



Damian Bramlett

Objects for Deployment

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veteransbookproject.com

When I think about Jerry's death, I am reminded of my own vulnerability and inevitable demise. My only hope is that when I die, it's not as horrific and tragic as his death. Good people should not have horrible deaths. If only we all passed in a way similar to that in the movies -- gently, peacefully, and with our closest friends and family nearby.

My hope is that by exploring Jerry Bonifacio's life, I might learn more about myself as a soldier and how I deal with the deaths of those close to me.

This is SSG Jerry L. Bonifacio, as I knew him.





I first met Jerry in 2002 upon my arrival to a National Guard infantry unit in California. Even then, he never struck me as your typical infantryman -- a bit short, glasses and a constant grin on his face. Then again, I don't think I ever fit the infantry stereotype; no square jaw, no hard stare, and I certainly am not built like a brick shithouse.

Beyond the physical aspects of his being, Jerry (or Boni, as I referred to him) almost always had a smile plastered on his face and kind words falling from his lips. He didn't resort to military gossip, and he had a great sense of humor.

And I think that's why we hit it off right away...neither one of us really "belonged."

Two peas without a pod.

This book includes the mantras and chants Boni and I learned in infantry school. Their tone is violent and destructive – kill anything that moves. I bring it in to show -- for the infantry especially -- the military does a lot to really break you down as a person and then rebuild you for their purposes.

The chants were a way to reinforce the habits and mind-set we were in. “Kill this,” or “Fuck shit up.”

I bring it in my book to show that this training becomes PART of who we are. But it also doesn't DEFINE who we are.

There are both parts.

Likewise, these chants were the backdrop for my friendship with Boni. But our friendship extended far beyond it.

Infantry Mantra #1

Why is the sky blue?
BECAUSE GOD LOVES THE INFANTRY!

What makes the green grass grow?
BLOOD! BLOOD! BRIGHT RED BLOOD!

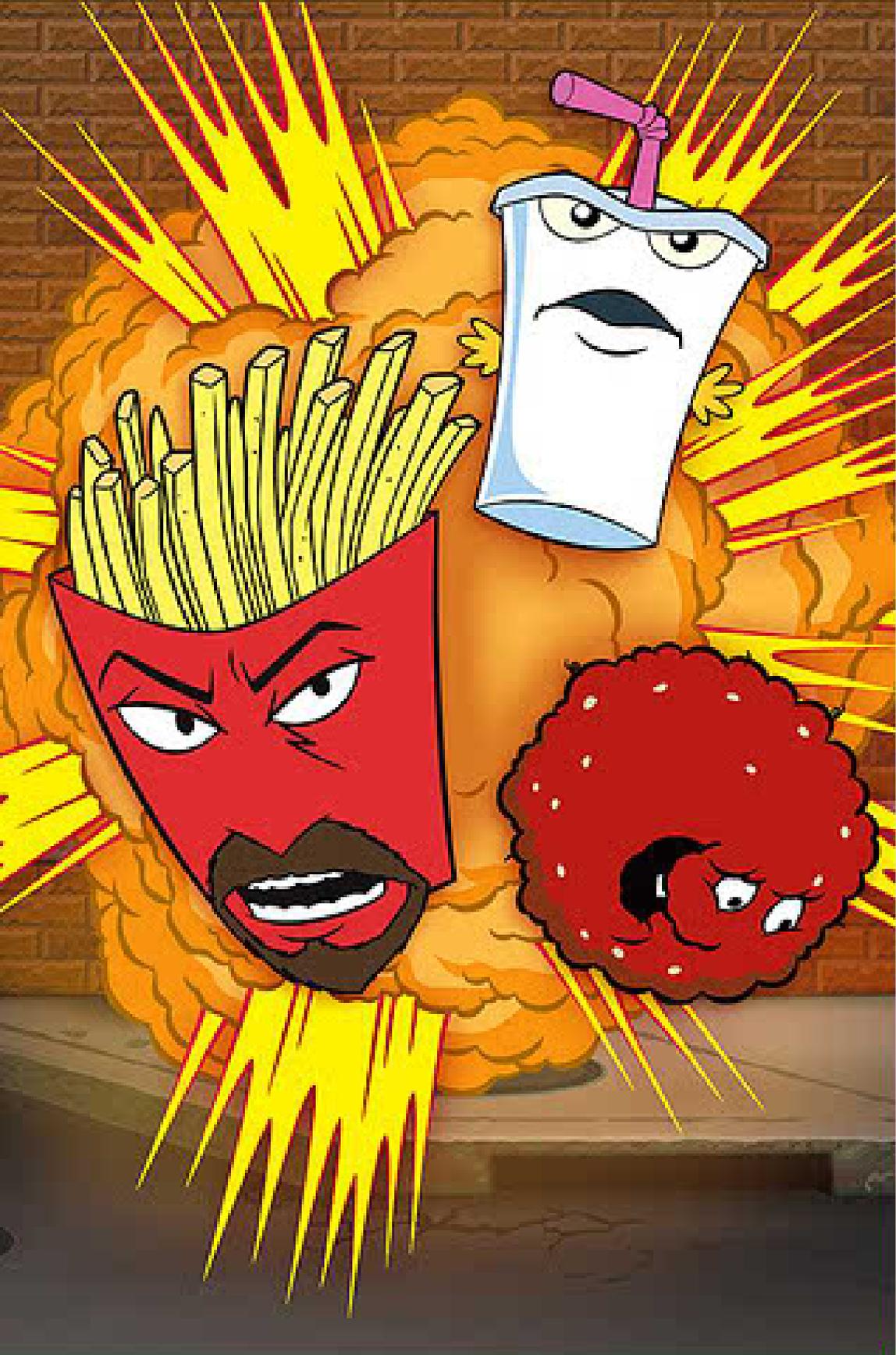
(This was a motto I learned during my first week of Basic. I will probably never forget it.)

As it turned out, we both had quite a bit in common...

Comic books

Boni bragged about having thousands of comic books. We would talk comics for hours.





Cartoons

Aqua Teen Hunger Force
and
Sealab 2021
were two of his favorites.

HEAVY METAL!!!!

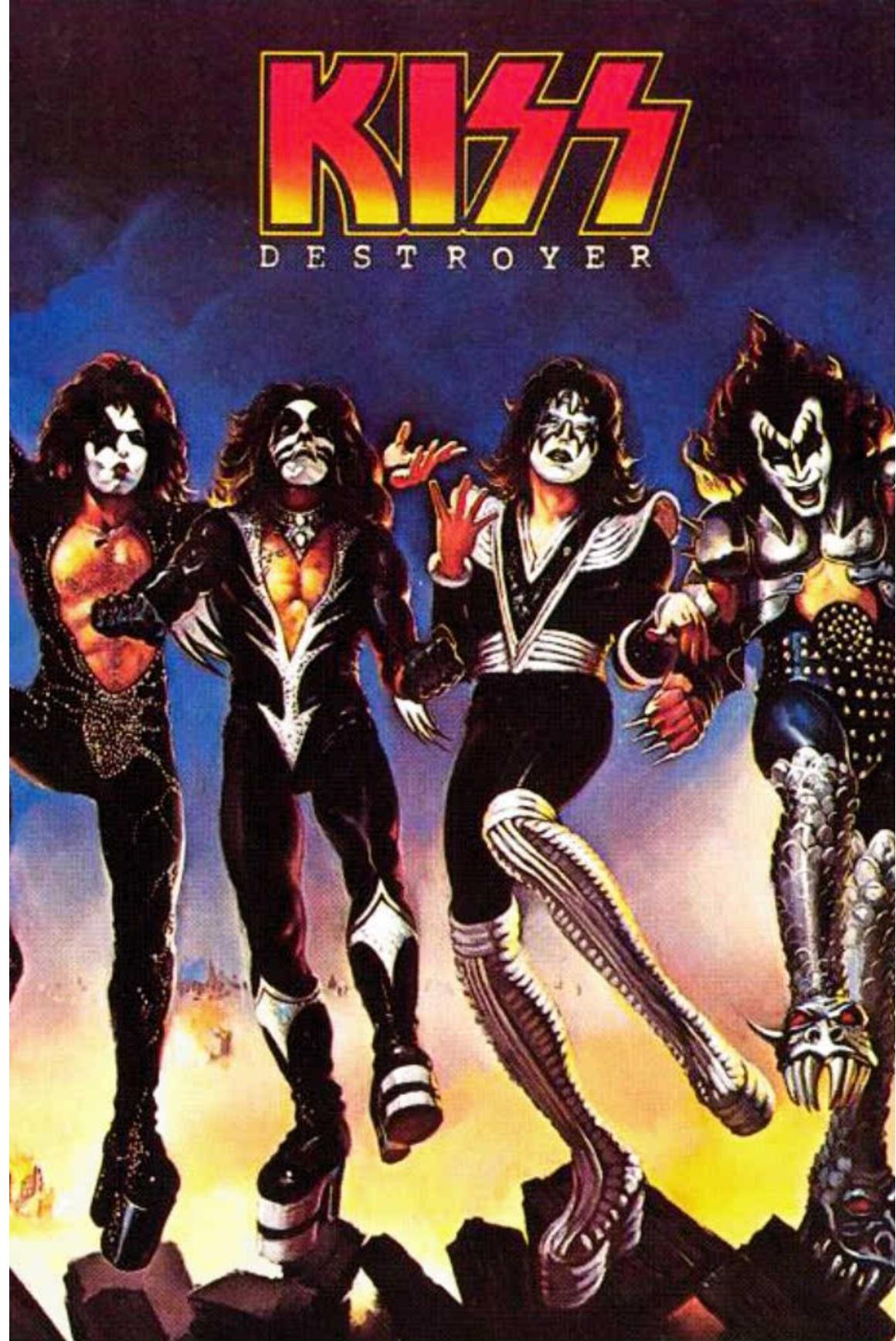
KISS

Scorpions

Megadeth

Dio

the list goes on and on...



Infantry Mantra #2

Rape.

Kill.

Pillage and burn.

Rape, kill, pillage and burn!

(We used to say this as a sort of chant to get us fired up before doing training exercises in Basic. I never really liked saying this phrase and would always mouth it.)

But Boni and I had a lot more than just cartoons and music in common; we were both soldiers in the same California National Guard infantry unit and we loved serving.

I will always remember Jerry as being a quiet professional. In fact, I can't really recall a time when he bitched about the usual Army shit that most Joes complained about. He always set a good example for the men he was responsible for.

He did his job, and he did it well.

To me, he was the ideal soldier.

I recall an incident (if you want to call it that) where I was treated differently because of a word stamped on my dog tags. In the Army, they put several pieces of information on your dog tags: first and last name, Social Security number, blood type and religious preference. On my tags, I had “Atheist” stamped as my religious preference.

One day, during train-up for a deployment to Iraq, my team leader came through to check my ID’s. Upon seeing this, my rifle team leader told me to change it to some type of religion (like Christianity) because he said, “If you’re captured by Iraqis and they see that on your tags, they’ll kill you.” To which I replied, “They’re gonna kill us anyways.” I was amazed that after serving several years with this guy, he was telling me to change my beliefs to match those of everyone else in the unit.



After that encounter, I was treated a bit differently by some of the other guys. I was no longer invited to hang out; we rarely sat together at the same table in the chow hall, and conversations were kept to a minimum.

Boni, however, never treated me any differently. His view of me stayed the same. That's just the type of guy he was -- thoughtful, rational, non-judgmental. It's hard to find qualities like that in a friend...especially in the civilian world.

Infantry Mantra

#3

Motivated, motivated, down right motivated.
HOO HAH! I wanna kill somebody.
HOO HAH! I wanna kill somebody.

NOOOOOOWW!!

(This was a very typical chant for us to sound off with at the start and end of a formation.)





We had just finished four months of train-up for a tour to Iraq. Four months of breaking our backs and sweating our asses off in the middle of the New Mexico/Texas desert. Our company commander authorized some R&R and permitted us to drink. We were all ecstatic! I hadn't had a drink in months and was looking forward to killing a sixer of New Castle. As this photo shows, infantrymen love their booze and can turn just about anything into a cooler...even a footlocker!



Needless to say, we all got pretty trashed...Boni included. He was a good leader, but also knew how to chill out and hang with his Joes.

This is one of my favorite pictures of Jerry. Bourbon was one of his favorite poisons. He looks like he's really enjoying himself and his life. We always joked around a lot, but here he looks like an experienced man. And he was.

This is how I like to remember him.

Infantry Mantra #4

CAPTAIN JACK (marching cadence)

Hey, hey Captain Jack
Meet me down by the railroad track
With that rifle in my hand
I'm gonna be a shootin' man
The best I can
For Uncle Sam

Hey, hey Captain Jack
Meet me down by the railroad track
With that knife in my hand
I'm gonna be a cuttin' man
A shootin' man
The best I can
For Uncle Sam

Hey, hey Captain Jack
Meet me down by the railroad track
With that grenade in my hand
I'm gonna be a killin' man, a cuttin' man
A shootin' man
The best I can
For Uncle Sam

To state the obvious, Jerry's death was a complete shock to me. I had messed up my back, shoulders and knees, so I wasn't in country when he died.

He was working at a security checkpoint when he was killed, checking IDs and searching vehicles. One of his soldiers was going to search the next vehicle that came through the gate, but Boni said he would do it. As Jerry approached the vehicle, the man driving it detonated an unknown amount of explosives.

I was floored! He was three months away from coming home, and he got killed by some spineless motherfucker in a car packed with explosives.

This is where I have a lot of guilt about Boni's death. If I had been in country, I more than likely would have been working the security checkpoint detail with Jerry. In this alternate reality, in my mind, it would have been me instead of him.

Ultimately, I know that I can't beat myself up over what happened or to even think in such a negative way. Yet, I still can't help but think, "What if?"

The guilt took a long time to deal with. At first, I dealt with it by drinking. Then I wised up and got some counseling. Counseling did what alcohol couldn't do and gave me the tools to deal with loss, as well as many other issues.

He died on Monday, October 10th, 2005 in Baghdad.

I didn't receive word about it until the 11th...via email.

The news drained my body of all strength and rational thought.

The emotions I felt upon hearing word of his death were intense. I was sad and crying, while at the same time angry and frustrated. I was half a world away and there was nothing I could do about it.

I wanted revenge -- revenge against those behind this cowardly attack. Revenge for Jerry. Revenge on my behalf. In the past, that's how I dealt with losing guys in the services. "I can't wait to fucking get revenge." And we would.

As much as I would have loved to jump on a plane headed for Iraq, pick up a rifle and start shooting people who I thought were insurgents, it would have done nothing to bring him back or make me feel better.

This is something that it took me a long time to realize. It's not a healthy mentality to have. And the further away I got from the military, the further I got from this mentality.

It's unfortunate that humans tend to think that way. As Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

As I mentioned before, Boni was a huge fan of KISS. I mean, a HUGE fan! He had mentioned to his fiancée that if anything should happen to him, he wanted to be buried in a coffin covered in KISS images. Somehow, as I understand the story, word of this got to the funeral director. The director then made some calls and was able to secure a coffin donated by Gene Simmons himself! It's a pretty amazing story when you think about it.





The previous image is of Boni's fiancée and family receiving the flag from his casket. The image alone speaks volumes.

On the surface, the image shows a sergeant presenting Jerry's fiancée the flag from his coffin, while an officer consoles the grieving family. Below the surface, there is a family riddled with grief, guilt, sorrow, confusion and a host of other emotions. They are torn apart by the loss of their son, their brother, their future husband. The words I write here can never fully describe this image.

I got the next picture from one of the guys in my old platoon. It's from a memorial service they held for Jerry in Baghdad.

The guys in the foreground were part of my old squad.



SSG
JERRY L. BONIFACIO, JR.
IRAQI FREEDOM

Funerals can be quite an emotional rollercoaster. You can be bawling your eyes out one minute and laughing the next. For me, military funerals are even more emotional. A flag-draped casket, twenty-one gun salute, and the sound of Taps being played turn me into a mess.

And all I could think was that I never got to say goodbye or have one last beer with him. In fact, I was sure this was a surreal dream and that he'd be returning home, safe and sound. As I watched his body being lowered into the ground, a broken record was playing in my head: "It should have been me...it should have been me...it should have been me..."

But it wasn't me.

Poor Boni

About a million pieces are left
of a friend I knew so well.
Liquified in seconds
in a place that resembles Hell.

But now, only pain remains
for his friends and next of kin.
And the thought of seeking vengeance
penetrates deep within my skin.

So I go wandering through the valleys,
within provinces and small towns
in search of the faceless killer
that knocked poor Boni down.

And as I searched for this faceless killer
I realized that he's not there.
He's been back home this whole time
voted into a lofty chair.

Infantry Mantra #5

I am the Infantry. I am my country's strength in war, her deterrent in peace. I am the heart of the fight -- wherever, whenever. I carry America's faith and honor against her enemies. I am the Queen of Battle.

I am what my country expects me to be -- the best trained soldier in the world. In the race for victory, I am swift, determined and courageous, armed with a fierce will to win.

Never will I fail my country's trust. Always I fight on -- through the foe, to the objective, to triumph over all. If necessary, I fight to my death.

By my steadfast courage, I have won 200 years of freedom. I yield not -- to weakness, to hunger, to cowardice, to fatigue, to superior odds, for I am mentally tough, physically strong, and morally straight.

I forsake not -- my country, my mission, my comrades, my sacred duty. I am relentless. I am always there, now and forever.

Since the funeral, I have not returned to visit Jerry's grave. I've made plans to in the past, but I just never went. I'm not really sure why. Perhaps it's my way of dealing with his death; maybe it means I haven't fully dealt with his passing yet. Perhaps it's a way for me to disconnect from the military.

In reality, you don't go to a graveyard for the person you're visiting, you go for yourself.

Boni's not going to care if I visit; he's gone, but I'm not. I guess I just want to remember him in my own way.

In the end, I lost a good friend. Someone who I won't be able to hang out with again, talk comic books with, swap DVDs, or attend his wedding.

I've noticed that civilians seem to define me as a person based on my time in the Army. When it comes up in conversation that I once served, people focus on that.

“What did you do?” “Did you go overseas?”
“Did you kill anybody?” “Thanks for serving.”

But, the other thirty years of my life shaped me, too. I think of my time in the Army like someone else might think of a shitty job at a coffee shop or waiting tables; the job didn't define me as a person. But then again, nobody is shooting at you while you're waiting tables.

The Army doesn't define me as a person, but it can change your life.

It doesn't define Jerry either. Jerry had a life outside of the military; he had a fiancée, worked at a local refinery, collected comics, and so on. This is what defined Jerry Bonifacio, not the Army. The Army is only one aspect of his life and if he had lived long enough, certainly not his last.

This book is dedicated to:

SSG Jerry "Boni" Bonifacio, Bravo Co 1-184
Infantry Regiment (Air Assault), May 13, 1977
- October 10, 2005; KIA Baghdad, Iraq

PFC Ervin Dervishi, Bravo Co 1-22 Infantry
4th Infantry Division (Mechanized); KIA
January 24, 2004, Baji, Iraq

CAPT Danny D. Entrican, 5th SFG, August 12,
1946 – May 18, 1971; MIA/KIA in Vietnam

All the men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country. It is in their sacrifices that we find liberty and freedom. It is in their deaths that we learn more about their lives and ourselves.

As Plato once said, “Only the dead have seen the end of war.”

I read this quote in two ways.

Literally, Boni is now gone. He has actually seen the end of war. He’s not here to deal with all the PTSD and relationship issues, grief and loss.

The aftermath of war is infinite.

I believe war has become inevitable. As much as it is terrible, I think we’re going to engage in it as long as humans are around.



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We made this book for listening. Please accept our invitation. We made this book for deployment. Please pass it along and invite someone else to listen.

Thank you,
Monica Haller

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Damian Bramlett served in both active duty and the National Guard from 2001–2005. He was attached to Bravo Company, 1-184th Infantry (Air Assault), 29th Separate Infantry Brigade (SIB) and functioned in a number of capacities including rifleman, assistant gunner, radiotelephone operator (RTO) and team leader. This book is based around his experiences during a 2004–2005 Iraq deployment with the 1-184th.

Damian currently lives in San Jose, CA where he is completing his master's degree in justice studies, with an emphasis on social justice. His plans are to pursue a PhD in sociology, as well as a career in writing and teaching. He still reads comic books and still watches cartoons.

