

Again from Korea. Again from a mountain top.

Yesterday I took out a patrol. It was Sunday ... a Sunday with-
out services ... a Sunday out in that troubled land that lies be-
tween two armies. There is no room for a church on our misty
hill in this lonely land of many battles.

No, the day seemed only like a wet, slick day anywhere, and
I wondered, as we moved down the slopes to seek out our en-
emies, why the feeling of Sunday had so completely deserted
me. But the ridges, and the woods, and brush, soon pulled our
bodies into a shallow sort of fatigue, and thinking became tire-
some. We wandered far, under the fitful skies.

Then, a group of Chinese who had been waiting, opened up
and shot our lead man ... and we suddenly became involved in a
short, sharp struggle of grenades and bullets. But we, at

a dis

advantage, had to pull back without our dead soldier.

Yet we knew what we had to do, and soon we set out again to

risk much to get to him. This time we moved - not to gain knowledge, for we knew about our foe - not for ground, for we

were turning back - not for glory, for we had been there a long,

long time. We returned into a holocaust of bullets to recover

the symbol of someone who had been so alive a short while

before - and we returned in the hope that we, too, would be

treated in the same way, were we ever there.

We set out, taut in every nerve, moving in a high-tension sort of way. I happened to look at the wet, bony wrist of some

one beside me. He gripped his rifle with a chalky hand.

Flesh

and caution, against the savagery of bullets and sharp little frag

ments

We set out...an intense group of men ... under that

terrible,
broken sound of artillery, and the snicker of machine
guns in
the bushes. Then, in a final, fearful second of confusion -
in a
second of awful silence, one gutty private crawled up,
and with
the last ounce of his courage, pulled our soldier back to
us.

We had succeeded. We started back, rubbery legged
and very
tired ... feeling a little better, a little more certain there
would be
a tomorrow. We had done something important. We were
bring
ing our soldier with us.

Then it was night, and the rain was soft again. We drew
up
on a nameless ridge and dug into the black earth to wait
for the
enemy, or for the dawn. The fog moved in among the
trees. I
sat for a long time looking at the end of the world out
there to
the north.

Korean War (21)

Category: Korean War

Published: Wednesday, 03 August 2011 11:07

Written by dave

Hits: 3453

Nine months in a muddy, forgotten war where men still
come
forth in a blaze of courage. Where men still go out on
patrol,
limping from old patrols and old wars. Weary, jagged war
where
men go up the same hill twice, three times, four times, no
less
scared, no less immune but much older and much more
tired. A
raggedy war of worn hopes of rotation, and bright faces
of green
youngsters in new boots. A soldier's war of worthy men -
of
patient men - of grim men - of dignified men.

A sergeant sat beside me. For him, twelve months in the
same
company, in the same platoon, meeting the same life and
death
each day. Rest? Five days, he said, in Japan, three days
in Seoul...
and three hundred and fifty-seven days on this ridge!
Now he sat
looking, as I was, at the same end of the world to the
north.

Nine months, and I am a Company Commander now,

with

the frowning weight of many men and many battles to carry. A

different, older feeling than of a platoon leader. New men ...I

must calm them, teach them, fight them, send them home whole

and proud ... or broken and quiet. But get them home.

Then

wait for new replacements so the gap can be filled here, that

gun can be operated over there.

There is much work to be done. I must put this man where he

belongs, and I must send many men where no man belongs. I

must work harder and laugh merrier... and answer that mother's

letter to tell her of her lost son. Yes, I was there I heard him

speak I saw him die. So, in many ways, I must write the

epitaph to many families.

There is always that decision to make as to whether a man is

malingering or sick ... whether to send him out for his own

sake,
and for another's protection, or return him for a necessary
rest.
And one must never be wrong.

One must be ready and willing, always, to give his life for
the least of his men. Perhaps that is the most worthwhile
part of
all this ... the tangible sacrifice that an infantryman, a
soldier,
can understand.

I see these things still I am slave
When banners flaunt and bugles blow
Content to fill a soldier's grave
For reasons I shall never know

Now it is raining again. The scrawny tents on the line are
dark
and wet, and the enemy is restlessly probing. It will not
be a
quiet night.

Lt. David Hughes

My mother showed that letter above to the Rocky

Korean War (21)

Category: Korean War

Published: Wednesday, 03 August 2011 11:07

Written by dave

Hits: 3453

Mountain News, which printed almost all of it.

My mother got several handwritten letters about that letter and what it told them about that endless war.