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A Tool of War

Since the dawn of man, there has always been conflict, and where there is conflict, there is war. Throughout man's history, the tools of war have evolved from the spear, to the sword, to the bayonet on the end of a rifle. But the passing of the torch for defending the nation has been a consistent rite of passage for most military families, those bred from birth to be a nation's warriors, only called upon in times of war. For these families, history seems to constantly repeat itself, as generation after generation answer the call, without hesitation or regret. My family is one of those dedicated to the cause, and as I set out to embark on my own war, I learn the history of my own family heritage, never knowing the legacy that lies in my bloodline until now.

Outside my barracks at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, families gather to await their sons' graduation from basic training, and become the next generation of warriors in the United States Army. As I exited the building, I didn't expect to see any of my family there; after all it is a long way from Detroit. But in the distance, I could see my father quietly waiting. As I approached him I noticed something in his hands wrapped in newspaper and taped on both ends. As I stood before him, he said to me, with a tear in his eye, "Congratulations, this is yours now." As I grabbed the present, I noticed it was slightly heavier than it looked. The newspaper wrapping was from the *Detroit Free Press* and dated the second of February, 2004. That was the date I

left Detroit and came to Fort Sill to begin basic training. As I pulled back the newspaper, the sharp, smooth edge of a blade pierced the wrapping. My father said to me, "That bayonet there has served our country for two wars so far." I told him, "Make that three; I got orders to ship out in two weeks for Iraq." Then the man I've known to always be reserved and keep his emotions to himself began to open up and tell me the history behind our family heirloom.

This bayonet belonged to my grandfather when he rushed the beaches of Normandy, through the Battle of the Bulge, all the way to the steps of Berlin. He told me how the crack near the hilt of the blade came from my grandfather pounding it into a German soldier's helmet on D-Day. Then he said to me, "When it was my turn, he gave it to me, just like I'm giving it to you." He told me how he used it to cut his way through barbed wire while searching in the tunnels of Vietnam and how this bayonet saved him when a Viet-Cong got the drop on him during the 1968 Tet offensive. He said, "By the time I could react, he was too close for me to raise my weapon in time. That's when I pulled the bayonet and stabbed him in the throat."

Then he taught me how to use it: to mount it on my weapon I place the loop on the hand guards over the muzzle and connect the clasp to the front sight post. He then said "Use the ridged side of the blade to open a wounded soldier's uniform because it's good at tearing through clothing, and you need to get as close to the body with the dressing or he'll bleed out." He also showed me how to attack someone with it: "Always point the blade at the enemy and keep it centered and away from you." Afterwards, he looked at me and said, "No matter what, you cannot hesitate to take someone's life. It will be the last thing you do." The man I've known all my life never spoke a word about the war he fought or even how to be a soldier, but on this

day, he sounded more like my drill sergeants than my own father. He passed on his knowledge and experience like he was still serving to this day.

This bayonet is more than a simple tool of war; its years of experience can be seen by the many scratches on the blade itself. Even though the passing of time has aged away the original paint, its sliver blade and rich mahogany handle still remain solid and strong. The stamp at the base of the blade, "Made in USA 1930," represents its years of faithful service and that of my family's service. It represents a measure of devotion to our country and my family's tradition of honor, courage, and commitment. It is defined by the many lands it has traveled, by the many battles fought, and by the many lives taken with it. Like the passing of a sword from king to prince, it represents my family's commitment to defending this great nation. It is a rabbit's foot, which has been proven time and time again throughout history, to safeguard the possessor, aid in the survival of allies, and in the destruction of its enemies.

Now, I have served our nation for almost seven years. Through the many experiences and what my father taught me, I have shared with this bayonet. I fully understand why my father never forgot its many uses because now I cannot forget. I cannot forget the time when we were low on supplies and I had to use it as a razor to keep my face shaved. I cannot forget the time when I used this tool to pry a piece of shrapnel out of a friend's leg. I cannot forget how I used it when the enemy tried to get the drop on me and was too close for me to use my weapon. I am reminded every time I feel the grooves of the handle and see the scratches in the blade. With all of my experiences, I see the stories that lie in each defining mark. I must remember these experiences so they can be passed on along with this bayonet. In my family, we are a legacy of warriors, and one day, I too will pass the legacy on to my son.