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Open Ears

Hannah Hansen

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whether or not I've killed someone," he said. "But I know, in Afghanistan, I was slinging rounds down range and someone got got. But don't turn around." Obviously at that moment the whole of platoon 1046, myself included, had to turn around. Way out in the distance, two cardinal red lights in near pitch black darkness took off vertically as if they were spaceships. Not a soul in platoon 1046 would've minded being on that injury vehicle at that moment. "You all didn't wanna listen," SSgt. Tena said. The hill was so steep that, standing up, you could reach out and touch the ground. The 50 pounds of gear and a rifle on our backs made it that much harder to get up the mountain. Yet, once we got into the thick of it, it was as if nothing could touch us. When we went to sleep that last night, most of us fell asleep before we could even get into our sleeping bags. But now we were on top of the world. The end was in sight.

Once we reached the top of "The Reaper", all of Charlie Company went into the final crest of the hill together. All 600 of us recruits war cried like animals as we ran down. The company first sergeant and the Commanding Officer did a speech, then we all sang the



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Marine Corps Hymn. *"From the Halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli. We fight our country's battles, in the air, on land and sea. First to fight for right and freedom, and to keep our honor clean. We are proud to claim the title of United States Marine."* The company first sergeant called Charlie Company to attention and ordered the drill instructors to "turn these recruits into Marines." Sgt. Castro, the one who rode me the hardest for every hour of the last 87 days came up to me. He looked me in the eyes and shook my hand. "I always knew you had it, Marine."