

Short Stories

"Mommy, when's daddy coming home?" asked Georgie, the youngest of the two brothers.

"He's never coming back. That's why I'm gonna go look for him, just two more months," I interrupted.

"Your daddy's coming home for Christmas and New Years sweetie, don't worry. And Ron, you must be insane if you think I'm gonna let another loved one of mine go out to the Vietnam war," said his mother.

"Mom, as much as I would like for your support, there's nothing you can do to stop me. I don't necessarily need your permission. I can't even bear to think what dad might be going through. What if he got caught by the other country's military and is being tortured as we speak? We don't know that and since no one else is doing a thing about it, I'm gonna go and bring him home. I don't care how long it may take!"

"Ron we've only lost your father for a short time, but I am sure not going to risk you too. I understand how you feel, we all miss him but you just gotta have faith and pull yourself together."

* * *

It was a warm spring afternoon when I recall being assigned to my new base. We had many objectives to accomplish, but I had a primary goal of my own; that was to find my father. With a little over two years having passed without mention from him, I was

quickly starting to think that he had disappeared. However, I always had strong faith, and now that I was close to the same base he was last seen in, I felt a new source of energy within myself. I felt a kind of determination which I had never experienced before. I was going to....

"Ron! Stop daydreaming! Now keep watch while the rest of us get some sleep!"

Said captain Stale.

"Yes Captain! I was just thinking for a minute."

"Well limit your thinking, whatever's distracting you-get rid of it. That's why there's so many casualties!"

"Understood Captain."

Captain Stale was always stern with us. He wanted us at our best and there wasn't any room for distractions or other sources that might lead to failure. This was the real deal; being surrounded by tall trees, green leaves, poisonous animals, plus all sorts of noises made by the wind and jungle inhabitants. It was a very chilling atmosphere.

As I sat there looking at my surroundings --thinking-- while keeping watch at the same time, I was remembering what my father looked like and all the good times we shared. I carried a couple pictures of him which gave me hope of finding him every time I saw them. I stared at those pictures for a long time, looking at his six foot two figure, shaved face which made him look young, robust body you could tell from just by looking at the way his clothes fit him, and his bright smile as he was teaching me how to bat. I had the illusion that after looking at these pictures, he would come out of no where and would

be able to be my Dad again. Of course this was just a fantasy, but it kept me going everyday. I thought about how he was always much more than a father to me, with our bond so strong I could say that he was my best friend. He taught me about respect, discipline, manners, and showed me how to be a gentlemen.

Along with that, many questions crossed my mind. Would I be able to recognize him after all this time? Was he healthy? Did he look the same? What was he doing? Was he still alive? These were issues I thought about quite frequently. I also wrote letters home keeping in touch with the family to see how things were over there and if there was any sign of Dad. Soon enough I received a letter from home informing me about Dad.

"Dear Ron,

Georgie and I are doing just fine, however I have some shocking news about your father. I received a letter from the military the other day, it was concerning you father and his position. It said he was captured and they believe he's in a village called Can Tho. Now I know how badly you want to find your Dad, but just don't be too optimistic about it. We miss you a lot! Well you take care of yourself and come back home soon.

Love,

Mom."

* * *

The morning dawned fairly quick and I woke everybody up. There were gun shots and grenades exploding in the distant atmosphere, but nothing out of the ordinary that we had not adapted to yet. In fact, it was much more frightening when there was silence.

As everyone woke up, our mission was confirmed: to target and seize an important leader. We would have to interrogate him for valuable information and sometimes, we

would have to carry out torture when they refused to cooperate. We moved with stealth over to the village where this leader we were supposed to capture resided. We stalked through the tall grass, leaves and trees; it was a complete jungle.

As I was walking with the rest of the group I was thinking to myself, *“Should I guide them to our pre-destined location or should I divert the group towards Can Tho where my father was believed to be captured?”* I kept thinking about it over and over and the more we traveled the harder it was to make a decision. I knew what I wanted to do, but also what I had to do. Right when we arrived at a fork in the path, I was asked to look at the map and guide the group to our location, I listened to my heart, thought about my Dad, and said: “We take a left here.”

The Captain looked at me in a strange way, puzzled by my guidance and unsure if I was telling the truth. He glimpsed at his route then back at me. “Lieutenant! Are you sure we take a left?” he asked in disbelief.

I tried to keep my calm although I could feel my body temperature rising. I now had to make up a lie which would have to be so believable I myself would have to believe it. He approached me slowly, I met him half way trying not to be underestimated and said to him.

“Captain, the map shows that if we take a left here we would be able to get there in a much shorter time, just think of it as a short cut.” I said trying to sound believable.

“Let me see the map.” he said trying to confirm it for himself. He analyzed it for a

bit then compared it to his route and said:

“Yes I see, it’s a shorter route which would save time, but it is also a more dangerous one, Lieutenant.”

“But it would save time and we would have the element of surprise, it would be easier to invade the village, extract the leader, and accomplish the mission. The faster we get this done, the faster we go home.” I said, not just trying to convince him, but also the soldiers who traveled with us as well.

“It’s too risky Lieutenant! We’ll stick with the original route.”

“We’re at risk already.” I argued in desperation. “The longer we stay here, the longer we jeopardize our life.”

Captain Stale stood still for a minute, looked around in thought, analyzing each soldier’s face, including mine, and said, “Let’s vote then! Everyone who wants to take the shortcut, raise your hand!” he demanded. He glanced around and quickly noticed he was outnumbered. He then looked back at me and said, “We’ll take the shortcut.” Afterwards he looked at everyone else and said, “As of this point on I want everyone on their toes, be alert and cautious at every step! The less noticeable you are the better!”

We now began our new journey. Captain Stale lead the group along with me, but I slowly started to fall behind in order to be able to depart from the group when we got close to Can Tho. We made our way slowly, creeping through the tall jungle trees, all the while, aware that death could be right around the corner. We passed a couple mines and deadly animals, traveling farther and farther with our confidence building up. I could say we were getting into a comfortable situation with really no sign of danger anywhere.

As we neared Can Tho, I felt so close to my father but then again so far. My heart

hammered as I thought about leaving the group and going to find my father, but I knew in reality that I couldn't. I was hoping an opportune moment would come, when one of the soldiers approached me and whispered,

“Yo Ron, you look so nervous man, just try to calm down. Nothing's gonna happen, this was actually a good idea taking the-”

“BOOMMM!!!!!!!!!!

He was shot! One moment he was just talking to me and the next he was down! I panicked! I didn't know what to do or say, and automatically dropped to the ground as a reaction to what had just happened. I was on the ground trying to recover from what I had just seen, thinking that could've been me when right there at that instant I saw something. It was located right in front of my face, as if someone had purposely put it there knowing I would come across it. But how could it be? It was my Dad's dog tags. I picked them up and placed them around my neck.

I could hear the Captain's voice in the distance trying to give out commands, but I could see everyone trying to hide and duck in order to save themselves. Bullets flying everywhere, and small grenades were being exploited around us. But the enemies were spotted quickly. They were about a hundred yards from us, right outside of Can Tho, and they were rapidly approaching.

We scattered around, took positions, hiding behind trees, and trying to camouflage with the environment we were in, but we were not far away from each other. As enemies and soldiers opened fire, I moved behind a wide tall tree hoping not to be seen while

planning my next move. I then zigzagged from tree to tree as fast as I could at the same time firing my weapon as a resort of protection. I shot enemies down, however, my intentions weren't to kill, but rather to get them out of my way. I didn't believe in the purpose of this war and I hated violence, but for my father I was willing to make sacrifices and take risks.

"AAAAHHHH!! ROONN HELP ME!! RONN! ROONNN!"

I could hear soldiers screaming my name in agony in search of help, but I was now on my own, I was fighting for my own purpose. I made my way passed corpses and wounded soldiers who were blaring my name, but I just pretended to not hear them.

I successfully made my way into the village, hiding behind a big cargo truck analyzing what I thought would be bigger, but it was just a camp. There was a lot of motion in place, armed men speed walking all over the camp taking and carrying out orders. Then more men entered the jungle to join in on the battle against the men I left behind. I felt awful with my conscious telling me it was my duty to go and help them. I thought about my action plan on finding my Dad and then the thought of all those wounded soldiers who I left behind calling my name for help penetrated my mind. I couldn't abandon them like that, they would've given their life for me and it wasn't fair that I wasn't there for them. After all it was my idea to take this short cut and they shouldn't have to suffer because of me.

Would I let so many men suffer and possibly die just so that I could find my father if he was still alive or even still at this camp? But after all this time of waiting, thinking,

fanaticizing about finding my father I couldn't back down. I couldn't go back home empty handed. I thought about what decision I was going to make, I wanted to go after my father but my heart was telling me those men needed my help and that it would only be fair to assist them.

I made my way back into the jungle thinking to my self, *"I'm gonna go help out those soldiers and right after I'm gonna get my Dad."* I kept thinking this, but I knew in reality I wasn't going to be able to do both although it seemed to comfort me by thinking this. The further I traveled into the jungle getting closer to the enemies the more hate and anger that filled inside of me. All of a sudden many feelings and emotions took a hold of me.

I stopped by a bush, kneeled on one knee, and took aim. I had the enemy on target and wanted this shot to hurt. I wanted my victims to feel what I had felt for the past years. I opened fire and he collapsed. I kept my eye on him and I could see him suffering in the distance, dieing in pain. Enjoying every bit of it I moved carefully only to locate my next target. I analyzed him for a bit, he was concentrating on his aim. I moved in stealth, sneaked up right behind him, took out my sharp knife, and cut his throat. Blood was being spilled at my pleasure, this was no longer business but it was a personal matter. I continued the killing as a way to relieve my misery. Feeling invulnerable I stood up making myself visible not caring anymore.

"RON! GET DOWN! GET DOWN!" Yelled one of my partners.

I didn't listen to him, I felt untouchable and was determined to kill everyone who

stood against me. I didn't last long though, I was quickly shot in the shoulder and then immediately in the leg. However, the adrenaline running inside me and sorrow I had suffered for so long didn't allow me to feel any pain. I was on the ground, angrier than ever, trying to get up and continue with this madness but I couldn't. Soon enough my allies finished everyone off.

"Ron are you ok?" Asked Captain Stale looking very concerned.

"Yeah I'm fine, it's nothing. Help me up."

"No stay down, we suffered three casualties and more wounded. I have contacted the general and he is now sending a chopper to extract us. We cannot go on like this."

"NO! I'm not leaving! I need..."

"You're wounded and can't carry on. You are going to get on that chopper."

"NO! I need to stay Captain! I need to go to that camp over there!" I said very frustrated. "At that camp over there, I need to get my father..."

"Lieutenant Ron! You're getting on that chopper am I understood! Now shut up!"

He interrupted me in a rude manner.

I then knew there was nothing I could do. I was left there grieving. Then the chopper arrived and I was placed inside of it. Captain Stale approached me and said, "See you at home Lieutenant." And then rapidly disappeared. I didn't even have the chance to tell him about the camp where my father was being held at.

The chopper was soon enough going to take off still waiting for other wounded soldiers and casualties to be placed inside of it. I thought about getting off and all the

different possible consequences that could bring, it wasn't such of a good idea but then again I just couldn't leave empty handed like that. I then began to think about all of the good times my Dad and I shared, but this just made me more rebellious and angrier.

After reminiscing for some moments I then knew I wanted to get off but the chopper was ascending and I was in the middle of it surrounded by other fellow soldiers. I was screaming in anger, there was nothing left in my will that I could do. The soldiers aboard tried to calm me down and some even offered me tranquilizers, but they had no idea of my symptom when right there and then I looked outside the chopper to have one last look. I couldn't believe my eyes. At the camp there was a tall man, long hair, looked tortured, and weak. Was it possible it was my father? I placed my head close to the edge, grabbed a megaphone that was near, looked at the man in the camp and said , "DAD!!!" He looked up and we made eye contact, but the chopper kept going.