

CHAPTER ONE:  
“TO TELL THE TRUTH...”



*Barracks 3, Front View*

**T**his is a story of four years prior to World War II. All of the characters, except Lucien Vane Rogers and Waters, were my classmates. The unusual circumstances in which some of the characters were involved are all true. Conversation which can not be remembered after fifty years is as close to the truth as the author recalls.

Recovery from the Great Depression of the late 1920s had begun, but we were on the way to World War II, and all of us ended up on active duty, but the story of each individual's experience during the war would be very long. Therefore, I decided to limit the story to the four years prior to our active entry into combat. These were memorable years and, hopefully, worth the telling.



It was 1936. The country appeared gradually to be recovering from the Great Depression. There were no bank failures

after Roosevelt's first administration. More businesses were opening and fewer closing. The pre-Depression financial boom had not returned but things were improving financially. While things seemed to be going well in this country, the politics within the entire old world were unsettled. Germany and France were not friendly, and the Spaniards were busy murdering each other. This was the year I entered college and began to be aware of the political differences on the two sides of the Atlantic.

In spite of the beginning of national recovery, finances in my family had not changed much and the source of money for college was in question. There wasn't much question as to which college I would attend. My friends were traveling about the country looking for the college that suited their needs best: math, physics, women, athletic scholarships and the rest of the thousands of things that colleges offer. I had decided on Clemson because it was financially possible for me and my parents.

I had saved money of my own from a summer job with the Army Corps of Engineers (a job that continued through college) surveying the inland waterway from Georgetown to Charleston. Most of the miles between the two cities were marsh, mud, thick brush and snakes. An occasional alligator could be spotted. To move required wading through mud and swimming. To move in the brush required the use of a bush ax and the hope that the ax head would not strike a wasp nest or beehive. If this happened, you got to the waterway as quickly as possible. If, after hitting a wasp nest, you were able to submerge, the wasps flew away. The bees were more persistent and it required longer and more frequent trips under water to get rid of them. Only one of our group had the disaster of being swarmed by bees when his head came up. He was literally unrecognizable, as his face had become swollen as a result of the attack. But, without that job, there was no chance of college.

My parents drove me to Clemson, a 240-mile trip, in their old Pontiac. At times, during the long trip, I wished that I had stayed and gone to the College of Charleston, but I was determined to get away from Charleston during my college years. They left me in front of Third Barracks and turned around and went

home. Parents were encouraged not to stay the first day.



I was left in front of the barracks with approximately a thousand other freshmen. We were lined up and taken to a large room that had been converted temporarily into a barber shop where four barbers were busy shaving the heads of the incoming class. This didn't upset me, knowing that brains were between the ears and not tangled in hair. So we were all equal insofar as hair was concerned. I did not notice a difference in attitude in any of my classmates. We were then escorted to our rooms, bare except for a bar on which to hang clothes and a desk, bed and chair.



*Interior—Barracks 3, c. 1930*

My roommate was there ahead of me and eating a cracker that had apparently been stored in a suitcase.

"I am Art Williams," I said, holding out my hand.



*Dan Moorer*

“I’m Dan Moorer,” he replied, shifting the cracker from right to left hand. “I’m from St. George.”

“I’m from Charleston,” I replied. “We have the rest of the afternoon off. I’d like to go watch football practice. Would you like to walk over there?”

“No thanks,” he replied. “I’m not an athlete or interested in athletics. I think I’ll go to the library and get familiar with it.” With that, he pulled another cracker from his suitcase without offering me one and chewed away.

He was one of those people who, because of posture and attitude, still managed to look a little disheveled when dressed in their finest military clothes. But he proved to be a good student in spite of the military environment that he felt imposed on his time.

Dan continued to chew on his crackers. He continued to eat them when I was out of the room. I was particularly annoyed when he ate an entire Thanksgiving cake that his mother sent him without offering me a sliver. But, after all, the goodies did belong to him.



While Dan scanned the library, I walked down to the practice field to see some of my high school football heroes in action.

Gene Flathman, a mediocre high school player, had turned his teenage fat into almost three hundred pounds of muscle, and he was a star of Clemson. In spite of his fame, he was cordial, and I could sit with him on the bench with the other players. Later, he transferred to Annapolis, where he became captain of that team and the strongest man ever to have played for the Navy.

I was enthralled with the kicking and passing of the freshman star, Banks McFadden, and captivated by a young coach who lined up in scrimmages and taught by example. His name was Frank

Howard and sometimes, off the field, he flaunted a Phi Beta Kappa key awarded while he was a football lineman at the University of Alabama; and of course there was Jesse Neely, head coach, a quiet gentleman on and off the field.

In contrast to the student-athletes, there was Shad Bryant, a very good halfback who amused himself on bus trips by spitting through a window at people walking alongside the road. He was very good at this, too. The student-athletes were just as tough and much more useful to the college or whatever calling they might follow after graduation.

I also realized that, isolated in the foothills, there really wasn't anything to do for recreation but athletics, watching or playing. The rest of the afternoon my options were either following Dan to the library, going back to my room, or going for a walk.



By the time I returned to the room, Dan was back from his tour of the library. He was scanning the *Greenville News*. "I don't understand what is going on in Europe. Mussolini wants to murder the Ethiopians for no practical gain to Italy. Ethiopians are being killed because they are Ethiopians. Spain is even more of a mess. Fundamentally, I guess, the cause is animosity between people who own land and millions who survive in borderline fashion with barely enough to eat. To confuse the picture even more, Russia is backing the Spanish communists, apparently to get land closer to their projected future bombing sites. Germany is fighting for no good reason except developing for future war and trying to browbeat the French. They say that they are fighting Russians in Spain. The names of the different parties and leaders would take a genius to remember."

I replied, "No doubt the people of those countries hate each other, but that's been going on for centuries and, in great part, is why our forebears migrated here—to get out of situations that they could not control. But they are a long way from Clemson. The population on the eastern side of the Atlantic is different from that on the west, and the best thing we can do is to leave

those guys alone. The *News and Courier* says that a lot of Italians are disgusted with Mussolini, so maybe he won't be around for long. But, whatever, he can't cause us much misery."

"Hope you're right," he replied, "but I am not as happy as you. If the mayor of St. George went nuts, he'd have a hard time bothering anyone but locals, but the head of a major country can generate trouble for all of us."

"More important," I said, "it's time for chow, so let's go down and eat grits and something unidentifiable."



*Mess Hall*

The mess hall was the domain of Captain Holcombe, who was apparently taught as a child that life couldn't go on without

grits two, or preferably three, times daily. So we had grits and unidentifiable stews and eggs (which were said to be dried and reconstituted), grits and cabbage, and some other unidentifiable vegetable undoubtedly filled with calories but tasteless. St. George food must have been on a par with Captain Holcombe's. At least Dan never complained, and, no matter what awful stuff was served, he was satisfied.

Lucien Vane Rogers was at our table, a skinny five-foot human encyclopedia who had finished first in his class in high school and had every intention of repeating that act here.

We introduced each other. "You two from the coast?" he inquired. "What do you think about the dam they're going to build that will flood old plantations but allow navigation all the way to Columbia?"

"To tell the truth, I haven't thought much about it, but I am not sure that getting a lake is a fair exchange for losing all those square miles." Dan added, "We have plenty of water for people, and I don't believe that anything but a canoe will get to Columbia. The whole damn thing is a politician's pipe dream, but, being politicians, they'll win, build the Santee dam and manage to increase their bank accounts through the contracting companies and, perhaps, the legislature itself."

Lucien Vane abruptly changed the subject. "Arthur, some of the guys from Charleston tell me that you're good at math."

"Well, I don't know how good I am but at least better than in Latin, French or any other language you can name. If all grades depended on Latin, I might still be in high school wondering if my latest translation of Cicero deserved a pass. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I thought we might get together sometime and discuss math or anything interesting."

I wondered what his motive really was. Nevertheless, I was flattered that a student of his caliber apparently wanted to talk about things academic.



Supper was over and I suggested that we walk to the ice

cream shop to get additional calories to last the night. Lucien Vane decided to come along and Dan went back to the room to read.

Lucien said, "I heard you talking about the situation in Spain and disagree with you in regard to our having no interest in interfering. You know, I was born in Spain and lived there until my stepfather, an American soldier, married my mother and moved here. I continue to correspond with relatives in Germany, and they are apprehensive regarding Germany's attitude toward France and its clear animosity toward England. They believe that Germany is in Spain primarily as a training exercise for a coming conflict. After all, what does Germany have there in regard to land or money? Not a damn thing that anyone has declared. I'm not sure what we can do, but France and England can't take a beating while we sit here with our hands folded and just talk to reporters about how unfortunate things are. We're doing that now, while the small war is killing Spanish hundreds."

I said, "I believe that the two sides of the ocean are politically separate and that France and England are big boys who can take care of themselves, even though a major conflict comes. After all, Spain is a small country with a mess in internal politics complicated by outside meddling with none of the outside nations having anything substantial to gain. And we are thousands of miles away, protected from trouble by a big ocean."

He replied, "If something happened, it would be hell to get from here to there."

I heard a call. "Williams! How was your supper?" The caller was Dr. Bill Lippincott, a professor of chemistry whom I had met prior to registration outside Third Barracks, which he had been monitoring.

"Maybe they should change chefs," I replied.

"Well, if you were an athlete you could eat with them. Their food is a step ahead of yours."

We continued back to the barracks, where we were required to be at "Long Roll" at 8 o'clock, when the students stood at attention alongside their rooms for roll call. After all, it was an all-male school where a cadet might risk disciplinary action to see a

female. Following confirmation that we were where we belonged, after roll call, the upperclassmen stood at their doors with a paddle and as the freshmen ran down the hall, they had their behinds swatted. The most vicious was a sophomore named Waters. I was surprised to see him come into our room a few minutes later.

"Williams," he began.

"Yes, sir!" I promptly responded.

"I hear you are Jewish. There's nothing wrong with that. Back home some of my best friends are Jews. But, if I find out that you are one of those smart-alecky sons of a bitch who try to show the rest of us up, you'll have a blacker and bluer behind than you have now. I saw you with Lucien Vane at supper. What were you doing, asking him to help you with your work?"

"No, I didn't ask for help. I can take care of myself academically, and if things get tough, I work harder. I do not impose on my friends."

"Boy, you trying to contradict me?"

"No, just trying to tell you what happened."

"Moorer, you were there. Is he telling the truth or, like most of them, lying?"

"He's telling the truth. I haven't had your experience in general. There aren't many in St. George where I grew up."

"What kind of place wouldn't have those bloodsuckers? You must come from a bunch of poor ignoramuses without much to suck from."

"Well, we weren't much except a community who raised a little corn, had a few cows and did not dislike anyone in town except for a good reason. How you worshipped God was never a reason."

"You must come from the poorest town in the country, or you're lying or both. But don't worry. I'm not all bad. Next time you get paddled, I'll just get your butts black and blue. You won't bleed any. You have a nice night, now." He then left the room abruptly.

"Now what in hell was that about!" I exclaimed.

"I don't know," said the always analytical Dan, "but it appears to me that he's a guy who has taken a beating in the past,

and he's making an attempt to be superior to people who can't fight back. If he hasn't been a winner anywhere else, he won't be one here. I wouldn't worry about him. I'll bet he's gone before the rest of his class."

"Wish I could be as philosophical as you, Dan. I think he's sadistic and if he's going to leave, I hope it's soon."