The Bull  
By Richard Martinez

Get up! We’re going into town and we’re waiting on you!” The voice shouted through the phone and disrupted my peace and sleep. I was exhausted from traveling, but I grabbed my wallet and jacket and ran through the door into the waiting taxi. Paul, who was one my shipmates, looked at me and said: “We’re running with the bulls!”

My brain slowly kicked in: “You’re kidding?” A rush of excitement replaced the peace I had just been enjoying.

Driving in the taxi, I remembered a different morning at a different time. I was excited, scared, and tired from travel. The recruiter who helped me sign the dotted line said goodbye and wished me luck as I left Los Angeles. When I arrived in Chicago, yelling and shouting greeted me. The RDCs wanted to scare us and keep us on our toes.

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On the drive to the village, I saw mountains, colored with a vivid green. When we passed a mule pulling a cart, I knew we were near the village. We were dropped off where the bulls were to run. Adrenaline rushed through my body. My knees felt weak. I reached into my jacket and realized I brought my camera. I watched locals, running towards one of the major streets. We went to the party with the villagers from the Azores of Portugal. The villagers could tell we were military and laughed at us. Maybe they thought we would be the entertainment…at the end of a bull’s horn. A kid told us to get ready. Once we saw the signal flare go into the air, we were supposed to start running. My palms were wet with sweat.

I wonder if I made the right decision. No one in my family suggested I enter the military. It was my decision. I have not slept in 48 hours and I am rushed from one place to another, yelled at by men only a few years older than me. I can tell how they enjoy the rank and power over the new recruits. The RDCs bark their orders at us, intimidate us, and insult us. They move us from one room to another as if they, like Bulls, have horns. They run the show and we are the entertainment.
The locals had set out food and alcohol on tables. All of us had a few drinks to take off the edge. I couldn’t believe that I was about to run with the bulls. I looked up and noticed the worn brick buildings that lined the cobblestone streets. I watched the beautiful green-eyed women who stood on balconies. The young boy we had talked to earlier shouted out: “Run!” Up the street, I saw the crowd spill out onto the street, trying to avoid being trampled by a bull. Everywhere people yelled. Soon, the locals and my companions heard a bull roaring through a nearby street. When he charged in our direction, we ran for our lives.

The drill instructor is loud and angry. Always shouting, never talking in a normal tone of voice. He is as cold as the night air and doesn’t care. I am scared and yet I am not. I know I have to do what he says. I almost want to say something back. We are nothing but automatons with no names, only the last four digits of our social security number. My new name is 6757. I have no identity.

I ran down the street but the bull was too fast. I could hear him snorting as he raced around the corner. He crashed into walls and slid down the road while intimidating the crowd. I climbed a fence to take pictures of the monster. Then another bull appeared and banged his horns into the walls, showing us no mercy. He was the sound of charging thunder, ready to strike at anything in his way.

Richard Martinez was born and raised in Los Angeles. After graduating from high school, he served four years in the Navy with distinction. During his time in the military, he visited many countries but is glad to be home. Richard enjoys collecting vinyl, drawing, and writing. He is a member of the Student Writing Collective.

Photo: Alex Schnitzler