

Fallout from the Shank's Bootees Tale

With that story, I had found my writer's pen in the darkness of the Korean War. I had something of importance to say.

I scribbled out that story that night in Korea for myself. It came from my pent up desire to express what I was feeling and observing. My literary head co-existed with my military mind in my sore body - all at the same time.

I composed it the only way I could, in pencil on paper. Straight through from beginning to end. No drafts, or rewrites. And without thought of what my mother might do with it other than keep it among her son's letters. I sent it as much to lift her spirits - against the increasingly grim possibility of my death or injury -- the way the war was going.

It was months later I learned that my dear mother had typed it out after reading and rereading its message of hope where there was seemingly no hope. Then she approached a woman who lived in the same Shirley Savoy Hotel in Denver - Mary Chase, who had written the popular national play about a 6 foot rabbit called 'Harvey.'

Mary Chase, according to my mother, was struck by the story's beauty, right while Americans were only reading dark news about defeat and death, not life, in the ugly

Korean War (9)

Category: Korean War

Published: Wednesday, 27 July 2011 20:13

Written by dave

Hits: 5364

War. She told my mother that she had contacts at the editorial level of the Ladies Home Journal - as much a literary journal then as a ladies magazine. Could she send it onto them? Mother of course said yes and gave her the typed version.

In due course, unbeknownst to me - who was still fighting a war that would preoccupy me for at least another year - the editors liked it so much, coming right during that grim winter of war they wrote my mother that they wanted to print it, unchanged. And pay me \$500 for its 1,000 words. And also to get from her, background about who I was and where i had come from. They wanted to print that also, with the story.

That all would take some time for a monthly magazine to carry off, but it was done. So 'Shanks Bootees' was published with that large illustration (making Shanks look younger than he was). It was nationally published in June 1952 just after I had returned from Korea, while the war was still going on, though truce talks had started. Below is that sidebar, and the photograph she sent them, that the Army Press service had taken the morning after a particularly tough battle on Hill 339 I won with my company. The Army in Korea tried to send good photos and some stories of soldiers to local newspapers where their next of kin lived. In that photo I am carrying a

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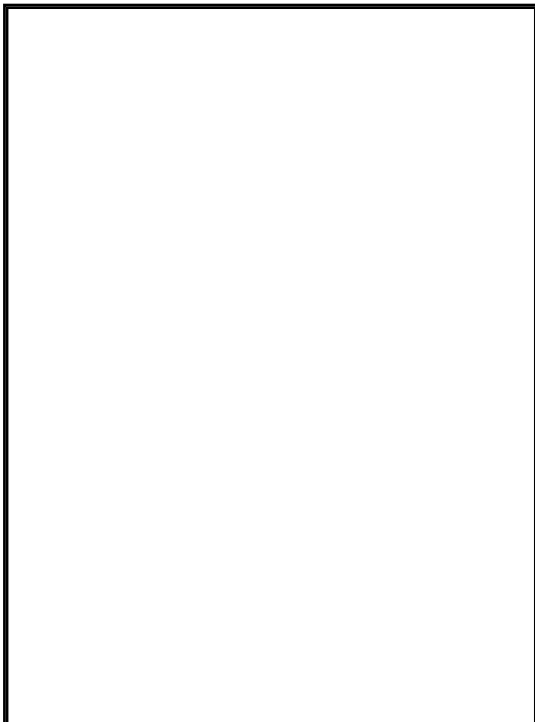
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Thompson Sub machine gun, not an issue Carbine that I had taken off a dead Chinese soldier I had killed. It became my preferred weapon. And I had a captured Chinese whistle around my neck.

In this case the publication went national - to 6 million subscribers

Sidebar to the Shanks Bootees story, printed on the same page as the story.

From the Ladies Home Journal June 1952



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Lt. David R. Hughes
the day after Hill 339

(Since Shank's Bootees came to us through the author's mother, we asked for more information about her son. Her brief factual reply tells, by understatement, a story so typical of the courage expected and accepted from our young men - and their mothers - that we asked permission to share it with our readers. LHJ Ed)

Denver, Colorado

Lt. David R Hughes, age 23, was born and raised in Colorado. His father died when he was six years old.

He received an appointment to the United States Military Academy in 1946.

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He graduated from the Academy with the class of June, 1950. In October he was ordered to Korea with the 7th Cavalry Regiment, First Cavalry Division. After two months in battle he was promoted to First Lieutenant. Later he was made commander of his company.

For his actions in Korea David has been awarded two Silver Stars, one Bronze Star, the Greek Cross of War, comparable to our Silver Star and the Distinguished Service Cross. He has also been awarded two Purple Hearts.

Sincerely

HELEN HUGHES"

Needless to say, that story got quite a bit of attention, even in writer's articles about it as a story "from the front lines" of Korea. After I got back to the US, as did Lt Shank, his family got a lot of attention too, for his last name was unusual. The couple even visited me, with the baby, in 1952 as they passed through Fort Benning, Georgia.

As recently as 2009, an adult professional daughter of that baby, now a 50 year old father (Shank was her grandfather) contacted me about more copies of that story. Shank survived the War, as did that baby who grew

up with a family of his own, and a third generation, whose last name is still Shank, contacted me.

I have heard and read of others who have sent out that story as a Christmas Card in years following.

Many ripples came from that small literary snowball I had tossed onto the ice of the frozen Han River, Christmas, 1950. A trade magazine "Writers Digest", claimed I was a new literary find. I could have turned to that future - but I had committed to a full military career fighting wars, while just writing about them incidentally.

I only got bits and pieces of what was happening to it while I was in Korea. I was busy.

But I had found my literary voice in War, after I was matured by combat and had something of significance to say - while yet I was leading men I had spent 4 years at West Point preparing to do. My thoughts about my men and war, my responsibility of leadership, became significant subjects I wrote and philosophized about later.

After I wrote Shanks Bootees in that bleak winter of 1950. I lost my sense of depression from the grim things around me and the uncertainty of the future. Writing was my outlet. And would be my legacy if I were killed. Life had deeper levels of meaning. And I had purpose which I could articulate. And so far I seemed to be leading my

men tolerably well.

The Presidential Speech

Then, in early July, 2013 came another, bigger fallout.

As the 60th Anniversary of the signing of the Korean War Truce, on July 27th, 2014 approached, President Obama's Speech writer was searching for some upbeat material about the ugly war and he encountered my 'Shank's Bootees' piece on the Korean War Project Web Site where I had posted it as a kind of Christmas tale in 2000. He seemed to be greatly touched by it. He tracked me down, asked permission to work it into the President's remarks - which I granted - and then set about trying to find Richard Shank, who would be about 85 as I was. With some tips from me on how to find Shank's granddaughter (the daughter of the baby boy who was born in 1951) who, in 2005 contacted me about the story, the White House found Shank in Gainesville Florida.

So the President, besides telling about my writing the story, told about Richard Shank now, at 85.

That speech was internationally broadcast over television. And Richard Shank whom I had never seen or heard about for 62 years contacted me.

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Those short excerpts from the President's speech are [HERE](#).

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