

## **OC2-70 Grand Canyon 2011**

By C.J. Spence

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September found Lynne and me in Chicago attending, #8, my infantry OCS (Officer Candidate School) reunion. We were in the lobby of the historic Palmer House meeting and greeting when Tom Corrigan walked in with his big Boston, Irish/Italian smile and gave Lynne and me his famous Corrigan bear hug. With his big smile flashing, Tom doesn't miss a beat, "C.J. I love those photos that you have been sending on your southwest hiking trips with Hart. I plan on retiring in April 2012. My plan, I'm walking out the door of the John Hancock building flying to Atlanta and having Don Sims, our Georgia cheerleader, pick me up and drive me to Springer Mountain, GA. But, before I attacked the Appalachian Trail I thought it would be a good thing to spend time checking out my hiking gear in the Grand Canyon."

For the next couple of days Tom and I kept throwing back "what ifs" and "maybes." At our formal dinner on Saturday evening, at the end we have an open floor, Tom announces that Spence is planning a Grand Canyon trip sometime in 2011 before his retirement and our next OC2-70 reunion in Seattle. If anyone is interested in some more OC2-70 mini-adventures give Spence a head-ups. Corrigan had planted the seed, but I was hoping for an early frost or freeze--throughout the rest of the evening a few classmates would drop by and say, "C.J. I think the Grand Canyon trip sounds interesting. When we left Chicago Sunday morning I had nine names expressing a definite interest in hiking the Canyon. Our next OC2-70 reunion would be in the fall of 2012 in Seattle, so the Canyon trek would give us a mini-reunion before Seattle. This was getting to be a trend; after our first reunion in D.C. ten of us joined John Gidmark for the Edmond Fitzgerald Ultra Marathon; when completed we had renamed the Duluth Death March. After Santa Fe, three of us once again joined Gidmark on a ten day canoe trip in the boundary waters of Quetico. After Boston five of us decided to visit Dan Shipp, who hosted our first reunion in D.C, and run the Marine Corps Marathon. The Grand Canyon after Chicago and before Seattle would fit in nicely with our other mini- adventure-reunions. Our rallying cry, "Drive On," began at Fort Benning when we thought we were pushed to our physical limits, Now "Drive On" became our rallying cry for our mini-reunion adventures. It was time to "Drive On!"

On our flight home my thoughts were not focused on the grand time we had in the "Windy City." Lynne and I loved Chicago. Al and Doris Perez had put on a super weekend for OC2-70 showing us their city; my focused was not on the book by Erik Larson, "Devil in the White City" that Lynne had purchased for me to read on the flight home. My reoccurring thought...is the Grand Canyon doable? From time to time I would get a nudge from Lynne, "A penny for your thoughts?" I would say, "Canyon thoughts and I'm thinking the OC2-70 Canyon trekkers would make a tasty meal for the Canyon condors!"

On the way home from Albuquerque Lynne was my sounding board. I would list the positives: we had survived infantry OCS, airborne, first duty assignment for shave-tail 2Lts and Vietnam...but that was 40 plus years ago! All of us, the nine, were into some type of physical exercise: running, hiking, swimming, biking, skiing, golfing. We weren't in bad physical condition...but hiking the Grand Canyon with a 30 or 40 pound pack would be a whole new ball game. The big question would be the March spring time weather. Would we be lucky or unlucky in hitting the weather window? Lucky or unlucky in getting a group permit? I guess, lucky or unlucky would be a matter of perspective? Lynne was a good sounding board and her standard

reply became...talk to the Grand Canyon guru, Hart.

The following morning I called the canyon guru and informed him I was the official OC2-70 Grand Canyon guide and he was more than welcome to tag along with the antiquelts...Hart's reply, "I'll think about it." Which was Marine diplomacy for, "I don't want to be part of that tasty antiquelts meal for canyon condors." Hart suggested instead of coffee some La Posta bike riding time. We could work on a little canyon cardio plus discuss the canyon trip. The bike ride was successful on both accounts. March would be the most practical month for obtaining a group permit, and we would just have to deal with the spring weather. The first priority, I would need a hard number before I turned in my reservation request for a Backcountry group permit. First of the month, four months prior to the proposed start month; three nights below the rim. We would descend South Kaibab, two nights at Bright Angel campground giving us a day to recoup and enjoy the canyon. Day 3 the 4.5 hike from the inner gorge to Indian Garden; day 4 our ascent from Indian Garden, Bright Angel trail, to the South Rim. I would fax our application for our group Backcountry permit, with three choices of dates, on 1-November-2010. We had a Grand Canyon Plan. Drive On!

My first priority was to confirm a hard number of Canyon trekkers. I sent a group email to all OC2-70 classmates that were in Chicago: **Once-in-a Life time opportunity to sign on for a four day/three night March 2011 Grand Canyon trek.** Instead of picking up numbers my numbers dropped by three...due to overseas travel and ski trips. We were down to seven the minimum number for a group permit. But, I had a hard number: Jim Cornwell, Boise, ID; Tom Corrigan, Worcester, MA; Tom Callahan, Loveland, CO; Todd Ezell, Kerrville, TX; Ron Linn, Manhasset, NY/Washington D.C./Iraq/Afghanistan; Bill Music, Dublin, OH.

The week before Thanksgiving we had our backcountry confirmation...3<sup>rd</sup> choice. Three night below the rim...10-11-March-Bright Angel campground; 12-March-Indian Garden campground. Now, we could start thinking about gear, conditioning and worrying about spring time Grand Canyon weather.

Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas! I'm sure there will be plenty of items on Santa's Christmas list...maybe high on the list should be a book on "Sanity."

Happy 2011!

Sixty-eight days before the Antiquelts rendezvous at the South Rim...time to make reservations. The Maswik won out on the Canyon lodging. Location! Location! Location! It was just across the railroad tracks from the backcountry ranger station where we would park our vehicles and catch the bus shuttle to South Kaibab trailhead, their cafeteria that had a great trail hiking breakfast menu and it was a short walk to the Canyon rim.

Santa had been good. A new three person tent for Cornwell, a new two person tent for Spence, and a very colorful tent for Callahan. Under other Christmas trees: hiking poles, hiking boots, camelbacks, and yak-traks for the snow or ice. There had been lot of discussion about packs; when talking packs or gear one name always came up, Kazak. Kazak was the old guy in OC2-70. An E-6, a soldier's --soldier; two tours Vietnam; airborne ranger, HALO (high altitude/low altitude qualified) and a chest full of medals. When Kazak spoke...we listened! On our first OCS field exercise Kazak dropped by each platoon the night before with this message, "Pack Right," "Pack Light!" Therefore, for the Canyon trip..."Pack Right," "Pack Light!" was at the top of our list...easier said than done.

Corrigan would be our S4 officer...the logistics guy...coordinating flight schedules, travel routes and possible pick-up points. Cornwell volunteered to purchase our LURPS (freeze dried food). Spence volunteered to bring the C-rations in the basement from another era...but had no takers!

The Grand Canyon trek was coming together...but Grand Canyon conditioning was a whole different story...time flies when you procrastinate. All of us were in the procrastination model!!...during the last year the Canyon trekkers had experience: rotator cuff surgery, ACL repair, knees scoped, lower back pain, possible surgery, sprained ankles...we should have been thinking John Hopkins or Mayo Clinic instead of trekking the Grand Canyon.

During January and February there were occasional emails from our S4-officer discussing airports, Phoenix or Las Vegas, possible flight schedules and travel routes, but for the most part Canyon chatter was light...until Sunday 27-February when the phone rang. It was "The Judge," Callahan, almost in tears making a tough call. He decided his four knee surgeries were not up to the steep descent of South Kaibab and he didn't want to experience the opportunity of being Medivac out of the Canyon. It was a blow...but I knew that "The Judge" had made the right call. A few minutes later the phone rang again, I was almost afraid to answer. "Hello." "C.J., Helenmarie Shipp here, just wanted to tell you that on 19-March the TC Williams boosters are dedicating an 8-oared shell, The Dan K. Shipp. I know Dan won't tell anyone, so would you get the message out to Dan's OC2-70 classmates?" "With pleasure," I said.

Early Monday morning I emailed the Dan K. Shipp 8-oared shell dedication to OC2-70 classmates. Read the email from our S4 officer, Corrigan. Flights schedules had been confirmed. Ezell driving from Kerrville would pick up Corrigan and Linn in Phoenix with a 4pm ETA at the Maswik; Cornwell driving from Boise would pick up Music in Las Vegas with a 6pm ETA. My reply, "I love it when a plan comes together!" Drive On!"

After reading Corrigan's email I called John Storbeck who would be hosting the 2012 OC2-70 reunion in Seattle and informed him first hand about the Dan K. Shipp 8-oared shell dedication, in Alexandria, VA. Before I hung up I reminded John that 6 not 7 Antiquelts would be gathering at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon 9-March, which just happened to be on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. Callahan had dropped out due to his knees and we had an opening. John didn't hesitate, "Count me in!" He would connect with Cornwell and Music in Vegas. John was our most dedicated runner and was approaching 30,000 miles in his runner log...but South Kaibab would be a test for his knees! Four years ago he started the Appalachian Trail in Maine ignoring Kazak rule, "Pack-Right" "Pack Light." John's knees called it quits after seven days. This time John would be listening to Kazak.

9-March-2011

Up and at 'em! It's not every day you become an official baby boomer headed to the Grand Canyon to do some hiking with your fellow Antiquelts. Excitement was in the air. The email and phone chatter had been heavy, even Jim's wife Linda had noticed. "Jim, your OCS classmates seemed to be a little excited...even CJ has been using his cell phone!"

During breakfast Lynne was going over my last minute check-off-list. Camera, phone, backcountry permit...a long silence...I had almost forgot the most important item...the backcountry permit was still in the dresser drawer in the extra bedroom, not in my back-pack. Thank-you Lynne!

On the drive to the Canyon I kept running through things to do before the Phoenix and Las Vegas

crew arrive: spend time at Mary Colter's Desert View Tower, a work of art and architecture; stops at Mather and Yavapai overlooks; Maswik check-in; drop by the Back-country Ranger Station for the latest weather and trail conditions; make Sunday dinner reservations at the El Tovar, walk the rim trail checking out the Canyon vistas trying to identify the rock layers using the Canyon mnemonic (Know the Canyon History Study Rocks Made in Time); enjoy the porch and rocking chairs of the El Tovar Hotel while people watching and waiting for ETA updates from the Phoenix and Vegas crews.

The mission had been successful except for a minor hiccup; the Maswik cafeteria was under going a major remodel which meant a short hike to Bright Angel restaurant for our Thursday morning kickoff South Kaibab breakfast. My cell phone was ringing. The Phoenix crew was at the Maswik and the Vegas crew was running an hour behind schedule which wasn't a bad thing. It would give the Phoenix crew time to recon the Canyon rim, check out Indian Garden from the rim and gain a perspective on our final Sunday morning climb from Indian Garden to the Canyon Rim five days from now. After the recon we would meet the Vegas crew at "We Cook Pizza and Pasta" in the village of Tusayan.

The rim was crowded with tourist their cameras clicking; as we walked up Ezell looked at the Canyon vista and said, "Is this it?" A couple from Kansas looked at him and said, "Are you crazy!" Todd laughed and said, "Probably, but isn't this magnificent!" After the cameras had stopped snapping, I pointed out Plateau Point, Indian Garden and the flagpole in front of the El Tovar Hotel and said, "Gentlemen, Sunday morning we will check out the flagpole, give a crisp military salute, saddle-up, and head to the rim! Now, it's time to move-out, link up with the Vegas crew and chow-down on some pizza and pasta. Drive On!

#### We Cook Pizza and Pasta

As we drove past the park entrance station, on our way to the small village of Tusayan for our pre-carbo-load dinner, we all agreed that the Lifetime twenty-five dollar Senior Pass to the National Parks and Federal Recreational Areas was the best deal going. As we pulled into the "We Cook Pizza and Pasta," parking lot we spotted the Vegas crew. After our OC2-70 "Bear Hugs" greeting, with a few stares from the locals, we got down to the serious business of ordering pizza; it seemed everyone was in the mood for margarita pizza. It was time for some serious carbo-loading and story-telling. The first topic Grand Canyon conditioning?" As the Grand Canyon date crept closer we kept trying to convince ourselves "Hey, if we are not in the best shape that's ok, we can always call on our body memory...humping in the jungles of Vietnam. Todd kept reminding us he didn't have that body memory. His last backpacking days were Ranger Week, January 1970 just before our graduation. He spent his time in Vietnam flying slicks. Todd needed to build some body memory. He came up with the most unique training schedule, his version of two-a-days; a two hour early morning hike and a two hour late afternoon hike with his day pack filled with golf balls. Between the early morning and late afternoon hikes, a round of golf...riding not walking. Music won the throw-back award. He would be hiking in his 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne jungle boots, carrying his trusted p38 around his neck, a plastic spoon in his pocket, a new C-ration stove, new heat tabs, 1971 iodine tablets and his signaling mirror; we all hoped he wouldn't need his signaling mirror! Maybe Bill knew something about body memory that we didn't? Corrigan won the "Oldie-Goldie" award...his Boy Scout mess kit! He still had his Boy Scout mess kit, unbelievable! Storbeck with memories of the Appalachian Trail won the Kazak award "Pack Right" "Pack Light." His pack just over 20-lbs. Linn won the travel award; Baghdad to D.C.; D.C. to NYC; NYC to Phoenix. Cornwell won the extra gear and food award...if you needed it...Jim had it! Spence won a boisterous "Happy Birthday" with the final toast. "I don't remember my 56<sup>th</sup> birthday but I will never forget my 65<sup>th</sup>!" Drive-On!

## South Kaibab

Our S4 officer, Corrigan, informed us before lights-outs, "Gentlemen Reveille 0600...roll call 0700...chow 0730...last equipment check 0830...shuttle bus departs Backcountry Information Center 0900.

Thursday morning roll-call all present and accounted for except for Linn...he was still on Baghdad time. As we walked past the mule corrals Music started calling cadence, "Look to your right, what to you see, a dirty old mule looking at me...sound off... we breathed in the good air..." "Good Morning Grand Canyon!"

The talking points during breakfast: we had hit the perfect window for Grand Canyon early March weather...70s during the day...40s at night. And, maybe we didn't need our yak-traks? Another point of emphasis this was not a race, we would enjoy the trek; lots of breaks, take lots pictures and enjoy the vistas. The 7-miles should take about 7-hours.

The Backcountry Information center was busy. Lots of serious spring-breakers with some serious backpacks. They were at the scales weighing their packs with non-believing eyes, "I can believe my pack is this heavy!" They started laughing when they realized they were reading kilograms instead of pounds. Except for Storbeck, our packs were in the 35-40 pound range...much lighter than the rucks we humped in Vietnam. Our shuttle was on time and it was full...a few comments, "Hey, Spence I thought you said there would be only a few hikers on the shuttle!" Ignoring the comments, I struck up a conversation with a young hiker who had a distinctive saguaro cactus hiking pole; he and his hiking buddies were from Indiana. When one of them said, "Go Hoosiers" this caught Storbeck's attention. His roommate in Basic, AIT and OCS was Jim Baird. From the back-of-the-bus Storbeck asked "Do you by chance know Jim Baird state representative from the 44<sup>th</sup> District?" In 2010 our OC2-70 classmate, PhD, Purdue pig farmer threw his hat into the political arena and won in a landslide. The young Hoosiers did not know representative Baird.

Our friendly bus driver, as we were departing, "It's not to late to call it off!" One of the young Hoosiers agreed to snaps a few pictures of the Antiquelts. We needed proof that we were of sound mind and body and we were really doing this. No more photo shoots, no more what-ifs, it was time to saddle-up and start our descent through, "The Chimney," the icy section of South Kaibab. The latest trail report patches of ice, yaktraks recommended through "The Chimney." Storbeck a few minutes later, "Heads-up, the brown-looking-dirt is ice!" At almost the same time I hit a patch of brown dirt. I went flying, face-first down the trail. Maybe it wasn't a good idea to leave the yaktraks in the car? After a quick mental check all body parts seemed to be working and there were no condors circling overhead! A few minutes later Linn went down falling backwards on his pack. When Cornwell asked about injuries, Linn's reply, "Just my ego!" Everyone else survived "The Chimney!" Our first good view of the Colorado River Ooh-Aah Point, not far from Cedar Ridge where we would take our first break. We had descended 1.5 miles and 1100' feet. Cedar Ridge is a popular destination for day hikers. During our break Ezell struck up a conversation with some Eco-tour group hikers. They asked Todd if we had trouble getting a backcountry permit. Todd replied, "It was easy...we got it this morning." They were in shock..."Unbelievable!" they said. As we were moving-out, our S4 officer dropped by and said, "Unbelievable, yes; we submitted our request 4-months prior with three start dates; we were lucky and got our third choice."

Cedar Ridge to Skeleton Point: this would be the easiest...1.5 miles with an elevation drop of 800'. This section had great views of the Canyon. The cameras were clicking. Skeleton Point

would be a good place for lunch and too re-group. We discovered everyone had a different hiking pace and keeping a tight group was not easy. Everyone was ready for a lengthy lunch break. From time to time we all kept getting up and walking to the edge checking out the tight switchbacks...the switchbacks were daunting.

Skeleton-Point to Tip-off 1.4 miles with an elevation drop of 1200' would get our attention. Tip-Off connects the east and west Tonto trail...you do not want to take the wrong trail at Tip-Off! Storbeck, our point and now recon would never let us take the wrong trail. On this section we lost our group cohesiveness. We came trickling in: Ezell, Corrigan, Spence, Music, Linn, Cornwell. Cornwell was doing a great job at drag...Cornwell walked by and reported to Storbeck, "Sir, Candidate Cornwell...all trekkers are accounted for Sir!" Tip-Off was a great place for afternoon brunch...time to hydrate and refuel but you had to beware of the two Ravens they were crafty thieves.

Tip-Off to the Black Suspension Bridge. The last section would be the toughest, 2.0 miles with an elevation drop of 1800' We were tired. Our bodies were talking to us. This was crunch-time. Time for that "Body Memory" recall. Time to check the sky for circling condors. A command decision was made before saddling-up and moving-out; Point-man Storbeck would not wait for us at the suspension bridge but keep trekking and secure our group campground; one of the group campgrounds had better accommodations than the other, so being first had its benefits. There were moans and groans as the saddled-up and headed down the trail. As we continued to step down the trail, Music said, "C.J. it's all about inertia. Inertia says a body in motion tends to stay in motion unless acted upon by an external force." And, for the last seven-hours our packs wanted to keep going down, as we stepped down those switchbacks, we were the external force stopping it as we completed each step. We have been doing squats or squats thrusts for 7-hours!" I replied, "Got-it...inertia!"

The tunnel before the Black Suspension Bridge we took our last break; a very long break as we discussed Bill's "inertia" which caused our aching sore bodies. Cornwell finally suggested if we were going to complete the hike in 7-hours we needed to get moving. Storbeck had "done-good!" We had the five-star campground. As Ezell's dropped his backpack, "Spence, this can't be a five-star campground there's no masseur or masseuse on call!" We had completed the 7-miles with an elevation drop of 4800' in just under 7-hours! Drive On!

### Bright Angel Campground

We needed only two tents. Linn and I decided to sleep on the cement ledges under the picnic shelter...Ezell decided to try Storbeck's technique of sleeping on top of picnic tables. In 1976 Storbeck decided to celebrate "The Bicentennial" by riding his bike across the U.S.A. John started in Astoria, Oregon the western most terminus of the Lewis and Clark Trail and ended at Surfrider Beach Club Seabright, NJ. During the cross-country trip Storbeck perfected sleeping on top of picnic tables. John would stop at small towns, check in at the police stations and asked permission to sleep in their town parks; the town parks had advantages: restrooms, picnic tables under covered shelters and the local law enforcement would check on John throughout the night. John would tie one end of a small rope around his wrist and the other end to the chassis of his bike. Ezell wasn't concerned about John's rope tying technique or about campground squirrels stealing his hiking boots but he was apprehensive about rolling off the picnic table.

We, "Grunts" learned early to take care of our feet. Now, it was time to give our tired "daws" some fresh air, a blister check and a cold water soak in

Bright Angel Creek. Ezell won the "Feet In Creek" award...7-minutes...that numbed his Canyon Toe (blood blister under the big toe-nail) and Cornwell won the "Funky Camp Shoes." He took more than a-little-ribbing with his Barefoot Running shoes.

After supper we broke out the single malt, one shot per canteen cup, and cigars. The tradition of single malt and cigars started at our reunion in Boston, hosted by Corrigan. Linn missed Boston. He was in Kabul, Afghanistan under the protective eyes of his two Gurkha bodyguards. Ron kept assuring us he was in good hands! In Boston, Music came up with the idea that at our next reunion in Savannah, GA we would celebrate Ron's safe return with single-malt and Gurkha cigars. Eighteen months later on the balcony of Savannah's historic Marshall House Music passed out the Gurkhas and the Antiquelts toasted Ron's safe return. Now, in the inner gorge of the Grand Canyon it was time to continue that tradition.

Campground chatter is usually about tents, camping gear, food, hiking conditions or trails, but 10-March-2011 it was all about the evening ranger program at Phantom Ranch amphitheater...the bulletin board area was crowded with campers talking about Ranger A.J. The Antiquelts were undecided...the amphitheater was a long ¼ mile, a Kazak ¼ mile, and our "Body Memory" had not recovered from our 7-hour hike. In the final tally only Music and Spence made the hike. We arrived early and the amphitheater was full. When Ranger A.J. kicked off his 7:30pm evening program, "How the Grand Canyon Was Formed," to a standing-room crowd. The first 15-minutes was a quick 101 geology lesson on the living, breathing earth. A.J.'s analogy...think of earth as a chocolate coated peanut (core, mantle, crust.) Then he was off and running about tectonic plates, volcanic eruptions in Indonesia and Iceland, and earthquakes in New Zealand, Chile and Haiti. If Ranger A.J. had been teaching geology 101 to a classroom of college freshmen after his lecture there would have been 100 freshmen changing their majors to geology. Ranger A.J. was passionate about geology, passionate about the Grand Canyon and his passion carried over to his ranger talk. I have been to many National Park Ranger's evening programs...but this was the first one where the Park Ranger received a standing ovation.

11-March was a recoup day. A day to relax, short hikes, soak feet in Bright Angel Creek or the muddy Colorado, and have our first Canyon breakfast of LURPS, a lot different from our C-rations in Vietnam. Granola and blueberries was the LURP of choice. As I poured hot water into Corrigan's packet Storbeck said, "Tom, the directions say use cold water!" Corrigan, "Who reads directions?" Corrigan, gave the hot water granola/blueberry a thumbs-up with the same enthusiasm as we gave the ice-cream sandwich the night before. After breakfast Phantom Ranch was at the top of our to-do-list. Mary Jane Colter's Phantom Ranch dining hall and cabins had set the style for the rustic architecture of our Western National Parks, now called "Parkitecture."

In front of the Phantom Ranch dining hall we were trying to one-up-each other...Ezell, "Spence, this is what I call a five star accommodations! "Todd, no way this could be five star there's no masseur or masseuse on call!" On cue, just like in a theater production, coming up the trail was a colorful troupe of young people; for once the Antiquelts were speechless... a few sat at the outside table...a few went inside...but they said, "Nothing!" After numerous questions the table...a few went inside...but they said, "Nothing!" After numerous questions the silence was broken...they were not actors, not a troupe, but river rats on a 24-day float trip. Each day on the river brought out a different theme...today's theme, "Mardi Gras!" They were an eclectic group: New Zealand, Australia, Germany and ten different states...this had to be a photo shoot.

Mid-afternoon the EMT Ranger dropped by campsite and asked if anyone had any injuries or concerns; Ezell with his knife out ready to drill in the top of his Canyon Toe asked, "Do you make house calls?" "Kind of," he replied. I will show you how perform the painless needle technique which is less painful than drilling a hole in the top of your toe-nail." The ranger gave Todd a sterilized needle and explained how to slide the needle under the toe nail. He kept reassuring Todd it was painless. Todd's cheering section yelling, "Amputate! Amputate!" All of us were a little doubtful ,especially Todd, about the painless part. But, never doubt a ranger...mission was successful!

After supper the Antiquelsts decided to make the Kazak ¼ mile hike for the evening ranger talk "You ask the Ranger?". AJ was good and fielded a smorgasbord of questions. Amazingly, A.J. answered all questions...we all came away more knowledgeable about Canyon snakes, spiders, squirrels, deer, mountain lions and California Condors. One of A.J. tidbits that caught our attention; last year's high summer temperature at Bright Angel Ranger Station...145 degrees! There's no doubt, in our minds, hike the Canyon in the spring not the summer!

### Bright Angel to Indian Garden

Time to say good-bye to Bright Angel campground. Our first leg 1.5 miles to River Resthouse with an elevation gain of 0-feet! Numbers can be deceptive...The elevation of Bright Angel Campground 2480'/River Resthouse 2480'. You would think this leg would just be a gentle stroll. There was nothing gentle about the 1.5 miles! Short, steep, ascents and descents with over a mile of exposed sand dunes. This stretch of trail had our attention. As we were trudging through the sand dunes I asked, "Does anyone remember the Sean Connery movie, "The Hill?" A unanimous response, "No!" "It was a great WW11 movie set in North Africa. Sean Connery refused to obey orders and was sent to this hell-hole of a British military prison. The prison had a sadistic sergeant who made the prisoners run a steep man made sand dune in full gear for punishment until they could run no more!" "Hey, C.J. was the name of the sadistic sergeant, Spence?" After the sand dunes we took a much needed break at the River Resthouse.

Indian Garden is a little oasis with a small creek running through the campground. Storbeck forged ahead and secured our group campsite. Having the lightest pack has advantages; but when Storbeck volunteered to carry out the trash...with our sticky, smelly, cigars that advantage took a turn south. From Indian Garden we could see the flag pole in front of the El Tovar which would be our focus the next morning. Our game plan, after an extended lunch break, hike to Plateau Point...Plateau Point never happened. Everyone was enjoying our little oasis and telling and listening to stories. Ezell had one of the better ones.

Our Hook'em Horns tennis player, 2LT Ezell, after graduation was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard.) With limited time 2LT Ezell developed a noon day tennis workout. One day walking off the tennis courts Ezell was approached by a Major, General Westmoreland's aid, with a question, "Did you play tennis for UT. Ezell replied, "Yes." Ezell asked, "Were you the Aggies tennis coach?" The Major replied, "Yes." After the brief conference between the Horns and Aggies 2LT Ezell would be General Westmoreland noon day tennis opponent.

A few months later 2LT Ezell had a meeting with the battalion S4 officer about an upcoming field exercise. 2LT Ezell reported and discovered quickly that the Major didn't like 2LTs, especially 2LTs in The Old Guard. The Major kept 2LT Ezell at "stand-at-ease" and began to grill the young LT when the phone started to ring...when the ringing stopped there was a knock at the door, the door opened slowly and the Major's secretary stepped in, "Sir, General



Westmoreland on line-1 for LT Ezell.” It was Westmoreland’s aid changing the tennis match from 12:30 to 1pm. The Major didn’t miss a beat, 2LT Ezell went back to “stand-at-ease” and the grilling continued...the phone once again started to ring...once again, when the ringing stop, on cue the Major’s secretary stepped in “Sir, the White House on line-1 for LT Ezell.” This time confirming time and dress for the upcoming White House State Dinner. 2LT Ezell started to return to “stand-at-ease” when the Major said, with a high pitched voice, “Uh-what did you say you needed LT?”

The Indian Garden evening ranger talk, “Kolb Brothers (Emery and Ellsworth). They were dare-devil photographers and river runners who in 1911 ran the Colorado River and produced the first motion pictures of the Grand Canyon. We thought we might dropped by the historic Kolb Studio on our way out. Before turning in...no lights-outs... S4 officer Corrigan, “Gentlemen, Reveille 0600...moving out 0800...Kolb Studio at the rim 1400.

The next morning gazing at the snow-cap rim and the El Tovar flagpole I said, “Gentlemen, at 1800 we will be enjoying fine wine and steaks in the historic El Tovar dinning room.” With brisk salutes... “Drive On!” as we headed up the trail.

Our long, mid-morning, rest stop, Three-Mile-House...1.9 miles with an elevation gain 942’. As we dropped our packs, we noticed a silhouette of yoga movements against the rock-out-cropping, we all moaned, “If only, we had that flexibility!” She was a yoga instructor from Berkeley and she would have blended in beautifully with the eclectic river rats. When we asked about trail conditions from Mile-and-a-Half to the Rim she didn’t minced words...hazardous...perilous...treacherous. Cornwell, “Same as, “Gawd-awful!” Ezell, “I will trade you five LURP Ice-Cream sandwiches for one of your Yaktraxs...she smiled, “No deal!”

Time to saddle-up for our next 1.5 miles to Mile-and-a-Half House; in that short distance with an elevation gain of 981’ the Canyon went from spring time to winter time. Mile-and-a Half House was in deep winter. Music flashed back to an earlier time when the drill sergeants would give breaks and say, “Smoke’em if you got’em!” Music version, “Yaktrax’em if you got’em!” No doubt our last 1.5 mile leg to the rim would be treacherous. The first .8-of-a-mile wasn’t bad; but huge contrast in hiking conditions...north facing slopes deep winter... snow, patches of ice, and red and green mud. The south facing slopes springtime. On the stretch of never-ending switchbacks, we would picked the most favorable south facing slopes for our breaks. On our last break before the first tunnel Cornwell spotted two condors riding the thermals high above the canyon wall truly a magnificent bird! Definitely this was the perfect spot to take a break. At the first tunnel I let out a war-whoop, “.2 tenths-of-a-mile-to-go!” As Cornwell exited the tunnel and looked towards the rim he smiled, “Spence you must be talking a Kazak .2-of-a-mile?” No doubt, I was brain-dead. The first tunnel on the ascent is .7 miles from rim and this section had the most treacherous ice.

As we began slowly negotiating the skating rink, the non yaktraxers were thinking, “Maybe we should have made our “Last Will and Testament!” The trail traffic was picking up and many of the young day hikers seemed oblivious to the trail conditions. Music was in front of me. “Bill remember your explanation about “inertia” on our final descent to Black Suspension Bridge? “So, here’s my ascent “inertia” thought. “The oblivious, ice-skating, hikers coming down the trail are bowling balls and we are going to be the bowling pins!”

We had reached a section of ice that neither Ezell or Spence could negotiated...we kept slip-sliding and losing yardage. Linn stop me and said, “C.J. remember during Ranger Week when we were on night recon and you dropped out of site and I had to pulled you out of a Georgia

swamp...now 40-years later I'm hauling you out of the Grand Canyon," he chuckled as he gave me one of his yaktraks. A few yards up the trail, Music was pushing Ezell toward the red and green mud. A hundred yards later the second tunnel "War-whoops!" with some serious high-fives. I moved up the trail to take pictures as the antiquelts exited the tunnel. A beautiful lady, our age, came hiking up the trail. She looked like she had just stepped out of latest outdoor magazine; in fact that was my comment as she went by. She stopped, "Well, thank-you. I always say, a woman should look her best at all times. My husband and I hiked from Phantom Ranch this morning. Isn't this such a beautiful hike. I was speechless.

At the rim, Pointman Storbeck directed us away from Kolb Studio. He thought the green, muddy, mule trail was shorter and safer. During the short hike to the rim Storbeck broke the devastating news of Japan's 9.0 earthquake and tsunami. Music and I glanced at each...Ranger A.J's, 10-March, evening talk... about the living, breathing, earth and the movement of tectonic plates! As we topped out at the rim Ezell spotted a family in full Hook'em Horns regalia... of course, they would be more than happy to take our group photo.

One more saddle-up... moving down the hiking path to the Maswik... Music started calling cadence:

I don't know, they say it's rough  
Canyon trails are mighty tough.

No way we gonna fail  
Marchin' down the Kaibab Trail.

Now we see the end in sight  
Bright Angel Trail is on the right.

Spence is always in the know  
Tunnel's there, quarter mile to go.

Hiked the quarter no end in sight...  
More climb and ice a deadly fright!

Sound off!

We were sitting outside our rooms on the second floor enjoying cool ones with salty nuts when Cornwell smiles, "You know, Spence the North Rim does look inviting!" Sounds of Silence... "Drive On!"