

The Shoe-Glo Agent

by Dennis Payton Knight

I was stationed at Fort Richardson, Alaska. My unit was a detachment maintaining small aircraft for the U.S. Army Alaska Aviation Battalion. We weren't very military in that outfit, but once in a while we were made to stand inspection to evaluate our fitness for soldiering as measured by the shines on our boots and belt buckles.

One of my pals in the barracks hailed from Michigan, home state of a then-new multi-level marketing company, built on the premises of representatives recruiting representatives below them, who in turn would recruit another layer, and so on. Companies following that business model will sue you for calling their businesses a pyramid scheme, so I'll ride with their preferred euphemism, multi-level marketing.

PFC Jackson's mother had secured a position with the company and recruited her son as a representative, thereby beginning the process of building the first strata of agents needed to make her fortune. Jackson didn't have much of a market in the barracks for the company's dish soap, beauty aids or anti-aging creams, but the need for shines on boots provided his niche. He sold Shoe-Glo, a plasticized substance in a spray can that would yield a spit shine so luminescent it would otherwise have taken quarts of expectoration and two rags to accomplish. Shoe-Glo got me through inspections, and I was a happy customer.

A year later I was reassigned to New Jersey to serve in another Army Aviation unit embedded in an erstwhile blimp hangar at Lakehurst Naval Air Station. It was my lucky break, as it gave me the opportunity to live the entrepreneurial dream as a Shoe-Glo agent.

Jackson wasn't interested in recruiting me into his own strata, but he connected me to purchase Shoe-Glo at wholesale by way of his mother. I managed funds to acquire an opening inventory of a dozen cans of the stuff, and I was in business. I sprayed free sample treatments on the dress shoes and boots of soldiers and sailors stationed at Lakehurst and managed to sell that case and several more.

And then July rolled around, the heat rose, the humidity index zigged to its highest of the year, and along came the announcement of a visit by the Inspector General or one of his surrogates. The night before I could smell propellant in the air, and knew, with self-satisfaction, that Shoe-Glo had been deployed generously about the barracks.

I awoke the next morning, not to a bugler's Reveille, but to the uproar of my name and ancestry being taken in vain, and saw the shine on the toes of my own boots had cracked into small facets in the dampness. A fresh application of the product, instead of restoring the glow, turned it to glop.

I don't recall the rating we got in that inspection, but I'll not forget the testimonials of my customers. "Knight! You son-of-a...."

And that, my friends, is the story of my career as a Shoe-Glo agent.