

THE COBURG GATE

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The Coburg Gate

A COLD WAR NOVEL

CRAIG PAULSON

Hellgate Press



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This book is dedicated to those cold warriors who sacrificed greatly for the peace and stability of the United States. In 1946 an iron curtain fell on Eastern Europe. It remained in place for over forty years. Then it was lifted by President Reagan. Today former Russian satellites Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Albania are NATO member countries.

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Map of Germany, ca. 1979

THE COBURG GATE

CHAPTER I

PICKLE SUIT RECRUIT

1 979 WAS AN eventful year in my life. It didn't start that way, but that's how it ended. At the beginning of that year, I was working at the University of Minnesota as a lab assistant, grinding samples into powder for the testing of heavy metal content. I processed gyttja (yitya) samples and prepared them for chemical testing.

Gyttja is a gelatinous, black goop composed of decaying organic matter, found at the bottom of weedy lakes. College interns got the fun job of collecting the samples in the summertime. They spent their days driving to various lakes, launching a motorboat and then boating to a selected location on a topographic map and gathering samples from the deepest parts of the lake bays. They used what looked like a small torpedo tied to a rope to collect the samples. I baked the samples in a bread pan in an old baker's oven, then after they became rock hard, I ground them into powder. I used a hammer and a chisel to remove the inch-thick black concrete from the baker's pan. Then I used a blender to break the gyttja into smaller chunks, loudly filling the room with black powder. Finally, I used a mortar and pestle to grind them into powder.

It was a great job for a hungry college student. But college was over for me. I had graduated. And now, I was grinding out powder samples of gyttja so that the chemist could take a small portion dissolved in liquid and run it through the atomic atomizer, burning the sample so that the color of flame would indicate the type of heavy metal content.

This was not how I wanted to spend the rest of my life. The work was redundant and tedious. I wanted something different. I wanted some excitement. And then one of those fortuitous moments in life occurred.

My redemption was an Army Wants You advertisement in the newspaper that offered two years in Germany, and VEAP. VEAP was the Post-Vietnam Veteran's Education Assistance Program. For a single man stuck in a rut it was the perfect solution. The solution to my predicament was two years in the Army, followed by more education.

The next day, I visited the recruiter's office. I told him that I wanted to be stationed in West Germany.

"Great," he said. "How would you like to be a military policeman?"

"Well, I'd rather be a medic," I replied.

"Well, we don't need any more medics. Since the Vietnam War, everybody wants to be a medic. So I see here on your paperwork that you have a college degree. Smartest enlisted are in the military police. They score higher than any other group on aptitude tests." My recruiter had just lied to me.

I told him, "I don't want to shoot anybody".

"No one does, we're not in a shooting war, we're in a cold war."

He gave me a stack of paperwork to complete. That night, I filled out the paperwork. First name last, last name first, middle initial on each page:

NAME: THORSTEN, Paul C.

DOB: 02/14/1955

POB: ST PAUL, MN

HEIGHT: 68 inches

WEIGHT: 175

HAIR: BLOND

EYES: BLUE

HOME OF RECORD: THOR MN

He advised me to keep copies of my paperwork, because the Army will lose your important paperwork. I turned in the ream of paper the next day and took the oath to support and defend the constitution. I was officially a soldier.

After basic and Military Police (MP) training, I arrived in Germany only twenty months left on my two-year enlistment. I flew commercial to Frankfurt, West Germany. At the time, I remember thinking a free trip to Germany at government expense, *wunderbar* (wonderful). My instructions when I landed were to report to the USO at the Frankfurt airport, so that's what I did. In the USO Office and hallway outside it, OD green duffel bags were stacked to the ceiling. And there were soldiers everywhere, coming and going. A sea of green pickle suits. That's what we called the uniform. It was green, OD green to be precise, from head to toe. Shirts, pants, and hats were all OD green.

Everyone signed in at the Frankfurt USO desk and waited. Eventually, names were called, and we were loaded onto an OD green school bus. We were taken to a military compound somewhere in downtown Frankfurt. The compound buildings were light brown stucco. It was dark when we arrived, and the lighting in the compound was not very good. We were jet-lagged and tired, which created a surreal experience in the shadowy light. We were there, but we weren't. We gave a copy of our orders to someone in charge, and we were told not to leave. They didn't have computers, or if they had them, they didn't use them to keep track of us. It was all paperwork. So we lit cigarettes if we smoked and sat on our duffel bags and talked or dozed. The conversation was not remarkable.

"Where you from, what's your MOS [Military Occupational Specialty (job)] and does anyone know where we're going?" And in true

military fashion, the question that caused the most discussion and debate was, “What will happen next?”

Soldiers will talk about, debate, and discuss what’s going to happen next until they either find out or the conversation becomes completely incredible. So there we were, a group of five of us, trying to figure out among ourselves where we were going. The conversation went like this:

“Anybody heard where we’re going?”

“No, I haven’t heard, but they’ve got our orders. What do you suppose they’re doing with our orders?”

“Well, they’re probably trying to figure out who’s here.”

“Doesn’t seem very efficient, does it? What did your orders say? My orders said report to some center in Frankfurt like the personnel processing center.”

“We must be in the personnel processing center.”

“They sure don’t tell us much, do they?”

“My buddy got sent to Berlin. He says they are surrounded. I hope I don’t get sent there.”

Then I spotted someone from basic: Fox. Fox had been squad leader during basic training. He was 5 feet 9 inches tall, 170 pounds, brown hair, and brown eyes, He had a square face with a medium size nose and mouth. Squad leader was an appointed position given by the drill sergeants. He seemed like a nice guy. He was steady, clear-eyed, and reliable. He seemed like a soldier who would have a successful career. As I recall, he told me he was from somewhere in Missouri. We talked about our experiences in basic and what we knew about our classmates. There had been no group graduation. The day after you completed the final tasks of MP training, you were placed on two weeks leave, after which you were to report to your first duty station. Fox and I were among the first to graduate, so we had no idea of the whereabouts of most of our classmates.

After a few hours, they started dividing us up by MOS like MP, clerk, finance pay specialist, tank driver, artillery spotter, or infantryman. By this time, they could have told us we were going to Mongolia and we

would have gone without thought or complaint. MPs were designated 95 Bravo or 95B. Somebody started walking around yelling for all the 95 Bravos to go over to a corner of the compound, pointing to the location. There were about twenty of us, and we went where we were told.

Then we were led into a small classroom. Some sergeants were waiting for us. We knew they were sergeants because they had stripes on their arms. The more stripes the more authority they had. The leader was an older partially bald, sinewy sergeant, with a large black mustache. According to his name tag he was Sergeant Zorn. He had the most stripes. He said to no one in particular and to everyone in the room in a loud voice, "Call me Sergeant (Sgt) Z." Thereafter I never heard him called anything but Sgt Z or sometimes, in private conversation, just Z. There was no doubt that Z was in charge. He and the younger sergeants looked us over. Sometimes they asked who we were and then took a few notes and left the room. They were drafting us for assignments.

When they returned, we were instructed to line up. So we lined up. And then they started going down the line. As they walked down it, they looked at each person's name, and then they looked down at a piece of paper.

"You, Baumholder."

"You, Mannheim."

"You, Mainz."

"You, Wurms."

"You, Wiesbaden."

And so they drafted us. Sometimes there was a sidebar discussion between some of the sergeants, and then one of them walked up and said "you" and the name of one of the towns. Fox was pulled out of line with a few others, and they quietly left. I was drafted for Mainz. As we were leaving, one of the sergeants said to us, "Y'all are lucky you're not going to the rock."

"What's the rock?" we asked.

He laughed and said, "Baumholder."

CHAPTER II

MAINZ

SERGEANT ZORN CROWDED five of us in a Jeep. The back was filled with our duffel bags and footlockers. Some of us held our duffel bags in our laps. Off we went to Mainz, dozing all the way.

When we arrived at the barracks in Mainz, other sergeants were waiting. A couple soldiers left for Mannheim with a waiting sergeant, and a couple soldiers left for Bad Kreuznach (BK) with another sergeant. I stayed with Z. I was in the 8th MP Company, part of the 8th Infantry Division (Mechanized). Headquarters (HQ) was in BK. There were platoons in Mainz, BK, Baumholder, and Mannheim. My new home was Lee Barracks, which was in Mainz-Gonzenheim, a suburb of Mainz.

It was Thursday night. Z showed me where I was staying. It was a barracks room with about half-a-dozen bunks and lockers.

Z said, "Pick an empty spot. You're off until Monday at zero six hundred. Everybody is out training. Don't eat at the chow hall; you're on separate rations, meaning you get extra money to eat at your own expense because of shift work. The other soldiers don't like MPs, so mind your own business this weekend." He left. There was bedding rolled up in the empty lockers. I picked an empty bed, made it, and went to sleep.

The next morning, I placed my things in the empty locker. The lockers could be padlocked. There were three drawers on one side, and above that some open shelves, and on the other side a rod for hanging uniforms. I used the lock from one of my duffel bags to secure the locker.

I didn't know what to do. When I enlisted I chose Germany because I wanted to tour the country. At the USO, I had picked up a brochure about the Rhine River Cruise, and decided to do that. I went down to the bathroom at the end of the hall, and there was another soldier washing up. I introduced myself. His name was Greg, and he was from Chicago. He had short brown hair and a handsome face, almost movie-star looks. Greg was medium built, average height and weight. He and I were both new and off until Monday.

I asked Greg if he would be interested in taking the Rhine cruise from Mainz to Koblenz. He said sure, and asked how it worked. I told him the brochure indicated that the cruise ship to Koblenz docked somewhere in downtown Mainz. After the cruise we could ride the train back to Mainz.

"Sounds good to me," Greg said. "We can ride the streetcar outside the main gate to downtown Mainz." So off we went, out the main gate to the streetcar stop and downtown. The streetcar placard stated Hauptbahnhof. From my high school German class, I knew that meant train station, and the train station would be downtown. When the streetcar stopped at the Hauptbahnhof, we exited. I put my high school German to work and asked, "*Wo ist der Koblenz Schiffe?*" (Where is the Koblenz ship?)

I got strange looks when I asked that question. I'm not sure why, but maybe "ship" was the wrong word. Anyway, there's nothing like a picture, and fortunately I had the brochure. I would show it to someone, and they would talk real fast in German, something like, "*Oh ja, der Koblenz gugemal vorseight und dann...*" Anyway, we didn't have a clue what they were saying, and it was reflected by the blank looks on our faces, and by our hands turned up in the air at

our sides. Almost every German knows some English. They teach it in school. If you try to speak a little German, they will try to speak a little English. But if you don't try to speak German at all, sometimes they don't try at all to speak English.

We would walk a block or two, and then we would ask for directions. Someone would point the way after we showed them the brochure, and we would go that direction for a block or two and ask again for directions. We were slowly getting closer to our objective. The surrounding area was unlike the United States. There were old ruins everywhere. There were piles of bricks in many areas along the street. In some places, it looked like a war zone. We soon learned not to ask older Germans for directions. They would make no effort to speak English. Sometimes, after we walked by, I would glance behind and see an old man spit on the ground where we had walked. The younger Germans were friendly. They were open and they would help us. But some of the older people were not friendly. I guessed they were old Nazis. Finally, we made it to the boat dock on the Rhine River.

It was a lovely gray, powerful and wide river. It reminded me of the Mississippi of southern Minnesota, Iowa and northern Missouri. It looked a mile wide. Once we got on the ship, we started drinking beer and talking to people. They would ask us things like, "*Americanische ja?*" and "Where from?"

"Chicago," Greg would say and the Germans would say, "The windy city," and we would laugh, and then they would ask us, "Are you *soldaten?*"

We told them that yes we were soldiers, and they would say, "*Wilkommen in Deutschland*" (Welcome to Germany). We started talking to one young man who was attending college in Mainz. We asked him why some of the older men would sometimes spit after we walked by them. "Vell you see, it's like all children in Mainz know this story. During the war, an American plane crashed near Mainz, and the local people caught the pilot before the authorities

arrived and hung him from the Mainz Bridge, the bridge you saw when you got on the ship. This was *verboten* (forbidden)—a very un-German thing to do; we are very law-abiding people. The Americans heard about this and thereafter when they bombed Berlin, they saved one for Mainz, dropping it on their way back to England. That is why you still see rubble piles around old Mainz, from the bombing. Some of the old people still hate the Americans to this day, so they spit. Old men aren't always wise. Without you Americans, we would be like GDR. So I say, *Danke!*" (Thank you). GDR was the German Democratic Republic (Communist East Germany).

The ship had an enclosed lower deck surrounded by glass windows. The upper deck was open. There was much space and many places to sit. There was a polka band playing on the upper deck, and beer, wine, and other refreshments, as well as standard German fare such as bratwurst, rindswurst, and pomme frites (French fries, always served with mayonnaise). People on the boat smiled and danced and drank, and no one spit at us.

As we cruised, the Rhine River banks grew progressively higher and steeper, a steep green rocky hillside. The northern side was fractured by stone walls which separated the various small vineyard parcels. The vine leaves were aglitter from the bright sun.

The castles were striking. I had never seen a castle. They captured my imagination and took me somewhere old, somewhere I'd never been before. What was it about them that captured my imagination? America is a young county. There are no castles from the Middle Ages. An old building in America is a century old. In Germany, an old building is a thousand years old. History was made in the Rhineland. Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, and Napoleon fought here. Mainz was a Roman fortress, and in the Middle Ages a center of the Holy Roman Empire.

I pictured myself standing on the ramparts of a castle, safe and secure, content in my place in the world. I could see myself hunting wild boar on horseback and drinking tankards of ale with my comrades after the kill.

There were a variety of castles, such as the white Pfalz, which looks like a large, white ship floating on the Rhine, its steep, hundred-foot stone sides rising out of the river and coming to a point. It covers a small rock island in the Rhine, and was once used to collect tolls. It was efficient for its purpose, with catapults and battlements and dungeons. Legend has it that at times, a chain was placed across the Rhine so no one could pass without paying the toll. Those who could not pay were lowered into the dungeon with a block and tackle until someone paid their toll or they died.

There was the classic medieval Marksburg Castle, high on the banks of the Rhine, growing out of the stony crag on which it sat. The impregnable, never-breached, never-conquered Marksburg, with its high stone walls, roughhewn stone floors, and timber stanchions supporting the interior ceilings. It remains intact today. It is guarded by the central high tower, jutting up and overpowering like the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. There is a crenulated battlement in the middle of the central tower and others crenulated battlements surrounding the castle. The Marksburg is a war castle, a true fortress. This, like the Pfalz, is a serious building, with extensive defensive walls and elaborate torture devices in its dungeons.

And then there was the fairytale Stozenfels Palace, with its crème-colored façade and gothic English towers. The outside was English Tudor, the inside French. Inside, were elaborate furnishings, such as covered beds and exquisite Louis XV furniture. It was a palace complete with banquet hall, armory, chapel, and a draw bridge.

As I wandered the streets of the medieval towns during the many stops, I was taken back in time. It was a day to dream of being a medieval prince, or knight, or scoundrel, a good day to be alive. It was a day I would live again if I could.

Our journey through time ended in Koblenz. We rode the train back to Mainz. It was a quiet ride. I was contemplating the adventures that lay ahead of me in Germany. When my thoughts broke, every scene outside the window created a new imagining of the past

or a new vision of the future. I day-dreamed all the way back to Mainz.

Greg and I parted company. He was a garrison MP, and I was a field MP. After the Rhine cruise, we never shared time together again.

Garrison MPs performed full-time patrol duty in Mainz. Field MPs deployed with the mechanized infantry, and when the mechanized infantry was in garrison, meaning at home in Lee Barracks Mainz-Gonzenheim, we performed garrison MP duty. Garrison MP duty is what civilians would call police work. Traffic tickets, drunks, domestic disturbances, theft, assault, and drug use were the primary garrison crimes. In the military we did not arrest soldiers. We apprehended them. Article 7 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) defines apprehension as the taking of a person into custody upon reasonable belief that they had committed an offense.

My first shift as an MP was garrison duty. We worked three swing shifts 1330 to 2200 hours (1:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.), three midnight shifts 2130 to 0600 hours (9:30 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.) and finally three day shifts 0530 to 1400 hours (5:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.). There was a thirty-minute overlap to account for changeover.

Before starting our shift, we were picked up at the barracks and driven to the MP station for guard mount. Guard mount meant standing in a line at attention in front of the raised MP desk, which was about eight feet above the floor, and receiving assignments and instructions. After guard mount, we patrolled, driving around Mainz and the surrounding area. I liked driving. On most shifts, there were three two-person patrols. If we were short of MPs, there was sometimes a one-person patrol. On a normal weeknight, a patrol would receive two or three dispatches from the desk sergeant. Usually, it was a drunk GI creating a disturbance in downtown Mainz at one of the local clubs or in public.

As a policeman, you learn a lot about alcohol and its effect on people. You've got your funny drunk, your sloppy drunk, your depressed drunk, and the one that keeps police busy which is the beligerent drunk. As a matter of officer discretion, I would give the

funny, sloppy, and depressed drunks rides back to their barracks, but not the belligerent drunk. My first belligerent drunk was Private Green. He was stumbling around the bahnhof area, alternating between trying to locate the streetcar with the Mainz Gonzenheim placard and threatening to fight anyone who glanced at him. It was a hopeless situation. I guessed it was the Polizei (German Police) who'd called the MP desk. They had better things to do than deal with a drunk soldier. When I pulled up, Green was standing in the road between some streetcar tracks. As I exited the patrol vehicle, a German walked by and glanced at Green. He turned 90 degrees unsteadily to his right and caught his balance with his stiff right leg, saying to the passerby:

“What are you looking at? Mind your own fucking business” Then, still looking in the direction of the passerby, he spat, “Come here. I’m not done talking to you. Come here or I’ll kick your ass.” Then he turned back to his left, and slurred loudly, “Where’s the Minz Goosenheim train?”

“Here” I said. “I’m your ride, Green.” He was still in his pickle suit, so I could read his name tape.

He bent his head down, squinted, and read my name tape, “Tour-some. What kind of name is that, are you Frenchie?”

“I’m apprehending you, Green, for being drunk and disorderly. Now turn around and put your hands behind your back.”

He turned around and put his hands behind his back, stumbling and slurring. “You’re going on my list.”

I cuffed him and walked him over to the car, rolling him sideways into the backseat of my Pinto because he couldn’t fit sitting up with the handcuffs on. He lay sideways in the seat, facing the front, mumbling and slurring all the way to the MP station.

When we arrived at the MP station, I placed him in one of the cells across from the MP desk. He wrote my name on the bill of his cap as I filled out the paperwork. And he repeated that I was going on his list, over and over. Standing by the MP desk, talking to the

desk sergeant, I saw Rick. Rick was black, and he was married to a lovely German woman. He was a corporal and spoke fluent German. Rick was one of the senior MPs. He was at the station palaver-ing with the desk sergeant. When he saw what Green was doing, he walked over and told me, "My name is on his list too." Then he yelled at the desk sergeant, "Hey, are you on Green's list?"

"Twice," came the response. That was a relief. I was new and had no idea if I should be worried about Green. Rick was about my height, and almost as wide as he was tall. He had large biceps. I had heard Rick was one of the toughest MPs in the platoon.

Rick said to me, "I hear you're an educated man, do you play chess?" I did play. Rick said we should play sometime, which we did. We didn't see a lot of Rick in garrison, because he was our Polizei liaison, meaning he rode patrol with the Polizei. But we saw him on occasion.

The next night, I was on patrol with Reyes. He was from a large family of farmers from the Rio Grande Valley, near McAllen, TX. Every man in his family had been in the military. We talked about sports. Who won games, who was playing well, and so on. He was very knowledgeable about baseball. In high school he had played baseball, football, and basketball. He wasn't very big, maybe five-foot-six and 155 pounds. While patrolling, we received a radio call about a domestic disturbance. We had been trained that these were dangerous situations because the female spouse would often turn against the officer when the male spouse was apprehended and cuffed, in some cases attacking the MP. The correct process was to separate the couple into different rooms.

The desk sergeant radioed us the location of the domestic disturbance. We were the second patrol to arrive. The two MPs waiting for us on the scene were Zane and Harvey. Reyes was the senior MP. Mainz was Reyes's second assignment, while for the rest of us it was our first assignment. The desk sergeant radioed us to apprehend the husband and transport him to the MP station. He advised both pa-

trols to go in together because the husband was large. He said the apartment was on the top floor. It was a long walk up three flights of narrow stairs. And then we heard the yelling husband and wife going at it.

“I’ve had enough. I’m going back to Florida!” she shouted.

A male voice responded. “Good. Maybe you can find a job there and stop spending all our money.”

Reyes knocked on the door. It immediately went quiet.

“Go away, no one’s here,” said the husband.

“MP, open the door. Desk sergeant said to bring you in, and that’s what we’re going to do,” said Reyes. We heard some scuffling, and then the wife opened the door.

Reyes rushed into the apartment. “Let’s go before someone gets hurt.”

The husband responded. “I’m not going.”

“Have it your way.” And with that, Reyes leaped up and put the guy in a headlock while the rest of us grabbed a limb each.

It was like holding onto a big fish; he was flopping around, trying to shake us off. But no punches were thrown. We wrestled him onto his stomach, and Reyes cuffed him. Then Reyes and I grabbed him under the armpits, face down. I was on the right and Reyes on the left. Zane and Harvey grabbed him by the legs. Reyes and I headed out the door and down the stairs. He continued flopping, but with the cuffs on, there wasn’t much he could do. We literally tossed him in the backseat of the Ford Custom. At the MP station, the desk sergeant told us to put him in a cell, shouting from across the room to the man, “The neighbors are getting tired of the arguing. Figure it out or send her home. Your First Sergeant is on his way again.”

First Sergeants are the highest ranking enlisted in a company. They coordinate the discipline of the enlisted and resolve difficult personal issues, including situations like this where a husband and wife are constantly fighting.

My first garrison tour was ending. One last day shift, and then I

would have some time off. The next day, some of us were going to visit the big Mainz-Kastel Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) Depot. I was shopping for a camera, while most of the other MPs were stereo shopping. The first big purchase for many soldiers was a stereo. But first, I had to finish my shift. It was a beautiful day, clear and sunny. I was patrolling in one of the southern suburbs of Mainz with the window rolled down. Day shift was easy, nothing happened on day shift. The most exciting thing was transporting the AAFES manager to the bank to make a deposit of AAFES sales income.

That day, while I was sitting at a stoplight, a man walked out of his house naked and peed in the front yard, as nonchalant as someone getting their mail from the mailbox. He saw me staring, looked at me and said, "*Wie Gehts?*" (How goes it?).

Then he walked back into his house. Apparently, you can pee in public in Germany, or at least in your own yard. Then I received a radio call from the desk sergeant, to do a practice siren run. It sounded like fun, so I turned on the lights and sirens. To my surprise, the Germans ignored me. Our sirens and lights looked and sounded different than the Polizei lights and sirens. As I tried to go through stop lights without stopping, the looks I received from the German drivers ranged from irritated to incensed. Arms were flapping, gestures were made, and things were said in anger I had never heard before. Lesson learned, desk sergeant. We had no authority or control over Germans off-base. I guess it was part of my initiation. When I got back to the MP station, I said nothing about it.

The next morning, Reyes, Zane, Harvey, and I visited Mainz-Kastel. It was a large Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) warehouse that served a large region of Germany. They had specialty stores for stereos, cameras, furniture, jewelry and appliances. Sooner or later, every soldier in the area visited Mainz-Kastel, because the items were tax-free and Germany had a high sales tax. Zane and Harvey were shopping for stereo components.

There were a lot of audiophiles in the service. Soldiers would research speakers, woofers and tweeters, turntables and receivers. It was a passion. There were magazines full of advice and pictures of components in every barracks room. I was hunting for a camera. Reyes came for the company. I bought a 35 mm Pentax K1000 camera. It had a metal body and was a great, sturdy camera. Zane was researching his next stereo purchase; he already had a stereo system in his room. Every time I stopped by his room, it seemed he had Bob Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde* or *Blood on the Tracks* turned up. Sometimes, I would lie on the floor and listen.

Zane had grown up on a small ranch. He had pictures of quarter horses on his wall. But he loved Bob Dylan, not country music. For a while, growing up, his nickname was Tiny, because he had once bought a Tiny Tim album. But then he got his name in the local paper for saving fishermen from drowning. As he told the story, they were a couple old guys from Chicago, drinking beer and fishing while he and his little brother were duck hunting. The fishermen managed to flip their boat completely over. He said he didn't hesitate, he saved them one at a time in his small Jon boat.

The first man he pulled out of the lake had a pacemaker. Zane gave me a good piece of advice. When you rescue someone from the lake into a small boat, you can't pull them in over the side, or you'll capsize. They should crawl in the back over the transom. You lower the outboard motor so that they can step onto the metal plate above the prop and crawl in. In a small boat, it's best to sit in the front to balance the weight distribution as they crawl in. It was surprising the boat didn't capsize. He was using a ten-foot Jon boat. After he delivered the second fisherman to their cabin, he was asked to retrieve their tackle floating on the lake and tow their boat to the dock. He picked up his little brother, who was waiting patiently on the shore, and they flipped over the capsized boat and bailed it out, before towing it back. They didn't chase down the bobbers and lures floating on the water. His mother called the local newspaper, and

they interviewed his brother who made him sound like a hero. Anyway, the best thing about it all, he said, was that after that he was no longer called Tiny.

Zane had a small mustache and light brown hair. He was about six-foot-two and weighed about 210 pounds. He ate everything and never gained weight. He was always saying country stuff like, "There isn't a horse that ain't been rode. There isn't a cowboy that ain't been throwed." Zane and I were becoming friends. Except for his stereo, he was easygoing. No one was allowed to touch his stereo.

He was always willing to doing something, so we did things in our free time. We would hear about something and do it. We heard about a nude beach, and Zane thought he knew where it was, so we drove to the location in his car. He owned a Citroen. It was a faded yellow box with a slide shift. His car was the size of a four-man golf cart. To shift gears he had to manipulate the shifter in the dash. The shifter looked like the handle of a parking brake. We never found the beach. We did find a pond, but by that time it was dark and deserted.

Harvey was very young, just out of high school. He was quiet. We didn't know much about him. He wanted a good stereo. I got the feeling he had not had many material items in his life and that buying something like a stereo was an important moment for him. None of us hassled him about it, except Reyes, who wondered why anyone wanted to spend so much money on a stereo when radio music was free. I was in the Reyes camp. I didn't come to Germany to listen to music. So Harvey got stereo advice from Zane, and bought a Pioneer receiver with a tape deck and phonograph and Kenwood speakers.

The next day, we had a unit picnic. Mandatory fun, as we say in the military. I was attracted to women with dark hair and brown eyes. Angela had long legs, dark hair, and brown eyes. She was beautiful. I heard she was from Louisiana. The first time I saw her, I stared, and then looked away before she spotted me. Angela was our

personnel specialist. She was intelligent, and no one messed with her. Something about her demeanor demanded respect. The fact that she worked directly for Z may have been a factor. The first time I had a conversation with her was at the mandatory fun.

Somehow, we ended up alone together at the picnic, and we talked. We talked about the military. We had both joined to get ahead. Angela joined for the legal experience and for VEAP. She told me how she loved New Orleans, with all the different people and the dance clubs and music. She told me she loved to dance, and she and her roommate Chris and her friend Jimmy went dancing every weekend usually in Frankfurt. I told her I had also joined for VEAP, and to tour Germany. That I wanted an advanced degree so I could do something more challenging than lab assistant. Maybe lab chief I said, laughing. I told her I couldn't dance a lick.

She took me aside and whispered, "Be careful, there are some women who join the military to find a husband."

I laughed again and asked, "Is that why you joined?"

"Well if I did, it wouldn't be you, because you can't dance."

Then we talked about the military some more, and I asked her, "Is there anyone I need to look out for? Is Z okay?"

"I get that a lot. Sergeant Z's bark is worse than his bite as long as you don't lie to him. Lie and you die, as he says, and he means it. But watch out for the officers. If one ever talks to you, be careful. You're a private. What would an officer want with you?" Then she did something sweet. She asked me about the lab work, and she looked interested.

Male ego engaged, so I told her. Heavy metals like lead, arsenic, and mercury are in the gyttja. When fish ingest heavy metals the heavy metals are deposited into the fish's fat through the food chain. If a person eats too many fish who have consumed these metals, they can contract diseases like cerebral palsy. So identifying the drainage areas that contribute to heavy metal pollution is worthwhile.

I also told her about the torpedo. The torpedo was an ingenious device. It was a two-inch diameter pipe about eighteen inches long with a large, circular lead weight attached near the top for stability. On the end was a welded rebar loop, and on the inside of the torpedo was a plastic tube that was held in by plastic screw-in tip. There was a small chamber in the top of the pipe with a ball bearing so that when you pulled up, the ball bearing sealed the sample in the plastic tube. A rope was clipped to the rebar loop. Then the torpedo was dropped over the side of the boat with the rope running through your hands, and when the torpedo hit bottom, you tightened your grip to keep the torpedo erect so that it didn't flop over on its side when it hit bottom. I blushed when I said erect. She smiled. Then it was pulled up, and you placed the sample in a marked sample bag for processing by me. Processing samples was grunt work.

By this point I was certain she would have no further interest in me. But not once did she look bored or look away. Zane came over and started talking to us and then some others joined us. I left to get another drink.

In my short experience, there were two types of MPs. The by-the-book MP and the laissez-faire MP. I was the live-and-let-live, laissez-faire type. Calvin Dixon, was the other kind. He would spray furniture polish on his helmet and spit-polish his boots before every shift. MPs had the best helmets. We wore helmet liners, not the traditional steel helmets. The helmet liner was thin fiber glass lacquered with multiple layer of black paint until it shined. "MP" was affixed to the front in large, white letters. Next to the letters, a large red reflective stripe was affixed on each side. Over the temple was the 8th Infantry Division symbol, a blue arrowhead and a large white "8" with a yellow arrow through it. Across the back were more red stripes.

We wore jump boots, with hard, shiny toes. The best way to make them shine was to spit on them and then polish with a soft rag. Something about spit made them shine. Over our uniform we wore

the military web belt. The holster was attached to the right side of the web belt with the .45. The .45 was the Colt .45 caliber Model 1911, semi-automatic pistol. The primary side arm of the US military since 1911. To prevent loss of the .45, there was a lanyard attached to the belt which snapped onto a loop on the .45. Handcuffs were attached to the back of the web belt with a snap strap that fit around the web belt. The night stick and night stick holder loop was attached to the left side of the web belt.

Dixon volunteered for everything. He wrote many tickets. Regarding alcohol and traffic tickets, I often exercised officer's discretion which meant no apprehension or citation. Verbal warnings for traffic offenses and rides to the barracks for congenial drunks were my preferred resolution.

Many of us had joined the military to escape something or to get ahead. Some had alcohol problems, and some even had drug problems. One of my roommates had a drug problem. Shortly after I arrived in Mainz, I was going to play one of my cassette tapes that I kept out in the open in a common area of the room in case someone else wanted to use it. One day when I opened the cassette box, there was something wrapped in tin foil hidden between the plastic folding cover and the cassette. I opened the tin foil and found hashish. I exclaimed loudly, "What the hell is this doing here?"

My roommate, Belvedere, came around the corner of a footlocker. His bunk was on the other side of the room. I rarely saw him, because we worked in different squads. He whispered, "That's mine," to me and to meet him in the bathroom in five minutes. So I waited a few minutes and proceeded to the bathroom. When I got there, he was waiting with one of his friends, Nelson. Nelson was from Los Angeles. He was slightly taller than me and weighed about 190 pounds. He was well liked, a natural leader.

Nelson started talking. "Belvedere has already been in trouble once for drugs. His father is retired military, and if he gets in any more trouble, his old man will disown him. If they catch him again,

he will not be an MP, and they will ship him out of here. So would you mind not saying anything about this?"

"Can he hide his stuff somewhere else?" I asked.

"It won't happen again," said Belvedere.

"Then I'll let it go."

"Thanks," said Nelson.

Nelson was a short-timer, meaning he would leave in a few days to return to the states. He was known for a special hold he had used once to break up a bar brawl. Every post had clubs. There were separate clubs for the lower enlisted, the senior enlisted, and the officers. The lower-enlisted clubs got wild on the weekends, and on occasion the MPs were called in to break up the brawls. One of the holds used to walk the rowdies out of the club was the tip toe hold.

To perform the tip toe hold you place the nightstick between the subject's legs from behind with your fingers downward tightly gripping the center of the nightstick. You lift upward and forward with your right hand while grasping the subject's clothing at the neck with your left hand. A subject in this position is under your control and can only walk forward on their tiptoes. It is very effective and useful for walking a rowdy out of the club.

The rumor was Nelson, as a young inexperienced MP, held the nightstick with his hand up instead of down by mistake. Nelson literally had him by the balls as they say. Thereafter, in platoon lore this was known as the full Nelson. After two years the story was still being repeated. The full Nelson, however, was not.

Later I learned why Belvedere hid his hash in my cassette. One morning, I woke up early in the morning, 0500 (5:00 a.m.) or so, to blue eyes staring me in the face. The blue eyes were those of a white German Shepherd. I jumped back against the wall beside my bed. MPs from Frankfurt were conducting a no-notice health and welfare inspection with drug sniffing dogs. It was really a legal search for drugs, but in the military it is defined as an inspection of the troops and their barracks. Inspections were permissible anytime of the night or day.

THE COBURG GATE

One day, I noticed Belvedere had moved out. Scuttlebutt was he got in trouble and was shipped out. I later heard it had something to do with being unfit for duty. They shipped him to Bruholm, Germany, to an engineering battalion in the middle of nowhere.