

The Virginian-Pilot

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By Diane Tennant
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EDWARD PERRY HART was born wanting to be a soldier, secured an appointment to West Point, played on a championship lacrosse team, sang in the choir, was on the debate team, became tank platoon leader for the 894th at Fort Knox, led a scout platoon for the 32nd Armor in Germany, led a company at Fort Hood, was promoted to captain, commanded an armored cavalry troop, was promoted to major, earned a bronze star and Gallantry Cross in Vietnam, taught military science at Arizona State University, was promoted to lieutenant colonel, earned master's degrees in business and history, commanded a battalion in Germany, became deputy inspector general in Germany, led a unit training branch at Army headquarters in Europe, became inspector general at West Point, became a dean at the Armed Forces Staff College, retired as a colonel, taught at Tidewater Community College, worked as a military consultant, retired again in 1996, leads tours at the MacArthur Memorial, is active in his church, loves his wife, enjoys his eight children and nine grandchildren, sings baritone and has appeared in more than 30 local theater productions, including two walk-on roles with the Virginia Opera.

But the part of his biography that grabs everyone's attention is four months in 1958, when he was Elvis Presley's platoon leader.



1ST LT. EDWARD HART, PLATOON LEADER FIRST BATTALION 32ND ARMOR STATION | FAMILY PHOTO



ELVIS PRESLEY IN UNIFORM, 1960 | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Here are the details:

Elvis was drafted in 1957, got a deferment to finish filming "King Creole," entered the Army in 1958, shipped out to Germany to join a tank battalion and could not pull guard duty because he would have been mobbed by German girls.

Hart did not shake Pvt. Presley's hand, write down his personal phone number, get his autograph or like his songs.

Elvis saluted Hart, drove a jeep for a sergeant, cleaned bathrooms, and got along famously with everybody in the unit, according to "Soldier Boy Elvis," which was written by Hart's master sergeant, Ira Jones, and Bill E. Burk.

Hart attended meetings to discuss the problem of what to do with Pvt. Presley, was pleased that his man was never late for duty despite living off base and enjoyed listening to him and the men sing gospel songs one cold night on bivouac.

Notice that was "one" cold night. Also notice the single photograph of Pvt. Presley with Hart. It appears on an unnumbered page in the book "Elvis in the Army," by William J. Taylor Jr., right before Chapter 5, with a caption that begins "A rotten, fuzzy photo of the Scout Platoon," which is truth in advertising. It shows 32 men. Maybe 33. It really is fuzzy. Pvt. Presley is front row, third from the right. Hart is back row, far right, and part of him has been cropped out.

A number of men and tanks from the 32nd Armor appeared in Elvis's 1960 film, "G.I. Blues." Hart was not one of them, having rotated out of Germany in early 1959.

So, to recap: four months, no handshake, no autograph, no fan, no movie role. Some might say Hart missed his chance.

But there's more to life than rock 'n' roll. See first paragraph.

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