

FRESH FATIGUES

a one-act drama

by Mark Blickley

© by Mark Blickley, reprinted by author's permission, registered WGAW. [All stage, motion picture, radio, TV, public reading, translation & publication rights are reserved. For information contact M. Blickley c/o This Month ON STAGE, P.O. Box 62, Hewlett, NY 11557-0062.]

[Authors Note: I was so sure that my first play, a 55-minute one act., *Fresh Fatigues*, was going to bomb in New York City, I refused to submit my bio for the American Theatre of Actors playbill. On opening night I sat on the floor next to the theatre's exit sign, my stomach knotted tighter than a hangman's noose.

Guess what? Instead of suffering the embarrassment of strangers reading my sentences out loud, I sat on that cold, wooden floor and eavesdropped on a group of military men trying to con each other. The audience applauded, and Estelle Parsons, a member of the board of directors for The American Theatre of Actors, congratulated me and expressed interest in connecting me with the famed Actors Studio playwrighting division.

It was all pretty heady stuff for a 30-year-old failed short story writer who had just recently written his first drama, an adaptation of a lousy short story. This short story, a cathartic tale about my Air Force experiences, was simply too powerful for me to abandon, even after I had buried it under an avalanche of pretentious words and purple passages. The truth of the piece kept screaming to escape from its prose prison. So instead of artistic descriptions and pounding similes, I simply plucked the characters out of the short story and propped them upon my desk, like three-dimensional dolls.

Then a wondrous thing happened—these dolls began to animate themselves. They spoke and kicked and screamed while I frantically took notes. My bloated prose style dissolved, freeing the characters. When I completed the script, I sent it off to the Library of Congress to be copyrighted, as I had done previously with a dozen short stories that were never published. Then I mailed the play off to the Vietnam Veterans Ensemble, where it was swiftly rejected. I was shocked at this rejection, because I had seen a few of their productions and felt certain they would jump at the chance to produce my opus.

After receiving their rejection slip, I had no idea what to do with the script. I knew no one in the theatre, but I did know that *Fresh Fatigues* wasn't considered a full-length play. That's when another aspiring writer friend called to tell me that he'd discovered an organization called the Dramatists Guild. I was surprised to learn that membership could be had by simply sending proof of copyright registration for a full-length play, along with a nominal fee. I hadn't written a full-length play,

indeed had no idea how to go about writing one, but as I studied my copyright certificate, I saw that it just listed *Fresh Fatigues* as a drama, not distinguishing its length. So in 1983, using deceit and ample funds in my paltry checking account, I became an associate member of the Dramatists Guild.

My membership dues paid off immediately when a listing of the monthly Dramatists Guild Newsletter mentioned a one-act writing contest sponsored by the American Theatre of Actors. I was lucky enough to have a director, one contracted by the ATA for this contest/festival, who was looking for a role for a particular actor. I've always believed that he pulled my script out of the pile because the age requirement of my play's protagonist meshed perfectly with his actor friend.

Since that first production ten years ago, I've had six plays produced in New York City at the Impact Theatre, Double Image Theatre, Playwrights Preview Productions and the Third Step Theatre Company, where I was a writer-in-residence and collaborated on an ensemble musical, *The Elephant Piece*, as a book writer. Early in 1995, my play *The World's Greatest Saxophone Player* was selected to the New Hope Performing Arts Festival in New Hope, PM.

FRESH FATIGUES

CHARACTERS

MAJOR HAMMOND - A forty year old physically fit officer.

SERGEANT TREZZA - Major Hammond's overweight secretary.

SERGEANT BOYD - Twenty-year-old dressed in filthy fatigues and boots. He is approximately the same size as Major Hammond.

SECURITY POLICEMAN #1.

SECURITY POLICEMAN #2.

Time: Early spring, 1973

Place: Charleston Air Force Base, South Carolina. The office of squadron commander MAJOR HAMMOND. Downstage Left is the door leading to the office, Downstage Right is a full-length mirror. Major Hammond is in his tee shirt doing push-ups in front of the mirror.

HAMMOND: *(struggling)* Forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight, (pause) Come on, Major, you can do it! Forty-nine, fifty!

(Hammond springs up, pats his stomach and towels off. He carefully puts on his shirt as he admires him-self in the mirror He then walks over to his desk, sits, and begins leafing through papers. He taps the desk, nervously looks at his wrist-watch, and speaks into the intercom)

HAMMOND: Trezza! Trezza! I want you in here on the double with Sergeant Boyd's file.

(SERGEANT TREZZA enters with the file and a cup of coffee. He cradles his clipboard, waiting for Hammond's directives)

TREZZA: Here, sir.

HAMMOND: When's this hero supposed to arrive?

TREZZA: At nine, Major.

HAMMOND: *(agitated)* Great way to start my day. Why does this squadron get all these Vietnam Veterans? Who's assigning them to me?

TREZZA: My buddies up at McGuire and Moody say they're getting them.

HAMMOND: Are your buddies getting their balls broken by them, too?

TREZZA: *(laughs)* I guess so.

HAMMOND: *(Flips through file)* I tried to be patient. but I can't understand their lack of team spirit. Team spirit is essential to the smooth operation of this squadron. This Sergeant Boyd seems to be the worst of the lot. I know what he expects. He thinks I'm going to pat him on the ass, thank him for his war efforts and send him home in a parade. You know, Trezza, when I first heard about the Vets' behavior I figured what the hell, give them time to adjust. But it's been three months since the war ended and now I'm mad, No more leniency. I'm going to burn this Sergeant's ass and hold it up over the base like the god-damned Statue of Liberty!

(Hammond slams his fist on the desk)

HAMMOND: Do you know this Sergeant Boyd, Trezza?

TREZZA: No, sir, Those Vets stick together. But I did see him in the N.C.O. club a couple of nights ago. Funny thing, too. Baby Blue, this hot stripper from Louisiana was working the club. She went right over to this table where Boyd's sitting by himself chugging shots and starts rubbing up against him. '

(Trezza, next to Hammond, demonstrates)

TREZZA: And when Baby Blue picks you out of a crowd it's an honor, let me tell you! But Boyd just sat there sipping his drink and didn't even look at her. Well, Baby Blue was pissed, She gave him the ultimate snub, She didn't offer him a tit. You see, if Baby Blue likes someone she holds out her tit and rubs it across his face.

(Trezza demonstrates by holding out an imaginary breast that he swipes across the Hammond's face. Hammond turns his face away in disgust)

TREZZA: But she just gave Boyd her back and walked away, and everyone in the club knew she was pissed. We were pissed, too, 'cause she kind of sulked and gave a lousy show.

HAMMOND: *(annoyed)* That's a fascinating story, Trezza. I can always count on you to give me great insights into my men. Listen, if you ever find the courage to leave the Air Force let me know. I'd like to recommend you for undercover work with the C.I.A or a hotel. Okay?

TREZZA: *(smirks)* Yes, sir.

HAMMOND: When I walked in this morning my picture of Ted Williams was on the floor. The glass is cracked.

(Hammond opens his desk drawer removes the framed photograph, hands it to Trezza)

HAMMOND: I don't know how it fell off my desk but you make sure nothing else happens to it. I want it back today, It took me years to get his autograph.

TREZZA: I know, sir.

HAMMOND: Do you remember him, Trezza?

TREZZA: Vaguely, sir.

HAMMOND: Hmmmm. You're too young. What a great man.

TREZZA: Greater than the Babe?

HAMMOND: Ruth just smashed baseballs. Williams smashed base-balls and enemy aircraft. Did you know that he flew in two wars in addition to hitting 521 home runs and batting .3447

TREZZA: *(bored)* Yes, Major. I think you've told me a little about him. I'll get on this right away.

(Trezza exits. Hammond reads the report on his desk. SERGEANT BOYD strolls into the office. Hearing footsteps, Hammond looks up)

HAMMOND: Who the hell do you think you are, Sergeant, coming in here unannounced!

BOYD: *(pauses, executes a crisp salute)* Sergeant Boyd reporting as ordered, sir.

(Hammond growls, returns the salute and shuttles through the paperwork on his desk, He extracts a manila envelope that he flings at Boyd)

HAMMOND: You look like shit. How do you smell? *(Boyd shrugs)* I've got two dozen reports on you. Sergeant, and not one says you're worth a rats ass. I'm pulling you off the flightline. I don't want any idiots working on my planes. What do you think about that, Sergeant?

(Boyd shrugs)

HAMMOND: Answer me, Sergeant!

BOYD: I don't care ... sir.

HAMMOND: You don't care? Well I care, dammit! What the hell's wrong with you? According to your file you were one hell of a mechanic over there. Your write-ups on performance while under fire is outstanding. Now you get stationed at a

paradise like Charleston and what happens? You become derelict in your duty and disobedient. What's your excuse, Sergeant?

(BOYD shrugs)

HAMMOND: Answer me, Sergeant!

BOYD: I'm unhappy ... sir.

HAMMOND: Oh. *(pause)* You're unhappy. Why? Are you a war-monger Do you miss the glory or the exotic whores? Not enough action in South Carolina?

BOYD: No.

HAMMOND: *(angrily)* No what?

BOYD: Sir. No, sir.

HAMMOND: Why were you such a good airman in Nam and worthless now?

BOYD: *(locks his finger squeezes)* I guess I didn't have to worry back there.

HAMMOND: *(screams)* Say what?

BOYD: *(releases fingers, scratches cheek)* I didn't have to worry, I was a great mechanic and not just on airplanes. I was great at doing everything mechanically. I'd pee my pants during every rocket attack, get laid when I was supposed to, hate who I was supposed to hate. Everything ... you know normal. Regular stuff.

HAMMOND: Stuff? What stuff? Stuff is another word for drugs, isn't it, Sergeant? Are you a dooper, Sergeant?

BOYD: No, sir. I mean, I'm a dope. But if you're asking me "are you" that would depend on the are. If the r comes after the word dope then no, I'm not a dope, sir. If you're asking me "are you a dope" and the are comes before the word dope then yes, I'm a dope, sir.

HAMMOND: *(grinding teeth)* You're funny, Sergeant. Real funny. I'll bet you're a dooper any way you spell it. I bet you miss all that high-grade crap you used to get over there. That's why you're walking around here with your head up your ass.

(Boyd shakes his head, blows up his cheeks and puts his finger in his mouth. He makes a loud popping sound)

BOYD: That pop you heard, sir, was me pulling my head out of my ass. Sorry for the noise, Major, but when my head cleared my ass the air rushing in to fill the vacuum made a popping sound. I think it's similar in principle to a sonic boom.

HAMMOND: More jokes, Sergeant. Better pop it some more because I'm going to see to it that you piss into a bottle everyday until we catch your drug habit. You're going to piss on command, Sergeant, and if your urinalysis doesn't nail you, I will! You make me sick.

(Boyd shrugs)

HAMMOND: Your behavior and appearance on base, and especially the flightline, is harmful to the younger troops we have here.

BOYD: I'm only twenty, sir.

(Hammond stands up and circles Boyd, jabbing his finger into Boyd's ribs to punctuate his sentences)

HAMMOND: I don't like you, Sergeant. You're weird. I'm sick of all the article fifteens filed against you.

(Hammond picks up a report from his desk and reads it)

HAMMOND: Hair too long, unshaven, out of uniform or filthy when you're in one, late for work, failing to salute officers, wiseassing your superiors. Big tough man aren't you, Sergeant? The Air Force too rough for you in South Carolina?

(Hammond throws the report back on his desk)

BOYD: Yes, sir.

HAMMOND: Poor Boyd.

BOYD: I've saved a few dollars, sir.

HAMMOND: Ah, a wit. A god-damned military wit! So this is your act, huh, Sergeant? A witty N.C.O. in smelly clothes. Now that I know I'm dealing with a superior intellect, let me throw off my gruff military bearing and turn modern.

(Hammond stretches out his arms as if to embrace Boyd)

HAMMOND: Let me reach out to you my dear, sweet smelling Sergeant.

(Hammond leans an inch away from Boyd's face)

HAMMOND: Now tell me, Sergeant, why do you wear your old fatigues when you've been issued fresh ones?

BOYD: Because they're mine...sir.

HAMMOND: And maybe by wearing jungle rotted fatigues everyone will stop, look and whisper in reverent tones (*cups his mouth with his hand*) 'there goes a Vietnam Vet.'

BOYD: The whispering is much better than the crying, sir.

HAMMOND: And what's cried? I'm special! You can't touch me! So you've been to war, big shit. You're lucky. What about the ones that wanted to go but couldn't? I've never seen combat and it breaks my heart, but I live with it. I'll probably be a major for another six years because I didn't go to war. But I deal with it and strive to be the best officer I can. You ever hear of Ted Williams?

BOYD: Sure. I mean, yes, sir. Ted Williams played for Boston.

HAMMOND: That's right, Sergeant. And he was a damn good fighter pilot, too. A Korean War hero. I wanted to be like Ted Williams, hitting grand slams and shooting down Commie aircraft.

(Hammond pulls off his eyeglasses)

HAMMOND: These eyes of mine prevented me from being a good hitter and a pilot. But I stuck it out and became an officer like Ted Williams even though I couldn't fly or hit a fastball. And that took guts, too, Sergeant.

BOYD: (*snickers*) Yes, sir, Major. I can see the similarity between you and Ted Williams. I noticed it as soon as I walked in.

(Hammond puts his eyeglasses back on)

HAMMOND: You didn't notice anything. How could you with that cloud of filth you carry around with you? But I'll tell you what the similarity is, War Hero! I write left-handed. Williams batted left-handed. He risked his life for his country. So do I. You see, my heroic Sergeant, as a lefthander I always smear what I write. I can't help it. If you add up the amount of reports I've had to write, the papers I've had to sign, there must have been thousands of ink smears on my hand with thousands more to come. I figure with all this ink on my hand a lot of it must've been absorbed through my pores.

(Hammond holds his hand up in front of Boyd's face and turns it for Boyd's inspection. Boyd jumps back, thinking Hammond is about to strike him)

HAMMOND: My skin's drinking a slow, poisonous death. So don't think I'm going to pity you or absolve you just because you spent X amount of months in a combat zone. What really happened is that it broke you. You embarrass your uniform, Look at those boots!

(Hammond points to Boyd's boots)

BOYD: I can't polish these boots, sir. I've tried. Believe me, I've tried. Polish can't hide the stains. It just brings them out more.

HAMMOND: Stains? What stains are you talking about, Sergeant?

BOYD: Fear stains, sir. Fear made my feet sweat like they were crying. I used to think it was just sweat, but I'm not so sure anymore. Sometimes I think of the wetness inside my boots as ... tears or something. I know it sounds strange but sometimes I think my feet are the only part of me that can cry anymore.

HAMMOND: No, it doesn't sound strange, Sergeant. If I had to put on your boots my feet would cry, too. *(airily)* We'll just have to take them off and break in a new pair, won't we?

BOYD: I can't.

HAMMOND: Why not, Sergeant?

BOYD: Because they're mine.

HAMMOND: The new boots we issued you are yours, too, Sergeant!

BOYD: Then what will happen to these?

(Boyd reaches down and touches boots)

BOYD: These feet are different than the ones I enlisted with, Major. You've got a record of my boot size. You think it's just a matter of me picking out a new pair. It's not. My feet have changed. They feel things. I told you I went through my tour doing everything mechanically, like a robot, I did what I was taught and told to do. I even stopped thinking about myself after a while. I just thought about blocking out aircraft. But my feet were always pouring water into boots from the moment I landed in 'Nam, At first the water chafed my feet and it hurt like hell. After a while I got used to it. And then I began to depend on it. I'd lace up my boots real tight so the sweat wouldn't escape. I knew that if my feet sweat during rocket attacks, and it hurt, I'd be able to do my job 'cause my fear was trapped inside these boots. If

that sweat or water or tears or whatever the hell it was escaped from my boots it would have paralyzed me. I'd have been too scared to do my job and that would've put my crew in danger. That's why I've got to leave these boots on. I can't wear any other boots but these. And these fatigues. I have to wear what belongs to me, don't you see?

HAMMOND: I don't see anything, Sergeant. But I can smell. If anything's changed about your feet it's jungle rot. That's all, Sergeant. Jungle rot. A fungus. Filth. I'm not buying that rot spewing out of your mouth, either. What's your pitch, Sergeant? You want to go home? You want me to send you home with good paper and a brass band? Is that what you want, Sergeant?

BOYD: No. No, sir,

HAMMOND: Bullshit! You're a liar.
Sergeant.

BOYD: I never said I wasn't a liar. I don't want to go home. I do want out with good paper. I need time alone so I can figure out how to make the connection between my feet and my brain.

HAMMOND: How about making the connection between hot water and a bar of soap, Sergeant?

BOYD: Before I arrived this morning I shaved, Major.

HAMMOND: I'm flattered, Sergeant.

BOYD: By mistake I squeezed out twice as much lather as I needed. I've got this thing about wasting shaving so cream so I smeared it all over my face until only my eyes were left uncovered. I hadn't looked at my eyes for a long time. And the longer I stared at my eyes the more I realized they weren't mine. No matter how much I squinted or widened them I knew they weren't mine. They were the dull eyes of my father.

HAMMOND: (*disgusted*) He must be real proud of you, Boyd. Was he in the service?

BOYD: Yeah, he was in the service but he's made a career out of working in a hospital laundry. My father's life peaked at nineteen aboard a troop transport anchored off the coast of Japan, waiting for the order to invade that never came, thanks to the Bomb. He justifies his entire life by the seventy-two hours he spent floating on the Pacific Ocean instead of the twenty-seven years he spent bleaching out other people's filth. He pushed me into joining. Demanded it. Now all I want is to be left alone by the Air Force and my goddamn father bragging about his Sergeant son.

(Hammond walks over to Boyd)

HAMMOND: That's real fascinating, Sergeant. I can't wait till the movie's released. Why don't you take off those filthy fatigues and send them to your father to clean? But if we can drop Papa for the moment and get back to the real world, the world in which you're a fuck-up, I'd greatly appreciate it. You signed a four-year contract. You have more than a year left to pull. Nobody made you join. The Air Force is voluntary. So save the heart-wrenching Daddy stories for draftees, okay Sergeant?

BOYD: *(embarrassed)* Yes. Yes. sir.

HAMMOND: *(points to a chair)* Sit down!

(Hammond returns to his desk)

HAMMOND: What do you want, Sergeant?

BOYD: A discharge.

HAMMOND: That's simple, Sergeant. I can have you thrown out within a week.

BOYD: You can throw me, Major, so long as I land outside this base with good paper.

HAMMOND: Why is your expulsion with good paper so important? Aren't your selfish little concerns urgent? Why hold up your release by insisting on an Honorable Discharge? I'll push you out of the Air Force for the good of the service. It's a simple administrative procedure, a thirty-five dash twelve.

BOYD: I want out with good paper. I deserve an honorable. I'm not really sure why I want it. I think I'll need the benefits attached to it. It'll give me some excuse for having signed up. Excuses have become real important to me now.

HAMMOND: Why lie, Sergeant? Tell whoever wants to know that you joined and couldn't cut it.

BOYD: Major, I did what I was told and with the war over I figure I deserve time off for good behavior. Christ, Major, I figured civilians would give me a hard time, not you guys. I thought if anyone would understand it would be you guys.

(Hammond edges towards his desk. By the end of his speech he's sealed behind it)

HAMMOND: Oh, I understand, Sergeant. You want me to give you the same respect and privileges other men have earned fulfilling their four-year contract. Just because some of your tour of duty was spent in a combat zone doesn't mean you deserve anything more than any other airman who served his country. At any time

an airman could've been sent to 'Nam. You were lucky, that's all. Why don't you be grateful for the experience you've had and let it go at that. I admit I envy your experience, but not the way it affected you. It broke you!

(Boyd jumps up from the chair and leans across Hammonds desk)

BOYD: I'm not broken! I just need time to rest, Major. For years I've been in a ring where the only rest you got was when you were knocked out or when you knocked somebody else out. All I want now is to take a little breather between rounds, sit on a stool and swish water around my mouth till my head clears a little. That's all. You keep pushing me into this ring smeared with your chicken shit rules where I slip and fall on my ass even though the fight's over. It's over, Major.

HAMMOND: From what I hear it's not water you're swishing around your mouth, it's whiskey. You misjudge me, Sergeant. I want you to retire from the ring. The problem is that because of your rank as a non-commissioned officer I can't put you out without a hearing. With your war record what kind of recommendation will a hearing board make? It'd be hard enough to take a strip from you, let alone boot you out. That's funny, huh Sergeant? Boot you out. If I were to bring your boots before the board they'd probably order a firing squad for you. Or maybe just a fire to burn your boots, you being a war hero and all. There is a way, though. If you agree to waive the hearing I'll push you out of the military within two weeks with a General Discharge. That's not such a bad piece of paper. You'd still be eligible for many G.I. benefits. And you'd be out in two weeks, I promise, Sergeant. But I can't have you leaving here before your time's up with an Honorable. Other vets would pull the same stunt as you and my leadership would be undermined. Besides, you don't solicit anything but contempt. You're irresponsible and a quitter. You're dangerous.

BOYD: Yeah, I know. That's why I room by myself.

(Hammond walks behind Boyd and places his hands on the back of the chair. He is trying to seduce Boyd into waiving the hearing)

HAMMOND: Take my offer, Sergeant. Get away from us. Leave. Think of it, Sergeant. In two weeks you can start shooting dope with your friends on street corners as you wait for the high Schoolgirls to walk by on their way to class. You can corner all the little girls you want and tell them how hard a life you had fighting the big mean men in South Carolina. Maybe you can solicit the sympathy from a pretty sophomore that you're trying to solicit from me. Waive the hearing, Sergeant. Let me help you get rid of me.

(Boyd is thinking over what Hammond has said. Suddenly he leaps off the chair)

BOYD: I'm a sergeant and I'll demand my rights as a sergeant. If you try to kick me out with anything but an Honorable I'll demand a hearing. I don't deserve bad

paper. I made sergeant and crew chief while still a teenager. Remember that, Major.

HAMMOND: *(shakes head in disbelief)* How did that ever happen?

BOYD! How? I'll tell you how. The Air Force mistook my fear for courage. You wonder about combat, Major? You're mad at me because I got to a war and you didn't? Let me tell you, Major, I wondered how I'd act. You know what I learned? When rockets are exploding I'm more afraid than anyone else on the flightline. If one of those suckers hits a plane loaded with all that fuel—*(Boyd makes an explosion noise and gestures with his hands)*

BOYD—that's the ballgame, as Ted Williams would say.

(Hammond presses his face close to Boyd's)

BOYD: You dirty his name just by having it come out of your mouth.

(Hammond pivots in disgust and walks to the far end of the stage)

BOYD: I could easily crouch in a corner with my head between my knees, crying, when those rockets burst. But I'm too scared for that. I can't see the bastards who are trying to blow me to bits. I just hear them. The rockets. My enemy isn't breathing flesh, it's sounds. A wheezy hiss that swells into a bursting whistle of flame. I get so scared I think of the exploding rockets as some kind of audio component that I can shut off by turning a knob. Lower the volume, shut it off I say to myself. My knob is getting those planes off as quick as I can. I believe that if I can get the aircraft blocked out fast enough, get them flying, they'll stop aiming their explosions at me and go after them instead, You see, I figure they'll go after the plane worth millions of dollars and not me who makes two-twenty a month. Good American logic, right Major?

HAMMOND: The only good thing about you is that uniform, Sergeant, and you've failed it, You're in my office because you're a failure. A failed, broken man.

BOYD! No! You're the failure! You failed, Major! I gave you a chance but you failed to take it!

(Boyd slaps the chair)

BOYD: Nice office you have here, Major. Real comfortable. Do you want me to tell you what happens outside this line office, Major?

(Boyd paces around the office, pauses by a window, points)

BOYD! Outside this line base, outside this line state? You're still puzzled over my great write-ups while I was under fire, right Major? You don't think I'm brave enough?

HAMMOND: I think you're sick!

BOYD: Now you're getting it. Sick. Sick and scared. Truth is, loading body bags as fast as I could during rocket attacks gave me the great write-ups and fast rank, but you see, Major, I didn't care about the rockets when the cargo was bags. I just wanted those bags out of there, away from me! I didn't want to smell them or touch them. Their stink got so bad I could taste them. It was like I was a cannibal or something 'cause I'd swallow that smell and feel it grow in my stomach. It'd make me puke and even that smelled sweet compared to the plastic bags broiling in the sun. The death I was swallowing didn't belong to me! It belonged to the bags in the plane flying away! Away from me!

(Boyd lifts his arms over his head and slaps the window his voice rising and his slapping getting more frantic)

BOYD: Get those planes up! Get those planes out of here! Get them –

HAMMOND: Sergeant! Sergeant!

(Hammond grabs Boyd's arms and pulls them down)

HAMMOND: Sit down, Sergeant!

(Hammond leads Boyd over to the chair; Boyd shakes him off and sits)

BOYD: *(catches breath)* I had it easy, Major. I never saw anyone get hit. I heard explosions. I saw explosions. Later I saw bones and flesh straining against plastic. You got some really strange patterns in those bags.

(Boyd drops to his knees and presses down on an imaginary body bag)

BOYD: Sometimes the lumps were in such weird places it was funny. If you pressed down on them they'd be real soft if they were fresh and you didn't hit a bone.

HAMMOND: What are you? A pervert, Sergeant? You think that was funny? The men in those bags —

BOYD: *(interrupts)* The boys.

HAMMOND: —have my sympathy, not you. How do you feel standing here asking me to release you from your contract when those men—

BOYD: *(interrupts)* Boys.

HAMMOND: —in the bags died fulfilling theirs?

BOYD: *(rises off his knees)* Those boys in the bags would want me out. They'd be pulling for me.

HAMMOND: How do you figure that, Sergeant?

BOYD: Because they owe me for what they put me through,

HAMMOND: For what they put you through?

BOYD: That's right, Major. Their stink was so bad sometimes I couldn't keep food down for days. But the worst thing was that they reminded me I was a person and not just part of a crew. The only time I thought of myself as an individual was when I imagined my crew throwing up and not eating because of the smell I'd give off if I was zipped up in one of those things.

HAMMOND: You'd make your crew vomit if they smelled you today, Sergeant. You should be ashamed of yourself!

(Hammond walks back to his desk)

BOYD: I am. I missed a whole step. The lighting back, the dying. I was the middle man, Major. Blow 'em up, zipper them in and then give 'em to me to send off. Oh, I'm lucky, Major. I slept in a bed, ate hot meals. I'm lucky. I know that. I didn't fight. I didn't see dying. I didn't even see death. I only smelled it and felt how heavy it weighed wrapped in plastic. And I posted them on the one-forty-one's like a goddamned mailman, except I didn't carry a bag. Flung bags into planes. When my planes took off they screamed. My buddies said all engines scream when they take off, but my planes screamed at me for filling their bellies with stench. They screamed at me because they knew I was lucky and that my luck was the piles of flesh I weighed them down with, I didn't care about rockets, Major, when the cargo was bags.

(Hammond grabs Boyd by the shoulders and leads him to the chair. He forcefully pushes Boyd into the chair)

HAMMOND: Take it easy, Boyd. Catch your breath. *(pause)* Am I supposed to be frightened by that story, Sergeant? Am I supposed to feel sorry for you?

BOYD: I'm all right! I'm okay! South Carolina just doesn't smell sweet enough. Women don't smell sweet enough. I should be happy. Happy to be pack. Happy to work on planes whose passengers all sit during the flight.

HAMMOND: If you need help ask the Air Force, Sergeant.

BOYD: I am asking the Air Force. I'm asking you, Major! Help me!

HAMMOND: What would my other troops think if you walk out of here with my blessing over your dereliction of duty? Not completing your tour is a gross dereliction of duty. Think of my position, Sergeant.

BOYD: Major, I'll walk out of here anyway you want. Just get me out with good paper. Please, Major.

HAMMOND: No, Sergeant. Impossible. Pull yourself together and finish out your tour. It's only a little more than a year. Take the time to see how enjoyable it can be pulling duty in a peacetime Air Force. Get out of those clothes and clean yourself up.

BOYD: I can't. There's no sense to anything anymore. No purpose. Only chicken shit rules that prevent me from thinking. This is who I've become, Major. You'll have to deal with it because I've dealt with it.

(Boyd slowly walks to the door as Hammond speaks)

HAMMOND: As your commanding officer I'm telling you to either clean up your act and fly straight or waive a hearing so I can discharge you in accordance with Air Force policy. Those are the only choices you have and those are the only things I have to deal with, Sergeant.

(Boyd grabs doorknob, is about to leave)

BOYD: I can't, Major.

HAMMOND: Goddamn you, Boyd! Close the door!

(Boyd closes the door. Hammond charges over to him)

HAMMOND: You've made me the laughing stock of Charleston Air Force Base. You think I don't know what the pilots and navigators are laughing about when I walk into the Officers Club? They're laughing at me because I can't handle the smelly, insolent enlisted men servicing their aircraft. While they're breezing through clouds I'm anchored behind this desk having to put up with all the crap necessary to keep them gliding through the air towards fast rank and respect. You've made a fool of me, Sergeant. You and your friends.

BOYD: I have no friends here, Major.

(Hammond walks back to his desk)

HAMMOND: I tried to be patient. I really did. I never reprimanded you when the flood of article fifteens against you came pouring into this office, I gave you a chance. I gave you time. It's not fair what you're doing to me. You're trying to destroy my career, aren't you?

BOYD: *(stunned)* No. No, sir.

HAMMOND: Yes, you are, I tried to help you now you have to try and help me. Straighten yourself out, Boyd. Do your job. That's all. If you need to see doctors I'll send you to doctors. Just please, change your fatigues and keep your mouth shut, okay? No hard-assed military shit. I'm asking you, Boyd. I'll see to it that you don't pull too much extra duty. Just do your job and keep your mouth shut for sixteen months.

BOYD: I need to get out, Major.

HAMMOND: And I need respect! This is my life, Boyd. You understand? My life! You're jeopardizing my life every minute you walk around this base looking like you do and acting like you do. I don't know what it's like to be in a war, but I do know what it's like to be under tire. I'm not a glamour boy pilot. Everyday I'm under attack by the base commander for some deficiency, whether it exists or not.

BOYD: Just get me out, Major. That'll make everyone happy.

HAMMOND: Yeah? When you got out I'd still be here listening to the snickering at the Officers Club. I heard General Susberich is upset with me over the lack of discipline in this squadron. I don't want to retire as a major. I don't want men ten years younger than me laughing at me when they're promoted to light colonel and I'm not.

BOYD: You seem to be doing all right from where I'm standing, sir.

HAMMOND: Then step back and take a good look, Sergeant. You're the one who's doing all right.

BOYD: Oh, yeah? That's good to know.

HAMMOND: Well, you are. You have more power than I do.

BOYD: Major, if I had your power I'd be on a commercial airliner flying in any direction that's away from here.

HAMMOND: Look, Boyd, if you can cover the battle scars for a moment and look at the situation realistically, you'll see that I'm telling you the truth.

BOYD: What's the realistic situation, Major?

HAMMOND: That we're both in the military. That we both have jobs that are dependent on each other.

BOYD; I've been dependable, Major. Real dependable. Now I want to leave this job and move on. I'm only a worker. I was supposed to be a warrior. You're management. You're deciding to stay, not me. I don't want a brass band parading me home. I want a slip of paper that'll prove what I did was all right. That's all. No power, No parades. Paper. To pry my boots off with.

(Hammond throws up his arms.)

HAMMOND: We're back to feet, huh? You know, Boyd, I think you're an actor. A good actor. You pretend not to see the power you wield, but I think you do. I think whatever's inside those boots of yours has nothing to do with any emotional anguish. I think it's a feeling of power you've trapped inside them. That's why you don't take them off.

BOYD: Major, are you saying if I click my heels three times and make a wish I'll end up in Kansas?

(Boyd shuts his eyes, clicks his heels three times, mumbles)

BOYD: Kansas...Kansas...Kansas. *(pause)* Doesn't work, Major. You're wrong.

HAMMOND: No, I'm not. You're an actor, Sergeant. This office is a stage and the audience is the whole god-damned base! And you've been casting me as the villain. But I can't be the villain. I don't have any power over you. A villain has to be threatening, right?

(Boyd shrugs)

HAMMOND: I tried to be threatening but didn't pull it off. You've known all along they were just threats without any power behind them.

BOYD: Power. What power? I'm what a powerful man looks like?

HAMMOND: It's your smell that gives you away. That powerful sour smell of yours. You can walk into the office of your squadron commander and make him sniff your stench. That's power! You said something before about having had to smell the death that wasn't yours. Well, you're pulling the same thing on me. You're making me and the rest of the troops on base smell your bitterness, your anger. Nobody

here did anything to you except take you back from a war and give you clean clothes and a job. So stop acting so self-righteous about your pain!

BOYD: I'm not being self-righteous, Major. I'm trying to spare the Air Force with having to deal with my pain. Don't you understand? I'm giving you guys a way out but you won't take it.

HAMMOND: A way out? You're telling me that's a way out?

BOYD: The key word's out, Major. Get me out.

HAMMOND: Way out of line, that's what it is! You're a crew chief. You understand the importance of discipline. I'll bet the discipline of teamwork got you out of 'Nam alive.

(Boyd laughs)

HAMMOND: Was that a real laugh or a camouflaging laugh?

BOYD: What do you mean 'a real laugh?' What would I be camouflaging?

HAMMOND: The truth. I think deep down you know if we let you out with an Honorable, your example would lead to a breakdown of discipline on this base. I think you understand the value of discipline. I think it saved your life.

BOYD: Do I have to keep thinking of myself as part of something? Is that all I am? Part of something?

(Hammond sits behind desk)

HAMMOND: That's right, Sergeant.

BOYD: And that's Why I have to get out. I'm part of something that has nothing to do with Charleston Air Force Base.

HAMMOND: You're wrong, Sergeant You're very much a part of Charleston. One Civil War began here, Boyd. Don't start a second one on this base. The morale of this base is one of the responsibilities of your rank. Be truthful with yourself, Sergeant.

BOYD: Can we discuss the truth, Major?

HAMMOND: Certainly, Sergeant.

BOYD: You've accused me of being an actor, but you've been untruthful from the very beginning of our conversation.

HAMMOND: No, I haven't. I've admitted you have the upper hand. I'm only an officer commissioned by the President; you're a war hero.

BOYD: Can we cut the war hero crap, sir?

HAMMOND: Believe me, Sergeant, I wish you would.

(Boyd's angry. He walks behind Hammonds desk and leans over him)

BOYD: You had me going for a while, Major. I mean, you started out like a typical hard-ass and then you suckered me in with your one on one approach. I thought for a moment you were human, that you were listening to me. You're not listening. But I am.

HAMMOND: And what do you hear, Sergeant?

(Boyd bends down, speaks in Hammond's ear)

BOYD: A liar. A scared liar. You forget that I'm an expert on fear.

HAMMOND: *(angry)* You better explain that last remark, Sergeant. And it better be good!

BOYD: I walked in here not trusting you, Major. But I listened to what you said because of the three months you gave me before hauling me in here. I just realized that you didn't bother me so I could have a chance to straighten myself out on my own. You delayed seeing me because you're afraid of me. You're only seeing me now because others have noticed your fear the base commander, pilots, your other troops.

HAMMOND: *(nervously)* W-Why would you frighten me, Sergeant?

BOYD: Because your neck is on the block if you don't get me to—what did you call it? —fly straight? You're scared 'cause you're not in the same league as me. I don't care how much metal is pinned to your collar, I'm closer to your vision of Ted Williams than you are and you know it! I've been tested I made it through 'Nam. You wouldn't have, you'd have cracked over there, I know. I've seen guys like you over there, Major. It would've broken you.

(Hammond springs up from chair)

HAMMOND: That's a lie! A stupid lie! I wanted to go! I wanted to!

BOYD: Yeah? Well I want to go, too. You're going to get me out with good paper, Major.

HAMMOND: No!

BOYD: Yes, you are. That's all you're good for ... paper. That's all you are ... paper, Paper rips, Major.

HAMMOND: Shut up, Boyd!

BOYD: You're going to give me good paper and I'm going to give you back your secret so you can continue intimidating green troops. Nobody will know what a frightened man you are.

HAMMOND: *(clenches fists)* How dare you speak to me like that! I'm an officer in the United State Air Force!

BOYD: *(smells blood)* No wonder pilots and navigators laugh at you. Theirs are camouflaging laughs, too, Major. They're camouflaging the disgust they feel at having an office clerk receive the same pay and privileges as them. But you'll never get the respect they get. Why should you? Talk about unfair! Why should two fighters be paid equally if only one steps inside the ring? That's what they whisper about you in the Officers Club. You know. You feel it. Don't blame me. I'm not your excuse.

HAMMOND: You sonofabitch!

(Hammond grabs Boyd by the neck and slams him into the wall behind his desk)

HAMMOND: You sonofabitch! You sonofabitch!

(Boyd slides down the wall gagging. Hammond releases his grip. Boyd coughs, clears his throat)

BOYD: You're tough, Major. Real brave. You know if I hit you I'd rot in jail. Kill me, Major! Kill me!

(Hammond grabs Boyd by the lapels and pulls him up. He pummels Boyd against the wall to punctuate each sentence)

HAMMOND. God-damn you, Boyd! You've got to start looking like a responsible airman, you hear me? You're going to change your fatigues! You're going to walk around this base and do your job like every other member of this squadron! '

(Hammond releases Boyd and walks toward the mirror)

HAMMOND: You're not the superstar on this team—

(Hammond points to reflection in mirror)

HAMMOND: I am!

(Hammond talks to Boyd while watching him in the mirror)

HAMMOND: You're a utility player, and I'm going to utilize you! You hear me, Boyd!

(Hammond turns and faces Boyd)

HAMMOND: You're going to walk out of this office looking like a non-commissioned Officer, not a derelict! Scum like you aren't going to put me on General Susberich's shit list! You hear me, Boyd!

(Boyd gasps for breath, rises)

BOYD: You're concerned about how I look when I leave this damn office? You're concerned about how I smell? You're concerned about these boots? Okay, Major! Look! These boots! I'm pulling them off for you! There they go!

(Boyd flings the boots across the room, next to Hammond)

BOYD: Off! Off!

(Boyd quickly strips)

HAMMOND: *(stunned)* Sergeant ... you put those clothes back on!

BOYD: See! Easy! Right, Major! This uniform? Off! I'm taking it off for you, Major!

(Boyd hurls his shirt at Hammond and then his pants)

BOYD: Now get me out! You win. Major! The world will know you've won! See, Major!? See!? I'll walk out of here and the world will know you won! You can get me out! Get me out. Major!

HAMMOND: *(scared)* Sergeant Boyd! Put your clothes on!

(Boyd strips down to his oversized government issued boxer shorts)

BOYD: You win, Major! They're off! You did it, Major! Congratulations! Now get me out! Get me out, Major! I'm going to walk out of here and tell everyone I meet that you won! You did it, Major! Major Hammond did it! Hail Hammond! Hail Hammond! Bless you, Major! You did it!

(Boyd starts out of the office)

(Hammond rushes over to intercom)

HAMMOND: Trezza! Get the S.P.'s in here on the double!

(Hammond tackles Boyd at the door They struggle. Boyd frees himself)

BOYD: *(out of breath)* I'm walking out of here, Major, and you can't stop me. I'm going to march over to General Susberich's office and tell him how skillfully you got me to take off my boots and fatigues. Then you'll be the hero. That's what you want from me, isn't it, Major?

HAMMOND: Gel back in here, Boyd. Lets talk. Put your clothes on.

BOYD: Not Unless you give me an Honorable I'm walking out of here, Major, I'm walking over to headquarters.

HAMMOND: *(fidgeting)* You win, Boyd, I'll give you the good paper. Just stay put, Don't leave. And put your fatigues on.

BOYD: You lying to me, Major?

HAMMOND: No. I give you my word. Get dressed.

(TREZZA and TWO SECURITY POLICEMEN crash through the door. The Policemen leap onto Boyd, whose back is to them. Boyd falls forward. He struggles but is handcuffed and yanked to his feet. A Security Policeman picks up Boyd's pants and is about to hand them to him)

HAMMOND: *(to Security Policeman)* No! Leave those alone.

(Hammond snatches the pants out of the Security Policeman's hand throws them by the mirror and addresses Boyd)

HAMMOND: You'll never wear them again.

(Hammond pulls his raincoat off the coat rack and hands it to the Security Policeman)

HAMMOND: Wrap this around him, airman.

BOYD: Do I have to do this to get out?

(A Security Policeman pushes Boyd towards the door)

BOYD: I don't want anyone to see me like this. *(near tears)* You failed, Major! You failed! I am a sergeant! I deserve more respect! You have no right to allow this to happen to me. I don't owe anything!

(Boyd is led away. Hammond, visibly shaken, locks the door. As soon as the lock clicks into place the lighting changes. The office blacks out as an unnatural light spotlights Hammond. This spotlight must click through many different colors and densities to show a passage of time as Hammond remains frozen in front of the door. Hammond slowly turns and walks to his desk. He picks up a pen and starts scribbling away. He stops, looks at the door, smirks, and continues writing. Suddenly he throws down the pen, rises, removes his shirt and walks over to the mirror, where he begins to do push-ups)

HAMMOND: One ... two ... three ... four ... five ... six ... seven ... eight ... come on, Major.

(Hammond collapses on the floor his outstretched hand touches Boyd's fatigue shirt. He feels the material, looks up at it and slowly pulls it towards him. He examines it and sniffs it. Hammond undresses and pulls on Boyd's fatigues. He shivers as he zips up the pants, buttons the shirt. It's as if the fatigues are ice cold Hammond retrieves Boyd's boots. As he moves towards the boots his shivering is less pronounced he's growing accustomed to the fatigues. Hammond plops down on the floor and pulls the boots down. He lets out a slight cry, almost a whine, as he laces them up. He stands in front of the mirror modeling the filthy uniform. He turns in all directions to get a good overview of how he looks. The shivering returns, but he dismisses it with a smile. At last he feels comfortable in the fatigues, so he walks over to his desk and presses down the intercom button. There's a pause. Hammond does not speak)

TREZZA'S VOICE: Yes, Major. Major? Major Hammond? Are you there, Major?

(Hammond runs his hand gently over the fatigue blouse, as if absorbing some kind of power from it)

HAMMOND: Trezza ... what's on my agenda, Trezza?

TREZZA'S VOICE: You have a surprise barracks inspection in twenty minutes, sir.

HAMMOND: Okay. I'll be leaving shortly. Call up Chief Crawley. I want him to make the rounds with me. Till then I don't want to be disturbed, Trezza.

TREZZA'S VOICE: Are you all right, Major?

HAMMOND: I don't want be disturbed, Trezza!

TREZZA'S VOICE: Yes, sir.

(Hammond walks over to the mirror and admires himself. Then he crouches into a batting stance and “digs in” at the plate. He takes two half swings. His face becomes a study in concentration as he tenses his body waiting for the pitch in the mirror. When he sees the pitch he executes a powerful swing and clicks his tongue as he makes imaginary contact with a baseball. Blackout)

End Of Play