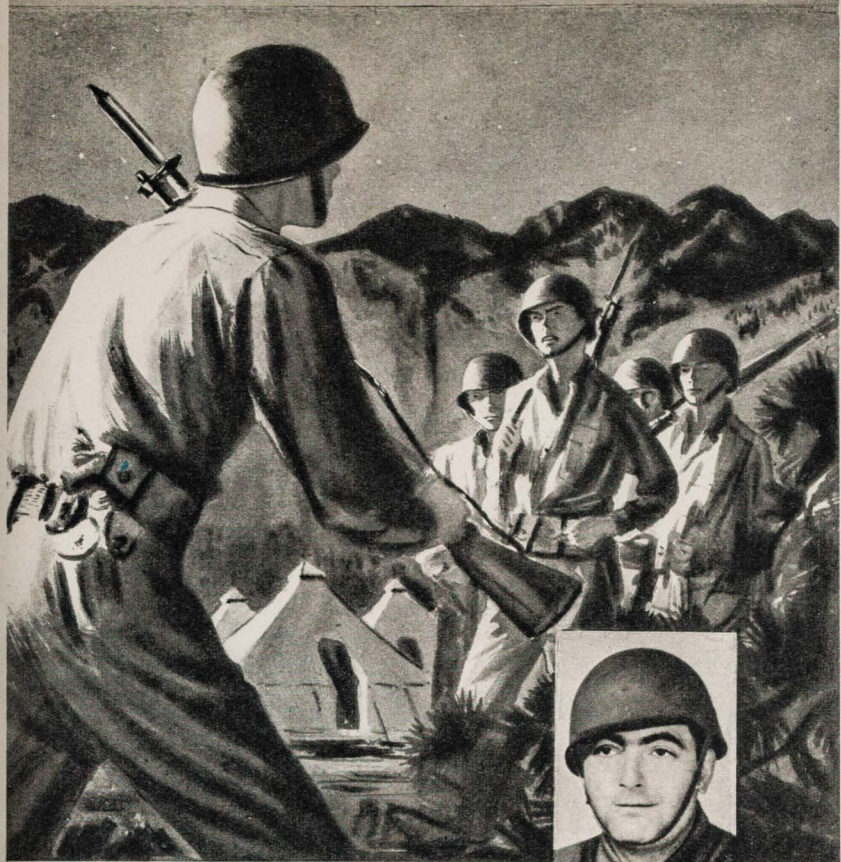


Tenth in a Series by Famous War Correspondents



"I had to kill a man for not giving a password. He was a friend." Right, Stefan Heym.

# My Favorite War Story

By STEFAN HEYM

German-born author of the novel and movie, *Hostages*;  
now an enlisted man in the U. S. Army

## Lebedeff, the veteran Marine, tells the dramatic story of how he killed his pal, Judd Aubrey

Sergeant Lebedeff was one of four Marines, veterans of Guadalcanal, attached to our outfit "for purposes of special training," their orders said. Our captain, who was a typical garrison soldier, didn't approve of their presence. I believe he was secretly afraid of their smiles.

Especially Lebedeff's smile. The Sergeant wasn't talkative, and he kept much to himself. He was barely Marine height, slight, freckled, almost beardless. Once the Captain was heard to say to a lieutenant: "And *that* they call a leatherneck!"

Thus the Captain started a little war of his own against Lebedeff. It ended in sheer exasperation on the Captain's part near the end of our training maneuvers.

By then, most of us were grimy and tired. The excitement which had kept us going the first days had worn off. Sham fighting had become a boring routine, a game for no stakes.

This night Lebedeff and three of us were sent on patrol. The Captain gave us our instructions: "The password for tonight is 'Sweet Home.' Anyone approaching this post will be challenged and let through only on giving the correct password. Is that clear, Sergeant Lebedeff?"

"Yes sir," said the Sergeant quietly and saluted. We marched into the purple evening.

What was all the shouting about, anyway, we wondered. This emphasis on passwords seemed ridiculous. After all, we knew most of the

men by face or name. They knew us.

The guard must have thought the same. When we came back from our patrol, he nodded and grinned at us.

But Lebedeff stopped. "Why don't you challenge us?"

"Aw, go on," said the guard. "Cut the kid stuff."

Lebedeff's face darkened.

"Challenge me!" he shouted.

The guard, taken aback, obeyed. "Password"—but his tone questioned the sense in Lebedeff's anger.

"Sweet," said the Sergeant. "Countersign?"

"Home," replied the guard.

### The Captain's Question

The loud exchange had roused the command tent. Flaps opened and the Captain came toward us.

"You want the enemy to hear?" he reprimanded. Then he recognized Lebedeff. "What's all the noise?"

Sergeant Lebedeff said nothing.

"It was about the password . . ." offered the guard.

"What's that?" The Captain turned to Lebedeff. "I told you there would be no laxity on passwords . . ."

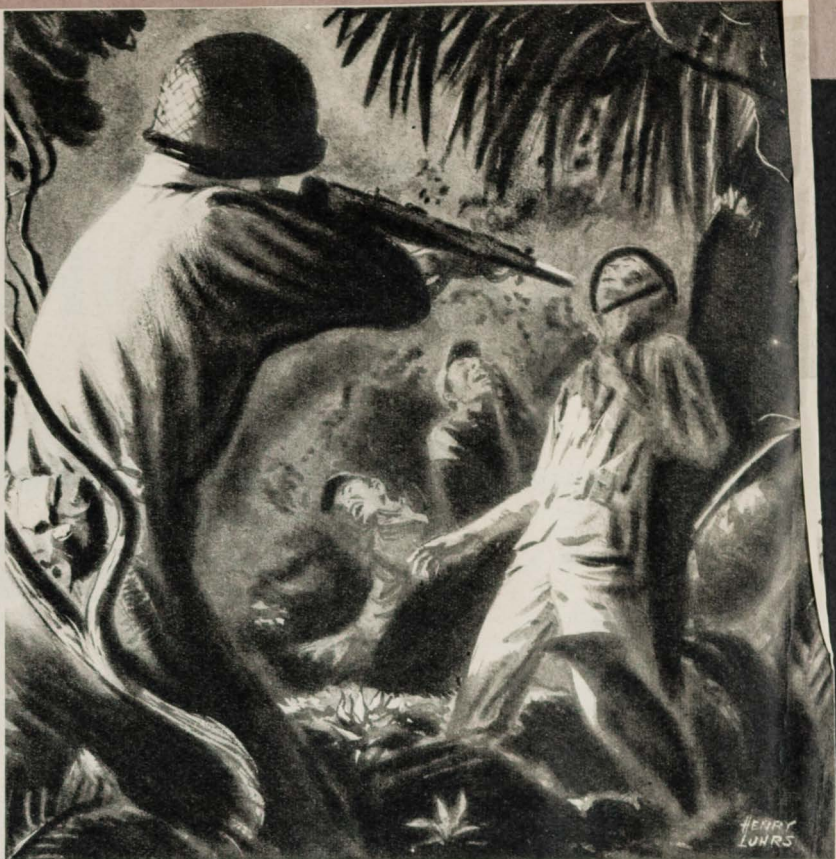
Lebedeff broke in, his voice thick.

"I'm touchy on the subject of passwords myself, sir," he said. "I once had to kill a man for not giving one, and he was a friend."

The Captain coughed, surprised. There followed an odd silence.

Then Lebedeff said, "Judd Aubrey . . ." and he spoke the name as if he were holding the dead man's hand. "Judd Aubrey was the laughing kind. To him, this war was what I guess his whole life had been—a big, unending joke.

"Judd laughed at everything—the



"I shot like mad . . . the whole magazine . . . I wanted to kill him good and dead."

mosquitoes, the rations, the Jap snipers. He went through the jungle as if it could not touch him."

"Speak to the point," said the Captain, uncertainly. He seemed unable to make up his mind whether to silence the Sergeant or to listen. The sudden rush of words from the usually silent Lebedeff was having the same strange effect on all of us.

Lebedeff continued:

"But Aubrey's great joke was passwords. He would distort them, twist them, sometimes not give them at all, or steal up behind and suddenly jump out and shout them into the guard's ear. It was bad. It infected the other men, and many stopped taking the passwords seriously.

"Finally, the Colonel put a stop to it. He issued orders that whoever did not give the password, or gave it incorrectly, was to be shot.

### Guard Post in the Jungle

"Aubrey griped some, but he saw the point: the Japs on other sectors had been sneaking up on our men, trying to penetrate our positions by using outdated or incorrect passwords.

"I was standing guard one night when Judd and two others went on patrol. I'll never forget . . . The jungle was dark, a shadowy thickness you could cut with a machete.

"I watched and listened. After a time your ears grow accustomed to natural noises, you scarcely hear them. Instead you wait for the hardly noticeable cracking of dead wood, the sucking sound of the marshy ground, which indicates the approach of man—friend or enemy.

"And then it came. A firmer shadow seemed to loosen itself from the rest. Slowly I trained my rifle on it and said, not too loudly, 'Halt!'

"It was not quite time for Aubrey's return. Yet it seemed to me that I could see the white teeth glistening between his laughing lips, recognize the way he swung his arm.

"And the others appeared to be behind him—if I could trust my eyes.

"But why didn't Aubrey stop? 'Halt!' I said again, louder this time, 'and be recognized.'

"The shadow kept creeping up. I cursed Aubrey's jokes. This war was no funny game. It was for keeps.

"'Aubrey!' I cried in desperation. 'Aubrey, halt! The password! You know I'll have to shoot you!'

### The Password Never Came

"I strained my ears. I thought he might whisper the word for fear lurking Japs might overhear it. But not even a whispered word came, only the heavy breathing of the jungle and the faint, steady, creeping approach of the shadow, or shadows.

"I shouted once more. I don't know what. Probably just a scream.

"Then I fired. I shot like mad. I emptied the whole magazine. I wanted to kill him good and dead. It was difficult to see where I was hitting, and I didn't want him to suffer.

"My shots alarmed the camp. Men came running. I explained as fast as I could, hating every word for the seconds lost by it. And you couldn't just go out and look. You never could tell who was around. The search had to be organized, and the searchers had to keep fingers on triggers.

"Then we found Judd Aubrey. He was dead. I had hit him clean through the head, thank God.

"We also found three Japs, one dead, two badly wounded.

"They must have used Judd Aubrey as a shield, for he carried no weapons when we picked up his body, and we never heard of the other two men on that patrol. The Japs had wanted him to lead them into our positions.

"Judd had known the password all right, I guess, but he kept it to himself. Probably thought it was a good joke he was pulling on the Japs, probably laughed—but laughed to himself, in a silent way. . . ."

"What was the password?" asked the Captain.

"Sweet Home," said the Sergeant.