

# NUKE PUNK

A Wiseass Guide to Survival

By Richard W. Schlueter

What would happen to me? Plucked fresh, shortly after high school graduation and then plopped into boot camp. I wasn't ready. I was a nerdy, skinny, puny wiseass. Puberty had barely kicked in. Oh, yeah, I was a know-it-all, too.

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The letter started it all. My life was over. My mom's face was sad when she said, "The letter's from the U.S. Government, son."

I fantasized my senior year filled with wild parties, wild women, wild experiences. My fantasies were great. The letter ruined everything.

The bullying I tolerated in the last months of high school paled compared to my imaginary fears of boot camp which would soon become a reality. I grew up in farm country, Ohio, and was posolutely out of place when thrown into a big room with over aged and violent thugs form New York City. A few Neanderthal throwbacks from states where cross-breeding was required were sprinkled in. Chuck in a couple Texans for good measure. And finally throw in an evil Company Commander, whose teaching skills were highlighted by physical and mental abuse. Marinate then sauté in the San Diego sun. This medley of 87 misfits made up company 354.

Nobody likes a wiseass, but it's who I am. So when I got to the skivvy station I asked for jockey shorts instead of boxers. That statement and being discovered concealing nose drops sealed my fate. Doomed on the first day.

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My Navy nuke schooling introduced me to many unique characters; adventures in themselves. Leloy taught me "total awareness" and how to pluck the eyeballs from someone's head; Steitch brought out a level of competitiveness and seething anger that terrified me; Bonnie taught me...well she must have learned skills from an anaconda. Turner deserves his own sentence. He was the brother I never had until we were assigned to different boats. We had many adventures together and have many scars to show for it.

Before I was drafted I didn't even know the term for a gay person. Called my male friends, 'boy friends'. Didn't think drugs existed in Ohio. Boot camp opened my eyes but not like my next duty station in San Francisco. With its various forms of women, drugs, and anti-war demonstrations, the temptations were like road kill. I couldn't look away. Had to see more. My innocence was stretched, poked, twisted; gone.

Half way through nuke school I bought my first motorcycle, a Honda 305cc Superhawk. I was free. Although "Question Authority" was a common slogan of the 60's, I took it to mean "Reject Authority". Everyone on the roads was too slow. Traffic laws were annoying, especially speed limits. Turner always road on the back in his grey Hush Puppies and helmet. He needed his helmet.

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My efforts (or lack thereof) in my last training class, Submarine school, screwed me over. I didn't know how badly until I was assigned my final duty station; a Thresher class fast attack nuclear submarine. The Thresher recently sunk. 129 dead.

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Too thrifty for my own good to pay for transportation from the airport to the boat I hitchhiked. When my free ride providers turned into kidnappers I was forced to make a risky and painful escape.

I was a bruised and bleeding NUB (nuclear unqualified body) when I reported on board the USS Gato, but I did receive a flattering nickname. I fought it, but Slut stayed with me for the next 3-1/2 years. Without a bunk, I slept where I could while constantly studying between every shit job imaginable.

The world as I knew it disappeared. The first year on board, the boat was under water over 280 days. No news, no music, no TV. Liberty was sparse and precious. Any chance I could, I explored; Rio de Janeiro, Puerto Rico, Bermuda, St. Croix, Barbados and more. All provided cheap and ample Rum to get into trouble.

War games aside, our real mission was surveillance. Surveillance of Russian submarines; as close to Russia as possible. So much for warm waters.

When Capt. Ahab came aboard, we were at sea always; in the cold waters. He wanted to be the best and was willing to risk the boat and crew to do it. He almost killed us once with an illegal drill. Colliding with the Russian submarine, under water, in Russian waters, was the closest he came to killing us all.

Somehow I survived boot camp, the crazies in nuke school, my wild bike rides, and Capt. Ahab.

