

A DUSTY BOOT SOLDIER REMEMBERS

Twenty-Four Years of Improbable but True Tales
of Service with Uncle Sam's Army

LARRY A. REDMOND
Colonel, U.S. Army Retired

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A Dusty Boot Soldier Remembers

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PO Box 3531

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email: sales@hellgatepress.com

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DEDICATION

To all the “dusty boot” soldiers who trod the roads and trails of this twenty-four year Odyssey with me. They were Patriots and Heroes all, and I salute them.

“I’d like to have two armies: one with lovely guns, tanks, little soldiers, staffs, distinguished and doddering Generals and dear little regimental officers who would be deeply concerned over their general’s bowel movements, or their Colonel’s piles, an army that would be shown for a modest fee on every fairground in the country.

The other would be the real one, composed entirely of young enthusiasts in camouflage uniforms, who would not be put on display, but from whom impossible efforts would be demanded and to whom all sorts of tricks would be taught. That’s the army in which I should like to fight.”

JEAN LARTEGUY
The Centurions

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PREFACE

I started writing this epistle for my children who asked that I do so in order that some of what I experienced while wearing the Army green is not lost. The experiences of their grandfather, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Devlin, in World War II and the Korean War, were never recorded. The children asked that I not let that happen to my service. I have tried to be totally candid laying out the good, and the bad, as my memory now recalls it. Although started at the request of my children, the more I remembered the many incidents I experienced, and put them on paper, the more I realized how much I had done and been involved with over the course of those twenty-four years. Some of what follows may be of interest to others even if they never served in the military. My tales may shock some and cause more than a few raised eyebrows. I assure you everything you will read did happen. Recognize that these stories are from my perspective and hence others involved may have a different view. Counsel was sought from those who shared these adventures with me when there was doubt in my mind as to exactly what happened. Some correction in my writing was necessary as points were made by comrades and my memory jogged to recall the facts. Amazing things happened starting in June 1962 until I took off the uniform in January 1987. It was truly a remarkable time for a poor American kid of Irish descent from the wrong side of the tracks in Columbus, Ohio in the service of what is, in my mind, the greatest country

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in the world. The United States may not be perfect but it is still the greatest. As I used to tell my troops, "Moses did not find the promised land, Christopher Columbus did. And we are privileged to live there." I hope this proves a memorable and enjoyable read whether you are family, friend or just an interested patriot.

THE BEGINNING: PROVIDENCE COLLEGE, 1958

"Fly Town USA" we called it. The lower middle class section of Columbus, Ohio where I was born and spent my early years was a mixed neighborhood of Irish, Italian and Black families. The gangs were integrated and one needed to know which side of the street you could safely walk down. Most of the old neighborhood has long since been torn down and replaced by condos and freeways. I graduated from Aquinas College High School in 1958. I was fortunate to earn an academic scholarship to Providence College and to have a kind and generous Aunt, Mae Redmond, who gave me a thousand dollars every year. This along with my scholarship for \$1,000 paid for my tuition and room and board. That number of \$2,000 may be hard to believe today but it was true in 1958. Mom and Dad could not even swing the funds for incidentals and books, as things were very tight in the Redmond household. My uncle, Bud Morrissey, helped me find a job with the city of Columbus every summer enabling me to earn funds for the next school year. For three years I worked for the Columbus River Patrol out of Hoover Dam on the Scioto River and cleaned rather large outhouses, or if you prefer, latrines, in the park along the river. The fourth year I worked for Parks and Recreation as a recreation supervisor at Goodale Park on the edge of Fly Town not far from St. Francis Church and School, my home parish growing up and where I attended grade school.

I called the academic scholarship a “gift” even though I had very good grades in high school. I think the Dominican Fathers thought that I had the calling to the priesthood and would follow in the footsteps of my uncle, Father Stephen Francis Redmond, a Providence grad from the 1940s and his uncle, my great uncle, Father James “Jim” Walker. He was a lieutenant of Infantry, a decorated WWI veteran, who following the war went into the priesthood. Uncle Jim was historian of the Dominican Order in the USA, having been the Western Province Provincial, somewhat like a commanding general. They were both great men and worthy of emulating.

When I arrived at Providence, Uncle Francis had come to the college from New Orleans, a town he loved and where he was stationed at the time. I had some vision of going into the pre-seminary side of the college in a residence called Guzman Hall. Uncle Francis took me out to dinner and told me he thought I should spend the first two years in the regular college dorms and if at the end of that time I still wanted to enter the seminary, I could bypass Guzman Hall and go directly to the seminary. He took me through Guzman Hall which was like an old Army platoon bay (a wide open room) of twenty plus metal framed beds. Most were decorated with religious cards, rosaries and holy water bottles. Frankly it did not fit my style.

In the ensuing two years I enjoyed life at Providence and was decidedly engaged in the Reserve Officer Training Corps Program and many other campus activities. I even joined the United States Marines, well not quite, but almost! My family had many uncles and cousins in the Corps and I was drawn to that service. I enrolled in the Marine Platoon Leaders Course and had orders for Lance Corporal Lawrence A. Redmond to report to Quantico, Virginia in June 1960 for six weeks summer camp. In late May that all came crashing down when I was ordered to report to Chelsea Naval Base Hospital in Boston for an orthopedic evaluation of my left knee due to a high school football injury.

Taking the train from Providence to Boston, I made it to the hospital and had a Navy captain, an orthopedic surgeon, tell me I was not qualified for the Navy or the Marines. Not only had I had a previous knee problem but my left leg was $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch shorter and my left thigh $\frac{1}{2}$ inch smaller than my right. As I recall the Navy surgeon said, "It is my opinion that by the time you are forty you will have the knees of a sixty-year-old man; no way can I approve your joining the Marines." I was dumb struck, my dream shattered! Honestly, I cried on the train ride back to Providence. Although a disappointment it may have been in my best interest. Based on what I saw and experienced years later in 1968 on my first tour in Vietnam, had I been a Marine captain in Vietnam, I might not have come home at all. The Marines had a very high casualty rate among their officers in Vietnam.

I stayed in ROTC and at the end of two years Uncle Francis came back and took me out for a great prime rib dinner at a really fancy restaurant. When he asked me if I wanted to go on to the Seminary I told him, "No, I hope to graduate and serve my country in the Army." He smiled and said something like, "I knew that two years ago. Your mother had the calling, not you. I watched you grow up, play sports, drink beer, date girls, and the priesthood simply is not your calling."

The Providence ROTC Program was great and frankly more challenging than I expected. I was deeply involved in the Pershing Rifles—a military honor society. For those not familiar with that organization it was a must join for all truly gung-ho, committed ROTC cadets. We participated in drill meets and parades all over Rhode Island and New England. I was selected as regimental sergeant major my junior year and went to summer camp at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. My Pershing Rifles training and preparation for Marine Platoon Leaders Course held me in good stead. The first inspection in the barracks the drill sergeant, SFC Dustin, checked out my footlocker display, perfect; wall locker display, perfect; eyed

my spit shined boots and flipped a quarter on my bunk. It bounced. He looked me in the eye and said, "Prior service, Cadet Redmond?" I answered, "No, Sergeant." And he moved on. I was nominated for Camp Cadet of the Week the first week and won! After that Cadet of the Week award I sort of "got over" (had it easy) like a fat rat and never pulled KP, or walked guard for the next five weeks of training. I think I came in second overall at camp but I can't swear to that; top five for certain. In retrospect I did "get over" with that Cadet of the Week Award. Maybe it was just the luck of a poor lad of Irish descent.

My senior year at Providence I was selected the cadet colonel commanding 2,000 rag tag ROTC cadets with about 200 committed and good leader cadets. Captain Paul C. Listro, West Point, was my mentor and the guy who made sure I didn't screw up. I was also the company commander of our Pershing Rifles, Company K-12, and we won Best Company in the Regiment that year. Captain Listro was our advisor and was very helpful.

About six weeks before graduation and a Regular Army commission (pending assignment as an infantry officer to either the 101st or the 82nd Airborne Division) I received, via Captain Listro, a directive from Department of the Army to report to Chelsea Naval Base, Boston for an orthopedic evaluation of my knees. Oh God, not again, I thought. You can well imagine my horror when the same Navy orthopedic surgeon walked in to do the exam. Luckily the doctor did not remember our earlier meeting. In short he said to me, "What's this for?" I responded the Army. He then said something to the effect, "The Army, I see. OK I couldn't qualify you for the Navy or the Marines. You aren't going to do any of that dumb stuff like jump out of airplanes or try to become a Ranger?" I told him no—yep, I fibbed; OK it was an out and out lie. He signed the papers qualifying me for my Regular Army commission and I returned gleefully to Providence not having a clue what I had just let myself in for.

About a week before graduation all of the distinguished military graduates who were to be commissioned in the Regular Army were called into a conference room and asked if we might be interested in joining Special Forces. I wasn't completely sure what Special Forces really was, or did, but I thought hell you're signing up for everything else, why not. We were told to sign on the dotted line, take a mental evaluation test of some kind, and that was the last I heard of it, for two plus years.

*Redmond's Rule #1 – Lead, Follow or Get the Hell Out of
the Way*

My orders came through for the 101st Airborne Division and I graduated on 5 June 1962. My parents drove to Providence for the graduation. I honestly think that trip was the furthest they had ever been from Ohio. We traveled back to their apartment in Columbus where I spent one day and then I proceeded by train to Clarksville, Tennessee and my own "Rendezvous with Destiny" (this is the motto of the 101st Airborne Division, the Screaming Eagles, as stated by Major General (MG) William Lee in General Order #5 fall 1942).

BEING A NAP: FORT CAMPBELL, KY, JUNE 1962

Now for the uninitiated a NAP is a non-Airborne person; a “leg” (one who walks to the battle rather than jumping in by parachute), a guy who, in other words, was not yet parachutist qualified. And there I was, a brand new butter bar (gold color bar) second lieutenant (2nd LT), NAP, in one of the two Airborne Divisions in our great Army at that time. Walt Werner, one of my closest friends from Providence, and also a Regular Army LT and fellow NAP had arrived at Fort Campbell the same day I did. We went together to in-process and we were both assigned to D Company, 506th Airborne Battle Group, known as the Currahees. We went to the Central Issue Facility to draw our gear. By the end of the day we had not yet reported in to our company.

I was sound asleep in my room, about 0200 that night when the phone rang. “Lieutenant Redmond, an alert has been called, report to your unit immediately.” I thought it was a joke. It had to be a joke. This was something they did to all newbies. I stepped out into the hall. Walt along with two other LTs who reported in that day were also in the hall discussing if this was some kind of initiation joke. Suddenly, the light came on for all of us, this was real. Walt and I took a cab since neither of us owned a car at the time. Between us we had barely enough cash to pay for the ride having not yet been given a partial pay to cover our expenses for the remainder of June. We arrived at D Company each dragging two duffel bags of new

equipment. Fortunately the cabbie knew the post and knew where the Currahees and D Company were located; neither Walt nor I had a clue.

The company commander was glad to see us; or so he said. He was a big, and I mean big, black captain, football player at Arkansas in the mid 1950s. To be a black player at Arkansas in the '50s one had to be tough and know how to play football. He introduced each of us to our platoon sergeants. I was very lucky. My platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Arno C. Land, proved to be the epitome of a noncommissioned officer (NCO) and a mentor who quickly set me on the straight and narrow. The captain told him, "This is your new platoon leader. Take care of him and get his gear squared away." I thought to myself, well he might as well have said, here's a good case of smallpox, enjoy it!

Sergeant First Class Land, however, took me to the platoon headquarters and said something like, "Look, sir, we'll get your gear sorted out. I am not sure what's happening but if you just do what I tell you, when I tell you, this will be over shortly. We have these little call outs all the time; nothing to it." I am not sure what I responded but it was something close to a good Airborne School, "Clear, Sergeant. Yes, Sergeant."

He assigned a young soldier to help get me into my field gear so that I looked like a soldier who knew which end of the rifle the bullet came out of. Needless to say when that rascal finished with me he returned to the platoon bay and the word was out; hey guys we got a new "LOOOIE" and he didn't even have his gear put together.

About thirty minutes later I followed Sergeant Land downstairs and out to the company street where he told me to stand in the rear of the platoon. He said after he gave the report, he would move to the rear by the left flank and I should move to the front by the right flank and then just do what the company commander directed. In this case the order turned out to be, "stand easy men," to which I did

not have to do anything. I was one relieved 2nd lieutenant. That also gave SFC Land some time to come speak to me and reassure me that all was OK.

About that time there was the unmistakable sound of 2½ ton (referred to as deuce and a half) trucks coming down the road; lots of them. Well SFC Land said, "Not to worry, sir, we do these little drills all the time. They are just making sure the Transportation Battalion drivers know where to report and can find the units OK."

Next came the command to, load trucks. Well SFC Land said, "Sir, we do this all the time. They will just drive us down to the airfield to make sure they can convoy properly. Not to worry."

Shortly the trucks pulled out and headed to Campbell Army Air Field. Well hello!

We off-loaded at the longest and largest airfield I had ever seen. This was definitely impressive stuff. At least it was impressive until the trucks all drove off and I got a funny feeling that something big was happening. SFC Land again told me, "Sir, we do this all the time."

Suddenly up came a stream of stake-and-platform trucks; now those are really great big trucks for you nonmilitary readers. There were twenty, thirty or forty of them. The trucks were loaded with what I was about to find out were things called parachutes. For a poor kid from the wrong side of the tracks in Columbus, Ohio this was getting pretty impressive but also a little scary. SFC Land said, "Sir, not to worry. We do this all the time just to check out the quartermaster riggers."

As quickly as the trucks with the parachutes parked, up came a second convoy of stake and platform trucks. They had all kinds of wooden boxes filled with what even a brand new NAP recognized as ammunition, real bullets, Tonto. You know the stuff you shoot at bad guys. Each truck had two Military Policemen (MPs) assigned to guard the cargo; yep it was the real stuff, live ammo for sure. At this point they had my attention, to say the least. Sergeant First

Class Land said, “Sir...” Well by now you get the idea of what he was saying!

I was reassured, a little. Then I noticed that many of the troops had jumped up from sitting or lying on the ground. You learn early in the Airborne that paratroopers all lie down whenever they can. They were all standing now and pointing off in the distance to these little specks in the sky. I don’t know if any of you have ever been impressed by fifty or sixty plus Air Force C-130s in an air train coming in for a landing, all in trail, one behind the other, at forty-five to sixty second intervals. I was certainly impressed! Sergeant First Class Land said, “Sir...” About this time I was beginning to feel a little uneasy about what SFC Land had to say.

The captain called us both, along with Walt Werner and his platoon sergeant, over to his jeep and said something to the effect that, “Sergeant Land, this may be a go. I want you to get a parachute on Lieutenants Redmond and Werner, take them over to that C-130, and show them enough to keep them alive.” Turning to us he said quite calmly, “You both may be about to win your jump wings the easy way.” (Jump wings are awarded to any non-Airborne person who makes a combat jump.) Needless to say I was not impressed, nor was Walt. I was not terribly excited about what I was experiencing. Sergeant First Class Land said, “Sir...” At that point I am not sure what he said but I followed him.

Redmond’s Rule #2 – Things get worse under pressure. Stay cool.

Sergeant Land got Walt and me into our parachutes, a contraption I had never even seen before and about which neither of us knew anything. We were totally engulfed with gear! The main chute, a reserve chute and our packs and weapons were all rigged and hung on our bodies in such fashion that moving was not easy. Heck, just standing was difficult. Walt then lumbered off with his platoon

sergeant to another aircraft and SFC Land marched me up the ramp of our C-130. Then he said, and this I truly believed when he said it, "Look, sir, you will be number one in my stick (a group of jumpers). All you have to do is stand in the door. I'll hook you up to the anchor line cable (pointing to a heavy metal cable running down the interior of the aircraft). Don't worry about anything except keeping the body position I am going to teach you. When I tap you on the butt, spring up and out; your static line will do the rest." That was all not very reassuring to this non-Airborne twenty-two year old. He put me through the correct body position, and a quick orientation on the jump commands then marched me to the jump door. I really sort of waddled, being in a parachute with all that gear for the first time. He stood me in the door. I looked out at the forty-five men in my brand new platoon and saw them look back at me. I said to myself, "Oh Lord, if there are bad guys wherever we are going they are the least of my worries. These lads don't look very friendly." It didn't strike me at the time but Sergeant Land did not tell me what to do when the ground came up!

The good news is that about fifteen minutes later the ammo and parachute trucks cranked up and drove off. The aircrews all headed to the Clubs and we marched four miles back to our barracks. The exercise was terminated. Yes my almost "easy way to win my wings" was just a test, an exercise. Thus ended my first exciting day as a Currahee, Band of Brothers, you get the idea; and it did happen just as related. There were many days like this one to follow, some good and some not so good.

That was my first of many experiences I would have donning a parachute but it truly was my scariest. They really know how to welcome one to the Airborne.

Neither Walt nor I were jump qualified nor had we been to the Infantry Officer Basic Course. But there we were leading troops, doing the Airborne shuffle four miles around the Division cantonment area each day with the soldiers, pulling Officer of the Guard and going

to the field with the Currahees. I must credit my later success at jump school to SFC Land who was a former Jump School cadre. The Fort Campbell Jump School had closed the end of April 1962 and I had missed the last class by just two months. He took me to the old jump school just down the troop line from our barracks and put me through about 90% of what I would experience, and endure, at the Benning Jump School. It was great preparation for what was to follow. He did teach me how to do a correct parachute landing fall when I reached terra firma. I was grateful for this training; it helped me immensely when I finally attended Jump School.

Two major field events in the "life" of D Company occurred while I was there as a leg.

The first event was a road march a week after I arrived. The company was supposed to march forty-four plus miles in two days to Kentucky Lake, bivouac and lie around drinking beer, eating burgers and hot dogs, swimming and just unwinding. After the fourth day we were to be trucked back to Fort Campbell. This was a Division directed training event but in this case the company timing was in conjunction with a three day weekend, maybe the Fourth of July, I have forgotten. At any rate the troops all requested through the chain of command that they be allowed to make the march in one day and then have a three day pass opening up the opportunity to visit Nashville, Tennessee and "E Town," aka Evansville, Indiana. The company commander got the OK and so we all started off on the march. At about the thirty mile mark we were all tired, soaked with sweat, our feet and muscles aching and most of us had blisters on our blisters. A lot of the troops were beginning to think that the cool water of Kentucky Lake sounded better than the flesh pots, booze and sin of those distant towns. At the forty-two mile mark, near a place called the Birdcage, a nuclear weapons storage facility on base run by the USMC for the Navy, the commander got a radio call saying that his replacement had arrived. I was selected to run into garrison in the commanding officer's (CO) jeep to pick him up

and bring him out to finish the march with us. I commented that maybe someone needed the break more than me but was told to get my tail in the jeep and back to garrison to pick up the new boss. I will admit I was hurting but I wasn't the only one.

We all did finish this true exercise in pain and suffering and were turned loose for the next three days. Sore feet and aching muscles be darned, the troops for the most part took off for parts unknown, and whatever it was that paratroopers could get away with in those waiting dens of iniquity. Walt Werner and I spent the time with our feet elevated, airing out, and consuming large volumes of beer. No one to my knowledge ever suggested another 44 mile walk and a three day pass. The pain wasn't worth the reward.

The second event was during a field training week in the woods of Fort Campbell as the company prepared to go on Exercise Swift Strike II that fall. The platoon was ordered to dig in along a tree line with an opening of tall grass about 100 yards wide to our front. Everything was good until the opposing force came busting out of the wood line led by five M-48 "Patton" tanks. My son who served as an Armor officer will tell you that the M-48 was sort of like a mini tank. I agree when compared to the M-1 Abrams of today that he worked with during his time in the Army. But to a brand new 2nd lieutenant they looked like Hannibal's elephants coming at us. I ordered a retirement; no let's call it a retreat, back into the swamp behind us where the tanks couldn't go. Sound tactics I thought. Later we reoccupied the position after the attacking forces withdrew. Sergeant First Class Land and I had a little chat about Airborne soldiers and retreating. I never in the next twenty-four years backed away from a fight except for one incident I will report on later in this tale. "No retreat Redmond" became my mantra.

In those days, while being an officer brought certain perks and a level of prestige, it also brought some responsibilities that would amaze our modern day Volunteer Army lieutenants and captains. We leaders were required to be in the company mess hall each

morning at 0400 when the sergeants roused the troops; *Noblesse Oblige* (translation, Nobility Obliges). We drank coffee and discussed the upcoming day's activities and learned from the old hands. The troops knew when they got up we were already in the company area. Nice gimmick, maybe it was only the Airborne, I can't say for sure, but I was told it was standard up and down the troop line at Fort Campbell in 1962. I suspect it was a holdover from WWII. The really tough part was that you had to put on a clean set of starched fatigues, breaking starch we called it in those days, to go to the mess hall at 0400. Following our normal four mile run around the troop line at 0600 you cleaned up and broke starch a second time with a fresh set of fatigues. Then after lunch you were required to break starch a third time. Officers set the example with a clean, pressed uniform at all times when in garrison. The cleaning bill took up a good portion of my jump pay, once I qualified for and received jump pay.

One day in late July orders came through for LTs Redmond, Werner and Bonavalonto to proceed to Fort Benning for Airborne training, the Infantry Officer Basic Course and Ranger School. Jules Bonavalonto was another friend of ours from Pershing Rifles in New England and also assigned to the Currahees. Needless to say, after two plus months as non-Airborne soldiers in the 101st Airborne Division, we were ready. The three of us traveled to Benning in Jules's car. As I recall I slept most of the way in the back seat while Jules and Walt enjoyed the scenery.