

Section 2, Branch Options and Assignments Other than Infantry

Finance Officer – The Looie with the Loot – Tom Lankford

Upon graduation, I remember being told by General Berry (Assistant Commandant of the Army Infantry School) that “you can’t make a career in this Army without earning a Combat Infantry Badge.” I guess he didn’t understand the short horizon most of us had relative to our intended military careers! I polished the Finance Diamonds affixed to my collars and headed to my next duty assignment, Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis, for a three-month program to learn the Army way of bean-counting. Then it was on to New Cumberland Army Depot, across the river from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. My principle recollections from that time were our periodic trips to the Pentagon where, as a newly minted 2LT, I stayed in the background and kept my mouth shut.

Finally, in July 1970, it was off to Vietnam, where I was assigned to the 23rd Infantry (Americal) Division with an Admin Company stationed in Chu Lai on the South China Sea. We had 200 Finance staff members to handle the processing of records and resolve pay concerns/modification requests for the 28,000 soldiers assigned to the division. We all made regular trips to the various fire bases in our area to meet with the troops and respond to their Finance concerns. Of course, we managed the distribution of cash pay once a month.

My most memorable event was the snap announcement of a “C-Day” in early October. I’m sure you all remember these attempts to render worthless all the US MPCs (Military Payment Certificates) that had leaked into the black market by quickly replacing all certificates legally held by US troops with new certificates of a different color and then declaring the previous scrip worthless. My assignment that morning was to arm up, grab a couple of footlockers filled with \$1.5 million in new MPC, and, along with ten men, hop on a Huey for a trip to Duc Pho and three long days of counting incoming old currency and exchanging it for the new. After converting \$800K, we balanced to the dollar, something only bean counters would be proud of! It was quite an experience.

However, in spite of our assigned duties, we all knew that the most important thing we did was respond to regular emergency calls for blood donation from the 9th Medevac Hospital, located just down the hill from our offices. Our guys were there on a moment’s notice.

So, looking back, my year in-country was much different than for most of the others who were assigned to Vietnam. About the only consistently common aspect was that almost all of us returned to “the world” after a year, relatively healthy and intact, and over time,

that year faded into a distant memory. That said, I hope we will always remember our OCS classmates who were not so fortunate. [*Editor's Note: Tom was the 50th Company's "Distinguished Graduate" and as such was automatically eligible for a Branch transfer.*]

North to Alaska with the Combat Engineers – John Jay

After OCS, I declined an invitation to try out for Ranger School, but there was a branch transfer opportunity to the Combat Engineers. I was expecting to go over to 'Hot and Humid' to build roads and bridges and maybe use C-4 for something other than heating up rations. At that point the vagaries of testing and wonders of Army reasoning took an experienced logger, equipment operator and welder and assigned him to an ADM unit. For those of us who still don't comprehend acronyms, that stands for Atomic Demolition Munitions. Okay, I'll be all right with that. Show me how to blow up big things!

After three months of training at Ft. Belvoir, Linda and I were off to Fairbanks Alaska with everything we owned in the back of a 1/2 ton pickup (including the motorcycle). Then it was 18 months of Arctic maneuvers, rock and ice climbing, building ice bridges, roads, and primitive air strips, blowing up ice bridges and ice jams, and constructing cabins in Native villages. All the while, many of my OCS barracks mates were soaking up Agent Orange and dodging 'incoming'. Some were badly hurt. Two didn't come home. The irony of it has shadowed my days for 47 years.

"Quartermastering" in Thailand: Hard Duty, but Somebody Had to Do It – Bill Snodgrass

While I was at Ft. Lee an opening came up for a Rations Breakdown Officer in Bangkok. It was a "long tour," so I would have to extend for a year. But I could take my family and so I went for it. I was assigned to Bangkok for two years with my family; my second daughter was born there. It was a pretty cushy assignment. I got a \$300 cost-of-living allowance for the housing and lived in a gated three-story apartment complex. We had two maids, one live-in to cook and take care of the kids, and another to do house work, all for less than \$100 per month, plus rice for their subsistence.

I was first assigned as the Rations Breakdown Officer that supplied the embassies and those troops in Laos and Cambodia that Nixon said were not there. (Someone was sure eating a lot of rations!) I was then transferred to be the Commissary Supply Officer. The Commissary Officer was an ROTC graduate who didn't know his butt from a hot rock. He was relieved, and we got a Major who was outstanding. I learned more from him than anyone in the Army. And he taught me how to play golf. I had 5 GI's and 73 Local Nationals to run a million-dollar inventory. Remember, in the 1970s that was a lot of stuff because most of the items were less than a dollar each. The biggest problem we had was pilferage. The Local Nationals liked their food hot and spicy, so they would

“borrow” Tabasco by sticking bottles down their pants. On the black market a bottle of Tabasco brought almost as much as a bottle of Johnny Walker. The locals would also wolf down a lot of Indian Curry, which was **really** hot.

In 1971, I was put in charge of the Clothing and Supply Center. Because we were at the end of the supply chain, and a low priority to boot, we were always out of stock of our supply items, like at a rate of 67% zero balances for items. The shelves, in other words, were bare. (When a supply ship stopped in Vietnam, the troops there rightfully had a higher priority than us, and the system would divert our shipments.) The Major before me “solved” that problem by falsifying the records to show that we had only a 10% zero balances. (He did this by withholding one of most inventory items –a single ream of paper, for example-- so the inventory reports would not show a “zero balance.” This made him look good by having a low zero balances percentage in his reports, but, of course, this actually hid the real problem in the supply situation.) When I got the assignment, I reported this to my commanding officer. The Major, who had been a rising star, got busted and was rified out of the service. Anyway, I got my inventory down to a pretty respectable 20% zero balances and received the Army Commendation Medal.

We were assigned to the Navy Motor Pool for transportation. When I needed a car my Sergeant would go over and pick up an old vehicle. When I made Captain, my Sergeant started calling the motor pool. He would say, “*Captain* Snodgrass needs a vehicle tomorrow.” The Navy Motor Pool took this to mean that a Navy Captain needed a vehicle and sent me a new car with a driver. The strangest assignment I ever had was when, as the Duty Officer of the Day, I had to escort the commanding officer’s dog to the airport, as he (the CO) was being transferred stateside. His wife, by the way, was a pain and never said thank you for anything.

One more “war story.” Bangkok was a big R&R destination and had a lot of “massage” parlors. When I hurt my back and could not stand up straight, my supervisory Local National suggested that I go to a massage parlor. I told him I had my wife with me and didn’t want to mess with the massage parlor scene. He told me to go to one that had Japanese letters; these were legitimate. I found one, and the gal in charge ordered me up a very pretty masseuse. I said (in Thai), “No, you do not understand I have a bad back and I’m hurting. I need a back massage.” She said, “Ooooooooooooooh, you want a massage.” She assigned me a short fat gal who walked on my back for an hour. I walked out standing tall and lookin’ good, like I shoulda been in Hollywood.

A Chemical Officer in Vietnam – Rick Harner

After OCS, I got a branch transfer to the Chemical Corps and went to Fort McClellan, Alabama for Chemical Officer Training. This was scary stuff. Training involved learning all of the various chemical and biological agents available in the Army arsenal. We learned their characteristics of toxicity, symptoms of toxicity, methods of delivery,

treatment after exposure, and methods to minimize exposure. We also had nuclear warfare training and were taught how to predict nuclear fallout patterns and rates of exposure. After a month of training, I was assigned to the 2nd Armored Division at Fort Hood, Texas where I ran the gas chamber to train troops in the proper use of the gas mask. (Think about working in a room full of tear gas day after day!)

From there I went to Vietnam and was assigned to the Quy Ninon support command in I Corps. There I worked in the tactical operations center, coordinating security for all the compounds. It seemed that in Vietnam there was not much use for a Chemical Officer, so most of us got assigned duties related to our infantry OCS training. From there I went to the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Eagle, near Hue. I worked in the tactical operations center of Division artillery where I coordinated helicopter landings at the various firebases. My job was to keep our aircraft from being shot down when the firebase was on a fire mission. Occasionally I would visit a firebase to inspect the gas masks that were on hand in case of an enemy tear gas attack. We also got to field test a new rocket fired from a helicopter gunship that would deliver tear gas to the target area. It took the pilots several attempts to deliver the weapon successfully. I then got my first command assignment at the 10th Chemical platoon where we made napalm in 55 gallon drums to be loaded under helicopters and dropped on enemy locations. Mostly these were used to clear suspected booby trap sites. After ten months in Vietnam I was released from active duty and returned to the States.

A PERSONAL PLEA FROM A CHEMICAL OFFICER: In Vietnam, Agent Orange was widely used as a chemical defoliant to remove the leaves from trees and brush. By the time I reached Vietnam, Agent Orange was no longer used, but the residues from earlier usage were still present. Agent Orange was later shown to be carcinogenic, causing a wide variety of cancers and other maladies, including prostate cancer, Hodgkin's, Parkinson's, and diabetes to name a few. **IF YOU WERE EVER SENT TO VIETNAM IN A MILITARY CAPACITY**, you are considered to have been in contact with Agent Orange and you may be eligible for compensation. **CONTACT THE VA ABOUT ENROLLING IN THE AGENT ORANGE REGISTRY.**

Di Di Mauing Outta Khe Sanh - Adventures of a Signal Officer – John Lee

When drafted, I was working in Alaska as a structural engineer for an oil company and moonlighting as a charter pilot and flight instructor. I had a degree in Civil Engineering and had taken many electrical engineering courses. On OCS graduation day, I was summoned to the 50th Company Orderly Room for an interview. The suspense was chilling, but as it turned out, Personnel had checked my background and wanted to know if I would consider exchanging my new crossed rifles for crossed semaphores and accept an immediate commission into the Signal Corps. Okay! After Airborne School at Benning came Signal Officer Basic at Fort Gordon and then an MOS-defining Communications Center Operations Course at Fort Monmouth, NJ. After Fort

Monmouth I was assigned to an Airborne Infantry Battalion of the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg. Then it was on to Vietnam with the 37th Signal Battalion, 1st Signal Brigade in Da Nang. That assignment, with heartfelt thanks to some great Enlisted Men, NCOs, and Officers, set me up on my life's course. My Commanding Officer badly needed a Battalion S3. Because the war was winding down, Brigade couldn't send them a qualified officer, so they decided to take a chance on me, a lowly snot-nosed Second Looie who was asked to do a Major's job. Thanks mostly to some great NCOs I navigated that assignment quite successfully and was exposed in depth to virtually all Army Signal technologies. For a while, I even doubled as S2 (Intel). Again, many thanks to some great Officers and NCOs for helping me pull that off successfully.

I was in this assignment for about seven months and was really into it, so much so that I even declined R&R. The 37th Signal Battalion had a detachment at Khe Sahn, near the DMZ. Khe Sanh was a 1st Cav Airmobile firebase. As I understood things, the overall mission of the 1st Cav was to secure the DMZ and slow the NVA down to enable the overall US troop withdrawal. The Detachment Commander was about to ETS and I asked for the job. I got it and recall that I was there about 40 days. When the weather was bad and the gunships couldn't fly, "Charlie" rained rockets and light artillery down on us almost continuously, or so it seemed. I lost one man to a rocket (That still haunts me. He was fetching some part out of a Conex, when a round came in after him, right through the door.) My above-ground equipment (antennas, air conditioners, generators and trucks) took a continuous shrapnel beating. Still, we kept everything running until the very end. That itself was remarkable because most of my troops were working on equipment that wasn't included in their MOS. Finally, the NVA came after us with everything they had, including armor. Airstrikes (including B-52s) couldn't stop their assault, and the order finally came down for all units to pull out of Khe Sanh altogether....NOW!... and that was the end of that. I'll never forget LTC Bill Clingempeel, 1st Signal Brigade, formerly of the 82nd, who was right there with me and personally helped me maintain order, control, and classified equipment security protocols during our hasty withdrawal down the A Shau Valley. He was badly burned when a round hit one of my fuel storage revetments, just as we were pulling out, but he survived.

I was a "Legal Beagle" on LT Calley's My Lai Trial Defense Team – Brooks Doyle

Shortly before OCS graduation a TAC (LT Toolson I presume) approached me and asked if I was interested in remaining at Ft. Benning to work in a Special Courts Martial office as my first assignment. I chose the Special Courts Martial assignment, prosecuting minor offenses such as AWOL, disobedience of orders, drugs, etc. I did this for about eighteen months. Non-JAG lawyers could prosecute cases, but not defend soldiers so charged. During this assignment, I met and got to know a good group of JAGC (Judge

Advocate General's Corps) lawyers. Eventually, I decided to request a branch transfer to JAG, and it was accepted. I by-passed 1st LT and was commissioned a Captain. Timing is everything and so is "location, location, location." I needed a JAG assignment. And LT Calley (of My Lai Massacre infamy) needed another lawyer for his defense team; the trial was about to be held at Benning. I was tapped for the job. (There were four of us; two JAG officers and two civilian attorneys.) My initial role was to travel around the U.S. interviewing every member of Calley's platoon, trying to determine what they would likely testify at trial. I was on an airplane virtually every day going city to city and state to state. The My Lai event had occurred March 16, 1968 but didn't come to light until the following year. Calley was charged, I believe, in early 1970. A lot of the pre-trial work (e.g. discovery requests, motions, etc.) had commenced before I joined the team. By the way, William "Rusty" Calley, had gone through Infantry OCS sometime in 1967.

The Ft. Benning Staff Judge Advocate's (SJA) office had tried earlier to procure funds to remodel the post's General Court Martial court room, without any luck. As soon as senior brass decided that Calley would be tried at Ft. Benning, money somehow turned up. While the remodeling was occurring, the Special Courts Martial court room where I was initially working was used for preliminary hearings. On one occasion at such a hearing in my building, I was in my office and word came that Calley had a phone call. I was asked if it would be OK for him to use my phone. That was the first time I had seen this individual. My thought then was how awesome – or did we even use the word "awesome" back in 1970? --it would be if I could be present, if even just for an hour, at the trial once it convened. Little did I know that I would spend every day in the court room for what turned out to be a two-month "trial of the decade." This involved being on National News a number of times. Calley and I at one point spent about two weeks, during a recess, up at Walter Reed Hospital while the government shrink interviewed him regarding his sanity. One of the defense witnesses had testified that Calley may have done what he was charged with (i.e. 102 murders) because of mental issues. That got an immediate recess so the government could get their mental experts involved. Calley was, of course, convicted of three murders and sentenced to life in prison. The Ft. Benning Commanding General eventually reduced the sentence to, I think, 20 years and President Nixon reduced the sentence further to 10 years. Calley was eligible for parole and got out after about a year and a half. *[Editor's Note: Brooks chose not to comment on his views of LT Calley because he still considers their relationship to be legally privileged.]*

After the trial was over, the SJA (Staff Judge Advocate) contracted out the job of transcribing the record, which numbered in excess of 5000 pages. I note that one of the young gals who came to Ft. Benning to type up the record was named Louann. She and I became an "item" and we got married in 1979 after dating for about 8 years. So, for the first time in about 46 years, we will be able to return to the place where we first met.

Congressional Liaison – Navigating Tricky Waters – John O’Shea

As it turned out, OCS prepared me for a very different “military” assignment. Infantry training focuses on the human dimension of warfare with a soldier-centric approach placing high value on individual discipline and resilience, personal initiative, and performance-oriented leadership. This ethos certainly prepared me to be an effective platoon leader along the DMZ of Korea, but little did I know that it would similarly prepare me to be an effective liaison officer on Capitol Hill, 7,000 miles from the Korean peninsula.

As a soon-to-be promoted major, I was selected as one of a small group of military officers assigned to Congressional liaison for the Secretary of the Army, a position for which there is no field manual, no training, and no forgiveness. While there is no school for such an assignment, there is opportunity to apprentice if one is fortunate to be mentored by someone who previously served in that position.

Liaison officers provide information and data to Congress and organize fact-finding travel when requested by Members of Congress. The purpose of the travel is to enable the Members to make informed decisions regarding authorizations and appropriations for the Armed Services. While that process, on the surface, seems logical and straightforward, political realities reveal a turbulent undercurrent sometimes in conflict with logic and reason. That is when individual discipline is critical for maintaining an effective relationship with both Members and staff of Congress.

So what did OCS teach that helped me navigate the risky waters of legislative liaison? First was veracity, second was resilience, and third was a rock solid sense of humor. Credibility is the coin of the realm in legislative liaison: without it there is nothing. Credibility is delivering unvarnished facts even when the facts are bad news. That’s when resilience pays off because sometimes the messenger is shot (or would prefer to be). But, just as in 50th Company during 1969, humor lifts, humor sustains and humor wins.