

An Old Irritation

By Pete Clark

It was fifty-six Years ago, about this time in the fall, that a minor incident occurred that was both condescending and disrespectful. That it was irritating is an understatement.

My Basic Training Flight completed the First Phase of Basic Training at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas in July of 1963. I was assigned to the 3359th School Squadron at Chanute AFB in Rantoul, Illinois for training in Weather Observation and to finish Basic Training. We arrived at Chanute two weeks before the new classes began. During that period, we were housed in a casual barracks and began Second Phase Basic Training and worked in base details.

When classes began, I was on B Shift which meant that I was in class from 1200 to 1700. Reveille was blown at 0500 and we had five minutes to be dressed and in formation on the street in front of the barracks. We would then march to the Parade Ground for physical training and close order drill. At 0700 we would march to the chow hall for breakfast. After breakfast we did Squadron Area details until lunch. We left for Building P-3 and class at 1130. At Building P-3 we studied meteorology. At the end of the day we would march to the chow hall for dinner.

After meals we could leave the chow hall individually or in groups. Dinner was special because it marked the end of mandatory formations for the day. We did a lot of marching at Chanute in both good and bad weather. Some student leaders insisted on counting cadence on glare ice. Whole formations slipped and fell, but that made no difference to young martinets, consumed by their power over others.

About three weeks into the Meteorology class, I was assigned to tutor a Lieutenant of the Royal Afghan Air Force. Unfortunately, the man had no interest in learning, but I was ordered to get him through Observer School so he could move on to Forecast School. If he washed out of the Weather Program, he would be sent home to Afghanistan where he would be executed for loosing face. I leaned on him hard and he finished Observer School.

One evening we marched from P-3 to the chow hall. We were called to attention, dismissed and formed a line into the chow hall. A man in civilian clothes, with a group of cub scouts stood in our way. He said to an NCO, "Get these troops out of here. My boys have to eat," and we were turned out of the chow hall. In effect, those kids were told enlisted personnel were not worth feeding. I have sometimes wondered if any of those kids grew into people who called the men and women fighting in Southeast Asia *Baby Killers* or were ones who spit on GIs returning home from the horrors of Vietnam.