



THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

Year 2015

Article 19

4-13-2015

It's Not Something We Speak Of

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Class of 2016

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Snow, Tucker B. (2015) "It's Not Something We Speak Of," *The Mercury*: Year 2015, Article 19.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2015/iss1/19>

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Keywords

creative writing, non-fiction

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It's Not Something We Speak Of

Tucker B. Snow

Approaching the beach, he could see his hands trembling with nervousness. He was a long way from home and didn't know whether he would ever see the face of his beautiful wife ever again. Pvt. Gordon Snow looked over at his friends trying not to imagine the thoughts circling through each and every one of their minds. As the white sand came closer and closer, the wide-open ocean began to look like a dreamer's paradise but it was their duty and honor to fight for their country on this very beach. Pvt. Snow had no clue how long they would be there or how long he would last in this battle. However, the first line of the Marines could not afford to be overthinking every aspect of the attack. Their mission was to stay alive for as long as they could and to gain control of Iwo Jima. That would be a very trying task due to their unfamiliarity with the terrain.

The landing hit the beach and they opened the door to gunfire all around them. Gordon struggled to find his legs as he sprinted onto the beach. Mortars rained like hellfire down on the beach all around them. Pvt. Snow and his platoon found safety in a bunker for a momentary yet needed rest. He looked over to find members of his platoon badly injured. One with an unnoticed bullet in his arm, his adrenaline had kicked in. He called over to his buddy, asking if he was okay. There was no response. Gordon quickly crawled over to Tom but, before he got there, there was a noticeable gunshot wound to side of his head. In the first 10 minutes, Pvt. Snow had already lost his best friend in the platoon. A rush of helplessness came upon him as he struggled to find his bearings but he knew he had to push on.

Without another pause, Gordon rushed with his platoon out of the bunker further and further from the beach. They ran for their lives as gunfire continued to fly all around them. After getting to more cover they unleashed what seemed to be minutes of straight gunfire not targeted in a particular direction besides toward the trees. The platoon had to merely hope that their bullets were hitting the enemy and not just the ground.

As Pvt. Gordon Snow sprinted toward a tree for cover, he was struck by a stray bullet. Instantly, he screamed in pain but continued on to

the mossy tree. Gordon's arm felt like hot coals had been poured into the open wound; it was the most extraordinary pain he has ever experienced. He collapsed at the base of the tree. The ground was moist from the early morning dew still upon the ground. All Pvt. Snow could do was look and hold his arm in pain, until finally a thought came across his mind. He thought about the moment when he would finally be able to hold his wife in his bullet-wounded arms again. Suddenly, his pain changed to focus, to push on and thrive in this opportunity to serve his country.

Pvt. Gordon Snow felt the wet ground with his bare hands. As he looked down he noticed the moisture had soaked into his skin like water on a sponge. Gordon quickly brushed off his hands and climbed to his feet after grabbing his gun again. Another defensive positioning was taken behind the tree. More platoon members were constantly rushing by, some falling, some finding cover at the very next tree. Gunfire was the only sound besides the horrifying screams of the injured soldiers on both sides. An opera or piece by Beethoven would have been an ideal change of pace from these disturbing echoes of pain and suffering.

The death and destruction that captivated his mind was the most impactful and terrifying thing that Pvt. Snow had ever experienced. He had always imagined war in the past with the knowledge that he could always be faced with being deployed, but never had he thought that it would be even close to this horrifying or scarring. There were times when Gordon was protected by the tree where he felt that he could just close his eyes and float back into his wife's arms. However, the grim reality of soldiers falling around him drew Gordon back to this very dark reality, which was Iwo Jima.

Gathering himself, Pvt. Gordon Snow analyzed the different tactics he could use from his training to gain an advantage over the enemy. He tried raking through his brain for the perfect piece of training that could help him and his comrades on this mission. With no information forming in Gordon's hippocampus, he was left with relying on following the orders of his leaders in command. He looked ahead and saw many other American platoons proceeding up the brush-filled mountain. Men rushed up the steep slopes advancing further into enemy territory amidst the gunfire raining down all around them. Pvt. Snow was struggling to find the enemy targets he was supposed to be shooting at so he continued up the mountain until he reached a building where American soldiers were taking refuge as a base. Finally, he had a temporary respite.

The gunfire began to slow with every passing minute going by in this asylum. Mortars in the distance were coming to an end and inside this base there was a general feeling that this battle was coming to a close soon. As platoons made their way into the new American base, others went back

out to continue fighting the enemy until they had fully regained control of Iwo Jima.

My grandfather, Pvt. Gordon Snow, was on the first line of the Marines in the battle of Iwo Jima. He was one of those courageous men that went back out and fought tirelessly for his country and the loved ones he had at home. When people think of the battle of Iwo Jima, many consider the historical photo taken of soldiers raising the American flag after victory. However, when I think about it, I think about the ultimate sacrifice many gave during that battle and the mental toll it took on veterans who returned home.

This is a time in my grandfather's life that we do not talk about in my family. I learned this lesson the hard way one night sitting down at dinner. Looking over to his usual dining seat, I asked, "Grandpa? What is that tattoo on your arm? Were you in a war or something?"

Before he could even recognize that I had asked him a question, my dad leaned over and responded, saying, "Tucker, that's not something that we talk about with Grandpa. Someday I will tell you about it but please don't ask him about it, okay?"

I replied, "Okay, Dad. I am sorry."

That was it. That was the end of our discussion on my grandfather's war experience and I was trained to forget about it, which is exactly what I did. Years later, my grandfather passed away from cancer with every story he could have ever told me of his role in the battle of Iwo Jima. Had I missed out on hearing his heroic acts of bravery or of his fearlessness? My mind wandered as I tried to reason why he would want to keep these experiences a secret from his family. Maybe these were not times of glory? Maybe they were times of heartache and anguish? Without my grandfather alive to answer these questions, I thought that many would go unanswered, and therefore I dropped it until one night.

All I could see were his broad shoulders facing away from me. His head tilted down concentrated on something in his hands. I had never seen my father like this before.

"Hi, Dad. Is everything okay?" I asked.

He replied, "Of course, bud, I'm just looking through some of Grandpa's old things." I could tell from his voice that he had been crying when I realized what he was talking about. I moved closer to him and noticed all the metals and "souvenirs" from my grandfather's time in the war. There had to be dozens and dozens of things that he had collected throughout his years in the service. I had to ask, "Dad? Why didn't Grandpa ever want to talk about the war with us?"

"Sit down, son. Your grandfather never wanted to talk about the

war because it was not a proud time in his life. He did things that he did not want to do and had a hard time talking and even thinking about them afterward. But in my eyes, your grandfather is a hero. He fought on the front lines with the Marines in the battle of Iwo Jima. That is how I remember him regarding the war, not as someone who cannot talk or think about it.”

With every word, I could see how proud my Dad was of his father and how proud he was to be the son of this hero. The medals that my dad showed me were astonishing: the history, the stories that were embedded inside them. I finally understood why this was not something we spoke of in our family before my grandfather’s death and very rarely after. Gordon Snow may have kept his story quiet, but I will certainly be celebrating the heroic actions for years on end. A war hero’s tale is not one to be hidden in the corner but to be proudly told.