

Fred Small

"At The Elbe"

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Well mister I just overheard you talking through your
drink
How the Russians lie like rugs how they've pushed us to
the brink
Now sit right here beside me I've an old man's tale to
tell
How Yanks and Reds were friends once at the Elbe.
My name is Joe Polowski I hitched up in '41
Left my sweetheart in Chicago and I learned to fire a
gun
The fog in the Ardennes so thick you could not see your
nose
Nor the ghosts in the Belgian wood advancing through
the snow.
We left our dead behind us and we scaled the Dragon's
Teeth
With screaming mimis overhead not one of us could
sleep
Some fell to the enemy some fell to the creeping cold
And I killed a German sniper who was not fourteen
years old.
When a soldier takes a hit my friend it ain't like
Hollywood
Bone and guts go flying and everywhere there's blood
For a moment he is mystified there must be some
mistake
As it all drains out in a crimson lake.
Then April turned the weather and likewise the tide of
war
As haggard hungry Germans surrendered by the score
And thank god for the Russians who took the battle's
brunt
And broke the back of the Wermacht along the eastern
front. Then
We saw a burst of lilacs and the river swift and wide
And rest and welcome waiting for us on the other side
And Yanks and Reds laughed out loud to be alive at the
Elbe.
We caught the glint of water and upon the distant
shore
Men and trucks and horses not German and not ours
No bridge to cross but at the dock a boat securely tied

We blew the chain and rowed like demons for the other side.
But when we stepped up on the land oh Jesus what a sight
Blackened bodies of civilians like driftwood piled high
Cut down by stray artillery -- what the hell is it all for
We knelt and cursed the cruelty and madness men call war.
Three Russians approached us, we shook hands and then embraced
Stalingrad had traced it's lines of sadness on their face
Upon that field of corpses these weary happy men
Swore an oath that it must never happen again.
And then we wept and cheered and spoke in languages unknown
They poured us Russian vodka by god we drank it down
We sang "The Volga Boatman" they sang "Tavern in the Town"
I never kissed so many men as on that afternoon when
We saw a burst of lilacs and the river swift and wide
And rest and welcome waiting for us on the other side
And Yanks and Reds laughed out loud to be alive at the Elbe.
But no sooner were we stateside than the cold war headlines read
Commies in the unions commies under every bed
Hurrah the Nazi devil's down long live the devil Red
And not one word about the oath we swore amongst the dead.
There are kids today who'll tell you we fought Russia in the war
There are armchair heroes set to settle some old score
There are profiteers and pushers primed to send young men once more
To blow themselves to glory on some godforsaken shore.
So drape my coffin with the flag of the good old USA
Let Yanks in army khaki and Reds in Russian gray
Lower me so gently into the German clay
And speak again the oath we swore that day when
We saw a burst of lilacs and the river swift and wide
And rest and welcome waiting for us on the other side
And Yanks and Reds laughed out loud to be alive at the Elbe.
...at the Elbe

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