

I am indeed a United States Army brat, born at the West Point Military Academy to Adele and Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. My father, a graduate of West Point in 1908, was later assigned to instruct cadets in military tactics and strategy. Before I was a year old, we moved to Fort Benning where Father may have found time to do a bit of wild boar hunting on horseback and with dogs. Then he was stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to attend the Army's Command and General Staff School for two years, after which he taught there for two more years.

From birth to my 17th year, home was one Army post after another. Family life included English Springer spaniels that my father bred and trained for field trial, hunting, show and companionship.

In 1940 Father was rushed to Alaska. Our family - Mother, my younger brother and I – had to stay behind at the Presidio in San Francisco. But he did get to take the last two of his beloved spaniels. His mission was to head the Alaska Defense Command. Fort Richardson, Defense headquarters, was built in half the time scheduled with round the clock, round-the-seasons labor and night-lights mounted in washtubs providing light in the winter darkness. To put secret military airfields on distant Aleutian Islands, fishermen were persuaded to let their boats carry steel mesh that could be laid on boggy tundra to enable our fighter planes to land safely.

Father made rare but much longed for visits home. He couldn't say when he would be home next. That was not allowed. But I noticed that from time to time, Mother would get ready for bed wearing a robin's egg blue robe, a touch of Chanel behind her ears and a dab of oil on the lids of her lustrous French eyes. Sure enough, the next morning her door would be locked, and soon I would find myself being swung joyously around in my father's arms.

On June 17, 1945, still a student at Stanford University but home for the weekend, I was visited by the general in charge of the Presidio. Accompanied by his wife, he knocked on the door and told me that my father, commander in chief of the Tenth Army, had been killed in action while at his observation post watching his men plow through the final days of the bitter 82-day battle that defeated the Japanese at Okinawa.