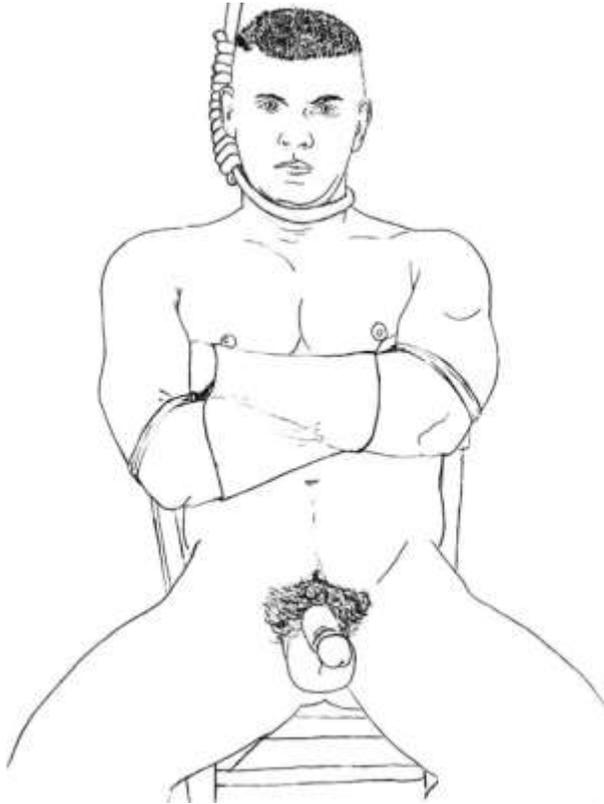


the BrigRat

Soldier Boy

better'n a boy scout!



BrigRat sent this story along with this newspaper clipping -- evidently from a small town in Georgia -- the Chatahoochee runs through west central Georgia, GBI is the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. He said the narrator wrote most of the story -- up to the last day.

Body Identified

The body dredged from Chatahoochee last week was identified as Donald R. Nesmit, 27, a dishonorably discharged soldier who had a record of drug pushing. He had been convicted twice, the second time serving a year at hard labor before being dishonorably discharged. A Police spokesman said they were investigating this as an organized crime execution. Anyone with information is asked to contact Sgt. Beebe Buckman with the Dawson County Sheriff's Department, or Agent Mike Landers of the local GBI branch.

Army life had been pretty good, up to then. I had enlisted right out of High School, partly

for the excitement and fun and travel promised by the recruiter, and partly for lack of anything much to do around my small-town home.

Basic Training was easy since I had always been physically active, playing sports, running and so on, as well as spending a lot of time hiking, hunting and gathering woodland skills. Advanced Infantry Training was just more of the same, and I got ready to ship out with my unit to a foreign assignment.

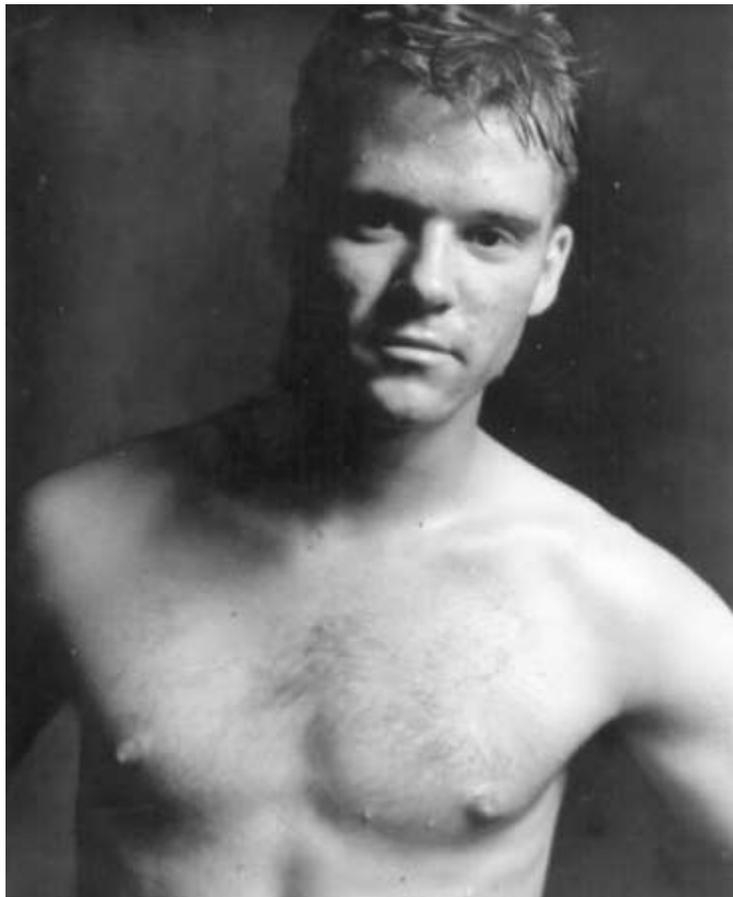
I enjoyed going to the Beer Hall or some of the joints just off base that were more interested in grabbing a soldier's pay than checking ID's, getting drunk with my buddies with increasing frequency.

The Army had really cracked down on drugs of all kinds, but off base almost anything was available if you knew where to look, and once in a while that sweet smell of pot would drift out of a barracks or some hiding place away from the main part of the base.

I didn't really care that much for pot, but the challenge was fun. I would put on my camouflage fatigues and sneak out of the barracks late at night, then avoid the sentries and MP's, crawling under the wire to get off base. A couple of miles run back and forth, dodging any traffic along the way, and I would be back with enough pot in the cargo pockets of my fatigues to keep a bunch of us happy for a week.

The night after one of these excursions, three of us were getting quietly high, hidden well into a large clump of bushes in a remote part of the base. Sudden noise, bright lights and barking dogs didn't seem to matter a bit as I stood up slowly, hands in the air, then put them behind my back for the hand-cuffs to be snapped in place.

Next morning in the stockade, things seemed much more serious as I talked with investigators, admitting that I had supplied the pot, but refusing to say where I got it. This cost me a couple of days standing at attention in the hot sun and some nights lying on a cement floor hogtied with hand-cuffs and leg-irons until I finally made up some fake details of a supply system.



Just for my own amusement, I pictured my Company Commander as I described my supposed contact, but nobody picked up on it. There was a lot of talk of years in prison and bad discharges, but because of my youth and inexperience, as well as what they believed to be my coöperation, it wasn't that bad.

It still hurt, though, to stand in a court room wearing my best uniform and say,

"Guilty, sir."

My buddies got a month each, but I spent three months at hard labor in the stockade for supplying.

When I finally got out of the stockade, I fell into a strange sort of limbo which happens sometimes in the Army. I had been detached from my unit when it shipped out, so nobody quite knew what to do with me.

Sergeants in the supply system are connivers all, and one of them latched onto me, getting me assigned as his gofer to run errands and take care of details, but naturally not telling me that I would take the fall in case discrepancies in the supply accounts were discovered.

This suited me fine, as I would carry a clipboard and look official as I pretty much did as I pleased around the base.

Life became a little boring, and again it was more for excitement than anything else that I approached Vinnie, my previous direct contact, and the others who had provided my pot.

They were impressed by my silence under questioning and pleased by my new freedom, so I found myself crawling under the wire two or three times a week and making deliveries all around the base but more careful, though, not to use anything myself.

After about half a year of this, I took a week of leave and Vinnie's boss took me on a trip to Miami Beach to meet the big boss.

It was a good time, living in a huge house with all the food and drink and amusements I could ask for. Surrounded by all this luxury, I felt a little embarrassed to wear the faded jeans and boots and T-shirts which were my usual civilian clothes, but was given some nice slacks, sport shirts and such so I could feel comfortable in town or on the beach.

I talked with the boss several times, describing the Army base and some of the ways I was bringing things in, as well as how the operation might be expanded both on my own base and others in the southeast region which he controlled.

Back at the base, life seemed very raw by contrast, but I was really more comfortable in my fatigues than living so high in Miami Beach.

It was some four months later when they came for me. I had been sitting around in my cammie T-shirt and fatigue pants and boots, talking with some buddies in the barracks, but had just gone to the latrine at the end of the building.

Luckily, I caught a glimpse of the approaching MP'S and ducked into an unused shower stall as they went by, then heard them asking my buddies where I was. I jumped out of a window, quickly pulled off an unobtrusive access panel in the foundation and snaked my way into the crawl space below the floor, then replacing the panel from inside.

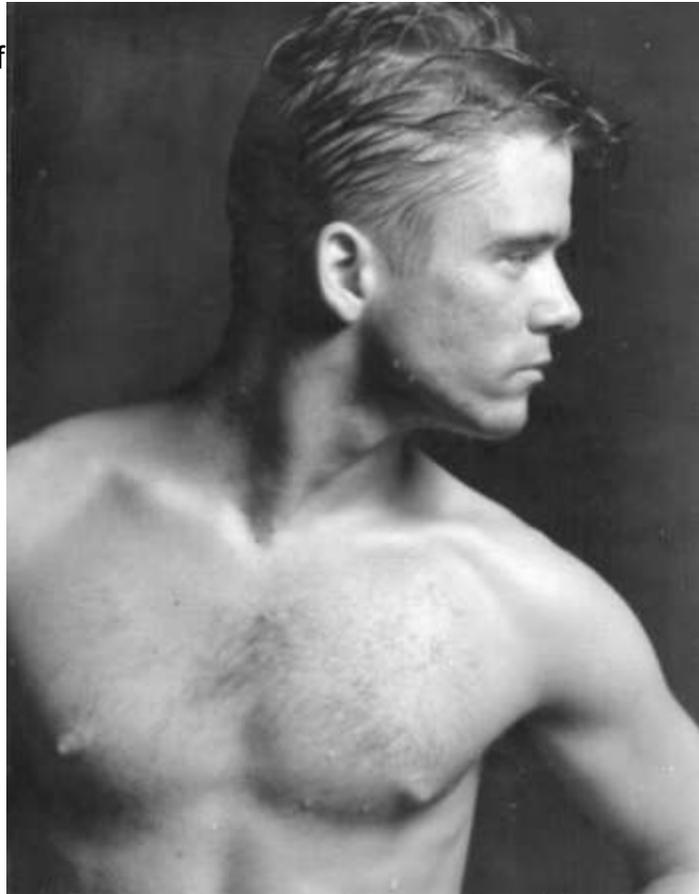
The MP'S happened to see another man in fatigues just disappearing around a nearby building, so went dashing off in chase. They left two men in the building and others searched the area, so it was very late that night when I crawled out, then went under the wire.

I used all my woodcraft as I worked my way out of town, once stopping at a house to steal enough food to keep going. I holed up in the woods all day, then kept a regular appointment with Vinnie the next night.

He was naturally upset at hearing I would no longer be able to distribute on base, but drove me to a small, isolated cabin where I was told to wait. He came back in a couple of hours with some Big Macs and shakes, then watched as I wolfed them down.

As I looked up from my hasty meal, I noticed a small automatic pistol with a silencer aimed directly at my chest.

"What the hell? Hey, Vinnie, what gives?"



"Sorry, Donnie boy, but you know too much, too many people, important people."

"So you're going to shoot me?"

"Like I said, sorry, but I have my orders."

"But you know I won't say anything. You know what happened last time I got caught. I didn't talk then, I won't talk now."

"Sorry, Don. Now, just get up real slow, turn around and lean against that wall."

I did as he told me, hoping for a chance to do something about it, but he was too good to give me an opening. I spread eagled against the wall, hearing just a slight metallic chink before a hand-cuff was snapped on one wrist, then it was pulled down and the other was pulled down to meet it.

Vinnie had obviously watched a lot of cop shows -- he knew just how to keep me off balance until my hands were tightly cuffed behind my back, palms facing outward. He picked up a chair and placed it facing into a corner.

"Sit down, Don, and keep quiet."

I sat in the chair, facing the corner of two walls, wondering if I would ever get out of this. Vinnie was good at his job, and I was pretty sure he would carry it out. Here I was, barely twenty, about to die, the suspense unbearable.

"What happens now, Vinnie?"

"We wait for a little, then we go for a ride. I told you to keep quiet."

Silence drew out for seemingly forever, but perhaps only half an hour.

"OK, Don, let's go."



I got up and walked outside as Vinnie held the door for me, then climbed into the back seat of his car. I thought about begging, pleading for my life, but that seemed pointless. He would do what he would do regardless of whatever I might say.

He stayed on back roads as he drove, seemingly in aimless circles, but I finally guessed he was checking to be sure he was not being followed. He turned onto a narrow track into a stand of tall pines, driving now only by the light of a partial moon for a few hundred yards, then stopped and carefully turned around, got out and held the door open for me.

"Let's go, Don."

No point in waiting. I got out, then walked away from the track about fifty yards in the direction he had gestured.

"Stop there. Get down on your knees."

Not even a chance, I could never jump him from that position.

"Give me a minute, please Vinnie?"

"OK."

I knelt there in my camouflage T-shirt and pants and combat boots. In this outfit, someone would have to almost trip over my body before seeing it. I might never be found.

"Vinnie. Let someone know where I am afterwards, please? I don't want to just rot out here. Take my wallet if you want, I won't need it."

"OK. Now shut up."

"Thanks."

I knelt still, hand-cuffs biting sharply into my wrists, trying to think of some words to whatever God might be listening. If He had allowed me to come to this, it probably wouldn't do me much good now, but I had nothing to lose. I thought of Vinnie's silencer right behind my blond crewcut and wondered if I would hear the shot, feel the bullet. Finally I could take it no longer.

"OK Vinnie. Do it."

Nothing.

"Do it, damn you. Get it over with."

Nothing. Some faint hope came over me and, very slowly, I turned to look back. I just caught a glimmer of light, heard an engine start, and I was alone. *Oh my God! Thank you, Vinnie. Thank you, God.* I stood up, then turned in the direction the car had gone, slowly walking through the woods until I reached the road.

What now? I wouldn't get far in these cuffs. After my fear, I didn't really care. The stockade would look pretty good right now.

I walked. And walked. Dawn turned to day as I abruptly came to a minor highway. Several cars whizzed past. Maybe someone would help me, maybe get rid of the cuffs, give me a chance. One of the passing cars screeched to a stop, circled, and came back to me. Too late to run. A young soldier in fatigues got out, walked up to me, grinning.

"Well, well. You just might be the guy the MP'S have been looking for. They've been driving everyone crazy. Everything searched, long delay getting off base. You've caused a lot of trouble. How'd you get those hand-cuffs on, anyway?"

I was too tired and too glad to be alive to bother trying to lie.

"Yeah, I guess I'm who they're looking for. A friend put the cuffs on, then he left me out there."

"Some friend," he snorted. "Let's go. I'll drive you back."

All too soon we turned in at the Main Gate. The MP'S were really checking only outgoing cars and didn't pay attention to us among the regular morning stream of cars going on the base.

"Stupid MP'S. No wonder they lost you. Couldn't find you if you walked in with a brass band, I bet."

He drove to the Provost Marshall's office and followed me into the building, enjoying the sensation as they realized who I was. He had to tell his story about half a dozen times before receiving grudging thanks, then left me.

Nobody seemed to have a key that would fit the hand-cuffs which had long before caused my hands to lose any feeling, and some officer just said to leave them for now and get on with the questioning.

I sat there for hours, talking to one investigator after another, then around again, always with the same result. I told them how I left the base, very briefly that I had met someone who had taken me out to the woods to shoot me, but had changed his mind and here I was. They kept asking for names, locations, who, what, where? Finally I just kept repeating one phrase, over and over, no matter what they asked.

"I was kneeling out in the woods with a pistol at the back of my head. He could have pulled the trigger as easily as not, but he didn't. I have nothing more to say."

Eventually they accepted that and I got a lecture on misplaced loyalty, then was taken to the stockade where someone finally managed to get rid of the cuffs before my hands fell off. Sitting in my cell, after, I kept wondering why Vinnie had not pulled the trigger. I wondered what would happen to him ... if I would ever be able to thank him.

The Court Martial was routine and quick. I pleaded Guilty to the few charges of distributing drugs that they knew about and firmly denied anything else. With my prior conviction, though, this time I was sentenced to one year at hard labor and a Dishonorable Discharge.

I thought I was lucky, considering what almost happened.

They say you learn things in the stockade. Like how to be a man. Like how tough the guards are. Like how they own your body -- for their fun and games. What I learned was how to take a fist in my gut for no reason at all. What I learned was how to take a knee to the balls and say,

"Thank you, Sir! Can I have another, Sir!"

What I learned was how to drop my pants and grab my ankles at the snap of a finger. I learned how to grab the bars for balance when bending forward and spreading my legs back.



I learned how to lick and suck cock, how to swallow cum, how to swallow piss. And I learned how to take a cock up my ass and say,

"Thank you, Sir!" How to take a fist up my ass and scream. I learned how to be soft and cuddly to a hairy gorilla, to kiss him like I meant it, to lick and suck his tits, his balls, his cock like I enjoyed it.

Yeah, I learned lots of things in the stockade. Most I learned how tough I could be -- how much I could take without protesting. How I could do things I never thought I could do, how I could let things be done to me I never thought I would.

The year in the stockade seems to go on forever, but eventually even the longest time comes to pass. The MP'S took some little pleasure in giving me back the pair of old jeans, an Army green T-shirt and a pair of boots which was all of my stuff which had not been looted somewhere along the line.

After all the paperwork was done and I had changed out of my prisoner's fatigues for the last time, one of the MP'S grinned as he came up to me with a pair of hand-cuffs. I had worn them so much by now that I didn't care, just let him cuff me behind my back.

Two MP'S led and two more followed as we walked through the busiest parts of the base on the way to the Main Gate, and try as I might, I couldn't help blushing in embarrassment as snickers and comments and stares followed me all the way.

Just outside the gate, they finally removed the cuffs, handed me the envelope containing my DD and other documents and told me to get lost.

Now what? No money, no job, no friends, nowhere to go. A DD on my record would forever keep me from getting any sort of decent job. Maybe Vinnie should have pulled that trigger and to hell with it.

I walked along the highway toward town, wishing I could get a beer at one of the joints I passed. I wondered if anyone was following me. Just then, a burgundy Caddy pulled along side. Bingo. I must have sensed it without knowing how.

I didn't know the man, but I knew the type. I had seen men like him with Vinnie's group here, and more in Miami Beach. He zipped the window down a quarter inch or so and called out,

"Need a lift, soldier?"

I nodded. He popped the door locks and I opened the passenger door and got in, holding tight to my papers.

"Where to?"

I shrugged my shoulders and grinned -- a forced one.

"Nowhere special. Maybe just a couple of beers then?"

He knew what I wanted most, just now. Maybe he had once wanted the same thing under similar circumstances.

"OK. Sounds good. It's been a long time."

"I know," he said.

All right. No pussy-footing around. He knew who I was and wanted me to know he knew. The organization must have some pretty good sources on Base. Nothing more was said until we sat in a booth with a couple of empty beer glasses and another one full before me. He grinned.

"Pretty thirsty?"

"It's been a long time," once again.

"What do you figure to do now? It doesn't look like you have some cushy job waiting for you. I know they don't do much for you when you get out of what you just went through."

I looked at him but really past him, a little fever in my eyes. It felt good. I brought myself back to reality to hear him say,

"By the way, you ought to know that some people really appreciate your imitation of a clam. Good work."

"Thanks. No, I was just wondering what to do. I haven't thought about much else the last month or so, and still have no good ideas."

"We might have something for you to do. Pay is good, not much trouble with taxes. We could use you."

"What if I say no? Are you going to shoot me?"

He laughed,

"Not after what happened to the last guy who tried that."

"What do you mean? Did something happen to Vinnie?"

Suddenly serious, he had said too much.

"No, nothing like that. Just a little trouble. No sweat."

I knew he was lying now, and it troubled me. Still, there was nothing I could do about it. He went on.

"Look, you don't have to trust me. I was just told to let you know there is something available, then to give you this and to wait for a day or so. I'll see you again and you can tell me if you're interested in going farther.

"If you are, then I arrange for you to take the next step. Someone else will tell you more, still no strings attached and you can still back out. You'll be told before anything happens that would lock you in. OK?"

He slid an envelope across the table. A hundred dollars. Smart. Enough to keep me in a motel and meals for a day or so, but not enough to do much else.

"What do I have to lose? OK. I'll meet you here. Tomorrow, same time. That good enough?"

"Fine. See you then. Oh, by the way. This is just between us, you understand?"

"Of course. Who would I tell?"

He laughed again.

"Better not be anybody, but I don't think there is."

Next day, same time. I had a receipt from a cheap motel, a terrible hangover and almost no money left. Thank God he was there.

"Hi. Good to see you. Decided yet?"

"Not much choice to make, nothing else to do."

"Good. I figured as much."

We finished our drinks and went out. As we approached the airport, he handed me another envelope. A ticket to Miami.

"Flight leaves in about an hour. When you get there, walk out to the street. I'll just drop you here. Good luck. Maybe see you again some day."

"So long. Thanks."

No names, I had noticed. There are never any names. I was nervous during the flight, wondering what would happen.

In Miami, nobody seemed to notice me. Who would? Just a kid in jeans and T-shirt, like a thousand other kids in any big airport. At the street, I looked around. Now what? Suddenly a plain van with no windows pulled to a stop.

The side door slid open, a figure beckoned. I jumped in, the door slammed and we were off. A partition had been installed just behind the front seats so I could see nothing outside, and only dimly in here.

I heard a voice talking briefly over a radio a few times, then nothing but traffic noises outside. Obviously they didn't want me to know where we were going. Probably someone was watching to see if we were being followed.

"Lie down, face down, spread out."

I did as I was told and quick hands checked me over very carefully.

"Roll over."

I did, and again was carefully searched. He must have sensed my slight embarrassment.

"Sorry about that. We have to be careful."

Now he was using a flashlight to examine my boots.

"Looks OK. We'll check again when we get there," he called to the driver. *These are very careful people*, I thought. We drove for an hour or more, twisting, turning, changing speed; no way I could ever reconstruct this trip.

Finally we came to a stop. After a pause, the door slid open and I was hustled out of the van and into a door directly ahead, so I only slightly glimpsed the interior of a large garage, dimly lit.

We climbed a set of metal stairs, went through another door, along a short hall and into a room. I looked around, noting a bed and bureau, a TV set, a few chairs around a table and an open door leading to a bathroom. All the walls were of cement block and there were no windows.

"Strip."

I took off my boots, then all my clothes, and stood there as he took my things, closed the door with a heavy thud and the sound of a bolt, leaving me alone, buck naked.

In about half an hour he was back with my things.

"Just one more thing."

He pulled on a rubber glove, then poked around in my mouth, using a flashlight.

"Turn around and bend over."

He completed his examination.

"Sorry about that. Just have to be careful."

"OK. I understand, I think."

He laughed.

"Yeah, I can imagine. You want anything to eat?"

"Sure that would be great. Burgers and shakes OK?"

"Yeah, wait a few minutes, I'll be back."

As more than a few minutes passed, I was thinking back to the last time someone had brought me burgers and shakes. When they came, they were from McDonald's, too.

A day passed. McDonald's was doing a good business out of this. I watched TV, bored. I might as well be back in the stockade. I wondered how many others had been locked up here, and what had happened to them.

Finally he arrived -- the big boss himself, with a couple of men.

I jumped to my feet and stood at attention. The Army had trained me too well. He smiled slightly, then nodded to his men,

"Wait outside."

I didn't think they liked that, but they did it.

"Now young man, please sit down. I expect you are wondering what all this is about."

"Yes, sir."

I looked at him across the table. He was relaxed, I was rigid.

"You know a little about some of our operations. You participated to some small extent. It cost you a year of your life, and at your age that's a long time. I would like to give you a chance to get something back for that year and, especially, for your silence during that year.

"After what they did to you, you have good reason not to love the Army. We do a good deal of business around military bases. You can easily pass as a soldier, know all the jargon, the accents, the special things that only someone who has been there can know.

"Dressed as you are, anyone would think you a soldier on pass. With a

uniform and some forged cards, you could go onto any base in the country, perhaps excepting some high security areas in which we are not interested anyway."

He paused.

"Yes, sir."

Let him tell me what he wants.

"We arrange for distribution of certain products. You already know what they are. Maybe a few more varieties, but all much the same."

I knew. Drugs.

"Yes, sir."

"We need connections and distributors. We need to know what is happening on certain bases where we have interests. We need someone like yourself who can blend in, who can obtain such information. Sometimes we have complications. Some competition here, some snoopers there. We need some of these annoyances to go away."

I caught my breath. He wants me to kill for him. I learned lots of things in the stockade, but this was not one of them. You're supposed to learn how to kill a man in the army. But that was all dummy practice, all make-believe. Besides, the enemy is not a man, he's just the enemy. I didn't know if I could do it. More, I knew I didn't want to do it, even if it meant....

"Yes, sir."

"We require absolute obedience. No questions, no quibbles, just do it. You will be tested on this from time to time, just so we may be certain of your continued reliability. Do you understand this?"

"Yes, sir."

"In return, you will have the use of apartments or houses in your areas of operation, an appropriate car, plenty of spending money, nice vacations, all the good things in life. Are you still interested in our proposition?"

"Sir, may I think about it for awhile? And what will happen if I say no?"

"Certainly. You may remain here. I will come about this time tomorrow. If you wish to join us, we will proceed from there. If not, you will be taken to the airport and given a ticket to wherever you wish in this country."

"Sir, that seems fair enough. One thing, though. I have never killed a person. Lots of animals, but no people."

"Should you join us, that is an omission which will soon be corrected. But it should not be a major part of your duties. For obvious reasons, we prefer to settle our problems by more peaceful means."

No doubt about that. If I say yes, I'll have to kill someone. I wonder who. I guess it wouldn't matter if it was just another druggie. I wonder if Vinnie went through this. He failed his test with me. I wonder what that got him.

"Yes, sir. I'll think about it sir."

"Good."

He walked to the door, tapped, and it opened. He turned back to see me standing, again, at rigid attention.

"Until tomorrow."

McDonald's did some more business. I sweated over my decision all night and well into the day.

Time was passing, and I had to have an answer. On one hand, excitement, money, good living, all that. On the other hand, what could I expect out of life, starting from zip ... no, from minus zip -- a big strike against me and nothing much for me.

I had killed plenty of animals -- deer, rabbits, chicks, whatever ... a man couldn't be too much harder, especially if I didn't have to look at his eyes. From behind is easier.

One thing kept coming back to my mind. He had said I had no reason to love the Army, and of course he was right. All the chicken-shit, the paperwork, the drill, the snotty little lieutenants.

All those months in the stockade -- all the faggin' my ass, queerin' my mouth, all the letting my body be pawed and punched, sometimes at the same time, by hairy apes who owned my body if not my mind.

No, I could do without all that. But my buddies -- the beer parties, the long bull sessions, the field exercises, yelling out the chorus as somebody sang a cadence song while we double-timed to PT, that lump in my throat as we swung past the reviewing stand in perfect alignment and step with band playing and flags flying.

Yes I loved it, more than I could ever say. I had loved it all so much and they wouldn't let me stay, but at least this would keep me closer to it than anything else I was likely to find.

Afternoon. The door opened. I jumped to attention. Habits are hard to break.

"Well, have you decided?"

"Yes, sir. I would like to accept your offer. Thank you, sir."

"Good."

He nodded to one of the guards with him, who produced a small pistol with a big silencer.

"You will need to be familiar with this. I know you are a good shot. Practice with this weapon."

It was placed on the table, and from habit I picked it up, turned to one side and checked it out -- a 0.25 automatic. With the silencer it would make hardly a sound. No clip, no bullets. He smiled. The clip was placed beside it. Only then, I noticed the guard was wearing very thin, almost invisible, rubber gloves. So, only my fingerprints would be on it.

OK. The pistol suddenly brought back recollection, it looked like the one of which I had just caught a glimpse in Vinnie's hand before he handcuffed me. A lot like it.

"Chuck will fill you in on details."

Who is Chuck?

"He has my orders. He will carry them out and pass them along to you. You will carry them out also, exactly, precisely, promptly. Do you understand?"

For a second, I saw pure evil -- malevolent and terrifying -- in his eyes.

"Yes, sir."

Oh God, what have I gotten myself into.

"I mentioned a car. What do you propose?"

I had given that some thought.

"A pickup truck, please, sir. Not too big, nothing flashy, maybe two, three years old ... with a row of spotlights on a roll bar. Lots of soldiers drive those."

"Good. Chuck will take care of that, too. Tell him. Now, I have other things to attend to. We will probably not meet for some time. You will stay here for about a week while some details are completed, then you will go north. Under no circumstances whatever are you to come to South Florida without permission. Do you understand?"

Again that terrifying look.

"Yes, sir."

He left me -- again at attention. Then I sat down to play with the pistol and wonder if I had just made the most terrible mistake.

Chuck turned out to be the man who had brought me here and searched me so thoroughly. I felt as though he were an old friend. He took me in the back of the van, stopping first at an Army surplus store where I bought some GI gear -- combat boots, cammie T-shirts and fatigues, shorts, insignia. Also some cheap civilian slacks and shirts of the types favored by lower ranking GI's.

When I asked, Chuck took me to a place which sold much used and abused jeans, and I selected a couple of pairs which fit very tightly, one of which I later turned into cut-off shorts.

We drove far out into the Everglades and set up some targets. I noticed his pistol was already loaded before he gave me a box of bullets, and he never quite emptied his clip. We were both pretty good shots, and I soon got used to the pistol, although it was obviously intended primarily for very close range -- like a few inches from the back of a man's head.

He let me keep it, but I had to use up all the ammunition. I would use my real name mostly, but they set up a false identity as a soldier, to be used very carefully when I needed to go on bases.

As we discussed the details, I chose a name and later stenciled it on my fatigues, promoted myself to corporal, then was provided with very good forgeries of the ID card and other documents I would need.

The truck was a little darling -- a white Ford Ranger. I liked the purple one better, even the black one, but those would stand out like a sore thumb -- no sense calling attention to myself. It had the lights I had asked for and a black cover that stretched tight across the truck bed to keep out rain -- and, more importantly, hide whatever I might be carrying.

I soon added a rifle rack for the rear window. I was told to change the registration as soon as I got settled so there would be no link with Florida.

Several days had passed when Chuck told me to get some sleep during the day. Obviously tonight would be busy. I was too nervous to sleep, but I cleaned the little automatic several times, tried to relax with the TV and finally managed to doze a little.

The late news was just beginning when Chuck arrived and told me in very precise detail exactly what I must do and gave me a full clip for the pistol. After locking me into the back of the van, he drove for a long time -- city, then highway, then smaller country roads. When the door slid open, I jumped out, just seeing the tail lights of a car pulling away from the pull-off where we had stopped.

I looked down at a man lying on the ground, wearing a rather dirty, rumpled, white shirt and a pair of white slacks, looking whiter than white in the moonlight. His wrists handcuffed behind his back. Another man stood to one side wearing dark clothes and a face mask.

Following my earlier instructions, I grabbed the man on the ground by his shoulders and dragged him into the van, followed by the stranger. The door slammed, and we were off. Total time, less than a minute.

The man was moaning a little, then started to ask where we were going, as though he were just regaining consciousness. Following orders, I said nothing, just tapped him on the head with the silencer, then a little harder, until he got the idea and stopped talking.

We were on a rough road, maybe off the road sometimes the way the van pitched.

Then we stopped, door opened. I dragged him out and held him upright, then guided him as we walked back into the woods, ten yards, twenty, enough.

"Stop. On your knees."

I thought of Vinnie, so long ago. The man before me dropped to his knees, then started to tell me something.

"Shut up!"

Following orders. I let him kneel there, barely conscious of the others standing a few yards behind me, as I slowly pulled out, then raised the pistol. I tried not to think of what I was doing -- just a job, just target practice. It wasn't real. I was just going through the motions in a dream.

The pistol could probably not be heard as far away as the van, certainly not farther, but the man's head jerked back then forward and his body crumpled over, lying sprawled awkwardly on one side.

I stepped around to stand beside his head. It was tilted back, stretching his throat like a roach that you've sprayed.

I aimed at his forehead just above and between his eye and ear and emptied the clip. The head jerked a little with each black hole that appeared. The body didn't even twist or jitter -- none of the anatomical body jerks the Army taught me to expect.

There were a few trickles of blood, but it was much cleaner than I thought it would be. He looked more asleep than dead, even though his head was stretched back and his mouth was open like he was singing.

I turned round. Two of the men had cameras and had been taking pictures. I hadn't noticed -- no flash -- they must have been using super fast film. Chuck held out a plastic bag into which I dropped the pistol. If I screwed up, they would have my fingerprints on a murder weapon. Well, better than someone else's prints and my body lying back there in the woods.

Chuck walked back to the truck and brought back the rifle and walked over to the body. He placed the muzzle right on the guy's forehead, to the side, then pulled the trigger. His head exploded like a pumpkin. He looked back and sniggered,

"This one we don't want identified that easily. No open coffin."

Then we walked back to the truck and climbed in -- just some guys coming back from a camping trip in the woods. Nothing unusual at all.

Next day I left, driving my nifty little truck, looking just like a million other lean boys in boots and jeans driving a million other pickup trucks throughout the south.

I had been told not to go to the base where I had been stationed, just in case somebody might remember me, but to set up shop at a big Army base near the center of the crescent of Atlantic and Gulf coast states.

I took a motel room just outside, then as evening descended, drove back and forth through the small city, watching the swarms of soldiers with too little to do trying to get rid of their cash -- and the bars, shops, pimps and whores who were eager to help.

God it was good to be home. I prowled the town, then parked and sampled the bars, showing my fake Army ID card when asked to prove my age. No problem.

I noted especially those bars where they didn't ask and some of the crowd seemed under age, figuring these would be the best places for finding guys who would be willing to take the risks I needed.

It was easy to strike up conversations with the lonely, bored soldiers to be, spinning stories and fitting right in. The base trained a lot of people so there were always plenty of transients coming and going -- nobody would notice one more friendly stranger who was good for a beer or two.



Next day I went to some rental agents, giving the impression I wanted a private love nest, and since I was willing to pay several months rent in advance, I finally got an open ended lease on a little cottage out in the woods a few miles from town.

It was perfect. The main room held a couch and a couple of moth eaten chairs around a wood-burning stove, a kitchen counter and equipment along the far wall and a table and some wood chairs between.

The bedroom had a big iron bed, bureau, chair and some hooks for clothes to one side with a bathroom behind. Screened porches front and back held a few extra chairs, some trash cans, a broken tricycle and a rusty swinging seat for two.

Everything was old, tired and a bit dirty, but not too bad -- just the thing for a soldier maybe with a wife and kid, trying to stretch out his meager pay at month end. Best of all, I could see nothing but woods and brush in any direction.

I had no business yet, but I just couldn't resist putting on my camouflage fatigues and combat boots to go on base. It was a busy time and I got a visitor's pass by just showing my ID card and later found someone to get me a decal so I could come and go as I pleased.

It was wonderful, just walking around, giving brisk salutes to the occasional officers, getting lunch at a snack bar and a real GI haircut, learning the locations of significant buildings, blending in, belonging, one of the crowd.

I saw a busload of new arrivals and stood nearby, close enough so passers by would think I was one of them but far enough so they wouldn't ask who I was. They were all herded into a building and I followed, and when I saw they were being given some brochures about the base, I picked up some, too.

A platoon ran by at double time, one voice carrying the familiar cadence song verses followed by the roar of the chorus; my eyes misted over for a moment.

I went through several company areas, lifting a few notices from bulletin boards so I could have some names and background to use in making up stories to explain my assignment -- just a corporal in the supply section or whatever.

Finally, after working hours, I went to the beer hall which, as always, was doing a thriving business. I shared several pitchers of beer with some new-found friends, stopping just soon enough so I could drive home without getting stopped for DUI.

Back to business. I very quietly started to ask about drugs. I got a lot of fishy looks and,

"No way, man!"

comments, but slowly found a few sources -- the competition. It was pretty easy to track back one level to find where the stuff was coming from -- much harder to find the next

level, but I finally did. They had good protection from the local cops, but my organization had better connections and the competition was raided.

Next day, we were in business. I was careful to keep out of the direct line, drugs flowed down and cash flowed up, but I was off to one side, just watching, hinting, keeping an eye open for possible dealers, but careful of informers, talking to Miami when necessary from pay phones through an office in a nearby city where the call was patched onward.

I made a point of never getting friendly with any of the soldiers I recruited. For one thing, I didn't want them to remember me. Often they didn't even connect me with what they were getting into, just a quick contact, then a hiding place to pick up and drop off.

Occasionally someone would pick up the drugs but not leave the money. A trip out in the woods blindfolded and handcuffed in the back of my truck, then a pretty heavy beating, generally corrected that problem. The time I'd spent in the stockade didn't go to waste.

A few users, an occasional distributor, were caught, usually going to the stockade for some time. I didn't worry about them -- I had been there before, but still I didn't want to know them.

The brass were getting nervous, more anti-drug notices, more warnings, more lectures. I moved on to another base on my circuit for a month or so while things went on.

My new competition was so obvious. He was trying to pass as a soldier in one of the bars off base, but just didn't quite have the right language -- subtle little touches of pronunciation and wording that were not quite right.

I started grousing about never having enough money, and he bit, suggesting he might know how to make more. I checked with Miami, then followed up. We met in a quiet alley where he was to give me just a sample which I could check out, then see if I could peddle more like it around base. Just a sample, no cash, no worry, no danger -- the regular recruiting pitch.

He wasn't expecting anything when I hit him and it only took seconds to get him in the truck. By the time he woke up, we were well out of town, his wrists firmly handcuffed and ankles spread wide, tightly bound to tie-down rings at the corners of the truck bed.

I had scouted the area for places like this, a little back road where a pickup with a pair of lovers would never be noticed. I untied his ankles and dragged him out of the truck, then we walked in the three-quarter moonlight down to the smoothly flowing river.

"Hey. Where are we going?" Then guessing, "Oh no. What are you going to do? Why?"

He was increasingly frantic.

"Shut up. That won't help, just shut up."

He was quiet, stumbling along, then we were at the shore. He took a couple of slow steps into the water, reluctant to get wet. I had to tell him three times before he dropped to his knees, water well up his pants legs.

The faint splash was louder than the cough of the pistol, then two more just to be sure. There was more blood this time -- maybe it was the water ... it washed out of the three black spots, fading to clear in the eddy.

I pushed him out into deeper water with a long stick and watched his body bob, half floating, half dragging on the bottom. Eventually the current swung him away and washed the body down stream.

I climbed back in my truck and drove home to get good and drunk. Second time was even harder than the first. The first guy was some piece of shit that deserved it -- at least I'd told myself that.

This guy -- he was someone I sort of knew. He was me -- just not as good at it. He was a real person. And it was mostly my doing -- not something I had to do. I could have worked around him, got him sent away to prison, scared him out of the business. But no, I had to

I got into the habit of stopping at sporting goods stores on my travels, picking up a pair of cheap handcuffs each time. I never knew when they would be needed. And once in awhile, a pair at a time, they drifted away -- with the stream ... or got lost in the woods. I was really getting good at this, and it didn't hurt quite so much.

Time passed. It seemed impossible that I had been at it for a year. I was told to come to Miami, changing planes a couple of times, changing clothes in a men's room in Atlanta. I got grand treatment. They were very pleased and I lived like a king, money to throw around, time to lie on the beach in the sun, all the good things.

I was still nervous when I talked to the big boss, keeping in character by snapping to attention when he came in the room, always calling him "Sir," while the others mostly said "boss." He told me to keep up the good work, passed on a few tips about the competition, told me the narcs didn't have a clue, and generally tried to make me feel appreciated.

All the same, I was glad to get home -- back into my comfortable fatigues, my ramshackle cottage.

But things changed -- they always do. Sometimes for the worse, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the no difference. But they always change. A few more hits, a lot more business. Then there was Tommy.

I should have known better. Tommy was just too nice. Tall, lanky, blond, so open and honest that he could never conceive of someone else telling him a lie. He came from Montana and off base always wore cowboy boots with his clinging jeans and either a cowboy shirt or an Army T-shirt of some kind.

I had met a lot of men, of course, but because of my present line of work, it was impossible to make any lasting friendships. I couldn't risk seeing more of those I had brought into the distribution business and for the others there was the difficulty of never being able to pin down my job location on base if I told them I was still a soldier, or some other occupation if I told them I was not. And at the same time, I had to be sure that people to whom I had told different stories never had occasion to compare notes.

Anyway, Tom was so friendly and he loved my truck -- he wanted to ride forever, one cowboy booted leg hanging out the window as he drank a beer while we charged along, all the spotlights on the roll bar slashing through the night.

I was always very reluctant to bring anyone out to my little house in the woods, but he really wanted to get a break from living in barracks, so spent a few nights on my old couch.

He told me a lot about the little ranch where he grew up, but which never paid its way, only very gradually touching on the substantial part of his pay which went to take care of his family.

He obviously thought I was making some pretty good money somehow, and finally was begging for help.

As I said, I should have known better, I never should have done it. He was too nice and honest to be peddling drugs, but I let him start, and he was doing all right for some months.

I noticed he seemed a bit restrained, and asked him about it, but he always said that everything was OK, and he really appreciated being able to earn the extra money.

He called one evening and asked if I could pick him up. He was quiet and pensive as we drove to the house and as we drank a few beers. Finally it all came out.

"Oh I was so stupid. It looked like such easy money, but I never figured on what might happen. Two good buddies of mine got picked up. They are really in a jam, and if they give my name, I'll be right in there with them. I know the Army will stop my pay if I get sent to the stockade, and my folks won't be able to get along."

"Maybe I can help with that. After all, I got you started in all this."

"No, I can't take money from you. You were good to me, telling me how to make some, but I can't take it as a gift, even for my folks."

So noble. Stupid, but noble.

"OK, I understand. Maybe we can think of something. Meanwhile, I'm getting hungry. Wait here while I get some burgers and we'll see what we can do."

I drove off to get the food, but also to make a telephone call. I had standing orders in case of something like this, but I wanted to call in and confirm what I had to do. When I returned, we ate together. I remembered that other night, even the same McDonald's bags on the table.

He somehow didn't seem too surprised when I let him see the pistol but his eyes widened as he stared at it, then muttered,

"Oh no,"

and sort of sagged down in his chair. He got up when I told him and leaned against the wall.

Memories kept surging back as I snapped a handcuff on, then pulled his hands behind his back and snapped the other, squeezing them both tight. I didn't dare look at his face, just let him stand there, shoulders slumping and head drooping onto his chest as what was going to happen to him sunk in.

I gave him a little time as I watched him -- blond hair cut close and GI at the sides, a little longer on top, green cammie T-shirt, arms pulled back by the handcuffs, jeans and cowboy boots.

"Wh ... when are you going to do it, Sir?"

He had figured it out.

"When you're ready."

"Yeah. OK. I guess there's no point in waiting, Sir."

"Good. Out to the truck."

At least there was no begging, no whining. And contempt would have made it easier for me ... but I wouldn't like to have to think about him that way later. He lay on his belly in the back of the truck. I pulled his cowboy boots wide apart and tied them to the rings at the corners of the truck bed.

I was thinking of that spot by the river.

"Don?"

"Yeah."

"Can you make sure I'll be found? That way my folks will get my GI insurance. They can live on that for quite awhile."

"Sure. I can do that."

"Thanks."

Not what I had planned, but why not. I snapped the cover down taut to hide him and took a different route from usual as I thought about it.

Had he expected what must happen to him? Was this the only way he could think of to get money to his folks? Did he even plan it all along?

I thought I knew how his parents would feel, spending the money which came to them at such a terrible cost. I couldn't ask, would never know.

There was a little picnic area off a minor highway which was seldom used this late at night. Plenty of shrubbery would hide my truck just in case someone drove by. Tommy crawled out of the truck and walked slowly across the parking area, then into the tall pines.

"Stop there, behind that picnic table."

Nobody would see him lying there until daylight.

"On your knees."

He did it. Nothing more to wait for. I took the pistol out of the cargo pocket of my fatigue pants and raised it, aiming directly at his blond head. How many times had I done this before? I don't even know. I never liked to think about it, never kept count.

I knew I had to do it, but such memories came flooding back, memories especially of the time I had knelt like that with Vinnie right behind me.

I couldn't do it, of course. I just couldn't. I turned and left him kneeling there, and thought I heard him sobbing.

I wondered who would come for me first. A couple of days had passed. I didn't want to know what had happened to Tommy, but he must have been found, maybe arrested, maybe in the stockade. I hoped so -- I hoped he learned something from it, I hoped it turned him around, unlike me.

I wondered how his folks back in that dusty little ranch in Montana would feel. They'd be plenty embarrassed, they'd be sad, but at least they'd still have their son.

And they'd get something to tide them over. I had gathered all the cash I could lay my hands on and sent it to them inside the hollowed-out pages of a book which I had used as a hiding place.

I knew how proud Tommy was about taking money, but there was nothing he could do about this.

The McDonald's bags were piling up. It had been three days. Something had to happen soon. I thought of getting drunk, but I didn't want to be drunk when I faced whatever would come. At least I could act like a soldier.

I thought long and hard about what I had done. About the turns my life had taken, how I had done this to myself -- I couldn't blame anyone -- I was the one who took each step, one right after the other, with my eyes wide open.

I thought about Tommy and why I had done what I had done with him. I wondered if I was really attracted to him. He was cute and maybe I did really want to deep inside.

I never did -- I never had sex with anyone, guy or girl, after that year in the stockade -- just my hand and fuck-books and my imagination. And I had repressed most of my imagination and only bought lesbian fuck-books, maybe so I wouldn't have to think which I'd rather fuck -- guys or girls.

I drew this picture of Tommy then I

decided to write everything down. No names -- no last names, at least. I still don't want to cause trouble. But I do want someone to know that I lived. I'll mail this to a friend when I go out for MacDonald's tonight, if they don't come for me by then.



Up to here, Donnie wrote everything and mailed it to me. What follows is my speculation on what happened to him. I tried to write it like Donnie wrote it himself. A friend of his sent me the newspaper clipping. I asked around and I think there were two guys who came for him, but my source wasn't sure. Other details are pretty much SOP.

the BrigRat

Then they were here, two of them, quiet, efficient. They had me covered before I knew they were there, so I just sat, perfectly still, waiting, while one watched me and the other searched the little house. It didn't take long.

"Looks like he was expecting us."

He had found my pistol lying on the table -- empty, with a full clip lying beside it, and a pair of hand-cuffs, arms open, waiting to be used. He fiddled with the hand-cuffs -- they were special ones I had seen somewhere and bought on a whim -- the cuffs joined by a hinge instead of a chain so hand movement was much more restricted than usual, making it impossible for the wearer to tamper with the locks.

"Where are the keys?"

"In the trash. I figured nobody needs them."

He laughed.

"OK, soldier, you know the drill."

I stood up very slowly, walked to the wall and leaned against it, hands and feet spread wide. One of them stood to one side with his pistol while the other carefully patted me down -- snug cammie T-shirt, loose baggy cammie fatigue pants, combat boots.

Then he used my special hand-cuffs, and I got to feel just how restrictive they were as my wrists were pulled together, palms outward, unable to move.

"He's clean. Let's go."

We walked outside.

"How about the truck?"

"Put him in back and you drive it. I'll take the car."

I hated to think of someone else driving my beautiful truck, but at least I was to get one last ride. Awkwardly I climbed into the back and lay face down, spreading my legs wide so they could tie my ankles with the ropes still attached to the rings which I had used to tie down Tommy and so many others before.

"Hey, soldier, where do you want to go?"

Surprised, I told them about the spot by the river which I had used.

"Sounds good, but it better not be a trap."

"How could I have known you would ask?"

"OK."

I gave the necessary directions, then they pulled the cover taut above me and snapped it in position. I followed our position in my mind by the road surfaces and turns.

We were soon there. The cover was pulled back and my ankles untied then, for the last time, I got out of the truck I loved so much.

"Take care of the truck for me," I asked.

"OK, now walk."

I walked slowly toward the river, no point in rushing things now. On the bank, I looked out at the few lights across the river, then took a step forward, then another. The water was up to my knees.

"Stop."

OK. I sank to my knees, the water feeling chilly against my skin as it soaked through my fatigue pants, now up almost to my waist. Nothing more to do. Now it was all up to them. I thought about Vinnie, and how I had knelt like this before, at least then I was dry.

Since then, I had been living on borrowed time. Now the loan had been called.

Then I thought about Tommy, wondering where he was and what would happen to him. He, too, had knelt like this, but then walked away. I hoped he would make better use of his borrowed time.

I wondered if my body would ever be found, drifting down the muddy river, mostly under the surface ... probably barely visible. I wond....