

Het volgende fragment is het begin van hoofdstuk 10 uit het boek Front Lines, geschreven door Michael Grant.



Rainy Schulterman – Military Intelligence School, Camp Ritchie, Pennsylvania, USA

Rainy stands before Colonel Derry in his office. She is at attention. He leaves her at attention while he makes a show of looking over her file.

Rainy has a pretty good idea what he's seeing there: of the forty student soldiers in Rainy's class, she is first in German fluency, second in her command of Italian and French, fifth in the math skills that are particularly useful in deciphering coded messages, consistently scores well in her comprehension of the handbooks and lessons, and reads a map reasonably well. She seems to have an intuitive grasp of aerial photography.

On the downside – or what Colonel Derry will no doubt see as the upside – the report from basic training indicates that she can't shoot worth a damn, can barely raise the heavy M1 to aim, and is of no use whatsoever in hand-to-hand combat.

Rainy's instructors – even the "sensible" older hands, who, like Colonel Derry, believe that women have no business even being here – give her high marks for leadership. And neither the censors nor her fellow soldiers nor her NCOs nor her officers have ever gotten an indiscreet word out of her.

She can, in short, keep a secret, a fact she's exceedingly proud of.

Colonel Derry is not a subtle man, and his motives are not hard for Rainy to grasp: he had obviously been hoping to wash out all the females. This is no longer basic training – basic training is almost impossible to wash out of since the army is quite keen to fill uniforms. But this is an elite school, and eliminating the weak is a legitimate part of its role. In fact, as Rainy knows very well, of the initial forty in the school, three women and five men have already been reassigned.

Rainy 30 every one of those reassignments so far. She shares the desire to graduate only the most capable. And when it comes to capable, Rainy Schulterman stands out, trading first place back and forth with

Sergeant Andy Sprinter – Andy Sprinter who stands six feet three inches tall and could toss Rainy Schulterman in the air like a drum major's baton.

Rainy holds her attention stance. Colonel Derry is *willing* her to break attention. He is *willing* her to speak out of turn. But she stands there with her arms at her side, back stiff, chin up, eyes level, barely breathing.

I can stand here all day if that's the game you want to play, Colonel.

"At ease."

The change from full attention to at ease is slight. Proper but minimal. She will not show relief.

"Private First Class Schulterman, what do you think of this school?"

"I think it makes a vital contribution to the war effort, sir."