

CHAPTER SEVEN:  
“TIMES WERE GRADUALLY IMPROVING . . .”



*THE CADET BARRACKS—NO. 3, 111 ROOMS; NO. 2, 79 ROOMS; NO. 1, 135 ROOMS*

**W**e got off the bus about the same time that Bill Lippincott left the drugstore with an ice cream cone in his hand. “Hi, Dr. Lippincott,” I hailed. “What’s new in Clemson?”

“Can’t say there’s anything worth remarking upon,” he answered. “Where you guys been?”

“In the old home town, Charleston, showing my friend, Lucien, the philosophy of the confederacy.”

“Well,” said Bill, “that was an unnecessary mess that became a tragedy. We’ve talked about the percent of evil in people manifested in various ways. The South seemed to have consolidated their evil all against the North. No sensible man could possibly believe that slavery was a proper part of this country. But if they spoke against it, their neighbors would not speak to them. It was a self-induced hysteria that could only lead to many deaths,

North and South, but the South had no chance at all of beating a highly industrialized region that housed most of the industry in the country. And the South? An agricultural slave culture that should have been the shame of the people who operated it. The blacks did the work, and the whites made the money. I would have thought that all the issues would have been settled by now, but greed and this crazy mass hysteria can only lead to destruction of the South as we know it.

"They were courageous and probably brave fighters, but it has been centuries since that's made any difference. All wars are won with armaments, and the South could manufacture only relatively small amounts of it, and I can't imagine what they were thinking of.

"Worse than the war was a recovery period with no money to pay people who used to be slaves. There wasn't adequate industry so there was not adequate money."

"Lucien had been impressed with poor upkeep on houses even in what is called the elite part of town," I interposed, "but what did Charleston look like after it had been shelled?"



*Formation*

The day of our return highlighted the ROTC, and the cadet colonels were the men of the hour. There was a parade with Alex Graham, head of the formation, followed by all of the cadet

colonels, none of whom I knew very well. The corps marched by presenting arms in front of the main building, where the companies became individuals again. I participated, wondering what we had accomplished.



Times were gradually improving. Manufacturing had begun to turn around from survival to recovery. A few more students had cars on the campus. Airplanes were becoming faster and deadlier. It was obvious that the next war would be fought with machines and new weapons. The skills to employ these weapons in battle required weeks, not four years. There would be man-to-man fighting, but that, too, depended on discipline developed in a short time.

The parades and, as a matter of fact, the whole ROTC was passé, and future combat depended on this technical know-how and the superiority of equipment. Individual battles were bloody, but the time devoted by the ROTC was largely wasted.

The only minor news in Clemson was that Waters had been arrested in Anderson for fighting and had been released chiefly on the basis of his being a Clemson student. I suspect that most students would have sentenced him to life in Anderson.

So that night was a night for tail beating. Most cadets accepted this as part of living and had little reaction to the humiliation, like a pauper who accustomed himself to “that’s the way things should be.” Then, there were the hyper-reactors, furious at having someone beat them with a board. That night Charlie Bryan told him, “Mr. Waters, I’m from Johns Island, and we raise a lot of cotton and pigs. It was my chore in the family to slaughter the pigs. I know how to.”

Waters stared, unbelievably, at Charlie. He started to talk, thought better of it and walked away.

The rest of us, not knowing what to say, walked to our rooms where we cheered for Charlie and wondered why one of us had not previously called his bluff. Talk in our rooms brought up the old questions. Are we following Clemson tradition? Are we

subjecting ourselves to an unsuccessful battering? Most thought hazing to be of no value and should be abolished, certainly in its physical form.

It was decided, as the discussion rolled on, that war could not be avoided. The pressures, economic and physical, had gone beyond any peaceful solution. France and Belgium had asked for alliance with England to prevent German invasion but no solution had been reached.

With that, Waters stalked into the room and reasonable conversation stopped. "You guys see what happened out there?" he began. "You know I could have whipped Charlie's ass but didn't want to interrupt long roll. But I'll get him."

Ike Grimball advised him, "I'm sure you will, but remember that Charlie is 5 feet 11 inches and weighs in above some of his hogs and, as he says, is an expert in managing animals. If I were you, I'd think twice before tackling that guy."

The rest of us nodded in agreement.

The revolt against Waters had begun.

At the next long roll, Waters swung with less force, except when the smaller cadets like Lucien Vane came down the line.

Ike opined that every group had its sadists who had to hurt or kill someone. In Europe, killing in absolutely inconsequential battles was a murderous way to get their kicks. Here, satisfaction was obtained by slamming into a man running with a football or throwing a baseball toward a batter's head or stepping on a basketball shooter's forward foot, or beating an opponent with a paddle but leaving him uninjured.

Following the rules of war or peace dictated what could or could not be done, depending largely upon geography.

Shooting at a bull's-eye was the same as shooting at a head, hiking and calisthenics generated the same strength needed for hand-to-hand combat. The discipline for combat could be developed over a period of weeks, not four years.

The powerful urge for survival didn't need teaching. This is God-given to us all.



The social system at Clemson, as at other military schools that aped West Point, depended upon rank. The top of the heap was Alex Graham. I first heard of Alex, who had been a high school leader, at the beginning of his freshman year at Clemson. Roy Pearce, the Brady brothers, and a large group from Columbia promoted Alex as head of the freshman class. I expected to find him aggressive and self-promoting but found instead an intelligent, handsome man. Had I been from Columbia, I would have supported him. As it was, I voted for him.

The lowest men on the social scale were the senior privates. The only one I knew well had been our next-door neighbor in Charleston and was the son of the principal of Charleston High School. Heaven only knows how Henry had acquired the post of the lowest man on the totem pole. Maybe he had led a regiment up the wrong hill twice or, more likely, had a difference of opinion with an important member of the administration. He didn't seem to mind, however, had a satisfactory senior year, and later became a successful businessman.

I remember one parade with Alex in front of the corps and his sycophants at his side. When the parade passed a visiting dignitary, the colonel and lieutenant colonels pulled their swords out of their scabbards as they passed the visitor, all but one (I do not mention his name because it must still be an embarrassing thought to him). He struggled with the sword, but it remained stuck. Later, it was discovered that someone had glued the sword to the scabbard. Strohecker was suspected, but the perpetrator of the crime was never found.

The area around Clemson was lovely. Low, rounded hills, mountains in the distance could be seen through a light haze, all creating a memorable setting. John C. Calhoun had built his home there because of the setting, his home later becoming part of the college campus. Unfortunately, in the relatively carefree days in the late 1930's, most of the cadets were exposed only to the campus itself and saw little of this surrounding beauty. I was seldom ever more than ten miles away, and as part of the Block C club initiation, I was left once at that distance dressed only in my un-

derwear to try to get back to campus. I was fortunate in spending some weekends at Bill Lippincott's home in the mountains. The campus itself was used for the usual things that engage a military college although, once in a while, something extraordinary occurred.

One day, for example, I was attracted by a commotion behind me while drilling and was astonished to look back just as Lucien Vane threw a remarkable hard right hand that landed on Waters' jaw and landed him on his backside. The confusion was quickly cleared by cadet officers, and the drill went on.

Later, Waters and Lucien Vane Rogers were court-martialed. Waters was confined to the campus for the semester. Rogers was not disciplined.

Later, I talked to Lucien Vane in his room. "My God!" I exclaimed. "How in the world did you deck Waters?"

"When I was a child, I was teased unmercifully about high grades and poor physical ability. I was a bookworm and had no close relationship with anyone in my age group. It was impossible for me to become closer to other students who were fascinated by physical activity from 'Kick the Can' to football. Their goals were to excel at something physical and make a passing grade. The few students with good grades and poor athletic ability were not part of the team.

"The time finally came to retaliate. I started boxing and calisthenics in the local YMCA and, for a while, was as compulsive as with my usual activities. I did win my weight in the Atlanta Golden Gloves. At that point, teasing became less, and I pursued my usual interests.

"I will talk to him, will not apologize, but will suggest that life would be easier for him if he found himself acting less like a bum and more like a member of the human race. There must be a reason for his unreasonable actions, but that is his business, not mine."



Dr. Sikes had been president of the school for years. He

kept a low profile, spoke softly and, so far as I know, had no practical jokes directed toward him. In high school, students loaded the rear of a particularly austere faculty member's car with fireworks. As he started the car, they started to explode in the back seat. To the disappointment of the students, Mr. McLaughlin, our Latin teacher, showed no reaction and drove quietly away. Dr. Sikes was not only austere but had the students' well-being in mind, and none of us would be crude enough for a practical joke.

Dr. Sikes had a similar response when he had been his own victim. He was talking to a thousand or so students, and things went well for five minutes or so. At that point, the president's upper plate fell out. He recovered it with one swipe across his chest where it had fallen, and adeptly replaced it where it belonged. Dr. Sikes went on with his talk with no comment about the incident, and there was no reaction from the students.



*Dr. Sikes*

Lucien Vane believed that the student-body's reaction typi-

fied the sort of man who should be president.

After the talk, I went to the mail room. I was known chiefly on the campus as the mail man, throwing letters as I read the name, from the second floor of second barracks, and, miraculously there were few complaints. The only major fuss that day was from Lucien Vane who thought that a letter he was waiting for had been lost. We searched the room that Mrs. Goodman's (the mail director's) emissary left the letters in but were unsuccessful.

Lucien Vane remained upset. I imagined that the letter must have been of unusual importance, probably containing money, but was puzzled by his unusual and aggressive emotional reaction. "Whatever it is, it will probably come tomorrow." He replied that he hoped so, but that if it didn't, he would have to bring the matter to the attention of the Post Office Department, regarding a system that was crude and ineffective.

I was still puzzled by his reaction when he had not fussed during the preceding years. I was upset enough to talk to Earl Mazo, who took the matter seriously and thought that we might get advice and probably reassurance from the chief advisor of the paper's reporters and editors.

Dr. John Lane taught English, but, as with other superb teachers, he taught speaking, writing, and a love of literature and culture in general. Most important, he was able to develop rapport with the students and advise them about life's problems.

When we arrived at Dr. Lane's home, he was playing the old straight-backed piano inherited from his father and used to help pass the time of day.

We were greeted with, "Hi, Earl and Art. What brings you?"

I outlined Lucien Vane's reaction to the missing letter, contrasting this with his moderate reaction to everything else we'd discussed with him during the last few years. I asked whether anything needed to be done to investigate his outburst.

He replied, "It doesn't seem that you have a problem, but he might. The letter may have contained money, a letter from his girl, or any number of things. If your concern continues, I would suggest that you talk to Mrs. Goodman and have her ask the Post

Office to look into the matter. In any case, the problem is his and possibly the Post Office Department's."

Late that night, Lucien Vane came into my room. "As you know," he said, "I receive mail from Germany from time to time. Usually it is the sort of news that we have talked about, the Jewish problem, European politics, and so on. Last week I received a letter that my brother, with whom I am very close, was wounded in Spain and that word regarding his condition would follow this week. The implication was that he was seriously hurt. When no news arrived today, I went out of control.

"But that is the sort of thing war brings: depression, uncertainty, and hysteria. Today I became hysterical, but, war being what it is, I have to wait for news from Europe. I am ashamed of my lapse in self-control and can promise that it will not be repeated."

"I understand your reaction," I replied, "but no harm has been done. Most of us will sympathize with you, and all of us wish your brother well. If you should need support, call us. Tragedy is not best faced alone and, though there is little that we can do, feel assured that you have friends who might help in sharing your difficulties. The best thing to do about this morning, in my opinion, is try and forget it and remember that there are many of us who sympathize with you and will do what we can to help.



At the beginning of my senior year, I finally was appointed to a position of command, captain of a company quartered in temporary barracks. My tenure of office was the football season, after which Walter Okurowski, a full captain and linesman on the team, would replace me. I was astounded that those in authority would place that much trust in me after the "going up the wrong hill" episode. My temporary captaincy proved to be a pleasant time.

My duties were to see that everyone was where they belonged at long roll, leading the company in parades, attending meetings at which only ROTC officers were welcome, seeing that

rooms were well-kept and other minor matters. As unnecessary as I thought the ROTC to be, this was a boost to my ego, though everything returned to normal when Okurowski took over after football season.

Having nothing else to do, I took "snap" courses in sociology, botany under Frog Ware, who was a bird enthusiast and who banded, with the help of students, heaven knows how many birds in the course of a year and, perhaps with even more ardor, identified his banded birds the following spring.

These courses and others like them were utilized by those who needed reasonable grades to maintain academic eligibility. Important to me was the fact that they gave enough credits so that my graduation came in January, instead of June.

My romance during the year was Tirzah McAlpine, who was one of the world's nicest people and lived to play bridge. She and her friend, Margaret McCollum, played daily so that I had to learn the game and became reasonably capable but never lifted a card after leaving college.

The undoubted leader of local bridge buffs was Dr. Huff who probably had a first name but nobody used it. He taught physics and was thorough, humorless, and probably a genius or bordering on that category. His preparation for a bridge game was unusual, and only he could have devised it. I was honored to be invited on a bridge preparation field trip.

We went into the hills nearby and gathered flowers. A surprising number of orchids grew near Clemson and in the nearby mountains Huff's chief targets were Lady Fringe or one of the other orchids to decorate his bridge table. A number of other flowers complemented the orchids. The next step in preparation required strawberries. These were not just dumped into a bowl but arranged on a platter in the form of a giant strawberry, tediously arranged in layers that got smaller from bottom to top, each strawberry tediously placed. The orchids and other flowers were arranged around the pyramid on a table near the bridge table.

Huff was a perpetual winner of the bridge game, being able to recall everyone's hand in sequence from the previous weeks.

During the course of my card-playing career, I became a

minor employee of the Registrar's Office, working under Gus Metz. The only significant event during my career as Assistant Registrar occurred one day when a secretary yelled, "Arthur!" I thought that I had probably been fired, but it happened that my diploma had worked its way through the bureaucracy and landed in the Registrar's Office. "This is yours," she said as she handed me the diploma. This was probably the world's shortest graduation ceremony.

I was now formally a graduate, a position even more influential than the cadet colonel's.

I gave myself an award, a trip to Charleston, and because of his work with me playing bridge, invited Huff to visit. A second reason was his love of flowers, for the gardens were in bloom.



*Dr. L. D. Huff, Physics*

Even away from school, Huff could speak only of bridge, flowers and physics. Neither of my parents was high school graduate and both knew little about Huff's loves. So conversation was

skimpy. To satisfy his love of flowers, we went to Magnolia Gardens, which were in full bloom on a lovely day. New rustic wooden bridges had been built over canal lines with azaleas and other flowers. Huff was intrigued by the bridges that were made of unpainted wood and were colorful unto themselves. He was intrigued by the various preservatives that might have been used on the wood, the probable methods of impregnating the wood and the methods of holding what appeared to be loose branches to form the structures. He appeared uninterested in the masses of flowers. Certainly, he thought the orchids in the hills around Clemson to be lovelier.

When we returned home, my parents didn't know how to handle this character, so my father excused himself because of an impending insurance sale and my mother had to leave to play a most important game of Mah Jong. Consequently, we went back to Clemson the next morning, where everyone felt more comfortable.

I was fortunate enough to have rented a room from Mrs. Goodman, the postmistress. She was middle-aged, always well-groomed and efficient. Her hobby was her flower garden. Asked if anything had come of Lucien Vane's outbursts about his missing letter, she said that she had contacted the Post Office and had heard nothing from them. He had rented a post office box and would no longer be bothered by the sloppy practice of my throwing mail from the second floor.

The rest of my time at Clemson was spent drinking soft drinks at McCollum's, dating Tirzah, and wandering around the campus to see parts that I had no occasion to visit as a student. I even volunteered to visit the cow barn at awkward times, usually at night, to tend to the cows with milk fever by giving them calcium gluconate and watching them quickly regain their strength. This was my only medical activity prior to medical school. In general, life as a minor assistant to the Registrar was a bore.