

St. Michael and the Marine

Below you will find a letter written by a young marine to his mother after being wounded on a Korean battlefield in 1950. The Navy chaplain, Father Walter Muddy, to whom the letter was shown, thoroughly checked the facts with the young Marine and the sergeant in whose patrol he had served. Having concluded that the facts mentioned in the letter had actually occurred, Father Muddy made the letter public, in 1951, before a gathering of 5,000 Marines at the Naval base in San Diego, California. Since then the letter has been published in newspapers and magazines, read on the radio and television, all over the world:

Dear Mom,

I wouldn't dare write this letter to anyone but you because no one else would believe it. Maybe even you will find it hard but I have got to tell somebody.

First off, I am in a hospital. Now don't worry, ya hear me, don't worry. I was wounded but I am okay you understand. Okay. The doctor says that I will be up and around in a month.

But that is not what I want to tell you.

Remember when I joined the Marines last year; remember when I left, how you told me to say a prayer to St. Michael every day. You really didn't have to tell me that. Ever since I can remember you always told me to pray to St. Michael the Archangel. You even named me after him. Well I always have.

When I got to Korea, I prayed even harder. Remember the prayer that you taught me?

"Michael, Michael of the morning fresh crop of Heaven adorning," you know the rest of it. Well I said it everyday. Sometimes when I was marching or sometimes resting. But always before I went to sleep. I even got some of the other fellas to say it.

Well, one day I was with an advance detail way up over the front lines. We were scouting for the Commies. I was plodding along in the bitter cold, my breath was like cigar smoke.

I thought I knew every guy in the patrol, when along side of me comes another Marine I never met before. He was bigger than any other Marine I'd ever seen. He must have been 6 feet 4 inches and built in proportion. It gave me a feeling of security to have such a body near.

Anyway, there we were trudging along. The rest of the patrol spread out. Just to start a conversation I said, "Cold ain't it." And then I laughed. Here I was with a good chance of getting killed any minute and I am talking about the weather.

My companion seemed to understand. I heard him laugh softly.

I looked at him and said: "I have never seen you before! I thought I knew every man in the outfit."

"I just joined at the last minute", he replied. "The name is Michael."

"Is that so!" I said surprised. "That is my name too!"

"I know," he said and then went on, "Michael, Michael of the morning . . ."

I was too amazed to say anything for a minute. How did he know my name, and a prayer that you had taught me? Then I smiled to myself, every guy in the outfit knew about me. Hadn't I taught the prayer to anybody who would listen. Why now and then, they even referred to me as St. Michael.

Neither of us spoke for a time and then he broke the silence. "We are going to have some trouble up ahead."

He must have been in fine physical shape or he was breathing so lightly I couldn't see his breath. Mine poured out in great clouds.

There was no smile on his face now. Trouble ahead, I thought to myself, well with the Commies all around us, that is no great revelation.

Snow began to fall in great thick globs. In a brief moment the whole countryside was blotted out. And I was marching in a white fog of wet sticky particles. My companion disappeared.

"Michael!" I shouted in sudden alarm.

I felt his hand on my arm, his voice was rich and strong: "This will stop shortly!"

His prophecy proved to be correct. In a few minutes the snow stopped as abruptly as it had begun. The sun was a hard shining disc.

I looked back for the rest of the patrol, there was no one in sight. We lost them in that heavy fall of snow. I looked ahead as we came over a little rise.

Mom, my heart stopped. There were seven of them. Seven Commies in their padded pants and jackets and their funny hats. Only there wasn't anything funny about them now. Seven rifles were aimed at us.

"Down Michael!" I screamed and hit the frozen earth.

I heard those rifles fire almost as one. I heard the bullets. There was Michael still standing.

Mom, those guys couldn't have missed, not at that range. I expected to see him literally blown to bits.

But there he stood, making no effort to fire himself. He was paralyzed with fear. It happens sometimes, Mom, even to the bravest. He was like a bird fascinated by a snake.

At least, that was what I thought then. I jumped up to pull him down and that was when I got mine. I felt a sudden flame in my chest. I often wondered what it felt like to be hit, now I know.

I remember feeling strong arms about me, arms that laid me ever so gently on a pillow of snow. I opened my eyes, for one last look. I was dying. Maybe I was even dead, I remember thinking well, this is not so bad.

Maybe I was looking into the sun. Maybe I was in shock. But it seemed I saw Michael standing erect again only this time his face was shining with a terrible splendor.

As I say, maybe it was the sun in my eyes, but he seemed to change as I watched him. He grew bigger, his arms stretched out wide, maybe it was the snow falling again, but there was a brightness around him like the wings of an Angel. In his hand was a sword. A sword that flashed with a million lights.

Well, that is the last thing I remember until the rest of the fellas came up and found me. I do not know how much time had passed. Now and then I had but a moment's rest from the pain and fever. I remember telling them of the enemy just ahead.

"Where is Michael?" I asked.

I saw them look at one another. "Where's who?" asked one.

I said: "Michael! — Michael that big Marine I was walking with just before the snow squall hit us!"

"Kid," said the sergeant, "You weren't walking with anyone. I had my eyes on you the whole time. You were getting too far out. I was just going to call you in when you disappeared in the snow."

He looked at me, curiously. "How did you do it kid?"

"How'd I do what?" I asked half angry despite my wound. "This marine named Michael and I were just . . ."

"Son," said the sergeant kindly, "I picked this outfit myself and there just ain't another Michael in it. You are the only Mike in it."

He paused for a minute, "Just how did you do it kid? We heard shots. There hasn't been a shot fired from your rifle. And there isn't a bit of lead in them seven bodies over the hill there."

I didn't say anything, what could I say. I could only look open-mouthed with amazement. It was then the sergeant spoke again, "Kid," he said gently, "everyone of those seven Commies was killed by a sword stroke."

That is all I can tell you Mom. As I say, it may have been the sun in my eyes, it may have been the cold or the pain. But that is what happened.

Love, Michael

