

## **BLOOD FEUD**

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\*German indicated with <>\*



German Private, Eckhard Keller was badly wounded. Edmund, his twin, had seen him fall and tried, despite the pounding of artillery fire and the advancing enemy troops, to pull him into the cover of the bushes. The Americans were coming in fast and the brothers feared for their own safety. They had heard about these 'mobsters' who would kill innocent civilians and take no prisoners. Cut off from their older and more experienced squad members, Edmund and Eckhard's fear gave way to sheer panic. With all his strength, Edmund dug his boot heels into the ground and hauled back on the weight of his defenseless, wounded brother, desperate to reach the concealment of the hedges. Bullets whirred past, striking into the ground before him and ricocheting off the surrounding rubble and wreckage. The sound of the battle rose to such a force that Edmund could no longer stand it. He covered his ears and ground his teeth hard, screaming against the all consuming noise, as well as his own helplessness. The Americans were nearly upon him now; he could see their faces through the smoke of weapons fire. Time had run out. With no choice but to leave Eckhard exposed and alone, young Edmond dashed and scrambled into the thick foliage. He prayed that his elder squad mates would come to their rescue. He prayed that God would take the American's away. And he prayed that he could have been braver.



Item, King and Love Companies advanced over the ground the Germans were fighting so ferociously to hold. The battle was lasting a long time, and casualties were heavy. The medics, though considered non-combatants, risked injury from enemy firepower as much as any armed soldier, yet they made their way among the nightmarish tapestry of wounded and dead, often facing the unbearable, but necessary, decision of leaving behind those who had no chance of making it to the field hospitals.

One such medic from King Company's 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, hit the ground beside the corpse of a soldier, using it to shield himself from a hail of bullets. A break in the firing came seconds later and he scrambled into a crouching run, checking fallen GI's as he made his way forward. He'd nearly caught up with some of 1<sup>st</sup> Squad when a moan from the roadside hedges caught his attention. Staying low, Doc made his way through the smoke of gunfire and burning debris and came upon a young wounded German. Upon closer inspection, he surmised the soldier to be no more than about sixteen or seventeen years old. Despite the desperation he saw in the boy's eyes, the corpsman knew the Army's rules: take care of your own first and the enemy wounded later. But he recognized the abject fear etched around the boy's eyes, heard the silent scream coming from the gaping mouth, and went against the grain of policy. German or not, this was, after all, a human being who lay before him. And so, with the best *'I'll try to fix it'* smile he could muster, Doc pointed to the arm band on his field jacket, indicating that he meant no harm.

From the amount of blood covering the kid's uniform, he doubted there was much he could do, but nevertheless, he drew the torn fabric aside to inspect the wound. After so many months of combat, there were few injuries that surprised him anymore. Perhaps it was the absolute terror in the young soldier's expression, or maybe it was simply that he was so very young, but whatever the cause, Doc let his breath out slowly and sat back on his heels. Shrapnel had torn apart the boy's midsection. There was nothing to be done for it.

From out of the sound of firing guns, exploding grenades and the blasting of tank weapons, the scream for a medic rifled frantically on the air. Instinctively, Doc jerked his head in the direction of the voice; it sounded familiar and immediately he began to rise. But the boy, grabbed his wrist and held tightly with blood-slick hands. Having no idea if his apologetic words were understood, or much less, even heard in the din of the still raging battle, the medic leaned forward and placed his hand on the young brow. Surprisingly, the eyes that looked into his own seemed to comprehend his sentiment and his urgency and the firm grip about his wrist eased.

"MEDIC!!!" The shrieking call from somewhere in the clouds of burning wreckage, and ruin, broke the moment.

Doc patted the boy's shoulder, raggedly whispered, "I'm sorry", and hurried away in the direction of the voice that screamed so frantically for help. He did not look back. Maybe, he hoped, the kid would forgive him. Maybe God would even forgive him. And maybe, he hoped, some day soon, this damned war, and all the killing, would be over.



Edmund watched in horror as the medic left Eckhard. In his eyes, the man had deliberately deserted his brother without even trying to give him any aid.

< “Dirty American medic,” > the soldier hissed between clenched teeth. < “You will pay for what you’ve done!” > When he felt it was safe enough, Edmund went to his brother. He hauled him behind the bushes that he had taken refuge in, and clutched him protectively.

Eckhard grunted against the movement. < “Tell mother, I love her.” >

< “You tell her.” >

The injured soldier’s breathing became more labored. < “I won’t be making it home.” >

< “Sure you will,” > Edmund encouraged, holding his brother even tighter than before.

Eckhard shivered. < “I’m so cold,” > he said, and closed his eyes.

Frightened, Edmund quickly placed his hand over his twin’s chest; he felt the heart slow until it beat no more. He touched the still warm cheek. A single, primeval scream erupted from his throat and then he bowed his head over Eckhard. < “That medic will pay.” >

For two weeks Edmund followed the company that was responsible for his brother’s death. He was skittish from lack of sleep, took items of use, and food that he could scrounge from civilians and dead soldiers. He looked like a mad man -- hair a matted mess, covered in grime from crawling through filth and muddy ravines. One night in particular, Edmund awoke to his brother’s voice.

< “Edmund?” >

The voice startled the young man from his sleep.

< “What are you doing here?” >

Eckhard’s voice seemed to surround him. It was everywhere and nowhere at the same time. < “I am doing what needs to be done.” > Edmund stood and frantically looked for his missing ‘piece’, the one thing that was lost to him forever.

< “It’s not right,” > Eckhard reasoned. < “Then again, you always do what you want, right or not.” >

Edmund could hear him, but not see him. < “You know me too well, brother.” > He looked behind the tree, thinking his twin was hiding there. < “You also know that you can not talk me out of anything.” > Eckhard was always making him think twice about his decisions.

< “Edmund,” > the voice sighed, < “You will do as you always do, no matter what the cost. Only this time, your revenge may be the loss of your soul.” >

Edmund glanced up and saw nothing but dying leaves. The moon shown through the canopy, creating shadows that danced eerily around him. The only noise reaching his ears was the rustle of the breeze through the branches, making them creak. They seemed to moan, like the dying men he scavenged from. Edmund wasn’t sure if his brother had been there, and yet, he seemed so near...



At Battalion Headquarters, Captain Jampel dismissed his platoon leaders. As the men filed out, he called Lieutenant Hanley aside.

“Yes Sir?”

“I have several reports here saying that your area has a sniper. I thought your men cleaned it out?”

“They had, sir.”

“Well, when you get back, you might want to send out another patrol.”

“Yes, sir.” Hanley saluted and stepped into the sunshine. He lit a cigarette and watched Sergeant Saunders pull up in a Jeep.

“Ready Lieutenant?”

“I have a few more things to do here, but would you pick up Doc from the hospital and take him back with you?”



"Sure," he replied as he put the Jeep in gear.

"Oh and we've got a sniper in the area. I'll set up some recons when I get back. Be careful." Saunders grinned, answering, "Always, Lieutenant," and pulled away from the curb.



At the aid hospital, Saunders approached the nurse sitting behind a desk. "Afternoon, Lieutenant. I'm looking for a medic from King Company, came in early this morning."

"I think the fella you're looking for has gone to get supplies."

Saunders looked up to see Doc step into the hallway, checking his shoulder bag. "There he is. Thank you, Lieutenant."

From the far side of the room, laying on a cot, Kirby called, "Hey, Sarge!"

"Hey, Kirby." Saunders took a step toward the prone private.

"Look Sarge, you gotta get me outta here."

"Oh, now Kirby, why would I wanna do that?"

"You don't know what goes on around here."

The head nurse at the desk cleared her throat. "Private Kirby," she warned, and tapped her pencil on her desk.

"Sorry ma'am. I'll be quiet."

The medic and the sergeant stifled their grins.

Doc whispered to Saunders, "He's been warned several times since I've been here."

"Sarge," Kirby muttered conspiratorially, "you gotta help me. They're gonna kill me if you leave me here."

"You know, Kirby, I feel, as squad leader, that if you were so injured that you had to come here for a couple of days, then who am I to remove you from somewhere that can help you? Besides, I would feel horrible if you returned to my squad too soon and re-injured yourself."

"But --"

"No 'but's' Kirby. You'll be getting the best care the Army can give you. You just relax and get better."

"Sarge, you don't understand --"

A nurse approached with her hands behind her back. "Private Kirby?"

"Yes?" He smiled brightly at the dainty face. "You must be new ..."

"I just came on shift." She smiled sweetly and rocked a little on the balls of her feet. "The girls said I should give this to you."

"Oh really? What is it?" he asked, warily.

She produced a very large hypodermic needle and held it up to the light. "Now," she said, squirting some of the fluid out of the point. "This won't hurt a bit."

Doc and Saunders headed for the door. "See ya, Kirby," they said in unison.

As they reached the sidewalk they heard, "Sarge – OWWWW! You're mean!"

Saunders laughed as he climbed behind the wheel of the Jeep.

"The guys are gonna love this," Doc said snickering.

"They always love a good Kirby story." Saunders grinned as he pulled away from the hospital.

During the bouncy two hour ride back, Doc tried to grab some shut-eye.

"We're almost home." Saunders announced.

From out of nowhere, a rifle shot cracked the air and Saunders slammed his foot down hard on the brake peddle. Instinctively, he pushed Doc out of the Jeep.

"Doc?" He squatted down and scooted over to the medic. "Are you okay, Doc?"

The medic shook his head, biting his lip.

"Where at?"

Doc peeled his hand away from his right bicep and Saunders saw the small hole oozing blood.

Bullets flew past the noncom's head as he looked for an escape route. Spotting a trail that lead into the woods, he slung the Thompson and medical rucksack onto his shoulder and helped Doc up.

"Come on Doc, we gotta get going."

More bullets buzzed past, zipping into the trees as the men vanished into the shadows.

As they moved through the trees, there were times when Saunders had to drag the medic when he lost consciousness. He stopped a moment to catch his breath. Blood was seeping through Doc's bandage and saturating his jacket sleeve.

"My feet feel like lead." Doc said.

"Am I complaining?" Saunders looked at the surrounding terrain. "This looks familiar," he mumbled, more to himself than to Doc.



Edmund couldn't believe that he'd lost them! They had been right in front of him. He felt nothing but seething anger. Stopping a moment to get control, he took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and slowly released it. In the stillness of the trees ahead, a noise reached his ears.

He checked his ammo, slammed the clip home and set the rifle butt against his shoulder. He sighted down the barrel, breathed, and felt his tension ease as he relaxed into his task.



Saunders heard the distinctive click of an M-1 and dropped to the ground with Doc.

"Sorry, Doc, I heard something. I'll be right back. Stay still." Saunders patted Doc's shoulder and bellied away into the undergrowth.

But there wasn't any sign of the sniper. As luck would have it, on the way back to Doc, he found the entrance to a cave. "I knew this place looked familiar," he whispered. On recon a couple of days ago, Cajé had found this place and he marked it on the map for the lieutenant. Saunders let his eyes adjust to the darkness and he walked a short distance in. Satisfied there could be safety here, he went back to his wounded medic.



Edmund's anger continued to consume him. Sighting down the rifle he saw nothing of the two men. He fired several shots, lowered the weapon to his hip and waited. After a time, he moved forward and soon noticed fresh blood on the leaves.

With a wounded man the sergeant wouldn't get anywhere fast. The American's would probably remain hidden, at least until dark. Edmund bit his lip and glanced over the terrain. Sometimes there were caves in these hills, maybe...



After Saunders had changed the bandage on the wound, he wrapped Doc in his jacket.

"Doc?" he whispered.

A soft moan escaped dry lips.

"Doc, wake up."

The medic's blue eyes opened. "Sarge?"

"Yeah, Doc, I'm here."

"How am I doin'?"

"Not so good. You have to stop bleeding for me." Saunders patted the medic's feverish forehead.

Doc smiled weakly. "Think we'll make it outta here?"

"I don't know." Saunders looked down the dark passageway.

"Boy am I thirsty." Doc's tongue rolled over his dry lips in an effort to moisten them.

Saunders put the canteen up to his friend's lips.

"Thanks," Doc replied, licking the remaining water away.

"You rest." The sergeant capped his canteen and sat beside the injured man. Not wanting to surrender to sleep, Saunders fidgeted. It wasn't enough to keep his eyes open. Slowly, they closed and within moments he was asleep.



After much searching, Edmund had found a cave entrance. He had no need to hurry; his victory was close. Savoring his satisfaction, he sat against the nearest tree and watched the sun set.

Edmund took a deep drag off his cigarette and slowly released the smoke. The sun was fully down. "Now is the time I extract my pound of flesh." He crushed the butt of the cigarette beneath his boot and entered the cave.



Saunders heard a noise that roused him. He placed a hand over the medic's mouth and stood against the cave wall, pointing the Thompson toward the opening.

"American!" a German-accented voice shouted into the darkness. "I know that you are in here. Give me the medic and I will leave you alone. I want nothing else."

Saunders hesitated a moment, gathering his thoughts. "What do you want with my medic?"

"That's between me and him." The American didn't answer. "Fine, I can wait. There is no other exit from this cave."

Saunders heard the footsteps retreat. He waited a full minute before moving back to Doc.

"What did I do to him, Sarge?" Doc whispered.

"I don't know, but we gotta get out of here."

Saunders patted Doc's good shoulder and stood up. "I'll be right back."

Walking over to the two main tunnels leading farther into the hill, he felt a breeze on his face and then hurried back and knelt down by the medic. "Come on, I think I've found a way out."

Saunders listened for any sign of movement as he lifted Doc from the floor of the cave. The two men headed toward their only other way out.



After confronting the sergeant, Edmund had gone over to the closest tree to wait. His focus remained on the mouth of the cave and his anger mounted. He was more determined than ever to do what he had come to do. Edmund gritted his teeth, causing pain to shoot into his already tired brain. His finger tightened on the trigger and fired several rounds into the cave entrance.



At platoon headquarters for King Company, Lt. Hanley entered the bicycle shop he was using for his CP.

"Brockmeyer, have you heard back from Battalion Aid yet?" Hanley asked.

"No, sir."

"I've been back for over an hour, they should have been here before me. Try to contact them again. I want to know the exact time Saunders and Doc left."



"Yes, sir." Brockmeyer picked up the phone.  
 Hanley stepped outside to watch the road. He leaned against the building, lighting his cigarette.  
 Cajé came around the corner, almost bumping into him.  
 "Sorry, Lieutenant."  
 "That's okay."  
 "Heard anything yet?" the private asked, letting the question speak for itself, and lit a cigarette.  
 The lieutenant shook his head and took a long drag.  
 Brockmeyer stepped into the doorway.  
 "Well?" Hanley asked.  
 "I finally reached the head nurse at Battalion Aid. She said they left a good three hours ago."  
 The lieutenant stood up straight. "Three hours?" Hanley shook his head. "It's almost dark."  
 "What's the plan, Lieutenant?" Cajé asked.  
 Hanley dropped his cigarette on the ground and stepped on it. "Get your gear."



Saunders could feel the breeze on his face as he half dragged the injured medic down the dark tunnel. Stopping a moment to catch his breath, he leaned against the cave wall. He hitched Doc up a little higher to get a better grip and started walking again. With any luck, he thought, they'd find another exit from this godforsaken, underground hole.

Ten minutes later, they came to a dead end. The breeze that they felt on their faces was from a small crack that ran from floor to ceiling. It was barely wide enough for a small rodent.

Saunders sat Doc on the floor of the cave. He lit his lighter, checked the bandages, and then slipped it back into his pocket.

*I've boxed us in. All the Kraut has to do now is toss a grenade. What was I thinking?*



As Hanley and Cajé crested the road, they saw Saunders' Jeep. As soon as Hanley stopped pulled over, Cajé jumped out.

"Anything?" Hanley asked, reaching for his carbine.

As he approached the other vehicle, Cajé motioned with the barrel of his rifle. "There's blood on this side and some in the passenger seat."

The two men looked into the trees. Cajé nodded at the trail. "Sarge may have followed that."

"Let's go."

Within minutes, they were under the cover of the trees. "Lieutenant," Cajé whispered.

Hanley moved over to his scout, who held out his hand. "M-1 casings," Hanley said. "Someone was firing at somebody."

As they moved onward, Cajé couldn't shake the feeling of déjà-vu. He looked back and almost tripped over the lieutenant, who had squatted down to look at something.

"What is it?"

"More blood."

Cajé stepped ahead of the office, scanning the trees. He whispered more to himself than to the lieutenant. "Looks so familiar ..." his thought interrupted.

"It should," Hanley replied. "I sent you guys out here a couple of days ago to recon the area."

"That's it! Lieutenant, there's a cave not far from here."





Saunders heard the ricocheting bullets echoing down the passageway. He leaned down and spoke into the medic's ear. "Doc, I'm going to find a better place to hide, stay quiet."

He picked up his Thompson and moved back down the way they'd come, finding a small opening in the cave wall. It would be tight, but it would afford him some protection. Feet first, he slid on his belly into the cramped spot. Pulling his Thompson in front of him, he listened and waited.



Edmund inched toward the area where he confronted the sergeant. He moved toward the two main tunnels and felt a slight breeze from the right one. *So there is another way out.* Stepping into the tunnel, he pulled the rifle into the crook of his arm and checked the clip, clicked it into place, and put his finger on the trigger. He wasn't going to miss this opportunity.



Hanley and Cajé moved toward the cave entrance. Cajé did a quick check and found nothing except more spent casings. The lieutenant gestured that they move ahead. From time to time, they stopped to listen, and then worked their way further on.



Edmund took a slow deep breath, smelling the dusty dankness of the cave and moved forward. Unbidden, Eckhard's voice came at him from the very rock of the cave -- beneath, to the sides, above -- always in his ear, or behind him, everywhere.

<"*This is wrong, Edmund.*">

The disembodied voice rolled and echoed in his brain.

<"I have to do this!"> Edmund responded, regardless of the direction his voice carried.

Not far away, and unaware that anyone besides the German, Doc and himself, were in the cave, Saunders slipped his finger into the trigger guard of the Thompson.

The echoes of a voice reached Cajé's ears. He waited for an ambush, grip tightening on his Garand. Cautiously, moving forward, he shouted into the darkness. "Hande hoch!"

Instantly, Edmund dropped to his belly, settled the rifle butt against his shoulder and pointed it at the demanding, enemy voice.

Saunders breathed a welcome sigh of relief at the sound of Cajé's voice. He had to signal him to let him know where he was. 'Shave and a haircut' came to mind and he tapped out the little song on the Thompson's barrel, hoping that the PFC would respond.

Edmund heard the tapping noise from somewhere behind him. He turned his head to look over his shoulder, and tried to slow his ragged breathing in order to hear better.

Not far from Cajé, Hanley had heard the tapping, recognized it and responded on the wall with the answer, 'two bits'.

More tapping, Edmund grit his teeth as he shivered. He was trapped. *You gangsters won't feast on my entrails!*

Meanwhile, Doc heard a voice shout. It sounded like Cajé, but he couldn't really be sure. *Where is that damn tapping coming from?*

Cajé shouted again, "Hande hoch!" and saw the outline of an armed soldier lying on the floor of the cave.

Edmund fired into the darkness, and at the same moment, the Cajun instinctively pulled the trigger of his own weapon. The bullet hit the German once in the back.

Cajé moved to disarm the wounded soldier. He shouted for Doc.



The medic's ears rang with the gunfire and he almost didn't hear the call. Dust was settling in his nostrils making him sneeze. He heard Caje shout for him again, and he willed his body to respond.

Within moments, he saw Caje kneeling beside the soldier, applying sulfa and a bandage. Quickly kneeling beside the PFC, Doc who rolled the young German over. From experience, he knew that the man wasn't going to make it. He looked into the face of his enemy, hand resting on his neck to check for a pulse.

A bloodied hand grabbed his wrist and Doc was suddenly taken back to another place, days ago when another boy with the same face as this one, had looked into his eyes with desperation and fear. "I'm trying to help you." Doc managed to tell him. But the grip loosened and the hand fell to the floor.

The boy spoke, but his words were for someone only he could see. <"Yes, *Eckhard*, I know it now. He was only trying to help you."> The young soldier barely responded with a shuddering breath. His eyes focused on Doc. "I'm sorry, for everything."

Doc placed his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Why?"

"You left my brother to die. I understand, now, that you had no choice." A wave of pain shook his body. "You had to help others."

"This is war, there's nothing to be sorry for."

"I hunted you, that is not war, that is vendetta."

"We do strange things when we're in pain."

"I really am sorry."

"You're forgiven." The medic had given absolution before, but this time was different. Watching the young eyes release the hatred, a small spark returned.

Edmund smiled, <"I'm so glad you're here *Eckhard*."> Then he turned his gaze to the medic and asked, "Can I go home now?"

"Yes, soldier, you can go home now."

The End