



We Were Just Cadets- The Story of the 1960 “Long March”

by

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In the late '50s, as Arlington State College (ASC) transitioned to a four-year college, the two-year ROTC program also changed to a four-year curriculum. With that change, the ROTC program was to send its first class to Summer Camp at Fort Hood in 1960. Those cadets would be the first to attend Summer Camp from ASC between their junior and senior year and then go on to graduate as military officers, U. S. Army second lieutenants. I was one of those cadets. We were unbelievably fortunate to be at the right place, at the right time with the right people. Colonel Kirk P. Brock the Professor of Military Science and Tactics (PMS&T) along with his staff of officers and sergeants were concerned about instilling leadership qualities in their cadets. They wanted to teach their cadets how to

excel. They realized that they needed something for the cadets to focus on, a challenge, something nobody else had done.

The Right Place: No one that I knew expected this institution and this ROTC program in the middle of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex to become what it is today. During the change from a junior college to a four year college, ASC remained a branch of Texas A&M for several years before coming a permanent branch of the University of Texas. Today, it has grown to be an important branch of the University of Texas system and has the finest ROTC program in Texas. This growth began when 'we were just cadets'.

The Right Time: As cadets we were the lucky ones who were there to receive the benefits of these academic and military program changes. I don't think any of us realized until later, how fortunate we were.

The Right People: Few, if any, of us cadets were aware of the quality of the military instructors headed by Colonel Brock, a highly decorated surviving POW from the Korean War. He was supported by assistant PMSs Majors Oliver A. Hord and Charles T. McDowell, and Captain Willard Latham. Captain Latham was the newest addition to the ROTC staff. He too was a veteran of the Korean War, handsome and highly decorated. At 32 years of age he turned the heads of many coeds. He was also an alumnus of ASC and its Corps of Cadets. While a cadet he had risen to the rank of Cadet Colonel as commander of the Corps of Cadets and he also had commanded the Sam Houston Rifles. Now assigned as an Assistant PMS&T, he immediately became the tactics and physical fitness instructor. He conducted physical training and also field training in the hilly area on the north side of Arlington, challenging the cadets' tactical and physical ability by running us hard over the rough terrain. Frankly, I did not understand why he was so tough and dismissed it that he was just that way. I would learn later that he had a good reason.

We were the cadets that comprised the transition class from the junior to senior ROTC program and the first to go to Summer Camp in 1960. We were the cadet leaders of the corps of cadets when we were sophomores. As juniors we again were the cadet leaders. After Summer camp we would return to continue to lead the corps. Later I began to understand how important that was for us when we went on active duty. Little did we know that three years of cadet leadership experience placed us well ahead of our contemporaries from other schools. When confronted with real leadership issues, we could handle them without hesitation, because we had done it before.

The instructor team under Colonel Brock's guidance devised a plan to make the cadets believe that they thought of the march to Fort Hood themselves. The instructors thought it worked. The cadets had a different point of view. I expected that we would ride a bus to Fort

Hood like we did when we went on trips to performances like the two Junior Rose Bowls with the Sam Houston Rifles. Some how the word came out that Captain Latham was going to lead some cadets on a forced march to Fort Hood. "March to Fort Hood?" we exclaimed, "That must be over a hundred miles." In fact it was 160 miles. As I remember, Captain Latham expected us to volunteer. Like a military professional that I hoped someday to be, I guess I did. But I did not think for a minute that I thought of the idea myself. Neither did fifteen other cadets. Sixteen out of twenty-eight camp bound cadets "volunteered" to march 160 miles to Fort Hood, near Killeen. The next thing I knew, we were spending weekends on twenty-five mile 'practice marches' and running to and from the physical training site at a farm north of town to toughen us. Captain Latham often would arrange a brief church service before the march on Sunday.

As the academic year neared its end, our physical fitness improved, despite our private objections. We would never complain about it in Captain Latham's presence. Doing that might result in pushups, running laps, or worse. Toward the end of the spring semester of 1960, the junior class, called MS (Military Science) IIIs, was very fit and preparing to go to Summer ROTC Camp. Then came the day. On June 11, after families and girl friends said goodbye, Captain Latham, as march commander, with sixteen of us, in military fatigues, web harnesses and pistol belts, canteens, ponchos, and combat boots, marched south on Cooper Street continuing along State Highway 157. Little did we know that we were doing something never done before. None of us considered that this would become a piece of university lore. We certainly did not know what was in store for us during the next five days because we were just cadets.

Day One – Saturday, June 11th: We marched on the shoulders of the road most of the time. The reflection of the sun's heat, off of the pavement, made it hotter. With Captain Latham setting the pace, we jogged down and walked up hills. We would take 10 minute breaks every two hours, but soon none of us wanted the breaks because our muscles would cramp up on us. With 33 miles completed, the cadets camped the night in Joshua, rolled up in ponchos on a school ground.

Day Two – Sunday, June 12th: The team continued the march at 5 AM after policing (cleaning) the school ground in Joshua, trekking 6 miles to Cleburne, and having breakfast at a local café. Shortly after we resumed the trek, Billy Clark had to drop out of the march due to blistered feet. He had not been able to join the toughening preparation marches. Major Hord was our support. He ran supply and support runs for the team and carried our bedrolls in a carryall. In this case he served as the ambulance to evacuate Billy back to Arlington. That day was extremely hot, and we made it worse by listening to a radio commercial about refreshing ice tea. We stopped more often to rest because of the

sweltering heat. Zack Prince later learned that a very unusual heat inversion, a column of heat that flows to the ground blistering grass, crops, and any vegetation beneath it, occurred near the little town of Rio Vista as we marched through it. It was a good thing we did not know about it at the time. We continued down highway 174 toward Lake Whitney where we planned to camp that night. About ten miles out of our camp sight we encountered a rainstorm drenching all of us to the skin. We camped at night near Kimball Bridge. A couple of cadets cooked veal cutlets and a few innocent by standing grasshoppers for the team. I remember how good it tasted. That night we tried to dry our clothes and equipment by building fires and hanging our damp fatigues on limbs over the fires. Mike Marsh awoke the next morning to find that his shirt had fallen into the fire.

Day Three – Monday, June 13th: The team was up early and continued to Lake Whitney where Captain Latham permitted us to take a swim. It felt so good. Despite this relaxation, we were sore and it was very hard to get up and hit the road again. Our feet were blistered from walking the gravel shoulders of the highway. Mike Marsh wore his poncho over his shoulders to avoid sunburn until Major Hord could bring a new shirt from Arlington. We breakfasted at a restaurant near Meridian. Gene Weidemeyer was the next casualty. He pulled a tendon and was unable to continue. We jogged down a hill to lunch at a roadside café. Captain Latham had reminded us that we must act like officers and gentlemen when we went inside. Bob Darrah was so hot and thirsty that when the waitress did not offer any water, he proceeded to the counter, picked up a frosty pitcher filled with ice and water and proceeded to gulp from it while the ice and water streamed down his fatigues. All the cadets broke into hysterics as the good captain scowled, but did not say a word. Needless to say, Captain Latham was not elated. Later, we completed 21 miles to Meridian. Before we jumped into our bedrolls, we chopped up six watermelons and made them disappear in record time. That night, there was a heavy dew making all of our gear wet again.

Day Four – Tuesday, June 14th: The team breakfasted at a restaurant near Meridian. Major Hord informed us that we were being reported in all of the metroplex newspapers. Someone bought a newspaper and passed it around. We felt good that the folks from home were following our progress. As we passed through Meridian, several old timers, sitting in the shade in front of a little country store, were asked by Robert Roten what the temperature was. One of them replied that it was 103 where they were in the shade, but most likely hotter than that on the road where we were. Now we had to make it to Fort Hood. We also learned that the good people of Gatesville were planning a reception for us. My boots were becoming extremely uncomfortable. During a break Captain Latham, in his role as leader and medic, asked me how I was doing and inspected my feet. My big toes were badly blistered and hurt to the bone when I took any steps. He asked me if I wanted to quit. I considered it, but I just couldn't. "I'm OK, sir." I said. I was determined to gut it out.

Later, during Summer Camp, my two big toenails would fall off and new ones would grow back. I was not aware the Captain Latham was also suffering from severe blisters. Art Cleveland was caring for him and several other cadets. Many years later, Dr. Art Cleveland in talks on leadership would comment, "Even future generals are not immune to blisters." Ed MacConnell was quoted that day in the news saying, as he looked at his blistered and tired feet, "It seems to me that the human body was designed to operate on four instead of two." The Star-Telegram city editor had suggested that one of the reporters, Ed Johnson, join our march for eight miles that afternoon. We asked Ed if his boss liked him. We continued and covered 25 miles nearing Turnersville. Camping in the open close to the road, another storm unleashed its wrath on us just before midnight making us move under a bridge. We were just barely asleep again when a strobe of light broke our slumber. It was a farmer with a flashlight and a shotgun. He suspected us to be escapees from the reformatory at Gatesville. As luck would have it, Major Hord had stayed with us that night, carryall and all. I believe if Major Hord had not assured the farmer that we were not escapees, that he would have held us hostage until the highway patrol came to get us. Major Hord convinced him to let us continue. As he left, the farmer said that he had, in his time, turned in six escapees. He must have felt he had hit the escapee jackpot when he found us. With all these interruptions, our night was blown.

Day Five – Wednesday, June 15th: We were up and moving at 4 AM enroute to Turnersville. We stopped at the town's only café for breakfast. It was so small that all of us could not get inside. The owner, Mrs. Wallace, took us to her home where she prepared a feast including the best biscuits I have ever tasted. Someone made a school's shower facilities available which was an unexpected treat. Back on the road, we covered only 17 miles that day, arriving in Gatesville to a huge and warm reception. We were greeted by Alfred H. Hopkins, the Gatesville Chamber of Commerce manager, who personally served us a tub of cold lemonade. County judge, Norman Stone placed the city's facilities including its park and swimming pool at the cadet's disposal. As we settled our camp in the park, local teenagers had their own reception planned. In several cars, they repeatedly drove through the park yelling obscenities and driving onto the grass. We were road weary and not in a good mood. Finally, led by Roger Kannady, the cadets armed themselves with empty Coke bottles found by Gerald Osburn. They deployed at strategic ambush locations ready for the "enemy's" next pass. When the cars came, they were clobbered. The cars disappeared into the town never to be seen by us again. The harassment stopped. We guessed that the body shops would be doing a good business. We bedded down for the last night on the march. We were only eight miles from our destination.

Day Six – Thursday, June 16th: We marched out of Gatesville at daybreak penetrating deep into Fort Hood. On this final day, the temperature was cooler, but the dirt trails were dusty

and hilly. With shoulders back, we marched proudly down that last hill loudly singing jody chants. Most of us were numb as we completed the 160 mile journey arriving at the designated crossroads. We were met by Fort Hood Commander, Major General (two stars) Edward G. Farand, who arrived by helicopter, a welcoming party, and the press. Even Captain Latham was smiling with pride. "I am very pleased. I feel there is nothing that these boys can't do," he proudly said. Yes, he was proud of us and we were proud of ourselves. Of the sixteen cadets who started the march 14 completed the 160-mile saga. Not bad for 'just cadets' who were lucky enough to be at the right place, at the right time, and were taught, mentored, and, yes, even loved by the right people.

EPILOGUE

After the roadside celebration and photos, we were bused to our different company barracks. Arriving two days before camp formally began, we showered, rested, ate, and became familiar with our new home for the next six weeks. The Fort Worth and Dallas newspapers reported, "General Greets Tired A.S.C. Men" and "Snappy Cadets Complete Long Trek". One statement in the Star Telegram was, "Reliable sources say that some money changed hands in Arlington Thursday, the lucky ones are those who knew that these cadets are winners."

I now realize that we were lean, gaunt, had dark tans, and, I am told, looked pretty tough. Twenty-three years later when I had returned to UTA as the Professor of Military Science, Dr. Walt Mullendore, then Dean of the School of Business, mentioned that he remembered us at camp. He was a cadet from another school in the mid-west. He commented that the word was out among the 3000 other cadets at camp, "Don't mess with the ASC boys, they are tough." I don't know about tough, but Captain Willard Latham and all of the military instructors had done a great job with a bunch of guys from "that little junior college in Arlington."

Willard Latham distinguished himself and UTA in his military career by eventually rising to the rank of Major General.

Of the total 28 cadets from ASC attending Summer Camp, 19 returned home as Distinguished Military Students with recommendations from the camp commander for Distinguished Military Graduate (DMG). Being a DMG opens the door for a cadet to become a Regular Army Officer with strong career potential. The ROTC program concluded its Cinderella year in grand fashion.

On a personal note, this experience gave me the confidence to draw upon in combat when under hostile fire in Vietnam. When my radioman was hit while we were hip deep in rice paddy water, I had the confidence to know that I could carry him and his radio to safety.

Without that experience of the march which made one push beyond his known limits, we both might not be here today. I can never repay those officers and sergeants who molded us into what each of us became. I will be eternally grateful. I am sure the others feel the same.

END

Here is a list of the marchers:

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| 1. Billy Clark | 9. Michael Marsh |
| 2. Arthur G. Cleveland | 10. Gerald G. Osburn |
| 3. Bob Darrah | 11. Billy Bob Pinkerton |
| 4. James Hunter | 12. Zack Prince |
| 5. Allan E. Jenson | 13. Ronald Rendleman |
| 6. Roger Kannady | 14. Robert Roten |
| 7. Ronald W. King | 15. Joel H. Ward |
| 8. Ed MacConnell | 16. Gene Weidemeyer |