

## "Red Reeder is the greatest leader of men I've ever been around!"

*Vince Lombardi*  
*Asst. Football Coach*  
*USMA, West Point, NY*

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### LAST INNING

**His Bed:** "I couldn't figure out what was going on. Here it was almost noon, and he hadn't gotten up. The Colonel had always been an early riser. He'd muscle himself up with the overhead bar into a sitting position, strap on his artificial leg, swing on over into his wheelchair, and scoot into the bathroom. But now, something was wrong. I could feel him moving-- trying, but he was still there, sunk into my mattress and pillows. Then, all Hell broke loose. . . a rush of people and equipment, and boy did I get shoved around. Then, there I was alone, with pillows on the floor and my sheets and blankets askew."

**His Cap:** " They called him Red. He always wore a hat or a cap to protect his ruddy skin against the sun. I was one of his favorites with my gold Army `A.' He was a gallant gentleman who tipped me to the ladies as we passed them. He wore me to the hospital a few months ago on a visit to his ailing wife, took me off, gave her a kiss, and said to her, `My mother always told me to take off my hat when kissing a pretty girl. '"

**His Great Granddaughter:** "When I was almost two, Grandpa said he thought I was going to be the best athlete of them all."

**His Paramedic:** " We found a 95-year-old, white male in serious distress from severe congestion in the lungs. We took his vitals, started an IV, and got ready to transport. As we moved him from his bed to the evacuation stretcher, there was no doubt he wanted to do it himself. Our urging for him to relax was wasted breath. You got the idea he really wanted to walk to the unit. Talk about tough. I couldn't help but notice the photos and medals hanging on the walls of his apartment. A couple of photos were signed by Presidents. He was more relaxed after we got some oxygen going."

**His Sister:** " He was not only my brother, he was a father to me. He was a powerful force in my whole life. And he was funny."

**His Typewriter:** "At first, I was upset to be owned by an amateur who only typed with two or three fingers. But what a team we became. In the early days before we moved to Virginia,

he and I really turned out the text! Book after book. We would draft the stories, and he would give the pages to his wife, Dort, who would do the polishing. Then on we'd go to the next project. In later years, as his tremors got worse, it was slow, but almost to the very end, he would peck away at my keys using a stylus his

granddaughter had fashioned for him. The last few weeks he was giving dictation to whoever was there to help, and I was under the dust cover."

**His Classmate:** "Red was the most popular man in our class. He was a great athlete, a natural leader, and possessed an infectious sense of humor. His subsequent athletic achievements, heroic military record, and phenomenal writing career have been a source of pride among all our classmates. We, his classmates from 1926, were the ones who recommended him for West Point's Distinguished Graduate Award, and we are proud that he got it."

**His Bible:** " My pages are covered with his notes and underlining. On my flyleaf, he wrote: 'See page 928' where he underlined a passage from Mark, 'Be not afraid. Only believe. '"

**His Hospital Bed:** " He wasn't much of a load. I suppose he was originally over six feet tall, but age and illness had taken their toll. He probably only weighed eighty pounds when they put him on me, but then, he was missing the weight of one leg. I could tell he was in a bad way. He was hooked up to more than the usual tubes and monitor wires, and at first, there was a lot of activity. Had lots of visitors -- family and friends. Couldn't operate my controls himself - his hands trembled, and he was too weak to press the buttons."

**His Auto Mechanic:** " I got a big kick out of the way the Colonel would bring a small problem in here with his solution all mapped out in his mind. He would spend an hour to talk me around to his solution. Then, when it worked, he would really heap on the praise and brag on me to everyone in the shop. He loved to talk sports, especially baseball and football. Didn't have much interest in the Orioles; said he was a National League man -- once played for the New York Giants. He called me Frank; I called him Colonel."

**His Artificial Leg:** "He insisted that I be put on the window sill of the hospital room, instead of the closet. He told them he didn't want me out of his sight. It's been a rough few years for me since he's been losing weight, constantly making adjustments at Walter Reed. But, before that, we were a perfect fit. In fact, many who worked with Red in the early days after the war didn't know he had lost a leg."

**His Daughter:** "He never recovered Mother's death. He sat at her bedside for sixteen hours that last night. After she died, we tried to get him to go into the Assisted Living Wing long enough to recover -- to build up his strength. But he wouldn't hear of it. He told his doctor he didn't even want to discuss it. Some may say he died of a broken heart -- that he lost the will

to live. But I think he was afraid of giving up his independence. He couldn't stand the idea of not being able to take care of himself."

**His West Point Ring:** "I am quite worn down after seventy-two years. He didn't wear me much in the later years when his knuckles began to swell. But when he did put me on, you could feel his pride. He loved wearing the West Point motto - Duty, Honor, Country."

**His Brother:** "Russell was a scratch golfer, even after he lost his leg in WWII. For many years in the '30's, after I graduated from the Naval Academy, he and I carried on our own private, inter-service golf tournament. We bought a silver loving cup and had it engraved 'Reeder Brothers' Cup,' and put all our scores on it. We used it for toasts at both of our weddings. I finally conceded the cup to him after he beat me in a long string of matches. We both married well."

**His great-nephew:** "Just two weeks ago, Unk came out in his wheelchair, and asked me, 'Do you know where your strike zone is?' When I showed him, he said, 'That's good! More players get on base by being walked than by hitting. '"

**His Wristwatch:** "He sent the paramedic back for me as they were loading him on the ambulance. Punctuality was important to him. He once said, 'Set up your appointments to a specific minute, like 6:33 P.M.. Then those involved will be more likely to remember and be on time.' In the hospital, I got stuffed in a bag with his clothes. I heard him asking for me, and then, his daughter found me and returned me to his wrist. One of his last questions was 'What time is it?'"

**His Grandson:** "At five-thirty the morning of my West Point Graduation, the phone rang. My roommate couldn't believe it. It was Grandpa, who said, Dale, it's time to get up! This is one of the most important days of your life!"

**His Wheelchair:** "I'm red too! -- top of the line, manually operated chair. I'm the house chair. There's also what he used to call 'the electric chair' for traveling outside the apartment. Up until recently, neither of us got much use because Red felt using us would weaken him and set a poor example."

**His Son:** "My father had a phenomenal memory. He never forgot a single detail of any game he played in, and few details of the games he coached. Even more impressive was his story telling memory. He not only recalled hundreds of wonderful, laugh-outloud stories, but he remembered who he had told them to. He would often start out by saying, 'Now Russell and Dale, you've heard this, but I want to tell Tom about Butch Ordway's home run against Navy. . . .'"

**His Hearing Aid:** "Since that fatal day in France when the German 88 exploded next to him, I, and about a hundred predecessors, have sought to give him access to the spoken word because he drew strength from the interchange and repartee with friends and family. He has not been patient with our efforts. He has dreamed up a number of his own improvements mostly involving SuperGlue. That's one reason I have so many predecessors."

**His Son-in-Law:** " He was truly a father to me, ... and a fiend. He was a man's man. He loved hunting and fishing and sports -especially baseball. He was a master story teller. He had little use for jokes or puns. He sought and found humor in real life. He would occasionally cuss, but never in the presence of ladies. He liked to toss down a beer occasionally with his pals, but always in moderation. No one I ever knew had a stronger work ethic. He believed in some pretty basic values like hard work, honesty, and patriotism -- and in case you miss the point, that's another way of saying 'Duty, Honor, Country.' "

**His Walker:** "He laughingly called us the 'Tubular Cavalry.' Here in Virginia, we spent nearly nine years walking. No wheelchairs or carts for us. He and Dort were part of the daily scene, walking together to noon meals and also to church services every Wednesday. He and I were normally out ahead setting the pace."

**His Nurse:** "I simply couldn't believe my eyes when I saw his name on the board. I told myself it must be another Reeder. I mean, he was just here a couple of weeks ago sitting in his wheelchair for hours beside his dying wife. After she died, he came out of the room, struggled up out of the wheelchair, doffed his hat to us and said: 'Thank you, all, for everything you have done for my wife.' All of us cried."

**His Automobile:** "I had it made until that close call in the parking lot. I mean he changed my oil every month whether or not we did any driving, and in the last years, most of the driving was down to the garage to get the oil changed. I was really pampered; then, after the close call, my easy days were over -- he gave me to one of his grandsons."

**His Granddaughter:** "He said he thought I'd make a great cadet, but he wanted me to know how tough it was going to be. So, he invited me up to watch the first few days of Beast Barracks. I ended up going to Brown, and he was proud of that."

**His Electric Razor:** " Right to the end, he used me to maintain his well groomed and natty appearance. Daily, he'd shower, shave, put on a clean shirt with an ascot and go out to have breakfast with Dort. I have been told that next to his hearing aid, he worried more about my maintenance and upkeep than anything else. He even purchased a small vacuum cleaner to assist in keeping me working. Then, he worried about keeping the vacuum working."

**His Priest:** "His knowledge of the Bible was impressive. His questions always reflected a healthy bit of skepticism about some of religion's outward trappings. He once said he was

glad they changed the Prayer Book, because he couldn't bear the thought that his mother would be termed a `miserable sinner.' He was barely conscious when I gave the last rites. I don't think he heard me."

**His Doctor:** "He was my friend as well as my patient. Nothing in my medical training prepared me for such a patient. He had an iron will, a sharp mind, and a quick wit. He dominated every session I had with him. I could not prescribe to him. I could only advise. He should have gone from his wife's funeral to the hospital or at least into the Assisted Living Wing. But, he had earned the right to feel invincible -- he had risen above the amputation of his leg, conquered Guillian Barre, was holding Parkinson's at bay, and had survived earlier heart problems. In the end, he stopped taking his medicine. I told him: `You have to take it, Colonel! If you don't you'll have congestive heart failure.' He said: `I'm not taking it anymore. Period!'"

**His Ballplayer:** " He wasn't just a coach. Although he was a very good one. He really knew baseball, and when he told you to adjust your stance or your grip, it got results. But, he was more. He was a mentor, a fiend, a father figure to us all. He called me Freddy; I called him Coach. When I was medically evacuated from Vietnam, he came to my bedside. He took my hand with his tremendous grip and urged me never to give up. It was a turning point in my life. When I heard he was failing, I went to his bedside and held his hand. The *grip* had weakened, but you could still feel the strength of his character."

**His Alma Mater:** "Grip hands with us, strengthen our hearts as the long line stiffens and straightens with the thrill that your presence imparts..."

**His Wife:** "Come on, Red. Time to go. Game's over."

**His God:** "Well Done, Be thou at peace."

*Written by Colonel Red Reeder's son-in-law, Colonel Dale E. Hruby, USMA 1958.*