

It was dawn. The air was thick with the anticipation of the day. Today lives may be lost. Today honor was at stake. Today – war was upon us. Digging through my hamper, I found my oldest pair of jeans. They were worn in, torn and full of holes, and smelled revolting from previous endeavors into the lake – they were perfect. My lucky t-shirt was in a similar state of perfection, though it was freshly cleaned. I laced up my high-tops with extra firmness; enough to create that firm snug feeling of confidence. Throwing on my jacket, I was out the front door before my mom could finish her sentence, “Don’t forget your sister’s recital is ton-.” The door slamming behind me cut her short.

I was the kid of the group. The next youngest had a full 2 years on me, so I often felt like an annoying little tag-along, but not today. Today, more than any other in my 12 year history of existence, I was necessary. Kurt and Paul were already on their way to the park when I caught up with them. The route to the park is normally rerouted through back alleys, the woods, or Mr. Grander’s backyard, but this morning found us making a straight path. We had something to accomplish, and there was no room for childish games. As I said earlier, war was upon us – and we were men fulfilling our duty.

Finally stepping foot onto the asphalt of the River Park basketball courts found us wading through the sands of Normandy. This was our hour. Everyone knew it. Mike and Sam were already waiting for us. There were no jocular high fives or insults exchanged at today’s meeting. We were focused on the task at hand. With simple head nods of the utmost manliest nature, we greeted each other. Not a single word had passed through my lips all morning, and I knew that it had been the same for the others. It was an overcast day that hinted at rain with every second passed. It was as if the sky knew what today meant, and it was providing the right atmosphere.

With a pickup in the wind, our leader Mike instinctively turned his gaze to the other end of the courts. A red rubber ball bounced along the ground towards us, coming to a slow stop at my feet. I picked it up, and looked to Mike. He focused, with a glare in his eye, on the other end of the courts. I followed his look until I saw what he saw. Standing opposite us was a group of 5 boys – the enemy had arrived. Their leader, Morgan, spoke the first words of the day.

“Are you ready?”

Mike answered by throwing the red ball back towards the other group. Morgan caught the ball and smiled.

“Is that a yes?”

Some of the boys tossed their jackets off and cast them away, as our two groups of soldiers manned our positions on the court. Others have said I am mad, but I swear to you that I heard the violent poundings of a timpani drum as we stood facing our enemies. The faint, heavenly sound of voices singing rose up, as if our time in heaven was near. And while some may say that these sounds were only thunder or the local church choir practice, I know that they are wrong. The world knew that we were men going to war,

possibly never to return to our families again. We were men fighting for life, liberty, and honor in the most dangerous form of battle a man can face-

Dodgeball.