the U.S. Army was greatly reduced in size. The rapid downsizing returned many veterans to a civilian economy that was, although it appeared robust, beginning to slowly slide almost unnoticed toward depression by the middle 1920s.

In the downsized Army many officers with high-level command experience were relegated to company grade (captain and below). Dwight Eisenhower and George S. Patton, for example, lieutenant colonel and colonel respectively and armor leaders during the Great War, reverted to the rank of captain. Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur, however, was an exception. MacArthur, largely through the influence of his mother, was retained in that rank and assigned to the U.S. Military Academy to reform and modernize the curriculum, tasks he performed exceedingly well. Other officers left the military altogether.

Officers who struggled on low pay in low level assignments later found themselves leading regiments, corps, armies, and in two cases, army groups. The great Army educational innovation of the period was a system of schools to train future leaders for positions well above their current grades. Many of those who completed these schools and who were to later achieve high rank came to the attention of perhaps one of the greatest staff officers in Army history, George Catlett Marshall. Marshall's effectiveness as a staff officer was such that

he never held the field command often considered necessary to rank among the greatest generals. His acumen as a superb staff officer was evident when he served on General John Pershing's staff during World War One.

Following the war he was first assigned as Pershing's aide and then to staff positions of increasing responsibility. During this time Marshall kept track of the promising officers who would lead future American Armies when and if they were formed. Marshall supposedly maintained a "little black book" in which he jotted down the names of and notes about various officers he encountered, although no one ever actually saw the book, nor is there any evidence that it ever existed. It was with this extensive background that General George C. Marshall became Chief of Staff, United States Army on the fateful day of September 1, 1939.

It was while Marshall was serving as Assistant Chief of Staff during a White House conference held on November 14, 1938, that it was decided to direct the Army General Staff to expand the Army over a period of two years from some 167,000 enlisted ranks to 240,000. Officers increased those figures by approximately 10 per cent. The National Guard was to be increased from 190,000 to 240,000. These plans went forward and by September 1, 1939, Regular Army strength, including officers, was about 190,000. The National Guard's strength reached some 200,000 while another 110,000 individuals were in the Reserve.[3] However, the Regular Army in 1939 was still so small that it actually ranked behind that of Portugal, a European non-combatant.

The War Department envisioned an Army of some 4,000,000 men and believed it had two years to build and equip such a force. It didn't have such a force three years later when, after Pearl Harbor, the United States entered first the Pacific war and, then, less than a week later, responded to Hitler's war declaration by committing itself to the European part of the war. In less than four years after Pearl Harbor, however, almost 8.5 million men would serve in the Army of the United States and be deployed on every continent except Antarctica.

General Marshall's "little black book", or his memory if no written record was actually kept, produced sufficient names of men trained to assume senior commands. However, it did not list enough junior officers who would do the actual leading, fighting, and dying in the battles necessary to win the war. Put in perspective, 19,000 officers had come from the National Guard, and 18,000 from the Officers' Reserve Corps (trained but not employed), but 280,000 were produced by the Army itself through the training of enlisted men who became officers. Many of these new officers would lead the platoons, companies, and even battalions fighting in the war. They would also command the service and supply troops so necessary for the fighting forces' effectiveness.

To get these officers, General Marshall ordered the formation of Officer Candidate Schools in Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, Quartermaster, Engineers, Coast Artillery, Finance, Cavalry, Chemical Warfare, and Medical Administration. Physicians were to be

[3] Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History. *Highlights of Mobilization, World War Two, 1938-1942.* Stetson Conn. Historic Manuscripts Collection, File Number 2-3.7 AF. B. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. March 10, 1959).

given an orientation course but trained officers would administer the provision of medical services.[4]

The Army established the first Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. The curriculum, over which General Marshall kept a watchful eye, was developed and then followed in all subsequently established Officer Candidate Schools. As proof of his interest, Marshall, when he didn't like what he saw, called forth yet another officer from his "little black book" to finish the curriculum; Lieutenant Colonel Omar Bradley, himself a former teacher. That curriculum is still largely followed today in the basic or leadership section of the course. Former Army sergeant and official George Marshall biographer, Forrest Pogue, reported in his monumental multi-volume work that General Marshall took particular interest in the preparation of junior officers at Fort Benning. When he became concerned with the program in 1941 he appointed one of his favorites, Omar Bradley, to shape things up. Candidates had to be trained like the soldiers they were going to lead. Those candidates were then trained and tested to become the leaders who would carry into effect the mission ordered by the United States government.[5]

Two requirements were uppermost in Marshall's mind. First, an applicant must have been an enlisted person (draftee or otherwise) so that he could understand the men he would lead. Second, a graduate of OCS was first to be a leader. Once qualified as such, he would receive training in the Army branch to which he was assigned. The basic phase or component of the course, 13 weeks (91 days) long, would be the primary test of leadership potential. This phase was later expanded to 17 weeks.

In language that would be recognized by every graduate of Officer Candidate School since, General Marshall admonished the first Fort Benning OCS graduating class that they would face nothing but difficulties ahead and often without the resources they felt they needed. Nevertheless they were admonished to continue on and let nothing stand in the way of accomplishing the mission.[6]

As recognition of tank warfare's importance grew, the Army eventually turned to Fort Knox to produce Armor officers sufficient to lead the tank battalions that would be part of 16 armored divisions, plus 65 independent tank battalions. These independent battalions were to support, as needed, 66 infantry divisions, though no battalion was permanently attached to any specific division. In addition to training those who would operate the tanks in combat, planners emphasized combined operations contemplating teams of tanks, mechanized infantry, and artillery supported by Ordnance, Quartermaster, and Transportation branches. The mastermind of the new armored force was a former cavalry officer, Adna Chaffee, Jr. Chaffee, whose headquarters was at Fort Knox, wanted to control

[4] Milton M. McPherson, *The Ninety Day Wonders: OCS and the Modern American Army* (Fort Benning, GA: U.S. Army OCS Alumni Association, 2001), p. 113.
[5] Forrest Pogue, *Ordeal and Hope 1939-1942,* vol. 2 of *George C. Marshall* (New York: The Viking Press, 1966).
[6] Ibid.

the training of all elements of the armored team but he failed in his attempt. Still, the army authorized him to set up a training and doctrine development school.

In July, 1940, the first men from the draft began to arrive at Fort Knox and the Army developed a training curriculum for what became the 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions. On July 25, 1940, Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Stephen Henry was directed to plan, organize and operate an armored forces school. The Secretary of War approved the school on September 19, and a replacement center was added to train new soldiers to fill forming divisions and replace casualties. The Army separated the school and replacement functions on October 25, and the school became the place for doctrine development and armor education. The replacement center trained the enlisted men and sent them on for specific training. In 1955, these operations became the United States Army Training Center, Armor or USATCA.

Chaffee's fight was long and hard and he died of natural causes on August 22, 1941, before he could see the result of his labor. The distinctive triangular Armor patch is a symbol of what he wanted, and largely accomplished. Members of every armored division would wear a patch of three colors: red, for Artillery; blue, for Infantry; and yellow, for Cavalry/Armor. The center of the patch depicted a track and cannon, and thus further represented the parts of the combined arms team.[7]

Before Chaffee's death in August, the first classes of Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox graduated. The school continued to produce new officers until it was closed after the last classes which entered in November, 1944, graduated. The graduates had undergone the basic phase, plus additional training totaling 17 weeks to emerge as second lieutenants. Officially, OCS at Fort Knox produced 11,349 officers. While most of these served in armored units, many led anti-tank units and other units necessary to support the mobile force the United States produced, probably the most mobile force of the war.

In the end, the Army closed OCS at Fort Knox because the casualty rate among Armor officers had been lower than expected. The loss of Infantry officers had been higher and a need for more infantry in the European theater was clear. Still, service in tanks was a dangerous occupation. However, after the landings in northwest Europe in June, 1944, the supply of junior officers was augmented by the direct commissioning of superior NCOs who had proven their leadership in the toughest crucible of all, combat. Their survival also proved their technical capability. Both of these qualities made these combat leaders a better choice than new, un-blooded junior officers from home.[8]

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[7] The story of Adna Chaffee and his fight for mechanization is told in M.H. Gillie, *Forging the Thunderbolt,* (1947; reprint, Mechanicsburg, Pa: Stackpole Books, 2006). Based on artifacts offered for sale on the Internet, it appears that the motto, "We forged the Thunderbolt" was first used to describe the replacement center about 1943. "Thunderbolt" was obviously a takeoff on the German "Blitz" applied to armored warfare (interestingly never by the Germans. *Blitzkrieg* or Lightning War was an invention of the western press). In 1947, The Army Office of Heraldry recognized "Forge the Thunderbolt" as the official motto of the Armor School.

[8] An example is an NCO in a tank company of the 745th Independent Tank Battalion, which supported the 1st Infantry Division from Normandy to the end of the war on May 8, 1945. Sergeant A.G. "Bud" Spencer arrived

on the continent as a tank commander and finished the war as a company commander. His direct commission, earned on the battlefield, came after the breakout. Spencer was not unique. Personal Interview, Marseilles, Illinois, 2006.

Chapter 4

The Second Time: The Korean War - 1951-1953

The Korean Conflict, sometimes referred to as the Korean War or the Korean Police Action, is one of the least understood military actions in American history. The reasons for the American Revolution, the Civil War, and World Wars One and Two are self-evident to most Americans, although the causes of the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Spanish American War are perhaps less known.

The Korean War however remains an enigma for most Americans. The war has become known as the "Forgotten War."[9] Though it is perhaps easier to forget than to understand the war, it certainly has not been forgotten by the million or so soldiers who fought in it, by the families of the 34,000 who died there, or by the other millions who served, often against their will, because of it.

Some of the difficulty is explained by the description of Korea as "the wrong war, at the wrong time and with the wrong enemy."[10] While that remark, made by a revered general, seems somewhat unusual, it actually puts the situation into its geopolitical context. The Korean Conflict resulted from a series of mistakes committed by the USSR, the US, and Communist China. It now appears none of the major powers wanted a battle on the Korean Peninsula, none had expansionist goals there, and none intended it as a test of wills. That the war in fact became all three affected the lives of almost six million Americans, nearly three million of whom served during the conflict in the Army. If the war is to be understood at all, it must be seen as the first conflict to tie Europe and Asia together into one geopolitically competitive sphere in the rapidly growing tension between the Western nations and the Sino-Soviet bloc.

The United States then became involved because it was confronted with one of the earliest challenges to emerge from what President John Kennedy would later call the "long twilight struggle" of the Cold War. From 1949, when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created, through the Vietnam era and into the 1980s, many of America's leaders were convinced the nation faced a grave threat from the specter of international communism. Throughout this period these leaders, fighting a Cold War that on occasion turned hot, confronted what appeared to be an imposing, monolithic, and inexorable coalition. The

[9] The phrase comes from one of the war's best chroniclers, Clay Blair in *The Forgotten War*, (New York: Times Books, 1987).

[10] Attributed to many but most recently to General Omar Bradley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the conflict in a *New York Times* article dated July 7, 1981.

tragedy for the United States is that for much of this era no such coalition in fact existed. Many would die to prove this.

North Korea, or the Democratic Republic of Korea, attacked South Korea, the Republic of Korea, in the early morning hours of June 25, 1950. The South Korean Army had been trained by American advisors and equipped with excess World War Two weapons, except tanks. These were withheld for fear of the South attacking the North - a qualm the USSR apparently didn't share. The South's forces were no match for the North Koreans, who were backed by 150 T-34 Soviet tanks. Seoul quickly fell, and North Korean units drove deeply into South Korea.

Faced with a rapidly worsening crisis, the Truman Administration on June 30, 1950, decided to commit American ground troops to the Korean Peninsula. There they helped establish a defense line around the southeastern port city of Pusan. The United States action, sanctioned later by a United Nations Resolution, led it into the dreaded "land war in Asia".

The United States entered the Korean imbroglio in an entirely different position from that which it held at the start of World War Two. With its nuclear monopoly and a navy more powerful than the rest of the navies of the world combined, it was undoubtedly the greatest military power the world had ever seen. The Army, which had been rapidly reduced from 8.5 million personnel in August, 1945, still had a respectable strength of some 600,000 troops. However, this force was located in several places around the world, particularly in Europe. Unfortunately, the 111,430 in Japan, the Philippines, and Okinawa were not enough to fight the battles in Korea.

In June, 1950, the United States had a reserve corps of 217,435 officers and 291,182 enlisted men. Pentagon planners deemed this sufficient to very rapidly increase the size of the Army.[11] It was obvious to them that the veterans of World War Two were excellent teachers and senior leaders. There was, however, a need for younger men to fight and, if need be, die in the coming battles. As a result, the Army called the first draftees in July for conscription in September. As these new troops were being trained the World War Two veterans, along with those soldiers whose tours of duty had been involuntarily extended, fought through the first part of the war. This included many bloody battles that occurred as a result of the Chinese intervention. The expectations of an early end to the war had soon evaporated when Chinese troops entered the fighting at Thanksgiving, thus making "home by Christmas" hopes a pipe dream.

The Pentagon quickly realized that the numbers of World War Two veterans and young officers produced by West Point and college ROTC programs would be insufficient to lead the platoons and companies formed as the Army expanded. Planners thus reinstated Officer Candidate School, beginning in February, 1951. The reactivated program was 22 weeks long,

[11] The authorized strength of the Army on June 30, 1950, "crept" from 630,000 to 680,000 on July 14; to 740,000 on July 19; to 834,000 on August 10; to over one million by the end of August and after the Chinese intervention to 1,552,000 on April 17, 1951. *Highlights of Mobilization, Korean War*, Office of the Chief of Military History, March 10, 1959.

up from the 17 weeks of World War Two. By the end of 1952, the Army had commissioned more than 15,000 officers through OCS. With the fighting slowing and eventually ending in 1953, the Pentagon closed all such schools by January of that year. The only exceptions were Infantry and Artillery, which continued to operate until 1973, and Engineer, which closed its program in 1954.[12]

The Korean War has been called an infantry war and that accurately describes the last three years of fighting (1951-1953). However while the war in Korea somewhat resembled the combat of World War One more than the mobile operations of World War Two, there was significant armor involvement.

In what was perhaps the most aggressive and spectacular advance of the war, Lieutenant Colonel (later Lieutenant General) Welborn "Tom" Dolvin commanded a task force built around his 89th Tank Battalion and led it out of the Pusan Perimeter on September 26, 1950. The offensive later linked up with the forces that had landed at Inchon during Operation Chromite on September 14.[13]

The remainder of the war was primarily the infantry contest portrayed in many popular accounts of the conflict's history. However, there were Army tanks which on at least one occasion supported the Marine Corps, which had as its own organic heavy tank, the M26 Pershing. One famous situation occurred during the retreat from the Chosin Reservoir, following a massive Chinese offensive. Led by 1944 West Point graduate Captain (later Colonel) Robert Drake, one armored unit, the 31st Tank Company, a remnant of the 31st Infantry Regiment, covered the rear of General Oliver Smith's Marine column on its long retreat to Hungnam.[14]

Still, the mountains and rice paddies of Korea were not the only places where the American Army was committed for actual or potential conflict. As the United States was fighting in Korea, it was also building up its strength in Western Europe. World War Two had proven that Europe was tank country. The need for an increasing number of mobile troops for use both in Korea and on the plains of Europe caused the Army to open OCS at Fort Knox a second time on September 28, 1951. As Captain Thomas J. Canavan observed in his essay "Let's Keep Armor OCS":

> The program was to consist of 11 classes with 100 candidates per class. This time, however, they were to receive 22 weeks of training - a five week increase over World War II O.C.S. (sic) In addition, a class was to graduate every other week. At first, these

[12] McPherson. Note that Professor McPherson was a 1952 graduate of Infantry OCS, Class 16-52. Unfortunately, his work doesn't mention OCS at Fort Knox. For that story we are indebted to the work of Captain Thomas J. Canavan, who served as an OCS at Fort Knox Company Commander in 1967 and 1968, and Lieutenant Steve Strawbridge, graduate of OCS at Fort Knox, Class 27-67.

[13] Blair, pp. 297-300.

[14] The company commander of the tank company, Robert Drake, defied Smith's order at the end of the retreat and pushed his M4 Sherman tanks ahead of the Marines' Pershings because he feared that the heavier Marine tanks would destroy the bridges, thus stranding his men and equipment. Blair, p. 540.

> goals were not reached. The first three classes had more than 100 candidates and started about one month apart. It was not until the fourth class that the Officer Candidate School was able to proceed as planned. The program was retained at Fort Knox until 12 May 1953, during which time 1,256 lieutenants received commissions.[15]

Thus, on May 12, 1953, the Army closed OCS at Fort Knox a second time. One side note of interest is that while officer candidates were housed in the large red brick barracks (now offices) on main post during World War Two and Vietnam, Captain Canavan says the candidates in 1951-1953 were housed in wooden barracks north of the Armor School, possibly near where Boudinot Hall now stands.

[15] Thomas J. Canavan, "Let's Keep Armor OCS" (paper, United States Army Armor School, 1967), 2. For full article see Appendix G, p. 107.

Chapter 5

The Vietnam War

The 1964 presidential election in the United States was decided very much by where the electorate stood on the issue of peace and war. Though American soldiers in the early 1960s were on the ground as advisors in the far away and little known country of South Vietnam, most Americans seemed uninformed about the fighting there. The larger issue that was of much deeper concern to most citizens at the time was the ongoing tension with the Soviet Union. During the summer and fall of 1964, Democrat Lyndon Johnson, the incumbent president, ran as a peace candidate against his hawkish opponent, Air Force Reserve General and Arizona Republican Senator Barry Goldwater.

Though Johnson's campaign focused on the issue of whether the nation would perhaps have peace or war based upon the next occupant of the Oval Office, it differed from earlier presidential contests of a similar nature. Unlike Woodrow Wilson in 1914, and Franklin Roosevelt in 1940, both of whom ran on "I kept us out of war" platforms, Johnson instead offered the premise that he was the better leader to keep a nuclear war from happening.

The world had only recently witnessed the Cuban Missile Crisis as well as a confrontation with the Soviet Union over the Berlin Wall. In light of such occurrences, with their possibly apocalyptic consequences, skirmishes with guerrillas in distant Indochina were on the minds of few Americans. It was thus perhaps understandable that a theoretical nuclear war, as opposed to a real but small brushfire war, concerned most citizens.

Almost immediately after President Johnson's election, the war in Vietnam grew in intensity. Largely a civil war, though this fact was misunderstood at the time, the conflict presented the peace candidate, now the responsible Commander-in-Chief, with an increasingly difficult set of military choices. As a result, the Johnson administration was unwilling to withdraw from Vietnam.

Faced with a complex array of political, diplomatic, and humanitarian issues, some of which may appear opaque, erroneous, or misguided today, the president made a number of incremental decisions that led to further involvement. Like many American leaders of the time, Johnson was captivated by the theory of "the falling dominoes" in Southeast Asia. As a result, he took a number of steps to confront Communist expansion there. Those steps, taken with seeming logic one after the other, drew America inexorably into the quagmire of Vietnam and resulted in what is considered by many as the most divisive war in the nation's

history. That war would destroy the Johnson administration and leave scars still visible fifty years later.

The Vietnam era, roughly 1960-1975, was a unique period in American history. The nation was transformed and the transformation was evident everywhere. From the Beach Boys' innocuous music about cars and surfing in the early 1960s, to the psychedelic sounds of the Jefferson Airplane and the Doors at the end of the decade and from the button down collars and penny loafers of 1960 to the tie-dyed tops, bell bottoms, and sandals of 1970, American culture underwent a sea change. Authority figures, once respected, were now questioned if not reviled; riots and acts of terrorism too often replaced civil discourse; and the civil rights and women's movements fueled a powerful drive for equality for those who in many ways had been excluded from much of the American dream.

It is likely that many of the social and political changes that emerged during the Vietnam era would have occurred without the war and many of the changes were long overdue. Yet, because it drained economic resources and deflected political attention, the war in Vietnam became a focal point of anger, a lightning rod of sorts, for those seeking the social reforms of a "Great Society." Interestingly, the war was fought mainly by the poor and disadvantaged who were the intended beneficiaries of many of the social reform movements.

Vigorous debate about the wisdom and conduct of the war was warranted, in fact essential, in a functioning democracy. It was America's longest war of the twentieth century. It consumed enormous resources and much political capital which could have been better employed at home. Political considerations made the call-up of reserves unpalatable, so the Johnson administration resorted to the Selective Service Act to meet its manpower needs.

While hundreds of thousands of young men accepted their obligation to serve, others burned draft cards in protest or fled the country to Canada. Still others married and started families or used political or economic influence to avoid service. Sometimes these actions were taken out of genuine conviction; sometimes out of a drive for self-preservation. In either case a generation of Americans was divided between those who served and those who did not.

This kind of division was not unique to the Vietnam era. Every war in American history has had a similar division. However, never before had those who served returned home to less appreciation for their sacrifice. Not only were they subjected to ridicule, but the situation deteriorated to the point that Congress had to pass a law prohibiting discrimination against a person simply because he or she had served. Still, those who served either remained in the military or came home, with or without visible scars, to begin building their lives over.

Today it is not uncommon for people, when they learn that someone in his 60s or 70s is a veteran, to say, "Thank you for your service." The phrase has become so common that it has now perhaps fallen into the category of the "politically correct" thing to say. That the

older veterans do not seem overly enthralled by this phrase is not surprising when many found themselves spit upon, discriminated against and blamed for serving during Vietnam, a war that, especially for the counterculture of the time, seemed unjust, unnecessary, and unwinnable.

Another reason why Vietnam veterans as well as veterans of other wars find the "Thank you" well intended but of little meaning is that only the veterans themselves understand what they endured, the choices they made, the sacrifices they offered, and, in some cases, the horror and pain of combat. At veterans' reunions, these are seldom discussed; they do not need to be for they are understood. It is not possible, however, for them to be understood by non-veterans or for them to be fully shared with anyone other than those who lived the experience.

In the history of the United States, references to the war in Southeast Asia and those who fought there are now mostly footnotes, mentioned usually as a partial explanation for the social changes that emerged during the war. It is the footnote nature of the remembrance of that war in fact which led to this book.

During Vietnam the United States Army was called upon to quickly train some 375,000 troops and then to deploy them to Southeast Asia, the continental United States, Europe, Korea, and elsewhere around the world. To lead this force, about 40,000 new officers were needed, a 40 percent increase in the pre-war officer corps. As had been the case in earlier wars, these new officers were expected to lead, and if necessary, to die with young American soldiers on the field of battle.

The expansion of the officer corps had to take place between 1965 and 1969 and had to be accomplished in a shorter time period than that which had occurred during the much larger World War Two expansion between September 1, 1939, and October, 1942. Once again, the main source of these new officers was Officer Candidate School.

About ten percent of these needed officers were prepared at the Armor School at Fort Knox, Kentucky, between December, 1965, and March, 1968. Despite the significant role it played in the Army's efforts to expand its officer corps, little has been written about the Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox during those important years. In the one thorough history of OCS the Fort Knox program is mentioned only in passing, and in this way has become little more than a footnote to a footnote.

In the late 1990's a graduate of Class 1-68 of OCS at Fort Knox decided that the program and the men associated with it deserved acknowledgment beyond a footnote. This book is a result of his efforts and those of others who were graduates of the program or who were the cadre who trained and evaluated those who became the leaders of what was, at least to date, America's last draft based Army.

Chapter 6

The Third Time: The Vietnam War - 1965-1968

As the chill of the Cold War deepened during the 1950s and early 1960s the Army went through a number of trials while its leaders considered the best way to face the continuing threat of a confrontation with the Soviet Union. In the mid-1950s defense planners decided to reorganize all Army divisions, except armored divisions. The new division that emerged from the reorganization was supposed to be part of an Army better able to fight in a nuclear environment if war with the Soviets in fact occurred. Reflecting the Army's fixation at the time on the atomic battlefield as well as the new division's five component structure, the reorganization emphasized the battle group over the regiment and the brigade, and positioned a five (penta) battle group division as the main tactical fighting unit of the Army.

The Pentomic concept was the subject of much debate and criticism. Those who seemed unwilling to, as defense intellectual Herman Kahn famously phrased it, "think about the unthinkable" saw the reforms as an Army effort to legitimatize nuclear war. There was also Congressional criticism of the idea, and this hostility affected the funding for an Army that was already downsizing after the Korean War.

Even after its implementation a number of difficulties continued to trouble the Pentomic concept and in the early 1960's the divisional structure of the Army was again changed. This time planners centered their reform efforts on the Reorganized Objective Army Division, often abbreviated as ROAD. The ROAD concept resembled the Army's more traditional structure by organizing most divisions into three brigades. This approach tended to mute the critics.

Besides political criticism and organizational confusion in the Army, the nation faced other serious challenges during the 1960s. The Soviets shot down an American U-2 spy plane over the USSR, bringing about the cancellation of a planned summit between the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States. Tensions escalated in West Germany, considered a critical Cold War keystone for the defense of Europe in the event of a Soviet attack through the famed Fulda Gap. In the divided city of Berlin itself, the East Germans constructed the Berlin Wall, causing President Kennedy to mobilize Army Reserve units. The decade also witnessed persistent problems on the Korean peninsula and ongoing stress in the Middle East.

Then in the autumn of 1962, during the most serious confrontation of the entire Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union edged perilously close to nuclear Armageddon

after the Soviets placed nuclear armed medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in Cuba, just ninety miles from American shores. Through all this the Army met its commitments with an active duty strength authorized at just under a million men, about one hundred thousand of whom were officers.

To sustain this number, the officer corps required approximately 14,350 new second lieutenants, the average from 1961 through fiscal 1965. The largest producer of new officers at the time, as it is today, was the Reserve Officer Training Corps, conducted at the nation's colleges and universities. This program resulted in 9,886 new officers in fiscal 1965. In addition, 524 graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point entered the Active Army, while another 541 new officers were direct appointments. Some of the latter were battlefield promotions but most resulted from the requirement for needed specialists. Another 1,664 medical officers also entered the Army. The Infantry and Artillery Officer Candidate Schools at Fort Benning, Georgia, and Fort Sill, Oklahoma, produced an additional 2,272 new lieutenants, the largest number since the Korean Conflict.

During fiscal year 1966, which began on July 1, 1965, the Army initiated a complete analysis of its schools. The body that prepared the study, headed by General Ralph Haines and known as the Haines Board, released its report in February, 1966. It contained, among other findings, the following conclusion:

> The primary mission of Army Officer Candidate Schools is to prepare selected individuals for appointment as Reserve commissioned officers in the Army and for active duty as second lieutenants. The secondary mission is to serve as a basis for mobilization as the needs of the service require. *It is the most responsive source of officers to meet fluctuating requirements.*[16]

The Haines Board had observed the following trend: Officer Candidate Schools at Fort Benning and Fort Sill had produced 781 second lieutenants in 1963 and another 1,688 had graduated from OCS in 1964. These numbers clearly indicated the increasing need for officers due to the American involvement in Vietnam but they also reflected a decrease in those produced by ROTC programs. The Haines Board, which worked all through 1965, was already able to spot trends affecting the need for new officers.

The year 1965 began with some 85,000 American soldiers in Vietnam. The Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) commander however soon requested an increase in the size of the American force in-country. The MACV requests, and the Johnson administration's response to them, presented a dynamically changing situation for Officer Candidate School programs.

In July of 1965, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara went to Congress for authorization to increase the size of the Army by 375,000, a process that would take two

[16] Department of the Army, *Analysis of Current Systems of Officer Schooling,* vol. 3 of *Report of the Army Board to Review Army Officer Candidate* Schools (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office. February, 1966).

years to implement and which was designed to support a projected force of some 250,000 soldiers in Vietnam by the end of fiscal year 1967. It seems clear in retrospect that the Johnson administration did not then realize that the eventual commitment of personnel to Vietnam by the end of 1969 would be 351,000 from the Army with another 170,000 from the Navy (including Marines) and the Air Force.

The mathematics of the situation dictated the solution. Because the ratio of officers to enlisted men at the time was approximately one to ten, an expansion of the Army by 370,000 men required about 37,000 new officers. The United States Military Academy at West Point was in the first year of a planned ten year program to expand the school from an enrollment of 2,529 Cadets to 4,417 by 1975.[17]

The situation was not much better for ROTC. ROTC programs were already under attack at colleges and universities throughout the country and enrollment in them was in decline. Beyond this it was clear that even a 25 percent increase in ROTC cadets could not result in producing new officers in less than four years, and then only at about 3,000 per year.

The only practical choice then was to increase the enrollment in Officer Candidate Schools. These new students included men who had been selected from the enlisted ranks and others produced by a new program, the College Option for Officer Candidate School Program, offered to non ROTC college graduates. It was clear to Army planners that these efforts would need to be initiated as rapidly as possible.

The Army quickly expanded the Infantry Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning. It was evident however that Benning alone could not produce the approximately 40,000 new officers needed. As a result, Army officials directed the various branches to start branch specific Officer Candidate Schools. Army planners restarted OCS for the Armor Branch at Fort Knox and at other posts for several other branches due to the need for a rapid, large scale increase in the officer corps. Fort Sill, which had continued to be the site of Artillery OCS after Korea, and Fort Benning, the home of Infantry Officer Candidate School, also produced increased numbers of junior officers for the same reason. [18]

On August 26, 1965, the Department of the Army ordered the Armor School at Fort Knox to activate an Officer Candidate School. The OCS there was one of the first to get underway, and the Army determined that it was to start training select individuals who would receive thirteen weeks of branch immaterial training related to leadership and other non-branch specific matters. The Army then transferred those candidates who successfully completed this training to three branch specialty officer basic courses. Lieutenant Steven T. Strawbridge has described the impact of Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox:

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[17] This expansion would move the production of second lieutenants from about 600 in 1965 to a whopping 1,100 by 1975.

[18] Including the most famous OC graduate in history, John Shalikoshvili, who rose to the rank of Four Star General and served as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It is believed that he is the only graduate of any OCS program to achieve this high status. One of the contributors had the honor of spending some time with the General after he had retired (he passed away in 2011). When he called the General "OC", Shalikoshvili responded with a good natured grin.

> Fort Knox soon saw the effects of the Army's decision to train new officers there. Preparation for the program at the Armor School required the organization of a command unit to house and administer candidates and provide their leadership training and evaluation. In some academic departments the number of classes and instructors doubled. A brigade organization (the Officer Candidate Brigade) which consisted of eight companies, A through H, of two classes each (hence A1; A2; B1; B2; *etc*.) and a headquarters company was organized September 10, 1965, with Colonel Paul C. Root, Jr. in command.[19]

The Officer Candidate School itself was under the direction of the Assistant Commandant of the Armor School, Brigadier General Albin F. Irzyk. Irzyk was a famed armor battalion commander who during World War Two served under General George S. Patton, and alongside future General Creighton Abrams. Irzyk was Assistant Commandant throughout most of the life of the Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox and he took special interest in it and its product. Though most candidates did not know it at the time, his spirit and dedication would be stamped on each of them. Following his assignment at the Armor School, General Irzyk returned to Vietnam for his second tour where he played a key role in saving Saigon during the TET Offensive in the spring of 1968.

Because the Armor School was among the first to establish an OCS, the Army stipulated that during its first fiscal year of operation from 1 October, 1965, through 30 June, 1966, the school was to train some students only for the thirteen week branch immaterial curriculum common to all Officer Candidate Schools while retaining others for an additional ten weeks of training as Armor officers. Those sent elsewhere finished their training in Transportation, Ordnance, or Quartermaster branch schools. After July 1, 1966, the Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox prepared only Armor officers through a full 23 week long course.

While there is no written rationale for the decision that Fort Knox was to provide the Basic Phase of OCS for candidates in branches other than Armor, the reasons appear obvious: Ordnance, Transportation, and Quartermaster branches did not have active Basic Phase programs in place before Fort Knox did. One of the original tenets set down decades earlier by General Marshall stipulated that the officer candidate should be proficient in the combat arm to which he would be assigned.[20]

In addition, as noted above, the father of the Armor School, General Chaffee, never saw Armor as involving only tanks. Other branches, such as Transportation and Quartermaster, whose mission in part was to supply armored units, and Ordnance Corps, which was critical to maintaining armored vehicles and weapons, were seen as equally important as the tanks.

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[19] The preceding quote and much in the next several paragraphs is based on an article by then Lieutenant Steven T. Strawbridge published in the Fort Knox Post newspaper, *Inside the Turret,* on March 1, 1968. Steve has graciously granted us permission to use his article. For the entire article, see Appendix H, p. 113.

[20] 1944 Infantry OCS graduate Harold Steele reported to the Veterans History Project that he spent a year in Basic and Advanced training at Fort Sill (Artillery) and, with the pressing need for Infantry officers was sent to Fort Benning where, before OCS, he had to go through Infantry Basic Training.

In fact, the ROAD divisions which came on-line in the early 1960s were based on Chaffee's Armor Force concepts. Even the non-Armor ROADs had substantial need for officers in the combat support and combat service support branches.[21]

Finally, whether called upon to lead truck convoys or office staff or mechanics, officers were required to be leaders in the most basic sense of the word. The training and evaluation phase of OCS was the same for all branches during the first thirteen weeks of a rigorous, twenty-three week long course. Because the Armor School was ready for the first phase, it made sense to train those future officers at Fort Knox.

With the United States' increasing involvement in South Vietnam beginning in 1965, Officer Candidate School was reactivated at Fort Knox and at several other sites on September 13, 1965. The first OCS class did not start until December 9, 1965, due to a lack of sufficient numbers of suitable candidates. Because the Army did not decide until the late summer of 1965 to re-open OCS at Fort Knox, the early selection process for qualified Armor candidates could not produce the numbers necessary to begin formal training at the Armor School. As a result several classes in 1965 went unfilled.

Once the school actually started, classes were to begin at approximately ten-day intervals. School officials divided the program for the first fifteen classes into two training phases. Phase I, called Basic, was thirteen weeks long and consisted of branch immaterial subjects such as military courtesy and history, drill and ceremony, and leadership training and evaluation.

The ten week long Phase II portion of instruction consisted of classes provided by specialized branches of the Army. At Fort Knox, candidates in classes that started their training before July 1, 1966, either remained at Fort Knox or were sent to branch schools at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland, or Fort Eustis and Fort Lee in Virginia. Beginning with classes starting after July 1, 1966, at Fort Knox however, each class was twenty-three weeks long and included training only for those to be commissioned in Armor branch. After July 1, 1966, OCS at Fort Knox was called Armor OCS.

The last OCS class at Fort Knox graduated on February 23, 1968. For the period December, 1965, through February, 1968, Fort Knox OCS trained and commissioned 3,354 second lieutenants in Armor, 22 in the Transportation Corps, 9 in the Ordnance Branch and 7 in the Quartermaster Corps. In addition, 929 individuals completed thirteen weeks of Fort Knox OCS Phase I training before being sent to Ordnance, Quartermaster, or Transportation

[21] An example of this is that each ROAD division (armor, infantry and mechanized infantry) had a division "Base" common to all. The Division Support Command (where the Transportation, Quartermaster, and Ordnance units were found) required 141 officers. In an armored division the number of Armor officers required in the tank battalions was 204. Mechanized infantry divisions (with the standard three tank battalions) required 102; regular infantry divisions (with the standard two tank battalions) needed 68. Thus, the number of so-called support leaders actually exceeded the number of tank officers in all infantry divisions and amounted to two-thirds of those in armored divisions, excluding cavalry squadrons. Above data from *Armor Reference Data*, US Army Armor School, Fort Knox, Kentucky, April 1965.

branch school. This was a significant increase over the numbers of new officers accessioned by the Army prior to 1965.

The first candidates who arrived at the Officer Candidate School were quartered in barracks located near main post, in an area that had been used to house garrison troops since before World War Two. These were relatively new red brick buildings that looked more like college dormitories than traditional Army barracks. Four of these buildings would house ten OCS companies. Three buildings housed two companies each and one building housed four companies.

North of the barracks for the candidate companies there was an additional barracks for housing unassigned candidates who were arriving at or departing from the OC Brigade. This building was the same type that housed Companies A, G, and H. When OCS was in its early days this building housed new arrivals, mostly those who were waiting processing into one of the OCS companies. Later, as the rigor of the program exacted its toll, this building temporarily housed those who were for one reason or another leaving and who were being processed for assignment elsewhere. There was another barracks for enlisted personnel whose assignment was to support the school. Still another building served as brigade headquarters. There was in addition a mess hall.

The Armor School designated the first two Officer Candidate Companies as Company A1 and Company A2. As the first candidates began training, post engineers were re-conditioning the large red brick buildings south across the street from Company A. The massive red brick buildings, since remodeled into modern office buildings and still in use, housed from east to west, Companies C, E, and B and D in one double building, and F Company (quickly dubbed, unofficially, “F Troop” after a then popular television comedy show about a confused cavalry captain and his charges). Later, Companies G and H were housed in newly released barracks in the same area as A Company.

Each Officer Candidate Company (each consisting of two classes) had a commanding officer who was usually a captain; an executive officer who was usually a first lieutenant; and NCOs. There were three platoons in each class, each under a Tactical Officer who was usually a second lieutenant. Each platoon usually consisted of between 35 and 40 officer candidates at the beginning of a class cycle.

Candidates who arrived at Fort Knox for Officer Candidate School had been through a rigorous selection process. All were volunteers and all had scored well on the basic Army examination, the Armed Forces Qualification Test or AFQT. They had also scored well on a special Officer Candidate School Qualification Test. Following these examinations applicants were carefully screened by a panel of three officers. Those found suitable were then given a class start date. A few, such as college or university graduates who entered OCS through the College Option Program, had been offered a choice of schools, though the choice was usually limited to the combat arms of Armor, Artillery, Engineers or Infantry. Many others came to OCS directly from units or schools located at Fort Knox.

Without question the program at the Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox was a daunting one. OCS was a crucible of sorts, an intentionally constructed environment of constant challenges and unending demands and decisions. As Lieutenant Steve Strawbridge, a graduate of OC Class 27-67, said in his *Turret* Article:

> Initially, candidates were often bewildered by the number of things they were required to do in the small amount of time allotted. Learning to properly budget time, determine priorities, and accomplishing tasks with the maximum efficiency became rote for the candidate aspiring to become an officer.

When each OCS class began its program, candidates were ushered into a lecture hall, usually Gaffey Auditorium, if it was available. There the Assistant Commandant or his designee addressed the assembled would-be officers. The Assistant Commandant told the candidates that OCS would be a test of their ability to work under pressure. He then looked at the class, directed each candidate to glance to his right and left, and said, "One of you will not be here to graduate."[22] He further explained that if the school made a mistake and dismissed someone who could have made a good officer, a disservice would be done to the individual and the Army would be out of one officer. However, if the mistake was instead passing someone who was unsuitable, the mission of the Army and the lives of the young Americans put in that person's charge would be endangered.

It was clear to the candidates from the Assistant Commandant's remarks that if there was to be a mistake in the demanding months ahead, it would be that of dismissing a person who could have done the job of an officer. And, as candidates were soon to learn, their platoon Tactical Officers (or TACs) were the first line of defense against this mistake.

As expected in a program designed to produce officers, leadership was emphasized during the entire course, which, following the departure from Fort Knox of the first classes for their branch specific training, was 23 weeks in duration. However, the most intense evaluation was conducted during the first 13 weeks, referred to as the Branch Immaterial Phase. This was followed by ten weeks of the equivalent of the Army's Officer Basic Course, a school completed by all newly commissioned officers in every branch. However, Officer Candidates were not commissioned until after 23 weeks of schooling, and candidates could be and were dismissed from the program as late as the 22nd week.

Steve Strawbridge, in his *Turret* article, described the evaluation process as follows:

[22] This pronouncement was based on the direction of the Department of the Army that the schools were to expect an attrition rate of some 30 percent. This would, in fact, be about the percentage applicable to Fort Knox OCS. It is difficult, however, to determine whether this figure was truly an *expectation* or actually a *directive* to graduate only approximately 70 percent.

> Performance of tasks in itself was not sufficient for a candidate to warrant a commission. The effective accomplishment of tasks dealing with people required the constant application of knowledge, leadership principles, and sound judgment. To develop effective performance, the candidate was placed in leadership positions which included Company Commander, Executive Officer, First Sergeant, Platoon Leader, Platoon Sergeant and Squad Leader. These positions were rotated every three days to afford Tactical Officers maximum opportunity to counsel, guide and evaluate each candidate. During each tour of duty in a leadership position, the candidate was closely observed by his Tactical Officer and fellow candidates in the chain of command. Following the tour of duty the Tactical Officer used his written evaluation of the candidate and the performance of duty reports written by other candidates in the chain of command to counsel the candidate on the effectiveness of his performance, and to suggest actions he should take prior to and during his next tour of duty in a leadership position….
>
> Four times during his stay in Armor OCS, each candidate was required to rate himself on those character traits that have been found over many years to contribute to leadership ability. He was also rated on his standing in the same character traits by his peers, the other candidates in his platoon.
>
> Half of the candidate's total grade was derived from his evaluation by his Tactical Officer, his company commander and the contemporaries in his platoon….
>
> Leadership evaluations took place four times during the 23-week course. The rating of the "Tac" counted 50 percent…. If a candidate failed in leadership evaluation, he appeared before a panel of officers headed by the Commanding Officer of the Brigade. The "Panel" considered all information available on the candidate and made subsequent recommendations to the Assistant Commandant [for most of the life of the Program, Brigadier General Irzyk] for the Candidate's retention in or release from the OC program.
>
> The remaining half of a candidate's total grade was determined by his performance within the academic departments of the Armor School.

Lieutenant Strawbridge wrote the above from the perspective of a graduate who had successfully completed the program and who could then reflect on his experience. While immersed in the daily rigors of OCS, however, candidates often had a somewhat different perspective. For example, because a major part of the Tactical Officer's role was to winnow out those they believed should not complete the program, many candidates saw TACs as the enemy.[23] Candidates grimly referred to the "peer reviews" as "bayonet sheets" because everyone knew some would be evaluated poorly by their peers. The feared "panel of officers" seemed to resemble to many something from the Inquisition, and most candidates believed an appearance before it would result in termination from the program. The panel's

[23] The men most maligned by candidates were always the Tactical Officers or "TACs". An especially tough one became the talk of the entire company and often among graduates long after leaving Fort Knox. The TACs were usually young, exceptionally sharp officers who, at least in the second half of the school's life, were often graduates of the program themselves. They were tough, demanding, and relentless, for they had, in the first instance, the great responsibility of avoiding the mistake described by General Irzyk.

judgments became a verb, and could be heard in a lament, whispered in a quiet moment between candidates, that “so and so was paneled”, rather like he had been executed by firing squad.

Chapter 7

The Officer Candidate Course: The Official View

The program was divided into two parts. The first was designed to provide the candidates with the tools to prepare them to be junior Army leaders. The second part was the winnowing of those unwilling or unable to perform the responsibilities of officers and to improve their chances to be successful leaders. The first part was primarily the responsibility of the faculty of the Armor School, the latter that of the OCS Brigade, a group that included Company Cadre and Tactical Officers (TACs) with the support of enlisted personnel for such things as drill and ceremonies and administrative matters. There was a considerably different curriculum instituted for ten classes in Fiscal Year 1966, (the 13 week or Branch Immaterial phase) than that which was applied the final year and a half for the Armor or 23 week course.

The curriculum for the Branch Immaterial phase called for a program of instruction totaling 476 total hours of instruction. This was divided into 373 hours of instruction at the Armor School and an additional 103 hours which was the responsibility of the Officer Candidate Brigade. The instruction at the Armor School included Infantry Tactics, Map Reading, Administrative Matters, and Methods of Instruction.[24] A summary of the curriculum for both the Branch Immaterial course and the Armor Course is contained in Appendices E and F.

The second part of the curriculum dealt with Drill and Command, Inspections, Physical Training, and ominously, "Supplemental Training". The leadership evaluation function is only alluded to in the curriculum but the total hours of instruction for which the Officer Candidate Brigade was responsible was 103.

After January 1, 1966, some of the classes started were 23 weeks in length and they were all directed toward commissioning officers in Armor Branch so that there were, in early 1966, Branch Immaterial classes (13 weeks) and Armor Branch classes (23 weeks) working through Fort Knox at the same time. The 23 week course had a similar basic curriculum as the 13 week course with more content directed toward Armor subjects. The Armor School part of the curriculum called for a total of 616 hours of instruction while the Drill and Command, Physical Training, and even more dreaded, "Supplemental Training" at the Officer

[24] *Program of Instruction for Branch Immaterial, Officer Candidate Course (13 weeks).* U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Knox, KY, October, 1965.

Candidate Brigade amounted to 220 hours of instruction.[25]

Besides delineating the program of instruction, the curriculum is instructive as to the origin and purpose of the course. In the 13 week course, fully 48 hours of instruction were in infantry matters, squad, platoon, and company organization and employment. In the 23 week course, some 50 hours were devoted to Armor organization and employment while only six were devoted to infantry matters. Clearly, the curriculum of the Branch Immaterial phase drew heavily on the Fort Benning Infantry OCS model as the Armor School developed its own Armor heavy program.

Another indicator of the use of the Infantry model within both the 13 and 23 week curricula at Fort Knox is the Leadership Evaluation Course. This was an outdoor exercise in the second half of the program in which candidates were grouped together and assigned various roles (squad leader, fire team leader, or subordinate). The group was then confronted with situations of simulated combat to which they were to react; all subject to evaluation. The curriculum specifically attributes this exercise to the U.S. Army Infantry School Leaders' Reaction Course.[26]

This is the curriculum that makes the first mention of Military Stakes. Within the 23 week course, this was the last major hurdle before commissioning, and thus it was not a part of the 13 week course (the Military Stakes component is only mentioned once and alludes to something not otherwise explained). For the 23 week course, Military Stakes served as a kind of "final exam". In intensity it can be compared to Ph. D. orals or the bar exam required to practice law. It is fully described in the Curriculum Guide for the 23 week program of instruction:

> A performance type of test, conducted on a course approximately 7 miles long requiring solutions to a series of graded requirements administered by all departments conducting instruction in the Armor Officer Candidate Course.[27]

The Curriculum also establishes 15 stations which must be present on the Military Stakes Course. These are summarized as follows:[28]

- 2 stations on automotive maintenance and procedures
- 2 stations on field operations and tactics
- 1 station for staff operations and security
- 2 stations on military engineering and demolitions
- 1 station on armored cavalry operations

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[25] *Program of Instruction for Armor Officer Candidate Course (23 weeks).* U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Knox, KY, August, 1967.

[26] *Program of Instruction for Armor Officer Candidate Course (23 weeks).* U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Knox, KY, August, 1967.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid. This document includes a summary of matters to be tested at stations during Military Stakes. It prescribes the number of stations as outlined above, except for Tank Gunnery for which the guide states only that competence should be tested at "stations". We have therefore assumed that there were two such stations.

- 1 station on mine warfare
- 2 stations on communications (radios and radio/telephone procedure)

With the above overview in mind, the following will describe the program as most candidates remember it.

On the first full day of class, candidates received a briefing on the program as well as an *Officer Candidate Program Manual* which they were directed to study carefully. This manual established the training program that was to be followed for the next 23 weeks. Approved by the Continental Army Command (CONARC) which was then charged with training Army personnel, the program was remarkably similar to that of all the other 23 week officer candidate programs. It clearly was designed to resemble that at Fort Benning.

Chapter 1 of the *Manual* began with a statement of the mission of the Officer Candidate Program. This mission statement was couched in the same language as that used in the report by the Haines Board, and began with the following: "To develop selected personnel to be Second Lieutenants of the Army of the United States…."[29]

In the briefing, the officers of each Officer Candidate Company described the role of the platoon Tactical Officer. The *Officer Candidate Program Manual* explained that the TAC was to:

> ...assist candidates in attaining the required standards for commission. They observe the candidates in their performance of assigned duties. These observations are the basis for observation reports and counseling periods. During counseling periods the Tactical Officer points out to the candidate his proficiencies and deficiencies and suggests remedial action for shortcomings noted.[30]

At the beginning of OCS at Fort Knox, the Tactical Officers were young ROTC, West Point, or Fort Benning Officer Candidate School graduates. The emphasis is on *young*, for most were between 22 and 26 years of age. Those chosen for these assignments were generally relatively new to the Army. Most were first or second lieutenants. They served under captains, majors, and colonels who came from the same kind of background, but who had more years of service and thus more experience in the Army. Some of the more senior officers for whom the Tactical Officers worked had combat experience in Korea or Vietnam. A few Tactical Officers were themselves Vietnam veterans.

TACs, with little specific training, were given the challenging task of training new officers and culling from the ranks of candidates the unable, the unsuitable, and the unmotivated. This was a serious task, for the procedure in effect called for these young, junior officers to make judgments that could later result in life and death decisions made by the new officers they were helping to prepare. As the program continued, most new TACs were selected from among the top ten percent of each graduating class. These new groups brought their own set of experiences and viewpoints to this difficult and demanding decision making process.

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[29] *Officer Candidate Program Manual*, U.S. Army Armor School, Fort Knox, Kentucky, May 1966. P. 1.
[30] Ibid., 4.

But wherever they came from, the Tactical Officers were always, to use an Army term of the time that denoted excellence, "STRAC". Their fatigues seemed always to be more sharply creased, their boots more highly polished, and their gig lines straighter than those of their candidates.

Any time candidates were harassed up to 2300 hours, a TAC was on duty. In every instance when candidates did PT or grass drill, sometimes long after "regular" hours in the darkness of a Kentucky night, TAC officers not only supervised but frequently joined in themselves. When the candidates were running or drilling, TACs almost always led by example, and ran as hard or harder than the candidates they were supervising. When there was a crisis in the life of a candidate, perhaps a family tragedy back home, such as an auto accident or possibly the serious illness of a parent, the TAC was one of the first involved and provided counsel and assistance.

And finally, after he had been involved in the leadership evaluation process during which a candidate was found wanting, it was the TAC who had to bring the bad news. The burden these young junior officers carried would not be fully understood or appreciated by the candidates until months later when they, too, were sometimes called upon to make judgments with life and death consequences.

Candidates almost always remembered their TAC, though most TACs do not remember specific candidates. An account related by Ed Fitch, one of the early Tactical Officers, illustrates this point. After completing his assignment at Fort Knox, Ed left active duty and entered the Army Reserve where he participated in several Annual Training periods. During one of these, while in a Post Exchange, he met a former candidate who was then a captain. Ed, who was a first lieutenant, tapped the captain on the shoulder. The captain, upon recognizing Ed, immediately snapped to attention and said, "Yes, Sir." They both had a good laugh as Ed told the captain that he, Ed, was the one who should address him as "Sir".

The above sums up the theoretical relationship between TAC and candidate, but as is the case in much pedagogic theory, practice resembled something else. During the first 13 weeks of the program not only were candidates intentionally stressed through exposure to responsibility by holding positions in the chain of command but also through a myriad of other methods, creatively concocted by the TACs.

These methods varied in detail from platoon to platoon and from TAC to TAC but their theme was similar throughout all the companies and they spanned the several years OCS existed at Fort Knox. TACs frequently imposed punishment for individual shortcomings, such as imperfections in uniform, improper locker display, or leadership lapses. The TACs often exacted these punishments on the spot. The usual procedure in these cases was an order from the TAC to "Drop and give me ten!" This required an offender to immediately drop to the ground and perform ten rapid pushups. If the candidate performing the pushups was in the candidate chain of command, the next candidate highest in the chain stepped forward to assume the punished senior's duty. This permitted the chain to continue to function throughout the duration of the punishment.

Some candidates on occasion endured another more disruptive and time consuming penalty. This occurred when, after spending the day training elsewhere in the Brigade, they returned to the barracks to find their carefully arranged footlockers turned upside down, their blankets, sheets and pillows pulled from tightly made bunks, their highly polished floors intentionally scuffed, and their starched and pressed uniforms strewn around the room. Candidates unfortunate enough to have received this "corrective action" were said to have had their quarters "nuked".

While the TACs did not believe in mass punishment for the deficiencies of one or two, most candidates considered it strange that all members of a platoon were somehow often deficient at the same time. Although much of the above seems to demonize the platoon Tactical Officers, this is not the intent.

Cadre formally evaluated candidates during the seventh, eleventh, seventeenth, and twenty-first weeks of the course. Those found deficient in leadership were referred to five member officer review panels. These panels then made a recommendation to the Assistant Commandant of the Armor School on whether the candidate should be dismissed from the program, left in place, or retained and moved back to a later class.[31] These evaluation weeks were often the most stressful ones for candidates because not only were they being evaluated themselves, but they were also required to evaluate their own friends and fellow platoon members. This was always a difficult task but one which graduates would need to be able to handle later, after commissioning.

The Officer Candidate Course strictly conformed to a rigid and stringent schedule. Each highly structured day began with reveille at 0530.[32] Immediately following reveille, candidates made their bunks and prepared the barracks for inspection, and then the company, made up of three platoons, formed up for a half-hour of physical training, or PT.

After PT candidates dressed in the uniform of the day, usually heavily starched and pressed fatigues with flawlessly shined brass, immaculately polished boots, and a gleaming black helmet liner bearing the OCS insignia. And woe-be to the candidate who appeared in improper uniform or without required equipment. They then moved to the mess hall for breakfast. There, during the first eighteen weeks of the program, they sat in silence and at attention on the first six inches of their chairs.

Following breakfast, another formation occurred at 0730 with the company formed into its three platoons, under the candidate chain of command. Immediately following the formation the company moved to the site of the day's first period of training. All candidates were to double time (in other words, run) while in the brigade area, and thus the company

[31] This last was officially called "turned back" but to the candidates it was always "recycled", a term most had associated with the concept employed by the Army in basic and advanced individual training when new recruits were sent back to an earlier training cycle after they failed to meet the requirements of their initial training cycle.

[32] The Army operates on a 24 hour clock. Therefore, reveille was at 5:30 A.M. while noon was 1200 Hours. This method of time keeping will be used throughout this book.

double timed in a column of twos to each place of instruction, sometimes to Boudinot and Gaffey Hall, sometimes to other training sites such as maintenance shops or tank parks.[33] If the day's training was in a field location, candidates were usually bussed or trucked there, though long road marches also occurred. On these marches, a favorite technique of the TACs was to permit candidates to walk downhill, and then require them to double time when the road ran uphill. In fairness it must be said that as always, the TACs ran as much in these situations as the candidates did.

The academic portion of the program consisted of typical Army classroom instruction, designed to impart information which

> ...will enable the officer candidate to successfully assume the duties of a Second Lieutenant upon graduation. Thus, one of the principal duties of each candidate is to study, understand, and retain the instruction presented.[34]

The school guaranteed study time each evening. During this period the TACs were not allowed to "instruct". They were, however, expected to enforce the rule that each candidate studied during "study hour" six days per week.

Normally, instruction was provided between 0730 and 1700 hours Monday through Friday and 0730 to 1200 on Saturday. Saturday afternoon and Sunday were considered as off duty hours but decidedly not "free time", at least during the first 18 weeks. Time off duty generally was spent working off the demerits that had been assigned for more serious deficiencies than those that warranted push-ups, attending to personal equipment, working on group projects, and bringing the cleanliness of the barracks "up to OCS standards".[35] When the candidates were not in Armor School classes, there was counseling; "Commander's

[33] Most Army buildings are named after fallen heroes. Gaffey was a World War II hero who was killed after the war in an airplane crash while in command at Fort Knox. His remains are buried at a cemetery on post. Orsbon Hall, which housed G Company, is another example and is named in honor of Staff Sergeant Herman Orsbon, a recipient of the Silver Star who died during the Battle of the Bulge.

[34] *Candidate Program Manual*. 6.

[35] This nebulous concept seemed to change with progress through the program and became a device for TACs to criticize, loudly, the general failure of the "messes", a pejorative term frequently applied to candidates, singly and collectively, who failed to meet the standard.

Time"; plenty of PT; including indefinite duration runs, grass drill, and low crawling,[36] close order drill, briefings on required subjects,[37] but almost never "free time."

The daily academic classes were for most candidates a welcome break from the pressure that routinely characterized life in the company area. The classes were primarily taught by officers, many with combat experience and/or significant time in a command position. Officer instructors were sometimes supplemented by civilian specialists, as was the case for classes on military history. Non-Commissioned Officers frequently provided instruction on practical subjects related to radios, map reading, vehicle maintenance and recovery, and close order drill. On the whole, this instruction was outstanding and, after the thirteenth week, substantially the same as that received by the newly commissioned officers from ROTC and West Point who were attending Armor Officer Basic, or AOB.

Although the last ten weeks of the program closely resembled Armor Officer Basic, the candidates were not yet officers and a substantial number would in fact fail to graduate. The rigor of the program's stringent nature remained, and candidates continued their education under strict scrutiny, had few privileges, and were treated differently than AOB students receiving the same academic training. Officer candidates were kept separate from AOB students. This difference was obvious during the hourly ten minute breaks when candidates were provided with water or an occasional cookie but were excluded from the area reserved for AOB students, where the snacks appeared of higher quality.[38]

The daily life of the candidate was inexorably governed by the schedule outlined above and by severe restrictions at all times when not "on duty." These restrictions varied according to the stage of the Program. The academic day was 0730 to 1700. This was followed by two hours allotted for eating, planning and preparation for the following day's schedule, miscellaneous details, and barracks tasks. These tasks included such activities as cleaning, spit shining floors with Butchers Wax, and garbage removal. Mandatory study hour was 1900 to 2000 on all nights except Saturday. Quiet hour was 2000-2100 when, if not

[36]The indefinite runs, frequently with a rifle held above the head, often lasted until a sufficient number of candidates "dropped out", which to the TAC, just meant they needed additional "remediation"; grass drill consisted of standing in a spread out PT formation and being commanded to do some physical exercise, such as dropping to the ground, doing pushups, and then rising to resume running in place or doing some other exercise, again with opportunity for "remediation". The low crawl was then a part of the Army's Physical Combat Preparedness Test (PCPT) which every soldier was expected to pass. The low crawl, which was executed by dragging the body forward with the arms and legs while the torso remained on the ground, had to be performed in a set time. As an exercise, however, candidates were sometimes taken to a field, 60 to 100 yards long, and directed to drag themselves across. The slowest half of the class was often required to repeat the exercise.

[37] The briefings included classes on the honor code and other general subjects. One of these briefings dealt with how to rank other candidates. At the beginning of the program in 1965-66 a rule required a candidate to rate 25% of his peers in the lower quarter of his platoon. This was to prevent candidates from rating each other always in the top of the class. The rule was relaxed later in the program and candidates were then admonished to give careful attention to their duty and that everyone cannot be excellent.

[38] This was confirmed in 2011 when an officer who had been assigned to School Support said that his orders were to provide tea and coffee, along with a wider choice of sweets to the AOB students than that provided to the OCs.

subject to harassment, candidates could write letters, or work on personal matters such as polishing boots and carefully setting up the next day's uniform.

Though quiet hour was officially designated for the above types of activities, it was unofficially the time when candidates engaged in the most infamous flouting of regulations allowed without violation of the Honor Code: the smuggling of "Pogey Bait".[39] From 2130 to 2300 (bed check time when all lights were to be out and candidates in their bunks) the barracks were prepared for final morning inspection. Sleep was allowed between 2300 and 0530 the next morning when the routine began anew.

This schedule of daily activity was followed throughout the 23 week course, though in weeks 18-23, when candidates were in the Senior phase of the program, the atmosphere was somewhat more relaxed and the harassment less intense. Passes were allowed on rare occasions and again this depended upon the stage the candidate was in. Passes were always subject to the discretion of the Company Commander, and rarely given. When passes were given they were restricted as follows:

- Weeks 1 and 2: Passes allowed for the brigade area only on week days and Sunday until 1930 and on Saturday until 2400 (midnight).
- Weeks 3 and 4: Passes were allowed on-post only, on weekdays and Sunday until 1930 and off-post (within 50 miles) until 2400 on Saturday.
- Weeks 5-11: Passes allowed on-post only, until 1930; off-post until 2400 Saturday and until 1930 on Sunday.
- Weeks 12-18: Passes allowed on-post to 1930 on weekdays and off-post Saturday overnight until 1930 Sunday.
- Weeks 19-21: Weekdays off-post until 1930. Saturdays off-post overnight until 1930 Sunday.
- Weeks 22-23: Senior Candidates could be allowed off-post any night.

Of course, the discretionary nature of the pass system made time off-post rare for most candidates. Leaves permitting absences from duty were not allowed for any reason, except for bona fide emergencies and even then might result in the candidate being turned back.

The candidates were bound by an Honor Code enforced by their fellow classmates and a formal charging system where a panel of candidates decided guilt or innocence and where appropriate, recommended penalty. This was very important because an Army officer is only as good as his word. In the language of the Candidate Manual:

The following basic points constitute the OCS Honor Code:

1. An officer candidate always tells the truth and keeps his word;
2. An officer candidate is honest in all his efforts;
3. An officer candidate does not quibble or employ evasive statements and tricky wording;

[39] This was the term applied to a variety of food products brought into the barracks, where eating outside the mess hall was prohibited. The origin of the term is unknown. More about this concept will be explained later.

4. An officer candidate respects the property rights of individuals and the government;
5. An officer candidate's signature is his bond;
6. An officer candidate is honor bound to report any breach of honor that comes to his attention.[40]

The Honor Code was actually administered by company and brigade Honor Councils. The Councils were made up of candidates elected by their peers to serve in that capacity and were charged with the responsibility of hearing and deciding allegations of breaches of the Code. Hearings on charges were conducted according to procedures established by the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Of course, the Council's power did not supersede the right of command officers to bring charges under the UCMJ for more serious offenses.

The Honor Code served as a guide for candidate actions and was taken seriously. However, at the first briefing on the Code, it was made clear that a violation of the no food in the barracks policy was not a violation of the Honor Code, provided no one lied about it. Thus pogey bait was improper but not dishonorable.

Army food at Fort Knox justified the claim that the U.S. Army is the best fed Army in the world. However, mealtime during OCS, despite the excellent food, was almost always a highly stressful period for candidates. Standing at parade rest in a line outside the mess hall in front of a chinning bar, each candidate was required to perform a specified number of chin-ups before entering the building. Inside, TAC Officers and on occasion, the Company Commander and/or the Executive Officer were seated at a head table where they could keep an eye on the candidates.[41]

Supplied with the standard mess trays, candidates went through the "chow line" where servers placed large amounts of well prepared food on the trays. Candidates then moved to a mess hall table where they remained standing until a full complement, usually four individuals, had arrived. At that point all sat down as one, insuring that they were seated only on the first six inches of the chair, and with their backs held straight. All meals were taken in complete silence, with no conversation between the candidates permitted.

Although no one was permitted to speak while eating until they reached Senior candidate status, the atmosphere in the mess hall was not peaceful. Observant TACs or, in the most dreaded cases, the CO or XO would bark an admonition at a particular candidate such as "Are you eyeballing me, Mess?!"[42] followed by a peremptory, "Get outside and give me 10!" whereupon the unfortunate candidate immediately arose, moved quickly to the door and out of the building, did the required remediation, and then re-entered the mess hall to complete

[40] *Officer Candidate Manual*. 13.
[41] It didn't work the other way however because if a candidate was observed looking toward a TAC, he would quickly be accused of "eyeballing" and immediately sent out of the mess hall for "remediation" which usually consisted of push-ups or other callisthenic exercises.
[42] "Mess" was the name given to candidates who did not meet "OCS standards". Similar appellations, though used less frequently, were "Goat" and "Dud".

his meal. Woe be however, to anyone who reentered without first washing his hands. This procedure was repeated at each of the three meals on week days and the two on Saturday but seldom on Sunday.

There inevitably was neither time to complete a full meal nor to eat all that was desired. The unending physical demands of running, PT, and barracks work meant that candidates were burning away large amounts of calories. There were no overweight officer candidates.

Each platoon attempted to address this dietary situation by developing ways to smuggle additional food, called for some unknown reason "pogey bait", into the billets at night. Usually the platoon selected a Pogey Bait Officer or PBO. This was accomplished sometimes by drawing lots, sometimes in other ways. The PBO's job carried risks. If the PBO was the one whose duty was to rendezvous with the supplier at a designated location someplace outside the barracks, it could be an especially hazardous undertaking because the TACs were constantly on the lookout for pogey bait operations. If the PBO's responsibility was to collect money, take orders, and call them in while another designated candidate linked up with the vendor outside, the danger was less but still present for a TAC might discover the PBO in the process of taking orders or making the necessary phone call.

A number of establishments around Fort Knox provided pogey bait but one, Chicken-On-Call, seemed to be a candidate favorite. All the vendors involved surely were aware of the game, and hamburgers, French fries, milk shakes, sodas - never diet, - and even pizza were delivered clandestinely to parked cars, dark recesses behind buildings, and even to Dempster Dumpsters - those large, ubiquitous trash bins found on every Army post. The PBO then somehow slipped these highly valued rations into the barracks. There, in the semi-darkness found after lights out, candidates hungrily consumed cold pizza, almost warm hamburgers and soggy French fries - all washed down with ice-diluted Cokes.

The TACs knew all about it, of course, although they feigned ignorance and generally more or less tolerated the practice. However, on occasion they did not. When a TAC discovered a pogey bait operation that was being executed with poor operational security, retribution was certain and swift. Candidates then were forced to undergo a range of humiliating punishments.

Occasionally the penalties included such things as eating hamburgers with the wrappers still on. Sometimes the punishment consisted of the TAC strewing pogey bait across floors that had been spit shined to a mirror like sheen with Butchers Wax and then informing the candidates the floors needed to be re-done to "OCS Standards." Or sometimes candidates were assembled in the shower room to receive a cascade of food and drink hurled by the TAC. While this sounds somewhat sophomoric, it was in fact one of the few times when candidates and TACs - at the candidates' expense, of course -injected a little fun into the otherwise deadly serious process of learning to be an Army officer.

In the twenty-second week Senior candidates who had managed to stay in the program - about 30 per cent of those who had started were gone by that time - were confronted by Military Stakes. This almost became a rite of passage, although the last review panel also met

that week. Military Stakes was a throwback to the days when cavalrymen rode their horses over a course, exhibiting various military skills at stations set up around the circuit. Cavalrymen riding horses covered a course of about seven miles and this was the length of the course the candidates, without horses, ran. Along the way, each candidate was expected to make reports, call in artillery fire, solve map reading problems, extract disabled vehicles from various situations, and carry out other activities concerning weapons, weapons systems and, especially, tanks.

Military Stakes took place on Saturday morning and successful participants were given overnight passes. However, those who had been "paneled" at the last review board were also informed of their fate.

Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox also had a social side. In the eighth week the company officers' wives organized a social circle for the candidates' wives. The circle's purpose was to orient them to military life after their husbands were commissioned.[43]

The thirteenth week also brought a party for candidates to acknowledge their "turning green;" that is reaching Intermediate candidate status which allowed them to wear green tabs under the OCS collar insignia and a green band around the helmet liner. At the thirteenth week party, the candidates were allowed to poke good natured fun, always of course with reservation and some trepidation, at the TACs and the course. The party was held at the Half Track Club, a kind of candidate version of the Officers Clubs they would encounter at Army posts around the world after commissioning. The Half Track Club was located in the basement of Company B2 housed in one of the big red brick buildings.

The Half Track Club was theoretically open to candidates to use in their free time. Free time was extremely scarce, however, and few candidates used it except on the special party occasions or after they became Senior candidates.

A similar party was held at the end of the eighteenth week when candidates achieved Senior candidate status. Senior candidates wore cavalry yellow tabs under the OCS collar insignia and a yellow stripe, similar to that worn by TAC officers but narrower, around the helmet liners. For the last five weeks of the program, Seniors were allowed Officer Club privileges, although, like access to the Half Track Club, these were more theoretical than real.

Another social event occasionally occurred which included bachelor Senior candidates and students from one of the women's colleges in the area. The candidates were attired, according to the season, in either the Army green Class A uniform or the short sleeve, khaki uniform then worn in the Army. They were then bussed to the event, which was chaperoned by the TACs. While not formally acknowledged as part of the program, there can be little

[43] The role of the Army wife in the 1960's was a difficult one. Officers' wives, who were always a minority of women associated with the military, had an important part in advancing their husbands' careers and in performing functions within the military community. This was (and remains) similar to the role played by wives, and now husbands, in corporate bureaucracy. Perhaps one of the best depictions of this is in the book and film *We Were Young Once and Soldiers,* which depicts the responsibility of the wives when their husbands were in combat. Their role however, was much the same when the husband was in the continental United States, Europe, or many other places around the world.

doubt that the candidates' conduct at such events was observed and considered in the final evaluation.

During the last three weeks of the program, each company posted orders showing where candidates were to be assigned upon graduation and commissioning. Many were sent to posts in the United States, either to training units as cadre or to TOE units such as tank battalions, mechanized infantry divisions, or armored cavalry squadrons. Most assumed that assignments to units in the United States meant a period of six months of troop duty followed by a tour of duty in Vietnam, either as an individual replacement or as part of a deploying unit.

Several were posted to European and Korean commands where a number of experienced officers and NCOs were being reassigned to Vietnam. This resulted in a serious erosion of combat readiness in these areas, which remained strategically important to American national security.

The Army assigned approximately one percent of the graduates, usually selected from among the top ten percent of their class, as Officer Candidate School Tactical Officers or to other positions in the Armor School.

Approximately 700 more went to flight school and after graduating as pilots usually flew rotary wing aircraft such as the OH-6A Cayuse light observation helicopter; the ubiquitous UH-1 "Huey"; the CH-47 Chinook; or perhaps the hot new attack helicopter of the day, the AH-1 Cobra.

Of the 6,000 or so men who applied for and were accepted into Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox 4,322 finished to be commissioned as second lieutenants in Armor branch or in one of the other branches for which Fort Knox had provided the branch immaterial phase of training. The top ten percent of each class were eligible for Regular Army Commissions after one year. The others were commissioned in the Army Reserve. The top ten percent of these, based upon their Officer Efficiency Reports, could after some service, also be recommended for "integration" into the Regular Army. A Regular Army commission was a much more secure means of remaining on active duty as a career officer.

Thus, fully 1,800 men failed to complete the program. Of these many self-selected out; that is, they submitted a Letter of Resignation or "LOR". Candidates were prohibited from resigning until after the seventh week. After that however men could and did drop out of the program for a number of reasons. Officer Candidate School was rigorous and challenging, and some felt the end was not worth the sacrifice the program demanded. Others experienced pressures that grew from the additional dislocation from their families that resulted from the long period of separation required by OCS, and simply chose to not contend with these sorts of tensions. Some encountered medical issues.

However, most of those who did not complete the course were removed from the program because of leadership or academic shortcomings. Each class received "turn backs"-candidates who had been given a second chance to correct deficiencies by being sent back to a later class. Some of these men were later commissioned and made good officers. Others

who were turned back, however, failed to graduate. When a friend was turned back or removed from the program, even those who had rated the candidate in the poor category on the "bayonet sheet" felt the loss.

When a candidate left the program he reverted to his permanent rank and was assigned as the needs of the service dictated. After the thirteenth week, that is, after basic leadership training, a former candidate might retain the E-5 grade temporarily held while in OCS. Some former OCs were sent to a non-commissioned officer school, made sergeants, and assigned to Vietnam. Others were sent to units where they served as tank crewmen or reconnaissance scouts or in a variety of other enlisted jobs, both in the United States and in various overseas locations.

Many candidates had entered the program as lower ranking enlisted men, most of whom were armor specialists of one sort or another. However, others who had entered Officer Candidate School had done so as sergeants, up to and including E-7s. Even Warrant Officers were eligible for the program. If these candidates left the program, they too reverted to their previous rank.

Finally, at the end of the twenty-third week, the candidates were ushered into the same hall where they had been welcomed to the program six months earlier. There they were awarded their diplomas. It was at this point, that each candidate was told for the first time, his class rank.

The candidates also received discharges from the Army of the United States if they had entered service as draftees or from the Regular Army if they had enlisted. Then each member of the graduating class raised his right hand and swore the oath to defend and protect the United States from all foes, foreign or domestic. Though many graduates have long since forgotten their class rank they have not forgotten the moment the gold bar was affixed to collar or shoulder. One graduate recalled that he had a low class rank but his gold bar weighed the same as any other; a physical as well as a metaphysical weight.

Those who successfully completed the program stood their last company formation, and moved to a building where they were presented their commissions, many of which today adorn the walls of graduates' homes or offices. This memorable ceremony was often conducted in Boudinot Hall, the same building in which the candidates had taken so many of their classes during the previous six months. There was then a public ceremony which was attended by family and loved ones, if possible. Those who did not have friends or family present had each other, and a bond was acknowledged which this book affirms. Each person to be commissioned took upon himself an oath in the following words:

> I ..., do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without mental

> reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter, so help me God.[44]

Following the oath, each new United States Army officer was presented with his commission, signed in the names of the President of the United States and the Secretary of the Army, who for all those commissioned during the life of Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox was the honorable Stanley Resor. In part, that commission said:

> Know Ye, that reposing special trust and confidence in the patriotism, valor, fidelity, and abilities of (the named individual), I do appoint (him, either a Regular or Reserve officer) in the ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES.

The commission went on to state:

> And I do strictly charge and require those Officers and personnel of lesser rank to render such obedience as is due an Officer of this grade and position. And this Officer is to observe and follow such orders and directions, as may from time to time, be given by me or the future President of the United States of America, or other Superior Officers acting in accordance with the laws of the United State of America.

Thus ended what many would regarded as the most demanding, challenging, and difficult schooling they would undergo. The small gold bar, often referred to as the "butter bar", when pinned on by a loved one or friend, would forever be the symbol of what they had accomplished.

The next phase of these young officers' lives held a different set of challenges. Those challenges were more responsible, more important, and more deadly. But, on this day, as he stood in formation with his classmates in his dress green uniform with a brightly shining gold bar on each epaulette, every newly commissioned officer knew he had been rigorously tested and found worthy of receiving the extraordinary trust of serving as a United States Army officer.

[44] This was the standard oath taken by all military officers.

Chapter 8

What Was Accomplished

As the tempo of the Vietnam War increased, the United States Army needed some 40,000 second lieutenants to maintain its commitments around the world and to fight the war in Vietnam. Public opinion however was causing a decline in ROTC enrollments and even West Point applicants. These 40,000 new officers amounted to fully 40 per-cent of the pre 1966 Officer Corps and they were produced in just 4 years.

Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox operated for a little more than two years and produced ten percent of the required total. Put in perspective, an armored battalion was authorized about 35 officers of all ranks from second lieutenant to lieutenant colonel, so OCS at Fort Knox produced enough officers to fully staff some 140 armored battalions, enough Armor officers to provide more than the complement for two full ROAD armored divisions.

In addition to those commissioned in the Armor Branch, twenty-two lieutenants were commissioned in the Transportation Corps, seven in Quartermaster Corps and nine in Ordnance Corps, all of whom were members of the first OCS class at Fort Knox that graduated on May 24, 1966. An additional 929 individuals completed their first 13 week course at Fort Knox and went on to the final, more academic, branch training in Transportation, Quartermaster and Ordnance. Those officers were not commissioned in Armor but they are as valued as any of those who faced and overcame the challenges of the course at Fort Knox.

Officer Candidate School graduates at Fort Knox filled numerous leadership positions, not only as Armor officers but also as Transportation, Ordnance and Quartermaster officers. They served around the world in Europe, Korea, Panama, Alaska, the United States and, of course, in Vietnam. These young officers filled company level leadership positions as well as senior battalion staff positions, often in combat. On occasion some served temporarily in battalion command and executive officer positions, all within two years of commissioning. In short, these Fort Knox graduates were the Army's junior leaders on the front line, some in combat in Vietnam and others in assignments elsewhere.

However well prepared in the barracks and classroom, the graduates were young and many times, but not always, new to the "real Army", that is to the Army outside training. When confronted with the realities of leadership, some did better than others.

Eleven graduates of Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox achieved the rank of General officer, one of whom reached four star rank. Three graduates, Robert Leslie Poxon, Class 28-

67, Company F1; Harold A. Fritz, Class 10-67, Company A1; and James M. Sprayberry, Class 2-67, Company B1; were recipients of the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for conspicuous gallantry "Above and beyond the Call of Duty." The first graduate named above gave his live for his country and received the award posthumously.

In addition to Lt. Poxon, at least 112 others also made the ultimate sacrifice for their country when they were killed in action or died as a result of wounds received in Vietnam or of other causes while in service to their nation in Vietnam.

All graduates served the Army as directed. It has been said that when one enters the Army, one gives the government a "blank check" to fill out as best meets the needs of the service. Every man who completed OCS at Fort Knox signed that blank check and the Army redeemed each check, one way or another.

After the Vietnam War, the Army's need for officers was again considerably reduced. In 1971 Army Chief of Staff William Westmoreland commissioned a study, under the direction of Major General Frank W. Norris, to look at the Army School System. In many ways, this is the other bookend to the Haines Board report of 1966.

General Norris was not looking at OCS in particular. The Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning had reverted to its former much reduced role and all the others, except Artillery, had been closed. He was looking, however, at the special needs of the some 20,000 officers, most of whom were Officer Candidate School graduates who were then in the grade of Captain, but who did not have college degrees. Norris recommended a way to provide this basic education so that these former enlisted men could succeed at the higher level Army Officer Schools. General Norris' comment is a fitting tribute to all those who went to OCS and served their country:

> Generally, however, it can be stated that each officer has served his Nation well (or at least to the limits of his ability) at a time of national need when many individuals who had higher education qualifications were actively avoiding service. From the stand point of loyalty, the Army owes them a lot.[45]

Not every graduate of Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox would be a Medal of Honor recipient, or would through an outstanding career of dedicated and devoted service become a General officer. But each and every graduate did voluntarily step forward and pledge his life to his nation. That act alone is enough to justly fill every Officer Candidate School graduate, as well as the cadre who led them and the faculty who taught them, with pride.

[45] Department of the Army, *Review of Army Officer Educational System,* Frank W. Norris, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), II: 8-4.

Chapter 9

The Insider's View

As the committee working on this project expanded, its members decided that a history of OCS at Fort Knox from December 9, 1965, to February 23, 1968, should include personal accounts of the program from the perspective of the people who participated in it. As the number of persons contacted increased, some circulated their remembrances of the program. From these developments, two things became evident: first the memories of all were very similar in character; and second no one remembered everything but all remembered something. The committee decided that we should compile these recollections for the enjoyment of those who completed the program and as a record for others.

The following accounts use the first person plural "we" and "us" because all who went through OCS at Fort Knox will relate to the stories and because this is a collective memory, constructed from recollections of events that occurred forty-five or more years ago. The committee is gratified that several former Tactical Officers and Company Cadre have assisted in the project. To simplify telling the story, we have created two categories of participants. The first is "Candidates" or "OCs" (those who eventually graduated). The second is "Cadre" (including both Tactical Officers - many of whom were themselves former OCs - and the company commanders, executive officers, NCOs, administrative support personnel, and others who were part of the OCS program).[46] In a few cases we have observations from wives of those in the program. Much more should be said about the role the support personnel and these women played but, understandably, few have submitted remembrances.

To preserve the confidentiality of those individuals kind enough to submit a remembrance, the committee has chosen to use initials rather than the individual's full name.

Life before OCS

We came to Fort Knox along different paths. Most of the OCs were enlisted men, that is they were privates through sergeants.[47] In fact, because the upper age limit for applicants was 32 or 33 (absent special circumstances), there were only a few senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who became OCs. Practically, the highest ranking NCOs who became Officer Candidates were Sergeants First Class (E-7). On the day we entered OCS we were all theoretically equal in military rank, that of Officer Candidate. Everyone of lesser

[46] Together with enlisted personnel (NCOs, administrative support, and other staff) OCs and TACs made up the Officer Candidate Brigade responsible mainly for leadership, physical training and evaluation.

[47] Warrant Officers were eligible for the program and class 9-66 did have one candidate who was a Chief Warrant Officer.

rank than E-5 was promoted to that rank. Those candidates whose rank was higher than E-5 continued to be paid at their previous grade.

Former NCOs had made a career choice to pursue a commission, but most of the rest of us had either enlisted in the Army (in many cases because we believed we would be drafted) or had in fact been drafted. A few had enlisted to make the Army a career, but had not yet become NCOs.

Of the last category, one former enlisted man told how he came to apply for OCS. OC JS said:

I was a Sp5 (Specialist Five), assigned to Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland, when I was talked into applying for OCS by a fatherly Warrant Officer.

He got his assignment to Fort Knox, a place to which he had no particular desire to return. Other enlisted men were encouraged to apply during Basic Training or early in their careers.

The third major source of OCs (after former career soldiers and those encouraged soon after joining the Army) was "The College Option for OCS Program". Candidates from this source were men who were college graduates who had not completed a ROTC program. When they enlisted the Army guaranteed a start date for OCS, assuming they completed Basic and Advanced Individual Training. These men upon being commissioned were obligated to serve two additional years as officers. Should they fail to gain a commission however, they were, like draftees, only subject to two years of service as enlisted personnel.

OC BD described his College Option experience as follows:

I walked into the Army recruiter and asked if this was where I could join the Reserves (6 years of service with training and drill only while on active status, absent a mobilization). There were two SFCs and one told me in a rather cold manner where I could go to enlist in the reserves. I then asked about Army OCS and the same SFC said, 'You have to be a college graduate.' I said, 'I'm a college graduate.' Suddenly, the other sergeant got the most comfortable chair in the room and I found my tail comfortably ensconced in this chair while I was happily talking College Option OCS. At the end of a very cordial chat I was given a nice glossy pamphlet telling me about the various corps (i.e., branches). I was told to come back in the following day. I did so. The sergeant recruiting me said, 'How soon do you want to go in?' I then told the biggest lie of my life, 'How soon can you get me in?' A few days later I was on a bus on my way to the Chicago Armed Forces Entrance and Examination Center.

Of course, the Army recruiters had recruitment goals and rewards for signing college graduates for OCS, just like other specialties.

The First Day

However we came to apply for OCS, if accepted we received orders to report on a given date to a specific building in the Officer Candidate Brigade area at Fort Knox. Most of us did not know what to expect that first day but one OC received an alarming preview. OC HP

arrived at the appointed time only to discover that his class was already full and he would have to wait until the next class was formed in ten days or two weeks. He remembered:

I was sitting in the day room while being processed and every time the double door opened into the hallway of the barracks it was sheer pandemonium. The new Basic Candidates (those in the first thirteen weeks of the program) were everywhere, doing pushups, standing at attention, or braced against the wall, crawling in between and over each other, and all being yelled- no, screamed- at, by a host of Tactical Officers.

I spent two weeks watching the goings on in the cluster of barracks used for OCS, wondering what the hell was I getting into.

For most of us without OC HP's introduction the first day started innocently enough. We entered the company headquarters office where the First Sergeant and several other enlisted men processed our records, issued us bedding, and directed us to where we would find our beds, desks, and lockers. Someone gave us a diagram showing how our beds, lockers, and desks should be prepared for inspection, and told us to be ready accordingly. Those who had arrived early enough usually did so. Some incoming OCs did not arrive early enough to prepare for the inspection and paid the price when leisure time abruptly expired.

When in the barracks, if we were lucky, the former NCOs among us helped us get our living area ready for inspection. It soon became obvious however, that no matter how hard we tried to comply with the models provided, we would never meet "OCS Standards."

As the program moved into late 1966 and early 1967, the majority of Tactical Officers were themselves graduates of OCS at Fort Knox.[48] Those OCs who graduated in the top ten percent of their class were sometimes offered the opportunity to become TACs and many accepted the assignment.[49] However, early in the program TAC's were selected from wherever young officers were available. Tactical Officer AF, a ROTC graduate then in Armor Officer Basic, remembered how he learned he was to be a TAC:

In about the sixth week of training (during Armor Officer Basic), several of us were told to report to the Armor School and they trucked us in from the field. We met with a Colonel Busey who told us that all our orders had been changed, and we were going to be staying at Fort Knox to be TAC Officers in a newly formed OCS Brigade…. I hardly knew what OCS was and had no clue as to what a TAC was.

But however they were selected, TACs soon realized that their duty was to subject the new OCs to pressure as quickly as possible. Former OCs who later became TACs were able to "improve" on these techniques until they made the pressure an art form. As OC HP (who would later serve in Vietnam) observed:

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[48] Here we differentiate between the company command officers (generally captains) and executive officers (who were generally first lieutenants) and Tactical Officers (generally second lieutenants). Few OCS graduates from Fort Knox held the higher ranks before the program started closing down. Almost all the senior officers were West Point, ROTC, or Fort Benning OCS graduates.

[49] Sometimes this resulted in an undesirable career move as OC turned TAC CW reported: "Being selected as a TAC officer right out of OCS was an honor and ultimate disaster for our career." More on this point, later.

The level of physical and emotional stress applied was only second to combat itself which was no doubt the logic. There were many candidates who washed out for one reason or another and it was not until you made Senior Candidate (week 18) when you could almost feel like you would make it.

The life we endured for six months was saturated with stress. Even the slightest mistake, real or imagined in the eyes of the TAC, was met with ridicule and "correction". This almost always took the form of a high volume dressing down, pushups, or other actions or demerits which had to be "worked off", or by restrictions on where we were allowed to go in our rare free time.[50]

When TACs, often assisted by Senior Candidates (OCs who were in weeks 19-23), "corrected" a group in formation, the result was a mass of confusion, noise, and mayhem.

That first day in Officer Candidate School provided a jarring sample of what we were to endure over the next 23 weeks, the first thirteen in overwhelming intensity, then tapering off during the last ten. Some OCs recall standing in a formation where TACs directed questions at each Candidate. As the Candidates attempted to answer, the TACs almost always found the answers wrong. This of course then resulted in constant "correction".

These first day formations had various names but one common appellation (which is not politically correct today) was "a Chinese Fire Drill" to describe pure chaos. OC JS said:

I clearly remember standing at parade rest lined up in the Quadrangle,[51] waiting to be processed… every time the line moved, we snapped to attention, took a step or two, and then right back to parade rest. All the while, TAC Officers and Senior Candidates worked the line, advising us to 'quit now', at heaven knows how many decibels, two inches from our ears.

Often the details of that first day have (thankfully) left our memories but as OC BD said:

I don't remember much about… (the first day) other than crawling up and down stairs with TAC Officers and… Senior Candidates hollering in our ears…. I do remember being happy at lights out at the end of a stressful and confusing day, contemplating the idea that we had only 5 and ½ months to go.

Complying with the Impossible

Although OC BD thought this would with luck, last for "only" 23 weeks (of course being turned back and thus a longer time in the program was always a possibility) the total chaos did abate to some extent after 11 weeks.[52] Once OCs became Intermediate Candidates

[50] We all knew we were being "punished" but, officially, we were being "corrected". Physical violence toward the Candidates by the TACs was specifically prohibited.

[51] The large red brick barracks were in a "U" shape. The space between the wings formed a courtyard that resembled a "quadrangle" with one side open.

[52] Evaluations took place during the 11th week, followed by processing of those evaluations, decisions on the fate of Candidates and counseling, before we turned Intermediate at the 13th week.

(usually referred to as "turning green" because those in Intermediate status wore a green stripe around their helmet liners and green tabs under their OCS brass) the correction process changed. Rather than the unremitting stress of the first eleven weeks, the pressure in the program, while still present, now subtly shifted more toward honing leadership skills. This evolution seemed painfully slow and most felt pressure throughout the full 23 weeks.

As OC CT recalled:

I actually think there was not one day during OCS, with the exception of the day we graduated, when I did not feel that pressure, or what I guess can be called the trepidation of failing to complete the program.

Our schedule, throughout the program was tight. Up at 0530, fall out for physical training (PT) by 0600, back to the barracks by about 0700 for personal hygiene and dress, report for breakfast by 0730, back to the barracks for cleanup, preparation of the barracks for inspection and then down to another formation by 0800. Frequently, this was followed by a half mile run in a column of twos to the Armor School.

When we reported for classes, it seemed like we had already put in a full day. We were glad to be out from under the microscopic view of the TACs, and the classroom atmosphere, though serious, seemed almost relaxing. Unfortunately, as drowsiness began to overtake us, not a few Candidates fell asleep (much to their detriment when caught). About 1200, the TACs reappeared once more to double-time us back to the barracks for a quick (and stressful) noon meal. It was then that we also often discovered we had failed inspection.[53] Then, it was another run back to the Armor School for more blissful time in class.

While we were in classes, the TACs were back in the company area doing paper work (including "observation reports" on Candidates who were members of the candidate chain of command), inspecting our quarters and planning for our return. The candidate chain of command was extremely important in the TACs' evaluation of us. Each candidate served a number of one-half week tours as company commander, first sergeant, platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and squad leader. TACs loudly, and often, criticized those in the chain of command, often issuing corrections on the spot and getting ready for the after tour observation report and counseling session.

While we were enduring the process, the TACs were working. TAC AF described his workday:

I consciously focused on the candidates who were in command positions for that segment (tour) and tried to find examples of actual behaviors that evidenced good or bad planning, initiative, military bearing, etc. Then it was off to physical training where there were more opportunities for TACs to observe behavior. I was always searching for that nugget of candidate word or action that could be used as a teaching point during the evaluation and counseling phase, a few days after the next leadership rotation. Next we had breakfast with you and once

[53] This was evident when we entered the platoon bays or small rooms to find everything torn apart or upside down.

again watched. Finally, perhaps there was time for a quick barracks inspection and then double time with you to classes at the Armor School where we had standing orders to "leave you the hell alone." No harassment… Finally, somewhere after the dinner meal, we did our evaluation counseling sessions which I believe we all took very seriously.

Classes at the Armor School usually ended about 1700.[54] Then it was back to the barracks where we attended to personal hygiene and where we often reassembled the result of a failed inspection. This was followed by the dinner meal, again under the eyes of the ever present TACs. About 1800 we were back to the barracks to begin general cleanup and performance of obligated chores (cleaning common areas, for instance) and performing the most memorable task, making the floors of the barracks shine like glass.

To make the floor cleaning easier, we had large electric buffers and were admonished that the floors were not to be "spit shined."[55] Many candidates however remember spending part of the evening on hands and knees with a can of Butcher's Wax, some water, and a cloth doing just that. To maintain the shine we walked close to the walls on paths referred to as "Ho Chi Minh" trails, a reference to the clandestine supply route then being used to funnel supplies from North Vietnam to the south. Each pair of candidates bunking in the same area was then responsible for their own space and the part of the "trail" near their bunk.

Everyone attempted to attain the perfection that provided an escape from "correction." Sometimes we received assistance from Senior Candidates who, after 18 weeks, often showed up to offer "friendly advice." OC JS remembered that all such advice was not so friendly:

One day a helpful Senior Candidate suggested we try the furniture polish, 'Pledge' on our highly shined barracks floor, so we got some. What a great deal! What a nice guy that Senior was for suggesting it. Of course, being a Senior, he knew all the tricks of the trade and it was good that we could learn from him. So, one day, after buffing the floor till it sparkled, we applied the finishing coat of 'Pledge'. It was amazing! That floor took on a depth of shine. That morning, as we left the barracks for the day's training, it looked absolutely wet it was so shiny… (TAC) was going to be pleased with us.

When we returned that evening, our entire floor was ransacked. Bunks were toppled over, wall lockers turned upside down, and clothing scattered all about. It looked like a tornado had blown through Third Platoon. Obviously, we had committed some kind of infraction, but what? The third floor looked better than ever when we left that morning. That night we learned from another 'helpful' Senior Candidate, during fits of laughter, that 'Pledge' makes the floors slicker than ice."

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[54] Not always. Sometimes, to our discomfort, classes ended earlier. If a block of instruction ended before 1700 we were remanded to the tender mercies of the TACs for dismounted drill, character guidance, and most often, additional PT. One of the favorite "time killers" was the run without objective in either time or distance. Woe be to the Candidate who dropped out.

[55] The practice of OCs staying up after lights out to use small rags to hand buff floors to resemble the shine we had to keep on our boots had proven an unnecessary distraction during earlier versions of OCS.

It does not take a great deal of imagination to guess that the first person to discover the "ice" was the TAC, during his morning inspection.

During the first weeks of Officer Candidate School the TACs and others gave us a myriad of tasks which everyone knew could not be accomplished in the time allotted, let alone done well and never, of course, to that ubiquitous "OCS Standard." For the unfortunates in the candidate chain of command, there was always the question, "Why did you fail?" A tour in the chain was followed by a "counseling session". There, not surprisingly, the TAC emphasized the failures of each member of the chain and those failures were inevitably many.

TACs evaluated us as "Inadequate", "Marginal", "Adequate", "Superior", or "Exceptional" (though if anyone can remember a "Superior", let alone an "Exceptional" rating, he has not revealed it). One OC did remember that one of his proudest moments in OCS was receiving his first "Marginal", which did not come until he was well into the Intermediate phase.

In fact, under the system, we were expected to fail, at least while we were Basic Candidates. While few of us knew then the words General Marshall had spoken to the first OCS class in 1941[56], we were learning the lesson he wanted to convey. Surely, most of us realized the lesson even if, to an outsider, this process seems ridiculous. It would become even clearer when we reached our duty assignments. Still, according to one TAC wife, *"I couldn't believe what he was forcing you guys to do."*

Each TAC had his own standards for judging us, but they were usually very similar. TAC AF certainly spoke for most TACs when he said:

My favorite candidates demonstrated the traits on the evaluation forms. They took initiative, did pay attention to detail, and, by golly, they had moral courage. In my book, give me a guy who was maybe a little bit sassy; who was not afraid to stand up to me and when in charge, took charge. In my opinion the meek (that's not the same as quiet) were not cut out to lead men in combat. Good candidates moved with a purpose! At PT one day, I ordered the current Candidate Company Commander to drop and give me ten (pushups). He said, 'Which arm, Sir?" That got my attention! I admired his confidence, so I ordered ten on each arm; he did them (one armed pushups)! As someone said, 'It ain't braggin' if you can do it.'

In fact, getting back at the TACs safely and without harm became something of an obsession with us. While there was much plotting, few good pranks ever progressed much beyond the stage of wishful thinking. One which did however is remembered by OC JF:

One night of mischief found us pasting newspaper over the TAC's door and painting it dark green on the bottom and light green on the top in line with the color scheme of the rest of the hall. When the TAC came in in the morning he could not find his office. Cool huh?

Quitting

[56] As mentioned earlier, the Army Chief of Staff had told the graduating OCs, "…the real leader displays his qualities in his triumph over adversity, however great it may be."

Probably every one of us considered quitting at one time or another during the first 11 weeks. Many of us felt we certainly would be dropped from the program anyway, so we might as well quit. The question "Why endure all this punishment when I'm going to be dismissed from the program?" surely went through the minds of many. The question was often reinforced by the TACs and Senior Candidates who frequently asked "Why don't you quit?" One of the answers to this question was that we couldn't quit during the first seven weeks of the program.

Keeping unwilling Candidates in the program so long was not uniformly liked by Candidates or TACs. OC BB described one way of quitting during the first seven weeks:

Demonstrating the intentional stress and mental fatigue placed on the candidate to sort out the faint of heart, my bunk mate went AWOL (Absent without Leave) the second night, never to be seen again.

There were programmatic challenges to having the unwilling in for a protracted length of time. TAC RF said:

I always lobbied for an earlier opportunity (for Candidates to quit), especially to eliminate those soldiers who were dragooned into the program by illicit means and really didn't want to be there. However, there were Boards at each phase… to determine if a candidate was worth recycling or a lost cause; the recycling was especially used at the Senior Candidate Phase.

We reached the first milestone when we completed seven weeks in the program. We were evaluated by our TACs and some, released from the "no quit" prohibition, submitted their "Quit Letters."[57] On resignation the former OC reverted to his previous rank and was sent out of the OC barracks and into the Headquarters Company barracks near Brigade Headquarters, there to await reassignment.

One Candidate wrote home at this time:

It has been one week since it has been possible to quit this program and already ten percent (of his class, seven) have quit and another five percent are seriously considering it.

I came very close to quitting last week but, after a talk with the commanding officer, decided to wait for eleventh week evaluations.

Quitting seemed like the only way out but, even after the prohibition against quitting was lifted, it wasn't easy. Peer pressure, a constant factor in military units, played a big part in keeping men in the program. As OC JS remembered:

As it turned out, if I quit, I wouldn't be the first. That was a good thing. In the coming weeks several guys Dropped-on-Request. The way to freedom had been paved. Unfortunately, quitting was not a pleasant thing in Armor OCS in 1965-1968…. Quitters were subject to especially biting ridicule. I do not know how people who DOR-ed were treated, I never saw that part. The part we saw was akin to Amish 'shunning'. This gave me pause. I did not want to be shunned,

[57] Formally, these were "Letters of Resignation" or "LORs" and if accepted, the Candidate was "DOR" or "Dropped on Request". This process was exemplified in the movie, *An Officer and a Gentleman,* which may be the best Hollywood version of what we went through, though much tamer, and the consequences of our submitting an LOR was likely assignment to Vietnam, not a return to civilian status.

but was it worse than carrying on? I was in a quandary. I wanted to quit but was afraid to quit. Consequently, for the time being, I did nothing. I just sucked it up and continued with the program. After all, I could always quit later.

Those who did resign from the program in a sense became non-persons (hence the shunning) if they foolishly told their peers before they moved out of the barracks. In fact, most did not tell anyone, except perhaps a very close friend. Instead, we found out who quit when, upon returning from class, we found an empty bunk with mattress folded and all personal effects removed. Only rarely did any OC see the DOR-ed candidate again.

OC CT remembered:

There was a guy in my company who was an E-6 (a Staff Sergeant) before he entered the program. He seemed really STRAC, too - at least he impressed the heck out of me as knowing how the Army worked and what was going on in general. But for some reason he quit, and was sent to Headquarters Company. I remember the only time I saw him after that was a few days later when I noticed him standing road guard as we were crossing a street while we ran by on our way to Boudinot Hall. It was sort of strange to see him there - kind of melancholy and a bit depressing, I guess. He was a good guy too, and I have often wondered what happened to him after that.

Candidates were formally evaluated after 11, 17 and 22 weeks. Of course, we knew we would be evaluated by our TACs on the basis of displayed leadership qualities and by the Armor School on the basis of academic progress. However, probably the most feared evaluation was the peer review done on a rating sheet sardonically referred to as the "Bayonet Sheet".

OCs rated in the bottom quarter of the class by their peers were definitely in trouble.[58] For most of us this was the first time we had been called upon to make what in essence could be life and death decisions about our friends. [59] At the same time that each of us felt remorse in seeing others removed from the program, we experienced relief if that group did not include us. We had been told from the outset that half of us would not graduate (the actual figure was about one-third) and hence the rating was in effect a "bayoneting" of our peers.

Those who failed the evaluations were called before a panel of officers charged with deciding whether the candidate should be turned back (often referred to as being "recycled") or dropped from the program. After each evaluation period, we often learned who had been "paneled" when we found their empty bunks. Rarely was a decision to submit a person to a panel made known to us, except near the end when recycling appears to have been most common (many of those who were turned back later graduated and made fine officers).

Successful completion of seven weeks brought a party, where some candidates were able to poke good natured fun (very dangerous duty for those chosen) at the TACs. This party was

[58] Early classes were ordered to rate equal numbers in each quartile but this was relaxed on the basis that some acceptable candidates might be forced out by an arbitrary low rating.

[59] Those dropped from the program often found themselves assigned to Vietnam, at a time when the war was at its hottest.

also accompanied with what would for most of us be our first "Cinderella Pass", that is we were allowed off post until midnight on the Saturday of our party. For married OCs this was often their first opportunity to see their wives. Subsequent completion of thirteen weeks and eighteen weeks brought overnight passes and one of the few social activities was the Senior-status Party, a military ball affair in which wives or girlfriends attended and even some young women were recruited from local colleges as dates for bachelors.

These events allowed Candidates and TACs to relax a bit (always carefully restrained by both sides) and to put their relationship in its proper mode. TAC AF remembered:

At the dances (eleventh and eighteenth week parties), we could really relax and treat our OCs in a much friendlier manner. I remember at one such event, we were joined by two OCs who had graduated from his college, the University of Illinois, and one wife who was also an alum and all sang our school song. Of course, everyone cheered while we sang and then booed at the end.

Such events helped make the experience endurable.

If we survived the eighteenth week evaluations, not to mention the parties, we began to see graduation as a possibility, even a probability. Still, at week 22, we were yet again evaluated and this time faced a unique Armor School final exam of sorts known as Military Stakes. Passing Military Stakes helped determine whether we graduated.

The Mess Hall and Pogey Bait

Every OC remembers two remarkably intertwined phenomena: meals in the mess hall and pogey bait. Pogey bait refers to food smuggled into the barracks for late night snacks. Although officially prohibited and subject to confiscation, pogey bait was not grounds for dismissal from the program, absent special circumstances. That the two concepts were intertwined seems strange but they were inseparable parts of OCS.

When not in the field we ate three meals a day in the company mess hall. However until the eighteenth week we were never allowed more than 45 minutes between when the first Candidate entered the mess hall and the last exited to eat our meals.

On entry, we took our trays and moved through the serving line where we received excellent food, well presented. We then stopped by the beverage counter,[60] and moved to a table of four where we stood until all the places at the table were filled. We then took our seats in unison, insuring that we sat on the front six inches of the chair, with our backs ramrod straight. At that point we were permitted to eat, but only by the "Square Meal" method.

Square Meals occurred when the candidate took a fork full of food, lifted it straight up to mouth level, moved the fork and food straight into the mouth, returned the fork to the

[60] There were no "leisurely" cups of coffee for the OCs but the TACs were served by a Candidate, selected to be the Dining Room Orderly, or "DRO". Everyone got the opportunity to be DRO but, predictably, no one ever did the job to the satisfaction of the TACs.

vertical, and then straight down to the table. This process was repeated until the food was gone (which rarely occurred) or the allotted eating time had elapsed. After eating, the OC returned his tray and utensils, and then moved out smartly and at double time to the barracks for some personal hygiene. This was followed by double-timing back to the Armor School for further instruction.

As with everything else in the first eighteen weeks of OCS, there was never enough time to eat. As OC HP observed, that was the logic. Not only were there 70-100 men to feed at every meal[61] but there were constant distractions. TACs were always correcting OCs and even the slightest glance in their direction (they often roamed throughout the mess hall) brought a charge of "eyeballing", which was instantly "corrected" by an order to leave the mess hall, do the required penance (usually pushups, loudly counted), clean up, and return.

Frequently the TACs singled out an OC for special activity. Because of course, this was almost never accomplished to the TAC's satisfaction; it was invariably followed by "correction".

Inevitably, this became something of a game, though the slight enjoyment that came from it was limited by a strict injunction against laughing or even smiling. As we progressed in the program, TACs started to unbend a little, but never more than a little. OC MD remembered:

While having lunch toward the latter part of our second eight weeks (during the Intermediate phase) a TAC… called out to me to 'somersault' on up to the TAC's dinner table. Having by now learned to instantly obey an order, plus wanting to demonstrate obeying 'exactly', I rose from my chair saying, 'Sir, Candidate D. Yes, Sir!' I somersaulted up to their table. Upon arrival, I again said the obligatory, 'Sir, Candidate D. reporting, Sir.'… (the TAC) looked at me and said, "D., you're an idiot.' I think he had forgotten why he called me up in the first place."

We can all relate to the elation the somersaulting Candidate brought to the room. Actually, OC MD was probably really only expected to move rapidly to report to the TAC. Had he not somersaulted, as directed, he probably would have been roundly criticized and corrected. When the candidate complied, exactly as directed, the bluff had been called. In all likelihood there was no other purpose for Candidate MD to be called to the TACs' table.

During a normal day, we burned a lot of calories and there never seemed to be enough food or time to eat what was available. Therefore, by lights out we felt starved. Also, we knew that a violation of the No Food Policy would not constitute a violation of the Honor Code, unless we lied about it. Thus, if we figured out how to deceive the TACs, without lying, we could eat a late night snack. Failure in that effort resulted in the TACs confiscating the food or worse. Of course as became obvious, the TACs really knew all about this, and frankly, seldom made more than an occasional attempt at interception. However like all smugglers we had to be creative.

[61] This was always difficult so companies rotated which platoon went first so the each got at least one meal per day in which to eat for the full allotted time.

Much pogey bait originated from a carry-out food place named Chicken-on-Call, located not too far from our barracks. The folks at Chicken-on-Call delivered pogey bait to designated locations where we paid for the food, and then smuggled it into the barracks. The big question of course was how to get it past the TACs.

The regulation against food in the barracks established the essential rules of the game. It was not against the rules to order, receive or even eat food outside the barracks. Therefore, to be actionable, the food had to be intercepted in the barracks. How the TACs caught the shipments and how the OCs avoided interdiction as well as how violations were punished have become parts of the OCS legend. Everybody has at least one memory of success or failure.

One thing was evident early on. The TACs seemed to somehow have an uncanny sense for knowing just when and where a shipment arrived. The TACs then descended on us at the most critical time, and early efforts at smuggling were unsuccessful which led to the loss of some of the valuable goods (for many of the TACs had once been starving OCs themselves).

It wasn't until much later that we learned that we were being thwarted by a "mole"! After the orders had been placed at Chicken-on-Call, an employee there called the OC Brigade Headquarters where the Charge of Quarters (usually a Senior Candidate) in turn phoned the receiving company. The TACs of course then knew when the food was coming.

One OC, DL, remembered the plan his platoon devised to deceive the TACs:

My platoon decided we needed a distraction and I volunteered (or was drafted) to take a group to attract the attention of the TACs. Since we needed a 'committee', I was named 'Pogey Bait Officer' and my group was designated the 'Pogey Bait Committee'. If asked, we had to admit to these offices but, to protect us even from an inadvertent Honor Code violation, we had no idea when the delivery was to be made or how it was to be brought in.

"The 'committee' did things that were obvious. We carried right side up garbage cans, laundry sacks and trash bags. The first time we were intercepted, my TAC asked, "L, are you the 'Pogey Bait Officer?' My truthful answer was, 'Sir, Candidate L, I am.'

Then there was some jousting, a lot of pushups, and another TAC helped make our life hard as the two circled around the obvious transporting devices. Then they pounced and uncovered the container, only to find innocent, non-food items. In the meantime, the food had made it safely into the platoon area and we ate well.

The whole process was fun for everybody. The OCs got to flaunt the rules (at least a little) and the TACs enjoyed their roles. As TAC AF put it:

And, of course, evenings were play time; pogey bait time after study-time was always cat and mouse time. Sometimes I wasn't sure whether I was the cat or the mouse. You guys were very creative.

Of course, creativity was the teaching point.

But, inevitably, we got caught on occasion. When we were caught, there had to be "correction". As OC HP remembered:

Several times during OCS we would be caught with food and had a 'pogey bait party'. Sometimes this meant having it thrown all over the platoon bay which was a real bummer as it would mean spending the night cleaning the place by flashlight. If we were lucky, it meant dumping everything - burgers, fries, drinks, shakes, pizza, everything - in a trash can and stirring it up and having everyone come by for a handful. Again, if lucky this would be done in the showers, so cleanup was much less of a problem.

But, if the pogey bait party was not in the shower, the effects could be devastating (the results, of course, would then be blamed on the unfortunates in the candidate chain of command. A graphic memory was presented by OC JS:

When you are so damn hungry, and are anticipating the arrival of a pizza, loaded with pepperoni, mushrooms, onions, green pepper and whatever else, and it is interrupted, the heartbreak begins. You feel like Isaac as you are directed to unwrap that pizza and place it, upside down, on your recently spit shined floor which is virtually glowing with a dazzling high gloss sheen. As further directed, you set the heavy duty buffer brush on that wonderfully aromatic crust and begin buffing the floor. I am tearing up even today, just remembering it.

It was not only in the barracks that the urge to eat outside regular meals moved us. Sometimes we visited the PX or the occasional snack truck that made its way into the Armor School area. Still, creativity might also appear. OC MD remembered:

…the incident happened during our night compass course training. As you remember, this was groups of three or four trying to locate three telephone poles, in the dark, using only our compass. This we did successfully. In addition, we had pogey bait delivered by Chicken-on-Call to map coordinates at 0030 in the morning. Now that was fun, and we didn't get caught.

In fact, we all have memories like this about life in the barracks where pogey bait was a welcome distraction in a program that left us not only exhausted, but stressed and strained to the limit. Perhaps that is why some Candidates tried to find support from their families, especially a wife. As OC TH observed:

Church was always well attended and packed solid, whether one was religious or not, since that was the only time we could get as close and affectionate with our wives as possible.

Still, we persevered, learned, and became leaders willing and able to withstand hardships, offer no excuses, and overcome obstacles, just as General Marshall had long ago said officers must do.

The Honor Code

The Honor Code was explained to us early in the program. It would govern us during the time we were in OCS and later on active duty, and became so instilled, that it guided us years after.[62] The Code was enforced by the candidates themselves.

Put simply, the Honor Code required OCs to tell the truth, be honest in all efforts, and to not "quibble." Also, importantly, each Candidate was "honor bound to report any breach of honor that comes to his attention." Violations were referred to an Honor Council of Candidates who could, and did, recommend a Candidate's removal from the program. The importance of the Honor Code and the influence on us cannot be overestimated.

The definition of what constituted a "quibble" is difficult to formulate but every OC knew it when he saw it. OC MD provides the following description of two incidents he witnessed:

The first incident I witnessed was during a Saturday inspection in our barracks. A TAC officer came into our area and found something on a candidate… which was not allowed. (The TAC asked)… the candidate lied and said, 'No." There was no doubt that it was his. That same day, the candidate was dismissed and gone from our company for lying, an Honor Code violation.

The second incident happened in our second eight week period. In this case, a group of candidates had snuck into some vending machines and were attempting to get upstairs without getting caught. A TAC asked one particular candidate if he was hiding a Coke behind his back. The candidate said, 'No', he was hiding a 7UP. The candidate was out of the unit the same day for Quibbling, an Honor Code violation.

We all understand the two examples OC MD remembered. However, a violation was not usually summarily punished with expulsion; in fact TACs did not have the power to summarily expel anyone.[63] Rather, the typical alleged violation was submitted to the Company Honor Council where the appointed Candidate members decided whether the facts justified the charge and then recommended appropriate sanctions, which did not always include removal from the program. One member of an Honor Council recalled how difficult it was sitting in judgment of a close friend, who eventually became a fine officer.

The Final Exam

Most academic courses have a final exam to test student knowledge and understanding. The Armor School was no exception. It administered a unique final exam to those OCs who made it to the twenty-second week. Our final exam was called "Military Stakes."

The horse cavalry of a past generation had a tradition of testing troopers by having them ride their horses over a course of some seven miles with stops along the way to demonstrate proficiency at relevant military tasks. This was the model used to test the OCs.

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[62] It might surprise the casual observer but one former OC who later became an attorney said the principles of the Code helped make him an effective advocate and advisor and drew a favorable response from judges before whom he practiced.

[63] Almost certainly in the examples cited, the process took longer or the candidates, perhaps already in trouble, chose to resign, rather than face a hearing.

The course was about seven miles long with at least eleven stops along the way. Of course Armor OCs had no horses so we ran the entire course.

Busses delivered the OCs early on a Saturday morning to a far point on the Fort Knox reservation. We were timed at the start and turned loose at intervals. We ran to the first station where we might be required to call in artillery fire on a target or solve a map reading problem. OC DL remembered:

I had run through about half the course when I came to a station where I had to put into operation a Korean War vintage radio set. There were a number of dials that were very temperamental and a slight variation could leave the set non-operational. After I finished adjusting the dials, nothing happened. As the time, and my score, melted away, I realized the one thing I had not done - turn the on/off switch to 'On'. I did that and to my amazement and relief it started up perfectly.

As we ran the course, each minute chipped away the score. We started with 1,000 points and the length of time and any missed points at the stops reduced the number we had. If we failed to finish with at least 750 points we failed and turnback was a distinct possibility.

Candidates could be and were paneled after Military Stakes but those who passed were given an overnight pass, often the first any of us had since joining our classes over five months previously.

Graduation

Either before or after Military Stakes (depending on the weekend and the weather) we participated as the Senior company in the parades held on Saturday mornings after inspection. At the parade we were dressed in khaki or Army dress green uniforms with gleaming black helmet liners. Intermediate Candidates had a green stripe around their helmet liners while those of the Senior Candidates had a yellow stripe.

We marched to the main parade grounds about one–half mile from the brigade area. The parade ground (used for parades from the opening of Fort Knox and still in use today) is a large field that lies between the old post hospital and the post theater (since remodeled into a conference center) and post headquarters.

There was an order in which companies lined up for and marched in the parade behind the military band. Looking out onto the parade field from the reviewing stand and spectator area, the farthest company to the left and next to the band was the graduating Senior Officer Candidate class. While the farthest company to the right was the company most junior in status. When the command "Pass in Review" was given, the band led the parade elements as they marched by the reviewing stand. The band was followed by the Senior company which was in turn followed by the other companies in order of seniority.

The twenty-third week was the last chance for "paneling".[64] Those of us who were deemed deficient at this stage might be offered a choice to either leave the program or to move back as many as ten or eleven weeks to another class. This actually presented a difficult choice, particularly for College Option candidates and Candidates who had been draftees. In either case, a Candidate who was turned back faced several more weeks in OCS in another class and, if he graduated, he was obligated to serve at least two years of active duty. Draftee and College Option Candidates might have only a year or even less of obligated active service left if they quit. Most did take a turnback but it was a difficult choice.

Either the morning of actual graduation or the day before, we were awarded our diplomas stating we had graduated from the Armor School. Simultaneously we were administratively discharged from the Army as enlisted men and then sworn in as commissioned officers. For most of us, this was one of the proudest moments of our lives.

The Exceptions

There were at least three notable exceptions to the foregoing scenario. First, Classes 12-66, 15-66; 16-66; 17-66; 19-66; 20-66; 21-66; 23-66; 24-66; 26-66 and 27-66 were at Fort Knox for just thirteen weeks before being sent to their branch schools (Ordnance, Quartermaster, or Transportation) for completion of OCS. The last ten weeks, with emphasis on branch specialization, were conducted in a fashion similar to the last ten weeks of the twenty-three week Armor OCS program at Fort Knox. The men who were eventually commissioned in their respective branches survived by far the most difficult and perhaps the most important part of their OCS in those first 13 weeks. They too are valued members of our fraternity.

The second major exception was the experience of the first and last classes (9-66 and 5-68). The first eight classes scheduled (Classes 1-66 through 8-66) were not filled and never met. In August, 1967, the Army decided to close all Officer Candidate Schools except Infantry, Artillery, and Engineer (the last two were also closed later).

Class 9-66 was designated Company A1 and was the test class for OCS at Fort Knox.[65] As OC TB said,

We were the first class to start OCS at Knox in quite a while, so the TACs and candidate, and cadre were all learning. Most of our TACs were graduated from Fort Benning OCS. Being the first class, and a trial class, we were subject to some things that later classes did not 'enjoy'.

The last class, 5-68, Company B2, developed a motto: "The last shall be first". Biblical references were not unusual in OCS. When the class was scheduled to start, there were only

[64] That is, your status was reviewed by a panel of five officers representing The Assistant Commandant of the Armor School.

[65] Though presented the whole 23 week program, graduates of this class were allowed to choose their branch of commissioning: 41 chose Armor; nine Ordnance; and seven Quartermaster; and 20 Transportation.

a few qualified people who had signed up for Armor OCS and they were still scattered in various stages of training. The Army tried to honor its commitment. As OC AF remembered:

We found out that our future was insecure. We weren't through 'Station 12', the last in-processing step, during our in-processing because it was uncertain if we would complete training. There were rumors we would be sent to Ft. Benning for Infantry OCS, and others that we would just be cancelled. For a week, we did work details, painting foot lockers and such. Then it was determined that there were quite a few soldiers who had enlisted for Armor, so they pulled guys out of AIT and filled the company rolls. My bunkmate… was in his second week of AIT - normally, an eight week course of specialized training - when they sent him to the OC Brigade! Those poor guys had no time to prepare, no uniforms, no Armor School patches - all that stuff."

Class 5-68 officially began training on September 1, 1967, and completed the 23 week course on February 23, 1968, becoming the last class to graduate from OCS at Fort Knox.

Whether we were in the first, last or any other class, we all remember the training as tough but generally excellent. First or last, and regardless of class rank, we found the gold bar that signified the rank of second lieutenant "weighed the same". And some of us received a candid, though sobering, depiction of what we might become. As OC JM remembered a grizzled (?) twenty-five year old captain back from Vietnam saying, you are "cannon fodder." Though many of us would serve in places other than Vietnam, we knew at graduation that some of us would not survive.

The third major exception to graduation, commissioning, and then assignment to a line unit was an eclectic group that may be described by three examples. No doubt there were others who also, upon successful completion of OCS, did not follow the usual path. We relate three examples of this class of new officers.

Probably the strangest case was that of OC James Shapard (who has allowed us to use his name and experience), which may come as a surprise to some of his classmates in Class 31-67 C2, the last C Company class. Jim had almost four years of enlisted service and had completed OCS. However, less than a week before graduation, a review of his medical records revealed he had a medical condition that barred him from service as a commissioned officer. In fact, his rare genetic condition probably disqualified him from service in the military at any level. Though Armor School officials presented Jim with his diploma in a private ceremony, he could not be commissioned.

At first Jim stayed with his company, which was then being phased out. His former TACs referred to him as a "third lieutenant" and befriended him. Then Jim was transferred to OC Brigade Headquarters at his former rank (E-5) where he supervised details. All the while he pursued appeals all the way through the Surgeon General's Office. All appeals however were to no avail.

Since there were no openings at Fort Knox for his rank and specialty, he was transferred to Fort Bliss, Texas. While there he started writing letters to the congressional delegation from his home state. Finally, almost 6 months after graduation, he was commissioned a

second lieutenant, not in the Armor Branch but in the Ordnance Corps. Thus, the last graduate of OCS at Fort Knox to be commissioned, like the first in class 9-66, was commissioned in the Ordnance Corps.

The other exceptions deal with those honor graduates (the top ten percent of each class was so designated) who were selected to become TACs toward the end of the OCS program. We are aware of two, though there are doubtless other similar stories.

Some were barely able to finish one class when they found themselves out of a job. TAC CW said,

...being selected as a TAC Officer right out of OCS was an honor and ultimate disaster for our careers.

CW chose as his best available option, to become a helicopter pilot. Later he found himself in command of a tank company in Germany with little prior armor experience. In frustration CW resigned his commission and then re-entered the Army as a Warrant Officer pilot.

In another case a TAC finished his first assignment only to find that there were no more classes forming at Fort Knox. Apparently forgotten by the Army, he remained on-post with no assignment until an enterprising colonel accused him of "hiding in plain sight" and instigated an investigation. Cleared of all charges, he was sent to Vietnam as an advisor, left the Army as soon as possible, and pursued a successful career as a magazine editor.

Still, by February 23, 1968, the people at the Armor School could take pride in accomplishing their mission. Three times the Armor School had been called upon to help meet the needs of the Army for high quality, highly motivated, and well trained junior officers who could lead American soldiers in time of war. For the third and last time, the Armor School had met the challenge.

The Impact on the Graduates

The wife of a TAC said, while we were writing this, *"My husband had come to believe no one remembered and no one cared."* He was of course wrong on both counts and we can attest to that on the basis of contacts with approximately 1000 graduates (as of the date of writing) of OCS at Fort Knox as well as the submissions found in the Insider's View. But, do we really care?

The answer to that question is crystal clear in the comment of OC WM who spoke for all of us when he said:

I regard those months in Armor OCS at Fort Knox as the crucible that formed the rest of my life. Although I am retired now, it is easy to look back over nearly 50 years of 'living' and recognize the OCS experience as the genesis of the confidence and fortitude that enabled me to cope with the vicissitudes of life. Equally important to me was the instilling of 'honor' as the fundamental guide to dealing with others.

We graduates will never be able to adequately thank all of the faculty, cadre and, yes, even the TACs (maybe most especially the TACs) who pushed, harassed, encouraged, taught,

and trained us to be the best we could be, in the military and out. No word of thanks will ever suffice to express our gratitude to those, who like us were themselves young, for their hard work and dedication in doing their job and doing it well.

It is fitting, then, that one of our Tactical Officers conclude this story of those demanding, challenging, and ultimately rewarding five and one-half months at Fort Knox. TAC AF said:

In summary, I was and still am, proud to have been an OCS TAC Officer at Fort Knox, Kentucky. As a group of young lieutenants assigned to do an unfamiliar job, an important job, I think we did pretty darn well, and the data on our product supports that contention. How could we not succeed, though, given the quality young men sent to us? Out of just over 4,300 men, three of you earned the Medal of Honor! And ten of you achieved the rank of General officer. Even better, my guess is all of you did your damn job. Forge the Thunderbolt!

Yes, TACs (and cadre), you did your job "pretty darn well."

Chapter 10

Epilogue: End of an Era

Under the Army Organization Act of 1950 Armor and Cavalry were combined to form the Armor Branch. In 1955 the 3rd Armored Division was shipped to Europe and the Armored Replacement Training Center was activated to resume training at Fort Knox. It was given the new name U.S. Army Training Center Armor (USATCA), and comprised approximately half of the population at Fort Knox. Soon after the Armored Center and Armored School were officially designated the "Armor Center" and "Armor School." In 1957 it became the US Army Armor Center. Fort Knox would serve as the "Home of Cavalry and Armor" for the next seven decades.

For most of us, OCS at Fort Knox was a defining period in our lives. We all shared a rigorous regimen for months, whether we lived in the large red brick buildings so well known for their attics where Tac Officers enjoyed supervising (or, as some would say, torturing us during physical training) or in those gray, "modern" mundane brick rectangles found in the Officer Candidate Brigade area. We attended classes in Boudinot Hall, stood in formations in the predawn darkness on the Brigade parade grounds, and underwent seemingly endless runs on the PT fields of the Officer Candidate area along 23rd Street. We learned tank gunnery on the post's now silent main gun ranges and map reading on the rambling terrain of Fort Knox.

After commissioning, graduates were assigned to various places around the world. After those assignments, many graduates returned to Fort Knox to attend the Armor Officer Advanced Course. Still others returned when they were assigned to the US Army Armor School (USAARMS) or to the US Army Training Center Armor (USATCA). Many returned to raise their families or marry and begin a family and some remained at Fort Knox after graduation and filled important jobs in the Armor School and OC Brigade itself.

Some of the memories we have of the fort are good, some painful. But whether the memories are good or painful, most of us would agree they are strong. We trained and worked at Fort Knox as young men in search of ourselves and adventure during a dangerous time. Many of us have discovered, as we have reconnected with friends from four decades ago and made new friends too, that the experiences we shared then link us yet today. The strength of this is seen in the large numbers of graduates who have chosen to communicate through the various social media and e-mail over the past two years.

The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission recommendations changed the "Home of Cavalry and Armor" dramatically.

Largely replaced by the Human Resources Command and several other organizations, the Fort Knox we knew is now embracing its new array of missions. There is no longer basic and specialized schooling of Armor personnel. The cadence calls of training companies are rapidly fading into the past. The squeak and rumble and dust of tanks on the march remain only in our memories. Agony, Misery, and Heartbreak hills are now on paved roads that lead off main post into the former range and training facilities.

And so with the US Army Armor Center and US Army Armor School both relocated to Fort Benning, Georgia, the era we knew has gone forever.

The changes at Fort Knox and the massive expansion at Fort Benning make it extremely unlikely the post will be used ever again to train young officers. The period 1965-1968 was the third and, in all probability, the last time the nation will call on Fort Knox to train officers to lead its young men in battle.

As these words are written those responsible for this work shed a symbolic tear for in a very real sense the fate of Fort Knox is a kind of metaphor for our own condition. The youngest of those proud new lieutenants who were prepared to be officers through OCS at Fort Knox during the Vietnam era are now in their sixties, those a bit older are in their seventies. Our time at Fort Knox is nearly five decades in the past. Almost all of us are retired and brother officers from our group dismount at Fiddlers' Green almost each day. Such is the lot of aging veterans.

Most graduates would agree that Officer Candidate School defined all our lives in some way; that it melded all our souls together forever. A unique bond remains to this day, attested by the fact that so many of the 4,321 graduates have enthusiastically "checked in" and many find that talking with people they have not seen for decades comes very easily.

All graduates did not end up with a chest full of medals or remain in the Army as a career. Many carried the training and experiences and discipline honed in the service to achieve their greatness in other careers after military life.

However, when the nation called a third time, Fort Knox and we responded. In the phrase common today: "All gave some, some gave all."

"Forge the Thunderbolt"

In the memory of those we lost.