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## A Modern War: How Large Dairy Corporations Negatively Affect the Relationship Between Dairy Cows, Humans, and the Environment

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Eastern Kentucky University

A Modern War: How Large Dairy Corporations Negatively Affect the Relationship  
Between Dairy Cows, Humans, and the Environment

Honors Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements of HON 420

Spring 2022

By

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Mentor

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A Modern War: How Large Dairy Corporations Negatively Affect the Relationship  
Between Dairy Cows, Humans, and the Environment

Mikayla Marti

Dr. Erin Eliassen

I created a short romantic story to represent the mostly negative relationship between humans, dairy cows, and the environment. The research was conducted relating to dairy consumption's effect on human health, the effect of large dairy corporations on cows' health and well-being, and the effect of dairy production on the environment. The desired evidence through scientific findings was minimal to nonexistent due to the political nature of the dairy industry. This is represented best in the war setting of the short story as war is highly politicized and rarely unanimously agreed upon as either good or bad. My argument started much stronger than it ended for this reason and helped shape the plot of the story.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis mentor, Dr. Erin Eliassen for being an extremely helpful hand throughout my journey of creating this thesis. She provided me with many resources and ideas that I would not have had access to or thought of on my own. I would also like to thank my friends and mom for supporting me the whole way and believing that I am capable of creating something worthwhile.

## **Introduction**

Before beginning at Eastern Kentucky University, I had an interest in food politics, specifically relating to large American corporations and governmental interactions. This eventually led me to pursue a degree in dietetics and have the opportunity to learn more on this subject which intrigued me so much. One of the largest food infrastructures across United States history is the dairy industry. However, as this industry is large, wealthy, and influential, it also raises much concern due to its associations with global warming, health risks, and animal cruelty. The more dairy was discussed as a food group in my courses, the more my existing questions deepened. After wading through research on this subject, I argue large American dairy corporations are negatively impacting humans' health, cows' health, and the environment more than they are benefiting them.

This argument started out more as a hypothesis because although my courses had instructions to limit intake of dairy products to reduce the risk of contracting chronic diseases, the scientific evidence behind these statements was never shown. Similarly, various documentaries reporting the dangers of dairy's impact on the environment and how cruelly the animals are treated exist; however, I had not been exposed to any concrete data supporting these same claims. Therefore, to make my hypothesis an argument, or disprove or alter it, I began with intensive research in crafting my thesis.

## Review of the Literature

The most integral piece of literature that helped shape my argument was a book titled *Food Politics* written by Marion Nestle<sup>1</sup>. She is a registered dietitian who served as a senior nutrition policy advisor in the Department of Health and Human Services for several years and worked on writing the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans. She explains the process of developing the guidelines that function as the nutritional recommendation “handbook” for all Americans. The Advisory Committee is appointed to research specific scientific questions to determine nutritional recommendations. When this research is collected, summarized, and analyzed, the committee creates a scientific report with their recommendations based on this data. Then the Federal Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services review the scientific report and make a new report. During this process, Nestle recounts that various scientific findings are either not included in the Dietary Guidelines or altered to appease certain corporations and donors who are influential over food systems and lawmaking.

Her writing of these happenings proves that nutritional recommendations in the United States are not as straight forward as some may perceive them to be as it is influenced by large food companies whose aim is to make money. One of the areas she specifically describes is dairy—the Dietary Guidelines recommend Americans limit their high-fat dairy consumption. However, dairy is everywhere and not always at the request of the American people. Since the beginning of national food group graphics like the pyramid and MyPlate<sup>2</sup>, dairy is its own food group that is equal in size to fruit and vegetables.

After reading this and comparing it to my own experiences with how I and others around me perceive dairy, I searched for scholarly research examining the effects of dairy consumption in humans. However, I began to come across something that became an essential theme in my story and argument: the research I was looking for was minimal to non-existent. Dairy consumption and its effects on humans, cows, and the environment are extremely prevalent in modern media and widely discussed. But when looking for scientific evidence to either support or antagonize the dairy industry, there is not much to use.

### *Dairy consumption and human health*

I split my research into three categories: dairy consumption's effect on human health, dairy production's effect on dairy cattle's health and wellbeing, and dairy production's effect on the environment. With the human health effects, most studies including dairy focused on the risk of obesity and cancers. In one meta-analysis conducted by Harrison S, Lennon R, Holly J, et al<sup>3</sup>, the researchers concluded that there is a moderate risk of developing prostate cancer with people who regularly consume milk and dairy products.

Another study by Torres-Costoso A, López-Muñoz P, Ferri-Morales A, Bravo-Morales E, Martínez-Vizcaíno V, Garrido-Miguel M<sup>4</sup> found that dairy consumption, especially higher fat milk (2% or whole), is linked to increased body fat and not significantly linked to bone development. This was an interesting study to find because when most people think about drinking milk, they think that it improves bone health. However, this study suggests that milk should be questioned for its role in bone development.

There were very few similar studies to these last two, but they showed the same results. Because of the lack of research in this area, I had to think outside of the box to find more data for this topic category. Thus, my incorporation of studies like *Why Americans eat what they do: taste, nutrition, cost, convenience, and weight control concerns as influences on food consumption*<sup>5</sup> and *Many Americans falsely optimistic about their diets*<sup>6</sup>. These sources do not show the physical impacts of dairy consumption, but they do pose theories as to why we consume so much dairy even when we know of the controversy of it. One is that taste is the most important influence on what a person chooses to eat, followed by cost. If a person enjoys the taste of dairy and finds it to be affordable, he/she will choose to consume it despite its controversy.

#### *Dairy production and cow*

The next area of research investigated is how dairy production affects dairy cows' health and well-being. I quickly found that most studies conducted with dairy cattle aimed to enhance milk production and did not evaluate their health and well-being in the ways I thought they would. Although to increase milk production, researchers look at ways to better crossbreed or feed the cows (which may improve their short-term physical health), the question I asked was never remotely considered: would dairy cattle be healthier and live longer if they were not subjected to living their lives on large dairy farms?

A source that discusses the animal cruelty side of mass milk production is *Cowspiracy: the sustainability secret*<sup>7</sup> and *Got the facts on milk?*<sup>8</sup>. Animal abuse and mistreatment, early mortality rates, forced insemination, lack of free-roaming

space, and depression from separating the mothers and calves are some of the topics in these documentaries that we often hear about in daily conversation (and less in scientific studies).

### *Dairy production and the environment*

With environmental research, the most relevant scientific, peer-reviewed study is written by Finnegan W, Goggins J, Clifford E, and Zhan X<sup>9</sup> and details exactly what global warming potential is associated with dairy products. The researchers track greenhouse gas emissions from the dairy cattle's defecation and flatus to milk production (machines used to milk and homogenize) to transportation of the products (fuel usage). Their findings conclude that dairy products have a high impact on global warming. Again, it was extremely difficult to find peer-reviewed sources on this subject because it just does not exist. I had to rely on this study and documentaries to provide me with evidence to support my claim. Some of the concerns in these documentaries and in media include greenhouse gas emissions, water use and consumption, feeding crops to livestock instead of people, mass land occupation, waste, and deforestation.

### **Farm Experience**

After I collected as much data as I could, I visited EKU's dairy farm before I officially constructed my argument. I wanted to see first-hand how dairy farms are run and how the cows are treated, even though small-scale farms operate differently than large-scale farms. The condition of the cows and the farm was better than I expected it to be, however even when the cows are treated well the

moral dilemmas of forced insemination, separating the mothers from their calves at birth, and using their product (milk) solely for human benefit still remain.

### **Approach to the Creative Project**

When starting to collect research, my argument became less strong due to a lack of relevant research in this area. Additionally, because some studies demonstrated some positive effects dairy has on the human body, my argument could not remain one-sided. Thus, I propose that although dairy has both positive and negative effects, it more negatively impacts humans, cows, and the environment.

Seeing through these studies how messy this relationship is, I brainstormed how to best represent it in a creative manner that also suited my abilities. Based on my confidence in creating and writing about fictional characters, I decided a short romantic story to be the best project to represent my argument and research. Because most of the interaction in this three-way relationship involves humans and cows, the two main characters (love interests) metaphorically represent a cow and a human. While devising the plot, I thought about the studies I collected, the data presented from them, and the data that was not. Thus, I aimed to depict the destruction of the environment, the positive and negative aspects of our relationship with cows, the executives of large dairy corporations, and the effects of continuing current milk production procedures unchanged.

Creating the plot was the most difficult part of the creative process as there were many aspects of research, experiences, and emotions I wanted to bring together in the story. Within a few weeks had jotted down multiple different plot lines, but had not taken to any of them enough to commit to one. So taking a step back, I comprised a list of the shows and movies that left a lasting impression on me and brought out some sort of intense emotion, as this is what I aimed for my story to do as well.

Violet Evergarden is an animated show following a young girl who suppressed her emotions her whole life and ends up losing the one person she cares about. After this tragedy she is unsure how to live her life and eventually finds herself working as a transcriber. She writes letters for people who are illiterate or are not proficient in conveying their feelings to others through words. Through interactions with her clients, Violet learns about herself in ways she never did before and for the first time is able to understand and experience emotions.

Every episode easily brought me to tears, and in light of my own desire to write a moving story, I questioned what exactly evoked my emotions. The writer used the letters Violet wrote to bring characters' inner emotions, thoughts, and feelings into the open and available for others to perceive. Once I determined this to be the cause of my own display of emotions, I decided to also use letters in my story to have the same effect.

### *Plot overview*

As I decided how to utilize the letters to show the inner emotions of my main characters, I had to also consider time periods which used letters as the primary form of communication. An idea about setting the plot during the midst of World War II struck me and I began forming the rest of the plot around this and the other ideas I had previously formulated.

The story is historical fiction taking place in World War II during the year 1943. The cow-representing character, Clyde, and human-representing character, Lloyd, share romantic feelings but are not actually in a relationship. Clyde is drafted as a marine and taken to the Pacific fronts while Lloyd remains undrafted and stays in their hometown. Where Clyde is stationed, he is assigned to a Lieutenant Colonel who gives Clyde and his fellow troop members their orders. One of these fellow troop members befriends Clyde and they share some positivity and friendship amongst the chaos. Once the battles begin, he participates in a grueling fight on the beach that lasts several hours and is witness to horrific scenes of killing.

Clyde and Lloyd exchange letters throughout the story that show their feelings and actions toward each other. Because Lloyd is reserved with his romantic feelings, when Clyde is drafted, he has nothing to say. But because his reasons for not sharing his feelings are not due to a lack of wanting to, he later regrets his final encounter with Clyde after he is gone. In an attempt to make up for his lack of action, he musters up the courage to write Clyde a letter to ask how he is doing, but still cannot put any heartfelt emotion behind his words.

Then when Clyde is at his lowest point on the beach, he reads Lloyd's emotionless letter and feels even more dejected, but still continues to fight because he has no other choice. As hours and days pass, Lloyd's actions eat away at him as he comes to realize Clyde may not come home. He finally writes a letter with all the things he's always wanted to say and sends it to Clyde.

As the battle drags on for hours, Clyde's physical abilities worsen until he is practically unable to carry on. His troop leader notices his physical state but sends him back out to fight anyway. After his decision, Clyde dies of exhaustion without ever having read Lloyd's final letter.

## **Parallels**

### *Relationship*

With the topics of research that I aimed to depict, I was intentional about how they were represented in my story. First is Clyde and Lloyd's romantic relationship. Their feelings for each other are positive because most humans do not actively wish harm upon cows, and most cows do not go out of their way to inflict harm upon humans. However, Clyde is very upfront and open about his feelings with Lloyd and anyone who asks. But Lloyd is much timider and for most of the story, does not verbally share his romantic feelings with Clyde at all. Lloyd's feelings are much more guarded because in real life, humans create things like campaigns and documentaries to showcase the abuse industries subject to cows; however, not much is done about this abuse. In other words, it is mostly talk without following action.

### *Setting*

By the end of this creative process, the war setting became one of the best and most influential parallels between the story and real life. The soldiers represent the massive number of cattle we have, all being gathered in certain places (equivalent to large dairy farms). They are subjected to grueling tasks and often killed at a young age, similar to some dairy cows. In the story, the United States government is also considered to be similar to the heads of large dairy corporations as they send countless soldiers to fight wars those soldiers may not understand or support.

Within the battles Clyde participates, hordes of soldiers are shipped in every so hour due to the mass amounts of soldiers that are killed. This represents dairy cattle being disposable and readily replaced for the purpose of creating a product from which they will not reap the benefits. The destructive battles also allow the chance for environmental destruction representation. As it is a large-scale war, staggering amounts of land are destroyed by weapons and bombs; and areas that are not destroyed are used for increased food production and shipment which also has negative environmental effects.

Finally, arguably the most important aspect of this setting in context of large dairy corporations is that wars are extremely political. Just like the talk around dairy, opinions can be strong and often disagreeing. In war, there are positives and negatives, and it can be hard to categorize actions as completely good or completely bad.

*Draft*

The significance of Clyde being drafted to fight in the war is that it is against his will, and he is providing a service. Dairy cattle do not have a say in whether they live on a dairy farm and they're there to provide a service, not for them, but for us.

*Supporting characters*

After Clyde is drafted, he meets another drafted soldier named Danny who represents another dairy cow. He is a warm character whom Clyde interacts with to give the reader another opportunity to observe his inner thoughts and emotions of fear, longing, and sadness. As Danny represents another cow, it shows the similarity of cows being social creatures and forming connections with each other in similar ways that we would as humans.

When Clyde arrives on the beach, he is assigned to a troop leader who oversees him and a small group of other soldiers. As this officer gives orders and is present with the soldiers and sees their performance in person, he represents dairy farm managers. Unlike the United States government which represents the larger heads of dairy corporations, this troop leader sees the drafted soldiers in person and assesses their strengths and weaknesses, and sees firsthand how they are subjected to abuse. As such, he is much more hesitant to make decisions that will hurt Clyde or put him in a situation that may expose him to more risks. But because he also has orders, he cannot follow his heart/conscience and struggles with this internal battle.

### *Clyde's death*

Clyde's death by his troop leader's decision parallels premature death of dairy cattle that sometimes happens from being overworked. The inspiration for Lloyd finally telling Clyde how he feels but Clyde never living to experience it comes from a future that could become a reality. If the dairy industry waters continue to be so murky without anything to change it or enlighten the situation, all three components of this relationship may continue to suffer: cows, humans, and the environment. And before humans, as a group, make a move to change, it may already be too late.

### **Conclusion**

As I wrote, I would add new characters, take some out, and change aspects of the plot as I thought of something better; however, my argument throughout never changed. The aspect that changed the most however, was the addition of the political parallel that I described with the war. After completing my story, this is the best parallel that brings together my research, argument, and story. It incorporates my confusion and frustration at the lack of research and my struggle to find a way to represent this in writing.

Moving forward, I hope to see research conducted to answer the questions that I and many others have posed—to make my story less hypothetical. Additionally, in the field of dietetics, it would be beneficial for nutrition experts to be able to relay a more concrete and evidence-based recommendation regarding the consumption of dairy. But from what I have

gathered from the research thus far and through my short story, I argue that large American dairy corporations are more negatively than positively impacting humans' health, cows' health, and the environment.

## A Modern War

*February 6, 1943*

*My Dear Clyde,*

*You are the one person who must always be aware of my feelings. I have never been one to express exactly how I feel or what my words to you truly mean. I can stand being misunderstood by anyone else...just not you. Every day, every second I wonder if you're okay, and if you think of me too. Even if you think of me, I hate to say it's not enough. I want you to live. I want you to fight your way back. I want to touch you, to be with you, to ask you questions no one has asked you. I am the most foolish man I have ever known, for I've felt these feelings for you since the start but I would stop myself from telling you. I can't get that time back but I can tell you now and hope you forgive me. I love you. I love you more than your generals need you for this wretched war. Come back, Clyde.*

*Lloyd*

...

"I got drafted."

Lloyd was silent, watching Clyde's face for any inclination to what he was thinking. Quietly, as if to not shatter some imaginary glass, Lloyd starts, "So you're really going?"

Clyde's stiff face softens, "What choice do I have?"

...

More silence echoes through the room in which Clyde anxiously waits in. Other newly drafted soldiers surround him and add to the heaviness of the air—no one dares to talk. Finally, one of the Captains meets them, "Listen up boys! Today is your first day as a U.S. Marine. You're Privates—the lowest of the lows but do *not* take your position lightly—we're here to fight and goddammit we're gonna win. This ship docks in two days in the Pacific. You don't have the luxury of extensive training but we'll teach you as much as we can in these two days. Alright then. On your feet!"

They quickly stand awaiting their next instructions. They're told to exit the room to the deck and as they file out one by one, Clyde thinks about the person he left behind. He and Lloyd met a couple years back and had been inseparable until now. Living in a small town mostly profitable by agriculture, both men picked up work on a farm. Clyde always handled the more physical labored duties—fertilizing soil, transporting hay and soil, picking crops, tending to the livestock, and repairing broken machines. His already muscular frame was even more

hardened by this labor. Lloyd, on the other hand, managed the business items, handling money, selling the crops, and establishing partnerships. They met by chance while Lloyd was inspecting the plowing machines that Clyde happened to be repairing that day.

The intimidating giant, muscular man covered in grease and dirt was the first to speak. With a genuine smile, he says, “Hi there, anything I can help you with?”

Taken aback by the contrasting gentleness of his words and his appearance, Lloyd eventually announces his inspection of the machinery. They spent that whole day together despite Lloyd’s schedule full of other meetings and responsibilities. Lloyd was drawn to Clyde’s unbiased genuineness that, unfortunately, was pretty rare in their town. While Lloyd considered himself to be in the ingenuine mix, Clyde may have been the only person to disagree. His appearance would scare people away, even if his words and actions were objectively kind. Lloyd was the only person to see him for what he truly was.

In the next few days, Lloyd would venture out from his office to check on the physical farm...in the next few weeks, Clyde would wait in the places he knew Lloyd would routinely show up...in the next few months they were meeting each other outside of the farm for meals, walks, movies—anything and everything. Clyde is already thinking about what to write him—

*January 31, 1943*

*Lloyd,*

*Surely you must know, but I already miss you. I haven't had a proper conversation since the last time you and I spoke... There are more people here than our small town but they still treat me the same. Honestly, it's probably even worse—I'm just a weapon for them. I haven't even made it to any battles (specify the specific place/terminology) but I don't even feel like a person anymore. I know you have faith in my abilities as I did most of the physical labor back home but I just have no idea what it will be like out there. Then, now, and after this war, my feelings for you will be the same.*

*Much love,*

*Clyde*

A handful of officers take charge of Clyde's group for the remainder of their time on the ship. As they said, they only scratched the surface of combat basics, already being mid-war and needing sheer manpower. Clyde is just over six feet tall with a firm muscular build that towers over almost everyone on board, including the officers. His back, arms, and legs are particularly chiseled, and you can easily see each muscle lying beneath the skin. Despite his large frame and build, he is nimble and maneuvers with ease and shines amongst the other soldiers during training. The officers take note of his skill and plan to place him with a particularly successful Lieutenant Colonel once in the Pacific. Because of this troop leader's skill, his troop is sent a few exceptionally skilled soldiers and

many average and below average soldiers. With his tactics, he utilizes the skilled soldiers to the best of their abilities and attempts to find strengths within the other soldiers as well. Out of the leaders placing themselves in danger on the front lines, he is the most reputable.

Back home, Lloyd anxiously walks their hometown streets, mentally tracing the routes they took together so many times. At each turn, he remembers Clyde's warm and comforting smile, but can't seem to remember his own shining back at him. He wonders if he should have said more, if he could have said more before he left. He walks and walks as endless streams of thoughts flow through his mind, silently adding to a pile of anxiety and regret. When his legs refuse to take him any further, he heads home to a pen and paper.

*February 1, 1943*

*Dear Clyde,*

*I know I cannot ask any specifics, as my letter would never reach you if I did. I hope you have arrived at your destination safely; I am wishing and assuming the best for both my and your sake. Do what you can to return safely.*

*Lloyd*

Pouring as much luck and hope as possible into his fingertips to transfer to the paper, he hands it off to his local mail man. He emptily returns to his living room and waits. What else can he do?

Meanwhile, time seems to speed as the drafted men's boat docks and Clyde heads off to find his official officer. The men's loud and intense voices that he had previously been taking orders from were met with a firm but quiet voice, "Understood, these men are in my care now. Best of luck on your way back."

The sudden change in atmosphere almost throws Clyde's thoughts into an anxious frenzy before being directly spoken to for the first time since he last spoke with Lloyd.

"Lieutenant Colonel Alexander; you can call me Alex if it's easier for you. What do you go by, Private?"

No one had told him their name yet, let alone asked for his. He was sure the first thing he would want to talk about was his physical build and prowess. Although he hadn't yelled, Clyde could still sense the sternness in his voice and demeanor.

"Clyde, sir."

"Alright, Clyde. Pick up your stuff and head to our camping area, it's number 9 to your left. Our troop is meeting back at this spot at noon; don't be late."

Clyde nods and heads off to his new living area. He is slightly comforted by the Lieutenant Colonel despite also being intimidated by him. He can't help but be happy that he feels acknowledged as a fellow human being, but something lingers on his mind that he can't seem to shake: did he sense a hint of sadness?

It's now noon and Clyde rejoins Alexander along with about 15 other men, some he recognized and some he didn't. Right before the Lieutenant Colonel speaks, he makes eye contact with a nervous-looking Private and tries to give his best reassuring smile. "Everyone's here now, let's go over what we need to. Welcome to troop 9; I won't waste any time with this. Japanese soldiers are expected to show up on these shores in about 24 hours. We have just enough time to nail down a plan of action and get some preparatory rest. This will be like nothing you've ever seen but my goal is for as many of you to survive as possible."

Alexander pauses to look at the faces of the men surrounding him, looking at him with eager yet dreading eyes. He takes a deep breath and lets out a just as long sigh before continuing with the attack and defense plan he's come up with.

Half the troop will be on the offense, meeting Japanese soldiers on the shore as soon as they are visible. Both sides will be mostly armored with rifles, tanks, and anti-tank weapons. The other half of the troop will throw their efforts into defending the island by staying near the base and stopping the Japanese soldiers who make it past the first half of the troop. They are informed that this battle is likely to last more than a day and more U.S. marines will be sent around the clock to replace the soldiers already here that will inevitably fall. While the other troops spent this 24 hours lazing and putting off their dread, Alexander's men ran through their plan over and over again until it was time to sleep.

Clyde was assigned to the offensive group due to his sheer size, intimidation factor, and physical skill. While walking through the plan each time up until the battle, he found some companionship in one of the soldiers also assigned to offense—the man whom Clyde first noticed and very briefly tried to reassure with a smile. His name is Danny, a little younger than Clyde and from a larger city. He is a bit timid to speak completely freely but Clyde considers him to be trustworthy.

For the first couple hours of getting to know each other, in unfortunate circumstances, they talk about friends and family back home, favorite books and movies, and other small life details. Most of Clyde's stories from home involve Lloyd and he doesn't have to explicitly say his feelings for Danny to understand how he feels about him. Clyde has never been one to care about what others think but because Lloyd is extremely conscientious about how he appears, Clyde tries to omit the romantic feelings from his stories out of politeness. The younger boy picks up on it on his own but has never been one to judge that sort of thing.

The two men are thankfully able to laugh and smile genuinely for the first time since leaving their homes. Danny's innocence and friendliness resonate with Clyde. Maybe it was the loneliness, being separated from Lloyd for so long, or just this man's boy-like qualities, but now Clyde finds himself thinking of Danny as a little brother he wants to protect. It isn't until the sun starts to set that Danny lets Clyde into his true inner thoughts, hoping to not be alone.

“Clyde...are you scared at all?”

Glassy tears start to coat his eyes as he sorrowfully looks up at Clyde. His eyes are met by an even more forlorn gaze and the regret, panic, and cries he had been holding in for days finally let themselves out. Other men around them apathetically looked on as outbursts like these weren't uncommon, but Clyde understandingly acknowledges Danny and softly pats him on the back. When the younger soldier can finally calm down, he smiles at Clyde to thank him and sees a protective look that reminds him of his older brothers back home. They continue working through the plan together silently preparing for the inescapable horror soon to ensue.

When he gets back to his tent exhausted and ready for well-deserved rest, Clyde finds a letter on his pillow. Seeing that it is addressed from Lloyd, he feels the first bit of hope in a while and tears at the envelope. He reads its contents quickly but carefully:

*February 1, 1943*

*Dear Clyde,*

*I know I cannot ask any specifics, as my letter would never reach you if I did. I hope you have arrived at your destination safely; I am wishing and assuming the best for both my and your sake. Do what you can to return safely.*

*Lloyd*

He sits blankly staring at the words. So many emotions flow through him he can't do anything other than stare and try to sort through them one by one: joy that Lloyd wrote to him, hope that he'll return to him soon, sorrow that he's not there with him now, motivation to swiftly write back, and lastly the emotion he doesn't want to believe he's feeling. Slight disappointment lingers in the back of his mind at Lloyd's words...or rather lack of words. But he quickly pushes this even further to the depths of his thoughts as he gets out his own pen and paper.

*February 4, 1943*

*Lloyd,*

*I have finally reached the place where the battles will be. It's actually really beautiful, clear blue skies and even bluer waters. If I wasn't here because of this war I think I would be enjoying myself. Maybe after everything is over we can take some shared time off from the farm to come—just sit in the sun and relax for once. I think about it at every resting chance...I'll see you soon and tell you in person how much I adore you.*

*Much love,*

*Clyde*

He quickly seals the letter and runs off to the postman. Coming back to his sleeping bag mentally and physically driven to the edge, he slams his head to his pillow and is out.

...

There's an eerie buzzing sound ringing all around him. Something is moving his body...no someone. His head is slammed against the ground and his eyes shoot open to see Danny over him, mouthing something, still shaking Clyde awake to his senses.

"...here!!"

Clyde still only hears buzzing and asks, "what?"

"THEY'RE HERE! THEY CAME EARLY! THE JAPANESE ARE ON THE ISLAND WE HAVE TO GO! HURRY!"

Clyde shakingly jumps up and sporadically gets his gear on while Danny impatiently waits. He finally has his things in order and with no time for words, the two men run to their offensive positions on the beach. Gunshots are firing in the near distance about half a mile down the shore to their right and marine voices fill the air leaving no space for the serene silence they knew just 10 hours ago.

They're almost to their posts when Danny's boot becomes drenched. He feels the puddly sensation still 100 feet from the ocean and, confused, looks down to his feet. His eyes widen in horror and intensely stare at the new shade of red staining his boot. Right next to his foot is a member of troop 9, unmoving and

sprawled out in an unnatural position. The shock is sent to his legs, but as he nearly buckles down to the sand, Clyde appears on his right to support him.

Bravely he states, “We have to keep going. Stay strong Danny.”

Clyde’s physical and emotional support brings power back to his legs and he pushes on. They pass a couple more lifeless bodies but eventually reach their places and ready their weapons. Lieutenant Colonel Alexander comes into view from their right and tells his men to stay at their designated posts—stick to the plan they ran through yesterday.

Further along the beach, heaps of other marine corps soldiers are fighting back Japanese forces. Alexander’s troop members helplessly watch soldier after soldier fall, the scenes almost too horrible to watch. Alex had warned them yesterday that other leaders do not emphasize strategy as much as he does so a situation like this would likely happen, and that it’s all the more reason not to leave their posts even as their men are slaughtered in front of their eyes.

Seeing things he never dreamed he would see, Clyde’s mind enters a state of panic—will that be him in a couple hours or days? Will he ever see Lloyd again? Will he suffer? His thoughts are surging, taking over every inch of his brain, paralyzing his body, losing control—“Clyde, tell me about Lloyd again?”

Clyde is snapped out of his panic and looks at Danny’s reassuring gaze. Slowly, without breaking concentration on the fighting before them, he begins to share warm stories once again with this young soldier. This goes on for about an hour as Japanese forces creep toward them, inch by inch. Right before they are

in shooting range Lieutenant Alexander shouts, “Here they come! Ready your arms, clear your minds, and fire on my count. One. Two. Three!”

All of the offensive men immediately fire their rifles in formation attempting to stop as many Japanese men from entering the campsite. Shots are fired back from the other side just as forcefully, already taking down two troop soldiers. As a group, they slowly press forward without breaking formation. Inching closer to death, the men on the outside fall more quickly, but they still press on. Feeling the pain of the pressure, Danny screams from the depths of his stomach and cries while shooting every Japanese soldier in sight.

Clyde helplessly watches as the men he’s come to know fall around him one by one, never getting back up again. Somehow he manages to stay alive until nightfall when the Japanese forces are successfully stopped.

The last man falls signaling cheers and cries from the American men and Clyde falls to his knees. He doesn’t even have any thoughts—just rest. It only lasts for a second before he thinks of his friend. He whips his head to turn to see every area around him but doesn’t see him. Frantically and with barely enough voice to get out, he yells, “DANNY?!”

No answer...

Somehow with enough energy he jumps up and starts checking the bodies around him, terrified that one might be this friend he’s come to care for—the only person on this beach he can emotionally rely on. An arm raises from the sand

and slowly waves in Clyde's direction and he runs with more speed than he even had in battle.

Danny is lying in the sand looking almost too peaceful. Thankfully he's okay, just tired. Upon this realization, Clyde cries for the first time since he left home. Without Lloyd, he hasn't known who to turn to but he's found just a glimmer of familiarity with Danny that's turned into such deep platonic affection.

Together, they make their way back to their sleeping quarters and attempt to save up just enough energy for the next battle in just a couple hours.

Day breaks and the new marines disembark from their ships—unskilled reinforcements for the new waves of Japanese soldiers sure to come. But for some reason it brought upon such an uneasy feeling in the pit of Clyde's stomach, almost a feeling of betrayal the more he focused on it. He had just watched as familiar faces were blown to bits, their bodies still staining this beach's sand. As fortunate as he felt to not be one of them, there was an equal amount of guilt he felt—what was different between him and them? It could have been him.

And now here the U.S. government has brought more miserable men fighting to die. He wonders how many men they will bring for this unfortunate future until they somehow decide enough is enough. But he and they have no choice other than to fight. So they do.

...

Lieutenant Colonel Alexander is back in the center of a group of anxious men—the only two who had heard a similar speech from him once before were Danny and Clyde. Even though his plan was the best of any of the troop leaders...only two of his men survived, and those two are now undoubtedly physically exhausted. With only an hour until the new enemy wave arrives, Alexander silently makes a difficult decision. He starts timidly, being the first time he has ever given orders like this, “So...a lot of you are new.”

Seeing Clyde and Danny’s faces, he continues, “I’m glad to see you two.”

Turning his attention back to the group he says with more confidence, “They’ll be here in an hour so start preparing your minds now. I won’t lie it’s not fun and it’s not easy either. I’ll teach you how to use the tanks and anti-tank guns until we see their ships. Stand your ground.”

While the men were gathering for this speech, Clyde was feeling a little bit of relief anticipating another well thought out plan from Alexander. But with each word of the Lieutenant Colonel’s presentation, his hopes fell like leaves blowing from trees in the wind, one by one. Wasn’t he going to give us a formation? Signals? Even any encouraging words?

Amidst his raging despairing thoughts, he remembers his fellow soldiers’ bodies scattering the beach. That was what resulted from Alexander’s careful planning—not even to his fault but just the treacherousness of it all. So if he

chose not to come up with another does that mean...he doesn't think they'll survive either way?

Once Alexander has a moment alone, Clyde begins walking toward him aiming to confirm his suspicions. He gets within five feet of him and begins, "Lieutenant Colonel, sir, do you think—"

As Alexander turns to face Clyde, he sees ships in the distance. "TO YOUR WEAPONS THEY'LL PULL UP ON THE SHORE IN ONLY A FEW MINUTES. MOVE NOW."

Clyde is shaken from his trail of thought and rushes to find Danny and their rifles.

Just like the day before, Clyde bears witness to the untimely deaths of his young comrades. He's not as quick on his feet or as motivated to move as he was just 12 hours ago but thinking of Lloyd waiting for him back home and Danny fighting next to him pushes him forward again and again. Once the beach is almost so red it matches the sunset, the fighting stops with the last fallen Japanese soldier.

To no surprise, none of the new soldiers were able to stay alive, once again leaving Clyde and Danny physically alive but mentally in the deepest of trenches. Although they are breathing, that's about all they are. Clyde is so physically exhausted that he lies on the blood covered beach and closes his eyes. His muscles ache, his trigger finger won't move, his shoulders tense and

sore, and his legs unable to support the rest of his body. He falls asleep right then and there.

Alexander patrols the shore looking for surviving men. He finds Clyde peacefully resting and instantly feels regret welling up in his stomach. Instead of waking him to move him back to his quarters, he decides to let him be, and seeing the condition he's in, he's not confident about sending him back into battle again in another 12 hours. Already having made one decision going against his beliefs and morals, he was about to do it again.

Morning comes and the sunrise wakes Clyde from his bloodied spot in the sand. Another new wave of U.S. marines have been herded on the island near the tents, awaiting orders. He's insanely groggy and has trouble pulling himself off the sand, but he slowly does. He hears Alexander calling for troop 9 and instinctively heads toward his voice. But the first step he took failed and he came tumbling back down. Confused at his own body's unwillingness to move, he stands and tries again. His legs are shaking at an alarming rate trying to support his large frame but satisfied at his ability to stay standing, he continues along the beach.

Alexander sees Clyde's zombie-like stature limping its way toward him and his heart tinges. When Clyde is standing face to face with him, Alexander can get a good look at how the last 36 hours has stamped itself onto his body. The troop leader's gaze starts meeting Clyde's and from there his eyes scan the rest of Clyde's sunken face—blood covers half of it and he's unsure if it is his or someone else's. What's not covered by blood is covered by dirt, sweat, or a

mixture of the two. His eyes traveling down, he sees Clyde's neck harbors several deep bruises and scratches, soon to be infected if not treated. It's ever so slight but his arms are shaking from extended overexertion, and he's even missing a fingernail. Shreds of cloth have been torn from his uniform, his legs are clearly about to give out, and his boots haven't been dry since his arrival.

He takes a deep breath when he's finished analyzing Clyde's body and directs his eyes back to Clyde's. He starts to speak but his words catch in the back of his throat...he had already decided what he must tell this broken soldier, but he can't verbalize it. Every single part of him is stopping him from telling Clyde to fight again, but his military duties ensure that it is said.

Upon hearing his orders that haven't changed despite the deaths, cuts and bruises, and exhaustion, Clyde's willpower hits a low he never thought possible. It's not like he was expecting to be told to sit out, but somehow the Lieutenant Colonel's mournful expression while giving this order actualized the forlorn situation of it all. But orders are orders, so he hobbles off to his weapons.

...

Since he sent that last letter, Lloyd has felt even more anxious than he did before. He wasn't expecting to hear back from Clyde soon but even so he's doing all he can not to imagine the worst. He reads the words he sent over and over

again in his head, obsessing over how short the letter was and how little emotion it conveyed.

Every night when he goes to bed his subconscious takes over and holds him tight in nightmares where Clyde never returns home. And every morning when he wakes up, tears stain his cheeks. After 2 days of this cycle he decides he has to change: in case his nightmares become a reality, he can't say goodbye without sharing every inch of his hidden emotions with Clyde.

*February 6, 1943*

*My Dear Clyde,*

*You are the one person who must always be aware of my feelings. I have never been one to express exactly how I feel or what my words to you truly mean. I can stand being misunderstood by anyone else...just not you. Every day, every second I wonder if you're okay, and if you think of me too. Even if you think of me, I hate to say it's not enough. I want you to live. I want you to fight your way back. I want to touch you, to be with you, to ask you questions no one has asked you. I am the most foolish man I have ever known, for I've felt these feelings for you since the start but I would stop myself from telling you. I can't get that time back but I can tell you now and hope you forgive me. I love you. I love you more than your generals need you for this wretched war. Come back, Clyde.*

*Lloyd*

Without even reading it, he seals the letter in an envelope and runs to the post office, not even bothering to change out of his pajamas. His only thought being, "This has to reach him."

...

Japanese men are yelling, running with their rifles while they storm the red beach. U.S. men let out equally loud screams of terror, exhaustion, and determination. It's all Clyde can do to stand in one spot with his rifle and shoot. Luckily Danny has a little bit more energy and stands back to back with him, keeping watch on the places Clyde doesn't have the strength to turn to see.

Having gone through these exact scenes and killings twice before, Clyde's body moves through the motions allowing his mind to wander. Lloyd's face fills his brain, then his voice, then finally his letters. Since Clyde had left their home, he had been so confident in Lloyd's romantic feelings for him, even if they were never actually spoke it into existence. But being separated from each other, experiencing horrifying sights, and then receiving Lloyd's brief and almost emotionless letter, he's been doubting what he held to be absolute.

Gunfire continues to ring in his ears and Danny yells, "Hey! Stay focused okay? Just a little longer!"

Clyde replays memories of when he would reach out to touch Lloyd, to hold his hand, and he would silently push him away. When he would tell Lloyd he loved him and he would only give a smile back. Was he really the only one who felt this way? Would the person he loves be waiting for him if he came home from this war?

“CLYDE!”

Clyde’s legs crumble beneath him with his thoughts. Before Danny can fend off the nearest Japanese soldier to be able to help him up, he hears an eerie gunshot that just hangs in the air. Danny thinks, “Please, please, please...”

He finally defeats the opposing soldier and whips his head around to see the man who had become like an older brother to him. And he looks like every other soldier who had been shipped off to this hellish beach. A hole that had never been there before carved out a piece of his chest where his heart should be. His eyes still glistened but with no life or movement. And a sole tear slowly rolled down his face, making a sorrowful path through the blood and dirt.

...

Another six hours passed when the battles on the beach were once and for all declared won for the United States Marine Corp. Danny had managed to survive and was awarded a medal of bravery for being one of the only Privates to

survive the entire endeavor. With everything he bore witness to, however, pride or happiness was something he never felt. Before the ship came for the survivors to leave the island for home, mail from the previous day was delivered. When the postman called out looking for Clyde, Danny answered and retrieved the letter for his friend. He had no intention of reading it, but instead decided to deliver it back to its owner, who he felt from Clyde's stories might be stricken with inconsolable grief.

In their hometown, Lloyd lies on his couch as unrelaxed as he could be when he hears a slow knock at the door. He sits up so quickly he can't see for a second...Clyde was the only one who ever slowly knocked. Could he really be here right now? He's frozen by his thoughts and another slow knock fills his ears. With that, he jumps up already overcome by relief, tears welling in the corners of his eyes. He opens the door, "Thank god you—"

He stops mid-sentence upon seeing a man in a marine uniform that he had never seen before.

"Hi, my name is Danny and I think you must be Lloyd, right? I don't know how to say this; I met Clyde where we were stationed and became friends with him. Real nice guy. He told me about you. He talked about you a lot actually."

Lloyd's brain can't form a cohesive thought so he says nothing but tears already begin to race down his red cheeks. Danny notices Lloyd's fragile state and slowly continues, "I think I know what kind of relationship you two had. I

didn't read this letter but I wanted to give it back to you. Clyde...he uhm. He fought really hard. But he can't come home..."

Lloyd doesn't even blink but drops to his knees. Danny silently extends his arm to leave the letter right in front of his face. Lloyd's shaky hands grab it so carefully as if it were made out of glass. Seeing the envelope still sealed, he looks up at the man who brought it and asks through staggered breaths, "Was it...did he read it?"

Danny doesn't have the heart to say it aloud so he just shakes his head no. Feeling like he accomplished what Clyde would have wanted him to do, he takes his leave to head back to his own family. The clanking of his heavy boots is the only sound that fills the air. The sound gets further and further from Lloyd's ears until there's nothing left to fill the aching silence.

Speaking one last sentence to the man who will never hear it, he whispers, "I'm so sorry."

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