

OCS Prep

Fort Sill, Oklahoma





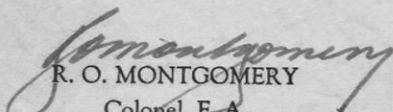
FIELD ARTILLERY REPLACEMENT TRAINING CENTER
FORT BRAGG, NORTH CAROLINA

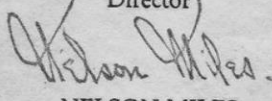
CERTIFICATE

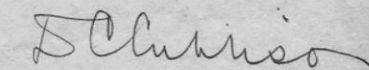
This Certifies That

Corp. Julius A. Menzezoff

has satisfactorily completed a one month preparatory course for Field
Artillery officer candidates.


R. O. MONTGOMERY
Colonel, F. A.
Director


NELSON MILES
1st Lt., F. A.
Secretary


D. C. CUBBISON
Major General, U. S. Army
Commanding

Date JUN 27 1942

Certificate of Completion Preparatory Course for Field Artillery Officer Candidates issued to Corporal Julius A. Menzezoff, who went on to graduate with Field Artillery OCS Class 32-42 on October 1, 1942.

OCS Prep during World War II and Memories from Graduates of OCS Prep at Fort Sill, Oklahoma During the Vietnam War

The beginnings of OCS Prep during World War II:

The rapid expansion of officer candidate schools in 1942 did not quickly end the shortage of officers. The War Department needed to find a suitable way of weeding out undesirable and unfit candidates while satisfying the growing need for officers.

From Cedat Fortuna Peritis: A History of the Field Artillery School by Boyd L. Dastrup, copyright 2011:

Out of this conundrum emerged the preparatory school and recycling policy. In mid-1942, the War Department organized a preparatory school course of one month in the Field Artillery Replacement Center on Fort Sill. The Replacement Center had opened on 28 November 1941 as a tent city just west of Henry Post Field. The recreation buildings, post exchanges, mess halls, bath houses, and a headquarters building were constructed of wood. The center furnished field artillery basic training for selective service inductees and shipped them to tactical units that were well advanced in their training for the development of teams from the company level to the division level.

The preparatory school also provided basic field artillery training for individuals who had been accepted to the Field Artillery Officer Candidate School but lacked basic military training. During the course, instructors taught the applicants weapons handling, small-unit tactics, map reading, drill, and other subjects and conducted daily inspections of quarters, daily inspections in ranks, and weekly uniform inspections. If the officer candidate successfully completed the preparatory school, the individual then attended the Field Artillery Officer Candidate School.

MG Robert M. Danford, Chief of the Field Artillery, opposed dismissing any candidate with a reasonable prospect of becoming an officer and urged recycling students with academic and leadership deficiencies to later classes. In September 1942, the Field Artillery School also organized a salvage school course for candidates reporting to the Officer Candidate School without attending the preparatory school and for students who struggled to keep up with their classmates in the Officer Candidate School.

The salvage school course lasted four weeks. It provided basic instruction in gunnery, gun drill, tactics, and mathematics. Those students who used the salvage school course to overcome difficulties encountered in the Officer Candidate School enrolled in a new Officer Candidate School class that was doing the work that they were doing at the time of transferring to the salvage school course.

Although the preparatory school and the salvage school courses reduced the number of dismissals from the Field Artillery Officer Candidate School and removed students who would have slowed down the pace of their classmates, they enabled the school to absorb several hundred students during the critical period of 1942-1943 when so many men were being sent to Fort Sill without benefit of an adequate background.

An Officer Candidate Preparatory School was established at Camp Barkeley, Texas in April 1942 to help reduce the failure rate at the Medical Administration Corps (MAC) OCS. The four-week course was designed by 1st Lt. Edward Marks, MAC, who served as its first commandant. It had a cadre of five MAC officers and six enlisted personnel, and classes ranged from 150 to 400 students. Not surprisingly, OCS candidates who had completed that course did better than those who had not.

Elliot Richardson, who later served as the Secretary of Defense, US Attorney General and Secretary of Commerce graduated from Medical Administration Corps OCS in 1943. Richardson began his military career after surmounting several difficulties. His repeated efforts to volunteer had been defeated by poor eyesight; he was drafted in December 1942, and although he had memorized the eye chart, his glasses gave him away. He was classified as a noncombatant and ordered to enlisted medical training at Camp Pickett, Virginia. There he completed OCS prep school and then went to Camp Barkeley for OCS.

OCS Prep Schools

January 1943 Field Artillery Journal:

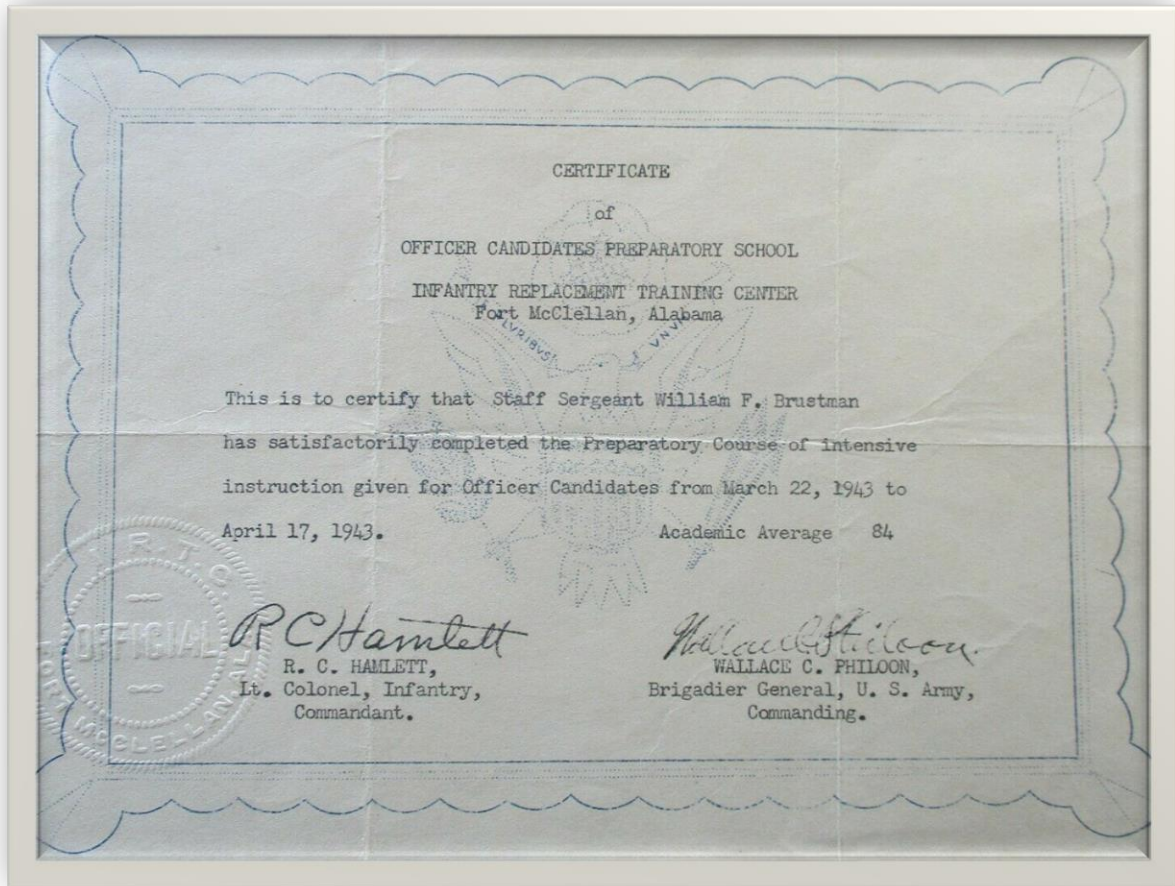
A comprehensive 192-hour schedule is being standardized for these schools, which are conducted at Fort Sill, Fort Bragg, and Camp Roberts. Firing battery, preparation of fire, and gunnery math lead the list of subjects, with 35, 24, and 24 hours allotted to them respectively. - F.A.S. Information Bulletin.

An interesting reference to the Fort Sill OCS preparatory course during World War II comes from an excerpt from ***Above the Thunder – Reminiscences of a Field Artillery Pilot in World War* by Raymond C. Kerns, Class 44-42:**

“The only man in our hutment who had any serious trouble was Howard Kenyon, a good old country boy from Nebraska who had come down from Alaska as a corporal. When Howard got something through his head, he never forgot it, but he was slow to learn. He worked very hard, and some of us, especially Kellogg and Kipley, helped him each night until lights out at 2100 hours. Then Kenyon would go to the study hall and remain there until 2300, every night. Nevertheless, with only three weeks left to go before graduation, he was put back into an OCS preparatory course. Long after the rest of us had gone on to our first assignments as second lieutenants, Kenyon was still there, finishing the prep

course and going all the way through OCS again. He graduated, he was commissioned, and as a second lieutenant he was killed in action in Belgium.”

Note: The above incident took place in early September 1942, about the same time that the World War II Salvage school was being organized.



***Preparatory Course of Intensive Instruction for Officer Candidates
Certificate Fort McClellan 1943
(The certificate indicates the course is 4 weeks long)***

The earliest known Fort Sill OCS Prep Class after OCS re-opened in 1951 was Class E-2-64. That was thirteen years after the OCS program was up and running again. There are no official records available, but there is a picture of the class provided by COL (Ret) Ronald Spearman and comments from Vandeventer E. Scott both from Artillery OCS Class 5-65.



***Echo Battery Pre OCS 7th Training Battalion USATC FA October 1964
Class # E-2-64 Fort Sill, Oklahoma***

Vandeventer E. Scott: Class 5-65

After graduating from college, I was drafted and was sent to Fort Leonard Wood for basic training and then to OCS Prep at Fort Sill. On Friday afternoon, 11 September 1964, after having completed OCS Prep, CPT Fairman (the CO) and LT Kelley (the XO), congratulated us on having completed OCS Prep and advised us that although we were off-duty for the next 48 hours, they stressed: 1) that we were to report to OCS Headquarters at 17:00 hours on Sunday for induction into OCS and: 2) that during those next 48 hours we were to remain within a 50 mile radius of Fort Sill.

Arthur V. Bliss: Class 6-65 I went through the 8 week Pre OCS training program designed for college option candidates in September – October 1965. It helped me hugely to graduate from OCS.

Joe Lander: Class 8-65

Artillery Officer Candidate School (OCS) Prep from January-February 1965

The purpose of this paper is to provide my observations/comments/feelings from my participation in US Army Artillery OCS Prep which I attended in the period January to February 1965. Many young men entered this program during the build-up for the Viet Nam War and likely shared many of the same experiences.



After I graduated from college in 1964, I was in a type of limbo. I was not looking to start a career because I was expecting to be drafted into the military because of the Viet Nam War build-up. As a result, I researched what my military options were. I decided that it would be better to select the military than be drafted and have little say in my future service. After visiting my local, Erie, Pennsylvania, US Army recruiter, I found an enlistment program that sounded promising, it was the College Option Program (those who completed it were called “College Ops” for short).

This program took college graduates and prepared them to be 2nd Lieutenants in the US Army. It filled the growing need for junior officers that the US Military Academy (West Point) and ROTC could not completely fill. Applicants for the program were required to be college graduates, be physically qualified, select one of the combat arms branches (Infantry, Armor or Artillery), and complete Basic Training, Advanced Individual Training and Officer Candidate School for the branch chosen. The commitment for this program was enlisting for two years; upon graduation from OCS and being commissioned a 2LT the service requirement was three years.

In my case, after being accepted in the College Option Program I enlisted on 9 October 1964 and went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for Basic Training. Interestingly, at the Army Recruiting Station in Cleveland, Ohio, where I enlisted, two others, Nino Arsena and Jim Ulrich, enlisted at the same time as I did for the same program and went to Basic, AIT and OCS together. Nino, after a setback, graduated in Class 10-65 and Jim graduated in Class 8-65 with me, went to RVN and was KIA on 13 Feb 1967.

Our training platoon at Fort Leonard Wood was a mixture of personnel who had enlisted for OCS or Airborne follow-on assignments. We graduated from Basic prior to Christmas 1964 and went home on leave prior to going to our various AIT assignments. Those of us going to AIT looked forward to an “easy” January and February 1965 when we went to AIT at Fort Sill to learn how to be Fire Direction Center soldiers and “relax” prior to an expected “tough” OCS experience – little did we know then.

I left Erie and my fiancée, Carmen, to go to Fort Sill in early January 1965 and was assigned to the 7th Training Battalion, US Army Training Center. When I got there, we were informed that those of us that were eventually scheduled to attend OCS would be going to a “special” AIT unit – we were going to something called “OCS Prep,” actually Battery E (OCS Prep), 7th Training Battalion, USATC. We were told that this was a fairly new organization and that it was established by the Training Center because many of the College Ops did not complete OCS because of their lack of military experience and their inability to compete with the other cadets in their class, many of whom were senior non-commissioned officers with 6-10 years of prior service.

As a result, I and many others were in for a great surprise, it would not be an “easy” time or a place to “relax” prior to OCS. Our first hint of our future happened when we got off the bus that transported us from the Army Training Center to the OCS Prep area. A drill sergeant named SFC Baca (I can still see him and hear him in my mind as I write this), who looked like a young Arnold Schwarzenegger in a well pressed fatigue uniform and highly polished boots yelling, “DROP and give me one-zero.” This was the start of what seemed like a million push-ups I would be doing over the next eight months. I also learned quickly the difference between “ten” and “one-zero” – for us ten did not exist.

In the first two weeks many of our fellow OCS Prep cadets quit the program, some because of the constant pressure, some because of the physical training, and some I am sure, because they knew if they did quit, they had less than two years still to serve before their enlistment would end and they would be back home. Many of those who did quit, to me, were the more promising cadets. I also thought about quitting but a phone conversation with Carmen convinced me not to quit and finish OCS Prep and OCS on time so I could get back to Erie for our wedding date, 14 August 1965 (OCS graduation was on 3 August 1965).

This all made the OCS Prep experience valuable and validated the reason for establishing the program. The pressure worked and many more of us succeeded and were commissioned as 2LTs than would have if we had had an "easy" time and a "rest" prior to OCS. Our preparation as Field Operation and Intelligence Assistants also helped for our OCS education. We spent a lot of time on Gunnery and Tactics that we used in the main OCS course. After graduation from OCS Prep at the end of February 1965 and the move to OCS we did not have the same shock previous College Ops had before OCS Prep was established. I do not know the previous graduation rates for College Ops, but I am sure it increased greatly with the establishment of OCS Prep.

Our OCS Prep class had at least 19 members who graduated from FAOCS: Nino Arsena (Class 10-65), Carlton E. Baird, Hiram R. Ellis, Alfred E. Grassa (Class 10-65), Edward A. Hennen, Kenneth E. Heyman (Class 10-65), Thomas W. Keon III (145 miles on The Hill), Richard D. Kirkeby (Class 9-65), Stanley Kline, Joseph N. Lander, Charles J. Manz, Roy N. Minich, Thomas A. Plikuhn, Sebastian B. Rinelli, Gary J. Reinhart. (Class 9-65), Albert J. Rodrigues, Leeming Tuttle, James C. Ulrich, and George A. Winters. Even though we did not all finish on the same day – we all finished!

David Barnes: Class 12-65

Prior to joining Class 12-65 Don Kyle, Larry Vinyard, Dick Samples, Dick Weigle and I went through "Echo 7 OCS Prep", which ran parallel to Artillery AIT. It was a surprise to us when we arrived Fort Sill, having been told prior that AIT would be "pretty relaxed" after basic training! We got off the bus and were immediately "Dropped" for push-ups. We then knew that we weren't going to "relax"! It replicated the OCS hours, discipline, Tac NCOs along with the Field Artillery gunnery. I remember overlapping the graduating OCS Prep class by a few days thinking "Those guys are pretty STRAC - I've got some hard work to do"!! (I didn't know that Morris Postlewate, my OCS cube-mate and experienced Army-type, would be matched up with me in Robinson Barracks to help me make it through!) The main reason for OCS Prep was due to the high drop-out rate for college graduates at OCS proper, having been in the Army for less than 4 months. Its aim was to give a high dose of Army experience plus weed out those who weren't committed. We ran a lot of Jarks and got in pretty good shape! As I remember, only two of our "Preppers" decided to opt out of OCS.

Pictures from "Echo 7 OCS Prep" provided by COL (Ret) David Barnes Class 12-65





Guido F. Verbeck III, Class 2-66

My family has a long, unbroken line of military service, back before the Civil War and, as a boy growing up, I knew that I would serve, too. When I went to college I signed up for ROTC and then, when I changed colleges, I did the same. The two programs were like night and day, and I dropped out after six months. As graduation time approached (January 1965), the war in Vietnam was building up, and I visited the Recruiter.

There was an OCS option as described as follows (1-6) and I enlisted:

1. Complete College
2. Enlist for the OCS option
3. Choose Artillery or Infantry
4. Complete Basic Training satisfactorily (Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri)
5. Complete AIT satisfactorily (Fort Sill, Oklahoma), OCS Prep
6. Complete OCS satisfactorily, 23 weeks, at Fort Sill.

I began Basic at Fort Leonard Wood in March 1965. Thirty-two of my classmates were in the OCS option program. SFC Smith met us as the bus pulled and "greeted" us as we got off. "Who wants a date with a blond and a brunette?" He asked. Hands went up, and those selected were handed mops and brooms and directed to clean up the barracks while the rest of us settled in.

Basic was Basic. Option guys were split up among the various platoons, but over the 8-week time we learned who we were, and a bond began to form. The cadre knew from the beginning and we noticed they seemed to give us a harder time than the rest of the class. When we graduated, the OCS option group was held over for a few days and moved into one barrack. The first afternoon, I went up to the Orderly Room for some reason. The cadre were talking and drinking coffee. SFC Smith offered me a cup of coffee and a big smile. "You guys may have thought we were tougher on you," he said, "And we were. We knew you were going to OCS and one day we might serve under you. We wanted to be sure we helped in turning you into the best officers, we possibly could." Thank you, SFC Smith.

On to Fort Sill and OCS Prep. We were now together as a separate class- separate instruction and separate barracks next to the AIT area. As I remember the curriculum- the same Gunnery classes as those who would be working in future FDCs, plus the guns, firing missions, map reading, ammunition, etc., with homework at night. And there were other things beyond classwork... daily inspections, barrack cleanliness, demerits, "circle-buffing" the floors, pressed uniforms properly hung, attention to detail, leadership and teamwork... all with eyes ahead to the life at OCS. We ate in the mess hall with the other AIT classes and shared guard duty at night.

A memorable moment was returning to the barracks one afternoon and finding all my stuff laid out beginning from the front door, up the stairs, down the hall

and to my footlocker (which I had left unlocked), and some artwork with shaving cream. It was truly a masterpiece, and a clear reminder to everyone to lock their footlockers when the owner was not present. Several others had the same opportunity before the course was finished. Underneath all of it was an unrelenting sense of urgency. A couple of our classmates dropped out and were reassigned to other AIT platoons working toward the FDC MOS. Then graduation, a banquet with awards and nice words, and packing our duffle bags in preparation for tomorrow's trip across the post to....

Robinson Barracks and the start of our OCS journey. Even though we had been a single group through AIT, we were divided up among the barracks. Gunnery was easier since we had already had that curriculum. We were generally in better physical shape, understood the Honor Code, and attention to detail. The rest of our OCS class was made up of Soldiers from E-4 through Warrant Officer, a few had already been to Vietnam. I had already heard of a good friend of mine from high school, and in an earlier OCS class, who had been killed over there. I'm sure I have left out a lot of details- you'll have to forgive me, I've never been this age before. Looking back, I wouldn't have missed walking that path for anything. OCS Prep was a major turning point. Some friendships have lasted until today. God bless them all.

George A. Bannon: Class 1-67

Following graduation from BCT at Fort Leonard Wood, most of the soldiers went home on leave, but those of us who were going to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for Advanced Individual Training (AIT) as Fire Direction Center (FDC) Specialists in Artillery Gunnery, followed by OCS, went by bus to Fort Sill.

We arrived at Fort Sill on Friday afternoon, April 29, 1966, and went directly to the In-Processing building. As we were processing in, we talked to a couple of soldiers who were already in AIT and they said that it was a lot better than Basic Training. They got off at 4:30 pm, they had their cars on post, and it was mostly classroom training. That was the life-style that most of us anticipated and we thought that we could use some much-needed de-compression time between Basic and OCS, so we were looking forward to the experience. We also assumed that we would have the weekend off, since we got there late on Friday. Our FDC AIT was scheduled for 8 weeks.

A small shuttle bus picked us up and took us about a mile to our area and the first thing I noticed was that it looked so much better than the other barracks areas that we passed. Everything was painted distinctively and even all the walkways were lined with painted rocks so it looked like a vacation resort. When the bus pulled up and a big ol' Staff Sergeant (SSG) named James Roethler who, we learned later, was called Big JR by his buddies, started screaming at us, dismissing any thoughts that we had of a fun-filled AIT. He also announced that this version of AIT was actually set up as OCS Prep, a mirror image of the actual OCS program, where all of the restrictions and rules of OCS were to be enforced

during our AIT. AIT was not going to be the “walk in the park” that we expected. Big JR explained to us that it was intended to help us be more successful when we finally got to OCS. The MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) for our AIT was 13E and Artillery Gunnery FDC was a major part of the Artillery OCS curriculum. Both the discipline and standards of Big JR’s OCS Prep and the fact that we had Artillery Gunnery training during AIT gave us an advantage when we got to OCS, where the attrition rate exceeded 50%, much of that due to the academic complexities of “Artillery Gunnery”.

In a nutshell, the OCS Prep AIT was comprised of two separate and distinct functions, similar to OCS:

- 1) the academic portion was a combination of classroom and field training, conducted during the normal “work day” and
- 2) the training in time management, discipline, team work, enhancement of soldier skills, and a healthy dose of what seemed like harassment took place before and after the academic portion each day. We operated under the same very demanding SOP’s (Standard Operating Procedures) as OCS; and SSG Roethler, who himself was awaiting orders for OCS, guided us in the preparation for OCS, such as in the following:

- Purchasing additional uniforms so a fresh uniform would always be available.
- Tailoring uniforms to enhance personal appearance, to include sewing pocket flaps shut and altering all uniforms for a trim fit.
- Purchasing 2 pairs of Corcoran Jump Boots, which take a better shine than issued boots.
- Applying a “spit shine” requiring many layers, to boots and shoes prior to OCS
- Having leather name tags sewn inside all footgear, instead of hand-writing our names in ink on a dab of white paint.
- Replacing nailed boot heels (even on brand new boots) with glued boot heels because the nail holes could conceal granules of dirt that would be described during an inspection as “filthy boots” and result in demerits.
- Purchasing additional brass buckles to “prep” them for the inevitable inspections.
- Practicing the unique layout of the footlocker in accordance with the OCS SOP, so it became second nature while in OCS.
- Wearing “high and tight,” “white sidewall” haircuts.
- Concentrating on physical fitness, primarily pushups and running (Big JR personally took care of that aspect).

One of the reasons we received Sergeant’s pay in OCS was because of the added expense of buying Corcoran Jump Boots and extra uniforms, tailoring all of our uniforms for a “trim” fit, the laundry expense to always have freshly starched fatigues and khakis, and the miscellaneous expense to keep our “house” in great condition. In AIT, however, we didn’t yet have that increased pay, so my wife had to send me extra money for those expenses. About 1/3 of the initial 126 candidates that eventually started in our OCS class had gone through OCS Prep AIT at Fort Sill. The attrition rate for that group was much lower than those who

were not trained in Artillery Gunnery and/or did not have the benefit of the “head start” provided to us by the OCS Prep program. Big JR could have very well, given the opportunity, said that: “I told you so.”

I had another interesting, “small world” experience on our last day at AIT, while we were packing to leave. Some soldiers for the next class were moving into the barracks and one of them ended up near my bunk and almost caused our duffel bags to get mixed up. In talking to him, I learned that his name was also George Bannon and he saw my name on the Bunk Tag, which was affixed to every cot in the barracks. He assumed that members of his class had pre-assigned bunks, so we got a laugh out of that and chatted a little. He was from Philadelphia and we couldn’t determine if we were related, so we said our goodbyes and I left to go on leave. I saw him again, about 8 months later, when we were both at the Travel Office arranging for transportation to Germany.

Months later, as a lot of candidates in OCS were struggling to get organized so they could meet the strict guidelines of the OCS program, adjust to the lack of free time, and handle the complexities of gunnery; it became apparent that those of us who endured OCS Prep had a distinct advantage. Academic failures, mostly for the math-driven Gunnery subjects, resulted in one or more “setbacks” of 6 or 8 weeks to repeat some of the training. OCS was exceptionally challenging for the normal 23 weeks and there were candidates who spent 39 or more weeks in OCS because of setbacks. I don’t know if I could have endured for that much of a longer period. We started with 126 in our class and we graduated 60, 26 of whom were from the original 126. We were finally granted leave when we graduated from AIT on June 24, 1966, so I headed back to New Jersey and I had two weeks before my report date at OCS.

John Stone: Class 1-67

I’m an extremely proud alumni member of Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Artillery OCS - Class 1-67 (we actually graduated in December 1966). 2LT Harold Bascom "Pinky" Durham was my OCS classmate - and he was by far the most gung-ho, balls-to-the-wall, never quit, follow-me, young man I’ve ever known. His personal drive and enthusiasm were infectious. I was not surprised to see America decorate Pinky with the Medal of Honor – that was Pinky Durham!

Well, I was a member one of the first OCS Prep classes in the Spring of 1966. The guinea pigs, so to speak. OCS Prep was an experiment, and for my part I believe it was invaluable. First of all, OCS Prep was actually my AIT (Advanced Individual Training). No one was allowed to enter OCS without an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty). That way if you failed to complete OCS the Army could put you to work immediately. I was a pipeline soldier. I went to OCS Prep straight from Basic Training at Fort Dix (October-December 1965). I was just Private Sad Sack E-2, but when I showed up in Lawton for AIT, I discovered the Army had concocted something called OCS Prep. Who knew?

The decision to teach us the 13E20 MOS in OCS Prep was brilliant. “Gunnery” was one of the back-breaker segments at Artillery OCS due to the heavy emphasis on math skills. It accounted for a significant number of academic setbacks and drop outs. Entering Artillery OCS as a fully trained 13E, Fire Direction Center Operator, made gunnery a cake walk. Ironically, Pinky never attended OCS Prep, so he actually struggled with gunnery in the classroom, but clearly not on the battlefield.

The Army was a blur for me between October 1965 when I entered service, and December 17, 1966 when I graduated from Artillery OCS as a 20 year old Second Lieutenant. I had been a “Rent-a-Sargent” in Basic Training (A squad leader with a three-stripe armband), but OCS Prep was a whole new ball game. Spit shined floors, maintaining an immaculate rack and footlocker, breaking starch daily ... all of that was a far cry from the wet-mopped floors and baggy new-issue fatigues we wore at Basic.

Mostly I recall some of the “new-guys” I met in the OCS Prep barracks. Paul Garrel (sp?) - a Snake-eater coming from two tours in “Nam” with Special Forces... the old man of the group. Paul was inspirational ... and a little frightening. Max Zavenelli - literally a renowned world-class chess champion, and today the head of U.S. Chess internationally. I still recall three or four of us staring at a chess board in one cube area, while Max was in another shining shoes. We’d call out our move, and Max would surprise us with his counter-move when he couldn’t even see the board. One weekend (on a rare pass), Max held a simultaneous chess match in downtown Lawton, and won all one dozen matches in less than an hour - including a victory over the city chess champion. Max was brilliant. Then there was Kevin Gross, my favorite Jewish guy. I still entertain friends with some of Kevin’s patented Jewish Christmas Carols ... like, “Gentiles roasting on an open fire... Lions nibbling at their toes!” A truly funny man.

It’s impossible for me to overstate the significance of my time in Artillery OCS and OCS Prep. Without those foundations I would never have enjoyed the incredible experiences of a 20-year-old Commissioned Officer (my girlfriend had to buy the booze because I wasn’t old enough ... but two million men had to salute and call me “Sir”- go figure).

Jack Walker: Class 1-67

I received my draft orders in late 1965 so decided to enlist in the College Option OCS program. They said it would guarantee me a slot for Basic, Advanced Individual Training (AIT) and an OCS school. I, therefore, enlisted and entered the Army on February 21, 1966. After 2 months of Basic they boarded us on a bus and off we went to Fort Still to what we thought would be AIT - 8 weeks in Artillery Training before OCS - 23 weeks.

Well, our bus stopped in front of the Fort Sill AIT office and we were in for a huge surprise. We were on the ground doing push-ups almost immediately. Sergeant

Jim Roethler met us and was with us for the duration. Later on, when we were upperclassmen in OCS he entered the OCS program so we met him again. He was afraid we would deal him a lot of crap, but we did not. We thanked him for giving us the preparations for the real OCS. Even though it was almost like the real OCS it was a great “prep.”

Jim Gleckler: Class 16-67

I am an alum of Artillery OCS Prep. I remember a few things, but not terribly much. It really helped me academically in OCS.

Martin C. Newman: Class 17-67

Basic training went like clockwork, but instead of a two week leave, we were loaded early the next morning (after basic graduation) on a bus headed for Fort Sill, Oklahoma (had no idea where it even was). Arrival at Fort Sill proved to be quite an experience as we were to meet the always loud and in your face SGT Kersey (I would really like to see what Jim Kersey had to say about OCS once he got there). Once push-ups became common place, we kind of settled into OCS Prep activity. Out about 4-5 weeks, we put together a football team at the Battery Commanders suggestion/direction. And while many of the others in my class drilled daily, I, along with a few other preps (some had been college stars), played football. And football went well, all the way to the post championships. As it would be, we started OCS on the Sunday prior to the championship game (between OCS Prep and OCS), so the Prep team was all but wiped out as 3/4 of us entered OCS that Sunday. A request from our previous Battery Commander to the OCS Commandant to allow us to play in that game fell on deaf ears. In fact, I believe that OCS won on a forfeit as Prep could not field a team.

Since all the Prep players were known to our new cadre, we did not start our OCS career standing tall, but in the standard drop position. Actually OCS, after the first two weeks of Jarks, wasn't too bad. One thing we learned quickly was that the name of the game was teamwork. With it you can win, but without it you will go down in defeat. Once we figured the cadre out, things ran smoother.

Richard V. Manix, Jr.: Class 18-67

I went through basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, OCS Prep at Fort Sill and OCS at Fort Sill in 1966-1967. As I recall OCS Prep focused on gunnery which gave us a real leg up in OCS.

Ted Van Allen: Class 19-67

I did OCS Prep at Fort Sill as well. Nothing like being an underclassman for 8 additional weeks just to prepare you to be an OCS underclassman. Getting the 13E20 AIT training did help making the gunnery classes easier in OCS.

James E. Snyder: Class 26A-67

Some of my classmates attended Fort Sill's OCS prep course as their AIT. And that may explain why some candidates didn't have to learn the hard way, never accumulated the number of demerits the rest of us did, and never seemed to run the hill (MB4), whereas this was a regular Saturday and Sunday event for many of us.

Gordon F Kelley: Class 27B-67

I went to OCS Prep. OCS choices were for me first Infantry as I was gung-ho and in great physical shape, Signal Corp for the after Army skills, and third Artillery as math was involved and I had taken a lot of math in college as I wanted to be an engineer, preferable automotive.

That's how I got to 13 Echo OCS Prep. A big black Sergeant, whose name I unfortunately can't recall was our instructor and he taught us everything inside and out, with no questions asked. He was so big, (I am 6 feet, 1 inch) so maybe 6 feet,7inches that he had to tuck his ears in when he put on his helmet liner. Needless to say, we were very respectful of this wonderful NCO.

What did OCS Prep do for me and others? 13 Echo training was the heart and soul of the Artillery OCS program, so for anyone 13 Echo trained with our NCOs, the gunnery instruction was a re-run, and in fact the captains teaching it, in many cases knew less than what we did. But being a good military brat, one keeps his mouth shut and looks forward. Those of us with good grades were also assigned a weaker student and we spent many the night under a blanket with a flashlight trying to make some poor soul with and Infantry basic training course understand sight/ angle of sight/ and all the other math to shoot.

So, to me, OCS Prep was the most important thing that happened as I knew my gunnery inside and out and the NCOs knew that I knew my stuff.

Ronald Terry: Class 36B-67

I'd like to add my two cents on OCS Prep. I was approached in my fifth week of Basic (Fort Ord) and escorted to the Company Commander's office (D Company 3rd Battalion, 1st Training Brigade). He asked, based on my performance to date, if I'd be interested in attending OCS. I (with a wife and child on the way) said yes. Three weeks later I was enroute to Fort Sill reporting to Echo Battery, 7th Training Battalion.

I would have to say the training (on the guns and basic gunnery procedures) was very helpful when I transitioned to OCS. It was a shortened OCS experience which included the fire watch.

Dale Nichols: Class 40A-67

I was selected to go to Artillery OCS Prep which was the FDC AIT with extra hazing. Apparently, most AITs were fairly relaxed but not this one. If anything,

it was harder than OCS -- but only about 90 days in length, and they often let you off on Saturday night. The idea was to wash out those who couldn't learn the subject matter or take the hazing before they got to OCS. The only problem for those of us who got through both was that we had nine months of hell instead of six. OCS Prep had the toughest inspections I ever had in the Army. Washouts in OCS - I don't remember losing anyone from OCS Prep, but we lost about half of the starters in my OCS class.

Brian Kobinsky: Class 46A-67

I did basic at Fort Lewis, Washington in February and March of 1967. AIT was OCS prep at Fort Sill, which as I recall was just like another 8 weeks of OCS. I do recall shiny helmet liners though, but not much else.

Note: There was a significant reduction in OCS during August 1967. Five classes started in May, four in June, six in July, two in August, three in September, one in October, one in November and none in December.

Kerry Walsh: 503-68

Regarding OCS Prep. I attended that 8-week school at Fort Sill in September and October of 1967. It was wonderful. Great gunnery classes, great instructors without the harassment and rigors of OCS.

I feel very fortunate to have had those 8 weeks of gunnery in preparation for OCS. We had other guys transfer into our OCS class in November of that year that were 11Bravos. They were at an extreme disadvantage in gunnery classes.

Billy R. Cooper: Class 1-69 *From the Reluctant General* by Billy R. Cooper, Copyright 2011

On Monday of week 2 of (Leadership Preparatory Course (LPC) at Fort Sill, prior to class, my drill sergeant found me at my bunk and asked, "Private Cooper, how would you like to go to OCS?" That's right, OCS. I said, "Drill Sergeant, I have no idea what you are talking about. Please explain it to me." He took a seat on an adjacent footlocker and told me to sit down. It took him about thirty minutes to get me to understand that OCS was Officer Candidate School. He indicated the other drill sergeants and he had discussed it, reviewed my records, and thought I had the potential to be a good officer. He explained that it was purely voluntary. He said one more thing I did not expect. He said, "Cooper, you are never going to be happy as an enlisted man. I think you should do it." I said, "What happens if I fail?" He said, "You will be assigned to complete cannoneer AIT and probably be assigned to duty in Vietnam."

After all the explanations were done and his reaffirmation that he thought I could do it, I told him I would give it a try and do my best. He helped me fill out the application. He set up the interview with the brigade commander, a colonel, and

worked with me diligently for a few days to prep me. Discussions of current events, opinions about the Vietnam War, leadership questions, and why I wanted to be an officer were the topics. He was great. We got it all done. I passed the interview and was accepted for OCS. He helped me pack all my things and moved me to a different barracks for OCS prep. He was a great NCO. Before he left me, he shook my hand, said good luck, and saluted me as he said, "Let me be the first to salute you, future lieutenant, because I know you will succeed." I said, "Thank you, Drill Sergeant," and returned his salute. He walked away. I think his name was Staff Sergeant (SSG) Smith, but I'm not completely sure. I hope he reads this and remembers. It is perhaps the best tribute I can give him. He remains one of the best NCOs I ever met even though it was for a very short period of time.

At this point, I had been a soldier for about eleven weeks. Now, I was off to OCS prep, which was artillery fire direction. (13E AIT) consisting of fire direction and observed fire procedures. The how-tos of target identification, target location, call-for-fire procedures, ballistics for different artillery projectiles, impact of weather, projectile weight, propellant temperature, and other nonstandard factors on ballistics (flight trajectory) to hit the target. Learning to properly use tactical radios was also very important. I may have left a few things out. All this was done manually with graphic firing tables, graphic site tables (these were slide rule equivalents), and tabular firing tables. We spent some time on the Field Artillery Digital Automated Computer (FADAC or Freddie FADAC as it was known). We were told if we could master these things along with leadership and discipline, not only could we be good fire direction center soldiers, but good officers as well if we completed OCS. Most of our time was focused on academics. Regular soldier responsibilities, like KP, guard duty, barracks duties, were important. But the skills that would help us, our units, and fellow soldiers best in Vietnam involved mastery of everything related to delivering effective fire support to maneuver units. I was good at it. I was selected to be the trainee first sergeant for most of the course. Apparently, some of my fellow classmates did not appreciate that and gave me a semi blanket party on the last day. After graduation, I found my wall locker overturned, and my footlocker had been thrown downstairs. Disappointing. I think my fellow classmates thought I was too tough on them. No matter. Eight weeks of 13E10 AIT. All of us graduated. Scheduled for OCS.

Rob Mood: Class 22-69

I don't think I had any orders when they loaded us onto the bus to Fort Sill, and I don't remember if I had any expectation about where I was headed specifically. The first night at Sill I was in a WWII wooden barracks – I think it was Saturday, March 15, 1969, and we were told you will find out everything you need to know tomorrow. Somehow, I think I recall it was an Honest John crewman AIT. Anyhow, the next morning – Sunday - I was pulled out of formation and told to get my shit together chop chop because I was going to be marched "across the

street" to Charlie 7. That was said as if it were meant to induce dread. C7 was a complex of new, one-story, cinder-block buildings, between Schwartz and Thomas streets, just east of Tacey Street. Google Earth says that now it is the Fort Sill NCO Academy.

It was the OCS Prep AIT, but it had fallen on hard times. Charlie 7 was pretty straight forward 13E20 AIT, with a layer of OCS prep lathered on top. It was supposed to be 3-tiered class system, like OCS, with blue, green, and red classes, but when our class started, another class had graduated that weekend, and there were not any others in the program. Instead of getting a class worth every 2 or 3 weeks, they were getting a class every 8 weeks, so we didn't have any middleclass or upper class to harass us. We just had a couple of old drill sergeants who were not very strict or very motivated, and in fact neither of them was Field Artillery, so they didn't know what we were learning. C7 was the first place I ever heard the term "Chief of Smoke", and I didn't know what it meant so I asked the class Drill Sergeant. He didn't know either.

We wore polished helmet liners with some smooged-up insignia on the front, and we broke starch every day and learned to spit shine. We had pretty tough standards for cubical display and order, but mostly we just looked after ourselves and marched to class every day. Our gunnery classroom was two or three blocks down Tacey Street from the Battery Area, and after the first couple of weeks, the BC of the week just marched us down there. The classroom building is still there, at the corner of Packard and Tacey. We didn't double time very much and we didn't sing at all. But we either learned the phonetic alphabet thoroughly, and used it constantly, or did a lot of pushups. Our gunnery instructor was an E6 who was very good. I'm ashamed I cannot remember his name – maybe Martinez or Ramirez – but he taught us gunnery well enough that OCS gunnery was 95% review for me.

After five weeks, when we would have become upperclass, the cadre pretty much left us alone all the time, and most evenings we would stroll over to the Tacey Street beer hall and have a Coors or two. No new class came to C7 in the 8 weeks we were there, so we didn't have anybody to fuss at, so we had plenty of spare time.

Oddly, we did pull KP. C7 had its own mess hall, and every day two or three guys were detailed to KP. There may have been critical training days when nobody was detailed, but I remember pulling KP twice. The Mess Sergeant and the cooks were all really laid back and cool, and mostly the KPs didn't do much except clean up. January and February had been pretty uniformly nasty at Fort Leonard Wood - cold rain and overcast – so outside KP on a warm spring day with the sky blue and sun out was really nice. Sort the garbage into the correct cans and wash them out after the trucks picked them up and mostly just sit in the sun on the loading dock and bask. The C7 First Sergeant and Mess Sergeant had an interesting little racket going with the morning reports, so we ate really well.

I will have to say that OCS Prep sort of spoiled me for OCS. During the 8 weeks of pretty rigorous classroom training which I seemed to have mastered, I had lost the dread and 'tail-between-the-legs' attitude I had when I left Fort Leonard Wood. I'm not sure I was hot shit yet, but I certainly felt like OCS wasn't going to be any big deal. HA!

Dave Whelan: Class 22-69

I was in Class 22-69 and also went through AIT at Fort Sill (OCS Prep). In some cases, we had the same instructors in both programs. The AIT program was well planned and served as a good way to determine potential, or lack of potential. I know when I went through, it was heavily academic - not that the physical side was ignored.

By the time we were done, our uniform was ready for OCS and I didn't wait at all to begin - 2 weeks leave and I was back at Fort Sill for the games to begin. You couldn't help but feel sorry for the few candidates that came to Fort Sill from a different AIT. When I was in OCS those candidates unlucky enough to wash out normally just went across the street to Advanced Leader Course (ACL) School. Also never heard of any special black polish - but spent some quality time in the Tacey Street beer hall, close by the phone center.



**OCS Prep Helmet Liner donated to Artillery OCS
by Nolan Hargrave OCS Prep Staff 1969-1970**



Comments from the OCS Prep graduates who did not complete the OCS program are included to provide points of view from a different perspective.

**Robert A. (Bob) Bracey: USATC FA (OCS Prep) – Fort Sill, OK 1967
(From The OCS Experience – Memories of Robinson Barracks)**

The stories and pictures bring back many great memories of Fort Sill and the Field Artillery OCS, even for those of us who are not among the alumni. As with so many of the alumni who have recounted here the ways in which their lives were altered by the OCS experience, I can honestly say that it had a significant impact on a number of us who did not attend, as well.

I was among those who were accepted into FA OCS while completing basic training at Fort Jackson in the spring of 1967. Subsequently, while most of my contemporaries were sent to Fort Ord for Infantry AIT, I was ordered to report for the OCS Prep program at Fort Sill. There, while learning the Fire Direction and Intelligence MOS (13E20) we were introduced to the rigorous discipline, character and leadership building that would prepare us for more of the same upon our ultimate transition to Robinson Barracks.

From the day we arrived we began preparing for the academic challenge, the discipline, Jarks, parking lot runs and E&E that lay ahead in our quest to become leaders. Our AIT classroom training concentrated on the technical aspects of fire direction; but beyond the classroom our leadership development continued. Unlike those who were pursuing identical technical training in the non-OCS-prep units, we led a very restricted life. I recall that around the fifth or sixth week we were finally offered our first opportunity to leave the post. However, there was a “catch.” We had been invited to attend a Sunday night ice cream social and program at a church about a block north of the downtown bar district; and immediately following the event the BC would distribute passes good for about two hours of free time. As this was the first time we were “turned loose” in Lawton, we spent most of our precious two hours just trying to orient ourselves. In the end it wasn’t much real freedom; but we were so deprived that each of us savored every moment.

Most of us had chosen FA OCS, because we believed the Field Artillery to be a behind-the-lines operation; and many were shocked to learn that our ultimate role would be that of the FO. We were even given a bit of introductory FO training during a couple of our field training sessions at the OP. Being out there at the OP where we could see the results of our work did so much to heighten our interest. As we approached the final weeks of AIT, we were all eager to face the challenges that lay before us – just a few blocks up the street at Robinson Barracks.

Finally, in mid-August our “graduation” day arrived. Almost immediately after the ceremony we were ordered to “fall in” for an important message from our BC. We all assumed that the “news” would be our OCS class assignments. To our

great dismay the message was quite the opposite. We were informed that the Army had decided to drastically reduce OCS throughput for a while (with the exception of the Armor OCS at Fort Knox). We were given several choices:

1. Accept a temporary assignment while awaiting a FA OCS class date (expected to be no more than a few months duration).
2. Report immediately to Fort Knox for Armor OCS.
3. Rescind our OCS application and complete our service obligation among the enlisted ranks.

After more than four months of basic training and OCS preparatory AIT (with the latter being exceptionally rigorous), the news did not sit well with many among us. Of the forty-four soldiers in my AIT class, only four of us chose Option 1. Nobody chose Option 2 (the cadre had done a fantastic job of “selling” the idea that the Field Artillery was the place to be); and the remaining forty chose Option 3. Each day during the next four weeks a few would receive orders for their next assignment. Of the forty who chose to abandon the idea of attending OCS, all would be sent to Fort Ord for additional training prior to deploying to RVN. Among the four of us who chose to continue waiting for a class date, one went to Korea, two were sent to a Howitzer unit in Germany and I was assigned to an Honest John rocket battalion in Nürnberg, Germany.

Germany was a long way from Vietnam; but each month one or more from my FDC section would be “levied” to the war zone. I was exempt from that possibility, since my assignment there was temporary, pending my return to OCS. The months passed quickly; and still no order to report back to Fort Sill. One day in mid-December of 1968, my BC sent his clerk to fetch me from a training session in which we were conducting an Honest John fire mission dry run. Turning my position at the FADAC over to another member of the FDC team, I jogged back to the BC’s office, only to find him, the Battalion Commander and Executive Officer all awaiting my arrival. My class date had finally come through; and they must have realized that, with less than four months of remaining active duty obligation, I would be reluctant to make a choice that would extend my obligation an additional thirty months. Over the next two hours I defended against an all out sales assault that would have made the most successful car salesmen envious. I had really wanted those Gold bars, and was tempted; but thanks in part to my training, I thought it through carefully. Ultimately, I decided that it was time to move on with my life. Completing the remaining year of my undergraduate education and beginning an engineering career had become my new primary objectives.

It’s true that I am not an alumnus of the FA OCS; but, looking back, I cannot help but note the profound impact that the mere pursuit of that goal had upon my life. Ultimately, it was one of those forks in the road – a point where one must choose which path to take – that forever alter the sequence of events that constitute a person’s life. Had my FA OCS application not been accepted, I would

surely have been a foot soldier in Vietnam. Had I survived that experience, I'm quite certain that my life afterward would have been quite different. Had I not chosen to persist with my goal of attending FA OCS even as others were giving up on the idea, I would have served as an enlisted soldier in the Field Artillery in Vietnam; and my life would have taken a different path. Finally, had I not decided to forego attending FA OCS when my class date finally came through, my active duty obligation would have been extended another thirty months, after which I may have decided to make a career of military service. My life's entire timeline would have been altered. I would not have returned to school when I did, would not have the engineering career that I've enjoyed and I would not have met the wonderful woman to whom I've been married for nearly forty years.

Yes, my visiting this site indicates that I still wonder what it would have meant to be counted among you; and I deeply respect those of you who achieved the goal to which I once aspired. I can only speculate about how my life would be different today. Still, I'm quite happy with the choices I made.

**Joe P. Dunn: Class 1-70 (Resigned from OCS in the 5th or 6th week)
*From Desk Warrior: Memoirs of a Combat REMF, copyright 2004***

The artillery OCS Prep unit was a very different experience from my unhappy days in Basic Training. Most in the unit were college graduates with several graduate students as well. Our drill sergeant was quite unlike the macho, screaming, profane egomaniacs from Basic. A pencil thin, almost effete Black man, with a high voice, he was intelligent and articulate. Everything about him bespoke gentleman. We were to refer to him as Drill Sergeant Sir, and it seemed appropriate. Many years later, Lou Gossett in *An Officer and a Gentleman* reminded me of the man. The first lieutenant who served as company executive and training officer was another story. A pompous dullard who could never seem to get anything right, he was a laughingstock among the cadets and the cadre as well. Although a bit overweight, soft, and pudgy, he preened around attempting to demonstrate, at least in his own mind, the model to which we should aspire. One of his early pronouncements was that for the rest of our lives we would be recognized as having been military officers by the bearing and demeanor that would set us apart. If he was an example, I wished to forego this distinction.

The prep unit was structured as a preview of OCS. We progressed through three stages--lower, mid, and upper classes--during the eight-week period which simulated experiences as trainees, NCOs, and officers. Lower class entailed heavy harassment conducted by the mid class under the supervision of the upper class. The harassment wasn't vicious. In fact, it was sort of a game, and the time frame was short, so I didn't mind the lowerclass time period at all. Life as mid and upperclassmen was pleasant. As an order freak, I liked the preciseness, the attention to the smallest detail, and the challenge to get everything just right in the prep unit. Hard work and merit paid off, and the battery (known as a company in most other areas of the Army) worked together

as a unit. This was quite unlike the chaotic incompetence of Basic. Since we needed to be alert for the classroom work, proper sleep was a priority. The military believes in getting up early--in this case 4:30 a.m.--so we were dispatched to bed at 8:30 p.m. with bright sunlight still streaming through the windows. It didn't get dark until between 9:30 and 10:00 p.m. during May and June. It was difficult to go to sleep under these conditions, but most of the time we had to sneak out of bed anyway to shine our boots and belt buckles and clean the barracks. We slept on top of our tightly made beds or even on the floor since there wasn't time to make the bed to inspection-quality in the allotted two minutes when we leaped out of bed in the pre-dawn morning.

I rather enjoyed playing the game in AIT and was reasonably good at it. My favorite memory is what some others considered the worst nightmare--the traditional Jark every Sunday morning. Named after a Colonel Jark, the first commander of OCS, it was a 4.2-mile roundtrip run up a mountain in combat boots carrying your weapon. Theoretically we were to stay in formation, but inevitably the formation broke down and runners were allowed to proceed on their own in a competitive race to the top. It was a tough run. The mountain was steep and the rifle got heavier and heavier. I was usually among the first finishers with my legs, arms, and lungs burning. When everyone finally made it to the top, we started back in formation. On the way down winning the race wasn't important. The goal was to get everyone back by encouraging and assisting weaker runners, shouldering their rifles as needed. If that wasn't enough, the tradition dictated carrying a rock down the mountain. The larger the rock, the more macho the achievement. OCS candidates placed their rock in front of them at breakfast as symbol of their accomplishment. As a former cross-country runner, I had good legs; but my upper body strength wasn't as fully developed. Getting my rifle, and usually someone else's as well, down the mountain was enough stress on aching arms and shoulders, so I confined myself to modest rocks that I could carry clenched in my fist. I remember one super athlete cradling a small boulder in his hands with two rifles slung over his back.

Many runners couldn't make it up the mountain in the first place. Most ended up walking and taking breaks to sit down and rest. On the trip down, the sides were littered with breakdowns. Several times I thought that I would join the number, and I did throw up at least once, but I always kept running to the end. In a perverted sort of way, I enjoyed the challenge of the Jark. The best part though was that when we returned, we could let our aching, sweat-drenched bodies stand under a hot shower for as long as we wished. Many then collapsed in bed, but I strolled over to the mess hall for morning brunch where we were free from any harassment. Although so tired that I could hardly lift the fork to my mouth, those brunches are among my fondest memories of my Stateside Army days. I was around for only a few OCS Jarks, but they were a bright light in an otherwise dismal time. Even if, like my pebbles, the rocks grow into boulders over the years and the physical feats of carrying three classmates down the mountain on your back become more apocryphally heroic, the Jark is a

unique rite of passage and bonding experience among artillery officers. I never wore crossed cannons on my lapel, but I have swapped a few Jark yarns with artillerymen at various times in later life.

Most of AIT was devoted to the serious classroom work of learning to direct artillery fire. I decidedly did not like FDC. I found the elementary geometric formulas and the slide ruler as baffling and frustrating as I had in high school, and my calculation skills were substandard. Although I had brought this on myself through the OCS option, I reflected that it was typical of the Army to test an individual extensively to determine strengths and weaknesses and then assign him to an area of demonstrated ineptitude. To say that I was not competent to direct live artillery fire was a modest understatement. In my first field exercise, I had the tubes pointed 180 degrees in the opposite direction from where I thought that I was firing. The range officer noted that I was more danger to my own side than to the enemy.

Several in the OCS Prep unit had made the decision to drop the OCS option, including a few who had increased their enlistment term to get the opportunity; they were stuck with their three-year obligation even if they didn't go to OCS. However, everyone was told that we couldn't drop OCS during AIT. I suspected, as I had when I raised the issue during Basic Training, that these pronouncements were a lie and all the duplicity was about maintaining good statistics. The Army believed that too many candidates were dropping out of OCS before they entered the program, so units were ordered to lower the drop-out rate. I was still too green to challenge the system, but I was convinced that the Army and the truth had nothing in common. The institution would say whatever was convenient to suit their purposes of the moment. As I witnessed later in Vietnam, truth and reality meant less than good statistics from which to spin the official story of the day. Already I was experiencing one of the root causes of our failure in the war.

Some candidates were persistent enough to drop OCS during AIT. Since I enjoyed the OCS Prep unit and the thought of having to serve in FDC was not appealing, I wavered back and forth. Since my obligation remained two years until I actually accepted a commission and every day counted no matter where I was, I drifted along putting off a final decision. I was increasingly convinced that Vietnam was inevitable no matter what route I took. We were threatened constantly that OCS dropouts were automatically sent to Vietnam. However, almost 90% of non-OCS-slotted FDC graduates were going anyway. If one completed OCS, a Vietnam tour awaited either immediately or certainly during the second year. The high casualty rate made second lieutenant forward observers in great demand.

For the most part, the OCS Prep unit was a collection of talented individuals. It would be interesting to know what became of them in the military and beyond. How many of them, whether ultimately commissioned or not, became Vietnam statistics?

I started OCS with inadequate motivation, and it was as miserable an experience as advertised. In the prep unit, if you worked very hard and did things right, you received praise rather than abuse. It didn't work that way at OCS. The abuse, the hostility, the adversity, and the chaos were constant no matter what you did. It wasn't possible to do it right no matter how hard you tried. For an obsessive person such as me, that was very difficult to accept. We were up almost all the first night devoting hours to arranging the scores of field manuals and technical books on our shelves according to the specifications. I was exhausted, but I knew that the display was perfect. My cubicle mate, a walking disaster of disorganization, gave up and went to bed hours before I did. The next morning the inspecting midclassmen descended on the barracks screaming and shouting and tearing everything apart. One excoriated my cubicle mate about his disarray and then started yelling at me about why I hadn't helped him. He turned to my shelf, pulled one manual out about, half an inch, pointed at the book with a sneer, and asked why my shelf was shamefully out of line. The only response that we were allowed to give to any charge was "No excuse, Sir." When I bellowed out the mantra, he screamed in my face at the top of his lungs that my books were a disgrace, and I had no explanation. With a couple of swipes, he slung the manuals across the room bouncing them off the wall and tearing them apart. He then proceeded to rip up my bed and toss the mattress and everything else I had all over the room. Everyone else experienced the same fate. The barracks was in shambles. No one could tell what belonged to whom.

An almost uncontrollable rage welled up inside me. My face was red. The midclassman put his nose right against mine breathing heavily in my face and screamed repeatedly, did I want to hit him? I yelled back, "No Sir," each time, but my mind was pulsating internally that at that moment, nothing in the world would give me greater pleasure. As he continued to scream insults at me, I fought the urge that was growing by the second. Only a tremendous amount of fear of the situation, of him, and of the consequences prevented me from ending my OCS venture that very first day in what would have been a very satisfying effort to break his nose.

To some extent today, I can understand, although I do not accept, the scenario. It was the beginning of a process of molding us to deal with fear, arbitrariness, chaos, intimidation, anger, and the necessity of maintaining discipline and poise no matter what. As I learned later, this was good preparation for combat. At the time, however, I only discerned fear, anger, and hatred. The fear was far more than of a particular individual and situation. It was the terror of the arbitrary and totalitarian power which the system held over me and of having my whole life ruined, even going to jail, if I couldn't control myself. My complete powerlessness in a totally artificial world was very difficult for me to accept. I knew that I was about to explode, and I had no recourse. Several candidates didn't make it through the first day. Certainly, I would have loved to walk myself. If this was what it took to be a military officer, I knew that I didn't have it.

