

BEN MAMROTH

Shell Shocked

“I still get cold sweats whenever I hear cat calls. That’s how the Japs used to communicate with each other during the war when not on the radio.”

97 years old and the man still deals with memories of the War. I only see him three times a year, but I figured I would notice something like that between stories of his action from the War and tales of how badly he wanted a Tommy Gun until he got one, and then how hard he tried to get his old rifle back – he wasn’t the only one. It’s one of those guns that belong in the movies and with the gangsters, he used to say, not in his unit’s hands.

“I know just what you mean, Dave. In Korea, we could hear them (the Koreans and Chinese soldiers) moving around by the squeaking of their boots; squeaking shoes still make my heart skip a beat.” This time it was my grandpa chiming in. You wouldn’t know it by having a normal conversation with him, but he was responsible for taking out many strategic targets during the fighting in Korea. He would sneak behind enemy lines and used a system like radar to drop bombs on buildings and camps, occasionally pausing to put his sharpshooter commendation to good use. He just said he worked with electronics. We all know better, but the stories are finally starting to come out.

Sal was 10 when he got his first and only tattoo. Dirty needles dug into his skin as the Nazi pushed harder than necessary so the Jewish pig would get a taste of the short time remaining in his insignificant life; which is funny to him. Sal is still alive, runs 3 miles every other day, swims the other days and says he relished walking over that man’s body when the Americans liberated their camp. But don’t

ask him about it. Or trains. He'll stop talking and stare off as in a trance. His last train ride was too crowded. And dirty.

But that's not what this conversation was all about. The sentence-long anecdotes were references to what we now call PTSD, but the name was different back then for those who actually "complained" about it. Pansy, bitch, and other names were used to describe what they were saying. But at least they could talk about it.



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