

To make sure that you're in the right mood for the third chapter of my book here's a very brief synopsis of what occurs in the first two chapters. Keep in mind that a number of details have been left out of the synopsis as to not spoil any of the surprises.

#### Chapter 1

On June 12, 1967 (a little over a month after my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday), my induction notice is received. My roommate (who is also fellow band member), and I immediately launch a plan that includes me ingesting a massive amount of speed and staying up for a number of days before I appear at the induction center located in downtown LA.. My intention is to be as uncooperative as possible to thwart their policy of turning me into a soldier without doing anything that might land me in jail. In my mind "No jail" was right up there with not being a soldier. No thanks, no way. Upon my arrival my lack of enthusiasm for the program in conjunction with the blatant disrespect I show every authority figure I'm forced to interact with seems to be going well except for the fact that I'm ordered to appear the following day for further evaluation. The second day does not go well at all and I'm ordered back to the induction center yet again. The third day winds up being a circus of horrors when I'm finally introduced to a captain who is in charge of operations at the center and attempts to intimidate me into reciting the oath, which I refuse to do. Instead of being arrested or charged with anything I am escorted onto a bus bound for Ft. Ord filled with young men who have enlisted.

#### Chapter 2

On the bus ride from hell I contemplate my options of evading my so-called responsibility, and avoiding jail at all costs. I decide to confront a chaplain at my first opportunity, thinking that a man of God would surely have empathy for my situation and do something to rectify the problem. When arriving at Ord later that night we're subjected to an involuntary discourse of what will be in store for us in the next few days. No one was shouting at us or acting like a raving lunatic as of yet. We're then led to an interim barracks where we'll be living for the next two days before we're bussed up the hill to experience boot camp. After being up for six days I pass out on the top bunk without undressing. The next morning I awake to a hard linoleum floor with blood gushing from my nose as a result of not responding to reveille and being pushed off the top bunk by my interim barracks commander. I narrowly escape being beaten by him and his cohorts, before realizing that no one at Ord is going to help me. Every authority figure I'm forced to interact with hates me immediately. Later that day the volunteers take up a collection for him to show their gratitude for his kindness toward them. I do not contribute. I manage to arrange a meeting with a chaplain the next day and am under the impression that he will assist me in my quest to be excused from the insanity, but things do not go as planned. I stumble from the chapel in defeat, making a solemn vow to never be a soldier as I involuntarily head back to the interim barracks.

**"What we have here is failure to communicate."**

**Strother Martin as the chain-gang warden in "Cool Hand Luke"**

**"I never expect a soldier to think."**

**George Bernard Shaw**

**"We all go a little mad sometimes."**

**Anthony Perkins in "Psycho"**

The legendary Monterey Pop music festival had taken place mere miles from Ord less than a week previous and is usually credited with being the inspiration for the term, “Summer of Love.” In theory it was commemorating peace and love, and provided classic moments of musicality for thousands as the audience celebrated astounding performances by Hendrix, Otis Redding and others by devouring massive amounts of illegal drugs. And don’t forget the free love axiom that went along with it. It might well have been taking place on another planet. I was reluctantly making my way back to the barracks, and it suddenly dawned on me that for the first time in years, I had not listened to or played any music for the last two days. There had been no radios, record players or TVs available to us during this time. It’s not exactly like realizing that you’ve lost the feelings in your legs as you’re lying face down in a rice paddy. But none the less, the thought of losing the right to participate in continuing my quest for the magical embrace of musical nirvana, was succeeding in making me even angrier than I was already. Strange but true. Did the lame offer of applying for drumming duties in one of their fucked-up Special Services projects ever enter my mind? Not once.

Upon my return, I entered the barracks just in time to witness the presentation of Roddy’s unearned monetary fund. As he received the undeserved dividend, applause and cheers erupted once again, Roddy had a look of total disbelief on his face. He can’t even believe how dense these guy’s truly are, I thought. This couldn’t happen every time with every new crew. I refused to believe that. Unacceptable. Kill me now.

“I think you guys are going to surprise them up on the hill. I see a lot of troops come and go through these barracks and you guys are special.” Spoken as Roddy waved the wad of bills in his hand. Pause “I have an announcement for you regarding a change in your time of departure. Instead of your expected departure time at 1100, you will now be departing at 1500.” That meant we would be leaving before dinner instead of lunch. “Now if you’ll fall in outside, I’ll teach you the fundamentals of dressing your formation.”

Jimmy crack the fuckin’ corn. Who gave a shit about dressing your formation? The volunteers did, as they gleefully scrambled out of the barracks and into the street in their futile quest to broaden their mental horizons. I strongly suspect that Roddy has gone on to make a fortune at being one of those bullshit motivational speakers that corporations hire for big bucks. A travesty.

We went over the useless procedure until it was time for lunch, and then for the last time that Roddy would be sharing the golden mealtime moment with us, we were marched over to the mess hall to consume the nutritious Army provisions being offered. I was unable to discern if my appetite was in fact slowly returning to normal or what actual state it was really in due to the bland and almost tasteless cuisine that we were expected to devour. I forced myself to chew and swallow as much as I could, but it was tough going for Mr. Stomach. Oddly enough I seemed to be the only one having a problem with this. The volunteers were somehow managing to ignore how awful the food really was and were inhaling it without reservation. Maybe Roddy was right. This was a special group if they could consume this crap, I thought.

We returned to the barracks for the last time and were instructed to kill our remaining few hours, making sure that our Army gear and duffel bags were up to snuff and our new wardrobe and military accessories were stored in the proper military manner. I made no effort at all to participate in any of this. I sat on the bottom bunk with the duffel bag open in front of me while gazing out one of the open doors thinking about how swiftly my life had ceased to be my own. I kept trying to convince myself that it couldn't be any worse, knowing completely well that it damn well would be. The volunteers on the other hand were having a grand old afternoon, offering each other advice and tips that they had gleaned from their brother, uncle or dad on how to survive boot camp. All this while they meticulously arranged their goods in the stupid green canvas bags. And then it happened. The evil green bus pulled up in front of the barracks, and the volunteers became much quieter. The mood had morphed into nervousness, fear and if you count my own mood, loathing (open homage to Hunter S. Thompson). We were herded out into the street and onto the bus, where we took our seats.

Roddy stood at the front of the bus and addressed us. "It was a pleasure acting as your interim barracks commander and I want to wish you all good luck with your Army career. You men are going to turn out to be great soldiers!" And with that, he was gone, his pockets lined with his unmerited cash. The door was closed. There was silence except for the bus motor being started and slowly pulling out of the barracks area. Eerily silent. And here came that question again. What the hell do I do now?

We were driven up the hill past rows and rows of barracks, offices, a PX and assorted Army installations. Virtually all of the older wooden structures had disappeared and all the buildings we were viewing now were definitely modern and contemporary constructions. We passed row after row of elongated three-story buildings that were the barracks used to house the

new trainees. I would learn later that the buildings were referred to as 'hammer heads' because of the way they looked from an aerial view. This is where the war machine would begin their indoctrination, teaching our American youth how to kill the evil and wicked Viet Cong.

The bus began to slow down and to our immediate right I noticed that there were several D.I.'s standing on a grassy knoll next to one of the barracks complexes. They appeared to be waiting for us. The bus pulled to a stop in front of them, the door opened, and in an instant the demon drill sergeants were on the bus. One in the front and one on the side. They appeared to be very pissed off about something and the one at the front of the bus began screaming at us in a thunderous pitch.

**“GET YOUR FAGGOT ASSES OFF OF THIS BUS AND FALL IN, COLUMNS OF FOUR IN THE FOREYARD!”** I glanced over to the only foreyard in our eye-line and spied yet another two drill sergeants awaiting our arrival. This was very ugly.

**“NOW! MOVE IT! ON THE DOUBLE! DON'T BE THE LAST MAN OFF OF THIS BUS OR YOUR WORLD WILL BE SHIT!”**

All hell broke loose as adrenaline and sheer terror seemed to permeate the air. It was absolutely insane. The volunteers would've trampled their own mother and little sister to get off of that bus. Fortunately for me, I was seated very near the side door and did not have to be concerned about being the last one in the formation as I managed to evacuate the premises easily. Even I knew that this was not the time to make an attempt to have any sort of rational conversation with the demons. In fact I think that I must have been in a sort of psycho shock state as I began to laugh as I struggled to tote the goddamned duffel bag to the foreyard along with the rest of the terrified victims. The drill sergeants continued to maliciously harangue us all and several of them had taken to kicking the volunteers in the seat of their army fatigues if they were deemed to be moving too slow. As we approached the foreyard the two awaiting D.I.'s were already in full tirade mode, and were screaming and spitting in the randomly picked volunteers' faces as they were attempting to dress the useless formation.

**“YOUR MOMMY WON'T BE ABLE TO HELP YOU HERE MAGGOT! DROP AND GIVE ME TWENTY AND SOUND OFF!”** This meant that you were required to perform twenty pushups, counting out loud (the louder the better is what they were looking for) after each one was concluded. One of the volunteers was ordered to crawl on his belly like a reptile across the foreyard and back; all the while the demon screamed at him to put his face in the dirt and grass. He did, and when his task was completed there were bloodied scratches that covered his face as he had

literally not raised his head as he was slithering in the dirt. He looked terrified as the demon continued his verbal assault. I had never seen anything like this in my life, before or since. Holy shit!

It didn't take long for me to have my first face-to-face encounter with one of the demons. The ranting psychotic was not four inches from my face, spitting and fuming. "WHAT'S THIS MESS ON YOUR FACE MAGGOT?!"

I had forgone the shaving ritual since my arrival at Ord and I assumed that's what he was referring to.

"It's my face sergeant." I said firmly, but purposely not shouting, as you must have noticed by now that I have a serious problem with this authority figure stuff. It really didn't matter how anyone answered anyway. Even if someone could miraculously come up with the correct answer, it would be wrong. It was a no-win situation. Of course the demons would argue that this display of moronic psyche games would not only instill discipline and character, it would somehow lead to producing a better soldier. A better soldier perhaps, if you were willing to submit to their will and exist without having any independent thoughts. But there was no way anyone could appease the demons at this point. They had a license to be raving psychotic assholes and they were generously offering us a perfect performance. And it mattered not, if I perceived it to be absolutely insane.

"YOU SMART-ASSED MAGGOT! DROP AND GIVE ME TWENTY AND YOU'D BETTER SOUND OFF LIKE YOU'VE GOT A PAIR, YOU INSIGNIFICANT PIECE OF DOG SHIT! NOW!"

I was beyond reluctance, but had to swallow my pride yet once again and comply with the demon maniac to avoid a beating and or jail penalty. Passive aggressive if you will. I assumed the position and began the ridiculous ritual, all while the demon severely admonished me to count louder.

"I CAN'T HEAR YOU MAGGOT! YOU'D BETTER SOUND OFF OR YOUR WORTHLESS ASS WILL BE DOWN THERE ALL DAY!"

"Four! Five! Six!" This was definitely rubbing me the wrong way, and I was feeling more helpless than ever as I had absolutely no alternate plan to make this unwanted harassment disappear from my life. I continued and completed the involuntary push-ups.

"ON YOUR FEET MAGGOT! THE NEXT TIME I SEE YOU IN MY FORMATION YOU WILL BE CLEAN SHAVEN! IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?!" Before I could even respond he had noticed something else and pounced on my soul yet again. "WHERE ARE YOUR DOG TAGS PRIVATE BROWN?! DON'T YOU KNOW THAT MILITARY LAW

REQUIRES YOU TO WEAR YOUR DOG TAGS AT ALL TIMES?! WHERE ARE YOUR FUCKING DOG TAGS?! YOU NEVER TAKE THEM OFF! ARE YOU A FUCKING RETARD?! DO I HAVE A FUCKING RETARD IN MY PLATOON?!”

I was obviously not making a good first impression with my newly appointed caretakers.

“They’re in my pocket sergeant!” I screamed. Not because I was attempting to comply with their bizarre expectations, but because I hated the son of a bitch that was standing four inches from me, attempting to break the sound barrier with spittle emanating from the grotesque hole that served as his mouth. I was wondering if there was an actual death chant that you could recite to rid one self from an unwanted assault, and decided to look into it when I had a chance. I desperately needed some serious cosmic voodoo shit to intervene.

“GET THEM OUT AND PUT THEM ON PRIVATE BROWN!” As I reached into my pocket to retrieve the meaningless ornament, and obey my noble Drill Sergeant’s command.

And don’t forget that while I was engaged with my particular demon, the other three were enacting their own version of Hell on wheels all around us. Unmercifully. There was no shortage of screaming and psycho ranting. Push ups, double timing around the foreyard, face in the dirt around the foreyard. But the degradation and humiliation they were inflicting on us did not strike fear into me in the manner they intended it to. I was afraid, to be sure, but every ugly moment strengthened my resolve to somehow avoid this at all costs. Almost. Was I ready to take a stand in the stockade? Not quite yet.

“YOU ARE A FUCK UP! AREN’T YOU?! I DON’T LIKE FUCK UPS! I HATE FUCK UPS! YOU KNOW WHAT I DO WITH FUCK UPS LIKE YOU?!”

How do you respond to something like that? But I probably said, “No sergeant,” as I was putting the goddamn dog tags on.

“I ASSIGN THEM TO KP FOR THEIR ENTIRE FIRST WEEK OF BOOT CAMP! HOW DOES THAT SOUND TO YOU, ASSHOLE?!”

KP? Kitchen Police. And to tell you the truth it immediately sounded preferable to me than running up and down the hills of Ft. Ord with the demons in wrathful pursuit.

“YOU ARE IN A WORLD OF SHIT PRIVATE BROWN! DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?! IT MEANS THAT AFTER YOUR WEEK IN THE MESS HALL, YOU’LL BE PERFORMING DOUBLE

TIME ALL NEXT WEEK TO MAKE UP FOR THE TRAINING THAT YOU'VE MISSED! WON'T YOU?!"

Uh oh.

He pointed to his right toward a rectangular complex at the end of the barracks fifty yards away. "REPORT TO THE MESS HALL! NOW! ON THE DOUBLE! MOVE YOUR ASS! I CAN'T STAND TO LOOK AT YOU ANYMORE!"

Believe me, the feeling was mutual. I gathered my duffel bag and proceeded in my attempt to tote it double time to the mess hall. I actually began laughing again as I was making my way. I thought, "I'm losing my fucking mind already! Why am I laughing like a crazy man? This is not funny. Not even a little." As I continued with my rendition of the "on the double." There was no way that you could prepare for their onslaught. You may think that you can imagine it, but no.

The ranting continued in spite of my absence in the formation, and was showing no signs of dissipating. But at least it became a little fainter as I approached the mess hall. Up a few stairs and I entered what could have almost passed as a high school cafeteria, only larger, with the appropriate propaganda posters adorning every wall. There were a half dozen people in attendance all busy jostling around behind the cafeteria-like serving area at the far end of the building. They were all adorned in t-shirts and fatigue pants. And then I was noticed.

"New meat!" One of them was shouting at me. "Get your ass over here!" As I approached the serving area he continued, "Store your goods in here" pointing to a small closet and storage receptacle located behind the area. "Josh, show this miserable prick his new job."

Josh was large and burly and had many tattoos emblazoned on his arms and forearms depicting the U.S. Army insignia and celebrating soldier hood. He had a very slight southern drawl. "This way troop." We made our way through the kitchen area and out the back door to find ourselves on a concrete porch with steps descending to the foreyard. "Fill two cans with water," he pointed to an assortment of metal trash cans at the base of the stairs. He was gruff, but at least he wasn't shouting. "Two cups of detergent in one of them. The other can is for rinsing," he exclaimed, pointing to a large green paper bag that contained the detergent and said cup. "You collect the trays when they exit and you clean and rinse in that order." He handed me a large scrub brush. "The rinsed trays go here." He pointed to a ledge that was built into the porch. "You got that troop?"

"Yes sergeant." I replied, even though I had no idea what his rank may have been. As ungodly and uncivilized as it may seem, there was no

rank insignia being displayed on the sleeve of his t-shirt. Evidently my response was correct and enabled me to escape any further reprimand. But the volunteers were enjoying no such luxury and I could hear that they were still being traumatized for life by the rampaging sergeant demons.

“Move your ass. Chow in twenty minutes.” He reentered the mess hall and was gone.

Goddamn. Was my response Pavlovian in nature? I had immediately referred to him as sergeant and I hated myself for it. But at least I didn't have someone hovering over me wailing like a banshee for the immediate moment and perhaps I could concentrate further on my options and miraculously devise an updated escape plan; The only problem being, there was really only one. I could refuse to respond to their orders and make my way to another new home. The stockade. Or I could actually choose to leave, which would eventually lead to the same location. And then there was the incredibly remote chance that Gene would find Super Attorney, who would somehow perform an astonishing miracle and extract my carcass from their clutches. Actually, I had discounted that chance completely when I was on the bus at the induction center. Fuck me.

As I was filling the containers with water and the essential soap I noticed that the background ranting seemed to be escalating and approaching the mess hall. I descended the steps and crept around the back of the building so I could take a look. I cocked my head around the side of the building and saw that hell on earth had moved to the entrance of the mess hall. There was a large overhead ladder ensconced right in front of the entrance that I hadn't noticed previously due to the state of shock I must have been in. The harassment from the demons was full force and relentless.

**“MOVE YOUR ASS FAGGOT! YOU WILL TRAVERSE THIS OBSTACLE, OR THERE WILL BE NO CHOW FOR YOU LADIES! MOVE IT! GO! ARE YOU A GIRLY, FAGGOT?! YOUR MOMMA'S NOT HERE TO HELP YOU NOW, YOU BETTER MOVE YOUR ASS!”** Permutations of this were being used by all four of the demons. You get the idea.

The volunteers' still panicked state was in evidence and most of them were succeeding in traversing the stupid obstacle, but not all. There were several that were struggling to complete the task, but were not quite up to it. Their grasp of the overhead ladder would lapse and they would tumble to the ground only to be kicked and cajoled by the motherfucking demons to get to the back of the line and try again. Even though I had been witness to the most insane spectacle I'd ever encountered, I was convinced that they would eventually allow the few poor souls that wouldn't be able to complete the

ladder obstacle to eat. But not until massive amounts of ridicule and degradation were administered.

I had seen enough. I made my way back to the porch and ascended the stairs to attend to my first real Army assignment. I will be the first to admit that I wasn't being all that I could be, but I did manage to complete the difficult assignment and mere minutes later the first of the volunteers burst out of the mess hall with a look of total panic on his face and immediately stuck his aluminum tray into the rinse container. I had absolutely no incentive to point out to him that it should be dipped into the other can first. It wouldn't have mattered to me if he had thrown the goddamned tray across the foreyard. He was maniacally thrusting the tray in and out of the rinse container.

I attempted to make small talk. "Is this the most fucked up thing you've ever seen, or what?" I said, and again I began to laugh involuntarily.

He thrust his tray at me without saying a word and ran down the stairs and across the foreyard like he had been shot out of a cannon. Jesus!

It wasn't long before more of the terrified volunteers began exiting the mess hall and it didn't take me long to figure out that all I had to do was offer them the scrub brush and they would do the rest. None of them were interested in hearing my snide and sarcastic comments, as they all seemed to be under the impression that there was no time for anything other than cleaning, rinsing and disposing of their trays. And then they were swiftly down the stairs and running across the foreyard as fast as their shocked and horrified bodies would carry them. Unlike myself, they were all making a very great effort to perform in the manner expected of them, to the letter. The problem for me was the motivation-by-fear factor, which of course has been used since the beginning of time, but I continued to embrace the philosophy of total denial. And yes, I can't really pretend that the situation wasn't scary as hell, but what was the worst that they could do if you didn't buck up to the system? Verbally harass you? They might even hit you or kick you as I'd witnessed since we arrived. But I was certainly prepared to withstand that sort of depraved behavior at this point if I had to. It's human nature. We do what we think we have to do, even though your mindset may have been telling you of a different plan thirty minutes earlier. I still wasn't ready to resist their total onslaught to the point where it would land me in the stockade, but all of my initial intentions were involuntarily mutating from minute to minute.

It wasn't long before the last of the volunteers had exited the mess hall as if they were on fire, maniacally cleaning their trays and racing off across the foreyard. Sergeant Josh then reappeared to provide me with an

update on my newly appointed duties. Haul the very heavy water-filled containers around to the side of the mess hall, empty them and scrub them with a cleanser until I could see my face in them. Stash them appropriately and collect the trays and tote them inside to the ultra-modern sterilizing dishwasher. I then had ten minutes to eat whatever remnants of the cuisine had been left, before I would scrub the tables clean, and mop the floors until they shined. And for a very special extra treat, he informed me, I would then be allowed to clean the grease traps. I was beginning to suspect that my body had been imbued with some strange savant-like power that enabled me to attract and then immediately antagonize every authority figure that I had been confronted with. I figured that the space aliens had enacted this upon me while I was sleeping.

I complied with his orders, cursing under my breath every-one and everything that had been contributing to my tortured situation the entire time. When I finally was allowed to sit for the allotted ten minutes, I was not surprised to discover that the food was not one iota better on boot camp hill than the other Army swill I had previously attempted to consume. They had seemed to discover a way to prepare food that was bland and tasteless and enriched with massive amounts of fat and cholesterol. I was unable to eat everything on my tray and I thought of a scene from an Army film I had seen as a child, in which the recruits were not allowed to leave the mess hall until they had eaten everything on their tray. I was hoping that scenario would be duplicated here, as it was preferable to me to sit at the table rather than clean the goddamn mess hall. I could sit here until I pass out, I thought. Then what would they do?

Unfortunately it was not to be. After the ten minutes had expired, Sergeant Josh was towering over me. As gruff as ever.

“Dump the rest of that in the garbage and collect your cleaning utensils from behind the serving line and start on these tables. Move your ass.”

He evidently didn't see that movie, I thought. And I reluctantly rose to do his bidding. I cleaned the tables, I mopped the goddamn floor and then it was time for my special treat. The grease traps. Cleaning the traps was the lowest job of all of the jobs in the mess hall, and the cooks and workers seemed to take great delight that I would be performing this degrading and filthy task. Lots of nudging and cackling between them was duly noted. Let's just say that the Army spared absolutely no expense when it came to cooking with grease. The more the better. And the lion's share of the annual amount that was used seemed to be resting in the trap that I was shown to clean. They provided me with an imaginary super mutant hand cleaner after

I was done, but I could still feel the grease on my hands and under my fingernails. And I was very, very tired. There was absolutely no question that this day had been unequivocally the worst day ever in my twenty-one years. No contest. And it wasn't even over yet. I now had to drag the goddamned duffel bag into the barracks to find out where I was supposed to sleep. And you know what that meant. The demons.

Sergeant Josh was beside me. "It looks like we have you all week troop. You must be a real fuck up. Be here standing tall at 0500. Dismissed. And you'd better double time in the foreyard."

I began to tremble attempting to hold the rage and frustration in, and not grab one of the large butcher knives that was readably available to plunge into Sergeant Josh's ugly fuckin' Army face over and over. But alas, I managed to hold myself in abeyance.

Night had fallen and it was closing in on 7:30, and they expected me to be back here at 5:00 AM the next morning to submit to another round of slave labor. I was approaching full rebel mode as I exited the mess hall and descended the stairs into the foreyard. I felt whipped, but my resolve remained intact. There were two entrances to the barracks with double doors on both sides indented perhaps twenty yards on each side of the elongated building. The mess hall was adjacent to the left side of the barracks and I immediately began debating whether or not I would actually make an attempt to sprint the twenty yards to avoid further harassment. There was no one in the foreyard and I could see light emanating from the second floor windows.

"Fuck it!" I thought, "I'm not running. There's no one out here anyway to see if I do or not." I would bask in every rebellious act, no matter how slight or petty.

I entered the left side of the foreyard and made no effort to double time. I was in fact draggin' ass, as they say. My petty rebel act paid off and not one psychotic scream of verbal abuse was directed at me. Any one of the volunteer's would've ruptured their hamstring attempting to cover the twenty yards as quickly as possible. Not once thinking if anyone was actually out here to see them. That's how good soldiers are brainwashed and manufactured. After eight weeks of being constantly subjected to this dictatorial mentality, most people would never question an order from a higher ranking official. If the order was "double time across the foreyard," that's what they did without question. Day or night. Rain or shine. Watched or not watched. And I don't suspect, but rather I know, that this is the same mentality that contributed to the massacre at My Lai and countless other atrocities that we've never heard about. Goddamn. A lot.

I made my way through the doors and entered the barracks for the first time. I heard the demons still ranting somewhere in the building. The acoustics could have been playing tricks, but the din seemed to be coming from upstairs. The light was dim and directly in front of me was a stairway and to my immediate right was a wall covered with the all too familiar posters. Beyond that was a lighted hallway. I stepped forward and turned into the hallway. It extended all the way to the other end of the long edifice and the floor was shiny and buffed. I could see light emanating from several doors from the right side of the hallway located dead center in the structure. I leaned the duffel bag against the wall and proceeded toward the doors. Stopping at the first one, I wondered what the procedure might be in a situation like this. Do I knock? Was I supposed to recite some stupid Army jargon to gain entrance or what? Before I could make up my mind, the door was thrust open by a young, good looking and lanky man bearing sergeant stripes. He was no D.I., but he looked pissed off and a little startled to see me in front of him.

“What the fuck are you doing down here Private!? Why are you in my face like this!? When you’re confronted with an NCO in this hallway your back will go up against the wall and you will assume the position of attention!”

I backed up into the opposite wall and stood.

“Now what the fuck is your problem?! Why are you down here standing in front of my door?!”

“I went straight to KP this afternoon and no one told me where to go.” I confessed. I had no strength left. I wasn’t even sure what I was saying.

“No one told you where to go what!” he snarled.

My minute mental capacity was diminished, but I got it. “No one told me where to go Sergeant.” And even though I answered as he had suggested, he saw right through me.

“You look like you have a bad attitude and I’m going to be your buddy and give you some advice,” he said in a very un-buddy-like tone. His bony wavering index finger was right in my face. “You’d better get with the fuckin’ program.” then noticing my unshaven stubble “What’s that shit on your face?!” He didn’t wait for an answer. “Get your ass upstairs and report to sergeant Fisher,” Pointing to the stairs in the direction where I had entered. “Move out!”

I moved out and collected my duffel bag to tote up the goddamned stairs and report to Sergeant fuckin’ Fisher. The stairs were two tiered. Halfway up you turned left and around in the opposite direction, and ascended until you reached the second floor. The actual barracks were to my

left and there were no doors. Rows of cheap metal bunk beds lined both sides of the long room and two footlockers were arranged at the foot of each bunk. The majority of the volunteers were attending to their footlockers, while two of them were at the opposite end of the room manning electric floor buffing machines. Shiny floors were obviously very important to the Army way of life. I spied the only demon in the room as he prowled toward the opposite end of the squad bay, stopping when he noticed one of the volunteers was not performing as expected, and would then unleash his wrath on them. I assumed that this must be Sergeant Fisher. There were no other D. I.'s or army personnel other than the volunteers. There was no idle chatter coming from the volunteers. The only sound in the room came from demon Fisher and an occasional "Yes sergeant." from the volunteer who was being chastised.

As I approached, his back was to me. "Sergeant Fisher?"

He spun around looking as if he wanted to strangle someone. This was the guy that had been kind enough to assign me to KP for a week in my first ten minutes of boot camp.

"Private Brown, the fuck up!" He was enjoying himself in his own private authoritarian world. "Find an unassigned bunk and have your new bunkmate show you how to align your footlocker. There will be fifteen minutes before lights out for showers, and I want that shit off your face. Do you understand what I'm saying to you fuck-up?!"

"Yes sergeant." It was very easy to hate sergeant Fisher immediately. It could only get worse.

"Then why are you still standing here Private?! Move your insignificant ass!"

I immediately turned to begin my quest to find an unoccupied bunk. I found a top bunk half way down on the left side of the barracks, and deposited my duffel bag at the foot of the bed. They had kicked my ass. I sat on the edge of the bottom bunk and rested my face in my hands, attempting to collect my thoughts, and trying to find a way to be positive regarding the future.

"Hey. Hey man," someone was whispering to me. "Don't let Fisher see you sitting on that, man. He'll kick your ass. You better get up!"

I looked up and found a volunteer standing at the end of the bunk. The name tag on his shirt told me that this was probably Ramirez.

"Get up, get up! Don't let him see you!" He was gesturing frantically.

I rose and whispered angrily, "What the fuck! We can't even sit on the goddamn beds?!"

"No man. They don't want us on the beds."

I was shaking. But I suppose I was lucky that demon Fisher was at the other end of the barracks with his back still to us. “Fuck!”

“C’mon, I’ll show you how to align your locker.” He whispered.

Goddamn, I thought, we can’t even raise our voices to speak. This was definitely upsetting my bio-rhythms. But in the world I was in, the only thing that mattered to me at the moment was not upsetting sergeant Fisher. My condition was insignificant as he had made clear to me earlier that afternoon. I was pissed off and I was tired, but I had to eat crow yet again and pretend to be interested in how to align the fucking footlocker. Locks were provided for the lockers in addition to a key, and Ramirez whispered that Sergeant Fisher had warned everyone not to lose the key and not to fail in locking them before lights out. Anyone discovered not complying with this would be in a world of shit. As far as I was concerned this was already a world of shit, and another reminder was not required.

“FALL IN!” Screamed Fisher, and everyone immediately scrambled to come to attention in front of their bunks. I didn’t scramble, but I did assume the position.

“Ladies, you now have fifteen minutes before lights out. I suggest that you shower and shave. Tomorrow we will begin our efforts to turn you into the fiercest killing machine on the planet. When we’re through with you in eight weeks, you’ll have survived the toughest and most thorough training regimen ever devised by man. You’ll be able to stand tall and wear this uniform with pride. Your parents will be proud of you. Our government will be proud of you, and if you’re not a bunch of worthless fuck ups, maybe I’ll even be proud of you. But until then you are fucking unworthy insignificant maggots! You hate me now, but you will love me when you are under battle conditions and your life is saved by something you learned in my boot camp! Fifteen minutes! Fall out!”

I was in the John Wayne movie from hell. I gathered my army soap and shaving gear and made my way to the showers. Mercifully Fisher didn’t follow us into the showers, but in spite of that there was no small talk. When you have fifteen minutes to shave and shower accompanied by near exhaustion, no one is a Chatty Cathy. Besides, since we had arrived at Ord none of the volunteers had made an effort to engage me in detailed conversation. But they still seemed to respect my right to lower my head and charge into the raging locomotive engulfed in flames if I chose to.

I returned to my bunk and deposited the shaving gear in the footlocker as Ramirez had demonstrated, and then applied the lock and closed it. I was in no shape to withstand any further inconveniences this night, and I

definitely wouldn't be raising my hand and requesting that more punishment be administered to my 'maggot ass'.

It seemed to me as if they were going out of their way to subject me to every available dehumanizing technique that the military brainwashing corps had been successful with in turning America's young boys/men into what they hoped would be the next Audie Murphy. I had decided that while I was in their presence I would pretend to comply with their ridiculous mind games and demands in a desperate attempt to avoid further punishment. But I had to come up with some sort of dramatic act soon that would enable me to extricate myself from this fucked up psycho-prison. But at this point, I remained clueless as to what it could possibly be.

"FALL IN!"

The scramble ensued and we took our position at the foot of the bunks.

"Reveille is at 0500, and we have a tremendous training schedule planned for you tomorrow!" Fisher roared. "We don't expect you to like it ladies, and we don't care if you do or not! You'd better get a good night's sleep so you'll be able to keep up! Do you maggots understand?!"

"Yes sergeant!" They all screamed. Since Fisher wasn't gazing in my direction I did not participate. I was grasping for petty rebellious moments like this.

"Lights out! Get in your bunks!" He ordered. Everyone made a major effort to comply and launched themselves into the bunks with abandon. He began strutting to the entrance of the barracks and stopped at the foot of the bunk that was mine and Ramirez's. "Reveille is 0430 for you asshole!" He glowered at me. I made no effort to respond. "Get your ass out of that bunk and come to attention!"

Even though I had told myself to avoid this sort of misunderstanding, I was obviously unable to comply with my own rules. I knew that he expected me to respond and I knew exactly what he expected to hear, and yet I was still unable to give him the satisfaction of hearing it at that moment. And now it was going to escalate into something worse. I got out of the bunk and gathered myself to stand at attention. But not exactly with the enthusiasm that was expected of me, and as soon as I was off the bunk he reached down and tore the blanket and sheets from the bunk, and threw them into the center walkway of the barracks in one fell swoop.

**"YOU FUCKING MAGGOT FUCK UP! YOU'D BETTER GET YOUR SHIT TOGETHER YESTERDAY BEFORE I FUCKING KILL YOU! DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!"**

“YES SERGEANT!” I screamed louder than I ever had in my life, fueled by the anger and hate that had been so prevalent in my life as of late. Method screaming, if you will.

“DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!”

“YES SERGEANT!” It’s amazing what an exhausted person can do when the right buttons are being pushed. I expected him to hit me or at least grab me, but he seemed to be satiated by my insane screams.

“YOU FUCKING PISSANT! GET YOUR BUNK MADE. LIGHTS OUT!” He turned and swiftly made his way to the light switch at the entrance to the barracks. “THERE WILL BE NO CONVERSATION IN HERE! IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?!”

“YES SERGEANT!”

The lights were then turned off and he was gone.

The lighting was dim, but very manageable as the lights in the hallway remained on. I gathered the bedding from the floor and proceeded to remake my designated slumber chamber. There was total silence and I’d almost forgotten what it was like. The last time I had almost experienced it was mere hours ago, earlier that afternoon on the bus ride up the hill, if you don’t count the bus engine. But strangely enough it seemed an awful lot longer. I couldn’t even detect any of the volunteers whispering to each other. Total obedience, whether they were being watched or not. Unbelievable. I laid down on the bunk and as tired as I was, my brain refused to shut down for the night. I went through countless scenarios attempting to come up with an avenue of escape that didn’t include incarceration. But I continued to draw a blank. If I were religious, I’d have been down on my knees praying and pleading for the ever powerful entity to have mercy and step in to save me from the insanity that had instantly changed everything in my life for the worse. But I knew that there was no one who would be intervening and saving me from my horrendous predicament. It was me against them, and they held all of the power, while I retained none. Mercifully I finally managed to submit to sleep. For a minute.

My all too short moment of sleep was disrupted by the familiar banging of the metal trash cans that seemed to be so popular at Ord. It wasn’t morning. It was the middle of the fucking night, and one of the rampaging demons was having a little first-night-at-boot-camp fun duplicating the sound of a small jet taking off, by twirling a baton around the inside of the container.

“YOU LOSERS WILL FALL IN, COLUMNS OF FOUR IN THE FOREYARD NOW! MOVE YOUR ASSES! GO! DON’T BOTHER TO GET DRESSED! GET THE FUCK IN THE FOREYARD! MOVE IT!”

I rose up and I could see the demon standing at the entrance to the barracks with his twirling baton. It wasn't Fisher, but what did that matter? They were interchangeable. Many of the volunteers were already making their way out the entrance and down the stairs by the time I was able to assimilate exactly what was happening.

**“YOU FUCKING FAGGOTS HAD BETTER GET YOUR HEAD SCREWED ON STRAIGHT OR IT’S GOING TO BE A LONG EIGHT WEEKS FOR YOUR MISERABLE ASSES! FALL IN! COLUMNS OF FOUR!”** And then he was descending the stairs himself before everyone had evacuated the bay. Many of the volunteers were still frantically attempting to make it to the stairs.

I took a quick look around to see if there was in fact a hidden demon that I had missed, but he had been the only one. Fuck this, I thought, They're counting on the fear factor again, and not policing the area so to speak. I was out of the bunk and made my way not down the stairs, but over to one of the windows where I separated the blinds to peer into the foreyard below. I was the only one left in the barracks, and I was convinced that the demon would not be back to check. Who would have the audacity to not obey their every command? Evidently it would be me.

An outdoor light had been turned on and I spied the volunteers in their underwear, falling in and coming to attention. The demon D.I. was carousing up and down the formation and dispensing the usual malicious admonishment. I couldn't make out every word, but the reason for his tantrum seemed to be that someone had failed to close the lock on their footlocker. And of course the demon had chosen to punish everyone for one person's error. Goddamn. How can someone volunteer for something like this, and theoretically want to achieve high marks, and then not be able to remember an incredibly simple task? I wondered. I'm barely making an effort and I managed to remember it. It boggles the mind. But they were down there, and I was up here unscathed for the immediate moment, celebrating another one of my petty victories. I was confident that no one would notice my absence. The volunteers would not be looking around and wondering where Brown was. And I had not had encounter one with the demon on duty, which provided me with a nonentity status that had me yearning for a similar non-relationship with Sergeant Fisher. I returned to my bunk and stretched out prone and waited for the volunteers' punishment to come to its conclusion. I figured I'd be warned when the first of them returned and entered the bay. I could then get out of bed to see if the demon wished to continue with his punishment. There's no way he would be

coming through the entrance before any of the volunteers. He'd be behind them ranting. You could count on it.

It must have been twenty minutes before I heard the first volunteer return, when I rose up and noticed that all of them were heading straight to their bunks and getting under the covers. My heart sang for a brief moment. I had gotten away with it. Now if I could only be as lucky in a few hours when they would wake me up to report to KP.

I was roused from a very deep sleep being nudged by a solid object between my shoulder blades, accompanied by a loud and aggressive whisper. "Brown. Out of the rack, you're on KP!"

I rolled over and looked up as I regained consciousness, to see the young and lanky sergeant I'd encountered downstairs in the hallway the night before he sauntered away from me and out of the barracks. I felt like shit. But I managed to get up, make the bunk and brush my teeth before I realized that I probably had another fifteen minutes before I had to report to the mess hall. It was still dark outside and the volunteers remained asleep. There were no clocks available to me, but I knew that it hadn't taken me thirty minutes to complete my tasks. They had awoken me at 4:30 and my time to report was 5:00. I could leisurely walk to the mess hall in less than two minutes. I figured that I probably had the only ten free minutes to myself that I would see that day. And amazingly enough, an idea entered my depraved mind out of the blue. I was immediately convinced that it would work. I'd have to sort out some details during my stint on KP, but I felt that I had the way out. I would somehow dramatically stage a faked suicide attempt. But how? It would have to be believable to the demons and it would have to be fool-proof in that I didn't want to actually wind up succeeding. The thought of actually committing suicide had never once entered my mind and I had no intention of embracing that mindset now. Taking pills was not an option. First of all I didn't have access to any, and even if I managed to obtain them, I deemed it to be too dangerous to my well being. What was I going to do, take them at lights out? And my condition would be discovered by who? Hanging? Absolutely unacceptable. Jump off of a building? Another bad idea. Shoot myself with an Army carbine? I don't think so. Cut my wrists? Jesus! I'd have to give this much more thought, but I was convinced that a faked suicide attempt would work if I could come up with something believable and entirely safe for myself. But I'd probably need some help. That could be tricky. I attempted to gather my wits together and descended the stairs in a very bizarre and excited state. It was quiet downstairs and no one was visible in the hallway. I headed straight out of the doors and into the foreyard. Again, there were no Army police spying on me

and as casually as I could, covered the twenty yards to the mess hall without a reprimand. And in my heart, I celebrated another petty triumph. Which would last for another thirty seconds if I was lucky.