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Reluctant Lieutenant: From Basic To OCS In The Sixties (Williams-Ford Texas A&M University Military History Series)



Synopsis

With intimidating tales of bellowing drill instructors and their seemingly incongruous tasks, Reluctant Lieutenant captures the essence of what it meant to survive the training regimen of the Old Army. Author Jerry Morton is a gifted storyteller equally at home describing blind navigation through the woods on a dark night as recounting the perils of smuggling a skin flick into his barracks at OCS. In this engaging memoir, Morton reconstructs his reluctant journey through basic training, advanced infantry training, and infantry Officer Candidate School during the Vietnam era. His is a unique record of what it was like to be a conscript in the U.S. Army in the late 1960s. Morton's accounts also provide a roadmap to the sociology and culture of the military, especially the class system that divided college graduates from those with less education or economic stature yet sustained a solidarity that overrode class differences in the field. He describes his disappointment and discomfort at being "killed" during training ambushes. But he also shows how someone with a master's degree in psychology could adapt to an environment in which the army did the thinking and the soldier the doing. However unintentional, by the end of his journey Morton is no longer a civilian but an officer, adept at army gamesmanship and ready for command. This book offers an entertaining and informative foray into the training system used by the army during the Vietnam era and valuable insight into military culture. Veterans of the Old Army will find their memories kindled by this vivid account of one man's experience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Like Mr. Morton, I went through Infantry OCS at Ft Benning, 53rd company, commissioned in October 69. I was disappointed that more than half of his book (202 pages out of 320 pages) covered basic training and Advanced Infantry Training (AIT) which is only about 8 weeks total. OCS is about 6 months. And, for me, he did not capture the OCS experience well. I'm not exactly sure what the Army was really trying to do in OCS, but it didnâ™t do a good job of producing high quality infantry officers. It was more like a fraternity hazing than anything else. So much of what we had to do was just meaningless and did not contribute to what we would need to lead a platoon in combat. I realize they wanted to put us under stress to see if we could perform well when tired and harassed. But that greatly interfered with learning. We never learned how to organize a platoon for an attack, how to write orders, what things to consider when planning an attack, how to position troops and guns in a defensive position, when to send out patrols, logistics for supporting an attack, and many other very important things. While evaluating us under stress was important, ROTC officers did not have to go through the same level of harassment and I assume they functioned about as well as an OCS officer in combat. We did learn about weapons â“ how to fire them, how to clean them, etc. but as officers, we would not generally be using most of them. Mostly, OCS was just exhaustion. And exhausted people do not learn well, even if taught well. Since my time in OCS, Iâ™ve learned how the Marines train their officers. They have a training period that focuses on stress and physical evaluation.

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