

Aging Lifestyles: Army life looks good again

by Joe_Volz

Back in the 1930s, Army life looked pretty good to a lot of young Americans mired in a Depression with unemployment at 25 percent. They used to have the saying: At least you got "three hots and a cot."

Now, with unemployment heading toward 10 percent, the economic advantages of Army life are looking beneficial. It is definitely not the Army this GI Joe remembers. Forty-five years ago, I was a \$110-a-month intelligence analyst assigned to Cold War Germany.

Now that the Army has advanced so far from the days when pay was low, it might be time for all the veterans in the audience to remember fondly, or not so fondly, those good old days.

I was a member of the "brown boot" Army in the years after World War II, but before Vietnam. We were just "transitioning" from olive drab Ike jackets and brown shoes into fancy dull green uniforms and black shoes.

Awhile back, I returned to Fort Dix, N.J., the huge Army base in the south New Jersey pinelands, to see just how the modern Army had advanced. The base is named after Maj. Gen. John Adams Dix, a Civil War hero and later a New York governor introduced thousands of young men, and women in recent years, to the rigors of Army life. We learned how to fire now-obsolete M-1 rifles, throw hand grenades and pick up cigarette butts (they called that exercise, "policing the area").

Today's all-volunteer Army is much more civilized than the Army of the past, which was filled with disgruntled draftees. They regularly went AWOL "absent without leave," and the stockade next to my barracks was always full of customers.

However, they tell me that today's soldiers actually want to be in the Army. So, perhaps, some of the lessons I learned in this man's Army almost half a century ago may no longer apply in today's Army, which promises to help you "be all that you can be."

For one thing, I learned that "goldbricking" was a common way of life. For those born in recent decades, the word meant that you did your best to avoid work. You went into hiding when they were looking for someone to clean the mess hall, for example.

I was sent off to Germany after going through a nine-week "intelligence analyst" course at Fort Holabird in Maryland, which consisted mainly of typing classes. When it came time to deploy, I suggested that maybe I

should be sent to France, since I had studied French for a number of years.

When I arrived in Germany, the headquarters of the 66th Counter Intelligence Corps in Stuttgart did not need any analysts; instead a file clerk was needed. I became a file clerk and never did any intelligence analyzing at all. I was a librarian in fatigues. I understand in the modern computerized and soldier-friendly Army that type of misuse of the troops rarely happens anymore, or so they say.

Yet there was plenty to do at headquarters. I went out for the base football team that required a few practices a week, and I discovered that I could get a free week in the Bavarian Alps if I wanted to attend a religious retreat. I did.

Today, the Army offers all sorts of education benefits if you want to sign up. But we were not completely without education opportunities in the old days. As a matter of fact, the Army had an "early out" program. We could leave as early as three months if we wanted to head off to college and the semester was about to start.

I found that the University of Munich was offering German courses, so I applied and went to Munich for a few months. It was an enjoyable time attending class and eating Wiener schnitzel.

All these years I thought that I had gotten a good deal in the Army. It wasn't until I learned that today's analysts are getting \$20,000 bonuses that I realized how much Uncle Sam undervalued us old brown-boot troopers.

But, then again, maybe we were just a bunch of patriots. We certainly weren't in it for the money.

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