

## RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY

By John F. Hall

When I was 12, and lived in Miami, Florida, I remember listening to a song written by Paula Anka called, "You Are My Destiny." These are some of his lyrics: "You are my destiny. You share my reverie, you are my dream come true, that's what you are... You



share my sweet caress, you feel my loneliness. You are my dream come true, baby that's what you are. Heaven, I love you so. The emptiness can't take your love from me. I stay alone and think of you... You're more than life to me, that's what you are. Heaven and heaven alone can take your love from me. Cause I'd be a fool to leave you, and a fool I've never been. You are my destiny, you share my reverie. You are my dream come, that's what you are...". One definition for the word 'destiny' is this: "The hidden power believed to control what will happen in the future; fate."

When I was 14, I was inspired by the song, "Climb Every Mountain." The song was written by Oscar Hammerstein II. These are just a few of his lyrics: "Climb every mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, 'till you find your dream. A dream that will need all the love you can give, every day of your life for as long as you live...".



My dream, at that time, was to be free to see the world. When I was 17, and with parental consent, I enlisted in the Army. I completed Basic and Advanced Training at Fort Gordon, Georgia. I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, for Jump School. I became a paratrooper at the age of 17 and six months. My dream, at that time, was to be assigned to an Airborne unit in Germany. I would be free to travel all around Europe during my annual 30-day Army leave. I was asked to list my station assignment preference. I put down Germany.

I think that the station assignment preference was a joke. Greyhound buses pulled up to our barracks on Fort Benning. Everyone in my Jump School class - boarded the buses. I guess the Army felt that I deserved a lump of coal for Christmas, because on December 22, 1962, I arrived on Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Instead of a medieval castle, I found myself in a wooden World War II barracks heated by coal. That evening, I decided to walk to the Post Exchange (PX) to purchase shoe polish. On the way to the PX, I passed a small billboard sign. It was dimly lit by a single naked light bulb. Through the thick fog and coal smoke, I could barely see what was written on the billboard. I walked up to the billboard. It had only three words: "Rendezvous With Destiny." I wondered about those words and what they meant.

Fast forward time, and 60 years later, the billboard is long gone. I'm 77 and a retired soldier. I make monthly trips to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I pick up monthly medicine for my wife, Paula. I have to sign for the controlled medicine. Every three months I pick up regular medicine for myself and Paula. The story continues on Friday, February 25, 2022. I talked to Cody Callaway, he just completed an Army enlistment. He said that he expects the United States and Russia to be in a war in a year. The previous day, Russia

invaded Ukraine. It was a major escalation of the Russo-Ukraine War that began in 2014. After talking to Cody, I drove to Fort Campbell, and then on to the Town Center Pharmacy. After picking up Paula's monthly medicine, I decided to drive over to the Soldier's Center and inquire about getting a new dependent identification card for Paula.

The Pandemic that began in 2000 caused many things to be extended. The ID Section at the Soldier's Center had extended the expiration date of Paula's ID card for an additional year. More than 16 months had passed, and I was concerned that Paula's expired ID card would prevent me from getting her monthly medication. She had retired from the Blanchfield Community Army Hospital on Fort Campbell, after 35 years of service. She was the Chief of Administrative Services at the hospital. We have a long connection to Fort Campbell. We were married at South Chapel, on Post, on April 17, 1965. She was 18 and I was 19.

I parked in the Soldier's Center parking lot and walked into the Center. Two platoons of soldiers were inside. I made my way around them as they went into a large briefing room for a deployment briefing. I went into the ID Card Section and I went up to the reception desk. The ID person on duty advised that I could make an appointment for Paula, but the next available date would be at the end of April. The person advised that I could do a "walk-in." But that it could involve a long wait. I told the ID person that I would take that option and asked what time should I bring Paula to the Soldier's Center. I was told to arrive by 7:30 am, on Monday, February 29, 2022.

The older I get, the less I mind having to wait. I'm reminded of a hymn written by Stuart Hamlin called: "Teach Me Lord to Wait." These are his lyrics: "Teach me Lord, to wait down on my knees, till in Your good time You answer my pleas; teach me not to rely on what others do, but to wait in prayer for an answer from You. Teach me Lord, to wait while hearts are aflame, let me humble my pride and call on Your holy name. Keep my faith renewed, eyes in Thee, let me be on this earth what You want me to be. They that wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. Teach me Lord to wait." On Monday, February 29, 2022, Paula and I arrived in the parking lot in front of the Soldier's Center. We got out and stood in line, six feet apart, in front of the Center.

About 16 other people, mainly dependents, sponsors, and retirees, were waiting in line. It was freezing standing there. There was frost on the top of the posts in front of the Center. I put on my gloves. The fingers of my left hand sustained frost bite back in 1963, when I was a machine gunner in the 101<sup>st</sup>. When it gets very cold, and I'm outside, those fingers turn white. One of those fingers is numb to this day. I looked over at two platoons of soldiers who were also waiting to go inside the Soldier's Center. I decided to take their picture. I felt that it was just a matter of time before these soldiers would be deployed to Europe. They would be the tip of the spear to hold back the Russians.

It might have been the Director of the Soldier's Center who opened the front doors. The soldiers walked in first, and then Paula and I walked in. The Director, in a loud voice, gave us instructions to stand outside the ID Section. He cautioned us to stand six feet

apart and not to come into the ID Section until instructed. My Spinal stenosis was giving me back pain. I sat down on a nearby chair and patiently waited with Paula. I looked up at the Center ceiling and noticed some toy paratroopers, with open parachutes, suspended from the ceiling. A small plastic DC-9 plane was suspended among the paratroopers. Today, in the states, I believe the Army's 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, is the only Division size unit to have paratroopers. The 101<sup>st</sup> is an Air Assault Division. Its soldiers rappel down ropes off the sides of Black Hawk helicopters. During World War II, The Army used dummy paratroopers to fool the Germans. I took a picture of the plane and paratroopers suspended from the ceiling.

Colonel Samuel R. Lobbed wrote the song: "Screaming Eagles." These are his lyrics: "We have a rendezvous with destiny. Out strength and courage strike the spark that will always make men free. Assault right down through the skies of blue; keep you eyes on the job to be done. We're the soldiers of the hundred-first; we'll fight till the battles won!" Back in 1963, when I was a paratrooper in the 101st, some of the words to that song were different. It was "Jump right down through the skies of blue; keep your eyes on the jumpers below..."

In 1956, Harold W. Arberg wrote the song, "The Army Goes Rolling Along." I always liked that song. These are his Lyrics: "March along, sing our song, with the Army of the free. Count the brave, count the true, who have fought to victory. We're the Army and proud of our name. We're the Army and proudly proclaim. First to fight for the right, and to build the Nation's might, and the Army goes marching along. Proud of all we have done, fighting 'till the battles won, and the Army goes rolling along. Valley Forge, Custer's ranks, San Juan Hill, and Patton's tanks, and the Army went rolling along. Minutemen, from the start, always fighting from the heart, and see the Army keeps rolling along. Men in rags, men who froze, still that Army met its foes, and the Army went rolling along."

On July 7, 2022, soldiers at Fort Campbell held a ceremony. For the first time in nearly 80 years, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division cased their flag colors as they deployed to Europe. The flag colors will be uncased after the arrival of the Division Headquarters at the European Command Theater of Operations. 'In Matthew, Chapter 24, Verse 6 are these words: "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to past, but the end is not yet."

The United States has been shipping and per-positioning lethal weapons in Europe for over six months. Many soldiers in the 101<sup>st</sup>, that are deployed to Europe, are seasoned veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In a toe to toe match up between the Russian and American forces, the American soldiers have the advantage because they are better trained and motivated. The Russian soldiers lack a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) Corps. American soldiers all volunteered to serve in the Army. The Russians are conscripting men up to the age of 40 for two years of military service.

Today is July 15, 2022, the temperature outside is 95 degrees. I've been working on this story since February, way too long. On August 16, 1942, three years before I was born,

the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was activated at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Its first Commanding General, Major General William C. Lee noted that the Division had no history, but that it had a “rendezvous with destiny.” The General also said that the new Division would habitually be called into action when the need was “immediate and extreme” and that it would fall on its enemies like a thunderbolt from the skies.



I saved a recent pictures of 101<sup>st</sup> soldiers boarding a commercial jet plane bound for Europe. I put on my first Army uniform as a soldier on my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. I took off my last Army uniform one day before my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Most of my adult life, I served as a soldier. I considered it to be an honor to have served this nation as a soldier. One day, I shall meet my Supreme Commander, Jesus Christ, and

have my “rendezvous with destiny”.

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