

In the Navy â€” so it goes

by Jason_Love

I live beside a navy base. It occupies a stretch of coast where I would surf if it werenâ€™t for the shooting ranges. Thatâ€™s the problem with friendly fireâ€”it hurts just like the other kind.

The base spreads inland for 16 gazillion miles and is in the way of everything. I pass the barbed wire fences when Iâ€™m jogging, when Iâ€™m driving, when Iâ€™m too drunk to do eitherâ€”

Iâ€™ll tell ya, theyâ€™ve got their own little world in there.

Behind the armed guards and No Trespassing signs is a grinning community, replete with shopping centers, movie theaters, and drive-through McDonaldsâ€™es. Theyâ€™ve got their own golf course! Whatâ€™s more, they donâ€™t pay taxes on any of it. I hear you can buy a car in there for, like, a dollar.

For a long time, I struggled with this whole navy-behind-the-fence issue. It felt so separatist, so Us versus Them. The base was a giant Samâ€™s Club where everyone was having a blast while I pressed my nose against the window trying to read the price tags.

I had to become a member.

In the recruiting office, I spoke to a gentleman with a square head. His name was Kirby. Kirbyâ€™s jacket

was decorated with medals, stars, decals, and happy faces from his first-grade teacher. He carried a trophy full-time.

“May I help you?” he asked.

“Yes, I was hoping to get on the base.”

“Wanna do some shopping?”

With that, Kirby laughed harder at his own joke than any man ever should. That’s why they assigned him recruiting, the cheery disposition. So it goes.

Kirby recovered over a glass of water and described the life of a Seabee from sunup to sundown. He talked about mandatory meetings, and my nether parts twitched. He mentioned manual labor, the kind they make you do in high school detention. He talked about vacation time, sick days, time cards. And no matter how far I tilted my head to one side, it looked like any other fool-time job.

Besides, you have to wear three different uniforms (not all at once).

Threatened by these developments, I grew silent. I needed time to think. Kirby asked if I wanted some water. I used a response that my wife finds very effective: I ignored him.

Thoreau warned against any venture that requires new clothes. My grandpa warned against men who match. I told my grandpa that he reminded me of Thoreau. He was offended because "they didn't know nothin' back then" burp.

Kirby butted into my reverie.

"Or you can join the Reserves," he said.

I've never been reserved. I'm a guy who'll smoke the lump on the floor to find out what it is. But according to Kirby, by joining the Reserves I could get onto the base without jeopardizing my normal routine of screwing around all week.

Kirby explained the benefits of the Reserves and had me eyeing the dotted line up to the moment he said, "Of course, in the event of war, you would join our regular battalions overseas."

Insert sound of screeching tires.

“You mean to die?”

He laughed at the joke, but it was no wanna-do-some-shopping?

Kirby stood up straighter than God and said, “You won’t fight for your country?”

In the grand scheme of things, I’m a pretty patriotic guy. I raise the flag on Memorial Day and know all the Presidents by heart. I rooted for the Patriots in the Super Bowl. But I don’t feel that I’ve reached a point in my life where I could handle people shooting at me. I can hardly cope with dirty looks.

Kirby shook his head. He was disappointed in me. He would have to get in line.

“How 'bout I take a brochure and think it over,” I said.

Kirby handed me a brochure. When I got outside, I accidentally dropped it in the trash. And as I walked away

from those barricades, I no longer yearned to be on the other side. Reality sucked it out of me. Private golf is fine and good, but battle overseas?

If all those people in there are willing to man the U.S.S. Bulls-Eye to defend democracy, they deserve an untaxed paradise bordered with barbed wire. As for me, Iâ€™™I keep rooting for the Patriots.

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