

UB: INDUCTEE

This was a remembrance I'd written in college after I'd survived my two years in the Army.

Early in April 1969 my brother Steve and my cousin Luke decided to take advantage of concurrent spring vacations to see a ball game during the week. Me? I was due to report for induction in a week, so I was available and looking for a good time. After a few friends dropped in at the house, and after a few phone calls were made, there were six of us going to see the Phillies play the Pirates. Chuck was looking for funds, but Joe, John, and I scraped together the necessary train fares. The midday sun beat strongly on the station platform. It was warm for early spring and we all wore light jackets. It was stuffy on the train heading south from Bristol – many were smoking and the tinted windows created a greenhouse heat. [Yes, I used the term “greenhouse” in 1973.]



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Old Connie Mack [Stadium] was a short hike from the North Philly station — not a challenge, since of late I had been walking more to prepare for the long marches ahead. We hopped over the westbound tracks and followed an old freight line for a hundred yards, sparkles blinding us from the broken glass which collects around all tracks. This jaunt brought us to the rear of the stadium and the high right field wall, a challenge to all hitters. Across the street, facing the wall, was an endless row of houses all painted a uniform pale yellow with brown trim. We walked down this block in a crowd, listening to the businessmen — their expectations of the game and their methods of getting the afternoon off.

As we turned the corner and walked the length of the left field bleachers, we saw fans converging on the main gate where general admission tickets were on sale. It appeared as if everyone had walked to the park that day, but actually they were walking from wherever they had parked. On a weekend they might have parked as many as ten blocks away behind a gas station, but this was Thursday. We were counting on good seats for just a dollar. Ticket, program, and souvenir sellers all wore smiles — the Phillies had won their first two games of the season. Would this game be a third straight win? (Would I get a last minute deferment?)

Our tickets were for section 42. As we weaved through the crowd in the refreshment area, we smelled the coffee, hot dogs, and hot chocolate. We had skipped lunch to take the noon train to town, but finding our seats was more important just then seats first, eats later. We passed from the hazy, commercial underworld up the runway numbered 42 into the bright clear daylight. We were pleased to find that the section was chock full of empty seats, and that we were situated above and behind first base. We quickly sat because the starting lineups were then flashing on the scoreboard. The field was a well-groomed deep green. It would be a couple of months before the sun burned brown the most trodden patches.

We stood for the National Anthem. The flag high above the centerfield wall showed the wind to be brisk and out of the West; however, as the breeze entered the stadium, it swirled throughout in all directions. "... and the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air..." I realized that the sun was behind the wall in back of us and that, although the field and the outfield seats would enjoy warmth, we would be in a shadow all afternoon. The crowd cheered as the War of 1812 came to its courageous conclusion. The game began.

During the second inning Steve got up to seek out the nearest refreshment counter and grab a hot dog. He mumbled something like "tell me what happens" as he left because the Phillies were at bat. Tony Taylor, the speedy little Cuban second baseman, ducked under four pitches and walked to first base. On the second pitch to Don Money, Taylor scampered to second — a steal! The Phillies even looked as if they wanted to win. A vendor came down the aisle and very quickly five franks and five hot chocolates were ordered, distributed, and paid for.

I was just getting my change when Money connected with a solid drive to right-center that dropped in front of [Roberto Clemente](#). Taylor scored easily and Philadelphia took the lead. As I chomped down on my hotdog, Darren Johnson blasted the first pitch into the upper deck in left — two more runs! Steve came dashing down the aisle, orange soda sloshing out of his cup, yelling, "What's going on?" As the roar of the crowd

indicated, he had missed something. As it turned out he had missed the only three runs scored the entire game. We twisted the knife when we showed him the eats that we'd obtained without leaving our seats.

Although the rest of the game was well pitched, it lacked the action that would have kept the blood circulating. I shivered and tapped my feet. I looked up and strained to see the rafters under the roof. They were inhabited by pigeons but, as dark as it was, bats could easily have perched there instead. The crack of an enemy bat, like a rifle shot, brought me back to the game. Fortunately the ball curved foul before striking the right field wall. I thought of those row homes being bombarded by the titanic home runs that left this park. Even then that high wall must've been casting a cold shadow on their front porches.

I brought my legs together to retain some body heat and wondered where they would be a year hence. Would they still be a part of the rest of me? I observed that, even though Woody Fryman was striking out batters, his pitches were high, and that not too far into this season, when the hitters had developed their timing, they would be "killing" balls that high. I made a wish that I could be around to see the hitters get their timing, but I knew I wouldn't be. I'd have to settle for just the final scores in the Stars & Stripes. I then wished for the time to read an occasional newspaper overseas.

"Let's beat it!" We had just 10 minutes to catch the 4:18. From my Drexel commuter days I remembered that this train was no joy ride. Marking the end of a fun day, the sun took on a burnt orange color as we wandered here and there on the platform. We all acknowledged an enjoyable trip, and that it had been too long since the last time. Everyone had various remarks to make about the tricky weather and about dressing warmer the next time. It would be a couple of years until I had to worry about being warm enough at a ball game. The sun disappeared, and my count of the days left to go dropped by one more.