

CHAPTER FIVE: FORT McCLELLAN, HITLER, AND MR. GREENVILLE



Waterwagon

We finally arrived at the end of our junior year. We in the ROTC had planned to spend most of the summer at Ft. McClellan, Alabama, along with students from other southeastern schools learning the practical side of warfare. Unfortunately, a poliomyelitis epidemic isolated the school and kept us on campus during the several weeks before camp when we would have been at home.

Clemson without classes was unbelievably boring. We couldn't get out so women couldn't get in. We tired of basketball and baseball played without supervision or skill. More daring students found their way to Easley or some other nearby town, loaded a truck scrounged from one of the athletic departments, and sold whiskey on the campus in great secrecy. That was when I took more than one drink and still remember lying on my bunk with the room whirling around it, one foot on the floor to keep from falling off. I never got that drunk again, but time still passed more quickly with alcohol.

At long last, the quarantine was over, and we were loaded

into a hot and non-air-conditioned train with a coal burning engine. Smoke poured in through the windows, making us all hot, filthy and smelly. We may have been the first load of soldiers happy to see Anniston, home of Ft. McClellan.

The barracks there were like those at any other army camp but seemed luxurious for the first day or so. The first lecture outside with the temperature pushing 100 degrees was how to get along in the field with as little water as possible. A canteen of water was supposed to last a day, used for drinking and tooth-brushing and washing as well. The use of minimal amounts of water was adhered to because we were usually in the field where none was available. The canteen did not include water served at breakfast and supper. The sermon was followed by a walk of several miles in the heat, a midday meal and a second march in the afternoon. Late afternoon and evenings were occupied by horse-shoe pitching, volleyball, and the like.

The following day, because I was being considered for an officer's position in the corps, I was given command of a regiment and ordered to attack an opposing regiment on a distant hill. Everything seemed to go well. The scouts were out and the bulk of the opposition located. Everything seemed to be going well when I heard a commanding voice shout, "Williams! Get your ass back down here!" Bewildered, I walked back to the regular army colonel who was supervising the exercise. "Williams," he said in a scathing voice, "can't you read a damn map?"

I almost collapsed. The road led to the wrong hill. I resumed command through the exercise, but my dreams of reaching cadet colonel were gone, and I spent my senior year as a lieutenant, next lowest to those who had demonstrated a complete lack of military ability and held the rank of senior private.

My energy thereafter was directed entirely toward academia, which was probably fortunate because competition to enter medical school was fierce, admission determined mostly by grades although other things were considered.

My final humiliation was reduction to senior private at which rank I handled the most unpleasant jobs. I was outpost of the regiment that I had previously commanded. My job was to

post myself between opposing forces and send a signal if the opposition showed signs of aggression. To top the day, I lay down in a bed of poison ivy and spent a large part of the year scratching.

Dan Moorer talked to me at supper. "Arthur," he said, "I was sorry to hear that you screwed up reading that map."

"Oh well," I replied, "better to be a colonel for a day than never be a colonel at all."

"Hell," Dan replied. "When I look at the horses asses appointed as colonels in the corps, I think that I would be happy all day as a private."

"Thank you, Dan. I don't know of any outside the regiment who knew of my brief promotion."

After supper, we gathered in the parade ground, protecting the rest of the regiment from the enemy. The only problem was that this was an all-night assignment and I found a soft bunch of bushes that would support me, with my rifle in shooting position should the enemy become obstreperous. Finally, the inevitable happened, and I dozed off. Waking at sunrise, I looked around the poison ivy that was around me and, of course, knew what was coming.

We walked to the firing range, where we were taught how to shoot .45-caliber pistols and .30-caliber rifles. On the way back, Dan, our newspaper-reading addict, said, "You know, while we are playing around in the heat and dust, a hell of a lot's going on in the rest of the world that could make us real soldiers. Hitler says he loves everybody but is building 700 planes and training 10,000 pilots to protect his poor old country. In the meantime, he's invading Spanish Morocco just to give his army a little practice. Practice for what? He's building forts along the Belgian and Swiss borders. To keep his bricklayers busy? And what are we doing? Subsidizing football fields for colleges around the country. Roosevelt is a nut. At least a navigable channel from Charleston to Columbia has been turned down. Instead, money is being poured like water into a highway between New York and Florida. It will be called the Ocean Highway, and every politician between New York and Miami will get rich."

"I don't know, Dan," said Lucien Vane. "The government's

philosophy might be partly right. Somebody has to build the fields and roads, and it seems to me we are on our way out of one hell of a financial crisis. My father owned a couple of pairs of pants a year ago, and now he's able to get a Sunday suit. We're doing things through private companies. A lot of them collapsed in 1929 or thereabouts, but our economy has always been based on its advantages over government decree, and it seems to be working again."

"Hey, you guys!" yelled Ike. "Let's talk about women. We are all interested in them."

Speaking of women, Anniston, Alabama, had more whores than any city in the south. Maybe more than any city anywhere, due to the proximity of Ft. McClellan, which was all men, thousands of them, and a few women who were nurses, secretaries, and such but not satisfying a fraction of a man's need for a female.

Anniston was a pretty little southern town with mostly wooden two-story houses with a front porch that had rocking chairs and sometimes a swing made of wooden slats. The difference between these houses and those in the rest of the south was that they contained women for hire of any size, shape, or personality that best fitted your desire. It was within walking distance to the camp so that access was no problem. The men in need entered the living room, had a conversation with the madam who ran the house, and ended up in bed upstairs with the girl of his choice, having settled accounts with the madam. One made his way back to the fort with something other than sex on his mind. The intercourse industry made life considerably less stressful. This looked like a practical way to solve the sex problem. Nobody got hurt. You didn't get mixed up with some woman who wanted to get married when all you wanted was to get between her legs. Picking a girl here gave you satisfaction and you could then pick a partner you could live with who would probably have some interest in sex.

These Anniston girls were part of a big industry and, for most, the only way they could make a reasonable living. The houses were part and parcel of the life of Anniston, and most of the

cadets thought about visiting a house and going to a movie. Many did both. Venereal disease was part of the package.

Unless you wanted to participate in Anniston's biggest business, or drink a chocolate ice cream soda, there was little in the way of entertainment in town. At McClellan your day was systematically scheduled, and, in spite of all the talking to the contrary, the discipline came at times as a relief.



Back at camp I read the *Saturday Evening Post* until supper. After eating, I walked to the gym and saw Lucien Vane playing with the weights.

"Lucien, what in the world are you doing, messing with those things? Don't you know you're supposed to be the intellect of the campus?"

"I fiddle with these things every now and then. I spend so much time sitting, I want to be sure I can stand up and walk. Besides, if someone flaunts the idea of smart-ass in my face, I'd like to correct his attitude."

"Makes sense. But you look more at home in the library than here. Be careful or someone will call you a smart-ass just to see what will happen."

"Don't worry, Art. I keep physical activity to myself. I'm not sure that anyone but you knows that I know one piece of equipment from the other."

I said, "Tomorrow is more pistol shooting. I hate those damn things. They kick like a mule. The bullet is a foot off target for every millimeter you aim. They are heavy and awkward, and how they can play a significant part in a modern war, I don't know. If I wanted to fight the Slobovians, I'd donate a pistol to each one, and, sooner or later, accidentally or on purpose, they'd wipe each other out."

"It's not that bad." said Lucien. "If we weren't shooting pistols we'd be doing something else more obnoxious. That's the pleasantest way to look at it. Even digging latrines might be more fun. Incidentally, what did you think of Jim Farley's visit to the

campus?”

“I don’t believe it,” I replied. “How a man can be introduced to you once briefly and remember your name forever afterward doesn’t seem possible.”

What Farley had done was stand in the middle of the parade ground, shake a cadet’s hand while hearing his name and walk on. That night, at a party in the gym, Farley wandered around and called each cadet by his proper name. He didn’t forget one.

“No,” opined Lucien. “That man has a rare gift of memory and intellect in general. I can’t imagine what he’s doing in politics and guess he was conned into it by FDR, the world’s greatest bull artist. He probably uses him to remind him not to say the same thing twice, and it must be nice having someone stand behind you in a crowd reminding you of every name. That’s classical FDRism. I don’t see why the president is paying so little attention to what goes on in Europe.

“I’m the only person in Clemson who hears directly from relatives what’s going on in Germany. I have a copy of a newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, that calls the Jews hideous-looking with a repulsive accent, and they cite studies that inferior breeding begets inferior. They use this superior Aryan philosophy and no doubt will use it on the Jews as a final solution, extermination. In the meantime, they throw the Jews into a fenced ring with large dogs trained to bite, so the victims end up without hands, ears or genitalia. If I can find out from relatives through the mail, why can’t the government know what’s happening and say or do something about it? Good old FDR!”

“Your source may be from a family who hates Hitler. I hope that we interfere if government information confirms what you tell me. We’ll see. In the meantime, Laura Bragg (the head of the Charleston Museum who was on leave in Pittsburgh) quit wearing silk stockings because they come from Japan and refuses to exhibit anything in Pittsburgh because the Japanese are murdering Chinese by the thousands.

“Anyhow, let’s go and learn how to shoot at the Germans or anyone else we have to. As for me, the casualty will probably be my foot.”



Fort McClellan firing range

The pistol range was as unpleasant as anticipated. The recoil was hard, the barrel always kicking up after shooting, always kicking at the sky or my head, and, to make things worse, there was always an instructor watching my technique and yelling to pull the trigger smoothly and not to jerk it.

My scores were bad but not awful because two shots hit the bull's-eye. I was convinced that someone either did me a favor or fired on the wrong target. The only people who did well were the John's Island crowd, like Ike and Charlie Bryan who grew up with guns and with hunting squirrels, marsh hens, and whatever moved in the island woods. Ike Grimball actually laughed when he saw me shoot from the sitting position. At least I furnished the only humor on that hot, dusty, and, in general, unpleasant day.



Having destroyed my military career leading a regiment up the wrong hill, I elected to devote my energy to academics and writing. The messenger from Clemson to the world was *The Tiger*, and it so happened that my friend, Earl Mazo, was editor. I had preceded him as editor at our high school paper and so far had an "in."

"What you want to write?" asked Earl.

Being the only reporter who was on an athletic team, sports seemed reasonable, so I was on the spot appointed sports editor.

My most important duty was spotter for reporters in the press box at football games. When twenty-two guys, eleven of whom dress in one color and the opposing team another, who's who can become confusing.

Since I shared the dormitory with the football team, I knew each Clemson man standing, sitting or on ground face up or down. I even recognized them lying on their backs or on the backs of their necks, their waists sharply bent with their feet planted behind them in the playing field grass. I studied brochures of other teams but wasn't much better than the other reporters identifying the other guys in weird positions assumed after a hard tackle or block.



A. V. WILLIAMS
Assistant Sports Editor

Football was old hat to most of the people in the press box and there was the usual banter about individual performances in the game, the crowd, the school, the weather, but most of the talk did not concern football or, if it did, it was something unusual about football somewhere else.

Our first game was with Newberry and it was dull. The little college hadn't the size, speed or skill to be an equal opponent for the larger Clemson team.

The first conversation was with a Greenville reporter who said, "You look Jewish."

"You're absolutely right, but why bring that up in the middle of a football game?"

"Look at that punt!" he exclaimed. "Must have been 55 yards in the air! Oh, about that other thing—I heard from a friend, a newspaper man in Germany, who tells me Hitler is raising hell with the Jews. What's going on? I don't read much here."

"I honest before God do not know. Hitler has convinced the Germans that the Jews are racially inferior, ugly and a pestilence. He says the Germans are superior in every way. The Germans, he says, are all handsome and 100% Aryan, whatever that is. If the Jews fight back, they are promptly killed. Roosevelt knows all about this and, I am told, has written Hitler to stop the killing.

"I believe we don't interfere because the Germans are militarily strong and our politicians would rather see a few thousand people murdered than embarrass themselves in a fight we might not win. I also think that some Germans believe Hitler a temporary phenomenon.

"Oh, damn! Charlie Timmons fumbled the ball. Nobody touched him. He just dropped it! He just dropped it! Now that's not like Charlie. I remember against Wake Forest, though he fumbled, accidentally kicked the ball 15 yards forward, and we eventually scored. No such luck this time."

"Hey, kid," the Greenville man said. "Don't you have family over there so you can know what's going on?"

"No," I replied. "You know, you sound just like Hitler. The Jews are not in an international conspiracy plotting against anyone. We're just a religion that hasn't anything to do with politics

in Germany or anywhere else, although I'll admit that we have some rough discussions with the Arabs. You want to know what I know? Read *Mein Kampf*."

"Hey!" a voice came from down the table. "Leave him alone and let him enjoy the game."

"You're right," said Mr. Greenville, "but it would be nice to know for sure whether Germans are killing non-Germans or whether it's all a matter of crap."

"Thank you, sir," I said. "If anybody wants me, I'll keep on spotting. Maybe I'll be able to enjoy the next game."

"How you guys gonna make out against Carolina this year?"

"Don't know, but it won't be another Newberry."

After the game, we walked to the Block C party where visiting teams were entertained. The Greenville reporter again tried to squeeze information that I did not have. I finally told him to go to hell and find someone in Greenville who could help him.

With as much information as I could get at the Block C party, I elected to go back to our room where Dan was stuffing something into his suitcase and said he was going to the library.

I went to the Tiger office and wrote the story of the game. It wasn't much of a story, but it hadn't been much of a game.



I had not seen Bill Lippincott in weeks and, after calling, walked to his home to tell him my troubles. First of all was the mess at McClellan and failing as a military star.

He said, "Art, you know how the faculty feels about the military and I'm a little surprised that you had military ambitions. I'm very sorry that you were hurt, but all a high ranking in the cadet military corps would have been was time away from more worthwhile things and the development of interests that wouldn't have helped you later. Stick to your studies, man. You're a good student, so go where your strength is, and that's scholarship."

I also told him about the Greenville reporter who was Jew-conscious to the point of obsession.

"Hell," he said, "anti-Semitism has been around for more

than a thousand years because the Jews have been the best scholars around for a lot longer than that. Christ was necessary to give the people something to see and statues to touch and symbols to bow down to. I like Christianity because it does those things. I like being part of the crowd.

“But, if you look at the Old Testament, the principles of Christ’s teachings are all there. Anti-Semites, then, are people who find an excuse to hate a people who originated the religion they were taught. They violate the mandates of their own religion. But get used to it, Art. Anti-Semitism is everywhere including, as you know, students in this school. The guy from Greenville is one of the most benign you’ll meet.

“But don’t let these guys bug you. You’ll do fine.

“How did you like Anniston, not McClellan. I know how everyone feels about that tour of duty. But I understand that it is the whorehouse capitol of the world.”

I laughed and said, “You couldn’t be more right. The guys walk downtown for sex like others go for a soft drink. I participated in the soft drink part, incidentally, waiting for friends who felt the need for forgetting one course of frustration. To tell you the truth, if it weren’t for infection and unwanted pregnancy, it’s a pretty good system.”

As always, I felt better after talking to Bill and went back to the barracks. Nothing much was doing at the barracks, so I went to the *The Tiger* office. Earl Mazo came in scratching his head regarding the subject of his next editorial. I suggested that he might urge Frank Howard to cut down on his bacon and eggs in the morning to make room for another player on the bench, since Frank’s behind occupied space for two. That was rejected as inappropriate. My next suggestion was that black players be recruited because I had seen bigger, stronger black players on the Charleston playgrounds than on the football team. This was rejected as politically impossible. I’ve forgotten what the final subject of the editorial was, but it might have had something to do with urging the cadets to sell poppies on Poppy Day or some other subject that would not arouse controversy. Integration of black and white was a no-no. The only integration at Clemson was a

female student, Ellen Carpenter, who was allowed to attend the school of architecture. The cadet corps, to a man, would have voted against integration had they been given the chance. There was only segregation because that was the way God intended things to be.