

SMA Julius William Gates “The Farm Boy” which became the highest ranking enlisted soldier in the Army, “The Sergeants Major of The Army”.

BY

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Group Room R10

28 February, 2005

SMA Gates Life as A child:

Julius William Gates was born 14 June 1941 in the Piedmond region of North Carolina. He was the sixth child of nine children. He spent a lot of time doing back breaking work to maintain the family farm. As a little boy he enjoyed riding the back of the pickup truck out to the farm. He enjoyed watching the animals eat and play. When he was eight years old, his father bought a service station and built a new home nearby. The workload for Gates tripled when they purchased the service station and so did responsibility. Gates carried this workload until the age of 16.

Gates attended grade school in Carrboro, North Carolina, and high school in Chapel Hill. School was good experience, and the teachers maintained constructive relationships with the parents. Teachers concentrated on the basics and made sure that each student had a firm foundation. In school, Gates best subjects were history and geography. Math was the subject that issued the biggest challenge. Gates loved football, baseball, and basketball but due to the house hold workload, sports were out. At the age of sixteen Gates quite school. He accepted a job as an assistant service manager with the local ford dealer. He used his earnings to help support his family. After working at the dealership for a year and with his parent's reluctant consent, he enlisted in the Army.

He enlisted 12 August 1958 at the age of seventeen for three years. It's what he always wanted to do. He was influenced by soldiers returning from the Second World War. He was impressed by all the uniforms when they came home. His brother had served in the pacific during World War II. Two of his uncles had served in the European theater, and one participated in the D-Day Invasion.

Julius W. Gates life as a soldier:

After initial processing at Raleigh, North Carolina, he reported to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He attended basic training and advanced individual training there. Gates spent a week and a half at the reception station, taking tests, receiving clothing and given a medical exam. They were restricted to the company area with no visits to the Post Exchange. He pulled a lot of details and found out what KP (kitchen police) was. He made the mistake of volunteering for KP, because everyone was saying how great it was. He never volunteered again. He listened to stories of soldiers who were there a month or so. The stories were about tough discipline and terrors of life on "Tank Hill" at Fort Jackson. Gates found some truth in the stories when he reported to his basic training company. Gates discovered that the successful completion of Basic Training required teamwork. Basic training was not difficult for private Gates. Gates learned basic military subjects, such as physical training, drill and ceremonies, and proper fit and wear of uniforms.

In basic training the day began at 0430, with "Lights Out" at 2200 hours. Gates remembered many of his fellow recruits working late in the latrine and under fire lights. Training continued on the weekends with Saturday inspections and makeup training on Saturday and Sundays.

After basic training Private Gates remained at Fort Jackson for eight weeks of infantry AIT. Private Gates graduated from AIT in December 1958. He was then shipped out to Fort Dix, New Jersey, in route to Germany to join the 3d Battle Group. It took fourteen days to reach Germany by ship. A voyage that seemed an eternity because he was on KP every day. One of Gates first special assignments in Berlin was standing guard at Spandau Prison, where Nazi war criminals were confined. Gates and his fellow soldiers toured communist East Berlin, but there was a "sense of possible confrontation." A definite separation of the two sides. While stationed in Berlin, Gates served as a sniper, senior rifleman, and fire-team leader. Periodically, his unit would travel to the training areas in West Germany for infantry tactical training.

Gates became a Specialist Fourth Class and attended a local noncommissioned officer academy. This taught him leadership principles and the methods of presenting physical training, writing lesson plans, and

conducting dismount drills. The academy also featured map reading, which would grow in importance as the Vietnam War heated up. As a Sergeant, Gates would learn to appreciate the academies as “an opportunity to see and talk to NCOs from the rest of the army”. Gates also made progress in his civilian education. He successfully passed the General Education Development test (GED) and received a high school diploma. At the end of Gates three year enlistment, he returned to his home town and went back to work for the ford dealer. Home town wasn't what it was when he left. Friends had moved or gotten married so he reenlisted in the Army. At this time he knew that he would make the Army a career so he went all out. He enlisted for air borne at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for his next assignment. He attended air borne school, graduated and became a part of the 3d Battle Group, 187th Infantry. Duty in 101st Airborne Division left an everlasting impression on Gates. The knowledge, experience, and judgment of the senior noncommissioned officers where very impressive. Those NCOs were veterans of World War II and Korea. They rotated back and forth between Fort Campbell, other airborne units in Okinawa, and Germany. By the time Gates left Fort Campbell, he had made 70 jumps ad earned his “master wings”. Before his career was over, he had tallied over 300 jumps. Gates knew that he would make the Army a career, so he took advantage of every opportunity to gain knowledge. He also attended jump master, pathfinder, aerial delivery, air transportability CBR, and ranger school. Gates had to attend a two-week reconnaissance commando school before he could attend ranger school. This was the toughest school he had ever been to in his life. He was selected as distinguished honor graduate of ranger school. In 1965, Gates returned to 101st Airborne Division, where he was promoted to Staff Sergeant and assigned as an instructor at the recon school.

Gates 101st Airborne Division experience paid significant dividends during his two tours in Vietnam. He served his first tour in Vietnam with Company B, 2d Battalion (airborne), 502d Infantry, 101st Airborne Division. He served as a rifle squad leader and spent the entire tour on search and destroy mission. The North Vietnamese Army attacked a Special Forces camp at Dak To, Gates unit rushed to the scene; there was no time to think about the situation. He and his men simply fought as they had trained. Gates was wounded while leading his squad during an assault on an enemy base camp. He completed his tour of combat as a platoon

sergeant and returned to the US ^{in the} spring of 1967. Gates was promoted to Sergeant First Class and served as an instructor in the ranger training command at Fort Benning, Georgia. His responsibilities included teaching basic subjects like hand-to-hand combat, bayonet training, and land navigation. While assigned to the ranger training command, he became the first American to attend the British Army Tactics School.

In January 1969, Gates returned to Southeast Asia a second time. He reported to company K of the 75th Infantry, the ranger element of the 4th Infantry Division. His unit mission was to patrol within the area of operation, direct the enemy, and report the information to higher headquarters. The highlight of this tour was a mission where they collected information that stopped an attack on their camp. The second highlight was an area ambush between Paeiku and Ankhe, resulted in the capture of high ranking Vietnamese officers.

In 1970 SFC Gates returned to Germany directly from Vietnam. He served three years with the 2d Battalion, 54th Infantry, 4th Armored Division. He served two years as the battalion S-2 and the battalion operations sergeant. This was the first time he was accompanied by his family. He took advantage of professional development opportunities by taking courses in combat intelligence, personnel, and physical security.

In 1973 Gates reported to the mountain ranger camp in the national forest at Dahlongea. He served as chief instructor of the patrolling committee, supervising instruction in patrolling, and aggressive operations. He attended advanced noncommissioned officer course at Fort Benning and graduated distinguished honor graduate.

In 1974, Gates was promoted to Master Sergeant and returned to Fort Benning as First Sergeant of 3d ranger company. After a year he moved to the basic noncommissioned officer course, as the enlisted company commander.

Gates knew that he would need an associates degree to maximize his career opportunities. He began taking college courses at night while attending ANCO. Later he earned an associates degree from community college of El Paso while attending the Sergeants Major Academy. Gates attended the Sergeants Major Academy as a Master Sergeant, January 1977. He regarded the academy experience as unique, since he was responsible only for himself and his family. After graduation, Gates reported to Company A, 1st Ranger Battalion, 75th Infantry, at Fort Stewart, Georgia. As First Sergeant, Gates organized the newly developed 24th ID Noncommissioned Officers Academy and served as its first commandant. In 1978 Gates was promoted to Sergeant Major. He then moved to Virginia Military Institute for two years as ROTC instructor. He received promotions to command Sergeants Major in 1979 while assigned to VMI.

In 1980, Gates reported to the 2d Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry, 2d Armored Division in Garlstadt Germany. He served as Battalion Sergeant Major and later became the Sergeant Major for 2d Armored Division (Forward).

After serving three years in the brigade, Gates was selected as the 3d Infantry Divisions Command Sergeant Major. He spearheaded the effort to refurbish its NCO Academy. With the changing Army and the new equipment such as the Abrams, the Bradley, computers, and tactical artillery fire control systems, NCO Education needed an overhaul. Gates assisted his commander in producing an NCO development program that later became the Army's model.

In 1984 Gates returned from Germany to the Sergeants Major Academy as the school's Command Sergeants Major. He used this opportunity to influence NCO training throughout the Army. Among his projects at the academy were the further development of the common core subjects for basic and advanced courses and construction of the new academic building. He visited the Command and General Staff College and the Army War College to explain the Command Sergeants Major role of assisting and supporting commanders. Gates worked through the fort Bliss chain of command to have Biggs Gym constructed and new

housing for academy students. Foreign students also began to attend the academy during this period. NCOs from the armed forces of the Philippines, Italy, and Great Britain came to the academy.

Gates was selected as command Sergeant major of eighth Army and US Forces, Korea in May 1985. He worked to improve the training of both US and Korean forces. He assisted Korean in developing an NCO academy system and began sending noncommissioned officers to the United States for training. Gates also assisted in the development of the NCOER System.

CSM Gates worked hard to have soldiers' barracks and recreation facilities built. He established additional soldier programs, such as soldier of quarter program; supported by the Association of the United States Army. Near the end of his tour in Korea, CSM Gates requested reassignment to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas.

Life as Sergeants Major of the Army:

Instead of returning to JRTC, he found himself going to an interview for the position of Sergeants Major of the Army. At the interview he was asked a wide variety of questions about Army priorities and policy issues such as the role of women in the Army. They have particular concern to family issues, and asked for his opinion about his wife's role. Command Sergeants Major Gates told the selection board that he thought the top priority of the Army should be training. "That means everyone training, regardless of the MOS...for their wartime mission." He was asked what he thought his duties would be. He replied, "I think the Sergeant Major of the Army's job is to keep the chief of staff informed about the enlisted perspective of the Army. Chief of Staff General Carl Vuono agreed with Gates and endorsed his selection as Sergeants Major of the Army four days later.

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He found that his "biggest challenge" was keeping in touch with unit soldiers. Visiting Army installations throughout the world was his way of taking the Army's pulse. Operation Just Cause in Panama is

where Gates spent his Christmas 1989. The soldiers who were required to fight and win operation just Cause were highly trained, disciplined, and motivated to do what was right.

During Operation Desert Shield and Storm, Gates visited southwest Asia three times and spent Christmas 1990 with troops in Saudi Arabia. Despite the extensive travel Gates undertook as SMA, he had time to improve training, enhance the status of the NCO, and improve the quality of life for soldiers. As a member of the uniform board he influenced more than 150 minor uniform changes including the introduction of desert boots and a belted overcoat. He also ensured a bottle of hot sauce was included in all Meals, ready to Eat (MRE). During his term the Army Communities of Excellence (ACOE) Program was introduced, designed to encourage soldiers to help themselves by making facility improvements. His concern for single soldiers caused the establishment of the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Program.

To Gates, training remained the Army's critical issue. "Making training the number one priority in the Army had a lot to do with pulling the Army together, and causing us to focus on our wartime tasks. The NCO Battle Staff Course, a new NCO Evaluation Report, and the self-development test were also established during Gates' tenure. Gates assisted with the success of the year of training followed by the year of the NCO. He believed that a strong NCO Corps was critical for a strong Army. He was the first to get the ideal of a smaller more deployable, more lethal, better trained, better equipped Army. He requested additional efforts to assist soldiers leaving the Army. His efforts and concerns resulted in the establishment of the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP).

SMA Gates' contributions to the soldiers, Army, and Nation are far greater than anyone could ever imagine. He believed in Training and taking care of soldiers. I will close with one of his famous quotes; "One of the strengths of our great Army is the unique ability of our soldiers to rise to the occasion and get the job done. No matter what the adversities or the situation, during peace or war they get the job done. Soldiers who

wear NCO chevrons on their sleeves represent a unique Army strength. Our most precious resource is our soldiers”.

Work Cites

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