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## **I Missed Reserved Meetings for Seven Years ... and I'm Still Happy about It!**

**by Jacob G. Hornberger**

Democrats are taking President Bush to task for missing a year of monthly meetings in the National Guard, which he presumably joined in an attempt to avoid being sent to fight in the Vietnam War. Apparently believing that skipping such meetings is something to be ashamed of, Bush is being circumspect about the entire episode.

Nonsense! He ought to be taking the same attitude about those meetings that I do: I didn't attend those monthly meetings for seven out of the eight years I served in the Reserves and, some 30 years later, I'm still as happy as I can be about it!

During the first three years I was at Virginia Military Institute — 1968–71 — I was faced with the prospect of being sent to Vietnam. During my freshman and sophomore years, I had bought into the standard government line that the war in Vietnam was being fought for freedom and democracy; and during those two years, I was what might be called “gung-ho,” even joining an elite military unit known as VMI Rangers during my junior year.

It was during my junior year (1970–71), however, that I began breaking through to the truth and recognizing the U.S. government lies surrounding the Vietnam War. By the time I was a senior, every time an announcement was made in the mess hall about a VMI graduate dying in Vietnam, I knew that he had sacrificed his life for nothing or, more accurately, for a worthless cause based on official lies and deception.

(By this time, much of the VMI cadet corps had turned against the war, much to the chagrin of the VMI administration. I still smile when I think of the reaction of the VMI administration to the large number of cadets who sought permission to attend an anti-war rally at Washington and Lee University, which is adjacent to VMI, to hear a talk by the famous anti-war radical Jerry Rubin. While the administration reluctantly granted the request, it made an interesting exception to a VMI regulation that required VMI cadets to wear their uniforms while visiting Washington and Lee. Apparently wanting to avoid any embarrassing photographs

popping up in the press, the administration not only decided to temporarily rescind the rule but actually prohibited cadets from wearing their uniforms to the rally.)

One day during my senior year (1971–72) an army officer walked into our military science class and announced that because of our withdrawal from Vietnam (the best thing President Nixon ever did), manpower requirements for the military were being significantly reduced. Anyone who would like to trade his 2-year active-duty commitment (to which we had obligated ourselves) for a commitment entailing 3 months of active duty and 8 years in the Reserves was asked to raise his hand. I raised my hand so fast my arm hurt for a week!

After graduation from VMI, I received a commission as an infantry officer, with an 8-year Reserve commitment hanging over my head (with the prospect of having to attend 96 monthly Reserve meetings!), but at least the prospect of fighting and dying in Vietnam for a worthless cause — and one based on lies and deception — was no longer a threat.

The Army agreed to defer my 3-month active-duty commitment, and I entered law school at the University of Texas in the fall of 1972. UT is located in Austin, and the reason that's significant is that Austin was what might have been called "Hippy Heaven" during the 1960s and 1970s. That meant not only that the city attracted multitudes of draft resisters and anti-war activists, but also that the Reserve units in the area were filled to capacity with the rich and influential kids who used the Reserves and the Guard as a "respectable" way to avoid being sent to Vietnam, since everyone knew that the military's policy at that time was not to use Guard and Reserve units for Vietnam. (Those who experienced the "honor" of being sent to fight and die for "freedom and democracy" in Vietnam were mostly the members of the regular Army and the kids who were being drafted; the draftees mostly consisted of those who lacked the money and political influence to get into the Guard and Reserves.) That meant that there was no room available for the Army to assign me to a Reserve unit in Austin during my law-school years. After four years savoring the wonders and beauties of military life at VMI, I was one happy camper over that situation because it meant that I didn't have to attend those monthly Reserve meetings!

On graduating from law school (and after having served 3 months on active duty at infantry school at Ft. Benning, Georgia), I returned to my hometown of Laredo, Texas, to practice law. It seemed that the Army sort of forgot that I even existed because even though I notified it of my change of address, I didn't hear from it for a few more years ... until one day at the start of the seventh year of my Reserve commitment, when a set of military orders arrived at my home advising me to report to a U.S. Army Reserve detachment in Laredo.

By that time I had completed 6 years of my 8-year Reserve commitment without having had to attend a single monthly Reserve meeting, so you can imagine my dismay at this turn of events! I immediately wrote letters and made telephone calls asking to be relieved of those orders. One reason I cited was the demands arising from my law practice, but because Reserve meetings are held on weekends the Army didn't find that argument very persuasive.

I employed what I considered to be my most convincing argument, one that I was sure the Army would accept in relieving me of having to attend those meetings. The Reserve unit in Laredo was a supply unit, which meant that it was a *support* unit rather than a *combat* unit. I told the Army, “I’m a combat officer. What could be more humiliating and demeaning for an infantry officer than to be assigned to a supply unit? You can’t do this to me!”

Well, they could, and they did. During the seventh year of my 8-year commitment, I reported to my first monthly Army Reserve meeting — with my short-hair wig on, of course. Ironically, a friend from elementary school who had been in the corps at Texas A&M had received the same orders I had and felt the same way I did — and so the Laredo unit had two new lieutenants, both of whom had attended military colleges, and neither of whom was very excited to attend these meetings.

Since Laredo was 150 miles away from the nearest city, there really wasn’t anyone around for a supply unit to deliver supplies to. So during much of the weekend, the men would ... well ... just sit around (or, even worse, hurry up and wait), which actually is pretty much the nature of military life everywhere. Given that there were important sports events being played on the weekends, my fellow lieutenant Doug brought in a television set so we could watch football, basketball, and baseball.

At the end of one year of boring and ridiculous monthly Reserve meetings, I put in another request to the Army suggesting that they ought to consider relieving me from having to attend any more monthly meetings in order to make room for another officer to experience the honor and pleasure of them. Lo and behold, the Army granted my request! So out of my 8-year Reserve commitment requiring 96 monthly Reserve meetings, I’m pleased to say that I had to attend only 12 monthly meetings in all (and no two-week summer camps either!). While I would have preferred none, I’m grateful that it was only 12.

At the end of my eighth year, the Army sent me a letter saying that if I would agree to re-up for a few more years in the Reserves, they would promote me. I’m happy to say that even though I still might not have had to attend those monthly Reserve meetings, I took the honorable discharge instead. As President Bush says, that’s the bottom line anyway.

*Mr. Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation and delivered the 1972 [valedictory address](#) at Virginia Military Institute.*

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