

03/14/98  
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I wanted to write a book about the army... And so I racked my brain and turned my memory inside-out to recall dates, events, everything that left a mark on me over the course of the nightmare that was my year in uniform (be it camouflage or dark blue).

I wanted to write a book about the army because, seven years later, I thought I still had a score to settle. And I wanted to rub their nose in my own personal victory. I wanted to show the old meatheads that nothing they made me endure had escaped me, it was all carefully archived in my head and that, contrary to their claims at the time, I had forgotten nothing.



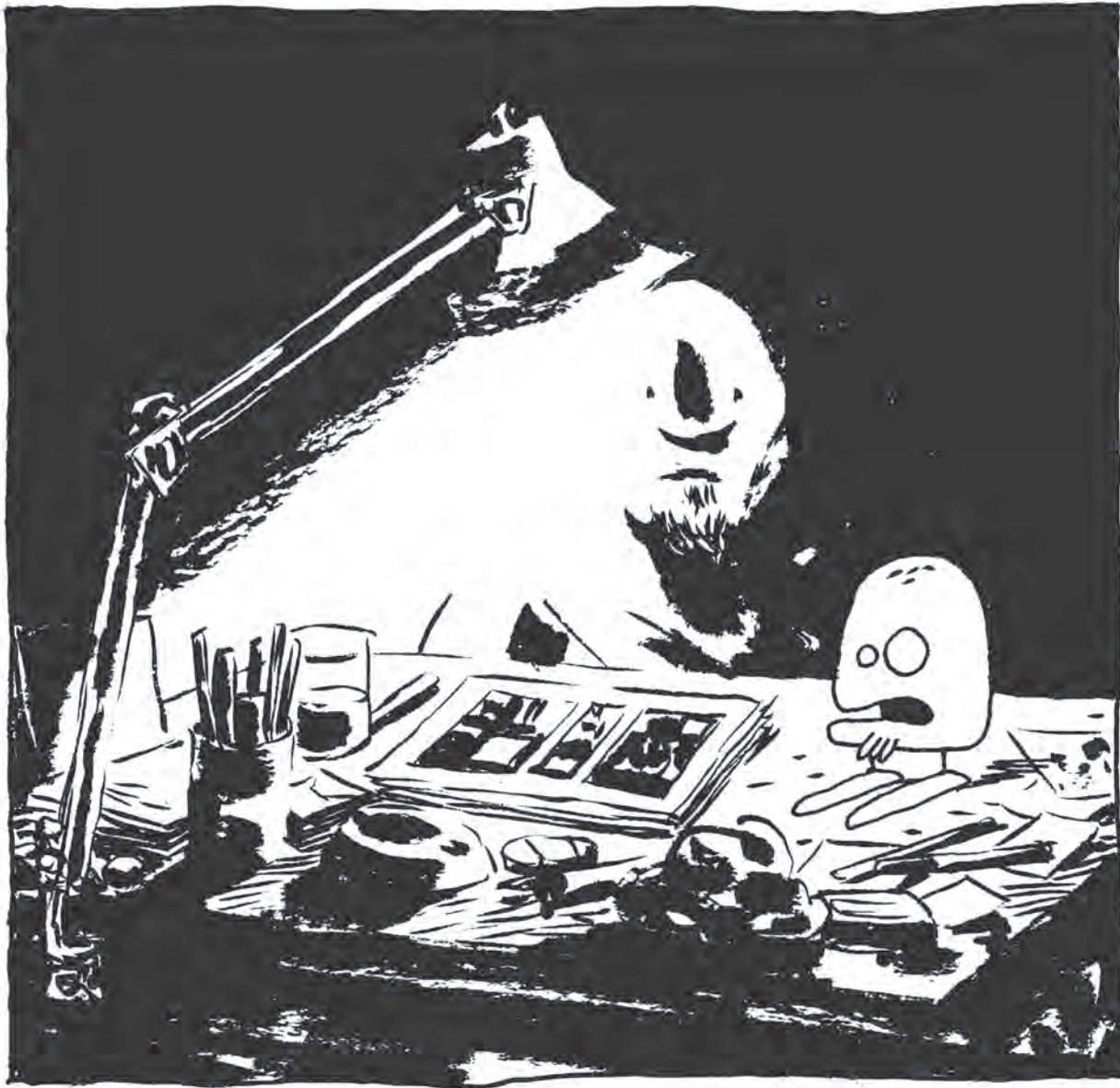


So I set out to detail, in chronological order, my daily life as a typical soldier. I wanted to show the fear, the isolation, the hazing ... but something was off. The further I got, the more I found myself reticent to write and draw, as if the story I was telling had, in reality, no importance.

I threw it all away and gave it a rest. I knew I still wanted to talk about the army, but clearly I didn't know what to say. And then, like a slap in the face, came the disappointing realization that I wasn't angry anymore...







When did I lose my rage? For a long time after my release, it had gripped me by the stomach. I had harbored it carefully, like a relic, like vengeance.

But it had abandoned me! Well... not completely. I realized that even though nothing had been forgotten, it had been forgiven. As stupid as that. I no longer resented anyone. That didn't mean I was free of hate - far from it - but it was no longer directed at a vicious sergeant or a sadistic corporal... No, my hate was now directed fully at the collective inertia of the system, and my own resignation in the face of it.

I had made peace with almost all the rest...

I was inducted into  
the French army at  
the Nancy air base on  
June 4, 1991. My dad  
drove me there.

I tried  
to wave to  
him, but he  
didn't see  
me...

...almost...

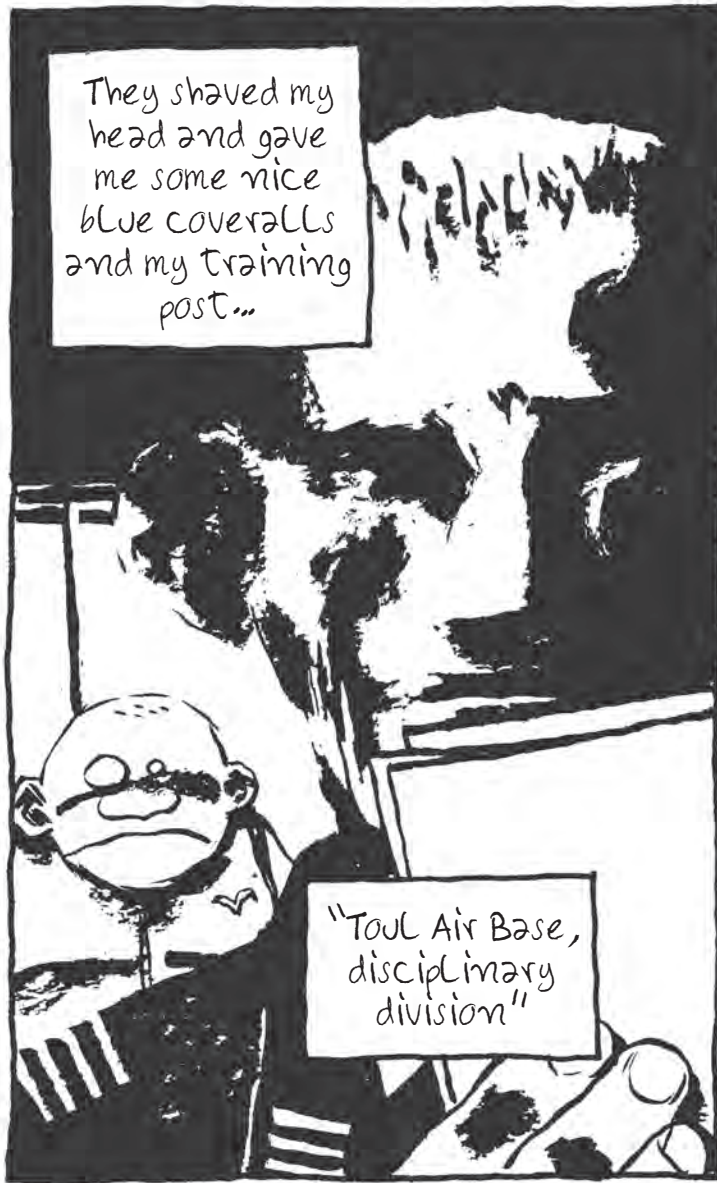


He lingered  
for a moment  
in front of  
the barracks  
gates...





...then  
he was  
gone.



They shaved my  
head and gave  
me some nice  
blue coveralls  
and my training  
post...

"Toul Air Base,  
disciplinary  
division"



I never  
figured out  
why I got  
disciplinary.

LISTEN UP  
FILTHY CUMBAGS!  
WHEN I'M DONE  
WITH YOU,  
YOU'RE GONNA  
BELCH BLOOD!

But one  
thing was  
sure, it  
wouldn't  
be cheery.



...Indeed, it wasn't.  
I Learned how to  
march, dress, shout  
inane responses to  
stupid questions, lace  
my shoes, stand up  
straight, sing in the  
binary rhythm of soles  
on asphalt, live with  
meatheads 24/7, sleep  
with one eye open and  
wake with a jolt, stop  
dreaming, keep quiet...



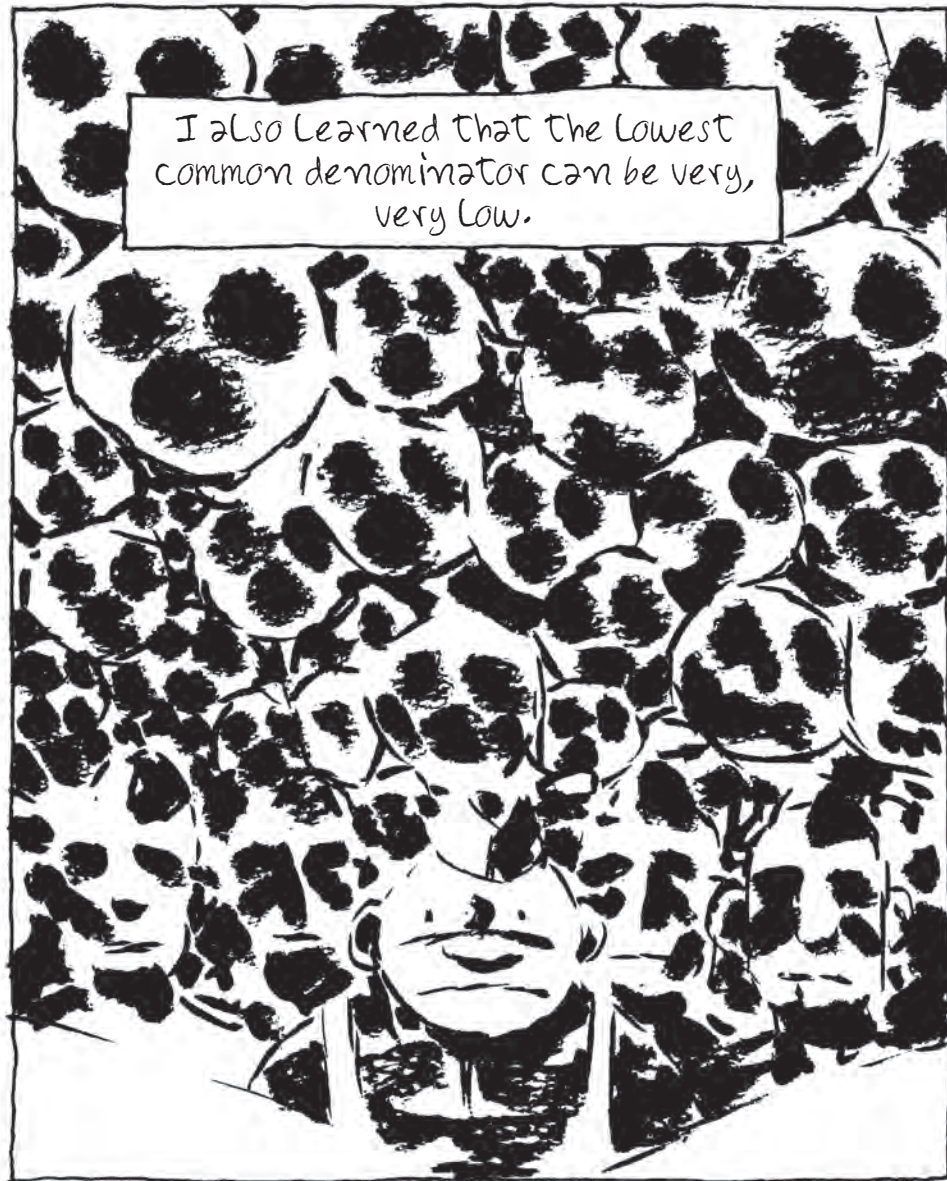


I Learned  
to Live with  
the Enemy non-  
stop, to watch  
for his approach  
and the latent  
threat it  
represented.



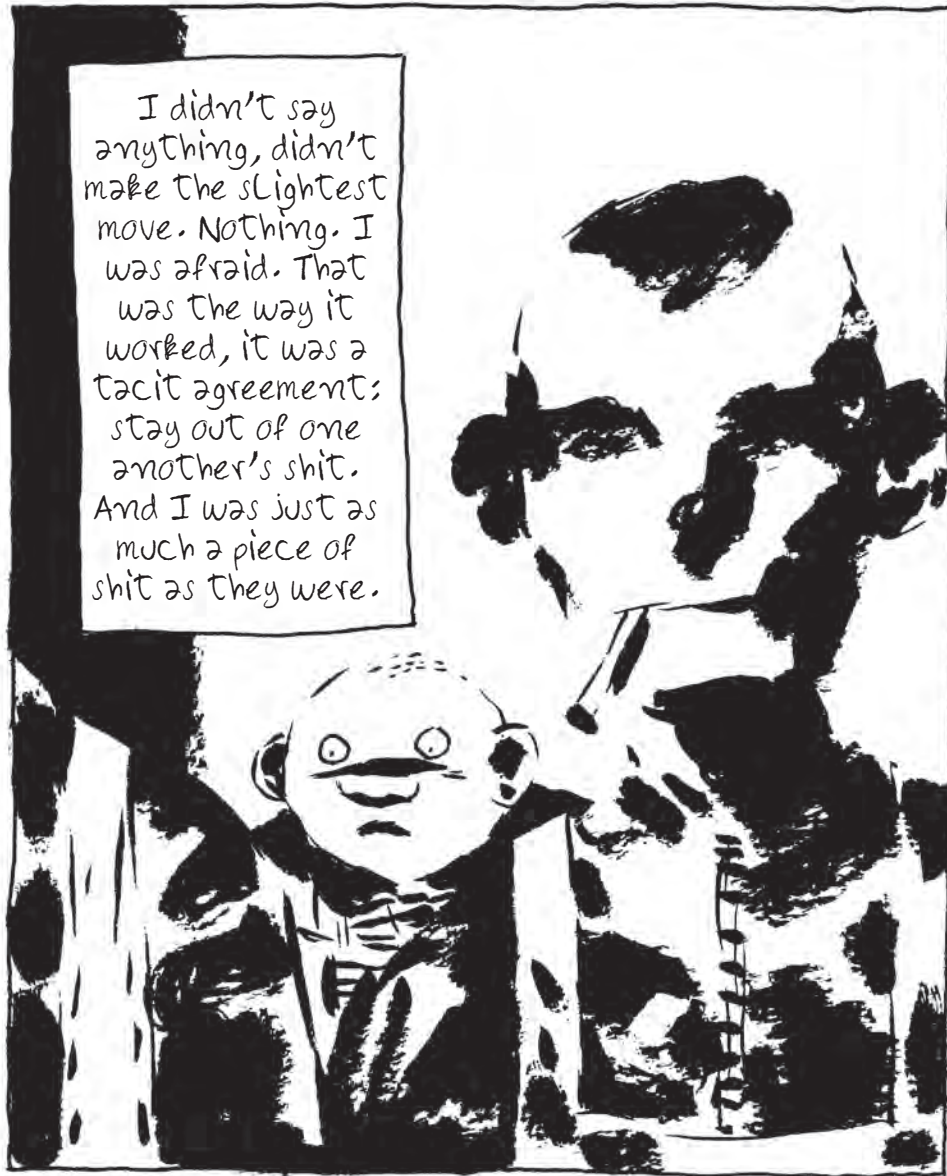
I Learned that  
it was pointless  
to play the hero  
when you're  
legally deprived  
of all your  
rights.



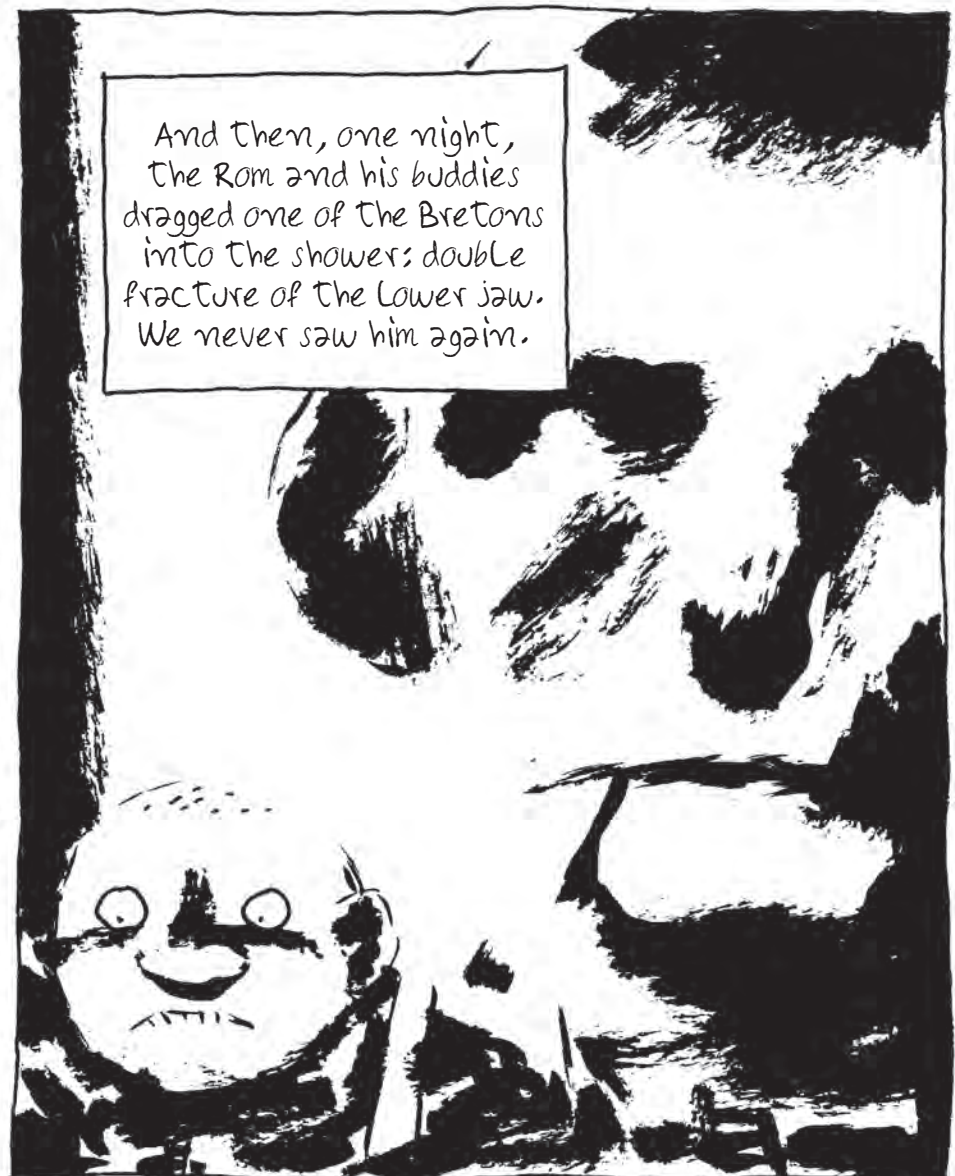


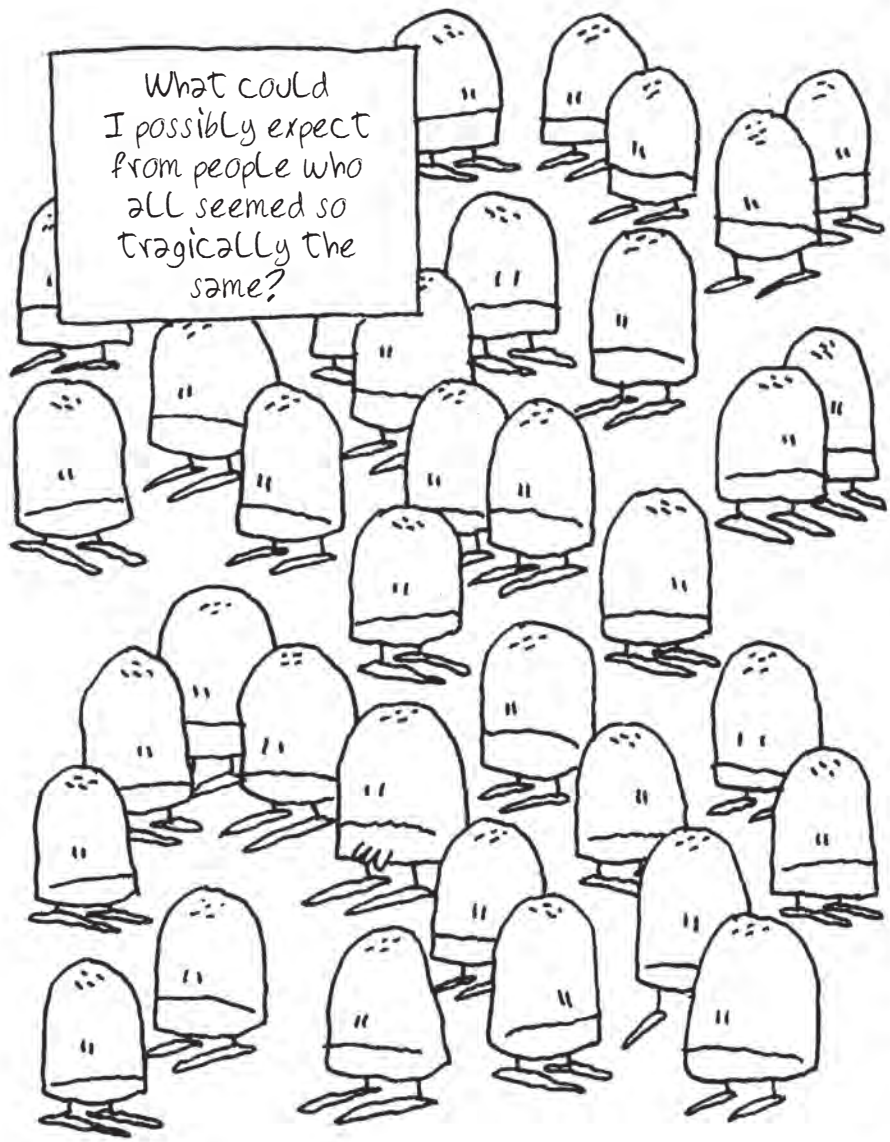


I didn't say anything, didn't make the slightest move. Nothing. I was afraid. That was the way it worked, it was a tacit agreement; stay out of one another's shit. And I was just as much a piece of shit as they were.

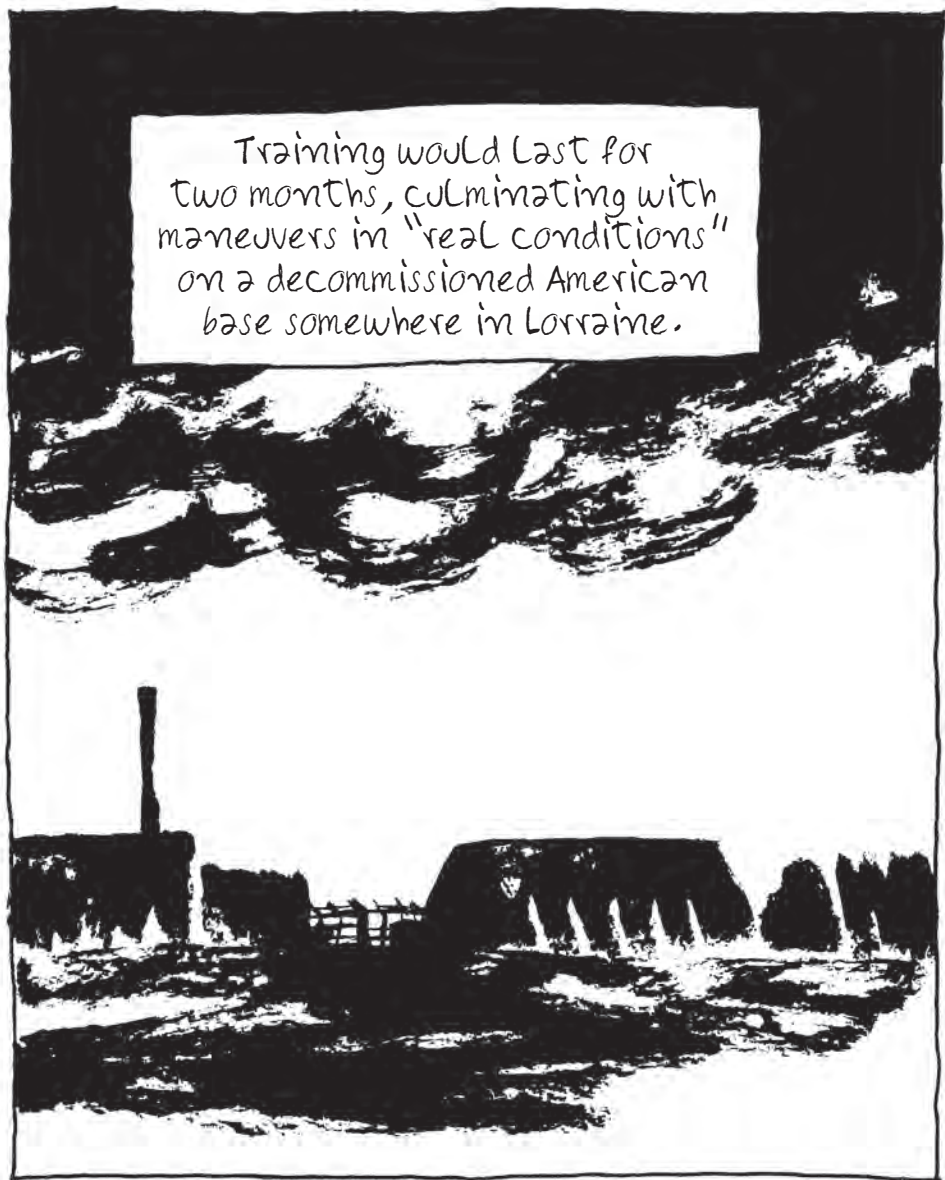


And then, one night, the Rom and his buddies dragged one of the Bretons into the showers; double fracture of the lower jaw. We never saw him again.



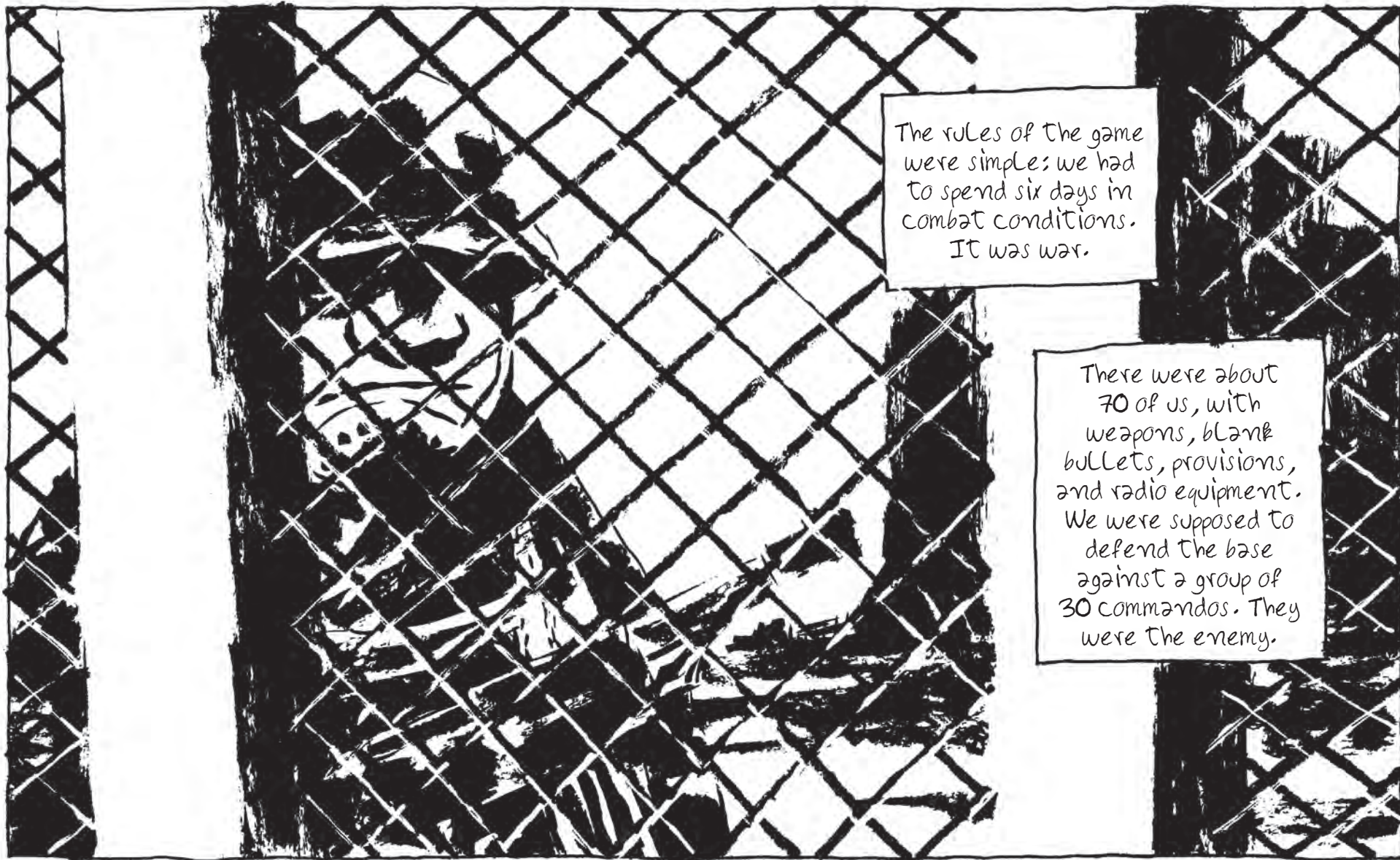


What could I possibly expect from people who all seemed so tragically the same?



Training would last for two months, culminating with maneuvers in "real conditions" on a decommissioned American base somewhere in Lorraine.





The rules of the game were simple; we had to spend six days in combat conditions. It was war.

There were about 70 of us, with weapons, blank bullets, provisions, and radio equipment. We were supposed to defend the base against a group of 30 commandos. They were the enemy.