

IN HARM'S WAY

By: CCK



Acknowledgement: I would like to express a huge thanks to Doc II for beta reading my story and making it so much better. Another really big thanks to KT and Doc for helping me illustrate my story. It has made it something I am more proud of than anything else I've done.

The sky grew black as night descended. This was the kind of night the men of King Company hated. With no moon shining, the area around their foxholes was pitch black. You couldn't see a foot in front of your face, let alone anyone or anything moving out there.

With everyone on high alert, their collective nerves were raw and on edge. Every sound, every wisp of even the slightest breeze caused hearts to beat faster and breaths to come in quick pants. You could almost smell the fear in the air.

Saunders lay back against the side of the foxhole, his helmet pulled down over his eyes. He hadn't slept in two nights, and he knew tonight would be no different. He too felt his heart beat faster and his breath shorten with each sound.

Saunders lay and listened as Kirby checked and rechecked his BAR. It was a bad habit Kirby had picked up whenever he was nervous or scared. Of course he would never admit to being scared but Saunders could always tell.

Saunders began taking a mental roll call of his squad. At the far end of the line Littlejohn and Billy shared a foxhole with Mihok, the new replacement. He had joined the squad two weeks earlier and seemed to fit right in. It was one of the few times Saunders had gotten a replacement that had some battle experience.

The next foxhole held Murphy and Brent. Both were good soldiers. Men Saunders could count on and trust like the rest of his squad.

Directly to Saunders' right were Cajé and Doc. The medic stayed with Cajé to treat the arm wound he had received in an earlier battle. Though the wound was minor, a slight infection had set in. Now he was running a small fever and Doc wanted to keep an eye on the scout.

Saunders sat up quickly, pushing his helmet back on his head and startling Kirby. In the distance they heard the high pitched scream of German 88's.

"Incoming!" Saunders screamed. "Take cover!"

The skies lit up like daylight as the 88's began to fall. Dirt and debris sprayed the men with each explosion as they tried to push themselves deeper into their foxholes.

The shells landed closer and closer to the soldiers as they rolled up into a ball trying to make smaller targets.

Saunders watched helplessly as an 88 landed in the middle of one of the foxholes. He knew Brent and Murphy could not have survived the attack.

Doc saw the 88 hit and immediately began to scramble out of his foxhole.

"No, Doc!" Saunders screamed over the sounds of the explosions. "Stay where you are. You can't help them now."

Doc slowly sank back down into the foxhole, his stomach twisted in knots. Sometimes he wondered why he was here. He hated feeling so helpless, hated when he couldn't do his job.

The next shell landed on the far side of Saunders' foxhole, sending shrapnel flying.

Doc heard a cry of pain, and then someone screamed.

"Doc, Doc!" It was Kirby's voice. "Sarge has been hit."

"Stay where you are, Doc!"

He heard Saunders' call.

"I'm all right. Don't try it."

"Kirby, how bad is it?" Doc yelled back.

"He's got shrapnel in the back," Kirby shouted. "He's bleeding bad."

"I said I'm all right," Saunders yelled through gritted teeth. "Don't take the chance."

Saunders could feel the blood as it ran down his back. Kirby began putting pressure on the sergeant's wound in hopes of stemming the blood flow. Saunders bit his

lower lip to keep from crying out when Kirby increased the pressure.

Saunders began to feel as though he was floating, the edges of his vision began to grow dark. He attempted to lie back against the wall of the foxhole, he found he was leaning against Kirby's chest. Kirby wrapped his arms around him, helping him lie back when the darkness began to claim him.

"Roll him towards you, Kirby."

Saunders heard that all too familiar Southern drawl of his medic.

"Let me get a good look at his back."

"Doc," Saunders called weakly, fighting to keep his eyes open. "I told you to stay put."

"Oh, you did?" Doc smiled at Kirby. "Guess I didn't hear you."

"One of these days, Doc, you're going to take a chance like this and you're going to get yourself killed." Saunders began slipping deeper into unconsciousness and his words were becoming slurred.

"Yeah, Sarge." Doc pulled out more bandages and handed Kirby the scissors to cut Saunders shirt away. "So you've told me before."

"Yeah, but you never listen. One of these days, Doc...." Saunders voice trailed off, his eyes closed and his head dropped to the side.

"I know, Sarge," Doc said tying the bandage in place. "One of these days I'm going to get myself killed."

Two months later

Saunders felt a sense of déjà vu while he sat in the foxhole waiting for the German advance. His back still ached from where the shrapnel had been imbedded. He knew he was lucky to be alive.

The battle started quietly with small weapons fire. The squad could hear the fighting as it got closer and closer to their positions. Soon the mortars began to fall, landing in the distance at first, gradually moving in.

"Get ready," Saunders yelled over the ever increasing noise of the battle. "Here they come."

A sea of German soldiers seemed to appear on the far side of the field. Once the advance started, the firing grew heavy. One soldier after another, on both sides, fell. The battle swiftly progressed.

All around him, Doc could hear the cries for a medic. He made several attempts to crawl out of his foxhole to those cries only to be pulled back down by Kirby.

"What are you trying to do, Doc?" Kirby shouted over the sound of his BAR. "Get yourself killed?"

"I'm needed out there, Kirby!" Doc angrily shouted back. "Now let me go!"

"No way, Doc," Kirby quickly answered back. "The fighting is too heavy out there. Between the mortars and those Krauts out there, you wouldn't stand a chance. Now stay put!"

Kirby pushed Doc back against the wall of the foxhole before returning to the advancing German force.

Doc sat grumbling to himself. What good was he if he couldn't do his job? Soldiers were dying all around him and he couldn't do anything about it. Not as long as his watchdog was close by.

The battle raged on as Doc sat and listen to the cries for help. It was driving him crazy. He couldn't take much more of this. He slowly crept up the side of the foxhole

and peered over the edge. All he could see was a sea of German soldiers. As one fell, three more took his place.

The night sky would light up with each mortar blast making the scene before him even more eerie.

Another mortar shell hit, lighting up a foxhole several feet to Doc's left. He could just make out young Charlie Rogers lying over the edge.

Doc shook his head in disgust. Such a young life cut too short, and him sitting there doing nothing about it.

Another mortar exploded near the foxhole, lighting the night. To his horror, Doc saw the young soldier lift his head and reach out his hand towards him as if pleading for help.

Doc quickly looked for his watchdog. Kirby was on the far side of the foxhole. He had his back to Doc, as he fired at the enemy.



Doc sprang out of his cover and sprinted across the field towards the wounded soldier. He had to reach him. It was worth any risk if he could just help this one young soldier.

A mortar landed close by, knocking Doc off his feet. He landed face first in the dirt, his hands scraping across the rocks.

Doc stood, wiping his bloody hands on his trousers and continued across the field. In another burst of light, he saw Charles fall back into the foxhole, so Doc picked up his pace.

Just a few more feet, and he'd be there. He just prayed he'd be in time.

As he reached the edge, he made the decision not to dive into the hole, which would have been his first instinct. He feared he would injure Rogers more if he landed on him.

Suddenly, something slammed into his chest, spinning him around and throwing him into the foxhole. He lay motionless, fighting to take a breath.

He hurt, God how he hurt. White hot pain shot across his chest and down his left arm. He feared he would never take another normal breath.

Fighting to get his breathing under control, he attempted to move. He realized he had landed on Rogers and feared what damage he had done to the young soldier. His movement was rewarded with a burst of pain that sent his mind falling into a black void.

"Fall back!"

Doc heard his sergeant's voice shout the order.

"Fall back, now!"

"I'm here, Sarge," he cried out in not much more than a whisper. "Please God, don't leave me here to die."

He heard the call to fall back again as his mind sank further into the darkness. Then he heard nothing.



Kirby heard the call to fall back as he slapped another clip into his BAR.

"Okay, Doc," he called over his shoulder. "Let's move."

When he got no response, he feared Doc had been hit. He turned to find Doc missing instead.

"Doc!" he shouted. "Doc, where are you?"

"Fall back now, Kirby!" Saunders shouted, running past the foxhole.

"What about Doc?" Kirby shouted back, then realized Saunders couldn't hear him.

Kirby shook his head and climbed out of the foxhole. Quickly scanning the area for any sign of Doc, Kirby fired his BAR backing away from the advancing German force.

Feeling someone tap his shoulder, he looked back to see his sergeant at his side, Tommy gun blazing.

"Go, Kirby!" he shouted and sprayed the area with gunfire.

"I can't, Sarge." Kirby continued to scan the area.

"What do you mean you can't?"

"Doc's missing," Kirby answered back. "We can't leave without him"

"We can't stay here or we'll both be killed." Saunders nudged his BAR man towards the retreating line. "There's nothing we can do now. Just go!"

Kirby reluctantly turned to leave, still scanning the horizon for any sign of the missing medic. He felt Saunders push him to move. Lowering his head and closing his eyes briefly, he prayed their medic would be all right.

Saunders stood in front of Hanley in their makeshift headquarters. Hanley looked up from the maps on his desk, concern filling his eyes.

"What do you mean, Doc is missing?"

"It's like I told you, Lieutenant."

Saunders pulled out his pack of Lucky Strikes and shook one out. "When Kirby turned around, he was gone. No one saw him leave. He must have tried to get to one of the wounded."

"I can't believe that, Saunders. Not with all the gun fire going on around him. He's not crazy." Hanley shook his head in disbelief.

"When it comes to the wounded, he doesn't think," Saunders said around the cigarette as he lit it. "That's his biggest problem. I've told him a number of times he's going to get himself killed. He just keeps putting himself in harm's way to help the wounded."

"Is there anyone else missing?" Hanley asked.

"That new kid, Rogers, hasn't shown up yet." Saunders took another drag of his cigarette. "We also lost Williams and Jackson."

"Were there any other casualties?" Hanley wrote the names of the missing and dead in his file.

"Littlejohn took one in the arm," Saunders continued. "Mihok got clipped in the thigh. They'll both be fine. Everyone else seems okay for the most part."



"Okay, Saunders." Hanley pulled his own pack of cigarettes out. "That will be all."

"Sir?" Saunders took a step forward. "I'd like permission to go look for Doc. Kirby and Cajé are ready to go. We could be back with him by morning."

"I'm sorry, Saunders." Hanley knew his sergeant wasn't going to like his decision. "But that area is loaded with Germans. We can't get near it right now."

"Look, Lieutenant." Saunders threw his cigarette down in disgust. "Doc could be holed up somewhere with a wounded Rogers. Hell, he could be wounded himself."

"I'm aware of that, Sergeant." Hanley did want Saunders to see the concern he couldn't hide. Looking down at his maps, he avoided eye contact.

"Let me take Kirby and Cajé and we'll take a quick look." Saunders knew this sounded weak, even to him. "We can sneak in and out without any contact."

"I'm sorry, sergeant." Hanley's voice was quieter than normal, Saunders thought. "We can't risk losing three more men right now. Doc will just have to wait."

"YES, SIR!!!" Saunders stressed, snapping a salute and storming out the door. Hanley's shoulder dropped with an audible sigh as he closed his eyes.

"Hold on, Doc." He whispered to himself. "We'll come for you. I promise, and I'm sorry."

Cajé and Kirby stood at the end of the street, waiting for Saunders to return from seeing Hanley. Kirby paced back and forth, unable to sit still, while Cajé sat quietly, smoking his cigarette.

Cajé was the first to notice their sergeant, and he jumped off the wall he had been sitting on. He didn't like the look of this. He could tell by the way Saunders was walking the news was not good.

"It's about time," he heard Kirby say as Saunders approached. "What did he say, Sarge?"

Saunders walked past the two soldiers without saying a word. The look on his face told Cajé to let it drop, for now anyway.

"Sarge?" Kirby called after the retreating figure and began to follow. "Sarge, what did he say?"

Cajé placed a hand on Kirby's shoulder, preventing him from following the sergeant.

"Let him go, Kirby." He spoke quietly as he watched Saunders walk into the dark of the night.

"Let him go? Are you crazy?" Kirby looked back at his friend. The look on the scout's face said it all. "Oh, got ya."

The two men stared into the dark where their sergeant had been.

His eyes slowly opened to see the beautiful orange and amber colors of the sunrise.

"Ain't that something?" he whispered to himself as he attempted to rise.

The shooting pain he received for his efforts reminded him of the night before. He could feel Rogers beneath him as he lay sprawled out in the foxhole.

He cried out in pain as he rolled off the soldier and curled up into a ball. His breathing was coming in short, fast pants and he fought to get it under control.

He saw his medical ruck just a few inches from him and reached out to pull it to

his chest. Holding it tightly, he rolled back over to face the young soldier he was sure he probably couldn't help.

Rogers' blank stare told the whole story. Doc felt he had been punched in the stomach.

He took a deep breath and pushed himself away from Rogers. Biting back another cry of pain, he propped himself up against the side of the foxhole.

He opening his ruck and pulled out the bandages he would need. He knew this was not going to be easy. Every movement, no matter how small, was met with blinding pain.

He pulled back his jacket and shirt, he saw the red, swollen and angry looking bullet hole in his upper left chest. It continued to ooze a small amount of blood.

"Well, at least the bleeding has slowed," he said to himself.

He sprinkled a liberal amount of sulfa on the wound, pressing the gauze bandage against it. He grit his teeth against the pain and pressed as hard as he could to stop the bleeding completely.

He threw one end of the bandage over his shoulder, pulling it up under his armpit. He pulled the ends as tight as possible, using his good hand and his teeth, it took what strength he had left to tie it off.

"Mama always told me never to use my teeth," he laughed to himself. "Boy, if she could see me now."

The smile faded from his face as he thought of the possibility that he would not see his mother again. Then he thought of his sergeant.

"Man, Sarge is going to have my hide when he finds me." The smile began to form once again on his lips but quickly faded. "Oh God, Sarge, please find me."

Saunders sat with his back against the wall of the bombed-out school house. His helmet was pulled down over his eyes, a sure sign that he was not to be bothered.

Kirby made a few attempts at walking his direction, but Cajé always stopped him, telling him now was not the time.

So the two soldiers sat across the street from their sergeant and watched. Not sure if he were asleep or just brooding, but sure that they were not going to be the ones to approach him.

Kirby felt Cajé nudge him and then indicate with his head to look down the street. They watched with apprehension as Hanley made a straight, determined line towards Saunders.

"Man, this don't look good," Cajé whispered as Kirby shook his head.

"Saunders." Hanley's towering figure cast a shadow over the still sergeant.

"Yes sir?" Saunders peered out from under his helmet.

"I need some volunteers." Hanley took a deep breath before continuing, "You, Cajé, and Kirby are elected."

"Just what have we volunteered for this time, Lieutenant?" Saunders noticed Kirby and Cajé hesitantly making their way across the street. Hanley noticed them also.

"You're needed for recon," Hanley said loud enough for the approaching soldiers to hear. "I need you three to go back in there and find out where the Krauts are positioned."

Saunders jumped to his feet as Cajé and Kirby rushed to cover the distance.

"Ya mean it, Lieutenant?" Kirby asked. "They're really going to let us go back in to...."

"Recon the area only," Hanley cut him off. "You are to make no contact. Is that

understood, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir," Saunders replied, his heart dropping into his stomach.

"Oh, and sergeant...." Hanley turned to walk away.

"Yes, sir?"

"If you find anything of interest, bring it back with you." Hanley smiled as he walked away.

"Yes, sir!" Saunders shouted after him, a new enthusiasm in his voice. "Saddle up. Let's go find Doc."

Doc awoke suddenly to voices, German voices. A sense of panic seemed to rise inside him as the voices sounded closer and closer.

Maybe this wasn't so bad. At least he would get the help he needed, or would he? Maybe they weren't bothering with prisoners, especially a medic. Medics had no useable information. What good would he be? Would they just shoot him?

Play dead. That was his best chance. Then Sarge could find him. Sarge had to find him.

Moving as quickly as possible, gritting his teeth against the pain, he pushed his medical ruck behind his back. He hoped they wouldn't find it. If they took it from him, he didn't stand a chance.

He closed his eyes and fought to control his breathing. He tried to stay as still as possible when he heard the German voices above him.

Pass by, he thought to himself. *Please God, let them pass by.*

Doc could sense someone standing over him as he fought to slow his breathing even more. His pockets were being gone through and his wallet removed. Then his watch was ripped from his wrist and his father's ring was pulled from his finger.

Jerked up by his jacket suddenly, Doc bit his tongue to keep from crying out. The coppery taste of blood filled his mouth as he heard one of the German soldiers yelling instructions to the others.

Just as suddenly Doc was dropped back against the foxhole. He could hear the German soldiers voices fading as he sank gratefully back into the darkness.

Saunders, Cajé and Kirby crouched behind the thick layer of bushes as they watched the Kraut patrol walk by.

Saunders signaled for the two soldiers to move further down the line of bushes. Dropping on their bellies, they crawled the full length of the foliage, emerging into a small clearing.

"How much further is it to the field, Sarge?" Kirby whispered.

"We got about another three miles, Kirby," Saunders whispered back.

"At the rate we keep running into these Kraut patrols, we'll be lucky to get there before dark," Cajé joined the discussion.

"If we get there at all," Saunders mumbled, not realizing his men had heard him.

"We ain't givin' up, are we Sarge?" Kirby whispered.

"Give up?" Saunders looked at Kirby in surprise. "No, Kirby. We're not giving up. We're not going back without Doc."

The two soldiers nodded their agreement then turned and followed their sergeant in search of their missing medic.

He could hear someone calling his name, but it sounded so far off. The voice seemed to get louder and he struggled to come up out of the depths of the darkness surrounding him.

The voice began to sound more familiar and Doc fought to open his eyes.

"Sarge?" he weakly called.

"Open your eyes, soldier, we need to get moving," the voice seemed to call to him.

"Sarge, you found me." Doc licked his dry lips. What he wouldn't give for a drink of water right now.

"No thanks to you." The voice grew stern. "I told you, you were going to get yourself killed one of these days. Now just look at you."

Doc saw the fuzzy image of his sergeant standing at the top of the foxhole. Arms crossed in front of him, his helmet had been pushed back revealing a tuft of blond hair.

"I'm sorry, Sarge." Doc blinked his eyes trying to focus on the image as it seemed to fade in and out. "Rogers was hurt bad. I had to try to get to him."

"Yeah, and look where it got you." Saunders shook his head in disgust. "Well, we're pulling out, so you better get moving."

"What do you mean, Sarge?" Doc looked up in shock at his sergeant. "I need help. I can't do it on my own."

"Well, I can't spare anyone to help you," Saunders spit back. "You got yourself into this mess, you best figure out how to get out of it."

"Sarge?" Doc reached out for his sergeant, but the image turned to leave.

"Please don't leave me here. Please help me."

The image seemed to fade into the mist and Doc's hand fell to his side.

"A dream," Doc mumbled to himself. "It was just a dream. Sarge would never leave me. He won't leave me."

Doc could feel the heat rising in his body. A fever was developing and he knew that could account for what he saw. He didn't have much time and he knew it.

"Sarge, where are you?" he cried out, coughing from the effort. He let his mind begin to sink back into the welcoming darkness. "Help me, please."

The three soldiers reached the edge of the clearing and looked across the field at all the foxholes that had been dug.

"God, Sarge." Kirby mumbled. "There must be a hundred foxholes out there. How are we going to find him in that mess?"

"You mean if he's even out there?"

Caje shot back.

"We're going to check out each and every one of them." Saunders' response left no room for argument. "I don't care if it takes all night. I told you, I'm not going back without Doc."

"And if he's not in one of those holes, Sarge?" Caje questioned. "Hanley said we're to only recon this area and then get back."

"Really, I didn't hear that." Saunders tried to put a surprised look on his face.



"Did you, Kirby?"

"Me? No, Sarge." Kirby shook his head. "I didn't hear a thing."

"Then I guess we keep looking, don't we?" A smile began to creep across Saunders' face.

"Yeah, Sarge." Caje smiled back. "I guess if you guys didn't hear anything then I didn't either. We keep looking."

Saunders took a deep breath and placed his hands on the two privates' shoulders.

"Okay, let's go."

The sun had gone down and the night was cool, with a slight breeze. The moon was full, giving off a bright evening illumination.

"Medic."

Doc's eyes slowly opened at the sound of a voice.

"Sarge?" he weakly called.

"No, medic, I afraid your sergeant is not here. Only I am here."

Doc blinked his eyes in an attempt to bring the face of the man speaking into focus. The bright moonlight behind the figure obscured his features, as it bathed the front of him in shadows.

"Who...?" Doc weakly asked.

"Who am I?" There was a sound of amusement in the man's voice. Bending forward until he was within a foot of Doc's face, the man's evil grin caught Doc off guard.

"I'm a captain in the German army, medic, and your worst nightmare."

"Nooooo...." Doc cried out with what little strength he still possessed.

On the other side of the field, three heads turned in the direction of the scream.

"Oh, yes," the captain teased. "Your sergeant has deserted you, left you to die. Now you will be taken back to our lines. You will give me what information you have."

"But?" Doc tried to swallow but found his mouth and throat too dry. "I'm just a medic. I have no useful information for you."

"That may or may not be true." The captain sneered. "But I will derive a great deal of pleasure from trying to find out."

Doc's fear increased when he heard the captain's sadistic laugh.

"Your sergeant warned you, didn't he medic?" the captain continued. "He told you someday you would get yourself killed. You chose not to listen. Now you belong to me."

Doc stiffened at the captain's words. This couldn't be happening. How would he know what the Sarge had told him?

"No!" he shouted as loud as he could. "You're not real. It's the fever. You're not here!"

"Oh, I'm here Doc and very real." The captain grabbed the front of Doc's jacket. "It's time to leave."

"No!" Doc shouted as he began to fight the captain with all the strength he could muster. He fought against the hands that were pulling at his jacket. He could feel two more sets of hand holding him down.

Oh, God, he thought to himself. *There are two more of them.*

"No, don't touch me," he continued to scream as his strength began to fail him. "I'd rather die than go with you. Get your hands off of me!"

"Doc, Doc, calm down. You're going to start bleeding again. I'm just trying to change your bandage." Doc's struggle grew weaker as he realized the captain's voice

had taken on a French accent.

"You're okay, Doc." Another familiar voice began to break through the fog.
"We're here now. You're safe. Take it easy."

Doc stopped struggling as he slowly opened his eyes. He was startled at first to see the captain's face in front of him but it quickly faded and the face of his Sergeant soon replaced it.

"Sarge, is that really you?" Doc could barely speak above a whisper.

"Yeah, Doc. It's me." Saunders patted the medic on the shoulder. "We're going to get you back now. Just stay still."

"I thought you guys left me." Doc closed his eyes against a wave of pain.

"Leave you?" Kirby sounded shocked. "Why we'd never leave you, Doc. Why would you think that?"

"Because... I put myself... in danger again...." Doc's words were becoming increasingly slurred. "I'm sorry, Sarge... Rogers was hurt... needed me... should have listened... will next time...."

Doc's head fell to the side, and Saunders looked to Caje with concern in his eyes.

Caje lifted a morphine syrette and smiled at his sergeant. "He's okay, Sarge, just blacked out."

Saunders nodded his head and looked back at his medic, Doc's words running through his mind.

"I don't think I'll take that bet, Doc," he whispered.

"What bet, Sarge?" Saunders had forgotten how good Caje's hearing was.

"That he'll listen next time, no bet. If he did, he wouldn't be our Doc." Saunders placed his jacket over the unconscious man. "Let's get him home."

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