

Creative Expression – Fictional: “If anyone has experienced hell – lived through a fireball”

Steve Geeho Kim

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University – Prescott

ENGL355, Professor Ava Hardiek

July 18, 2022

“If anyone has experienced hell – lived through a fireball”

June, 2022, 2330 hour. I am called upon in an emergency to an unknown territory. A territory that I have only heard of, but never been to the actual land, nor spoken to anyone who was from this area. Not only myself, but my teammates beside me look to be nervous as hell as we are flown in a cargo aircraft across the Black Sea. I think we were mostly excreting– more to the fact of a thought of possibly dying within the next 24 hours upon debarkation.

As we flew North-Northeast along the coast lines East to Tulcea, we can now smell the ashes from burning buildings and villages. We can also breathe in and taste the dense air mixed with pollution, portion of gasoline from nearby powerplants and gas stations, and most disturbingly, what we all guessed correctly to be– foul odor of rotten corpses.

With a loud bang coming from the aircraft’s right waist, the pilot crew had no other choice but to force myself and the men next to me to evacuate the aircraft at 15,000 feet, near the coast of Odesa. Thankfully, we had parachutes on and landed near the shore. We scavenged ourselves together as quietly and quickly as possible before we came to the first rest stop. Thankfully, no one was injured or lost their survival gear. We pushed on further to the first city we came across. The place was empty, a ghost town– looked as if no one lived here for many decades, more like a ruin, with buildings sliced diagonally... just like what it looks when a baby slices their first birthday cake. Background was solid gray. Air thick of fog and smoke coming from each and every direction. At every few hundred feet, we would witness dead bodies lying almost everywhere and anywhere. Bodies ranged anywhere from grown adults, to men in uniform, and even small children.

A government building, possibly where high officials worked, was wrecked. Of course, empty with windows shattered, door panels destroyed to the ground, and pile of papers discarded

across the hallways. I, Sart, PT (point-man) Udt and Sev decided to search the building in case of any survivors or resources we could later use. Upon leaving the building, on top of the office desk was a torn piece of fabric colored in blue and yellow. Inside the mail post out front by the building was a booth for newspapers and magazines. Mostly empty, but few partially-ripped prints were still left. The headlines on the front page read, “Hammer & Sickle surrounds the capital” and underneath as a subtitle read, “Protect the Borderland.”

After reading the articles, many of us, including the team lead, Teuk, felt more frightened, alarmed, and experienced an unsettling nerve– as we witnessed a small pack of civilians walking in the distance towards us. “Excuse me old man, where’s the city governor and where are you all going so urgently?” asked Hidbo. The old man, without stopping his hurried pace, simply urged us in high-pitched tone to clear this area immediately while pointing east towards the horizon– just above the Black Sea.

“What’s happened? What’s going on?” questioned Marne and Su. Still, no answer from the old man nor any civilians who walked past.

We all faced the sea to check what the issue was. Our worst fear has been clarified when we started to identify several masts appearing from the horizon, shrieking sounds of turbines blazing past our heads, and most importantly... the flapping fabric colored in white, blue and red. “They’re here! Udt, choose a low ground! Sart move! Sev and Hidbo push right! Marne and Su, watch our six and keep an eye out for the people – make sure they make it across the bridge!” ordered Teuk. I followed Udt to find our quickest alternate waypoint while Sev and Hidbo tried to get the enemy’s attention by drawing fire to the south.

Our enemy has also spotted us. They approached this burning city, in hope to conquer the southern region of the country with ease of mind. However, seeing that the country has now

received military aid, the enemy was more furious and now... they've started bombarding us with all the force they have. Their infantry was also landing ashore. Although Sev and Hidbo were our fastest members with a lot with wit, they were obviously outnumbered in size.

“Push RIGHT! Keep pushing right!!” we heard Teuk on the coms. With our smart enemy trying to outflank us by also curving around our 3 o'clock position, Sev and Hidbo were eventually blockaded from further movement. They held their ground and so did we. During the confrontation, for a split second, I thought I was watching fireworks in front of my eyes– as many men fired their ammunition towards our direction. Despite the crisis situation we were in... it was beautiful in such a way, never had I seen so much explosion in front of me. While enjoying the scenery, fireworks went away, but there were still explosions in the area. When I came to my senses, I had my back against the trench while Su was patching my arm from a gunshot.

“FOCUS! COME TO YOUR SENSES!” Su shouted while slapping my face. Just then Su was now on the ground himself rolling from pain while holding his shoulder. Teuk rushed over to assist the patch while Udt slowly closed in our position and provided covering fire. Teuk finally finished patching both myself and Su. We all picked up our weapons and sprinted like wild cheetahs towards Sev and Hidbo. Marne was already here, but he was paralyzed from the waist down. “Boys we're outflanked from all sides, we've got to move backwards!” ordered Teuk. “Where to?!” cried Sev. “Down!” said Teuk with a frightening look while looking down from a steep cliff. Sev, Hidbo and Teuk first jumped. Followed by myself and Udt. As Su was carrying Marne on his shoulder, an RPG exploded few meters away from them– blasting Su and Marne. Only Su was blasted off the cliff while Marne fell in the opposite direction.

Plop! Pop! Boom! Clank! Scratch! All six of our bodies rolled, twisted, smacked against boulders, tree branches, and the grass until smacking our stomach or back against the hardened mud a hundred feet below. Our uniforms tore as they surpassed sharp tree branches and sharp corners of boulders. Rifles and ammunition cases sparked small and quick bursts of flame due to friction– literally notifying our enemies the direction of our fall. Zoom! Zoom! Clank! Fling! Bullets were flying above our heads. “Cough... cough... boys form up on me below this boulder...!” Teuk forced himself to shout towards us while he had a tree branch stuck into his shoulder. I dragged my body across the dirt towards Teuk. Sev and Hidbo were already with Teuk, both with broken ankles. Udt was counter-firing towards our enemies above and Su was patching up Teuk’s shoulder.

“I’m out! Anybody have an extra mag?!” shouted Udt. Sev and Hidbo limped towards Udt to help cover-fire and hand their extra mags. “Sart... you good?” slurred Teuk. “Yeah, Toookie, I can bite it,” I replied with dirt in my mouth. “Grrrrr!!! Ah!!!” with a sharp and painful cry, Su fell forward holding his face. A bullet scratched against his face– leaving a burn and a cut. Teuk and I forced ourselves to pick up Su and pull him back towards the boulder for cover. “HOW THE HELL?! HOW THE HELL DID WE GET INTO THIS MESS? HOW THE HELL ARE THEY BETTER THAN US? WE– WE ARE THE BEST, WE-ARE-THE-BEST!!” Su cried out with a whimper. “Su, shut your mouth. Suck it in. Suck it in. Be quiet, they’ll hear and know our position. Okay? You’re strong. Suck it in.” I tried to calm Su down. Just then another body fell forward in front of us. It was Sev – losing his helmet during the fall, he had a headshot.

Teuk, Su and I froze in spot, looking at Sev’s body. It seemed like Udt and Hidbo didn’t even realize Sev was shot dead- as they continued their counter-fire towards the enemy above. Then, without warning or a sign, a second shell of RPG from our side whistled towards Udt and

Hidbo. With a massive fireball that I’d ever seen up close, Udt and Hidbo were blown backwards and soon laid dead before our eyes.

“Sart... take these, I’m going for high ground” slurred Teuk, as he was handing me all of his remaining ammo and held a satellite phone in his left hand. “No, no, Teuk, not a good idea man” I replied back. “Provide cover fire, I’m going” slurred Teuk, then with all his strength-staggered up the boulders towards the open cliffside that was few meters away.

“WHERE’S TEUK GOING?! WHERE’S HE GOING?!” Su shouted while providing covering-fire towards the direction of second RPG. “HE’S CALLING FOR EXTRACTION! GIVE THEM HELL!” I shouted back, and as soon as my voice rang across the cliffside, with a loud pop, Su fell next to me dead. “CURSE YOU ALL! CURSE YOU!” I shouted towards the enemy while discharging both mine and Su’s rifle.

“This is... Lt. Teuk, call sign Jaguar. We need... an immediate extraction. Coordinates are sent... did you... receive?” slurred Teuk. “Eh, roger, Jaguar, coordinates received, Black Hawks and Chinook are being scrambled, over” a voice from the satellite phone replied back. Upon the end of the conversation, two RPGs were fired towards myself and Teuk. In a slow motion, the last that I saw Teuk was being thrown down from the cliffside.

I was being shaken, rocking back and forth. When I squinted my eyes open, I was placed on a stretcher- inside a Chinook, being escorted back to base. My ears were ringing with the sound of- that I am now safe, Teuk’s body was undiscovered and the enemy was annihilated upon my extraction. The sky never looked so beautiful.