

CHAPTER ONE

“What da ya think, Sarge? Think they’re done? I’ll bet they’re done. Isn’t it too dark to fight? I’m out of ammo, Sarge. Can I go down and draw more ammo?”

Squatting, Sergeant Jennings looked down the hill in front of the foxhole. Visibility was only seventy-five yards. A veteran of campaigns in the Pacific during World War II, he could smell a big fight coming and the odor was pungent around the hill. Looking down at the outline of the private’s helmet and shoulders, he shook his head. Darkness made it difficult to see, but there was no mistaking the strong Brooklyn accent, and the rapid-fire questions.

“Here’s another bandoleer and a couple of grenades, Jawaski. Get loaded up and get ready, company’s coming!”

Jawaski stood, took the bandoleer and eased back down disappearing from view. The sergeant rose and made his way to the next fighting position along the perimeter. Jawaski’s small frame fit easily into the foxhole. He took the ammo out of the bandoleer pouches laying them on the dirt rim at the top of the foxhole. It was routine and he did it with little effort in complete darkness at the bottom of the hole. Sitting on the cut out seat he thought out loud, “Was that four or five rounds I have left?”

For three consecutive days they had taken the hill, only to lose it again in the darkness. The North Korean assaults began with night flares, blowing bugles, whistles, and shouting. Waves of soldiers would run up the flare-illuminated hill, mindlessly struggling over their fallen comrades. Jawaski was a city boy, and true to that upbringing, he had never fired a weapon until he enlisted in the army. He had never held one until the unit armorer at Camp Chaffee replaced the wooden stick he had carried for two weeks with a M1 Garand. Brooklyn had been home his whole life. Arkansas was as far removed from New York as one could get, and he’d spent six weeks there learning to soldier. He saw very little else, other than the areas at Chaffee he trained in and what he saw through the window of the train. If anyone asked him if he had been to Arkansas he would probably say, “I’m not sure. You been? Maybe we could go visit someday. Would you like that? I would.” and on and on.

Tonight, lots of ammo was a good thing, even when you had to carry it up and down hills. Why the North Koreans wanted the hill puzzled Jawaski. Why the Americans didn’t give it to them was a greater mystery. He didn’t question that out loud, but just about everything else was fair game. Everybody poked fun at him because he asked so many questions, but if Jawaski had learned one thing at Chaffee, it was you did what you were told, when you were told, no questions, no hesitation. His combat experience in Korea had answered about all of his questions. You did what you were told ‘cause you’d die if you didn’t, or worse, you could cause buddies to die.

A loud whisper came from his left, “*Leo!*”

In a foxhole five yards away was Private Cody Inman, a product of Cheyenne, Wyoming. He was a part-time rodeo cowboy, ranch hand, cowpuncher and broncobuster. Cody had filled Leo’s head with stories of riding the range, rattlesnakes and star lit nights. Leo couldn’t get enough and at times, Cody redirected the discussion a bit to talk about the big city. Leo dreamed of riding a horse across endless ranges, and Cody dreamed of riding a subway beneath the largest city in the world. They were exact opposites, but best of friends. They had vowed when their tour in Korea came to an end, they would visit each other, the City Boy and the Cowboy.

“*Hey! City Boy!*”

“*Yo!*”

“*Bet a can of peaches against that short pack of Chesterfield’s in your Cs that they’re done for the night. What da ya say?*”

“*Peaches? You got a bet cowboy.*”

High overhead they heard a muffled “*Pop!*” and an illumination flare lit up the hillside like an evening in Manhattan. They looked back at one another and Cody smiled as he tossed a small green can of ration peaches over to Leo. The bugling and whistling began as Leo caught the can and stuck it in his pocket. They smiled at each other in the yellowish illuminated light, turned and began firing down the hill into the first wave of charging North Koreans.

“*Pop, Pop, Pling!*” The clip ejected from the breach of the Garand.

“Diddle damn, I’m the King of Siam. It was two!” said Jawaski. He stooped down, grabbed a full clip off the foxhole shelf, inserted it into the breach of the weapon and grabbed a grenade from the shelf. Pulling the ring pin out with his teeth he tossed it out high over the front edge of his hole and waited. In a few seconds, there was a loud “*BANG!*” He counted to three and was up knocking down the screaming North Koreans as they came up the hill at him.

On it went. Reload and kill. Reload and kill. As he loaded his last clip, he unconsciously snapped his bayonet on the end of his rifle. He tossed the last grenade down the hill, waited, “*BANG,*” one, two, three and stood just in time to see that the North Koreans had broken through the American lines to his left. The parachute flares were drifting low, but their illumination still lit the night enough to see clearly the battlefield around him. To his left he saw Inman climb out of his foxhole, weaponless, his hands in the air. He was out of ammo and surrendering as two North Koreans approached him, both with fixed bayonets, yelling wildly in Korean. Inman was shaking his arms in the air and yelling back trying to be heard above the noise and confusion of the battle. Frustrated, he brought his arms down and moved them out to the side, in a sign of confusion. As he did, one of the soldiers took a quick step forward and jammed his bayonet into his stomach.

Jawaski gasped and held his breath as he watched Inman grab the end of the bayonet at the rifle barrel. He struggled trying to pull the blade from his abdomen, as blood gushed from his stomach. The second North Korean thrust his bayonet through the American’s ribcage, gave it a quick sideward motion, slicing the left lung and liver and just as quickly, withdrew the long blade. Inman fell to his knees and rolled over on his back, still clinging to the bayonet stuck in his belly. Angry and yelling, the first soldier kicked Inman in the side, and centered his left boot on the dying man’s belly trying to pull his bayonet free.

The fading flare gave the scene an eerie black and white effect, like an old movie. It seemed surreal, almost dream like. As Jawaski watched the soldier struggling to remove his bayonet, his horror became intense anger. He leaped out of his foxhole screaming and charging the two North Koreans, firing the Garand from his hip as he ran. The one soldier frantically twisted his rifle in an attempt to pull the bayonet free, while the other turned, raising his rifle to fire. The last three metal-jacketed .30 caliber rounds to leave the Garand hit the North Korean center mass and knocked him to the ground.

A sudden surge of energy helped the other soldier to free his bayonet, but as he swung the barrel around to fire, Jawaski was eyeball to eyeball with him. All of their training and combat experience was focused as the two faced each other in that mortal moment, one fueled by fear, the other by intense rage.

Parrying the North Korean’s rifle and bayonet to the side, Jawaski brought the stock of his Garand swiftly up to the soldier’s chin. The butt stroke glanced off the jawbone spinning the Korean around. Using the spinning momentum, the North Korean spun completely around attempting to bring the bayonet down on the side of Jawaski’s neck and shoulder. The American went to one knee, dropped the butt of the rifle against the ground and thrust the bayonet forward, up into the upper abdomen and chest cavity of the North Korean. The force of the thrust and the Korean’s spinning movement took the blade through both lungs and heart, before it exited on its own accord. Dead on his feet, the Korean’s knees buckled and he folded face first to the ground.

Standing with the two dead Koreans at his feet, Jawaski extended his arms and rifle over his head and screamed at the top of his lungs. The release of anger and anguish went unnoticed on the battlefield, as other life and death struggles were shaping and concluding. Drained of emotion, he dropped to his knees in the bloodstained dirt, and stared down at his friend’s lifeless body. The cowboy’s eyes were open and staring. The smile that Jawaski had seen earlier was replaced with a more grotesque expression. Inman’s mouth was open, his tongue protruding as if he died in mid-scream. It was the face of torment and intense pain. Jawaski rose to his feet and slowly moved away, leaving his friend behind.

Walking through the carnage, the battle intensified around him. Bullets zipped about, one tearing into his jacket sleeve and grazing the meat of his left arm, others kicking up the dirt at his feet. The rifleman’s creed is “It only takes one to kill you.” It might be a bullet. It might be an artillery round. It was neither for Jawaski, because it wasn’t his time. In more cases than not a soldier’s luck would run out, but not this time, not for Jawaski. He walked dazed through the battle as if he was on a Sunday stroll in Central Park.

Several shots fired from the right hit the dirt in front of him. Stopping, he stared at the dirt kicking up, and squatted to rub the ground where the bullets had ricocheted. He tried to process what he had seen, but nothing clicked upstairs. Mild shock kept its grip as he rested on the back of his boots, balancing himself with the butt of

the Garand firmly on the ground. Resting there, his thoughts slowly caught up with the moment. Throbbing pain was suddenly stinging his left arm. He reached for the pain and felt the warm flow of blood.

“Damn! I’m hit! Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!” he repeated out loud.

The physical pain was followed by the mental recognition that he was out of ammo and would have to surrender. Since he had witnessed first hand the enemy’s attitude toward prisoners, he sprang to his feet and ran.

Fully conscious now, he saw how completely Bravo Company had been overrun and routed. During the previous two nights of fighting when it became evident they would lose the hill, there was an orderly retreat. Tonight, the ammo ran out early because the North Koreans had doubled their efforts in charging the hill. Someone should have seen it coming. No one had.

Jawaski’s pace picked up until he was running as hard as he could without tumbling headfirst down the hill. As he neared the company area, he realized there wasn’t a safe place to hide. The enemy was everywhere, thousands of them surrounding the hill and beyond. The deeper into the American lines, the more North Koreans there seemed to be. It was a nightmare, a horrible, devilish nightmare. Cowboy and Indian tactics were taking place on the battlefield with close, intimate combat everywhere. Some Americans were fighting, most were screaming in panic and pain as they died at the end of a North Korean bayonet. The further he ran, the more he realized he was on his own. There was no one coming to save him, no trucks to haul him back to the rear. There was just thousands of North Koreans killing every American in sight. The chilling realization made him turn to his left away from the company area and into the night.

He ran blindly, tripping over rocks and bushes, around a small hill and up a long valley. If he circled the hill and walked west for say, twenty city blocks and then south another two, he would head in the direction of brigade headquarters. It was like walking from one neighborhood to the next back home in Brooklyn. The sound of killing was beginning to dim and eventually faded out as he rounded the back of the hill.

In just a few minutes he had put considerable distance between himself and the fighting. His eyes had gained their night vision, and he maneuvered around bushes and rocks, making his way up the valley.

Above, the sky was bright with stars. He looked up and in that careless moment a rock shifted under his weight and he crashed to the ground, sending rocks sliding down the slope. Ten feet ahead he saw a shadow move behind a bush. Taking the Garand he pulled back the bolt and let it slide forward, as if chambering a round, the bayonet still fixed to the end of the barrel. The empty gun was useless except for close, hand-to-hand fighting, but to anyone seeking to harm him it sounded as if a round was loaded and ready to fire. It would also signal to a fellow American the distinctive charge of an M1 Garand.

“Walk forward,” whispered a voice. Jawaski felt elated and took two quick steps toward the voice in the bush.

“I’m American.”

“*Shsss!* Take it slow. No quick movement. No noise.”

Jawaski stepped carefully toward the bush, and the shadow stepped out, took his arm and pulled him to the ground. Whispering the two men continued their conversation.

“Thank God I found the American lines. They overran us before we could bug out, bayoneting everyone who surrendered. I ran out of ammo and ran for it. Radio back to brigade and get help.”

“There is no American line, Jawaski. It’s Dan Welch. The gooks are everywhere. They came in mass and overran our lines. It looks like it’s every man for him self. You and me, we’re both out of ammo. If we work together, we’ll get back to brigade. We’re a good twenty miles from there. We’ve got to bug out and bug out quick, or daylight will expose us.”

The two men moved quickly up the trail together. After five hours of walking and running, Welch turned up a ravine and sat down behind a large rock. Jawaski followed.

“How’d you get out? You’re out of ammo too? How’d you know I wasn’t one of them?”

“They hunt in packs and don’t stumble around. They don’t sound like they’re from Brooklyn, either.”

There were several moments of silence, and Jawaski said, “They murdered my best friend, Cody Inman. He was up for the big R home next week, and now he is gone.”

“Inman bought the farm? I’m sorry. They killed a lot of our guys tonight, Jawaski.”

“You don’t understand. He raised his hands to surrender. Two Korean soldiers bayoneted him. They murdered him. He just wanted to give up. He never stood a chance.”

Reaching in his pocket, Jawaski pulled out the peaches and began to softly cry. After a few moments, he regained control and wiped the tears from his dirt stained face.

“They had no right to kill him like that. We don’t murder them. It’s not right.”

“I wish I could tell you something to make it okay, but I can’t. We lost a lot of real estate tonight. I’ve lost all my friends since we got here. I won’t take on new ones. There’s just too damn much dying going on around here. We’re slaughtering North Koreans like rats running around a dump, and they keep coming. They have family just like us,” Welch whispered. “Too much damn dying.”

The two men sat quietly for ten more minutes until the tall American stood up. Without saying a word he picked up his empty M1 Carbine and headed out, followed quickly by the smaller Jawaski.

Walking noiselessly, Welch came to a sudden stop, dropping to his belly on the rocky ground. Jawaski followed. Within seconds, some thirty feet below several soldiers passed them making their way down the valley. Their movement was fast and silent. In seconds, they were gone.

“Are they friendlies?” asked Jawaski in a whisper.

“We couldn’t take a chance. We were lucky. They were North Koreans. Smell that? North Koreans soldiers don’t smell like us. They don’t stink, just different. I couldn’t tell until they passed down wind where I picked up their scent. We need to move. They may pick up ours.” Walking quickly, the two men moved up the valley.

“We crest the hill and we should be safe. Another fifteen miles and we’ll be back home briefing the brigade brass. It’s a ways, but we can do it.” Turning to face Jawaski as he walked he said, “Just over yonder and we’ll rest all we want.”

As they climbed the hill, Welch could see the slight hue of the morning sun beginning to show on the horizon to the left. It was still plenty dark, but he knew the sunlight came quickly once it broke over the horizon. Picking up the pace, he moved up the side of the hill. For every one step he took, Jawaski had to take two and breathing hard, he fell behind.

“Don’t leave me, Welch!” The little man whispered between breathes. Welch heard the plea and slowed his pace. Once they crested the ridge, they would rest in the rocks. From then on the walking would be downhill. It was just a matter of getting over the top and Welch knew that. Raised in the Appalachian Mountains, it was up or downhill everywhere you went in West Virginia. Jawaski, on the other hand, was not up to the task. Welch slowed his pace even more to keep the shorter man close.

As he turned his head to check on Jawaski’s progress, Welch saw flashlights moving parallel to their trail, below in the valley. The lights were about a half a mile behind them. Looking to the east he saw the sun breaking up from behind a peak, spreading light against the higher peak of the mountain ahead. He could see they weren’t far enough around the hillside to make cover before the sun broke, and he was beginning to worry. If they were caught in the open on the mountainside by the sunlight they would be easily spotted by the patrol coming to their rear. He looked up and decided their only chance was to head straight up and over the ridge ahead of the sunlight. Grabbing Jawaski by the collar he pulled him up the hillside.

On the mountain above the ridge, the rocks and bushes were beginning to take form as the light crept downward. They had about two hundred yards to reach the crest, and the slope increased considerably as they drew nearer to the top.

A hundred yards now, Welch struggled ahead, pulling poor Jawaski along. The sun’s rays were only a couple of hundred yards above the ridge now, lighting its way down the hillside like a wave coming toward a beach. The rocks and bushes were clearly visible. In a moment, the light would betray them to the patrol below. The ridge was just fifty more feet.

“Come on Jawaski, don’t quit on me now, just fifty more feet, forty feet, thirty, ten!”

The light was almost on top of them now. Their shadows beginning to show as Welch gave one final jerk and hurled them both over the crest of the ridge. The sunlight broke over the mountain peak and the hillside lit up. Down below, a North Korean soldier looked up and watched the sunlight expose the crest of the shorter mountain. At a half of mile, he could clearly see the rocks and bushes intermingled with shadows. Satisfied nothing had gone that way, he turned and followed the patrol as it continued up the valley.

A few seconds later the sunlight peaked the ridge crest and cast a warm blanket of sunshine on Welch and Jawaski’s outstretched bodies. The warmth was caressing, physically and mentally. In the heat of flight neither man noticed how cool the October night air had been. The field jackets that kept them warm were now unbuttoned

to let in the air. They lay on the ground slowly catching their breath. Welch rolled over and patted Jawaski on the leg. Too breathless to speak, Jawaski smiled. His first since he and Inman had smiled at each other for the last time.

Sitting up, Welch scanned the valley that lay out in front of them. Several knolls were to either side with larger mountains to the right. Mentally picturing the contour map he had studied the day before at the command tent, he pointed his finger west and said, "There. That's where we'll find the brigade lines, on the other side of that mountain."

Jawaski sat up and pointed to the mountain and said, "*Go West*, young man!"

Welch chuckled as he helped Jawaski to his feet, and they started down the hill at an angle, keeping their feet under them and maintaining a westerly direction. After three hours they approached a small village that rested in the valley between the mountains. Jawaski sat in the shade of a bush, while Welch kneeled and surveyed the village below. He saw mud huts, about ten by ten, with rice straw roofs. There was cloth hanging on most of the front doors and no windows, simple dwellings for a simple people. The village stirred with morning activity, workers headed for the fields, older women cleaned up after breakfast, and began to prepare lunch. It looked friendly, but Welch knew looks were deceiving. The villagers might be friendly and hide them out, but more likely they feared the ruthless North Koreans more than the South Koreans and Americans. Out of fear they would sound the alarm. There could also be North Korean agents there, he figured. Agents were everywhere and Koreans, north or south, looked like Koreans. Looking back into the shade, he saw a very pale and worn out Jawaski. Looking around he spotted several large boulders to their right where they could hide and rest.

"We'll move to that outcrop of rocks and wait for dark. It's too risky moving in daylight. We just have to be patient and settle for a late night supper back at camp."

Jawaski nodded in agreement, and they moved carefully toward the rocks. Crawling between two large ones they sat back in the coolness of the shade and relaxed. Jawaski's boyish face and blue eyes portrayed an air of innocence. His delicate hands still trembled from the swift flight over the mountain. His five-and-a-half foot frame gave him the appearance of a choir boy. There was no outward indication of how efficient he could be at fighting the enemy, eyeball to eyeball, and killing him.

Welch, on the other hand, was large framed, tall and firm, like the yellow poplar tree that grew in his native West Virginia Mountains. He was nearly a foot taller than Jawaski. His face sported a two day beard, his eyes were brown and steady, a face that could have easily been chiseled from granite. He was handsome in a reassuring kind of way. His hands were large and powerful, capable of delivering a man to his maker with one well placed blow. The two soldiers were an odd pair, thrown together by a deadly moment in time.

"Where you from, Welch? Southeast, I'll bet. How'd you manage to escape the North Koreans? Do you have a girl? I've got a bunch of girls back home. When I get back, I'm going to pick out one and marry her. You married, Welch?"

Welch patiently listened to the little man jabber on. He had never had a conversation with Jawaski, but he had heard he'd talk your head off. By the time you had a chance to answer his questions, you had forgotten most of them. Welch tried to speak, but was cut off.

"You making a career of the Army? I'm not. It's 1951, and I got better things to do with my life. My dad works on the docks and is in the union. He said he would get me on when I got back from the war. Hard work, but it pays, and if I'm going to get married and have a bunch of kids, I need a good job, don't you think? It's all union, so once I'm in, I'm set for life. What'd you do before the war?"

"Welch! What'd you do before you came to the Land of the Morning Calm?"

Welch gave the little man a look. The chatterbox had run out of questions and was ready to hear someone else's voice. Jawaski sat and stared at Welch, patiently awaiting his response.

"I worked in a coal mine in West Virginia. My family has worked in the mines far back as anyone can remember. Coal has been very hard on my family."

Jawaski sat pondering what Welch had said. In Brooklyn you didn't have to face death two hundred feet under ground. It usually came with a fire, ten stories above ground.

"You got a girl?"

"Welch smiled, "We married just before I left for Korea. The first time I saw her, I knew I had to marry her. It took a lot of courting and a lot of money, but she finally said yes."

Welch sat with his eyes closed leaning back against the boulder. He was back home now, remembering, daydreaming, and Jawaski was right there with him.

“We were married at the Elkins Baptist Church in Amelia’s hometown. She arranged the whole wedding and it was the grandest thing Elkins had seen since the VJ day parade. You should have seen her perform as she walked down the aisle. She looked like the Queen of Sheba. I can still see her smile as she walked toward me.”

“The Queen of Sheba? The King of Siam, I am!” Jawaski was hanging on every word, just like when he was riding the range with Cody Inman’s stories.

“I rented the Elk’s Hall in Elkins and hired a small band to play at the reception. Amelia’s second cousin, Connie, sang Johnny Mercer’s *And the Angels Sing* for the bride and groom’s dance.”

“Was she as good as Martha Tilton?” Jawaski asked.

“Better.”

Jawaski leaned forward, his interest peaking.

“The band wasn’t up to the level of Benny Goodman’s band, but they gave it their best.”

Jawaski broke in, singing softly:

*“We meet and the Angels sing,
the Angels sing the sweetest song I ever heard.
You speak and the Angels sing,
or am I reading music into every word?”*

Surprised, Welch listened as the little man sang the song from start to finish. He leaned back and remembered how Amelia floated across the dance floor, how light she felt in his arms, her beautiful smile.

*“You smile and the Angels sing,
and though it’s just a gentle murmur at the start.
We kiss and the Angels sing,
and leave their music ringing in my heart.”*

Covering his mouth with both hands, Jawaski puffed out a quiet solo of whiney notes that sounded similar to the trumpet solo played at the end of Tilton’s vocals by the song’s co-writer, Ziggy Elman.

It was Welch’s turn to lean forward. “Man, where on earth did you learn to do that?” exclaimed Welch quietly, in amazement.

“Ah, that ain’t nutin’. You can learn a lot of stuff sitting at home listening to the radio all the time. I was always too little to get picked for stick ball games. I spent a lot of time by myself. Where did you go for your honeymoon?”

“I spent all my money on the wedding and the reception, so we couldn’t go far. My Aunt Betsy invited us to come and spend a week at her home in Huttonsville. She took care of everything. All we had to do was enjoy ourselves. It was one of her wedding gifts. Aunt Betty took me in when mom died. Have you ever been to the mountains, Jawaski?”

“No.”

“From Aunt Betsy’s front porch you can see the Tygart Valley and the Laurel Mountains. Amelia and I married in the fall when the trees were in full color. We would sit on the porch swing and watch Canada Geese fly in “V” formations around the mountains and down through the valley. On our last day we were walking in the upper pasture when a Red Tailed Hawk glided over us. Amelia shouted, ‘*Wait for me!*’ I wrote her last month and told her when I got home I would buy a small plane and fly her over the mountains and valleys. I miss her and write every week. I haven’t got any letters back. I can understand her not having the time to write. God, I really miss her. You ever fly Jawaski? Jawaski?”

The little man was sound asleep. Welch eased over to the opening of the rocks, squatted, leaning against one of the boulders. Everything looked normal in the village below. He felt alert, but soon started to doze. He had gone thirty hours without sleep. Not a great length of time by combat standards, but the swift flight from the battle had taken its toll. He folded his arms and laid his head on his knees. He wasn’t tired, but it would be good to rest

a little. His thoughts were with Amelia as he fell asleep, holding her in his arms, dancing about in Aunt Betsy's leaf covered yard.

Welch awoke startled by a howling dog below in the village. Easing over to the opening he peered out into the darkness. He couldn't see his watch, but from the look of things it was early evening. The rest was welcomed. They would miss supper, but he would settle for a hot cup of coffee and breakfast. He felt the hunger pains of not eating for nearly 40 hours. He tried to forget the hunger and reached over to wake Jawaski. Placing a hand over the little man's mouth he shook him gently.

"Wake up Jawaski! Wake up!" whispered Welch. Jawaski jerked awake and fought the hand over his mouth until Welch's calming voice reassured him he was safe for the moment.

Sensing a release of tension, Welch removed his hand.

"What time is it?" Jawaski asked, yawning.

"It's around 2000 hours. We slept through the day. I dozed off and on until I finally gave in around 1100. Been awake about fifteen minutes. There's a dog howling up a storm down in the village. He must have got wind of our scent. We'll stick to the side of the mountain until we reach the rice fields. We should make good time along the roads in the dark."

"I'm hungry," said Jawaski.

"So am I, but it will have to wait until we reach brigade. Let's get going." Welch eased from between the large boulders and started walking. Below, the dog continued its barking. They traveled a half mile along the hillside before Welch felt they were safe. Down below, the rice fields were barely visible in the starlight. Moving carefully down, they came to the flat hard surface of the dirt road. The rice fields were broken up into watery grids with narrow walkway dividers and access roads to either side. The men traveled along the road moving quickly, leaving the barking dog behind in the darkness. The rice fields stretched endlessly up the valley. Welch noticed faint lights on the right ahead. Motioning to Jawaski, he kneeled in the road and studied the surrounding landscape.

"Light up ahead."

"What are we going to do? Do you think it might be brigade? Do you want me to walk up there and see what it is? I'm cold and hungry"

Twisting around nearly face-to-face with the jabbering Jawaski, Welch said, "*Shush!*" Jawaski reeled backward and plopped down in the road. Welch frowned, feeling angry with himself for shushing so loudly.

"There's another village straight ahead. The two villages have adjoining rice fields, and I'm betting there's a road that crosses between the properties to the other side. It will be wider and safer to cross on. It must be along here somewhere."

Looking directly into the darkness, Welch allowed his eyes to adjust to night vision and slowly began scanning the landscape, not focusing directly on any one object, just scanning and taking in the landmarks, whispering softly as he scanned. "Mountain on the right, rice paddies down the valley, bigger mountain on the left, village behind and village ahead."

"Access road across the field, twenty yards ahead," whispered Jawaski from behind. "See the shadow line that travels right to left. It's thicker than the walkways."

Sure enough, the thicker pattern of a road was ahead. Welch had scanned across it several times without noticing its significance. He looked back into the bright smiling teeth and eyes of Jawaski's dirty face. Reaching back, he patted Jawaski on the shoulder and whispered, "We'll cross, circle the village on the side of that mountain. It's higher, but doesn't appear to be nearly as steep. Let's go, pal. Quickly!"

They trotted to the intersection, took a sharp left and headed out at double time. The rice field was a hundred yards wide, so they would cross it in about twenty seconds. They were vulnerable out in the middle of a flat area and needed to move quickly across and get up the side of the mountain. Half way across disaster struck as the road swallowed up Welch with no more noise than a soft, muted splash. Jawaski skidded to a stop and stood there in the darkness, staring down at the spot where Welch had dropped out of sight.

"Welch," whispered Jawaski. Silence.

Ten more seconds. "Welch!" A little louder this time, with a hint of fear.

The surface of the road a few feet in front of Jawaski suddenly began churning. Welch reappeared, splashing, coughing and fighting to keep his head above the thick liquid substance that was sucking him back

down. With no swimming skills and very little buoyancy he struggled to catch his breath, before sinking below the surface once more.

Jawaski stood engulfed in dark silence once again, but only for a second as he began looking frantically for something to extend out to the drowning man.

Several seconds later Welch resurfaced a second time, now in a dead panic. He was fighting for his life, but somehow maintaining enough of his senses to not scream out loud. He continued to do the only thing he knew to do and that was to flail about, catch a deep breath, drop down to the bottom and push off, attempting to draw himself closer to the edge. It was a good plan except for the two feet of mud on the bottom, which grabbed his feet and refused to let go without a struggle. Resurfacing again, he was no closer to the edge.

Jawaski moved as close to the edge of the mysterious pool as he dared, kneeled and reached out to grab Welch as he surfaced and flailed about. As Jawaski leaned out he felt the Garand sling tighten across his chest. Reacting instinctively he pulled out his bayonet, cut the sling near the barrel's end and wrapped it twice around his hand. When Welch broke the surface again he gripped the end of the sling tightly and tossed the rifle toward him.

Welch felt the impact of something against his shoulder and neck and instinctively grabbed hold, pulling it to his chest. Jawaski felt the strap go taut and pulled in his big fish, grabbing him by the collar of his field jacket and wrestling him onto the road. Welch lay flat on his stomach, gasping for breath, throwing up the thick liquid and all the time, attempting to crawl away, trying to put as much distance between him and whatever it was he had just crawled out of.

Listening to Welch gasp and puke, Jawaski smelled for the first time the strong stench of human waste. The pool was about eight by eight and judging by the bouncing efforts of his friend, at least seven feet deep. A four hundred square foot pool of human waste in the middle of the road, thought Jawaski. Minus, of course, the square foot Welch had just recycled through his stomach and out on to the road.

Kneeling next to Welch, Jawaski whispered softly, "It's a croc, a trench where farmers store human waste to fertilize their fields. 'Waste not, want not' they say. You, my mammoth friend, have been swimming in human poo!"

Welch fought to gain control over his retching and spoke in the direction of the voice. "I fell in a pond of human, *crap?*"

"*Shush!*" said Jawaski. The word was barely out of his mouth before Welch was silenced by his efforts to further empty his stomach on to the dirt road.

Jawaski stood, took Welch by the collar of his jacket and pulled the big man across the dirt road and down the bank. The thick slime that covered Welch's body provided a slick apron to easily move his large frame across the dirt.

"No! No! Not again. I will be quiet, I promise," Welch whispered in a scream, too weak to resist, as he slid down the bank toward the water of the rice paddy. Jawaski warned, "Hold your breath." They both entered the rice paddy together, Jawaski standing knee deep in the water, Welch just on the top of the surface. Half rolling the body and swishing him about, Jawaski moved around the paddy repeating the movements several times, before stopping and lifting Welch's head above the muddy water.

"More," Welch said taking a deep breath and dunking himself under the water. Jawaski repeated the rinsing action several times until Welch found his feet and stood, clinging to Jawaski's jacket. Soaking wet and exhausted, he stood facing the little man who saved him. In the dark, Welch reached out, grabbed Jawaski and hugged him. Jawaski attempted to pull away at first, but the big man held tight, so he hugged back. They stood for several seconds in the middle of the dark rice paddy, clinging to one another.

Grabbing the bigger man by the arms and pushing him to arms length, Jawaski whispered, "You stink!" Laughing and sobbing Welch watched as Jawaski walk over to the bank and located his rifle. Stepping back into the water, he lowered it below the surface, rinsing it off.

"Sergeant Jetty is going to kill me for treating my weapon this way."

"At least, you have your rifle," responded Welch mournfully.

He continued to swish it about as they waded across the rice paddy and reached the road at the base of the mountain. Helping each other out, they began to climb. Jawaski led the way this time, with Welch holding onto the strap of the Garand for balance.

"God, I stink!"

“Yes you do, Welch,” said Jawaski, trying to hide a chuckle.

“I mean, I really stink to high heaven Leo. Is this what it smells like in Brooklyn in the summer time? And it’s Dan, Leo. My friends call me Dan.”

“You smell worse, Dan!” Jawaski said, smiling to himself.
