



Lieutenant Carlton R. Rouh is holder of Congressional Medal of Honor

THAT'S HOW IT IS, BROTHER

BY
IRA WOLFERT

~A Hero Talks, Simply and Realistically, of Heroism and Its Rewards ~ Neither of Which Are Very Hard to Find Once You Have Learned where to look...

ALL the thinkers who think in the papers and on the radio," said First Lieutenant Carlton R. Rouh, United States Marine Corps, "say that the only thing the fellows want when they come home is just to take up where they left off and get going again.

"But that is one they would do better to tie outside. Learning to want just that is the hardest thing there is, I think, for a soldier to learn. Those fellows have had a knocking around, the combat soldiers anyway. There's been artillery knocking down their ears, and all the rest of it, all that stuff out there knocking at their brains, and sometimes they get the impression that they've been thrown into a meat grinder 100 miles long.

"Then, when finally they're through the meat chopper and get a foot ashore in the United States of America, I don't care who they are, or what kind of a deal they expect is waiting for them, they all think the same thing. Holy cracking creeping jeeppers! they think, as if the United States was a beautiful girl for them to touch. After that, the same dirty old overalls hanging on the peg waiting for them is a shock to see. It's like being a child and getting a 'sensible' present for your birthday. Coming home from war is the greatest, biggest, most wonderful bangest-up birthday most fellows are likely ever to have in their whole lives. It takes a little studying to learn that a sensible present, a chance to take up where you left off and get going again on your life, is the best for you.

"And there is no kidding about that. The very best break a soldier can get is to throw the whole thing over his shoulder, count his life in the war as dead and take up as a civilian where he left off.

• • •
"Well, what the hell is so good about a gas station? A gas station is hard work. It's long hours and worries and taking lip from cranky customers and having guys try to steal the eyes out of your head. You'd think it was good enough if you worked ten, fifteen years to put the gas station together for yourself. But with everybody saying nothing's too good for you, well then, who can blame you for thinking what the hell is so good about a gas station when fellows who didn't do anything in the war except work hard at making money for themselves are riding around in swell cars, smoking cigars that you got to use both hands to hold up?

"The kid threw the gas station away after a couple of weeks. I don't know what happened to him after that. Everybody said the war made a bum out of him, a guy who thinks the world owes him a living.

OldMagazineArticles.com

Lieutenant Rouh

"It wasn't the war made a bum out of him. There is nothing in war to teach you the world owes you a living if you've got ears to listen to what the war says to you. But if you've got a head that can be turned, that old glad hand can sure turn it around."

"Cobber" Rouh, as the Marines learned to call him ("Cobber" is Australia's equivalent of our "pal"), is a big, serious-minded, soft-talking man of 26 now, black-haired and with the black, shining eyes of his French ancestors. His own story of what made a hero out of him is practical and hardheaded, and it takes into account facts that the "nothing is too good" contingent back home is inclined enthusiastically to overlook.

The Hotel Linden, with its twenty-one rooms and bar-and-sandwich counter, seems to be the key to what made a hero out of Rouh. It sits stolidly on the edge of the obscure byway of Lindenwold and is a not exactly luxurious enterprise. Only with careful management and hard work did it earn a living for the Rouh family—a widowed mother and her four sons.

Carlton Rouh became boss at the age of 18. He wore an apron around the place, and the handy man's overalls, and the book-keeper's green eyeshade, and the manager's felt hat, and the owner's worried look when going down to the bank—and just generally wore the pants there. This went on for five habit-forming years. In this time the hotel formed in the youth what is formed in most owners of small businesses who keep above water—a habit of initiative and a habit of responsibility toward the job itself and toward the workers, if any, involved in it. It was this more than anything else that, carried to its ultimate conclusion, won for Rouh a soldier's ultimate award.

"A fellow looking into his own mind, trying to figure out *why* he did what he did in the war has got a big mystery on his hands all right," Rouh told me. "When I got into the Marines, they put me at the bottom—buck private. The corporals, the sergeants, and some of the big shots, too, they made it clear to me—many times in a nasty way—that my job from now on out was to worry about what lay between my shoelaces and hair comb, and all the rest is their worry. But I couldn't change my frame of mind. I worried about every problem that came up for the platoon, just like it was a business I was in back home, and worried about the solution for it. And if my solution was better than the squad leader's or platoon leader's, I'd find a way to let them know.

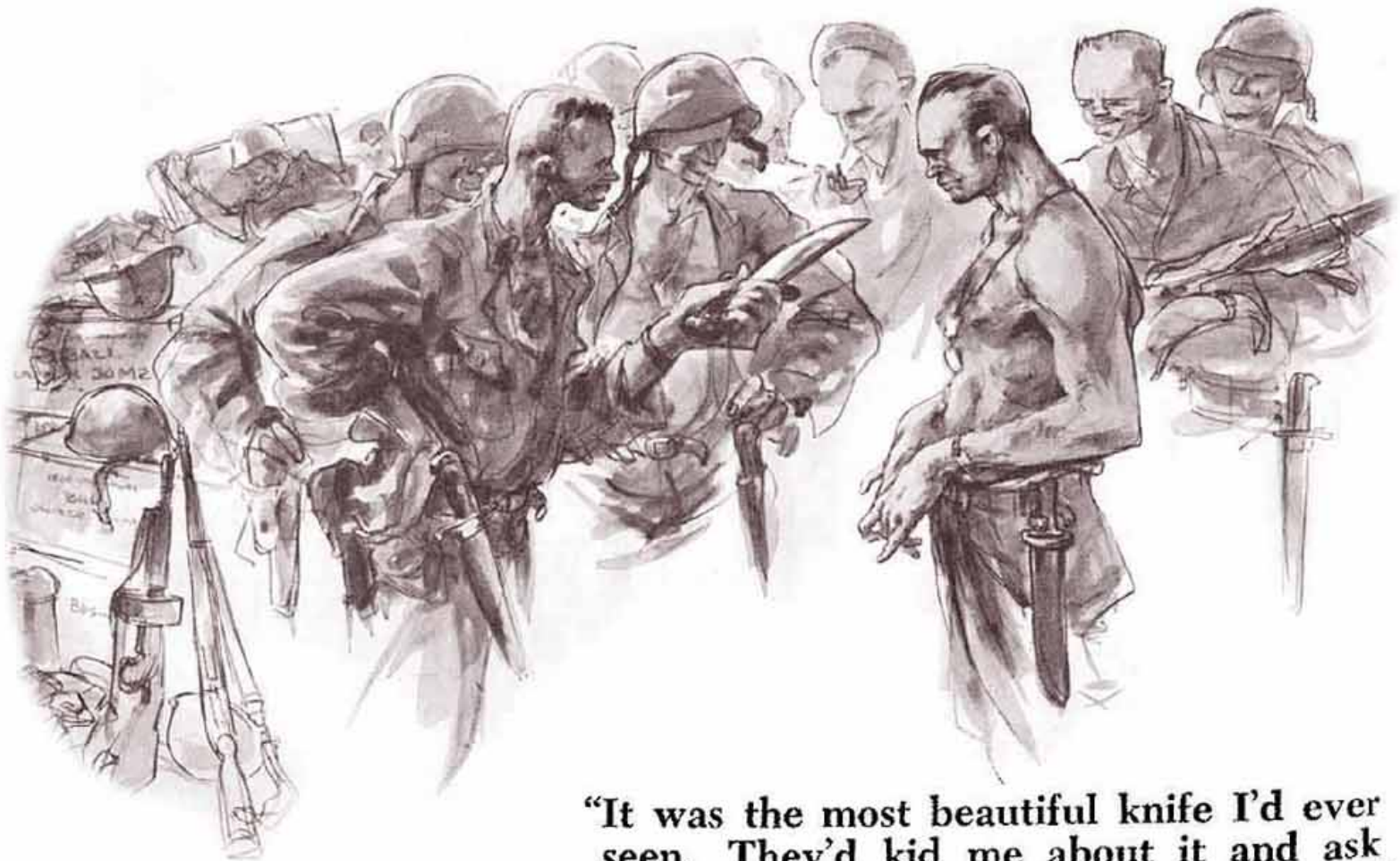
"Like I remember when it came time to hit the beach at Guadalcanal, the lieutenant was puzzled how to get the ammunition for the platoon ashore. 'Everybody,' he decided, 'pick up a case and walk ashore with it. They're not heavy.'

"'Look, Lieutenant, sir,' I said, 'if somebody starts shooting at me while I'm wading, how long is that case of bullets going to stay on my shoulder?'

"'We've got to get them ashore.'

"'Leave them in the boats,' I said. 'We can clear the beach with the ammunition in our belts. Then we can go back to the boats for the case loads.'

"The lieutenant was a Harvard man, I remember. 'A splendid notion,' he said.

Lieutenant Rouh

"It was the most beautiful knife I'd ever seen. They'd kid me about it and ask me was I carrying it just to scare myself"

"I look back on myself and I was a pretty funny sight, I guess. I couldn't shake it out of my head that the war was my business for the time being and if I made good at it I'd get what I wanted, which was to come home with as little time wasted out of my life as possible.

"The upshot of the whole thing was they made me a corporal, and then they gave me a commission on the field, jumping me from corporal to second lieutenant and giving me my own platoon."

The promotion did not result exclusively from the habits of thought and work formed in him by experiences running the Hotel Linden. A Silver Star came before it, and a Purple Heart.

The line from the Hotel Linden to the winning of a commission is straightforward and plain to follow, but the line from the hotel to the medals winds a little bit and starts far back.

"When I sailed for the Pacific," Rouh said, "my brother gave me a knife as a present. It was the most beautiful knife I have ever seen in my life, with a walnut handle on it like a piece of fine furniture. I carried it everywhere. I never used it on cans or coconuts or to chop trees or roots when digging foxholes the way the fellows used their knives, and they'd kid me about it and ask me was I carrying it just to scare myself.

"'Never mind,' I told them. 'When I want it, I'm going to want it bad, and then I'm going to have it.'

"The time to want it bad came when I volunteered to go in after some wounded. I knew the old Marine rule—'Never volunteer for nothing.' But I always had the idea that if I wasn't up to something I wasn't doing enough. Well, I was hanging around the command post doing nothing when I heard of these wounded and said I'd get them out.

"They gave me a patrol and we took off. The wounded were supposed to be where there were no Japs, but the Japs were there all right, firing a machine gun across the path we were on, and I motioned the patrol down and went on myself to have a look with a grenade.

"The Japs were making so much noise they couldn't have heard me coming if I was an elephant with a trombone in my nose. They were sweeping an area across the path with the one gun. You could make out the arc of fire by the leaves their bullets were chopping. I walked up to the edge of the arc and pulled the pin on my grenade, and then walked down along the edge of the arc to where the machine gun was.

Lieutenant Rouh

Too Close for Comfort

"I had got close enough to throw the grenade and was hitching to toss when I saw a Marine lying in the jungle there under the machine-gun bullets. He was drawing a bead on me with his rifle. I had to yell at him. I guess things were too hot there that moment for anybody to see straight or think out the facts. 'Don't shoot,' I yelled and he heard me and put down his gun, and the Japs heard me and swung their gun wide and eight bullets went through my pants leg in a crowd.

"Only one of the bullets went into me, but when I ended up my flopping I was behind a tree with nothing to shoot and the use of but one leg and the grenade still in my hand.

"It occurred to me I could still throw the grenade and maybe take a piece out of the gun crew, but I didn't feel like letting the Japs know I was still alive, so I did a kind of a cowardly thing. I put the pin back in the grenade and hung the grenade on my belt and held tight, out of business, out of the war.

"I sat there for four hours, something like that, before they could get me out of there. All the time I thought the Japs would send out a man to look for me and I kept wishing I had a bayonet. I didn't want a rifle, just a bayonet. I couldn't think of anything else, just: If I only had a bayonet! I gnawed my brains raw hoping for a bayonet, and I never once thought of the beautiful knife my brother had given me that was strapped right there to my side.

"When I got to the hospital that night, I recollected the knife for the first time and gave it away to a corpsman. I just didn't want it any more."

This expedition earned Rouh the Purple Heart. He won the Silver Star by carrying through successfully another volunteer mission to retrieve wounded—this one involving a journey by night to a jungle river line held by Japs.

The motives that prompted his actions still puzzle Rouh. For example, the Hotel Linden can be seen butting him steaming up to the Jap machine gun. But where was the Hotel Linden when he put the pin back into the grenade, and where was it when he suffered first an amnesia and then a revulsion for the beautiful knife his brother had given him? A well-known New York psychiatrist with whom I discussed the incident said, "Apparently this boy loves his brother so profoundly that he would rather die helpless than involve him in any way in the death."

"Well, I don't know," Rouh said. "Sometimes a good thing happens and you think the fellow did it because he's so used in civilian life to feeling responsible for the business he is in and for his own sort of fate that he can't shake off the habit of it. But I've seen no-goods do the same thing—get in there all of a sudden and pitch.

"The feeling that comes to you is: Well, it's your turn now to do something. That's the way it always came to me when it came and that's the way it came to everybody I ever talked to who felt it. You get this feeling that it's your turn and you move along with it—jump alone with a rifle into a gun emplacement, as I've seen happen, or go

Lieutenant Rouh

"I did a kind of cowardly thing. I put the pin back in the grenade and hung the grenade on my belt and hung tight, out of business, out of the war"

frontally against machine guns that have been bothering you or whatever it is. Then the people back home read about it in the newspapers and say 'For God sakes!' and wonder what kind of a guy that is when he is just the same guy he always was, only the feeling came into him that it was his turn.

"When I was finally made second lieutenant and got a platoon of my own, I had butterflies in my stomach. It wasn't the work I was afraid of, but just the idea of giving men jobs to do that might kill them. I guess that feeling of responsibility to the men was as much to blame as anything else for what happened on Peleliu Island.

"I had a heavy-mortar platoon going in there. We hit the beach D-Day, a minute after the first wave. Four Alligators took my platoon ashore. I stood on the top of one. It was one of those kind where the back drops out to let the men out. And the twenty men in there ran out and a Jap shell fell right on my boys while they were all clustered there together running out.

"The beach was really bad. It was really as bad as things could get and yet leave somebody to survive it. By three o'clock in the afternoon we had worked up to the edge of the airfield we were supposed to cross. It seemed to me, although it was none of my business, there wasn't time before darkness to throw the men across the airport and on to the ridges beyond where the Japs had their artillery.

"So I went up about 500 yards forward of where the mortars were, to our observation post, to see if the men there were where they had a chance to live out the night, and also to see about putting in another wire to the telephone they had. No, it wasn't only my men I was thinking about. I was thinking about the wire, too. We had only that light combat wire up there and I wanted a parallel line of heavy field wire in there as soon as possible. Because there was heavy shelling flapping our communications around.

"There was a Jap ditch at the edge of the airfield where the observation post was. At one end it tapered down to nothing, but at the other it was the entryway to a dugout and where it reached the mouth of the dugout it was seven or eight feet deep. The coral dug out of the ditch had been banked along the side and my men were lying against this, trying to spot the Jap guns in the ridges at the other side.

"That airfield didn't look to me to be a place for the men to spend a safe night with only a coral bank for protection, so I went down into the ditch to look over the dugout. It was a hard thing for me to do. I had made it a guiding rule of my life on all of those

Lieutenant Rouh

islands out there never to go into a Jap cave. Not even six months after the last Jap in it was presumed dead, and even the quartermaster boys had been in there for souvenirs. But I was the only one around that airfield I could order to do it. The others there under my command were busy spotting targets of opportunity for the mortars out back.

Digging in the Dark

"Before I had come up there, some infantry working along the edge of the airfield had squirted a flame thrower into the mouth of the dugout. There were some Jap dead in the ditch when I jumped into it and wisps of smoke were still coming out of the dugout. I slid along the side of the ditch to keep as far out of the line of fire of the dugout as possible. There were some shelves at the side of the entrance with a whisky bottle on them and some packages wrapped in cloth. I threw one of them up to Private Stillwell to give to a kid from Intelligence who was looking for souvenirs and then stepped deeper into the darkness and lifted my carbine to make sure the safety catch was off.

"Then, bang! There was this loud bang, and I thought it was my own gun going off by accident when another bang came right on top of the first one, and I had a feeling like a sledge hammer had come whamming to hit me in the gut. I doubled over. There was a great temptation to fall down, but I didn't give in to it. I held myself back from falling and turned doubled over and ran doubled over down to the ditch, to where it was low enough for me to jump out. My boys pulled me to where they were and I lay there for a minute while my mind came together again and my breath got easier and I could think how lucky I was.



"Look, Lieutenant, sir, if somebody starts shooting at me while I'm wading ashore, how long is that case of bullets going to stay on my shoulder?"

"The bullet had gone in just below the ribs. I remember on New Britain I lay out quite a few hours with a fellow who had been hit there and he hadn't seemed bad off at all, just lay smoking cigarettes until the litter bearers could get up to him. I thought then: If I'm not going to get it in the legs or arms, please let me get it there, just below the ribs.

"Well, I lay there thinking all those things and taking my belt off to put a pack on the hole in me when one of the fellows yelled 'Look out!'

"I got to my feet. I remember that. Then after that I can remember things only in patches with blind spaces in between."

According to the official records, as the three men clustered around Rouh to aid him in looking after his wound, a Jap crawled out of the dugout and tossed a grenade into

Lieutenant Rouh

their midst. One of the men cried a warning and Rouh made a violent effort and rose erect with outstretched arms and pushed the three men out of the way and then turned and (in the language of the citation, accompanying the Medal of Honor) "placed his own body between them and the grenade and took the full blast of the explosion himself."

The kid from Intelligence who was looking for souvenirs was so moved by Rouh's act that he voluntarily requested a transfer from his relatively safe job at headquarters to a mortar platoon.

"What went on in my mind that I can remember wasn't hero stuff at all," said Rouh. "I don't remember pushing those kids out of the way or turning back to the grenade. I don't even remember seeing the grenade. I remember 'Look out!' all right, and getting to my feet, but I don't remember turning, or anything I did after I got to my feet. I just remember getting up, and then my mind skips over things and I can remember being on the ground and rolling toward the bank where the grenade had been. Then I remember lying there and shooting going on and Pruden coming toward me shooting and stepping over me and straddling me, shooting into the ditch. There were fifteen Japs there, breaking out of the dugout.

"My whole side was torn off. That's the way it looked. I couldn't take my eyes off the hole where my side had been. 'Don't look at it,' Stillwell, I think, said, and I lay back against the coral bank. My mind was pretty clear by then. I saw Doc Crain just walking along there. 'There's the doc,' I said. 'Get that doc.' He gave me plasma.

"A shell fragment came along somewhere in that time and took a piece out of the back of my head. I don't remember that at all. My mind must not have been working at that moment. It's a funny thing how it blanked out at so many of the doing parts of the things I had to do or had to get done to me."

It's funny but understandable. In order to do what his sense of responsibility had compelled him to do, Rouh had had to take hold of the most deeply rooted instinct in man—the instinct of self-preservation—and throw it away. The blanking-out of portions of his mind was an aid to that ferocious purpose.

"I come home," Rouh said, "and I find the people thinking: All right, he was a hero, so what? I can't blame them. That's the way things are, and that way they add up to the best for everybody—even for me. In the old days when fellows fought in those tin suits you see in the museums, there was a pay-off for a war record like mine. They'd give me a castle and farm land around it so I could put serfs to work and then form them into a platoon to fight when the next war came around. Pretty nice. But hell, in the old days I wouldn't have had a chance to make a war record like mine. I'd have been one of those serfs.

"No, they don't pay off on a war record that way any more. The world is geared different. When the war came on December 7, 1941, it was a game where everybody in the country was dealt a hand and from then on

Lieutenant Rouh

out you play your hand. You take the fellow back home on plush saying the income tax is ruining him, destroying his incentive, and the fellow shaking up and down on his breaking bones in a foxhole somewhere—they're both playing the cards they drew.

Fate Plays a Hand

"The fellows overseas drew the bad cards. There's no looking around that one. That's a fact. The way I figure, a man spends twenty years of his life buying a house and the things that go with it for his family. A man careful with his money, the way I am, if I had had the break of drawing a defense job, I'd have had a house and icebox and the automobile pretty near paid off by the time the war was over and be that much up on life—hell, a fellow can always scratch up food for his family. This way, with the cards I drew, I wind up with empty pockets and a patched-up hole where my side used to be, getting on toward thirty years old, and still twenty years behind the game.

"So what? That's the way things are, and if you take them that way you don't get hurt. There's no direct pay-off on a war record, but there are plenty of indirect pay-offs. The country is grateful the best it can be, the way it is geared. A fellow with a war record he has a right to be proud of can find it a useful thing to have the rest of his life. The other veterans in the town respect him if he proves the same kind of fellow in peace as in war. The government gives him a little the best of it in their dealings.

"People generally respect him if he proves to be the same kind of civilian as soldier. I've seen it right here in Lindenwold, fellows who made a good thing out of being prominent in the American Legion, fellows who get the edge in a deal when you don't know anything about them, except they seem to be doing all right, and they won medals in the war twenty-five years ago.

"No, you tell me twenty years from now, 'You were a hero—so what?' and I think I'll be able to answer, 'Brother, so plenty!' The whole thing is to play the cards the way they fell and not cry over them and take the country the way it is geared, and not cry over that either, and just take up where you left off and get going."

THE END