

Bourne toWrite...

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Hidden Danger

by Richard Lewis

Frank had learnt to hide his feelings long before entering army life. Biting the bullet and keeping his chin up no matter what, was second nature.

It was the spring of 1944 in Italy. Frank was driving alone in the open top Jeep from Anzio to Cassino, having managed to scrounge a few days leave. Plucky green shoots were appearing across the stricken landscape and he thought, 'what a wonderful day, the enemy finally on the run, no mortars coming in, no heavy guns or snipers taking a pop.'

A surge of relief ran through him. Somehow, he'd escaped the carnage of three desperate months trapped at the beachhead, living in a foxhole with just a corrugated iron lid for protection. Three quarters of his regiment had been wiped out and his nerves were shredded but he hid it well, being known for his stoicism and keeping a positive front even when things seemed hopeless.

The Jeep rattled along willingly, when suddenly, a blinding flash and whoosh of dust and hot air flipped it over like a pancake, launching Frank into the bright morning air. Time slowed as he summersaulted, arms flailing wildly like a drowning man, landing in a mangled heap at the side of the road.

Unknown to Frank, IED's had been laid in the road to cover the German retreat. The pressure plate devices waiting just below the surface, eager to detonate the charge of TNT.

The next thing Frank knew, he was coming round in a hospital bed in Amalfi. He'd suffered a fractured skull, broken leg and lost all his front teeth but worst of all was the shock. As the weeks passed, his physical injuries were healing well but he felt as if part of him had been left behind in that foxhole and that he was desperately trying to keep the lid on.

He wanted to write to his sweetheart Nancy but had been unable to, due to his hand shaking so badly. He'd asked her to marry him before embarkation but she'd said,

"I'll not be a war widow but if you survive, then yes, of course I'll marry you."

Four months after the accident, with the war entering its final stage, Frank was invalided back home. He appeared to be making a good recovery but knew he was not right and true to form, would never talk about his experiences.

Frank met Nancy for the first time in three years at her parent's house. Both felt a mixture of excitement and apprehension. They seemed to be greater strangers than before, no longer the carefree young couple who danced at the village hall and played tennis in the park.

Six months later, despite reservations from Frank and Nancy's parents, the marriage, with its white lace and promises, went ahead. Though like driving that road from Anzio to Cassino, neither understood the hidden danger. Like a ticking bomb, unseen forces buried within, would eventually blow the union apart.

The relationship had survived the war but the marriage would never endure the peace.