

“War Days”

by Stanley Clift, 399-AT

V. Stanley Clift, 399-AT, kept a “War Days” notebook. He related both his and his buddies’ experiences. He included a group of poems by Bob Johnson, with the opening comments:

Bob Johnson was to me a strange person. It must take his type of person to be a poet. He had imagination, and he was moody. Too moody for his own good.

Toward the end of the war in March and April of 1945 he tried to drown his sorrows in schnapps and German wine. Succeeding all too often. It got him in trouble, fights with the other fellows. Refusing to pull guard duty and such. He was high strung also, not quite fit for the black nights and shell sounds.

Many the night I’ve stood with him talking over the “ills of the world.” “What are you fighting for?” he would ask. “For the industrialists who got us into this?”

He was a Southerner, from Georgia to add to the effect and a Republican to cinch matters. He had been around a lot, was in his ’30s and had had a rough life. His poems show it don’t they?

Who Knows?

Death comes . . . and who knows?
Perhaps it’s not so bad. Perhaps in that
Eternal sleep a guy forgets the rain
he’s had . . . and then again . . . there
might be some enchanted land . . .
where he might fathom all the things
that he could never understand. For
what is life . . . but one continuous
mystery! . . . the tears and never-ending
strife . . . is death so bad to set a
broken spirit free. If that stilled voice .
. . could tell us where the spirit goes .
. . Perhaps we living would rejoice . . .
but then . . . who knows?

Request

My Prayer today is not for gayety and
pleasure. I wouldn’t ask for finery nor
baubles bought with treasure . . . but I
have only one request that I would ask
of He . . . who grants all things we
treasure best . . . and were it granted
me: Tis not for gold nor bright career
for which I’d have design . . . for there
is something far more dear . . . that
Worldly goods so fine . . . but were I
given that request . . . I’m sure my
wish would be . . . When I had thought
of all the rest, is: “God Protect my
mom for me.”

A Prayer

The Storm is o’er . . . Now we can leave our

dungeon of despair. No longer does the angry tempest soar . . . So let us lift our arms to God in Prayer. “Our Father who are in Heaven let your guiding light . . . reveal the pitfalls leading to our goals . . . and let the singing fire of truth engulf the night . . . and cast away the hatred in our souls . . . And Lord, We pray it be thy will that love will rule . . . the hearts and minds of every being here . . . and make the hand of every man a willing tool . . . that we might build a realm where Peace is dear . . . and let us God, our trespasses and sins atone . . . and with your wisdom let us carry on.

My Mom

I love my mom . . . Cause it was she . . . who always loved and sheltered me . . . Cause she could never comprehend . . . why little boys grow into men . . . Cause she so simply eased my fear . . . and kissed away my childish tears. I love my mom . . . cause it was she who had enduring faith in me . . . and though fame hasn't been my fate . . . she still believes her boy is great. There are no words that could define . . . a mother that's as sweet as mine . . . So I have only words to say: “God Bless my mother on this day.” I love my mom . . . and if I were a king, I'd give my throne to her. But I am not. So I'll impart my only gift . . . a loving heart.
—Bob Johnson, France 1945

[Stan said that Bob was later transferred out of the unit and he didn't know Bob's fate.]
And there were other poets around. One I found in my “War Days” book.

Sit and Wait!

The hardest job of soldering
Is just to sit and wait.
Wait for this and wait for that,
And wait, and wait, and wait.
The toughest thing a soldier does
In this or any clime.
The hardest task that ever was
Is killing precious time.
Cooling heels in Italy
Waiting for a drive
Wondering where the push will be,

And why he's half alive
Waiting for a railroad train,
Waiting for a boat,
Waiting for the winter rain,
It gets a soldier's goat.
Sailing across in a dirty tub,
Waiting in southern seas.
Drinking beer in a London pub,
Or scratching at tropical fleas.
The rottenest hand of soldiering
That's ever dealt by fate
Is never the fighting and never
The hate,
But to wait, and wait, and wait.
—Captain Joseph H Weston, AC

And lastly a letter I penned:

Dear Folks:

For the past two days the weather has been beautiful. I think I have never seen a more beautiful place than France. Even in spite of the scars that war has inflected upon her. She is still lovely to look at. It's such a pity that a place so beautiful should be chosen as a battleground. I wish it were possible for you to see the customs of these people. They have a "town crier" just like the one in the movies, who comes around once a day with the news. He usually has a bell or a drum to attract attention, which he does quite aptly. When the news is good, the enthusiasm is terrific, but woe is in store for the little man when things are not going just right. I have seen him more than once run for safety. But lately his Public has showered him with smiles of gratitude other than sticks or stones.

It is such incidents as this that make life over here a little more beautiful for all of us. There are amusing sights, and if everything turns out for the best, it will be an experience well worth remembering. For were it not for this opportunity to see how the rest of the world lives, lots of us would never have realized just how perfect we had it.

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