The Ardennes: Two Vignettes

by David Ackley

In the Ardennes for the first time you saw the damage from trees exploded under barrage when you picked wooden shrapnel out of flesh with a pair of tweezers, like pulling quills out of a puppy's nose-- as if the trees, always friendly in a past which threaded through maples turning red in the fall, had been conscripted against you. It was said the Germans loved their forests. At the start, the cover of the forest had let them outflank the French and their Maginot line; now it was a weapon of desperation. The splinters you picked out were red.

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In the Ardennes, two G.I.'s came amiably off a tailgate, both bandaged around the eyes, the ¾ ton otherwise loaded with gut wounds, shredded legs, etc. You sat the two with the eye bandages beside each other, gave them both cigarettes and told them to sit tight until you could get to them.

“ I don't give a shit,” one said to the other. “ I seen enough to last me.”

“ It feels funny when you can't see the smoke when you're smoking,” the other said.

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