

Give Blood and Thanks

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Chapter 17: A Mission Remembered

"Hell Sergeant, you keep staring at the picture and she just might pop out and get shot."

The young Private was out of line, he knew it. It was part of the job though. Be the Alpha male no matter what and bust balls on anything you can. Weakness was not an option in war and all the men were constantly tested by each other, Grunts and NCO's alike. Sergeant Remfred Brody tucked the picture of his red haired beauty into the vest pocket of his BDU and snapped the flap closed.

Nothing was sacred, he understood that, but that didn't mean lines weren't ever crossed. Everyone has a threshold for all types of torture; emotional or physical everyone cracks at some point. Brody was far from any threshold but he very much would have enjoyed inflicting a little physical reinforcement of the chain of command. But that would show weakness - like the Private got to him.

"Catch a few hours of sleep Private. Thank you for volunteering yourself to be lead scout when the shooting starts tomorrow. That is very brave of you."

The Private sighed rolling his face away from Brody in the fox

hole and was snoring within seconds of closing his eyes. Tomorrow was the big day. Brody's first mission as a Combat Leader. Men would be behind him and looking to him to make the choices that would ensure their safety. He closed his eyes and put his palm to the pocket with the picture of Des. He hated this war, this jungle, the fighting, and the dieing.

Every bullet that flew past his head and every mission marked as complete was a step closer to getting home to her. That is what kept him going and kept him alive.

'God damn Des. I miss you so much,' he thought.

* * *

The five men laid on their bellies' prone in the tall grass as they waited for the patrol to pass by. Brody held out his hand indicating they should stop and wait for his next command. He watched the tattered pants and dirty sandals of three Vietnamese soldiers walk by. The gun metal tips of the ak47 rifles briefly dipped into view and his heart rate increased as he clutched his own rifle to his chest. After the patrol was out of sight he looked back to his men. He silently pointed to the young Private he shared a fox hole with last night, and then pointed to himself. They both were

going to move across the road and down to secure some more ground. The other three would follow on Brody's signal.

Brody moved up to the road's edge with the Private close enough behind him to drink from the canteen tied to his pack. Brody hopped up and trotted across the road with the Private on his heels. The tall grass masked a culvert on the other side. Unexpectedly, Brody and the Private rolled to a stop at the bottom of a steep embankment. Both men quickly got to one knee and pointed their M-14s in opposite directions.

"You alright Sarge?" the Private whispered.

"Yep I'm alright. There is no climbing up that thing to warn the other guys. Be prepared to catch them." With that Brody whistled and three more bodies tumbled or slid down the jungle grass slick with sweat and moisture from the air.

Their objective was just through the trees about a half a klick ahead of them. This was a refueling station and an important crossroads in the enemies supply line. A little encampment of about three huts and a large gas tanker. The mission was simple with only three objectives: subdue, recon, and destroy. That is what the reports would say anyway. For the soldier those words mean kill

everything, stuff papers in your pack, and blow the place up. They would take each hut in teams of two and Brody would take one alone. He drew a map in the dirt and assigned each man to his hut. If all went well they would come out of this alive.

The men were nameless and faceless to Brody. He had to keep it that way. Too many of his friends had died already so he was done making new ones. He was there to do his job, keep as many alive as he could, and get back home to Des.

The five men made a wide circle in the jungle to get themselves into position behind their respective targets. They were to move in on Brody's signal.

Brody closed his eyes and held the spoon on the M61 frag grenade. He had already pulled the pin about thirty seconds ago, but he was taking some time to pray and think about Des. This was his custom if he had time to think before engaging the enemy. It put him at peace with the two most important things in his world, God and Des. He opened his eyes and listened to the voices coming from the tin walled hut with the thatched roof just ahead of him. The spoon flipped open and he cooked the grenade for a few seconds before throwing it through the window. The men inside would never have a chance to throw it back and by the time they heard the thud on the

floor boards it would already be to late.

The explosion was Brody's signal. Each team of men converged on their targets. The shouts of panic in Vietnamese and his own men screaming, "Light them up!" as they kicked in the doors, echoed in Brody's ears. He made his way to the entrance of the hut he had just blown the door off of, raised his rifle and looked inside.

A fine red mist sat stale in the air and the walls were spattered in bits of bloody tattered flesh. The lower half of a man twitched as the nerves exhausted their last bit of energy. A singular torso waved it's arms and silently screamed reaching out for Brody. Blood squirted from the stringing internal muscle fibers and intestines that remained where the body had been cut in half from the blast. What was left of the man gurgled trying to breath, trying to scream, trying to live; Brody discharged a cartridge and put a hole in his brain. No more suffering.

The gunfire died down and Brody called for a sound off. The numbers one through five rang true and alive. Time to head back to the safety of their own lines.

"Set those explosives on the tanker with a five minute timer and let's get the fuck out of here."

"Yes sir," one of the men called out and started off toward the truck. A shot exploded out of the bushes and the man fell clutching his throat where a bullet tore it open. Instinctively Brody's men scattered to find cover. The young man rolled in the dirt holding out a hand to his comrades. There was nothing to be done, he was lost. The men took up reinforced positions behind trees and behind the huts they had just cleared out. They waited for Brody's command but he was gone running. Brody ran into the underbrush as fast as he could to circle around.

"Return fire!" he screamed. His men began laying down a hail of bullets cutting the jungle to shreds in the direction that the rifle fire had come from. Brody needed this distraction to mask the sound of him tearing through the brush to get to the back of the enemies position. He ran with long strides, jumping over logs, and putting his head down to plow through boughs of leaves. Bullets ricocheted all around him splintering off timber and pinging on rocks. These were the bullets from his own men.

Brody came upon the first of the men crouched next to a tree. He slung the M14 over his shoulder and unsheathed his KA-BAR. The hardened blade cut through the throat easily and he saw the other two men close and also crouched next to trees. He slung his rifle back

up in his hands and squinted down the iron sights. He shot the man in view of the other, effectively instilling that pants shitting fear of life or death in the remaining Vietnamese soldier.

Brody sighted the man up for the shot and waited for him to turn and see him. The man didn't fire and put his gun in the air talking in Vietnamese. He was trying to surrender to Brody. The shots from his own men stopped and the jungle was quiet except for the Vietnamese soldier begging for Brody's mercy.

Remy stopped and stared at the man. He felt like God holding life in his hands. The judge, the jury and the executioner. What is just and right in this world did not apply out here. Remy made the call and became the harbinger of death. He fired.