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The Story of War

Sampson

“September 7, 41” announced the man through the radio. From that point on, my life would change forever. My name is Sampson, and back then I was a fairly average eighteen-year-old. It was 1940, and I had just returned from a summer vacation up in New York where I was celebrating graduating from high school. It would be the last time before I would have to find a job. My dad was a hunter and fisherman, my mom stayed at home, looking over my younger sister, who was an aspiring artist. I had lived a fairly normal life so far, and would probably have gone on to work a desk job, raise a family, and quietly retire if the Great War didn’t take place.

“Oh my god!” whispered Mom, “No! Why, why?”. I had just been drafted into the United States Army to fight in World War II. I was to attend basic training in two weeks, and then would be shipped out to the frontlines. The memories of the last war were still fresh in people’s minds. “Don’t go, we can hide you. You don’t have to go and die!” said my sister, Margaret. “And if I get caught? Remember what happened to Steve when he got caught ditching the draft? His family had to take out a second mortgage just to pay the fine, and he was never the same after being locked up for five years!”. At the time, if you were caught ditching the draft, you

would be sentenced to five years in prison and would have to pay a fine of two hundred fifty thousand dollars.

One month later

The sound of the cargo plane's engines was deafening. I had just landed at RAF Croughton, the largest base in Britain, along with my platoon. Basic training was brutal, but it went by all too fast. I heard worried chatter in the platoon that they didn't have enough training, and that the German and Italian forces had been preparing for months. The British soldiers were very annoying, and often stole food, cigarettes, and other personal effects from us. However, we were in the fight together and often socialized and trained together. The staff sergeant (the leader of each squad; one squad was comprised of four to eleven guys; one platoon consisted of four squads), a guy in his early 30s by the name of Rick, was despised of by the squad. He would look for every inconsistency, and when he found them, he would give beatings and would force the men to run miles on end in frigid conditions. A slight wrinkle in a bedsheet, punishment, one bullet misplaced, punishment, and so on. Because of this, we often played pranks on the slightly senile sergeant. We would plant mites in his bed, put lime juice in his coffee, and many other small pranks that kept us entertained. This would not last forever, as the platoon was given our first assignment: North Africa.

Klaus

I could hear the chants of the Nazi supporters marching through the streets. Adolf Hitler had become the Fuhrer of Germany. Hitler promised the resurgence of Germany after its demise after World War I. He was a hero in the eyes of many including me. My father, Friedrich, had fought in World War I and was a member of the Nazi party. Many of my friends supported Hitler, and would, later on, join the Hitler Youth.

As you probably know by now, my name is Klaus. I was a scrawny man, with blonde hair and ice blue eyes, the ideal complexion of a Nazi. I was attending university, studying advanced physics, which was my favorite subject. As a member of the Hitler Youth, I was often tasked with putting out propaganda posters all over Munich, my home. One day at the week's Youth meeting, the troop leader announced that we would be sent to a summer camp to train for combat. All of us celebrated, as we were prideful and joyous to serve their country. This had been conditioned into our heads ever since they were young through the Youth, school, and our families. Many families had going-away parties before their sons would leave. Mother made apple strudel, her specialty, which was a rare occurrence, as we usually ate dry bread and cabbage soup due to the food shortages. Many of the stores were understocked since most if not all of Germany's production infrastructure was put towards the war effort. It would be the last hearty meal I would eat for a year.

Three months later

I had been assigned to the 4th Panzer division and would attend specialized Panzer training for two months. The Panzer IV was the most widely feared tank in the world and was the pride of my country. Our tactic of Blitzkrieg (Lighting War) revolutionized war as we know it. During the wars past (especially World War I) armies fought in trench warfare, with fixed positions and long battles. In Blitzkrieg, light armored divisions would enter a battle zone at high speed, quickly destroying enemy artillery and surrounding enemy troop positions. Then, infantry units would move in and finish off the shocked enemy. This tactic was most likely the sole reason for Germany's fast and total domination of almost all of Europe during the war.

I was fascinated by the prospect and was ecstatic to commence special training. I was assigned the gunner position, where I would wield the Panzer IV's 2.1-inch (diameter) turret. It was grueling to sit inside the tank for hours on end during training, as it was extremely hot inside. I saw my comrades come and go since many trainees failed. I graduated top of my class from training and was promoted to commander. I met General Heinz Guderian, the general of Panzer forces and a national hero. When I walked on stage, however, I looked into his stark grey eyes and saw nothing but pure barbarity of which I had never seen before. All my life I had looked up to men like him, but recently I had been doubtful. "Maybe they are not right, maybe they are not the 'good guys'." I thought as I fell asleep.

The wailing of the alarm pierced through the quiet calm. This was the alert bell, in which we had to report for orders to deploy on a mission or briefing. I and the rest of the division had ten minutes to get clothed and to run to our stations. That day we would be briefed for the invasion of Poland, the first battle of the war. I and the division would be at the forefront of the

invasion, being the first units to rush in and rapidly deteriorate the Polish defenses. We were to set off to the border at noon.

Allen

“Whoooo! Yeah!” yelled my friends. We had been partying through the night; as usual at the time. My name is Allen, and back then I was a high school dropout, I had ADHD, and I was addicted to partying. I and my friends would go out on our bikes on the mountain roads all the time, or we would take the jet skis that we stole from the marina out to Venice Beach. All in all, I was a pretty bad kid, mostly because of the death of my mother fourteen years back. I had no purpose, no path in life until the war started. One of my friends in Hawaii called me one day frantically yelling “Allen! Allen! They bombed us! The Japs bombed us! They blew up the whole island! There are swarms of planes everywhere!”. The line cut off. The next day, Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared war on Japan. That was the day I found my path.

One week later

All the headlines said the same thing that week “Japs bomb Pearl Harbor! America at war!”. I headed to the Air Force recruiting office to voluntarily enlist. Ma always loved planes; she said it was like riding on a bird. I knew this was my chance, my chance to make something out of myself, a chance to right my wrongs, a chance to make Ma proud. After physicals, I was

stationed at Hawaii to fly the B-17 Flying Fortress in the war against Japan. I was to report to the AFB (Air Force Base) Los Angeles in a week to be shipped out. I was excited to serve my country, but I was still a bit scared. The B-17 was considered the best war machine in the sky at the time, but I heard from my friends that it had a horrible record and that many of the crews didn't make it back.

The day before shipping out

It's the day before I have to report to the base to leave home. I heard on the radio at the dinner that some fanatic by the name of Hitler was stirring up his own war in Europe and that he was hand-in-hand with the Japs. I knew those Germans couldn't be trusted. We let them off too easy after the last war and now look, they found another maniac to hide behind! My friends wanted to go out tonight and party as usual before I left, but I knew that I couldn't show up to the base hungover. I refused. Pa took me to breakfast for the first time since Mom had died. He met her before the first world war, but he had to leave when he was drafted. Ma was pregnant with me at the time, but they Pa didn't know if he would come back to see Ma or his newborn son. Thankfully, he got back, but not the same as before he left. No one came back the same; I can say that from experience. He seemed lonely, and sad as my mom said. In his depression, he didn't see the subtle evidence of Ma's sickness. She passed away when I was five. It was only me and Pa at the funeral. None of her family members came.

The next day

“Run! Run! Run! Get your butts on that plane!” yelled the squadron commander. It was the next day, and I had been sorted into the 23d Bombardment Squadron, 5th Bombardment group of the Seventh Air Force to be based in Hickam Field, Hawaii. I was ecstatic to get there, as I had heard that the beaches were pristine and that servicemen often got to roam the island when not on call. That changed when I got to Los Angeles AFB.

First, some context. A squadron is made up of twelve to twenty-four planes. A group is made up of around two squadrons and a group is usually attached to an air wing. The wing commander is the leader of the whole wing, which is usually all based in one location.

Now back to the story. The wing commander had all three-hundred of us line up in our individual groups. To this day I don't know how one man could bark as loud as he could. He ordered us to dispose of all personal possessions that we had except for our identification and clothes. I slipped the photo of Ma into my back pocket. We would then report to our individual squadron commanders to get our gear. My commander's name was Rod; he was a friendly guy, only three years older than me and the guys. We were given large military duffle bags which contained two to three sticks of deodorant, a pocket knife, our uniform, one MRE (meal ready to eat). “They're gonna refill our bags when we get to Hickam right?” I asked Rod, “That there is all you get for six months,” he replied. The other guys in the squadron were shocked and seemed, I, however, had come prepared. I had packed eight boxes full of snacks, deodorant, cash, candy, and booze that dad promised he would mail to me. We stepped out onto the searing heat of the LA midsummer. The tarmac felt like burning coals under sandal-clad feet. Ten mammoth transport planes were waiting across the runway. I was going to war.

Sampson

The scorching heat hit my face like a tidal wave. We had just landed in Tobruk, Libya. I could hear the artillery firing from the frontlines outside the city. The Nazi's were pushing to the city, led by Erwin Rommel, or as many of the men called him, 'The Desert Fox'. We were to reinforce the city and relieve the depleted Allied troops who had been stationed there. Tobruk was a vital port city that was used to inject supplies into the brutal African front. Allied commanders refused to give the retreat order, so we were tasked to prepare for invasion. Rick sent us to the western front of the city where we saw the situation at hand. The wall was dilapidated, the gate a rotting piece of wood. Meanwhile, I could hear the rumble of the Nazi tanks along the horizon. They would be here in a couple of days.

Two days later

I was at my station on the western tower, trying to get some sleep when the first bomb detonated. Italian dive bombers had commenced their night attack. The air siren started wailing, and I could hear the rumble of men rushing to their stations. Then, I looked to the walls. I saw the camouflaged Panzer tanks rushing towards the walls already a couple hundred feet away accompanied by Axis infantry. They were ambushing us. "Western wall! Axis troops there!" I yelled into the telephone to alert the men in the

dugouts. No one picked up until a half-awake Australian soldier answered the call from a dugout on the frontlines. “They’re all over us mate! I don’t know if we can hold them much longer. The Australians were in charge of the defense lines outside the city. They dug small manholes. It must have been pure terror for them that night to wake up to the Nazi’s attacking in front of them. From my spot up in the tower I could see the whole attack unfolding. There were about fourteen thousand Axis troops attacking against only a couple thousand Australians in the dugouts. My M-1 Garand wouldn’t be able to fire that far, but the weapons depot was right across the street from my station. The depot was in chaos, men were running every which way searching for their weapons. In the confusion I snatched Springfield standard-issue sniper rifle from the rack along with some flares and sprinted back to my station. I couldn’t stand watching my fellow soldiers being attacked, I had to do something. I used to go hunting with my father when I was young; I was a decent shot, but I was out of practice. I dragged a table to the other end of the watchpost and got into position. The Australians, somehow, had managed to hold off the Axis troops, but the fighting was still raging. The British warships in the bay were firing their guns, but that was all the support they had. I learned later on that the men in the city refused to go out there stating that it would mean immediate death. I was enraged hearing this as I thought that we were here to fight, and if we died we did so with absolute honor, and certainly not in vain. I heard that those men surrendered to the Italians a couple months later.

We held off the attack, and two more after that, but we were running low and supplies and morale, the two things that were vital in desert warfare. We were ordered to

retreat west into Egypt to regroup, while a skeleton force of ironically, Australians would stay and hold the city. I disagreed with this wholeheartedly. I believed that we should have stayed and defended the city, maybe even attack the Nazi Afrika troops who were camped only half a mile away. But I had no say in the matter, so I got on the truck with my squad and drove off. I saw the faces of the Aussies as we drove out the gates. They echoed sadness, but also strength and patriotism for what they believed in. Tears fled down my cheeks like cats and dogs. I wanted to stay and fight with those brave men, but I knew I couldn't, that I wasn't as good as them. The repulsion at Tobruk would be my only military action in Africa.

I would be sent back to England, where I would participate in the Invasion of Normandy, or V-Day. The heroism I saw around stayed with me all my life. We fought hard and long, but finally we finished what we came to do. When the men dropped the Nazi flag over Berlin, I saw Germans celebrating, I saw normal people celebrating freedom, salvation. I saw fellow Americans fall for their country on the beach. I always hated going to the beach, as the sand got everywhere.

Klaus

“Für das vaterland!” cried the Panzer division (‘for the fatherland’ was the traditional Nazi war cry). We had just commenced our charge into Poland. I was at the front of the charge leading my crew. It was a beautiful morning in the Polish countryside

that would be tainted by what take place over the course of the day. We drove into town expecting to be met by resistance, but all we found were a couple of scared Poles running behind their comrades. We drove through, destroying the defensive positions and military which were my targets, but other tank commanders destroyed the shops and homes as well. I tried to yell to them to stop, but it was in vain. Some of the civilian population had fled, but most remained. We drove out and looped back around to regroup, but as we drove around the city I saw soldiers with unrecognizable uniforms pulling families out of their homes. I was flabbergasted, and when we regrouped with the rest of the force I looked for the commander of the cruel soldiers. I heard that they were from the Gestapo and that they were sent by Himmler himself on the Fuhrer's orders. "What the hell do you think you are doing?" I asked the commander. "Ah, Captain Klaus Wagner. I have heard much about you, it is great to finally meet you." replied the smug, cold-faced man. "As I said, why are your men doing this to those innocent civilians?" "Maybe you don't know who I am captain. I am Major Gerhard Schneider, and to answer your question, they aren't innocent at all. They are Jews, and therefore should be executed or sent to the camps per the orders of the Fuhrer." answered the major. "What in the world are you talking about? What camps? So what if they are-" I was interrupted by Hans, my gunner. "Just walk, away. I will explain, come." he whispered, pulling me away. "I will be seeing you very soon, Captain," said the Major. Hans brought me to our Panzer and explained "Hitler is rounding up all the Jews and killing them because he thinks they are dirty and lesser people," as he handed me a newspaper from the day before. "That's barbaric, I thought he stood for the resurgence of Germany, not crazy, inhumane things like this," I

replied. "I would keep your mouth shut, as I heard that the Gestapo is arresting and executing all so called traitors to Germany" he warned. "Oh my. Thank you Hans for telling me this you are excused," I direly replied. "What in the world does he think he is doing?" I thought. "This isn't what Germany stands for! He is a maniac that man is!" I wrote in a letter to Mother. "What if the Gestapo are monitoring the mail?" I thought as I hid the letter in my uniform. We were to push farther into enemy territory tomorrow. I needed rest.

Six years later

I came back from the war feeling different. Everyone else was angry and defeated, yet I was horrified. Not that Germany lost, but that Germany was in this war in the first place, and that I took part in the inhumane and disgusting acts that were ordered by that maniac Hitler. I would face the Nuremberg Trials the summer after the war ended. I was sentenced for my crimes, which I wholeheartedly deserved. I saw families taken from their homes, seperated for no reason at all, except for the false ideology that Jews were of a lesser race, which wasn't a reason at all really. If I was given one wish today, it would be to have done something to stop it, or atleast desert the Wehrmacht (German name for the military). But I didn't, I couldn't, I couldn't abandon my great country. I thought that I would just pass through the war untouched, and see my great nation rise again free from the maniacal, gross binds that held it back. But Germany would be

punished greatly for its sins, given unreasonable burdens for the amount of treachery it had imposed on the world. Almost like how Atlas was to hold the Earth on his shoulders.

Allen

The view out of the window was beautiful, just as I had imagined it. The waves were crystal blue, the beaches pristine. The plane ride had been rough. We were strapped to hard seats against the wall, and were squeezed shoulder to shoulder. My first breath of Hawaiian air was as pure as I had ever taken. We were assigned barracks by squadron. I was given a bed near the door, luckily, as the tents didn't have any ventilation. We each had a shelf, a bed, and a chest at the base of the bed. I unpacked my items, then reported for our first assignment. "You fine men will be carrying out one of the bravest missions of this war. Succeed, and you will be honored as heroes by your grateful nation," announced the wing commander. "You will be flying the brand new B-29 bombers that just came in from the mainland. Your mission is to drop your payload of bombs over Tokyo, Japan. You will fly your bombers to the Mariana Islands, from which you will fly to Japan after refueling. This is what you have been training for all of your military careers. Make your country proud!" he went on to say. We were given the rest of the day to prepare, as we would leave early tomorrow morning. "We are being sent over the ocean to the land of Japan. The commander made it sound like we may not come back. I love you, and I miss you," read my letter to Ma. I put it in my front pocket. It was the

middle of the day, so I headed over to the beach, thinking I would find something fun to do. The sailors and the airmen were partying down the beach. I usually felt the urge to join or even instigate those sort of events. But I didn't feel it that time. I felt happy, free, and even calm. I stayed there, laying on the sand, watching the waves come and recede, almost like a paintbrush, constantly rubbing against the canvas.

"Get up! Get up!" yelled the wing commander. It was the day, the day that would open my eyes forever. We usually were given rations for breakfast since food was scarce, but today we were served freshly-cooked meals or "real food" as we called it. At around ten o'clock we got to our planes. We were ordered to remove all defensive guns on our planes except for the tail gun. I brought a couple bags of candy and some pop from my supply boxes since the flight to Tokyo was seven hours long. I was stationed at the bomber position. I was to aim and drop the payload over any buildings. We taxied to the runway, which was very short for the size of our planes. Most of the time we brushed the trees at the end of the runway when taking off. We took off near the front of the wing; when we lifted off the ground I felt the second of weightlessness that I savored. "Ma always wanted to ride an airplane," I thought, staring at her photo as we took off.

Seven hours later

We were only a couple miles away from the city now. I was in position, ready to fire my ordnance. We came over what looked like some suburbs. They didn't look too much different than the suburbs in Los Angeles. We came over the what looked like the

downtown area of Tokyo. It was in chaos, people were running everywhere, cars speeding away. I hesitated; I could hear the shouts of my fellow airmen urging me to drop. "I can't, I can't kill all those people," I thought. Yet, I still pulled the trigger. I watched as the arsenic cluster bombs dropped from the bomb bay along with tears from my eyes. I saw the explosions rocking the ground almost thirty thousand feet below. I looked around and saw my fellow Americans falling to their doom. In that moment I realized that I was nothing. I realized that what I had lived for my whole life meant nothing in the bigger picture of our world. I came back from the war dumbstruck, depressed, and certainly lonely. I watched as the world moved on around me. People seemed happier than ever, which I didn't understand. I didn't understand how all those innocent people died, yet they were happy. I felt the weight of their souls pressing down on my shoulders. Pushing me farther and farther down a tunnel of loneliness. I wasn't sad, in fact I was shocked. I didn't cry anymore, I just sat there, watching. I watched the stars move across the sky as I once did. I saw Ma up there, shining.





