

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

The death of Captain Waskow

Editor's note: Pulitzer Prize-winning World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle wrote the following column after a stay with the 36th Division units near Mignano and Venafro, Italy. Pyle was later killed on April 18, 1945, by Japanese forces.

In this war I have known a lot of officers who were loved and respected by the soldiers under them. But never have I crossed the trail of any man as beloved as Capt. Henry T. Waskow, of Belton, Texas.

Capt. Waskow was a company commander in the 36th Division. He had led his company since long before it left the States. He was very young, only in his mid-20s, but he carried in him a sincerity and a gentleness that made people want to be guided by him.

"After my own father, he came next," a sergeant told me.

"He always looked after us," a soldier said. "He'd go to bat for us every time."

"I've never known him to do anything unfair," another one said.

I was at the foot of the mule trail the night they brought Capt. Waskow's body down the mountain. The moon was nearly full at the time, and you could see far up the trail and even partway across the valley. Soldiers made shadows as they walked.

Dead men had been coming down the mountain all evening, lashed onto the backs of mules. They came lying belly-down across wooden pack saddles, their heads hanging down on the left side of the mule, their stiffened legs sticking out awkwardly from the other side bobbing up and down as the mule walked.

The Italian mule-skimmers were afraid to walk beside dead men, so Americans had to lead the mules down that night. Even the Americans were reluctant to unlash and lift off the bodies at the bottom, so an officer had to do it himself and ask others to help.

The first one came in early in the evening. They slid him down from the mule and stood him on his feet for a moment.

In the half light, he might have been merely a sick man standing there, leaning on the others. Then they laid him on the ground in the shadow of the low stone wall alongside the road.

I don't know who that first one was. You feel small in the presence of the dead men and ashamed of being alive, and you don't ask silly questions.

We left him there beside the road, that first one, and we all went back into the cowshed and sat on water cans or laid on the straw, waiting for the next batch of mules.

Somebody said the dead soldier had been dead for four days, and then nobody said anything more about it. We talked soldier talk for an hour or more. The dead man lay all alone outside, in the shadow of the stone wall.

Then a soldier came into the dark cowshed and said there were some more bodies outside. We went out into the road.

Four mules stood there, in the moonlight, in the road where the trail came down off the mountain. The soldiers who led them stood there waiting.

"This one is Capt. Waskow," one of them said quietly.

Two men unlash his body from the mule and lifted it off and lay it in the shadow beside the low stone wall. Other men took the other bodies off.

Finally there were five, lying end to end in a long row alongside the road.

You don't cover up dead men in the combat zone. They just lie there in the shadows until somebody else comes after them.

The unburdened mules moved off to their olive orchard.

The men in the road seemed reluctant to leave.

They stood around, and gradually one by one you could sense them moving close to Capt. Waskow's body.

One soldier came and looked down and he said out loud, "G** dammit." That was all he said, and then he walked away. Another one came. He said "G** dammit to hell anyway." He looked down for a few moments, and then he turned and left.

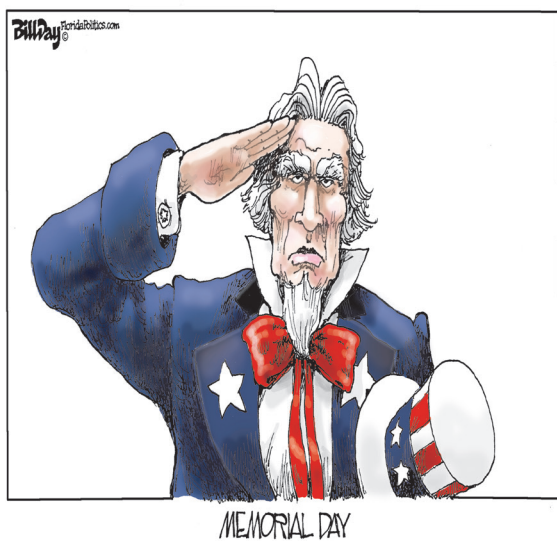
Another man came; I think he was an officer. It was hard to tell officers from men in the half-light, for all were bearded and grimy dirty. The man looked down in to the dead captain's face, and then he spoke directly to him, as though he were alive. He said: "I'm sorry, old man."

Then a soldier came and stood beside the officer, and bent over, and he too spoke to his dead captain, not in a whisper but awfully tenderly, and he said: "I sure am sorry, sir."

Then the first man squatted down, and he reached down and took the dead hand, and he sat there for five full minutes, holding the dead hand in his own and looking intently into the dead face, and he never uttered a sound all the time he sat there.

And then finally he put the hand down, and then reached up and gently straightened the points of the captain's shirt collar, and then he sort of rearranged the tattered edges of his uniform around the wound.

And then he got up and walked away down the road in the moonlight, all alone.



LETTER to the EDITOR

Simpson should put up or shut up

Why does Mike Simpson expect others to present alternatives to his \$33 billion plan to gut the economy of the Pacific Northwest? He claims, "We need to have honest conversations." So, let's be honest.

The science has already been proven and recorded as fact; fish and dams can successfully co-exist. As a matter of fact, the highest num-

bers of both salmon and steelhead ever recorded returning to our rivers came during a 10-year period that began 25 years after the last dam was completed.

From 1938-1947, approximately 1.9 million anadromous fish returned over Bonneville Dam, the only dam in the river system at that time. From 2000-09, approximately 6.8 million salmon and steelhead returned to our river system, an increase of 358%. The last dam was completed on the Snake

River in 1975. Proof positive that fish and dams can, and do, co-exist.

Simpson and his minions need to prove their scheme to breach our dams and destroy our economy, at such a great cost, will result in the return of even one more fish to our rivers. The burden of proof is on them alone, nobody else. If they cannot prove their case, they need to shut up and go home.

**Dick Sherwin
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