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North Highlands, California 95660

**Southwestern Signal School  
Camp San Luis Obispo  
Extract of Unpublished Memoir of  
Ronald O. Williams**

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Compiled by Ronald O. Williams circa 2003. Scanned 6 July 2020

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March 5, 2003

Western Mobilization and Training Center  
P.O. Box 4360  
Camp San Luis Obispo, California 93403  
Att: Ms Sandy Paralta

Hi,

I bet you expected a few lines from me describing my memories of CSLO. You must have been surprised to have received a novelette. I rooted around and found my diploma from basic training. It's a little worn as I carried it in my wallet for years. Also there are two post newspaper articles concerning SWSS honor grads. From them Col. Francis N. Miller is identified as commanding the 505<sup>th</sup> Signal Group and Lt. Col. Carl H. Sturies as the SWSS commandant. Lt. Col James McClung commanded the Basic Training Group and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Kenneth Foulkes commanded Company 2-BTG.

Were you able to find a copy of the old promotional booklet describing CSLO?

Regards,



Ron Williams

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9 September 2002

State of California  
Western Mobilization and Training Complex  
P.O. Box 4360  
Camp San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-4360  
Attn: Ms Sandy Paralta

Dear Sandy,

Please refer to our phone conversation a few weeks back. You asked if I could supply my recollections of CSLO. Well, being retired I have over the past 6 years began to write my bio just for the fun of it and appease the wishes of my grandchildren. My efforts were sporadic, so the continuity is awkward, but you should be able to pick out those items that may be of interest to you, so here is the part about CSLO that covers February through mid- August of 1953. If you would like to have enlarged photos copied on appropriate paper let me know which ones might be of value. I tried to select those that had some sort of CSLO backgrounds.

Next year we plan to motor Highway 1 and drop in at CSLO. With the huts gone it will not be the same as it was 50 years ago at all. I hope you saved just one as a museum piece. The publication I am looking for is a magazine style booklet that describes CSLO in detail and pictures many of the facilities. I had one but it was put in that magical place from which nothing of value ever returns. I would copy such a booklet and return it assuming you have one to send.

I have lost track of everyone I shared my time with at CSLO except Jack Addy. If you would like I will write Jack and introduce you to him and see what he might have to provide for you.

Best Regards



Ron Williams

## FORT SHERIDAN

My Mom often kidded me about having been found in an alley. That really bothered me because neither my Mom nor Dad ever showed deep affection. By that I mean there was hardly any hugs and kisses. I always liked my aunt Lorine, as she would shower me with hugs and kisses. She had this rabbit skin jacket that shedded awfully and the rabbit hair clung to me like glue. Her husband, my Dad's baby brother Howard, would caution me that the fur that he had given her was mink not rabbit. Now my Dad dearly loved his brothers. He was never happier than when he was hanging out with them. My problem was he could never remember my name. When he called to me he usually would evoke Howard's, name followed by Hershel or Lee. I would remind him that I was His son Ronald that my Mom named me after the movie star Ronald Coleman. My concern about whether my Dad loved me or not wasn't decided until the day I entered the army. I was drafted in January of 1953. The Korean War was still raging but there were peace talks and our guys were really kicking butt. It seemed possible that the war would end anytime. That morning my Mom relieved me of the fifth of I.W. Harper that I had in my AWOL bag while at the same time issuing a strict warning. Now she didn't kid around or make idle threats and she made quite an impression when she lectured me. "Sun flower" that was her pet name for me, "if you come home with a tattoo I'll cut your arm off. If you come home with a wife I'll cut that off too." Having been warned getting either was never even the slightest of options. My dad drove me down to the induction center on Van Buren Street. We had breakfast in a storefront diner. I don't recall what we talked about and eventually I had to leave him. We shook hands and I started up the wide stone steps leading into the induction center. Half way up I turned to wave goodbye. There he stood with his hands tightly clenched at his side. He was bowed forward as if he wanted to follow me. His face was contorted and there were tears in his eyes. I wanted to go back but that would have just made it harder. From that time on I never again questioned his affection for me.

I spent the day rolling fingerprints of the new recruits like myself. For lunch they put out a buffet. The food was gosh awful bad. Cold, greasy hamburgers and macaroni with cheese. For all I know it might have been C rations. Before rolling prints we were given a cursory physical to make sure we were not terribly diseased or deceased. Finally at about three PM we lined up and took the oath of allegiance. We were told to express our acceptance of becoming soldiers by taking one step forward. I didn't take the step but it didn't matter, as I was now the property of the United States of America. We marched in a single line over to the Union Station and boarded a train for Fort Sheridan. The Northwestern tracks bisect Lake View where we now lived and where I grew up. I remember the Belmont Theater and my High School, Lake View, flashing by. The station at Highwood was just a platform. There we boarded a bus and rode over to Fort Sheridan. This was Wednesday evening. The next Wednesday morning we flew to Camp San Luis Obispo, California. In between our processing took four working days. I thought that such an amount of time showed inefficiency. Actually the performance at the induction center was really just the opposite. For example the bus from the train station drove directly to a warehouse where we were outfitted with field coats and field hats. They wanted to make sure we were dressed warmly as Fort Sheridan is located on the shore of Lake Michigan where it is really cold. Next we went to a barracks that was placed right next to the post stockade. In fact when you left the front door of the barracks three strides would take you to the stockade fence. We drew mattresses, pillows, sheets and blankets. A Sergeant showed us how to make a tight G.I. bed. There was a problem as the springs of our bunks were so stretched that it was like sleeping in a hammock. My back ached terribly after a few nights. With our bunks made they marched us over to this consolidated mess hall where they served several thousand meals a day. It was there that they did serve C-rations three times a day. Ugh, ham and Lima beans, spaghetti all greasy tasteless goop. I really considered deserting. I had heard Army food was bad but this was awful. How could I endure this for two years? At this time of my life I weighted 130 pounds with a 29-inch waist. Food, unlike now, was not a big deal, but still a guy has to eat something. There was an option as corn flakes and milk were available at every meal. I had corn flakes and milk for breakfast and lunch and I bought a hamburger and shake at the PX for dinner. One of the guys from my neighborhood, Ronnie Haake, that was drafted with me went home every night. He would crawl out under the south gate where his buddies picked him up. I guess his Dad brought him back before dawn.

That Sunday my parents came for a visit and brought me a chicken dinner. God, it was delicious

took us to O'Hare and the plane, an old C-54, had its engines running, waiting for us. Now this was back in the days when planes didn't cruise at nearly 600 miles an hour. These old prop jobs flew at best somewhere around 200 miles an hour and we had 2000 miles to go. What was even worst was this old bird's pressurization system wasn't working well. That was O.K until we crossed the Rockies. We flew low and slow to Albuquerque where we landed in the early afternoon. We didn't taxi to the terminal but to a hanger where we used the washroom. It was bright and sunny and the temperature was 65 degrees. At that point I decided the Southwest was going to be the place for me. Later on in life it was for a short time. When we had to climb over the mountains some of us became air sick or developed a splitting headache. It wasn't fun. About sun down we skirted the Grand Canyon. At 8:30 Pacific Coast Time we landed at Paso Robles, California.

What I remember most about the flight was the flight attendant. She was really stacked and her blouse was so tight that it didn't close completely and she was braless, or so it seemed. Because the pressurization was out, or nonexistent, we flew low and we could see people on the ground waving at us. One group of four was waving frantically besides a small private airplane. We informed the pilot and he reported the supposedly downed plane. As I mentioned before we were flying along side the Grand Canyon at sun down. There wasn't much we could see in the deepening shadows and darkness but it was thrilling just to be so near such a renowned landmark that we had known about almost all our lives.

There was no boarding stairs or a ladder. We slid down a rope and the aircrew threw our duffel bags down onto the tarmac. There was a waiting bus to drive us the fifty or so miles to CSLO. The driver informed us that the mess halls would be closed when we got to our new company area and if we wanted dinner he would stop somewhere. That we did. There was a Diner in Atascadero that served us burgers and beer. All to many of us had a beer to many. Staff Sergeant Lopez who was not pleased with out general condition greeted us. He ordered push-ups for us all in the light rain that had begun to fall. Because I was the so-called plane commander he asked for my name. But nothing came of it. What punishment that was forthcoming was immediate as Sergeant Lopez put his foot squarely between the shoulder blades of every recruit he felt was tipsy and pushed him into the mud while he was doing push-ups. That was the only incidence of cruelty that I encountered while in the Army.

Now Camp San Luis Obispo is a National Guard Camp. By military standards it is rather small but they managed to train several divisions there during WWII. In 1953 the East Garrison billeted elements of the 505<sup>th</sup> Signal Group commanded by Colonel Francis N. Miller. Their mission was to provide the manpower needed by the South Western Signal Replacement Training Center (SWSRTC) headquartered there commanded by Colonel James A. "Iron Lung" McClung. There were four companies that made up a basic training group, four Southwestern Signal School (SWSS) companies and two technical service school companies. In the technical service school they taught pole climbing, switchboard operation and field wireman duties. At SWSS, manual central office installation, crypto clerk, UHF repeater installation, teletypewriter maintenance and field radio repair were taught. I think IQ segregated us. If you were above the norm you were assigned to SWSS and below to the Technical Service Unit. The basic and school company living areas were located at the Northwest corner of the West garrison. The school buildings were located to the south across Dairy creek. The basic instructors and training cadre were First Cavalry Korean combat veterans but the SWSS instructors were civilians. I eventually drew central office installation.

As soon as we had arrived in the Basic Company area we drew bedding and retired to the little five man huts that would be our homes for the next six months or so. I had my bed made when I discovered my pillow was missing. Being a natural paranoid I assumed the kid next to me had taken it so I took it back. The next morning they reassigned us to huts in alphabetical order by name. When I picked up my mattress there was my delinquent pillow. What can I say!

Now my vision of California was palm trees, orange groves and vineyards. When I stepped outside the first morning I was stunned to find that there was not a tree in sight. We were surrounded by dried, brown, grass covered hills. What a surprise to find that SLO is an arid locale. All that I knew about SLO is that a lady from there each year always entered a script for one episode of the radio show "Dr Christian". Passing through SLO the night before produced only one lone palm tree that was visible from the bus. But, all that was needed was water as we found later that along the streams passing through the

camp the vegetation was verdant and lush. Dairy Creek had cut a deep flat-bottomed ravine with steep sides perhaps 200 yards wide that was impenetrable. One training class we went down to the bottom where there was a clearing and a small section of bleacher seats, one platoon at a time. They picked one squad to hide in the greenery except one trooper had to take a position in a highly visible foxhole. Those chosen to hide were not allowed to go more than two steps into woods. From our position on the bleachers some 75 yards away we were not able to spot even one person except for the guy in the foxhole. If you felt you had located someone you were asked to walk to the edge of the woods and point them out. In doing so one GI actually stepped over one of the men that was hiding stretched out on the ground. Viet Nam must have been a nightmare.



Back Row L-R Doug, Jerry and Howard  
Front Row L-R Ron and Al

I moved in with what initially were four really nice people. However, Dough Williams from Bremerton, Washington turned out to be a social misfit in the end. Jerry Whitager, a Washington logger, Al Weeden and Howard Wentzel who hailed from Central Wisconsin turned out O.K. I only hope that I was as good a comrade to them as they were to me. But Dough a really handsome hunk, which we all liked a lot, went bad on us. The hut, number 262, had two bunk beds and a single cot along with a bare lamp bulb and oil stove. Each of us had a shelf for field gear that also held a clothes rod for our uniforms.



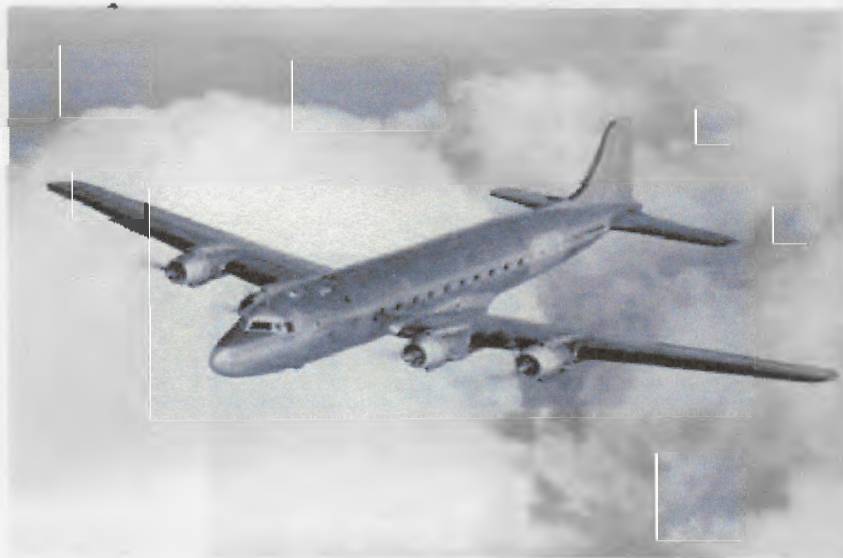
Jerry and Howard

trousers came together down by my knees. I could hardly walk. I finally paid to have them tailored to fit. Also the low quarters were too small. I complained repeatedly but they just wouldn't give me a size larger because my clothing record stated I was a size nine, not ten, and that was that. Finally my dad bought me a pair of brown Florsheims and sent them to me. We had to carry our duffel bags filled with clothing from the warehouse to our barracks. I was so weakened by the flu that I really struggled.

When my family arrived at Fort Sheridan I was on fireguard. It was my job to patrol the company barracks and make sure no one was smoking in bed. I had a white helmet liner, Sam Brown Belt and empty holster. But I did have a nightstick. I was between barracks when I noticed my Dad had arrived and he had parked illegally. With my head down I marched over and tapped on his window with the nightstick. He looked up surprised and alarmed and he didn't recognize me until I began to laugh. God I loved him and my Mom so much. They stayed for several hours and fed a chum named Richard Hoffman and me lots of fried chicken.

We had silly things happen such as when the guys on the floor above tried to mop. They flooded the floor and the water began dripping on us below. Our howls and scream went unnoticed and we finally had to storm the second floor to achieve relief. There was always a poker game going and one afternoon the Charge of Quarters announced on over the PA that all the guys in unauthorized cards games were to report immediately to the orderly room. A few dummies actually turned themselves in assuming he knew who they were.

## CSLO



Douglas C-54 Skymaster

Wednesday the fourth of February 1953, in case you don't remember, dawned bright and clear and 12 degrees below zero at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. The day before had been unusually warm, so warm in fact that a slight thaw had occurred. I had my morning corn flakes and milk as usual. Later we turned in our bedding, gathered up our duffel bags and placed them on a six by six for transport to O'Hare Field. There were forty of us that had been singled out for the Signal Corps. All of my buddies old and new went to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas to learn to be artillerymen. For the trip to California I was made the plane commander. Big deal. What that really meant was I had to carry this big stack of personal history files and travel orders. As we were waiting in formation for transportation to O'Hare Field we noticed the empty beer cans and whiskey bottles that we had pushed into the snow outside our barracks windows were now protruding skyward. I'm sure the Cadre saw them but they graciously turned a blind eye to them. A bus

and I am not a fan of chicken. I have ghastly memories of my Mom, when we lived in Nashville, doing in a chicken for Sunday dinner by wringing its neck. The poor headless thing would race around, you know like a chicken with its head chopped off. Sometimes I don't see chicken on my plate but little arms and legs about to be devoured by a cannibal. I do believe my wife when she is seeking some degree of revenge will buy the oldest toughest bird she can find and serve it up to me partially raw. But, anyway the food did get a lot better in basic training except for Mondays when C-rations were served. By mid afternoon after two meals of C-rations you could smell us coming long before you could see or hear us. Once we were marching in a column of fours and the guy in front of me was so flatulent that I had to get out of formation and march along side in the ditch. Corporal Gilman our Drill Instruction and number one persecutor started to force me back in line when a blue cloud descended on him and he just shrugged and ordered me " as you were." I don't remember the recruits name but I got even a week or so later. We were marching back from a transition range when I inadvertently stepped on his heel. Pop, off came the heel and he had to walk all the way home on one tiptoe. Poor guy.

I have two other C-ration stories. While I was stationed at White Sands Proving Ground my boss a Staff Sergeant with the Initials SSS would send me to the mess hall for a can of C-rations. This was his afternoon snack. He would open the can with a penknife and tackle that slop with out warming it or disguising it with catsup or what ever. Oh, how could he. While in California there was a rash of grass fires down near Santa Maria. At this time I was in school but they were sending some of the basic training companies to help fight the fires. They also sent field kitchens from the 505th Signal Group. The fare was C-rations. Illegal Mexicans that were on their way to Salinas to pick lettuce were rounded up and pressed into service. The cooks would give these guys all the C-rations that they wanted. Their systems were not prepared for high-energy food and they suffered terribly. Once in school we were called out of class and trucked up into the nearby hills where the dry tall grass was on fire. We were under the command of a second lieutenant from the 505th that we had never seen before. When we got to the fire there was nothing we could do, as we didn't have any tools. The lieutenant wanted us to use our field jackets to beat the flames. Well we were not about to do such a thing. So we relaxed and languished in front of the fire for a few hours. During this time we would contribute some effort in containing the blaze by urinating on it. It was a relaxed afternoon but we were always keeping a weather eye on the fire and except for poddy breaks stayed safely away from it. The fire down at Santa Maria was the real thing as chaparral was involved. The way they fought the fire was to create a firebreak by a controlled burn in front of the fire. The basic guys were down there for almost a week. When they got back and were unloading the trucks an emergency call sent them back again. I have never seen elation turn so sour so fast.

Now Camp San Luis Obispo was and still is I believe a National Guard facility and every summer an ROTC type outfit called the California Cadets would train there for a few weeks. I guess the kids ranged from 14 to 18 years of age. One of their favorite pass times was setting the grass on fire. The fires never amounted to much in our area because the winds were low and during the night the fog would drift in from the Coast and moisten the grass. One of our favorite things to do was turn off the oil line to the stoves in their huts while we patrolled their area. One of our guys glued a dime on his fatigue hat and impersonated a cadet colonel. He had a bunch of them doing totally outrageous things for a time.

But anyway lets get back to Fort Sheridan. In the four working days that we were at Fort Sheridan we were given aptitude tests, issued clothing and given our first round of shots. The tests proved to be Ok but the clothing and shots were a different story. I believe the shots made me ill, especially the tetanus shot as my throat and mouth became inflamed and sore. So much so that eating and talking was extremely painful. It was probably just the flue as we were in the middle of an epidemic. To combat the flue they hung sheets between the bunks in an effort to inhibit the flue germs to the residents of the contrived cubicle. I don't think the sheets helped at all. However, I was the only person with symptoms. When we left Sheridan we were sent to California. Half of my basic training company was from the mid-west and the other half was from the Northwest. Now, almost all of them from Fort Lewis Washington were suffering symptoms but we began basic training just as scheduled. Because I weighed 130 pounds with a size 16 neck all of my khaki shirts, fatigue jackets, and Ike Jackets had to be tailored. If they tried to fit my bod the neck would stand open. If they upped the size to fit my neck the rest of me looked like sad sack. Finally they took big sizes and cut them down for me. They did however exact some revenge as my wool Class A



Back in World War II the men lived in squad tents that evolved into the huts when floors then roofs and finally walls were added. There were three large independent one-story buildings, the latrine, the Mess Hall, and the headquarters building, which housed the orderly room, offices, day room and supply room. One hut was used as a mailroom and another was the arms room where our M-1 rifles were stored. For the next eight and one-half weeks except for one 12-hour pass this was home. Now needless to say we didn't spend a lot of time there for we were gone from the Company Area most of the day attending classes or out on the ranges.

Our platoon leader was a Corporal Gilman, he like most of our cadre were former First Calvary Troopers. In fact later in May we stood parade for the awarding of Purple Hearts and other medals earned in Korea. Each morning Gilman would wake us up by blowing a police whistle. In no time we would not respond to any other non-coms whistle, either in our company or the three other companies abutting ours. In fact we didn't wake up if someone other than Gilman was trying to rouse us. Pavlov would have been proud of us.

Our basic training cycle did not begin until the following Monday. So for the next few days we worked to spruce up the company area and try to master close order drill. We did not have any paved sidewalks leading to the huts. But there were red pea gravel paths that were bordered with white washed stones. They were rather attractive and they served the purpose of keeping us out of the mud when it finally rained. My first job was to ride with a truck and load up pea gravel from a nearby natural deposit with a shovel. Because it wasn't a dump truck I had to shovel it off the back of the truck back at the company area. The next day I repaired those sections that had eroded and spread a thin film over the rest in order to restore the color. Sometime in the middle of the basic cycle I was late for reveille and drew company punishment that night. There were 3 or 4 of us that were given the task of applying a fresh coat of whitewash to the stones that bordered the walks. Using a brush proved to be slow and tedious so I searched for an alternative method. It was a simple matter to pick up the rock and dip it into the bucket of white wash. In less than an hour I was done much to the surprise of Corporal Gilman. I never told him why. Corporal Gilman seemed to take the Army in stride, as he never appeared to be uptight or ill humored. At the end of basic training we chipped in and bought him a wristwatch. We presented him with the watch and then threw him into the showers. We held the watch until he dried off. He got a bigger bang out of our prank than we did.

There were a lot of humiliating experiences that happened while I was a member of Company 2 BTG of the Southwestern Signal Replacement Training Center School (SWSRTC). Perhaps the biggest was a letter my Uncle Fred sent me. Fred served during World War I and volunteered after Pearl Harbor. He was sent to CSLO. He was useful to the Army while they were trying to process the influx of men early on. But, in less than a year they sent him home as they no longer needed an over fifty-year-old Staff Sergeant. Now Fred was a real joker and his letter was addressed in big block letters "TO THE BEST SOLDIER IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY SIGNAL CORPS". He expertly added a Signal Corp Emblem and General's Stars. When I stepped up to the Mail Hut for my mail there suddenly appeared half of the Cadre wanting to see what I looked like. During close order drill we were all given an opportunity to guide the platoon. When my turn came I picked out a point in the distance to guide on marched away to howls of laughter. For some unknown reason I effected the gait and posture of Groucho Marx. On bivouac we ate our meals sitting on the ground. The first night I laid my M1 beside me and became engrossed in conversation with my Hut Mates. One of the Cadre spirited my M1 away. Jerry gave warning and I jumped up and demanded my rifle back. The thief intended to roast me to the fullest until I pulled my bayonet and loudly exclaimed "O.K. but I still have my bayonet". The ruse worked as he forked the M1 over immediately and stalked away. Sometime in week 6 or 7 we tackled a transition range where we began in fox holes firing at targets a couple of hundred yards away. Targets subsequently began popping up closer and closer to our positions simulating a frontal assault against us. The next step was to throw practice grenades and then we fixed bayonets and charged a line of dummies. While waiting our turn a recruit asked to borrow my bayonet as his for some reason wouldn't seat properly. Being a willing rube I agreed, but he didn't return my bayonet and I had to use his. At the third step my bayonet fell off my rifle. The Range Officer Lieutenant "Pushup" Jones went ballistic. Fifty pushups later Sergeant Lopez asked for an explanation. He must have believed me as he got a screwdriver from the arms van and disassembled the

bayonet to find that dirt had lodged in the slot that took the rifle's bayonet stud. He cleaned it out and all was then well. I looked for that guy but when everyone is dressed alike and our faces shadowed by our helmets I was never sure that I had found him. Just one more bayonet story. When they issued us bayonets we were cautioned to never tug on the bayonet to free it from the rifle. Well I was tugging on my bayonet when the warning came to mind and I immediately stopped tugging. If I had not stopped it is quite possible that I would have been seriously injured when the bayonet released and possibly have hit me in the face or neck. The thought came to mind "Always do what they tell you".



Ron and His Bayonet

Lieutenant Jones was a big, red faced, maverick from the Oklahoma National Guard. He let us know early on that being a Range Officer is a serious task when you consider that he has to guide and protect 120 guys with guns and ammunition from accidents. He told us that when and if we screwed up he would pass out pushups by the hundreds. We all laughed realizing not one of us could do more than 75 pushups. He then showed us a memo pad where he would keep count as we gave him pushups on the installment plan. And that he did. I didn't deserve the honor of his notation thank goodness. He had a sense of humor that he demonstrated when the first squad left their fox holes in a bayonet charge that I describer earlier. All the time he was providing heroic narrative to spur us on e.g. "Fix Bayonets", "Prepare to Charge", "Charge, not that way you damn fools you'll get killed". He then pointed to the rear. The charge ended in confusion and hilarity. He always ran things from atop a wooden tower. One day he explained that being a Range Officer entailed a degree of danger. He pointed to the floor of the tower and exclaimed "This isn't all bird shit you know". He was a good guy. If you don't know a "maverick" is an enlisted man that becomes an officer via field promotion.

Besides the M1 rifle we became acquainted with firing a rifle grenade, a 3.5" rocket launcher, a hand grenade, M2 carbine and the 30-caliber light machine gun. The rifle grenade is a tubular cigar shaped projectile, which fits over the muzzle of the M1. Firing a blank cartridge propels it. Normally the stock of the rifle is placed on the ground to absorb the recoil of launching the relatively heavy grenade. But they, the Cadre, had us fire from the shoulder. I remember firing and hitting the 55-gallon drum used as a target. The kick was strong enough that the time spent getting back in the formation was rather hazy. As I remember

we only had two serious injuries all during basic. One guy fell down the stairs leading into the target pit on range "O" breaking his arm. The other happened when we were firing the rockets. The loader stands behind and to the side of the gunner and loads the rocket into the rear of the launcher. He then takes two wires that are attached to the rocket and inserts them into two spiral contact springs on the side of the launcher. When the rocket is loaded and the ignition wires connected the loader stands at the shoulder of the gunner and raps him on the helmet to let him know its OK to shoot. The injured man wound the ignition wires tightly into the springs and when the rocket was fired the back blast caused the anchored wires to whip back and lash the loader's back. We were instructed to just slide the wires into the spring so that they would be ejected backwards by the blast. We fired the M2 carbine one round at a time and finally on full automatic with a 5 round clip. The first round was horizontal and subsequent rounds were higher and higher until the last was almost straight up. The Cadre decided to have a little fun as they took the carbines and began firing at a crow that was perched on the edge of a target frame. They must have fired a hundred rounds at him without effect. The Company roared at their lack of success as the crow placidly flapped away apparently undisturbed.

During basic we had two GI's screw up and they were court martialed. The Browning machine gun can be disabled by placing a block of wood, shaped like a "T", between the bolt and the receiver. We started on the 1000-inch range with both the M1 and Browning. When firing was completed the gunner, as a precautionary measure, is required to place the wooden "T" block in the gun before proceeding to replace his target. To reach the target one has to walk directly before the muzzle of his machine gun. One guy forgot the block and Lieutenant Jones arrested him. One firm rule was to never have any ammunition, shell casing and or projectile when leaving the firing area. Weapons are to be unloaded and unused ammunition turned over to a member of the Cadre. When we fell into formation we were instructed to point our rifles upward and pull the trigger. After one transition range when we pulled our triggers there was a loud report and we were suddenly one trooper fewer as he was instantly arrested. I remember the 1000-inch range for the ground was hard and strewn with sharp pebbles. After firing on the range we all had scraped and bleeding knees and elbows. A somewhat recent brochure covering CSLO depicts the 1000-inch range, as it is today where a pad covers the pebbles. I find such consideration to be rather sweet. Oh, I forgot we had a little motor generator set that ran the PA used on the rifle ranges. We were moving it by hand from the 500-yard line forward on range O and I bumped my wrist on the muffler. I received a painful burn that I didn't report.

Enough of my faux faux. Let's pick on the other guys for a while. Now Dough thought of himself as a Riverboat Gambler. He and a couple of hot shots decided they had found a victim to fleece. This guy didn't from his appearance seem formidable in anything that would require thinking. In no time at all he cleaned out Dough and his friends. Later we found out that he was Las Vegas croupier and assistant pit boss in civilian life. When we got a 12-hour pass Dough got a tattoo. I didn't realize that tattoos scabbed over and had to heal. Poor Dough managed to scrape the scab off and the tattoo became a mottled mass of colors. There were lots of guys that were caught with their hands in their pockets. Punishment came in two similar modes. You could either carry a large rock with you wherever you went including bed or fill your front pants pockets with gravel. If you dropped your rifle it was yours to keep night and day even when in bed. It seemed that right after noon chow they would schedule a training film. What a dirty trick to fill our bellies and then bring us into an air tight room, turn out the lights and present a dreadfully dull movie. I can remember struggling to stay awake while multiple images danced across the screen. If you fell asleep they made you stand at the back and hold your M1 at arms length above your head. One guy fell asleep again doing this and his M1 tumbled to the floor.



Ron With Pack and Rifle

I never got the hang of sighting my M1 correctly except for battle sights. Because of my nystagmus and poor sight adjustments I failed to meet the minimum requirements to qualify for the M1. I could have cheated as scoring was made by the individual on the honor system. The term M1 pencil refers to cheating the honor system. Those that failed to qualify on Range O were singled out to wear "Maggie's Drawers". When firing on range O a round disk, affixed to a stick, is held up by the target attendants to mark hits on the target. The shooter can then determine where his shots are going and make any needed aiming adjustments. If there were no hits the shooter is informed that he had missed the entire target by waving a little red flag named "Maggie's Drawers". Those of us that didn't qualify had to wear a scrap of red flannel attached just above the left breast pocket with a big safety pin. Later on the Cadre scored us for our performance on a complicated transitional range. There we moved one at a time from one firing position to the next. The positions were in foxholes, behind windows and doors, etc to provide realism. With only one target at a time to shoot at I didn't have a problem determining what target was mine. Battle sights were used and by then I had received combat glasses that didn't bounce around like my civilian horn rims. I scored 420 out of a possible 500 and I was the only one in the company to hit the target out there at 1000 yards. This qualified me for the M1 and I was able to retire my hated symbol of failure.

Food in the mess hall was pretty good. So, good in fact that in 8 weeks of Basic training I gained 15 pounds. We were always hungry. Food was a reward and there was plenty of it as seconds were readily available, except on bivouac. There was one catch. If you took seconds you had to finish every morsel or ort. If you are not a crossword freak "ort" is a three-letter word for table scrap. One objective of bivouac is to simulate some degree of deprivation. Dough wrangled a task that took him back to the company area and I had him get 20 Hershey bars for me. I gave him 5 for his trouble and began to supplement my diet with chocolate. The result was increased pangs as sugar doesn't satisfy hunger but it does hinder the digestive process of protein and fat that is satisfying. So I gave them away. One of our military's biggest jokes is the mess kit used in the field. It's a little like an oblong frying pan with cover and folding handle. You really need three hands and a great deal of luck to keep from spilling your meal. We always were served mash potatoes if we had ice cream. The ice cream came shaped in a block with a thin paper wrapper. The server would stick the ice cream into the mashed potatoes so it wouldn't fall.

About midway through Basic we did get a 12-hour pass and most of us rode the bus down to Pismo Beach. Back then the beach was known for its clams. There were restaurants that specialized in clam chowder. We found one that had shovels and buckets by the door and depending on how many clams you were able to dig up for them they provided the best clam chowder ever. I understand that today the clams are gone due to pollution in the area. What a shame. We stopped in a bar and I had a gin and squirt even though I was not 21 yet. Two MPs came in and carded the Infantry guys from Camp Roberts that were there but ignored the Signal Corps soldiers from CSLO. It was a while before I began breathing again. After being read the "Universal Code of Military Justice" it's apparent that one doesn't want to stand a Court Martial. The First Sergeant read it to us one platoon at a time in the company day room. I recall one part where he instructed us that we were not to wear any civilian clothing while in basic training. One GI then asked if it was OK to wear pajamas. The old Sarge went ballistic and exclaimed a real soldier always sleeps in just his skivvies.

I had my share of problems with authority. My first episode was nearly my last. When I reported before our Company Commander, Second Lieutenant Kenneth Foulkes for my first month's pay he asked me how long I had been in his command. I replied that I came in during pre-cycle week. He challenged my reply by saying that he knew all his recruits and it was impossible that I could have been with the company from the beginning. I started to argue until the First Soldier, sitting at his side, told me with his eyes to shut up and agree to anything. At that point I reveled in a sense of pride for following, inadvertently, a suggestion from my Dad to keep a low profile during Basic. At this point I was twenty years old but I didn't shave. Unlike my Dad I don't have much of a beard. At the first personal inspection Corporal Gilman asked me if I had shaved that morning. I lied. His reply was a suggestion to stand closer to my razor in the future. I let out a guffaw that resulted in having to give him 25 pushups in front of Lieutenant Foulkes.

We didn't switch from O.D.s to khakis until after Memorial Day and we were standing parades in Ike jackets after the weather had really warmed. The day when medals were presented to our Cadre was sunny and very warm. Corporal Gilman had previously clued us in on how to cheat a little by slowly bending our knees and then just as slowly straightening up. This measure reduced the discomfort caused by standing motionless for so long. Colonel McClung would bellow from his spot on the reviewing stand "Steady, Steady" if he noticed movement when we were supposed to be at attention. That day several G.I.s collapsed, most recovered immediately, but a few remained on the ground unattended. When we marched away we stepped over them. Scuttlebutt was that those that fell out received additional PE to toughen them.

Our CO was a stickler for discipline as a basic CO should be. For seven weeks we earned the best company ribbon in competition with the other three companies. He was really proud of us and he took his command seriously. He would eschew one meal a day from the officers' mess to eat with us. His presence was really an informal inspection both of the quality of the food preparation and the cleanliness of the tableware etc.

One Sunday evening an officer popped into our hut and introduced him self as the Inspector General. At first we expected some sort of ruse but shortly an aide appeared to take notes for him. We told him that we thought our treatment was fine and no changes were needed. However, the guys in the next hut complained that the weather was too cold in the morning for just fatigue jackets. So the next morning at reveille the uniform of the day was proscribed to be field sweaters, field jackets and gloves. One problem was we were not allowed to take them off when the temperature warmed. At the final formation Lieutenant Foulkes asked if we wanted the same uniform for tomorrow. We were glad to revert to the old ensemble. His pride in us however was destroyed during bivouac. The first night, Monday, I suffered as my feet were frozen. I learned why we had changes of socks and a spare pair of boots. Tuesday night I removed my boots and socks and dried and powdered my feet. I put on clean dry socks and my dry pair of boots. I was comfy all night except for my stint on guard duty. There were aggressor forces about and we had to protect our sleeping comrades from their pranks. They taught us that at night to look out of the corner of our eyes as that involved the most sensitive parts of the retina. That I cannot do as at that time my nystagmus, an involuntary oscillatory eye movement, made it impossible to look at anything except for an instant. Once I thought I spotted movement near me but I heard nothing and there were no reports in the morning of intruders. Wednesday evening after dark we packed up and moved eastward to another campsite. During the march over the company was ambushed by an aggressor force that was reinforced with my platoon. Each man had a bandolier of blank ammo. The aggressor force placed charges beside the bridge that the company had to cross while we along with a tank took a position on a steep hill above the bridge. When the point crossed the bridge the charges were set off and the point was soaked by the water blown skyward by the charges. They came after us and I scrambled onto the tank and stayed there and rode it down off the hill. That was a bad idea as the road down was steep and narrow. I was afraid to stay on the tank and afraid to jump off into the dark.

That night the weather was balmy and humid. Just after breakfast it began to rain and we practiced squad assault and defense tactics. After lunch we crawled the infiltration course. This was a dry run in preparation for daylight and then a night transition under fire. The course was built on an alluvial fan, which had been

formed by a normally dry creek. At this time even though the rain was light the water from the creek spread out over the course and into the finishing trench. Another creek poured into the starting trench. After the first run we were soaked. But we had to stay wet until we crawled the night course. The course is a square 100 yards by 100 yards with three machine guns positioned to cover one third of the course. The gun barrels are placed in a frame that keeps the fire always above us and directly to the front. The guns are fired in five round bursts in sequence. Therefore two thirds of the time you are not under fire and if you so chose you could safely stand up. Of course Jones would have a hemorrhage if you did so.

I crawled the two daylight sorties and left my pack on a steep bank beside the range road and just took my rifle and mess gear down to where the evening meal was being served. While we were eating my back muscles began to ache. When I started back up the bank to my pack my back spasmed and I fell over backwards. At this point a half dozen of so guys had succumbed to the cold and wet and were sent by ambulance to the Post Hospital. Before I had stopped sliding down the bank my buddies and the Cadre were there to help. I opted to stay and they put me in the target house where there was a jeep engine generator set that powered the floodlights for the nighttime operation. The engine provided welcome heat and I thawed out. Finally my squad was ordered to the starting trench. As they passed me standing in the doorway watching the pink tracer bullets that caromed skyward they prodded me to join them. It was really hard to leave the protection and warmth of the target house for the cold and wet. But my buddies shamed me and I fell in at the rear. The water was waist deep in the starting trench and the floor had eroded into a "vee" and we were slipping and sliding to get into position. When the time came to climb out we had to boost each other, as it was impossible to get enough purchase to pull your self out. I was the last man left in the trench. I tried and tried until I finally shoved the barrel of my M1 into the ground like a tent stake and pulled my self out. There were a lot of people including our Chinese American Lieutenant that were getting up on all fours and scurrying forward when our gun was silent. Suddenly the lights came on and Jones sent all of us back to the starting trench. This time we all stayed on our bellies. When I reached the finishing trench I rolled over into it. I wound up sitting with my knees beneath my chin but my M1 was nowhere to be found. The water level came up to the top of my knees so I had to grope for Mr. Garand's invention. Finally I determined that I was sitting on it. We marched back to the campsite as the rain ended. I changed into dry clothes and crawled into an empty pup tent, as my partner was one of those taken to the hospital, I fell asleep but was awakened by the Cadre at about 2 Am. I packed up my gear and my missing tent mates and climbed onto a six by six for transport back to the company area. My trusty M1 was clogged with mud so I took it into the latrine where we had long trough like washbasins that served six men at once. I placed the poor thing into warm sudsy water and cleaned it of all mud and debris. I oiled the metal parts but I didn't reassemble them. I crawled into bed and immediately became unconscious. That night was an education that taught us that we were not prepared both physically and mentally for the rigor that Mother Nature bore on us. We lost the best company ribbon. When I hear of the reduced level of training in the new Army needed to accommodate women soldiers it makes me fearful for their safety. Training should be tough, really tough to save lives. The moral of this disaster is to stay dry.

The next day because I had fallen out I was excused from morning training. I used the time to clean my gear and wash clothes. There were abandoned socks and towels that I found and washed. I left them on the clothesline but they went unclaimed. So a few days later I took them. When I went to reassemble my M1 I was shocked to find that the stock was the color of a marshmallow and had shrunk to the point where the metal parts wouldn't fit. I took it over to the arms hut and the armored cooked up a concoction of leets foot oil and iodine. It reminded me of the scotch that Doc cooked up in "MR. Roberts". I added as much oil as possible and after an hour it all went together. The stock was a gleaming cherry color.

The last week of basic was hell week and we usually went to bed about 1:30 AM and reveille was a few hours later. Each day seemed like a week. But on Wednesday we returned to the company area in the late afternoon and were ordered to return in full field equipment on the double. We had been assigned to a mock alert. They loaded us onto trucks and we drove up into the hills to the Northwest. We were high enough to glimpse the ocean. We were given a salt ration and a full bandolier of live ammo. Each of us now had 64 rounds of 30-06 ball ammunition. It was instant democracy. Where we had to pitch our tent was so steep that Jerry kept rolling down on me. So we moved the orientation from across the fall line to parallel to it. This time we both eventually slid out of the tent. We finally dug holes by our feet in such a

manner that we were standing on a step. That worked out OK. The field kitchen fed us dinner and breakfast so we really didn't need to open the salt rations but some guys did. When we got back they tossed the empty containers into the supply truck along with the unopened ones. Lieutenant Foulkes got stuck paying for the opened ones.

Across California Highway 1 near the main gate there rises a 500-foot high hill where the huge letters SWSRTC were formed from cement blocks. There's a road that winds to the top and it would have been an easy task to reach the top via it. However, we had to negotiate the steepest way to the top. When we reached a really steep portion we used the vegetation, which proved to be poison oak, to help us. For the next week we looked like an Apache band of raiders from the calomel lotion and other concoctions applied by the medics. When we reached the top the Cadre let us sit down and rest for ten minutes or so. Big mistake, when they ordered us up our legs were initially like rubber and a few fell back down again. This was a lesson for mountainous Korea to which most of us were headed. Later we were sent out on patrol to locate placards of machine guns, cannons etc. Each patrol leader then reported what they had found. The Cadre tuned pale when a number of blocks of nitro starch were reported found. This proved to be real stuff left from WWII that must have been uncovered by the last week's rain that ended our bivouac early.



Civilian Attired L-20

It wasn't enough that we had to look out for the Cadre but we also caught it from the sky above. The post had its own air force that consisted of several DeHaviland L-20 spotter aircraft. The L-20 is a sweet all metal bird outfitted with a huge ravenous Pratt and Whitney radial engine. The airframe was developed in Canada in the late fifties. There is a recent movie with Harrison Ford where he is a charter pilot in the Caribbean and he flies an L-20 equipped with floats. It broke my heart to see it trashed during the making of the movie. Every now and then one of the L-20s would fly over and the passenger would pelt us with eggshells and coffee grounds. One evening we were returning from the machine gun range along Dairy Creek Road that was bordered on both sides by tall eucalyptus trees. We could hear the plane and he was close but we felt that the trees that were too close together for him to get to us. Suddenly there he was below the tree tops flying in a steep bank and following the curve in the road. By being in a banked condition the plane fit into the limited space between the trees. Another time we were out where Cuesta College and the airstrip are today and we could hear him. The roar was so loud we knew he was close but we couldn't find him. Suddenly he popped up from out behind a low rise. He was just a few feet above the ground when he flew over us.

Even the worst of things have to end and so did basic training. Looking back it was a good experience that instilled discipline and determination that had escaped me to that point in life. Al, Jerry and

Dave moved to the TTG and I don't remember exactly what happened to Doug. Al's wife came out to be with him the last week of basic and they set up housekeeping while he was in school. After basic we drifted apart except I helped Al and his wife pack up when he finished school. I really didn't think too much about the Army or any of my trivial experiences. But after retiring in 1996 after 26 years with Motorola I joined the American Legion Post here in Schaumburg where sharing memories with other post members is a lot of fun. However, it is humbling to talk about my misadventures with guys that served on Guadalcanal or fought their way from Normandy on into Germany. They are a great bunch of guys and being with them is a rewarding experience. They honored me this year by electing me the Post Commander for 2003.



SWSS Mates

Bill Gaynor, George Fisher, Delmar Olson, Ron and Jack Addy

After basic we were assigned to SWSS school companies. SWSS stands for South Western Signal School. Our Company area was just across the street from our basic company area so moving was a snap. We marched to and from class in a column of fours. The Post Band usually preceded us. Members of the band had formed a Dixieland Band and they played the area bistros. It was not uncommon for us to march not to a Sousa beat but a good likeness of a somewhat rapid New Orleans funeral march. The Post Commanding Officer was Colonel "Iron Lung" McClung who loved the Colonel Bogey March that we heard daily. This occurred before the movie "Bridge on the River Kwai" and only the British and Colonel McClung were aware of it. We all learned the bawdy words to Colonel Bogey and we would sing them in a hushed voice just for fun as we marched. To get to the school we had to cross Dairy Creek. The bridge walkways required a step up. As we were walking a lone, lost Recruit with full field equipment for some reason was walking beside us at "Present Arms". Now he was staring straight ahead and could not see the step up. Well he went sprawling on to his belly and his M1 left his grasp and slid over the side into the creek. The M1 is a tough machine and I bet it fared O.K. That is if he found it.

Once again we had five men in the hut. There was Delmar Olson, Jack Addy, George Fisher and myself. The fifth member was a commercial artist from LA. I can't recall his name. In general we got along without friction. Jack, who was the most sensible and adjusted one of all was sent to Korea. George was a professional dancer and he would perform a soft shoe for us to "Song From Moulin Rouge" which was rather neat to watch. A little about Delmar later. I was the sleeper of the group.







Bill, George, Delmar, Ron and Jack  
June 13, 1953

I had gained about 15 pounds during basic training. In fact those that needed to gain did so and those that needed to lose weight did also. The fourth member of the hut was Delmar Olson from Eastern Washington. Delmar had a weight problem but he dropped 30 pounds during Basic Training. But when we hit the school company Delmar hit the ice cream and milk shakes. Along about 8:00 P.M. he would amble over to the adjacent PX and get a double milk shake or two. He owned the single bunk and he would stand at the foot of it and fall backward in a controlled crash without spilling a drop. There he would lie on his back and suck down his drink. This behavior annoyed us so George Fisher slid Delmar's footlocker beneath his cot and placed his in its stead. When Delmar did his reverse belly flop the flimsily built plywood locker exploded in every direction. The effect was minimal as Delmar eventually regained his lost 30 pounds plus some extra. There was a WWII Japanese scout tank positioned near the main gate and one Sunday afternoon we went for a stroll and decided to crawl in and inspect it. All was well until Delmar found that he couldn't squeeze out. We pulled, pushed and tugged and his bloated carcass finally released. I really don't have reason to criticize him, as I am presently a well-rounded 210 pounds.



Delmar Olson

One evening after class we were treated to a work detail mid way during our march home. Machetes were passed out and we began cutting the tall grass bordering the parade ground. There were not enough machetes to go around so we took turns swinging them. Incidentally the backside of the blade is better than the sharp edge for cutting grass. When it was my turn I began to cut the grass until I realized that I was alone. Those closest to me had disappeared. We finished the grass and marched to the Company area and stood in formation for a time as The Company CO, Captain Frank G. Von Drasek, had something to tell us. One by one the missing GI's glided into formation from between the nearby huts. I later learned that there is a storm drain below the ditch and they had dropped through into it via a manhole while my back was turned. The drain opened up at the company parking lot and they had hid under some cars until the Company showed up. Bugging out to beneath cars in the parking lot occurred a lot until finally VD put a sentry there.

I received a package of goodies from my Mom that I miserly hoarded in my wall locker. God got me for being so stingy by sending a hoard of ants to invade the locker. I had to put the box outside so the ants in transit would follow and then take and put the box in the garbage. I didn't get a taste. The next shipment got divvied up immediately and we got cokes and had a party.

Each evening when it turned dark our School Company area became a Ham fest. Antennas and aerials appeared from nowhere. The lights in the huts grew dim as the illegal transmitters were turned on. Many of the Ham operators had purchased wall lockers identical to those issued to us. They put their ham rigs in the new lockers and put the ones with clothes in station wagons in the parking lot. Friday night they would switch lockers for Saturday's inspection. I'm sure "ole VD" our pet named for the CO knew about this and he just tolerated it. He was a great guy even if he lacked loyalty. I was on KP and he had me building a fence around the mess hall of empty 3.5" rocket canisters and bailing wire. When I was done I convinced him that it looked terrible and he agreed, so I pulled it all out. I went inside and the cook asked me to level the grill for him. Well I took matchbook covers and placed them under two legs until things looked level. Captain Von Drasek watched me work while having his afternoon coffee. My check was to pour water on the grill and see how level it was. The cook stopped me with "Don't pour cold water on the Grill". VD looked on approvingly as I filled a glass with hot water. Well hot water or cold water makes no difference to a hot grill and a thick layer of distress orange colored rust appeared magically. I tuned to face "ole VD" but he had deserted me. The cook was not pleased until he remembered the grill needed honing anyway. So for the next hour or so I was busy erasing the rust with steel wool and a huge emery stone.

It was the middle of basic when I first had to pull KP. As luck would have it that day was Sunday. So I missed having a day off. To make things worse I was late and drew doing pots and pans. The Mess Sergeant had me climb up and retrieve a huge aluminum bowl that was used to mix salads. He then proceeded to scramble two eggs in it for his breakfast and then he gave it to me to wash and return to its position high up on the kitchen wall.



First Time KP Williams (March 1953)

There were a lot of stray dogs around the mess hall and the outside man would usually feed them scraps. One day while on outside duty I had a ton of outdated ice cream that I fed to the pack. Those poor guys would eat and shiver. We also had a cat that hung around named "Minnie the Mooch". She would catch a tiny field mouse and bring it before us when we had a smoke break on the mess hall entrance stairs. She would play with it and finally stun it with a sharp whack and pop it into her mouth. A few quick chomps would ensue and she would then slowly swallow the poor creature whole. It was a disgusting sight to see the mouse's tail slowly disappear between her lips. For the squeamish this often proved to be a retching experience.



SWSS Company 4 Chow Line

One Saturday night some guys that were senior to us in the company had a toga party. This was long before such became popular in college. They had fashioned togas from bed sheets and horns from kelp stalks. They took the company two-wheeled cart for a chariot and paraded about the company area in song and bawdy verse much to our delight.

Bill Gaynor latched on to a hand cranked generator from an Easy "8" field telephone. Whenever someone fell asleep he would accost them by sending a burst of the 20 cycle current through their knee. There was always a howl and a scream. Bill was given the name of 60 Cycle Gaynor. I believe it was he that swiped a large high voltage capacitor and charged it using a "Megger". He would then place one bare

terminal wire in a urinal and the other on the wet floor beneath. Some unsuspecting guy taking a shower would hop out to relieve himself and "BAM". I am surprised that Bill wasn't murdered in his sleep. Elton took this electricity thing too far as he tried to jolt me using an appliance cord plugged into the wall. Fortunately for me Bill realized the danger and cut the cord hardly a moment too soon.

Our Captain demonstrated his fairness when half the Company got caught without stiffening their fatigue hats as ordered. The Army had begun issuing new fatigue caps that contained a stiffening form and in order for every one to be uniform in appearance we were told to add what ever was needed to obtain a similar appearance. I tried several approaches but neither looked nor felt acceptable and I ignored the order. One evening the Adjutant inspected each mans hat and those without something installed were written up. The next morning all gigs were dropped because the C.O. found the platoon nearest to the garbage cans had passed along dividers from waste egg crates. Those near enough crammed them into their hats and were spared. VD felt that he couldn't rightly punish anyone as a result. The hat thing went without notice from then on. Normally I am somewhat lax in dress but I was one sharp soldier after Basic when we had time on our hands to really shape up. I spent a great deal of time starching and pressing my fatigues. My Mom had sent me an iron and I used a blanket on top of a footlocker as an ironing board. I became very adept in obtaining a sharp military press. A lot of the guys, Bob Lapinski for one, bleached their green fatigues such that they appeared to be old timers and not raw recruits. It became obvious immediately to stay ship shape at all times. While others were busy Friday evening preparing for Saturday's inspection. I was free to do as I pleased as I always put everything back where it belonged. Changing shoes and underwear became a religion during basic for bad things happened if you didn't. During basic we took PT at 4:00 sharp every day. We removed our fatigue jackets while we exercised and a member of the Cadre would mark an "X" on the back of our white T Shirts with charcoal. Woe to the trooper who had an "X" on his back the next day. We laced our two pair of boots in a different manner so the Cadre could differentiate between them and thereby determine if we had changed our boots each day as ordered. If the pair of boots left beneath your bunk for inspection was the ones being worn that particular day, the Cadre would cut the laces at each crossover. That happened to Doug at least twice. Besides looking sharp I was addicted to a standing retreat. When the call to retreat sounded on the Post Public Address System most GI's would duck inside. Not me. I would grab my cap and race outside to stand tall as the Company Flag was lowered.

On Easter Sunday I rode the Greyhound bus up to Camp Roberts to see Ed Wade. Ed and I before being drafted worked in the mailroom of the American Osteopathic Association. Ed was still in basic training and couldn't leave the Company area. So we spent the afternoon in the day room shooting pool and gassing. Ed was always a good talker but this day he was subdued as he had the flue and his voice was nearly lost to him. The First Sergeant invited me to have dinner with them. That was a nice gesture even though the Sunday evening meal is usually sandwiches and macaroni. It was just getting dark when I left Ed's company area and headed for the post bus stop. To get there I had to cross this huge asphalt parade ground. It's a rectangle of monstrous proportions. Maybe a half mile on a side. On the far side of the parade ground was the post chapel. It was white clapboard structure with a bell tower or steeple. From my vantage point it was right out of Currier and Ives or a subject for a Norman Rockwell painting. There were hymns issuing from the chapel along with the warm glow that seemed to be candlelight. And I suddenly was over whelmed by homesickness. Oh my I wanted to cry not just because this was the first holiday away from Mom and Dad but my feet hurt terribly. Half way across on the diagonal I had to remove and carry my shoes. When the bus came my feet were so swollen that I couldn't get them back on so I rode back to CSLO in my stocking feet. At the main gate an MP came on board to check passes. I thought I would be busted for being out of uniform but he just smiled and advised me to get shoes that fit. Except for my heart breaking when I espied the post chapel it was a great day. I was out of basic and it was great to be treated as a normal human being again. Seeing Ed was a great treat. Ed spent his subsequent Army time in Europe where he traveled extensively. His Mom and Dad are Irish immigrants with that wonderful Irish accent. He went to Ireland to visit family that he had never seen. He later told me how disappointed he was that they had never heard of Paddy's Pig or McNamara's band. Ed also told me an urban myth that delinquent basic companies were forced to scrub the parade ground at Camp Roberts with toothbrushes. Well maybe it isn't a myth. Ed in later life made it big time as a commercial artist.

Later on two guys visited me from my Lake View neighborhood in Chicago, Al Stressler and Joe

Rogers. They were stationed up at Camp Roberts and decided to look me up. During basic I gained about 15 pounds and no longer looked like Ecabod Crane. They didn't recognize me at first. I got a pass and we went into SLO. I wasn't 21 yet so booze was out and all the body shops we knew about were off limits so we just wandered around. The neighborhoods were just beautiful displays of flowers. I'm really partial to Spanish style architecture draped with red rambling roses and they had a lot of them there. It got to be early evening and we had missed chow so we opted for pizza. That California style pizza gets ranked right up there with swill, spam, barium and C-rations. I couldn't buy beer off post but on post the PX didn't card anyone. In fact there was a beer hall extension to the PX with tables and a jukebox. One of the favorites was a sprightly song called "Poor Old Elijah". Everyone would stomp their feet in sync with the music and the wooden floor would develop a discernable standing wave. Or maybe that after a few beers it's my eye balls that warped and not the floor. I have never got into drinking beer except when WSPG was home.



Joe Rogers and Al Stressler

One Sunday our unknown hut mate didn't get a weekend pass so he treated us to a ride to Avila Beach. I was shocked to find that the Pacific Ocean was only 50 degrees.



Jack and Ron at Avila Beach, California

Being in school proved to be a treat even though I didn't get the Military Occupation Specialty that I preferred. I really wanted Crypto School but that required at least one year of college. My second choice was field radio repair. Not getting field radio repair wasn't all bad because field radio repair was a free ticket to Korea where there was a shortage of repairmen. That was a fate that befell my hut mate Jack Addy. I wound up with Manual Central Office Installation and Repair (MOS 3095). We first learned how to unpack and set up field equipment that didn't require soldering or any other complicated endeavors. We were divided into three man teams. Bob Lapinski and Bill Gaynor, both from Chicago were on my team. Also in the class was Larry Hancock, a cowboy from Anaconda, Montana and Ron Marzek from L.A. When

we began soldering I was above Bob on a ladder and dropped a huge glob of molten solder from the tip of my iron onto his head. Luckily it cooled a lot on the way down and Bob had a thick head of hair. His scalp was not burned but his hair was badly singed. From that point on I did the planning and QC and they did the manual labor. Later we made a permanent installation that was hard wired and the connecting cables were carefully routed and laced down.



**CENTRAL OFFICE INSTALLATION CLASS**  
Top Row L-R Instructor, Ron Marzak, Bob Lapinski and Ron Williams  
Sitting L-R Elton Hansen, Bill Gaynor and Larry Hancock  
Not Shown Johnathan Leonard

Leonard is not in the picture because he was at this time in the class preceding ours when he fell ill and washed back to our class. He was regular army and was an established baker who wanted into electronics. When he drew KP he made cup cakes and other goodies for the company so his crew always had an extra man assigned to attend to his KP duties. The weather was really hot and the school commander allowed us to remove our fatigue jackets while in class or lab. The big insects are formed from 100 pair cable



The SWSS MOB SCENE picture above has me in the center of the first row with Elton Hansen on my right and Larry Hancock to my left. This must have been a class break. Bill Gaynor is above my right shoulder and George Fisher has his arm on Bill's Shoulder. Bob Lapinski is behind George. Ron Marzak is at the top center with his fingertips in his waistband. Most of the remainder seem familiar but I can't recall their names unfortunately.

For me being put in the Signal Corps was a blessing for it set me on the path to eventually becoming an electrical engineer. I ate up the manual central office course and was awarded the prize of honor student. If you were to ask Bill who deserved being honor student more he would say it was he. The first two weeks of the course covered manual dexterity things, including learning how to solder, now Bill aced that part and I hardly passed. But those grades were not included in the final analysis. Besides that, in one part of the course we had to debug our switchboard. I was helping Bill in back where the relay rack is located and Bill was operating the switches trying to locate problems. When we were through I inadvertently left my coke bottle in his switchboard and he got gigged for it. He was one angry Irishman. I confessed to the instructor and I am sure he made things right. Later on while at WSPG I passed the exam for college GED in an effort to get into crypto school. When I was discharged my confidence in being able to handle college had risen to the point that I could hardly wait to get started.

While in school that lasted for four months, April through July, I managed to get to both L.A. and Frisco for weekend visits. L.A. wasn't much, but Frisco was memorable. For those of us from the Midwest and Northwest going home meant waiting for graduation and a subsequent furlough. However, we had a lot of guys from L.A. and San Francisco who went home every weekend, assuming they could get a pass. You could tell the guys from L.A., as they would start to get antsy in anticipation of going home about mid Wednesday. They would leave at noon on Saturday or when Saturday morning training ended and straggle in sometime before reveille on Monday morning. Most dozed in class all day Monday. I went to LA one weekend with some guys from there that owned cars and we paid for their gasoline. We stayed at a downtown hotel. We did go to Hollywood and Vine and spent Saturday evening at the Stage Door Canteen. We danced with some really pretty hostesses. On Sunday we went to Santa Monica and spent the day on the pier and beach. I remember that during the trip down to LA we found the area around Santa Barbara to be absolutely beautiful. We were packed into two cars and one broke down on the way home just above there and we made like circus clowns in one car in order for all of us to be back before reveille. We left the disabled car on the side of the road and the owners Dad rescued it sometime during the week. Having a car was a bonanza and one of the guys flew home to Chicago on a three-day pass and returned with his car. That was an unassisted nonstop jaunt of 2,400 miles.

Hut mates Jack Addy and George Fisher and I drove with two guys from San Francisco in their Chrysler convertible. On the way up we were unnecessarily concerned about being pressed into fighting a fire that was raging on the Hunter Liggett Military Reservation. They dropped us off at the bus station in San Francisco and we spent the night in a nearby run down hotel. Jack had lived in Frisco before moving to Tacoma in the Mission District and he left us for friends and family. George and I rode the cable car to the wharf and as we were walking back to downtown an old guy driving a gray 37 Plymouth called us to his car. This being Frisco we assumed he was gay and paid him no attention but he was persistent so we stopped to talk with him. He explained that he was a widower and he treated GI's to a tour of the city. So we took him up on his offer. He knew all the special haunts of Frisco and drove us through the Presidio and Golden Gate Park etc. Finally he asked where we were staying and he drove us to the Roosevelt Hotel on Union Square. He introduced us to the manager who gave us a great room for practically nothing. I bet the gentleman who befriended us subsidized our stay. He had a logbook of those he had met and included our names. What a great guy. I wish I could remember his name.

The next day, Sunday, I had planned on having lunch at the top of the Mark. However, George announced that he was penniless and I had to feed him. Jack rejoined us at the bus station at noon and we spent the afternoon at an amusement Park near Golden Gate Park. Early that evening we picked up our ride and headed south on 101 with the top down. The area north of San Jose was filled with orchards and olive groves. Today this has been replaced by Silicon Valley. We were rear ended on the outskirts of San Jose. I did however get to the top of the Mark with my first wife in 1972. We didn't have lunch just drinks and or

Wednesday afternoon we swapped locations with the other center that was located to the North and at a higher elevation. We had been issued full field gear and M1 carbines but all we had to carry up was our weapon as our packs were trucked up. But because we were armed we had to wear steel pots. The next morning we awoke to find that the valley to our south was filled with fog. It seemed like you could just walk across to the other side. It was very pretty and awe inspiring. Fog was not a stranger, as a wall would creep in every evening from the ocean. Fog was good for it formed a blanket that kept the heat from radiating into space and the evenings with fog around were ten degrees warmer than when the sky was clear. And since most of us did not have cars or were going anywhere anyway visibility was not a concern. I wound up as the odd man being at the end of the alphabetical list and slept alone wrapped in my shelter half. The nights were warm and there wasn't even a hint of rain. In fact during the 6 months at CSLO it only rained three times. The night we arrived at the beginning of February we may have gotten a quarter of an inch, the day in late March when we crawled the infiltration course and one day in July. All in all I don't think it added up to an inch in total. It must have been a drought year as evidenced by the grass being brown in February. Years later I would travel to California for Motorola to find in rainy years the hills would be an emerald green



Upper Left-Break Time---Upper Right Bill Gaynor  
 Lower Left-L to R- Ron Williams Bill Gaynor, Ron Marzak and John Leonard  
 Lower Right-View of the East Garrison

As I had nothing to do the message center CO would excuse me at about ten o'clock and ten minutes later I was asleep. One night a unit counting cadence awakened me. I opened my eyes to find a



platoon in a column of fours with M1's and full field gear marching up the hill and by me. In addition each man either had a 30-caliber machine gun or tripod to carry. They were leadership school students out on their 36-hour trial of fire. The training was more robust than advanced infantry but less than Ranger training. But still it was a tough 6-week grind. I think just about all of us considered volunteering but thought better of it. They wore powder blue helmet liners and they were of course named blue bonnets. As part of their training they acted as DIs in the basic companies. Graduation meant a sure ticket to Korea.

That Friday afternoon we loaded everything back up and returned to the post. It was somewhat like being in a circus as we had the big message center tent to put up and tear down. It was a big job to roll it up and get it on a truck. We had to clean our carbines, turn in our field equipment and help wash the trucks before we returned to the school company area. I don't recall nary a thing about graduation day but I do remember charging into the shower when we got "home".

When we finally graduated from the SWSS School Company we were given two weeks leave and then we were to report to our new stations. I escaped going to Korea by an eyelash. The FECOM quota was filled when my name and that of my buddies and fellow Manual Central Office Installers came up. Bob Lapinski and Bill Gaynor, fellow Chicagoans were assigned to Fort Lewis Washington. I drew the 14th Signal Company stationed at the Holloman Air Force Base located just outside Alamogordo, New Mexico. I later learned that the reason I didn't get into field radio repair is due to the need for them in Korea. Because I was a class C physical profile I couldn't be sent out of the USA and letting me become a repairman would be wasteful to the Army.

Back in the early fifties getting on an airplane was not easy. You had to get reservations three weeks to a month in advance. We had our reservations but for some reason not even known to God they held us up for an extra week during which we did exactly nothing. Perhaps they held us over to increase the head count for the next year's appropriations. We lost our reservations and we signed up for a non-scheduled flight to depart from the Burbank Air Port. Being smarter than the average bears we mailed our duffel bags to our new stations and went home just with our AWOL bags. We rode the Greyhound down from SLO to LA. We took a cab to Burbank. The flight was supposed to leave at eight. Our hearts really dropped when we learned from some Marines from Pendleton that they had been waiting since Tuesday for the flight to leave. This was Friday evening and they were having trouble with the airplane. The mechanics worked on it within our eyesight. After several attempts to repair the DC-3 and subsequent test flights monitored by the FAA they scrubbed the old Dakota. The producers of this fiasco then leased a Curtis C-46 Commando. It was named the Californian and had its name emblazoned on its sides. They worked on it for a while and finally we took off about 2:30 in the morning. We landed for fuel at Albuquerque and got off without incident. But during landing I woke up to see a filling station just about at the same level as the airplane.

On we went to Kansas City where we were held up while repairs were being made. We were in uniform and I had bought a garrison cap like the policemen wear. A Signal Corps orange circle surrounded the brass Eagle insignia on the cap. Really impressive. As we entered the terminal Bill pushed open one of the double doors while Bob opened the other and I paraded through like Mac Arthur returning to the Philippines. Some jar head called attention and I immediately ditched the hat into my AWOL bag for the standard issue. The Marines were embarrassed and angry for their mistake. But Bob Lapinski was a gifted mediator and he had them laughing at themselves forthwith.

It was about 2 P.m. when we finally took off for Chicago. Now the airport in Kansas City is situated on a spit of land at the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers. It is a postage stamp. When we took off the pilot to extend the runway started our take off roll on the grass as close to the perimeter fence as possible. We landed at Midway about 4:30. Our families had given up on us and gone home. Bill lived on the South side of Chicago and he took his own cab. Bob and I shared a cab to my house. I wanted to split the fare but Bob wanted to treat. I have never seen either of them again. I did learn that they went to Fort Lewis and were assigned to the 505th back at SLO. The 505th subsequently left California. Half went to Fort Hoo-che-cooch that is Fort Huachuca in Arizona. The other half went to Fort Hood, just outside Killeen, Texas. Now we knew that the 505th lacked sufficient manpower to facilitate training. Therefore the Groups personnel spent their time in BS make work jobs. We were so happy that we were not going to

the 505th, or so we thought when we were assigned after graduation. They wound up in Arizona and I found myself in the 288th Signal Company, 505th Signal Group at Fort Hood eventually. I would have caught up with them in Arizona where the elements of the 505th were reunited, but I was medically disqualified after one year and six days of service.



E3 Ronald Williams- December 1953



Southwestern Signal Replacement Training Center  
 Basic Training Group  
 CAMP SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

**WILLIAMS, RONALD O.**

HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED BASIC MILITARY TRAINING AS PRESCRIBED BY AR 41  
 TRAINING PROGRAM 21-114. DATE 4 April 1953

*[Signature]* 2 *[Signature]*  
 COMD. OFFICER, COMPANY 2 COMD. OFFICER, BASIC TRAINING GROUP

SIGSLO FORM 213 6-2 '57



**Outstanding**

Outstanding SWSS students for July shown here with SWSS commandant Lt. Col. Carl H. Sturges are (left to right) Pvt. William C. Ellis, Field Radio Repair; Pvt. Robert D. Andrews, High Speed Radio Operator; Pvt. Ronald O. Williams, Manual Central Office Maintenance; Pvt. Carl A. Everett, Cable Splicing; Col. Sturges; Pvt. Rockne F. Stewart, Carrier and Repeater; Pvt. John L. Wong, Photography; Pvt. George T. Kobori, Power Equipment Operation and Maintenance, and Pvt. Hillard W. Green, Cryptography. Honor students are selected on a basis of soldierly conduct and scholastic achievement. (U.S. Army photo)



Pvt. Ronald O. Williams



Pvt. William C. Ellis



Pvt. Hillard W. Green

## SWSS Honor Grads. . .

Three students will receive recognition next Friday as top scholars of the fifty-third graduating class of the Southwestern Signal School. Ceremonies will be at 1000 hours in the school's demonstrator building.

Col. Francis N. Miller, Commanding Officer of the 505th Signal Group, will be guest speaker at graduation. Honor graduates are Pvts. William C. Ellis, field radio repair; Ronald O. Williams, manual central office maintenance, and Hillard W. Green, cryptography.

All three of these men were honored recently by the school for being top students during the month of July. They were selected for the monthly honor on the basis of soldierly conduct as well as scholastic achievement.

Pvt. Ellis, 23 years old, top student in the field radio repair course, is a native of California. He attended high school in El Monte, Calif., and then the University of California at Berkeley until his induction into the Army. He was a member of Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity at the university.

Top man of the manual central office maintenance course is 20-year-old Pvt. Williams. Although

born in Atlanta, Ga., he spent most of his life in Chicago, Ill., where he attended Lakeview High School. On his release from the Army, Pvt. Williams plans a return to his native Georgia for study at Georgia Tech.

Pvt. Green, 23, is cryptography's honor student. A native of Salt Lake City, Utah, he attended the University of Utah where he was preparing to become a doctor. He plans to return there for final medical training when he is released from the Army.

### Other graduates:

#### Field Radio Repair

Charles A. Burns, Robert D. De Bisschop, Neil C. Farr, Herbert Herman, Milton W. Hughes (NEG), Arthur J. LeVeque, Elmer L. Pfaff, Jerry R. Pryor, Bobby V. Taylor.

#### Cryptography

Billy G. Abshere, Kenneth W. Ben-shoof, Gerald R. Crossman, Robert F. Klay, Clifford S. Munns, James D. Palmer, John G. Powers, William A. Spojka.

#### Manual Central Office Maintenance

William J. Gaynor, Laurence C. Hancock, Elton R. Hansen, John F. Harney, Robert A. Lapinski, Jonathan Leonard (NEG), Ronald A. Marzek.