

A LIVING IN THE COUNTRY
SHORT TALE

DRILL
SERGEANT



HARTLEY STEVENS

Drill Sergeant

A Living-In-The-Country Short

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Drill Sergeant

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A Living-In-The-Country Short Tale

By

Hartley Stevens

I loved football — I mean, I really *loved* it. I was recruited out of high-school to play for the University of Florida. I wasn't offered a scholarship. The U-of-F was suffering some NCAA sanctions and scholarships were on the chopping block. This was the mid '80's.

Still, as an invited 'walk-on' I lived in the same dorm as the scholarship players, I ate at the same training table, took the same classes. At the same time, I was like a second-class citizen and had to work harder and longer to get noticed. The practices were next level up, way more difficult than I'd imagined. The off-season workouts were twice as grueling.

I played for two years and didn't get noticed.

The real *talent* was just that good. Sixteen players I interacted with on a daily basis moved on to the NFL. I knew I wasn't NFL material—I just wanted to be a Gator player. It didn't work out.

And so, midway through my sophomore year, I found myself floundering. I always thought football, as a player then a coach, was going to be my life's calling. It wasn't to be and I needed a radical change.

My family was my *rock*, my steady-on. My mama was sweet and my dad was tough. Then they decided to divorce and my *rock* got busted with a sledgehammer.

I needed to get out of town, far away. Do something different, see the world. I decided to join the Army.

My grades were good. I got great scores on the SAT and ACT. I graduated first in my class from high school, then had two good years of college. I decided to kick this *Army* training in the ass and seek adventure.

I rented the movie *Stripes*, then watched it the night before moseying down to the recruiting station. The guy behind the desk fell over himself to sign me up.

He asked, "What do you want to be?"

That seemed obvious, but mama always said that people who couldn't go to college went into the military. "An Army person." I said.

Looking back now, I'm sure Sergeant Recruiter had a difficult time holding back his tears of joy at my pain to come. "So, you want to be a soldier?"

I thought, *Maybe I should be talking to someone else?* My best friend from high-school was a cadet at the Military Academy at West Point. I'd been recruited there for football too, but declined when the Gators came calling. "Yes... a soldier."

“What job do you want?”

Job? What the hell, there were jobs? “I’m not sure, I kinda figured everyone just got to be soldiers, as you say. I thought it was all digging foxholes, living in tents and shooting guns.”

He must have been thinking that I didn’t even watch the advertisements on TV. Those “Be All You Can Be” commercials. He said, “You have the highest scores of anyone I’ve ever recruited. You could have your pick of any job you want.”

I’d told him my football, down-trodden story and my angst with the coaches. And about my family *rock* being obliterated. He, was reading, some asinine script.

I told him, “I’m not in any legal trouble. I just need to get out of town and on to the next thing in my life, as soon as possible. I don’t care a damn about any particular job. I didn’t even know there were different jobs.”

Recruiters are supposed to recruit applicants into the highest possible job they can. They can get paid a bonus. Evidently the sky was the limit for him. And I was the wandering sheep he’d never seen. “With your qualifications you could go legal, work day in and day out with lawyers, prosecuting cases.”

“Whatever. Let’s do that.”

Looking back now, I see his options weren’t as plentiful. I can remember the smug smile as he got ready to punish the college-boy. Remember, this was all before 9/11. Back when we weren’t even sure about patriotism, because of Vietnam. No one *volunteered* for the army.

“Would you like to go Airborne?”

“What?”

“Would you like to jump out of planes?”

I made his day. “Does it pay more?”

He scribbled and smiled again. “Oh yes, it certainly does.” I’m sure he thought, *At least it does for me.*

I condescended, “Sergeant, I don’t care about the job. I don’t intend to make this crap a career. I just need to get out’a here as quick as possible.”

It was probably his best day as a recruiter. I’m sure he told that story from a different point of view for the remainder of his time in service.

“Well then, let’s just sign some papers and we’ll get you on your way.”

I left for Fort Sill, Oklahoma, twenty-six days later.

I’d never flown in a plane. I’d never seen snow. I’d never really been *cold*. That was all remedied in short time.

We spent the first five days in Processing in the Welcome Center. We got yelled at a lot and issued all manner of camouflaged clothing and tools to live in the dirt. The experience was horrible, but expected. I spent that first week as a soldier bunked next to a heavy fellow who

nightly practiced Voodoo. He'd sneaked in materials and supplies necessary for building dolls which he stuck with all manner of sharp objects. He'd somehow got matches, burning incense and herbs. I hated him.

On the seventh day GOD arrived. The god of hate, vengeance and honed military skill. His name was Drill Sergeant Weir. I was nineteen years old.

I'll never, ever forget Weir or that first day.

One hundred and fifty of us rag-bag wannabes lined up in three platoons, fifty men to each.

Weir was dressed in perfect uniform, medals plastered against his chest. He was black as coal and moved with the grace of a NBA basketball player.

Behind him was something I recognized. A cattle trailer hooked to a semi-tractor.

The Welcome Center drill sergeant, who we figured had been so mean to us for the last week, saluted Weir. "They're all yours."

@#%&&&&***!@#%&&& - times a billion.

Sticks and stones will never break my bones – but, words will never hurt me. So the children say.

Bull... let *me* say.... Bull... shit. Right before our eyes, Drill Sergeant Weir grew horns and scales and all the other creepy, scary shit which adorn demons from hell.

Six more devils descended upon us and began yelling words which would wilt an oak.

The message was, “Get your sorry excuse for a roaches snarled ass into the cattle car.”

One hundred fifty young men, scared out of their minds, grabbed everything they owned plus two hundred pounds of newly-issued gear and tried to get through a hole the size of a doorway—at the same time.

I was one of the first.

To say they were yelling commands and insults is not nearly an accurate description of what happened. It was the scariest moment of my life—still. We packed into that cattle car as hard away from the hate as possible. A diesel engine came to life. The vehicle moved.

Hell opened up a doorway and life afterwards has always been different.

Drill Sergeant Weir, said—no, “said” is far too nice a word—he *boomed* orders with the authority of a cannon. The five other drill sergeants yelled in concert, “GET YOUR SORRY ASSES TO THE SIDE. MAKE A PATH.”

I smushed my face against the plastic glass of the cattle car. I’d happily ride outside or on top if possible.

“You make me sick, sick to disgust. Start pushing up Oklahoma air, you sorry mutherfuckers.”

On top of each other, with no regard for our brethren, we began doing push-ups on the sides, backs and faces of our fellow soldiers.

Drill Sergeant Weir slung our gear aside like shreds from a lawn mower. He kicked, he flung, he stamped on bodies, legs and arms.

“I see some of you pussies not moving, not fast *enough*. Beat your face! Beat it against the glorious ground which you should be honored to drive across. Push it up ladies, push.

“Wheeeen this vehicle halts. Every last dick-swinger will exit this vehicle as fast as possible. You will stand at attention in your assigned platoons. I pity the last man...”

The cattle-car stopped. The door opened. I’d been first in—I was nearly first out.

Standing on line, quivering with terror, at least I was fourth in line on the front row.

The platoons were separated, the other two skirted off to the side and being yelled at for themselves.

Long, loud, silence ensued as Drill Sergeant Weir conducted perfect facing movements and stood in front of the first soldier in line. The one who’d scabbled hardest and climbed over his fellows most. Weir leaned back and got all of the oxygen around us, then slammed forward, pecking with his hat into the nose-bridge of the number-one runner, drawing blood.

“ARE... YOU... LOOKING... AT ME???”

The whole platoon, all fifty of us, shook with fear. But, we were damned-ass happy it wasn’t us.

Soldier-hopeful number one said, as he gazed to the side, “NO!! Drill Sergeant.”

Weir sucked all the remaining oxygen from beneath the barracks.

“WHEN... I... LOOK... AT YOU... YOU WILL GIVE ME... YOUR FULL ATTENTION. YOU ARE WHAT WAS LEFT AFTER YOUR PIECE OF SHIT DADDY SLIPPED HIS USELESS ROOT OUT OF YOUR MAMA’S STANK CROTCH... BEAT YOUR FACE.”

Soldier One went down for twenty push-ups.

Drill Sergeant Weir conducted perfect facing movements again and came to stand in front of soldier number two.

Mind you... this is the guy, who’d tried hardest to beat *number one* to the line.

“ARE... YOU... LOOKING... AT ME???”

He was a tall, skinny fellow. I thought he might faint.

“YES, Drill Sergeant! I’m looking at you.”

The air got thinner as Weir breathed back. “FAGGOT... BUTT FUCKING FAGGOT. You look at me—you want my ass—you butt-fucking faggot. REACH OUT AND TOUCH MY ASS – DO IT, BOY – DO IT, YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO.”

Soldier two stood rock steady. Smart guy.

“Beat your face.”

Drill Sergeant Weir did the same facing movements like before as soldier two pushed up concrete. Weir came to soldier three. I was soldier four. I was trying to learn fast.

Soldier three was a hard case from ghetto St. Louis, but clever. He'd prove that over the next months.

Weir poked him with brim of his hat. "ARE... YOU... LOOKING... AT ME???"

So "yes" and "no" were the wrong answers. I came from a world where even though the asshole asking was mean, there *was* a right answer—wasn't there? I'd decided on *yes*, even if it meant pain.

Soldier three was stringy, small, but ended up okay. "Maybe..."

"MAYBE... MAYBE... WHERE YOU FROM BOY?"

He was from east, St. Louis. And the next minutes of his intense pain saved *me* from having to say 'yes' or 'no'. I worked hard, to make him successful for the next eight weeks.

The End

Before You Go...

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