**Judecca, Ohmen Medical Clinic, 39 ABY**

I, Sparky von Wagglehorn III hung suspended in a light emerald green bacta tank. I slowly opened my eyes and peered around the room I was in. The pain from my wounds sustained on Antenora during a recent engagement felt dull, and my mind seemed muddy from the medications. Glancing through the green haze, I felt my mood darken as I realized he’d likely be stuck in this tank for quite some time. The deafening silence was almost enough to overwhelm me. Yet in the distance, I felt like he could hear recruits training in the courtyard I knew existed just outside the outer clinic wall. The sounds of the cadences brought memories flooding back into my mind…

**Judecca, Advanced Combat Training Camp Aurek, 38 ABY**

It really wasn’t long ago at all, though sometimes it feels like ages. Especially considering some of the actions I’ve seen recently, my body and brain feel so much older than the 19 years I’ve commanded in this existence, but I still remember the first day of my basic combat training as vivid as if it just happened. That’s honestly a lot more than I can remember about my recent engagement on Antenora.

My grandfather and father had both actively prepared me for this first day of combat training. My own grandpa was one of the few remaining veterans of Vader’s mighty 501st, and I was going to be damned if I let him down. He’d tried to teach me all sorts of things as a kid. While other kids were out playing games or inside playing holoball, I was cleaning my E-11 Blaster or plinking at targets with my grandpa’s old slugthrower. My own father even, despite being more inclined towards piloting, actively taught me the survival and evasion skills needed if I was ever to be found behind enemy lines. While other kids dreamed of their futures, mine was never anything but a cold, hard, pre-determined course of action. Yet nothing they taught me in my early years prepared me for the first time I met Drill Sergeant Florent.

“LISTEN UP YOU FILTHY PIECES OF FEK”, Drill Sergeant (DS) Florent screamed at us, as we poured off the hoverbus. It only went downhill from there, as he, in graphic detail, described just how similar we were to the mound he left in the refresher that morning. The next hours were spent performing a variety of tasks, which were deemed “mission essential” by the DS. I scarcely had time to take in my surroundings, but was very aware that the small , two story red brick building in front of me was likely my only home for the next weeks.

Of course, that was before I realized how much time we’d be spending in the “pit”. Shortly after his initial warm greeting, he and a few other drill sergeants rapidly approached our small line of recruits. They immediately grabbed our packs and through them on the ground, dumping our meager belongings from home all over the cold hard dirt. After they dumped our gear out, they started grabbing recruits by the collars and throwing them down into the dirt as well, commanding everyone to start crawling as low in the dirt and sand as possible to the other end of the field, a mere 100 meters away. A few kids didn’t know what to do. One started crying. I never saw that kid again, as I shoved my face in the dirt and got as low as I could to start crawling. I still wonder what they did with that recruit. His family never saw him either.

Most of us got about halfway through the dirt pit when the drill sergeants started shouting again. A kid, named Speck, to my immediate right looked at me with a glint in his eyes. He seemed to actually be enjoying this! We were commanded to return to our packs, on the double. Those of us that were left (two recruits had quietly packed their things and returned to the bus, and the crier was gone) sprinted back to where our packs had been strewn about.

“PACK YOUR SHIT, WARRIORS”, the DS commanded. I didn’t even care which stuff was mine! I grabbed everything I could reach in front of me and threw it all in my pack. From there, the drill sergeants had us drilling the rest of the afternoon. We’d hold our full packs above our heads, out in front of us, and run back and forth across the 100 meter dirt pit all day. By the end of that first day, we were pretty broken, mentally and physically.

The next day wasn’t much better. It was a series of “disciplinary” exercises in the pit. More dirt. More running. More crawling. More yelling. Less tears. At one point, a drill sergeant pulled out his blaster and fired random shots over our backs as we crawled through the dirt. A kid wet himself.

That night, after our first meal there, we were ushered into an auditorium. The room was nearly 30 meters tall, made of cold grey stone. The 20 or so recruits left were guided to very utilitarian rock benches that surrounded a small stage, where a single man sat in a nondescript black uniform. We sat with our backs stiff at attention. The cool air flowing through felt good, and the small echoes throughout the cavernous auditorium were somehow reassuring.

The man sitting on the stage had jet black hair, slicked back down behind his ears. His eyes were grey and his face seemed vaguely familiar. His black uniform didn’t have a single medal, nametape, or pocket on it. He stood up to a small stone podium to address us with a pleasant smile.

“Good evening recruits. My name is First Sergeant Jed Otano.”, he said as he smiled again. He proceeded to walk us through the requirements to graduate, his long career as a stormtrooper, and his love of all things imperial. He informed us that the primary camps we had all come from indicated that we were the best. That we’d be going on to be officers and leaders in the Clan Scholae Palatinae military. It was actually a nice evening. The cool air felt great, and 1SG Otano seemed to actually care about us. I remember going to bed that night happy to be a recruit, despite the constant pains in my muscles and dull sensation in my brain.

Those warm feelings were gone when the door to our barracks opened at 0300 in the morning. 1SG “Smiley” Otano came storming into our small barracks area, rapidly throwing chairs, bunks, lockers, packs and everything all over the place. His face maintained a look of steel fury as he grabbed recruits and threw them to the ground.

“GET OUT GET OUT GET OUT!”, he screamed. We all, in various states of dress, poured out into the pit area just outside the barracks and formed up in two lines, best we could. After about 8 of us had exited the building, 1SG Otano and the drill sergeants started grabbing the recruits who hadn’t made it out yet, and subdued them facedown to the ground. Eight of us had made it in formation, with the remaining 12 now lying face down in the dirt just outside the barracks entrance. A cool rain was starting to fall in the darkness. There was a small glow coming from inside the barracks. 1SG Otano strode slowly, purposefully towards the eight of us in formation.

He spoke, cold fury emanating from his very being, “You eight are the only ones who would be alive had this been an attack. You would have just lost twelve brothers in arms, all because of your selfish desires to put yourself above the Empire”. I felt so indignant! Here I was, getting in trouble, because I was faster than the other twelve? Was he kidding? He wasn’t. He proceeded to smoke us by having us do a mixture of running, push-ups, and sit-ups for the next three standard hours.

At 0600, we were released to the wild. When I say released, I mean that 1SG Otano told us that we needed to escape the “rebel” attack and evade until extraction came. We were all confused, and none of us moved initially. It took a few stun blasts to a couple recruits for the rest of us to make ourselves scarce. We ran, all 16 of us that were left standing.

The next few days all blurred together, as we broke into small teams to try and evade 1SG Otano and his drill sergeants. We could only assume that once captured, we’d be kicked out of the course or beaten or something. None of us wanted to find out. Speck and I spent those days hiding out in dug outs in the dirt, drinking rain water and eating grubs. This is where I was truly grateful for my grandfather’s training when I was young. Speck seemed to come from similar stock. Periodically, at night, we’d hear stun blasts in the distance, with a choked off scream or yell. We assumed that meant one of our brothers had been caught.

Three nights into our impromptu survival exercise, they caught Speck and I. I really can’t describe it well, as I don’t quite remember it. One minute I was sleeping huddled up in the dirt, the next I was waking up from a stun blast, subdued in a make shift cell back at the barracks courtyard. I’m not certain what all happened, but we were down to six recruits. After my training, I’d heard that most of the ones who couldn’t handle the first week had been drummed out and sent off to different military schools, where they might be more useful.

**Judecca, Ohmen Medical Clinic, 39 ABY**

“Lieutenant Sparky, LIEUTENANT SPARKY”, the doc said as he shook my shoulders. I immediately came to, as light flooded into my vision. I felt the soft press of white linens on my skin, and the pain I had felt in the bacta tank was gone. I must have fallen asleep during my walk through memory lane.

The doc spoke, “Well there LT, you gave us quite a scare. That business on Antenora just about killed you. Good think you’re a Camp Aurek Grad, those instructors sure know what they’re doing”. I smiled to myself my memory flashed through the remaining weeks I spent at camp. Though that first week had been absolutely hellish, the time I spent at Camp Aurek had clearly paid off.