

The Ballad of Hiroo Onoda

Haiku by Don Mathis

Hiroo Onoda
Inducted in the army
Under August Moon

Japanese Army
Taught him guerrilla warfare
Spring graduation

1944
Sent to Philippine island
December orders

Never surrender
And never Hari Kari
Live on coconuts

Another August
Another and another
Unit gone, war finished

Onoda lived on
He ate bananas when ripe
Killed cow now and then

He never believed
The fight was done, peace declared
Until a spring day

Honorable soldier
Recalled 30 years of war
With a storm of grief

Received a pardon
Hiroo was hailed a hero
Still battled dark thoughts

Japan had transformed
He bought a Brazilian farm
But crops gave no balm

Back to his homeland
A life to help young sprouts grow
Gave him fulfillment

Yet the Philippines
Stayed rooted in memory
He must revisit

So in '96
He made a pilgrimage back
Palms swayed, conscience cleared

Now, 2014
The harvest is finally done
The warrior goes home



Japanese Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda was the last soldier in the Philippines to surrender after World War II. He was finally convinced in 1974 that the war was over and he began a life worth living. He reluctantly accepted his back pay, and then donated the entire amount to a shrine for the war dead. After a period of ranching in Brazil, he established a school in Japan where youth could learn the lessons of nature. Mr. Onoda died in January 2014 at the age of 91. His essence can be summarized in his quotations.

*Lieutenant Onoda, Sir, reporting for orders.
I will do as you say. I will not complain.
Men should never give up. I never do. I would hate to lose.
One must always be civic-minded.
People cannot live completely by themselves.
Life is not fair and people are not equal.
Some dreams are best not to wake up from.*

Dover Beach

Matthew Arnold

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.