

## A Battle For Higher Education

A short story by Daniel Fisher

### CHAPTER ONE

The war for knowledge was raging and I felt like I needed to fight. I was not fresh out of boot camp when I joined the English 1100 Infantry Squadron. At 35 years old, I was also not the youngest or the smartest. A couple of them were still in high school. The platoon was as rambunctious as a college fraternity on spring break. Little did I know what was to come. The war was about to take over my life for the next two and a half months.

After 12 years at Fort Pickerington, I made the decision to leave and work in the field for a few years before the war got so bad. One day, decided to re-enlist and serve my fellow men and women. I signed up for the CSCC Technical Infantry. I was to report to Union Hall, room 213 on my first day. I figured I could keep up with the younger people, even if it has been years since I have been in a formal combat environment. As soon as I stepped in to the barracks, it felt like I had forgotten everything I had learned in boot camp. All I could do was take a deep breath and tell myself "I can do this. I know I can. I want to be here. No, I need to be here."

### CHAPTER TWO

Not even two minutes went by before a young, big guy sat down next to me. He shook his head and said "Dude, I think I'm in the wrong place. What's the synonym number for this platoon?" I immediately realized that I was not the only one who was scared or anxious. I looked over at the big guy sitting next to me and said, "Okay, my name is Dan, I can look up the number for you." He introduced himself as Henry and thanked me. Together, we pulled up his training schedule, and the location he was supposed to be in. Henry was in the wrong place. "Oh man, I've never been in a blended platoon before. Have you? Is it hard?" said Henry. I grinned and said, "This is my first one too. I don't think it's supposed to be easy, but we can help each other out. I think you have to talk to the drill instructor to get placed in this platoon." Just as those words came out of my mouth, a pretty blonde woman walked in and stood at the front of the room. All I could think was "That's her. That's the drill instructor. My life is over." I looked over at Henry and saw a mirror image of my fear.

My fingers and toes were tingling and my heart was racing at what felt like a hundred miles per hour. The room fell silent quickly as I looked around at the other people in my platoon. I could see that same fear in their eyes that Henry and I had shared earlier. We were all thinking the same thing, here comes another hard-ass drill instructor. We can all look forward to pointless exercises and lots of difficult training. In a unified tension, the platoon waited for her to start shouting orders at us, just like we got in boot camp. Instead, she flashed a genuine, brilliant white smile at us and introduced herself as Staff Sergeant Kelli Nowlin. "This must be some sort of strange tactic, or reverse psychology." I thought. She went on speaking

and occasionally flashing that bright smile until I realized that I was not in boot camp anymore. Perhaps it will not be so bad after all.

As I sat with my platoon listening to SSgt. Nowlin explain what our first battle was going to entail, I began to relax. That is when she began describing the enemy. They were called the “Modern Language Army” or MLA. I learned that they could pop up at any time, dropping grammar bombs, planting double-spacing mines or launch citation rockets. They sounded terrifying. The fear I had felt earlier suddenly returned. Smiles on my platoon mates vanished as we all looked to SSgt. Nowlin for some semblance of reassurance that we would all live through this somehow. As tensions arose to new heights, she explained what our first battle was going to be. It was in a strange and foreign land called “Vignette.” In only one week, we were going to war with Writing Project one.

### CHAPTER THREE

I sat in silence, diligently outlining my first method of attack on Writing Project one. My thoughts were racing, screaming doubt and failure at me. A loud voice erupted from my left side. “What are you working on?” said the voice. I looked over and saw a smiling African-American woman staring intently at me. “I’m planning my attack route for Writing Project number one. How about you?” With another smile, she said “I’m working on the same thing. My name is Jo.” I introduced myself and we talked for a few minutes, then went back to our work. My nerves began to calm and I breathed easier as I felt like there were more and more people in my platoon that I could get along with. I realized that my platoon is comprised of nice people, here for the same reason I am; to fight and win the war, hopefully coming out on the other side smarter than when we enlisted.

On the battlefields of Vignette, a thin, quiet woman named Georgina Rojas from my platoon approached me. She suggested we work together and perform a peer-review on our Writing Project one strategies. We sat quietly, examining each-others strategy for victory in Vignette. After about fifteen minutes, we had each written down some suggestions for the other to follow and make improvements. As I returned to the barracks with my fresh battle plan, I was confident that I would succeed and victory would be mine. When I showed my final plan to SSgt. Nowlin, she smiled and told me that I had done very good on it. I was proud of myself and went to sleep that night knowing that I was on the right track, while dreaming of my second mission: Writing Project two.

### CHAPTER FOUR

Staff Sergeant Nowlin gathered the platoon to make an announcement. I correctly assumed it would be regarding Writing Project two. Our assignment was a response to textual intel gathered from the enemy. I chose to research an essay on videogames, with the intent to support ongoing operations in MLA territories. I knew my research could be valuable, but it

was up to me to make it that way. The responsibility of providing actionable intel for my superiors weighed heavy on my shoulders.

Each time I read the essay, I saw something I had somehow missed before, so I read until I no longer saw anything. Back in the barracks, I went up to a young, petite woman named AnaKaren for some advice. We looked over our work together and made suggestions for the others project. At one point, SSgt. Nowlin stepped in and answered some of our questions so we could formulate our battle plans with more accuracy. At the end of the day, I submitted my textual response report to SSgt. Nowlin for a final review. When it was returned to me with her notes, I found a few areas to improve. I worked hard on perfecting my research to fight the MLA, but ultimately, they attacked with limited success. It turned out that I forgot one small, yet important detail; the format of my document. Lesson learned.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Sadly, my girlfriend's aunt died back home, so I was cleared to go off base for a few days. However, I missed an important briefing from SSgt. Nowlin in my absence. The MLA had recently launched a new attack, which they conveniently named Writing Project three. Our platoon was selected to compose documents in response to our research. We were allowed some leeway in choosing our method of attack, and I pondered mine for almost a week. I finally decided to compose a report on drug addiction and recovery.

Upon my return to the barracks for our next briefing, a platoon mate named Quinn asked if we could revise our attack strategies together. I welcomed her over to my table and we exchanged files. We both offered ample suggestions to each other, along with some from SSgt. Nowlin. I returned to my bunk that night to work hard on my project. I went over it again, and again. I interviewed professionals, attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and combed the internet, desperate for more intelligence to make my project as effective as possible.

The next week, I visited the writing center located on the base twice. I arrived at the briefing early to plead with SSgt. Nowlin for any last-minute suggestions. And like a grenade, the "Works Cited" page along with citations in my report were not done correctly. Thankfully, SSgt. Nowlin is a kind, very caring woman who was happy to help me correct my mistakes. After the briefing, I submitted my report confident that my superiors would approve. I walked out the door with several platoon mates, talking about how relieved we were to be so close to victory and how happy we were that operation Writing Project three was a total success. I then realized how much I would miss the platoon, the briefings, SSgt. Nowlin, and our journal and discussion board assignments. That old fear was rearing its ugly head again.

## CHAPTER SIX

This is it. My final report, a reflection of what I have learned in combat this summer. When I walked into the first briefing only two and a half months ago, I did not think I could do it. My platoon and especially my Staff sergeant proved me wrong. I thought they would all

judge me and make me feel stupid. Instead, each one of them extended a helping hand to me in some way, shape or form. Some helped me individually, while some just laughed at my dumb jokes. It warms my heart in ways I have never felt before to know that I have had an impact on the war for knowledge, no matter how insignificant it may be. I am battling to make life better for my family and myself, and I hope to do that by helping others. That is what I live for.

I do not know how things would have turned out for me if I had been assigned to another platoon. I like to think it would have been just as good, but something in me says it would not have been as special. I will miss my platoon mates greatly. I often see some of them wandering around the base. Each person has had an impact on me and helped me prove to myself that I can do this. I will never forget this experience or the people involved. Especially SSgt. Kelli Nowlin, who has been extremely patient, empathetic and helpful to me. English 1100 was quite simply one of the most enjoyable times of my life and I am happy I had the opportunity to fight for knowledge. Semper Fi.