

the separation center

a g.i. purgatory

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A separation center is a great institution — one of the greatest. It's a place where every guy would like to go, but a place he wants to leave as soon as he gets there. In other words, as a temporary abode, the more temporary the better. Sooner or later, you all have to go, but you don't have to come back. Very few do.

A Separation Center is like a number of things:

(1) It's a sort of GI purgatory—a place where Servicemen can cleanse themselves of their "sins" before entering into civilian life. That's why there's a pearly gate at the exit of every Separation Center. When you pass through that gate, brother, you're on your own, and there's no hard-hearted bosun mate to tell you what to do any more. You'll probably feel as light as an angel, but what you think is Gabriel blowing his horn is really only the sound of several taxi cabs blowing

at you because you're standing in the middle of the street in a dream. It won't take you long, however, to wake up to the fact that the tweed suit you saw advertised for \$22.50 back in '42 sells for fifty smackers now. . . . Suppose something happens, though, and you don't make the grade into that heavenly civilian existence—then your soul goes straight to—what I mean is, they'll probably enlist you in the Marines or something.

(2) It's a sort of preparatory school for civilian life. There you learn how to become a civilian in one easy lesson. It's a very exclusive school, however; none but people with very good points are accepted. You matriculate without cost, and for your diploma, you get a thing called an honorable discharge. The only degree you get is a degree of satisfaction. What you learn there is very basic. They teach you to tie a four-in-hand instead of a bowline; they teach you to peg your pants instead of spiking them, and to call a wall a wall, a floor a floor, and a bathroom a bathroom.

(3) It's a boot camp in reverse. You have to unlearn everything you learned. It is very similar to these demobilization camps which have been set up for all the service dogs, so they can go back to their owners reasonably tame and docile. This way, we can be sure that none of the discharged servicemen will go around biting people once they're loose.

(4) It's a reconversion plant—just like they're doing with the war industries, only with humans instead of guns. The special processing makes a new man out of you. A guy goes in a sailor, comes out a civilian, qualified, tested and approved. The only difference is, if a man suffers a breakdown, then you can't send him back to the factory for overhauling.

