

## THE STUDENT IN THE MURRAY STATE SWEATSHIRT

By John F. Hall

One thing that this old writer learned to do, as my memory has a way of drifting away, is to start on a story and finish it within a week. The process of collecting the pictures for the story takes a little longer. This is a true story. Actually, all of my stories are based on my experiences and observations. I rely on the grace and inspiration of Christ to help me remember some of the events in this story. I use a 1984 Murray Ledger & Times newspaper article and picture in the story.



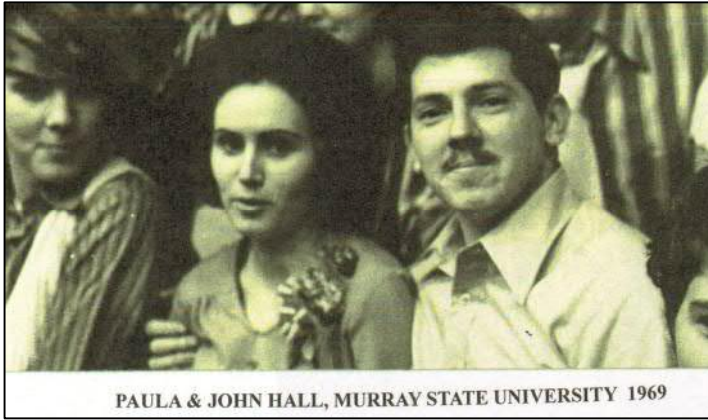
It all began when a Murray State student walked into the Sunset Inn restaurant in Golden Pond, Kentucky. The year was 1964. The student's name is Paula Andree Oakley. She was wearing a Murray State sweatshirt. She came into the restaurant for a take-out meal. She was with her young sister, Marsha. Paula was there just long enough to pay for the meal. Inside the restaurant was a seven-man Honor Guard squad from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Earlier that day, the squad performed military honors for a soldier who was killed in a motorcycle accident in Benton, Kentucky. I was a paratrooper from Florida. One night, I made a combat parachute jump out of a Huey helicopter. I was the last man to jump. When I put my boots on the helicopter's skids, I realized that the pilot had over-shot the drop zone. I was going to land in the trees. I thought I would be gored to death. So I crossed my legs, crossed my arms, and made my peace with God and closed my eyes.

I was the newest and youngest member of the Honor Guard squad. He was sitting quietly at a table by himself. I was taking a night literature course at Austin Peay College in Clarksville, Tennessee. It was my first college course, and the only one available at that time. I was in over my head. The literature course prerequisite called for the completion of English 101 and English 102. Not having completed those two courses might cause me to fail the course. I was from Florida and I never heard of Murray State or even where it was located. I was looking at the student's sweatshirt. She looked to be about 18 and was very petite. The other soldiers enjoyed picking on me.

After the college student and her sister left the restaurant, one of the older soldiers turned to me and said: "Why don't you call up that pretty college student and ask her for a date?" I replied: "That's ludicrous. I don't know her name, or where she lives. I don't know her telephone number. I don't even own a car." I was having to take a Greyhound bus from Post to Clarksville to take the course. I watched as one of the other soldiers was talking to the waitress. As I suspected, she said out loud: "Her name is Paula, and her (dad's name is Andrew Oakley. You can look up his phone number in this phone book and use the restaurant's phone to call her. She lives across the street in a red brick house." Then the soldier that was talking to the waitress said to me: "Are you afraid to call that student?" I was a fearless and foolish paratrooper. I only feared Jesus Christ. I walked over to the counter and looked up Mr. Andrew Oakley's phone number. I called it and it was busy. I

tried three more times. It was still busy. So I told the squad that it was no use calling Mr. Oakley. I went back to the table to finish my hamburger and French fries.

I finished eating and got up to pay for my meal. Then another soldier said: “You need to



call the phone Operator and ask her to have the phone line checked.” Just as I thought that I beat the squad at their own silly game, I realized that I would have to get the Operator to check the line. I called the operator and requested to have the line checked. After a few minutes, the operator advised me that the phone was off the hook. I thought I had won, but

the squad Leader said: “Hall, go over to Mr. Oakley's house and tell him that his phone is off the hook. There could be an emergency call and he needs to know that his phone is off the hook. Be quick about it! We are leaving in five minutes.”

Now I was faced with an Order from the squad Leader to go over and to tell Mr. Oakley that his phone is off the hook. It was a moonless night and no light was on the porch where Mr. Oakley lived. I had to run to get across the street, to tell Mr. Oakley, and then to run back to the restaurant. I walked up to the door and knocked. Mrs. Oakley opened the door. I did not want to seem foolish. In John, Chapter 8, Verse 32, Jesus said: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” I told Mrs. Oakley that I tried to call Paula, but your phone is off the hook.” Mrs. Oakley said: “Thank you for telling me. Paula is next door at her grandmother's house. You can talk to her over there.” I thanked her and started to run back to the restaurant. For some reason I stopped. I felt that I had nothing to lose, so I ran to Paula's grandmother's house. I knocked on the door, but no one answered. So I knocked harder.

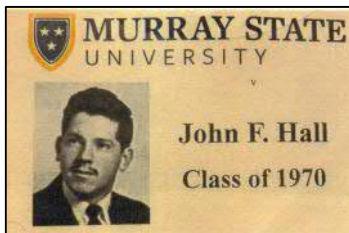
The porch light came on and Paula opened the door. I could see in her eyes that she was angry. She said to me: “You almost got me in trouble by knocking on the door so many times. You almost woke my grandmother up.” I tried to explain that I was told to tell her parent's that their phone was off the hook. Paula came closer and I started to back up. She continued to walk towards me. I stopped as I was at the edge of the porch. She put both hands on my chest, and with unbelievable strength, she pushed me off the porch. I fell off the porch and onto the ground. I looked up at Paula and said: “Don't be mad at me. My fellow soldiers were picking on me and daring me to ask you for a date. I apologize for almost getting you in trouble. We are leaving.” I turned and started to walk away. For some reason, I stopped. In Jeremiah, Chapter 29, Verse 11 are these words: “For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” I believe in Divine Intervention. If the Good Lord wanted me to have a destiny with this girl, so be it. I turned around and said: “Can I write to you?” She did not answer for what seemed like a minute. Then she softly said: “Yes.” I

asked for her address. Her younger sister, Marsha called out: "It's box 56, Golden Pond." I ran back and told the soldiers that they almost got me killed because that 95-pound Wildcat pushed me off her porch.

Two months later, in 1965, I was thrown out of my bunk. I was with the squad on a mission to escort classified Naval weapons to South Korea. I was on a World War II Merchant Marine ship than steamed head long into a typhoon in the East China Sea. I somehow made it to the pilot house. The waves were 50 to 60 feet high and they came crashing down on the ship. It was January and I did not want to become shark food.

I went inside, the Captain knew that I was scared. He said to me: "I've sailed in worse storms than this." He told me to sit down and hang on. The Captain had a white mustache and a well trimmed white beard. He had on a captain's hat. I fell asleep and when I woke up the sea had calmed down some. I believe that John Newton and I shared a similar experience of being caught in a storm, with the likely hood of drowning. He wrote the hymn, "Amazing Grace." When I hear some lyrics from that hymn, I am reminded of that fateful day, especially his lyrics: "Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come. This grace that brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home..." The Captain told me to get up and grab the wheel. He told me to look at the big compass and keep the ship on a specific heading. He said that he was going down to the galley for coffee. I steered the ship for an hour. I was a sailor once, and young.

Paula and I became engaged in January 1965. We were married on April 17, 1965. I enrolled at the Hopkinsville Community College in 1966. I transferred to Murray State



University (MSU) in 1968. I pledged Alpha Kappa Psi, a business fraternity. On the evening of my installation into the fraternity, I forgot my bow tie. I ran from the business building to Oakhurst, the on-campus home of Dr. Harry Sparks. I asked if I could borrow one of his bow ties. He invited me inside and he loaned me a new bow tie. I told him that I would return it that night. He said: "Son you can

return it tomorrow. Now go and enjoy your installation." I earned a Bachelor of Science in Business degree in 1970. Dr. Sparks presented me with that degree. I was working part time at the MSU campus post office. I was taking graduate courses towards earning a Masters in Business Administration. Then my connection with MSU came to a temporary stop. I was the first student in Trigg County to apply for student loans from Trigg County Farmers Bank. The bank wanted me to start repaying those student loans as I had graduated from MSU.

I dropped out of graduate school and accepted the position of manager of the Fort Campbell Rod and Gun Club. I developed the first RV trailer camping area in the Third Army region. I stayed as manager for a little over a year. Today, the RV camping area was enlarged with small cabins. The Rod and Gun Club no longer exists. I joined the Kentucky State Police in 1972, first as a license examiner, and then as a Trooper. I decided that if I was injured on the job, I would want to teach at a community college. Congress had created the Law Enforcement Education program (LEEP). The purpose was

to increase the education level of police officers. I submitted an application for the program.

In 1976, I was taking graduate courses to earn a Master of Arts in College Teaching (MACT) at Murray State University. I was required to drive to MSU in my police car in my police uniform. I would go to a MSU restroom and change into civilian clothes. I would then put my uniform and police gear into the trunk of the police car and go to class. After the class was over, I would go back to the police car. I would take the uniform and police gear out of the trunk. I would go back to the restroom and change out of my civilian clothes and back into my Trooper uniform. I was under the obligation to remain for five years in law enforcement or repay LEEP for the tuition and books.

Dr. Constantine Curriss, President of Murray State University, presented me with my MACT degree in 1977. Since LEEP was paying for my graduate tuition and books, I continued to take graduate courses to earn a Specialist in College Teaching Degree (SCT). Dr. Curriss presented me with my SCT degree in 1978. In 1979, I was given a Direct Commission as a First Lieutenant in the Kentucky Army National Guard, 198<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion, Louisville, Kentucky. I was a Trooper assigned to Trigg County. In 1980, District Judge, Chappell Wilson told me to come to his office after Court. He told me that he wanted me to be the Executive Officer in D Company, 100<sup>th</sup> Division, Army Reserve, in Murray, Kentucky. I told the Commander of the 198<sup>th</sup> about Judge Wilson's request. He approved the transfer.

In 1981, I received a call from the 198<sup>th</sup> Military Police Battalion. They wanted me to meet with their 8-4 supply officer and another officer from Battalion. I told them that I could meet them at the Cadiz restaurant in Cadiz, Kentucky. They had an urgent request. The Artery Company in Murray, Kentucky was designated to transition to a Military Police Company. The urgency was that the Commander of the Artery Company was creating problems. He was also a professor at Murray State University. The President of MSU had denied the professor tenure. Word got back to the 198<sup>th</sup> that this professor was going to create an incident to harm the reputation of Dr. Curriss and the Kentucky National Guard.

I had been an officer for less than three years and they wanted me to replace the Captain as soon as his two years of Command times was up. They did not trust the four platoon officers in the Artery Company. They told me that the Captain may try to get back at me when I relieved him in a year. I told them that I would have to get approval from Judge Wilson, who was also a Battalion Commander in Paducah. He gave me permission to transfer back to the Kentucky Army National Guard. I then received Orders that assigned me to the newly designated 614<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company in Murray, Kentucky.

I had to figure out what incident the Captain planned to create. I contacted Dr. Curriss and he invited me to meet with him at Oakhurst. I explained my mission in the 614 Military Police Company. We met at Oakhurst several times. I suspected that the Captain would create an incident at the MSU Homecoming Parade of 1981. I was correct. The Captain called me into his office the day of the parade. Three of his platoon officers were also

present. The Captain told me to arm the Military Police soldiers, assigned to work the parade. I told him that Battalion did not authorize the arming of the soldiers. The Captain said: "I am giving you a Direct Order to arm the soldiers." I told the Captain: "That is not a lawful Order and I will not obey it."

What the Captain planned to do is for his three lieutenants to swear that I gave the unlawful Order to arm the soldiers. Then one of the officers would fire a round in the air. It would be falsely leaked to the press that Dr. Curriss requested me to arm the soldiers. The Captain thought the Regents would fire Dr. Curriss, and destroy my military career.

The Murray Ledger & Times published a picture and an article about my promotion to

**HALL PROMOTED —** John F. Hall, Commander of the 614th Military Police Company, Kentucky National Guard, was promoted to the rank of Captain. Hall is a graduate of Murray State University and is a 12 year veteran of the Kentucky State Police. He has served as Commander for the past two years. During this time the strength of the local unit increased from 115 to 167 Guardsmen. Hall said his major goals as a Commander were to keep the unit up to 100 percent strength and to help insure a new armory for Calloway County. The decision for a new armory is now in the hands of the Kentucky Legislature. Captain Hall will serve as Commander until May 1, 1984. He pointed out that the success of the 614th Military Police Company was due in great part to the support and cooperation that it has received from the local community. The Calloway County High School, Murray State University, the city, county, and state officials who have worked very hard to make an new armory for Calloway County a number one priority. Pictured above are 2LT Larry Nixon, First Sergeant Paul Pennell, and Captain John F. Hall, Commander of the 614th Military Police Company.

Captain. This was the article: "Hall Promoted - John F. Hall, Commander of the 614<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, Kentucky National Guard, was promoted to the rank of Captain. He is a graduate of Murray State University and is a 12 year veteran of the Kentucky State Police. He has served as Commander for the past two years. During this time the strength of the local unit increased from 115 to 167 Guardsmen. Hall said his major goals as a Commander were to keep the unit up to 100 percent strength and to help insure a new armory for Calloway County. The decision for a new armory is now in the hands of the Kentucky Legislature. Captain Hall will serve as Commander until May 1, 1984. He pointed out that the success of the

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Back on March 25, 1983, my world began to fall apart. At 5:30 in the morning, my dad, Charles J. Hall died in a hospital in Daytona Beach, Florida. I still remember the crushing words from his doctor: "John, we lost him. He was scheduled to be transferred to Gainesville for more tests. But he died peacefully in his sleep." My dad, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was a member of the NASA team that helped put the first man on the moon in 1969. He was my advisor. We were close. After the funeral, I had his remains buried in the Trigg Memory Acres Cemetery in Cadiz, Kentucky.



In 1983, I was burning both ends of the “candle stick” being a Kentucky State Trooper, Commanding 167 Guardsmen, and taking the Advance Military Police Officer correspondence course. My dad's funeral in Florida made me reexamine my life and my priorities. My dad wanted me to leave law enforcement. I stayed long enough to take an early retirement. Calloway County was given a new armory. The unit designation of the 614<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company was changed to the 438<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company. My dad wanted me to have a career in the military. In 1984, I transferred back to the Army Reserve. I was a Training officer for most of my career. I was an Inspector General for nine years. In 2005, I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel at the age of 60.

In addition to my three grand children: Andrea, Heather, and John-John, I am a surrogate grandfather to Jade Hakes, Skyler Crisp and Lexie Crisp. On October 22, 2022, Skyler married Kendall Lancaster. At the wedding reception held in the War Memorial Building in Hopkinsville, Skyler told me that she would be going to Murray State University to complete her degree in biology. She will become another student wearing a Murray State sweatshirt.

John F. Hall

\*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:  
<http://www.ajlambert.com>

