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Chapter Two

I don't remember a great deal about the fall semester at Denison in 1968 except that I gradually stopped going to class. The Econ major that my father had arranged for me was unfolding itself, chapter by tedious chapter, in macroeconomics lectures delivered weekday mornings by a gray-suited pedagogue, and I simply couldn't stay awake.

The son and grandson of Yankee manufacturers—and himself involved in the affairs of Winship Luggage from the time he was a boy—my father never for a moment considered that I might be unsuited for business. For a good portion of his life, he looked in vain for some shred of evidence that my brother or I would, finally, magically, blossom into the “Businessman Son” he confidently expected, never recognizing my younger sister as his heir apparent, although she was standing right in front of him.

In any event, I returned home for the Christmas holidays in 1968 with a sense of impending doom and carefully sounded out Mrs. Blair (the administrative head of the local Selective Service Office) one Sunday after church in late December, as



Congregational Church, North Main Street, Canandaigua,
NY—circa 1968

people milled around the steps of the Congregational Church.

“But Bill,” she said, smiling warmly at me, “you have nothing to worry about. You’re still in college.”

“Not for very much longer,” I muttered, trying hard not to be overheard by my parents, who were chatting with friends nearby.

“Come see me Monday in my office,” she told me firmly.

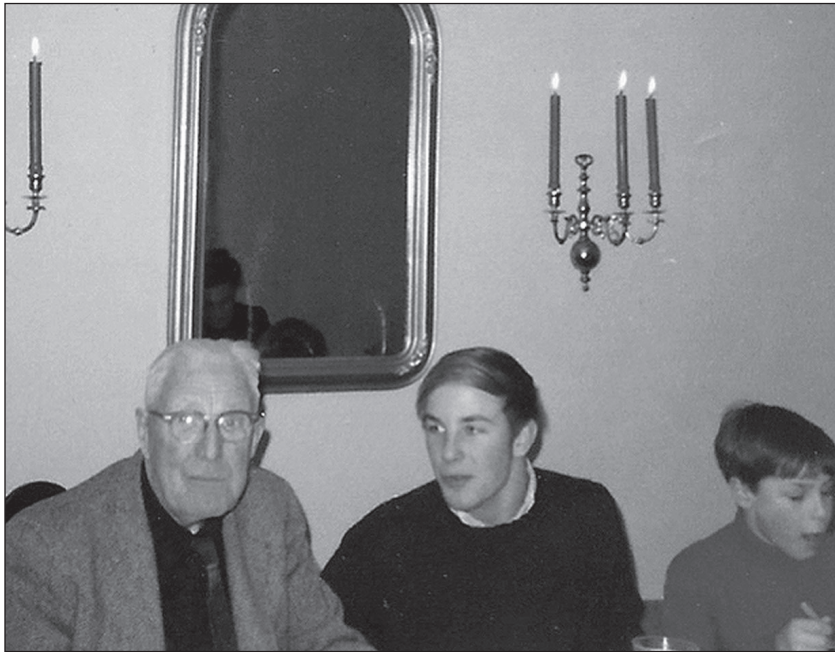
Mrs. Blair ushered me into her office in the Canandaigua Post Office building and carefully closed the door. The news was as bad as could be expected. Since the Tet Offensive, launched by North Vietnam at the beginning of the year, the U.S. government was conscripting every warm-blooded,

semi-comatose male it could lay its hands on—except those with a college deferment.

“How about some *other* school?” Mrs. Blair suggested, with concern in her voice. I shook my head and thanked her, knowing that my father wouldn’t go for it.

“You can come and stay with me, you know,” said my Aunt Pete, gripping me fiercely by the arm as we stood in the kitchen moments before Christmas dinner, her voice low so as not to be overheard by my parents in the dining room. Pete was my mother’s younger sister, a professor at McGill University in Montreal.

“I can’t,” I told her, both of us understanding that fleeing to Canada would irrevocably debar me from any future



My grandfather (A. W. Winship), me, and Josh—Christmas dinner 1968



My father, Aunt Charlotte, Susie, and Winnie—Christmas dinner 1968

Christmas with the family.

Pete and my father occupied opposing political positions, and their dinner table arguments were legendary. In November 1968, Richard Nixon had been elected president; Pete felt that Nixon's foreign policy was fundamentally unsound, and she advanced this proposition over Christmas dinner.

"Let me tell you something," said my father, as he leaned forward, his forefinger stabbing the table. "If the communists take over Vietnam, they're going to march straight into Laos and Cambodia."

"Now, darling . . ." murmured my mother.

"And the *NEXT* thing you know," said my father, his

voice rising, “they’ll be standing on a beach in California, pointing a gun at your head, and telling you *WHEN TO GO TO BED, WHAT TIME TO GET UP, AND WHAT TO EAT FOR BREAKFAST!*”

My Aunt doubted that the North Vietnamese had their eye on real estate in California, but once “communism” had been invoked, the discussion quickly cycled beyond the bounds of reason and logic.

Over Christmas vacation in ’68, everybody went to see *Romeo and Juliet*, Zeffirelli’s new-age paean to romantic love, running for the umpteenth week at the Playhouse, but I found I couldn’t sit through a screening with the military hanging over my head.



Playhouse Theater, Chapin Street, Canandaigua, NY—1968



South Main Street, Canandaigua, NY—Christmas holidays 1968

In the first week of January 1969, the Registrar's Office at Denison notified me that my scholarship was being withdrawn and that I was now on academic probation. When I failed to register for the winter semester, I watched as my draft status transformed itself from 2-S into 1-A.

In the final week of January, I made my way across the snow-covered sidewalk to the newly installed Army Recruiting Office on South Main Street in Canandaigua. The empty storefront was unheated (the radiator had broken), and the two recruiting sergeants were pacing around, smoking cigarettes and swinging their arms.

They were delighted to see me—the rate of Army recruitment having fallen to record low levels.

College experience? Outstanding. They would immediately send me to Officers Candidate School. “Whatta you think about THAT?” said the Army recruiter, enthusiastically strewing colored pamphlets across his desk.

“What kind of commitment are we talking about?” I asked.

“Let’s see: Basic Training . . . AIT . . . six months of OCS before you’re commissioned—total of about five years,” he answered.

I headed for the door. While I accepted the necessity of atoning for my academic failure, five years was too long to spend in purgatory.

The Navy recruiter in Geneva was likewise delighted to see me. College experience? He would immediately place me in Officers Candidate School. “SEE THE WORLD!” he told me in a comradely way. The commitment? Six years.

Same story with the Air Force.

In the end, I walked back into the Army Recruiting Office in Canandaigua, where the same two guys were pacing around, swinging their arms.

“Hey there, young fellow,” one of them greeted me. Had I given any thought to “Officers Candidate”— I waved him off.

“What’s the absolute minimum amount of time that I can enter the U.S. Army for?” I asked him.

“Minimum enlistment is a three-year hitch,” he told me.

“That’s still too long,” I said.

“I’ll tell you what I’m gonna do . . .” said the other recruiter in the convivial tones of a used car salesman. By this point, I’d recognized that they were desperate to write up any kind of a deal.

“You pick the time you want to go in, and we’ll sit on

your draft notice until you're ready. Two-year hitch. Whatta ya say?"

"Give me a month," I told them, "and then you can take me."

"February . . ." said the other one, scribbling frantically on the recruitment form, ". . . *end* of February. Why don't we make it the twenty-eighth?"

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Chapter Three

In the final week of February 1969, I drove to Syracuse for my draft physical, as per instructions in correspondence from the U.S. government that began, “*Greeting: You are ordered to report . . .*”

Bleak snow on the NY State Thruway, as I pulled off at Exit 36 and made my way to the run-down municipal building in Syracuse where the Army physical was to take place. A bunch of guys were arriving at the same time, all of them about my age (nineteen) or a little older. We were ushered inside by a diminutive Marine Drill Sergeant wearing his dress blues and a Smoky Bear hat.

The Marine D.I. led us up to the second floor where, on his orders, we stripped to our underwear and stood at “Attention” along a line taped to the floor, clutching our paperwork. He was savagely impatient—in a state of barely controlled fury that I later came to recognize as the default temperament of all drill instructors—and he accompanied a civilian doctor as the latter made his way down the row of semi-nude guys, completing the brief ritual of stethoscope, tongue depressor, and “Drop your shorts, turn your head to the left and cough”—the Marine Drill Sergeant reinforcing these

instructions as necessary:

“Head to the left, goddammit . . . *YOUR OTHER LEFT!*”

When the physicals were completed, and we’d all pulled up our shorts, the Marine D.I. marched to the far end of the room, did an abrupt “About Face,” and began moving rapidly down the line, tapping each guy on the shoulder as he passed and counting aloud:

“*HU-WON . . . HOO . . . HREE . . . HORE . . . HIVE . . .*” until he reached seventeen. He strode to the front of the room, faced this impromptu group of seventeen, and addressed them in a hoarse bellow:

“*On my command,*” he bellowed, “*you will take two steps to the right. You will do this not BEFORE my command . . . not AFTER my command . . . but directly ON my command! IS THAT CLEAR?*”

He glowered at them.

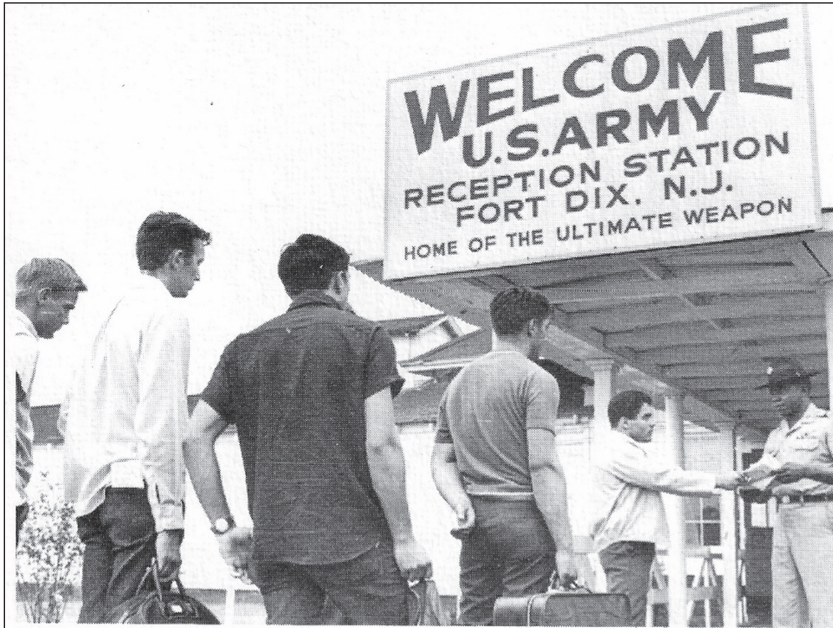
“*Group: Attench—Hut! Right Step—Harch! Right Step—Harch!*”

A small but significant gap had now opened up between the larger group and the seventeen—segregating the latter. He seemed to swell as he leaned forward and addressed them:

“*Congratulations! You men are now UNITED STATES MARINES!*”

There was a moment of stunned silence as he approached them and began collecting their medical paperwork. We had lined up any which way, in no particular order, and I was only two guys away from the group of stunned Marine recruits—all of which reinforced the impression that my life was now being choreographed by forces completely outside my control.

Two days later, on February 28, 1969, my father drove me back to Syracuse to report for induction—carrying only a



RECEPTION CENTER. This is the gateway to the Army. Haircuts, clothing, medical examinations and a bewildering array of interviews and tests face the new recruit.

Reception Center, Ft. Dix, New Jersey—1969

toothbrush, safety razor, and an extra pair of underwear and socks, as per instructions in the letter from Uncle Sam. (*“Bring nothing else. You will be issued everything you need upon induction into the United States Army.”*)

The Old Man had an epigrammatic piece of advice prepared as he stopped the car—something to the effect of “Keep your mouth shut, your bowels open, and don’t volunteer”—but it trailed off as we turned to face each other.

We both knew that he had authored this scenario: A World War II Navy pilot, he believed that military service was a necessary adjunct of citizenship and exactly what was

needed at this particular juncture in the life of his wayward elder son. There was a moment of silence as we regarded each other across the front seat of the Plymouth Valiant.

“Take care of yourself, and write when you get a chance,” he said. I nodded and stepped out of the car.

Inside the induction center, we were herded en masse into a room, where a military clerk read the brief oath, which we numbly repeated—whereupon we were herded onto buses bound for Fort Dix, New Jersey.