

January 29, 2019

Gary Hooper

I have kept in contact with several of my Officer Candidate School classmates over these past fifty years and have shared some of my memoirs from this class with a few of them. Some have left this earth for the Big PX in the sky. One my classmates forwarded those memoirs to my OCS Tactical Officer, Lt James Bredemus who e-mailed me a very kind note. The following is my e-mail back to him.

Dear Lt Jim Bredemus,

Prior to the Army, I never written a check nor ever balanced a check book. I bounced a \$5.00 check at the PX and I was in real trouble. The Company Commander, Captain Scott, wanted me out of the OCS program. You went to bat for me and saved my butt.

I was the candidate Special Affairs Officer and I was the guy who decorated your car when your roommate got married. You owned a blue Chevy. You informed me on Friday afternoon that it was my responsibility to make Kleenex flowers and ribbons the evening before the Saturday wedding and that I had 15 minutes during the wedding ceremony to perfectly decorate your car and to follow the wedding entourage to ensure that no flower fell off, and if it did to immediately retrieve it so that you didn't receive a DR. I purchased five boxes of white Kleenex and five rolls of scotch tape and spent the evening and most of the night making puff flowers for the wedding event along with another candidate named Jim Stuart from New York, whom was paneled out in the 21st week because of academics. The wedding was at 10am that Saturday but we were informed that we couldn't start until everyone was inside the chapel. In twenty minutes, your car looked sensational. We followed you out of Fort Gordon and only one flower fell off which we immediately recovered. The total cost for the Kleenex and tape was \$6.97 which we were never reimbursed. Therefore, after 50 years with inflation, interest and annual penalties, my accountant states that you owe me \$781.49, but because of you, I learned so much about myself and leadership, I am hereby cancelling the debt.

I remember that I was the Candidate Platoon Leader for the weekend during 13th week of our class and you called me into your office and informed me that the platoon had a weekend pass. I replied, "Sir, Candidate Hooper, yes, Sir." I saluted

and began to exit your office. You then said. "I didn't dismiss you candidate, you are also to prepare for a full junk on the bunk inspection that will take place on Sunday at 1300hrs." I replied, "Sir, Candidate Hoopfer, Yes Sir." I again began to exit your office. You then stated, "I didn't dismiss you candidate, you are also to strip and wax the platoon area floor and I want platoon barracks painted." I responded that there wasn't any wax or paint in the company area. You responded by informing me that this was a personal problem and that I perhaps should talk to a chaplain. Then I was dismissed.

I called for the platoon sergeant and squad leaders and informed them that even though we had been granted weekend passes, nobody was going anywhere. We stole paint, rollers, brushes, and wax from every paint locker which my guys obtained within a mile. We had to mix multiple paint colors and painted the entire barracks. It was painted a kind of a blue green with black trim. It was beautiful. In the morning we striped the floor and waxed it. We signed out our rifles and washed them in the shower, dried and oiled them.

You showed up at 12:50. We were ready. I received a merit for the condition of the rifles, but for some reason you ordered Candidate Frolich to about face and informed me that Candidate Frolich had missed a belt loop and I was ordered to do 100 push-ups for failing to supervise. I was really pissed. How do you miss a belt loop and how did you know that he had missed a belt loop? I never received another command assignment for the next 10 weeks. I thought that I had failed and was going to be paneled out. Thinking back on it, I guess this was a leadership test and I passed it.

I understand that you probably don't remember me, but I will always remember you. I remember that we were never to sit on the Tactical Officer's toilet seat as if was some sort of military religious icon. I graduated somewhere in the middle of the class. When each of us had to fill out the bayonet sheets on each other, my bayonet sheets always began with "If Candidate Hoopfer could ever learn tact and diplomacy..."

In the second week of OCS, we had to take and sign the Honor Code oath, "I will not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate anyone in my midst who does." This is the same oath that the service academy students have to take. An oath with this significant dictum must last forever. I have always maintained that oath as a lifetime guide in my personal and professional life. It has served me well.

Our class started with 106 candidates and graduated 43 of the original class. I remember crying in my bunk the first three nights in OCS wondering what had I got myself in to. I remember you fainting after giving blood. I remember the square meals. I remember doing a review parade in the low crawl position around the parade ground. I remember three-minute phone privileges. I remember poogy bait runs to the PX. I remember the Chinese Fire Drills.

I remember the "Partridge Inn" in Augusta. You always called me either "Candidate Gross" or "Candidate Magic." You asked me how many demerits I had? I answered, "today or this week?" You answered "This week, Candidate Gross." I answered, "Sir, Candidate Hoopfer, 80 Demerits, Sir." You made the sign of the cross and thereby forgave 75 demerits. We met at the Partridge Inn where you had me recon the female availability; I reported that there are two targets at 2 o'clock, a blond and a red head", and you asked, "Who's the best looking?" And I replied, "The blond." You replied, "You got the red head." The following afternoon, you walked into the day room where I was the Day Room Orderly that afternoon with the red head that I had been dancing with the previous night. I was not pleased.

I loved being in Vietnam. I loved working with the Vietnamese. I loved leading, training, advising, and working with the Vietnamese; I had two Popular Forces platoons and they were good guys. I went over to Vietnam at 175lbs and 5 months later, I weighed 125lbs. I left the field and became the Advisory Group Adjutant. My replacement in the field was a Captain Redman whose first words were, "I hate the Vietnamese." I responded, "You are going to have a very long and unhappy year, Captain."

I was probably much better as an Infantry officer than I ever could be as a Signal Corps officer. I guess it is just destiny and karma. I loved being in the field with my platoons of Vietnamese Popular Forces.

Two years ago, I return to the Me Cong River delta on a river cruise and traveled past my Area of Operations in Vinh Long Province. I began to cry. I often wonder what had happened to my Vietnamese platoons.

I wish to thank you for leadership, your training, your toughness in perhaps making my life extremely interesting for those six months, because I, by being able to survive OCS and you in particular, everything after in my life 'was gravy, just nothing but gravy.' But I will never forgive you for Tiffany, the red head, who could have been the possible eternal love of my life.

Gary Hoopfer
Your Officer Candidate ("Candidate Gross")
1Lt Signal Corps

An Aside: Last Sunday was International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In my DNA document search, I found a transport manifest list for a concentration camp in Poland that listed two Hupfer's in August, 1943. The sixth column had the word "Jude." Two of my ancestors perished in the death camps in Poland.