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Advanced Composition

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Feature Article

**From the Korean War to Heading the White House Fellowship Program:
The Distinguished Career of Tom Carr**

Thomas Carr likes to take risks. For much of my interview with the Army Retired Field Artilleryman and White House Fellowship leader, he described the oddities in his life that led to many happy coincidences. Mr. Carr represented himself as a cat able to land safely on his feet, and his interview reflected his uncanny ability to think on his feet, solve problems, and recognize golden opportunities. In one such instance, he woke up one morning on the Charleston Battery to the beautiful sight of the Charleston harbor. While enjoying the early morning air, Mr. Carr—still in his pajamas at the time—was confronted by a car full of beautiful women who all giggled and gave a great wave before they peeled off and drove away. Little did Mr. Carr know then, but one of the women in that very car was to be his future wife. Because Mr. Carr was preparing to attend The Citadel, his host wondered if he would like to go watch a Citadel football game. Mr. Carr replied that he was eager to go—his host had mentioned that there'd also be girls there. When Mr. Carr attended his first Citadel football game, who, of all people, did he meet there? None other than his future wife, one of the girls who was in the car that morning.

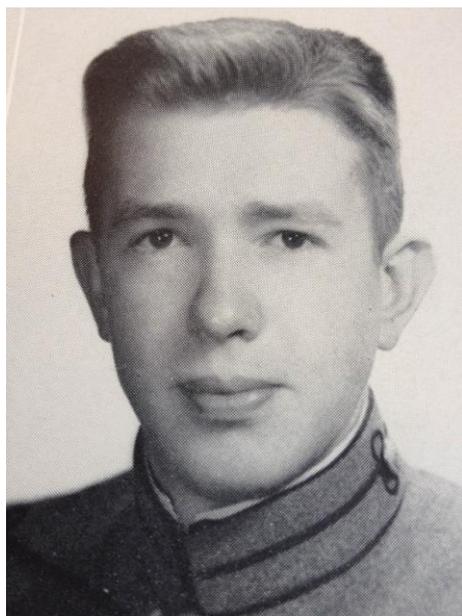
It is coincidences like these that Mr. Carr focused on in his interview. A 1950 graduate of the Citadel, Mr. Carr never planned on having a career in the United States Military and certainly

never intended to go to a Military Institution. When asked why he decided to attend he said, “I went to The Citadel because I was unable to get into very many other places. I was a disciplinary problem. Evidence of that was, during my years at The Citadel, there was a limitation on the number of demerits you could have in total of 200. If you got 200, you couldn’t graduate. I graduated with 196.”

Despite claiming to be a disciplinary problem, Mr. Carr went on to join the United States Army and to have a distinguished career that included fighting in the Korean War and earning a Purple Heart. Mr. Carr cited the influence of his father, who was a Navy Captain, and his brother, who was an Air Force machine gunner/radio operator. After attending Coast Artillery School, Mr. Carr began his journey to Korea in which he was told, “We’re going to make you a regular Field Artilleryman.” Despite having no previous training for these duties, Mr. Carr quickly caught up to speed. In fact, he had nothing but positive things to say about the Military’s support of him during and after the war. He received most of his training for combat on the ship to Korea.

Mr. Carr explained that the reason he was able to adapt to these often swiftly changing situations was due to what he learned in his time at The Citadel: “I can’t stress too much the impact of The Citadel. And somebody said, ‘Well, what did you learn there?’ And I said, ‘Well, learn is not quite the right word. More absorb. And it’s like throwing a cat in the air. How do you learn to land on all four feet and scamper away? ...I learned that at The Citadel. We learned to be light-footed. We learned to deal with almost anything.’ ‘And did you learn it at The Citadel?’ ‘Well, for some reason, all of us seemed to have that ability. And it allowed us to take advantage of things that others may not have.’”

Mr. Carr went on to explain: “During my time as a civilian in the office of the Secretary of Defense, I spent some time in charge of education in the military. And that allowed me to go off to Harvard and Yale and Princeton and spend time evaluating what they were doing for the military. I also spent a couple of years at Princeton on a Fellowship. So I’ve had a pretty good view of the rest of American education. It’s superb. I mean, there’s just nothing like it anywhere. But nothing beats what I got here.”



Carr's 1950 Citadel Yearbook Picture

Humble about his actual combat experience, in the n interview Mr. Carr chose to share the unusual antics he often got into while in Korea. Describing a battle in which the North Koreans “absolutely clobbered us,” Mr. Carr moved on to emphasize his meeting with a long time friend after the skirmish ended. On the road retreating from the battle, they encountered a train lit with gasoline burning from the vehicles and tanks overturned. Mr. Carr ran into Carroll LeTellier, an old friend from The Citadel. They stopped alongside a burning train and noticed something unusual. “[We knew] it was a quarter master train”, Mr. Carr said, “because it was loaded with box cars, and some of the doors revealed there were provisions and stores and so on within.” But what caught the eye of Mr. Carr and Mr. LeTellier was the Pabst Blue Ribbon.

Mr. Carr said, “We realized it was filled with stacks of cases of beer. As we looked at it and were very tempted to run across the road into the car, the train began exploding one car at a time. It’s obviously loaded with ammunition, but we said, ‘Hey, let’s quickly get over there.’ So

we did. We ran into the burning train and loaded up a jeep with cases of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer. One of the smartest things we ever did. Or the dumbest.”

It is small events like this that add extra sparkle to Mr. Carr’s life. After returning from Korea, he married his girlfriend of six years, the young lady he met at the football game, and remained in the service for seven and a half years before was honorably discharged for medical reasons.

Even when Mr. Carr described getting the Purple Heart while in Korea he was modest, saying: “Well, it’s not a very good story.” At the time he was a forward observer who directed his unit to adjust fire on the enemy. Riding in the number one tank, bullets began raining down on them. Mr. Carr quickly ducked his head inside the tank, but left his hand exposed. At that time, a bullet bit into his finger, permanently damaging it. Mr. Carr said after his story, “That’s hardly worth a Purple Heart or anything else,” understating his sacrifice and highlighting his humility.

After leaving the service, Mr. Carr was sought out to be the head of the White House Fellows Program. This program, which he developed, still searches the country for great young men and women who are becoming rising stars in their fields. The Fellowship grants them a year-long opportunity to work alongside U.S. Cabinet members. In its first year, the Fellowship garnered 8,000 interested participants, but only fifteen were chosen. The extremely prestigious group that Mr. Carr, alongside David Rockefeller, brought together has allowed for many great innovations from that Presidential administration to the present day.

At the close of the interview, Mr. Carr who now is retired in the Charleston area, couldn’t say enough about the love he still harbors for the Army. In fact, he said: “I’d join [again] right now if they’d let me.” I think this says a lot for the outlook of the nation and suggests that we

should take great care of the veterans who've already done their service. Mr. Carr—even through the difficulty of War, the many moves of the military, and being discharged from a job that he loved—remains committed to the greater good and is grateful for the happiness that his life brings him. He became part of something greater than himself and let this be the driving force behind his life.