

TWO MARCHES AND A "BICKWACK"

by Fred Hobbs

What do you do in the infantry? You march, you march, you march! Old soldiers were painfully aware of the truth of that chant. In today's military, footwork probably is not so much of a factor. Technology, now even including drones, has replaced the traditional role of the "dog faced GI."

Back in the 1950s, just after the Korean War ended, marching was still very much a staple of Army life. Two especially memorable and almost mirthful marches occurred in my two-year stint of serving Uncle Sam.

Of course, in basic training we were required to march everywhere. To the rifle range, to the exercise fields, to the mess hall, to classrooms and to the infirmary to receive our inoculations and lectures about the perils of unprotected sex. And then there was the infamous twenty-mile march culminated with a foggy, rainy two-night stay on the surprisingly chilly ground near the shores of Monterey Bay.

Twenty miles with full field packs on our backs while shouldering an M-1 rifle.

And we were expected to keep in step. One "comrade in arms" was required to carry a heavy rock in the left pocket of his fatigue jacket to remember which foot came first. Upon arriving at the campground, we received a briefing from Sgt. Jordan, our field leader, who while well versed in Army jargon and hygiene protocol, had apparently failed spelling, grammar and proper pronunciation of words of French origin.

"When you mens is on bickwack," he intoned, you will wash under your armpits and around your crouches." Exhausted though we were, almost to a man we collapsed on the ground amid a mixture of groans and giggles. We then proceeded to erect our tents, consisting of two canvas shelter halves, each one shared with a buddy. Then we hunkered down to sleep in our first-ever bivouac.

Several months later another marching tale unfolded. My comrades and I in the American Forces Radio Network went about our duties as announcers, disc jockeys, newsmen or engineers without the requirement of daily "dismounted drill," an outdated term from the old Cavalry days for marching, generally with rifles on shoulders. But one particular day, our young commanding officer, a "shave tail" lieutenant fresh out of college ROTC, determined that we needed to pick up our carbine rifles and put our best feet forward.

Not being inside a traditional military post, but located in a venerable residential neighborhood in Berlin, Germany, the lieutenant chose a beautiful nearby city park for our marching session. He decided to combine the drill with an outing for his tiny dachshund, Grindle. Picture this. Ten American soldiers of varying marching interests and abilities parading down a flower bedecked park pathway, a confused pooch trailing behind, attracted by squirrels frolicking nearby.

As the lieutenant tried to count cadence and control the dog, the amused local German population strolling in the park overheard this monologue: "Hup two, three, four...hup two,

three, four...Grindle, come back here. Here Grindle, Here Grindle!. Grindle, stop that!" It was impossible to keep in step, to refrain from laughing, or cover up the embarrassment of this pathetic display. We were never required to march again.