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Memories Never Forgotten

For many years I have thought about writing a story that might express the true feelings of an Infantry Soldier going into battle for the first time, and then afterwards when he has experienced the horrible deaths he has seen and has become a part of the smells of a human body deteriorating in the hot sun, the sounds of exploding shells, listening to the passing artillery shells coming and going and hoping it would pass him by, the crack of a bullet narrowly missing his head . . . not easy to forget.

On September 9, 1943 most of us, after years of constant training, were looking forward to battle. We had enough of the boring daily routine of training and thought a change would be welcome. Little did we know what real battle was like, but we soon learned that the life in an army camp playing war was much more to our liking. We were cocky, and even if we did have doubts about what was ahead of us, we weren't about to let our buddies see that. Although before Alta Villa we had seen soldier friends and foe alike lying dead, I don't really think it registered in our minds, in my mind at least, until we went through the mountain village of Alta Villa and saw and smelled the bodies and the pitiful deaths of our comrades, civilians—men and women, and worst of all those poor little innocent children swollen up, their clothes bursting in death.

Those feelings of dread and sorrow lasted until I woke up in the hospital after being wounded on that hill overlooking Monte Cassino Abbey. I thought the feeling was in the past until several years later I found myself in that far off country of Frozen Chosen, Korea, and that awful dreadful feeling returned. Yes, my friends, it was with us then and will always remain with us forever. I can only imagine what thoughts go through the young replacement when he reports to his Company and sees what battle has done to the battle hardened veteran or the frightful experience he is subjected to if he has to report to his Company during the dark hours of the night during an attack. That was what many of the replacements had to do during the Rapido River attack, and many of these young men and boys, or most of them, rather, teenagers, never found their companies or knew a soul in their units because in the heat of battle, in the dark, lonely and afraid, the enemy's bullet found them and they were no more. Perfect strangers to us. We sorrowed for these unknown comrades, but only their families, friends, wives or sweethearts at home knew them. Knowing what battle and war really is, the sad, lonesome feeling of going back to the lines during the night, rain beating down on your face, fear in your hearts and doing your best to not let the feeling known to your buddies and knowing that your comrades must be feeling the same way and would not let you down.

I don't think I can really come up with the words so that the uninitiated can understand or even be interested, but I know the ones who went through these horrible experiences will understand what I am trying to say. Why were we the living allowed to come back; how were we chosen to continue with our lives when so many others made the extreme sacrifice and lie in those cemeteries row upon row of crosses, so far away? God Bless them and God bless all of you who are still suffering in your own way. God bless our great 36th Infantry Division Association.