

Robert L. Manson: AAA OCS 11-53 (Fort Bliss)

After World War II, the military services of the United States were disbanded rapidly, and by late 1946, all Army OCS training had been transferred to the Army Ground School at Fort Riley, Kansas. Only 542 candidates graduated from OCS at Fort Riley in 1950. The OCS program at Fort Riley was the only program in operation then, as a Branch Immaterial school, until the opening of Branch OC Schools after the start of the Korean War.

The Korean War began on Sunday, June 25, 1950, when North Korean Armies invaded South Korea. The critical need for Army Branch Officers resulted in the opening of several branch OCS programs in 1951. Among these was the AAA OCS program at Fort Bliss, Texas. Some other Branch Army OCS Schools that were opened were for the Signal Corps at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey; the Corps of Engineers at Fort Belvoir, Virginia; and the Ordnance Corps at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. The Infantry OCS at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the Field Artillery OCS at Fort Sill, Oklahoma also were reactivated at that time, and the OCS program at Fort Riley, Kansas, continued to operate.

An Army Officers Candidate Program - Antiaircraft and Guided Missiles Branch, The Artillery School, with an Officer Candidate Student Detachment, 4054th ASU, AA and Guided Missiles Branch, The Artillery School, was established by General Orders Number 110, Headquarters, AAA and Guided Missile Center, Fort Bliss, Texas, dated 16 October 1951.

The OCS program at Fort Bliss was housed in what originally had been a World War II army hospital, and which later was used to billet German rocket scientists working at the nearby White Sands Proving Ground after WWII. The first Director of the school was Colonel Robert H. Krueger. He left the school in August 1952 to become the commander of Camp Drake in Japan. This was an installation that many Fort Bliss OCS graduates passed through on their way to assignments in Korea.

OCS Class No. 01-52 reported To Fort Bliss in mid-October 1951, and graduated six months later as "Able One", on 2 May 1952. The Fort Bliss program followed a twenty-two week curriculum modeled on the OCS programs of WW II and of those times, with emphasis on physical fitness, military academics, leadership ability and branch specialty skills. Candidates assumed class leadership roles on a rotating basis, and periodically they were appraised by their peers. A School Honor Code was an integral part of the candidates' experience. The early AAA OCS classes at Fort Bliss trained on weapons systems and equipment that were of World War II vintage, but later classes trained on state-of-the art target acquisition and gun pointing radar and surface-to-air guided missiles.

There were fourteen classes that graduated approximately 1,175 candidates from the AAA OCS program at Fort Bliss. Class No. 13-53 had the distinction of graduating the 1,000th successful candidate on 16 April 1953, in a class of 91 candidates. The final class, Class No. 14, walked across the stage of Theater Number 1 at Fort Bliss to receive their commissioning certificates on 17 July 1953.

The attrition rate of these classes was high, sometimes approaching fifty percent, not unlike the rates of World War II and later OCS classes in all branches of Army service. Attrition was due to failure by candidates to meet established physical fitness, academic or leadership standards. Significant attrition also was due to voluntary resignations.

After commissioning, most Fort Bliss OCS candidates were assigned for a short tour of duty with active AAA gun battalions and missile units emplaced in the continental United States to provide air defense for major American metropolitan communities, military installations and critical infrastructure against high-flying bombers. A few others were assigned to the Faculty and Staff at Fort Bliss as instructors to provide training in AAA specialties to Officer Basic Course attendees and Enlisted specialists. Graduates of several classes served with the 2nd AAA Battalion, Division Artillery of the 1st Armored Division, an active combat division in training at Fort Hood, Texas.

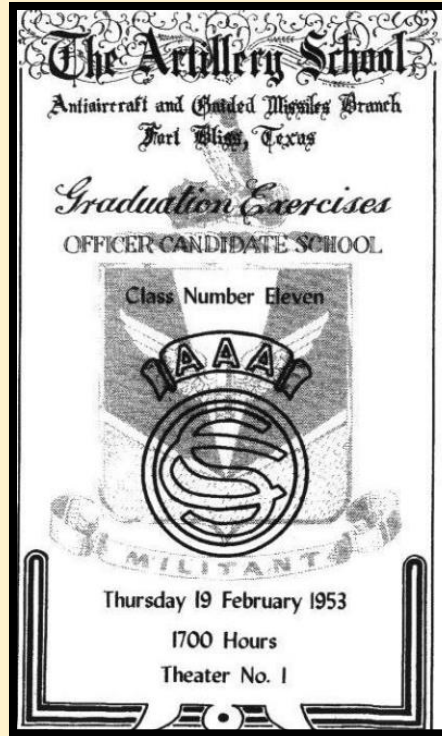
Most individuals assigned to units in the CONUS, typically after ninety to one hundred-twenty days, were assigned overseas, usually to the Far East Command in Korea. A few also were assigned to NATO units in Germany and England. Still, a few others ended up in Alaska or Panama.

Those candidates that were assigned to units in Korea typically joined the self-propelled AAA battalions attached to front-line Infantry Divisions. There they served as platoon leaders and eventually battery commanders and battalion staff officers. These divisional AAA units often provided ground support for infantry combat operations in Korea. A few were reassigned to field artillery units and served as forward observers. Others were assigned to separate AAA mobile and gun battalions that provided air defense for the port facilities and the POL storage area at Inchon and the important military airfields near Seoul.

When the Korean War Armistice was signed in July 1953, the military services instituted a RIF (Reduction in Forces) program, and many Fort Bliss AAA OCS graduates were eligible for release from active duty. Although some elected to complete their term of active duty, most choose at that time to return to the opportunities of civilian life where many eventually were highly successful in professional, business and academic pursuits. Many stayed in the Active Army Reserves after being released from active duty, and some attained field grade rank before retiring from the active reserve. Still others chose the active Army as their career, where some achieved General Officer rank.

Quoting from Major Roger L. Steltzer, Operations Officer, OCS at Fort Bliss, in the 1953 pages of the *Antiaircraft Journal*, "Well done" can be written of the job done over the months the school has been operated. The best traditions of the Officer Corps have been maintained. Duty, Honor, Country have been instilled into about 1,175 young officers. "Well done," indeed".

Regardless of where they were assigned, the 1952-1953 graduates of the AAA OCS program at Fort Bliss served proudly at the time of their country's "Forgotten War" and during the Cold War.



AAA OCS Class 11-53 Receives Oath of Office