

The Duck

H & S Company 3rd Armored Amphibious Tractor Battalion was on a forced march across Vieques, a small Caribbean island owned by the U.S. government and used for military training. There were civilians on the island, but they kept away from the marines.

During the march, the men were given a rest stop beside a well overlooking a wide valley. Within minutes, Fenner, a hulking lance corporal from West Texas came back cradling a duck. It wasn't pleased and kept squawking until Fenner put it back on the ground.

"Watch this," he said, holding the duck's beak against the dirt, and then drawing a straight line away from its beak. Dropping his hands, the marine stood up, leaving the duck motionless, staring at the line in the dust.

"Learned that on our ranch. It won't move until I release it from the spell. It'll be here tomorrow, when we come back. Watch and see."

The Gunny told them to fall in and moments later they were marching up the hill leading to the bivouac area.

Just before they went around the bend, Mark turned back.

The duck was still motionless alongside the road.

The next afternoon, hot, dusty and tired, they hiked back from the training area.

Walking at the end of the formation, Mark heard the laughter before he saw what everyone was laughing at.

It was the duck, still trapped inside Fenner's hypnotic spell.

Coming closer, Mark broke ranks and ran over to the duck. He didn't know exactly what to do, so he brushed away the line in the dust that led to the duck's beak, and then he lifted the duck and tossed it into the air.

For a second the duck fell back toward the road, then its wings grabbed the air and it flapped away toward the valley.

"Why the fuck you do that for?" someone shouted from the formation.

"It would have died there," Mark answered.

"So?"

Mark ran back to get into ranks. "So now it won't."