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**A Female Soldier's Last Battle**

**By Donald Schnell**

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I arrived at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in 1974, in my 19th year, into the heart of the 82nd Airborne Division at the John F. Kennedy Center. The old timers called Fort Bragg "Little Hell." The 82nd Airborne was the first to engage the enemy on land to protect America's freedom. Even in peacetime, there was always a natural tension of readiness and alertness among the troops and around the base itself.

Every other day or so a C-40 transport plane would arrive with a load of America's kids, gaunt, aged, gray-haired beyond their years. Some shielded themselves with a barrier of hostility. They wouldn't let you get close, didn't want to know anyone, didn't want anyone else to die in their arms. Some were hostile, some clearly mentally destroyed, forlorn and withdrawn, being led around like zombies. The first ones off the plane were in wheel chairs or on crutches, missing limbs, faced burned beyond recognition. All would be greeted by mobs of defiant protestors.

"Baby killers!" the mobs would chant, taunting and spitting at the returning soldiers. The protestors wore flags sewn to the seats of their jeans to demonstrate their disrespect for the American government and our country's policies. The irony was their freedom to protest against the very kids who were risking their lives to defend democracy and the right to protest.

In the midst of the mob were grieving parents, claiming their sons in body bags. Many of the young returning survivors were hooked on heroin or cocaine, not at all coping with the devastating Vietnam experience they had endured. The rejection of their sacrifice by the American people only compounded the residual trauma of the killing fields. I saw the irony. Most of the returning vets were from lower and middle-class backgrounds. Most of the protestors were the privileged and the educated who didn't have to go to war.

The talk on the base was all about John Travolta's Saturday Night Fever. Another John by the name of Elton was making a splash with Kiki Dee in the duet Don't Go Breaking My Heart. Sadly, for me, this

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was clearly be a place of broken hearts and broken dreams. From my point of view, the returning vets were damaged for life. I didn't see how they would ever get on their feet. More than the loss of a leg, an arm or a fellow soldier, how would they ever heal their broken spirits?

In "Little Hell," I was the first white soldier to be phased into an all-black unit. This phasing-in process was part of the military's on-going plan to fully integrate the army. Official desegregation was passed into law in 1948, but that was the end of it. The reality was the races had difficulty working together, so ethnic groups congregated. All white and all black units still existed, and desegregation was still only on paper. When I was in basic training in Missouri, three white soldiers viciously assaulted a black soldier who they refused to allow in their unit. The drill sergeant supported it, and looked the other way. At this point in time, everybody looked the other way. But at the moment of my enlistment, through the encouragement of President Jimmy Carter, the Army official policy intended to make desegregation a reality. I was one of the first soldiers to be involved in the process.

Understandably, many among the African-American troops did not welcome my arrival. In particular, one of my roommates, Marty, had the habit of making "whitey" his punching bag. He continuously incited others to vent their racial anger as "black power" and do the same. I remember that into this tense situation, my other roommate, a good friend and fair-minded individual by the name of James Bailey, spoke words of wisdom.

"This is the army, and everyone has only one color...green. Give him a chance, Marty." James was wiry and tough, with a don't-mess-with-me quality honed in the streets. Marty was a good fighter, but he was softer from privilege in his life, a little more GQ, and he listened to James.

The music that defined my life at this moment came from Pvt. Billingsley, a heroin addict, who always seemed to be playing the Average White Band album, and particularly the single, Play that Funky Music, White Boy. It was either this or Herman Melville and the Bluenotes singing, "Oh, mercy, mercy me, things ain't what they used to be."

Billingsley used a three-word response in every situation to sum up the negativity of the environment. "This is bulllll-shit, man, this is bulllll-shit!" If I entered the barracks, if it was raining, if it was time for dinner, it was always the same response. Soon everyone would be repeating this mantra, and most would nod their heads and agree, "Uh-huh," with vacant, drugged eyes. This was one of the more obvious signs of the depressed and oppressive atmosphere in "Little Hell." The sergeants in my unit had just come from long tours of duty in Vietnam. They knew the military from experience. Shortly after my arrival, Second Lieutenant Mayer was put in charge of our unit. He was a thin, white Mormon from Brigham Young University who had only book experience from the ROTC, and had never tasted combat. Since he had to prove his authority over the combat soldiers, he made certain we took orders from him, by making our lives miserable. Tensions were high between the white lieutenant!

and the black sergeants. I was caught in the middle.

Fortunately, this was a time in my life when I was gathering much personal strength through the spiritual path of Zen Buddhism, a path of meditation that awakens the seeker to the timeless present moment. Zen Buddhism teaches the practitioner to value life, because it is transitory; we never know

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when death may come to call us. So we work diligently in the here and now, where we are, to achieve the enlightened state. The enlightened state is experienced when the practitioner brings all of his or her aliveness and concentration fully to the present moment. This is a way of finding the strength of God within right here, right now.

The requirements of sitting zen, known as zazen, are rather demanding. Zazen is the practice that Buddha used to attain spiritual enlightenment. In zazen, the meditator sits Japanese-style on the heels. However, in this rather difficult practice, the weight of the body is held approximately one-half inch off the heels by the strength of the legs. The chin is perfectly parallel to the floor, and every effort is made to hold a perfectly erect position. You sit absolutely still and keep the attention focused on the present moment, the breath, and nothing else. It is a powerful technique used by many martial artists, as it sharpens the mind and body very quickly. Our days were rather full so I would have to be up by four AM in order to get an hour of zazen under my belt. I wore a T-shirt and combat fatigue pants. It was quite cold, but in zazen you learn to ignore the needs of the body. What is a little cold compared to the goal of liberation and spiritual enlightenment?

Buddha was only a man, and he told himself after he sat under the Bodhi tree that he would not leave that spot for any reason until he achieved enlightenment. If Buddha could do it, there is hope for the

rest of us. Buddha said, "I am a human being who is evolving spiritually. What I can accomplish, you can accomplish."

One morning, Marty got up to use the restroom. Imagine his surprise to see me sitting so erect and motionless! He freaked out, and kept staring at me. And staring, And staring. I didn't move a muscle. Marty was petrified. He was spooked, as if he was witnessing something demonic. He awakened Bailey to have a look. Bailey explained, "He's meditating, man. It's cool, it's what you do in karate."

Thank you, James Bailey. From that moment on, I was known as the meditating martial artist. I was continually giving classes to my fellow soldiers, showing them how to punch, block, and kick. It is amazing that in the West you can get away with being into God and spiritual subjects if you are a good fighter. The contortions one goes through for the Lord!

Bailey started to meditate with me every morning. Then another soldier from Hawaii, a black belt in Tae Kwon Do named Rick, joined us as well. Soon we had five meditating military monks in our zendo. (A zendo is the hall where the group practice of Zen takes place.) Before long, there were too many of us to use the barracks room. We relocated to a recreation hall and practiced around the pool tables. We needed a roshi, a Zen priest, and I was elected to serve in that capacity. I used the pool stick for the kyo-kyaku stick to keep the fires of meditation burning. The kyo-kyaku stick is also known as the stick of compassion. The monk uses it if your posture weakens or you start to fall asleep. He strikes you on either the right or left shoulder. After you are struck, you bow to the roshi in gratitude for keeping you on the path to enlightenment. The loud "crack" of the kyo-kyaku stick has been known to bring many a monk into spiritual enlightenment. Because the crack happens in!

the moment, it forces you to awaken into the moment. Buddha means "the awakened one." To remind others of the transitory moment of life is an act of great compassion. It encourages the experience of

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the preciousness of life. Further, Zen teaches that we all have the power to turn hell into heaven. "Little Hell" needed a dose of Zen Buddhism.

Bailey invited our first female practitioner to join the group. This was Margaret, a single African-American mother of two young children. In attitude and physical shape, she reminded me of Whoopee Goldberg, except for her short military haircut. Nobody messed with Margaret. Her will power was too strong. Since the military was strict about weight, she had remarkably trimmed her body for 90 days on nothing but tuna and water. Margaret was a loner, who had clearly had a hard life. She'd known plenty of alcoholism and abuse from family members and her ex-husband, and although she was only twenty-four, she looked about fifty. In addition to her substantial military duties, she had the full responsibility of raising her two kids, four year-old Joe and five year-old Little Maggie. Yet she also was taking college classes. I first met her at night school, in Black History class. She needed the credit for the Nursing Degree she was working toward. I admired Margaret. "Little Hell" wa!

s hard enough for a man. Women weren't respected. They could technically join the military, but they weren't welcome.

All who attended the morning sesshins, as they were called, were dedicated and disciplined individuals without exception. I was a committed roshi, very serious about meditation and very strict about latecomers. I wanted everyone to achieve enlightenment so that we could live in a happier, and more peaceful world. No one wanted to be the recipient of Sergeant Schnell's displeasure. That was the effect of the military, karate and Zen on me!

One day we knew something was wrong when Margaret didn't show up. I discovered later that afternoon that she'd been diagnosed with leukemia. Her case was advanced, and she was in great pain and suffering. The doctors gave her only a short time to live. Margaret continued to attend sesshin for as long as she could. She said that the meditation helped her manage the pain and get through her day. Every morning she'd show up. She didn't care about the diagnosis or what the doctors said. Her indomitable will kept her focused on her Zen meditation discipline. For all of us in sesshin, Margaret became the Buddha. Her strength during this crisis made our practices and difficulties seem lightweight by comparison. Margaret always asked for an extra dose of the compassion stick from me.

Her disease progressed until one morning Margaret didn't appear. The temperature in the zendo that morning was particularly cold. Later that day, I learned from James Bailey that Margaret was in the hospital. I found her there, practicing her zazen in spite of heavy pain medication. She asked me if there was a way I could bring the sesshin to her hospital room. With her encouragement, nine of us gathered at the hospital early every morning to keep the sesshin going. The rest of the group continued without us at the recreation hall. Everyone wanted to participate with Margaret, but we couldn't bring that many people into her room.

Our first obstacle was Nurse Leona, a Christian Fundamentalist. With a temper that matched the color of her red hair, Leona let us know that she didn't want any disturbance on her floor. We explained that what we were doing was spiritual, that it was Margaret's religion, and that we would be extremely quiet. She wanted no part of what she perceived to be Satan's work and went to great lengths to have us

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expelled.

Leona complained to the hospital chaplain that a non-Christian element was invading the peace of the hospital. She called Second Lieutenant Mayer, and enrolled him to keep us distracted from our practice. He put me on all night guard duty with no relief, and he sent Bailey and I into the field for a week of survival training with no food. Margaret persevered while awaiting our return, and as a group we held our ground with clear, quiet, Zen authority. It was the first time I realized how few rights a hospital patient has. You can be dying and a fundamentalist nurse can deny you're your religious preference and freedom. In order to see Margaret and help her with her Zen practice, I was required to fill out several forms declaring my religion to be Zen Buddhism, although I was, in truth, a Christian practicing Zen Buddhism. I had to do the same for Margaret and the rest of the group. I was also told that this admission would affect my ability to keep my Top Secret clearance. It!

was clearly a threat, designed to discourage me, but Margaret's one-pointed determination that the group must continue as a whole was my inspiration. She was a clear model that especially in sickness that you need to keep your spiritual discipline.

An old, black Master Sergeant, a Green Beret, who joined our group every day went straight to the Head Chaplain of Fort Bragg. This Master Sergeant was one of the first people in my life who completely impressed me. He was all soldier, tall, erect, muscular, all spit and polish, an African-American king. No one crossed him, but not because he was mean. On the contrary, he was kind and fair, and he was known to be colorblind. He treated everyone equally. He was so decorated for heroism and carried himself with such regal dignity, his word on the base was essentially law. He worked around the clock to get the returning soldiers from Vietnam off drugs. The Master Sergeant had seen action in the Korean War and served multiple tours in Vietnam, where he saved countless lives and seen numerous buddies killed in action. Yet he maintained a powerful, positive spirit and strength I only wanted to emulate. In fact, he had been first exposed to Zen while touring in Vietnam. One of is

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vious big frustrations was dealing with the "textbook" officers like Second Lieutenant Mayer, who had no experience in combat but ranked over him because of a college degree.

The Chaplain was a textbook soldier like Lieutenant Mayer with a higher rank than the Master Sergeant, but I suppose the Master Sergeant made it clear that if Mr. Chaplain wanted to continue to receive the cleanest and finest transportation everyday he would have to play ball. I suspect he also made it clear that he was aware of some of the married Mr. Chaplain's shenanigans with one of the young female soldiers. Apparently, he'd transferred her from his motor pool to be his personal secretary, and things were going on in his office behind closed doors. At that time, sexual harassment had not yet become an open issue in the military, but the Master Sergeant had a case to make, and the Chaplain knew it. No one messed with this Master Sergeant, not even the generals!

Much to Margaret's relief, and the chagrin of Nurse Leona, we were granted clearance to report to the hospital at 8 AM to honor our spiritual practice of zazen. We were excused from all other duties from 8:00 to 10:00 AM.

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Still there was quite a scene. Imagine a typical military doctor striding into the room with, "Hello, and how we doing today," only to find nine soldiers sitting on the floor in perfect, silent zazen around the bed, in which sat his patient, totally still and erect. When doing a sesshin, we would not even veer from our practice to acknowledge the doctor or anyone who entered the space. The sesshin was our time to focus on our inner divinity. Often Margaret's two young children, Joe and Little Maggie, would participate by sitting on the Master Sergeant's lap. The kids behaved, because their mother had taught them the rules. After a few days, the doctor got into the spirit of it. He realized he was walking into a zendo temple. He came in quietly and performed his examination serenely. It was a total shift in the typical hospital protocol.

As Margaret grew weaker, she took advantage of the tilting mattress to keep her upright. Then she would just lie back with the bed tilted at the proper angle. In Japan when a person is dying, a screen is put in front of them that shows the Buddha traveling to heaven. The screen is used as a reminder about where we are to focus during this journey of life. Every minute of every day I wished for that screen for Margaret. I told her about the screen and its symbolism, but we both knew that it wasn't likely we'd find a Buddha screen in the Bible Belt of North Carolina. She remarked that for her I was her screen, her reminder to look to heaven and follow the Buddha. For me, Margaret's poise and her grace as she faced her death certainly made her the Buddha.

The doctors were amazed at how calm and accepting Margaret was about everything. They said she was taking about one-third the pain medication that similar patients would take. On some days, she took no pain medication at all. They didn't understand how it was possible. Since Margaret had no family, the Master Sergeant was busy making arrangements with the social organizations to take care of Joe and Little Maggie.

We arrived on time one spring morning to find Margaret's bed empty. Nurse Leona told us somewhat cruelly that we were no longer allowed in the hospital. We learned from the doctor that Margaret had died peacefully around 4:00 AM. He said she rang the bell for assistance and when they got there she had already died. Her bed was tilted up and she was sitting comfortably with a peaceful look on her face - a Zen Buddhist all the way! More than likely she made a conscious transition to the heavenly realms while sitting and doing her habitual practice.

Margaret had a military funeral, disguised as a weapons training procedure. Military funerals for ordinary soldiers are not customary, but all the arrangements had been quietly made by the Master Sergeant. The Chaplain was absent, so the Master Sergeant read from the Old Testament, the 23rd Psalm. I was given the privilege of folding the American flag that adorned Margaret's simple casket and presenting it to her children. I walked toward them in the slow, dignified, carefully measured steps of the walking form of Zen meditation known as kinhin. A lump formed in my throat that I couldn't control.

"Your mother was so strong, Joey," I whispered as I knelt close to him. His big sad eyes looked directly into mine. "Keep this flag to always remind you of how strong you are and how strong your mother was."

He asked, "Is my Mommy coming back?"

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With tears streaming down my face, I said, "She's with God now."

As Joe took the flag in his little hands, he stood straighter and tears rolled down his young face as well. I rested my palm upon Little Maggie's head. She reached up for me to hold her, which I did. Her little arms squeezed around me in the tightest grip I'd ever known. She buried her head in my shoulder and sobbed.

The shots from the rifles rang out in the clarity of that brisk spring morning, unexpectedly, like the crack of the kyo-kyaku stick. For me, and I'm sure for most of the zendo group, they symbolized Buddha's teaching to awaken in this very moment to the preciousness of life.

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## **Female Hair Loss Treatment And Information**

**By Paton Jackson**

Did you know that female hair loss is part of the lives of more than 25 million women in the United States alone? Most of them are not using any female hair loss treatment and only few are aware of the existing hair loss treatments. In almost all the cases Female hair loss could be avoided, stopped and new hair growth could be stimulated.

Female pattern hair loss is similar to what is known as the "male pattern hair loss" for men. It is caused by an increasing amount of a chemical called DHT which usually occurs in the menopause age. As opposed to men, women usually suffer from thinning hair around the forehead and crown of their scalp, and not a complete baldness.

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There are several available treatments for female hair loss of this kind:

Natural female hair loss treatment - There are several natural products that showed good results in stopping female hair loss like Advacia and Revivogen. These products are made up of hair growth vitamins, herbs and minerals and have no side effects.

Female hair loss products - The most popular hair loss product for women is Rogaine. Rogaine is the only FDA approved female hair loss treatment. Its' main component is called Minoxidil which is a DHT inhibitor.

Other less common female hair loss treatments like wigs, hair thickeners and hair transplants are not recommended.

Another kind of female hair loss is a temporary hair loss. This kind could be a result of metabolic problems during pregnancy, a severe stress condition, chemotherapy, high fever or infections. The treatment in these cases would be stopping the medical problems as soon as possible. This would also result the hair regrowth.

If you do not suffer from female hair loss we congratulate you and advice you to use regularly a shampoo, a conditioner and moisturize and to maintain a healthy diet. If you start losing your hair do not ignore it. You can stop your hair loss. Good luck.

911 corp. has executed a research to find the best female hair loss product. Find the results only on

– All about female hair loss

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