



# Mistaken Enemy

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A patrol of eight men carefully made their way down the narrow path, surrounded by trees in the vast countryside. They kept their heads up, watching for enemy movement. They had joined the army from all over the United States, yet war had brought them closer than brothers. Following their strict training, the unit moved their highest-ranking officer up and down the lineup constantly, making him less likely to be singled out by enemy fire.





Unknown to them, another well-trained soldier was hidden in the distant foliage and tree cover. The German sniper tracked the group in his sights as they moved along the exposed trail. He knew how to pick the leader from the group by stride and posture. If he could pick off the senior officer first he knew he might be able to pick off another one or two in the moment of panic. He carefully chose his target, looking keenly down the sights of his custom Karabiner 98k.

He had already proven himself to be accurate to over half a mile and felt complete confidence as he set his sights on the chest of the decided leader. He breathed out slowly, squeezed the trigger, and watched his bullet rocket towards its target, piercing the body of the soldier who suddenly fell to the French soil, dead.



I would never meet my great Uncle Lorraine, but my other great uncles would talk about him from time to time. Some of them had also served in the armed forces. In fact, my great Uncle Roy happened to see Lorraine the day before he was shot.

His gregarious nature and clean-cut look made him a pleasure to be around. He had a way of lifting the conversation wherever he went. I sat transfixed as I heard the same stories told, over and over again.

\*Actual image of Lorraine (left) and Roy (right), the day before Lorraine was killed



Our family talked about how my great grandpa was never the same after he received the fateful telegram, informing him that his son had paid the ultimate price in a battle fought halfway around the world. It damaged my great grandpa deeply, he had lost something he could never get back.

At times I would watch him, staring into space, lost deep in thought, I wondered if he was thinking of his lost son.



Fast-forward to 2001. I boarded a plane headed to the East Coast, with Russia as my final destination from the Boise airport in Idaho, only to be surprised by several men from Germany's modern air force. They had been in training with our own Air Force based in Idaho. I was blown away by how, 60 years later, the two previously enemy countries now related to each other as allies and treated each other kindly.

The trip went by fast, and I soon found myself on the return trip as I took off from South Central Russia, near the town of Grozny, to catch my connection in Moscow. Keep in mind, I'm blonde and blue-eyed, 6' 1" and just minutes into the flight, a passenger tapped me on the shoulder and asked me in Russian if I was German. My interpreter sitting next to me said no, he's "Americanski". The passenger didn't believe my assistant, and before I knew it three or four other men were standing around me pointing at me, yelling Russian profanities that I needed to get off their plane even though we were 30,000 feet above the ground.



I was shell-shocked for a second, but in a moment of clarity I reached into my coat and pulled out my US Passport. I handed it to the people that were yelling and they passed my documentation around, shaking their heads "ok." The situation de-escalated quickly and everyone returned to their seats. As I settled into my seat I was taken back by what had just happened.







In my research, before I traveled there, I had learned that Nazi Germany had used the Chechen-Ingush region surrounding Grozny as a giant gas station because of the plentiful oil fields nearby. They launched attack after attack in the area as they pressed North, towards Moscow. During my time there an absence struck me - there were no old men. While every other age and gender were represented there, there were no men over the age of 70.

I searched but not one could be found in my 10 days there. I would learn the local men and even boys had fought for their families, and most had been killed by the occupying German forces. Generations of men wiped completely from the landscape of the beautiful Caucasus mountain range. No wonder the passenger still held a great deal of anger toward the Germans. Though the war had been over for decades, he was still looking for someone to "take it out on."





Every person you meet is the culmination of their experiences, knowledge, and understanding or in many cases, misunderstanding. Indeed, it is also a possibility that if you had been born in someone else's shoes, you might be just like that person, too. Like someone who is well trained, I want you to see beyond the obvious. How many times have we looked down the emotional barrel of our reactions, squeezed the trigger, and fired off a comment or two in someone's direction that we wish we could take back? Know this: our fight isn't with each other, it's with the impulse to hate.



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