

ROTC.

By James Collins.

Engineering school was stressful and demanding. Taking 21 credits in one semester meant having nine courses, which included laboratories. To further aggravate this schedule, classes were alternately situated at the top of the big hill and at the bottom. That meant every two or three hours, we had to rush up or down the hill, within 10 minutes. The most annoying course was ROTC. Every Thursday we had to dress in full uniform, attend a class, and at the end of the day, walk to the ball field, undergo an inspection and suffer through an hour of marching procedures. Between each class, we had to have a perfectly tailored uniform, rush in the direction of the next class and if we met any ROTC officers, we were required to salute them. Because of my workload, I always carried two full book bags, one in each hand. According to the arbitrary ROTC rules, you must keep your right hand empty at all times, so you could give a salute to an officer. With two heavy book bags, this was impossible. My solution was to immediately drop the book bag and generate a salute. In freshman year, this was acceptable and I went through the course with the minimum number of demerits. Any infraction of the ROTC rules could result in a demerit. These were negative units, which subtracted one point from your class mark for each demerit remaining at the end of the semester. You could erase a demerit by working one hour after class in the ROTC office cleaning weapons.

Sophomore year was a different animal. A new group of student ROTC officers arose and they had a class schedule the inverse of mine. This meant that every time we changed classes. I was going in one direction and had to pass them coming in the other direction. They lined up; I dropped my books and saluted. They stopped, and each gave me a demerit for having material in my right hand. Occasionally they got me for not having a button closed on my uniform jacket. The demerits started to increase. I worked a couple of hours every week, but I could not keep ahead. Near the end of the semester, I had 18 demerits, which were listed on the bulletin board in the ROTC office. I had the most demerits of the entire wing, which got everyone's attention. If you acquired 20 demerits, or more, you failed ROTC and received an F.

Just before the final formation of the year, a number of my classmates came to me and told me to be in the field 40 minutes before the start of the activity. I did as requested, and was surprised to see an entourage carrying boxes of supplies. They had me take off my shoes and one group polished them to an unbelievable shine. Three took my suit jacket, cleaned it, lint brushed it, and sewed every button in place so nothing would drop off. Another contingent took my hat, brushed it, polished it, squared it away and put it back on my head. Then they took me over to the position where our squadron would line up and they all lined up on me

and put a marker on the ground. They ordered me not to move an inch and the entire squadron would line up on me. I appreciated all the attention they were giving me to prevent me from acquiring the demerits, which would probably have me expelled.

The dreaded inspection started on time. ROTC Capt. Guido with his subordinates started down the line and inspected each cadet one at a time. There were four rows and I was in the second row. They stopped in front of me, looked me up and down, could find nothing wrong, and went on to the next cadet. When they reached the third row, I could see them out of the corner of my eye passing behind me. Captain Guido kicked dust from behind me onto my shoes. They finished the third row and instead of going to the fourth. They came back to the second. As they stepped in front of me, they turned and Capt. Guido said, "Oh we missed the dirt on his shoes. That is two more demerits. Collins, you are out of here."

(There is an old Irish saying: Beware the anger of a patient man). That is when I hit him full in the face and lifted him out of his shoes. I never got a second shot in as the entire squadron piled on top of him and his subordinates. You could hear the punches at the other end of the field. The entire squadron had broken into chaos and the regular Air Force colonel who ran the ROTC was apoplectic.

Fully a week later, I received a called to go to the Dean of Engineering's office. I figured the jig was up I was going to be expelled. Brother Leo had stacks of paper in front of him and looked calm.

"Mr. Collins, you have been the victim of a conspiracy to drive you out of the ROTC. Capt. Guido has been expelled as has one of his officers and two others are on suspension. All have been dismissed from the ROTC. We interviewed every member of your squadron and learned the entire story."

"You talked, to everyone on my class? Why didn't I ever learn about it?"

"They were told it was highly confidential and they could suffer if you learned about this from them. By the way, they all indicated you did not want to be in the ROTC. Why did you ever join?"

"Because you told me I had to join ROTC, otherwise I couldn't get into engineering school."

"What you mean, I told you. We never spoke how did you come to that conclusion?"

"Well, your name was on the letter I received saying I had to join the ROTC so I assume you told me."

"Well, Mr. Collins. I will have to get back to you on that. Now you are in good standing with the college, and all of your demerits have been deleted. Your classmates think highly of you."

A week later, I was called back into the office. Brother Leo shook my hand, sat me down and said,

"I looked into your surprising statement about the letter that indicated you had to join ROTC and found it to be totally valid. The women in administration learned that we get \$750 for every student who joins ROTC. They took it upon themselves to issue the letter to increase the number of ROTC students. I had nothing to do with that and that has now been rescinded. The next class for the engineering school will not have that mandate in their letters."

"Brother, my guess is that next year's class of ROTC students will be at least 25% lower than this year's class. The majority of the people in my particular class want no part of the ROTC."

We shook hands, I left, and I left the ROTC, which I never wanted to be part of. The following year the ROTC class coming in to the engineering school was more than one third less than previous years.

THE END