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# THE ORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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*These men had saved their world, but there was a vital reason why they must never go home . . .*

# THE OTHER ARMY

by **GEORGE HUDSON SMITH**

(author of "The Three Spacemen")

**WAR AND LUCK** were funny things, thought Lt. Ed Kenyon, as he waited in General Tyler-Spence's office for the CIC of the Army of Mars to see him. Here he was on Mars, doing nothing more exciting than listening quietly to the dry wind whisper outside. If he had been on Mars just two weeks ago, he'd have been listening to the screech of Rumi rockets. He didn't really know whether he was secretly glad or sorry that his training had been finished too late for the last victorious battles of the war that had started before he was born, twenty years ago. A war that had strained Earth's resources to the utmost, as it was fought on four of the planets of the solar system and on the planets of Alpha Centauri. A war that for years had been

a very near thing for Earth, but which had ended in complete victory—due mainly to the fanatically-brave men of the Army of Mars, under the leadership of General Tyler-Spence.

He let his gaze wander outside to where most of the remaining veterans of the Army of Mars were drawn up in long lines, waiting for the transports which would take them back to Earth. It was hard to believe that these men were the same who had stormed Belgath, against twice their number—who had held the breach at the Halruth Canal. These men, whom he had passed on his way from the scout ship that had brought him from Earth with important and secret dispatches for the General, had saved Mars and the system; for by saving Mars they had

made victory for Earth possible. They didn't look like fanatical killers; they didn't even look like veterans. They looked more like a bunch of young men on a holiday outing. There was reason for their gaiety, of course, for they were going home for the first time in five years, going back to Earth—away from the thin air and rotten climate of Mars—back to blue skies and green grass instead of yellow skies and rust-red sand.

**T**HE PRETTY blonde WAC Captain, who was the General's secretary, smiled at him as she said, "The General will see you in a few minutes. He's reading your dispatches now."

"Thank you...should I say 'sir' or 'ma'am'?" he grinned at her.

"Captain will do nicely. Lieutenant," she said turning back to her work without an answering smile.

"How long have you been here, Captain?" Ed asked after a few minutes.

Looking up briefly the girl replied, "Too long, Lieutenant; everyone who has ever set foot on Mars has been here too long."

"Oh? Well I'm sort of sorry I didn't get here sooner and...you know...see a little action."

The WAC gave him a pitying look as she lowered her blonde head over her desk. Ed shrugged his shoulders and turned back to the window of the command post. In a few minutes a buzzer sounded and the Captain looked up to say, "You can go in now, Lieutenant."

Grand General Tyler-Spence sat behind a huge desk, with the dispatches spread out before him. He gestured with one leathery hand for Ed to sit down. He ran the other through his silvery hair in a gesture the lieutenant had seen at least a hundred times on TV screens. Suddenly it came to Ed that he was in the presence of a legend. This man, more than any other, was responsible for the defeat of the invaders. He could remember reading, as a boy, of this man's exploits. On Mars, On Venus, on the Alpha Centaurian planets of Naraka, Nestron, Erobus and Tartarus and now he was facing him across a desk.

"Do you have any idea, Lt. Kenyon, what these orders contain?" the General asked in his silvery voice.

"No, sir, I haven't; all I know is that I was to report here for duty, and to carry these dispatches to you."

"Yes. Well, then, you didn't know that you are to be my replacement?"

**K**ENYON STARED goggle-eyed. "Your replacement, sir? I don't understand. A lieutenant replacing a Grand General in command of an Army?"

"The war is over, Lt. Kenyon. There isn't any need for a general on Mars any more; the Army won't be here."

"Oh, that's right. The Army of Mars will be going back to Earth now that the war's over."

"No, not exactly. Not exactly, Lieutenant."

"You mean that you and your men are moving out to some other planet?"

"This Army can never go back to Earth, Lieutenant; none of its members can ever go back."

"But I don't understand, sir; I don't know what you mean."

"If this Army ever returned to Earth, it would mean confusion and a catastrophe even worse than a defeat by the Rumi would have meant."

"What... what do you mean, sir?"

The general ran his hand through his silvery hair once more as he slumped down into his chair. "If you remember your history at all, you

will recall that the great need of Earth in this long war has always been manpower. About ten years ago, it looked as if we were through—simply because of a shortage of men. It was then that the Army of Mars was created."

"Yes, sir. I remember reading about what a wonderful job the draft boards and replacement centers had done to raise another two million men for the Army of Mars."

"Hmm. Yes, they did a wonderful job—you might even say a miraculous job. A job that won the war. And that's why the Army of Mars can never return to Earth, and that's what the dispatches you brought with you deal with."

"But, sir... I still don't understand."

"The men of my army, Lieutenant, are all PFI's."

"PFI's? You mean..."

"Projected Force Images. Not really human beings at all, but electrical energy copies of human beings. The draft boards of Earth didn't have any real replacements to send out, but they did have complete life-patterns of all the men in the off-planet forces. They had the PFI reproducer, that had just been perfected by Dr. Schlitz of Berlin, and so they made two million copies and put me in

command of an army of electrical phantoms."

**ED KENYON** shook his head in amazement. "The men? I mean the men don't know, sir?"

"No; they think they are just as real as you are. They have all the memories and feelings of the men they are reproductions of. Right now as they prepare for me to review them for the last time their thoughts are of home and family."

"But, General, what are you going to tell them?"

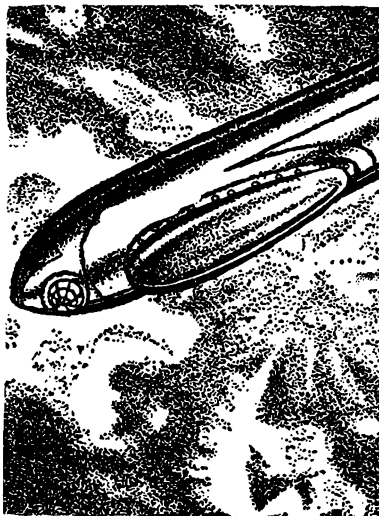
"I'm not going to tell them anything; I'm going to turn them off. My orders are to disactivate their energy receivers in a way prepared for a long time ago."

"But...sir. That's like murder," Lt. Kenyon leaned across the General's desk. "Would you murder your own men, sir?"

The General regarded him calmly. "Yes—it is murder in a way, for they are as much alive as any other men, I suppose."

"Then how? I mean these are men who have fought under you, sir. Men you must have come to like and respect. How can you..."

"Lt. Kenyon," the general said sternly. "I love those men, but there's such a thing



as duty. If you stay in the army long enough you'll learn what I mean."

"But sir... I..."

"Can you picture what would happen if these men were allowed to exist. Lieutenant? To return to the families that they think are theirs? What would happen when hundreds of thousands of wives found themselves with two husbands each virtually identical to the other and each thinking he was the only one? When millions of men found themselves fighting themselves for the same jobs, the same homes, the same families?" The general pressed a black button on a small transmitter he had picked up from his desk.

"But, sir...couldn't they be sent some place else? Couldn't they be allowed to go on living some way? How can you...?"

**"AND WHERE** is there a place where they wouldn't come streaming back from someday? They want to go back to their homes. And if we told them the truth, what then? They might come to hate Earth; that, combined with the fanatical battle fury which was artificially instilled into their makeup, might make them a greater menace than the Rumi ever were."

"General, you're right—but I don't think you can go through with it," Kenyon said.

"But then, you don't know me very well," the General said, holding up the small transmitter-like device. He pointed to three buttons on it. "When I pressed this first button a moment ago the disbanding of the Army of Mars began. All base and office personnel were deactivated. Look in the outer office, Lt. Kenyon."

Ed Kenyon ran to the door and looked out. On the floor, in front of the chair in which the pretty blonde Captain had been sitting, were a pair of low-heeled shoes; in the chair

was a khaki shirt and skirt, and black lace panties.

Kenyon whirled on the General. "You can't do this; I won't let you."

"You can't help yourself, Lieutenant," the General said pointing a service blaster at Kenyon's middle. "I'm going to carry out my orders and then turn over my command to you. If you try to stop me, I'll kill you."

"But it's murder! This girl and all the others...it's murder."

A few minutes later the General and Kenyon were standing on the balcony of his headquarters, dressed in respirators. The General held the transmitter in one hand and kept Kenyon covered with the automatic in the other. Below them, the crack regiments of the Army of Mars passed in review. The officers and men strode by in their Martian battle armor... strode by and were gone. Nothing remained of them but piles of clothing and gear.

"Murderer! Murderer!" Kenyon yelled at the General.

"Your orders, Lieutenant, are to await the arrival of the next ship from Earth. With the work parties on board her you are to collect the weapons and clothing of the Army of Mars. I'm afraid that you'll find them scattered all over

the planet," the General said with tears in his eyes.

Kenyon glared at him. "And you'll go back to Earth. Back to another hero's welcome like you received after Venus and Naraka and Nes-tron. Tell me, did you murder your armies then?"

Smiling bleakly, the General asked. "Didn't you ever

wonder how General Tyler-Spence could be in so many places throughout the two systems? Don't you wonder why there are three buttons on my transmitter, Lieutenant?"

Lt. Kenyon saluted as he watched the empty uniform of the General drop to the floor.