

Bachelor Quarters Fort Benning

Being unmarried when I arrived at Benning to do perhaps a two or three year tour instructing officers on Infantry Tactics, I was assigned a miserable Bachelor quarters room.

It was miserable for several reasons. First of all I was still so junior in 'rank' that I didn't rate the larger - older brick-stone - quarters that bachelor Captains and above got. Secondly the very small one-room apartment I got was in the old wooden frame buildings slapped up during WWII. And those many barracks-type rooms were used by junior-rank officer students who were assigned to take courses at Fort Benning for just a few months before moving on or back to their original post. So it was just a 'temporary' living arrangement. Thirdly I got there in the coming heat of the Georgia summer, with no air-conditioning.

So I determined to spend as little time in that small room, with shared bathroom, as I could. So I spent as much time when I was not working out of my equally hot instructional office near the training areas, in one of the smaller air conditioned officers-clubs scattered over the huge post - for breakfast and lunch. And ate in the central officers club for dinner, as often as I could with Patsy.

There were a number of large grassy parks with huge

trees nearby, where she liked to walk her dog for its exercise. I often joined her there sometimes driving past them on the way to the club, seeing her, stopped, and walked with her. There was a small circular park in front of the Fort Benning headquarters, which was rimmed by Old Army officer quarters, in which Patsy lived with her family.

And across the street was the central Fort Benning Army Chapel.

Music

I soon learned that Patsy loved classical music, especially operas. She had quite a collection of long play vinyl recordings at home.

Her favorite piece was Claude Debussy's Claire de Lune. (you can hear it by clicking here [Claire de Lune](#))

I was, after the last savage year of war in Korea, hungry for some cultural solace (which was the primary reason I bought that fragile small defenseless parakeet the day I landed in Phoenix to visit with my Aunt Arleen, and walked past a pet shop.)

I was delighted that she liked fine music. She began to listen to it while she was growing up to young womanhood in Germany where her father was stationed after the war and they lived in places like Garmish,

where, in spite of the wreckage of war, music was coming back.

There were no FM radio stations in the US beyond the east coast yet. I could only listen to some popular music on Georgia AM stations - lots of it twangy country, in my bachelor room on a dinky radio. No solace there.

So I went out and got a portable LP record player, first of all to play in my room when I retired for the day. I borrowed some of her records. Then I started building up a collection of my own. Bach, Beethoven, Brahms - more than opera.

After a number of dates eating at the officer's club we started driving out of Columbus, Georgia south on a side road to a wonderful small restaurant for dinner where I brought that player, and played - low enough not to disturb the few other guests that were there - and there was no music on hand.

About that time I had been training the parakeet progressively by releasing him into the open air, near my quarters, whistling, and he would return. But one windy day he went out of sight over a wooden rooftop and never came back. End of that episode, where other officers would look at the bird perched on my shoulder, then at the two very impressive rows of combat ribbons on my chest and wonder about my sanity.

No. I simply was marching to my own drum in this world, as I had begun to do even at West Point, once I had the self confidence which comes from succeeding against all odds. By my tour at Fort Benning, filled with young officers who had yet to fight in a real war, and had won, had pretty much earned that right fighting on behalf of my country, having near the end of my fighting, decisively thrown both the North Korean and Chinese Armies back out of South Korea in my assigned sector where they originally two years before had been invaded and depressed. Some called it the Forgotten War, and other Americans, having not been drafted, just shrugged and lived their contented American lives that were beginning to prosper in the 1950s, ignoring the cost in blood and treasure it had taken to defend that small country from the brutality of two communist regimes.

In some of my letters back home from Korea I had named it the 'Second Page War' - aware of just how much Americans ignored it.

It was also about then after months back in the United States that I became used to the American public trait of ignoring that which did not directly threaten them or their immediate welfare, like a large draft would have. The not-in-my-backyard syndrome which grew up the further away that younger Americans got from the memories of Pearl Harbor, the Bataan Death March, the 450,000 men killed in WWII - and heading for 34,000 killed in the 'small'

war in Korea. I was getting less sure that the American public deserved the sacrifices its soldiers made on its behalf.

I was also still keenly sensitive to the losses my Company K, 7th Cavalry - largely draftees - had taken in Korea (which reached 67 killed, over 200 wounded, and one captured, during its 15 months in combat.)

And I was developing an itch to express myself on the the larger lessons of that war in my maturing mind once my life was normal back in the United States.

Photography and Patsy

And there was nothing more pleasantly 'normal' than my growing love for Patricia Simpson as we walked around in the park, swam in the club pool. dined with classical music in the background, drove around the post where her younger brother was already in airborne training to join the 187th Airborne Brigade in Korea.

I started taking pictures of her - not really posed - but highlighting her flawless complexion, very long braided hair, and that serenely beautiful look. I still have some of those pictures.

Sometimes at night I would drive her out to the deserted bleacher area of some of the training areas right off what was named the 'Harmony Church Road' (after an old pre-

military Georgia settlement) where we would sit in the dark bleachers in the moonlight while I tried to explain to her what was I was teaching the young officers and candidate officers of OCS on their way to Korea and their possible death or injury unless they listened to my advice.

And of course I would take her to all the social functions that Fort Benning's Tactical Department held, which were many, partly because key officers were always coming and going. I was acutely conscious of what a beauty Patsy was as my date, especially when she was dressed up. Fellow officers would wink at me and complement me for having such a beauty on my arm. According to some of the comments which came to me from their Army wives, we became a 'beautiful couple.' They wondered if marriage was in our plans.

In turn she invited me to the several 'charity' functions that Army wives and their grown children put on. I would have to do goofy things like put my face in the center of the target of soft balls to win prizes.

The Fort Benning newspaper began referring to the 'Patrician' beauty of Patsy Simpson.

As I got to know her father and mother, ate with them on occasion, she and they let me put a small Darkroom in their basement, so I could process and blow up many of the pictures I took of her with my black and white

Rolliflex. I was really good at that, remembering the photography and darkroom lessons my Aunt Mary and Uncle John taught me back in high school, and my practice at that at West Point - where I had bought a good projector.

As we seemed to get more serious in our relationship, we bought a bicycle-built-for-two. We split the cost. And we began riding around the post on weekends. When we finally sold it, Patsy joked that since we couldn't agree how to split the value of the bike, we had to get married instead.

And Patsy owned a dog she named Jane. It was her constant companion while she lived in her family's quarters right across from the headquarters at Fort Benning. We would walk it, too, to the park/parade grounds. When we got married, Jane was with us right until we got orders to go to Haddonfield for a Master's Degree in 1954, then we had to leave her with Patsy's mother at their home.



Married Life (2) Courtship

Category: Married Life (1)

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Church

While there was a beautiful small Army chapel - full sized church actually - right across the street from Patsy's quarters, she, having been baptized and confirmed in the Episcopal faith in the historic Fort Monroe Chapel, she preferred to go to Sunday church at the large civilian Episcopal Church in downtown Columbus, Georgia.

Having not attended church services since West Point two and a half years earlier, I started going to Sunday services with her there.

The Army's standard Protestant services were derived from the Episcopal Churches of England - which most of the English Crown, and then American Army officers before the American Revolution embraced. It was very close in liturgy with what I was used to every Sunday for 4 years of West Point.

It was no big change for me, to participate in the services Patsy was familiar with. I had by then time put Christian Science on my back burner and had attended no local services.

Great Writer?

John and Nancy Flynn invited us over to dinner with them many times during 1952. John had been my first company commander in Korea. Sometimes I went alone, carrying my portable typewriter with me to sit out on their veranda and pound out many of the stories that I had

bottled up inside me from the major experiences I had gone through leading up to and in, the Korean War.

Flynn, a Major teaching higher level Tactics in Fort Benning's Tactical Department by now, took a great interest in me. While I had been just one of his 6 officers in Company K, 7th Cavalry during the war, the combination of my being thrust into violent combat right out of West Point without even the benefit of formal Infantry Lieutenant Training I should have ahead of time - except for the exigencies of that war - but my evident natural abilities and evident - to him and those who recommended me for a series of awards for valor - made him take a special interest in my career. We had long talks.

During that period in mid 1952 the formal presentation to me of the Distinguished Service Cross for my battles on Hill 347 took place. Had I been back home in Colorado it would have brought out at least a Congressman and other Politicians, and possible a ceremony before the Secretary of the Army in Washington or Denver. But since there were many deserved combat decorations handed out to soldiers and officers who had returned to Fort Benning from the Korean war, still going on, this was just another day at the military office for them, and me.

As I recall the Major General Post Commander, and a couple Colonels in my chain of instructional command,

and the local and Fort press, attended in his office. Not important enough for me to have asked Patsy Simpson and her Major Father to be invited to attend.

However both the Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News of Colorado, made a pretty big deal of it. As they had both my awards for Silver Stars at an earlier time while I was still in Korea.

Then, a little earlier I had received a big fat \$500 check, notice to me, and a flurry of press releases by the Ladies Home Journal that my 'Shanks Bootees' story I wrote during the blackest days of the December '50 retreat in Korea was going to be published in the July 1952 edition. The Ladies Home Journal was considered then to be a prestigious Literary Journal besides being a premier woman's magazine.

I had already written a second story "Death of a Soldier" while composing it at the Flynn household. And submitted it to the same Journal. With the first story, only 1,000 words long - but being paid \$.50 a word, I thought as a lark I would write the next one, twice as long and see if I got paid twice as much. I did and they obliged - I was paid \$1,000 for 2,000 words.

With all that and the substantial publicity that also garnered me in the Fort Benning newspaper, I think Patsy thought I was enroute to become a Great Writer.

Part of my appeal for her? She never expressed it that way - but all our 57 years of married life right up to and including on her death bed in 2011, she urged me to write, write, write, no matter what else I was doing.

She became my greatest fan.

In the Hospital

But before there was serious talk of marriage in the early spring of 1953 I was hit by a painful malady.

I, as all the officers on the post had to take periodic physicals. Part of that entailed being taken to one of the grassy parks, be measured for run, jump, sit ups, pull ups, and pushups to meet the Army standard.

When it was my turn, I passed all the tests just fine. I was still in good physical shape. One of the tests was the maximum number of sit ups I could do. I don't remember what my count was, but it was to the point I really flopped back down harder on my back near the exhausting end.

The next day I was sitting in Patsy's home, listening to a record, when a very sharp pain hit my back. I stood up and it hit even sharper, and was so continuous I doubled up and had to sit, then lay out on the floor. Alarmed Patsy got her old Studebaker out and took me to the hospital.

The long and the short of it was that I had been hit by a large kidney stone. First and last one I ever had. The

situps may have dislodged it.

In any case, after X-rays were taken the Army doctor gravely said I might have a form of tuberculosis in a kidney. What? The thought crossed my mind that if I married, would that threaten the health of any children?

There was no other sign, then or later, so I forgot about it, and just wondered whether I was susceptible to kidney stones. Answer was no.

After a painful retrograde procedure the stone passed, I spent one full day in the hospital, where Patsy visited me.

I don't know whether that episode reminded me I was not immortal, in spite of surviving Korea with only two lesser Purple Heart wounds and avoided many, many close shaves, any one of which could have killed me. But I decided I should start thinking seriously about getting married. An Army career often makes for difficult marriages, but it was obvious that a girl who grew up as an Army brat at least knew what such a life entailed. Patsy had lived such a life already. She could be a perfect Army wife, no matter how many wars or temporary deployments pulled me away. I was not only in love with her, but she seemed like a perfect wife-in-waiting for me.

And so, in the early spring of 1953 I ordered a West Point 'engagement' "A-pin" matching my class ring crest,

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including its 1950 year engraved on it. And got ready to pop the question.