



MARK NUTTER

THE BATTLEFIELD MASSEUR

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By Mark Nutter

Mister President. Madame First Lady. Distinguished members of the military. Fellow healers. Ladies and gentlemen. Today I am humbled. To think that I, Corporal Lester Mott, should be the first recipient of the President's Purple Medallion for Distinguished Service in the Field of Therapeutic Massage—well, words fail me. Still, I'd like to explain how I ended up at this podium today.

I was born Lester Aloysius Mott in Joplin, Missouri, in 1917. My earliest memories were of cows on our family ranch. I was observant of muscular tension between the shoulder blades of the livestock. I noticed how, the more relaxed a cow was, the better it tasted as sirloin or brisket. I resolved to use my hands to relax these animals for the benefit of all.

At that time, there was no formal course of study in livestock massage. So I taught myself through trial and error. I invented tools to make my treatments more effective. I designed a table the cows could recline on, a heated table powered by a small kerosene engine. I wrote tranquilizing music for pan pipes, recorded it on 78 disks, and played it on a phonograph powered by the same kerosene engine. Since this was a new kind of music, I called it "New Age," until I could think of a better name.

I practiced many hours a day. If I couldn't get a cow, I'd work on a family member or an old mattress. My skills grew. Word spread throughout Missouri. Our cows had achieved a level of contentment and deliciousness never dreamed possible.

Then the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Like all young men my age, I was eager to serve my country. However, my attempts to enlist were stymied because, due to years of practicing massage, my index finger had become too muscular to fit in a rifle trigger guard. I remained at home with the women and the cattle.

Finally, in 1944, as the war effort dragged on, I was conscripted into the army, on the condition I massage my fellow recruits as well as cows. I happily agreed.

I was deployed to Europe. The Battle of the Bulge.

My squad parachuted into Belgium. To a man, my fellow soldiers were grateful for the massages I gave them during our descent, enabling them to land and roll on the ground, loose and injury-free.

We landed in an area of fierce fighting. The guys who were already there were so tense, their shoulders touched the edges of their helmets.

Before we could enter the battle, we were ordered to snap to attention. Who should approach but Old Blood 'n' Guts himself, General George S. Patton. He stopped when he saw me, heated table and portable phonograph at my side.

“What the hell are you supposed to be?” he snarled.

“I’m the battlefield masseur, General.”

“Is that some kind of French crap?”

“No, sir. It’s therapeutic.”

Patton snorted.

“You’re a pansy. You don’t belong on the front next to these brave boys, with your pansy table and your pansy music. Stay behind the lines.”

I was crushed. Was this what I had trained for? To wait while my friends charged into battle with tight musculature? I think not.

Direct order or not, I was going to do my duty. My country needed me.

I strode into the fray, confident my heated table would be much in demand on the snowy battlefield.

At first, our troops were so widely spaced, there was little to be done. I did notice a severed arm in the snow. I massaged it until the fist relaxed.

Before long, a soldier emerged from the white landscape and staggered up to me. He pointed hopefully to my table.

“Massage?” he said.

“Lie down,” told him. “You can leave your uniform on.”

He climbed on the table and lay on his back, while I switched on the kerosene heater and rubbed apricot oil on my palms.

“Roll over on your stomach.”

The soldier sat up. “I prefer a female therapist,” he said.

“There are no female therapists available.”

He sat up. “What’s the point of a massage if it’s not from a female therapist?”

I crossed my arms and frowned.

“I know what you want,” I said. “You want a happy ending.”

“So? What’s wrong with that? I’ve been fighting this hellish war for two years. I can’t remember the last time I enjoyed the touch of a woman—“

A bazooka shell tore through the air and blew his head completely off.

If he’d kept his head down and let me work on his longissimus capitus, he’d be alive today.

I wiped the blood off my table and pressed on.

Another soldier tramped up to me.

“Massage?” he said.

“No happy ending.”

“I just want a massage.”

“The enemy is advancing fast,” I told him. “I recommend a sixty-minute massage, instead of my usual ninety.”

“Sounds great,” he said, lying down on the table.

I applied gentle pressure to his spine. “Any trouble spots?” I asked.

“Just this hunk of shrapnel in my head.”

“Okay. Take deep breaths. Try to relax. I’ll use lavender-scented oil.” I gestured to the carnage that surrounded us. “The oil should cover up the stench of burning flesh.”

It felt good to finally be doing what I was put on this earth to do—working tension out of tired muscles.

At the end of the hour, the soldier sat up, a new man.

“I feel great,” he said, smiling.

“Drink plenty of water,” I said. “And get that head wound attended to.”

Thanks to positive word of mouth from the soldier with shrapnel in his head, I treated another seven soldiers.

I had made a small difference. But it wasn’t enough. The Germans continued to advance. I cut my hour-long sessions down to thirty minutes, then ten minutes, then a quick thirty seconds of acupressure on the little space between the thumb and index finger.

I needed to do more. I needed to be bold. Hell, I had already disobeyed a direct order from General Patton. What did I have to lose by taking it farther?

While my guys were retreating, I began advancing.

I saw a German soldier lying in the snow. The back of his head had been blown off. Poor bastard, I thought. Reiki healing won't do him any good now. A daring plan hatched in my brain.

Dragging the dead German behind the cover of some pine trees, I removed his uniform and put it on. Perfect fit.

In my disguise, I would be free to enter German territory. I would offer my services as a masseur. I would massage the Germans, but badly. I would use oil that smelled like beer farts. I would attack the wrong pressure points on their feet and cause internal organs to bleed. If I got a German officer on my table, I would start on the back of his neck, stroking and kneading, progressing to choking and throttling. By the time he realized this was not part of the treatment, he would be dead.

Maybe, if I were very lucky, I'd get Goebbels or Goering or even the Fuhrer himself on my table, taking a break from inspecting the troops. I'd say, "Your arm must be tired from doing all those salutes. Here, let me work out the tension." Then SNAP—I'd pop his arm out of the socket. "Haha. How will you do your famous 'seig heil' now, you Nazi bastard?" I will remember to yank off his other arm too.

"Drop the phonograph, you stinking Kraut!"

It was one of my own guys. I guess the German uniform fit a little too well.

The good news was, my guys had stopped retreating and were advancing. (The fact my German uniform fit well might also be considered good news, but not in this context.)

The bad news? I was about to be shot as an enemy soldier.

"Wait. I'm on your side. I'm Corporal Lester Mott, the masseur."

“Maybe you’re a Kraut spy, posing as Lester Mott. That’d be just like a Kraut. Get us on a table so you can do Kraut experiments on us.”

“I swear, I’m Lester Mott. Hey, I know you!” I said. “Your name’s O’Malley. I gave you a thirty-minute session a hundred yards south of here. I worked out a knot in your lower back.”

O’Malley lowered his rifle. “I feel better. Now I don’t get stabbing pains when I crawl on my belly. Maybe you really are Mott.”

I exhaled and nodded.

O’Malley raised his rifle again. “And maybe you put on a Kraut uniform so you could defect to the other side. Maybe you’re a traitor.”

“No, I—“

“Move it!” he snapped. “Leave the table.”

I was amazed at how roughly I was treated by my own men. Doubtless, my ‘no happy ending’ rule had come back to haunt me.

I was taken to an abandoned farm and kept in a barn serving as a military prison. I was so depressed, all I could do was lie in the hay in a fetal position, unable even to provide massages for the tense Belgian cows surrounding me.

One night, on the eve of my being sent home to be court-martialed, the doors of the barn were thrown open. Four military policemen stormed in and pulled me to my feet.

“You’re needed,” was all they said.

They took me to an improvised military hospital, ironically on the site of a bombed-out civilian hospital. There, amid dozens of cots occupied by wounded soldiers, was General George S. Patton. He lie on his left side. His face was a grimace of pain. His right arm was bent and twisted like a child’s pastel novelty straw.

Patton managed to growl, “Jesus, it’s the pansy masseur.”

“How did this happen, General?”

“I’m not sure. I drew my arm back to slap a soldier who said he was too nervous to go into battle. Suddenly my arm got knotted up—OW! DAMN!”

“Had you done anything else with the arm?”

“Just slapped another dozen soldiers.”

“Breathe deeply. Try to relax.”

I went to work on the General. I prodded. I poked. I kneaded. After an hour, his arm began to unwind.

“Oh, you pansy bastard. Oh, that’s good.”

Patton sat up. He actually smiled. He walked along the row of cots. The wounded soldiers smiled back at him. He slapped them, pain-free.

Then he slapped me. A slap of gratitude.

Later, we won the war.

And so it is with deep humility that I accept the President’s Purple Medallion for Distinguished Service in the Field of Therapeutic Massage. Not just for me, but for General Patton. For our brave relaxed fighting boys. For the cows. Thank you.

