

SURVIVALIST FICTION



The Old Man

by Old Bear

The old man watched as the young men, looking warlike in their cammies, left to join their militia units. He had been too old to fight in the last war and did not even bother trying to join for this one. He envied the young, with their strong bodies, their enthusiasm and energy. Slowly he walked back to his small house. He lived alone now. His wife had died several years' back and his children were too busy making money to bother to visit more than once or twice a year. The old man took off his "city" clothes and neatly folded them.

Then he took out some well worn pants and shirt that were more suitable for the woods and indeed had spent many days and nights there. Last he put on his old field boots and was pleased with how they felt after not being worn for so long. On his belt he placed his hunting knife and canteen. Going to the closet he took out his rifle with loving hands. He removed the bolt and inspected the bore, knowing that it would be perfectly clean and shiny. Replacing the bolt he gathered the rounds from several boxes of his hand loaded ammunition and put them in his pockets. He checked the scope mounts to be sure they were tight and put his hat on his head. In a small rucksack he put several sandwiches, that he had previously made. Now he was ready. He left the house by the back door and walked across a neighbor's field. He simply could not stand having the people of the town make jokes about him. They would yell out and ask if he was going off to the war, then they would laugh. He left by the back door.

After walking for three hours at a steady, but not stressful pace, the old man found what he was looking for. The road crossed a narrow bridge about 500 yards from the forest at that point. It was this road that the militia had taken to engage the enemy and it was this road they planned to march back in triumph. In time the old man found a large oak tree that he could, with difficulty, climb. Tying his rifle to a long rope, he worked his way up the tree, until he found a decent place to sit. He could see the bridge clearly from his seat in the tree. He carefully drew his rifle into the tree and used a short section of rope to secure it to the tree, while he used another section to tie himself to the main trunk of the tree. He would hate to fall asleep and fall out of the tree. He slowly nibbled his lunch and took sips of his water. Once or twice he dozed off, but the rope held both him and his beloved rifle safely in the tree. The sound of far off gunfire jarred him awake. A few men in cammos came walking across the bridge. They did not march, but walked at a fast pace, occasionally glancing over their shoulders as they moved. The old man took out his knarled pipe and filled it. He took a match from his waterproof holder and struck it with his thumbnail and lit his pipe. As he smoked he watched the direction the smoke drifted and how fast it moved. Soon the knowledge of wind direction would be important. He also liked smoking his pipe. As he waited his mind wandered. He found himself thinking more of the past these days. He thought of his wife and the things they had done together. At times the memories seemed more real than the present. They had their little sayings that meant a great deal to them, but would mean little to others. Both having grown up watching "Disney", they had often used words or phrases from their childhood. One such phrase was from the Davy Crocket Series. As Crocket's friend was dying at the Alamo, he said to Davy Crocket " Give them what for Davy". From her deathbed, his wife had looked him in

the eye and said "Give them what for Davy". That was why an old man was sitting in a tree on a warm summer afternoon, instead of puttering in his garden and waiting to die, like a civilized gentleman.

Now more men were coming across the bridge. Some were wounded, many had no weapons. It would not be too long now the old man thought. He untied his rifle from the tree and retied it so that if he dropped it, the rope would prevent it's falling to the ground. The old man doubted that he had the strength to climb down and back up again. Now several vehicles were crossing the bridge. Many times they seemed to take little notice of the men struggling along on foot and the men had to either get out of the way or be run down. The old man loaded the magazine of his rifle. He emptied the ashes from his pipe, refilled it, but waited to light it. Now the sounds of fighting were much closer. A large number of men came down the road. Many did not even try to cross the congested bridge, but swam or waded across the stream to the other side. Several officers were trying to organize some resistance along the stream, with limited success.

Some of the patriots were digging fighting holes near the stream, while others were dragging logs, rocks and anything else they could find to make barricades. The route of men became a trickle and then stopped. There was a time of quite, while the road remained empty. Then came the vehicles of the enemy, supported by large numbers of men on foot. The old man sighed. The young always expect things to be easy and glorious. To them war is a wonderful game. The old knew better. That is why they choose the young to be soldiers instead of the old, but choose the older to be generals.

The old man now lit his pipe and took up his rifle. The fighting was fierce and brutal along the stream, but in the end the patriots, under cover of a rear guard, had to give ground. As the first of the enemy's vehicles drove onto the bridge the old man's rifle spoke and a hole appeared in the driver's forehead. The vehicle swerved into the bridge railing and came up on two wheels before stopping. For now the bridge was blocked. Some men came up to try to move the vehicle, but as they reached the doors they died. The bullets that killed them came from a weapon that had been outdated for three wars. Other drivers died in their vehicles, until none would sit behind the wheels. It was of course only a matter of time before they enemy figured out where the old man was and once they did a hail of bullets cut leaves around him. Still he smoked his pipe, reloaded and fired his rifle. Suddenly a bullet hit the old man low in the abdomen. The pain and shock was so great that he almost dropped his rifle. He let the pipe fall from his mouth and clenched his teeth. "Give them what for Davy". He muttered under his breath and drew the rifle to his shoulder again. Two more accurate rounds he fired that day and two more of the enemy died.

Then the old man found that he was very tired and the rifle slipped from his hands to hang within easy reach on the rope. The old man found himself standing in a green field and his wife was there with him. They were no longer old, but stood in the splendor of their youth. He took her in his arms and she said "Good job Davy" and they walked away together. The militia regrouped and with the aid of some of the National Guard was able to drive back the enemy advance. No one would ever know who the patriot that had held the bridge with such accurate sniper fire was and the town's people assumed the old man had wandered off in the woods as

was his habit, and died there. The local sheriff, himself an ex-Marine, seeing the spotless dress uniform hanging the closet and the empty ammo boxes was not so sure. It did not matter. What mattered was that the old man had been in the right place and at the right time and done what he knew he had to do. He would not be lacking for brothers among the unsung heroes in heaven.