



Chapter 10

Thomas Alexander Stokoe

Military (August, 1966 – August 1968)

When the appointed day to be drafted into the army arrived, I reported to Fort Douglas, had a physical, then we loaded onto a bus, went to the airport, boarded a plane and flew to Seattle, Washington where I would be stationed at Fort Lewis for basic training for two months.

Basic training consisted of military classes, PT or physical training or P.E. as it is known in the public school system, field exercises, weaponry, gas chamber and masks, low crawl beneath machine gun fire – green or red laser bullets flying above – grenade throwing, marching, saluting, range shooting with both rifle and pistol, bayonet training, camping in the field, KP or kitchen duty, police call or picking up garbage, inspections, and multiple kinds of training in preparation for warfare. There were approximately fifty guys in my unit. The army fed us well.

Upon completion of basic training I was sent to Fort Ord, California for AIT or Advanced Infantry Training. It was slightly similar to Basic Training but less regimented with less harassment. I went to typing school in preparation to be a clerk. I ran into Hughie Keil from Samoa who was in an adjacent company and we spent time together in the evenings. We met two Samoan families, the Randall family and the AINU'U family. The two fathers were in the military. A son of the Randall family

was the quarterback for his high school JV team and we attended one of his games. The other family was Ainu'u, and Hughie and I had Sunday dinner at their house. I attended one military dance where the army shipped girls in. I took a two week leave upon completion of AIT and went home to Hawaii. I dated Donna Oliver, a nice Hawaiian girl attending CCH. From Hawaii I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia as permanent party for the next twenty months and would be honorably released in August 1968.

At Fort Gordon I was a clerk in the company commander's office. What occurred during the two years is basically described in my commentary on fellow soldier, Frank Morgan, as requested by his daughter-in-law for their family reunion in San Antonio, Texas. I wrote this account in June of 2003:

Frank Morgan

Upon arrival at Fort Gordon, Augusta, Georgia in January 1967, I was assigned to the 95th Civil Affairs Group, Headquarters Detachment and placed in an old wooden army barracks with approximately sixty men. One was Frank Morgan from Jamaica. Being situated two bunks away from Frank we soon became good friends.

One of the first things I noticed about Frank was that he was outgoing, articulate, and quite dramatic. He spoke with expression, had a ringing laugh, and was congenial, polite and considerate. He was also witty, intellectually quick, and spoke with a Jamaican accent. He struck me as one who could become a successful lawyer even a politician.

Frank had a sense of humor and in a verbal battle of wit he could put down anyone. He was a good person. He had religious principles, honor, respect and commitment. He was a hard worker, conscientious and ambitious. Patience may not have been his number one virtue, but doing things right and having things function properly was important to him. Frank had common sense. He had respect for authority and was well liked by his peers, superior officers and non-commissioned cadre.

Frank was selected as "soldier of the month" and was promoted to Specialist E-5 prior to his honorable discharge. His military occupation status was personnel specialist. He was a fast typist and worked in an office building across the street from our barracks under direct supervision of military officers who spoke of him as being efficient and thorough in performing his duties.

Frank was never enthused with K.P. (kitchen duty) nor was he zealous about police call or picking up trash and cigarette butts around the barracks. He did not relish getting up at 4:30 a.m. to peel potatoes and wash pots and pans. Nor did he have any desire to sing while doing these duties. He performed them knowing it was just part of military life.

Speaking of singing, Frank loved to sing in the shower. His ringing tenor would echo through the west end of the barracks and if the shower window was open, his voice would carry into the street. He was no Enrico Caruso or Pavarotti but he did have plenty of volume and passersby could hear him fifty yards down the street. Frank may contest this distance but he was never fifty yards away to hear himself.

When you are in military service you enjoy the opportunity to go off base. Such opportunity arose for church services and special passes. It was through church services that Frank had the opportunity to become acquainted with Kay. On several occasions I accompanied Frank to the home of Kay and her mother. They were friendly and kind and made us feel at home.

On one occasion we entered their home and the air was filled with a beautiful aroma. Kay was preparing dinner for us. When all was ready we sat down, Frank blessed the food and we ate the most delicious steaks I have ever tasted. They were absolutely sumptuous. I asked Kay how she made such wonderful steak and her mother replied, "She marinates the steak." Then both Kay and her mom proceeded to explain the recipe. To this day, thirty-five years later, I have never tasted steak so delicious and appetizing as the steak cooked by Kay that day.

A holiday was approaching and Frank asked me if I would like to see New York City. We could take in the sights and stay with his family. I had never been to New York so Frank's invitation was appealing. We were able to arrange special leave from the base and headed to New York. This trip would prove one of the most enjoyable times I would have in the service.

Arriving in New York we were met by Frank's mother. Later in the day I would meet his father. Over the next two days Frank's mom would cook for us and we would go sightseeing. From Times Square, the Rockefeller Trade Center, Central Park to the subway, Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island and numerous other sights, Frank was the perfect tour guide. Then we went to Radio City Hall to see the famous Rocketts, followed by a movie.

The movie was a murder mystery, "Wait Until Dark." Somewhere in the middle of the plot, the suspense grew and the scene became real scary. Suddenly, a figure unexpectedly lurched across the screen and the theater audience erupted with screams. Frank's scream was one of the loudest. He even leaped half way out of his seat. The audience then laughed and buzzed with comment as the dramatic tension was broken. Frank would later say "I can't believe I screamed. How embarrassing." At least he was not alone. There had to be a couple of hundred others who reacted similarly. We enjoyed the show.

New York was absolutely fabulous and I was enthralled with all the sights and excursions. Frank made sure I had a good time. His mom and dad were gracious hosts and the trip for both of us was a nice break from military life. There's one thing I must say about Frank. It was always enjoyable going places with him. He was fun to be around.

One evening in the barracks around midnight one of the guys came in drunk. He had joined the Army fresh out of high school. Normally a quiet kid he was now loud and obnoxious. Next to Frank's bunk was a fellow from Puerto Rico named Carrasquillo who told the drunk to be quiet and go to bed. However, the drunk became all the more irreverent and began to insult Carrasquillo and Puerto Ricans in general. Carrasquillo bounded out of his bunk and the two were ready to duke it out. Frank stepped in as the peace maker. With great eloquence and calming Frank took charge. He praised Carrasquillo for his patience, extolled the virtues of the people of Puerto Rico and convinced Carrasquillo to jump back into his bunk.

Turning to the drunk, Frank convinced the fellow he was momentarily irrational and his drunken condition would not be appreciated by his parents if they were present to see him. His mother would be ashamed of him for this was not the son she had raised. He would be an embarrassment to his family and the good standards upon which he was raised. The drunk began to cry, then with soothing influence, Frank assured the drunk his mother would forgive him if he would go to bed and be quiet. He then coaxed the drunk to jump into his bunk and go to sleep. Frank's performance was a master piece of psychology in action. The barracks became totally quiet and we all went to sleep.

One day Frank, Oswald and I were summoned to the office of 1st Sergeant Earnest E. Fields. Sergeant Fields was a pleasant man in his fifties and the guys respected him. He invited us to sit down and then in a somber tone he shook his head and said, "You three have come down on orders from the Pentagon to go to Viet Nam. You are to report to San Diego to ship out in four weeks." We sat silently and he continued. "However, there is a military regulation that states anyone born outside of the United States must have a security clearance before going to a battle zone. Morgan, you were born in Jamaica, Oswald you were born in Germany and Stokoe, you were born in New Zealand. The Army will initiate a background check on the three of you. Once this is completed and your security clearance comes through, you will be cleared to go to Viet Nam."

Viet Nam was a thirteen month tour. By the time the security clearances came through we had less than thirteen months remaining in the service so we never shipped out to Viet Nam. Perhaps this was a blessing in disguise for it enabled Frank and Kay to spend more time together and their friendship blossomed eventually into marriage.

Our company mail clerk was Martin Hammerman from New York. He naturally had a strong New York Accent. He would walk throughout the barracks delivering mail. All the guys relished receiving letters from home and photos of loved one. We would sit on our bunks and read our mail. Frank would receive letters from his parents. Having been to New York and met Frank's parents, I would inquire how his folks were doing. Frank would reply my dad did this or went to such and such and my mother is preparing for such and such. Being acquainted with one's family strengthens the friendship.

Periodically our company would go on a field exercise. A field exercise is the equivalent of a family going on a picnic except this was no picnic. Our company would pack equipment and supplies into military vehicles, fall into rank for inspection and instruction, then pull out as a motorcade and head out into the woods. We would each carry a M-14 rifle. Upon arrival at our destination we would unload and set up camp, go through the various drills of the day and eat our "K-rations." Frank and I would sit on rocks and talk. Such events were refreshing breaks from being cooped up in our personnel offices.

A couple of times down at the Motor Pool we had competitions in setting up tents. We would divide into teams and race to see who could erect their big tent the fastest. There were sergeants with stop watches timing us. There were about eight men on each team. Probably the biggest inspection for any Company or Battalion was the I.G. Inspection. I believe we had one per year involving massive preparations, cleaning and polishing for the visiting top brass inspectors.

One day we were called out into formation and were addressed by the company commander who informed us we would be participating in a joint exercise with the Air Force and Navy to capture Puerto Rico. This was a “mock exercise” in case we should ever be called to invade some area and set up a Headquarters Detachment.

Preparations were made over the next couple of weeks and on the appointed day we drove to a designated airport, loaded our vehicles and equipment onto Air Force planes, and flew off to sunny Puerto Rico. Upon arrival, we unloaded our vehicles and equipment and drove to a U.S. naval base where we would be stationed for a week. After sitting around the barracks for twenty-four hours we were informed that our joint forces had captured Puerto Rico. With our mission accomplished we were free to hang out at the beach which we did daily for the remainder of the week. We never knew how we conquered Puerto Rico. All our unit did was land and sit. Anyway, we enjoyed the beach immensely and everybody got sun burned. Everybody’s faces, back, chests and legs peeled but it was sure a good vacation.

Jack Tremblay was the lad on the upper bunk and Frank kidded him regularly. Tremblay was a young kid aged eighteen who was prone to sleep and smoke a lot and had somewhat of a hacking cough. As lights were turned on at 5:30 a.m. we would get out of our bunks and prepare for the day, except Jack Tremblay, who would lay in his bunk and sleep. It seemed Frank was the alarm clock that had to wake him up. He would make funny, witty remarks about Tremblay, his general attitude, disposition and outlook on life. I can still remember the gist of some of his discourses. Frank would give Tremblay eloquent lectures on the danger of oversleeping, the pitfalls of smoking and the outcome of being lazy. He suggested Jack would never find a wife as no woman would marry a lazy bum who slept all the time and could never get up in the morning to do an honest day’s work. These remarks made in subtle jest, yet not lacking in truth, would cause Jack to grin, even laugh.

“Even if some poor, blind girl had the misfortune to be engaged to you Jack, you would never make it to the altar as you would still be sleeping in your bunk. “ Frank continued. Jack would stir a little, smile, cough a couple of times, and continue to lay there. “Jack, if you don’t get up right now you will die in bed from over sleeping. If you don’t die from oversleeping you will die from emphysema.” Jack would finally sit up, and hacking from his perennial cough, grope for his pack of cigarettes. “Jack, I am going to do you a great favor. I am going to save your life. Give me your pack of cigarettes. You are going to give up smoking right now and live to be a hundred instead of dying in your bunk of emphysema at age eighteen. Give me your pack of cigarettes, I am going to throw them away.” In response, Jack would bound out of bed and get ready to face the day. Frank was an expert psychologist employing subtle humor.

It was amusing to hear Frank give his spirited lectures to Jack Tremblay. Frank’s lectures were entertaining and funny. He had the gift of words and was never lacking in advice for Jack. Indirectly, Frank was like a father giving guidance and direction to a son. The Frank-Jack banter was comical; in fact, Frank was really quite a comedian.

In January 1967 Captain Henderson was our commanding officer with Lieutenant Huff as Executive Officer. Later, Captain Henderson was succeeded by Captain Thayer with Lieutenant Kuhn as Executive Officer. We had approximately fifty officers in our Company which was quite unique in comparison to other Companies.

Working as a clerk in the Company Commander's office I was called upon, my first week of arrival, to make a pot of coffee. I did so and when the 1st Sergeant poured himself a cup and tasted it he said, "Who made this coffee?" Bobby Webb, a clerk in the office replied, "Stokoe." The 1st Sergeant then said, "Stokoe, you are never to make a pot of coffee for this office ever again." Well, so much for my coffee brewing ability. However, my inability in this regard did not deter my making rank of Specialist E5 eventually.

Part of my duties was the maintenance of physical fitness records. All company members had to run a mile once a year and I entered the completion in the training record file. This included officers and enlisted men. Most of the officers obediently ran the mile but there were a couple who said to me, "Stokoe, now you know what to do don't you? You've got to take care of us in the record file. You got our drift?" I replied, "Yes, sir." They were not going to run the mile but wanted me to indicate on their record they did. Enlisted men are to obey officers no matter what. It is the chain of command and military protocol. I didn't like the request but did as the two lieutenants commanded.

I was called upon by the Company Commander to write letters of commendation for enlisted men who were about to complete their military service and exit the military to civilian life. So I wrote several letters of commendation and the Company Commander reviewed and signed them. Having access to their military records in the office and knowing most of them personally, I was able to write precise letters honoring their service. I enjoyed writing letters of commendation.

One opportunity I enjoyed was going to church on Sundays off base in the Augusta ward. Bob, a ranking friend to all of us who went to church, had arranged for a military bus to take us and bring us back. He drove the bus. At one time I held five positions in the ward and for two straight years I wrote and directed the ward road show. We even went to South Carolina with our second show. This was fun. I also taught a Sunday school class of teenagers and went home teaching. We military personnel really appreciated the opportunity to attend church.

We were often invited by a family to come to their home and eat cookies, cake and ice cream. We liked this and felt a certain affinity with the family as a second home and nice place to hang out. We also went swimming in a nearby lake. The Thompson family was very kind to us and we enjoyed the fellowship and friendship. Bob eventually married one of the daughters and they lived in Las Vegas. Lonnis, another daughter, married and kept in touch over the years with a Christmas card or newsletter. When you are in the military, you appreciate the friendship of a family.

Soldiers came and went but a few stayed in our Company for over a year. It's been thirty-five years since Frank and I were in the Army and names of guys in the Company have faded. A few that Frank might remember: Abolino, Meyer, Graham, Izekowski and Silva who worked in the motor pool, Baker

who worked in the armory; Dennis Quella who had the pink car; Ferris was the kid that was drunk; Rutledge, Hice, Sears and Bobby Smith who worked with me in the C.O's office.

We all looked forward to the day our military stint would be over. There were many who counted the remaining days until ETS (expected termination of service.) I got out August 14, 1968. I can't remember if Frank got out before me or after. None-the less, we were counting the days as ETS time drew closer. Frank said he would return to the stock market office where he worked prior to being drafted. I told Frank I would return to Utah and start my school teaching career. On the day I left, or Frank left, we shook hands and wished each other well. Such a day was a triumphant day, a day of freedom, a day of new beginnings. Now all we have are the memories.

BACK TO SALT LAKE 1968

Upon being released from the Army on August 14 of 1968, I came to Salt Lake City and stayed with the Willard and Sheila Shingleton family in the Avenues. They had two children: Mel and Tiare. I immediately bought a green, 1968 Volkswagon bug and made the rounds to school districts placing applications for teaching jobs. I also went to the Job Corps at Clearfield, placed an application there and was interviewed.

Blair Brewster was the Personnel Director for Granite School District. He was in charge of hiring teachers, or more specifically, directing teachers to school principals for job interviews. While filling out an application at the Granite District Personnel Office, I ran into Stan Natividad. Stan and I had attended the Church College of Hawaii 1959-61 and he also was looking for a teaching job. Blair Brewster had served a mission in Hawaii and had a genuine liking for people from the islands and wanted to help us. He invited Stan and I to his house for a barbecue, which I thought was very kind of him, told us there were no openings at the moment being school was going to start in a week and a half, but that he would be on the look-out for us.

Two days later I received a phone call from the Clearfield Job Corps offering me a job. I really wanted to teach in the public school system and be free during the summers. The Job Corps was year-round. Being this was the only job offer I had received, I accepted.

The very next morning Blair Brewster called me and said that he wanted to talk to me and Stan and to come to his office immediately. He told us there were two openings in P.E. - one at Bonneville Jr. High and one at Churchill Jr. High and to take our pick as to who would go interview at what school. Stan chose Bonneville so I took Churchill and off we went to be interviewed.

The principal at Churchill was Mr. Cannegeiter. He seemed a very nice man. He asked what school I graduated from and I told him Utah State University. He said he graduated from Utah State too. "What did you major in?" I replied history and theater. He said he was in music at Utah State and had acted in a play directed by Professor Morgan at the Old Lyric Theatre. I told him I had acted in plays at the Old Lyric Theatre directed by Professor Morgan. He asked me what plays. I started naming them and as soon as I mentioned "After Dark" his eyes lit up and he said, "I was in After Dark too. I was Old Tom." I said, "I was the villain, Chandos Bellingham." We both laughed. To think we had been in the

same play, at the same university, at the same theatre, directed by the same professor except about twenty years apart.

Then he asked me what I had been doing over the past year. I said was in the army stationed at Fort Gordon, Georgia. He said, "That's where my son is stationed right now, Fort Gordon, Georgia." I said, "Your son wouldn't happen to be Russ Cannegeiter?" He replied, "Yes. That's my son."

I said, "I know your son. We sat together on the military bus going to Church on Sundays. We went to the same ward and on Tuesday nights to MIA!" What a marvelous interview this was. We both enjoyed the "visit". The coincidence in this conversation was truly remarkable and it just verified to me that, "God, moves in mysterious ways." Mr. Cannegeiter offered me the job and I accepted.

I phoned the Job Corps, thanked them for the job offer, and told them I had changed my mind but preferred teaching in the public school system. Later that day they phoned back and increased the pay offer which was more than I would receive from Granite School District. However, I turned the offer down. I wanted to be free during the summers. And so began my teaching career in the fall of 1968 at Churchill Jr. High, Salt Lake City, Utah.