

SCARWAF/Foreman

SCARWAF



In Every War, There Seems To Be At Least One Really
Oddball, Bastard, Off-the-wall Unit.
During The Korean Conflict,
It Was An Outfit Called SCARWAF.

Jim Foreman

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SCARWAF is a bizarre, tongue-in-cheek history of the 1903rd Engineer Aviation Battalion, SCARWAF; as being told some thirty-five years after the fact to a grandson, who had asked, "What did you do in the war, Grandpa?"

SCARWAF is an acronym which means "Special Category Army Reassigned With the Air Force", or in plain language, a bastard, oddball unit made up of misfits.

It is a story about Billy Bob Boomer, a professional rodeo cowboy; Jack "Red" Ryder, a rattlesnake hunter; Lester Price, who repaired traffic signals; Bobby Ward, a dogwood salesman; artist, Arthur Arthur Arthur and Obert Filpot, the most repulsive person in Texas. After being drafted, they were thrown together because the army, having no standard classification for their unusual civilian occupations, dumped them into a catch-all heading of Special Category. Knowing of no other use for such people, they were shipped off to an unknown unit which happened to also be designated as Special Category.

Under the leadership of a National Guard unit from Chicago, which was made up for the most part by members of a street gang known as the Roaches, they finally realized that if they expected to survive should they find themselves in combat, they had better take charge of their own training.

This story takes its protagonists from one fiasco to another as they stumble from the insanity of induction, through basic training and finally to Korea where they had to beg, borrow or steal nearly everything that they needed in order to accomplish their mission of building airstrips.

Underlying the ribald, profane, vulgar and sometimes irreverent humor is a tale about men who were civilians trapped in army uniforms. This is the story of a few men who survived in the Army by dodging the bullet, rather than catching it. There are no heroes in SCARWAF--only survivors. Their only aim was to get the job done, get out of the army and resume their private lives.

CHAPTER ONE

Gory, gory what a helluva way to die
Gory, gory what a helluva way to die,
and he ain't gonna jump no more.
Gory, Gory, what a helluva way to die,

I'd heard that song before. A few years ago, I had the misfortune of trying to get a night's sleep in the same hotel where the 82nd Airborne was having one of their annual reunions. They staggered up and down the halls most of the night, bellowing that song to the tops of their voices before throwing up on the floor and passing out in a drunken stupor. This time, it was coming from a much different source than those inebriated revelers; it was my ten year old grandson who was singing it.

Jason had come to stay with us for a couple weeks, but since our neighborhood was made up of mostly retired people like myself and no young families with kids, he was having to more or less entertain himself. I walked around the house to where he was running a toy truck over little piles of sand.

"Where in the world did you ever hear a song like that?" I asked.

"Grandpa Jack went away to a reunion with the guys that he was in the army with and came back home singing it," he replied. "He was a paratrooper and jumped out of airplanes with a parachute and killed lots of Germans. Grandpa Chuck goes to reunions too. He was on a battleship and shot down lots of Jap airplanes with an Ack-Ack gun."

I had long realized that when it came to my daughter's kids, I was outnumbered by a ratio of two to one in the grandfather department. She married a man whose parents had divorced and remarried, giving her children two grandfathers on their dad's side but only one on hers.

"What's a reunion?"

"What's an Ack-Ack gun?"

"What did you do in the war, Grandpa Jim?" came his questions in rapid-fire order. This kid had the unique ability of being able to ask questions three at a time.

"Well, I wasn't in the same war that your other two grandpas served in," I replied.

"How come you weren't in that war?"

"Do you get to go to reunions, sing songs, get drunk and throw water balloons at people?"

"What's a whoopee cushion?"

His other grandfathers must come home with some mighty tall tales about their exploits at reunions with their old buddies. To my knowledge, my old unit has never had a reunion, and probably never will have one if our luck holds out.

"During World War Two, the one in which your other grandfathers served, they drafted men according to when they were born. The last month and year that they drafted was October, 1928, the month before I was born. Had the war gone on any longer, I would probably have been drafted to serve in it. I was in the Korean War, or Police Action as they liked to call it, and served in an organization known as SCARWAF." I answered.

"What's a Scarwaf?"

"What was the Korean war?"

"Grandpa Jack killed all the Germans and Grandpa Chuck shot down all the Japs, so why did you join up to fight in another war?"

"Actually, I didn't join up, I was drafted. Being in the army was the last place that I expected or wanted to be. The best that I can figure is that they decided to have the Korean war to get even with those of us who were born a year or so too late to get drafted into what they call the big war. SCARWAF is an acronym which means Special Category Army Reassigned With Air Force."

"Special category sounds real important. What did you do in it, were you a spy or something?"

"What's an acronym?"

"Were you a General?"

Now I was getting somewhere with my grandson. Neither of his other grandfathers were in any kind of an organization which had special in its name and he thought that I might have been a General or something.

I sat down beside him, "Special Category means that the Air Force had a special need for airstrips to be built in Korea so that they could fly their airplanes there. They didn't have anyone who could build airstrips, so after the Army drafted us, they sort of loaned us to the Air Force to build runways."

"Was I born when you went off to the war?"

"How old was Mama?"

"Was that in the olden days?"

"I suppose that you could call them the olden days because your mother wasn't born then either. In fact, I hadn't even met your grandmother when I was in the war. The Korean war happened many years ago, in 1950."

"1950 had been a good year for me, even a great one by some standards, at least up to that point. I now owned my own crop spraying business and during the summer just ended; I had worked my way as an migrant crop sprayer all the way from the Mission Valley of Texas northward to the Canadian border. The spraying season had finally ended and I was back at home with both the airplane and truck paid for and money in my pocket.

One of the first things that I did after returning was to buy myself something which I had always wanted: a brand new convertible. It was a 1950 Dodge Wayfarer sport roadster fitted with the optional, 145 horsepower Chrysler engine. Although that combination made the little roadster one of the hottest stock cars around, I souped it up even more by installing a high compression head, dual racing carburetors and glasspack mufflers. Not only could such a car pick up speed at an alarming rate, it could also pick up far more girls than I could possibly keep entertained. I

spent next few weeks riding around in my new car with the top down and my right arm encircling some cute little thing who snuggled close against me with her hair flowing in the breeze.

Football season was in full swing and the Stinnett team was doing something which it had been unable to accomplish during any of the twelve years that I had spent in those hallowed halls; it was actually winning games. A winning team does certain things for a small town; the most notable is to bring out the townspeople to watch. I even began to attend the games, partly to watch the home team trounce their opponents but mostly because it was a great place to show off my new car and pick up girls.

Her name was Janet Winchester. She was now a senior, homecoming queen and the head cheerleader. She had long blonde hair, long blonde legs and a long blonde ass. It had been at least four years since I had seen Janet and My Oh My what those four years had done for her. The last time that I saw her, she was a shy little thing with knobby knees, buck teeth and a face full of freckles but she was now the most popular and prettiest girl in school.

Full, round breasts strained to escape the confines of a bra and she now had the cutest little butt that I had ever seen. I took one look at that nubile body in the tight blouse and short skirt; she took one look at my car with fender skirts and convertible top; and it was instant love, or at least instant lust. No matter whether the attraction was love or lust, hardly an hour passed after that when we weren't together. Parking on a dark country road after a movie became the standard fare with Janet not only allowing me to fondle her beautiful breasts, but she aided the process by always wearing sweaters and a bra with the snap between the cups. However, only on rare occasions would she allow a finger to explore that wet and wonderful world which she insisted that she was saving for her wedding night.

We were without cares, or even knowledge of what was going on around us. We were especially unconcerned about some obscure war going on half way around the world. We were too busy snuggling together in a little world of our own to take note of such mundane happenings.

Her mother immediately began to weigh my potential as a son in law and evidently considered me to be an adequate catch because she would invite me to dinner almost every night, during which she would comment at least a dozen times what a lovely couple we made. Even though her mother was obviously trying to bring our budding relationship to a quick conclusion in front of a minister, her father was somewhat less enthusiastic by always adding, "But he doesn't have a real job. He just flies around the country in airplanes."

I walked into the post office one morning to pick up my mail and there he stood, Obert Filpot, the most repulsive person in Stinnett, possibly even in the whole state of Texas; well perhaps the third most repulsive, when you consider his parents, Big Egbert and Mama Filpot. Big Egbert, who weighed at least three hundred pounds, was known around town as "Hawg" so, it was only natural that his first fat offspring would become known as "Shoat". Mama Filpot stood well over six feet tall, weighed at least fifty pounds more than Hawg and always looked as if she had just emerged from a fighting a forest fire. She not only could, but did whip Hawg's ass and throw him out of the house every time he came home drunk, which happened at least twice a week.

Obert always wore bib overalls and usually had at least one hand thrust down inside of them, alternately scratching or playing pocket-pool with himself. Obert had some sort of a problem with his gastric plumbing which caused him to produce intestinal gasses in such

quantity that he could not only fart at will, but could do so with a blast which far surpassed anything which any normal human could produce. His favorite game was "Pull My Finger".

Obert had a round, fat face with tiny, pig-like eyes, set close together under an overhanging brow. It made one wonder just how long it had been since his ancestors climbed down from trees and started walking erect. His laugh was something close to the sound of that made by a hog, sort of a Snort, Snort--Oink, Oink, usually followed by a fart or two.

The Filpots lived in a collection of shacks and shanties, and an abandoned school bus down south of town where they raised hogs, hell and kids. Part of their property was used as the local trash dump, but it was impossible to locate the line of demarcation between where the dump ended and the Filpot yard began.

It seemed that Mama Filpot spawned another male Filpot about every nine months and fifteen minutes, providing a stair-stepped succession of hubcap stealers, pig screwers, tree climbers, cat killers, window breakers, rock throwers, yard pissers, creepers, crawlers and screamers.

The whole Filpot family stayed drunk about two thirds of the time and amused themselves by fighting with each other or taking pot shots at anyone who tried to sneak in without paying the fifty cents they charged for using their dump.

The Filpot's post office box was just above mine and while I waited for Obert to fiddle with the combination lock to get his mail, I did my best not to breathe. The last time that he saw soap, it was going the other way. His bodily odors, combined with his gastric discharges were enough to peel paint and kill flies. The whole Filpot family smelled so bad that it was claimed that whenever any of them went out to feed their hogs, they would all run to the upwind side of the pen.

It seemed as if most of my life had been spent looking at and smelling Obert's backside. With his last name coming alphabetically right before mine, no matter what I did or where I went, he was always right in front of me. The day that I began the first grade in school, the teacher seated us in alphabetical order, putting me right behind that fat cesspool. When we had a fire drill, I had to follow Obert. When we went through the lunch line, I followed Obert. I endured Obert through the first six years of school, until "Hawg" decided that since he had only gone through the sixth grade and was a success in life, that was enough "learning" for "Shoat".

Obert finally managed to work the combination, which required only two numbers to open, and removed his mail from the box. He fumbled through it and moved down to the window to pick up something. I took my last breath of fresh air at the door and plunged into the fogbank of Obert smell which hung like a cloud in front of the boxes.

I twirled the knob to open my box, which was more or less a foolish exercise since they all had the same combination and the only purpose of the lock was to keep the door from being left open and the mail blowing out when someone opened the front door. Mixed in among the seed catalogs, copies of Trade-A-Plane News and the Grit Newspaper was a small yellow slip, indicating that I should call at the window for a registered letter. I moved from the old cloud of Obert in front of the boxes to the new one that he had left hovering at the window.

"Sign yore name rat cheer," said Mr. Bates, the postmaster, pointing to the bottom line on the yellow slip. He then thumbed through a stack of identical letters until he came to the one addressed to me. He ripped off the attached green return card and slid it through the window for my signature. "Looks like we ain't gonner be seein' you 'round cheer much longer 'cause they done gotcha, along with Shoat, Bucky Groves and most of the other young studs like you who

didn't go off to fight like real men in the big war." he added.

"Greetings from the President of the United States." the letter began. Why in hell am I getting a letter from Old Hairy Ass; I didn't even vote for him. He is a damn Democrat. Texas, for the most part, is predominately Baptist and Democrat and with my being a fifth generation Texan, I suppose that I should have belonged to and supported both of these factions. However, I have managed to remain one of the few holdouts or outcasts from both of them. I suppose you could call me a Republican backslider.

"A group of your friends and neighbors have selected you to....." Damn! I barely escaped WW-II by being born three days too late to get drafted and now they are throwing another war just to get even with me.

"You are hereby ordered to present yourself at the Selective Service Office, located in the US Post Office Building in Borger, Texas at 9:00 AM on November 3, 1950 for induction into the United States Army. Bring only enough clothing for two days." Not only were they drafting me into the Army, but they were doing it on my birthday.

Janet responded to the news that I was being drafted into the army by turning on the tears. The flow began as soon as she heard the news at noon and lasted till well past midnight. When the tear factory finally stopped production, she looked at me from bloodshot blue eyes and said, "Let's get married before you go."

There was no question that I had a fantastic case of the hots for cute little Janet and wanted to jump her shapely body in the worst way, but now with my life as messed up as a dog's breakfast, the last thing that I wanted to do was to take on the responsibilities of a wife. Her mother joined the fray by saying that getting married before leaving for the army gave a man a special reason for wanting to return from the war safe and sound. She almost made it sound that going into the service single was an open invitation to disaster. In order to keep things from getting too tense, I gave Janet an engagement ring and we sort of set a wedding date for the following June, after she graduated from school but before I would be sent off to the war in Korea. This seemed to please her mother to no end and the whole matter sort of slid to a back burner.

CHAPTER TWO

October flew by and I attempted to put all of my affairs in order. I managed to sell both the crop spraying airplane and the truck which was used to service it. There was certainly no reason for me to keep something like that sitting around for the next 15 months until I returned. I decided to keep the car under the possibility that I would be stationed at a base someplace in the states and could take it there.

Even though Janet and I were sort of officially engaged, our nightly petting sessions consisted of nothing more than lots of heavy breathing and frustration. "Just wait until we are married in June and I will give myself to you with the greatest enthusiasm," she would say.

Rather than departing in a torrent of tears, I bid Janet goodbye on the night before I was to leave and asked my dad to take me to Borger to catch the bus to the induction center in Amarillo. He had been the soul survivor of a machine gun company during World War One and just before I boarded the bus, he gave me one last bit of advice about getting along in the army, "Keep your bowels open, your mouth shut and don't volunteer for anything."

The bus ride from Borger to Amarillo was a quiet one. Obert had the whole seat across the back of the bus to himself. He sat there, happy as a clam, looking at comic books, snorting, oinking and farting. As we got off the bus in a part of town where I wouldn't normally venture without a gun, a guy with a clip board began to read off our names. Filpot came right in front of Foreman and as usual, I was found myself following Obert. Right behind me in the line was Bucky Groves, who had always sat right behind me all the way through school. He was a weird little guy who wore thick round glasses, ate his own buggers and got through school by copying answers off my paper. Often as a joke, I would write down an answer so silly that no one would ever believe it, allow him to copy it and then change it before turning in the paper.

Bucky, whose dad owned the local Helpy-Selfy laundry where two bits rented a Maytag for an hour, was the total teacher's pet. From his first day in school, he was always the one who got to beat the dust out of the erasers. He was usually so covered with chalk dust from pounding the erasers that he looked like a ghost most of the time. When he got into high school, he graduated from erasers to running the movie projector. It was an ancient Keystone which was about the same size and weight as a Buick engine and had to be moved around on a table with little steel wheels. You could hear him pushing the projector up and down the halls, with those

little wheels squeaking like a thousand mice in heat.

Bucky always wanted to be the big athlete and went out for football in the fall, basketball during the winter and baseball in the spring. He was so totally uncoordinated that in order to keep him out of the way, the coaches would make him the equipment manager. Being the equipment manager meant that he was the one who kept the socks and athletic supporters clean. He would haul a big pile of them down to his dad's laundry each night and return them spotless the next morning. I can still remember what I wrote in the yearbook when we graduated. "Here's to Bucky Groves, the best damn eraser pounder, projector operator and jock strap washer in Texas."

Once inside the frigid barn that was being used as an induction center, we were told, "Remove all of your clothes, roll them in a bundle and form a single line." It didn't take Obert but about two seconds to shuck his clothes because all he ever wore was a filthy shirt, overalls and clodhopper boots without any laces. He never bothered to wear things like underwear or socks. It was at this point that I realized that Obert not only had short, hog-lie hair all over his body; but he was also covered with what appeared to be scales.

One by one, we stepped through a door where we were told to, "Bend over and spread your cheeks." Obert bent forward, grabbed the cheeks on either side of his face and pulled.

"The cheeks of your butt, you simpleton," muttered the doctor, who was seated on a short stool which placed him in the proper viewing position. "Jeez, would you look at all that shit," he said as Obert separated his fat hocks.

Obert turned his head and replied, "Whut'd you 'spect to see, ice cream? Snort, Snort--Oink, Oink--Fart, Fart".

"Get that filthy bastard out of my sight," yelled the doctor as we were being hustled along to the next station. What an awful job that must be; asshole inspector at an Army Induction Center.

The remainder of the physical went along at about the same rate of speed as had the butt inspection, "Stand on the white line, read between the red and green lines, turn your head, cough, piss in the bottle, raise your right hand and repeat after me." We were in the army!

"Git yore clothes back on and git yore asses in line, you somzabitches; yore in the army now," shouted a fat, pimply-faced kid wearing a blue arm band, emblazoned with a PFC stripe. There is nothing lower in the army than an acting PFC. "Git yore asses on that bus out front, I ain't gonna wait all day fer yew."

I noticed that Bucky Groves was no longer in line behind me and as we boarded the bus, I saw him standing off to one side. "Hey, Bucky, better get on the bus," I yelled at him out the window.

"I ain't going into the army with you. I flunked the physical and they are sending me back home," he replied.

"How come, you fail the eye test?"

"Nope, I got flat feet, flatter than a duck," he replied.

Our second bus ride of the day, which carried us from Amarillo to Fort Sill, was even quieter than the first one. I suppose that it was the shock of realizing how, in only a few minutes, one can be converted from a happy, carefree civilian to something even lower than an acting PFC.

Obert shared his back seat on the bus with the acting PFC who went along to see that none of us escaped on the way to our next stop. The acting PFC didn't seem to mind the cloud of

Obert's swine smell as they brayed, snorted, oinked and farted away the whole trip. Perhaps he had been an Obert before he joined the army and being around him was like old home week.

It was almost midnight when we staggered off the bus in front of the only lighted barracks building in Fort Sill. A real PFC, not an acting one like the Obert clone who had escorted us there, stood behind a truck loaded with blankets, pillows and sheets. Handing each of us two blankets, a pillow and two sheets, he yelled, "Pick out a bunk inside and make it in a military fashion. I'll inspect them in fifteen minutes." Who on earth ever heard of having to make up a bed and then have it inspected before you were allowed to unmake it and get into it?

The one-stripe martinet strode into the barracks exactly fifteen minutes later, ripping beds apart and ranting that we would stay up the rest of the night unless we were able to make our bunks in an acceptable military fashion. It was obvious that he had to stay up all night and had every intention of making us do the same. About an hour later another bus loaded with more new recruits pulled in so he left us in order to abuse the fresh bunch of arrivals.

"Reveille, you miserable bastards!" screamed the PFC of earlier that night, rending the air with blasts from his whistle and beating on a trash can with an adapter used for stacking cots. "Drop your cocks and grab your socks. Fold the blankets, stuff the sheets into the pillow cases, roll the mattress to the head of the bunk and fall out in the company street in fifteen minutes. You got a long day ahead of you."

A long day ahead! What the hell did he think yesterday was, a vacation? We stumbled into our clothes, wadded the bedding and rolled the mattresses as ordered.

"Jesus Christ," someone yelled, "It's only five in the damn morning. We've only been in bed for three hours. It ain't even daylight yet."

"Everyone drop and give me twenty-five," shouted our martinet with the whistle. "I'll teach you bastards to talk back to a superior NCO."

Twenty-five pushups later, we were standing in the dark street. "Stack the blankets in the truck, throw the sheets to the front and fall in." ordered the PFC, punctuating it with more blasts from his whistle.

"Rat Face! F'wrd March! HUP, Two Three Fo!" We must have stumbled along for half a mile or so in the total darkness before we came to a mess hall. There were lights inside and aroma of food, which we hadn't tasted since the sack lunches we were given on the bus the day before, beckoned to us.

"What the hell do you want?" shouted a voice from inside the mess hall," in answer to our tormentor's pounding on the door. "We don't open till six."

"At ease men, smoke 'em if you got 'em, and no talking," ordered the PFC. For the next hour and a half, we stood like idiots in front of the mess hall, waiting for it to open. This was our first lesson in the famous military operation, called "Hurry Up and Wait".

Things began to look up a bit after we had a good breakfast and the sun had risen to drive away the chill of the night. The PFC herded us off to a building where we took some tests designed to evaluate the intelligence of a primate. The most intelligent question was, "Which of these tools would you use to drive a nail?" The illustrations showed a saw, a hammer, a square and a brick. Obert picked the brick, because that was what he always used to drive nails.

"How far did you get in school?" asked the interviewer.

"Clean through the sixth grade, Snort, Snort--Oink, Oink," replied Obert, who was going

through the process right in front of me.

"What kind of work did you do in civilian life?" asked the interviewer.

Raised hogs and took people's money to dump their trash, Snort, Snort--Oink, Oink," said Obert. The interviewer ran down the long list of occupations on the form. Finding none which matched with feeding hogs, he checked the last box, "SPECIAL CATEGORY".

It was now my turn. "How far did you get in school?"

"I have four years of college," I replied.

"What kind of work did you do in civilian life?"

"I'm a pilot and owned my own business, a crop spraying service." I must be making quite an impression on the interviewer after what he had heard from Obert.

The interviewer ran down his long list, shrugged his shoulders and checked the last box, "SPECIAL CATEGORY".

"You mean that you have classified me in the same category as that fat idiot right in front of me?" I asked. "I have four years of college and that guy barely got half way through grade school. I fly airplanes and he feeds hogs!"

"If what you did in civilian life don't match any of the occupations on this list, you go into Special Category," said the interviewer. "Next!"

Next for us was an official army haircut. There were no barber chairs and no cloth around your neck to catch the clippings. You stepped between two barbers who were standing on pop cases to bring them up to the proper elevation for shearing. There was a race between the two barbers to see who could finish his side first. The haircut part of the induction process took only about twelve seconds as clippers whirled and hair flew until all that remained was short stubble. The barbers had to stop and clean their clippers twice before they could finish mowing their way through Obert's greasy hair.

We were then herded into the final stage of our induction, where I followed Obert through the issuing of uniforms. They weren't too careful about measurements, simply handing us clothing from one of three piles; Small, Medium or Large. "Swap around among yourselves until you come up with the right sizes to fit you," we were told.

"Whut are these damn things," asked Obert when they tossed him several pairs of size 48, olive green boxer shorts.

"Underwear," replied the astonished clerk.

"Never wear them," replied Obert as he tossed them back. "They jist git in my way, Snort, Snort--Oink, Oink--Fart, Fart." I never knew what they got in the way of and certainly wasn't going to ask.

By the end of the day, several hundred men had been processed and their future assignments in the military rested in the hands of the lowly clerks who had interviewed them. Men were assigned to the Infantry, Armored, Signal, Chemical and other units until all that remained were those classified as "SPECIAL CATEGORY". "What do we do with all of those Special Category people?" asked a clerk.

"I hear that there is some sort of a National Guard outfit up in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri which is called SCARWAF. I'm told that it means Special Category Something or the other; supposed to have something to do with the Air Force. Since that is a Special Category unit, send all of the Special Category people there," replied the Captain in charge. "Good place to get rid of them."

CHAPTER THREE

"Recruit Foreman, you are the tallest one of the Special Category troops and you have a college education, so I'm making you an Acting PFC and putting you in charge of a contingent of men and their records. You will see that they all get to your new unit of assignment at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. All that you have to do is keep them all together and get off the train when it gets to Rolla, Missouri. Think you can handle that?" asked the Sergeant.

"No problem, Sergeant, I'll take care of everything," I replied.

He handed a large manila envelope containing a stack of records and a blue arm band with a single stripe to me. "Sign here for receipt of the men and their records."

I signed the form, but stuffed the arm band into my pocket. After seeing the other people who had been bestowed with that dubious honor, the last thing that I ever wanted to be known as in the Army, was an acting PFC.

The bus took us to the railroad siding where I escorted my twenty-three charges into a rickety old passenger car. There were holes in the seats and pieces of the ceiling were falling down. Any windows which happened to be open would not close and those which were closed would not open. The toilets didn't work and the few doors which still hung on their hinges slammed open and shut each time that the train lurched over an uneven spot in the tracks. Although most of the railroads had long since converted to diesel power, our train was being pulled by an aging steam locomotive.

The train huffed, and puffed, and belching clouds of black smoke, jerked its way out of the station as the sun was setting on our second day in the Army. I opened the manila envelope and read the orders: "Special Orders No. 48, Dated 4 November 1950, 2nd Personnel Processing Company, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The following EM, (Recruits) are transferred this post to Hqs. & Hqs. Company, 1903rd Engr Avn Bn, SCARWAF, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Recruit (Acting PFC) Foreman in charge with records." I counted the names on the list and noses in the car to be sure that I had everyone aboard.

I sat there, trying to decipher the Army Sanskrit on the orders to learn where we were going and what kind of outfit we were being assigned to. Engr became Engineer and Avn could mean nothing other than Aviation. Bn. translated to Battalion, but SCARWAF couldn't be converted to anything with which I was familiar. Could it be that I was being sent to an Aviation

unit of some sort due to my experience as a pilot? Perhaps everyone else on the car was a pilot, but realizing that Obert was with us, I knew that this was a foolish idea.

Obert was the only person aboard whom I knew; however, I certainly wasn't about to strike up a conversation with him. I introduced myself to the fellow sitting next to me. He was a tall, lanky sort with big nose which angled off to one side as the result of a number of hard impacts with the ground. He had a strong accent which placed his point of origin someplace west Fort Worth. He told me that his name was Billy Bob Boomer and that he had been a professional rodeo cowboy before being drafted. Sticking out the legs of his wrinkled uniform pants were green cowboy boots with yellow, stovepipe tops. Noticing my interest in his boots, he said, "I wear size 14AAA and have to have my boots specially-made for me by a bootmaker down in Seymour. They didn't have anything that size at Fort Sill, in fact they didn't even have a listing for my size. Told me to wear these till I got to my permanent station where they could requisition boots for me."

More people joined in the conversation. There was Jack Ryder, known as Red Ryder because of his flaming red hair which stood out in all directions and not even Wild Root Cream Oil could control it. He was only a couple inches over five feet and would weigh perhaps a hundred pounds with a rock in his pocket. He was from LaVerne, Oklahoma and made his living as a professional rattlesnake hunter; said that he had the ability to tame any kind of snake or wild animal.

Billy Bob Boomer replied, "Bet you ten bucks that you couldn't tame some of the mean, raunchy old bulls that I've rode."

A short, fat Jewish kid by the name of Solvatore Goldberg, said that he was from Oklahoma City and that, prior to being drafted, had worked as a collector for his father who was in the loan business. He said that mostly his job was to feed Bubba all the ribs that he wanted and tell him when to stop breaking bones on someone who failed to pay on time.

"Who or what is Bubba?" I asked.

"Bubba is an Ex-football player and later an ex-wrestler who weighs about 300 pounds," replied Goldberg. "He was number 64 when he played for the old Dallas Bulls, which happened to also be his IQ. I'd take him along with me when I went out to collect overdue payments. They usually took one look at Bubba and came up with the money. If they didn't, I'd let him start breaking a few fingers and then move to arms and legs. He enjoys the work and says that he likes to hear bones pop. If I didn't tell him to stop, he would probably turn them into hamburger and then they couldn't ever pay."

I'll never know how Goldberg managed it, but the uniform which he had been issued only that morning, was neatly pressed and fit him like a Brooks Brothers suit.

Others spoke up about their civilian lives. Lester Price repaired traffic signals for the city of Fort Worth. Bobby Ward was a salesman for a dog food company, while a frail little guy by the name of Arthur Arthur Arthur said that he was an artist who made a living by hand-painting eyes on fishing lures. We asked him how he came to have a name like Arthur Arthur Arthur and he said that his father stuttered and when he was born, the nurse asked what to name the baby. Every time that he said Arthur, the nurse wrote it down and when she got all three blanks filled, she stopped and sent it off to the court house to be recorded. By the time that they got a copy of his birth certificate back, it was too late to change it.

It finally came to me what the Sergeant had said when he put me in charge; we were all listed as "SPECIAL CATEGORY" troops. Each one of us had some sort of unusual civilian

occupation which wasn't on their official military list. I checked the records and, sure enough, every last one of us was classified as "SPECIAL CATEGORY", or in good old Army lingo, oddballs. The question now was, what sort of an outfit would they be sending nothing but oddballs to?

The train rattled into Oklahoma City at around 10:00PM, shuttled our car onto a siding, hooked us to several other passenger cars and puffed away. We sat there without lights, wondering what would happen next.

Goldberg spoke up, "There is a service station over there on the corner, I think I'll run over and call my parents while we are waiting."

"The Sergeant who put me in charge, told me to keep everyone together and on the train. I'm not sure that you should go," I replied.

"It's less than a block and if the engine comes back, I'll come running." he replied.

We watched as he slipped from the car, hopped across the tracks and headed toward the lights of the filling station.

Just as Goldberg disappeared into the station, a diesel locomotive backed onto the siding where we were and coupled itself to us. As the train began to move, I saw Goldberg running toward us across the tracks. It was an uneven race, Goldberg's stubby, fat little legs against a train which was already moving. We chugged away, leaving him standing in the dim glow of a dirty street lamp. Here I was, my first bit of responsibility in the army and I had already blown it by losing a man. What would they do to me when they found out; would I have to pay for losing a man or would I just spend the rest of my life in Leavenworth?

"What the hell am I going to do now?" I asked. "When they issued our uniforms back at Fort Sill, they told us that if we lost anything, we would have to pay for it. I just lost a whole man."

"Don't worry," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "A fat little Jew like that shouldn't be worth too damn much. I'll kick in five bucks to help cover whatever they charge you for him."

"What can they do with you. You don't have any stripes to take away, so they can't bust you and they certainly won't fire you and kick you out of the army," said Lester Price.

"I hope that they shoot your ass, Snort, Snort--Oink, Oink," said Obert. "I always wanted to put a bullet in your ass, but never got the chance. Maybe they will let me be on the firing squad when they shoot you."

"Why don't you just keep quiet and let someone else find out that Goldberg is missing," suggested Billy Bob Boomer, the Rodeo Cowboy. "With all the confusion and people who will be milling around when we get there, they aren't likely to miss one little Jew."

It began to rain as the train rattled through the night and everyone except me curled up in the seats and went to sleep. I didn't get a wink of sleep because I was worrying about what was going to happen to me when they found that I had lost a man.

It was around five in the morning when the train screeched to a grinding halt. "Rolla, Missouri, everyone off," shouted the conductor as he walked from one car to the next. "Fort Leonard Wood and end of the line for you guys."

We dragged our duffel bags off the train, along with a couple hundred other new arrivals who had occupied other cars. As soon as we were all off the train, the engineer gave a couple toots and rattled away. A sign over a telephone hanging on a pole under a light informed us, "ARRIVING TROOPS FOR FORT LEONARD WOOD CALL 2114 FOR TRANSPORTATION."

The phone must have rung at least a twenty times before a sleepy voice answered, "What the fuck you want?"

"The sign said for arriving troops to call this number for transportation to Fort Leonard Wood," I replied. "A bunch of us just got off the train and....."

"Motor Pool don't open till eight, call back then," interrupted the sleepy voice on the other end and hung up the phone.

The drizzle had turned into a mixture of rain and snow which was soaking everyone to the bone as we stood on the deserted platform.

"Looks like we are stuck here till the Motor Pool opens at eight in the morning," I told the huddled masses.

"Let me see what I can do about getting someone out here," said Billy Bob Boomer as he dialed the phone, "Soldier, this is Major Catastrophe at the rail head at Rolla and I'll tell you what the fuck I want. I have two hundred troops standing in the goddamn rain and I want your lazy ass out of the sack and out here in a jeep for me and trucks for the enlisted men; RIGHT NOW!" he yelled, slamming the phone down.

Twenty minutes later, we could hear the grinding of trucks as headlights began to bore through the mist. A jeep bounded to a stop next to the platform and a Corporal jumped out. "I'm looking for some Major who called about transportation," he said.

"He caught another jeep to the base, said to tell you to bring the rest of us in the trucks and to be sure that we got hot coffee and breakfast as soon as we arrived," said Billy Bob.

I could already tell that this was one man who would go places in the Army.

After we had been fed a good breakfast, I herded my charges, now numbering only twenty-two, out into the street where we stood in a small group with the other new arrivals. A Sergeant came by, asking what units each group was assigned to.

"We are to report to the 1903rd EAB, SCARWAF," I replied.

"The what?" shouted the Sergeant, snatching the orders from my hands. "There ain't no such damn unit on this post. This here is an Armored Post and we don't have no outfit like here for damn sure."

Other groups were loaded aboard trucks which bounced away, until we were the only people still standing in the street. "Let me see those orders again," said the Sergeant. "I still don't think that you belong here." He took the orders and strode away toward a large building with a flag flying in front of it.

When he finally returned, he thrust the orders into my hand, saying, "You belong to some sort of Air Force thing called the 1903rd Engineer Aviation Battalion. They are over on the east side of the base in the old WAC barracks. Our trucks don't go over there, so you will have to hike. Go as east as far as you can on this street, then turn right for about a mile. Your unit is in some barracks with a high, chain link fence and guard towers around them. Looks like a stockade. We hoisted our duffle bags onto our shoulders and trudged off in the direction we were told, taking turns carrying Goldberg's bag in case he should show up later.

We found our way to the location described by the Sergeant. It consisted of about twenty buildings set in a square inside a tall fence. The fences terminated at guard towers at each corner of the compound. Tall poles with floodlights were placed every fifty yards all the way around the enclosure.

"If this was where they kept the WACs during World War II, wonder whether all this

security is to keep the men out or the women in?" asked Billy Bob.

"I'll bet if these trees could talk, they would have quite a story to tell," said Ward. "There probably ain't bushes anywhere else in the world that's seen as much nookey as these."

I took my charges inside the compound and located a faded sign over a door which said, "ORDERLY ROOM". Seated behind a desk, wearing six stripes with a diamond in the middle, was a short, fat Italian-looking man who looked like the bad guy in every gangster movie that I'd ever seen. The nameplate on the desk said that he was 1st Sgt. Santino. He looked up from a racing form as I entered and said, "What do you want?"

"If this is the 1903rd Engineer Aviation Battalion, I have some men with me from Fort Still," I told him.

"Hot damn, new recruits have finally arrived. Now everyone who is a PFC or above can stop pulling KP!" he shouted, jumping to his feet. "Sergeant Schultz, front and center."

"Vas is loose?" asked the fat, round faced Sergeant, reverting to his native tongue as he emerged from the supply room where a poker game was in progress.

"These new recruits just arrived from Fort Sill. You're the First Platoon Sergeant, so get them located in the barracks then send some of them to the mess hall to relieve the people on KP," said Sgt. Santino. I pulled the Acting PFC arm band from my pocket and slipped it place on my arm, perhaps being an Acting PFC wouldn't be so bad after all.

Sgt. Schultz took the orders from me and began to call off the names on it. I've had it now; he is going to find out that I lost Goldberg. We each answered when our name was called.

Arthur, "HERE"; Boomer, "HERE"; Cooper, "HERE"; Evans, "HERE"; Filpot, "HERE"; Foreman, "HERE". Damn, here it comes. Brace myself for what is bound to happen to me now. Goldberg, "HERE", shouted Billy Bob Boomer from somewhere in the back. Harris, "HERE", continued Sgt. Schultz.

I was home free, Billy Bob had saved my ass and Schultz had bought the ploy. The fat, German Sergeant was now the one responsible for the lost Jew; seemed only fitting.

"Arrite, youse worthless bastards, line up according to tall, behind this PFC," shouted Sgt. Schultz, pointing at me. We milled around, trying to shuffle ourselves into line according to height. "Youse is in the Army now and youse asses belongs to me."

Sgt. Schultz, as well as the rest of the cadre of the 1903rd, was made up of members of a National Guard unit from the south side of Chicago which had been activated for the Korean war. Most of the members of the unit were also members of a Chicago street gang called the Roaches, most of whom had joined the guard because it gave them a chance to play with real guns and they could use the armory as a place to hang out and play basketball.

As a Illinois National Guard unit, it was commanded by a 1st Lieutenant Hull, a nephew of a state senator. Lieutenant Hull had served during WW-II as a clerk typist at Fort Riley, Kansas in the base special services. His primary duty was to keep track of the basket balls in the field house. When the war was over and he was discharged, his uncle got him a job reading water meters in Chicago, made him a 1st Lieutenant and put him in command of an obscure guard unit.

On the night before activation of the 1903rd, Lt. Hull and his company clerk, Cpl. Santino, had given everyone in the unit promotions to the highest rank allowed in the Table of Organization for a Battalion Headquarters. Lt. Hull became Lt. Col. Hull, Cpl. Santino became First Sergeant Santino and even Private Schultz, who had been in the unit for less than a month became a Platoon Sergeant.

Realizing the possibilities offered by the activation, Col. Hull got his nephew, Mickey

Nerdlinger, a seventeen-year-old high school dropout, to enlist. Known as Mickey the Machinegun, because of his ability to make machinegun sound effects with his mouth, he expected to be assigned as armorer where he could have his own machine gun. Instead, uncle Wallace listed him as the Battalion Construction Supervisor and gave him the rank of Master Sergeant. About the only construction which Mickey Nerdlinger had ever done was to build a tree house, which fell down the next day, breaking his little brother's arm.

We were assigned to a unit which replete with rank but totally devoid of experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

The moment we walked into the barracks it was obvious that they had long been populated by women before being locked shut until the next war required their use. Not only were the latrines totally lacking of the fixtures known as wall-hung urinals, but each sink was fitted with a mirror far larger than necessary for shaving. The walls were painted a sickly shade of off-pink and frilly curtains hung on every window. A slight hint of perfume still lingered in the air.

Billy Bob sniffed the stale air and remarked, "This place smells just like a little old whorehouse called the Chicken Ranch, down near where I went to school at Texas A&M. I got a hard-on as soon as I walked in."

We had barely finished making our bunks in an acceptable military manner, including one for Goldberg, when Sgt. Schultz came in. "Everyone on this side of the barracks report to the mess hall for KP," he said, waving his hand toward one side of the building. "The rest of you men start arranging your gear in your lockers, according to the diagram on the bulletin board."

A dozen men headed out for the mess hall and their first taste of the bane of soldiers everywhere; Kitchen Police. They trudged into the mess hall and reported to Sgt. Cook, the Mess Sergeant. "The first two men in line start peeling that pile of potatoes," he ordered. "The next two get busy on pots and pans, three more help set up the serving line and rest of you sweep and mop the floors."

Sgt. Cook turned around, took one whiff of Obert and yelled, "What in hell is this filthy thing doing in here? Get out of my kitchen, you stinking hog; want to give everyone the GI shits? Tell Sergeant Schultz to send me someone else to replace you on KP. I won't have something like you stinking up my kitchen."

Sgt. Schultz strode into the barracks, grabbed Billy Bob and sent him off to replace Obert who was supposed to have been washing pots and pans in the mess hall.

"Snort, Snort," Oinked Obert as he flopped down on his bunk. "KP sure didn't last long for me, did it?" Then Obert turned over and went to sleep.

When Billy Bob staggered in from his session of pots, pans and grease traps; reeking of garbage, lye soap and sweat, Obert was laying on his bunk, still fully dressed but snoring loudly. "I've just spent the last ten hours up to my ass in grease, garbage and steam because of that fat

bastard over there," he said. "As long as he's allowed to remain that filthy, the Mess Sergeant isn't about to let him in the mess hall and all of us will be pulling extra details to fill in for him.

"Looks like we need to invite him to a little GI Soap party and clean him up a bit," said Red Ryder. "Big and dirty as he is, it is probably going take at least a dozen of us to give him a good bath."

"Get some GI brushes and several bars of lye soap," said Billy Bob. "We'll all strip down to our skivvies and drag his ass into the showers for the bath of his life. He can't get away with hiding behind dirt and filth around here."

"Reckon we ought to harpoon him first?" asked Red. "He looks like a beached whale laying there."

"Looks like Moby Dick," said Ward.

"Moby Dick is a whale?" laughed Red. "Hell, I always thought Moby Dick was a venereal disease."

Brushes and bars of lye soap were brought from the mess hall and all the while, Obert snored and grunted, contented as a hog in mud. "OK, everyone ready?" whispered Billy Bob, as they huddled around the sleeping hulk. "At the count of three, we grab him and drag his filthy ass off to the latrine. One, Two, Three."

A dozen men pounced on the inert Obert, grabbing arms, legs, fingers, ears and anything else that offered a good hold. Obert began squealing like a stuck hog as they dragged him, fighting and farting, toward his destiny with soap and water. When his clothing was finally removed and every shower head blasting at full force, not an inch of his body escaped the wrath of the stout brushes and caustic soap as they worked their way through multiple layers of dirt and crud.

The battle raged on. No quarter was asked and none was given. Obert was making a desperate effort to preserve his lifelong style of slovenly living against a dozen men who were armed with industrial strength soap and brushes and just as determined to bring a little cleanliness into his life. They wrestled and fought, tumbling and rolling from one shower stall to the next, over toilets, under sinks. Squealing, swearing, fighting and farting could be heard from one end of the company area to the other, but not a soul came to investigate the fracas. Noses were bloodied, eyes gouged, fingers bent and ears bitten; but not until the last bit of toe jam was washed away, every shred of belly-button lint removed and the long accumulation of grease, cooties and dirt scrubbed from his hair was Obert allowed to emerge from the showers. He almost glowed in a state of pristine pink asepsis which he had not even known on the day that he was born.

Half an hour before the earliest rising roosters even thought about voicing the arrival of dawn, Sgt. Schultz turned on the lights and blasted on his whistle, "Reveille, youse bastards! Drop your cocks and grab your socks. Formation in fifteen minutes."

Eyes squinted against the glare of unfiltered bulbs, blankets flew into the air, bare feet pounded on the wooden floor as bladders, filled to the limit, raced for the latrine to be emptied. The whole barracks was in sudden motion; all except for Obert. He lay in his bunk, white as a sheet, mouth hanging agape and glazed eyes wide open. He was covered with beads of cold perspiration.

"Hey Sarge," yelled Red Ryder, "I think that something is wrong with Filpot. He looks dead."

Sergeant Schultz shook Obert, then felt his pulse. "He's still alive, but just barely," he shouted as he raced toward the orderly room to call for an ambulance.

In due time, the olive green ambulance with a huge red cross on either side, bounded up the company street and skidded to a stop at the barracks door. A doctor and two attendants, carrying a canvas litter, rushed inside.

After checking over Obert, the doctor replied, "He doesn't seem to be wounded in any way, but he is in a severe state of shock. I never saw anything like this before. Does anyone have any idea what might have happened to him?" Not a word was mentioned about the gang bathing which had been administered the night before. "We'll have to get him to the hospital immediately, hope that we can save him," said the doctor as they rolled the inert hulk onto a litter and carried it, with great huffing and puffing, to the waiting ambulance.

Soon after the ambulance roared away in a cloud of dust and flying gravel, it was discovered that the entire sewer system for that barracks was plugged and water was backing up into the latrine. The base plumbers were called and came with their plungers, chemicals, snakes and Rooter-Rotor machines. Three hours later, water finally began to flow through clean sewer lines and one of the plumbers said, "Never saw such a mess in all my life. The drains were plugged solid with hair and some kind of scales. Looked and smelled like someone had been cleaning fish and butchering hogs in there."

CHAPTER FIVE

I had decided that since I was in the Army, I would give it my best shot. I was in for fifteen months and might as well make the best of it. I set out to be sharper than any of the officers and the sergeants, which wasn't all that difficult in most cases. Most of them were south Chicago hoodlums who tried to carry on their slovenly ways in the service. Most of them lived in only slightly better conditions than Obert.

I kept my area in the barracks spotless, all my clothes neat and properly arranged. I shined my shoes to a mirror finish and ironed creases in all my uniforms. I was the first one in formation every morning, placing myself at the front and took the lead on everything we did. I did what I was told to the best of my ability and never complained. It wasn't long before I began to notice that the sergeants gave the worst jobs to others and usually sent me off on the easiest ones. I also endured a considerable amount of criticism from the other men, mostly because I was making them look bad.

We were frantically trying to get ready for the usual Saturday morning inspection when Obert walked into the barracks after his stay in the hospital. He flopped down on his bunk, looked around and said, "I'll get you fuckers for what you did to me. You tried to kill me. The doctors said that I nearly died from shock."

"Geez Filpot, we didn't mean to do you any harm, just trying to clean you up a bit," said Billy Bob.

"Bullshit," said Obert. "Foreman was probably behind the whole thing. He has always thought that he was a lot better'n me. I ought to beat hell out of him right here and now."

"Actually, Foreman is probably the best friend that you have around here," said Red. "While you were in the hospital, he kept your area neat and clean so it would pass inspection and keep you out of trouble. Fact is, you'd better get your ass off that bunk and tighten it up because the old man will be through here in a few minutes for inspection."

During the time that Obert was in the hospital, recovering from the effects of the forced bath, the 1903rd had received large numbers of men from draft centers all over the nation. We also received several brand new Butter-Bar, Second Lieutenants, fresh from ROTC programs at various colleges. Although one would think that, having been in the ROTC, they would have received some basic military training. The sad truth was that few of them knew much more about

the military than did the draftees. Our particular 90 day wonder was Lt. High, who matched his name by being almost seven feet tall. With each step of his stork-like legs, he could cover a full four feet of ground.

Lt. High came to us from the North Dakota State Teacher's Normal at Fargo where he was attending college on a basketball scholarship, hoping he would be picked up by one of the pro teams when he graduated. His alternate aim was to become a high school basketball coach. About all that is necessary to become a high school coach is to be smart enough to know the game and dumb enough to think that what you're doing matters. I really doubt that either of these two aspirations would ever come to pass because he ranked about even with Obert in the intelligence department.

Since Lt. High had spent most of his college time on the basketball court, about all that he had learned about things military while in the ROTC, was how to march. With his long legs, covering ground was as natural to him as breathing. We would have to gallop along at a fast trot just to keep up with him as he led us off into the Ozark hills on his famous ten mile marches. His ideas of how to build physical fitness went back to those of his coaches; drive a person into the ground and then push him some more.

Lt. High tried to make up for his lack of knowledge and ability by going overboard on military discipline. He required everyone who was talking to him to stand at attention and demanded a salute each time that he met anyone of lower rank. While he was simply an ROTC 90 day wonder, he had turned into a Regular Army asshole once he got on active duty.

One day, while we were gasping for breath after returning from one of Lt. High's little exercises in exhaustion, Red Ryder spoke up, "I'd like to bust that long-legged SOB right in the nose."

"Fat chance," said Billy Bob. "First off, you can't reach high enough to hit that tall bastard in the nose and second, he'd take your head off if you tried."

"I'll bet fifty bucks that I poke him in the nose one of these days," replied Red. "Not only will I bust his honker, but I'll lay another fifty that he won't do anything about it when I do."

"I got a twenty dollar bill to put on that first bet," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "He'll go through you like grease through a goose, but it will be worth twenty just to see him get hit."

"Put me down for ten," added Lester, "But how are we going to know that you really hit him and got away with it?"

"I'll pick the time and place, and there won't be any question as to what happened. All of you will be there when I paste him." Red had his hundred dollars covered within a matter of minutes.

A few days later, we were huddled around Lt. High while he was giving a demonstration of some sort. Suddenly, Red Ryder let out a yell, leaped as high as he could and belted the Lieutenant square on the nose. Blood spurted from the Lieutenant's nose as he staggered back in surprise. The Lieutenant shook his head to clear the cobwebs, doubled up his fists and drew back to let Ryder have it. Red cried out, "Jeez, Lieutenant, I'm sorry. You see, I'm goosy as hell and can't help swinging when someone grabs me in the ass."

"Well, the next time that you feel a goose coming on, stay the hell away from me," said Lt. High as he wiped his bloody nose.

"Damn, I love to bug officers," said Red Ryder that night in the barracks, as he collected his bets.

"Ten Hut!" shouted Sergeant Schultz as he stepped aside to allow Captain Sanders to

enter and begin his inspection. Following in his footsteps like baby ducks were Lt. High and Sergeant Santino. Billy Bob stood at rigid attention as Captain Sanders checked his clothing hanging in the locker behind his bunk, then he flipped a quarter onto the blanket to test it. The quarter bounced twice. Billy Bob stood a full head taller than the Captain who had to tilt his head back to check the length of his hair.

"Haircut OK, Brass OK, Uniform clean and pressed," said the Captain as he worked his way downward toward Billy Bob's feet. "Belt buckle shined, pants creased," and then he saw the green cowboy boots. "A week of KP will teach you to wear the proper boots for inspection."

"But Captain, these are the only boots that I have to wear," said Billy Bob. "I wear size 14AAA and the supply sergeant can't seem to get any to fit me."

Captain Sanders stared at the boots for a second and asked,

"I've always wondered why cowboys wore boots with such pointed toes."

"That's so we can kill roaches in corners," said Billy Bob.

"Sure would hate to get kicked in the ass by one of them," said the Captain as he turned to Sergeant Santino. "Forget what I said about putting him on KP, but tell Sergeant Kowalski to get on the horn and find this man some boots."

As the inspecting party worked its way from man to man down the other side of the barracks, I happen to look down at Red's dress shoes which were placed under the edge of his bunk. I noticed something which appeared to be a pair of pink panties stuck in the top of one of them. I nudged Red and pointed to them. Red quickly bent down and snatched up the panties. Red had a thing going with the cute little PX clerk named Susan, and I had heard him sneak her into the barracks last night after lights out when he thought everyone was asleep. Evidently she had been unable to find her panties when she left.

Red looked around for some place to hide the panties and finding none which he could reach without moving from his spot, stuck his thumb into the elastic band around the top, stretched it out and shot them atop the heating duct which ran the length of the barracks.

As the Captain was inspecting our side of the barracks, Lt. High occupied himself by running his hand along the top of the heating duct, searching for dust. Naturally, he found the panties which he held up and demanded, "Where did these come from?"

"Probably been up there ever since the WAACS were here in 1945," answered Red.

Lt. High looked at the offending panties for a few seconds, shrugged his shoulders and stuffed them into his pocket.

When the Captain reached Obert, he took one look at the wrinkled and sagging blanket and said, "Laying on bunk after it was made. Put this man on KP for a week. Besides, a few days scrubbing pots and pans might sweat some of that blubber off him."

"You can't make me take no bath 'cause the doctor said I didn't have to," said Obert.

"And for back talk, there will be a week of guard duty after the KP," added the Captain.

As the inspecting party was leaving the barracks, Schultz turned and said, "Ve iss behind on training, so youse vill report to the classroom after inspection and I vill giff a lesson on zee rocket launcher."

"Damn," said Red. "I have a date to take Susan to a movie in Waynesville this afternoon. Now I'll have to break it and listen to that dumb kraut talk about bazookas."

"You're damn lucky that the Lieutenant didn't sniff the crotch of those panties or he would never have bought that bullshit about them being up there since 1945," said Billy Bob.

As the inspecting party made their way to the next barracks, Schultz went to the armory

where he drew a bazooka, complete with a couple rounds of live ammunition to use in the demonstration.

We gathered in the classroom where Schultz was standing at the front, trying to read the manual. "Youse takes this thing called the Pro-Ject-Tile and youse sticks it in the back end of this thing called the tube. Then youse takes these wires which are hanging out and youse winds them around these two little knobs. Youse do that to keep the Pro-Ject-Tile from falling out if youse has to tilt it up to shoot a tank off a hill." He demonstrated by attaching the wires to the terminals.

"Or if you want to shoot a turkey out of a tree," whispered Lester, which produced a considerable amount of snickering.

"At Ease!" Schultz ordered. "This class isn't funny and youse guys better pay attention."

We supposed that the rocket in the launcher was like Schultz; a dummy for demonstration purposes only and of no particular danger to anyone. Even so, the whole thing was getting to be a bit ridiculous as it was obvious that the fat Sergeant knew nothing about the subject that he was trying to teach.

Schultz continued, "Now, once that youse has the wires all tied up, youse put it on your shoulder like this. Inside this here handle, there is a thing called a magneedle which is hooked to this here trigger. When you pull the trigger, the magneedle flies out of the handle and goes around to the back end of the tube where it hits the Pro-Ject-Tile, which causes a spark that sets off the powder and the projectile shoots out and blows up a tank." At this point, everyone with any sort of mechanical ability or knowledge of firearms was rolling on the floor in laughter.

Luckily, Schultz had the thing pointed toward a window when he pulled the trigger. A blast of flames shot from the back end of the tube when the thing fired, knocking down the podium and setting his instruction book on fire. The rocket crashed through the glass of the classroom window, roared across the street and through the window of the supply room, where it exploded with a deafening bang and a cloud of smoke as it demolished a file cabinet. Sergeant Kowalski emerged from a cloud of flames, ashes and smoke, screaming that Schultz was trying to kill him because he was Polish. Schultz was immediately restricted from teaching anything about firearms.

"You know," said Billy Bob, that night in the barracks, "If we are going to learn anything which might keep us alive in combat, we'd better start teaching ourselves. This bunch of National Guard eight-balls don't know Shit from Shinola. They couldn't pour piss out of a boot with the instructions on the heel."

CHAPTER SIX

Schultz walked into the barracks one Saturday morning just before inspection, looked at Goldberg's empty bunk and asked, "Where the hell is Goldberg?"

Every man on that floor of the barracks had pitched in to keep Goldberg's bunk and clothing in perfect order. Goldberg's bunk was next to Obert's pigpen, so in comparison, it couldn't help but look good. In addition, having Goldberg's bunk next to Obert's kept anyone else from having to sleep next to him. Goldberg's boots were always spit-shined to a mirror finish and every piece of clothing was hanging in exact order. The US on the blanket was perfectly centered, exactly thirty-six inches from the foot of the bunk. Goldberg's bunk and clothing had stood a number of inspections and never received a single gig.

"Probably on KP, Sarge. He was gone when we got up this morning and there's a towel on the foot of his bunk," Arthur Arthur Arthur replied.

"How come he is always on KP, guard duty or some other detail every time I try to find him?" asked Schultz. "I haven't seen him in so long that I can't remember what he looks like."

"Don't be silly, Sarge, you know what Goldberg looks like; little short, fat Jew, 'bout so tall," said Arthur Arthur Arthur, measuring with his hand. "You ought to remember what he looks like. You chewed his ass out the other night for being late when he reported for guard duty."

"Oh, Yeah, I remember him now," replied Schultz. "Too bad the rest of youse bastards can't keep youse areas as neat as Goldberg. Anyway, I came to tell Foreman that Captain Sanders wants to see him. Get down to the Orderly Room on the double."

"What the hell have I done now to get the Captain on my ass," I thought to myself as I hurried along the company street toward the Orderly Room. "Surely it's not about my losing Goldberg, or Schultz wouldn't have asked about him when he came in."

Schultz was always asking about Goldberg and someone would always tell him that he was on some sort of detail or assignment which kept him out of the barracks. It had become a game to see who could come up with the most outrageous story to tell Schultz when he was looking for Goldberg. Then, perhaps the Captain was wise to the scam and was having Schultz ask one last time to see what we would tell him before he lowered the boom on me.

Saluting smartly, I reported, "PFC Foreman reporting as ordered, Sir."

"At Ease, Foreman," answered Captain Sanders, returning my salute. "There are a couple things that I wanted to talk to you about."

"Two things! Goldberg and what else?" I thought to myself.

"I have noticed that you are wearing an Acting PFC armband. I haven't issued any of those in this unit and was wondering how and where you got it."

"Fort Sill, Sir. It was issued to me before I left there. It is on the orders which transferred me here and I figured that I could just keep wearing it," I replied.

"Oh, I see. I had also noticed that you are usually at the front of most formations and seem to take charge in a lot of situations. Have you had prior military service of some sort?"

"Not before now," I replied. "But, I have always tried to be a leader." I knew that those are the sort of answers officers like to hear and it never hurts to spread a little bullshit.

"I like to see men exercise leadership when it comes to them naturally," he replied, "And I plan to recognize those leadership qualities with promotions."

I don't know what he is leading up to, I thought to myself, but so far this meeting has a lot better than I had anticipated.

"The other thing that I wanted to talk with you about was the possibility of your applying for Officer Candidate School. I've been going over your 201 File and you certainly qualify," said the Captain. "I'd like to recommend you for OCS school."

"What would be involved if I go to this school?"

"You would be sent to a three month Basic Officer Candidate School and after completion, you would become a Second Lieutenant."

I could see that this wasn't going to be the ass-chewing that I had expected and that I should make the best of it. "Thank you, Sir. I appreciate your faith in me and was wondering when I would receive proper recognition."

There is an old Texas saying that goes, "If you can't dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit." I wasn't about to admit that the reason why I was usually at the front of formations was because Schultz wanted the tallest person at the front.

"Would the time I've already served and that in school count toward my discharge date and would I return to this unit after I become an officer?" I asked.

"Upon graduation, you would be discharged as an enlisted person and be sworn in for three years as an officer. Once you were commissioned, you probably wouldn't return to this unit. My guess is that you would go to the infantry or artillery, that's where they really need officers."

"In spite of all of the benefits of being an officer, I think that I had rather serve the 15 months that I was drafted for and get back to the business that I left when I came in," I replied.

The meeting was going so well that I figured that I might as well press my luck. "Since I have been acting as a Squad Leader, and you consider me as being officer material, how about making this PFC stripe permanent?" I said.

"Actually, I am way ahead of you on that," replied the Captain. "Your promotion to PFC is already on orders which come out tomorrow. I just wanted to be the first to congratulate you. Now, for the other thing which I wanted to talk with you about."

Damn, could this be about Goldberg? Surely he wouldn't call me in to give me a promotion and then hit me with losing Goldberg."

Captain Sanders went on, "Winter is coming on and, as I'm sure you know, all heating on this base is done with coal. I need someone for a permanent detail as fireman to keep the water heater and furnace stoked and going. It is a filthy, dirty job, but whoever does it will be exempt

from all inspections, details and formations. I have a man for the second barracks and the mess hall, but I need someone for the first barracks and the officer's quarters. Do you have any suggestions?"

"I have the perfect man for that detail; Shoat Filpot. I mean Recruit Filpot, Captain," I replied. "I can't think of anyone more suited for that job."

"Shoat Filpot?" the Captain laughed. "That name certainly fits him. I understand that Sergeant Cook threw his ass out of the mess hall because he got to be so filthy. You didn't happen to have anything to do with giving him that GI bath that nearly killed him, did you?"

"Gosh No, Captain," I replied. "You can't possibly think that I would be involved in such juvenile antics, would you."

"Naturally not, but I'd have given anything to have witnessed that struggle; it must have been something. We could hear it all the way over in Officer Country; sounded like you guys were having a free for all. Some of the officers wanted to come over and break it up, but I told them to let you men work it out among yourselves."

"He did put up quite a struggle."

"Well, your first duty as a PFC and squad leader is to give Filpot the job of fireman," said the Captain.

"Incidentally, Shoat and I come from the same town and have never gotten along too well, so I might have a bit of trouble selling him on the idea of being the fireman. I had much rather have him want to be the fireman than to simply tell him that he has to do it. Since he will be exempt from all other details anyway, how about letting me use this Acting PFC stripe as an Ace in the Hole in case that I need it to close the deal?"

"Now, that's what I call leadership. Do what you want with that armband," replied the Captain, "I've never cared for acting ranks and have no plans to issue any of them. If a man is worth promoting, I'll see that he gets it. Give the thing to Filpot if you like, it doesn't mean beans around this unit anyway."

"One other thing," he said as I turned to leave. "Next time that you come to see me, leave the bullshit at home. I've been in the Army a lot longer than you and have seen and heard it all. Be honest with me and we'll get along just fine."

My feet barely touched the ground as I headed back to the barracks. I had been in the Army less than a month and I already received a promotion to Private First Class. Perhaps the Goldberg thing is so far gone that they will never tie his loss to me when it is finally discovered.

"Obert, have I got good news for you," I said as soon as I walked into the barracks. "I just lined up the sweetest deal in the world for you. I was in the Captain's office and was able to get him to agree to let you be the fireman for this and the officer's barracks."

"What kind of shit are you trying to hand me?" asked Obert. "Why would you do anything for me? You never liked me and I damn sure never liked you, especially after that damn bath that nearly killed me."

"Well, we home town boys have to stick together if we are to get along in the Army," I told him. "I know how you hate to stand inspection, and if you are the barracks fireman, you can move your bunk and stuff down into the boiler room where the officers will never see you. Just think, no more inspections means no more gigs and no more walking guard duty every night."

"I still think that you are trying to screw me somehow," said Obert. "I never trusted you and still don't. What's in it for you?"

"Obert, you have me figured all wrong," I said. "I just had a chance to do an old buddy a

favor and save you from standing inspections; and get you into a nice, warm place for the winter. If this is how you are going to thank me for trying to help you, I'll just go back down to the Captain and tell him to let someone else have the job."

"You and the Captain can take all that shit about being barracks fireman and go shove it," said Obert. "I don't believe that there is any such job as barracks fireman and you are just trying to get me down in the boiler room so you bastards can play another trick on me. I ain't moving an inch."

"OK, if that is the way that you want it," I replied. "I forgot to mention that being the fireman for the officer's barracks also means that you would be made an Acting PFC. Not only would you get out of inspections, you wouldn't have to pull any details like KP and Guard Duty."

"No KP and no Guard Duty?" asked Obert, "And I would get one of those PFC armbands to wear like you wear?"

"That's right, Acting PFC, no details and you get to stay inside where it is warm and dry while the rest of us are outside, freezing our butts off in the rain and snow."

"OK, I'll try it for a while just to see if you are trying to screw me somehow," said Obert.

"Good, pile your stuff on your bunk and I'll even help you move it down into the boiler room where it's nice and warm," I said, handing him the Acting PFC armband. "I know that you are going to be in hog heaven there."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Although Lt. High and Obert had been in the same unit for several weeks, they had never come into direct contact. Lt. High tried to keep out of sight as much as possible by leading us on day-long marches into the woods, while Obert stayed holed up in his private little rat's nest in the boiler room. It was inevitable, however, that these two were bound to meet and we were just waiting for the day. It happened one Sunday morning when Lt. High was headed for the mess hall and Obert was returning to his rabbit warren.

Obert had long since recovered from his bath and resumed his life of filth, plus a good coating of coal dust and soot from his job as fireman. He was humming to himself as he strode past the Lieutenant without the slightest recognition of his presence. Obert figured that since being a fireman and an Acting PFC made him exempt from all other military duties, he should also be exempt from having to salute officers.

Lt. High took about three steps, and realizing that he had failed to receive his customary salute, turned and yelled at Obert, "Soldier, don't you know what you are supposed to do when you meet an officer?"

Obert turned, wrinkled his fat brow and replied, "Jeez Lootenant, I don't know. I guess I'm supposed to move over and get out of his way, so I don't knock him down, Snort-Snort, Oink-Oink."

"You are supposed to salute him, that's what, and I demand a salute and proper respect."

"Well, Lootenant Jackass, Sir, if a salute is what you want, then here's a real salute for you," replied Obert, shifting his weight to one foot, lifting the other leg and letting fly with one of his better farts.

Lt. High was furious. "My name is Lieutenant High and how dare you call me a jackass."

"Well, you're braying like a jackass, so I figured that I might as well call you one," replied Obert.

"What is your name, soldier? I'm putting your ass on report."

"You want my ass on report, well here is a another report from my ass for you," said Obert, as he shifted to the other foot and ripped off an even better one.

"For the last time soldier, I'm ordering you to give me your name," demanded Lt. High.

"Obert Filpot," replied Obert.

"Don't try any of that funny name shit with me, Soldier, I'm a lot smarter than that. What is your real name?"

"Acting PFC Obert Finus Filpot," said Obert. "That's the only name I got, except that everyone back home calls me Shoat."

"Well, Private Obert Finus Filpot, I'm placing you on report for insubordination and disrespect to an officer and I'm giving you a direct order to remain in your barracks until I personally release you. You will not leave the area of your bunk for any reason other than to go to the latrine or mess hall," fumed Lt. High. "Do you understand what it means to receive a direct order from an officer?"

"I reckon so, Lootenant. You say that I ain't supposed to leave my bunk for no reason at all, except to piss and eat?"

"That's correct, and I will deal with you tomorrow morning with Captain Sanders," replied the Lieutenant as he scribbled Obert's name on a piece of paper. "And, while you are at it, go take a bath, you are a disgrace to the uniform!"

"I don't gotta take no baths, Lootenant. The doctors at the hospital said that I didn't have to 'cause the shock could kill me," replied Obert as he turned and headed for the boiler room.

Lt. High was nervously pacing the floor of the Orderly Room, waiting to see Captain Sanders when he walked in. "Captain, I have confined one of the enlisted men under house arrest and want to bring him up on charges. He not only refused to salute me, but he called me a jackass and farted at me; Twice!"

"So you are the one who confined Filpot to his bunk," asked the Captain. Did you happen to notice that it got awfully cold in the barracks last night and we didn't have any hot water this morning,"

"Well, yes I did, Sir, but what does that have to do with this situation?"

"It just happens that the man whom you placed under house arrest is the one who keeps our boiler and furnace fired. Since you told him not to leave his barracks, there wasn't anyone to keep our furnace going last night. I heard about it this morning when I went to find out why we had no heat."

"In that case, I'll release him from house arrest so he can do his job, but I still want to punish him for disrespect to an officer. I want him on KP for the next month," replied the Lieutenant.

"I don't know if that would be such a good idea or not," replied the Captain. "The Mess Sergeant threw his ass out of the kitchen because he was so filthy the first time that he was on KP. How would you like to have him serving your food at the Officer's Table?"

"But, Captain, we can't allow a man to get away with insubordination just because he is a filthy hog. We will lose the respect of the other enlisted men. What can I do to punish him?"

"Tell you what, Lieutenant. Why don't you call him out in front of afternoon formation and strip him of that Acting PFC armband that he wears. That should teach him a lesson."

"If that is the only punishment that you will allow me to give to him, it will have to do," replied Lt. High as he left the office.

"Stupid Jackass," muttered Captain Sanders. "If I could ship both him and Filpot out of here, I'd raise the IQ of the unit a full 20 points. At least Filpot serves a useful purpose."

CHAPTER EIGHT

One of the rumors floating around every military unit during the early months of the Korean war was that everyone would be home by Christmas. The only problem was that they didn't bother to say which Christmas, and from the way that things were going in Korea, it obviously would not be Christmas of 1950.

The UN forces were in full retreat down the Korean peninsula, dumping tons of equipment and supplies as they went. The Chinese troops were hot on their heels and making use of the abandoned supplies in order to keep their advance going. By doing this, they could outrun their supply lines and still function. In fact, the equipment which the we were dumping was a lot better than what they could get from China.

By Christmas Eve, the UN forces had managed to push the North Korean forces all the way back to the original line which separated North and South Korea at the beginning of the war. But the bad news for the US was that General Walker, Commander of the 8th Army had been killed. He was driving northward from Seoul to visit a British Unit when his Jeep collided with a South Korean Weapons Carrier.

Meanwhile, back at the 1903rd, Captain Sanders was making an announcement concerning our chances of going home for Christmas. "Half of the unit will be given five days leave for Christmas and the other half will receive the same number of days for New Year." Several of us from Texas and Oklahoma were hoping that we would be off at the same time so we could travel home as a group.

When the orders were issued with the names for each holiday period; Lester Price, Goldberg and Arthur Arthur Arthur were on the Christmas list while Red Ryder, Billy Bob, Obert and I were scheduled for leave time at New Year. We decided that since we couldn't be at home for Christmas, we would save our leave time and not go at New Year. Janet was going with her parents to visit relatives and wouldn't be at home anyway, so it was no big loss for me.

Billy Bob made a deal with Arthur Arthur Arthur to stop by Fort Worth and pick up his car, which he referred to as Old Paint, and bring it back to him. Since I had no idea when or

where I would be going, I decided that the wise thing would be to leave my car at home.

"Ain't that a bitch," said Billy Bob. "That damn little Jew gets to go home for Christmas and his kind don't even celebrate it.

"Not only that," said Red. "He ain't even here and he gets put on the Christmas list.

"I suppose that comes from all those faultless inspections he has stood," I added. "If we had let his area go to hell, one of us might have been going home instead of him."

A few days before Christmas, we went out in the woods behind the company area and cut down a small pine tree. We set it up in the middle of the barracks and decorated it as best we could. Even though we had the trappings of Christmas and there were a few presents under the tree, it was awfully hard to get into the spirit of the season. I had three presents under the tree, one from my parents, one from Janet and one from her mother.

"We've been in this stinking place for almost two months and none of us have had a drop to drink," said Billy Bob. "I say that it is high time that we threw ourselves a real, old fashioned Texas Christmas drunk."

There was about a dozen men in the barracks who were not allowed to go home for Christmas, so we took up a collection, with Red putting in the most of the money since he was still flush from winning the bet when he punched Lt. High in the nose. Billy Bob caught the bus into Waynesville to obtain a supply of Christmas Spirits of the bottled variety.

We were never able to figure out how Billy Bob managed to get aboard the bus back to the base with two gallon jugs hidden inside grocery store shopping bags and then smuggle them into the barracks without being caught by the Military Police. It was strictly forbidden to bring liquor onto the base, much less into the barracks, but evidently the guards weren't looking for anything that large and obvious.

"The liquor stores were all closed by the time that I got to town," he announced, "But I got a great deal on a couple gallons of moonshine from some guy who was selling it out of the trunk of a Buick in an alley. He let me have his last two gallons for only ten bucks so he could get home to the wife and kids. He guaranteed that it is good stuff. I already sampled it and it goes down as smooth as a vanilla milkshake."

We broke out our canteen cups and Billy Bob produced a brown, one gallon jug from one of the sacks. It still bore a label which indicated that it had at one time contained Coca-Cola syrup. Red Ryder, having furnished most of the money for the Christmas Spirits, was given the honor of the first drink. He took a good belt, and gasping for breath, said, "M'God, I've been poisoned!"

"Shit, Red, you're just a pansy," said Billy Bob. "If you can tame rattlesnakes, you sure ought to be able to tame a little bootleg hootch. Down where I come from, this stuff would be known as Waco Wahoo, the kind of moonshine high school kids drink under the bleachers at football games. The really potent moonshine down around Fort Worth is called Trinity River Stump Blower."

"Trinity River Stump Blower?" I asked.

"Sure; it's called that because it's made in stills along the Trinity River and that's the way that we test the stuff. We dip a corn cob in it, stick it under a stump and light it off. If it don't blow the stump out, it needs to be cooked some more. They say that the tadpoles in the river

water are what gives it the special flavor."

"Damn," said Red, wiping tears from his and peering into his cup. "This stuff is turning my aluminum canteen cup black!"

We had made a sizeable dent in the first jug when Obert came walking through the barracks. "Hey Filpot, care for a little Christmas Cheer," asked Billy Bob, holding up the jug.

"Don't mind if I do," replied Obert, smacking his lips. He took the jug, sniffed it and turned it up. Once, twice, three times the jug gurgled before he came up for air. "Purty good hootch," he said, wiping his mouth on a dirty sleeve, "But Pa makes better."

"Hawg makes moonshine?" I asked.

"Shore does, best stuff in the Panhandle," replied Obert. "The still is hid in a cellar under the barn and we feed the used mash to the hogs. The smell of the pig shit covers up the smell of the still; Snort, Snort--Oink, Oink. Nobody would ever think of looking for a still at our place."

"Well, I'll be dipped," I replied. "Who would have ever thought that Hawg was a moonshiner."

"Jist goes to show that you don't know everything that goes on around Stinnett, Smart Ass," said Obert. "Grampa Filpot set up that still back during prohibition, about the time I was born, and it has been dripping prime moonshine ever since."

We had a couple more rounds and Obert got up to leave, bidding us a Merry Christmas by lifting his leg and giving us a parting fart.

"I'd rather hear a fat man fart than a pretty woman sing," said Red.

"That's 'cause you're queer as a three-dollar bill, you damn Okie," replied Obert.

"Hey, Filpot, you reckon those stinking farts of yours would burn," asked Billy Bob as he flipped open his Zippo.

Obert had long prized his gastric discharges, for both quality and quantity, but had never considered them as a pyrotechnic. "Jeez, I dunno if they will burn or not. After I eat a good bait of onions or peppers, they'll shore 'nuff burn your eyes."

"How about working up a good one and let's see if it will burn," said Billy Bob as he thumbbed his lighter.

"Human farts are composed mostly of carbon dioxide and won't burn," said Bobby Ward. "The only kind of farts that will burn are ones made up of methane gas. Methane farts only come from animals which eat grass or hay."

"You claim that my horse's farts will burn but Filpot's won't? What makes you such a damn authority on farts, anyway?" asked Billy Bob.

"I went to Panhandle A&M up at Goodwell, Oklahoma for three years, studying to be a veterinarian, before I ran out of money and had to start working for the dog food company. They taught us things like that there," replied Ward.

"Bullshit," said Billy Bob. "I got five bucks that says that you don't know what the hell you are talking about."

"That sounds like a fair bet to me, but where are we going to find a horse around here to test."

"Hell, who needs a horse when we got Filpot," said Billy Bob. "He can fart better than most horses. I'll bet five bucks that his farts will burn. Anything that stinks that bad is bound to

be flammable."

"You're on," said Ward. "Drop your drawers Filpot, and give us a good one."

"What's in this for me?" asked Obert. "If I'm going to fart so you bastards can see if they will burn, I want something out of it."

"Just give me a fart that burns and I'll split the five bucks with you," said Billy Bob, flipping the lid on his lighter.

Obert dropped his dirty fatigue pants to his knees, exposing his naked ass. He bent over and strained as Billy Bob thumbed the wheel on his Zippo. A foot-long tongue of blue flame shot from between Obert's fat hocks and a plume of white smoke from burning hair rolled upward in a mushroom cloud.

Obert let out a squeal and leaped into the air, jerking up his pants. An involuntary second fart followed the first, which was still burning. Blue flames shot through the seat of his fatigues as an area the size of a dinner plate glowed red and disappeared in another cloud of rancid smoke.

Obert was leaping around the barracks, squealing and feeding the flames by blasting off one fart after another. Ward and a couple others grabbed blankets and were trying to wrestle him to the floor so they could put out the flames.

"Fer Chrissakes, Filpot," yelled Billy Bob, "Stop farting and the fire will go out."

Someone finally grabbed a buttcane, which was filled with water and soggy butts, and doused the leaping Obert. The whole seat of Obert's fatigues was burned away and his fat hocks were blistered and as red as a baboon's rear.

"Hey, Filpot," said Billy Bob. "With that red ass, you are all set for Christmas. You look just like Santa Claus."

"Santa Claus, my ass," yelled Obert. "You bastards are always trying to kill me. First, you give me a bath and now you set me on fire. I'll get you sumbitches if it's the last thing I ever do."

"The blisters don't look too bad," said Ward, giving his professional opinion. "But you'd better get down to the Orderly Room and see if they have something for you to put on your ass. If they ask how you got burned, just tell them you backed up against a hot furnace."

Obert was gone for about half an hour before he returned, carrying a tube of the white ointment which the army uses for just about every kind of wound. "They gave me some white greasy stuff to rub on my ass," he said. "You bastards tricked me and set me on fire, and now I want my part of the bet."

"What the hell, Filpot. You can have the whole five bucks. The show that you put on was worth twice that. Have another snort," said Billy Bob, holding up the jug. "Merry Christmas!"

CHAPTER NINE

Snow was drifting to the ground like thousands of tiny, white parachutes as Obert made his way out of the barracks and around to his nest in the boiler room. A radio, somewhere off in the distance, was playing Christmas music and the aroma of roasting turkey drifted from the mess hall.

Obert shook down the ashes in the furnace, threw in several scoops of coal and banked the fire for the night. Then he trudged through the snow to the Officer's Barracks to do the same thing. As he entered the door of the boiler room, black smoke was puffing and rolling from the door of the furnace, indicating that the chimney was clogged with soot.

"Damn, what a hell of a time to have to clean a plugged-up chimney," Obert grumbled as he gathered the tools for the job. When the barracks were built back in 1942, someone must have foreseen the constant need to clean the chimneys, because they installed permanent ladders leading to the roofs of every building.

Taps were playing as Obert scaled the ladder to the roof of the Officer's Barracks. Lights winked out in buildings from one end of the company street to the other, except for those in the mess hall where the cooks were working through the night to prepare a special Christmas dinner for the unlucky ones who hadn't been permitted to go home.

The first gallon jug of Ozark moonshine had given its life for a good cause and its brother had been drafted into service. We sat around in the darkness, sipping moonshine from aluminum canteen cups and discussing our plight.

"What a hell of a place to be on Christmas night," said Billy Bob. "If I was back at home, I'd be down in Fort Worth, instead of stuck here in this stinking hole, I would be kicking up my heels with a pretty little filly at a party someplace out on the Jacksboro Highway. Man, do they have parties out there! They got so wild that they have had to put up chicken-wire fences in front of the bands to keep the musicians from getting killed by flying bottles."

"What really pisses me off," said Ward, "Is that fat little Jew, Goldberg, was on the Christmas list and Jews don't even believe in Santa Claus."

"If Jews don't believe in Santa Claus, then who do they believe in?" asked Red Ryder.

"Moses, Noah or one of those other old guys that preachers are always ranting about," replied Ward. "My Mom went to a hard-shell Baptist church where the preacher was always carrying on about lambs, burning bushes and things like that. My old man is an Atheist, so I never knew who to believe in."

Hey, Billy Bob, do you believe in Santa Claus?" asked Red.

"Why hell yes, I believe in Santa Claus. I also believe in the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy and Nymphomaniacs who stay so damn horny that they will pay a man to spend the night with them. There ain't no more Santa Claus than there are Unihorns."

"What the hell is a Unihorn?" asked Red.

"You know, those horse things with one horn in the middle of their head," said Billy Bob.

"They are called Unicorns, not Unihorns, you stupid, drunken Texan," said Red Ryder.

"I may be drunk, but don't start calling Texans stupid. You damn Okies are so stupid that you think that asphalt is a case of the piles."

"Ever hear about the Texan who was six foot tall but only weighed thirty-eight pounds...that was after a mad Okie had kicked all the shit out of him," replied Red.

At least Texans are smart enough to know that there ain't no Santa Claus," replied Billy Bob.

"Well, if there ain't no Santa Claus, then what the hell do you call that up on the roof of the Officer's Barracks," asked Ward, peering through a hole that he had scraped in the frost on a window.

"It is hard to tell from here with all the snow, but it looks like a fat man trying to climb down the chimney," said Billy Bob.

"See, I told you that there is a Santa Claus," replied Ward, "And there he is over there on the officer's roof."

"Bullshit, If that is Santa Claus, then where the hell is his sled and raindeers?"

"Probably parked on the other side of the roof, where we can't see them," replied Red.

"How come he is over there on the Officer's Barracks and not here on ours?" questioned Ward.

"That figures, just like in the mess hall. The officers get steak and we get beans," replied Red. "I'll bet that Santa Claus leaves all of his presents for the officers and he won't even come over here."

Billy Bob raised the window and yelled at the dark figure on the roof, "Hey; you, on the roof, are you Santa Claus?"

"Bet your sweet ass, I'm Santa Claus, Ho Ho Ho," came back the reply.

"Ho Ho Ho yourself, fat man. Get your fuckin' goats off the roof before I come over and shoot every damn one of them," yelled Billy Bob, slamming the window shut.

"Now you've done it," shouted Red. "Ain't you never heard what happens if you piss off Santa Claus, especially on Christmas Eve. Now, he won't leave presents for anyone in this barracks. You've screwed up Christmas for all of us."

"How could I have screwed up Christmas for us? He is leaving all the presents for those damn officers anyway," said Billy Bob.

"That's probably right," said Ward. "We ought to do something to get even with the

officers for getting all of the presents."

"Let's dynamite the place, or better still, we'll burn it down!" shouted Billy Bob.

"Naw, we can't do anything like that," said Red. "How about throwing a skunk in the door?"

"Where in hell are we going to get a skunk on Christmas night?" asked Ward.

"I know," said Billy Bob. "Let's go over and piss on their furnace; that will stink almost as bad as a skunk. We used to have an old dog which would piss on the heater in our living room every time that he went by. It looked like so much fun that I tried it one day and Dad came in just as I had a good stream going. He thought that I'd been the one who had been pissing on the heater all the time and beat the shit out of me with his belt. From then on, every time that the dog pissed on the heater, I'd run for the door."

The effects of the Ozark moonshine were laying heavy on us and we had a certain amount of difficulty in finding our way to the door to the boiler room in the officer's barracks. Between tripping, falling, singing, swearing and snowball fights, we finally arrived. Obert, who was still up on the roof, trying to clean the chimney, had managed to plug it even more, filling the room with soot and smoke.

"Do we piss on it one at a time or all at once?" asked Ward, who always seemed to need a plan for everything that we did.

"Well, shit, let's just all gang around, haul it out and let fly at the same time; the more piss, the bigger the stink," said Billy Bob.

Clouds of steam were rolling off the sides of the hot furnace when a voice behind us said, "What the hell is going on here?" Lt. High, who was on duty that night as Officer of the Guard, was standing in the door.

Billy Bob, who always seemed to be able to come up with the right answer at the right time, replied, "Well, Lieutenant, we saw all of this smoke coming out of the boiler room and thought that the place was on fire. We couldn't find a fire extinguisher, so pissing on it is the only way that we knew to put it out in a hurry."

"Have you men been drinking?" demanded Lt. High. "You know that drinking in the barracks is against regulations and can get you into a lot of trouble."

"Well, we ain't what you'd really consider as drinking, Lieutenant," said Billy Bob. "It is Christmas Eve, so we mixed up a little egg nog to celebrate the occasion." Then he added, "Would you care to join us for a shot of it?"

We figured that Billy Bob had gone completely out of his mind when he offered the Lieutenant some of our moonshine and that we would be headed for the stockade or someplace worse.

We found our way back through the darkness to the barracks, and Billy Bob located a canteen cup for the Lieutenant. "I can't see exactly how much egg nog mix I'm putting in, Lieutenant," he said. "Hope that I don't get it too strong for you."

Lt. High lifted the cup to his lips and took a big swig. "Damn, that is good egg nog that you got there," he said as soon as he could get his breath. "How about a little more of it?"

Billy Bob took the cup, poured in more straight moonshine and handed it back. Having already cauterized his taste buds, the second swallow went down with much greater ease; as did

the third and then the fourth.

The warm feeling of the Ozark Christmas cheer was flowing through the Lieutenant's veins, thinning his blood and thickening his tongue. Suddenly, he asked, "Private Ryder, Did someone really goose you that time that you punched me in the nose?"

"Of course someone goosed me, Lieutenant. Do you think I'd be stupid enough to actually strike an officer? I really felt sorry about hitting you, Sir, but just couldn't help it," replied Red.

"I still don't think that anyone goosed you," said Lt. High. "I think that you just wanted to hit me; like the big kids used to do in school. When I was little, the bigger kids were always hitting me and then saying that they couldn't help it."

"Honest, Lieutenant, I'd never do anything like that, besides you are at least two feet taller than I am and a hundred pounds heavier. You could pound the poot out of me if you wanted to."

"I still don't believe that you are goosy and someone goosed you," replied the Lieutenant.

"That really hurts me, Lieutenant; to think that you don't believe me. I'll prove to you right here and now that I'm goosy. You stand right in front of me and I'll let someone grab me in the ass. You will see that I'm telling the truth."

Lt. High managed to rise from where he was seated on the edge of a bunk and stood more or less erect. Red Ryder stepped up onto a foot locker and said, "OK Lieutenant, watch this."

Billy Bob grabbed a handful of ass, Red let out a yell and swung with all his might. Red's fist whistled through thin air as Lt. High ducked the blow. The tall Lieutenant's big fist smashed into Red's nose and blood flew. Lt. High laughed as Red crumpled into a heap on the floor.

"When that red headed little son of a bitch comes to, tell him that I'm goosy too, and someone must have goosed me," said the Lieutenant. "Merry Christmas and thanks for the hootch. By the way, I can drink all of you bastards under the table any time that you'd like to try again."

CHAPTER TEN

After we went through a metamorphosis on Christmas morning and struggled our way back to the realm of the living, we had hangovers which would have killed a horse. In addition to a roaring headache, Red Ryder's eyes were swelled nearly shut and his nose was the size and color of a Granny Smith apple.

"Man, that was some drunk we had ourselves last night," said Billy Bob.

"I think that I'm going to die," said Red. "What did that damn Lieutenant hit me with?"

"Just his fist," replied Billy Bob. "You went down like a poled ox. We thought that you were dead for a while."

"I'm not too sure that I'm not," said Red.

"Let's open our presents and see what we got," said Billy Bob.

My parents had sent me a new portable typewriter, exactly what I had been wanting for a long time but had never gotten around to buying. Janet sent me an electric razor and her mother sent a box of cookies and a really awful yellow silk tie with a hand-painted picture of a horse on it. It was the sort of tie which would be worn only by rodeo clowns.

The prevailing rumor floating around the 1903rd at this particular time was that we were bound for Korea the minute that our basic training was finished. Since the National Guard Cadre viewed their call to active duty as simply a long summer camp, they weren't interested in a quick trip to Korea. They reasoned that if basic training was never finished, they would never be sent to a combat area. Basic training, or what little of it had been going on, ceased completely.

February was ending and the snows of winter melted. Even though the number of weeks that we had been in service dictated that our basic training should have been completed, we found ourselves almost as untrained as the day that we arrived.

"The Inspectors are Coming! The Inspectors are Coming!" shouted Lt. High as he rushed into the barracks. "An inspection team from the Fifth Army will be here in four days and we have to be ready for them."

Rocks were gathered to line the streets and walks. A flag pole was erected with a neat circle of stones placed around it. The artistic talents of Arthur Arthur Arthur were called upon to paint a Battalion sign. It was to read, "1903rd Engineer Aviation Battalion". Arthur Arthur Arthur, as a silent protest for having to stoop so low as to become a sign painter, got a certain amount of silent revenge by misspelling Aviation. He spelled it, "Avaition" but I don't think that anyone ever noticed the difference.

On the first day of March, we went through the pay line to receive our monthly pittance, only to be greeted by Sergeant Santino, who was taking up a collection to buy items for the upcoming inspection. With the funds which he extorted from us, he bought things like whitewash for the rocks, oilcloth table covers for the mess hall and welcome mats to go in front of each door.

The 1903rd leaped into a frenzy of activity. Wooden floors were scrubbed and bleached until they were as white as desert bones, rocks were whitewashed and brass was polished. Rifles, which had yet to be fired, were cleaned and oiled to perfection. We were ready for inspection, or at least we thought that we were.

"Battalion formation at 10:00. All personnel except for cooks and KPs will be there. Class A Uniform with helmet liners, belts and rifles," Announced Lt. High at reveille formation. "Today is the day!"

To be sure that we would not be late for the 10:00 AM formation, whistles began blowing at 9:00 AM. We snatched up our rifles and ran into the street. Boots had been spit-polished, belt buckles glistened, the creases in our uniforms were so sharp that they would almost shave.

This was the first time that we had gathered in a full battalion formation and it was awesome to see. First was Headquarters Company, which also included the people which made up Battalion Headquarters. Evenly spaced after Headquarters Company came the three Line Companies, A, B and C, the ones which would do the actual construction once we were in full operation. Eight to ten men formed a Squad, four Squads formed a Platoon and four Platoons were a Company. Four Companies total a Battalion of some 650 men and 160 officers.

I stood at the head of the First Squad of the First Platoon of Headquarters Company. In front of us was Sgt. Schultz, and in front of him stood Lt. High. Captain Sanders and Sergeant Santino stood at rigid attention in their assigned places at the head of Headquarters Company. Out in front of the four Companies stood the Battalion Headquarters Officers, with Lt. Col. Hull at the peak of the brass pyramid.

A staff car, trailed by a bus, pulled to a stop in front of the Orderly Room. Out of the car stepped Colonel Davis, a full Bird Colonel. He was a West Point graduate and as Regular Army as anyone could ever be. He ate, slept and lived nothing except the army. He was followed by a Major, a Captain and finally a Sergeant, who was carrying a clip board. From the bus emerged about twenty-five enlisted men, whose casual but very businesslike manner reminded me of a bunch of bank auditors.

We braced in rigid attention as the occupants of the staff car strode to a position in front of Lt. Col. Hull, who snapped a smart salute to the Colonel with eagles on his shoulders. As Colonel Davis returned the salute, Obert emerged from his burrow in the boiler room and headed for the Officer's Barracks to stoke up their furnace. As he passed behind Colonel Davis, he came

out with his usual greeting, "Oink, Oink," after which he lifted his leg and let fly with one of his better farts.

Colonel Davis jerked around, glared at Obert and demanded, "Who or what the hell is that?"

"I think that his name is Fullpot or something like that, Sir," replied Col. Hull in a rather meek voice. "He is our barracks fireman."

"Sergeant, make a note of that man's name," said Colonel Davis, as the Sergeant scribbled a note on his clip board.

The Bird Colonel was making a rather cursory inspection tour of the troops until he came to Billy Bob and noticed his green cowboy boots. "This man is out of uniform. I want him on report," he said.

"But Colonel, these are the only boots I have. They can't seem to find any to fit me," said Billy Bob.

"Do you men to tell me that you have been in the army for four months and still don't have boots?"

"Fraid so, Sir. People are always telling someone else to get me some boots, but no one ever does."

"Make a note of this, Sergeant," ordered the Colonel as he moved along the line of troops.

When he had finished the inspection, he announced, "Each of you will be interviewed by my staff before we leave."

He then turned to Col. Hull and said, "I've seen your barracks fireman and a soldier who has to wear cowboy boots, now I want to see your supply rooms and company records. I certainly hope that they aren't in the same condition."

Col. Davis and his team went through the 1903rd like Sherman marching to Atlanta. Before they were finished, they had systematically explored every shortcoming, every omission and every error in the whole operation. Their evaluations showed that there was much to be desired, both in training and leadership.

Orders were issued in which about half of the original members of the National Guard units were either discharged or transferred to reassignment centers. Headquarters Company bid farewell to the greatest number of them. Lt. High and several other officers were seen with packed duffle bags, waiting for a truck to take them to the other side of the base. Sergeants Santino, Schultz and Kowalski, who were part of the group which had received paper promotions on the night before activation, hit the road. Two or three dozen of the worst misfits and oddballs who came into the unit by way of Selective Service, including Obert, were either transferred for reassignment or else scheduled for discharge as unsuitable for service. They also discovered that Goldberg had been missing since day one and notified the FBI to arrest him as a deserter. This didn't take any genius because he had never collected his monthly pay. When the wrecking crew departed, the 1903rd was a mere shell of its original self.

Colonel Hull, who by some miracle, had managed to survive the blood bath, spoke to a much smaller battalion formation, "Men, we have one week in which to qualify the entire battalion on the rifle ranges. After that, most of you will be sent to various schools for advanced engineer training before we regroup at our new assignment."

"New Assignment!" With the war continuing at a hot and heavy pace, that could mean only one place, Korea! There was a suggestion going around while we practiced on the rifle ranges, that we had better learn how to shoot accurately, because in a very short time, we would be shooting at North Koreans and Chinese.

Captain Sanders called me into his office. "You will serve as my company clerk for the next two weeks while we see if we can bring some sort of order to our records. At the end of that time, you will leave for Engineer Construction Supervisors School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Also, I'm promoting you to Corporal before you go," he added.

I was so inundated with morning reports, duty rosters, orders and requisitions that the next two weeks were simply a blur. Billy Bob left for Fort Hood to learn how to run a motor pool while Red Ryder went to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey to learn photography. I found that Lester Price was going to demolition school and Arthur Arthur Arthur was being sent to drafting school at Fort Belvoir at the same time that I was. Since we were all going to the same place, we decided to collect our travel pay, buy a car and drive through.

After a considerable amount of shopping around, the only thing that we could find which fit within our budget was a dinky little British Austin which had served the better part of its useful life as a London Taxi. The price was \$200, but the sergeant who had brought it with him on a transfer from England, claimed that it was in perfect shape.

It was a tall, narrow, black thing with flat sides, large disc wheels and a luggage rack on top. The tiny engine appeared to have been designed to power a model car rather than a real one but we were assured that it had lots of power and would take us any place we needed to go.

There was only a single driver's seat in the front, located on the right side in typical British fashion. The space where a driver's seat should have been was occupied by a luggage rack. There was a full seat across the back. Three people and three seats, no problem!

The travel allowance was \$90 for each person, so after buying our "Pride and Joy", we had a total of seventy bucks to carry us the nearly fifteen hundred miles to Fort Belvoir. We set about preparing the car for the long trip to Virginia. A black, asphaltic substance was drained from the engine and new oil put back in. Water was added to the battery and radiator and the air checked in the tires.

Our trusty vehicle had to have a name, so I suggested that we call it Rocinante, which you may or may not remember, was the name of Don Quixote's horse. A rather literal translation of the Spanish word, Rocinante, means an old nag, well past its prime but still able to pull a cart. It seemed to be an appropriate name for our noble steed. Arthur Arthur Arthur called on his artistic talents and lettered the name in Old English Script just under the tiny rear window. He also lettered "Belvoir or Bust" on either side.

"You guys are going to the left armpit of the world while I get to go to within a hundred miles of my home," said Billy Bob as he tossed his duffle bag into the trunk of Old Paint. "I can go home every weekend if I want to."

The day came for us to depart for our new home and we were ready. Duffle bags were packed, orders printed, rifles turned in and supply cleared. We secured our duffle bags onto the luggage rack atop our vehicle. As a final step before we departed, Lester was sent to the base service station to fill the tiny tank with fuel. He jumped into the driver's seat and motored away

from the barracks, As he turned onto the street, his velocity was a bit too great and centrifugal forces reacting on the weight of the duffle bags on top became more than the hard, narrow tires could resist. The little car heeled over like a schooner in a brisk wind, lifted the inside tires off the ground, wobbled momentarily on two wheels and finally flopped onto its side.

Half a dozen people rushed to the little car's aid and gently lifted it back upright. Other than a broken left front window glass and a certain amount of scratching and grinding that it received from sliding along on the pavement, it was as good as ever. Arthur Arthur Arthur picked up his brush and painted an addendum, "BUSTED ONCE", immediately under his first message and we were on our way.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was difficult to determine whether Rocinante was being propelled along the highway at its top speed of forty-six miles per hour by the tiny engine or the cloud of blue smoke spewing from the tail pipe. We soon discovered that for each four gallons of gasoline consumed, one quart of oil would be converted into smoke. Lester commented that he once owned an old Johnson outboard motor which required the same mixture; but it had more power. Since the crankcase held two quarts of oil and the fuel tank held eight gallons, we calculated that we would run out of both oil and gas at the exact same instant.

In order to stretch our money far as possible toward our goal in Virginia, we bought only re-refined oil which sold for ten cents a quart. The term, re-refined, meant that they had taken used motor oil which had been drained from various cars, ran it through a strainer to removed dead grasshoppers, larger chunks of whatever and most of the dirt, then put it back into cans. We concluded that if the car was going to burn a quart of oil every hundred miles, then it might as well burn the cheapest stuff that we could find.

Between stopping for oil, airing up two of the tires and taking an occasional pee, it required a mere five hours to cover the 120 miles from Fort Leonard Wood to the outskirts of St. Louis. We rolled slowly through the town of Eureka, looking for a restaurant which fit both our fancy and limited finances. Finding nothing, we were headed out of town when the tiny rear window was filled with the red lights of a police cruiser. A pair of huge sirens perched on the front fenders, yowled at each other like angry, chrome tomcats. We pulled to the side of the road.

The door of the cruiser, bearing a huge gold star which proclaimed "Eureka City Marshall", swung open and a hulking policeman heaved himself out. His paunch, which bulged over a Sam Browne Belt, was held in check by straining shirt buttons which appeared ready to shoot off into space at any moment. Hitching up his pants, he hooked his thumbs in his Sam Browne and swaggered to what, on most cars, would be the driver's window.

With a good deal of huffing and puffing, he bent down and thrust his fat, red face through the open left front window whose glass was left in the street back at Fort Leonard Wood. "Hey,

there ain't no steerin' wheel in this damn thing!"

"This is an English Austin, officer. The steering wheel is over here on the right," replied Lester, who was driving at the time.

"I saw this damn thing goin' through town and thought that there warn't no body driving it," said the officer. "English Austin, you say. I was down at the pool hall this morning and heard a good'un about one of them little cars, goes like this.

"There once was a man from Boston,
Who owned an English Austin.
There was room for his ass, and gallon of gas,
But his balls hung out and he lost 'em."

"Yuck, Yuck, Snort, Snort," brayed the fat cop, holding his belly which bounded up and down as he laughing at his own joke.

"If this here is one of them English Austins," he continued, "Then what is that funny name back there on the back?"

"Rocinante," I said. "That is the name of Don Quixote's horse."

"Don Coyote, you say, never heard of him. He one of them Hollywood Cowboy stars, Huh? Git out and let me see your driver's license."

We stepped out of the car and Lester handed the policeman his license. The officer squinted at the license for some time and said, "Texas, Huh? If you're from Texas, what you doin' drivin' one of these here dinky little furren-built cars? I thought all you rich Texans all drove big, red Caddeylack Convertibles with bull horns on the hood. Did yore oil well run dry? Yuck, Yuck, Snort Snort."

"Well, we are in the Army and we bought the car to drive from Fort Leonard Wood to Fort Belvoir, Virginia," replied Lester.

"Figure you're goin' to drive this thing all the way to Virginney, Huh," said the officer. "From the way that it is smokin' you ain't goin' to make it crost the Mississippi."

"Well, we do have to add a bit of oil now and then," said Lester to the officer, who was still squinting at the driver's license.

"Got a title or bill of sale of some kind to prove that you own this here thing and it ain't stolen?" asked the officer. "It ain't got no license plates that I never seen."

It was at this point that we realized that it was still fitted with the British license plates. "We have this bill of sale from the former owner, and we planned to register it when we got to Virginia," replied Lester, pulling out the papers which the Sergeant had given to us when we paid for the car.

The officer looked at the papers for a considerable length of time, moving his lips as he read. Then he finally said, "Looks like you boys are in a heap of trouble, git back in that thing and foller me around to see the judge."

"What law have we broken, officer?" asked Lester.

"Don't you git smart-mouth with me, boy," replied the fat cop. "I'm the law 'round here and if I say yew are in trouble, then yew better bet yore sweet ass that yew are in trouble. 'Nuther word out of yew and I'll have to handcuff yew for resisting arrest. And don't you get no ideas about trying to run from me, I got a police special engine in my car."

We followed the police car, with its red lights flashing and sirens wailing, as it pulled around the corner and stopped in front of the local feed store. Sitting in a rocking chair on the porch was a human blimp with wads of hair growing out of his ears; must have weighed at least three hundred pounds. He was wearing bib overalls and rolling a baseball-size wad of Beechnut chewing tobacco around in his cheek. Brown rivers of juice streamed from the corners of his mouth and dribbled into the pockets on the bib of his overalls. Flies buzzed over a semicircle of tobacco juice in the dirt street, indicating his exact spitting range.

"Hey, Uncle Leroy," yelled the officer as he hoisted his bulk out of the patrol car. "I done arrested these here Texas fellers and brung them around fur yew to fine."

Great ghosts of Langtry, Texas and Judge Roy Bean, the hanging judge. If we got out of this mess without them taking us for every cent that we had, we would be lucky.

Uncle Leroy, who we supposed was the local judge, picked up his walking stick, banged it on the porch and said, "Court's in session. How do you fellers plead?"

About this time, an old pickup truck, with its fenders flapping like wings, rattled to a stop in front of the feed store. A tall, stringy farmer unbuckled a leather belt which held the door closed, climbed out and said to the judge, "Hey, Leroy, I need some chicken scratch and a couple sacks of laying mash for my hens."

The judge replied, "Damn it, Cletus, can't you see that court is in session and I'm busy. Clarence, go get Cletus what he needs while I figger out how much to fine these Texas fellers that you brung in." Clarence dutifully followed Cletus into the store.

"I asked you fellers, how do you plead."

We stood there, looking at one another and I finally asked, "Plead to what? your honor."

"You know damn well what you were doing to break the law, so why don't you just save a bunch of my valuable time and tell me what you were doing wrong and then plead guilty to it so I can fine you and get it over with," yelled the judge. "Want me to fine you for contempt of court too?"

"Well, your honor," I replied. "Since we were simply driving through town and violating no laws, there is nothing for us to enter a plead to."

"What are you, some kind of smart-ass lawyer feller, asking all these stupid questions?" asked the judge.

"Not at all, your honor," I replied. "If you would tell what we are charged with, we would be able to enter a plea."

You gotta been breaking some law, or else my nephew, Clarence, wouldn't have brung you in. Hey, Clarence," he yelled toward the back of the store, "Jist what was these Texas fellers doing, anyway?"

"Well, Uncle Leroy," said Clarence as he emerged from the back of the store, dragging a sack of laying mash. Cletus was right behind him, carrying the other two sacks. "They wuz driving right through town without stopping, and they wuz acting real suspicious like they didn't know what they wuz lookin' fur. Two of them was ridin' in the back seat and the car ain't got no steerin' wheel."

"What have we got here, now? A bunch of them damn preverts doing unholy things in the back seat, and how could they have been driving if the car ain't got no steering wheel?"

"Your honor," I spoke up, "The car is an English Austin. It has only one seat in front because it used to be a London Taxi; and that one is on the right side because that is the way that they build them in England. There is a steering wheel on the right side where the driver sits. There is no other place for the other two of us to ride, except in the back seat, and I assure you that we were doing nothing wrong."

"English Austin, you say. Clarence told me a good one this morning about one of them little cars. There was once a man from Boston...."

"I done told them that one, Uncle Leroy," interrupted Clarence. "But I don't think that they understood it, anyway."

"Why in hell would anyone want to buy a dinky little car like that, with only one front seat?" asked the judge. "I thought all you rich Texans drove big, red Caddeylack Convertibles with bull horns on the hood."

"Well, your honor, we are in the Army which makes us far from being rich. We are being transferred to Fort Belvoir, Virginia to go to school. This is the only car that we could afford."

"You planning to drive a car like that all the way to Virginney, huh? Looks like it won't even make it to the Mississippi River. What is that funny name on the back?" he asked.

"They said it had something to do with one of them Hollywood Cowboys by the name of Don Coyote or something like that," replied Clarence.

"Well, since you are soljers," the judge continued, "I'm going to do my bit for the war and let you off this time, but don't you never come back here in my town doing strange things and making trouble again."

As we pulled back out on Highway 66 and headed toward St. Louis, we looked at each other and shouted in unison, "OBERT FILPOT!"

We became lost several times while trying to get through St. Louis; winding up at the stock yards once and on the wrong side of the river twice. It was as dark as midnight under a skillet when we finally found our way across the Mississippi River and into rural Illinois.

"Think we should stay the night in a motel?" asked Lester.

"No sense wasting money on a motel room," I replied. "We have our blankets and pup tents with us, so why not just find a deserted spot and bed down there for the night."

A few miles further along, Lester spotted a road which turned through an open gate and into a grassy field. It was well grown over, indicating little use. "Looks like a park or something," he said.

"Looks good to me," I said. "Just get as far back from the road as possible. That way we aren't likely to be seen and rousted out by some joker like that fat cop back in Eureka."

Within about fifty yards, the road faded to nothing but grass, so we stopped for the night. Rather than bothering to pitch tents in the dark, we simply rolled up in them. Being as tired as we were, it didn't take long before we were sleeping soundly.

The noise didn't jolt me awake, but just nudged me into that twilight area between sound sleep and a full state of consciousness, then I heard it again. It came as a soft, flapping noise, like laundry on a clothes line when disturbed by a light wind. I wiggled my left arm up to where I could see the glowing dial of my watch; ten minutes of five. Raising the shelter-half enough to

allow me to peek out, I saw dozens of monolithic forms, standing in stark, black rows against a sky which had just begun to suggest the coming of dawn. Some of these forms were squat and stout; others were tall and slender. A few were topped with round globes or crosses. The most prominent of the dark shapes stood well above the rest, and was crowned with a cross. We were sleeping in a cemetery!

That sound, that flapping sound, came again and I saw a ghostly white form rise and float near the top of the tallest of the markers. Then it slowly settled back out of sight. By this time, I was fully awake and whispering loudly to Arthur and Lester, who were still rolled in sleeping cocoons, "Wake up, you guys, there is something awfully damn strange going on here."

"What time is it?" grunted Lester.

"Mumffp," was all that Arthur Arthur Arthur had to add.

"You'd better wake up," I said. "We are in the middle of a cemetery and I think that there is a ghost of some sort out there."

"You're dreaming," said Lester. "There isn't any such thing as a ghost."

"It may not be a ghost," I replied. "But there is something awfully damn strange going on over near that tallest tombstone."

We were totally awake now, but barely breathing as we lay there, waiting for the next appearance of the apparition. First came the flapping noise and then the specter rose, hovered for a few seconds and sank from sight.

"Holy shit," whispered Lester, "Let's get the hell out of here."

Grabbing boots, blankets and clothing, we leaped into Rocinante and slammed the doors. Lester turned the key, the little engine caught and he jammed it into reverse gear. As we swung around, a large white goose appeared in the glare of the headlights. With wings beating against the night air, it rose from inside a fenced enclosure around a grave, only to flop back to the ground. The headlamps also showed why it was unable to fly away; its feet were hopelessly tangled in some vines.

"Well, damn," said Lester. "All that excitement over a stupid old goose. Brave bunch of soldiers you are."

"I noticed that you were the first one in the car," I replied.

"Just because it scared the shit out of us is no reason to leave the poor thing trapped like that to starve. Let's get the vines off and let it go," said Arthur Arthur Arthur.

The gray of dawn was turning a rosy pink as we drove one direction out of the cemetery while the goose waddled off in the other. "I'm hungry as hell after all that excitement," said Lester. "Let's find some place for breakfast."

Rocinante marked its trail across the level farmland of Indiana and Ohio with a trail of blue smoke, but as soon as it saw the mountains of West Virginia, it developed a sudden case of death rattles. Each mile seemed to bring it closer to its final demise. When we stopped in a small West Virginia town for fuel and its normal dose of used oil, it simply refused to start when we were ready to leave.

We removed the spark plugs, and dug out the accumulated carbon with a nail. This had always breathed life back into the little engine before, but it still refused to reward us with a

single cough, gasp or belch of blue smoke.

A local hayseed, who had been sitting in the shade of a tree and watching our efforts, struggled to his feet and came over to where we were sweating with Rocinante. "Sounds like it ain't got 'nuff compression to start," he said. "I got some stuff over in my pickup that ought to get it running again. I call it my overhaul in a jug; use it on lots of old junkers to make them run long enough to get rid of them."

He returned, carrying a brown jug which had a corncob for a stopper. "Pull out the spark plugs agin' and I'll pour in a good dose of this," he told us.

A thick, brown liquid oozed like January molasses out of the jug. He cut off blobs about the size of walnuts with his finger and poked one into each spark plug hole. Then he forced a much larger wad down the oil filler pipe. "Put the plugs back in and try it," he told us.

Rocinante roared to life with a power that it had never known. A thick cloud of stinking smoke poured from the tailpipe and the little engine seemed to jump with excitement. "That dose ought to last long enough to get you to where you are going," said our benefactor. "Then you'd better sell it real quick as it will be a gonner after the effects wear off."

Rocinante purred up and down the green Appalachian Mountains with the greatest of ease. It had a power and speed which we had never known possible and no longer marked its path with a trail of smoke.

"I don't know what that guy poured in, but it makes it run like a new car," I said as we rocketed along at a good forty-five miles per hour. "He said that we'd better sell it as soon as we can, but what do you think."

"Sure runs a lot better than when we got it, might as well keep it for a while," replied Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"Sure would be nice to have a car to drive around Washington DC," said Lester.

We skirted along the south side of the Potomac River with the spires and columns of the various monuments to past presidents, towering to our left. As we turned onto the Jefferson Highway to take us the final few miles to our destination, a sprawling used car lot appeared ahead with a sign stating "CASH FOR USED CARS".

"I think that we had better take that guy's advice and sell it for whatever we can get for it right here," I said, pulling into the driveway. "Don't mention anything about the left door having no glass."

"I sure hate to part with it, now that it is running so good," said Lester, "But I suppose you are right."

A fat man with a huge cigar stuck in his face and wearing an awful checkered suit which looked as if it had been made from the table cloth in an Italian restaurant approached. "Wanna do some car trading, fellows?" he asked.

"Actually, we are considering selling it," I replied. "That is if we can get a fair price for it."

"We always pay the highest prices for good, clean used cars," said the cigar as he slid under the wheel. He shoved the accelerator to the floor and the little engine screamed in protest. Then he jammed it in gear and took a turn around the lot, sliding to a stop. "Hunnerd-fifty bucks," he said.

"We couldn't let it go for that. After all, you have cars which aren't nearly this good, priced for five or six times that much over there," I replied, pointing to the junkers in his third row. "We just drove this car all the way from Missouri and it runs like a fine watch. Besides, we have over three hundred in it."

"Well, with the steering wheel on the wrong side, it is going to be a lot harder to sell," replied the cigar. "I might be able to go as much as two hunnerd, but that would really be cutting my profit to the bone."

"Well, gosh, I don't know. This is the first place that we've stopped. Perhaps we ought to look around a bit. It is bound to be worth three hundred if it is worth a dime," I replied.

"Two twenty-five," said the cigar, "And that's it," said the cigar. "Take it or leave it."

"Well, I suppose that you know the car business better than we do, but it's going to be awfully hard to divide two hundred twenty-five by three. Make it two hundred forty, giving us eighty dollars each out of it, and you got yourself a deal." I replied. Arthur Arthur Arthur and Lester nodded in agreement.

He thumbed through the papers for the car and pulled out a check book. "Your sign says cash for cars," I said. "We are new here and it will probably be hard for us to cash a check. How about cash so we can split up our money right here?"

He rolled his cigar around three or four times while glaring at us, then he pulled out a fat wallet and peeled off the cash without making a dent in its contents. "You fellows sure strike a hard bargain," he said.

"Where can we catch a bus to Fort Belvoir?" I asked.

"It stops every hour right out there," said the cigar, pointing to a bench in front of his place. "One is due along any minute now."

We unloaded our gear and walked out to wait for the bus. While standing there, the cigar was busy, painting a price of \$500 on the windshield.

"Look what that tight bastard is going to sell our car for," said Lester. "I'll bet that we could have gotten three hundred if we had held out a little longer."

"Well, what's done is done," I replied. "After all, it got us here and we picked up forty bucks on it. What more could you ask for?"

The cigar got into the car and pulled it into a vacant space in the third line. Then he revved the little engine to its maximum speed as a final test of its stamina. Just as the little engine reached a good scream, there was a loud clattering and a plume of smoke rolled from under the front end of the car. Oil and water sprayed onto the newly painted price. A loud bang issued from the vicinity of the engine and then everything was silent. The checkered suit just sat there, chewing the unlit cigar.

"Sounds like that guy back in West Virginia knew what he was talking about," I said, as the bus to Fort Belvoir pulled to a stop.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Both the month of April and my days in school were rapidly coming to an end when, along with my daily letter from Janet, I received a large envelope from the 1903rd. It contained several copies of various orders, one of which was my promotion to the rank of Sergeant. Among the other orders were those which transferred the 1903rd to the control of the Air Force, effective 14 May 1951, and finally, unit movement orders, Dated 1 May 1951, sending the entire unit to a place called Beale Air Force Base (formerly Camp Beale), California.

In reading these orders further, I found that the unit was to move in two separate sections; an advance party, consisting of one officer and twelve enlisted men, and followed two weeks later by the main body. The advance party was to be there on the 14th of May, with the remainder to report on the 26th. I found my name listed as part of the advance party, which was to be commanded by a Major Parker, Engineering Officer for Battalion Headquarters. Along with my name on the advance party, were the names of Billy Bob Boomer, Arthur Arthur Arthur and Red Ryder.

There was also a personal letter to me from Captain Sanders, telling me that I did not need to return to the unit at Fort Leonard Wood when my school ended on the last day of April, but to report directly to California on the 14th of May. Travel orders and a travel voucher were included.

His letter also told me to report to a Major Parker, who was a new officer in the organization, a Civil Engineer who had been recalled from the reserves and assigned as Engineering Officer in Battalion Headquarters. This would allow a total of two weeks travel time, far more than what would be needed for the trip. It would be a chance for me to spend some time with Janet without being charged for leave time.

Janet drove my car to Amarillo and met me when I stepped off the airplane. Six months had passed since I had seen her and she looked even better than I remembered. She welcomed me home with several long, passionate kisses interspersed with floods of tears. It was so good to be back home.

The big engine in my car rumbled to life; I pulled out of the parking lot and turned toward the main highway. Janet was sitting very close with her head of my shoulder. "Instead of going home, let's go to Tucumcari and get married tonight," she said.

This was a shock that I hadn't expected. All that I had wanted to do was to come home and spend a few days away from army life, not to plunge headlong into marriage.

"Why don't you say something?" asked Janet in a tight little voice.

"Well, a shot coming out of the blue like that is a bit of a shock and, to tell the truth, I'm at a loss for what to say."

"Don't you love me?"

"Of course, I love you, Janet."

"The why don't you prove it by going to Tucumcari tonight."

The situation was getting to be far too tense. I didn't want to break off with Janet, but I certainly wasn't ready to get married either. After all, we had gone together for less than a month when I left for the army.

"You don't love me!" wailed Janet and the tears began to flow. "Mother said that you were unreliable and probably wouldn't go through with it."

"Was going to Tucumcari your idea or hers?" I asked.

"Well, she sort of suggested that if we got married tonight, then we could go on a honeymoon before you had to go back to the army."

"Janet, some times mothers get a bit too anxious for their daughters to get married and suggest things which aren't necessarily in their best interest. We have gone together for such a short time and we have all of our lives ahead of us. You will be involved in school activities, proms, graduation and all that and getting married right now would probably create too many problems for you. You know how the school officials feel about someone getting married before graduation. They might kick you out of school."

"We could keep it a secret," she suggested.

"There is nothing in the world that I would like to do more than for us to get married, but at this point, I think that the best thing for us to do is to enjoy the short time that I will be here and after I get settled in California, we can make more logical plans."

This must have made sense to her because the tears stopped and the wailing reduced to soft sobs as we drove toward home.

I had been at home a couple days when I received a telephone call from Billy Bob. "I'm driving through to California in Old Paint. Arthur Arthur Arthur and Red are coming along; how about you going through with us?" he said.

"Sounds like a ball," I replied. "Where do we meet?"

"Red suggested a roadhouse out at the east edge of Amarillo called the Clover Club, says it is easy to locate, everyone knows where it is and a good place to meet. See you there around dark on the 10th. Bring along something to eat on the way to save some money," he said.

I'll agree that the Clover Club was known to everyone. It is probably the most infamous beer joint, dance hall and whorehouse in the whole Panhandle of Texas. The band plays behind a chicken wire fence to keep from getting killed by flying beer bottles and it is hard to tell whether there are more people dancing or fighting most of the time. When the place really gets to

jumping, it resembles something between a prison riot and an Indian attack. On Friday and Saturday nights, they send three ambulances, five police cars and a fire truck out there just so that they will be handy when needed.

When I arrived at the Clover Club, Arthur Arthur Arthur and Red were already there, and had been for some time, considering that they were well on their way to a good drunk and had amassed close to a case of empty beer bottles lined up on the table in front of them. As I stepped through the door and stopped to allow my eyes to adjust to the dim light and cloud of smoke, Red yelled, "Have a beer Sarge, you fuckin' old brown nose," referring to the new stripes on my khaki shirt.

"Well, I see that you are wearing Corporal stripes," I said. "Where did they come from. You win them in a poker game, or did you just go out and buy them at the PX to impress some little skirt back home?"

Red didn't get a chance to answer because Billy Bob staggered through the door, wearing his beat-up old cowboy hat and carrying a whole ham in one hand and a gallon jug of some sort of clear liquid in the other. "Billy Bob Boomer, the meanest son of a bitch in Texas is here, you lucky people." he yelled at the top of his voice. I can whip every motherfucker in here."

Five or six truck drivers dumped girls off their laps, stood up and headed his direction, evidently anxious to take him up on his offer.

Billy Bob set the ham and jug on a pool table and grabbed a cue stick. "Sure is a bunch of them," he said.

Red, Arthur Arthur Arthur and I grabbed empty beer bottles and rushed to his side to see if we could save his ass from being pounded to a pulp by the truckers. However, they were cut off by the bouncer who stood nearly seven feet tall, weighed at least as much as the average rodeo bull and looked about twice as mean. Carrying a baseball bat in his hand, he stepped in front of Billy Bob and said, "We don't need no shit out of you, Cowboy. What you got in the jug?"

"This here is a whole gallon of the best Trinity River Stump Blower that was ever made. It'll blow a stump clear into the next county," replied Billy Bob.

"It's agin' the law to bring your own bottle in here, Cowboy, so you just get your ass and that jug right back out the door before I take this bat and bust hell out of both of you," said the bouncer, whose knuckles were almost dragging on the floor.

"Come on, let's get the hell out of here, before either that gorilla with the baseball bat or that bunch of truck drivers kill all of us," I whispered.

"We sure ain't gonna starve on our way to California," yelled Billy Bob as we shoved him out the door. "I got enough ham and Stump Blower to take us all the way to hell and back."

We walked out to Billy Bob's car that he called "Old Paint". It was a 1946 Chevy Coupe which looked like a Crazy-quilt due to the many different colored pieces of exterior sheet metal. The car had originally been sort of a light tan in color, but now the right front fender and door were blue, the hood was white and the left front fender was green. The left rear fender and trunk lid were black.

"I see why you call this car Old Paint, I said, "But why are all of the parts a different color?"

"Well, every time that me and Old Paint get drunk, which is just about every Saturday night," said Billy Bob, "We usually run into a tree, fireplug or another car. When something gets bent, I just go down to a wrecking yard and buy a fender or whatever off a wrecked car and bolt it on. No use in painting it since I'll probably just bash it up again before the paint got dry."

"Well, I'll tell you what. Since I'm the only one who is sober, I'm going to drive. Give me the keys," I told them.

"Hell, you don't need a key for Old Paint, said Billy Bob. "There are two wires hanging down from under the dash, just twist them together."

There are two bunches of people that are hard for me to put up with. One is sober people when I'm drunk and the other is drunks when I am sober. I pulled out of the parking lot at the Clover Club and headed west on Highway 66. I hadn't driven more than half a mile before the engine began to cough, sputter and finally died. The fuel gauge rested firmly on the "Empty" peg.

"OK, everybody out and start pushing," I said. "We are out of gas and there is a service station about a quarter mile up the road."

"Just in time, too," said Red. "I have to take a leak something awful." They jumped out and were busy watering a speed limit sign when we were bathed in red light coming from the spot lights on a highway patrol car which had pulled to a stop behind us.

"What's going on here?" asked the patrolman as he walked up to the driver's door.

"It is a combination out-of-gas and piss stop, officer," I replied. "As soon as they are finished, they are going to push the car down to that station."

"How much have you had to drink?" asked the officer, directing his five-cell flashlight into my eyes.

"Not a drop, officer. I'm sober as a judge." Then I realized my error in using the word "judge" as it was very likely that is whom he would want me to talk with. With my luck, it would probably be his uncle like good old Uncle Leroy, back in Eureka.

"Step out of the car," he ordered. "Let me see your drivers license and smell your breath." After looking at my license, he sniffed my breath. "Close your eyes and stand on one foot."

I stood erect on one foot while Red, Arthur Arthur Arthur and Billy Bob were making smart remarks like, "He looks just like an old Sand Hill Crane standing there on one foot." and "Now, see if he can lift the other foot at the same time. I'll bet that he can't do it without falling on his ass."

"You bastards get back in the car and shut up before this officer arrests you for being drunk," I told them.

I suppose that it did look a bit odd with two of us in uniform, two in civilian clothing and only one person sober.

"Where you headed, soldier?" he asked.

"We are all in the Army and are on our way to our new station in California," I replied. "I just picked these guys up back there at the Clover Club where they were doing a little celebrating."

"OK, looks like you have things under control, Sarge, but just don't let any of your buddies get under the wheel as they are pretty well gone," he said as he walked back toward the patrol car.

"You don't have to worry about that, officer. I'll keep them out of trouble. By the way, would there be any chance that you could give us a shove down to that station?" I asked.

"Sure thing," he replied. "Hop in and I'll have you there in nothing flat." Now there was a really nice cop!

While I was filling Old Paint with gasoline, my three passengers were buying several bottles of a sickeningly sweet soft drink called Delaware Punch. After dumping out about a third of the contents, they would refill the bottle with Trinity River Stump Blower. They sipped this concoction while miles and miles of Highway 66 rolled beneath the tires. I munched on a piece of the fried chicken that I had brought along, but left the drinking to the others. A combination of darkness, boredom of the road, and effects of the stump blower finally took effect and drunken conversation turned into loud snoring. The flashing neon signs above the dozen or more bars that lined the highway through San Jon, New Mexico slipped past and the lights of Tucumcari rose over the horizon.

"I see a watering hole," said Billy Bob, who had raised his head high enough to peek out the windshield.

"I gotta piss," said Red Ryder.

"I think I'm going to be sick," mumbled Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"Let's stop and all have something to eat," I suggested. "Some food might help sober you guys up a bit as we still have a long night ahead of us."

"Good idea, I'm hungry as a bitch wolf," replied Billy Bob. "I ain't had a bite to eat since I started drinking a couple days ago."

"Me too, how about some good Mexican food," replied Red.

"Now, I know that I'm going to be sick," said Arthur Arthur Arthur as he rolled the window down and hung his head out into the blast of cool, night air.

"EL TORO LOCO", the crazy bull, flashed in red neon over the door of the restaurant as we pulled to a stop. The right door flew open, Red and Billy Bob, neither of whom were wearing shoes, leaped out and raced for the door.

"I think I'll just stay here and die," said Arthur Arthur Arthur.

Neither Red nor Billy Bob were in sight when I stepped inside. "Did you see a couple guys come in here?" I asked the waitress.

"Yeah, a tall, skinny one and a short, red head came racing in here like they were going to a fire, nearly knocked me on my ass. "The tall one was yelling that the last one to the crapper would piss his pants. They're both in the john," she replied, pointing toward the back of the place.

When they returned and sat down, she placed three glasses of water the table. "Special tonight is four enchiladas with beans for a buck and a half."

"I'm so hungry that I could eat a horse; which is probably what your enchiladas are made out of," said Billy Bob. "Give me a dozen of them, with lots of hot peppers on the side."

"You mean that you want three orders?" she asked.

"Whatever it takes to get me a dozen," replied Billy Bob. "Along with two bottles of beer with each order; and bring the beer now."

"I'll have one order of enchiladas and make this on separate checks," I said. "If he's going to eat three meals, let him pay his own check."

"Just a burger and fries with a chocolate shake for me," said Red.

She brought our food and carefully lined up three separate plates in front of Billy Bob, each containing four enchiladas, a large mound of refried beans and lots of Jalapeno peppers on the side. He slid over in front of the first plate and began to eat, washing down the spicy food with cold beer. The contents of the first plate disappeared in record time and he attacked the second. Our waitress and the cook were watching from the door leading to the kitchen.

Red and I finished our food at about the same time as Billy Bob polished off the second plate and moved the third. He didn't put that one away with the same gusto as had been shown on the first two, but he managed to eat every bite of it. He signaled the end of the meal with a loud belch.

"I'll be damned, you win," said the cook as he handed the waitress a five dollar bill. "I never saw any human who could eat three of my Mexican plate lunches in one sitting, much less with six beers. That skinny bastard, must be hollow."

"Good going, Cowboy," said the waitress as she slapped him on the back and handed us our checks. "I just won five bucks from the cook, betting that you could eat it all."

Billy Bob looked at his check, "Eight dollars!" he yelled. "I'm going to faint." With that, he tumbled backwards onto the floor in a feigned fainting spell; his skinny legs and bare feet, sticking straight up in the air.

"Hey, Butch," the waitress yelled toward the kitchen. "I kept telling you that your food was going to kill someone and now it has. Look at what it did to this guy."

The cook came rushing from the kitchen with a pitcher of water in his hand. "Call an ambulance or the fire department or someone," he yelled, as he dumped the water into Billy Bob's face.

By this time, we were all roaring with laughter, even Billy Bob, who was soaking wet on the floor. The cook, who didn't seem to enjoy the joke all that much, started yelling, "You crazy bastards get the hell out of here, and I ought to fire your ass for being a part of the joke," he stormed at the waitress who was doubled over in laughter.

Our plans were to drive all night while it was cool, to escape the blazing summer heat of the desert. Later, when the sun began to really bear down, we would find some fairly cool place where we could rest. This was the usual method for crossing the hot, arid western states in the days before automobiles had air conditioning.

Having sobered up considerably after eating, Red took the wheel for a while. Billy Bob climbed into the back seat with Arthur Arthur Arthur, who was doubled up in a fetal position and making no sound.

The hot chilis, three orders of refried beans, six beers and a dozen enchiladas finally began to work their magic on Billy Bob's digestive system with predictable results. It was around four in the morning when the first blast filled the car. "Holy shit!" gasped Arthur Arthur Arthur as he was jolted awake. "Roll down all the windows. I dreamed that I was being gassed. That's even worse than Filpot."

Billy Bob's gas attacks became stronger and more often as the night turned to dawn and the sun crept over the horizon. "We have to do something about Billy Bob and those stinking farts," said Red. "With all the beans, beer and onions that he had last night, they could last for a

week."

"You know, I'll bet that drug stores have something to cure them. They can cure most everything else with pills," I said.

"Winslow, Arizona is just ahead. Stop there and let's see what we can find. I can't stand this much longer," Said Arthur Arthur Arthur.

Highway 66 forms the main street of Winslow. In fact, Highway 66 forms most of the town, which is two miles long and two blocks wide. Beyond one block to either side of the highway puts one out of town and into the desert. Red parked in front of the first drug store that we came to and headed for the pharmacy. There was a girl, who looked to be about seventeen, behind the counter. Red asked her, "You got anything back there that will cure stinking farts?"

Her face turned about nine different shades of red as she stammered, "The pharmacist isn't here yet, but I'll see if I can find something for you." She looked at several different bottles and boxes, finally bringing a square plastic box containing several large green pills to the counter. "This might help some," she said.

Red paid for the pills and returned to the car. "Here, Boomer, take one of these now, and you get another one every time that you fart."

By ten in the morning, the desert was beginning to take on its daily supply of heat and Billy Bob had been force-fed at least a dozen of the big green pills, which he washed down with a mixture of Delaware Punch and Trinity River Stump Blower. The pills were evidently working because his noisy discharges no longer had the slightest odor.

"Time for a few hours rest," I said, "Pulling off the highway and under a bridge where a small stream bubbled across polished, round boulders. This looks like a great place to escape the heat."

Sitting on the cool sand, we ate an early lunch, consisting of slices of Billy Bob's ham, pieces of fried chicken, pickles and boiled eggs; finishing off with chocolate cake that Arthur Arthur Arthur had brought. I stretched out on the soft sand beside the stream and, having been awake all night, had no trouble in going right to sleep.

I don't know how long I had been sleeping when Billy Bob began yelling and shaking us. "You bastards have been trying to poison me," he shouted.

"What the hell are you carrying on about?" I asked.

"These damn, green pills that you've been making me take," he said.

"What about them, they stopped your farts from stinking."

"I was reading the information on the box and those damn things are chlorophyll pills for dogs! They are to make dogs smell better, not people!" stormed Billy Bob.

"Go back to sleep, Billy Bob," I said. "Don't worry about those pills unless you start chasing cars, pissing on fireplugs or get an urge to lick your balls."

The evening sun was low on the horizon when we pulled back onto the road. That night's driving carried us out of Arizona and across the great Mojave Desert to Bakersfield, the southern entrance to the lush San Joaquin valley of California. Turning northward, we followed Highway 99 through grape vineyards, fields of cotton and stately orchards; a vast change from the barren deserts which we had just crossed. We took turns driving, stopping only for gasoline, food and

occasional rest. On the afternoon of the 13th, we pulled into Marysville.

"Let's find a motel room, clean up and get a good night's rest. We are supposed to meet a Major Parker at the main gate of Camp Beale at eight tomorrow morning," I told them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Weeds stood nearly head high right to the edge of the pavement and blades of grass poked through cracks in the asphalt.

"This can't be the right road," said Red. "It looks like it hasn't been used in years."

"The man at the service station said to go straight east on this road for about twelve miles," said Arthur Arthur. "It must be the right one because nothing has turned off of it anywhere."

"I see something ahead in the middle of the road, looks like it might be a guard gate," said Billy Bob.

"CAMP BEALE Main Gate," the faded sign informed us. We dutifully obeyed the stop sign posted on the front of the building. One door on the empty guard house swung back and forth on a single hinge while the other lay in the ditch across the road. Glass, which had once been in the windows, lay in shards on the ground. A telephone hung on the wall--I picked it up--it was dead. Just past the empty guard house, a sign had been erected in the middle of the road, "U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPERTY No Trespassing".

"You sure we are at the right place?" asked Arthur Arthur Arthur. "There is nothing around here."

"The orders said Camp Beale, near Marysville, California and the sign says Camp Beale," I replied. "It must be the right place, but where are all the buildings and people?"

"Let's drive on in. There must be another gate," suggested Billy Bob.

Side streets branched off the road which we were following. Thousands of concrete foundations poked up through the weeds like grave markers in a forgotten cemetery. We drove to a large building which stood alone at the end of the street. It was a field house, much like a large gymnasium. Like the guard house, it was in a sad state of repair. Doors were missing, windows broken and holes knocked in the walls. There was evidence that a fire had been built in one corner, apparently in an effort to burn the place down.

"There must be a mistake of some sort," said Billy Bob. "There is nothing here. How can

we reopen a base which has no buildings?"

"I see something over there," said Red, pointing across the forest of empty foundations.

These buildings turned out to have been the base hospital and were in much better condition than the field house and guard gate. It consisted of several dozen identical wards, all connected by covered wooden walks. Through the windows of one of the larger buildings, we could see that it had served as the mess hall. It was still equipped with huge stoves, sinks and other mess hall equipment, but the tables and chairs were nowhere to be found. Other buildings had obviously served as offices, supply rooms and administration buildings. Most of the windows still had their glass and the original fixtures were still in place in the bath rooms, except that there was not a single toilet seat in the whole place. Why anyone would steal nothing but the toilet seats was beyond me.

We found two of the buildings which had locked doors with boards nailed across them. There were no windows, so we were unable to see what was inside. Beside these two locked buildings was a fire station, which was also locked and boarded.

"It is well past eight," I said. "We had better get back to the gate where we are supposed to meet Major Parker."

A Major was standing in the road, looking at the guard house when we drove up. Several enlisted men, most of whom I recognized as being members of the 1903rd, stood nearby.

"Sergeant Foreman reporting, Sir," I said with a salute. "Are you Major Parker?"

"That's right," replied the Major. "I take it that you have already looked the place over. What did you find?"

"To tell the truth, not much. There is a field house about two miles down this road and a hospital over that hill. The field house isn't much, but the hospital buildings are in pretty good shape."

"I can't understand it. When they briefed me, they said that the base was complete, just as it was when they closed it in 1945, and that there would be firemen and guards here," said Major Parker. "Let's have a look at what is here and I'll get a report back to Fort Leonard Wood."

A closer look proved that there was little to report, but the unit orders were already in effect and the rest of the 1903rd was on its way to a base which had nothing more than an old hospital, a dilapidated field house and hundreds of empty foundations.

We were to learn later that through an error, the War Assets Administration had sold off all the buildings at Camp Beale in California instead of Camp Hale, which was now slowly falling apart in the mountains of Colorado.

"It looks as if this will be our home for a while," said Major Parker as we walked through the deserted hospital. "We are just going to have to make the best of what we have."

After a considerable amount of beating and hacking with an old fire axe which we found hanging on a wall, we finally broke into the locked storage buildings. Inside, under layers of dust, spider webs and mouse nests, was tons of hospital equipment. There were army cots, mattresses, blankets, hospital beds, operating tables, X-Ray machines and all sorts small items; including at least two thousand bedpans. We also found piles of sheets, pillows and other linens which were still usable, even after six years of storage. There was even some additional equipment for the mess hall, but no tables or chairs.

"The first thing that we have to do is get the utilities turned on and working," Major Parker said to me. "I'll drive back into Marysville and contact the local electric company about power, while you see if you can find out where water comes from and what has to be done in order to get it working."

Fire Department equals water in great quantities, so I concluded that would be the logical place to start looking for information about the water system. I broke into the locked fire department and on a wall was a detailed map of every water line, fireplug, faucet and water tap on the whole base. It also indicated the location of the water supply point for the base. In digging through the desks, I also found a gold mine of information in the form of a handbook with instructions for both normal and emergency operation the water supply and storage system. Attached to the handbook were several keys on a string, obviously for locks at the water station.

The water supply point was located in the rolling foothills, some six miles from the base. One of the keys which were with the instruction book unlocked the gate in the high, chain link fence around the place, another opened the door to the building and others fit the locks on huge electrical switches. A massive diesel engine sat in one corner of the building. Everything appeared to be in the same condition as it had been the day that the place was shut down.

After inspecting the concrete reservoir which was bone dry but appeared to be in perfect condition, we decided that we should see if anything worked. Following the instructions in the book, we opened and closed various valves to put the system into what was called "Low Water Emergency Supply" condition. Finally it was time to close the switch which was marked, "MAIN PUMP".

I shoved the huge lever to the "ON" position, main connectors inside the box slammed closed. The largest of the electric motors issued a cloud of dust, dead spiders and ozone as it hummed in protest and wound up to speed. At first it spun freely until with the surge of power, it began to operate under a load. Pressure gauges jiggled and moved to indicate that something was happening inside the vast manifold of pipes and valves.

"We got water flowing," shouted Red, who was standing at the top of the ladder on the tank. "It sure is rusty and dirty, but it's flowing."

"Let's wait until we have a few feet of depth in the tank before we open any valves to start sending water to the base," I suggested. "Some of you go to the hospital and close every water valve that you can find."

When Major Parker returned, he also had good news. People from the electric company would be out the following morning to reconnect power to the hospital buildings.

"We have a lot of work to do in order to get this place in shape before the main body of the unit arrives two weeks from now," said Major Parker. "I'll get in touch with Quartermaster and set up delivery of supplies that we will need."

The following morning, we found that the water had risen about there feet in the storage tank and concluded that it was time for us to see if we could get water flowing to the hospital. Major Parker had left earlier to go to the Army Depot near San Francisco to make arrangements for drawing food, equipment and basic supplies.

Studying the drawings of the water system, I learned that it was divided into two separate and independent systems; normal and emergency. The normal system supplied water through one

main line to the entire base, which included the hundreds of buildings which had been sold and moved. The emergency system used a separate line which directed water only to the fireplugs, fire department, the hospital and a few other buildings shown on the map. With the main valve to the normal system closed, I opened the red valve to the emergency system. I knew that it would take some time for the pipes to fill, but after an hour, the water was still flowing freely with no indication that it was ever going to build pressure in the system.

Shutting off the valve, we set out to locate where the water was going. This didn't prove to be too difficult as there were large wet puddles around every fireplug. Every fire hydrant on the base had evidently been opened to drain the system when the base was shut down. It took five of us the rest of the day to locate and close the hundreds of open fireplugs on the sprawling base.

Darkness came but Major Parker still hadn't returned, so we decided to call it a day and head back to town where we were staying in a motel.

"Let's find a watering hole and have ourselves a beer before we eat," suggested Billy Bob.

"Any suggestions?" I asked.

"Well, I saw this bar about two blocks from the motel and it looked like some place that I could enjoy drinking in," he answered.

The bar was in a rather dilapidated two-story brick building whose upper windows had long since been boarded up. A sign over the door advertised that this was the oldest continually operating bar in California, having been established in 1850. Inside, the walls were festooned with various photos, junk and artifacts dating back to the time when gold was discovered only a few miles from the town at a place called Sutter's Mill. There were several oddities displayed across the top of the back bar, like a sheep with two heads and something which was claimed to be a genuine jackalope, a cross between an antelope and a jack rabbit.

There were actually two bars in the place, the front one which catered mostly to the tourist trade and the rear bar where all the regulars congregated. Billy Bob, who knew his way around bars such as this, headed straight for the back bar. We hoisted ourselves onto the tall stools where Billy Bob shucked off one of his boots and set it on the bar.

"Do you know what kind of boot this, little darlin'?" he said to the bartender, a rather attractive lady who had a forty year old face on the body of a twenty year old. Nature had been very kind or else she had taken great care of her body. She wore a nametag telling everyone that she was Marge.

"Other than an ugly green cowboy boot setting on my bar, what do you mean?" she asked.

"I'm surprised that you don't recognize this boot, Darlin'. This here is a famous Texas Drinking Boot. I won it in the Texas National Drinking Boot Championships down in Fort Worth two years ago. I was the Grand Champion Boot Drinker, downed seven bootfuls in one hour."

"I've never heard of any such thing as a drinking boot," replied Marge, who in her years behind a bar thought that she had heard every wild story known to man.

"There is an old tradition that the owner of a genuine Texas Drinking Boot gets his bootful free," said Billy Bob.

"And I think that you are full of shit, but it will be worth the price of a bootful of beer just to see you drink it." said Marge.

The boot was so tall that Marge had to tilt it in order to get it under the beer tap. "This

damn thing must hold two gallons," she remarked as the beer flowed in. When the boot was filled to the rim of the stovepipe top, she slid it back to Billy Bob.

He blew the foam aside, tilted the boot and took a long swig. "Nothing like a boot to make beer taste good. There is another Texas Drinking Boot tradition, a Grand Champion Boot Drinker always shares his boot beer with his friends," he said as he slid the boot over in front of me.

I had heard of men drinking champaign from a lady's shoe, but drinking beer from a boot bordered on the ridiculous. But who am I to fly in the face of the great Texas Drinking Boot tradition. I took a long draw on the boot and shoved it down the bar to Red.

The boot progressed from Red to Arthur Arthur Arthur and on down the bar to where several of the locals had been cheering us on. Each of the locals took his turn at the boot and by the time that it reached the other end of the bar, it was all but empty.

The boot was passed back to Billy Bob, who finding only about one good drink left, handed it across the bar to Marge. "There is also one more tradition of the drinking boot, that is that the bartender gets the last drink."

"What the hell," said Marge as she turned the boot up, drained the remaining suds and handed it back.

"Oh, I almost forgot the final and most important tradition of the Texas Drinking Boot, that is that the person who takes the last drink has to refill it."

"If you think that I'm going to pop for another two gallons of beer so you drink it out of a smelly boot, you are a few bricks short of a load," replied Marge.

"What the hell," said one of the locals. "Fill it up and put it on my tab."

The boot has been filled, drained and refilled three or four times when Major Parker walked in. "Howdy, Major," said Billy Bob as he pushed the boot toward him, "Welcome to a Texas Drinking Boot party. Have a swig."

Major Parker declined the offer of the boot and said, "I figured that I'd find you guys in a place like this. I have some good news and some bad. Let's go eat and I'll tell you all about it."

He had gone to the Army for supplies, but had been told that since we were now assigned to the Air Force, they no longer had any obligation to supply us with anything. Failing to get help from the Army, he had gone to the Air Force base at Fairfield/Suisun. When he told them of our needs, they decided that, even though we were now assigned to the Air Force, we were still Army troops, and they wouldn't give us the time of day.

Little did we realize at the time, but this was going to be the situation which we would face the rest of the time that we were assigned to the Air Force.

"It looks as if the 1903rd is like a little old doggie calf," said Billy Bob.

What on earth is a doggie calf?" asked Major Parker.

"A doggie calf is one whose mother won't have anything to do with it and neither will any other cow," replied Billy Bob. "How are we going to obtain basic supplies that will be needed to get ready for the arrival of the main unit?"

"I suppose that I can use this letter which authorizes me to make emergency purchases on the civilian market and simply buy everything that we need," replied Major Parker. "Each of you start making lists of supplies that you need for your particular area and I will contact local

suppliers."

The following day, with all of the fireplugs closed, I opened the valve to the emergency water system again. Water flowed through the system, but at least we now had some pressure to indicate that the flow had been reduced considerably. Finding the remaining open pipes was rather simple as all that we had to do was look for streams of water shooting into the air from pipes which had been disconnected when buildings were moved.

It took a considerable amount of digging to find the individual valves for each of those buildings, but we finally had all the leaks plugged. It was now time to see if we had water at the hospital. When valves were opened, water flowed into toilets, water heaters filled and lavatory faucets produced water. We were in business!

"One of the first things that we have to do is arrange for tables and chairs for the mess hall," said Major Parker. "We can't have eight hundred people standing around holding trays every meal."

"I noticed a picnic table in the day room. It was built from two-by-sixes and looks fairly simple. How about duplicating it by about fifty times," I suggested. "That number of tables will fit in the mess hall and seat half of the battalion at a time. I can work up a material list for building them."

"Good idea, and while you are at it, better include enough lumber and nails to make some of the other repairs that are needed," replied Major Parker.

Major Parker and I sat down with a plan of the hospital and began to designate a use for each of the various buildings. Due to the layout, it was impossible for each company to have its supply and orderly rooms adjacent to their barracks. All orderly rooms were grouped into a large building at one end of the complex. Battalion headquarters was to occupy the hospital's main administrative buildings at the other end. Supply rooms would be grouped into one of the large buildings where the equipment had been stored. While it was not the normal layout recommended in the Army manuals, it proved to be very efficient.

Trucks loaded with lumber rolled in and were unloaded at the various places where the material would be needed. Tools were rented and supplies bought. Menus for a week were planned and the food necessary to feed 800 men was ordered and stacked in the mess hall.

On the 26th, two weeks after the advance party first set foot in the deserted place called Camp Beale, the remainder of the 1903rd arrived on a number of busses or in the few trucks and jeeps which had been brought along with the unit. They unloaded at 2:00PM and were immediately issued bunks and shown where they would be living for the next several months.

At 6:00PM, the men of the 1903rd were called to the mess hall, and while they had to stand while eating, they were fed a hot meal which had been prepared by Major Parker and a dozen enlisted men, only one of which was assigned as a cook.

"We owe a great debt of gratitude to the advance party who, in only two weeks, changed this place from a ghost base into livable quarters," announced Colonel Hull at the battalion formation the following morning. "All training will be suspended until we have built mess hall tables, made necessary repairs to buildings and secured the area. Work assignments have been given to Company Commanders and will be posted on the bulletin boards. Welcome to Beale Air

Force Base."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The month of June came and went very rapidly with the entire 1903rd being involved in such tasks as building tables for the mess hall, repairing damaged roofs and replacing hundreds of broken windows in the old hospital buildings. Meanwhile on the homefront, Janet had gone with the senior class on their trip to Carlsbad Caverns, graduated, sent me a letter every day and called two or three times. The main crux of her letters and phone calls was wanting to know if I had found a place for us to live and when we were going to get married.

I told her that since a large number of military had come to the area, there was limited availability of housing and the prices had gone up to the point that we simply could not afford it on what I received. I suggested that since I would be getting out of the service in about six months, perhaps the best thing would be for her to get a job in the meantime and make plans to register that fall in college. We would make definite plans to get married as soon as I was discharged. While this was far from being totally agreeable with either her, especially the part about her going to college, she and her mother finally agreed that it would be the best idea.

I was assigned to the Operations and Engineering Section, known as S-3 in Army lingo, where I was responsible for seeing that the people doing each of the many tasks had the required equipment and material needed in order to complete their jobs most efficiently. It was often necessary to borrow lumber from one jobsite in order to keep another one running. This was what I had been trained to do at the school in Fort Belvoir and I found it most rewarding.

One morning, Major Parker called me into his office, "Sergeant Foreman, inspecting officers from both the Air Force and Army will be here the first of next month to determine our level of training and combat readiness status. Anyone who is not qualified for the job that he is now holding, or who is over rank for his job will be transferred. You are actually doing the job of Construction Supervisor, but that slot is now being held by Sergeant Nerdlinger, who has been carried there ever since the National Guard was activated. He is Colonel Hull's nephew and I am stuck with him."

Master Sergeant Nerdlinger was all of 18 years old and his greatest claim to fame was

being able to make sound effects with his mouth. He could mimic machine guns, fire engines and exploding shells; but he could barely carry on a intelligent conversation. In fact, most of his conversations were a mixture of English and sound effects. Few people knew that he even existed, because he spent most of his time hiding in his room and reading comic books.

"Well, Sir, just where does that leave me?" I asked.

"That is what I'm getting to," replied the Major. "There is an opening in this section for a Sergeant as the soils tester. Here is the Army manual on that subject and the testing kit is located in supply. When the inspection team arrives, I want you to know everything that there is to know about testing soil and be able to answer any question that they can throw at you. If you hit a snag, come to me and I'll help you out."

For the next two weeks, my head was filled with previously unknown terms like California Bearing Ratio, compaction density, optimum moisture content and sluff angles. I knew the proper name for every piece of equipment in the testing kit and how to use it. I learned far more than I really ever wanted to know about dirt. It all paid off when the Captain who evaluated me wrote on the bottom of his form, "Highly qualified in assigned TO/E position". That old Texas expression, "If you can't dazzle them with brilliance, then baffle them with bullshit," paid off once more for me.

Heavy equipment began to roll in each day, and with it came more and more job assignments from the Air Force. Even though we were involved in teaching men how to run heavy equipment, the Air Force seemed to think that there was no end to our ability when it came to construction work.

One piece of heavy equipment in particular, called a Tournadozer, came in to us great numbers. It was a huge, roaring monstrosity mounted on four large rubber tires and was supposed to be the ultimate in dirt moving equipment. A bellowing diesel engine drove a generator, which provided power through hundreds of relays, switches and solenoids to electric motors located inside of each wheel. While it had only limited ability to function as a bulldozer, it could roar along at speeds as high as 40 mph on level ground. It leaped and bounded along with a rocking gait, much like that of a camel. The operator sat on an unprotected seat, high atop the thing, hanging on to a bar to keep from being pitched from his perch. It was touted to be the ultimate in a dirt moving machine, but in truth, it was such a Rube Goldberg affair that only the military would buy such a thing.

Maintenance on the Tournadozer became such a problem that the factory finally sent specialists to teach our mechanics how to repair them. They looked over the line of disabled units and told us, "When something breaks, put on a new part." Since being unable to obtain a supply of new parts was the problem in the first place, their instructions were totally useless.

The Air Force took over the deserted railroad warehouses at the south side of the base for a supply point and we were asked to repair the rail bed so tracks could be replaced. I was over at the warehouses one day and noticed about fifty new refrigerators, still in crates, stored there. I asked the Air Force Corporal what they were for and he replied, "If someone brings us a requisition for a refrigerator, we can give them one."

We built firing ranges, training facilities and roads. We were also given the task of

draining, cleaning and repairing a small reservoir in the hills to the east of the base. This place was to become a base swimming and recreation area. Mainly, these jobs provided excellent training sites for many of our people who had never seen heavy equipment before, much less operated it.

Soon, we found that we had so many projects assigned to us that we had to begin working 12 hours each day in order to keep everything on schedule. We did not realize it at the time, but this would also prove to be good training for the time when we would have to do it in Korea.

The summer of 1951 was especially hot and dry in the Sacramento Valley of California and anything cold to drink was a scarce commodity around the 1903rd. One day, Major Parker mentioned, "If we had a refrigerator of some sort, we could keep cold pop and beer for the people here in S-3."

"I think I know where we can get one," I replied as I drove away in a Jeep. "I'll see what I can do."

I walked in the back door of the warehouse, found a refrigerator near the back of the bunch and wrote down its serial number.

An hour later, I returned with a truck and backed up to the dock. The Air Force Corporal emerged from his air conditioned office and asked, "What do you want?"

I handed him a small slip of paper with the serial number that I had written down earlier and said, "Load this refrigerator in the truck."

He took the piece of paper and began to check the numbers on all of the refrigerators, while continually bitching about how hot it was and why did people always want something. When he finally came to the one with a number which matched the one on the paper, he said, "Why in hell do they always pick one which in the back?"

Fifteen minutes later, I was unloading a brand new refrigerator at S-3.

"Where did this come from and how did you get it?" asked Major Parker.

"If you look and act obvious enough, anyone will believe that what you are doing is legitimate," I replied.

"In other words, you are saying that I shouldn't ask," said the Major.

"That's one way of putting it. Another is what you don't know, can't hurt either of us."

I used this method of obtaining needed items many times in the future and it worked every time.

August was not a banner month for the people of the 1903rd. Instead of the preface of, "I have some good news and some bad news," it was more like, "I have some bad news and some really bad news." The first bad news was that since the war in Korea was not progressing to an end as rapidly as had been expected and all of the people who had been drafted for 15 months were being extended to 18 months. The really bad news was that the 1903rd was being placed on alert for overseas movement. Rumors had it that we would be going to Alaska but few of us believed that. Overseas obviously meant Korea.

I called Janet to break the news that I would be in the service for at least eight more months instead of five and that I would probably be going to Korea, then I listened to twelve

dollars worth of wailing and sobbing.

The multitude of make-work tasks which the Air Force had been giving to us were dropped and a major effort was launched to bring all of the unit's new arrivals up to required levels of combat readiness. A maximum effort was made to qualify everyone on both their personal weapons as well as crew-fired ones. We also began to build packing crates for shipping all of the battalion equipment.

A stubborn forest fire had been raging for several weeks in the Clear Lake area of the Mendocino National Forest, some fifty miles west of Beale. The Forest Service, being unable to bring it under control, finally asked if we could send some men and heavy equipment to help fight the fire. On August 22nd, about 200 men and several pieces of heavy equipment were dispatched. One week later, the fire was under control, but we were now far behind on both the training schedule and preparations for overseas movement.

As is the custom with the military, the officers did everything possible to keep our destination a secret, but there were so many visible signs that Korea would be our new home that there were few doubts in anyone's mind.

It was just after noon on a Saturday when Billy Bob suggested, "Let's take in a movie this afternoon."

"What's playing?" I asked.

"John Wayne picture at one theater and a musical at the other," replied Billy Bob.

"Know anything about either of them?" I asked.

"The John Wayne is a war picture," replied Arthur Arthur Arthur, who was the most cultural minded of the bunch. "The musical is based on a book. It's all about a dirty old man who lived in a castle and had lots of bucks. He also had the hots for this cute little cunt who was the daughter of his grounds keeper and was willing to do just about anything to get her in the sack. She didn't want to have anything to do with him because she starched her drawers every time that she looked at the good looking boy who took care of the dirty old man's goats."

Arthur Arthur Arthur continued, "The dirty old man figured that the only way that he was ever going to get the girl into bed was to do away with the goat herder, so he invited him up to have a drink. He opens a secret lid on his ring and dumps some white powder in a glass of wine and hands it to the kid. While the kid was a long ways from a mental genius, he was smart enough to figure out that the old man is up to no good, so he dumps the wine into a potted plant, which instantly wilts and falls over. When the old man sees that he can't poison the goat herder, he grabs a sword and starts trying to slice him up. The old man chases the kid around and around the room, chopping off a few candles and potted plants as he goes, but can't catch him. He finally lunges at the kid, who is standing in front of an open window. Naturally, the kid jumps aside and the old man does a half-gainer out the window and splats himself on the ground about four stories below. It turns out that the kid was actually the old man's long, lost grandson. He inherits the castle, his money and all his goats. The kid and the girl get married and they live happily ever after."

"Does the John Wayne have a cartoon?"

"Two of them. Roadrunner and Marx Brothers," replied Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"Good, let's go see the John Wayne," I suggested.

We got to our seats just as the movie was ending and when the lights came on, Billy Bob whispered to me, "Look, there is Colonel Hull sitting down front."

"Never thought of him as the movie-going type," I replied.

"This movie is probably the closest thing to the real army that he will ever see," said Billy Bob.

After the roadrunner outfoxed the coyote a half a dozen times and the Marx Brothers finished their antics, the movie came on. John Wayne was a Lieutenant Colonel and the CO of a combat engineer outfit someplace in the South Pacific. Between killing Japs and giving hell to all of the butter-bar Second Lieutenants under him, he spent most of his time drinking and playing poker with the First Sergeant. One day the Japs killed the First Sergeant, which really pissed John Wayne no end. He grabbed up a machine gun with his bare hands, jumped on a bulldozer and went clattering off down the road, wiping out Japs right and left. With bullets whizzing all around him, he used the bulldozer to shove several trucks loaded with more Japs over a cliff. The movie ended with him shoving a huge pile of rocks into a hole where a dozen or so Japs had been hiding while they shot at him with machine guns. Naturally, John didn't receive a scratch because all that the Japs could hit was the blade on the bulldozer.

"Ever notice in the movies, when an American soldier gets killed, he usually swears; but when a Jap gets killed, he always screams?" I asked as we left the theater.

"Good old John Wayne really gave those Japs a lesson in sex," said Billy Bob.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"He taught them that it don't pay to fuck around with John Wayne," replied Billy Bob.

"Colonel Hull isn't coming out," I said. "You suppose that he is going to see it again?"

"Probably. He has always been a Regular Army asshole and a movie like that would really give him kicks."

At reveille formation on Monday morning, Col. Hull was there, not in his usual starched khaki uniform, but in fatigues, web belt, helmet liner and combat boots. His thumbs were hooked in his pistol belt and there was a noticeable drag in his left leg as he walked. He called the formation to order with a cross between a cowboy drawl and his usual Chicago accent.

"Holy Shit!" whispered Billy Bob. "The old man has gone ape shit and thinks that he is John Wayne."

"Glad that he didn't see 'Iwo Jima' or he would have us raising a flag on a hill someplace," I replied.

In the mess hall that night, Billy Bob reported, "Colonel Hull was down at the motor pool today, asking me to teach him how to run a bulldozer. I think that he is a couple tacos short of a combination plate after seeing that John Wayne movie."

"I always knew that he was stupid, but never thought that he was crazy too," I replied.

"Boy, that's a frightening thought; going to Korea with an insane man leading us," replied Red Ryder.

"Most officers are a bit Looney Tunes, look at Patton. He was crazy as a peach-orchard

boar during most of World War Two," I told them. "I don't know whether only the insane become officers or if they go crazy after they become officers."

"Must be the latter, because it seems that the higher the rank, the crazier they are," said Red.

"Not necessarily," I replied. "Remember Lieutenant High? He was a goofy as a three-star general by those standards."

"I'd just as soon forget that son of a bitch," replied Red. "My nose will be crooked for the rest of my life."

It seemed that Col. Hull became more obsessed with the John Wayne syndrome with each passing day. His leg dragged more and more as he walked and his John Wayne drawl had completely replaced his Chicago accent. He suddenly began to attend all formations, always wearing fatigues, helmet and pistol. He even issued orders that everyone would wear helmets and carry their M-1 Rifles to reveille formations.

A few weeks later, trucks loaded with combat gear pulled up to the supply room. We were issued combat field packs, gas masks, steel helmets, bayonets, bandoleers of ammunition, hand grenades and all of the other gear usually associated with front line infantry troops. Col. Hull replaced his military pistol with a matched pair of nickel-plated revolvers with pearl handles.

Rumors began to float around that we were being transferred to the infantry and were going straight to Korea as combat troops. Other rumors had us landing behind the lines in North Korea for a secret invasion. By the first of October, we were ordered to fall out with full field packs for every formation.

"I never thought that we would wind up as combat troops," said Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"We are still Aviation Engineers and are going to Korea to build airstrips," said Bobby Ward, who was in a position to see all orders which came in to the unit. "Nothing has changed since we received the overseas orders, except that the old man has gone crazy as a doodle bug and thinks that he is John Wayne."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

It was less than a month before we were scheduled to ship out and because there was so much work to be done, all leaves had been cancelled. Over the phone, Janet suggested, "If you would let me drive your car, I'd come out there to see you. I could get there on a Friday and we would have a whole weekend to ourselves."

This was the best suggestion that I'd heard in a long time. I told the Captain about Janet coming and not only did I get the weekend off, but he extended it to a three-day pass which meant that I could leave on Thursday afternoon and not have to return until Tuesday morning. I'm sure that having been in the service as long as he had, He knew the importance of a few days with your loved one before going overseas.

When Janet arrived, I already had the weekend planned. I had reservations for two rooms at the Tahoe Inn, along with tickets for the stage show in the club. By taking the back route through Grass Valley, it was only an hour's drive through cool pine forests to the beautiful lake nestled high in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

The Tahoe Inn was situated astride the border and had a white line painted down the middle of the lobby indicating which half was in California and which half was in Nevada. There were wall to wall slot machines on the Nevada side where gambling was allowed. Our rooms were on the California side of the hotel.

The bell boy carried our bags to our rooms, which just happened to be next to one another and shared a common balcony. The balcony faced out toward the mountains on the other side of the beautiful blue waters of Lake Tahoe. What a setup, I could walk out my door, across the balcony and in her door. As soon as he left, we were in each other's arms. It wasn't long before her sweater and bra were on a chair and I was cuddling those beautiful breasts. The crisp mountain air caused little goose bumps to pop on them in spite of my efforts to keep them warm with my hands. I slid my hand between her legs, but as usual, she stopped me with that same old line, "Not until we are married."

"But darling," I protested. "We love each other and are going to get married anyway."

"I want to make love as badly as you, but I just wasn't brought up that way."

"But, I'm going off to the war. Suppose that I don't come back. What harm would just this one time cause?" I'd seen that old line used many times in the movies and it always seemed to work for them.

"We could get married in a few minutes in Nevada, and then this would be our honeymoon. We could make love all that we wanted to," whispered Janet.

I'll have to admit that the temptation was awfully strong to rush across the state line and tie the knot at one of the many wedding-while-you-wait places which lined the road, but I still wasn't sure that was what I really wanted to do. I knew that I loved her, or at least liked her a lot, but marriage is for a lifetime and I was far from certain what the next six months of my lifetime would be like.

"Janet, I thought that we'd been through all of this before and that we would get married as soon as I got out of the army. I realize that I've been extended three more months, but the news says that we should all be home by Christmas. Five or six months isn't that long to wait."

"I don't think that you love me at all," she replied as she began to cry.

I held her close for a while, with neither of saying anything. She then dried her eyes on the pillow case, gave me a long, wet kiss and said, "I suppose that I'm just being selfish and I couldn't stand it if something happened to you and I had refused you this way." With that, she stepped out of her skirt and panties and slipped between the sheets. The next three days were sheer bliss. We made love, took showers together, watched sunsets and made love some more. We even attended a stage show, more to recoup our strength than to see the show.

Janet dropped me off at Camp Beale in time to keep from being listed AWOL on Tuesday morning and drove away toward Texas. I was totally exhausted and my eyes were red-rimmed from lack of sleep. As she disappeared from sight, a sudden chilling thought occurred to me, suppose that after that weekend of lovemaking, she was pregnant. If she wasn't, it certainly was not because she hadn't had the opportunity. I knew that I hadn't used any sort of protection and didn't figure that she had either. At times when one is so totally involved in frantic lovemaking, they never think about things like that. In fact, had she turned around and came back, I would have married her on the spot out of sheer guilt.

I finally consoled myself with the thought that we were going to get married anyway and since I had only six months left to serve, I'd be back before the baby came. It would be one of those hurry-up weddings and people would talk, but who cares. I spent the rest of the day deep in thought about those three wonderful days of bliss and lovemaking.

We walked back into the barracks after retreat formation, dumped our field packs on the floor and locked our rifles in the rack which was standing in the middle of the room.

"Bullshit! Bullshit! Bullshit! Nothing but Bullshit!" shouted Lester Price. "Here it is Friday night, we just got paid and there's nothing to do except sit around here, scratch ourselves and look at each other."

"One week from today we will be on a ship bound for Korea," said Billy Bob. "There has got to be something that we can celebrate."

"Well, this is November third and it just happens to be my twenty-third birthday," I

replied. "You can celebrate my birthday if you like."

"Great idea," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "Let's go into town and have a going away party for Foreman's birthday. We can make it a party to remember."

"I know just the place to have the party," said Bobby Ward. "There is a restaurant over in Yuba City where they have an all you can eat seafood buffet for three bucks a head and half price drinks every Friday night. Must be something special for Catholics."

"Well, I'm certainly not Catholic, but I like shrimp as well as the next person," I said. "My Great Grandfather fought along side General Sam Houston at San Jacinto in the war with Mexico in an effort to drive the mackerel-snappers out of Texas."

"You say that you had ancestors who fought in the Texas Revolution?" asked Billy Bob. "I had relatives who died at Goliad."

"That's too bad," I replied. "Everyone who fought for the Republic of Texas received land in one form or another. Those who lived through the war got a League and a Labor while those who died got nothing but a three by six hole in the ground."

"What is a League and a Labor?" asked Red.

"They are Spanish land measurements," I answered. "A League is nearly three thousand acres and as Labor is about a hundred- eighty. How much each person actually received depended on the honesty and ability of the surveyor who marked it off."

"Your kinfolks still have that land?" asked Billy Bob.

"Hell no," I replied. "Swindler and shyster lawyers were out in force as soon as the war was over and came up with nearly every acre in their names within a year. When Great-grandpa Green Foreman died, he didn't have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of."

"How come your kin folks hated the Catholics so much?" asked Red Ryder.

"Well," I told him. "In 1825, when my kin moved west from Kentucky, the Mexicans and bead-counters had such a hold on Texas that no person was allowed to own land, have a business or even get married unless he was a Catholic. Being more or less good Methodists, a bunch of them got together and decided to kick a few asses and bring their own brand of religion to the state. They won the war, but while they were busy whipping Santa Anna and gaining independence for Texas, the Baptists and Philadelphia lawyers sneaked in and took over. Now they are just about as bad as the Catholics and Mexicans ever were."

"Know how to tell a dead lawyer in the road from a dead skunk?" asked Billy Bob.

"No, how?" replied Red.

"Ain't no skid marks in front of the lawyer," replied Billy Bob.

"A birthday party for you is a great idea," said Red Ryder. "But just how are we going to go about getting to town and back? Too bad that good looking girlfriend of yours isn't still here with your car."

"If she was, I'd have something to do which would be a lot more fun than hanging out with you guys."

"I'll bet that she gave you a real birthday present while you were up at Lake Tahoe for a whole weekend," said Billy Bob.

"Was it as good as she looks?" asked Red.

"I'll never tell," I replied as I tried to change the subject. "Wonder if we could get a taxi to

come out here after us."

"I'll bet that he didn't get any," said Lester.

"You'd lose," said Billy Bob. "When they got back, Foreman was so pussy-whipped that he could hardly walk and she had a smile on her face that an undertaker couldn't remove."

"Back to our original problem. How are we going to get to town for this party?" asked Red.

"A taxi would charge us an arm and a leg to come all the way out here, but I know how we can get to town and back," said Billy Bob. "There is a brand new Air Force bus down at the motor pool. It came in about a week ago and is just sitting there. We'll take it."

"You'll get your ass thrown in the stockade for stealing a bus," I told him.

"No problem, I won't be stealing it," said Billy Bob. "I'll just sign it out for a trip to town and list myself as the driver. I do it all of the time."

Twenty minutes later, Billy Bob pulled up in the shiny new blue bus. "Hop in," he yelled. "We got wheels and we got a party to go to."

We picked up half a dozen other members of the 1903rd who were trying to hitch rides and headed for the road to town. As we approached the main gate, an Air Force Policeman stepped out to stop us.

"How are you going to explain our using this bus to that guard?" I asked.

"Simple, just watch," said Billy Bob as he pulled to a stop and handed the trip ticket to the guard.

"What you going to town for?" asked the guard.

"Church bus," replied Billy Bob.

"This is Friday. What kind of church has services on Friday night and who is in charge of the trip?" asked the guard.

"It is some sort of a special Catholic service and Chaplain's Assistant Foreman, here is in charge," replied Billy Bob.

The guard handed the trip ticket back to Billy Bob and we pulled away. "I've been called a lot of things before, but never a Chaplain's Assistant," I said.

"Well, since this trip is to celebrate your birthday, I thought that I'd give you some of the credit," replied Billy Bob.

We dropped off our hitch hikers in Marysville and rattled across the bridge over the Feather River into Yuba City, where we located the restaurant and parked the bus. Six of us, Billy Bob, Lester Price, Arthur Arthur Arthur, Red Ryder, Bobby Ward and I headed for the door.

"Do you have a reservation?" asked the oily looking little character behind a desk at the door.

"Course we do, Boomer party of six," said Billy Bob. "I called for a reservation a couple days ago."

"Sorry," said the oily one, "I have no such party on the reservation list."

"What do you mean, you have no such party on your list?" shouted Billy Bob. "Do you realize who you are talking to? Just because we happen to be unlucky enough to be wearing military uniforms doesn't mean that we aren't important people. I am Billy Bob Boomer, winner

of the best all-round cowboy award at the Cheyenne Rodeo last year. This is Red Ryder, nationally known rattlesnake hunter and this is Arthur Arthur Arthur, a famous artist and Perry Como's nephew. We are all here to celebrate Chaplain's Assistant Foreman's birthday and we expect a table right now."

"Well, just a minute, gentlemen," said the head waiter. "I'll see what I can do."

A few minutes later, he returned, "I'm sorry for the error in your reservations. The owner told me that there would be a special party of six tonight, but he failed to give me the name. Please follow me, gentlemen."

"See there," whispered Billy Bob. "You can cover up just about anything if you shovel on enough bullshit."

We were shown past the long buffet table, piled high with foods from various oceans. There were bowls of boiled shrimp, plates of oysters, piles of crab legs and platters of fish of all kinds. A dozen or more kinds of salads filled one end of the table while breads and desserts occupied the other.

We were seated at a table which was far nicer than the others in the room. China plates with gold edges were flanked by three forks, three spoons and two knives. Each place was set with a wine glass, two goblets and linen napkins folded in the shape of little sailboats.

A waiter, who was wearing a plastic bow tie and a vest which was about two sizes too small, came to the table and told us with a strong French accent, "Gentlemen, my name is André and I will be your waiter tonight." He produced a match with a stick at least a foot long and lit several candles which stood in a brass candlestick in the middle of the table.

"I thought that this was one of those helpy-selfy deals where we could eat all that we could hold for one price," said Red Ryder.

"Oh, yes sir, this is our Friday night seafood buffet, but the management assigned me to this table as your personal waiter," replied André. "May I suggest a very nice 1939 vintage wine which was bottled under a private label and the owner keeps just for his special guests?"

"Pour us a slug of it," said Billy Bob. "If the stuff is good enough for the guy who owns this place, then it is bound to be good enough for us. I always liked private stock, whether it was booze, horses or women."

André returned with two very dusty bottles of wine, which he carried as if they might explode at any moment. He carefully removed the cork from one bottle and poured a small amount into a glass and handed it to Billy Bob.

"Is that all that I get?" asked Billy Bob, looking at the swallow of wine in the bottom of the glass.

"That is a sample of the wine to see if it meets with your approval, Sir," replied André.

Billy Bob tossed down the wine in a single gulp, thought a minute and replied, "It ain't Lone Star Beer, but I suppose that if it's the best you got, it will have to do."

André poured wine for each of us and said, "May I prepare your salads?"

"Well, if that is your job, Andy, then go right ahead and whip up salads for us."

"The name is André," corrected the waiter.

"Whatever, I certainly don't want to be the one who knocks you out of work," replied Billy Bob.

We finished our salads and André escorted us to the buffet table where we piled plates high with food. "Careful of those raw oysters," said Billy Bob. "They say that at least eight out of ten of them work and we might wake up so horny that we would be after anything that moves."

When we returned to the table, Lester Price raised his glass and gave a toast,

"Here's to Mahatma Gandhi,

Who woke up one morning with a dandy.

Called for his aide to send him a maid,

A sheep, a goat or anything handy."

We made countless trips to the buffet table while André opened a dozen or more dusty bottles of the 1939 vintage wine. He seemed to get a certain look of glee each time that a cork popped. Wine is like fog which will sneak slowly up on a person without their ever realizing. By this time, we were basking in the warm glow of fermented grapes and feeling no pain.

"What are the house rules about how many times we can go back for more food?" asked Red.

"I don't know, probably like down at the pool hall; one foot on the floor and one hour time limit," replied Billy Bob.

"I've been up there after more shrimp so many times that I am getting ashamed of myself," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "People are beginning to stare at me, so I think that I'll crawl there this time so no one will notice."

"The truth of the matter is that he's so drunk that he can't walk," said Bobby Ward.

Arthur Arthur Arthur slid from his chair and, holding his plate in his teeth, crawled across the floor and under the buffet table. His hand crept from beneath the tablecloth and began to grope around for the elusive shrimp.

André appeared instantly and tried to coax Arthur Arthur Arthur from his hiding place beneath the table while we roared with laughter. "Please Sir, you must come out from under there."

"I've been back so many times that people are looking at me," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "I wanted to do it this way so no one would notice."

"If you will come out from under the table, I will get you as many shrimp as you wish," said André, with a noticeable loss of his affected French accent.

We became aware of a considerable commotion which was taking place at the door. Three couples were there and evidently rather unhappy with the situation. Two of the men were fat, fifty and bald while the other was a tall, lanky type who was wearing a Boss of the Plains Stetson and a fancy embroidered western suit which flashed with hundreds of sequins. They had three twenty year old fluffs with them, each wearing a fur coat and sun glasses. We seemed to have become the center of attention as most of them were pointing in our direction.

The head waiter came to our table and said, "Gentlemen, there seems to have been a mistake and you will have to leave this table immediately."

"Why should we give our table to those three guys and their chippies?" asked Billy Bob.

"Because this table was reserved for them and I gave it to you by mistake," replied the head waiter. "I must insist that you leave immediately, or I will be forced to call the Military Police."

"Come on, Billy Bob," I said. "We've been thrown out of nicer places than this before. They can just take the table and go cram it. If they throw us out, then we don't have to pay the check." With that, we got up and headed for the door.

"Sir, your check," shouted André, who had completely lost his French accent in all the confusion.

"Screw you and your check," shouted Billy Bob as we charged out the door. "If you want to throw us out and give those bastards our table, then give them the check too."

We stumbled onto the bus and Billy Bob managed to get the engine running. André was waving the check in the air and trying to get the door of the bus open. "Youse worthless bastards owe me over two hundred bucks!" he shouted in his newly acquired accent, which somehow reminded us of Sergeant Schultz.

"Two hundred bucks!" shouted Red Ryder as we pulled out of the parking lot with André still in hot pursuit. "That must have been some awfully expensive wine, but I say that nothing is too good for Foreman on his birthday. Happy birthday, you worthless damn Texan."

We picked up several other soldiers who were hitching a ride back to the base and when Billy Bob pulled to a stop at the gate, the guard asked, "How did the church services go?"

"They went great," replied Billy Bob. "Chaplain's Assistant Foreman must have saved a hundred lost souls."

"Good for him," replied the guard. "By the way, did you happen to see six drunk soldiers while you were in town? We got a call from a restaurant in Yuba City that they ran out on a two hundred dollar check."

"It is just terrible that there are men who would do such a thing and bring disgrace to all of us who so proudly wear the uniform of the United States," I replied. "As Chaplain's Assistant, I feel that it is my duty to lead us in silent prayer for these wayward men. Will everyone please lower their heads and offer a silent prayer for these lost souls."

The guard lowered his head with us, and after several seconds, I said, "Amen, and bless them for they knew what they did."

The guard handed the trip ticket back to Billy Bob and we drove away. "I hope to hell that this bus is well grounded," said Red Ryder. "Lightning is bound to strike any second now."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

We were already tired and disgusted when we climbed off the busses which had transported us to the Army docks in San Francisco. We were in full battle dress, wearing steel helmets and carrying full field packs, rifles slung over our shoulders, bandoleers of ammunition hung around our necks and dragging our duffle bags. We looked for all the world like combat troops bound for the front lines. Colonel Hull was out in front, blowing his whistle, dragging his leg and yelling for us to fall into formation.

A hulking ship with peeling gray paint and huge blotches of rust was moored to the dock, awaited our arrival. The faded name "USNS General Neslon M. Walker" was painted on its bow. Two sailors watched our arrival from an dock-level hatchway which was opened in the side of the ship. The opening was large enough to drive a truck through and one could have stepped directly into the ship from the dock. We could see row upon row of stacked bunks inside the ship.

A long, narrow gangplank angled steeply upward from the dock to the top deck of the ship. There was a strong odor of diesel in the air around the ship and a number of workmen were using steam hoses to clean the red oxide protective coating which had been applied to combat the rust. We learned that it had just been removed from the fleet of mothballed relics which had been stored across the bay at Benicia since the end of World War Two.

"Follow me, men!" shouted Colonel Hull as he blew his whistle, waved his hand and limped off toward the gangplank, dragging his left leg in John Wayne fashion.

"Asshole!" whispered Billy Bob. "It is OK if that old son of a bitch wants to act like John Wayne, but does he have to embarrass the whole unit in front of the Navy!"

We struggled up the steep gangplank, puffing and sweating under the load of combat gear and heavy duffle bags. Up and up we climbed until we finally stood on the uppermost deck of the rusting scow. Colonel Hull marched across the deck to an open doorway and shouted for us to follow him. Inside the doorway, another steep stairway faced us, this time leading downward into the dark bowels of the ship. Single file, we stumbled and staggered down flight after flight of

steel steps, until we finally reached a number of long compartments, each filled with end to end bunks from floor to ceiling, stacked one above the other. Row upon row of dim bulbs protected by wire guards cast a yellow glow in the aisles between the bunks. Sunlight flowed into the middle of the huge compartment through the open hatchway where the same two sailors stood, watching us as we crammed ourselves into the narrow aisles.

"Why the hell didn't we just walk aboard through that door in the side of the ship, instead of climbing all the way up to the top deck and back down again?" asked Billy Bob in a voice loud enough for Colonel Hull to hear him.

"At Ease!" shouted Colonel Hull. "Everyone knows that when troops ship out, they always climb the gangplank; it's a military tradition!"

"Tradition, my ass," shouted someone from the rear. "You're a stupid asshole."

"Get that man's name and put him on report!" shouted Colonel Hull. But, finding the owner of the voice which made the salient remark in that crush of people was impossible.

"Each compartment holds 200 men," shouted Captain Sanders. "Pick out a rack and stow your gear on it. This will be your home for at least two weeks. Latrines are forward and aft. I want to see all sergeants on deck in thirty minutes."

The bunks were nothing more than frames made of steel pipe with a canvas cover stretched over them. They were six feet long and a bare twenty inches wide, spaced no more than eighteen inches from the one above or below it. Once we put all of the combat gear, rifle and duffle bag onto the bunk, there was no room left to lie down.

When all of the sergeants were gathered on deck, Captain Sanders said to us, "Men, conditions will be difficult at best during this trip. I am depending on you sergeants to assume your roles of leadership and maintain the morale of the men in your compartment. Each of you will be in charge of some detail while aboard and I expect you to see that it is done properly and without my having to become involved." With that little speech, Captain Sanders probably did more to draw the men of the 1903rd together than anything before.

The sun was a red ball in the west when the USNS General Nelson M. Walker wallowed beneath the Golden Gate Bridge and pointed its rusty prow toward Japan. When the sun rose over the stern the following morning, there wasn't a speck of land, another ship or even seagulls to be seen.

Arthur Arthur Arthur was leaning on a rail, staring blankly at the gray water rolling past, "Boy, I never knew that this much water existed."

Red Ryder, who had just come from the opposite rail, replied, "Yeah, and there is just as much more over on the other side."

Days came and days went while we ate food which tasted of diesel, drank coffee which smelled of diesel and listened to the incessant rattle of paint chippers as the sailors went about their work of changing the ship from a rust bucket into a ship of the fleet. About the only thing which broke the monotony was periods of sea sickness.

"You know," said Billy Bob one morning, "Being in the navy is as bad as being in jail. You chip the paint off one wall of your cell on Monday, and put on a new coat on Tuesday. Same goes for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. You don't have to work on weekends, but you still

can't get out of the cell. Bad as it is, being in the army beats the navy all to hell."

On the foggy morning of the fourteenth day, we awoke to find that the ship had slowed to a crawl. The water around us had changed from blue to a dirty brown and clumps of floating trash could be seen in all directions. Seagulls wheeled around the fantail and dove after scraps of garbage which the cooks dumped overboard. The air held the smells of strange land. A rope ladder was thrown overboard as a small yellow boat came along side. The pilot came aboard and took command of the ship; we were coming into Yokohama Harbor.

We moved forward at a snail's pace, then stopped dead in the water. We strained our eyes for a glimpse of land, but all that came within sight through the fog was a few small fishing boats. We would wave at the occupants, but they simply stared at us with stoic faces. As the day was approaching its end, two tug boats approached and nudged their blunt noses against our steel side. The stubby little boats belched smoke and water churned behind them as we moved slowly sideways to a dock which materialized out of the fog.

"Fall in and follow me!" shouted Colonel Hull as we hoisted our field packs, rifles and duffle bags. Back up the narrow stairways we climbed and then down the swaying gangplank we stumbled on legs which had become accustomed to the constant roll of the deck. "Line up single file, draw a box of C-Rations as you pass that truck and load onto the train."

The engine which was attached to the ancient cars, sat there like a huge animal, breathing coal smoke and making train noises. Aboard, we found that the hard wooden seats were designed for the proportions of the average Japanese and there was no place to store our gear. We sat in our tiny spaces, wearing our combat gear and holding our duffle bags between our knees. When everyone was aboard, the engine gave a couple shrill toots and puffed into the approaching darkness.

A Lieutenant came through the car, telling us, "Eat only the dinner portion of your C-Rations and save the breakfast portion for tomorrow morning. You will get a special treat tomorrow at noon as it is Thanksgiving and we will be served a full turkey dinner with all the trimmings."

We opened our boxes of C-Rations and read the instructions printed on the inside of the lid. "This package contains rations for one day for an individual soldier. Packages bearing the Number 1 are to be consumed for breakfast, Number 2 are for lunch and Number 3 are for dinner.

"Would you look at the date when this stuff was packed," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "This box has the date of September 8, 1943. That makes it eight years old, probably spoiled by now."

"Hell, yours is almost new compared with mine," said Billy Bob. "This box was put up in December of 1942."

"Would you look at the choices that I have for dinner," said Red Ryder. "I can have ham with beans, ground beef with beans or franks with beans."

"I got meatballs and beans and pork with tomato sauce and beans," replied Bobby Ward.

"What the hell, I have a can of beans with beans," said Billy Bob. "Wouldn't surprise me to find a can of peaches with beans. With all of these beans that we will be eating tonight, we'll all be farting like Filpot."

"Yeah, or like you did on that trip to California," I replied.

"Speaking of Filpot, wonder where he is now and what he is doing. You ought to know all about him, Foreman. He was an old buddy of yours from back home, wasn't he?" said Red Ryder.

"I saw the orders when they shipped him out of the 1903rd at Fort Leonard Wood, he was headed for the Laughing Academy at Fitzsimons Hospital in Denver." said Bobby Ward.

Some government shrink probably decided that the army was what drove him nuts, gave him a pension for life and sent him home. He is probably back in Stinnett right now, screwing his pigs and getting drunk every night while we are headed for Korea," I replied.

"Hell, knowing the Army, they have probably made him a Lieutenant by now," said Billy Bob.

The train huffed and puffed and rattled along in the darkness for about an hour, pulled onto a siding and stopped. The tiny bulbs which illuminated the cars dimmed and went out, leaving us in silence.

Billy Bob, who was leaning out the window, said, "Looks like we are here for the night, because the train crew just got off and left."

It was difficult to decide whether that night was equal to, better or worse than those had been on the rolling ship. Sleep comes with great difficulty when one is sharing a small, hardwood seat with a duffle bag, rifle and field pack. Sleep was also hard to come by when a passenger train would scream by about every ten minutes all night long.

"You'll have to whiz out the door because the shitter is stopped up and running over," reported Billy Bob as he returned to his seat.

"Hell, you Texans just aren't accustomed to the better things of life, like flush toilets," said Red Ryder. "There is a little lever down beside the pot, that you step on to dump it."

"Hell, I'm not that stupid," said Billy Bob. "The damn thing is jammed and won't work."

"When the train stops, the lever is locked so you can't dump the toilet while in the station," I told them. "Soon as the train gets moving again, you'll be able to use them."

The train crew returned at daylight, shook up the fire in the boiler and soon had steam squirting from every seam. When everything was up to power, they gave a couple toots on the whistle and puffed back onto the main tracks.

We opened our boxes of C-Rations and checked out what we would have for breakfast. "I got some powdered coffee here, but where do we get hot water to mix it with?" I asked.

"Use cold water, I suppose," replied Billy Bob. "After last night, cold coffee is better than no coffee at all."

"If you scrape the white coating off the chocolate bar, it ain't too bad," said Lester.

"I have some moldy old crackers and some peach flavored stuff about the consistency of an art gum eraser to spread on them," said Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"Well, at least we can look forward to a Thanksgiving dinner today," said Bobby Ward. "It is awfully hard to screw up a turkey."

Our train huffed and puffed along, pulling off and stopping on a siding about every twenty minutes to allow one of the streamlined passenger trains, which are the major transportation for the Japanese, to rip by. It was almost two in the afternoon, we pulled onto a

siding, next to an engine hooked to two cars which were obviously traveling kitchens of some sort. The kitchen cars were moved next to the rear two cars on our train and ramps lowered to make walk-ways between them. As soon as the occupants of those two cars had filed through and were served, the ramps were lifted and the kitchen cars moved forward to the next two cars. Since we were in the first car of the train, we would be the last ones to go through the chow line.

"Hope to hell that there is something left when they get to us," said Billy Bob.

Carrying our mess kits and cups, we walked into the tantalizing aroma of Thanksgiving back home. First, we came to a huge pile of roast turkey, consisting of nothing except drumsticks. Obviously, the better parts of those birds had been served elsewhere; but any part of a turkey beats cold beans with beans from a can. Next came the stuffing, candied yams, green beans and finally pumpkin pie. We filed back into our car in anxious anticipation of our meal.

My mouth watered as I picked up the drumstick to take a big bite. I bit down on the leg and it sprang back like chewing on a truck tire. I tried to wrench a piece of meat loose by clamping down with my teeth and twisting the leg. I was finally able to detach a piece of meat by sawing away at the leg with my pocket knife. The longer that I chewed on that rubbery piece of turkey, the larger it became until it seemed that I was trying to swallow a baseball. I looked around and everyone else was experiencing the same problems in trying to eat their tough drumsticks.

On the siding next to us, the cooks in the kitchen cars had lifted the ramps and were putting things away. Our windows were open as were those on the kitchen cars, so I took the offending turkey leg and heaved it across the space between the cars and back into the kitchen. Seeing me do this, everyone else in the car began to return their drumsticks in the same manner. As our train pulled from the siding, some eight hundred tough, inedible drumsticks flew through the air and returned to their home in the kitchen cars while the cooks frantically tried to stem the flow of returning turkey legs by closing their windows. We finished the rest of our Thanksgiving dinner while the train puffed its way toward the seaport town of Sasebo.

When the train reached Sasebo, it backed onto a dock next to a ship bearing the name, "Koanmaru" in both Japanese and English. Each of us was handed another box of C-Rations as we walked from the train to the ship, up a short gangplank and aboard.

The Koanmaru was built entirely of wood and the floors covered with mats made from rice straw. The ship was Japanese in every way. All signs were written in Japanese, all the bathrooms were fitted with Japanese fixtures and the crew was entirely Japanese.

There was much shouting in Japanese, gangplanks were raised, ropes were released and black smoke began to boil from the stack. We eased slowly from the dock, swung around and moved out of the harbor. There was ample room for us to pile our duffle bags, rifles and combat gear out of the way, so we sat cross-legged on the rice mats and opened the C-Ration boxes to see what had been packed in them eight or nine years ago.

Night came and the slow rocking of the boat combined with the nearly sleepless night on the train had everyone snoring in short order.

It was just turning gray in the east when whistles began to blow. "Everyone on their feet and in full battle dress," yelled Col. Hull. "We will be going ashore in Korea within the hour.

Everyone check his weapon and fix bayonets."

"What an Idiot," whispered Billy Bob. "What is he going to have us do, invade Pusan?"

The city of Pusan began at water's edge and crawled up over low hills. Smoke hung low in the sky and hundreds of small boats chugged their way toward fishing grounds a few miles off shore. The captain of the Koanmaru threaded his way past fishing nets and into the harbor. With a great amount of shouting and pointing, he brought us up against a long dock where a line of trucks sat waiting.

The gangplank had no more than touched the dock when Colonel Hull shouted, "Follow me, men!" as he charged off the ship with his rifle at the ready.

Within a few minutes, the entire unit stood at attention on the dock. An Air Force Colonel walked up, looked us over and said, "I am supposed to meet the 1903rd Engineer Aviation Battalion. Who are you?"

Col. Hull came to present arms with his rifle and replied, "The 1903rd Engineer Aviation Battalion reporting for duty, Sir! Lieutenant Colonel Hull Commanding."

"What the hell are you doing with all of that battle gear?" demanded the Air Force Colonel. "You are assigned to the Air Force, not the damn Marines. Who the hell do you think you are, John Wayne?"

"But Colonel," protested Col. Hull. "This is Korea and a war zone. I requisitioned combat gear for my men so we would be ready to handle any situation that we might find ourselves in when we landed."

"Bullshit!" bellowed the Air Force Colonel. "The front is two hundred miles north of here. The only way that you could get further from combat is to jump off the fucking dock and start swimming. Have your men throw that combat shit in a pile on the dock and get their asses aboard those trucks."

It was with the greatest pleasure that we tossed the field packs, ammunition belts, horseshoe rolls and other combat gear into a pile which became higher and higher. Just to think that we had been forced to drag all of that useless gear 12,000 miles because Col. Hull had seen that damn John Wayne movie.

As we were climbing aboard the trucks, we heard a lot of shouting as Japanese crewmen came running from the Koanmaru. We watched as it listed a bit and sank slowly until it rested on the bottom of the harbor, still tied to the dock. When we drove away, all that was above water level was the bridge and smokestack.

"I'm damn glad that we got here when we did," remarked Billy Bob. "It would have been a long swim if that old tub had decided to sink last night between here and Japan."

The convoy of trucks rattled through the stinking streets of Pusan, past a Korean Army Post and along the Naktong River for a few miles before it turned left across a bridge and onto a delta which was protected from flooding by a high dike. We met another convoy of trucks, bearing Marine Corps Insignia, approaching from the opposite direction.

"That is the First Marine Air Wing, departing from K-1 Airbase, where you are going," our driver told us. "You are taking over the base from them." As we entered the deserted base, we saw our trucks and heavy equipment standing in long lines. They had been shipped over ahead of us on a freighter in order to be here when we arrived. There were the piles of boxes which

contained all of our equipment, waiting to be unpacked.

A Pierced Steel Plank runway stretched nearly a mile in length and a hundred or more tents stood erect on wooden frames. Stovepipes from pot-belly heaters stuck through the top of each tent, some still sending a trail of smoke into the chilly air. Several buildings which the Marines had used as base headquarters stood on a small rise of land and other smaller buildings clustered around them.

"At least there is a lot more here than there was at Beale when we got there," remarked Major Parker.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

We climbed off the trucks and formed a battalion formation in the area between the flag pole and a building bearing a sign which proclaimed, "BASE HEADQUARTERS, First Marine Air Wing". Carrying a folded U.S. flag under his arm, Col. Hull ordered all staff officers to join him at the flag pole. With great pomp and ceremony, he pulled out the corners of the folded flag and attached them to the rings to the rope which flapped against the pole. Still grasping the folded flag, Col. Hull ordered, "Hand Salute". Every right hand in the unit snapped to right eyebrows as one of the officers briskly raised the flag. The flag unfurled as it rippled up the pole and a fresh breeze set it flapping against a blue Korean sky.

"Welcome to Korea, men. This is our new home," shouted Col. Hull as a titter of laughter ran through the assembled battalion. "At Ease, and no laughter. This is a serious moment."

"Hey, Colonel Asshull," shouted a voice from somewhere in the rear of the formation. "You got the friggin' flag upside down!" From that day forward, as long as I was in the unit, Colonel Hull's name was Colonel Asshull.

Much to our surprise, mail arrived on the next day after we did. I received two letters from my mother and a newspaper, but nothing from Janet. After all, more than a month had passed since our weekend at Lake Tahoe and I was anxious to know if it was going to result in a little surprise package.

Our first priority, before beginning the task of building a new runway, was to designate which buildings would be used for what purpose and get unpacked and into operation. The largest building, set in the form of a large letter "H" had been used by the Marines as Base Headquarters. It was only logical that it should also become our Battalion Headquarters. Directly across from it were several identical Quonset buildings which became Operations and Engineering, Battalion Supply and Communications. One large mess hall, which was located behind the headquarters buildings, would feed the entire battalion. Half a dozen smaller buildings became billets for officers holding the rank of Captain or higher while the junior officers had to live, barracks-style, in a larger building. At least none of the officers had to sleep in tents as did

the enlisted men.

Hundreds of boxes containing our equipment were moved to the buildings where they belonged and unpacked so we could get into operation as quickly as possible. I was helping separate the boxes which belonged to the Operations and Engineering Section when Billy Bob came by. He was driving a truck pulling a low-boy trailer. On the trailer was a huge crate marked "ROAD ROLLER". "Hop in and give me a hand with this crate," he yelled.

"Why did you ship something as heavy as a road roller in a crate?" I asked. "Why didn't you simply ship it on its wheels, along with the rest of the heavy equipment?"

"Wait till you see what is really in this crate," replied Billy Bob as he pulled to a stop behind the repair shop at the motor pool. "It is a very special road roller."

We hacked away steel bands, pulled dozens of nails and finally the end of the crate dropped open. Inside, chained securely to the floor, was Billy Bob's crazy-quilt Chevy; Old Paint.

"I wondered what you did with this thing before we left Beale," I said. "I knew that you didn't take it back to Texas and didn't think that there was anyone stupid enough to buy it."

"I knew that we were bound to need some wheels when we got here, so I just put Old Paint in a box and shipped him over," replied Billy Bob. "I'd like to see the Fort Worth National Bank try to repossess it from me over here."

There was a double row of square, four-man tents near the mess hall, so they set aside the first four of them for the cooks. Bobby Ward, Billy Bob, Arthur Arthur Arthur and I moved into the next tent in the row. Since Lester Price was the demolitions expert and worked with explosives in his job, he decided to set up his bunk in the shed where all of the unit's dynamite, TNT, black powder and other explosives were stored. Red Ryder took over a back room in one of the Quonset buildings as a photo laboratory and figured that an ideal place for him to sleep was in the darkroom. Who would ever think of looking for him there.

Near the officer's housing area, was the building which had been the Officers Club for the Marine pilots. The walls were decorated with paintings of bent-wing Marine Corsairs on strafing runs, dropping bombs on villages and shooting down Chinese Mig-15 Fighters. A fireplace stood at one end and a long bar ran across the other. It was made very clear from the beginning that this club was for officers only and enlisted men were far from welcome, even as bartenders. They hired a couple Koreans to mix drinks for them.

"If those damn officers can have their own private club, then why can't we have one for the enlisted men?" asked Billy Bob. "There is an unused building over near the control tower, which the Marines used as a ready room for their pilots. It would make a great enlisted club with a little work."

The word went out and every man offered to spend some of his off-duty time to make it the best enlisted club in Korea. Stone was hauled in and several people set about building a huge fireplace at one end of the building. It reached from floor to the ceiling and was wide enough to burn the largest of logs. Packing crates were salvaged for materials to build the bar, tables and chairs. Someone went to Pusan in a truck and came back with a genuine American juke box, complete with the latest recorded hits. No one ever asked where it came from and no such information was ever offered.

Hanging under the control tower was a traffic light which the Marines had used as an alert

signal. While the Marines were operating from the base, all that they had to do in order to know what the alert status was at any time was to glance up at the light to see if it was red, green or yellow. Since there were no longer airplanes on the field, the traffic signal had no purpose. Lester Price removed it from the tower and installed it as a decoration in the corner of the club.

"That is a genuine New York City traffic signal," he said. "You would not believe how sophisticated it is with all the timers, relays and other electrical equipment that is packed inside. It can be programmed to do just about anything with traffic at any time of the day or night. The only place that I ever saw one of these signals was when I went to school at the factory."

When he installed it in the club, the timers and switches were adjusted to turn the green light on at noon, when the club opened, and change to red at midnight when it was time to close. Fifteen minutes before closing time for the bar, the yellow light would begin to flash as a warning that it was time to buy that final round. During other times, it would change from green to yellow to red and back again, just like it had when installed in New York City.

Arthur Arthur Arthur agreed to paint a suitable mural on the long, back wall, but refused to say what he had in mind. He blocked off four large squares, each about seven feet high by eight feet wide. Above the first one, he lettered "STEVE CANYON". It was obvious that it was going to be a Steve Canyon cartoon, the most popular comic strip in the newspapers in 1951. Steve Canyon and Summer Olson had a hot and heavy thing going on at the time, however the newspaper censors weren't about to allow them to do anything more than hold hands and make moon eyes at one another. Arthur Arthur Arthur had other ideas.

We had been in Korea for almost two weeks and even though I had written to Janet four or five times, I had heard nothing from her. My mother mentioned in one of her letters that she had seen Janet driving down the street in my car, so that ruled out the possibility that she had an accident of some sort. I was rather irritated that she had not taken it back home as soon as she returned from California. I even considered trying to place a long distance call to her, but since such a call was very difficult to make due to the difference in time zones, I thought that I'd wait a few more days to hear from her.

Early one morning, well before the club was to open, Arthur Arthur Arthur picked up his brushes and announced that he was going to the club to work on the comic strip.

"You want a little company while you paint?" I asked.

"Nope, I want to do this without an audience. A great artist like me has to work alone," he replied. Two hours later, he returned, cleaned his brushes and put his supplies away.

"Care to fill us in on what you painted?" I asked.

"You will just have to go see for yourself," he replied. "A great artist like me never reviews his own work."

The suspense was just too much for us to wait until the club opened, so we took off in a bunch to see the results of Arthur Arthur Arthur's work.

In the first square, Steve Canyon was entering Summer Olson's living room. There was a very noticeable bulge in the crotch of Steve's pants as he said, "I've missed you, Summer Baby." She says, "Me too, it has been nearly three hours."

In the second scene, they are kissing while Steve pulls her sweater up with one hand

while slipping off her skirt with the other.

In the third scene, she is down to her panties and bra, and Steve has his shirt off. Summer is tugging at Steve's belt, saying, "Why in hell do you men have to wear clothes which are so hard to get off?"

The fourth and last scene, both are nude and Steve is humping Summer on the couch. She says, "Buzz me, Flyboy," and he is saying, "Hot Damn."

"Holy Cow," I said. "That is one Steve Canyon strip that will never be seen in the Stars and Stripes. I'll bet that old Milt Caniff never drew a strip with Summer Olson doing anything like that."

"If he did, I'll wager that he'd make a lot more money than he does now. Just think how well a whole comic book like that would sell," replied Bobby Ward.

"They'd have to keep them under the counter at the drugstore, like they do with some of the little Popeye and Olive Oyl and the Mutt and Jeff books that I've seen," I said.

"Better not let our Bible-thumping Chaplain see that or he will be in here with white paint, covering it up to save us from sin," said Billy Bob.

"What the hell," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "I simply painted what all of you horny bastards are thinking about every time that you read the strip. We know that Steve and Summer don't just sit around holding hands and breathing hard."

It was about two weeks into December when an urgent call was put out for all National Guardsmen to report to Battalion Headquarters. When they were in formation, Col. Hull announced, "There has been a mistake made by the Army. When they extended all of the draftees from fifteen to eighteen months, they did not realize that they could not do the same thing with us. We were called to active duty for fifteen months and can't be extended. All guardsmen must be discharged by the last day of December unless they volunteer to remain a minimum of two more years. Those of you who do not wish to stay, will be leaving for home in twenty-four hours."

A shout went up from the formation as they scattered to begin packing for the trip home. The only National Guardsman who chose to remain in the army was Col. Hull. He wisely decided that being a Lt. Colonel in the Army in Korea had far more to offer than being a civilian and reading water meters in Chicago.

Two days after the announcement, there was not a single company commander, supply officer or platoon leader left in the entire battalion. Every First Sergeant was gone, along with all of the other National Guard members who had received midnight promotions to sergeant on the day before they were activated. The 1903rd would never see full strength again.

As a Staff Sergeant, I was now one of the highest ranking enlisted men in the unit. Major Parker was not included in the group which could go home because he had been recalled from the reserves and had nearly eighteen months remaining on his enlistment.

Major Parker went to Col. Hull and said, "We have several enlisted men already in the unit who are capable of assuming the position left vacant by the National Guard sergeants who went home, so I suggest that we concentrate our efforts on securing experienced engineering officers."

"I'd been thinking the same thing," replied Col. Hull. "Move your qualified men into those slots as soon as possible and we will see if we can waive the time-in-grade requirements so we can promote to the rank which the position calls for. I have already contacted the 8th Army and they are transferring several engineering officers and four company commanders to us from Army units in Japan. One of the company commanders, a Captain Fish, is bringing his own First Sergeant with him. I'm told that Captain Fish, who is a West Point Graduate, is the same person who single-handedly won the football game against Navy in 1926."

"You mean that he is a West Pointer who has been in the Army for 25 years and is still only a Captain?" asked Major Parker. "He must be pushing fifty years of age by now. What's the matter with him and how does he manage to remain in the Army that long over-age in grade?"

Well," said Col. Hull, "I understand that he has a bit of a drinking problem which has kept him from getting promotions. Since he was responsible for winning the football game against Navy and most of his old classmates are Generals by now, no one is willing to be the person who boots him out of the Army. When he is assigned to a unit, they just sort of put up with him for a while and then transfer him on to another unit."

"He must have been some football player to have won the game against Navy all by himself," said Major Parker.

"Not really such a great player, just lucky," replied Col. Hull. "When I heard that the famous Captain Fish was being sent here, I did some research on him. Seems that he had sat on the bench for four years and had never played a single down in a game."

"It was the annual Army-Navy game of 1926 and Navy was leading by a score of 21 to 17. Navy had the ball, first and goal, on Army's two yard line with twelve seconds left on the clock. Most of Army's backfield had been injured, so the Army coach, figuring that it was the last play of the game anyway, sent Fish in as a defensive back."

"Both teams lined up; the ball was centered but the Navy quarterback, who planned to simply fall on it and let the clock run out, fumbled the ball into the end zone where it rolled to a stop at Fish's feet. The Midshipmen on the sidelines, thinking that the game was over, fired the touchdown cannon and turned the Navy goat loose on the field. Since no Navy player had touched the ball after it rolled across the goal line, it was still a live ball."

"Fish was bent down to pick up the ball and take it home as a souvenir when the Navy's goat saw his exposed rear end and came charging with its head down. Fish saw the goat coming and took off in a dead run down the field with the ball in his hand and the mad goat right on his heels. When Fish crossed the goal line at the other end of the field, the referees blew their whistles and gave Army a touchdown, which won the game for them. Even though time had run out, the ball was still alive and the touchdown counted."

"Considering what you have told me about Captain Fish, what do you know about the First Sergeant that he is bringing with him?" asked Major Parker. "He must be a real winner too."

"He is Sergeant Owl," replied Col. Hull. "Back in 1927, when Captain Fish received his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Army, he was provided with a Private as an orderly to polish his boots, press his uniforms and keep house for him. Orderlies in those days were known as "Dog Robbers" because they were robbing some dog of its rightful job. Owl had just joined the Army and was assigned to Fish as his orderly and has been with him ever since. Each time

Fish was assigned to a new unit, he took Owl along with him. Now and then, he would managed to get a promotion through for Owl before his ineptness was discovered. Sergeant Owl will be the new First Sergeant and Captain Fish the Commanding Officer for Headquarters Company until we can find a unit where they aren't known and get rid of them."

Major Parker called me into his office. "As you know, Sergeant Nerdlinger went home with the rest of the National Guard people, so as of right now, you are Operation Sergeant. It is a demanding job, but I have been observing you and feel that you can handle it. I can't promise how long it will take to get you promoted to Master Sergeant, but Colonel Hull said that he would try to get a waiver of the time-in-grade requirements to get you promoted."

Suddenly, I found myself in charge of the Surveying, Demolition, Soils Testing, Drafting and Photo Sections. I had my speech all prepared when I called all the people in my sections together.

"Well, guys, we managed to make it through basic training at Fort Leonard Wood in spite of people like Lieutenant High and Sergeant Schultz and we did a credible job in bringing Beale back to life. Major Parker just put me in Nerdlinger's job and I'm going to have to depend on each of you to help me get it done."

"What the hell," said Red Ryder. "If a jerk like Nerdlinger could handle that job, then a stupid Texan shouldn't have any problem with it. All that you need is a good supply of comic books to keep you busy and out of our way so we can do our jobs."

One of the benefits of being in Battalion Headquarters was the fact that you got your mail shortly after it came in and didn't have to wait until just before the evening meal. Bolinger, the mail clerk, dropped by S-3 with our mail and handed me a couple letters and a picture post card. It was one of those cards with a color picture of a motel which are given out free to all their guests. It was from the Bide-A-Wee Motel in El Paso. A little arrow pointed to a circle around one of the doors with a notation, "Our Room".

I turned the card over and read it, "Dear Jim. Just a note to tell you that Bucky and I just got married and are on our honeymoon. Bucky's tires were so thin that we drove your car and someone stole it from right in front of our door at the motel. Hope you have good insurance. I was going to send your ring back, but we had to sell it to pay for bus tickets home. Your Friend, Janet Groves."

"Well, if that's not a hell of a note," I said to myself. "Janet dumps me and marries old duck footed Bucky, the bugger digging jock strap washer. She must have wanted to get married awfully bad to settle for him. I've heard of guys getting a Dear John letter, but I got a Dear John picture postcard." For some reason, the news of her marrying Bucky gave me far more relief than heartache, but I sure am going to miss that car.

We had just finished breakfast and were preparing to go to our various jobs when a whistle screamed in the street.

"What the hell," said Billy Bob. "Must be some sort of emergency for someone to call a formation at this time of day; better get our asses out there on the double and see what it's all about."

As we jockeyed into formation in the company street, we saw the one responsible for all the noise from his whistle. He was black as the ace of spades, about five feet tall and weighed no more than ninety pounds, including his brass thunder whistle. Above a dozen hash marks, indicating his many years of military service, on his sleeve were six stripes and a diamond. Behind him stood a W. C. Fields look-alike with gray hair and wearing captain's bars. The Captain stood at least six feet, weighed three hundred pounds and had a huge red nose as big as an apple.

"I am First Sergeant Owl," said the owner of the whistle, "And this is Company Commander Fish, the man who single-handedly won the football game against Navy in 1926."

"Is this really our new CO and First Sergeant, or some's idea of a joke?" whispered Billy Bob, who was standing directly behind me.

"Must be some comedy team that the USO has sent over," I whispered over my shoulder.

"At Ease, you two sergeants, or I will have your asses on report," shouted the owner of all the hash marks. "Captain Fish has a few words for you."

The rotund captain staggered forward, reeled back and forth a bit, trying to form some words, and slurred "I'm Captain Fish, and I scored a touchdown and won the game against Navy in 1926. You do what First Sergeant Owl tells you and we'll get along just fine."

"He must drink like a fish, cause it isn't even seven in the morning and he is already drunker than shit," whispered Billy Bob.

First Sergeant Owl stepped back in place and continued, "Each and every tent leader for each and every tent will report to supply and draw a can of D, D and T. You will then sprinkle this here D, D and T through the cracks in the floor of each and every tent and around the door of the tent. There is an insect in the company area which is biting the E M of the 1903rd and causing them discomfort and misery. This here D, D and T will drive this insect away."

By this time, everyone in the formation was doubled over with laughter. First Sergeant Owl continued, "Don't laugh, he's out there and I plans to get him."

"Hell, I thought that the D, D and T he was talking about was a railroad," said Arthur Arthur.

"Let's have some order here," shouted Sgt. Owl. "I have some more announcements to make. Each and every one of you were issued a new fur cap last week, but you are not authorized to wear fur caps until the first of January. These are special cold weather caps and if you wear them now, you might get a bad cold and end up on sick call, and if there is anything that I can't stand, it is people going on sick call for a cold.

"Wear them? Hell, I thought they were to sleep with," shouted Billy Bob.

"One other thing," continued the Owl. "We have had reports that there is a North Korean pilot, who is known as Piss Call Charlie. He usually comes in just as each and every one is going into the mess hall and drops some bombs. Each and every one of you should be alert for this pilot and report him immediately if you see him. You are dismissed."

"Is each and every one dismissed?" someone shouted.

"What a pair of assholes," said Billy Bob as we left for our jobs. "Wonder where they got them; they must both be pushing fifty if they are a day."

"Sergeant Owl said that Captain Fish had won a football game against Navy in 1926,"

said Bobby Ward. "Hell, I wasn't even born then."

"No wonder he could win a football game," said Billy Bob. "The drunken old fart is built like a football. The rest of the team probably rolled him across the goal line."

"Do you think that there is any such person as the Piss Call Charlie, that he mentioned?" asked Billy Bob.

"Hell no!" I replied. "There has been some mythical enemy in every war. During the first world war, it was the fictitious General Heerman. No matter what happened or what went wrong, they could always say that it was General Heerman. During World War Two, they had these little things that they called Gremlins. In Korea, we have Piss Call Charlie. There is no more a Piss Call Charlie than there is one of Billy Bob's Unihorns."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The phone on my desk rang, "This is Colonel Hull, would you drop over to my office. I have a special project for you to take care of."

That's just what we need, another project of some sort. I wonder what kind of a Mickey Mouse thing he wants built now. They have had the carpenter shop so busy building writing desks and foot lockers for the officers that they can't get anything else done.

"You are the first to hear about this," said Col. Hull as I stepped through his door. "Bob Hope and his troupe is coming over here to do some special Christmas shows and one of them is going to be held right here at K-1. He will fly in, do a morning show on Christmas Eve and then fly on to Seoul for another show in the afternoon. What I need for you to do is design and get a raised stage built for him to perform on. It should be at least fifteen feet wide, ten feet deep and with steps at both ends. It needs to be built on the ramp, just in front of the control tower so there will be plenty room for people to sit."

"I'll take care of that, and we will probably need to get the rest room under the tower cleaned up too. I'll also see that the back room at the enlisted club is set up for him to use as a dressing room," I replied. "Anything else, Sir?"

"Yes, one other thing, send Sergeant Ryder to see me. I want to talk with him about starting a unit scrapbook and photo album, and what could be better than the Bob Hope show to start it off with."

"Hey, Red," I shouted through the closed door to the darkroom. "The Colonel wants to see you."

The door open an inch, "What the hell have I done to have the old man on my ass?" asked Red.

"Nothing like that," I replied. "Guess who is coming right here for Christmas."

"Santa Claus?"

"Nope, bigger than that. Guess again."

"Bigger than Santa Claus, must be Filpot."

"Hell no! Not Shoat Filpot either," I replied. "Bob Hope is coming here and the old man wants you to start a photo album and scrapbook."

"Bob Hope coming here, Bullshit! That will be the day," said Red. "Bob Hope wouldn't come anywhere near this dump. After all, there isn't a General within miles and it's the big brass who Hope entertains, not enlisted peons like us."

I roughed out a sketch of the stage that Col. Hull had requested and handed it to Arthur Arthur to draw up. Just as he finished, Col. Hull stepped into my office, wanting to see it.

"This looks just fine except, I just got some more information about the show and the stage is going to have to be made a bit larger," he said "In addition to Hope, Teresa Brewer is coming along. Better make the stage at least twenty by sixteen feet. Bring me the plans as soon as they are done. You will also have to arrange for two dressing rooms."

I sketched the larger stage and gave it to Arthur Arthur Arthur, telling him, "Teresa Brewer is also coming, so the stage will have to be bigger."

"Teresa Brewer is coming here!" shouted Arthur Arthur Arthur. "She is an absolute, living doll. She can put her shoes under my bunk any time that she wants to."

Stage plan number two was finished and I took it to Col. Hull.

"Glad you are here," he said. "I was just going to call you. Teresa Brewer isn't coming now, but Marilyn Monroe is, along with a small band. Better make the stage at least thirty feet wide and twenty feet deep."

I handed the new sketch to Arthur Arthur Arthur, saying, "Back to the drawing board. Teresa isn't coming, but Marilyn Monroe is, along with a small band."

"I wish that he would make up his mind as to what size stage he wants so I could get it done," replied Arthur Arthur Arthur.

I was just passing the flag pole on my way to see Colonel Hull with drawing number three when he stepped from the door of Battalion Headquarters. "There you are, Foreman. I was on my way over to see you. I just got word that Hope is bringing Marilyn Monroe, plus Les Brown and his full band. The stage will have to be at least fifty feet wide and forty feet deep. The back half will need to be raised a foot higher than the front to serve as a bandstand and a backdrop will have to be added. We will also have to build a special stand to seat the Generals who will also be coming here to see the show."

"How many Generals?" I asked.

"Better make it half a dozen," replied Col. Hull

"Art, you aren't going to believe this," I said as I stuck my head into the drafting room.

"I know, draw that damn stage again," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "Why don't we just sit on our asses for a couple hours and let the old man make up his mind about what he wants. It will probably save two or three more changes."

"I think that this will be the last one," I replied. "We now have Hope, Marilyn Monroe and Les Brown with his whole band, along with a half dozen Generals. Who else could possibly be added?"

The phone rang, "Make that a dozen Generals in the reviewing stand," said Col. Hull.

"Make it a dozen Generals," I shouted to the drafting room.

"You will lose your bet about Bob Hope coming here," I shouted to Red through the

closed darkroom door. "There will be at least a dozen generals here."

"I'll believe it when I see old Ski Nose walk off the plane," came back through the door.

Three minutes later, the phone rang again, "Senator P. Clayton Twilliger, from Alabama, will also be in the reviewing stand," said Col. Hull.

"Add one Bowl Weevil Senator in the reviewing stand," I shouted to Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"And a partridge in a pear tree," sang Arthur Arthur Arthur.

Col. Hull looked at stage plan set number four and reviewing stand plans number two for a few minutes and signed his name in the lower corner. "Get busy building this as soon as possible as we have only eight days until Hope will be here."

"We can tear down the old Fire Station to get the lumber we need and start building tomorrow. No way could I get a requisition through for new lumber and start building it before next summer."

"Scratch one Fire Station," replied Col Hull.

I must have had fifty men, who had been pulled from the runway project, tearing down the old Fire Station and building the stage and reviewing stand. I looked up to see Col. Hull bounding up in his Jeep for at least the fiftieth time since we started construction.

"What color?" I asked.

"Blue," he replied. "But, how did you know that I was coming to tell you to paint it?"

"Just a lucky guess," I replied. "But we don't have any blue paint. How about olive drab; got lots of that, or yellow."

"What color would you have if you mixed olive drab and yellow together?" asked Col. Hull.

"Sort of a baby-shit brown," I replied.

"Paint it OD and trim it in yellow," he said.

On December 23rd, the job was finished. The stage was genuine Army olive green in color with bright yellow trim. Red, White and Blue bunting hung from the backdrop and Arthur Arthur Arthur had lettered a huge sign which read, "WELCOME BOB HOPE".

On the morning of December 24th, every member of the 1903rd pulled out his dress uniform and did his best to remove the wrinkles which had been accumulating while they had been stored in the bottom of duffle bags for the past two months. A powered street sweeper ran up and down the ramp, whisking away the layer of dust which had settled during the night.

Staff cars began arriving, carrying Bird Colonels and Generals. Jeeps laden with Majors and Captains drove up. There were Navy Officers, Air Force officers, Marine Corps officers and Army officers. A small twin-engine Beechcraft landed and as it taxied up, the pilot placed a red flag containing two gold stars in the bracket above the left window.

Billy Bob remarked, "There's enough brass around here to make a radiator for a Maxwell.

"If a war should break out someplace, there wouldn't be anyone to run it. They are all here," I said.

Trucks and busses emerged from the trail of dust which marked the route of the road to Pusan. Hundreds of servicemen, representing not only the US but several other countries

supplying men to the UN forces, arrived for the big show.

A large number of civilians, both Americans and local, began arriving. Several nurses in their starched white uniforms stood in one group.

"I'll bet a nurse could make a hell of a lot more money thrashing mattresses over here than she could sticking needles in butts," remarked Billy Bob.

"And they probably do," replied Red.

A complete Army Band stepped from its bus, set up to one side of the stage and began to tune their instruments. A huge truck, pulling a trailer which sprouted antennas and speakers from every corner pulled up on the other side.

A generator fired up in the trailer and military marching music began to belch from the speakers. At least three thousand people had gathered for the show.

"How about that?" asked Billy Bob. "They send a band and leave them sitting there while they play records. Just like the Army."

There were UP reporters; there were AP reporters, and there were reporters from Stars and Stripes. It seemed that every 4 X 5 Speed Graphic and 16mm movie camera in Korea was there.

"Well, it looks as if I was wrong about Bob Hope coming," said Red. "Guess that I'd better get positioned out front with all those other photographers if I am going to get any photos."

The music ceased and a voice came on the speakers, "We are in radio contact with Bob Hope's pilot and they are now crossing the east coast of Korea. They should be here in half an hour."

We clustered in small groups, waiting for the arrival of the famous Bob Hope and his troupe. Photographers jostled for positions to give them the best shots. Light readings were taken and cameras checked and rechecked. You could feel the anticipation flowing through the crowd.

Then, from the east, came the roar of airplane engines. All eyes strained to get the first glimpse of their arrival. Over the horizon came three shining Lockheed Constellations flying in a loose formation. Their spinning propellers reflected the early morning sun. They were being escorted by a dozen Marine Corsairs, flying in tight formations.

Six F-80 Shooting Star jet fighters zipped back and forth, trailing black smoke from their tailpipes. The Constellations made a large circle around the field while the formation of Corsairs, with their huge engines bellowing at full power, buzzed the runway and pulled up in an arc which took them to a position high above the Constellations. The Shooting Stars swished past the runway at five hundred feet of altitude. The reviewing stand was packed with high-ranking officers, all watching the airplanes through binoculars. Thousands of cameras clicked away at the circling airplanes, however due to their high altitude, they would appear only as specks on the prints.

We stood in awe as one of the Constellations swung out over the ocean, dropped its landing gear and lowered its flaps for a landing. As the Lockheed, with its three rudders standing high in the air, came gliding in over the waves at the end of the runway; the roar of its four mighty engines suddenly increased and the landing gear folded out of sight. The pilot abandoned his approach and climbed away from the field. When he reached the altitude where the other two ships were circling, they made one more pass across the field as a group and set a course to the

north. We stood there and watched them disappear.

A Sergeant ran from the communications trailer, saluted the dozen or more generals on the reviewing stand and spoke briefly with them. A Captain, who was obviously from Special Services, returned to the trailer with him and made an announcement over the PA system. "The pilot of Bob Hope's airplane called on the radio and said that it would be too dangerous for them to land an airplane that big on a runway such as this, so they have gone directly to Seoul. However, so you will not be disappointed, I am going to personally send a special USO Show, which is waiting in Pusan right now, to entertain all of you brave fighting men. The show will go on immediately after noon."

The Generals left the reviewing stand and departed in their airplanes and staff cars, the Captains left in their jeeps and everyone else loaded back aboard their trucks and busses. The nurses and the civilians disappeared. The band returned their instruments to their cases and left.

"See there," said Red Ryder. "I was right. I knew damn well that Bob Hope would never come here."

"But the Captain from Special Services said that he was sending a special USO Show out here right after noon," I replied.

"I'll bet that the show that he is sending will be a real winner," said Red. "Did you notice that every one has left except for us, even that Special Services Captain who made the announcement bugged out."

Perhaps a hundred men were there after lunch to see the replacement show. A weird assemblage of musical instruments stood on the stage. We took our places on the ramp and a strange little man came from behind the backdrop. He hoisted the collection of drums, horns, bells, whistles and other musical gadgets onto his shoulders and introduced himself as George-the-Great and his One-Man-Band. Then he strapped a pair of cymbals to the inside of his knees and began to play his musical junk pile.

He began his show with a rendition of Jingle Bells, followed by five or six other melodies, all which sounded exactly alike. He finished off his part of the show by telling several very old jokes. We laughed at the jokes, mostly out of sympathy for the guy. Then he introduced the second act, which he called "Erma and Her Magic Dancers".

A short, fat lady, probably the wife of the One-Man-Band, came out carrying a fiddle. She began to saw away on the fiddle, which reminded one of the sound of cats being beaten to death, while George-the-Great shoved a couple scruffy old red hens onto the stage. They began to jump and hop around to the music. The whole show was over in about twenty minutes, which was just about all that we could take anyway. They received their polite applause, got back on the bus and left.

"You mean that all we get as a replacement for a Bob Hope show is a One-Man-Band and a dancing chicken act?" asked Billy Bob.

"The lady with the chickens certainly was no Marilyn Monroe," I said. "Fact is, she was so damn ugly that she would make Eleanor Roosevelt look good. Up till now, Old Lady Roosevelt was the ugliest woman that I ever saw."

"Hell, even the chickens were better looking than that old broad. The club is open, what say we go get roaring drunk," said Billy Bob.

Lots of booze passed across the bar, but it failed miserably when it came to producing the desired level of Christmas spirit. It was around eight that night when Billy Bob said, "I'm getting drunker than hell, but I'm not enjoying it."

"Do you realize that this is the second Christmas in a row that we haven't been home?" I asked.

"I'm sort of getting used to having Christmas screwed up by the army," he replied. "What did you get from that good looking girlfriend of yours?"

"About a week ago I got a Dear John Picture Postcard from her. She mailed it to me from her honeymoon with the dumbest shit-face in the world."

"It would really take something special to make me forget that ugly broad and her damn dancing chickens," said Billy Bob as he tried to change the subject by ordering another round of drinks.

Someone burst through the door, shouting, "The officer's club is on fire. They lit the candles on their Christmas tree and the whole place went up in flames!"

"Think that we ought to go up there?" I asked.

"I knew that something good was bound to come out of a day as bad as this one has been," said Red. "But I never thought that it would be anything as good as the officers burning down their own watering hole. Damn, it tickles the shit out of me to see officers get the short end of a stick now and then."

"Why should we go. We ain't got no wieners or marsh mallows to roast," replied Billy Bob. "If we go up there, those damn officers will probably want us to help fight the fire."

"Why don't we do our part by going up and pissing on the embers?" asked Bobby Ward. "At least it would show them how we feel about them and their damn private club."

"Know what," said Lester. "Since it's Christmas and all that, and the officers burned their place down; we really ought invite the them to come down to our club. Some of them, like Major Parker, are pretty straight shooters."

"Suppose Captain Fish shows up, he'll drink every drop in the house," said Billy Bob.

"Long as they pay for what they drink, I say that we invite them here," said Lester.

Several of us walked up to where most of the officers in the unit were standing around the smoking remains of what had once been their private watering hole. Snow was beginning to fall, erupting into little curls of steam as each flake met its death on a glowing ember.

"Sorry about fire," I said to Major Parker. "We'd like to invite all of you down to the enlisted club if you care to finish your party."

"I don't feel much like a party, but I will take you up on the invitation for a drink," he replied.

Major Parker and I walked back to the enlisted club. "What you drinking, Major?" I asked as I motioned him to a table near the fireplace.

"Scotch on the rocks," he replied.

"Double?" I asked.

"At least a double after everything that has happened today. I thought that nothing could be worse than that dancing chickens, but I suppose that burning down the club tops even that disaster," he replied.

We were joined by Billy Bob, Lester and Red Ryder as we laughed and talked. Major Parker looked at the Steve Canyon comic strip on the wall and said, "I always wondered if Steve ever got in Summer's pants, and now I know."

"We are just hoping that the Chaplain never sees it," I replied.

"Hell, that pious old bastard would probably get a kick out of it. You knew that he just got himself a Korean house girl, didn't you," replied the Major as he finished his drink and stood to leave. "Thanks for the Scotch, Foreman. I'm not feeling very festive tonight, so I think that I'll just wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and head for the sack."

Col. Hull was huddled with half a dozen other officers over a table in the corner, apparently not wanting to associate with their lowly enlisted hosts. They had their heads together in a guarded conversation which ended abruptly anytime that someone walked near.

"Wonder what Colonel Asshull is plotting," said Billy Bob.

"I'll bet that he is up to no good," replied Red Ryder. "I've never trusted that crooked bastard and never will."

Bobby Ward spoke up, "I got a look at his 201 file and did you know that he promoted himself from 1st Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel on the day before the National Guard was activated. Not only that, but he never made it above the rank of Corporal while on active duty during World War Two."

Two days later, we were to learn the sad implications of that conversation. Sergeant Owl gave us the news, "Captain Fish asked me to inform the enlisted men that Colonel Hull has decided that, since the officers have had a New Years party planned for several weeks and their club burned, they are going to use the your club for it."

"Are we invited to the party?" I asked.

"No, it is a private party for officers only," replied Owl.

"You mean that we are being kicked out of our own club on New Years Eve, so the officers can have a party?" asked Billy Bob.

"Not just for New Year, but permanently. It is an officers club now," replied Sergeant Owl.

"Those miserable, thieving sons of bitches have simply taken our club away from us and there isn't a damn thing that we can do about it," stormed Red.

"I'd like to take a bulldozer and run it right through the place," said Billy Bob.

"Careful what you say, Billy Bob, little owls have big ears," I warned him.

"Why don't you guys cool it and let me handle the matter. I know just what to do," said Lester.

For the next three days, Lester would leave his tent early each morning with pockets bulging. When he returned an hour later, they would be empty.

"Care to let me in on what you are doing or is it better that I don't know?" I asked.

"I have no idea what you are talking about," replied Lester. "All that I can say is that the Officer's New Years Party ought to be one that they will never forget."

The last day of 1951 arrived at K-1 Airbase, but there was little joy among the enlisted men.

"This place is the pits without our club," said Billy Bob. "Let's get in Old Paint and go

into Pusan or someplace. Even going over to the village to visit Kim Luck and his bunch of ugly whores would beat hanging around here."

"I think that we should stick around," I suggested. "I have a feeling that things will liven up considerably around midnight."

At around eight, a bus pulled in, stopped at what used to be the enlisted club and about thirty girls got off. Laughing, squealing and giggling, they entered the building.

"Would you look at that," said Billy Bob. "They have shipped in a complete whorehouse from Pusan for their party. What a bunch of bastards. I hope that every one of them comes down with a good dose of the clap."

"The officers must really be a bunch of dirty old men," observed Ward. "Not a single one of those girls could be a day over fifteen."

A few minutes later, a truck pulled up and half a dozen Koreans jumped to the ground. The hauled musical instruments into the club. In short order, the music began and Billy Bob became even more despondent over the loss of our club. "I still think that I'll fire up a bulldozer and run it right through the middle of the damn place."

"A stupid act like that will get you nothing except a trip to Leavenworth," said Arthur Arthur. "I think that Lester has something special in mind when midnight arrives. I'm going to stay awake just in case he does."

"Where is Lester?" I asked. "I haven't seen him since dark."

"He's probably just sitting alone in his tent, playing with his explosives," replied Bobby Ward. "Some times, I think that he had rather be with his dynamite than with people."

We huddled around the pot belly stove and sipped bourbon from canteen cups. Just before midnight, we left the warmth of our tent and walked down the street and stood outside of the club. The building blazed with lights and rocked with music and laughter.

"Miserable, thieving sons of bitches," muttered Billy Bob.

At ten seconds before midnight, the green light in the traffic signal flicked off and the yellow light began to tick off the seconds to midnight. The officers started their countdown to the new year, "Nine, eight, seven."

Lester, who appeared out of the darkness, said, "I think that we should be a little further away and out of sight at the stroke of midnight."

We stepped out of the street and between some dark tents as the officers continued counting, "Five, four, three."

"Two, one, Happy New Year!" they shouted. The band stuck the first notes of a Korean version of Auld Lang Syne. The juke box, which had stood silent during the party, came to life. Its neon tubes flashed, electric motors whirled and a record dropped onto the turntable. The most popular record in Korea during that time, "Tokyo Shoeshine Boy", bellowed from the speakers, completely drowning out the band.

Suddenly, the juke box began to shake and gyrate as if it were a living thing. A cloud of white smoke spewed from beneath it, filling the room with a choking cloud. "Tear gas!" gasped one of the officers and everyone dashed for the door.

The girls scrambled onto the bus and the driver started the engine. "Look," yelled one of the officers. "The girls are getting away."

The band staggered from the cloud of tear gas, dragging their instruments with them. They tossed them onto their truck and roared away into the darkness.

It became very quiet for a few seconds and the coughing and gagging officers, who were huddled in a group some fifty yards away, stared at the haunted building. Without warning, a single, loud explosion sent the corrugated steel roof flying into the air. As the roof reached the apogee of its flight, four simultaneous blasts erupted, neatly blowing away each corner of the building. The four walls sort of melted slowly inward toward each other, reducing themselves to nothing more than sticks of kindling. The splintered boards and corrugated steel of the roof crashed down on the shattered walls. Finally, with a shuddering blast, the fireplace became a storm of flying stones and all was quiet.

"What the hell happened?" asked one of the stunned officers.

"My God, I never saw anything like it," said another.

"Must have been an air raid or else we have just been shelled by artillery," gasped a shell-shocked Lieutenant.

"It's a wonder that we weren't all killed," said another.

"Was anyone hurt," asked Col. Hull.

"Not a scratch," answered one of the officers. "But the girls all ran away when the tear gas came; and we had already paid them for all night."

"The band is gone too," said another.

"Must have been Piss Call Charlie," said Colonel Hull. "But he usually comes early in the morning. Who would have expected him at midnight."

"It's got to have been Piss Call Charlie," replied another officer. "We're at least two hundred miles from any enemy artillery."

"What amazes me," said Col. Hull, "Is how he managed to get in here, drop his bombs and escape without being heard.

Fingers of flame began to lick at the shattered lumber and soon the whole pile of rubble was a blazing inferno, filling the night with smoke and dancing red flames.

"The fire will take care of any remaining evidence," said Lester.

"What evidence?" asked Billy Bob. "I thought that Piss Call Charlie bombed it."

"I told you that a New York City traffic signal could be programmed to do just about anything," whispered Lester. Combined with several yards of primer cord and a few pounds of TNT, it allowed me to administer a bit of justice where justice was due. Too bad that it and the juke box had to go along with the building. Happy New Year."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

No one seemed to know where they came from or how they got there, but there was about a dozen wild monkeys which ran free around K-1 Airbase. They certainly weren't native to Korea, so must have been brought in as pets by earlier occupants of the base. These filthy little creatures were about the size of a large house cat. They had tiny little heads in comparison to the size of their bodies and bright red butts. They were as wild as a box of snakes and spent most of their time picking fleas off one another or playing with themselves while perched on top of the old control tower. If they weren't scampering around the control tower, they were skittering along the wires from the top of one power pole to the next, looking for some kind of mischief to get into.

These monkeys were notorious for entering deserted tents and literally wrecking the place in search of candy, cookies or other goodies. Some people put out food and tried to coax the little critters to them, but they were extremely wary and wouldn't come down from their lofty perches to get it unless everyone moved at least fifty feet away.

One morning, I saw Red Ryder walking down the company street with one of the monkeys perched on each shoulder. They seemed to be very happy and completely at ease. "How in the world did you get those wild things to sit on your shoulders?" I asked.

"No problem," he replied. "I told you guys that I could tame anything and these monkeys are much easier to handle than some other animals that I've dealt with."

"Now that you have them tamed, what are you planning to do with them?" I asked.

"I'm going into the monkey business," he replied. "You know that most of the airplanes that fly to Korea from Japan or Formosa have to land here for fuel before going on north. I plan to sell at least one monkey to each of them as a mascot."

"From what I've seen, those damn monkeys are pretty wild and mean. How do you go about catching them?"

"It's simple to catch a monkey, you just gotta be smarter than it is," replied Red. "You take a box and cut a hole in it just big enough for the monkey to stick its hand through, then you

put an orange or apple inside. The monkey sticks his hand in to get the fruit. He can't get his hand back out while holding the fruit and is too stupid to let go. All that I have to do is walk up and pick him up."

"How do you keep those mean little shits from biting you?" I asked. I know a little about wild monkeys and they turn into real buzz saws when you try to hold them."

"That is my secret," replied Red as he walked away.

I hadn't thought much about Red's monkey business until a few weeks later when an Air Force Lieutenant wearing pilot's wings and a cap with a 50 Mission crush, stormed into my office. He had three or four bandages on his face, one across the end of his nose and another on his right ear. Monkey shit was smeared from one end of his leather flight jacket to the other.

"Sergeant," he shouted, "I'm looking for a red headed little son of a bitch who calls himself the monkey man. Where the hell is he?"

"What seems to be the matter, Lieutenant?" I asked.

"The matter is that miserable little bastard was just down on the flight line and sold me a monkey named "Ace" for fifty bucks. Said that all of the pilots coming to Korea bought one as a mascot."

There was no question in my mind who the pilot was looking for, but I wasn't about to give him any help in finding Red. "Well, Lieutenant. What makes you think that I would know anything about this person?"

"The man fueling my plane said that he was one of you engineers and the sign on the door says Engineering," he replied.

"This is the engineering section of the 1903rd, Engineer Aviation Battalion, but we have something like a thousand men assigned to us. Besides, if you have already bought a monkey, why are you so interested in finding him?" I asked.

"As soon as I had given him the fifty bucks for the monkey and he walked away, it went crazy, shit all over my jacket and bit the hell out of me. Then it ran away and the last time that I saw the little bastard, it was sitting on top of the control tower, playing with itself."

"Well, gosh, Lieutenant," I replied. "I'm sorry that you lost your mascot, but it seems to me that if you took possession of the monkey after paying for it, whatever happened after that would be your responsibility."

"If I didn't have to report in at Kimpo in two hours, I'd find that damn monkey man and pound the shit out of him till I got my fifty bucks back," said the pilot as he stormed out the door.

A few minutes after the mad Lieutenant had left, I tapped on the darkroom door, "Hey Red, you in there?"

"Is he gone?" came from the darkroom.

"Yeah, and you can thank me for saving your ass. That Air Force Fighter Jock was big and mean and mad as hell," I replied. "He said that you sold him a monkey named "Ace" and it nearly ate him up then ran away. He wanted his money back, along with about an acre of your hide."

The door opened an inch and Red said, "Some people are just sore losers. I've sold that same monkey at least half a dozen times before but he is the only one who got pissed when it ran away. Ace is really a nice monkey and wouldn't have bit him if he hadn't tried to hang onto it."

"You mean that you knew that it was going to run away after you sold it?" I asked.

"Hell yes, if they didn't run away, I'd be out of business before long. There's only eleven monkeys on the whole base and I sell half of that number each time a squadron lands here."

"Isn't it awfully dangerous when the monkeys to bite people?" I asked.

"Sure is," replied Red. "The poor little bastards are likely to catch rabies or something worse from biting officers."

The primary mission of the 1903rd at K-1 was supposed to be the rebuilding of the taxiway and construction of a 500 foot extension at each end of the runway. However, just as at Beale, the Air Force seemed to have no idea whatsoever as to the limitations of an engineering unit. By the middle of February, we had also been given at least half a dozen additional projects. We were to completely rebuild the base Operations Building, build a three mile road around the south part of the base, build wooden frames and floors for some 200 tents, fence the motor pool area and repave the parking ramp. No raw materials were available locally for these projects, so we had to set up a complete rock quarry and gravel pit some two miles from the base.

In order to keep up with the demanding schedule, the entire battalion went on a twelve hour day, seven day work week. No sooner had we done this than the Air Force sent down a directive that we would be expected to supply base security as well as security for any aircraft which might be on the base. Although we were about two hundred men under authorized strength, we had to remove one officer and thirty enlisted men from construction duties in order to form a Provost Marshal detachment.

Very few weeks went by before we were forced to go on double 12 hour shifts each day in order to keep up with the work load. Half of us would work from noon till midnight and the other half would work the other shift. As a result, the mess hall was forced to serve four meals each day. At both noon and midnight, breakfast was available till the hour of twelve, after which it was possible to get nothing but the dinner menu. The problem with this arrangement was the fact that the cooks began to serve their weekly ration of mutton only during the midnight meal. Those of us who got off work at midnight were faced with a nightly fare of Australian goat.

One night, as we approached the mess hall, that all too familiar odor of cooking mutton came wafting in on the wind to let us know what was in store for dinner.

"Well, it smells like we are in for roast goat again," said Billy Bob.

"I've eaten so damn much mutton that I wake up in the middle of the night, dreaming that there is a sheep in the tent," I replied.

"Isn't there any way that we can get the cooks to serve some of the mutton at noon, so it gets spread around and the night shift doesn't have to eat it all?" asked Lester.

"I've complained about that to the Mess Sergeant, but it fell on deaf ears. The officers all eat at noon, so that is probably the reason that it is served only at midnight," I replied.

We arrived at the door of the mess hall and Billy Bob shouted, "Do you know how to get the cook's goat?"

"No, how do you get the cook's goat?" I answered in a loud voice.

"You wait till he ties it up and then you grab it and run," yelled Billy Bob.

"If you swiped the cook's goat, then who would he sleep with?" yelled Lester.

"He only sleeps with the pretty ones, he feeds the ugly ones to us," shouted Billy Bob.

Then we began to sing in unison, "Baaa Baaa Baaa!"

I tried to open the mess hall door, but it was locked from the inside. "When you bastards decide to act like humans and stop that damn bleating, I'll let you in, and not before," shouted the Mess Sergeant from behind the locked door.

We sat down on the ground outside the door and began a chorus of Baaas. It was a Mexican standoff; us on the outside and the Mess Sergeant on the inside, with neither willing to give an inch.

A jeep drove up and Major Parker got out, "What is going on here? I heard all the noise and came to see what was the matter," he said.

"The cook won't let us in to eat, Sir" we told him.

The Major walked to the door and hammered on it with his fist. "I demand that you open this door right now," he ordered.

The Mess Sergeant, not realizing who was the owner of the voice, shouted back, "You'll eat this fucking goat or do without. When you shut up that damn bleating, I'll let you in."

"A couple of you men break down this door," ordered Major Parker as he stepped out of the way.

Billy Bob and I lowered our shoulders and charged the door. It turned into a hail of splinters as we crashed through. We stepped back and Major Parker walked in ahead of us, picked up a tray and went through the serving line. When he reached the end of the line, he sniffed the mutton on his tray and proceeded to dump it into the garbage. Each of us followed his lead and soon the entire pile of roast mutton had been transferred from the steam table to the garbage pail.

Major Parker went to the Mess Sergeant and said, "I realize that you have to serve a certain amount of mutton, but from here on, you will spread it out over all meals, and that way, no one group will have to eat it all."

One of our greatest problems in making progress on the engineering projects was the fact that we simply were not able to obtain needed spare parts for broken equipment. The Army would supply absolutely nothing, even though what we needed was available only a few miles away at the Masan Supply Depot. The Air Force didn't even have catalogs from which to requisition parts for engineering equipment. At one point, a full fifty percent of all heavy equipment in the battalion was on deadline because of lack of parts.

One day, Billy Bob dropped by my office. "Care to go for a little ride with me?" he asked.

"Where are we going?"

"I'm going to steal a bulldozer," he replied. "I have every bulldozer in the unit on deadline because the hard rock at the quarry wears away the blades and I can't get new ones."

"You mean that you are going to steal a whole bulldozer?" I asked.

"Not exactly steal one, just sort of trade an old one for a new one." he replied. "There is a whole row of brand new D-8s parked at the depot over at Masan. I'll drive in with one of our worn out dozers on the truck, along with a requisition for mess hall supplies. The guard will make a note of its serial number on the truck that I will be driving, as well as that on the dozer. Once inside, we will drive over to where the new units are parked, unload our old one, drive a

new one back on and drive back out."

"How are you going to handle the serial numbers?" I asked.

"Simple. That is why I need you to go along with me. I need your help to swap the engine hoods, which has the serial numbers painted them. Those jug heads at the gate will never know the difference. Those new dozers will never be issued to anyone and will probably be left here as junk when the war is over and we leave."

In a period of two weeks, Billy Bob had replaced almost the full complement of the unit's bulldozers. As time went along he executed the same old switch game with several jeeps and truck as well as simply stealing the only 40 Ton crane in Korea. I suppose that no one was ever got wise to the scam.

Even working double shifts and reassigning men from one job to another, we were barely able to keep up with the deadlines which had been set for us. But it seemed that every time that we began to catch up, the Air Force would find several other projects to hand to us.

A disabled bomber was returning to K-9 Airbase, some twenty miles away, and crash landed on their only runway, ripping up about 3000 feet of pierced steel planking. We received an urgent call for help and immediately dispatched about half of our Company "B" to make repairs. Three hours after the men arrived, the runway was back in usable condition. The Commanding Officer of the 452nd Bomb Wing presented us with a unit commendation for our efforts. Also, as a reward for our making such speedy repairs, we were immediately assigned several other projects at K-9.

One of these projects which was to complete the assembly and erection of a prefabricated steel hangar which the Air Force had been working on for more than two months. "Their main problem," said Major Parker, "Is that they don't know the difference between an erection manual and a manual erection. From what I can see, about all that they have been doing is playing with themselves."

We completed the job in only six days, including the time that it took for us to disassemble the portion which the Air Force had put together. Had they ever been able to erect the hangar, all of the walk-through doors would have been twelve feet off the ground.

The Air Force assigned so many projects to us at K-9 that we finally had to send the entire Company "B" there on a more or less permanent basis.

In short order after Company "B" went to K-9, the Air Force sent down requests for company strength units to be sent to work at other airbases. Company "C" was sent K-3 Airbase, located on the east coast of Korea near the village of Pohang Tek and Company "A" was dispatched to K-2 Airbase at Taegu. In order to maintain progress at K-1, we pulled enough people from each of the assigned line companies and formed an additional "D" Company.

As the Battalion's Construction Supervisor, I found that I was having to constantly travel from one company to another in order to keep up with my job. There were times when I would be away from my desk for as long as three weeks at a time. Naturally, my desk work piled higher and higher.

More or less as a joke, someone down at the carpenter shop built a rather unusual IN and OUT box for me. The bottom of the upper "IN" box was hinged and fitted with a small spring

which held it closed when there was no weight in it. Whenever any weight was put in the "IN" box, the bottom would open and dump it into the "OUT" box and then snap back closed.

One day, when an Air Force Colonel was in my office, the distribution clerk came by, dropped a stack of papers into my "IN" box. Flip-flop-dump went the bottom and everything dropped into the "OUT" box. The distribution clerk picked up what he had just deposited and walked out. The Colonel pushed down on the bottom with his finger, and for some reason known only to high ranking officers, failed to see the humor in it and really chewed me a new one.

There were three modes of travel in Korea: by Jeep at the Korean National Speed Limit of 15 miles per hour over really terrible roads, by Korean trains or by catching a ride on military aircraft. While bouncing from one company to another, I utilized all three of these methods of travel.

Shortly after I became the Construction Supervisor, they assigned a young Korean man to me as a combination driver and interpreter. His name was Kim Duk, a very bright young cadet who was attending the Korean Military University, which is something like West Point is to the U.S. Army. He was serving a six month internship with the UN Forces before he graduated. His worst problem as a driver was that any time that he got behind the wheel of the Jeep, he turned into a Barney Oldfield. He would turn his cap backwards and shout, "Brroom, Brroom, Honk! Honk!" as he roared away in a cloud of flying gravel. He drove with one hand on the horn button and the gas pedal to the floor, whipping through traffic and bounding across intersections without looking. After one trip to Pusan with him as my driver, he was demoted to the rank of Co-Pilot and interpreter.

Kim became my traveling companion, friend and confidant during the following six months. He was anxious to learn English and in return, taught me much about the culture and language of Korea. One day he was reading a magazine and asked, "What is Egg Wiped?"

"I have no idea what you are talking about," I replied. "Spell it and perhaps I can help you."

He spelled the word, "Egypt."

Only after he had gone back to the University, did I learn that he was the son of the man who was Vice President of Korea at the time. I met Kim some twenty years later, when he visited the United States. He was then a Brigadier General in the Korean Air Force.

Riding the Korean National Railroad was a study in frustration, culture and tenacity. The schedule went something like this: If the train was in the station, it might leave sometime. If it was not in the station, it might arrive sometime. No one seemed to know or care if there was a schedule to its operation.

Finding a seat on the train was impossible as it usually carried about ten times as many people as it had seats. Riders jammed body to body in the aisles and clung to the outside as it jerked and bounced along, stopping only for breakdowns, or to take on water or coal. The rest of the time, it crept along slowly enough that people could usually hop on or off without fear of getting injured. The Korean train was referred to as the Toonerville Trolley and we rode it only as a last resort.

There seemed to be a definite division between the Marines and the Air Force when it came to air travel during the Korean war. If one was traveling from one point inside Korea to another, he traveled with the Marines. If they were going from Korea to Japan, Formosa or Hong Kong, he would go to the Air Force for air transportation.

If traveling from someplace like Seoul to Pusan, one could find Marine C-46s going four or five times each day. However, if you wanted to get to or from the more remote places like Pohang Tek, you might have to change planes four or five times and fly from one end of Korea to the other.

One time, when I had gone to visit some of my section which was surveying off a new runway at Osan, Red Ryder went along to take progress photos. We were over on the side of the field which was occupied by the Marines, waiting to catch a plane. There must have been around 200 servicemen waiting for flights to various places.

While we waited, a small Beechcraft C-45 came taxiing up. Mounted in a clip above the pilot's window, flew a red flag containing a single gold star. The plane was obviously assigned to some Marine General for his personal transportation. A staff car, also flying a general's flag, drove onto the ramp.

Red Ryder, who always wore field pants, a sweater and no cap, looked far more like an Associated Press Reporter than a soldier. He grabbed his camera case and pushed through the crowd to get near the general as he climbed out of the staff car. Red hauled out his big, 4X5 Speed Graphic camera and a handful of film holders. I wondered to myself, "Why in hell does Red want a picture of some Marine General?"

I suppose that the General figured that any publicity was good publicity, so he stopped to allow Red to get his photos. Red had the driver back the car around to a spot in front of the airplane which was waiting with its engines ticking over. Then Red had the General strike a number of different poses, none of which seemed to suit him. He had the General straighten his tie, align the windshield wiper blades on the staff car and finally remove his sun glasses.

It was difficult to determine which was getting the hotter with all of the delay, the General or the engines on the airplane. The pilot kept leaning out the window of the plane to see what was keeping the General from getting aboard. Occasionally, he would have to rev up the engines in an effort to force some cooling air over the hot cylinders.

By this time, all 200 or more people who were waiting for planes had formed a semi-circle behind Red to watch what was going on. Never, in all the time that I had known Red, had he ever taken this much time and trouble to set up any photo, much less one of some obscure General.

Red took some more light readings with his meter, slipped a filter onto the lens, took another light reading and finally shoved a film holder into the camera. He lifted the heavy camera to his eye and squinted through the viewer. Then, without clicking the shutter, he lowered the camera and said, "Well shit, just a fucking, insignificant little one-star."

Red snatched up his camera case and disappeared through the wall of waiting troops, leaving the bewildered General standing in a stiff pose beside his staff car. At first, the General didn't move, just sort of stood there with his face getting redder and redder with each passing second while he searched the crowd for his tormentor. Unable to locate Red who was close to a

foot shorter than most people; he whirled, jumped into the waiting airplane and slammed the door. The staff car roared up the hill toward Base Headquarters and the airplane taxied rapidly toward the runway.

Later, when I found Red, he was laughing like an idiot. "Boy, did you see the look on that old fart's face when I called him an insignificant one-star? I'll bet that he shit his pants."

"If he had gotten hold of you, he would have hung your ass out to dry," I replied.

"Yeah, I know, but it was worth the risk just to see that look on his face," replied Red.

"Damn, but I love to bug officers, and the bigger they are, the better I like it."

CHAPTER TWENTY

It was early April and the cold weather of winter was giving up its hold on the land. But, the most pleasant part of the arrival of spring meant that our tour of duty was finally approaching an end and we were expecting orders to go home to arrive any day.

Corporal Bolinger, the mail clerk, came through my office and dropped my mail on the desk. "Did you hear the news?" he asked.

"What news?"

"They just extended us draftees another three months. We're now in for 21 months and won't be going home this month."

"Hell, it doesn't surprise me in the least. They will just keep extending us three months at a time until the war is finally over. The way things are going, we may be here for ten years."

I thumbed through my mail. There were two copies of the hometown newspaper, both over a month old and a letter from my mother, which contained much more up to date news in the form of a small clipping from the hospital report column. "Born to Mr. and Mrs. Bucky Groves on April 1, a 7 pound, 11 ounce baby boy."

I looked at the date and counted up the months since I'd last seen her. Well, how about that! No wonder Janet wasn't worried about getting pregnant at Lake Tahoe, she was already nearly three months along. One thing for sure is that a nearly eight pound baby certainly wasn't premature, so it couldn't be mine. There's also a pretty good chance that it isn't Bucky's either. You might call the baby Bucky's April fool present. Old eraser beating Bucky was always so stupid that he'd believe that babies can come along in as little as six months. Janet probably gave him a little nookey one night and then suggested that they run off and get married. Whether he knew it or not, he's the kind of person who'd jump at the opportunity to marry the prettiest girl in town, no matter how pregnant she might be at the time. Two things for sure is that she didn't save it all for her wedding night and I wasn't the first one to get in her pants.

Billy Bob, who was now in charge of the whole maintenance section at the motor pool,

and I were both promoted to Master Sergeant on the same orders, so we decided that it was high time that we do something to celebrate the occasion.

Billy Bob suggested, "Let's get in Old Paint, go to Pusan and see what kind of trouble that we can get into."

"That is a good way to lose these new stripes," I replied. "We have been in Korea for nearly six months and are far overdue for an R&R to Japan. Let's ask the old man for about a week off."

"Good idea," replied Billy Bob. "I've never been so tired of nothing but Australian mutton, busted equipment, rain and mud in all my life. Let someone else have the headaches for a while."

"Well, as for myself, I'd give almost anything for a real Texas-size steak, some fresh vegetables and a glass of milk."

"And real eggs that come right out of a shell and aren't served in little cubes," added Billy Bob.

We pulled our wrinkled dress uniforms out of our duffle bags and took them into the village to get our new stripes sewn on and have them cleaned and pressed. The village, which was situated just outside the gate, was typical of what could be found just outside every military installation in Korea. The bigger the base, the bigger the village. There was always a laundry and cleaning shop, a bar called Rosy's, a curio shop and the ever-present whorehouse. The village outside K-1 was no exception.

The Korean businessmen were famous for their signs, which displayed disclaimer messages in both Korean and English. Unfortunately, some of the English translations weren't always in what might be known as the proper King's English. This laundry had a huge sign which warned one and all, "THE MANAGEMENT OF THIS CLEANING INSTITUTION IS TOTALLY IRRESPONSIBLE IN THE EVENT OF FIREMEN OR THIEVES".

Dressed in our genuine Army best, and clutching our precious R&R orders, we hopped a ride aboard a truck bound for K-9 Airbase where we could catch an Air Force airplane to Tokyo. A few hours later, we were winging our way eastward across the Sea of Japan with seven whole days of anticipated wine, women and song.

Since we were Master Sergeants, we were offered very nice individual rooms at the Air Force Base to use during our stay, but as Billy Bob put it, "That is still too much like being in the Army. They probably blow bugles or something every morning."

We caught a taxi to downtown Tokyo and checked into one of the better hotels located right on the Ghinza. Search as we would, we couldn't find a single restaurant which served real steaks. "I suppose that when in Rome, do as the Romans do," said Billy Bob and we settled for eating in a very nice looking Japanese restaurant. We removed our shoes and were escorted to a low table with cushions to sit on.

The menu was all in Japanese, so we asked the waiter, who spoke fairly good English, to bring us whatever he recommended. After a small salad, thin soup and some fishy-tasting snacks wrapped in seaweed, he brought on the main course. It was a typical Japanese dinner, mostly vegetables with bits of meat. Two or three bites later, I found something in my mouth which looked, felt and tasted like the strap from some hippie's flip-flop. Laying it on the side of my

plate, I asked the waiter what it was.

He smiled, bowed and said, "You are lucky, you got squid."

The squid remained on the side of my plate while I carefully ate the remainder of my dinner.

We bought a few trinkets, some dishes which we had shipped home and stopped off at one of the many dance halls. The music was loud, the girls only moderately attractive and the drinks very expensive. I looked at Billy Bob and asked, "Well, Billy Bob, are we having fun yet?"

When we returned to the hotel, we asked the manager for some suggestions of what to do while in Japan. He replied, "I get you nice girls, all virgins, no VD."

"No thanks," I replied.

"What matter?" he asked. "You no like virgin girls. I get you virgin young boys. You like boys."

"No, we don't want boys either. We just want to see or do something while we are here," I replied.

"I know what you can do," said the man. "You can climb Fujiyama. There is old saying in Japan. There is no greater fool than the man who has not climbed Fujiyama."

"I've raced up Pikes Peak," I said. "So I might as well climb Fujiyama while I'm here. I certainly don't want to be known as a fool because I had the chance and didn't climb it."

The arrangements, which cost us ten dollars, were made and we boarded a train the following morning for the fifty mile ride to the base of the 12,000 foot mountain. The day was clear, the air was balmy and we were ready to begin our assault on the peak. The only problem was the fact that one must do certain things before he is allowed to scale Fujiyama.

If you think that you have seen tourist traps here in the United States, then you ain't seen nothing when it comes to extracting money from the tourists who come to climb Fujiyama. First, you must go into a shrine where you are prayed for, blessed and anointed with some sort of smelly oil; to the tune of about ten bucks each. Then, we found that we still could not climb the mountain until we bought a genuine prayer flag and a bamboo walking staff, which went for another five dollars each.

We were now blessed, anointed, equipped with prayer flag and had a walking stick but there was more. "You must have a guide so you do not get lost during your climb," we were told.

"I don't think that we will get lost," I told the man. "We will just follow the trail."

"But it is the law. You cannot climb Fujiyama without a guide," he told us.

"How much?" I asked.

"Ten United States Dollar," he said with a deep bow.

"For both of us?"

"Ten Dollar for each guide. One guide for each person," he replied. "It is the law," he added.

"This is getting to be a little ridiculous," I told Billy Bob. "Shall we scrap the whole thing and go back to Tokyo?"

"We are already fifty bucks into this thing, so we might as well go ahead. It can't cost us much more," he reasoned.

"OK, two guides," I told him.

He trotted out a couple boys, neither of whom could have been a day over twelve years old, and told us that they would guide up to the resting place. I should have picked up on that last statement about the resting place, but we were anxious to get started. I did notice that neither of our young guides were equipped with the required prayer flag and walking stick. I suppose that prayers and sticks are only necessary for tourists.

Ready to go? Not quite! Seems that we have to wait until there is a group of sufficient size to go up and the group must have a senior guide to lead them. Cost of the senior guide; another dollar for each person in the group.

"At least the price is getting cheaper," said Billy Bob.

"Not necessarily," I replied. "Just spread out over more people."

The Senior Guide led his group of fifty people along a well-marked trail on their trek up the mountain. Our youthful guides spent most of their time racing ahead and playing with other equally youthful guides. This was probably the main source of employment for all of the boys in the village.

We had walked four or five miles up a very gentle trail when we came upon a large building, where the Senior Guide announced that we would stop for lunch. After three or four other groups arrived, we were served box lunches, to the tune of three dollars each. After lunch, the Senior Guides announced that it was rest time and we would resume our climb in one hour.

"This is as bad as the Army," said Billy Bob. "This climb is nothing but hurry up and wait."

It was around four in the afternoon when we came to the 8,000 foot level of the 12,000 foot mountain. There, we found a huge hotel, complete with a restaurant and a large staff. The Senior Guide announced that we would stay here for the night.

I asked him why we were stopping so early and he replied, "To allow the guides time to return to the bottom of the mountain so they can go home before dark."

"Are they returning tomorrow morning?" I asked.

He replied, "Yes, with a new group which will be climbing the mountain."

"Who will be guiding us the rest of the way?"

"You will need more experienced guides for the second half of the climb," he replied.

We spent the night at the hotel, which cost about twice what we were paying for our room back in Tokyo. Following breakfast the next morning we were assembled and told, "Prayer time."

"I think that I've had all the prayers that I need to get me all the way to the top," I told him.

"But you must have the prayers for today. Yesterday's prayers no good for today. Prayers good for only one day in Japan. Without new prayers, evil things will happen to you."

"If you keep trying to pry money out of us, evil things will happen to you," I replied.

Soon, there was a new man there, telling us that he had guides for hire so we could continue our climb.

"I think that we will just follow the Senior Guide," I told him.

"But it is the law that each person must have a guide," he protested. "You will not be allowed to continue without one."

"How much?" I asked.

"Five U.S. dollar each," he replied.

"We will give you two bucks for two guides, not a cent more," I told him.

"But all guides get five U.S. Dollar," he protested. "It is the law!"

"Piss on you and the law. Take it or leave it."

He shrugged his shoulders and took our two dollars. Soon, we were joined by the same two kids that had been with us the day before. "Papasan say that you GIs cheapskate bastards," said one of them.

"Perhaps we should have been hoss-trading with these high-binders on their prices all the time," said Billy Bob.

We had climbed to the 9,000 foot level by noon and the Senior Guide announced that it was time to stop for lunch. As soon as we had eaten our box lunch, which cost four dollars each this time, he pointed to a different trail and told us "Climb over, take this trail back to the bottom of the mountain."

"But we aren't all the way to the top," I protested. "I wanted to go all the way to the top."

"This is as high as tourists are allowed to go, too dangerous," replied the Senior Guide.

We looked around for our guides, but they were nowhere to be found. We walked down the well-marked trail and Billy Bob remarked, "You don't seem to need a guide to get back down, do you."

When we added up all the costs associated with climbing Fujiyama, we found that we had been taken for nearly a hundred dollars each. Billy Bob came up with an addendum to the old Japanese saying, "There is no greater fool than the man who has not climbed Fujiyama, unless it is the man who had climbed it twice."

Having spent most of our available money climbing Fujiyama, we decided to check out of the hotel and catch the train back to the Air Force Base where the free rooms had been offered to us when we arrived. Being Master Sergeants, we were welcome at the "Rocker Club" which was for the upper three enlisted grades. We had huge steaks for a buck each and mixed drinks were only two bits.

While staying in the NCO quarters at the Air Force Base, we visited the biggest and best stocked PX that either of had ever seen. I bought a Japanese copy of a German Leica camera and Billy Bob bought a Japanese copy of a Japanese record player.

Suddenly, the week was over and we were flying back to the mud, rain and mosquitoes of K-1.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

"General Ehrgott, from Aviation Engineers Headquarters at Wolters Air Force Base, is coming to inspect us!" Colonel Hull announced on the first day of May. "He will be here on the fourth and will inspect all of our projects. I want this battalion to be in top shape and for us to make a lasting impression on him."

The General arrived as scheduled, was fed a breakfast of ham and real eggs, which had been flown in from Japan for the occasion, and began his tour of K-1. Trailing after him as he began his inspection was a long row of lesser officers, led by Colonel Hull.

"Looks like a bunch of baby ducks running after their mother," remarked Red. "If the General stopped without warning, there would be at least a dozen broken noses."

One of the first places that they visited was the motor pool, with its usual din of activity. Colonel Hull introduced the General to Billy Bob, who was involved in one of the many supply problems that he faced all the time. One of the pieces of heavy equipment was on deadline and could not be used because of worn out starter brushes. The Supply Section did not have the needed brushes and seemed unable to get them anywhere in Korea.

"Do we have any brushes which are bigger than the ones you need?" Billy Bob asked the mechanic.

"Yes, we have piles of alternator brushes for the Tournadozer, but they are too big to fit the holders," replied the mechanic.

"Then," said Billy Bob, "Clamp one of those brushes in a vise, cut them down to slightly larger than the correct size with a hacksaw and use a file to finish them to size."

"Amazing ingenuity," said the General. "Who would have ever thought of cutting a larger brush down to fit in a smaller space. I'm going to recommend this man for a medal of some sort."

"Thank you, General. These men deserve all the recognition that they can get," replied Col. Hull.

It was at this point that the General glanced down at Billy Bob's feet and noticed the beat up old green cowboy boots. "Why is this man not wearing regulation boots?" he asked.

"You are out of uniform, Sergeant Boomer. Report to me in my office after the

inspection."

"Are you going to get me some boots?" asked Billy Bob. "I wear these because ever since I've been in this man's army, no body has been able to get me any."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have been wearing those boots ever since you came into service?" asked the General.

"Ever since day one," replied Billy Bob. "I wear size 14AAA and no body has ever been able to get any for me."

"Has anyone tried to get boots for you?" asked the General.

"Dozens of times, but it never seems to go anywhere," replied Billy Bob.

The General turned to Col. Hull. "Colonel, this is inexcusable. I want you to personally see to it that proper boots are obtained for this man, and send me a copy of the paperwork to prove that it has been taken care of."

After the General and his retinue had gone elsewhere, Billy Bob muttered, "What an asshole. Telling Col. Hull to get me boots is like telling it to stop raining in this hole. Someone ought to whittle that pompous Air Force idiot down to the proper size. With his mentality, he ought to be in Special Services, handing out basketballs."

The General and his trail of baby ducks went from company to company and job to job. When he was ready to leave, he announced, "I am truly amazed at the number and size of the projects that this battalion has completed. In the face of great odds, they have accomplished the unbelievable and competed the impossible. I'm honored to have men like you under my command."

"What he is trying to say," whispered Billy Bob, "Is that we make it appear that he is doing his job. He will probably get a promotion as a result of this trip."

The General was so impressed with our abilities that he told us, "The Air Force has decided that K-1 is no longer needed and all construction here will be terminated. The entire unit will be moving to K-6 Airbase, located some 30 miles to the south of Seoul, where you will begin construction on a 9000 foot concrete runway. You will also be required to build a warehouse and give the marines a hand with in erecting some Quonset Huts. Initially, the contingent which was still at K-1 would move to K-6, then the other companies would join it there as they finished work where they were located.

Those of us who had been originally drafted for a period of 15 months had now been extended to a total of 21 months. Most of us were going under the assumption that would be allowed to go home when those 21 months were over. Some even suggested that we would be able to leave Korea early enough to allow us to take our accrued leave time before our discharge. Before he left, General Ehrgott blew all of those ideas right out of the water when he announced that President Eisenhower had just signed an order which extended all draftees to a total of 24 months and that those who were in Korea would remain there until within one month of our new discharge date. When we received our discharges, we would be paid for any unused leave time.

"See, I told you that we would just keep getting extended three months at a time until the war is finally over," I told Red and Billy Bob.

"If the Gooks don't want to give up and keep fighting, we may never get to go home. Someday we will just become old Papasans and sit around wearing those funny birdcage hats and

smoking opium," said Red.

Major Parker called me in and told me, "Pack up your entire Section and get it on the train to K-6 as the advance party for the move. You should leave immediately in your Jeep and drive through to be there when the rest of the advance party arrives. I'll join you as soon as I can get away from here."

He gave me basic drawings of what we would be doing once the whole battalion was in place and added, "There is absolutely nothing in the way of facilities in the area where we will be going, but you can probably get the Marines, who are located on the opposite side to the field, to house and feed you until more of the unit arrives."

I packed all of my belongings and loaded them in the blue, Air Force Jeep which I normally used. I bid farewell to K-1, which had been my home for the past seven months, and began the 300 mile drive northward on Korea's infamous Highway 1.

Even though we were technically in a non-combat area, it was not a good idea to drive at night because of the great number of North Korean sympathizers who roamed the Taebaek Mountains which formed a backbone down the length of Korea. They would come down out of the mountains to attack almost anything which was moving at night, and about all that would be found the following morning would be dead bodies and a burned vehicle.

I spent my first night on the road with our Company "A" which was located at Taegu. The next night was spent with a Turkish outfit near the town of Taejon. I spoke no Turkish and few of them knew any English, but they treated me like royalty.

The day that I arrived there was some sort of Turkish National holiday and they invited me to join them in celebration. The cook roasted a young goat which they had "liberated" from some local farmer. The roast kid was served to us with all sorts of strange foods, which I suppose were considered to be delicacies in Turkey. After the meal, they broke out several bottles of the worst tasting stuff that I have ever had the misfortune to drink. It was sort of a dark brown liquid which put off fumes which brought tears to your eyes. It took at least three good shots of the stuff before I could get it down without gagging. The party lasted until around two in the morning, when the last of the participants lapsed into a drunken stupor.

I woke up in the middle of the night and raced to the john with what could be classed as a real knee walking, toilet hugger of a hangover. After disposing of most of what I had consumed, all that I could think of was that I couldn't remember eating what had come up. I was finally able to sip some unbelievably strong coffee in the mess hall the next morning. The cook came by with a bottle of the stuff that we had been drinking the night before and asked in limited English, "Some hair of dog that bit you?"

"No thanks," I replied. "But if I could find that damn dog right now, I'd shoot him."

The cook shrugged his shoulders and poured shots of the stuff into the coffee cups of several of the Turks, who readily accepted it as a cure for their hangovers. My condition had improved very little by the time I reached K-6 at around noon.

The Marine guard waved me right through the gate and I located the mess hall, where a good lunch did great things for my hangover. After lunch, I located the Sergeant Major and asked if he could put me up for a while in their transit barracks. I now had a place to eat and sleep.

The following morning, I put on my last clean fatigues and drove to the area where we

would set up battalion headquarters and build the new runway. On the way, I dropped off my dirty fatigues at the laundry in the village just outside the main gate. A Korean laundry during those days was not, as some would suppose, a long line of white washing machines. To get the clothing clean, it was handed over to some Korean women who would take it to the nearest stream and pound the dirt out by laying them on a rock and beating them with a bamboo stick. The laundry was then hung on lines to dry. The final step was to iron everything with huge irons which were filled with glowing charcoal to keep them hot.

I stopped by the railroad station to check out the siding where we would unload our equipment when it arrived before I returned to the base. The rail yards were well laid out with several side docks as well as one end dock where our heavy equipment could be driven directly off the flat cars. There was ample parking space and, best of all, there was a Marine guard on duty at all times at the siding.

When I drove back to the village, the shack which had been the laundry that morning, was now a pile of smoking embers. With much waving of hands, the badly singed owner explained what had happened. "I dry clean wool uniforms of Marine GIs with gasoline. Something happen and Poof! Fire everywhere! All gone, your GI Fatigues burn up, everything burn up. I had sign which say no responsible for fire, but sign burn too."

I certainly was not going to belabor the man about the loss of my clothes. After all, I had lost only two suits of fatigues, but this man had just lost his livelihood.

Driving back onto the base, I stopped at the gate and asked the guard, "Do you have a clothing sales place where I can buy some new fatigues?"

"Clothing sales is in the back of Wing Supply," he replied. "Couple blocks straight ahead and turn right. You can't miss it."

Naturally, the only thing that they had for sale was genuine Marine green fatigues with USMC stenciled on the pockets of the jacket and even the buttons proclaimed that they were genuine USMC issue. But they fit, they were clean and green fatigues are green fatigues. I had neither the time nor inclination to sew stripes on the sleeves. Who cares whether I am a Master Sergeant or a private.

A few days later, the men and equipment of my section arrived by railroad. I concluded that if we pitched a tent at our new site, we would have to guard it constantly to prevent theft. I was able to locate a place for us to pitch our squad tent inside the area which was under security of the Marines and our equipment would be safe. After checking the rest of my men into the transit barracks, we were in business.

The survey parties were busy driving stakes to establish the centerline of the runway and Arthur Arthur Arthur began drawing maps for the runway and laying out grade lines. I began a search of the area for fill material and sand which would be suitable for making concrete.

When I drove to the railhead to check incoming trains, I found several flat cars loaded with some of our heavy equipment had already arrived and were parked on the siding. I was checking the condition of the equipment when the Marine guard approached and demanded, "What are you doing there, Private? That is Army equipment."

"I know," I replied. "I have been waiting for it to arrive. It belongs to the 1903rd Engineer Aviation Battalion and we are moving here to K-6."

"You say that an Engineer Battalion is moving here. What does a Marine have to do with the arrival of Army Engineer equipment?"

It finally occurred to me that he had noticed the USMC on my pocket and thought that I was a Marine. "Actually, I am Army Master Sergeant Foreman and I had to buy these fatigues when mine were lost in a fire in the village,"

"Don't try to pull that shit on me," said the Marine MP as he swung his rifle toward me. "You just put your hands against the side of that flat car and stand real still while I call the Sergeant of the Guard. I think that I've just found someone who is involved in the black market."

"Whatever you say," I replied as he began to blow his whistle.

A Marine Sergeant came running up, holding his 45 Automatic at the ready. "What's the problem?" he demanded.

"This guy is trying to tell me that he is in the Army, that he is a Master Sergeant and that he is suppose to be fooling around this equipment," replied the MP.

"Let's see some identification," demanded the Sergeant.

I pulled out my dogtags for him to look at and said, "I'm sure that these will prove who I am and that I am in the Army. Second, if you will go over to my Jeep with me, I will show you my trip ticket to prove that I am a Master Sergeant and a member of the 1903rd EAB."

As soon as the Marine Sergeant saw the blue Air Force Jeep, I knew that I was in for a lot more explaining. As it turned out, he didn't buy any part of my story and demanded that I accompany him to the base to see the Provost Marshall.

I stood at attention while the Marine Major read each piece of paper that I had presented as evidence that I was whom I claimed to be, was there on official business and had paid for the fatigues which I was wearing. He read my trip ticket for the Jeep and tossed it on his desk. Next was the receipt showing that I had paid for the fatigues. Luckily, I hadn't thrown it away. He also looked at my copy of the orders promoting me to Master Sergeant and finally at the orders assigning the 1903rd to that base.

"You claim that you have been here for two weeks?" he asked.

"That's right, Sir," I replied. "I arrived here three days after the date on the trip ticket for my Jeep."

"The Jeep that you are driving is another matter which I will get into in due time. These orders for the transfer of your unit are not effective for another two weeks. What are you doing here now?" he asked.

"I am part of the advance party," I replied.

"I want to see the officer who is in charge of this advance party," he said.

"That would be Major Parker, but he is not here yet. He is still at K-1," I replied.

"Do you expect me to believe that this advance party, which you claim to be a part of, has no officer in charge. I find that very odd. I really believe that you have stolen the Jeep that you are driving and are either AWOL or else a deserter," he replied.

"Major, if you would simply get on the phone and call Colonel Hull at my unit, I am sure that we can have this straightened out in no time," I told him, figuring that telling him to call a Colonel was better than calling a Captain, especially a drunk one like Fish.

"Oh, I'm certainly going to call the unit that you claim to be in, but in the meantime, you

will cool your heels in the stockade," he said. Then he called the Sergeant from the outer office. "Sergeant, I don't know what we have here, but lock this man in the stockade under armed guard until I get some answers."

Three hours later, the Sergeant took me back before the Major. "I checked out your story and it appears that you are telling me the truth."

"Thank you, sir," I said. "I knew that everything could be straightened out with a telephone call."

"Some things are, but there are still a couple matters that the phone call did not cover. The first is the fact that you are driving an Air Force Jeep with an expired trip ticket which was issued by an Army unit."

"Sir, I can explain the blue Jeep. The 1903rd is an engineer unit which has been loaned to the Air Force. Some of our equipment is Army and some of it is Air Force. My Jeep just happens to be Air Force," I told him.

"I never heard of anything so absurd in all my life. Are you trying to insult my intelligence?" he said.

"Sir, if you will look at my orders, you will see that following the unit name is the acronym, SCARWAF. That means Special Category Army Reassigned With the Air Force. We are Army Engineers who have been loaned to the Air Force to build runways."

"For the time being," he said. "I will concede that what you say is true, but there is the matter of your wearing a Marine Corps uniform. You see, we in the Marines cannot have someone like yourself degrading the Corps by wearing their uniform. I am very proud of the uniform and its heritage and feel that your wearing it is a personal insult."

By this time, I had endured about as much of this asshole as I could stand at one time. "Well, Gung Ho, Major," I said. "If my wearing these fatigues is that much of an insult to you, then the least that I can do is to remove all evidence that they ever belonged to the Marines." With that, I ripped off the pocket which was stenciled USMC and tossed it onto his desk. Then I began to twist the buttons in an effort to tear them off.

"Soldier," screamed the Major, whose face was turning bright red as he leaped to his feet and shoved his finger into my face. "I am giving you a direct order to cease destroying that uniform. If you remove even one of those buttons, I'll have your ass in the stockade until hell freezes over. You have exactly thirty minutes to get your ass to hell off this base, and if you ever return, I'll have you in irons so fast it will make your head swim."

"Yes Sir!" I replied, and snapped him a salute.

I found the rest of my advance party and told them, "Better keep a rather low key while you are on the Marine side of the base. If anyone asks, you never heard of me. There is an idiot major who is the Provost Marshall and he and I didn't exactly hit it off the best in the world. Until we get some of our own brass up here to run interference, I will have to stay someplace other than in the transient barracks."

A few weeks later, the main body of the battalion had arrived and I was so busy that I had more or less forgotten about my encounter with the Marine major. One of my surveyors drove up in a Jeep and said, "Hey, Foreman, Colonel Hull wants to see you, and he said, Right Now!"

When I walked into the tent which was serving as Battalion Headquarters and reported, he looked up from a large stack of papers which he was reading and said, "Foreman, what the hell did you do before we got here, start a damn war with the Marines? I thought I had everything straightened out when they called about you but now I'm holding a total of twenty-six different Delinquency Reports and Statements of Charges against you. They are all signed by the Marine Provost Marshall over on the other side of the base. He has you charged with violating just about every Military Regulation in the book, with the possible exception of rape. Some of his charges are very serious; like deliberate destruction of government property and insubordination to an officer. He bucked them down to me through Fifth Air Force Headquarters so I will have to reply by endorsement to every damn one of them. What do you have to tell me about this?"

I explained the situation to Colonel Hull and how the episode with the Major had come about. Fortunately, he found the whole thing to be far more amusing than had the Marine major.

"I asked him to call the 1903rd and let you clear up all the questions," I said.

"I was told that some Marine Officer had called for me but I was out. I understand that he talked with our Provost Marshall and wanted to know if we had men at K-6, but said nothing about any problems with you. He must be a real idiot," he remarked.

"That's putting it mildly," I replied. "There must be some way that we can let the air out of his tires."

"Well, as Base Provost Marshall, he does have quite a bit of clout, even for a Major. It is probably best that I just play the game with this paperwork and stop the boat from rocking. In order to protect our asses, I'm putting a letter of reprimand in your 201 file on each one of these. As soon as things cool down, I'll remove them."

"By the way, Colonel. We are supposed to begin erecting some Quonset Buildings for the Marines and I will need to be going onto their base. The Major said that he would throw my ass in the stockade if I set foot back on his base. Think that you can get him to back off a little?"

"Let me get on the horn with the base commander and see if I can get you off the hook. I'll let you know how it comes out and if it is safe for you to be seen over there."

"We are supposed to put up twelve Quonsets for them. The buildings come in eight foot sections and each building is to be eight sections long. I doubt if there is a Marine over there who is smart enough to count that high or use a measuring tape; so if we used only seven sections in each building, we would have about 96 feet of building left over. I was just thinking that a nice Quonset Building would beat this tent nine ways to one."

"I have no idea what you are proposing," said Colonel Hull with a wry smile. "But how long do you think that it will take you to steal those dozen sections?"

"Are you accusing me of being a thief, Colonel? That really hurts me, but I would say that you can expect to be off this dirt floor within a week."

Two days later, The Colonel sent word to me that I could go onto the Marine side of the base without fear of ending up in the Major's stockade and that I was to report to the base facilities office for a list of locations for erecting the Quonset Buildings.

A Lieutenant at the facilities office handed a drawing of a typical Quonset Building and the original hand-drawn sketch of where each of the buildings was to be erected. While I looked at the drawings, he asked, "How long will it take to get them up, Sergeant?"

"Ten buildings; ten days," I replied.

"That is certainly fast. A couple months ago, it took us two weeks to erect just one," he said. "I'll need those drawings back when you are finished with them."

"Tell you what, Lieutenant," I offered. "We have a blueprint machine over at our Engineering Section, and we could make you some nice blueprints of this drawing. Would you like that?"

How about that, he hadn't even stopped to count how many buildings we were suppose to put up and didn't even blink when I said ten buildings. My first stop was to take the drawings to Arthur Arthur Arthur. "Art, do you think that that you could redraw these in such a manner that no one would ever notice that they had been changed?"

"No problem, except that I will to have to lower my standards a lot. These drawings look as if they had been done by an eighth grade art student."

"Good," I replied. "Here are the changes that need to be made. Reduce the length of each building to 56 feet, change this group of four buildings to three and these five to four. When you are finished, make about half a dozen copies and destroy the original."

Two weeks later, I handed a neat roll of blueprints to the Lieutenant and told him that the job was finished. When we toured the finished buildings, he kept remarking about how quickly we had put them up. After I left, he called Colonel Hull, who was sitting in his brand new office, and told him how efficient we had been in getting their buildings erected.

Colonel Hull replied, "You are more than welcome and any time that you need more buildings erected, don't hesitate to call on the Engineers." He hung up the phone and remarked, "Four new Quonset Huts isn't bad pay for a couple weeks work and we can always use a few more."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I had been up at K-44 Airbase, an emergency landing strip which we were building near the front lines, for about a week and had just returned to Headquarters. Before going to my tent or my office, I decided to drop by the runway project to see how progress was coming along. As I drove up, a bulldozer operator stopped, pulled his throttle back until the engine slowed to a clattering idle and came running over to my Jeep.

"Where the hell have you been, Sergeant Foreman," he yelled above the noise of working heavy equipment. "Everybody and his dog has been looking for you."

"Who was looking for me?" I asked.

"Arthur Arthur Arthur was looking everywhere for you yesterday and Sergeant Ryder was out here this morning," he replied. "Major Parker was in the mess hall at noon and said that if anyone saw you, to tell you to get to his office immediately."

I found it to be very odd that those particular people would be trying to find me, but I suppose that I'd best see the major first. As I drove toward Battalion Headquarters, Billy Bob, who was wearing his dress uniform, came bounding up behind me in a Jeep.

He leaned out the door of the Jeep and shouted, "Where the hell have you been? You got exactly thirty minutes to be ready to leave."

"Leave for where?" I asked.

"Home! You dumb bastard. We are going home!"

"But this is only September 16th," I replied. "I didn't expect to see any orders until after the first of October and then they would probably be to extend my enlistment for another three months."

"Are you going to sit there and bitch about getting to go home early, or are you going to get you ass in gear and go with us?" he shouted as he roared away.

I doubt that there was ever anyone who packed in less time than I did. Clothing was dumped out of my locker and crammed into a duffle bag. I ran over to S-3, grabbed my portable typewriter and a few personal items which were in my desk and went next door to say goodbye to Major Parker.

As we shook hands, Bobby Ward stuck his head in the door and said, "Foreman, I have picked up your records and orders at Battalion Headquarters; your duffle bag is already aboard the truck and it's leaving for Kimpo in about two minutes, whether you are on it or not."

"I have to turn in my gear and clear supply," I replied.

"Never mind that," said Major Parker. "I'll take care of those things for you. Get on that truck or you will probably be here for another six months before they can get you on orders again."

The truck was already moving when several hands reached over the tailgate to help me aboard. As we bounced out the gate I looked around to see who was in the truck with me. There sat Red Ryder, Bobby Ward, Lester Price, Billy Bob and Arthur Arthur Arthur, all grinning like idiots.

"OK, when do you bastards yell Surprise! and tell me that this is just another cruel joke?"

"It's no joke," said Bobby Ward, handing me a stack of orders. "Read them yourself. We are really going home!"

"Well, it looks as if we came into this thing together, and we are leaving it together," I remarked.

"Only one person is missing, Obert Filpot," replied Red Ryder. "But he was always a couple bales short of a full stack."

"Wonder what ever came of him after they shipped him off to the funny farm?" asked Bobby Ward. "I sort of liked him. I suppose that was because I wanted to be a veterinarian and deal with animals, that's the only reason that I can think of."

"Probably promoted him to a Lieutenant," I joked.

"Lookie here what I got this morning," said Billy Bob as he hoisted a brand new boot up for me to see.

"How 'bout that. You finally got new boots after only 23 months, and on the day that you leave for home. What happened to your old green stovepipes, give them a proper funeral?"

"Got them right here in my duffle bag," he answered. "Me and them old boots have been through too much together just to throw them away. I've worn out the soles four times and they must have got me at least a barrel of free beer. I'm going to take them home, have them bronzed and hang them on the rear view mirror of my car."

"About going home, Billy Bob, will you be going on down the road with the rodeo circuit when you get out?" I asked. "And speaking of the rodeo circuit, what became of Old Paint?"

"Kim Luck, who owns the whorehouse in the village, wanted to buy it from me. He offered five hundred dollars in Korean money for it. I couldn't think of anything that I could do with that much Korean money, except spend it at his place. I couldn't stand five dollars worth of his ugly whores, much less five hundred. I decided to give Old Paint to the nun who runs the orphanage. I figured that it would be more useful to those little kids than hauling a bunch of whores around. As far as what I am going to do when I get out, I haven't the slightest idea, other than that I damn sure ain't going to start riding bulls again."

"How about it Ward, are going back to school and finish up your degree and become a veterinarian now that you will have the GI Bill to pay for it?" I asked.

"No, I think that I'll go into politics," he replied.

"Politics," snorted Billy Bob. "That means that you will change from doctoring complete horses down to just dealing with horses asses."

"Perhaps," said Bobby, "But my uncle is sure to be elected to Congress from Oklahoma and wants me to go to Washington with him as his aide. He said that he would show me the ropes and give me a lot of help. No matter what happens, anything will beat the hell out of selling dog food for a living."

Red spoke up, "I'm going back to New Jersey where I went to photography school and marry the prettiest girl in the world."

"What's the matter, did you knock her up while you were there?" asked Billy Bob.

"Hell no, I didn't knock her up; you crude bastard, I met her at a USO dance and decided the very next morning that I was going to marry her. We saw each other every night for the rest of the time while I was in school and have written every day while I was here." The wedding is planned for Christmas Day."

"You have my congratulations," I said. "I thought that a certain little twat and I had a hot and heavy thing going and I was all set to marry me when I returned. I found out that she hadn't been totally true to me when she sent me a picture post card from El Paso to let me know that she was on her honeymoon. Six months later, my Mother sent me a clipping out of the paper, announcing that she had just had a baby. I suppose that you could say that somebody had it in for me while I was away."

"Was that the one who came to see you at Beale?" asked Red.

"Sure was. As it turned out, she was already a couple months pregnant when she came to see me. She tried to talk me into marrying her while she was there, but luckily I didn't."

"Did she ever get married?"

"Less than a month later. She married a 4-F little dipshit with flat feet."

"Are you going to stick with photography after you get married?" asked Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"Probably not. Her dad owns a construction company and wants me to go to work for him."

"What are you going to do when you get out? Go back to flying airplanes and the spraying crops?" Red asked me.

"I sold my airplane and truck shortly after I was drafted and I'm not sure just what I'll do," I replied. "I'd have to start all over from scratch and I understand that the spraying business has changed a lot, and for that matter, so have I."

Lester spoke up, "I'm going to go to school on the GI Bill and become an Electrical Engineer. Things will happen in electronics that we cannot even imagine today. The electronic equipment that we have today will be considered to be junk in ten years. I understand that Japan is making a thing called a transistor, which is about the size of an aspirin tablet. One of them will replace a whole vacuum tube."

"Hell, I figured that you would stick with blowing up things," said Red.

"No way!" replied Lester. "You guys never knew it, but I was scared shitless the whole time that I was working with explosives. I never want to get near anything more powerful than a firecracker again. At times, I would be so scared that I'd go out and throw up after setting

charges."

"Why didn't you ask for some other job?" I asked. I'd have done something for you if I had known how you felt about explosives. I always thought you liked blowing up things and that was why you slept in the building where they were stored."

"Demolition was my job and I was going to do it come hell or high water. I slept in that building because I knew that if I ever got away from all those explosives, even for a day, I wouldn't have the courage to go back," said Lester.

"How about you, Art. Are you going to keep painting until you become famous?" asked Red.

"I already have a job lined up with a movie studio in Hollywood," replied Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"Bullshit!" said Billy Bob. "What are you going to do, shoot old Gregory Peck or Jimmy Stewart out of the saddle?"

"No," replied Arthur Arthur Arthur. "I'll to be drawing animated cartoons for the movies. Do you realize that it takes 24 separate drawings for each second of showing time. I mailed back a signed contract a week ago and the job will be waiting when I get there."

"Can you make a living doing that sort of thing?" asked Billy Bob. "I'd figure that you could make more money by painting signs."

"I don't know about signs, but my starting salary is going to be three thousand."

"Three grand a year ain't all that bad," said Billy Bob. "That is nearly sixty a week; a lot more than you're making in the Army as a sergeant."

"That's three thousand a month," replied Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"Holy Shit!" shouted Billy Bob. "One of my uncles is a crooked bail bondsman down in Fort Worth and the other a shyster lawyer, and neither of them brings in that kind of money."

We had an hour to wait before the plane left for Japan, so I went to the rest room and changed from my fatigues into a dress uniform. When I returned, they were talking about Korea.

"I'm going to miss Korea," said Red.

"I'll miss it about like I'd miss a boil on my ass," replied Billy Bob.

"Since we have spent nearly a year there, it became almost like a second home," I replied. "There have been a lot of good things happen to us here and I'm sure that we will remember those far longer than the bad ones."

The airplane which would take us across the Sea of Japan was an aging C-119 Flying Boxcar. It deserved such a name because the body was nothing more than a bus-size aluminum container with a wing sitting on top of it. The pilot's compartment was perched right in front of the wing and was reached by climbing a ladder running from the main body through a hole in the cockpit floor. A huge, oil-dripping engine hung from the wing on either side of the body. The C-119 was mainly used for transporting litter patients and fold-down bunks were stacked three deep on either side. The upper two were folded up and the lower row was used as seats when hauling passengers. Passengers sat sideways, facing one another across a aisle.

The pilot climbed down the ladder from the cockpit and told us before we took off, "You will all be wearing parachutes and life jackets while on this flight. If I open the back doors and give the order to jump, shove the life raft out first and everyone go out behind it as fast as you

can. You can pull your rip cord as soon as your feet leave the ship. Inflate the life jacket after the chute opens. If this plane has to ditch in ocean, it sinks in about ten seconds, even quicker if the water is rough!"

"Boy, that is a comforting thought," said Billy Bob. "Here we spend a year in Korea without getting our asses shot off and now we will probably drown on the way home."

The big, round engines on the airplane began to whine, shake, sputter, cough and finally came to life in a cloud of blue smoke. After a certain amount of coaxing, the pilot was able to get both of the whirling masses of machinery to spinning smoothly and we taxied away from the terminal.

Lined up with the runway, the engines roared with power when the pilot shoved the throttles to the wall. We surged down the runway, the plop plop plop sound of the tires striking the expansion joints in the concrete getting faster and faster. With a shudder, the nose lifted and the tires spun free in the air. Electric motors hummed and the huge tires slowly folded out of sight into gaping holes behind the engines.

We watched the world tilt and the familiar landscape of Korea fell below as the pilot began a turn to the left. "Goodbye, Korea!" shouted Billy Bob above the roar of the engines.

"I'm going to miss it," I shouted back.

"What?" yelled Billy Bob.

Rather than try to shout against the noise of two big engines, I simply shrugged my shoulders.

The late afternoon sun was behind us as we made our way eastward and the coast of Korea disappeared in the evening haze. The pilot banked to change course, and we were able to get a glimpse of the reason. A towering cloud, situated directly in our path, was spitting arrows of lightning toward the churning waters below. We checked the straps on our parachutes and tightened our seatbelts.

Rain began to pound on the aluminum skin of the ship with such force that its noise even exceeded the din of the engines. The air was becoming rougher all the time and the bright orange life raft, which was not secured, began to roll back and forth between the seats at the rear of the airplane.

I shouted to the people seated on either side of the raft, "Put you feet against the thing and try to keep it from thrashing about!"

The airplane was pitching with such force that the life raft floundered about like a whale beached in rough surf. The eight men seated at the rear of the airplane, four on either side of the raft, grabbed onto whatever they could find in order to control it. Someone evidently pulled on the wrong thing and the raft seemed to become a living thing. It writhed, twisted, flopped and grew in a terrifying manner. The men, who had been attempting to control the errant raft, scrambled forward to escape its clutches. When the orange whale finally grew silent, it was so large that it completely filled the rear portion of the cabin.

The Co-pilot came tumbling down the ladder and saw the inflated raft. It was impossible to hear a word that he was saying, but his rapidly moving jaw and red face were enough to convince us that he was not particularly happy with the situation.

Then, just as suddenly as the rough air had grabbed us in its fury, it spit us out the other

side into calm air. Soon we began our descent for a landing in Japan.

The next two days were filled with the endless processing which takes place when one has a permanent change of station. Records were checked, physical examinations given and forms filled out. The Chaplain cautioned us that when we returned home, to be careful about using certain words and phrases which had crept into our vocabulary. A Captain from personnel gave a rousing speech about the future that continued military service had to offer and suggested that we consider an enlistment for three more years. His speech had even less effect on us than that of the Chaplain. Last, but certainly not least, in our processing was the famous short-arm inspection to be sure that we were not taking some social surprises home with us.

Interspersed between those endless sessions were trips to the bulletin board to see if our names had appeared on the list for air transportation back to the states. The list, which was changed about every two hours, would begin with Generals and descend through the ranks as long as space was available. It usually ended somewhere around the rank of Captain, which meant that lowly Sergeants had little or no chance of going home by air. After four days of waiting, our names appeared on a long list of people who would board a ship which would take us to San Francisco.

When we entered the ship, we found a carbon copy of the one which had brought us to Japan a year before. The main changes were that this ship was spotless and the food much better. Boarding the ship was much simpler too, as we were allowed to walk aboard through the dock-level door instead of climbing the gangplank.

Once aboard, a Navy officer came to our compartment to see Billy Bob and me. "You men are the ranking NCOs in this compartment so you will be in charge of KPs for cleaning the dining deck. You will divide the men in this compartment and alternate days cleaning up after meals."

We called the men together and told them of the detail which was assigned to us for the voyage. Since there was about one hundred men in the compartment, there certainly was no need for fifty at a time to be on KP. We made up a roster of four squads, with a Staff Sergeant in charge of each group of twenty-five. By doing this, each person would have to pull KP only once every four days. In addition, we had the easy part of KP. The dining deck was always a lot easier than working in the kitchen, especially if you drew pots and pans.

After Billy Bob and I had inspected the mess deck, we returned to tell the men, "The job will be simple and if everyone pitches in, we can have it done within an hour and you will have the rest of the time off. There will be no need for you to hang around after it is clean." This was almost unheard of in the world of KP.

One of my groups was on duty during the first meal. When the mess line began to thin out, we started routing people to one side of the deck while we began to clean the other. By the time they had finished eating, half of the tables were clean and we could whip out the other side in a matter of minutes. As soon as it was done, I told my men that they could leave and I waited for the arrival of the Chief Petty Officer to inspect.

When he walked in, he demanded, "Sergeant, where are the KPs?"

"I inspected the deck and released them," I replied.

"You can't do that," he stormed. "I am in charge of this mess hall and I will decide when to release them."

"I'm in charge of the KPs and if there is any problem, take it up with me," I replied.

"I'll have you know that I am a Chief Petty Officer with twenty-three years of service and I'll decide when they can go," he blustered.

"I'm a Master Sergeant with twenty-three months of service and the same rank as you are," I replied. "I was placed in charge of the KPs and when the place was clean, I told them that they could go."

"Suppose that I am not satisfied with the job?" he demanded.

Then tell me what you want done and I will handle it with my men," I replied.

It finally dawned on him what I had said about how long I had been in service and he remarked, "You mean that you are a Master Sergeant and have been in service for only twenty-three months. It took me eighteen years to make Chief. You must have kissed a lot of ass."

"Not really. If a person does his job properly, that is all the time should take. " I replied. "You must have fucked up a lot to have taken you eighteen years to get six stripes."

I told Billy Bob about my session with the Chief and between the two of us, we probably gave the man more ulcers during that single trip than his whole twenty-three years had before.

After fourteen days at sea we arrived in San Francisco, where all Air Force and SCARWAF people were shipped off to an Air Force facility located on Yerba Buena Island, midway across the Oakland Bay Bridge. Here, the SCARWAF troops were told that we would be released from our assignment to the Air Force and transferred to Army bases near where we lived for discharge.

When the orders came out, we found that Billy Bob and I were to report to Fort Hood, Texas for separation. Lester Price would be discharged at Fort Sam Houston and Bobby Ward and Red Ryder would receive their separation at Fort Sill. Arthur Arthur Arthur had requested that he be discharged from a base in Southern California, but he hadn't received his orders.

"I'm heading straight for Fort Hood and get my discharge in my hand before I even go home," said Billy Bob.

"I think that I'll go home and report there one day before my discharge date," I replied. "That way, they will have to process and let me go without any delay. That will prevent some shavetail Lieutenant from putting me on a shit detail while I am waiting. I've found out that even Master Sergeants get put on details."

"Since most of us ship out for home tomorrow," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "It is very likely that we won't ever see one another again. I think that we should have one last party."

"This has to be a party to end all parties," said Lester.

"Great, let's rent a car and drive up to Yuba City and go back to that place where we ran out on the check," said Red.

"We shouldn't push our luck," said Billy Bob. "There's probably a warrant out for our arrest up there."

"How about Fisherman's Wharf?" suggested Bobby Ward. "I've heard about that place all

my life but have never seen it."

"I'll vote for that," said Lester. "This is Friday night; think that we should call ahead for a reservation?"

"Hell No," said Billy Bob. "We are returning war heroes and they aren't about to refuse us service."

We stood before the Air Force Corporal who informed us, "Men going through processing are not eligible for passes."

"What do you mean that we are not eligible?" Red demanded. "This is our last night together and we want to go into town for a little party."

"I'm sorry, but I will not issue passes to anyone who is in processing, especially you Army people. If I give you passes and you aren't back here in the morning, my ass will be in the sling," protested the Corporal.

"Billy Bob put his nose about an inch from that of the Corporal and said very slowly, "Son, I don't like that crack of yours about the Army. Now, would you mind counting just how many stripes there are on all these sleeves and compare them with those two puny little stripes of yours. Your ass ain't never been in a sling like it is going to be in about ten seconds if you don't hand over six passes."

With passes in our pockets, we climbed the long flight of stairs that led from the island to the station on the lower level of the bridge. Soon we were on a train which deposited us at the end of Market Street, one block from the teeming kettles of boiling shrimp and crabs along Fisherman's Wharf.

"You can really tell where we are," remarked Red.

"Smells like a whorehouse exploded," replied Billy Bob. "Which restaurant do we go to?"

"That looks like the biggest and fanciest one around," replied Bobby Ward. "Let's go whole hog on this last party."

"Do you have reservations?" asked the oily little character behind the desk.

"What do you mean, do we have reservations?" demanded Billy Bob. "Do you have any idea who you are talking to?"

"Oh shit! here we go again," I whispered to Red.

"We are the six sergeants who raised the flag on Hill-186 in Korea," said Billy Bob, referring to the pile of rocks that we ground up into gravel while building the runway at K-1. All of the hills and mountains in Korea were numbered and those numbers corresponded to their height above sea level.

"I know about the Marines who raised the flag on Iwo Jima, but I never heard about this Hill-186 in Korea," replied the host.

"That is probably because it was a secret operation," replied Billy Bob. "Sergeant Price, here, blew up more explosives on that single hill than on any other one in all of Korea. Now, how about a table before we have to call the manager?"

"Please be seated in the bar. It will be about thirty minutes before I can have a table for you six gentlemen."

"See, baffle them with bullshit, works every time," said Billy Bob.

"What will you men have?" asked the cocktail waitress who had far more than ample tits

and far less than ample blouse to cover them.

"Double Martini on the rocks, with an olive," said Arthur Arthur Arthur.

"Double Bourbon and Branch Water," ordered Billy Bob.

"Since everyone is going for doubles, make mine a double Martini like his," I replied.

We sipped our drinks and watched the returning fishing boats nuzzle their way into position against the docks. "Looks just like the fishing boats coming into Pusan harbor," said Red.

"Yeah, but it certainly doesn't smell the same," I replied.

Glasses became empty and the cocktail waitress returned, "Another round," she smiled.

"You are the most beautiful damn woman that I've seen in a year," said Billy Bob.

"Thank you, you big tall stud," she replied. "I get off at midnight and for a hundred bucks, you can have me for the rest of the night."

I've seldom ever seen Billy Bob at a loss for words, but all that he could reply was, "Just bring me another Bubble Dourbon."

Just as our second round of doubles disappeared into empty stomachs, the oily host informed us that our table was ready. "I'll add your bar tab to the dinner check," he said as he led us to a window table overlooking the bay.

"I'm going to have a steak that takes about half a steer to make," said Billy Bob.

"You don't order steaks in a seafood restaurant," I said. "Unless you don't care what kind of steak you get."

"We just received a special shipment of extra large lobsters from New England," suggested the waiter.

That seemed to be as good an idea and any other, so we placed our orders for lobsters. Billy Bob added, "Tell Tits, out there in the bar, to bring us another round of what we have been drinking."

Tits arrived from the bar with our drinks and as she handed Arthur Arthur Arthur his Martini, she offered a toast.

"Of all drinks made with gin,

I like Martinis the most,

After two, I'm under the table,

And three, I'm under the host."

"Give the lady three Martinis," shouted Billy Bob, attracting the attention of everyone in the restaurant.

She smiled, patted him on the shoulder and whispered, "OK, but it's still going to cost you a hundred bucks."

Salads and bread came. Arthur Arthur Arthur picked up a piece of bread and cut off some butter with his knife. The dulling effects of two double Martinis must have reached all the way to Arthur's fingers and as he talked, the bread slipped out of his hand and onto the table while he carefully buttered his palm.

In a few minutes, the waiter brought some cloth bibs which he fastened around our necks to protect our clothing, then he brought our lobsters. They were so large that their tails hung over one end of a large platter and their claws over the other. These crustaceans had lived long and

careful lives in order to grow to their present size, but they had made one last and fatal mistake when they entered a trap to munch on the bait. First a plunge into a tub of boiling water and then onto our table as a last supper before we parted.

"May I suggest a nice California white wine to go with your lobsters," said the waiter.

"Whatever you say, Clyde," said Red. "If it is good enough for Californians, then it is probably good enough for us."

Billy Bob looked at his lobster and remarked, "Biggest damn mudbug that I ever saw."

"The biggest thing like this that you Texans ever saw was a crawdad. No wonder these look big to you," said Red.

How do you get into one of these damn things?" asked Arthur Arthur Arthur.

The waiter supplied each of us with a small hammer and demonstrated how to crack the shell in order to get at the meat in the tail. Arthur Arthur Arthur, holding his hammer in his buttered hand, swung at the lobster, missed and broke his platter in half with the blow.

Without the slightest indication of irritation, the waiter supplied a new platter and suggested that he open our lobsters for us. Soon, well over a pound of delicious white meat was exposed. "When you have finished with the tails," he said. "I'll help you with the claws."

Even with a huge lobster fighting for control of our senses, the effects of three doubles still caused everything to swing and sway as if the restaurant was afloat. The waiter returned to our table, "May I suggest a Brandy Alexander as an after-dinner cocktail?"

"Hell yes, bring on old Randy-Brandy," said Billy Bob. "He can't make us any drunker than we already are."

The drinks arrived and Billy Bob remarked after his first sip, "Hell, this ain't nothing but a fancy little milk shake."

"I think this is what all the queers out here drink," said Red. "These California fairies can't take real booze."

"Your check, gentlemen," said the waiter as he placed a tray containing what looked like a small leather-bound book on the table. "Since this is a party of six, I placed the customary fifteen percent gratuity on the check."

"Did it take a whole book to write out our check?" said Red as he picked it up. He opened the book and squinted at its contents. "Two hundred forty bucks!" he shouted. "That is as much as the check that we walked up in Yuba City."

"Think that we ought to try to walk this check?" asked Billy Bob.

"No, and you aren't going to get away with your fainting act again either. It comes to forty dollars each," I said. "We are in a fancy place and should expect to pay fancy prices. Get out your wallets and let's pay the check."

"Be sure that Tits gets her share of that tip," Billy Bob told the waiter. "And, can you call a taxi to take us back to Yerba Buena Island."

A few minutes later, a taxi pulled up in front of the restaurant and all six of us piled in. "Drop us off at the gate to Yerba Buena Island," Billy Bob told the driver.

"I ought to take you bastards out to the middle of the bridge and dump your asses into the bay," replied the driver.

"Damn, what did we ever do to you?" asked Red.

"Well, first you dirty bastards tried to kill me and then you set me on fire; that's what," said the driver as he turned on the dome light to allow us to see his face.

"Well, Son of a bitch, if it ain't Shoat Filpot," shouted Billy Bob. "How in hell did you wind up out here in San Francisco driving a taxi?"

Well, it's a long story," replied Obert. "The Army sent me to the loony bin up in Denver. Every time that they asked me a question, I'd just laugh at them and fart. It didn't take me long to convinced them that I was crazy as a peach-orchard boar, so they gave me a disability discharge and a pension for life."

"I knew that only the Army would do a stupid thing like that," said Lester.

"Then some doctors found out that I was hooked up wrong on the inside, so they operated on me. Now I don't fart any more."

"That is amazing," said Billy Bob. "Old Red Adair down in Houston couldn't have capped a gas well like you."

"I came out here where I thought no body would know me and started back to school," continued Obert. "Then I ran onto Goldberg, who now calls himself Chang Goldfarb and claims that he is a Chinaman. Funniest looking Chink that I ever saw. Anyway, he owns a bunch of taxis and gave me a job driving for him. He came out here to hide out when he heard that the FBI was looking for him jumping the train in Oklahoma City. I go to school during the day and drive a taxi at night for a little extra money. It don't pay much, but added to what I get from the Army every month, I live real good."

"That just goes to prove that the Army pays a lot more for crazy than they do for smart," said Bobby Ward as Obert pulled to a stop next to the gate leading down to Yerba Buena Island.

"This is as far as they will let taxis go," said Obert. "Nice seeing you fellows again."

We made our way down the long stairs and staggered into the barracks singing "The Yellow Rose of Texas" to the loud protests of those who were already asleep.

We were having breakfast in the mess hall when the loudspeaker blared, "Sergeant Foreman, report to the Orderly Room."

"What do they want now?" I wondered. "We paid the check last night and didn't break anything except the heart of that cocktail waitress."

"She should have gotten a least a fifteen buck tip," replied Red. "I doubt that her heart was too badly broken."

I walked into the orderly room and the Corporal behind the desk said, "Here are your orders, an airplane ticket to Amarillo by way of Los Angeles and bus fare on to your home. Your bus to the airport departs in thirty minutes."

"What about the others who are with me? We came into this thing together and we would like to go home together."

"Their orders will be along later today, but you are leaving right now," he replied.

I returned to the mess hall and told them, "It looks as if the time has come for a parting of the ways. I have my orders to leave in half an hour, but you won't get yours until later today." I shook hands all around.

"Damn, we can't just shake hands and walk away from two years together," said Arthur Arthur Arthur. "We have to get together again. How about a reunion?"

"When and where?" asked Billy Bob.

"How about a year from today, at that restaurant where we were last night?" asked Red.

"One year is too soon to have a reunion," replied Bobby Ward. "To be a real reunion, it should be at least ten years."

"OK, ten years from today will be October 12th, 1962. Let's meet at the main gate of Fort Leonard Wood," suggested Lester.

"What the hell would we do after we met at the main gate of Fort Leonard Wood?" asked Billy Bob. "There is certainly nothing to do in Waynesville. How about right here."

"I'll be living in New Jersey," replied Red. "That would be an awfully long way for most of us to come."

"How about the Clover Club in Amarillo," suggested Billy Bob. "I'll bring a ham and a jug and it will be just like the time when we met there to drive to Beale."

"That place will probably have burned to the ground by then, or else closed down by the board of health," I replied.

Well, we all have each other's home addresses," said Red. "Why don't we keep in touch by letter or at least exchange Christmas cards. We can plan the place when the time comes."

The driver was blowing his horn as I shook hands once more, grabbed my duffle bag and ran to catch the bus.

EPILOGUE

"And that, Jason, is what I did when I was in the Army."

"You didn't jump out in a parachute or shoot down airplanes or kill any enemy soldiers?" he asked.

"Nope, not a single one. Not every one in the Army is involved in combat. I was one of the lucky ones who did other things."

"Was that all true? Did all those things really happen that way?"

"I suppose that most of it is true, or at least that is the way that I remember it."

"Where did you and your friends finally have your reunion? Did you get drunk and throw water balloons and sit on whoopee cushions?" asked Jason.

"Nowhere. We never saw each other again. I got a Christmas Card from Bobby Ward a few years later. There was also a form letter with it, saying that he was running for some office and asking for a political contribution."

"Why didn't you ever have a reunion?"

"I suppose that all that we had in common was the army and when that ended, so did our relationship. It's sad to think that we could spend two whole years together and then never bother to see one another again."

Jason thought about what I had told him for a considerable length of time and then said, "You were sure in a dumb outfit, weren't you?"