

An Experience

By Wally Wersching (1971)

As I awoke, I heard a strange sound, the sound of someone crying. I quickly opened my eyes to see who it was but all I could see was the coal black of darkness. I tried to remember where I was but could not. Then someone else was crying and I wondered where I could be. I strained my eyes to see through the darkness. I could see nothing. I stopped trying after awhile because I was very tired.

I must have dozed off because the next thing I remember, someone turned on the lights and was shouting obscenities and a word I had never heard before. He was saying that we had two minutes to get dressed and get outside.

I got out of bed and noticed that I was already dressed. I looked at the bed where I had been sleeping and I knew why. It was a bare mattress with a large gaping hole down the center, which was alive with cockroaches.

I looked around to see something familiar, I was in a fairly small room with many metal bunk beds jammed in it. I then thought that I might know some of the people that were milling around in sort of a half-awake stupor. Everyone I saw looked like a frightened child. I began to worry because I could see no familiar face.

The same man came in the room again, shouting more obscenities. He began herding all of us out the door into the pre-dawn darkness. Once outside, another man started yelling at us, telling us to stand in straight lines. It was then that I noticed that the two men who were yelling at us were wearing some kind of blue uniform.

When we were all in a straight line, both men herded us across a large parking lot with no cars on it. As we got close to a building, which looked like our destination, there was the foul smell of vomit in the air. I looked around as I walked and could see puddles of vomit scattered everywhere.

When we finally reached the building, the two men herded us in the door single file. By the time it was my turn to go in the door, I was really worried. Here I was with a group of strange people in a strange place and everything I had seen was very strange to me. On top of all this, those two men were constantly yelling. To say that I was worried is really an understatement.

I went through the door and I immediately smelled food. I followed the line of people toward the smell of food. Finally I entered a large room that looked like a cafeteria. There was a gigantic anchor painted on the wall. Underneath it were the words: "U.S. NAVY".

Then it came back to me. I had joined the Navy and was in boot camp. I had enlisted for four years. I was still worried.