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The Enemy

by RICHARD WILSON

It was a totally new kind of war,

and yet not really a new war at all

AT DUSK the sergeant leaned over the parapet, weary, looking south toward the enemy lines. For him this was the worst part of the day. The fighting was done until tomorrow and the enemy casualties were being brought in through the gate below. Their bodies were piled in awful abandon on the big flatbed trucks.

A phrase from another war came to his mind. Walking wounded. There were no walking wounded in this war. They

came in on the trucks, still and tangled, or they didn't come in at all.

He couldn't have merely wounded one of the enemy, as soldiers used to. The thought of inflicting such an injury, in the old conventional way, was obscene. To strike through the breast into the heart. . . . He shuddered with a trembling that came up through the thighs and contracted his stomach.

The lieutenant had come to stand beside him.

"You shouldn't watch, if it bothers you," the lieutenant said.

"It's all right, sir," the sergeant said. He looked down again.

"We had a good day. Three hundred, the colonel said."

"That's good." The sergeant laughed sardonically. "Are we winning?"

"It's hard to say. We're not losing."

"Aren't we, sir?" The sergeant spoke bitterly. "Aren't they? Aren't we all?"

"Look, sergeant—" the lieutenant began. Then he shrugged. The sergeant was older than he was by seven or eight years. There was no need to give him an orientation lecture. He reached in his pocket and took out a fresh pack of cigarettes. He opened it. "Have one. A shipment just got in."

"Thanks." The sergeant took a cigarette. He stared at it and the fingers holding it trembled. "Look at it," he said hollowly. "Look at the freakin' thing!"

The lieutenant looked at it, then at the front of the pack. *Ruby tips to match your lips*, it said under the brand name.

"What are they doing to us?" the sergeant said. He crumpled the cigarette in his fist and threw it down and ground it under his boot. "Isn't it hard enough?"

"It must be a mistake," the lieutenant said. He sounded

shaken, too. "Because of the shortage, maybe. Unless it's a fifth column trick. Like the rumor about them not going to wake up again."

"It is just a rumor, isn't it?" the sergeant said. His voice was almost pleading. "We just freeze them for—for the duration, don't we? Don't we, lieutenant? Because I couldn't go on if they were really dead. Nobody could."

The lieutenant spoke sharply. "Snap out of it, sergeant! It's just propaganda. I'm surprised at an old hand like you falling for it."

"I'm not, sir. We couldn't really kill them, could we? It'd be suicide, wouldn't it? It's not total war, is it?"

"Not total, no. There'll be an end to it one day, and then a beginning again. I know it's hard, but it's the only way."

THE LAST of the big trucks had rumbled in from the battlefield. The sergeant watched the gate close in the fading light. Beloved enemy, he thought.

"Three hundred today," he said aloud. "And one was my personal contribution. My platoon was strung out behind me, and she came up over the hill—"

"Sergeant!"

"She was mine. I got her personally. I aimed slow and held the sight on her. Then I let

go. It was almost like—"Sergeant!" The lieutenant was trembling. "The third person singular is prohibited! You know that, sergeant!"

The sergeant was calm. "Yes, sir." He looked at the young officer. "But I feel better for having told about it. I'm all right now, sir. I hope I didn't upset you."

"No," the lieutenant said. "No. We'll forget about it."

"I'll have one of those cigarettes now, sir, if you don't mind. It doesn't matter about the tip, now that it's dark."

"Well . . ." The lieutenant hesitated. "I was going to send them back to Quartermaster, with a report. But all right. Here. I'll have one, too."

As the sergeant lit them he

could see a bit of the red tip in the lieutenant's mouth. He dragged deep on his own, pretending he could taste lipstick.

"Lieutenant," he said. "It doesn't matter where you hit them, does it? I mean it doesn't hurt them at all?"

"No," the lieutenant said. "No, it doesn't matter. They just go to sleep."

"I'm glad." After a while the sergeant said, "I guess I'll hit the sack."

"It's still early."

"Yes. But I like to get up early. There's always a line in the latrine—at the shaving bowls."

"Combat troops don't have to shave," the lieutenant said.

"I know. But we do. We all do."

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