

Hero

by Jason W. Olson (March, 1994)

Time passed as he laid inside of the old bed. Jacob, a man of sixty-two, had been settled there for about fifteen minutes. The once made bed was now covered with wrinkled up blankets that tended to wrap around Jacob's frail body. The room was dark with the only the moonlight flowing from a window which was positioned ten paces to the wooden frame's left. Time seemed to stand still as Jacob tossed and turned in his seemingly fruitless attempt to fall asleep.

The moonbeams exposed a neatly kept room with a night table to the old man's left and a dresser a couple of steps from the bedposts. These prying beams also exposed an open doorway to the right of the head of the bed. A dim yellowish light crept into the room and seemed to over through a portion of the floor from the white moonlight. A small dripping noise came from the inside of the door, the sound of dripping water.

Jacob had finally fallen to sleep. Now time seemed to pass even slower and even disappear into the background of Jacob's consciousness. Now he was dreaming. This dream started out as a peaceful experience, with Jacob lying under an oak tree on top of a hill. The hill was high enough to let it's occupant look across a large pasture. High green grass enveloped most of the large field with a hint of brown showing here and there.

The branches of the tree were full of green foliage that provided good shade for Jacob from the hot sun. The old man didn't look so old as he sat under the tree. In fact, he looked like he wasn't older than 25. He was enshrouded in a faded pine-green military uniform. The pants looked faded with a large hole in the right pant leg near his knee. His jacket had many medals displayed on his right breast. Some were ribbons that displayed many different colors, some were

multicolored bars, while the others were forged out of silver and gold metal that glistened in the intense sunlight.

He was also wearing a pine-green army cap that displayed many black bars. These bars were arranged in a horizontal fashion and wrapped around the hat and brim. Time past as Jacob lazed under the old tree. The scene was so placid that Jacob's eyelids started to get heavy and collapse under the hidden pressure of the silent calm. Upon closing, Jacob was filled with a relaxed, free falling feeling that seemed to overtake his whole body. Just then, a loud sputtering sound flew passed Jacob's head and startled him for a moment. In a split second, Jacob found himself on his belly with his hands over his head. He began to lift his head but another whizzing sound came shooting at him. He instinctively ducked back down as the flying missile shot across the area where his head once was.

Jacob then stealthily rolled over to find some cover behind the oak tree. Feeling secure for the moment, Jacob slowly lifted up his head. He looked up and noticed that the top half of the tree was missing and that he was huddled behind a burned out stump of what was once a magnificent plant. He then looked out to the large pasture and fell into shock.

The large field with the tall green grass now was a large muddy marsh with men in different colored uniforms scurrying across it. Some of these people were wearing the same colored uniform that Jacob had on while the others wore navy blue uniforms. Explosions rocked the ground below as the two colors clashed with one another. Jacob witnessed many men being savagely murdered on both sides during these random raids. Large pools of blood spread across the brown pasture, highlighting the many bodies that had been slaughtered. This once placid and quiet pasture was now turned into a brutal war zone where time seemed to come and go quickly.

The air was filled with the sickening smell of burning flesh with a touch of sulfur. This scene sickened Jacob to the core of his being and this hideous odor upset his stomach a little bit. From behind the burned out stump, he watched helplessly as he saw the two feuding sides slaughter each other at will. A man wearing a torn and soiled navy blue uniform latched onto Jacob's back and thrust him forward over the blackened stump and onto the dirt ground below.

Feeling a little woozy, Jacob took to his feet and turned to face his unnamed foe. At one glance, he saw that the man in the blue jacket wasn't a man at all, but a young boy of about sixteen. His face had the appearances of a normal teenager under the caked on mud that enshrouded his facial features. "This boy has that look of a militia man in his eye alright," Jacob thought, "the look of death."

In his left hand was a long rifle with the barrel made from forged steel and the stock was made from wood. Upon the end of the barrel was a thin, sharp bayonet. The boy stood there, looking over Jacob.

"Who are you?" Jacob asked. The boy stood there, silent.

"You **can't** possibly be one of **them**," Jacob stated. The boy again just stood in place while a light rain began to fall, washing some of the mud from his brow. The two opponents stood in place for what seemed to be hours, looking at one another like a vulture looks over an abandoned kill.

Without emotion, the blue coated boy raised up his rifle and charged at Jacob. Jacob responded by trying to duck to the left side of the charging attack, only to slip in the mud and fall onto his back. The boy paid no attention to Jacob's slapstick fall and charged at him, displaying the gun's barrel perpendicular to his own body. Quick as the cheetah, Jacob turned this sudden disadvantage to his advantage by latching onto the outreached rifle as it passed over his belly. Once he had the barrel of the rifle in his grasp and proceeded to pull it downward, behind his head and thrust the tip into the dirt. With this sudden jerk, the boy let go of the weapon and stumbled passed the laid out Jacob, then collapsed a few feet in front of Jacob's body. Upon connection with the ground, the rifle's front end sank quickly into the deep mud floor and stuck there, with the butt end sticking out of the soil.

Jacob then leaped to his feet and turned to his adversary. The gun was standing in a vertical position with the bayoneted end buried deep in the dirt. With his composure regained, the boy returned to his feet and faced Jacob. Jacob stood within an arm's length of the butt end of

the gun, which was the only exposed part of the weapon since the bayonet and steel barrel were submerged in the saturated soil.

"You **don't** have to **do** this", Jacob stated.

The boy, as he had many times before, just stood there with a stalking look in his eyes, a look of 'death before dishonor' encrusted on his face. Then the boy charged at Jacob again, and this would be his last charge. Just as the boy moved, Jacob pulled the gun out of the ground, like Arthur pulled excaliber from the stone. Jacob then jumped back with the bayonet pointed at the Boy's chest. This action didn't faze the attacking boy at all and he just drew a small dagger out of his left coat pocket, then aimed it at Jacob in mid-charge.

When the boy was within five feet of Jacob, the angry child raised up his weapon to stab at Jacob in the neck. Instinct took over as Jacob thrust the barrel, and the exposed silverish bayonet, toward the running boy. Unfazed by this action, the boy dived at Jacob with all of his might, only to have the sharp edge of Jacob's gun run through the boy's body and pierce his heart. This sudden blow caused the stunned boy to drop his dagger. The forward motion wasn't completely broken with this blow and Jacob fell backwards. During Jacob's fall, the barrel end, with the boy's body attached to it, began to rise up and cause gravity to drive the young man's body down the barrel. Once Jacob's back connected with the ground, the gun's motion ended as well with the wooden stock landing perpendicular to the ground. The bayonet had now pierced through the boy's back and laid exposed, soaked with blood, pointing to the heavens. Jacob opened his eyes to see the mortally wounded boy a few inches above him. His left hand hung motionless, covered with blood from the boy's chest wound and had blood dripping from his mouth. Jacob awaked quickly to find the boy on top of him, crouched over the horizontal weapon. The boy had a look of surprise and shock on his face as his glazed eyes looked directly into Jacob's soul. Jacob then noticed that the blood had begun to drip onto his face from the boy's mouth. The dripping sound began to ring in his mind, like the sound of a loud bell that seemed to get louder with every drip.

All of a sudden, Jacob woke up violently and sat up in his bed. The room looked like it had before, dark and quiet. He grabbed his face in shock and noticed the sweat that had covered his face and neck like a blanket. He was breathing hard enough that he could hear it. Once calmed down a little, he noticed a slight dripping sound off in the distance. He looked up to find the source of this sound. He looked in the direction of the open door and noticed that the sound was coming from in there. Jacob, with his eye's frozen with fear, focused upon the white sink that laid behind the open door. Small drops of water formed and fell from the faucet head, one after the other.