

PERSPECTIVE: A VIEW OF HOW IT REALLY WAS WITH PICTURES

Upon a day, not long ago, we stood on the threshold of an exciting, welcoming world. The boredom of graduating ceremonies aside, we were expectant and enthused. Look out, world, here we come! We will cure of you of all your ills, make you richer and cleaner. We are a new generation with new ideas for better plastic bags, fewer decays, whiter hands, more horsepower, and less sinus congestion. Another generation of young Americans unleashed. The fun-loving days were over. The high walls of academe fell down. It was a time to stop theorizing at the pizza parlor, and get the ball rolling. A time to get serious and get to work.

But the world fought back! Like a series of electric shocks, reality zapped into us: "You have a duty, my boy". "There is a war on". "You have been reclassified IA". "You may appeal in 10 days". "You have a six year obligation, ya know". "Well, I was in the Army in '44". "It's not at all what you think it is like". "Uncle Sam needs YOU". It appeared the world would have to wait. We were in the Coast Guard.

The 12th of September, 1965, wasn't a day like all days! We were off. Segregated into sections by the innipresent alphabetical system, we trudged from small stores to the barber, from the exchange to the drill field, from the auditorium to the armory. And all the while we cursed the new shoes that came in unorthodox sizes and the crotch ravaging dungarees. Didn't we look good in chambray shirts and garrison caps after a day's drilling in the pleasant warmth of a Virginia summer. Phew! But, of course, there was joy in the hearts of some - their leggings fit.

All the little asides: "But I heard that socks go in the bottom drawer". "No, you carry your rifle with the bolt open". "How do you put these leggings on?". "But I've never seen the inside of a hospital, let alone the bed corners". "I can't get my security drawer open". "But the fan keeps me awake". "Do you salute if you are in a crown of 100?". "How in the world do you get the floor...deck clean?". So forth and so on ...ad infinitum!

After a week we were exhausted. Our muscles ached, our ears rang, our feet throbbled. We felt homesick, deprived, maladjusted, and generally exploited. Our rooms were a mess; we were bewildered; our uniforms didn't fit - and it was hot. In this frame of mind, we marched off on a Monday morning and took our first physical fitness test. Also, we strove to master Mercator Projections, the theory of the maneuvering board, and the history of the Coast Guard. Our horizons widened. We tackled our first communications class and came away perplexed but sane. We learned to drop the breech block, make strongbacks from poker tables, differentiate between clinker and carvel, read flashing light, and fall out for Guard Mount.