

PEOPLE SOUP



Two Ways Of A One-Way Mirror

Heffe, I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard our country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.

BULL!

What I write is what I have seen in the short time I have been here. This is my opinion and mine alone. I hope this will give you better insight to what the world calls the United States Army. Enjoy!

Much Love Always,
PVI Klemens Van "Doc" Schmidt

Fort Belvoir, Virginia, home of the engineer. I still wonder why I am here.

Three thousand miles detached from home and only a set of camouflage uniforms to show for it all. What happens here, on the inside? I really don't understand; I just leave here.

It started as a half-cooked idea: see what the real army is like and kill some time. I was the one to sign on the dotted line, no one else. So here I am, inside, looking out.

Very quickly you learn there are but a few things that make up this army of ours, a world of its own with time, beer, hopes and confusion to the maximum.

"Wake up!"

Oh, God. Why do something as stupid as that?

"Come on people. Get your lazy asses out of bed."

Just one more minute, sergeant, one more minute.

The world spins in a clockwise motion, but my mind was not, that fine winter morning. The wall locker was a massive blur of gray, a menacing reminder of the day to come. Now, if only I could find my keys.

What I did then could scarcely be called walking. It was more in the line of stumbling and a low-crawl. The floor, as if a battle field, lay covered with the bodies of platoons after platoons of empty beer cans.

I tried my best, but they kept dying off, one by one in the heat of battle that lasted late into the night.

I tried to stand up, only to find the floor rushing up ever so quickly towards my face. Pain, the sound of knees cracking. The constant pounding of artillery shells in my head. What a way to spend a Saturday morning!

In the beginning, there was the recruiter, a smooth talker who could sell contraceptives to a nun. Where they find these people, I will never know.

From California to Fort Dix, New Jersey, described to me as being within nukeing distance of Princeton. I was the only one to leave the Oakland A.F.E.E.S. (Armed Forces Entrance and Examination Station) that week for Fort Dix and the idea of the east coast was hard to hang with at first. Later, I would have very little time to worry about it, much less anything else.

Many stories are told of Basic Training. Stories can only start to explain what happens in one of those places. When I went through, it was eight weeks long. Recent survivors tell me it is now twelve weeks long.

1:00am, jet lag from a long flight, and a person as green as myself reported in for duty. We were both full of expectations, fears, and pure nightmares of the weeks to come.

The C.Q. (charge of quarters) and the M.F.I.C. (mother f...ker in charge) could care less. We were just more paperwork for them.

All too soon, we were dropped off at a Reception Station for inprocessing, never told a thing. Just wait here: it will happen to you soon enough.

Four days. Twenty different multi-color forms (in triplicate) and 75 pounds of gear later, we were assigned to a company for training.

Within the company, we were divided into platoons of fifty people and given a D.I. (Drill Instructor). The man thinks he is God.

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Due to financial cuts, personals are now c50 per four lines. We will print no personals without payment.



LANCE W CHRISTIAN

Maya, Pretz, Ralph, Evan, and Jorin- Sorry I missed post pig-day celebration. I love you all, even if Prov. is a jinx!!
The lost little New Yorker

Miss Jolly Anonymous of the New York Coffee House- It's good getting along with you again-Tons of love always-Prince

Mel, m'lady, I still think you are crazy and I hope it gets you in the end. I love you, as always. Someday you may find cold hands on your stomach for the 'good old days.' Thank you for all your help. Enjoy!

Hey Gorgeous (uh...Vandy) Seems to me you owe me. A visit will be sufficient. Love Austin
Rosina- You will always be beautiful and special to me. I love you, Robin. XOXOXO

Free tickets Amy? Ahh, New York! I Love you! Prince

Becky & Julie- Thanks for the supportand letters. Catch ya later! Love, Van

Sam & Scott- what ever became of the dim lights on the highways of Kansas? Have fun in Boulder. Keep in touch. Love, Doc

Heh, heh, heh, Miss Prissy, heh,heh,heh. Love Austin
P.S. Write me at 18 Keith Ave Brockton, MA, 02401

Allison and Wendy- How's life in S. Ill.?? I hope you both have a wonderful summer!
Paul Taco

Dear NH/VT- There's so many of you to write personals to but so little space to write them! So until we meet again. Peace! Paul

Lost!! Lost!! Lost!! Lost!!
About two years ago, I lost a personally autographed picture of Bo Derek. For two years now I haven't been able to sleep at night. If any one finds it or has it please send it to me! Box 10 c/o LRY. Thank you. Very loney!

Andrea (alias Charlie James Stevens)- It was great being up there. (no pun intended) Thanks, I'd love to do it again. (And I think you and Kate are neat too.) Peace-Neill

DVF that isn't: I knew you guys didn't know how to run things, but you could have given it a TRY.
A Sorry Old One.

Hey Donny R.- You may be stoned in the wrong house, yeah, but can ya walk funny?

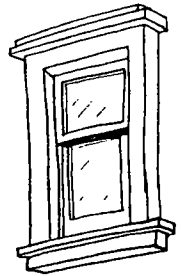
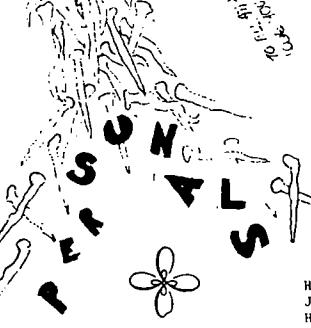
Everyone!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Please buy LRY T-shirts and buttons, this is part of what keeps this paper going! Paul

We're looking for a 5'5" female, between the ages of 18-21, with blonde hair, likes to play pinball, party, and dance to the Ramones. If you fit this description, write Hopeless, c/o LRY
Dyed hair does not count.

Leslie- I see you didn't make the Taco Family Portrait! Missed you. Have a good time and hurry up and get back to California!

David- Check this issue. Love you too! Leslie

Becca: People out here still talk about the Becca chile too, I wonder why?? Love, Bekah



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Hey Keith, Claudia I, Jett, and John- "Not the Golden Flying D--k!" H:-

Becca, Phil, and Paul- My roomies, co-workers, and comrades. I love you. Thank you for making me feel so at home. The other one

Austin- To put it simply, thank you for helping me get my shit together. I've been straight for three months for the first time in five years. My head is clear and I can finally see where I'm going. The party's over and life has begun. Thank you for being a friend. Love and Peace, Neill



Dawn- How about this personal! Anyway, this will probably be the last personal you will get before you fly away into the sunset, so when you are feeling down and it costs too much to call me, think of all the good times we have had together!
Love, Paul

Prince, Help!! Where are you? We don't want to lose contact, you are the only person of the royal family we know. Love Tommy and Bekah

Lisa F.- How's life in the "Big Apple"? Don't forget you've still got friends up here. Call us sometime! Love, the Tacos



To everyone who never wrote back and never sent an article or even dropped a line to tell me why so I could get someone else to do it: Thanks a whole fucking hell of alot the ed.



CLAUDIA JOHNSON: THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR COMING TO SEE ME AT SCHOOL. IT REALLY MEANT ALOT TO ME. DID YOU HAVE FUN AT (WH) SPRING? CALL ME!! PLEASE!!
To my love.
One so alive, so vibrant, so loving: To leave before your time is up, no, it is not right.
Please stay and fly with me.
You, whose light shines and fills my world. I love you.

Phil
Valerie B. Harph- Yes, I live in Ca. Formerly of Northridge Ca, and now writing to you via LRY from Concord, Ca. We at Starr King Fed are having a Tri-Fed conference, and that includes you. Don't miss it, Aug23-28. So what if it's the same week as Con-Con. Love ya, David L. Bragen
P.S. May there be warm fuzzies in your clothes-hamper.

Kathy Deslauries- I'll thank you forever for the chalice. Now I'm complete. (And yes...it is just like Knott's) Take care and hang on...I will write back some day!
Love, Neill

I have half a mind for sale and am still looking for the other half. For inquiries, please write Van Schmidt
2049 Junction Ave
El Cerrito, CA, 94530

Gretchen- So the T-shirts finally got out! Its about time! You still owe us. Us at the office

Lauri Roth, where are you? please write. I don't have your address or phone number. Miss you, Bekah

STATE FROM ME!
LOVE, DAN

Amy- Our room smells funny! Tequila and menage-a-trois? I love ya, roomie! XO Robin

Claude- I love you. (I really do!)

Jamie- Thanks for being you. Be happy and stay out of the rain!
Peace, Claudia

Do you point as I point? Do you point as I point? Who am I pointing at? Are you in cahoots?

Hi everyone in Starr King and the Sacto local! Sorry I haven't written, but life in Beantown is a bit hectic. Don't forget to write and fill me in on all the gossip. Tacos get lonely too!! Hugs and kisses to Lenore, Bunny, Claire, Tinker, Lisa, Cecilia, Sean, Shawn, Amy, Gareth, Curt, Kurt, Nathan, Lynn, Lynne, Debbie, Mary, Hillevi, Gil, Katy, Kathy, Peter (both), RJ, Lori, Lia, Dante, Kevin, Chris, Ari, Lyndon, Dave, Terry, Sue, David, Marcy, Damon, Sara, and Nora.
Love, Leslie

Leigh: So I am your past. Screw you too, baby.

A perSonable
frum ryk
if i can say hello....
.....hello.....



Kathy W.- Thank you for accepting me and trying to understand me, in spite of everything. As always, I love you! Robin

Neill-you're right, it is a nice way to start the day!
Jeff Edmonds- Hey big brother, incest is best! I love you, Robin

For all of you who can't keep track of me-my new address is Janet Rosado
62 Hill St. Apt. #7
Woburn, MA 01801

Keith-You're such a f--k bunny. Why do you have to be so goddam pretty? Who can resist?
The Female LRY population -2

Melanie & Max- Hey phriques, stay cool and don't forget to right! Bunches of love, David Louis Bragen

The U.D.L.- We're going to wipe out weekend hippies in your life time. Hank, Co. Pres

Claudia- Hi! Have you heard that Rachel stringbean did? It was Bizarrr and with Ronald Reagan too!! Love, Bekah

Hi Hillevi, from Erika
To all of Jim's Soda Shop junkies-yeah you!! You know who you are. We MISS you all! Its been to long! Come on Texas, Memphis isn't that far! 'Til next we meet, SWUUC you!!
With lots of love,
and lots of fun, Laura and the OKC LRY

P.S. Hey Columbus, OH, are you still there? We never quite found anyone else who could compare!! Bish, bish forever!! We love you-let's get together, OK? Call us collect: (405)-691-1327. The cutest little piece of fuzz you ever did see is still in our hearts.

Dear Chas- Between Ziggy, SW, and People Soup, I think we will get there. See ya in Paradise,
Love, Dorothy Hammill

Dear LRY'ers- If you would like to receive GRUST, Starr King's newsletter, send your address (and maybe even your name) to: Gil Brown
1415 Piedra
Walnut Creek, CA, 94596

Robin - Hi kiddo!! Love ya lots, Bekah

Max- If you ever read this, I'll know your'e there! Do me a favor and try to stay away from your favorite addiction! Hint "16" say high to G-town. L.S.D. jr

Sahra McC.- How are you? I'm fine after being on the road for way too long! One of these fine days, by the time you read this, I'll come and visit, I owe you one. You know who

HAPPYHAPPYHAPPYHAPPYHAPPYHAPPY!!!

David, I love you, always. Think and I will understand for we are linked. Forever Your Lady



Have you ever made a psychological center of a fortune teller? The world may never know!

THE UN COLLEGE LIFE

PAUL VATL

It all started about 3 1/2 years ago when I went out into the working world armed only with the ambition to work and make a living for myself.

At the age of sixteen, I dropped out of high school and went out to earn a living. All I was thinking was that someone out there had to be willing to hire me.

My first job was selling flowers. On the weekends I got up at about 3:00am, wrapped as many flowers as possible, then ate breakfast and headed for my corner out in the suburbs. This went on for about two months, with my average earning being \$100 a weekend and \$450 on Mother's Day.

My next job was working in a theatre as an usher. I worked thirty hours a week at minimum wage. At the time, that brought my earnings to \$90 a week, which is hardly enough to live on after paying rent, bills, food expenses and transportation. After painting the entire foyer of the theatre and getting paid \$30 I decided it was time to get out of the business.

I tried framing shops next. The hours were better and so was the pay. Unfortunately, after a few months I started coming to work a little late once in awhile, then more often, then quite often. I found out the hard way that you can't expect an employer to keep accepting excuses forever. I was fired.

Being fired is a really shocking experience. It really makes you think about what you have to do to prevent it from happening again. When you get fired, it's hard to admit that it is your own fault. You want to place the blame on your employer, but in the end you find that you just have to try harder the next time around.

After three different frame shops, the latter two which I did not like for various reasons, I was ready to give it up.

I spent three months salvaging an abandoned hotel four blocks from where I was living, taking the antique furnishings and selling them. When I started running out of things to sell, I decided it was time to find another job.

This time, I was lucky. I found a job I really liked. I was paid to run around Chicago delivering messages and assorted items back and forth between businesses there. The job had a basic pay rate plus commission, which

meant that the harder I worked, the more I earned. I was having some problems making ends meet so I got a roommate to help take the edge off expenses. That was a mistake!

My roommate paid the rent for two months then kicked me out of my apartment. Since his name was on the receipts, the police could do nothing. I couldn't afford a lawyer and the building was being sold in a few months.

So there I was. I had a job I liked but no place to live. That's where having parents came in handy. The same parents I had put through years of wondering what I was doing and whether I was eating right, etc. The same parents whose last knowledge of my work was when I was teaching bicycle repair at a local college. To this day they still can't believe that someone without a high school diploma could teach college.

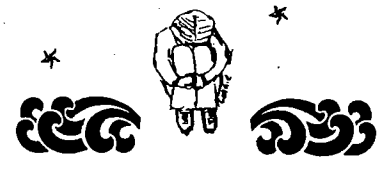
I moved in with my parents and started anew. I was eighteen and my parents no longer had any legal responsibility for me. My life choices were basically up to me now.

I decided to try restaurant work. Actually, that was the only kind of work available at the time. After two months I was able to save enough to rent an apartment and buy a car. I finally had a job I liked; they liked me and gave me hours I could handle.

When the weather got better, I started painting houses on the side. My employers noticed my interest in working with my hands and changed my job description from part time bus boy/waiter, to maintenance for the grounds. I had the choice to work as many hours as I wanted. It worked out well. When I didn't have houses to paint, I would work longer hours.

In the span of two years, I worked ten different jobs and lived in five different places. All this "on the job experience" taught me that it was time to settle down a little bit.

I learned a few things in those two years. I found out what you have to do to survive in the working world, how to deal with the people with whom you work and what amount of responsibility you have to take upon yourself in order to be self supporting. I also gained the feeling of security that is generated from having the same job for awhile.



One drawback to being on your own is that you find that all your friends with whom you spent the years growing up are no longer there. You find that you have to make new friends, and unless you go to college or work in the same town, your chances of seeing them are not very great. If you stay in the same town as your high school, you might see them when they come home on weekends.

There are an awful lot of feelings that go along with seeing old friends and talking about old times and finding out what they're doing. Cutting that tie and accepting that you are no longer a member of the once great Gestalt is a hard thing to do, but it is necessary in order for you to move on with your life. Right now, I'm sitting in the lobby of a college dorm in Madison, Wisconsin.

I've spent the last few days observing college life and seeing old friends. I run in to lots of people I grew up with and find out what they plan to do with their lives. Part of me wants to be here with people my own age; the other half wants to be doing what I'm able to do now, which is sit back and take an unbiased look at all of this.

I know now that my decision not to go to college was right for me, at least for the time being. Maybe the next time the issue of going to college comes around my decision will be different.

The transition between the end of high school and going out on your own is not easy. Whether you choose to go to college or work for a living, it will be a learning experience. So when the time comes for you to make the decision, THINK about what you want from life and go for it! Out there is a world waiting for you and your future to become part of it.

OH, REALLY?

MICHAEL DAVIS



It was late in the afternoon, and it was extremely cold. My jacket was not that warm and Boston in the middle of January was not the place to be without proper attire.

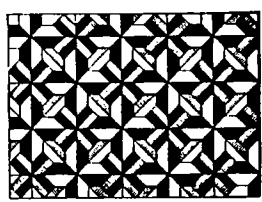
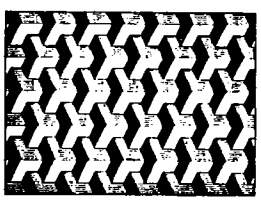
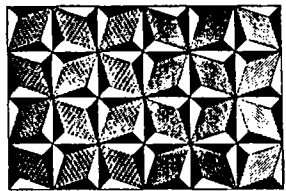
I was waiting for the MBTA out in the middle of Commonwealth Avenue. Ah, finally. I put my token in the box as I stepped into the train. That token was extremely expensive to me at that moment. I was not working and was planning to move back to New York within a week. I looked at all the faces on the train as I usually did, but this time I thought of something in a new way. Like the older gentleman sitting about four seats away from me. How expensive was that same token to him? It was the same 75c but what was it to him? I tried to put myself in his place. I could see him looking at the train from a different angle, and he was thinking not of the cold, but of the amount of work that was not checking out right with the figures he had calculated.

I noticed a young woman sitting next to an affectionate young man. She too was looking at the train from a different angle and could have been thinking about how her boy

friend there was starting to get on her nerves and how she was going to break up with him.

We were all looking at the same things, yet how different we saw them! It then occurred to me that for every person sitting on the blasted subway, it was a totally different subway to each and every single one of them. Some looked at it for maybe the first time, some, not even noticing it because they had ridden it so much.

That evening led me to thinking about something. What is reality? Yes, that question has been asked before, many times. The truth of the matter is that I really believe that reality is simply what you perceive it to be. "Be realistic" is a popular phrase, but how realistic can one be outside of his or her own perception? Face it, there is no all seeing eye, looking at things in an objective manner. There can't be - everyone sees life slightly differently. And everyone's perception is as real as it can possibly ever get. That's it. For anyone who says that this statement is cosmic or "far-out" - I'm not trying to be that way - the only thing I am being is realistic.



4 WANTED FOR HIRE:

JAMES HODGES

So, you have to find a job. None of us want to spend long hours slaving behind a stove or sweeping floors, but eventually, we have to go to work. The major reason is money. How else are you going to afford that new stereo?

If you go to college, it is much easier to get a job, but I'm going to address the problem of finding unskilled labor (restaurant, delivery, cashier, that sort of stuff). The most important thing is appearance. If you are applying for your first job or have little experience, appearance is about all an employer has to judge you by. When you go in, always ask for the manager as he or she is the only one who does the hiring. If there is a help wanted sign in the window, you can just ask for an application, then ask for the manager. You should always wear your dress clothes, you know, the stuff that mom buys for you in Spring that does nothing but hang in your closet. That purple tie-dyed T-shirt from the last conference just won't cut it. Dress in appropriate clothes for appropriate jobs. If you are applying for an outdoor or landscaping job, a good pair of jeans and a flannel shirt are fine. If you are applying for a position in a high class restaurant, a coat and tie or long dress may be necessary.

Make sure that your hair is clean and well combed. For guys, this does not necessarily mean that you have to cut your hair, but it can surely help. You'll get alot more "Can you start now?"s than "Don't call us, we'll call you."s.

Another important thing is speech. Avoid cliché expressions, such as, "Lookin' for any help?", "Need workers?" or "Hiring?". Phrases like "Are you accepting applications?" or "Are there any job opportunities at this time?" are more effective. Always speak clearly and loudly. Be prepared to tell of past experiences or training that qualify you for the job. Know when you can and cannot work. Try to be available for flexible hours. Have a phone where you can be contacted. YOU can always go back to the same place later and see if a job is open.

Timing can be very important. Sometimes an employer will not look at applications in the file, but instead will hire the first person who walks in the door. Always apply alone; never bring friends along. It just doesn't look good to an employer.

After you get a few jobs or have some kind of skill, like typing or cooking, you can try a job agency. Job agencies can be found in the phone book under employment opportunities. They will interview you, get a list of your skills, and locate a job for you. Some jobs are temporary but these jobs can help you get experience. In the end, it is all up to you.

GOOD LUCK!



If you find this creature, box it up and mail to Cleveland, Q

As of August 1, 1982 the Selective Service preppies Act will go into effect. Congress, seeing preppies were a dwindling American, voted this bill into action.

You will be required to go to your local Post Office, and surrender your name, address and, social security number. Numbers will be chosen from these at random, when chosen you are required to serve a two week tour of duty at the closest library, college campus, or so on. Preppie haircut with polo shirt (collarator included) are required. Remember. Join the few. The Proud. The Preppies

two ways of a one way mirror. (cont.)

You will hate, fear and loathe the man, but in the end, come as close as can be to loving that man. Listen to him, he is ex-11B (infantry) What he teaches you could save you in later life.

The first few weeks we went through was more bull and headgames than you can imagine. -Take the gear off, ten minutes of class. Breaktime.

-Rush to put it back on. Hope for seven minutes; expect five; get three. (That is how it goes.)

-Take the gear off. Rush back in for class. (raining all the time) -Ten more minutes of class, then back out.

"If you are not out of this building, all 200 of you maggots (Military Apprentice Getting Great Organizational Training), in fifteen seconds, in an orderly fashion, you are wrong."

"Stop dragging your asses people. This is no vacation."

"You are soldiers; act like you have a purpose in life." (If I did, would I be here?)

"You little people are pissing me off." This went on for three hours at a time, for three weeks.

All through basic, you live in close contact with fifty others, twenty-five hours a day. The D.I. had us pair off with a buddy, someone to watch out for who will watch out for you. If you are wrong, so is he.

The relationship with your buddy is the closest thing one can get to marriage. Given time, you will know what he thinks, eats, when and where he shits, all about his family and his home town. You and he are the same person.

This is a good idea, the pairing off. Sometimes you are too tired or sick to do much of anything like shining boots or cleaning your area, so he will help out and do it for you. You would do the same for him. It just is.

Hell and highwater. Just him, you and two M16-A-1 rifles.

This worked out fine for four weeks. Then he was recycled (set back) with the flu. He was sent to another company, gone for good. No buddy and the duty and responsibility of two people. I was watching both sides of the coin at one time.

If Basic or regular army teaches you anything, it is tolerance. More bull flies in such a short time and you are sure that every bit of it is aimed at you.

You quickly learn that there is no such thing as fantasy in the army.

With Basic, it is either give in or give up. There is no other way. You can't beat the system. Nothing is new to them; they have seen it all and more.

The mind just snaps, echoing in the now voided brain. Everyone at one time or another during basic will sit down and cry. If not on the outside, then on the inside. The pressure is too much. You cry and then you find yourself truly free.

At the time when the mind goes, those who have already "broken" will always lend the hand and support that is needed. It is no longer sets of two, but the platoon has become one great big amoeba. You then have a wish, or need, to learn. You will survive this place.

The head trips that the D.I. plays on you are thrown back into his face. It does not phase you a bit, and the D.I. lets up a bit. He now knows he has what he wants, soldiers. He has gained the advantage and your real fight begins.

Habit and reaction take over. He yells "Hit the dirt!" and you will never remember falling, but you will taste the dirt in your mouth. There is nothing else to be had, for that is all there is.

The fight to find yourself begins. Not search, but fight. Not the outer image, the shell, but what makes the person within. You no longer have burdens while you are there. No fear of life or death exists (to a point) and at last you have the foundation for a stronger soul.

The fight is with the D.I. and yourself, with yourself as the prize.

My main fight was with the weapon, the M16-A-1 rifle. Death.



"Private Schmidt reports as ordered, sir." "At ease, private. It says in your jacket that you are a combat engineer." "Yes, sir. 820th C.E. battalion, sir." "Good. There is a vargame today in Georgia and they asked for a demo to fill a slot." "Yes, sir." "Get chow at 0530 then supply at 0550. Good luck and have fun." "Yes sir."

The last thing in the world I needed, wargames. Give a thousand gun-happy, reservists, national guardsmen, and regular army personal weapons and the permission to use any deserted swampland around, all that will become is pure chaos.

After some time I made it to the chow hall, my head still pounding ferociously, the smell of food overpowering. The urge to pass out was even greater. As I passed through the doors, all that could be seen was line after line of green pickle suits. Herded like cattle, waiting for slaughter like pigs.

I decided to play it safe and chickened out with eggs and milk. Somehow they found a way to screw that one up also.

I looked down at the plate; the yellow yokes of two over-easy eggs seemed like they were two bloodshot eyes staring back at me. No matter where I pushed the plate on the table, their gaze followed me.

Before the smell and noise became too much, I gulped down the milk and abandoned the eggs to some lesser faith.

It is places like this that can quite easily turn one into a vegetarian.

A snug web belt around my waist and a tight strap of the weapon on my back is the most secure feeling I have ever felt. But in times of war, being a combat engineer, I would be on the front. Not so secure, no?

You would swear never to shoot or kill, but when you find bullets flying very closely overhead, your life becomes very important.

Without your fire cover, your buddy's life isn't worth scrap when he rushes forward.

It is just that the rifle freaked me out when they handed it to me that first time. What in the world do you people want me to do with this piece of garbage? Eat it?

At the range, the targets are no longer circles or black boxes. Instead, little green (what else?) silhouettes of people. At first sight, it is very hard to hang with.

A 5.56mm bullet will enter the body, making a hole the size of a dime. Leaving that same body, the hole will hold a grapefruit comfortably. I almost found out about grapefruits while trying to calm down a scared guard at a walk mount at 2:00am with a loaded M-16 pointed at my chest. It is very hard.

First shoot at 100 meters or less, then work outward. One clean hit only takes three seconds. The distance will work up to 400 meters, never really seeing what or who you hit. A little movement and the reflexes will do the rest.

What is worse (if worse can be) is the M-36 hand grenade. Anything within a five meter circle is no more. Fifteen meters further, not much better off.

FOLLOW



(...cont.)

In case of war,
I get the front.
Better me than you,
But I really don't know
what I would do.
I just can't say.

If the chow hall was bad, the supply depot surpassed it by far.

Four white walls, a narrowing hallway, finally leads down to a little caged window. And another line of green.

Not a word was being said by a soul there. Heat built up in the room from the ever growing line of bodies. No sounds, only the echoes of heartbeats as the walls slowly moved in towards me. The click of heels as the line progressed. One by one, the gear was distributed. Finding myself at the head of the line, I was handed a pile of forms and a military black ink pen.

Form after form, my mind slowly flowed forth from the tip of the pen. The plastic, my bones. The paper, my skin. The ink, my blood. And the words, my soul.

The list of forms and numbers, cross reference numbers to others still. The print attacked from all sides, rushing up to my face with infinite speed, grace and tact. Slowly, I was consumed by a wave of paper.

After the last signature on the last form, came the supplies.

Can openers, ammo pouches, helmet liners, shoe laces. Any and everything I would need for the oncoming battle was there. I was armed to the teeth and loathing every minute of it.

The biggest problem of today's army is the same as my father's or his father's army, alcohol. Any color, size, or shape of bottle will do, as long as it has a proof. Age is no matter on base. Old enough to die, old enough to drink. This post alone has six different places at which to buy booze. One is only 150 meters from the barracks. Frunk in public does not exist on post. All the M.P.'s so is return you back to the barracks.

Drink during lunch, on the way back from duty, all the way until midnight. (one needs at least four hours sleep to maintain.)

The time, place and situation really don't matter. If the soldier wants to drink, he will. It will soon turn into a \$50 - \$100 a week habit. And that's only the week days.

Drugs are next on the list. In the woods around any post, six out of ten trees or bushes will have a stash in it.

Marijuana is not taken lightly by the Army. Dogs are run quite often through the barracks, and getting caught with even as little as a seed is a quick ticket out.

The only way to beat the dogs is pills. You name them, they have them.

Any pain, in any way, the medics will pass pills on as long as you need them. The Army gives, and the people pass them on. Taken with beer, the average soldier will soon forget.

Abuse to remember, to pass time, abuse to escape. Everyone has their own reasons and are on their own trips.

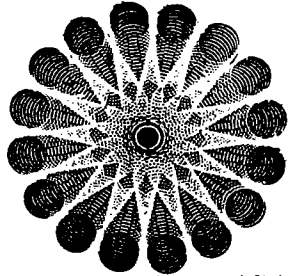
After a very bumpy jeep ride, I arrived at the chopper pad.

The helicopters lay side by side, blades spinning and the blast pushing me back as I fought to get closer.

Suddenly I froze, hypnotized by the egg-beater like sounds striking me across the face. Blades turned forward in a backward motion, just inches off the ground.

Someone waved to me and I rushed to get in. Within seconds we were airborne, except for my stomach, which still lay on the ground below. At this time, it was an even bet as to which was spinning faster, the rotor blades or my head.

Twenty one choppers, all in a tight formation, with ours at the point. We were off to wherever. Why not?



When in the military, there is a definite boundary between being on the inside and outside. There is respect from the older folks, understanding by the vets, and fear and hatred (same thing) by the youth.

The outside no longer exists. No one bothers to read the paper or watch T.V. The fear of the reality that we could possibly face is just there and is no longer a real part of our lives.

What has happened in the past nine months? We really don't know.

The towns around post like our easy money, that's about all. Police know we are quick targets for D.W.I.s, among other things. Locals usually wish we were someplace else.

On the inside, it's a world of its own. Those who are here will help us to no end. They are mostly the wives of service members and understand. Most things are either free or low cost on base. It is almost like a mix between a dictatorship and a commune.

When people say they hate the military, it's not really hate, but fear. How can they hate what they do not know or understand?

A hate of what happens during war, a fear that it might be them or anyone else on either side of the action. I wish people could see the difference between their fears and hate.

It's not that the military is bad in itself. We act only on what the current government dictates. We can do very little on our own; we're like puppets on strings.

The government misuses the military at times. It is all politics, nothing more, nothing less.

There is slack from the government, slack from the civilians. And we are in the middle of it all.

There are those in the army for the fight, the hard-core rangers. They are the ones I can't understand. I don't think I ever will.

A gentle nudge woke me from my sleep. Somewhere along the trip I had dozed off.

Both hatches were wide open and a sergeant was passing out cardboard boxes of K-rations and beer. Any and everything you have ever wanted from a can, and all of it fifteen years old. Peaches, cake, candy, turkey, and much more. Three boxes of K-rat will keep a soldier on the front alive. Better yet if the enemy eats them.

As I finally woke, I recognized a song by the Doors coming from a tape deck behind me. We sat with our feet hanging over the side of the door in the cool breeze, drinking beer and eating K-rats. Slowly watching the cans we did not want to eat slowly shrinking away as they fell to the ground, we knew all the time that that could be us, by accident or design.

Fights are not uncommon. Living in a forty man bay, divided into four man sections, the only walls being lockers, tension grows quickly.

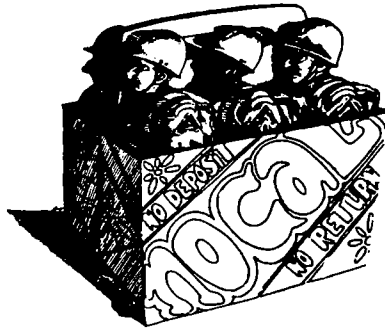
Privacy is rare, but highly appreciated. You find it where and when you can. Thoughts of home, counting the days until leave, transfer or end of duty.

With so much time on my hands, I just shine my boots and try to find myself on the tip of a wet wax rag.

Bullshit and headtrips from hard-core sergeants are expected. You search deep within for extra energy. Every morning you say it is the last, no more. But you always seem to make it through the next day.

Letting loose of home, friends and possessions. All I own fits into a duffle bag. Letters are always worth their weight in gold.

I accept what I am and have only started to find myself in this strange world in which I find myself.



This is what we had all been waiting for. The squad leader finally told us what our mission was.

Our squad and one other were to land at the LZ (landing zone) three to five minutes before the main group (which had dropped back beyond sight now), create a sound and stable perimeter around the LZ and hold it.

What did the LZ look like? We had no idea. It could be friendly or enemy control by the time we got there. We had to wait and see.

A large burst of rounds went off next to me and I almost went airborne out the hatch. The sergeant had started passing out blank ammo and people were testing their weapons out the hatches into the trees below.

Then the door gunner with the .50 caliber machine guns cut loose. No one could hear a thing from then on.

I found myself with my finger on the trigger, emptying 20 round clips into the trigger overhead, aiming for the clouds, watching the paper walls being chopped to shreds.

Now all we waited for was the five minute warning and the smoke to mark the LZ.

There are always those who pass out, but sleep is salvation. Waking, the horror. Eight to ten hours sleep a blessing. Sleep is an escape from it all, a chance to dream of other lives, things, people or places.

Waking up just minutes before the LZ turns on the lights to start the new duty, it is 4:15am. Laying awake in bed, the fear and loathing for the passing of each second is terrible.

Before I go to sleep each night I ask myself why? All I can come up with are excuses, no real reason. It's a feeling that is hard to put on paper. My day will come when it does.

Then it came. Five minutes, the pilot told us. Now only the sound of the blades and the rushing wind could be heard.

As if in one mad Christmas time rush, we all started to check our gear and grab the full ammo clips that lay around.

It was not long till the pilot spotted the purple smoke that marked the LZ. The .50 calcs opened up on the tree line around the clearing to soften up our landing.

The choppers were down for no more than 30 seconds before we were out of them.

We rushed for cover in the trees and were met by heavy enemy cover. The sergeant radioed to the main strike force to delay until the outcome of this soon to be massacre.

Then off went the loudest sound I have ever heard in my life. It scared the living daylight out of me. Something went off very close to the left of me.

I lay there, trying to regain my hearing when the referee declared us dead, ending our part in the war games.

The noise? A dummy M-36 hand grenade, three feet from my head. It was only a game, luckily.

All it took was three easy minutes. Now I have seen on faith what could have been. Sometimes I just don't know.

Funny thing, this Army. Nothing more, nothing less.

