Observations on Leadership: Moral and Otherwise

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1. *In Some Circles, Brashness Passes for Leadership*

In Officer Candidate School during the year **1969,** it seemed at times as if abruptness, aggressiveness, and loudness were proxies for leadership. 29 At any rate, there we were, a miserable lot of conscripts uprooted from graduate schools (for the mostpart);30 and we had to do a forced ranking of each other's "leadership" every week. We called these sheets for the forced rankings "bayonet sheets." It was an apt term, "bayonet sheets." It was apt because the line drawing was brutal and frequently based on happenstance

scraps of information. Yet, too regularly, someone who was rated low on leadership ended up being "recycled" through extra months of **O.C.S.** or shipped out to Vietnam with two weeks of leave "enroute." Those who washed out of **O.C.S.** ended up "in country" and were designated **"11** Bravo," that is the **M.O.S.** (Military Occupational Specialty) for light arms infantry-fancy words for cannon fodder.31

We all shared sleep deprivation, virtually constant harassment **by** upperclassmen and tactical (training) officers, and grueling physical training. In time, **I** came to believe that not many other officer candidates had a sound handle or pers pective on the concept of leadership either. 32 Quiet, thoughtful men were shipped out to Vietnam, while **I** felt at times as though **I** was destined to keep company with aggressive, loud, and brash youngsters. 33 **If I** had been smarter, more mature, and less scared of the jungle or of dying in the rice paddies, I might have skipped the theatrics of **O.C.S.** and volunteered to take my chances in the war. "Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose; But young men

think it is, and we were young."34

**32.** Every week, if my memory is correct, we had to rate each other's leadership . In the early weeks, **I** remember having to ask other candidates to point out a classmate who I did not recognize **by** name so that I could "rate" his leadership. It seems unlikely to me that **I** was the only one with such difficulties in the early going. When our class, Engineer **O.C.S.** Class **#30-69,** graduated at Fort Belvoir, there were eighty four of us left. We were commissioned on Halloween (October **31, 1969). My** best estimate at this late date (forty years later) is that between five and twelve candidates washed out or were "recycled," meaning had to repeat a segment of the **O.C.S.** program. Most of those who were offered the choice of recycling and "washing out," i.e., going to Vietnam as an enlisted man with an infantry **M.O.S.,** chose the latter.