

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*Have Mercy on My Soul:* Vaughn Short, a veteran of World War II, tells us of the death of an enemy soldier in his arms.

### **Tony Kahn:**

Hi, this is Tony Kahn, the Producer and the Director of *Morning Stories* on WGBH, Boston. Just back from Blogger Con III in Palo Alto, which was an incredible event with ripples that will be going on, I hope, for a very long time. I want to thank you all who came up just to say, "Hi," to say that you enjoyed *Morning Stories*, and that meant an awful lot to us. We're going to keep on bringing them to you, and also who just checked in to say, "Hi," and to make sure that we stay in touch as this incredible revolution keeps on working itself out. Today's *Morning Story* is in celebration of Veterans' Day and Veterans' Day Week. It comes from World War II and it's about how wars don't just end when armistices are signed but can keep on reverberating through your life and the lives of generations that follow. It's called: *Have Mercy on My Soul*.

### **Vaughn Short:**

We were on the banks of the Pulangi River after the war in Mindanao. And we was accepting the surrender of the Japanese troops that came down out of the mountains. And I was a medic. And this Japanese fella, he wandered in out of the jungle. And he was pathetic. He was dying, in fact.

He was burning up with fever and I was sure that he had malaria. And I knew he had pneumonia. And so I took him in the aid tent there and I doctored him the best I could. And I had quite an audience, tending to this guy; quite a little ring of guys standing around, making remarks about my professionalism and this, that, and the other.

And so I asked the cook to bring a bowl of soup. So he went over and he brought over a bowl of hot tomato soup. So I sat there with this guy with his head on my lap and I fed him this soup. Then in a little bit, why, he gave a cough or two and up came the tomato soup or and up come the blood, you couldn't tell the difference, but, he died.

[Music plays and continues under the narrative]

And so, everybody said, "Well, you killed him, you've got to bury him." And I protested. I said, "No. I didn't kill him." I said, "It was that damn food out of the kitchen that killed him." [chuckles] And so here's this poor guy laying there dead and we're having a big argument over who killed him. [chuckles some more]

[Music continues]

Anyway, they took him over there and threw him in a little grave on the sandbar and shoveled some sand over him. And so, I took a couple of old planks there and stuck in and made a little cross and . . . and I inscribed a little poem on 'em. I said:

Unknown, unwanted and unwept  
Far from Nippon's cheery skies

In a grave shallow and unkept  
My worthless carcass lies.

May the demon imps of Hell  
As they shovel the burning coal  
Know that I served them well  
And have mercy on my soul.

[Music plays]

And heck I'm just a kid. But later on I thought about that, and well, it bugged me. I mean who am I to condemn anybody to Hell, you know?

[Music]

Nevertheless, I wrote it. I used to write very heroic things about wars and, and I had a lot of poetry. And I rolled it up and I don't know if you remember the old KC Baking Powder Cans that they . . . round metal cans that . . . I rolled all my poetry up and I put 'em in those cans and I dug a grave and I buried them.

[Music plays]

May the demon imps of Hell  
Know that I served them well  
And have mercy on my soul.

[Music plays then fades out]

**Tony Kahn:**

*Morning Stories* is podcast every Friday from WGBH-FM here in Boston. If you'd like to check out our website, that's at <[wgbh.org/morningstories](http://wgbh.org/morningstories)> and "morningstories" is all one word. Talk to you soon.

[End of recording]

Transcribed by: Lorena Knight

Notes from transcriber:

This story always gives me the chills!