

**A Memoir of David August "Call It What You Like" Ron Hardy 1 of 10
as told to Ron Hardy**

While I was serving in the US Army is when and where I held my hands up in the air as I figuratively jumped off the face of the earth. This jump was a spiritual as well as a mental leap into the hands of the unknown. I refer to God as the hands of the unknown. On July 3, 1974 at the age of 17, I enlisted in the United States Army. Although the Vietnam war was in full swing, I didn't have any fear or thought of dying nor a true sense of what the war was really being fought about. I had quit going to classes at school after completing the 9th grade because my test scores on the California Scholastic Achievement Test showed I was working at a college level as were the rest of my peers in my classes of which non were Black males except me. Between the ages of 14-17 my conviction was to learn and experience the ways of the world. In other words the streets, girls, shiny things along with the reality of being a Black man in America were calling my name. During that period before going into the Army, I was enrolled in 5 different high schools in 4 different cities in 2 different states always in the 10th grade. My plan for redemption was to go into the Army at 17 which did happen. I was a small guy physically in a sense, but strong mentally which made me strong physically. The second day in the Army at the reception station at Fort Polk, LA was amusing but reassuring. A white guy bet me \$50 dollars that I couldn't do fifty pushups. I did them so fast that it blew his mind. He didn't want to pay up. Before I could say or do anything, two big Samoan guys that were watching stood up and insisted he pay me. He just didn't know I was about to do the fool about my money. My first week in basic training marked my destiny in what they call "This Mans Army". I was given a special privilege to leave the barracks in order to take my GED tests. This was not the norm. There was a standing rule that during the 1st week in basic training no one is allowed to leave the barracks area for anything except our regular training. I passed the GED tests so actually I completed high school a year ahead of my expected high school graduating year. There was one glitch. The first evening as I was going to take the first part of the GED test my entrepreneurial self kicked in.

I noticed an AFEES station across the street from the street from the testing sight. An AFEES station is a type of pub that sells beer. I went in and bought some cans of beer. I didn't drink beer and still don't to this day but I knew the other guys at he barracks did. I put the cans of beer in the legs of my pants above where they were tucked into my boots. The cans of beer cost about .35 cents and I sold them back at the barracks for \$2 a can. Oh, I just knew I was rolling until the second evening when I got back from the test of course with more beer to sell. I was confronted by the Sargent on duty who asked what did I have in my pant legs. Busted !!! Somebody had told on me. I was taken to the NCO officer in charge. The NCO officer looked like a real life version of Fred Flintstone. He was a short, thick white guy with a caveman type look. As he sat behind his desk, I was standing in front of him rocking my knees. He looked straight into my eyes and told me if I didn't lock my knees he would kick them out from up under me. As our eyes locked into each others, I believed him. His relentless stare put a hard fear in me that I had never experienced. All I could think about was my father. ” I quickly locked my knees and manned up. I was now my own man in this man's army. Captain Hernandez, our platoon commander ordered me to do kitchen duty for a week . Some type of way I avoided the kitchen duty. My combat, physical agility and shooting scores were in the top 10%. Captain Hernandez did show me favor. Drill Sargent Diaz was our platoon drill Sargent. He was from Puerto Rico. He was the the skinniest yet toughest man I' d ever met. I think we had a love/hate relationship. I was small and hard to break. Some might say “tough as nails”. He was confident, stern and hard as a rock. He was what I call a bad boy. He didn't play at all. My favorite story about him is one day he had me in a position that's called the dying roach. This position is where your elbows are on the ground and your hands are under your chin while your body is elevated up off the ground held up by the tips of your toes. An unbearable position for any length of time. One day he put me in that position. I was smiling at him. He kept me there for a very long period of time but I endured it with that big smile still on my face . He

became so frustrated at me that he threw the butt of a M16 at me. We were constantly in a battle of wills. I never did get a chance to go downtown and party during the last 3 weeks of basic training like everyone else due to my ability to keep Drill Sargent Diaz on my ass. Visiting prostitutes and getting tattoo's was the right to passage to manhood for most guys during basic training, so I felt like I really didn't miss anything. My AIT (Advanced Individual Training) was at Fort Sill, OK. I was in the Counter Battery Counter Mortar Radar Crewman School. I was the honor graduate out of the Army guys in that class. There was one guy from the Air Force whom scored higher than me. It tripped me out because I was high so much of the time on mescaline. Mescaline is a kind of psychotropic drug like peyote cactus that's used by some native tribes. I learned quickly that drinking alcohol was not my thing. I was out one night with a couple of guys in my class from Philly at the Enlisted Mens Club. The bartender recommended a good tasting smooth drink called a slow gin fizz. This drink tastes great and seduces one to drink as as many as one can until the gin kicks in. I got drunk We went back to the barracks. Some kind of way I ended up getting into a fight with these two guys. I remembered my mother warned me about drinking. People will try to take advantage of you when you're intoxicated. I fought both of them. I didn't drink after that at all and still don't. A big disappointment came for me at the end of the AIT. The rule was that honor graduate from the Army guys would be automatically promoted up a rank. I was not promoted to PFC. I spoke with Captain Sloan, the School Commander about the matter but he didn't promote me. He was a Black guy so I figured maybe he was trying to make a statement to me because there was a White guy from the Air Force that scored a little higher than me. I don't know but it didn't sit well with me. I wanted my promotion. He gave me a letter of Commendation stating that I was Honor Graduate but no promotion. He told me to wait until I get to my regular duty station and they would promote me from there. I then headed back to the Bay Area on leave before heading to Fort Hood,TX..

I learned my hustling partner from Oakland, Gary Davis had been shot in the head and killed by his older brother. Gary was 17 years old at the time and a real gangster. He had the respect throughout Oakland in a time when neighborhoods were marked off and you didn't cross turfs but he and I hustled together all over Oakland. Those days are another story. I went over to San Francisco and kicked it with my boy Roy Johnson. Roy and I had signed up to go in the army on the buddy plan, but he didn't pass the test so I went on alone. Roy was a few years older than me. He reminded me of Napoleon Bonaparte. He was shorter than me and most men but he was a giant among all men. Roy eventually let heroin get the best of him but later he did shake back. On to Fort Hood, I walked into my new home HHB1/82 field Artillery unit. As I was walking to find my room, Jeff Roberson who was the smoothest, coolest person I had ever met was walking down the hallway and asked me my name and where was I from. I told him from San Francisco and he replied "My brother lives there." He then so to speak adopted me as his son. Well, that's what the other guys called me "Roberson's son" or "Kid". He had a Buick Wild Cat and we rolled all over Texas. He was from Texas City, TX so he knew Texas pretty well. He had women in Georgetown, TX., Austin, TX, Temple, TX, Waco, TX and at Fort Hood also. He was a real player. If you didn't count their girl friend at home, most guys didn't even have one lady. Women were a precious commodity at Ft. Hood in those days. I was 17 years old and girls for me were a big priority. Roberson taught me many things. His first lesson was how to wear a Afro hair style but still be in accordance with the military standard. He showed me how to keep my hair edged around the sides, brushed down using a stocking cap over night to keep it flattened. It looked short and in compliance during military hours. After duty we would comb out our hair into a big Afro and hit the streets looking like civilians. He taught me how to drive without using hands on the long winding Texas highways. I couldn't roll a joint right so he would have to drive and roll the joint at the same time. I traveled with him all that winter. When we partied on post he would drop me off at the enlisted man's club and he would head on to the Non Commissioned Mans Club. I was on my own as to getting

back to the barracks. I felt a bit of sorrow for most of the other guys that didn't have a car or whom where new to Fort Hood. The winters on base can be mentally and spiritually draining. Most of the guys hung around the barracks drinking or getting high off whatever would come through. I could see the change that came over them being so isolated on the worlds largest military base especially with very few women around. I begin to notice during the week or so before pay day that mess hall would be crowded and tempers would flare up and fights would break out. The guys were frustrated and angry. You would need a machete to cut through the tension. There was plenty of cultural misunderstandings which led to hostility between the Black and White guys. I analyzed the situation and came to the conclusion that the atmosphere was so volatile due to the guys were broke or low on money and had to eat in the mess hall. It would be over crowded. I also concluded a large part of their stress was because they were unable to buy beer, wine or whatever their fix was. The few weeks after pay day you could breeze through the mess hall quickly hassle free and the vibe was cool. I figured out a way I could help remedy this problem. I became a purveyor of marijuana. The system that I developed of buying my weed to sale a week or so before pay day and fronting it out to the guys. They loved me for it. They were broke and needed it. I fronted it to them and they paid me on pay day. The guys loved that system. They could get their weed when they were broke. Some of them may have had PTSD or some other type battle inflicted disorder. Back then marijuana was not a option for stress and war related illnesses but my enterprise may have helped somebody. From my travels with Bro. Roberson I made many contacts and had gotten some good weed connections. Roberson was a real player. He used to tease me saying “ Bro August, you're a good catch dog, but you just don't have no bite”, in reference to my experience with the ladies. Our joy ride came to a end abruptly one fall night.. We were rolling back to our barracks. Roberson noticed someone following us. He pulled into our parking lot but did not park . He drove to the next section and pulled up by the loading dock. He told me to sit tight. He jumped out of the car and approached the back of the car. I

then heard 4 shots ring out. He had been hit 4 times. The vehicle that was following us sped away. Roberson was a true Houdini. He survived the shooting with little damage . I never really learned what the shooting incident was all about. Roberson was in to so many things and especially the ladies so it could have been about one of them or it could have been about something else. I never asked him and he never told me. He was later deployed to Germany. The system that I developed of buying and selling my weed was booming with very few problems. I was rolling with cash and still a private E-2. I bought a 1973 Pontiac Gran De Ville shortly after my birthday in 1975 at 18 years old. I had my eye on a Cadillac El Dorado but that Gran De ville was a bit sharper and definitely more unique. It was burgundy with a white vinyl roof and gangster white wall tires. It had chrome spoke rims on it as well. The powers that be were on to me that I had something going but could never catch me. They always tried to set me up , but it would be on or right after pay day when surprise inspections were held. The only thing I had on hand was cash. I remember once a surprise inspection was held and I did have a couple pounds of weed but my hiding skills surpassed their finding skills on that go round. As a radar crewman, I knew my stuff. None of the other guys in the radar section had been schooled in operating the radar unit and knew little about the intricacies that the job entailed. Bro. Bryant was a ex football player from the University of Pittsburgh and was in the army to help his family financially. Bro. Smith was from Nebraska. Our driver and mechanic was a white guy named Jones. When our section leader, Sgt. Milo was transferred , Bro. Smith became acting Sargent and section leader. We trained hard in the field and were all friends ready to go to war together. In early spring 1975 Bro. Smith needed to go home and get married. I lent him the money to go on that journey. Later during the summer of 1975 he turned on me and reported me to the Captain Duckworth for not cleaning my weapon. I really could not believe it. I thought he had my back. I certainly had his back until that point. I guess he passed the acting Sargent test. We got into a physical altercation because of that issue. While fighting I got my hands on a shoe brush, I drew blood from him and left him with what I'll call a pussy on his forehead.

He didn't report that incident to the Captain, but I did learn not to fight when witnesses were present. One other time I had a dispute with a guy, but we privately locked ourselves in a room and fought it out. After the fight, we came out of the room but left our dispute there. No witnesses no proof which meant no reprimand from the powers that be. The not cleaning my weapon punishment cost me a weeks pay and I was given an article 15 which is a reprimand that goes on your record setting you up for worse things to come. I really didn't mind the weeks pay but it was the principal of the matter. He knew I was handling something or another that day. I was always the man with the plan.. Things began to go down hill from there. I was later given a second article 15 for being 2 minutes late. Another weeks pay and a second crucial bad mark on my record. I began to understand the psychological tactics of the military. Divide, conquer and then empower those hungry for power. A power seeking person will follow directions from an authority figure without questioning morality, spirituality, common sense or compassion. A person with a thirst for power will do well in the military until going by the book boomerangs back at them when they become the target of the book. The US Army officially stopped deploying troops to Vietnam in July of 1975. The war was about to end. That's when the war on Blacks seemed to start. Our company commander, Captain, Duckworth began to play psychological games with us. He didn't care for my intelligence or self confidence. He told me he didn't understand me. He said, "He didn't think that I had the little guy syndrome because he had seen me competing athletically with other guys." He saw the compassion and love I exhibited to them. He saw the respect and love they displayed to me. He couldn't figure me out. He called me to his office one day asked me, "Private August, what do you want to do after you leave this man's army?" I replied, "I'd like to go to college." He introduced me to the phrase "menace to society." He told me, "Private August, I wouldn't want you in any school around my kids because you are a menace to society." I was 18 years old and didn't know what to think. During morning formation inspections I started to notice he would target me and other black troops. This applied to the black guys that they feared or didn't like. PFC Jones, the

white guy in our radar section would look like he slept in his uniform wrinkled up and all along with his scuffed up boots. The captain would not comment anything about his appearance. He and the First Sargent would ride certain black guys back for any little thing they could find. One day Bro. Bryant lashed out at the First Sargent for harassing him. As I said, Bro Bryant was an ex football player. He told the First Sargent who used to brag that he knew karate, “You think you know karate but I know crazy, I’ll kick your fucking ass” in his James Brown voice. Bryant was immediately transferred to the mental hospital facility at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, TX. We never saw Bro. Bryant again. The sole purpose of the military is to defend ones country, family and self from your enemies. I was beginning to see who my enemy really was. Most of the Black troops saw this but continued to try to play the game. Everyone had their own personal reason for their service. Money and financial stability was a common denominator for many guys Black or White. Things were getting real weird around that time. Many of the black guys were getting early discharges from the army called a Chapter 13. They were putting them out of the military left and right without any benefits. They didn't need us any more. The war was over. Captain Duckworth suggested that he would put me up for a Chapter 13. I asked him, “If I'm so bad and a menace to society why don't you Court Marshall me and send me to Leavenworth Military Penitentiary? ”. In my mind I was thinking I'd rather go to jail than be dishonored in military service. It also occurred to me since I was so bad maybe I needed to go to prison so I could connect with some real bad guys and learn how to get good at being bad or at least get some good connections. He replied , “Private August, you need to go back to the Bay Area and find the highest hill you can, then go sit on top of it. When you find out what you want to do, then come down and let us know.” Failure for me was not an option. How would I feed, clothe and take care of myself? My mind began to click. These people have tried to use not just me but many other Black men to fight this war and now they want to throw us away like trash. Once the “man” is on your back in the military, everything changes even your friends and buddies turn their back on you. They don't want the

man on their back because they're associating with you. To survive in the military during peace time you have to have a dog eat dog mentality. The saying is "Cover Your Own Ass". During a war time deployment the mentality is "Cover Your Buddies Back." I've heard stories of many friendly fire deaths that occurred but not recorded as such during the Vietnam War. They still didn't have much on me to warrant a bad discharge, but then the unexpected happened. I was taking a friend to get his heroin fix one night in Killeen, the city outside Ft. Hood. There were what appeared to be a bunch of hippie looking white guys hanging around in front of the house. It didn't alarm me. We pulled up to the house in my car, which was burgundy with a white vinyl roof, a gangsta white walls and chrome spoke basket rims. My friend got out the car. Suddenly these hippie looking guys drew down on us with handguns. I panicked and tried to fight them off. I thought they were trying to rob us. I wasn't about to get robbed. I hustled too hard for my cash. I had a big wad of money in my pocket. It turned out that they were the police. They were undercover police waiting for Texas Slim whom was a known dope dealer and pimp to make his dope drop. Texas Slim had a vehicle that looked similar to mine; however, it was a Cadillac though. The police made a mistake and I messed up their sting. They were mad. While sitting in the back of the police car, Detective Scroggins one of the hippie looking undercover detectives sat in the back seat of the car with me. He hit me very hard between my legs in my groin with the butt of his gun and said, "Nigger, the next time a white man tells you to freeze, Nigger you freeze". At first I really did think they were trying to rob us. Unfortunately, I had a little marijuana in my pocket. This was great news for Captain Duckworth. He finally had something to warrant beginning the Chapter 13 bad conduct discharge procedure. I was booked for possession of marijuana and released back to my military unit. I started thinking and soul searching. What's the next play? What's gonna become of me? Captain Duckworth already wants to destroy me. The war is over and my services are no longer needed. By any means necessary I must win so I devised a plan. I began looking for someone to shoot me in the right side of my chest away from my heart. I forgot about the fact that I have a lung

also on that side. I was blessed and a bit lucky that the bullet and fragments missed my lung. I hoped that at least I would get a medical discharge and some money to work with when I got back to the real world. This was my play since Captain Duckworth felt I was a menace to his society and was trying to dishonor me with a bad discharge. I was willing to pay for the shooting service but I found a guy who jumped at the opportunity to do it for free. He said “ Shoot a nigga, shit I'll do it for free ” but I did pay him for his service. He was a Black guy from Tennessee. The Tennessee click of guys always seemed so raw and uncut. I just needed someone to handle this business so I could advance my plan. All went well, he shot me and dropped me in front of the hospital on base. I stumbled into the hospital shot and bloodied up. The pain was bearable. It wasn't as bad as I had anticipated it to be. There, I lay in a hospital bed in pain for 24 hour without being given any pain medication. I was told because of the nature of the wound being so close to my lungs that the doctor didn't want me to have any pain medication. The doctor was concerned that it may have punctured my lung. He wanted to monitor my breathing and vital signs without any interference from any narcotics. I was never in jeopardy of losing my life. The bullet lodged on my right side in my upper shoulder. It shattered off my ribs and scattered thought out the right side. Later I was Honorably discharged from the Army, but I didn't get the money that I was playing for. I played out that scenario because Captain Duckworth pushed my hand with his quest to ruin my life with a bad discharge and assertion that I was a menace to society. I didn't want to hit the streets living the outlaw code **“Get money by any means necessary”** or **“Get it how you live”**. I didn't want to return to the world with that type mentality or train of thought. It would be dangerous for me as well as for other people in the world, but I knew one thing. It takes money to survive in the world. I've never looked at money as a source of power, but knowing it's a needed resource for survival. When I discharged out of the Army with my benefits, I felt a sense of optimism integrating back into society. The world now would be a far safer place and hopefully I wouldn't end up another negative statistic on the demographic charts tracking the young Black American male....Or would I ???

