

– Thee Queek! –

After orientation, our first weeks of army Basic Training were devoted to: learning to march, conditioning exercises, and some basics of infantry combat. No order prompts more fear and dread for a foot soldier than, *Fix bayonets!* This means hand-to-hand combat with the enemy is expected and may require using your rifle as a spear. Practicing the methods of fighting with a bayonet brought home the reality that, within a few months, our lives might end in a painful and terrifying death.

Fortunately, one of the redeeming characteristics of our species seems to be the ability to find a sliver of humor in almost any calamity, and so, in spite of the morbid prospects of bayonet fighting, we did. The director of the Bayonet Committee happened to be my Platoon Sergeant, Staff Sergeant (SSG) Rosario. We actually liked Sergeant Rosario, an unusual sentiment for basic trainees when applied to a Drill Instructor. He never engaged in the harassment or sadistic behavior displayed by some of the other DI's, and he was the only DI who occasionally smiled during interactions with us. Sergeant Rosario was of Puerto Rican heritage, and the irony of a Puerto Rican teaching the art of knife fighting was not lost on us. He would begin each bayonet exercise with the same chant, shouting from an elevated podium, "*There are two kinds of bayonet fighters!*"

After a slight pause, he would add, "*The quick...*"

followed by another pause, "*...and the dead!*"

His black eyes would slowly scan the group of trainees before him. Then came the question, "*Which kind are you?*"

At this point, we were expected to shout back, as loudly as possible, "*THE_QUIICK!*"

Sergeant Rosario had a rather pronounced Puerto Rican accent, so, phonetically, his question during the chant sounded like *thee queek* to a bunch of Midwestern white boys.

Even in our downtrodden mental state, we couldn't resist shouting back at the top of our lungs, "*THEE_QUEEK!*"

Our instructor never failed to smile at this pronunciation, and it became one of our rituals. I'm sure he recognized the subtle joke, and probably realized the utility of distracting our terror with a bit of humor, so we could better concentrate on what he was teaching. At least for me, the ruse worked.