

“I’m sorry, Sir. I didn’t notice him missing at this morning’s formation.” Platoon Sergeant Sorenson explains to Captain Jones around 1000 hours. Nobody appears too surprised that Sanger goes AWOL just after payday. In fact, Sanger, Taylor from B Company, and Red Clerk from battalion are all absent without leave.

“That’s all right Sergeant Sorenson. If he is gone, he is gone. There is not much anybody can do about it now.” The captain appears resigned with this bad news.

Sanger going AWOL begins a fresh array of difficulties for me when learning I must clear post for him. This means I have to walk length and breadth of Schofield barracks obtaining clearances from various commands. I need to obtain a signature from the motor pool NCOIC for some abstruse reason, the EM Club, to see if he left a tab, the recruiting sergeant, who could give a shit less, the bank, even though he has no account there, and the library, a book is overdue so, they refuse to sign off on him. This project takes me out of the orderly room for several afternoons.

Rankin in the supply room obtains a brand new Underwood 15-inch carriage allowing me to type the wide mimeograph wax template when we need to make copies. I merely type out what I want then take it up to battalion where a clerk runs off two hundred copies for me. The template is just a tad bit too wide for my ancient Remington portable that I brought from home. The feel of the wide carriage typewriter is very comfortable too. For some reason known only to him, Sawyer procures a cheap, tinny little Smith Corolla portable typewriter. His infatuation with the stupid thing is gratuitous. One night when he is the OD, he wakes up Rankin at 0200 to fetch the Smith Corolla from the supply room, so he can type a letter. There are plenty of typewriters up in battalion, but he wants his beloved little Smith Corolla for his correspondence.

A week later, another man goes AWOL because Captain Jones would not grant him an emergency leave. I have to clear post for him too. The farthest distance I have to walk is the EM club; this time I calculate my travels to arrive at dinnertime. I bump into Sergeant Vega, still in B Company, who offers to drive me around in his car. On our very first stop, we maneuver through the chain link gate of the motor pool, drive over the spacious parking area to the garage where I obtain my first signature of the day, and while driving back to the entrance, we have the misfortune to encounter Major Bell, our battalion executive officer. He commences to chew Vega a new ass for driving his civilian vehicle into the motor pool. I try to explain to the Major we are on official Army business, but he does not want to hear any of that shit, “Don’t you *ever* let me see you driving this car in this motor pool again, *Sergeant!*”

“Yes, sir, yes, sir, I won’t do it again sir,” Sergeant Vega supplicates as if a spooked bovine.

“I know goddamn well you won’t, *Sergeant.*” The vitriol just pours forth as if we committed a felony. We count ourselves fortunate when old Major Bell shouts at us, “now get the hell out of here!” Our encounter with the rabid XO is too much for Vega, and he declines me the use of his car, so I begin hoofing it once more. My hike ends at the EM Club right around 1700 as planned. The Sergeant at Arms fails to remember me from a year ago when he was

tempted to toss my ass out of the club for chatting up that chippy go-go dancer. He declines to clear post for my AWOL because the nitwit has a small tab outstanding.

“He’s AWOL Sarge. He isn’t going to pay anyways.”

“I don’t care, I’m not clearing him.”

“Can I get something to eat?”

“The restaurant will open in about ten minutes.”

“How about getting a drink until then?”

“Ah,” he looks at the wall clock, “yeah, sure go ahead,” he says and tells the big fat Samoan bouncer it is okay to serve me. I quaff down a cold one, order a dinner then walk back to the barracks and rack out.

The next morning I learn Captain Jones got mad at Rankin, our acting mail clerk, and fired him. He tells me I am the company mail clerk now. The next thing that goes wrong is Banfield fails to follow through on paperwork for acquiring the company’s new M16s, and Captain Jones chews me out about letting him do anything involving the entire company. My workload is more than one man can handle.

The latest rumor is the advance party shall consist of six people, Captain Jones, the three platoon leaders, the supply sergeant, and me. The whole arrangement sounds screwy to me, but nobody hears anything different. We have weight restrictions for the airplane and Sawyer calculates we should ship our entrenching tools by boat. This means we will arrive in Vietnam without anything to dig foxholes. “Gee, sir, do you think leaving our entrenching tools behind is the best idea?” I ask him.

“Don’t worry, *Lupton*,” he responds dryly, “*you* will take your entrenching tool with you.” Knowing damn well from his terse reply, it will be me filling all our sandbags if he has anything to say about it. Wishing I kept my big mouth shut is an understatement.

Getting anything accomplished without interruption in this orderly room is virtually impossible and pandering to the executive officer grinds my guts. “*Lupton*,” the lieutenant demands my obeisance for his every whim.

“Sir,” I respond, rising to go see what he wants of me.

“Get me the scissors.”

“Sure sir,” I tell him while traipsing back to my desk, snatching the scissors up, and handing them to him, “is there anything else I can get you, sir?” The answer is negative, so I return to my task. After this charade occurs a few times, I try to economize my exertion by merely responding: “Yes Sir,” And sit idling for his query but this is not good enough for our little man.

“Come here, *Lupton*.” Okay, I get up and walk into his office. Maybe he has something to show me, but no. “Do we have any scotch tape?” The triviality of this exercise annoys me to no end, yet I say nothing. This is not the last time he treats me more as his aide-de-camp while he rehearses for his generalship.

There are oodles of other distractions to boot. Like when Sergeant Cox comes in the orderly room, interrupts me for the training roster clipboard, examines it, talks with Azzalino,

and then just plops the clipboard down on top of my typewriter – as I am typing! Nobody in their right mind can focus with all these diversions.

Admittedly, spelling has never been my greatest triumph, but Lieutenant Sawyer cannot spell for shit either. His punctuation is merely a guess, and he rags my ass obsessively regarding typos and spelling errors. Being new to clerking, I am never able to develop a foolproof technique for correcting my own work. Other clerks tell me this is their chief dilemma also. It behooves me to leave my composition sit for twenty-four hours then review it for errors before handing it to Sawyer. There is no one to teach me this, and I only perfect this procedure well after leaving the Army. The Lieutenant expects it to be ‘letter perfect’ when I give it to him. Sawyer makes his share of spelling boners too, for example, he keeps transposing the spelling rule of i’s before e’s except after c; instead placing his e’s before his i’s. The amount of time it takes to get anything out of the office annoys Sawyer to no end.

“I want you to be careful about your typing and spelling, Lupton,” he demands of me as he and the Captain leave for the day. I try to sway him on my dilemma about proofing my own work, but he turns piqued every time. “Don’t be insubordinate with me, Lupton,” he gruffly retorts, “I want the work coming to me let-ter perfect every time,” he demands with a wag of his finger.

“But sir, I don’t see the typos...”

He grows even more crotchety then turns caustic, “don’t sass me, Lupton.” Sawyer takes a few steps back into the room. “I want your work perfect before it gets to me.” I take note that he is always trifling in front of Captain Jones.

“Right, sir, sure,” is my only safe reply. Both officers leave for the day as I continue my thirteenth hour trying to produce “perfect” work when the orderly room is not so zooish. I never get to eat dinner this night because I am trying desperately to finish this project. I am too tired though and keep making typos no matter how plodding I type and eventually throw in the towel; walk over to the snack bar only to find it closed. The only other option is the beer garden where I eat a slice of greasy pizza and drink a beer. It is late now, and I climb into my top bunk too pooped to pee.

Talk about the road less traveled. I receive a notice from brigade wanting an interview regarding reassignment to Fort Shafter in downtown Honolulu. I have to pass on the invitation because I waived to return to Vietnam. Forty years hence, I sit in the hotel bar at a D Company reunion listening to another Vietnam returnee like me boasting how cushy his assignment is as a member of the indigenous Hawaiian permanent party, USARHAW, nicknamed the Lazy H. They get to wear Khakis, eat lunch at the NCO Club, and work a forty-hour week – “oh God,” I sigh, “nirvana passed me by!” He crows about dodging some dim-witted MP who harangues everybody about the height of his pant’s cuffs. On their way to lunch, the MP chases after them with a tape measure until some big doofus NCO lifer draws blood with a punch in the nose. In retrospect, I zigged when I should have zagged.

I feel fortunate to share a small room with only four other men of the headquarters group plus a few junior NCOs, totaling eight in all. This is the most privacy I ever enjoy during my

entire enlistment. My top bunk is a special place to me. My head lies level with the windowsill and right across the road lives a colonel with his family. His high school daughter practices her baton twirling in the front yard, and for an additional benefit, I get to watch her moving about inside the house at night where she puts on a show by washing her hair in the sink directly in front of a utility room window wearing only her Shorty nightgown. The little miss provides many hours of voyeuristic gratification.

On a hunch, Captain Jones uncovers a group of malingers. They go on sick call with sham maladies then rendezvous at the snack bar as the company prepares for a day in the field hopping to miss the trucks before wandering back to the barracks undiscovered. This is the first time I have seen Jones lose his temper. The guy dumb enough to admit to the whole thing gets an Article-15. This is my first ever Article-15 form. It is a fill-in-the-blank kind of legal form, which is confusing if you have never done one before. Naturally, it comes back from brigade for corrections; Jones is pissed. I fix it by the end of the day for them to resign, which means the one receiving “justice” has to revisit the whole episode over again, and neither man is pleased.

Lieutenant Sawyer goes on leave for two weeks in October. I liken his departure to lancing a boil. In tribute to his absence, the headquarters group nicknames him Napoleon to poke fun at his diminutive stature and despotic demeanor; even Azzalino blows smoke about screwing Sawyer if given the chance.

The platoon leaders submit the names of those up for promotions, and I work on their recommendations eagerly, especially mine, for I get to write my own glowing commendation letter. My understanding is that a promotion to E5 will change my MOS permanently, and that means I am out of the infantry – forever! Lieutenant Sawyer reviews my commendation but fails to sign it; in fact, he walks it up to battalion himself. To discover which date this magic event shall occur on, I eagerly phone Sergeant Davis to see when he expects the E-5 promotions to come down. “Aw, Lupton, don’t bother me with that now,” he replies hanging up on me. His demeanor is mean spirited, my feelings are hurt, but I have to let it go. Subsequently, the other candidates receive their promotions, but I never hear about mine ever again. I can only believe Sawyer shit canned it while up at battalion. I grow leery of Davis too. When I bring up the morning report one day, we need to modify one lousy number to make it perfect. Without asking me, he inserts the report into a typewriter and, just as he goes to hit the wrong numeral, “Sarge that should be a...,” bam, too late, he types a three instead of a four. Realizing he fucked up, he jerks the form out of the typewriter, hands it to me without a word, and begins shuffling papers on his desk. Now I have to redo the goddamn thing over again, and Sawyer gets pissed about that too. Davis’s crowning insult comes when I need an answer to a question; after telling him it is I on the line, he answers the telephone, “Yes dear.” I hear everybody up there laughing his ass off at my expense and decide never to bother the jerk again.

One afternoon, with the normal pandemonium of the day subdued, I hunt and peck through a letter for Captain Jones when Sergeant Yamabiashi walks in and hands me the *Stars and Stripes*. He points to a list of KIAs in Vietnam for the prior month. It shakes me to see Slater’s name as a casualty of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division. Taken aback, I sit humbly for a moment before

walking outside to smoke a cigarette. I feel like being alone for a few minutes. As I blow out my drag, I call to mind the incident where the Liquor Control Board agent almost busted him in the Kemoo Bar. We got drunk at the EM club later that day then came home laughing and singing like fools. I giggle recollecting his swanky little boast when telling us he dropped his load into his honey bun after promising not to. “Shit,” I think to myself drearily, “That was not so long ago either.” I field strip my cigarette and return to work.

Sergeant Azzalino knows the Captain will be in the field all day and proceeds to swill beer all afternoon. This gives me a chance to accomplish some work without incessant interruptions and the afternoon passes tranquilly for a change until about 1800 when Azzalino barges in pushing Fetters violently into Lieutenant Sawyer’s office. Yelling invectives, he slams the door shut, and we hear Fetters groaning after each pummeling. Sawyer’s chair upturns and the thumping and bumping vibrates the plywood wall. It does not last very long though, and Fetters scurries out of the room, scared shitless, and maybe crying. With Azzalino in hot pursuit, he dashes to get away from his antagonist. Azzalino rushes after the scrawny, boneheaded private pushing him out the front door where we hear him berating the private once more before stopping to catch his breath; then he leaves for home. I sit in the orderly room with Ball shaking my head then go into Sawyer’s office and straighten up the place. Ball tells me, “When we were in A Company, Azzalino took Fat Walker out to the rifle range after Saturday inspection and beat the shit out of him.” I rather feel sorry for Fedders, but he is an immature little fuck-up, and Azzalino has it out for him ever since he arrives in Hawaii as one of the AIT trainees. A month later, Sawyer asks me about the incident, but I am wary of getting between two lifers, both of whom can make my life more stringent than it already is now.

It is a Saturday afternoon, and with Sawyer gone, I decide to take the rest of the day off. Leaning against the metal railing of the second story lanai, I chitchat with Hardison as we observe two soldiers staggering across the quad returning from the beer garden; one of them is inebriated out of his mind. Both are singing a song although neither of them can remember the words. They reach the quad catty-corner from ours where the pair endeavors to climb the stairs. “Look at that guy,” says Hardison, “I wonder what his mother would think of him if she could see him now?” The drunker of the two stands on the bottom step weaving as he tries to grasp his situation through his befuddled, bloodshot eyes. I just laugh at the joker for I have been in this condition many times myself. It could happen one day in the far distant future that maybe his granddaughter will proudly boast about her “Gramps” sacrificing for his country. How “Gramps” braved the dreaded commie hordes defending our American way of life. Never imagining how her revered “Gramps” actually surmounted his utmost battle – ascending the stairs at Schofield Barracks. Our hero makes it to the top of the first flight of steps before slumping against the concrete balustrade, his buddy encouraging him to grope his way still further up the steps until they reach the third floor where “Gramps” suddenly heaves his afternoon’s imbibe down three floors of stairwells. His splatter slithers to the ground in an elongating rush of slick, sickening yuck. “Gramps” is lucky though, he has a buddy to steer him towards one of the doors to the bunkroom, but not before our hero pukes yet another huge gusher

three stories below, this one slickening the handrails all the way down to the ground. Hardison and I laugh uncontrollably.

Rumors of our departure are endemic; everybody knows we are going, but nobody can tell me the date. I make friends with a clerk at Brigade. He tells me his Warrant Officer told him that when he (the Warrant Officer) will have 15 months on the rock, that the advance party will depart for Vietnam. My clerk pal pulls the Warrant Officer's file and counts the number of months the WO has been here and determines that the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade will depart Hawaii in December 1967.

People inundate me needing information regarding their leave before troop shipment. We understand the eligible ones can have a 30-leave right up until November 30. Mostly the married lifers get the leaves to resettle their dependents; everybody else gets diddly squat. I am eligible for a 30 day leave, but Captain Jones will only approve a 14-day furlough, which gets whittled down to a 3-day pass in November because everybody is still of the impression I will be going on the advance party. Captain Jones and Sergeant Azzalino go on their two-week leaves when Lieutenant Sawyer reappears.

Upon his return, Sawyer enters the orderly room wearing his customary scowl, making me think he did not get any pussy while on leave. He is not happy when finding his office is messy. Actually, we have been using it to spy on the Colonel's teenage daughter across the street as she practices her baton twirling. Ball returns from outside to inform us that all the windows are full of gawking GIs watching the teenager jump up and down. We have to stand on Napoleon's chair or desk to peer out the raised windowsill and nobody remembers to wipe off the boot prints. "Clean it up, Lupton," he orders dourly as he stomps out of the orderly room on his way to battalion.

"Right, Sir," I reply and hasten to wipe the footprints off the desk and chair and straighten up the papers on his desk. He returns a little while later still grumpy that somebody violated his domain. I do not bother asking him if he enjoyed his leave, knowing he does not give two shits to a fart in wind about my concern.

I sit immersed in my typing as Sawyer departs for the day. As he begins talking to me, I just happen to be typing m-e-n-t at the end of a word. I can type the m-e-n-t suffix sequence almost reflexively, rapidly, even without thinking about it. The lieutenant feels slighted; turning livid, he stops to accost me angrily snapping, "Don't you *ever keep typing while I am talking to you, Lupton!*"

I look up at him dumbfounded, "Sure, sir, I didn't mean to ignore you or anything." An ass chewing ensues, and then he demands to see plenty of work ready for his signature first thing tomorrow morning. Obviously, his vacation does nothing to assuage his shitty demeanor.

When Sawyer enters the next morning, the lieutenant announces he failed to notice his ID card expired while on leave and that I need to type out an Application for New ID for his new one, ASAP. I get on the assignment right away by banging out the half-page form for his signature. "Here ya go, Sir. Just sign here and I'll get this up to battalion so they can check your records."

“What records, Lupton?”

“Ah, you know, they have to authenticate your signature and verify your birth date,” I tell him as he stares at the ID application. The enlisted men are frequently losing their cards, so they can get a new ID indicating they are twenty years old, which allows them to drink in a bar. Short and Fedders were caught falsifying their date of birth for exactly this reason.

“I don’t need to do that, Lupton.”

“This is what we do with all the ID applications, sir.” He looks up at me with consternation.

“But I am an *officer*, Lupton,” emphatically implying I am not, nor could I ever be allowed into the demimonde world of the commissioned. Sawyer is actually affronted that I would equate *him* to the lumpen enlisted, even though his roots lie deeply within these ranks. “Did you think I would put down a wrong birth date?”

“No, Sir.”

“You know what you are implying, don’t you Lupton?”

“Sir?”

“You are implying the officers’ corps of the United States Army is corrupt.”

“Sir?”

“By wanting to verify my signature and birthday, you are implying an officer of the United States Army Officers’ Corps would do something illegal.”

“I...I don’t think I was implying anything Lieutenant Sawyer,” I should have shut up, but no, “even though I did read in the *Army Times*, that a captain went to Leavenworth for pilfering army equipment.”

“And you think I would do that?”

“Well, no Sir...”

“Do you know what that is, *Lupton*?” He examines the paperwork again.

“Sir?” He looks up at me angrily.

“*THAT’S MUTINY, LUPTON!*” He takes me completely aback. Mutiny, you gotta be shitting me. I stammer for a reply. Sawyer looks down at the paperwork; I nearly roll my eyes skyward in awe but hesitate for just an instant, he looks up, almost catching me. Pissed to the gills, his face turns crimson. “We’ll just see about this, *Lupton*.” He snatches the phone to call battalion and asks for Lieutenant Lipsett. The conversation is halting. He appears annoyed at the answer, demurely hanging up the phone. “He says brigade needs to verify my signature before they will take my picture and issue me a new ID card. There is no need to validate my birthday because of my age.” Both of us are each half right. The lieutenant scribbles his signature, hands me the form, and I gratefully rush up to battalion to drop it off, happy to be away from this little monster.

As I walk down the elongated hallway, I hear an angry, booming diatribe echoing from the farthest office and, as I draw closer, I recognize the voice as Colonel Beers. “Now get out of here,” he roars in finality. Out from the Colonel’s office jaunts Lieutenant Fuck Up, as he crosses the threshold of the CO’s door, a smirk besets his lips.

“Hi Lupton,” he says to me, waiving merrily as we pass.

“Hi Sir,” I respond wondering what he did this time to get his ass chewed by Beers. I turn to see him sauntering out the door just as happy as a freshly laid peacock.

Everybody sitting in battalion appears in on this shaggy dog story; even Lieutenant Lipsett sits behind his desk trying to hide the simper on his lips. “What?” I ask, looking around. One of the clerks cautiously reads me Major Bell’s entry on Fuck Up’s efficiency report, “The thought of this officer leading men in combat fills my heart with horror...” everyone, including Sergeant Davis snickers at that comment. “And this comes from a major who has just been passed over for promotion for the third time,” whispers the clerk cynically. “Beers is having Fuck Up transferred down to Ft. Shafter to be their new recreation officer, which gets him out of going to Vietnam.” Of all the cockamamie schemes men connive to evade combat this is genuinely the shrewdest one yet. It even beats the story about my childhood friend who eats himself obese to flunk the draft physical then diets to play tackle at Kutztown State, a teacher’s college where he majors in “special education,” which maintains his deferment long after he graduates.

While at S1, Sergeant Davis hands me a packet of papers in response to a Presidential Investigation. Colonel Beers is all bent out of shape about it too, not only because it looks bad on him, but also because the suspense date (due date) is approaching shortly. It seems that when Brown was going through AIT training, the DIs got pissed at his performance. They take him aside; harass him a bit by making him climb into a fifty-five gallon drum. For affect, one of the DIs tosses in some chicken guts then they roll the barrel down a hill. It bruises Brown up a tad but mostly it humiliates him in front of his peers, what with chicken shit splattered all over him. His mother writes President Johnson a letter, and Johnson wants an investigation into the incident. I almost become hysterical as I read the complaint while walking down the hall, but nobody is laughing now. Lieutenant Sawyer, the initial investigating officer, loses the paperwork in the move to D Company. The two drill instructors creating the problem are long gone, and it falls on me to get the investigation typed up and submitted. I return to the orderly room and tell Napoleon what we need to do. To get the job finished there is no choice but to obtain as many statements from the other trainees who witness the incident.

Brigade schedules me to take a Proficiency Pay Test, which is only available to those with over two years of service. The extra pay is only thirteen dollars a month, but I go and sit for the exam at the adult education building. Evidently, I did not score high enough to qualify for the extra dough because my results disappear into the brigade black hole forever. The next morning, Lieutenant Sawyer asks me where I was all yesterday afternoon, and I tell him. He asks me the same question for the next three days in a row for some damn reason, and I tell him the same damn answer. I almost feel his *raison d’être* is to charge me with being AWOL.

We have a man who wants to make an application for a compassionate reassignment. This involves a commanders’ declaration in support for relocation, a couple of forms need compiling, and all this work consumes time. After a few painful attempts with much travail, we manage to get the man reassigned to a stateside command and put this problem behind us.



A couple days later, two more soldiers go AWOL. This development means I have to go gallivanting across Schofield Barracks once again to clear post for them. One of them is a sergeant lifer whom you would not expect to pick up and take off. If the AWOLs miss troop movement, the Army can charge them with desertion and cowardice and toss their asses in Leavenworth Prison.

Offhandedly, I pull a boner by saying aloud in front of two of Banfield's platoon buddies that I could not trust the dickweed to clear post for the AWOLs because all he would do is fuck off and never get the job done. Days afterwards, Banfield confronts me about this little mea culpa, but I stand my ground by egging him to come at me if he needs to. Two days later, he settles the score when, after correcting his mistakes on some trifling assignment he typed, he hands the job back and tells me to go fuck myself. I look up to see his two platoon pals watching my reaction, so I calmly put his assignment on Captain Jones's desk with a note to see Banfield for corrections. "If you two do not have any business here, you need to leave." I tell the observers coldly. After they walk out, Banfield meekly retrieves his work from the Captain's office and corrects it. "Ya know, Banfield, if you are not happy here, you should return to your platoon."

"Aw, go fuck yourself, Lupton," he scowls on his way out the door. I should have been clever about the whole thing and told the moron to clear post for these two jackasses, and then Banfield would be out of my hair for four or five days.

During the reorganization, C Company sluffs off an asshole private who wants out of the Army very, very much. He threatens to pull an "Outlaw" in our orderly room if the Army will not discharge him. Jones puts him to work in the supply room, and I begin the paperwork. I get talking to him a little bit and assure him he is making a big mistake by going this route, but he does not care, he wants out. This project is especially tiresome because Lieutenant Sawyer hates these kinds of people to the ends of the earth. Admittedly, I make a few typos and have to retype this clown's statement several times. The day after I give Sergeant Davis the paperwork he hands it back to me merely saying the job is not good enough. I show it to Sawyer, and he finds a misspelling overlooked before and circles the offending word with his pen. "Aw gee, Sir," I whine, "now I have to retype the whole page over again because Sergeant Davis will not accept a white-out correction that large." Boy is Sawyer pissed now! He shoves the paper back across his desk to me as if I was conning my way out of the army. The whole assignment takes days to complete; nobody is happy about anything, except the jerk off who wants out of the Army. Days afterwards, the reprobate signs himself out of the United States Army with a smile on his face and a dishonorable discharge in his hand.

New men assigned to D Company arrive all the time. One of them is Sergeant Doan. Doan wears E7 stripes but is only an E6. This situation comes about because during the Korean War when the Army used platoon sergeant stripes for E6s, which have two rockers, the same as E7s do now. DOD grandfathers in the Korean era E6s, who now do not have to re-sew the lesser chevron on their sleeves. The only catch is these sergeants never seem to advance in rank. In fact, Doan has not received a subsequent promotion since 1953! Truncated and dumpy, he

replaces Rankin in the supply room. To make sure Brown does not create more Presidential Investigations Jones makes him a superfluous supply clerk along with Taylor, who resembles a mole; Rankin returns to Headquarters Company.

Newly assigned Staff Sergeant Williams arrives from West Point where, at least according to him, he taught military history. He even smokes a pipe in a hopeless effort to appear academic, and in my opinion, that makes him look somewhat doofless. To be candid, I think West Point got rid of his dumb ass and now he is stuck in a line company, like it or not.

One of the few black officers I ever meet in the Army, in addition to that one I bumped into while shitting my guts out in General Weyand's latrine, signs into the company. He is Lieutenant Roussell, fresh from OCS. This brings D Company's officers up to strength with Captain Jones, and Lieutenants Sawyer, Swenson, Shepper, and Low.

Captain Jones and Sergeant Azzalino return from their leaves, and I get my 3-day pass. I should have taken off and used up my time as a tourist in Honolulu, but I am too cheap to spend the money, besides after five minutes, lying on a beach bores the crap out of me. As I sit in the tiny coffee shop next to the circular sports arena, Brown waddles through the door with a look of urgency on his pudgy face. "Lieutenant Sawyer is looking for you, Lupton," he tells me as if crucifixion is my fate. I should tell him to get lost, but I will just have to deal with the problem when I return. I find Lieutenant Sawyer frantically rummaging through my desk searching for a document that, unbeknownst to me, must be renewed after 60 days. I join in the hunt as we search every nook and cranny of the orderly room, even looking behind the ARs in the bookshelf, as if for some reason, I may have hidden it there. Failing to find the form, I have to redo the stupid thing and walk it up to battalion where Sergeant Davis chews my ass. He gives it to Lieutenant Lipsett who signs it then Davis makes me run it all the way up to brigade. Months later, I find the errant paper residing a three-ringed binder I created as a form-filling guide for myself.

Every Monday morning all of the men, including the officers, of the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade participate in reveille at 0600. D Company's small headquarters detachment normally skulks behind the screen door of our little bunkroom during this ceremony. Nobody notices our absence until one Monday morning, when feeling pressed to complete the morning report, I shoulder past our group of shirkers. "Don't go out there." Morris the Medic warns me. I huff past him declaring, "I'm the company clerk," as if I am too important for this trivial ritual. I make a big mistake. As the whole battalion faces to salute the Old Stars 'n Stripes, Sergeant Azzalino observes me walking on the lanai to the latrine and has a shit fit about the whole thing.

"When a Colonel, in the United States Army can show up at six o'clock in the morning for reveille you guys can too!" When the next Monday morning comes around, I stand in the rear of the formation watching Lieutenant Sawyer roam C Company's ranks, pick out some dumbass GI whispering to his buddy, and makes him stand stiff at attention as if this were basic training. He is always the predator.

At 0400, the lights come on announcing another shakedown. We roll out of our bunks, unlock our foot and wall lockers, and attempt to conceal our piss hards by putting on our pants.

Captain Jones, Lieutenant Sawyer, and First Sergeant Azzalino begin rummaging through everyone's belongings searching for contraband. Of all the others, Napoleon picks my lockers to inspect. I feel he is almost disappointed when he does not find booze or ammunition in my stuff. I despise this intrusion with a passion.

The advance party packs up a conex in preparation for our departure then at the last minute brigade decides to send Colonel Beers and all four of his company commanders plus Lieutenant Swenson; Charlie Company fills out the rest of the advance party. On November 27, they fly to Vietnam leaving the rest of the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade to sail to the war zone by ship. This change leaves me marooned with the executive officer and Sergeant Azzalino to prepare the company for troop movement. With the absence of Captain Jones, Lieutenant Sawyer immediately sees fit to pass out Article 15s one after the other. On one such occasion, Sawyer himself types up the Article 15 using his cheesy little Smith Corolla portable only to find out he placed the carbons in backwards. "The Article 15 forms, Lupton, where are they?"

"We are out of them, sir." I reply. "I can't get any more either." The battalion clerk has already packed up his supplies so there are no more Article 15 forms available. Just before Jones left, I procure 30 of the forms but now I find myself completely out of them as departure day approaches. This information does not go over well with the Sawyer.

Just to make my life even more insufferable, Fish and Simone go AWOL, which makes six of them. For some reason, I am not surprised either of these clowns takes off. Both came to B Company when I was in the third platoon, both are OCS rejects from Ft Benning, and while I get along with Simone, Fish is a real jerk off. We never did like each other from the get-go. Once again, I waste my time hoofing the expanse of Schofield Barracks.

After returning from clearing post for my most recent AWOLs, I sit typing a project well after 1800 hours. It suddenly dawns on me I need to make an entry on tomorrow's morning report, and as Napoleon walks out of his office, I blurt out, "I need to make you a Class A officer, Lieutenant Sawyer." He stops in mid stride, turns to me, and says irately. "Don't you ever speak to me that way again, *Lupton!*" If looks could kill, I should be lying on the floor with a wooden stake driven clear through my heart.

"I..., I just wanted to remind myself that I need to make an entry on the morning report tomorrow to enter you a Class-A officer. You know, so you can draw pay from finance for the company. That's all." He hesitates for a second as his faux pas sinks in. Turning, without a word, Sawyer reenters his office as Ball and I steal glances at each other.

The next morning Lieutenant Sawyer calls me into his office, "Close the door, Lupton," and, in a whisper so low I strain to hear him, he apologizes to me for his prior night's ass reaming. His penitence appears heartfelt, but his narcissism shall return; I just know it.

"Ah, sure Sir, I did not mean to be uppity toward you last night, it just burst out. I apologize to you too." I should take advantage of his contrition and attempt to reconcile but this first-rate opportunity for rapprochement evaporates forever. Just to be a bit toady, I come to attention, salute him, and then leave his office. I retrieve the morning report, return to his office, and point out the entry for Class-A officer. "Right here sir, this allows you to draw pay for the

company,” I explain to him. He signs the report without comment, and I hurry up to battalion cheerful to be away from the executive officer. I know he is unaware we needed to make this entry just as he is oblivious that I needed to enter him as D Company’s commanding officer during Captain Jones’s two-week leave, which allows him to document his command time. I did not know that either, but I am not going to step on my dick and tell him after finding this out.

Reminiscent of when the 25<sup>th</sup> Division prepared for departure to Vietnam two years ago, the quad fills up with packing boxes and conexes. They wait for the forklifts to load them onto eighteen-wheelers. Even the rains come too, stranding the heavy equipment in a quagmire of mud. With all of the kitchen gear packed away, only Headquarters Company’s mess hall is operational. A whole battalion forms a gargantuan line stretching along A Company’s building all the way back to B Company. It takes forever to get chow and many of us defer to the snack bar for nourishment. Too harried to eat all the time, my ulcer begins acting up again. The dull throbbing pain reminds me I should eat well and not fret, but not being born with enough time, I refuse to stop.

Lieutenant Sawyer wants me to drive down to Ft Shafter with Brown and Taylor for some ungodly reason. I ask him if the two supply clerks can go alone because I have just too much work to do. He appears miffed that I do not jump at his decision but ruefully agrees. Screw him though I am too busy to be away for a whole afternoon.

Two days before Departure Day, two of our six AWOLs show up in the morning formation as if nothing ever happened.

Finally, D-Day arrives on December 4, 1967. I start packing up everything left in the orderly room. When I try to put our typewriters into a box, Sawyer stops me, “put those typewriters in my office, Lupton.”

“Sir, do you mean we are not taking these with us to Vietnam?”

“That’s right, Lupton. Take the portable. The other two typewriters are for the permanent party.” I am dumbstruck. We are taking this cheap little portable instead of the wide-carriage Underwood! I am flummoxed, but I know better than to argue with him.

The whole battalion lines up their field equipment and duffle bags in long rows by company, the MPs appear at the corners of the quad to staunch last minute AWOLs, and I hold one final mail call before throwing the remaining letters into the company conex.

A sergeant appears from nowhere asking for two men. They are to report to the next quad. “Why?” I ask.

“Because they have 1049 requests pending, and until they are resolved, these guys cannot ship with you to Vietnam.

“You gotta be shitting me, Sarge.”

“Nope, they have three days to get over to C Quad and report to the first sergeant.”

“Three days, it’s only right over there,” I point.

“I know, but they have three days before they have to report.” The two lucky GIs gather up their field gear and weapons and happily trek over to the next quad. We never hear about

them again. In the last week before troop shipment, the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade loses approximately a third of its personnel.

We eat our final meal in the lone Headquarters Company mess hall and loaf around on top of our duffle bags waiting for the busses to take us to our ship. Rumor of the day has us marching down to the boat with a band playing Yankee Doodle Dandy, but I know this one is a crock of bullshit, which it is.

The busses roll in just as it starts getting dark. We toss our duffle bags into the back of the bus and must take off our field gear to get into the vehicle, claim a seat, and sit with our equipment on our laps. One man trips and falls in the aisle. "Get down! Get down, ya gotta learn to get down!" crows a gaggle of black guys, everybody laughs their asses off. They reiterate this ridiculousness until we all grow weary of it and a subdued tranquility sweeps over our merrymaking.

We ride in silence for our final twenty-mile excursion ending at Pier 40. I step out of the vehicle to see a couple of guys yanking out our duffle bags from the rear of the bus. I grab one and drag it into a long line where a lieutenant seated at a rickety card table checks off our names before allowing anybody up the gangplank to board the troopship. I gaze up at the prow of our vessel and stand awe struck at the name of our transport, I cannot believe it, she is the USNS Gordon, déjà vu all over again. Sure enough, I even recognize the big iron door on the side of the ship that I disembarked through with the 25<sup>th</sup> Division 23 months earlier.

I follow a line of men clamoring down a series of steel stairways into a compartment amidships where I claim a top bunk for myself. Not long afterwards, Lieutenant Sawyer appears, and we rummage the cargo bay for his duffle bag. Upon finding it, he orders me to grab it and follow him. He bounces up the two staircases with me in tow huffing and puffing trying desperately to keep up. Up on the main deck, I hoist Sawyer's sixty-pound bag upon my shoulder and scurry to follow him until we reach a flight of external stairways, which he ascends jauntily without ever looking back to see if I am still with him. I hustle up the stairs before he morphs into the Mad Hatter and vanishes into a hatchway and down a set of metal stairs. Panting like crazy, I peer down the stairwell to see his ankles disappear around a bulkhead. I ponder for an instant then say to myself, "fuck this," and toss his bag end over end down stairway. I trundle down breathless, grab the strap, and lug his possession to a stateroom that sleeps four passengers in two double bunks. There is not much room for more than four wall lockers and a writing table.

Always the officer, "Here is your bag, Lupton, you can go," he tells me, merely pointing to it. Now I have to hump my own bag up the first flight of stairs then down the other two staircases to get back to my troop compartment. How he found my duffle bag among all the others I will never know, but I am positive he made an effort to pick mine.

Hardison and I go up on deck to watch the remaining troops load the Gordon. Leaning against the side of a warehouse opposite the ship, a lieutenant smooches his girl friend farewell by sticking his tongue down her throat. Catcalls encourage his blond sweetie to turn, smile, and eagerly waive at us. To demonstrate his prowess to those wishing it were they bidding his cutie

adieu, the lieutenant pulls her tight against him and sucks her face as if a vacuum. She appears energized by the jeering crowd as the couple glues their lips to each other in one ultimate embrace, all to the merriment of the troops. Finally, his beloved pulls herself away from her paramour, waves again to her spirited devotees shipping off to war, and evaporates into the shadows of the depot. "Let me smell your finger, lewd-tenant," shouts a reveler, which brings forth a roar of good cheer.

By now, I feel tired and return to my stuffy compartment, climb up into my rack, and sack out. Upon waking, I feel the ship rolling underneath my feet. The nearest head is through another compartment, up two staircases to the main deck, and then down another set of stairs. I brush my teeth and wash my face then join the interminable chow line snaking its way toward the dining room. Remarkably, on this cruise, the victuals are tolerable, even approaching the Navy chow we ate on the amphibious exercise. I eat and return to the head to take my morning dump then go back to the troop compartment where First Sergeant Azzalino waltzes through the aisles inspecting each man's bunk before chasing everybody up on deck. As on my previous excursion, I observe many men growing green about the gills. My stomach too feels queasy with the rolling as I watch the last of the Hawaiian Islands drift by the ship.

As the company assembles for morning PT, converging currents make our first day a rough passage. The PT leader sets the cadence for pushups; as the ship sinks into a trough, the pushup is easy, and as the ship rises on the swell G forces belabors our endeavor. Sergeant Azzalino watches from the sidelines as Napoleon roams the crowded deck, egging on those of us attempting to game the rolling ship. Lieutenant Sawyer demands we stay remain coordinated with the PT instructor, but not everybody is so enthusiastic, and some get out of coordination with the formation, which annoys the Lieutenant. Sawyer picks out a black soldier who is out of cadence with everybody else. For something this trifling, an ass chewing would suffice, but no, Napoleon extracts his vengeance by committing the man to three days in the brig, nourished only by bread and water.

Before any prisoner can serve his sentence, he must undergo a physical exam by the ship's doctor, which means I must type the order of incarceration on a form provided by the purser. I stand in front of a sour Lieutenant Sawyer sitting at the small writing table in his cramped stateroom perusing the incarceration papers. After a few minutes of silence, I begin to fidget. He senses my discomfort and continues staring at the papers just to annoy me; then he hands them to me, "Fill 'em out, Lupton." I take the papers and leave.

Finding a typewriter becomes an adventure. As I approach the bow of the ship, I find a large cluster of men crowding the rails to watch the dolphins ride the Gordon's wake. The ship lolls up on the crest of a wave then falls lazily into the trough, which splashes up a giant crest of water, causing the giddy crowd to scurry back along the sides to avoid the splatter surging over the fore railing. The slothful ones take a drenching.

I locate a typewriter in a cramped dayroom where all of the battalion's senior NCOs congregate. I sit in the corner hunting and pecking slowly because my stomach wants to purge. With a slight headache, I progress until Major Bell opens the door and asks A Company's first

sergeant to join him in the passageway. The door remains slightly ajar, so we can hear the major callously rebuking the first sergeant, "All of the KPs are AWOL from the galley, Sergeant, if you don't get your ass over there and get them back working, I'll have you court-martialed." The ambience in the room suddenly thickens with umbrage. The First Sergeant reaches in, grabs his hat, and disappears just as a private does when caught slacking off.

"The last cruise I was on there was never a problem like this," the disgusted C Company first sergeant remarks sardonically.

"There is something wrong with that major," adds another platoon sergeant, others nod in agreement. I just keep pecking away trying all the time to keep my morning's scrambled eggs in my tummy. Halfway through my assignment, I gravely ponder a visit to the rail to assuage my stomach, but I preserver and never do heave-ho the whole cruise.

With the paperwork completed, I leave the senior NCOs sitting in silence, morosely dreading Major Bell's return. Lieutenant Sawyer reviews the confinement papers, and without saying a word, leaves to find the ship's doctor. This is a good time to get lost in the crowd. The side of the ship is crowded with those vomiting over the Gordon's rail. A guard at the hatchway tells me I cannot go down to my troop compartment because the officers are pulling an inspection. I agree with him that I need not enter now, find a cool spot in the shade along a bulkhead, and sack out for an hour. Something rubbing my pant leg awakens me where I find the merchant marines dragging a large, bulky greased cable along the deck. I scowl at them for not waking me up before they lubricated my nice clean uniform, and now I have to scrap the black residue off my pant leg, the dumb fuck heads.

Aside from typing out the company's *Domain of the Golden Dragon* cards (crossing the international date line at 180 degrees longitude), life on board is very humdrum. Others pull KP and ship's guard, so I have nothing to do except sit along the side of the ship reading *Armageddon* by Leon Uris. The merchant marine has a more urbane library than the Navy pukes on that troop ship we sailed on for the amphibious exercise in August. Watching flying fish keep up with the ship is another pastime, along with counting the Japanese glass fishing floats bobbing past. I can imagine some of them are still out there after all these years at sea.

One afternoon, we feel the ship coming to a discrete slow down then somebody announces there are two destroyers zigzagging, one on the port, and one on the starboard side of the ship. Rumor quickly spreads that they are searching for North Vietnamese submarines that want to sink us. The likelihood that North Vietnam is sophisticated enough to maintain a submarine in the open ocean is uncanny. Eventually, the ship speeds up, the two destroyers disappear over the horizon, and we go eat chow. That night Sillen shows us a ship's newspaper reporting that on the prior cruise a man fell overboard. The rag said the ship never bothered to turn around because they could never find him in the open ocean at night. Forty years later, I read in the Americal Division Association newspaper relaying this story as a suicide by a Mexican cook who wanted his mother to receive his 10,000-dollar GI insurance. I guess he figured a cooks' probability of dying in Vietnam were slim to none, or, on the other hand, maybe mom needed the dough right away. Bizarre is the only word to describe this anecdote.

I have an opportunity to visit the NCO's lounge where painted on all four walls are the unit logos of the outfits this ship transported to war zones from WWII, to Korea, to Vietnam. The bulkheads are completely full, and I recognize many of them.

The ship's police, men with SP armbands, keep everybody on deck during the day. Most of the time half the ship is off limits while the crew paints the other half. A guard does not allow us to take any food out of the dining room. On Sunday, an SP chases me to the fantail, which is the only place we can smoke. The navy is full of these little chickenshit traditions like this.

The only meeting of D Company, aside from morning PT, is when Lieutenant Sawyer assembles the company in our cargo hold for a vacuous lecture about getting into a criminal shit storm with Vietnamese police. According to him, if we commit some sort crime, the Vietnamese government will prosecute us. His whole sermon is myopic crapola because the civilian police always turn over any miscreant to the MPs for prosecution. The lecture is dower and dry, hardly worthy of great leadership. I often wonder what this man's childhood was like as a lifers' offspring, a spotless room, hospital corners, and virtual obeisance. For the life of me, I cannot remember ever seeing Sawyer crack a smile, not even once.

Rumors are rife as to where we will land. One has us debarking at Na Trang, which is in the middle of Vietnam. The other landing place is Cam Rhan Bay, a bit further south. On December 19 they wake us up at 0300, and on my way to the latrine, I see a tiny white light way, way off into the blackness. A deck guard tells me the lights emanate from Qui Nhon, and the ship will dock there later this morning.

After an early breakfast, I collect everybody's letters in a mailbag, drop them off at the purser's office, and get in line to exchange my greenbacks for MPC. I go up on deck to watch the tugboats churning muddy brown water as they berth the Gordon. We lean against the railing watching Vietnamese dock laborers attempting to drag a humongous rope onto the quay. Three of them together struggle fruitlessly to drag the line out of the water until a big black staff sergeant walks over, and with one hand, yanks the rope onto the dock. As we wait to disembark, jets drop bombs on a mountain top way off into the distance, the booming follows shortly afterwards. "Don't worry, there ain't no VC around here," taunts the fat patronizing prick. I merely sneer at this big bulbous REMF, boasting as if he is some sort of badass, fuck him. About this time, I see Captain Jones and Lieutenant Swenson come on board the ship. My first impulse is to run and tell Jones how difficult Sawyer has been since the captain left, but I temper my passion so as not to appear too conspiratorial against the executive officer. I will not come out on top if push comes to shove. Besides, I cannot even get near him because of the crush of men emerging from below deck lugging their field gear and weapons. We busy ourselves by loading live ammo in our magazines and policing up the area before leaving.

Lieutenant Sawyer, Azzalino, Doan, and I will join others flying to Duc Pho on a C130 while the remainder of the company takes a truck convoy. A couple of duce-and-a-halves take us to a staging area where we hurry up and wait until noontime when we become hungry. There is an Air Force NCO club across the tarmac and Azzalino goes over to see if he can procure something to eat. He wants to know if we (the enlisted men) can come in and get chow, but the



club manager says no. I guess the lower ranks are only good enough to stand perimeter guard at night to keep him safe as he schleps drinks to his schmuck sergeant cohorts. Azzalino is able to procure some sandwiches though; at 1400, our cargo plan arrives, and everybody crams into the fuselage. Because there are so many of us, we have to stand and brace ourselves with our duffle bags to maintain our balance during takeoff and landing. There are so many men crammed inside we could not fall over anyways. The flight is not too long and before we know it, we are descending to land at Duc Pho. With a great amount of noise approaching panic, our plane touches down and right away reverses its engines making a screeching halt, and then immediately taxis back up the runway to disgorge us without shutting down the engines. When the rear door drops, an Army major walks briskly up the ramp and bellows in a high-pitched voice clearly audible over the idling engines, "Get out of this airplane, now! Get out of here! Hurry up, hurry!" Everybody hustles out the rear and past the two starboard engine exhausts, which feels like they will fry the skin right off my face. Immediately, the ramp closes and the C130 takes off in a roar from the PSP runway, and we find ourselves standing in the bright sunshiny quiet. The whole event is anticlimactic. I find myself on the first day of my second tour standing in Vietnam staring at the burned out hulk of another hapless C130 lying just beside the runway.

As we wait for a deuce-and-a-half to pick us up, I walk over to the perimeter barbed wire and stare at the proverbial village life just beyond. Sergeant Doan joins me and I say, "This looks just like my last time here."

"What?"

"I said it looks just like the last time I was here, Sergeant Doan." The conversation ends there, and I could never boast that our supply sergeant is an interesting fellow.

Trucks arrive and take us on a short ride to a place next to Duc Pho named Bronco where the rest of the battalion is now occupying the perimeter bunkers. Squad tents arrive; we busy ourselves erecting it to use as the company orderly room, the five headquarters personnel will live in it too. Captain Jones and Lieutenant Sawyer get a small circular tent for themselves while the platoon leaders stay with their men on the bunker line. Doan and Azzalino find an abandoned bunker not far away where they bunk. Just as we finish erecting our tent, folding cots, c-rations, and beer and soda arrive. There is no ice though, but I find the warm Carling Black Label refreshing to drink with my beefsteak c-ration dinner. Everybody is authorized two beers or sodas each but that does not stop Azzalino from drinking five or six beers, every night.

Darkness is falling by now, and I think we will just sack out after a few hours, but no. Captain Jones wants a sandbag perimeter build around the tent before we can do that. Everybody pitches in when a truckload of sandbags arrive and shortly thereafter, we have a single wall, five bags high wall surrounding the tent. During this activity, we watch a Spooky hose down and area several miles away, so far away that we cannot hear the Gatling gun firing. Tracer rounds ejaculate from a virtually blackened sky in a wavy red ribbon that rebounds from the ground as if hot lead poured into a wet mold. Nobody has ever seen a fire demo like this one before and a discussion ensues as to what kinds of ammunition the Spooky uses. "It is just M60

ammo. There are four ball rounds between all those tracers,” I declare as the ribbon of red roils and bursts off the ground. “I’m damn glad it’s not my ass out there.”

Everyone is tired now, so I lie down on my bunk thinking I am going to get some sack time, but no, Azzalino demands somebody be awake all night, and of course, that burden falls on us five enlisted men. The guard is only an hour and a half so what the heck.

The next morning I drag out my field desk and set up for business, only there is not much to do yet. The battalion’s mission for the next few weeks is to acclimatize, fill the eternal sandbag, and train with helicopters.

The first thing everybody wants is a hammer. I told Sergeant Major Lee this and nobody listened to me. The men on the line adapt though and soon they turn their bunkers into homes.

Duc Pho is a bread-loaf shaped hill jutting from the rice paddies of Southern I Corps. There is a single road carved up the side of it by the Marines who used to occupy this AO. Allegedly, the Marines sowed mines on the sides of the mound, but nobody knows for sure. The one comforting feature is the tank perched atop the hill. The crew turns on the spotlight periodically throughout the night, which resembles a Luke Skywalker light saber. The bolt of pure white light searches eagerly for a target just in front of our bunker line, and then a fifty-caliber machine gun blasts away at any suspicious object it finds. It is comforting to say the least.



**Figure 1 Duc Pho 1968**

The day before Christmas, Lieutenant Sawyer is oddly cheerful with the approaching holiday. He procures the branch of a small pine tree, mounts it in a ten-can of dirt, and wants us to decorate it with c-ration can lids, grenade pins, and other military gewgaws. “D Company is going to have the best looking tree in the battalion,” he announces enthusiastically. “Come on,

Lupton, cheer up will ya, let's get this thing decorated." I sit listlessly next to him on a bunk cutting a c-ration can into a spiral. I cannot get into the holiday spirit knowing I could be home right this minute enjoying Christmas with my family, but I am stuck here sitting next to this stupid son of a bitch playing with old c-ration tin cans. Sawyer takes note of the dismal enmity towards him by me and everybody else, and after several more minutes of trying to lift the Christmas cheer, he leaves and does not return for the remainder of the afternoon – all to the relief of everybody.

The cooks are very busy this afternoon. They begin cooking turkey loaf early and prepare all of the fixings of a good Christmas dinner, considering where we are, it is not too bad. It rains all morning but around 1100 hours the sun comes out and the afternoon turns sticky hot.

As the serving line forms, Captain Jones sits at the end of the chow line handing out Red Cross Care packages filled with toiletries, talcum powder, and some writing paper to each man as they head for a place to eat. It is a very nice gesture, but for some reason, angst grips me as I approach the captain, and when Jones hands me my Care package, I have a hard time feeling gracious towards his goodwill gesture. "Merry Christmas, Lupton," he says with genuine cheerfulness.

"Ah, merry Christmas to you too, sir," I reply as he hooks the loop over my little finger, but I really do not feel comfortable around him today.

There is a board nailed to one of the tent poles, and I claim that as mine to eat dinner. I get about half of my chow down my throat when I notice the pole appears to be cockeyed, and then all of a sudden, the whole tent leans over to the ground. This confirms to me that cooks are the stupidest motherfuckers in the United States Army. They rolled up the sides of the tent outward instead of inward, which allows the rainwater to collect and weigh down the canvas so much the tent pegs eventually give way. The tent pole I am eating on winds up lying across my tray in the sand. I am at the tipping point. Sweating profusely, I crawl out from under tent and stomp off to the orderly room. "Fuck 'em," I swear, "let those dumbass sons of bitches clean up my mess."

A call from battalion comes over the landline warning if there is any gunfire tonight, Colonel Beers will personally have that man court-marshaled. The Christmas cease-fire is officially in effect.

After the others join me in the tent, we try to get the Coleman lantern fired up. Morris the Medic loses the little rubber gasket sealing the cap on the pressure tank and a search by everybody ensues. The gasket is history, so in the waning daylight we desperately attempt to carve one from the cardboard of a yellow legal pad, but no luck. No one has any gook candles, nor even a flashlight, or anything else for illumination. As the tepid daylight turns into inky darkness inside the tent, there is nothing more to do but lie on our cots and sack out early. "Merry fucking Christmas," a sarcastic voice rings out.

"Fuck Christmas," someone morosely retorts, which sets the ambiance for every Christmas hence for the rest of my life.