

## **Some Kind of Monster**

“It had to be done,” I repeated for the forty-first time that day, as I watched the last of the whiskey swish around in the bottom of the glass. The bitter aftertaste lingered on my tongue.

The aftertaste of the time enlisted in the war left an even more bitter taste in my mouth. Everything reminds me of the war. The slam of a door jolts me just as the deafening bombs on the battlefield did. A knock on the door brings back the intoxicating memory of the gunshots that rang out over the trenches. And when the moon falls into the sun’s placement in the sky, the darkness swallows me while the nightmares start.

But one nightmare in particular makes itself known. It weaves itself into the crevices of my mind, holds on for dear life every time a shot of whiskey burns down my throat. The battle of Normandy. The most pivotal moment in Canadian history, the most traumatizing experience of my life.

I vividly remember landing in a field, the dark inky sky with no clouds to disrupt it; the moon stamped into the scenery. The parachute I was wrapped in didn’t ward off the bone chilling air that made its way through the material of the uniform. All night I walked with my hand stretched out in front as I wandered around, looking for my rendezvous point; the battlefield near the coast.

When dawn broke through the cloudy sky, the morning was welcomed with a round of gunshots. I dove for cover in a nearby ditch, the same trench that I would call my temporary home for the time being. I swung the rifle around into

shooting position, the cold metal barrel resting in my hand, while my finger gripped the trigger. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5 shots rang out. Each bullet hitting its target, the soldiers down. On my elbows and knees I carefully made my way down the coastline, the rifle slung on my shoulder.

As the nightmare continued on, it appeared in frames. I vividly remember shooting down a few other German soldiers, a prayer said in the name of each of them. It shouldn't have made a difference, it shouldn't have hit me this hard. The death of this particular soldier from the opposing side pained me. Photos from the inner pocket of his uniform lay in a puddle of mud. A portrait of a family of three occupied the slip of paper. Lightly shaded ringlets falling past the shoulders of a little girl, piercing eyes staring back through the photo. Arms wrapped around the child, arms that told her that they will always be there; those arms lay limp in sludge. It pained me to know that I took the life of a husband, that I put a bullet through the chest of a father, and that I'm the reason why that little girl will have to cry herself to sleep each time bad dreams seize her mind.

We weren't supposed to feel this kind of grief. We weren't supposed to feel for those who fought for the enemy.

"They got themselves into this war," the general said. "They voted that monster into power. All seventeen million, two hundred thousand of them voted him into the position to rule over their country." We learned to push aside any thoughts or feelings of grief for these people. "The moment you start to rethink

this, and start to grieve for the opposing side is when you know that you are now on their side.”

But I can see it all so clearly now. I can see it in still frames. The soldier scrambling around for his rifle, his hands moving frantically on the soggy terrain. Me slipping in the mud, as my boots splash through the puddles. I’m close enough for him to see me now. His head shoots up, and it’s as if he’s a deer in headlights. A trigger is pulled, my trigger, and the next thing I know is his limp body lying face down in a swamp on the battlefield. I remember seeing fear in his eyes. Fear and excruciating terror. Those eyes will haunt me for the rest of my life. Permanently take over as the subject of my dreams.

I rub my eyes as I take a drag from the lit cigarette, and pour myself another hearty glass of whiskey. Once again I remind myself, “It had to be done.”