

THE TENT

By John F. Hall

Over the years, I've written stories about a rock, a doorknob, a box car, a storm, a beach, a gift and many other things. This is a story about a tent, your tent. The Apostle Paul wrote about tents because by trade he was a tent maker. He pictured the body in which we now live as a tent- a temporary resident. He pictured our new body in Heaven as a house rather than a tent—a permanent high quality house, that God has promised us.

Tents make inadequate living quarters. Tents leak, then get rain soaked and drip. They let in the cold in the winter and they let in heat during the summer. When it rains, water seeps into the ground and into the tent. Because of this seepage, the ground inside the tent becomes muddy. I can speak to living inside small and big tents for weeks at a time when I was in the military. I would always trench around the tent to allow the rain to drain from the top and sides of the tent. When possible, I would gather pine needles and put them under my sleeping bag to form a moisture barrier from the ground.

There is only one time during my four decades in the military that I did not get into my sleeping bag. That time occurred on Fort Campbell during a winter training exercise. Our platoon was several miles from the barracks out into the field. We were told to eat our C-rations and turn in for the night. Our platoon was issued sleeping bags but no pop tents. A pop tent is a small, individual tent made of canvas and is stretched over supporting poles and fastened to the ground using ropes and metal pegs. At that time, I carried a tiny transistors radio with earphones in one of my two M-1 rifle ammo pouches. Because I was an M-60 machine gunner, I was not issued a rifle. I was issued a holster and a 45 caliber automatic pistol. I had a small paperback book in the other ammo pouch along with a small can of oil.

During the winter training exercise, that night, I became concerned about the weather forecast for the next day. My earphones allowed me to listen to the radio weatherman's warning about an approaching arctic front. It was drizzling, so I spotted a large cedar tree that had been hit by lightning. It was cut, almost in half and it formed a lean-to. I decided that it was a better shelter than sleeping out on the ground in the drizzling rain. Rather than sleep in my sleeping bag, I decided to leave it rolled up, to get under the tree, to sit on the bag while resting my back against the tree.

I was wearing my Army poncho, a waterproof raincoat that also covered my head as I was leaning against the tree. I would drift on and off to sleep in this position. Sometimes, I would fold my arms and rest them and my head on my knees. All night long, I could hear the constant dripping of rains drops hitting my poncho. Morning came and I began to hear other soldier's voices. Then in distress, one soldier cried out, "Oh! No!" I came out from under the tree and could not believe what I was seeing. The ground was completely covered in several inches of snow. It was like seeing a horror movie. I watched a hand rise up from under the snow. Most of the soldiers had taken off their wet, muddy boots and left them outside of their sleeping bags. Those boots were now frozen and full of snow.

At that time, C-ration boxes contained cans of food, matches and a small amount of cigarettes. I don't smoke, so I would trade the cigarettes for a can of fruit. I would keep the matches. I was responsible for my assistant gunner and my ammo bearer. They had taken their wet, muddy boots off and left them outside their sleeping bags. These boots were now full of snow.

I went in forage for dead tree branches to start a fire. I cleared off a small area of snow on the ground. I ripped up the paperback book and piled up the branches on top of the pages. I poured the oil on top of the branches and used the C-ration matches to light the fire. My assistant gunner and my ammo bearer were able to dry off their wet boots. So I went in search of my platoon sergeant. He found me and told me to eat chow and then be a guard at the intersection as the field training exercise was still on going. The cooks from the



company mess ' hall brought out a hot breakfast, if you can call it that. By the time the hot powdered eggs, bacon and basket were put in my metal mess kit, they turned cold.

(pictured: John F. Hall (see arrow) holding a .50 caliber machine gun at the Tank Commander Certification Course, Fort Knox, Kentucky. Members of his tank crew standing behind turret).

I was standing on the road with my M-60 machine gun. It weighs 23 pounds, so I normally carry it on my shoulder. The arctic front was beginning to hit with a vengeance. Down the road came with a M60 Patton tank. It slowed and came to a stop in front of me. The tank commander opened the turret hatch. I watched as the hot air from inside the tank turned to steam as soon as it reached the bitter cold air. I asked the tank commander where he was going. He said, "We're done, we are heading back to post before we get stuck out here." The tank commander got a smile on his face and asked me if I was cold. I told him to move on. Fifteen years after standing on that frozen road, I found myself on Fort Knox attending the Tank Commander Certification Course. During that two week course, I did not have to sleep in a tent. A picture was taken of me in the turret with my crew behind me. In 2 Corinthians, Chapter 5, Verse 1, are these words, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in Heaven, not built by hands."

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*Read other stories by John F. Hall at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>