

Abe Hoffman

Ninety Day Wonder

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On October 16, 1940 I went to the Draft Board for the 106th Precinct, Ward 4, Queens, NY and registered. I was given a card with the legend "Carry this card at all times". I no longer carry this card with me at all times, but neither have I discarded it.

The card said I was 5'5", eyes of brown, 135 lbs. and they checked "light" for complexion. Thus I was not sallow, ruddy, dark, freckled, light brown or black, all of which were unchecked. On April 28, 1941 I received another card saying "until further notice" I was classified 3A. I was, at that time, the sole support of my mother, all of my siblings having been married, hence my deferment. Finally, on November 16, 1942, I was ordered to report to the Board and proceed to Camp Upton, on Long Island. On December 4, 1942, we were sent to Camp Lee, Virginia. My work experience had been as a Certified Public Accountant, but I was to be assigned to the Quartermaster Corps.

It was a dark and sleeting night when our train pulled into camp. I remember distinctly the fog and dismal darkness. A lone sentry was strikingly visible in the strong light of the misty gloom. He seemed wound up like a toy soldier, shouldering his rifle, mechanically pacing up and down a prescribed line, guarding what appeared to be a warehouse. We finally reached our barracks late at night. We got a few hours sleep and were roused at 5.30 AM. After a few strange days of orientation and direction, we fell into an organized plan of basic training, which was to last ten weeks.

While in the service, I wrote to each of my two brothers. Harry was to keep my mother informed, since she was illiterate and he lived very close to her. I still supported her through an allotment deducted from my pay. My brother Max {Mac} who was my mentor [he was eight

years older] had returned with his family from a two year posting as an IRS agent in Dallas, and was now living in Queens. The following are excerpts from some of my letters to Mac, which guide my memory of what came next.

Letter: Sunday December 13, 1942, Co.K 10th QM Training Regiment --

On Monday, tomorrow, we start a 4 week basic training in infantry tactics to toughen us up. While QM is a supply corps and does not usually engage in offensive tactics, it must defend itself. After this course, we go to a technical school for 4, 6 or 8 weeks, depending on what we are selected for.

I will try for OCS and am getting my material together now. You can help by QUICKLY getting letters of recommendation from those of your friends who meet these requirements:

1. Know me somewhat.
2. Have impressive stationary and appear to be well established.
3. Will write a general character recommendation for me.
4. Prefer Army or Navy Officers.

I have some of my own letters coming. Letters from fellows like Schott are also welcome. I aim to submit about 10 letters. Your quota is 3. Address them "to whom it may concern" and have them indicate as extensive a relationship with ME as possible. Also get the following: A transcript of my record at Pace. A transcript of my record from CCNY.

I did very well on my tests. I got 143 in the general test, 127 in mechanical aptitude, and 128 in radio. These marks are considered good. The requirement for OCS is 110 minimum in the General Classification Test. Most fellows who get over 150 are geniuses, and 40% of the total make 110 or over. I'm in the top 10 or 20%.

Excerpts from letter December 25, 1942--

You cannot appreciate the rigorous courses we have. Everything is scheduled and very often we have not enough time to dress for our formations. Almost every night there is work of some sort. We scrub our barracks twice a week at night. We must clean our shoes, our rifles and our clothing. No excuses are accepted and any failings are punished. We are supposed to shower every other night and shave every night.

From a letter January 24, 1943--

My application for OCS is in. I've already been interviewed by my Regimental Board and passed. I went for my Post Board exam yesterday and will know in a few days how I made out. I think I did well. If I pass, I will then have to pass the physical exam. We had a 10 mile hike yesterday which I actually enjoyed because of the weather. We hike every Saturday afternoon. The chow whistle just blew and I will close.

From a letter February 13, 1943--

As you perhaps noticed, I am now a cadet. I got notice last night and moved over here to QM school this morning. I was appointed corporal on Feb. 1, because an officer candidate must be a non-com. This setup is entirely under a different command and things are done quite differently, so I'll have to reorient myself somewhat. I don't know what to expect, except a lot of hard work for the next 13 weeks. The other candidates came from all over the U.S. and overseas, and are of a much higher caliber than those I've been bunking with heretofore.

In writing, please use this address:

Cadet A.J. Hoffman
Company C 2nd QM School Regiment
Camp Lee, Va.
Bldg. T-1697[in lower left corner]

The course will last 13 weeks, of which 8 will be academic and 5 in the field. We will be required to study every night till 8.30. Also, discipline, cleanliness, bed-making, etc. will be more stringent.

I feel bad about sister Frances. Good that you are now able to visit her frequently.

Here, I wish to deal with three negative events during my time at Officer Candidate School(OCS): Younger sister Frances with a baby daughter lost her husband when the cruiser Juneau was torpedoed in the sea battle for Guadalcanal in November 1942. All the crew was lost, save for ten survivors. Frances held on to hope for many months.

In the midst of my OCS training, my older sister Lillian, who was born in Europe, passed away.

A far lesser tragedy occurred when my best friend at OCS, Francis Jones from Boston, was caught cribbing answers from another's test paper during an exam and was expelled forthwith. His mother came down from Boston, to no avail. During my tragedies I wished to go home, but our company commander, Captain Brown, a decent, compassionate father figure, gently persuaded me to stay on and complete the course.

From a letter March 14, 1943--

All is going well. I'll breeze through the academic quite easily. So far out of 5 exams I got 5 S's. I expect to get 15 out of 15 S's. The course covers a wide variety of military and administrative subjects, such as military law, warehousing, supply, field operations, map reading, methods of instruction, plus others. I can give proper commands, lectures, setting up exercises, etc. I am almost certain I can get my bars by May 15. Chances are about 98%.

Excerpts from letter April 2,1943

My 15th 'S' is in and my academic part is over. This is my second week of military, which is quite relaxing. We take marches, see endless demonstrations , get all kinds of weapons training, see movies, and go on convoy rides. Today we went out to a field bakery and baked bread. We disassembled our small arms and found them to be wonderful mechanisms. PS – I'm Cadet, not Corporal.

On May 13, 1943 I was graduated from QM OCS class # 21. Next day, on May 14, 1943, I was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, QMC.

I was now a Ninety Day Wonder.

