

PAULA, THE OLD SOLDIER AND THE FORT

By John F. Hall

After Paula and I were married in 1965, at South Chapel on Fort Campbell, she went to work for a pathologist at Jennie Stuart Hospital in Hopkinsville, Kentucky. She was



training under Dr. Johnson. This doctor's husband was in the military and he was a pathologist at the old Fort Campbell Army Hospital. This hospital, from my memory of being there, seemed to have miles of highly buffed wooden corridors. Dr. Johnson had privileges there and she would take Paula to that Army hospital to continue her training as a histologist. She learned to prepare tissue samples and stain them with dyes which can aid in microscopic tissue analysis. During this time, Paula passed the Civil Service Test to become a clerk/typist, a GS— 2. That job paid twice as much as she was making as a histologist working for Dr. Johnson. Paula was offered a job working at supply on Fort Campbell. She gave a two-week notice to Dr. Johnson to accept the clerk/typist job.

One day, as she was typing, an officer walked up to her desk. He asked Paula if she knew who he was. She looked at his name tag and said, “Yes Sir!” The officer looked at her and said, “I am Colonel Cushman and I am your boss.” Paula looked at him and said, “Yes Sir.” The Colonel's name is John H. Cushman. Years later that officer became a Lieutenant General (three star). He died November 8, 2017 at the age of 96.

Paula applied for higher paying jobs. She became the Division's Forms Management Officer. And then the Division's Record's Management Officer. When the 101St Division Commander's secretary and the Assistant Division Commander's secretary went on



training, leave or vacation, they wanted the best and the fastest typist to fill in to do the secretaries work. Stopping in the middle of this paragraph, I'll take you back to when Paula was a freshman in Mrs. Simmons typing class at Murray State College. Paula was gifted and she could type 130 words a minute with no mistakes on an IBM Selectric typewriter. Now you know why Paula was detailed for weeks to do the typing. After one 101St exercise in

Germany, Paula worked seven days a week, 12 hours a day to get out those after action reports. All this typing was done in the old wooden Division Headquarters building. I remember back in 1964, I was detailed as a Colonel's driver. I would sit in a chair outside of his office, on the second floor of that headquarters, and wait to drive him where ever he needed to go. I was taking a night literature course at Austin Peay College in

Clarksville, Tennessee. The Colonel allowed me to read and do my homework sitting in that chair. I'm not sure if he was the officer that told me that if I was going to get ahead, that I better get a college education. There was a lot of history in that old wooden headquarters building. It was constructed in 1942 and it was only suppose to last 20 years.

Paula continued to apply for other jobs on Post. She applied for the Chief of Administrative Services position at the new Army hospital. The place where she was working did not want to lose her. They tried to keep her from even being considered for the position. The officer that interviewed her for the job said, "I am going to take a chance on you." Paula was hired. She became the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer for the hospital. She was responsible for all the hospital medical records. She was responsible for the hospital Post Office and Distribution Center. All the medical vendors and salesmen had to report to her office for visitor badges. At times she was supervising over 24 civilian and military personnel. Paula never wore a military uniform, but she served 32 years in support of the soldiers on Fort Campbell.



My dad wanted me to make a career out of the Army. But after three years on active duty, I wanted to get a college education under the GI Bill. Later, I followed his advice and enlisted in the Army Reserve in 1977. Two years later, The Kentucky Army National



Guard gave me a Direct Commission as a First Lieutenant. I was 34 and still in decent physical condition. I had some bad parachute landing falls (PLFs) back in the 1960s when I was a paratrooper in the 101st. My back and my feet, from running in combat boots, were wearing out. But I stayed until the Army Reserve told me that I had to retire at the age of 60. I miss the BDU fraternity and my "Band of Brothers." My dad died many, many years ago. We needed more time together. So many questions that I needed to ask him. So many things that I wanted to know. Phil Coulter wrote the song, "The Old Man." John McDermott gives a heart felt rendition when he sings that song. These are some of Phil's lyrics: "The tears have all been shed now. We've said our last goodbye. His soul's been blessed and he's laid to rest, and it's now I feel alone. He was more than just a father, a teacher my best friend. He can still be heard in the tunes we shared when we play them on our own. I never will forget him for he made me what I am. Though he may be gone memory lingers on. And I miss him...the old man. As a boy he took me walking by mountain field and stream. And he showed me things not known to kings and secrets between him and me. Like the colors of the pheasant he rises at dawn. And how to fish and make a wish besides the holly tree. I thought he'd live forever, he seemed so big and strong, But the minutes fly and the years

roll by for a father and his son. And suddenly when it happened, there was so much left unsaid. No second chance to tell him thanks for everything he's done..." It's true that I called dad, my old man. It seems like he just turned around and then he was gone. Now I look in the mirror and you know what I see? The old man in the mirror is looking back at me! My grand kids, friends and family think that writing is hard work for me. What I don't tell them is that my true stories bring out the best in me. If I don't share them, they will be lost for all eternity.

The late Billy Graham wrote, "The greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one's life, but a legacy of character and faith." So to Andrea, Heather, John—John, Jade, Skyler and Lexie, I leave my stories that tell of my faith in Christ. Decades ago, I was a paratrooper in B Company, 327th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. I was making a night parachute jump out of a Huey helicopter, in the 101st Recondo School. The pilots passed the drop zone as my feet left the helicopter's skids. I looked down and realized that I could be killed when I crashed into the trees below. I crossed my legs and crossed my arms and said that I was coming home to Christ where for all eternity I shall be. The trees destroyed the parachute and I thought it would be the end of me. But I survived and Christ found another use for me. In the true stories that I write, I acknowledge His existence and the role He is playing in my life. The Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 1:5 wrote, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure dwells in you as well." It is the heritage of faith that is passed down from generation to generation. That faith was handed down from my grandfather John and then to my dad Charles and then down to me. If it wasn't for my faith in Christ, I don't know what would have happened to me.

For the past few months, because of the pandemic, my age and my compromised immune system, I have sheltered in place. Paula and I needed to pick up refills at the Town Center



Pharmacy on the Fort. So with my cloth face mask, I drove to Fort Campbell. The Military Police at Gate 4 were wearing face masks. I held up my military ID card so the soldier could scan the front and the back of the card. I realized that something was missing as I drove towards the pharmacy. After 78 years, the 101st Airborne Division and Headquarters building was gone.

It was demolished on April 8, 2020. I had wanted to go in there one last time, to go up to the second floor, and see if the chair on the outside of the Colonel's office was still there. It was 56 years ago that I sat there studying my first college course. Paula spent months typing out reports there. Few people have any real connection to that old building. I was

sad to see it go. In a matter of time, the grass will cover over the ground where the headquarters once stood. New soldiers to the Fort will not know that it even existed.

Who knew that Paula, the teenage girl from Golden Pond, would become part of the history of Fort Campbell? I like to end my stories by giving reference to the title. I came to the Fort as a teenage soldier of 17. I married Paula on the Fort in my Honor Guard Uniform. Then I became an officer and I attended Blanchfield Army Community Hospital military functions in my dress blues uniform that Paula asked me to attend. Now I'm an old soldier coming back to the Fort with the words, "Duty, Honor and Country" still ringing in my ears.

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*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:
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