

# The Most “Unforgettable Character” I Met in the Army

by Thad (Sam) Samorajski, 398-A

The arrival of the ASTP “boys” at Fort Bragg (me among them) was a momentous occasion. Gone for us were the illusions of a college curriculum in engineering and the possibility of a commission at its conclusion. Instead, a tough cadre of NCO’s from the 100th Infantry Division greeted us at train side. Their hard faces spoke of tough times ahead. Even the music provided by the Division Band sounded ominous. I joined a small group assigned to Company A, 398th Infantry and marched off in the direction of some barracks. There to greet us was the “mother of all sergeants”—the most amazing character I ever met in the Army.

His language was simple and straightforward and he had the look of a very tough character. I remember his words, “All of you ass-holes have been assigned to my platoon. Therefore I feel obliged to give you some advice. If you will keep your mouth shut, do everything I tell you, forget about home, and perhaps—just perhaps—I can make soldiers out of you. One other point. There will be no God Damn swearing in my platoon. Furthermore always remember that I am your sergeant and not your mother. Therefore, you will not bother me with your God Damned personal problems.” To emphasize his last point, he bounced a cusp of tobacco juice off a nearby rock. It was a pithy introduction and I was deeply impressed.

We soon learned that our sergeant was a career army man from the First Infantry Division. He let it be known that he had some despair of his own about coming to Fort Bragg and the Hundredth Division. In time we got to like “Mr. Macho” but I don’t think the feeling was mutual because he was constantly on someone’s ass. I received more than my share of his attention. One occasion I especially remember occurred during our first day of training—close order drill. I was out of step. Reprimand came swiftly. “God Damn it boy, get in step!” A hard kick in the offending leg followed. To add insult to an already sagging pride, a shot of tobacco juice headed in my direction.

Life with “Mr. Macho” was never dull. His leadership qualities and simple life style brought quick results. In all matters military, he displayed a fascinating fatalism that I admire to this very day. The following are additional clues to help you identify this “amazing character.”

**1. Loyalty.** We were spending our last days at Fort Bragg. The Company was a beehive of activity—checking personnel records and packing gear. “Mr. Macho” seemed depressed. Rumor had it that he was to be transferred out of the Company. We had become Sunday morning “pals” because of our common interest in the comics. So I learned that he had some sort of a medical problem. Further, I believe he was approaching twenty years of service and eligible for retirement. No matter. He wanted to remain with the Company. Subsequently, he was ordered to take another physical. I went along to help with his paper work and hearing test. We must have done well because in the end, he got permission to stay with the Company.

**2. Fatalism.** We were on the Staten Island Ferry crossing the Hudson River. We were loaded to the ass with equipment and headed for embarkation. Remember guys? There was silence at first but soon someone began to talk. It was interesting stuff and everyone strained to listen. Another rumor was making the rounds. These words drifted across the salty air. “I hear we are going to the Pacific by way of the Panama Canal,” intoned some jerk. “Wouldn’t surprise me none,” answered another. “What do you think about it Sarge?” From the back came the crusty answer. “I don’t give a shit where we go.”

**3. Shipboard.** A lot of attention was given to keeping us informed. As you probably recall, we were constantly bombarded with all sorts of irrelevant crap but never told anything important like where we were going. I remember a session with “Mr. Macho.” We were six days out of New York when our ship began to bounce around like a rubber duck in a tub of water. “Gather round!” came the clarion call. A shuffle of feet and then a terse statement. “Men!” he said. “I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that we are in a hurricane. If you get sick, well—that’s just too damn bad because I ain’t

got time to listen to your friggen problems. The good news is that submarines can't fire torpedoes in rough seas." There was a final admonition. "So get your asses back on the bunks and stay put." Where else could we go? A swim maybe.

**4. Marseilles, France.** Remember the joy of land after thirteen days at sea? Fresh air and solid ground. In addition, we were greeted by cheering mobs as we began our slow march away from the docks. Among the crowd I noticed a young girl with a trim figure and pretty face standing above me on an embankment. I can still see her even now. She had long sensuous legs topped off by a short red skirt that fluttered in the evening breeze. She wore a tight sweater that revealed well formed breasts and a thin waist. Her long dark hair and pretty face glistened in the soft light of a setting sun. A twentieth century Joan of Arc waving wildly at the young American warriors coming ashore. She was beautiful. I stood in awe. Not for long. The loud voice of "Mr. Macho" broke the spell. "God Damn it boy! Get back in ranks and keep moving. You're holding up the fu\*\*in war." We turned a corner and she was gone but never forgotten.

**5. Combat.** One of my most vivid memories of combat evolves around "Mr. Macho." We were on the forward slope of a ridge facing Wingen and taking fire from the Germans in town. Those of you who have already identified "Mr. Macho" know that he had a marvelous contempt for German gunnery. I was amazed to see our sergeant moving around the area as if on a drill field while most of us were frantically digging in. Some Kraut with a burp gun must have been watching too because he stitched a row of bullet holes in a spot on a tree behind him just inches above his head. Our sergeant wasn't even phased. He spat a chaw of tobacco at the forest floor wrinkled his face in a sneer, and exclaimed "those German bastards couldn't hit shit if they were standing in the middle of it."

**Disclaimer.** The text describes my recollection of T/Sgt. John Nix, Platoon Sergeant, Fourth Platoon, Company A, 398th Infantry. While I cannot vouch for the complete accuracy of my account of Sgt. Nix, it at least expresses my opinion of a very remarkable man. Other members of Company A will, I am sure, have other memories of our Sergeant. I think, however, that we would agree on one point—that he was a Hell of a man.

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