The plan was to write a little about what memories I had of OCS, that was part 1. And then a little about the rest of my time in the Army, that was part 2. Both done.

And that leaves part 3, a quick trip through the 43 years since I got out of the Army. As before, I go on a bit. You don't have to read it.  :-)

Peter

Part 3 — After the Army, Life

First the basics. I met Gail about the time my Army stint was finishing up, and we got married in 1973, the day Secretariat won the Triple Crown at Belmont. Much to her grandmother’s dismay, we pulled out a TV during the reception to watch the race. Every year since then, when I hear people talking about the Triple Crown, I know I have to concentrate extra hard to try to remember our anniversary. This year especially, as number 40 is coming in a couple of weeks.

No kids, neither of us we really eager. I often wonder about that, wondered what life would have been like with kids. No way of knowing, of course. It certainly has made things easier financially, but that was never a consideration.

No career to speak of. A little time trying out life in a small business, didn’t really like it as I walked away with the feeling that I didn’t care for the ethics of many folks I was dealing with. After that we moved to New England (I grew up in NW Connecticut), to western Massachusetts, first for 9 years in Amherst where the state university is, and then the last 30 in the small town of Sunderland.

A running friend had the idea that he and I and one other guy ought to start a magazine about very long-distance running, ultramarathons, so I drifted into that. It turned out to be more substantial and more successful that I would have imagined. Spent 15+ years doing that, mostly running the business side, also a bunch of writing and editing. Quite enjoyed it, worked very hard some weeks, hardly at all others. Sold it when the internet came along, didn’t seem to me like that boded well for print publications.

And the next thing, again just sort of drifted into, back to my finance roots, a tax business, been doing that for about 15+ years. I work like crazy for 3 months, hardly work at all for the other 9. Not so bad. I have too many clients for the available hours, but I like most of them, just ordinary people whom I feel like I’m giving a good service to at a reasonable rate. Makes me feel good about myself.

Others things. Health is generally good though there have been issues. Memory is disappearing, eyesight is not so good, hair is mostly gone (I’ve always had bad hair, so it’s not really a big loss), had a hernia fixed a year ago. Major bump in the road was prostate cancer about 5 years ago. My dad had that, so when my PSA numbers went up I paid attention. It took about a year to deal with, first a couple of biopsies, with the second showing mid-level cancer, then figuring out what to do, and prostate cancer is a pisser, because it is not at all clear what to do – surgery, radiation in one of a couple of different ways, or even nothing at all on the theory that something else will get you first. Did a bunch of research, opted for surgery. Seems like it was successful, that all the cancer was contained in the prostate. My plumbing works a little differently, but it still works just fine. And I didn’t have to put up with radiation or chemo. Cancer lite really. (Note: I can’t imagine I’m the only one dealing with this. If anyone wants more details, I’m always happy to talk. And one of the best things I did was be public about it from day 1. It made what is a very scary journey a whole lot less difficult.)

Sports. I think what I would really have liked to be in life was a professional athlete, but you need a different body for that. But I like being active. At some point in the early 1970s I discovered the sport of orienteering, found out I was really good at it, and I’ve been enjoying it ever since. And it also brought a few unexpected surprises:

<http://www.petergagarin.org/misc/wheatiesstory.html>

<http://www.attackpoint.org/viewlog.jsp/user_62/period-1/enddate-2008-12-21>

The orienteering also got me into running, just for fitness at first, and then into trail running and eventually marathons and ultramarathons, did I think 8 100-mile runs and maybe 25 50-milers and a bunch of marathons over the years. I won’t deny that there was some pain, but always wonderful adventures. I’m still doing the orienteering regularly, still running regularly, everything slower of course but still better than giving up. Last ultra was a 50-miler about 4 years ago, I thought that was the end of them, but for some reason I signed up for another, two weeks from now. Not sure if I will make it or not, but I have already gotten a lot of pleasure out of the anticipation. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

And I have also returned to the game of golf, which I played as a kid and then quit for 25 years when real life intruded. My game is neither great nor terrible, but I have made a great deal of progress on the mental side, enjoying it more and more, getting pissed less and less, having a couple of good friends to share a few hours with from time to time. I just wish it hadn’t taken me so many decades to make this progress, but better late than never.

Politics. The is an old saying to the effect that if you aren’t a liberal when you are young then you don’t have a heart, and if you aren’t a conservative when you are old then you don’t have a brain. I guess I have neither, as I’ve gradually moved from a conservative kid, certainly far removed from the student protests of the 60s, to a left-center old man, I’m guessing (though based on no facts) a fair bit removed from OCS classmates. So be it.

My involvement in politics has been strictly at the local level in Sunderland. First was getting on the Finance Board in Sunderland, and then chair of it for half a dozen years, responsible for the town’s budget and oversight of its financial affairs. Presenting the budget at annual town meeting in front of a couple of hundred people, well, it was far from the only time I thought back to my OCS training, feeling stressed, but also feeling like I knew how to deal with the stress, how to think on my feet, how to project a voice out to a crowd. Then a few years on the school committee, then after that they talked me into being on the building committee for a new library. That was an experience, almost all good, and I smile every time I go by the building.

<http://www.attackpoint.org/viewlog.jsp/user_62/period-1/enddate-2007-09-02>

Friends. I have always been lousy at making friends, and then if I did make any, keeping them. Lonely all through my youth and early adult years. Kept up with no one from school or college or the Army. Orienteering was the one exception, a bunch of good friends for the last 30 or 40 years, perhaps the reason I have stayed with it. But I still get mostly failing marks in social matters. It just doesn’t come easily. Some things I think you are just genetically hard-wired for.

And finally, family. A brother and a sister. Another brother shot himself in the early 70s, he had drug problems, very sad. My dad died a decade ago. We didn’t get on too well and I didn’t see him the last few years. He was very smart, very accomplished, very sure of himself, but somehow I just couldn’t deal with him, and that was sad too. My brother has two kids, both wonderful. My mom, 94, is still alive. I never had much of a bond with her, she was always very private and reserved, so the last 3 years have been a bit of a surprise, as I now am in charge of her life. She still lives at home in Connecticut a couple of hours away, but now she needs 24-hour care. So I have 6 employees and I visit every week to deal with whatever needs dealing with. I never would have imagined being in this situation. I mean, I never really liked her. But at a certain point there was no choice. She fell, she got hurt, she was in the hospital, she wanted to be back home, and with my brother in Texas and my sister not able/willing (she could have used a little OCS training), it fell on me.

Honestly, I thought she might live a few months at most. Now it looks like she’s not going anywhere soon. She has not so much of a life – almost blind, very hard of hearing, has to be fed, liquid foods only, needs help with everything, also pretty bad dementia. It doesn’t seem like her life is much fun. But we take care of her as well as possible, and somehow I find myself willingly doing this for this person I never really loved. And it is all OK.

Who knows how many years we have left. Who knows what will happen. I have never known what I wanted to do. Things have just happened. But I am certainly happier than when I was young. There are always things you wish had been different, but fortunately also a lot of things that bring a smile. And that is not so bad.