

The Side That Wins the War...

A Monologue by Dan Kehde

Selected from his collection, "1400 Boxes of Jello and Other Monologues"

Cast: 1

Length: 4 pages of dialogue (1100 words)

Performance time: About 6 minutes

The Story

A Yankee soldier describes his dread before and during a fierce battle against waves of Reb soldiers. The sounds, the sights, and even the smell of battle assault him as he tries to survive while shooting from a small hole in a low rock wall. He wonders what is the difference between bravery and sheer stupidity.

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THE SIDE THAT WINS THE WAR ...

I saw them coming. We all did. We had spent that night behind a low rock wall on the far side of the field; bedded down every which way so that some of us were resting our heads on the legs of others with our arms still wrapped around our muskets, just in case the mist cleared and the moon came up and the patrols went out again. But it never cleared. And all night long you could hear the sound of the whole regiment as it slept – that half-silent roar a whole bunch of sleeping men make with a kind of a half-breathing, half-snoring, coughing, moaning sound that keeps the crickets silent and makes you wonder if you should dare nod off if everyone else in the company is already asleep. I had a crease in the wall where two rocks had been joined for a long time and then knocked apart sometime in the last few days so that there was a small crack about the size of my fist that I could just slide my barrel through.

All through that night I'd wake up and look out through that crease over the field to the side where the Rebs were. The mist started getting real thick along about dawn so all you could see was this low-hanging cloud stretched over the corn that kind of glowed by the light of the clouds in front of the moon. And down behind the Reb lines I could see their campfires painting the mist orange and red all along the distant hills. And then the sky started to get bright and I looked back at the regiment and the Sergeant Major roused us back to our own fires so we could get some coffee in us and those of us who'd foraged on the march maybe some breakfast other than hardtack.

And then the Reb bugles started to blow and we broke back to our positions. I found my crease where I had covered it up with stones and grass so no one else would take it, and I set my rifle and got ready. Now down over the top of the corn, you could just see the heads of the Reb officers as they mustered their men to the line. Some of them had hats better than the finest women of Boston. Great plumes of feathers and ribbons and medallions of all kinds just gleaming in the sun. And off left, behind our line, up on the flat rock of that high hill, sat Phil Tripplehorn and his tripod and his rifle just scoping in those officers. Every once in a while, POW, Phil'd squeeze off a shot and one of those hats would disappear below the corn and everyone on the line would cheer. Phil'd taken three or four before we saw a puff of smoke from the trees up above the Rebs. By the time we heard the report, Phil was tumbling down that hill with most of the top of his head shot clean off. And then they started coming.

If you've never heard the Reb yell then you probably won't understand this. Try to imagine all the sounds of human suffering – all the crying, the moans, the cries and the rattles of death – all mixed into one screaming wail. Then try to imagine kneeling behind a foot-thick, two-foot high rock wall as sixty thousand Rebs roared across the cornfield, all of them making that noise. And you've got one shot before you have to reload. And Sergeant Major is telling us to hold our fire until he gets the signal from the hill behind us that they're in range, because we can't see them but no corn stalk is going to stop our bullets. And the noise is getting louder, and louder and louder.

"Open fire!" the Sergeant Major finally cries and twenty thousand muskets cut down that cornfield like a single swipe of a sharp sickle, laying the Reb troops out naked before us. And the second line fires behind us and the Rebs fall. Then we're loading and firing as fast as we can and they're falling over each other so that each new wave the Rebs sent up is getting stopped by the bodies of the ones that went before. And by the time they get to climbing over them, they've taken three, sometimes four shots themselves, and they just stop, and kind of look at you like, what was all this for, and they drop on the pile themselves. And finally some of them started shooting from behind the bodies. And we started getting hit. Most of the ones I saw took it in the head when they raised up to shoot so it was real fast like. I've seen too many men bleed to death or gunshot and linger to ever want it any other way but fast. But I stayed in my crease so I never did raise my head up to get it shot at. For a few minutes we had a real shootin' battle going and I really thought we'd have another stand off when this Reb colonel comes riding up and starts leading those shooters from behind the bodies in another charge. And here comes the yell again and here comes another twenty thousand Rebs across that cornfield. By that time we've got a whole 'nother regiment in reinforcement and we're just waiting there, firing and cutting them down just as fast as they come into range, taking down that officer and all those men, and more after that and more after that until I swear the Reb Army couldn't have anymore men alive in it. What was that colonel ... what were any of those Reb officers thinking?

End of Freeview

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