



## **Väinö Linna: The Unknown Soldier**

Two shortened fragments of the novel *Tuntematon sotilas*, 1954.  
English translation W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., London 1957.

The three comrades saw him too late. Now they found themselves face to face with Lammio. The lieutenant paused for effect before asking:

- Who gave you permission to ride in that truck?
- No one, said Lehto.
- What `s in those cartons?
- Why, just crackers...and jam.
- And where did you steal it?

Rahikainen smiled innocently.

- We did not need to steal them.
- Don't try to excuse yourself. Are you stupid enough to think I'll believe that stuff? Lehto,  
don't you know that you're not allowed to leave the company without permission?
- Yes.

Lammio called in his most official voice:

- Lieutenant Koskela.
- Yes...?
- Sergeant Lehto and Privates Maatta and Rahikainen are each sentenced to two hours at attention with rifle and full field pack beginning on the next hour. Reason: absence without leave from a company on the march, theft of food and, in the case of Sergeant Lehto, insubordination to a superior officer. Have you got that?
- I've got it, said Koskela.

In the tent Lehto threw himself on the ground angrily:

- I can't see myself standing for two hours. By God, I'm not afraid of that shrimp.

Koskela was embarrassed.

- It's not a question of being afraid or not. It's just the easiest way out.
- All right then. But I sure won't put anything in my pack.

Hietanen had been ordered to supervise the carrying out of the sentence and he started them on their way. He led them some distance away from the camp.

- You certainly look handsome standing there, said Hietanen setting himself on a boulder for a smoke. - Stay there for a while, but we are not going to waste two hours.

They had kept up this pretense for half an hour when a low humming began to be heard in the east. The sound grew, and soon they could make out black specks in the sky.

- Bombers.
- Maybe they're ours.
- Coming from the east. No...one, two, three, four...by God, boys – eighteen! Our's don't fly in such big formations. There's more... nine fighters behind 'em for protection.
- They're Ivan's...there goes the flak.

From the camp came cries: - Air raid! ...Shelter.

Koskela, popping out of his tent, shouted to Hietanen:

- Take cover!
- Into the woods! Hietanen cried, but Lehto remained standing:
- I'm not going anywhere. I'm undergoing punishment.

Hietanen smiled at first, thinking Lehto was joking. Then he saw that he was in earnest.

- Don't be crazier than you are, said Rahikainen, nervously eying the bombers.

Lehto didn't even glance at the sky.

- If you're so damned afraid, go ahead. I'm staying.
- I don't mind staying either, said Maatta.
- All right, we'll all hang together.
- Don't be crazy, what's the sense of this? said Hietanen.
- Ask Lammio, said Lehto. – This isn't my idea.

The roar of dozens of motors set the air quivering.

- This next lot's for us. They're headed this way.
- Stay where you are...don't run! shouted Lehto, pale but determined.

The first bombs burst on the other side of the road. Then came a whole series of tremendous crashes followed by blasts of air which nearly knocked them flat. The nearest bomb, however, fell a safe distance away among the tents. Confused cries came from the tents:

- Help, somebody...help me! Jesus, help...I'm dying...help me...

The cry was drowned in the crackle of machine guns and the roaring of motors.

Lehto's face was grim.

- Don't move...not until our time's up...
- Somebody's hit... we ought to go help, suggested Hietanen. But still Lehto refused.
- Well then, by God, I'll go alone, said Hietanen and set off a run toward the tents.

Lehto laughed harshly. He had gained revenge, and they could do nothing to him. Death was the worst they could inflict on him, and he was not afraid of that.



