

A 2nd Lieutenant's Infantry Retirement
04-23-2012 by Harry Zirkelbach

I had finished College and entered the Army at the bottom of the heap., a private. Through diligence, incompetence, luck I was not injured in the basic training phase, and one day a year later I was selected for Officer's Candidate School. I overreached, chose the Infantry branch for my career. "Storm the enemy", my goal.

That turned into a bad dream almost immediately.

Physically, I was unqualified, yet the determination to succeed made my life all that more difficult. I willed to lead whatever group of men assigned to my command. I was determined to lead, not follow. Every day began with optimism, on long, forced marches with full 79 pound pack, often ended with me in the hospital, feet swollen, back aching, medics keeping me alive, barely I thought. The final insult, my unit was given a 2nd Lt freshly minted, and without much interaction between that leader and my troop, they were sent to Europe.

I was given assignments within the Infantry at our Texas command, one tedium following another until suddenly the end of war in Europe was announced.

Complete Army units were quickly reassigned to the Pacific Theater for the pending invasion of Japan. Little attention given to what I was told would become a honorable discharge from the Army.

Mid summer 1945, even Unit reassignment orders were cancelled without replacement orders. Things didn't exactly stop, but it might have seemed so to those involved.

Mid August, Japan surrenders. Units are ordered to return to the permanent United States base, for the orderly return of military in the Army, Navy, Marine forces, to civilian status.

I was to be processed out from the Brooke Army Hospital in Texas. There seemed to be unaccounted delays in any paper work processing, something I had developed a knack with.

Then this scuttlebutt. The Doctors were demanding immediate release to an inactive status. They wanted to return home re-establish civilian medical practice. The Army refused.

These Doctors became my friend.

When I appeared for discharge, details of my being hospitalized were ascribed to arrogance of the Army that I should have been considered for the Infantry, and that all my difficulties were the result of poor, consistent misjudgment by Army Officers.

I was to be given a Medical Discharge for service related injuries.

So instead of returning to Brooklyn overweight and unemployed, I was being released 2nd Class Lieutenant (Army) given a decent pension for life, with access to Regular Army Officer Medical benefits. And I did write a Thank You letter to the Doctors at Brooke Army Hospital for care they gave my release from an Army that did not initially appreciate my dedication.

I would learn this misunderstanding between the Doctors and the Hospital at Brooke, lasted six weeks, with a small army of military personnel given medical discharges for the slightest of irregularities. None were recalled, re-examined by replacement doctors.

All the following years I loved identifying myself as 2nd Lieutenant U.S.Army Retired. And the pension was generous too.