Hero

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Abstract

"If you must shoot, aim low and try to cripple, not kill." I laid down the Duty Officer instructions and yawned...
"If you must shoot, aim low and try to cripple, not kill."

I laid down the Duty Officer instructions and yawned. I could see myself trying to hit someone in the dark with the Army's .45 pistol. Might as well throw it at him.

"Good night, sir." Private Melton had come past the door and decided to be friendly for a change.

"Good night, Melton." I looked at my watch. Two o'clock. Melton's footsteps faded down the hall and all was quiet again. The silence was almost unbearable and I lit a cigarette just to hear the spluttering of the match. Saturday night. What a night to be Duty Officer. I'll bet—

Smash! The outside door down the hall banged open and I heard a shuffling sound coming down the hall punctuated by labored breathing. Here comes trouble. I ground my cigarette out and stepped into the hall.

Corporal Lindsey was using both walls for support as he reeled from one to the other. His enormous body seemed to shake the building as he thumped up the hall toward me. He had a cut on his left jaw and the trousers of his uniform were torn. His crew-cut head bobbed around loosely; as he came up to me, he stopped and leaned on one wall. His
head slowly raised and I looked into red pig eyes. He held my gaze with defiance for several seconds and then with great effort his mouth dropped open.

“G’evening, sir. I guess I’m kinda —” Corporal Lindsey collapsed on the floor with a resounding thud. I looked at the heap on the floor. Now what do the damn instructions have to say? I couldn’t lift him with a crane.

A patter of bare feet came down the hall behind me and I turned to see the Communications N.C.O., Sgt. Webb, hurrying up. He was immaculately clad in shorts.

“Hello, sir. That’s Jake isn’t it? Boy, he’s hung one on this time hasn’t he?”

“Yes. You’re the commo Sgt.; help me to communicate this body to his bed.”

We both grabbed an arm, stooped and lifted the 250 pounds of blissfully sleeping humanity to its feet. Our progress through the hall and up the flight of stairs to Jake’s room was a series of grunts, slippings, and curses but we finally tumbled Jake into his bed.

Sgt. Webb removed Jake’s shoes and we both contemplated the body.

“He was alone again, wasn’t he?” Sgt. Webb was shaking his head slightly from side to side. “He’s always alone. Nobody’ll go with him on Saturday nights ‘cause he always gets to talking about the Korean War and then he gets in fights. I had to carry him up one other time too. It’s no fun is it?”

“You can say that again.”

We were turning to leave when I noticed Jake’s right hand slowly opening and closing. I looked at Sgt. Webb wonderingly. He smiled slightly and, walking to the wall, he removed the Medal of Honor hanging there and placed it in Jake’s huge paw. Instantly the hand grasped it and the left hand stroked the medal softly, lovingly, and his deep breathing changed to a whisper.

“F’r conshpicuous gall’ntry ‘bove ’n beyond. . . .” Jake slept.