

## **Drafted**

A cool, fall breeze had blown the darkened leaves on to the porch of our house. My mother walked through them to come inside with our mail. "Here's a letter for you, Jack", she said. It was from the local Selective Service Board. The letter I had been dreading had finally arrived. I was to report on December 6, 1952 for induction into the armed services. Three weeks earlier, I had taken the train to San Francisco where I visited the Coast Guard Recruiting Office to join the Coast Guard. Even though I had passed the physical and signed the enlistment papers, I could not be sworn in until they received acknowledgments of my character from three references. Now that I got my induction notice, all that effort was for naught. I had to report for induction. My plans were ruined. I did not want to be in the army.

Earlier, I had been exempted from the draft, because I was in college getting my degree in Accounting. After graduation, the exemption was lifted and I became subject to induction. My brother, Walter, had been in the Army, near the end of World War II. He thought I should join the Navy or the Air Force, since the Army was fighting in Korea. It was then that I decided to join the Coast Guard. But now it was too late.

With my small suitcase of clothes, I said goodbye to my family, and walked out the front door, through the curved archway and down the stairs. I passed the small front yard, with the short green hedge that wrapped around the corner

and down the side of the house. I wondered whether I would miss seeing this familiar small yard and home.

I headed for the local board in San Mateo. It had rained the night before, and the streets were still wet. Fifteen or twenty other young men were there when I arrived. We boarded a Greyhound bus and drove up the highway to San Francisco for our physical.

We arrived at an older ornate building at 30 Van Ness Avenue. We marched up to the second floor. It was crowded and noisy, just one large open room, with large overhead fluorescent lights. There must have been two hundred of us, stripped down to our underpants, lined up into groups, getting examined.

Earlier, when I had first tried to enlist in the Coast Guard, they told me that I was seven pounds underweight and to return in three weeks. I fooled them. For three days, I had eaten bananas, lots of bananas. When I returned to weigh in again, I made the correct weight, but the examiner told me to get off the scale, empty my pockets and get back on.

Was he surprised, when I still made the weight.

Here at the army examination, there was no question about weight.

After we passed the examination, we were sworn in the Army, and boarded another bus and drove South to Monterey and Fort Ord. We were assigned to Company A of the First Infantry Regiment of the Sixth Army Division for basic training. After the first eight weeks, I had hoped to go to Finance School, since by BS degree was in Accounting. This was not to be. We were told that there

was a shortage of Military Policemen in the Far East, and since our Company had a high education profile (average of three years of college), we were all selected to go to Military Police School. Only one member of our group was assigned elsewhere, a Certified Public Accountant, who was assigned to Finance School. The remaining of us were reassigned to the 505th Military Police Battalion at Fort Baker, California, across the bay from the San Francisco Presidio. At least, I wasn't going to be in the Infantry.

Fort Baker was located along the north end of the San Francisco Bay. In the center was an oval parade grounds, covered in grass, surrounded by the main post and officer quarters. On the South edge were barracks and classrooms. The Golden Gate Bridge loomed a few hundred yards to the West. From my top bunk bed, I could see the sparkling golden lights strung over the towers. We had classes in shooting and disassembling a 45 pistol, driving a Jeep and using a dispatch radio, and learning how to throw someone over your hip and shoulder. It wasn't easy throwing someone who was much larger than yourself. At times, I don't know how I did it. Maybe the other person knew he was supposed to flip over and land on his back.

We later shipped out to Korea, where I was assigned to guard prisoner camps and entrances to our Army base. I saw a world so completely different from my home. First there was a disciplined Army life, crowded, close quarters, no time to yourself, a lack of sleep and surrounded by a constant noisy group. In Korea, we saw imprisoned soldiers kept behind barbed enclosures, very poor

families living in cardboard houses, wrapped in discarded or stolen army blankets, outhouses sitting in bare muddied villages and no modern conveniences of any kind. The main street of the town was just a bare muddy road lined on either side with boxes of vegetable and fruits so huge, they didn't look real. I learned the large sizes were due to using human waste as a fertilizer. I starred at some of the sights, almost not believing what I was seeing. Having never lived away from my family, it was a huge awakening of how others in the world survived.