

There is No Place Like Home

by [Armando Simón](#) (May 2025)



Army Barracks (Artist Unknown, Mid-20th C)

While a teenager, Elmo had seen many films on Europe on television and the cinema. Whether they were documentaries, or fictional movies set in Europe, invariably there were attractive panoramas shown: London with its Big Ben and Parliament, and its cheerful friendly people; Munich with its double domed cathedral, its Oktoberfest, and its friendly people; Venice with its gondolas, its Piazza San Marco, and its friendly people; Barcelona, with its bullfights, its Güell Park and its friendly people; Paris with its Eiffel Tower, its

Louvre, and its obnoxious people. Nor was he confined to just these cities. He longed to see Norwegian fjords, the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the Escorial, the forests of Germany, the misty Alps of Switzerland and Austria, the cities of Helsinki, Vilnius and Budapest, the region of Transylvania (home of Dracula), the green fields of Ireland, the Greek islands.

His family had no excess money with which to go to Europe, either as a family, or to send him by himself, even if they had been so inclined.

Thus, he was doomed to a life of total, absolute boredom in Herington, Kansas.

To be sure, his parents wanted him to go to college. In Lawrence, Manhattan, Wichita, or Emporia.

All of them in Kansas.

"Close to home," his mother said. "So we can visit on the weekends."

Elmo gritted his teeth and did not respond.

He had decided on an alternative: He joined the Army. Right after graduating from high school.

He slowly came to this conclusion after watching on television two films, *Private Benjamin*, with Goldie Hawn, and *Stripes*, with Bill Murray.

Elmo knew that, because of NATO, the US Army stationed a huge portion of its army in Europe in order to deter Soviet expansionism in that continent. A bonus for many enlisted men, therefore, was that they got to travel, no, *live* overseas.

And, as far as Elmo was concerned, that alone was worth it.

It was even worth getting caught up in a war later on, down

the line.

So, he joined the US Army and was sent to boot camp, where he was shorn of hair, made to get up before dawn, tracked miles of forest, rocks, and muck, yelled at, given dismal food and clothes, and was fatigued with endless exercise and drills.

After boot camp, any assignment was welcomed. Even Guam or Greenland. At least, going to those two remote places would be a change of pace. Besides, from Guam, he found out, one could hop a ride on a transport while on leave and go visit Japan, Korea, or Taiwan, or even the Philippines. And from Greenland, one could likewise visit Canada, Iceland, Scotland, or Norway.

Instead, for the next few years, until the end of his enlistment, Elmo was stationed at Ft. Riley, Kansas.

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Armando Simón is the author of *The Only Red Star I Liked was a Starfish* and *Very Peculiar Stories*.

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