

Chapter 23 – Moving and Army

In June, 1968, we (J.A. and I) looked at a map around Comfort, Texas, and saw that Austin had a bunch of green, water, and trees. UT in Austin offered me a doctorate program in educational statistics based on test scores. Next, the problem was to find a Reserve unit. In early June, we drove to Austin. I made an appointment with a transportation unit. The captain accepted me since I could type and knew payroll.

The move had its drama. Just before the move the VW bug was replaced by a brand new VW bus. It made sense that more stuff would fit in the box. And a trailer hitch was added. A Uhaul 10ft enclosed trailer was rented and filled. Care was taken to not overload the tongue. The old upright player piano had to stay. It was no longer tune-able. Stretching the strings would break the wood holding them—sad loss.

Taking the route from Las Cruces south through El Paso and then east on IH10, it must have been a late start. We ended up climbing the steep Guadalupe Pass in the dark. The bus was straining with the trailer. Several times, stopping was necessary to cool the clutch. The burning smell was in the cockpit. Finally, the crest was there and the downhill to the flat Texas terrain was ahead. Later, in Austin, the clutch had to be replaced.

No place to stay. Searching the ads, we found a duplex near the corner of Burnet Rd and Anderson Lane, northwest side, for \$165/mo including utilities. Nice place.

The next day, the Reserve unit is the destination. The Captain says he cannot enroll me like he had previously promised. I remind him of the chance that I took to move based on his promise. Stating my previous performance of rising from PFC (E-2) to Specialist 4 (E-4) in my Las Cruces unit and my marching, leadership, and clerical (payroll) skills, he capitulated. My E-4 status was very rare in that I had never attended Basic/Advanced training. He immediately set up the assignment to complete the required 4-6 month active duty training. Leaving in late August for Ft Jackson, SC precluded the UT coursework and teaching. J.A. landed a math teaching position in southeast Austin for the fall of 1968-69.

Off to training by Greyhound with my duffle bag. Ft Jackson, across the Mississippi, dreading the loss of freedom. The loud bossing of enlisted trainers (regulars) when loading and unloading the busses was annoying. I knew their fear tactics were baseless threats. My new home was in a WWII barracks building without hot water. My uniforms are carefully packed in my duffle

Donning my starched and faded camos with obvious dark shadows of removed Spec 4 patches, shiny boots, brilliant brass, and snappy responses to commands, the drill sergeant immediately singles me out during the first formation. He walks around me looking at the uniform and snappy position at attention. He asks, "How long have you been in the army, cadet?" "Almost two years.", I reply. Then, standing directly in front of me, he yells questions in my face. Without blinking I respond loudly right back in his face.... "Yes, Drill Sergeant Grippon!" He replied, "You, Cadet Gadberry, are the Cadet Platoon Sergeant". I even received a private room in the barracks. Dern good deal.

My job was to wake and muster the platoon, do cursory inspections, and assign latrine duties to the 30-plus boys/men. Most were draftees from deep southern states like Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi. Some could barely read and none knew the King's English. My position of enforcing the rules soon made me procure a safety lock on the inside of my bunk room.

The barracks had a boiler under the floor but did not have a grate to burn wood. We went a month with cold showers and the Command did nothing to help us. Other barracks had grates. A few of my men formed a reconnaissance squad to find a grate from one of the other buildings. One day, the squad of 3 guys, stayed behind while the troops were out training in the Carolina woods. I covered for their absence in the training. They procured a grate and installed it in our building. Finally, hot water! The weather was turning colder.

Our platoon grew closer and policed themselves. Thieves and slackers met their justice. I seldom had to ask Sergeant Grippon for help. We left our latrine and bunkroom pristine for any walk-through inspections.

One morning I received a complaint from my latrine squad that a trooper from a different platoon had entered our latrine after it was cleaned. I ran up the steps to our latrine and found the guy messing up our spit-shine. He was not supposed to be there. Nobody liked the jerk. I ordered him to clean it up and leave. He talked back and became confrontational. A scuffle ensued. Pinning his arm behind him and marching him to the steps in front of the company muster, I gave him a little shove. He stumbled and rolled down the five steps. The company commander said, "Looks like Cadet Sergeant Gadberry is cleaning out his barracks." My platoon cheered.

More military to follow....