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Memoir Assignment

“I can’t wait to get out of this shithole,” I confessed while throwing down the jack of spades, collecting another book in our game. The past couple weeks if we weren’t training we were huddled around an end table playing spades in the temp barracks. Fort Polk Louisiana, what a dump. I suppose it could be worse, we could have been thrown in a tent city like the rest. Instead we were assigned four to a room in an actual building. Perks of being attached to a special forces unit while in the field I guess. I was lucky enough to share a room with some good ole boys; Dietrich was from Kentucky, Jay Love grew up in Missouri, not far from where we were stationed out of, Lamp was from Maryland, though he acted more southern than any of us, and I spent a good portion of my life in Arkansas, meaning I was just country enough to get along easily with my battle buddies.

“I mean fuck, we thought Ft. Leonard Wood was bad but this place takes shitty to a whole new level,” I said before spitting into an empty mountain dew bottle. Together we must have been through at least thirty cans of grizzly wintergreen since being in Ft. Polk.

“Yeah you won’t see me crying when it’s time to leave,” Lamp said as he dealt out a new set of cards.

“At least after tonight we can start packing all this shit away,” Jay Love always sounded as goofy as he looked when he had a dip in, he never found a way to keep himself from drooling and every time he would spit he would have to wipe away a string of saliva from his mouth.

“If only it wasn’t so god damn cold outside,” I complained while leaning back in an old metal chair, counting the books I thought I had in the new hand of cards, “what time are we stepping off again?”

“Pretty soon I think,” Jay Love said wiping at his mouth, “I overheard Gary telling SSG (staff sergeant) Roberts the horse trailers are on their way.”

SSG Roberts was the NCOIC (non-commissioned officer in charge) our unit decided to send with us, later on we would all find out he was under investigation for drinking on duty the whole time we were in Louisiana. Gary was one of the scariest human beings to walk the earth, although you weren't think it at first glance. Gary was in charge of the special forces group we were assigned to, this was their show, they were the ones being graded on how well they could train a foreign military force; in which my unit was roleplaying as the foreign military being trained for a few weeks. We all learned pretty quickly Gary wasn't about playing games.

In the Army the word “hooah” is used to respond to practically anything. Go do this - hooah, how are you doing today - hooah, go punch your face through some rocks - hooah; when in doubt... just say hooah. But Gary didn't like the word for some reason, we found that out on day one.

“Listen up highspeeds, the next fuckstick I hear use the ‘h-word’ is going to be in for a bad fucking day,” at first a few soldiers chuckled thinking it was meant as a joke but by the time Gary finished everyone believed his tone and the look in his eye, “and you better believe I've killed for less.”

After that, no one was brave enough to utter any h-words around Gary.

“Are we really using horse trailers?” I scoffed at the idea, “isn't this supposed to be as realistic as it gets? I don't think anyone is riding around Afghanistan in fucking horse trailers.”

“That's what they said, if we use humvees or anything else they said the opfor (soldiers roleplaying as bad guys) would see us coming as soon as we entered the box.” Jay Love replied.

The ‘box’ was several acres of land, woods, and dirt roads used for military role playing / laser tag. Once you entered the box it was game on, everyone had real time missions going on, even the opfor. Our mission, essentially, was to ambush a group of bad guys camping out then

evac before they had time to call in reinforcements. Of course all of this was to happen in the middle of the night.

We played spades until we heard someone shout from down the hall, “Gear up, ten mikes full battle rattle!”

Ten minutes later we were all, forty or fifty of us, formed up in full gear watching as two horse trailers pulled around in front.

“Alright check it out killers, were all about to fit in these damn trailers hooah,” SSG Roberts voice boomed out, usually the formation would all respond back with a loud and proud ‘hooah’, but not with Gary watching, “and let me tell you, if theres not enough room you better find a way to make some fucking room because if I got to do this bullshit you bet your ass you got to do it too.”

The sun was just dipping into the horizon by the time we were loaded up and moving. The ride was bumpy and uncomfortable, we all laid on top of each other like packed sardines so that the trailers looked empty from the outside.

“Son of a bitch,” a voice cried out from underneath the layer of bodies, “I’m laying on fucking horse shit.”

For a brief moment there was some laughter before Gary interrupted from somewhere in the entangled group, “Is something fucking funny?” ... “Yeah I didn’t think so, now shut the hell up.”

For the rest of the ride the only sounds were the rattlings and the trailers and rocks being thrown underneath.

By the time the trailers stopped and we unloaded the last bits of daylight was fading away.

“Dietrich, Love, over here. Get out your NVG’s (night vision goggles) and make sure they work,” being the team leader I had to do a weapons and equipment check every so often to make sure they didn’t lose or break anything.

“We got about a four or five mile hike through the woods before we get,” I briefly explained before next step off, “light and sound discipline guys, use your NVG’s and be as quiet as possible, I hope you brought cold weather gear, it’s going to be a long night.”

We moved through the woods painfully slow. Using NVG’s was a nightmare, it’s not like the movies or video games and the ones we were using only covered one eye, so half your vision was green while the other blind. Depth perception was impossible to determine and oftentimes you would hear someone along the line of troops stumble and roll helplessly down a hill or fall into thick brush. Everyone also lugged around fifty pounds of gear, some even carried M249’s and 240B’s, poor bastards, those things weigh a lot more than standard M4’s. The woods were thick and everyone received branches to the face at some point in the hike. In a single file line it was harder to stay behind the person in front of you than one might expect. There was no way to tell who anybody was with NVG’s, all you could see was green moving blurs.

After a couple hours of stumbling through the woods we halted and the single file line of soldiers converted to a circle with three sixty protection. By now the temperature dropped considerably and while we were tired of struggling through the woods, we knew we didn’t want to wait around for too long.

“What the fuck is taking so long?” Deitrich whispered with a little shiver.

Having just been briefed by our squad leader I knew that we still had a lot more freezing to do, “We’re half a mile out, the LT, SSG Roberts, and Gary went ahead to scout the place out. Once they get back they will brief us and we’ll get this shit done.”

For three more hours we laid in a big circle in the middle of the woods. When it was time to finally move again soldiers were either frozen or asleep. I had to shake Jay Love before he got up.

“What the fuck took so long,” he mumbled while rubbing at his eyes.

“There was a creek they couldn’t find a way around, were going through it,” I was just as unhappy about the news as Jay Love was.

As we approached the creek we could hear the quick splashes of those crossing in front. One by one we plunged our boots into the frigid waters and did our best to contain the sounds of misery that often followed.

Luckily for us, we didn't have to go far after crossing. Soon we were at the treeline peeking in at a small encampment. We could see the opfor had a few night guards sitting around a fire, unaware of what was about to happen.

The sounds of blanks being fired rang throughout the woods. Each shot would fire a laser, if the equipment on your gear started beeping, that meant you were hit, wounded or dead. The frenzy that ensued was as chaotic as to be expected. As we pushed from the treeline into the encampment more opfor began crawling out of wooden shacks. I tried my best not to be trigger happy, the more blanks you fired the dirtier your weapon became and the longer it took to clean.

"Fucking useless thing!" When I glanced over I caught Gary fighting with a jammed M249. After a few empty clicks from pulling the trigger Gary sent the jammed machine gun flying through the air. I watched as it crashed into the muddy ground. My heart skipped a beat thinking about what would happen if I ever threw my weapon like that, we weren't as untouchable as special forces guys like Gary.

Gary didn't give a shit. A few moments later I watched him pick up some poor private and chucked him into a wall screaming, "YOUR FUCKING DEAD," after his lasertag vest refused to go off. I don't know who that private was, but I'm pretty sure he defecated himself then and there.

After six hours or so of preparation, it took less than ten minutes for the whole ordeal to be done with.

"EVAC, EVAC, EVAC!" SSG Roberts yelled out.

Within seconds the chaotic frenzy organized back into an orderly formation and we found ourselves jogging along the sides of a dirt road. A mile or so later, we were kneeling in a field waiting for our ride. Perfect time for another weapons and equipment check.

We listened to the sky rumbling as three chinooks, the long helicopter with a set of blades at the front and back, dipped down and landed before us.

“LOAD, LOAD, LOAD,” we were commanded.

Squad by squad and team by team we filed into the helicopters and were soon soaring through the air. From the sky we could see a convoy of vehicles headed for the encampment we had just been through, for reinforcements. It wasn't until then that everyone seemed to remember our boots were frozen and wet.

Before long we landed in the airfield and convoyed back to the temp barracks where we finally heard the magic words, “Index, index, index.”

The training event was finally over.

As Dietrich, Jay Love, and I return to our room we meet up with Lamp and hear about it all from his perspective.

“Fuck, I think the showers are all going to be full for awhile,” Lamp said with tired red eyes.

I grinned while packing a can of grizzly wintergreen, “Well boys you know what that means, time for some more spades.”

