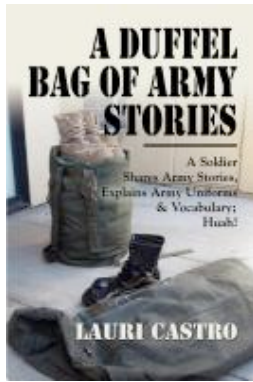


A DUFFEL BAG OF ARMY STORIES

A Soldier
Shares Army Stories,
Explains Army Uniforms
& Vocabulary;
Huah!

LAURI CASTRO



Have you ever wondered about soldiers? Do you have unanswered questions about Army uniforms? Have you ever listened to soldiers or veterans having conversations and barely understood what they were saying? A Duffel Bag of Army Stories is a woman veteran's first publication - revealing humorous stories and difficulties. It also explains Army Uniforms and Army Vocabulary. This book is perfect for civilians wishing to learn more about the Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard.

A Duffel Bag of Army Stories

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A Duffel Bag of Army Stories

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Second Edition

Chapter 2: At Ease, Soldier

When it comes down to it almost anything can be funny and almost anything can become fucked up. The following are my versions of funny which I call *At Ease, Soldier*.

Learning to Throw Grenades

When I went to Basic Training (in 1984) the Army had all female units that trained together, for Basic Training only, of course. Many of our Drill Sergeants were males but there were no male trainees or recruits in our battalion or living in our barracks. This separation somewhat influenced the males to view us differently.

When we learned about grenades we first studied posters and flash cards. Then we practiced with “dummy” grenades which we could pull a pin out of and throw. These “dummy” grenades made a popping sound and/or emitted a small puff of smoke within 3 to 5 seconds after pulling the pin. The sound effects/ smoke effects were meant to condition us into realizing that within the same 3 to 5 seconds a “real” grenade would explode.

At some point in our training we had to “qualify” or demonstrate a minimum level of competence in grenade throwing. We had to pull a pin out of and throw a minimum number of real grenades successfully.

At this qualification course one of us, a female recruit-Basic Training soldier would climb down into a foxhole with a “safety” or coach-type of soldier who was always male. The trainee was wearing a standard duty uniform or BDU-Battle Dress Uniform, a flak jacket, and a helmet. The safety wore a more distinctively colored helmet, RED, so it was obvious to any observers who the trainees were and who the experienced soldiers were. The safety guided us in our stance and overall posture and reviewed

with us to make sure we knew how to pull the pin from a grenade and then had us do it. The safety's arms were just outside ours in a manner similar to a person being shown how to hold a bat and swing it to hit a ball. The safety gave us female soldiers about 2 seconds to pull the pin and then throw the grenade. If we were not quick enough they threw it. I think my safety threw all my grenades but maybe not. I got mad at him because he kept taking my grenades and throwing them. I asked him whether I was supposed to throw my own.

“No,” he said. “All that matters is you experience live-fire grenades safely.”

That is a description of live-fire grenade training for Basic Training soldiers the way I experienced it. But if you were there, if you were a fly-on-the-wall in a foxhole you would be able to perceive so much more attitude and nuance. Here is what it felt like. The safeties were somewhat tense and nervous wrecks. They really did not think women belonged in the Army. They probably disliked all recruits. They were there to make sure that we didn't blow up, not us and not them. They were there to take a grenade from us and pitch it away and throw it if we were too slow. If the situation called for it they were prepared to cover our body with theirs to protect us from our stupidity. They were waiting for something bad to happen and trained to respond. They wanted to live. My safety was a walking heart attack. He was a nervous wreck and his hands were twitchy. I don't know how many female recruits came into his foxhole that day or how many he oversaw that week. He may have thought women did not belong in the military but to his credit he kept both of us alive.

This is an example where our training did not match our qualification. Most of us had practiced picking up our practice (training) grenades) and counting one —one thousand-two-one thousand-three-one thousand and then pulling the pin and throwing each grenade while standing in a particular posture. If our safety coach took it from us after two seconds

and threw it.....oh well. On the other hand, both I and he lived through the experience, so kudos to him.

The Disco Hut

There is a Basic Training experience that we used to refer to as The Disco Hut in the 1980's. I guess it became nicknamed the Disco Hut because everyone 'got down' in there. The Disco Hut was a small building. We walked in wearing our protective mask which a civilian would call a gas mask. While we were inside we did jumping jacks (or side straddle hops) and jogged in place to get our heart rate going. Then we got yelled at. We were ordered to take our masks off. Meanwhile, one of the Drill Sergeants, wearing a protective mask, had ignited some concentrated material that resembles a large chunk of incense that had been stored in a can. While this material was burning the room filled with mustard gas.

Mustard gas hurts. If a person is not wearing a protective mask it makes you choke and gasp. It feels like breathing fire. For the soldiers, we feel the burning and then our eyes and nose begin watering with tears and snot and whatever it takes to cool us down. The problem is the tears and snot burn too. It just hurts and a person cannot breathe.

While we are still in the Disco Hut we have to remove our gas mask and walk over to a Drill Sergeant and calmly state our name, rank and Social Security Number. Then we are expected to calmly walk outside and not run outside which is what we feel like doing. The whole time we are breathing deeply because of the exercises we had to do inside the Disco Hut.

If there are only a few soldiers in line taking turns stating their name and Social Security Number and so on, one can take a deep breath, take off their mask and wait their turn. If there are a lot of soldiers in line a soldier might panic before their turn comes. If a soldier simply walks out because

they want the fresh air they will be ordered to come back to the Disco Hut. If a soldier puts their mask back on and rejoins a group doing their jogging in place the Drill Sergeants will probably overlook the fact that this particular soldier did not stay with their group. As long as the soldier indicates they are following directions the Drill Sergeants will not interfere. There is also the fact that sometimes a soldier gets out of sequence from the group they walked in with because their protective mask does not seal properly and a Drill Sergeant takes them outside and works with them and their mask before bringing them back into the Disco Hut.

As we walk, not run, outside there are Drill Sergeants yelling at us to make sure our senses are not overwhelmed and that we are listening. We have to give our names and they yell at us to walk it off a certain number of laps and also yell at us not to touch our face. Our eyes are tearing, snot is coming out of our noses and yet if we touch our face we may end up wiping powdered gas residue into our eyes.

We are near an area like an ordinary High School track field. We are told to walk it off and expected to walk a certain number of laps so we can sweat out the poison we have just been exposed to. Meanwhile our nose and eyes continue to drain. As tears and snot fall we walk and walk and walk. We walk it off.

After we have all had a chance to walk it off and breathe some good air we take a cattle car (a bus stuffed with soldiers) back to our barracks so we can shower and change into clean uniforms. Then we assemble into an indoor classroom setting where we clean our protective masks. Some of us stick around so that the soldiers who return late can get a shower and calm down and we clean their masks for them because for them, they have endured all they can endure. As soldiers, we help them by cleaning their masks.

Inviting Michael Jackson to My Basic Training Graduation

I completed Basic Training in February 1985. We had a graduation ceremony and I suspect I never even told my family there was such a thing as Basic Training Graduation. To me, it seemed like Alabama was ridiculously far from California and so the idea of inviting anyone to a graduation ceremony celebrating 13 weeks of school did not feel worthwhile. I also believed my family could not afford to come to Alabama. I did not tell my family. I did not invite anyone I knew. Nonetheless I took one of my Basic Training graduation invitations and looked at the address on the back of *Thriller* (on cassette) and mailed it to Michael Jackson at that address. He did not come to my graduation. A few years later, 1990 or so, I was talking to a soldier in Colorado when I was attending training there.

When graduation came, I tried to keep looking at the bleachers to figure out if he was there but Michael did not come.

“Celebrities suck” I told Sergeant (SGT) South for no reason whatsoever one day years later. “I invited Michael Jackson to my Basic Training graduation and he did not come” I explained.

“Well, I invited Whitney Houston to my Basic Training graduation and she did not come” said Sergeant (SGT) South.

“Celebrities suck,” we agreed with each other.

But then we laughed at ourselves because I thought I was the only soldier silly enough to invite a celebrity to my Basic Training graduation. It turns out Sergeant (SGT) South was like me. I wonder how many other military members have tried to invite celebrities to their Basic Training graduations.

While I am mentioning Whitney Houston I should mention this. While I was in Colorado, 1989-1990, Whitney Houston came and did a concert open to the public using an outdoor performance space at the Air Force Academy in Colorado. I went with several Army friends. Several times in between songs I screamed 'WHITNEY' at the top of my lungs. Whitney heard me and at one point broke out into a smile. I was very pleased with myself. My friends were all embarrassed. Here's to you, Whitney.

Peeing in the Snow

One time when I was still new to being stationed in Germany we went to the field and it was quite cold. Brrr.Brrrr-brrrr-rrrrrr. The landscape as far as the eye could see and our field site was completely dominated by snow. I have to admit I had grown up in Southern California and really did not know anything about the snow. All I know is all of a sudden I was living in a tent in the snow.

My platoon sergeant, (a Sergeant First Class) told me that I would not have my own tent even though I was female. I did not expect my own tent but when women soldiers first started showing up in the 70's (before my time) and 80's (mid-80's - that's me), there were some units that put women in their own tents.

I remember waking up at night and needing to pee. My Army Division did not use commercially available portable toilets in those days. The whole time I was in Germany we used a shovel and took a nature walk when we were in the field if we had to relieve ourselves. Anyway, I woke up in the middle of the night and I had to pee and even though I knew I should walk away from the tent I just did not quite feel like it because it was so cold. Just outside the tent, not too far away, I peed in the snow. As I crouched down and watched the steam rise from the pee I wondered if anyone had ever caught frostbite peeing in the snow. I did not want to be

the first. So I had decided to just pee without walking too far from the tent.

The next morning I got up before the guys began moving. It was a duty morning and we all had to be up by 0700 hours (7:00 AM) which was usually chow time in the field. As I stepped out of the tent I saw the yellow snow. Even though it had snowing a bit overnight, there was still yellow snow. I guess pee seeps up. So I kicked some snow over it and yet the yellow still seeped up and made crumbly yellow snow but it would not go away. So I resolved not to pee in the snow next to tents again. I also resolved to walk away from the pee.

I went over to where one of the duty areas on site was and hung out for awhile. This was the mess tent and we would be eating there later. Maybe they let me help set up such as setting trash bags by taping them to tent poles. I know it was warm there and they let me hang out/help out. Then I began walking back to my tent area.

Our platoon sergeant had the guys from my tent in a formation. I started to run because I had not known we had a formation scheduled. The platoon sergeant called out that I did not need to be in the formation and to stay where I was. I walked closer and stood behind the formation. It did not take long for me to realize as I listened that the Sergeant First Class was chewing the guys out for being nasty ass pigs because somebody had pissed outside the tent. His plan was to keep them in formation until somebody 'fessed' up. The guys were squirming around a bit and looking around at each other uneasily because they did not know who did it and yet some of them were probably silently guessing that they knew who did it. After a while since no one admitted who did it or told on anyone else our platoon sergeant released them from formation and from being chewed out by him.

I could not confess. I just could not admit to it. This is one of those moments in life where a core desire for self-honesty clashes with self-preservation. I had been having a tough enough time adapting to my platoon initially and I did not need the tarnished reputation I would surely receive if I told everyone it was me.

Germany was a two year duty for me. After about a year I told one of the guys named Private First Class (PFC) Eagles about it. He had been in that original group that got chewed out. I told him that it was me. We had been hanging out off duty with another guy named Specialist Wise who liked to play electric guitar. We had become his roadies. We helped by carrying his amp or a second guitar. Our socializing friendship grew so one day I told Private First Class (PFC) Eagles. He could not believe it. He said nobody suspected me.

I admitted I did not know pee would stick to the snow but that at the time I did not want to get in trouble for it. I even admitted to him I had gotten myself worked up into thinking I might get frostbite from being too close to the snow while peeing so I just wanted to pee and get back in the tent and into my sleeping bag. We laughed about it for awhile that night.

The German Farmer

When I was stationed in Germany we did training in field environments for at least a week or more every month. We would leave garrison and set up our tents somewhere. I never saw maps or attended meetings that showed the big picture of where all the other Army units were going to be setting up their camps because in that unit I was not someone who needed to know these things.

One time a large number of units were set up within and around a town. I remember I took a daytime walk and never encountered any gate guards

or field perimeter guards. I met a German man, a farmer who asked me if I wanted to see the baby pigs. Let's overlook the fact that I should not have been wandering around without 'my battle buddy' and I should not have gone into a barn alone where I could have been endangered, nonetheless, I decided to go see the barn. Sure enough, he had barnyard animals like sheep and ducks and a mommy pig with newborns. He showed me around and I left and walked back to our field area where our tents were set up.

Everybody I encountered told me that Sergeant First Class (SFC) Parks was looking for me so I went to see Sergeant First Class (SFC) Parks. He asked where I had been and I told him I had been to a German farm. I immediately suspected he did not believe and as he admonished me for wandering around he told me that the next time I went to a German farm I should take the platoon with me.

I then told everybody who had told me that SFC Parks was looking for me that I had permission to take them to the German farm I had just come from. I took a platoon of doubters to the farm and then that very nice farming man showed everybody the animals and then invited us in to sit down. He offered us beer which we had to turn down since we were in a duty status. Then he offered us fresh ice cream and we must have stayed visiting for at least an hour, perhaps closer to two.

None of us spoke German and he did not speak English but we all managed to share some stories while eating some very fresh farm food that he shared with us. Finally, sadly, we admitted we had to leave. As we walked back I was glad to be proven right, I had been to a German farm and I was glad that within our group there a Sergeant because if we got in trouble the Sergeant would get in trouble for us since he outranked us. (It has long been an Army tradition that the highest ranking soldier is responsible for individual behaviors within a group). Sergeant First Class

(SFC) Parks was waiting by our tents and since we had not been drinking, we were not in trouble and he said it was because we stuck together.

I like to think that is among one of the best days in terms of socializing that any one from my platoon experienced while being in Germany. The farmer was friendly in the 'my house is your house' sense of the word. He genuinely liked us and did not convey any sense of how he wanted the US out of his country which is something overseas American soldiers can experience either openly or with subtlety.

I Give PFC Reed and PFC Talbot a Counseling Statement

The military uses a form or document known as a counseling statement to annotate positive or negative information about a soldier. One time during my first year or two on Active Duty, I was instructed by my Squad Leader, Sergeant (SGT) Compass to fill out counseling statements for two soldiers in our squad. It was near the end of our duty day when he informed me of this. I had gone into my barracks room after work and one of the soldiers, Private First Class (PFC) Eagles came by.

"Come on," Eagles informed me. "John is going to play some music. He is going to rehearse at Katterbach. Let's go" Eagles said.

"I can't go anywhere yet" I replied. "Sergeant Compass wants me to do counseling statements on Reed and Talbot" I said.

Eagles sat down and said he would help me think about what to write. I do not remember how much time passed.

"I know" Eagles said. "You can just write Private First Class (PFC) Reed is 6 foot 2, has blonde hair and blue eyes and is an awesome soldier" Eagles offered.

"I can't write that" I said.

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“Why not?” Eagles asked

I did not have any kind of an answer because his suggestions were all true. So I wrote up a counseling statement for Private First Class (PFC) Reed. Then I walked over and knocked on Reed’s door.

“Hey Reed, I have to give you this” I said.

I handed him the counseling statement. He was not happy to see me at his door with a counseling statement. Then he smiled as he read it.

“Do you really want me to sign this?” Reed asked.

“Oh yes” I said. “I am turning that in” I told him. Reed signed it and gave it back to me.

Private Talbot was not quite as tall as Reed so I did not refer to his height in my counseling statement for him. I did refer to his hair and eyes. I think I also wrote down that he possessed a nice smile and could do a lot of push-ups too. Then I knocked on his door. Like Reed, he was not happy to see me knocking on his door with a counseling statement in my hand. Then he read it and laughed.

“Do you really want me to sign this?” Talbot asked me.

“Yes.” I said.

“Are you really going to turn this in” Talbot asked.

“Oh yes.” I insisted.

“I never signed one like this before” Talbot said and then he started laughing again.

I suspect that all of the Sergeants in my platoon read my counseling statements. One Sergeant asked me whether I even knew how to write

counseling statements. Within a few days my Platoon Sergeant, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Lake decided that only Sergeants and above would write the periodic counseling statements for our platoon.

Marching My Army Soldiers Into the Navy Muster

This is truly the most embarrassing story I could ever tell about myself. But, in retrospect, it is funny. After I got out of Active Duty I initially joined the Army Reserve and then joined an Army National Guard unit. A fair amount of paperwork and little things known as ‘orders’ went along with me getting released from one unit, military branch, to go to another, but that is just normal operations.

After joining the California Army National Guard unit I requested and got sent to a military training school in Aurora, Colorado. I attended the Medical Equipment Repairers Course at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center. (That training is in Texas now). There were other sergeants from all over the country attending this school but the majority of soldiers were fresh out of Basic Training and were privates. Every morning we had formation after breakfast and did accountability which is like roll call. Then each group of about 30 soldier-students would be marched to their classroom. The group I was assigned to already had an NCOIC, (Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge) named Sergeant so he marched our group of soldiers to class every day.

One day Sergeant Church did not come to formation. I was stunned. So I stood up at the head of formation and gave the accountability report. Then after waiting for some of the other groups of soldiers to be marched away I called my group to *Attention*, followed by a *Right, Face* and a *Forward, March*. So far; so good. Somewhere along the way it was time to call *Column Right, March* and they made a right turn and now we were heading down the street toward the schoolhouse where our classroom was.

We still had to make another right turn but so far everything was going just fine. Now comes the part I have wanted to relive several times in my memories. We reached an intersection and I called out *Column Right, March* to my soldiers and they ignored me. I called it again. They ignored me. I called it louder. They turned. But now we were no longer at the right spot to turn into the intersection. I was marching four columns of soldiers, and since we were past the intersection we crossed the street and stepped up onto the curb. Now we were headed for the Navy who were standing around holding coffee cups having a morning *muster*. The school building where I needed to take the soldiers was another block away and this explains why they did not want to make that right turn when I called *Column Right, March*. So now, we were actually marching toward the Navy who were standing outside their Navy barracks.

Real life happens second by second, and here I was leading four columns of soldiers into the Navy. They saw us coming, heading for them like a wave about to thump and they scooted out of our way. Now there was nothing between us and the building the Navy lived in except a few more footsteps across the grass. I had stage fright. I just could not think of what to say. I was a brand new sergeant before coming to that school and had only practiced marching squads. The size of the group I was marching intensified my fears. Now, to my immediate left, Private Brett said "Sergeant, do something, and he was speaking directly to me.

I replied, to him, honestly, "I can't think."

He then said "say *Class, Halt*." What a godsend he was to me in that instant because he was right and I used those exact words.

Me: "*Class, Halt*."

My soldiers stopped. Thankfully none of the heads of any of my soldiers had hit the side of the building yet, but, measuring by seconds, it was very

close. Now my brain was clear. It had no ideas in it, but it was clear. The pressure abated. This direct-command-leadership-headache-I-was-experiencing-which-is-when-only-you-can-make-a-decision-and-everyone-is-waiting had now evaporated.

We were still in a bit of a pickle. The Navy was still standing all around us on three sides, except to our front where the building was. They were still swilling their coffee cups around. At moments like that it would have been fun to shake some salt from a salt shaker at them in case they miss the sea in their face but I was in command and there was no time for being a smart ass. Either I asked Private Brett what next, or he simply offered it. "Say *Countercolumn, March*."

He was so right. It was perfect. "*Countercolumn, March*" I ordered and the thing is nobody ever knows how to do a *Countercolumn*. Even when you are at Basic Training practicing marching all the time, almost every *Countercolumn* includes somebody's missteps.

After the embarrassment of me marching my soldiers into the side of a building I gave them a *Countercolumn, March* command causing at least two columns to march into each other. The end result is that all the squads make a u-turn simultaneously but there is usually some chaos as squad leaders will not be sure if their squad's u-turn is executed toward the inside or outside of the marching formation. As we maneuvered this marching u-turn the Navy began their ribbing of me.

"Hey Sergeant Castro I know you don't like the Navy but who ordered this attack."

Anyway, my class marched back across the grass, stepped down the curb, made a "*Column Right*" back into the street and marched to the next intersection. Now we made another "*Column, Right, March*" into the proper cross street, went a short ways and halted. I called my class to attention

and then gave them a “*Left Face*.” I told the class to “Fall Out to your classroom.”

This story I have just recounted reminds me of another story that I call:

Why Won't the Enlisted Come Out of the Rain?

One year I was in an Army Reserve Combat Support Hospital (unit) in California. As a hospital unit our deployment mission was to either staff (backfill) an existing military hospital (while the fulltime military got deployed) or set up a field hospital in a deployed environment. We had many medical specialties such as doctors, nurses, anesthesiologists, oral surgeons, at least one neurosurgeon and so on. In some cases these people had a previous military background in the Army or Navy for example and after getting their medical education they joined back up as medical officers. In some cases they had been recruited directly from the civilian medical world and had no previous military background.

We had all gone to a military training area known as Camp Parks, near Dublin in Northern California. We were getting ready for a Change of Command ceremony involving the outgoing Colonel (Hospital Commander) and the incoming Colonel. We, the enlisted, were standing in formation as the officers practiced calling us to attention and doing everything else they were going to need to do during the next day's Change of Command ceremony. At some point the officers walked away leaving us soldiers in formation and it began to rain. First the rainfall was gentle. Then it began falling harder. The First Sergeant (1SG) knew we were standing in the rain. He tried to wait and see if any of the officers would take responsibility for us and release us from the formation. For some reason I was not in the formation when the rain hit. I had been pulled to work on something like the PA (public address-microphone) system and I remember watching the soldiers get wet. I heard an officer say to another officer “why won't the enlisted come out of the rain” and I

told her “they are in formation. They need to be given an order. They need to be released by someone in command.”

I think the First Sergeant (1SG) ended up going over to the front of the formation, assuming command and releasing everybody from formation, that is, from standing in the rain. I am sure that later he talked to some officers so that the higher ranking officers presiding over the Change of Command had lower ranking officers who understood drill and ceremony procedures to keep an eye on things and monitor everything so that the enlisted did not have something like that happen again for the rest of the weekend. Informally this is known as babysitting, that is, when the lower ranking help out the higher ranking to make the higher ranking look good.

The Mad Shitter

I was stationed in Germany for two years. It was my first permanent party station meaning it was my first assignment wherein I was not in a training status. At some point I was no longer a newbie there and the rhythms of everything came easier. One time we were in the field and our (duty) work site was some distance away from the main site. This meant we had no mess tent in our area and so at least one of us had been designated to go make regular food runs. The procedure we used in order to get the chow to our site involved mermitees. These were insulated containers that could carry 3 insert containers. The insert containers were taken out and filled with food at a field or other mess hall area. Typical dinner fare might be scalloped potatoes, ham slices, waxed green beans, salad and so on. One day, Specialist (SPC) Rich, one of the guys, asked me if I wanted to go with him to pick up breakfast or chow, and I said yes.

On that small work site I did not need a lot of approvals to help Specialist (SPC) Rich. I asked my Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge, (NCOIC), a Sergeant, and I had permission. That morning we left early because our goal was to get back to our site with hot chow by no later than Oh-seven-

hundred (0700) or 7 AM. We picked up the food, brought it in and served it to everyone. We were on a small site. So it was easy to check and make sure that the new morning shift ate before relieving those who had been on duty all night. That way the new crew ate first, then relieved those on duty. Then those coming off of duty could eat before bunking down.

After we knew everyone had eaten we cleaned up. We packed up any trash bags associated with eating such as paper plates, cups, disposable plastic eating utensils and so on because on Active Duty we almost never used our mess kits. When our eating area was cleaned up we headed back to the larger field mess site. Once we reached the mess site we put our trash in a trash staging area. We went to the mess hall and washed our mermits. Then we left our clean mermits there. We would return later during dinner to pick them up already filled with a hot meal for dinnertime chow.

With that overview of what we were doing let me explain what happened. During the morning run to pick up and deliver hot food it was still early in the morning and the temperature was lower than 50 degrees Fahrenheit. During the after breakfast drive to wash our mermits it was warming up. Both Rich and I had been making casual conversation and having a few laughs all along. However as it got warmer, the inside of the vehicle started to smell badly. The smell increased and worsened. No amount of opening the window for ventilation improved the bad smell inside the vehicle. As the day's heat increased and the foul stink increased we each had less to talk about.

As I looked out my opened window I know I was thinking "Damn! Richy, why don't you wash yourself off?" But he was thinking the same thing about me.

As the smell increased, so did our silence. Now we did not have any field showers at either our site or the main site. But we did have jerry cans,

which are five gallon metal cans or 5 gallon plastic containers filled with water. It was easy to devise ways to wet our washcloths for personal wiping down or we could find other ways to dump water on ourselves. In my opinion there was no shortage of guys who did not change their shorts regularly in the field. There's an old Army saying about ranger underwear, not to be confused with commando style. Ranger underwear has been described as wearing yours outside out, then inside out, then trading with your buddy. That way you will never run out but I'm sure no one has ever traded undies like that. It's just talk. Anyway, here we are, Rich and I, driving in a stinking vehicle. We have nothing to say to each other and our drive time is at least 45 minutes each way.

We are both convinced the other has no decent habits of personal hygiene. Each of us thinks the other stinks and we have probably decided we do not want to be friends anymore. We're also stuck with each other.

We arrived at the field mess site and worked in silence. We helped each other unload the trash, and then we cleaned the mermitees. We talked to the staff onsite regarding when to return and meanwhile we were dreading the inevitable stinking long drive back.

During our drive back the temperature continued to rise along with the awful stink. We continued to have nothing to say to each other. Finally, we reached our duty site again and as we were getting ready to lock the vehicle we were picking up after ourselves so the vehicle would remain clean. There have been plenty of soldiers that leave their trash in vehicles as long as possible but I have always felt that if I picked up responsibly someone else would not litter the same trash out the window.

As we picked up the inside of the vehicle, I noticed a paper bag, just a brown paper bag like the kind people packed school lunches into in the old days. I asked Rich if it was his. He said no and said he thought it was mine. One of us looked inside and there was a good sized human shit in

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the bag. As surprising and gross as it was it also explained the stink of the truck and let each of us know the other was not funky, gross and unwashed.

“Who did this” we asked each other.

“They didn’t even use toilet paper” we observed because there was none in the bag.

Even after we threw away that stink bag we kept thinking about it.

For the next few days if Rich and I made eye contact with each other when other soldiers from our site were around we knew we were each wondering the same thing.

“Did he do it?” we wondered simultaneously.

“How about him?” we contemplated.

“Maybe it was him” we each thought.

Anytime we knew we were each thinking the same thing we laughed uncontrollably. The guys in our platoon would ask us why we were laughing and we could never explain. What if the person who asked us had done the “shitting?”

At that time I was the only female on our site so we knew it had to be a guy. We dubbed this anonymous soldier by the nickname ‘The Mad Shitter’.

We wondered if it was personal since everybody knew Rich used that truck and during that field exercise it was more or less reserved for meal runs at key times. Maybe someone was sleeping in the truck even though soldiers were not allowed to sleep in trucks because if soldiers slept with the vehicle running the Army trucks were notorious for giving a soldier

carbon monoxide poisoning and possibly then causing death. Nonetheless someone could have been sleeping in the truck and was too lazy to go shit somewhere appropriate so they went ahead and shit in a paper bag in Rich's truck.

On the other hand, Rich was gay. Some soldiers in the platoon knew and others may not have. I knew. I also knew even though Rich was a good soldier and KNEW how to do all his soldiering responsibilities, there were some soldiers in the platoon who were verbally crueller and yet when no one was looking, they wanted to make out with him.

We never learned who The Mad Shitter was but at one time he was in the 3rd platoon, Bravo Company of the 141st Signal Battalion within the 1st Armored Division which was stationed in Germany in the 1980's.

Nostalgia for Commercials

When I was stationed in Germany the technology for watching American movies was the VCR or video recording cassette used with a television. When soldiers arrived in Germany from the states they would often be asked, almost right away, whether they had any movies.

I remember that even before I know who anybody was, I gave a guy who knocked on my door two videocassettes that I had brought with me. He took them to the Day Room which was a living room type of area for soldiers in the barracks. I never got them back either and I was too new to really know who was who. I was SOL-sorta outta luck.

Most videocassette recordings were taped directly from broadcast television in those days and so they included commercials. If someone had a fresh videocassette from the states OR *the world* as it was called everyone would hoot and holler about the new commercials.

“This is from *the world*!”

“Come on down to the Day Room. Simms just got back from *the world*. He brought some TV shows from *the world*.”

“Ooh, rewind that. Play that one again.”

My Tribute to the Ice Age is Bolo

Note: Bolo means no go.

In Germany I was in a 4 person room in the barracks which meant that sometimes I had 3 other roommates or room-dogs as we called them. Our room had a small refrigerator similar to the mini-refrigerators in some hotel rooms. The very small freezer within had very little room in it. Since we rarely used the freezer I started putting small plastic dinosaurs in the freezer. If any friends opened our refrigerator and inquired my room-dogs explained it was Castro’s Tribute to the Ice Age.

One time after my dinosaurs were in the freezer we had an inspection. Our room was flawless. Then the Battalion Commander opened the refrigerator.

“What IS this?” he asked.

I believe my room-dogs sighed silently and yet collectively were thinking “Oh shit.”

Officers like Lieutenant Colonels in command do not really talk to Specialists like me during formal inspections. Lieutenant Colonels talk to Majors or Captains, and of course the nearest Major did not know why there were dinosaurs in the freezer. Neither did my Captain.

The highest ranking enlisted soldier in the room was our Company First Sergeant (1SG) and he did not know why there were plastic dinosaurs in the freezer. If my Platoon Sergeant (PSG) was in the room the First Sergeant (1SG) would have asked him why there were dinosaurs in the

freezer. But my Platoon Sergeant was circulating throughout the building making sure other soldiers were ready.

Squad Leader Sergeant (SGT) Evans was in the room and he was asked why there were dinosaurs in the freezer. He asked me and of course I replied that it was my tribute to the Ice Age.

Meanwhile out in the hallway other soldiers were trying to peek in our room to see what was going on because they were waiting to be inspected. Usually if an inspection takes too long soldiers will try to get word to other soldiers about what is going on. For example if the top of my wall locker had been checked and found dusty this information would fan out and everyone would wipe down the top of their wall locker while they were standing by waiting. Since the delay was due to dinosaurs in my freezer no one knew what was going on.

Sergeant Evans assured the Battalion Commander that the dinosaurs would be removed from my freezer and that was the end of that. Nothing else in our room was inspected by the Battalion Commander and for our room the inspection ended. I thought it was bogus that such a big deal had been made regarding my toy dinosaurs but the plastic dinosaurs were bolo.

Another Barracks Inspection

The next time we had an inspection in our barracks my Squad Leader and my Sergeants all made sure there were no plastic dinosaurs in the freezer. No dinosaurs. But, I did have a nice collage taped to the wall.

When the Battalion Commander came into our room he looked at my collage. I had a picture of David Bowie singing to a skull from a concert picture. I had some pictures of The Cure. I am sure I had a picture of John Lennon.

A Duffel Bag of Army Stories

I had a quote from Claes Oldenburg that stated “I am for art that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.”

I had this hideous looking rubber man that had unfortunately had been burned in an ashtray when I was hanging out with some Army friends. I cannot remember what led to the rubber man becoming burnt up a bit. One of the arms had come off and I had reattached it with a safety pin.

I am sure I had more quotes. I remember one from a punk band that said “if we were as miserable as our lyrics, we’d be a right miserable bunch.” I know the commander looked at my wall for a long time. Meanwhile other soldiers were peeking into our room trying to get information for the grapevine as to what was taking so long. There was not a large entourage of Officers with the Battalion Commander during this inspection so he addressed the First Sergeant (1SG) who was at his side.

“Soldiers are allowed to have artwork or posters. It has to be in good taste” the Colonel said. “This is not in good taste” he said and added “this is disturbing.”

“She can take this down” the First Sergeant (1SG) said.

“I don’t understand this” the Colonel said and he continued looking at my wall.

“Well, that is....” I began to explain.

“Are you the First Sergeant?” the First Sergeant retorted as he cut me off.

“No, First Sergeant” I answered.

“He’s talking to me not you. You’re not the First Sergeant” the First Sergeant told me.

The First Sergeant instructed my Squad Leader to have me clean up my wall art. Next, Sergeant Evans told me that he really did not see a problem with anything I had hanging up because he could not see anything wrong with it. Since the Colonel wanted me to take things down though, I had to take things down. Good-Bye hideous burnt rubber man of mine.

After note: I recently heard from one of my old room-dogs from Germany. She said that during inspections nobody ever looked at her stuff or gave her a hard time because everybody was busy giving me a hard time. So she said I helped her have stress free inspections.

FIGMO/ FIGMETSO and Short-Timers

In the past decade many Active Duty soldiers have discovered themselves to be involuntarily extended. This means no matter how many specific years a soldier signed up for, the Army can keep them in uniform longer. There was a time, however, when a soldier could count on being rotated out of an overseas duty assignment after 24 or 36 months. An enlisted soldier could depend on being released from the Army on a specific date. During the United States last war that involved a draft, specifically the Vietnam War, US soldiers could count on 6 month combat tours.

Note: Required military obligations of Officers are different. The service obligation of an Officer is indefinite and the military ID card for an Officer lists their term of service as indefinite. Officers have to put in a request to resign their commission if they want to get out and of course the Department of the Army has to agree to let them go.

Back in the days when enlisted soldiers could count on getting rotated out of a unit or completely released from the Army, FIGMO and FIGMETSO meant something. FIGMO means Fuck It Got My Orders. FIGMO means a soldier has received their PCS (Permanent Change of Station) Orders. These PCS Orders (Permanent Change of Station) mean that a soldier is being ordered to report to another unit and the unit they

are presently assigned to has to release them. Soldiers are given about 30 days to clear a unit. They have to attend specific briefings. They have to make arrangements to have their personal belongings packed up and moved by plane, ship or truck. They may have to schedule a physical or medical exam. They may have to get a series of medical shots that have to be spread out across days or weeks. Usually a soldier can complete their out-processing within 3 weeks and then they usually request personal leave (vacation) time. At the conclusion of the leave they have to report to their new unit.

FIGMETSO is usually perceived as being better than FIGMO. FIGMETSO includes the military abbreviation ETS which means Extermination of Time in Service and an ETS date is the date the Army will release you from your enlistment contract. FIGMETSO means Fuck it, Got My ETS Orders.

Back in the day when soldiers could rely on date specific PCS and ETS orders they used to write FIGMO or FIGMETSO in big letters across the front of page one of these papers and tape these Orders to the outside of their door for all to see. If you were brand new to the Army and you crossed paths in the hallway with a soldier who just got their orders you might think they were crazy.

“FIGMO” they’d say and they would walk down the hall saying “Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha, FIGMO.”

“FIGMO”.

“FIGMO”.

“FIGMO, muthafucker, FIGMO. Ha, Ha, Ha!”

“You’re just changing Commanders and mess halls” the FIGMETSO soldier would say to the FIGMO soldier.

FIGMO and FIGMETSO refer to a state of mind that has to be experienced to be truly understood. It is possible that FIGMO and FIGMETSO always meant more to overseas soldiers. Soldiers who got FIGMO orders could look forward to a fresh start if there were other soldiers or officers they hated or if they needed to live something down because of some bullshit that happened.

FIGMETSO soldiers could look forward to smoking pot if they had given up smoking when they joined up. Male and female soldiers could look forward to wearing their hair in styles that did not comport well with the uniform. It is well known that guys in uniform are required to have short hair but many women choose to wear short hair in uniform especially if they have to endure wearing helmets practically all the time. So, in a way, many women “butch out” while in uniform because shorter hair is easier to deal with. For this reason female soldiers who are getting out or who are leaving a hardcore overseas duty station will look forward to greater personal hairstyle flexibility.

Prior to getting their PCS (FIGMO) or ETS (FIGMETSO) orders many soldiers used to start counting off the anticipated days for how long they had left in country or at that duty assignment. Soldiers used to keep these paper calendars hanging up in their room where everyone could see their calendar and these were known as Short Timer calendars.

Every day soldiers would make an X on their Short Timer calendar so they could mark another day off.

“45 days and a wake up!” a Short Timer might announce to anyone who would listen.

“How long do you have left?” a Short Timer might ask a newcomer. “What? 24 months .36 months. Oh, I can’t count that high” a Short Timer might brag to a new soldier.

For newcomers, or newbies, it could get nauseating as you walked to the morning duty (work call) formation after the PT formation.

“25 days and a wake up.”

“17 days and a wake up.”

“Shi-i-i-t. 3 days and a wake up. Blink and you’ll miss me.”

“Grrrrr-rrrr.” Some Short Timers growled at newbies who they saw walking toward them in the halls. This was done to gauge the reaction of the newbies who often thought they were crazy. Short Timers thought it was fun to spook a newbie.

“I’ve been in the latrine longer than you’ve been in the Army” a Short Timer might call out to a newbie.

One very popular Short Timer expression was “Fuck You, I’m Short!” This phrase was said or sung in a gleeful voice.

There was also such a thing as Short Timer Art. This could be found on civilian jackets worn by Short Timers. It could be found drawn onto the camouflage fabric covering our military helmets. It featured a drawing of a pair of Army boots sticking out from an Army Helmet. In between you see widely grinning teeth on a face that is hard to see. This is because Short Timers are hard to see because they are hard to find. They are almost empty boots and empty helmets because they have almost gone on out. Behold the Short Timer!

What if She’s Dead

The first time I met my room dog (a room dog is a roommate) Xiao-Xiao (Shoo-Shoo) she probably thought I was weird. When she showed up I had no room dogs. All of my other previous room dogs had either completed their military obligations and returned home or rotated to

other units. I was all alone in my 4 person room in the barracks. One day in the early afternoon I came in and saw someone curled up sleeping on one of the bunks. She did not have any blankets or sheets because that idiot in supply never did any laundry and never had any sheets to issue new soldiers. Either that or he was just an asshole. I went through that with him when I was new too.

Anyway, there she wearing a yellow athletic suit that the military used to issue and we referred to these as the *banana sweats*. She had a hoodie on also and the drawstrings were pulled tight around her face. I could not really see her face. I assumed she was sleeping. The flight to Germany from stateside is quite long and most newly arriving soldiers show up feeling sleepy. There is also a significant time difference to get used to. She was sleeping and I ignored her.

A few hours went by and I was off duty in my room. My imagination started giving me ideas and it occurred to me that maybe she had showed up, decided she hated it there and killed herself already.

I was positive I would get in trouble if she was dead. I would get court-martialed for sure if she had killed herself. She could have taken pills and right now she could be near or approaching death.

I walked over to her and stood by closely to see if I could hear her breathing. Simultaneously, in addition to my worrying about whether she was alive I also began worrying about whether she would wake up and think I was a creep. I could not hear her breathing and I could not see her chest rising because she was all curled up. I decided to poke her. I poked her on the shoulder and stepped back. Some people wake up swinging fists.

“Hey, are you alive? Are you hungry?” I called out. “The mess hall is only open for another thirty minutes” I added.

Now she did something I will never forget. She opened one eye, her meanest eyeball, and she said “Go away.” I was instantly intimidated by her.

I was also extremely pleased and relieved that she had not killed herself. Later on I met her and her name was Private First Class (PFC) Xiao-Xiao (Shoo-Shoo) Jefferson and she was from Long Beach, California.

The Morning My Room Dog Threw My Keys at Me

One morning my room dog threw my keys at me. We lived in the barracks in Germany and the door keys were big skeleton keys. If the door was locked, even if you were inside the room, you needed to use a key to unlock the door. One morning I woke up at about an hour before formation to go to the bathroom. It was close to 0400 (4:00 AM) and as I walked to the door so that I could go down the hall to the bathroom I noticed I was stepping on music cassettes and they were mine. I reached the door and then since it was locked I could not get out. I went back into my area and could not find my keys.

I heard my room dog stirring about in her bed and called out “Hey Xiao-Xiao (Shoo-Shoo), have you seen my keys.”

Then she chucked my keys at me. She threw them really hard.

“Are you looking for these?” she called out in her meanest command voice.

“What are you doing with my keys, Xiao?” I asked innocently enough, “and why are my cassettes all over the floor?”

“You don’t remember?” Xiao asked. “You don’t remember saying ‘they’re just cassettes Xiao, kick them across the floor’.” Xiao got up and

kicked some of my cassettes across the floor. “You don’t remember Skinny and Pee-Wee bringing you back to the room?” Xiao asked.

“No, I don’t remember that” I said and walked out to go down the hall to the bathroom.

When I returned to the room Xiao started telling me that I had been embarrassing during a barbecue we held the day before. It was a weekday but we had a day off because our command gave us a free day. I am sure we earned the day off for putting up with some bullshit grueling duty. We probably earned it for achieving a certain number of days without getting Article 15’s or DUI’s. During our day off, some soldiers began barbecuing right outside the barracks and we had beer there too. I remember I had just received my orders. FIGMO. I was so exhilarated with my orders that I was on Cloud 9. Then I drank some beer. All of a sudden I was way-way drunk.

Xiao-Xiao said I was throwing chicken bones at everybody, and I said mean things too. Xiao said that I had peed outside behind a bush instead of coming inside to the building to use the bathroom. Shesaid everybody was mad at me over that.

As I thought about it I kind of remembered soldiers getting mad at me about peeing and I got mad at them. I told them that field soldiers peed outside all the time. I do remember feeling like they were acting holier than thou because as soldiers we really all peed outside a lot.

Usually when we have peed outside it was because we were living in tents and had no choices. I guess I was so drunk I did not want to walk all the way upstairs to pee. I was also wearing a skirt and it was really easy to pee outside.

I also remembered that I walked over and saw my friend Sergeant Devoe. He worked at finance and I talked to him from outside the building where

he had a ground floor work area. He was behind a thick bulletproof window and he could not hear one word I said but I did not realize that at the time. So I stood outside the window and talked to him for a long time. Talk. Talk. Talk. Then I went back to the barbecue. I guess I started throwing chicken bones again.

Xiao said Skinny and Pee-Wee had to chase me and they finally got me and carried me up to the room. They locked me in my room because they took my key and gave it to my room dog. They told me I could not come out of my room or I would get in trouble. They probably told the Sergeant on duty (CQ or Charge of Quarters) down the hall not to let me out.

Off Duty in Korea

Note: The border area between North and South Korea is known as the DMZ or Demilitarized Zone.

In Korea I lived in the barracks on Camp Hovey which was right next door to Camp Casey. It seems like almost everyone stationed at Camp Hovey and Camp Casey was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division. Those of us in the division proudly referred to it as "Second I-D." Camp Hovey and Camp Casey were about 2 hours north of Seoul if you were driving. We were fairly close to North Korea. As the crow flies we were probably no farther than 10 miles from North Korea but there were no direct roads to the DMZ area.

All of the roads involved hills and were winding. It was a long drive to the DMZ but it was a short helicopter ride. I know we were relatively close even though I believe there were a few duty (out) posts that were even closer to the border/DMZ. If we went out the back gate of Camp Hovey we were in a Korean town called Toko-Ri. The front gate leaving Camp Hovey led directly into a military training area which led directly to the

back gate of Camp Casey. The front gate of Camp Casey led to a Korean town called Tong Du Chon or Dong Du Chon, also known as 'TDC' by us. I loved me some TDC. Maybe I loved being 25 years old.

When we were off duty we could only go out of the front gate, to Tong Du Chon, or the back gate, to Toko-Ri if we had a pass because there was a curfew in effect for soldiers. The way the curfew was managed was by issuing passes to us. There were 2 hour passes and 24 hour passes but the understanding with a 24 hour pass was that a soldier would not have to be back by midnight but did have to be back by the following morning's duty formation. If we had a 2 hour pass we had to sign back in by midnight. Only two soldiers at a time from our platoon could be on a 24 hour pass but there were numerous 2 hour passes available. We had to pick up our pass and then sign out and later on sign back in at the Company Orderly Room. There was always at least one soldier on duty in the Orderly Room. I took both my passes with me when I left Korea. I still have them in a photo album.

In the big picture of things, the reason we had curfews and pass requirements is because the 2nd Infantry Division always had to have a certain number of soldiers on site and the number was quite high. The 2nd I.D. always had to be ready for a call up. The Army counted on us being ready to mobilize quickly at all times.

We had a post shuttle that wound its way from Camp Hovey to Camp Casey and back again without going outside the gate. Since our curfew was for midnight, it seems like the last bus leaving the Camp Casey gate to drive us around all the barracks was close to 11 PM. There was also one franchise of taxis that could drive around on post and also go in and out the gate. Once we were outside of the gate there were lots of Korean taxi companies and the cabs were all very distinctly colored but none of these other Korean taxi's could drive onto our post.

The Goat Path

It was not unusual for a bunch of my platoon fellow soldiers to get drunk after work. One time we had to be back by midnight but missed the 11:00 PM or 2300 (twenty-three hundred) camp shuttle. So we took a taxi to the back gate. From the back gate we could walk the long way in or take a short cut we called the goat path. When I was off duty in Korea I had a tendency to wear clothing that was the most opposite of a uniform that I could think of. So I believe I had heels on and the goat path did not seem like a good idea to me. However the guys wanted to take the goat path. I did all right for awhile but when we got to the steep part one of the guys threw me over his shoulders and carried me up and over the steep part of the goat path. I am not sure who carried me except he was tall. At best a platoon can be brotherly and my platoon brought me back to our barracks.

When Cody Wore My Heels and I Wore His Flat Shoes

One time on a Friday night my friend Cody and I both had an overnight pass. Yet we also had to be in formation by about 8:00 AM or 0800/zero-eight-hundred for a Saturday morning road march. Friday night we got dressed up and went out dancing. There was a nightclub called Studio 54 in Tong Du Chon with a dance floor that lit up. It was great fun to dance there.

When we were done dancing that night we took a taxi to the back gate and walked in. We decided we could not take the goat path so we walked the long way in. We had both been drinking and I was having a hard time walking that one mile or so in heels on an unpaved dirt road. I tried to walk in stockings (practically bare feet) but it was still winter and the ground was way too cold for that.

At some point Cody and I tried to share shoes. He wore one of mine and I wore one of his. There we were stumbling along and laughing wearing one flat shoe and one high heel. Then he had to pee. Then I had to pee as well. Meanwhile it was freezing. Laughing was funny. Walking was funny. Peeing was funny. But we were getting nowhere. We were still really far and we were dressed for dancing, not for the cold. Then Cody decided that he could wear both of mine and I could wear both of his. I was happy with that arrangement and did not want to give him his shoes back when he realized he could not walk in mine.

“Damn, Castro. How do women walk in these?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” I replied. I am sure I was a bitch and did not want to give him back his shoes.

Eventually we made it back and of course we both went on the next morning’s road march. I kind of suspect we were not on speaking terms that day. Hey Cody, I am sorry about those blisters I caused you just in time for that road march because I did not give you back your shoes. Cody did learn something from that experience. He learned that shoes he thought were great shoes for me to wear when we went dancing had no value for walking back to our barracks.

Do Military Dogs Outrank Military Soldiers?

One time when I was stationed overseas on a military installation, I walked past a military vehicle that was clearly marked as such and I also noticed it was marked as being K-9. Similar to civilian military vehicles that are K-9 it does not make sense to walk near where the dog is sitting. I think people are universally afraid of police dogs. Nonetheless I looked closely at the K-9 dog and it was a German Shepherd. Then I noticed the dog wore a neckerchief with E-4 Corporal rank attached to it. At the time I was an E-4, Specialist.

Even though Corporals and Specialists receive the same pay, Corporals outrank Specialists because the appearance of their rank insignia has 'hard stripes'. I noticed I had a few questions and I was on my time off. So I waited for the Military Police soldier who worked with the dog to return to the vehicle and I asked him a few questions.

"Hey, is that dog really a Corporal? Does he outrank me? I mean I think there is something kind of wrong about that dog outranking me."

The Military Police soldier replied "He is a Corporal for accounting purposes but he does not outrank you. The rank gets used to cover his training costs, his medical check-ups, his travel and his food. He does not outrank you, Specialist, okay?"

I was astonished to discover the dog had rank but I was relieved to find out he did not outrank me.

When in Doubt, Whip it Out

The military has a saying that goes "when in doubt, whip it out." This refers to the age old question concerning appropriate times to offer a salute. The answer means that if you are not sure, you render a salute. In most cases enlisted Army soldiers know when to salute Army officers. But just because someone is in the Army does not mean they are particularly skilled at reading and knowing the terminology and appearance for rank of other branches such as the Navy, the Marines and the Air Force along with the Coast Guard. Additionally we are also expected to salute officers of the military from other countries if those countries are allies or friends of the United States. This does not mean the foreign officers can give us orders, it just means we display proper military courtesy by rendering a salute to these officers.

Now here is where it gets confusing. On a normal workday uniform it may be fairly easy to distinguish who the officers are. But when military

members are wearing their fancy dress uniforms it can get tricky. Dress uniforms have extra flourishes, gold bands or braids, shiny emblems on headgear, and stars, or bars. This is why “when in doubt, whip it out” is the golden rule.

I Salute an Enlisted Katusa

Korea has a male conscription policy which means all men have to serve in the military. One of the options Korean men who are fluent in the English language have is to serve alongside the American military stationed in Korea. These Korean soldiers are called Katusas by the Americans which means Korean Augmentation to the United States Army. One of their duties is to serve as translators. When I was in Korea, the ROK Army or Republic of Korea Army wore duty uniforms that were a solid olive drab color, similar to the US Army uniform colors of the 1960’s and 1970’s. In contrast to this uniform the Katusas wore a uniform similar to the American Army woodland camouflage uniform with the exception of the placement of their rank.

When I first got to Korea I did not know what a Katusa was. There was a place at Camp Casey that we called the *turtle farm*. It was called the turtle farm because there were two doors that were side by side. One door was for in-processing and next to it was the door for out-processing. It took at least one year to get from one door to the next and so that was why we called the in and out processing area by the name the turtle farm.

I was just a newbie at the turtle farm. I saw some Korean Katusa soldiers and noticed one had yellow rank embroidered onto the pocket flap area on his shirt jacket pocket. The appearance (a yellow or gold rectangle) was similar in shape to the rank for an American Army 2nd Lieutenant, (2Lt). This yellow bar meant he was a Private E-1. But I did not know this. So I saluted the poor guy and waited for him to salute me back. He did not salute me back because he knew there was

no reason for me to salute him. But I was younger and more idealistic and so I held my salute waiting for him to do the right thing. He did not salute me, but he was conflicted so he stayed in place.

Then, a Katusa who outranked him came along and began yelling at him, probably because he was late for something since I had come along and was saluting him. Now, among the Katusas the lower ranking enlisted soldiers are expected to salute the higher ranking enlisted soldiers. This young Korean Private was expected to salute the Sergeant who came and yelled at him but he could not start a new salute when I was still standing there saluting him. Now this Sergeant was yelling even more at the Private, in Korean, of course and I was still standing there.

Even without knowing the language I knew the Katusa I saluted was being chewed out. Finally the Sergeant told the Private to salute me back and so he did. Now I finally was able to drop my salute. Then the Sergeant continued yelling at the Katusa Private. Sometime within that same day or later I inquired at one of the in-processing briefings as to how I would recognize Korean rank. That is when it was explained to me that enlisted Katusas saluted each other so not to use that as a hint that maybe there was someone around to salute. He said when I got to my unit I would meet some Katusas and that I could have one of them explain to me what their officer rank looked like.

I have to admit that after I was able to get to know some Katusas, I found I was embarrassed about having saluted a Katusa Private when I was new to Korea.

Cadence follows:

Mama, Mama, can't you see

(Mama, Mama, can't you see)

Lauri Castro

What the Army's done to me

(What the Army's done to me)

Mama, Mama, can't you seeeeeeee!

(Mama, Mama, can't you seeeeeeee!)

What the Army's done to me

(What the Army's done to me)

I used to drive a Cadillac

(I used to drive a Cadillac)

Now I pack it on my back

(Now I pack it on my back)

I used to wear my faded jeans

(I used to wear my faded jeans)

Now I'm wearing Army green

(Now I'm wearing Army green)

Where's the Shower Point? and Where's the Damned Shower Point?

Many times when I have been 'in the field' (military style outdoors camping & training) with the Army, sooner or later soldiers have needed an opportunity to take showers. Normally some location is found where men can shower and normally the guys are being driven for showers before anyone has located a female shower point.

When I was in Korea, it was normal for extremely rural civilian family homes to have running water for cooking purposes and well water for household needs. But many of these isolated rural homes did not have in-home showers or bathtubs. So, there were places within the towns or villages that had community bathhouses.

One time in Korea, a bunch of the guys and me were in a military vehicle looking for the shower point for the guys. I just went for the ride. Staff Sergeant (SSG) Jeffrey was driving to the shower point for the first time and he got lost in some rural Korean village. He progressed from *lost* to *way-lost* and then to *lost-beyond-all-hope*. He stopped to ask a Korean for directions but the Korean did not speak English. Staff Sergeant (SSG) Jeffrey did not speak Korean.

Nonetheless, Staff Sergeant Jeffrey asked him "Where's the shower point?" and of course the man did not respond with a convenient answer in English.

Sergeant Jeffrey (Staff Sergeant Jeffrey) asked more loudly "Where's the shower point?" and we (his soldiers) started laughing inside the vehicle. Sergeant Jeffrey (Staff Sergeant Jeffrey) asked even more loudly "Where's the SHOWER point?"

Inside the vehicle we continued to laugh and we were laughing at Staff Sergeant Jeffrey and at the facial expression of the Korean man

One of our guys, Specialist (SPC) Laff said “Hey (Staff) Sergeant Jeffrey, quit yelling at him, he’s not deaf.”

But now Staff Sergeant Jeffrey must have really had it and he yelled at the guy “*WHERE’S THE GOD-DAMNED SHOWER POINT?*”

Now we realized we better convince Staff Sergeant Jeffrey to leave the Korean man alone. Laff told us “I think Sergeant J is losing it out there. Then he called out “Hey (Staff) Sergeant Jeffrey, leave him alone, we’ll go another time.”

What is even funnier about this story is that Staff Sergeant Jeffrey happens to be a Black man and as we watched from inside the vehicle we were convinced that this rural Korean man had probably never seen a Black person before. Can you imagine if the first Black person you ever saw in your life just happens to be Staff Sergeant Jeffrey and he’s verbally going off on you in a language you do not understand about the shower point? We were convinced that Korean man must have thought that Sergeant Jeffrey (Staff Sergeant Jeffrey) was crazy.

My Bathhouse Visit

On my designated shower day a duty driver who knew where they were going drove me to a bathhouse and dropped me off and told me what time he would return. Put yourself in my boots. There I am, somewhere in Korea, and I walk toward the entrance. I had on a dirty green and brown camouflaged duty uniform (officially called woodland Battle Dress Uniform-BDU). My hair was pinned up under my helmet. My face was dirty. I carried no weapon. As I walked up to the entrance a few women must have thought a man was trying to break in. So they blocked the entrance and screamed something at me, in their language of Korean naturally. I pulled off my helmet and removed some of my hairpins and

let my hair shake down. Now they parted away from the door and let me in. Now that they recognized I was a woman their guardedness dissolved.

I do not know what the men's bathhouse was like in that town but here is how this one was. It was indoors. There was a large tiled raised circular area like that which a fancy outdoor water fountain statue might have. At intervals around the circle there were spigots for water. There were young children playing and splashing in the water. At almost all of the spigots there was a woman sitting on a small bench or just sitting in a kneeling down manner. Each of the women had a pail with their soap, shampoo, etc and a pail for dousing the water over their body. So I saw the style of how they did things and knelt down at a spigot. The water was cold. "Oh shit," I thought to myself, "but hey it's water." A woman tried to guide me away from the spigot but I thought she was being mean in a way that the locals might be to outsiders. I thought she was giving me shit or trying to fuck with me. I decided to ignore her because I really did want to wash myself. I began throwing some cold water on myself. Then a woman brought a bucket over and tossed some, not all, of the water on my arm. It was warm. Now I understood that I was at the broken spigot. I laughed and moved to a warm water spigot. They laughed too and then I dropped my attitude about whether they had an attitude.

I shampooed and conditioned my hair. I used a blow dryer in the dressing room and then pinned my hair up. When my unit came to pick me up they asked me how it was I said it was great. They asked me to talk to some of the other women soldiers because there were women soldiers who were afraid to come to the bathhouse. I was the first to come. So I shared my experience with others including the warning about how there was a spigot that did not have warm water so if they got the cold one to move to another one. I also told everyone the place was clean because there was a woman there who was constantly washing surfaces and things.

One of our Black soldiers had some extra questions because sometimes in very rural parts of places like Korea the locals have never seen anyone with Black skin. Sometimes even the adults are like children and want to come touch the person's skin. This particular Sergeant (Staff Sergeant Delora) had some questions because she knew she wanted to wash and yet was feeling self-conscious about whether women and children would be staring at her. I told her the local people there were pretty friendly and that it was me who had gone in with an attitude. I told her that she should go if she wanted to get cleaned up. She ended up going and then came back saying it had been a positive experience for her too.

The Guys Get Massages in There

When I was stationed at Camp Hovey, we had some guy soldiers living in Quonset Huts. These Quonset huts had no indoor plumbing. All of the women soldiers lived in buildings with indoor plumbing but some of the guys in my platoon were living in Quonset huts. Since they had no showers in their living quarters they used to walk down a small hill and go into a trailer building that was only for males. During my first month or so in Korea I did not realize some of the guys had no indoor plumbing in their barracks and needed a separate showering place.

One time, off duty, I was sitting at an outside stairwell and I was talking to one of the guys, (SPC) Specialist Adams. I had a perfect view of a large trailer that guys who carried towels were walking into while wearing shorts or PE clothes. There were separately marked doors for entering and exiting. When the guys walked out of the exit door they seemed more relaxed.

“What’s going on in there” I asked Adams.

“That is for massages. Guys are getting massages in there” Adams said, and of course he was lying to me.

I believed Adams. As I watched the next 4 or 5 guys walk out of the trailer looking relaxed my political opinions about the way the Army treats males and females differently began to rise out of my mouth.

“Well, isn’t that just like the Army” I said.

At this point let me also reveal some background information which contributes to why I believed Adams. All around our barracks and throughout our Division there were Korean women and men who worked polishing boots and doing laundry, military and civilian. For the price of \$15.00 to \$30.00 a month, we could have our boots cleaned and polished and our military laundry done or boots plus military and civilian laundry done. We had to provide laundry detergent and boot polish but the Koreans who had been approved to work on post doing our laundry and boots had a lot of customers. Since there were already Koreans waiting on us hand and foot, so to speak, it was easy for me to believe that the guys had set up a place where they could get daily massages.

“This is bullshit” I remarked to Adams. It’s just like men to think men should get massages any old time they want. What about female soldiers? What about it?” I continued.

“Well, you can get a massage from any of the guys, anytime” Adams said.

I watched one of the guys leaving the trailer and when he passed by I asked him if it was true that guys were getting massages in there and he answered with a yes. I probably missed the winks and smiles he and Adams exchanged. I asked a couple more guys whether or not guys were getting massages in there and all those liars told me yes. Those damn good for nothing lying soldiers-oops, I am a soldier too.

“I am going to go in there” I said. “I am going to go over there and tell the Koreans I want a massage too” I insisted.

Just when I was got up and was going to walk down the stairs, Adams stopped me. “That is a shower building” Adams explained. “The guys who live in the Quonset Huts have to go down there to shower” he explained.

A New Friend

One day, during the winter in Korea, there was some reason why nobody from my platoon was around. Some soldiers were in the field Some were detailed to something which means somebody higher up the food chain than our commander asked our commander for some soldiers and our commander said to take the Radio/Platoon. Two more soldiers had done some of the 24 hour duty that gets you the next day off sand that left me. I was the only one around. The Platoon Sergeant gave me keys to the platoon shed. He wanted me to get rid of all kinds of junk in there. Since I did not have my military license I was just going to have to carry things.

I cleaned, sorted and organized. Then I began carrying things on the long walk to the dumpster.

Meanwhile, some soldier that was not from my Division-I could tell by her patch- was sitting in a sedan. She was sitting in a US government owned vehicle (GOV) that is primarily designed to look anything but tactical. It just looks like a civilian car. She was parked outside the mess hall and I had to walk by her to get to the dumpster.

I walked by carrying weird pieces of metal frames. I walked by carrying a military vehicle bumper. I walked by carrying a bunch of torn or burnt canvas I could not see over. Meanwhile I was cursing her, the driver in the sedan even though I did not know her. It befuddled me that people could be in the Army and have it easy. ‘Curse all those soldiers who do not have to deal with the weather’ I thought to myself as steam came out of my nose and I walked by carrying all kinds of crap. Then I fell down, and

dropped the military junk I was carrying. It hurt. So I picked up the junk and threw it and then sat down in the snow waiting for my leg to let me stand up again-remember I said it hurt. More steam escaped from my nostrils.

“Do you want to come in here and warm up?” she, the driver asked as she lowered the window and called out to me.

“Yes” I said and she could not have opened that door fast enough for me. She had some tea in a thermos and shared it with me. I took off my field jacket and sat in there and warmed up for awhile.

“When did you decide to talk to me” I asked.

“I was checking you out when you walked by carrying the truck bumper” she told me.

“I was hating you” I said. “It’s hard to believe there are people in the Army who do not have to be out in the weather and who do not get their uniforms dirty all the time” I said.

I learned that she was a driver and in her unit all she did was drive VIP’s like US Senators or cabinet members. She also drove high ranking Officers around if they came to Korea.

Going to Seoul during the Olympics & Going to the Gay Bar in Seoul during the Olympics

I was stationed in (South) Korea in 1988 when the Olympics came. Our platoon was still using normal policies for issuing off post 2 hour and 24 hour passes. Some platoons went as an entire platoon to the Olympics and they were able to go and not need 24 hour passes. This is because certain platoon sergeants or platoon leaders decided to buy their whole platoon some tickets. In the Signal Platoon (formerly Radio Platoon) that

I was a member of there was no mass purchase of tickets to an Olympics event so we did not go as a platoon. Prior to the arrival of one of the busy Olympic weekends in Seoul, our Platoon Sergeant had everyone who wanted to go sign up for a platoon lottery and he decided that two 24 hour passes for females and two 24 hour passes for males would be issued for going into Seoul.

Tara and I got the female passes and Snyder and Dennis got the male passes. We agreed to ride down to Seoul together and one Saturday after our work hours we took a bus down. Once we got to Seoul, I ditched Tara with the guys at a popular restaurant-bar that had upper level outdoor seating. It was very popular with soldiers and civilians too. I told her I would be back.

I took a bus to a US Army military unit which was a Transportation Company in Seoul. I had several friends down and one had a room with no other roomdogs/roommates. PFC Bobbi Lee was originally from Louisiana. She had learned Korean and she spoke Korean with a southern accent. It was fun to get into a taxi with her and listen to her speak to the Korean taxi drivers because they were always surprised when she spoke Korean to them.

It took a while to get there. Perhaps an hour went by from the time I left Tara until I knocked on Bobbi's door. Bobbi was in bed watching TV and there was a guy (soldier) watching TV with her. That day had also been a duty day for Bobbi. I was really sorry to hear she didn't feel well. I could see my hanging out plans vanishing into thin air. I still talked to Bobbi and told her I had a pass and told her I could stay out all night. I said I was hoping I could stay there. I also told her there was a problem, because my Platoon Sergeant would not let me come without my Battle Buddy and so I was going to have to get back in touch with Tara. I reiterated to Bobbi that I was sorry she felt sick.

Bobbi said something about needing my help with something and I went into her bathroom with her. She was in a superhooch and did not have to go down the hall to a bathroom because she had a private bathroom in her room. So I went into her bathroom with her. She told me everything.

“I’m not sick. I didn’t feel like working so I pretended I was sick. I certainly did not expect Sergeant Dipshit to show up. He even brought me chicken soup and he is worried about me” she revealed.

“Well, I am glad you’re not sick.” I said.

“I am sick of him” she said. I noticed there was nothing wrong with her voice and she actually sounded fine. Her play-acting had fooled me too. Out there her play-acting had convinced me she was sick.

She wanted me to stay and for him to leave. We agreed that she would

get rid of him and take a shower and get ready to go out. I would go get my friend, my Battle Buddy.

I returned to the bar and restaurant where I had left Tara. She was glad to see me because the guys were shitfaced drunk and she didn’t want to hang out with them.

“We can stay with my friend Bobbi. She is in the Transportation Company” I told Tara. “It takes about an hour to get there by bus” I explained.

So we took the bus and walked. Then we knocked on Bobbi’s door.

Bobbi had only begun to start getting ready because her Squad Leader had just left. Tara unpacked a few of her things and was comfortable and made some small talk with Bobbi. An hour or so later Tara seemed surprised to learn that Bobbi and I were going out. I tried to talk to talk

Tara into just staying put in the room. But Tara wanted to come out with us.

“You don’t understand” I elaborated. We’re going to go to a gay bar. I don’t think you are going to be comfortable there” I tried to be convincing.

“Are you gay?” Tara asked.

“No” I replied.

“Is Billie gay?” Tara inquired.

“No” I said.

“Then why do you want to go there? Can’t we go somewhere else” Tara asked.

“We want to go to The Cave” I said. “Look” I explained some more. “There are no taxis back to Tong Du Chon -2nd Infantry Division- where we are stationed tonight. These taxi drivers are making

boatloads of money off all the foreigners who tip. They are not going to drive 2 hours to take soldiers who do not tip back to their barracks and then make no money for the 2 hour drive back to Seoul. They are not going to give up 4 hours of driving easy money foreigners around tonight. We have a safe free place to stay tonight and we can still hang out tomorrow until the last shuttle back. I think you should just stay here” I told her.

“I want to go to the bar with you” Tara said.

When Bobbi was ready all three of us took a taxi to The Cave. The Cave was beautiful in a mysterious kind of way. After walking in the outer door, we immediately walked down a stairwell that was decorated so that it

looked like boulders and stone. Perhaps they were real boulders. Upon going Downstairs we entered another door and within that door was a dance club that was also decorated like a cave.

As soon as we walked in several things began happening. Bobbi knew people and was saying hello to them in English and in Korean. Every Officer from the 2nd Infantry Division that saw me walk in with Tara immediately walked out while sending me that look-*why did you bring her here?*

Meanwhile, as I looked around I was thoroughly delighted with the presence of all the athletes. It was an international gathering, the likes of which I would never see again. I wanted to dance and mingle and talk to the athletes and foreigners. But as soon as I walked in with Tara every Officer from the 2nd Infantry Division walked out.

We all ordered drinks and then someone asked Bobbi whether she wanted to smoke and she went to the bathroom to smoke some clove cigarettes. Bobbi left to go to the bathroom with. Tara got really uncomfortable when she thought Bobbi went to smoke and I had no choice but to get Tara out of there. So we walked it off and then took a taxi back to Bobbi's. Sometime previously Bobbi had given me her key. I took Tara to Bobbi's room and then left to take another taxi back to The Cave.

"Why are you still going out" Tara asked and I left and shut the door.

I do not remember anything else except my Battle Buddy and I returned to our barracks the next day before our passes expired and we signed in together as we were ordered to do.

Not Buying My Dad a Christmas Present From Korea

During my 15 month duty assignment in Korea, Christmastime came. We did not have cell phones then. When we wanted to call home we could use the telephone in the orderly room for free if we kept track of what time it was back home or wherever we wanted to call. There was a 16 hour time difference between California and Korea. Usually during off duty hours such as on weekends there might be a line of soldiers waiting to use the phone. My father lived in California and so California is the only time zone I paid attention to when I was in Korea.

I remember using the phone and of course I was not alone in the orderly room. Other soldiers were around and could hear me. I told my Dad that I was sorry I did not send him a Christmas present because the only things to buy were beer or hookers. Everybody in the orderly room looked at me and threw me a dirty look. But hey, my Dad, who had been in the Army, believed me. He said he understood. After I told my Dad I loved him and hung up some other soldiers let me know how they felt.

“Damn, Castro. That’s ate-up; that is ate-the-fuck-up” someone said.

“Castro, I cannot believe you told your Dad that” another soldier said.

“Castro, you’re no good” is a comment I started hearing from some soldiers after that phone call home.

I eventually had several embroidered robes with dragons on them made for my closest friends and for my sister and my Dad. I also brought some blankets home from Korea. Last but not least I gave my Dad a cigar lighter with moving titties on it and he liked that quite a bit.

Bob Hope Comes to Korea

I happened to be stationed in Korea from 1987 to 1988. The Olympics were in Korea in 1988. Near the beginning of the Olympics there was an entertainment show that was performed in Seoul and I believe the President of South Korea attended this variety show. It is possible the Olympics committee was in attendance and part of the purpose of the show was to welcome the Olympics to Korea. Somebody sent a bus to the Second Infantry Division (2nd ID) and a bunch of us soldiers put our Class A's on and were taken down to Seoul to see that variety show.

There was no shortage of soldiers in Class A uniforms in attendance. We sat at large circular tables that probably sat a dozen of us. In the center of each table there was a bottle of champagne and waiters brought us a four course meal. We had appetizers, salad, a dinner plate and dessert. Anytime the champagne bottle at our table was empty another was brought to our table. There may have been other refreshments but I do not remember them. When the entertainment began it would be fair to say we were happily buzzed. Every time a beautiful woman, any woman, appeared on stage or made a few remarks we cheered. We gave standing ovations to women on stage simply because they were women. We hooted and hollered. Every so often, oblivious to the rest of the room, someone at our table stood up and said "Raise up, Second ID (pronounced Second Aye-Dee)!" Then the rest of our table and possibly an adjacent table or two stood up and we toasted glasses. We may even have said called out something like "Second ID, Second to None....Huah!" Suffice to say we were pleased with ourselves. We were happy. It showed. I am sure the show went on. I am sure we watched and appreciated some of it or perhaps even all of it.

Within a few weeks Bob Hope came into Korea and did a show in Seoul. The Army was invited but I do not believe that the Second Infantry Division was invited. No one sent a bus for the 102nd Military Intelligence

Battalion. Even if we did embarrass our Division a few weeks earlier, anybody who knew anything about Bob Hope should have known he could have handled us. He would have had fun making a few jokes at our expense if need be and he would have enjoyed our spirit even if we acted a bit like animals.

I found out about not being able to see Bob Hope one weekend when I was visiting some friends from the Eighth Army in down in Seoul which was 2 hours away from where I was stationed. I found out they had tickets for Bob Hope and that Eighth Army could not find soldiers who wanted to put their Class A's on. Meanwhile my uniform was 2 hours away and 2 hours to return so I could not use one of the Eighth Army's tickets because I could not have made it there and back again to get my Class A's. I am still upset about this. Bob Hope came to Korea and I didn't get to see him.

Bob Hope, In My Opinion

Bob Hope began visiting the military as a performer during World War Two. Once he started doing it, he continued to do so. He made a lifelong commitment toward remembering the troops especially the military members who were far from home during Christmastime. He brought entertainers to visit the military for about 50 years.

Military units began presenting him with unique gifts during his entertainment tours. Submariners gave him presents. Air Force and Navy units gave him presents. The Marines gave him presents. The Army gave him presents. They gave him jackets with their unit patches. They gave him embroidered bathrobes. They gave him swords. There should be one or more Bob Hope Military Museums to display all these unique items in a setting that is accessible to large numbers of military servicemembers, military family members and veterans.

DA Squad, DAS & DASL & DAASL

For a period of time while I was stationed in Korea my squad came up with something that was funny but cruel. It was based on humor at someone else's expense. We had a newly arrived Staff Sergeant (SSG) assigned to the squad I was in. There are times when newly arrived leaders come in talking a lot of talk they cannot back up as time goes on. Some leaders are by nature more subtle. Some leaders are more boastful.

Staff Sergeant (SSG) Jeffrey came to us soldiers and gave us a pep talk and told us we were better than everybody else and how he wanted us to be motivated and he said all of the usual leadership stuff. Later on, one of the guys in the group told the rest of us that we should do what Staff Sergeant Jeffrey wanted. From now on, when Staff Sergeant Jeffrey stood alongside of us in formation and called us to *Attention* as a Squad preceding the Platoon formation being called to *Attention*, we were going to sound off with "DA SQUAD" which to us meant Dumb Ass Squad.

We started sounding off as "DA SQUAD" and Staff Sergeant Jeffrey really liked it. We told him he was our DASL but of course we did not reveal this meant he was our Dumb Ass Squad Leader. Our Assistant Squad Leader, Sergeant (SGT) Nick knew what DAS meant and he proudly proclaimed he was the DA-ASL which of course meant Dumb Ass Assistant Squad Leader. One time Sergeant Nick walked up and down the row of soldiers in our Squad and gave everyone a leadership title. The person in the Squad line up next to him was the DA-A-A-SL or Dumb Ass Assistant to the Assistant Squad Leader and the next person was the DA-A-A-A-SL or Dumb Ass Assistant to the Assistant's Assistant Squad Leader and so on. We laughed and laughed.

We only had one Private who we cherished because he was our only one. In the spirit of fairness to him he was actually a Private First Class (PFC)

and not a Dumb Ass anything. When Sergeant Nick reached him in the line-up he told him “Sorry Private, you’re only a Private.”

Our Private did not receive a DA-A-A-A-SL title of his own.

The problem with this little inside joke was that Staff Sergeant Jeffrey really liked being the DASL and having DA SQUAD. He wanted us to stencil it on our t-shirts.

We started talking among ourselves.

“What are we going to do?” we asked each other.

“Who is going to tell Staff Sergeant Jeffrey what DA SQUAD and DASL means?” we wanted to know.

We thought about replacing DA SQUAD with something else but then we would have to continue with all the huah motivated sounding off indefinitely and we really did not want to make that commitment either. So we arranged for someone to tell him about it privately. It had to hurt his feelings. I guess we felt justified because working was more important than some of the strutting around stuff we felt he had wanted us to do.

The Creature From the Bog – Me!

While I was in the California National Guard we went to drill for the weekend at Camp San Luis Obispo-Home of the California National Guard. Back then, Camp San Luis had individual white cottages that were probably built around World War One. Soldiers could stay individually or with a roommate in one the cottages during drill duty weekend. These buildings were eventually condemned due to asbestos and/or peeling lead paint. But, during the years we used them we thought these cottages were kind of cool because they represented the opposite of open bays with *too-many-to-count* bunk beds in them. Calling them cottages may be a

misleading. These were very small huts with room for about two Army cots. There was also an Army stove for heat.

I was relatively new to the 146th Combat Support Hospital then and I did not have a car. I had taken a Greyhound Bus to get there that weekend.

I was still a newbie member of the California National Guard. I did not have a roommate to bunk with so I moved into one of these cottages by myself. We did not have bathrooms inside these cottages but if we took a walk there was a bathroom building not too far away. One bathroom building was designated for women and there was a separate building for the men.

Sometime during Friday night I tried to figure out how to use the stove heater in the cottage. All I really succeeded in doing was getting a lot of soot on my face, hands and arms. On Saturday morning I woke up early and walked to the bathroom and shower building. I did not have my boots laced up. I just put them on loosely. People with cars were parking next to their cottage. When these soldiers wanted to go to the bathroom they drove over to it. I did not have a car so I walked. It was early and it was still sort of dark outside.

As I walked to the bathroom the mud was clumping up on my boots and I was kind of getting stuck in the mud. If I had felt like lacing them up properly they would have stayed on better. But I was going to be changing my clothes in the bathroom anyway. I thought it was a better idea to wait until I was done putting my uniform on before lacing my boots up properly. So that left me trying to walk to the bathroom building with mud sticking to my boots. Mud, mud and then more mud which is heavy for those who have not walked with it stuck to their boots before. Mud likes to stick to itself so the clumps of mud were growing.

I have to point out that I did not have any friends in this unit yet because I was still new. As I was walking to the bathroom I started dragging at least one of my feet instead of lifting it because as I recall one boot had more mud on it and so it was heavier. It seemed to me that if I lifted my foot the entire boot might come off. There I was. I headed for the bathroom dragging one boot and it was still kind of dark outside.

Several of the women soldiers in the unit were in the bathroom building getting ready and they did not know me. They saw a shadowed outline of me and don't forget my face still had soot on it. All these girls screamed and squealed and they called me the Creature from the Bog. They ran into someone's car and left.

When I looked in the mirror I have to admit I had a lot of soot on me. I had a daunting amount of mud on my boots and I had no friends because the girls had screamed and run from me. "It's going to be one of those days I said to myself."

After I had my uniform on and my boots laced up I walked over to the mess hall for morning chow. One of the screaming soldiers from the bathroom, Sergeant (SGT) Flores introduced herself to me and she was the person who had nicknamed me The Creature from the Bog. Then she introduced me to her friends and they all welcomed me. For the next several years if we were hanging out aside from military duty and anyone asked us how we became friends Sergeant (SGT) Flores would tell people how the first time she saw me I was the Creature from the Bog.

Sergeant Flores Almost Throws me off the Bridge

One day Sergeant (SGT) Flores was driving and we had left Camp Roberts which is somewhere near Paso Robles. As she drove she told me about military training she had signed up and it would take her away for quite a while. She did not see a reason to keep paying rent so she planned

A Duffel Bag of Army Stories

on putting her stuff in storage while she was away. She was living with someone so it would put an end to their living together.

I casually asked “Did you sign up for the training because you wanted a break up?”

Flores did not say anything but I could tell she did not like my question.

“That’s cold, Castro. I am just going to pull over and let you out” she said.

We were about to cross a bridge and I was trying to figure out exactly where I was in case I had to walk a few hours or days.

“Okay” I said ‘but make sure I get my duffel bags too.”

“Oh, you’ll get duffel bags” she promised and I could tell by the tone of her voice she meant to throw them at me.

She pulled over. I braced myself mentally for a long walk.

“Look....” I said and I am sure the words and ideas for an apology were forming.

“Shut up, Castro” she ordered.

I was quiet. We sat silently in her truck which was still pulled over and not moving. Then she entered the lane of traffic again and finally spoke. “Just shut up, Castro, and I’ll take drop you off at home” she said.

A while later she said, “You know I didn’t think of it that way, but it’s probably true. It’s a break up and I am just not used to sharing really personal information so freely with people.”

Sergeant (SGT) Collette Almost Shoots Me

One year I had a friend named Sergeant (SGT) Collette who worked full time for the Army. It was well known by her friends that she was pretty hardcore about being in the Army. Valentine's Day came while we were stationed together. One of our mutual friends and I decided to buy Collette and Collette's partner some flowers. We bought a lot of flowers. There were even one or two leather ones. The assortment of flowers we selected for them was quite beautiful.

My friend drove me to Collette's home which was on an ordinary civilian street. She lived in a house that had a porch. My friend dropped

me off and drove some distance away on the same street to wait for me. I went up to the porch and placed the flowers on the doorstep. Then I rang the doorbell and hid. There was no answer but I knew she was home. I rang the doorbell again and remained hiding.

There was still no answer. It was February and cold outside. I rang the doorbell again and hid again. I waited. I was beginning to think I should give up one fun of a surprise. I remember seeing the curtain part but I did not see anyone. I waited for awhile and then got clear of the porch. I was still being quiet and discreet as I left the porch. I went to my friend's car and said it was a no go.

"I think they're in bed or something" I said. "They won't answer the door." We drove home.

When I got home I got on the phone and rang Collette up.

"Hey Letty (nickname for Collette)" I began, but was cut off.

"Guess what, Castro" Collette said. "Someone tried to fuck with me but I was ready. I had my gun and I was ready."

“Damn, Letty” I said and I was visualizing this really nice German handgun she had showed me previously. I also could remember seeing the curtains part a little while I was hiding on the porch. My memory was so vivid I almost felt that if I moved now, I would get shot by her then.

“That was me and Benjy-we brought you flowers, look on your doorstep” I explained.

“Hold on” Collette said.

“Hey, thanks Castro. Sorry about that. I thought someone was trying to fuck with me” Collette apologized.

“It’s okay, but lighten up. Can you? Can you lighten up and stop being so hardcore all the time” I asked and by now I was feeling some mixed up anger because if she had shot me. she certainly would have killed me.

“Your head would have been really messed up if you had shot me and killed me too” I said.

The Road to Fort Polk, Louisiana

In approximately the year 2000 the 352nd Combat Support Hospital, an Army Reserve Unit from Oakland, California was scheduled to report to Fort Polk, Louisiana for Annual Training (AT) also known as Summer Camp by many soldiers. At this point in time, many of the soldiers in the 352nd had been experiencing California based AT’s. They were getting pretty bored of the same old-same old and I think a lot of the soldiers were in a pretty good mood en route.

Some soldiers reported directly to the airport. Other soldiers, mostly enlisted, reported to our unit, parked their cars there and then busses were provided to take us to the civilian airport in Oakland, California. The

Army Reserve did not charter a flight for us. Our unit had purchased seats for us on civilian flights. Soldiers had different check-in times based on their flight schedule but I believe most flights arrived at the Louis Armstrong Airport in New Orleans within an hour or so of each other. We wore civilian clothes for travel because we were flying on civilian airplanes.

After we arrived in Louisiana, there were a few chartered busses waiting to take us to Fort Polk. I got a seat near the front of one of the busses and called out to Sergeant (SGT) Lucinda Sanchez to sit near me. I noticed that one of the unit full-timers named Sergeant (SGT) Alexander who we called Zander was sitting near the front too. During this bus ride we had no responsibilities whatsoever and so felt free to just shoot the breeze about anything and everything.

The bus began moving and we had this huge front window to look out of. We were on a non-elevated road surrounded by water and it looked as though anytime it rained enough a road like this would be in the water.

“Well no wonder they eat alligators here. We are surrounded by them. I have eaten alligators, have you?” I remarked.

“No. I can’t say I have” Lu (Lucinda) answered.

“Shit, a couple of those alligators could set up a decoy and stop this bus and then eat us” I continued.

“A Squad of alligators could take this bus out” Lu said.

“A Platoon of Alligators could take out all our busses, the whole unit” I suggested and then added “Can you imagine having that many teeth and a head that weighs 100 pounds?”

“Hey Lu, I would be a bad ass if I was an alligator” I admitted and continued with “Would you still be a conscientious objector if you were an alligator?”

After this inquiry, Zan, who clearly overheard our banter, cracked a smile.

“Well, I think if I was an alligator I would be content to be an alligator. I would have to hunt to eat” Lu answered.

Hey Lu, I asked “What if you were in heaven getting in the recycled line and you thought you were in line to be a bird and you came down as an alligator? What if you were living in one of these swamps and deep inside you knew you wanted to spread your wings and fly-that would make you mad, huh?”

“I would probably be a grouchy alligator if I thought I was in the wrong body” Lu responded.

“Yeah, I would be grouchy too if I wanted to be a songbird and instead I was living in the mud eating cold frogs. I bet frogs are like marshmallows to an alligator” I said.

“You know what all that water means?” Lu asked.

“Surprise me” I replied.

“It means the mosquitoes here are going to be unstoppable” Lu said.

“You’re probably right. We are going to have mosquito bites on our faces by tomorrow. Look,” I said and I sucked inward, drawing my cheeks in. “This is what I’ll look like by tomorrow after the mosquitoes suck the blood out of my face.”

“Oh. Wanna see what I’ll look like tomorrow” Lu said and then she sucked her face in.

“Hey Zan” I called to Sergeant (SGT) Zander who was sitting nearby. “Suck your face in Zan” I said.

But even though he was laughing his ass off, he would not suck his face in for us. Lu and I continued to talk about nonsense for another hour or so on our way to Fort Polk.

Looking Mighty-good in Them BDUs

Note: A BDU is a Battle Dress Uniform which is a camouflage colored duty uniform in woodland colors of brown, green and black or sand colors.

There are times when soldiers spend so much time with other soldiers that they cannot wait to hang out with civilians again. Sometimes soldiers are or should be sick and tired of hanging out with other soldiers. Sometimes soldiers are specifically tired of their own immediate platoon. Despite these feelings that make a soldier bored of being with their own platoon an unexplainable thing happens. All of a sudden one of the soldiers in your midst starts seeming pretty cool.

If a soldier is a lesbian all of a sudden she will notice one of the guys is kind of cool. Suddenly he looks attractive even though he and his uniform are filthy because he has been in the field too long. All of a sudden this guy seems to have a good sense of humor and a lesbian soldier may be shooting the breeze with him about all kinds of stuff.

It happens to straight guys too. All of sudden they will begin thinking someone else is way cool. It does not necessarily mean they are sexually attracted to this soldier who is suddenly really cool but their individual

behavior changes because all of a sudden someone they either never noticed or previously could not stand is cool.

This phenomenon is known as being in the field too long. The chief symptom is when one notices someone else is looking mighty-good.

Soldiers will frequently joke about this phenomenon.

“Hey Garcia, you’re looking mighty-good in them BDUs, boy” a soldier calls out.

When lesbian soldiers happen to notice that all of a sudden one of the males is looking mighty-good in them BDUs they may shake their heads and say to themselves “Damn, I have to get out of the field. I have been in the field too long.”

Sometimes women soldiers will say to each other “I have been in the field too long. Specialist Hunter is starting to look good to me.”

“Hunter” says another female soldier. “Oh no, honey. You have been in the field too long.”

When soldiers call out to each other that they are looking mighty-good in their uniform it is almost always in a setting where there are plenty of other soldiers around to overhear it. This type of commenting does not come from a place of meanness. It is an amusing kind of compliment and most soldiers take it in a good natured way if they are told they are looking mighty good.

The Squeaky Boot

The current Army boot is a suede desert boot. I am not aware of desert boots developing squeaks. When we wore our black leather boots it was possible for some innocent soldier to develop a squeaky boot. One day,

all of a sudden, the right or left boot developed a squeak. This could happen to any soldier of any rank at any time.

Maybe it was the right boot, maybe it was the left boot but all of a sudden as you walked down the hall or were marching in formation your boot said “squeak! If this happened while marching all the soldiers closest to you were sure to hear it. Sometimes, the entire formation heard you and everybody has always hated on a soldier with a sorry ass squeaky boot.

Sometimes a fellow soldier would say “Do something about that squeak, Soldier!” as though anything could be done. There was no cure for a squeaky boot except time. As mysteriously as it showed up, it would one day vanish. In the meantime you could not walk down the hall or march in formation without irritating your fellow soldiers.

Squeaky boots were embarrassing. Squeaky boots made a soldier feel like a social pariah. Nothing could be done but soldiers spread rumors. One popular suggestion was taking a shower with your boots on. It didn’t work for me.

Cadence follows:

Stomp you left and drag your right

(Boots cost money-boots cost money)

Stomp you left and drag your right

(Boots cost money-boots cost money)

Snake Lady

One year when I was in the 907th Medical Company in the New Mexico Army Reserve we went to Navajo Mountain for our Annual

Training. Navajo Mountain is in Navajo Country just inside Utah but we drove through New Mexico and Arizona to get there.

The 907th Medical Company (dental) was a dental unit and we had planned to set up the dental clinic and provide dental care. All of the dentists in our unit were practicing dentists. When our Colonel planned for this exercise for us he made sure to communicate that no one was practicing medical/dental skills on Native Americans. We were practicing setting up our generators with a power drawing load and we were practicing setting up our dental X-ray unit and so on.

After a full day of driving we reached Navajo Mountain. That night we set up cots and slept in the school gym. The next day we set up tents to run our dental clinic in. While we were setting the tents up one of the guys named Specialist (SPC) Gonzalez hit his own foot with a sledgehammer. He had to stop working early that day because he hurt himself. All of the guys were mad at him because he stopped working early and he was not anybody's favorite soldier that day.

After work Gonzalez and I decided to take a walk. We changed into civilian clothes like jeans or shorts and just started walking. Soldiers frequently like having portable music and I had some music with me in the form of a small boom box. After Gonzalez and I had walked awhile uphill into some mountain area we sat on a log. We talked. I set my radio/boom box down on one side of me on the log. I set a beverage drink I had on the other side of me.

Gonzalez and I had something in common about which we were both commiserating. We talked at length sharing our tales of woe with each

other. We continued to listen to music for awhile. It became a bit darker outside. All of a sudden, right at about the same time that the Queen song Another One Bites the Dust began I heard a distinctive sound. Shk-a-shk-a-shk-shk-shk-shk-a-shk. Shk-a-shk-a-shk-shk-shk-shk-a-shk.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Probably a June Bug” explained Gonzalez.

The sound did not go away.

Shk-a-shk-a-shk-shk-shk-shk-a-shk. Shk-a-shk-a-shk-shk-shk-shk-a-shk.
Shk-a-shk-a-shk-shk-shk-shk-a-shk.

“Give me your flashlight” Gonzalez said to me.

I handed my flashlight to Gonzalez who was now standing up. He shone the light beam of the flashlight across the log. When he shone the flashlight to my immediate left we both saw the rattlesnake. The snake’s head was flattened like a Cobra in that scary snake way. It was very close, way too close for comfort to my left arm.

“Oh shit” I said.

I told everybody later that I had not moved so quickly since Basic Training. All of a sudden I was standing up and had grabbed my music box and turned it off too. I knew instinctively the snake had been chilling and jamming with us until Another One Bites the Dust started. Our snake hated that song. That song is the story of every snake’s life. Another One Bites the Dust. Even though I grabbed my music I left my Gatorade where it was because it was extremely close to the snake.

Meanwhile, even though I was up and ready to head down the mountain I noticed Gonzalez was still standing there shining the flashlight on the snake and trying to get a better look at it.

A Duffel Bag of Army Stories

“Is that a diamondback?” I heard Gonzalez wondering out loud.

“Oh no” I said. “I am a city girl and if a rattlesnake tells me to get off his mountain I am gone; going, going, gone.”

“I want to look at the snake” said Gonzalez. Even though the Army expects that I will not leave my buddy or that I will help him if he gets hurt I told Gonzalez I would wait for him at the bottom of the hill.

Gonzalez had the flashlight and even though I was worried about running into more rattlesnakes on the way down I walked briskly to the bottom of the hill. Then I waited.

“That damn gimp soldier better hurry up and get here” I said to myself. “His sorry ass better not need First Aid from me either.”

After a while I saw the light from the flashlight and knew he was coming along.

“You left me” Gonzalez said.

“You were standing there acting like a knucklehead messing with a rattlesnake” I told him.

When we reached our unit we told everybody not to go hiking on the mountain we had been on. The following day we asked one of the Navajo working with us why they did not warn us about rattlesnakes.

“That’s a sacred mountain” one of the Navajo explained. “We never go there. The snakes protect it.”

Within a few days one of the officers started kidding me about whether the snake I had seen was six inches or so. He also started calling me Snake

Lady. A few months later back at our home unit I was called to the front of the unit during formation and presented with a green rubber snake.

Late and Ate-Up for a Unit Movement (Alaska)

One year while I was in my New Mexico Army Reserve unit we had planned for an Annual Training in Alaska. On Saturday morning we needed to report to our Army Reserve unit at 0800 (8:00 AM). That Friday night I had stayed up drinking with friends. I figured it was ok because I was not in charge of flying the plane.

At around 0200 or 0300 (between 2:00 AM and 3:00 AM) I was at home, possibly somewhat drunk and I was packing. I decided to take a bath. Following the bath I planned to sleep in the living room on the couch with my packed duffel bag near me. After my bath I changed my mind and decided not to sleep on the couch. I went to my bedroom. This was not a good idea,

I was sound asleep when Sergeant First Class (SFC) Miller came to pick me up. She decided that someone else must have picked me up and she went to the unit. When she arrived at the unit she asked if I was there yet and of course I was not. One of the other soldiers decided it was still early enough for him to get me so he drove over and knocked on my door. I did not hear him. He returned to the unit.

It was very close to 0800 (8:00 AM) when one of my roommates saw my duffel bag in the living room and he came into my bed room and woke me up asking “Hey Lauri, aren’t you going to Alaska today?”

“Oh shit!” I exclaimed, “Give me a ride.”

As we drove up to my unit I saw an Air Force Blue bus waiting next to my unit which was in formation. I had dressed extremely quickly and was not really done putting myself together. My pant legs were not tucked into

my boots properly. My boots were not laced up or tied properly. My hair was somewhat disheveled and did not look neat under my soft cap.

I jumped out of my roommate's car. I grabbed my duffel bag and headed for the formation. Lieutenant Colonel (LT COL) Albert was addressing the formation and he called out to me "You can stop right there. I want to see your ID card and your dog tags."

As I pulled my dog tags and ID card out and held them, I could feel *that look*. I could feel all of the eyes of everyone in the unit on me. I know I looked rough. I know I looked bad. I know I had no excuse and I know they knew it.

"You know there are consequences for missing a move-out?" Lieutenant Colonel (LT COL) Albert asked me as he approached me and checked my ID card and dog tags.

"Yes Sir" I said.

"Why were you late?" Lieutenant Colonel (LT COL) Albert asked.

"I don't have an excuse" I honestly replied.

"We'll talk about it later. Load up your duffel bag. Go inside and get a breakfast burrito and then get on the bus" Lieutenant Colonel (LT COL) Albert ordered.

"Yes Sir" I answered.

The bus took us to an air terminal at Kirtland Air Force Base. About 5 hours later we were still standing by in the air terminal since there was some mechanical problem with our plane. Our Commander, Colonel (COL) McIntosh told us he was going to release us until the following morning. He said he needed everyone on time.

“You got that, Castro” Colonel McIntosh called out directly to me.

Yes, Sir” I replied.

The following morning I was on time. My uniform was sharp. My boots were laced up. My pant legs were tucked in. A few other soldiers were scraggly because they stayed up drinking but I was squared away and I remained squared away for the rest of that Annual Training.

Moose Steak and Moose Spaghetti

While I was in the New Mexico Army Reserve, our unit commander put together an Annual Training for us that involved going to Alaska. We flew a military plane from Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico to Elmendorf Air Force Base adjacent to Fort Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska. These two formerly separate military installations are now known as Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. We spent one night in the Army barracks. The next day we were divided into two groups. One group went to Fort Yukon and the group I was with went to Nulato, Alaska.

The group I was with went to Galena Air Force Station which was very much part of the Cold War in the 1980’s due to its proximity to the former Soviet Union. We took a tour. Then we flew to Nulato.

Our mess sergeant had ordered a certain quantity of food items to be sent to us in Nulato. It all had to flown in and nothing arrived in bulk. He wanted to wait until everything he had ordered arrived and then he planned to begin implementing a standard 14 day menu. The problem with his plan was that the locals were not bringing us everything. They brought some eggs, some cereal, some meat and some pasta and so on. They brought us anything perishable but other than that it was a box here and a box there. The reason the locals did not bring everything at one

A Duffel Bag of Army Stories

time is because whatever room existed on the daily flight was being used by other needs such as US Mail deliveries. It was not all about us.

The first 2 or 3 days all we had to eat were MREs. We were complaining. Our cook was not really ours anyway. We had borrowed him from some other unit. This may have made it easier for us to give him a hard time. He concluded he had enough food items available to offer us breakfast so breakfast became our first non-MRE meal. Some of us started imploring with him to mix and match our meals, just as long as he cooked us something but he wanted to stick to the approved Army menus and yet we did not have ample supplies on site for that.

My friend Specialist Gonzalez and I were walking around Nulato and we found a small neighborhood store. We went inside the store. A six pack of soda was about \$6.00 and that surprised us. We did not buy it. We saw a box of pizza. It was made by Chef Boyardee. Inside the box there were ingredients to make pizza dough and I guess it also included toppings. That cost about \$6.00. Everything was \$6.00. Even though we chose not to buy it, the local people in the store saw us looking at the box. They knew we were with the New Mexico Army Reserve group that had come in to set up a temporary dental clinic for their community.

“Are the soldiers hungry?” someone in the store asked us.

“Yes” we said. “Some dumbass Sergeant won’t feed us anything except for cold food” we grumbled. Notwithstanding the fact that soldiers are not supposed to whine, we whined.

The locals put the word out that we did not have hot food to eat. Some local people came by and told us that on Wednesday they were bringing us a potluck. They did too. Wednesday afternoon they started coming by and dropping off pots and casserole dishes.

We had spaghetti and meatballs and the meatballs were made with moose meat. We had some rice and moose stew. We had moose burgers and moose burgers with cheese. We had some more moose stew. We had moose steak. It was all absolutely wonderful. Thank You, People of Nulato!

Breathe with Your Gills!

I swear this happened and my friend says it did not. One time during drill (duty) weekend we went to a high school track to run. One of my friends Specialist (SPC) Gonzalez, and me looked at each other. We just knew the 2 mile run was going to be hard for us. We were not in shape. We ran and ran and pretty soon we were both panting.

“Open your mouth and breathe with your mouth open. Then the surface area of your tongue will absorb oxygen too. It’s like breathing with your gills” Gonzalez told me while we were running and panting. I did it. We both ran with our mouths parted open. But every time I looked at him I felt like laughing and I was trying to concentrate on my run.

“Damn it, Gonzalez. You’re making me laugh” I complained to him but I still listened to his idea about breathing with my gills.

Some Last Names Just Do Not Belong on a Uniform

Everyone in the Army wears their last name on their uniform. Informally, we call each other by our last names all the time. Certain last names can lead to convenient nicknames. Soldiers with the last names of Anderson or Robinson may be called Andy or Robbie and it does not matter if the soldier is male or female. Last names like Janowski or anything ending in ‘ski’ lends itself to the nickname Ski. But there are some last names that just do not belong on a uniform.

One example of a last name that does not belong on a uniform is the name Dick. It is possible that a male Lieutenant can handle being Lieutenant Dick because under our breaths we call almost all Lieutenants ‘dick’ anyway. A male Officer with the last name Dick can begin as a Lieutenant Dick, after promotions become Captain Dick, Major Dick and possibly even Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel Dick. That’s it. I do not believe the Department of the Army would ever allow anyone with the last name Dick to become a General but if so he would be a General Dick.

In one unit I was in we had a Private Dick. I know he had it rough sometimes because of his name. There is just no way to say “Private Dick” in a command voice that sounds neutral. Consequently the command voice anyone uses when communicating with Private Dick has a tendency to sound disrespectful.

“Private Dick, Get over here: NOW.”

“Private Dick, Does your Mother know you joined the Army?”

“Private Dick, Are you eyeballing me?”

If a male named Private Dick stayed in and were promoted he would eventually become Specialist Dick, Sergeant Dick and possibly First Sergeant Dick or Master Sergeant Dick. He could also be promoted to Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Dick. He would never be promoted higher than that. I do not believe there could ever be a Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA) Dick. If an enlisted woman joined the Army with the last name of Dick she would quickly marry any unmarried guy in the formation and legally change her last name because I just cannot imagine any woman in the Army wanting to be called Private Dick or Sergeant Dick. That name is trouble with a capital T. I believe that female Officers with the last name of Dick would probably change their last name to their

mother's maiden name prior to receiving their Commission as an Officer or else they would get married and change their last name prior to receiving their commission. .

Other last names that can be difficult in the Army are Cheek, Cheeks and Head.

Army Carpool or The Nearest National Guard Unit was Many Hours Away and they Still Found Me Someone to Carpool With

One year I moved to Northern Arizona because I had applied for and accepted a teaching job in Navajo Country. I had been a member of a National Guard unit in Long Beach, California when I moved to Arizona and so I was just marked absent after I stopped going to drill (duty weekend) in Long Beach. When I got to Arizona I was pretty far away from any National Guard units and I had some concerns about my car being reliable so I did not bother looking for a unit to join.

I was living and working in Pinon, Arizona. One day I drove away from the reservation and turned on my cell phone and pulled in all kinds of voice messages. (There was limited cell phone service on the reservation and some cell carriers do not offer service there). I listened to a message from a National Guard officer in Arizona telling me I needed to get in touch and start coming to drill. I called up and told her that I would come to drill if she could find me someone to carpool with. I made myself laugh because I knew there was no way she would find anyone who lived near me.

One Friday I was at Pinon Middle School where I worked. Someone came to introduce himself to me and said he would pick me up at 1500 hours (3 PM) sharp so that he could take me to drill. We were going to go to Camp Navajo in Flagstaff and it was a Friday evening-Saturday-Sunday drill. I'll just nickname him as Sergeant-awesome-driver-and-good-storyteller. I

could not believe the Army found someone that would drive about 50 miles out of his way to pick me up and take me to drill. I was living in Pinon and he was somewhere around Ganado. From then on we went to drill together and to AT (Annual Training) together.

I Get Kicked out of the Convoy and it's a Good Thing

I was only a member of the 1404th Transportation Company, Arizona National Guard for about half a year because I had made arrangements to move to New Mexico. Before I moved from Arizona I attended our two week Annual Training (AT). For our AT we convoyed to Idaho and did our training there. At the end of our 2 weeks we convoyed back.

In stateside military convoys the military vehicles have to stagger their departure times so that we don't interfere too much with civilian vehicles. A certain number of vehicles will travel together and after so many minutes another group of military vehicles will depart. There is always a convoy commander which is usually a Lieutenant and he or she is responsible for the convoy and he or she creates a realistic timing interval plan to keep military vehicles spread out and yet also includes stops at designated rest stops or fuel stops.

The convoy pulled over for refueling at a civilian gas station and convenience store.

We had a set amount of time to be there and then we had to pull out. I had gone into the convenience store and was last to line up for the restrooms. There were separate male and female bathrooms and the guys did their business and got out of their bathroom. The female bathroom had only one stall and every single female soldier was on her period. That is just one of those things that will just make everything take longer.

I finally got my turn in the bathroom and then I stepped over to the counter to make a cup of tea. While I was getting in line to pay I noticed I did not see any soldiers in the store. I paid and was trying to rush to get out of the store and as I stepped into the parking lot the Lieutenant in charge of the convoy was there.

“Castro, will you get a move on-THE CONVOY IS LEAVING” he said. I noticed the vehicles were leaving and my vehicle was about to leave and the passenger door was open and waiting for me. I ran over, spilling my tea, and of course I had all my Army gear on which made all my movements more cumbersome. The floor of the vehicle was practically as high as my neck and I had to climb way up to get in the truck. So I climbed up, spilling my tea and our vehicle took off. All this quick departure did was make me spill more tea and now my pants were about as wet as though I had pissed myself.

I felt exasperated and I wanted the answer to just one question. “Is it too much for me to have just one cup of tea?” I asked the universe, silently and yet powerfully from within myself. “Is it really too much for me to have a nice, civilized cup of tea?”

After a while the whole convoy met up at a place where we could eat our MREs for lunch or walk over and eat some food from a convenience store or adjoining fast food restaurant. During this stop one of the soldiers walked over to me and told me to get all my gear and to go see the First Sergeant (1SG) because I was leaving the convoy. I went to the First Sergeant (1SG) and he told me I was riding in the van and that another soldier who needed convoy practice was going into the convoy.

I had mixed feelings. I felt ashamed. I felt like I was being thrown out of the convoy because I wasn’t a good soldier. “I’m a good soldier. I don’t know why they are throwing me out of the convoy” I said to myself. But I

did what I was told and got inside the van. The First Sergeant was driving a van that was a civilian vehicle. It sat about 8 or 9 and there were some other soldiers in there and so I went to the last row and got comfortable. I took off my tactical stuff, I took off my helmet and stretched out and read a book. I had no responsibilities whatsoever.

The reason the First Sergeant (1SG) was driving a civilian vehicle is because if a unit has all tactical vehicles and is going far away for AT, it is very useful to have a civilian van. A duty driver would be assigned to the vehicle and that driver would drive soldiers for any non-emergency medical needs. The use of the civilian vehicle provided us with off duty opportunities. For instance the duty driver would drop us off at a shopping mall and movie theatre area and pick us up at a designated time.

Soldiers can wear civilian clothes when they are in civilian vehicles. When soldiers are in tactical vehicles they have to wear their duty uniforms. If the military vehicle is a certain weight class and above soldiers also have to wear helmets. The most reliable way to recognize a tactical vehicle is based on whether the vehicle is painted camouflage and looks like contemporary military inventory. Some vehicles the Army no longer uses are sold off as surplus to civilians.

So I was a passenger in the van and after a while we came to a convenience store. I was inside making my cup of tea and suddenly I realized I did not have to rush. We did not have to keep up with the convoy within a specific timing interval. We were following the convoy but we were not in the convoy because we were in a civilian vehicle. When I realized I did not have to rush I realized something had happened. I remember being in the convoy and asking for a nice cup of tea and here I was getting my nice cup of tea.

Having Dinner with Combat Medic Friends and Choking

I went to eat at a Vietnamese Restaurant with some friends who had pulled very recently pulled a tour in Kosovo. My two friends were pretty tuned into each other with their communication skills and being able to read each other's body language very easily.

Of course I was talking about something, eating my hot soup and drinking me beer and then I started coughing. Choke. Gasp. Choke. Gasp. Within 3 to 5 seconds I realized that neither of my friends would hesitate to save my life and I saw them both making eye contact with each other regarding my choking.

Of course I could just imagine what was going to happen next. One would Heimlich Maneuver me and the other would tell everyone else in the restaurant to remain calm and that everything was under control.

"I'm OK. I'm OK. I'm breathing" I tried to say but I was coughing. "I'm OK- I'm OK. The beer went down the wrong pipe" I explained using non-medical terminology. I could see that their heightened state of alert went back to casual again.

My Retirement Ceremony

I was in the New Mexico National Guard when I achieved a total of 22 years of service. Most of my military service has been in the Army Reserve or the Army National Guard. This means that I will be eligible for a pension when I reach the legal retirement age.

My last days wearing a uniform were in May 2007. During June 2007 I received a phone call from my former unit asking if I could attend a retirement ceremony scheduled for July 2007. I replied that I would be there. I was not required to be in uniform. I told some of my friends and they were proud of me. One friend wanted to invite about a dozen people

to my retirement ceremony and I shut that idea down. I agreed that she and a few friends could attend. I did not invite anyone else. I did not invite my sister. Sorry Maureen. I presumed that during the event the Commander would call me up and give me a certificate and that would be that. Why would I want to invite anyone for that? Secretly, I did believe I might receive an award.

The day for my retirement ceremony arrived. Only one friend, Zelda, was able to come. She told me her brother had been in the Navy and she was curious about the military. She agreed to drive and she picked me up. When we reached my unit I noticed they had set up an area with about 25 seats, in rows, for the retirees and their guests. I introduced Zelda to some of my military friends and we talked with some of these soldiers while we waited for the 1300 hours (1:00 PM) formation. While we were waiting, someone came and asked Zelda for her name. I did not think to consider why anyone wanted her name. Eventually my Army unit got into formation and the soldiers were called to *Attention*.

Our General (BG-Brigadier General) began presiding over or addressing the formation. I was the only woman retiring and my last name came first alphabetically. Everyone was still standing at attention as my name was called.

“Staff Sergeant Laurie Castro, report” said the Major (MAJ). He was standing behind the General (BG) at a podium. He used a microphone and he had the retirement ceremony schedule in front of him resting on the podium.

I walked up in front of the General (BG) and while facing him, I saluted him. He saluted back. I dropped my salute and remained facing him, standing at *Attention*. The formation was right behind me, and they were still standing at *Attention*.

“Attention, to Orders...” said the Major (MAJ) and then he read the award citation for a Meritorious Service Medal. This is a federal award and I am quite proud.

“Attention to Orders...” continued the Major (MAJ) and he read the award citation for a State of New Mexico Distinguished Service Medal. This is a state award and all I can say is huah! At the time though, like a good soldier I was quietly standing at *Attention*.

“Spouses make a difference” the Major (MAJ) said, reading from prepared material “and our achievements are their achievements. At this time the Sergeant of the Guard will escort Zelda...”

I was watching as one of the soldiers, Specialist Antonio, escorted Zelda to a place in front of the formation and she was presented with some flowers. Zelda was extremely gracious and pleasantly surprised because she truly enjoyed receiving flowers. She was smiling from ear to ear.

“She’s not my spouse” I whispered to the General (BG) from my position where I was still standing at *Attention* in front of and facing him.

Everything was happening really fast. I told the General (BG) that she was not my spouse at the exact same time as I realized Zelda was receiving spousal appreciation. The General (BG) quickly turned to catch the Major’s (MAJ) eye. Even though it is not a military protocol he made a slicing gesture with his hand across his neck. In hand gestures he said “cut!”

Despite the large numbers of gay people in the military, I knew (in 2007) the military did not really want to know whether or not I had a gay spouse and I am quite aware of this.

“Do you want me to take my seat” I whispered to the General (BG).

“No, you have more coming to you. I want to make sure you get everything you have earned” the General (BG)said. Meanwhile the Major (MAJ) had cut short reading his prepared material that involved thanking my spouse. The Major (MAJ) was waiting silently for direction from the General (BG). By this time Zelda has been escorted back to her seat and she was seated with her flowers across her lap.

Then, I am presented with a brevetted promotion, a flag of the United States, a flag of New Mexico, a certificate from the Governor of New Mexico and congratulatory letters from the Department of the Army and the New Mexico State Adjutant General. My arms are full as I render a final salute and return to my seat.

“I think they were really open-minded” Zelda says to me as I sat down next to her.

“You have no idea” I replied.

The rest of the awards ceremony continued and the other retiring soldiers were presented with similar recognition.

I would like to say Thank You to all of the New Mexico soldiers who ran all of that paperwork up and down the flagpole to create a very nice awards ceremony. It is commonplace for retiring soldiers to leave their respective units with only a handshake.

Lauri Castro

Animal Within

(full animal)

I

We all have a beast within
our inner animal
we know it is in there

I was not conscious of meeting mine
until I joined the Army

I started to sense it in Basic Training when we hollered and grunted
as we exited the cattle cars

“Mo-tiii-vaaa-ted, mo-tiii-vaaa-teeddd,
MO-TI-VA-TEDDDD DRILL SERGEANT”
“Huah!”
“Rah!!!!”
“AAAHHHHHHHHHH”

II

We all have a beast within
our inner animal

When I began learning to fire my M-16
I felt how my nostrils flared but only after I squeezed the trigger
while the smoke, smell of smoke-gunpowder
curls away from the charging handle

I realize I can feel my right nostril pulsating
and I know my animal is dominant

Don't touch me
Do not touch me

III

We all have a beast within
our inner animal
We know it is in there

I was not conscious of meeting mine
until I joined the Army
Sometimes during battalion runs I felt it then too

Lauri Castro

I frequently fell back behind the herd running together
as I kept running behind the group

When they succeeded in smoking most of us
when so many soldiers were walking/running behind the main body
some kiss-ass sergeant would try to pull us all into a group
so we could come back into the battalion area together
“There’s only one Army - we go out together - we come in together,
huah?”

Uniformity - the Army way
except if I was running, trying, pushing myself
I did not want to wait
for some-sorry-ass-soldier who was walking
when I was asked to stop and wait for the sick-call-AWOL-profile-
lame-fallout-sorry-ass-scooting-soldiers

I could feel my nostril flare

don’t stop me

I’m running

don’t stop me

don’t touch me

don’t stop me-now

IV

Sometimes they put my name on a list
to do remedial physical training after the duty day for one week
because I fell out of the battalion run

They never asked why I didn't stop
when I was told to
I was never reminded I was violating a direct order when I didn't stop

Maybe they knew I couldn't stop in that heightened state
I couldn't stop
I couldn't stop

We all have a beast within

Chapter 5: Army Vocabulary Words for Civilians

Most of the words presented here are used by Active Duty, Army Reservists and the Army National Guard, seamlessly. Some words are regional and anchored to specific regions. Other words are more likely to exclusively be used by the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard.

Army Vocabulary Words for Civilians

The most important vocabulary words or concepts are Active Duty, the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard. I could write for pages and pages about these distinctions and definitions because ever since the early 2000's the clear distinctions that used to exist between the definitions of Active Duty, Army Reserve and the Army National Guard are not so clear especially to most civilians who do not know that much about the military anyway. I will begin with these definitions right away.

Active Duty

Active Duty means those who wear a military uniform for work just about every day. If they usually have weekends off, the truth is they can be called in to report at any time. Once an Active Duty member reports in, they can be kept on duty status for just about any length of time. Since they work full time they will receive full time paychecks and full time benefits such as medical and dental for themselves. Their dependent family members are also eligible for medical and dental care if the servicemember has done all their family-care-paperwork correctly.

Army Reserve/Army Reservist

The Army Reserve means Army soldiers who typically work one weekend a month and also for a minimum of two weeks each year. They get paid

for duty and training and for the times that they wear their uniform based on military requirements. Many times Reserve soldiers are supportive of non-profit community activities like parades or racing events such as a 5K race. If a soldier who is still in the military (Active or Reserve) is wearing a uniform they are participating in an event that has been approved of or is sanctioned and allowed. In some cases their participation is done in lieu of duty or in addition to it and so they are being paid, or are on-duty, while performing those functions. It is also possible that their participation is completely voluntary but has been approved by their Commander.

The Army Reserve is everywhere. The contiguous United States has 10 Army Reserve Commands. Soldiers of the Army Reserve are distributed throughout every state in a way that is based somewhat on population and these population counts are usually based on the US Census. Other factors are strategic considerations. For those who are unaware, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa are part of the United States and they have Army Reserve units. The Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) is also part of the United States but they do not have their own Army Reserve Units.

National Guard

The National Guard is Army soldiers and Airmen (Air Force men and women) who traditionally work one weekend a month and also two weeks a year. They get paid for duty and training. Every state has National Guard units in it. Washington, D.C., has National Guard units. The territories of Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands and Guam have National Guard units. American Samoa wants National Guard units but as of this printing (July 2012) they do not have their own National Guard. The Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, (CNMI), do not have their own Army National Guard Units.

The Governor of a US State or Territory is also the Commander in Chief of the National Guard of the state. The Governor of a state can do things to improve the experience of being in the Army and

Air Guard. Some Governors and state or territorial legislatures have set up additional college funds or student loan repayment funds for their Guard. Some Governors and state legislatures have enacted legislation so that Guard members do not have to pay out of pocket to register their cars. Governors can sign awards. Governors can perform many types of morale boosting actions. They can enhance funding and make it possible for their members to get specific training that their state pays for. They can authorize reimbursement to their Guard members for out of pocket/paycheck expenditures such as their monthly Life Insurance Premiums. When it comes right down to it, in many ways the Governor is a figurehead with respect to the National Guard. It is the National Guard Bureau and the Pentagon who really make plans for the National Guard.

In times of state emergency Governors have historically been able to use the Air and Army National Guard members and their equipment to help. Equipment is anything useful such as vehicles, helicopters, snowplows, shovels and sandbags. National Guard members can help during rescue operations when there are stranded hikers. They provide assistance during extensive flooding or wide scale forest fire emergencies. The Army and Air National Guard can perform patient transport or bring food out to remote locations when people and livestock have been cut off from food resources usually due to weather based events that make normally traveled roads unsafe. The National Guard can be used for situations like riots or civil disobedience which is when large groups of civilians are perceived by local authorities as being out of control and behaving in ways that threaten lives and property. The Active Duty Army and the Army Reserve historically has not been able to bear arms (use weapons) against citizens of the United States on American soil.

The National Guard can be armed at home. It has long been believed that the National Guard is really people's neighbors and they will not be trigger-happy in their own state and their own communities. Thus the National Guard can help de-escalate a situation that might otherwise escalate. The reasons why the National Guard can be armed at home is further explained under the heading Posse Comitatus in Army Vocabulary Words.

Distinctions between Army Reserve and Army National Guard

The Active Duty military components, the Reserve components and their buildings or facilities, their assets like helicopters or 5 ton vehicles belong to the federal government and therefore they belong to the taxpayers of the nation. If it suddenly floods in your city and there is an Active Duty military base nearby or there are Army Reserve or Navy Reserve units nearby they cannot let your city or state use their vehicles, watercraft or rubber boats. This is because those assets belong to all the people of the United States and one state cannot unduly benefit.

However the Army and Air National Guard components can help if the Governor of the state orders them too. The Army National Guard and the Air National Guard can help out in their own state or territory with equipment and Soldiers and Airmen if the Governor orders them to help in times of need like emergencies and natural disasters.

The Active Duty military and Reservists and their assets cannot be used to help out a state in times of disaster or emergency unless the President through the Pentagon orders the military to assist the civilian authorities. If your city is drowning the Army Reserve, or Navy Reserve or Active Duty Army or Active Duty Air Force will watch you drown.

As individuals we will help. We will pull you from a burning car or jump in a river to pull you out if you are drowning. We will help you if you are

choking and we will give you CPR to help restore your breathing. But as military units we have to be ordered to help and oftentimes our civilian leadership, Republican and Democrat alike do not understand how military orders come about.

The Army National Guard and Air National Guard can help their own state if their state, through their Governor asks the Guard to help. The Governor of a state cannot ask the Active Duty military in their state to help in an emergency. The Governor has to declare a state emergency for affected counties or for the state. Then the Governor has to ask the Federal Government as represented by the President for help.

about face

About, Face is a military Drill and Ceremonies command. It means to turn around individually after reporting to an officer or if in a formation, to turn around in unison with the other soldiers.

acting jack

An Acting Jack is a soldier who has been promoted by the Commanding Officer usually the CO (Company Commander) into the rank of Sergeant. This soldier has not been promoted by the promotions board yet and will still receive pay for their previous rank. An Acting Jack is allowed to wear Sergeant stripes and the lower ranking soldiers have to treat the Acting Jack as though the Acting Jack really outranked them.

advance party

The Advance Party refers to soldiers who report to a location before the main party does to make sure that all the plans and coordination will work out as expected. For outdoor training settings, the advance party may show up early and set up tents and camouflage nets. For indoor locations that involve hotels and meals the advance party will verify that the lodging

is clean and safe and that clean places to eat have been identified. Army Reserve and Army National Guard units often use Advance Party teams.

airborne

Airborne is the name given to soldiers who learn how to jump into a location with parachutes. It sounds exciting to many. But soldiers in Airborne Units have to get up really early, as in Oh-dark-30-early and they have to hurry up and wait a lot before they finally get to jump. There are many things that may seem tedious that have to be done on the morning of a jump before soldiers actually jump. Soldiers in key leadership positions may spend more time supervising, coordinating or inspecting for safety then actually jumping themselves. Airborne soldiers are a cut above others after successfully completing Airborne Training. They are authorized to wear a Parachutist Badge on their uniforms. Sometimes other soldiers, whether they are airborne or not, will call one of their peers who is airborne by the nickname “*Airborne*.” (See also chairborne)

alibi

The term alibi is frequently used on a military firing range. Sometimes a weapon like an M-16 will jam up and be unable to fire. At the point when the other soldiers have removed their empty magazine, some soldiers still have ammunition. The range cadre will allow more firing time for alibi fires.

ANCOC (pronounced A-Noc)

ANCOC refers to the Army Advanced NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) Course. Staff Sergeants (SSG) that are promotable are required to attend ANCOC. In cases where units may have Sergeants First Class (SFC) who have not yet attended ANCOC, they will have to attend ANCOC.

APC

An APC is an armored personnel carrier. An APC looks like a tank but it does not have a BIG GUN on it. It is used to transport members of the military. Statistically speaking, APC's have probably moved more Soldiers and Marines than Airmen or Sailors. But, all branches have specially trained tactical operatives who might require APC transport.

Article 15

An Article 15 means trouble. An Article 15 means a soldier got written up for something they did or did not do. It means there is some documentation or written history that will follow the soldier around. In other words a soldier got in trouble and it is formal. Article 15's for most soldiers are administered by Company Commanders that are usually in the rank of Captain (CPT). These Captains can take 1 or more stripes from a soldier. They can put a soldier on extra duty. They can fill out paperwork authorizing payroll to cease paying the soldier for a specific period of time. This is known as forfeiture of pay and allowances. Usually a Captain only takes 15 days of pay such as with the punishment of 15 and 15. This is 15 days of hard duty and 15 days of forfeiture of pay and allowances. The hard duty is usually something labor intensive such as shoveling rocks. It is done somewhere visible where some of your platoon or company can see you shoveling rocks or digging ditches.

Soldiers can receive Article 15s for Disrespecting an Officer or Non-Commissioned Officer (Sergeant), Disobeying a Direct Order from an Officer or Non-Commissioned Officer, fighting, unauthorized use of a military vehicle, vandalism of government property, coming up positive on a urinalysis (piss test) and Driving Under the Influence (DUI). Soldiers can also receive Article 15s for Failure to Repair, (FTR). Failure to Repair means that a soldier has been warned about something, usually repeatedly. For example a soldier may have been warned that they have to be on time

to formation and yet they keep coming late. In the past when people used checkbooks more regularly a soldier may have been warned not to pass bad checks and even taught how to balance a checkbook. If soldiers who were re-trained in checkbook management continued passing bad checks they could get an Article 15 for FTR. Failure to Repair really means that a soldier is messing up and if they do not mend their ways they are going to get thrown out at the very least.

Soldiers who receive Article 15's can request a Court Martial. Sometimes soldiers think that they can beat an Article 15 by requesting a Court Martial. If the Court Martial finds that whatever infraction the soldier committed is really not a big deal they will simply dismiss it. This also puts an end to the Article 15. On the other hand some soldiers who request a Court Martial to beat an Article 15 are actually Court Martialed out and they may undergo a period of confinement (lock-up, military style), reduction in rank (possibly all the way down to Private E-1), forfeiture of all pay and allowances and a Bad Conduct Discharge (BCD).

ASVAB

The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery is the written exam which individuals who want to join the military have to take. It is administered on a computer in a setting where military recruiters or other uniformed members are keeping an eye on the test takers to be certain that the test questions are answered by the individuals being tested with no cheating. The scores derived from it are used to determine which fields of military work the recruit has the intellectual aptitude to be successful in. The ASVAB is scored by the Army in a way that test sections are combined to create scores that mean something to the Army. For example there is a CL (clerical) score that comes from the ASVAB sections that measure VE (verbal or paragraph reasoning) + AR (arithmetic reasoning) + MK (mathematics knowledge). Some additional test categories are GS (general science), EI (electronics information and

WK (word knowledge). There are several more categories. People can often find sample tests on line and ASVAB books with lots of practice tests can be found in public libraries.

at ease

At, Ease is a stationary drill and ceremonies command. It does not involve marching. Soldiers who are waiting in a formation may be told to stand At Ease. This means they do not have to stand at Attention or at Parade Rest and they can be more relaxed. It means they can talk to their friends or even light up a cigarette, if allowed. Technically it means they have to keep their right foot in place so that when they get called to Attention they are still lined up and haven't drifted too much.

At ease is also used as an expression between soldiers meaning that somewhat should lighten up or settle down about something. *At ease on that flirtation, Private!* Sometimes when women soldiers know they are being checked out they will say *At ease, soldier* (or *at ease on this*) to whoever is checking them out as they walk by.

ate up or ate the fuck up

Ate up means messed up. For example if a soldier comes out to dress uniform inspection and it looks like their uniform was being stored all wrinkled up in a bag and there is no excuse for them to have a wrinkled up uniform then they are ate up or ate the fuck up. If everyone in a unit is standing tall and looking good except one person that person is ate up. An example between soldiers might be *you're about ate up*.

balloon

The balloon meant that what we once thought of as the inevitable nuclear war or other war between the East and West had begun. *You better get that*

lard out of your behind and stop moving like pond water so you can be ready when the balloon goes up.

Basic Training, Basic Combat Training

Soldiers who enlist go to Basic Combat Training to become soldiers. Basic Combat Training lasts about 9-10 weeks. It includes learning to march. It includes marksmanship which is learning to shoot. It includes working out which soldiers call PT or Physical Training. Officers will use the term “Basics” to refer to Officer Basics but Officers do not *enlist* to become Officers. No one in the Army calls Basic Training “Boot Camp.” Marines go to Boot Camp, not soldiers. Soldiers who enlist for Active Duty often have to wait about half a year or more before they go to Basic Training. An individual has to take their written test and pass it (the ASVAB) and they have to pass their physical which includes a hearing test, a urinalysis and laboratory blood work. Recruits have to be scheduled for a Basic Combat Training course that has vacancies and which is timed to end near the start date for whatever their MOS (Military Occupational Skill) also known as a job will be.

Soldiers who join the National Guard or Army Reserve as enlisted soldiers are usually scheduled for Basic Training within about half a year of signing up. They can start going to their Reserve or Guard unit drills before they attend Basic Training and they will be paid for drill time. There is some training they cannot participate in until they go to Basic Training because at this point they are newbees and technically they are still civilians. Most of the time soldiers who sign up/enlist to join the Army National Guard or Army Reserve go to Basic Training followed by their MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) training back-to-back or one after another. Some soldiers that are going into the National Guard or Army Reserve go to Basic Training during summer time and then come back to their home station unit. From now on they attend their drill duty in uniforms. The following summer they will complete their MOS

(Military Occupational Specialty) training. This is called a split training option. The split training option is used for those who sign up while they are still juniors in High School.

barracks lawyer

A barracks lawyer is slang for someone in the barracks who helps other soldiers when they are in trouble. A barracks lawyer is not an official position it is just someone that informally starts helping out. The minimum skill for being a barracks lawyer is being someone who can speak and write using complete sentences. A barracks lawyer finds out who is in trouble. A barracks lawyer talks to the troubled soldier to find out what is going on. If the soldier in trouble feels like it, they will tell the barracks lawyer everything.

battalion (battalion /company /platoon /squad)

A Battalion is a military unit that includes a Headquarters Company (HHC) and at least 3 Companies. Alpha Company (A Co), Bravo Company (B Co) and Charlie Company (C Co). A Battalion is usually commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel (LTC). (See **HHC** for more).

battle assembly

Battle Assembly is a term used by the National Guard and by the Army Reserve to describe our *duty* or *drill* weekends. The term Battle Assembly was not in use prior to the 2000's. Some units still do not use that term. Some units still call duty weekend by the name *Drill*. As one fulltimer NCO friend explained "If we call it Battle Assembly we will scare them off. They will think we're deploying them."

battle buddy

Beginning with our earliest experiences in basic training we are taught to work in teams of at least two soldiers and to be in communication with someone else. The soldier we are working with at any given time or even sitting and eating lunch with is our buddy. Sometimes when large numbers of us have to cram into a space Sergeants will say *Go ahead. Make your buddy smile*. This means we are really standing close.

bivouac

The first time soldiers at Basic Training do outdoor camping, military style, it has been traditionally called bivouac.

black market

The black market is pure economic principles stripped down to their essence. The black market refers to the ways that spring up to meet needs or desires. It is usually all based on verbal arrangements. Some black market transactions are illegal and can get both buyers and sellers in trouble and some are just informal transactions. Sometimes soldiers are just buying or trading for cigarettes on the Black Market. Sometimes soldiers are trying to get alcohol. In addition to the black market where buyers and sellers are soldiers there are also black markets where the sellers are selling military stuff to civilians.

blood wings

For many years our uniforms have included pin on rank. This pin on rank has pointy pins that are like the sharp part of a safety pin. Some of our badges or awards also have pin on versions. When a soldier has been promoted or has been awarded a distinctive badge other soldiers walk by, and, in turn, they will pound with their fists on the pinned on badge or rank. The recipient of the pounding earns their *blood wings* in this manner.

Sometimes the pounding is really hard. Sometimes the pins are filed so that they are sharper.

blues

Blues is an informal word for Dress Blues which is our Army Service Uniform.

BOLO

A bolo is a no go or a failure of some kind. *I bolo'd that uniform inspection or I was a first time bolo on that land navigation course.*

BNCOC (pronounced B-Noc)

BNCOC refers to the Army Basic NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) Course. Sergeants (SGT) that are promotable are required to attend BNCOC. In cases where units may have Staff Sergeants (SSG) who have not yet attended BNCOC, they will have to attend BNCOC.

On Active Duty most soldiers have completed their ANCOC or BNCOC courses before being promoted. In the Army Reserve and Army National Guard there are some extenuating circumstances and sometimes it takes longer for a soldier to complete their ANCOC & BNCOC phases 1 and 2 et al.

boot camp

No such thing. There is no boot camp in the Army. If you want to go to boot camp, join the Marines.

branch

The following, in alphabetical order, are the branches of the Army: Whether someone is Officer or Enlisted, if they are in the Army they are in one of these branches.

Lauri Castro

Adjutant General Corps

Air Defense Artillery

Armor

Army Medical Specialists

Army Nurse Corps

Aviation

Chaplain Corps

Chemical Corps

Civil Affairs

Corps of Engineers

Dental Corps

Field Artillery

Finance Corps

Infantry

Judge Advocates General

Medical Corps

Medical Service Corps

Military Intelligence

Military Police

Signal Corps

Special Forces

Transportation Corps

Ordnance Corps

Quartermaster Corps

Veterinary Corps

brass

Brass can refer to shiny parts of a dress uniform but most of the time it is a collective way to refer to officers that travel in packs. Commanding officers like Colonels or Generals usually travel with their staff as a necessity. *The Brass is going to be here to inspect and if everything is not right somebody is going to jail so you better have your shit right and accounted for.*

brig

There is no brig in the Army. Join the Navy if you want to go to the Brig. If, for some reason, the Army has turned a soldier over to the Navy or Marines a soldier could be placed in a brig.

buffer

A buffer is a device that is somewhat larger and heavier than a vacuum cleaner. It is used along with floor wax and a buffing pad to make a floor shine. There have been many times and places where the Army had some old rickety buffers. They would run away from a soldier if a soldier did not hold them down as hard as possible while using them. Some of these old buffers beat up a few soldiers too. In a fight between an old rickety buffer and a trainee the buffer usually wins.

cadence

Army cadences are songs that accompany physical soldiering tasks, so that they seem more fun. Cadence works. We sing cadence on long marches if we are on pavement, that is, the kind of surface where everyone can stay in step. There is a whistling cadence based on The Seven Little Dwarfs to the theme of going off to work. There is a rather funny or cruel cadence about an innocent yellow bird. There are cadences about being in The Army. There are cadences about your cheatin' girlfriend back home and your best friend back home, neither of whom can be trusted. Eternal themes involve Airborne soldiers or Rangers and the rest of us who couldn't even dream about being that hardcore sing these Airborne and Ranger cadences too.

chairborne

Chairborne refers to soldiers who know they sit on their butts a lot at work. Chairborne soldiers may refer to themselves as chairborne rangers even though they are not rangers at all. Chairborne soldiers know they are desk jockeys. Sometimes other soldiers look down chairborne soldiers but if you tell a chairborne soldier that they suck they will probably fuck up all your military records.

charlie-foxtrot also known as clusterfuck

A charlie-foxtrot or clusterfuck is anything that occurs which comes out fucked up. It is usually not as simple as one soldier making a mistake that only affects that one soldier. The consequences of a clusterfuck involve more than one soldier. For example, a bunch of reservists are about to get on a bus at their unit for training and the soldier who is supposed to be bringing them breakfast burritos is late. Now everybody on the bus is mad at the supply sergeant. (This is not a true example because I helped deliver those green chile breakfast burritos on time).

chapter out

Sometimes the military releases a soldier from the military even though the soldier has not completed their enlistment contract. This may be referred to as being *chaptered out* because the authority to release the soldier is based on a chapter in Army Regulations. Sometimes new soldiers are chaptered out for being unable to adapt to military life. This is not punitive.

CQ (pronounced phonetically as cee-q) Charge of Quarters

Charge of Quarters is a specific duty. At a designated hour, which is usually 1600 hours (4 PM) two enlisted soldiers report to the 1ST (First Sergeant). One enlisted soldier is in the rank of Sgt (Sergeant /E-5) or above. This is because one of the soldiers has to be an NCO, which is a Sergeant or above. The additional soldier is in the ranks of Specialist /E-4) or below. The NCO will be designated as the CQ and the lower ranking enlisted soldier will be the CQ assistant.

One of the duties of the 1SG (First Sergeant) is maintaining a list that is posted for all to see and that clearly identifies when soldiers have duty. At a designated time such as 1600 hours (4 PM) after working all day soldiers will report for duty and they will be released from this duty at about 0830 hours the next day. At this point they soldiers will have a designated amount of time off so they can sleep. While they are on duty the CQ and CQ assistant will answer phones and check official email on behalf of the CO (Commanding Officer) and 1SG (First Sergeant). These 2 soldiers will also verify that the work and duty areas which belong to the Company (example B Company) and the living quarter areas and the physical inventory areas (arms rooms, safes, vaults, military parking areas are safe and secure.

If any soldiers from within the command are behaving inappropriately the CQ needs to enforce the regulations that get the misbehaving individuals to knock it off or else they need to document it and report it. Coinciding with the shift of the CQ there is a SDO which is a Staff Duty Officer. The SDO is either a high ranking NCO (Non Commissioned Officer) or Officer. CQ's can request guidance from the SDO during their shift.

chevrons

Chevrons are stripes. Army chevrons look like upside down letter V's. Corporals (CPL) have 2 chevrons. Sergeants (SGT) have 3 chevrons. Some enlisted rank includes Chevrons and Rockers. (See **rockers**). The rank for a Private (E-2) is 1 chevron. The rank for a Private First Class (PFC) is 1 chevron and 1 rocker.

civilians

Civilians are everybody who is not in uniform and that distinction should include government employees, even if those same government employees may have more GS (government service) rank than God. Some government employees may think they are not civilians. Here is my litmus test. If you can call in from home to say that you are not going to be somewhere you are a civilian. If you can call in somewhere to say that you are going to take the morning off you are a civilian. If you have the option to resign whenever you want to you are a civilian.

Firefighters and police are civilians when compared to soldiers, although they may disagree. It is true that those who take an oath and wear a uniform are not quite civilians compared to those people who have never taken an oath and worn a uniform. But it is highly likely that police and firefighters can be there for the birth of a child without too much difficulty. Many times Active Duty soldiers cannot be "there" for their families because they are "being there" for Uncle Sam.

There are degrees of difference within all the uniform wearing oath taking individuals when contrasted with the military. Many, if not all, uniform wearing oath taking civilians put their lives on the line, yet the military often seem to sacrifice bits and pieces of our own lives while we are living our lives. We forgo relationships or screw them up once we are in them. We miss birthdays and Christmas with families repeatedly. We work through our own birthdays or New Year's Eve to the point of holiday numbness. We say *ain't nothing but a thing* or *I don't give a fuck* but then maybe when it is time to give a fuck we cannot express ourselves. Yes, there are plenty of families begun by members of the military and the military frequently gives lip service to family values but the military is also hard on relationships. Some spouses or significant others find they do not want to be married to the military. Others do a commendable job but there are no ribbons of valor or distinction for military spouses.

CO - Commanding Officer /Commander

A commander is a person in command. In traditional Army units a Captain (CPT) is the commander for a Company. The Captain (CPT) is the highest ranking officer in a company. The Captain (CPT) works closely with the First Sergeant (1SG) who is the highest ranking *enlisted* member of the unit and also a *non-commissioned officer*. A Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) is the commander for a *battalion*. A Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) is the highest ranking officer in a battalion. The Lieutenant Colonel works closely with a Command Sergeant-Major (CSM), who is the highest ranking *enlisted* person and also a *non-commissioned officer*.

When soldiers are speaking with each other, usually in conversations about work, they may refer to 'The Commander'. *There's been a change. The commander wants us to tag anything serviceable in all these piles on the pallets.*

The word commander is primarily reserved for Officers. When enlisted soldiers or Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs or Sergeants) are in

charge of duty teams of soldiers they are more likely to be referred to as Team Chiefs or Crew Chiefs. NCO's lead, guide, direct, supervise and train but specific Officers such as Platoon Leaders, Company Commanders, Battalion Commanders or Division Commanders are considered as being in command.

commissary

The Commissary is a supermarket located on an active duty military installation. They often have excellent prices although some dollar stores or discounters are probably similarly priced. For some items the prices cannot be beat. Many times there are 'military only' coupons available inside a commissary and these coupons can be quite a good deal.

There was a time when Reservists and National Guard members were only allowed Commissary access 14 days a year and an additional 14 days if they were anywhere near a commissary during their Annual Training. Commissary cards were issued to us Reservists/National Guard members and each trip to the commissary had to be noted with an ink stamp or hole-punched through our commissary card. During

our 14 days of Annual Training we had to carry our 'orders' with us and one specific set of orders would be regularly stamped on during our commissary visit. I was pleased when Reservists and National Guard members were granted parity with Active Duty when it came to using the commissary. We can now go there without anyone restricting how often.

commo

Commo means communications. A soldier may refer to working in commo or soldiers may remind each other not to forget spare parts for commo gear.

company (company /platoon /squad)

Most military units have a Headquarters Company (HHC) an Alpha Company (A Co) a Bravo Company (B Co) and a Charlie Company (C Co). Each Company has a Company Commander (CPT) and a First Sergeant (1SG). Within each company there is usually a Headquarters (HQ) Platoon, a 1st Platoon, a 2nd Platoon and a 3rd Platoon. Within each platoon there will be 4 squads of 7 to 10 (enlisted) soldiers. (See **HHC**). Each Company has 4 platoons that ideally have 30 to 40 soldiers. The overall size of the Company is approximately 150 soldiers. 4 or 5 Companies will make up the Battalion.

Within a Company there is usually a First Lieutenant (1LT) assigned as an Executive Officer (XO, pronounced as each separate letter X-O) to the Captain but some Company Commanders do not have an XO. Each of the Platoons in the Company must have a Platoon Sergeant in charge. If the Company has a few Lieutenants (2LT of 1LT) they can be assigned as Platoon Leaders. Platoons have to have a Platoon Sergeant but they do not have to have a Platoon Leader.

conscientious objector

A Conscientious Objector is the legal term for someone who objects for religious or personal moral reasons to the taking of life. They feel so strongly that even though they want to join the military they also want to let the military know, up front, that they do not want to bear arms against their fellow man. They still train and learn to use weapons but if a deployment occurs they are not supposed to be given duty assignments that require them to shoot or kill. Often times they are placed into Military Occupational Specialties such as Chaplains Assistant or some of

the medical fields although most medical fields require soldiers to bear arms, i.e., shoot if ordered to.

At the time when an individual is enlisting they are asked as part of their enlistment contract whether they are a Conscientious Objector. This is the appropriate time to identify Conscientious Objector status. If a soldier checks the box that says NO on the Conscientious Objector question and then later on objects to the taking of life they have an uphill battle trying to get the military to change their status. (The Army Times has covered instances when soldiers are trying to get the Conscientious Objector status. Interested individuals can research this in the Army Times.

conscription

Conscription refers to mandatory military service and some countries require this. In Israel, everyone, male and female, serves in the military for a certain amount of required service. South Korea and Germany have mandatory military service for males. In Germany, males who do not want to perform military service can choose community service instead but the military service requirement is shorter than the community service obligation.

contractors

Contractors and sub-contractors are civilians and they may or may not be Americans. They perform some of the same tasks that uniformed military members also do. In theory, their work should compliment and be supportive of military members and military missions. There are probably some excellent and commendable contractors. Unfortunately there are some corrupt ones and in places like Iraq they are not accountable and are not and have not been punished. They cannot be prosecuted in courts in the United States because Iraq is outside the legal jurisdiction of the United States. They cannot be prosecuted in Iraq because the United

States has demanded some type of diplomatic immunity for its contractors. Corrupt contractors have a detrimental effect on the United States and on the United States Army.

Soldiers are taught that since we have a civilian Commander in Chief (The US President) and a civilian Secretary of the Army, we have to treat civilians as though they all outrank us. When corrupt civilians are in our midst we still treat them like they outrank us. The fact that civilian contractors are paid more than soldiers is what causes soldiers to listen to them.

Soldiers who are not chairborne (see **chairborne**) know stories of corrupt contractors and soldiers are pissed off that these people don't get in trouble. I am really surprised that more soldiers haven't killed contractors because of all the problems they cause. It would be more meaningful if the US Government would stop being afraid to hold contractors accountable and persecute them and make them serve time at Leavenworth. Since they want to work for the military in high stakes environments they should be subject to UCMJ. Oftentimes military have to do the jobs that contractors are getting paid for because contractors don't do things right because they are not held accountable and they suffer no consequences when they do wrong.

CONUS

CONUS means the Continental United States. Hawaii, Alaska and the US Territories such as Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the US Virgin Islands, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands are OCONUS, or outside the Continental United States.

corporal

Corporal is a military enlisted rank. When a Private First Class (PFC) is promoted they will usually be promoted to the rank of Specialist (SPC).

Some Specialists (SPC) have duty reasons causing them to be in charge of other soldiers. These soldiers will be laterally (sideways) promoted to the rank of Corporal. The rank of Corporal includes 2 hard stripes or 2 chevrons and unlike Specialists (SPC), Corporals (CPL) are considered to be Non Commissioned Officers (NCO).

court martial

A court martial is a form of military justice. It is as formal as it gets. Cases of serious black marketing usually result in court-martials for military members. Drug smuggling usually leads to court-martials.

The Army has a book called the Manual for Courts Martial. This governs everything involving military legal actions. When soldiers lose at their Court Martial the Military Police bring them to the barracks to get everything they were issued and they throw it in a duffel bag. At the conclusion of whatever confinement or prison sentence they are ordered to they will have to surrender their uniforms and boots. They have to turn in everything they were issued because they have lost the right to wear them. This is why soldiers and former soldiers sometimes get mad at civilians, except for kids, who wear uniforms. This is because military members have to earn their uniforms and civilians just wear them.

One time a soldier came back to our barracks under Military Police escort along with a German Shepherd and the soldier was wearing leg irons. He needed to find one more pair of boots because he needed two pair of boots to turn in. He had probably sold a pair previously but now he was begging for a pair of boots because he said things were going to be worse to him if he did not return everything. He was truly scared. This is one of those moments in human nature where it does not seem like it makes much sense to help someone because you will never see him again. I remember giving him a pair of boots.

cunt cap

A cunt cap is a canoe shaped cap. Prior to 2000, soldiers wore cunt caps with their Class A Dress Uniforms.

DD-214 (pronounced dee-dee two-fourteen)

The DD-214 is a Department of Defense form that records an individual's discharge or release from the military. Veterans have to have a copy of their DD-214 to prove that they are veterans. Anyone who has served should save their DD-214(s).

This is a suggestion for soldiers and former soldiers who have at least one DD-214. Within each state there are usually county buildings known as the Hall of Records. They keep track of births, deaths, marriages and divorces when those events are filed in the County. Former soldiers (servicemembers) can take their original DD-214 (and some Identification) to their County Hall of Records and file their DD-214. (There is probably a filing fee). This means the former soldier (servicemember) keeps their original but has a copy that is as good as the original on file. Sometimes it can take awhile to get a hold of a replacement DD214 if it has been lost and this can make it easier to get one's hands on a legitimate copy.

demilitarized zone / DMZ

A demilitarized zone usually refers to a border area that is like a 'no man's land' in between two nations or in between one divided nation. The two countries are usually heavily armed on their own sides of each border and either side may shoot kill anyone from the other side that is in the DMZ. The DMZ itself is not occupied. There is a DMZ in between North Korea and South Korea. Within the DMZ there is a building that is used for meetings and negotiations between the North and the South, including allies of the South, such as the United States. The meeting room

has a line down the middle and the meeting conference table also has a line down the middle. The North enters through the side of the DMZ they control and sits on their side of the table. The South enters through the side of the DMZ they control and sit on their side of the table.

deploy /deployment

A deployment is a military movement that has been ordered by the President.

dispatch

A dispatch is a set of procedures that soldiers have to follow when they want permission to 'check out' a military vehicle. (Soldiers do not use the term 'check out'). Soldiers have to perform safety checks such as adding fluids, checking tire pressures, turn signals and brake lights. If the requesting soldier completes and documents the safety checks and has a valid reason to use the vehicle with a Commanding Officer's signature a motor pool soldier can dispatch the vehicle. The term dispatch can refer either to the procedures for dispatch or the binder of paperwork that stays with the vehicle and proves the driver has permission to use the vehicle.

dog tags

Dog tags are aluminum identity tags that soldiers wear around their neck. Dog tags identify a soldiers name, a service number (which presently is our social security number), birth date, blood type and religious preference. Soldiers can select any religious choice including *pagan* or *wiccan* and soldiers can also choose to select *no religious preference*. Lost or stolen dogs tags pose individual security risks because of the possibility of identity theft or other misuse of the social security number.

downrange

Downrange refers to areas, usually in a military theatre of operations that are less safe. Downrange areas are in the scope or in the sights of non-friendly guns or weapons. When soldiers are downrange they need to be alert.

Drill

The term *Drill* is used by National Guard and Army Reserve. This term has been replaced by *Battle Assembly*. The concept of drill does not make sense to active duty soldiers because they know they belong to the military 24 /7, or 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For Reserve and Guard members that are not deployed drill refers to that time of month when they will need to get ready to be punctual, wear their uniform and boots and be willing to be serious if the training calls for it. Sometimes going to drill is fun and sometimes it is ridiculously fun.

Drill and Ceremony

Drill and Ceremony refer to all of the skills soldiers need to learn that involve formations. This includes stationary commands and marching commands. This includes inspections, parades and command and control for formations.

Drill Sergeants

Drill Sergeants are entrusted with the task of turning civilian recruits into soldiers. Drill Sergeants conduct the training at Basic Combat Training. If they exemplify high standards and instill respect for high standards within us (the prize is inside) we may strive to make our Drill Sergeants proud for the rest of our time in uniform. If they fail to set high standards we may be less dedicated.

duffel bag

Duffel bags are rugged bags that were traditionally made of canvas. Duffel bags are wonderful. Over the years the canvas has become thinner but ideally duffels are the kind of bags that always can fit some more and can carry any amount of weight. One expression that is popular among Drill Sergeants is *Get your head out of your duffel bag*.

When soldiers are packing duffel bags the first they do is create a pile of everything that absolutely has to fit. There is an art to figuring out what to put where. For example it is easy to place a rolled up sleeping bag into a duffel bag and then continually sit on and squish the duffel bag to squeeze excess air out of the sleeping bag so that there is still plenty of room left in the duffel bag. If the first thing that will be needed is the sleeping bag, another packing strategy needs to be used. Some packing strategies are based on getting it all in there and some packing is based on making sure that whatever a soldier needs first is near the top. Sometimes soldiers use rope to make the items they are packing smaller.

dust bunny

Dust Bunnies are accumulations of dust that are found in barracks or behind wall lockers. Sometimes these masses of dust particles are the size of a small animal, hence the term Dust Bunny. Dust Bunnies are inanimate.

duty

Duty means work based on the fact that you have been given orders to do something or complete a shift. If you have to answer the phone a certain way...*Bravo Company, 141 Signal Battalion, Specialist Castro speaking, this line is unsecure, May I help you?*... that is a duty. Duty driver, Guard duty and CQ (Charge of Quarters) are duties. When something is a duty a soldier has a higher obligation to be where they need to be and do what they need to

do. If someone else has been on shift for 12 hours following a work day of 10 hours, the replacement soldier has a DUTY to relieve them and to be there on time.

enlist/enlistment

Enlisted soldiers are those who went to see a recruiter one day and began the process of enlisting. A recruit has to take an ASVAB or Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. This is a written test and the scores derived from it are used to determine which fields of military work the recruit has the intellectual aptitude to be successful in. A recruit also has to take and pass a medical/physical exam. Usually a recruit has to have a high school diploma or GED but sometimes this requirement is flexible. A recruit has to have a clean criminal background check. In some cases the military does grant waivers depending on what kind of trouble with the law the potential recruit got into. In times when the military needs trainees some requirements may be more relaxed. In times when there are waiting lists to get in the military recruiter is less likely to perform all the steps it takes to seek a waiver because there are other qualified recruits and because the approving authority will probably deny the waiver request.

The recruit will receive training at Basic Training. Then the recruit will attend Advanced Individual Training (AIT) which causes a recruit to become a soldier with a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). The Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) is a job.

Enlisted ranks are as follows:

<u>title</u>	<u>abbreviation</u>	<u>pay grade</u>
Private	PV1	E-1
Private	PV2	E-2

Lauri Castro

Private First Class	PFC	E-3
<i>Specialist</i>	<i>SPC</i>	<i>E-4</i>
	or	
<i>Corporal</i>	<i>CPL</i>	<i>E-4</i>
Sergeant	SGT	E-5
Staff Sergeant	SSG	E-6
Sergeant First Class	SFC	E-7
<i>Master Sergeant</i>	<i>MSG</i>	<i>E-8</i>
	<i>or</i>	
<i>First Sergeant</i>	<i>1SG</i>	<i>E-8</i>
Command Sergeant Major	CSM	E-9
Sergeant Major of the Army * SMA		E-10

* There is only one Sergeant Major of the Army.

executive order deployments

An executive order deployment means that the President can mobilize the military without asking Congress to declare war. According to Article 1, Section 8 of the US Constitution, the Congress holds the power to declare war. For well over a decade military mobilizations have been based on presidential executive orders. Some recent executive orders impacting and authorizing military mobilizations are listed below. These cite the authority of the US Constitution, sections of the United States Code and some also cite the National Emergencies Act.

Executive Order 12722 August 2, 1990 (full title) Blocking Iraqi Government Property and Prohibiting Transactions with Iraq.

This cites the US Constitution; the International Emergency Economic Powers Act et seq., the National Emergencies Act et seq., and section 301 of Title 3 of the United States Code.

After citing these authorities this Executive Order declares a state of National Emergency for the United States. This is signed by President George H. W. Bush.

Executive Order 12727 August 22, 1990 (full title) Ordering the Selected Reserve of the Armed Forces to Active Duty

This cites the US Constitution and sections 121 and 673b of Title 10 of the United States Code.

After citing these authorities this Executive Order determines it is necessary to augment the active armed forces to conduct operational missions in and around the Arabian Peninsula. This is signed by President George H. W. Bush.

Executive Order 12743 - January 18, 1991 (full title) Ordering the Ready Reserve of the Armed Forces to Active Duty

This cites the US Constitution; the National Emergencies Act et seq., section 301 of Title 3 of the United States Code and in (for) furtherance of Executive Order 12722.

After citing these authorities this Executive Order authorizes (mobilization) of any (military) unit or individual (military member) for a period of up to 24 consecutive months. This is signed by President George H. W. Bush.

Executive Order 12982 - December 8, 1995 (full title) Ordering the Selected Reserve of the Armed Forces to Active Duty.

This cites the US Constitution and sections 121 and 673b of Title 10 of the United States Code.

After citing these authorities this Executive Order authorizes the military to conduct operations in and around former Yugoslavia. This is signed by President William J. Clinton.

Executive Order 13076 - February 24, 1998 (full title) Ordering the Selected Reserve of the Armed Forces to Active Duty.

This cites the US Constitution and sections 121 and 12304 of Title 10 of the United States Code.

After citing these authorities this Executive Order authorizes the military to conduct operations in and around Southwest Asia.

This is signed by President William J. Clinton.

Executive Order 13120 - April 27, 1999 (full title) Ordering the Selected Reserve and Certain Individual Ready Reserve Members of the Armed Forces to Active Duty.

This cites the US Constitution and sections 121 and 12304 of Title 10 of the United States Code.

After citing these authorities this Executive Order authorizes the military to conduct operations in and around former Yugoslavia and related to the conflict in Kosovo.

This is signed by President William J. Clinton.

Executive Order 13223 September 14, 2001 (full title) Ordering the Ready Reserve of the Armed Forces to Active Duty and Delegating Certain Authorities to the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Transportation.

This cites the US Constitution; the National Emergencies Act (50 United States Code sections 1601 et seq., section 301 of Title 3 of the United States Code and in furtherance of the Proclamation of September 14, 2001, Declaration of National Emergency by Reason of Certain Terrorist Attacks.

After citing these authorities this Executive Order authorizes the (mobilization) of any (military) unit or individual (military member) for a period of up to 24 consecutive months. This is signed by President George W. Bush.

FNG fuckin' new guy

FNG is military slang that goes back many years. It refers to a new soldier who is worthless because he/she does not know how to do anything yet.

FTR Failure to Repair

Failure to Repair, (FTR) means that a soldier has been warned about something, usually repeatedly. Failure to Repair means that a soldier is messing up and if they do not mend their ways they are going to get thrown out at the very least.

FTX Field Training Exercise

A Field Training Exercise (FTX) is a military training exercise that usually involves several military units and can involve an entire Division. *We were in the field.....we were at a field problem.....*Some military specialties can participate in meaningful training related to their military skills regularly. Some training requires greater coordination. For example soldiers in field artillery units cannot drive their big tanks and big guns on ordinary city streets. A great deal of coordination and planning is required.

flash

Flash used to be a word that soldiers practiced responsiveness with. In response to the word flash, a soldier would respond instinctively and hit the deck covering their head and ears. Now, flash primarily refers to a blue patch on the front of a black beret. Flash can also refer to the priority status of a military communication-message. A flash message is a higher priority message that needs to be communicated with a higher ranking Officer immediately.

formation including reveille & retreat

A typical formation in a garrison setting is a group of soldiers standing in an organized manner. A formation is organized in squads and by platoons within a Company and our placement is based on our duties. If we stand organized according to duties and rank then it is easier for our leaders to perform accountability which means making sure we are where we are

supposed to be. It is not unusual for a non-deployed Active Duty unit to have 4 formations a day. Typical times for a formation at an Active Duty military post are 0555 hours (5:55 AM), 0830 hours (8:30 AM), 1300 hours (1:00 PM) and 1655 hours (4:55 PM).

The reason we have a formation just prior to 6 AM is so the unit can salute the flag going up at 6 AM (*reveille*) and then the unit can begin physical training/exercising. The 0830 (zero-eight-30) formation is the beginning of the work day and at this time the soldiers should be showered, in their duty uniforms and have eaten breakfast. The 1300 (thirteen-hundred) formation is to ensure soldiers are not lollygagging or goofing off at long lunches and are ready to get back to work in a punctual manner. The formation just prior to 1700 (seventeen-hundred) is so that the company can salute the flag coming down at 1700, (*retreat*). Some soldiers are dismissed from work at 1700 and some soldiers are given a break for chow and then they are returned to work/duty.

forward

A forward area is any deployed area where the likelihood of being in danger is imminent for any number of reasons. During the Cold War of the 1980s, some parts of Germany were considered a forward area. My unit and division were forward areas and we trained as though *the balloon* was going to go up any day now. Forward means the area is hot, or could become hot, and when it does you are in the toasty zone. Forward area soldiers have to keep in mind that at certain times they really have to move like they have a sense of purpose. The opposite

of moving like you have a purpose is *lollygagging*.

Gamma Gote

A Gamma Gote is a 6 wheeled military vehicle that was once used on Active Duty (1980's) and then filtered into the Army Reserve and Army

National Guard (1990's). During the late 1980's the federal government could have had quite a fundraiser if they would have let soldiers pay to shoot at, throw grenades at and just blow these Gamma Gotes up.

garrison

Garrison refers to permanent military establishments. For Army soldiers, garrison means a place where soldiers can live in buildings and have hot and cold showers and electricity. Many times while on duty we have to live in tents, or have to adapt to other non-permanent living arrangements. Returning to garrison means returning to a fixed location that already has a secure perimeter, fence, and that 'we-the assigned unit' does not have to provide security because there is already a security force in place.

A garrison environment cannot be entered except by individuals who pass a checkpoint guarded by military or civilian security. Civilians who wish to enter a military establishment can do so if they have a legitimate reason and destination that can be verified.

Off duty has broader meanings in garrison then it does when we are *on duty* on location somewhere or deployed somewhere. In garrison we can wear civilian clothes off duty, we can smoke or chew tobacco if we want without resorting to getting it on the black market and we can drink alcohol if we want. In garrison we can find some civilians to kick it with when we are *off duty* or we can make arrangements to see our loved ones.

gig

A *gig* is a naturally occurring or leadership induced infraction/or error that should be found during an inspection.

GOV / POV

GOV: Government Owned Vehicle: If it belongs to the military or the federal government and is for Official Use Only it is a GOV.

POV: Privately Owned Vehicle: If it belongs to an individual and is not for Official Use Only it is a privately owned vehicle.

grass drills (your ass is grass)

Grass drills usually happen during Basic Combat Training but can occur at other times. During grass drills the (Drill) Sergeants take you out on a grass or mud field and start calling out the names of exercises rapidly. They call out *the push up, starting position, move* and no sooner do you get in position and start pushing and they will call out something else like *the mountain climber, move*. It goes on and on and on. It's as though a soldier can't move fast enough to keep up with the commands. No matter how fast the soldiers are moving, the Sergeants yell at you and tell you that you are moving too slow and that you need to listen. The skin and uniforms of the soldiers will be covered with mud and grass stain. *Your ass is grass* refers to being in a situation where no matter what you do, it is just not right.

greens

Greens is an informal word for Dress Greens which is our Class A Dress Greens.

Gung ho

Gung ho refers to soldiers who are motivated, motivated and downright dedicated. Gung ho soldiers are enthusiastic and hard charging.

HQ /HHC

HQ means Headquarters and is a command and control location. HHC means Headquarters and Headquarters Company. If a unit primarily contains Military Police or Military Intelligence there are other individuals in the unit that are not MP or MI soldiers. The unit armor, the unit supply and the mechanics are some of the soldiers that will be assigned to the Headquarters platoon.

hurry up and wait

It is commonplace for soldiers to be required to report somewhere, usually very early in the morning, and then not be needed for hours. Anytime soldiers are required to stand around and wait for something it is called *hurry up and wait*. Many soldiers develop an internal way to meditate when they are *waiting*.

huah

Huah is the most important word in the Army. The pronunciation is varied depending upon the occasion. It is used to accentuate motivation. For example if a small or larger group has been encouraged to do their best, they may collectively sound off with a “hu-ah!” It can be said in a monotone by weary soldiers as a way of indicating that they have understood instructions or information that has been given to them. It can also be shouted in excitement. It can be expressed more animal-like and grunted. It is a verb, a noun and an adjective all at once depending on context. Sometimes we say it backwards in which case huah transforms frontwards into hu-rah so we can say it backwards as rah-hu. It is a way of expressing agreement and commitment. It is as much a battle cry as any worthy expression, sound or word from any military past or present. I believe there is disagreement among military scholars as to whether huah has origins in the American Civil War era “hurrah.”

instant 88 Mikes

An 88 Mike is a driver. An instant 88 Mike is a soldier who the Army needs to drive something somewhere. 88 Mikes are made when the First Sergeant (1SG) informs a soldier that they are now a driver.

jump status

An Airborne soldier that is assigned to a unit that regularly jumps out of airplanes is on *jump status*. Soldiers who are on jump status regularly receive jump pay added to their paychecks.

latrines

Latrines are bathrooms. They are usually larger than household bathrooms.

leave

Active Duty soldiers earn 30 days of paid *leave* per year. Leave refers to the status of being off duty and being allowed to travel or go home if home is far away. Soldiers have to request and be approved for leave in order to be on leave. Soldiers can be recalled from leave.

legs

As far as Airborne soldiers are concerned *legs* are anyone who has not gone Airborne. If you have never jumped out of an airplane and you have not been awarded Airborne status you are a *dirty, nasty, filthy leg*.

line unit

Some military specialties allow soldiers to work independently. If soldiers work independently they are not in line units. If soldiers are part of a larger collective during their duties and if they are usually outside, they are probably line soldiers in line units. Indoor soldiers do not have to wear

their headgear all the time and they can probably scratch their head if they want to. Indoor soldiers can probably take bathroom breaks if they want. Line unit soldiers have to keep all their military gear on including headgear. Line unit soldiers have to be more disciplined about keeping all their military gear on and have to be more disciplined about bathroom breaks.

lollygagging

Lollygagging means moving like pond water at a time when the Drill Sergeant (or other Sergeants) wants you to MOVE.

M-16

An M-16 is a military rifle. It typically fires blanks or 5.56 caliber ammunition. It can be fitted with a grenade launcher or tube which is an extra barrel underneath the main one.

marching call outs from former Marines

Many times there are former Marines who join the Army. Sometimes they are called upon to lead a formation. Soldiers can tell if they have a former Marine in their midst because there is a language difference while marching. At times when an Army soldier will count out *One, Two, Three, Four* a former Marine will call out *Hun, Hoo, Hee, Hore*. At times when a soldier might call out *Forward, March*, a former Marine will call out *Horward, Harch*. No one knows why Marines and former Marines talk like this. There is no known cure. The only reason soldiers in a squad or platoon listen to marching commands like this is because we like the Marines. If we didn't like them so much we would say *Hey, speak English*.

medical coverage for Army Reservists/National Guard

Army Reservists only get medical coverage for themselves when their uniform is on. This means if they injure themselves during convoy

training or during standard night training like map reading/land navigation they are covered for line of duty injuries. During periods when their uniform is on they are also medically covered for illness such as the common cold. Historically, their dependent family members got no medical benefits unless the soldier got deployed and then the soldier had to enroll their family members for medical coverage under a plan known as CHAMPUS some of the time and also known as TRICARE.

Historically, any time a Reservists weekend duty was over and they took off their uniform they no longer had medical coverage from the Army Reserve. However some things have changed. For a long time there were so many Reservists without dental care of their own that whenever they got mobilized their pre-mobilization check-ups revealed they needed dental care. Then the military had to offer dental care to these mobilized Reservists. During the 2000's Reservists were offered opportunities to buy reasonably priced dental care insurance plans through Tricare Army Retirees including Army Reserve Retirees are also eligible to use Tricare for dental coverage based upon enrolling..

mess kits

A mess kit is an item that is issued to soldiers. Some issued items are like library books and have to be turned back in to our unit before we leave that duty assignment. A mess kit resembles the shape of a rounded paperback book. The two hinged parts include a pan/or bowl and plate with compartments. It also has a handle that can be held onto with a tool or gloves if a soldier is heating the mess kit. It is made completely or mostly of aluminum. During storage we fold the two parts together and the handle fastens it shut. Inside it we keep a knife, a spoon and a fork. While I was on active duty we almost never used our mess kits to eat from while in the field. During these days of increased awareness of how much trash we create the Army probably needs a revised mess kit for the 21st and 22nd century.

MEPS (Military Entrance Processing Station)

MEPS is where individuals who are beginning the process of joining the military go for ASVAB tests and to take military physicals. MEPS locations are usually in larger cities within most states or US territories. MEPS are used by the Navy, the Army, the Air Force, the Marines, the Coast Guard and the Merchant Marines to name a few.

military honors: 21 gun salute

One aspect of military honors might include a 21 gun salute. This means that soldiers or members of a veteran's service organization will fire blanks from 7 weapons three times in unison.

military hops

When Active, Reserve or retired members of the military are at a military installation with a military airfield they can find out if they can 'hop' somewhere. This is a way of hitching a one way ride on a military flight. Some types of military aircraft do not ever allow military hoppers on board. There is a posted order or priority for hops. Active and Reserve Retirees are the lowest priority. Servicemembers on Emergency Medical Leave have one of the highest priorities. Military hops are also called Space Available. The type of military aircraft that allow for hops are fixed wing and there must be some type of passenger seating inside.

mogas

Mogas is an Army name for gasoline if it came from a military fuel source. This terminology may be outdated.

MOS

MOS training is Military Occupational Skill training. All soldiers complete training that allows them to have a military skill.

mosquito wings

Some privates wear rank that consists of 1 chevron which looks like an upside down letter V. An upside down letter V also looks like mosquito wings so the rank of PV2 is casually referred to as mosquito wings. Soldiers wearing mosquito wings are Privates (PV2) that have been promoted from entry level Privates (PV1).

Officer

The military includes Officers and Enlisted members. There are four ways to become an Army Officer.

- 1). Attend West Point. Interested individuals should contact a High School Junior Reserve Officers Training Course (JROTC) or a college Reserve Officers Training Course (ROTC) program for guidance regarding West Point.
- 2). Join the Active Duty, Army Reserve or Army National Guard and through your command request an Officers Service Battery (OSB) written test. If an enlisted soldier passes this test and is an outstanding soldier they can get assistance from Officers in their Chain of Command to help them put together an application packet for Officer Candidate School (OCS). There are some prerequisites such as a specific GT score on the ASVAB, a college degree such as an Associate of Arts (AA) or Associate of Science (AS) degree or a higher degree such as a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS). This course of training begins with Officer Candidate School and is followed by the Officer Basics Course.

3). Participate and successfully complete a college Reserve Officers Training Course (ROTC).

4). Individuals who are already doctors, nurses or lawyers and who completed their educations at appropriately accredited universities need to get in touch with Army recruiters that specifically recruit for the Army Medical Department (AMEDD) or the Judge Advocates General (JAG).

Some families mistakenly believe their son or daughter who enlisted is going to be made an officer or promoted into being an officer. That does not happen.

There are times of emergency when enlisted soldiers are given *battlefield commissions* and turned into officers. Battlefield commissions can be taken away when the series of battles/war is over because those individuals typically do not meet the criteria for being a Commissioned Officer.

Officer ranks are as follows:

<u>title</u>	<u>abbreviation</u>	<u>pay grade</u>
2 nd Lieutenant	2LT	O-1
1 st Lieutenant	1LT	O-2
Captain	CPT	O-3
Major	MAJ	O-5
Lieutenant Colonel	LTC	O-6
Colonel	COL	O-7
Brigadier General	BG	O-8
Major General	MG	O-9

Lieutenant General	LTG	O-10
Army Chief of Staff	GEN	O-11

NCO or Non-Commissioned Officer

Once an enlisted soldier has been in a while or is fairly competent they will be promoted enough to become a sergeant. The ranks of Corporal, (E-4), Sergeant, (E-5), Staff Sergeant, (E-6), Sergeant First Class, (E-7), First Sergeant or Master Sergeant, (E-8), and Command Sergeant Major, (E-9) are Non-Commissioned Officers. There is only one Command Sergeant Major of the Army, (E-10). All ranks of sergeants are NCO's or non-coms. These individuals are the backbone of the Army. They handle or oversee logistics and conduct hands on training for younger, newer soldiers. In TV shows and movies lieutenants often do what sergeants really do.

OCONUS

OCONUS is an abbreviation that means outside the continental United States.

oh-dark-30 (pronounced Oh-dark-thirty)

Oh-dark-30 refers to any time that is very early in the morning and involves a soldier being on duty or being told to report in. *Everybody needs to be here at oh-dark-30. Bring all your shit, don't forget your dogtags and ID.*

Officer clubs, NCO clubs, enlisted clubs

Most military installations have Officers clubs with at least one bar and restaurant. Officers Clubs have become all ranks clubs and all ranks are welcome. Back in the day, very large Active Duty military installations like Fort Gordon, Georgia had a separate club for Sergeants known as a Non-Commissioned Officers Club. We referred to it by pronouncing each

initial separately as the NCO Club. Another club was for Enlisted Members. We referred to this by pronouncing each initial separately and call it the EM Club. This club was for soldiers in the ranks of Private (PV1), Private Second Class (PV2), Private First Class (PFC) and Specialist (SPC). Lower ranking enlisted members had separate clubs from higher ranking enlisted to keep us from fraternizing with each other.

orderly room

The expression Orderly Room is used primarily by Active Duty soldiers. An Orderly Room is the main office where at least one soldier does paperwork or administrative work for the First Sergeant (1SG) and the Company Commander (CPT). Every Company has their own Orderly Room.

PFC

PFC means Private First Class. PFC or Private First Class is the title of the rank and E-3 is the description of the pay grade.

PLDC

PLDC refers to Primary Leadership Development Course. This training is required for becoming a Sergeant (SGT) or for keeping the Sergeant stripes if a soldier is promoted before completing the course.

permanent party

For Active Duty Soldiers, their Permanent Party is a duty assignment they will last for at least two or three years. When soldiers are in their Permanent Party they are issued a military patch to wear on their left shoulder. Soldiers who have experienced deployments and combat are authorized to wear the patch of their deployment unit on the right shoulder. In duty uniforms and dress uniforms soldiers wear a combat

patch on their right shoulder and their present duty assignment patch on their left shoulder. If a soldier has more than one authorized combat patch they have to decide which combat patch to wear.

phonetic alphabet /phonetic numerals

The phonetic alphabet is the practice of using words to represent one letter in the alphabet. The phonetic alphabet developed so that servicemembers communicating with 2-way radios that might experience sound distortions and interference could strive for success. This is the entire phonetic alphabet. Alpha-Bravo-Charlie-Delta-Echo-Foxtrot-Gulf-Hotel-India-Kilo-Lima-Mike-November-Oscar-Papa-Quebec-Romeo-Sierra-Tango-Uniform-Victor-Whiskey-Yankee-Zulu.

None of the phonetic alphabet words rhyme with each other because that would create confusion. Numbers are pronounced one by one. For example 100 is one-zero-zero. 9 is pronounced niner and is still pronounced that way. 5 is fife and 3 is tree but fife and tree may have fallen into disuse.

platoon (platoon /squad)

A Platoon is made of about 4 squads of 7 to 10 (enlisted) soldiers. Platoons must have a Platoon Sergeant in charge. If the unit has a Second Lieutenant (2LT) Officer or a First Lieutenant (1LT) Officer to assign to the Platoons then the Platoons will also have a Platoon Leader. Platoons have to have a Platoon Sergeant (enlisted Non-Commissioned Officer) but they do not have to have a Platoon Leader (Commissioned Officer). 3 to 4 Platoons make up a Company.

pogey bait

Pogey bait refers to food that soldiers like to bring to the field with them or which they like to have access to during deployments. It could be

sunflower seeds, it could be Moon Pies. It is whatever soldiers like. It is called pogey bait because there have been times and places (Vietnam, Korea) where little kids run after military vehicles because they want us to throw food at them. We have thrown MRE's, candy bars, gum, etc.

Pogey bait has usually been thrown out by soldiers sitting in troop seats in back of a vehicle. Drivers and assistant drivers do not throw pogey bait. There have been times and places where it looks like a parade of kids because so many kids are running after military vehicles. This practice may have become discontinued and discouraged because of safety concerns.

posse comitatus

In the years following the Civil War many discharged soldiers ran around behaving criminally. They occupied homes and farms. They stole, fought, raped, etc. In 1878 the Posse Comitatus Act was enacted. One of the purposes of the act was to prevent soldiers of the United States from occupying civilian homes in the United States. According to Posse Comitatus, the Active Duty cannot be armed (armed means under arms or using weapons) at home, in America while under orders. The National Guard is the only branch of the military that has legally been allowed to hold and use weapons against citizens of the United States. It is believed that National Guard members will not be trigger happy in their own state because the civilians are their friends and family members.

Posse Comitatus was repealed in 2006 by the Congress and President George W. Bush signed the repeal. The repeal was attached to a defense bill. Then in 2007 the repeal was repealed and changed. Tracing what happened (repeal, repeal of repeal with provisions) can be difficult.

post / post exchange / px

Permanent Army military installations in the United States are usually called posts even if the word post is not used in the name of the installation. Soldiers might refer to going on or off post. Commissaries are always called commissaries but on an Army Post the main store is called a PX or Post Exchange. On an Air Force installation the main store is called a BX for Base Exchange because Air Force Installations are Air Bases. On a Navy installation the main store is called a NEX for Naval Exchange. The Marines have a MX and the Coast Guard has a CGES.

PT /Physical Training

Physical Training refers to working out in the Army.

pup tents

A pup tent is a small tent that fits two soldiers rather snugly. Each soldier carries one half of the pup tent as well as some tent pegs and tent stakes in their rucksacks. Pup tents are so small that is easy for soldiers to roll away in the night and wake up down the hill on a bed of rocks or groundcover cactus exclaiming “*Hey, where’s my platoon, oh shit.*”

qualify

Qualify refers to completing or passing some Army standard of competence for a skill or task. It is usually used after completing some training that may last weeks or months. *I qualified* or *I am Oh-Five-Qualified*. A soldier may refer to a number or letter combination that a civilian just won’t comprehend but the number or letter refers to the training course that was completed. It can be also be used for demonstrating success within individual skills such as during Basic Combat Training. *Yo, I was the last to qualify on night fire.*

recon

Recon means reconnaissance. Recon means that an area has been checked out by eyes and boots on the ground.

Reserve Components

For soldiers the Reserve Components consist of the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard. For the nation, the Reserve Components also include the Air National Guard, the Navy Reserve, the Air Force Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve and the Coast Guard auxiliary.

rocker / rockers

Sergeant Stripes or rank is identified by chevrons, and for higher ranking Sergeants with chevrons and rockers. Chevrons are similar in appearance to upside down letter Vs. Rockers resemble the bottom portion of a letter U. The chevrons and the rockers are connected.

roger

One word that is a significant part of a soldier's lexicon is *Roger*. Originating in prehistoric times or else in sci-fi, Roger was part of the phrase Roger Wilco which can be deciphered as *received-orders, will-comply*. For a soldier the *will-comply* part is redundant. All that matters is letting others know you have received orders or instructions. *Roger that, copy that, clear* or *check* are the words many soldiers use at meaningful intervals especially in regard to performing sequential tasks.

RPG

An RPG is a Rocket Propelled Grenade.

R & U shop /military housing

An R & U is a repair and upkeep shop. Sometimes Active Duty military installations own the housing on their installations just like colleges may own their own student or facility housing. When housing on a military post is owned by the military, there are often R & U shops where the military or family member can borrow tools or use common supplies like nails or hinges. Historically, the military felt it was good to let the military household take care of their housing.

In recent decades however, the military has allowed for-profit contractors to develop property on military installations and then rent this housing to military families. Unfortunately, as a result of the final contracts that have been entered into, many military families have been prohibited from making simple repairs to doorknobs or hinges. If the military family makes their own repairs the military servicemember can get in trouble with their command for violating the terms of a contract. Small repairs often have to be done by independent civilian contractors who might come from a distance of 4 or 5 states at cost to the military in order to complete a repair.

Another observation about military housing is that previously the military often had staggered rent prices. Officers paid more rent than enlisted. High ranking enlisted paid more than lower ranking enlisted. The military has long felt that staggered rent scales were fair but for-profit-civilians do not understand that concept. It should be added that previously because of the differentiated rent the size of the rental units were either more spacious or less spacious.

rucksack

Rucksacks are official military backpacks. They are much bigger than academic book bags.

servicemember

A servicemember is someone who wears a uniform and has taken an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America from all enemies foreign and domestic. A servicemember has to follow orders and is subject to punishment as defined by the UCMJ, Uniform Code of Military Justice for any violations of orders.

sham & sham artist

Sham and sham artist are terms used by soldiers to describe peers that always seem to find ways to get out of work. Shammers are always finding ways to spend time shamming and they are looked down upon.

The Army ethos has a strong work ethic and a resulting sense of pride. Shammers cannot embody the same sense of pride or self respect because they get off on doing nothing at the exact time as their peers are doing something. There are times when every soldier wants to sham but if someone shammed all the time they would be worthless.

ship date

The date that a recruit begins traveling on government provided or government paid for transportation in order to report to Basic Combat Training is known as a ship date.

shit on shingles / SOS

Shit on Shingles is creamed chipped beef that is served over two slices of bread that are laid flat. This is food for plates not bowls. It looks like gravy over bread. It looks like...well...there is a reason for the nickname. Some soldiers really like it.

short-timer

There was a time when an enlisted soldier could count on being rotated out of a duty assignment after 24 or 36 months and could depend on being released from the Army on a specific date.

Once a soldier knew for sure that they had about 45 days or less remaining in a specific assignment, that soldier becomes a short timer. Short timers exude indescribable happiness.

sick call

At the beginning of a duty day, soldiers usually have to participate in a formation or a form of accountability (roll call). If soldiers feel they have a legitimate reason to see a doctor they can report to sick call instead. In some units soldiers report to formation before reporting to sick call and in some units soldiers report to sick call first because sick call starts earlier than formation.

snake

“Look, a Snake.” In a uniformed crowd, if someone says *Look a snake* or tells someone *to take care of that snake*, it means a soldier has a bootlace hanging loose from their boots. For the uninitiated, soldiers in uniform have to keep their uniform pants tucked into their boots so that there are no loose pant legs and there is never anything to trip over.

Sort-a-outta-luck /SOL (pronounced as it is spelled: S.O.L)

SOL means sort-of-outtta luck. This dates from at least the Vietnam War era. If there is only room for 14 of 16 soldiers in the back of a 5 ton vehicle, and everybody is headed to chow, the 2 soldiers who have to walk are SOL.

Specialist (SPC)

(A note about SP4 and SP5 and SP6)

A Specialist is a military enlisted rank. When a Private First Class (PFC) is promoted, the next rank is the rank of Specialist (SPC). When a Specialist (SPC) is promoted the next rank is the rank of Sergeant (SGT). At one time the Army had Specialist 5 (SP5) and Specialist 6 (SP6) ranks. When the SP5 and SP6 ranks were being used, SP4 meant Specialist 4. As the SP5 and SP6 ranks were phased out the abbreviation for Specialist changed from SP4 to SPC.

Based on sheer numbers there are more Specialists in the Army than any of the other ranks. Yet it remains a rank about which little is known because the word SPECIALIST does not sound like military rank to the average civilian. Corporal sounds military. Sergeant sounds military but Specialist does not sound military.

The appearance of Specialist rank insignia is also different. All of the other enlisted rank includes a combination of chevrons and rockers. Specialist rank looks like a chevron and rocker that are placed together, turned upside down and then filled in so there is no white space. An eagle is in the center. The eagle resembles the eagle that is present on the rank of the (SMA) Sergeant Major of the Army, but there are differences in what the eagle grasps in its talons. *Specialist rank wants to know 'Why am I here?'*

Standard Operating Procedures /SOP (pronounced as it is spelled: SOP)

Standard Operating Procedures are the set of protocols that soldiers are taught for certain situations that they are likely to encounter or may encounter in an emergency. There are Standard Operating Procedures for

handling US Mail, military weapons, and identifying where soldiers can smoke their cigarettes.

squad (squad /platoon / company)

When soldiers line up in formation there are only 4 squads. Each squad has a squad leader. Sometimes squad leaders are Specialists (SPC), sometimes they are Sergeants (SGT) and sometimes they are even Staff Sergeants (SSG). 4 squads equal 1 platoon and 4 platoons make up a Company.

squared away

Squared away refers to soldiers who keep their uniforms and their military gear highly organized and looking good. Squared can also refer to keeping paperwork highly organized.

stand-by...prepare to copy

“Stand-by... Prepare to copy.” Stand-by means exactly as it sounds. It is the way the speaker tells the listener or whoever the audience is that they are going to receive some pertinent information. *Prepare to copy* traditionally means the listener or audience needs to write something down to be absolutely certain they have the correct information. The information will have to be conveyed to those with more rank and it has to be accurate.

The *organized* State Militia

There is such a thing as an organized state militia. If you walk into a National Guard Armory you will notice pictures on the wall. You will see a picture of the Commander in Chief, that is, the President. You will also see pictures of the entire Chain of Command such as the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of Defense as well as uniformed members of the Chain of Command like the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Then,

on another wall in the Armory, you will see pictures of a General, a Colonel, etc., and on their uniform where it should say US Army it says the name of their state such as California. These people in the pictures and the people in their command are members of the organized state militia. I met several members of California's militia when I was in the California National Guard. They were volunteers. They received no pay unless the state had asked for their services. They learned about many of the same things the soldiers learned so that in a time of emergency the state could use them for various tasks that need to be done when large deployments happen.

Prior to learning about them firsthand I was completely misinformed. I remember once I asked a soldier a question regarding who was in these pictures on the armory walls.

“Oh those are PX soldiers, wanna-be's. They just buy whatever rank they want and they buy themselves whatever ribbons they want. It's make believe.” I remember him well and that soldier was a really good guy but in this regard he did not know what he was talking about. In the case of the *organized* militia, my friend was wrong.

As far as other militia groups go, it is a free country and people can form neighborhood watch groups, bicycle clubs or militias if they want. If they manage to make their communities better, or even do no harm, so be it. If they break the law then they become a law enforcement problem. Loose militias are out there.

The *organized* state militias are informed. They are prepared just in case and they dedicate personal time in pursuit of preparedness. They are assets to their communities and their state or territory, if their state or territory is truly using them effectively.

stateside

Stateside refers to any location in the continental United States or CONUS. Places outside the United States as well as Alaska and Hawaii are OCONUS because they are so far away. The US Army considers Alaska to be an overseas tour.

stay in your lane

The Army uses the expression *stay in your lane* as a reminder to soldiers that they can only talk to members of the press about their own feelings and their immediate duties and responsibilities as long as classified or compromising information is not discussed. Soldiers can give a 'shout out' to their hometown or state, their family and loved ones. They can say positive things about how they feel about their Army buddies. They can honestly discuss feelings or fear or nervousness. Soldiers cannot discuss policy because it is not their military job to develop military policy. High ranking officers and Public Affairs Officers are the only soldiers who can discuss policy.

TA-50 Alley Pronounced Tee-AY-fifty

Korea used to have an area that was formally off limits called TA-50 Alley by soldiers. It looked like a flea market. Anything soldiers might want like duffel bags and uniforms were for sale there. Some of the things that soldiers could not get through official channels were available for sale too.

Troop Medical Clinic / TMC

If a stateside Active Duty military installation does not have a larger medical facility on site, it will have a TMC. The soldiers in medical specialties that work in a TMC are part of the command that is based at the nearest active duty military (Army) facility. The TMC provides services that probably meet the needs of most soldiers but they can also

coordinate getting the soldier to a higher level of medical support of needed.

Troops

Troops refer to members of the military but it primarily refers to members of the military who sacrifice the most such as many of the line units in the Army and the Marines. It really does not refer to rear echelon soldiers with duty assignments in rear echelon locations. Troops includes Officers and Enlisted.

Turkey Farm

The Turkey Farm once referred to an area in Korea that was off limits and it was filled with Black Market military gear.

UCMJ: The Uniform Code of Military Justice and the Manual for Courts Martial describe rules and procedures that affect all servicemembers wearing uniforms of the United States. The UCMJ is part of the backbone of the Army but it also has to be enforced. Soldiers within commands, battalions and commands need to have a sense of whether wrong doers are held accountable by UCMJ.

Soldiers within all ranks should perceive that others within all ranks are being held accountable. If Enlisted never see Officers held accountable, and there are events when Officers should have been held accountable, it has a demoralizing effect.

use of deadly force

If use of deadly force is authorized soldiers have the right to shoot to kill. During Operation Katrina Relief, use of deadly force* was authorized but only to protect life not to protect property.

* The group I went in with from the New Mexico National Guard flew on a military plane from Kirtland Air Force Base to New Orleans Naval Air Station in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana. As soon as we got off the plane, we attended a briefing conducted by a JAG Officer that was already present. He authorized use of deadly force.

Our group commander, a Lieutenant Colonel, did not believe we should have taken our M16's to Louisiana. He had us turn them in for accountability purposes and only the MPs kept their weapons.

veteran

Any individual who has served honorably in a military uniform and been discharged honorably is a veteran. Some veterans are combat veterans and some veterans have not been in combat. There are varying legal definitions regarding veterans with respect to their eligibilities. The Veteran's Health Administration is available to veterans of Active Duty and to servicemembers who have been awarded some disability status for injuries sustained in uniform. Not all honorably discharged members of the Army Reserve and Army National Guard are authorized to use the Veteran's Health Administration medical centers and hospitals. Army Reservists and Army National Guard members who are honorably discharged without disabilities and who do not have prior Active Duty service cannot use the Veteran's Health Administration and when they can it is for a limited number of months based on their deployments. Some veterans are eligible for veteran's preference points when applying for government jobs and some are not.

war face

There are times when soldiers have to keep a serious face. This is called a war face. We usually present a war face when we stand at *Attention* for a very long time.

Warrant Officer, WO1, WO2, WO3, CW4, CW5

The Army has Warrant Officers. These soldiers begin their military service as enlisted soldiers. Some specialties that involve technical skills are fields that have Warrant Officers and these are subject matter experts who must have ‘hands on’ expertise. This is not an administrative only position. A Warrant Officer in the field of helicopter repair has to know how to repair a helicopter. WO1 means Warrant Officer 1. WO2 means Warrant Officer 2. WO3 means Warrant Officer 3. CW4 means Chief Warrant Officer 4. CW5 means Chief Warrant Officer 5. Sometimes Warrant Officers do not like being referred to as Sir or Ma’am even though as Officers they have to be addressed as Sir or Ma’am for military courtesy. Once Warrant Officers have the rank of WO3 and above they are technically Chief Warrant Officers and their soldiers usually call them Chief. Most soldiers always address all Warrant Officers as Chief.

wash rack

A wash rack is a location, usually on a military location, where soldiers can *do it themselves* and wash military vehicles of all sizes. Wash racks use recycled water.

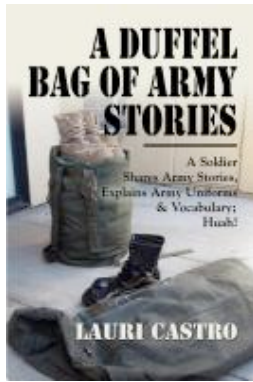
Workers Compensation and the National Guard

There are times when National Guard soldiers are on Federal Orders and other times when they are on State Orders. When National Guard soldiers are on Federal Orders they are eligible to receive medical care if they have documented injuries/illnesses. When soldiers are on State Active Duty Orders they have to submit a worker’s compensation claim if their injury/illness will last longer than the time period that they are under duty orders for.

Lauri Castro

XO (pronounced as individual letters, X O)

XO means Executive Officer. The XO serves under the Commanding Officer. A Colonel (COL) or Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) will usually have a Major (MAJ) as an XO. A Captain (CPT) will usually have a First Lieutenant (1LT) as an XO.



Have you ever wondered about soldiers? Do you have unanswered questions about Army uniforms? Have you ever listened to soldiers or veterans having conversations and barely understood what they were saying? A Duffel Bag of Army Stories is a woman veteran's first publication - revealing humorous stories and difficulties. It also explains Army Uniforms and Army Vocabulary. This book is perfect for civilians wishing to learn more about the Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard.

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