

Name unname name number

by David Ackley

Times in the army you are reminded who you are, by a letter, a recollection, a word with another G.I. from home, even your name bellowed by an impatient NCO: "ACKLEY! FRONT AND CENTER!"

Other times you disappear into the collective gargantuan worm assembling its segments to the shouts of the sergeants of bodies and shouldered duffle bags to shuffle and lurch noses to backs on millipede legs out of the ship's bowels up ladders and across metal decks *Close it up close it up* glimpses of sky rooftops cranes masts shaven necks below damp hairline back of cap what you look like to the one behind him to the one behind him 1500 sweating necks shuffling down a too springy gangplank glimpsed strip of dark water below pinched between grey hull and black pilings bad place to fall.

Solid pavement suddenly underfoot, the worm disassembles, segments to lines and ranks and square formations. The pavement shifty to your sea legs.

Tenshun! At ease. Fall out in place. Light up.

You sit on your duffle bag, extract your walnut pipe and tobacco pouch from pockets, fill, tamp light up. The air is sweet with recent rain, edged with the char of recent burning, the pavement, slick, reflecting the forms of the seated and sprawled troops. The sky overcast but brightly lit from behind. You feel the likenesses in phrases, Set it up there, mate. Slowly, that's it, that's it. English. Your own tongue. It dawns New England: Old England. Once, centuries back, a man and wife came from this place, sailed across the way you've just come, settled on the Connecticut shore, generated sons, passed on a name. Your sense of home splits apart between here and there, as if your self had birthed its own double. Now come home. Your eyes settle closed, falling into that shifty half sleep, that sleep anywhere, anytime that the army cultivates and

sometimes all it affords. From the flat-capped loungers against a warehouse wall , a capped, rubber booted and tweed jacketed man detaches himself and strolls up to you, both wary and curious.

“ Think you're Philip Ackley ?. That's me mate, I was here first, no room for two of us, so hop it.”

You snap awake, there's noone.

No matter, here or there, you're always RA 30139038, the one and only.

