

The
KINGDOM
Chronicles

I Was a Soldier Once



by Steven G. Kennard

The Kingdom Chronicles

Short Stories of Life and Love

Somewhere in the Kingdom

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I was a Soldier Once



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ne of my all-time favorite shows “M*A*S*H*” was on television last week. It was one of the last episodes when the Korean War finally came to an end. Everyone was celebrating and saying their last goodbyes, and then one by one they caught their rides and headed off to the airport and eventually back home.

It was late when the show was over so I went off to bed and fell asleep. It wasn't but a few hours later I suddenly woke up with Vietnam on my mind, “Not again” I thought. Within a few minutes it seemed like everything flashed before me, even words spoken and deeds done.

REMEMBERING



y the time I got to my unit I had already seen and heard enough to know that I wasn't going to make it here without God. For He had been with me through everything else, surely He was here with me too.

For an eighteen year old kid this was certainly an eye opening experience of a different kind, but I had a decision to make. Do I stand alone in this place and do the right thing, knowing what would come my way, or do I give in and join the crowd. All the alcohol, drugs and women could be mine if I just joined in. All the darkness had to offer was on display and all for the taking if I wanted it.

One night I stood in a dark place to be alone with my thoughts, and with God. There was something wrong in my spirit that I could feel, I felt the battle inside me to give in like everyone else and enjoy all the different varieties of sin. It was a time to choose and I talked to God, my friend, about me. I kept asking myself “what will you do? After all you might not ever see home again.” I remember thinking that I knew no other life, but with God and how could I give up on Him now? I just couldn't do it, so I made God a promise that I would stand for Him even if it cost me everything. Next Sunday I went to the chapel service and wondered where everyone was. You would think that in this place the chapel would be full every week, but it wasn't.

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Again and again I tossed and turned trying to get back to sleep, but I couldn't. I could still remember that first prayer I made to God in Vietnam, to please send some Christian guys and oh-yah Lord, a new chaplain too. Then I saw in my mind's eye the events of the next month. I now saw eight of us and a different chaplain that God had brought together for such a time as it was. Pictures flashed before me of our times of witnessing and the sharing of the Gospel that we did. I saw our chapel meetings and the regular get-togethers in our rooms. We talk and shared among ourselves and we would sing. I remember thinking, "I did that, I really was there ... so long ago." Now it's just a memory that evades my sleep and keeps me awake at night.

We truly became a band of brothers unto ourselves in that short time we were there. A couple of us have managed to stay in touch over the years. I know in my heart that the things we did in the name of Jesus and things of God are written down as an eternal record in Heaven and will one day stand as a witness of faithfulness put into action in a place that no one wanted to be. In my mind, as I lay there in the dark trying to get back to sleep. It was made known to me laying there in the dark bedroom, that things done for the Lord will stand the test of fire and the books will be opened and the record itself will one day give its own account of deeds done and of those who did them.

TIME TO SAY GOOD-BYE

I laid there and I remembered all the good-byes said as each man's time was up and he was going home. We prayed with him for safe travels and blessings at home. Slowly, one-by-one they all went home until it was Terry and I. Where there had been eight, there was now two and a short time later we prayed our last prayer together and Terri was on his way home also, ... now there was one.

I never regretted what I did to be there for so long, even though it made me be the last one there. After Terri left I somehow felt I had finished something, like I had seen my job through, an assignment completed. In a place no one wanted to be, I was the first one there and now in another two months I would be the last one to go home.

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Now in my mind I was trying to remember leaving my unit. It was hard because I don't remember ever saying a good-bye to anyone. We were the Christians and we fought two battles there, the physical one, the war, which was the reason we were there, and the other was a spiritual one. When you're the last one to go there isn't anyone to say good-bye to you. You just throw your bag into the back of the jeep and hop in for the ride to the airport. There's no one to look back at for the last time, no one will wave back and whisper a prayer for you. Now, many years later I can't remember any of it and it bothered me. I couldn't get back to sleep and it was 2am.

My next memory was at the out-processing station at Cam Ranh Bay. When I got there they said it was only a three day wait to get scheduled on a flight out. So why was I still sitting there after six days?

It was a Sunday night and I decided to go to the chapel and pray. I was always the only one in chapel, but this time there was someone down in front kneeling at the altar praying. I waited for him and after he finished we started to talk. He told me he had been in-country now for thirty days waiting for orders assigning him to a unit. During his wait he was pulling a lot of guard duty and guard duty was something I knew a lot about.


I began to share my experiences of two tours in Vietnam. I shared with him what I called the "Testimony of Eight," and that he could do it also. What God had done for us and particularly me, God would also do for him. As I was sharing with him of all our adventures I remembered a duffle bag I was carrying back home with me, it was full of tracks, gospel tracks. I suddenly knew what I was supposed to do and maybe even the reason I was still there after six days. I brought my new friend of thirty minutes back to my bunk at the out-processing center and gave him that duffle bag half full of tracks. "Now you can do what we did. You have a witnessing tool in the form of these tracks," I said to him. He gladly took the bag and headed out into the darkness back to his unit. I never saw him again. That short one hour encounter was pre-ordained and it too is written in the books of heaven.

The next morning as we all gathered around to hear the roster call of names for the first flight home. It was one moment of my life that I can never forget. If I forget all else I never will forget the feeling of hearing my name called. The first name called for the first plane out was mine, confirmation that God had

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not forgotten me. I really was going home, so hard for me to believe that tears came to my eyes. A few hours later I was on the plane and you could have heard a small pin drop to the ground for the silence was over-powering. There were rumors of commercial planes being shot down and you were not truly safe until the plane turned out over the ocean well away from enemy rockets. All was quiet until suddenly the plane banked and turned out over the ocean. Then all joy and shouting broke out, no one, not even I could hold back the joy we all felt that now we were on our way home. A wonderful time of rejoicing and with a few tears in my eyes I too was shouting because this time, I was going home.

THE FUTURE

ow so much time has passed that I thought I had remembered so much about Vietnam. It seems like so long ago and now it is even hard to believe that all that happened, and that I was a soldier once. How many times have I just whispered to God “Did I really do that?” A few pictures in a frame and a few medals around them say I was there. It seems far away for me now. That fight is over, but the second battle will never be over till we stand in glory with Jesus.

Yes, I was a soldier once, so many years ago. It’s a little hard to remember, I wish I could let that go. God help me to always remember I am a soldier in His army and I fight the battles as the enemy brings them to me. Today, the enemy came against me again. He’s the same old enemy I fought before. Another battle with temptation and I’m still standing. Chalk another one up for our side.

I am looking forward to the day sometime in God’s future, when the new heaven and the new earth are established. I believe I will be there. All the battles that should have been fought will have been fought. The sounds of our wars have grown quiet. Will I remember that I was a soldier once?

Righteousness will rule the kingdom and we will be given a new name and a new future. One day I will not remember that I was a soldier once even in His army. All things will become new and we will never again remember that there was ever an enemy to engage, a battle to fight, or a cause to stand for.

THE GLORIOUS FUTURE

I was ... hmmm ... I was something once I can't remember anymore. I only know of the future and it is a bright one at that. Life in the Son for He is the light of the Kingdom. What a glorious King we serve... I don't know, nor can I remember what was before this, or how I got here, but now I serve the King of all Kings and there is none like Him.

I was a servant once ... and will forever be a servant in the house of my Lord. By the way, did I mention He is my Father? I am a Son now. I always have been and forever will be. I just heard from my Father. He says He has something He wants to tell me ... What was that I heard Lord ... You have a mission for me?

Okay everyone I have to run now. I hope to see you again somewhere around the Kingdom. Always remember that we are who we are, because He is who He said He was, and that's just how it is in the Kingdom.

Everything from here on out belongs to the **KINGDOM CHRONICLES**.

