

Brothers

By Jeffrey T. Brierton - NCO Journal

June 15, 2016



A U.S. Army Soldier, assigned to the Washington National Guard, uses his body to create an opening in a wire obstacle so his team can assault a position during the August 2015 Exercise Grizzly Defender in Alberta, Canada. (Photo illustration by Spc. James Seals, using photo by Sgt. Matthew Sissel.)

Editor's note: The NCO Journal is a forum for the open exchange of ideas pertinent to the NCO Corps. Although the poem below, written by former Staff Sgt. Jeffrey T. Brierton, is not in the format we normally publish, we found it worth sharing.

Where do you find all the courage
in the terrible dark of the night?
How do you find the strength you need
to steel yourself for the fight?

At your back the sun is descending
and the shadows are growing tall.
You know when the daylight fades to black
they'll rage through the breach in the wall.

What do you say to your soldiers
who remember their brothers who died?
How do you tell them how scared you are?
That your stomach is churning inside.

You can't help but see 'cross the sand bags
and try not to count all the dead.
But you notice a look in your Soldiers' eyes
and try not to see all the dread.

How do you tell them you'll carry the day
and pull them away from hell's door?
When they know that too many have already died

and you can't lose a single man more.

So you tell them it's time to lock and load
and saddle up for the fight.

You tell them that everyone's going home
and that nobody dies tonight.

So where do you find all the courage?
Could it come from deep down inside?
In a place only history's heroes have known
Where the heart and the soul collide?

We learned where you find all the courage
in the terrible dark of the night.

You find it alongside your brothers
back to back in the thick of the fight.

Jeff Brierton served for 10 years in the U.S. Army Reserve as an Armored Cavalry Scout (19D) in the 2/338th 85th Division in Waukegan, Illinois, leaving the service in 1993 as a staff sergeant. He holds a Ph.D. in American history from Loyola University Chicago. He recently retired as a high school principal after serving for 37 years in public education. He is currently an associate professor of educational leadership at Concordia University Chicago and has recently published Ethics and Politics in School Leadership: Finding Common Ground.