

My Hawaii
Father Cross

A Cross to Carry

© Copyright Brett Paufler 1-29-14

(fiction, obviously)

Brett@Paufler.net

As seems to be par for the course, I stop caring about projects... very soon after they are finished, written, posted to the web, or whatever. Haven't bothered to reread this since it's inception in January of 2014, nor have I worked any further on editing Cliff Hanger's My Hawaii since then. Maybe someday. Maybe someday.

It was the war to end all wars -- that was the hype, at least. And young Mr. Cross, being the romantic young soul that he was, believed this with all his heart. It was the moment he had been waiting for, the action he so earnestly desired, the call to duty, the call to arms, something to do that mattered, that really mattered. For they, now, his generation were going to were going to root out the injustice of the world, battle evil, and make the world pure and whole again -- turn it into a place of Truth, Honor, Freedom, and Beauty... or at least, that was the plan.

The reality was slightly different. The reality was a battlefield strewn with the dead and dying -- bullets flying, snipers firing, machine guns doing their rat-tat-tat; and into all this, just as a sort of percussion ensemble, a drunken choir to keep the beat, would fall the rain of artillery -- first here, then there, without rhyme or reason, or more than a moments forewarning, the whistling whine of death, singing it's ghastly tune.

It was not a happy place to be.

Now, as we all know, Father Cross is rather-overly cheerful by nature. But even he, confronted with this scene was having a hard time putting on a happy face.

“Wipe that smile off your face, soldier!”

Of course, Father Cross wasn't just any soldier. He was no sniper or gunner, no bombs did he drop or weapons did he carry. For Father Cross was in the Medical Red Cross -- a stretcher carrier by trade. And his job was to run into the No Man's Land -- that carnage of death -- and carry out the dead, dying, and wounded, whom he could not help but notice included no small number of stretcher carriers who had just been sent in to do the same.

And here we get to the gist, the Moment of Truth. When ordered to go over the top, Private Cross did not balk. Head down, he ran, dodging bullets, ducking around machine gun spray, and dancing about as the artillery played. He ran. And he ran. And he ran.

And then, there he was, in the Valley of Death. A bandage here, a bandage there, splinting a broken bone, and then coming upon one who was too far gone, too injured to treat in the field. So, Private Cross picked him up, turned around, and started to run. And he ran. And he ran. And he ran. And as the artillery dropped about him, he turned this way, he turned that way, and he turned all the way around and back again, racing as fast as he could, till he saw the line, the bunker in the dirt, and he made one last dash, and with much cheering and encouragement from the troops he went over the wall, and down into the safety of the other side...

No, really, the other side. In all the confusion, he had run the wrong way. Which was just as well, because on his back, was one of their own.

Now, as you might imagine, having delivered himself to the other side, the enemy made no indication of letting him go. Which didn't really seem fair to Private Cross and not very sporting, at all. But then, after another shell exploded close by, he had to admit that he wasn't really keen on the return trip either, so he smiled

when they offered him a cigarette and graciously accepted a cup of tea. But when he took a bite out of the potato they gave him and put on the happy face, they shook their head, pointed to the large pile he stood next to, and it was pretty clear what he would be doing for the next three years of his life.

In truth, Father Cross doesn't like to talk about the war that much -- brings up too many bad memories, "So many good boys died." And so, if asked what side he fought on, he'll say, "Neither," which is probably true, seeing as how he never touched a weapon. But after a bit, it's pretty clear he's just trying to be cryptic, because if asked about his homeland, he'll just reply, "Lihi'i is my home, now."

"But where you born in Germany?"

"Ya! Vo!"

"But you just said you were an Australian?"

"Aye, mate?"

"Japanese? Really?"

"Hai!"

So, I guess, he doesn't want to say. And so, where he spent the war is unclear, "It gave me plenty of time to learn German. Of course, my German was pretty good to begin with, so I tried to spend as much time speaking {English / Japanese / Hungarian / Swahili} as possible."

"So, Father Cross, why don't you want to tell anyone where you were born."

"Oh, that? That's not a secret." And he'll walk you down to the sparkling waters of the lagoon. "Here. Right here, this is where I was born." And then, after a pause, he'll add, "And if I haven't already died and gone to Heaven, someday this is where they are going to lay my bones to rest."

Eh, Cliffy. Dat middle part, you missing dat middle part.

Yeah. How he get from there to here.

From where to here?

Oh, I no know.

I think he maybe live in somebody's basement for the while.

Hey, Cliff. Maybe Father Cross stay with your brother in law before he come here?

Yeah, that be why he no so thrilled you take up residence on his couch. He already get his fill of the freeloaders years before.

Yeah. Yeah. I can hear his brother now, 'Oh, no. Not again.'

So, he get him the job as the Missonary.

Yes, well, that's about it.

Like many after the war, Father Cross's heart was broken. He no longer believed in what he had before? His soul was empty. His life, one of sorrow. But there was the training of his youth. And so, being religious, he sought refuge in a church -- cleaning this, cleaning that, but come Sunday, and a sermon?

"I can't. I just can't."

His calling no longer called.

So, you know, it was clear he needed a push.

Out! Off!

Get off the couch!

Out of here!

Scam!

Varmoose!

Oh, that true maybe it be the German church. 'Oust vedersains, ze lazy boys.'

And no com'a back'a here, da no more.

Dat be the ono top notch I-tal-ion, Kimo.

I study up. Quiz Father Cross later. Maybe at least scratch one country off the list.

So, yes. Long story short, the church bought him a one way ticket to paradise. They called it Missionary Work.

“You’re sending me where?”

Lihi’i was not Father Cross’s first stop on his Missionary Whirlwind World Tour. And I bet you can’t say that three times real fast...

Mission Airy Whirled Wind Whorled Tour

Missionay World Tour.

Miss Son Wind World World Tour

Miss Son? No. No. Miss Sun World Tour.

She sound the sexy.

Bright eyes.

Big smile.

Gaping teeth, sunken eyes, starvation, hunger...

Cliffy, I no like this story no more.

And neither did Father Cross, so he was happy when he finally landed on the shores of Lihi’i. It was nice. No one was dying. No one was even crying. And no one was in need of anything.

Hey, he ask we tell him what we need.

We need plenty.

Yeah, candy bars be running low again, Cliffe.

But he no ask.

He just like you, Cliffe.

Yeah. Yeah. First day, he hit the beach, go the swimming, and he never look back.

I’m thinking he was probably taking a bath.

Hey, Kimo. How many missionaries you know take the bath with the mermaid?

This the joke?

Yeah, it the joke. It be the none, because once the missionary take the bath with the mermaid, he no the missionary, any the more.

I don't think it happened like that.

You there, Mister Cliff? No, I did no think so. Because if you be there, then maybe, you know.

Well, so maybe it had something to do with the mermaids.

Oh, face the facts, Cliffy old boy. It have everything to do with the mermaids.

And Grandma Tutu, she pretty hot in her day.

So, um, I'm sure there were benefits to a tropical paradise...

Yeah, there be. Oh, right. Cliff maybe feel the need to mince his words on the account of the Thirty Seven maybe hear what he say.

But she no here right now.

And we no tell.

Eh, still, better safe than sorry.

OK. Fair enough. So, we get to ogle the mermaids for him...

I'm sure Father Cross could not help but notice the beauty around him...

Oh, that be the good Cliff, you dance the dance...

But can you walk the walk?

What? That make no sense. Of course he walk the walk if he can dance the dance.

And Father Cross could do both -- walk the walk that is the dance between cultures as he tried to do what he could, which was less than nothing.

He adapted. We all do.

And before Kimo and Kami interrupt me again...

What? We no interrupt?

Blame us for the nterrupting when we no interrupt, be the bad manners. Besides, it be more like we add color narrative.

Anyway, some of us adapt better than others...

Ka'la'la'la maybe more so than the rest

Yes, some of us take to Lihi'i a little easier than the rest. Others think that they are missing something, get Rock Fever, or want to explore the world.

But this wasn't Father Cross's complaint. He wanted to do God's work. But on Lihi'i it was clear that work had already been done.

Amen to that, Brother Cliff.

Can I get an hallelujah!

And then Father Cross met Ku the God of War!

Oh, it just no Ku.

It be Pe'la

Kala

Wewe

Oh, and Ted, best not to forget Ted.

Yes, indeed. I do think you have a point. Ted has never been the most refined, um, individual. And it is not too terribly difficult (actually not difficult at all) to see Ted yelling at Father Cross, “Hey, down in front! You’re blocking the view,” as the good Father got between Ted and his view of Wewe, the local mermaid, sunning herself on the beach -- all naked and free spirited lik.

“Ah, that’s better. Care for a cigar?”

Having never seen a talking turtle before, I’m sure Father Ted would have been at a loss for words.

However, that has never been Ted’s complaint, “How about a nip of the old hootch, then?”

And there you have it, I think. Not only were the residents of Lihi godless heathens. But to make matters worse, their gods themselves were godless heathens.

“So, you’re saying no one has ever shown you the way?”

“What are you talking about, preacher man. Beach this way, bar that way. And if you keep blocking my view, you’re going to go that way,” Ted may have added with a bit of a shove, sending Father Cross into the water and bringing Ku to the scene.

Fight!

Fight!

Fight!

Fight!

Granted, after the war (which war, of course, always being tricky to say, some say The Colonial, some The Great War: the war to end all wars), Ku had taken it easy. Which is perhaps just another way of saying that according to the terms of the disarmament treaty, good old Ku was no longer allowed to fashion a bow or carry a spear. But that didn’t mean he couldn’t carry around a big stick... especially if he used it for fishing.

So, as always, Ku was just returning from (or for that matter, going to) his favorite fishing spot, tackle box in hand, when he saw the commotion on the beach.

Being the God of War, obviously, Ku had a thing or two to say, “Now, I want you two to come out fighting, keep it clean, keep it honorable, but none of this sissy surrendering stuff, taking prisoners, or trying to fast talk your way out of it. We don’t play that way around here”

“What? You want me to fight a turtle?”

“Tortoise. I’m a sea tortoise.”

Yeah, best to get that straight. Really ruffles his feathers if you get that wrong.

Or telling him he have feathers. That probably ruffle his feathers most of all.

So, anyway, as they were getting Ted’s pedigree straightened out, “A sea tortoise, aren’t you on like the endangered species list or something?”

“Oh, see, he’s trying to talk his way out of it. You going to fight me or not?” Being exactly the type of question Ted likes to ask while kicking you in the shins or taking a nip out of your toe.

Oh, hey. Ted not the nice guy nice sometimes.

Especially you show up with nothing to drink.

Or try to sleep it off in his spot.

Oh, yeah. And it all his spot.

He think he own the beach.

Yeah, and you try to sleep it off in his spot you just going to wake up the yelling and the screaming.

He bite you in the big toe, that be what he do.

“Ouch!”

“You don’t like it? Find your own beach. Now, amscray, I’ve got a mermaid to watch. Speaking of which...”

<Splash!>

“Oh, now you’ve done it. The gloves are coming off now, Preacher Boy.”

Now, turtles, er, rather, that is to say, tortoises are an ornery lot. Ted is the most ornery of the entire lot.

“You are going to rue the day you didn’t share your communion wine with me, Preacher Boy.”

And all Father Cross had really wanted to do was sit on the beach, enjoy the falls, and this turtle...

“Dat be Ted, Father Cross. He probably mad you, because call him a turtle.”

“Or you on his beach.”

“Give him the wine..

“The whiskey...”

“Or even the cigar...”

“And he let you be.”

Ah, we no sound nothing like that, Cliff.

Not at the all.

Anyway, there it is. The locals (I shall not point fingers or name names) getting drunk at all hours of the day and night, fighting on the beach, carousing...

Eh, that what you call it, Cliff?

Da carousing?

Sound classy.

Sound sophisticated.

I think I have to remember that

Hey, Wewe, Want to the carouse with me for the while?

I no kiss-kiss and tell.

Yes, and this is exactly what Father Cross saw -- Paradise Lost.

Um, hey, Cliffe. I think dat the other story.
Probably no good as dis story, but definitely the other story.

No matter. In a flash, Father Cross saw his calling -- to tame these wild beasts.

Hey! Who you calling the wild beast?
You best be talking about Ted, now, there, Cliffe?

Like the best of missionaries, Father Cross started with the children and women folk, entertaining them and reading Bible verses to Wewe and the rest on the beach.

“No smoking in class, Ted,” Wewe might say. And the girls were doing Father Cross’s work for him.

Until one day, Ku returned. (I guess he must have wandered off and gone fishing having no interest in fairy tales and children’s stories... or maybe he’s just an honorable sort of guy and doesn’t believe in attacking a fella unawares.) “Well, looks like you’re all settled in. So, I think it’s about time we had that showdown, Father Cross.”

But by then, Father Cross had built his church, was doing sunrise services on the beach, afternoon choral lessons in the rain, and all the rest, and so he just looked at Ku, smiled, and said, “Personally, I think I already won that fight.” But before Ku could object (or find a nice well-balanced log to use as a club), Father Cross offered the truce and said, “Victory without lifting a finger in battle. Nice trick that, huh? What if I offered to teach you my ways?”

And that in a nutshell is how Father Cross made peace with the demons from his past and became friends with the God of War. And if you have any doubts as to the veracity of this tale, perhaps

you would like to substitute for Father Cross next week while the visiting church group is in town.

Oh, no thanks.

That school be the virtual war zone without Father Cross around to keep the peace.

Well then, I rest my case.

Still, I don't know, Cliff.

Yeah, last time you tell it, Father Cross was going for the walk down the back side of Mauna'pau to visit Mano when he ran into Ku fishing at his favorite spot and they fight over who land the biggest fish...

Or if Father Cross even have the right to fish.

And time before that, Ku was pounding the taro into poi...

He pound that poi but good

And he threaten to pound the Father Cross but good he no shut up with those Bible verses of his.

Yeah, well. Next time I tell it, I suppose it will take a different form as well. Every wave is different from the rest.

Oh, that be the big talk from the guy whose scared of the rain, much less walk in the water.

Hey, that right. Cliff, you scared of rain...

I'm not scared of the rain. I just don't like getting wet.

And why? Because you scared.

Just admit it.

It be better.

Everyone know the reason you no never leave because you scare of ever flying in the plane again with Thirty Seven.

Or what she do to you ever take the boat behind your back.

So, you be the scared.

The scaredy-fradey cat.

Hey, Cliffe. There be the anything you no afraid of?

Heights. They don't call be Cliff Hanger for nothing... but that's probably another story best save for a different time.

Oh, no. We got time.

Fire still bright.

And Thirty Seven out of town, so you no have that excuse.

Well, maybe just one more...