



One Man's War

P. M. Kippert

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The book evokes what it's like to be in mud and blood under constant German gunfire, whether in thick misty woods or on open terrain like the Anzio beachhead.

"Every soldier tells it a little different, even though it's always the same for all of them. I find it interesting. Every time," a nurse tells Bob Kafak, a nineteen-year-old private in World War II, and the protagonist of P. M. Kippert's *One Man's War*.

Wounded at the Battle of Anzio, Kafak returns to the front lines as the Allies drive the Germans back across the Vosges Mountain. He does his best to survive by keeping his senses alert and his ass down. The strength of Kippert's novel is that the story rings true. It's filled with the kind of details that only someone witnessing the horrors of war firsthand would know: "A slug ripped into his face, just below the eyes, and came out the back of his head, ricocheting around the inside of his helmet." At its best, the book evokes what it's like to be in mud and blood under constant German gunfire, whether in thick misty woods or on open terrain like the Anzio beachhead.

Perhaps the most profound question the main character asks himself again and again is why one man survives battle but not another. He figures it's all "just a matter of chance, bad luck, a random throw of the dice." He isn't afraid to volunteer for dangerous missions, yet resists promotion despite his own heroics. One of the best scenes is when Kafak joins "the battle sled team" and lands in a mine field. It would have been comical if they weren't also being bombarded by German artillery.

Characters come to life through their verbal tics and styles of cursing, as well as their nicknames, like Dash, Upchuck, and Bama. In Kafak's view, officers don't last long enough to bother learning their names. As if to reinforce the facelessness of war, the author provides few physical details, letting the reader form the same loose attachments to the men in the trenches that Kafak does.

One Man's War will appeal to history buffs and anyone interested in the real, human stories from war that should not be lost.

TRINA CARTER (Summer 2016)

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