



Clarence Watsby

NOV 30, 1927 - DEC 23, 2018



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Clarence Watsby

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Clarence Watsby was born in November 1927 and was raised north of Donna. His parents were of hardy Norwegian stock and were lured from South Dakota as farmers to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas with all the wonderful tales of a tropical climate and rich, lush soil that produces three crops a year. The very dream that you could reach outside your window and pick a delicious orange or grapefruit any day or time of the year was too much to resist. Clarence had two brothers and one sister. One of his brothers has passed away but his older brother still lives on part of the original family land just east of Clarence's home, a ranch-style, pink brick that Clarence drew the plans for, with a yard that is one of the showplaces of the Valley. His older sister resides in Weslaco with her husband. Clarence attended Donna public schools and was Salutatorian of his 1945 high school graduating class. I met Clarence in 1951 when we were organizing the National Guard in the upper valley. Donna, San Juan, Pharr, McAllen, Mission, and Edinburg formed the 3rd Battalion, 112th Armored Cavalry Regiment. (I found out too late that the Battalion was formed specifically to flesh out the Regiment to prepare it for Korea. I had already signed on for three years. Walter Hyde forgot to tell me that when he talked me into joining.) Clarence had joined the Donna unit, which was company G. I joined the Pharr unit which was designated the Howitzer Company. I was also employed as a full-time Technician at the same time I was sworn in as a member. You could have written several books about what I did not know about Artillery and running a National Guard unit. I did manage to fool some people for 35 years before they finally caught on to me. Enough about me. Jack Sanders had been employed full-time and was organizing the maintenance end of this new Battalion. He had set up his shop in an old airport hangar at Donna. Jack already had several mechanics including Eliecer (Red) Medina and Pat Ramsey. The State also authorized Jack a Parts Clerk. While all this was going on, Clarence was farming and running a chicken and eggs operation



with his dad and brothers. Jack offered Clarence the Parts Clerk job. There was not any way Clarence could turn it down. It paid almost \$50.00 a week. Remember, this was the old Magic valley of 1951. Life was not exactly a bowl of cherries. Clarence did not have any military experience except Guard membership and his only civilian experience was working on the farm. But, if you ever had any dealings with Jack Sanders, you are well aware that he is a sly old fox and he certainly ain't nobody's fool. He knew the kind of help he was getting. Well, Clarence worked in the position for a while, always hoping a mechanic position would open up. Eventually, it did and Clarence became a full-fledged, full-time track and vehicle mechanic. Pharr, meanwhile, was awarded the first National Guard Armory in south Texas, Later, the OMS shop was added in the back. During all this activity of building, growing and organizing, Jack approached me about assigning Clarence as Motor Sergeant at Pharr. I jumped at the chance to have a full-time technician as Motor Sergeant, plus I had become very aware of Clarence's abilities. Quality help in those days was hard to come by. So, Clarence and I became not only co-workers but very good and close friends. In those good old days, which were really not so good, when you got an Armory you got a building. Period. There were no frills like furniture, painted classrooms and restrooms, sidewalks, flagpoles, paved parking areas or landscaping. It was really bare bones. The unit and it's personnel provided the frills by hook or crook or begging, borrowing or stealing. What the hell is wrong with you? You got a new building. What do you want? Egg in your Beer? There would not have been much landscaping, designated parking area, hardstand, sidewalks or shelving in the supply Room without Clarence Watsby or Merwin Beamsley. Certainly, others contributed but Clarence Watsby and his good right arm Merwin Beamsley were the guiding force behind all those projects. After Hurricane Beulah, Clarence and his Maintenance Platoon reset all the trees that had been blown over. No one told them to do it. It was just one more splendid example of Clarence's leadership and sense of responsibility (He may have felt like those trees were his own since he personally planted them as seedlings.) I guess the point I am trying to make is the generous giving that was displayed without any thought of any compensation except for the inner feeling of doing a job well that needed to be done. The Armory should have



been called the Watsby and Beamsley Armory, without them, it would not have been much Clarence is a builder and planner by instinct. I observed him for years out in the shop. Wherever he is at, whatever he is doing will be upgraded and improved. As I said previously, that wily old fox Jack Sanders used Clarence's abilities to perfection. When a new piece of equipment came in, or a new procedure was to be installed, or a project had to be built, Jack would pick Clarence's brains and then nine times out of ten assign him the project knowing that it would be accomplished in good order. Clarence was the Motor Sergeant for Company A, 4th Medium Tank Battalion (formerly Howitzer Company, 3rd Battalion, 112th Armored Cavalry Regiment) on 15 October 1961 when the 49th Armored Division was ordered to Fort Polk, Louisiana because of the Berlin Crisis. I was assigned as the First Sergeant. It was a difficult and uneasy time for all of us. We didn't know where we were going to end up or how long we would be gone. Clarence and I lived in a small cadre room on the second floor of an old WWII barracks. I remember well that after a couple months of living together in such a small area, I could start a sentence and pause and he would finish the statement just as I had been thinking it, but not expressing it. Later on he got to where I would start a statement and pause and he would give it a better ending than I was thinking. I remember telling my wife about this amazing situation and commenting that he knew me better than she did and yet he had only lived with me a few months and she had lived with me for ten years. She said it only proved that he had a superior intellect has compared to mine. Of course, she was only kidding? There were many long, cold hours put in during that 1961-62 winter at Fort Polk but there were also some good times and a lot of laughs for the ridiculous situations we would find ourselves in. The coldest winter in 80 years in Louisiana, antiquated equipment, shortage of cold weather gear, disgruntled reservists and an intensified combat training program caused us misery, but it was Bearable. The good times included many trips back to the Valley in Clarence's 1957 Ford with CPT Ken Sanders, SP Vicente Pena, SGT'S Harvey and Henry Farris, myself and Clarence. We would leave Friday night and return Sunday night. We usually cheated a little on both ends when we couldn't go home we would go to Houston, Galveston, Alexandria or a couple places that I can't mention and we still do not talk about. Of course, CPT



Sanders and I only went along to check and see if any of our people were visiting such terrible places. There were other memorable official events such as completing Iron Dragoon, the Division maneuver, with our company A the lead Company when they popped the smoke to end the 2-week maneuver. Finishing our tank gunnery tables in the snow and ice. Completion of the intensified combat training program. Supporting the 36th Infantry Division summer camp with our equipment and personnel. Flunking the Army Training Tests and having to redo them (mainly because the word was out we were going home so interest and initiative were at zero). The longest summer camp on record was about to be over. The movement to home stations on 9 August 1962 and Release from Active Duty Clarence returned with the motor convoy. Rebuilding the unit began. Many of our key personnel got out on return from active duty and went to work full-time to put their lives back together. Some had done a lot of growing up. Many of our people got divorced. (They found they could get along fine without each other. In fact, they preferred it that way.) Our little trip to Fort Polk did provide many of our people an opportunity to attend college that they would never have had. Clarence continued on as a mechanic in the Organizational Maintenance Shop. He also married my wife's sister shortly after our return. We spent the next 20 years raising families, sweating RIF'S, reorganizations, enduring and somehow surviving incompetent and sometimes mentally sick supervisors and commanders. My, how time flies when you're having fun. (I would be remiss if I didn't mention that we also had some very fine supervisors and commanders, but it seems that as you get older you remember the bad ones more vividly.) Jack and Clarence continued together as a great team until the late '60s or early '70s, the time is not really important to this yarn anyway. Two events occurred. I took a job in McAllen at the Headquarters because my job here in Pharr was downgraded Jack Sanders retired and of course recommended Clarence to be the Shop Chief. This caused the usual talk and political maneuvering when a key position became vacant. I ran into Colonel Lucas, the then State Maintenance Officer, and he inquired of me about Clarence's qualifications. I told him essentially what I have been trying to say here. He asked me if he had any weaknesses. I told him the only weakness that I was aware of was his reluctance to toot his own horn



and the established fact that he is a quiet man and does hold his own counsel. (Weakness Hell! The world would be a much better place if there were more men with those same weaknesses. The rest is current history, and most of you know it. Clarence got the job and never even slowed down. He just got better. Clarence and his people met the challenges and they were many. They included numerous reorganizations, assignment to the 1st Cavalry Division, winter training at Camp Ripley, supporting Company C in Honduras, and the continuing transition to the Bradley. These are only some of the challenges that I am aware of. I do know that he and his men have stood tall and performed magnificently. Clarence and I did get to go to a few schools together. I soon got wise and quit that foolishness. Every time we went to school together, I struggled and he was always first in class or never less than distinguished graduate. Just for kicks, I checked his records. In all his schooling and education, he was never less than distinguished graduate, when it was rated. During all these years, I have always asked Clarence's advice about anything to do with building, growing or mechanics. So when I retired in 1985, I asked Clarence's advice about the kind of lawn Mower to buy since I would now have plenty of time to work in the yard. He suggested that I buy a standard power mower and be sure not to get a self-propelled mower as they were just more trouble than they are worth. Well, listen to me brothers. Do not listen to Clarence. If you are closing in on 60 years old, GET THAT SELF-PROPELLED MOWER. You need all the help you can get. I never let him forget how he advised me wrong. But, I guess when you really stop and think about it being right 99 times out of a 100 ain't bad for government work. There is always a big loss when an organization loses a dedicated individual. The organization can, however, overcome this loss with extra work, added zeal, and perseverance. When an organization loses a highly intelligent and dedicated individual he is damn near impossible to replace. Clarence Watsby will be damn near impossible to replace.



Tribute Wall

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GH

Gustavo And Alma Hernandez posted:

Clarence was a true friend and man we loved and respected. We met him when my sister, Julie, provided care for his wife, Nola. We would visit him every time we went to the Valley. We knew he liked Whataburgers, so we always treated him to a gift card on his birthday and Christmas. We took him a belated slice of Carrot cake which was his favorite for his 91st birthday. He was always generous and shared fruit from his orchard over the years. My husband always enjoyed talking about college football with him, especially A&M; Clarence loved his Aggies. I'm glad we got to visit him after his birthday. He will be missed. Our heartfelt condolences to Jan and Roy, as well as the rest of his family. May God comfort them at this time. Rest in peace our friend.

December 26 at 7:57 AM

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Melissa Mcgee Garcia posted:

As a former neighbor of Mr. Watsby

December 24 at 6:40 AM

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Memories only last if you share them

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