

## The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

### Ohio State Engineer

**Title:** Basic Training at "The Rock"

**Creators:** Leslie, William C.; Huber, Charles C.; Hullinger, Lewis

**Issue Date:** 1944-02

**Publisher:** Ohio State University, College of Engineering

**Citation:** Ohio State Engineer, vol. 27, no. 3 (February, 1944), 13, 24-25.

**URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/36033>

# BASIC TRAINING AT "THE ROCK"

By WILLIAM C. LESLIE, CHARLES C. HUBER, and  
LEWIS C. HULLINGER

(Leslie and Huber, now Officer Candidates at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, were stationed for several months on the campus in engineering studies. Hullinger, a pfc., is one of the sixteen remaining engineer ROTC men still on the campus. All three are members of Tau Beta Pi.)

HOW did we happen to be sent to the camp which has been referred to as "The Alcatraz of the Army"? It all started on June 23, 1942, when we were among some eighty-odd juniors in the College of Engineering who enrolled in the advanced course of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, which in normal times awards commissions to graduates who complete the two year advanced course. However, the pressure of war prompted the War Department to order us, along with the junior ROTC students in all other university units in the country, into service, to be sent to replacement training centers for training in our particular branch.

In accordance with this order, on Monday, April 26, 1943, we reported for induction in Columbus; all but a few who failed to pass the final physical examination were processed at Fort Hayes and shipped the following Saturday to the Engineer Replacement Training Center at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. Of the original group, sixty-one were recently again on the campus, in Army Specialized Training, awaiting orders to report to Officer Candidate School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Several weeks ago, orders were received for forty-four men, which left seventeen of the engineers on the campus. One has since transferred to the Air Corps.

Rumors (the real backbone of the army) had the boys guessing as to where they would be sent from Fort Hayes. But when the cars were backed into Union Station and coupled to a westbound train, it was no longer a secret. We had heard of the character of the modified commando training given at the camp situated in the Missouri Ozarks, so we knew it didn't promise a picnic.

Through miles of monotonous terrain the train rolled westward through Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Then across "Ol' Man River" to St. Louis, where our cars were transferred to another engine. Then through more flat country, until in the darkness, all that could be seen was the alternating blackness of valleys and the reflections on

the desolate walls of cuts in the gradually heightening hills. A seemingly endless, winding trail suddenly ran out at what seemed to be a little city in the wilderness. We were then marched away to what was to be our home for the next three or four months.

Our first day, Sunday, was not the proverbial day of rest. Rifles, cartridge belts, haversacks, and footlockers were issued. We had to learn to do many things: roll packs, fold clothing and arrange it neatly in the footlockers, make beds properly, clean rifles, align shoes properly under the bed, and hang clothing in the proper order, to mention a few. The first week served to initiate us into many of the duties required of the basic trainee. Perhaps the least popular of these were the twice-weekly "prayer-meetings", G. I. terminology for scrubbing the barracks. Another duty in the same category was K.P., when someone woke you up in the middle of the night and rode you all day until everyone had been fed three meals, the dishes were all washed, the floors scrubbed, and the tables set for the next day's breakfast. Each day one man in each barracks was detailed as room orderly, and it was his duty to keep the barracks neat and clean throughout the day.

In the first several weeks of the training much of our time was spent in viewing training films, which give the recruit a picture of the foot-soldier going through infantry drill, first-aid, detection of booby traps, defense against air attack and gas attack, combat principles, and other phases of his work. We were also shown an interesting series of orientation films. These were always in theaters about a half-mile from the company area, and we usually went "on the double", one of the exercises designed to round a new soldier into shape. Other units in the regular conditioning process were physical training and calisthenics every morning, the obstacle course, and hikes of gradually increasing length.

Our first hike was one of five miles, taken in the third week, which gave us our first real battle with the hilly, rocky terrain. This was followed one week later by a ten-mile hike. The climax of this type of training came in the sixth week when

*(Continued on page 24)*

## BASIC TRAINING AT "THE ROCK"

*(Continued from page 13)*

a twenty-five mile hike was scheduled, which was said by some to actually cover over thirty miles. The toughest job to take that day was not the hike, however, but to be on K.P., to see the men march in to the music of a band and not to be one of them. Not many failed to make the full distance.

Perhaps the most popular phase of the training was rifle fire. Much of the time in the first five weeks was spent in range practice and "dry-runs". The latter refers to simulated fire, during which position, trigger squeeze, and breathing may be checked. The high point of this five-week instruction period was record firing, which required the trainee to score two-thirds of the total possible points to qualify. Extra proficiency with the rifle was rewarded with sharpshooters' and experts' medals. "Bolos," men who failed to qualify, were required to fire again after more practice until they could qualify.

After rifle firing was over, considerable time was devoted to the study and operation of other weapons, some of which may not be issued to engineer troops. Among those demonstrated were .30 cal. light and heavy and .50 cal. machine guns, carbines, .45 cal. automatic pistols, Thompson submachine guns, rocket launchers, hand grenades, and grenade throwers.

The most enjoyable week of the increment was that in which we went to ponton school. On Monday the entire training battalion hiked about five miles to a broad river site for training in river crossing and bridge-building. Shelter for the week was provided in huts, fifteen feet square, in four compact rows, one for each company. Instruction and actual bridge-building covered footbridges, boat drill, 25-ton ponton bridge, infantry assault raft, and 10-ton pneumatic ponton bridge. The week was concluded on Saturday with a "forced march" of sixty steps at a dog trot alternated with thirty steps at a walk for the last four of the five miles back to camp.

The last few weeks dealt chiefly with combat training and various specialized tasks the engineer soldier may be called upon to perform. Included were a day on the combat range with live shells flying overhead, and three days on a combat problem when only field rations were eaten.

Two weekly features of basic training were training tests and inspections which were held either on Friday or Saturday. There was considerable competition between platoons and between companies in the tests, but the best platoon rating seemed always to be won by the one with the best espionage system. The tests were held

in the open on the battalion drill field and could often be recognized from the company area. Thus the first units to take the tests generally had the lowest score. Inspections, made by the platoon commander, gave him an opportunity to make suggestions for the improvement of the personal appearance of his men and the care of their equipment. It also gave the sergeant reasons for putting men on extra duty the next week.

The big day came on the last Saturday of the increment when we underwent inspection by the commanding general of the ERTC. He was accompanied by several lower officers including a chaplain, upon whose shoulders lies much of the responsibility for the service man's morale.