

An Introduction to the Military

A Tough Decision:

At just eighteen years of age in 1957, I wanted to become a flying officer in the United States Air Force. The USAF Recruiter told me that I had passed my tests however; I needed to go to Denver, Colorado to take further tests and physicals. History changed on October 4, 1957, when the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I. While the Sputnik launch was a single event, it marked the start of the space age and the U.S.-U.S.S.R space race. I was caught in a National re-focus of the Air Force Mission. The sizes of Aviation Cadet Classes were cut in half because the nation suddenly became geared up for the missile-age. This placed persons who had passed the tests on a "waiting list" for a class to open. My plans were about to be altered again by a situation over which I had no control. I was #2 on the Big Horn County Draft Board list and draftees were being taken at the rate of two per month. I had less than thirty days to decide whether to be drafted in the Army or enter the Air Force as an enlisted man. I chose the latter.

Basic Training:

I seriously wondered if I permanently ruined my life by enlisting in the U.S. Air Force. The "Reception Center" for the USAF is located at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas. I climbed off the bus from the airport along with about fifty of the most diversified group of "kids" I had ever been around. Two men in Smoky Bear hats, our Training Instructors (T.I.'s), arranged us by height into a rough formation. Our bags were at our feet. They showed us the position of "Attention." Heels together, toes slightly out, back straight, shoulders back, thumb and forefinger touching pant seam, eyes straight ahead, no motion, no sound, staring at the back of the head of the person in front of you. They spoke as though they were angry with us for being there! This is how it all began. In basic training at Lackland AFB, Tex., airmen learned a new way to count: Hup, Toop, Threep, Forp. (It was spelled that way in the drill manual.) Until we were marched to "The Green Monster" and issued military clothing, we were known as "Rainbows" because of our diverse appearance. In retrospect, there is nostalgia for certain aspects of those days. I actually survived Basic and now consider those times as "character building" experiences.

Military courtesy rules were covered repeatedly. The rules on appearance were a short haircut every week, a shower and shave daily, and polish all shoes daily. Clothes must be clean every day, hung with the left sleeve out and spaced precisely 1" inch apart; bed made with hospital corners with the top blanket tight as a drum. The T.I. would bounce a coin on the bed and if it did not bounce, he would grab the blankets and sheets, pulling them off the mattress and toss them aside, issuing a "gig" to the offender. No pictures or personal items were permitted outside a small space in the footlocker. Clothes in the footlocker had to be neatly rolled in a manner that they would not open when the inspector grasped the material by the edge and shook them. The Inspector might command a person to recite, word perfect, one of the eleven Security Instructions, (General Orders) of a sentry, a chain of command or general knowledge question--woe to the person who did not first respond by saying, "Sir" in his answer!

Target Shooting:

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The .30 Cal. M-1 Carbine was introduced to us while on bivouac during basic training. We were instructed that when the “Red flag is raised on the control tower, target firing is in effect. We were further instructed that during firing, if we had a problem, we would put the weapon pointed down-range on the ground, and raise our hand. “Sharpshooters are in the tower and they will shoot you if you point your weapon at any direction other than the target.” We received “familiarization” with the SMS acronym meaning, “Safety on, Magazine out, and Slide open and locked.” When it came time to fire, we were given ten rounds of ammunition to put in the magazine; up to fifty men lined up and assumed the prone position to “sight in” our weapons. After firing, we were permitted to check our targets for any needed adjustments to the sights after the “All Clear” signal. Firing for “Record” meant that we fired ten rounds from each of five different positions, without checking our targets until completed and the “All Clear” signal whistle. When I approached my target, the “bull’s-eye” was completely obliterated! I felt good about my shooting record until I learned that the men on both sides of me failed to qualify—all three of us were shooting at my target!

The Chaplain: James K. Seastrand

My “persona” was reduced to “Name, Rank, and Serial Number” and at times, I had to reach into my soul for an identity. One of the peaceful comforts I received came from the only LDS Chaplain that I ever met in my “active” tour of duty. Lieutenant James K. Seastrand provided me the LDS Serviceman’s kit containing a small, brown-covered Book of Mormon and Principles of the Gospel and an LDS “dog tag.” Chaplain Seastrand was kind to me and even drove me to a San Antonio Stake Priesthood meeting off base. A self-satisfied feeling overcame me when we went through the gate and received a salute from the guard. I felt very privileged to make this trip with Chaplain Seastrand. During the meeting, a plan to attend General Conference aboard military aircraft was revealed. LDS Pilots needing flight time would fly a transport to Salt Lake City with “Permanent Party” personnel wishing to attend. Unfortunately, my “Training” status denied me this privilege. Thirty-seven years after I was discharged, I located Chaplain Seastrand in Las Vegas, Nevada. I was unable to speak with him but his wife Roselle, told me a little about him. James died, July 1997 while speaking before an Inter-faith Council; he served as Mayor of Las Vegas for 16 years; he was a Regional Representative and Temple Chairman—instrumental in obtaining the Temple in the Las Vegas area. A remarkable man, he was a “mover and shaker” in real estate and as a community leader. I am honored to say that I knew the man as my Chaplain at a time when spiritual guidance was desperately needed in my life.

This was my introduction to military life and the many years experience following provided a rich appreciation of the military.

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