

## The Last Full Measure

This Story is dedicated to the Men and Women of the EOD Training and Evaluation Unit One

It was almost thirty years since he shipped out, after what some would consider a long and distinguished career; a career that spanned three decades and too many wars. He was now almost eighty and spent most of his days reminiscing. He recalled the day that he finally retired, the three hundred men and women of the EOD crew that gathered in the high desert to recognize his years of service and dedication. The blue of the sky was a few shades lighter than his full-dress uniform; so bright it hurt your eyes to look at it. A slight breeze, the flag whipping in the wind, dust scattering in whirls around the desert floor, and the eyes of the command focused on him as they listened to the invocation, followed by the addresses of their commanding officers, and the presentation of the flag. Then the ceremony was over and the sideboys were arranged two to a side on the exit ramp; the boatswain announced “Explosive Ordnance Disposal Training and Evaluation Unit leaving,” finished his piping, and then handed over his pipe. The band struck up “Anchors Aweigh,” and three decades of service were over. . . just like that.

Gradually, his friends drifted off, one by one, and he was left with time on his hands; time to think and reminisce. Until today, most of his memories were good ones, but today he wrestled with a growing sense of doubt, a feeling that he might have made some wrong decisions; a feeling that perhaps his life had been a mistake. The years of service, the separation from loved ones; the constant moving and travel; the anxiety that the next bomb diffused might be the last. Was it worth it? Did anyone care?

The years after the last war were the worst; people questioned the morality of the war, the necessity of the fighting. For him, and for all his friends, war wasn't pretty, and none of them preferred fighting to a lasting peace; but sometimes peace required fortitude. So he and his unit shipped out, did their jobs and buried their dead; but they made life safe for those back home. He used to think that there was some comfort in that thought—that the safety of the men and women back home was all that mattered, but now he wasn't sure. Hadn't they ignored him when he returned home? There were no words of thanks for a job well-done.

He thought back to the ceremony they held after the war to dedicate a memorial to honor their fallen comrades at Darwin Wash, on a day much like the one on which he retired. The sky bright blue, the breeze whipping the sand into dust demons, the air so fresh it almost hurt to breathe. Commander Sanders announced each man's name and then a lone shot was fired from a rifle somewhere on the ridge of one of the surrounding mountains, the echo of the

shot like a whisper from a friend long gone. Nicholas Wilson, PO 2<sup>nd</sup> class; Edward Austin Koth, PO 2<sup>nd</sup> class; Paul John Darga, CPO; David Shaun Roddy, PO 2<sup>nd</sup> class; Gregory John Billiter, CPO; Joseph Adam McSween, PO 1<sup>st</sup> class; Curtis Ralph Hall, PO 2<sup>nd</sup> class; Patrick L Wade, CPO; Jeffrey Lucas Chaney, PO 1<sup>st</sup> class; Kevin Ronald Bewley, PO 2<sup>nd</sup> class; Luis Ariel Suffront, PO 1<sup>st</sup> class; eleven men, eleven fallen comrades, eleven lives—were they wasted? He no longer knew.

As he sat thinking of these men, dead some thirty years, he winced as the pain in his chest flared up. . . .

He was on a platform, and as he looked out, he saw thousands, hundreds of thousands, of men arrayed in front of him. Toward the front, in the place of honor, stood a tall man, much taller than those around him, arrayed in a blue cloak trimmed in red, a three-corner hat atop his graying head, possessed of a regal mien, a sword hanging from his side. Near him, arrayed in motley colors, with rag-tag uniforms and mis-matched armament, and displaying a flag with thirteen stars on a field of blue, were thousands of troops. Behind these stood thousands upon thousands of men in gray and blue; no longer opposed brother to brother but, hands clasped together, facing forward toward the platform. Behind these were the doughboys, with their baggy pants and cumbersome helmets, some with gasmasks at their side, or carrying their Springfields on their shoulder. Behind them in row upon row massed the GIs with their mesh helmets, drab green uniforms and their M1s slung from their shoulders. After these were gathered men and women in camos, khakis, and jungle greens carrying assault rifles, grenades and hand held rocket launchers.

In the background a high-pitched voice could be heard talking, and slowly, all the people arrayed on the field turned toward the rumpled man standing in the distance.

The man stood away from the rest of the crowd, on a small platform, looking forlorn and lonely. He was tall and wore a plain black coat, black pants, and a black stove-pipe hat. His voice was muffled, as if he was talking on a cold November day, sometime far in the past. The words were difficult to hear, due to the shuffling of feet and the murmur of the crowd, but they carried on the wind as the tall man spoke. . . “But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground . The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.”

And then, Scott J. Hamilton, Commander EOD Training and Evaluation Unit One heard his name called. He looked to the side and saw eleven men acting as honor guard; eleven men who waited for their Commander these many years. He glanced to the end of the platform on which he was standing, and saw the sideboys arranged two to a side. The boatswain announced “Explosive Ordnance Disposal Training and Evaluation Unit leaving” and heard the piping as he stepped through the sideboys and onto the ground. And then he heard a cheering

as the hundreds of thousands gathered in the open field turned to him and welcomed him as one of them.

In the background, the tall man continued speaking “It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us. . . that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.”

Commander Scott J Hamilton walked among his fellow countrymen, and was troubled no more. He was home.