

A Change of Life

By Marvin Gough #25852

In September of 1943, I was drafted into the Army for World War II. That proved to be a change in my life. At that time, I was a green country kid.

We were loaded into a bus at Pittsburg, Kansas, and headed to the military. There was a four-hour layover in Kansas City. Some of the big boys got pretty drunk in that four hours. About 10:00 p.m., our bus left for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. After a while, those who had had too much to drink needed a nature's call stop. The driver would not stop, and soon he was threatened with running water on the bus. Here comes a railroad crossing; the bus had to stop. They forced the door open, and there we sat while a line formed alongside the bus.

We arrived at Fort Leavenworth in the wee hours of the morning and made our first formation and were marched (more like herded) to a barracks and told to bed down.

A couple of hours later, we were routed out for breakfast formation, marched to the mess hall and fed. I don't remember what we had to eat, but it sure wasn't Mom's cooking.

After breakfast, there were more formations, and our processing was begun. As we were marched (herded, again) from place to place, we were jeered with, "You won't like it here."

I don't remember the exact procedure; after all, it's been 61 years, but pretty soon, there I stood bare-naked and no place to put my hands.

Finally, we were issued clothing, two of each, and told to put on one outfit and carry the other. Only my belt and tie fit.





Back at the barracks, we were told to mark our clothes. Now the American enterprise system entered.

Some of the permanent personnel had rubber stamps and would mark our clothes for a price. They furnished the stamp, but we stamped our own clothes.

After evening chow, we were called out again for formation, and they asked for volunteers (you, you and you). The taller you were, the sooner you were volunteered.

I was picked for fire-guard duty. What on earth was a fire guard? Well, I was assigned to an abandoned mess hall and was to walk around it from 8:00 p.m. until midnight. In case of fire, I was to yell “Fire!” The nice thing about

being a fire guard was I didn’t have to pull kitchen patrol (K.P.). By the way, I never had to yell “Fire.”

The two weeks at Fort Leavenworth were formation after formation. The prize was one afternoon we were called out, lined up (this meant the tall guys on the north and the shorter guys to the south). Our barracks leader was a private, first class .

For all I knew, he had the power of a general. Our leader started each session with, “Here’s what we are going to do.”

That day, after his opening remark, he said, “You college men line up to the north.” Somebody shouted out that he hadn’t finished college.

Our leader replied, “If you just walked across the campus, consider yourself college material. High school, fall in south of the college group, and the rest of you fall in south of them. Now here’s what we’re gonna do. You college boys pick up the cigarette butts, high school boys pick up the candy wrappers and the rest of you dumb bastards will go along and learn how.”

Our group was finally on shipping orders to move out to basic training camp. We were trucked to a railroad siding along the Missouri River, loaded onto a Burlington Northern train and pulled out.

We had chair car accommodations hooked on the rear end of a passenger train. The next morning at daybreak, we were in a whole new country and, about noon, pulled into Denver, Colorado, loaded onto trucks and hauled to

Buckley Field, Colorado, about 15 miles east of Denver.

We were checked into a barracks, and there I sat. So I decided to go outside to look around to see where I was.

While walking around, I met a well-dressed soldier.

I spoke. He spoke, then hollered, “Soldier, don’t you salute officers?”

“I didn’t know you were one.”

He explained to me how to recognize officers and saluting them. I said, okay, saluted him and started to leave. Then he asked, “Do you have the price of a haircut?”

I thought he was hitting me up for a loan (35 cents). I checked my pocket and said, “Yawh.” I had 35 cents.

He said, “Well, go get one.”

I found the base barber shop, walked in and saw two chairs.

One was giving a haircut, the other a singe job. This was using burning wooden sticks and metal comb. First chair open was the burn chair. “You’re next,” he said.

I said, “I’ll wait for a haircut.” But he assured me he would cut my hair, so I got my first haircut after being inducted. I had heard all those tales about the GI burr—job haircuts, but all my time in the Army, I never had a burr cut.

After basic, I served in the Army Air Force as a ground crew mechanic, working on B-17 and B-29 bombers.