

Notes from Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas

October 2, 1969

I am now well into the second week of military life. This type of life has been much more pleasant than expected. Adaptation has been easy since there are many rewards to being a captain. The army has slowly applied pressure and achieved conformity. This is probably the best approach with MDs, DDSs, and Vets since they are training a well trained professional group. The Army has demonstrated no marked desire to create soldiers but rather orient us so that we can continue with our professions.

Army life started on September 17 or 17 Sep [The propaganda is already taking effect.] with a brief two hour orientation. For the next week we remained in civilian clothing. The first week we filled many forms of unknown meaning. During this week I went to the main officers club several times. It was a real pleasure to belong to a private club with excellent food drinks and service. One week after induction we started wearing uniforms.

During the first week the officers reminded the group that we were volunteers. This is certainly a distortion of the word - volunteering under sufficient pressure with monetary and physical penalties accompanying failure to comply. We were also reminded not to blame the Army for our fate since the Army was just following government orders. This is a "good point" since the people are definitely responsible for the war in Viet Nam. The group has accepted the situation with minimal grumbling. This is the only appropriate response since we have entered an authoritarian, non giving, non yielding, conservative group which detests any deviation from the norm or failure to comply.

There are several people here in Fort Sam whom I had known before, [Bill] Elkins, [Walter] Bayless, and [Mike] Wilson from Methodist [Hospital, Dallas]. The other students are from all over the US. The American medical community is very small. A majority of the group will be going to Viet Nam, Korea, Japan or Germany. Those who remain in CONUS will probably go to RVN what a euphemism.

October 19, 1969

The five weeks of basic training is nearly over. Through numerous subtle ways the Army indoctrination is taking over. The members of the class were determined to maintain their individuality. Yet most have now established a group identity - platoon identity. They hiss at other platoons, cheer when all are present or laugh when many are absent. The Army also worked on esprit with the experience at Camp Bullis with the infiltration course and the compass courses.

The experience here in San Antonio has revealed a remarkable amount of immaturity. The class is exceptionally hostile. They hiss and boo unpopular or unacceptable comments by the Instructors. This type of behavior has not produced many negative comments from the instructors. Probably the most deserved amount of hostility was appropriately displayed against the collection drive for United Fund. Command type pressure was applied at the same time the authorities were saying they were not applying pressure. It was suggested that if you did not give you might get more duty

Notes from Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, continued

assignments. It has been my experience that the United Fund collections are usually extorted under maximum force - it is no charity but a tax.

The Army has done an acceptable [job] of indoctrination and education in a brief period of one month. The teaching is professional and compulsively well organized. Some of the administrative courses are boring but this is to be expected. Most of the teachers are not impressive. The most outstanding is Major Walker who gets considerable pleasure from the Army, particularly from weapons. While at [Camp] Bullis he demonstrated many weapons; each time he ran eagerly to the weapon like a boy with a new toy.

Several of my friends from internship were in the class [#5] before mine. Walter Bayless and his wife were both down here. He is a very conscientious and effective physician. Just before they left for Germany [Willflecken, spelling uncertain, on East German border], I had dinner with them at La Louisianne. His wife is Judy. [Bill] Elkins and Jerry Rodgers were also in class #5. [1968 graduates from University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, Dallas]

James B. [Jim] Evans

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