

A True Hero

*These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhopd serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.*

Rupert Brooke
The War Sonnets

Red Hawk appeared to Robbie on the next full moon.

"Would you like to go anywhere in particular, Robbie?"

"Since I heard Mr. Turnbull say that Jack had died in World War II, I started to wonder what happened."

"Well, let's go take a look."

Red Hawk took Robbie to Station 143, North Pickenham, England on October 18, 1944 to the 44th Bomb Group Ready Room.

"Attention on deck!" called First Lieutenant Michael Taylor, as Lieutenant Colonel Jack Turnbull entered the ready room.

Turnbull began his briefing quickly, "Seats, gentlemen. This morning our mission is to Leverkusen, Germany, approximately ten miles northeast of Cologne, to attack a chemical works located there. We will have a total of thirty-one B-24's in our group. We will conduct this mission

exactly as we have for the last twelve sorties. Our fighter support will lead us in at exactly 1450. That will provide us five minutes over the target, just enough time to drop our payloads before we expect to encounter resistance. However, be prepared for opposition during the entire sortie. I say again, be prepared for opposition. I'll fly with Lieutenant Taylor in the lead aircraft of the 67th Squadron. Major McLaughlin, a weather update..."

"Yes, sir. The weather is expected to be clear over the target area. Clouds will be building from the west during our mission, and we may encounter them on the return flight."

"Very well," Turnbull took charge again, "Any questions?"

"Very well. Chaplain."

Robbie looked on as the chaplain led the group in prayer.

"Lord, give our men the strength, courage, confidence, and skill to execute this mission and return safely. In your name, we pray...Amen."

"Amen," was offered clearly but quietly by all the airmen.

Lieutenant Taylor caught up to Turnbull on the way out of the ready room. "Colonel, will you be

flying in the co-pilot's seat? I'll make the arrangements."

"No, lieutenant, I generally don't take that seat. I feel it's more important for you, as the commander of the aircraft, to remain in the Command Pilot seat. I won't disrupt the integrity of your crew and their training. Is that satisfactory?"

"Yes, sir, just wanted to check first. Some Command Pilots insist on taking that seat."

"I understand. I don't. I'll sit behind your co-pilot."

"Yes, sir, Colonel. My crew will be ready in five minutes."

Red Hawk then took Robbie into the aircraft during its flight. Robbie immediately noticed the noisy, cold, and cramped quarters. He watched in awe as the men conducted their flight.

Just a few miles from their target, Technical Sergeant Jerome Anderson startled Robbie, calling across the plane's intercom, "Fire! We have a fire in the bomb bay!"

Robbie felt his heart go directly into his throat and looked at Red Hawk.

"Do you want to leave, Robbie?"

"I'm O.K."

The bombardier, 1st Lieutenant Randall Rollins, requested and received permission to jettison his payload, taking the fire with it.

"Doors open! Bombs away! Fire is out! Door closed and locked!" Rollins reported to Taylor.

"Roger. Any idea how it started?"

"Not yet," Rollins reported as he strained his eyes through the heavy cloud cover to see where the bombs may have landed and with what effect. "We'll take a look."

Jack Turnbull sat stoically behind the co-pilot as the crew handled the emergency. By the book, Jack thought to himself. Good job. Continue on. Stay focused, lieutenant. Stay focused.

Taylor continued to lead the formation to the target area. All planes dropped their bomb load as scheduled, and the formation met no resistance. Well, a successful mission so far, Jack thought, despite the fire onboard his adopted plane. Don't know about losses—no bombing results—tough clouds. Wish I could get some idea. Well, it's not the first time we couldn't tell how we did. Continue on. Stay focused.

Just a few minutes later, Jack saw the storm clouds building quickly before his formation. Just after he noticed it, Taylor reported it to him.

“Colonel, looks like some bad weather ahead. At least 3-4,000 feet above us and it doesn’t look like we can get around it, either.”

Jack glanced quickly at the plane’s altimeter, which read 24,000 feet. He knew instantly that there would be no going over the storm. “Clouds will be building—my butt!” he thought. The plane simply could not get that high that fast.

“Correct, lieutenant. Looks like we’ll just have to split the formation and go through. We’ve done this many times before. Nice and easy,” Jack offered calmly as a confidence-builder for the young New Yorker as they entered the clouds and visibility went to near-zero. Master yourself, Jack thought to himself as he prepared to help guide the young pilot through the challenge.

Robbie was frozen in fear as he watched the clouds swallow the aircraft and felt the turbulence shake every bit of the plane. Taylor and his crew calmly handled the turbulence and continued flying by their instruments, knowing that the integrity of the formation depended on his smoothness and abilities. Suddenly the plane banked sharply to the left, perhaps struck by another bomber. The pilot

struggled to regain stability of the craft. At this point, Jack instructed, "Be strong, lieutenant. Center the needle. Center the needle!"

Red Hawk took Robbie from the plane at that point seconds before the plane plummeted to the ground and ended the lives of too many heroes.

"Are you doing O.K., Robbie?" Red Hawk asked as he saw how shaken the boy was.

"What happened to the plane!?"

"This is going to be hard to watch...."

"I can handle it. I need to know."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

"O.K., let's go to Baltimore."

Robbie and Red Hawk next appeared at the home of Jack's mother, Elizabeth "Mum" Turnbull, 2111 Sulgrave Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland on Election Day, November 7, 1944.

Mum Turnbull had risen from her breakfast table at 9 a.m. and changed into a dress in order to perform her citizen's duty to vote in the general election. She proudly clipped on her set of pilot's wings, a gift from Jack upon his earning his

qualification. While it was a task she performed every day—on every sweater, blouse, dress, jacket (and she would eventually be buried with)—today she did so with a great deal of melancholy. She had been notified that Jack had been reported missing two weeks earlier and hadn't received any more recent news. No news, in this case, she thought, was bad news. With each passing day she had a greater feeling of foreboding.

She walked to the front closet to get her coat when the doorbell startled her. She looked at her sister May, her housemate since her husband's passing. She briefly hoped the visitor might be a neighbor coming to walk her to the polling station. That hope lasted but a second, when a chill ran through her body. She knew before she opened the door. She looked at May and said, "This is it."

She took a deep breath and opened the door slowly. Her breath left her lungs, and she briefly felt faint. Before her stood an army officer and a chaplain, certain to bear the news she feared most.

"Mrs. Turnbull?" the officer asked delicately. Mum offered an acknowledgment with a barely perceptible nod.

"Mrs. Turnbull, I am Colonel Finney. This is Reverend Sheedy. May we come in?"

Still not speaking, Mum opened the door further, allowing the men to enter. She walked to her kitchen table and gestured for the men to sit. They waited for her and May to do so first.

Finney began, "Mrs. Turnbull, it is with great regret that I must inform you that your son, Lieutenant Colonel John I. 'Jack' Turnbull has been killed in action over a small town called Petegem-aan-de-Leie/Deinze, Belgium, about nine miles southwest of Ghent and near the German border."

Mum did not move or respond. Her face betrayed the slightest hint that she wanted to know how and why, so the chaplain continued softly, "Mrs. Turnbull, your son was assigned as Command Pilot for a mission over Leverkusen, Germany. His group made a successful run over the site, but encountered a severe thunderstorm on their return to base. It appears that the aircraft that Jack was in was struck by another in its group, causing both to crash."

Mum's eyes asked for just a little more information.

Sheedy continued, "Nuns from nearby Convent Gesticht van Den H. Joseph responded to the accident, treating two conscious survivors, Staff Sergeants George Sims and Lawrence Lindsay, who had miraculously been able to parachute out of

Jack's plane. All the others on board the planes, twelve in all, were killed in the crash except for Jack. The nuns found him breathing but unconscious. They were able to transport Jack to their convent and treat him while they awaited proper medical assistance. Unfortunately, Lieutenant Colonel Turnbull died within 48 hours, having regaining only brief periods of consciousness. Our nation mourns his death as he was a fine officer and a loving son. "

Mum continued to sit silently, this time her eyes dropping and blinking back her tears.

The colonel, attending now to the unpleasant business concerning the disposition of the body, continued, "Mrs. Turnbull, your son's body has been interred at Henri Chappelle Cemetery, Belgium. He and his comrades were briefly buried in the World War I American Cemetery at Flanders Field, until we could arrange for a proper military burial at Chappelle Cemetery. Jack was buried with full military honors."

The colonel slid a folder to the middle of the table with all of the pertinent information on the specifics of Jack's burial. He continued, "Mrs. Turnbull, the United States of America can never know your grief and can never compensate you for this loss. Perhaps it would be of some comfort for

you to know that I trained with Jack here in the Maryland Air Corps, and I have never known a finer pilot or a finer person. I share your tremendous loss."

Mum continued to sit in silence for several more minutes, still blinking back tears. "Thank you," she finally whispered.

"Is there anything that we may do for you, Mrs. Turnbull?" offered the chaplain.

"No. No, thank you," Mum whispered again as she stood and escorted the men to her door. As she opened the door, she turned to her sister.

"Are you ready, May?" Mum asked in regard to their original plan to cast their votes, "Let's go."

Robbie was terribly shaken by those two scenes but persisted in his questions to Red Hawk.

"Mr. Lewis said that the Turnbull Award was named in honor of Jack Turnbull. Can you tell me about that?"

"Well, I can show you some of that if you would like to see it. It's not nearly as hard to watch as what you just saw."

“Sure,” Robbie said, trying to be enthusiastic, but he had clearly lost some of his optimism in the last few minutes.

Red Hawk took Robbie to Homewood Field, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland on June 7, 1946.

Midshipman Second Class Stewart McLean stood along the sideline of the fabled field, next to his attack mate from the U.S. Naval Academy, freshman phenom J.H.L. “Lee” Chambers. Four other midshipman stood next to Chambers and their coach, William H. “Dinty” Moore, who stood like a proud father next to them all. It was half-time of the 1946 North-South College All-Star game, the annual showcase of the best collegiate lacrosse talent in the country. On this special night Moore had been selected to be the south team’s coach. Both teams were lined up on their respective sidelines for a solemn ceremony. A crowd of some 3,500 spectators stood silent as Mum Turnbull was escorted to the center of the field by her eldest son, Doug. The crowd and the All-Stars were well aware of the significance of Mrs. Turnbull’s presence. They knew that this was to be a tribute to Jack.

The public address announcer began, “Ladies and gentlemen, today we are honored to have Mrs. Elizabeth ‘Mum’ Turnbull, escorted by

her son, Doug, Hopkins's great four-time first-team All-America, here to present a special award in honor of her son Jack, who perished in service to his country almost two years ago. The Mount Washington Lacrosse Club, Jack's former club team and, as you well know, the preeminent team in the country, has endeavored to award a trophy in Jack's honor and memory to the outstanding attackman in the country who 'best emulated the example of Jack Turnbull in good sportsmanship, fair play, field leadership, ability to both feed and score, and who is able to aide the defense.'"

The midshipmen stood at attention as Mrs. Turnbull arrived at midfield. McLean thought of his plebe teammate, Lee Chambers, and what a phenomenal player he had been all season, the uncharacteristic poise, and the thirty-five goals, for a freshman. McLean glanced over toward the North sideline and saw Alfred "Shorty" Hausmann, the senior first-team All-America In-home from Army. Surely one of those two players will be honored. McLean then thought of Jack Turnbull, whom his father had known through the Maryland Army Air Corps. He remembered seeing Jack play when he was a boy. What a great tragedy, what a terrible loss.

The public address announcer continued, "Mrs. Turnbull would like to present the handsome

cup which Doug is holding to the inaugural recipient of the Lieutenant Colonel John Iglehart Turnbull Memorial Award..."

McLean stood poised to applaud Chambers or Haussmann.

"Midshipman Second Class Stewart McLean, United States Naval Academy."

Dazed by the announcement, McLean looked to his left at Chambers who offered him a smile and a nod to proceed to the center of the field. McLean slowly left his post on the sideline and began to make his way to midfield to greet Mrs. Turnbull. He stood at attention in front of her, his chin and lips quivering, vainly attempting to hold back his tears. Mrs. Turnbull greeted him with her characteristic warm smile, extending her hand. McLean noticed the pilot's wings clipped onto the lapel of Mrs. Turnbull's dress and immediately understood their meaning. He grasped her hand in return.

"Congratulations, Stewart, you have been a credit to this great game. Thank you for being the first player to honor Jack. We could not have wished for a more appropriate choice," she said with impeccable grace and dignity.

While valiantly attempting to maintain his military bearing McLean surrendered to his tears.

Doug Turnbull shook his hand and presented him the beautiful cup, with his name engraved upon it. McLean was oblivious to the cheers of the crowd, who were clearly in agreement with the choice. A military man seemed only appropriate.

Still stunned and overwhelmed, McLean was only able to reply, "This will forever be the greatest moment of my life, ma'am. I will cherish this as long as I live."

McLean returned to the sideline to the hugs and handshakes of his teammates and coaches. Most notably, Lee Chambers, who would be honored with the same Award three years later, hugged him warmly. McLean had eased Chambers's plebe year at the Naval Academy and had graciously deferred, and even catered, to Chambers's immense talent, when less-secure upper-classmen would have attempted to keep the brash, young colt in his place. Dinty Moore then embraced McLean, who said, "Coach, I cannot believe that I deserve this award. They must have made a mistake."

Moore looked straight into McLean's now-swollen eyes, and said, "Don't ever think that you don't deserve this Award. Jack Turnbull was a great player and great man, and so are you. You have just placed your own stamp on the history of this game"

and set the standard for all future recipients. Thanks for allowing me to be a part of it."

McLean's parents were overcome with joy and humility in the stands. His mother saw his father shed a tear for the first time since she'd met him thirty-seven years before. His father made his way to the chain-link fence behind the players' bench to relieve his son of the Trophy and give him an abbreviated hug. McLean sat down on the bench slumped over to cover his face with his hands. His teammates, particularly his fellow midshipmen, strolled by one or two at a time to pat his shoulder. For several minutes McLean did not move. Then he suddenly shook off his emotions, put on his helmet, and returned to the sideline.

Robbie continued to watch in amazement as the South team erased a 9-2 deficit at the half and executed a superhuman rally to tie the game at eleven, as Chambers scored with less than a minute left to play. After three extra periods, the teams were knotted at fourteen. Chambers finished the game with a record seven goals.

Robbie stared at Red Hawk in disbelief at all he had seen during the visit.

"That's a little bit about Jack Turnbull, but there's a lot more. He was a truly special person,"

Red Hawk paused when he saw how worn Robbie had become, "but we'll save that for another time."

Robbie woke from this visit completely exhausted. This trip had been much more emotional than the others had been. His parents saw the fatigue in his eyes when he conveyed the essence of the dream.