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We were suppose to train on the Big Island for 30 days but because of our new training mission, the 20th Infantry leaves Pohakuloa after only two weeks. The other battalions are stuck in the Quonsets huts for an additional fortnight. Grumbling ensues in the shower when Sillen offhandedly remarks to somebody from the 3rd of the 1st Infantry that we are going back to Schofield early to train the new AIT trainees. You can trust me though, everyone is grateful to be leaving this dumpy place.

Shortly after returning to Schofield, we learn the brigade decides to bring in a bunch of DIs from the mainland to train the troops. For several months, the trainees march off in one direction while we continue with our normal monotonous training schedule.

Upon arriving at the barracks, there is the usual mad scramble to clean up our field gear, rifles, and other equipment. Humping the lava fields shreds the leather of our boots, and our supply sergeant eagerly exchanges new boots for our old ones. "I want to see these boots spit-shined tomorrow morning," Sergeant Diaz orders the platoon before leaving for the day, and begrudgingly, we settle in after chow to shine them. Sure enough, Diaz comes around after morning formation to look at every man's new pair of boots, and he is not happy when he finds several pairs untouched. He leads the offending shirkers away for some extra police call and weed pulling as everybody else readies their field gear.

In the Air Force, the men receive their paychecks in their mailboxes every two weeks. In the Army, we must line up by rank, report to the pay officer, usually Captain Shelton. Reporting loudly, "Spec4 Lupton reports for pay, sir," I stand at attention in freshly starched fatigues, newly spit-shined boots, wearing a shiny, fingerprintless belt buckle, and saluting for all I am worth. A perfunctory act of fealty, the sacrament makes me feel beholden to my company commander, a reminder to me of exactly who controls every facet of my life.

"Yeah, here is Lupton. Your visit to the IG almost got me thrown into the stockade." I snicker at his remark failing to realize he is dead serious. He methodically counts out my money, deigning contempt as I retrieve it. Our eyes meet, words fail me, and so I move on.

The next morning at formation, First Sergeant Lee announces to the company that in the future, if anybody misses their dental appointment, their ass gets an Article 15. His demeanor is prickly, as if this is just one more burden he must endure. This decree applies to the entire battalion, not just B Company. The C Company First Sergeant misses a dental appointment and the Colonel schedules him for court-marshal, but he writes his congressman complaining that in 18 years of his Army career he has never been fined or court-marshaled for anything thus forcing Colonel Beers to drop the action. Nobody says a thing, but I always interpret Captain Shelton's unlikable remark as laying blame for this policy change squarely on my shoulders because I bitched to the IG. To think, I manage to piss off everybody again.

On payday, Captain Shelton allows his men to take half a day for personal business. I always walk over to the bank to make my 100-dollar deposit before I am tempted to spend it on anything. The bank is always full of activity with six long lines of people extending from the teller's counter across the lobby to the windows. I try to

choose the queue with the fewest civilians in it because I always seem to pick the line where a civilian worker cashes paychecks for their entire work group. Luck is not with me again as I settle in the line with only one civilian in it, the fat, ugly Pineapple snack bar waitress who it turns out is cashing pay envelopes for her PX cohorts. I cannot tell this until it is too late. She slyly pulls each check out of her purse one at a time, about 30 of them. By the time I realize this, changing to another line is not an option, and an hour after I go in to make a simple deposit, I stomp out fuming, and pissing and moaning to no end.

Returning from the bank, I happen to meet Sergeant Diaz on the sidewalk where he demands I pay him fifty cents for that haircut he gave me on the Big Island. He shows me his little black book with five or six names jotted down. I am stunned. He never said squat about paying him. This is extortion. At first, I balk but knowing Diaz can make my life even more miserable than Captain Shelton can, I bitterly hand over two quarters. I suppose he needs the money to buy one of his 12 brats a hotdog or something.

The reward for making Guard Supernumerary is to get out of walking guard all night. Somebody must stay awake and operate the telephone in case something goes wrong, so the truck driver, the Supernumerary, and the Sergeant of the Guard take two-hour shifts staffing the telephone. I have lots of motivation to make Supernumerary especially when it is raining. To have a loose thread dangling from your pocket, to have a wrinkle in your uniform, or to have a fingerprint on your belt buckle is a death knell; your ass walks guard that night. Depending on who the Officer of the Day is, the nitpicking can be that extreme, the competition is that keen. I remember Smokey Fell telling me the story when several men helped Ward get dressed for guard mount; there was not wrinkle in his uniform, not a scuff on his boots, his brass was immaculate, and seconds before the guard bell rings Ward leans on a freshly painted windowsill with his forearms. There being no time to change, Ward stands guard mount in his immaculately pressed uniform with painted sleeves. Ward walks his guard that night too.

After meticulously dressing in freshly starched khakis, I remain standing catatonically, remembering before hand to place my pistol belt and rifle on my footlocker, so I need not bend over and crinkle my pants before the guard mount. When the bell rings, I walk slowly, stiffly down each step to avoid wrinkling my pants or scuffing my brand new spit-shined combat boots. Second platoon's Lieutenant Fuck Up is the Officer of the Day, and to my surprise, he conducts the guard mount to the letter of the Army Regulation, inspecting each man's rifle, carefully looking at each man's front, and even taking the time to inspect the rear of each rank. Drat, the competition is tougher than I anticipated. The Lieutenant picks Slipka for Supernumerary because his physic is that of a blonde Germanic warrior. Being the platoon leader's favorite private sure does not hurt his chances either. Shit! Now I have to walk guard tonight.

My fifth general order mandates it is a sin to quit my post before being properly relieved. Around 0630, as I slowly circle the PX, which is the building next to my barracks, my guts tell me it is time to take a shit. I am in a real quandary about how to relieve myself without getting into an actual shitstorm. Figuring I can squat behind the trash dumpster real quick and dump my load quickly without anybody seeing me, I blithely approach the dumpster when one of the PX workers drives right up right next to the big trash bin. So much for that idea, I am hurting. If I abandon my guard post with the lame excuse of having to take a crap, I surely will fall into a world of shit. After my

next stroll around the PX, Sergeant Blankenship pulls up next to me in the guard truck; I implore the Sergeant of the Guard to let me run over to our latrine and take my dump. No, no, I cannot do that. Blankenship, the stupid lifer, insists I get into the ¾-ton truck and ride with all the other guards back to the guardhouse. I implore him, but he not will relent. I climb into the guard truck farting and cussing, my face turning red feeling as if I want to pass out. The truck drives past the front of our quad, turns right into the quadrangle, and stops midway between B and C Companies. I am incredulous. I jump out of the truck before it comes to a complete stop. Blankenship yells at me to get in formation, so he can dismiss the guard, but I dash up the stairs fumbling with my belt buckle, and just in time too. I park myself on the pot only moments before a turd of gargantuan size falls out of my ass, forming a big three coiler in the bottom of the bowl. I sit dreamily recollecting the fable Mr. Giles told our trade school class of boys that, “there will come a time in your lives one day when you will rather take a good shit than get a piece of ass.” His prophecy comes true this morning.

I know the mess hall closes shortly, so I dash downstairs, turn in my rifle to the Rankin the armorer, and eat breakfast. Upon returning to the barracks, I see my bunk disheveled. “Hey, what’s with my bunk?” I rag Sergeant Ahuna.

“Sergeant Diaz ripped it up Lupton because it was not made properly,” he comes back at me.

“I was on guard until just a few minutes ago! What is the matter he cannot wait a couple of minutes for me to get off guard?” My platoon sergeant’s behavior qualifies for the classical military definition of chicken shit: People who can lord it over others of inferior rank with stupid, inane, and petty rules and regulations just because they can. The whole thing grinds my guts.

“You should have made it before you went on guard last night,” Ahuna snaps back at me with Lifer Logic. Ahuna is scared of Diaz too; it is stupid to think he would intercede for me. I remake my bunk piece-by-piece, glaring at Diaz when he enters the quad bay. The smirky lifer bastard walks past ignoring me. I stand staring at him and throw him the finger after he passes. I never liked or disliked Diaz, but now I cannot stand his petty guts.

B Company acquires new replacements and Vietnam returnees almost everyday so each of the two platoons gives up one squad to form the third platoon. Diaz picks my squad for the new platoon, and we spend a morning lugging our bunks, footlockers, and wall lockers to our new barracks on the other side of the mess hall. Sergeant Yamabiashi becomes the platoon sergeant and Lieutenant Swenson is our platoon leader. For some reason, Yamabiashi puts me in the weapons squad as the 90 gunner. I have no idea what he thinks we were going to do with the 90mm. It is too heavy to lug up into the Kahukas, the rounds are too expensive to waste in training, and we never ever draw it out of the arms room except for inspections.

Days later, Sergeant Yamabiashi asks me if I want to take a shot at becoming Soldier of the Month, which entails an interview by all of the first sergeants and the battalion’s Sergeant Major Lee. The prize is a 100-dollar savings bond, whoop de do, and I get to spend the rest of the afternoon studying the 90 field manuals and prepping my uniform for the interview. The next morning at 0900 one soldier from each of the companies, assemble at the battalion headquarters waiting for the sergeants to arrive. Yamabiashi gives me the wrong uniform; I notice everybody else wears combat boots

while I wear low quarters. It is too late to change. The panel calls my name first. Each sergeant gets to ask me a question. “You want to take your time before answering the question, Lupton,” Sergeant Major Lee lectures me.

“Right Sarge, err, Sergeant Major,” I quickly correct myself because I know these enlisted lifers are pickier about protocol than officers are. His first question is what I think about the Vietnam War. I stumble at first thinking the question unusual. Maybe I should answer with humor by crisply saying, “I feel, Sergeant Major, we should kill all the men, rape all the women, and eat all of the babies,” but this will not likely go over well with the panel of sour pussers facing me. “I think the way we fight the war is a little strange, err, I mean...” I bear in mind the incident when A Company surrounded a village then announced to the villagers that they had better flee before we bring down an artillery barrage on their village, allowing the VC a chance to disappear. I dare not say anything that they may construe as antiwar sentiment, this much I know. “The way we fight the war is strange to me.” There, Gomer Pile could not I have said it better, but I have no conviction. I had better say something they want to hear, or I am toast. “I mean the tactics we use over there ...ahh, are unusual, but ...I am on the Army’s side. I mean ahh... I’m in the Army, so I support the war effort.” Not a lot of sincerity, but hopefully, this gets me out of a tacky situation.

“Okay, First Sergeant Lee, what is your question for Lupton?” Phew, I am out of the hot seat with Sergeant Major Lee.

First Sergeant Lee does not quibble for a heartbeat, he spouts out his question, “How do you raise the American flag to half mast?”

Shit, I do not know. “You raise the flag...,” haltingly, I stammer thinking deeply into the recesses of my brain when an epiphany bursts upon me, “You raise the flag to the top of the mast, and then lower it to half mast.” Good, I got it. The questioning continues. The C Company First Sergeant asks me what they call the ball on the top of the flagpole.

“A truck,” I answer enthusiastically, presumably correct because none of them blanch at my answer. Sergeant Major Lee dismisses me, and the other candidates take their turns.

I hang around outside of B Company’s orderly room waiting for my results. I watch First Sergeant Lee walking across the quad with A Company’s first sergeant. They split off when they approach the company area. I look expectantly at Lee, hopefully for a good report; as he nears the orderly room door, he glares at me and merely shakes his head implying, “What kind of an asshole are you?” He says it all with his dismay. I cannot imagine how I manage to piss off the lifers so much. Fuck those stupid assholes anyways. Without further inquiry, I return upstairs, change into fatigues, and forget the entire sordid incident.

The beer garden is only half a block from the quad so after payday, while I still have some money, I stroll over for a cold one. Sitting at the far end of the courtyard are Harley, Moran, Moser, and Kershner; I naïvely think we can bond together as platoon brothers, but as I sit down, Harley asks me how long I have left in the Army. I tell him until May 1969. The snidely bastard rolls with laughter, “Shit Lupton, you have more time left than all four of us put together.” Moran, Moser, and Kershner are draftees who are obligated for only two years. Harley is an enlistee who returned from Vietnam in early 1966, and he has only a few months left in his enlistment. All four of them have

been here for a while, and all now have less than four months left in the army. I have another 24 months to go, and this thought depresses me. I take a draft from my beer and look intently at each one of these gems without saying a word. They dismay me, sitting with their smirky short-timer snickers. “Yeah, shit Lupton, Moser, and Moran have less than four months in the army, Kershner here is even shorter than they are. I have less than three months left,” Harley proudly rubs salt into the wound.

“Nice of you to point that out, Harley,” I say to him flatly, never taking my eyes from his, “You are so kind to remind me.” I do not have to call Harley a shithead he knows it already, and he revels in his role.

“Yeah, it’s too bad for *you*, Lupton.” They all stand up simpering coyly like the cat that just got away with eating the canary and leave me sitting with a cadaverous feeling in the pit of my stomach. I turn to watch another group of platoon members come in and sit down across the way, raucously drinking, and having a good time, but I stay by myself. Sitting with my back to the crowd, I buy a few more beers and enjoy my own company.

I find my existence in B Company to be insufferably boring. Day after day, we attend classes run by our NCOs and the officers. To while away the time between lectures, I subscribe to *The Readers Digest* because the stories are short and readable in between breaks, and the magazine will fit conveniently into my fatigue pants pocket. Returning from a break, I sit next to Daryl in the front row waiting for Sergeant Biggs to begin with yet another mind-numbing lecture about a subject so mundane I cannot even remember what it was. Daryl asks to see my *Readers Digest*, so I hand it to him as he slouches in his seat leafing through it, elbows resting on the desk when Sergeant Biggs waltzes in announcing the commencement of his class. He grabs my Digest from Daryl’s hands and tosses the book across the room. “Hey, what are you doing?” I yell indignantly.

“Fuck you, Lupton,” Biggs snaps back as he struts in front of the room looking like a peacock in full plumage, “We are beginning a class. Leave that book where it is.” I stand to challenge him when I hear the low avuncular voice of Sergeant Cox warning me to back down.

“Lupton,” I hesitate a moment.

“Sit down, Lupton, or I’ll kick your ass.” Biggs is just so full of himself this afternoon.

I know he will make a big deal out of it if I retrieve my magazine and the whole confrontation will be over nothing. I will be the only loser here. Biggs commences his class without further rancor, and I think the matter is finished. After the class, the NCOs hang around in the orderly room as if it is their clubhouse when I come in to check the duty roster. Upon my presence, Sergeant Biggs petulantly leafs through a magazine and makes an angry comment about doing what he tells me without giving him any lip. I refuse to kiss his ass and defiantly snap back that next time he should keep his hands off my property. First Sergeant Lee sits shuffling papers without paying attention to our exchange, but Biggs dares not to press the issue in front of him. The sergeant resumes angrily flipping through his magazine, agitated I would confront him in front of the first sergeant. I leave feeling smug with myself for telling him off in front of his cronies, and getting away with it too, even though in the end, I am only deluding myself.

Standing with others waiting for the afternoon formation to begin, the conversation turns to who made temporary buck sergeant. I listen as Mosher claims he saw the names of the men on the promotion list. "Moran, Kershner, Archibald, and I are on the list." He pauses a second, looks at me and says, "Lupton, your name is not."

"I didn't expect it would be," I reply acrimoniously. All of the Sp4s scheduled for promotion are draftees, all of whom spent their entire enlistments in Schofield, none of whom will deploy with the 11th Brigade for Vietnam as rumor may have it. I conclude that to succeed in the Army, I have to morph into a minion, possess no ambition, remain brain-dead, play the game, and swallow my pride – I will not need it anyway. Virtue is the innominate soldier lost amongst the ranks, identical, nondescript, and yet, I seem to call attention to myself by repeatedly stepping on somebody's dick.

I retreat to the library most weekends to get away from everybody. The black guys play their radios at such a high volume it bugs the shit out of me, especially when competing stations play at the same time. They play their jabungee jive in competition with the white guys' pop music. Classical is my preference but only one radio station plays light orchestral compositions, which becomes tiresome after a while. Even when I retreat to the library, the civilian kids congregate for bull sessions and concentrating is difficult. I withdraw even further into the recesses of the library to read *The Agony and the Ecstasy* where I empathize with Michelangelo's pitiful existence. Everything is boring and mundane to me. I have no direction, nothing to look forward to, and the notion of two more years of this dreary bullshit disheartens me.

I sign up for a speed-reading class, a math class, and I take a night course in English grammar too. There is a pair of air force sergeants in my English class. They persistently taunt me about their slovenly military careers, their 9-to-5 workdays, weekends off, and their unkindest cut of all, "What's a rifle," laughter envelopes the classroom. Bevis and Butthead think they are funny. It grinds my guts hearing how cushy others have it in the military.

People always talked about seeing the Old Lifer PFC. Usually, old lifers are at least staff sergeants, but it is possible to do 19 years in the Army and come out a buck private. Paranowski is one of them. He travels up and down the ranks several times mainly because of alcohol. He is a friendly little man whose stature reminds me of Brooks except Paranowski has a brain on most normal days. He willingly pulls his KP and guard without quandary. On one occasion, the reenlistment sergeant holds a company meeting to ferret out some re-up candidates. He starts his meeting with, "How many of you men love the Army?" After a few snickers, everybody sits muted, "Ah, one man," responds the blissful sergeant. We in the front row turn to see a solitary hand raised, it is PFC Paranowski, the room cracks up. The re-up sergeant's spiel falls on deaf ears. Paranowski resumes his climb back up the ladder from PFC to SP4, and eventually, back to buck sergeant. The captain likes him, as do the other sergeants. He becomes a squad leader in the 2nd platoon. One payday weekend he disappears on a bender, staying AWOL for a week. The MPs pick him up soused from a bar in Wahiawa and that is the end of Paranowski. Colonel Beers drums his ass out of the army as a Private E1 with nineteen years of service and a dishonorable discharge, just short of his needed 20 years.

Captain Shelton has the perfect pedigree of a winning officer, a graduate of West Point, Airborne qualified, a Ranger, and formerly a general's aide-de-camp. He is now putting in his perfunctory command-time as a captain, which will qualify him for fast

track to full colonel or even general some day. All he lacks is his purple heart and a medal for valor, and with any luck, the Congressional Medal of Honor. The tittle-tattle circulating is the Captain is willing to sacrifice his whole company for his CMH. The thought of earning another man's CMH at the expense of my own life is discomforting.

Our convoy travels to the windward side of Oahu via Kamehameha Highway past the great expanses of sugarcane and pineapple fields. I smell the pungent, rotting odor of pineapple as workers follow two booms behind a tractor slowly crawling along harvesting the crop. The trucks stop along side of the road behind the ocean, and we unass the duce-and-a-halves. We break apart the live ammunition boxes and enjoy the morning sun while casually loading our magazines. Afterwards, the company marches indolently in single file up the mountain road, pausing now and again to organize. From our heightened vantage point, we watch surfers riding the waves while we defenders of democracy sweat our way up the hillside in the now hot tropical sun.

The company maneuvers into position to assault a hill with our live ammo. When we are all on line, the command to fire comes; we advance up the hill. I fire only a few shots while struggling up the incline until we are close to the boundary road, not quite at the top of the hill. This is where we are supposed to put down a final burst of fire. As everybody blasts away, I resolve to save myself oodles of time cleaning my weapon if I furtively unload my remaining magazines into the tall dry grass. I finish my deed just in time too because Lieutenant Homes comes behind us encouraging everybody to keep firing like crazy. I slip my empty magazine into my rifle and fire the remaining round in the chamber, "I'm outta ammo, sir," I yell to him as the rest of the company furiously empties the last of their ammunition into the hillside. With the live fire exercise over, we trudge around the Kahukas some more, and return to the barracks late in the day.

My prudence pays off, and I turn in my weapon on my first attempt without taking much effort cleaning it. While I wait for Rankin to inspect my rifle, I watch Lieutenant Holmes and Harley struggling with the Lieutenant's rifle. It seems Holmes tries to clean the bore by ramming the cleaning patch into the muzzle of the weapon instead of drawing the swatch through the bore from the chamber. Now the cleaning rod is stuck fast in the muzzle, and both men try to extract it by having a tug of war, but they only succeed in pulling each other off balance. Rankin joins in this fiasco by teaming up with Harley, but the two of them pull Holmes off balance once again, and then all of them throw up their hands in defeat, leaving the officer embarrassed as he examines the stuck ramrod. "Ah, do you mind if I give it a try, Lieutenant?"

"Sure, Lupton, have at it," says Holmes sarcastically inferring my idiocy as he gladly hands me his weapon. I place the cleaning rod handle on the floor, stand on it with both feet, and then pull up on the rifle. The rod cleanly exits the M16.

"Here you are, Lieutenant," I retort condescendingly to the officer's original derision, "Piece of cake." Holmes snatches his weapon back gratefully if not mortified, thanking me profusely if insincerely, and hoping I will go away and not say a word of this affair to anybody.

Geth, one of our AIT trainees, is having a terrible time convincing Rankin to accept his rifle, but the armor adamantly hands it back to him for the third time. Listening to him cuss with scorn, I follow Geth upstairs and observe how he cleans his rifle. After wiping each rifle part with an oily cloth, he lays the pieces down on his bunk where static electricity draws dust particles to the metal parts like a magnet. Geth fails

once more to turn in his rifle before I take pity on the poor boy and lecture him never to place his rifle parts on his blanket but to place them on his footlocker. He is grateful for this tiny tip-off when the armorer accepts his rifle with no problem.

The next week B Company is to give a live-fire demonstration to some three-star general from USARHAW. Rumor has it that this is the exact same general Captain Shelton worked for as aide-de-camp. My platoon draws fireguard detail and the supply sergeant issues us several canisters of water equipped with a hand pump that will squirt a piss-sized stream of water ten or fifteen feet, we load them on our backs. Others get fire beaters that are a piece of rubberized canvas attached to broom handles allowing us to beat the fire to death, so the theory goes anyways.

While the other two platoons take up their positions just under the ridge of the hill, Lieutenant Swenson sets up the company's four machine gun positions, so they can fire over the heads of the advancing troops. The Lieutenant orders the gun crews to remove every fifth tracer round from the ammo belts because of a real danger in setting the entire Kahuka Range on fire. Over the radio, I can hear Colonel Beers ordering Captain Shelton to load up the machine guns with tracers. "The Colonel wants a good show, and I'm going to give him a good show." Shelton announces to everybody, and he orders Swenson to reload the belts, but this time with solid tracers.

Platoon sergeants Diaz and Harper lay quarter sticks of TNT down range under sandbags to simulate artillery fire. The explosions will look good when they kick up all that dry dirt. They string the explosives to a central ignition location using commo wire, so they can set them off one by one during the melee. Meanwhile, Captain Shelton stands Mussolini-like on the hood of his jeep supervising my platoon as we dampen down the top of the knoll where a helicopter will deposit the VIP cabal. Standing akimbo, "I'll show them how to dampen the dust," the captain determinedly proclaims as we furiously squirt away. There is a bit of fruitlessness to this whole charade, but Captain Shelton is determined to put on a good demo for his favorite general and his retinue. The word comes over the radio that the helicopter with the VIPs is inbound. Captain Shelton pulls out a new set of freshly starched fatigues from his AWOL bag. He forces his arms and legs into the stiffened clothing being extra careful to preserve their creases then he laces up another pair of freshly spit-shined jump boots. When the helicopter lands, there stands the captain stiff at attention, squinting through the dust, and saluting the helicopter like the archetypal soldier he is.

Out of the helicopter come the general, some majors, Colonel Beers, and his adjutant Lieutenant Lipscomb. Saluting ensues all around; a short conference convenes before the demonstration begins. The two platoons begin their attack by firing wildly and charging down the first hill yelling like crazy. The machine guns start firing solid tracer rounds over the heads of the advancing troops, and shortly as the platoon assaults the objective hill they disappear into the thick smoke of a now raging grass fire. At the same time, the live fire inadvertently severs the commo wire; the TNT charges fail to explode. Choking and gagging, the assault platoons retreat from the flames as popping M16 bullets and the errant quarter sticks of TNT randomly explode adding a combat ambiance to the fiasco so enthusiastically sought by the Colonel, except everyone is advancing to the rear rather than overwhelming the phantom enemy. The demonstration is a bust.

As the platoons begin straggling away from the conflagration, the general turns to Shelton demanding an explanation, "Captain, weren't you were ordered not to use tracer ammunition during the drought?"

Snapping to attention, Captain Kissass turns to the general, and in a loud voice even I can hear, "My colonel ordered me to uses tracers to jazz up this demonstration, SIR!" The color in Colonel Beers's face drains away, leaving a ghastly look. Provided a perfect pretext to abandon the hilltop, and instead of ordering the Captain to takes charge of the fireguards, Beers follows us briskly ordering us to get down the hill and start attacking the inferno with our squirters and beaters.

Mosher complains ammunition in the grass is igniting, and they cannot get to the flames. Exploding M16 ammunition causes everybody to take shelter on the road far downhill from the fire. The duce-and-a-half I am riding comes to a halt as bullets bounce off the hood, we duck for cover until the popping ammunition diminishes. When I peek over the cab of the truck, I recognize this is the live-fire boundary road, exactly where we did the live fire exercise the week before; the exploding ammunition emanates from precisely where I unloaded my magazines. I wisely elect to remain mum about my roll in this little debacle.

Colonel Beers steadfastly approaches, ordering everybody to get back up the hill and start beating down the flames before they creep over the mount and the Kahuka Range is lost. "The Colonel has gotta be crazy," one of the retreating firefighters says within earshot of the battalion commander. Beers takes the comment in stride and walks stalwartly from behind the truck, ordering the men to renew their efforts to conquer the blaze. My attempt to extinguish a small fire using my water squirter is useless. My spray of water is too feeble to affect the flames, and my depleted water runs out almost immediately. I ditch my tank in the duce-and-a-half and take up one of the fire beaters. The flames reach the top of the hill but fail to catch the down side ablaze, and after a few minutes, we get the upper hand on the inferno. The Kahukas are safe; everybody wearily retreats down the road past the red civilian fire truck stuck half way up the rugged mountain road. The chassis is too low for the dirt road and the firefighters are now not anxious to proceed further, lest they risk their precious shiny red fire truck.

In the chow line, Deifenbach tells us that when he is driving the Captain back to the barracks, Shelton sees the VIP's convoy approaching from the opposite direction. "Instead of just saluting the other jeep, Captain Shelton bolts upright at attention to salute them. This scares me shitless, and I jam on the break. The Old Man just about flipped over the front windshield," Deifenbach pauses to control his mirth, "The only thing that kept him from going over the hood was his heels got caught on the seat." All of us are all in hysterics.

The AIT trainees finish their training and join the company full time. Ever since they arrived, there is resentment amongst the enlisted men because the trainees are exempt from pulling KP or guard. The old guys are happy because now there are more enlisted men to pull the shit duty. However, never one to get out of anything, I am stuck on KP when the company goes out in the field. On our first day, one of the cooks almost sets the mess tent on fire by failing to drag the burner far enough away from the tent when fueling it. The burners are not easy to gas up because the cook has to pour gasoline from a five-gallon can into the small orifice of the fuel burner without the aid of a funnel. Inevitably, gasoline spills and when the brainless cook strikes a match, the spilt gasoline

bursts into flames as in Dante's Inferno. The mess sergeant has a convulsion fit keeping the tent flaps out of the fire, and at the same time, he is yelling not to pour water on the gasoline fire because that causes it to spread even further, electing instead to smother it with a piece of canvas. After this excitement, the mess personnel settle into their normal routine of screwing up perfectly good food.

Captain Shelton and Colonel Beers appear at the mess tent for a sit-down together and order me to get them cups of coffee. When I arrive with the coffee, I set the cups down and pour the Captain his coffee. Captain Shelton immediately corrects me by placing his coffee in front of the colonel and retrieving the empty cup for himself. "You always serve the higher rank first, Lupton," he sounds annoyed at correcting my faux pas.

"Oh, sorry, sir, sorry," I apologize timorously. Being around officers ranking higher than a captain is new to me, and unconsciously I have sinned. An Army adage avers that if a battalion commander knows your name, then normally you are in deep shit. Now the Colonel knows my name. He never looks up at me, but his annoyance at my breach of protocol is evident.

Just after we finish cleaning up for the day, it starts raining. Nobody has time to make a poncho tent, so the KPs must take refuge in the back of the duce-and-a-half. Ramos and another man lie exhausted on the wooden fold-down seats while the rest of us cram ourselves sardine-like on the floor of the truck as the rain pours heavily outside. The conversation turns to experiences with things that go bump in the night. I tell my story about the time a trainee steps on an armadillo on a moonless night in Fort Polk, Louisiana, how hilarious that was when the startled man fell screaming into a ditch while the armadillo scurried through the grass in the opposite direction. The prospect of a panicky black man is too much for one of the KPs because he takes his hand and runs it underneath Ramos's pants leg, yelling, "Centipede!" Ramos turns into banshee man, running the full length out the back of the truck, eventually tripping over a foot loop on the tailgate and landing hard on the muddy ground. Nobody can stop laughing for five minutes. Ramos swears retribution if he finds out who pulled that bullshit. "I'll whoop yo motherfucking ass, you wait and see," he threatens everyone as he climbs back into the darkened duce-and-a-half, intentionally stepping on everybody lying on the floor. "You think you are so goddamn funny, do you, you asshole, do that again, and I'll kick your ass, motherfucker." There are small anecdotes in the Army that make the defense of freedom all worthwhile.

I rejoin the third platoon the next day. We hump the mountains in the morning and after noon chow, Lieutenant Swenson volunteers us for a reconnaissance patrol. Nobody is overly enthralled about this extra patrol until we reach the bottom of a steep ravine where there is a half-decent sized rill suitable for wading. Several of us strip down naked and lie in the cool, clear flowing water. Somebody produces a bar of soap, and we pass that around for a bath while others shave and rinse out their sweaty t-shirts. I will have to hand it to the Lieutenant on this one, we enjoy our afternoon bathing, and after wallowing for an hour, we dress and ascend the opposing hillside refreshed if not sweating profusely once again.

The nighttime finds us sitting atop a knoll watching the sunset. Just as it becomes dark, a swarm of mosquitoes arises from the grass in a frontal attack. They are so thick we can plow through them by waiving our hands back and forth, and they reform immediately as if in a gaseous state, attacking our mosquito netting covering our

helmets. Their persistent high-pitched buzzing mightily impresses us with their ferocity, but I turn up my collar and slather bug spray all over my hands and fall asleep under a poncho tent I share with another man. Supposedly, one man should always stay awake, but this is training, and I am not interested in pulling guard when nobody is going to check on us. In the middle of the night, I happen to wake up when I hear somebody approaching our position. I yell, "Halt, who wanders yonder?"

"Sergeant Blunt," he replies.

"Okay," I answer.

"Goddamn it, Lupton, you are supposed to say, 'advance and be recognized.' And what's this, 'who wanders yonder' bullshit anyways," Blunt scolds me angrily.

"Okay, advance... aw that's all bullshit, Blunt. You never said that in Vietnam and neither did I." Blunt reaches my tent realizing my head still lies on my backpack; my eyes remain closed. He admonishes me to stay awake, "yeah, yeah, right," I keep replying until he leaves. During this whole affair, I never do open my eyes, not even once, and soon I drift back to slumber land until sunrise.

The object of gas chamber training is to give the students a taste of what a snoot full of tear gas feels like, and it burns like Hades. Everybody who ever goes through basic training encounters the gas chamber. I remember my experience well when our platoon sergeant tells us what they plan for us, and especially, he warns us not to start running from the gas but to put on our gas masks and wait in the formation for our next instruction. "Don't run," admonishes Sergeant Cartagena, "Whatever you do, don't run when we gas you. I want you to put your rifles between your knees, hang your helmet liners on the muzzle, put on your gas masks, clear them, and then compose yourselves and wait for us to tell you what to do next." We practice this drill several times until all of us can put on our masks within fifteen seconds.

The whole company idles in ranks waiting for something to happen when the DIs catch us off guard and pop several CS gas grenades right under the noses of the men at the right front corner of the formation, and then mayhem ensues. Cartagena's warnings are lost upon everybody as the men from the front ranks barrel through the formation to escape the burning tear gas. Our discipline dissolves when just about everybody, including myself, heads into the cow pasture behind us, leaping the barbed wire fence, running wildly in panic, and strewing our equipment everywhere. Our platoon sergeants laugh hysterically on the upwind side of the now billowing smoke. They knew this would happen, and when the gas dissipates, they begin gathering up their well-scattered class of trainees.

As for as myself, I can humbly claim I did not run as far as everybody else did to escape the burning smoke. After beckoning us to rejoin the formation, Sergeant Cartagena rails an acerbic tirade at us miscreants for abandoning our equipment. "We picked up the helmets that you girls left behind and put them in that building over there. Everybody without a helmet, get your ass over there." I assemble with about twenty other men, and on signal, one of the DIs throws open the door; after everybody runs inside he shuts it behind us. I expect everybody to calmly grab a helmet, sort through them to find the owner then return to the formation. Instead, a mad scramble ensues; it is everyman for himself when we realize the building contains CS gas. Shoving ensues as everybody grabs any helmet he can and rushes out the other door. My eyes burn, my nose and throat smolder, and to my horror, there are no helmets left for me. I retreat

outside where the DIs razz us mercilessly while standing stiff at attention blinking non-stop tears as the ass chewing continues ad infinitum. After the harangue, they allow us to swap our equipment, so everybody regains their own stuff.

Our next travail is to enter the gas chamber in small groups where a sergeant gives us a muffled lecture on what he wants us to do, and then in threes, we take off our gas mask and yell out our name, rank, and service number; only then will he let us out. The air appears clear inside the chamber but when we take off our masks, we get a whiff of burning gas. The first few guys doff their masks and panic. The other sergeant blocks the door demanding they do the routine. Each spews out their information so fast their jabber becomes indecipherable gibberish.

After everybody goes through the CS chamber, we must enter an adjacent building containing chlorine gas. No one dares take off his mask because this stuff will kill us. We stand in our group, listen to an officer give us a short lecture, and then file out of the chamber. I do not know if there ever was chlorine gas in that room because the air was clear, but I can assure you nobody wanted to find out.

There is a brooding atmosphere in the formation as we wait for the trucks to arrive, much like when you learn the mess hall is serving liver for dinner. The routine is the same as in basic training. Groups of ten enter the innocuous looking building with small windows located about six feet high. We enter a smoke-filled room where some stupid young second lieutenant ladles out yet another teaspoon full of powdered CS gas onto a pie plate heated by a candle underneath, and the room fills with enough smoke to diffuse light from the windows. As a sergeant guards the door, the officer tells us he wants us to take our masks off and yell out our name, rank, and serial number before he will let us out. One at a time, the first few men rattle off their data and quickly dash for the exit. When it comes my turn, I take a deep breath, squeeze my eyes shut, and yank off my mask. I yell out my information, but he restrains me as I walk toward the door. "Open your eyes," he says.

"I really don't want to, sir," I plead. He is not amused.

"Do it, Lupton." I must and immediately my eyes smolder from the burning CS. I am out of breath and have to inhale only to get that vicious snort of burning tear gas. I move toward the door determined to leave if I have to break the door down when the lieutenant signals to let me out. The smoke trails me out of the door as if I am on fire. I cannot stop salivating, phlegm dribbles grotesquely from my nose, and my eyes water incessantly. Paranowski grumbles that that dim-witted lieutenant need only use one or two teaspoons of gas for the whole company, not two for each group. Henderson declares his dick burns from residue on his fingers when he whipped it out to take a piss. Trying to shake the gas from our clothing fails, and our eyes keep watering freely as we climb into the duce and a half. Only after the truck gets going do we experience a little relief.

When we get back, the Sergeant Diaz allows us to change clothes and shower to wash the residue out of our hair. The tincture of CS persists until we stuff our uniforms into our laundry bags. Admittedly, this exercise breaks the boredom of our training schedule, not that anybody gives a shit about ever doing it again.

Our battalion commander is an asshole – I shit you not. I am always amazed how petty this man can be, but this order takes the cake for chickenshit. The whole battalion stands in formation awaiting transportation to the Kahukas for two days in the boonies.

We Vietnam returnees dress for the field in our jungle fatigues. The uniforms are cooler than state side fatigues, they have useful pockets to carry our c-rations, and they fit loosely and dry out faster. They are the envy of those who have not been to Vietnam. The uniforms are very chic, a must have item, but they are in short supply, impossible to find, and the Colonel is without his pair. On this morning, First Sergeant Lee appears in front of our formation and tells us that everybody wearing jungle fatigues has to take them off and put on his regular state side fatigues. Exclamations of protest follow, which annoys the first sergeant. He confesses, "The Colonel does not own a pair, so you cannot wear yours until they issue everybody else theirs," rejoins Sergeant Lee, "the Colonel owns a pair of jungle boots though, and it is okay for you to wear them." Disdain in his voice is clearly identifiable. The logic is pure Lifer. All of the Vietnam returnees peel out of the formation and hustle up to the barracks to change back into regular fatigues only a moment before the duce-and-a-halves pull into the quad.

We unass the trucks at our assembly point and begin the long trek into the mountains. The sun is hot already this morning, and we sweat greatly as we climb the stuffy mountain trail. We scorn the Colonel for not letting us wear our jungle fatigues knowing damn well he is not humping these mountains. The climb continues for hours until we happen upon a troop of boy scouts. I feel a little stupid dressed to the nines in combat gear watching the little munchkins laugh and giggle at our appearance as we labor past them. A little while later, we come across several men hunting wild pigs. They use dogs, carry M1 carbines, and dress in camouflage clothing not available to us. They do not carry food or camping gear, and they will probably go home well before sundown. I never thought anybody would come up here in this shitty jungle for the fun of it if he did not have to. I guess it is all in ones perception of a good time. We, on the other hand, are stuck out in this mosquito-infested jungle for the next two days.

That afternoon, we are descending a hill when Payne stumbles and takes a header, landing on his back upside down with his head wedged into some tree roots. Nobody wants to touch him until he regains consciousness lest we aggravate his injury. As we look at him in his predicament, his eyes keep fluttering as if he is feigning unconsciousness, but he is having a difficult time doing so. While Lieutenant Swenson arranges for a helicopter to fly him out, we gossip about him shamming his way out of the field with this ruse, but his tenacity is strong, and he maintains his awkward position as others chop down trees for an LZ using their entrenching tools. This whole charade takes an hour or more and miraculously Payne opens his quivering eyes with the sound of the helicopter approaching. His neck is not broken, and he laboriously staggers to the chopper and climbs in seemingly dazed and exhausted as we pile his field gear onto his lap. Good acting Payne, if that is what it is, you are outta here. Now our platoon is well behind everybody, and we must hurry in our march to join up with the company before sundown.

Third platoon straggles in to the company assembly area where Captain Shelton supervises the distribution of water from five-gallon cans. We eat our c-rations and rest before nightfall. Sergeant Yamabiashi tells us not to build poncho shelters because we will be making a forced march tonight. About 1800, the company sets off. At first, we stick to jeep roads and the pace of the march is fast. At this speed, I tire quickly and can only put one foot in front of the other to keep up with the formation. When we stop, I sit down briefly, and when I stand up, my feet feel like I am walking on red-hot coals. This

never happened before, but I do not have time to whine about my discomfort for we begin marching again on a rocky road until we surround a mock village. Speaking Vietnamese, Sergeant Yamabiashi yells for the occupants to come out of the hootches. There being no reply, we blast away with blank ammunition and throw a few artillery simulators into the hootches until somebody puts a stop to this nonsense. Hypothetically, they are all dead, and we begin our march again only this time we slowly ascend the mountain in single file along a narrow path. We hump this trail in total darkness for over an hour until the company bunches up when we come to a portion of the footpath that disintegrates into a dangerous gap everybody must cross. The Captain disregards his light discipline in this situation and carefully helps every man make a large step over the radically rutted trail. Rainwater has completely eroded away both sides the trace. The flashlight beam disappears into the blackened abyss. With this obstacle past us, we continue our hump for another hour before Lieutenant Swenson tells us we can sleep alongside the trail. The mosquitoes are bad until it starts raining and the rest of the night becomes even more uncomfortable.

By the time we start our trek the next morning, I have already consumed one of my canteens of water. With about 150 soldiers all following one another in single file, the trail immediately turns to mush. As the morning wears on, the line of men strings out, and we find ourselves traveling in small groups. I turn a corner to see a large mud puddle in the middle of the trail. Miller warns me to avoid the pool of water and to skirt its edges. I take heed of his advice then turn to warn Hardison, but I am too late to save him. He glibly walks through the seemingly shallow puddle when suddenly his lead leg sinks into the mud all the way up to his hip. Hardison falls forward off balance creating a wave of muck; he reaches out to break his fall only to engulf himself in the red slurry even farther. I turn weak from laughter as I offer a hand to pull him out of the Kahuka booby trap. Hardison fails to see the humor in his hardship as the mud phlegmatically slimes its way down his heretofore somewhat dry lower body. "Fuck you, Lupton," he grouses angrily.

"I tried to tell ya," is my defense.

We turn to see Lieutenant Swenson coming around the bend, "Don't step in the mud puddle, Lieutenant," warns us both in unison. It does no good. The Lieutenant is giddy from fatigue, and he clownishly skips into the center of the mud monster. The puddle consumes our fearless leader, as did Hardison. Hysteria disables us all as the gangling officer tries to outrun gravity and perform a Jesus-walk across Muckville Pond. It only gets worse after refusing our helping hands; he flounders repeatedly in his struggle to extract his ass from the slush. His rifle hopelessly disabled by mud, he cheerily reaches the other side by crawling on all fours. A lesser officer would be mortified, but Lieutenant Swenson exhibits great leadership in the face of adversity.

Our good cheer wanes as the morning wears on. Solemn and serious by 1100, I am out of water and growing thirsty as the sun bears down upon us. The line of soldiers strings still farther apart as we mindlessly traipse along precipices only a few feet wide with chasms plunging 300 feet straight down into a seemingly bottomless abyss of jungle. A fall from these slopes means certain death; still we must keep going. I find myself walking with Archibald and Hardison. The three of us stop for a break, and we peer into the vacant verdant valley before us. "I'm out of water," I declare. Hardison drains the last few drops from his canteen, which leaves only Archibald with half a canteen. "You

got water, Archibald, how about a drink, will ya?" If I had not asked this dickweed, he would have drank in front of us without offering us any. He begrudgingly passes his canteen to us for a swig. I am expecting he will offer us another drink before we get going, but he does not. I feel bitter as I watch him swill yet another mouthful, the stingy prick, and without looking at us, he puts his canteen away. I would feel obliged toward Archibald if he had the courtesy to offer us one last tiny sip, but I am too proud to supplicate to this asshole. I push past him determined to find the end of this field problem. I become obsessed with the lyrics of the *Cool Water* song.

All day I face the barren waste
Without the taste of water, cool wa-ter
Old Dan and I with throats burned dry
And souls that cry for water, cool, clear, wa-ter

I come across a gaggle of men waiting their turn to use a rope to ascend a steep, slippery incline. As I await my turn, I watch our Philippine FNG filling his canteen from a shallow mud puddle at the base of the hill; mind you, everybody keeps walking through this same puddle on his way up the slope. I cannot believe this dingdong, but he is desperately thirsty. After filling half his canteen with filthy reddish water, he thinks it prudent to purify it with iodine tablets. By the time it is my turn to pull myself up the rope, the FNG takes a swallow from his canteen. His face crinkles with nausea as he gags up the putrid water. Realizing his folly, he abandons his quest by bitterly bestowing the offending contents of his canteen back into the puddle. "You are going to taste that foul shit for the rest of the day, Pedro," somebody lectures him with a haughty chortle. Pedro spits at this comment but can only join us in climbing the hill, and he keeps going.

The trek moves on throughout the afternoon. I find myself resting with a group of people only to discover a much-expended S3 Major sprawled amongst us. Some of the guys question him to find out he is one of the planners of this debacle. There are a few veiled comments regarding the intelligence of this marathon field problem, and the major agrees with us that the route should be a tad bit shorter.

We resume our exertion throughout the heat of the afternoon still without any prospects of finding water until we begin walking down a long incline. Exhaustion is taking its toll on many of the former AIT trainees who still need conditioning to handle this mountainous terrain. I think back to my very first dismal experience in the Kahukas with the Wolfhounds and can empathize with these poor unfortunates totally.

I find myself walking alone down the seemingly endless hill until I meet up with a lieutenant wearing a baseball cap. His uniform is pressed and clean, and he tells me the end is near and to keep going. "Water," I ask him, "is there water there?"

"There is a water trailer just down the road and up another small hill," he tells me, "you're not far away." Thank fucking Christ for that. I quicken my pace at the prospect of water as I enter a cool, shady vale. I am very alone by the time I approach a small bridge over a flowing stream. It is cool, damp, and bucolic until some nitwit hiding in the woods fires off a few blank rounds emulating a sniper. "Fuck you, Jack," I yell to him without slackening my stride. I am too pooped to play infantryman anymore; and I am obsessed with water, cool, clear, water. Only one more hill to go. I quicken my pace up the rise; turn the corner to see the godsend water trailer with POTABLE stenciled in big

white block letters beckoning me for a drink, I make a beeline to its spigots. I fill my first canteen and drink the whole quart straight down without stopping. I take no chances and fill both of my canteens just in case the trailer runs dry. I stagger over to join several other men who are sprawled exhausted on the ground, flop down, and continue my drinking, totally whooped.

We sit dog-tired in the shade watching the remainder of B Company arrive at the water trailer. Each man wears a desperate look on their face until they realize this is no mirage, and then they pick up their pace. Pedro does not even bother filling his canteen he just puts his head underneath a spigot and lets the water flow into his mouth. I casually down another tepid quart waiting for the rest of the group to appear. A few hours later trucks arrive for us. We are rested and ready to go now, and the ones who arrived early are generally in good spirits while the latter arrivals look like they were drug behind a truck. Back at Schofield, there is the usual pandemonium of men vying for the latrine resources to clean up and eat chow.

As I settle down into my comfy clean sheets that night, I swear, I swear I will find a way out of the field somehow. I do not know how, but I will get out of this stupid infantry and into the rear where I feel I belong.