

Daily View

"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today'" Hebrews 3:13

May 21, 2020

"No excuse, sir!"

When we got off the bus at Fort Ord in July, 1968, the drill sergeants howled at us and berated us unmercifully. They also shouted questions, asking about our level of education, work experience, and other personal issues, like whether any family members were ever in the military. You were required to answer, loudly, "Yes, Sergeant!" or "No, Sergeant!"

Once we were divided into our platoons (groups of 30-35 men), I learned why they asked those questions. At 20½ years old, I was one of the "older" recruits. Most were barely 18 years old, and there were some 17 year olds, who had lied about their age to get into the Army (during Vietnam!).

As I stood in formation on the first day, trying my best not to be noticed, I was called out, along with four other young men. One, an older kid like me, was appointed "platoon guide" (his father was a full-bird colonel in the Air Force). He was given temporary stripes of a buck sergeant. The other three men, of which I was one, were given the temporary stripes of a corporal. We were "squad leaders." That's before "squad" was a cool name for your friends. This "squad" was 8 draftees who didn't want to be there.

The advantage of being a squad leader was that you were exempt from guard duty and KP (kitchen police) — no staying up all night guarding stuff or peeling potatoes. That good. The bad was that squad leaders were responsible for the actions of the men in their squad.

About midway through basic training, the young man who was platoon guide was transferred to another unit. Again, I was minding my own business, trying to lay low, but they appointed me to replace him. This was a disaster, as far as I was concerned. Now, instead of 8 men, I was responsible for 35 "men." It was like being a camp counselor for 35 immature teenage boys.

One day, I left the barracks a little early, but some of the other guys were still in the barracks. Unfortunately, they left without cleaning up the place and the drill sergeants saw the mess while we were out marching around and shooting at stuff.

When we got back, the company gathered as usual and I'm trying my best, as usual, to be incognito. However, the next

thing I know, the company commander, Captain Ito, summoned me to the front. He made me put on my 30 lb. backpack and my steel helmet and told me to drop into the front leaning rest position — that's the starting position for push ups.

So, there I was, facing the asphalt, palms on the ground, arms extended. He didn't say, "drop and give me 50 [pushups]"; we were used to that. Instead, he left me in that position and began to ask me questions about the state of our barracks.

As he interrogated me, he dropped pebbles on my helmet, several at a time. "What happened, Posey; why was the barracks in such disorder today?" *ca-chink, plunk, ca-chink...*

He kept asking and I kept giving him reasons why it happened but every time I gave an answer, he dropped more pebbles on my head. After several minutes of this, my arms were quivering and I was afraid they would give way. I was thinking what does this evil genius want me to say? I've given every possible answer I can think of.

Finally... it occurred to me... I simply said, "*no excuse, sir!*" Abruptly, the pebbles stopped hitting my helmet. He then calmly told me to stand up and take my place in the formation.

There are a couple of takeaways. First, think of how often we rationalize our sins, making excuses for things we do that we know are not excusable. Think further ahead: what will we say at judgment? II Corinthians 5:10,

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Instead of self-talk that attempts to excuse and rationalize our bad behavior, isn't it better to just say, "no excuse, Lord. Please forgive me?" Consider Psalm 32:1-5,

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.



Fort Ord Barracks, 1968 (Lance Nix)