

# REPUBLICAN PERSPECTIVE

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## Two-Star Lunch



In the Army of the 1950s (and maybe today, for all I know) certain work is done by detailees rather than permanent assignments. Typical among these are mess duty (kp) and various forms of guard duty. Like most soldiers who never advanced beyond PFC, I frequently drew such details during my almost-three-years at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

During the summer of 1958, our “full bird” Battalion Commander decided to hold a Battalion picnic, perhaps in honor of the Fourth of July---but I’m not sure. He invited the Post and Division Commander, General William Westmoreland, and Mrs. Westmoreland. I happened to draw kp duty that day.

Of course, the Westmorelands were seated as guests of honor at the head table. The Battalion Commander was seated next to the General. Someone would have to serve them. As the most highly educated of his kp’s (I’d had two months of college before flaming out, just after turning 17), the mess sergeant picked me. I was given a white tunic and was told (in stronger language) not to foul up---not to spill the Westmorelands’ lunch.

Under the watchful and surely nervous eyes of the mess sergeant and the Battalion Commander, I completed my deliveries. The Battalion photographer captured the moment for posterity. It lives on in my photo album of that era. I don’t know whether the photo also graces a page in the Westmoreland album.

I had carried out my precarious mission. There had been no mishaps---no spill on the General or his wife, or anywhere else for that matter. The bird Colonel was home free, the mess sergeant was home free and---best of all---I was home free. My moment of military glory was assured.

But not all details are as inherently benign, mundane, or free from pitfalls as kp---even kp with a two-star General involved.

As I mentioned, there were various forms of guard duty. One of these was called "prison chaser." Fort Campbell had a stockade (jail) for military prisoners who had been court martialed and sentenced to confinement.

While the operation of the stockade was (as I remember) under the jurisdiction of the Military Police, detailees were drawn from throughout the units on post to supplement the MP's. This detail was the prison chaser. An unpleasant and sometimes scary assignment.

The job of the prison chaser was to guard inmates who were temporarily outside the stockade. Perhaps on a work detail, perhaps a trip to the dental clinic, and so on.

By now you realize the kp story was a tease. It's the prison chaser system that I want to tell you about, and how it could interface with our criminal justice system.

But I've used up my space telling you about my luncheon with the Westmorelands, so the prison chaser will have to wait for a future column.