

Full Metal Jacket

A Screenplay by Stanley Kubrick & Michael Herr

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FULL METAL JACKET

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A
Screenplay
by
Stanley Kubrick
and
Michael Herr

Based on the novel
THE SHORT-TIMERS
by
Gustav Hasford

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1967 - PARRIS ISLAND

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"IS THAT YOU JOHN WAYNE?
IS THIS ME?"

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The Marines are looking for a few good men...

Barbershop. A row of barbers with electric clippers work ankle deep in hair as they give the young Marine recruits a 30-second, skin-head haircut. We see Joker, Cowboy and Leonard.

A drill instructor shouts at the line of waiting recruits: "You are about to receive your first Marine Corps recruit haircut. You will be shaved completely bald.

"If you have a mole, bump, scar or anything else protruding from your head, and by protruding I mean anything sticking up out of your head, the minute you sit down in that chair place your finger on whatever it is on your head, and let the barber know whatever is there, verbally, by saying, 'Sir, the Private has a mole on his head!'"

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-2-

Dawn. Green Marines. Two junior drill instructors screaming, "GET IN LINE! GET IN LINE! YOU WILL NOT MOVE! YOU WILL NOT SPEAK! Red brick buildings. Willow trees hung thick with Spanish moss. The shaved recruits standing tall on yellow footprints painted in a pattern on the concrete deck.

Parris Island, South Carolina, the United States Marine Corps Recruit Depot, an eight-week college for the phoney-tough and the crazy-brave.

"I am Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim, your senior drill instructor. And these are your junior drill instructors, Corporal Durrane and Corporal Seaton. From now on, you will speak only when spoken to, and the first word out of your mouth will be, sir! Do you maggots understand that?"

The recruits mumble "Yes, sir," but not in unison.

"I can't hear you! Sound off like you got a pair!"

"YES, SIR!"

Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim spits. "Listen up,

herd. You maggots had better start looking like United States Marine Corps recruits. Do not think for one second that you are Marines. You just dropped by to pick up a set of dress blues. Am I right, ladies?"

"YES, SIR!"

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Joker says in a John Wayne voice: "I think I'm going to hate this movie."

Cowboy laughs.

Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim laughs, too. The senior drill instructor is an obscene little ogre in immaculate khaki.

Sergeant Gerheim walks slowly back along the line of recruits. "Who said that?"

Silence.

Sergeant Gerheim peers into each face. "Who said that?"

"I did, sir," Joker says.

Sergeant Gerheim aims his index finger between Joker's eyes and says, "Private Joker... I like honesty. I like you. You can come over to my house and fuck my sister."

He grins. He punches Joker in the stomach.

Joker sinks to his knees.

"You little scumbag. I got your name. I got your ass. You *will not* laugh. You *will not* cry. You will learn by the numbers. I will teach you. Get up!"

Joker gets to his feet and comes to attention.

Leonard Pratt grins.

Sergeant Gerheim puts his fists on his hips. "*If* you ladies leave my island, *if* you survive recruit training, you will be a weapon, you will be a minister of death, praying for war. And proud. Until that day you are pukes, you are scumbags, you are the lowest term of life on Earth. You are not even human. You people are nothing but a lot of little pieces of amphibian shit."

Leonard Pratt grins.

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"You got a name, scumbag?"

"Leonard Pratt, sir," he says with a thick hillbilly accent.

"Like hell it is! From now on you're Gomer Pyle!"

Leonard Grins.

"Private Pyle thinks I am a real funny guy. He thinks that Parris Island is more fun than a sucking chest wound."

The hillbilly's fact is frozen into a

permanent expression of oat-fed innocence.

He punches Leonard in the chest.

"You maggots are not going to have any fun here. You are not going to enjoy standing in straight lines and you are not going to enjoy massaging your own wand. My orders are to weed out all nonhackers who do not pack the gear to serve in my beloved Corps. Because I am hard, you will not like me. But the more you hate me, the more you will learn. I am hard but I am fair. There is no racial bigotry here. We do not look down on niggers, kikes, wop or greasers, because here you are all equally worthless. Do you understand?"

Some of them mumble, "Yes. Yeah. Yes, sir."

"I can't *hear* you, ladies!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I *still* can't hear you, ladies!"

"YES, SIR!"

"You piss me off. Hit the deck."

They crumple down onto the parade deck.

"You got no motivation. Do you hear me, maggots? Listen up. I will give you motivation. You have no esprit de corp. I will give you

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esprit de corps. You have no traditions. I will give you traditions. And I will show you how to live up to them.

Sergeant Gerheim struts, ramrod straight, hands on hips. "GET UP! GET UP!"

They get up, knees Sore, hands gritty.

Sergeant Gerheim says to his two junior drill instructors: "What a humble herd." Then to the recruits: "You silly scumbags are too slow. Hit the deck."

Down.

Up.

Down.

Up.

"HIT IT!"

Down.

Sergeant Gerheim steps over their struggling bodies, stomps fingers, kicks ribs with the toe of his boot. "Jesus H. Christ. You maggots are huffing and puffing the way your momma did the first time your old man put the meat to her."

Pain.

"GET UP! GET UP!"

Up. Muscles aching.

Leonard Pratt is slow getting up.

Sergeant Gerheim stands over him. "Okay, scumbag, on your feet."

Leonard gets up on one knee, hesitates, then stands up, inhaling and exhaling. He grins.

"Why are you grinning at me, Private Pyle?"

"I don't know, sir."
"You are grinning at me, you ugly ape!"
"I can't help it, sir!"
"You got a crush on me?"

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"No, sir!"
"You want to smoke my pole?"
"No, sir!"
"Then you hate me? You want to kill me?"
"No, sir!"
"Don't lie to me."
"Sir, I'm not...lying to you."
"*YOU? YOU?* Did you say *YOU?* Do you know what a ewe is? A ewe is a female sheep. A female sheep is for fucking!"
"Sir..."
"Why do you want to fuck your drill instructor???"
Sergeant Gerheim punches Leonard in the chest hard. Leonard doubles over with pain. "LOCK THEM HEELS! YOU'RE AT ATTENTION!"
Leonard comes to attention. Eyes front. But the trace of a grin remains.
"Wipe that grin off your face."
The grin is involuntary and Leonard cannot always control it.
Sergeant Gerheim backhands Leonard across the face.
Blood.
Leonard locks his heels. Leonard's lips are busted, pink and purple, and his mouth is bloody, but Leonard only shrugs and grins as though Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim had just given him a birthday present.
"Why did you join the Marines Cops?"
"To become a man, Sir!"
"Private Pyle, you may just be the dumbest United States Marine recruit in Marine Corps history."

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Close order drill, Leonard makes a mistake.
"Private Pyle, what are you trying to do to my beloved Corps?"
"I'm sorry, sir," Leonard says.
"You are dumb Private Pyle but do you expect me to believe you don't know right from left?"
"No, sir."
"Then you did it on purpose. You want to be different."
"No, sir." The trace of a grin appears at

the corners of his mouth.

"You think I'm stupid."

"No, sir."

"Then why are you grinning at me?"

"I'm not grinning, sir!"

Gerheim hits Leonard on the right side of his face, a hard stunning clap. Pain takes the grin away.

"What side was that?"

"Right side, sir!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir!"

He slaps him just as hard on the left side.

"And what side was that?"

"Left, sir," Leonard says blinking with pain.

"Don't fuck with me again, scumbag."

"Yes, sir!"

The close order drill continues.

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Beatings, we learn, are a routine element of life on Parris Island. And not that I'm-only-rough-on-'um-because-I-love-'um crap in Mr. John Wayne's "The Sands of Iwo Jima".

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Mess hall. The recruits move sideways at the position of attention, trays held flat against their chests, pressed close to the man in front of them, the DI's shouting, "Assholes to belly-button! Assholes to belly-button!"

Mounds of scrambled eggs are piled high on each tray, with sausages, bacon, hashed brown potatoes, cereal, toast and grapefruit.

The recruits follow the man in front of them from the food counter to tables which hold twelve. They stand at attention while one recruit says grace, reading from a printed plastic card which looks like a menu and which has its own little stand on each table.

On the command the recruits sit. Sergeant Gerheim suddenly appears at Leonard's place and bellows, "Private Pyle!"

Leonard leaps to his feet. "Yes sir!"

Sergeant Gerheim sweeps Leonard's tray to the floor with a loud crash of dishes and cutlery.

"Private Pyle, the doctors have certified you as a fatbody. With those tits on you you belong in Playboy. You will receive half-portions at all meals and no deserts, potatoes, bread, jam or butter! Is that clear?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

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Various training shots. Leonard being shouted at and beaten.

For the first four weeks of recruit training Leonard continues to grin, even though he receives more than his share of the beatings. Even having the shit beat out of him with calculated regularity fails to educate Leonard the way it educates the other recruits in Platoon 30-92. Leonard tries harder than any of us. He can't do anything right.

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At night, as the platoon sleeps in double-tiered metal bunks, Leonard cries. Joker whispers to him to be quiet. He stops crying.

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Barracks.

On the first day of our fifth week, Sergeant Gerheim beats the hell out of me.

"Private Joker!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I want you and Private Cowboy to clean the head!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I want it so sanitary and spotless and sparkling that the Virgin Mary herself would be proud to go in there and take a dump."

"Yes, sir!"

Joker and Cowboy start for the head.

"Private Joker!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Do you believe in the Virgin Mary?"

"NO SIR!" I say.

It's a trick question. Any answer will be wrong, and Sergeant Gerheim will heat me harder if I reverse myself.

Sergeant Gerheim punches Joker in the solar plexus with his elbow. "You little maggot," he says, and his fist punctuates the sentence. "Are

you a Jew?"

"No, sir!"

"An atheist?"

"No, sir!"

"A communist?"

Joker stands to attention, heels locked, eyes front, swallowing groans, trying not to flinch.

"You make me want to vomit, scumbag. You goddamn heathen. You better sound off that you love the Virgin Mary or I'm going to stomp your guts out."

Sergeant Gerheim's face is about an inch from Joker's left ear. "EYES FRONT!" Spit sprinkles his face.

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"Are you winking at me?" More spit. Joker blinks.

"No, sir."

"Are you eye-fucking me?"

He punches Joker in the stomach.

"Negative, sir."

"You want to fuck your drill instructor? You want to smoke his pole?" More spit.

"No, sir!" Joker manages not to blink.

"If I catch you winking at me again, I'm going to gouge your eyes out and skullfuck you!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Now, sound off, you do love the Virgin Mary, don't you?"

"SIR, NEGATIVE! SIR!"

"What did you say, private?"

"SIR, THE PRIVATE SAID, 'NO, SIR!' SIR!"

Sergeant Gerheim's beefy red face floats by like a cobra being charmed by music. His eyes drill into Joker's, they invite him to look at him; they dare him to move his eyes one fraction of an inch.

"Have you seen the light? The white light? The great light? The guiding light - do you have the vision?"

"SIR, AYE-AYE, SIR!"

"Who's your squad leader, scumbag?"

"SIR, THE PRIVATE'S SQUAD LEADER IS PRIVATE SNOWBALL, SIR!"

"Private Snowball, front and center."

Private Snowball, a black recruit, runs down the center of the squad bay snaps to attention in front of Sergeant Gerheim. "AYE-AYE, SIR!"

"Private Snowball, you're fired. Private

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Joker is promoted to squad leader."

Private Snowball hesitates. "AYE-AYE, SIR!"

"Go."

Private Snowball does an about-face, runs back down the squad bay, falls back into line in front of his rack, snaps to attention.

Sergeant Gerheim turns to Leonard. "Private Pyle, Private Joker is your new bunkmate. Private Joker is a very bright boy. He will teach you everything. He will teach you how to pee."

Joker says, "SIR, THE PRIVATE WOULD PREFER TO STAY WITH HIS BUNKMATE, PRIVATE COWBOY, SIR!"

Sergeant Gerheim looks from Joker to Cowboy. "You queer for Private Cowboy's gear? You smoke his pole?"

"SIR, NEGATIVE, SIR!"

"Outstanding. Then Private Joker will bunk with Private Pyle. Private Joker is silly and he's ignorant, but he's got guts, and guts is enough."

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Training continues.

Shots feature Joker and Leonard.

I teach Leonard everything I know, from how to lace his black combat boots to the assembly and disassembly of the M-14 semi-automatic shoulder weapon.

I teach Leonard that Marines work hard. Only shitbirds try to avoid work, only

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shitbirds try to skate. Marines are clean, not skuzzy.

I teach Leonard to value his rifle as he values his life. I teach him that blood makes the grass grow.

"This here gun is one mean-looking piece of iron, sure enough." Leonard's clumsy fingers snap his weapon together.

"Think of your rifle as a tool, Leonard. like an axe on the farm."

Leonard grins. "Okay. You're right, Joker." He looks at Joker. "I'm sure glad you're helping me, Joker. You're my friend. I know I'm slow. I always bean slow. Nobody ever helped me..."

Joker turns away, "That sounds like a personal problem," he says, keeping his eyes on his weapon.

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Mail Call.

"Private Pyle."

Leonard yells his name, runs down the squad bay and comes to attention in front of Sergeant Gerheim.

"Private Pyle, sir!"

Sergeant Gerheim looks at the envelope.

"Who's Lucie Pratt?"

"Sir, that's the private's sister."

"Does she smoke your pole?"

"No, sir." Leonard grins.

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"Is she a good fuck?"

"Sir, I don't know."

"Maggot, do you expect me to believe there's a shit-kicker in Alabama who doesn't fuck his sister?"

"Yes, sir,"

"Maybe she likes coons."

"No, sir."

"You think I'm funny?"

"No, sir!"

"Then wipe that fucking grin off."

"Yes, sir!"

"GO."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Leonard claps the letter between his palms, held out horizontally, takes one step backwards, does an about face, and runs back to his bunk.

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Outdoor school circle. The platoon is grouped in a semi-circle around Sergeant Gerheim.

Sergeant Gerheim holding an M-14 says, "The deadliest weapon in the world is a Marine and his rifle. It is your killer instinct which must be harnessed if you expect to survive in combat. Your rifle is only a tool; it is a hard heart that kills. If your killer instincts are not clean and strong, you will hesitate at the moment of truth. You will not kill. You will become dead Marines and then you will be in a world of shit because Marines are not allowed to die without permission; you are government property!"

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-11-

During our sixth week, Sergeant Gerheim orders us double-time around the squad bay with our penises in our left hands and our

weapons in our right hand, singing:

This is my rifle
This is my gun
One is for fighting
And one is for fun.

And:

I don't want no teen-aged queen
All I want is my M-14.

Sergeant Gerheim holds up a rifle. "You will give your rifle a girl's name. This is the only pussy you people are going to get. Your days of finger-hanging ol' Mary Jane Rottencrotch through her pretty pink panties are over. You're married to *this* piece, this weapon of iron and wood, and you *will* be faithful."

They run. And they sing:

Well, I don't know
But I been told
Eskimo pussy
Is mighty cold...

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-12-

Inspection. My mind isn't on my responsibilities and I forget to remind Leonard to shave.

Sergeant Gerheim looks disappointed.

"Private Joker!"

"Yes, sir."

"Private Pyre did not stand close enough to his razor this morning."

"No, sir."

"Private Pyle!"

"Yes, sir."

"Into the head on the double!"

"Yes, sir!"

Leonard double-times into the head.

"Recruit squad leaders, into the head, on the double!"

"Yes, sir!"

Joker and the other recruit squad leaders double-time into the head.

Sergeant Gerheim strides in after them.

"Recruit squad leaders form a circle around this toilet."

They apprehensively group themselves around the toilet.

"Now, on my command, you will open your pants and urinate into the toilet. Do you understand?"

"YES, SIR!"

"Open your pants and urinate in the toilet!"

They hesitate.
"IS THIS A MUTINY??"
"NO, SIR!"

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"LOCK THEM HEELS! YOU ARE AT ATTENTION!
READDDDY.....WHIZZZZ...."

They whizz.

Sergeant Gerheim grabs the back of Leonard's neck and forces Leonard to his knees, pushes his head down into the yellow pool. Leonard struggles. Bubbles. Panic gives Leonard strength; Sergeant Gerheim holds him down.

After it seems that Leonard has drowned, Sergeant Gerheim flushes the toilet. When the water stops flowing, Sergeant Gerheim releases his hold on Leonard's neck.

Leonard straightens up coughing and sputtering, his face and hair soaked in urine.

Gerheim says: "Private Pyle, I wouldn't put my hands in piss for just anybody. I hope you appreciate that."

"Yes, sir."

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Practise field bayonet training.

Sergeant Gerheim demonstrates effective attack techniques to a recruit named Barnard, a soft-spoken fern boy from Maine. The beefy drill instructor knocks out two of Private Barnard's teeth with a rifle butt.

Sergeant Gerheim says, "The purpose of bayonet training is to awaken your killer instincts. The killer instinct will make you strong. If the meek ever inherit the earth the strong will take it away from them. The weak exist to be devoured by the strong. Every Marine

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must pack his own gear. Every Marine must be the instrument of his own salvation."

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The confidence course was designed to test the recruits' fear of heights.

The Confidence Course: they go hand over hand down a rope strung at a forty-five-degree angle across a pond - the slide-for-life. They hang upside down like monkeys and crawl headfirst

down the rope.

Leonard falls off the slide-for-life repeatedly. He almost drowns. He cries. He climbs the tower. He tries again. He falls off again. This time he sinks.

Cowboy and Joker dive into the pond. They pull Leonard out of the muddy water. He's unconscious.

Joker says, "Should we take him to the sick bay, sir?"

Gerheim kneels down to see how badly he is hurt. He says loudly, "It's okay. It's just a hard-on!"

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-15-

Back at the squad bay Sergeant Gerheim fits a Trojan rubber with a hole in it over the mouth of a canteen and throws the canteen at Leonard. The canteen hits Leonard on the side of the head. Sergeant Gerheim bellows, "Marines *do not* cry! You will fill this canteen with milk, and every day after chow you will nurse it at the table!"

"Yes, sir!"

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Mess Hall. Leonard is nursing on the canteen. The recruits at his table try not to notice but crude and derisory remarks come from drill instructors at nearby tables.

-17-

Practise field. Pugil stick fighting. Two recruits face each other. Each man wears a football style helmet, face mask and groin protector. He is armed with a five-foot pole, padded at each end. The object being to knock your opponent down. The platoon is formed around the combatants in a large circle. The DI's yell at them to be more aggressive. The recruits play war with the pugil sticks. They beat each other without mercy.

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-18-

The recruits enter the barracks from a

training session. Leonard finds his bedding and the contents of his opened locker box strewn on the floor.

Gerheim stands at the far end of the barracks, hands on hips. "Ten...hutt!"

The recruits line up at attention in front of their bunks.

Gerheim says "Private Pyle!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Get up here, on the double!"

"Yes, sir." Leonard double-times up the squad bay and comes to attention in front of Gerheim.

"Do you recognize this?" He points to a jelly-donut, placed on a sheet of newspaper on the table.

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"A jelly-donut, sir."

"Do you know where I found it?"

"Where?"

"In my footlocker, sir."

"How did it get there?"

"I took it from the mess hall, sir."

"Private Pyle, are you allowed to eat jelly-donuts?"

"No, sir."

"Why not, Private Pyle?"

"Because I am too heavy, sir."

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"Because you are a disgusting fatbody, Private Pyle."

"And is food allowed in the barracks, Private Pyle?"

"No, sir."

"Then why did you hide a jelly-donut in your footlocker, Private Pyle?"

"Because I was hungry, sir."

"Because you were hungry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go back to your place, Private Pyle."

"Yes, sir." Leonard double-times back to his bunk.

"Private Pyle has dishonoured himself and dishonoured the platoon. He is a dumbass, cowardly, fatbody, a ten-percenter who does not pack the gear to he in my beloved Corps. I have tried to help him but I have failed. I have failed because you have not helped me. You have not given Private Pyle the right motivation. So from now on whenever Private Pyle fucks up I will not punish him, I will punish all of you."

Outside the barracks, the platoon does many squat-thrusts and side-straddle hops many, many of them.

Leonard has been positioned, facing the platoon, standing at ease.

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-20-

Leonard touches Joker's arm as they move through the chow line with their metal trays. "I just can't do nothing right. I need some help. I don't want you boys to be in trouble. I-"

Joker moves away.

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The first night of our seventh week of training the platoon gives Leonard a blanket party.

Midnight.

The fire watch stands by. Private Philips, the House Mouse, Sergeant Gerheim's "go-fer," pads barefoot down the squad bay to watch for Sergeant Gerheim.

In the dark, fifty recruits walk to Leonard's rack.

Leonard is grinning, even in his sleep.

The squad leaders hold towels and bars of soap.

Four recruits throw a blanket over Leonard. They grip the corners of the blanket so that Leonard can't sit up and so that his cries will be muffled.

The sound of hard breathing of fifty sweating bodies and the fump and thud as Cowboy and Private Barnard beat Leonard with bars of soap slung in towels.

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Leonard's screams are like the braying of a sick mule, heard far away, he struggles.

The eyes of the platoon are on Joker. Eyes are aimed at Joker in the dark, eyes like rubies.

Leonard stops screaming.

Joker hesitates. The eyes are on him. He steps back.

Cowboy punches him in the chest with his towel and a bar of soap.

Joker slings the towel, drops in the soap, and then beats Leonard who has stopped moving. He

lies in silence stunned, gagging for air. Joker beat him harder and harder and when he feels tears being flung from his eyes, he beats him harder for it.

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The next day, on the parade deck, Leonard does not grin.

When Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim asks, "What do we do for a living, ladies!" and the platoon replies, KILL! KILL! KILL!", Leonard remains silent.

When he asks, "What makes the grass grow?" and they reply "BLOOD! BLOOD! BLOOD!" Leonard remains silent.

When the junior drill instructors ask, "Do we love the beloved Crotch, ladies?" and the platoon answers with one voice, "GUNG HO! GUNG HO! GUNG HO!" Leonard is silent.

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-23-

Shots of the platoon firing their rifles.

On the third day of our seventh week we move to the rifle range and shoot holes in paper targets.

Later they are grouped around Gerheim. "Does anyone know who Charles Whitman was?"

Blank faces.

"None of you dumbasses knows?"

Cowboy slowly raises his hand.

"Private Cowboy?"

"Was he the guy that shot a lot of people from a roof?"

"That's right, Private Cowboy. He shot and killed twelve people from a 28-story observation tower at the University of Texas, from distances of up to four hundred yards."

The recruits look impressed.

"Does anybody know who Lee Harvey Oswald was?"

That's easy. Almost every hand goes up.

"Private Snowball?"

Private Snowball says, "He shot Kennedy, Sir!"

"That's right. And do you know how far away he was?"

"It was pretty far. From that book suppository building, sir!"

"Two hundred and fifty" feet. He was two hundred and fifty feet away and shooting at a moving target. He got off three shots with a bolt

action rifle in six seconds, and got two hits, including a head shot. Do you know where those men learned to shoot like that?"

No one knows. Joker raises his hand.

"Private Joker."

"In the Marines sir?"

"In the Marines. Outstanding! Now those people did not put their Marine training to a good purpose but they showed what a Marina with his rifle can do, and before I am through you will all be able to do the same thing."

Leonard stares at Gerheim.

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Parade deck, Manual of arms.

"I want to hear some snap, crackle and pop with those weapons."

Leonard and other recruits smartly doing their manual of arms.

"When you snap those rifles to port arms, I only want to hear one pop!"

By the end of our seventh week Leonard has become a model recruit. Day by day, he is more motivated, more squared away. We decide that Leonard's silence is a result of his intense concentration. His manual of arms is flawless now, but his eyes are milk glass.

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Barracks, Night. Leonard cleaning his disassembled rifle. He handles each piece lovingly and seems to be talking to them.

Leonard cleans his weapon more than any recruit in the platoon. Every night after chow Leonard caresses the scarred oak stock with linseed oil the way hundreds of earlier recruits have caressed the same piece of wood.

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Training shots featuring Leonard.

Leonard improves at everything, but remains silent. He does what he is told but he is no

*longer part of the platoon.
Sergeant Gerheim is careful not to come
down too hard on Leonard as long as Leonard remains
squared away.*

-27-

During the hour before Taps, the platoon is working on its shoes, brass and rifles. A Kentucky boy named Perkins lays his rifle down, steps to the center of the squad bay and slashes his wrist with his bayonet.

"Oh, Jesus Christ," Cowboy says.

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Leonard slowly gets to his feet but says nothing.

Gerheim gets up from his table at the head of the room and walks unhurriedly down the squad bay.

He stops in front of Perkins who is still holding the bayonet.

"Private Perkins, sheath your bayonet!"

Perkins doesn't move.

"Sheath your bayonet, scumbag!"

Perkins drops the bayonet on the floor.

Gerheim walks closer and looks at Perkins' wrist. It's a mess but Gerheim decides he's got some time.

"Private Perkins, why have you made a mess in my nice, clean squad bay?"

Perkins doesn't reply.

"Private Perkins, I did not have you down as a shitbird. Why have you done this?"

Perkins says nothing.

"Private Perkins, you have let me down. You have let the platoon down. You are a gutless piece of shit."

Perkins just stands looking at the floor.

"Private Perkins, you can live like a pig in your own home but not in my barracks! Get a mop and bucket and clean up this mess. After that, double-time to the sick bay."

Perkins stumbles off to get the mop.

Gerheim speaks to the platoon.

"Private Perkins botched the job. Now, if any of you other shitbirds ever get the same idea you better do it right. (Holds out his arm and mimes what he says). The approved U.S. Marine Corps way is to take a razor blade and cut deep

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and vertical from wrist to elbow, Do you understand?"

"YES, SIR!" the platoon shouts.
"And do it in the shower - no mess
afterwards - and do it in the middle of the night
so you'll have enough time to bleed before anyone
finds you. Is that clear?"
"YES, SIR!" the platoon shouts.
Except Leonard, who says nothing.

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The platoon, led by Sergeant Gerheim is
singing.

Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday dear Jesus,
Happy Birthday to you.

Gerheim says, "God has a hard-on for Marines
because we kill everything we see. He plays his
games, we play ours. To show our appreciation for
so much power, we keep heaven packed with fresh
souls..."

"The Marine Corps was here before God. You
can give your heart to Jesus but your ass belongs
to the Corps... Do you understand?"

"YES, SIR!"

"Today is Christmas. There will be a magic
show at 0930 and the Chaplain expects everyone
there except Jews and atheists..."

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Night Barracks. The platoon stands by until
Sergeant Gerheim snaps out his last order of the
day: "Prepare to mount...Readdy...MOUNT!" Then
they're lying on their backs in their skivvies, at
attention, their weapons held at port arms.

They say their prayers:

"This is my rifle. There are many like it
but this one is mine. My rifle is my best
friend. It is my life. I must master it as
I must master my life.

"Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire
my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than
my enemy who is trying to kill me. I must
shoot him before he shoots me. I will."

Leonard is speaking for the first time in
weeks. His voice booms louder and louder. Heads
turn. Bodies shift. The platoon voice fades.
Leonard is about to explode. His words are being

coughed up from some deep, ugly place.

Sergeant Gerheim has the night duty. He struts to Leonard's rack and stands by, fists on hips.

Leonard doesn't see Sergeant Gerheim. The veins in Leonard's neck are bulging as he bellows:

"MY RIFLE IS HUMAN, EVEN AS I, BECAUSE IT IS MY LIFE. THUS I WILL LEARN IT AS A BROTHER. I WILL LEARN ITS WEAKNESSES, ITS STRENGTHS,

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ITS PARTS, ITS ACCESSORIES, ITS SIGHTS, AND ITS BARREL.

"I WILL KEEP MY RIFLE CLEAN AND READY, EVEN AS I AM CLEAN AND READY. WE WILL BECOME PART OF EACH OTHER.

"WE WILL...

"BEFORE GOD I SWEAR THIS CREED. MY RIFLE AND MYSELF ARE DEFENDERS OF MY COUNTRY. WE ARE THE MASTER OF OUR ENEMY. WE ARE THE SAVIORS OF MY LIFE.

"SO BE IT, UNTIL THERE IS NO ENEMY, BUT PEACE!

"AMEN."

Sergeant Gerheim kicks Leonard's rack.

"Hey-you-Private Pyle...."

"What? Yes? YES, Sir!" Leonard snaps to attention in his rack. "AYE-AYE, SIR!

"What's that weapon's name, maggot?"

"SIR, THE PRIVATE'S WEAPON'S NAME IS CHARLENE, SIR!"

"At ease maggot." Sergeant Gerheim grins.

"You are becoming one sharp recruit, Private Pyle. Most motivated private in my herd. Why, I may even allow you to serve as a rifleman in my beloved Corps. I had you figured for a shitbird, but you'll make a good grunt."

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Graduation day. Two hundred new Marines stand tall on the parade deck, lean and tan in immaculate khaki, their clean weapons held at port arm.

They pass in review.

Joker walks right guide, tall and proud.
Cowboy carries the platoon guidon.

Graduation day. No words can express the way we feel. The moment the Commandant of the Marine Corps gives us the word, we will grab the Viet Cong guerillas and the battle-hardened North Vietnamese regulars by their scrawny throats and we'll punch their fucking heads off.

The Commanding General of Parris Island speaks into a microphone: "Have you seen the light? The white light? The great light? The guiding light? Do you have the vision?"

They cheer, happy beyond belief.
Leonard does not smile.

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After graduation Sergeant Gerheim forms us into a school circle to read out our orders.

"Pickett!"
"Yes, sir!"
"0300 - infantry."

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"Adams!"
"1800 - engineers. You go out and find mines."
"0200 - Intelligence. None of you shitbirds were smart enough for that."
"Cowboy!"
"Yes, sir."
"0300 - Infantry."
Pratt!" (That's Leonard)
"Yes, sir!"
"Infantry."
"Davis!" (That's Joker)
"4212 - Basic Military Journalism...*Basic Military Journalism?* Do you want to be an office pinky?"
"No, sir!"
"Are you a writer?"
"I wrote for my high school newspaper sir!"
"Jesus Christ, you're not a writer, you're a killer!"
"A killer, *yes, sir!*"

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When he finishes, Gerheim says "Today you people are no longer maggots. Today you are

Marines. You're part of a brotherhood. From now on, until the day you die, wherever you are, every Marine is your brother. Every Marine will be ready to give his life for you, and you will be ready to give yours.

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"Most of you will go to Vietnam. Some of you will not come back. But always remember this: Marines die - that's what we're here for. But the Marine Corps lives forever - and that means you live forever."

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Our last night on the Island. I draw fire watch.

Joker stands by in utility trousers, skivvy shirt, spit-shined combat boots, and a helmet liner which had been painted silver.

Sergeant Gerheim gives him his wristwatch and flashlight. "Good night, Marines."

Joker marches up and down the squad bay between two perfectly aligned rows of racks.

One hundred young Marines breathe peacefully as they asleep - one hundred survivors from the original hundred and twenty.

The squad bay is as quiet as a funeral parlor at midnight. The silence is disturbed only by the soft creak-creak of bedsprings and an occasional cough.

A recruit is talking in his sleep.

Joker stops. He listens. A second voice. Two guys must be swapping scuttlebutt. "If Sergeant Gerheim hears them it'll be my ass." Joker hurries towards the sound.

It's Leonard. Leonard is talking to his

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rifle. But there is also another voice. A whisper. A cold, seductive moan.

Leonard's rifle is not slung on his rack. He's holding his rifle, hugging it. "I love you!" Joker snaps on his flashlight. Leonard ignores him. "DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? I CAN DO IT. I'LL DO ANYTHING!"

Leonard's words reverberate down the squad bay. Racks Squeak. Someone rolls over. One recruit sits up, rubs his eyes.

Joker watches the far end of the squad bay.

He waits for the light to go on inside Sergeant Gerheim's palace.

He touches Leonard's shoulder. "Hey, shut your mouth, Leonard. Sergeant Gerheim will break my back."

Leonard sits up. He looks at Joker. He strips off his skivvy shirt and ties it around his face to blindfold himself. He begins to field-strip his weapon. He pulls off the blindfold. His fingers continue to break down the rifle into components. Then, gently, he fondles each piece. "Just look at that pretty trigger guard. Have you ever seen a more beautiful piece of metal? He starts snapping the steel components back together. "Her connector assembly is so beautiful..."

Leonard continues to babble as his trained fingers reassemble the black metal hardware.

Leonard reaches under his pillow and comes out with a loaded magazine. Gently, he inserts the metal magazine into his weapon, into Charlene.

"Leonard...where did you get those live rounds?"

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Now a lot of guys are sitting up, whispering "What's happening?" to each other.

Sergeant Gerheim's light floods the far end of the squad bay.

"OKAY, LEONARD, LET'S GO," Joker says, "You're in a world of shit now, Leonard" The overhead lights explode. The squad bay is washed with light. "WHAT'S THIS MICKEY MOUSE SHIT? JUST WHAT IN THE NAME OF JESUS H. CHRIST ARE YOU ANIMALS DOING IN MY SQUAD BAY?"

Sergeant Gerheim comes at Joker like a mad dog. His voice cuts the squad bay in half: "MY BEAUTY SLEEP HAS BEEN INTERRUPTED, LADIES. YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS. YOU HEAR ME, HERD? IT MEANS THAT ONE RECRUIT HAS VOLUNTEERED HIS YOUNG HEART FOR A GODDAMN HUMAN SACRIFICE!"

Leonard pounces from his rack, confronts Sergeant Gerheim.

Now the whole platoon is awake. They all wait to see what Sergeant Gerheim will do, confident that it will be worth watching.

"Private Joker. You shitbird. Front and center"

Joker moves his ass. "AYE-AYE, SIR!"

"Okay, you little maggot, speak. Why is Private Pyle out of his rack after lights out? Why is Private Pyle holding that weapon? Why ain't you stomping Private Pyle's guts out?"

"SIR, it is the private's duty to report to the drill instructor that Private ... Pyle ... has a full magazine and has locked and loaded, SIR!"

Sergeant Gerheim looks at Leonard and nods. He sighs. Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim looks more than a little ridiculous in his pure white

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skivvies and red rubber flip-flop shower shoes and hairy legs and tattooed forearms and a beer gut and a face the colour of raw beef, and, on his bald head, the green and brown Smokey the Bear campaign cover.

The senior drill instructor focuses all of his considerable powers of intimidation into his best John-Wayne-on-Suribachi voice: "Listen to me, Private Pyle. You will place your weapon on your rack and-"

"NO! YOU CAN'T HAVE HER! SHE'S MINE! YOU HEAR ME? SHE'S MINE! I LOVE HER!"

Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim can't control himself any longer. "NOW YOU LISTEN TO ME, YOU FUCKING WORTHLESS LITTLE PIECE OF SHIT. YOU WILL GIVE ME THAT WEAPON OR I'M GOING TO TEAR YOUR BALLS OFF AND STUFF THEM DOWN YOUR SCRAWNY LITTLE THROAT! YOU HEAR ME, MARINE? I'M GOING TO PUNCH YOUR FUCKING HEART OUT!"

Leonard aims the weapon at Sergeant Gerheim's heart, caresses the trigger guard, then caresses the trigger...

Sergeant Gerheim is suddenly calm. His eyes, his manner are those of a wanderer who has found his home. He is a man in complete control of himself and of the world he lives in. His face is cold and beautiful as the dark side surfaces. He smiles. It is not a friendly smile, but an evil smile, as though Sergeant Gerheim were a werewolf baring its fangs.

"Private Pyle, I'm proud-"

Bang

The steel buttplate slams into Leonard's shoulder.

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One 7.62 millimeter, high-velocity, full metal jacket bullet punches Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim back.

He falls.

They all stare at Sergeant Gerheim. Nobody moves.

Sergeant Gerheim sits up as though nothing has happened. For one second, the recruits relax. Leonard has missed. Then dark blood squirts from a little hole in Sergeant Gerheim's chest. The red blood blossoms into his white skivvy shirt like a beautiful flower. Sergeant Gerheim's bug eyes are focused upon the blood rose

on his chest, fascinated. He looks up at Leonard. He squints. Then he relaxes. The werewolf smile is frozen on his lips.

Joker says, "Now, uh, Leonard, we're all your bros, man, your brothers. I'm your bunkmate, right? I-"

"Sure," says Cowboy. "Go easy, Leonard. We don't want to hurt you."

"Affirmative," says Private Snowball.

Leonard aims his rifle at Joker's face.

Joker doesn't look at the rifle. He looks into Leonard's eyes.

Leonard is grinning at them, the final grin that is on the face of death, the terrible grin of the skull.

The grin changes to a look of surprise and then to confusion and then to terror as Leonard's weapon moves up and back and then Leonard takes the black metal barrel into mouth. "NO! Not-"

BANG!

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Leonard is dead on the deck. The Marines slowly gather around the two bodies.

The civilians will demand yet another investigation, of course. But during the investigation the recruits of Platoon 30-92 will testify that Private Pratt, while highly motivated, was a ten percenter who did not pack the gear to be a Marine in our beloved Corps.

Sergeant Gerheim is still smiling.

Sergeant Gerheim was a fine drill instructor. Dying, that's what we're here for he would have said blood makes the grass grow. If he could speak, Gunnery Sergeant Gerheim would explain to Leonard why the guns that we love don't love back. And he would say, "Well done."

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1968 - DA NANG, VIETNAM

"THE AROMA OF ROASTED FLESH IS ADMITTEDLY AN ACQUIRED TASTE."

A hundred Marines are seated in the Freedom Hill PX movie theatre watching John Wayne in "The Green Berets"

Joker and Rafter Man sit way down front. They wear clean uniforms.

I spend the Vietnamese lunar New Year's Eve, 1968, at the Freedom Hill PX near Da Nang, watching John Wayne in The Green Berets, a Hollywood soap opera about the love of guns.

The rest of the audience is made up of other cleanly dressed Marines and dirty Marine grunts who are sprawled across their seats and have propped muddy jungle boots onto the seats in front of them. They are bearded and look lean and mean, the way human beings look after they've survived a long hump in the jungle, the boonies, the bad bush.

Joker props his boots on the seats.

We watch John Wayne leading the Green Beanies. John Wayne is a beautiful soldier, clean-shaven, sharply attired in tailored tiger-stripe jungle utilities, wearing boots that shine like black glass. Inspired by

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John Wayne, the fighting soldiers from the sky go hand-to-hand with all of the Victor Charlies in Southeast Asia.

He snaps out an order to an Oriental actor who played Mr. Sulu on "Star Trek. Mr. Sulu, now playing an Arvin officer, delivers a line with great conviction: "First kill...all stinking Cong...then go home."

The audience of Marines roars with laughter. This is the funniest movie they have seen in a long time.

A Marine yells at Mr. Sulu, "You fuckin' asshole, *you* kill stinking Cong. I wanna go home *now!*"

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Freedom Hill PX.

*I'm a combat correspondent assigned to the first Marine Division. I've been in country for six months.
Rafter man tags along behind me like a kid.
Rafter Man is a combat photographer. He has never been in the shit. He thinks I'm one hard field Marine.*

Joker and Rafter Man move in line up to a table with the Red Cross emblem on it and two large coffee urns and trays of donuts. Joker looks the Red Cross girls over. They're not

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particularly pretty, but Vietnam duty has spoiled them.

"Hi Marines," the blonde says. "I'll bet some nice hot coffee would go real good about now."

Joker smiles. "Sure would... Girls, I'm Corporal James Davis. I'm a reporter for Sea Tiger. This is Rafter Man. He's my photographer."

"Hi"

"How'd you girls like to have a beer with us when you're through here?"

"Sorry, guys, we don't go out with enlisted men," the blonde says.

"We don't even go out with lieutenants," the brunette says.

Joker laughs. "Hey... just a minute. You girls don't expect us to satisfy our lust with a donut, do you?" The girls laugh.

"I'd say a donut is all the hole you zoomies rate."

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Outside, a ten year-old shoe shine boy collars them. "Changee money? Boom-boom pictures? Dinky dow Cigarettes?"

"I'll have a shine," Joker says.

Nearby an attractive Vietnamese prostitute starts preening herself for Rafter Man and Joker.

Rafter says, "Joker, I want to go out into the field. I been in country for almost three

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months and all I do is take hand-shake shots at award ceremonies. A high-school girl could do my job."

Joker says, "Rafter, you'll get yourself wasted the first day you're in the field and it'll

be my fault. Your mom will find me after I rotate back to the World and beat the shit out of me. That's a negative."

Not getting very far with body language, the Vietnamese hooker tries conversation. "Hey, baby, me so horny. Me so horny."

Joker looks her over. She looks pretty good.

"Me so horny. Me love you too much. Hey, what you say? Number one pussy. Me love you too much."

"How much!" Joker asks.

"Fifteen dolla."

"For both of us?"

"No, each you fifteen dolla."

Suddenly, Rafter Man's Nikon camera is cut from his neckstrap by a teenage boy who jumps on a Honda, leaving them in the bike's backwash, staring in helpless amazement. Some White Mice stand around giggling.

A beefy civilian engineer standing nearby offers some advice. "You ever catch one of them li'l nigs just pinch 'em. Pinch 'em hard. Boy, they hate that."

*The weekly editorial meeting of 'Sea Tiger',
the Marine Corps newspaper.*

The Da Nang office of Sea Tiger, presided over by Lieutenant Lockart, seated at a U-shaped collection of tables.

A sign on the wall behind him says in six-inch block letters: FIRST TO GO, LAST TO KNOW, WE WILL DEFEND TO THE DEATH OUR RIGHT TO BE MISINFORMED.

Present are, Joker, Rafter Man and six other combat correspondents and photographers.

Lieutenant Lockart is hunched over some letter trays filled with typed copy, telexes, and 8 x 10 photographs.

The atmosphere of the meeting is breezy but professional.

"Okay, guys, lets keep it short and sweet today," Lieutenant Lockart says. "I gotta leave for Phu Bai in half an hour."

"What's up there, sir?" Collins asks.

"Combat Media Techniques seminar," he says, sorting through a stack of copy.

"Okay...anybody got anything new?"

A pause.

"There's rumour going around that the Tet ceasefire's going to be cancelled," Joker says.

"Rear echelon paranoia," Lieutenant Lockart says without looking up.

"A bro in intelligence says Charlie might try to pull off something big during the Tet holiday."
"They say the same thing every year."

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"There's a lot of talk about it, sir" Joker says.

"Forget it. Tet is a combination of Christmas, New Year and July 4th, and every zipperhead in Nam will be banging gongs, barking at the moon and visiting his dead relatives. Anything else?"

"Sir, my camera was stolen," Rafter Man says.

"What camera?"

"Black body Nikon."

"Gook just shot by on his Honda, sir, whipped that sucker right off Rafter's neck," Joker says.

"Look at his neck."

Rafter shows the red welt on his neck.

"You saw this happen?" Lieutenant Lockart asks Joker.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you try to stop him?"

"I tried to catch him, sir," Joker says. "I encountered difficulty overtaking the Honda on foot."

"All right," Lieutenant Lockart says "When we're finished here, report it to Gunny Slocum."

Lieutenant Lockart picks up a telex.

"Ann Margaret and entourage are due here next week. I want someone to be there on the airfield and stick with her for a couple of days."

"Colour me gone," Joker says

"You're not a photographer. Klammer, you take it."

"Aye-aye, sir."

"Get me some good low angle stuff. Don't make it too obvious but I wanna see fur, and early morning dew."

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"Aye-aye, sir."

"*Diplomats In Dungarees*...Marine engineers lend a helping hand rebuilding Dong Phuc village recently damaged by heavy fighting with VC forces in the area...Good"

He picks up a photograph. "Joker, can't you come up with a better caption for this picture of a sentry dog than, 'G-r-r-r'?"

"How about "Bow-wow!" Joker says.

"How 'bout thinking of a better caption?"

"Aye-aye, sir." He picks up another sheet of paper.

"The Lawrence Welk Show will go out on TV in two weeks. Chili, do 100 words on it. AFTV'll

give you some background stuff."

"We're plugging Lawrence Welk?"

"Don't you like serious music?"

He reads again.

"NVA Soldier Deserts After Reading

*Pamphlets...*a young North Vietnamese soldier who realized his side could not win the war deserted from his unit after reading Open Arms program pamphlets...good!"

"Sir!" Joker says.

"Yes?"

"Why don't we drop a couple of million of those suckers and go home?"

"Too expensive"

He scans another story.

"Did General Mossberg really say this: *"We are a nation of high-protein meat-eating hunters, while the other guy just eats rice and fish heads"*? Did he really say that to The New York Times, The Washington Post and Newsweek?"

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"You should have heard the rest."

Lieutenant Lockart shrugs and picks up another story.

"Not While We're Eating. NVA learn Marines don't like to be interrupted while eating chow.' ...Joker, the enemy never runs. He *flees...* patrols aren't dangerous, they're danger-filled... Style...style, Joker."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Joker, where's the weenie?"

"Sir?"

"The *kill*, Joker. The *kill*. All that fire, the grunts must have hit *something*"

"Didn't see 'em, sir."

"Were you actually there on that op?"

"Yes, sir."

"Joker, I've told you we run two basic stories here. Grunts who give half their pay to buy gooks toothbrushes and deodorants - *Winning Of Hearts and Minds*. Okay? And combat action which result in a kill - *Winning the War*. I don't ask much of you people but I do expect you to adhere to my editorial policy."

"You must have seen blood trails, drag marks?"

"It was raining, sir."

"Okay, well that's why God passed the law of probability." He tosses the pages to Joker.

"Re-write it and give it a happy ending. One killed. Make it a sapper. Or an officer. Which?"

"Whatever you say," Joker says.

"Grunts like reading about dead officers."

"Okay - an officer. How about a general?"

"Joker, maybe you'd like our guys to read the paper and feel bad. In case you didn't know it, this is not a particularly popular war, and it's our job to report the news that the why-are-we-here civilian newsmen ignore."

"Sir, maybe you should go out yourself on some ops. It might give you a different perspective."

"Joker, I've had my ass in the grass. I didn't like it. Lots of bugs and too dangerous. Fortunately, my duties keep me in the rear where I belong. *In the rear with the gear.*"

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Midnight. Down in Dogpatch, the gooks are shooting off fireworks to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

Early evening in the ISO hootch, a pre-fab wooden building thirty feet long, with screens at each end, but otherwise open, with rolled-up canvas to be let down in case of rain.

At one end of the room are a number of bunkbeds. The other part has several desks, and a refrigerator.

On the wall are pictures of Bob Dylan, Cesar Chavez, several Playmates of the Month, Ann-Margaret, Steve McQueen on a motorcycle and Lyndon Johnson with a pencilled-in moustache.

A large hand-written sign says: WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY, AND HE IS US.

Fireworks can be seen through the screened end of the hootch.

The men lie on their racks and swap scuttlebutt.

Joker writes in his notebook.

I add some lines to the notebook which I keep so that I return to hometown America in a rainbow of campaign ribbons across my chest, brave beyond belief, the military Jesus, I will use it to write the war novel which will make James Jones and Ernest Hemingway look like a couple of pussies.

Joker puts down the notebook, lights up a joint and says, "I got to get back into the shit. I ain't heard a shot fired in anger in weeks. I'm

bored to death. How are we ever going to get used to being back in the World? I mean, a day without blood is like a day without sunshine."

"Shit." Corporal Payback turns to Rafter Man. "Joker thinks that the bad bush is down the road in the ville. He's never been in the shit. It's hard to talk about it. Like on Hastings-"

Chili Vendor, a tough Chicano from East L.A., interrupts: "You weren't on Operation Hastings, Payback. You weren't even in country."

Oh, eat shit and die, you fucking Spanish American. You poge. I was there, man. I was in the shit with the grunts, man."

Joker grunts. "Sea stories."

"Oh, yeah? How long you been in country, Joker? Huh? How much T.I. you got? How much

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fucking time in? Thirty months, poge. I got thirty months in country. I've been there, man."

"Yeah," Joker says. "They've got his picture on the wall in the Hanoi Post Office."

"That's affirmative" says Corporal Payback. "You listen to Joker, New Guy. He knows ti-ti-very little. And it be ever does know anything it'll be because he learned it from me. You just know he's newer been in the shit. He ain't got the stare."

Rafter Man looks up. "The stare?"

"The thousand-yard stare. A Marine gets it after he's been in the shit for too long. It's like you've really seen...beyond. I got it. All field Marines got it. You'll have it, too."

Rafter Man says, "I will?"

Corporal Payback takes a few hits off the joint and then passes it to Chili Vendor. "I used to be an atheist when I was a New Guy, a long time ago..."

Corporal Payback takes his Zippo lighter out of his shirt pocket and hands it to Rafter Man. "See? It says, 'Just you and me, God - right?'"

Corporal Payback giggles. He seems to be trying to focus his vision on some distant object. "Nobody is an atheist in a foxhole. You'll be praying."

Rafter Man looks at Joker grins, hands the lighter back. "There sure is a lot of stuff to learn."

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Suddenly, there is a series of tremendous explosions a few hundred yards away.

"Oh, shit, rockets."
A sudden swoosssh..
"Incoming!" Daytona Dave shouts.
"Them're outgoin'," says Chili Vendor.
Daytona Dave hears the deep sliding whistle
of the other shells. That ain' outgoin'".
"That ain't outgoing," Chili Vendor says.
"Now what I jus' say?" Daytona Dave yells as
they run for a short trench a few yards away.
Rafter Man stands there, frozen. "What..."
A rocket hits the deck twenty yards away.
Rafter Man hits the ground.
Joker jerks Rafter to his feet and shoves him
towards a sandbagged trench a few feet away.
Corporal Payback does a stunt-man dive into
the trench and lets out a scream of pain.
Guys are running around in their shorts,
firing their M-16's blind.
In the trench, Payback is moaning.
"Where you hit man?" Joker says.
"I'm not hit. I think I broke my fucking
arm."
"Then shut the fuck up, man," Daytona Dave
says. "You're making me nervous."
Joker peeks cautiously over the sandbags. A
few yards, in front, three Marines lie dead.
"Jesus Christ I'm not ready for this," Joker
mumbles to himself.
Corporal Payback is groaning.
Rafter whimpers.

All around the hill orange machine-gun
tracers flash up into the sky.
Outgoing mortars.
Outgoing artillery.
Incoming rockets.
All kinds of noise.
Illumination rounds pop high above the rice
paddies.
The flares sway down, glowing, suspended
beneath little parachutes.
Joker grabs Rafter Man and pulls him into
their hootch. "Get your piece."
Joker picks up his M-16. He snaps in a
magazine. He throws a bandolier of full magazines
to Rafter Man. "Lock and load, recruit. Lock and
load."
"But that's against regulations."
"Do it."
Outside, headquarters personnel from the
surrounding hootches are stumbling into rifle pits
on the perimeter. They crouch down in the damp
holes in their skivvies. They stare out through
the wire.
The rockets blink like flashbulbs. The

flashbulbs pop. And then the sound of drums.
"Well, happy fuckin' New Year everybody,"
Joker says.

Chili Vendor says. "Oh man, why can' they
jus' leave us alone one
time?"

"'Cause they ain't gettin' paid to leave us
alone," Daytona Dave says. "Sides, they do it
'cause they know how it fucks you all up"

The crumps start again somewhere outside the
wire and walk in like the footsteps of a monster.

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The crumps are becoming thuds. Thud. Thud.
THUD. And then it's a whistle and a roar.

BANG.

On the perimeter M-60 machine guns are
banging and the M-79 grenade launchers are
blooping and mortar shells are thumping out of the
tubes.

Star flares burst all along the wire,
beautiful clusters of green fire.

"I hope they're just fucking with us," Joker
says. "I hope they're not going to hit the wire.
I'm not really ready for this shit."

Outside their bunker: BANG, BANG, BANG.

Daytona Pave, huddled against a wall of the
trench, mutters to himself, "Don't worry, baby,
God'll think of something"

Somewhere someone has left on a radio playing
the Rolling Stones "Get offa my cloud".

*Inside our damn cave of sandbags we huddle
elbow-to-elbow in wet skivvies, feeling the
weight of the darkness, as helpless as
cavemen hiding from a monster.
Each of us is waiting for the next shell to
nail him right on the head - the mortar is an
agent of existential doom.*

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Dawn. Major Lynch's office. The mortars
have stopped but sporadic rifle and machine gun
fire can be heard in the distance.

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*The Informational Services Office on the hill
is a carnival with green performers - many,
many of them. The lifers are all being
fearless leaders. The New Guys are about to
wet their pants.*

Everyone is talking.

Major Lynch, their commanding officer, marches in and squares them away.

"Everyone *will* shut the fuck up," he says, "The enemy has used the Tet Ceasefire to launch an offensive all over the country. He has hit every major military target in Vietnam. In Saigon, the United States Embassy has been overrun by suicide squads. Khe Sanh is standing-by to be overrun."

Everybody starts talking at once.

Major Lynch is calm. He stands in the center of chaos and tries to give them orders. Nobody listens.

"Everybody will shut the fuck up!" His words snap out like bullets from a machine gun. "Zip up those flak jackets. Put on that helmet, Marine. Load your weapons but do not put a round in the chamber. Joker!"

"Aye-aye, sir."

Major Lynch stands in front of the Marine Corps flag - blood red, with an eagle, globe, and anchor of gold, U.S.M.C. and SEMPER FIDELIS. He taps Joker's chest with his finger. "Joker, you will take off that damned button. How is it going to look if you get killed wearing a peace symbol?"

"Aye-aye, sir!"

"Get up to Phu Bai. Captain January will need all his people."

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Rafter Man steps forward. "Sir? Could I go with Joker?"

"What? Sound off."

"I'm Compton, sir. Lance Corporal Compton. From Photo. I want to get into the shit."

"Permission granted. And welcome aboard."

The major turns, starts yelling at the New Guys.

Joker says, "Sir, I don't think that-"

Major Lynch turns back to him, irritated.

"You still here? Vanish, Joker, most ricky-tick. And take the New Guy with you. You're responsible for him." The major turns away and starts snapping out orders for the defense of the First Marine Division's Informational Services Office.

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Joker and Rafter Man look out of the open door of an S-55 helicopter.

Thousands of feet below, Vietnam is a narrow strip of dried dragon shit upon which God has sprinkled toy tanks and airplanes and a lot of trees, flies and Marines.

Joker's ears pop. He pinches his nose and puffs out his cheeks. Rafter man imitates him. They sit on bales of green rubber-impregnated canvas body bags.

It's a beautiful day. I'm so happy to be alive and in one piece. I'm in a world of shit, but I'm alive. And I'm not afraid.

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The door gunner smokes marijuana and fires his M-60 machine gun at a farmer in the rice paddies below.

"Git some...git same...harharhar."

The door gunner has long hair, a bushy moustache, and wears an unbuttoned Hawaiian sports shirt. On the Hawaiian sport shirt are a hundred yellow hula dancers.

The hamlet beneath us is in a free fire zone - anybody can shoot at it at any time for any reason. We watch the farmer run in the shallow water. The farmer knows only that his family needs some rice to eat. The farmer knows only that the bullets are tearing him apart.

"You guys ought to do a story on me suntahm," the door gunner shouts above the noise of the helicopter.

"Why should we do a story about you?"

"Cause I'm so fuckin good," he says, "'n that ain't no shit neither. Got me one hunnert 'n fifty-se'en gooks kilt. 'N' fifty caribou." He grins and staunches the saliva for a second.

"Them're all certified," he adds.

"Ever shoot any women or children?"

"Suntahms."

"How can you do that?"

"Easy - you just don't lead 'em so much. Harharhar."

Since lift-off, a bullying Arvin captain and a big Arvin sergeant have been questioning two VC prisoners seated on the floor opposite them with

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their backs to the open door, the wind tearing at their shirts, their arms sharply tied behind them.

The Arvin captain has been concentrating on one man, a hard-core VC, who won't even look at him. Suddenly, the captain starts yelling hysterically but the prisoner keeps his eyes lowered.

The Arvin captain stops shouting, breathes hard a couple of times and makes a sharp movement

with his head to the Arvin sergeant standing over the prisoner.

The sergeant pushes the prisoner out of the door, a frozen look of horror on the victim's face in the split second before he disappears.

It happens so fast, it takes a couple of seconds to sink in to Joker and Rafter Man.

Joker looks at the door gunner.

The door gunner winks amiably at him.

Joker looks at Rafter. Rafter's mouth is open.

The Arvin captain starts shouting at the second VC prisoner who looks like he's ready to give Uncle Ho's Private telephone number.

Joker gestures to Rafter Man's camera. Rafter Man looks down and sets his exposure.

It looks like the prisoner is answering the questions but he doesn't seem to be making the Arvin captain any happier.

Joker says, "Start shooting pictures - lots of them."

Rafter starts shooting pictures.

The captain doesn't like this at all and angrily gives Rafter Man the traditional

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no-pictures-wave-off. "Hey, you, Marine. No camera me! No camera me!"

Joker gestures to Rafter to keep shooting.

"Number ten! Hey, Marine - why you camera me?"

Joker leans closer and shouts to be heard.

"Captain, we are officially accredited US Marine Corps combat correspondents and if you harm this prisoner we're going to file an official report of this entire incident together with our photographic evidence."

"You number 10 motherfucker. Me captain. Who you talking to?"

"I'm talking to you, Captain Zipperhead, sir."

The Arvin captain looks like he's going to have a stroke. He shouts something to the sergeant who draws his pistol but keeps it pointed at the floor.

Joker shifts the M-16 across his knees.

Stalemate.

Then, suddenly, the Arvin captain turns and pushes the prisoner out of the door.

He turns back to Joker and laughs, showing two gold teeth. The sergeant thinks this is pretty funny, too.

Joker fires his M-16 on full automatic into the two men, blasting them out of the door.

Joker stares at the empty door.

Rafter flops down on the floor.
The door gunner grins and leans over to
Joker. "Ain't war hell?"
Joker stares at the empty door.

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-42-

Captain January is in his plywood cubicle in the back of the ISO hootch. Captain January is the kind of officer who chews an unlit pipe because he thinks that a pipe will help to make him a father figure. He's playing cut-throat Monopoly with Corporal Kegan. Captain January isn't Captain Queeg, but then he's not Humphrey Bogart, either.

He picks up his little silver shoe and moves it to Baltic Avenue, tapping each property along the way.

"I'll buy Baltic. And two houses." Captain January reaches for the white and purple deed to Baltic Avenue. "That's another monopoly, Corporal." He positions tiny green houses on the board.

"Joker, I've got big piece of slack for you." Captain January picks up a manila guard mail envelope and pulls out a piece of paper with fancy writing on it. "Congratulations, Sergeant Joker." He hands him the paper.

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS,
GREETING: KNOW YE THAT REPOSING SPECIAL
TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN THE FIDELITY OF JAMES
T. DAVIS, 2306777/4312, I DO APPOINT HIM A
SERGEANT IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS...

Joker stares at the piece of paper. Then he puts the order on Captain January's field desk.
"Number ten. I mean, no way, sir."

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Captain January stops his silver shoe in midstride. "What did you say?"

"Sir, I rose by sheer military genius to the rank Of Corporal. But I'm not a sergeant. I guess I'm just a snuffy at heart."

"Joker, you will betray the Mickey Mouse shit. You've got an excellent 6-month record in country. You've got enough time-in-grade. You've been on enough combat ops. You rate this promotion. This is the only way war we've got."

"Captain January, you know I do my job. I've fought to make the world safe for hypocrisy. My stories are paper bullets fired into the fat black

heart of Communism. Let me do it as a Corporal."

"Joker, I don't think you understand how important our job is. Grunts are good show business but we make them what they are. History may be written with blood and iron but it's printed with ink."

Joker thinks for a few seconds. "Sir, I shot two Arvins on the way up here on the helicopter. They were killing prisoners."

"You shot two Arvins on the way up here on the helicopter?" Captain January asks, looking down at the monopoly board.

"Yes, sir."

"You're pulling me leg, right?"

"No, sir."

"You're not pulling me leg?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, damn." Captain January slaps a card onto the field desk. "Go to jail - go directly to jail - do not pass go - do not collect two hundred

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dollars." The captain puts his little silver shoe into jail.

Captain January looks troubled. Then he looks up and says with finality, "Joker, you've always had a sick sense of humour. You are definitely pulling me leg. You will be wearing chevrons indicating your proper rank next time I see you or I will definitely jump on your program."

"Yes, sir."

Captain January shifts into another gear. "Okay... now I want you to hump up to Hue. One-One is in the shit. Two NVA divisions have overrun the city. Charlie's finally decided to dig in and fight."

Captain January looks at Rafter Man. "Who's this? Sound off, Marine!"

Rafter Man stutters.

Joker says, "This is Lance Corporal Compton, sir. The New Guy in Photo."

"Outstanding. Welcome aboard, Marine."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Joker, make sleeping sounds here tonight and head up to Hue in the morning. We've had reports the VC have executed hundreds of civilians, maybe thousands. They've uncovered several mass graves. Walter Cronkite is due *here* tomorrow so *we'll* be busy. But your job is important, too. We need some good, clear photographs. And some hard-hitting captions. Get me photographs of indigenous civilian personnel who have been executed with their hands tied behind their backs, people buried alive, priests with their throats cut, dead babies - you know what I want. Then get

me come good feature stuff on the fighting with good body counts. And remember: we're writing our own report cards in this country. Don't be afraid to give us a few A's."

"Yes, sir."

"Joker, before you go up there you will remove the unauthorized peace button from your duty uniform."

"Aye-aye, sir."

"And Joker..."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't even photograph any naked bodies unless they're mutilated."

"Aye-aye, sir."

"And Joker..."

"Yes, sir?"

"Get a haircut."

"Aye-aye, sir."

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The helicopter on it's way to Hue. Joker and Rafter Man stare silently out of the door.

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The helicopter settles down at an LZ on the outskirts of Hue. Joker and Rafter hop off.

The LZ is cluttered with walking wounded, stretcher cases and body bags.

Corpsmen immediately start carrying canvas stretchers to the helicopter. On the stretchers are bloody rags with men inside.

Joker stops a master sergeant. "Top, we want to get into the shit.

"The master sergeant is writing on a piece of yellow paper on a clipboard. He doesn't look up, but jerks his thumb over his shoulder.

"Two-five. Gasworks...a click north."

"Gasworks. Outstanding. Thanks top."

The master sergeant walks away, writing on the yellow paper. He ignores four skuzzy grunts who run into the compound, each man holding up one corner of a poncho. On the poncho is a dead Marine. The grunts are screaming for a corpsman and when they put the poncho down, very gently, a pool of dark blood pours out onto the concrete

deck.

-45-

Joker and Rafter Man walk up the shattered street, awed by the sheer destruction.

A huge, black pall of smoke hangs above the city in the distance and the sound of distant firing of M-16's and AK-47's can be heard.

They pass a tank, its treads blown off, a huge black hole through its turret.

Rafter Man photographs it.

Three or four wounded Marines walk towards them along side a jeep with stretchers tied to it. They're bloody and bandaged, and their fatigues are torn.

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"Whyn't you take a picture? It'll last longer," one of the grunts says.

Rafter does.

Some Vietnamese who have been huddled by the side of the road are pointing towards the smoke, crying and wailing pitifully.

One of the wounded grunts yells at them, "Hey, fuck you if you can't take a joke!"

The wounded grunt laughs without humour and walks on.

A shell goes off in the distance and Rafter starts to hit the deck. Joker gives him a look and he straightens up, slightly embarrassed.

-46-

A squad of Arvin troops are looting a house. They are loading a truck with furniture, TV's, stereos, clothes. They look like boys in their outsized helmets and uniforms.

Another shell goes off in the distance. Rafter Man checks his impulse to dive for cover and looks at Joker.

"Remember this, Rafter Man," Joker says, "Any time you can see an Arvin you are safe from Victor Charlie. That's definite. You're safe until they start yelling, 'Beaucoup VC, beaucoup VC!' and then runaway. But then you have to be careful, Arvins are always shooting at chickens, other people's pigs, and trees. Arvins will shoot anything except transistor radios, stereos, Coca Colas, sun glasses, and the enemy."

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Joker and Rafter Man catch up with a big Marine lieutenant with an expensive pump shotgun slung across his back and DEADLY DELTA on his flak jacket, followed by his radio man.

"Sir, we're looking for Hotel, 2/5. I got a bro in the First Platoon. They call him Cowboy. He wears a Cowboy hat."

"I'm Cowboy's platoon commander. The Lusthog Squad's up in the platoon area up by the gasworks. You people 1/17?"

"No, sir. We're correspondents for Sea Tiger. I'm Joker, sir, Corporal Joker. This is Rafter Man."

"Glad to see you."

They walk along with the big Marine.

Rafter takes a few shots of the lieutenant who enjoys the attention.

"If you men have come looking for a story this is your lucky day. We've got Condition Red here and we are definitely expecting rain."

"Outstanding. How is it going, sir?"

"Well, it looks like Charlie's got a whole division in the town, and he's dug in pretty good. We're still working this side of the river street by street and house by house. But when we get 'em out where we can see 'em, we're getting some really decent kills."

"Mind if we tag along?"

"Welcome aboard. By the way, my name is Bayer. Robert M. Bayer, the third. My people call me Touchdown. I played a little ball at SMU. You here to make Cowboy famous?"

Joker laughs: "Never happen... Sir, we've heard the NVA have executed a lot of civilians. Have you come across anything?"

"There's a mass grave about half a klick east, just this side of the Phu Cam Canal."

Joker takes out a map. "Can you show me where, sir?"

Joker and Rafter Man stand in a small group of military and civilian officials near a large excavation containing about 40 bodies.

It smells really bad. The snuffies doing the digging have all tied olive-drab skivvy shirts around their faces but casualties due to uncontrollable puking are heavy.

All of the dead people are grinning that

*hideous, joyless grin of those who have heard
the joke, of those who have seen the terrible
secrets of the earth.*

Rafter man shoots a roll fast and reloads.
Joker asks a lieutenant, "Now many bodies
have you got so far, sir?"
The lieutenant looks irritably at Joker and
Rafter Man. "What outfit are you men with?"
"Sir, we're correspondents from Sea Tiger."
Complete change of attitude. The lieutenant
brightens up. "Oh, hello."
"I'm Corporal Joker, sir. This is my
photographer Rafter Man."

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The lieutenant smiles. "I'm Lieutenant
Cleave, I'm from Hartford, Connecticut."
"Sir, do you have a body count yet?"
"Unofficially it's about forty."
"Do we know how it happened, sir?"
"Well, apparently the NVA came in with lists
of names - government officials, land owners, army
and police officers. They went around to their
houses and politely told them to report to local
schools for political indoctrination. They shot
everyone who turned up, some of them were buried
alive."
Joker nods and writes in his notebook with a
ballpoint pen.
"MARINE!"
Joker looks up and sees a poge Army colonel
marching up to face him. The poge colonel has a
classic granite jaw. His jungle utilities are
razor-creased, starched to the consistency of
green armour. Joker stands to attention.
"Corporal," the Army colonel says. "Don't
you know how to execute a hand salute?"
"Yes, sir!" Joker says.

*I hold the salute until the colonel returns
it, plus a couple of seconds extra, to
identify the colonel as an officer to any
snipers in the area.*

"Marine," the colonel says. "What is that on
your body armour?"
"Sir?"
"That...thing."
"You mean this button, sir?"

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"What is it?" the colonel says.
"A peace symbol, sir."

"Where did you get it?"

Joker thinks for a couple of seconds. "A liberal gave it to me, sir," Joker says, keeping a serious face.

The colonel jabs Joker's button with a forefinger and gives him a fairly decent Polished Glare. His blue eyes sparkle. "That's right, son, act innocent. But I know what that button means."

"Yes, sir!"

"It's a ban-the-bomb propaganda button.

Admit it!"

"What is that you've got written on your helmet?"

"Born To Kill?"

"You've written 'Born to Kill' on your helmet."

"Yes, sir."

Why did you do that?"

"I don't know, sir. Everyone writes things on their helmets."

"You write 'Born to Kill' on your helmet and you wear a peace button. What is that supposed to be, some kind of sick joke?"

"No, sir."

"Well, what is it supposed to mean?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Answer that question, corporal, or you'll be standing tall before the man."

"Well, sir," Joker says with exaggerated thoughtfulness, "I suppose...I was trying to

suggest something about the duality of man."

"The what?"

"The dual nature of man?... You know, sir, the Ju