

# Boots on Manhattan

## A Writing Sample

-Part I of The Novel Trilogy- *The Foot Soldier*  
- a Novel & Film Trilogy By Ray Boylan & Johnny Blue Star  
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Summary: Deuce Lacey, a teenager, whose father, Sergeant Lacey, is in the military, but owns a cigar store in New York in the late 1940's, discovers his father's secret diary. His father's remarkable story sheds some light on his own background and family history, something he has always strongly desired to understand. His curiosity in reading these pages- as developed in these samples- is well-rewarded.

**SEGMENT FROM THE NOVEL VERSION  
OF “BOOTS ON MANHATTAN”**

**CHAPTER VIII  
SKEETER**

For Rabbit, although the release from apocalyptic hell was a distinct blessing, he still had to deal with the physical realities that immediately followed his prolonged drenching. So, finally home and shivering with a towel wrapped around his soaking clothes, Rabbit walked down the hallway past the storeroom. *Fucking minnows!* He thought.

He then went to a garbage can near the storage room, pulled off his shirt and shook it out. A couple of minnows fell out into the can. *Absolutely ridiculous*, he thought. He went up to the bedroom to put on a new shirt and dry himself off. His hands were still notably shaking. Rabbit was very upset, but also determined.

He reached under the bed and pulled out a small toolkit. Then he walked back down the stairs and went into the storeroom, where he took out various instruments with which

to pick the lock on the safe. He felt despondent. Why did he have to resort to such measures?

Rabbit truly loved his father, as flawed as he was—and he truly didn't like to lie to him or do something incredibly deceptive like this. But in his heart of hearts, Rabbit had a sense that part of him was half-starved inside, starved for affection, starved for a sense of personal power, but even worse, starved for the tiniest scrap of information about himself and who he was.

You can't really know that much about yourself if you don't know anything about your parents. And Rabbit knew less than nothing. It had just taken one glance at the diary to know it probably contained a lot of things he wanted to know about his father, and probably, indirectly, about himself. His father, the cigar shop, his relationship to the military, and his personal history, were all just one big secret that had gnawed at his gut since he was about nine years old and he had started to ask questions.

Now was his time to find out. The safe now open, he pulled out the diary and began to read . . .

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*Hell, I don't know who, if anyone, will take a look at this, but, if they do, maybe I should introduce myself.*

*My name is Max Lacey. I'm currently an Intelligence Officer, a sergeant in the U.S. Army, assigned to a unit in the Philippine jungle. Not my happiest assignment. Too dangerous, not the best fit for my skill set. And uncomfortable as hell. Damn mosquitoes everywhere.*

*Recently I was hurriedly moving along with my unit, looking around, taking mental notes. Somehow I was able to focus despite the explosions and gunfire all around me. Clipboard in hand, I jotted down what I could not afford to forget while stepping over dead bodies. Suddenly there was massive gunfire. Soldiers in my unit dropped all around me, dead or wounded. Even Sergeant Greenwald, who ran the platoon, went down suddenly. I rushed over to him immediately, tried to revive him, but when I moved his head I saw a bullet wound right above his ear. I then realized he was as dead as a doornail.*

*Most of the surviving soldiers were crying out in pain as the medics made it over to them. Suddenly, Lieutenant Mercer walked up to me, while I was still at Greenwald's side.*

*"Well, Lacey," he said, "better look around. Looks like this is your unit."*

*"I was assigned here for two days, Lieutenant. I'm making a recognizance of troop movements for the general. I don't know shit about combat."*

*"That's too damn bad. See that hill?"*

*"Yeah," I said, "it's swarming with Japs."*

*"Take it!" he said.*

*"Lieutenant, I'm trying to tell you. I'm a pencil pusher."*

*"You do what I say, Sergeant."*

*I could not believe what was being asked of me. "You want me to be responsible for—?"*

*"I want you to do your goddamn job."*

*Mercer then turned to the rest of the unit's survivors and announced, "Greenwald's dead. You bastards do what the sergeant here tells you to do. You got it?"*

*I was unsure of myself but did not let that stop me from answering the call of duty. I signaled the men. Just as I was about to give my first order, the lieutenant smiled at me grimly and threw me a Browning Automatic. Technically a rifle, it was basically a light machine gun. At my command, my men marched toward the hill. But now all of them could clearly see there were Japanese soldiers crawling like ants all over it.*

*A private voiced my own fears, "They're all over the place. How we gonna make it, Sergeant?"*

*"I don't know," I answered truthfully. Then, feeling the dark humor of the situation, I added, "If I see MacArthur, I'll be sure to ask him."*

*Then something strange happened. A kind of light switched on inside me. It is hard to describe, but it was like an energy, a strength, if you like, that I had always felt inside of me, but it had never switched on.*

*I nodded at the private, and then with some strange determination settling in my jaw, I started running toward the hill with my machine gun in hand. My enthusiasm, if that's what it could be called, was contagious. We ran uphill for*

*several minutes, me leading the way. I felt my confidence build, ready to do the impossible.*

*But then, with all this going for me, while running at the top of my game, I hit the top of a ravine, tripped on some branches and toppled down the side.*

*All my men could do was watch as I literally tumbled down into the middle of a Japanese machine gun nest. My fall was so fast and out of control that my men looked at each other, sighing and shaking their heads, certain that they were about to witness the end of the shortest command in the history of the US Army.*

*Before I reached the bottom, the Japanese noticed me and started firing, but somehow my toppling and zigzagging down the hill enabled me to elude the bullets. My men stared down in amazement as I somehow managed to land on my feet at the very end of my fall. I then proceeded, single-handedly (out of necessity, because no one was backing me up) to take on the whole nest of seventeen armed men. My little sputtering Browning killed all of them. As the last Jap fell to the ground, I*

*smiled. I felt vindicated and uncommonly sure of myself. That little spark inside had gotten brighter.*

*Two of the G.I.'s at the top of the ravine looked down in astonishment. I heard one say to the other, "Did you see that?"*

*"I don't believe it." He then pointed over about twenty feet away, where Lieutenant Mercer was similarly looking down in silent amazement.*

*I stared at the bodies around me, drinking in the moment as my men trailed down the hill. If I could do this by myself, what might I manage to accomplish with a unit of trained men at my disposal? Or was I somehow something more? Something special?*

*When Mercer reached the bottom of the ravine, he asked me, almost rhetorically, "How'd you do that?"*

*"To tell you the truth, I don't know. But it felt like me—if you know what I mean . . . Damn, it felt good!" Something had opened inside.*

*"You still feel like going back and counting heads?"*

*"No, Sir," I answered.*



*“Good. Because I alerted headquarters about your little exploit. Hey, there’s no one else to lead these men! You’re now in charge of the unit—permanently.”*

*Mercer then walked away. As he passed by, one of my men said in a low voice to the lieutenant, “I swear I never saw anything like it!”*

*Mercer stopped to say, “Take care of him, son. He’s in command of your unit.”*

*“But—” the soldier began to protest.*

*“He’s an anomaly, what you might call a natural soldier. Damn, I never saw one either.”*

*That evening I cleaned the lanterns in the camp, taking them down and dumping moths, mosquitoes and various dead bugs into a large tin bowl. I even had to brush a few out of the mosquito netting where they had gotten stuck. While I was doing this, another sergeant came in and said, “You got any new orders?”*

*“Not that I am aware of,” I answered and dumped another lantern full of bugs into the bowl.*

*“What the hell are you doing?”*

*“Collecting a few dead bugs.”*

*“What in hell’s name for?”*

*“Psychological warfare.”*

*The sergeant looked at me askance. “I always thought you were nuts, Lacey. Now I’m sure of it.” Then he simply turned around and left.*

*I went outside after him, but instead of following the sergeant, I went over to Private Benson, who was busy painting a small jeep camouflage green. “Hey, can I have a can of that?” I asked.*

*“You can have anything you want, Sarge. I was standing on top of that ridge when you hit bottom and decimated those Jap bastards . . . ”*

*“You in my platoon?”*

*“No, Sir.”*

*“You wanna be?”*

*“Hell, yes!”*

*“That won’t be any trouble. I’ll just have to speak to Mercer.”*

*“Okay,” he said, quietly, probably surprised at how easily he thought I could slip him into my platoon.*

*“Well, don’t just stand there. Get your gear. You can bunk over there—with me. I need a man who’s good with paint.”*

*“Paint?”*

*I left with the can, leaving Benson to ponder what I might be up to.*

*At night in my tent, I lay there quietly, listening to the sounds of the Philippine jungle outside. Suddenly, I heard heavy steps approaching the entrance and, before I could get up, Lieutenant Mercer stepped inside.*

*Skipping introductions, he said, “There’s a rumor running around that the Japanese have just burned a town, but they left behind a big supply dump. Trouble is, you got to cross that river. This side’s swarming with Japs.”*

*“Is it doable?”*

*Lieutenant Mercer said with sincerity, “Only for someone like you, Max.”*

*I smiled. It felt good to be needed. “I’ll give it a shot, then.”*

*And I did, that very night . . .*

*On the outskirts of the Japanese encampment there was a lone Jap unit somewhat sheltered from the sight of the rest of their camp by a promontory. Almost isolated, the unit was a perfect target. We made quick work of them, sneaking in with knives and bayonets. Not a shot was fired. Then my men assembled some of the small Japanese boats tied at a nearby pier, in preparation for our crossing.*

*While the boats were being readied, Benson and I engaged in a little psychological warfare. I mixed my collected dead bugs into the paint I had to create a grisly concoction that I dabbed on the cheeks of the dead Japanese. Benson, good with a spray can, painted graffiti on one of the Japanese tents. The graffiti consisted of a pictogram of a mosquito and, in bold, green paint underneath, the word "SKEETER."*

*Our work done, we then ran to the boats, which were already leaving the shore. My platoon and I all crossed the river without incident, and when we reached the other side we took a trek through the jungle. Not too far in, we came across a huge supply dump, including some heavy machine guns. We loaded*

*and readied the wagons we found there, hauling away as many supplies as we could carry.*

*The next incident significant to my story actually occurred inside the Japanese camp. As my writing progresses, you will understand why I was privy to such privileged information about such an incident regarding the enemy.*

*About this time, inside one of the tents, Private Mi-Cha Kang, a Korean forced to serve in the Japanese army, stood at attention before a Japanese corporal. The corporal was responding to a fervent request from his private.*

*“Yes, I agree, Mi-Cha, you have done famously as far as prisoners go. You have outdone everyone in my platoon.”*

*“Then let me go,” pleaded Mi-Cha. “Let me do it. I will seek out the bastard and kill him.”*

*“It would do a lot of good. Many of my men are superstitious. The way he defaces our dead soldiers is disgraceful. Alive or dead—it would be beneficial.”*

*“Then, please, Corporal, let me go.”*

*The corporal weighed his options. “I know you are impatient. Despite the fact you are Korean, you are one of my*

*best men. But, let me be frank, you want to take an all-Korean unit into the jungle on a search-and-kill mission. But what will keep you from going over to the American side?"*

*Mi-Cha looked genuinely surprised. "You think that of me? I thought you knew me."*

*"I know your father." The Corporal almost left it at that, but then added, "He is in jail now. One of the most serious trouble-makers in Korea."*

*"He disowned me when I enlisted."*

*The Corporal choked a small laugh. "I would hardly call it an enlistment, Mi-Cha."*

*"I went in readily. That is why we are not on speaking terms."*

*"Your father isn't on speaking terms with anyone. Outside of your brief visit which the command structure graciously granted him, he has been in isolation for two years. Besides—despite the fact you have captured over thirty of the Americans and Filipinos—you have not one kill under your belt."*

*"Let me remedy that. Let me hunt down the Mosquito."*

*"We'll see. I'll think it over."*

## CHAPTER IX

### JACK

Rabbit paused for a moment, drinking in his revitalized image of his father. But, why, if Sergeant Lacey was such a big-shot war hero, did his father's life seem so desperate and petty? And was he resorting to criminal activities to enlarge his income? Gunrunning was obviously a crime and it was equally clear that his father was smuggling weapons to another country.

Furthermore, there was a certain sense of doom hanging over his father, as though, no matter what he did, there was no hope for something better. Although his father did well, despite the smuggling of expensive armament, how come there was seldom any real money around? And why did they have to live on the top of a damn cigar store?

Somewhere, there were answers. Rabbit looked up, hoping they were in the diary he had just opened once again, and then continued to read—

*I was moving quickly forward with a few men in the Philippine jungle, when we were suddenly surrounded by a*

*large number of Japanese soldiers. Despite my desire to fight, I knew we had no chance of winning. We were altogether outnumbered. It was too much of a surprise and we were forced to surrender. I held up my hands and stood there mutely, while they searched every inch of my clothing, weaponry and field gear. I was searched first, probably because I was the only officer present. Then they searched everyone else.*

*Apparently, they felt they hit pay dirt when they found a green spray paint can in Benson's knapsack. At the time, Benson was about twenty feet away, but I could see the paint can in a Japanese sergeant's hand and they had begun to beat him unmercifully. Realizing that they were associating the paint can with Skeeter and they were trying to beat my name out of him, I stepped forward.*

*I was quickly surrounded and separated from my entire unit and had to face a Japanese platoon, standing at rigid attention. The Japanese corporal signaled one of his privates to step forward and assist in my interrogation.*

*The corporal barked an order at the private. Then the corporal said something else—more slowly and deliberately.*



*The private translated it to me then (and throughout the rest of the short interrogation): “So, you are the psychopath defacing our dead soldiers?”*

*I shrugged, spreading out my hands in a questioning manner. “Who me?” said my body language. “What are you talking about?”*

*My reward was to have the Japanese officer strike me hard on the face. The corporal spoke again, his angry voice shouting as the private translated, “What! Nothing to say? Come, let us hear the buzz of the notorious American Mosquito!”*

*The corporal then hit me in the stomach with the butt of his rifle. He turned to his men and commanded, “Tie the bastard to the tree.”*

*Soon enough, I was bound to a tree. I looked defiantly at my captors, expecting the worst. The sergeant then picked up a Type 100 submachine gun and threw it to the translator.*

*“Okay, Mi-Cha—here’s your chance for your first kill. Prove yourself. Finish him off . . .”*

*Mi-Cha looked down at the submachine gun in his hands, lifted up his head, and then, without even a quiver of emotion,*

*proceeded to mow down the corporal, swinging quickly over to finish off the other Japanese soldiers. He ran over to me, bloody and beaten, and pulled me up quickly, practically dragging me into the jungle.*

*Later, in the Intelligence Division American Headquarters, I found myself standing at attention, while a very serious looking major addressed me, saying, "We have vetted his story. He is the son of a prominent dissident, Chul-Moo Kang, maybe a Communist, but still a firm opponent of the Japanese. He speaks five languages fluently. We're going to use him. Good work, Lacey."*

*"Good work?" I almost laughed. "He saved my life and asked if I could bring him in as a prisoner. I didn't do shit. Jack did everything on his own."*

*"Jack?"*

*"I call him Jack. His name sounds like something I would order in a Chinese restaurant."*

*"Well, then, Jack sounds all right. Let's just say it all worked out extremely well for all parties, Lacey."*

*"I'd say so."*

*“We know you’re a big hero now, Lacey, but HQ wants you and Jack to scope out what’s going on around the coast of Luzon.” The major paused, took a deep breath. “You know things have not been going well here in the Philippines. The general is making some critical decisions and what we are doing in Luzon is a prime matter of concern. We need on the ground intelligence, something you used to be good at.”*

*“The coast? That’s a pretty fucking dangerous place to be.”*

*“Frankly, it’s almost certainly a suicide mission. That’s why you can say no.”*

*“I can say no? It’s not an order?”*

*“It’s more like it’s a volunteer mission, but you two are the only ones qualified to do this. We briefed the general. He wants you to do it—if you will.”*

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*Later, I was in my tent with Mi-Cha, squatting on the floor and eating fruit.*

*“Did you get that, Jack? MacArthur actually knows who we are. He asked for us personally.”*

*Mi-Cha heaved a sigh. "We'll probably be killed."*

*"I'd say so."*

*He looked at me, serious. "Who do you have at home?"*

*"Just a son. I'm divorced. My son is staying with my cousin."*

*"Isn't that rare? For a father to have custody?"*

*"She was a raging alcoholic. And, well, she assaulted me."*

*"Where is your son?"*

*"He's with my cousin Eddie and his wife Isabel. We used to be very close before I left. But now, I guess my son and I don't know each other very well. He probably won't even miss me if I don't come home."*

*"That's sad. My father's in jail in Korea. The Japanese don't like him. But they liked me enough to force me to enlist. But I played the loyal colonist lackey since I've been here. In fact, I begged them to go after you."*

*"I was popular, heh?"*

*"Well-known and roundly hated. The Japanese are very proud people," Mi-Cha explained. "They see you as someone*

*shaming them by defacing their dead. I don't know what they'll do if we're caught."*

*"Does anyone know what you did?"*

*"I doubt it. I killed every single damn one of them."*

*"Well, do you still have your uniform?"*

*"No one asked for it so I kept it."*

*"Wear it, then, when we leave tomorrow morning."*

*Mi-Cha looked intently at me, probably wondering what my plans were. Well, he would find out soon enough.*

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*Late in the afternoon, out in the Philippine jungle, when we knew we would be in Japanese-controlled territory, Mi-Cha dressed in his Japanese uniform. If we were captured, at least he would have a cover story. He would be my prisoner and I would be the bad American and, if we got away with it, he would be able to return to his unit. In that case, things might go slightly better for us. Who knew for sure? So any way, when we went out in the field collecting intelligence, this was our fallback position—and we dressed for the eventualities.*

*We had been in the field for about a week, surprisingly successful in not being captured and noting the presence of Japanese soldiers, hundreds and hundreds of Japanese soldiers. Neither of us thought we would survive, but we still took precautions. Better captured than killed. Better me captured than both of us.*

*So, in order to disguise us, whenever I left to get food, a responsibility I assumed, I would shackle Mi-Cha to a tree. His idea, not mine.*

*This time, I started a fire before I left, and with some difficult positioning, Mi-Cha could tend to it when I was gone—without being able to free himself.*

*He looked ridiculous—bound and trussed like the French might have done with prisoners in the ancient Bastille. All those chains and handcuffs were heavy, but he demanded we carry them before we left base camp. I thought maybe it was ridiculous, but I did get a kick out of tying him up.*

*Unfortunately, without thinking, I left a pail near the tree, filled with green paint and dead insects. Just in case we killed a Jap or two along the way.*

*Looking at him this way, I again questioned the sanity of leaving him so alone. What if some animal came up and ate him?*

*“Is this really necessary, Jack?” I asked.*

*“Yes. As long as we are in enemy territory, even for a few minutes, I must look like your prisoner. Otherwise, they'll kill me in a second.”*

*“How about me?”*

*“They'd never kill you immediately, especially if you keep that disgusting pail of green paint around.”*

*“What will they do to me?”*

*“Nothing very nice, Lacey.”*

*“I'm going fishing.”*

*“Good. I'm hungry as hell.*

*A few hours later, I came back with a few fish I was lucky enough to spear. Mi-Cha, who was tending the fire with a severely shackled left hand, looked up, smiled, acknowledging the catch. I removed the shackles from his hand and gave him the frying pan. He then dumped a bunch of wild onions into the pot and took the fish from me.*

*We both looked up suddenly, hearing a relatively inconspicuous rustling in the bush. We both thought it some kind of an animal, perhaps a wild pig. We froze for a moment, curious, but not worried. The “not worried” part disappeared when dozens of Japanese stepped out of the bush and surrounded us.*

*Considering the area was swarming with Japanese, even more so than we contemplated, it was almost a wonder we survived a week until we were captured. And, when we were, Mi-Cha got credit for my capture—a feather in his cap and, with his continuing freedom, a tiny possibility still remained open for our eventual escape.*

*Inside one of the Jap tents, Mi-Cha’s superior spoke with him about me. “So, Mi-Cha, you finally had your crack at the Mosquito and—?”*

*“This was not my unit, remember? I was just a translator. I asked for my own unit. I was not responsible for their failure.”*

*“I understand,” said the corporal. “Still, it must have been humiliating to have been captured by this man.”*



*“I am not happy about it, but I was not involved in the decision to raid that little village. It was thoughtless and dangerous without proper reconnaissance. They walked right into an ambush. Skeeter had a lot of men with him. They killed everyone except me.”*

*“And why were you so lucky?”*

*“Before the ambush, when we had caught Skeeter on the outskirts of the village, I translated during his interrogation. As we were leaving the camp, Skeeter’s men jumped us. Skeeter probably wanted to steal me as a translator. Who knows? He wouldn’t let them kill me . . .”*

*“I’m sure you think that explains everything. Well, at least he’s here, regardless of whatever really happened. Clean yourself up and get back to your post.”*

*Soon enough, Mi-Cha was asked to translate during my interrogation. I was being forcibly interrogated by several Japanese while the corporal stood by. Two interrogators were in the front, rapidly firing questions at me. Mi-Cha’s discomfort was obvious as he translated what was said.*

*I refused to answer, ignoring them. So they jammed their batons into my sides and stomach. All I was willing to do was to parrot my name, rank and serial number. Each time I repeated that formula, they slapped me.*

*The corporal muttered something in Japanese I would later learn meant, "Tough son of a bitch." Then he ordered his men to stop and turned to Mi-Cha, saying, still in Japanese, "We have definite evidence that the Mosquito is an intelligence officer."*

*"How would you know that?" asked Mi-Cha.*

*"One of our prisoners broke down. He blew the whistle on this bastard. I guess he was the one forced to paint our soldiers' bodies. He hated Lacey's guts."*

*The corporal nodded for the interrogators to leave before continuing, "I have orders not to kill him. They want him back in the homeland. They think they've got better interrogators than we do."*

*"I doubt that," said Mi-Cha, matter-of-factly.*

*"Me, too. The jungle somehow whets your appetite to get all you can out of a prisoner."*

*"You're quite right."*

*“Looks like I have to send him to Nagasaki. They think he may be a big deal.”*

*“Will they kill him?”*

*“Probably. He will undoubtedly be shot for what he did to our soldiers. But, before that, they will squeeze out of him all they can manage.”*

*“I wish them the best of luck.”*

*“I have done you a big favor, Mi-Cha. A chance to wring at least a drop of glory out of his capture.”*

*“And how’s that?”*

*“I have asked them to let you to accompany him. He will be your prisoner, and you can assist the interrogators.”*

*“Why would they want me?”*

*“You have first hand understanding of the challenges we face here—the American and Filipino army, their strategy and resources as well as the terrain.”*

*The corporal looked down at me, lying in a pool of my own blood. “He’s rather damaged merchandise, for the moment. They’ll probably let him heal for awhile before they break him into little pieces again.”*

## CHAPTER X STORE INVASION

Back in the storeroom of the cigar store in New York City, Rabbit was sitting on the floor in the corner of the room, reading about his father's past military exploits, when Sergeant Lacey flung open the storeroom door.

"What the fuck are you doing here? What's this?"

"It's your diary, Dad."

"You read my diary, you little son of a bitch?"

"You should be proud—"

Sergeant Lacey switched subjects. "How'd you get into the safe this time?"

"Let's just say I am multi-talented."

"So you pick locks now?"

"I can," affirmed Rabbit. "So what?"

He felt defensive, but then let that go as his heart filled with pride for his father. "You're a war hero, Dad. A war hero! I know everything about you—"

Sergeant Lacey cut him short. "You sure as hell do not."

"You mean there's more?"

“No, I . . .”

“Where is it, Dad? I want to read it.”

“There is no more, God damn it.”

“You’re lying, Dad.”

“How the hell do you know?”

“I can see it in your eyes.”

“Well, if there is, you’ll never see it. It’s private.”

“What did the Japs do to you, Dad?”

“None of your business.”

“Did they torture you? Is that why you go to all these doctors?”

“You keep asking questions like that and I will definitely turn you over to your cousin. I promise you.”

“I want to read the rest.”

“You never will.”

