

MY FIRST TEN

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MSG William Walker

An account of my first 10 years of service

79S5V5WF7 and 11C1/2/3V 1/75 and 75th RGR REGT

20 September 2006

Class 57

Abstract

The paper is an account of the first ten years of MSG William Walkers military career.

The account includes a brief period of time in high school followed by basic training and advanced individual training. There are no references to operations sited in this work.

This work is the personal experience and accounts according to the writer. There are views and feelings expressed through the eyes of the writer.

Table of Contents

Abstract

The beginning

Childhood

High school

Exploring the Armed Forces

MEPS

Basic Training

Airborne Ranger

1/75

Life and travels

The change

The result

I never intended to serve as a member of our nation's armed forces. I was born in Macon, Georgia on the 30th of October 1972. My mother and father were already proud parents of my older brother who was five at the time of my arrival. Unfortunately, my parents had experienced the loss of their second child, a daughter, only a year before I was born. I think it is safe to say they were relieved to have a healthy child this go around.

Named William Michael after my great grandfather, they decided to call me Will as opposed to the traditional short for William, Bill. Not long after I was born we picked up and moved to Atlanta where my younger brother was born. I spent most of my childhood in the town of Stone Mountain, a suburb of Atlanta.

My father was an executive in a well to do business there. I had a normal childhood as far as troublesome boys go. My two brothers and I were always in some sort of mischief. Never having done anything against the law, we managed to mature with a rock solid base of morals and values instilled by my parents.

The summer of my junior year I began to think about my future with more focus. I had enrolled into junior reserve officer training corps as a sophomore solely for the purpose of gaining a school parking space. Even though my intentions for JROTC were misguided, I found myself quite interested in the structure and discipline of the military. I had applied to several universities and was accepted to a few but deep down, I had no desire to spend another four years in school.

I began to explore the realm of the armed forces and after visits to the Air Force, Navy, and Marines I decided to give the Army a shot. I was pleased to see that they

offered pretty much anything I wanted without too much red tape. The Navy could not promise me SEALs, the Air Force would not allow me to recover downed UFO's, and Force recon just seemed too boring. I already knew what Army Rangers were from the Grenada and Panama conflicts.

It did not take long for me to make my decision and before I knew it I was on my way to the military entrance processing station. At first, I was told the only way to become a Ranger was to sign up as a cook. Later, after I left there in disgust, a phone call came offering me a three year Airborne Ranger Infantry contract. It was a done deal and I figured as long as I was only going to stay for three years, I might as well do something tough and worthwhile. This all took place during the Christmas break of my senior year and I was to ship out that summer. Several of my friends did the same and in August of 1991 we found ourselves loading a bus for OSUT at Ft. Benning, Ga. Needless to say, my mom was not a happy camper but my father was damn proud and knew that I had made a tough but meaningful decision. The way I saw it, I would have flunked out of college after one or two semesters since all I wanted to do was party. It may sound crazy but I really enjoyed basic training and AIT. Mostly I enjoyed laughing at the weak-minded individuals who thought it was too much to handle.

My drill sergeant was a Ranger veteran and once he learned of my ranger contract it was game on. He pushed me and a few others in the same boat to the extreme every chance he got. It probably helped for the most part but I still think it was unnecessary. Moving on to airborne school was like having freedom again. We worked long hours for the three week school but we did get the weekends off, something I was not used to.

There was nothing quite as exhilarating as leaping into the sky with only a cheap canopy on your back. I truly loved it and was looking forward to my next few years as a Ranger. By this point I was completely comfortable with the Army life. I took pride in everything I did and enjoyed striving to be better at everything.

I moved directly from airborne school to the Ranger indoctrination program on the same day. Welcome to reality. Now this was a challenge. Unlike anything else I had ever done. Nearly four weeks of true gut checking. Everyday we lost more and more to injury or weak constitution. Before we knew it our three hundred strong class was down to less than one hundred. It was physically demanding to the extreme but even more mentally challenging than anything else. I felt like I had found my place and I was living up to my goal of doing something tough for my three year stint. I excelled and even shined in RIP. I was Johnny on the spot fixing problems with equipment and attitudes and it was noticed by the cadre.

I graduated with orders to the first battalion at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah Georgia. I was pumped and ready. I had not intended to remain in my home state but it just worked out that way. Off we went, about thirty of us to 1/75. It was a complete shock to say the least and not long after I got there I was questioning my decision. These guys were physical fitness gurus and total experts at every aspect of their jobs. I struggled to do just about everything. I could pass all the physical stuff at the eighty percent standard but I brought down my platoon average, as they were all one hundred percenters. Every run and workout session was a near death experience for me. Sub six-minute miles were taking its toll on me. The road marches and twenty-mile foot marches were pain, pain, and more pain. I refused to quit and I would not be broken. Even though it seemed the

world was against me and I was the scum of the earth to all my superiors. I began to realize that it was all merely a test and despite all the suffrage, I was getting better. At the point where I had almost decided to say no more, there was one single event that shocked me back into action. My first company level live fire raid was a daylight endeavor. At the height of the carnage on a mock village, I lost my focus and began to fail at my duties and an ammo bearer for a sixty-millimeter mortar team. I could not do anything other than gaze in awe at the destruction and wrath that the men around me were causing. The force created from every explosion and every secondary sent waves through my entire body. Fast movers and little birds spilled down a fiery death at an incredible speed. My gunner was literally about to beat the holy hell out of me when the platoon sergeant told him to let me watch. Somehow through all of his other monstrous duties, this sergeant first class knew I was on the bubble. I think he knew that if I saw what this band of brothers was capable of I might just stick it out. Watching the controlled chaos, I knew that as long as I was serving my country, there was no other group of men that I would want to my left and right in a combat situation. It was and still is the most awesome and incredible display of teamwork and power that I have ever seen. I was hooked.

The night iteration was proof positive I was back on course. I performed my duties flawlessly and quicker than ever. I did not need to watch the rest and would not have been able to see it anyway. I never was very good at seeing in the dark, even with night vision goggles. For the next thirteen years of my life I would grow into my own. I became the leader and the expert. I married and fathered two beautiful children. I excelled in nearly everything and enjoyed every minute of it. I remained relatively free of injury by the grace of a higher power and participated in several types of operations.

I traveled the world with the 75th Rangers and did some incredible things. I matured and grew in more ways than one. I had become a man and found out who I really was.

As an Infantry squad leader I could think of nothing else in this world I would rather do. It was suggested to me in the fall of 1996 that I step down from my squad leader duties and work on the staff for one year. This would be my opportunity to get some college and to let my next in line, who was ready, take charge. I agreed to work as the S-3 air for one year. The CSM interviewed me and it was a done deal. The only problem was that the BN CDR wanted me to become the reenlistment NCO.

As a jumpmaster, I thought the air job would be perfect to broaden my knowledge of airborne operations so I was not thrilled with the reup job. It was a duty that until that day had been reserved for the injured and recovering. I was neither and felt it was a setback.

I followed my orders and before I knew it was on my way to Ft Jackson, South Carolina for a seven-week course on how to be a retention NCO. I had no idea what I was getting into. All I knew about reenlistment was that I had reenlisted once myself. It was a first for the Ranger Regiment. Three NCO's, one from each BN, were selected to attend the Career Counselor course. None of us knew what the hell we were doing. As all good Rangers do we put nose to grind and did quite well there. We returned to our units as experts on retention and reenlistment options and benefits.

It was no picnic typing contracts and sitting at a desk, as I was more into hands on and field work. To be honest, I hated it. I planned to count the days until I could return to

my platoon. I slowly figured out how to manage the time and became pretty proficient at the job but I still hated it.

Once again, it was a single event that changed my mind. One of the Rangers from Charlie Company was ready to leave and had expressed interest in going to Vincenza Italy. Now before I came along, Rangers were not offered a whole lot in the form of options. Most just stayed there and received the bonus. I worked it out so this young Soldier could not only PCS there but get a school along the way and move during the summer when his wife and kids wanted to. He was happy but his wife baked me a cake and cried as she thanked me for all I had done. That's when it hit me that this job had a huge impact on not just the Soldier, but also the Soldier's family. The feeling of accomplishment lasted longer than anytime I had taken a young Soldier from marksman to expert on the range. It was at that point that I realized I could make a difference in the lives of families.

Before long word got around that I was the go to guy for problems. Not just retention stuff either. I took care of damn near anything and took pride in it. From speaking to the other two retention NCO's I could tell they felt the same. We convinced the unit to create positions on the books for each of us and behold, the 79S4V slot was born. All three of us submitted to reclass and remain in place.

Since that point, each of us has contributed to the cause and moved on to other things as Career Counselors. Each of us can look back and see how our hard work and dedication contributed to a better life for Rangers and Soldiers everywhere. It always puts a smile on my face and nothing beats running into a guy that swears I did more for him than anyone else ever has. I love it.

I could have easily written about various deployments and operations but I feel the point of this testament is to share what has made us who we are. Many things have changed over the years and things will continue to do so but what makes us a great nation is how we adapt to that change and the little things along the way that make us who we are.