



## THE GABILANS TO CHOSUN

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# The Gabilans to Chosun

MEMOIR OF A FORGOTTEN WAR

A NOVEL

STEPHEN A. KLOTZ

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*To A.P. and M.P.K. who made me. They deserve  
the credit for what good I may have done.*



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# INTRODUCTION

IN THE FALL OF 2004 Dr. Paul Caanen flew to Monterey, California to attend an AIDS conference. He rented an economy model sedan and placed a roll of watercolor paper, a glass jar, brushes and several tubes of paint in the backseat and then drove out of town to paint landscapes before the meeting the following day. Driving toward Salinas alongside the Santa Lucia Mountains, he carefully pulled off the pavement next to a recently disked field. He placed the watercolor paper on the trunk, sketched the mountain slope before him with its scattered live oaks. A white farmhouse and red barn stood out halfway up the mountainside. His feet slumped into the soft dirt, meadowlarks called from clumps of rust-colored grass at the edge of the field and the late morning sun warmed his tall frame.

An hour later, he tossed out the water, placed the painting on the back seat and drove toward Fort Ord, a site he had not seen for over thirty years. He went through the main gate, now derelict, and looked toward a small cluster of decaying barracks. These buildings once stood shoulder-to-shoulder, block following block, in the immense fort. Nearby, was the dilapidated Fort Theatre with a fabric banner billowing out in the gentle breeze which read, "Native American Rally Today." When Caanen last saw the theater it was advertising *The Sound of Music*.



Fort Ord infantry trainee barracks

Caanen drove onto an old deserted parade ground, stopped the car, got out and walked along the row of decrepit two-story barracks. Each one rested on pier and beam foundations several feet off the ground. Flakes of yellow-brown paint and fragments of green asbestos shingles lay in neat rows below the buildings, having slid off the gabled roofs. Caanen rapidly sketched the barracks.

Later, he looked westward as the sun just barely topped the pine trees spraying light over the weathered, yellow facades of the barracks. He stepped on to a concrete threshold, pushed open the front door, and entered a small foyer. The stairwell to the second floor was directly in front of him but the wooden floor had a large gaping hole and the flooring had fallen to earth below.

Against the gypsum wallboard was a large black plastic bag filled with yellowing paper. Caanen pulled out a stapled

contract: a copy of a mortgage for a house in Arkansas. Another sheet with foxed edges was a Department of Defense order cut August 15, 1965, for a staff sergeant to proceed to Kimpo Airport, the Republic of Korea. Caanen stood transfixed trying to recall the moment he had received just such an order. Those were confusing times.

He slowly dropped the papers and walked to the car. To the east, just barely perceptible, were the peaks of the Gabilan Range, home to Steinbeck's *Red Pony*. He pulled the automobile keys from his trouser pocket and slid into the front seat staring at the shabby yellow buildings. There was a time when the scene before him was vibrant with thousands of shouting young men, marching and running in formation. Those were exciting times for many men.



**BOOK ONE**  
**ARMY BOUND**



## CHAPTER 1

### AN ARMY RECEPTION

THE SUMMER OF 1965 was an inferno in the Midwest with daily temperatures nearly 100°F throughout June. Paul Caanen, aged twenty dropped out of college for the third time, living at the family farm near Kansas City with his parents. His father, a professor of medicine, was not pleased to see him back in the house and the two argued daily. His father gave up urging his son to return to college and succeed as he had done being awarded a scholarship to the University of Chicago. To show his indifference to his father's achievements, Paul focused his attention on agricultural matters at the farm such as mowing pastures, tending to the sheep, cattle and hogs.

His cherished hero was Gabriel Oak from *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Yet, Paul obviously wanted more than just being strong, steady and capable. By night he read the philosophy of Kant and Schopenhauer. It was no surprise however, when he received a letter from the local draft board ordering him to report to the Armed Forces Receiving Center across the street from the Kansas City Post Office, a short stroll from Union Station. Paul's beloved mother drove him to the building in the early morning hours and left him on the sidewalk in his best Levis and T-shirt. She sat in the faux, wood-paneled Mercury station wagon, tears streaming down her cheeks. Caanen, close to tears himself, waved goodbye

surreptitiously and walked into the yellow brick building. He felt supremely empty. Yet, he had betrayed his mother by doing absolutely nothing to save himself from this fate. This was not the future she foresaw when leaving him as a freshman at college three years before. As a young bride she had experienced the absence of her husband for three years when he fought his way through Normandy with the 3rd Army; she was not prepared to experience such anxieties again.

A corporal stationed at the entrance told him to find a place to sleep for the night, as he would be boarding a bus the following morning for Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and Army Basic Training. After claiming a weathered leather couch to lie on for the night, Paul joined the other recruits assembled in the spacious “ballroom.”

“Alright, everyone toes on the yellow line on the floor and face me,” shouted a thin, dark haired, stoop-shouldered Specialist E-5. “We’re gonna give you a physical and check your blood and urine. Keep your mouths shut and move quickly. Okay, You, You, and You into the latrine and give me a urine sample in this container. Fill it halfway up! Halfway up! I don’t want any piss dribbling down the side of the container.”

Fifteen minutes later the specialist slapped a flashlight in his palm to accentuate his commands. “Alright, we’re gonna’ start the physical. Strip down to your birthday suit and throw your clothes on the chair behind you.” There was pandemonium as a hundred men groaned, mumbled profanities and began to remove their clothing. Most of the recruits had never undergone a physical examination and were a little alarmed at what might be coming.

“Hold the noise down! Alright, Doc will check you out for heart murmurs now.”

Dr. Leon was a short man with large glasses, a menacing



smile and graying short-cropped hair. He pronounced his name with a French pronunciation, *Lee-own*. He sauntered casually along the line of men, briefly held the stethoscope to their chest, thrust his head toward the recruit's head, and looked him over from head to toe.

"You! Back up two steps and stand there," he said to a recruit after listening intently with the stethoscope. Later he said, "Specialist, collect those men I had fall out and send them back upstairs, they won't be in This Man's Army." A handful of recruits grabbed their clothes, dressed hurriedly, and ran up the stairs to the entrance. No one stopped to argue about the decision—they had been given their freedom because of a heart murmur. Paul was relieved that he had made the cut—it was no use returning home to haphazardly study philosophy and argue with his father, no matter how sophisticated and righteous it made him feel.

"Alright everyone, turn around and face the back of the room. Grab your cheeks and bend over! Bend over there! Doc's gonna check you out for hemorrhoids." The specialist walked deliberately along the line of men shining the flashlight at each butt. "Dr. Lee-own" walked stiffly behind him glancing over his right shoulder at the straining recruits. At the close of the day the remaining recruits formed up again on the line in the "ballroom."

"Alright, one man at a time, knock and enter the Doc's office. One at a time! If he gives you the green light, you're off to Leonard Wood tomorrow," the specialist said.

Paul knocked on the thin paneled door and entered the room with its scuffed, white linoleum tile floor and gun barrel gray government-issue metal desk in the center of the spacious room. Sitting behind the desk, Doctor Leon stared at a document, his right hand buried in the middle desk drawer.

"Are you a muff diver?" he asked, not looking up.

“What, Sir?” Paul asked.

“I said, are you a muff diver!?”

Paul, uncertain as to his meaning, looked quizzically at the doctor who now raised his head. Paul could see he was fingering a pistol in the drawer of the desk.

“A muff diver or Nancy-boy, which is it?”

“Muff diver, Sir,” Paul said, at which point Dr. Leon signed a form and handed it to him.

## CHAPTER 2

### BASIC TRAINING

THE NEXT MORNING THE recruits boarded the Greyhound buses with their only possessions, the clothes they were wearing. Upon arrival at Fort Leonard Wood the young men queued for the “barbers.” Boot Camp began. With raw, shaven and sometimes bleeding skulls, they double-timed over to the quartermaster and were issued fatigues. A sergeant stood rigidly in front of the men and began chanting, “Alright, I want you to take four fatigue trousers, four blouses, eight pairs of socks, one web belt, eight briefs, eight tee-shirts...Hey, asshole, I said eight socks, not nine!” Army efficiency was evident from the get-go. Hundreds of men were measured for summer wardrobes within a matter of minutes and nearly every item fit perfectly.

Their Drill Sergeant met them outside the quartermaster warehouse. He would be with them twenty-four hours a day for the next two months. Every recruit was immediately in awe of his Drill Sergeant from the moment of the first meeting. Sergeant Powell stood out by virtue of his starched and pressed fatigues, a campaign hat cocked forward on his brow, dark sunglasses that were never removed, and the perfect symmetry of his Black facial features and moustache.

Week one was an eye opener and Powell’s cleverness was inexhaustible. The platoon fell out on the parade ground one very hot afternoon and Powell talked to the men in

conversational tones for the first time. He stood at ease, slowly bobbing forward and backward at the waist by rising on his toes. His dark glasses kept everyone from observing where he was looking. He did not sweat like the recruits who had moisture stains under their armpits and down their backsides. His fatigues were always crisply dry, tailored and sharply creased.

“Okay, we need recruits who actually know what they’re doing. We’ve got to get the parade ground renovated this week. Raise your hand if you’ve driven heavy equipment.”

“Good! Fall out over here!”

“How many masons have we got? Fall out over there!”

“Any carpenters? Excellent. Fall out over here!”

Most of the platoon volunteered for various ‘construction’ work. As it turned out “heavy equipment operators” pushed wheelbarrows full of gravel to the parade ground; “masons” were issued a trowel and removed dandelions from the turfed areas; “carpenters” were given crowbars and ordered to remove nails from lumber used to erect the bleachers.

Sergeant Powell’s favorite exhortations to the privates under his charge were: “Get it right or a Cong’s gonna shoot your ass off.” “Wake up! You won’t last twenty seconds in Nam.” “Close up the line, you sons-of-bitches.” “You pansies can double-time it back to the barracks.”

No one wanted to disappoint his Drill Sergeant and Caanen was no different than the others. Powell’s impeccable dress, clear diction, and ease around men mesmerized Caanen and the others. To a man, they revered Sgt. Powell.

Caanen was put on KP (Kitchen Police) duty for a week. He spent hours each afternoon peeling spuds, reaching into a burlap sack of potatoes, peeling and cutting out the “eyes” and then pitching the spud into a large galvanized garbage can filled halfway with water. Every now and then the mess

sergeant inspected the floating potatoes. Caanen and another recruit filled three cans a day and struggled to drag the cans into the kitchen. This mass provisioning and the monotony of the job was Caanen's first awareness that life as a private in This Man's Army had its shortcomings. The tedium of daily Army life began to weigh heavily.

The platoon was housed in a brick bungalow-style barrack. The soldiers were busy each evening polishing belt buckles, boots, doorknobs and faucets in the john. Caanen (and every other recruit) spent a lot of energy avoiding Matheny, a bully who sauntered around the barrack in the evenings punching men's shoulders. After an evening of pummeling by Matheny, victims were barely capable of holding their arms in the air. He bullied some soldiers into straightening out his footlocker. Although short statured, Matheny sported enormous biceps.

Calisthenics commenced at 7:00 a.m. sharp. The exercises were various and Matheny's large biceps could not rescue him doing poorly in calisthenics. The mile run at the end of the exercise was difficult for him and he gasped for breath. Sergeant Powell was on his case right away.

"Come on you pansy, finish the race! For a tough guy your legs are puny, Matheny." The other recruits smiled to themselves but hoped the sergeant wouldn't go too far humiliating him—they would be the ones to pay for it.

The heat and humidity were oppressive in cotton fatigues. Afternoon exercises were often called off because of the heat index. Windows were kept open in an effort to prevent the spread of meningitis. Since there was no air conditioning the humidity in the barracks was suffocating. As the second month wore on most of the soldiers lost 10 pounds or more and were constantly hungry. The chow hall was crowded in the evening, but with food, spirits revived. Following dinner everyone drifted back to their barracks and worked on

personal matters until *Taps*. Then, they lay in their briefs on top of the bed sheets—twisting from side to side until dawn.

\* \* \* \*

Private Whaley came from a small family farm in southern Missouri and was the only man in the company with whom Caanen spoke to with regularity. Boot camp was not a place for making friends—recruits were busy from *Reveille* to *Taps*—and little was said except for jokes or complaints about the military. Whaley was convinced that everyone would end up in Vietnam. The memory of his small girls waving to him as he left the induction center came to his mind's eye every day.

Caanen, on the other hand, appeared unfazed by threats of being shipped off to Vietnam. The emptiness he felt when his mother left him at the Recruiting Station had been replaced with a gung-ho approach to the Army—he was obsessed with the thought he would make it a career. At night he continued his former way of life reading Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, intellectualizing about his existence. Didn't Wittgenstein volunteer for the Army as a lowly private in World War I and later as a hospital orderly during World War II?

"I don't think I can possibly go to Vietnam," said Whaley. "I mean my wife and girls need me for years to come."

"I doubt the Army is going to consider that a good reason for not sending you," Caanen said. Like most of the unmarried men he was not very empathetic. Flushed with his own good health, he was responsible only for himself. He retreated into philosophical sophistry to explain his failure to succeed at the university. He was going to do something different and more important than his father. Whaley's family crisis was not his intimate concern.

Whaley, white-haired and flushed from a day in the sun, looked downcast. He knew full well there would be no

exceptions made for him. “My wife wanted me to come home this weekend—they wouldn’t give me a pass.”

In the Army, Caanen and the others experienced a classroom different from any they had known before. Soldiers marched and double-timed from one “classroom” to the next. Classes were conducted outside in the grueling sun—the lecturers stood on wooden platforms at a rostrum and used microphones. On each side of the platform were flags and guidons of the different units. The “students” sat on wooden planks and impatiently awaited their smoke breaks.

One weekend of leave near the end of training half of the men returned with tattoos, Matheny with two of them; one was a horned, blue devil with a trident in his fist on one shoulder and on the other, a red heart with an arrow piercing it and “Mother” inscribed in the center of the heart. It all looked a little fantastic, what with his blonde hair cropped short, plethoric face, and bulging biceps flexed for effect.

One evening Caanen lay on his bunk reading when Matheny suddenly stood beside his bed. “What are you, a pussy, Caanen? You didn’t come with us for a beer. You pussy!”

Caanen groped for something to mollify him to avoid a fist pummeling. “Yea, I guess I am somewhat of a pussy,” said Caanen feebly. Matheny scoffed and walked off.

Whaley told Paul that his response to Matheny was just right. “Why argue with the guy when you know good and well he can beat you to a pulp.” However, Whaley’s well-meaning statement did not ease the shame of allowing someone to threaten him. Caanen knew that this was not how the pint-sized Private Maggio would have reacted to a bully in *From Here to Eternity*.

Eight weeks of grueling training finally ended. There was a sense of pride and a great deal of relief upon completing Boot Camp. Everyone anxiously awaited his next assignment. At

the graduation ceremony each soldier learned of his next duty station. Whaley and Caanen drew Fort Ord, California, the major jumping off point for infantrymen to Vietnam in 1965.