

NO GUNS FOR YOU

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By James Collins

After World War II, the police department in the city of New York expanded to 44,000 members. To train all these new officers the NYPD had created the police academy, which gave a 16-week intensive training program similar to an Army boot camp. At that time, you could only join the police department if you were a resident of the city of New York. There were 71 precincts, which covered the five boroughs. A typical training group consisted of 1500 candidates, which worked out to be about 21 candidates per precinct.

The training similar to that given by the Army included intense physical activities. Class instruction was followed by tests, street training and simulation of various events that a police officer might encounter during his tour of duty. Experienced police officers carefully watched the candidates and scored them according to their performance in each of the training elements. Eventually the greatly anticipated graduation day would arrive when the candidates formally joined the NYPD and obtained a badge and a gun. They already purchased the uniforms for their daily performance in the Police Academy.

The graduation day for one of the classes in the early 1960s was memorable. The 1400 successful candidates all lined up in a large field. It was an impressive presentation. The officer in command of all training stood on a small dais in front of the assembled troop and congratulated them on their accomplishments. He then diverted from the standard presentation and made an unusual request.

“Will all the members of the Academy who are from the 44th precinct please raise your hands.” They did and he continued, “Will all of those in the 44th precinct who come from the Highbridge district in the Bronx please come forward and form a line in front of the dais.”

As the designated candidates worked their way out of the parade lineup, they walked towards the front of the formation and a few pattered each other on the back anticipating some kind of special commendation.

The 18 candidates stood at attention in front of the entire regimental formation. They were all smiling and chests were puffed out because they were special.

“Gentleman you have been the bane of my existence during the 16 week training program. I am going on record in front of the entire training class that I do not want to issue guns to any of you. All you people from Highbridge think that you are special and feel that you are above the crowd. You do not respect any authority, as you believe you know more than they do. You do not follow policy or procedures and go out of your way to do things your own way. Former members from your neighborhood are on the force and show the same attitude. I predict that some of you will obtain all kinds of awards and medals for bravery. Some will be injured on

the job or shot but hopefully, none will die in the line of duty. Some of you will also rise to high ranks with the department. However, others will be dismissed from the department for violating orders and policies. They may also be charged for ethics violations and for criminal activity. Some of you will go to court and some will end up in prison. It is for these reasons that I went to the bosses last week and presented my concerns but I was overruled. At graduation today, you will be issued guns and badges but I am totally opposed to the idea.

The future proved his predictions were correct.

THE END