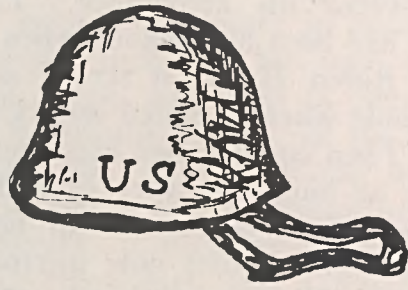


# Operation Christmas

It was a dark, cold night on December 25th in Korea. There were six of us marines huddled around that little potbellied stove in the squad tent. It was one of the coldest nights that we had seen thus far. We could hear the sound of the shells and the planes off in the distance. Those were the only sounds, for there wasn't anyone in the tent that felt much like talking.

I guess all the men were thinking about the same thing that I was at the time. The thoughts of all of us were at home. What were the folks having for Christmas dinner, and what would the kids be getting? We all knew that this might be our last Christmas, for this was a tough patrol mission that we were going out on. We knew all this when we took the job though.

As I looked around the tent, I noticed that most of the men had finished their smokes, and I told the rest of the men to put their cigarettes out and get ready to move out. We were scared; there was no use in trying to hide it. But most men going into battle are. I knew these men of mine, and I knew that they had the stuff that was needed for the mission before them. They were rough and ready soldiers, but a man isn't kept from being scared, just because he has experienced battle before. Each time that he faces the enemy he is scared. As I started to move out of the tent one of the men asked, "Sergeant, don't you think that we had better have a little prayer service before we go out on this mission?" I turned to the boy and answered that I thought that would be a good idea. I stepped back into the tent and got down on my knees. I asked one of the fellows to start the prayer, and each one to say what



he had on his mind. Afterward I would close it. That night I heard some of the most earnest prayers I have ever heard in my life.

Then we moved into the night. We had blacked our faces so that we could not be spotted easily by the enemy. It was a very dark night anyway. All thoughts of home were gone now, and in their place was the conviction that we had a job to do. Everyone wanted to get out there, get it done, and get back with his life. Each one knew what his job would be; we had been over the details a thousand times since that first day that the commander had told us about our job. It was a dangerous one all right. We called it "Operation Christmas" because of the day that it was to fall on. It really would be a merry Christmas if we all came back alive.

I thought now of just how we were going to get in there and get out again without losing our heads. Our "Operation Christmas" was to go into an enemy encampment and destroy everything that we could in the way of supplies. They had a couple of oil towers and a large supply of munitions that we especially wanted to make Christmas fireworks of. We hoped that we could succeed in doing this without losing any of our "Santa Clauses."

As we neared the enemy camp, I halted the men and went over with them again each step of the plan. We were all set. I moved out first, and the men were to follow me at two minute intervals. We intended to surround the camp and come into it from all sides at exactly the same hour. We already had synchronized our

watches. I reached my position and waited for the "zero hour." It finally came, and I edged my way forward along the icy, cold ground. I dared not make a sound for fear that it would be my last. When I found the oil tower that I was looking for, Mike was already ready there waiting for me with his share of the dynamite. We set our little surprise all around the base of the tower and waited for the second zero hour.

When the time came, we started to move back the same way that we had come in. Mike was pulling behind him the wires necessary to set off the explosives. When we all met back at the predesignated point, we would have our Christmas explosions. The other fellows had been setting some fireworks of their own. These fireworks however came in a little larger package than those we had been used to back home. They made more noise too.

We all reached our meeting place safely, each one stringing wires behind him. We hooked them up to the main switch and then drew straws to see who one would be the lucky one to push down the plunger on the bomb. I won. I stepped up to the balance and pushed the plunger down. She have never seen a more beautiful display of fireworks than those towers and munitions blowing high. The enemy didn't know what had hit them.

We all made it back to camp safely that night and went back to our tent and had another prayer service to thank God for guiding us back safely to our own camp.

Sunset: A maze of beautiful color—red and pink with touches of yellow and blue — filling the western sky with a soft, watery glow, as purple shades of twilight steal quietly and peacefully over the earth.

—Gena Jo Fant.

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JOE SANDERS

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