

Toy Soldiers, Will You Follow?

By: Angela Power

I gazed out over the dank grey sky filling my head with idle thoughts before the enemy approached. I miss the days when you actually saw a sunset in the sky, the beautiful red and orange swirls gravitating around a bright yellow sphere. Now all you get is the black sky of night gradually going to the bluish grey sky of day; all the beauty being hidden by the dust and artillery smoke this war has created. It has been a while since we were ordered into our positions to wait for the attack to come. I started to pray, without reason, that they weren't going to show up at all. I've been hoping this since I first found out that the enemy was planning an attack on us. They had planned something they called 'The Great Push' in which they surprise attack us with hundreds of their men. Too bad it's not a surprise to us. They were essentially just running out here to be slaughtered. It made me sick to think of it and I pray that they just change their minds and go home.

Then it started. The first hundred of them galloped over the hills into their death. They started dropping one by one and I realised just how bad it was for our opponents, not even one quarter of these men were going to survive. All these brave, young soldiers are sacrificing their lives in vain, and our side is to blame. I was so wrapped up in my thoughts that I hadn't even fired a shot yet.

"Soldier!" The Sergeant yelled, "Stop watching and start firing!"

With that I lifted my gun and aimed at the first person I saw across the barren ground we call 'No Man's Land'. He was a young man, probably in his early 20's, and I found myself wondering what his life was like. What did he have to go home to? A wife? A family? Was he thinking about how he was going to make his daughter's world a better place by being in this war? I bet he has a son at home who he still needs to teach to play catch or had an argument with a friend that he wishes he resolved before leaving. I bet he has a life... just like me.

BANG! A bullet zipped by my head just barely missing me. *Pull yourself together soldier*, I mentally disciplined myself, *Stop thinking of them as people and start thinking of them as evil beings who are trying to take away your chance at having the perfect race*. The only problem with this kind of motivation is that I don't have these beliefs anymore. When I first became a Nazi it was because I wanted Germans to become a more dominant race, not the best intentions I know, but still much better then what being a Nazi had become. All the terrible things I've seen happen to innocent people just because they were different is too horrific to think about. It's not even just the outsiders that undergo these unfair treatments either. They'd torture one of their own if it meant gaining power and control. They treat us like we're a bunch of toy soldiers that they can set up, order around, and knock down as they please; and really, they

can. The Nazi generals hold all the power and we are just here to do what is expected of us until we are replaced, like an old used toy.

Even though I don't agree with the Nazi's antics I can't just get up and leave, it's either you're in it or you're dead. I have to stay in this to protect my life and my family's life; I won't let them down just because I felt pity for the men I'm killing and anger at those who control me. With my resolve strengthened I raised my gun again and found my next target. Without even looking at his face I shot him down. Then another, and another, and another, each without pausing to see the person behind the gear.

I tired quickly. Not from the weight of the gun, but the weight of the crime I was willingly committing. Even though I wasn't thinking of the people directly, killing someone was still emotionally draining. The thought that you are taking someone's fate into your own hand can be terrifying and empowering all at the same time, that mix of emotion can have varying effects on people. It can break someone to the very core so that they're only a shell of the person they once were. Following orders obediently while keeping their minds vacant, protecting the little bit of sanity that they have left. It can also make people power hungry, seeing how easy it is to control people's lives. That's probably how this whole mess got out of control, a bunch of power hungry people that won't stop till they have everything.

"Lieutenant Begnt!" Someone called from behind me. I turned around to see Private August. "I'm here to relieve you from sniper duty," he said.

Relieved, I stepped down from my post and waited for him to climb up before taking my leave.

I went back to where the rest of my platoon was, sitting on the muddy ground in a little alcove. There are only seven of us in my platoon altogether, but I barely know any of their names, which is a pretty sad thing since I'm supposed to be their leader. We don't talk unless a command is being given, so it gets pretty lonely sometimes.

I settle down in my corner and I'm left alone with my thoughts. This generally isn't a good thing. Lately my thoughts have been spiraling out of control, constantly thinking about life and death and the guilt that lives inside me for what I'm a part of. I think of where I am right now, in these trenches, risking my life for something I don't even believe in. I listen to the radio sometimes and I hear how they talk about us Nazis. Calling us cold blooded killers, animals at best, that's all we are to the world. That's all I am. All these sacrifices I'm making - basically throwing away my right to be a human being, for what? An artificial cause? A chance at a 'better life'? To be ordered around like a toy soldier, like I'm not a person at all? For the safety of my family? I stop. That's the one that gets me every time, my family. Here I am practically convincing myself to get out of the war and deal with the penalty when it's not just my life that would be affected by this decision. My wife and my daughter would be thrown under the bus as soon as I turned my back on this army. I know how devastated they'd be if they found out I was

killed in the war, but it's not nearly as bad as if they found out I was killed for fleeing. They would be disgusted with me and they'd be taken into custody. I'd never let that happen to the ones I love most.

These thoughts were muddling my mind, filling me with rage and despair for what I have become. *I have to clear my head before I do something I'll regret*, I think to myself as I get up and go for a walk, wanting some fresh air. Not like I'll be finding fresh air anytime soon with all the dust and gunpowder swirling around, but anything is better than that dingy claustrophobic alcove I was in before.

The sky was brighter now, but I wouldn't call it sunny. It's more like the sun's rays were being entrapped behind the demonic clouds, trying to break out of their grasp. The muddy trench water sloshed around my boots as I walked along the path, and when other footsteps could be heard with mine I hid along the trench walls. I was breaking the law by being out here, of course, and the last thing I wanted was to be spotted and punished. In my opinion it was an unreasonable law to begin with. They say it's to make sure no one interferes with the operation, but no one would dare do that for they'd be a dead man for even having such a thought.

I found myself passing by rows and rows of gunmen shooting automatically like machines, without care, without question, without any drive except the hundreds of orders they've been given. *They're the enemy. Kill them. We are the perfect race. Kill them. All others must be destroyed to make a better world. Kill them. They are evil. Kill them. Kill them! KILL THEM!* Over and over again until you don't know if they are your thoughts or theirs, and all you can feel is the bloodlust that drives you into obeying.

Looking at all of them lined up like toy soldiers, doing exactly what they're told, brought a song that my daughter used to sing to mind. *"Another day in the assembly line. Everybody better march in time. 'cause the factory don't care why, you've been saying could've should've would've. Toy soldiers will you follow?"* (No Place like Home - Marianas Trench). She never understood the meaning of these lyrics, never had to experience the truth in them, but I see it right here in front of me and feel it inside me. Everyone just going through the motions of the war: wake up, shoot, kill, sleep, repeat, all because that's what we're told to do. Few of us actually want to be here, killing for this cause, including me. I'm always thinking of all the things I could've, should've, and would've done with my life; I was going to be someone more than a killing machine. Unfortunately for me I don't get much choice in the matter. I'm just a toy soldier that the higher ups get to play with. I follow the orders given no matter the consequences.

I walk by the spot in which I was stationed earlier just in time to see a bullet rip through Private August's head. Frozen in spot I watch as the blood leaks from his face onto the ground, quickly making a gory, reddish brown puddle as his blood mixes with the mud. I don't even have time to feel sorry for him when two men come and drag away his lifeless body like he was just a

sack of potatoes. To them he's just another death, another mess to clean up before returning back to their happy lives.

"You there!" one of them yells at me, "Take over his position." And so there I went. Back to following the orders to be a senseless murderer. Doing what I'm told and standing in line with the rest of them, waiting to see whose life I ruin next.

I climb up and look across 'No Man's Land' seeing the tragedy that had happened here. Barely any soldiers were left alive by now, just a few stragglers trying desperately to crawl back to safety, which for most of them was never going to come. We were shooting at them like these broken, hopeless souls were just as dangerous as when they first came running towards us. No one felt pity, no one felt compassion, they all just followed orders like toy soldiers. "*Toy soldiers will you follow?*" The song repeated in my head again, but I ignored it and took my stance. Lifting my gun into my shoulder I heard a small commotion over the dying sounds of gunshot.

"Now!" Someone yelled. "Come on, if you're to be a bloody officer!" With that someone emerged from a crater in the ground and ran towards me with his gun raised screaming, "Godforsaken swine!"

I fired a shot, like I had been told, and the man crumpled onto the ground in a pitiful heap. The guilt raked through my body tenfold as I saw his friend run out of the hole after him to help. My body trembled so hard that I couldn't even lift my gun to shoot his friend like I should have; I just stood there watching as he dragged the man back to safety. Not that I had any desire to shoot anymore. I felt disgusted to even hold this killing machine in my hands. I dropped the gun to the ground as rage built inside me.

I was done. Done killing innocent people. Done taking orders. Done being punished for being anything less than perfect. Done being a Nazi. Done being a murderer. Done being a father who can't even be home to watch his little girl grow up. Done with life.

Quickly I thought in my head how this decision would affect my family. Sure they'd be devastated, but I was never home anyway so my absence wouldn't make much difference. If anything, this will benefit them since they will get a sum of money and they can finally stop worrying about whether their father will come home or not, because he won't.

I will not be a part of these games any longer. *Toy soldiers will you follow?* That phrase ran through my mind again and again. *Toy soldiers will you follow?* The only difference now is that I finally have an answer for it. No, I won't follow. I will not be one of their toy soldiers anymore.

With that I picked the gun back up, raised it to my own head, and killed for the last time.