# My Service as an Enlisted Marine

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I reported into the 38th Officer Candidate Course (OCC) on 11 October 1965 at the Marine Corps base in Quantico, VA and voluntarily dropped out of the program after the end of the fifth week of the program. My biggest obstacle was the physical conditioning. It took three weeks for me to get into sufficient physical shape necessary to complete the Hill Runs that were a critical part of the physical training (PT).

After the first successful completion of one of these Hill Runs, upon returning to the barracks, I was called in to see our Platoon Commander, a Captain, who I thought was going to say 'good job' or something equally encouraging. Instead, he asserted that I had been 'sandbagging' the whole time I had been there. It was his opinion that I could have completed the PT Program without any issues from the very first day I arrived. Giving less than 100% was not what The Marine Corps wanted in its Officers, and if I didn't step it up, I wasn't going to graduate. His words made me doubtful I would graduate with the rest of the officer candidates in my OCS platoon.

Soon thereafter, it was time to be fitted for, and sign purchase agreements for officer's uniforms, costing about $1,000 (this is approximately $7,600 in 2018 currency). Not wanting to sign a promissory note for that amount of money for uniforms I would not be permitted to wear, if I didn't make it through the OCS program, I scheduled a formal meeting with our Platoon Sergeant and Sergeant Instructor who offered two opinions:

1.) Since I had scored high enough on the Aviation Test to be 'Second Seater' (not a pilot), I should stay in the program since I was doing better, or

2.) Being that enlisted status was not a thing to be ashamed of, I could drop out of the OCS Program and save the $1,000.

Taking the side of caution and knowing that whether or not I graduated depended on the opinion of our Captain, I decided to drop out, which seemed like a good idea at the time. All the Marines I had known in civilian life had been enlisted and none of them had anything bad to say about being an enlisted Marine.

After completing the D.O.R. (Disenroll On Request) process, including an interview with the Lt. Colonel who was in charge of the OCS Program, it was off to a Holding (or Casual) Company over by the air field at Quantico where there were approximately 45 of us waiting for disposition. One consequence of the D.O.R. process was an Administrative Reduction In Rank from E-2 to E-1. Our time was spent on work details during the day and a few turns of guard duty at night.

The last time I pulled guard duty, the Sergeant of the Guard was a Staff Sergeant who was ready to retire but had been caught up in the 90-day extension that the Marine Corps put in place in 1965. He wasn't happy about it, as I heard him discussing the matter with the Corporal of the Guard, who was in the same situation. When I was done with my duty shift at 2200 that evening and had turned in my rifle and gear, the Sergeant asked me if I had a car, and I said yes. He then told me to bring it up as he had somewhere to go which I assumed we were going to see the Officer of the Day or go to some official place of business, but his directions took us to the Staff NCO Club. Once there, I parked in a dark corner, the Sergeant dropped his pistol, holster and cartridge belt on the seat, told me to wait for him and went inside.

About 30 minutes later, he came back looking more relaxed, and I drove him to the Guard Shack. Even with my limited (at the time) experience, I didn't think that going to the Club while on duty was something that was usual practice. Later on, when I became Sergeant of the Guard myself (on more than a few occasions), I always included in my instructions to the guard crew that drinking while on duty was not allowed.

After a week and a half, orders came down for 20 of us to go to Infantry Training Regiment (ITR) at Camp Geiger in North Carolina. I heard later that starting with the 39th OCC, anyone who dropped out went straight to MCRD Parris Island, but that wasn't the case in 1965.

Of course, one person out of the 20 had to be in charge of the whole group during transport, which involved 3 buses and a train ride, and that person was me, which set the tone as far as extra duty went for as long as I was on active duty.

Fortunately, a Sergeant from Quantico was going to Camp LeJeune, so he drove my car there and delivered it to me. This was fortunate since Main Side Camp Geiger was full and a number of us ended up at a reactivated Korean War facility out by the Rifle Range called Stone Bay. I desperately wanted a way to get there besides riding in a Cattle Car.

There were no mess hall facilities near our barracks. To get to the nearest mess hall, we were required to hike two miles both ways through the woods at every meal.

We were integrated with the 'just-out-of-boot camp' Marines from Parris Island who all seemed a little distant until we discovered they all thought we had been in the Brig, because our Utility Jackets had dark green patches where the Quantico name tags had been sewn. Once that was explained, all was OK.

There must have been a shortage of M14 rifles because we were issued M1's.

ITR training was a 3-week course, and at the beginning of the third week, the Career Advisor (an Old Time Staff Sergeant) had us assemble in a room and proceeded to tell us that none of us had an Enlisted MOS, so when the 3-weeks was up, we were to be shipped off to wherever the Marine Corps had an the most urgent need, most likely infantry. Then, in the middle of his presentation, after a dramatic pause by the Career Advisor, he offered us our choice of MOS if we would extend our enlistments by a year.

He had an enticing list of Technical MOS's that were short on staff to offer us. We all went for it. Later, we found out the offer wasn't a true extension. Instead, it was a whole new enlistment starting on 13 December 1965, making my future Discharge date 13 December 1968 for a total of 3 years, 9 ½ weeks of active duty.

Strangely enough, during my time on active duty, I met many other Marines who did not graduate from both previous and later OCC programs who did not extend their enlistment, and they were all in the same MOS's that we signed up for. The normal obligation for those who didn't graduate from an OCC program was 2 years.

I was promoted to PFC (E-2) at the end of ITR and received orders to report to Camp Lejeune after a 10 day leave.

I reported in to Headquarters and Service Battalion, Marine Corps Base, Camp LeJeune, NC, the first week of January 1966 not knowing that I was to spend my entire time there. The next day, I reported to Data Processing Installation (DPI) #2 at Camp LeJeune for 6 weeks of training that was administered by Master Gunnery Sergeant Elgin. Besides teaching us the basics of data processing, he also gave us the benefit of his vast military experience, encapsulated into four simple rules. He advised us that if we followed those four rules, our life as an enlisted Marine would be honorable and successful.

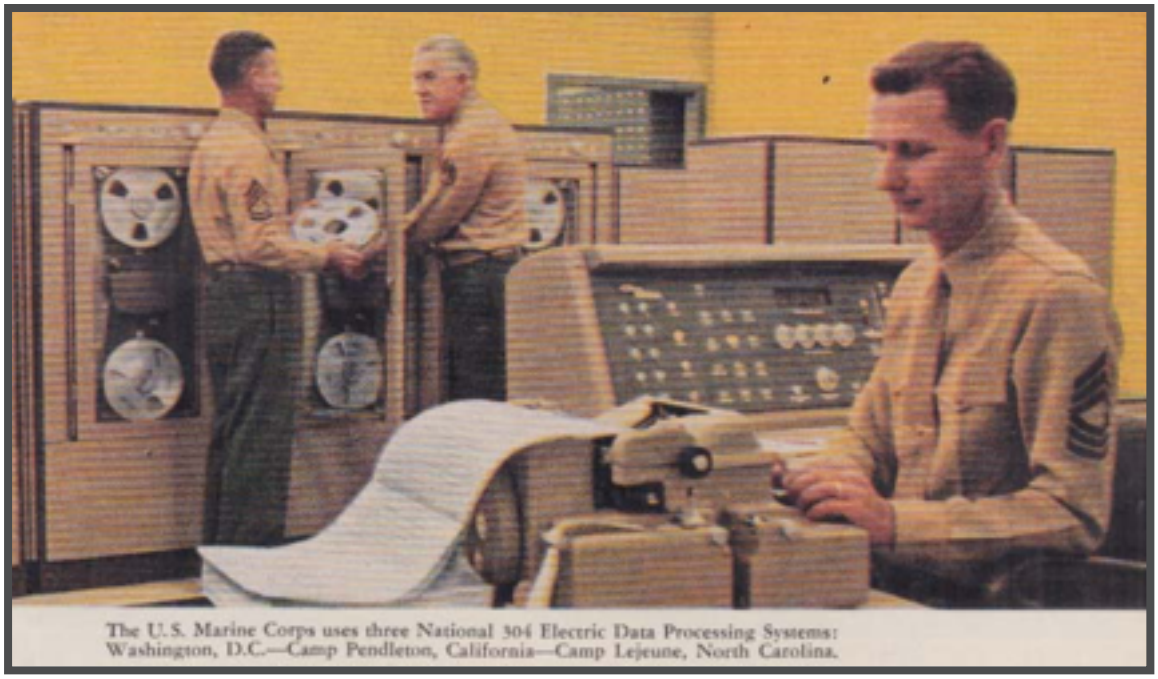
MGySgt Elgin was the best Staff NCO I met during my time in the service, and his guidance put me on the right track when I needed it most. MGySgt Elgin retired in the spring of 1966 after a distinguished career of 45 years. On my own, immediately after exiting the OCC Program, I had already figured out that my only good option was to be the best enlisted Marine I could be. The advise I received helped me do just that, and to this day, I have not forgotten his advise. Here are MGySgt Elgin's four "Unofficial Rules For Enlisted Personnel":

1.) Be squared away at all times
2.) Whatever duty you have, do it well
3.) Stay out of trouble
4.) Avoid contact with officers

Please note that Rule #4 is not to be interpreted as a denigration of Officers. Based on my own observations, including those made while a brig Chaser for a year, if you're an enlisted Marine and you get called in to see an Officer, there was a 99% chance that something unpleasant was going to ensue. So, the best course of action was to avoid anything that would cause that to happen.

Upon the completion of my computer operations training, I was assigned as an Operator on the Main Frame Computer at DPI #2. The Marine Corps had a network of 3 Main Frame Computers: DPI #1 at HQMC, DPI #2 at Camp LeJeune, and DPI #3 at Camp Pendleton. These computers were mainly dedicated for personnel accounting, because it was such a labor-intensive process. The 0141 Clerk in each company office, or location, wrote up longhand any changes to the personnel in his area and sent them to DPI #2 or #3 for processing. These changes were then coded by data analysts, key punched onto Punch Cards (IBM Cards), separately verified, and finally, the data was loaded into reels of magnetic tapes. Everyday, these magnetic tapes were updated with a week's worth of changes and physically shipped DPI #1 on Friday evening, either by Greyhound or by Air from Camp Pendleton. HQMC merged all the changes over the weekend and sent out updated Master Tapes on Sunday. The picture below gives you a good visual of the equipment and what it was like to work at the Data Processing Installation. The three Main Frame Computers we used were 1959 Model National Cash Register (NCR) 304's. They were old and they were slow but they worked.

I needed an official military driver's license in case I had to take these Magnetic Tapes to and from the bus station in Jacksonville, or to and from the airport in New Bern, NC which was whenever processing didn't



The U.S. Marine Corps uses three National 304 Electric Data Processing Systems: Washington, D.C.—Camp Pendleton, California—Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

finish them on time. So, this extra duty assignment was added to my resume.

For the next three years, life went on with these routine, duty shifts, and periodic drill, training, inspections, physical readiness testing (PRT's), and rifle range qualifying.

In May of 1966, I was promoted to Lance Corporal (E-3) and was assigned to a month of guard duty. While on guard duty, I repeatedly found open doors at the PX about every time I walked around it, which I reported promptly. These lapses were eventually corrected by the Officer of The Day and the MP's. This netted me a favorable report to the Company First Sergeant, and as a reward, more duty of other kinds later on. The lesson I learned from this is that if you do a good job in one area, you get noticed and selected for more duty assignments. All this extra attention was perhaps due to my I good-faith efforts to follow rule #2, "Whatever duty you have, do it well."

In August of 1968, a humorous incident occurred involving the Operations Officer at DPI #2. The floor in the 304 Computer Room was a steel grid into which tile panels fit snuggly (and thus difficult to clean on field day). They could be removed if necessary with a suction-cup device. One day, the Woman Marine First Lieutenant, who was the Operations Officer, was showing visitors on day shift, how the tile removal devise worked and lifted up a panel only to find a case of Budweiser beer underneath, cooling off in the area beneath the grid where the cables and air conditioning ducts were located.

Things went downhill from there. The MP's were called, they dusted the beer for fingerprints and took the evidence away for 'further examination', which I'm sure consisted of drinking all 24 cans in their search. The perpetrator was not found, but there was a consensus of opinion that a member of our work shift, who was a former member of the 37th OCC, and still a PFC after almost 2 years, was the person of interest. He had openly stated many times that he didn't want a promotion so as to save money on new chevrons and not having to sew them on.

This same person was scheduled for promotion to Lance Corporal (E-3) in September of 1966, the month

before his discharge, but he failed to show up at the Company Office to pick up his promotion warrant. He had chosen to go to the beach instead (a perk of his working the night shift). The next day, he was called in to see the C.O. (a bad thing, as previously noted) to explain himself. He claimed he wasn't told about the issuing of the promotion warrant. Since communications were verbal, it couldn't be proved if he got the word or not. Our C.O. said he had initially planned for a 'Reduction In Rank' for his irresponsible actions, but instead, since the warrant for Lance Corporal had already been issued, he promoted him to E-3. The C.O. added some additional requirements before he could be discharged: an individual clothing inspection in 10 days to ensure the state of his uniforms was satisfactory with regard to cleanliness, pressing, and proper chevrons. The COs decision seemed like poetic justice.

I was promoted to Corporal (E-4) in September 1966, and immediately, started pulling Duty NCO at the Company, and also, Corporal of The Guard at the Battalion level (no good deed goes unpunished). I was now beginning to question the wisdom of rule #2, "whatever duty you have, do it well." The better I performed, the more new duty assignments I got.

Life continued on routinely, but a minor issue arose in March 1967. DPI #2 was being operated around the clock, nearly 24/7. Each 304 work-shift had an E-6 as Shift Supervisor with 5 workers. The supervisor on day shift, even though married, was having an affair with the Woman Marine Corporal that worked for him. Although they thought it was a secret, everyone knew.

At the beginning of March, one of my afternoon shift co-workers needed a generator for his car. Three of us went to breakfast early on Saturday morning so we could drive down to Swansboro, NC to a junk yard for the part. On the way, some of us got thirsty, so we stopped at a Howard Johnson's motel on Route 17 where we'd spotted a pop machine. Upon exiting the car, the door next to the pop machine opened and out came the day-shift supervisor and the Woman Marine Corporal. A few moments of awkward silence followed, and then, everyone walked off without saying a word.

We went about our business, repaired the old Chevrolet, went to the E-4/E-5 Club that night for 10-cent beer-night and whatever else weekends on base had to offer.

Monday after lunch, the three of us were in the barracks waiting for our shift to start at 1600 when a runner came and told all three of us that we had to report in an hour early to see the Master Sergeant who was our Operations Chief. When we arrived and shut the door to his office, the Top asked what we did over the weekend. We told him, but left out the part about the pop machine episode. Then, he asked if that was all, because the E-6 Day Shift Supervisor had come to see him to recommend that all three of us be put on the next set of Quota Orders for WESTPAC. After telling him then about our encounter at the motel, he told us to say nothing about this and sit tight, as the situation would resolve itself.

At the next change of shift, the three of us managed to avoid the involved couple who we'd interrupted at the model. Then on Friday, all of our shift Supervisors received a temporary commission to Second Lieutenant and were immediately transferred. I saw the former Staff Sergeant (who was now a Second Lieutenant) once after that when we were walking towards one another, but to avoid him, I shifted my direction and walked into a parking lot, just so I wouldn't have to salute him.

A shuffling of personnel was needed to fill the vacancies left by the newly promoted Shift Supervisions to officers. I became the "acting" Supervisor on the Midnight Shift, which I preferred, because it was less chaotic than the other two. As a rule of thumb at DPI, everyone had to be trained in readiness to take the

place of people two ranks ahead of them. In this instance, it paid off as the staffing vacancies were replaced without any missteps.

The following week, the Woman Marine Corporal started checking out as her enlistment discharge was pending. A week later, I was promoted to Sergeant (E-5) with an MOS change to 4021 (Technician/Supervisor). I stayed on the Midnight Shift until December 1968 with only temporary changes to other shifts for reasons of personal leave, rifle range qualifications, or as training other personnel required it.

Being a Sergeant was much better since there was no more Liberty Card to be concerned with and the pay was only a few dollars a month short of a Second Lieutenant's pay. For me, it meant better, longer weekend liberty was possible. However, extra duty assignments continued, as I became a Senior Duty NCO and Sergeant of the Guard.

On one instance of Duty NCO, I was performing the 1600 'Start of the Duty' check of the interior of the barracks, grounds, parking lot, and the dumpster when I spotted a burnt mattress on the clothes line, which I duly noted in the Log Book. It was still there at 0800 the next morning, which I also duly noted it in the Log Book. Later in the morning, I was awakened by the company office clerk who told me the Executive Officer wanted to see me. So, to look sharp, I got cleaned up, put on a fresh set of Utilities, shined my boots, and reported as ordered. The burnt mattress was the topic, since it was government property and someone was going to have to pay for it. I explained that I recorded my findings in the Log Book at the beginning of my shift, so it didn't happen on my watch. The XO asked my thoughts on the subject, after adding that the company inventory didn't show any missing items.

A number of possibilities came to mind:

1.) Someone from our company burned it and stole a mattress from someone who was on leave or at the rifle range.
2.) Someone from our company burned it and stole a mattress from Service Company next door.
3.) Someone from Service Company burned it and hung it on our clothes line.

The XO was a First Lieutenant on Light Duty from being wounded, with a wire cage protecting his injured hand. He was a competent officer, but not acquainted with the nuances of enlisted personnel where petty larceny was not unknown. He innocently asked me, 'would someone really do that?'. The guilty party was never found, and the dumpster received another offering.

Extra duty continued when I was selected for Chaser School. This is not to be confused with the sport of cross country chaser, but more specifically, the On-Base Chaser for taking prisoners from the brig to Battalion Headquarters for courts martial and Battalion Office Hours. Working nights and being available during the day had something to do with my selection for this additional duty assignment. Fortunately, the frequency of this type of duty wasn't every day so it wasn't too bad. The worst part of this duty was the occasional Sunday mornings I had to report to the brig at 0630 to pick up a half dozen prisoners to be trucked out to the Main Gate as a trash working party. Then, I had to supervise them as we walked back 5 miles to the brig while they picked up trash on the side of the road. At least I was up in time to go to breakfast when it was over. I tried to avoid conversation with the prisoners, but occasionally, one of them would taunt me by saying 'I'm getting out and you're still in, how about that? My reply was an old retort, and I would say 'I've taken a lot of you characters back and forth, and I know what's going to happen next. You're getting orders for OCS'. The miscreant would blurt out 'OCS?', and I would explain, 'Right, that's OCS, and it

means Over Choppy Seas'.

There was a rumor rampant among the unmotivated Marines that if you went UA (Unauthorized Absence) enough times, you could get out with a Bad Conduct Discharge (BCD). The technique was to take off for 29 days (30 days or more made you a deserter which carried much more severe penalties), but after the third instance of this, you would get out with a BCD. However, the reality of the situation was quite different. Periodically, the Marine Corps would made one of its sweeps for chronic 'Brig Rats' who were then sent, under guard, to Staging Battalion at Camp Pendleton, and then, shipped off to Vietnam.

Thanks to the buildup in strength of the Marine Corps at this time, due to the Vietnam conflict, overcrowding of the barracks was an issue at this time. The 1941-era, H-shaped barracks where 50 or so Marines were normally billeted, there 120 of us jammed in. Wall lockers were parallel to the long axis of each rack with just enough room to swing the door open and a row of racks was placed down the middle of the Squad Bay.

Those of us who were newly promoted E-5's petitioned the First Sergeant for permission to turn the storage room over the recreation room into a sergeant's quarters, which he approved. On Saturday, we sergeants went to work rearranging our new quarters, moving the material from what was to be our new quarters to another storage room over the company office, cleared up our new quarters, and then moved all our racks and wall lockers in there. It was still crowded, but not as much as before, and it was away from the madding crowd.

On the Marine Corps Birthday in 1967, I visited my Sister, who was a Captain in the Army Nurse Corps at Fort Belvoir, VA. She was married to a Marine Corps Captain attached to the Army Engineer Schools at Fort Belvoir. Before my brother-in-law went to Vietnam, they invited me up for a weekend, and I was able to go to the Officer's Club there, as a guest and in civilian clothes of course. I got to see how the other side lived. Pretty well, I must say.

In the Spring of 1968, our C.O. left the Marine Corps. The rumor was that he was passed over for Major too many times, but that was unsubstantiated. He always seemed competent to me. His replacement was a Woman Marine, First Lieutenant who had previously worked at H&S Bn. Headquarters (next to our Barracks) and drove a new British Racing Green MGB.

One morning while I was in the Gunny's Office picking up a Chaser Assignment, the Lieutenant and the First Sergeant were discussing the case of a Marine who had been arrested in Jacksonville the afternoon before. I heard the Lieutenant ask 'how could this man be intoxicated at 1600 hours?'. The Gunny and I looked at each other and shrugged our shoulders, as if that wasn't really a problem. Again, I'm sure that the Lieutenant was competent in all she had to do, but she was a little out of touch with the life of enlisted personnel.

About this time, the Marine Corps purchased three, new, state-of-the-art IBM 360, Model 40 mainframe computers to replace the NCR 304's that we previously used. In addition, the front of the computer building was remodeled to include a large room with panoramic views of the new computer unit that was being installed.

In addition to myself, there were two other graduate engineer Marines at DPI #2. One had graduated from Purdue University in Indiana, the other from M.I.T. in Cambridge, MA. Both had worked for IBM before being drafted and were helping with the 360 installation to such a degree that were asked to stay on active duty until the job was completed by our Installation CO. They both respectfully declined the invitation.

The Chief Programmer for the NCR 304 was a Master Sergeant who previously had been in Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD), but had one go off on him which caused the loss of an eye and other injuries. For everyday use, he had a glass eye that matched his good one. However, for The Marine Corps Birthday, he wore a gold glass eye with the Eagle, Globe and Anchor (EGA) in it. For Saint Patrick's Day, he had a green one, also with the EGA.

Once, while debugging a computer programming problem, the Master Sergeant told us a story about himself as a young PFC in 1949. He was part of the Marine Corps Detachment that accompanied Chiang Kai-Shek and his entourage from Mainland China to Formosa and that the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang were two of the most unpleasant people he had ever encountered. He was of the opinion that the change-over to the IBM network was going to be an equally long and unpleasant process as well, since the programming languages were entirely different. This meant recoding all the software programs from the old system so they would work on the new computer hardware. This Master Sergeant was another one of many outstanding Staff NCO's that I had the good fortune to be associated with and receive advice from.

In July my Chaser License expired, and I didn't renew it.

In August, our company had an Inspector General (IG) inspection and failed it. I'm not sure of all the reasons for the failure, but part of the reason could have been the 'brown-bagger' E-5, who was chosen by the IG staff to demonstrate Close Order Drill on us enlisted Marine, completely blew it. A 'brown-bagger' was a married Marine who lived in Base Housing, or off base, and brought his lunch every day in a brown bag. There was also 'The Brownbagger' a tavern and restaurant right off the Main Gate at LeJeune, which wasn't a bad place to have a beer and something to eat.

The week after the IG inspection, I was surprised to read in the 'Navy Times' that my name was on the E-6 selection list for Staff Sergeant promotion. I was surprised because I had only been on active duty for 34 months.

Our Woman Marine, Lieutenant was replaced by a male Captain who was a 'no nonsense' officer and starting off holding Pay Call to meet us as he handed out our paychecks Perhaps as a reflection of our poor showing on the recent IG inspection, he began requiring some of the Staff NCO's to hold Close-Order Drills, and for the rest of us, additional military training and inspections. During one of these personnel inspection, one of the 'career PFC's', who had just returned from leave, was standing in formation with a months-old hair cut and Elvis Presley sideburns he had cultivated while on leave. The definition of sideburns in the Marine Corps is that 'sideburns stop where the ear joins the head'. I knew instinctively that trouble was brewing. I was in the rear rank and could see the First Sergeant's face turning brighter red with each passing moment as he looked this kid over. Eventually, he launched into the best description I've ever heard of the PFC's appearance and his lack of attention to detail concerning said appearance, using profanity as a sort of poetic art. The Barber Shop and a private inspection were next on the list for this particular person.

The redo of the IG inspection was scheduled for early October. When the inspection finally come, we were still wearing the summer tropical uniform, and all went well with the barracks, rifle and personnel Inspection. Next, we mustered on the parade ground for Close Order Drill. All us senior NCOs were standing there trying to shrink down into our shirt collars to avoid being selected to lead the drill. Once again, I was the unlucky one picked to lead the Close Order Drill. Since I knew what foot to call the commands on, the whole demonstration proceeded without error or incident, even while drilling all four platoons at once. I felt

quite proud of myself, and at this point, I thought my days of extra duty were over, but not so. Once again, what I had learned early about being the best I could be from a former Master Gunnery Sergeant (rule #2, whatever duty you have, do it well) got me noticed. I found myself with yet another extra duty assignment with the Holiday Flag Detail at Base Headquarters where the Garrison or Holiday Flag was flown. The ceremony took six Marines to hoist, lower and fold the flag.

As 13 December crept closer, I finally reached my last week of DPI #2 duty before checking out. I was out on my usual 5-mile, forced-walk with the brig Marines on clean-up detail, that I took every morning after the Midnight Shift ended at 0800. Others might have complained about the extra duty of brig Chaser and the 5-mile walk each day, but I reasoned it did serve a useful purpose for me:

1) Exercise,
2) A chance to buy a 'Washington Post' newspaper from the box at the Bus Station, and
3) Missing the morning barracks inspection so I didn't get chosen for remedial clean up.

While out on this particular clean-up detail, I saluted an officer's vehicle, and when I looked carefully, I saw that the driver was one of the members of my 38th OCC Platoon (C-1), now a Captain. We seemed to recognized each other, but that was it. He had gone his way, and I had gone mine.

After turning in my 782 Gear, going through dental and medical checks, making sure I had a very regulation hair cut and all the other finishing touches, I was ready to pick-up my DD214 discharge papers on the morning of Friday the 13th, 1968. However, a glitch at disbursing delayed my final trip out the main gate until mid afternoon.

The next week, I interviewed for a job at the Ford River Rouge Steel Complex in the Detroit area and another at U.S. Steel in Lorain, Ohio on Thursday. Friday was my day to report the Marine Corps Reserve Center in downtown Cleveland, OH, to turn in my discharge orders. This effort involved a 60 mile round trip, paying to park, and slogging through the usual slush covered sidewalks. When I arrived, an overweight Sergeant (I was apprehensive that if he exhaled enough, the buttons on his shirt would have scattered around the room like shrapnel) came out to stamp my orders and ask me if I wanted to join the Reserves. When I respectfully declined, that became my last official act of military service.

As a postscript, my service in the Marine Corps turned out to be a great asset in civilian life. I had learned how to deal with people, and in particular, I had learned respect for unionized personnel. Wherever I worked, our dealings together were based on shared values, mutual respect, and common sense rather than belligerence. I started my first engineering job on 16 January 1969 and worked for more than 40 years in heavy industry. Thanks to the GI Bill, I was able to go back to school at night to earn a Master's Degree in Business Administration, and ultimately, to buy two houses with the benefits.