

The Sanity Hearing

by John R. Quinn, 397-C

August 1944, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We were preparing to be shipped overseas and it was a time of relative tranquility. All training had ceased and if you were not on a duty roster, you were pretty much at ease. Having almost three years' service, I was not going to make a rookie mistake. My plan was to head for the PX and some 3.2 beer.

I stuck my head out of the barracks door, looked up and down the company street, and ascertained there were no non-coms waiting to pounce on unwary GIs for real or imaginary details. In fact there was only the slight and lonely figure of 2d Lt. Bacos up near the company office.

Bacos was called Junior by some of the officers to his face and by most of the company behind his back. For an officer, he was well liked and not feared by most of us. I did not even think he knew me because he was Second Platoon and I was Third. Seeing that he was all the way up at the other end of the company street, I ventured tentatively into the street.

I was about half way across, and committed too far to duck back into the barracks, when I heard a ringing command, "HALT QUINN!" Given no choice, I held up and Bacos rapidly came alongside.

He said, "Quinn. I see you are a typist and take shorthand too!" I tried to explain that my mother taught shorthand and typing and had forced me to take both. I never mastered either subject, and damn near did not graduate from high school because of my deficiency in those subjects. Bacos would have none of that.

"Your ARMY MOS indicates proficiency in shorthand and typing, I have been designated hearing officer at a sanity hearing and the company clerk is tied up with P.O.E. requirements and you are my court reporter." I protested my absolute inability to function as a court reporter, but Bacos was sure I could do it. I told him I could barely remember shorthand for "Dear Sir," but he was the Lieutenant and I was the Pfc. So off we marched to the hearing room.

The subject of the hearing was one Augustus Brown, about 6'3" and 230 pounds of glowering malice. He was fresh out of the stockade for throwing a brick through a plate glass window in Fayetteville. I obviously do not have the transcript, which was completely indecipherable, but will try to give you the gist of the testimony as reconstructed by Lieutenant Bacos and myself after the fact. Fortunately the testimony was memorable.

As I remember it the first witness was the first sergeant, a stoic Native American. He testified he would rather go overseas a man short than have Brown in his company. He testified that Brown, despite five years in service, did not know how to assemble and disassemble the M1 Garand rifle. Gus had never qualified on any weapon on the range. He had never completed a march, and rode the sick book constantly. He had spent most of his five years on permanent KP until the cooks had rebelled and threatened to take reductions in rank and go back to line company assignments unless August was removed from the kitchen. He had stockade time for fighting and AWOL.

Bacos then called Brown to testify. He asked him if he knew the purpose of the hearing. Brown said he did. Bacos then asked him to state the purpose of the hearing. Brown said it was to secure his commission to Annapolis. This threw Bacos a little. Bacos asked why he thought so, and Brown replied that Whitey, the cook, had told him why the hearing was being held. Bacos then asked why he thought he could be a Navy officer since he had been such a complete failure in the Army. Brown proudly rested his case for a Navy Commission on the fact that he was a frequent rider on the Weehawken Ferry.

This, to the best of my recollection, is what went into the transcript, as reconstructed by Lt. Bacos and myself. I asked Bacos if he wanted me to type it up. He graciously declined, saying he would find someone else. I do not know how the court ruled.