

First Officer Assignment

(14 August 1967 – 1 November 1969)

By Charles Seland

Greg Salter, an OCS buddy from California, came to my house in Dunmore, in mid-August. A few days later we took a bus to McGuire Air Force Base, next to Fort Dix. I visited my basic training company during the two-day wait for a flight and hoped to find SGT Mitcheson, my former drill instructor. He was, unfortunately in the field with trainees at the time, but I left a message thanking him for his guidance when I was a raw recruit, only 10 months ago. I was proud to sign: With High Regards and Sincere Appreciation, 2nd Lieutenant Charles Seland.

When Greg and I departed the next day for Germany we were keenly aware that we were about to face reality. School was over. Whatever theories had been absorbed within a cloistered environment were about to be practiced. Was I prepared? Was I confident? Was I in control of my destiny? I couldn't sleep on the flight; I was rather consumed by a blur of conflicting perceptions of the future. I settled down with the thought of doing the best I could. Like—did I have other choices?

We arrived at the Frankfurt Airport on a Sunday and were met by our respective battalion representatives. Gret was assigned to the 53d Transportation Battalion in Kaiserslautern; I was assigned to the 28th Transportation Battalion in Mannheim. The cities were about 55 miles apart. On the first night I was booked in comfortable hotel, the Hollander Hof in Viernheim, a suburb of Mannheim. A dinner of Jager Schnitzel and Eichbaum-Apostle beer concluded the long day on a positive note.

The next morning I was taken to the Battalion HQ with instructions to see the adjutant, 1LT Faucher. I confidently strolled into his office and, seeing that he was a First Lieutenant, snapped to attention, saluted sharply, and said resolutely, "Sir, Lieutenant Seland. Reporting for duty."

He rose slowly rising from his desk to shake my hand, but my formality created some confusion. With a "what the hell are you doing" look on his face, he half-heartedly returned the salute and then extended his hand in friendship while muttering, "Hey, lieutenants don't salute other lieutenants!"

My attempt to make a good first impression flopped. He sat down with that "you have a lot to learn" look and started reading my orders. "Your name is Charles. So...what's your nickname, Chuck?"

"Yes Sir...it is." That, of course, was one big lie. By now my confidence was rattled and I was struggling to survive the encounter with a bit of dignity. Just then I heard giggles from the three ladies in the adjacent room. They had heard the encounter and

were apparently amused. My self-assurance was going south. Then I was directed to wait in their office before meeting with the Battalion Commander, LTC Bond. The ladies immediately stopped giggling but downcast glances amongst them convinced me that I was the object of their entertainment. They quickly concluded that I didn't understand German and they had, therefore, no fear of reprisal. Anyway, I was too nervous to care about the source of their levity.

LTC Bond was courteous to his newest lieutenant. We proceeded with the customary welcoming remarks of "glad to have you in the Battalion" and "I hope that you can settle in all right." After the meeting, I was taken five miles towards the city center to Turley Barracks where the unit to which I was assigned, the 595th Transportation Company (Heavy Truck), was garrisoned. Several other truck companies were also stationed there, including another Heavy Equipment Transporter (HET) unit like the 595th.

I still seethed from the encounter with the Adjutant and prayed that my introductory meeting with the company commander, 1LT Danks Seel, would go better. He was "only" a lieutenant, but I entered his office with a sharp salute—taking the risk that he would not be offended and currying to his status as "THE" commander (and my new boss). He put me at ease immediately by returning the salute with a slight smile and commenting that I didn't have to salute him, "but thanks anyway." I was impressed. He personified a professional officer in every way, from his starched uniform which he wore impeccably well, to his pristinely clean and neat office. Having recently graduated from a southern military college, he spoke with a slight drawl, concentrating on words which were to the point. He avoided the chance to overpower his new subordinate. After some cursory introductory comments he outlined the company's mission, task organization, training cycle, and strengths and weaknesses. He explained my responsibilities as a platoon leader while giving me a lot of latitude to do my job. He offered his advice whenever I needed it. Surprisingly, he avoided discussing personalities, saying that he left that to my judgment "since people react differently to different people, and what I see in people may differ from what you perceive." I never forgot these words of wisdom.

OCS theory was about to be applied in a line unit with seasoned and professional Soldiers. Some had been to Viet Nam. These were the ones ready to act without a lot of prompting. They viewed new officers with skepticism but once accepted you were their leader. I was amazed that such young drivers and mechanics were responsible for operating and keeping the 24 HETs fully mission capable. The lower ranks were proud, tough, and they stuck together--professionally and socially. They knew what had to be done and did it well. These were good men and good Soldiers. (There were no females assigned to the unit.)

Before long I also became proud of the unit, tough in temperament, and sensitive to giving or receiving crap from anybody. I responded well to 1LT Seel who, in my opinion, displayed solid leadership talents and organizational capabilities. He wasn't hesitant to straighten me or anyone else out if we violated regulations or his policies. He enforced high standards and was efficient in his core command responsibilities. In my mind he

mirrored the OCS tactical officers, with a heavy emphasis on leadership principles. I knew that I could work with him if I followed his advice.

Sergeant First Class (SFC) King was my Platoon Sergeant. He had led the platoon prior to my arrival and he now tolerated me as a nuisance without being outright rude. He didn't smile much and made few conciliatory offers of help. He once told a fellow sergeant, when they planned to do something which was a bit improper, that he didn't trust me (to keep quiet, or look the other way). My leverage was the annual efficiency report which I would write. Promotions and special honors depend on that report, so.... As it turned out, within a few weeks we had evolved to an unspoken understanding: he would run the platoon, I would assist him when necessary. Actually, I soon realized that he was a very good Platoon Sergeant who managed the men effectively. In turn he was respected by the Soldiers. So why should I intervene when such an arrangement was mutually beneficial: he would continue to be respect and I would gain some valuable experience.

1LT Carl Mundy was the other lieutenant in the company. A maintenance warrant officer kept the fleet of trucks and other pieces of equipment in reasonably good shape. First Sergeant (1SGT) Cummings was 1LT Seel's right hand man.

The company's 24 HETs were never dispatched individually but rather in convoy formation. This was mandated by highway clearance rules associated with operating outsized and oversized vehicles. The trucks were a vital asset in wartime based on the necessity to move armor rapidly to support combat units in forward operating positions. Since there were only a few HET units in Europe, their availability rates were closely monitored to the USAREUR HQ level. The day-to-day challenge was to keep the trucks running while trying to solve three dichotomies. First, the difficulty in getting the timely delivery of repair parts since the priority of effort by the Department of the Army (DA) was Viet-Nam. To counter that problem units often hoarded excess parts which was, of course, not allowed. (If caught then the punishment could be severe.) Second, was the high turnover of mechanics and drivers. The new ones needed a lot of on the job training before reaching full efficiency. Our higher-level maintenance support was, fortunately, only a few miles away and manned mostly by highly-skilled German civilian mechanics. Third, was the need to limit the number of serious accidents, both driver and non-driver fault. Easier said than done. For instance, getting to and from the Autobahn from Turley was possible only by travelling through residential and small business areas. Autobahn driving was relatively easy except at construction sites where trucks often had to squeeze through the constricted lane. Also exciting was the transit through unfamiliar German cities and towns within which the convoys did not often stop for red lights. The escort jeeps scrambled like bumble bees around the trucks in order to get to the next intersection where they blocked traffic in order to allow the trucks clear and open passage. The jeeps then scurried to the next intersection and repeated the process. Convoys travelling in hilly or mountainous terrain were subject to quickly changing road conditions, especially in the winter. And once committed, a HET convoy had to move forward; turning around was virtually impossible.

I liked the leadership style of this company and the adrenaline rush I often felt while on convoy. I was happy to be with the 595th Dragon Wagons, even though the administrative work was overwhelming during the first few weeks. I was the Supply Officer, Pay Officer, Re-enlistment officer, Voting Officer, Safety Officer, etc. But I went on a few convoys with 1LT Mundy and then by myself as the convoy commander. On my second convoy as convoy commander, a drive shaft fell from a truck, bounced underneath, punctured the fuel tank and ignited 200 or so gallons of diesel fuel. In a half hour the tractor was destroyed. Fortunately, a local German fire department had responded quickly and prevented the fire from spreading to the trailer and tank which was being transported. An investigation team flown in from the U.S. later concluded that lack of lubrication caused the drive shaft to fail, thus the unit was exonerated. Lubrication procedures were changed and this type of incident was not repeated.

Due to the high number of accidents in our company, the Battalion commander directed that a convoy with four or more trucks must have an officer as the convoy commander. For me it meant that discretionary “road time” was finished, along with the honeymoon period when faults were excused due to the fact that one was new on the job. But the pendulum swung heavily the other way because of my absolute intolerance of unsafe and high-risk driving practices. There was a lot of pressure on 1LT Mundy and myself and I must admit that I became downright brutal. If a Soldier had an apparent driver-fault accident, I tried to relieve him immediately of his driving responsibility, pending the final decision by the company commander. Who would then take his place? A platoon sergeant or a mechanic if they had some experience. I wanted everyone to learn. Forget the convoy movement schedules and forget the high risks. Drivers had to either slow down, keep a good distance between vehicles, drive defensively or be assigned to another job. Lives were at stake and I wouldn't bend. I heard some whispered complaints, but I think the men began to realize it was the best way. Besides, I didn't want to explain any driver-fault accidents to Seel.

It was vital to keep the unit trained and efficient—not only to perform a wartime mission, like repelling a Russian invasion of West Germany, but also to pass the various inspections conducted by higher HQ. The most important was the annual U.S. Army, Europe (USAREUR) Command Material Management Inspection (CMMI). A company commander could easily be relieved if he or she failed. Another was the unannounced and USAREUR-led Operational Readiness Test (ORT). This determined the proficiency of a unit to load-up all essential equipment and material and then move from their garrison location within two hours after the initial notification. To prepare for these events, 1LT Seel developed plans which, if followed as he directed, best established our chance to pass either event. To prepare for the ORT, for instance, he had us “crawl” through the deployment process to gain basic familiarization, then “walk” (don't hurry) to iron out the kinks, then “run” to carry out our specific studies as quickly as possible. Seel's plan worked and we passed both inspections without a hitch.

Incidentally, I lifted weights during my high school and college years and continued to do so ever since. Using the Turley gymnasium to work out, I got to where I could bench press 215 pounds several times, even though I only weighed 148 pounds. In early

1968, I placed third in my weight class (those who weighed between 133 and 148 pounds) during the USAREUR weightlifting championships which were held in Furth, Germany. I was very proud of this achievement since the contest was oriented on Olympic lifting (overhead press, snatch, clean and jerk) rather than power lifting (bench press, squat, dead lift) which were my specialties.

Army life continued to progress. Lieutenant Seel always gave me sound advice and kept me straight. Once I was sure to get an ass-chewing for a bad decision I had made while on convoy. Seel responded with some firm guidance. "Chuck," he said, "when you are on a convoy, then make decisions that you can explain to me when you return back to home station." He went on to define the meaning of responsibility. "When you are the convoy commander, then whatever happens on that convoy is your responsibility. You cannot blame problems on the drivers, or the non-commissioned officers (NCOs). You cannot blame German drivers or bad road conditions. You can't blame anybody or anything—you are responsible for achieving the convoy mission regardless of the obstacles. That's why you're an officer." He stressed that I should use all of the human resources available to get opinions, weigh options and select the best course of action. The final decision, he stressed, "is yours and only yours." He wanted me to consistently enforce high standards regardless of the stress distracters of rain, snow, darkness, missed movement schedules, missed meals, etc. In turn, he committed to support my initiatives but would quickly rein me in when I got too overeager. Seel is one smart guy. I still refer to his advice.

A sample of convoy problems occurred on a 100 meter-long road construction site a few miles from the Nahbollenbach Army Depot. It was late afternoon and raining. A German construction crew had demolished one of the two lanes on an already narrow country road, so we were forced to send our five loaded trucks, each carrying an M-60 tank, over the open lane. The first driver succeeded by going slowly, very slowly, and carefully. The second made it about halfway when the trailers' rear tires happened to slide off the wet road surface and into the soft shoulder. The right rear of the trailer sank and the barrel of the tank pointed skyward at about a 20 degree angle. I called for an immediate roadside huddle of the NCOs and drivers and choose an option which I thought I could best present to the CO (company commander) when I returned to Turley. After we made the decision, Soldiers shoveled dry dirt onto the road. Simultaneously, the first truck disconnected from its trailer, backed up to the stuck vehicle, then secured a chain between them for the towing effort. A German bulldozer also used a chain to secure itself to the stuck trailer. When given the start signal, all three vehicles inched forward at just the right speed and angle to pull the stuck trailer onto the road's surface. Tires were then cleared of mud, chains disconnected, and the vehicle slowly inched forward on the dirt-covered surface. The rest of the convoy followed without incident.

Over the next several months I had several other unforgettable incidents while on convoy. This one, however, best exemplifies the challenges and problem solving techniques associated with moving heavy equipment. It also led to a life-long lesson for

me: seek out those who can help solve problems in a calm and cool manner and then reward people in an open forum, praising them for correctly executing decisions.

After I was in the unit for eight or so months, 1LT Seel was promoted to Captain and reassigned to the Battalion HQ as the Executive Officer. 1LT John Pfister became the new CO, moving from his position as the Battalion Maintenance Officer. He was basically neutral towards me, perhaps tilting on the unfavorable side. When one of my convoys arrived back at Turley, he noticed that many of the Soldiers on the convoy were wearing black French berets. He got very mad. I explained that the convoy had stopped for vehicle repairs alongside a French Army barracks in Speyer, south of Mannheim. The French and American Soldiers exchanged hats as a sign of camaraderie. He told me that this was a bad idea. He fortunately didn't ask to see my hat which was...a beret.

My rather firm leadership style continued during his command. During that time I had a Soldier court-martialed for threatening me. He told me that if he ever saw me downtown alone, then I've had it, the implication being that he would beat me up. Lieutenant Seel, as the Battalion XO, administered the Summary court martial.

Going downtown to Mannheim was a favorite week-end pastime. Greg Salter and I liked the Tracadero Night Club. It was modestly priced, had a three-piece band and a lady performer, but it was not a place to bring your visiting parents. I dated a few German girls, and introduced a certain Fraulein to Greg. She was also dating a lieutenant in the Battalion. When the lieutenant discovered what I had arranged 'his' girl to date Greg, he challenged me, during a Friday night Happy Hour at the Officers' Club, to go "out back" with him and settle the matter. His friends calmed him down but it was apparent that my off-duty adventures were not seen so favorably by everyone. I was told that the wives were talking about me during their socials.

Things began to change when I started to date Margarete. She was the Safety Clerk in the Battalion HQ but found the work to be boring. Soon after we got serious, she left the Battalion to work for the University of Mannheim as a foreign language secretary.

In late July, about a year after I had received my commission, the Battalion Commander selected me as Lieutenant Pfister's replacement. His term of active duty was expiring and he would return to the States.

On 1 August I was promoted to first lieutenant and assumed command a few days later. On Friday afternoon, the day after I occupied my new office, four of the 110 Soldiers in the company formerly requested to be transferred. First Sergeant Bolt said that more were thinking about leaving because of my perceived heavy-handed leadership style. Well, me thinks, this was no way to start a command tour. And I desperately needed to do something before the Battalion Commander found out. So I buried the requests in my desk drawer, attended Happy Hour that evening and got mellow with a few beers.

The next morning—USAREUR units worked on Saturday morning in those days--the company Administration Clerk informed me that more transfer requests were being prepared. He wished me “good luck”. When the work day ended, I retreated to my two-room apartment for a quiet and thoughtful week-end. It was time for a change.

On Monday morning I called for an impromptu meeting. Everyone was required to attend except the company clerk who stayed at his desk to answer the telephones.

After the company assembled, I explained my vision for the next twelve months. I parroted the standard themes about being proud to have been selected for command, the need to maintain high readiness ratings, blah blah blah. When everyone was sufficiently bored, I jump-started their interest by declaring that I wanted to talk to the lower-ranking Soldiers, and excused the senior NCOs and officers. There was ominous grumbling as they left.

Once everything settled down, I told the Soldiers that I wanted to talk about subjects which related to them directly. First the barracks. “Why is it that every Sunday a Sergeant has to walk though the barracks to ensure that everything is Okay. The Battalion Commander or his XO don’t walk though my apartment on Sunday.” I lowered my head and my voice and said as I looked up from under my eyebrows, “thank goodness.” There were a few chuckles. “Look,” I continued, “you’re mature adults. Right? You’re professional Soldiers. Right? You can take care of yourselves. Right? Effective immediately, a sergeant will not walk though the barracks on Sunday. Next, alcohol in the barracks. Right! Listen, I don’t want to hear about any alcohol in the barracks. I don’t want to hear about it.” I lowered my head again and rolled my eyes upward in a “you got it” look. Some Soldiers smiled. “Next. The color of your rooms. It is battleship gray. You know why? Because the Navy gave the paint to the Army for free. Do you think he Navy paints their barracks room battleship gray? Hell no! Starting right now you can paint your rooms any color you want, as long as it’s in good taste. And you can hang anything you want on the walls as long as it is not pornographic or insulting to others. Another thing: paint names on your trucks. They’re your trucks and they should have names. And finally, well, some of you may consider me to be a hard ass.” Heads nodded. I strolled over to the Soldier who had been court-martialed, “You know...I don’t like Article 15s.” They knew that only a commander, now me, can dispense Article 15 punishment according to the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). “First, they take a lot of time to prepare and Specialist Messerschmidt (the company clerk) is always complaining that he’s overworked.” Smiles from all! “And an Article 15 can get into your military record. I don’t like that.” Now the Soldiers were sitting up straight and listening attentively. “And as far as a court martial, well, the company has had only one in the past year. But what was I supposed to do?” I said lightheartedly as I showed my hands in a gesture of openness. “As an officer I received a direct threat. That can’t be ignored.” I was standing next to the guilty Soldier but not looking at him. I asked, “Was I right or wrong?” while shrugging my shoulders. Then the Soldier seated next to me smiled and nodded while everyone laughed. With this high note I sensed that it was time to end the meeting while I was ahead. There was only one more point to hammer home. My facial expression now transformed from a

smile to a stern stare. I pursed my lips and put on my mean face. I returned to the stage which was a few inches higher than the floor. Speaking slowly and emphasizing every word while glaring into each Soldiers' eyes. They were fixated on me. "I have one more thing to say. Listen carefully. You are the best god-damned Soldiers in this Battalion. Maybe in whole Army. And I'm asking you to stay that way for at least, I smiled sheepishly, for at least, well, for at least another year." I smiled and got out a "Thank you for your time" comment as stepped down from the platform and took a step towards the exit door. A Soldier near the door shouted out, "A..ten....hut." Everyone jumped to attention and stood still in absolute silence. As I continued to walk to the door I was acutely aware that everyone had risen to the assurance of my words and that I was experiencing the proudest moment yet in my fledging Army career.

1SG Bolt came into my office right away. He said that the NCOs were grumbling about being ejected from the meeting. When I asked him what he felt he responded in his customary deep-gravelly voice, "I told them, "He's the Old Man now and he can do what he wants"". I then asked him what *he* thought. "I told him that I'm the First Sergeant and I support the Old Man." From that moment on, he and I had the closest professional relationship that could exist between the Top Shirt and a Company Commander. (I could never refer to myself as the "Old Man" since I was younger than so many in the unit. But 1SG Bolt delighted in referring to me as such.)

A few weeks later LTC Robert Metcalf, LTC Bond's replacement, called me. "Do you know the names on your trucks?" he asked gruffly.

"Yes sir." I lied.

"*Raw Soul, Soul Man 2, and Frito Bandito?*" What do those names mean?"

"Sir, *Raw Soul* and *Soul Man* are names of songs from James Brown. *Frito Bandito?* I'm sorry, I just don't know."

"Those trucks were in Heidelberg this morning. They carried tanks for a change of command ceremony at the USAREUR HQ. There were a lot of important people there and I got a call from one of them. Get those names off the trucks."

Shit! What now? I had promised the drivers they could name their trucks. Should I back down? Shit! I then blurted out that the drivers and mechanics love those names, and the morale and unit esprit was high because of it.

"Okay. Send all of the names to me and I'll be the second-line approval authority, after you." I quickly assembled the Soldiers, explained the issue, and had them change a few names. I then sent the list forward. Thank God, all were approved—including *Frito Bandito*. I've developed a love for that cartoon character ever sense.

Around this time I told John McPherson, the company's maintenance warrant, that I wanted to buy an antique German grandfather clock. Luckily he knew another warrant

officer in Hanau who had some for sale. We went there on a Saturday afternoon and I offered \$90.00 for the best of the ten that were offered. "How much money do you have?" John asked. I had enough to buy all ten and did so. John thought big. He took nine of the clocks to his government quarters in Mannheim and sold them. I was given my investment money back and got the tenth clock for free. A few weeks later I financed 20 wall clocks from Peter Zeck's Clock Shop in Heidelberg. John sold 18 and I kept the best two, again for free.

The next challenge was to pass the USAREUR Operational Test (ORT). It was vital to pass that (and other major inspections) because they validate the preparedness of a unit to go to war. An ORT, for instance, mandates a unit to leave the unit's garrison location within two hours of an alert. Failure may result in the relief of the unit commander. Why? Because the commander signs the monthly Unit Readiness Report (USR) which, more often than not, evaluates whether a unit is mission capable in the areas of maintenance, training, and a range of other important factors. Usually, the rating of "mission capable" is perpetuated from commander to commander; one preferring not to be perceived as inferior to one's predecessor. This cycle is only broken under highly unusual circumstances, such as the fielding of new equipment within a unit, relocation to another garrison, or a major reorganization due to adjustments in a unit's Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE). So, if one fails an inspection then the core judgment of the commander is questioned because the unit's last USR probably recorded a mission capable status. My USR, a two-page CONFIDENTIAL document with an "as of" day being the last day of the month, was hand-carried to the Battalion S-3 Operations Officer and always accepted as written.

To prepare for the ORT we relied on the "crawl-walk-run" method until we were confident. And since the ORT followed the same general inspection schedule every year, the NCOs could track the team's location through contact with other units being inspected. Since the alert always came at around 1900 hours, we remained after work in the Officer/NCO lounge located in the basement of the barracks. We played pool to kill the time. At 1900 hours on the second evening, just as the NCOs had predicted, the team arrived and told the Charge of Quarters (CQ) to alert the company. We heard blaring horn which was activated by the CQ, but decided to wait in the lounge for several minutes before infiltrating to our respective duty locations. I was the last to leave and trotted to my office, feigning surprise and concern. Fortunately, things were progressing as we had practiced; there was not much shouting going on since everyone knew what to do--they needed few, if any, last minute instructions. An hour and forty-five minutes later I accompanied the team leader to the motor pool, about 300 yards away. The trucks and escort vehicles (jeeps) were lined up at the back gate and ready to depart. The Soldiers who were not assigned positions in the vehicles were boarding our bus. Then I heard reference to the company mascot, a Saint Bernard dog named Brutus. The inspector asked the driver if the dog was listed on the bus manifest as a passenger, along with everyone else getting on the bus. The bus driver looked confident, but I was thinking, "Damn it! We didn't think of that."

"Look under B. You'll find him there. Brutus."

The inspector fumbled with his flashlight and after a tense few seconds simply responded, "Right!" I sighed loudly, winked at the driver, and heard the team leader announce, "The ORT is over." I held my breath. "You all pass."

A few weeks later there were problems with the Russians regarding Allied access rights to Berlin. Alert orders were issued to the two HET companies on Turley Barracks, the 377th and the 595th, to be prepared to deploy from the garrison within several hours. The destination was being determined. I thought that the Soviet Bloc was applying pressure in Europe to distract the U.S. from the war in Viet Nam. Whether true or not, I was just a little cog in a massive military machine, but a cog which had better be able to do its wartime mission.

The priority, once alerted, was to get the trucks prepared and to establish a system to receive repair parts once we were deployed. In the late afternoon both units were ordered to deploy half of their trucks (12 HETs X 2) in about four hours. The destination was the motor pool of an armored company in Gelnhausen, near Hanau. The commander of the 377th was a captain and outranked me, so he was designated as the convoy commander. He led his two serials from Turley at around 2000 hours and arrived in Gelnhausen without difficulties. Five days later the crisis was defused and the units returned to home station.

Also around this time there was a shortage of officers in Europe so we had a disproportionately high number of administrative duties which would normally have been delegated to others. For instance, there was a shortage of lawyers in USAREUR so first lieutenants in line units were often assigned as defense or prosecution attorneys in Battalion-level special court-martials. We didn't have legal training but that's how it was. My first "attorney" assignment was to be a prosecutor. The case involved a Soldier accused of assaulting a Nigerian national outside a bar in downtown Mannheim. I prepared for the case by studying the UCMJ, getting advice from the lawyers in the nearby Judge Advocate General (JAG) office, working closely with German and American police authorities, and receiving good cooperation with the victim. On the morning of the court martial, however, as I was picking up the victim at his apartment, he reconsidered and refused to cooperate. He felt that a black man, testifying against the white defendant, would be dismissed as irreverent in an American court. He thought that he was wasting his time and thanked me for what I had done so far. I pleaded with him in the interest of justice..."coming from brave men like you." He was unconvinced, but after a very delicate discussion he reluctantly agreed to testify.

When we got to the Battalion HQ he was streaming with sweat and shaking slightly. I left him in the waiting room but was unsure he would remain there. But he was probably scared by the military surroundings and unsure of a way to leave the installation without me. The trial began with the defense attorney and myself making opening comments. We then summoned several witnesses to reinforce our arguments. My last witness was the victim, and as soon as he entered the courtroom, I sensed trouble. He surveyed the room as if he was in a cage, and his anxiety increased. He

then declined to sit down after the oath had been administered, simply saying that witnesses do not sit in a courtroom in his country. The board members smirked as they assumed that I had not adequately prepared my star witness. Somewhat shaken myself, I asked a few introductory questions before getting to the point.

“Do you see the person who beat you up? Can you point to him?” Silence. Almost everyone bent forward. Hollywood could not have crafted more tension. The victim rotated his head to glare at every person in the room. He was conscious of his responsibility to be exact and he didn’t want to look foolish in front of these uniformed Americans. He studied the faces of some people twice, including those of several board members. He had to be certain. I winced and I mentally kicked myself in the ass for having neglected to inform him of the room arrangement and the location of the defendant. The Nigerian was now oozing sweat.

“I see him.” he whispered.

I was now about as nervous as he was. If he pointed to the wrong person then the trial was over and I would become the brunt of jokes by the officers on the Board. (It may be Friday but I’m going to skip Happy Hour. I’m mortified and embarrassed. I’m not going to listen to the officers taunting me. Screw Happy Hour.) But duty calls and I had to go on. “Please point to him.” (Like REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE point to him.)

He twisted slightly to his left and pointed straight at the defendant. “There he is.”

At that the victim then lowered his head and looked downward. Silence! I waited. Seconds ticked by. It’s all right now, not fast now...) Then the victim looked up at me and we stared at each other. I felt like giving him a great big hug. Instead I said softly, “Thank you. I have no further questions. You are excused. Please return to the waiting room.” As he turned to depart, I faced the Board, staring at their eyes. Be patient, I said to myself. Be patient. Then I spoke in a low voice as if putting a baby to bed. “The prosecution rests its case. I have no closing arguments.”

Following the defense attorney’s lame closing remarks and some administration guidelines, the Board cleared the room to deliberate. It was short. Guilty.

I was the man of the moment at Happy Hour.

The other two cases would more routine. I won the second and lost the third.

Another time I served as a board member (not a prosecuting or defense attorney) on a court martial. I was unexpectedly made the presiding judge. The incumbent judge was challenged off the board (relieved of his position) by the defense attorney who believed that I was not prepared to be the judge and that I would make procedural mistakes which he could subsequently use in an appeal—if the case didn’t go his way. In fact, I was not prepared. The details of the case are immaterial, my ability to perform as the

judge is. But once appointed, I immediately adjourned the court and called the JAG office for advice. When the court was reconvened I emphasized that I would rely heavily on the JAG for advice and that, in the interest of justice, I was in no hurry to rush the trial, even though it was Friday. The defense council, another lieutenant, tested my fortitude and knowledge for an hour or so. He soon became convinced, however, that my frequent trips to the telephone to seek advice from the JAG officer only resulted in adding time to the trial; all of my decisions were legally sufficient and supported by competent authority (the JAG). Eventually the trial continued in an orderly manner, with fewer objections from the defense attorney. When the trial later that day, everyone present knew that I had done everything right. The Soldier was found guilty and there was no appeal.

In due time 2LT Norman Kosin replaced 1LT Mundy as a platoon leader. Norman was married, had two children, and always conducted himself in a business-like and professional manner. I was fortunate to have him in the company. He performed his two primary duties (platoon leader and operations officer) expertly and gave commensurate time and energy to his multiple duties.

Around this time the Battalion, under pressure from the 37th Transportation Group, upgraded its accident reduction initiatives. Fortunately, the 595th had already improved its accident prevention program by developing a new set of incentive awards. From a nearby German trophy shop we bought an etched outline of a HET which could be embossed or engraved on unit certificates or metal items. The latter included cigarette lighters and name plates. In addition, we significantly reduced the number of accident-free miles one had to accumulate in order to get an award. Drivers quickly realized that with an award came prestige. Perhaps more importantly, it was a handy reference when seeking a civilian driver-related job after an Army career. These awards became important morale builders. The 595th even received a letter from a General at USAREUR HQ which complimented the company for accumulating over 100,000 accident-free miles—a substantial achievement for HET company in Europe. Positive incentives succeed, so I didn't favor the Battalion's "Dented Door" policy. The unsightly door was given to a unit which had a serious accident. It had to be displayed in front of the barracks and. I considered it a bad idea.

Every year at Christmas time the Direct Support Maintenance shop (our higher level maintenance shop) had one of the truck tractors painted white, with green holly leaves scattered about. Towns through which convoys frequently travelled were requested to welcome the truck, with Santa perched in a tank's turret, and allow us to distribute presents at the local orphanage. Police escorts and the town's mayor normally met the truck and escort jeeps near the town's entrance and escorted it through the town. Soldiers from the company, dressed in their formal green uniforms and wore white helmet liners. They walked alongside the truck as a safety precaution. Once at the destination spot Santa--a volunteer who was usually the heaviest Sergeant in the company--dispensed gifts to the children. The gifts were obtained through donations of the Soldiers in the company. As we slowly drove out of the town(s), on-lookers frequently rushed towards the truck and escort jeeps giving us bottles of wine.

Participating in this event was an emotional lift for every Soldier present and an impressive display of German-American friendship and camaraderie.

My father and sister, Diane, visited me in January 1969. We toured Mannheim and Heidelberg before going with Margarete to the area of Garmisch-Partenkirchen. I had to rent a VW Beetle for the trip because my Fiat 850-Sport Coup was too small. This was the first opportunity for my immediate family to meet my future wife.

Margarete and I married four months later in Mannheim's town hall. The Catholic ceremony that took place a few days later was on 30 May (Memorial Day) in the Ziegelhausen Monastery, near Heidelberg. The location was idyllic because the medieval monastery offered a splendid view of the Neckar River and, perhaps providentially, the unpredictable German weather cooperated by being cloudless and warm. The young priest, unfortunately, didn't speak a word of English but I knew the procedures and took it all in stride--until he administered the marriage oath. He was nervous and sweat glistened on his forehead. As he stood in front of Margarete and I, he searched for his 3 X 5 inch card on which he had written the oath in English. Then, sighing, he enunciated every word with extreme care: "Do... you...Charles See...land.....take,..dis vo..man to...be...your....lav...ful vife?"

I smiled approvingly and quickly affirmed, "I do."

The sweat had developed into small beads on his forehead and a small trickle eased from one of his sideburns. Bewildered, he looked at me pleadingly. Something was wrong. I glanced over my right shoulder at Greg Salter, my best man. He shrugged as if to say "beats me". Margarete tilted sideways. "Say 'Ya.'"

"Ya," I said.

Immense relief reflected on the face of the priest. He sighed noticeably before continuing. Margarete's subsequent affirmation "Ya" brought on a subtle smile of relief. The remainder of the ceremony was routine, to everyone's relief.

The wedding dinner was in a restaurant next to the river. We walked there from the monastery, tiptoeing through an adjacent meadow to avoid the cow droppings from the herd which had just crossed our pathway. The next day we left for Italy to enjoy our honeymoon in Venice and Florence.

A week later I sat at my desk again, focusing on preparation for the USAREUR Command Material Management Inspection (CMMI). This was a major event. Skilled inspectors would nit-pick the readiness of equipment and maintenance-related administrative systems to decide if a unit was satisfactory or not satisfactory. A negative evaluation could be devastating for a unit commander. Like my predecessors, I signed my unit's monthly Unit Status Report (USR) which indicated that the unit was ready to perform its wartime mission.

The six companies in the Battalion were to be inspected, in turn, from Monday through Thursday. Friday was set aside for the out-briefing to the Battalion commander and the six company commanders. On Tuesday afternoon, two days before our inspection, a Major from the CMMI team looked through a chain-link fence into my motor pool and saw something suspicious. Crawling through a hole in the fence, he came upon two cargo trucks (deuce-and-a-halves) full of excess equipment and junk. I got a call: "Lieutenant Seland, come to the motor pool, immediately. The CMMI team is here." A few minutes later I arrived, visibly shaken. The USAREUR team caught me with excess. A Major no less. Oh, Jesus!

The Major was standing next to the two trucks with a look of disgust on his face. Another lieutenant on the chopping block! Skipping the introductions, he pointed to the two trucks and demanded what was in the trucks. I thought, 'Can't you see? It's excess.' Maybe the prudent course of action would be to flinch in terror while licking my dry lips and whining the truth to stroke his superior authority. Maybe I could say truthfully, 'Jeez, it's a bunch of excess repair parts which we were hiding from you. You know, Sir, we were going to dispatch the trucks on the day of your inspection just like the other companies do when your annoying inspection team shows up.' Maybe he would feel sorry for me. But then again, he didn't look like the forgiving type. Bye-bye to my Army career.

Then I got second thoughts. Screw the self-flagellation BS. I didn't get to this point to get rolled over so easily. Didn't I learn something in OCS? Don't run! But be cautious! This guy's no pushover.

I muttered, "Sir, I haven't seen these things before. I'll have to check it out." He scanned my face in disbelief. "Check it out?" he said sarcastically. "Get your Battalion Commander here. Now! I want him to see this." Ah ha! The Major wanted to advertise his discovery in order to self-endorse his proficiency. What a jerk! But he did have me in a bind. And now he would relish watching me squirm in front of my boss!

LTC Metcalf arrived 20 minutes later from Taylor Barracks, by which time the Major was playing his role to perfection: *The* dominant USAREUR staff officer shining his beam of excellence on the screwed up locals. First came the lecture on the consequences of violating USAREUR's excess repair parts policy. Next came the proclamation about the upcoming visit by his full Colonel—first thing in the morning--to see this debacle first hand. And that was it. As he strutted away in victory, I decided to get some quick advice from LTC Metcalf. His response was short and direct: I got myself into this situation and I would have to figure a way out of it. As he got into his staff car he glanced towards me. Maybe he was wondering how soon he would replace me.

The unit leaders soon gathered in my office. They reminded me of my possible (probable?) relief from command which I parried by highlighting our shared responsibility. "We're all in this together" sounded nice, but we all knew whose head would ultimately roll. Considering this probability, they united in the belief that if I wanted to keep my job then I must attack, take risks, be decisive, be clever, and go for

broke. I had nothing to lose. If I “won”, I’d be a hero. If I “lost”, well, at least I’d put up a good fight.

Time was precious so we stepped on the accelerator of our collective imaginations and went into an ‘adaptively planning’ session (making it up as we went along). Then a plan was formed.

At 0900 hours the following morning I met the Colonel at the front gate of Turley. He was quiet as we rode in his staff car to the motor pool: no questions, no comments. I led him into the maintenance bays where the excess parts had been cleaned, labeled with turn-in tags, and aligned in perfect order as they rested on the waxed and buffed concrete floor. A freshly washed 2 1/2 ton truck, with a starched-uniform driver standing nearby at parade rest, was ready to transport the parts to the turn-in point a few miles away. Soldiers were a safe distance, eager for entertainment within the Hollywood setting for which the performance which was about to start. “Sir,” I said in that what-have-I-got-to-lose voice. “Here are the excess repair parts. We were going to turn them in this morning, but the Major wanted us to first show them to you.”

The Colonel’s face contoured into a curious expression. He was not angry nor did he look like he was about to go ballistic. “I thought that you had a lot more stuff, like two truck-loads full. What I see now won’t fill half a truck. What’s up?”

That was a great question, but I was ready. Now the comeback, or to put it more crudely: Did I have the balls to stand up to a full colonel--the chief of the CMMI team--or would I give in and beg forgiveness? Come on: do it. “Well, you see, Sir, there was a lot more stuff. Over the past few days we put everything in the trucks, you know, broken furniture and boxes, parts, and just a lot of junk. Most of it should have been thrown away long ago. But everything got thrown in those trucks. Then we separated the reusable repair parts you see here (I motioned in the direction of the maintenance bay) and threw everything else in the trash (I motioned towards the nearby overflowing dumpster). We did this to prepare for your inspection... (pause, higher tone inflection) ... TOMORROW. (Pause, let it sink in) ...Sir, with your permission we’d like to take these parts (motion away from the dumpster and point towards the maintenance bay) to the turn-in point.” Finished. Concluded. End of story line. Your turn.

Of course he didn’t see everything which the Major had seen: some of it had already been stashed under the wooden floors of the self-made platoon shacks. So it came down to this: The Slam-Dunk-‘em Major saw a lot of stuff on the trucks. I claimed most of it was junk. The Major wasn’t around and the Colonel wasn’t interested in digging deeper. He seemed sympathetic towards me as he mulled my obvious fairy tale and the implications that I might be relieved from command. He knew that hoarding excess screwed up the Army’s peace-time repair parts requisitioning system. And he probably knew that the Army’s Military Movement and Issue Priority System (UMMIPS) could not replenish repair parts during wartime to a HET company which would be roaming around Germany. But the Colonel was clever. “Continue to get ready (for the inspection),” he advised in a mild tone. “And good luck.” As his staff car drove away I

was aware that he had succinctly punted the problem to the inspection team who would, if we were that bad, find the company “unsatisfactory” when they arrived the next day.

As scheduled the next day, the inspection started with a short in-brief in the classroom. The Major was absent. A Captain who was leading the day’s inspections said, “We’re here to help you.” (Lie number 1).

“We’re glad to have you,” I responded rosily with lie number 2. The unit leaders were then paired up with their inspector contemporaries. The day-long inspection was detailed but we were ready. Morale was high considering yesterday’s confrontation with the Colonel. We knew how to best satisfy the inspector’s unrelenting passion to find deficiencies: defend politely and firmly when challenged; be friendly so as to not alienate the inspector(s); say as little as possible; and don’t be afraid to say nothing.

The out-briefing the next day was suspenseful as the briefer rattled off the results to the Battalion commander and his subordinates. Finally “The 595th Transportation Company.” My heart was beating fast. “Vehicle maintenance--satisfactory. Non-vehicle equipment maintenance—satisfactory. Records management—satisfactory. Areas for improvement: Management of excess repair parts and the timely turn-in of excess. Any questions!” Hell, it would take prodding by God himself for me to ask a question, considering that I had not been lambasted and my career appeared secure. In fact, the analysis for the 595th was less severe than for other companies. When the briefing finished I sauntered away, not wanting to test my luck with the Major who, along with the Colonel was making small talk with the Battalion Commander. Let sleeping dogs lie.

It wasn’t long afterwards when another problem occurred. A four-truck convoy was having serious problems and had fallen far behind its movement schedule. The convoy commander was the weakest line-NCO in the company and I had little confidence in him. Mr. McPherson and I felt compelled to find the convoy and conduct an on-the-spot assessment. By the time we got to the convoy location, near an Autobahn exit ramp near Aschaffenburg, it was too late. One of the loaded trucks had just veered into oncoming traffic while coming off the ramp and had hit a car. The truck’s driver, surprisingly, showed no remorse whatsoever, even when informed several days later that the German driver had died. This Soldier was one of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s “Project 100,000 Soldiers”—sub-standard individuals whom Mr. McNamara, apparently hard pressed to fill recruitment quotas during the Viet Nam war, had allowed into the Army. Following the accident I relieved the Soldier of his driver duties and placed him in the Maintenance Section. Soon after that, another Soldier had his shoes stolen from the barracks. I was so alarmed at the prospect of having a barracks thief that I personally searched for the shoes. I found them under the bed of the Soldier who caused the accident. The Soldier’s name was painted on the inside of the shoes in accordance with Army guidelines. When one of the NCOs rubbed the paint lightly with lighter fluid, however, the top layer came off and the rightful owner’s name below became visible. I administered punishment to the thief and several weeks later he was discharged from the Army.

Following this accident the company received the Dented Door award from the Battalion. It had it displayed in front of the company to signify that we had had a serious accident. I tolerated this for one day before having it stored in the basement pending the Battalion's direction to send it to another company. On a positive note, LTC Metcalf allowed the company to focus for a week on maintenance and driver refresher training. When convoys again started to roll, they did so without any significant accidents or incidents.

The most significant independent newspaper for the American soldier abroad was the *Overseas Weekly (O.W.)*, a commercial enterprise aimed at an enlisted military audience. Headquartered in Frankfurt, Germany, it had a press run of around 50,000. The paper acquired the nickname, "The Oversexed Weekly" by blending girly pinups with come-on headlines: "Captain Seduced My Wife, Genius GI Tells Court," "Raped Twice in BOQ, Army Nurse Charges," "Old Sarge Drops Dead on Gen's PT March." The newspaper continually exposed the sometimes unbelievable antics of officers. For example, the battalion commander who made a practice of roping up soldiers who returned late from leave and having them immediately led around the base; or the lieutenant colonel who dressed his twelve-year-old son in a military uniform to help conduct troop inspections." Could the 595th be subject to an article in THAT newspaper? "Hell no," 1SG Bolt told me. "Most of the Soldiers who bitch are in units that stay in garrison. You know, Personnel and Finance and Supply companies. They have a lot of time and typewriters available. Companies like this (595th) are on the road or in the field. Our Soldiers don't have time (or the typewriters) to complain." Well, that was soothing until two young, long-bearded O.W. reporters, several cameras hanging around each of their necks, came to my office. They wanted to write a "good" story, something positive about the company. Well, I had never read a "good" story in the O.W. so I politely rejected their offer and steered them to my sister HET company, the 377th. They mumbled something, then acquiesced and left. I called LTC Metcalf who told me that I should have allowed them to do a story about the 595th. Was he nuts? Anyway, it was too late; they were gone. About a week later the article came out and was fantastically positive—about the 377th. To buttress the theme, the narrative was peppered with splendid photos of smiling Soldiers. Shit! I screwed that one up. Later I discovered that one of my Sergeants had called the O.W. and asked the newspaper to come to a *good* unit for a change. I ate crow for this mistake--having denied the Soldiers in the 595th the praise which they deserved.

My two-year active duty commissioned service was to end in a few months. I decided to extend it for three more months because, frankly, I had no reasonable job offers.

My change of command was held on a Friday afternoon in late October. 1LT Miller, coming in from USAREUR HQ, assumed command during a small ceremony on the parade field at Turley. The reception for the new commander, and send-off for the old one, was held that afternoon in the Turley Enlisted Club. We ate finger snacks and drank some beer. After about an hour several enlisted Soldiers invited me to a party at one of their homes. Feeling honored, I readily agreed. When the reception ended we packed ourselves into three cars.

The accident was classic. The first car was driven by a German. When a yellow light changed to red he abruptly slammed on the breaks. The Soldier in the car behind crashed into him. The next car, in which I was a passenger, hit the second car. The fourth car, also driven by a Soldier, hit ours. Within minutes the German and American Military Police (MP) arrived and correctly assessed the situation: the Soldiers were Driving Under the Influence (DUI). The MPs suggested that they take a blood-alcohol test and I agreed. Other options included the Soldiers confessing to a DUI charge or simply refusing to give blood. Well, I was not quite sober myself but the trip to the Mannheim Military Clinic would buy us some time. When we got there the medic was ready with his needles. But just as he was about to insert it, the Soldier, following my advice, said that he had changed his mind. The MP nodded his understanding (as if to say "good move") and listened passively as the other two Soldiers also refused. He then shrugged his shoulders, said Okay, and left. Our punishment came when our families became aware of what had happened, arranged to pick us up, and then greeted us in a sour mood.

On Monday morning I reported to LTC Metcalf. He was surprising calm as he explained to me the nuances of the USAREUR Regulation about DUI. The MPs, he said, must inform a suspected driver that refusal to take a blood alcohol test is sufficient to legally prosecute for a DUI offense. But...since the MPs did not inform the drivers (or me) of this fact, then the drivers would not have action taken against them. One of those involved, incidentally, was his jeep driver. As I listened to LTC Metcalf read from the regulation, I was not sure whether he was admonishing or admiring me. I never asked, never knew, and never approached the subject again.

Two weeks later, on 1 November, I was out of the Army.