

# The Bonds of War

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Members of the University of Georgia class of 1943 who participated in ROTC were required to attend school year-round in 1942 in order to graduate in December, six months earlier than the usual June schedule. On January 3, 1943, we reported to Fort Benning for 13-weeks of training and instruction at Office Candidate School (OCS). The men who completed OCS successfully were commissioned Infantry Second Lieutenant on April 7th, 1943. The accompanying picture includes thirty-one members of the UGA class December 42 and thirty recent graduates of the University of Iowa. The remaining 120 men came from various units where they had been privates or non-commissioned officers.

The ROTC experience had begun for most of us in September 1939—two years before the bombing of Pearl Harbor—but as time passed there was less and less doubt that we were headed into a war experience of some kind. My father was an infantry veteran of WWI combat in France so I understood some of what it would be like, though we had been told not to expect 'trench warfare'. Those four years of training—with classes and drill in all kinds of weather—had the effect of deepening our friendships so that the assignment to Fort Benning with 30 other candidates we knew was a Godsend. We studied, slept, ran, crawled and ate in alphabetical order. Our experiences gave us the opportunity to be and to make supportive friends throughout the group. Even the faces whose features are hard to discern in this picture bring emotions of respect and sadness and humor!

The infrequent messages between us and/or survivors over the years have brought news of honors, awards and promotions. They represent, however, only a fraction of the acts of heroism many of which will never be described—or known. I do know that the kind of bond I am trying to describe occurs many times in human experience, then and now. It is to be cherished, honored and remembered.

The following quote from Mike Norman's book *These Good Men* is appropriate as I try to describe the bonds experienced and the emotions shared:

I know why men who have been to war yearn to reunite. . . Comrades gather because they long to be with men who once acted their best. . . I did not pick these men. They were delivered by fate and the military. But I know them in a way I know no other men. . . They were willing to guard something more precious than my life. They would have carried my reputation—the memory of me. It was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were so willing to die for one another. As long as I have memory I will think of them all.