'Who will pay that kind of money to stay on a diet? People who are desperate, people who have tried everything else . . . '

Joe Bones

Mean in the name of lean

By JOHN CARR

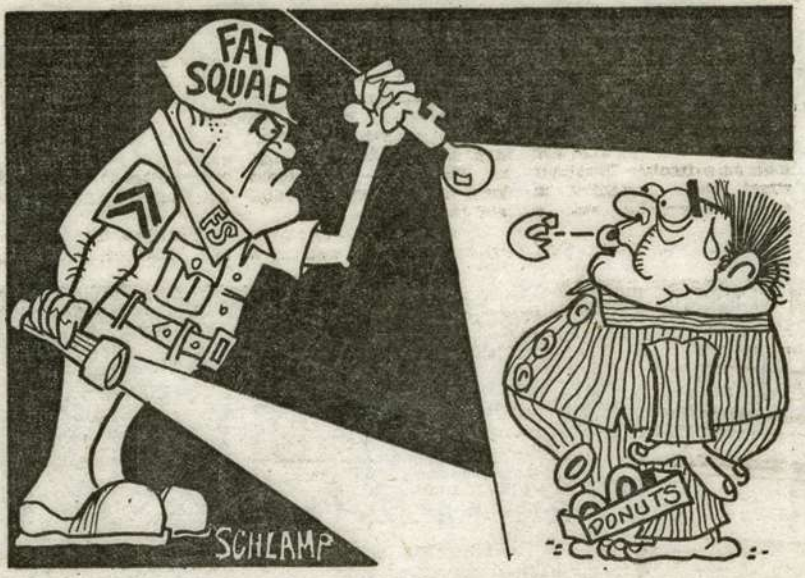
The refrigerator door opens silently in the night and a sliver of light scores the linoleum floor.

Suddenly, the still dark is shattered:

"Freeze, turkey! Drop it. NOW!"

The Fat Squad strikes again.

"We're strict. In fact, we're mean. We're the Fat Squad commandos, and we're proud." That's Joe Bones speaking. A nice person, basically, but a bad hombre when it comes to dieters. See, the dieters pay him $300 a day, and he or one of his commandos moves right in for a little intense surveillance.



Ever vigilant

"We are on the job, breakfast, lunch and dinner," he said. "We are even there in the middle of the night. The Fat Squad commandos never sleep."

Bones runs a new business designed to make diets succeed for people who have tried everything else. When you hire the Fat Squad, you don't cheat on your diet. They don't let you.

Also, when you hire the Fat Squad, you can't fire them.

"We move in and we provide the discipline," Bones said. "If need be, we will tie you to the bed to keep you from breaking your diet."

Your $300 actually buys you three commandos, each on an eight-hour shift. They go to work with you, come home with you, accompany you on dates.

Reasonable force

The client signs a document allowing the commandos to use "reasonable physical force" to prevent the dieter from eating "unauthorized food."

If you don't want them listening to your every word, they will wear headsets that block out the sound. But they will watch you, and they won't go away. Once you hire these commandos, you are stuck with them for the term of the agreement, which is at least three days.

"That's the crucial period with dieting," Bones said, "just as it is with smoking."

(You also can rent commandos who won't let you smoke, but so far nobody has.)

After the $900 for three days, you can add extra days at the rate of $250 each.

Desperate remedy

"Who will pay that kind of money to stay on a diet?" Bones asked rhetorically. "People who are desperate, people who have tried everything else and can't take the time to admit themselves to a health spa or a fat farm."

When you sign up, the Fat Squad "shakes down the place," Bones said. The refrigerator and pantry are cleared of all foods that are not on your diet. Other parts of the house, including the bathrooms, are searched for "caches." "You don't trick a Fat Squad commando," Bones said.

The Fat Squad has been operating in the metropolitan area for about three months. Its headquarters are at 107 Waverly Place in Greenwich Village (phone: (212) 254-7878), but the commandos will go anywhere.

So far, the Fat Squad has had 40 customers and the number of inquiries is going up, Bones said. "We get good word of mouth," he explained.

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