

# SQUELCHED

**Succeeding in Business and Life  
by Finding Your Voice**



*Terry Beard*

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# Contents

Preface

My Life as a Jigsaw Puzzle

Prologue: Not Good Enough!

## **Part I: Squelched, How I Lost My Voice**

Drafted US Army: Continuing to Fight My Battles

Army Reflections: Time to Reflect

Civilian Life: New Horizons

Connubial Bliss and Blisters

University of San Francisco

Dead-end Career Move

My Business Launch Pad

TheBigDay: Wedding Space

Vacuum: Clean Up

## **Part II: How I Found My Voice**

A New Point of View

Mom Passes: Goodbye to the General: Family Legacy

Curing Father Hunger

Developing Confidence is an Inside Job: Incubating A More Positive Me

Pascale: The French Connection

Why Paris: A Lust for Life: Living My Passion

This Too Shall Pass: A Blessed Event

Friendship Lessons

Rotary: The Launch Pad for Community Service

Voice of Discouragement: Tough Times  
Finding My Voice: A Safe Harbor in Paris  
Arlington Club Toastmasters: The Greatest Toastmaster Club in The  
Universe  
Benefits of Public Speaking Development  
Cultural Ramifications  
Path of Self-discovery: Reclaiming and Redefining  
Reflections on Many Miles Traveled

**Part III: Speeches**  
**A Sampling of Speeches Delivered at a Variety of Venues**

Wet 'n Wild  
Attitude of Gratitude  
Pull Up Your Pants, Take a Chance to Advance, Go to France and Do the  
Dance  
It's Never Too Late  
Reflections, Renewal, and Resilience  
Becoming a Self-Made Man: Flight to Paradise

**Part IV: Letters to My Sons**  
**Passing the Torch to the Next Generation**

To My Older Son Jeff  
My Best Dream...21 August 1990, in Paris  
To My Two Sons  
  
Epilogue: Wheels Down  
Praise for *Squelched*.

## **Drafted US Army: Continuing to Fight My Battles**

AS I HAD PREDICTED, I was no longer a student in college, the military draft notice came, and I was required to report to Fort Lewis on January 11, 1967. My fellow draftees and I were rounded up like cattle and loaded onto a bus without any personal baggage. A few long hours later, we arrived at our destination, boot camp, Fort Lewis, Washington, which is located a few miles north of Olympia. As we passed the Olympia off-ramp from the interstate highway, I was reminded of the night that my dad had bailed me out of jail only a few years prior.

Now that I had my freedom from college, and on the military dole, I was free of economic worries, I was questioning myself. Having earned poor grades in high school and without the possibility of earning a college degree, where was all of this leading me?

While serving in the US Army, I was essentially on a government sponsored vacation. I was lucky enough to have been shipped overseas to Germany, not to the war in Southeast Asia. The Viet Nam War was blazing across the television screen each night, with news anchor Walter Cronkite delivering all the news from around the world from his plush office in New York City. It was clear to me that I would be sent off to a war that no one understood, even in its early years. But as a US citizen and the son of a Navy veteran of World War II, I would of course serve my country.

Immediately upon arriving at Fort Lewis, I could identify with my idol Elvis Presley. My Elvis-styled hairdo was within 24 hours a thing of the past. Like everyone else, I was now sporting a white sidewalls haircut, which looked as if we were all right out of Terry's Barber School. Like everyone else, I was outfitted with a new wardrobe, given a duffle bag and foot locker, and assigned to a billet that bunked 55 raw recruits. My first job in basic training was to do my turn under the billet shoveling coal at 3 a.m. in the cold and freezing rain.

Actually, I enjoyed myself tremendously in basic training: all of the buck privates were readymade friends, and one's station in life didn't count. The biggest challenge of our daily grind was banding together to endure our arrogant and mouthy drill sergeant.

Frequently, we buck privates were told by our drill sergeant to drop to the ground, sometimes straddling a mud puddle, in the pouring rain, and to give him twenty push-ups. We may have thought we were developing our physical endurance but we were also bowing down to his highness.

Each week, right after we each received our weekly stipend in cash, our drill sergeant called us all to "attention" in the privacy of our barracks, and then after we all assembled in formation, we were ordered to be "at ease." We were then asked to make a donation to his weekend beer drinking and carousing fund. If we cooperated with him, he assured us that he would be busy over the weekend, and we'd be free of him harassing us. Eventually, after we graduated from basic training, we learned that our drill sergeant was demoted for his behavior and shipped to Viet Nam.

As buck privates, we were all given a battery of tests in the first few days of basic training. We were measured, sized-up, and ranked. Our test results became numbers affixed to our permanent military files. My poor high school grades didn't hinder my ability to score well on the military tests. I had one goal. I wanted a desk job in the military or else I would become a ground pounder or an artillery man. When asked questions on the multiple choice tests as to whether I liked the outdoors, or liked to work on cars, go hunting, or go for a walk in the woods, I responded, "No."

From my perspective, I did well on the tests. I was given a desk job, and was awarded a Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) 71F40 (Postal Clerk). Once I completed basic training, my next move in my military career was to attend Advanced Individual Training (AIT).

While I felt relieved about my MOS, I was harassed constantly by the senior military commanding officers at Fort Lewis. In the first couple of weeks during boot camp training, I was approached by a captain and a lieutenant on more than one occasion and urged to consider going to Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Fort Benning, Georgia. I already knew that Fort Benning was famous for infantry training. No way. One of the captains became visually disgusted with me during the interview process, and he noted and underscored in my permanent file that I couldn't make a decision. I couldn't care less, because I knew saying "yes" to OCS was a free ticket

non-stop to Viet Nam, everyone's biggest fear. I knew that if I was given orders to go to Viet Nam I could always delay my departure by saying yes, I'll go to OCS.

Once I graduated from basic training, I was shipped off to Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, "The Home of the Army Dollar" (the military financial center). I spent six weeks at Fort Benjamin Harrison, where I learned how to run and operate an Army Postal Office (APO). My fellow Army buddies and I had the time of our lives. Every day we wore our dress blues ... our Army-issued dress suits, with a shirt and tie. My first chance to play executive, all dressed up but nowhere to go except to work in the APO training school. After work, it was another matter; we were back in our khakis, our casual dress, and on the road again off base to chase the local chicks.

Finally, it was graduation day from AIT; I received my postal worker certification papers and my orders for my first tour of duty. To this day, I wonder why I was picked out of hundreds and hundreds of graduates to be the only Private First Class (PFC) who wasn't shipped to Viet Nam. I never had to play the "I'll go to OCS" card to delay my trip to Viet Nam. (I was learning to play "the game.")

Everyone else I met at basic training in Fort Lewis, and my fellow Army buddies at Fort Benjamin Harrison, believed that we were all going to be shipped overseas. With my "orders" to report to Frankfurt, I felt like I was off on a government-sponsored vacation for two years. Yes, I was the luckiest guy in the world; I had in fact just won the military lottery. Freedom and safety.

Once I had my overseas shipping orders, I could not get out of Fort Benjamin Harrison fast enough. Several of my Army buddies, friends for a season, resented my good fortune to be traveling east rather than west to Southeast Asia with them.

Free room and board in Deutschland. My new home was in downtown Augsburg at Infantry Kaserne, a few blocks from the Koenigsplatz, and not far from where I worked at APO 09112. Along with my Army postal buddies, I lived on the fourth floor overlooking the fringes of the city's center. We were provided with private rooms, some rooms with two guys to a room, and some spacious rooms with four guys to a room. I felt like we lived in a hotel except that the walls were Army green, which was a constant reminder that we were really in the military. The marble floors and

the hardwood floors were spotless. I felt at home, while in the military. I had some ready-made friends, a few bucks in my pocket, drinking buddies, all of us with a common cause. Be good boys and appreciate the fact that we were not in the Mekong Delta or at My Lai.

Many months after my arrival at Infantry Kaserne, I asked a question of one of my senior officers. “What is it about that huge pile of brick and rubble at the corner of our building?” I was told that pile was yet to be scooped up; it was debris from World War II. Some twenty years later, Germany was still cleaning up after the devastation from the war. The Cold War had just begun.

My monthly Army stipend covered most of my toiletry needs and daily consumption of the world-famous German beer ... Löwenbräu.

My stint in the military was awesome. Those guys serving their time in the military working as cooks or postal clerks had what we referred to as “dick” duty (easy). During times of war, mail call is #1 for all the troops, and during times of peace, it was #2 after chow at the mess hall. I thought I would rather be #2 in popularity in Germany than #1 in popularity in Viet Nam.

The time passed quickly at Infantry Kaserne. We never had the regular Army protocol of reveille, as did other Army units at the Kaserne, nor did we have white-glove inspections of our barracks. We were completely free to do our own thing. Everybody wanted their mail, so we were left alone. I never felt so popular. While in high school, I was in a fight daily, and friends were scarce. In the Army, there was no fighting, no class struggle, and your grades in high school or your parents’ wealth made no difference. We all got along well and we all wore green, the great leveler.

We worked five and one half days a week. After work, our evenings were ours to do as we wished. My fellow postal Army buddies and I recognized that we were fortunate to be living peacefully in the heart of Europe.

The day I arrived in Augsburg, I looked out the window and spotted across the street the local disco, called the Rumpel Kammer (“junk house”), which I soon learned was off limits to GIs. The noise of this joint on the weekends reminded us of the fun we were missing back home with our girlfriends.

Looking out the window and a block down the street from the Rumpel Kammer, I saw a German *gasthaus*, which wasn’t off limits to GIs. It

wasn't long after I started frequenting this pub that I met Lisa Bremer. Lisa was recently divorced from an American military officer and was looking for a little fun to wriggle her way out of boredom and loneliness. Well, she found it. She became my girlfriend, my big sister, and my mother all in one nice package. Often after a few beers, I would ride along with her in her car to make the trip to the outskirts of town to sleep overnight in a little garden shack no larger than 125 square feet. The one room was outfitted with a small table and two chairs, a little sink, and a tiny bed that allowed two people to snuggle. What else was needed? In the mornings, it was easy to get dressed and go back to work. We wore the same Army fatigues, so even though those fatigues from the night before might be a little wrinkled, who cared? I wasn't out of uniform.

Lisa was 36 years old when we met, I was 20, and to this day many decades later we are still connected as friends. She looked after me while I lived down the street from her apartment. She bought a car for me and my Army buddies, and my buds and I drove all over Bavaria. At the end of each month, she would always make sure that I had money for a little gas, liters of beer, and a ticket or two to the flicks at the PX. Most importantly, she always invited me to her family dinners on Bismarckstrasse, two blocks from the Kaserne. I obliged. I was one lucky guy; few of my Army buddies had a German home to call their own.

While serving on active military duty in Europe, I traveled extensively. I took over eight weeks of real vacation and lived life to the fullest.

One trip that I'll never forget was going to Scandinavia. I had heard that Sweden was the land of free love. It was a goal of mine to experience this dream. One night, at the Britannia Inn, in the heart of Copenhagen, I was playing darts, a game called 301. After drinking several beers, I struck up a conversation with a cute girl who lived 30 minutes outside of Copenhagen. A dream was fulfilled, to go home with a Swedish or a Danish girl. The following morning, I woke up in her bedroom, and as we opened the bedroom door, we were immediately in the kitchen. We joined her parents at the breakfast table. As I sipped my coffee and reflected over the experience of the last 12 hours, I thought, "I'm living the dream."

The following day, I left for Stockholm. At the train station, I bought a paperback book that one would never see back home at the newsstand. The book was entitled *Flossie*. I was so excited to read this sex and trash-filled book that I began to read excerpts of it out loud to my travel buddy, Gary

Walden. As the train continued to chug along, I kept on reading the juicy pieces to Gary. We were sharing our trip from Copenhagen to Stockholm with three other travelers, local gals our age who were as cute as little buttons. Finally, one gal said to me, "We understand English." In a New York second, I turned red, too embarrassed to speak, and I bolted to another cabin. I lost any opportunity for us to hook up with these gals upon our arrival in Stockholm. Sex might be out in the open in this part of the world but being discreet was expected. This time I was benched for the right reasons. Lesson learned.

It is during these years in the military that I learned the thrill and excitement of European travel. I fell in love with Paris.

In December 1968, I was honorably separated from the US Army; like the rest of the troops during this period we received our discharge papers some six years later after our separation date. At the time of separation, we knew that we might be called back into active duty, given that there was a war going on in Southeast Asia.

I could go on and on about my time on my government-sponsored two-year vacation in the US military, but now I knew that I was ready to go to school once I was separated from the US Army, and make something of my life.

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