

Sergeant Ahuna greets me the next morning with his wily I gotcha now smile. I stagger down for morning chow only to have phlegmatic fried eggs slopped on my tray by Sutton, this flap-jawed, big-lipped, black-assed cook nobody can stand. I want to puke when I chomp down on the bits of eggshell he left in them. When bending over for cigarette butts on morning police call, my hangover is only exacerbated. On Mondays, we do PT to shake out the weekend's alcohol intake and toughen us up for the rest of the week. I fare poorly due to my 30 days of inactivity; I am sweating profusely as we double time into the quad after our exercises.

While training in the Kahukas, we hump up the mountain on the first day to spend the night on a hilltop with clouds of mosquitoes until the wind picks up and blows them away. During the night, the wind dies causing dew to form on the poncho tent and leach into our clothing. The night is cold, and I regret not bringing an extra fatigue jacket or even an extra t-shirt. In the early morning light, we disable our drenching wet tent and wait for the order to move out. While we assemble, I notice a soldier completely covered with mud, and I mean mud from head to toe. As he shivers in the early morning dampness, his only distinguishing features are the whites of his eyes. People stare at him, wonder aloud how anybody could be so muddy, and we chuckle at his misery. He must be from battalion because nobody recognizes him. After eating our C-rations, we move down the mountainside, warming as the sun rises.

I awake with my upper lip swollen and my 2nd incisor smarting to no end. This time it is obvious to Sergeant Diaz I need to make a sick call. The dentist offers to fix my tooth or pull it, whichever I want. I opt to save the tooth, so he drills a hole in it to relieve the pressure of the abscess. With his reamer, he digs and digs until he extracts the nerve piece by tiny piece, showing it each time to me as if a trophy. He flushes out the cavity, puts in a temporary filling, and we make another appointment to begin sterilizing the root canal. On subsequent visits, he continues to enlarge the orifice and takes innumerable x-rays with his reamer still in the cavity. For some reason he leaves my tooth open until the next visit. On my next appointment, I find a new dentist. He says the old one left for Washington, DC, and now he wants to sterilize the cavity and seal it. By taking culture after culture over a period of weeks, he prepares the tooth for the amalgam core, and finally finishes up with a permanent filling. After fixing a few large cavities, I am done with the dentist, but then my upper right front tooth abscesses, and we must start the root canal process all over again.

I frequent the EM club where we can drink on credit until the end of the month. The booze is cheaper than the Kemoo Bar, and I do not need a pass to get off the base. The only thing I hate about this club is the 300-pound Samoan bouncers who patrol up and down the aisles as if sharks searching for wounded prey. They avidly seek out anyone showing the slighted bit of tipsiness then jump on him, squeeze his elbows together behind his back, and forcibly push the drunk outside through the double doors. The club employs a pair of them, they are fat and ugly, and they make me feel ill at ease. A drunken tussle with one of these ogres is a death wish.

One Sunday afternoon Daryl and I find ourselves drinking highballs in a very crowded club; a band belts out songs with an underage teenybopper singing pop tunes. During the band's break, I turn maudlin while staring at the pretty singer sitting by herself. She is the only woman in the whole place, and to me, she is the epitome of womankind and purity and with a gulp of Crown Royal, I fall in love. I must talk to her,

I really must. With my courage poured into a fresh glass, I stroll through the packed room of inebriated soldiers, swagger up to her table, and sit down beside her. Using my best Casanova impersonation, I give it my best. As I yell over the jukebox behind us, she fidgets nervously, looks away, and the conversation goes absolutely nowhere. Shortly, I receive a tap on the shoulder. One of the bouncers jerks his thumb over his shoulder indicating I should leave, but I yell its okay and waive him off. He asks me something I cannot understand, and I reply, "He said it's okay." The fat slob believes me and leaves. After a few more minutes of vainly trying to get this high schooler's curiosity, I get a more rapacious tap on my shoulder; I turn to see an older man. He motions for me to accompany him. We walk far enough from the jukebox so we are not yelling at each other. "We do not allow the soldiers to bother the girls. You will have to go back to your table." His nametag tells me this is the Sergeant at Arms speaking, the man in charge of the club.

Always the perfect gentleman, I wish to bid our biddy adieu, not because I am well-bred, but because I am drunk and foolish. "Well let me go say goodbye to her and I'll..."

"No, I told you, I want you back at your table *right now!*" The old Sarge's authority voice deepens as if talking to his child. I sense the fat bouncer lurking just beyond my peripheral vision waiting to pounce.

"But I only want to be polite and tell the lady goodbye..."

"Do you hear me? She doesn't give a shit about you, and if you do not return to your table right now, I'll have your ass thrown out." I can tell the Sergeant at Arms has had just about enough of this drunk. As his image blurs, I waiver briefly, relent, and rejoin Daryl, my only good decision this afternoon.

I sit lovelorn staring at my little Venus hoping for a fleeting glance, but she never looks my way. The Sergeant at Arms is right the little cunt could not give two shits to a fart in the wind about me. We swill drinks well into the evening when we decide to ditch the place.

In an attempt to keep the drunks off the streets, the Army provides a shuttle bus. We catch the bus and sit stupidly as the bus driver makes a circuitous rout through Wheeler Air Base. The driver chose this rout first because there are two inebriated soldiers in the rear of the bus beating the shit out of some hapless airman. The airman defends himself by running down the center isle and out the door; the drunks cheer their victory. The bus drives past each quad, stopping to let guys off. We exit the bus one quad past ours because we are napping and have to walk back to our barracks.

The next morning, talk about feeling like shit. This hangover is viler than any hangover in Vietnam. It is Monday, PT day, and I toil through the exercises, afterwards drinking my canteen dry. The contents taste like warm metallic swamp water, and throughout the day, I seriously question my existence on this rock. Life cannot go on like this. It is only a matter of time before getting drunk and getting the shit beat out of me. By the end of the day, I resolve to stop drinking and do something, anything, to get me out of this goddamn infantry for good.

I put myself on a strict budget of 40 dollars spending money each month and bank the other 100 dollars; this way falling off the wagon is more difficult. With lots of time on my hands, I sign up for a typing class at the adult education complex down the road. At night and on weekends, I seek vacant offices where I can practice my typing. I solicit

Sillen to do small typing jobs for him. The work is sporadic, but I am dry and warm when the company returns from the field wet and cold.

The battalion reenlistment sergeant just about shits his pants when I feign reenlisting to change my MOS. The reup Sarge tells me I must retake my GT test, and if I bring up my scores, I can qualify for, “many jobs in the army, no problem,” he assures me this with the gracious smile of a crocodile. This sounds like a plan to me, so I retake my intelligence test and manage to increase my GT score from 92 to 113. Captain Shelton casually remarks 113 can get me into almost any Army school, but there his interest in my education dies. The reenlistment sergeant pressures me to reenlist for six years before qualifying for retraining. He dangles Commo School, Clerk Typist School, and other such mirages. All I have to do is take a burst of six – but fuck that shit.

I observe that the enlisted dental assistants have it made, no KP, no guard, no field, no rifle, and no inspection bullshit. I ask the dentist if he has a textbook on dental mechanics, the making false teeth. They have nothing like that, but the doctor gives me a plaster mold of somebody’s teeth. This is good for a start, and I ask my mother if our family dentist can spare a first-year dental textbook, which he sends. I spend most of my spare time at the library studying this book and the plaster choppers. Everybody thinks I am nuts.

For the next three weeks, B Company suspends training to create a picnic park next to the dependent housing, allegedly named Colonel Oran Henderson Memorial Park, the colonel is not dead yet, but after three weeks of monotonous labor, we wish he were. The supply sergeant provides axes, machetes, and hand sickles to clear an area of thick undergrowth. Sergeant Diaz demonstrates how to cut three-foot high grass by using a forked stick and bunching it up then whacking it with the machete. “Just like sugar cane,” adds Captain Shelton.

“Yes sir, we cut cane like this in Puerto Rico.” After a couple of demonstrations, we wallop the crap out of the tall grass until we clear several hundred feet. The platoon loads the grass, the stumps, and the rocks onto several duce-and-a-halves then we begin the routine all over again. The company plugs away at this bullshit for three weeks, and everybody hates every minute of it. We are never invited for a picnic or to utilize this little make-work project, and after we finish, nobody else uses it either and the jungle returns.

For the next two weeks, we paint the barracks. The labor is monotonous; every day we paint the walls and windows using undersized paintbrushes. Nolan is stuck painting the latrine with car paint, which gives him terrible headaches and dizziness. Several weeks after we finish, the Army brings in contract painter, and we push all of our bunks, footlockers, and wall lockers into the middle of the room where we cover everything with great sheets of plastic. The painters spray-paint the entire barracks in two days and leave.

I drape my towel over the foot of my bunk so the orderly will know I have KP the next morning and at 0400, he quietly wakes me up. All the KPs dress in previously worn fatigues because KP is a dirty, thankless job, and it lasts until 2000 that night. All of my fatigues are dirty from painting, and I must break starch with new fatigues and wear my spit shined combat boots. Bleary eyed and scruffy, this morning’s Kitchen Police slouch myopically at a dining table praying silently for the coffee to finish brewing.

The first person to arrive normally signs up for the DRO job, which is the easiest and cleanest job while the next most coveted work is trays. You work like crazy during the rush, but afterwards, things slow down and usually there is time to kill. I always elect to wash pots and pans, considered the worst job, because I can work alone at my own pace and seldom will anybody bother me, not even the cooks.

When Lieutenant Lewis sees the scruffy appearance of the DRO, he turns livid. Sergeant Diaz catches the first ass chewing then the mess sergeant, and eventually, through the tiny window, the XO spies the two tray-washing KPs waiting idly in their dirty uniforms for the rush to begin. It only gets worse when Captain Shelton gets in on the scandal. Sergeant Diaz frantically collects the KPs in the kitchen and starts berating us for looking like shit, except when he glances me, he pauses briefly, looks me up and down, "This," he points to me, "this is what KPs should look like." Compared to the others, I am one sharp soldier, my uniform is clean and pressed, my boots are polished, and the platoon sergeant even bends down a tiny bit to see if my belt buckle is shiny and free of fingerprints, and it is. Sergeant Diaz dispatches the other KPs upstairs to change into clean uniforms. Without being toady, I score brownie points big time.

Before the DRO returns, Captain Shelton orders a glass of milk, so the mess sergeant dispatches me for this trifling task, "Your uniform looks good, Lupton."

"Why thank you, sir."

"From now on, the mess sergeant will inspect the KPs every morning and the best looking man will get the day off to be the orderly room runner." This is a small enticement for the KPs to dress by the book and a large inducement for me to circumvent KP, no matter how trivial this may seem. I show up for my next KP wearing newly starched fatigues, spit-shined boots, polished brass, and I even sport a brand new baseball cap. I could almost demand the mess sergeant pick me for KP Supernumerary; I deserve it, and with vainglorious self-righteousness, I depart the mess hall and ensconce my skinny ass in the orderly room where I sip coffee and run small errands for Sillen. By 1700 hours, I am through for the day.

I enjoy the job I created. For the first time, I feel included in the workings of the company; I scrutinize the milieu of the orderly room very closely. Even if my inclusion is infinitesimally insignificant, I feel imperative. After I return from an errand to battalion, I overhear Sillen mention Pearl Harbor with First Sergeant Lee. Sillen jokingly declares the new sergeant participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor, which is ridiculous, but walking in on the middle of a conversation can be perplexing. We are getting a new platoon sergeant from the replacement depot. I remain clueless until Sergeant Yamabiashi appears in the orderly room and graciously introduces himself to everybody. He is returning from Vietnam through the Army hospital at Tripler where he has been convalescing for the past year. I learn he suffered a leg wound while advising Vietnamese CIDG soldiers, he speaks Vietnamese too, and spent a week surviving in the jungle with an infected leg until he walked up to an ARVN encampment. At first, the ARVNs thought he was Vietnamese, but that did not last long. When they flew him home on the C141, the man on the stretcher above him began dripping blood on his chest so when the plane landed, the young girl passing out Welcome to Hawaii leis would not even approach him. The Captain assigns Sergeant Yamabiashi to 2nd platoon as their platoon sergeant.

Schwartz shows me his new orders transferring him to the Pentagon. After writing to Senator Bobby Kennedy to bitch about the Army assigning him to the infantry at Schofield Barracks, the Senator helps Schwartz get the plum duty he wants. "Yeah, Senator Kennedy is hard on the army," he lectures me, "I was never supposed to be in the infantry because when I volunteered for the draft, the recruiting sergeant told me I could become a cryptologist, and the army would send me to school for that job, not bad, eh?" The smug bastard, Schwartz is older than most of us, in his mid twenties, and has a college degree.

"You can volunteer for the draft? I didn't know that."

"Yup-per, I told my recruiting sergeant I wanted to volunteer of the draft and become a cryptologist, or I would enlist in the Naval Reserve. He needs to fill his montly quota and after making a call or two, he said okay. I told him it needed to be in writing, and he said okay to that too. I have been fighting this since I got out of basic. I was flabbergasted when I got orders for AIT, and after that, the army assigns me to Schofield Barracks. I wrote Kennedy and showed him a copy of the contract the recruiting sergeant signed, and now I'm almost gone." The smirky fucker waives his orders at me, and I am intently resentful of his good fortune.

"Henderson signed up to be a motor pool mechanic, and they put him in the infantry too."

"That is because he didn't get anything in writing. That's the key, writing."

"He even reenlisted for six years, and he is still here."

"That's his problem, he needs a written agreement."

"Shit, is that all you did to get out of here?"

"Yup, give it a try with your senator, Lupton. You never can tell what will happen." I immediately go up stairs and type out a letter to Senator Clark, our dowdy, balding old representative who has been Pennsylvania's senator for a millennium. I never get an answer.

On February 19, I dress in Class As and catch the bus to Honolulu. I am excited about my appointment for an upper GI x-ray. The nurse at x-ray instructs me to remove my outer clothes and put on a gown; I follow her into the x-ray room and stand on a platform while the doctor pushes a bulbous instrument head against my stomach. "Push down as if you are moving your bowels," he instructs me. I break wind, everyone laughs except me. All the while, he kneads his instrument upward into my stomach. "There, there it is, come look." Other personnel crowd around the screen commenting on the image, and that is the end of the procedure. The chief nurse tells me they will send a report to my doctor.

I head for the bus stop and catch the Wahiawa bus back to the barracks. I should have taken the bus down to Honolulu and wasted the rest of the day down there because when I return, Ahuna sees me from the third floor window and greedily invites me to change into fatigues and join the men who are picking up cigarette butts in the bushes around the building. With regret for being so stupid, I join the rest of the platoon in their mindless detail.

"According to the x-ray report, Lupton, you either 'had an ulcer', 'the ulcer is forming', or 'the ulcer is now healing'," the battalion's chief medic painstakingly quotes from my report.

"So what does that mean?" I ask.

“It means we treat you with Maalox, and I want you to keep your stomach full at all times, that’s all.” His response is so nonchalant, so indifferent I become anxious. I want out of the Army with a medical discharge. I went to Vietnam and did my duty. In my mind, I am done, and now all the Army wants to do is dispense a stupid fucking bottle of Maalox and some duffless antacids and send me on my merry way. Fuming as I walk back to B Company, I fumble to juggle my Maalox and prescriptions when attempting to light a cigarette. As I approach Headquarters Company, a sawed off little second lieutenant comes waltzing out of the orderly room. My hands are overflowing when the truncated officer yells, “good morning troop,” in his most demanding voice. I know what the little prick wants – he wants me to salute him. My meds drop as I comply, and the patronizing little dickhead deigns not to help me. Assisting the private is beneath his civility. Okay, no problem, I retrieve my medications, light my cigarette, and return to B Company, peeved, but none the sorrier.

Almost everywhere at Schofield, FTA appears as graffiti. Disaffected soldiers paint it on the trashcans at the PX, on the theater wall, and on the bus stop benches in front of the snack bar. The catchphrase appears almost universally overnight. Standing at the side of the afternoon formation with their arms crossed, are our officers, staring skeptically at what is about to happen, except for Captain Shelton who is behind all of this tomfoolery. First Sergeant Lee announces the company needs a slogan to boost unit cohesion and morale. “Now when I tell you men, I want you to bellow, B Company, Sykes Regulars!” This whole slogan thing is stupid. The men stand underwhelmed, and when First Sergeant Lee gives his command to yell, unwittingly, I am one of only a few to sound off.

“F...T...A, all the waaay,” my boisterous voice trails off into obscurity. I believe my smartass cheer will be indistinguishable amongst the male chorus. A stunned silence follows until the gaffe sinks in then everyone cracks up, even Captain Shelton smiles.

“Very good, Lupton,” the First Sergeant responds in a flat, monotone voice. I feel my goose is cooked. After a few more tries, an apathetic cheer resonates throughout the quad. Through lack of spirit, our company aphorism dies an ignoble death this very afternoon.

When we are kids barely able to aim a rifle, Mr. Wade, a neighbor’s father, takes us to Art’s Rifle Range to shoot 22 rifles. Interest in this activity lasts for some time, we never matriculate into competition shooters, but I do get useful exposure with firearms that come in handy later in life. I shoot expert in basic training and score high when the Wolfhounds qualify with our M14s before leaving for Vietnam. When 1st Sergeant Lee tells us the brigade wants to start a rifle team, I jump at the chance. I remember vividly Sergeant LaVilla and Sergeant Prine. Both are TDY when I join the Wolfhounds and neither train with the company, and bingo, I foretell this as an excellent opportunity to skate out of training and KP and guard, oh my!

In the morning, a group of wannabes goes to an indoor range to shoot 22 caliber target rifles. The rifles are bulky and heavy and weigh about 20 pounds. We zero in the rifles by using sandbags to brace the weapons. A spotter tells us how to adjust our sights after each round, and then we begin practicing. The NCO in charge is our battalion S4 sergeant who runs the practices very seriously and tries to help each man improve.

In the afternoon, an even larger group of wannabes of all enlisted ranks assembles at a special large-bore rifle range. Most have absolutely no experience shooting large

bore competition except Nolan. It is he who shows us how to blacken the front sight with a carbide lamp, zero in the rear sight, and explain the distances to the targets. After zeroing in our weapons on the 25-meter range, we begin shooting targets at varying distances, 50 meters, 100 meters, 150 meters, and 300 meters. Half of us must work in a trench lined with rows of targets affixed to gizmos that allow us to raise and lower the targets. After a round of shooting, we lower the target, count the hits in the various circles, call in the score, take black sticky paper to patch the holes of the black portion and white sticky paper to patch the white portion of the target, and then push the target back up for the next round. One buck-sergeant patches the white portion with black stickers and the black portion with white stickers until somebody on the firing line notices this. The dumb ass endures a load of mockery for being so stupid. I tell you this just so you know it possible.

Rumor has it that the 8th Army is coming from Korea to shoot competitively. The high scorers of USAHAW (United States Army Hawaii) will then contend for a chance to make the All-Army rifle team. We will compete with a team from the Philippines, and the winners will then travel TDY to the mainland for further competition. I could be years touring and shooting; visions of stateside travel, maybe Germany, France, and even the Olympics dance in my head like so many sugarplums. If only I can get out of KP and guard. To control my heart rate, I halve my smoking to one pack a day and forego my morning coffee.

After a week of this routine, I am contented with this wonderful duty while the company continues field training in and around Schofield. Every day, we must look at the duty roster First Sergeant Lee posts in the hallway outside of the orderly room. I discover my name scheduled for a weekday KP. "Hey, Top, you have me scheduled for KP on Friday, and I have to go to the rifle range all day." He becomes exasperated; after throwing his pencil down on his desk, I can tell he is pissed. I say nothing; he rises, regains his pencil, angrily scratches out my name, and writes in somebody else's. I have transgressed the first sergeant, not a good thing to do, but I am determined to qualify for TDY and fulfill my daydream of traveling the Pacific basin in my quest to get out of the dumb fuck infantry. I am really a dumb shit too.

On Friday morning, we assemble at the rifle range for practice. We are shooting the 300-meter targets today with a timed-firing of 10 rounds. The line of men starts blasting away at the targets trying to shoot all ten rounds within 20 seconds. The trick is to fire one round and have the front sight fall to the bottom of the little black circle already realigned to fire the next round. You cannot meticulously re-sight the rifle because you will run out of time. I fire nine of my ten rounds okay before the NCOIC calls time. My score is seven rounds in the black and two in the white. The sergeant in charge is not impressed, but for my first try, I think it is not so bad. I am not daunted because with a little bit of practice I will be hitting the black ten out of ten in no time. The buck sergeant who confuses white with black fails to hit the entire target four out of ten shots. Nolan scores the highest of the entire group; I come in sixth, which is well ahead of my more tenured NCO competitors. We adjourn for the day at noontime.

After lunch, our group assembles outside the indoor rifle range to shoot 22. Sergeant Dalton is there; he has come from the NCO club. I know this because I can smell the beer on his breath. He harangues me about leadership; babbling incessantly about leading his men in combat, he sounds ridiculous. Dalton is merely posturing to

impress his own platoon members with his pretentious bullshit. “Oh, please,” I think to myself, “on July 19th when the shit hit the fan, instead of leading your men in the fire fight, you volunteer to guard a wounded man while the rest of 3rd platoon gets shellacked.” Dalton returns to the company area with a full load of ammunition, 3rd platoon members are livid. Being with 2nd platoon, I cannot verify this account. In any case, he is obnoxious. He leans up close to me with his foul breath spouting his sanctimonious bullshit, I say nothing, but I know the score; I am not impressed with his charade. Finally, the goddamn door opens, and we file in for the practice.

On Monday morning, I smugly watch the company marching off to do PT. I look forward to large bore practice and feel confident I can make the team with just a little bit more diligence. We climb into the duce and a half and join the other competitors riding to the rifle range. The very first thing to occur is the NCO in charge reads off a list of names. All of the enlisted are out, every one, cut from the team, and told to re-board the truck. Those left standing are all buck sergeants and above, only Nolan remains on the team. Most of us scored higher than that chunky colorblind buck sergeant who remains standing with the surviving competitors. The duce-and-a-half drives away. Everybody pisses and moans about the process, some want to bitch, but bitch all you want, who is to give a shit. After chow we mosey over to the small-bore range, the NCO in charge is enthusiastic as ever, but I cannot seem to get excited about the 22 anymore. I deliberately miss my bulls-eye, so he rightfully eliminates me.

For my quixotic resolution to join the rifle team, I pay and pay and pay. The First Sergeant puts me on KP every third day for a month, I pull guard on the weekends, and one day, I have to tell him he has me on guard and KP on the same day. This time he is happy to adjust the KP roster, and he is benevolent enough to give me a day to rest between my next KP and my subsequent weekend guard duty. I am positive the First Sergeant conspires to screw me out of KP Supernumerary because the mess sergeant eliminates me for a frayed belt loop in deference to another man wearing an old wrinkly pair of fatigue pants. After this charade, I go upstairs and change back to dirty fatigues. Screw ‘em, the mess sergeant never notices the difference. This teaches me a bitter lesson, but I never complain to First Sergeant Lee.

Almost from our first day in the Army, the sergeants emphasize we must follow the chain of command. For us, the chain of command begins with our platoon sergeant then our company commander, the battalion commander, the brigade commander and so forth all the way up to the Joint Chief, and even the president of the United States. To break the chain of command is a sin. I ask platoon Sergeant Diaz if I can see Captain Shelton. He asks why. I just tell him education. Okay, I go in to see the captain and ask him if he will allow me to attend clerk typist school, so I may become a clerk. In my mind, I am gaining valuable civilian skills, and getting out of the infantry too. I lay out my reasons for wanting to change my job and earn a clerk’s MOS on my permanent record. He tells me he will look into the matter, and I leave his office with a modicum of confidence that I may succeed. In the afternoon, an angry Sergeant Diaz calls me into the orderly room. He and the first sergeant are pissed at me. “Why didn’t you tell me you wanted to go to clerk’s school, Lupton?”

“I did Sarge,” I whine, “I wanted to see the Old Man regarding education.” Nothing can hide his consternation; he feels I made an end-run around the chain of command by not explaining my intentions to him first. First Sergeant Lee looks at me

wearily. Apparently, everything backfires; I piss off the Captain with my appeal. To Shelton, I am betraying his mission of building and training a combat company. Diaz orders me back to the platoon; they will let me know. Nothing ever comes from my petition, and forever more, the Captain ceases to acknowledge my existence. I have sinned again.

The new dentist works diligently on my second root canal. He meticulously cleans, dries, and packs the cavity after he takes a culture to make sure there are no bacteria remaining. This process takes a period of weeks, and he gives me a sense of finality. When we make my next appointment, I opt to see him on a Saturday, so I have an excuse to come here rather than stand the routine Saturday morning inspection. "Can you write, Important Must Keep, on my appointment slip? That way I will be sure to make it here." Okay, he agrees, no problem. I give First Sergeant Lee my appointment slip, and he deposits it into his folder under the appropriate date, still no problems.

The next Saturday I awake to discover the routine weekly inspection is actually an IG inspection, which is much more elaborate. We must dress in starched fatigues; stand in ranks as the IG follows Captain Shelton when inspecting our rifles, and afterward a civilian and the IG will inspect our field gear laid out on our bunks. The Marines wax poetically calling the latter examination, "junk on the bunk."

I show Sergeant Diaz my appointment slip for 1100 hours, and he says no. "But Sarge, I gotta keep this appointment. It says so right here," I point to the words written on the paper.

"We have inspection, Lupton. You are not going to this appointment." He hands my appointment slip back to me and turns away. I am pissed to no end. Goddamn you. After breakfast, I stand the ranks inspection in the quad as Captain Shelton and the IG methodically work their way through the company. At 0930 hours, we return to the barracks to lay our field gear on our bunks. We loiter interminably waiting for the officers who never come. I still have time to make my appointment, so I ask Sergeant Diaz again if I can go to the dentist, again he answers no. The civilian eventually appears at 1115, walking insipidly past each man's bunk then he disappears out the door. After he leaves, I fume.

The word comes down that anybody with a gripe can go see the IG officer and register his complaint with him. Henderson complains he cannot get plastic sheets for his bunk. He needs them because he wets the bed. I do not know what Grimes is there for, he is new in the company, but I am sure his complaint is important to him. I show the IG Major my appointment slip, and he asks if I went to see Captain Shelton about this when Sergeant Diaz told me no. I tell him no, the Captain was busy with the inspection this morning and going over Diaz's head is suicide. He nods, dutifully writes down my complaint, and keeps my piece of paper. I never see the IG again.

Rumor has it that the 11th Brigade will receive 700 AIT trainees, and we will train them. The company will need many more buck sergeants after the trainees join the platoons, and a group of us is in line for promotion. Moran, Moser, Kerchner, a few others, and I have been E4s for only four or five months. We need six months time and grade to meet normal promotion protocols, so the scuttlebutt is that the company will give out temporary E5 promotions to a select few. Temporary rank puts the requisite amount of stripes on your arm, but you do not get E5 pay until you have enough time and grade to qualify. I am not so optimistic about becoming a buck sergeant and squad leader

so much as I am hopeful this slight bump up in rank will get me out of the shit details I hate so much, i.e. guard and KP.

The trainees will join the brigade after the battalion returns from Pohakuloa on the Big Island. I remember Smokey Fell telling me about the Big Island. The Army maintains an infantry training reservation located between Mona Loa and Mona Kea, both 14,000-foot mountains. The weather is windy, cold, and dry at seven thousand feet elevation. The entire training area is over 100 thousand acres, mostly used for live fire training for almost every type of weapon the Army owns. "They give you brand new boots when you return from Pohakuloa because the `a`a lava chews up the leather in a few weeks," Fell explains. "The elevation is so high that when you run, you cannot catch your breath, it gets goddamn cold up there too; the wind never stops blowing, and your lips chap in the dry air."

Late in the afternoon, we board giant C141s at Wheeler Airfield across from Schofield barracks. The noses of these birds fold out and almost our entire company loads one airplane. We sit on the floor leaning against our duffle bags for the one-hour flight to Hilo. It is dusk when we unload the plane. There are dozens of duce and a halves waiting for us. My platoon tosses up their duffle bags to those already in the truck, and we struggle up the tailgate to occupy the seats running along the length of the vehicle. We sit like sardines with our elbows cramped at our sides as the convoy takes off for Pohakuloa 50 miles away. We cannot see much because of the canvas top on the truck and the rapidly fading light soon disappears. The driver must continuously downshift as we gain elevation; it seems there is only one direction and that is up. Each time our driver shifts into a lower gear, the truck lurches forward with a jolt until the men sitting at the end of the seats start bitching about sliding out of the truck. Our driver fails to see the humor in our groans at each downshift, and we retort impolitely with, "Hey, can't you drive this fucking thing..."

"Hey, fuck you," echoes from the cab as the driver revs his engine, down shifts into first gear, and vengefully pops the clutch just to piss us off some more.

"Whoa," we yell in harmony as everybody slides to the rear; the last two men on the end begin to panic. The truck slows then gains speed and we struggle to shift ourselves forward when the Red Ball Express shifts into second and then third gear, pushing us forward against the cab. The whole process begins anew as the truck slows on the next hill, and the driver labors to maintain speed until the engine almost stalls then he shifts crudely back down the gear train once more. The mad downshifting continues as the convoy climbs, the air cools, and finally the trucks reach the Quonset huts at Pohakuloa. We tumble out of the vehicle muttering obscenities at the driver who refuses to get out of his cab. He guns the diesel engine producing a bilious cloud of vile exhaust and drives rapidly away, grateful he escaped a severe ass beating.

Captain Shelton, who accompanied the advance party, directs us to our Quonset huts. Everyone grabs a duffle bag from the pile and drags it to our new quarters. I take hold of Hill's bag that contains his training weights. It must weigh 100 pounds, and I pant rapidly as I muscle it over the threshold. Everybody searches for his own bag and eventually everybody claims himself a bunk. We have an oil-fired heater in the middle of the room, one of the NCOs manages to get that fired up, and eventually the room warms to a comfortable temperature.

First Sergeant Lee announces the location of our mess hall and invites us to visit for a warm snack. Major Bell is inside bullshitting with the mess sergeant. The major is normally very dour but tonight he is in good spirits as everybody gets a canteen cup of hot soup. Normally, I do not give a crap about soup, but tonight it really hits the spot and warms me through and through. In the dark, I experience trouble finding my Quonset hut because all the buildings are the same. Eventually, I recognize voices, get undressed, and snuggle down into my fart sack warm and comfy to sleep fitfully until 0500.

At reveille, we wake to a cold room, which motivates us to get out of the sack and into our fatigues. Immediately we line up at the mess hall for breakfast. The dining room is small, and we must remain in line until those before eat and leave. We wash our mess trays in 32-gallon garbage can of boiling hot water with a long-handled brush, rinse the tray by holding the corner so as not to scald our fingertips, and stack the steaming hot trays for the next man.

We spend our first day pulling shit details. I go to the ammo dump for the day to load trucks with bullets and mortar rounds. For the whole morning, we cannot smoke; when we leave for noon chow, we fire up our cigarettes after passing through the entrance gate. The temperature warms a bit in the afternoon sun, but the wind maintains its 20-mile an hour gusts throughout the day. Already the corners of my mouth turn dry and crack due to the arid blowing air. Every time I open my mouth to eat, the tiny breaks reopen. I will not heal completely until we return to Schofield weeks later.

The lava flows are pahoehoe, the more viscous fluid resembling soft ice cream, except on steroids. The swirls run in random directions, and with the dearth of rain, there are few trees or green vegetation to influence the wind. The whole place is desolate and depressing.

The next day, we form up and march out the main gate as the wind blows rain in our faces. What ever happened to the cold, dry, and windy climate is beyond us as we march until late morning in a persistent driving rainstorm. After our platoon breaks away from the company for a mock attack on a hill, we take off our ponchos, roll them up crudely, and wrap them around our pistol belts so we may run without hindrance. As we wait to get going, the rain persists; the Goddess Pele maintains her grudge against the common soldier.

Lieutenant Holms spreads the platoon out on line, and we advance at a slow walk toward a small hill. When we are about two hundred meters away, a jeep-mounted machine gun takes us under fire on our left flank. Lieutenant Holms dispatches my squad to charge the aggressors while the other two squads attack the main objective. Half the squad fires their rifles while the other half runs forward then they hit the ground. Now we run forward a short distance and hit the ground as the others blast away. Right away the pointy `a`a lava forces us to abandon this tactic and everybody stands and fires hip level shots as we assault the machine gun. As we close on the machine gun, the jeep drives off with the gunner still firing. Now my squad must rejoin the rest of the platoon at near the top of the hill. It is here I realize why Smokey Fell complained so bitterly about the high altitude draining your strength away. The thinner air takes its toll as we climb the rise. I am so exhausted I take my M16 and push myself up the hill. "Get up here, Lupton," Sergeant Diaz yells at me in between his own wheezing. Lieutenant Holms conquers the summit and begins yelling at us too. The others struggle up the hill huffing and puffing one-step at a time. Every instant I slow to catch my breath Holmes

berates me, “Get yer ass up here, Lupton!” I stand with pained face, panting, trying to regain the strength in my legs as Diaz and Holmes badger us to join the rest of the platoon on the summit. Only with great effort do I wobble almost to the top where I flop down defeated amongst the lava rocks too tired to go further.

Lieutenant Holmes is not happy with the platoon’s performance. He rails about the line falling apart while running through the rocks. Some men fall behind fatigued while others must negotiate the cruder `a`a lava, which slows them considerably. Only the platoon’s leaders, who did not fire and maneuver, are able to ascend in good order. I am half lying on my elbow and half leaning against a boulder as the lieutenant threatens us with doing it again, in between heaving, everyone moans. We assemble dejected, red faced, and sweating after struggling to stand on our feet then the platoon shamefully files off the hillside toward the road where the mess hall has set up the mermite cans for our noon chow.

Our good spirits return after nourishment. Some are optimistic we will march back to the Quonset huts and cease this stupid bullshit on a rainy day, but no, heavy rain resumes as we heft ourselves up into the open duce-and-a-half for the ride to another featureless lava field where the entire company conducts yet another inane assault. Daryl rides with us instead of the mortar jeep he rode around in all morning. Someone bitches about the renewing rain. “Man, it sure was cold riding in that jeep all morning,” he pronounces. A collective ooooohhh rises from the truck bed. To Daryl’s mortification big mouth Moran announces, “That remark calls for a Fuck – Him!” Chuckles ensue, everyone chants sardonically, “Him, him – Fuck Him,” followed by rollicking laughter. Even Lieutenant Holms riding in the cab turns around to see what is so goddamn funny. The downpour rages to punctuate our point to our discomfited whiner.

Our truck arrives at yet another distant lava field created from the jagged `a`a lava. It is deadly when you trip, which is what happens to me while running. I go down on the `a`a with my knuckles still holding my M16 and tear the skin from the back of my hands, but I get up and keep moving. The medic band aids my fingers after I pour water over the lacerations to get out the tiny lava grit.

The mess hall trucks out our evening chow and the Goddess Pele halts the rain long enough for us to eat, but the Hawaiian deity denies our request to staunch the blowing wind, “you white men are here, therefore, you must suffer,” she whistles with each howling gust.

Sergeant Diaz positions Henderson and me on the windy side of a hill where someone else dug a shallow foxhole. A few minutes later, we get the word for one of us to come get one sleeping bag from the supply truck. Why only one sleeping bag for each two-man hole remains a mystery to me ever since. We are still soaking wet from the day’s rain as Henderson and I stretch one of our ponchos over the top of the hole and secure the edges with rocks. The damn thing rattles and flaps all night, but the poncho substantially breaks the incessant wind.

“I don’t know, Henderson, we only have one sleeping bag. I guess we should rotate in and out of it every two hours. What do you think?”

“That is okay with me, Lupton, the other man can wrap up in the poncho to stay warm.” Supposedly, we are to have one man awake all night while the other one sleeps, but that protocol breaks down after the first two hours rotation. Both of us are dog-ass tired, and nobody comes around during the night to see if anyone is standing guard or not.

I take the first turn in the sleeping bag. My fatigues are still wet as I shimmy down into the fart sack. Goddamn, it is warm in here after a few minutes. I am asleep in minutes, and then instantly Henderson rocks my shoulder, "Lupton, two hours are past, it is my turn now."

Ah fuck, I am aware of the blowing wind once more, half my face is chilled, and I know Henderson wants to get warm for the first time today. Begrudgingly, I crawl out of my warm cocoon and put on my still frigid wet boots, "Damn, these boots are colder than shit, Henderson."

"Yeah, I know. My feet are freezing too." I wrap the poncho around me. It feels cold even through my field jacket, and my feet remain uncomfortably cold as I drift in and out of consciousness for the next two hours. We pull this exchange two more times during the night and when Henderson wakes me for his turn in the sack at 0300, I awake to a cold, cold gust of air blowing through the poncho tent; I snap back to reality. I cannot do it. I just cannot get out of this sleeping bag.

"Hey, Henderson, if you want to get warm you are gonna have to come in because I am not getting out." I snuggle down even further. My feet are warm and finally dry, as are my fatigues.

"Okay," Henderson replies taking off his boots. I roll on my right side and let down the zipper. Henderson struggles in. It is a real tight fit, but we lie back to back squeezed into our bag as the wild wind howls in laughter. Hey, fuck you Pele.

The dawn is breaking when I hear Sergeant Diaz barking orders to others. "We better get up, Henderson," I whisper as I shimmy my shoulders to wake my sleep mate.

"Yeah, okay, Lupton, let's get out of here." I pull the zipper down, freeing us like larva from the cocoon. Both of us sit, stiffened by the cold and cramped by the confines of the bag, we put on our still wet boots in silence.

"Ya know, Henderson, we probably shouldn't tell anybody about our sleeping arrangement last night," I tell him.

"Yeah, no problem, Lupton, I won't say a word if you don't?"

"Our secret is safe with me, man, this never happened." I stand upright causing the poncho to lose its anchoring rocks. We roll up our ponchos, the sleeping bag, and rejoin the platoon for our march to the chow line.

The company endures another morning tromping round the lava fields. The weather warms a bit in the afternoon making it much more pleasant than the day before. The company sits comfortably on the side of a grassy knoll as we watch Sergeant Riggs put the jeep mounted 106-recoilless rifle crew through their firing exercise. The crew calls out their step-by-step loading routine before ramming the large black tubular weapon with the hefty 106 antitank round. Mounted on top of the tube is the fifty-caliber spotter rifle, which uses a special white phosphorous round that simulates the trajectory of the 106. After much adjusting of the traversing and elevation wheels, the gunner pulls the trigger wheel between his knees, the white 50-caliber spotting round drifts lazily to an old beat up tank. Another round secures the proper sighting and then a huge explosion roars out the back of the 106 with a fiery vengeance. We watch the 106 tank round drift almost nonchalantly out to the tank where it explodes with a muffled retort. "Very good, Sergeant Riggs," Captain Shelton congratulates the crew. "Now do in the other one."

"Yes, Sir," rejoins the weapons platoon sergeant. As the crewmembers reload the rifle and traverse the firing range to sight the new target, the loader falls flat on his ass as

he attempts to cross behind the jeep when the cannon roars to life, throwing its lethal discharge fifteen feet to the rear. I gasp with the others as the back blast of the rifle almost incinerates the errant loader into teeny-tiny little pieces. An apprehensive moment ensues as the near pulverized soldier grasps that he just missed eternity by an instant. Huddled conversations reveal the gunner leaned up to adjust the spotting rifle and inadvertently pushed the firing wheel with his kneecap. Everybody sighs with relief when Sergeant Riggs turns to us with a smile as the crew reloads the tank killer one more time.

The next fifty caliber round lands close to the new hulk then the 106 round explodes out of the barrel and nails the target right square center. I am relieved when the practice is over. This is too close an incident for sure.

Later in the afternoon, we march to the live-fire range on the hillside where we find foxholes miraculously dug for our convenience. Norcross, Hill, and I occupy our foxhole while Sergeant Ahuna supervises the squad about fifteen feet above us. The mess hall brings out our evening chow and after we eat, we reoccupy our foxholes waiting for nightfall. We bring back with us about three thousand rounds and proceed to load our magazines. This is more ammunition than I have ever seen at one time in the army, and we expect to blow all of it away tonight.

It is the end of the day where the wind dies down, the atmospheric slack tide, and while we busy ourselves loading our magazines, Norcross looks up at us and yells, "GAS!" He runs up the hill flapping his hands. Are they are gassing us? We do not have gas masks, how could they do this to us?

"GAS!" Hill retorts and tears up the hill. I am stunned, remembering the tear gas training in basic; we have no gas masks...what is going on?

"GAS!" I confirm, running hard holding my breath. The colorless, tasteless gas is stealthy, undetectable until my nostril catches the full whiff causing my upper lip to curl convolutedly into a disgusting yuck. Sergeant Ahuna is hysterical.

"You guys detect gas?" asks Ahuna through his shit-eating grin.

"Goddamn it, Sarge, go take a shit will ya." He chortles once more with his fat, chunky Pineapple cheeks jiggling like a horse's ass as he relishes in our distress. We return to our hole to resume loading our magazines. A minute later, we must run from the hole again as Ahuna farts deathly one more time. You would think this is the funniest thing Ahuna has ever seen, and he enjoys himself even more when we must evacuate our foxhole for the third time. Much to our relief, the wind picks up after sunset, and we relax unaffected in our hole while waiting for the mortar platoon to start firing flares.

Lieutenant Holmes gives us permission to commence firing before darkness envelopes us, and we start blasting away with as much ammunition as we can. Because we have so much M16 ammo, I fire my entire magazine full automatic, magazine after magazine, at the derelict vehicles down range. The mortar platoon begins firing mortar flares that burst far to our front, drift slowly to the ground with their yellow baby-shit luminescence, and we blast away as fast as we can. Our rifles' gas tubes turn cherry red their entire length and I fear mine might explode. I take a break and reload my magazines before the next flare pops then resume firing as rapidly as I can. Some people try to shoot the flares with their tracer rounds as the flare drifts toward us, causing Lieutenant Holmes to go ballistic. I cannot help it though; I take a well-aimed shot with ball ammo causing the magnesium to explode in a great plume of sparks. Ahuna comes

running up, “Who shot that flare? Who shot that flare?” However, we all fain ignorance while shunning Ahuna’s eyes and chuckling amongst ourselves. We finally shoot through our 1,000 rounds and must let our smoking rifles cool before handling them further.

The next day we continue our company maneuvers, and after evening chow, Sergeant Ahuna gathers the squad around him to brief us what is to happen this night. Ever so casually, I ask him if maybe he would not mind sitting upwind of us tonight. His jolly good sense of humor from last evening evaporates into an outburst of noxious invectives. “Goddamn you, Lupton, you think you are such a fucking smartass. You keep it up; I’ll get you an Article 15!” My offhand remark genuinely pisses off the moron. Norcross, standing behind Ahuna, cracks a smirk, as does Hill, who steals an amused glance at Norcross, and then at me. I sink my teeth into my lower lip to the point of drawing blood, but I too am losing it. “Don’t you get smart with me, Lupton, Goddamn you.” Ooh, he is pissed now.

“I only asked you to sit up wind, Sarge,” I defend, trying to make light of my faux pas.

“You keep it up, Lupton; I’ll get your fucking ass busted down to *private*.” Now he is not so funny even if he is merely posturing, I manage to reduce my countenance to somber, Norcross snickers. Ahuna whips around and berates him and Hill, who covers his mouth with his hand. A tense moment ensues as Ahuna glares at them, then back at me; his eyes fill with rancor, he is breathing heavily.

“Okay, Sarge, okay,” I know when to cave even if it is mortifying. The pudgy little nobody stomps away in a huff. “So what bent him out of shape so much?” I query the others. The squad laughs furtively.

“Boy, Lupton, you sure know how to piss him off,” Slipka adds.

“Hey, the asshole thought he was so funny cutting those farts last night,” I defend with a shrug of my shoulders. I sometimes wonder what I do that ticks people off so much.

When we finally return to the Quonset huts, Sergeant Diaz pisses everybody off by making us clean our rifles before we go for a shower. I pour oil down my barrel to soak the carbon then I work on my trigger mechanism with my toothbrush and oil. There is a lot of carbon from our firing exercise and the job seems endless, but I manage to get the bolt mechanism clean. The Army allows us no solvents and there is no hot running water like at Schofield; the job is tedious. The last thing I do is run several patches through the bore, and it shines like new for me when I turn in my rifle to the supply sergeant. Afterwards, I gather my shaving kit, a change of underwear and fatigues, and tromp off to the showers in the windy dark where there are plenty of dirty men rotating in and out of the showerheads. I shave afterwards, brush my teeth, and feel human for the first time in four days.

The next day, we spend our morning cleaning up all of our field gear. We have been here almost two weeks and some of us need haircuts. There is no barbershop at Pohakaloa, Hilo is the nearest town, and nobody has transportation anyway, so Sergeant Diaz gives several of us haircuts. Diaz has 11 kids and this is a normal chore for him. From the scowl on his face, I need not have asked if we get a massage and a hand job after the haircut. He fails to appreciate the humor of my joke.

For my attempt at jocularly, I must walk guard that night. The air is cold and still as I stroll slowly amongst the Quonset huts on my last two-hour guard. In the dawn quiet, cooks hurry to their day's work. From the water trailers, KPs draw 5-gallon cans of wash water for the emergent heaters. Atop the smoke stacks of the heaters sits a 10-can to keep out the rain. A tacit competition exists to see who can fire their 10-cans the highest by dripping the most gasoline into the heater before recklessly tossing in a match. I count the fiery whoosh of igniting gasoline and occasionally catch a glimpse of the 10-can arcing gracefully to their zenith above the rooftops. The subsequent ding on the lava announces the successful fire up of yet another emergent heater, three for each company. The Dawn of Army Civilization is fast approaching.

Before we return to Schofield, the battalion fires the 90mm recoilless rifle today. Each man gets to shoot two rounds after they act as assistant gunner to the man before them. When my turn comes around, I am the assistant gunner to the battalion surgeon. Do not ask me why he is firing the 90mm, but he is, and after I lock the breach of the rifle, dumb shit Mosher instructs me to put my head against the small of the gunner's back with my arms wrapped around his waste. I grab hold to find my arms will not fit around his waste. When he fires the weapon, I feel as if somebody smacked my right ear with his open palm with all his might. My knees wobble, my eyes blur, and I almost black out. If I were not holding onto this fat tub of lard, I surely would crumple to the ground. I stand punchy, staggered, wanting to run off the range to escape the next dreadful blast, but I must load the doctor's second round. I open the breach, pull out the expended casing, and shove the next round into the rifle. After closing the breach, I tap the gunner on his helmet. "Head to the rear, Lupton," Mosher's voice sounds distant.

"Fuck you," I yell back at him. I push my offended right ear snugly against the captain's blubbery gut, hold my left palm against my left ear, and close my eyes tightly, holding on for all I am worth. This firing is tolerable; the concussion is substantially muted.

The surgeon has had enough, he waltzes off the range, and another man rotates to take his place. I want to run after the doctor, but I have to fire my two rounds before I can get relief. Too dazed to give a shit, I just pull the stupid trigger. The deafening roar scrambles my brain once again; I watch the supersized bullet drift down range, exploding with a muffled whimper. "Good shot, Lupton!" I hear Lieutenant Holms yelling from a great distance even though he stands right beside me. Still punchy, I want to give up, this whole thing is insane, but I still have one more shot to make. My assistant gunner reloads me, and I just point the stupid weapon down range and pull the trigger. The goddamn concussion rattles my brain even more, who cares where my round landed. Finally, I can get off this range! Vibrating, I put down the 90 and stagger quickly off the firing line. At night, we sit around cleaning our rifles when Moran asks, "I can hardly hear anything. Does anybody else's ear ring?" We all laugh from our own muted world. "I feel like I am living inside a tuning fork."