

mybooxite.com

The Enemy Soldier

Carlos Navarro

He must have dozed off for a moment. Last he saw, Jimenez had been right there in the hole with him. But now Jimenez was gone. Probably went back to re-group with the squad. He and Jimenez had got ahead of the squad, or lost them, and ended up here in this hole, an artillery crater really, not thirty yards from the enemy line. He could hear them talking, and their wounded moaning. They must have taken a direct hit. 'Our guys sure know how to work those mortars,' he grinned. But now he had to stay awake. Been, what? Two, three days since he had an hour's sleep. 'Gotta stay awake,' he kept telling himself, until Jimenez returned with the squad.

He must have dozed off again because he didn't see the enemy soldier. He didn't see him running up to the crater and jumping in. By the time he did see him, the German was almost on top of him, giving him no time to reach for his rifle or draw his side arm. But luckily, by chance, he had dozed off with the bayonet in his hand and, at the last moment, when the German's body was a foot from his, he swiftly pointed up bayonet, and let him fall on it.

They lay there, the two of them, face to face, gazing into each other's eyes, as if recognizing something in them, or expecting an explanation, but saying nothing, not uttering a sound, save their heavy breathing.

The German was about his age and size, same complexion, same gray eyes and close-cropped auburn hair. Reminded him of his brother Zeke, and of his father when he was young. And by the way the German was looking back at him, blinking, knitting his brow, it seemed that he, likewise, reminded the man of someone he knew. Everything between them was similar, near identical, except for the uniforms and insignias on the sleeves.

Who was this man? At first he didn't care to know. Just another Nazi soldier, a barbarian, a threat to his country, a brain-washed fanatic he had to kill or else be killed by him. Nothing to feel bad about. He was doing his duty. But then, he looked up and saw that the sky and the trees and all things outside the crater had become a gray blur; and he realized that at that instant in time, in that Godforsaken hole, that he and the man lying on top of him were intimately alone in the world; that they had been inextricably bound by fate in a brotherhood of their own.

So, no, he wouldn't, he couldn't just ignore him and get on with the war. He would wait until his body went limp, then turn him over and search his pockets for ID or a wallet with photos of his family. All soldiers, even Nazis, have a family back home, parents, siblings, maybe a wife and kid. He would keep the German's ID and photos, and maybe someday, years later, after this war was forgotten, he would contact his family. By then he would know what to tell them. The man might have done the same for him.

But then, when he tried to move, he felt a weakness come over him, and saw the bayonet slip from his hand. The German had not impaled himself on the bayonet as he had thought. As he fell on him, he had deflected the bayonet with one hand, and with the other sunk his field knife deep into his abdomen. The blood soaking their uniforms and the ground around them was his blood, not the German's.

When Sergeant Jimenez returned with the ten man squad, he was dead. Spriggs, the medic, inspected the wound, the slushy pool of blood, and shook his head. "Abdominal aorta. Severed."

"He musta dozed off when the Kraut jumped him," Jimenez conjectured, clenching his fists, his voice heavy at once with sorrow and rage. "Otherwise it would be the Kraut who'd be lying there dead."

Spriggs laid a comforting hand on Jimenez's shoulder. "With a wound like that, he must have died in seconds. Probably never knew what killed him. At least he didn't suffer."

Before covering him up with a blanket, they searched for his dog tags and through his pockets, but found nothing.

"Sonafbitch! The goddam Kraut took his dog tags and wallet with all the photos of his wife and kids. He used to show them to me and talk about them every chance he got."

"Them fuckin' Krauts, they're like that," commented another man. "They have no respect for the dead. Probably took the tags and pictures as trophies to show off to his buddies and gloat about it."

"May he get his soon," Jimenez hissed, "and take a long, long time to die."

Word crackled over the radio that the enemy had retreated, and the squad was ordered to sit tight until further notice. The rest of the day they took turns catching up on

their sleep and standing guard. At night, they came out of the crater and buried their dead buddy in a patch of daffodils that miraculously had been spared the artillery barrages from both sides of the line.