

Courage Under Fire

In his 56 years on the planet, Adolf Hitler did incredible harm and was responsible for millions of terrible deaths. Yet, in all of the horror he unleashed, there are pinpoints of light and nobility.

And a German soldier, Pvt. Joseph Schultz, was one of those pinpoints.

Schultz was sent to Yugoslavia shortly after the invasion. He was a loyal, young German soldier on patrol. One day, the sergeant called out eight names, and Schultz's was one of them. They thought they were going on a routine patrol. As they hitched up their rifles, they came over a hill, still not knowing what their mission was.

What they saw were eight Yugoslavians standing on the brow of the hill – five men and three women. It was only when they got about 50 feet away from them – the distance that any marksman would be able to shoot out an eye of a pheasant – that the soldiers realized what their mission was all about.

The eight soldiers were lined up. The sergeant barked out, "Ready!" and they lifted their rifles. "Aim!" and they got their sights.

Suddenly, in the silence that prevailed, there was a thud of a rifle butt against the ground. The sergeant, the seven other soldiers, and those eight Yugoslavians whirled around to look.

Pvt. Joseph Schultz walked toward the Yugoslavians. His sergeant called after him and ordered him to come back, but he pretended not to hear him.

Instead, he walked the 50 feet to the mound of the hill, and he joined hands with the eight Yugoslavians.

There was a moment of silence, then the sergeant yelled, "Fire!"

And Pvt. Joseph Schultz died, mingling his blood with that of those innocent men and women.

Found on his body was an excerpt from the Apostle Paul: "Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres."

In 1973, Yugoslav Zastava Films released the short movie *Joseph Schultz*. The plot was based on Schultz's refusal to execute Yugoslav partisans and his eventual execution by the firing squad he was assigned to.

Schultz's courage was remarkable, but it was an indication of how fiercely the passion for freedom and truth burns within the human spirit.

And it is a reminder of how much we should treasure, and seek to protect, the liberty that we too often take for granted.

– Beecher Hunter