
Chapter 4

The Citadel

Another pivotal change

Well, the party was over and along with that, my fifteen weeks of English classes ended. We passed all of our exams and prepared ourselves for departure to our designated colleges. My group, which consisted of twenty-five students, left Lackland AFB for a military school called “The Citadel” in Charleston, South Carolina.

We arrived at the Charleston airport around 2:00 am that day in early August of 1974. There was a big tour-bus right outside of the airport waiting for us along with a cadet officer, who was there to



greet and escort us to our assigned battalion and company at the Citadel.

As we were traveling toward our school, I noticed the city and its beautiful surroundings, with many waterways, bridges, and well-lit roads. I also saw many signs saying “The Citadel” along our way, making me proud to be part of that city and school. The school was well known not only in the city of Charleston, but also in the state of South Carolina and United States of America; for many students came from all over the USA to attend. We represented an international contingent, invited by the USA. A few of the other countries represented were Germany and Thailand.

We arrived at the college around 4:00 am. The bus went through a tall iron gate and a guard who was standing by the gate motioned his hand for our bus to go in after he recognized the cadet officer who was on board. The bus headed towards our battalions, which also had huge columns on all four corners with high walls. I couldn’t help but to notice that all of the buildings there seemed to be gigantic as we circled a sizeable grassy area which mostly was used for military parades and exercise.

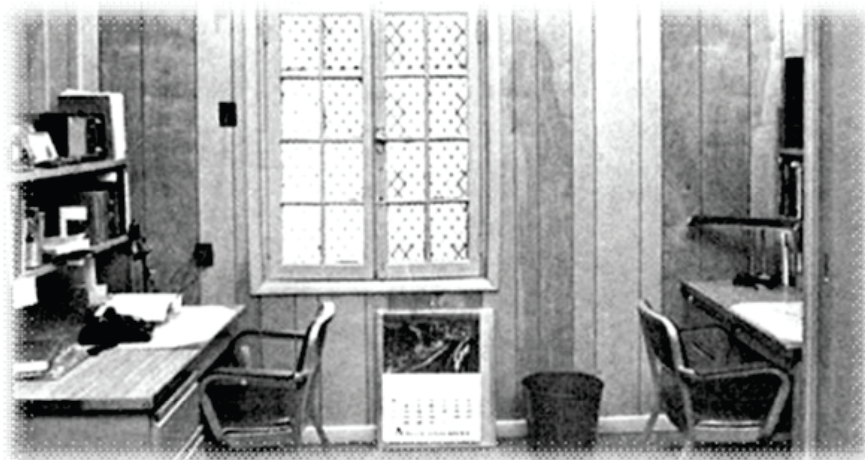
There were four battalions at the Citadel; and each battalion had four companies except the second one, which included the “Band Company”. The bus would stop at each battalion for each of us to get off and proceed to the assigned room.

I got off the bus at the second battalion, retrieved my suitcases, and went inside through another iron gate where a cadet guard unlocked and opened the door for me to go in. He was nice enough to help me carry my suitcases to the

fourth floor in company “F” where I was assigned. I was surprised and shocked when I noticed the gate being shut behind us using a padlock.

(Oh my God I said to myself! That felt a bit awkward and scary to me. The very first thing that came to my mind was how this place looked and felt like a prison!)

The cadet directed me to my room and offered help if needed. I went inside the room; the size of the room was about ten by fourteen feet with a bunk bed on one side and cabinets and desks on the opposite side. There was a window that opened up for fresh air but it was wired with mesh wire along with iron bars to prevent escape or suicide by cadets. **It truly was like being in a prison!**



I was too tired to think about anything else at that time. All I wanted to do was to complete my studies and go back home to Iran. I was not interested in wasting my time with anything else. I decided to wait and see what would happen next.

I fell asleep on one of the beds without any sheets or pillows, granted I was not prepared with those things since

no one had advised us what to bring. I must admit that we were given a book or catalog with the list of things to bring but we were too busy to read it. Even if we had read it we probably would have thought the Iranian navy had taken care of it for us. Nevertheless, I slept with my clothes on since it was cool that early in the morning. The next day I went to the school's supply store and obtained what I needed for the rest of the semester including my study books. The room was double occupancy but my roommate had not arrived yet.

At 5:30 am, the sound of the bugler playing 'Reveille' woke me up. The sound was very pleasant to my ear and I was eager to know what it meant. Five minutes later, it sounded again. I got up, looked outside, but nothing was going on. By the fourth or fifth time, that pleasant noise was not so pleasant anymore! I was not able to rest after that, so I decided to go downstairs to see what was going on. Then suddenly I heard the sound of cadets marching, with someone calling cadence,

"Left, Right, Left, Right"

"Where did everyone go?" I asked the guard at the front gate.

"They are gone to the mess hall for breakfast" he answered.

It was still dark outside, so I slowly walked toward the mess hall. When I spotted the building, I went in and joined the rest of my friends there who were gathered around one long table eating breakfast with much enjoyment.

As we were eating our last breakfast, with a great deal of freedom and ease of mind, I noticed that some of the cadets

were eating their food by “squaring their hand” and then bringing it towards their mouth. It came across as very strange to me and I could not understand why they were eating like that! After breakfast was over, we stepped outside of the mess hall and again I spotted some cadets who were walking in the form of a square. Turning my head to the right and left, I tried to figure out why these cadets were walking so awkward. Needless to say, I was a bit confused at everything I was observing. No one had drilled us concerning this military school and the expectations of what lay ahead. Every event was a surprise for me.

A building labeled Infirmary got my attention. The first thing that came to my mind was that perhaps they had some “mentally challenged” students in the same school, who were there for observation. I couldn’t help to think that since I had seen so many strange things such as iron gates, wired-mesh windows, or could it be that we would have to do the same “dance” as they were? **God forbid!**

I really didn’t know what to think. Not having military background and training on one hand and facing a school like this with unfamiliar activities on the other hand, allowed numerous surprises to come to my friends and me. At any rate, at 7:00 am, I was instructed to introduce myself to the cadet Corporal in my assigned company, where he drilled me with a loud voice on how to communicate!



My first response was; “Sir, I am not deaf; you do not have to yell at me!” Not realizing that it was part of their system. He yelled again even louder telling me not to look at him, and to repeat after him these words: “Sir, my name is cadet recruit so and so” and some other stuff. It appeared as if everyone was angry at each other, with all the yelling and facial expressions.

A QUOTE FROM ONE OF THE YEARBOOKS EXPLAINS IT WELL:

“Wow- this place looks crazy. Go to that desk and do what? Get your toe on the line, Mister, and keep your eyes straight ahead.” Those were the first wonderful words of welcome from my cadet cadre Corporal. I really was not expecting a tea party, but this guy was ridiculous. All this parading around with an “idiot bag”, gym shirt and shorts, and black shoes and socks! What kind of dress code is that? (This “idiot bag” was nothing but a laundry bag we were made to carry on our shoulders while going all around the campus, from one station to the other to collect the material or uniforms we needed to use later on. Then they made us dress in gym shorts and shirts with our dress shoes and

referred to us as ‘knobs’ or ‘zeros’ which was military slangs!)

Two days later, the system came in to effect. Little did we know what horror lurked behind those pillars! About 10 o'clock in the morning, they rushed us onto the quad in neat little rows, leaving us without supervision. What is going on? The silence was killing me and then ...

I heard the front gate creak as it slowly closed to a metallic slam with background music of a jet engine. Sweat began to pour down my brow and then someone spoke over the loudspeaker. Gentlemen of the Class of 1977, your system is now in effect!”

All hell broke loose! They (cadet cadres) were coming to us and calling us names, right in our faces, telling us to run, to do push-ups and many physical activities that I did not mind to do, but they did not have to be nasty about it! For the next three weeks, everything was intense. I lost a lot of weight. No one was friendly toward us.

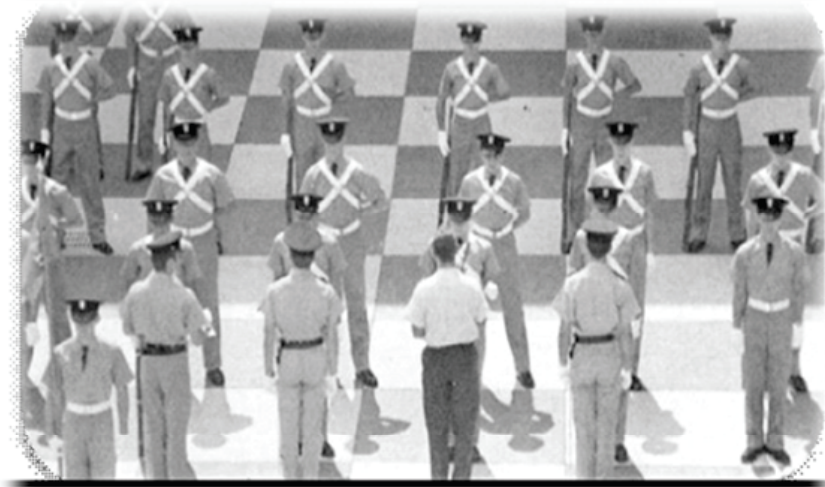
It was during one of those days when we were told to get ready for a picture taking event. I got excited and put on my white Iranian Navy uniform in order to make a good impression. Then, the next thing I knew, we were taken to the public bath and shower room. They cornered all the freshmen against the wall and we were packed like ‘sardines’. One of the upper classmen was holding a stick in his hand, and pretending to hit us if we didn’t pack ourselves in while the rest of them were making jokes and laughing at us. Boy I was angry and so humiliated especially being in my Iranian uniform. Sweats were running all over my head and face, while at the same time my blood was boiling inside

me, fixing to explode. I hated what we were there for. If that was their military training, I sure did not want to be part of that. They were acting like a bunch of kids!

WAS I THE ONLY ONE THESE CADET CADRES HATED? *I felt I was being picked on a lot including, being called a 'camel jockey'. But that didn't bother me since I had never ridden a camel before. Nevertheless, I was determined to be the best and go along with their system; that is until the first inspection. That night I stayed up until 2:00 am cleaning up my room, shining my shoes, or anything else I thought needed to be done. I wanted to show everyone that I was the best.*

Saturday morning inspection came. We lined up outside while the officers in charge inspected our clothes, haircuts, shoes, and rifle. Then the cadet officer came to my room to inspect there too. I did well, passing my inspection. The cadet officer congratulated me for having a clean room and moved on to the others.

Well, I was happy about the result of the inspection and was looking forward to a relaxing weekend, especially since I was up so late the night before. In addition, I was looking forward to getting together with the rest of my countrymen to see how they were doing since we had not seen each other for the last two or three weeks. (*Wrong! Another surprise was waiting for me!*)



Saturday Morning Inspection

Once the inspection was over, we were instructed to line up outside of our rooms and the cadets in charge yelled, “Hit it and give us fifty push-ups, you zeros!”

Suddenly, every freshman went down to the ground except me.

“Why?” I asked!

“You have to, because I told you so.” One of the cadet officers exclaimed.

All kinds of thoughts were running through my head as I was trying to analyze the situation, and trying to understand why we were being punished! I worked so hard, stayed up late, my room was clean, and I had passed my inspection. Why were they punishing me? I felt humiliated by this action and was getting angry. Blood was rushing through my head as every upper classmen in that hallway was in my face pressuring me to explode! At that moment, I

had no desire to be part of their “game” or that type of behavior.

“You’d better get down and do what we say or you will get demerits!” the officers yelled as they stormed toward me, getting in my face.

“Go ahead and give me demerits!” I responded to them, and pushed my way out and walked off the formation.

Well, that day was the beginning of my misunderstanding about the Citadel and the way the system worked. The following week, I found out about a frightening incident that happened to one of my countrymen. While he was fast asleep, several cadets stormed into his room in the middle of the night, bagged him into a laundry bag, and dragged him all the way down from the 4th floor of the barracks to the middle of the quad. They tied the bag in a knot and left him screaming! He was scared to death!

This experience about my friend put a great deal of fear in me, that they might do the same or something worse to me. As a result, I had to start thinking about how to protect myself against the unknown actions by other cadets.

The door to my room would not lock; therefore, anyone could come in at any time. However, after I heard what happened to my friend, I became more cautious and used my toothbrush to lock the door from the inside. I also slept with a rod by my side (the rod that I used to clean my rifle), just in case someone would try to attack me at night. The

situation was so bad that I could not trust anyone anymore. Every night I would be shaken at the slightest noise or movement, opening my eyes to see what was going on. I also told my roommate that I had better not catch him being a part of any conspiracy against me and he never was.

Resigning From the Navy

Many complaints were passed on to the Iranian Naval attaché in Washington, DC and as a result, we had several visits from them to our school; but nothing was changed or done after their visits, even though we were promised otherwise.

However, it was during one of those visits by an Iranian Naval officer to the Citadel that my name came up by the school administrator, claiming that I was not happy with their system and was having a hard time adapting. Then, I was asked to pack up so the naval officer could escort me back with him to Washington and ultimately back to Iran to resign from the Navy. This was shocking and dreadful news for me since I was the only one whose name was mentioned. Actually I figured my friend who was bagged in the laundry bag would go before me. But it was too late and the decisions were made, so I went along with their plan.

On our flight back to Washington DC, the officer who was escorting me fed me a bunch of non-sense scare tactics to frighten me. He said that the consequences of my rebellion would be great for me and my family back home. I did not respond or question him since the verdict was already assumed for me to go home.

It wasn't my idea to go back home. I never minded to be part of the military training. What I had so much problem with, was the unnecessary hazing, name calling, and pressuring us to do something against our will. During my four years of schooling at the Citadel, we participated every summer in some kind of real military training. We went to Norfolk Virginia for Marine training and to Corpus Christi for Aviation training. Another summer I was on board the "USS Joseph-Hewes Destroyer" and I loved every minute of that. But the Citadel's training, to me was a game of "Mickey-mouse" stuff, and very humiliating!

The following day I discovered surprising announcement. Nine other Iranian students protested and were asked to leave the Citadel for the same reason as I was. They joined me in Washington, DC with the same expectation of returning home and to resign from the Iranian Navy. This was good news for me since I felt the Navy was looking down on me and my negative attitude toward the whole thing. But I was not the only one who was disappointed and displeased by the way we were handled by our own Iranian Navy and lack of information concerning the system at the Citadel.

At any rate, we stayed at a hotel in Washington, DC for ten days while they communicated our desire to the Iranian Government to arrange for our trip to go back home for resignation. But due to pride and embarrassment to the Iranian military under Shah Reza Pahlavi, they lied to us by telling us that if we went back home we would be punished. This is what we were told:

1) That they would send us into their prison when we get back to Iran,

2) *That they would take our father's house for the expenses that they already spent on us, and*

3) *They would also send our fathers into prison as well.*

I didn't mind their threats against me, but their intimidation against my father had a deeper affect on me. They were very shrewd in persuading us to go back to the Citadel by using manipulating words and fear tactics and by scaring us with threats against our families.

So, instead of going back home to Iran, all but two students turned back to the Citadel. These two expressed that they would prefer prison over the Citadel! One of the guys who chose to go back home was the one who was hazed by being bagged inside the laundry bag.

The eight of us came back to the Citadel with our heads hanging down like sheep, scared and embarrassed. As a result, there were rumors all over the campus that the Iranians were trapped here at the Citadel, because if they resigned from the Navy and went back to Iran, they would face prison.

Upon my return to school, I was transferred from "F" company to "H" company. I was trying my best to adapt to the military fraternity system. Everything was going ok for a while, until one morning at the breakfast table after I had served some upperclassmen, a cadet Corporal (who was a member of the "sword drill", who kept their heads shaved in order to intimidate others) was sitting right next to me. He started demanding different things and watching my reactions. When he noticed my frustration, he asked what I was going to do about it "you so and so". He called me

names, but when he called my mother a nasty name, I lost my temper! That was the worst thing he could have said, and as a result I punched him in the mouth, almost causing a fight to erupt, but we were stopped by other cadets. That night I was not permitted to sleep in my own bed for my own safety. Instead an arrangement was made for me to spend the night in the infirmary with the other mentally challenged students, ha!

The rumor of that incident was all over the campus within less than an hour. Many congratulated me for standing up to an upper classman, but I was not happy about what happened. In fact, I was terrified for sure to be dismissed from school for having raised my hand to another cadet. Later, I was charged before the school's Court Martial to three hundred hours of confinement and walking tours; which I gladly accepted since I did not want to go back to Iran and their prison!

This Court Martial was conducted by the cadets of the school. Except for the size of the room, it was similar to a real life courtroom. I had to hire my own lawyer to speak on my behalf and there were also witnesses involved. Earlier that week, I had been summoned to meet with a Colonel who was a ranking member of the college staff. He told me that the consequences of what I had done might be severe and may also be cause for my dismissal from the corp. of cadets. It was then that I became terrified of being sent back to Iran to possibly face prison, not to mention the embarrassment this could cause my family. That was not the right way or my intention to be dismissed from a well known school and resign from the Iranian Navy.

Hence, at the court martial, I made it easy for everyone involved and told them how sorry I was for what I had done and that I would accept the responsibility and any punishment they decided to give me. After deliberation, they decided to give me 300 hours of walking tours. Every weekend, I had to walk back and forth on the barrack quadrangle with a rifle on my shoulder until all 300 hours were completed. I gladly accepted this punishment and was very grateful they were not going to send me back to Iran.

Five months later, we heard from the two guys who returned home. They had been able to resign from the Navy without any problems or consequences. There was no such punishment as going to prison or any financial burdens. At that time, we learned a big lesson and our eyes were opened to something new. Our own Iranian Navy lied to us. They kept us here by misrepresentation and deception. I felt so bad in my heart, as though someone whom I trusted the most stabbed me in the back.

Therefore, because of the pressures from the school system on one hand, and lies and deception from our own Navy on the other, we thought twice about what we had gotten ourselves in to and we could not ignore what had just happened to us. This news had caused much disappointment and became the subject of our conversation for many weeks and months to come.

The state of my faith was in question. I didn't know what to pray or who to blame. I felt like I had been hung in mid-air. At times, I felt like I had been thrown to the wolves and I was on my own to stay alive, or like a sheep without a shepherd, lost without purpose or direction. It took me three years to really understand the mission of the Citadel as a

military college, and what was the meaning behind all the hazing and non-sense. I just wished we had been better informed before we stepped our foot into that military college.

Now, life outside of the citadel was great. One summer, two of my friends and I traveled to California for sightseeing. We flew to Los Angeles and there we rented a car and cruised the west coast from San Diego to San Francisco. We went to the HMS Queen Mary, San Diego Zoo, Disney Land, Universal Studios and Hollywood and much more. It was very educational and in some cases weird concerning places and people we met or saw for the first time!

One Christmas holiday I also traveled to San Antonio, Texas by taking a Greyhound bus. This way you can start and stop any place you wish until you reach your destination. So, I stayed a night or two in Atlanta Georgia and toured the historical places there, which was very interesting. Then after visiting my friends Mel and June Curtis in San Antonio I flew to New York and spent a few days there sightseeing the Statue of Liberty, FBI building, United Nations building and much more before heading back to my school. Another Christmas holiday I went home to Iran for a visit which I will talk about in the next chapter.

I spent other summers and holidays around Charleston, Folly Beach and Myrtle Beach with my friends. We shared the expenses to rent an apartment during the summers since the school closed the barracks. I enjoyed learning to cook a few meals by trial and error, but for the most part it turned out good.

There were two other students from Iran at the Citadel before our group came. These two (Hoshi and Siya) failed their courses while they were in England for four years as students and were sent to the Citadel, being a more disciplined school, to finish their courses. So, I decided that I would stay here in the USA for as long as I could before going back home to serve in the dogma of the Iranian Navy, just like Hoshi and Siya.

As a result, I failed one of my courses on purpose. It was my economics course. I just didn't take the required four exams, only the last one during the semester. That did not give me a good enough grade and it brought my average low enough to fail in that course. But as the time passed a new event changed my perspective all together. I will discuss them in my next chapter titled "A New Passage" which encouraged me to finish my courses on time by participating in the summer school program. Thus, it took me four years and one summer session to graduate.

My major course of study was "Business Administration" and my minor was in "Math". I took math to keep my grade point average "GPA" up since it came easy to me. The last course of mathematics that was offered in my courses of study was "linear equations" and I made 100 on it. My worse subject was "American History", and since I was not planning to stay in America at that time, I showed little interest in that subject. But I didn't know what was ahead of me or what God had planned for my life!

Nevertheless, many of us, including myself, stayed here in the United States of America, and said good-bye to the people that we could not trust and work for any more. Later I realized that it was God's will and purpose for my life.
