

DON'S NAM

**Franklin D.
RAST**

Universal Publishers/uPUBLISH.com

1999

*Don's Nam by Franklin D. Rast
Gilda M. Agacer, ed.
Leonard Martin, assoc. ed.*

*Copyright © 1999 Franklin D. Rast
All rights reserved.*

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 99-60923

ISBN: 1-58112-849-5

*Universal Publishers / uPUBLISH.com
1999*

www.upublish.com/books/rast.htm

*This book is dedicated to
Members of the 1st Logistical Command
who served in the Vietnam War.
In particular the men of the
7th Transportation Battalion of the
48th Transportation Group
known as the
Orient Express.
For those that served in Vietnam -
you know my story because it's your story too.*

In loving memory

of

*First Lieutenant Joe Bush (KIA Laos)
Captain James B. Hansard (KIA near Dau Tieng, RVN)
Private First Class Trey Prather, USMC (KIA near DaNang, RVN)
Sergeant William W. Seay (KIA near Ap Nhi, RVN;
Medal of Honor)*

Preface

This book is about the beginning of the end of the United States involvement in Vietnam from a junior officer's perspective on a conscious and subconscious level. It was adventitiously conceived on a sunny September day in 1989, as just a whimsical day dream when I poignantly visited the Vietnam Memorial Moving Wall in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

A Morning Advocate staff writer, Angela Simoneaux, saw me laconically kneeling, then culled me docilely away for an interview, after Guy Reynolds, snapped an emotive photo that ended up reverently on the front page of the newspaper, Monday, September 25, 1989, in graphic retrospect encomium of the Vietnam war malcontent.

It was a Procrustean photograph looking for an epochal script that could blend with the exotic horror that was the epitome of the Vietnam war on a low ranking soldier's level. Like most emotive events of my oppugnant life, the photograph placed me in the repertoire of its Alpha and Omega coevally again.

"Damn, that old green 'Army Foot Locker,' but I can't just throw it away, can I, Dolly? It's just a part of me, cause it's just so real. Damn it all!" I yelled. After all, it was real to me. The boys saw it with me, as I jumped out the back of my hooch (home) and checked the night action out near my garden. The NVA weren't there physically, but ghosts were hitting on me. They were picking and pulling, as I enigmatically fought back like a droll to chaff playfully with them. They were dancers, man.

"For God's sake, Don, go to bed. Don't you carry on about ghosts. It's just not here anymore. Cool it. Rub my foot, 'Jack-ass' in heat!"

And I did, cause, she was incisively right, and I did right, but I sneaked the old words in, fashioned after what I saw in my youth as a rite to pass over in a catechism, and then I was born in limbo again for the boys that are now ghosts in my charge. What a crying ass pity, that I'm still living, and they have all the compactibe fun.

Most of the contents of the book are congruent facts, but a hiatus of over twenty-six years must allow for some play of the imagination. To the captious reader, I'm not ashamed to profess this shortcoming. Also, some of the individuals portrayed that read this book, might take offense to my description of them. All I can do is apologize ahead of time, and say that it was done to fit the concentric scheme together for readability. This story bears distraught emotions in a time our Nation was in a kind of fractious limbo. In no way do I try to emend the contents with omniscient comments about how or why we lost the war. The brackish acerbity is in cadence with the 60s' enigmatic quandary, written in a latent lingo of the GI who served in Vietnam. In other words, for the "hand" (18-wheeler truck driver) who's thumbing through this book, while pensively scratching his tired ass at a Petro truck stop, he'll postprandially see where this book comes from. 'Cause, after all, us truck drivers have a better story to always tell after the official log book is speciously finished, and the hot coffee is poured at the counter in Tucson, Arizona. Let the legend, or lampoon, of my small part in Vietnam begin with the simple thought that my ken was just maybe from too many cups of coffee at the truck stop, just past the

“chicken-coop,” where a furtive DOT dude had yelled- “Pull over 'Wild Man,'
you're in a world of deep trouble!”

Don Rast
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
May 1998

Table of Contents

PART I

EARLY MEMORIES —	11
COLLEGE 1963-1968 —	25
FORT EUSTIS, VIRGINIA —	33
FORT WOLTERS, TEXAS —	35
VIETNAM: ARRIVAL, 10 MARCH 1969 —	49
534th TRANSPORTATION COMPANY —	53
CONVOYS —	61
CHUA —	151
SOLATIUMS —	235

PART II

379th TRANSPORTATION COMPANY —	263
PATROLS —	273
DISILLUSIONMENT —	335
R & R —	359
AMOUR —	371
ENLIGHTENMENT —	387
COMPASSION —	389
EPILOGUE —	391
GLOSSARY —	393

PART I

*I knew a man, and whether he was in the body
or out of it I cannot say, but he was
caught up to the third heaven,
caught into paradise, and
heard unspeakable words
which it is not
lawful for
a man to
utter.*

*(St. Paul,
II Corinthian,
12, 2-4)*

Chapter 1

EARLY MEMORIES

*Confucius said, "Men are born pretty much alike,
but through their habits they gradually grow further
and further apart from each other."*

I was born on February 10, 1945 at the U.S. Army Hospital, Camp Bowie, Texas (Fort Brownwood). Dad was a Pacific World War Two veteran. Mother was a stern woman, of Victorian English descent, with a mink coat and a first-hand memory of Bonnie and Clyde. I was instantly programmed, a post World War II baby boomer, and for this A-Bomb distinction, directly pee'ed into the face of my Aunt Doris who had driven four hundred miles to observe the arrival of the Rast and Simpson union with her future husband, Bill Miller, an X-ray technician at the Vet's Hospital at Fort Humbug in Shreveport.

Soon after World War II, Dad was discharged at Barksdale AFB and found employment as a millworker with a local company, but, because of his special skills in cabinet-making, was temporarily hired to teach at the Trade School on Travis Avenue in Shreveport. We lived across the Red River in Bossier City in a two-story duplex on Benton Road. There was this sulphur plant behind our place and one day it exploded. Upon hearing the explosion, Dad ran downstairs and across the green winter grass to help. Not long after, he came back very disappointed saying, "they didn't need any help." Another early memory I have of Benton Road is of a parachute and boiled peanuts. Dad had a small supply parachute from World War Two. Mom was fond of boiling green South Carolina peanuts as a treat for Dad, using a pressure cooker. One day, she was boiling some and somehow I unclamped the pressure cooker lid and as any three-year old would typically do—caused destruction. The pressure cooker exploded and boiled peanuts were scattered everywhere. Mother was burned on her hands and Dad rushed home. Frightened, scared, and guilty, I got the parachute out, stood on the upstairs porch, posed, and jumped below into a sandbox in which I had earlier buried alive one of our neighbor's cats. The rescued cat had suffocated. My parents were not impressed, and from that time on I was tagged a "difficult and unusual" child.

We then moved across the Red River to Shreveport to 4550 Hardy St. and assumed normal (WASP) lives of the 1950s. Dad was always working in the basement on cabinets and various other items for extra dollars, while Mom was constantly cooking and sewing. I was happily enjoying "spoiled" heaven when at age six my "hussy" evil sister Rebecca arrived to complicate my already cluttered view of life on this earth. She was to me an intruder into my exclusive domain.

My parents were of the 30's, when real values were actually practiced, instead of suggested. The word "liberal" was almost non-existent when they grew up. It applied only to certain folks with money. The GI Bill was a great leap forward because it opened the eyes of the common people to higher education.

I have to step back at this point and reflect on this thought. I am jumping ahead too fast, so let's go back to the *Doggie in the Window*, by Pattie Page. I was only four years old remembering the times of the *Hit Parade* and my "silver" security quilt, which was actually purple. Though not a liberal "thumb-sucker," I observed, with awe, the situation which many mortals created, and swam around in with a gloom and doom perception. The late '40s, the '50s, and the early '60s were suburban meat and potato meals. It was the period of America as the epitome of prejudices that eventually tore our moral fabric, spoiled us, and led us to fight reality with TV programs showing darn good western and war movies, laced with comedy splits by Martin and Louis, Abbot and Costello, and Amos and Andy. The Wednesday night Papst Blue Ribbon Beer fights knocked many sports loving veterans of the "Big One" in the dirt (six-pack Joe's).

As an older kid, I became a waif bohemian. Many perceptions of the late '40s, '50s, and '60s were mostly born of plain "good ol' boy" ignorance, pure and simple. Democratic WASPs were the mainstream of America in the '50s. McCarthyism and the John Birch Society were drilled into every conversation because the "Reds" were coming and they had the A-Bomb! I came to the conclusion that doomsday was just around the corner and either the Commies, polio, or some "Invaders from Mars," would end it all for me. Before anybody can understand this mentality, one has to examine our own personal perception of how things are created out of our own experiences, communication and interaction with others, and personal observations of day to day occurrences.

My reality was a good childhood memory of being car-shuttled fifty-four miles, every other week on Highway 80, to mother's birthplace, six miles outside of Arcadia, Louisiana, where Bonnie and Clyde were shot. Another childhood memory was the annual trek to Dad's parents in Holly Hill, South Carolina for two week vacations.

Arcadia, in those years, was a small town supported mainly by agriculture. My Great Grand-Daddy on the Simpson side had been a bodyguard to Queen Victoria and had even taught Edward, the future Prince of Wales, to shoot and duel. He deserted the British Army, stowed away on a ship, and ended up in Claiborne Parish in the 1880s with no money, but full of determination to survive and flourish in America.

The Simpson family was prolific and self-supporting, land-rich but cash-poor. Almost all my aunts and uncles were sent to college because my grandparents on both sides had endured the Depression and World War Two, and not having been able to obtain much schooling, wanted their children to fare better. To my country cousins outside Arcadia, I was a "city slicker" and subject to playful jokes. We would swim in the numerous creeks and ponds, hunt 'coons and rabbits, and set hooks. The work ethic was strong—everyone had chores to do.

One pitch-dark winter night, when I was five years old, we went possum hunting, and, being the youngest of eight kids walking on a red dirt road, I was totally scared by them telling me of an escaped convict in the area. Suddenly, one of my cousins yelled, "it's him—the convict," as they ran up the road leaving me alone and petrified. It was ghostly quiet as I ran along the dark dirt road not knowing whether or not my cousins were really close in front of me. I sud-

denly stopped in the pitch darkness because I sensed danger, quickly found a baseball-size rock on the road and hurled it with blind instinct. There was a thump, then a yell, and flashlights came on. My cousin Bucky, about twelve years old, was knocked out and was bleeding badly at the back of his head. He was rushed to the hospital in Arcadia for stitches. So much for convict jokes survived on their city-slicker cousin! This was my earliest memory of a natural survival instinct I have carried to this day.

Most rural areas didn't have plumbing or electricity until the early '50s. This necessitated the use of kerosene lamps and out-door privies. Out-door privies were cold places in the winter and hot places in the summer, but most of them contained the luxury of a Sears Roebuck catalog. One time, at my Aunt Bessie's near Arcadia, my cousins Ross and Freddie exited from the privy (they were affluent and had a two-seater) and told me, as I stood next in line with Cousin Willis, that they had seen a large snake behind the privy. We looked, but didn't see any snake, and then proceeded to do our business. Suddenly, we were simultaneously struck on our rears by imagined snake fangs assisted with sticks by Freddie and Ross. This joke instantly back-fired on Freddie and Ross, who were crouched behind the privy, as Willis and I exited in terror on all fours.

Since unassuming patriotism, coupled with real depression hardship, and puritan thoughts were normal, I can recall my Paw-Paw Simpson, when I was about eight, watching workers stringing electric wires to the farmhouse and dairy barn. He looked at me, and said with frustration, "it ain't gonna work 'cause the electricity's too far out of town."

We were shoveling cow manure behind the dairy barn, October 1957, when our wireless transistor radio announced that the Russians had launched Sputnik, and it was circling over the United States. We threw the shovels in the truck, went to the creek bottom, and dug a bomb shelter. It turned out to be unnecessary, because several days later a traveling salesman came to the farm and sold us a bomb shelter.

Obviously, the farm was an enjoyable diversion for a "big city" boy growing up in the '50s. Everyone worked. My uncles were up at four a.m. to milk the cows and then did such things as bailing hay or clearing land in the winter. My cousins and I worked too, but we were always swimming or hunting between chores. We shot Sun-Perch with .22 rifles in the creeks, climbed persimmon trees at night to shake down possums for the dogs to grab, or drove along the road on a winter night sweeping the green winter grass fields with a large flash light for big jack rabbits. There was a bountiful two-acre garden where my aunts, dressed in large bonnets and full-length dresses (females did not wear pants), would pick vegetables. Everyone would participate in shelling peas, shucking sweet corn, snapping beans, churning butter, and tapping toes while listening on the radio to the *Grand Ol' Opry* or Jack Benny.

First frost was an occasion to butcher some hogs for the smoke-house. This was a great community social event, except from the hog's point of view. I remember the cracklings boiling in big black iron pots, sausage being made in the grinder, and pigs hanging upside down on wooden supports out back of the farmhouse on crisp foggy autumn mornings. There were plenty of chickens and

eggs in chicken coops adjacent to the smoke house. Turkeys were wild, but plentiful. They roosted at night in the pecan trees. For Thanksgiving we would take a flashlight and shine it up at a turkey on a pecan branch, grab its legs, then wring its neck and transform it into a traditional meal along with every imaginable side dish. The farm was self-sufficient. We went to town only for two reasons: to shop or go to an occasional Saturday night movie. We usually stopped at my Uncle Dee's country store for luxuries such as coffee, tobacco, clothing and shoes.

My uncles on both sides of my family served in World War Two and Korea. In 1954, I remember riding to the train station in Arcadia with MaMa Simpson and my youngest uncle, Joe. MaMa was a happy person, but when the train pulled out of the station with my Uncle Joe aboard she looked at me and said, "I'm sick and tired of sending my boys to wars. Our luck's been too good to last." Then she started crying and carrying on. I was upset, but sincerely thought that wars were glorious and manly. Such were the real '50s impressions shared by the young and old generations alike. My Uncle Joe was sent to Berlin as an MP, served his time, and returned to Arcadia. Upon his return he gave MaMa a Black Forest cuckoo clock as a souvenir.

Shreveport was hyperspace in the '50s compared to the idyllic, self-supporting ways of Arcadia. Primary school began under the shadow of the "polio fear" at Judson Elementary – a small cluster of wooden gray and white-trimmed military structures. Mrs. Adams was my first teacher, and I was a natural teacher's pet. Liking school, I plunged into projects, with parachutes and dead cats fading in the background. We had to bring our lunch, but the school provided milk for us in a big icebox. Pupils often exchanged lunches. My favorite swap was bologna and mustard sandwiches for hot dogs with mayonnaise. There were no Blacks there, and I often wondered and questioned innocently where they attended school. "Tend to your studies," was always the reply I got. I made good grades, but was confused by fictions and realities of day-to-day experiences. One day on Texas Avenue in Shreveport, returning from Arcadia, we were stopped at a red light. From the rear seat I saw some Black men in uniform tending to one of their own lying in a truck bed covered in blood. "Look at that!" Dad said, "they are just prisoners, and probably the injured nigger got what he deserved."

Shreveport was a well-off caste ridden society of the '50s with the glue of liberals holding it in the melting pot of prosperity. Our house was a split-level brick house of middle income distinction, which meant that Dad had a teaching job that paid the bills, while Mom stayed at home. Behind our house was a sheer cliff of red clay we called "Indian Cliff" that had an eighty foot drop-off to a natural drainage creek. It was riddled with trails and thus much explored by youngsters. There were homemade rafts, caves, and hollow rocks with "Indian war paint" hidden inside as food for a kid's imagination and bounty to lure him into an adventure. Many glorious days were spent with World War Two surplus equipment, slipping in the red mud and climbing dogwood or chinaberry trees. One day, I remember a Benjamin Pump pellet hitting my ankle. I rolled over into a bush and laid still for an hour. That night, I knocked on the house of the kid who I knew had fired the pellet, and told him, shaking, that my best

friend had been critically injured by a pellet rifle wound. He was hysterical. Later, in Vietnam, he earned a Silver Star for bravery. His name was Keenan Borland. I scared him good that night.

Mishaps were part of growing up; they taught me to watch my rear while my imagination roamed free. During a rainy October day, with six or eight other kids, I was feeling my Mickey Mantle Wheaties with my World War Two surplus military gear, complete with a K-Bar survival knife, which my Uncle Lee in South Carolina on my Dad's side, had given me as a souvenir (Uncle Lee was a destroyer escort captain who had married my Aunt Iris in Charleston). Loaded with equipment, I challenged my fellow soldiers to cross the Indian Paint Creek swollen with twelve to fifteen feet of rolling foaming water on a city water pipe of twelve inch diameter. "No way," they said. I instantly jumped on the rain-slicked pipe, and, as I was running and balancing across, I slipped and hit my right arm. It snapped on impact and I found myself swirling in the murky waters. My arm didn't hurt amidst my panic. All I could think of was how my parents would say, "I told you so," and being able to show the other fellows that I could take it. Struggling, I caught a bit of floating debris, paddled to the edge, climbed the slippery bank, ran home, and hid in a closet with the K-bar knife and gear. Mother came, listened to the story, and then rushed me to three hospitals. The first two gave me shots for pain while I waited anxiously in fear of having my arm taken off. Finally a doctor from Mexico came, looked at my arm, and said they'd have to put me under to set the compound fracture. Aunt Doris and Uncle Bill comforted me. Then the doctor gave me ether, and I saw Eskimos on the walls as I was being drawn into a gigantic swirling tunnel. Later, I awoke with a plaster cast up to my shoulder. I'd survived on fear and instinct. The cast on my arm made me an object of envy to other neighborhood boys who had never had one. I started third grade at Judson Street Elementary in 1954 with the plaster cast on my arm, where I was constantly asked, "Why would you want to go and do something stupid like that?"

Mrs. Gray, our flawless teacher gave us a project—a geography report on a country of our choice. I always enjoyed reading about jungles from *National Geographic*, which Uncle Bill gave me. Tarzan and Cheetah movies were right up my stream of thought, so I chose the Philippines for my project. With modeling clay and cane, I built a Philippine cart being pulled by oxen down a red clay road. Getting the materials together, I had my first real experience with a girl. She was Jewish, and seemed to show up everywhere I happened to be. Her views of World War Two were very different from my John Wayne version of the glorious conflict. We discussed a variety of topics, and explored answers to questions like, "Where did black people live?" and, "Why did they sit at the back of buses?" She certainly aroused my curiosity, and was a great platonic companion. We both made A's on all projects. I defended her when other kids called her Jew or "Nigger lover." We made the third grade lively with questions like, "Could you eat acorns and survive?" and, "What color was a 'Jap's' blood?" Most said, "Yellow or black," "Or, oh, it had to be black!" It was one, two, three, four—'50s thought. America was in post World War Two prosperity, but the early boils of internal social revolution were beginning. Layer upon layer of religious and ethnic differences in the melting pot, unfortunately, made all of us

kids scapegoats for a bigger enemy: the dichotomy of Communism and Big Government demagoguery. The dreaded Reds were for us minors, worse than polio and invaders from Mars. We were programmed to think that way by our Depression and World War Two parents; pushed by their images and thoughts of World War One, Teddy Roosevelt, Custer, and the Civil War. Such is history, and if lessons learned from it would be heeded, more good than bad would prevail in each phase.

I write for the sole purpose of relating to the present and future generations how we thought and lived in the '50s and '60s. This everyday living was reality. The imagination of some of us ran the gamuts from borderline thoughts to reality. There were everyday union guys, working stiffs, pinko intellectuals, bohemians, and hobos, all holding hands around the camp fire, while Hank Williams, Aretha Franklin, Elvis Presley, and Nature Boy showed us a new wave of musical thought. Action art (Abstract, Impressionism) was taking shape, but to the present '90s is not really thought out, but only collected for its monetary value.

We moved to a new home in 1955 with Skip, my Collie, and sister Becky. The place had began to take shape in 1952 with two acres of uncleared land at the end of Junior Place off Greenwood Road adjacent to Cross Lake. Dad paid five hundred bucks per acre, and we cleared the land on weekends. He built us a fine three bedroom brick home with a cabinet shop and fireplace. This was no easy accomplishment on his teaching pay of about one hundred dollars a week. He went to college at night at Northwestern University in Natchitoches, Louisiana to get some kind of "political" degree to remain in the trade school system as a teacher. Sometimes, I really got the feeling that our system and the commie system weren't different at all—it was just a contest to see who had the quickest way to keep the masses organized and productive.

I attended fifth and sixth grades at Jewella elementary. We shot marbles at recess, and I remember watching soldiers in convoy trucks on Highway 80. They all waved and shouted, "hey buddy." We were always impressed by the soldiers, and my best friend "Buddy" Payne was hysterical and dumbfounded that the soldiers all knew him!¹ School was all public, and blacks attended their own school while the whites attended theirs. I was a senior at Louisiana State University (LSU) in 1967 before I ever saw a black student. The color of skin was definitely a defining element of who would be what in their destiny for the '50s, '60s, and future generations. The Civil Rights acts of President Johnson were going to be the '60s issues, but let me go back again to Junior High School and High School. I want to absolutely state that my views of these times were founded upon, and very much affected by "old-timers," white Daddy-O's, and honkies on both sides of the emerging racial dispute.

There was television now to report every issue instead of just written journalism or radio reports. Television was a dynamic blend of *Howdy Doodie* and Walter Cronkite news reporting. This was a great leap forward in our, "I told you so," day-to-day lives of just living and surviving. We could now, by more

¹ Buddy Payne and I went on to attend LSU. In 1970, we haphazardly crossed paths in downtown Saigon, 14,000 miles from Jewella Elementary School.

rapid communication, form our own opinions of right or wrong. Big Brother government was not really necessary if one thought it out. Forty to fifty percent of jobs were created jobs. A necessity of big government in order to survive and keep control of the masses.

These are perhaps presumptuous thoughts to many for a thirteen or fourteen year old to be thinking, but I was always questioning the system. Perhaps I was precocious. Americans were becoming like ants in social revolt. I saw this in Vietnam on a much more vivid level later on, as I tagged along like a curious stray dog. So began my seventh grade at Midway Junior High School in puberty. A time when hormones would distract many of us from making good grades. Jocks were heroes. I stayed quiet and watched with intellectual awe (so I thought) the ups and downs of absolute white male control of the system. Blacks were getting fed up. Women were slowly getting pissed off. Living on the outer edge of Shreveport, inner city life was of little interest, except for shopping expeditions, or the twenty-five cent movies there. You could ride the trolley cars all over Shreveport for five cents. For the most part, adults wore dresses and suits when going to town. Blacks always had to sit in the back of trolley cars. Eating in restaurants was a white-only event. Black and white society was ardently separated, but whites were separated, also. For example, WASPs, like myself, were looked on with disdain by the Pope's Catholics, and vice-versa. There was more than one fist fight during recess based on trivial remarks over religion. Nevertheless, Shreveport was the very definition of a WASP Bible Belt City. Public schooling was stern, and you could get a good paddling even in high school with no remorse or revenge imposed on the teacher. I found out early that I had a natural ability to draw and paint, to the point of my teachers' keeping the pictures. History was my favorite subject. *National Geographic* magazine and *World Book* encyclopedia were read cover to cover. Good grades were sought after by every student I knew. Some kids were dumb and some kids were smart. School then was certainly conducted very differently than today's schools where teachers' hands are tied by rules and regulations. Through high school at Fair Park, I knew of only one or two drop-outs. You just didn't quit school.

Occasionally, in Junior High, we were treated to a Hollywood movie. One movie that impressed me was Audie Murphy's *To Hell and Back*. It was the good shy white American hero getting the bad German guys. Right up my alley of juvenile male out-door adventure. I was fascinated by several distraught girls who left the auditorium during the best fighting parts. After the movie, a Sergeant Clark, in full wondrous medal-laden uniform, appeared mysteriously at the podium to tell us about ROTC. It was available to all patriotic male students when they started high school. "Sign up now," he said, "or you'll just take gym classes and miss out on being a real man." Solemnly, about fifty young "Audies" marched down and signed up. It was ghostly quiet in the thought-torn auditorium. Even the football jocks gawked with open-jaws, in dumb-found awe, as we signed up for glory and duty. It was more solemn in there than in a church. For me, it was a painless and an inherently proud logical choice to better myself while learning to lead men over childhood concrete war obstacles to

glory. Sergeant Clark was really a hero to those of us who signed up, and that Audie movie was simply icing on the cake. He was a darn good recruiter!

This took place among countless other juvenile events that justified my innocent rapture with the military. School was necessary, but now boring. I made good grades, but I was always questioning my teachers, who then responded by turning around and loading me with “shits high kingdom” homework assignments to answer the very same questions I asked. Being that “never a dull minute boy,” as one teacher described me, I made up most of the answers. I was put down in this way when I asked about Hitler’s purpose in killing Jews—“Was it economic or religious?” “Why did the Japanese really start World War II?” “What caused them to be mad at us?” I was only curious, but these questions were not the “proper” questions for a fifteen year old.

Ninth grade graduates were treated to a field day—which turned out to be a “hormone picnic.” We were bussed to Lake Blistino State Park for fishing, swimming, and hot dogs. Our usually-stern WASP teachers, who acted as our chaperones, were amazingly loose. These teachers knew that we were now free from their grasp of control, *i.e.*, grades, and were straining for the thrust into high school. The cheerleaders, the prime targets, were done in by jocks and all extras. Teachers were so friendly I was dumbfounded. It was a definite “pick-neck,” and though I soon smelled of fish, it wasn’t real fish I’d caught. Such was the hypocritical ideology of the late `50s.

That summer, before high school, was spent mostly on the Simpson dairy farm near Arcadia. By then, I preferred to stay with my three older cousins at Aunt Bessie’s and Uncle Dee’s. After working from 6 a.m. to past dusk in the hay fields, we would pour buckets of cold water from the well on each other to get the dirt and itching hay off us. Then we’d listen to *Inner Sanctum*, *Judy Canova*, or country and western music on the big-tubed radio, while playing checkers and talking of things going on locally. There was no goofing off, and we were glad to get paid for the work we did. We burned red from the sun during the hay season and proudly showed off our blistered working hands at the Alabama Community Baptist Church on Sundays. Wages were five dollars a day. Uncle Dee had a general store located across the red-clay dirt road from the house. I remember that wood frame store as a center of social activity from the time the store opened at dawn till it closed after dark. Five-cent soda pops were kept in an icebox that an ice-truck man supplied by daily depositing a large fifty-pound block on the store’s front porch for chopping up with an ice pick to chill them. You could buy two RC Colas in glass bottles, a large slice of cheddar cheese, a can of sardines, crackers, and a candy bar for a total of forty-five cents. Then get back two-cents each on the empty RC bottles to buy four-cents worth of penny candy *Kitts* or *Bazooka* bubble gum. In the late `40s and `50s, us kids were spoiled rotten with real work and store-bought prosperity. This fact was constantly drilled into us by the Depression-era men who sat on the front porch during the summer, or huddled around the big wood-burning potbelly stove in the rear of the store during the winter, while Uncle Dee cut hair for twenty-five cents. Women came in and bought goods, but the store was men’s territory, and the talk mostly focused on who’s crops were doing what, or fish stories. There was a well outside the store, and men who got dry from all the jawing

could draw a bucket of cold artesian water from fifty feet down to drink from a dipper.

Arcadia was in Claiborne Parish, and Claiborne Parish was abundant in both natural resources and folklore. George Henry was part of this local lore. He was a bearded hermit who lived in a log cabin way back in the woods on a rocky hill of Uncle Dee' property. He didn't bother anyone. I'd been about six years old, sitting on a big feed sack of chicken pellets, when he came in Uncle Dee's store for provisions one cold wet winter day. He was dressed in worn khaki and carried a "toad sack" (burlap bag). He didn't say much while getting his supplies of coffee, sugar, and P.A. (Prince Albert) tobacco to put in his bag. He paid in silver quarters, saying only, "Much obliged." He had an affable twinkle in his fraught eyes, and I introduced myself to him out of curiosity, whereupon he handed me a silver quarter that he magically pulled out of my ear.

"Who was that? Was that George Henry?" I asked. "Yep," was the solemn reply of Cousins Ross and Freddie as they oiled their Daisy Red Ryder BB guns. Uncle Dee said that George Henry was a hermit who lived alone because of the Internal Revenue Service, a money-spending woman, World War II, and a big city business he'd once owned. It was believed by locals that George Henry had hidden lots of money in hollow trees and under rocks near where he lived. At my innocuous age, he looked like a pioneer hero, or something like that. "What is the IRS?" I asked. "They are the government's men who protect us," Uncle Dee replied. "We pay them a little money called 'taxes'." I immediately started concentrating on getting Freddie and Ross to go on a treasure hunt expedition armed with BB guns to George Henry's territory. In my mind, George Henry was a *different* person. I "figgered" he was interesting enough to go visit. Here were eight and nine-year-old boys convinced by a six-year-old to get out of bed early the next morning for an adventure he'd picked. We trotted along cow trails cut in the red clay, crossed creeks, walked over the open pastures below Pine Hill, shot BBs into a dead cow, swelled and rotten with buzzards eating at it, and entered the high country of the Claiborne parish hills in search of treasure and adventure. After climbing a steep wooded hill with lightning flashing above us and cold pellets of sleet starting to sting us, we came to George Henry's impalpable cabin. His stake had been cleared by hand, as evidenced by piles of brownish-red rocks. In the trees shadows was a small fish pond below the 12' x 20' cabin which was supported off the ground by rocks under a split-log wooden floor. One kerosene lamp luridly burned inside, dimly shining through the elusive burlap door, as the wind enthrallingly flapped it.

"Mr. Henry? Mr. Henry!" I stood outside the door calling, "how you doing?"

He opened the flap of burlap, and a flash of recognition came over his face like a mentor. "Come on in! What's up?" He shouted back at me.

"Nothing, I was just curious about you," I replied. He then said, "You are an interesting kid," and he was not at all abnormal in his actions. "Look at my fields, and see my dog under the floor, we don't bother nobody, son."

I told him, "You're right about that Sir. I was just curious cause you gave me that silver quarter."

“Don’t mean nothing. I like kids like anybody else. See them fields? I cleared ‘em by hand,” he replied.

The room was Spartan—a bed and lamp—and, an overwhelming abundance of scattered literature. In one corner was a golden statue. I’d never seen a statue like that before. It had to be George Henry’s carving, but it shone so brightly! I thought it was special—something to figure out in later times.

“Next summer you boys come on out and we’ll fish in the pond there and fry some brim with commel,” he said, as Ross and Freddie shot their BB guns at minnows on the pond’s surface. We left old George Henry and doubled back to Uncle Dee’s store to warm our numbed hands and feet on the glowing red stove. It snowed later that day, and we got pieces of tin and went to slide down Pine Hill. I’d later forgot about George Henry, but I’d learned from meeting him that some people are different from others, and that first impressions don’t necessarily reveal people’s true character.

High School and adolescent anxiety began in 1960 at Fair Park in Shreveport on Greenwood Road (Highway 80). Dress codes were strict. Boys wore pants (Levi’s or Lee jeans) and girls wore dresses (no pants or shorts) with tennis shoes or loafers and bobbie socks. We were WASP’s stirring the melting pot of the Bible Belt that first day of high school, and further separated ourselves into groups such as jocks or ROTC types. Cars were rare for a student to have, but there were some with hot rods. For me, I either rode the bus or Dad deposited me an hour or more early at the school ground on his way to teach cabinet making at the trade school on Travis Avenue. I always rode the bus back home. When I was at school early, I usually joked with the Negro janitors, which was a treat because we always laughed, and it relieved me of the often overly strict WASP philosophy which I longed to escape from.

Classes were no-nonsense. The few “cool men” and Daddy O’s were not looked upon with much respect. They were tolerated and coached along as best they could be. ROTC was scary. Sergeant Clark, with not a hair on his Yul Bryner head, guided us through orientation. I went home on my first day with lists of things required for high school. About twenty dollars worth of notebooks, and this and that other kind of stuff. ROTC, by contrast, didn’t require you to spend much, initially; everything was furnished. Sergeant Clark showed us around the arms room. We were excited that we actually were going to assemble and disassemble Browning automatic rifles (BARs), M1s, and .30 caliber machine guns. There was even a rifle team and “Dixie Land drill team” if you qualified to join.

We were issued wool “Eisenhower” uniforms for “Dress.” What extra money we had, from working or from our parents, was spent on extras like Sam Browne belts, fatigues, and paratrooper boots from the local war surplus store. We thought we were on the way to getting the best of both worlds—dress up like peacocks and kill like hawks.

To spit polish those all-leather boots was an art form. Apply Kiwi shoe polish to the top of the toe, put cotton in some water, then rub the black leather and shine. See your face in your boots while the rest of you was done up in starched khakis and brass shined with Brasso, and you were up for best dressed cadet in your own mind. Obviously, we had lots of illusions. Jocks were jocks,

ROTC type were “Rot-Sees,” or to ourselves, “Peacocks” and “Hawks,” but at the end of the day, we all about went home to basically the same identical `50s and `60s rituals. Dad came home complaining about work, but Mom always had a good meal waiting and a fresh uniform for me and dress white shirt for Dad. We pulled out the *on* switch of escape TV and watched Lowell Thomas or John Cameron Swasy report the news. Then I saw *Dien Bien Phu*, or *You Were There*, like the *Lost Battalion* in World War II, and drifted in and out of hawkish fantasy with the Pabst Blue Ribbon Wednesday night fight reminding all of us males, adults and kids alike, that violence was manly.

In high school I was so busy preparing for the predictable twenty-year war, just like the twelve grades, that I found no time for thoughts of my own past like George Henry’s golden statue, or why blacks were kept silent. I was really drifting along in high school, by preference to ROTC and Art classes. High school ROTC was a dilemma for me. I wanted to be a junior officer, but seemed to butt heads with the Cadre. For example, Staff Sergeant La Rossa, a Puerto Rican from Brooklyn, was coach of the drill team and in charge of deciding who was the best-dressed cadet. He tried to humiliate me by saying the rifle team was nothing but shit. The rifle team was a natural for me `cause I could definitely shoot straight. Master Sergeant Clark was the rifle team coach at Fair Park. Master Sergeant Stuffield was the opposing coach at Byrd High School. Clark and Stuffield were friendly rivals. They were Korean war buddies. All the cadets got a chance to fire twenty pound .22 caliber rifles in the school basement at paper targets, fifty feet away, the bulls-eye being only the size of a .22 caliber round. I fired my five rounds with the target rifle. Stuffield told chain-smoking Sergeant Clark, “Your boy missed four rounds.”

“No sir,” I said, “they are on top of each other.” I was right. So much for the drill team.

The rifle team was great because I got “live ammo.” Learning to squeeze, not pull, the trigger was the thought, and to “drift the bullet.” I couldn’t drift a bullet at fifty feet so instead I trumped through the woods after school like a sixteen-year old soldier and found targets at much longer range. I had a .22 Remington bolt action repeater, which Dad let me buy for thirty two dollars new at Lee Dry Goods. Yeah, some of us bought our weapons. Commies might eventually bomb us, but we would boil up to protect our flocks like fluffed-out Peacocks, and survive like Hawks.

Junior ROTC Camp, during the summer of `61, was at Fort Polk, Louisiana. We loaded on Blue Birds at Byrd High School, Master Sergeant Stuffield was our bus driver. His wife brought him some sandwiches in a brown paper bag, and told him he was such and such for taking the boys on a one-way trip. There was a violent argument, and I remember him saying– “It’s my damn job!” He closed the bus door, drove, and we settled into six weeks of summer camp. It was all hot sand and pine trees. I remember Sergeant Stuffield because he always had a troubled, anxious look on his face. After ten hours each day of crawling on pine needles with ticks and chiggers, we got to have our pleasure and humor with jock sports.

It was 6 p.m., the July sun blinding, when I caught a ten-inch “baby” softball instinctively in my ungloved hand playing in left field, and it was enough for us

Fair Park cadets to beat the red-eyed Byrd cadets. Stuffield, coaching the Byrd team, was “put out” with the west-side Fair Park WASP cadets, to say the least.

The rules at Fort Polk were very strict. Several cadets were sent home because they could not cope with the military activities. We did Physical Training (PT), Kitchen Police (KP), fired M1s and BARs (rifles with eight and twenty round clips) over sunbaked rifle ranges, and learned to read the compass and map. In essence, it was basic training, and no slack was given. Patrolling was what I liked, because it was an activity which involved moving in the field and learning to be clandestine. Our last week was spent living in pup tents in the field. It was hot and itchy. One night, after pulling guard duty, I crawled into my tent and buttoned the flap to sleep. When I felt in the dark for my gear at the back of the tent, my helmet suddenly jumped—an armadillo had crawled into it for the night. What followed was not so pleasant, as we both put on quite a show tearing the tent apart!

My early survival instinct of “seeing” in the dark often got me in trouble. For example, we were instructed to infiltrate through aggressor lines one night. There were blanks in our M1s, but no blank adaptors to quell the wax wadding in the .30 caliber rounds. Our patrol came out of a pine thicket at a built-up railroad track, and as patrol leader, I just sensed the enemy aggressors were on the other side lying in the gravel. We are comfort-loving creatures, and, the woods being full of every biting insect, it was a logical deduction. I halted my patrol, then crawled to within about ten feet of the railroad track and listened for a couple of minutes for the sounds of the enemy aggressors, who were on the other side. I even saw an “empire” stick his head up. My decision was to charge straight at them and fire our blanks. I tossed a rock to the left over the track behind the tresses to distract the aggressors into thinking we had already crossed the tracks and were behind them. They fired blindly. It worked too well, and some of the blanks we fired at them caused some injuries. Moreover, we roughed up some of the aggressors when they tried to avoid capture, and tied them to a tree. The “empires” were really pissed off and particularly mad at me. I shot back at them, saying, “What did you expect—for us to be ambushed?” Thank God we didn’t have bayonets!

These were just my instincts reacting. No matter what went on in military or civilian events, I relied mostly on my instincts, which meant quick decisions or actions, whether right or wrong. In wars, logic is the scythe of death, because we have all been programmed to favor thought-through, by-the-book conclusions. Since I had already concluded that logic was not possible in confusion and chaos, I saw that, instinct was the natural way to survive mentally and physically on our frail rock going around a ball of gas in the middle of nowhere. In other words take the logic, use the information, and then apply it in a non-logical way—it worked every time! Why?

This way breaks the logical rules of fighting, or doing things like an administrative game. There aren’t any games in real war and business situations. You rehearse what to do or say, but almost always end up acting on instinct—in my case then from a sixteen year old perspective. War and business are really violent.

We were treated to a United Service Organization (USO) dance before leaving Fort Polk on the last weekend of summer camp. There were older women from Leesville there. We drank cokes, ate hot dogs, and danced. We were absolutely euphoric.

Immediately upon returning to Shreveport, I got to go to Arcadia, Louisiana. My cousins were burned red from the sun. They didn't have ROTC, and were curious about their "soldier boy" city-slicker relative. We spent two weeks working—mending barbed wire fences and painting PawPaw's house at five dollars daily wages while I loquaciously narrated my adventures at Fort Polk. They weren't impressed. Cousin Willis had bought a mail-order Italian 9mm Mauser rifle for \$19.95, with twenty rounds of free ammo for deer hunting. We went out on Sunday after church to test-fire the rifle. My cousins shot at cans on barbed wire split fence posts and missed badly, even as near as fifty meters. Mausers were high powered kickers; drift at long range was an important factor. "Can I fire?" I asked. The reply was "Why waste a bullet? But go ahead. It'll break your skinny shoulder and shut you up." I aimed at a can on the fence post, but saw a movement above me, looked in the grove straight up, and squeezed the trigger. A buzzard came spiraling down, and before it hit the dry corn stalks I handed the rifle to Willis. "It's okay, but the M1 has a circular sight for easy shots." They were disdainfully outdone with me and concluded, I feel, that I was beyond salvation. Such were the early '60s. It was a darn lucky shot, I thought.

I remember when school started again, Master Sergeant Clark walking with me behind the brick buildings at Fair Park and saying, "Sergeant Stuffield had an accident, we have to go see what happened." We went quickly to Byrd High School in his car. Sergeant Stuffield had taken a target rifle, put it in his mouth, and blew the top part of his head off. Sergeant Clark politely said it was the war. I personally thought it was putting up with his wife who had handed him the bologna lunch at the Blue Bird bus when he was going away to Fort Polk for six weeks. I guess I became an officer or leader then. I felt emotion for Sergeant Stuffield—he was a good soldier, who dug his own peace-time grave.

High school was okay, I liked it, and I was an *A* and *B* model student from the teachers' point of view. The '50s and '60s educational system worked for me and the others. We all wanted to be successful. My life was WASP sheltered—every funeral I attended, a "thee and thou," preacher sent the deceased to Heaven to rest; with Hell reserved for Catholics, Jews, Orientals, and Commies. They weren't really like us. Public pity was the formal attitude toward them, but in the common folks' WASP level view, those folks were hell-bound, pure and simple.

After cutting yards for a while that school year, I finally landed a real "escape" job at the Burger-Chef on Greenwood Road (Highway 80). The pay was forty-five cents an hour. I worked after school for three days a week. I earned fifty dollars a month.

Senior year at Fair Park in 1963 was the post-World War Two baby boomers' biblical version of the *Garden of Eden*. Our jocks won the State AAA baseball and basketball championships. There were few drop-outs. ROTC cadets were respected. Good grades were hard to achieve, but achievable. Ike was the war

hero/protector, and Catholic-rich John Kennedy was definitely on a political roll against the other rich people represented by Richard Nixon. As WASP teenagers in sleepy Shreveport, we let the outside world drift by. Events like Dien Bien Phu and Little Rock's desegregation struggles didn't affect us in our day-to-day world. Stuff like that didn't happen in Shreveport. Many of my friends just wanted to attend "heavens-gates" colleges, and return to a good job either in a business owned by relatives, or a government-supported plant in Shreveport, and repeat the cycle of capitalist contentment. The theme was "don't rock the boat," since you could sink your ship by questioning the establishment. We were playing checkers instead of chess in 1963. Our early years spent skipping Lowell Thomas adventure action rocks from the TV were the only outside world we were exposed to.

Chapter 2

COLLEGE 1963-1968

*You will not learn from me philosophy, but
how to philosophize—not thoughts to repeat,
but how to think. Think for yourselves, enquire,
for yourselves, stand on your own feet.
(Immanuel Kant)*

Dad drove me from Shreveport to Baton Rouge to attend freshman year at Louisiana State University (LSU) in August of 1963. My dorm room was in North Stadium on the third floor of Tiger Stadium, an astute concrete structure built by WPA (Work Projects Administration) workers during the 1930s Depression. The massive stadium could accommodate 60,000 hysterical fans on autumn Saturday nights, and was always filled to capacity during the *Fighting Tigers'* football winning seasons of the '60s under Coach Charlie McClendon. LSU was well known then as the "Ole War Skule" land-grant school of such distinguished graduates as Generals Troy Middleton and Charlie Chenault. The university required two years of mandatory ROTC for able-bodied males. All our hair was shaved off, and we were marched by sophomore cadets in khaki uniforms to every place we had been instructed to go. We were rushed by Greeks on fraternity row, and encouraged to join a cool, laid-back type of culture I had never been exposed to. I rather resented the arrogance, besides I couldn't begin to afford their life style. Several "brothers" said I would be welcome and could help them out on their grades. I was always a good student who did his homework. During those early freshman days I was often tempted to go over to the other side of the law and make quick money doing homework assignments. Besides that, there were always plenty of sorority girls messing around the fraternity pads. The stadium dormitory, on the other hand, was a wasteland of rigorous hardships. It was a melting pot of North Louisiana WASPs and Cajun Catholics, thrown together without the perk of steady family money to grease the relationship. We were trying to be survivors. I went through so many roommates, I lost count. LSU, being a land-grant school, was required to accept any student regardless of his high school grades for at least two semesters. That concrete stadium was a real melting pot all right, and featured its own amenities, such as clanging hot water pipes and cats howling in heat at night. Rules were strictly obeyed. I obeyed them and survived. I studied to appease the professors and make the grades. I didn't really know what job or profession I wanted to have, so I began college with pre-med courses. It was a strange time for me, the 1960's.

On a rainy day in November, 1963, I went to English class and the teacher announced that the President had been shot in Dallas, Texas. Class was dismissed. I walked in the drizzling rain past the Indian Mounds, and then downhill to my stadium dorm to study. Needless to say, Catholic students were really