

## TOBIAS WOLFF

Tobias Wolff arrived at Fort Sill in late 1965 to attend the Field Artillery Officer Candidate School, class 9-66. He received a commission as a Second Lieutenant of Field Artillery in April 1966. He left Fort Sill to join the 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and served with the Special Forces in Vietnam. Upon completion of his tour, having attained the rank of First Lieutenant, Mr. Wolff left the Army in 1968.

Mr. Wolff currently resides in Syracuse, New York with his wife Catherine and two sons, Michael and Patrick. He is a Professor of English at Syracuse University and is working on a novel about Vietnam.

In the years since he served his country, Tobias Wolff has become an award-winning author. His first book, a collection of short stories titled *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*, won the 1982 Saint Lawrence Award for the best first work of fiction by an author. His other works include: a memoir—*This Boy's Life*—soon to be a major motion picture starring Robert De Niro as Mr. Wolff's stepfather; and an additional short story collection—*The Barracks Thief*—which won the 1985 P.E.N./Faulkner award for the best book of the year by an American author. His short stories have appeared as articles in such prestigious magazines as *The Atlantic*, *Esquire*, and *Vanity Fair*.

Mr. Wolff has held Guggenheim and Wallace Stenger Fellowships for creative writing and twice received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts. He holds a degree from Oxford University and a Masters of Arts from Stanford University.

Today Tobias Wolff returns to Fort Sill and Robinson Barracks. We induct him as the 621st member into the OCS Hall of Fame for his significant contributions to the nation both in and out of uniform. His photograph will hang in the Hall of National Prominence.

## **Tobias Wolff (Class 9-66)**

Tobias Wolff (born June 19, 1945, Birmingham, Alabama, U.S.) is an American writer who is primarily known for his memoirs and for his short stories, in which many voices and a wide range of emotions are skillfully depicted.

Wolff's parents divorced when he was a child. From the age of 10, he traveled with his mother, who relocated frequently and finally settled in Seattle, Washington, where she remarried. Wolff wrote about his childhood in the 1950s, including his relationship with his abusive stepfather, in *This Boy's Life: A Memoir* (1989; film 1993), which was perhaps his best-known work. His older brother, the novelist Geoffrey Wolff, was brought up by their father (an aeronautical engineer and a pathological liar) and wrote about his childhood in *The Duke of Deception: Memories of My Father* (1979). The brothers were reunited when Tobias was a young teenager.

Wolff served in the military as a paratrooper during the Vietnam War, after which he was educated at the University of Oxford (B.A., 1972; M.A., 1975) and Stanford University (M.A., 1978). He was appointed writer in residence at Syracuse (New York) University, where he taught from 1980 to 1997.

His first published collections of short stories were *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs* (1981; U.K. title, *Hunters in the Snow*) and *Back in the World* (1985). Wolff also edited several anthologies of short stories, including *Matters of Life and Death: New American Stories* (1983), *A Doctor's Visit: Short Stories by Anton Chekhov* (1988), and *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Short Stories* (1994).

Later works by Wolff include the memoir *In Pharaoh's Army: Memories of a Lost War* (1994), about his experiences and maturation in Vietnam, and *The Night in Question* (1996), a collection of 14 stories, many of which again reflect Wolff's time in Vietnam. The novel *Old School* (2003) is a penetrating look at what happens when a prep-school student plagiarizes someone else's work in an attempt to win a literary competition. A latter collection of short stories, *Our Story Begins*, appeared in 2008.

Wolff was the recipient of numerous awards, notably the 1985 PEN/Faulkner Award for the novella *The Barracks Thief* (1984), which follows the lives of three young paratroopers who are awaiting their orders to be shipped out to Vietnam. Wolff also won three O. Henry Awards (1980, 1981, and 1985). In 2015 he received the National Medal of Arts.

**Tobias Wolff: 9-66**

**From "In Pharaoh's Army" (*Memories of the Lost War*), Copyright 1994**

I was at loose ends and bored. My company commander had been working on me to apply for Officer Candidate School, and I finally agreed. I took some tests and went before a panel of generals and colonels who took note of my command presence and pronounced me officer material. They told me I'd be on my way in a month or so.

My orders came. Instead of sending me to the infantry school at Fort Benning, they assigned me to Artillery Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I felt both guilty and relieved. Since the Special Forces had no howitzers, they could not reasonably send me back there. My logic was impeccable, but six months later, with twenty years of life under my belt and new gold bars on my shoulders, I opened my orders and saw that I was going right back where I started, to Fort Bragg and the Special Forces.

My position was absurd. While laboring to become an artilleryman I had acquired a body of skills now utterly useless to me—trigonometry! calculus!—and lost or grown clumsy in those I needed. It was going to be hard for the troops at Fort Bragg to take me seriously as an officer when some of them had known me not long before as an enlisted man, and as something of a fuck-up. I couldn't even take myself seriously. In my OCS class I'd finished forty-ninth out of forty-nine, the class goat—like Custer, as no one lost a chance to tell me.

It wasn't as disgraceful as it looked. There'd been one hundred twenty of us to start with. But it was still pretty bad. I barely passed the gunnery course, and then only by pulling all-nighters in the latrine. I was chronically late and unkempt. My jocose manner amused only a few of my classmates and none of my training officers, who in their reports labeled me "extraneous" and "magic"—not a compliment in those circles—and never failed to include me in the weekly Tark, an hours-long punishment run in full field equipment, which was so effective in producing misery that people used to line the streets to watch us stumble past, as they would have gathered to watch a hanging. Some bystanders were actually moved to pity by the sight of us and slipped us candy bars and words of encouragement. The true Christians among them threw water on our heads.

In the end I finished OCS only because, mainly to amuse myself, I had written a number of satirical songs and sketches for our battery to perform on graduation night. These revues, in the style of Hasty Pudding or the Princeton Triangle, were a tradition at Fort Sill and a big headache to our training officers, whose talents did not lie in this direction. Along with hundreds of other visitors, the post commandant and his staff would be in attendance. There'd be hell to pay if the show was a flop. When the time came for the final cuts to be made in our class it was discovered that I was the only one who could put the whole thing together. They kept me on to produce a farce. That was how I became an officer in the United States Army.