

"What the hell is it, Tom . . . that hole?" I asked looking at him, hoping it wasn't what I thought it was.

"Got hit," he said, no expression in his voice. He grunted to a sitting position with his left leg stretched out in front of him.

"Why didn't you turn in?"

"I did. A corpsman put a dressing on it," he said.

"Let's see."

He pulled up the trouser carefully till I saw the blackened blood on the bandage.

He started to pull his trouser leg down but I reached over and lifted the edge of the dressing. It was red all around the hole . . . right on the fleshy part of the thigh. The skin around it was dark colored nearest the hole.

"Damn," I said, sitting back up, "Why didn't they evacuate you?"

"I didn't go back when they told me. I could still walk and my arms were O.K. for holding that rifle and squeezing off a round."

We sat there just looking at each other, even forgetting about the hot chow. Suddenly he remembered. "Come on buddy, it's getting cold!" He picked up his spoon to begin wolfing down food. I did too . . . didn't even start tasting it till it was half gone.

I heard a loud voice from around the corner of the water wagon and out of the corner of my eye I could see a new shoe-pac. I just kept shoveling in the hot pancakes while the voice said, "Jesus Christ, pancakes all the way over on the ship and what do we get here?"

—Martin Overholt, F.T. & S., Sr.



I PARKED the car and started toward the house. My heart was pounding harder now, and my chest ached. My shirt was soaked under my arms; the breeze made it feel cold. I kicked at a small stick; I wished I could have kicked myself. How could I tell him? Why couldn't I have been more

careful? I knew that fire plug was there, I just hadn't thought about it.

I went in the door to see if he was home. Yes, his keys were hanging in their customary place. I stood still, thinking, wondering what to tell him, wondering what he would say.

I walked into the kitchen and started past the basement door when I heard his familiar whistle. He always whistled that tune, but I never heard it anyplace else. I stopped and rubbed the back of my neck; my head ached a little bit. Why did it have to happen to me? Why didn't I pay more attention? I opened the door and started down.

When I got to the bottom I could see him in the coal room. He knelt, resting on one foot. His shoulders were wide, almost too wide for his hips. He was splitting the kindling that I should have been splitting. His upper arm flexed into a round knot as he raised the hatchet, and went limp when he let it fall.

As I approached the door, he looked up and smiled, "Hi, Rob, how are you?" I could hardly see his eyes, they were set deep under thick brows, and the light was dim. By this time of the day, his face was gray with a new crop of whiskers. His hair was still black, but it was getting thin. I wondered how he could work all day, and keep his clothes so clean.

"Fine--eh--dad." My throat was tighter now, and I could feel the drops fall from under my arms and tickle my sides. "What are you doing?" I tried to make is sound genuine.

He rose to his feet, saying, "Oh, just chopping some kindling." He stood with his head slanted to one side to avoid hitting the rafters. A smile lingered on his mouth when he said, "Got something on your mind?" His cheeks sagged inward between sharp cheek bones and a strong square chin.

"Yeah--I thought I'd better tell you--uh--I--put a crease --in a fender." I looked at the floor. I could see him out of the corner of my eye; his sharp Adam's apple recoiled when he swallowed.

"Oh did you?" The smile had left his face, and he was

studying me closely. "Is it very bad?" His tongue paused on his lower lip.

"Well, it isn't torn--but it's pushed in--far enough." I wished he wouldn't look at me like that--damn, I wished I could be more careful.

"How did you do it?" He turned away and dropped the hatchet on a pile of sticks, then started to tidy up the pile with his foot.

"Oh, I got too close to a--fire plug--I guess I wasn't paying attention." I put my hands behind me, and my fingers struggled with each other.

"Well, on your way to school in the morning, you'd better stop and see when they can fix it." He rubbed his chin with his hand; it sounded like sandpaper. He put a hand in his pocket and jingled his change, and whistled a few bars of that little tune.

"Yeah--I will." I felt better, and leaned against the door casing. "You want to take a look at it, dad?" I turned, ready to leave.

"No, we'll look at it after while." He knelt to split some more kindling.

"Aren't you kinda' mad, dad?" I stepped closer and looked at the kindling.

"Are you?" He turned his head in my direction, but looked at the wall.

"Yeah, kinda', I should have paid closer attention." I watched his face closely.

"No use for both of us to be upset, I guess." He was smiling again.

— *Richard Hunt, I. Ed., Sr.*