

AT JOURNALISM'S BOUNDARIES: A REPORTER'S JOURNEY FROM FACT TO  
THE EMOTION OF TRUTH

A Thesis

by

ERNEST WILLIAM LOESSER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2012

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

At Journalism's Boundaries: A Reporter's Journey from Fact to the Emotion of Truth.

(August 2012)

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This thesis is a work of literary journalism that explores the distinct boundaries in style that partition how a writer reports objective facts and reveals subjective experience. In brief, it is a genre-breaking prose composition that weds objective and subjective narratives in an organic, but necessary harmony. As a subject, it explores the author's experiences at two National Boy Scout Jamborees, held in the summers of 1997 and 2010.

The thesis fuses two unique narrative modes into a hybrid form that exhibits entirely new qualities and values. It alternates between first-person and third-person points of view to create an uncomfortable, yet necessary tension, suggesting that the story's accuracy is dependent upon two different perspectives. The thesis relies upon an unreliable narrator, whose story is reappraised by a credible third-person narrator.

This thesis should be read as an agonizing reappraisal that examines American society at the turn of the millennia and during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Several American authors, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Lowell, and Norman Mailer, have periodically explored this retrospective mode. While it is not a canonical

genre, the agonizing reappraisal allows the author to comment on the past and present simultaneously. In this thesis, the effect is achieved by pairing two unique narratives that are separated by more than a decade in time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Christensen, and my committee members, Larry Heinemann, and Dr. Hill, for their guidance and encouragement throughout the course of this project.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO BROKEN ARROW

In the twenty-first century, authors of literary nonfiction are unlikely to mitigate criticism raised by the genre's detractors. Despite the genre's growing canon, critics and ordinary readers remain skeptical of authors who push prose narratives beyond the traditional boundaries that have partitioned fact and fiction. In recent years, publications, including *Harper's*, *Poets & Writers*, *Salon.com*, and *Vanity Fair*, have sought to discredit literary nonfiction and its practitioners (Gutkind xxv). For example, the late David Foster Wallace and Ryszard Kapuscinski both received posthumous criticism that questioned the accuracy of their nonfiction writing (Dean/Shaffer). In academia, scholars have embraced certain nonfiction forms while neglecting others. The dearth of scholarship focused on literary nonfiction—or literary journalism—confirms the genre's enigmatic status within the academy (Hartsock/Lounsberry). Barbara Lounsberry notes that literary nonfiction presents a “semantic quandary” because it resists institutionalized categories of genre and subject (xii). Still, the relationship of Wallace and Kapuscinski to nonfiction—the former, a novelist turning to journalism; the latter, a journalist composing nonfiction novels—echoes the genre's auspicious breakthrough in the 1960's, when the novelist Truman Capote and journalists including Tom Wolfe and Gay

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This thesis follows the style of the *Southern Literary Journal*.



Talese introduced readers to a New Journalism. Whether it is called literary journalism, or creative nonfiction, scholars agree that authors in the genre dramatize facts and real life phenomena by using literary techniques traditionally associated with the novel.

This thesis—*At Journalism's Boundaries: A Reporter's Journey from Fact to the Emotion of Truth*—has pursued a “thin, blurred line between fiction and nonfiction” (Gutkind xx). For purposes of uniformity, this critical introduction will adopt the term literary journalism to describe the genre because it typically includes authors and literary works associated with New Journalism.

During the 1960's, Americans confronted certain realities—war, assassination, social dissent—that appeared more fictive than real. New Journalism emerged when journalists discovered that their traditional tools and models were inadequate for reporting the “new set of American realities” (Hellmann 2). During this tumultuous era, mass media exacerbated social fragmentation with its reliance on objectivity and facts; however, the New Journalists recognized that “the contemporary individual was in less need of facts than of an understanding of the facts available” (Hellmann 4). Americans needed reportage that articulated—what Gay Talese has called—a “larger truth,” existing outside the boundaries of traditional journalism (Hellmann 3).

By penetrating the public façade of an iconic organization, the author of this thesis sought to articulate his own larger truth about America at the turn of the millennia. The element of literary journalism—tentatively titled *Broken Arrow*— is composed of two distinct narratives that explore the 1997 National Boy Scout Jamboree and the Centennial Boy Scout Jamboree held in 2010. Since the author's narratives are separated

by more than a decade, this divide opens a window through which he can observe and comment on America's transformation during that thirteen-year period. In the early twenty-first century, America experienced a social, political, and economic sea change that began with the War on Terrorism and continued through the 2008 Financial Crisis. Like the New Journalists of the 1960's, this author has sought "not only facts, but also new ideas and forms through which" he could "develop new meaning, and therefore perhaps new truth" (Hellmann 8). The author's larger truth suggests that American organizations harbor congenital fascistic tendencies, despite their democratic ethos that promotes personal edification.

In abandoning hard news journalism, literary journalists must negotiate the abstract relationship between fact and literary art. "Journalism," Ronald Weber argues, "brings us the news not of worlds elsewhere, but of this world, with all its familiar foolishness and comedy, pain and tragedy"; however, the inclination to use journalism for artistic purposes "leaves it suspect to solid reporting" ("Some Sort of Artistic Excitement" 23). To prevent these suspicions, the literary journalist must develop a framing device that mediates the nonfiction narrative within a novelistic form, and it can be as simple as a forward or an afterword (Heller 15). If an effective frame is established, the author can present the "emotional and intellectual value of fact" with stronger credibility (Lounsberry xii). Lounsberry considers literary journalism a "discourse grounded in fact, but artful in execution" (xvi). The author can create an artful nonfiction narrative by incorporating "exhaustive detail" and multiple points of view, which are absent in traditional journalism (Pizer 211). These devices help develop

“thematic ironies” that are essential if the author intends to discuss “large philosophical and social issues” (Pizer 218/Hellmann 14). During the 1960’s, Tom Wolfe recognized that novelists had abandoned social realism, which allowed the era’s literary journalists to adopt the techniques employed in a canonized tradition. He outlined four essential devices that elevated journalism to literary realism: scene-by-scene construction, third-person point of view, realistic dialogue, and the incorporation of everyday details. Moving forward, this introduction will critique *Broken Arrow* by using Wolfe’s criteria for literary journalism.

Unlike news reporters, literary journalists distinguish themselves by using scene-by-scene construction. Traditional journalism is limited to historical narratives, organized by a model that moves from generalizations toward details. This form begins with a news lead, presenting the traditional five Ws: who, what, when, where, and why. Conversely, literary journalism forgoes this convention in favor of establishing a scene—bound by space and time—where the reader witnesses a dramatized event. The effect engendered by this technique illustrates the difference between inartistic telling and artistic showing (Booth 8). With scene-by-scene construction, the news lead’s five Ws are revealed through dramatization, rather than told by the author. For example, in “The Girl of the Year,” Wolfe begins his profile of Baby Jane Holzer by telling the reader nothing about the relevance of his subject or his own motivations. Instead, he shows Holzer at a Rolling Stones concert in New York City, and the subsequent scenes eventually answer the five questions provided in a news lead. Lounsberry agrees that the scene is the essential element of literary journalism. “Instead of merely reporting or

discussing an object or event, the artist of nonfiction recasts it in narrative form,” she writes. “The scene is frequently a sign that the form of the work is consciously artful” (xiv-xv).

While composing *Broken Arrow*, the author consulted many news articles that reported the 2010 Boy Scout Jamboree. They were typically less than a thousand words long and relied upon the hard news model. These articles frequently discussed the dangerous summer heat and the fact that eight hundred troops attended the Jamboree in Virginia. However, these facts cannot be experienced or witnessed by the reader when they are reported in a traditional news form. Scene-by-scene construction allowed the author to dramatize his experiences in severe temperatures and the appearance of thirty-five thousand scouts. These are simplified examples, but they illustrate how the reader cannot experience real life phenomena, unless the facts are self-consciously dramatized. In addition, scene-by-scene construction creates a space where the author can speak from different points of view prohibited by journalistic conventions.

Hard news journalism cannot experiment with points of view because there are no scenes where characters or the author interact with the physical world. Wolfe exhorts the third-person point of view because the first-person point of view is too limiting. Specifically, it limits the author to a single character’s perception of reality; however, he admits that the third-person point of view should not preclude authors from exploring the limiting first person. In fact, he uses both simultaneously while changing perspectives in “The First Tycoon of Teen.” In the article’s opening paragraph, Wolfe explores Phil Spector’s subjective fear of flying. The reader experiences Spector’s anxiety through a

scattered interior monologue: “All these raindrops are *high* or something...it is *sick, fatal*” (58). Wolfe created a unique voice and persona distinct from his own, and then removed Spector’s personal “I.” Wolfe repeatedly interrupts Spector’s first-person interiority with an exterior third-person point of view that dramatizes the scene and informs the reader: “He tightens his seatbelt over his bowels,” and “Phil Spector, twenty-three years old, the rock and roll magnate, producer of Philles Record” (58). The result is a stream-of-conscious narrative that reports relevant facts.

Like Wolfe’s article, *Broken Arrow* fuses the first and third-person points of view to dramatize a larger story from different perspectives. The first-person narrative explores the author’s own experiences during the 1997 National Boy Scout Jamboree. At that time, the author was not a journalist; he was a sixteen-year old adolescent, which raises questions about the author’s reliability. For example, the author remembers scenes, but not dialogue; however, while preparing for this thesis, he verified certain events by consulting two individuals who attended the event as well. In a newsroom, journalists typically confirm a controversial story with two sources. Regardless, the author decided to use the first-person point of view to establish an unreliable narrator. The third-person point of view, describing the author’s return to the 2010 Jamboree, acts to verify or deny the unreliable first-person narrative. William Faulkner uses a similar technique in the *The Sound and the Fury*. As Wayne Booth notes, Faulkner successfully narrated part of his novel through the unreliable perspective of Benji Compson because the other narrators—Quentin, Jason, and Dilsey—clarify Benji’s incoherent narrative (152).

These competing points of view complicated *Broken Arrow* because both perspectives necessitated very different personas. The first-person narrative was modeled after Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield. Both Finn and Caulfield criticize adult hypocrisy when they rise above their aloof adolescent status. On the other hand, the third-person narrative is edified and discerning, modeled after Norman Mailer's "reporter" in the first half of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. Like Mailer's reporter, the older persona is an observer rather than a participant, and he is "determined to be fair to all" at the Jamboree (Mailer 30). Wolfe has criticized *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, arguing that Mailer provides no perspective other than his own and that "any gentleman in the grandstand" might have made Mailer's observations ("New Journalism" 44). This thesis anticipated that pitfall. If the third-person narrative verifies the facts proposed by the unreliable first-person narrator, the latter provides an emotional truth to counteract the former's facts. Furthermore, the points of view are linked by a sequential narrative structure, which Donald Pizer defines as a narrative with "overlapping, but forward moving sequences of action," or rather, a single narrative supported by disparate narratives (210).

Critics agree that literary journalism requires scene construction, multiple points of view, and complex narrative structures; however, they dispute the role of dialogue. Wolfe argues that realistic dialogue is essential because it "involves the reader more completely than any other device ("New Journalism" 31). Alternatively, Lounsberry believes it is not essential and cites John Hersey and Gay Talese as literary journalists who distrusted dialogue. Weber asserts that the literary journalist "tries to draw together

the conflicting role of observer and maker,” but the author’s inclination to invent dialogue for the purposes of dramatization can reduce credibility (*The Literature of Fact* 3). *Broken Arrow* confronts this conflict directly. Dialogue is largely absent in the first-person narrative because the author was unable to remember significant dialogue fifteen years after the event. The absence of dialogue heightens the narrator’s unreliability, while preserving the author’s credibility. The third-person narrative has dealt with dialogue in two different ways. Firstly, the narrative includes direct dialogue collected from interviews with scouts at the 2010 Jamboree. This is problematic because unlike Wolfe’s urbane subjects, adolescents are not great communicators. They have poor diction and awkward syntax. They lack coherency when answering simple questions. The author has summarized portions of dialogue, but he has also sought to preserve the unique adolescent voice. The author has also incorporated public speeches delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and President Barak Obama at the opening and closing ceremonies. The author interpreted these orations as a discourse speaking for the Boy Scouts of America. These excerpts reinforce the author’s credibility. More importantly, the “center-of-consciousness” created by the third-person point of view provides a space where the implied author can provide commentary on the orations (Booth 153).

Whether collected in the field or through extensive research, literary journalists are expected to incorporate subject-specific details that transcend the scope of ordinary journalism. Wolfe believes these details possess symbolic value. “The recording of such details,” he writes, “is not mere embroidery of prose. It lies as close to the center of the

power of realism as any other device” (“New Journalism” 32). Broken Arrow has given acute attention to details unique to the Boys Scouts, but the author believes the thesis needs more of what Ernest Hemingway called *magnification*. In many ways, the Boy Scout Jamboree constructs a miniature America, and the author has focused on the details that develop this significant metaphor. Boy Scout council patches are one important detail. These patches are traded amongst the scouts, but as seen in the first-person narrative, they become a source of conflict, thus illustrating the hypocrisy of democracy with a scouting troop. Music is also an important detail that links both narratives. For example, the young persona discusses his attendance at an arena rock concert. Later, when the older persona hears a song at the Jamboree, he is reminded of the same event, and confesses to participating in a large-scale riot. This memory of a destructive, unpredictable crowd establishes an analogy for the vast crowd of Boy Scouts convening at the Jamboree. In another case, the older persona details the fate of the character Schlecht, whose humiliation is dramatized by the first-person narrator. More details from both points of view will help improve the entire narrative’s credibility.



CHAPTER II  
BROKEN ARROW

**From Sea to Shining Sea**

It began with a distant flicker. Very slowly, a multitude of starry beacons appeared and spread in uneven clusters across the dark arena. Each scout held a ceremonial candle, and soon, a hundred thousand flickering lights brightened the crowded field. Their silence was profound, and it was broken by a blue snap, breaking in the black sky. A red pop followed and then a long white crackle. Music spread across the arena, and its volume grew as the fireworks increased in frequency. Their eyes were transfixed by the low-altitude concussions that broke into multi-colored blossoms. They took in deep proud breaths of summer air that smelled like burnt gunpowder. When the spectacle finally climaxed, their candles were still burning, and slowly, the silence was replaced with many different sounds. First, you heard small groups chanting, but eventually, their voices coalesced into a single masculine tone. You could not see their faces, but they spoke in monosyllables. Their quarter note rhythm—*U.S.A. U.S.A.*—hung in the air like the last bar of Beethoven's Ninth symphony, trapped beneath a concert hall's ceiling. Slowly, the shouting died down as the troops dispersed and returned to their campsites. It was a centennial celebration for the Boy Scouts of America. The troops closest to the stage faced a long wait, and there was rain expected any minute.

In fact, there was a thunderstorm approaching, and Loesser feared that his luck had run out. He faced six hours of late night driving, and depending on how long he waited, it could be a very wet drive home. He joined a dark throng of scouts moving from the crowd's center towards its edge. They moved through a clearing in the trees that funneled them shoulder-to-shoulder. There were tree roots and stones protruding from the ground. It was a clumsy walk, but they moved swiftly. Loesser had no flashlight, but he stumbled along, following the light from some stranger's Coleman lantern. He remembered this silent march through the darkness; it was all very familiar now, and Loesser felt himself pulled farther and farther from his destination. The crowd did not care where it was going as long as it headed in a general direction. When the column passed a moonlit field, Loesser broke from their undertow and proceeded through an abandoned teepee village. There was no one around, and he followed the fluorescent glow of soda machines that illumined a stretch of asphalt road in red and green neon light. He knew he was approaching the press tent because the air smelled sour, and it was just beginning to rain when he reached his car, parked behind a long row of week-old latrines.

It was eleven o'clock, and Loesser joined the slow procession of headlights creeping towards the fort's main gate. These were the day visitors; the scouts would remain on base for another two days before the Jamboree officially ended. The Boy Scouts were a hundred years old, and tomorrow guaranteed a hangover. There was nothing left to keep the kids occupied. They were exhausted after seven days in the Virginia heat. They were bored with childish distractions. They were growing irritable

with the same old rations for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It was time to go home; it was time to return to the world, and Loesser's own instincts told him to flee. He had been here before, and he was tired and hungry and sick of the Boy Scouts, all over again. The previous night, he slept in one of the half-derelict motor inns outside Fort A.P. Hill. There was mold climbing the walls; there was a dark carpet that could absorb crimson stains; it was the perfect setting for a grainy snuff film starring some teenage run-a-way. However, he was determined to attend the Closing Ceremony—making it his fourth straight night in Virginia. Outside the base, traffic was heading west to Fredericksburg, where the two-lane country road linked up with Interstate 95. But Loesser knew better. He headed north across the Potomac River. In the darkness, he passed rotting barns and confederate graveyards. The road was empty in southern Maryland, but the rain persisted. All he wanted was to avoid the local authorities in this weird state that was neither north nor south.

It was half past two in the morning when he reached the suburbs north of Baltimore. He stopped at the closest highway rest area, where only a few itinerants milled about the gated food kiosks and convenience store. The air conditioning was too strong; the lights were too bright for the hour, and everyone—including Loesser—looked a little homeless. In the men's room, Loesser took a long half-conscious piss, and when he turned in the mirror, he paused to remove the red-white-and-blue Eagle Scout medal still pinned to his shirt. Outside, the highway hissed in both directions, but it could not silence the song trapped in Loesser's head all week long. It was something sentimental by Neil Young, something about a house in California, someplace in

Canada, and a journey to somewhere past. It was August 2010, and Loesser was returning from the National Boy Scout Jamboree. He saw what he wanted to see, but there was no second revelation. He was too old and too complacent now. He knew that all those ignorant kids and their rotten leaders were sleeping with a peaceful conscience because the crowd cannot ever see itself. You cannot ever see farther than the few heads standing in front of you. He finished his cigarette. The highway moved north and south; this was the midpoint of his trip. Soon he would leave again. He was heading for Texas, but in the past four days, he cured a lingering doubt that had metastasized in his brain like a tumor for thirteen years. Their flickering incantations would not cease. If they did not convene in Virginia, they would convene someplace else, maybe West Virginia. From somewhere along the New Jersey turnpike, Loesser saw the sunrise at a quarter past five.

### **Departure**

When it was all over I decided not to tell anyone this story. I suppose I've dropped a few details now and then, but never the whole stretch. I might've given a line from time to time just to make an impression, but mostly I stayed silent. People often say that I'm too quiet, but the story hasn't exactly been collecting dust because I haven't been able to kick it free. You could say it's been on the tip of my tongue ever since. I'd like to think that I've been ruminating, and I can say that because I've got patience, something most people lack. In the meantime, I've been trying to anticipate your responses: you're just a smart ass kid! You didn't see things right! You let your

imagination get the better of you! Quit reading so many books! I know you'll be suspicious as hell too and asking questions like where do I get the authority to make these accusations? Why am I reliable? Exactly what details haven't I included? If that is the case I guess I should tell you a little about my self.

I'm from the suburbs, and maybe you hate it there too. The town isn't important because there isn't much there. There aren't any skateboard parks or even a convenience store. There are lots of forests, but even those are disappearing. They are cutting them down and building these fake-looking houses with front hallways that can fit twelve-foot Christmas trees. There is no place left for the deer to hide, and everyone is complaining that they are always munching away on their precious front yards. People are always complaining about me too; seems like every time I leave the house someone is calling the cops on me. One time I was down where there used to be trees and this guy with his kid approached me. He was wearing a handgun on his belt. He said he was an off duty cop and proceeded to make all these accusations against my character. He was holding his kid with one hand and the gun in the holster with the other. Of course the real cops showed up, and they sent the vigilante prick on his way. I'd never seen him before in my life, but I hope he shoots himself in the leg, or in the balls, or his face someday—with his little bastard watching too.

That's how it is here, lots of cops and dads with guns, and you can't even walk around outside. When this isn't happening I'm usually at school; I'm a decent student in history and literature. It's the thirteenth oldest school in the nation, and it's got this motto—Ad Lumen—that is supposed to celebrate a tradition of enlightenment and

distinction. The school is even farther out there in the forest where there is still plenty of room for the deer, and we see them every morning by the roadside, all puffed-up and swollen. I've got two friends there, Dave and John, but they aren't part of this story much, and I don't have a feeling that things will end well for them anyway. I'm six-foot something, and when I joined the Boy Scouts everyone wanted to call me Slim, but I said that wasn't gonna fucking happen. I think that is about all you need to know for now. If I haven't mentioned already, you can call me Loesser.

What you do need to know is that this story begins with me shipping out to the 1997 National Boy Scout Jamboree, a nine-day nightmare in Virginia held on an Army base called Fort A. P. Hill. If you're unfamiliar with the name, A.P. Hill was a Confederate general during the Civil War whom we can all thank for inventing trench warfare. Whenever I hear that name, it reminds me how the Kaiser's Schlieffen Plan stalled out and how scared all those soldiers—Allied and Central—must have been when the tanks started rolling across no-mans land, effectively retiring A.P. Hill's great tactical innovation. They must have been pants pissing scared. Anyway, we all know about the Boy Scouts and their reputation for helping old ladies cross the road, selling war bonds, and sticking to the Scout Oath. But like I said, my town didn't have any traffic signals so there weren't any old ladies. Instead, they had us collect garbage along the main boulevards. The town paid us ten bucks for a few hours work, and it's funny because every time some young kid—whose pubes were probably just sprouting—would find some soggy rotten porno mag tossed in the bushes. They were always called *Cheri* or *Club*, and they dissolved into a pile of rainbow pulp in the kid's hands. I loved

looking at the heartbreak on their faces, and I always wondered how the hell the porno got there anyway? High school seniors? Some pervert afraid to get caught by his wife? There is no other answer except the porn fairy.

You would know all about it if you were a scout yourself. If not, maybe you have a dad who still has his dog-eared handbook and only a half-dozen merit badges because he never quite finished. Right now, I'm the highest rank less than Eagle Scout, which means I've been at it awhile, and I wasn't surprised that the Army was sponsoring this Virginia fag fest. They shipped us up to West Point for my first camping trip. We had to hike in a few miles, and by the time we got our tents up, black storm clouds had rolled in. There was lightning crashing everywhere, and you could see the whole valley lighting up. And there we were holding onto metal tent poles, trying to keep our tarpaulin from blowing away. Trust me, I tried to get out of this horseshit trip. Earlier in the summer, I did a weeklong excursion with my troop, and after that fiasco I was ready to turn in my badge. All these fathers showed up who probably hadn't been outside in months; they looked like accountant types, or real estate agents—fat, soft, and puffy. They started hogging the fire pit and bitching us out for building the fire too high or too hot. There was a small insurrection among the scouts, and the fathers were screaming, and I was the senior patrol leader who should have been controlling things. Instead, I was just standing and laughing, hating everyone and everything. I walked back to my tent and tried to sleep.

The '97 Jamboree was being called the experience of a lifetime; it would be the biggest, the loudest, and the most patriotic event in scouting history. I'm sure they say

the same lines every four years when this crap comes back around. My older cousin attended eight years ago. I don't know where it was or what he did for nine days, and I don't even know the guy all that well. If he had said something compelling, I think I would've remembered. I guess attending this dog show had become a right of passage in my family. For the record, I'll admit that I felt a little changed on the ninth day. I think I was privileged to have attended. I think I see things a lot clearer now, even though I feel a lot more alone in the world, more alone than before I went on the goddamn trip. My friends don't have a clue, and it's okay that I'm alone because I know what to expect from people. I learned that you don't need to listen to anybody, not your parents, not your teachers, and certainly not the politicians or anybody they drag out who claims to be a leader. I am not leading anyone anymore. If they need leadership, they can fend for themselves, and that's how it's going to be.

On the morning we left for Virginia, there were just three of us in the car, my mother, my younger brother, and myself. It must have been a weekday morning because my dad was already at work or on his way. I'm not really a morning person, and it would make sense that a busload of Boy Scouts would want to strike out at the ass crack of dawn on a Monday morning. I can imagine them saying, "The early bird gets the worm," or as my dad might say, "sleep when you are dead." On this July morning I was wishing for something just less than that. There was gray light brightening the sky, and we were heading east along a long county road that snakes through all the suburban communities. The longer you drive the smaller the houses get until they're just identical square boxes with small lawns closed in with a perimeter of chain-link fence. I was feeling like a



prisoner. I was hoping for anything to slow the car down, a rear-end collision, a flat tire, even just a single red light, but they were all green. My brother is two years younger than me, and I was sixteen. Throughout the whole car ride, I was wondering if he was going to throw one of his signature fits. He is shorter than me, thicker than me, sports a crew cut, and when he gets going on a tantrum, it's a mess. He'll start throwing shit and kicking shit; one time he threatened to throw himself out of a moving car. It gives me an ugly laugh, but usually he'll get what he wants. The thing is if he threw a fit that morning, it could've meant I was going alone. If I had to sweat it out in the Virginia swamp for a week, he could too. He would have left me with no one but fucking Fishman—I'll get to Fishman later, but I guess my brother grew out it.

There were a few reasons why I was locked into this trip. First, I suspect it cost a pretty penny, and once my parents sign the check there is no negotiating. For Christ's sake, it's a package deal that includes the hundred-dollar registration fee, costs for transportation, nine days worth of food, and any entertainment along the way, which sounds like a gyp because the bus wasn't stopping except for lunch. It was the Jamboree or bust. Second, I was elected patrol leader on account of my age and rank. There was just one guy older than me, and he was appointed senior patrol leader. He was the kind of guy who wears Birkenstock sandals and real thin Oakley sunglasses; he probably played soccer. I didn't want the job and I didn't volunteer because I wasn't about to be playing babysitter. I didn't know his name or care to know it. That left me in charge of just seven guys: my brother, his friend Johnny, Fishman, Schlecht, Big Jon, the Puerto Rican, and another kid whose name I forgot immediately. This wasn't going to be one of

those fancy resort camps where all the Jewish kids—like Fishman—disappear to for eight weeks during the summer. There weren't going to be cabins with electricity, no swimming pools and dining halls, and no hot showers. From late June to mid-August, my hometown thins outs; it's some seasonal exodus for those kids. I got sent to another camp once for a week, and it was run by these hippie-Christian types. I remember this elderly woman with short gray hair wearing a denim jacket she painted or embroidered herself. One night she was playing an acoustic guitar and singing a song about "how many miles must a white dove sail," and more of the same. It was a pretty song, and I've often wondered who wrote it.

This Jamboree wouldn't be anything like that. At least those camps had some girls around. From here on out, it was going to be all guys eating together, sleeping together, showering together, and everything just short of holdings hands. It was a terrible situation really because as I said most of these kids were younger than me, and it might have been the longest they were away from their blessed mothers. We call the real young ones twelve-year old Eagles because they probably hatched out of their mommy's egg with thirty fucking merit badges. They're know it alls and want to do everything by the book, and even though they are old enough to attend the Jamboree, I am pretty sure they hadn't heard of the labia minora or know to aim for the clitoris. I had this girlfriend until recently. She was a tall blond and in the grade ahead of me. She lived in the town down by the river that would flood whenever there was heavy rain. She attended this crappy high school, and her parents were recovering alcoholics. Her dad had only half his left arm because of a motorcycle crash up or what her mother called an Alcohol

Related Incident. I broke it off right after New Years. She was beginning to get me down, and I've learned that when certain people start making you feel depressed and you're wishing they weren't around, it's better to go be alone again. Her mother was an elementary school bus driver—one of those ladies you see chain smoking menthol 100 lengths—but the rest of the time she drove this old Ford Econoline van. We'd sit in the farthest back seat where her mother couldn't see, and Lisa—that was her name—she would unzip my pants, put her mouth down, and start going to work. It was hard keeping a straight face with her mom occasionally looking back in the rearview mirror. Lisa wanted to be a veterinarian, and I sort of miss her when I think about that van.

That was a couple months ago, and before I knew it I was heading to the Jamboree. Because we were traveling, the scoutmaster, a guy named Dick Richardson, said we had to wear our uniforms, which consist of a standard-issue khaki shirt, fatigue green shorts, and the famous red and green hat with matching socks—pulled up knee high, of course. Some of these kids would be wearing more patches than shirt; they had more shiny medals and brass ornaments than Field Marshall Rommel. I've hated these suits since day one. The shirts are too big at the shoulders; the shorts have too much waist. I'm 6'3" and weigh a hundred fifty; that's slim. These uniforms were cut for sloppy fatsos like Fishman and Big Jon. To make things worse, it felt like they were woven with plastic. The shirts don't breath well, which wasn't gonna help us in the heat. The leaders handed out these big black duffel bags, and they said we could bring anything we wanted as long as it fit in the sack. We were told to bring a few spare uniforms that we could alternate for cleanliness. We were traveling light. I had a

backpack filled with books and music, enough to keep me busy for a week because once we arrived I intended to find a cool shady spot away from the khaki-green herd. On regular camping trips there isn't time to be bored. When I was a Tenderfoot, four of us went hiking along the Appalachian Trail, and we were moving with full packs all day. We covered twelve miles in a weekend, despite being November and pretty cold. At one point we had to scale alongside a cliff that dropped down for hundreds of feet. I was moving one step at a time—my pack rocking above my shoulders—and I was looking out across the valley where all the trees had turned rusty shades of red and orange. There were some pastures at the bottom, maybe I saw a road, but you wanted to think that no one had ever seen this hidden quiet country before. Scouting is all right at times.

Eventually, we passed through a neighborhood I recognized and knew we were approaching the drop off. It was a parking lot behind some church, and I don't remember what town. I do remember meeting the other scouts there for the first time that past winter. It was February, and there was no heat in the gymnasium. I am pretty sure it was a Sunday and St. Patrick's Day. Not that my family is Irish, but I think it was the first time I wished I was old enough to drink because it would have been a lot more fun and a lot warmer inside a bar than sitting around with a bunch of scouts whose names I wasn't going to learn. Sometimes people accuse me of being aloof, but really, if I haven't learned your name it means I don't want to know you. We turned into the parking lot, and there was the sooty-looking coach bus and the khaki-green kids running around. I stepped out of my mom's car and the momentum of things changed for the worse. There was this woman shaped like an ugly gnome hollering at everyone to load their black

duffels on to the bus. Who invited her? Hell yes, I started moving. I would have done anything to make that bossy bitch shut her mouth. I think it was Dick Williams' ex-wife, and their son was going to the Jamboree too. I just couldn't help but imagine the horror and agony Dick must have felt waking up to her screaming face everyday. I got the patrol together except for Fishman. Fishman was late for everything because his mother ran his life. I said thanks again to my own mom and told her to beat it because we had to line up for role call.

### **Centennial**

For three decades, the United States Military hosted the National Boy Scout Jamboree every four years at Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia. However, the same event scheduled for July 2010 would be the last of its kind held at the Army's training facility, eighty miles south of Washington D.C. The fort is not the secret home of Green Berets or other Special Forces. It is not the home of mobilized infantry or Abrams tanks. It is not even the first stop for nervous recruits on their way to basic training. Fort A.P. Hill—very flat and densely forested—is a glorified parade ground that received its name from Ambrose Powell Hill, a Virginian and Confederate General. Hill graduated fifteenth in his West Point class and served in the Mexican-American War. After secession, he distinguished himself at Fredericksburg, Antietam, the Second Bull Run, and Gettysburg. Hill harbored no desire to outlive his beloved Confederacy, and he was killed during the Siege of Petersburg, one week before Lee's surrender in April 1865. Fort A.P. Hill is not the only military installation named after a famous gray coat. There

is Fort Braxton Bragg in North Carolina and Fort John Bell Hood in Texas. Regardless of Hill's loyalty, the Boy Scouts have convened at the base since 1981 for their own Super Bowl. It did not matter whether A.P. Hill owned slaves, and it did not matter if he sent Union sons to an early grave. The Boy Scouts could condone Hill's checkered past because the Boy Scouts can appreciate any good disciplined general.

The typical Boy Scout Jamboree is a colorful, loud, myopic event. Most scouts would never know that the Founding Fathers such as George Washington, James Madison, and James Monroe were born within miles of the fort's main entrance. Caroline County is in the heart of Virginia's Tidewater region, and it is the cradle of an older Republic. The fort occupies land that was formerly the Garrett Farm where Union cavalry apprehended and killed John Wilkes Booth, twelve days after the Lincoln assassination. However, all this history is irrelevant for the purposes of the Boy Scouts. There are other reasons why Fort A.P. Hill was an unofficial home for the National Jamboree. It covered seventy-six thousand acres of terrain—making it a hundred times larger than Central Park in New York City. The 2010 jamboree was not an ordinary Jamboree, and it was being touted as unlike anything in Scouting history. In fact, the Boy Scout's top brass delayed the event by one year so that it would coincide with the Centennial Anniversary of Scouting in America. Fort A.P Hill could easily accommodate fifty thousand scouts from all fifty states, national territories, and foreign continents including Europe, South America, and Asia. Over the course of nine days, the camp's population was expected to reach two hundred and fifty thousand visitors, making it larger than the state capitol in Richmond. Scout city—as one newspaper man

called it—would be supported by its own public transportation system, a telephone network, a hospital, a post office, a radio station, a daily newspaper, trading posts, and vast food reserves. Additionally, Fort A.P. Hill was remote enough that that the Jamboree would not disrupt any major communities or business districts, but it was conveniently located near Interstate Highway 95, which made it accessible to the entire eastern seaboard.

Between July 26 and August 4, representatives from more than eight hundred American troops would attend the Centennial Jamboree. Thousands of khaki and green clad youths would form a single uniformed clan, and only the council patches sewn onto their left shoulders would identify their distant homes. There was the Black Warrior Council from Tuscaloosa, Alabama; the Pikes Peak Council from Colorado Springs, Colorado; the Midnight Sun Council from Fairbanks, Alaska; the Blue Waters Council from Lake Huron, Michigan; and the Pony Express Council from St. Joseph, Missouri, among many others. They would arrive by airplane, touring bus, and the family station wagon. There would be a place for the Venture Scouts, Sea Scouts, and Lone Scouts from rural communities. The array of license plates evoked forty-eight imagined places: the Land of Rolling Prairies, Sportsman's Paradise, the Cross Roads of America, the Land of Enchantment, Peace Garden, and the Evergreen State. For months, possibly years, the Boy Scout's advertised the Centennial Jamboree's gigantism, and for one summer week, it transformed Fort A.P Hill into a miniature America.

The National Boy Scout Jamboree might be among the nation's largest events to run without interruption. Presidential conventions occur every four years; Woodstock

and Altamont have never had real rivals. But these gatherings have often epitomized the cult of personality or hedonistic chaos—and sometimes both. The Centennial Jamboree would be nothing like that. It would be an orderly and friendly event where scouts would display their self-reliance while away from home. Scouts could dress down during the day, but they were expected to wear dress uniforms to all flag ceremonies and all dinner tables, every night. It would run like clockwork from reveille to taps. However, no one was going to know about it because most major newspapers—excluding the *New York Post*—neglected to report this monumental convention. The *Post* ran a single story extolling the Scout's core principals. The reporter claimed that the twelve virtues identified in the Scout Law compose a national creed, regardless of a citizen's race, religion, or political interests. However, the five hundred-word paean went to press on the Fourth of July weekend, and since then most headlines were admonishing a double-dip recession.

The Centennial celebration would dwarf the original jamboree, but it was taking place during an era of equal economic and political uncertainty. In 1937, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt invited the Boy Scouts to hold their inaugural jamboree on the National Mall within sight of the White House. An earlier jamboree had been scheduled for 1935, but it was delayed due to a polio outbreak in the Capitol. The President's invitation attracted twenty-five thousand scouts whose campfires were visible from the Potomac River's shore in Virginia. Residents of Washington had not seen so many bivouacked tents since the Civil War. However, every scout that had come



of age during the Great Depression, and convened in Washington, was now old enough to watch the nation winded and wobbling from a second round of financial catastrophe.

In July 2010, America was sullen like a manic-depressive teenager crashing in a deep downer. There was no prescription strong enough to lift the nation from its gray funk. But just as some pundits discussed the looming post-American era, the National Boy Scout Jamboree was a beacon of optimism that no one knew about. It was as if the Boy Scouts, with all their flags and patches and honor codes, had been locked inside an old steamer trunk that was pushed back into the attic's farthest corner and entirely forgotten. Amidst this new cynicism, Loesser, a 29-year old Eagle Scout, decided to attend the Centennial Jamboree. He had been once before in 1997, and now he returned as the nostalgic skeptic, an urbane malcontent hoping to sample the event's strange fraternity. He had been quietly planning his return for years, but he greeted the jingoistic pomp because he knew the scouts better than most people. They were not Norman Rockwell's smiling trooper. Scouts are ungraceful and clumsy; they are not synchronized goose steppers, but scouts are no less cruel than their peers who prefer football or soccer. Their adult leaders are overweight and embarrassing clods. And when two hundred thousand scouts convene, Loesser knew that even a green and khaki crowd becomes an ugly crowd. Loesser had returned to observe their solidarity, and he would march anonymously with their ranks through the miserable Virginia heat.

## Lost Highway

Unlike most people my age, I don't procrastinate, but I'll admit that I was probably the last person to get on the bus. One look at it and you knew it was going to be filthy. Inside, it smelled like cigarettes and the seats felt like burlap. Apparently the clock was ticking because the bus started rolling before everyone had their asses planted. Dick Richardson was on the driver's bullhorn, announcing the trip's itinerary. There wasn't much to it. Basically, he said to sit down and get comfortable and keep quiet for a few hours before we stopped for lunch. Dick Richardson was funny. You couldn't dislike the guy. He had this contagious enthusiasm, sort of. You wanted to imagine him reciting the Scout Oath in his sleep—*I will do my duty to God and my country*, followed by a round of snores and farts. One look at him and you wanted to start chopping wood and pitching tents. He was built like a brick shithouse; he looked like a lumberjack with his red and green socks hiked up. Somehow Dick Richardson was inspiring. He had these one-liners like, "Let's get this shit down now, so we can have fun later." I don't know what line of work he was in, but I pictured him barking at teamsters or ordering bulldozers and concrete trucks in every direction. I was pretty sure he wouldn't be breathing down our necks, so the next nine days weren't going to be a complete disaster.

As I said, this bus was headed for Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia. It's an army base and from time to time, I have entertained joining the military. My grandfather served during World War II and even though he hated every minute of it, he can't quit talking about it. He was an artilleryman in Europe; he fought with Patton's Third Army; he says he hurt his back while tossing howitzer shells, and my grandmother says he went bald

because of the insecticides they put in the uniforms. My grandfather had a famous toupee, and I guess I was curious to know if I had the endurance to go the whole distance. I wanted to test myself physically because whether it's been Scouting or school, I've never really felt challenged. I don't think schools and teachers ever force kids to live up to their potential. The kids I see aren't too bright, but everyone keeps telling them that they're so damn special. These kids aren't willing to work for anything. They don't deserve lollipops or gifted classes, just a punch in the face to snap them out of their indifference. But the military, it's not really an option for me. If I joined up my family would be disappointed, and besides, I don't think there are going to be any old-fashioned wars anymore. The television says the stock market has smashed the glass ceiling, and we've got so many airplanes buzzing Iraq that Saddam Hussein can't move to scratch his balls. You have to wonder if there is anyone worth left to fight?

I wasn't about to make a hasty decision regarding my future on this trip, so as Dick Richardson instructed, I tried to get comfortable. The bus was really rocking and rolling. I don't get seasick, but there was this one time when my family and I were on a vacation in Arizona. We were on this three-hour bus drive to a canyon that wasn't the Grand Canyon. I don't know if it was the bus or something I ate because I puked all over the floor. I never even thought of going to the bathroom, but I don't think anyone noticed. That was a couple years ago, and I started looking around the bus to see if any of the young scouts looked like pukers. They looked okay for the time being, so I tried to zone out with some music. I turned on the Misfits, of course. They were a punk band from New Jersey that played a sound all mixed up with 1950's horror-movie kitsch. If

you're interested, they're about as good as the Ramones because I don't think either band has a lousy song. The lead singer kind of sounds like Elvis Presley, and he'll belt it out all romantic like, but he'll be singing about zombies or dead babies or the Kennedy assassination. The Misfits make a speedy fucking racket that I can't get enough of. So I was trying to tune everything out, but Fishman was at my right-hand side pointing at some picture in *Rolling Stone*. He was tapping away all excited at a photograph of Ozzy Osborne. That's right Fishman, I saw Black Sabbath in June, but you were at summer camp. You weren't there, you weren't invited, and you don't know any song other than "Iron Man." I saw Metallica earlier in the year too, but Ozzy and company put those creeps to shame.

All summer long Sabbath was playing a reunion tour with a dozen other acts, and I made sure we got to the Meadowlands right after they opened the gates. It was around noon and hot as hell. I was with my friend Dave, and our tickets put us at the twenty-yard line near the far end of the arena; we were nowhere near the stage and the place was empty. The first two bands were pretty tame, but the crowd livened up when Pantera came on stage. They're this heavy metal outfit fronted by Phil Anselmo, a thick-necked skinhead from New Orleans with "unscarred" tattooed across his belly. He's the kind of guy who over doses on heroin and brags about it. I know because I read the interview in *Metal Maniacs* magazine. We were sitting on the lower mezzanine, and when the band ripped into "Five Minutes Alone" it sent the kids behind the field goal into a frenzy. They started storming the stairwells down to the ground level. They were breaking apart security gates and spilling along the sidelines when a group of state troopers arrived.

They just sort of stood around in their knee boots looking like a bunch of Nazi brown shirts and shooting off rounds into the air. I heard a series of muted pops and saw some gray smoke, but the kids kept rushing the stairwells. No one on stage had any idea what was happening; they just kept belting a way and segued into the next song; it was called “Fucking Hostile.” Eventually the cops disappeared and the kids weren’t running anymore. You couldn’t really call it an interruption.

That concert was about the most fun I had in my entire life. There wasn’t anyone on the bus that could appreciate a full-blown riot. In my patrol, I was responsible for seven kids. Five of us were from the same hometown and we didn’t know the other three that well. There was Big John; he was taller than me and was a real fat fucker. This guy looked like a Hell’s Angel. He had a chain wallet and black boots and a messy tattoo on his left arm that looked like Mickey Mouse. The funny thing was, he had a baby face—a real cherub. We had a few things in common—Pantera, for example—but Big John didn’t read much and he wasn’t too bright. No one on that god damn bus was very bright, and the Puerto Rican kid in the patrol could barely spell his name. He kept threatening to cut our throats if we touched his shit, but he wasn’t too intimidating. He had these thin little legs and a spare tire around his waist. He looked like a weasel and Big John said it was on account of his Puerto Rican heritage, “Yup, that makes you half black and half rat.” You should have seen the kid blow his top. He would pull his knives out and start threatening to cut our throats again, but we just stood their laughing at him. There was a nerdy kid too, but I never learned his name even though I was the patrol

leader. I never heard him say a word. He wore a varsity jacket, but he didn't play a single sport, which meant his mom bought it for him.

He never heard the end of it once the word got out. It happened on a trial run camping trip. We had to do everything by the book, pretending it was the real jamboree. You could bring anything you wanted as long as it fit inside the standard issue black duffel, and that included your sleeping bag. You had space for some spare clothes, an extra pair of boots, poncho, canteen, lantern, flashlight, and maybe a pillow. Most of the time we played games of trust because we were all supposed to be bonding. One of the games involved two parallel lines of scouts facing each other. Dick Richardson drew a line between the scouts, and the object was to push your opponent backwards until you crossed the line. There were eight scouts to a patrol, four patrols to a troop, so thirty-two kids were lined up pushing at each other, grappling for a half hour, and some kids were fierce. There was this ginger named Hanbury; he looked like a redheaded Frankenstein and he won every time. After that we'd always say, "There goes Hanbury. He ain't too bright but he sure can push people." My brother played football so he pushed pretty good too.

This camping trip only lasted a night and Sunday morning we practiced the flag ceremony. All the patrols were in full dress uniforms and the four or five kids that were responsible for the flag really screwed things up. They lowered the flag too damn fast and it came dangerously close to touching the ground. These little pricks didn't even know how to fold it, which is bullshit because it's the first requirement before you get the rank of Tenderfoot. As expected, one of the adult leaders started to chew them out,

but this particular leader looked like a Marine Corps sergeant. He was short and stocky with a thick neck. I think part of this nose was missing too. He had piggish eyes, a flattop crew cut, and he started to pitch a real fit. There were veins popping out of his temples; you wondered if he was gonna have a heart attack—all because these kids snafu'd the flag ceremony. I wish he had dropped dead. He was shrieking and pointing his finger at the whole troop because somehow it was our fault too. I don't know who he was but one look at him and you knew he was dangerous; he was a real cop-type. On the bus, I saw him sitting up front, but I had no intention of getting personal.

I was sitting toward the back of the bus, and for whatever reason I couldn't get comfortable. My music wasn't working and I needed something more cerebral to mix with the blurry highway scenery. Fishman was wearing these astronaut-style headphones, and he kept distracting me by pointing at shit in his magazine. On the cover there was another new hip-hop genius, discussing the east coast-west coast nonsense. When it came to rivalries, I was more interested in the Norwegian black metal bands that were burning down churches, murdering politicians, and killing each other. They weren't interested in selling records; they wanted to turn things back to the days of Odin and Viking tribes—the dark ages. I read about them in *Spin* and had picked up a few of their records. Anyway, years ago when I bought *Appetite for Destruction*, Fishman had to have a copy too. I guess you could say that's the type of relationship we had. He had been tied to my hip since the second grade and in September we were starting our junior year. He was short and fat and his legs were like tree stumps. He wore his hair so long that our school bus driver mistook him for a girl. I don't know what he'd do without me.

He can't pitch a tent, let alone by himself, which is how I have to manage when I camp with Fishman. He had plenty of Hebrew school friends, but I don't know them. One time in the sixth grade, he had a crush on this girl named Elise Eisenberg. He wrote some letter that he left in her desk, but somehow his class found out about it. I heard that Elise was crying in the bathroom and Fishman was publicly humiliated. He told me all about his big plan the week before. I don't know who snitched, but I never told anyone. He may be a pain in my ass, but I can say that of all the people he knows, Fishman can trust me. What do I care about his romantic fantasies and what do I gain by telling? It was no use trying to do anything except just sit back and watch the highway in silence. That's what I did and before I knew it we were stopping for lunch.

Along the highway, there were Roy Rogers restaurants every twenty miles, but the bus didn't stop there. Our pit stop was neither a Denny's nor a Cracker Barrel. There wasn't any recognizable name out front, and when you went inside you had to pass through a turn style and take a paper ticket. It was buffet style and you had the choice of Chinese and everything else. How the hell did the Chinese get to some highway slop house in the middle of nowhere Maryland—at least I thought it was Maryland. I tried the Salisbury steak, the sesame chicken, and a side of lo mein. Which reminds me, there was a similar meal earlier that spring. My troop was returning from a weekend trip to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. One of the leaders had the brilliant idea to pull off the highway for authentic Amish cooking. The next think you know we're in this farmhouse sitting on benches, being waited on by a family of fucking Amish. They had the beards with the overalls and they were ladling something out of cauldrons into these large



ceramic plates that got passed around family style. For the life of me, I don't know what it was. I can't even speculate, but it was soupy. And no one said a goddamn word during the whole meal. That's how it is when you're in the Scouts. You end up eating in roadside dumps and trucker buffets. I've seen plenty of them along Interstate 95, from Williamsburg, Virginia, all the way to Boston, Massachusetts.

Back on the bus, they decided to play a movie because we were still a few hours from the Jamboree. I don't know where they found it or who brought it, but the film was *Delta Force* starring Chuck Norris. Maybe you've seen it because it's the type that cable channels show on Saturday afternoon. If you haven't, basically what happens is this. A group of Islamic revolutionaries highjack a 747 jumbo jet and demand that the pilots fly them to some Middle Eastern country; it was never specified whether it was Lebanon or Iran or wherever. The hijackers release some of the passengers, mostly women and children, but they keep the Jews and the Americans. As you can imagine, the Pentagon activates Chuck Norris and his team of elite commandos, who are dressed more like cat burglars or members of the French resistance than Special Forces. They assault the airplane, track down the hijackers, and free the hostages. Chuck goes after the arch villain and they fight it out hand to hand, but somehow Chuck takes him out with a rocket launcher and drops a one-liner like "Sleep tight" or "Take a breather." Meanwhile the commandos are racing around in dune buggies trying to secure the airstrip. The getaway plane starts taking off, but here comes Chuck hauling ass on a motorcycle armed with machineguns. He jumps on board just as the plane's wheels are leaving the ground. It ends with Delta Force and the freed hostages singing *America the Beautiful*,

while a commando dies in their arms. Chuck did not inspire me to join the army, but I can't speak for everyone on the bus. I always considered myself more like Captain Willard in *Apocalypse Now*.

When the movie ended I was just about falling sleep. It wasn't a deep sleep. It was more like that in-and-out nod you get when an airplane taxis before takeoff. I wasn't totally out and I was there enough to know the temperature inside the bus was suspiciously rising. The slow heat just made the outs deeper and the ins shorter. The bus was no longer on the highway, and all I could see were amber seas of corn or maybe grain. I don't know how long I was out, but naptime was over once Dick Richardson got back on the bullhorn. He said that the bus's air conditioner had died, but it wasn't a concern because we were almost at the Jamboree; we would just have to sweat it out for a little bit longer. I started to get that sticky feeling in the armpits, behind the knees, and even down the butt-crack. It was miserable and Fishman was looking overcooked, so I made sure he drank lots of water—he wouldn't do it unless I told him to. Dick Richardson was right. Just when you thought it couldn't get any hotter, the bus rounded a turn and there was this big sign reading: Fort A.P. Hill, Where America's Military Sharpens Its Combat Edge. Welcome Boy Scouts to the 1997 National Jamboree. There was nothing we could do except zip up our backpacks and get mentally prepared for a real fucking horror show. It wasn't long before we reached the drop-off location. I felt the bus settle down. I heard the front doors make that mechanical pressurized sound and slowly everyone started filing off the bus. When I stepped outside, I thought I was breathing on the surface of a planet that had spun too close to the sun.

### **The Inside Existence**

There are two signature events that structure the National Jamboree: the opening and closing ceremonies. On the morning of July 26, fifty thousand scouts marched into the grassy arena at Fort A.P. Hill. They were followed by a parade of eight hundred American flags and a trio of F-16 fighter jets that delivered a humbling, low-altitude afterburn. No convocation is complete without a keynote speaker, and at the 2010 Centennial Jamboree, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates presided as orator. As a scout in Kansas, the Secretary learned to cook over a winter fire fed with cow chips. He was a fifteen-year old Eagle Scout, a less than straight-A student, and a poor athlete. His career began when the CIA recruited a young graduate student at the University of Indiana, and since then he had advised eight different American presidents. He told his audience that he advanced to the top of the intelligence community not with family or political connections, but because he displayed the determination unique to all Boy Scouts.

This was not the Secretary's first visit to a National Jamboree. He attended the event in 1957, a time when America had thousands of servicemen stationed across the globe. Then it was Germany and Korea; today, it was Afghanistan and Iraq. For generations, he said, certain Americans have put aside their dreams to protect the freedom of their families, friends, and nation. Scouts have always been role models for boys and men alike because they embody the hard work and moral courage that made America the greatest democracy and economic power in history. The future of the world, Gates declared, depended upon the type of men America produced today. Unfortunately, the nation was experiencing a catastrophe of the soul. From Main Street to Wall Street

and Washington D.C., Americans continued to seek riches without considering if the means to their ends, or the trophies themselves, were decent, right, and true. Luckily, Scouting provides an alternative. It provides an antidote because its members are expected to combat the complacency, neglect, and ignorance that threaten social peace and justice. Unlike other institutions, Scouting sends young men into the wilderness where they must face challenges. But when they return as men, they can teach others the rejuvenating powers of the soul. He hoped that the Boy Scouts' optimism would persist through the twenty-first century, and he received a standing ovation from many adolescents who had not known his name earlier that morning.

The Secretary's speech relied upon an essential fallacy. Gates knew that the scouts he addressed faced an uncertain, and possibly a mediocre future. The approaching decade would be a lost decade. The military was overextended once again. The nation's core industries had been dismantled and auctioned off to the lowest Asian bidder. The costs for education were untenable. The entire country was drowning in debt, while constituencies fragmented beneath decades of bad policy, dispensed by turgid incumbents. Gates knew that some members of his audience would fail as scouts and citizens. Scouts will always be dropouts and drunkards too. They will receive arrest warrants and dishonorable discharges. They will be wife beaters and pederasts. They will be selfish and cowardly, and they would forget every word spoken by the Secretary. Loesser was no exception. In the thirteen years since he quit Scouting, he had not displayed the sobriety, the thrift, or cheerfulness expected from Eagle Scouts. He did not

hear Gates' speech. He arrived a day late on Thursday, July 27, but he pieced it together very quickly. There were transcripts prepared for members of the press.

At least that is how Loesser described himself at the entrance to Fort A.P. Hill. There was only a two-lane road leading in and out, and by nine o'clock in the morning, it was already bottlenecking the early arrivals. As visitors approached the security gate, some cars were waved left toward the main campground, but Loesser was waved right where a small team of Army specialists surrounded his civilian vehicle. They were armed to the teeth with shiny M-16 automatic rifles, and body armor protruded beneath their dirty blonde desert fatigues, which seemed out of place in a deciduous forest. Loesser presented his identification, and he knew that behind those impenetrable black shades, the private first class was eyeing his vehicle for anything suspicious. Hold up one second, he said, and Loesser complied. Whenever he flew domestically, Loesser always found a greeting card from the Department of Homeland Security stuffed in the bottom of his luggage, and now at the National Jamboree, Rin Tin Tin was faithfully circling his Jeep. The dog's trainer kicked at Loesser's tires and encouraged his canine counterpart to take his time—to sniff at every damn crack on this Yankee's automobile. Then came the procedural questions: how do you pronounce your name? Did anyone else pack the vehicle? Did anyone else ride in the vehicle? No one, Sir. I'll be visiting for three days. Move along, he said and waved Loesser forward.

He joined the procession of cars and busses heading deeper inland. Once you were inside Fort A.P. Hill, it was nearly impossible to leave because the main camp was at least a mile from the entrance and traffic was barely moving. The boyish voices on the

Jamboree's radio station said to expect scattered thunderstorms and highs in the low nineties. Inside the base, the terrain was entirely flat; there was no cover from lightning. There was a loudspeaker system somewhere because Loesser could hear an unintelligible voice delivering useless announcements like the ones during rush hour on New York City subway platforms. Slowly, he approached a mobile telecommunications tower provided by AT&T. Loesser heard sonar signals, and it was not the last evidence of the Jamboree's corporate sponsors. There were billboards for Direct TV. Chevrolet provided PT Cruisers that were fueled by Exxon Mobile, whose own CEO, Rex Tillman, was recently elected as the Boy Scouts' national president. It was impossible to feel far from home in the presence of the Jamboree's blue-chip partners.

Loesser found it hard to believe that he had made it this far into Boy Scout territory. Back home, he had been a hack journalist with a few irrelevant scoops, and he learned the difficulties in securing press credentials. Each beat presents a different set of challenges. Politicians are only interested in speaking with constituents. Rarely had he penetrated the furtive Wall Street conferences where investment bankers pitched lucrative exit strategies to pie-eyed clients. The Boy Scout jamboree was incomparable. All you had to do was submit an online form and you were approved, no review process or background check. He was supposed to retrieve his press passes from an administrative office somewhere along the road leading to camp. When he found it, the office resembled the demo houses that are displayed at the slash and burn developments in suburban New Jersey. It was perfectly manicured with ornamental shrubbery, gravel paths, and even a gazebo. Inside, it was air conditioned and sterilized. No one looked old

or out of shape. Loesser eavesdropped on a pair of grunts discussing deployments to Afghanistan. They looked young enough to have only known the War on Terror, and maybe like them, if Loesser had joined after high school, he too might have served in his generation's own expeditionary force.

Loesser recognized that military life was divorced from the ordinary crises and concerns of civilian existence. He did not see sunken shoulders; he did not see the slouched postures, pulled forward by increasing waistlines—the tell tale signs of nine-to-five fatigue. Instead, everyone looked healthy and obedient. These few had volunteered the best years of their lives to fight a confused skirmish at the sidelines of civilization. These guys were okay eating freeze-dried meals and sleeping in their boots. They did not complain when they were expected to be America's ambassadors and executioners. But once they filtered back home, it should come as no surprise when they finally cracked. Even the radio broadcasts only hinted at the outside existence: a suicide bombing in Iraq, an Air Force C-17 crashed in Alaska, killing all four crewmembers. In Arizona, a federal judge blocked controversial immigration legislation, and protesters were convening in Phoenix. The news of the world all sounded very distant from Fort A.P. Hill.

Back in the slow column, Loesser still had no idea how far it was to the main camp. The disk jockey filtered through classic rock standards, and when he spun "Paranoid" Loesser could not help but remember the Black Sabbath concert when he was sixteen. It was June 1997, and when Ozzy walked onstage there were eighty thousand people stomping their feet and chanting in unison. Garbage started raining down from the upper deck. They were throwing anything with a little mass, and on the

ground floor they were tearing down the security fences. Loesser had one leg over the ledge of the lower mezzanine when he saw a lean shirtless body hanging from the upper deck railing. The body dropped down and disappeared beneath the crowd's shoulders. The garbage was still falling and Loesser dropped too. He started running once he hit the ground floor, but it did not matter because the pigs had cleared out. When the riot was over there was a slow fleshy wall funneling out through the arena's only exit. The disk jockey switched to Aerosmith. At a fork in the road, another armed tenderfoot flagged Loesser away from the main artery. He found the parking lot reserved for members of the press at the end of a long row of portable latrines.

### **Marching in Line**

Try to imagine the climate on Venus with its acid rain and volcanoes spitting molten lead. It's ugly just two stones from the sun, and July in Virginia was just as bad. That sounds like an exaggeration, but I really wish I was exaggerating. I wish I could shine the truth up like our goddamn brass belt-buckles. The humidity was so thick you could push it around. From the parking lot, I couldn't see a patch of shade anywhere. It made you feel naked, like you were burning alive and suffocating. There wasn't anything we could do except collect our shit and start heading for the campsite. Out in the heat, Dick Richardson was all business. "I'm sweating like Michael Jackson in a toy store," he said while tossing duffel bags out of the bus and telling everyone to get moving. I tried rallying my patrol, but they were already slacking. The Puerto Rican kid was cursing like mad, and in Spanish. My brother and Johnny Boy were having trouble.



I found them bent over on their knees, dry heaving at first, and then bringing up lunch, so I started pouring water over their heads. We hadn't left the parking and already my canteen was half empty. Fishman turned redder and redder and wouldn't say a word. Schlecht was the one exception. He was a fucking champ. He didn't complain and he was carrying four bags of gear. It wasn't like we were racing to the campsite, but we had to get moving because after the first load we had at least another two trips for all the other crap.

The whole Jamboree was broken into four sub-camps: northeast, western, central, and southern. Dick Richardson's map led us to the farthest friggin corner of the Northeast region, and it wasn't the campsite I would have packed. It was positioned on a slope, which was bad news if it rained. The whole sub-camp would be draining piss and shit down into our tents. Luckily, it never rained, not even once, so you don't have to worry. We were stationed next to a gravel utility road, which meant we weren't penned in or surrounded by a bunch of fags from Connecticut, or even worse, Mainers. We were pitching our tents when a military prick arrived to show us the ropes and lay down the rules. First, he showed us the latrines and showers because—like the Scout Law says—a good scout is always clean. It was a makeshift thing portioned off with plywood and plastic tarps. There was a long stainless steel trough for pissing, but one look at it and you knew there would be piss spilling everywhere in no time. At this point, the shitters still looked clean and respectable.

At the medical tent, they warned us about dehydration and said we were supposed to drink some impossible amount of water every hour. Yup, the latrines would

be a mess by sunset. Already there were scouts and leaders spread out on the cots. I saw my brother eyeing the beds like he was Ivan Denisovich, but I told him to quit dreaming. He hadn't read the book and he didn't know what the hell I was talking about. Finally, they showed us the mess tent, where you picked up a red basket for breakfast, a white basket for lunch, and a blue basket for dinner. You couldn't retrieve lunch before you returned the first basket, and I knew my patrol would oversleep and fuck up somehow. If you missed breakfast, you couldn't claim lunch. They handed each patrol a blue basket and said to get cooking. We had powdered potatoes and a brown stew served in an aluminum tray. Campfires weren't allowed anywhere on base so after sunset there wasn't much to do. I turned in early because the crew was getting me down already. They made me think about dying—in a casual, insincere kind of way—but I knew I wasn't going anywhere. As usual, I was bunking with Fishman, but I didn't know that he suffered from chronic ingrown toenails. His feet looked like ground beef and already the tent smelled like week-old latrines.

To save my breath, I'm going to be brief. There's not much to tell because once we were at the Jamboree not much happened for long stretches of time. Tuesday morning—at least I think it was Tuesday—we picked up the white basket. For lunch we had a hero-length role and a can of chicken salad, an orange cube labeled cheese and saltine crackers, and a stunted green apple. They also distributed powdered drink mix, which wasn't Tang, but it was so damn sugary my teeth were aching after a few sips. Starting then, we were basically on our own. We headed out, but we didn't know where we were going. It was me, my brother, Johnny Boy, and Fishman. The entire Jamboree

was spread out along a circular asphalt track. Imagine a NASCAR speedway that was miles and miles in circumference. We started walking and eventually we found the amusement area, which was sort of like a summer-time boardwalk. There was a BMX racetrack, but it was disappointing because the bikes were too small for a six-footer like me. There was something called the Buckskin Games where you learned to throw knives and hatchets at tree stumps; we opted for this because the line was too long and serpentine at the shotgun range.

Later, we decided on the obstacle course because the line was in the shade. You had to climb cargo nets and scale walls by building a human pyramid with your patrol. Then we got to the knotted rope climb—you probably had one in your elementary school gym. It's the easiest obstacle, but Fishman couldn't get past the first couple knots and he never could in gym class either. The Eagle Scout in charge started whipping Fishman's ass with a long piece of grass. He was tall and think like me, but he had small black eyes. His complexion was so damn pale his face looked like a skull wearing a scout cap. He kept barking in Fishman's ears with a devilish laugh, until I bent over and let him use my knee as a stool. I couldn't stand that smug hick screaming at Fishman. I wanted to deck the son-of-a-bitch, but I didn't. Maybe they would have sent me home.

The next day, Fishman stayed at the campsite. I guess he didn't want another go at the obstacle course. I wasn't going to persuade him otherwise so I headed out with my brother and Johnny Boy again. I couldn't tell you what the others did all day. Big John and the Puerto Rican kept sleeping late, and I only saw them leave their tent for breakfast and dinner. It was the same as yesterday, walking around the fucking track in

the awful goddamn heat. Wherever there was a little bit of shade you found kids sprawled out and sleeping. There were always adult leaders hollering at their scouts to keep moving. We must have taken a wrong turn because there wasn't anything for a long time. After what felt like miles, we reached some sort of military exhibition where the Army displayed all different types of handguns and assault rifles. At the first table, there was a young soldier—barely an adult—discussing the display while all the kids pawed the guns. Most of them I didn't recognize. They looked almost futuristic, and the soldier just stood there answering any and every question. What was his rank? How old was he when he joined? Where was he stationed? Even when he wasn't asked a question, he kept talking about education and base salaries. He wasn't the only one. The Navy was giving SCUBA lessons, and there must have been fifty kids in their bathing suits lined up along a swimming pool. The Air Force had brought a flight simulator that looked like a ride from Epcot Center.

There was a whole lotta kids around, but the three of us found an empty picnic table. Today, lunch was canned tuna. We were minding our own business when this big hulking son-of-a-bitch sat down and started talking our ears off. I swear this guy had a neck thicker than a telephone pole. When he took off his cap, he had a thinning mess of blond hair, and he looked like a future prison guard. His troop was from Arkansas, and they traveled to Boston first, then down through New York and Philadelphia, and finally Washington D.C before arriving at the Jamboree. He asked us a dozen questions, but our answers were short. "You boys are awful quite," he said. "You boys aren't Jewish are ya?" Absolutely not. Good thing Fishman wasn't there. He would have shit his pants and

he would have been screaming: Nazi! Nazi! Nazi! He lost his sense of humor at Hebrew school. I don't remember the Rube's name, but after a little more of the silent treatment he packed up and left. Are you boys Jewish? What a dumb fucking question—Johnny Boy's as big a guinea as they come.

That night Dick Richardson said to double-time it with dinner on account of the opening ceremony. After another boring day and another shitty meal—tonight it was ground beef in brown sauce with tortillas—we started marching toward the fort's arena. At least, that's what they called it. This was not the Meadowlands, and this wasn't a Roman amphitheatre. It was just a big sloping field where they expected us to park our asses without any questions. Yes, attendance was mandatory and besides, we were already in our uniforms for dinner. It was a slow walk. Everyone was tired and no one stayed in formation. No one knew how long they were gonna keep us on our feet. When we got to the arena, we had to pause so that we wouldn't trip over the troop in front of us. The arena looked half full, and we sat down on the sharp dry grass, almost on top of each other. You couldn't see much except for a big fucking stage down front. It was bigger than the stage Pantera and Black Sabbath had back in June. It kept getting noisier and noisier. They said every troop was attending, and scouts kept spilling in behind us, blocking the exits, and I knew we'd be stuck there long after the show ended. Eventually, a master of ceremonies walked onstage. I couldn't see him, but I could hear his nerdy voice. There were at least four towers of speakers lining the stage from end to end. We recited the pledge of allegiance, the Scout Oath, and the Scout Law. Then they dragged on some politician who delivered a lukewarm speech I expected to hear at my

high school graduation. I didn't believe a word he said; the speech wasn't worth remembering; I couldn't even tell you who the speaker was. Finally, they brought out the entertainment. This was the low point because it was Mickey Mouse shit. It really was a Disney production with all those poor losers dressed up in Donald Duck and Goofy suits. It was painful to watch and I really just wanted to cry. If you get melancholy at home, you should feel it when you're surrounded by a couple thousand screaming kids.

By Thursday night, everyone was growing a little irritable. The Puerto Rican was managing dinner and doing an all right job. He was on time with the basket; he kept his hands clean and wasn't making a mess. We were having Salisbury steak and mashed potatoes, which required a little milk. It was getting close to chow time, and the spuds were thickening up nicely even though they came out of a box. I didn't notice how the Puerto Rican started mixing the potatoes with the fork he'd been using for the steak, but that's when Fishman lost his shit. He started asking the Puerto Rican to use a clean spoon, but he didn't respond. Fishman asked again, but the Puerto Rican didn't know what keeping kosher meant, and he just looked at Fishman and started saying, "What'chu askin? What'chu askin?" The next thing I knew they were wrestling over the goddamn gravy spoon, and the Puerto Rican started tossing potatoes into the Salisbury steak. You guessed it, Fishman went to bed hungry. I told him to eat the fucking meal, but this time he didn't listen.

After that fiasco, my brother and Johnny Boy were on clean up. They started dumping scraps and garbage into an empty jumbo can of baked beans. It was filling up fast, and they told Schlecht to go dump it out, but he refused. Why exactly? At some

point, someone christened the slop pail *The Schlechter* and made Schlecht its special guardian. “Schlecht, go empty the Schlecter,” my brother said, but the kid said no again. Schlecht had blond hair, blue eyes, and a small hunchback—he looked like some Bavarian village idiot. He didn’t talk much, but now he was giving us a mouthful. “Fuck no! Go empty it your fucking self!” We all just stood there laughing, and the whole time my brother and Johnny Boy kept dumping everything into the can except their own piss and shit. Then Big Jon decided to strong arm Schlecht. He dragged him over to the pail by his neck and pushed Schlecht’s face down within an inch of the sludge. There must have been half of a hot dog in there because Schlecht started puking and screaming, “No No No! It looks like chopped up dick!” Schlecht wasn’t bright, but he was right. I thought I saw a piece of foreskin floating around and everyone was laughing except Fishman and Schlecht, who was choking and crying. I guess it was my job to cool things down, but I didn’t. Sometimes you gotta let things go because being an authoritarian will only make tensions worse. My brother, Johnny Boy, and Big Jon weren’t complaining about my leadership. And as for Fishman and Schlecht, I guess there’ll always be victims in a crowd.

The next day I wasn’t talking with Fishman, and I didn’t see him around the campsite. I was sick of walking in circles, so I sat down in the shade and tried to read a little bit. I had started in on Machiavelli’s *The Prince*. I was intrigued because it was a misunderstood book. He said you weren’t supposed to rule by fear alone, but admiration too. The prince was a little sharper than the rest. The prince could anticipate people’s behavior because most people are predictable. The prince knew when to be strict and

when to be loose with the reins. I liked how Mac' encouraged you to be deliberate in your decisions and avoid being a victim. I finished the chapter I was reading and looked over at the adjacent campsite. There was the piggish-looking Marine Corps sergeant from that nightmarish, early camping trip. I heard crying and then I heard yelling. There was a real weak-looking kid lying on the ground, and I could see that his knee was bleeding. I don't know what happened, but the kid was balling and Sergeant Scheisskopf was turning bright red again. He kept shrieking and pointing fingers, and he wouldn't let any scouts help the kid lying on the ground. He kept waving the scouts away with a tent pole and the weak-looking kid was still crying and holding his bloody knee in the middle of the dirt road. There were some pretty worthless leaders here. The Sarg made me think about death again and how the world would be a better world without certain people.

### **Reporting from the Field**

Among some scouts, there was a consensus that the jamboree was just too big. The immensity they encountered at Fort A.P. Hill squashed their expectations, and Loesser concurred with their sentiment. Upon his arrival, Loesser confronted the nagging anxiety that the event was more than he could tackle alone. Would he find a story spread across eighty thousand acres? Would he talk to the right people in a crowd of forty, fifty, possibly sixty thousand scouts? Was he just another lonely tourist? The Boy Scouts were neither a complex nor innovative organization; however, they showed persistent growth into the twenty-first century despite the competition from online and virtual communities. Throughout their hundred-year history, the Boy Scouts had one



hundred million participants. Between 1982 and 2009, they produced one million Eagle Scouts, the same number produced since 1910. Upon its Centennial, the organization had 898,000 members between the ages of eleven and seventeen. And in the next decade, the Scouts expected to absorb some of the current 1.6 million Cub Scouts. If these kids were of voting age, the Boy Scouts would compose a coveted youth constituency—like the NRA or subscribers to the *New York Times*—in state and national elections.

On his first day, Loesser arrived at a crossroads. The signpost was a slim wood column that pointed in a dozen different directions: eighty miles to Washington D.C.; three hundred to New York City; two miles to Camp Brownsea Island; and 5,600 miles to Honolulu. At the base of the signpost, he found a pair of scouts trading patches. Across the Jamboree, scouts barter for obscure insignia in the same fashion that *deadheads* trade bootlegged recordings of the Grateful Dead. In '97, even the recalcitrant Loesser indulged in this past time because there was very little else to do. And before he knew it, he removed his own council patches from his three clean dress shirts to trade for a single patch depicting Moby Dick and the Pequod. The scouts he found trading beneath the signpost were from New Mexico. Their hometown was not far from the Mexican border, and they said there was considerable peer pressure in the region to use drugs and potentially sell drugs too. They had not experienced the cartel violence plaguing the Texas border, but they had seen many students gravitate to the drug scene. However, scouting, they believed, provided an alternative and even opportunities for recovery. Their own troop adopted a kid straight of juvie, and even though he still used drugs at first, in a few months he was completely reformed. They

had heard several rumors about who might deliver the keynote address at the closing ceremony, although most rumors said it was not going to be the president, despite the fact it was an informal tradition. “It’s disappointing,” said the Star Scout named Zachary. “I heard he bailed to go on television instead.” A group of traders had gravitated to their blanket, and Loesser did not want to disrupt their bartering.

Loesser arrived without a game plan. He took a slug of water, a deep breath, and joined the sweaty multitude. He drifted along the asphalt track, taking the uncertain and confused steps of an amnesiac. Nothing he saw punctured his memory, but the fort’s profound uniformity suggested that nothing had really changed in more than a decade. Much like a parade marcher who cannot see the parade himself, Loesser knew that a panoramic view of the Jamboree was impossible. From the ground view, only the variations among nylon collapsible tents added texture to the unfocused landscape. There were electric blue triangles, atomic yellow octagons, and ultra-violet red tents in the style of Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic domes. Although fewer in number, he still saw the antiquated canvas tents with pointed roofs that resembled church steeples. A troop, or possibly an entire sub-camp, was distributing orange baseball caps because they appeared in large clusters throughout the crowd. Scouts formed long lines at kiosks for Good Humor Ice Cream and Dunkin Donuts. They emptied bags of Doritos corn chips that they discarded in trashcans filled to capacity. Pepsi machines were chained to Coca Cola machines and everywhere Loesser saw the evidence of awful adolescent diets despite the Scout Oath’s charge to keep physically strong and maintain a healthy body.

In the distance, Loesser heard Guns n' Roses blaring from invisible speakers. The song was *Sweet Child of Mine*, and he was more than a little peeved that in this day and age, even the Boy Scouts intended to strip Slash and Axl Rose of their rock n' roll wickedness. Only the oldest scouts—those pushing eighteen—might have been born before the group disbanded in 1994. GNR was just one wavelength in a persistent clamor that enveloped every corner of the Jamboree. Where there wasn't rock n' roll, there were thousands of stomping feet and a dozen different accents. Huey helicopters buzzed the tree line and the shotgun blasts did not quit until the firing ranges closed in the late afternoon. But then suddenly it all ceased. A new electric voice announced that lightning was approaching from within ten miles of Fort A.P. Hill. The announcement scattered the khaki ranks. They ran from anything taller than a telephone pole and headed for anything that provided cover. Loesser ducked through the closest tent flaps too, and inside a retired sailor, dressed in a sky-blue shirt and navy-blue pants, barked incessantly at the youths huddled beneath the dripping canopy. Rain was spilling in through every grommet, and before long the planked floor was flooded beneath an inch of muddy water. Lightning was a cause for alarm. At the 2005 Jamboree, it was reported that a troop master from Alaska was incinerated when a reckless bolt of lightning struck his campsite. The original report was revised once an investigation concluded that a long tent pole touched a high voltage power line. The sailor's voice was as scratchy as his sunburned face, and his harangue did not ease the anxiety visible on the faces of his twenty or thirty-odd scouts.

However, the rain did not last long, and the revived humidity afflicted the crowd with an aggressive despondency. Scouts started fighting at the public water fountains; they fought for meager strips of shade beneath trees and food-storage freight containers. Loesser saw a pair of African American scouts chasing down a nerdish looking white boy. “Hey homo, hey homo in red,” they chanted while pursuing the portly dweeb who struggled to lose his pursuers. The kid carried a backpack that was larger than him, and hiking boots do not lend themselves to short-distance sprints. Loesser lost sight of the trio, but he remembered Schlecht’s face pushed within an inch of the garbage pail. When it wasn’t Fishman, Schlecht was the patrol’s perennial victim, and the negligent torture that summer might have had unintended side effects. In 2002, Schlecht led a weeklong crime spree that produced \$500,000 in damages to private property. Aided by at least two other scouts, Schlecht spray painted swastikas on luxury car windshields. He set fire to a parking garage at a Jewish country club. He hotwired a backhoe from a construction site, which was found, submerged in the Passaic River. But once the police identified one accomplice, the whole crew collapsed and pinned it on Schlecht.

He had not chosen trustworthy cohorts, and Loesser was chewing on Schlecht’s fate when he lurched sideways with an awkward step, and then another. He heard voices in the crowd, but he could not understand their words. He heard a jangling east Texas twang followed by the Massachusetts lisp. Finally, he heard a low altitude jumbo jet. How the hell did a 747 get clearance into this kind of air space? With each step, Loesser’s vision pixilated a little more, and then he felt a strange hand on his shoulder. “Hey buddy, you look a little overheated.” It was a short, corpulent scoutmaster sporting

a toothbrush mustache and a fanny pack hitched around his waist. The stranger had bright red epaulettes buttoned to his shoulders, and more medals than General Eisenhower tacked onto his khaki shirt. “How about you take a break over in the shade.” Loesser acquiesced and stumbled off the asphalt track. For the Jamboree, the Boy Scouts had invented a heat index modeled after the Department of Homeland Security’s own terrorist threat scale. All week long, the heat index stayed constant at emergency orange.

On Friday afternoon, Loesser knew he was approaching the military exhibition when he noticed an increased number of scouts doing push ups. In fact, everywhere he turned, he found scouts pushing off the ground to a quarter note count. At the Jamboree, a scout could see nothing else. He could skip the kayaking, rappelling, and the merit badge midway because the Military expo was the unofficial main event. All the branches of the military attended and their intentions were not discreet. Loesser watched a video produced by the National Guard, and he was not surprised to learn that the Guard’s motto, “Always Ready, Always There,” was just a slight variation on the Scout’s own “Be Prepared.” Not only did National Guardsmen fight terrorism and defend freedom, they developed essential career experience in growing fields including petroleum logistics. The Army brought impressive hardware too. Scouts could get a feel for a single-shot stinger missile launcher and climb inside the front cab of a Patriot missile system. “It holds six shots that cost a million bucks each,” said an Army specialist in charge of the display. He didn’t explain that all these weapons were on display because they were completely useless against an urban insurgency or a peasant militia in Iraq and Afghanistan. There was a West Point recruiter handing out application packets. A Coast

Guard officer discussed how his own unit patrolled New York harbor on the afternoon of September 11, and a Special Forces operative discussed a variety of dehydrated food. “Yes, m’am. We are always eating on the go,” he declared. The military expo was the largest attraction that Loesser saw, and its visitors displayed that naive enthusiasm you might see at a Javits Center boat show.

Since 9/11, the billions of dollar spent on emergency preparedness had opened many career paths for disciplined scouts. Outside the military expo, Loesser encountered a pair of First Class scouts who echoed this appraisal. They were from Lafayette, Louisiana, and they had spent the last three months watching the BP Gulf Oil Spill in their own backyard. They did not think the President had done enough or sent enough sandbags. “I’m not disappointed he won’t show,” said the dark-haired Arcadian. Instead, they were looking forward to a television personality who specialized in dirty jobs. “If Louisiana didn’t have the oil business,” said the sandy-haired scout with a deep Creole accent, “our jobs would be way down.” They were already concerned with finding employment, but they were hopeful that attaining the rank of Eagle Scout would improve their futures prospects. “I heard Eagle Scouts get to move up one rank when they join the military,” said the first scout named Mark. He came from a military family that claimed a veteran in every major foreign conflict. Mark intended to join the Marines, and his companion was interested in pursuing a career in emergency response. His older brother, an Eagle Scout, provided the inspiration. As he told it: one time, his brother found a stranger who had fallen off a horse alongside the highway and couldn’t walk on his own to get help. His older brother had helped this stranger with a sprained

knee. If things didn't work out, they felt confident they could work at the Tabasco factory on Avery Island.

By the afternoon of Saturday, July 31, the momentum at Fort A.P. had changed dramatically. The camp was swollen with visitors arriving for the closing ceremony. Traffic outside the base was blocked for miles in either direction. At the press tent, Loesser made small talk with a news cameraman from New Hampshire who had to tell his producer to turn around because entry to the fort was impossible by the early afternoon. Loesser spotted a pair of middle-aged journalists getting the red carpet treatment. They were given bicycles, helmets, and maps, but Loesser knew that their assignment was futile. He did not see them again, and it was an hour before the big show when they shuttled the journalists towards the arena. It wasn't long before the van stopped. It couldn't get past the crowd, and when Loesser stepped out, he felt the khaki-green riptide pulling him deeper and faster inside the arena. Their snake-line columns moved with a dangerous inertia. To challenge their advance would be worse than crossing the street during a New York City marathon. Loesser had tried this once, and he learned that the runners do not stop. They do not see you, and they will run you down into the pavement, without forgiveness. The scouts moved four abreast, and they converged on the arena from three separate entrances. You could watch them spilling in unimpeded, and the dust they kicked up was rising taller than the trees.

The arena was about half full, but celebrations were already underway. On stage, twin towers crowned with jumbo televisions broadcasted centennial events from across America. Scouts had convened in Times Square, at the Crazy Horse Memorial in the

Black Hills of South Dakota, and in a VFW hall somewhere in Florida, a hundred scouts danced to a local band crooning over a colorless blues riff. The whole closing ceremony—from sea to shining sea—had take on the appearance of a very innocuous rock concert. Then, at approximately 6:57 PM, the screens displayed the Presidential seal. President Barak Obama appeared on screen, but a chorus of boos preceded his salutation. Yes Scouts, congratulations on a hundred years, and thank you for a century of service. During the Second World War you carried messages and sold war bonds. Eleven of the twelve Americans that walked on the moon have worn your uniform. Today our nation faces a new set of challenges, but your service is still worth something. The President's delivery sounded tired, as if he were entering the early stages of laryngitis. The speech was approximately two hundred-sixty words long and lasted exactly ninety seconds. Their boos continued, and when the president faded to black, nearly all the scouts were on their feet. There was rain approaching, and Loesser saw clouds of garbage cascading down, but it did not reach the press box.

### **Finale**

Then it was Saturday, and we had to get ready for the closing ceremony. You could tell it was time to go home. Morale was at an all-time low, and there was an incident Friday afternoon that didn't help things either. All week long, everyone was trading patches because there wasn't anything else to do. The trouble started when this four-eyed twelve-year old Eagle with blond hair lost his patches. He claimed they were stolen, but we all thought the kid left them in the latrine and the patches got lifted, of



course. On Friday morning, Fishman's patches were missing too. Surprisingly, he held it together, but later that afternoon, the twelve-year old Eagle showed up at camp with a brand new stack of patches. Where the hell did they come from? Well, Fishman had his own ideas and he started making accusations. Something had to be done, and Dick Richardson had us form a tribunal. The senior patrol leader confiscated the patches, but the twelve-year old Eagle couldn't name all the patches in his bundle. On the other hand, Fishman identified a half dozen. There were a few Yoda patches and a few from Roswell, New Mexico with an alien waving a peace sign with his fingers. Somehow, the blond kid was walking around with half the patches that Fishman claimed were stolen that day. We were lined up in patrols hearing both sides, but the decision didn't fall with Fishman. We were out-numbered by three quarters of the troop. The twelve-year old Eagle kept the patches and Fishman went home empty handed. Was it fair? No. Did Fishman start crying? For the first time in his life, no. He sucked it up and wandered off. I'd been trading too, but I only had a few keepers: the Moby Dick patch, a Last Frontier patch from Alaska, and an old worn our Garden State patch because that's where I called home. Fishman didn't come back for dinner, and later that night I tossed my patches onto his sleeping bag. None of it fucking mattered. Even Fishman was going to forget about all this a year from now.

But like I said, it was a Saturday, and I was getting stir crazy. That afternoon, I struck out on my own because there was an exhibit I wanted to check out one last time. The Boy Scouts were sponsoring a six-month trip to Antarctica. Basically, you'd be living and working at a science station and it sounded great to me. I'd be away from

people for a whole half year. I'd done a little traveling; Montana was my favorite so far. Out in the brush at dawn—with no one but the jackrabbits—you got the feeling that the human species was out of order with planet's silent harmony. We were the aliens in fact, and we weren't invited here. I imagined Antarctica would be the same as Montana, but there was one problem. Because the seasons are reversed, I'd have to go during the winter of my senior year. I took the application knowing that I wouldn't go. I had to graduate. I was already planning on moving to the city, and Antarctica would prevent my departure. I walked back to the campsite and by this time Fort A.P. Hill was a real fucking mess. There was garbage everywhere, and the trashcans were full and spilling onto the ground. There wasn't any wind all week, and I could hear flies buzzing in a big angry cloud above a dumpster behind some food kiosks. So much for the motto: Leave No Trace. At our own campsite, there was a small mountain of soda cans and water bottles that was probably worth a hundred bucks in Maine or some other state. We had arrived on Monday. Today was Saturday and you couldn't hide from the rotten smell of week-old latrines.

That night it was Johnny Boy's turn to cook, but he wasn't moving. I told him to go get the blue basket, but he gave me the silent treatment. I suspected that he stole Fishman's patches. They weren't talking, and Fishman had been eyeing him up ever since the tribunal. What else could I do? I grabbed Johnny Boy by the neck and dragged him away from the picnic table. I kicked him in his lazy ass for encouragement, and then I kicked him again, and again, and again. After that he started walking for the mess tent. By Saturday we had seen it all: Salisbury steak, steak stew, steak fajitas, and event meat

lasagna. Can you imagine eating sloppy lasagna in ninety-degree heat? Johnny Boy came back with lasagna again. My brother, Schlecht, and Big Jon started grumbling, but I told them to shut the hell up. We only had to get through another night together.

After dinner, Dick Richardson called the troop to attention and ordered the patrols to line up in formation. For a second time, we started marching to the arena. Across the fort, every troop was in dress uniform and heading for the closing ceremony. We marched toward a cut-through in the forest that funneled us four abreast. We were walking on an asphalt path that looked pretty new. The asphalt was so damn fresh you could see the tar melting and sticking to our shoes. Uniformed soldiers lined the path every fifty feet or so, and if you stepped off the asphalt they ordered you back in formation. It felt like we were marching for an hour, and you couldn't see farther than a couple heads in front of you, which meant you couldn't see jack shit. I turned around once, and all I saw was a long unbroken column of scouts, cutting a serpentine route through the forest. I turned back around and kept my hands in my pockets. Some of the troops were singing those god awful marching songs, the kind that just repeat and repeat and repeat. One troop was singing about cleaning your bedroom, and another troop was singing the Mickey Mouse club theme song. Luckily, there was a louder noise the closer we got to the arena. Some prick in a Smokey the Bear hat stopped us to stop in front of a review stand where an army brass band was blasting John Phillip Sousa tunes. They ushered us into the arena, and down on stage, there was some sort of Native American performance. It was really just scouts wearing make-up and headdresses, screaming and stomping around in a circle. With those fakes hollering, the brass band, and the crowd

itself, there was a big noisy racket inside the arena. It was so noisy you could barely hear yourself think.

We sat back down in a patch of dead brown grass, and it was even more painful than the first time because now I knew that we'd be stuck here for the next few hours. The arena was more than half full, and Dick Richardson said they were expecting a hundred thousand people to show up. Some troops were tossing beach balls around, but that's when I noticed that the field was crawling with grasshoppers—big ugly fucking locusts. They were hopping everywhere. You couldn't kill 'em all so you just had to sit there and take it. Meanwhile, the pre-show entertainment was crap. It was barely a distraction until they brought on this woman who was introduced as a country-western singer. You had to watch her on the televisions, but she was wearing this elegant blue gown and she had long dark hair. The gown's neckline cut way down her chest and she had nice perky tits showing through. She was singing about her god and the country, and I think every set of eyes were stuck on the television screens, and you could only imagine the unspoken thoughts kicking around the arena. Maybe I'm just a pervert, but no one here had a seen a woman in at least a week. Yes, the crowd was disappointed when they dragged her off stage and that's when the garbage started flying. It was just a few bits of junk at first, and then the pieces got bigger and heavier, and some of it was wet. I figured someone tossed a half-empty soda can.

Suddenly, the garbage stopped falling and you couldn't hear a thing. A trio of F-16 fighter jets passed overhead, and if you weren't quick enough you missed them, but their low-altitude after burn made our ear drums rattle long after they were gone. At this

point, the speaker towers started blaring the *Star Wars* overture and that's when the crowd went nuts. Earlier in the year, George Lucas had re-released the entire *Star Wars* trilogy in the movie theatres, and now, every kid was on his feet because all week long, the rumors said that Lucas, an Eagle Scout himself, would deliver the keynote address. A luxurious looking helicopter circled in and landed next to the stage. I don't think the crowd exhaled until President Bill Clinton stepped out and proceeded to the podium standing at center stage. There was a modest disappointment as the President started speaking. I don't remember what Clinton said, and I didn't know anything about politics yet, but he projected a real sense of optimism. He wasn't old or fat, and the whole blowjob mess hadn't struck yet. He told people exactly what they wanted to believe. We are stronger than ever and the future is brighter thanks to the Boy Scouts. The top brass awarded him their highest distinction, the Silver Beaver, and then Clinton left. It was a short appearance; however, I don't think a majority of people ever sees a president in the flesh even once in their lives. Compared to real people, the President might as well live on planet Mars.

Nothing happened for a little while after the President left. In hindsight, they were probably waiting for the sun to set. Once the last bit of light disappeared, a parade of flags started marching through the crowd toward the stage. There were hundreds, possibly a thousand flags, one for every troop, state, and country attending the Jamboree. It was completely dark when the fireworks started. I couldn't tell how long the display lasted, but about midway, they started passing out candles, small silver candles, not longer than a cigarette, but a little bit thicker. The fireworks were exploding, and then I

heard the *1812 Overture*, which I thought kind of odd because it has nothing to do with America, but everything to do with the Russians kicking Napoleon out of Moscow. But leave it to the Boy Scouts to miss a subtlety like that. All they wanted was something patriotic sounding, and it didn't take much to satisfy the ignorant fucking assholes in this crowd. It was during the overture's finale—when the bells are ringing, the cannons are firing, and the cymbals are crashing—that I started noticing small flickering lights. You saw it at the edges first, then in small clusters, and eventually the light was spreading across the field and I saw a hundred thousand candles shining. The fireworks ceased; the music ended; we recited the Scout Oath. *On my honor, I will do my best to God and my Country...I will obey the Scout Law...and keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.* The televisions were broadcasting these giant American flags blowing in a silent wind. The candles were still burning, and that's when the crowd started speaking in monosyllables.

I heard it at the far right of the arena. Then I heard it down left toward the stage, and I heard it behind me. A hundred thousand scouts were braying, they were chanting—*USA, USA*—in a clean quarter note rhythm. I did not need to close my eyes to see things differently. The field and the stage and forest all dissolved. I saw the burned out skeletal remains of a city ruined by war. The bodies of traitors were hanging from the lampposts, and black figures without faces moved through the rubble and deeper into dark corners. It was a landscape of shadows and punishment. There was nothing left in the place I saw, and that's when I felt a strange unfamiliar hand gripping my right shoulder. I turned to look but I didn't recognize the face barely visible behind the starry

beacon. They were still chanting, and I did not see my brother, Fishman, the patrol, or the troop. That's when I snuffed out my candle. Slowly, the scouts started to move out of the arena, but it did not diminish their singular voice. It was still resonating when I started walking out in the darkness without a flashlight. I tripped over rocks or tree stumps protruding from the earth. I wanted to run, but there was no place to go. I kept walking, but I knew I had to find a place away from these people, whether it was Antarctica or Montana. I was wrong to think I could loose this crowd in the city.

### CHAPTER III

### CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this thesis has incorporated the four literary devices that distinguish a work of literary journalism from hard news reporting and other forms of nonfiction. It has explored a real world phenomenon, using multiple points-of-view within a scene-by-scene construction. In addition, it has included unique dialogue and details, which lend credibility to the author's reportage. *Broken Arrow* has also heightened the larger truth's emotional impact by using a non-linear chronology. *Broken Arrow* begins at its ending. The first section—"From Sea to Shining Sea"—is the final scene in the older persona's narrative. By repositioning scenes, the author was able to create a tension that persists into the final chapter, when the younger persona realizes he is participating, against his own will, in a mass fascistic ritual, which solidifies the larger truth. Similarly, Capote created suspense in his nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood* by postponing the description of the Clutter family's murder until end of the book (Pizer 216).

However, the thesis still lacks an essential element of literary journalism. Scholars agree that literary journalism requires a unique frame that organizes the author-reader relationship. A frame structures the "implied dialogue" between the author, reader, narrator, and subject (Booth 155). For example, Capote frames *In Cold Blood* with the subtitle: "A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences" (Lounsberry xiv). Mailer frames *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* as an informal history.



According to Heller, the frame “emphasizes the factual nature of the content, while in a seeming paradox drawing attention to the fictional shape of the form,” (14). A framing device is essential for the reader because literary journalism walks the gray line between fact and fiction.

Broken Arrow currently lacks an effective frame that organizes the implied dialogue between author, reader, and the two alternating narratives. This dilemma could be resolved with further creative thinking, and the author is encouraged by Wolfe’s statement that literary journalism is not inhibited by “sacerdotal rules” (“New Journalism” 33). The author is extremely intrigued by the organizing principle in Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*. Throughout the book, Carlyle uses an anonymous narrator—identified only as the “editor”—to present and comment on a biography of the book’s main subject—Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. This frame distances Carlyle from both his narrator and audience; however, the development of two unique personas—the editor and Teufelsdröckh—allows Carlyle to speak to his audience from different perspectives. While the narrator remains unreliable, the biographical frame suggests credibility because biographies are based on facts.

Moving forward, the author would frame Broken Arrow as a biography like Carlyle’s enigmatic book. To distance himself from his subject, the author would change the protagonist’s name from Loesser back to Life Scout. Second, the author would invent a new narrator that would tell Life Scout’s biography from the third-person point of view. The alternating narratives, describing different points in Life Scout’s life, would reinforce the narrator’s unreliability; however, the biographical frame would establish

credibility for the facts and experiences collected by the author. Like *Sartor Resartus*, the combined narrative should suggest that the narrator, in fact, is Life Scout, an effect that would shorten the distance between reader, narrator, and subject. The author should consult Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* for examples of modern works that manipulate nonfiction genres.

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