

EPIC POEM "I AM THE INFANTRY" property of the U.S. Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia

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WRITTEN 2004

EPIC POEM I AM THE INFANTRY

I AM THE INFANTRY QUEEN OF BATTLE! FOR TWO CENTURIES I HAVE KEPT OUR NATION SAFE, PURCHASING FREEDOM WITH MY BLOOD. TO TYRANTS I AM THE DAY OF RECKONING; TO THE SUPPRESSED, THE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. WHERE THE FIGHTING IS THICK, THERE AM I. . . . I AM THE INFANTRY! FOLLOW ME!

I WAS THERE FROM THE BEGINNING, MEETING THE ENEMY FACE TO FACE, WILL TO WILL. MY BLEEDING FEET STAINED THE SNOW AT VALLEY FORGE; MY FROZEN HANDS PULLED WASHINGTON ACROSS THE DELAWARE. AT YORKTOWN, THE SUNLIGHT GLINTED FROM THE SWORD AND I, BEGRIMED AND BATTERED. . . . SAW A NATION BORN.

HARDSHIP. . . AND GLORY I HAVE KNOWN. AT NEW ORLEANS, I FOUGHT BEYOND THE HOSTILE HOUR, SHOWED THE FURY OF MY LONG RIFLE . . . AND CAME OF AGE. I AM THE INFANTRY!

WESTWARD I PUSHED WITH THE WAGON TRAINS . . . MOVED AND EMPIRE ACROSS THE PLAINS . . . EXTENDED FREEDOM'S BORDERS AND TAMED THE WILD FRONTIER. I AM THE INFANTRY! FOLLOW ME!

I WAS WITH SCOTT AT VERA CRUZ . . . HUNTED THE GUERILLA IN THE MOUNTAIN PASSES . . . AND SCALED THE HIGH PLATEAU. THE FIGHTING WAS DONE WHEN I ENDED MY MARCH MANY MILES FROM THE OLD ALAMO.

FROM BULL RUN TO APPOMATTOX, I FOUGHT AND BLED. BOTH BLUE AND GRAY WERE MY COLORS THEN. TWO MASTERS I SERVED AND UNITED THEM STRONG . . . PROVED THAT THIS NATION COULD RIGHT A WRONG . . . AND LONG ENDURE. I AM THE INFANTRY! FOLLOW ME!

I LED THE CHARGE UP SAN JUAN HILL . . . SCALED THE WALLS OF OLD TIENTSIN . . . AND STALKED THE MORO IN THE STEAMING JUNGLE STILL . . . ALWAYS THE VANGUARD. I AM THE INFANTRY!

AT CHATEAU-THIERRY, FIRST OVER THE TOP, THEN STOOD LIKE A ROCK ON THE MARNE. IT WAS I WHO CRACKED THE HINDENBURG LINE . . . IN THE

ARGONNE, I BROKE THE KAISER'S SPINE . . . AND DIDN'T COME BACK UNTIL IT WAS

AOVER, OVER THERE. I AM THE INFANTRY! FOLLOW ME!

A GENERATION OLDER AT BATAAN, I BRIEFLY BOWED, BUT THAN VOWED TO RETURN. ASSAULTED THE AFRICAN SHORE . . . LEARNED MY LESSONS THE HARD WAY IN THE DESERT SANDS . . . PRESSED MY BUTTONS INTO THE BEACH AT ANZIO . . . AND BOUNCED INTO ROME WITH DETERMINATION AND RESOLVE. I AM THE INFANTRY!

THE ENGLISH CHANNEL, STOUT BEACH DEFENSES AND THE HEDGEROWS COULD NOT HOLD ME . . . I BROKE OUT AT ST. LOW, UNBENT THE BULGE . . . VAULTED THE RHINE . . . AND SWARMED THE HEARTLAND. HITLER'S DREAM AND THE THIRD REICH WERE DEAD.

IN THE PACIFIC, FROM ISLAND TO ISLAND I HOPPED . . . HIT THE BEACHES AND CHOPPED THROUGH SWAMP AND JUNGLE . . . I SET THE RISING SUN. I AM THE INFANTRY!

IN KOREA, I GATHERED MY STRENGTH AROUND PUSAN . . . SWEEPED ACROSS THE FROZEN HAN . . . OUTFLANKED THE REDS AT INCHON . . . AND MARCHED TO THE YALU. FOLLOW ME!

AROUND THE WORLD, I STAND . . . EVER FORWARD. OVER LEBANON'S SANDS, MY RIFLE STEADY AIMED . . . AND CALM RETURNED. AT BERLIN'S GATE, I SCORNEED THE WALL OF SHAME. I AM THE INFANTRY!

MY BAYONET . . . ON THE WINGS OF POWER . . . KEEPS THE PEACE WORLD WIDE. AND, DESPOTS FALSELY GARBED IN FREEDOMS MANTLE, FALTER . . . HIDE. MY ALLY IN THE PADDIES AND THE FOREST . . . I TEACH, I AID, I LEAD. FOLLOW ME!

(narrative)

THE EPIC POEM *AM THE INFANTRY* PRESENTS THE HISTORY OF US INFANTRY AND RECOUNTS ITS MANY GLORIES, IF THERE CAN BE GLORY IN WAR.

THE MOTTO OF THE INFANTRY IS "FOLLOW ME!". FOR THE INFANTRY IS ALWAYS IN THE VANGUARD OF BATTLE.

THE INFANTRY IS THE OLDEST OF THE COMBAT ARMS. ITS ROOTS BEGAN WITH THE FIRST CAVEMEN WHO STOOD TOGETHER TO PROTECT THEIR TRIBE AND HAS CONTINUED THROUGHOUT HISTORY.

THE PLACES MADE FAMOUS BY U.S. INFANTRY ARE FAMILIAR TO ALL AMERICANS. SOME WERE MENTIONED IN THE STANZAS OF THE EPIC POEM I HAVE JUST READ. OTHERS, SUCH AS BRANDY WINE, KINGS MOUNTAIN, FALLEN

TIMBERS, SHARPSBURG, GETTYSBURG, NORMANDY, BASTOGNE, CORREGIDOR, OKINAWA, PORK CHOP HILL AND YES, THE IDRANG VALLEY, AND HUE ARE FOREVER ETCHED IN TO THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES.

DURING A RECENT INTERVIEW WITH A VETERAN OF THE NORMANDY INVASION IT WAS POINTED OUT THAT NO LESS A PERSONAGE THAN EARNEST HEMINGWAY, WHO CAME A SHORE IN THE LATE AFTERNOON AT OMAHA BEACH, REMARKED THAT IT WAS A MIRACLE THAT ANYONE GOT OFF THE BEACH. THE GENTLEMAN STOOD JUST A LITTLE TALLER AND ANSWERED QUIETLY "IT WASN'T A MIRACLE, IT WAS INFANTRY!"

WHO ARE THESE MEN WHO HAVE SACRIFICED SO MUCH FOR OUR COUNTRY?

THEY ARE THE BUTT OF MOST OF THE JOKES IN THE ARMY. HIS INSIGNIA, CROSSED RIFLES, IS COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS CROSSED IDIOT STICKS. HIS NICKNAMES ARE, FOR THE MOST PART, DEROGATORY; CRUNCHY, GRAVEL GRINDER AND MOST COMMON GRUNT. GRUNT IS NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE SOUND MADE BY A HUMAN BEING PICKING UP A HEAVY LOAD; BUT, THE CONTENTED NOISE MADE BY A PIG IN ITS WALLOW.

IN THE OLD DAYS OF THE DRAFT IT WAS SAID THAT THE DRILLSERGEANT ASKED THE NEW RECRUITS TO HOLD UP FOUR FINGERS. THOSE WHO HELD UP TWO ON THE RIGHT HAND AND TWO ON THE LEFT WERE JUDGED TO HAVE TECHNICAL ABILITY AND WERE SENT TO BRANCHES SUCH AS ORDNANCE, FINANCE, MEDICAL, OR LOGISTICS. THOSE HOLDING UP FOUR FINGERS ON ONE HAND WENT TO THE ARTILLERY OR ARMOR AS IT WAS DEEMED THAT THEY WERE CAPABLE OF HANDLING THE SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT OF THOSE BRANCHES. THOSE STILL LOOKING AT THEIR HANDS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT FOUR WAS WERE SENT TO THE INFANTRY.

WHAT IS HIS JOB, HIS MISSION?

FIRST, LET US LOOK AT THE MISSIONS OF THE OTHER TWO MAJOR COMBAT ARMS, ARTILLERY AND ARMOR. ARTILLERY LENDS SUPPORT THROUGH INDIRECT FIRE AND ARMOR PROVIDES FIREPOWER AND MOBILITY TO THE BATTLEFIELD. THE ARTILLERY SUPPORTS FROM AS MUCH AS 17 KILOMETERS OR MORE BEHIND THE BATTLE LINES AND ARMOR PROVIDES ITS FIRE POWER AND MOBILITY IN THE FORM OF A MAIN BATTLE TANK MADE OF SIXTY TWO TONS OF HOMOGENOUS STEEL. THE INFANTRYMEN'S MISSION IS TO CLOSE WITH, KILL OR DESTROY THE ENEMY BY MEANS OF FIRE AND MANEUVER, A DEADLY GAME OF LEAP FROG WHERE ONE GROUP OF INFANTRYMEN LAY DOWN A BASE OF FIRE WHILE OTHERS MANEUVER TOWARD THE OBJECTIVE. THIS DEADLY GAME IS REPEATED UNTIL THE OBJECTIVE IS TAKEN! HIS PROTECTION A CLOTH UNIFORM.

THE INFANTRYMAN HAS MANY WAYS OF ARRIVING AT THE BATTLEFIELD. HE

MAY DROP IN ON THE SILENT CANOPY OF A PARACHUTE, OR ARRIVE ON THE BEATING BLADES OF A HELICOPTER. HE MAY RIDE IN THE PROTECTION OF AN ARMORED PERSONAL CARRIER, OR, AS SO MANY HAVE DONE, SIMPLY WALK TO BATTLE. REGARDLESS OF HIS MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION HE MUST, IN THE END, FACE THE ENEMY AND BEGIN HIS DEADLY GAME OF FIRE AND MANEUVER.

THE INFANTRYMAN OF TODAY WEARS A KELVAR HELMET AND POSSIBLY KELVAR BODY ARMOR WHICH PROVIDES SOME PROTECTION FROM RIFLE FIRE. HE CARRIES HAND GRENADES AND AN M16A2, 5.56 MM RIFLE WHICH IS CAPABLE OF ENGAGING A POINT TARGET AT RANGES IN THE EXCESS OF 600 METERS. HE IS PROVIDED WITH NIGHT VISION GOGGLES THAT USE THE LIGHT OF THE MOON AND STARS TO STEAL THE PROTECTION OF THE DARKNESS FROM THE ENEMY. A GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM TELLS HIM WHERE HE IS ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH, WITHIN ONE METER.

HE IS ALSO EQUIPPED A WEAPON THAT REPRESENTS MANY THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT BEGINNING WITH THE SHARPENED STICK OF HIS EARLY PREDECESSOR, THE CAVE MAN. THAT WEAPON, THE BAYONET. CAN ANYONE TELL ME WHEN THE LAST BAYONET CHARGE WAS MADE BY U.S. INFANTRY? IT WAS AT GETTYSBURG WHEN JOSHUA LAURENCE CHAMBERLAND'S MAINE MEN CHARGED DOWN FROM LITTLE ROUND TOP TO HALT THE ADVANCE OF JOHN BELL HOOD'S TEXAS BRIGADE. GRANTED, IT HAS BEEN SUBSEQUENTLY USED IN CLOSE IN FIGHTING; BUT, RARELY. THERE WAS A MOVE IN THE EARLY NINETEEN SEVENTIES TO DO AWAY WITH THE BAYONET AS SOME FELT THAT IT HAD OUTLIVED ITS USEFULNESS. COST EFFECTIVENESS WAS THE BYWORD OF GOVERNMENT. BAYONET TRAINING WAS CONSIDERED BY SOME TO BE INHUMANE AS THE SPIRIT OF THE BAYONET IS SIMPLY TO KILL. WHY THAN STILL CARRY THIS ARCHAIC WEAPON? THE ANSWER IS PHYSIOLOGICAL. THE MOST FINAL COMMAND THAT CAN BE GIVEN TO AN INFANTRYMAN ARE THE TWO WORDS FIX BAYONETS. THOSE TWO WORDS HAVE TOLD HIM THAT THE GROUND WILL BE TAKEN OR HELD. THE DIE HAS BEEN CAST. THE DAY WILL NOT BE WON OR LOST WITHOUT A FIGHT. THE ONLY REMAINING QUESTION IS WHO LIVES OR DIES.

THE BAYONET ALSO STRIKES FEAR IN THE HEART OF THE ENEMY. PICTURE, IF YOU CAN, A BULLET COMING AT YOU AND THE RESULT IF IT STRIKES YOU. I DOUBT THAT EVEN IN THESE DAYS OF HOLLYWOOD'S SPECIAL EFFECTS THAT MANY OF YOU CAN. NOW PICTURE A GROUP OF MEN WITH EIGHT INCHES OF COLD STEEL ON THE END OF THEIR RIFLES CLOSING ON YOU WITH THE INTENT OF IMPALING YOU. I DOUBT THAT MANY OF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM VISUALIZING THE RESULT.

WE KNOW WHAT HE HAS DONE AND WE KNOW WHY HE MARCHES OFF TO WAR. WE HAVE REMEMBERED THE MAINE, WE REMEMBERED PEARL HARBOR, AND WE HAVE KEPT THE WORLD SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY. BUT, WHY DOES HE FIGHT?

IT IS NOT FOR ANY OF THE MANY SLOGANS USED IN OUR CONFLICTS, NOR, IS IT FOR MOM, THE FLAG AND APPLE PIE. HE FIGHTS FOR ONE REASON, HIS BUDDIES. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEN IN A RIFLE SQUAD IS, IN MANY CASES, STRONGER THAN THE BOND BETWEEN BROTHERS. THE HEROS, ALVIN YORK, ROGER YOUNG, AUDI MURPHY, TO NAME THREE OF MANY, DID WHAT THEY DID NOT TO WIN A BATTLE OR A WAR; BUT, TO SAVE THE LIVES OF THEIR COMRADES. A GENTLEMAN TOLD ME OF A POST CARD THAT HE RECEIVED FROM A FRIEND DURING WORLD WAR II. THE FRIEND, AN INFANTRYMAN, WAS RECOVERING FROM HIS WOUNDS IN A HOSPITAL IN FRANCE. THE POST CARD ENDED WITH THE WORDS "I HAVE TO GET BACK TO THE FRONT, MY BUDDIES MIGHT NEED ME". WHAT IS THIS RELATIONSHIP THAT COMPELS MEN TO RISK THEIR LIVES FOR OTHERS? IT IS THE BOND OF THE INFANTRY.

AS MUCH PRIDE AS A COMBAT INFANTRYMAN HAS HE KNOWS THAT HE DOES NOT STAND ALONE. THE WELCOME SOUND OF AN AIR FORCE FORWARD AIR CONTROLLER TELLING HIM THAT HE HAS FIGHTERS ON STATION, THE CALL FROM THE HELICOPTER GUN SHIP LEAD SAYING THAT HE IS ROLLING IN ON THE ENEMY, THE WHISTLE OF FRIENDLY ARTILLERY PUTTING A STEEL ON THE TARGET OR THE TANK SPITTING OUT ITS DEADLY MUNITIONS. ALL ARE IN SUPPORT OF THE INFANTRY.

WE CANNOT FORGET THE SUPPORT PERSONNEL THAT PROVIDE THE INFANTRYMEN WITH THE MEANS TO DO THEIR JOB. WEAPONS, AMMUNITION, FOOD, WATER, UNIFORMS, REPAIR, MEDICAL CARE, MILITARY INTELLIGENCE, YES, AND PAY AS WELL. IN FACT, IN THE PAST, THE RATIO OF SUPPORT PERSONNEL TO COMBAT PERSONNEL HAS BEEN FIVE TO ONE. IN VIETNAM IT WAS AS MUCH AS TEN TO ONE.

IT IS IRONIC; HOWEVER, THAT IN THIS DAY OF HIGH TECHNOLOGY, THE ONLY GROUND GAINING ARM IS STILL THE INFANTRY,---- MAN HIMSELF. YOU MAY BOMB IT OR STRAFE IT, YOU MAY CALL ARTILLERY FIRE ON IT, OR RUN A TANK OVER IT; BUT, IT'S NOT YOURS UNTIL A MAN WITH A RIFLE IS STANDING ON IT.

THE NEXT TIME THAT YOU SEE A MAN WHO HAS BEEN IN THE MILITARY ASK HIM WHAT HE WAS. IF HE HAS SEEN THE HELL OF BATTLE AS AN INFANTRYMAN YOU WILL SEE THE PRIDE IN HIS EYES; BUT, LOOK CLOSELY AS YOU WILL ALSO SEE THE SADNESS AS HE REMEMBERS.

AN INFANTRYMAN'S WAR IS A VERY PERSONAL WAR. THE PILOT FLIES HOME WITHOUT SEEING THE RESULTS OF HIS ENDEAVORS IN, FACT, IF AN ENEMY AIRCRAFT IS SHOT DOWN ONE DOES NOT KILL THE ENEMY PILOT HANGING HELPLESS IN HIS PARACHUTE. THE ARTILLERYMAN RARELY SEES THE RESULTS OF STEEL ON THE TARGET; BUT, THE INFANTRYMAN MEASURES HIS ENDEAVORS IN HUMAN LIFE; BOTH FRIEND AND FOE. BATTLE IS NOT FORGOTTEN, EVER. ANOTHER GENTLEMAN, A WORLD WAR TWO VETERAN OF THE 11 TH AIRBORNE DIVISION WHO JUMPED ON CORREGIDOR, AND FOUGHT HIS WAY THROUGH THE

PHILIPPINES AND OKINAWA, REMARKED "I HAVE FORGOTTEN THE NAMES OF SOME OF MY BUDDIES AS I AM SEVENTY-EIGHT AND MY MEMORY IS NOT AS GOOD AS IT ONCE WAS; BUT, I CAN STILL SEE ALL OF THEIR FACES". SOMEWHERE, IN SHOE BOX OR A DESK DRAWER THESE MEN WILL HAVE A LITTLE BLUE BADGE WITH A RIFLE ON IT AND A WREATH AROUND IT. IT IS THE COMBAT INFANTRYMEN'S BADGE, A SYMBOL OF PRIDE AND SACRIFICE. TOO MANY, IF NOT ALL, IT IS A TREASURED POSSESSION.

LAST TWO STANZAS OF I AM THE INFANTRY

WHERE BRAVE MEN FIGHT . . . THERE FIGHT I. IN FREEDOM'S CAUSE . . . I LIVE, I DIE. FROM CONCORD BRIDGE TO HEARTBREAK RIDGE, FROM THE ARCTIC TO THE MEKONG . . . THE QUEEN OF BATTLE!

ALWAYS READY . . . THAN, NOW AND FOREVER. I AM THE INFANTRY!
FOLLOW ME!

(Narrative)

I AM THE INFANTRY IS A VERY EMOTIONAL POEM TO MANY OF US AS IT RECOUNTS, WITH PRIDE, THE SACRIFICES MADE AND BRINGS TO MIND THE MANY BATTLE STREAMERS THAT HANG FROM OUR UNIT'S COLORS, TOO MANY. PERHAPS THE MOST REGRETTABLE PART OF THE EPIC POEM "I AM THE INFANTRY" IS IT HAS NO END. SINCE I OBTAINED THIS COPY IN 1969 THERE HAVE BEEN STANZAS ADDED RANGING FROM GRANADA TO PANAMA; THE GULF WAR TO BOSNIA, AFGHANISTAN, AND NOW IRAQ. AS WE, THE HUMAN RACE, HAVE NOT SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED OVER THE CENTURIES I BELIEVE THAT THERE WILL BE MANY MORE.