

*6 November 1950, plus or minus a day
8 ½ Miles North of Anju,
The tragedy was "K" Company's*

Night of Sounds

by Jim Fine

Quiet, the absence of sound at the approach of darkness.
Approaching footsteps down the path behind me.
Grains of dirt falling noisily into the foxhole.
Whispered instructions for the night.
Footsteps on the path behind, fading to silence.

The dull metallic clicks of a rifle chambering a round.
The low whistle of a vagrant breeze.
Leaves on a nearby sapling sounding a staccato rattle.
The clack clack rumble of a distant tank.
My own breathing in anxious harmony with the sounds.
The hissing of the cigarette cupped in my hand.
The thunder-like roll of a salvo being fired – far off.
And for the moment silence... .

From somewhere in the rear, a dying raucous laugh.
My feet shuffling a bit in the damp hole.
A cough from the friendly knoll across the draw.
My ears roaring from unheard sounds.
More silence, the predominate sound of a moonless night... .

A slight shuffling from across the draw.
"Halt", from the friendly knoll, whispered softly.
My heart beating a little faster.
Again from the knoll, "Who goes there?"

My ears roaring from the strain of the unspoken countersign.
The sharp piercing report of a rifle from across the draw.

A low moan.

The safety on my rifle clicking as it goes forward.
"I got the son-of-a-bitch!"

A nerve rending shriek, "Mothersrrrrrr!"

"It's Whitham!!"

"Oh God!"

"Mother, Mothersrrrr!"

"Oh God! Why didn't he answer?"

"Mothersrrr!"

"It's a head-wound!"

My clothes rustling from a violent shiver.

"Mother, Mothersrrrr!"

"I called to him. Why didn't he answer?"

"Mother, Mothersrrrr...help...me!"

Sobbing. "I called to him."

"Mother!"

A cry of agony, "I called to him! Oh God, help me!"

Two pairs of feet with a loaded litter.

Bouncing, muffled, tapering, "Mothersrrrr."

Sobbing, uncontrolled and uncontrollable "Oh, Oh, Oh!"

"You couldn't help it. NOW SHUT UP and get hold of yourself."

A release of pent up air from my lungs.

Soft murmurs and soft sobbing fading to silence... .

The safety on my rifle clicking as it comes back.

Friendly fire is not friendly. There were more sounds this night, bugles, shouts, and conflict from a knoll south of the knobs held by "L" and "K" companies. Those need to be added one day. I don't know if the name Whitham is accurate or not. I wrote this in 1959 and did not look at it for almost thirty years. The name surprised me. I certainly have no recollection of it today and the name may well be fictional as I wrote it as a college theme. I will never forget the event described nor the sounds of the bugles, shouts and firing which took place later that night.