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At the first sign of daybreak, Saunders got up and stood at the mine entrance. He listened for any sound that didn't belong. Once he was sure there were none, he woke Doc. "Doc, we need to get moving."

Saunders studied the map as Doc got himself ready to head out. He knew where they were, knew where Phase Line Red was, but there was no way of knowing where the American lines were now.

Saunders was still studying the map when Doc walked up beside him. "Sarge, I should take a look at your leg this morning."

"It feels fine, Doc. See for yourself." Saunders didn't even look up from the map.

The medic bent down and looked at Saunders' calf. There wasn't much heat coming from the leg and the bandage was fairly clean. Doc assumed Saunders was downplaying his condition, but the leg in fact looked fine. "You're right, it looks pretty good." Doc stood up, shoved his hands in his pockets and heaved a heavy sigh.

Saunders could see Doc obviously had something else on his mind. "Alright, Doc. Out with it."

"Sarge, I think you should give me your pistol."

"Doc, you know I can't do that." Saunders folded the map and shoved it back into his jacket.

"I know a medic in the 84<sup>th</sup> that carries a forty-five. He doesn't even wear a Red Cross on his uniform."

"Doc, you do wear a Red Cross on your uniform." Saunders flicked the medic's Red Cross arm band. "I'm not giving you my Colt."

"You might need my help." Doc made one last pointless appeal.

Saunders shook his head. "Doc, one more weapon isn't gonna make a difference. And if you're found with a gun they'll shoot you."

Saunders settled on a direct approach toward the American lines. They would likely run into more Kraut patrols, but it couldn't be more dangerous than spending another day in Kraut territory. He realized the Americans would mount a counterattack sooner or later. Saunders just hoped he and Doc located the Americans before the Germans found them.

"Doc, if something happens ..."

Doc interjected, "Oh no, I'm not going to leave you."

"What if I'm dead?" Saunders pointed out. He knew getting the medic to leave him behind unless he was dead or captured would be impossible. "You need to keep heading south. Until you reach the river. Then follow the river west." He stared intently at Doc. "When the shelling starts. You just find somewhere to hide and wait for our guys to find you. You got that, Doc?"

"Okay, I got it."

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The morning began as the previous day ended, hiding from and dodging Kraut patrols. It was late morning when they stumbled upon two wounded German soldiers. Saunders found it strange the soldiers were headed in the same direction as he and Doc; toward the American lines. A vehicle with four more German soldiers pulled up as Saunders and Doc observed from the hedgerow. The two Americans exchanged glances as they watched an altercation between the German soldiers. Without warning, one of the soldiers from the vehicle pulled out a Luger and shot the two wounded soldiers. Saunders and Doc sat in silence as the four soldiers got back in their vehicle and drove away.

Once the vehicle was out of sight, Saunders stood and ensured they were gone. Doc



ran up to check on the two soldiers but found they were both dead. "Sarge, what was that all about?"

"The group in car must have been SS." He pointed at the two dead Germans. "They must have thought these two were deserting or something."

Doc could not comprehend the inhumanity of the action. "But why shoot them?"

"Senseless brutality." Saunders shot a worried look at Doc. "If the SS are around, Doc ..."

The medic finished Saunders' thought. "We need to get moving."

They quickly moved out past the German soldiers. Saunders kept them hugging the hedgerow along the road. It allowed them a quick escape into hiding while maintaining an easier trail to follow and walk along.

It was late afternoon when Saunders signaled Doc into the brush. He moved forward to get a better look and saw three vehicles coming toward them along the road. Saunders quickly hid in the brush and looked back to make sure Doc was hidden. He felt a sense of alarm when he could see the red from the medic's helmet. The late afternoon sun shone directly where Doc was in the hedgerow. There was no way for Saunders to get back to the medic or to signal Doc as the cars approached. Saunders could only hope that the vehicles would be traveling too fast to notice the medic's helmet.

Saunders held his breath as the first vehicle slowly passed, then the staff car. He was just about to let out his breath when the third slammed on the breaks and the four soldiers inside bolted from the vehicle. The Germans were all over Doc within seconds.

They fired a shot in the air to flag down the first two vehicles as they dragged Doc from the hedgerow. Saunders' heart sank as he saw they were the same four soldiers he and Doc had seen earlier in the day.

The other two vehicles promptly returned and more SS soldiers piled out. Saunders could see there were two officers and nine others. Eleven total. How was he going to take out eleven SS soldiers without getting Doc killed? If they drove away he'd never be able to keep up. How would he find Doc again? Saunders' mind was racing. He realized he had to act before it was too late.

The SS Captain walked up to Doc and in perfect English began to question him. "American Medic, what are you doing out here all alone?"

Doc knew he was supposed to remain quiet. Only name, rank, and serial number, but he also knew in order to protect Saunders they had to believe Doc was alone. "My unit got wiped out in the fighting the other night. I got lost and couldn't find my way back to the American lines."

"So we have a little lost lamb." The SS Captain laughed and was joined by the others.

Doc remained subdued. "I never did have a very good sense of direction. Guess that's why the Army made me a medic."

The SS Captain's eyes narrowed as he pulled out his Luger and pointed it at Doc. He looked into the hedgerow and yelled. "I believe there is a shepherd watching over this lamb."

Saunders let out a deep sigh and lowered his head against the top of the Thompson. The SS Captain just removed all options for getting Doc and himself out of this unscathed.

The SS Captain smiled cruelly. "I suggest this shepherd come forward or watch his lamb slaughtered."

Doc tried to struggle free. He realized the only way to prevent Saunders from surrendering was if he forced the SS Captain to shoot him. "I told you. I'm alone."

"I know what you told me little lamb. I also see how mightily you struggle to save your shepherd." He put the Luger against Doc's



temple. "Come out NOW. Or watch your lamb die!"

Saunders threw the Thompson and Colt back into the hedgerow, stood up, and stepped out onto the road. With his hands raised, he faked a heavy limp as he walked toward the Germans. The SS soldiers grabbed Saunders and roughly removed his ammo belt, jacket, and emptied his pockets. He felt the pain in his side as they yanked at him. Saunders understood this was only the beginning.

"I see your shepherd is a sergeant. Sergeants are always so interesting to SPEAK with." The SS Captain snickered as he emphasized the word speak. "They know so much more about the war than they are given credit for." Saunders stood directly in front of the SS Captain. "Now the question is. Is this Medic your only lamb? Or are there other sheep in your flock?"

"I have a badly wounded leg. Doc has been trying to help me back to our lines." Saunders stared directly into the eyes of the SS Captain.

"Pity, your Medic didn't hide better. You were so close to making it. Less than a mile." He sneered as Doc's shoulders slumped. "Medic, you will remember your carelessness as you watch your sergeant's suffering." With that, he kicked Saunders' wounded calf, sending him to his knees.

Doc immediately tried to get to Saunders, but was held back.

Saunders glanced at Doc, seeing the grief in his eyes. "Not your fault, D..." Before Saunders could finish he was pushed face first into the ground from behind. He felt a heavy weight land on the middle of his back as all the air was pushed from his lungs.

"You will learn to only speak when spoken to!" The SS Captain instructed, as he lifted Saunders' head with the toe of his boot. "Do I make myself clear, Sergeant?"

Saunders defiantly made no attempt to answer. "Answer Captain Hoffen when he speaks to you," growled a voice from behind Saunders. The knee in his back dug in deeper as his shoulders were wrenched backwards.

Saunders gritted his teeth and hissed, "yes, Capt'n."

"Pick him up. He has a long walk and I want to be back before dark." Captain Hoffen ordered.

Saunders was hauled to his feet and he was tied to the back bumper of the staff car. Captain Hoffen entered the back seat and Doc was pushed in beside him. "Why am I riding?"

"Medic, you and I are going to get to know each other on a different level. You shall live our motto. Accept Death. Hand Out Death."

The tone in Captain Hoffen's voice and the coldness in his eyes sent a sense of terror deep into Doc. He had only felt this once before, when he first met Captain Steiner. Doc couldn't put his finger on it, but he was sure this was going to be much worse.

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Captain Hoffen gloated during the ride back. He could not believe his luck to have found these two Americans. There was something different about these two. They were going to be a challenge and he needed a challenge. So many Americans freely talked or were easily tricked into giving up information. He did not think that would be the case with these two.

The captain saw from the very beginning each American would be willing to die for the other. The medic had tried to free himself to be shot before the sergeant was found out. The sergeant was obviously a combat veteran. He surely knew what awaited him when he surrendered. Captain Hoffen noticed there was a bond between these two he wanted to break. The captain would break them, just for the fun of seeing he could do it.

Captain Hoffen knew either American would be willing to undergo the pain and torture for the other. He needed to know who would suffer more anguish watching the other endure

the physical pain. The sergeant was a soldier. He might not like it, but he would do his duty either way. Captain Hoffen looked back at Saunders having trouble staying on his feet as the car kicked up rocks and dust into his face, he laughed. *The sergeant is strong and determined. He will be fun to break. Like breaking a wild stallion back home.*

He turned and looked as Doc watched Saunders, his fingers dug into the back of the seat, the anguish in his eyes. *Medics help soldiers, how bad will the torment be when he is not allowed to help the sergeant.* He closed his eyes and beamed. *I wonder how strong the medic's desire to stop the sergeant's suffering will be. How far will he be willing to go?*

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They finally stopped and Saunders dropped to his knees gasping for air. Doc immediately tried to get to him, but was prevented. He pleaded to Captain Hoffen. "Can't I at least give him some water?"

Captain Hoffen looked at Saunders, drenched in sweat and still struggling to catch his breath. "If the sergeant can make it here to you. Then you can give him water."

Saunders wasn't sure he could even stand. His legs were weak and quivered as he attempted to force himself up. Surprised they were able to hold his weight; he was finally able to stand. Saunders looked at the rope tying him to the back of the car. The rope had frayed and pulled apart during the drive. It wouldn't take much effort to break. He gulped, collected all the strength he could gather and yanked. The rope broke free. Saunders grinned and stumbled over to Doc.

Doc pulled out his canteen and handed it to Saunders. Saunders guzzled the water and Doc watched the blood drip from the sergeant's wrists where the rope had cut deep into them. Saunders emptied the canteen not knowing when he might get the chance to drink again. He wiped his mouth. "Thanks, Doc."

Their victory was short as they were lead into two separate fenced areas. The two areas had entrances on opposite ends of each other and shared one common fence. That was where the similarities ended. Doc was put into a compound that could house many prisoners. It had an old garage for shelter and a functional water pump in the middle. Saunders, on the other hand, was put in basically a cage with no shelter or water. The gates were locked and the two Americans were left alone. Doc immediately walked over towards Saunders. "Sarge, how ya doin'?"

Saunders staggered to meet Doc. "I'm okay."

"Let me untie your hands." Doc started to reach through the fence.

Saunders pulled back. "Doc, stop!" Saunders looked at the fence suspiciously. He took off his belt and threw it such that the buckle hit the fence. Sparks flew as the metal hit. "I was afraid of that. You have to be careful not to touch the fence."

Saunders put his wrists up next to the fence. Doc very carefully reached his fingers through the fence and worked the ropes free to untie Saunders' hands. "So got any ideas on how you're gonna get us out of here?" Doc grinned.

Saunders laughed. "Not yet, Doc. Not yet." Saunders rubbed his hands to get the blood back circulating.

Two of the soldiers came out and brought food into Doc. Nothing was brought to Saunders. Doc immediately brought his food over to Saunders and they carefully shared through the fence what little there was.

The medic waved to the separate enclosures. "Sarge, whaddya think this is all about?"

Saunders sat back, with his arms on his knees and surveyed the area. "I'm not sure, Doc. But they don't seem to mind you helping me as long as I can get to you."

Doc was sure he didn't like the ominous sound of that. "What do you mean as long as you CAN get to me?"

“Doc, you remember what it was like when Steiner worked us over. There are going to be times when they are going to throw me in the gate over there.” Saunders pointed to his entrance, which was about eight feet from their common fence. “I’m not going to be able to make it over here.”

“So you think this is about me not being able to help you.” Doc saw the stage that was being set.

“Yeah, yeah I do.” Saunders looked around. “Doc, you need to be careful how you react.”

Doc gave Saunders a look of concern and apprehension. “Whaddya mean?”

“What they intend to do to me. Well, that’s pretty obvious.” Saunders considered a moment on what he was likely in store for. “But with you. I have feeling it could be worse, Doc.”

“How can it be worse?” The medic was absolutely sure nothing could be worse than what they both feared was intended for Saunders.

“I think this is a lot less about what they are planning for me. And a lot more about how you react to not being able to help me. Doc, they didn’t even take away your bag.”

Doc looked down at his bag. “They didn’t even take away the five vials of morphine I have.”

Saunders sat quietly as he mulled over their options. “We need to figure out a way to use this to our advantage.”

“You let me know when ya got that figured out.” Doc grinned.

“Yeah, I will. In the meantime, tell them you smoke.” Saunders chuckled as he patted his empty shirt pocket. “I could sure use a cigarette.”

The temperature had begun to fall as the sun set. Saunders looked toward the shelter. “Doc, you need to go inside and get some sleep.”

“I’m not going in there with you out here.” The medic was adamant.

Saunders stayed practical as ever. “Look, Doc. I need you to eat, drink, sleep, stay warm and keep your strength up. When we get out of here, I’m going to need you to get me back.” To make his point, Saunders walked away from the medic and laid down.

Doc gave Saunders one last apprehensive look and walked inside the old garage.

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Captain Hoffen watched the two Americans. He laughed as Saunders tested the fence to see if it was electric. *I must not underestimate this sergeant.* The captain had been right about the strength of the sergeant as he watched Saunders walk away, appearing to instruct the medic to take refuge in the garage. These two were indeed going to be a great challenge.

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Sometime after Doc went into the garage, they came for Saunders. Saunders heard them coming and stood to meet them at the gate. They walked the sergeant into the large building, where Captain Hoffen awaited him. Saunders paused to survey the inside of the building as they entered. It seemed to be some sort of old factory. There was just one room with a small window overlooking the front grounds and only the one door. In the far corner there was what looked to be an old bath tub and a table with several sticks, whips, and other tools. The ceiling was very high and several ropes, chains, hooks, and even a noose hung from it. Saunders felt his stomach tightening. The soldiers laughed and pushed him forward.

“Sergeant, I think it is time we were formally introduced. I am Captain Hoffen of the Waffen - SS. I have been specially trained in Verschärfte Vernehmung by Gestapo chief Müller.”

Saunders took a sidelong glance to see in addition to the Captain, the lieutenant, sergeant, and the two soldiers who brought him in. “Saunders. Sergeant. Serial Number 227 06 22.”

“Sergeant Saunders. You will soon learn our Enhanced Interrogation methods are quite effective.” Saunders showed no reaction as he stared at the SS Captain. Captain Hoffen began to unbutton his coat. “Unfortunately for you, Sergeant Saunders. Serial Number 227 06 22, information is not all I am looking for.” He smiled as he nodded to the others. “But you’ve already guessed that, haven’t you?”

Saunders was immediately grabbed from behind and held by the two soldiers as the SS Sergeant pulled a rope from the ceiling and tied it around Saunders’ wrists. The rope was pulled so Saunders’ arms were stretched as far as possible over his head until his feet no longer touched the ground. His shirt was ripped open pulling all the buttons loose where they fell harmlessly to the floor.

“Now Sergeant, we were not as successful as we had hoped pushing the Americans back. Your troop strength was stronger than we anticipated. How many American units are deployed in this sector?”

“Saunders. Serg ...” Saunders response was halted by a blow to the midsection with a rubber nightstick. Saunders tried to catch his breath as another blow struck his upper thigh. Saunders glared at the SS Captain as he clenched his jaw tightly. “Sergeant ...” He felt a crack as the stick made contact with his ribs.

“Before we are done Saunders. Sergeant. Serial Number 227 06 22. You will beg to die. But WE will not kill you.” Captain Hoffen snapped his fingers and the SS Lieutenant brought him something from the table.

Saunders noted the inflection used when the captain said “we.” *Does he mean for Doc to kill me?* His thought was cut short as Saunders became aware of what the lieutenant had handed Captain Hoffen. The captain held a soldering iron in his hand as he approached the sergeant. Saunders watched as the threads of his undershirt started to burn. He felt tears flood his eyes as his skin burned and he smelled burnt flesh.

The cycle of interrogation; question, non response, beating and burnings continued until just before daybreak. There were rips and stains on his pant legs and his undershirt was covered with charred holes where the soldering iron had been used on his chest.

Captain Hoffen was amazed Saunders had remained conscious through the entire interrogation and never cried out. “Sergeant, I must say your tenacity is impressive.” The disheveled captain buttoned his coat and combed his hair. “It will make it even more enjoyable when I finally break you.”

The SS Sergeant cut open the back of Saunders’ shirt and undershirt from the collar down and they were torn open. From behind Saunders could hear the crack of a whip. He stifled a moan as the whip snapped into the flesh of his bare back. As the whip continued to slash across his back, Saunders struggled to stay conscious and held back his groans.

Saunders glanced up at Captain Hoffen when the thrashing finished. Captain Hoffen returned Saunders’ glance with a cruel smile as a bucket of salt water was thrown on the



sergeant's raw and shredded back. Saunders screamed in immense agony and finally weakened into unconsciousness.

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Doc woke with a start. The medic wasn't sure if he dreamt a scream or actually heard a scream. Doc was surprised it was morning already and cursed himself for sleeping so long. He walked into the yard and his heart sank as he saw Saunders was nowhere to be seen. Doc stared at the factory building and listened intently for any sounds. There were none.

The medic paced back and forth along the common fence for what seemed like a lifetime. Two soldiers finally dragged Saunders' lifeless body out of the factory and opened the gate. They laughed as they dumped him face first along the fence farthest from where Doc stood watching. Saunders did not move or make a sound when his body hit the ground.



Doc was sickened by what he could see. Saunders' shirt was torn and hung only around his shoulders and arms. All that remained of his undershirt in back was the collar around his neck. Saunders' back was a criss-cross of red welts and bloody stripes. His pants were soaked with blood.

While Doc could not actually tell if Saunders was breathing or not, he assumed he was. "Sarge, can you hear me?" Doc kneeled in front of the fence parallel with Saunders' body. "Sarge, you've got to wake up." Tears filled the medic's eyes and his voice cracked. "Sarge, I can't help you if you don't get closer to me." He remembered Saunders warned him to be careful how he reacted. Even though everything inside him cried out to beg them to let him help Saunders, the medic sat back and crossed his legs. In a calm southern drawl he began holding vigil and talking to the unresponsive sergeant.

"Sarge, did I ever tell you about my family? You know I'm from Arkansas, born and raised in the same little town. Population fifteen hundred." Doc chuckled. "If you count livestock." The medic pulled his knees up to his chest. "We lived in town and ran the grocery store. That's why I just always 'sumed I'd be a grocery clerk."

Without moving his head, Doc glanced toward the window to confirm his audience was watching. "I was pretty good in school. Maybe that's why the Army made me a medic. Whaddya think about me becoming a doctor after the war? Nah, I can't really see it either."

Doc continued to speak to Saunders with a calm assurance. "I grew up the youngest with three older sisters." The medic forced himself to laugh. "They'd all three love you. Matter fact, they'd probably fight over which one got first crack at ya. That would be a sight to see!" He could see agitated movement in the window out of the corner of his eye.

"In the summer I'd spend all my free time fishin'. Hey Sarge, maybe when we win this ole war we can go fishin' together. Whaddya say, Sarge?" Doc noticed Saunders stirring. "Sarge, I'm bettin' you fished growin' up. Is that why you go to the water when ya need to think?" Doc cleared his throat and continued to speak softly. "You find somethin' peaceful in the water, don't ya?" Saunders turned his head, opened his eyes, and looked at the medic.

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Saunders wanted to stay in the safety of his mind. Yet he could hear a calm friendly voice reaching out to him. Saunders kept hearing the voice calling "Sarge" as if that was his name. He let the voice flow through him, comfort him. This voice made him feel safe. Somehow Saunders knew this voice was not responsible for the excruciating pain he was in. He stirred sluggishly. He needed to see this voice. Saunders slowly turned his head, opened his eyes, and saw Doc.

Saunders rasped, "Doc."

Doc could barely contain the relief he felt at seeing those blue eyes opened. "Sarge, I know you're hurtin'. But I need you to crawl over here to me."

Saunders closed his eyes.

Doc tried to control his emotions as best he could. "Sarge, don't leave me now. Stay with me, Sarge."

Saunders opened his eyes. He dug his fingers into the ground and slowly pulled himself inch by inch closer to Doc. All the while Doc continued to talk to him.

"So as I was saying. Don't think bein' a grocery clerk will work for me anymore." Doc again took a quick glance at the window, this time no one watched. "What about history teacher? I want to make sure the generations to come know what went on here and why this can't happen again."

It took almost an hour for Saunders to make it the few feet necessary for Doc to reach him through the fence. When Doc was finally able to see Saunders closer, what the medic saw was even worse than he could have imagined. Doc knew there really wasn't much he could do to help Saunders. He carefully poured water through the fence for Saunders to drink.

"Sarge, there isn't much I can do to help your back." Carefully, he tried to sprinkle some sulfa on the worst cuts. "What about the front?" Saunders closed his eyes and rolled over onto his back. Doc was shaken to see the burn marks all over Saunders' chest. "Sarge, you want some morphine?"

Saunders' eyes shot open. In a whisper the medic could barely hear, he instructed, "Doc, you've got to break the vials."

"Why? Sarge, you're not thinkin' straight."

"Doc, I know what I'm saying. Trust me. Break the vials!" Saunders implored as he lost consciousness.

Doc didn't understand Saunders' reasoning, but the medic knew enough to trust Saunders' judgment. He grabbed his bag and pulled out the vials of morphine. Doc started to break each one. He finished breaking the last vial when the SS Sergeant came running out of the factory followed by four soldiers. Doc smirked. *I trust you know what you're doing, Sarge.*

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No one from First Squad had gone to see Lieutenant Hanley since they all got to the Aid Station. They made Sergeant O'Neill tell the lieutenant that Saunders was missing in action and presumed dead. Hanley asked about First Squad and why no one came to see him, specifically Doc. O'Neill only said the squad was still recovering themselves and Doc was busy helping with the wounded. Hanley didn't believe him, but let it go. He figured it was because of Saunders.

They told themselves the lieutenant needed to get his rest. Nevertheless they all knew it was just easier not to visit the lieutenant than to lie to him about where their medic was. It



had been three days since Doc had gone looking for Saunders.

As the lieutenant stood in front of them, they could no longer avoid telling him the truth. "Where's Doc? No one seems to know exactly where he is." Lieutenant Hanley looked at each member of First Squad as he waited for an answer.

Kirby was the first to say anything. "I told you it was a bad idea."

"What was a bad idea?" Hanley remained impatient.

"For Doc to go lookin' for Sarge alone." Kirby waved out in the direction where the front lines were.

Hanley didn't quite believe what he just heard. "Doc went looking for Saunders?"

"Yes, Sir." Cage quietly replied.

"Well, Cage and Littlejohn couldn't walk. Kirby couldn't hold a gun. And I had a concussion," Billy interjected.

"So WE couldn't go." Littlejohn finished.

Lieutenant Hanley raised an eyebrow. "So YOU couldn't go."

"Yes, Sir. So Doc went alone," Billy innocently responded.

Trying not to raise his voice, Hanley countered, "Let me see if I have this straight. You were all too injured to go AWOL to look for Saunders. So Doc, an unarmed medic, went behind enemy lines alone to look for him."

"It sounds worse when you put it like that, Lieutenant," Kirby pointed out.

Hanley yelled, "How else would like me to put it, Kirby?"

"Lieutenant, we just weren't going leave him out there alone. Not again." Cage presented their case.

Billy reaffirmed. "We couldn't do it to Sarge again, Lieutenant."

Littlejohn added, "And Doc was the only one in any shape to go."

Lieutenant Hanley suffered the same guilt for having left Saunders behind before and relented. "How long has Doc been gone?"

"Three days." Cage responded solemnly.

"Three days!" Hanley could not hold back his alarm. "Do we even know where he headed?"

Cage quietly answered. "He was going to start looking where Saunders had met up with Second Squad."

"Are we going to go look for them, Lieutenant?" Billy optimistically responded.

"NO, we are not. I've already lost an NCO and a medic. I don't intend to lose an entire squad." Hanley looked at their dejected faces. He promptly added, "We're getting ready to mount a counterattack. I'll see if our platoon can take that area."

The lieutenant walked away and First Squad somberly contemplated the likelihood of finding their sergeant and medic.

"I told ya there'd be hell to pay," Kirby quipped.

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The SS Sergeant and two soldiers grabbed Doc, while two others dragged an unconscious Saunders into the factory. Doc looked over the room and was sickened as he became aware he was standing in Saunders' blood. He could not even begin to imagine what they had done to Saunders earlier. Saunders was dropped at the feet of an angry Captain





Hoffen.

The SS Captain was already annoyed Doc had stayed calm when Saunders was brought outside. Doc had sat peacefully talking to Saunders, almost willing the sergeant within reach. Now to have the sergeant instruct the medic to destroy the vials of morphine had infuriated the captain. The sergeant would soon feel his wrath and the medic would watch. "Your sergeant might be too smart for his own good. But in the end, he will not change the unavoidable."

Doc innocently responded, "I'm not sure what you're talking about, Captain."

"I doubt that, Medic." Captain Hoffen kicked Saunders onto his back. Saunders moaned in pain. The others laughed in anticipation of the coming events. "Medic, do you know what Arrest Mit Verschaerfung is?"

Doc uneasily shook his head.

Captain Hoffen gloated. "Your sergeant is about to find out what that means."

"Haven't you already done enough to him?"

Saunders was pulled to his feet. His hands were tied tightly together behind his back and attached to a hook hanging from the rafters. The hook was raised until Saunders feet were pulled off the ground. His entire body weight rested on his curved shoulders and wrist joints bent backwards. Saunders immediately groaned in pain and his breathing became labored.

"Do not worry, Medic, THIS will not kill him." The captain looked away from Saunders to Doc. "So Medic, why don't you and I sit? We can have a nice long talk."

Doc was pushed into a chair that was placed right in front of Saunders' hanging body. "Alright, Captain. We'll talk. Why is it you hate medics so much?" Doc swore he saw Saunders grin.

"Medics are weak and are not able to make necessary life and death decisions in the field of battle."

"Or at least the decisions you agree with."

Captain Hoffen was surprised at the aggressiveness of Doc's response. Again these two Americans had shown to be a pleasant surprise. "Because they cannot accept death or hand out death!"

"I may not like it, but I can accept death." Doc thought about all the death he had seen since landing at Utah.

"Can you?" Captain Hoffen sniped. "You fight against it, even when it is inescapable."

"I don't make that choice." Doc sighed as he entered the battle of wills with the SS Captain.

Captain Hoffen continued to push Doc. "But you do make the choice to allow suffering?"

"It's not our place to hand out death." Doc felt somehow he was in a battle with the devil for Saunders' life.

"Not even if a soldier is enduring unmentionable pain?" Captain Hoffen toed Saunders' blood on the floor with his boot.

Doc remained steadfast. "No. I would not kill him."

Captain Hoffen pointed up at Saunders and criticized. "But you would make him endure more suffering even if it is inevitable that he will die?"

"I would help him as best I could." Doc tried not to dwell on the implication that Saunders had already been condemned to die.

Captain Hoffen was unrelenting. "What if he begs you to put him out of his misery? He cannot take anymore."

Doc knew there were many times he had considered giving a wounded soldier that extra dose of morphine to put him out of his misery. How could you not consider it? "I would try to ease his pain as best I could."

“You are weak, Medic. You will understand when your sergeant looks you in the eyes begging you to end his life.”

Now Doc understood exactly why Saunders had made him destroy the vials of morphine. Somehow Saunders knew and took away the decision Captain Hoffen hoped to force Doc into making. “That will never happen.”

“Medic, even the strongest soldier has a breaking point. We will find your sergeant’s!” The captain stood next to Saunders, grabbed a handful of hair, and yanked his head back. “And enjoy doing it.”

This banter continued back and forth for almost three hours as Captain Hoffen tried to push Doc to admit he would help Saunders die. The entire time Doc never took his eyes off Saunders. He could see the sergeant’s heart racing as he watched the sweat drip from every pore in Saunders’ body. Finally, Doc pushed back. “Captain, are you afraid to tell me your real reason for hating medics?”

“My father was a medic in the first war. He was not strong enough to put dying men out of their misery. He was weak, he left them to suffer, and it haunted him the remainder of his miserable life.” Captain Hoffen nodded to the others. They lowered Saunders down and cut his arms free. “He did not even have the courage to take his own pitiful life. I had to do even that for him. I was only ten at the time.”

Doc forced Captain Hoffen’s words to flow past him as he looked at Saunders curled up in a ball on the floor. He didn’t want to believe it was possible that Saunders would beg to die, but looking at him lying on the floor, Doc wondered how much more the sergeant could really take. He was still staring at Saunders when one of the soldiers grabbed his shoulders to lead him outside. As they left, Doc heard Captain Hoffen challenge. “Medic, we will see if you will not be willing to put an end to your sergeant’s suffering.”

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Lieutenant Hanley left Captain Jampel’s briefing and walked straight to First Squad. It wasn’t typical protocol, but he knew their moral was low and any bit of hope, no matter how small, might help. The squad barely looked up as the lieutenant approached. “At ease. Stay as you are.” He snapped sarcastically.

“Sorry, Lieutenant.” Littlejohn started to stand up.

Cage put out his cigarette. “What’s the word, Lieutenant?”

“Artillery will start just before daybreak. We’ll be moving up to get closer before it starts.” Hanley waited for the anticipated reaction.

“Are we going to be able to look for Doc and Sarge?” Billy asked eagerly.

Hanley very sternly instructed. “We are part of a counter-attack. Not a recovery mission.” He quickly added. “Now if we happen to find a missing medic or sergeant why we are moving through the same terrain we’ve been in before ...” The lieutenant was glad to see the squad look as encouraged as they had in days. “Now get some rest while you can.” Hanley smiled as he walked away, feeling a twinge of optimism himself.

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Doc walked into the old garage. He wanted to be where they couldn’t see him, where Captain Hoffen’s eyes wouldn’t be watching his every move. The medic wanted to scream, but THEY would be able to hear him. Instead he beat his fists against the wall until they started to bleed. Doc wanted to bleed; he wanted to share in the pain Saunders was feeling.

Doc dropped to his knees and broke down crying. He buried his head in his hands and sobbed. The medic cried until he had no tears left. Finished, he picked himself up and walked back to the fence and waited.

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Saunders was picked up and dropped into the old bath tub. He opened his eyes as he watched the soldiers bring buckets of ice water. They dumped the water in, pouring it directly on Saunders' head. He struggled to move, but two soldiers held him in place. They continued to dump water on his head and mocked him as he began to shiver. Saunders' hands went numb and he could feel goose bumps all over his body.

Once the water was deep enough, they began to dunk him. Several hands held his head and shoulders under until he stopped struggling. When they let him up, Saunders coughed and choked, gasping for air. The soldiers joked as they dumped another bucket of water over his face.

This near drowning repeated until after dark and Saunders was beyond exhaustion. The soldiers laughed as they flipped on a bright spot light and the soaked sergeant was carried outdoors and dumped. The outdoor temperature had dropped considerably and Saunders shivered as the cool night air hit his wet body.

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Second Platoon arrived at the location Second Squad had been pinned down. "Okay, we'll wait here. Once the artillery starts we'll move up and cross the river. There's a bridge a mile or so northeast of us that crosses a ravine." Lieutenant Hanley pretended not to notice as the men looked around for signs of Doc or Saunders. "Cage, Kirby, scout around and make sure everything's secure."

Hanley walked over to Sergeant O'Neill and pulled out his map. "Once we cross the bridge we'll split up. I'll take First Squad toward this old factory to the east." Hanley drew along the map with his finger. "O'Neill you'll take Third and what's left of Second Squad and continue northeast to this abandoned farm house. We'll circle around and meet here."

Lieutenant Hanley finished briefing Sergeant O'Neill as Cage and Kirby returned. Cage carried a camouflaged helmet in his hand. No question whose it was. Hanley looked it over. "Where'd you find it?"

"Up about two hundred yards." Cage pointed northeast.

Hanley hesitated. "Anything else?"

Kirby answered. "Nothin', Lieutenant. No bodies, no weapons, no equipment."

"We looked all around. There was no sign of him anywhere." Cage added.

"That's good, right? If he was a prisoner there'd be some other stuff, wouldn't there?" Billy optimistically asked.

Cage threw in, "Maybe he's with Doc."

"Sarge could be wounded," Billy worriedly added.

"How are we gonna find 'em, Lieutenant?" Littlejohn asked.

"Wait a minute. Let's not get ahead of ourselves. We don't even know they're together and we don't know that Saunders is wounded." Hanley looked over Saunders' helmet as he held it in his hands. "Besides, they'll be able to find us when the fighting starts up."

An anxious Billy inquired. "But what about the artillery?"

"You know better than that. Saunders and Doc will be able to find cover." Hanley looked around at their faces. "Look, the best way we can help Saunders and Doc is to keep our minds on what we're supposed to be doing. Got it?" Before anyone answered, the shelling began.

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Saunders shivered uncontrollably and drifted in and out of consciousness. Doc could see Saunders was suffering from hypothermia and could only imagine the infection likely raging from the sergeant's untreated wounds. The medic tried his best to reassure him. He talked to him continually whether the sergeant was conscious or not. When conscious, Saunders tried to talk to Doc about home. He coughed frequently and wheezed as he spoke, but asked Doc to tell his mom how much he loved her. "Doc, tell her how sorry I am that I didn't make it home."

Saunders talked about Tom being in the South Pacific and that Doc should make sure only Tom be told what really happened to his big brother. Saunders asked Doc to let Chris know the medic was with him in the end. Saunders was very adamant The Brat must never know what happened to him, this evil could not touch her. "Doc, she needs to keep her innocence." Doc was saddened by the finality in Saunders' voice and words.

The night progressed and Saunders' shivering became more violent. Doc worried at the pallor of Saunders' skin and the feverish sweat as he battled the effects of the torture and infections. The hypothermia progressed as his lips and fingers turned blue. The sergeant became more delusional and talked about Joey. The guilt he felt over his little brother's death gnawed at him, even now as his own death neared.

Saunders snapped back to reality when he heard the sound of American artillery in the distance. In that moment of clarity his shivering stopped and he looked directly at Doc. "I let you down. I'm sorry, Doc."

"What are you talkin' about, Sarge?"

"I don't think I can take anymore of this." Saunders lost consciousness one last time. *Sarge, you haven't let me down. You could never let me down.*

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Captain Hoffen and the guards walked in with Saunders. Doc stood up and with tears in his eyes yelled. "You can't do anything else to him. He's dead!"

The captain kicked Saunders brutally in the ribs. There was no sound or movement. Captain Hoffen pulled out his Lugar and pointed it at Saunders. "Are you sure he's dead?"

Doc had no idea if Saunders was really dead, but he might as well be. He knew Saunders trusted him to make the right decision. "Yes ... I'm sure."

The medic shut his eyes as he heard the shot from the Lugar. He opened his eyes as Captain Hoffen and the other soldiers were stepping over Saunders' body. Doc was startled as the SS Lieutenant and Sergeant grabbed him. He remained in a daze as they walked him into the factory.

Captain Hoffen walked in and handed Doc Saunders' dog tags. He reached into his coat pocket, pulled out Saunders' lighter and handed it to Doc. "Here Medic, something to remember your sergeant by. Keep this memento of the day YOU killed your friend." They all laughed.

Doc could still hear their laughing when the shelling started. Captain Hoffen started yelling orders and the others began grabbing items and taking them outside. The SS Sergeant stayed with Doc. The medic figured they were getting ready to move out. Doc didn't know if they were going to take him with them or just kill him. Part of him hoped they'd just shoot him. But the other part wanted to live to tell what had happened. Doc knew he needed to take Saunders' messages to his family.

The SS Sergeant started to move Doc toward the door. They had not quite reached the doorway when a shell hit the factory. Beams and debris came down on top of Doc and the sergeant. A large beam landed directly on the SS Sergeant crushing his body and cracking his skull. Doc had been shielded by the sergeant and did not have any major injuries. The medic could hear the others heading toward the factory. With little time to react, he wiped

some of the sergeant's blood on his jacket, buried himself under the debris and hoped they would assume him dead as well.

Doc heard someone enter the building. He held his breath as he felt some of the rubble being moved around. Someone kicked his back and lifted and dropped his arm and then he heard them walk away. Doc slowly let out his breath. He listened intently and heard the vehicles drive away. Doc couldn't tell if all three vehicles left and he didn't dare move for fear it was a trick.

Doc stayed perfectly still for what seemed forever, when he finally heard voices. He couldn't be sure what language they were speaking at first. But even the regular German Army would be better than the SS and what he had just endured. Doc slowly started to dig himself out from under the debris when he heard someone yell in a noticeably French accent. "Hey, Lieutenant. Someone's alive in here."

Doc tentatively called out. "Can someone help me?"

"Doc, Doc. Is that you?" Cage started pulling away the rubble and helped Doc to his feet. "Doc. Man I can't believe we found you!"

Cage and Doc went outside as Lieutenant Hanley walked up. Hanley saw the blood all over the medic. "Doc, are you ok?"

Doc looked down at the blood. "Yes, this isn't mine. A dead SS Sergeant in there. But mostly ..." The relief of being found was instantly replaced by grief. "Saunders' blood."

Cage started to go back into the building. "Is Sarge in there?"

"No." Doc fell to his knees and started rambling. "We were almost back ... They saw my helmet ... Sarge gave himself up ... I killed him."

At that moment, Kirby, Littlejohn, and Billy reached the building. "Whaddya mean you killed him, Doc?" Kirby shouted.

Doc told some of what happened after Saunders and he were captured by the SS. Afraid to see the pain he felt in their eyes, Doc didn't look at them as he spoke. He could hear them choke back tears as he told of what Saunders had endured. After he finished telling them how Captain Hoffen had shot Saunders, he finally looked into their faces.

Kirby angrily accused. "D'ya mean you just told 'em to shoot him?"

"Kirby, enough!" Lieutenant Hanley snapped. "Doc, you didn't kill Saunders. The SS killed Saunders." Hanley put his hand on Doc's shoulder trying to comfort the distraught medic. "Doc, where is Saunders?"

Doc pointed to the two fenced areas, his voice quivering. "In the smaller one."

Hanley nodded for Cage to check for Saunders' body.

Doc looked up at Kirby with tears in his eyes. "This Captain Hoffen, he made Steiner look like a Sunday School Teacher. It was all just a game to him."

"But Doc, Sarge was a fighter. He could have hung on 'til we got here."

"Kirby, Sarge fought all he could. You don't know everything they did to him. I don't even know ..." his voice trailed off. Finally he continued. "We don't want to know."

Cage ran back. "Not there."

"What do you mean, not there?" Hanley questioned.

"Lieutenant, I looked all over. Saunders is not here." Cage looked from Hanley to Doc. Hanley quietly asked, "Doc, could they have buried him."



“There wasn’t enough time, Lieutenant. The shelling started.” Doc looked at Hanley. “Why would they take his body?”

Lieutenant Hanley had no answers. “I don’t know.”

“To hide the evidence and bury him somewhere else,” Kirby snorted.

Littlejohn interrupted. “Lieutenant, Sergeant O’Neill’s on the radio for you.” He continued as he looked at Doc. “O’Neill says they have a bunch of SS pinned down at the farmhouse.”

Doc quickly jumped to his feet.

“Doc, are you sure you’re up for this?” Hanley questioned.

A determined Doc did not waiver. “I’m sure, Lieutenant. I’ve got to see this to the end.”

Hanley got on the radio and told Sergeant O’Neill to keep the farmhouse surrounded. He and First Squad were on the way. Hanley also let O’Neill know these SS men were likely the same ones who tortured and killed Saunders. Hanley handed the radio back to Littlejohn. “Alright. Let’s get moving.”

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Sergeant O’Neill met Lieutenant Hanley, when the lieutenant and First Squad arrived at the farmhouse. “We’ve got the house completely surrounded, Lieutenant. They aren’t gettin’ out of there alive.”

“Good. How many?”

“Not sure, Lieutenant. They were already inside when we got here. I figure the three vehicles held twelve at the most and we killed two when they tried to get back to the staff car.”

“Probably trying to get something out of the car to destroy before we could get our hands on it,” Hanley surmised.

Doc, who had been staring at the farmhouse since they arrived, spoke quietly. “There are eight of them inside.”

“How can you be sure these are even the same ones?” Sergeant O’Neill doubted Doc really knew for sure.

Doc spoke with a tremor in his voice. “They tied Sarge to the back bumper of THAT staff car. The two dead soldiers were the ones who always carried him outside after the torture. Always laughing as they threw him to the ground.”

There was a fire in the medic’s eyes and the rage in Doc’s voice grew. “I can tell you what every one of them looked, smelled, and sounded like. How each of them laughed as they tortured him.” His eyes still did not waiver from the farmhouse. “Yes, I’m sure they are the same ones!”

“Alright, Doc. We’ll get them.” Hanley nodded for Sergeant O’Neill and the rest of First Squad to move out.

The members of Second Platoon fought back the urge to uncontrollably charge the farmhouse. They had the SS surrounded and knew the Germans would soon run out of ammunition. So they cautiously commenced a calculated assault, slowly picking off the SS soldiers one by one. Lieutenant Hanley never offered or even considered the option for them to surrender.

Eventually, Cage got himself close enough to a side window to toss in a couple of grenades. After the explosion, Kirby and Billy rushed in the back door and opened fire.

Cage came around to the front of the house and met up with Sergeant O’Neill by the staff car. “Why don’t we see what was so important for these two to coming running out here for.” O’Neill stepped over one of the dead SS soldiers.

Cage started to open the front passenger door when he was drawn by something unexplainable in the backseat instead. “Oh my god, Sarge.”

Sergeant O’Neill looked over his shoulder. “What is it, Cage?”

Cage looked back at O'Neill. "Not you. Saunders." Cage quickly climbed onto the backseat to get a look at Saunders. He was astonished to hear a faint wheezing sound. Cage reached down to confirm Saunders had a pulse. "He's alive! Help me get him out of here." Sergeant O'Neill and Cage gently lifted Saunders off the floor and out of the car.

Littlejohn walked up and saw O'Neill and Cage lifting Saunders out of the car. The large private hastily threw his jacket down for them to lay Saunders on. He knelt by Saunders. "Look what they did to him."

Cage knelt on the other side of Saunders. "Littlejohn, he's alive."

Sergeant O'Neill stood staring at Saunders' injuries. He turned to look for Hanley while he shouted for Doc. "Doc! Doc, Hurry!"

Hanley and Doc came on the run as they saw O'Neill, Cage, and Littlejohn around someone on the ground. Doc froze as he saw the ripped sergeant's stripes hanging from the tattered shirt. His heart stopped and his feet wouldn't move. Then he heard a voice that sent a cold chill up his spine.

"So we meet again, Medic. I underestimated you both." A critically wounded Captain Hoffen stood grinning at Doc. Billy and Kirby held him up as he was bleeding profusely from a wound in his side. Doc lunged at the SS Captain, grabbing him by the throat and strangling him.

"Doc, he's alive." Hanley yelled. "He's alive, Doc." Hanley grabbed the back of Doc's shoulders. "Doc! Saunders is alive!"

Hanley's words sunk in and Doc released his grip on the captain's throat. Quickly he went to Saunders and fell to his knees at Saunders's side. Doc said nothing as he laid Saunders head in his lap and tears flowed down his cheeks.

Captain Hoffen choked out his last words. "I told you. WE would not kill him." Kirby and Billy dropped the dead captain.

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When Saunders finally woke he found himself in an Evac Hospital. Lieutenant Hanley sat quietly next to him. "How you feeling, Saunders?"

In a raspy voice Saunders responded. "I've been better, Lieutenant." Saunders gave a faint smile. "How long have I been here?"

"You've been out for six days. Briefly woke up a couple of times, but went right back to sleep. Your body needed to recover." Hanley lit a Lucky and handed it to Saunders, as he dropped the rest of the pack on his cot. "You've been through a lot."

Saunders grimaced as he felt a pull of the healing skin on his back. "How ..." he paused.

"You're going to be fine. Everything is healing, doctors expect a full recovery." Hanley continued. "You'll be back out with the squad in no time."

Saunders looked around with concern. "Lieutenant, where's Doc?"

"Take it easy, Doc's fine."

Saunders could read the apprehension in Hanley's face. "What is it, Lieutenant? What happened to Doc?"

"Doc blames himself," Hanley wavered and then followed up with, "for all you went through."

"That's crazy, Lieutenant. Doc kept me alive."



Hanley shook his head. "Doc doesn't exactly see it that way. We've all tried to talk to him. He's requested a transfer out of combat."

"You ALL need to stop feeling like you somehow let me down and guilty about what happens to me in this damn war."

"That's real ironic coming from you." Hanley laughed.

Saunders laughed as well. "Where is he?"

"He's been standing vigil in that doorway behind me since they brought you in."

"Lieutenant, go tell him I need to talk to him." Saunders called after Hanley.

"Lieutenant, you won't need to put that transfer request through."

Hanley grinned. "Haven't had time to do the paperwork yet."

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As Doc sat down, Saunders tried to sit up. "Take it easy there, Sarge. Let me help ya." Doc propped Saunders up against a pillow. "How's that?"

"Good." Saunders took a Lucky from the pack Hanley had left and snapped open his Zippo. He lit the Lucky and gave Doc a wry grin. "So exactly where should we go fishin'?"

Doc gave Saunders a puzzled look. "You heard all that?"

Saunders took a deep drag and replied with a straight face. "Of course, Doc. I listen to everything you say."

"You may hear everything I say. I'm not sure you listen."

"Be careful Doc, I just might marry one of your sisters," Saunders joked.

"You have no idea what you'd be in for."

Saunders smiled. "Can't be as bad as puttin' up with Kirby."

"We better get you back in the field as soon as possible, before you completely forget what that's like!" Doc exclaimed.

Saunders smirked. "Maybe I'll just stay here for a while. See what kind of trouble I can get into."

"Lookin' to revert back to your old ways, Sarge?" Doc grinned.

"You just never know, Doc."

"I know."

They both laughed.

It wasn't necessary for Saunders to tell Doc everything was okay and it wasn't his fault. The words didn't need to be spoken.

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Hanley stood back, watching with a twinge of jealousy at the ease with which Saunders and Doc spoke and laughed. Saunders had immediately relieved Doc of his guilt when no one else even came close. The lieutenant knew he and Saunders respected each other, were friends, but they did not share the same bond Saunders and Doc did. The medic was able to get past the





barriers Saunders put up to everyone else. Hanley could only imagine what secrets Doc knew about Saunders. There was a trusted bond with Doc that Saunders shared with no one else.

The End

*The following is a quote from an actual WWII medic:*

*"I served with the 84th Infantry Division, (Railsplitters) I was attached to Company B-333 Inf. as a company aid man. Unlike the vast majority of (medic's) I carried a .45 Pistol throughout the war, I was well aware that if captured with that weapon I would be shot, but I still took my chances. I wore no red cross on my uniform, and I traveled in combat along side of the infantrymen. There were numerous times when tending to the wounded the Germans fired on me, and I fired back. My job was to deliver back to the battalion aid station all those who were wounded, and that's exactly what I did. I'm not ashamed to admit I violated the rules of war, and I would do it again if I was once again in that position. Which at my age, those days are long gone. I never thought of myself as some kind of hero, I wasn't, I had a job to do and I did it as best as I could. I won no medals, because I chose not to accept any. The only honor I chose was that I did my job as best as I could and I assisted in bringing home alive, many who would have died if left on the battle field unattended. Every medic performed his duties as they saw fit, I never question that, I knew the risk I was taking, but I also knew that the German would just as easy kill the wounded as they would those that were not. Did I at anytime, shoot and kill a German soldier? you damn right I did, just as those medic's who served in the pacific war, where the Japs would shoot any soldier whether they wore a red cross or not.*

*I wasn't the typical medic, and I knew that. I would admit that the rest were far braver than I was, they took chances in tending to the wounded, as was required by the rules of war. I have no regrets concerning my actions. I had never failed to tend the wounded. And those that I did returned home alive, and that was the only medal that I wanted, seeing them being transported back home."*