

REMEMBERING WHEN PAULA AND I WERE YOUNG

By John F. Hall

When I was sixteen, I remember listening to a 1962 song, written by David Jones and Theodore Williams called, "Soldier Boy." These are their lyrics: "Soldier boy, oh, my little soldier boy, I'll be true to you. You were my first love and you'll be my last love. I will never make you blue. I'll be true to you. In this whole world you can love but one



John & Paula Oakley Hall

girl. Let me be that one girl, for I'll be true to you. Wherever you go, my heart will follow. I love you so. I'll be true to you. Take my love with you to any port or foreign shore. Darlin, you must feel for sure, I'll be true to you. Soldier boy, oh, my little soldier boy, I'll be true to you." A Cleveland, Ohio disc jockey named Alan Freed, coined the phrase 'rock 'n roll. I'm not sure if that song had some influence in my wanting to join the Army, and becoming a paratrooper. I do know that I was a bored, restless teenager, when I was sixteen. So I received parental permission to enlist in the Army. I took the Oath of Enlistment on my 17th birthday. I wanted to be assigned to a unit in Europe. I planned to use my 30 days of annual Army leave, to visit all of the countries in Europe. After

completing Jump School at Fort Benning, Georgia, I was assigned to Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

I had my share of parachuting out of Huey helicopters, the Fairchild C-119 "flying box car," and the C-130 Hercules. But it was a bitter, moonless, January night combat jump, that made me appreciate that I was not invincible. The Huey helicopter pilot overshot the drop zone. By the time I put my boots on the helicopter skids, and jumped, at 800 feet, I realized that I was going to crash into some hardwood trees, and possibly be killed. I developed a real strong faith in Jesus Christ, since I nearly died from a ruptured appendix, when I was a young boy. When I would pray to Jesus Christ, "I would say, "Jesus, I need Your help." This time, I felt that I needed to make my peace with Christ, and hope that it would be over, quickly. I close my eyes and bowed my head, and expected to die. I crashed into the trees. My parachute was torn to pieces, I was banged up, but alive.

I overheard several soldiers talking about a unit on Post called the Fort Campbell Security Platoon. They performed Honor Guard military honors, but their real mission was to provide escort security to the Navy. The Navy had a base on Fort Campbell called Clarksville Base, and nicknamed "The Birdcage." They were involved making nuclear weapons. At that time in 1964, the Birdcage was the number seven target for the Russians to destroy. I had just graduated from the Fort Campbell Recondo School, and I felt that I should look into joining that unit. The Security Platoon was under the command and supervision of a military police company on Fort Campbell. I made an appointment to talk to that company commander. He liked how I presented myself.

He told me that I could only go on Honor Guard missions, until my “Secret Security Clearance” was approved. I was allowed to transfer from Baker Company, 327th infantry, to the Security Platoon. Our Security Platoon’s barracks was built in 1941, for World War II. It was a two story, wooden building that had no wall insulation. It had a pay phone in the barracks. I had a small record player and about 15 rock ‘n’ roll 45 RPM records. I still have that player and the records. We received a mission to provide military honors for a soldier killed in a motorcycle accident in Benton, Kentucky. I was the youngest, and the shortest of the Honor Guard soldiers in the Security Platoon.

I cannot say that I was the poorest, because none of the other soldiers could afford a car. I called one of the soldiers: “GTO.” All he would talk about is buying a GTO Pontiac, muscle car, once his service time was up. As far as I could remember, I was the only enlisted soldier in our team. The other soldiers were all drafted into the Army. Our First Sergeant, Bill Teeters, was from Benton, Kentucky. Any time that I needed a three-day pass, he would give it to me. Looking back, the wooden barracks that I lived in, was torn down. The wooden 101st Airborne Headquarters, where I was temporarily assigned, as a Colonel’s driver, was torn down several years ago. The wooden South Chapel, where Paula and I were married on April 17, 1965, was torn down.

I’ve Written several stories about my wife, the former Paula Andree Oakley of Golden Pond, Kentucky. That town, since 1969, no longer exists. It is only because of Paula that I decided to stay in Kentucky. During my three-year Army enlistment, I completed just one night college course, at Austin Peay College in Clarksville, Tennessee, in 1964. It was a night Literature course. I was not suppose to take that course, until I had passed English 101. But it was the only available night course at that time. So I was going into that course with no English 101 preparation. I would walk from the barracks to the Greyhound bus station on Fort Campbell. It was a four-block walk. The bus would go to the Clarksville bus 1 Station. I would walk about a half mile to the Austin Peay campus. Two years ago, that concrete block bus station was demolished, ant not rebuilt. Clarksville runs a bus shuttle to and from Fort Campbell.

The barracks, the old 101st Headquarters, the South Chapel, and the on-post Greyhound bus station no longer exist. I remember talking to Paula from the pay phone in the old wooden barracks. Paula was detailed to type out after-action reports at the old wooden 101st Headquarters. The Greyhound bus station was my way from Fort Campbell to Golden Pond. Paula and I remember these things from back when we were young.

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