

# POW!

By: KT – Kyng Tygr



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Note: Foreign dialog denoted with < >

The seven men heard the sound of small weapons fire between explosions. Ste. Claire was being overrun and they were right in the middle of it.

An 88 landed close by and the men dove for cover.

Lieutenant Edwards stood, dusted himself off and yelled, "Whittaker," over the receding noise.

A freckle-faced redhead worked his way through the men to stand at his lieutenant's side. "Yes, sir?"

"Take these plans," the lieutenant pulled the paperwork out of his pocket, "and hide them under that loose brick in the main room. They won't look in the most obvious place."

"Yes, sir." The young man took the folded papers and started to walk away.

"Then meet at the rendezvous in ten minutes."

The soldier nodded as he left the others.

"Double-time, son!" Edwards shouted.

The corporal did a quick skip and ran around the corner.

The lieutenant turned to the remaining five men, as they walked down the hallway toward an exit. "Francois, you, Marcel, and Bastien head back to your homes. We'll head toward our lines. I'll contact Arnaud and let him know where the paperwork is hidden."

"Are you sure you will be okay?" the young Frenchman asked.

"We'll be fine. Now go." The lieutenant shook the man's offered hand as they neared an intersection. "Thank you, Francois, for everything. God speed to you."

"And to you, Lieutenant." With that the three French resistance fighters ran into the darkness.

Whittaker returned. "Lieutenant, they're coming in the back of the building."

"Then let's head out the front." The small squad ran to the nearest exit.

Hearing gunfire and shouting on the other side of the door, the four men flattened themselves against the wall and pulled their weapons up.

Connors, Whittaker, and Anderson fixed bayonets to their M1's. The lieutenant pulled out his service revolver and opened the door enough to see what was going on.

From the darkness of the factory came a shout, "*Hande Hoch.*" The lieutenant froze and turned.

"Drop your weapons, gentleman."

If Edwards didn't know better he would have thought it was an American.

"I mean it, drop them, now."

Connors, Anderson, and Whittaker looked to the lieutenant.

A German fired above their heads. "Now," the voice demanded.

The lieutenant dropped his small handgun to the floor, not taking his eyes from the darkness that engulfed their captor.

"You three had better follow your lieutenant's lead or the next bullets will come in contact with your flesh."

Connor lowered his weapon, and then Whittaker's descended.

Anderson's grip tightened on his M1.

"Anderson, do as he says," the lieutenant's attention was drawn to the voice in the shadows. "That's an order, soldier," Edwards commanded.

The lieutenant turned his head to look at the private. The young man looked like he was wound tighter than an eight day clock.

"Anderson, stand down, now," Edwards demanded.

Anderson turned to look at his superior, and the terror in the young man's eyes told the lieutenant everything.

"I know what they do to prisoners, sir." Anderson responded.

"Stand down, Swede." Edwards used the familiar name to calm the panicked private.

"But...."

"I mean it, put the gun down," Edwards watched as Anderson's weapon sank to the ground.

Each man was searched by a German soldier.

"So, Lieutenant, what are you doing here in this factory?" a thick German accent asked from the darkness.

"Edwards, Jaxon, Lieutenant, six-two-two-five-zero-eight-nine." A rifle butt hit the side of his head, causing reality to spin out of control. The pain was just beginning.

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Sergeant Saunders was tied to a chair. His body had given out, and he was now sagging, semi-conscious.

Lieutenant Ormond Jaegar of Hitler's 'influential' SS guard would be one of the Fuehrer's top men one day, he knew it. He was becoming one of the privileged few on the front lines, and it was only a matter of time before the great man would see his progress through the ranks.

Germans would one day be the master race and all others would bow to their superiority and strength, and he would be the one to put them there.

As Saunders became fully conscious, he took a deep breath in the stagnant room. He coughed and felt the tell-tale tingle in his cheeks as his stomach decided that moment to empty out onto the floor.

The room smelled of old blood, fear, and at the edge of it, death.

Saunders' one good eye looked up at the jabbering lieutenant. His mind flashed back to the beginning of this mission that morning....

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Billy signaled in the dim light of dawn and the men behind him scattered and disappeared into the surrounding brush. The young private ran back to Saunders, who gave him a moment to catch his breath.

"What is it, Nelson?"

"Two men," Billy replied. "One wounded."

"Stay here," Saunders called over his shoulder, "Caje, on me!" The two men worked their way along the ditch. They stopped and waited, watching the two men approach.

< "Not much farther, Bastien. At the American lines we can get help."> Francois told his friend.

Caje translated the sentences into Saunders' ear.

Saunders nodded at the two men on the road, and Caje spoke. < "Do you need help?">

At the sudden sound, Francois stumbled and fell, twisting to break his friend's fall. Francois saw stars as his lungs emptied of oxygen and his head hit the ground. The world spun and then went dark.

Saunders and Caje ran up to the two men. Caje rolled the injured one onto the road, and checked for weapons on both, while Saunders kept his eyes fixed to the trees on either side of the road, Thompson at the ready.

"All clear, Sarge," Caje informed him, standing.

"Doc!" Saunders yelled, and waved his arm.

The medic ran up and began an assessment of the men lying in front of him, finding there was nothing he could do for the resistance fighter with the blood-stained chest. He had been dead for a couple of hours.

Pulling scissors from his rucksack, Doc cut the sleeve of the other Maquis' shirt. "Looks like a graze, Sarge. Not too deep."

Doc grabbed a sulfa packet, sprinkled it liberally over the injury and tied a bandage around the arm.

"Littlejohn and Baer, make a litter."

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"Has our guest come around yet?" Hanley asked, as Saunders and Caje entered the aid station tent.

"Not yet sir," Doc responded and looked at his patient.

"Take a break Doc. I'll wait with him, 'til you get back," the tall lieutenant told his medic.

Doc nodded, stood and left.

"What do we do with him, sir?" Saunders asked the lieutenant.

"I'm waiting to hear back from S2," the lieutenant began. "He may be part of the resistance in the area, but with the take over of Ste. Claire yesterday, S2 has been scrambling, so I've been unable to talk with anyone at HQ."

The young man on the cot said something in French.

With a nod from the lieutenant, Caje took the seat that Doc had vacated and leaned down to hear what he was saying. He placed a hand on the young man's shoulder. Francois turned his head, opened his eyes and looked at Caje.

The lean scout smiled at him.

Francois returned the smile and said, "American?"

< "Oui, American.">

"Bastien?"

< "I'm sorry, but your friend did not make it.">

Francois closed his eyes, < "I'm sorry, Bastien, I tried. May God's angels take care of you now,"> he said and crossed himself.

Francois looked at Caje, "I am Francois, where is your lieutenant?"

Hanley stepped forward, nodding for Caje to leave. "I'm Lieutenant Hanley. You speak English?" the lieutenant asked, as he sat down.

"Yes, my mother taught me."

"Where were you going?" Hanley asked.

"I was with Lieutenant Edwards at the factory in Ste. Claire. He told us to head for our homes when the Germans began shelling. Bastien, Marcel, and I got out." His emotions threatened to run away with him.

Hanley lit a cigarette and put it to the young Frenchman's mouth.

"Thank you, Lieutenant," he replied around the appreciated offering. He took a deep drag and savored the tingle in his lungs.

"Marcel was killed as we left the factory and Bastien was shot when we went into the trees." He touched his bandaged arm, "and it appears that I was wounded as well."

"Did you see Edwards and his men get out?"

"No, we..." he paused "...I did not. They may have gone out the back way, I am not sure." He put his uninjured arm over his eyes to cover the feelings that tried to overwhelm him.

"I thought it best that we look for your lines, because of Bastien's wound, and you were much closer than home."

"What was Lieutenant Edwards doing in Ste. Claire?" Hanley asked as Saunders stepped up behind his superior officer.

"We brought an equipment and manpower list so that S2 could help us get the factory up and running again to supply the allies. We must go back to get them." His meaning was two fold.

Hanley looked over his shoulder at his noncom. "Take three of you and Doc. No contact. When can you be ready?"

Saunders shifted his weight. "Soon as you give the word," he responded.

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Saunders' squad worked their way though Ste. Claire. He sent Kirby and Caje to the opposite side of town to search, while he checked their rendezvous point.

Doc squatted down at the door and listened to Saunders' footsteps crunching up the stairs.

Silence filled the room. Doc stared down at his feet.

"Doc!"

The medic stood and turned his head to listen. Doc heard Saunders' return and raised his hand.

The pain-filled moan came again, "Doc!"

Saunders stepped over to stand beside his medic, his finger on the trigger of his Thompson.

"Kirby?" Doc whispered over his shoulder.

"Doesn't sound like him, he wouldn't holler like that in Kraut territory," Saunders whispered back.

"Caje then?" he asked.

"I don't see him doing it, either," Saunders responded.

"Maybe it's one of the guys we're looking for."

"That's possible or it could be Krauts." Saunders stepped in front of the medic using the wall as a shield. Looking down the street, he stepped onto the crumbling sidewalk and proceeded forward, listening for the call again.

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The German Lieutenant stepped up to Heinrich as he called out, "Doc."

The officer watched the young man, very impressed.

<"Do you know which building they're in?"> He asked.

<"Not far down this street, sir, in the building on the left,"> the young man whispered back.

<"You didn't see anyone else with them did you?">

<"No sir, no one.">

<"Very good, the Americans took the bait. Now, let's see what kind of fish we have caught.">

He turned to the other three men that he'd brought with him and signaled them to work around behind the two Americans.

<"No gunfire,"> he whispered, as they left the building.

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Saunders had worked his way down the street, checking each doorway and alley that he came across. Doc was right behind him, always a comfort, when a Schmeisser

butt hit him in the side of the head, knocking him unconscious.

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Someone grabbed Doc from behind, putting a hand over his mouth and pinning his arms to his body. Doc watched, powerless to do anything, as his sergeant was hit in the head, dropping him like a stone.

Doc struggled to get free as his hands were tied behind him.

A German lieutenant stepped out from a building with a corporal following on his heels. He shouted orders to the two privates standing guard over Saunders. They bent down and began dragging the unconscious sergeant toward another building.

The young man that stood behind Doc poked him in the back with his rifle, indicating for him to follow.

When they entered the building, the lieutenant pointed at a door and the two men dragged Saunders through it. He then spoke to the corporal and nodded down the hallway.

Doc was led down the hall and shoved into a different room, hitting the floor hard.

"Get up!" a voice commanded.

Doc tried to comply with the order but it was hard to obey with his hands tied behind him. A boot connected with the medic's right side, forcing the oxygen from his body in a massive whoosh. The pain was blinding, as his system screamed for attention. Worse than any bullet that he had ever taken, and no matter how he struggled he couldn't force his lungs to expand.

"Get up!" the voice commanded again.

Doc could feel the smooth wooden floor under his cheek as he lay there trying to breathe.

"Can't you hear me," the corporal spat out, "American?" There was another kick to Doc's stomach.

The medic's arm was grabbed and he was forced to his feet.

The German corporal held him against the cold brick wall.

"This is your fault, you know," Heinrich said, punching the medic in the stomach.

Doc gasped, looking into the eyes of his tormentor and saw only pleasure.

The corporal punched him again, and the medic fell to his knees, wheezing.

Heinrich stepped back observing his handiwork.

Doc looked up at him.

"This is for my grandparents." Heinrich kicked Doc again, and then squatted down in front of the winded medic.

"They never did anything to anybody." He hesitated, in thought. "American planes came with bombs, wiping out everything!" Heinrich stood.

Doc leaned back against the wall. The corporal slapped his face and he bit his tongue. His mouth filled with blood and he spat it onto the floor. The medic wiped his chin on his shoulder.

"This is payback for what you Americans did to my grandparents."

Doc still didn't respond.

"You know, I was born and raised in Madison, Wisconsin. Well, until my parents were killed in an auto accident. I had no family there, so they shipped me over here to my grandparents." He began pacing the room. "They didn't know what to do with me. They had raised their children and didn't need to be burdened with a six-year-old." He continued to pace. "My grandparents accepted me, even though I was an American." He stopped in front of the medic. "I found out, over the years, that Americans had been responsible for both of my uncles' deaths in the first war. My mother ran away when she

turned eighteen and found her way to America."

"Heinrich," someone yelled from the corridor.

< "What?"> Heinrich yelled back, aggravated at the interruption.

< "The lieutenant wants you.">

< "Coming,"> Heinrich answered, glaring at the medic before leaving the room.

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There was a hard slap across Saunders' face that jarred his teeth. The German had reached his limit with the stubborn American.

"Sergeant, I will ask you only one more time. What are you doing here?"

Saunders looked in defiance at the lieutenant.

A young man entered the room, snapping to attention as his superior's eyes focused on him.

After giving the corporal his orders, the young man left the room. Jaegar turned to the NCO.

Saunders realized that his time with the lieutenant wasn't over yet.

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Doc had managed to prop himself up in the corner, away from the door. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back. What a situation. With his arms tied, he was unable to gain any comfort from them.

The door to the room banged against the wall when it opened, causing Doc to jump, and the sudden penetration of light blinded him.

Heinrich strolled in and smiled at him. "The lieutenant wants to see you."

Doc rose to his feet and stumbled as a wave of pain seized his body.

Heinrich grabbed Doc's arm and pulled him into the hallway.

Doc tried to control the ache mentally as he was pushed forward. Each step was excruciating and he pulled his arms in tighter to his body hoping that would stop the throbbing.

Heinrich grabbed his shoulder when Doc came to a closed door. Heinrich opened it and shoved the medic into the middle of the room causing him to stumble and fall. Doc hit the floor hard, knocking the breath from his lungs.

As Doc fought for air, he saw his sergeant tied to a chair looking like death warmed over.

The medic gasped as he got to his knees. "Sarge?" Doc stood. He took a step toward the noncom but was stopped by two very large German men. Doc glanced at the SS lieutenant who leaned against a table smoking a cigarette.

Saunders' head came up.

The sadistic lieutenant asked, "What are you doing here?" When Doc hesitated, Jaegar continued, "I don't want name, rank and serial number, I only want the reason you are here."

Doc was not going to give this lowlife anything.

"Did anyone come with you?" The lieutenant watched the anger crawl through the medic's tense body. Jaegar scrutinized the intensity of Doc's determined gaze. "Your loyalties run deep. Give me what I want, and I will let your sergeant live."

Saunders knew what was coming. "He's a noncombatant, don't do this," he pleaded.

The lieutenant smiled as he switched tactics. Jaegar stood to his feet and walked over to the medical GI. With a cold hard stare at the medic, the lieutenant sized

him up.

"I've heard that, of all GI's, medics understand what pain is all about," and with one quick move Jaegar punched Doc's solar plexus, making him retch.

Doc saw stars and struggled for air. The two Germans at his sides pulled him upright by his arms.

"It takes a big man to hit one that has his hands tied behind his back," Doc hissed as he glared at the German lieutenant.

Jaegar smiled back at him. "You are inferior."

Doc huffed and lifted his head. "Sticks and stones...." he muttered.

"Don't," Saunders begged, "please don't do this to him."

The lieutenant turned to the sergeant and took a threatening step. "Then tell me what I want to know."

Saunders looked at Doc and then back at the lieutenant. "Saunders, Sergeant, two-two-seven-oh-six-two-two."

"You are forcing me to do something," the lieutenant pulled his Luger from its holster; "I really don't want to do." Jaegar faced the medic, blocking Saunders view.

Doc stood up straight and looked the lieutenant in the eye.

"If it will be easier, you can close your eyes." The lieutenant told Doc, as he settled the muzzle of the weapon against his temple.

"No," was all he could muster. His knees felt like melted butter and if the two big guys hadn't been holding him up he'd have been flat on the floor.

Saunders closed his eye and turned his head.

"Not your fault, Sarge," Doc said as the gun fired.

The gunshot echoed through Saunders' head as he heard his friend's body being hauled from the room. Doc's constant presence was gone for good, and he felt very alone.

"You should have talked." The lieutenant turned, wiped off his gun, and re-holstered it. "I hate to waste good medics, they're in such short supply."

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When the medic came to, he was in the same room as before, lying in a pool of his own blood.

Sparks were flashing like gunfire behind his eyelids and his head was pounding.

Working his way over to the corner, away from the door, he rolled onto his back. *Oh God, this hurts.* When the nausea subsided, one thought fought its way to the front, *what am I gonna do?*

*I need to get this damn rope off my wrists.*

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<"I'll get nothing from him now,"> the lieutenant told Heinrich, as the noncom collapsed again.

No amount of poking or prodding would bring the sergeant around this time.

<"Get him out of here. Dump him with the medic. The truck will be coming for the five of them later.">

Heinrich nodded, grabbing the semi-conscious sergeant under his right arm. Another soldier stepped up, grabbed the other arm and they dragged Saunders from the room.

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Doc's brain was thumping hard behind his eyes, and he sat in the corner of the room, his knees pulled up to his chest. He had worked the rope loose and was about to pull his hands free, when he heard movement at the door.

*Oh God, I don't want to go back!* He silently pleaded. Their terse conversation told Doc they weren't here for him.

The door violently hit the wall, and he saw two men dragging a third, as the light flooded the darkened room. Terror gripped his insides, and Doc curled farther into the corner. He blinked frantically trying to see. As his eyes adjusted, he saw in the brightness his sergeant being thrown to the floor.

There was a loud 'ohf' as one of the men kicked Saunders and laughed. The two men left the room.

Jerking his hands free, Doc quickly worked his way to his wheezing sergeant.

When his hand connected with Saunders' head he moved to assess his patient. No broken arms, a couple of broken ribs, some tenderness in the abdomen and no broken legs.

"Sarge?" he whispered, as Saunders moaned again. He waited a moment. "You okay, Sarge?"

"I hurt so bad," Saunders replied.

"I know, me too." The medic moved around to Saunders' hands and worked to untie his sergeant.

When he was successful, Doc stepped over Saunders and repositioned himself.

"Kirby?" Saunders' eyes were swollen shut and everything sounded far-away. The pain shut out any rational thought.

"No, Sarge, it's me," the medic responded.

The ache in Saunders' body clouded his mind, *it wasn't Doc... Doc was dead.* His hand reached up and grabbed the front of Doc's bloody shirt. "Caje, you gotta get back to the lieutenant and tell him what's going on here."

"Sarge, it's me," Doc insisted, pulling Saunders' hand from his shirt.

"Let the lieutenant know that Doc is dead. I couldn't stop it." Saunders lapsed into unconsciousness.

Doc sat back. What was he to do now?

It took some time, but Doc managed to move Saunders farther into the room, away from the door. Kirby and Caje were still out there, Doc hoped, going for help.

Doc finally gave in to his exhausted body and fell into a pain-filled, restless sleep.

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"Where are they?"

"Will you stop asking that?"

"They should have been here, Caje. We need to go back and tell the lieutenant what's happened."

"Don't you think I know that, Kirby? We'll wait a little bit longer and if they're not back, then we'll go get help."

"But Caje, we've been waiting for almost an hour. We've been darn lucky there've been no patrols."

Caje looked down at his feet. The scout knew that if the two men had been captured, there wasn't any way to get them out without help. The thought of leaving Doc and Sarge behind caused his heart to pause, but a decision had to be made.

"Okay, let's go." Caje turned and headed out of Ste. Claire with Kirby right behind him.

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Caje and Kirby burst into Hanley's office, all military decorum forgotten. Hanley stood as the two privates entered. "Report." "They have Doc and Sarge, sir" Caje responded between ragged breaths. Hanley stepped around the desk to stand in front of his men. "Get the squad, and I'll meet you in front of your bivouac in five."

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Billy, Littlejohn, Stewart, and Baer were starting another round of poker when the two exhausted men ran into the room.

"Hey, guys, wanna join us?" Billy asked, as he handed out cards to the other players. "It's my deal, and you know how much you win when I deal, right, Kirby?" When the man didn't answer Billy looked up. "Guys?"

"They have Doc and Sarge," Kirby said.

"The lieutenant is on his way, get your stuff, we're moving out!" Caje said.

The four men stood, knocking over the chairs, and began gathering their equipment.

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Sometime later Doc heard voices at the door and sat forward. The discomfort from his ribs hit him like a freight train, and he fell back against the wall, wrapping his arms around his chest.

The door opened and a huge man filled it. He was as tall as or taller than Littlejohn.

Doc heard someone in the hallway say something in German to the big man, and it didn't sound good. One thing popped into Doc's mind, the Sunday school story of David and Goliath.

Dread gripped Doc's heart, causing it to skip a beat. The medic put his hands behind his back to make it look like he was still tied.

Goliath seemed even bigger as he stood over the two GI's. He slid his knife from its scabbard, and concentrated on the semi-conscious sergeant.

Doc remembered something that Caje had told him once. "The heel of your hand is a great weapon, Doc. If you hit a guy a hard as you can in the nose, it'll do one of two things, kill them or incapacitate them long enough for you to get away."

"Leave him alone, you dirty, stinkin' Kraut." Doc was staring into the face of death.

Goliath turned toward the medic. <"What?">

"I said, leave him alone, you dirty, stinkin' Kraut." Doc stood, using the wall for support.

Goliath straightened up to his full height and put his hands on his hips. The big man's body language told Doc that he was in serious trouble.

*I hope you're right, Caje.* Doc stepped forward and repeated himself, "Leave him alone."

Goliath leaned down into the medic's face and snarled at him.

Doc cocked his arm back and with all the strength he had left in his body, he slammed the heel of his hand into Goliath's nose. He felt the cartilage snap, and he watched the big man fall backwards with the force of his blow.

Doc rubbed his hand and walked to the door.

Glancing around the jamb, Doc saw there wasn't anyone in the hallway. The time was now, Doc had to hurry. The medic rushed over to his semi-conscious sergeant. "Sarge...." Doc shook Saunders' shoulders.

Doc bent over and pulled Saunders' arm up over his neck. Adrenalin raced through Doc's body, his pain forgotten for the moment. The only thought that filled his mind was escape.

Doc lifted with all he had and half-dragged, half-carried the wounded noncom to the door. Checking again, Doc moved into the hallway.

Halfway down the corridor, Doc heard voices and footsteps. The medic looked around for a hiding place and saw a door. Doc hurried over to it, turned the knob, and was surprised to find that it wasn't locked.

The medic pushed the door open and dragged his semi-conscious sergeant through it, shutting it behind them.

Doc lowered Saunders to the floor against the wall and took a deep breath. The throbbing pain came roaring back, doubling him over. Doc squatted down next to his semi-conscious noncom, willing the ache to subside.

"Who's there?" Doc jumped at the voice from the darkness but remained quiet. "I heard you come in, who are you?"

Saunders took that moment to moan.

"Answer me, soldier, who are you?" the voice was insistent.

"I'm a medic with the 361<sup>st</sup>, first squad." Doc answered. "This is my sergeant. We were captured a few hours ago."

"Hanley's men?" The voice sounded surprised. "I thought they pulled out?"

"No, now, who are you?"

"Corporal Thomas Whittaker, assigned to Lieutenant Jaxon Edwards."

"Where's the lieutenant?" Doc asked.

"I don't know. I was hog-tied and thrown in here yesterday. No one has bothered to even bring me water." The corporal sounded annoyed. "Someone is going to hear about this."

Doc worked his way toward the voice.

"How did you know we were here?" Whittaker asked.

"Our squad was on patrol this morning when we found two resistance fighters." Doc reached the corporal. "The one named Francois told us that they were able to get away before the Krauts came in."

Doc began working on the rope that bound the young man.

"What about Bastien and Marcel?" Whittaker asked.

"Bastien died before reaching us, and Marcel was killed as they were leaving."

Doc stopped a moment and shook his hands. He had no feeling in his fingertips and his head was throbbing. He rubbed his temples and then began again on the knot.

"Hanley only sent two of you?" Whittaker asked.

"He actually sent four. Sarge and I were captured. Caje and Kirby, the other two... I dunno. They've probably gone for help by now. How many of you were captured?"

"There were four of us—the lieutenant, me, Connors, and Swede, I mean Anderson. I haven't seen anyone since they knocked the lieutenant unconscious."

Doc tugged hard on the end of the rope and it slipped free. "Are you ready to get out of here?"

"You need to ask?" Whittaker said, following the medic over to the door, rubbing his wrists.

Whittaker reached down and pulled the sergeant's arm around his neck.

Doc did the same with Saunders' other arm and the two men stood.

Doc opened the door and looked around the jamb. He nodded at the corporal and they stepped out.

Several steps down the hall, Doc heard someone talking in one of the rooms. He stopped to listen.

"What is it?" Whittaker whispered.

"Shhh...." Doc leaned closer to the door. The litany sounded familiar but the words were definitely not English, French, or German.

Doc tried the door as the words started over, and the three men moved into the room.

Doc saw a blond man leaning against the corner of the room with his tied arms wrapped around another man who appeared to be unconscious. The beautiful words continued, almost as if the man speaking them didn't realize the door had opened.

Whittaker inhaled, "Swede!" Whittaker dropped Saunders' arm. The corporal ran over to his friend and worked on the rope that bound him.

Doc sat Saunders against the wall and hurried over to the three men. When Swede finished speaking, he looked at Whittaker and smiled. Several of his teeth were missing.

"Tommy?"

"Yeah, it's me. How's the lieutenant?" The blond man looked down at his superior.

"He's been pretty quiet for the last half an hour."

Doc felt for the jugular vein. The lieutenant's pulse was barely there. Doc untied the lieutenant's hands, checking for broken bones.

"Have you seen Connors?" Whittaker asked.

"No, they took him out of here about an hour after they took the lieutenant yesterday afternoon. They haven't brought him back."

He looked up at the young corporal.

"I think they killed him." Tears started in the slate blue eyes. "They took me out first, thinking I would cave and tell them what they wanted to know."

The tears rolled down the bruised cheeks and dripped onto his lieutenant's forehead. "I didn't tell them anything, Tommy."

"I didn't think you would, Swede. Besides, the only thing you know is Swedish. I'll just bet that confused 'em." Whittaker patted the young man on his shoulder.

"Did it ever." The private smiled. "You should have seen them when I told them to <'kiss my ass.'>" He started laughing. "I did give them my Gramma's strawberry popover recipe. I didn't think she would mind."

"Well, we gotta get out of here," Whittaker said. "Doc, check the corridor, and I'll help Swede with the lieutenant."

Doc nodded and moved over to the door.

"All clear," Doc whispered over his shoulder as he pulled Saunders' arm around his neck.

The sergeant groaned.

"Come on, Sarge, we're getting out of here."

Doc checked again before stepping into the corridor. Whittaker closed the door behind them, gave Doc a quick nod, and they continued down the corridor.

Doc heard voices as he neared one room.

Doc approached the room and glanced through the slightly open door. There were at least ten men in the room, most of them resting on bedrolls, and several playing a card game.

Whittaker, the lieutenant and Swede came up behind him. "What is it?"

Whittaker whispered into his ear.

"About ten of 'em," Doc whispered over his shoulder.

Whittaker looked into the darkness. "There's an intersecting hallway about three doors down. It leads to another hallway that will take us to an outside exit. Can you get past the door?"

"I think so." Saunders moaned again. "Shhh, Sarge you gotta be quiet."

Saunders nodded understanding as they moved across the doorway. Whittaker and Swede did the same and Whittaker closed the door as he passed.

Doc moved down past the three doors. "Which way?" he whispered. "Left or right?" Whittaker pointed to the right and Doc nodded.

Doc heard whispering behind him and then movement in the opposite direction. Doc turned in the dim light to see Swede dragging the lieutenant.

Doc stopped to wait for the man.

"Where did Whittaker go?"

"Back to get the papers. He said he'd meet us outside under the trees."

"You okay?" Doc asked.

"So far. I just wanna get out of here."

"You and me, both." Doc proceeded on to the exterior door.

Doc leaned Saunders against the wall and opened the door a crack. Hearing footsteps behind them, Doc turned to see Whittaker walking up behind them.

"You guys still in here?" Whittaker whispered with a smile.

"Well, our burdens aren't light, ya know," Swede whispered back.

"I'll be sure and let the lieutenant know that you think he's fat."

"Ha ha," Swede responded.

"Coast clear, Doc?" Whittaker whispered.

"Sentry." Doc closed the door enough to see through. "Another coming up."

When Doc thought they were gone, he stuck his head out. "All clear, let's go."

Doc pulled Saunders' arm around his neck and swung the door wide.

In the shadow of the building, the men were able to run into the woods.

They lay down in the underbrush and waited as the sentries passed again.

When they had moved around the opposite corners of the building, the men moved out, quickly disappearing into the woods.

\*\*\*\*\*

< "These American's are not as easily persuaded as the French are,"> Jaegar commented, when Heinrich returned.

<"Wendell is taking care of the last two that we brought in,"> Heinrich reported.  
<"You know, there is still one you haven't spent time with.">

< "I had forgotten about him. Bring him here,"> Lieutenant Jaegar ordered.  
Heinrich gave a sharp nod and exited the room.

\*\*\*\*\*

The seven men squatted down beside a building on the outskirt of Ste. Claire, each catching their breath from the long run. The sun was just beginning to go down.

Hanley looked over at Caje, "The factory, where is it from here?"

"It's on the other side of town."

Hanley looked around the corner. "There doesn't appear to be any activity here. Kirby, you, Stewart, Baer, and Nelson cut around, get into the woods and wait there. Position yourselves to watch any exits behind the building. Avoid any contact with the

Krauts, if you can. Caje, Littlejohn, and I will work our way down the middle."

Kirby nodded, stood up, shifted his BAR strap, and headed out, the three other men following close on his heels.

"Okay, Caje, lead the way."

The dark-haired Cajun also nodded and moved along the street using doorways and alleys to get them to their destination.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was getting harder for Doc to put one foot in front of the other. The pain from his bruised ribs was excruciating, and it raced through him with every step.

"I gotta stop for a moment," Doc gasped.

"Me too, Doc," Swede commented.

Whittaker looked around and saw some cover not too far from where they were. "Over there," he pointed.

Doc headed toward the brush and what he hoped was a small respite from the war.

When Doc got under cover, he collapsed. Saunders landed on top of him, forcing the air from his lungs, and the pain roared through his body unchecked.

Whittaker and Swede maneuvered the lieutenant in and laid him down. Swede collapsed out of breath.

Whittaker stepped over and lifted the unconscious sergeant from the medic's gasping form. "You okay, Doc?" Whittaker asked, patting the medic's shoulder.

Doc managed to roll over onto his stomach, winded. He nodded his answer, closed his eyes, and used his hands as a cushion for his pounding head.

"How long have you been on the front line, Corporal?" Doc asked.

"This is my first mission in the field."

*Why doesn't that surprise me?* "How about Swede, how long has he been on the front line?" Doc sat up.

"His first, too."

"So why did the lieutenant have you two greenies on such an important mission like this?"

"Connors vouched for us. He said we needed the experience if we were going to be in S2," Whittaker explained.

"So you guys have been behind a desk, running operations?"

"I guess you could say that. But I've been studying up on wartime tactics, and I know woods. I grew up in them. We'll be all right in here. Trust me."

Doc shook his head. His Gramma always said 'pride goeth before a fall' and he sure as hell didn't want to be under this kid when he tumbled.

"So are you a hunter, then?" Doc asked, checking on Saunders and getting him comfortable.

"Yep, and a fisherman too."

*Well, that'll sure help,* Doc wanted to say but instead he moved over to the lieutenant, doing what he could for the officer. "You want to check on Swede? I haven't heard him make any noise since we came in here."

"Oh, yeah." Whittaker moved over to Swede, touching his shoulder.

"Swede, you okay?" Whittaker shook Swede's shoulder, when the young man didn't answer. "Swede, answer me."

The private turned his head and opened his eyes. "Are we out?"

"Yeah, buddy, we're out."

"We headed home yet?"

"Soon, pal. Everybody needs to catch their breath first and give our lieutenant and his sergeant a chance to come around a little bit."

"How's the lieutenant?" Swede asked. Whittaker looked over at the medic who was tending to the injured officer. Doc shook his head.

"You took care of him real good, Swede. The Doc here seems to think he'll be okay."

"Really, Doc?" Swede looked at the medic.

"He's real weak, and we need to get him to battalion aid, but I'll do my best to keep him alive."

Swede nodded and closed his eyes. "How are you doing, Doc?"

The medic was taken aback by the question. He hadn't even thought about himself. "I'm hurting, but I'll be okay, thank you for asking."

"Good," Swede said.

Whittaker looked over at the medic. "That's Swede for you, thinking of everybody but himself. He should have been a medic."

Doc moved over to the private and took his pulse. "Are you doing okay, Swede?" Doc asked, concerned with the beat under his fingertips.

"I'll be okay," Swede whispered.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinrich stepped out of the lieutenant's office and pointed at two of his fellow soldiers.

<"You and you, follow me."> On the way to the corporal's cell, Heinrich stopped to pick up Wendell from the medic's prison.

Heinrich opened the door and stepped into the room. The light from the hallway fell on the dead man, revealing his bloody face.

<"These two are gone! Check the other prisoners,"> Heinrich stated to the privates with him as he left the room. <"Get the men together and meet in the lieutenant's office.">

The soldiers nodded and did as they were instructed.

Heinrich hurried to the lieutenant's office to deliver the bad news.

\*\*\*\*\*

The longer the medic lay on the hard ground, the harder it was for him to move. Doc had to check on Saunders and the lieutenant but he couldn't get his legs to cooperate with his demands.

"You okay, Doc?" Whittaker asked.

"Can't move at the moment, but I'm sure I'll be okay."

"Swede's feeling the same way."

"How long have we been here?"

"I'd guess about thirty minutes or so." Whittaker looked out through the brush. "The sun is down now."

"It's warm here," Swede commented from over by the lieutenant.

"I know Swede, but we've got to go. The Krauts are probably looking for us by now," Whittaker reasoned.

"Just a little while longer," Swede stated. "I don't want to move, I hurt so bad."

"I don't think we should move the lieutenant," Doc said. "Sarge either for that matter. Besides, I don't think I can take another step." Pain raced through his body when he tried to reposition himself.

"Great," Whittaker mumbled. "What do we do now? We're too close. They'll find us, I know they will."

Doc thought a moment. "It's dark; I don't think they'll keep looking in the dark." *Great, now you're starting to sound like Billy.*

Whittaker looked at Doc like he'd grown a third arm. "Are you serious?"

"Well, we can always hope, right?" Doc said.

"They won't stop until they have what we've got," Whittaker said patting his shirt front.

*Have him check the perimeter. It'll give him something to do.* The voice sounded like Saunders' in Doc's pain-ravaged head, and he cleared his throat. "You could check the perimeter."

"Who are you to give a corporal orders, soldier?"

Doc sat up at his tone, braced himself with his hand on the ground, and looked the young man square in the eye. "Because, in the last week I've seen more death than you've seen in your whole life, that's who I am, and I don't plan on being one of the casualties of this mission."

The fire behind the medic's eyes told the corporal all he needed to know and he stood up.

"Besides, you're the only one who can actually move, so," Doc lay back down with a soft groan, "go check the perimeter."

"Man, I'd hate to see what you're like when you're not in pain," Whittaker said, slipping out of their hiding place.

The silence was soothing, like a balm for the soul. He closed his eyes, breathing in the soft pine, the dry leaves and the dirt. *Smells like home.*

Doc's mind wandered to peaceful times, a time before this godforsaken war.

*The music in the gym for the Prom was amazing and played in his head like he was actually there. Lorraine's shy smile reached her eyes when he touched her hand to give her the cup of punch. That first kiss with her was magical. Her lips were so soft and tender like a rose petal.*

Doc didn't want that memory to fade, but something was intruding on that special time. Someone was speaking in a foreign language. Doc opened his eyes in the darkness and listened.

Turning his head toward the sound, Doc realized that it was Swede. "Swede, you okay?" Doc whispered into the darkness.

The beautiful language continued for another couple of lines and then the young GI responded. "Yeah, I'm doing okay, Doc," Swede groaned.

"I heard those same words when I opened the door to your room back at the factory. It sounds familiar, what is it?" Doc asked.

"It's Psalms 23."

A twig snapped in the darkness and both men held their breath.

"It's me, guys," Whittaker announced from outside their hiding place. "The coast is clear. I think we should go, now."

Saunders moaned, and Doc rolled over to check on him.

"I can't go any farther, Tommy," Swede told him. "You take the lieutenant and go back without me."

Whittaker slid over next to his buddy and touched his shoulder, looking into pain-filled eyes.

"What, and have the lieutenant mad at me 'cause I left you? No way is that gonna happen. You're going with me, or I'm not going."

"He's right, corporal. You should go back to our lines and get help," Doc informed him.

"You two have lost it, haven't you?" Whittaker looked at his unconscious lieutenant and then over at the medic. "There is no way that I'm leaving four injured soldiers behind enemy lines to go for help when I'm all they have for protection."

"Well that's a really brave thought, corporal, but it's the only one I have," the medic said. "You know where we are and can bring back an entire platoon."

"Yeah, but...."

"No 'yeah buts' to it, we can't move Sarge or the lieutenant any farther, and you can't carry four injured soldiers on your back," Doc reasoned.

Whittaker huffed and sat back on his heels.

"Well, if we're staying here for any length of time we need to set up some sort of alarm."

Deep in thought, Whittaker let out a slow breath and looked at the medic. Snapping his fingers he moved from the hiding place.

\*\*\*\*\*

As Hanley, Caje, and Littlejohn approached the building, there was a lot of activity.

A German lieutenant stood in a doorway giving orders to six men who scattered into the woods behind the building.

One man stepped up to him, saluted and said something in German.

\*\*\*\*\*

Kirby, Stewart, Baer, and Billy had spread out with a good view of the building. In the dim setting sun, Kirby counted six men running toward them. He hand-signaled for the others to stay put as the soldiers entered the tree line.

All were ready as the Germans approached.

Kirby grabbed the one that went by him, covered his mouth, and thrust his knife deep into the German's back, killing him. Stewart, Baer, and Billy fired dispatching the others.

\*\*\*\*\*

Caje whispered over his shoulder, "I see four men outside, sir."

"And six just went into the woods. That makes ten. How many do you think are in the building?" Hanley asked the trusted scout.

"I'm thinking ten, sir," Caje responded.

"That's what I'm thinking too," Hanley said, rubbing his chin. He pulled up his carbine.

"Caje, you and Littlejohn, take out the two sentries. I'll wait until you can cover me and then we'll move in on the lieutenant."

The two men took out the sentries and then returned to their position.

Hanley came around the corner of the building locking eyes with the German officer. The soldier standing next to the German lieutenant raised his weapon and Caje fired one shot into his forehead, throwing him backward.

"*Hande hoch*," Hanley ordered, and looked into the woods when he heard the sound of rifle fire.

The officer did as he was told.

Hanley nodded at the building. "You two, check out the building."

Caje and Littlejohn both acknowledged and moved into the building.

Hanley stepped over to the lieutenant, and disarmed him. Hanley removed the German's belt and tied his hands behind his back.

"Do you speak English?" Hanley asked.

The German stared at him, feigning ignorance of the language.

"*Sprechen sie English?*" Hanley asked again.

"*Nein,*" the man responded.

"Great," Hanley pushed the man into the building as sporadic gunfire erupted inside.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinrich watched the four soldiers run back to the building.

He rolled onto his back and checked his grazed arm. He slipped the strap of his gun onto his shoulder, stood, and worked his way into the darkening woods.

\*\*\*\*\*

"The building is empty to the exits, Caje," Kirby announced as the four met up with the scout.

"Let's find the lieutenant," Caje said and headed back toward the front entrance, the others in tow.

\*\*\*\*\*

After sitting the German officer in a chair, Hanley had gone through the small room, collecting maps and paperwork that could be important, stuffing them into his jacket. Noise in the hallway caused Hanley to turn and point his carbine at the door.

"In here, guys," Billy said, pushing the door open. He stopped when he saw his lieutenant ready to shoot. "Sorry, sir, I saw the light," he explained as the five other men stepped in behind him.

Hanley lowered his weapon and relaxed his stance. "That's okay, private, next time knock. Walking in is a good way to get yourself a sure-fire trip home." As Hanley laid his carbine on the table and looked at Caje. "Did you find them?"

"No, sir, there's no one here but us," Caje reported.

Hanley turned to the lieutenant who sat in a chair with a satisfied grin on his face. "You look like the cat that swallowed the canary," Hanley said.

The German continued to smile.

"Where are our people?"

The German gave no response and the smile aggravated the American officer.

"They may have moved them out already," Kirby stated stepping up behind the seated lieutenant, making a point of resting the BAR muzzle on the chair back between the man's shoulder blades.

"Then why were they going into the woods?" Billy asked.

"Good question, Nelson," Hanley said, staring back at the officer in the chair.

"Why would you send six of your men into the woods?" Hanley asked, more for his own benefit than the German's. "Better still, why would I send six men into the woods?" A smile spread slowly across the American's face as recognition dawned. "Maybe to look for something or," he paused for effect, "someone." He lowered his head to be eye to eye with the German lieutenant.

The German's face twitched, and Hanley knew the answer.

"They got away didn't they?" He straightened up, smiling from ear to ear. "And

"you got nothing, didn't you?" He crossed his arms and cocked his head at the lieutenant. "I'll bet you're livid, aren't you?"

"Chalk another one for Sarge," Kirby commented, shifting his weight from his left foot to his right, and smiling.

Hanley looked at each of his men. "Littlejohn, you and Baer will help me take the lieutenant back to camp so that S2 can have a chat with him." He picked up his carbine from the table. "Caje, you, Kirby, Billy and Stewart will head into the woods in the direction that he sent his men."

The Cajun nodded.

"Avoid contact."

"Yes, sir."

The two big men stepped up on either side of the German lieutenant and lifted him from his seat.

Hanley led the way to the exit. He pulled his carbine up to his hip and checked before stepping out into the open darkness that surrounded the building. He, Littlejohn, Baer, and the German lieutenant headed toward the American lines. Hanley looked over his shoulder as his four other men slipped into the woods.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinrich watched from his hiding place as an American lieutenant and two behemoths escorted his tied superior from the building. He crept along the ditch following them at a distance.

When he felt the time was right, the German corporal pulled his rifle up to his shoulder and sighted on the American lieutenant's head.

*Take out the leader and the others will fall.*

Just as Heinrich squeezed the trigger, one of the big men shifted his weight and took the bullet that was intended for Hanley.

Heinrich punched the ground with his fist and rolled out of the ditch farther into the woods to avoid the bullets that were ricocheting through the trees.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Hey, Lieutenant, can we take a five? I'm bushed," Baer asked.

There was a gunshot and the young private was thrown into the lieutenant from the force of the bullet. Both men went down.

Littlejohn turned, fired several cover shots, grabbed the German lieutenant and pushed him into the ditch. From his safe position, he continued to give Hanley the cover needed to crawl to safety.

Hanley pulled himself from beneath Baer and did his best to pull the young man to the ditch beside Littlejohn. When they were close enough Littlejohn grabbed a fist full of the big guy's jacket and yanked him down into the ditch.

Hanley checked Baer's pulse. When he found none, he took the tag from the short chain and put it in an inside jacket pocket. He patted the young man's shoulder and crawled over to Littlejohn. "Where's he at?"

"Not sure, sir, but I'm thinking he's back that way on the other side of the ditch."

"There's been no return fire," Hanley mumbled to himself. He looked over his shoulder into the woods. "Let's go that way," he nodded towards the trees behind them, "to the CP."

Littlejohn nodded his understanding and then looked down at Baer. "Should I carry him back, sir?"

Hanley shook his head. "No, I'll need your help with him." Hanley gestured toward the German, and then looked down at the private. "I'll let burial detail know where Baer is."

The lieutenant stood in a crouch and grabbed the German by the arm, lifting him to his feet. "*Mach schnell!*" Hanley growled and pushed the man forward.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hearing the gunfire, Caje and his men stopped and listened.

"M1," Kirby said to no one in particular.

Caje looked at Kirby, worry crossing his thin features.

"You and Stewart, head toward the road, see if you can help. Billy, you stay with me."

Kirby nodded and the two men set out as the gunfire stopped.

\*\*\*\*\*

Whittaker had been gone a long time.

Doc checked on Saunders, then moved over to Edwards and Swede. The tired medic leaned against the tree, his mind flip-flopping between pain and rational thought.

*To bad they took our canteens, water would be nice right about now.*

Doc put his head against the tree to rest. The pain in his side screamed at him with every breath. Shifting to get more comfortable, Doc's dog tags rubbed together.

Doc grabbed the front of his shirt to quiet them and an idea formed.

*Tags make noise, why not string them together for an alarm?*

Doc pulled the tags from under his shirt and dangled them in front of him. He removed one. Moving over to Saunders, Doc took one of his tags and then did the same with the other two. He then removed his bootlace and strung the four tags together. When he was finished, he worked his way out of hiding to find the perfect place to hang the tags. Crawling back to safety, Doc lay down next to Saunders and passed out.

Some time later Doc felt a cold hand on his neck.

"You scared me there, Doc. You've been out a long time."

Doc groaned as he sat up. "How are Sarge, Swede, and the lieutenant?"

"Well, from a non-medical stand point, they are still breathing."

Doc moved over to check on his three charges. Pulses were strong, even the lieutenant's was making a come back.

"Looks like the decision to stay put was a good one, Doc," Whittaker said.

There were several loud snaps outside as twigs were stepped on. Doc dropped low and froze.

Whittaker turned and crawled out into the darkness.

\*\*\*\*\*

Caje lifted his foot off of the twigs. He turned to Billy putting his hand to his mouth and signaled for the young man to go to the left while he went right.

Billy nodded, and moved off in the direction that Caje had indicated.

Caje moved though the trees, as silent as a mouse.

Noise off to the left made Caje freeze and wait. Someone was moving in behind him.

Caje crouched down low and looked for a place that he could surprise his stalker. While moving toward a large tree the PFC was tackled from behind.

The two men tussled with Caje's M1.

"*Hande hoch!*" Billy yelled, with his rifle leveled at the man who sat a stride Caje's stomach. Billy watched the hands lift into the air. "Get up." Billy emphasized with a movement of his weapon.

Caje rolled to his feet and aimed his rifle at the young man.

"Whittaker, Thomas, Corporal, three-six-one-six-two-nine-five."

"We're with the..." Billy began. Caje poked him in the side with his elbow.

"No information, he could be a Kraut," Caje added.

"I'm not a Kraut." Whittaker dropped his hands. "But you could be."

"Zeppo," Caje waited for the answer.

Even in the darkness Caje could see the relief wash over the young corporal's face when he heard that one word.

Whittaker took a deep breath and released it with the counter-sign. "Groucho, Chico, and Harpo."

"We had to make sure. We came looking for our sergeant and medic," Caje said.

"They're back over there with Lieutenant Edwards and Swede."

\*\*\*\*\*

Doc fought the pain and darkness that tried to consume him.

The tags jingled, his alarm worked, someone was coming.

Fear grabbed Doc's stomach and twisted until he thought he was going to vomit. The medic looked around him for something he could use as a weapon.

"Doc, it's me!" Whittaker called from outside. "Nice alarm you made up," he said as he crawled in, jingling the tags, dropping them into the medic's hand. To Doc's relief, two familiar faces came in behind the corporal.

"Hiya, Doc!" Billy said as he entered. "Man is it good to see you." Billy glanced at his sergeant. "Is Sarge okay?"

"He will be once we get him to battalion aid."

"Let's get out of here," Caje ordered.

"First, we need water," Doc said.

Caje handed his canteen to Doc, who lifted Saunders head and poured a little onto his lips. Billy helped Whittaker do the same with the lieutenant and Swede.

"Come on Swede, the cavalry is here let's get going."

Swede opened his eyes, "I can't move, Tommy. Take the lieutenant and go."

Whittaker shook his head. "Will you quit? Caje and Billy came all this way to get us and I don't think they'd like it if you stayed here. So, if you want to die you'll have to do it back at the aid station." Whittaker pulled the young soldier's arm around his neck. "Which way, Caje?"

Caje pointed north and they started out.

\*\*\*\*\*

Kirby hand-signalied Stewart to the other side of the road. Stewart nodded and crouched his way across the road. Kirby's trained eye watched in all directions. He could vaguely see Stewart stop in the ditch.

"Kirby," came the hoarse whisper. "It's Baer."

Kirby ran across the road and knelt down, touching the shoulder of the big man. He looked around in the darkness. "Which way would they go?" Kirby thought out loud. The private looked down the road and shook his head. "Lieutenant wouldn't risk being out in the open."

"You think they'd take the trees?" Stewart asked.  
"Yes, I do," Kirby stood and adjusted his weapon into a good firing position.  
"Let's see if we can catch up to them."  
Kirby stepped into the trees with Stewart on his left.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hanley heard something moving in behind him. He whispered to Littlejohn, "He's moving in behind us, drop."

Littlejohn nodded understanding and both men grabbed the German, forcing him to the ground between them.

Pulling his carbine up to his shoulder, he sighted into the darkness.  
They could hear a whispered conversation and then the woods went silent.

\*\*\*\*\*

The three men in front of Kirby disappeared, so he lowered his body to the ground and motioned for Stewart to do the same.

"Kirby, where'd they go?" Stewart whispered, "They were right there."

"Shhh," Kirby ordered. "You wanna get us shot?" he said as he scanned the dark trees in front of them. "They don't know we're here."

Kirby's mind scrambled to figure out a way to let his superior know he was there, without being shot first. The only thing he could think of was to yell and pray that the lieutenant recognized his voice. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"Lieutenant, it's me, Kirby!"

"Kirby? What are you doing here?" Hanley lowered his rifle, stood, and took a step forward.

Kirby and Stewart walked toward the outline of the tall officer.

"Caje sent us back to help when we heard the gunfire," Kirby explained.

"Well, so far that was the only gun play that we've had, but we can use the help." Hanley turned with the two privates following him. "Kirby, ten paces back and to the left. Stewart, ten paces back and to the right. Keep your eyes peeled for anything. Let's move out," the lieutenant instructed.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinrich saw the two men join the other three and fell farther back. They were moving at a pretty good pace when Heinrich tripped over something large in the darkness and fell face first onto the hard ground.

Rolling over to see what it was Heinrich noticed it was a dead American soldier. Moving over to the dead man the German corporal had an idea. The fighter was a little bigger than he was but the plan would work.

Heinrich removed the dead man's dog tags and clothing, dressing quickly in the darkness. Checking himself over, he knew he would fit in perfectly. Now there would be plenty of time to get to his lieutenant.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Caje, you think we could stop for a minute?" Doc asked.  
"You okay, Doc?"  
"I'm hurting really bad. I need to stop." If only he could get a deep breath without the pain.

"Yeah, we could all use a break," Caje said as he moved over to the side of the road. "Take five," Caje commanded.

The other men joined the PFC, setting their charges down on the ground.

"Billy, let's make sure it's clear," Caje said. Billy nodded and followed behind his squad member.

"I'll take some more of that water," Swede said.

Whittaker removed the cap of Billy's canteen and handed it to him.

Doc used Caje's canteen and poured the life-giving fluid into both Edwards' and Saunders' mouths. He then took a swig for himself.

\*\*\*\*\*

Billy saw a form in the ditch, ran over to it, and squatted down. "Caje," Billy whispered.

The scout joined the private. "We've got to move, now," Caje ordered, watching the trees. The two men stood running back to get the others.

Doc saw the two men in the darkness and stood. He could see from their stride that they were in a hurry. He stood up.

"Everything okay?" Doc asked Caje.

"They got Baer. We have to move quickly." Caje helped Billy lift Saunders up onto his back. Whittaker lifted Swede up onto his feet, and Caje helped Doc with the lieutenant. "You okay, Doc?" Caje asked as they started out, Billy and Saunders leading the way.

"I just hurt, Caje."

"You're head is starting to bleed, again."

Doc took his free hand and touched the wound on the side of his head. "Oh, yeah, I forgot about that," he wiped his hand on his jacket.

Caje reached into his web belt and pulled out a bandage and sulfa. He passed the items to the medic. "Go ahead and fix it Doc, I've got the lieutenant."

Doc worked on his head as he walked and fell behind.

"Come on, Doc," Caje said when he noticed the medic had dropped farther back than he liked. Caje watched Doc's head slowly nod, as he waved his hand for the others to keep moving.

"I'll catch up," Doc said.

Caje stopped and waited. "I'm not losing you again." Caje responded.

The medic bent at his waist and put his hands on his knees. Doc's breathing came in great gasps between grunts of pain. "I can't go any farther, Caje. I'll hide somewhere here along the road in the trees and you can come back and get me." Doc looked up at the scout and saw four instead of two. The medic blinked to clear his eyes but it didn't help. "I'm only holding you back. Get the lieutenant home and come back to get me. I'll be real quiet. No one will even know I'm there."

"Whittaker!" Caje shouted. The man stopped and turned.

"Yeah, Caje?" Whittaker responded.

"How's Swede doing?"

"I'm okay, Caje. What's wrong?" Swede answered.

"Doc's not doing so well. Can you two take the lieutenant?" Caje asked.

"Sure," the two men responded in unison, turning to get their lieutenant.

Caje went back to Doc and pulled his arm around his neck.

"No, Caje, honest, I can wait. I'm not that bad," he slurred, and leaned heavily on the Cajun.

"Well, you don't sound good to me. I'll get you home, Doc."

Doc looked at the young scout; the pain finally overwhelming him. "I knew you'd come back, Caje." Doc's eyes rolled back, and his head dropped forward.

Caje stumbled with the sudden dead weight, but righted himself and caught up with the others.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinrich watched the sentry stop the five men just after dawn.

He was too far away to hear the sign/counter-sign. Heinrich thought for a moment, *there has to be another sentry. It would be too obvious if I came in right behind them.*

Heinrich circled the small village, waited an hour, and came in from the opposite side.

"Don't shoot," Heinrich said from behind a tree.

"Show yourself," the private ordered.

Heinrich stepped from behind the tree holding his wounded arm.

"Zeppo," the private waited. Heinrich looked at the soldier, acted like he was about to answer and promptly fainted. "Medic!" the private yelled as he lowered the injured man to the ground.

\*\*\*\*\*

The German lieutenant was under lock and key and being well-guarded.

Hanley was heading to his office when a sentry yelled medic. Hanley rounded a corner and saw a soldier laying on the dirt road with the sentry over him. The closest medic ran over. "Is he okay, Doc?" Hanley asked.

The medic shrugged his shoulders. "We won't know until we get him in to see the doctor. The only thing I see in my exam is the bullet graze on his arm."

Another medic ran over and helped the first one take the young soldier to the aid station.

"What happened?" Hanley asked the sentry.

"He stepped out of the trees and when I asked him for the counter-sign he dropped."

"I'll check on him later. Good work, soldier." Hanley turned and continued on to his office.

An hour later, Kirby stuck his head in the door.

"Sarge and Doc are back, Lieutenant. Caje and Billy brought them in to the aid station about five minutes ago."

Hanley stood and the two men went over to the aid station to check on their friends.

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Kirby pulled the tent flap back and allowed his lieutenant to enter first.

Hanley saw his sergeant and medic lying in cots side by side. Relived that they were home, he breathed a small '*thank you*' looking skyward. The lieutenant stepped over to the doctor to ask about his people and the three men that were brought with them.

"Saunders is going to be out of it for a while and so will your medic," the doctor looked over at the two men. "They both have several broken ribs and a lot of bruises, but no internal injuries."

"What about Edwards and his men?" Hanley asked.

"That German lieutenant did a number on Edwards. He's been taken to surgery. Anderson is doing fine. He's hooked up to IV's and is asleep over there." The doctor nodded his head in the direction of the young soldier. "And Corporal Whittaker here," he indicated patting the shoulder of the man who sat on the table in front of him, "is dehydrated and hungry, but he seems to be physically fine."

"Thank you, Doc," Hanley responded. "You've done well, Corporal. You brought a squad member and your lieutenant home in one piece."

"Please, sir, take these," Whittaker said, pulling papers from his shirt and shoving them at the lieutenant. "I don't want the responsibility any more."

Hanley stared at the paperwork.

"Give them back to S2 or G2 or the president himself, I don't care. I just don't want them any more."

"Why don't you head over to the mess tent and get some breakfast. When you're done come back to my office for debriefing in an hour. Then you can go get some sleep."

"Oo food."

"Take it slow corporal," the doctor said.

"Okay, Doc," Whittaker said as he practically ran from the aid tent.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinrich saw the red-headed Whittaker come into the mess tent. The German corporal was amazed that the young man had made it back here and looked down at his plate to avoid eye contact.

Watching the young soldier get his plate of food and a cup of coffee, Heinrich released a sigh of relief as the soldier walked by him unnoticed.

Whittaker grabbed a seat down at the far end of the table.

Heinrich had to get out of here before the inevitable happened.

The German corporal looked around to see where the closest exit was and a plan began to hatch as he stood.

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Whittaker got comfortable in his chair, relieved to finally be sitting down to do something he'd wanted to do for two days. "Thank you God, for getting me through this," Whittaker said as grace for breakfast.

Picking up his fork, he dug into the powdered eggs like they were his last meal. Whittaker had half the plate gone when he saw someone stand out of the corner of his eye, at the end of the table.

"No," Whittaker whispered, as recognition hit him. The corporal's fork clattered to the metal tray as he stood, knocking his chair backwards.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinrich heard the noise behind him and turned long enough to realize that Whittaker knew who he was.

He ran from the tent, with Whittaker right behind him.

Heinrich turned into a dark alley and waited.

The German corporal had one purpose, to eliminate the one person who could expose him. He tipped his head to listen to the quiet street. He pulled the bayonet from its scabbard, as he heard running feet skidding to a halt at the mouth of the alley.

Heinrich stepped farther back into a shadow and time stood still.

"I know you're in there," Whittaker yelled into the darkness.

Heinrich held his breath, steeling himself. The red-headed corporal will make a stupid move and he would be the victor. Heinrich watched as Whittaker popped his head around the corner.

"There was an MP around the corner. I'll go get him."

"Do you really think I'll wait here for you to get back?" Heinrich responded.

Whittaker stepped into the dark alley, every muscle tensed for a fight. "No, but now I know for a fact that you're in here." The young man walked forward, looking behind anything the German could use as cover.

Heinrich watched the soldier work his way through the alley. When the man got close enough, Heinrich launched himself from his hiding place to thrust the bayonet deeply into Whittaker's stomach.

Whittaker gasped in surprise as the pain exploded in his body like an 88 shell in his mid-section. Whittaker wrapped his fingers around the hilt of the bayonet and pulled it free from his stomach.

The two men fought for what seemed like an eternity.

Whittaker had managed to pin Heinrich to the ground and with his last breath shoved the bayonet into the flesh of the enemy below him.

Heinrich couldn't believe the pain that raced through his body.

Whittaker lay atop him like a dead weight, causing white little explosions behind his closed eyelids. He pushed the lifeless soldier off him, managed to crawl into the pockmarked street, and promptly passed out.

\*\*\*\*\*

Doc heard a commotion at the aid tent flap. He lifted his head off the pillow as two stretchers were brought in. The doctor worked with the first man sending him immediately off to the surgery tent.

Doc sat up, trying to get a good look at the second man. The medic that blocked his view moved, and Doc saw Whittaker's red hair.

The medic swung his legs over the side of the bed and fought the wave of pain that coursed through his body. Doc stood on unsteady legs and worked his way over to the table. "What happened?" Doc asked the medic that had brought Whittaker in.

"We don't know yet. We found the other guy in the street and this one in the alley already dead." The younger medic shook his head. "It looks like it was some fight."

Doc braced himself with the table as a wave of dizziness washed over him.

"Let's get you into bed, Doc." The young medic said, helping the fellow medic back to his cot.

Doc stared at the dead young corporal on the table, for what seemed like a long time. The boy should be going home to his parents on his two feet, not in a casket. It was all so senseless. He clasped his hands over his chest, and stared at the olive drab tent over head. His mind was empty of thought as he fell into a fitful sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

The beginning storm woke the sleeping private. The thunder was loud and close.

Swede lay in the darkness counting off the distance between lightning and thunder. His mom made a game of it when he was little to take his mind off the approaching storm. Now it was just something he did automatically when he heard

thunder or saw the lightning.

He was feeling better than he had in a while, and felt comforted as the refreshing rain started falling on the canvas tent.

For some odd reason Psalm 23 slipped from his lips.

\*\*\*\*\*

Heinrich sat up at the loud thunderclap, and soft sing-song language of rain, regretting the sudden movement. Pain radiated from the fresh surgery. Holding the site, he stood to his feet, a plan hatching as he stabilized.

Looking at the cots around him he saw the one called Anderson in front of him, the one called Saunders, and the medic that he had had free reign with, to the left.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was a noise off to Swede's right that made him turn.

A flash of lightning and Swede inhaled sharply. The face that haunted his current dreams stood beside him with a surgeon's knife.

"Doc!" Swede managed before the man slit his jugular and he breathed his last.

\*\*\*\*\*

The panicked call for Doc woke Saunders. Lightning flashed illuminating a figure moving toward him.

As bloody hands closed around his wind pipe, Saunders was able to yell, "Doc!"

A thunderclap sounded, clogging the air with sound.

\*\*\*\*\*

Doc sat up, not fully awake, at the urgent call from his immediate superior and friend. Looking over at Saunders' cot, he saw a GI standing over the noncom with his hands wrapped around the sergeant's throat.

"Stop!" Doc shouted and dove at the form in the darkness. The two men landed hard on the dirt floor sending plumes of dust into the already thick, moisture-laden air.

The thunder reverberated outside covering the battle for dominance that ensued.

The tent edge gave on their collective body weight. The two men rolled into the cold rain which pelted their bodies like tiny needles.

Heinrich stood looking for something, anything to stop the medic. This one man could unravel his plans to rescue his lieutenant.

Doc lay in the mud, his strength draining out into the cold liquid beneath him. Rolling onto all fours he struggled to stand. Heinrich landed on his back with his knees, forcing the medic's face into the mud puddle. Rather than panic, he let his body go limp.

With a burst of strength he didn't realize he had, he lifted up out of the puddle and drew in a huge gulp of air.

A flash of lightning allowed Heinrich see a pipe leaning against a nearby tree. The German corporal slogged through the puddle and grabbed it.. Taking a step toward the kneeling medic, he swung wildly, hoping to connect and stop the confrontation.

Doc ducked and rolled to his hands and knees by the tent, as the pipe swooshed past his head, narrowly missing. The medic watched the frustrated German put the pipe on his shoulder like a baseball bat, preparing to take a final swing.

Mud and water sloshed around the German corporal's ankles as he took another

step.

Doc watched Heinrich's hands tighten on the pipe.

The medic's muscles tensed for action.

Suddenly the air was alive with activity. Every hair on Doc's body stood on end; he took a deep breath smelling the lightning. He remembered the sensation from childhood and dropped, instinctively covering his head.

The tree Heinrich stood under peeled down the middle from the electricity's pursuit to the ground. The power raced down the metal pipe and into the German corporal's wet body, killing him where he stood. Smoke curled from the falling body as the air rushed back into the void the lightning created, deafening the medic with its ear-splitting force.

The last thing Doc felt as he lost consciousness was the cold driving rain on his face and the ground beneath him moving with the violence of the thunder.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me," Doc whispered.

"What was that, Doc?" Saunders asked.

The medic opened his eyes to an olive drab tent and antiseptic smells. He turned toward his sergeant's voice.

Saunders sat on the edge of his cot. The red marks on his neck where Heinrich tried to end his life were fading. "Welcome back, Doc."

"How long have I been out?" Doc brought his hand up to rub his dry eyes.

"A day or so." Saunders reached for his cigarettes on the little table between the two cots. "MP's heard the lightning hit the tree and came over to check it out." He lit his cigarette and took a drag. "When they got over here you were unconscious by the tent, and the Kraut was dead under the tree. The doctor wasn't sure which killed him first, the lightning or the tree falling on him." He took another pull from the cigarette.

Doc took a breath and closed his eyes.

"He deserved what he got, Doc," Saunders reassured his medic.

Doc nodded, knowing Saunders was right. In Doc's heart that man was still a man, no matter what he'd done or what military organization he belonged to. Loss of life was still horrible, whomever it happened to. "How's Swede? I don't see him this morning. Did they send him to Battalion aid?" Doc asked.

Saunders looked down at his feet. "The Kraut slit his throat before he started on me." Saunders rubbed his neck.

Doc's heart dropped, death was even worse when it was someone you liked.

"He seemed like a good kid."

"They all do, Doc."

"Hey, Doc's awake," Kirby announced over his shoulder. Caje and Billy entered with the private, and the three men stepped over to the foot of the medic's cot. "You had us worried there for a while, Doc, sure glad you're back."

"Glad to be back, Kirby." Doc wanted to sit up, but decided against it when the pain announced its presence.

"We wanted to check on you, see how you were doing," Billy smiled.

"Thanks, guys." Doc folded his hands over his chest.

"You've got to hurry back, Doc. That new medic is a butcher."

"Oh, Kirby, he is not," Caje countered.

"You were there. You saw the size of the carving knife he carries."

"Kirby, it wasn't a carving knife, it was a scalpel just like Doc carries," Caje said.

"I'm sure Morris was glad he had it, too. He'd be going home in a pine box if he hadn't done what he did," Billy added.

"Yeah, well, Doc needs to hurry back." Kirby put his hands in his pants pockets and kicked at the dirt floor.

"Why's that, Kirby?" Caje grinned. "Are you missin' him messin' with your feet?"  
Billy and Saunders snickered.

"Aw, you guys don't know nothin'!" Kirby said turning to leave. Over his shoulder he repeated himself, "Hurry back, Doc."

"We'll let you guys get some sleep," Caje replied. "Come on, Billy, let's go get some coffee."

"See ya, Doc and Sarge," Billy responded as they left the tent.

Doc smiled as the three men left. He watched work crews clear away fallen branches and other damage from the storm through the tent flap. Doc's attention was grabbed when Saunders uttered a pain-filled grunt. "You okay, Sarge?"

"Yeah." He took a pull from his cigarette. "Did Swede ever tell you what it was he was saying back in Ste. Claire?"

"He said it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm in Swedish. Very pretty," Doc commented.

"Yes, it was. I've never heard it said that way before."

Both men became extremely quiet, thinking of the scripture that seemed to say everything.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...."

end