

## Initial Entry and Training January 1975 to May 1975

By Allen Lawless

I was born in Detroit and grew up in Garden City, Michigan, a community that expanded in the Fifties to provide a place for white workers who were fleeing the city and environs of Detroit. There are lots of homes in Garden City, most of which are small three-bedroom bungalow-type homes with full basements. My mother married right out of high school and my father was a steelworker. My brother and sister were born 13 months and 2.5 years after me, respectively, so that meant I was the big brother.

I did the usual public school thing, concentrating on playing trombone at Vogel Jr. High and G.C. East High School. The most remarkable thing in my musical training occurred when Mr. Frank Wilson, the East High Band Director, listened to me play in my first trombone sectional and in the span of one minute, corrected a tone production problem I had had ever since I began playing three years earlier. That was an unforgettable moment for me and if he was half the teacher I think he was, the encounter meant something to him too. It was the proverbial “light bulb going on” scenario. Unfortunately, Mr. Wilson died during the Christmas break, barely 3 months after I began high school in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

During my school days, I became intrigued by the euphonium. This instrument was more commonly called “baritone” but I later learned that the baritone was a different instrument altogether, though it looked similar to the euphonium. In junior high school, the band had King and Conn 3-valve, bell-front euphoniums. The high school had 3-valve Kings and Conns similar to those in the junior high, but it also had a Reynolds 4-valve instrument. I found the Reynolds with the extra valve to be fascinating, although I wasn’t allowed to play on it very often.

When we had a substitute band teacher in high school (which occurred fairly often after Mr. Wilson’s passing and until Mr. Naumoff became our full-time teacher), I would sometimes pick up an unused euphonium and play it in rehearsal. During this time I taught myself the differences and similarities between valve combinations and slide positions. I also taught myself how to read eu-



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phonium notation in the treble clef, in addition to the bass clef which I knew well from my trombone playing. In time I appreciated the role the euphonium enjoyed in most band arrangements. The sonorous voice of the instrument blended well with most other voices, therefore the playing of melodic passages and relatively difficult obligato lines were frequent tasks both with other instruments as a *tutti* passage and in section *solis*. This was much more interesting than playing rhythmic punches, which was often the role of the trombone in concert band and dance band arrangements.

Following high school, my music-making didn’t end, as it had for so many of my classmates. I continued to play euphonium in a local community band on a borrowed instrument.

I had entertained the idea of going to college after high school and had even picked out Michigan Technological University up in Houghton, in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. As a graduation gift, my parents fronted some money for me to take a road trip with a friend, Steve Takesian, up there to visit and hang out for a few days. It was a great trip with only a little bit of real

excitement – on a back road leading up to the Pictured Rocks on Lake Superior’s shore, my low-slung car, a 1968 Pontiac Tempest with front suspension that had all but collapsed, encountered a rock. This rock tore off the flywheel cover, making a horrible grinding noise in the process. We checked it out, but there was no other apparent danger. I simply wouldn’t be able to drive over anything taller than roadkill without turning it into hamburger.

About six months after high school, I went into the Army as a “food service specialist”. This is a big fancy term for “cook”. (In the interim period I worked as a busboy/dishwasher in a local family restaurant, then moved to head cook.) The Army recruiter put an attractive spin on this cute little proposal such that I could (if I qualified) become an *Army Security Agency* (ASA) cook. That meant that I’d be cooking the same omelets and meat loaf for people who were supposed to be secret about what they were doing/studying. That sounded kind of exciting for me, an 18-year-old who had barely been in the work force six months before the overwhelming urge to escape southeastern Michigan befell me. It took about six months to learn that I had absolutely no intention of working in anything associated with, around, near, or from the auto industry. While I realize that many people choose to live there and I mean no disrespect to them, living in that area simply wasn’t in my future. I knew there was a big world out there and I wanted to see a little of it, not be entrenched in a corner of the Great Lakes region.

I wish I could say that my motivation for joining the Army was borne of a sense of patriotism. That wouldn’t be accurate. Quite simply I, along with most of the people in my particular age group, was wary of the military in the aftermath of Vietnam. I certainly didn’t want to go to Vietnam – the news stories from Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather, and the garbage spewing from Jane Fonda’s mouth revealed a turmoil that I simply didn’t want to experience. Besides, perfectly good people were being killed in Vietnam. No, in retrospect, my motivation for joining was purely selfish – I wanted and needed work experience and the Army was a good way to get it. And the best part was, I could get that experience elsewhere in the world.

The Army guaranteed me two things: one, I could go to cook school and learn how to burn food; and two, I could get a stabilized assignment at Ft. Devens, Massachusetts. Ft. Devens, a smallish Army installation lo-

cated about 35 miles west of Boston, sounded exotic too, and I certainly had never been in New England and that, coupled with the ASA angle, convinced me that’s where I would go.

But first I had to go to basic training. After processing through the AFEES station in downtown Detroit and taking the enlistment oath (a process which took two days – a little detail that my recruiter forgot to mention since I took the bus home and surprised my mother who had thought that I was off to the Army for the next few months), I got on a plane for Columbia, South Carolina via Atlanta. They had given me all the paperwork I was supposed to take. I was traveling alone – apparently all the other new recruits were slated to go to basic training in places other than Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. I think most of them were going to Ft. Knox, KY.

I had been on a plane only once before. In high school, our social studies class had taken a one-day trip to Washington, D.C. Getting on a plane again was fairly exciting and it wasn’t until the security precautions and other bureaucratic procedures became tiresome that I began to loathe air travel. Well, on second thought, maybe it was the constant bevy of kids screaming in my ear at 2:00 A.M. while my flight was going to Europe. At any rate, in the Atlanta airport I saw my first panhandler, who was disguised as a Rev. Sun Young Moon disciple. He was dressed in some kind of orange costume, which I think was supposed to emulate some kind of eastern religion. With a bright smile, he approached me and asked me if I had seen the light. I told him, yes, I had watched the sun come up this January morning. He immediately began looking for his next victim.

Upon landing in Columbia and somehow making it to the new recruit reception station, they directed a group of us who had arrived at the same time – it was probably 11:00 P.M. or so – to the dining facility where they made sure we got a hot meal. I thought that was pretty good – I had expected some fire-breathing, apoplectic-faced drill sergeant to be yelling and screaming at us right from the start. But no – hot food first. The yelling and screaming would come later.

We found ourselves in a fairly modern building with decent bunks. We got situated and turned in. It had been a very long day.

The next few days consisted of a bewildering series

of being herded off here and there to get haircuts, uniforms, and otherwise obtain the things we would need to sustain us over the next two months of basic combat training. The attitude of those who herded was relatively calm and easy-going. I kept wondering when the bottom would fall out and we'd find ourselves with some purple-faced guy screaming and spitting in our faces. It certainly hadn't happened yet. And even the haircuts were reasonable. While we saw plenty of guys with buzzcuts, the short little tough-looking guy with a Smokey the Bear hat who watched us from a distance had told the barbers to avoid the buzzcuts. Except for one guy – this guy apparently decided he could give the barbers precise instructions on how to cut his curly locks, so when the barber looked at the drill sergeant, the drill sergeant just rolled his eyes and gave the snip signal. This guy wound up with a buzzcut. The rest of us got our hair cut short, but it wasn't all cut off. I was beginning to think that the people in this place weren't all insane from eating that goofy white stuff with butter running through it. I think they called it "grits".

They issued uniform items, which, we learned, formed our personal clothing issue. We would be required to take this personal clothing issue with us everywhere we went, as long as we were in the Army. I kept wondering about the boxer shorts – I hated boxer shorts, and that's what they issued to me. Would I be required to wear boxer shorts and have my gonads wrapped in impossible configurations as long as I lived? With that question, I realized I was scared to death. Absolutely petrified. I remembered all the cliches – don't volunteer for

anything. Stay under the radar screen. Don't be the first and don't be the last. Do what you're told immediately and don't question anything. Certainly don't give anybody any grief – especially the barbers. Here's what they gave us:

Quantity	Description
2	Coat, Army green. One summer weight, one winter weight
2	Trousers, Army green. One summer weight, one winter weight
1	Overcoat, wool
1	Raincoat, water resistant
1	Jacket, field, green
3	Shirt, khaki
3	Trousers, khaki
4	Shirt, fatigue, green
4	Trousers, fatigue, green
3	Shirt, poplin
2	Belt, black
1	Buckle, black subdued
1	Buckle, brass
2	Tie, four in hand
6	T-shirt, white
6	Shorts, boxer
5	Socks, boot, pair
2	Socks, black, pair
2	Boots, black, pair
1	Shoes, low quarters, pair
1	Hat, service
1	Cap, overseas
2	Cap, fatigue
2	Inserts, gloves, wool
1	Gloves, black, work, pair
1	Gloves, leather, dress, pair
1	Scarf, green
6	Handkerchief, white
1	Bag, duffel
2	Padlock, combination
1	Bag, laundry

After they gave us all this stuff, they told us to pack it inside the duffel bag. Yeah, right. By the time we did that and later unpacked it, the stuff looked like we'd slept in it.

Our time spent at the reception station was rapidly coming to a close, though we didn't know it. Late one afternoon, dressed in our brand-new cotton fatigues with the silly baseball caps, a bunch of odd-looking vehicles pulled up. They looked like they wanted to be buses, but didn't quite make it. They told us to get on, that we were going for a ride. We clambered aboard and the drivers set off for points unknown. Later on we would learn that they called these vehicles "cattle cars." I certainly felt bovine being jammed into the thing, dragging my ubiquitous duffel bag filled with goodies – not to mention the rest of my boxer shorts.

The world exploded. The door of the cattle car was thrown open with a crash and some guy with a purple face and Smokey the Bear hat started screaming something unintelligible. Something about getting off the god-damn thing and moving our asses. I certainly understood that this was not the time to react slowly to a given stimulus, so I grabbed my stuff and ran and ran and ran some more. All along the way, in the evening gloom, some guy was yelling at one of us. The Smokey the Bear hats were all over the place, and none of them looked very happy. One of us fell down

and one Smoky the Bear hat screamed at him while he was falling, wanting to know why he was falling and why he felt he needed to take a break. The Smoky guy called this guy every name in the book and some names I hadn't yet heard. It was awful – the screaming, yelling, turmoil, pandemonium. I ran until my lungs were bursting, across a field with my duffel bag, sweating in the January balminess of the South Carolina winter. I was sure that sometime when I had been least aware of it, I died and went to hell.

Up a hill – a long hill, and then down a street. White two-story buildings. Must be barracks, I thought numbly. These were wooden and looked old, dingy, beat-up. Screaming. Some guy doing pushups. Running, sweating, gasping. Sheer terror through the yellow glow of the streetlights.

The door to the building on the left banged open. I followed the guy in front of me, who turned left on the first floor. Some Smokey guy yelling something unintelligible. Row of bunks, OD green footlockers and gray wall lockers. Highly polished floors, especially in the center. Dim lights from lightbulbs. Crashing sounds, footfalls, guys running upstairs. A Smokey the Bear guy yelling at me to throw my stuff up on the top bunk, whose mattress was bare. Somehow I found the strength to throw this duffel bag, which easily weighed 460 pounds, up on the top bunk. I then stood there in some kind of stock-still position, panting and sweating profusely. Upstairs, I heard what was probably a wall locker crashing down and more screaming and yelling.

Eventually, everybody got in and found a bunk. The screaming and pandemonium stopped. Just heavy breathing and a palpable fear. The bright lights of the modern building of the reception station went away and we were now blessed with an uncertain situation, though it certainly wasn't a vacation spot, and a ramshackle building that we were evidently going to call home for awhile.

Finally, the short, tough-looking guy I remembered seeing in the barber shop called us to gather on the inside of our bunks, facing him as he walked up and down the mirror-like surface of the highly-polished floor. In a normal voice, he introduced himself saying he was the senior drill sergeant for our platoon, Sergeant First Class God. He told us we would call him "Drill Sergeant" that we would not ever call him "Sir". He explained that he was

an NCO and that he worked for a living.

He further explained that we were going to undergo basic training in his platoon – that we were members of 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Bravo Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Combat Training Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Training Brigade. He did not use any of the real garbage that we'd heard in the movies – that he was our mother, father, and while we could pray to God for our souls, that our asses belonged to him. He did say, however, that we were not ever to walk on the same floor with our brand-new boots on that he himself was walking on with his spit-shined boots. We could see that his walking up and down left scuff marks on the highly polished, glassy floor. When we entered the building, we'd walk around, keeping close to the wall. At one end of the building was a latrine which also contained two clothes washers and two dryers to service 32 guys who routinely got dirty. The other end was a small office – his office. The center of the building on each floor was a large bay in which four bunks were lined up end to end toward one side and four bunks were lined up toward the opposite side. Gray, narrow wall lockers were situated between the bunks and green wooden footlockers aligned up directly against the side walls. The second floor had an emergency exit in case of fire, which amounted to a ladder nailed to the outside wall.

His short speech over, he told us to gather in a little closer and observe what he was about to do. He proceeded to begin making a bunk, using hospital corners. He used terms like "dustcover" and tight blankets, and 45 degree angles. We watched him make a bunk in about 2 minutes and when he was done, it looked like a poster bunk for the U.S. Army Basic Training Journal Magazine. Then he ripped it apart, and told us to make our own.

We set to doing that, and nobody spoke except in the quietest of whispers. We knew we were in for a rough go and we didn't want to incur the wrath of any of these guys, least of all this guy who certainly knew how to scream, but somehow seemed more human than some of the other Smokey the Bear guys we'd had the privilege of meeting.

And so began our training. We learned how to march, to take direction without question, to do pushups when we screwed up. If we didn't do something just the way we were told, we'd get a dirty look and the command, "Gimme ten." If we screwed up especially badly, we

get a directive to knock out 20 situps. We learned that before we could go and get chow in the mess hall located just up the hill, we had to do “the bars”, the set of monkey bars that we’d have to negotiate. There was a fundamental problem with the monkey bars. The apparatus wasn’t just a ladder set up horizontally 8 feet off the ground – the ladder rungs had metal sleeves over them that rotated. Negotiating this thing required more than a simple hand-over-hand action. Since the bar sleeves rotated, that meant it was very easy to slip off. I surmised that not only was this apparatus supposed to get us in a blue funk just before going in the chow line, it was supposed to reduce the severity and nature of blisters on the hands. Whatever the reason, the blue funk remained and the blisters stayed too, though much reduced due to the sleeves. It required a lot more upper body strength to negotiate than I had thought, and I had a lot of trouble with the bars. The small guys could usually climb those things like monkeys. I envied them – not the monkey bars, of course, but the small guys who could do those things back and forth, back and forth.

Nevertheless, we’d have to do the bars before marching into the mess hall. While waiting in line, we’d have to remain in the position of Parade Rest. There certainly was no talking. We also had to run everywhere we went – walking was not permitted, unless we were in formation. Even then it wasn’t walking, it was marching. Almost the same thing, except we were expected to do the walking thing in step. This wasn’t especially difficult for me since I’d had plenty of experience with that kind of thing in marching band during high school. Some guys did have trouble in discerning left from right. I began to see the rather formidable job the drill sergeants had.

One guy related his experience with coming into the Army. He said that the judge had given him a choice – either do three years in his jail or go into the Army. His bunk was the second one down from mine. I have no idea what he did to be threatened with prison. Two other guys, who happened to be cousins, had come into the Army on the buddy plan. They both were interested in only two things – weapons and “laht infantry”. They were focused on those two things and very little else. They both had some trouble with the training regimen.

Regarding the mess hall, the one we used was a company-sized facility – a one-story wooden framed building also dated from the WWII era. The kitchen was small, but the cooks back there did a reasonably good job with

chow. I certainly found myself being presented with opportunities to eat more often than I really wanted, but I ate regardless. I pulled KP twice during the 8-week course. I washed dishes the first time and helped set up the dining room tables. The second time I washed pots and pans. It made for a long day, but I wasn’t harassed. In some respects, pulling KP was a welcome relief.

Back in the barracks we learned to pull Fire Guard in two-hour shifts throughout the night. Since the WWII-vintage buildings were veritable firetraps and would be engulfed within minutes should a fire occur, we would don the helmet liner identifying us as the Fire Guard and pull our duty. If you were lucky, the schedule would be set up so that you pulled it towards the beginning of the night (after 10:00 P.M.) or before the drill sergeant came in to roust us out of our racks at 5:30 A.M. I remember pulling it twice and had it somewhere toward the middle. It meant lost sleep but I don’t remember being exceptionally groggy the next day.

I remember a spring storm that knocked out the power in the barracks. We had no light to see by, so I remember climbing into my bunk that night very early – about 8:00 P.M. I hadn’t showered or shaved, a practice I usually did at night before racking out, so I wasn’t quite prepared when the morning’s frantic activities began. It had occurred to me that I was tired beyond comprehension and needed the rest.

We went through the gas chamber, getting a whiff of tear gas – not a pleasant experience, but I was able to hold my breath and keep from inhaling the stuff. It kept me from coughing and choking. We threw hand grenades on the grenade range, first learning how to pull the pin and properly throw the grenade. The Smokey the Bear guys drove up the adrenaline to a fever pitch on that one. Nobody dropped a live grenade, nobody had to fall on it. Everything came out okay.

We marched here and there, very often to the rifle range where we learned how to fire our M16A1 rifles and how to clean them later. I managed to qualify as an expert with the weapon. While out at the ranges we often would have a C-ration for lunch and would horse-trade for the better ones. In those days, a small pack of 4 cigarettes was included within the C-ration accessory pack, along with water-resistant matches, salt and pepper, and even a small bundle of toilet paper. The cigarettes would get traded around too – Winston and Marlboro being the

favorites and the unfiltered cigarettes like Chesterfield the unwanted ones. One of the often-heard phrases from the drill sergeants was, "Smoke 'em if you got 'em." This was a euphemism for taking a break.

One thing we did just about every day – march up and down the infamous "Drag Ass Hill", which was the reverse slope of Tank Hill. Bravo Company was located very close to the summit of Tank Hill, a portion of Ft. Jackson that had remained largely unchanged since WWII. The reverse slope side of Tank Hill featured a couple of narrow paths, about wide enough for two abreast, through wooded areas that headed downhill a good half-mile. After a full day of training, we'd have to climb up Drag Ass Hill with butt-packs, weapons and steel pots. It was arduous at first but as our physical condition improved, the hill became more fun to negotiate than work.

Just the opposite was true in the morning on the way out to the ranges in that we'd get to march down Drag Ass Hill. One morning I was feeling particularly jaunty, perhaps since I happened to lead one of the two columns. The Senior Drill Sergeant marched in the lead toward the center of the two columns. Instead of avoiding puddles, he marched directly in them with his spit-shined boots. I thought that was silly, but he evidently thought it would convince us he was a tough old bird. He was tough all right, but not because he walked in puddles.

Since I was such in a jolly mood, I happened to be marching down the hill slightly faster than the Senior Drill Sergeant and managed to overtake him briefly. He took one look, saw that I was in front of him, and calmly ordered me to drop and give him 20 situps. That directive brought me out of my reverie, so I peeled off and executed the 20 situps. I then re-joined the formation in the back. Thus ended my time "leading" my men into battle and certain victory.

A couple of weeks into the program we were permitted to visit a small PX up on the top of Tank Hill to buy toiletries and similar articles. Candy, gum, and soda was strictly prohibited, however. Beer wasn't even in our vocabularies. We had a photo taken in our green uniforms. I tried to look as fierce as I didn't feel.

Rendering proper military courtesy to a noncommissioned officer upon his entering our barracks was to shout, "At Ease!" cease all activity, and immediately

assume the position of Parade Rest. This would occur at least a couple times after we had returned to the barracks following the day's training. The drill sergeants would make themselves available to provide the inevitable light harassment and answers to our questions. As time went on, the light harassment gradually dwindled and the Senior Drill Sergeant, in particular, would make himself available for questions.

One fine evening I was sitting on my footlocker, brush-shining my boots. As I was shining and buffing away, looking downwards, I saw a pair of spit-shined boots appear, facing me. Since none of us had the faintest clue in knowing how to spit-shine boots, much less have the time or the energy to actually do it, I knew that one of the Drill Sergeants was now standing in front of me. And I was flagrantly violating proper military courtesy in that I was seated and not at the prescribed position of parade rest while this fine gentleman was not only in the barracks but standing in front of me. When I realized what had transpired and my resulting egregious error, I dropped my boot and leaped up, assuming the position of parade rest. But it was too late.

It was the Junior Drill Sergeant – the one we all avoided best we could.

You could hear a pin drop in the barracks. He had zeroed in on me. I cringed, awaiting the onslaught.

Oddly enough, instead of a tongue-lashing, all I heard was a question: "You wahren't gonna git up, were you *Packerhead*?" [italics NOT added]. Since my fine fellow had clearly emanated from the southern United States, his accent resulted in his saying "Packerhead" when he really meant "Peckerhead."

The end result was the same. I got to knock out 10 pushups. I was moderately surprised not to get the Ultimate Punishment – digging a six-by. A six-by was a hole dug 6 feet long by six feet wide by six feet deep. In short it meant a lot of work. The worst part was it had to be done under the barracks itself. (For purposes of explanation, all barracks were built on brick stilts, presumably to keep the wood from rotting. This method of construction left an area underneath in which the hapless soul could crawl, carrying his entrenching tool.)

One night, late, the barracks door banged open and somebody staggered inside. He scuffed his way onto

the center section of the floor, the place we were forbidden from walking on in our boots. While the light wasn't on and we couldn't immediately see who it was, we recognized the voice. It was the Junior Drill Sergeant, a staff sergeant who also was a Vietnam veteran. He whooped and hollered, raising hell and waking everybody up. He was too drunk to hassle anybody though, and after a few minutes of that nonsense, he left the barracks the same way he came in – by crashing through the door going out.

A few days later we were told to take seats on a set of bleachers. This particular drill sergeant railed on about not being permitted to remain within the Army. It seemed pretty clear that he had some problems that he couldn't overcome and that the Army had worked with him enough. While none of us liked this particular drill sergeant, we knew a serious thing had occurred.

There was some racial tension in the platoon. One black guy in particular seemed to delight in carrying a chip on his shoulder. Remembering to stay out of trouble, I stayed away from him best I could. Still, there was one day that he decided he wanted to pick on me. We almost came to blows, then it occurred to me that he was looking for precisely that – a fight so that he could demonstrate his black prowess. I backed off, but he left me alone the rest of the time. I concluded that he was insane and he wouldn't stop until somebody knocked him cold.

About six weeks into basic training and with the final two weeks rapidly approaching, we were permitted an overnight pass. On a Friday night, a bunch of us went down to a local hotel in Columbia and got rooms. We'd heard we could get some "company" so we talked to a guy in the hotel about arranging for some "company". About 7:00 P.M. somebody knocked on my door. It was a sweet young thing who definitely knew more about things than I did. After going around once with her, she somehow scrounged \$40 more out of me than I'd initially paid with the "promise" that she'd come back and spend the night. Naïve isn't the term. Being flat-out stupid is more accurate. Needless to say, she didn't show and she was able to walk out with \$60 of the \$341 I had earned for that month.

Mike Del Gaudio slept in the bunk under mine. He was dark, fairly tall, and even more scared than I was (which was considerable). We got along pretty well because we both knew to stay out of trouble and to not be first or

last for anything.

The next weekend, Del Gaudio and I did the same kind of thing. He and I went to a local motel this time and expressed an interest in some "company". Sure enough, a half-hour later a knock on the door. Two women – one was rather senior and mature and the other younger, quiet and didn't say much. I did the negotiating, since I'd been down this road before. (I certainly didn't admit to Del Gaudio that I'd been ripped off for being a first-class idiot the previous weekend.) While negotiating, it seemed clear that I would be the one to "date" the more mature one. At consummating the "date", however, I decided to go with the younger, more quiet of the two. Del Gaudio went with the more mature woman.

Two weeks later, while I was at cook school still at Fort Jackson, I got a letter from Del Gaudio, who had gone on to medical training at Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio. He lamented that he had caught the clap and had to get treatment for it. I thought to myself, better him than me. At least he's at a place that's full of doctors. I've got a bunch of cook school students around me – they wouldn't help me very well at all.

Everybody in my platoon made it through basic training – a rather unusual situation that characterized the positive leadership of our Senior Drill Sergeant. By the time we finished and graduated, we were feeling very much like a team. We'd been through a very tough, demanding training program and had survived.

Even the PT test went well for me. I was able to negotiate the bars, the tricky turns at the end of each section, and do the minimum number required plus a few more. I was no monkey and I couldn't see myself trying to emulate one. The Run, Dodge, and Jump, the Bend and Reach, Pushups and a One Mile Run comprised the PT test. Five events, none of them easy for me.

We participated in a graduation ceremony. It was the first time I saw an Army band performing. They looked sure of themselves and marched far better than we did. And they did it while playing instruments, reading music, and paying attention to the drum major signals. It looked incredibly complicated, but I thought that would be something I could do.

After the ceremony, the Senior Drill Sergeant honored us by calling us "Soldiers." It was a good feeling. After

we got done cleaning the barracks for the 412<sup>th</sup> time, stripped the bunks, and otherwise prepared the facility for the next cycle, we had some time to sit down with the Senior Drill. He was relaxed and jovial and even poked fun at some of us when our Advanced Individual Training (AIT) assignments were read aloud. He looked at me in surprise and asked, "Cook?" I just shrugged and he handed me a copy of my orders.

Some guys were going on to other posts for their training and many, if not all, of these guys were permitted some leave. Not I – I would remain on Ft. Jackson, reporting immediately to AIT with no leave. I was quite embittered about that, although I wasn't the only one. The idea of reporting for another 8 weeks of training, with likely the same amount of harassment, didn't sit well with me. I had to admit to myself that for the first time, I was homesick.

All the same, a truck finally came for me and I threw my stuff into the back of it. I would report to A Company, 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Training Brigade for my course of instruction in how to burn food. When I was done with this mess, I'd only then be permitted for some leave and my next adventure as a member of the "permanent party" at Ft. Devens.

In cook school I decided I didn't want to learn how to burn food. After all, I was an Eagle Scout and I certainly had learned how to burn food in getting the Cooking merit badge. No, I rather wanted to play euphonium in an Army Band. The more I thought about that idea, the better I liked it. But I had to undergo cook school first. After all, it had been guaranteed to me.

So I proceeded to undergo the training. It wasn't really all that bad – the harassment was certainly minimal. We were even permitted to grow a mustache, which I did. I wanted to look older than my years and I thought a mustache would fake everybody out.

All the same, we'd fall out in the morning in formation after having gotten up and march to chow. We'd come back on our own and prepare for the next formation, then march to school. I can say with absolute certainty that I learned absolutely nothing in cook school. We didn't learn to bake, although I remember a class about it. Baking was the one area that I'd hoped to learn about, but we did very little baking.

One morning during the last two weeks of cook school (which was nothing more than slave labor – practical exercise and work in a functioning dining facility), I was frying eggs on the chow line. We'd fry the eggs (either scrambled or over easy – none of that omelet stuff) in a little bit of bacon fat, then use a spatula and scoop them up onto a plate. We'd then put the plate on a narrow section of the chow line where the soldiers lining up would take one and move along. One guy knocked over a plate and I reached out and grabbed it. During the process of doing this, I managed to send my back into spasms which was a condition I'd suffered when I was a young teenager while playing baseball.

I literally couldn't walk in an upright position. I was canted over sideways and in a lot of pain. I walked about a half-mile in the bent-over position to the medical clinic and received an injection of something that knocked me out. Things evened out eventually, but I was still sore when the PT test rolled around. Figuring I was going to have a problem in passing the test, I explained the situation to the drill sergeant and he told me just to do the best I could. This time, unlike in basic training, we had to run two miles instead of only one in addition to the other four tests previously mentioned. So I trundled around the track the prescribed period of time and as I suspected, I failed the run by about 15 seconds. That didn't seem to bother the drill sergeant a great deal because I still passed the course and was permitted to graduate.

With that, I managed to make my way back to Michigan for a couple weeks of leave. I felt I'd earned it. When I went into the Army in January, I weighed perhaps 190 lbs. and had a 36-inch waist. On my way home in late April 1975, I had a 30-inch waist and weighed maybe 165 lbs. I was on top of the world because my next stop was my "permanent party" station – I was done with training and the hassles that are inherent to Army training.

Following my leave and factoring in three days in travel time, I loaded up my 1968 Pontiac Tempest (with the caved-in right side and the front suspension that didn't) and headed across the Ambassador Bridge to Windsor, Ontario. My plan was to take Canadian Highway 401 to Buffalo, New York, cross the Peace Bridge there and head across upstate New York on the NY Tollway.

At the end of Day One, I stopped in Depew, NY, a suburb of Buffalo. This was completely unremarkable

– nothing there but a bunch of 18-wheelers – so I set out on Day Two and made it to Williamstown, Massachusetts, where I found a small motel to stay overnight on my second night on the road. Along the way and in Troy, NY, I ran across my first New England “rotary”. A rotary is nothing more than a traffic circle, but to this Midwesterner who had never incurred one of these, it was a bit unsettling. I managed to survive and picked up State Route 2, which crossed over into Massachusetts. Williamstown, a picturesque New England town at the northern edge of the Berkshire Mountains in western Massachusetts, was small, quaint, and quiet. I enjoyed an afternoon walk in the springtime air before getting some dinner and settling down for the night and my final push to Ft. Devens the next morning.

Of course, I had my massive personal clothing issue with me, to include my mandatory boxer shorts. After showering in the morning, I put one pair of those things on, a white T-shirt, and one set of my khakis. I was still a Private E-1, the lowest of the low, but I was proud and I was ready to report in. Not long after setting out from Williamstown along Route 2, I spotted a roadside diner and stopped in for breakfast.

I sat at the counter and ordered a full breakfast and coffee. In talking with the owner of the diner, he asked me where I was headed. I explained I was on my way to Ft. Devens for my first assignment in the Army and we talked some about his background. He had served some years before, so he understood what I was going through. When I was done eating and ready to push on, he told me that the breakfast was on the house. I was touched and humbled by his generosity. He certainly didn't have to do that.