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NINE RIVERS FROM JORDAN

AN

*Plays by the same Author*

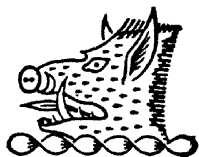
THE OLD LADY SAYS 'NO!'  
THE MOON IN THE YELLOW RIVER  
A BRIDE FOR THE UNICORN  
STORM SONG  
THE GOLDEN CUCKOO  
THE DREAMING DUST

DENIS JOHNSTON

# NINE RIVERS FROM JORDAN

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THE CHRONICLE OF A JOURNEY  
AND A SEARCH



DEREK VERSCHOYLE  
LONDON

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■

**TO MY SONS  
FROM A PRODIGAL FATHER**

■

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▪

## INTROIT

SO NOW I SPEAK at high noon, and from the Dome of the Rock. In Jerusalem, below us, under the midsummer sun, the barricades are up, and behind their barbed wire, the Proconsuls are packing while Arab and Jew prepare to come to a decision in the old way. We are all as indignant with the situation as they are with each other and with us. For none of us can see that, in its own fashion, it is not a bad way. Indeed, it is the only sure way, so long as sovereignty still remains cached in holsters of local authorities.

Amongst the shattered timber of the Hercynian Forest, the boys from the back rooms have emerged into a temporary V-shaped silence, and are hanging hangmen to prove that hanging does not pay. While, in Dublin's Pearl Bar, the Vigliacci meet under the fat eye of the Editor of the *Irish Times*, and find to their disgust that they have no hope of death at all.

What are we doing with the world passed on to us by our parents – we who are so much less worldly-wise than they were, for all our neo-Shavian enlightenment? How do I point out from this threshing floor of three persuasions that winter is warm and summer cool, as all but ploughboys ought to know, and that the circle ends when the Spring ends? To begin anything is to confront those frozen, forbidding faces in the auditorium – those sceptical eyes proclaiming only a knowledge that they are not entitled to a sign. An angry generation, unintelligent in its anger, knowing only what is not, and believing very little more – a generation disappointed in Heaven, praying for a weapon that will solve its problems, and discovering with some apprehension that prayer is answered – a generation of smart operators who buy only what is of no value, and sell themselves for nothing.

At the first of a new year, we have come here again, as we said we would. And in what we have to say, may we be redeemed without money.

In the beginning is the Myth, and the Myth is Now, and this Now is an illusion. So do not bother to bluepencil my tenses as you

read. For these displaced papers, salvaged from a universal house-moving, are written at more Nows than one, and what is affirmed on one page is sometimes disaffirmed on another. For it is not the issues that matter any longer, but sanity of behaviour – not the whys, but the hows. In the desert, I think as a child; in the Pontine slough, I practise the artifice of middle age; but up in the mountain it is like none of these things. There is Time in this testament, and Time makes contradiction inevitable, and tenses hard to follow.

As so, the kilometre stones lie tumbled at our feet, leaving us free to choose which turning of the road shall be visited – Roma 15 – Roma 10 – Roma ? – where all of a sudden the guns go off.

We might begin with the soft pad of a camel around the base of the Great Pyramid on a night that shone like silver. A dragoon read my hand in the moonlight, and told me of nine rivers that I was going to cross. But not even the Sphinx could tell me what I was to look for after I had passed the ninth. Like our first parents in Eden, I had a warning. I was not to touch the fruit of the Dead Sea. But if – as ever – man is born to disregard warnings, we should forgive Heaven for having created him so, before we ask Heaven to forgive us.

Or maybe we should start with a bundle of letters written by a girl in Ekartsberga which I found in the wreckage of Alamein. They were not very remarkable letters, but she seemed a nice girl, and I made up my mind that some day I would return to Thuringia and give them back to her. But the lawful owner, Georg Sichermann, was not there to tell me what I would find when I arrived at her address. Would it have been better if my goal had been as empty as was the Colosseum, when I paused there for reflection, after taking it over in 1944?

Or shall we go to a hospital in France, where I learnt of the seven dimensions of the universe, and of how this mystery may defeat the scythe? Or perhaps to a Church in Tyrone to attend a wedding ceremony held in defiance of the law, though oddly enough, by the command of General Eisenhower? Maybe journeys should begin, instead of end, in lovers' meetings?

And so the memories come back, not only of the waking life, but also of the dreams, running in channels of their own until they have become as much a part of memory as are the other things. And as the dreams take on the lineaments of that which we imagine to be life, then life in its turn becomes the dream.

I died one Spring morning in the Brenner. Or maybe I only dreamed my death on the night before I went up. Yet dreamed or not, I remember it, and all memories are one, interwoven into the fabric of a more subtle tapestry than we can apprehend from this abyss of five senses in which we are fettered. If it would need a miracle to bring me back here to the foot of Jacob's ladder, even in the guise of Otto Suder, it would need a greater one to have saved me on that morning when the war is supposed to have ended.

# 1

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## THE CATECHUMENS

Now the springing plough is upon the weald  
And Youth on the slopes receives the Sacrament  
That sears the furrows on the hillside.

## THE IVORY DESERT

WHAT this Mr Constantinescu's actual business is I have never liked to enquire. But I gather that he takes a detached view of the war, and is either cornering something that Rommel is going to purchase as soon as he takes Cairo, or is concealing something that Lampson will need very badly when he decides to hurry away. Yet his realism is touched with a certain bonhomie, and he seemed to enjoy talking to me on the terrace of Mena House as we listened on a warm June evening to the trucks of the Eighth Army roaring in retreat along the desert road. From most of them came a raucous singing.

— These men do not appear to be greatly disturbed by the situation, said Mr Constantinescu.

The diamond on his finger twinkled discreetly in the half light from the open door of the Hotel.

— Nor do you, I replied.

His smile broadened, and he spread out his plump hands.

— I have not lost nearly all my tanks. Nor do I profess to be a belligerent.

For a while he considered the end of his cigar in silence. Then he continued.

— I presume that you people wish to win this war? Yet sometimes I wonder with what weapons or by what form of magic you imagine that you are going to do so. Or do you really believe that you are going to win?

I took a little time to consider.

— Now that you mention it, I can't remember having heard that point being discussed. At least not in those terms. Maybe it's because England has always managed to pull through in the past. It's hard to visualise the English being beaten in the long run. There's something about them.

— Ah yes, said Mr C, I think I know what you are going to

mention. It is this thing that the English have invented, and which they call 'Character' – something to which they attribute all their successes in the past, and attach all their hopes for a profitable future.

– You don't believe in it?

He smiled again and shook his head gently.

– The English do not realise how lucky they have been. They have always done their best throughout their history to avoid what is good for them. Yet circumstances have forced success and allies upon them. Even this Suez Canal that you are here to defend, was built for them by the French, despite their most vehement opposition. But such good fortune does not last for ever.

– Not even when it's called Character?

– The old methods will not win a war any more. Allies can no longer be purchased by increasing the taxation. It is not enough to arrange that one's enemies shall starve to death – the traditional policy whenever it is inconvenient to shoot. Nowadays it is necessary to be serious about war – to have an army, and to be prepared to make use of it – that is to say, if you really wish to go on protecting your interest in disorder.

– Our interest in disorder? Is that how you talk about our peace-loving Empire?

He smiled politely and smoothed out a crease in his white dinner jacket. Behind his heavy-framed, dark spectacles he raised and lowered the long, curling eyelashes of which any beautiful woman might be proud.

– I am sure the meaning of the Balance of Power is still taught in your colleges?

– Of course. But the Balance of Power isn't what you mentioned.

– Oh come, my friend. What is the Balance of Power except the support of disunion and international jealousy as a matter of policy? Has it not been the practice of all the Anglo-Saxon countries to obstruct discipline and order in other parts of the world – that is to say, when it is not Anglo-Saxon discipline and order? Is that not why you are always the so firm friend of all the smaller and more disruptive peoples who stand in the way of unification?

– You mean that we try to support the weak against aggression?

– You have used the very word that I was searching for. The respectable brigand is never aggressive once he has got more than he needs. That epithet is reserved for his younger pupils.



I was getting the worst of this argument, principally because I was in the dark as to what my friend's own national affiliations might be, and this made it a little hard to stage a counter attack. I knew that he comes from a place called Czernowitz – the Wigan or the Bronx of the Mitteleuropa Music Halls. But Czernowitz has belonged to so many different rulers during the past fifty years that its alumni are difficult to place in the sphere of racial loyalties. Indeed, this fact may account for Mr Constantinescu's balanced sense of Realism in matters of international politics.

Rising, we walked out together, and turned up the slope that leads to the Pyramids. The unruffled singing of the retreating Army continued in the distance.

– Oh they've shifted father's grave to build a se-wer,  
They've shifted it regardless of expense.  
They've shifted his re-mains  
Just to lay some bloody drains,  
To glorify some Toff's new res-i-dence.  
Gor Bli-mey!

– I am not surprised at this singing, continued Mr Constantinescu. They are leaving to Hitler the greatest mausoleum of the human race. These pyramids are not monuments to man's greatness, but to his colossal vanity – the vanity that makes him wish to live on after his allotted span. In all generations men have fought to possess this strip of sand and weed – these tombs of a few bygone nonentities, and I have often wondered why. It is quite ridiculous to fight for a graveyard, and-I think that is what the Sphinx is laughing at.

As we approached the lady in question, I looked up at her face in the moonlight – the face that still smiles faintly despite the discourteous kiss of the cannon-balls of the Mamelukes. She reminded me a little of a girl I used to court in my college days – except for the fact that this other lady turned out to have no secret at all. That was the principal mistake I made about her.

\* \* \*

I am a radio War Reporter working for the British Broadcasting Corporation. It is my first job of this kind, and I have not been in the Middle East long enough to get over my initial surprise. In fact, I have not yet fully unpacked, because everybody in Cairo is busily doing the opposite.

I had imagined that I was going to be entrusted with some pretty serious work out here. Knowing what was wanted under our system of free and objective reporting, I was not going to concern myself with propaganda. I was going to describe soberly and sensibly exactly what I saw, and give the people at home the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth, whether happy or unfavourable. While marooned in Lagos for nine or ten days, as was everybody else below the rank of Brigadier, I had entertained myself by reading Homer, and had selected my prototype from the opening pages.

The man for wisdom's various arts renowned  
Long exercised in woes, O Muse, resound,  
Who, when his arms had wrought the destined fall  
Of sacred Troy, and razed her Heaven-built wall,  
Wandering from clime to clime, observant strayed,  
Their manners noted, and their States surveyed.

It appears, however, that the greater part of our tank force has recently been scuppered in the neighbourhood of an empty barrel in the desert dignified by the name of Knightsbridge, and that our Cairo Office is arranging to remove itself to Jerusalem, and from thence – should occasion arise – into the interior of Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, I am told it is imperative that I do no broadcasting at all. The situation is much too difficult for a newcomer, and although I am welcome to the entire coverage of the desert field force if I choose to take it, I needn't think that I can make use of anybody else's transport.

Our Office itself would arouse some surprise in Portland Place, London. Its location, the Sharia Gameh Sharkas, is not much of a thoroughfare. Its neat white Mosque is the best thing about it. The rest is given up to small Arab shops and restaurants, in front of which the native public sits, dressed in tarbooshes, striped nightshirts and boots. The local radio programme is wafted loudly on the sultry air at most hours of the day, crooning its rhythms on three or four notes and quarter tones. A shaggy and extremely cynical-looking goat is usually tethered to a tree outside the block of flats in which our premises are housed.

The entrance hall has broken camp beds and mattresses in every corner, on which the descendants of the Pharaohs lie asleep all day, as though awaiting the kiss of some eccentric Fairy Prince. They are of various sizes and ages, but of approximately equal

dirt. Most of them have scabs that are attractive to flies, and all of them seem supremely contented.

There is a lift that remains permanently fixed between the first and second floors, so that you have to go up by the unlit staircase, falling over the sacks and bundles that have been left there temporarily by the sleepers. Then, passing a Cave of Ali Baba on the first floor, you reach a mysterious medical man's apartment on the second. The story is current that he is the City Agent for an expensive lunatic asylum, and those seen going in and out lend colour to this theory.

On the third floor comes the BBC and above this we never penetrate. All I can say is that as you sit at your desk pondering over the problems of War Reporting, American visitors look in from time to time and present you with a visiting card that reads:

Mademoiselle Fifi  
Hostess and Social Activities.

On receipt of this card you say nothing, but silently point upwards. And the callers nod and steal away and are never seen again.

I have spent very little time in this office during the few days that I have been in Cairo, as there are bugs in the arms of the wicker chairs that bite one's bare elbows, and the only Secretary – a very pretty girl called Lallah – goes off every day about noon, and is usually not seen again until a quarter to four. This period is what is known as the 'hour of the siesta', and it includes the time of the Radio Link to London when our despatches come red hot from the typewriters. So it was easier for me to do my own typing in the Pressroom, and to leave Our Office entirely to the crates of engineering spare parts that encumber the floor space.

This Cairo siesta is an unshakable institution, and it is not in any way affected by the fact that two Panzer Divisions are now trundling straight for the Nile. Even the offices of Middle East General Headquarters are wrapped in slumber during the hotter hours of the day, and no urgency in the military situation has altered this rule.

After all, the situation isn't really anybody's fault, and there is very little that can be done about it. After all, what could the chaps be expected to do with those little two-pounder anti-tank guns that fire a silly shell that simply bounces off a Mark IV at

five hundred yards range? I mean, it's simply murder, old man. As for those ex-cavalry officers whose only idea of armoured warfare is 'Whip up the brutes and charge' – why the Hun simply laughs at us. Laughs at us! I mean it's nothing short of suicide, old boy, to expect tanks to go forward until the sappers have cleaned up those bloody minefields. Just see what happened at Knightsbridge where we lost the whole damn lot in one afternoon. On the other hand, how can the infantry be expected to do anything without proper support from the armour? And the blasted tanks simply refuse to move! After all, look what has happened at Tobruk. I mean it's just exactly what I prophesied, old man, only nobody would listen.

In brief the trouble seems to be due to three clearly defined causes – (1) slackness and lack of understanding on the part of the people at home, (2) panic and lack of initiative on the part of the high command, and (3) too many 'optimistic amateurs' amongst the rank and file. On the door of the Press Censors' Office in the Immobilia Building hangs a notice:

THE TROUBLE ABOUT RUNNING THIS WAR IS THAT  
THERE ARE TOO MANY POLITICIANS WHO THINK THEY ARE  
GENERALS  
AND TOO MANY GENERALS WHO THINK THEY ARE POLITICIANS  
AND TOO MANY JOURNALISTS WHO THINK THEY ARE BOTH.

So probably it is actually my fault.

But the most memorable moment of all came at that Press Conference when it was finally decided to admit frankly that everything is not quite as it should be at the front – in fact that the Army is in full retreat, and that nobody knows where it will stop! Picture the packed room in the Immobilia – the trestle tables laden with typewriters and old communiqués – the map-covered wall behind the dais from which the Military Spokesman releases the morning's news. It is Colonel Philpot, Assistant Director of Public Relations, and he stands there facing the Correspondents – their pencils poised above their pads, their runners waiting at their elbows to hasten the news to the Censors' tables.

Developments in the battle have resulted in certain areas losing their former tactical importance. Accordingly, the garrison of Knightsbridge has assumed a mobile role.

This sally was received with such a hearty roar of laughter that

the Colonel thought again, and finally deleted it from the Communiqué. There is a limit, even to official understatement!

\* \* \*

It was from this welter of bored indifference, confusion and buck-passing that I set forth on what looks like being my first and only visit to Rommel's Desert. There were four other Correspondents in the party. Close behind us, as we took the desert road for the Wadi Natrun, came an elderly American General and his personal driver in a jeep. He, too, was going to see the sights – the vanguard of Columbia's might, hastening to our aid.

My breast was filled with the delightful apprehension that I used to experience when, as a small boy of five or six, I was taken in a horse tram to see my earliest Pantomimes. There were monsters and demons ahead of us in the depths of this stony, sandy waste, towards which an endless line of telegraph poles was leading us.

How can one describe the retreat of a modern Army? – the roaring, rattling caterpillar of battered trucks and dirty men – the great transporters shouldering broken-down tanks, the RAF recovery lorries towing wrecked aircraft, the field kitchens and the ambulances, the mobile junk shops and the mass of indeterminate machinery churning the dust and spewing out petrol fumes, entangled in traffic blocks and then grinding onwards once again.

The garrison of Knightsbridge has assumed a mobile role.

Tractors and bulldozers – wrecks and runners – staff cars and clattering machine-gun carriers – armoured control vehicles and map lorries – trucks breaking off from the column and bumping violently across the margins of sand and scrub, followed by long trails of brown dust – trucks lining up in the staging areas or queuing for petrol – trucks in their tens and in their hundreds and in their thousands clanging and roaring their way eastward with a ceaseless hammering of steel on steel, or dispersed in open flocks amongst the sandhills and across the desert to the south as far as the eye could reach.

The dust rose behind our own machine in a billowing fog that was sucked into the rear, and covered every piece of kit and gear with a layer of sand. Our eyes smarted beneath our rubber goggles, and with each mile our faces got browner and browner.

Along the margins stood a succession of signs, warnings, and direction posts. The green and red divided square of the Pioneer Corps, the blue and white stripes of Signals. And the various

Headquarters Areas indicated by code numbers. The badges on the trucks show to which unit each belongs – the camel of Middle East Headquarters – the hippopotamus of 1st Armoured Division – the little desert rat of the Seventh. I tried to memorise them all for future reference. The white fern leaf of the New Zealanders – the double T of the Tyneside Division.

Military Police notices appeared at intervals – some serious, some semi-facetious.

KEEP OFF THE SOFT SHOULDERS  
IT SLOWS OUR BLITZ TO ARRIVE IN BITS  
WHO'S YOUR HITCH HIKER?

– It's all right, old boy, one of the veterans said. You won't really have to report it. To begin with, there won't be any means of getting the copy back. Everything will have gone to hell. And even if you could get it back, whatever you tried to say would be killed by the Censors. So why worry?

Why worry? But this was terrific stuff. I watched the men of the retreating army as they drove past in the opposite direction. Most of them were dirty and tired, and yet the impression that I had first got at Mena House still held good. They were not looking particularly distressed – only bored.

– Things must be pretty serious, I remarked to a driver, in a motor park where we were filling up with petrol.

– Hope it puts the wind up Cairo.

In the gateway of a nearby Ordnance Depot, the Captain in charge chewed a sprig of coarse grass as he surveyed the busy scene. Through one entrance, a steady flow of damaged transport was coming into the repair shops, while at the other end, reconditioned vehicles were going back on the road again. His face assumed a philosophic cast.

– You know, he said, sometimes I'm quite sorry for old Jerry. He tries so hard. He really deserves to win, doesn't he.

And with a shake of his head he handed me an imitation English bank note on the back of which somebody had printed in Arabic:

#### THE SIGNS OF DISSOLUTION

If you examine this Bank note you will remember that time when you could cash ten times its weight in gold. That was only because this note was guaranteed by the Great Empire. All its property stood behind it.

Its grandeur, however, has been lost; its riches have been exhausted. The day when a beggar will refuse to accept an English pound has drawn near. God's will is that England shall perish, and it shall.

Along the margin of the road a small group of coffee-coloured camel drivers sat comfortably in the shade, idly watching the white man. Occasionally eggs were held up for sale to the passing lorries. From one of these vehicles came a further verse of my favourite song.

Now father he was never called a quitter.  
I don't suppose he'll be a quitter now.  
And in winter and in heat  
He'll haunt that bleeding seat  
And only let them shit as he allows.  
Gor blimey!

In the sandy margin lay a copy of the *Peoira*<sup>3</sup> *Journal-Transcript*, dated the 10th May, that had presumably been dropped by the American General on his way through.

A membership drive of the Daughters of Pocahontas has Sisters Skelton and Follas as Captains of the teams. Miss Anne Hydrich of Hydrich Scientific Scalp Specialists says, 'No case should be considered hopeless until it is examined by her office'.

(After that I presume it may be regarded as definitely hopeless.)  
Somebody was enquiring at a small tent marked 'Information'.

– Have you any idea where the Forward Press Camp is?

– Haven't the foggiest, old boy. Everything's on the move. We call it The Gazala Stakes.

– Do you know if there *is* a Forward Press Camp?

– We don't know anything, old chap. But if you see a sign like a flying arsehole, it'll probably be somewhere around there.

– Thanks very much.

A few miles on, we drew up beside a furious little Major in a red forage cap. He was pulling up a board from the side of the road that bore the picture of an eye, and the initials PR. A fly whisk was attached to his wrist, and by his side stood an earnest orderly with powerful spectacles, holding in his hand a mug of deep brown tea.

– Excuse me, is that a flying arsehole on that board?

The Major turned and surveyed us with unconcealed distaste.

– Ah, some Correspondents! Well, there's no use bothering me

for information. All the lines are out and somebody's been jamming the wireless. I don't even know where Main Army is.

– Any other Correspondents around?

– There's a couple of parties still forward. But we haven't seen them for some days. Well, since you're here, you'd better have a cup of tea. Private Bailey, give them some tea.

The orderly extended the deep brown beverage, and in it a deep brown thumb.

– Have you seen the BBC recording truck anywhere? I'm supposed to join it.

– George Ely is around with that engineer fellow, but you'll never find them today. Better follow me back to Maryut. They'll probably turn up there eventually, and we can try and find where Main Army is in the morning.

There are some wireless masts beside a railway line behind Burg-el-Arab, and it was here that we dossed down for our first night in the desert, very tired, very dry, and caked with dust. George Henry Wellington Loftus, Marquess of Ely, the BBC's Conducting Officer, and Skipper Arnell, the Recording Engineer, came out of the darkness with two small trucks, and lent me a bedroll and a piece of soap, for I was quite innocent of any camping equipment. Although everybody was quite polite, I could tell that I was definitely the New Boy. They had had good times with my predecessor, and until they knew what kind of a chap I was, they would reserve their judgment.

At about one in the morning there was a little rifle shooting in the neighbourhood, and a certain amount of running around and getting into slit trenches. It might have been the Wogs trying to raid for arms, but as always with night shooting, nobody knew what it was. More easy to define were the bombers that kept passing over all through the night. I lay awake under my blanket staring up at the stars, and wondering as each throb-throb-throb approached, whether it was going to pass directly overhead, and if so, whether it could see me there.

To begin with, one imagines that one is much more important than one really is. It takes a night or two to realise that even if they could see you, the Heinkels are after bigger game than a few trucks dispersed amongst the scrub, and a few men lying around in bedrolls. The desert is wide, and there is a deep security in its vastness.

\* \* \*



I set forth this morning with Ely, Skipper and their two trucks, switchbacking crazily along the coast road, while the Gazala Stakes continued in the opposite direction. Sometimes we got an ironic cheer from a passing vehicle, and after puzzling over this, I realised that it was caused by the letters 'BBC' painted on the side of the recording truck. For some reason, our encouraging presence did not seem to be taken very seriously by the troops.

Beyond El Imayid the road continues to undulate along its escarpment for a matter of ten miles or more. Then a couple of small salt water lakes appear between the road and the sea, and the highway mounts into a group of hummocks covered with scrub and surrounded by a tangle of barbed wire. Ahead of us lay a small level plain bounded by another group of snow-white dunes farther west. The thinning eastbound traffic had now vanished altogether, and we were alone on the road, gazing across at the gun flashes that seemed to come from nowhere. Close beside us, a grim looking pillbox was half buried in the sand, and the edge of a minefield was marked by a few fluttering patches of white cloth strung on a strand of wire.

– Uh-huh, said the Marquess laconically. It looks as if something's up.

He got out his field glasses and started to scan the desert to our left. It was dotted with wrecked vehicles.

– Those are just hulks, I said.

– You never can be certain, he replied with a slight smile.

About half a mile away I could see the line of the railway with a string of flatcars standing forlornly near what appeared to be some station buildings. Skipper was watching the sky intently.

– Around sunset is their favourite time for coming over, he explained.

– Where are we now? I asked.

– In the Box, came the cryptic answer.

– Let's take a run down to the station and find out the form, said George, putting away his glasses with an air of finality.

We got back into our trucks and turned off to the left at a crossroads. Presently we drew up by the empty sidings. There was a sort of goods yard, and a compound surrounded by barbed wire on a line of crazy poles. Behind the station buildings stood a row of battered shacks with their doors hanging open. The whole place was littered with empty barrels and broken crates, and everywhere the brickwork was chipped and pockmarked by

machine-gun bullets. Where the road crossed the metals stood a signal, its arm inappropriately at 'Safety'. The entire neighbourhood seemed to be completely deserted, and as I mounted the platform, I read on the front of the building the name of the place:

ALAMEIN

\* \* \*

A small railway station set in the midst of some hundreds of miles of nothing whatsoever – that is all there is at Alamein. What it is there for and who uses it in peace-time, nobody can say. There was nothing to be seen there, and nothing to be done, so, setting the signal at 'Danger', we got back into our trucks and headed for the white sandhills down by the sea on the farther side of the road. They shone with a dazzling brightness in the setting sun, and I now knew why they had camouflaged my helmet a cream colour before I had set out from Cairo. It had seemed an odd shade at the time, but I assumed that they knew best.

In the soft sand beyond the salt lakes, the two trucks stuck fast. And then began the usual boring and burrowing, the usual digging and hauling that is the daily lot in the desert of anybody who strays from the beaten track (and sometimes of those who stay on it).

As soon as one truck was clear, George Ely and I left the other and walked across to a line of dugouts in which we were told we would find the South African Divisional Headquarters. It seemed possible that here we might get an idea of what was going on.

We did. Inside one of the dugouts, the Divisional Commander, a certain Dan Pienaar, was on the phone to the Air Force. It was my first interview with a senior officer in the field, and the circumstances seemed to me to be dramatic in the extreme.

– You ought to be able to do better than that, he was saying in a heavy Afrikaans accent. If you've got to bomb my trucks, you might at least hit them. But you missed every bloody one.

There was evidently some trouble, and an agitated Staff Officer hurried forward to expel us from the dugout. But the General, with a flap of his hand, waved us to a couple of chairs, on which we seated ourselves.

– Who's talking about the 10th Hussars? Dan went on. I hear you bombed them four nights ago for four hours. I suppose you'll say they never gave you the recognition signal?

– But they *didn't* give the recognition signal, sir, the Staff Officer whispered in the General's ear. Nobody knew what it was.

Then turning to us with the face of a martyr, he added,

– He's not being *fair* to the Air Force.

– OK, said Dan magnanimously. Forget the 10th Hussars. That still doesn't explain why we were shelled from the rear yesterday.

We could hear an indignant voice yapping in reply.

– See here, he continued. My father fought the British in the Transvaal, and all I want to know is, what side I'm supposed to be on now. Because if I'm on Rommel's, say so, and I'll turn round and have him in Alexandria within twelve hours. Just work it out, and let me know as soon as you've decided.

He replaced the receiver and turned to us.

– This is a new Correspondent, sir, said the Marquess.

For a moment the General's face was distorted with fury, and then he recomposed himself.

– Ah, so you're a War Correspondent! Well, I haven't much time to read the newspapers, but so far as I can judge, some people are very misinformed about this war.

– I'm not really a newspaperman, General, I said. I work for the BBC.

This was a mistake that I shall never make again.

– Oh! Then you're just the fellow I want to see. What the hell did you mean by saying that we had air cover back at Gazala?

– Well, sir, I really don't know...

– I heard it myself on the radio. The sky was full of planes, I agree, but not one of them was ours. Is that what you mean by 'air cover'?

– This is not the Correspondent who was at Gazala, sir, George interposed hastily.

But the General paid little attention.

– I'm not blaming anybody in particular. All I'm saying is that when the men hear that sort of thing it makes them very annoyed with the BBC. And judging by what they tell me Churchill has been saying in America, he must be very misinformed too.

– In what way, General? I asked in some doubt as to the wisdom of my question.

– He says he doesn't know why Tobruk was lost. Everybody here knows perfectly well it was lost because certain people couldn't make up their minds whether it was to be held or not. So Rommel made them up for them. You can't blame the men for

doing nothing when they know they're being buggered about. Can you?

– I suppose not, I replied, my pencil still poised over my virgin pad. However, I continued, Mr Churchill did go on to say that he was quite certain that Rommel could be kept out of Egypt.

– Yes, I heard that too; but I don't know what he supposes we're going to keep him out with. I've got no artillery and no armour. For weeks I've been asking to have my transport repaired, but now they tell me I shall have to indent for it through the proper channels. They say they have no more vehicles to give me, and yet I can't move on the blasted road for traffic piled up with all sorts of rubbish.

I coughed rather nervously. One's first interview with a Commander in the field is an event of considerable importance in the life of a War Reporter, particularly when the Commander is engaged in consolidating the last ditch. Yet I could hardly see myself getting away with any of this in a Press message.

OUR REPORTER, SPEAKING FROM THE ALAMEIN BOX,<sup>1</sup> QUOTES GENERAL PIENAAR AS STATING THAT THE LINE CANNOT POSSIBLY BE HELD AND THAT THE PRIME MINISTER IN WASHINGTON IS TALKING BALLS.

– Well, General, I said after a pause for reflection, maybe you could say something about the men?

This is always a good opening for a General. They usually begin, 'The men are splendid'.

– What men? he asked.

– The men holding the line.

– Oh, those! They're doing their best...what there are of them. There are my South Africans, of course. Then there are the Indians, poor fellows, God help them. And the New Zealanders ... if they get back this far. Oh – and there's supposed to be some Free French, only I haven't seen them yet. Where everybody else is, I don't know. I often wonder. Probably getting ready for the Second Front.

I had hoped to get some trite, quotable tribute to an English Regiment suitable for use in the Home Service. I must never forget that my first duty is to Home News. This was all right for Overseas, but Home News would regard it as a dead loss. Dan went on:

– I'm sure I don't know what good the Second Front will be

if we can't hold this one. Once they get to the Nile, where do we go then? Syria – Iran – the Caucasus as reinforcements for the Russians, I suppose.

– But, er, General ... this line. That must be fairly strong. I understand that it was prepared some time ago, for the final defence of Egypt.

– I've just been looking over the line, he continued. There are some very good stores and underground shelters, but as far as I can see there aren't any surface defences. They were to come later on, probably. And there's a gap seven miles wide just south of here that I'm wondering what to do about. In any event the whole thing ought to be farther forward to the west. Once they break through here they're in the clear right away.

– Then you think it *will* break, sir?

– Unless something more is sent up to me damn quick, it certainly will. I can't hold the line with what I've got now.

– Then that means the retreat goes on?

– No, sir. Not so far as I'm concerned. I've retreated far enough, and here I stop whether we hold the damn thing or not.

I sat for a while, pondering in silence over this brusque and poignant statement.

– General, I said at last, you certainly seem to be in a jam. Who do you blame for all this?

He rose and came out with us on to the sandhills, and we walked slowly across towards the hard, on to which the drivers had now dragged the second truck. The sunset was turning the sky a deep crimson over to the west where the guns were flashing across the snow-white dunes. He seemed to grow more mellow in the cool of the evening.

– I don't really blame anyone, he said. I know they're all good fellows, really. I just can't say what the reason for it is.

– Do you like good fellows, General?

– No, he snapped briefly. I don't. They call this the Alamein Box. Maybe it is a Box, but the question is, Who's caught in it? So my advice to you is, get out while the going's good, and off that bloody road. Good-bye, Mr What's-your-name. Try to get them to talk a little more sense on the radio. It's annoying, really it is. Well I'll be damned! Here's someone else to see me.

It was the American General who had passed us earlier on the road. Dismounting from his jeep, he advanced upon Pienaar with outstretched hand and a beaming smile.

– Gee, Gen’ral Pienaar, I sure am glad to meet you! I know some of your waffle-asses back in Cairo.

– Waffle-asses? Dan repeated, scratching his head vaguely.

– Yes, sir. Those guys who sit all day on chairs till they get patterns on their backsides.

Pienaar flung back his head and laughed for the first time. I watched them as they moved back across the sand and vanished into the dugout.

Somebody was singing an old Boer War ditty in the distance – somebody who was wearing the Khaki that the balladist was so sarcastic about.

– Die Khakies is mas nes in Krokidellepes  
Hulle sloop jou altyd water-toe  
Hulle sit jou op in skip vir in lang lange trip  
Ver oor die grote see.

O bring my terug na die Ou Transvaal  
Daar waar my Sarie Woon  
Daar onder by die mielies by die groen doringboom  
Daar woon my Sarie Marais.

I turned and noticed that George was unpacking the truck.

– I say, I said, we’re not going to stop here, are we?

– We’ve got to doss down somewhere.

– But you heard the General. He advised us to get out!

George looked bored. Skipper paused with a box of cooking utensils in his arms.

– You mean, you want to go back a bit?

– Well ... I mean to say ... after all, when the General tells us to get out of here ... I mean, it’s all very well, but we don’t want to go in the bag, do we? Like Eddie Ward, I added rather lamely.

George and Skipper exchanged smiles that infuriated me. It is one thing to be nervous. It is quite another thing to have everybody know that you are nervous. I was definitely at a disadvantage.

– We could go back a few miles, I suppose, before it’s dark. Do you want to?

– Yes, I want to, I snapped.

The damage was done now, so I might as well be frank about it. I was scared of the Alamein Box and of what was likely to happen there at any moment, and that annoying fact was plain for all to see.

So the cars were loaded up and we started off, going back

about five miles to this site by the sea near a tumbled-down lighthouse. On each side of us, a changing population of trucks and bivvies stretches indefinitely along the coast. Fifty yards away, the Mediterranean breaks in a shower of silver spray on the beach. Farther out, the waves pile up languidly – a bright Cambridge blue – before falling with a crash on the shingle. It would be very lovely here at any other time. Indeed it is very lovely now, Rommel or no Rommel.

\* \* \*

I shall remember this night all the days of my life. As the sun went down over Alamein, the full moon came up behind us with neat precision, as if in the opposite scale of a balance.

The evening was full of sound ... and then somebody turned on the wireless in one of the trucks.

The Voice of Experience from Cairo was on the air in calm and reassuring tones. However fluid the situation might be, there was no cause for alarm. Severe fighting was taking place about fifteen miles west of Mersa Matruh and there was no reason to believe that Rommel had penetrated any closer to the Nile. In official circles a quiet note of confidence prevailed, although it would be foolish not to be prepared for all eventualities.

A snort of sardonic laughter caused me to look around. The radio seems to attract listeners in the desert, like birds around a lighthouse. They come looming up out of nowhere and sit down in a silent semicircle, their pipes glowing in the dusk, their eyes fixed on the little window of light that is the dial of the receiver. I found myself looking into the face of a young Signals Officer.

– We were chased out of Matruh the day before yesterday, he commented with a grin. Good old BBC! I'd like to meet that fellow some day.

– It's not our fault if the Censor holds things up, snapped Skipper, ever defensive on the subject of our employers.

– Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realise *this* was the BBC!

A ripple of amusement went round the group. To my horror, the voice on the wireless changed, and it was followed by my own bland and sprightly tones describing my first impressions of Cairo. The tittering grew in volume until, after a while, they ceased to listen and the conversation became general. With the merciful darkness hiding my face I prayed to God that nobody would realise it was I who was talking.

– Wonderful how well some people manage to report a war from the bar of Shepheard's.

I should have been warned before; but then, who would be qualified to warn me of what one's own voice sounds like in the battlefield, saying such things? Certainly not my employers, for Radio Reporting is a new art, that is still being taught by the performers to the directors. Some day, no doubt, text books will be written on the subject, and I hope that on page one will be inscribed: The only critics who matter to the War Reporter are the troops amongst whom he has to live. Probably this should have been self evident, but somehow, when I did that little piece about Cairo, I was thinking more of my Mother and Betty than of these men here.

I sat down beside the Signals Officer and presently we swapped cigarettes.

– This seems to be a pretty good ballsup, I said.

– Not very surprising, he answered: Rommel's no 'damned Serjeant Major', as some of our high-ups like to call him.

– Do you know much about him?

– Only the usual stories. There's one I heard yesterday from one of our fellows who got back from Tobruk. He says that after the place was taken, the Gerries paraded all the officer prisoners, and Rommel drove up in his car. He got out and inspected them, and then he made a little speech. 'Gentlemen', he said, 'for you the war is over. You have fought like lions, but you have been led by donkeys'. But then, he always had it in for Richie ever since he captured that Order of the Day that was issued at the time of our last offensive. Richie is supposed to have said that the last siege of Tobruk proved the incompetence of German leadership. Any competent commander, he said, could have taken the town with ease. They tell me in Signals that the day the Panzers got into the place, a mysterious voice came up on our own wavelength on the radio telephone. It was calling Army Commander in person, and it said, 'General Richie, this is Rommel. I have taken Tobruk.'

– Is that really a true story? I asked.

– I don't know. It's going the rounds anyway, and like a lot of stories, the less credible it is, the more likely it is to be true these days. You'd scarcely believe how some of my chaps were captured. They were driving up the main road in a lorry, and one of our own armoured cars was dodging in and out of the column.



Suddenly, at a convenient moment, the turret opened, and a Gerry Officer stuck his head out and said, 'Schtopp, please'. He held up his hand and swung a machine gun, and there was nothing else for the column to do but obey orders. And there they all were – in the bag.

– But how did they get away to tell you this?

– Oh, the Gerries only held the officers. They hadn't got the means of coping with all the men, so they just disarmed them, turned them loose and drove off in our lorries.

– They seem to have quite a civilised way with prisoners.

– Yes; Rommel and the Afrika Korps are all right. It's only the Eyties who are swine. You want to avoid the Eyties if you're going to be taken prisoner. It's probably because they've always got the wind up. The yellower they are, the dirtier they are as a rule.

As the moon rose higher, and we sat talking beside the trucks, the lore of the Army was passed from mouth to mouth. How the Long Range Desert Group had taken Kufra; how an adventurous German, dressed as a British Redcap, had brazenly stood at a crossroads near Agedabia directing all the British soft-skinned vehicles (including a couple of Generals) up a side road into the bag; how the *San Giorgio* battleship had shot down Balbo by mistake near Tobruk, and how Collinshaw of the RAF had sent over one of his own planes and had dropped a wreath on the spot.

And I thought to myself as I listened to all this, how different it is from what I had expected, and at the same time, how much more exhilarating. This is the army that is defending the jugular vein of the British Empire at one of the greatest crises in its history. Yet it doesn't really seem to give a damn. On the whole it is being lazy and fairly incompetent and extremely bored – except for the colony in Cairo, which is thronging through all the available exits as fast as a word in the right quarter can carry it.

This doesn't seem to be quite as it should be. On the other hand, what about these men sitting on the beach, swapping stories before they go to sleep – stories of a strangely detached and impartial kind, many of which are cracking up a relentless enemy whose two Panzer Divisions are liable to cut them off before morning? It seems paradoxical, and yet there is a kind of common sense about it that is much more heart warming than the phoney heroics that good soldiers are supposed to display.

The radio is still switched on – Grieg's Piano Concerto is pealing

out now. And as I listen to its crashing arpeggios, I suddenly feel glad to be here, and I know somehow that I have picked up good news at Alamein – although there is precious little of it I shall ever be able to use in a Press Despatch.

Well, if the British Public can't have it, at least I can write it down for the good of my own soul! And now, as ten o'clock approaches, somebody looks at his watch and says:

– How about our bedtime song?

Skipper fiddles with the dial of the receiver, and in a few moments there comes the opening bars of an orchestra, going Oom-pah Oom-pah. And then, the softly caressing voice of a woman, singing in a deep and lovely contralto:

Vor der-Kaserne, vor dem grossen Tor  
Steht 'ne Laterne, und steht die noch davor?  
So wollen wir uns wiedersehn  
Bei der Laterne woll'n wir stehn  
Wie einst Lili Marlene  
Wie einst Lili Marlene?

– Why can't the BBC give us something like that?

– How's that for a nice bedroom voice?

It is a German woman, singing both armies to their sleep. She does it every night, and there is something in this final touch that grips my overstrained emotions and wrings them like a damp rag. It is just about all that I can take, this evening. The stirring of the night wind – the beating of the sea on the beach – the distant growling of the guns – and that woman's voice.

Aus dem stillen Raume, aus der Erde Grund  
Hebt sich wie in Traume, dein verliebter Mund.  
Wenn sich die späten Nebel drehn  
Werd' ich bei der Laterne stehn  
Wie einst Lili Marlene  
Wie einst Lili Marlene.

Maybe I might try just that one on the Censor?

One by one our visitors knock out their pipes, and tramp off across the sand in search of their scattered trucks. I peel off my clothes, and lie down in a bedroll in the shadow of the recording truck – my pencil and notebook still by my side. For a long time I stare upwards at the stars, listening as before to the throb-throb-throb of the aircraft passing overhead.

Behind us on the skyline the transport column continues to slip by – truck after truck all running eastward – a succession of purring smudges.

So long as that traffic keeps moving, the road to Alexandria must still be open behind us.

Keep running, smudges! Keep running!

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## THE PROPHET AND THE PYRAMID

THIS SHAGGY CAMEL plods its way up the slope to the Pyramids.

It is another night of moonlight, and after dinner at Mena House, I am again disposed to visit my friend the Sphinx; only this time, at greater leisure and expense. At the gate of the hotel, close to the tram terminus, a bearded dragoman offers me a lift on his probably syphilitic mount, and I accept.

An American airman has had much the same idea, and as his animal billows upwards from its knees, I hear him mutter:

– Gee, dis job is in revoise!

This evening no column of trucks is humming up the road from Alexandria. The line at Alamein has held, in spite of Pienaar's apprehensions, and for the moment the front appears to be stabilised until somebody can get his second wind. But in spite of this lessening of the tension, I feel very gloomy. As a Correspondent, I have so far been a total loss.

For all we know, this may be a vital point of the war, and I have had little or no idea of where to look for the news. In the absence of any guidance in the matter, I seem to have spent most of my time helping to get the trucks out of soft sand, and being told off by the Censors. For example, what do I think I'm doing, publicising this song, 'Lili Marlene'? ('I thought you were supposed to be on our side'.) And now I have been recalled by PR to Cairo so that my transport can be taken from me to facilitate Our Office on its *higira* to Jerusalem – a project that interests me not at all.

One behind the other the two camels pad their way across the open space at the base of the giant Cheops. It is almost as bright as day, and the cool air is an aid to Great Thoughts.

What am I doing here at all in these nutcracker jaws? Where the hell am I going? Why did I ever agree to take part in such futilities?

My dragoman is chatty; but I don't think, all the same, that I shall dismount and enter a tomb with him. I am sure it is interesting, but I would rather stay up here in the fresher air. I am not in the mood for tombs.

The Captain has something on his mind? He is perhaps considering his future? Then maybe he will have his hand read? It is customary on these occasions, and this dragoman is a noted reader of palms. Very cheap. Very good.

I knew that there would be a few extras above the price quoted for my camel, so with a smile I hold down a hand. The shambling of the brute stops, and the bearded figure in the white turban peers at my palm in the silver light.

– Yes, the Captain has a difficult hand, for there are women and children in it, and home life too. And yet there is some unhappiness. Some manner of trouble in the home, maybe. Yet the Captain has many friends – good ones and bad ones too. Some bad ones very close. He must beware. But better friends are on the way, so he need not despair. Soon the times will be better, and he will get his desire in the end.

My smile deepens. I was waiting for something like this.

– Ah, but you're not telling me the important thing. What *is* my desire?

– The Captain must find that out for himself. All men must find that out for themselves. But this I can tell you. Before long you will start on a journey – a journey over earth, over fire, over air, and over water. I do not know where this journey will lead you, but I think that it is from where it is white to where it will be white again. It is from a depth to a summit. And here in your hand I see nine rivers that you must cross, and at the end there is something that I do not understand, something about a Dove. When you have reached the last river, you will be at the end of your journey, and there you will find what you have been looking for.

He releases my hand and gazes up with an ingratiating smile.

– And that will be twenty akkers, I suppose?

– As the Captain wishes.

– I bet you tell that to all the fellows.

As a handful of notes passes between us, the American reappears on the other camel, gazing rapturously up at the mightiest pyramid.

– Jeez, what a contract! is his comment.

\* \* \*

Two middle-aged civilian friends in Cairo – the Delany Brothers – christened the blackest day ‘Ash Wednesday’. This was a malicious comment on the fact that the Allied Embassies and Offices were burning their papers. There were rumours in the town that Alexandria was already lost, and as the smoke of burning records rose up to heaven, His Britannic Majesty’s Ambassador made reassuring speeches to those of the population that could not be shifted. There was no cause for alarm, he said, and under no circumstances would our good friends, the Egyptians, be deserted.

For their part, the sons of the Pharaohs showed no particular anxiety over whether they were going to be deserted or not. They went about their business much as usual, with the exception of some uncollegiate-looking groups, known as ‘Students’, who marched up and down clapping their hands. For some reason this is interpreted as an anti-British gesture.

Meanwhile, my spirits were restored by the good company and good liquor of the Delany Brothers, and with a nasty glint in my eye, I made up my mind that I was going back to the desert, if not with the blessings of the Army, then on behalf of anybody else. And it was George Haughton, the Air Force PRO, who enabled me to do so. With his entire office standing by to get out on twelve hours’ notice, it was quite a feat to provide a truck for one section of the BBC to go the other way. But he managed it on condition that I drove myself, and regardless of the fact that he already had a recording outfit in the field under Frank Thornton-Bassett – a unit that is looked on with some suspicion by the Press.

But not, thereafter, by me. From then on, I became the little pal and firm supporter of the RAF in all its doings.

– Stick to the Air Force, said Haughton, and you’ll end up wearing diamonds.

– I don’t know that diamonds become me, George, I answered. But I’ll take your advice.

\* \* \*

It was hard to define what exactly our status was, or who was going to feed us. As for any authority to be touring around the battle area, all that we had was a receipt for the truck typed by George on a piece of paper in the following terms:

Further to recent conversations, and with the authority of the Deputy AOC, you are to attach yourself with Mr W. R. Arnell to the Western

Desert Headquarters of Command Public Relations. You will operate in accordance with S/Ldr McKenzie's suggestions. We have placed the 15 cwt truck at your convenience and I must insist that you shall accept responsibility for it during the emergency period while there is no driver available.

I felt that it was somewhat irregular, and could not be the normal way in which the better War Correspondents are provided with facilities. However, stuck into my licence, I had another document issued previously from GHQ Home Forces, which I have always regarded as the Magna Carta of my profession. The operative paragraph runs as follows:

- 2 a) Officially accredited war correspondents in uniform will come round during the battle. It is their job.
- b) These press correspondents must be allowed to go where they want so long as they do not interfere with the battle.

(sgd) E. Mockler-Ferryman  
for Lieut-General, GGS

– Skipper, I said as we bowled along, I don't know what suggestions S/Ldr McKenzie is likely to make, but we'll be all right so long as we observe the Golden Rule. Whatever happens, we must not interfere with the battle.

\* \* \*

#### DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?

enquired a notice by the side of the road. Skipper and I had set off together down the coast, ostensibly to make a commentary in the forward areas, but (so far as I was concerned) to begin a private showdown about this New Boy business.

We drove along past the artillery positions – past the cross-roads – past the barbed wire of the Box, and out along the road towards Tel-el-Eisa. Skipper, who was at the wheel, began to glance sideways at me, anticipating the suggestion that we might stop. Up to this it had always been *his* desert, and I had been the one to make the enquiries. But this time it was going to be different if it killed me.

Although my lips were a little dry, I managed to whistle a tune, after we passed that first notice. At last Skipper felt compelled to speak.

– How far do you want to go?

– Oh, just another mile or so, I replied with an airiness that I was far from feeling. Presently another roadside sign appeared:

IF GOING MUCH FARTHER PLEASE TAKE ONE →



The spurt of a shell appeared some distance away across the empty waste to the south. There was nothing to be seen except the bare road stretching ahead. Maybe we were still a long way behind the limit; maybe we were not. Nobody knew. Presently Skipper stopped the truck with a jerk at the bottom of a dip and snapped out:

– I'm responsible for this gear, and I'm taking it no farther down this road.

With an exaggerated nonchalance I got out.

– That's all right, old boy, I said. That's quite all right. You just stay here with the truck, and I'll go on myself.

I stepped off along the road and over the top of the next rise, leaving a silent Skipper glaring after me. As soon as I was out of sight I promptly dropped on my belly behind the nearest pile of stones and observed the unwelcome landscape for the space of about ten minutes, after which I lit a cigarette, rose to my feet and ran for home – that is to say, I ran until I was within sight of the truck, when I resumed my nonchalant and hypocritical saunter.

– It was quiet enough, I said on my arrival. Still, I think you were probably wise not to have come.

Skipper said nothing as he turned the truck round, but if looks could kill I would have fallen dead on the spot. It was a dirty trick, but it improved our relations enormously.

Then came that evening when I sat on the roof of the truck and gave a visual description of the Box and the little railway station and the desert stretching ahead towards Tel-el-Eisa. And a few guns pooped off around us, making a background of sound to the word picture. On the way back, the Stukas were out, and we both hung out of the truck watching the skies, as we belted down the road, shouting with schoolboy excitement whenever they seemed to be coming our way.

Safely back at Kilo 86, the Skipper suddenly became quite expansive.

– Well, he remarked as he parcelled up the disc, I must say that you've got something here that's never been got before.



I was about to thank him for his help and his pretty compliment, when he forestalled me with a touch of the old caution.

– Except, of course, by Eddie Ward, he added as an afterthought.

\* \* \*

The other Newspapermen are a tougher proposition, because their hostility is not personal, but is rooted in a hatred of Broadcasting as an institution. Through its very nature, the radio has a way of scooping even the best of them. And as old 'professional newsgatherers they resent this, and feel understandably that it is not fair.

We were standing on the Reweisat Ridge one afternoon, talking to General Auchinleck and A-V-M Conyngham. A British attempt at a counter-attack had gone awry, and we had lost another seventy to eighty tanks, because somebody had made a mistake in a map reference and run the whole lot on to a minefield. They were short of water up there, and – as one of the ack-ack crews put it – the great problem in the mornings was to decide whether to make tea with the shaving water or to shave in the tea. A tank commander had been describing to me how they used to fox the enemy gunners by reversing their vehicles slowly along the skyline, so that their movement was not apparent at a distance, and yet the range never remained constant. In the midst of this, I realised that the usual fuss was building up round the Auk over something the BBC was alleged to have said.

– Is it true that you've had to change your plans, sir, because of something that the BBC let out? asked Paul Bewshire of the *Daily Mail*.

His face wore an expression of cherubic innocence, but all eyes turned upon me, and I found myself the centre of a circle of malicious grins. To my relief, the Auk grinned too.

– Yes, we've had a bit of trouble, he replied, but it wasn't the fault of the BBC. We've traced the leakage to a report of Reuters, and sent a couple of Correspondents back to Cairo, on the strength of it.

I would have liked to have stuck out my tongue at Paul Bewshire, but my years forbade it.

A centrifugal profession, I thought to myself, as I watched them scatter to their various cars. All of them pretended to be on their way back to Kilo 86, but most of them intended to beat it back

to Cairo as quietly as possible, hoping that none of the others would have thought of doing so too.

It was a morning or two after this meeting on Reweisat that I got up before anybody else was stirring, and I climbed the sand-hills and sat down on the beach to stare at the sea. And as I sat there, I turned over in my mind some of the things that I had wanted to do in this job, and had so far failed to achieve. Was it because I didn't know how, or because my intentions were really so much empty wind?

How little we know about ourselves until something like War puts it to the test. We are so quick to spot the bullshit in others. But what about our own? How deep is our sincerity? At what point does our courage end and our cowardice begin? For a man facing these things for the first time, that is perhaps the biggest question mark of all! How great a coward is he? For a coward he knows himself to be, unless he is a fool. But how far it goes, no man can tell until he tries. And even if he can steel himself to be brave in his mind, how can he know what his body will do? The chilling of the tips of the fingers and of the toes, as he lights a cigarette, has nothing to do with the mind. The loosening of the bowels as the sirens sing and a blitz begins is an automatic reaction that no histrionics can ignore. One's stomach tells the truth about oneself. And one wants so much to know the truth.

Fruitless speculations, maybe, for a baffled Correspondent sitting on a Libyan beach and staring at the short seas. Yet, in spite of my failures, I knew that I was glad that I had come. I had seen the cigarettes glowing in the dark, as we sat around the truck and listened to Grieg's Piano Concerto. I had sailed in convoy from the north to the south Atlantic, and joined in those songs in the after well-deck. And the Air Force boys were perched by the hundred along the rails and on the boats and up in the shrouds, singing in harmony. Queueing at the bar for drinks before dinner, and discussing life night after night with all sorts of queer types as we neared the blazing colour of Freetown. Every man had a story, if only you could get down to it; every man was a world in himself. There was a great feeling of companionship in that convoy – the companionship of men who were all leaving home, just as I was myself – and probably for no more coherent reasons than those that had taken me away.

I had seen the kingdom of the Ants around Maiduguri; and the Nile at Khartoum, stretching like a sash of black velvet under the

brightness of the Milky Way; and the fresh wind whipping the great azure saucer of the east harbour of Alexandria where neat little Wrens in duck's clothing walked the promenade in the sunlight.

I had smelt the acrid heat of the air in Cairo, lurking sullenly between the chasms of the buildings after night had fallen. And I had discovered once again the beauty of everyday things – the sound of the sea, the flavour of food, the incredible loveliness of silver water pouring from a tap or swirling in the bottom of a deep bath – things I had known all my life, but had forgotten about since I was a child.

Rising to my feet, I rolled up my message of recall and flung it far out to sea. Then stripping off my pyjama legs, I plunged in after it, before trudging back over the ridge of sand to pack my kit.

– All men must find out for themselves what they desire. Before long you will start on a journey – a journey over earth, over fire, over air, and over water. From where it is white to where it will be white again ... Nine rivers you must cross – and at the end – something about a Dove. But do not despair, for better friends are on the way, and in the end ...

– Jeez, what a contract!

\* \* \*

By mid-July, I am glad to say that great upheavals were taking place in Our Office. Some went reluctantly home; others came quizzically out, and amongst these were a new Correspondent called Godfrey Talbot, and an upper-level administrative type known as Red Ted.

I met Godfrey on the terrace of Shepherd's and liked him at once, although he was more inclined to tell me his ideas on war reporting than to listen to my recital of the dirt of the Office. This is characteristic of the struggle that seems to go on perpetually in the Middle East. Everybody wants to talk about himself, and the great art of conversation is to prevent others from doing so, and to confine the talk strictly to one's own problems. It was clear from the beginning that Godfrey intended to keep away from log-rolling and propaganda, and to give the people at home nothing but the plain objective Truth.

Eventually we called a truce, and went out to Mena House to see if we could jointly talk Red Ted down, and get some sense

into the Report on Conditions that was obviously the first thing that he would undertake.

We went out there by tram, threading our way past those flat Arab carts on each of which a group of black-veiled women sat cross-legged. The tram driver at the controls had a small teapot on a neat little tray beside him, from which he helped himself to a quiet cup of something as he drove. Godfrey was instructing me in the mysteries of the professional language of journalism known as Cable-ese – the language in which I get occasional messages from home, that read something like this:

GRATEFULLEST YOU DESPATCH URGENTEST INTERVIEWS BRITISH  
REPEAT BRITISH TANK CREWS DESERTWARDS STOP INTEREST-  
INGEST HOME AND EUROPEAN STOP REGARDS BROADCASTS

There are certain rules that govern this fascinating game, in the course of which a news story or service message is boiled down into the fewest number of legitimate composite words that can properly convey the meaning. It presents a better mental exercise than the composition of a crossword puzzle. And, of course, Cable-ese has its own fund of dirty stories, such as the classic about the Correspondent who was cabled by his office after he had been silent for too long a time:

WHY UNNEWS?

To this he replied with equal briefness:

UNNEWS GOOD NEWS.

Came the sinister rejoinder:

UNNEWS UNJOB.

Rising to lyrical heights, he then concluded the exchange with:

UPSHOVE JOB ARSEWARDS.

When we got to Mena, our host motioned us to a table by the side of the swimming pool, and looking up at the palm trees, he shook his head significantly.

– How strange to think that here we are sitting down to dinner in these pleasant surroundings; and all the time there is absolutely nothing but a few miles of desert between us and Rommel.

At the next table an elderly officer was being talked to in passionate undertones by a nurse, to whom he had evidently got engaged.

– My mother always told me there was no harm in my enjoying

myself, so long as I never forgot to be a lady. She said she could always trust me to be that.

Her fiancé's agonised glance roved the surrounding tables in search of eavesdroppers. Ever kind, I pretended not to hear.

– I shall always be a lady after we're married.

And then, interpreting his expression for one of disappointment, she added archly:

– Except, of course, with You.

– I'm going away to Palestine in a day or two to get on with my Report, our host continued. That is, if this toothache doesn't get me down. I'm a martyr to toothache, you know.

We sympathised, and rose. A drunk but very bluff gunner approached me.

– Hello, old boy. Still reporting the war from Mena, eh! Why don't you come up forward, and visit us, old boy? We could show you a thing or two.

He staggered off, laughing softly to himself. Godfrey looked puzzled.

– I thought you had been up forward.

– I have, I grimly remarked. But no matter where you go in this war there's always somebody who says: What are you doing hanging around these rear areas? Look here, Godfrey, if you'll look after the Cairo link for a week or two, I shall go up Forward. I shall keep going Forward until that myth is exploded. Then you can take a turn. What say?

Godfrey assented with a smile, and we retired to our respective beds.

\* \* \*

This time there was going to be no fiddling round alone with Skipper. I had seen my predecessor's cavalcade passing through the City of Cleopatra, and I knew the form. I knew what Our Reporter should demand and what he should receive. And I got it – Drivers Sherlock and Pretswell and Recordist Skipper, a Staff Car and a Recording Truck. And above all, I got as my Conducting Officer, Mark, of the Rifle Brigade.

I liked him from our first drink together, when I expounded my ideas, and he was gracious enough not to inform me that I was a Wet. Our target was to be Hemeimat and the deep south of the line, where I was convinced that Rommel's coming attack would fall. In Alexandria we dined at the Union Bar with another of his Rifle Brigade friends, and we consulted him about the terrain.

– There’s really nobody down there but Jimmy, explained Red over the Kabbab.

I didn’t like to ask who Jimmy was, but it sounded as if maybe there was nothing between us and Rommel after all. Maybe the Man with the Toothache was right! Maybe he had private information.

– You’ll find our B Echelon somewhere along the Diamond Track, Red went on. Look them up. They’ll be glad to see you.

Next day we completed our stores by the purchase of a small crate of Greek wine, and off we went. We were desertworthy now. We had our water cans and our folding beds, our compass and our maps, our towing ropes and our emergency sand tracks. And we had no painted ‘BBC’ that might provoke sardonic applause.

We crossed the Reweisat Ridge, followed by Skipper and Sherlock in the recording truck, and we passed through the thickly laid minefields along its southern slope. Beyond this we entered the wide and empty territory of the 7th Armoured Division, where every second gunner and every NCO seemed to be an old associate of Mark’s, only too ready to record a story for us.

Steering by compass, we found the Diamond Track – a set of wheel marks distinguished from the others by iron posts a few hundred yards apart, bearing a diamond-shaped symbol. And as evening fell, we reached the leaguer of the B Echelon. All the way, conversation flowed freely. Mark and I had many mutual friends, and it seemed that we had each our domestic complications, in some ways strangely interlocked. And as evening drew on we opened the crate between our feet and broached the first bottle of Greek wine. Under its mellowing influence I amused myself with a pencil and paper by practising my new-found literary language – Cable-ese. The Rubaiyat provided a good subject for the first exercise.

A book of verses underneath the bough...

VERSEPRINT SUBBOUGH (two words)

A loaf of bread, a flask of wine...

EUCCHARISTWISE (one word)

...and Thou,

Beside me, singing in the wilderness

CUMSONGSTRESS DESERTWARDS (two words)

Ah, wilderness were Paradise enow!

OKAYS WILDERNESS (two words) (Total seven words.)

They received us warmly at the leaguer, fed us, and showed us where to sleep. As far as they knew there wasn't much up forward (except Jimmy, of course); but we really ought to go up and see, instead of hanging around these back areas. Next morning we set off as soon as the heavy ground mist had cleared, and crossing a wilderness of jagged stones, we struck due south by compass and eventually reached the Barrel Track. Then turning west once more, a jagged, tooth-like eminence appeared some miles ahead of us.

– That must be Hemeimat, said Mark.

– Who's on it? I asked.

– I think we are. But perhaps we'd better find Div and ask them.

Headquarters of an Armoured Division consists only of a few ACVs scattered about in various depressions, and it is not very easy to find. What we eventually did find amongst the rising sand-hills farther to the west was the HQ of the 2nd Motor Brigade – three or four armoured cars and lorries, from which came the intermittent buzz of the wireless and the quacking of voices on the Radio Telephone. Food and drinks were provided at a trestle table underneath a camouflage net that was stretched between two vehicles. They were very hospitable, and asked us to stay the night – although (this from a Battalion Commander) if we really wanted to get the picture, we ought to go up forward and not be hanging around Brigade.

We thanked them, and went on – dossing down for the night by ourselves close to a crashed Stuka that stuck a forlorn tail up into the air. As the sun went down we started our brew up, and surveyed a scene of wide and empty desolation.

– Well, we've seen the Barrel Track, and maybe there's something to stop Rommel going along it into Cairo. But if there is, it's bloody well hidden.

– Look, said Skipper, pointing towards the northern skyline. As he spoke, a fleet of tanks appeared, seemingly from nowhere, waddling and pitching across the loose stones, tossing and ploughing along like a great herd of prehistoric monsters, each with its long bushy tail of dust behind it. The Desert Rats were at their perpetual manœuvres. The desert wasn't so empty as it seemed.

As darkness came down they assembled into Close Leaguer, and the lines of vehicles faded into the dusk. We did not cross over to them. To go out walking at night without a compass is to get irretrievably lost once your own truck vanishes from sight. So we stayed where we were – Mark lying down on his bed, and dropping

off to sleep just as he was; I, with my middle-class background still clinging to me, going through all the ritual of undressing and washing and cleaning my teeth.

We were wakened next morning by the leaguer breaking up shortly before dawn. This is the universal practice. In daylight – dispersal; in darkness – concentration. We left them behind and were well on our way towards the west when something occurred in the air overhead, and a nearby truck hurriedly emptied itself of its passengers. I noticed them getting underneath.

– Dogfight, said someone, and our two vehicles came to a sudden stop. Following the drivers, I dashed for a slit trench, and once in, I turned to look around. There was some sort of a scrap going on far above our heads. But what really focused my attention was the behaviour of Mark. Alone of those present, he was walking about in a most high handed manner, staring up at the sky. In that moment I discovered in Mark two things: first, the Professional, secondly, the Officer; the professional – in that he knows instinctively when to take cover and when not to bother. This, to a novice, is one of the most puzzling things about war. Sometimes everybody lies down and vanishes from sight; at other times nobody does so except the mugs. The trick is to know by certain signs, far more subtle than a few bangs, which time is which.

With regard to his rank, I have noticed in this war that whenever occasion arises, the British private soldier gets into his slit trench and stays there. This is because he is not interested in the exhibitionist side of the game. It is not his business, and he very sensibly does not intend to get killed if he can avoid it. He did not ask to come here, and he intends to go home unless he is unlucky. This attitude has nothing to do with bravery or cowardice. It is just a feeling of indifference to the whole issue.

The good officer, on the other hand, takes a certain pride in being bored by danger. It is His war and His desert; and he advertises this fact by never wearing a steel helmet or a topee, and by never taking cover except on certain well-defined occasions, while at the same time recommending other people to do so. Maybe it savours slightly of affectation, and I prefer it to that of the Long Range Desert Group, who advertise their membership of this supposedly secret organisation by appearing in the Cairo bars in Arab headdresses – like so many understudies of Lawrence of Arabia.



About noon we reached HQ, 7th Motor Brigade, and were received by a Captain with a luxuriant moustache, and an artillery Lieutenant who introduced himself by the name of Bowman. He had just been showing a party of RAF officers round his front line positions, and was delighted that some shells had fallen close by at just the right moment. It gives them so much better an idea, you know. ...

– So you want to see what’s going on? he said. Of course there’s not much to see back here. What you ought to do is come out with me to ‘July’.

I gritted my teeth and turned to the others.

– Are we still not at the front? I asked.

– How would you like to see the Gerries? I might even take you to the pimple where I brought those RAF chaps. You’ll like it, and there’s a fine view.

I knew we were in for it now.

– How do we get to this pimple? I asked, with a frozen smile.

– In an armoured car. Actually the thing has no top. But that doesn’t matter much. We go pretty fast.

– That means no recording truck, said Mark. Skipper had better stop here till we get back.

– OK, I said in tones of deep resignation. Take me to your pimple.

Before long we were bumping down a wadi, sitting round the portion of this so-called armoured car where the turret ought to have been. Bowman was delighted and talked continuously, keeping up a running commentary on everything around us. We passed through a lane of barbed wire supported by little posts.

– This is our own minefield. You see those dummy guns, and what looks like a couple of men asleep beside them. They’re all booby-trapped. Gerry creeps up here nearly every morning and takes a shuftie to find out where our positions are. If he spots those guns and tries to attack them after dark, he’s in for a hell of a surprise. We play all kinds of tricks like that on each other.

And he laughed happily to himself.

Presently the armoured car got stuck in some soft sand, and we all got down to help her along. A Colonel, passing by in a light car, asked us what the hell we were doing there, and didn’t we know that our artillery were going to register in this area in about five minutes’ time. Bowman knew all about this, and was quite sure that we would be out before then.

– This is very unusual, he said. We’ve never got stuck here before. I have to do this circuit every morning – just to see if Gerry is around. Out here between the minefields it is really anybody’s territory, although he generally leaves it to us during the day.

I moistened my lips and smiled. Mark, I could see, was quite interested, and this fact did not at all increase my sense of security. Presently the car was moving again, and we found ourselves crossing a sort of derelict seaside golf-links, and approaching a wireless truck, parked hull down in a small depression. From its roof, an NCO was looking over the skyline through a pair of field glasses.

– This is July – one of our OPs. It stays here all day just to watch what’s going on. Now I think we’ll get out and walk a bit.

From the interior of the wireless truck a sepulchral voice contradicted him.

– Not around here you won’t. If you want to get shelled, you can bloody well walk somewhere else.

– OK, said Bowman. Let’s walk up on the ridge. We can see much better there.

We walked – at least, Bowman and I did. Mark, who does not like walking, stretched himself out beside the armoured car and went to sleep. Although more or less paralytic with anxiety by now, I was also distinctly bloody-minded, and was going to go anywhere this damn little man suggested.

– But surely, I asked, with an affected nonchalance, surely they don’t waste their artillery fire on solitary pedestrians!

– Oh no, not as a rule. But they know we have an OP somewhere here, and we’ve been annoying them a bit this morning, so naturally they’re a little touchy. I say – what a lot of wheel tracks there are up here today. Those aren’t ours, you know. They weren’t here last night.

Hoping to change the subject, and also maybe the direction of our advance, I paused and pointed to a nearby hummock.

– What’s up this way? I asked.

– Haven’t an idea, replied Bowman. Let’s go up and see.

Then as an afterthought he paused and unslung his glasses.

– Perhaps I’d better take a shuftie with the glasses first. No knowing what might be around, and it would never do to get a visitor sniped, would it?

I have no doubt that a good deal of this was an act on the part of my genial friend. But in retrospect, I doubt if it was entirely an

act. I dare say this bit of No-Man's-Land, from long acquaintance, had become almost as commonplace as Piccadilly, and not much more dangerous. He loved his work, and there was certainly something in what he was saying, for when we reached the summit on our hands and knees, and parted a patch of scrub to peer through, a surprising vista opened before our eyes.

To the north, a wide plain was spread out below us, dotted with hundreds of vehicles.

– What are those? I asked.

– Most of them are wrecks, said my companion. But Gerry has a trick of lying doggo in a place like that. You think a tank is a wreck, but she suddenly comes to life as soon as you show yourself. We try to plot the bearings of all the suspicious ones, so as to spot any of them that move during the night. Now look over there.

And he pointed to the west. On the next rise, not many hundred yards away, there was a scene of some activity. Trucks were parked in lines at the bottom of the declivity, and farther up the slope I could see elaborate strong points and diggings. Walking around these, engaged in their daily chores – some cooking, some washing, some doing nothing in particular – were our friends, the enemy.

– Well, I'll be damned, I said.

– Good view, eh? said Bowman.

– There seems to be quite a lot of stuff there, I said. Are you expecting an attack in this sector?

– Yes. Any day now. You can tell that from his dispositions. He's concentrating his Armour in the rear and bringing the 90th Light into the line. That always shows the direction he's planning to go. We just look for the black square and the white lozenge.

– Haven't we got any sort of entrenched front ourselves, like his over there?

– No. Nothing south of the New Zealanders. Just minefields and dug-in artillery. Just a few OPS protected by some infantry and carriers.

– Then what's to stop him, when he does come?

– Nothing much. Our tanks are somewhere up behind. I think the idea is for them to come down on his flank if he does come through. Let's go round to the pimple now. You can see better from there.

We walked back to the armoured car and remounted.

– Hang on, said Bowman. We'll have to cover the last bit fairly fast. It's across the open, until we get behind the pimple. They'll probably be at lunch, and anyhow it usually takes them a minute or two before they can fire.

As he continued to talk, I smoked incessantly.

– Better keep your heads down here. We're going over the skyline.

We crouched down as the car bumped over a crest and down a long scrubby slope. Presently we were passing through some more wire.

– This is a bit of their minefield. When we pass that corner just ahead, we'll come out of the Wadi into the open. That's where we'll have to step on it. Let's hope we don't stick again.

We turned the corner, and emerged on to the bottom of a wide sand valley. On the opposite side rose a great cliff, and along the top were the enemy diggings. A few hundred yards to the north, a sand hummock stood by itself in the bottom of the valley.

– There's the pimple, said Bowman.

For some reason that will always be a mystery to me, this was not one of the occasions on which we crouched down. As the car tore over this last lap of our journey, we all hung on to the open top of the vehicle and stared up at the slope opposite. Then, in a cloud of dust, we were behind the pimple, and out of sight once more.

As we climbed out, an enemy gun opened up. Bang – whine. Bang – whine. Bang – whine. Right overhead.

– I suppose we're the cause of that? I said.

– No, dammit, said Bowman. They're shelling that gap we came through about a mile back. It's rather a pity. I'd have liked them to have put up a decent show for you – like they did for those RAF boys this morning. Come and meet the chaps.

I nodded. Here at last was the bourne of my wanderings – a truly Forward Position. Never again could it be said that I had not been in the front line. Behind the summit of the pimple, a little group of men lay looking down at us with some distaste.

– They don't much like visitors at this hour of the day, Bowman confided. It rather draws attention to the place. Still, I'd like you to meet old Joe.

Old Joe was evidently the Artillery Observation Officer. He was peering over the summit through a pair of field glasses, and below him an NCO was on the telephone to our guns. A little lower

down, a couple more characters of indeterminate rank, wearing yellow headcloths, were opening a tin of bully with the point of a bayonet. A few of our own shells came rustling over from the rear, and fell with a crump on the hill opposite. The Spotter reported the score to the NCO who in turn reported it down the line.

– Having a bit of trouble, Joe? asked Bowman.

– Nothing much. Just annoying them a bit at their tiffin.

Not getting much of a welcome out of the official group, I approached the other parties who had the bully beef, and passed the time of day with them.

– Quite nice here, I said without much conviction.

– Bloody good, one of them answered with a beaming smile, his mouth full of bully. It's good to be back again.

– I beg your pardon? I said, with a start. What was that you said?

– I said it's good to be back. Long Range Desert Group, you know. We've just come back from out forward.

Slowly I returned to Bowman and Mark.

– Take me away, I said between my teeth. I give it up!

\* \* \*

On our way back we heard rumours of a visitor to the Desert. Winston Churchill had arrived in Egypt and was going the rounds, to see what was happening. Indeed, he was lunching at XIII Corps that very afternoon, and the last stage of the route along the Ridge was thinly lined with phlegmatic soldiers, who seemed to be in two minds about the warmth of the reception they were going to give the Old War Horse.

The over-all direction of the War does not inspire much jollity in men who have consistently been chased by superior numbers with better equipment. Besides, they like Auchinleck, and do not see why he should be kicked out for General Alexander and some new Army Commander from England.

Anyhow, the Old War Horse duly arrived at Corps in his boiler suit and topee and carrying a pale blue umbrella. He did not appear to be in very good temper, and as Skipper got out the microphone and uncoiled the cable, somebody said dubiously:

– Now, who's going to ask him to record?

We all looked at one another for a while.

– I imagine that’s a job for our Conducting Officer, I tried as an opening gambit.

– I don’t think so, said Mark. The PM isn’t a military contact.

This sounded like a deadlock. My companions had all become vague in the extreme.

– I see, I said, finally. It’s me for the high jump.

– Why not try the new Army Commander? Mark suggested. He might tackle him.

– That’s an idea. Where’ll I find him?

– He’s over there, sitting in one of those staff cars.

– What’s his name?

– Montgomery.

I walked over to the staff cars, but the only occupant was an Australian officer in a digger’s slouch hat, turned up at the side. I stuck my head in the window, and addressed him.

– I say, where do I find the new Army Commander?

– Who?

– His name is Montgomery, I believe.

– I’m the new Army Commander.

– Oh come, I said. I know he’s not an Australian.

His face creased into a bright smile.

– Oh, don’t go by my hat, he said. I’ve just been trying it on. Rather good don’t you think?

Montgomery (for so it was) has quite a flair for discussing hats, but I did not know this at the time, so I was rather at a loss for a reply.

– Oh my God! I beg your pardon.

– That’s all right, my dear fellow. What can I do for you?

Cautiously I switched to my usual gambit for Generals. One does not baldly approach them with, Look here, I do not want you – but will you please get me somebody else? You work up to this point gradually.

– I belong to the BBC, sir, and I was hoping that we might get a short recording from you?

Later on when Montgomery had fully realised the immense importance of radio in building up a name and reputation, there never was any need to ask him to record. He used to anticipate suitable moments and send for us well in advance. But on this occasion he waved me aside. Or, being a big-hearted generous soul, he fobbed me off with the next best thing.

– Not now, he said. They’ve been photographing me all day.

But I tell you what I'll do. The PM is somewhere around, and I'll get him to do a piece for you instead.

And believe it or not, when the Old War Horse finally emerged from his lunch, looking crustier than ever, I apprehensively stepped forward with the microphone, and he stopped in his tracks.

– Is this going out on the broadcast now? he asked.

– Oh no, sir, I replied. It's only a recording.

He must have had an odd idea about his Security arrangements if he pictured them allowing me to broadcast live from Corps. But once satisfied that he was not talking straight into Rommel's ear a few miles away, he went ahead, while the Quality stood around and waited.

– The Desert Army has to be seen to be believed . . .

And as he talked, I heard the cameras click around us; and I thought to myself, Now here is a nice little snapshot for the old folks at home – Sonny Boy recording the Old War Horse at Alamein.

In due course the picture appeared in *GEN* – the 8th Army's weekly illustrated – and I must confess that, mortifying as it was, it can only be described as a stroke of genius. A pair of thin and hairy legs with one stocking hanging down around the ankle, beside the baggy trousers of a boiler suit, and the end of a pale umbrella. That was all. It was entitled 'Winnie in the Desert'.

\* \* \*

Next time it was Godfrey's turn, and he made his first excursion into the Desert. We decided that we would try to cover Rommel's coming offensive by a co-operative effort – he doing the front line work with the recording truck, while I remained in Cairo, attending the Conferences and doing all the Think Pieces. In this way the News Rooms would get both types of material, and we felt that if we each stuck to our particular side, while at the same time playing into each other's hands, we might find we were getting somewhere towards a solution of this enigma of radio reporting. As it turned out we were excitingly right.

The battle had hardly started when we Correspondents, muzzled by the Censor in Cairo, had the pleasure of hearing all the essential facts coming back to us on the air from London, accompanied by an eye-witness description of the battlefield from me, of all people! This was a piece, recorded in anticipation on the Barrel Track

during the previous week, which I had sent home with a warning that it was not to be used till occasion arose. An occasion had certainly arisen!

This was a good start for Godfrey and me, and it was a brilliant little battle on which to try out our new ideas. Here, for the first time, we had the spectacle of an ace German General not only being out-fought, but also out-foxed. Never before in our experience had the Wehrmacht started a serious attack and been brought to a halt by superior tactics. For Hemeimat was not a soldiers' battle. It was a battle of wits, cleverly played by our High Command, and – with Stalingrad at the other point of the pincers – it marks the real turning point of the war – the point from which the rising tide began to recede.

Alamein was a position with flanks that could not be turned. The line, therefore – if there was a line – would have to be penetrated; and there was little doubt that, with the armour he had at his disposal, Rommel could penetrate almost any sort of line if he tried. The defenders' solution was not to have a line at all! And this was why we had been unable to find one when we went down to Hemeimat to look for it.

Instead of placing our defences across the path of the German advance, some genius had planned our principal minefields and defended areas lengthways along the slope of the Ridge, like a ship with its bow facing the oncoming waves, and with very much the same effect. This left the Barrel Track to Cairo wide open, and if Rommel had driven straight ahead with his tanks he would have been in the clear practically at once. In the clear, but without communications; for the 8th Army would still be dominating the bottleneck between the Ridge and the Quattara Depression through which all his supplies would have to pass.

A nice weighing of risks and possibilities! Would Rommel dare it, or would he try to clean up the 8th Army before he went through? Our new Command accurately calculated that he would not risk going through, but would try to fight. And sure enough, the bulk of two Panzer Divisions paused in the bottleneck, and turned north-east, waiting for the inevitable cavalry charge of British tanks.

But the cavalry charge never came. The lesson had been learnt, and the foxy work was now on our side. Comfortably ensconced behind its minefields, the 8th Army settled down systematically to shell the Afrika Korps on the plain below. No



attempt was made to come down. The British tanks were conspicuous by their absence. After a day of this, the Germans tried some spasmodic attacks themselves, all of which stuck in soft sand, and broke down. Then they started drifting together into the hollows and small depressions, in an effort to get out of sight of those infuriating but inaccessible gunners.

As soon as they were nicely concentrated, the Air Force took a hand in the game, and bombed them out into open dispersal once more. Then the guns got going again, until for a second time the enemy tanks were forced to take cover. And so on.

After about three days of this, the Afrika Korps had had enough of it, and withdrew in a body, to where it had started. It was a victory – and the first of its kind on the Allied side in the entire war – a Generals' Victory. Maybe we were not being 'led by donkeys' any longer. If these crack warriors could not only be out-fought but out-manœuvred, it opened up an entirely new prospect, and gave a strange elation and confidence to the Desert Army. The next move would be ours, and that in itself was quite a change.

\* \* \*

So now it is George Haughton's birthday. The battle is won, and we are holding a party for him on the Houseboat on the Nile which I share with him and Derek Adkins as a residence. The *Dahabiya* is lit with fairy lights, a buffet has been established at one end of the crowded deck, and the wireless croons softly at the other.

A striking South African WAAF is describing, with vivid gestures and a couple of songs, the expedition up the Nile in June, when she and several hundred equally glamorous types were evacuated to a place of supposed safety in the care of three Scottish soldiers.

A sub-editor from one of the Middle East English newspapers is telling of a disastrous apology for a misprint which went something like this:

...We regret very much that through a printer's error these gentlemen were referred to as 'battle-scared veterans'. What was meant, of course, was 'bottle-scarred veterans'.

Frank Thornton-Bassett is just back from the forward areas with a paper-backed copy of 'Dante's Inferno', and is full of his

usual dramatics. What an Air Force Commentator was doing up in the front line is a matter that requires some explanation, but he always manages to get to any centre of trouble on the specious plea of 'reporting bomb damage'. Once there, he makes the most of the situation by sending back powerful messages to George Haughton about freezing to death alone on the escarpment, and can somebody please send him just one small blanket, or a piece of bread and cheese, and how nobody can sleep for the thunder of the guns. Having a wonderful time, in fact. And he presses his 'Inferno' on me.

– You should read this, old man. Give you some sort of an idea of what those men are going through!

Rather than argue, I take his volume and slip it into my pocket.

George himself is very pleased, because tonight the *Egyptian Mail* has fifty-six lines devoted to the Air Force and only forty-two about the Pongos. That always makes the day for George. Mark is here, under rather a cloud, through having insisted on attending a nightclub called 'Doll's' in spite of the remonstrances of a Military Policeman.

He is interrupted by a Guardsman, very drunk, who wants to say what he feels about the BBC. Such lies and nonsense he has really never heard. I mean, only last night he, himself, heard an Eighty-eight being referred to as an Eighty. I mean the whole thing is simply laughable. It's letting the whole war down – that sort of thing.

Derek is pressing a drink on some departing guests.

– Have Wahed for the Sharia, old man.

One of them is a young gabardine Captain, late of the West African Frontier Force, who is a little pained at having had to smash up all the good work that Mussolini was doing in Abyssinia.

– Beautiful roads – lovely houses – fine waterworks – all gone, I'm afraid. However, I suppose we had to put the buggers out. Still, it was a pity.

In a quiet corner of the deck, my friend Mr Constantinescu is explaining about the Suez Canal to a Woman Correspondent with a dirty neck. Women Correspondents often have good looks, but they are a fairly tough bunch, and do not always spend as much time as they might on the problems of personal daintiness. But Mr Constantinescu has a Balkan bigness towards matters of this kind, and has managed to convey the impression that what he knows about the Suez Canal is the inside dope that has never

yet leaked out. And this always goes over well with Women Correspondents.

– The British Government were entirely against the construction of the Suez Canal, he explains. So they bought up all the available wheat, so that they could starve the fellaheen and prevent them from digging. Then the Editor of the *Westminster Gazette* insisted that it would be more moral to purchase fifty-one per cent of the shares, and stop it in this way. In revenge for being made to do this, Mr Disraeli gave the story of the purchase to the *Times* newspaper and enabled that paper to scoop the *Westminster Gazette*. But when they came to look at the Articles of Association for the first time after the purchase, they found that it did not make any difference whether England held fifty-one per cent of the shares or not. She still did not have a majority of the Board of Directors! So the Suez Canal was finally successful, and now you are all here to defend it – this vital lifeline of the Empire on the prevention of which so much was fruitlessly spent! It is all very fascinating – your English politics!

He laughs quietly to himself, and the party goes on.

Winston Burdett of Columbia Broadcasting is discussing the Old War Horse, and the objects of his recent visit.

– I dislike the way he uses words to conceal his meaning – rather like an old ham actor whose stuff is wearing a bit thin. You should have heard his change of tone after the final Conference. After most of our people had left the room, he stopped behind to speak to the Egyptian journalists, and he kept saying: ‘We’ll defend Egypt to the last drop of our blood.’ Not quite what he considered suitable for us. Eh?

– And what do you think of Roosevelt?

– Just a clever anti-red trying to protect Wall Street in spite of itself. Our real trouble is that we have no Plan whatsoever. Harriman as much as admitted it.

A few yards off, subversive stories are being told of the kind that upset the civilian promoters of this war – stories of fraternisation and of semi-humorous commerce with the enemy. For example there is one about a German Officer who carried into the Allied lines a wounded Britisher who had been lying somewhere in No-Man’s-Land. They asked him why he had gone to all that trouble and danger, and he looked embarrassed, and finally replied:

– Because if I had done nothing he would have died.

So they thanked him, and the question then arose as to what was to be done with the German Officer? Some argued that he must be held a prisoner; but I am pleased to say that less correct counsels prevailed, and he was given a letter of recommendation to his Commanding Officer, and a box of rations, and sent back.

I join in with a story I had heard from Scriven one evening in Alexandria. Scriven is a Lieutenant-Colonel in the RAMC whom I had previously known when we were both undergraduates. In the course of our conversation he let it out quite casually that for four days he had been a prisoner.

– That’s interesting, I said. How did you escape?

– Well, I didn’t exactly escape. It was during that very fluid period when there was really no front at all, and everybody was swanning around, chasing each other. I had a Field Hospital out in the blue, and I had a good deal of operating to do. In fact the orderlies were bringing in cases all the time. Then, as I worked, I noticed to my surprise that the orderlies who were coming in were Germans, and that the casualties were German too. I asked about this, and somebody said that our fellows had gone back, and we were now inside the German lines.

– However, I was very busy, so I just went on working; and whenever I wanted supplies or more help I asked for it, and the Germans provided it. I found before long that most of my assistants were German doctors. They evidently considered that I knew the Hospital and was the best man for the job, because they seemed quite happy to work under me and to take my orders. That went on for four days, and on one of them Rommel himself turned up and took a look around.

– At the end of four days somebody came in and said that they were going back, and that all the wounded would have to be got out at once. I protested and said that quite a number of the casualties were not in a fit state to be moved, and would probably die if it was attempted. All right, they said, you show us which are fit to go and which are not. So I went around the tents and pointed out this one that could go and that one that could not.

– And they took your word for it? I asked.

– Why not? I was telling them the truth. They loaded all the least dangerous cases on to trucks, and I went back to my operating. Presently, I noticed that the orderlies coming in were British once again, and so were the casualties. So I gathered that I wasn’t a prisoner any longer.

– Really, that’s a fantastic story.

– I don’t see why. After all, I had a job, like any other job. The enemy medicos work the same way. We’re not concerned with the nationality of our cases.

Winston Burdett seemed strangely disturbed by my telling this story.

– But, Winston, I said, you’re a humane and intelligent person. Surely you get a kick out of war being fought in a humane and intelligent way?

He shook his head.

– You can’t fight this war in the sort of way that you mean. I was listening to a Medical General referring to Rommel yesterday as ‘the gentleman on the other side’, and it made me despair of the mentality of these professionals who still take the gentlemanly view of war. It’s not a sporting event. We’ve got to realise that this is an utterly ruthless thing we are up against. Didn’t you hear what Von Papen said on the air a few days ago? Hitler is going to ignore Britain and the United States for a while, and complete the conquest of Europe. And as Von Papen put it, ‘It may be necessary to use extreme measures’. You realise what that means? They’ve already begun the systematic starvation of Greece, and now there are going to be wholesale massacres of the Jugo-Slavs. Yet we keep on talking about the enemy as though they were gentlemen!

– But if some of them are gentlemen, is there anything wrong in telling the truth about it?

– Yes, there is. It’s bad for morale. It makes us forget the only fact that matters – that we’ve got to fight this thing out.

– That is another interesting thing about the British, Mr Constantinescu interposed. They always find their enemies much more likeable than their friends.

– It’s just a matter of fighting clean.

– On what principle can you possibly talk about fighting clean with a man like Hitler? continued Burdett, driving home his point.

– Oh, but please understand, said Mr Constantinescu. With the English it is not a matter of principle at all. It is a sincere preference for the man on the other side. England is an old and a rich country, and like all the old and rich it suffers greatly from boredom. Well – he shrugged his shoulders – what can be more boring than one’s friends? But one’s enemies, never!

In the laugh that followed, I slipped quietly out of the argument, leaving him to quote:

...We, the gaunt zanies of a witless Fate,  
Who love the unloving, and the lover hate.

For I freely confess that I do not know the answer. I am not a cerebral type, and feel as I do feel, without worrying much whether I ought to or not. When people do something that I approve of, I want to announce the fact. I do not see why I should bother whether it is theoretically good for morale to do so or whether it is not. What is more, I doubt very much whether those who claim to know better are any more likely to be right. Maybe I am a disruptive type – an irresponsible type – certainly I am a type that would be disapproved of by the Old War Horse, if he knew about me.

But then I am not sure that I approve of the Old War Horse. Indeed, now that I'm in my cups let me admit that at times I am beginning to wonder what this War is about anyhow. Yes, I am afraid I am definitely drunk again!



POLYMNIA:  
OR  
THE FIRST RIVER

Halok yelek ubakoh  
Nose mesek – hazzara  
Bo yabo' berrinah,  
Nose 'alummothaw.

THERE is a breathless pant of saxophones in the great Hittite Hotel of the City of David. A full moon shines down on Zion – the full moon of a new battle beyond the Nile, and I sit here with Godfrey's message in my hand, and gaze around me at the merry scene.

The bright gold buttons of the Proconsuls and the Centurions – guardians of the holy places. The soft smiles and chatter of priority wives, most of them hustled from the perils of Egypt last July, and now having a little difficulty about getting back. Hearty nurses with red cheeks and rough manners. Leave doxies with the far-away look that dancing women wear when they are thinking of other things – women with their minds on their work, succouring freedom and democracy no less sincerely than the Gabardine Swine whose recreation they provide.

A tableful of Alexandrian Jews, dressed in black, talk French in polite undertones, and keep themselves strictly to themselves. The Head Waiter – a double of the God-guided Frank Buchman – serves drinks at a very great cost up to the zero-hour fixed by the Provost Marshal; beyond which there is definitely no drink. For it is the decree of Pilate that the soldier – whatever else befall – shall go soberly to his fornication.

TALBOT SUGGESTS YOUR SPEEDIEST RETURN AFTER REPEAT  
AFTER TASK FINISHED 1507z/20.

Urgent, yes. But not so urgent, it had seemed, to take precedence over my attempt at a bomber recording or to visit the Arab Legion out east across the Jordan. Yet apparently I have missed the bus, and the big attack on Rommel has already begun. As we dance away our Saturday Night in the New Jerusalem, the guns are blazing at Alamein, and the Desert Rats are starting to work. I have no doubt that Godfrey is up there, too, recording the barrage, and sending passionately frustrated letters about the fact that none of his despatches is getting through.

\* \* \*

There was a magic out in Azrak that made it a fitting turning point. It is a garden eastward in Eden, with the charm of all beginnings – like Graduation Day or the birth of a child – like the start of a pilgrimage, or the source of a river.

Once upon a time it had been the farthest outpost of an Empire, where the Roman legions would face about and fix their eyes on home. Beyond them, to the east, the roadless wilderness fades into the deep desert of Arabia.

The peace of a profound silence lies on its reedy pool and on its cluster of white-walled houses, stirred only by the whisper of the wind in the rushes, and the cropping of the scrub by a couple of supercilious camels in a little stone-ringed field.

A ruined castle stands there, brooding on half-remembered tales of Lawrence, and of the ghostly dogs of the Bene-Hillal – the mythical builders of the place – that howl around its towers each night, in search of their forgotten masters.

It was here that Colonel Lash instructed us in the courtesies of the tribesmen, before taking us across to dinner with the Legion.

– These are very formal affairs, he explained to us. When you first arrive you will be offered three cups of coffee in succession, which you must take, and for which you must not offer any thanks. Until you have had your coffee, they will not ask you who you are or where you have come from, but after you have finished you will be accepted as a guest. This is the Bedouin tradition of hospitality. Your coffee is something you must expect and accept, as a matter of course.

– And suppose they offer me more than three cups?

– Usually that is considered an insult. One for you, one for them, one for your journey, but a fourth for the sword. However,



in your case, they may imagine you really like coffee, and go on pouring it out. It's no good saying, No thanks, because they won't understand. What you must do is to hand back the cup with a little wobble of the fingers. This is understood to mean that you have had enough.

– I hope I shall be able to remember all this.

– Oh, you'll pick it up quickly enough. They have killed a sheep in your honour, and this will be served in a large shallow dish, together with rice and vegetables. We will all kneel around this dish and eat with our fingers – using only the right hand, by the way. The left hand is not respectable, as it's associated by the Arab with the opposite rite – evacuation. People will pass over particular titbits and lay them in front of you, which of course you must eat. And if you can manage to belch, so much the better. It shows your appreciation of the food. As soon as the principal guest has finished, everybody rises, and the next most important group squats down around the dish. What is left over at the end, goes to the women, who, by the way, don't appear at all. They're all hustled out of sight as soon as a visitor appears.

– You mean to say, they don't come out to dance for us afterwards?

– Certainly not. After dinner there will be plenty of singing and dancing – and even a little shooting, but it will be strictly a male affair.

– Shooting?

– Oh yes, but you mustn't mind that. It's only high spirits, and we usually allow it, so long as they don't use tommy guns.

As soon as it began to grow dark, we drove over to the main camp, and after an exchange of courtesies, we seated ourselves on a pile of rugs inside the wide mouth of one of the tents. Here I noticed that Chignall, my Recording Engineer, had evidently not heard the instruction about the cup-wobbling, and had to drink considerably more coffee than he wanted, before it could be explained that he had had enough.

Meanwhile a fantastic scene was building up outside on the wide space before the tents. An enormous yellow fire was licking the cooking pots, and from a group of men who squatted in a circle close by came an odd, metallic, rhythmic beat.

– They're grinding more coffee, said Lash.

– For Chignall, I suppose?

But before we could go into the matter any further, we were

interrupted by a wild, shaggy old man, dressed in rags and with a straggling grey beard. Waving a scimitar in our faces, he knelt before us, and uttered a stream of Arabic.

I bowed and smiled, but Lash ordered him away, rather curtly I thought.

– Part of the ceremony?

– Oh no. He's just an old loony. They really oughtn't to allow him to hang around the camp.

– Was he saying anything interesting?

– Not really. He said he wanted to cut somebody's throat.

– Jesus! It's as well I didn't understand him!

As we settled down around the enormous dish, the party outside began to get going in an even bigger way. In the light of the fire, long lines of warriors linked arms, each singing a line of the song in turn, their brilliant red sashes swaying and twisting as they danced, their tassels, holsters and bandoliers swinging and leaping with the rhythm. The sheep was beautifully cooked, and as I ate – my left hand tucked firmly away – I kept gazing out entranced at this amazing scene.

– Rather like the Last Supper, isn't it? said Lash.

I confessed that this had not occurred to me.

– I don't mean Da Vinci's version. But read your Bible again and you'll see what I mean. This is how they really ate in those days.

We gave way to the next session around the dish and went out into the open air where water was poured on our hands, and small towels were produced. The singing grew louder and faster – punctuated now and then by shots in the air. But not from tommy guns. Discipline was still being maintained. And leaving them there, we trekked back across the scrub and settled down in our tent for what remained of the night. A noble party, worthy of a noble occasion – this Last Supper of the Arab Legion on what turned out to be the first night of Alamein!

Then in the cold dawn I remember opening my eyes again. There was silence, save for the distant howling of a dog – who knows, maybe one of the phantoms of the Bene-Hillal. And then, very faint, as if from many miles away, there came a curious wailing. I got up and went out to listen. The full moon was going down, and I realised that it was Friday morning, and that this was the Muslims' call to prayer. Inside a nearby tent a lantern was lit, and a murmuring commenced. It was the opening chapter of the

Koran, that I had been taught to recognise by that Sub from the *Egyptian Mail*.

In the name of the most Merciful, the Compassionate,  
In the name of the King of Judgment,  
We alone do Thee worship,  
Of Thee alone do we ask forgiveness.  
Guide us in the pathway that is straight,  
The path of those to whom Thy love is great,  
Not those whose only heritage is hate,  
Or those who deviate.

A cold, clear night, with the dawn coming up over a jagged horizon. The voice of one crying in the wilderness – the howling of a dog – and here, beside me, the murmuring of prayers in a dimly lit tent. I drew the blanket closer around my shoulders.

– Make straight in the desert a pathway for our Lord.

Like the Roman Legions, I knew that I was turning round and setting out upon a long road home. At least – I hope it is the road home.

– What shall I cry?

\* \* \*

After breakfast we packed up our gear, and followed the uncharted wheel-tracks towards the west. One of the junior officers came along to guide us as far as the salt pans, where he gave us each a cap badge as a souvenir of the Arab Legion, and bade us farewell. Still following the wheel marks, we crossed these acres of white, sandy deposit, and then mile after mile of empty uplands, until we struck the road that led us south to Philadelphia, the City of the Ammonites, where we had lunch at the Air Force Station.

Thornton-Bassett was still there, his eyes glowing with indignation behind his spectacles at our unwarrantable intrusion into what he considered to be his territory. All the Middle East from the Quattara Depression to the Turkish frontier was Thornton-Bassett's territory.

When we arrived he was having a theological argument with some disinterested Pilot Officers on the subject of miracles.

– God is not a scientific conception, he said. There are no miracles and there never were. Not even if you try to avoid the

issue with that old cliché: They're only meant in a spiritual sense. Oh, hello.

– Hello, you dark-souled atheist, I answered. I bet you haven't got what we've got.

– Is it true, he glowered, that you've found some way of working your recording gear in a Liberator?

– No, old boy, I lied blandly. The whole thing has been an absolute failure.

– It's a good thing you said that, said Chig when we were alone. All that fellow wants is to find out how it can be done, and then get the Air Force to take him on a raid before they take us.

– I know, I know. That's why we've got to hurry back to Aqir. That Group Captain said we might try it on a raid in about a week's time.

We hastened onwards, through the hillside village of Salt, and down the long, twisting descent that leads to the bottommost level on the Earth's surface – the Valley of Jordan.

Bright blue Sunbirds were flying from tree to tree as the day grew hotter and hotter and the heavy, clammy atmosphere of that fabulous cleft settled on us like a blanket. Soon we were driving in our singlets, and it was getting too oppressive even for sacred hymns.

Going shall one go, and weeping

Bearing the train of seed.

Coming shall one come with ringing cry

Bearing his sheaves.

The Children of Israel bearing their brand-new tables of stone, pouring down this very road in the wake of Joshua, their hungry eyes fixed on Jericho. Or is it Lawrence and his Arabs, coming to harrass Johnny Turk? He was a better soldier than a translator – for all his All-Souls Fellowship. 'The various-minded man' is what he called Odysseus, if I remember rightly. But is that any better than Pope?

A translation should be free to represent the spirit, rather than to follow the literal wording. It should recreate rather than interpret. I cannot believe that Homer was a bore to those who first heard him. Yet Pope is a bore. And – let us be honest with ourselves – to the best of my recollection, the Bible is a bore, although I really must read it, and see what it says about the Last Supper – this primitive feast that precedes the Via Dolorosa.

The man, for wisdom's various arts renowned  
Long exercised in woes ...

What pompous wind! I wish I could remember how Samuel Butler put it. I think the man in question must have been rather like me. But then, aren't we inclined to visualise all public characters in terms of ourselves – from God downwards?

Going shall one go, and weeping  
Bearing the train of seed ...

At the foot of the Mountains of Moab we debouched on to the floor of the valley, and I turned and said to Chig:

- Who was in that motor car you bumped into on the corner?
- He said he was the Prime Minister of Transjordan.
- Do you think he really was?
- I've no reason to doubt it.
- I say. That's a bit awkward, isn't it?

\* \* \*

The River Jordan – this original font of baptism – is a narrow muddy stream, overhung by trees and drooping foliage. We got out and clambered down to the water's edge, where it winds its slovenly way under the Allenby Bridge. Dipping my hand into the verge, I anointed my forehead, and then stood up to observe the heavens as Chig filled a bottle with its waters.

- What, no doves? Isn't this rather invidious?

From a depth to a summit

Well, there is no depth deeper than this one, and if I am destined to cross nine rivers, what better start can I make than with Jordan? Let me look around for a moment from this depth, and maybe I can see a summit? Before me stands the Mount of the Temptation, behind me, the Hills of Moab with Mount Pisgah – an excellent place, the authorities say, from which to survey a Promised Land. But I doubt if there are any doves up there either. God forbid that I should have to follow the example of Noah and make tracks for Ararat!

We took the road for Jericho, but turned aside beyond the village and drove down to the headwaters of the Dead Sea. It was a desolate sight, amidst the cracked, grey cliffs of salt – the twisted stumps of petrified driftwood, lining its edge. The waters tasted brackish and bitter.

Why should any Wog be able to tell me my future? – not that some knowledge of the future is not possible. In an odd sort of way, I seem to know a little about my own future. I do not know how, but I do. Maybe it is just imagination, but I do not think so. I know, for instance, that I really am going on a journey, and that it is going to be tricky. I have no idea where it will take me, but I think that I shall get there, and that somewhere before the end, I shall meet – not any damn doves – but a favourite animal of mine – the Unicorn. I think also, however dangerous it may be, that I shall travel in safety so long as I go unarmed. I am not in this war as a belligerent, and so long as I remain in my own role and refrain from carrying arms, the war can do me no harm.

That is my own private reading of the future, as revealed by a Voice speaking from this wrinkled cunt of the world – the Valley of the Dead Sea. And I shall act accordingly.

Turning our backs on Pisgah, we drove through the baked and cracked mineral deposits, and set off up the main road that scales the opposite heights. Evening was now drawing on, and when we were about three-quarters of the way up, another of those sights appeared that I shall remember. About five miles away, on the topmost skyline, silhouetted against the setting sun, stood Jerusalem – a tall, slender tower with a cluster of minarets beside it. They were black as the jagged hills themselves, but framed in a lovely light, at first golden, and then a deep red.

And as a cumulus of cloud sank slowly behind the summit of the Mount of Olives, the deep blue and the blood red of the sky took on an even darker hue. Watching its beauty from below, we turned and twisted, we wound and zigzagged up the hairpin road that leads past the Inn of the Good Samaritan and comes at last to Bethany.

Bo yabo' berrinah,  
Nose 'alummothaw.

Coming shall one come with ringing cry  
Bearing his sheaves.

Maybe I am late for the battle. Maybe I ought never to have come here at all. But maybe there are more eternal things than being in time for battles.

\* \* \*

– Signum sacri Itineris Hierosol –

It was half-past seven on this Sunday morning that Chig and I piled into the car that PR had lent us, and took the road for Egypt by way of Hebron and Beersheba. Now that matters were really urgent, there was no aeroplane to be had, so it was a case of the Sinai Desert or nothing.

It also meant abandoning all our carefully laid plans to record a raid in a Liberator. So we beat it, through the hills of Judah, following the well-trampled route of the Flight into Egypt. Indeed, as I sat in the car turning the pages of my new cedar-bound Bible and surveying the scene around me, I realised that there is only one thing wrong with those coloured Bible pictures on which I was brought up. Instead of Joseph leading the ass on which Mary is seated, Mary should be the one who is walking, while Joseph has the ride.

For the rest, it takes Palestine to put all the Sunday-school stories into their proper perspective. If the Last Supper assumes a more realistic meaning when one is a guest of the Arab Legion, so also you can appreciate a familiar symbolism more vividly, once you have seen the shepherds leading their flocks of silly white sheep and their herds of black, evil-looking goats. I have not been disillusioned by Jerusalem as so many true believers are. I do not mind the smell of urine in the sacred places, or the cheap commercialism of the Holy Sepulchre – the shaggy old Priests with their money boxes, peddling holy relics in the basements. Nothing can kill the natural grandeur of these few square miles of man's search for God – the majestic hills – the deep defiles filled with vineyards – the terraced fields climbing the slopes – the square, flat-roofed houses.

And now that I am Hadji, and carry in my rucksack the six-and-sixpenny medal of the Franciscans, and a document that certifies me as having visited the bourne of all pilgrimages, I think that I understand my old religion better than ever I did before.

...ut sacri hujus peracti itineris perpetui numisma piae peregrinationis in animo tuo vigeant fructus ac memoria.

I have walked on the Mount of Olives, and climbed the belfry tower of the Russian Convent. From its summit I looked out over the clustering Jewish tombs that cover the slopes. Across the Valley of Kedron, the wall of Zion with its bricked-up Golden

Gate and the dingy dome of the Mosque covering the altar stone of Abraham.

Two little girls were playing amongst the cypress trees in the garden below. They smiled at me when I descended, and called out something in a language that I did not understand. I waved back, and strode down the hill to Gethsemane, paying my small tribute at each holy place, until at last I finished up at the Tomb of the Virgin with no change left in my pocket. So the Virgin had to do without a visit, and her old Keeper returned to his conversation with the Arab roadmenders, who were widening the bridge over the Brook Kedron, to permit the easier passage of charabancs and armoured cars.

I crossed over into the City and started to walk the Way of the Cross, but lost the direction somewhere around the eighth station where the route becomes a little complicated, and finally finished up having a cup of tea in the YMCA, which is not the correct destination.

Maybe symbolic, that walk – for I find it hard to follow the Christian all the way to Calvary, if indeed Calvary exists at all. So I was pleased with Jerusalem, this Mother of Religions, for nourishing not only the faith of the believer, but also the unbelief of the unbeliever.

Not that I would go as far as Frank Thornton-Bassett, who refused to enter the Holy Sepulchre with us, because he claims to be an atheist, and defiantly displays this fact on his identity disc.

– But surely, Frank, I said, if you don't believe at all in the existence of God, there's no point in making a demonstration of this kind? What does it matter whether or not you go inside, if there's nothing there?

At once I found myself involved in an argument that took us all round the sights and back to Ecce Homo.

– I know that argument, he said. You people think it doesn't matter if we pay lip-service to something that is monstrous. But I can't stand this sentimental, sloppy-minded regard for the word 'Christianity' by people who don't take the trouble to find out what it really means. It was the same sort of attitude towards politics that brought about the war. Let the racketeers have their way. It doesn't really matter. There's a lot to be said for all sides. Let them teach our children any sort of lies they like. If people are really sincere in their religious beliefs, we mustn't hurt their feelings by telling them that they're crazy.



– Oh come, I said. Christianity may not be all true, but isn't there a lot of truth in it?

His eyes bored into me.

– How long is it since you've read your Bible?

– Quite a while, I'm afraid.

– Or the Articles of Religion, or the Roman Catechism, or the Westminster Confession, or any of those intolerable compilations?

– I really can't remember.

– Well, read them, for goodness sake, and get some sort of an idea of what you're talking about. I know exactly what you're thinking. What you mean by Christianity is the Sermon on the Mount, and a lot of generalities about good living, and kindness to animals, and charity towards the poor, and Peace at any price.

– Well, isn't all that part of it?

– I know, I know. If you lead a good, clean life and don't beat your wife, you're a Christian at heart whether you go to church or not. But you ask the Archbishop of Canterbury what he thinks of that; or better still, ask the Pope.

– I'm afraid I don't know either of them very well.

– Well, ask the next dog-collar you come across what Pelagianism is, and you'll soon find out how little these things have got to do with Christianity. As an Atheist I believe in most of them myself – probably more sincerely than most Christians do. The Stoics and the Confucians believed in them long before Jesus was ever heard of. The Gnostic and the Mohammedan Philosophers who were slaughtered by your Lambs of God all believed in them too. I tell you it's monstrous ignorance to regard these things as Christianity, because if words mean anything at all, Christianity must be regarded as what the Christians say it is.

– And what's that?

He pointed downwards towards the Valley of the Jordan.

– It's a doctrine taught by a bunch of wild men who came up from that valley there, in order to denounce both Church and State, and to proclaim something that they called the Kingdom of God. That's how it began.

– What is this Kingdom of God?

– A Jewish millennium. The salvation of an elect few from the damnation which they themselves call down upon the rest of Creation. Read your Bible again and you'll see exactly what I mean. There's nothing meek and mild about Jesus. He's a wild, implacable character, breathing death and destruction on all who

don't toe the party line. As for Paul, who turned the whole thing from a flop into a success – he was just taking it out on the entire human race. Everything about the natural man is evil – his instincts, his sex feelings, even his efforts to do good, if they're not done under proper auspices. Nothing is right; and so the whole of Creation is utterly damned, except the Sect. That's what's meant by the Kingdom of God, and that's what you've got to mean by Christianity, if you mean anything at all.

Stunned by this outburst, I listened to him as he went on to denounce the implacable Deity who must have decreed such things, who had willed that his own creatures should be born in peril of the flame, and then presumed to redeem man from the Evil that he, himself, countenanced, by sacrificing himself to his own vanity. The War, itself, was proof enough of the spirit of mockery and hate that governs Creation.

I am a slow witted type, and not very quick at arguments, otherwise I might have noticed that he was accepting the truth of the Christian argument as he had defined it, and was railing against it, whereas I would merely have contradicted its truth. As an Atheist he did not mean that God was non-existent. He believed that he existed, but felt that if Christian philosophy was valid he must be a Demon. Herein lay the nub of Thornton-Bassett's militant bitterness towards what to me were just a few picturesque illusions. He did not disbelieve at all. In fact, if anybody is the unbeliever it must be me, for I do not take such a gloomy or such an orthodox view of Creation.

It was Frank Buchman who once shook his head over me and said that he could do nothing for me until I was convicted of sin. But he never got a conviction, because I am not oppressed by any particular feeling of evil in myself. So I find it hard to agree with Thornton-Bassett in attributing it to life.

But in order to go into the matter further, I bought this cedar-bound Bible in a shop inside the Jaffa Gate, and with it a great white shaggy sheepskin coat. And so equipped we are now passing through Beersheba and making for the frontier post of Asia.

\* \* \*

The road across Sinai winds endlessly across an uneven expanse of practically nothing, sometimes uphill, sometimes down, twisting around and along low escarpments. It is as empty as it is hot and

dusty, except for an occasional Army truck, belting along in the opposite direction. A line of hills comes up over the horizon far ahead, grows larger, and passes slowly by on one flank or the other, before fading away over the horizon that we have left behind. There are no petrol fumes on the Sinai road – no traffic jams – no speed traps. Indeed it seems a pity to disturb the God-like silence of this emptiness by the purr of our engine.

Looking up some of the places in this Bible that we have visited recently, I notice that they once sent the Ark of the Covenant to Ekron. Well, we had done much the same thing in pursuit of our recording project, except that we flew the Ark of the Covenant from Heliopolis in a decrepit old Blenheim with brakes that would not work. And having arrived at the same destination, we had followed the example of the King of Samaria, by sending messengers to enquire of Baal-zebul, the man in charge of the place. And Baal-zebul was very agreeable, but felt that he would have to get permission from higher up before he could allow two extra bodies with gear to go on an actual raid. In the meantime, however, he would be glad to let Chignall experiment in a training Liberator, and if I would like to go alone on the forthcoming stonk on Berenice of the Cyrenians, it could be arranged.

This was not quite what I had intended. To go on such a raid with recording gear would be a world scoop as well as a technical feat. To go by myself might be the first trip of its kind by the BBC, but it also savoured somewhat of a joyride, and a joyride over Benghazi in the present state of world affairs bore the marks of a contradiction in terms. However, once the offer was made, I knew that I had to go. If I wasn't prepared to take the risks of the other men in uniform, what the hell was I doing with the Air Force in Palestine in fancy dress?

So, rather gloomily I went to await the call on the false front of Tel Aviv, where my old Conducting Officer, the Marquess of Ely, was happily playing trap drums in a jazz band, under the brassy stare of the daughters of Israel. There, the word came through that the Operation was on, and would I please report at once. I met the crews in the briefing room. Flight Lieutenant Pearson was to be my Pilot, and he and his crew were all very nonchalant, except the Tail Gunner, a big, heavily built Australian who was shaking almost as much as I was myself.

They have a pleasing way in the RAF of easing the tension by making things worse. They refer to the operation as 'dicing with

death', and as I looked through my kit for something to read on the journey, those who were staying behind amused themselves by ghoulishly dividing up my property, and bickering as to who was to have my field glasses and my typewriter after I had failed to return. It made me so indignant that for a little while I quite forgot what was really involved. And my temper was not improved by the discovery that the only thing I had to read was that paper-backed *Inferno* of Dante that had been pressed on me by Thornton-Bassett at the party on the *Dahabiya*. A nice piece of light literature for a jolly night with the RAF!

Presently we were roaring down the runway and taking off into the darkness – the fourth or fifth in the string. For one of my size it felt cramped in the forward compartment, and there was very little to see except the shaded light over the Fire Controller's desk, and the glow from the instruments of the Wireless Operator on the opposite side. By plugging in my headphones, I could hear the conversation of the crew on the Inter-Com – Direction, Height, Drift. It was not long before I could identify each voice – the smooth cadences of the Skipper, the clipped retorts of the Navigator, the jerky comments of the Tail Gunner as he flung out flares over the sea to measure the angle of drift.

It is a very long way from Palestine to Benghazi – almost six hours' flying time. And here was my first impression of a long range bomber raid – the intense boredom of eleven-twelfths of the trip. Nothing to listen to but the hum of the engines; little to look at except my watch every five minutes. And then, that strange mixture of emotions that gets associated with the hands of one's watch... Thank God, another two hours before the trouble starts, and yet – Oh God, why cannot time hurry up, and let us get it over.

Well, it seems that on May Day 1274, Dante (or more correctly Durante), being nearly nine years old, went with his father to a festivity at the house of Folco Portinari, a wealthy citizen of Florence; and here he first saw Beatrice, the daughter of Folco.

That is the coast now, dimly showing over on the left. Sergeant Banks points it out to me from the Astrodome. From now on we are going to fly parallel with the shore – right round the bulge of Cyrenaica and on to our target.

Ahi, quanto a dir qual era e cosa dura  
Questa selva selvaggia ed aspra e forte  
Che nel pensier rinnova la paura!

They think I could see better from the rear compartment; and anyhow there is much more room there. OK, I will go along and try it. Opening the door, I step down on to the catwalk, and squeeze my way between the bombs as they hang suspended in the belly of the plane. Below me are the doors of the bomb bay, that will slide back when we are over our target, leaving this place wide open to the waste of empty space below. My parachute harness seems to catch on every projection, and holds me up while I trace the trouble to its source. At length I have to unhitch most of it, and push my way down the catwalk carrying it in my hand.

The rear compartment is quite a new world – a dim, half-empty place – very cold, stretching away to the tail, and inhabited by the shadowy figure of the Beam Gunner, Moverly. Somewhere up above us, a pair of legs disclose the presence of at least one other member of the crew, the Mid-upper Gunner. Moverly is talking on the Inter-Com.

– No, I've seen no Correspondent. No, he hasn't turned up so far. Must be still on the catwalk. Oh, no, here he is now. Don't bother. He's got here!

He grins and motions me to one of the side windows. It is much easier to see from this place, but much windier and more uncomfortable. There are two side windows and a great panel in the floor. We are flying at about eight thousand feet – the height of our attack – and presently Moverly points out of the port window. There below and far to the left is the glow of a fire. It is a ship in the harbour, left burning by the American daylight raid earlier that day.

We are a little ahead of time, so we circle around over the sea, waiting for our zero hour. There is no sign of any of the other Libs, although they must be somewhere around. Meanwhile, the glow draws nearer, and we can make out the flames, and the shape of the harbour wall below in the moonlight. Then we see another fire, and the dark land mass around the perimeter of the town is pierced by points of light. Long blue pencils spring up, sweeping the sky in front of us – the master searchlights – followed soon by the plain white beams of the others. The raid is on!

Next come scarlet flashes on the ground, and the flak starts to come up – crimson tracers feeling their way slowly, surprisingly slowly, up – up, before, around and beside us, bursting into showers of incredibly lovely fireworks all over the heavens. And

all in silence – for no sound penetrates above the hum of our engines and the chatter on the Inter-Com.

– More to your left, Skipper. I think that second fire’s a dummy. I believe I saw a Lib over there to the right, a few minutes ago. There’s somebody’s bomb flashes now, just at the head of the mole.

Mingling with the sparkles of light around the harbour, I can see greater, angrier flashes – the bursting of the bombs of the first arrivals. We are weaving now – very gracefully and deliberately – in and out between the red pillars of flak, like skiers in a slalom race. Then we steady up and the roar of the engines rises. We are on the bomb run, and passing straight over the harbour.

– More to the right, Skipper. A little more. Steady. Hold it.

– Bomb doors open. Steady. Steady.

And then we are weaving again, and belting out over the pitch black countryside that lies behind the city. My new-found elation rapidly disintegrates as a depressing conversation starts on the Inter-Com.

– Skipper, I don’t think those bombs got away. The doors didn’t open properly. Take a look, somebody, please. No, Skipper, the bloody things are still there. The switch stuck. Oh bugger, that means going round again.

Slowly we come round in a wide arc, and the pyrotechnic display reappears once more on our beam.

– No, that’s a dummy fire over to the left. Pay no attention to it. God, there’s a good bit of bombing by somebody! Better than that stuff falling back over the town. Any sign of enemy fighters? Yes, Skipper, something’s just passed over the top. A couple of Junkers, I think. Christ, did they see us? I don’t think so. Anyhow, they didn’t seem to. Well, keep a good look-out, chaps. Hope you’ve got that switch fixed, old boy. We’re turning now, coming in again.

We repeat our previous run, except that this time, as we steady up over the target, the words on the Inter-Com are much more encouraging.

– Steady, Skipper. That’s got it. Bomb doors open. A little more to the right. That’s right. Hold it. Hold it. BOMBS GONE! Now weave like hell.

We weave like hell through the rest of the flak. And now there is a complete reversal of the tension, and somebody is singing

Ye banks and braes of bonnie Doon  
Why do ye bloom so fresh and fair?

For a while, I stare back through the floor panel at the fantastic scene behind us, and then I find myself listening to another conversation that holds me rigid once again.

– Did anyone get a photograph? Not a very good one I'm afraid. There was something wrong with the flash. Do you think we ought to go back for another? I don't know, what do you say? Well, I would like a good photograph. What say to another run, for a photograph? What do you think yourself? On the other hand, there *are* those fighters. Any sign of them since? No, Skipper, but I think they're over there to the right. I'm sure I saw machine-gun fire. Oh well, maybe it's a bit silly to go back just for a photograph. Yes, I think maybe we had better beat it straight for Gazala now we are through. Oh dear – I *would* have liked a nice photograph.

Ye banks and braes of bonnie Doon  
Why do ye bloom so fresh and fair?

Breathing more freely, I thread my way back along the catwalk to my old seat. Everything has settled down for another long-drawn-out six hours of flying, flying, flying. Twenty minutes of unbelievable excitement stuck in the middle of twelve hours of slow, silent watchfulness – that's a heavy bomber raid in these parts. There is coffee in a thermos, and some sandwiches and chocolate.

– One thing, the mosquitos don't bother you up here, somebody says.

Let me see now. Where was I, before I was interrupted?

Lo spazzo era un' arida e spezza.

It is remarkable how often when one has rendered a line as literally as possible in the most suitable English words one finds oneself forestalled by Longfellow.

An experience that I cannot say I have ever had myself! It is tough on this Mr Cotterill to find himself forestalled by Longfellow in all his greater moments. There below us is the dusty, arid floor once trodden by the feet of Cato and his army – the same floor that Dante likens to that plain of burning sand on which the Violent are tormented – Emperor and Pope alike. He has left that section out of his damn little book – has Mr Cotterill. We go straight from the harpies –

Ali hanno late, e colli e visi umani  
E pennuto il gran ventre

(surely these are Gremlins!) – to Canto XVII.

But why, oh why, should he leave out the crimson Phlegethon,  
in which all the tyrants of history are scorched?

Oh fix thine eyes upon the earth beneath  
Where boils that bloody stream in whose embrace  
The Violent expiate their wickedness.

I think I can remember the gist of it. It was Nessus, the centaur,  
who took him on his back and showed him that memorable scene.

Over the desert in a stately shower  
Like snow upon the windless mountain tops  
Great flakes of fire are raining slowly down.

A vision of hell from the back of Nessus! There is nothing that  
Dante had that I have not got!

So falls the eternal flame  
Until the tortured wilderness beneath  
Like tinder under flint bursts forth in fire  
And multiplies its grief.

– I *would* have liked a nice photograph, the obliging centaur  
keeps repeating.

Without respite, these poor tormented limbs  
Now here, now there, are writhing in a dance  
As if they hoped each new successive pain  
Might, by such exercise, be shaken off.

Above my head, silhouetted in the pale starlight of the astrodome,  
the Fire Controller swings gently in a wide leather strap. The dim  
light from the sky shines on his helmet and on the nozzle of his  
oxygen mask. From time to time he farts gently.

After a while, he points to the south, and I climb up and look  
out from beside him. A welter of searchlights and flak is visible  
in the direction of the coast.

– Tobruk, he shouts in my ear above the throb of our engines.  
Seems to be taking a hammering tonight.

Onwards we fly, interminably, until the dawn begins to come



up, and we can pick out the flashing beacons of Palestine, guiding us home. It is bright daylight as we plane down in our turn and taxi along the runway. A truck is there, waiting at the dispersal point, to carry us back to the Briefing Room for interrogation.

Bumping across the tarmac in a truck. But what am I thinking of? The time is past for brooding on the spectacle of Pope Boniface VIII, bottom upwards in hell.

I am in a car, sure enough, but it is going through a maze of low sandhills, and emerging at the approach to a pontoon bridge.

– The canal, says Chig, with his usual economy.

He is right. We have crossed Sinai, and I am on my *diritta via*.



TERPSICHORE  
OR  
THE SECOND RIVER

*Sunday, 25th October*

ARRIVED Cairo about five o'clock from Palestine. Unloaded possessions at *Dahabiya*.<sup>1</sup> Godfrey desertwards with gate closed.<sup>2</sup> George says T-B is out 'reporting bomb damage' again.<sup>3</sup>

*Wednesday, 28th October*

Usual crop of rows over things reported as said on radio. Montgomery's principal matter for complaint turns out to have been heard on the German wireless, not on ours at all! Air Force furious about alteration of Malta daily air score by someone in London in a direction more favourable to enemy. About to send sarcastic telegram when forestalled by one from them telling me to be more careful with my arithmetic. Speechless with rage! Form of battle to date becoming clearer. We are attacking at northern end but Rommel still expects it in the centre. DMI hoping to continue this impression, so keeping enemy armour unconcentrated, as long as possible. Eian Ogilvy comes to live on boat in Derek's place – another Air Force Scot with nice sense of humour. My usual lunch-time and evening spot.<sup>4</sup>

*Sunday, 1st November*

Little enough hard news during this first week, but London still insists on two daily spots. Front probably bogged down in another stalemate. Every sign of usual series of ballsups starting. Godfrey in despair<sup>5</sup> and wants to change over, but he doesn't come out so I can't go in. Very galling.

*Tuesday, 3rd November*

News getting exciting. Attack definitely a surprise to Rommel. No effort to concentrate Afrika Korps till night of 26th/27th. When our first attack was launched many positions on Eytie front were not even manned. Then enemy armour was frittered away in

small counter-attacks of thirty to fifty tanks. Finally his main concentration of two hundred tanks was caught by Air Force when trying to form up and scattered by eighty tons of bombs in two and a half hours. On 29th, Aussies drove 'Thumb' up northwards towards sea, cutting off 125th Panz Grens and two Bersaglieri Regts. Rommel lost two more days trying to relieve this unimportant sector while Monty regrouped in centre. Then on night before last our heavy attack went in and split his armour. Unlikely he has more than one hundred tanks left and if he tries to get them away he will have to leave most of the Eyties behind. Poor old Littorio Div will have to walk! Godfrey still talking about coming out. How much of this new development does he realise?

*Wednesday, 4th November*

Have decided to go forward even if nobody is left in Cairo. Anyhow, all arrangements for this already made by Aitken with Astley without consulting either of us, and if I don't use proffered transport now I may not get it later. Mustn't wash BBC dirty linen in public.<sup>6</sup> Arrived at Main Army (Burg-el-Arab) to find, thank God, Godfrey already on his way back. Mostyn-Owen well up to form swatting flies and denouncing habits of all Correspondents.<sup>7</sup> Took me across to G Ops with André Glarner where we were briefed by Murphy.<sup>8</sup> Sounds pretty exciting in spite of Murphy's scepticism.

*Thursday, 5th November*

Off before daylight in jeep with Glarner. Fine sunny day at Tac Army.<sup>9</sup> Monty's and Conyngham's Conference on the beach announcing 'complete and absolute Victory'.<sup>10</sup> Monty said: Night before last three wedges were driven into enemy centre and yesterday our two armoured divs passed through. Enemy who can get away are in full retreat.<sup>11</sup> Rommel absolutely smashed. Von Thoma, Commander of Afrika Korps, captured. He dined last night with Monty and they went over the whole campaign from the Hemeimat battle to the present, drawing maps on oilcloth table-top.<sup>12</sup> Von Thoma frankly regarded his experiences in Spanish war as a tryout for this. Germans optimistic at start of our attack, thinking they could hold us as we did them at Hemeimat, then counter attack and go through to Alex. But incessant bombing and artillery fire has wrecked morale. Roads to his rear now four deep with traffic trying to get away. Mark and Skipper arrived while I was typing this with news of swanning

column bound for Tobruk. Three or four days on journey with air cover – code name ‘Grapeshot’. Can go with it.<sup>13</sup> Various others join our party, none of them Corrs, thank God.<sup>14</sup> First objective 30 Corps to find out more details. Chased them through minefield and across Tel Aqaqir battlefield and caught them up in the blue somewhere below Daba.<sup>15</sup> G3 told us ‘Grapeshot’ off for the present owing to rapidity of advance. Picked sandscrapes for trucks and settled down for the night.<sup>16</sup>

*Friday, 6th November*

My Mother’s birthday. I hope she got my cable.<sup>17</sup> Running into Daba. Mark anxious about minefields and made us follow in existing tracks. Our first enemy train in station filled with engineering spare parts. Delight of Skipper. Chaos of wrecked vehicles along road to Fuka. Columns of prisoners.<sup>18</sup> Brigadier Custance explains situation on airfield at Fuka where he recorded for us. His column swanning from south yesterday had cut across axis of retreat.<sup>19</sup> Sent back recordings with Fielding’s driver. No PR facilities this far forward. Mark and I made recy together as far as Maaten Baguish and then brought on the others. RAF advance parties already on Fuka airfield by the time we left clearing it up for our fighters. Camped at Maaten Baguish not by sea but amongst German dugouts on other side of road. First Corr here and will be well up with head of advance in the morning. Reading picked-up papers and letters to a late hour.<sup>20</sup>

*Saturday, 7th November*

Weather broke in heavy showers in morning, bogging down 7th Armoured to south of us. Definitely puts paid to ‘Grapeshot’ so we stuck to the road and chased 1st Armoured.<sup>21</sup> Ran into trouble at what proved to be perimeter defences of Mersa Matruh where we were held up for rest of day.<sup>22</sup> Took a prisoner<sup>23</sup> and had distinctly odd conversation with him on way back. That little scrap at Matruh a highlight for me personally.<sup>24</sup> Attempted my running commentary on a battle at last.<sup>25</sup> Not much of a commentary or much of a battle either, but Hope sprang eternal until darkness fell and we dossed down in the middle of the most advanced leaguer.<sup>26</sup>

*Sunday, 8th November*

They didn’t bomb us after all. Through the wire with the tanks and into Matruh.<sup>27</sup> Tunny fish and oily red Vino. Plated soup tureen in Eytie Naval HQ. First enemy personnel in Hospital farther down coast.<sup>28</sup> Then fantastic scene in a prison camp full

of blacks. They'll never believe this! What bores we will all be some day.<sup>29</sup> But so far Godfrey seems to be the only person on the air,<sup>30</sup> and God only knows what M. Owen is doing with my discs. Slept along road to Sidi Barani.<sup>31</sup>

*Monday, 9th November*

Struffed on road to west this morning.<sup>32</sup> Then held up by fire fight about ten miles short of Sidi Barani. Big news is of landing in Algeria, causing considerable hilarity. Maybe we're going somewhere after all. Still no indication on the air of any of my despatches getting back.

*Tuesday, 10th November*

Forward as far as we could go. Scrap this side of Barani looked like being another slow one so returned to Matruh to arrange a flight with Tac Recce. Fixed it for the morning. Pity we then went back to Main Army a few miles to east because the mail was not to our taste.<sup>33</sup> Someone shooting at us when camped on airfield for the night probably because of our wireless. Nice way to get it turned off! Worst thing was to hear Bruce Anderson's discs about Matruh on the air and not mine! What the hell is up?<sup>34</sup>

*Wednesday, 11th November*

Flew as far as Gazala on Tac Recce. Saw that they are by-passing Tobruk and will not hold it.<sup>35</sup> Had septic finger lanced and followed Skipper to Barani with Clarke,<sup>36</sup> new Conducting Officer, but never caught him up – the rat. And he has all our kit in Belinda.

*Thursday, 12th November*

Not much news about progress on Algerian end. Main fighting seems to be against French who object to liberation! Found Skipper parked happily a mile or two farther on. Then lost him again in traffic jam below Hellfire before we had taken our kit off him! So another night by roadside without any. New Zealanders working feverishly on Sollum corniche with Monty looking on.<sup>37</sup> He has issued another Personal Message congratulating everybody on wiping out almost entire enemy opposition (on paper anyhow) 'as effective fighting formations'. Our Staff car definitely broken down in Sollum and being repaired by New Zealanders who also gave us something to eat. Blast Skipper.

*Friday, 13th November*

(Such a date is all we need!) Got up corniche in car and into ruins of Cappuzzo.<sup>38</sup> Loaded up at enemy supply dump and on to Bardia. Heard Tobruk road was already open so hurried on,

arriving about four, and joined Bruce Anderson's outfit dossing in the main square.<sup>39</sup> Plenty of beds and blankets. South Africans fed us. Skipper will be here to pick up souvenirs as soon as he hears it has fallen. We have more than enough junk as it is.<sup>40</sup>

*Saturday, 14th November*

Sure enough, Skipper arrived while I was recording only British released prisoner on Anderson's gear. Did another piece with him in course of which somebody rang the bells of the Cathedral.<sup>41</sup> Bade them farewell and beat it for Gambut, whence I cadged lift to Heliopolis in a transport plane.<sup>42</sup> Skipper and Clarke to wait for Godfrey and to go with him to Benghazi. Then I shall come out again. Got my morning's disc on the night link from Cairo for London. That one, at any rate, got through!

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## NOTES

1) Arriving from Palestine, I unloaded my luggage at the *Dahabiya* – bedroll and cedar wood Bible, a crate of oranges from Jaffa, a couple of bright woollen saddle-bags from Amman, our Presto recording gear (disapproved of in engineering circles, as not being of BBC manufacture, but it does the job all the same), and a heavy, white sheepskin coat purchased in Jerusalem.

2) PR told us that the gate was closed on all traffic with the Western Desert for security reasons, including the movement in and out of Correspondents. So I had to take up the Cairo link temporarily until it could be arranged for me to get through.

3) Most of the first-string Correspondents were already forward and out of Cairo, amongst them Frank Thornton-Bassett, whom George described as leaving for the front with two rifles, a tommy gun and a long-handled Italian dagger. He expected the hardships to be terrific, and warned George not to rely on hearing from him for several weeks at least.

4) Each day after the exertions of the lunch-time spot, I used to take myself to the darkness of the Turf Club, where I would select a very old volume of *Punch* ('Collapse of stout party' vintage) and fall asleep over it. There was seldom any other customer on the midnight link, where I was usually received by an Armenian known to us as 'Mr Geranium' – the only person entrusted with the privilege of speaking live and unscripted on the air to London.

– Hello, London, he would begin. Not very much for you tonight. Only the usual.

– Really, I would gently protest. You mustn't put it that way. You should say, Here's some good luck for you tonight, London. I am proud to present your ace commentator.

But Mr Geranium did not smile. And then the long ride home through the half-darkened streets in a gharry – arriving at the *Dahabiya* just in time to hear my own stuff coming back on the air in what to London was the Overseas Midnight spot.

5) Godfrey wrote from the desert:

...Thank goodness you are getting something, for up here one can hardly write anything at all. All the meat, all the concrete stuff, everything about what is going on and where and in what manner – all that is stopped, and one is left quite baffled and thwarted. I think I will use this standstill stage to come to Cairo and you up here... Do try to say in one of your Cairo despatches – or convey it – that they won't at present let any real news out of the desert. They must think I'm sitting on my bottom idling... We'll try to do the you-and-me change over in the next day or so... Skip, I gather, is all set for Benghazi and months here...

Adios,  
GODFREY

Rather amusing, I felt – his frank desire to give me the battle for the reason that nothing was happening, and all the available news was being scooped by Cairo. However, I was quite willing to go, just as soon as he would come out. Meanwhile I think I did pretty well by him and his despatches, although I doubt if this cheered him very much.

6) At the same time there was some sort of a four-handed row going on between Mostyn-Owen, Philip Astley and the remnants of Our Cairo Office over Godfrey, which ended on the 4th when I hastily flung together a few of my things, piled into a PR truck (alone, for Chig was still in a spot of trouble with the Prime Minister of Transjordan) and bade a fond farewell to my now familiar friend, the big-bellied, fast-flowing, age-hallowed, full-flooded, ever-abundant, once pre-eminent, temporarily deified, and permanently piss-laden Mother Nile.

Le Nil, au bruit plaintif de ses eaux endormies  
Berce de rêves doux le sommeil des momies.

What had I discovered on her banks in the telescoped intensity of a few mad months? Little enough – except something of the rhythmic sequence of growth and rest, with the pain of the one and the stillness of the other, the exhilaration and the boredom, the frustration and the sense of comfort that together make up the fabric of life. Neither of them seems to last for ever, and both of them can be given ruder names as the spirit moves us.

And so I took the road for the Western Desert.

7) The red-hatted Leprechaun, Mostyn-Owen, lay on his bed exhausted with his refractory charges.

– I'm not off my feet from morning till night, he explained to me from his recumbent position. Private Bailey, give this man some tea!

8) Briefed that evening, by Murphy, the G-One, I was very much intrigued by his attitude towards Monty and the prospects of the battle to date. Monty, he told me, was going to hold a Press Conference at Tac Army in the morning at which he intended to announce a 'complete victory'. Of course we could make what we liked of that kind of optimistic talk, but as for Murphy himself... well, he went away laughing lightly and sceptically to himself!

9) Next morning we found the caravans of Monty's tactical HQ down on the beach not far from the spot where I had had my interview with Dan Pienaar over four months before.

10) Monty received us in the morning sunlight, wearing a tank beret with two cap badges. This piece of apparel seemed to be bulking in his mind, because his first words were:

– Well, gentlemen, as you see I have got a new hat.

He then went on to give us several unconvincing reasons for the assumption of so odd a head-dress, and not until he had gone fully into this matter did he turn to the subject of the Battle of Alamein.

At the mention of 'complete and absolute victory', one sceptical Correspondent, schooled in the fear of over-optimism, asked the General would he mind repeating that phrase, which the General obligingly did. We all looked at one another. We had often been warned against the use of such expressions, and we knew that we had not a hope of getting a Quote past the Censors. Yet there was the bare-armed Air Vice-Marshal smiling by the General's side, apparently in substantial agreement!

11) – But we mustn't think, Monty went on, that the show is all over.



For a moment we imagined that he was about to qualify his boasting. But not a bit of it. He continued:

– Now we are going to hit him for six right out of Africa!

12) The capture of Von Thoma was his chief delight, because they had both been at Dunkirk, where a number of British Intelligence Files had been captured, and they each quizzed the other about the contents of their own character sketches on the files of the opposing armies. And as Monty quoted to us the Afrika Korps' description of himself (as alleged by Von Thoma) he preened himself, for all the world like my son in his new school blazer, looking at himself in the glass for the first time.

13) As most of the others prepared to race each other for Cairo with Monty's statement (where it might be assumed we had already been scooped by a Press conference hand-out) Mark and Skipper arrived from Alexandria with confidential news about a swanning column bound for Tobruk. We were soon discussing it with a few other service people who had heard about it too – Sean Fielding, one of the Observer Officers working for PR with elaborate instructions to make broadcasting recordings, and with no gear whatever on which to make them; Warwick Charleton, a sallow, untidy-looking desert rat who was alleged to be Editor of something called the *Eighth Army News* – a desert newspaper for the troops; Archie Colquhoun, an Intelligence Officer specialising in the Italian Army; and Geoffrey Keating, the wild man of the Army Film Unit. For the next week this odd little party was to meet and re-meet in twos and threes, on the road or in bivvies, passing and re-passing each other over the better part of a thousand miles of desert as we severally chased after the Afrika Korps.

14) Our principal concern was to keep the news of this column from my brothers of the Press!

– Don't let this get around, said Mark. We don't want a whole crowd of odds and sods coming along with us.

– I couldn't possibly not fail to disagree less, replied Warwick Charleton, who is evidently an expert in the art of using words to conceal thought.

So Mark, Pretswell (the driver) and I piled into the Staff car, and signalled to Sean Fielding and his driver to follow along behind, while Skipper and Sherlock in Belinda (the recording truck) brought up the rear.

15) Great gangs of prisoners were already collecting in the new

cages down by Alamein Railway Station. A mile or two beyond this point, we turned off the road, and broke away across the open desert to the south, and soon we were passing through the white lanes of tape that marked the gaps in the minefields. Beyond these, we found that we were in the thick of the pursuit. On all sides of us, like a vast fleet in full sail, an Armada of vehicles was rolling forward, each truck and tank leaving a long feather of dust behind it.

Around slit trenches we went, through strong points and shattered machine-gun nests – some of them with the bodies of their defenders lying in neat rows under scraps of tarpaulin. Others who had been killed earlier in the battle were already buried in shallow graves, each with a helmet, or other identification mark, lying on the top.

On all sides enemy tanks and vehicles were still burning. Many were one-time British machines captured in the Gazala Stakes and now with German markings superimposed on the British ones. From most of them came a thick, oily smoke.

Then on – through the last of the defended positions into an even more exciting world, the other fellow's rear areas with his road signs and warnings, his supply dumps, and his equipment, furniture and personal possessions scattered everywhere in mad confusion. It was the first time that any of us had ever seen such sights. Previously it had always been *our* things that had been left behind. But now the Afrika Korps had assumed a mobile role.

Useless souvenirs began to accumulate in the back of each car and to decorate the headlamps and bonnets, much to Mark's disgust. We filled our tanks from German petrol cans, and stocked up with food supplies from his dumps. From all appearances we might now be far behind the enemy lines.

ARMEE NACHRICHTEN LAGER  
FELDLAZARETT  
COMMISSARIATO DI MOVIMENTO  
HY-BAD UNTERSUCH STELLE

Each new sign produced a mild argument as to what it meant. A Military Police lorry, dashing across the desert, was knocking in new directional signs as it went. Finally we found Corps halted for the night somewhere to the south of Daba.

16) Here our little party began to take stock of itself for the first time. Mark in his shorts and green Rifle Brigade forage cap,

reclining elegantly in a folding chair lately the property of the Luftwaffe. Skipper, his perky little moustache more aggressive than ever, casting an eye over his growing pile of souvenirs, as he supervised the roaring primus stove. Sean Fielding, lean and sardonic, seated on a jerrican at the end of the table, and preparing to have an argument with Mark over the virtue of fantasy in Art. The three drivers, a little way off, in deep consultation as to whether and where they were going to dig slit trenches for their bedrolls.

As it grew dark, I could see the brew-up fires springing into life all over the waste to the north and east. Somewhere in the distance a piper was playing 'The Road to the Isles', while closer at hand somebody else could be heard humming the last verse of the ballad:

Now won't there be some bleedin' constipation?  
And won't those turd-bound sods all bleedin' well rave?  
But they'll get what they deserve  
For having the bleedin' nerve  
To bugger about with a British workman's grave!

There was nothing at all in the sky – not even a cloud – until the stars came out. And as the chill of the evening smote me, I began to regret my hasty packing back at the Tabard Inn, that had sent me off without an overcoat.

The others kept talking, far into the night – long after the brew-up fires had been put out, and the desert faded into a featureless expanse stretching all around us.

17) Lying on my bed while the Luftwaffe straffed around the place (probably feeling for Corps) I got to thinking of my son in his gym shoes and cap, nonchalantly riding his bicycle on the Stillorgan Road: or earlier still, moving around the flat with startling rapidity on his pot – his eyes peering around the door to see whether I was there in the bed. And I thought of him at Etwall, seated on his Grandmother's knee, while she thumped out a song for him at the piano.

...Bil-ly Prin-ple had a lit-tle pig,  
When it was young it was-n't ver-y big,  
When it was old it lived in clo-ver.  
Now it is dead, and that's all o-ver.

18) Along the coast road we followed Mark's expert advice and

kept clear of the sand margins, in so far as the mass of wreckage allowed us. It is in these margins that the enemy mines are usually planted. About half way to Fuka we were stopped by a pink and white young Guards Officer with an embarrassed and diffident manner.

– I've got rather a large German Army here, he said to Mark, and I think that I ought to have one or two guards for them. Do you happen to have any men to spare?

We stuck our heads out of the car, and sure enough, behind him was a column of enemy trucks filled with a sinister collection of characters, all hanging out and staring back at us.

– Good God! I said. How did you come by that lot?

– As a matter of fact, I found them paddling in the sea.

Mark was sorry. We had nobody to spare, but he was sure that there was a POW cage at Daba. We sped on, full of apologies, and I presume that he managed to bring them somewhere.

19) On the airfield at Fuka we found Custance of the 8th Motor Brigade in one of the new Sherman tanks directing the finale of a minor battle that was taking place up on the escarpment. His column, swanning from the south on the previous day, had cut across the main axis of retreat, and he had managed to trap and shoot up an entire enemy column, which failed to break through his cordon. Hence the mess on the road all the way from Daba.

20) That night, camped at Baguish, I remembered the cold of the previous evening, and as the cooking was started in Belinda, I began to look around for an overcoat. There was a German Staff car abandoned by the side of the road, and beside it sat one of those lost dogs that had been a feature of the day. It was looking for its master, and obviously knew that we were enemies, for it growled and snapped at me when I approached.

But the poor brute was hungry, and presently the smell of cooking was too much for him, so he betrayed his side enough to wolf down a concoction that Skipper brought over to him. As I watched him at his supper I looked through the contents of the car. It was not at all clear why it had been abandoned so hastily, as it did not seem to be damaged. Probably some air straffing had sent off the occupants at the run, without collecting their possessions. On the rear seat was an Afrika Korps khaki greatcoat which I put on. There were also some very welcome shirts, handkerchiefs and other garments cached in a tin trunk, of which the others came down and took their share. But what interested me most of

all was a portfolio of letters and papers that I brought back with me to the truck.

There is something that I find very moving in personal belongings that have been left behind by a stranger, and this fellow's papers – whoever he was – were even more interesting than usual. Here was his Identity Card, and what appeared to be a number of Ration Books. Also his letters from home, and a bundle of personal snapshots and photographs. His name was Georg Sicherman, and I imagine he was the driver or orderly of the Officer whose greatcoat I had appropriated. Maybe the dog belonged to him too.

One of the snapshots must have been of his family, in a place called Furth, although it was hard to be certain of this from the inscription alone. On the back of a little girl's photograph, Aunt Gretel had written: Isn't your little...pretty? I couldn't quite make out the name in the Gothic script – but she *was* pretty. Somebody else had written a couple of poems. The first seemed to be a crude political squib, evidently the work of an engineer:

Who is our best Electrician?  
Why, our Führer, Adolf Hitler.  
For he has dimmed out Poland, and Germany regulated,  
Russia reversed, and England electrified.  
With his deeds he has set the world in high tension,  
And through it all, of short circuit no mention.

The other was a nostalgic effort on the theme, 'When will it be peace in Berlin?':

When hale and hearty, without a care  
We leave behind this dread nightmare,  
When grouzers no longer spoil our fun  
And love reigns high o'er everyone,  
When the nations bury the bloody hatchet  
And of the world's treasure  
Each gets full measure,  
Then it is peace in Germany—nay, on all the earth.

There were snapshots of factory parties, of picnics in the woods, and of soldier friends in Italy and in the Desert. But most fascinating of all was a bundle of letters from a girl called Anneliese Wendler.

A bomber passed overhead and dropped a stick of H E somewhere down the road. Outside the truck I could hear the voices

of the others in one of those interminable talks that were becoming an evening ritual. We were all becoming conscious of the surprising fact that these Germans whom we were fighting were actual people, and not mere symbols represented by so many blue marks on a map, and we were rather interested in our attitude towards them as individuals. Take, for instance, the pilot of that bomber.

– Look at it this way, somebody was saying. That chap up there has just been trying to kill us.

There was a general outburst of dissent.

– Well, at any rate he's bombing the road where we're spending the night. In an air raid at home I'm sure I would have resented that very much. But out here – do any of you feel that he is a shit to be dropping bombs on us? Personally, I mean?

– Of course not! Why should I?

– He's only doing his job like the rest of us, came the voice of Skipper.

They had something there. I had no intention of getting killed if I could avoid it, and if I had had an ack-ack gun I would have tried to shoot down that plane. But as for feeling any personal malice towards the pilot – well, the fact of the matter was that I didn't feel it in the slightest. And I wondered why I didn't! I had much more resentment against the man who said: Hello, old boy. Still reporting the war from Mena, eh?

But to turn to this girl, Anneliese – it looked as though she was in service in some sort of a lodging house in a Thuringian village called Eckartsberga. Georg Sicherman had been billeted in the town, back in September, 1941, and he and a couple of his pals had picnicked in the woods with Anneliese and her two friends, Irmgard and Thea Graul. Here were the snapshots – three pictures, each with one of the six missing – the one who took the picture presumably.

She began her correspondence quite formally, signing her name in full, describing the small events of the village and telling of the movies she had been to, and of her plans for the future. They were not very sophisticated letters, and they grew more intimate as time went on, and as Georg passed through Italy and eventually came to Africa.

Dear Georg,

It gives me great pleasure to see that you are still well and healthy, and I can say the same of myself. You needn't worry about my days out.

I don't like going out these days, besides nothing much is happening round here. All this makes me think of that lovely Wednesday that passed so quickly.

Yours ever,  
Anneliese Wendler.

After a little negotiation she agreed to address him in the familiar second person singular instead of in the formal plural, and from time to time there were further arch references to that Wednesday, when (I gather) he must have kept her out too late.

Dear Georg,

I received your kind letter with great joy on Monday, and I thank you kindly for it. I had begun to think that you, ungrateful man, had forgotten Eckartsberga, as you took so long to reply. But I always say a good thing must take its time: or are your letter paper and ink rationed? I often look back with regret on the lovely time we spent together, and how quickly it was all over! Your trip must have been terribly long; you must have been going at a snail's pace. I am sure, however, that you are enjoying your military service again. It rains every day here. It is my day out today, but I must be back by ten o'clock. The people are beginning to get on my nerves. They ask me every time, 'Can we expect you before one o'clock?', and all this is due to you - oh, that fatal Wednesday! Well, I don't care what they say. But it was grand, wasn't it? I wish you were here today. I shall now close or it will be ten before I leave. Hoping these lines will find you in the best of health.

With best love,  
Anneliese Wendler.

P S Do write soon.

Then one day in 1942, she enclosed her long-promised photograph taken in Naumburg, and she began to sign herself by her christian name alone. And here was the photograph itself - a nice simple blonde (although she humbly remarks, 'It's not very pretty') with a Madonna-like face and the strong, sensible hands of a working girl.

21) As we dashed ahead next morning, one of the things that struck me was the strange similarity between an advance and a retreat. All around us was the same atmosphere of unruffled confusion that I associate with the Gazala Stakes - the same universal ignorance as to what was going on - the same phlegmatic and slightly bored faces. If despair was absent in the one case, so was any marked hilarity in the other. This doubt about what was

happening extended to our own position in the advance. Even after we had run into a small pocket of resistance that was being cleaned up by a few men with rifles, we were still quite ignorant as to whether we were in front of the leading tanks or behind them.

(Some time later I was to attend a training course for a Division that had not yet seen any action in the war. The subject for discussion was the proper order of advance of the units of a Division in the face of an enemy. After going into this in considerable detail it was discovered that I was the only person amongst those present who had had practical experience of such a situation, and I am afraid that I caused great distress amongst the theorists when I revealed the fact that the advance of the Eighth Army from Alamein was led each day by whatever truck driver happened to be the first to shave and pack up in the morning!)

22) A few miles on we were stopped by an excited lorry driver with a confused story of having been shelled a little ahead. As we stood talking to him on the practically empty road, it became apparent that we must be nearer the front of the pursuit than we had imagined, and the fact that this man's truck had been merely carrying rations did not affect his proud position as the spearpoint of the United Nations. Mark had noticed some armoured cars a few miles back, so he said he would turn around and bring them up. Meanwhile, Sean Fielding and three other men who happened to turn up, took tommy-guns and said they would go ahead and investigate the trouble for themselves.

23) Dispersing to the side of the road, they stalked forward in the direction of what looked like an abandoned railway station. I went with them. We did not hold our position as the Advance Guard for very long, because presently we were overtaken by a reccy platoon, rattling along in its squat little carriers. The armoured cars, they told us, had refused to move at Mark's request. They had no orders, they said, about anything in front, and they did not propose to move until they were told to do so. The four tommy-gunners climbed on to the sides of the carriers, while I pointed out with some excitement that a man in a German uniform was emerging from the railway buildings a few hundred yards to the right, and was starting to approach us. Nobody seemed to be interested in him except me; and as the carriers moved off, I let them go and turned to meet the first live, free German I have encountered face to face in this war. (It was scarcely face to face in that damned OP!) As far as I could see



he was alone and did not appear to be carrying arms. We met in a spirit of great mutual interest, and bowed politely as though we were each surprised at the other's cordiality. The position was quite simple. He had been left behind, and he proposed to surrender. *Zu dienen*. I would be glad to accommodate him; in fact I would escort him up the road to where he would meet others better equipped to take him in charge than I was. In the meantime I thought that I would give him a demonstration of how broadminded our side could be towards a defeated foe.

But we had not gone very far before I realised that any chivalrous patronage on my part was feeble compared with his towards me. This was no cornered criminal, as pictured so often and so boringly in the Press and on the Screen. This was no baffled aggressor, confronted with the consequences of his evil-doing. He appeared to be unaware of any evil-doing on his part, or even that he had been defeated, and in response to my suggestion that perhaps he was glad to be out of it all, he politely demurred. He would prefer to continue the battle, but – as he put it with a humorous smile – with English food, American equipment and Italian opponents! If he was a little pained, it was with England, for having taken so odd and unnatural a course in world affairs. Indeed, he found it hard to understand how so reputable a people could be found in such bad company. Doubtless we had been misled by self-seeking rulers and were not wholly to blame.

This entertaining turn in the conversation so intrigued me that I encouraged him to continue as we strolled up the road. Was this the Führer's attitude towards England? I enquired. On the whole my prisoner thought that it was. Certainly, England had been a great disappointment in recent years. She had spurned the hand of friendship of a great and kindred people, and turned instead to Bolsheviks and Jews. *Es ist so schade* – so incomprehensible. But then, even Germany had had her moments of aberration, and he was sure that in the final settlement under the New Order, England's great contribution to the philosophy of National Socialism would not be forgotten. Her Imperial example – her paternal guardianship of the inferior races – her entirely realistic attitude in International affairs – her masterly system of world espionage – her adroit policy of Divide and Rule – all these had been a source of inspiration to the Führer, and he would be the first to admit it, when the war was over and a just peace given to a shattered world. *Ein Dienst ist des andern wert*. He was

beginning to quote the words of that great poetic philosopher, Kipling, when we arrived at the first batch of British vehicles on the road, and our little talk came to an end.

Here I handed my prisoner over to a somewhat depressed Sapper Captain, who listened sceptically to his formal words of surrender, and then directed him on up the road (much to his indignation) in charge of nobody at all.

24) Soon, Mark and Skipper arrived with the Staff car and Belinda, and we drove forward to a spot where we found the carriers dispersed to each side of the road, and a long slope rising before us towards a rough skyline. At the base of this slope was a minefield surrounded by barbed wire and an anti-tank ditch, and there was some sort of barricade across the road. Behind this, a series of diggings and strong points could be seen on the face of the hill. We got out to take a better look.

– I think I know what these are, said Mark. These are the perimeter defences of Mersa Matruh.

– Presumably made by ourselves?

– That's right. And not very well made, if all that I have heard about them is true.

– How wise that was, as it now turns out. It seems that somebody is still in the town, and intends to hold out?

– Oh, probably only a couple of men and a boy. However, we'll soon see.

Presently a lot of tanks came up and manoeuvred themselves into hull-down positions. There was a good deal of shellfire pooping away over our heads. For some reason this was not one of those occasions when one crawled around on one's belly, even though I did notice a little group of men burying somebody by the side of the road. There was a vehicle park behind the enemy wire from which a heavy cloud of smoke was drifting up into the air, and then blowing slowly across the landscape in lazy wisps. From time to time the bang of our guns and the whine of the shells overhead was punctuated by another and quite different sound – a harsh, crackling CRRRRRAAP, that seemed to come unaccompanied by any other warning.

– Anti-personnel stuff, somebody said.

And then I realised what it was. From somewhere in amongst those earthworks, somebody was shooting at us. There was no whine or whuffle because it was coming at short range, and beating the sound of the gun that was firing it. On the ground to

both sides of the road little whirlpools of dust and metal rose and splashed about. Then I noticed that the others were no longer standing by my side, but were lying on their bellies in a sandscrape. Even Mark was there, looking up at me with a half grin. And as I stood there watching those ugly little particles spurting about my feet, I suddenly made the most surprising discovery of all – a most enlightening and exhilarating discovery. It was the fact that although I was apparently being shot at from comparatively short range with anti-personnel shells, it was not particularly scaring.

I think that the most frightening thing about war is the fear of being frightened. But here, face to face with the thing itself, it was like being back in the Prefects' study at Merchiston with my hand out, being licked – disliking it, maybe, but knowing with a sort of impertinent triumph that it wasn't as bad as might have been expected. That was all I wanted to know. And knowing it, I am glad to say I did the correct thing.

I lay down, too.

25) From a sand hummock a little farther back, we did our running commentary. Beside me lay an empty champagne bottle, overprinted: Reserved for the Wehrmacht. And a copy of *Kladderdatch* which I did not find particularly amusing.

#### HUMORISTICHERS

Klein Ella: Mama, habe ich noch meine Milchzähne?

Mutter: Ja, mein Kind.

Klein Ella: Papa aber hat schon seine Bierzähne, nicht wahr?

(I think on the whole that *Punch* is better.)

Mark and I then proceeded to describe the scene before us at ill-timed intervals – ill-timed because of the fact that whenever we started to cut a disc, a deep silence immediately fell upon the battlefield, and everything that we said, subsequently turned out to be wrong. On playing it back afterwards, it gave the unmistakable impression of a poorly-reported football match without any final score. While we were busy at this task, Lumsden, the Corps Commander, turned up, took a look around, giggled, and went off. And as dusk fell, we could see through our glasses a couple of enemy trucks winding their way towards the summit and disappearing over the top. Probably they were pulling out, but it was soon too dark to find out, and presently our tanks withdrew into close leaguer.

26) After some discussion, we decided not to go back ourselves, but to leaguer up with the tanks on the spot. So we parked our trucks and cars between the lines of AFVs, and spread out our bedrolls in a hollow.

There was a certain glamour in the situation – peering out into the black void that surrounded the leaguer, the void that was now No-Man’s-Land. I walked out into it for a few yards to see what it was like, and to ease my bowels in a hole. But never out of sight of the dim, shadowy bulk of the nearest vehicle, lest I should lose my sense of direction and fail to find my way back. Then, with a jingling and rattle, the B Echelon arrived from the rear with stores, petrol and ammunition.

Some time later, we were interrupted by another visitor from the mysterious world outside. It was a stray donkey, wandering at large through the leaguer, braying at our conversation and trying to crap on our property.

I dared not strike a light to read another letter from Anneliese, but there was plenty to think about without that. It had been an extraordinary day – maybe not so profitable for my employers. Why should they or anybody else care that I had made a new acquaintance with myself? But I cared.

– Hee-haw, said the donkey.

I drew my looted overcoat closer around me as I lay on my bed, and looked up at the dark sky. Even if it wasn’t a very good commentary, we had had the battle to ourselves. There was a rumour that Bill Warrener and a party of Corrs had run into an ambush on the cliff road and had had to go back. That must be where Monty’s G-One Ops had gone into the bag. A crazy war. But it had its points.

– Hee-haw. Hee-haw. Hee-haw.

– Oh, bugger off, you bastard. BUGGER OFF!

27) Bright and early we broke leaguer and went down to where some sappers were filling in the anti-tank ditch. When it had been made moderately passable, the first tank waddled straight through the mined area, crossed the railway line and swung left on to the road behind the barricade. We went after it in our car, meticulously following in the tracks, but we got stuck on the railway embankment while trying to cross the line. This was infuriating, as all sorts of vehicles were now beginning to show up from the rear, and having spent a night outside the wire, I was determined to be the first Correspondent into Matruh. So when Warwick

Charleton and Archie Colquhoun appeared in a truck, I excused myself from my own party, and climbed on to the roof of theirs. Below us as we topped the rise, the blue sea filled the saucer of a bay, around the rim of which sat a small white town filled with trees and green shrubs. Three ships lay wrecked in the water, and most of the houses were empty shells; but after those miles of desert from Alexandria, the sight was inexpressibly attractive.

The town was completely empty, and as the leading tanks parked themselves along the seafloor and the crews began their usual brew-up, Colquhoun drove us straight to the Port Control building, which he told us had been the HQ of the San Marco Brigade – the Italian Naval Commandos. Here, he went through the place looking for papers. There was a nice little booby trap in the front hall – a trip wire attached to a hand grenade. But we left this for better men to deal with, and as soon as Colquhoun had finished his examination we got back into the truck and dashed farther along the coast.

28) Dismounting in the compound of a Hospital, we found ourselves at last confronted by the enemy. Out of every hole and corner, little Italian orderlies came running with their hands up. With smiles and ingratiating nods, they followed us around in increasing numbers, chattering and pointing. Whichever way we looked, a pair of earnest, smiling brown eyes was trying to catch ours, nodding and twinkling, eager for recognition, anxious to be bowed to. Brown hands plucked at our coat tails, and as soon as we turned around, there was another little man, winking ponderously and shaking hands with himself to demonstrate his pleasure at meeting us. I kept saying, 'Grazie, Grazie'. As if in secret, they smiled and whispered their pleasure at our coming.

Inside the Hospital, Colquhoun was talking to the CO and was seeking out the British patients. There were about six of them there in bed, all ready to tell us how well they had been treated and to put in a good word for the enemy medicos. The atmosphere of geniality rose.

Continuing my investigations on the other side of the compound, I found something that interested me more – the German section. Here, the sixteen-year-old orderlies were polite, but undemonstrative. I addressed the Doctor in German, and was rewarded by a click of the heels and a formal bow. Colquhoun had intended to ignore 'the Hun', but I pointed out that there were British casualties here, too. So we found them in equally

good shape, and just as ready to praise the treatment they had had. 29) Still farther along the coast the strangest encampment of all came into view, with a white flag flying at each corner of a high, rectangular fence. Inside the enclosure we could see hundreds of figures peering at us through the wire as our truck approached. Then as we stopped outside the gate, pandemonium broke loose. It was a prison camp crammed with Negroes and Indians, in the precarious charge of three white Afrikanders who had been left behind by the Germans to keep it in control. Behind the wire, men were leaping up and down, cheering, singing, clapping their hands and chanting frenzied spirituals on the theme: I'm free! I'm free, free, free! Praise the Lord, I'm free! Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Oh Lord!

A few were shaking the gates and shouting complaints and imprecations at the Afrikanders – resentful of the fact that they were still being kept behind wire.

– We're very glad to see you, said the self-appointed CO, a South African Sergeant called Vaneck. We've been here three days since the Gerry guards left us – a sort of independent state, you might say. We knew that if these boys got loose in the town and got their hands on any drink, they'd take the whole place apart and themselves with it. So we've been trying to keep them in till you arrived.

– Out! Out! Out! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

– Wait till I get my recording truck, I yelled above the din. I've got to get a disc of this.

– Do the best you can till we get back with the Police, roared Charleton.

– Praise the Lord! I'm free! was all that we could hear as we tore back along the coast to Matruh.

30) It was no wonder that my despatches were getting a little incoherent. Maybe that was why none of them was being used – I thought to myself – as I listened on the air to Godfrey, receiving the undivided attention of the British public. It might be, of course, that none of my discs had arrived. Maybe I should have abandoned the head of the advance and gone back, myself, to see why. On the other hand, my comments might just be bad!

31) In camp that night on the road beyond Matruh I began to analyse another thing that was making our days so exhilarating. It was the heady wine of real, anarchic freedom – another topic quite unsuitable for a Press despatch! In a world that is overrun

by Policemen and the power of Money – an overcrowded world – a world of tickets and passports and permits and penalties of forty shillings, we never get a chance to know what real freedom is. But out there in the forefront of that victorious advance, we were utterly beyond and above all Police Power.

Nor were we even dependent on the Laws of Economics. We neither bought nor sold. Everything was there for the taking – food, drink, clothing, fuel for our cars, beds to sleep on, blankets to keep us warm – anything we wanted. And what was the result of this? Did we rob or cheat each other? Were we all the more avaricious and acquisitive?

On the contrary. We felt superior to law. Instead of acquiring, we developed a God-like indifference to the ties of property altogether, and abandoned most of the rubbish we already had, once the first fine frenzy of souvenir hunting had passed. In this dream-world of practical Communism there was enough for all, and to spare. So we left it behind us for the next fellow, and passed on with unladen shoulders, living gloriously for each moment as it came. It was tremendous. We slept where we stopped, under a roof-tree of stars. And that's the best Hotel in the world, if you can get into it!

And for reading matter I had my package of lost letters to piece together, and the imagined picture of Georg and Anneliese that they conjured up.

Dear Georg,

Please send me an Army Post Office form for 2 kilo parcels, as I would like to send you a birthday present. There isn't much time to the 9th November. I hope you won't keep me waiting as I did you... Nothing much happens round here these days. I am going to the Cinema tonight; they are showing 'Riding for Germany'. I have seen the picture before, but what else can one do here? Irmgard and Thea Graul, at whose home you were billeted, have both got engaged. It all happened so suddenly. They met in November and got engaged in March. I shall now close, hoping to hear from you soon, and that you are enjoying your military service.

Yours ever,  
Anneliese.

Poor Georg! As I pulled his blue sweater over my head, I wondered what had happened to him, and whether he was really enjoying his military service as she had hoped. And then I noticed

that it had just turned midnight, and that this was his birthday! – his birthday, a year after the one on which he had got his 2 kilo parcel, and had taken proper note (I hope) of those arch references to the engagements of the other girls.

Amongst the papers was something that appeared to be the draft of one of his letters to her:

...By the time you get this letter I shall have been for a number of weeks in Africa, for it was on 11th October that I first set foot on African soil. I spent eight days in Rome and another eight in Naples before leaving. Although the progress and exotic charm of the two cities fascinated me, I would not have liked to stay much longer in either Naples or Rome. I was offered the alternative of either remaining in Naples or being posted to Genoa, to which I have not been. They tried to force me to remain in Naples but I stubbornly refused. I have not been doing military service for years in order to be posted to a garrison. I did not heed warnings or advice, since I want to get a taste of real fighting...

So now Georg had had his taste of real fighting, and I was wishing him a happy birthday. (We ask for it, don't we?)

.. Oh, how unconcerned the people in Rome are! From 10 a.m. on, they sit in the coffee houses, or Bars as they call them there, the ladies made up with all the ingenuity of the cosmetic art. I gasped when I saw the goods displayed in the shop windows. Things we have had to go without for ages are there plentiful...

The others were probably asleep, for we had had little conversation ever since Skipper had given us our bed-time song. Nine rivers. Well, we had made quite a good start with the Jordan and the Nile.

...Deine Schritte kennt sie  
Deinen schönen Gang  
Alle Abende brennt sie  
Doch mich vergass sie lang.  
Und sollte mir ein Leid geschehn  
Wer wird bei der Laterne stehn  
Mit dir meine Anneliese  
Mit dir meine Anneliese!...

...It was a beautiful day...Georg went on. Letters from home are like magicians—you open the envelope, and behold, a distant world rises before your eyes...

32) As we moved along the road towards Sidi Barani amid a



considerable stream of traffic, two Messerschmidts came roaring overhead in the opposite direction at not much more than the height of the telegraph poles. As soon as we saw what was coming, we pulled off the road on to the open desert and got out to watch. Everybody blazed away at them with small arms, but this appeared to have no effect whatever.

After they had vanished up the road, I was for getting on the move at once, but Mark said, No – they usually come back a second time. And sure enough, they did come a few minutes later – belting up from the rear with everybody shooting at them as before and their own guns firing back. Nobody on either side seemed any the worse for it!

33) Then, in the morning, the oddly out-of-place matutinal good-night of the Pacific Service coming through, as we shaved and had breakfast.

– This is the BBC from London wishing you all good-night, sound sleep and a happy awakening.

This was preceded by lashings of stuff, all from Godfrey. What the hell was happening to my discs? Main Army was now only a few miles to the east of Mersa Matruh, and there was a great temptation to go back and enquire. Maybe I just did not happen to have heard them, and there were enthusiastic bouquets from home. On the other hand I must be prepared for the opposite. So, braced for either kicks or congratulations, we drove back to the Leprechaun's quarters to find out whether there was any mail.

It was apparent at once that some of my recordings had been used, because Mostyn-Owen had heard them with apparent approval. But what was London's reaction? That was more to the point. Sure enough, there were three letters for our unit – one for Mark and two for me. I tore open the first. Was it cheers or groans?

GRATEFULLEST YOU DISPATCH URGENTEST RECORDINGS AND INTERVIEWS GREEK ARTILLERY FOR USE EUROPEAN SERVICE STOP REGARDS BROADCASTS LONDON.

Silenced by this unexpected turn, I read it again. It could not conceivably be regarded as a message of congratulations since it was a request for something that it had not occurred to me to send. On the other hand, I could not be wholly out of favour since they sent me their regards. Meanwhile, Mark was reading his own missive.

- Has anybody seen any Greek artillery? I asked at length.
- Yes, said the Major. I believe there are some Greeks just east of Hemeimat.
- Hemeimat! You mean to say they're still back there? I'm supposed to interview them.
- I've been recalled, snapped Mark. I've got to go back to Cairo.
- Good God! Whatever for?
- Apparently I'm to go back to my regiment.
- Do you mean to say you're leaving us permanently?
- It seems so.
- But they can't do that! Why, we're only just starting to go places!
- That's all right, interposed the Major. I know all about that, and I have another officer laid on to take his place. A very nice fellow. There need be no delay at all.
- Oh, bugger!
- There's been some cloak and dagger work somewhere.

But probably the most depressing thing of all was the asp lurking amongst the fruit of Godfrey's friendly and encouraging letter. It seemed that all my hottest news was 'dated' by the time it arrived, and that a lot of trouble was being experienced by the Censors in making out the carbon copies of my scripts. Skipper was incorporating blastings and jarrings on most of the discs in some ingenious manner that was not apparent when we played them back in the truck. And I was inaudible. Otherwise I was doing fine.

...Good luck! I wish I was there, but don't think I'm howling. My spell, the hard battering part of the battle, unspectacular, with little movement and little to say, was interesting, and I hope for more. I did indeed want to swap and come back here for a short while, and shall try to do this as well as you did. . .Something is happening to your recordings. . . I fear it will make them almost unusable in your own voice by the time they get to London. . . All your stuff today has now gone over. VERY GOOD (though technical quality not good). London has just sent a message over the Link saying will we tell you to talk more slowly and more distant from the mike. . . All this very tedious for you, when you're in the forefront of things and rushed and hurried...but your stuff is so good it's a pity to mar it by technical faults.

Good luck. Hope to see you soon.

GODFREY.

34) Dear Godfrey! A letter that could only have been written by an Englishman. The friendliness of its form – the appalling discouragement of its implications – the tight-lipped self-dramatisation in terms of a picture that was not entirely true – the tactful pointer to the conclusion that I should hurry back at once in despair. Well, I had promised him Tobruk-to-Benghazi, and that he would have.

35) Flying at 22,000 feet on tactical reconnaissance, it takes a practised eye to pick out the enemy trucks on the roads far below. But the boys in the Baltimore helped me in this, and from the movement around El Adem it was obvious that Rommel was not going to repeat our old mistake of trying to hang on to Tobruk.

It was bitterly cold at that height, but we could not come down any lower because one must not be interfered with on reccy, and we could see enemy fighters taking off as we passed over El Adem. However, they did not succeed in intercepting us, and once we were back over the Egyptian frontier we sank steadily until we could shed our oxygen masks and most of our outer clothing in preparation for the moment when we were to step out into the morning heat of the desert.

Mark and Skipper had kept breakfast for me, and after I had eaten it, I went back with Mark to Main Army and saw him off to Cairo. He was looking almost as depressed as I was.

36) My new Conducting Officer was a pleasant, plump artillery officer called Clarke.

– Artillery, I said thoughtfully. I suppose you don't happen to have come across any Greek artillery?

– Can't say I ever did.

– I'm sure you must find it boring...being detailed to shepherd War Correspondents?

– Well...it is, a bit.

– You wish you were back with your guns, I bet?

– Sometimes I do, rather.

Poor fellow. I felt sorry for him, in spite of his falling into my embittered trap. And within a week of my handing him over to Godfrey, he was badly wounded in a strafing attack. He would indeed have been better off with his guns.

37) There was a great gap blown in the zigzag road that winds its way to the upper level beyond the little harbour of Sollum. So I left the car and climbed over on foot, reaching the battered barracks at the top. Here was the usual pack of lost dogs, and

the unmistakable oily smell of buildings that have been occupied by Italians.

The New Zealanders were working on the gap when I clambered down again, with Monty sitting by the roadside looking on. Our car was still waiting at the bottom, broken down from too much hard driving and not enough attention, and two 'Jerkers' (or is it 'Jokers' that they call themselves?) were helping Pretswell to trace the trouble. I like the New Zealanders – the real shock troops of the desert war. The South Africans with their orange flashes, their gabardine hats and their very short shorts were the charmers of the campaign and the best company: the Australians were rugged and not so companionable, and came late and left early so far as this front was concerned. But it was the New Zealand Division that had borne the brunt of the hard fighting, time and time again. 38) And our first view of enemy territory was a piece of Fascist pomp, Fort Capuzzo, now a heap of rubble surrounding a small cemetery plot and a plaster eagle. The place was alive with War Correspondents, for we had lost our lead, and the really sinister thing was that I did not seem to mind very much.

Then, that same afternoon when we were walking through the streets of deserted Bardia, we heard a rumour that Tobruk had already been entered by the Queen's, closely followed by the Army Film Unit, who (as the story goes) promptly hoisted a Nazi flag, and then photographed themselves hauling it down.

We dashed along Mussolini's fine turnpike – past the celebrated roadhouse at Gambut – across the flat, featureless expanse on which the great tank battles of 1941 had been fought – until we found in front of us the remains of the old perimeter wire, and a line of look-out posts set up on erections of light scaffolding.

In the outskirts of the town a lorry had gone up on a mine. Passing this, we saw the sea before us, and the rows of white buildings stretching out on the promontory.

39) Tobruk, with its neat square buildings, its harbour filled with wrecked ships and its walls daubed with the slogans of various conquerors who have each sweated it out in turn.

AGISCI SEMPRE COME SE IL DUCE TI VEDESSE!

IS YOUR JOURNEY REALLY NECESSARY?

PANZER ERSATZEILLAGER OKH(E)

As I wandered through the wrecked buildings, what seemed like a million flies rose with an angry growl from the piles of debris, and darkened the air around me in a swirl of black snow. Some

of the walls were decorated with those elaborate, pornographic paintings that our southern enemies love so well. The Cathedral was just a shell, with hardly enough roof to echo our footsteps as we strolled through it after supper. From a heap of rubble behind the Altar I picked up the great Missal.

I would definitely go back to Cairo tomorrow and let Godfrey have the next stage of the chase. It was high time that I became a Radio Correspondent once again, and took my turn at the transmitter. But before I went to sleep I turned out the back of the Staff car in order to see what was there.

40) Although this God-like indifference to Things still persisted, a residue of odd articles had clung to our skirts – the relics of a truly remarkable fortnight.

A Roman Missal.

An Afrika Korps greatcoat.

A handsome soup tureen – a gift from the Italian Navy.

A dark blue jersey (probably the property of Georg Sicherman).

A package of photographs and letters from a girl called Anneliese.

A few Italian propaganda postcards.

A coloured portrait of General Rommel.

A single-track Staff from the Alamein to Tel-el-Eisa section of the railway line.

These I thought I might take back with me – the nostalgic rubbish of a great battlefield. The rest of it – the cigarettes – the bayonets – the helmets – the camp furniture – the Vino and the tunny-fish – all that sort of thing I would leave to Skipper and Belinda, or to anybody else who liked to come to Tobruk to collect it.

41) Skipper turned up next morning in time to make my last recording. Mostyn-Owen was now at Gambut, and was a little reluctant to facilitate my going, until he realised that he had in me a lightning courier for his bag of despatches. Once laden with these I was hastened to the airfield, and my own disc of the morning (in the course of which the bells of the Cathedral had been rung) was in London in time to lead off the victory broadcast of English Church bells that took place on the following day.

42) Sitting in the nose of an empty transport plane, turning over and tearing up my wads of unnecessary paper, I experienced a strange mixture of emotions, as each sheet called to mind some incident of those extraordinary days.

Hello BBC. This is recorded on the morning of the 14th November. I

am speaking to you from the battered town square of a place that you have heard of before – Tobruk. Somebody is ringing the bells of the Cathedral just behind me...

Despatch No 123

Our task is not finished yet; the Germans are out of Egypt, but there are still some left in North Africa . . . This time having reached Benghazi and beyond, we shall not come back. On with the task and good hunting to you all. As in all pursuits, some have to remain behind to start with; but we shall all be in it before the finish...

Personal Message from the Army Commander  
to be read out to all troops

Dear Sirs,

We have fought with all the means consented by our health, not too great, as you know. You have won the victory, as I personally supposed at the beginning of the war. Italian people do not hate you, but we have been obliged to fight by the circumstances and against our will. Take note, and good note of this in next future. And goodbye...

Captured letter.

(I hope it wasn't concocted by Warwick Charleton)

Dear Georg,

First let me wish you many happy returns of your birthday, and every good thing for this new year of your life. If things are not to your taste where you are now, I suggest you leave everything and come to Eckartsberga. I don't enjoy going out, since I know what a telling-off awaits me on my return every time. I learnt my lesson that lovely Wednesday that passed so quickly. Dear Georg, could you please do me a great favour and send me your photograph.

With best of love from  
Anneliese

Shall I take you at your word, Anneliese, and come to Eckartsberga, now that Georg seems unlikely to accept the invitation? Is that where I am going? Are you the dove on the summit? Shall I come, Anneliese, and find you? And if I do, will you be able to tell me what it is that I am looking for?

...Letters are like magicians. You open the envelope and, behold, a distant world rises before your eyes...

...Unsere beiden Schatten seh'n wie einer aus,  
Dass wir so lieb uns hatten,  
Das sah man gleich daraus.  
Und alle Leute soll'n es seh'n  
Wenn wir bei der Laterne steh'n  
Mit dir meine Anneliese  
Mit dir meine Anneliese!

## ICARUS IN MELITA

But now, my boys, leave off and list to me  
 That mean to teach you rudiments of War.  
 I'll have you learn to sleep upon the ground,  
 March in your armour through the watery fens,  
 Sustain the scorching heat and freezing cold,  
 Hunger and thirst – right adjuncts of the war.  
 And after that, to scale a castle wall,  
 Besiege a fort, to undermine a town,  
 And make whole cities caper in the air!

AS THE BOMBERS circled over Gambut in the dark, waiting for the signal to land, the ground crews stared upwards at their navigation lights and counted the planes several times over. It is routine to count them on these occasions, for it is natural to want to know as soon as possible whether they have all come back. Usually they are all there, but now and then one or maybe two are short on the count. This was a surprising evening because, count them as they would, they were not short. There seemed to be one plane too many!

Then, as one of the bombers flattened out and began to glide in towards the flare path, another of the circling aircraft swung in behind it and opened a furious fire. The bomber burst into flame and crashed out of control on to the airfield, while the attacker doused her lights and roared away out to sea.

It was a marauding Heinkel that had slipped in amongst the aircraft on their way back from the raid and, with its navigation lights switched on, had been coolly circling the airfield with the others, waiting for a suitable target to present itself.

– In the midst of the sea, Virgil says, there lies a neglected land that is known as Crete, under whose monarch in the Golden Age the world was chaste. There is a mountain there, named Ida, once laughing with springs and foliage, but now deserted like a forbidden garden. At one time the safe cradle of the divine child of

Rhea, it now resounds with the clash of swords on shields and the crazed shouting of the Corybantes.

This still describes the situation fairly accurately, and it is from this same island, Crete, that such raids have come from time to time, to the annoyance of the airmen of North Africa. So here we were back at Gambut, getting ready for a full-scale stonk, intended to knock hell out of the Corybantes and stop such incidents in future.

It was a daylight raid – an all-American show, led by several squadrons of Liberators at a high altitude, to be followed by Mitchells, to complete the damage from lower down. Four correspondents were the quota to be carried – Ed Kennedy and Bigio (two Agency men), Farnsworth Fowle of CBS and myself representing British broadcasting.

The American Air Force have been coming more and more into the picture during the past few months. When I was in Palestine they had taken over Lydda airfield and started operations with a series of spectacular training flights. Everybody took off, roared away in all directions, and came down anywhere from Abyssinia to Turkey, where the luckier ones were interned. The Americans are not very much disposed to take instruction from other people, which means, of course, that they have to learn for themselves by a series of disasters on a grand scale. I remember at Fayid, the Flying Control Officer – a rather precise Air Force type – coming indignantly into the Mess, and accosting the American CO of a squadron of B-24s that had settled down for the night.

– Look here, twelve of your pink elephants are parked around my flarepath, but the crews of only seven have reported. Am I to assume that the rest are self-propelled?

Rising from Gambut soon after ten o'clock, our formation circled over Tobruk until it had gained the enormous height prescribed for these affairs. On the way up I sat and watched the elaborate toilette of the waist gunner as he peeled off all his garments and donned a suit of long, light blue combinations, and then dressed himself again. From the inscription on the brim of his cap I gathered that his name was PETE. As soon as he was fully redressed, he opened the side window of the aircraft and swung out the muzzle of his gun in order to have a better field of fire, thereby letting in a blast of bitter air. Muffled to the ears in my Palestine sheepskin, I crouched as far out of the draught as I



could, and noticed with some foreboding that the glove I had dropped on the floor had stiffened into a hard and boardlike condition in a few minutes.

At about 10,000 feet we donned our oxygen masks, and from there we continued to climb until – at 23,000 feet – the hills of Crete appeared far below us, capped with masses of white cotton-wool. The sight held me at the window – temperature or no temperature.

Lord of Europa's Tyrian line  
Zeus born, beholding at my feet  
The hundred citadels of Crete  
I bless thee from this aery shrine.

There was nothing infernal about this vision. Maybe it was the sunlight, or the sense of company that one gets from flying in formation; but the whole thing inspired completely different emotions from those horrifying, solitary bombing runs over Benghazi.

And then as we dived to 20,000 feet, the pattern of the runways of Castelo Pediana appeared below us, and our bomb doors opened with a wild whistling of wind. Then our bombs were away and hurtling down, and not until they had gone did little points of light start to flash far below us, showing at last that we were under fire.

A light hail began to pepper my face inside the oxygen mask as I stuck my head still farther out. It was the moisture of my own breath freezing in the nozzle and blowing back against my lips. Far below, a tiny fighter was trying to taxi down the runway in an effort to take off, while all around it our bombs were bursting.

On our own level, moving majestically above the great cloud cumuli, the entire procession of bombers – squadron after squadron – was passing over the target and then turning round in a gigantic arc before passing out to sea. What an initiation into the Dionysian mysteries! What had they that we haven't got?

Fulfilled our red and bleeding feasts  
Held, the Great Mother's mountain flame.  
I am set free and named by name  
A Bacchus of the Mailed Priests.

\* \* \*

Hardly more than a week later, I was out over the Mediterranean once again; this time in a small, overloaded, weaponless Lockheed, looking for Malta in an impenetrable overcast.

TO AHQ MALTA

From HQ RAF ME

A.703 5 Jan Secret

FOR AOC (R) CAWTHORNE PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER FROM HAUGHTON (.) BBC CORRESPONDENT ARRIVING BY AIR THIS WEEK (.) HAS SPECIAL PERMISSION FROM DAOC IN C TO DO OUTSTANDING RAF PROGRAMME (.) REQUEST PLEASE GRANT EVERY FACILITY (.) WILL ADVISE ETA (.) IMPORTANT

(Sgd) G. W. HAUGHTON  
Squadron Leader. CPRO

So ran the Orders in my pocket, and I was pleased to find myself the first of the regular newsmen to obtain such permission since the opening up of Bomb Alley. The advance along the Libyan coast was still roaring ahead, and the Eighth Army had passed through Macerata, and was well on its way to Tripoli. The siege of Malta was drawing to an end, but I still hoped that I might be there in time for the last act. A new man – Frank Gillard – had arrived in Cairo, fresh from home, and I was free to move on to greener pastures.

So we slipped Skipper and the Presto recording gear on to a destroyer bound for Malta, and while I made arrangements to follow him by air, I showed Frank the ropes, introduced him to everybody I knew, presented him with my less portable equipment, and wished him luck. He was resolved – it was clear – to report the war soberly and objectively. That was all that the news rooms expected of us. The simple truth, free from propaganda and idle speculation.

Malta is not much more than a pinhead on the map, and inhospitable Sicily looms large and uninvitingly behind it. We got lost, of course, and stogged around, peering through the mist at the narrow circle of visibility, and wondering how much longer the petrol would last.

And then land loomed up out of the cloud – a rocky coast, and behind it a vista of stone terraced fields, and an airstrip fringed with wrecked machines. We landed, and were soon driving through the streets of Valetta – a white city like a heap of child's bricks that somebody has wantonly kicked over. Yet the Osborne

Hotel has still got some of the characteristics of a public hostelry. There is no food, of course, and no glass in any of the windows. But there is a boots, and a chambermaid, and a board in the hall on which to put down the hour at which you wish to be called in the morning – provided everything is still there.

Others will write of Malta under siege, giving particulars of the number of troops, the low incidence of casualties (but the high proportion of fatal ones), of the ravages of infantile paralysis and the efforts to hush this up, of the successful Victory Kitchens that only one third of the famished population will use (largely because of social snobbery), of the incredible eyesight that enables the Maltese gunners to distinguish between an enemy fighter and a fighter-bomber, and of the buying up of all the available newsprint by one of the local papers so that the other had to close down. I have more personal and egocentric reflections to make at this – the first pause in my quest.

Two stories only will I tell: the first is a brief picture from an airport outside Cairo, where in the middle of the night a plane-load of British refugees from Malta was being unloaded into safety. They were mainly women and children – the families of some of the 25,000 British troops that formed the professional section of the garrison. And in spite of the great drama of their situation, the atmosphere was much more like Saturday afternoon on Margate beach, than four a.m. on a desert airfield.

As the mothers settled down to a nice cup of tea in one of the huts, their offspring went off to play tig in the sand, followed by shouts of:

– Bob-bay, do be'ave yerself!

– Chaw-ley, yew'll go straight to bed in a minnit!

For months I had been vainly pulling strings to get to their island. To interview those who had escaped was the next best thing. But so little did they regard their lives as being anything out of the ordinary, that three small boys of about eleven, seeing 'War Correspondent' on my shoulders, gazed at me for a while, held a brief consultation, and then very shyly asked me for my autograph. I gave it with considerable diffidence, after which I asked them for theirs. They wrote their names in round and careful handwriting on the back of an old hand-out.

E. W. Brookes  
Brian Alan Waller  
Dennis Francis

And I think that I shall keep their autographs longer than they will keep mine.

The other matter that I have to report is the realisation of another of my personal ambitions – to make the first operational recording in a bomber over a target.

Skipper arrived by destroyer the morning after I did, bringing with him the recording gear and, characteristically, ten discs only – ten discs on which to record the entire eye-witness story of Malta – the first to be obtained directly since the siege began. It was obvious that we had to begin with the Air Officer Commanding. Air Officers Commanding hold a magic key, and if we ever intended to get out of Malta with any sort of priority, it was the AOC who had to be our first friend.

From past experience I have noticed that there is no better way of impressing anybody with the importance of radio than to record his voice and play it back to him. As soon as anybody – even the most important and sophisticated official – hears his own voice speaking his own words, he can be seen visibly to swell. This is good, he says to himself. This is Important. This must be got to Broadcasting House by the quickest available route. And if the man who has arranged it wants to go along just to make sure that it gets there safely, that man must be facilitated too. It only goes to confirm how Important it is.

The Air Vice-Marshal in Malta was no exception. A resolute old Pilot, who had been the mainspring of Britain's Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, he required no persuasion to make a recording for us. In fact, he insisted on giving us a fifteen minute talk on the entire history of the Air War in the Mediterranean, which used up no less than three of our precious ten discs. But it was worth it, because he became interested in our job, and lent a ready ear to my tale of how I had been trying for months to take my gear and engineer over a target in a bomber. The raids on Malta were not finished yet, and I suppose it tickled him to think that his battered command could do for us what Palestine, in all its glory, could not see its way to manage. Because the very next day we found that it had all been arranged.

There was a big raid on Tripoli scheduled for that night, but the AOC had considered the matter in the light of our technical difficulties, and had decided that Tripoli was not the place for us to visit. There was a good deal of flak there, he explained, and the weaving motion of the aeroplane would probably interfere

with the working of our gear. So we were to have a private raid of our own, on the important little Tunisian seaport of Sousse, where we would not be bothered with the complications of a mass operation, and could record away to our hearts' content, as the harbour facilities and railway station were being profitably blown up.

A private raid of our own! In a fever I got hold of Skipper, and tried to explain to him the results of Chig's experiments at Aqir. The principal problem was to record my voice without at the same time picking up the penetrating roar of the engine. If one tried to work with an open microphone, the noise simply churned the disc into a ploughed field. Therefore it was necessary to speak from an oxygen mask through the Intercom system of the aircraft. Secondly the gear was totally unsuited to a platform that was constantly shifting in a vertical direction. Every time the machine fell it seemed as if an invisible hand had lifted the cutter head off the spinning disc. While whenever it rose, the opposite effect occurred, and the needle dived into the turntable until it halted its revolutions altogether.

– Do you think you can work it out? I asked Skipper, after I had done my best to describe, in my non-technical way, how Chig had overcome both these difficulties.

– I'll have a try, said Skipper, always ready to work wonders when dared.

– Good for you, you little turkey cock.

As we fitted up the gear, fixing it into the cramped belly of a Wimpey in preparation for a test flight, another aspect of the situation occurred to us both, simultaneously.

– Probably there will be less flak at Sousse,

– On the other hand, what flak there is will all be coming at us.

– That's just what I've been thinking. At Tripoli they'll be shooting at a dozen other Wimpseys as well.

– Still, the AOC ought to know best.

– I suppose we shouldn't look a gift raid in the mouth.

The test was only partially successful, but it was good enough to warrant our making the flight. So came six o'clock that evening, and we attended the briefing, and watched the main Tripoli raid taking off. Our own Pilot was an Ace called Newman – a quiet, precise-looking young Squadron-Leader, with an obvious sense of humour. And he and the rest of the crew were very interested and somewhat amused by what we were trying to do.

We took off at about six-thirty – the last of all – and climbed above the low haze into the bright moonlight.

– Look out for that orange light, somebody shouted as we waved farewell.

He was referring to one of the mysteries of bombing operations in this area – a strange orange light that sometimes appears on a level with a bomber, and seems to accompany it for mile after mile over enemy territory, without ever coming any nearer. Nobody can say what it is or what it means. If it is on another aircraft, why doesn't it come in to attack or else sheer off? Indeed, why would another aircraft expose its position by a light at all? On the other hand, if it is not on a plane, but is some form of device to indicate our position to the gunners on the ground, what the hell is it on, and how does it manage to follow? The whole story has a strange, ghost-like quality, and those who have never seen it are very much inclined to disbelieve in it altogether.

I stood up, with my head in the astrodome, and talked from time to time into my oxygen mask, describing the scene, and hoping that my words were being recorded on the machine below. Skipper crouched at my feet peering at the spinning turntable in the silvery half-light, and now and then flashing a shaded torch to see whether anything was happening, and to wipe the swarf off the disc. There was no way of speaking to him except over the Intercom, which would have meant breaking in on the conversation of the crew. So I contented myself with a friendly tap on his head from time to time. Good old Skipper – he was going to have a dull time down there in the dark, fiddling with his gear, for three hours or more, and never knowing what was going on or what was going to hit us next.

At the end of my first piece of commentary I found that the microphone in the nozzle of my oxygen mask was not switched on, and that in all probability, nothing at all had got on the disc so far. After this we recorded the crew for a few minutes, talking to each other on the Intercom – Newman to Ender, the Tail Gunner, as he flung out the usual flares – Adams, the Second Pilot, to Fry, the Navigator – Boyd-Stevenson, the WOP, to Drayton, the Front Gunner. A good deal of it was obviously impossible to record, because of the motion of the Wimpey, but we hoped that a fair proportion of it would turn out to be intelligible.

And then, the line of the coast appeared below us, and the low haze cleared. This was going to be none of those thirteen hour

jobs like Benghazi. Indeed, there was the harbour of Sousse already, as clear as could be wished in the bright moonlight.

Suddenly above my head I heard a pop, and the sky was momentarily lit up.

– Christ, I said, if that’s flak, it must have been damn near! That’s the first time I’ve ever heard it above the noise of the engine.

Then, hastily restraining myself from further unbroadcastable comment, I signalled to Skipper to start cutting. And as we went in on our bomb run, the BBC made its first triumphant recording of a member of a bomber crew in actual flight over a target. Who it was made the remark I do not know, but clear as a bell it came over the Intercom.

– Here comes the f— shit!

From then on it was nobody’s business. Everything seemed to be coming up at us, and we weaved and twisted as never before, while – with a mouth dry as a limekiln – I clung to the astrodome and talked as best I could. I could feel the plane quiver under my feet as something hit it, and that I imagine was the end of all recording for the time being, although I still continued to talk. But it was not the end of our raid on Sousse. We had gone in twice over Benghazi. For some reason that was doubtless sufficient, we went in three times over Sousse. And as we continued our aerobatics, the voices of the crew kept coming over the Intercom reporting various holes as they appeared in the fuselage.

Then at last it was over, and we were above the sea once again, checking over our dents as we hooked it back for Malta.

– Are you all right, Tail Gunner? somebody enquired. Why the hell haven’t you been answering?

– He’s been outside, taking a walk on the flak. It was a bloody sight safer!

– Did anybody else see that orange light? said another voice.

– Yes I did. About five hundred yards off on the port beam.

In the outbreak of discussion that followed, it turned out that nobody was seriously hurt, although the Pilot himself had had his foot grazed and the Navigator had a small scratch, too. Most of the others reported holes in the fuselage in their vicinity. Meanwhile, Skipper got the much shaken cutter head back on to the disc, and we got busy on a final summing up of the raid. Presently I could see the light of a beacon flashing below us, and then the long pencil of a searchlight sprang up, and waved slowly

and deliberately across the sky. It was showing the returning Tripoli raid the way back to Luqa. The others were nearly all there before us, circling over the airfield, each waiting its turn to land.

Then down.

In the Ops Room everyone was highly diverted by the fact that we had been shot up, and the Personal Assistant of the AOC rang up for news. Needless to say, the Tripoli raid had turned out to be quite a sedate affair, which I suppose made our experience seem all the funnier.

– I doubt if we've got much, said Skipper, as we parted in the town, after the Interrogation.

– Who cares? I answered. We're only beginning, so the Effort ranks above the Quality.

A pompous remark, I thought to myself as I pulled the blanket around my shoulders and closed my eyes. But I think I'll stick to it all the same. We may not be much good, but at least we start things.

Next morning we returned to Luqa to give the boys a play-back and another laugh. They were taking off the main plane for repairs, and patching up the holes.

We wished each other luck, and went our various ways – I to purchase a few souvenirs of Malta in the shop of Carmilla Cossar, an ex-bumboat woman and friend of Princes. For Betty, a pair of old Maltese earrings. For myself, an eighteenth century coin to wear on my watch fob in honour of the occasion.

I know that nobody else will ever present me with a medal for the raid on Sousse, so I had better do something about it myself.

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## CONCLUSION

So that was the Battle of Egypt – or of Alamein, as they seem to be calling it at home.

– This will be one of the decisive battles of history, said Monty in his preliminary circular.

I feel a little guilty, therefore, in not trying to write history. Yet there are plenty of people who will do that, but not so many who will put on paper what it was really like.

Some people are shocked into cynicism by the difference between Theory and Practice, between the Myth of our Motives



and the Truth of our Intentions, between what we imagine we are doing and what really happens. But I find that this does not bother me. On the contrary, it gives me my first adult belly laugh. Besides, it works both ways. If heroes are not on the whole as heroic as they are popularly supposed to be, neither is disaster quite so disastrous. In fact, it can be quite amusing.

I think that very few of us would have cared greatly if we had been chased out of Egypt by Rommel. Certainly the singing of the soldiers on their way back past Mena House during the retreat was as unlike the despair of a beaten army as their demeanour during the advance was like the arrogance of a victorious one.

The more I see of good soldiers, the more I like them, and as a rough and ready truism it would seem the measure of our bitterness towards our enemy is in direct ratio to our distance or our nervousness – perhaps to both.

My second observation concerns the elusive nature of Truth. Pilate asked, What is Truth? And the question has never yet been properly answered. Like Godfrey and Gillard, I am going to report this War soberly and objectively. All that I have to do is to give the world the Facts. But the trouble is, there are no Facts. Or perhaps more truly, there are far too many of them, and none of them strictly true.

There are the Facts (and a ‘common-sense’ view of them) as seen by the soldier in the slit trench. There is usually quite a different view of both Fact and Common-sense in the Allied Embassies in Cairo. And there are various intermediate viewpoints at Corps, at Division, and at Army – all perfectly sincere, and all, in a sense, equally true. A crooked propagandist does not really have to invent a single lie, for there are sufficient Facts to prove or disprove almost any thesis, and the only problem is one of selection.

And overriding all this hangs a great blanket of fog and confusion through which one can dimly perceive that nobody has a very clear picture at all of what is going on. Not the soldiers – not the Generals – least of all, the Military Spokesmen! Nobody is in a position to place a finger unerringly on the points that really matter, and say This is the Truth about the situation.

As an example of what I mean by this conflict of testimony, let me describe the problem presented by the Mythical Battle of Matratin – as we called it at the time. It occurred during those

last few weeks when I was acting as Long-stop in Cairo by order of my Employers, who wished me to look after the Middle East portion of the Christmas Day Round-the-World hook-up, rather than return to the Desert. One evening when the advance was struggling on from Agheila to Marble Arch I dropped into the Churchill Bar, and found George Haughton there quivering with excitement. He had in his pocket a copy of a signal from Monty giving news of yet another most important victory. It appeared that a swanning column of New Zealanders, operating from the south, had cut across the enemy's line of retreat, and that the greater part of the Afrika Korps was in the bag – or at least, surrounded. Philip Astley was preparing a special communiqué to issue at the eight o'clock evening conference. So I dashed round to the Immobilia with my typewriter, but found when I got there that Astley had changed his mind, and was not going to release the story till next day. They confided to some of us who remained in the Press Room that it was the biggest story of the war, but that further consultations must be held in PR before deciding how it should be framed. George eventually showed me Monty's signal before we went to bed. In it he wrote off an entire Panzer Division and most of the 90th Light – for the second time in a month.

At next morning's Press Conference the story was released, and we all went to town on it, led by Winston Burdett, who happened to have the first turn on the Link. Thanks to this lucky chance he got World Quotes. That night there arrived two despatches of earlier date from Godfrey – both very gloomy, and stating that 'Nothing much is likely to happen in the near future'.

Came the third day, and Astley stood up at the morning Press Conference and took it all back. There had been no battle at all, he said. It was just a case of Monty's exuberance. Everybody who had quoted facts and figures on the previous day was now in the deepest state of depression – and poor Winston Burdett was as white as a sheet and the worst of all. But as they all commenced to send off despatches taking back everything that they had said, I founded a contrary movement.

– Look, said I, in effect. Aren't we all being a little too pessimistic? After all, Astley admits that he was wrong yesterday, so why should we necessarily believe him today?

I remembered Murphy's scepticism over the victory at Alamein. And Murphy had been wrong. Middle East Command was always ready to depreciate Monty whenever it got the chance, and surely

if we were to weigh the possibilities now, there was a better chance of Monty being right than the boys in Cairo. So I refused to follow the general line or to contradict myself. George was very non-committal and gloomy, saying privately that the Pongos had messed it up again, from which I deduced that there probably had been some sort of attempt at a swanning movement that had not come off. So in my midday spot I did a piece of bold speculation and stuck to my story about there having been a battle. But I left open a door of escape for myself (and for Monty) by saying that it was now uncertain to what extent the Panzers had since broken out of the trap.

Came another day with still no further news of any battle at all, and Astley told the assembled Correspondents that it was up to us to get Monty and ourselves out of the difficulty that had been caused by the original report. He rather maliciously agreed to pass on to Monty a questionnaire asking for facts and figures relating to the alleged battle and the number of prisoners taken. Then, later in the day came a scream from Godfrey:

Loud belly-laugh resound through the desert when the news is heard giving Cairo talking about Rommel's forces being cut in two. It just is nonsense. Can't someone *tell* them! It *is not true*.

By the same post arrived a recording from Frank Thornton-Bassett giving an eye-witness account of the advance of the New Zealanders on their swanning move – although his story stopped short in a most tantalising way just as the battle was about to commence.

Then came another day, and Astley threw a further bombshell amongst the bemused Correspondents by reading Monty's reply to the questionnaire. He specifically claimed to have captured twenty tanks, five hundred prisoners, thirty guns, and several hundred MT. So the fact of the battle was re-established, and everybody sent further cables contradicting themselves for the second time! Ploughing a solitary furrow of my own, I still continued to cling to my old story that the bulk of the Afrika Korps had been cut off. But – I said – so much of it was cut off that it was impossible to hold them in, and a considerable part had succeeded in breaking out to the west. This story, let me add, was largely my own invention, as being the most likely way of squaring the contradictory facts, and it was in the end the official

explanation. But whether nature imitated art, or art guessed right, I shall never, never know!

The last straw was the arrival of George with what he alleged to be the true figures, namely: three anti-tank guns, fifteen prisoners and thirty MT; and at almost the same time came another furious denial from Godfrey, neck and neck with a recorded eye-witness account of the actual battle from Curry of the New Zealand Broadcasting Unit!

At this point I gave up, and passed both accounts back to London, telling them that they could make what they liked of them, for I wished to hear no more about the Battle of Matratin!

I have told this story at some length because it illustrates in practical form one of the chief problems of the War Reporter in his search for objective Truth, and the fact that he has to be something half way between a Judge and a Detective. So perhaps the censorship is not interfering with so holy a thing after all; for if the bulk of what one has to say is only a half truth, it does not matter so much if it gets treated roughly. In fact, on several occasions I have thanked God that the Censor has saved me from making a boner.

For the same reason, the Propagandist does not really need to be a Liar. In war everything happens, and one does not have to invent facts to prove any point. It is only a matter of selection and presentation.

I have been interested for a great many years in this question of Horror and Atrocity Tales that comes up regularly in every war, and I have often wondered whether such stories – usually at variance with our personal experience of the enemy – are deliberately invented by some Government Department or whether they come into existence by some form of parthenogenesis.

It may be that there is such a Government Department, but I beg to report that I, personally, have never come across it. In fact, I do not believe that such a department would be necessary in order to build up the idea that our enemies habitually break all the laws of war. These ideas grow spontaneously in at least two ways.

To begin with, in time of war a good story will always be driven out of circulation by a bad one, just as good currency disappears in the presence of bad currency. Take the case of the *Altmark* – a ship carrying British prisoners to Germany that was intercepted by the Royal Navy in Norwegian waters, in bland defiance of Norwegian sovereignty.

When the liberated prisoners got back to England, the first batch of stories and interviews that came over the tapes were quite jolly. They had been treated well on the *Altmark*, and on the whole had few complaints. But the complaints followed, and before long there was quite a nice little pile of nasty stories, all of which got into the papers to the total exclusion of the earlier and friendlier ones. Soon the *Altmark* was being referred to as the 'Hell Ship', and from then on the whole incident passed into legend.

But more subtle than this is the argument from the particular to the general. A New Zealand Brigadier once announced gleefully in my presence that in some action his men had not sent back a single prisoner. Maybe he was telling the truth, in so far that some of his men *may* have murdered their prisoners. If I were Dr Goebbels I would be able to say, 'The New Zealanders frankly boast that they murder their prisoners'. And although the statement is founded on fact and could be substantiated by quoting their own Brigadier, it is nothing more nor less than a lie, because as an Army the New Zealanders do not murder their prisoners. On the contrary, they are more often suspected of a tendency towards fraternisation, and of being particularly susceptible to the 'blond fellow Nordic' approach. Indeed, I have heard serious complaints against them on this score coming from Middle East Headquarters.

Let me give another example of the process as I saw it at work. One day in Cairo, a member of the Staff of PR 2 was writing a handout about the difficulties that our Sappers were experiencing in clearing up the mines and booby traps left behind by the retreating Germans around Agheila and Brega. It was rather a bad-tempered handout, expressing the natural annoyance that we all sometimes feel, when our retreating enemies make it as hard as possible for us to catch and kill them. After a number of 'dirty tricks' had been referred to, an anonymous Sergeant-Major from Aberdeen was quoted as saying that there 'was not the slightest doubt' that the Germans had laid additional booby traps under the bodies of five of his men who had been killed on mines. No indication whatever was given as to how the fleeing enemy had managed to return in order to perform this feat, or where the other Sappers were supposed to be at the time it was done. But on the strength of it, the writer of the handout headed the entire document with the words:

And he then went on to finish it up with a remark of his own.

Many times before I had heard of the German practice of placing booby traps under bodies and injured men, but had never had direct evidence.

In this insouciant gloss it will be noticed that he refers to the subject as a 'German practice', and also introduces the additional matter of 'injured men', although there is nothing whatever in the body of the handout that could remotely be regarded as evidence on either point.

Nevertheless, the next day, the *Egyptian Mail* proceeded to re-write the handout, and to hit the headlines in the following way:

NAZIS TIE BOOBY TRAPS TO WOUNDED  
BRITISH SOLDIERS IN DESERT

It was officially revealed yesterday that the Germans retreating in the desert had attached booby traps under the bodies of dead and even injured soldiers. Many stretcher bearers have been killed by these fiendish devices while on their errand of mercy...

Now, there are many worse things in war than the booby trapping of corpses. Nevertheless it is interesting to note what the *Egyptian Mail* is prepared to describe as 'officially revealed', and how the additional gloss of Injured Men has assumed major proportions.

We discussed this development one evening in the Churchill Bar, but we did not get very far, since few of us seemed to think that it mattered very much one way or the other. The view of the bulk of the Correspondents was that the enemy were swine anyhow, and if this particular story was not exactly borne out by the evidence, there was probably something else just as horrible. So what the hell?

But, I pointed out, whether or not it is true, it is surely bad policy to insult people's intelligence in our propaganda. If this thing had been done to wounded men, surely anybody of sense would want to know why these victims did not see fit to warn their rescuers that they had better look out for booby traps? Evidently this difficulty did register in certain quarters, because the story was given a final gloss by some genius unknown, and the whole thing has since been immortalised in the Middle-East Diary of Mr Noel Coward, who came out to the desert later on to bolster morale (although it must be clearly understood that his visit had no connection whatever with ENSA).

After inspecting the Afrika Korps in the PW cages and commenting on their bestial appearance and anti-social habits, Mr Coward went on to write:

The most dreadful of all was that they fixed mines on to wounded men so that when our chaps came to pick them up they were blown to pieces. The wounded men who were conscious and aware of what was happening were efficiently gagged so that they were unable to warn their rescuers. All this was told to me by men who had actually seen it and so there was no 'German atrocity propoganda' nonsense about it. I should think, on the whole, that this is about as low as human nature has sunk up to date. War can and very often does bestialise men in the heat of the moment, but I know beyond a doubt that no British soldier would callously mine a defenceless wounded man. I wonder how soon it will be before these macabre, subhuman crimes will be glossed over and forgotten, and for what reasons?

In this way, step by step – from the cross-grained handout of an anonymous member of PR 2, through an imaginative sub-editor on the *Egyptian Mail*, and finally to the memoirs of a talented entertainer – the thing is built up into another civilian misconception of what, in fact, we are fighting – a misconception that is not, as a rule, shared by the soldier. In the RAF Headquarters Mess at Valetta I said one day:

– I hear that the Luftwaffe has been straffing the Malta Hospitals?

– Not lately, came the smiling reply. That was because they used to insist on us shooting down the Gerry Hospital planes on their way to Italy from Libya. But Keith Parke put a stop to that sort of thing, and there hasn't been an attack on our hospitals since.

The same applies to the Air-Sea Rescue Launches, that pick up the airmen of both sides when they ditch in the sea. They brought me over to Luqa and pointed out an Italian aircraft that is used for spotting pilots after they have been shot down.

– Did you ever hear the story of how we came by that?

And they went on to describe the epic of two RAF men who had been captured by the Italians, and taken for internment to the island of Pantellaria. Having arrived there with their escort, it was discovered that there was nobody available on Calypso's island to make a fourth at Bridge, so the party set out again by air for Sicily, in search of another player. It was a very bumpy day, and before long the Escort began to feel airsick. When he was no longer interested in anything except the condition of his stomach,

the prisoners gently relieved him of his gun, and went forward with it to talk to the Pilot. To him they broached the fact that they now wished to be brought to Malta instead of to Sicily; but the Pilot said, No. He was due for some leave, and would obviously lose this if he went to Malta. A long argument followed, in the course of which the very peculiar situation was thoroughly discussed. The Britishers pointed out that as they had a gun and were in a position to shoot the Pilot, they ought to be regarded as in control of the plane. The Pilot, on the other hand, argued with equal force that if they shot him, the plane would crash – unless they knew enough to fly it themselves – a matter on which he could hardly be expected to give them instruction. And even if they could fly it, could they land it?

Before the petrol ran out, a compromise had to be reached. So by agreement the destination was changed to Malta, on the understanding that the aircraft, if allowed to pass intact into Allied hands, would not be used for operational purposes, but would ever afterwards be confined to the neutral and humanitarian task of spotting the airmen of both sides who were unlucky enough to fall in the drink. They had a hell of a job in landing, because everything in Malta shot at them as they came in. But it was not one of Malta's good days for marksmanship, and they managed to get down without serious injury. And there in Malta the plane is to this day, and the pledge with regard to its use is being scrupulously observed by the Malta Air Force.

How significant it is that such tales are poison to the authorities on both sides. No breath of anything of the kind is ever allowed to pass the Censors, and even Montgomery, I now hear, has come under a heavy barrage of criticism at home for having entertained Von Thoma to dinner. The sinister approach of Christmas each year brings fresh headaches and heartburnings. Suppose, on this disruptive occasion, the fighting men were to get together and pass the time of day? Suppose for a few hours they were to stop shooting, would it ever be possible to get them started again?

Perish the thought!

As for me, I laugh. And with the help of God I shall do my best to spoil the official myth. For men on the whole are sane, and it is a good thing to be able to say so.

But here in Melita I have even better causes for my laughter. There is the discovery that Fear is nothing to feel ashamed about. Fear is a good and natural thing that need not be concealed



behind a false front of bravado. It is a healthy thing, and like all proper human passions, it can be turned to a useful purpose.

Fear, in its proper place, can serve to heighten the perceptions and to quicken the emotions. It is a bond that can link men together in a brotherhood that will outlast all other bonds. Once you and I have shared the same Fear, we have something in common that transcends Class, Race and Creed.

This is one of the things that we can learn from War, and it brings home the meaning of the creed of the fighting men – that War is not really such an evil thing at all. How can it be evil if, in it, one lives more abundantly, and experiences a deeper sense of the meaning of life? Maybe it was to this that Mussolini was referring when he made that ridiculous statement:

IT IS NECESSARY TO CONQUER, BUT IT IS STILL MORE  
NECESSARY TO FIGHT.

War, as these men play it, need not be some sordid squabble into which we are drawn weeping and with reluctant feet. It is a game to be played according to certain fixed principles and assumptions. And for that reason I here beg to utter one more heretical and anti-social statement which must be kept from the ears of Winston Burdett: that as War appears to be inevitable in this life, it is more important to keep it the good thing that it is, than to win or to lose it.

That may seem an arrogant statement and out of line with the principle of Peace, Retrenchment and Reform in which I was nurtured, but this is an arrogant chapter, and I am now an arrogant chap.

And why not, since I have broken bread with the Eighth Army and the Afrika Korps, and have been up and about on St Crispin's Day. I have seen the making of history, and am qualified to be a bore in all the Clubs. I have been at large in the desert, and tasted the plunder of Ophir and of Trebizond. I have shown the Centaur how to drink, and captured Troy with my wooden horse. I have wet my forehead with the waters of Jordan, and outsmiled the Sphinx with some excellent riddles of my own. I have been set free over Ida, and named by name a Bacchus of the Mailed Priests.

And upon my companions and fellow-travellers on this, the first phase of my Dioniad – the mentors and exemplars who have instructed me in the virtue of violence and the unity of courage and of fear, in the cleanliness of self-help and the merit of the

fighting men of all causes and of all generations, whether they happen to be right or wrong – on these I hereby confer in my New Year's Honours List the Citation and Badge of the Most Militant Order of the Partisans of the Desert, with my compliments and thanks:

Captain Mark Culme-Seymour (Grand Master) – for promoting and conducting the entire enterprise.

Major General Dan Pienaar – for saving the Empire that his fathers fought, and the Good Fellows that he didn't like.

A. R. Chignall – for pioneer research work on the problems of recording in flight.

W. R. (Skipper) Arnell – for his approval of a killer who was 'only doing his job'.

Squadron Leader George Haughton (with diamonds) – for a truck at an awkward moment, and for a good party at a less awkward one.

Flt Lt Frank Thornton-Bassett – for a point of view, while freezing to death on the escarpment.

Lt Col Scriven, RAMC – for eminent services to medicine and to human sanity.

The Delany Brothers – for a friendly hearth that drives away despair.

Godfrey Talbot – for helping to smash up Our Cairo Office.

Capt Sean Fielding – for conversations on desert evenings.

General Erwin Rommel – for not being a damned Sergeant Major, and  
An unknown German prisoner – for his quiet magnanimity in defeat.

END OF BOOK ONE

# 2

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## THE ORDINARY

– Now the seedsman  
Upon the slime and ooze  
Scatters his grain  
And shortly comes to Harvest:

## THE SYBARITES

Taitnet gabra lir i sam  
sella roisc rosiri Bran...

Over the summer seas  
Leap the white horses,  
Charming the eyes of Bran.

Brimming with honey  
The rivers flow to the shore  
Of Manannan Mac Lir,  
God of the Ocean.

EVERY hour we go slower.

Largo sostenuto.

Two Italian ships join our convoy – their tricoloured flags flying in the bright sunlight. A couple of submarines, with decks awash, nose their way forward on our port beam. Behind them comes another of those minor mysteries of the war – a Swiss vessel!

As the west coast section breaks away opposite Augusta, suddenly the snow-capped summit of Etna appears above a mass of clouds, towering majestically, high over our heads. Leaving the home of the Cyclops, we turn north-east for Cape Spartivento on the toe of Calabria.

The silver smoke of the destroyers drifts by as they plough over their white furrows – their bridges crammed with a crowd of sailormen. An enormous Italian liner passes us in the opposite direction, dipping her flag as she goes.

We have seen the legendary coast of Carthage, with the wreckage of ships lying along its beaches. And Calypso's island, Pantellaria, humping like a gargantuan slagheap through the haze.

That evening we listened to Vic Oliver on the wireless in the mate's cabin, and I turned over the pages of *Mein Kampf*, and the thudding of the depth charges went on almost continuously. A

lifejacket, hanging above the bunk, swung with the motion of the ship – and beside it, a whistle dangled on the end of a long, white lanyard. There was a little red bulb fixed into the collar of the lifejacket.

Thud – thud – thud.

Somebody was telling us a story of the Russian convoy, and of an enemy seaplane that shadowed them every day with unfailing regularity. One morning the Skipper of one of the escort vessels took a look around before going below to his breakfast. Reassuring himself that the sky spy was trailing them as usual, he turned to his Master Signaller and said:

– Better say ‘Good morning’ to him.

The message was flashed, and presently the aircraft winked its reply.

– Good morning.

– That’s very civil of him, said the Skipper. In English, too! Make some suitable answer.

And he went below, leaving the Signalman on the job. Presently the ship was being furiously machine-gunned from the air. When the calm had been restored, the Skipper sent for the Signalman.

– Had you anything to do with that?

– I don’t think so, sir.

– What message did you send him?

– All I said was, ‘You bugger off’.

First, our destination was to be Syracuse – then Taranto. Finally, they switched us to Brindisi, and we steamed onwards past the coast of Sybaris, to the corner of Italy’s heel, Santa Maria di Lucca, where we slowed to a stop and waited for the lame ducks to catch us up.

My Argo is a cargo vessel called the *St. Bernard* – a hospitable and unpretentious ship. I suppose that strictly speaking she is a tramp. There are no concerts or deck sports, no queues for drinks, and the only two passengers are myself and my new technical assistant. Our recording truck is down in the hold, where it shares the ship’s manifest with a cargo of delousing powder, lorries, airbombs and an enormous supply of French letters.

So we sit in the sun, rising and falling on the oily swell, while an Anvil Chorus of Chinese deckhands swing their clanging hammers on the maindeck forrard, as they chip off the rust and lay on a bright new coat of red lead. Away astern, an old hulk, canted over on her beam, wallows along in an effort to keep up.

Beside me one of the ship's officers is lolling – a pleasant-spoken Welshman in a singlet and sneakers, carving a plug of tobacco with a pocket knife, and teasing the weed into his pipe. It is he who owns *Mein Kampf*.

– I suppose we know what we are up to? I say, cocking an eye at the sky.

– Up to?

– I refer to our speed and our position, this bright afternoon. And to the fact that we seem to have come to a dead stop almost within sight of Corfu, out of which the Luftwaffe is operating.

He smiled placidly and changed the subject.

– What do you think of that book?

– It has me more puzzled than I can say. Whoever wrote this book must be half-crazy. There's no other word for it.

– Didn't you know that before?

– No. I only had it on hearsay, and I never believe hearsay – particularly international hearsay.

– I know. That's one of the things that too much propaganda has done to us. We've heard it shouting 'Wolf' so often that we have become allergic to it altogether.

Fair enough! I suppose that in a great many ways I was once a fairly typical pre-war liberal. I believed in God and in the fundamental goodness of life. I had nothing against Germany – in fact I rather liked what I knew of it, and felt that it had been given a raw deal after our parents' war. Munich did not upset me so much as the fact that nobody did anything about it when Hitler went back on his bargain and took Prague – not even the Czechs themselves! And we had to wait for a bad issue like Danzig before anybody would blow the whistle, and insist that bargains were meant to be stuck to.

Then came the phoney war, with the spectacle of two gallant allies sitting mum behind their phoney fortifications, while the object of their phoney promises was swiftly done to death – however well it deserved it! Is it any wonder that people like me became somewhat sceptical about everybody's intentions? Plain words and plain promises had ceased to have any meaning in international affairs – and one merely laughed at any mention of Non-Aggression Pacts, and at pretentious abstractions such as 'Liberty', 'Democracy', and 'Peace' – words that had been abused and prostituted far too often to be of any further use.

People like Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain had induced

such a cynicism, such a despair and hatred of the old world that was falling to pieces around us, that we were glad to see it go, and looked on any arguments that advocated a return to the *status quo* with the deepest suspicion.

And so Hitler had his way up to a point, not really because everybody was frightened of him, but because up to that point he happened to have had quite a good case, whatever his motives were. Maybe we should have examined those motives more carefully. But even here, it was hard to believe everything that we were told about them by people whose own motives were almost as questionable.

– That’s why you should have read his book long ago, said the ship’s officer as he sucked at his pipe. Maybe then you’d have realised that there’s no use arguing with Hitler. His facts are all wrong, you see. He knows nothing about history, and is completely naïve about the world we live in. When you’ve digested the half-baked nonsense that he uses for a philosophy you’re bound to see that we’re not up against a Machiavelli at all. Hitler’s not a robust gangster like Mussolini – bluffing the rest of the world with a few rags and wooden guns. He’s something far more sinister, because he’s pathological. What he does isn’t based on self-interest, but on self-expression. My theory is that he must have been persecuted as a ninny when he was a child. Ninnies always try to take it out on the world when they grow up.

– Maybe so, I said. But ninnies don’t usually have the assistance of the Wehrmacht in their thirst for self-expression.

A wry smile creased his face.

– I suppose the Wehrmacht was got at in much the same way as you were. It was impressed by the fact that he managed to get some of the things done that they thought were necessary. That’s one of the awkward things about Fascism. It does manage to get things done.

– I know. And it has got hold of the other depressing truth, that majorities are not always right.

– Still, they’re usually righter than minorities.

– In the long run, maybe. But, unfortunately, that’s not how the world works. It’s just one of democracy’s myths about itself to imagine that progress is brought about by majorities. It isn’t; and we may as well recognise that fact whenever we talk about the Will of the People. Majorities hardly ever know what they really want until they’re shown by the eccentrics.

– That’s a very dangerous point of view.

– It’s a very dangerous life, particularly when we let things slide until the obvious has to be done by a lunatic. Now that I’ve read Hitler’s book, I’m beginning to realise the full tragedy of it all. It wasn’t sanity that put him in the right so often. It was just a series of coincidences, and our own bloody slackness.

He smiled again.

– Isn’t it lucky he wrote his book; otherwise you might never have known?

\* \* \*

Brindisi.

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita...

An unctuous, fat Pilot comes out to guide us in.

– Mussolini caput! Tedesci caput! Va ben’.

They are chipping the fasces off the war memorial as we draw alongside the quay, and groups of civilians are peering through the barbed wire fence that separates the dock from the street. Not enemy civilians any more – nor friends either, according to our instructions. But whatever they are, it is pleasant to whistle and wave at an attractive co-belligerent on a balcony, even if we get little enough response. These packs of Eytie soldiery – the conquerors-elect of Alexandria – are now on our side, and a British sapper corporal who is unloading the ship sings out, ‘Lower away to Our Allies!’ as he breaks sarcastically into the Woodpecker’s Serenade. Most of his new employees happily join him in their own tongue.

– We’re up and working bright and early  
Disturbing all the neighbourhood  
To bring to every boy and girlie  
Our happy serenade on wood.

The town is plastered with posters representing Garibaldi pointing emotionally at the Union Jack, the Stars and Stripes and the French Tricolour, and saying, ‘These are our friends’. As for the Eighth Army, it certainly has settled down quickly into most of its old ways. Staff Officer ‘A’, to whom we report for directions, scrutinises our papers and instructs us to proceed to 8th Army Main, where we will find the Press Camp. But when we ask, Where is 8th Army Main? he is sorry, but he is not permitted to tell us, if we don’t know already. Security, you know.



- Really? say I. And if we knew already, then I suppose it would be quite all right for you to tell us?
- If you like to put it that way.
- Very well, I know already. Now you tell me where it is. His face darkens and he assumes a sceptical expression.
- Kindly don't try to pull the wool over my eyes. I know quite well that you don't know.
- Look here, I say, leaning over the table. Let's stop this. Is there another War Correspondent in Brindisi?
- I believe Norman of *The Times* is down at the International.
- Then, good morning.

\* \* \*

Following the detailed directions of *The Times* newspaper, we roar up the coast road in our newly-designed Recording Truck. Through Fasano, Monopoli and Mola. All the way, crowds of children wave enthusiastically, and hold up grubby fingers in the V sign.

It is not an unpleasant road, but the Recording Truck assumes a more sinister aspect with every mile that we travel. Hitherto, the BBC has used a variety of vehicles overseas, borrowed from the Army or the Air Force. But now that we are making serious preparations for the Second Front, we are building our own truck bodies to a special design.

Out of the capacious imagination of the Engineering Division, assisted no doubt by rumours from Algiers, this vehicle has been evolved. Clearly no programme man has had much say, as the only practicable seat is for the Driver, who is, of course, a member of the Engineering Division. The Observer either abandons observing and sits inside, where he is quietly sick on the floor from lack of ventilation, or he goes in front, wedging himself sideways on a small piece of board, placed on top of the batteries. Against his backside rests a bolt, which has been placed there to drive up his fundament whenever the driver accelerates; while just below his knees an ingenious knife edge has been fixed so as to lacerate his legs whenever the driver applies the brakes. In this way our friends the Engineers have got us on the spot once again; and my new companion – the Professor (a determined demon driver and pedal-trampler) – knows it only too well.

One suggestion from the Programme Department has, however, been incorporated. It seems that Howard Marshall, fresh from Algeria, did say that there MUST be a hatch overhead from

which it is possible to watch for hostile aircraft. Maybe things were different in Algeria, but for my own part, I always adopt an optimistic view of approaching aircraft, and prefer to go by the demeanour of the wayside ack-ack gunners. While they sit around, smoking and reading newspapers, there is no need for me to get a crick in my neck, looking out. On the other hand, when they start scanning the skies and swinging their gun barrels into position, it is into the ditch that I go – not up any damn hatch.

However, rightly or wrongly, I have the Howard Marshall Hatch right over my head, on which it releases a stream of water whenever it rains – as no doubt is intended. For the rest, the truck has a number of useful cupboards with doors that can be hammered open or closed (if you have a hammer), and a few small windows with frames that fall to pieces whenever they are opened. It also has a capacious drinking water tank heavily lined with rust, and a patent cooking stove that, so far, has done absolutely nothing at all.

Yes, conditions have definitely taken a plunge for the worse since the days when I visited Hemeimat with Mark.

\* \* \*

It's an odd thing that whatever way you sleep in these Italian villas, the paintings on the ceilings always seem to be upside down. This particular PR villa in the outskirts of Bari is under the charge of a baronet with 'Death or Glory' on his forage cap. He was at the piano entertaining a sulky Signorina when we arrived, so we set up our beds in a corner and settled down to sleep. For some time, the evening was disturbed by an acrimonious conversation between two Americans, as to which of them had been first into the war. The hardships that each had endured had far exceeded those of the other. What bombings – what blastings – what bullshit. They were drunk, or pretending to be drunk, which is worse. So there was nothing to be done about it.

When at last I slept, I dreamt of my cynical little son whom I am in the process of losing. His Christian name has been changed from what it used to be, so you wouldn't recognise him now. Indeed, he does not even know himself by the name that he had in the days when he used to sit on my knees in bed of a morning and get sung to. Last night, he asked me to go fishing with him, and deeply flattered by his friendliness, I went. My son – with his tough, handsome young face, and his cold logic, and his

battered knees. I tried to do the best thing for him, but did I succeed? Should I have stayed at home and fought my own war? The nights that I have spent asking myself that sort of question!

Still, last night I went fishing with him.

\* \* \*

The Eighth Army has just come to grips with the enemy for the first time since landing in Italy. The Trigno front – from Termoli to Campobasso – is a new kind of terrain, a panorama of green slopes and valleys with little white towns perched on the tops of the hills – a land of olive groves and stony, swirling rivers, of farm houses and stone churches sticking their heads above the treetops.

From a tower on the skyline at Pettaciato, I surveyed the valley before me and the white road twisting up the opposite slopes to the clifftop town of Vasto – still in enemy hands. Here and there in the dead ground behind a rise, tiny tanks could be seen on the move. From time to time the guns would belch from the trees behind us, sending the startled birds chattering and cawing into the air. And in the silences between the bursts of fire, the voices of children playing and calling to each other in the village street below. A new kind of war.

For background, I went to Bill Williams, G One at Main Army, and asked him to brief me. An Oxford Don, he is said to be the brains behind Montgomery. It was Bill Williams who had contributed in no small way to the upset of the Afrika Korps at the Battle of Hemeimat. It was known at the time that Rommel relied on captured Going-Maps to learn the condition of the desert behind our lines. So shortly before the attack, Bill's staff concocted an entirely fictitious Going-Map of the area to the south, drawing non-existent escarpments in the spots where they did not want the Panzers to advance, and marking good going for tanks where, in fact, there was soft sand. This fraud was specially printed in the Army Map Depot. A copy, torn and soiled with blood, was placed in an old haversack with a few personal letters, and a copy of the *Leeds Mercury*, and was then left in a burnt-out vehicle in No-Man's-Land.

No more was heard of it, until after Alamein, when Von Thoma and Montgomery got together for their after-the-battle dinner party. During the evening, Von Thoma told Monty that the map had been found, duplicated and circulated among the Afrika

Korps before the battle, as a result of which the tanks had run into soft sand, and so exhausted their petrol supplies that the whole course of the operation was affected.

– Any chance of my being allowed to tell that story?

– Sorry, he answered with a shake of his head. We've had quite enough trouble as it is, thanks to that damned little Trumpeter in Algiers.

He shook his head gravely, bade me good afternoon, and went back into his caravan.

But the best over-all picture came from General Alexander, back in San Spirito. A shy man with the Press, he is probably all the better soldier for that; and in many ways he is the opposite of Montgomery. An unassuming professional soldier, with a humorous, cynical smile, and a very refreshing attitude towards the war that he is directing – the kind of soldier to place in a niche between Shaw's Bluntschli and General Burgoyne.

– Say, General, one of the American Correspondents began. Where do we go from here?

– Well, gentlemen, he answered. There is a saying that all roads lead to Rome. But, unfortunately, all the roads are mined.

– Do you mean that everything hasn't gone according to plan?

– I doubt if wars ever go according to plan. Certainly this one doesn't. If our original plan had worked out properly after Salerno we would have swept north of Rome. We hoped that when the Eyeties signed the armistice, things would become so difficult for the Germans that they would withdraw. Actually they reacted very vigorously and did nothing of the sort.

– What would you say is their strength in Italy now?

– When we first landed there were only four or five German divisions in the country, but we know that there are now twenty-three, or possibly even twenty-seven.

– Say, that must be more than we have?

– More than twice what we have, although we are only up against ten of them at present.

– How are we going to get decisive results this way?

– We don't expect any decisive results, because Italy can never be a decisive battlefield. What is more, we have had to send home a lot of our small landing craft before the weather breaks in the Atlantic. They are wanted elsewhere for future operations. All we can say of this campaign is that if the Second Front is a success next year, these other preliminary punches will have prepared the

way for the knock-out. The same is true of the scrapping over in Yugoslavia. There are about sixteen German divisions tied up now in the Balkans where there were previously only four or five. At present they are trying to get a grip on the Dalmatian Islands and to clean up the Slovenes who have been fighting around Ljubljana.

– Fighting who?

– Oh, fighting each other, and the Germans, and anybody that comes along. Sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other. It's a confusing situation, but I'm afraid they are being gradually brought under enemy control.

– But isn't it of great importance that we take Rome?

– Well, geographically it's a communications centre. I dare say we would like to send our B Echelons in there. But it has really got more political than tactical importance. They say that whoever holds Rome holds the hearts of the Italian people.

And he smiled rather slyly before continuing.

– I'm afraid most of them imagined as soon as they signed the Armistice that they would all be going home – except perhaps Badoglio, who is pretty realistic.

– Haven't they been much help?

– The Carabinieri have saved us quite a lot of troops by keeping law and order, especially in Sicily. But I doubt if their troops will ever be any good to us as fighting units. They're very lazy and always turn up late. They might come in with some gusto if they saw the Germans pulling out, but at the moment all they manage to do is to murder a few Tedesci in their beds. And even this will peter out. The enemy can be pretty heavy-handed about that sort of thing.

– On that point, sir, can't anything be done to put a stop to this butchery of Italians by the Germans in the north?

– How? Oh, I suppose you mean by reprisals on prisoners? I don't think so. I'm against that sort of thing. It only leads to counter-reprisals. And they have more prisoners than we have.

– Have our casualties been heavy?

– No. On the whole, the Eighth Army casualties have been remarkably light. As a matter of fact, one of the funny things about this war is that although I have been on every battle front I've never seen a dead man yet.

– Will we bomb Rome if occasion arises?

– I hope the Germans won't make a stand in such a way that

makes it necessary to damage Rome. But as for declaring it an open city, we certainly shan't do that. If we get there we will want to use it ourselves.

– And how do you think it will all end?

– I don't believe the Germans will ever allow their Army to be beaten in the field. There was a lot of criticism of Ludendorff after the last war for having allowed things to go so far before asking for an Armistice. In my belief, when it comes to the point, they will invite in either ourselves or the Russians.

– Which?

– I don't know which. But in their place, who would you invite in? The weaker or the stronger of your two enemies? However, I've got to admit that I've made many prophecies in the course of this war, and not one of them so far has turned out to be right.

– Have you any ideas as to what should be done with Germany after the war?

– Well – I think the only thing to do will be to let the Poles and Czechs loose in Central Europe for a while, and come back ourselves in, say, a year's time to restore order. That's the British way. We don't mind certain things being done that have to be done, provided we don't have to do them ourselves. If we catch a spy and she happens to be a woman, we prefer to hand her over to other people to be dealt with.

And he laughed lightly, as he sat on the edge of the table, swinging one leg – the very picture of the charming, ruthless Irishman who has won so many of England's wars for her, and who is so much more ready to speak aloud the unspoken policy of England than any English gentleman.

\* \* \*

VV IL 1924! VV IL 1922! DUCE! VINCERE!

Along the coast road to Brindisi, old slogans are painted on the walls. We went back there to interview the realistic Badoglio – supposed ruler of supposedly liberated Italy – a sly old bird, still wearing the medal ribbons of the Abyssinian campaign of even more realistic days. The more actual ruler of the civilian population – General Joyce of AMGOT – gave us a short talk afterwards, and explained the situation. Our co-belligerents are being re-educated in democracy and self-determination. As the war passes northwards, civil government is to be re-established in

the liberated provinces – free elections are to be held in which the Allies will not interfere. All parties are to be represented, and the Italians can have any government they choose – Liberal, Socialist, even Communist. They can have any kind of government they like.

– Suppose it turns out that most of them would like a Fascist government? I asked.

The interview terminated.

\* \* \*

Driving back in the dark from Bari to Lucera with Shorty Lessing in his truck, I was telling him the scandalous Air Force version of the role of the big battleships at Salerno. The story goes that these two great battlewagons had been lying in Malta doing nothing at all, when the Admiral insisted that they be given an airing, as this inactivity was affecting morale. So they were despatched to take a hand at Salerno, and the Air Force were furious because it meant that they had to take a lot of fighter planes off the job of covering the beaches in order to provide an umbrella for the two ships. Each battleship took on one 88 on shore, which they consistently missed. Finally, when they could be persuaded to go away, the air cover was switched back to its proper job, and the RAF knocked out the guns themselves! A typical birdman story – I suspect.

I think we must have been a little drunk as we drove, because there was a funny old man swinging a lamp at an open railway crossing – to encourage us onwards, as we imagined. I seem to remember looking back as we went over, attracted by something that had passed immediately behind us. It was a train.

– Shorty, I said. Did you see what I saw?

– No, said Shorty. What was it?

– Never mind, said I. Go on with what you were saying about the women in Johannesburg.

EUTERPE  
OR  
THE THIRD RIVER

Tunisian pastures are pied with flowers,  
Algerian valleys are warm with vines,  
The orchards march where Aetna towers,  
And turf springs under Calabrian pines.  
All good green things contrive to dress  
The lands where our latest battle veers.  
We're all washed up with the wilderness.  
Gone are the deserts of yesteryears.

THIS is the winter of our discontent, and the story of a battle as different from that which has gone before as is this mud-bound Adriatic coast from the snow-white sandhills of Alamein. It seems that the gallant war is over, and our Homeric days are left behind. Gone are the contests of the Paladins, and in their place we have a grimmer kind of struggle with all its accoutrements – torn earth, wrecked cities, and the killing of children, women and old people.

Now we have no Alexandria to our rear – no Cecil Hotel on the seafront, where we can dump our dusty kit, and step out of the desert into a hot bath. The fleshpots of Naples are beyond our reach, and as the rainstorms beat in from the narrow, grey sea, we bar our glassless windows against the cold, and unroll our maps of the Sangro.

It was Tealeaf Stevens – one-time Indian PRO – who summarised our nostalgia for the old days in a poem in *Parade*.

No trucks are leaguered as last light fades  
And no one douses the brew-up fires.  
Rusty Jerrycans wait for raids  
As sentries along the Dannaert wire.



No one twiddles the magic screws,  
And only a ghostly company jeers  
At Richard Dimpleby's evening views.  
Gone are the deserts of yesteryears.

It is not only the weather that has taken a turn for the worse. I have lost my old companions, and my new ones do not inspire me with any more enthusiasm than my new truck. And though I am better acquainted with the needs of the news rooms, I see very little possibility under present conditions of getting any news to them before it is history.

After a few weeks floundering around with my Sancho Panza in the recording truck, I decided that in future I would cadge lifts from my brother Correspondents. So leaving most of my major handicaps behind, I took to the road with Shorty Lessing and Mike Davis and Dick MacMillan and Lynn Heinselring, and arrived at the enemy's winter line.

After the crossing of the Trigno, Vasto became the Headquarters of the Eighth Army, and our home for several months. It is a small seaside town perched on a height overlooking a bay. In summer it might be quite a pleasant little resort; in winter it is open to the winds and to every blizzard that sweeps across the sea from the steppes of Central Europe. When the Press Camp moved up, our Baronet, Sir Bowles, selected a windowless, stone house on the cliffs of a dreary headland known as Pinna Point. One approaches it along a mud track across some wrecked railway lines, and over one of those moors where a traveller might expect to meet the Hound of the Baskervilles. The absence of any glass in the windows meant that one had the choice of light and blasts of pure fresh air, or no air and no light.

The sanitary arrangements were non-existent and the best people generally used the deserted railway line as a lavatory. Each morning we all moved slightly farther along, until – came the time – we turned a corner, and found ourselves arriving in a station. After this, the camp authorities decided to put up a canvas contraption on a slope overlooking the rocks, from which one might observe derelict mines dashing themselves on to the beach below. The house was known as 'Dysentery Hall', and the amenities did not improve until ENSA parties began to arrive. Then the development was miraculous.

However, I needn't complain, because in the end I did better than most of my colleagues, by playing my old Air Force card.

Derek had arrived in Vasto with his train of Erks, and commandeered a villa within the Main Army compound, with quite a few windows and even a small indoor latrine. It belonged to an artist, and was decorated with painted inscriptions drawing passionate attention to the beauties of the view.

AD ELETTO DOLOR L'ARTE S'ELEVA

We spent several evenings arguing about what that meant. The most popular translation was 'Art encourages depression amongst the Best People'.

The Erks were fixed up in quarters around a small yard, where, under the guidance of Albert, the cook, they collected all the available stores and rations, and disgorged as much as they could spare for the inhabitants of the Villa. The Erk is a much more independent character than the Pongo, and is far more vocal about his personal comforts. Indeed, they were a match for Derek – particularly Albert, who was a very good fellow indeed, if you were careful enough to keep on the right side of him.

Leslie Karke told me that after the African campaign was over, he had been given the job of rounding up Public Relations personnel and checking over the lists to ascertain where everybody was. Two names defeated him for a considerable time – those of Albert the Cook, and Herbert the Driver. Nobody could say for certain what they were doing, except that they were both supposed to be manning a camp near Carthage. At last the day came when Leslie knew he must clear this matter up, so he set forth for Carthage, and eventually tracked down Albert and Herbert in their bivouac on a magnificent headland overlooking the sea. There they were, entirely alone, surrounded by an increasing pile of rations. What was the purpose of this camp? Leslie enquired. Neither of the boys could say for certain, except that it had been properly and officially established by some person unknown. Do you mean to say, asked Karke, that the two of you are living here with nothing at all to do? Oh no, not at all. They were very busy indeed. You see, Herbert the Driver had to fetch the rations for Albert the Cook; and Albert the Cook had to cook the rations for Herbert the Driver.

\* \* \*

In a hovel off the main street of Torino di Sangro, we attended an interrogation of prisoners. I have so often seen our poor fellows

being questioned by a brutal enemy on the stage and in the cinema that it was instructive to encounter it in real life – although the other way round.

The intelligence officer was a young Oxford man – easy going, and quite charming when alone with us, but with a faculty for assuming an expression of almost diabolical evil when confronted by a prisoner from whom he wanted some information. He had a particularly tough lot this afternoon, and he was turning on the heat in bland disregard of the Hague Convention – which I take it is the universal practice on both sides.

– You have a Mother? he asked of a blond Nazi, standing rigidly to attention before him.

– Yawohl.

– And a sister?

– Yawohl.

– They will wish to know what has become of you? They will have heard that you are missing?

No reply.

– You know that we give the names of all prisoners over the wireless? But not until they have answered our questions. Until you answer you will remain here.

– Under the Hague Convention I am not bound to answer such questions.

– It is a bad thing to be killed or to be taken prisoner. But this is nothing to the anxiety of waiting at home for news of someone at the front who has disappeared.

The wooden stocky face began to work convulsively. After a long and dreadful pause, the IO produced a photograph of some German atrocity and held it up before the prisoner.

– You see this? This is what your people have done to some of our prisoners.

– I know nothing of that.

– You know this German standing here? Do not lie to me, because we know his name, and if you lie to me it will mean an end to our friendliness.

– I know nothing of it. I have never seen him before.

– Suppose we do this to you?

The perspiration began to run down the prisoner's face, but still he retained his attitude.

– If you do anything to me, you know what will happen to the prisoners that we hold.

- That is no concern of mine. It is my duty to question you.
- And it is my duty not to answer.
- Very well. As you wish.

Once the prisoner had gone, the atmosphere immediately relaxed, and the monster at the table became a quiet, smiling host once again, handing round cigarettes.

- I say, there was a real gangster type! said MacDowell with some relish.

- Oh, I wouldn't say that, replied the IO. I only hope all our own chaps answer as correctly when they get captured.

- I suppose that was largely an act on your part? I enquired.

- Oh yes, of course, he smiled. It usually works, but when it doesn't, we just keep them overnight and send them back to the cages next morning. We get all the information we want quite easily from the False-Deutsch - the Poles and the Czechs and all the other non-German types. His army is full of them. There are a lot of Austrians here too, but we have to be careful how we approach them. Usually nothing upsets an Austrian more than to be told that his country is going to be made free and independent after the war. Bring in the next, Corporal.

His face resumed its diabolical cast, and we went on to survey the valley of the Sangro from the top of the ridge.

\* \* \*

Now it happened within the space of a few days that there journeyed together through these regions Doubtful and his friend Holy Orders, seeing what might be seen. And finding a place of safety for their carriage within the shelter of a sunken lane, they mounted to the crest of the hill and sat there for a while looking out over the river that flowed through the valley below. Then spake Holy Orders unto Doubtful and said:

Holy Orders: Well I never! Is that where the Germans are - there on the hillside, over beyond?

Doubtful: Yes, Padre. Directly opposite. It's not often you can get such a grandstand view of a battlefield. There are minefields all the way up those slopes, and each of those farmhouses sticking up out of the olive groves is probably a nest of machine guns.

HO: God save us! And which is Fossacesia?

D: That village to the right over towards the sea. And that's Mozzagrogno to the left. The shellfire you see is coming from German guns somewhere behind the summit. They are trying to

comb out the Indians, pinned down in the dead ground about half way up the slope.

HO: And where are our own lads, the Irish Brigade?

D: More to the right, Father. This side of Fossacesia.

HO: Across the river?

D: Yes, Father. Each Division has a bridgehead. Look there. You can see the Indians' Bailey Bridge to the left of the stony patch through the trees. This side of the blown viaduct. Would you like the glasses?

HO: Thanks. I can see it now. It looks deserted.

D: Naturally. The Germans can see it too.

HO: Well now, isn't that an extraordinary sight. And the place full of Irish! If we had those Americans here now, we wouldn't have to apologise for Irish neutrality, I'll be bound.

D: I never apologise for Irish neutrality, Father – least of all to Americans.

HO: Oh, but they're very bitter about it. Much more so than the English.

D: That's to be expected. Now that they're in it in spite of themselves, they feel we ought to be at war on their account! I can accept a certain amount of criticism of Ireland from the English, but I'm damned if I'll take it from the Yanks.

HO: Oh-ho! Look at that shelling now.

D: Yes: they're trying to hit the Indians' bridge.

HO: That was a queer thing to hear from you—supporting Irish neutrality. I always thought you Protestants were all pro-British.

D: Maybe we are. But there's a difference between being pro-British and being British. There's a lot of us Irish here, wearing this uniform because we believe that, on the whole, England is right. But she had to show us she was right, and to my mind she does this by leaving us alone, even though she needs those ports. That's why I say we ought to stay neutral as evidence of her good sense, but fight for England as a tribute to her sanity. Do you follow me?

HO: I do not. But aren't we lucky, now, in Ireland to have so few troubles, apart from the ones we manufacture for ourselves? Isn't it a miracle that God has blessed Ireland with the chance to make a choice at all?

D: Where's the miracle in that, Padre? Isn't it a choice that everybody has?

HO: Not a bit of it. Look at this valley in front of us – full of

men of all nations trying to kill each other. Have you ever asked yourself what it is that puts men on one side or the other? It's not a choice between Good and Evil. They're all cast in their roles like actors in a play. That's the real tragedy of war as I see it as a Priest. Most of them are over there because they are Germans – not because they necessarily believe in Hitler, any more than you believe in Churchill. They've got to fight for Germany because that's the way it works out for them. They're loyal to their homes, and they know that the Allies are going to smash up Germany if they win.

D: Then maybe they shouldn't have started it.

HO: Those men over there didn't start it, no more than you or I did. But they're in it now—just as you'd have been in it, too, if Churchill had thought fit to march in on Eire in 1940. Am I wrong or am I right?

D: How do you mean – just as I'd have been in it?

HO: Weren't you in the Irish Local Security Force back in those days?

D: I was.

HO: And wouldn't you have resisted if the British had tried to force their way into the country?

D: Certainly. We'd have resisted anybody who tried to push us around.

HO: Well, if you'd fought Churchill then, wouldn't you have found yourself on the same side of the war as those men over there?

D: That's quite different. Although I'll have to think out how it's different.

HO: It's not different. It just goes to show how it's not in our hands at all to decide on what side of the fence we'll fall. And once we're down on one side or the other, loyalty and propaganda do the rest. Did you ever consider what a queer thing it was that Europe was defended for a couple of centuries by a Turkish tribe – the Hungarians – against the assaults of Islam, led by the Janisaries, who were all the children of Christian captives?

D: That's a queer argument to be coming from a Priest. If War hasn't got a right and a wrong side to it what business have we in killing each other at all? How can you justify it on that basis?

HO: I'm not trying to justify it. War is a curse that man brings down upon himself through Evil. You don't justify a curse.

D: Nonsense. If that's all there is to it, the answer would be for us all to refuse to fight.

HO: Maybe that would be the answer of the Saints. But how many of us are Saints? Mortal man can't refuse to fight any more than he can refuse to suffer under any other affliction. You've admitted yourself you might have had to fight.

D: Then if it's a curse, and it's a pure matter of chance what side we're on, it looks to me as if a man I once knew in the Middle East was right. He used to argue that it was all God's malicious doing; and there's a lot in what he said, if we've all got to die for nothing.

HO: I didn't say it was for nothing. And you Free Thinkers always take Death too seriously. Sometimes some of the lads come and attack me and say what right have I – a professed Christian – to be here at all, giving countenance to men who are slaughtering each other? But, sure, haven't we all got to die some day, maybe in worse ways than by a bullet? It's the spirit behind it that matters.

D: Oh God give me patience with the Spirit behind it! I suppose it's all right to kill a man if you do it for the love of God? If one of those damned shells lands on us up here, what difference will it make to us how holy the gunner is? It says in the Anglican Prayer Book that even Good Works are sin if they're done for their own sake, and not for God's. Now you'd have me believe the opposite – that murder can be sanctified if we're on the way to Mass.

HO: Ah, don't be silly. There's a good many things in the Anglican Prayer Book I don't hold with, but it's sound at any rate on Pelagianism.

D: Pelagianism! That reminds me, I was to ask somebody about that. Explain it, Father, please.

HO: It was the special contribution of our own islands to the list of the early heresies.

D: Don't tell me that the Saints and Scholars ever produced a heresy?

HO: They did, God help us. And one of the most subtle of them all. It took St Augustine and a couple of Councils to correct it. That's why St Patrick was sent to Ireland, and one of the reasons why the early Celtic Church was always suspect in Rome.

D: I want to hear this. Go on.

HO: Did you never hear of the Miracle of Grace? I suppose not. Well, the error comes to this: that a Man may be saved by good works alone, without the help of the Grace of God. In these days

I suppose it amounts to a very general belief that religion doesn't matter so long as you're good.

D: I can see how poisonous that must be to the Church! Even the righteous must be damned if they don't belong to the Party. If we can only be saved by a Miracle, it certainly means that God is a demon. But don't look so alarmed. I have a less blasphemous answer. I'm coming to the belief that Good and Evil haven't any real existence at all. They're just illusions.

HO: Illusions invented by the Church to force people to go to Mass. Yes, I know that argument, too. But it's not so.

D: Very well, Father. You tell me what they are, if you can. I've wanted to know for a very long time.

HO: Well, I'll try. But you tell me this first. You suggested just now that the difference between the two sides in this war was that England could have trampled on Ireland but didn't, while Hitler would have if he could.

D: Something like that.

HO: Was it after you decided England was different that you put on that uniform and went out to Egypt?

D: I suppose it was.

HO: And tell me this. When you went out there, had you any idea who was going to win the war in the end?

D: Well, since you ask me, I thought that Hitler would probably win.

HO: In other words, you joined up with the losing side because you thought they were in the right. That was foolish of you, but it was Good.

D: Nonsense, Father. You ought to know that we Irish always join the losing side as a matter of principle. It's our national tradition to prefer lost causes. My fear now is that I've made a mistake. I'm rather worried about it.

HO: Well, if so it serves you right, for the Protestant sneerer and unbeliever that you are. I suppose you'd rather have Hitler win, so as to be on the fine, romantic side afterwards, resisting a wicked peace. Well, what are you going to do when, instead of that, you find yourself on the side of the winners who are imposing a worse one?

D: Easy now, Father. Don't lose your temper.

HO: I've told you what Good is. Now I'm going to tell you what Evil is, and how you'll recognise it as a disease of the Soul. Hitler is an evil man – in spite of all the things he's done for Germany,



and I don't deny some of them. He is evil because he has the quality of making other people evil. When evil men come into power, nothing but evil can flourish under them. Evil is infectious – just like a disease of the body. It breeds. You remember that old play you used to do in the Gate Theatre about the Vampire? Well, that's the way of it. An evil man bites you, and the next thing you find is that you are evil too—if you haven't got the Grace of God to save you. And that's just what we are going to find when this war is over – that we have managed to kill Hitler, but that we are doing, ourselves, everything that he has done – yes, and worse. Come back then, if you dare, and tell me that there is no such thing as evil, and that it's just an invention of the Church.

D: I'm glad I'm not one of your flock. You get hold of such ideas.

HO: Never mind. I've also managed to get hold of a bottle of whisky. Let's go back to Vasto and try a sup. I think we've seen enough of this battle.

\* \* \*

The Battle of the Sangro has not carried us north of Rome, as Monty announced it would in his opening message, except in so far as Vasto is geographically north of Rome to begin with – which I am sure is not what he meant. But it has carried us beyond the Sangro, for whatever that is worth.

First the Indians, and with them the Royal Fusiliers, fight their way up into Mozzagrogno – withdraw, and then fight their way back again.

The first ascent of the hill is in the darkness, up a rough narrow track – the sappers in front – swinging their mine detectors and laying down white tapes to mark the cleared track. The Fusiliers follow in a long file, leading mules laden with heavy weapons. Now and then a shell drops near the track and the mules rear and back, the frantic muleteers hanging on to their muzzles to keep them between the tapes. Sometimes one breaks away, and goes up on a mine with a shattering roar that sends more of them scampering.

Then there is a long halt – nobody knows why. Above, hang the shapes of the lower houses of the village and the outline of the Church. Somebody pushes forward to the head of the column to find out the cause of the delay. It is a blown culvert, over which no kind of vehicle could be expected to cross until a Bailey Bridge has been put in. Word is passed along. Push on into the village

without armour and consolidate. They do so, and report that the place is apparently empty.

Dawn comes up, finding the infantry sitting in the Church and in the big house on the opposite side of the road. In the Church they are in trouble because the windows are too high to be seen through, and they have no ladders. Presently – rattle – rattle – rattle – down the road come three German tanks, slowly and ponderously. One blows a hole in the side of the Church, which enables the Fusiliers inside to shoot back. Another sprays the houses opposite with flame.

It is an extraordinary battle – infantry against tanks, in a small built up area – the first unable to drive out the second without anti-tank weapons; the second unable to dislodge the first without any supporting infantry. Then both sides get orders almost simultaneously to withdraw, and, unknown to each other, they both pull out, leaving Mozzagrogno empty in the morning sun – until the Germans find out what has happened and come creeping back.

Next night a bridge is thrown across the culvert and the British armour manages to come forward. A couple of tanks climb over and wedge themselves between the houses. Under cover of their fire, the Irish get some more armour up on to the summit on their right, and when morning comes, they proceed slowly along the crest of the ridge in the direction of the sea, shooting at all the German positions from the rear.

And so the summit is won by the Indian Division, the position is taken by the Irish, and the crossing of the Sangro is an accomplished fact.

\* \* \*

When MacMillan and Mike Davis and I came forward again next morning, we were able to cross by the lower bridge and go straight up the hill into Fossacesia. The place was a smoking ruin, with half-hysterical Italians wringing their hands in the doorways. On a piano in the main street, one of the Skins was playing 'Moonlight becomes You – it goes with your hair'. In the garden of a big house that we had stared at for many days from the opposite side of the river, some of these civilians pointed excitedly at the mouth of a tunnel. Below the village there were underground chambers still occupied by the enemy – dozens of them down there, fully armed. While another entrance was being located on the reverse slope, a sergeant of the Skins went down, and was pulled out again with seventeen bullets in his body.

Justifiably annoyed by this, the Skins mounted a Bren gun at one entrance and proceeded to lob hand grenades down the other. But as nobody came out they soon got tired of this pastime, and blew in both ends, leaving the whole lot buried.

About a month later, when I was passing through Fossacesia once again, I suddenly remembered the tunnel. We turned aside to find if it had ever been opened. The garden was now occupied by a section of Canadian REME, and the CO came along with me to the entrance.

– It's strange you should ask about that tunnel, he said, because it was a puzzle to us for some time. We could see there had been a way in there, and we supposed a shell had landed and blown it in. But we also found the other end on the back-side of the hill, and we couldn't figure out how a shell could have hit that. Then one day some Eyties came along and started making signs. So we figured there must be some sort of an underground chamber, and we dug our way down to see what it was. First we brought up a lot of civilian clothes – men and women's too. And then a heck of a lot of weapons: Spandaus, Lugers, Rifles, everything. At last we got through to the centre where there was an underground Officers' Mess. I guess it must have been a Command Post.

– And is that where you found all the Gerries? I asked.

– I don't know what you mean by 'all the Gerries,' he replied. There was one German Officer sitting at a table, just as if he was taking a nap. But he was dead. He had blown his brains out weeks before. Now what do you reckon is the story behind that?

\* \* \*

Around Mozzagrognio enemy stragglers lurked for days in the cellars and in upper floors of houses. The Ghurkas cleaned them out; and then one day in Battalion Headquarters, somebody enquired quite casually:

– By the way, has anybody looked upstairs here yet?

– I don't believe anybody has. Havildar, have you been upstairs?

– No, sir. No one has been upstairs.

– Just nip up and take a look. You never can tell.

The Ghurka sergeant went upstairs with a tommy-gun and presently somebody was put-put-putting away in the upper regions. Then he came down.

– What was all that about?

- There were fifteen of them up there, Sir.  
- Good God! Did they show fight?  
- No, sir.  
- Surrender?  
- No, sir.  
- Well, what happened?  
- I shot them, sir.  
- What? All of them?  
- Good God! Fancy all those chaps up there. In Battalion Headquarters, too.

Next day somebody said:

- I say, what happened about those fifteen chaps upstairs?  
- The Havildar shot them all.  
- Yes, but I mean, what's happened to them since? Are they still up there?  
- As far as I know.  
- Well, don't you think they'd better be shifted? I mean, after all...  
- Perhaps you're right. Been rather busy, you know. Havildar.  
- Yes, sir.  
- Get some men to dig a hole outside the back door. Then tell them to carry those chaps down and bury them.  
- Yes, sir.

The hole was dug, and half a dozen Ghurkas started to carry down the bodies. They shifted them on a couple of ladders, and put them one by one into the hole, until they came to the last man, who turned out not to be dead at all, but only shamming. When he realised that he was about to be buried, he leapt off the ladder with a yell, and all around him the Ghurkas solemnly drew their long curved knives.

- Look here, interposed a passing officer, noticing the disturbance. What are you going to do?

- Kill him, sir, said the Havildar.

- But you can't kill a man like that.

- But, sir, explained the Havildar with sweet reasonableness. We have been told to bury him, and it would not be right to bury him alive. Would it?

\* \* \*

AFHQ  
Algiers

Wynford Vaughan Thomas is on his way out from home to join us, and I understand he's going straight to Naples. He is reported to have two

trucks and one car with him and two engineers so that the whole thing sounds more like a travelling circus than anything else. What his special commission is I have no idea, but knowing our Wynford I should think the whole front will become his parish.

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BY CAREFULLER CONSTRUCTION AND WRITING WHEN TIME AND  
CONDITIONS PERMIT NEWSCASTS BRITISH BROADCASTING COR-  
PORATION ARTHUR BARKER

Naples, Wednesday evening

(a) Haley, our new Editor-in-chief, has come out at Alex's request to see the situation at first hand.

(b) I got a signal telling me to report here to collect him and to take him round the two armies.

(c) We shall reach you on the evening of the 12th and will stay with Monty I understand. Trust you will be at Army (or Tac Army) so that we can see you. There will be plenty for you to tell the great man I've no doubt.

(d) About Gilliam's Christmas Day request, from London. If it's to be live, it will have to come from Naples, won't it? Would you care to come over and organise it, or have you had enough of Christmas Day shows? Vaughan Thomas should be here by then, and could take your front temporarily off your hands.

Do drop me a line. I should like to know if letters are getting through to you now.

Yours,  
FRANK

\* \* \*

On the main street of Lanciano, Mike Davis drew up alongside a passing Sahib and asked:

- Can you direct us to the best restaurant?

The Sahib considered us - and Lanciano - for a few moments before replying.

- Well, that depends on whether you want music and dancing, or just superb cooking.

So we called at the Town Hall, where there was nobody to be

seen, except a self-appointed Mayor, who evidently took us for people of importance. His manner was most ingratiating. We had come in on the heels of the Indians, intending to do a piece on the work of AMGOT and how it takes over the civil administration. But there wasn't any sign of AMGOT nor even of the Military Police.

First he took us to inspect the civil population, massed in a series of great cellars underneath the Cathedral. They all rose and clapped their hands as we solemnly walked through. The hotel was shuttered and barred, but it opened up at the demand of the Mayor, and presently crowbars and sledgehammers were obtained, and people started to knock down what appeared to be the back wall of a cupboard. From this aperture bread and ham and cheeses and bottles of red Vino were produced, and soon we were enjoying lunch as the guests of the Municipality.

The only occupant of the dining-room was a nice-looking blonde in the middle twenties, who seemed greatly interested in our arrival, but who made no attempt to join us.

Night comes – a night spent in the empty flat of Dr Desiderio Grunhut with all the apparent signs of comfort and a home – the photographs and snapshots – the books and knick-knacks – the toothbrushes hanging in the bathroom – the fat white cat mewing around in search of its favourite chair. But all the food is provided by ourselves, there is not a drop of water in the pipes, there is neither sanitation nor heat, and in the place of light we have little spills of cottonwool floating in saucers of oil.

Ken can play a little on the piano; but Lynn Heinzlering is better, thumping out old American dance tunes with a fair imitation of syncopation. However, we are not really in the mood for music or for conversation, because the night is cold, and the emptiness of the house and of the street outside has a depressing effect. Still, for a little while, some of us try to flog up the old subject that we never write about in our despatches.

It is, of course, Women.

But it is a desultory and insincere conversation, because the average man – no matter how great his feeling of loss may be – finds it hard to talk about such needs except in terms of bawdy anecdote. There are the exhibitionists, of course, whose stories of fantastic adventures we usually disbelieve. And the amatory snobs with their tales of wonderful whore houses that are always somewhere else. Or Warwick Charleton who outlined, one evening,

with embittered venom, his version of the rake's progress in all its horrifying details: stage one, the man's reluctance even to look at another woman because of the sacred associations; stage two his feeble efforts at auto-eroticism, which embarrass him with his pals, because he cannot keep the bed from creaking; stage three, depressed by this, and by the absence of any mail (somebody in Algiers cannot be bothered to send it on), he begins to cast around for some non-professional friend amongst the civilian population. But this comes to nothing because they are all in permanent employment with the men at the Base. Next, the first tentative pick-up in the street, made necessary because all the supervised brothels have been closed by the Military Police; next, association with anything that he can find, however sordid; and finally, VD, with which he goes home in black despair, only to find that he need not have worried, because the woman of his dreams has gone off with an American!

But that is only Warwick Charleton's sadistic picture. Most of my friends are neither so picturesque nor so ridden by habit. We are merely pathetic — though custom does not allow us to admit this. War and love are supposed to go hand in hand, yet I find that there is something in the active life, and the continued presence of violence, that dries up the deeper needs, and spares me from the worst of the tensions that might have been expected. In common with most men, I think a lot about women, but it largely ends in thought. I have not got a secret sex life that I do not write about here, and I do not believe that many of my companions have it either — except perhaps the homosexuals who definitely have the laugh on us in time of war. To the second step in Warwick's downward ladder, most of us may plead guilty from time to time. But what the hell? That's as clean a way out as most, and is nobody's business but our own.

The sting of the Charleton Saga is in the tail. What is happening to the wife or the girl in England? Is she going out with other men? Has she realised that she has the worst end of the bargain, and is she getting fed up with waiting? It seems a pity that such matters of everyday thought in the Eighth Army should never be touched upon in any of our accounts of the troops. And I am speculating on whether there is no way in which the subject could be covered, when I notice that the conversation has died on me, and our little party is ready for bed.

\* \* \*

I am wakened by a hand on my shoulder and a torch flashed in my face. It is Ken and the Professor in their shirts.

– Listen.

Outside – the dim, confused concatenation of night sounds.

– Listen to what?

The clack of a pair of heels on the pavement – the tick of the clock – the boom of a gun.

– Well...?

– Listen.

A whistling whine slices the gloom. Then...Crrrrrrraap! I know that sound.

– They're shelling us.

I look across at Lynn – fast asleep in the next bed.

– Oh hell.

The Professor has his watch out.

– Well, there's nothing we can do about it. Or is there?

Boom!

– Listen.

– I mean, why wake me up? I'm not going over to St Typhus's basement whatever happens.

– Hush.

The night yawns again. Wheeeeeee...Crrrrrrraap! The Professor is talking rapidly.

– D'you hear? Only four seconds between the sound of the gun and the sound of the shell. At five seconds to the mile, it means they're not much more than three-quarters of a mile away.

– Three-quarters of a mile! Why, that's just down the road.

– That's what I say. Maybe it's a counter attack. I think we ought to get out.

– Oh hell. At this hour?

– Well, we don't want to be caught here, do we? The truck's at the door.

A vision of a night ride in that truck with the Professor at the wheel rises before my eyes – maybe somebody sniping at him – encouraging him to better his previous performances. I turn to Ken, standing in the background, his eyes sodden with sleep, his tousled hair over his face – a large, good-humoured Great Dane.

– Ken, what do you think?

– I dunno. I can't do sums at this hour.

Bang!

– Hush! Listen.



– I can't believe they're really as...

Wheeeeeee...Crrrrraaaap!

– There you are! Four seconds. And if the gun's as near as that, where do you suppose their forward patrols are?

No, no...better to go in the bag than a night ride in that truck. Whatever must be, let it be in my bed.

– Couldn't you go and ask somebody something?

– There's a Brigade Headquarters on the edge of the town, says Ken.

– Right, snaps the Professor. Let's go and see them.

– At least there was, when we came in.

– OK. Tell me what they say. I'm going to stop in bed.

And as they file out I lie down again.

Bang...one, two...Wheeeeeee...three, four. Crrraaap!

I have known some searing and depressing experiences in the course of this war, but none of them is so depressing as that of being shelled at night. If I wake up at four a.m. I am a prey to gloomy thoughts at the best of times. Out of the shadows arise all the bogies that people my waking hours. At high noon, they are mere gnats and mosquitoes; but lying in bed, staring out into limbo, they tear at my brain like ravening wolves. The Agent who you suspect is swindling you – the egomaniac who alleges that you have injured him and says that he is going to do so-and-so – the Income Tax Inspector who must be pacified – the difficult letter that must be answered.

All that these require to complete their Witches' Sabbath is Bang – there it goes – wheeee – where's it going to land? – crrrrraaaap – that one sounded nearer – not in rapid succession, but slowly and deliberately, once every five minutes. I close my eyes...but not to sleep.

Yaes ofereode: yisses swa maeg! This has been lived through before.

Lucky Lynn, to be out of it so peacefully. Still, I'm better off in bed than running round in the street looking for Brigade. And even if they do find it, nobody will know anything at all. A mile every five seconds...I suppose he's right. Yet they CAN'T be that near. One seven six nought divide by five – three carry two, five carry one, two...less than a mile anyhow. Crrrrraaaap that one was farther off maybe we'd be safer on the stairs. Balls, if the bloody place is hit it's hit and you're as well off in bed as shivering in some bloody passage...reminds me of those nights I used to lie awake

worrying about the case and what I would have to do if they kept up this intolerable stalemate for another couple of years. It's odd how enmity starts – growing out of nothing – a look in the street, an idle remark repeated by a friend – it's our friends that do more real harm than our enemies – they and the people who carry the messages – and the agents and the solicitors whom we pay for their services God forgive them! I don't think I ever did any harm to that man. Yet the years of nights I seem to have lain awake like this because of him – just thinking about it and wondering what else I could have done and whether I have lost the chap for good and all. Why do people have to be shits to each other? I mean I can understand this bastard who is firing that gun trying to kill me and I don't really mind that so long as he doesn't succeed. After all we're supposed to be at war but I'm not supposed to be at war with her. Or am I? That priest said you have to go to war sometimes whether you like it or not. We are cast in roles, like in a play, and only the Saints can get out of it by refusing to fight. Maybe I ought to have fought harder. How little we know about ourselves and our deepest motives.

The real trouble is that now the Law has come into it with those smart-alec letters and provisos without prejudice and arguments about money like so many horse-copers at a fair – once Law starts coming into personal relationships they count for nothing and people very soon forget what it was all about to begin with and when I write and try to remind her he comes back with his Dear Sir we regret the tone of your letter to our client and feel sure that on maturer consideration you will regret it too. Oh, very high-toned, I'm sure. You'd almost think that I was the one without all the cards on the table. Maturer consideration your backside.

I wish I could stop thinking, and get to sleep again. I'll be a wreck in the morning not I suppose that there'll be any AMGOT anyhow. I'll get the Mayor to do a piece and send the truck off with it if Bang...was that it again? Just when I was getting sleepy easy now I should have counted it ought to be... wheeeee...oh-ho, where's that one going? It sounds as if it were CRRRRRAAAAAAP as if it went right down the street outside. Curse them they're only trying to annoy us and keep us awake. This is war – the thing I used to say was quite a good thing in its way. That's the trouble with the world. Too many liberated adolescents thinking of war in terms of the desert and excitement and pursuit and loot. But war isn't really like that. If ever again

I forget the weariness the fever and the fret and show signs of getting exalted by the thought of war just let me remember Lanciano and lying here in bed waiting and listening for the next one Bang...there it is now – trying to sleep and not being able to for waiting for the Wheeee...trying to forget and not to wonder where the next CRRRRAAAAP...That was a little farther off – where is the next one going? God, how long the night can be. How long how endless war can be. Next Christmas I used to say but it certainly won't be over this Christmas and will that mean another of those airgraphs? I could hardly read the last one her hand was so shaky and perhaps it's just as well for what I could read of it I didn't like...

Dear Son, I don't know where you are but Isabel tells me this letter will get you somewhere or other on Xmas day so I am wishing you everything good on that great day my own beloved son. I can't write now as I am not very well these days...and that is really all I can say now...I send you it with all my heart...if you were only here...without my not saying it here. Believe me darling you are seldom out of my...I am your own Mother.

Oh Christ, is my bed so warm and wide that misery must lie upon it too? I couldn't read her letter, and I know that it will be her last! T-B was right. It's all a dirty trick being played on us by somebody. T-B you're dead right yes even though you're dead you're right. They killed you in that suicidal old Blenheim with the brakes that never worked but your soul goes marching on proclaiming and proclaiming that it's a dirty trick played on us by Old Nobodaddy! And now everybody is raging at home because Monty had that bit of dinner with Von Thoma – the most natural and sensible thing it seemed at the time. Why do we allow ourselves to be bounced by any silly little bastard who writes a letter to the paper or asks a question in Parliament about Why aren't our boys taking the war seriously? and Are they to be allowed to shake hands with murderers? God dammit I've been shaking hands with murderers all my life and if I'm not to be allowed to do that now I'll have bloody few left to shake hands with. First of all there were those charming Black and Tans with all the quaint tricks who were so busy when I was at college. It was they – not the Gestapo – who reintroduced that good old medieval idea of torturing prisoners that has become so common today. Not of course that any of our own dear boys ever murder or torture anybody willingly. It's always in self-defence or by some earlier and less understanding

government. What's the use of digging up the past old boy and raking up Cromwell when we ought to let bygones be bygones? And then there are all those ex-gunmen now quite respectable who murdered the other side in their beds on Bloody Sunday, and are now all very civil servants in Dublin. And these nice New Zealanders who don't take many prisoners even if they do fall for that fellow-blond stuff. And all those pleasant-spoken Air-crews including the boys who bombed Sousse just to oblige me and the BBC. If that's not murder what is? I suppose the same thing goes for me too – accomplice anyhow accessory before and after the fact. Oh there won't be much shaking hands after all this if we don't shake hands with murderers.

Yet God knows, what chance have nations got to understand each other with all those diplomats and newspapers acting as the go-betweens? If a few solicitors can make complete strangers out of two people who once loved each other, what chance in hell has an Englishman got of understanding a German? We regret the tone of your letter to our client and we feel sure that on maturer consideration...oh this is where I came in. Yaes ofereode! What's that other one about that I used to say?

To defy Power that seems omnipotent  
To Love and (what?) – and Hope till Hope (what?)  
To Love and...

That unmentionable Anglo-Saxon verb conveys the loveliest experience in life, and I hope it will be a long time before I tire of it. I shall never be a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. God preserve in me Desire, and Love – the fruit of Desire.

To Love and bear and Hope till Hope creates  
From its own ruin the thing it contemplates  
Neither to change nor...

This 'Now' is an illusion. The physical existence of the past is what we must cling to like the resurrection of the body – I mean, instead of the resurrection of the body – a ridiculous idea...But what about the physical existence of the Future?...my violent death maybe...but not in this war so long as I don't carry arms... it's all in the bag...or is it?...

Neither to change...nor falter...nor...(what?)  
...nor repent.  
This like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
Good, great and...joyous...

Count sheep maybe. One – two – three – four – hello dear – six – seven – eight...

...that oblong is the window over there. What was I saying? Oh yes something about five seconds a mile. They went out to Brigade or somewhere, a long cold walk for nothing I'll be bound. It's quiet now not even a footfall in the street and it's getting light too. That's why I can see the window. I must have been asleep for quite a while. I went asleep counting sheep didn't I? It was five seconds a mile and if the sound of the gun came four seconds before the burst of the shell it meant...that the sound of the gun took four seconds...No GODDAMMIT of course I see it now. It takes the morning light before we can see what is perfectly obvious. God damn me for a halfwit!

I fling off the bedclothes and stride down the passage to the other room, where I point an accusing finger at two shapes dropping off to sleep.

– You pair of twots, I knew there was an answer to it! The sound of the gun has to get here too. Five seconds is only the difference between the time the sound of the gun takes to get here, and the time the shell takes to get here. The bloody thing might be firing from miles away!

Slamming the door, I go back to bed for another inadequate three-quarters of an hour, hoping that I have left them as wide awake as I am myself.

\* \* \*

The population is re-emerging as we record the Mayor in the Square. They spit spectacularly at a Fascist tapestry from the purlieu of the Town Hall, which is presented to me; for nobody, of course, has ever had the slightest connection with Mussolini or his works. In fact, from what we are told, the entire town must have spent the greater part of the past twenty years in jail, because of its unrelenting, subversive, democratic activities. Amongst the crowd is the blonde we saw before – always standing in the fore-front but never speaking to anybody.

I explain to the Mayor that all I want from him is about a minute and a half – you know the sort of thing – Italian Mayor speaking to his liberated townsfolk – followed by joy and enthusiasm of townsfolk. He will be glad to oblige. The enthusiasm of the crowd is the one thing that seems certain about this recording. Now remember, Mayor, only a minute and a half.

At the end of three minutes of impassioned oratory, my signals having failed to make any impression, I tell the Professor to lift. This at least stops the recording; but by now there is no possibility of stopping the Mayor, or even of getting near him. A growing company of anti-Fascist martyrs surrounds both Mayor and microphone, applauding at appropriate moments and re-echoing his most passionate sentiments in equally passionate responses. He has, in fact, long disappeared from sight, though not by any means from earshot. There is nothing we can do, so we light up our cigarettes and settle down for a quiet smoke and gossip in the truck.

After about ten minutes, an Air Force Officer appears and accosts us.

– What’s going on here?

– The Mayor’s making a speech.

– What for?

– Well, at the start it was for the BBC.

– Who authorised this?

– I authorised it. But not so much of it.

– He’s got no business to be making speeches without authority from AMGOT.

– AMGOT isn’t here yet.

– Yes it is. I’m AMGOT.

– Really? Well, I’m very glad to meet you. We’ve been looking for you since the day before yesterday. Now that you’re here, how about doing a recording for us yourself? All about how a town is taken over, and so on.

– Later, maybe. Meanwhile, we’ll have to stop this fellow. We’ve been looking up his record and we’re going to arrest him.

– Well, please arrest him as soon as possible. It’s the only way we’ll ever get back our microphone.

He breasted his way through the crowd like a swimmer in a stormy sea; and after a time the voice that breathed o’er Eden was stilled.

– You’d better take this stuff back, I said to the Professor. I don’t know what the Mayor said, but I’m sure the sentiments were impeccable. Anyhow, try it on the Censors.

The Professor waved a hand, and presently he was hooting his way out of town, back towards the Sangro bridges. How he got over them I do not know, because when Mike and Mac and Cliff Webb appeared, they reported that the river was rising and that

most of the bridges were already down. We settled down to lunch in our old restaurant, and prepared to quiz the mysterious blonde, who was still there.

– You are a spy, of course? began Cliff Webb.

– Non capisco.

– A beautiful one, nevertheless, I interposed.

– She looks a bit shopsoiled to me.

– I never saw a more obvious Tedesco Tart, said someone else.

– Easy there; she probably understands what you're saying.

– Well, if she understands it she's certainly a spy. She pretends she can't speak English.

– Why does she keep on saying Nix if she's not a Tedesco? That's not Italian.

But she sticks to her guns. She knows no English. She knows no German. If, in fact, she can understand some of the things that are said to her in both languages, she shows remarkable sang-froid. At length I get her to myself, and with the aid of a dictionary and a piece of paper, we set to work on her story.

#### COME VIRINI VOI LANCIANO?

Her name is Iola Tua of Tetti Faule, Carignano, outside Turin. A postcard is produced showing this fine old family mansion in the foothills of the Alps. To this quiet home come Jim and Joe – two escaped British prisoners from a nearby camp. Will anybody conceal them? Why of course they will. She does not know Joe's other name, but produces a photograph of St. Paul's Cathedral and says that he lives near there. Jim comes from somewhere on the north-east coast – if I have a map of England she will point the place out as he did to her – and he has written his other name on a piece of paper: MADGWICK. Then from the lining of her coat she cuts another scrap of paper on which is English writing:

I am well in a Italian...(illegible)

Letter follows. Love. J. Camp 66. 3400.

A coloured photograph of Jim is also produced, evidently taken in Cairo.

– What? Still talking to the Wehrmacht Whore! remarks the *Daily Herald* from the door. You don't have to go to all that trouble.

– Go away, I said. Even if it's a lie I like it.

After hiding for about two months in her home, word comes that the local Fascisti are on the trail of Jim and Joe. So it is decided that they must leave at once and try to reach our lines in the south. Neither of them can speak Italian, so Iola volunteers to go with them to act as guide and cover. They leave a note behind with her Mother, saying how well they have been treated – a note that Mother is to show to the British when the Allies arrive at last – and the party sets off for Pescara, disguised in civilian clothes.

All goes well until they reach the railway station at Rimini, where a German Interpreter becomes suspicious and demands to see their Identity Cards. And so Jim and Joe are in the bag again. And Iola would have been in the bag too, but for the intervention of the Italian Interpreter, who convinces his colleague that Iola has nothing to do with the two men (although he knows damn well that she has). So Iola carries on, cadging lifts on German trucks, and eventually she reaches Pescara. ('Iola niente stoopid.') Then walking by Ortona and Guadiagrelì she passes right through the battlefield and arrives in Lanciano, with the scar of a bomb splinter on her forehead.

Why did we take so long? Why did we not sweep north swiftly, as they had expected?

– Oh, Sangro! Sempre Sangro! Sangro! Sangro!

– Now what?

Laboriously she spells out:

I TO WISH TO SPEAK TO THE FAMILY FOR RADIO AND SPEAK  
HOW MUCH I TO WRITE DARLING MOTHER, I TO BE IOLA AND  
TO SALUTE FOR MEANS THE RADIO INGLESE, YES O NO? YOU TO  
BELIEVE HOW MUCH I NARRATION PRESONER INGLESE? IOLA  
NOT LIAR. IOLA BEFORE INGLESE ENEMY ITALIA ALWAYS LOVE  
INGLESE. YOU TO BE MUCH GOOD. IOLA NOT HAAPS TO BE  
ITALIA. IOLA HAAPS TO BE ALWAYS INGLESE.

COMANDO INGLESE TO THINK IOLA A LIAR. IOLA TO GO TO  
TURIN AND TO CARRY LETTER TO WRITTEN PRISONER INGLESÌ  
BEFORE LEAVING WITH I. I TO BE SAD ALONE FAR FAMILY.

I TO WISH TO BE FRIEND YOU: NOT TO THINK BADLY SIMILE  
CAMERATA. YOU TO TEACH I INGLESE? PLEASE TO WRITE YOUR  
THOUGHT NOT HAAPY TO DO TO READ CAMERATA HAVE YOU  
UNDERSTAND?

And as she writes, her blonde head bent over the table, the feeling grows in me that I must touch it. She is pretty, despite all that she



has been through, and she wants me to be her Camerata – to teach her Inglese – not to think badly. If I play my cards well I dare say I can have this woman. Maybe she is a spy, left behind by the Wehrmacht. Anybody could have a few snapshots and notes from British prisoners. And why didn't she turn back home again when the men were recaptured? She wants something from me that I could do for her, so why shouldn't she do something for me in return? All the better if she is a spy. That's what she's here for, and what harm so long as we know?

– Mi rincreshay. Niente radio machina. Capire? Domani machina ritorno.

YOU SPEAK COMANDO INGLESE. IOLA TO WISH TO STAY FRONTE. IOLA NOT HAAPY BARI NAPOLI.

– Si, si. Io parla Comando Inglese. Voi mangiare here domani?

– Buon giorno, signora. Va ben'.

Why does she want to stay here, and not go up to Bari with the refugee trucks? On the other hand, surely her story isn't quite slick enough to be phoney? If she was going to invent it all, surely she would have invented a smoother one – and have better proofs of it than those few dirty slips of paper? The Security boys laugh when I mention her. Yes, they have already had several sessions with Iola, and they still don't know whether she is all right or not. She says she wants to stay and work for the Army: but she appears to have no qualifications for any work of any kind. Can't speak English; can't cook; can't nurse. And as for the other accomplishment that we would all like to know about – the Security boys are not even certain about that. 'No,' they say; 'she'll just have to go up to Bari with the others.'

\* \* \*

Next morning we are definitely cut off. The Sangro has risen ten feet and swept away all the bridges.

AMGOT is now hard at work – rounding up refugees, tracking down civilian doctors for service in the local hospitals, finding out what has happened to the water supply, and how badly the Power House has been damaged. The streets are cleaned a little, and the civil police are reconstituted. The first case of reported theft is of the Town Major's chickens. He does not explain where he got them himself. The place is still being shelled nearly every night, and the bulk of the population of 23,000 people still sleeps under

the Cathedral. Prominent in the streets is a British ex-sergeant with false papers who has lived here for many months as a deaf and dumb half-wit under the pseudonym of Ugo Morone. It's the ear – not the mouth, he says – that betrays you. When a bomb or a shell comes along, you must be the last – not the first – to notice it and to dive for shelter. He did his 'bomb act' for us. He was supposed to have lost his faculties through air bombing; and so pathetic was his story, and so realistic his performance, that one sympathetic German is alleged to have burst into tears.

– The poor old Gerries, he says. They're not bad sorts. Of course, when I say that, what I really mean is, F— 'em all!

As I sit with Iola in her hotel wondering what is going to be the end of it all, the voice of destiny comes through, in the shape of a message that one of the Sangro bridges had been restored and that the Irish Brigade is pulling out that very afternoon.

Yes, God preserve in me Desire! But not too much. I know that I am a mug. When a man wants love there is only one way to get it, and that is to take it. And you never know where you can get it till you try. But in the very words that I write down for her, I know that I know that it is no good. I'm not going to try, because I can't. She is no spy, and if I were to play my cards, I might win the game, and that wouldn't be any fun.

Oh, Iola! What a pity!

– Se voi abbandone Lanciano avanti io rimette voi scrive?

I am going away with fair words as to the future. But there is no future for me with Iola for reasons that I cannot express, except that it would only be a parody.

If she was a spy or a whore it would be all right. One can buy love for money and not be any the worse for it. But there are other things that can make it too expensive.

– Denaro?

She professes to be offended by this last question. She is not destitute. She has quite enough money to get along with. So, taking her hand, I rise and bid Iola farewell. And following the wake of a blaspheming Brigadier, who is cutting a swathe through a one-way circuit, I recross the Sangro with the Irish Brigade, and come once more to Vasto.

\* \* \*

I am always amused and not a little encouraged by the elaborate interplay of the Great. At Tac Army—where I brought our

Editor-in-Chief and Frank Gillard to meet Montgomery – the game was at its best, the question being, Who was going to have to wait for whom? Arriving about five minutes after the appointed time, we were told that the Army Commander was not yet back from his daily trip to the front, and would we please wait. Fifteen-love to the Army Commander. But we would not wait. We would go for a little trip ourselves and come back later. On the way out we passed Monty driving in, and in my simple-minded way I was for turning round at once and going back. But the BBC knew a trick worth two of that. We went for our little trip and returned in about fifteen minutes. Thirty-fifteen to the Editor-in-Chief. But, of course, in the end the set was won by Monty. Having got us back, he still kept Haley waiting for another twenty minutes. In such ways the Upper Levels put each other in their respective places – and all in the best of spirits, for the tea party that followed was a most amicable affair. And it soon got down to the real business of the afternoon, which was the matter of my transport.

Now that I know my way around, all that I need to solve any other troubles in my own way is a private jeep. A jeep of my own! What music is in that expression! What an intoxicating vista of freedom it conjures up! No more cadging of lifts – no more sitting sideways on those bloody batteries while the Professor plays Rachmaninoff's Prelude on the pedals. With a jeep of my own I could short-circuit all the elaborate arrangements of Public Relations which are supposed to help us, but which are really intended to control us.

And what better topic could the Editor-in-Chief discuss over tea with the Army Commander than the needs of the BBC with the Eighth Army? And in what simpler format could those needs be expressed than in terms of One Small Jeep?

– Of course, said Monty over the sweet biscuits. Go to the Chief of Staff and get a jeep.

– A good start, I said, after we had come away. Thank you both very much. But I don't suppose I ought really to go to the Chief of Staff? Or should I?

– Of course you should. This business has been started on a high level. Keep it there.

A little dizzy at this Napoleonic acceptance of my thesis, that very afternoon I beat on the door of General de Guingand's caravan. De Guingand, like Bill Williams, was one of Monty's

brains trust, and was credited with having invented an amusing gloss on the technique of sabotage. He had given directions that whenever our men cut the enemy telephone wires behind the German lines, they should not leave them severed, but join them up again with the wrong wires. This not only caused confusion in German communications, but made it difficult to find out where the damage had been done, without tracing the lines foot by foot from source to destination. It seemed unlikely that so brilliant a mind would have much time to concern itself with jeeps, but having started this thing off, I was going to see it through.

– Who’s there? asked the General.

– The BBC, sir. The Army Commander says I’m to have a jeep. I got ready to duck.

– Oh yes. He’s been ringing me up about that. Go down to the Headquarters Motor Pool and see the officer in charge. He knows all about it.

Well, I must say you’ve got to hand it to Monty. In a world of bullshit and easy promise, it is quite staggering to find one person who actually means what he says, and does something about it. Monty *had* rung him up.

– Give the man a jeep. That’s an order.

Down at the motor pool, with the officer in charge, I inspected a brand new vehicle sitting in the park.

– Where is this jeep going to? he asked.

– It’s not going anywhere. I shall be staying with the Army, and the jeep will be staying with me.

– But I thought that Public Relations had got vehicles of their own?

– So they have. But not for me, it seems.

– Oh well, if the Army Commander says you’re to have a jeep, that’s all there is to it. But I’m damned if I know what strength to put it on. There you are – take it along.

– Thanks very much.

I got into My Beautiful, My Beautiful, and drove away, bowing to right and left as I went, with a hey and ho for the open road, and a you-know-what for the Trumpeter.

From now on I am definitely Monty’s man!

\* \* \*

Vaughan Thomas! My old friend, Vaughan, with a bright red face and a ridiculous beret, a dirty waterproof, and a wild zest for

life dancing in his eyes. Vaughan, fresh from home, with moustache bristling, two vehicles, and a pleasantly gloomy engineer called Wally Waldron, who lives in his recording truck, and is quite ready to make a nice cup of tea on the side, at any hour of the day or night. Truly, things are looking up at last.

– Vaughan, I said, as I packed my bag and stowed it away in the back of the jeep, I am going for a drive, and for the time being, I give you the Eighth Army.

– So soon? he asked. What’s happening up here that you’re in such a hurry away?

– At the moment we are engaged on an offensive. It is not at all clear what it is all about, since nobody in our High Command seems to want any more of Italy, and the Germans are definitely against it too. However, you have arrived with a fresh mind, and maybe you will be able to discover some object in it.

– Where can I see this offensive?

– Go up to a town called Lanciano and stay there for a night or two. You needn’t be in any hurry, because Monty’s estimate for the end of the war is the spring of the year after next. I shall be back here immediately after Christmas. Meanwhile, I give you the Eighth Army. I presume you have some Credo of War Reporting.

– What’s that?

– Oh come! Surely you are going to report the facts objectively and dispassionately, eschewing all propaganda and – and so on?

– I hadn’t thought of it. Should I?

– Never mind. Forget it. Go to Lanciano and ask for Mike Davis. He’ll tell you what to do, but don’t let him bring you anywhere himself. Oh, and by the way, look out for a blonde called Iola. Maybe you’ll have better luck, or better sense, than I had.

He was still enquiring about this when I drove away, taking the high road for Foggia and Naples.

## A PALACE IN CAMPANIA

## CHRISTMAS EVE.

The streets of Naples packed to overflowing – the Via Roma, the Corso Umberto, the Plaza Dante.

Truckloads of American boys sightseeing – drunks reeling on the sidewalks, jostling the local pimps, each with a soldier clutched firmly by the arm – You wanta nica girl?

Blackeyed, sluttish whores plying their trade outside the US Prophylactic Stations. Grandiose Italian Victory Medals on sale in the shops and in the postcard booths on the street corners – some of them commemorating unheard-of sea fights in Mare Nostrum. Others, more recent and more gimcrack, have been run off for our especial benefit, and bear the inscription: ‘Fall of Naples’. A couple of bob each.

Crowds swirl away in dust  
Faiths fail, and men forget.

Tattered posters bearing proud quotations from Mussolini still flap on some of the walls, and piles of litter lie in every corner – for the Germans are said to have taken away the garbage cans, ‘in order to encourage disease!’ If this is so, the garbage cans must be practically all that they have removed except themselves, for the shops are bursting with every kind of luxury – clothes, stockings, fine art, silver, jewellery, and a mass of trinkets for sale at prices that have far outstripped the fourfold under-valuation of the Lira, decreed by AMGOT. How truly Georg Sigherman described it.

In the midst of this roaring Fiesta of avarice – this fawning racket echoing up towards the hills once loved by Virgil and Tiberius – a few proud and tight-lipped Italians walk with cold, unseeing eyes.

The Villa Ruffo at Posilipo houses the British War Correspondents accredited to the Fifth Army. It is the palace of some local

princess and is perched gloriously on the hillside opposite Vesuvius. It is a place of great splendour and of considerable natural beauty, with its wide terrace, overlooking the bay, its elaborate furnishings, its shining glass and cutlery, its polished tables, its bathrooms, its white-coated orderlies, its multi-coursed dinners and its vats of vino. A tapestried dugout, if ever there was one!

And in the midst of these gay scenes sits the Trumpeter from Algiers – who has not been of much assistance to me in the course of my profession. And as I contemplate him quietly over the soup – his jolly red face, flushed with sociability and feminine attention – I decide that I do not like him, and that one of these days, with God's assistance, I shall kick that Trumpeter on his bugle.

There are one or two more of us present, as guests from Dysentery Hall, and at our corner of the table there is a tendency to argue about the merits of this set-up.

– Who would think there was a war on?

– Well, it's nice to get away from it all.

– But these fellows live here all the time, and when you compare it with Vasto...!

– Well, you can't blame people for making themselves as comfortable as possible.

– But why should they have all this, while we get treated like so many poor relations?

– Oh, I think it's a mistake for us to romanticise ourselves too much. Maybe they have the amenities, but we have the interesting front. Would you exchange the Eighth Army for the Fifth?

– No, I'm damned if I would. Not even for the Villa Ruffo.

– Then what the hell? You've got to expect that the chaps nearest home get the first rake-off. It's a sort of compensation for the bores and twirps they have to live amongst. I wouldn't take it at any price.

– Anyhow, we can be sure, as we sit in Vasto, that none of these chaps is intriguing for our jobs behind our backs.

The conversation ended in an explosion of cynical laughter. God, the Side of the Eighth Army! No wonder we are not popular.

After dinner, clustering round the bar at one end of the dancing floor, the talk turned to a comparison of our various employers, and with a number of incomprehensible Use Messages in my hand, I ventured the opinion that mine must be unusually odd in its handling of War Correspondents. I can understand their habit of

reporting despatches as UNUSED when I have already heard them coming back on the air, but what really baffles me are these service instructions that either tell me to do something that I have already done, or to stop doing things that I am not doing.

I was expounding a theory that possibly they are not at all clear who any of us are, when Roddy McDonald demurred, and took up the cudgels on their behalf.

– In a big organisation like yours, he said, it must be hard for your bosses at home to remember that they are dealing with real people.

– That’s quite a profound remark, I said. I suppose we aren’t people at all. We’re flags on a map – names on lists, perpetually quarrelling amongst ourselves over issues that nobody knows the rights and wrongs of. We’re half-mythical filers of Expense Accounts that nobody is in a position to check. Just so many confused voices shouting from the far end of a pipe.

– I doubt if the BBC is peculiar in that, said Roddy. Nobody really believes in his heart that anybody has a real existence except himself. It’s the cause of most of the cruelty in the world. People aren’t usually cruel to real people whose reactions can upset them.

– It also accounts for the surprise we always get when we meet the enemy in the flesh. He never squares up to the symbol, does he? Because we haven’t been regarding him as real.

– I have noticed before that you seem to be a little confused as to what this war is all about. Am I right?

– Perfectly right. I do my best, and from time to time I imagine that I know. But then something always turns up to contradict me.

– What sort of thing?

– I made a speech to a Priest the other day in which I outlined my discoveries on the difference between the two sides. I pointed out Churchill’s readiness to respect other people’s rights even when it didn’t suit him, and I compared this with Hitler’s habit of trampling on everybody when it did suit him. But since then I have remembered a Major who was in the ‘Highland Brigade’. He had been in France in the spring of 1940, and by mistake he had opened some sealed orders before the proper time. They turned out to be orders for an invasion of the Low Countries, which had never come to anything, because Hitler went in first! If that’s true, it’s funny, when you consider how we laughed at



Goebbels for trying to excuse the German invasion on the grounds that it was intended to forestall the Allies.

– Well, there's many a true word spoken by mistake, I suppose – even by Dr Goebbels. But since we're on the subject, I'll tell you what I think this war is really about. I have given the matter a lot of thought.

– I would be very glad to know.

– My theory is this: that most countries have got into it entirely by mistake, and then have to stop in it to fight for their bloody lives. What is really at the back of it is an entirely different war, between Russia and the United States, which is being fought by the Germans, paid for by England, and the other countries providing the playing field. I worked this theory out long before either Russia or America were in it, and I haven't had any reason to change it even though they do happen to be on the same side.

– Thanks, Roddy, I said after a long pause. You certainly have got a knack of making a fog even thicker! Have another drink.

\* \* \*

It was a pleasure to meet my friend Mr Constantinescu once again in Naples, and to find that he is still doing all right. Although reticent about the exact nature of his job, he has obviously got an official position, since he has changed his name and has been fitted out with a uniform that associates him with the invading Moguls rather than with the general ruck of the population.

Over some very expensive cocktails in one of the Service Clubs, we looked out on the Neapolitans milling by in the street.

– Look at them, I said. There they go in their hundreds, and not one of them was ever a Fascist!

I was hoping in an indirect way to embarrass Mr Constantinescu. But I need not have tried.

– I hope you are not sneering at them for that, he said with some earnestness. The spectacle of the Man-in-the-Street being bullied by one political creed after another ought to make us feel sympathetic – not superior.

– Even if we happen to have a few principles of our own?

– All principles are the same, my friend. When we get down to fundamentals, everyone wants peace and a good life. The only real issue in politics is the question of who is to rob whom? Naturally all the candidates for this privilege become indignant at the lack of political conviction on the part of people who will be

robbed anyway. But I cannot see why ordinary peace-loving people should be expected to martyr themselves in order to keep politicians in countenance or in office. No. I think that their comment is a very good one. They say Yes to whoever is in a position to bully them, and they throw him over quite happily as soon as he is no longer in that position. In my opinion they are quite right.

– That’s just an apology for blatant self-interest. You can’t get away from the fact that there’s something pretty cheap about all these countries that are entering the war now that they are certain who’s going to win.

– Ah, my friend, if it only were self-interest that inspires them! The real tragedy is that so few of the nations have acted in this war from genuine motives of self-interest. If they had done so they would have remembered that the real – the historic purpose of war is to break your opponent’s will to resist at the least cost to yourself.

– Well, isn’t that what we’re all trying to do? I asked.

– Not at all. To the majority of people in control, this war is not a matter of considered objectives at all. It is a Ritual Murder – a Jewish idea, he added with a slight smile of enjoyment. You will surely have noticed to what lengths these leaders will go in order to ensure that everybody goes on fighting till the last.

– I don’t follow you.

– Well, take Hitler for example. Consider how furious he is at any proposal for a peace that might save Germany from complete destruction. He is not concerned with Germany’s self-interest. He is determined that blood shall be spilt to atone for something or other – I do not know exactly what – in the past.

– Yes, maybe so. But then, he’s crazy.

– But many of the Allied rulers are the same. You must be aware of the grave fear in certain quarters that the Germans may surrender before the Allies have had a chance to wipe them out. We do not want peace on terms, even if satisfactory to ourselves. We desire a ritual murder. We agree with Hitler in this.

He nodded his head and smiled.

– Mr Constantinescu, I began.

– Mr Allardyce, he gently interposed.

– Mr Allardyce, you seem to be amused by this monstrous state of affairs.

– No, he said with a shake of his head. I am at heart a sentimentalist. That is why I am doing my present work, which is calculated to shorten the war – although to be quite frank, this is

not in my own personal interest. If my advice in matters of propaganda to the enemy were carried out whole-heartedly, I have no doubt that the war would end quite soon, on terms that would give the Allies everything they really want – or at any rate the means to get it. I admit that this might be embarrassing to me personally, but I do not allow that fact to influence the advice that I give. I do what I can with scrupulous honesty. Is it my fault if others in high places insist on benefiting me by defeating the work that I do on their behalf?

He sighed, and his handsome olive eyes filled with a deeper sadness, as he produced a small pile of pamphlets.

– Here are some of the papers that are directed by each side to the troops of the other. They will show you what I mean.

He held up a torn coloured picture of a screaming woman. It bore the caption:

### LONDON ‘BLITZED’ AGAIN!

Then followed another pamphlet showing a mass of hills with gaping jaws, eating up handfuls of British and American soldiery.

### THE MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS OF ‘SUNNY ITALY’ WANT TO SEE YOU...

– We all know that Dr Goebbels, like Hitler, is an advocate of the blood bath. You see how his propaganda to the Allied troops is calculated to make them fight more violently. He draws their attention to the fact that their wives and families are being slaughtered at home, and he taunts them with the suggestion that they are afraid of what lurks in the Italian landscape.

– Do you really think that’s the idea behind them?

– Dr Goebbels is no fool. We must assume that he knows the effect he is after.

– Nasty little liar!

– Not at all. These papers at least are truthful. We must admit that. Women and children in England are being blitzed by the Luftwaffe. And I am sure you will agree that the mountains of Italy are not a health resort. No, if you are interested in purposeful misrepresentation, perhaps you will glance at this other document.

With an air of conscious pride he produced a ‘Safe Conduct’ bearing the flash of the Fifth Army.

– Now here we have quite a different approach. You see that it

offers an honourable and safe surrender to any German soldier who tries to make use of it. What a bait to the tired fighting man who is suffering under shell-fire! And on the back you will see that it sets forth all the privileges and pleasures of being a prisoner. Yet we all know that any German who tries to make use of it – if he survives the passage through our lines – will certainly be pillaged by the Fifth Army, and will probably find himself employed on slave labour for many years after the war is over. But consider what might be done to end the war to the Allied advantage if the same sort of approach were made to Germany as a whole!

– But it would not be honest. That was what happened at the end of the last war, and it only encouraged a myth that Germany wasn't really defeated at all.

– Ah, my friend! What you call honesty is just the desire for the blood bath. Whatever happens, people will always find excuses for being beaten – and nobody is more skilful at this than the Englishman, who is never beaten fairly, even in sport.

– That is an exceedingly offensive remark, besides being untrue. Englishmen are frequently beaten at sport.

– Forgive me, my friend. Sometimes my tongue runs away with me when I am feeling impatient. I do not like to see my work being defeated by stupid people who sacrifice their own flesh and blood for the pleasure of being spiteful. How else can we describe these demands for Unconditional Surrender, coupled with pronouncements on what is going to be done to all the enemy leaders as soon as the war is over? What could be more irresponsible – more contrary to self-interest and common sense? But perhaps I am wronging your Lord Vansittarts. Maybe they are wiser than we think. Perhaps they realise that whatever may happen to England in the future, the one thing she cannot survive is another Victory. Who knows – they may be wise in trying to postpone it.

– Mr. Allardyce, I said with some heat, you have an annoying way of always confusing me. I don't agree with a word you say, but I gather from your uniform that you're now quite satisfied who is going to win. That, at least, is clear.

He blushed with genuine pleasure.

– One must always pay one's tribute to success. At the same time I take off my hat to you, sir. I freely admit that you guessed right before I did.

That definitely ended the conversation!

## THE SONGS OF SAMNIUM

## MORNING SITREP

To the Commanding General at  
 X Corps (He needs a bowler hat)  
 SITREP at 0600A  
 (Or somewhat later in the day)  
 Throughout the day the whole Div front  
 Was quiet, save for one small stunt  
 Laid on by Brigadier B. Strong  
 To get himself another gong.  
 A company disguised as sheep  
 Were organised, and told to creep  
 Up through the bushes, and surround  
 A certain feature on the ground  
 In which there was supposed to be  
 A party of the enemy.  
 Suspicions of the Boche were roused  
 By watching how the Major browsed.  
 This gallant man, though skilled in war,  
 Had never eaten grass before.  
 In trying hard to chew the cud  
 He choked his dentures up with mud  
 And uttered words of foul abuse  
 No self-respecting sheep would use.  
 Whereat (or whereupon) the Hun  
 Reached for his automatic gun  
 And suiting his action to the word  
 He opened up upon the herd.

Patrols were sent to get in touch  
 With units of the Fighting Dutch  
 Who hold positions on our flank  
 Dug in along the Wadi bank.  
 But when they reached the Dutchmen's wire  
 The Fighting Dutchmen opened fire.

The Erkshires, not a bit dismayed,  
Replied with rifle and grenade,  
Revolver, Bren and Tommy gun,  
Until the post was overrun.  
The Dutchmen fighting strongly back  
Then launched a Company attack  
With mortar and with tank support  
Which brought the Erkshire men up short.

The Germans, not to be outdone,  
Then opened fire with every gun  
And decimated friend and foe.  
(Could one describe the parties so?)  
Both sides by now, one must admit,  
Had lost their tempers quite a bit.  
It needed all the General's tact  
To get them to accept the fact  
That somehow they'd been led to make  
A most regrettable mistake.  
The casualties are moderate,  
The total count is 68,  
Of which it may be truly said  
That 42 of them are dead.

LEFT SECTOR 92 Brigade  
(This information was delayed)  
The enemy attacked in force  
And were repulsed with loss (of course).  
All our positions are intact.  
(I will not guarantee the fact.  
The Brigadier and Staff, forsooth,  
Are not addicted to the truth.)

Patrols were whistled out to find  
If any of the tracks were mined.  
The information is – they were!  
The casualties are quite severe.  
It seems that by an oversight  
Those were the mines we laid last night.  
But as we lost the minefield trace  
And no one could recall the place  
It was impossible, I fear,  
To warn in time the Brigadier.  
But now, at any rate, we know  
Some of the places NOT to go.

The gunners (if I am not rude),  
With singular ineptitude,  
Arranged a Stonk on RATION FARM  
But did it very little harm.  
It would have been a great success,  
At least so far as I can guess,  
If only the co-ordinate  
Had been five three and not five eight.  
But as it was, the barrage fell  
Upon our right hand FDL.  
I fear the Lincolnshire Dragoons  
Have lost a couple of platoons.  
The Duke of Clarence's Hussars,  
Abandoning their armoured cars  
With every sign of abject fear,  
Have legged it madly to the rear.  
The Rozzers at the Stragglers' Post  
Have carefully collected most.  
The Brigadier has been removed  
Until his temper has improved.

A troop of tanks was in support  
Of each Brigade (or so we thought)  
Until it suddenly transpired  
That yesterday – becoming tired –  
The crews decided to withdraw  
For several thousand yards or more  
And occupy an empty farm.  
There, free from danger and alarm,  
They fortified themselves with tea  
And generally made Whoopee.  
They were, unhappily for them,  
Discovered by the APM.  
And now they're all in durance vile  
Awaiting their impending trial.

The Air Force had a gala day  
Engaging targets all the way  
From ANZIO to CAMPO LANE,  
Down REGENT STREET and back again.  
They dropped a dollop of HE  
Upon the Erkshires' RAP,  
And some incendiaries as well  
And bags of anti-personnel.  
They straffed the AAPIU,

The JAG at GHQ,  
They also hit the LAD,  
The CCS, the ASC,  
The FDS, the FSU.  
They got the RASC too.  
They killed the RAVC vet.  
They slaughtered half the alphabet.  
They smashed the General's caravan,  
They killed the Sanitary man.  
And then, with sacrilege intent,  
They burnt the Senior Chaplain's tent.  
The officers' outdoor latrines  
Were simply smashed to smithereens.  
And finally they set on fire  
The Div. reserve of dannaaert wire.

The Ops Room (Air) was of the view  
That this catastrophe was due  
To some small measure of neglect,  
Perhaps not easy to detect,  
In briefing, or in marking maps.  
In any case, these small mishaps  
Are likely to occur in war.  
The wonder is, there are not more.  
Investigations late last night  
Have shed a little further light.  
Some soldiers, coming off the ships  
Displayed their recognition strips,  
Which is, of course, the usual sign  
To indicate our own front line.  
This caused the birdmen to assume  
With quite unnecessary gloom  
That we had suffered some defeat,  
And were, in fact, in full retreat,  
And waiting only for the dark,  
Were all prepared to re-embark.  
Which shows how careful one must be  
Displaying haberdashery.

THE SITUATION IS, IN SHORT,  
UNCHANGED, WITH NOTHING TO REPORT.

\* \* \*

Back at Vasto, I found Vaughan poring over this document which he said had been given to him by Bryant, the Intelligence Officer of the Indian Division.



– I asked if I might see a Sitrep, so as to get a general idea of what was going on, and this is what I was handed.

– A masterly summing-up. I wonder who the author is. We must go back to the Indian Division. Bryant always produces something good.

It appears that Vaughan has been having a tremendous time in my absence. Meeting Mike Davis in Lanciano, he was waved down the road towards Orvieto and invited to look around for himself. He was not told, however, that the road led straight into the enemy lines and that one of those uncomfortable situations had arisen when everything was going to ground.

The shellfire seemed rather heavy along the Mad Mile, but they assumed that this sort of thing was usual. Sitting outside some abandoned school buildings while Vaughan searched for a headquarters, Wally's only comment on the various shells that went whistling by was:

– Here's a rum do.

What finally convinced them that conditions were not all that they should be was the demeanour of the band of the Royal Artillery which arrived in the main square of Lanciano with the expressed intention of 'playing its comrades into action'.

A band! Here was something eminently recordable. And at what o'clock were they going to play their comrades into action? In about an hour's time. Splendid! Vaughan and Wally would be there, with cable uncoiled and microphone warmed up.

About an hour later the two of them went back, only to find one solitary bandsman busily packing up his trombone.

– Hello, said Vaughan. What's going on?

The reply was a little incoherent, but it was something about the town being under shellfire.

– Where's the rest of the band?

– At the other end of town, getting into the lorries.

– But, excuse me, aren't you going to play your comrades into action?

– Bugger my comrades, replied the trombonist, as he vanished swiftly up the street.

We drove around in my jeep, muffled against the stinging wind, and Vaughan told me how the Partisans had complained bitterly to the Royal West Kents in Casoli, that the Germans were going round the farms at night, grunting. Whenever an answering grunt was heard, the place was marked with chalk, and next morning a

party would call and collect the pig. On the snowclad face of the Majella opposite us, a battery had written the words:

### HAPPY CHRISTMAS FRITZ

with a carefully designed barrage. But Vaughan's favourite exhibit was a captured Order, signed by Capt Zanderwitz, OC 1st Battalion, 146th Grenadier Regiment:

From now on, latrines will be constructed within the strongpoints in such a way that a man attending to his natural needs will not expose to the enemy a white expanse of backside.

We sang as we drove – principally Irish songs with a sprinkling of Welsh.

In the county Tyrone, by the town of Dungannon  
Where many a rucktion meself had a han' in  
Bob Williamson lived, a weaver by trade,  
And we all of us thought him a stout Orange blade.  
Tooraloo toorallay  
We'll have no superstition round Portadown way!

We went to the Desert Air Force to hear all the alibis for the great Bari raid, when seventeen brightly-lit vessels were sunk, and an Ammo ship blew up, shattering half the glass in the town. A pretty SNAFU – to use the language of the Ops Room! And that afternoon Air Vice-Marshal Conyngham had given a conference to some touring Dominions Correspondents, in the course of which he had shot his usual 'we own this place' line.

– Gentlemen, he had said. There IS no Luftwaffe. If a German plane were to come within sight of Bari, I would regard it as a personal insult.

The boys had only just gone back to the Imperiali, and were busily typing out their messages, when in came the windows!

Everybody is highly diverted!

On the other hand, a deep gloom had been cast over the evening's OGPU (Organised General Piss-up) by the death of an ace pilot called Lance Wade – quite inadvertently in a landing crash.

– Such a nice, simple fellow, said Broadhurst to me. No nonsense about him. Just an honest-to-God straightforward chap with one simple idea – to kill Germans.

He shook his head mournfully, and we all joined in unison.

Outside, the north-east blizzard rose and drove the Adriatic up over the beaches and the landing strips and over half a dozen cantonments that lay along the shore.

In Derek's villa we enlivened the nights with readings from John Buchan's *Greenmantle* – a tight-lipped period piece – and the exploits of Young Bullivant (our best man – the niggers did unspeakable things to him) as read by Vaughan, would never leave a dry eye in the house.

We were well fed and housed there, and we didn't drink too badly either. But one night I thought that the time was ripe to raise this question of tea.

– Why is it, Derek, that excellent as your Mess is, we still have to have the well-known type of service tea, brewed in the same way as soup? Don't you think it would be possible for us to have a simple cup of tea like Mother used to make? Or would that be too much for Albert?

– Let's go and talk to him, said Derek.

In the kitchen, Albert professed to be perfectly well acquainted with all the mysteries of tea-making. The trouble was, he said, that he had no teapot. In the absence of a teapot, how else could he make tea, but in the same way as soup – in a saucepan? That seemed reasonable enough.

– Very well, said Derek. I shall get a teapot.

This was during that dismal period between Christmas and New Year when the rain continued to fall ceaselessly and almost horizontally. Just ahead of our advance lay a small seaport called Ortona, which the First Paratroop Division had decided to hold to the last, and the Canadians were having an extremely tough time, taking it apart street by street and house by house. We inspected it sometimes through our glasses without much enthusiasm.

– I never believed it before, remarked a very gloomy Canadian with a deep sense of drama. They're Supermen, sure enough. That's what we're up against – Supermen!

Somebody won a VC, and Derek reported that there were no teapots to be had in Vasto or the neighbourhood.

Then came the day when it began to look as though the taking apart of Ortona were coming to an end, and the last of the Supermen were pulling out. Vaughan said that he would like to go in with the Professor and the truck, and record his impressions of the place. That day I had a date with the Indians in a nasty little village called Villagrande, so we divided forces, and I promised to

come into Ortona when I had finished my work. Derek asked if he might borrow my jeep. As I was going in an Indian vehicle myself, I was glad to agree, and I watched him as he made his preparations. He got out his best hat, and his long blue belted greatcoat with the shiny buttons, and his fur-lined flying boots. He got out his new driver, Blondie, and together they gave the jeep a once-over, started it up, and vanished down the lane into the December drizzle.

Villagrande was an empty and desolate ruin in an indeterminate part of the front, with the enemy still lurking amongst the shattered tree stumps only a little way off. The hulk of a German tank was canted over on the outer fringe of the village, and as we wandered from house to house there came a squeak and a faint rumble from that direction. I looked across to see what it was. The tank turret was slowly swinging round.

– Christ! It's alive, I shouted, flinging myself on the ground behind a pile of rubble.

After a very nasty interval, I crawled over to investigate the wreckage and peered inside. It was only a hulk after all. Something had evidently upset the balance of the turret, already tilted over at an angle, and had caused it to move with the weight of the gun.

A ghost village – Villagrande – with a pocketful of scares.

As soon as I had seen enough, I entered Ortona to find out what was happening to Vaughan and the Professor. Later on, I was to see other places like Ortona, but at that time it was the first of a long succession of strongpoints that were to be taken against fanatical German resistance. Ortona was the beginning of total war on our front. Every house had been a fortress, every street was mined and booby-trapped, and wax-faced corpses were lying unburied on all sides. The Canadians in possession were badly shaken, and in the shambles of the principal square I found our Recording Truck parked alongside a knocked-out anti-tank gun. The Professor was standing by – very brisk, very bluff, very ready to get on with the job, so that the stuff wouldn't be late for the evening Don R from Vasto.

– I like this, he said. Just what suits me – a nice bit of action. Pity we can't have more of it. All the same we ought to catch the evening Despatch Rider at Vasto, oughtn't we?

From time to time a shell came wuffling over, and we all ducked behind the anti-tank gun. Vaughan – excessively interested in

everything about him – was having the time of his life, rounding up Canadians and interviewing them, and then doing the whole thing all over again so as to get it better. He had a small chair that had been taken from one of the nearby houses on which he sat while he rescripted his notes on the shield of the anti-tank gun. It never seemed to occur to him that anybody might be in the slightest hurry to leave Ortona.

– Now let's have a playback, he would say. I'm not sure that I oughtn't to scrap all this stuff and start again. What do you think?

– Really, Vaughan, I think you'd much better finish what you've got. I'm sure it's quite good enough. Then the truck can take it back.

Vaughan seemed a little disappointed, but did what I suggested. The gear was packed up, and the truck shot out of Ortona and down the home stretch with an alacrity that did it the greatest credit and which gave every indication that it would catch the evening Don R from Vasto. As we watched it go, I noticed a jeep parked on the far side of the square that seemed familiar; and a few minutes later, Derek emerged from the shambles of a block of flats, in the full glory of his blue double-breasted greatcoat. In his arms he was proudly carrying not merely a teapot, but an entire gilt and white teaset – cups, saucers, plates and sugar bowl. Blondie, who followed, had a large office typewriter.

– Hello, said Derek. See what I've got.

– Is this where you've come to look for a teapot?

– Yes, it's been most interesting. There's a Corporal in there who described the whole battle, showed how the Germans had tried to cut him off, but he shot them all down. In fact they're still lying at the bottom of the stairs. Would you like to come over and be introduced? I say, Blondie, do be careful with that thing. You nearly knocked against me.

– Look here, I said. There isn't a whole building in Ortona. You're not going to tell me you found that teaset here?

– Well, actually it was the Corporal who found it. I told him what I was looking for, and he pointed it out to me in the pantry. He's rather a nice chap. A Canadian.

– If I bring my typewriter back, can I keep it? asked Blondie. I want to type some letters home.

– So far as I'm concerned you may, said Derek. But I doubt if it works.

Blondie put the typewriter on the breech of the anti-tank gun and began to examine it. Then, pressing button 'A', he noted with some satisfaction that the machine was in full working order. So was the anti-tank gun. In fact, it must have been booby-trapped, for it went off with a shattering roar and blew down the side of a house opposite. Nobody was hurt, but Derek was very annoyed. It was careless of Blondie. It might easily have smashed his teaset.

So that night in the villa we had tea in a teapot, with cups and saucers and a sugar bowl to match.

\* \* \*

I went down to the local cinema in Vasto where Monty was delivering his farewell address to a representative gathering of the Eighth Army. We had previously recorded the nub of this address and sent it home, and he had bequeathed the manuscript to me with a look in his eye that clearly said that he hoped I realised what an historic document it was. The business of recording him followed what was now a set practice. After speaking his piece he listened to a playback. Then he recorded once more and listened again. The opinion of everybody was taken on the relative quality of both discs, and the better one was parcelled up by the Professor for despatch home in advance of the coming event. The other was retained by the General to be replayed to those Staff Officers who had not been fortunate enough to be present, and also to the Tac Army Sergeants' Mess. We had given him an electric turntable for this purpose, and I have no doubt that it was greatly appreciated, especially in the Sergeants' Mess.

In the cinema I got great pleasure from sitting in a stage box, facing the wrong way, so that I could study – not the departing Commander – but the faces in the lines of high-ranking officers as they listened to his lecture on 'How to Win Wars'. The polite and formal expressions on the faces of the Corps Commanders in the front row; the glassy smiles farther back; the frank and open boredom of the Air Vice-Marshal, who was not obliged to register any particular respect.

And Monty – talking away on the stage, having the time of his life. He was sorry to go, he said, and to take with him so many experienced officers. But duty called, and he was leaving the Army in the charge of a good soldier – a fighting soldier, who would maintain the traditions of the past. But before he went, he would

give them a few pointers – he would tell them how to win wars, so that they could continue to do their best, even without him.

He did not put it quite like that, but it is what he meant; and as I listened to him, I thought to myself, what a headache, what a bore, what a bounder he must be to those on roughly the same level in the service. And at the same time what a great man he is as a leader of troops, and how right he is to wear funny hats so that the soldiers along the roads will know their general and answer his friendly wave. Maybe he is not as great as he thinks he is, but by God there's no getting away from the fact that he out-foxed Rommel, and turned the men of the Desert Army from the shoulder-shrugging cynics they used to be into the confident, self-advertising crowd they are now.

Yes, I am definitely Monty's man, no matter how bored I have become with

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND  
GOOD HUNTING TO YOU ALL.

\* \* \*

I have often wondered how to report a military flop to everyone's satisfaction. Victories are easy, but I doubt if any way has yet been invented of coping with the opposite situation. Here is how the problem confronted me in mid-January. The Canadians on the coast were staging a limited offensive to break the deadlock north of Ortona. The principal part of this operation was entrusted to a newly arrived Infantry Brigade, unacquainted with the habits of German paratroops. They took a ridge on the first day, and reported the matter with whoops of joy. To my somewhat practised ear, it sounded like a ballsup from the start. But one can hardly say that in a Press despatch, so I did what I could in a very guarded cable, which was ignored by my employers in favour of the more optimistic views of somebody talking from Algiers.

The next day the Canadians were counter attacked and driven back to where they started from; at which moment, of course, the air was echoing with the happy trumpeting of their initial advance. (First source of annoyance.)

I then wrote another despatch correcting this mistake, and mentioning the fact that the Canadians had withdrawn, which

was put on the air the following morning. (Second source of annoyance.)

After they had looked up my files and found that I had rightly disbelieved them on the first day, they then queried my second statement that they had now withdrawn.

– This Division in the course of its entire battle history has never once withdrawn, one of the Gs, a very tough guy called Mervyn Sprung, explained to me.

I was sorry they had been annoyed, but this statement of Mervyn's appeared to me so remarkable that I had to look into it further.

– Forgive me, I said, indicating the map. But you see this ridge here, don't you?

– Yes, one of the Liaison Officers answered me, for the others had turned their backs.

– Am I right in believing that your chaps got on to it two days ago?

– Yes.

– And am I right in saying that the Germans are back on it now?

– Yes.

– Well, tell me, please – as a matter of interest – what exactly has happened, if you haven't withdrawn?

– It's this way: the Brigade that was up there was relieved by another Brigade, which regrouped in a somewhat different area.

– An area farther back?

– Actually, yes.

An explanation worthy of the Church. One never withdraws: one regroups in a different area. The garrison of Knightsbridge has assumed a mobile role. But I said nothing, because what's the good? I simply handed him a copy of the official *8th Army News* with a headline that read:

#### CANADIANS ADVANCING ON PESCARA.

– Can you blame them for getting a little confused at home? I asked. How are you going to regroup them back from there?

\* \* \*

A Major Verney arrived a few days in advance of the new Army Commander, and got us together to tell us all about him. A fine fighting soldier, with a heart of gold. Simple, yet interested in



everything around him. What was more – at Eton, he had been Keeper of the Mixed Wall. He was certain we would like him at once.

I got into trouble immediately over the matter of Passwords. Our villa was inside the perimeter of Main Army, and sentries started challenging me on my way home at night. I knew most of the sentries by sight, and they knew me; and in Monty's day if they had not known me and had seen me sneaking into Main after dark, they would probably have fired at me. Now, however, they wanted the Password.

– But I don't know the Password, I said. I live in here.

– I know, sir. I've seen you around. But you've got to have the Password. Those are my orders.

– Well, how do I find out the Password?

– I don't know, sir, I'm sure.

– I've got to get home to bed, haven't I?

– Yes, sir, I can see that.

– Well, what do you suggest?

– I don't know, sir. Unless...unless I was to tell you the Password.

– That's a brilliant idea. What is it?

He told me – and threw in the password of G Ops as well, just for good measure. So I went to bed.

At the first Press Conference with the Keeper of the Mixed Wall we shook hands all round, and he was really most friendly, and told us that he had rather not have any of this bombastic publicity. We quite understood...in fact we were delighted, and went away at once about our business. But a week or two later David Henneker – who by now had taken Bill Warrener's place as head PRO – came to me and broached the matter of giving the newcomer a little publicity after all. It was felt in certain quarters that perhaps he had been misunderstood – that perhaps it might be a good idea for the Army to hear something about him, or at any rate to know who he was. Had I any suggestions?

My suggestion was that I would do a description of a day in the life of the Army Commander – how he went out amongst the troops, and visited the forward positions – a gay smile here, a word of encouragement there – the personal touch, you know. And the men's reactions to this popular figure in whose hands the destinies of all lay secure. And then in the evening – perhaps a brief account of him poring over his battle plans into the small hours – answering

correspondence, seeing to all those thousand and one details that must always be at the finger-tips of every leader of men.

David thought it was a good idea, but it must all be quite spontaneous and unrehearsed, of course. I must not approach the Keeper personally, or even make him aware of my presence. I would just drive quietly along behind him in my jeep. And of course, I would submit the script to Ulick Verney afterwards for his advice and approval. It was so important, as Ulick said, to create the right impression.

The selected day came, and I brought Tony Beckwith along with me. Emerging from a side road near Tac Army, the Keeper took a good look around to see that we were there, and then set forth on his way to the front. He was preceded by a jeep containing two Military Policemen, who signalled the other traffic out of the way, and led us (to our great satisfaction) in the wrong direction over all the one-way bridges and around the traffic circuits. The Keeper followed, driving himself in the big open touring car that had belonged to Monty. With one hand he waved continuously to the groups of not-very-interested soldiery who happened to be about.

— Who was that, pray? was one phrase that I overheard being passed with exaggerated politeness down a line of exceedingly dirty Sappers.

Behind the Keeper came another jeep filled with boxes of cigarettes and minor toilet requisites that arrive in great quantities from people at home addressed to the Army Commander. Monty used to make a big show of distributing these, and the Keeper was naturally going to continue his excellent work. Last of all came Tony and I, gossiping about the Theatre.

We drove along, leaving a trail of free smokes behind us. Pausing beside a lorry driver, to whom the Keeper had spoken for a few minutes, I thought that it might be a good idea to get his personal reactions. He was holding a packet of ten Players in his hand, and gazing after the receding car.

— That must have been interesting for you? I said in my most inviting manner. I suppose you know who that was?

— Nao, he answered in his North-country accent. There was annuther maan wunse yews to coom roun' with cigarettes, but ah think 'ee's gone naow.

I did not incorporate this superb view of the functions of an Army Commander in my script, nor the fact that the driver didn't

even know who Monty was, much less his successor! But it soon became a popular story in the messes.

We eventually reached the HQ of our old friends, the Indians, and after passing a few words with some Sepoys in their own vernacular, our Quarry for the first time appeared to notice us.

– Are you quite happy? he asked, as he passed by with the Divisional Commander.

Tony gazed after their receding backs.

– Do you suppose, he said, he was referring to our outlook on life, or to our prospects of getting lunch?

When I later submitted the draft of my script to Ulick he had quite a lot of little amendments to make:

Insert at (X): You see an exceptionally tall, broad-shouldered figure, casual alike in dress as in manner, leaning back against the bonnet of his car, his hands in his pockets.

Insert at (Y): Everyone in the Eighth Army feels a personal interest in the doings of the Fifth Army on the other side.

Insert at (Z): instead of the words: 'It's late...to be', the following: 'The General believes in getting a proper night's sleep unless an urgent decision is called for: but all the same it may be fairly late before he gets to bed...'

But the thing that worried him most of all was the fact that I had described the Army Commander as having spoken to those Sepoys in Urdu. The point was that the Army Commander undoubtedly knew a little Urdu, but he did not really speak the language fluently – a fact that was probably known to several of his late colleagues in India. It would be very distressing if they got the impression from anything I said, that the Army Commander had been Trying to Show Off. You see the point? Supposing some expert in Urdu heard me saying that the Army Commander had been speaking it to some Sepoys, he might positively smile!

In short, would I mind not saying, 'He spoke to some Indians in Urdu', and say instead: 'He spoke a few words of Urdu to some Indians'?

After all, it is so important to create the right impression.

\* \* \*

At about four-thirty on another afternoon, we are standing in the mud and the driving sleet outside the Ops Caravan, while we

wait for Donald Prater to come out and brief us. Presently the contingent from Dysentery Hall arrives, shepherded by Gerald Bowles. Tony Beckwith uncoils his microphone lead and flops it in the mud – for it has been decided to record one of these conferences for the benefit of posterity. Presently Prater comes out along the duckboards, and the day's news is released.

- I'm afraid there's nothing today. Sorry.
- Nothing at all?
- Not a sausage.
- What about the Canadians?
- They haven't moved.
- And the Indians?
- Nothing to report.
- Air Force?
- Not a plane off the ground. Simply no news at all.
- But the guerrillas? Haven't they done anything?
- Well, actually they've taken a few villages and about thirty square miles of country. But nobody would be interested in that, would they?

\* \* \*

Oh, but we would!

To the north and west of us rise the mountains – tier upon tier of the Central Appenines, with their winding white roads, their hill-top villages, their pine trees and their intriguing mystery. Nobody can tell us with any certainty just where the front is, what roads are open, which villages are ours and which are in No-Man's-Land.

This country begins with a town called Casoli – perched on the top of a crag like a Disney drawing– and beyond this lies a fabulous area of Partisans and Commandos, into which Agents and Undercover Men disappear on their way to Rome, and out of which emerge escaping prisoners, and all sorts of queer characters. For somewhere on the slopes of the Maijella is hidden the southern end of the underground route that many a brave man takes to the north.

Up the valley beyond Casoli are ghostly villages, such as Faro, that have been totally destroyed by the Germans, so that they can give no shelter to our pickets during the winter. Here also is Civitella – a town that saved itself by the efforts of its own guerrillas, under a character calling himself Nick Williams (although

Italian). Then there is the country towards Toricella, where the infuriated enemy went around the farmhouses and slaughtered the entire population – men, women and children – as a reprisal for a local uprising. From the ancient battlements of Civitella, now occupied by a picket of the Royal West Kents, we can see the smoke-blackened farm buildings through our field glasses, and the solitary figure of Nick Williams himself as he trudges in along the hilly path, to report the latest disposition of his men.

Still deeper to the south west, there are flying columns under the command of a British officer called Wigram, that are stiffening local resistance farther in, and gradually taking over an enormous area that has, so far, been in enemy hands.

I have seen some of the messages that come into the Kents' Headquarters from the Partisans – a riotous mixture of military information, personal racketeering, flattery and axe-grinding.

Honorable Commanding Officer of British Farces (sic).

Women and children from Selva (region Civitella) are praying me for days implore this honorable commanding officer have pity of them. You know that Selva been ravaged by Germans. The people went away the day it was ravaged and they cannot go back because Germans are there and they capture men and women and rob anything they see. The Commissary of Civitella doesn't care for this crew because they make him presents and in the meantime the poor people don't know how to solve the problems of life especially winter time. Certainly our rulers that are foolish and unconscious put people in these troubles but you English people that are the most honest good hearted loyal and conscientious people of the world cannot be indifferent to the prayer that poor mothers and children raise to you in the heart of winter. They pray you please you send some of your valourous soldiers to withdraw the Germans from Selva if not for ever at least for some days so that they can go back to their homes and get what they need. Two hundred men and also women and children are already at your orders to clean away the snow from the roads to let pass your trucks even if all the way from Casoli to Selva. Volontaries of Civitella will guide you and help you in anything they can. I, Secretary of the Volontaries of Civitella, unite fervid prayer to the petitions of the women and children. Please accept humblest present that I and a few women send to the officers of this honorable commanding office. If you don't accept we will be sorry. And please answer me something to encourage the people of Selva. Still I salute you with distinct respect.

NICK WILLIAMS

PS You can fire a few shells from somewhere on Selva.

The opposition party, on the other hand, has as its spokesman a lady, who is even more free with her bribes, and who devotes herself more to personal gossip than to practical military matters:

Estimable Lieut.

I profit to send you a few drops of wine. I wish you will enjoy it with Cap. Vincent and Lieut. Coksage. I hope you didn't forget what I told you yesterday. I wouldn't be surprised if you forgot it because I know you have so many important things in your mind; your duty, your men, battles, arms, etc. But what I want is also an important thing. In our town I and all the people want to sweep away the ex-fascist rulers and leaders. They made us suffer for twenty one years, they bounded our hands, closed our mouths. But now thanks be to God and thanks much more to all the British soldiers we are free. And we want to choose who we want to govern us. The people of my town choosed my husband to be Commisary of Civitella. But the Yugoslav Commisary of Casoli sent us back the ex-fascist prefect. This man is deaf, he has no education, he is the son of a bankrupted goldsmith that has cheated so many people. Maybe some day we will get rid of him with clubs. It is the best way. All the people of this town except a few fascists and the priest want my husband to be President of the AMGOT of Civitella. He is the most learned man of our town. His brother was a socialist and syndic. Fascists sent him away and troubled him until he died heartsick. They also tormented us too, and now the new fascists and the priest that is a very immoral person and has no vocation still want to torment us. He collects 24 quintels of grains and 24 hectolitres of wine each year from the farmers. He has the church (that is his store) and he also runs a bank...

And so on, in tones of rising intensity. As events get duller elsewhere, we run around this area more and more, dividing our Colour pieces between the guerrillas and such exotic back-stage groups as the Field Security Section and the Psychological Warfare Branch.

In each town of any size there is a Security Officer and a small staff of NCOs belonging to the Intelligence Corps. These security NCOs always seem to run to type, recognisable by their intellectual appearance, their glasses and their bushy moustaches. In one office where I am being entertained to lunch, quite a little fuss is going on over a fur-coated brunette, from whom they want to get some information. It is strictly business of course, but several pairs of eyes beam brightly through their spectacles as they concentrate on their work. The Corporal is going to bring her to a

dance, and that ought to do the trick. Meanwhile the IO comes in, full of explanations about that house he commandeered. The I Branch, and AMGOT, and Field Security all seem to plough separate furrows, and none of them seems to think much of the other. Anyhow, it is untrue what the Eyties are saying about why the IO commandeered the house, and it simply isn't true that he had ever been living with the widow. Everyone is most sympathetic and say they will certainly deny it, and they quite understand.

– I used to like the Eyties, the Security Officer said to me. But it's really not possible after you've done this job for any length of time. If you're soft hearted with them you are only sorry afterwards. If you could have seen some of the scenes that have taken place in this office – men crawling round on their knees, weeping, and reeling off lists of their starving children. And the more they weep the more of a bully they turn out to have been. Now, it's only when a man stands up and fights back at me that I assume there is anything at all in what he says. Once the tears start I decide against him at once.

Meanwhile PWB (grossly misnamed the Piss and Wind Bureau) are carrying on with their job of shortening the war by working on enemy morale – a job that is continually being undermined by bad tempered speeches and idle threats from official fools at home, as Mr Constantinescu has already pointed out.

They have a newspaper, giving an excellent summary of the general war situation, which they shoot at the German positions on stated days, and drop from aeroplanes in his rear areas. They are wise enough neither to threaten nor to boast. They praise the German soldier's fighting qualities, but ask him what is the use of it all? They offer him the alternative of an honourable surrender and they play on his longing for home.

Across a reproduction of an enemy casualty list, one of their best pamphlets is printed in great red letters:

### THE DEAD NEVER RETURN

While on the other side, a sexy picture of a soldier being embraced by his wife is captioned:

**BUT THE PRISONER SEES HIS HOME AGAIN**

Of Ortona they say:

Es folgten vierzehn Tage erbitterter, mörderischer Strassenkämpfe  
...und trotzdem musste Ortona fallen!

Viele Fallschirmjaeger starben den Heldentod in der Strassen der Stadt. Viele wurden zu Krüppeln geschossen – für den Rest ihres Lebens. Ein schweres Blutopfer.

UND WOFUER? FUER VIERZEHN TAGE!

VIERZEHN TAGE ZUM KRIEGSVERLAENGERN VIERZEHN TAGE ZUM BLUTVERGIESSEN VIERZEHN TAGE ZUM ZEITGEWINNER WOZU!

It is one of the great imponderables of the war – this psychological campaign – for however such pamphlets may be waved aside by the soldier at the time, their messages have a way of lingering on in his brain. And nobody can ever say how many strongpoints have been given up just a little earlier – how many dog-tired parachutists have decided not to fight to the last because of that little something in the back of their minds.

The Germans, on the other hand, have a different approach to our men. They usually try to make the Americans feel that they are suckers to be fighting for Wall Street, and they give them rather silly Diplomas from US Steel entitling them to a plate of warm soup every ten days after the war 'should dividends not decrease'. Meanwhile they try to rub it into the British, that while they are fighting in Italy, the Yanks are seducing all their women back in England.

Who is best at the game is a matter of opinion, but my own belief is that enemy propaganda to our troops is not nearly so good as their internal propaganda, as embodied in Goebbels' 'Dreissig Kriegsartikel für das Deutsche Volk'. Or so good as the stuff that PWB turns out for consumption by the Axis soldiers.

\* \* \*

A letter from Vaughan:

My dear Muldoon (the name is taken from a line of an indecent song popular on the Sangro).

Greetings from our little forgotten island of Anzio. Quaint rumours reach me occasionally that you are alive and well and that Tony is at your side 'driving past the tellers'. But that is all I know of the great world and its doings. Our situation here is not so bad as Rupert Downing makes out, or as good as President Roosevelt seems to think. It's just normal Military fuck-up with an American accent. We are commanded by a dear old pussy-cat, who purrs away that we are all happy on the beachhead, and, in a sense, we are. We can't get off, so we might as well get on. We are in no danger of being pushed into the sea, but on the other hand the Germans are in no danger of being pushed off



the land. So we look like being here for the summer season. We have not yet been attacked by dogs, but last night the enemy drove a large flock of sheep towards us. Otherwise he adopts the normal methods of annoying us. We have a great deal of long range shelling and about four air raids a day and one heavy one per night. But as you can guess, none of this is as bad as the Correspondents make out. News and gossip are the great things we lack. So sit down and send me a line. Warmest greetings to yourself and Tony and to David Henneker. Tell him the blacks are closing in on us.

YOUNG BULLIVANT

\* \* \*

Still deeper in the interior of the Appenines live the Poles. They are an earnest and much-put-upon race with a dark and complicated psychology. A brief contact will give you every reason to like them individually, and it will also explain much of their national history.

As a comparatively small nation lying between gigantic neighbours who have usually been on bad terms with each other, it might be supposed – following England's historic example – that Poland would have made a profitable thing out of playing one off against the other. (*Vide, Balance of Power: Constantinescu. Book I, supra.*) But Poland knows a thing worth two of that, and by carrying out the difficult feat of antagonising all her neighbours at the same time, she has managed to achieve complete national martyrdom on more than one occasion. In fact, you finally come to the conclusion that as a race they insist on it.

Irredentist problems such as Vilna, Danzig and the Curzon Line interest me because we have one of our own in my native land – a problem that exhibits much the same neurosis about geography. Some years ago, we Irish insisted on breaking off our political – though not our financial – connection with the community with which we had been associated for many hundreds of years, and in which many of us have our racial origins. Unfortunately the boundary line of those who wished for this separation did not happen to coincide with the coastline of our tight little island; and a passion for geographical rectitude – coupled with a natural desire to tax our thrifty brethren in the north – has bothered us ever since, and has luckily kept us out of several entangling alliances that might have been entered into, if we had not been sulking over maps.

My point, however, is that we in Ireland do not approach this

problem with the same ingenuity as the Poles. We naïvely demand the return of something that we never had, and describe as a Garrison those of our race who choose to remain as they always were. We talk about abolishing an international boundary for which we, ourselves, are responsible, by shifting its position in such a way that it constitutes an injustice to four counties instead of to two. And in support of our aggressive separatism we quote the words of that Arch-Unionist, Abraham Lincoln! Naturally, all that we get is a laugh.

The Poles, on the other hand, are much more convincing. For example, this is how they statistically describe the population to the east of the Curzon Line (I quote the figures roughly from memory):

Poles – 2,000,000  
White Russians – 1,500,000  
Ukrainians – 1,000,000  
Ruthenian Russians – 900,000  
Other Russians – 500,000

From which it will be seen that the Poles, who come out head of the list, are obviously entitled to the place, and the Russians (of whatever variety) are simply nowhere!

Nathansen, their new Public Relations Officer, is a Pole of the Poles. Extremely polite, his face is perpetually distorted with agony at the thought of the inconvenience and discomfort he is inflicting upon others.

– I am *so* sorry. It is *terr*-ible to have kept you waiting. But the jeep is broken down and I have had to walk many miles in the snow. I am mortified. I have let you down again!

In civil life Nat had been a Mathematician with a sideline in fairy stories. Sometimes he combined the two at once, as on the occasion when he described the plot of a mathematical fairy story on which he was engaged, and which would already have been published had it not been for the holocaust of Warsaw and the ruin of all that is good in life. It was about a little girl who behaved according to Einstein's rather than to Newton's principles. Thus, whenever she ran out merrily to play in the garden (so increasing her velocity) she also increased her weight and played havoc with the clock. As she came running at her mother's limpid call, Time stood still and hovered over her ponderous head. A piece of idyllically Pure Mathematics, as Nat told it – though I forget its dénouement.

He told us this story one evening as we warmed ourselves around a stove in the Town Hall of Casacalenda; and I kept up the heat with armfuls of law books. I used to be a barrister once, so I enjoy burning law books.

When at last we broke through the snow into Campobasso, our visit to our allies took a well-established course. Elaborate arrangements were made for our entertainment, and all of them broke down. They went to endless trouble to refresh us in messes where the stoves blew up and the lights failed, and I would politely enquire in the dark as to what this was that I was eating.

– Is it a Polish dish?

– Oh yesss. Eet is called Makkarroni.

They brought us to a dance, and left us to break down the door of our apartment afterwards to get back to our beds. They were much too polite, next morning, to comment on their guests' eccentric behaviour in smashing in the door. It was one of those peculiarities that one ignores in a visitor.

We turned up in the square of Carpinone to record the changing of the guard, and the playing of some trumpet call with a long and interesting history attached to it – something about a sixteenth-century disaster in Cracow.

– Do you think we might put the microphone over here? I asked Nat.

He went to discuss the matter with the Education Officer, who had come many miles at great personal inconvenience specially to assist us. He spoke for several minutes in passionate Polish, and the Education Officer replied at even greater length, and with gestures. I was eager to learn what it was that I had started. Nat returned to me with the answer.

– He says, 'Yes'.

I suggested that perhaps we might pass amongst the bystanders with the microphone, and pick up a few of their comments as the Poles changed the guard. The Education Officer agreed that this was a very good idea, and came back an hour later with a complete script written by a well-known dramatist from the Warsaw National Theatre (alas now in ruins) beginning:

– Ah, who can these be coming down the street in such unusual and picturesque uniforms?

– Can it be...? Yes, we are in luck! They are the gallant Poles – the defenders of Tobruk – the unconquered victims of the Russian beast.

The quiet and restrained dignity with which my rejection of this work was received was very upsetting to me. It was just another of those disappointments that are the fate of Polish artists. We called upon General Anders – a distinguished figure with many rows of medal ribbons decorating his chest. Through an Interpreter, he told us something of the Stab in the Back from Moscow, by which his country was betrayed in 1939. Together with a million and a half civilians, he and his comrades had been deported to Russian prisons. Although wounded, he himself was denied the privileges of a Prisoner of War, and was lodged in a Moscow jail, until after Hitler's invasion of the Soviets. Meanwhile, England stood alone against Germany, while Molotoff was lunching with Ribbentrop in Berlin.

The difficulty was, of course, that we are at the moment supposed to be fighting Germany; not Russia.

– Now look here, Nat, I said. You know as well as I do that if the General wants to be put on the air by the BBC he mustn't talk on those lines.

Nat's face assumed its well-known expression of agony.

– What do you mean?

– You know quite well what I mean. He won't be allowed to say things like that about Russia.

– Oh, he will not say very much. I promise. Just a little he will have to say.

– No, Nat. Not a sausage. If he insists on attacking Russia the stuff just won't be put on the air. That's all there is to it.

– But please, please. The General insists. Just one small attack. That will be all.

– Sorry, Nat. It has nothing to do with me personally. I don't care in the slightest how many attacks he has. But I'm warning you – if he insists, it will just be cut out.

He wrung his hands and went away to consult with the General, and presently he returned with the script in his hand. It was in Polish, and I glanced through it suspiciously while the microphone was being connected.

– I suppose this is all right. You wouldn't have a translation, by any chance?

– No, we have no time for a translation. But it is all right. Your people will like it. I must go now to Castel di Sangro to attend the Commemoration, but the General will see you presently and will record it for you.

- OK. You know the position. Thanks for all the trouble you've taken.

- It is nothing. I am so sad that so many things go wrong. But what can I do? It is all most unfortunate. I am very, very sorry.

He vanished in a flood of apologies. What the Commemoration was I never discovered, but as it was in Castel di Sangro - under direct enemy observation - I have no doubt that it induced some shellfire and provided its crop of further tragedies. The General duly recorded his script for us, and it may be that he abused the Russians in it, or it may be that he did not. All I can say is that, judging by his expression, he certainly abused somebody, and that about half way through I caught something suspiciously like 'barbarski Ruski'. However, we packed it up and sent it off, fortified by the knowledge that we had done our best, and that there was nothing more we could do about it in Cantelupo.

\* \* \*

February 27th  
ANZIO BEACHHEAD

My dear Muldoon,

Most of my fellow scribes are falling by the wayside and can be heard freely stating that - of course - the real news story is at Cassino. I foresee myself a lone figure still talking from the beaches this time next year.

The beachhead is now so narrow that he shells the town with mediums. They drop all day outside our window. Thank the Lord most of them go into the sea. But it can get on your nerves after three weeks of it. When I think of the happy days at Vasto! My heart grieves for you, with the front pretty static and no prospect of it shifting. Frank, by the way, tells me he is going home. What are your chances? Whatever you do, don't leave without me.

I have little gossip to tell you. Life here is one long air-raid punctured by shelling. The front is now far safer than the rear! I dutifully send off a little piece every day (each one in cableese that would almost meet with your approval as my teacher in this subject). I have no idea at all if anything ever gets through. I expect Home News are writing their little comments on it - 'Gravely concerned.' I don't think they have any conception of what goes on in this business of News getting.

Still, I have got some things to report. And I look forward to the day when we sing the Ould Orange Flute riding in a taxi round the Vatican.

A final word on the Military Situation here. Old Pussy-cat has gone. We've got a good fighting general named Truscott in his place. The only thing is that he's got precious little material left to fight with. I think we

can just about hold the next attack, but it will be a damn near thing. We have not got any more ground to give up, and if he gets in a few fresh divs. it may turn the trick. So I'm already practising my German. On the other hand he may have decided to contain us, in which case we'll be here till next year. So keep writing, and I'm really much more cheerful than all this sounds. Greetings from the beachhead.

Yours aye,  
WYN

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## DETOUR IN ILLYRIA

ON THE WALL of Dysentery Hall flutters a flimsy.

CONFIDENTIAL

## ALLIED FORCE HEADQUARTERS

(Advanced)

MEMORANDUM to: Colonel Clark, PRO Fifth Army  
Major Heneker, PRO Eighth Army  
Major McCrary, MAF

- 1) The Public Relations Officer, AFHQ, directs that all public relations officers in Italy be notified by secure means without delay that no correspondents may go to the Balkans.
- 2) Appropriate officers under your command should be informed.
- 3) PROs of 15th Air Force, and of the Indian, New Zealand and South African forces are to be notified by Lt Col Howard, PRO for Indian forces, on his return today.

EDUARDE E. BOMAR, Lt Col AUS  
Asst PRO, AFHQ

- Why? I ask.

- I don't really know, old boy. I think it is some racket in Cairo. The Balkans come under Cairo. So only Correspondents from Middle East are to go there.

- Why should the Balkans come under Cairo? Aren't the Commandos operating from here?

- Oh yes. But administratively that area has always been part of the east. You've read your Roman history.

- I see. So it's the doing of the Emperors Arcadius and Honorius. This means that if I want to cross to Vis I must first go to Cairo and get somebody's permission?

- It's worse than that. You'll have to take a course in parachute jumping.

– What on earth for? There are boats slipping over to Dalmatia nearly every night.

– I dare say, old boy. But a course in parachute jumping is the rule. Probably to make it all seem more important. Or maybe it's to discourage people from going altogether. It means cracking up Tito, you see.

– Isn't Tito on our side?

– Yes, but he's not on Cairo's side. It's all very complicated. The Royal Yugoslav Government is trying to function from Cairo, and although it's against the Germans, I imagine that it's even more against Tito.

– Why?

– Because Tito is a Red. If Tito wins it's going to be very awkward for the Royal Yugoslav Government. And I don't think that our own Foreign Office will be too pleased either.

– So we're still not quite certain who we want to win this war.

– Oh, we're certain enough here in Italy. Monty has always backed up Tito, because he is a good soldier and is tying up more German divisions in the Balkans than the entire Allied Force is fighting on this front. If Tito were to collapse it would probably mean at least another twenty-five enemy divisions for us to cope with here.

– Then I think it's up to us to say a good word for Tito, in spite of Cairo.

– It's no good, old boy. Anything that you write about the Balkans has to be referred to Middle East for censorship. That's the rule too. You just can't get round it.

My mind goes back to those early Press Conferences near Bari, when the DMI predicted that we were in for a big counter attack that might even throw us out of Naples. It was to come after the Balkans had been cleaned up – which would probably not take the Germans very long. But the Balkans have not been cleaned up, and there has been no counter attack in Italy. On the contrary, they are still fighting viciously up and down the Dalmatian coast, where the enemy are trying to stifle the few remaining lungs through which the Partisans in the interior can breathe. The object is to cut the last connection with the outer world, by occupying the string of islands off the coast. All through the winter I have watched the operation maps of Desert Air Force, as island after island has been overrun; and now there is only one island of any



importance left – Vis, or Lissa, the trans-Adriatic foothold of the Allies and Tito's last open window. It is a fortress, garrisoned by the cream of the Partisan units, and stiffened with a few British Commandos and American Rangers. It is the channel through which most of the information regarding targets reaches the RAF from the Balkans, and the site of one of their most important Radar stations. Daily and nightly the big German attack upon Vis is expected to begin. They have massed their assault boats and Siebel Ferries in the anchorages of all the neighbouring islands.

I like the idea of the Partisans, and all that I have heard about them. They are gay, singing fighters who really know what this war is about. And to one as confused on that subject as I am becoming, that is very refreshing indeed. My own particular interest in them is not because they are Reds, since I have still to be shown that Communism makes men or States any less cruel, jingoistic, or convinced that the only answer to disagreement is punishment. I have no doubt whatever that sooner or later we will have to have a universal economic system, based on order. But what it will be like I do not pretend to know. I have also a sneaking suspicion that the present local currency and customs barriers cannot be maintained indefinitely, and if our present rulers cannot see their way to provide us with a unified authority in such matters we will have to look around for somebody who will, before we start killing each other again.

But what brand of Politicoes these will be, is a matter that is still open for discussion. In the meantime, the behaviour of the Socialist Fatherland in international affairs has not given us any reason to suppose that the Proletariat in Office has any solution either.

All the same, I like the sound of the Partisans. And it is a story that administrative, rather than security, reasons are keeping from the Press. Therefore I can be as smart as I like with PR in my efforts to get it, which is always amusing.

Phase 1 must obviously be tackled by the classic method of the Indirect Approach. We must begin with a security blackout on our own movements, brought about by a series of troublesome requests to PR calculated to make them even more bored with me than usual, and thankful if I leave them in peace for a couple of weeks.

Phase 1 must also be a Combined Operation, so that no Service shall consider itself primarily concerned. In this way the chances

of some highly placed official stepping in and saying 'No' are lessened.

What characteristic contribution, then, can each of the Services make?

First, the Air Force has its drive, its enthusiasm for publicity, and its refreshing ignorance about any arrangements by the Emperors Honorius and Arcadius in the Fourth Century. It has one single command for the Mediterranean, and a great interest in the Balkans. Neither Desert Air Force nor the outfit in Taranto appears to have been included in the obstructive circular of Edward E. Bomar, Lt-Col, AUS. On the other hand, the Air Force has no landing grounds on Vis. Therefore the Navy will have to provide the transportation.

Now, the Navy is very obliging, and will put itself out to an unlimited degree for any casual visitor, provided that no Admiral has to be consulted. Admirals always say 'No'.

The Army, on the other hand, usually delights in saying 'Yes' – provided it is not going to be asked to do anything more.

Thus, the outline of the Master Plan begins to take shape. The thing must be promoted by the Air Force, carried out by the Navy, under the amiable blessing of the Army – a brilliantly combined operation!

The imponderable element is the fact that I do not know how far that irritating Memorandum has circulated. Still, its enforcement is only an act of comity on the part of PR here, and unless somebody in Caserta has shown unusual zeal, there is a good chance that the King Pins of Central Mediterranean Force may be out of touch with the complicated views of Cairo.

\* \* \*

I am exceedingly interested in Radar, and even more so in Forward Flying Control. We had good results on the Mad Mile near Orvieto, and it would be interesting to try again in some more advanced spot. We could also record some messages home for the Erks – a good fillip for Air Force morale. Everybody is kind to us in Taranto.

Salzer, the PRO, will fix it, if it can be fixed; and what is more, he will go there with me. And so step by step, with the help of the Air Vice-Marshal, each detail is arranged. At his request an LCI agrees to take us any day we can turn up at Monopoli. But first

of all – just to get everything neatly buttoned up – we had better get the OK of the Fortress Commander. My heart misses a beat at the mention of the Fortress Commander. Here, at last, is the real crux of the situation. If there is any security reason against my going, we will soon hear it from the Fortress Commander. If it is merely a matter of politics – Cairo Correspondents *versus* Italy Correspondents – he probably will know nothing about it and care less.

We wait until we hear that he has no objection, and we drive the truck down to the quayside at Monopoli, scarcely able to believe ourselves really on the move. Robert Molesworth St Aubyn Wade, my Engineer, seems hardly less excited than I am. We cannot take the truck, of course, but we can take the contents. After about half an hour's work the precious equipment has been unscrewed from its bed, and we carry it, piece by piece, on to the Landing Craft, stowing it away under cover in the wheelhouse.

We cast off soon after dawn, and bat our way against a short sea, past Bari and Barletta to the Gulf of Manfredonia. The LCI is overladen to the waterline, and will barely answer her helm for top-heaviness. Drums of 100-octane petrol encumber her decks, which definitely mean No Smoking. From Monte Gargano, we head due north, and fetch up close to the little island of Pelagosa, beyond which we must not go in daylight.

From Pelagosa onwards, we slip deeper and deeper into what is virtually enemy territory. The danger isn't entirely a matter of air attack. The E Boats, too, must be avoided. They are everywhere along the Adriatic coast, and it seems to me that this unmanœuvrable, overladen Landing Craft would stand a pretty poor chance of dodging anything that happened upon it in the bright moonlight. However, the Navy is quite happy, and entertain us in what passes for the Skipper's Cabin. At about half past midnight, we go on to the bridge, and the steep outline of Vis is looming up before us. Some lights flash from the jetty of Komisa, and we give an answering signal.

– I hope they're not too trigger-happy tonight, remarks the Skipper. One tracer bullet wouldn't do much good to that hundred-octane stuff.

The words are hardly out before somebody fires a rifle from the pierhead, and we all duck down behind the plating of the bridge.

– It's all right. They're only signalling. It's one of their little ways.

The shore looms up, closer and closer, until we can see figures

standing on the pier, and voices ring out across the water. Then a floodlamp is switched on, and we draw alongside. Men and women in battle dress, each with a slung rifle, are waiting to receive us, and the words SMRT FASCISMU show up in white letters on the sea wall. There is an odd feeling of hilarity in the air, and somehow it seems the most natural thing in the world to find two British Commandos dancing a Highland fling on the quay. Gone is the atmosphere of indifference and boredom. Even the Commandos behave as if engaged on some exciting University rag.

### SLOBODA NARODU – VINSTON CERCIL

There is, however, an American Pilot waiting to go back to Italy on the L.C.I. He has been shot down somewhere near Zara, picked up by the Partisans, and brought to Vis by the Underground. What upsets him is the fact that his escort on this journey was an extremely attractive-looking girl-soldier loaded with weapons, and with what he describes as a chastity belt of hand grenades hanging around her waist.

– I can understand that business is business, he says. I can lay off a woman if it's going to make trouble. But God dammit we used to sleep together! Some guys tip me off these girls are dynamite. If you try to start anything, they shoot. You've gotta treat them like any other soldier and forget about their sex. OK, I say, that's all right by me, but hell, does that mean I've got to sleep with them? I'm not used to that sort of thing back home. So what I've gotta do is turn my face to the wall and lie awake all night cursing under my breath.

I have sometimes wondered why women soldiers should be a speciality of the Reds. It is understandable enough in Tito's case, where the whole population is on the run, and guerrilla warfare is the only way out. A woman can fling a Molotoff Cocktail as well as a man, or snipe a sentry, or mount a picket. They are not all strapping great wenches. There are fierce looking ones, of course, natural born Amazons who love the life; and women with cross, bitter eyes gleaming behind their spectacles, like the Cumann na Ban in Ireland. But the majority of them are like any collection of young women you would find in a tram or at a meeting. Bold faced cuties and shy little pieces that might be walking in a Wycombe Abbey crocodile; shopgirls and farmers' daughters; mannequins and sluts. How then do they make soldiers? The plain answer, leaving glamour aside, is that they don't make soldiers –

or at any rate, not particularly good ones. Not the kind of soldiers that can stand up to protracted warfare, or endure long periods of mortaring and artillery fire. But then, neither do a good many men.

The social consequences of disregarding sex are more interesting. It is out of the question for these women to have separate quarters or special facilities of any kind. So they live, move and sleep exactly as the men do, and the Skipper of the LCI, when transporting a mixed band of Partisans across to Bari, had been a little embarrassed on entering his ship's jakes, to find that they were even sitting together at stool.

It might be expected that this situation would lead to indoor sports on a large scale, but actually it works out the opposite way. An army has not any time for intra-mural love affairs, and if a woman soldier is so rash as to start a baby, she ceases at once to be a soldier and becomes a useless mouth. So any man who puts her in that condition is promptly shot, and if she doesn't disclose his identity, she is shot herself. The Jugoslavs are unsentimental about death, and a communal form of existence results in a very great roughness towards anybody who is caught not playing ball. A small boy of twelve was discovered last week stealing a few minor supplies. He was shot. No mother's tears or appeals on account of his age had the slightest effect on the verdict.

– They're a tough lot, said Doc Outfin – a tourist like ourselves – as we unloaded the gear. But you can't help being excited by their enthusiasm. They act like they know what they're fighting for. Which is more than can be said for some of us.

– That's interesting, I said. From all I hear, they seem to be fighting on more sides than one.

– In times like these, perhaps it's better to fight on all sides than on no side at all.

– Rather a delicate thing to say to an Irishman. It used to be the traditional policy of my own country, but we seem to have given it up lately.

He gave me a friendly smile, and sucked his pipe.

– There's not much to be said for the way any of us got into this War. Not even England. We avoided it as long as we could. But the Jugos – they don't put up with much in the way of bullying. I like them.

Whatever may be the merits of the Partisans, it was soon obvious that they are accustomed to do much more than is asked of them, instead of the reverse. What recordings would I like to begin with?

A small party, marching and singing. Why, of course, if I will come to a certain cross roads at ten the following morning, they will see what they can do. Next day we are met, not by a small party, but by an entire Battalion. Up the road they swing, led by an accordion band, old and young, men and girls, singing their marching songs, the valley echoing with the tramp of their feet.

A few words in their native language for our propaganda service? With pleasure. They lay on a public, open-air meeting at which a Serb, a Croat and a Slovene each speak in turn, and a crowd of many hundreds shouts responses, and chants their slogans between each speech.

An indoor concert or entertainment? Nothing simpler. In the Town Hall of the only Municipality, with lights blazing across the harbour, they hold a dance, and enliven it with a series of choirs, any one of which would be worth recording for its own sake. My only difficulty is a small boy of about twelve in full battle dress, who insists on standing beside the microphone and singing very loudly and slightly out of tune. From time to time I move away, only to be followed wherever I go. I do not like to order him off or interfere with his enjoyment – he may burst into tears and drop one of the hand grenades that appear to be fastened to his belt by the safety pins.

This is by far the most exciting job I have ever done. For the better part of a week we live in a farm house with the RAF unit. The island is rough and stony and dotted with white cottages that remind me of Connemara. Across the water, not far off, lie the German-held islands of Brac, Hvar and Korkula. It is there, in the sheltered bays and anchorages, that the enemy landing craft and barges are massed for the assault on Vis, and through a pair of field glasses it is possible to see the German transport moving on the roads. Yet the initiative is entirely with the Partisans, and it is only during daylight that the enemy runs around openly. During the hours of darkness he withdraws into the towns and villages, where he is harassed and shot at by raiding parties of Commandos and Rangers and Partisans who ferry themselves across nightly.

The island is heavily armed, and the roads and uplands are covered by a web of sentry posts. In every cottage men and women sleep with their tommy guns ready by the windows. An embryo Communism has affected even the RAF, for there is, of course, no currency whatever, and all transactions are on the basis of barter

and lease-lend. Indeed, it is pleasant to see the farm girls who serve in the Mess sitting down themselves when the first session is over, and being served in their turn by the Erks.

Each day we are taken to see Cerni – Tito's deputy in the Adriatic – a stocky Slav in the uniform of a Commander of the Yugoslav Navy. We record him as he gives our Flight-Lieutenant a full set of reports on the previous day's bombings, and suggests the targets for the next day. He is delighted to find that a British War Correspondent has come across, and he finds it hard to understand why others have not come in the past. He can send me through to Tito without any difficulty, if I have time to stay. Going overland, I should allow plenty of time for the double journey – ten days or a fortnight would be best, if I really wish to see the country and get an idea of what is going on.

But with a dozen discs in the bag, I am beginning to get into a fever about Phase 2: to get them home before it is discovered that I have them. Is anybody asking where I am? Have any rumours trickled over to Cairo that may start enquiries? No point in having got here if the recordings are trapped. How long can luck be expected to last?

The moon is going, the weather is fouling up, and the raid on Solta that we have been invited to attend is put off indefinitely. In a fever, we leave for Italy instead, battling our way through horrible seas to Bari, where we arrive at the Imperiali, wrecks from seasickness and laryngitis, and very, very secretive. Until those twenty-four recordings are on their way to England, we dare not open our mouths – least of all to any Correspondent.

Happily, Leslie Karke is in town on a visit from Vasto. Our luck is not failing yet.

– Look here, I say. You know as well as I do that this isn't a question of censorship. It's merely a question of 'Where are they to be censored – here or in London?'

– Well, Bill Paylor says that anything about the Balkans that is submitted to him, here, will have to be sent to Cairo. It's not his fault, but those are his orders.

– You know, Leslie, I feel we oughtn't to bother Bill Paylor with them. The stuff raises so many questions of policy, I'd rather not have the discs in my possession at all. Suppose I leave the whole bundle in the hands of the Air Force, where I'm sure it ought to be until after it's been examined?

Leslie smiled brightly.

- You mean, it's not strictly speaking a Press Despatch - something more in the nature of Operational Recordings?

- Exactly. The kind of thing that ought to be held, and sent straight to the Air Ministry.

- I don't know that we have the means of getting them direct to the Air Ministry ourselves. But now I come to think of it, the Americans might.

A pair of bright smiles illuminate our faces.

- That's a brilliant idea. The Americans are very helpful.

- Let's go and see them.

He takes the parcel, and we go round to the local Headquarters of the US Army Air Force. They are, indeed, very helpful. Major So-and-So is shortly leaving for the UK. He will be glad to deliver a small parcel of operational recordings to the Air Ministry. No trouble at all.

We leave them with him, and that is the last I see of them. I send a cable to the BBC telling them to enquire at the Air Ministry for a parcel that is to be censored before release. And as that is all I can do, I return to the Imperiali, where a great deal of rioting and singing is going on in honour of St. Patrick's Day.

\* \* \*

Now that it is all over I feel deeply depressed. I always do, at the conclusion of any period of sustained effort. Success is not really an occasion for junketing and joy, because the Effort is so much more interesting than the Achievement, and to reach our goal is something rather like death. Here I am, having just pulled off the scoop of my career, and all that I feel is a deep and melancholy lassitude.

Maybe it is partly due to the fact that I have been passing the time on my way back by reading the Bible and the Catechism in order to find out whether there is really any substance in Thornton-Bassett's strictures. And the experience has upset me.

- 'What is your name?'

- 'N or M' (a matter of doubt to begin with!)

In addition to this cause for my distemper, there is a good deal of accumulated mail to be gone through, including a letter from Frank Gillard to tell me that he is going home to cover the Second Front, and: 'London asks me to say that Godfrey (who should arrive in about a week) will succeed me here as Team Leader'.



Well. I dare say I have been a sardonic and undisciplined employee, and I am better off in Vasto than in Naples, coping with a stream of administrative cables from Arthur Barker. But to hell with them all the same, for not having the civility to tell me themselves that they were passing me over!

‘...London asks me to say...’

\* \* \*

At the bottom of the stairs, I am greeted by a party of drunk and hilarious Canadians.

– Ah! A British War Correspondent. How are you, pal?

– All right, thanks.

– My name’s Kelly and this is Dog-herthy. We’re Irish and proud of it.

– Indeed.

– And mine’s O’Shea. I’m Irish too. Ever hear of St Patrick’s Day, pal?

– Slán agat, I say. Céad míle fáilte.

– What’s that, pal?

– Ah, go to hell, you silly Canucks, and stop acting the goat!

Up in my room, I look at myself for a long while in the glass. On the way back from Vis, Salzer had been studying my passport, and had commented on the colour of my hair, as described therein.

– ‘Colour of hair. Black?’ he queried.

No, maybe it is no longer black – although this had not occurred to me before. No, perhaps it isn’t black any longer.

What a moment in your life – when you realise for the first time that you are no longer just down from College! It is cold tonight as I get out the blanket. And I think to myself that probably it will get colder and colder, until the blankets aren’t necessary, and they give me a sheet instead.

No, I suppose ‘Black’ isn’t the right word for it any longer.

It is the wind that blows old age upon me.

\* \* \*

A day or two later, I managed to get an appointment with the Fortress Commander, and had one of those thoroughly British conversations in which each party, with the greatest politeness, avoids saying anything that it actually means. He would be

delighted to do what he could about my going back to visit Tito. At the same time he was a little disturbed at my having gone as far as I had. I was equally disturbed and surprised that there should be any question about this. It was all right, of course, he explained. I had been given regular and proper permission. But it now seemed that maybe I shouldn't have been given permission at all. It wasn't exactly a matter of security. It was something to do with Cairo. Cairo hadn't said anything about it so far – in fact Cairo probably didn't know about it yet. Greatly taken aback, I hoped that this would not prejudice further excursions in the same direction. If there was anything I could do...? Oh, no. Nothing at all. It would all be worked out in the long run. But just at the moment, it might be better for me not to say anything about having been over there, until I heard further from him. I was most apologetic about this, but the trouble was that the Air Force had retained possession of my discs, and for all I knew they might already be in London. Then, he said, I had better cable Broadcasting House and tell them not to use them until further notice. It would be all right, of course. But just at the moment, while things were being fixed up, would I do this, please? Certainly I would. And then, perhaps, after I had been back to the Balkans, the whole lot might be released at the same time. Eh? Naturally.

But I knew that something was cooking, and that I was going to meet with difficulties about getting back. All of which added point to the situation, when I arrived in Naples that night and found the Villa Ruffo in a ferment over the fact that the recordings were already on the air from London. So I had to write back to the Fortress Commander and explain that, most unfortunately, it was just too late for me to cable. But if there was anything else that I could do...?

Came a letter from Frank – now at home:

Congratulations!

It's a wow. You've rung the bell with the hell of a clang. Today is Sunday. First, in Programme Parade this morning came a mysterious hint that something very special was to be heard before the 9 o'clock news. They broke off the 1 o'clock bulletin for a special announcement. The world held its breath and waited. Then they said that two BBC War Correspondents had taken recording gear behind the German lines in Yugoslavia and made some outstanding recordings which were to be broadcast tonight at 8.45 (the Prime Minister is speaking at 9 o'clock). They played samples, constantly reiterating your names and details of

your achievement. It was a magnificent bit of trailing. Obviously the boys in London are terribly excited.

This is just a hasty note to send my congratulations. I'm delighted that you've pulled it off. Now I know why it was that I couldn't get on to you over the business of that Austin car. It was puzzling me so much why you weren't able to send Bob off to clear it up. All is now clear.

I rejoice with you. It's lovely stuff. Quite historic.

All the best to you and Bob.

FRANK

This was soon followed by an abusive letter from Betty enclosing a cutting from an English paper that read:

### BBC MEN RISK LIVES FOR A SONG

(One's dear ones never do appreciate glory, do they?)

– There's absolute hell going on in Cairo, said some of the boys at the Villa.

– Oh? Tell me about that. I need cheering up.

– You know that the Correspondents there have had practically nothing to do for the past six months?

– Well, why do they stay there?

– Largely to get to the Balkans. One of them had just broken a leg, training for parachute jumping, when they heard on the BBC that you had sailed across from Italy. No course of training – no jumping – no difficulties at all, so it seemed. So they are all very annoyed – a little with you, but principally with the Trumpeter. But believe me, their annoyance is nothing to his. He's going to have your blood, if he can.

At long last my face creased into a smile.

– You know, it would be rather fun if he managed to get me sent home for having publicised our Allies, with the Imprimatur of the Ministry of Information! But I'm afraid it will never go as far as that. I am on the spot in quite a different way.

– In what way do you mean?

– I mean that, with the best of intentions, the whole thing has been grossly over-built at home. I mean, there's nothing very much in slipping over to Vis on an LCI. I've been in much more awkward places without causing any excitement. Yet from all accounts it must have sounded on the air as if I were somewhere in the suburbs of Belgrade, disguised in a heavy black beard. I don't think I ever conveyed that impression on any of the discs, did I?

– Maybe not. But then the Censor didn't allow any indication

of where you were, except that it was 'Jugo-Slav territory'. And anything connected with the Balkans sounds very glamorous at home, just now. But what the hell? Think of the times you have deserved a pat on the back and never got it! It all evens up in the end. And it was a good idea to get the Partisans to sing 'Tipperary'.

– But I didn't even do that! It was entirely their own idea. They think it's our national anthem!

Soon, every Editor in London was roaring at his Correspondent to go to the Balkans at once. But so effective were the counter measures, that even a service representative of *Eighth Army News* found himself arrested by the Military Police when trying to sneak aboard an LCI at Bari. The fantastic result was that my discs remained the only eye-witness account of the Partisans that got out for months to come, and all that anybody's rage succeeded in doing was to make my scoop complete!

But the situation got the better of me in the end, through the flaws in my own psychology. I had not been properly on the mainland, and I had not met Tito. And this omission began to assume gigantic proportions in my mind. I have no powerful competitive ambitions as a Journalist, but I don't like being considered a phoney, and I was galled by the deprecatory attitude of one or two of my colleagues:

– I understand that you weren't really on the mainland at all. What a pity. Of course, that is where the real story is, isn't it?

More infuriating still was the reaction of some of the people in Head Office.

– Actually some of it sounded almost too good to be true. You might, for instance, have recorded most of that singing in Bari. The Partisans *do* come over there sometimes, don't they?

And so Tito became a target, not merely of news value, but of honour. I besieged the proper quarters with requests to be allowed to return to Vis. From time to time it seemed as though I were getting somewhere, because they could no longer say to me:

– I'm sorry, old boy, but there simply aren't any facilities.

I didn't want any facilities. I knew how to get to Tito entirely on my own. All that was necessary was for them to stop saying 'No'. Then I found Mark – of all people – installed as a high-ranking Staff Officer in Monopoli, engaged in running the affairs of the-Commandos. He was still the same Mark, and as helpful as ever. He had supplies going over nearly every day and would

have been delighted to let me cross with them if only he could get permission. After he had done his best, he wrote to me and I realised that I was really up against it.

I gather your recent exploit on the Island has not made you too popular in some quarters, and this might have possible repercussions to the effect that High Army levels would request that some other person should be sent and not you.

However, the main thing is to get permission from all quarters concerned for *an* observer to go in and I am doing what I can. Anyway I will keep you informed of progress. I realise it must be done soon or not at all.

It was great fun seeing you. Do come in any time you are down this way.

Yours,  
MARK

This was the knell of doom. If High Army levels – not able to disaccredit me – were going to kick me in the pants by arranging with my employers that somebody else was to go, the prospect looked gloomy. It might be, of course, that the BBC – pleased with the programme I had given them – might refuse to be a party to any such arrangement. But such things do not happen. Loyalty is a one-way street running only from the servant to his boss, and employees who require that stands be made on their behalf are not encouraged.

I never expected that any stand would be made for me, and I was perfectly right in my forecast.

## A CATECHISM

that is to say

An Instruction that is to be learned of every traveller proceeding  
by way of the Valley of the Shadow

Who made the world?

Old Nobodaddy made the world.

Who is Old Nobodaddy?

Silent and invisible, according to the Author of the phrase, he is the Father of Jealousy, Creator of Heaven and Earth, whose darkness and obscurity gains feminine applause.

Is he to be congratulated on this, his handiwork?

No comment.

What is your name?

N or M.

Who gave you this name?

My Employers on my appointment, wherein I was made a member of the Staff, Something on a List, an Anonymous Filer of expense accounts, a Voice amongst Voices shouting from the far end of a pipe, a War Correspondent.

What is your training and qualification for this appointment?

Training none: qualifications, curiosity and verbosity. If you look at enough events and say enough about them over a long enough period, you are bound to be right from time to time, and to come by a number of memorable stories.

What memorable stories have you come by in the course of this employment?

The story of a Field Hospital functioning in the desert; the story of a German disguised as a British redcap directing the traffic from a British crossroads into the bag; the story of Balbo's death; the story of a faked Going-Map that won the Battle of Hemeimat.

How successfully have you written up these stories?  
None of them has been written up. They are all under the ban of the Censor.

Why?

Because they are not good for morale. Because they show men behaving in a humane, gallant or amusing way regardless of what side they are on, which is as dangerous to the War Effort as Christmas Day. Because the wrong person gets the credit.

What then is the point of your employment or of this catechism?

Of my employment, that still remains to be seen: of this catechism, to pause for a moment opposite the mirror – to consider for a little while one's objectives – to balance the books and to institute a brief check of cross references.

Why?

So that we may know where we are; so as to avoid any further surprises over the colour of certain hair as mis-described on a passport: so as to effect an introduction to one who may prove to be a stranger.

When?

In the midway of this our mortal life: when confronted with the entrance to Lo Passo.

Where?

On the bridge of a Landing Craft (Infantry) bound for the smoking beach at Anzio: from the co-pilot's seat in a Wimpey as she skims the surface of the Lower Danube: from the shelter of a moonlit jail in the Valley of the Shadow: in the map-lined operations room at Caserta: above the cloudy skies of Rome.

Admitting some discrepancy in the colour of that hair, is there any evidence of the identity of this person now present with the boy who winked at the Sphinx?

He has the same name on his bracelet, the same girl, the same inability to marry her, and the same dissatisfaction with the existing translations of the Odyssey.

What translation of the latter has he lately examined?

O divine Poesy...

Well? Why stop?

'Poesy' is a lousy word.

Nevertheless, go on.

...Goddess, Daughter of Zeus, sustain for me this song of the various-minded man, who after he had plundered the innermost citadel of hallowed Troy, was made to stray grievously about the coasts of men, the sport of their customs good or bad, while his heart through all the sea-faring ached in agony to redeem himself and bring his company home.

How about that?

He likes 'the various-minded man' better than Butler's 'ingenious hero'. But isn't the rest rather unreadable? Does the Aircraftman – like J. S. Mill – write clearly enough to be found out?

Don't ask questions. Continue with the text.

Vain hope – for them. For his fellows he strove in vain. Their own witlessness cast them away. The fools, to destroy for meat the Oxen of the most exalted Sun! Wherefore the Sun-God blotted out the day of their return.

What is the estimated date of his own return?

It has always been the Christmas-after-next, and presumably it will always be the Christmas-after-next.

Where is he going now?

To the first destination on the list supra: the smoking beach of Anzio.

Is this expedition strictly within the scope of his official duties?

Officially, yes. He has obtained permission from the Royal Navy to broadcast an account of how NAAFI supplies and other comforts are transported to the vessels covering the beachhead. Actually, no. His real purpose is mainly social. He intends to call upon his old friend Vaughan Thomas.

Is this visit to his friend Vaughan Thomas by invitation?

It is by invitation, in response to a number of judicious hints. In his pocket he carries his friend's latest letter.

Quote same?

'The Villa',  
Anzio-half-in-the-Sea

My dear Muldoon,

How your letter brings it all back – the iced champagne, Sir Godfrey tight-lipped (or tight anyhow) in that old portrait-covered room in the Foreign Office that has seen so much history, the few clipped words falling from his lips with a metallic clang like a Southern Colonel hitting a cuspidor – 'Muldoon, you must go to the beachhead'.

We knew you, madcap Muldoon! We – in the regiment – knew that, come what may, you would join us within sound of the guns. **THEY ARE WAITING FOR YOU NOW!**

My Indian servant will meet you at the landing stage on Wednesday week. Your old regimental song will be sung at our reunion. There are men here who will be proud to shake you by the hand: – Young Ginger (you remember his father at Eton – we shared the same boy in Macrum-pet's House); 'Bishop' Redfern (you can see he's a gentleman as soon as he shaves) and 'Towser' Mason (one of us). They will be with you – and of course – the GUNS!



You know the code. Your fellow-officers wait for you in a ruined bathing house three steps to the left of the dusty road which the natives call 'Purple Heart Avenue'. Muldoon – *you will not fail*.

I can say no more – I've kept my upper lip stiff too long.  
Yours for ENGLAND.

YOUNG BULLIVANT

When did he last see his friend?

For a few days after the arrival of Godfrey Talbot they did the rounds of Amalfi, Sorrento, Pompeii, during a general conference of the 'Team'.

Paying due attention, no doubt, to the celebrated Phallic wall paintings at the last resort?

How well you know them! His friend was under the mistaken impression that this portion of Pompeii had been liberated by the American Air Force. With the assistance of a guide, however, it was ascertained that the liberation of this ancient monument had been committed elsewhere.

What are the Six Liberating Arts?

Misdirected Air Bombardment, Looting, Bullshit, Prophylactic Fornication, Foxing the NAAFI, and Lying one's way through Traffic Jams.

What are the Seven Audible Memories?

The rattle and creak of a Bailey Bridge as your jeep passes over.

The CRAAAAP of an incoming shell.

The tramp of the feet of the Partisans.

The howling of the dogs of the Bene Hillal.

The crunch of pale blue breakers on a Libyan beach.

The voice of Lallah Andersen.

Distant piping, as the brew-up fires are doused one by one.

What are the Eight Visual Mysteries?

The sun going down behind Jerusalem.

The silver aquacity of running water in the tropics.

The bombed-out sepulchres of Foggia.

The blue sunbirds of Moab.

The pillars of fire slowly rising from Benghazi.

The clouds piled high over Crete.

The silent moon hanging placidly overhead during a Springtime crap out of doors.

Does this make eight?

Maybe not. But one should always try to give more than one undertakes.

Is that priggish sentiment any excuse for giving less?

Sorry. I miscounted.

To return to Pompeii, did any source of acrimony cloud an otherwise sunny afternoon?

Yes. When he discovered the reason for the guide's familiarity and leering manner of address.

What was the reason for these phenomena?

His friend – eager to obtain an early access to the primitive bordels – had described him in Italian to the guide as 'an eminent student of Erotics'.

How did he repay his friend for this offence?

By retaining in his own possession the entire packet of fealthy pictures showing reproductions of the Phallic wall paintings.

What welcome awaited the voyager on his arrival at Anzio?

As the LCI approached the temporary quay a high explosive shell fell into the water directly beside it.

Was this at a moment when he was recording his impressions into a live microphone?

Of course not. It was during the playback.

Did his friend observe this incident?

From the shore, with considerable enjoyment.

What other arrangements were laid on for his entertainment?

He was shown the sights of the town – Purple Heart Avenue, the Anzio Ritz, the collection of Chi-Chi Postcards in the Nettuno Post Office, the road to Flyover, the spot where the Professor had been sleeping when the Recording Truck had been hit. He was refreshed with a luncheon of spam and stewed tea, and introduced to the other inmates of the seaside villa that housed the Correspondents. He was enlivened with songs at the piano.

Such as?

'The Ould Orange Flute': a lesser-known street ballad concerning 'the tyrant Gladstone' and the arrest of one C. S. Parnell: an American patriotic fragment that begins:

If you don't like your Uncle Sammy  
Go back from where you came,  
To that land across the sea  
Wherever it may be  
But don't bring the old flag to shame.

How long did he remain in Anzio?

No longer than was necessary. Until the LCI had finished its business and was ready to pull out again.

In what terms did his friends describe his visit?

As a Record Quickie.

Identify the contemporary location of the other members of the BBC War Reporting Team in the Mediterranean area.

Beginning with the Leader, Godfrey Talbot was at the Villa Ruffo, consorting with Generals and answering messages from Arthur Barker. Michael Reynolds was sending home the daily Sitreps and attending High-level Conferences at Caserta, driven back and forth by a lunatic Italian in a jeep. Tony Beckwith was dealing with the Free French and the needs of the Overseas Service, and sending pencilled messages that began: – The Empire is being a bit of a bugger. Wally Waldron was making tea in his recording truck at Sessa. Molesworth St Aubyn Wade was boring Naples with accounts of his adventures in Jugo-Slavia. Going farther afield, Robert Dunnett – rehabilitated after a long struggle with Head Office over the pronunciation of ‘Pantellaria’ – was broadcasting from Algiers. While A. R. Chignall (principal party in the leading case of The Prime Minister of Transjordan versus Chignall) was Engineer-in-charge, Cairo, where he shared the attentions of the Trumpeter with a new man called Matthews.

Why does his tone change at the mention of Matthews?  
Because he is his obvious rival in the quest for Tito.

Had he still any hope of seeing the Balkans again?  
He did in fact see the Balkans again. He went gardening.

Gardening?  
‘Gardening’ is an expression used by the RAF to denote the laying of mines from aeroplanes.

Where were these mines laid?  
In a section of the Serbian Danube west of the Roumanian frontier. Other squadrons simultaneously mined the reaches of the river from Belgrade to the Iron Gates.

Why such a fuss about mining the Danube?  
Owing to the Partisan offensive against the Balkan railways, the Germans are using the river more and more to carry essential supplies to their armies in South-east Europe.

Was he instructed by his Employers to take part in this enterprise?  
He is rarely instructed by his Employers to do anything. He is more usually told not to do things.

In the absence of any specific instructions, why then did he go?  
In order to do more effectively what he had not done properly over Sousse, to record a live running commentary in the course of an actual flying operation. Because Molesworth St Aubyn Wade wanted another story to relate to the Villa Ruffo.

Did anything nearly prevent him from going?  
The presence of Florence Desmond at a Camp Concert on the airfield.

In what way?  
He wanted to hear her sing.

Describe the aeroplane in which the trip was made.  
A Wellington Bomber known as Q for Queenie.

Describe the operation briefly, giving proper credit to other people even where credit is due.

They took off from Foggia at about nine-thirty in the evening, and were over Northern Albania by ten. He sat beside the pilot and had a magnificent view. Molesworth was in the waist under the astrodome, and all the way across the Adriatic they recorded the crew talking to each other, and managed to get an amusing interview with each one of them. They could see a firework display of flak coming up from the direction of Belgrade, but there was no excitement in their own area as they came down almost to the water level, and roared upstream in the dead centre of the channel. Now every ripple, every reed, every bit of floating driftwood was as clear as daylight. Then the mines left the plane and the tail gunner reported their splashes astern right in the middle of the fairway. Climbing upwards again, they banked over in a turn and the serious part of the operation was over.

What followed the serious part of the operation?

A little light entertainment.

Consisting of?

Looking for barges and ships at anchor in the river.

And then?

And then machine-gunning them.

Was there any reason to suppose that these barges and ships had any connection with the War?

Only a *prima facie* assumption that everything in Central Europe is connected with the War and may profitably be attacked.

Did anybody object to this pastime?

There is little doubt that it was greatly objected to on board the ships. But nobody did anything about it. As they dived down on each ship in turn, she would come up into view dead ahead. And the guns would blaze, and the red tracers could be seen spouting ahead of the aircraft and tearing through and around the helpless vessel.

For how long did this entertainment continue?

Until they had exhausted their ammunition.

How was it afterwards described by those present?

As a piece of cake.

How were the resulting recordings received?

By the aircrews with embittered hilarity. On a preliminary disc he had said that they would get an operational supper of bacon and eggs before starting out. This was not the case. By the Pilot and Navigator with dismay. It was evident from their conversation over the Albanian

coast that they were five miles off their course. By Arthur Barker with approval. For some unknown reason the Observer had ejaculated 'Eureka' on landing. By the Visitors with satisfaction. The quality of the recordings was good. By the inmates of the Villa Ruffo with apprehension. Molesworth's first words were: 'I bet you don't know where I've been.'

With what other excursions did he pass the time while waiting for the opening of the offensive?

With a midnight excursion to Cassino jail.

Why at midnight?

Because one did not go into Cassino in the daylight – a mere graveyard of a town – a mass of ghostly white gables dominated by a hill, on the summit of which stands a wrecked monastery.

Who had wrecked the monastery?

The allied Air Forces.

With what result?

With the result of making it almost impregnable.

Still, it is presumed that the enemy had to be got out somehow?

The bombing of Monte Cassino did not get the enemy out. On the contrary, according to the Abbot, the enemy did not go in until after it had been bombed.

What does this go to prove?

That the Air Force, though it may supply the diamonds, does not always provide the answers.

Who promoted this visit to Cassino?

Mike Davis of the London Irish, on behalf of the *Daily Herald* and the BBC.

Did the prospects seem good?

At New Zealand Divisional Headquarters, where they dined, doubts were at first expressed about their prospects of getting in. However, the Guards were about to relieve the New Zealanders, and a small advance party of Officers was due to make the attempt by the south east road in order to look at conditions before taking over. As soon as the moon was up the Press Party went forward with them to a Battalion H Q in a farmhouse about a couple of miles from the town.

Describe the interior.

A warm, firelit kitchen filled with silent men sipping cups of tea.

Describe the plan of operations.

The Guardsmen with their guide were to go first. As soon as their arrival at the jail was reported on the telephone, the Press Party was to follow with another guide.

What lay between Battalion H Q and the jail?

A mile or two of empty marshland, totally deserted during daylight, but open during the hours of darkness to the patrols of both sides. They were warned to look out for a picket that would be expecting them, about half way across.

Did the Guardsmen arrive safely?

They did. Presently the telephone tinkled, and the second party knew that its turn had come. So they set forth in the bright moonlight, their footsteps ringing on the frosty road.

Describe the order of march.

First a New Zealand Corporal as guide. Then Mike and the BBC. Then the *Daily Herald* bringing up the rear.

What offer was made at Battalion H Q before their departure?

The offer of a tommy-gun apiece.

Was this offer accepted?

With regret it was gratefully declined.

On account of the Laws of War governing non-combatants?

No. On account of the fact that if there was going to be any shooting, there was no point in making it worse. On account of a personal understanding with Providence that it is safer not to carry arms in this war. If one is not in a position to shoot other people, one cannot be shot oneself, without old Nobodaddy losing face.

What other memories of this war are associated with moonlight?

Kilo 86 on the night when the Afrika Korps arrived at Alamein. The face of the Sphinx on a night of despair. The open flap of a tent at Azrak, with the Muezzin calling in the distance. The canopied deck of the *Dahabiya Yvonne* with the Nile in full flood, and his own voice coming through on the wireless. The harbour of Sousse 8,000 feet below. The reeds and ripples on the surface of the Danube.

What have such nights in common?

The silvery haze; the deep sense of space; the distance over which sound will carry, when not drowned by the hum of an engine.

What was unique on this particular night?

The motionless trees clad in an icy tinsel; the black hump of the hillside before them; a grey mist rising from the little patches of water in which the stars lay reflected; the clack of heels on the road; the sudden put-put-put of a machine gun away to the west, and the double bark of a Spandau in reply; the curving arcs of tracer bullets in the sky. But, most memorable of all, the croaking and chirping of hundreds of bull frogs in the marshes all around them.

Observing, were they observed?

After about half a mile's walk, by a silent figure standing half-concealed in the gate of a cottage.

Who was this?

The picket.

As expected, was he expecting?

He nodded his acknowledgment as they passed.

Were they observed from anywhere else?

Possibly from the black hillside now towering above them, for it seemed as if every eye must be focused upon them in their nakedness. But no sign of recognition came whistling through the frosty air.

Describe the rest of the journey,

Presently a stream splashed before them, and the guide led them away from the road, and across a line of makeshift stepping-stones. Then after another quarter of a mile, a rough heap of rubble appeared, with a tank lying on its side – a grotesque and helpless monster. In its shadow the body of a man – his wax-like face upturned towards the sky. They hurried on – clambering down the side of a quarry of loose stones and up the other side. Then ahead of them – the ragged gable of a building that marked the beginning of the town. At the butt of the wall another figure was standing motionless, watching them as they approached. His collar was turned up around his face. A rifle lay in the crook of his arm. Silently he motioned them to follow, leading them through a tangle of buildings and up to a doorway set in a massive wall. It was the jail; and Company HQ was inside. One by one, they passed in, feeling their way in single file along an unlit corridor where figures crouched in the darkness, and watchers peered out through sandbagged embrasures. Finally they arrived at a complex of small rooms lit by candles.

What was in these rooms?

In one, a dozen men resting on makeshift beds. In another, the signals section working at their keys and switchboards. In a third, the New Zealand Company Commander, with that steely-eyed look of half-concealed contempt for all Tourists and Quickies.

Why?

Because he lived in Cassino – night and day. Because his visitors were coming in for an hour or two during the darkness, and then hurrying off for the safety of the great rear areas, full of stories of their derring-do – like so many ENSA artists.

What invitation did the Company Commander extend to his visitors? To accompany him on his forthcoming round of sentry posts.

Was this offer accepted?

Unregretfully it was declined. The BBC humbly expressed the view that it would not have the nerve for such an excursion.

Did this excuse please the Company Commander?  
Noticeably so.

Plot the relative position of two opposing forces inside Cassino.  
Impossible. Both armies are inextricably mixed up in a shambles of streets and houses, lying low throughout most of the day, and revictualling and raiding during most of the night.

Was this the principal source of discomfort to the inhabitants of the jail?

No. Most irritating of all was the fact that the Unit latrine was on the far side of 'Spandau Alley' down which it was the practice of the enemy to fire at point blank range.

In what precise terms did the garrison sum up this situation?  
'Boy, do we long to be constipated!'

What other topics of conversation caught his attention?  
The fact that, having captured a tower a little way up the slope, they had just had a party shot up while carrying a Red Cross flag.

Did they express great indignation about this?  
No.

Why not?  
Because they were not certain about the purpose for which the Red Cross flag was being carried.

Are we to understand from this, that there is a certain amount of abuse of this emblem by our own good fellows as well as by the enemy?  
Yes. You are so to understand.

But is not this a very serious thing?  
Not so serious as it is to lie famished in a foxhole. After a few hours of this experience, the rules that are made in Geneva assume an academic rather than a practical importance. After all, a man will argue – the Red Cross is supposed to save lives. Why should it not save mine?

But does not honour enter into these vital matters?  
Of course it does. But in a practical rather than a theoretic way. If it can be seen that there really is a wounded man on the stretcher, neither side will usually fire. Soldiers do not as a rule wish to kill wounded men. They know that it might be themselves.

In what way can one describe this confusing mixture of rascality and gallantry, of bloody murder and of common sense, of intolerable grimness and of surprising joviality?  
By calling it War.

How did the Tourists get away from Cassino?  
They bade farewell to the Company Commander as he set forth on his round of Company positions, and they clambered back through the



rubbish and the rubble until they reached the road again, thence making their way back to where the jeep was parked.

Was the return journey uneventful?

Apart from the fact that the road was mortared behind them, it was uneventful. From the sound of machine-gunning in the town, they gathered that they had been wise in not accompanying the Company Commander on his rounds.

On what other occasions have equally good guesses been made?

When he had insisted on getting out of the Alamein Box, and the sand-hills were afterwards bombed and machine-gunned. When he had decided not to take Godfrey along the Mad Mile at Orsogna, and learnt afterwards from Cyril Bewley that they were now hitting even motor cyclists who tried to pass along it.

What moral is to be drawn from these facts?

That Old Nobodaddy keeps his bargains.

Apart from this, is there any evidence as to which side the supervising Deity is on, in this great conflict?

Reviewing the communiqués to date, and the number of matters that are blamed on the weather, it would appear that he is on the side of the enemy. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that he will not ultimately favour the contestants with the most religious Generals.

Which Generals are the most religious?

General Montgomery, who believes in Glory to God in the Highest and Good Hunting to us all: an American General called Patton who has been sacked for demonstrating his belief in the things of the spirit, rather than the cant of medical science. Kesselring, on the other hand, is not religious, and if he spares Rome it will only be in order to confuse the Catholics.

What practical steps have now been taken to implement the wishes of the Deity?

The Eighth Army has shifted centre, leaving an independent Corps to look after the Adriatic coast, and allowing the Fifth Army to concentrate on the shorter Garigliano front, and in Anzio. The Keeper of the Mixed Wall has left Vasto and has set up a new Headquarters on a hillside near Venafro, where his caravan was promptly bombed by our birdmen. The Allied Force in Italy has been brought up to a strength of about thirty divisions, as against twenty-three of the enemy's. But thanks to an ingenious economy of force, we have fourteen of our divisions lined up against only five of Kesselring's on the immediate battle front. The air situation is very healthy – although if it had been necessary to go on providing an umbrella for the Beachhead on the present scale, another month would probably have seen us at the end of our resources. No

enemy trains are able to move south of Perugia, except on short shuttle services.

What does all this presage?

The Overture to D Day, and to the general assault of the western world on Hitler's Europe. This is the start of a campaign – not merely of a battle – the opening move in the climax of the war. People who march in on other people are going to be marched in on, and those who claim to be a Master Race are going to have it put to the test in the only way that such pretensions can be decided. They are going to have to fight, until their leaders are either world conquerors or dead. They are going to be given precisely what they (and Sir Bowles Bart's cap badge) ask for – Death or Glory. That seems fair enough.

What BBC Correspondent is to be responsible for the coverage of the Eighth Army?

Correspondent Godfrey Talbot.

Did the regular Eighth Army Correspondent peaceably consent to this readjustment?

Most peaceably.

May one ask why?

Because, after studying the general situation, he had come to the conclusion that notwithstanding any preliminary hoo-hah, the Fifth Army would be the one to enter Rome.

What BBC Correspondent is to be responsible for the coverage of the Fifth Army?

Correspondent Wynford Vaughan Thomas (Beachhead) and the ex-Eighth Army Correspondent (Garigliano).

Describe D Day, as he saw it.

At 23.30 on Thursday, 11th May, 2,000 guns opened up simultaneously with Allied fighter-bombers participating in counter-battery work. With Emery Pearce of the *Herald*, Packard of U P, and another American, he took off from Foggia at 06.30 in a colossal air offensive, designed to fly the full length of the battlefield, pass out to sea, swing inland again north of Rome, and blast hell out of Kesselring's Headquarters on Monte Gargano. From the nose of the leading Fortress of the second wave, he observed the guns flashing in the snow-filled valleys far below, the P38s milling around like flies, a great pageant of air-power on all sides.

Did he bring with him his Engineer and recording gear to immortalise these impressions?

No. He was provided instead with the latest type of tape recorder, with the object of finding out how it worked under service conditions.

How did it work?

It did not work.

Did they bomb Kesselring's Headquarters?

They did not. North of Rome the clouds were piled below them in impenetrable banks, and they could not locate the place.

Was the climax of the operation therefore abandoned?

So far as they were concerned, it was not abandoned. After turning back towards the sea, the clouds suddenly cleared at 20,300 feet, and there below them lay the port of Civitta Vecchia. Pouring out streams of silver 'window' to confuse the enemy predictors, the formation passed through the flak and bombed the City.

What comment was made by the Pilot on this operation?

'Nice little place that. I wonder where it is?'

What comment came from the BBC?

As they roared out over the sea, the Radio Operator tuned into the Overseas Service, and the bright voice of a young woman remarked, 'This is Helen Cameron welcoming your criticisms, and saying Good morning to you all in the services'.

What comment came from the Navigator?

As they passed over Ponza, he returned a slip of paper bearing the names of the crew, together with a note of his own which read:

They just wasted time, money and bombs by bombing like they did today. We should have taken them back.

What comment did the Correspondent make?

There is no permissible comment to be made on the wiping out of cities in such an irrelevant manner. Instead, he attended a Canadian Concert Party at the Garrison Theatre with his friend Tony Beckwith.

Meanwhile the battle proceeded?

Slowly but effectively. The British and Indians crossed the Rapido and fought their way painfully up the Liri Valley. The Poles were as usual unlucky, as they ran into an enemy change-over in their first attack, and found twice as many men in the line as should have been there. But they were fighting mad on account of two or three of their number who had escaped back to their lines after being tortured in interrogation. After about five days, the enemy were still on point 593, above Cassino, but nearer to the coast, the French, who had started off slowest of all, were now going ahead much the fastest, and were already getting out of range of their own artillery. But what pleased Harding at Caserta most of all was the fact that the Germans had obviously been ordered to stand and fight it out, and were not withdrawing as soon as a position became untenable. This, of course, meant that they would not live to fight another day elsewhere. Hitler's policy of never retreating was beginning to pay off the other way round.

When did the turning point of the battle come?

It came on the day when he went with Wade and Maxwell Arnot to call on the Poles in their strange, winding valley known as the Inferno. It seemed oddly silent that morning, and the little fire-eaters were lying around in the fields, very battle weary but very proud of themselves. This was explained when the far end of the valley was reached, and it was discovered that the Monastery had at last been captured, and that resistance within the town of Cassino was at an end. They crossed the Rapido with the recording truck and tried to find a Pole who had been up on the summit.

Describe the action taken.

They passed through the sunny fields, brilliant with poppies and stinking with dead mules, until they came to the fringe of the ruins. Here, at the foot of the path that leads up to the summit, they observed a Polish Officer coming down – his arms full of an odd miscellany of books, vestments and wild roses.

Could he speak English?

He not only could – he did. Sitting there on a grassy bank, he recorded for them the whole story of the taking of the Monastery. His words were punctuated by the sound of desultory shell fire. Nobody knew from where or what it was, but it formed an excellent background to his words.

After which, no doubt, the entire party moved up to the summit?

Substantially incorrect. After being duly warned about mines, Maxwell Arnot moved up to the summit alone. Not even the bait of souvenirs and wild roses could make the Correspondent forget that his comrades of the Eighth Army Press Camp would soon be toiling up those same slopes, treading on each other's heels in their efforts to get their copy back to Naples.

Would it not have been good team work to have gone up there himself, thereby relieving his Leader of so tiring a journey?

It was still better team work to get his own discs to Naples at once, so that everybody could have the surprise of hearing them on the nine o'clock news that night.

Did any bad news mar the pleasure of a praiseworthy day?

Yes. The news of the death of Roddy McDonald and of Cyril Bewley on mines in the town.

How did this happen?

During some of that spasmodic shell fire, they had stepped off the road and were caught on a trip wire. Poor chaps – they were amongst the most likeable of the group, and they will both be missed very much indeed.

In what way did their death cause argument and disagreement amongst the Correspondents?  
Some people wished to pay elaborate 'Tributes' to them in the Press and on the Air.

Why should any objection be taken to this course of conduct?  
Because it draws distinction between the death of a Correspondent and the death of any other poor blighter who gets killed in this dirty business. Because it is only to the Press that there is any real news value in the fact that Roddy and Cyril happened to be Correspondents. Because when the sounding-board of publicity is made use of in such a way, what is really meant is: - Look at the hazards that *we* are going through. It might have been Us!

What other bad news was there?  
Passing from the tragic to the sinister, the news of the arrival of Kenneth Matthews in Bari.

What was he doing there?  
This is just the question that was promptly asked of Philip Astley at PR.

And what was the answer?  
Why, to go to Tito, of course. PR assumed that everybody knew all about it, since he had been brought over specially from Cairo.

By whom?  
Presumably by the BBC. Wasn't that the case? It was purely a BBC matter, of course.

Would PR presume to dictate to the BBC for one moment as to which member of its staff should go to Tito?  
Not for one moment. Such a thing had never entered their heads. Still, if Kenneth Matthews was already in Bari, ready and willing to go over to the Balkans, maybe the simplest thing would be just to let him go?

Did the Correspondent not send any further cables to Head Office?  
After his initial appeals - none.

Why?  
Because the whole subject is an unprofitable one, which must now be dropped. Because when one has tried to annoy people and been singularly successful, it is ridiculous to be indignant with people for being annoyed. Because it is rather a compliment when High Quarters go to such lengths in pursuit of a rather silly revenge. Therefore, to hell with Tito and the Trumpeter and all Illyrian diversions. The straight and narrow path leads northwards to the Eternal City.

NIHIL OBSTAT  
CENSOR DEPUTANS.

## THE VOLSCIAN MARSHES

IT was the 25th of May and night was falling on the little seaside town of Terracina, blotting out the scars of two or three days' fighting. To the north stretched the flat expanse of the Pontine Marshes, interlaced with canals and ditches and covered with sheets of flood water from which an evil grey mist rose in the air.

Through the heavily-mined orchards to the south-east came a jeep, with two men in uniform. On the front, below the windscreen, was painted the head of a white unicorn. The younger man – a fresh-faced infantry Captain in British battle dress – took a crumpled map out of his pocket, and dismounted in the main street to make an enquiry from an American truck. The other – a person of indeterminate rank, age and nationality, wearing a pair of German boots, a short American belted coat, and a British beret with an Arab cap badge, remained at the wheel, gloomily filling his pipe. This was your Reporter, trying to look anonymous as usual.

– Are you stopping here for the night? the Captain asked the driver of the truck.

– Reckon so, came the laconic answer.

– Do you know what's happening ahead?

– Can't say for certain. But I hear the Krauts are pulling out. We've broken through to the Beachhead.

– That's what we heard too. I suppose there must be a road open?

– I guess so.

– Well, all we can do is try.

He got back into the jeep, and we drove on. Crossing a series of craters, water hazards and churned-up detours, we finally reached the end of the long, ruler-straight road that leads through the marshes to Cisterna, just as the darkness of the Spring night became complete.

– I'm going to let down the windscreen. Otherwise I can't see a thing.

– It's this damn mist, said the Captain. What a hell of a place! There seems to be water everywhere.

– Soaks into you, doesn't it? Everything in my pockets is damp already.

Without lights, and very gingerly, at about eight miles an hour, the jeep proceeded northwards along the deserted road. We peered ahead for craters and obstructions. There was no sound except the purr of the engine and the croaking of the bull frogs. From time to time a shuttered house loomed up out of the murk, and vanished behind us, but there was no sign of any inhabitants.

For five or six miles the conversation turned on the general strategy of the war in Italy, and the policy of pin-down, encircle and annihilate. In front of the Allies the Gustav Line stood like a great door, hinged on the Central Apennines. Wedged in behind it was an anvil – the Anzio Beachhead. A lesser commander, lured by the bait of Rome, might be expected to lunge at the latch side of the door, drive it backwards, and connect up with the Beachhead. So he would break through to Rome and apparently win his battle. But although he might gain a political objective in this way, the enemy would live to fight again. They would have been driven back into their open escape routes, through the Apennines and up the east coast.

For a time it had seemed as if a military coup of far greater brilliance than this were about to be pulled off. Suppose the Allied high command had been sincere in its protestations that nothing mattered except the destruction of the enemy's field force – suppose the blow had fallen not on the latch, but on the hinge of the door – suppose the hinge had given way, and the entire door had been driven back upon the anvil of the Beachhead. Then – with half the German Tenth Army floundering in these Pontine Marshes, it might truly have been said that Anzio had paid a dividend!

– But that would have meant a very difficult advance through the toughest and most mountainous part of the line, said the Captain.

– Which we have had to do anyhow – yard by yard. Meanwhile the faster we go ahead in this area, the faster we are driving them right out of the trap. What do you suppose the Germans would have done in their heyday? Did they go for Paris in May, 1940, or did they mop up the Allied Armies first?

– Oh well, I suppose it's hard not to go ahead wherever you can do it most easily. And by the way, how far ahead are we going

along this road? I understand that the Germans are still in Cisterna?

– Yes, we've got to turn off to the left before we get as far as that. The trouble is to choose a turn that will get us through. There must be a picket along this road, somewhere this side of Cisterna. It can't be wide open. Or can it?

The roads through the Pontine Marshes are the nearest thing to a rectangular maze that has been constructed by man. Identical main roads and canals run at right angles to each other. Between them run smaller roads and drains, also at right angles; and where every road crosses every drain, there is a bridge – or would have been a bridge, were it not for the fact that most of them had been blown up. Therefore it was not only necessary to keep in mind the direction in which we were going. We had also – by guess or by God – to pick a route where the bridges were still intact, or where there were practicable detours across the canals. And this in the dark – with a mist billowing up from the drains on all sides, and the prospect of running into enemy patrols at any point in the journey!

It was an insane expedition, that could hardly be justified by any news story at the end of it. For several miles more, there was sign neither of man, woman, nor beast. Then, at a crossroads, through the ghostly light, appeared an armoured car.

We drew up alongside, and saw with some relief that it was American – a Fifth Army picket, watching the side road that led up to the hills. Dismounting, we identified ourselves to the head that was sticking out of the turret.

Yes, contact had been made with Anzio, and as far as was known, the enemy had pulled out of the country to the left of the road. If we kept going straight ahead for another three miles we would probably run into one of the Anzio pickets, at another crossroads. Here we could get directions for Mussolini's Pontine Capital – Littorio – after which the going should be easy. Duly thanked, the head sank back into its turret, and the journey was resumed.

It was the longest three miles on record. And as we drove, the conversation covered an equally wide range of country. The Captain was interested in theology and the drama. He was a practising member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, and had almost written a play on the subject of War Correspondents and their Habits – a satirical drama. I was unacquainted with the



Third Order, and would like to know what was meant by having 'almost' written a play.

The Third Order of Saint Francis was a community of pious laymen of the Catholic faith – admirers of the Saint, who nevertheless had not taken Holy Orders. As regards the play, he had written an outline of the Press Notices, an elaborate description of each character and his background, and a short treatise on the Art of Playwriting. All that he had to do now was to write the play.

I had written a play or two myself, but had never set about them with such forethought. I did not think that I would write any more plays, because all that I wanted now was to have a good regular office job, to go to the pictures a couple of times a week with a comfortable wife, and to study the Bible from Saturday to Monday.

– Study the Bible? considered the Captain, and he shook his head doubtfully.

Did he not approve of such a pastime? Within limits, yes. But for a layman, the Bible was rather a dangerous book. The Church had been very wise to discourage its general reading in the past.

– You mean, it gives us a shock when we read it? I asked.

No, that was not the reason. People who read the Bible too much have a way of coming to imagine that everything in it refers personally to themselves – a well-known step towards mental derangement. He even knew a man who imagined himself to be Jesus. Besides, at this distance from its original composition, it was difficult to be certain what ought to be in it and what ought not.

– Isn't it supposed to be divinely inspired?

To begin with, certainly. But that hardly applies to every new version and translation. We wrongly think of the Bible as something composed for the benefit of James I by a very intelligent Archbishop of Canterbury. All we know of what was in it originally is what a few fourth-century copies of copies tell us – like the Sinaitic Palimpsest. And there is no reason for holding that these too are divinely inspired. That is why it is better to rely on the tradition of the Church. No, after an active life like this one, he was certain that it would be bad for me to study the Bible. At the best, I would find it boring.

But that was exactly what I was after – to get back from all of this to a life of complete domestic boredom. The Member of the Third Order considered this paradox for a while, before referring to the truism that happiness, after all, is just a state of mind. And he was preparing to elaborate a thesis that this thirst for

boredom was probably at the back of mediæval monasticism, when a British voice challenged the jeep from the side of the road. It was the Anzio picket, full of indignant corrections to the news of the day, as soon as it was discovered that one of the arrivals was a Correspondent. There had been some sort of a fabricated American ceremony in the afternoon, that was supposed to represent – for publicity purposes – the union of the two forces, from Anzio and the South. But, in fact, according to the picket, contact had been made by their own outfit several hours earlier. And would the Press please see that this detail was correctly reported.

At such an hour of the night this seemed to be of very minor importance. The greater question was, How to get to Littorio? and on this point the picket gave its best information.

Conversation flagged during the ensuing journey – particularly after we had turned down a narrow side road, and found ourselves passing over two bridges that had been more than half demolished. It was harder than ever to see what was in front, and as patches of unusual colour appeared on the road ahead, one of us – and sometimes both – would get out of the jeep, and walk forward to see what they were. Sometimes there was a sharp descent, followed by a steep climb through a half-filled trench where there had once been a bridge. But just as frequently it turned out to be an open chasm or an obstruction that it was necessary to go around.

From the inhospitable Cisterna, to the right, came a firework display of tracer bullets. At last dim, imperial shapes began to rise around us, and the next question was, Is this Littorio? Everything was silent, but presently we could see that there were a number of armoured cars and bren-gun carriers parked in the streets, with GIs asleep in most of them.

There was not a sentry or a guard of any kind, so we proceeded to arouse various sleepers. The first man to be woken was merely abusive; the second did not know where he was and cared less. Maybe if we asked the Company Commander?...He did not know where the Company Commander was. The Company Commander was never found, and the identity of the town was never determined. But turning again towards the north, we drove on in the general direction of the gunfire, and as the dawn began to lighten the sky, conversation was resumed.

Yes, I would like to be going to a rather bad movie at the local cinema, where we would leave the car on the proper side of the

suburban road with the parking lights on and maybe have a gin and mixed in the more expensive part of the local pub. I would also be delighted to listen to a lot of stories about trouble with the fishmonger, and what was wrong with the ball-cock in the downstairs lavatory. And I would willingly inspect the gas meter and bring unlimited coal in for the stove. And yet, said the Captain, many people who spend their lives doing that sort of thing would probably be dreaming dreams of driving through the Pontine Marshes at dead of night in search of Anzio. It just shows you, doesn't it?

– What does it show you?

– It shows you how in spite of everything we always end up by coming back to Christianity.

I did not quite see how this followed, but was reminded by my friend that on my own admission my future programme included a regular study of the Bible. But not from any theological motives, I retorted. The Bible is a fine piece of literature, but much too full of contradictions to be taken in any other way.

That is precisely what proves its truth, objected the Captain. A book that gives four different accounts of the Crucifixion and three different resurrection stories, that blandly offers two conflicting Messianic pedigrees, and twists the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies in a manner that anybody can see through simply by looking them up – a book that can't even make up its mind about so simple a matter as the names of the Twelve Apostles could never be a fabrication. It must certainly be founded on fact!

Any good lawyer could tear it to ribbons – it's so artlessly handicapped by Truth. I laughed – intrigued and delighted by so rascally an argument. Like Iola's credentials, the Gospel story must be an honest one because it is so badly proved – because no inventor of fairy tales would ever have shown so much animosity as the earlier Evangelists do against all the major Apostles, and against the family – and particularly the Mother – of the central character. The older the version of the story, the more circumstantial it gets, and also the more bad-tempered over most of the principal Actors. According to the argument of this secular Franciscan, a proper study of the New Testament ought not to raise doubts in the mind of a dispassionate reader, but should prove its historical basis, and the real antiquity of its sources.

A much better argument than Paley's! But before it could be

pursued any further, we drew up at a wrecked bridge that lay across an expanse of water, rather wider than usual.

- I wonder what this is?

- Probably the Mussolini Canal.

- Yeh, it is, came a sepulchral voice from the side of the road. It was getting distinctly light.

- Charles, I said. Something tells me that we are under observation.

- Sure, you are, Charles, said the Voice.

And a breech bolt clicked.

- Good morning, I replied; and let in the clutch. We moved on across what seemed to be a Bailey Bridge, and through the old perimeter of the Beachhead.

Soon we were driving up the battered main street of Nettuno, and I was promising to study not only the Bible, but also the Apocrypha. And not only the Apocrypha of common knowledge, but also that rare and interesting New Testament Apocrypha, a translation of which the Captain would be glad to lend me!

In broad daylight we came to a halt at the Public Relations Villa. From this, we dragged out the local representative of the BBC and his Engineer, yawning and protesting, to make one of those half-serious, half-hilarious news spots that seem very good at the time, but are regarded with a jaundiced eye by the Newsrooms at home. Symbolising in our persons the break-through to the Beachhead and the union of the two armies, it ought to have been a very good recording indeed. However, in its time the inevitable letter came from London.

... We listened to your joint recording after the night-drive to Anzio, and could picture the scene only too vividly. 'Drunk again', was the comment...

\* \* \*

Soon, the Beachhead had definitely broken out, and the First US Armoured Division - affectionately known as 'Ernie and his Boys' - had swept through Cisterna and across the hills, to a place called Ardena, from which they could shell Valmontone and the vital stretches of Highway Six. Before long, the Anzio Press Camp was packed with Correspondents, lining up for the entry into Rome - the great cut-throat Agencies, the popular Dailies, the Think-piece Weeklies, and finally the boys from the Eighth Army Camp, Godfrey Talbot and all - hot in pursuit of the best of both worlds.

To the old hands, like Vaughan Thomas, all these new arrivals were a source of some jocularly. Rome was a titbit that was not going to be confined to those who had sat the winter out in Anzio. Still it was very exciting for him to be free again, to be able to pass under the Flyover, and to run around in all the areas that had been a deathtrap only a week or two earlier. His first objective was a group of shattered agricultural buildings known as 'The Factory', that stood a mile or two beyond the old perimeter of the British sector.

He had been in the chapel of this place, on a day in the previous February, when the big attack was launched that had nearly driven the Allies into the sea. Indeed, he had just taken into his hands a small bronze statuette of John the Baptist, when the barrage opened and a Scottish sergeant had remarked:

– Eh, mon, ye canna' touch that wi'oot noises fra' Heaven.

After fleeing precipitantly from the chapel, he had often lain on his belly near the Flyover, and had looked at the factory – now deep within the enemy lines – through his field glasses. Was the little bronze still lying where he had dropped it? Would he ever see it again? Now the entire building was an utter ruin, but he had a general idea of the lie of the land, and after some minutes of vigorous digging, he turned to me with a shining face, and John the Baptist in his arms. Looking upwards, at first apprehensively, a smile broadened upon his face, and he said:

– Eh, mon, there's no noises fra' Heaven this time!

\* \* \*

We went peering together through the streets of Velletri, while the GIs cleaned up the last of the enemy snipers. And we recorded a shooting match in Artena, where Molesworth St Aubyn Wade – under fire for the first time – came very near to getting a couple of punches on the nose. He had just discovered what I had found out at Mersa Matruh – that it is not as frightening as it seems. So strutting up and down the road, as a few shells came in, he twirled his moustache in a daredevil manner and said:

– What! Surely not in a hurry to pack up? I assure you, my dear fellows, I don't mind this in the slightest.

Several nights later, in the Ops Room of the First British Division, it was evident from the maps that an American Task Force was on the point of breaking into Rome around the back of the Alban Hills. It was about ten o'clock, after an evening of songs by

Hamish Henderson, and I was getting a little sleepy. This, however, was something special. If a Task Force was about to enter Rome, it was important to go in with it; not merely for the honour of being the first in, but to circumvent any regulations that might be imposed on the entry of Correspondents after the city had fallen. There were sinister rumours abroad that Special Passes would be required, and that only Certain People would be admitted for the present. But those who examine and enforce Special Passes are not usually on the scene while the fighting is still going on; therefore the golden rule for this kind of nuisance is to get there, and have your business done before they arrive at all.

– Molesworth, I said, let's put the gear in the back of my jeep, and get cracking.

While he unscrewed the turntables from their bed in the truck, and stowed them in the back of the jeep, I went into the Villa and gently shook Godfrey by the shoulder as he lay asleep.

– Sorry to wake you, Godfrey, but I just wanted to tell you that Molesworth and I are off. Do you want to come too?

A sleepy eye regarded me with some distaste.

– Where are you off to?

– Just to chase a column that looks interesting. It will be an all-night drive.

– OK. See you some time tomorrow.

Five minutes later our jeep was speeding up the dark road towards Cisterna, past the old perimeter line where the well-known shape of a great Ferdinand tank lay on its side, and on into the hills to Valmontone.

There was a lot of Luftwaffe activity. Around Valmontone they were straffing the roads in the dark, and for a while we went into a farm building and munched some food until the night had quietened down. It seemed almost too good to hope that we might find the road into Rome wide open, and bowl in with our gear, about six hours ahead of everybody else. But there was just a chance, and it was the sort of thing that does sometimes happen.

We had waited a long time for this moment – all through that winter on the Sangro, all through spring, and into the early summer. I could picture our arrival – the milling crowds of surprised and delighted Romans – the kissing and the Asti Spumante ...the triumphal progress to the Palazzo Venetia, from the door of which the Mayor (as in Lanciano) would invite us in to a luncheon

of hidden luxuries. Then, I might address a few encouraging remarks to the crowd from the balcony, all of which – together with their enthusiastic responses – would be recorded by Molesworth on the gear below. After that, Mark Clark and the Army might arrive, followed at a respectful distance by PR and its lorryloads of indignant Reporters waving their Special Passes, which had naturally been brought to the wrong destination by some uninterested GI. It made a pleasant reverie for a cold May morning.

There was no traffic on the road up the gorge and round the shoulder of the hills below Frascati. But there were signs that the tanks had passed that way. As it grew lighter, we could make out the distances on the kilometre stones: ROMA – 20; ROMA – 18; ROMA – 15. Then, as the cold grey dawn began to spread its fingers over the countryside, we ran into an open leaguer of American Armour, spread out on each side of the road, close to a great ornamental gate. To one side, there was a small concourse of jeeps around an armoured car.

We made our way towards this, and were met by another Correspondent – Dangerous Dan Duluce of AP (or UP). Nobody had seen anything of Dangerous Dan for several days – a circumstance that always upsets his closest colleagues. It appeared that having staked his reputation on this column being the first into Rome, he had lived with them ever since. He was naturally a little annoyed at the arrival of another Correspondent at this crucial moment, but was relieved to discover that it was only the BBC. The BBC did not matter. What Dan really wanted to know was, where was Packard of UP (or AP – anyway, the other one)? The BBC could not help him on this point, so some German chocolate was passed around and I was introduced to General Frederick, Commander of the column, in the shadow of whose personal armoured car Dangerous Dan was going to lead the Allies into Rome – once the General could be persuaded to start. But the General, although friendly towards the Press, had not yet carried out his Reccy. And until he had some idea of what was in front of him, he was not disposed to proceed, even to enable Dan to get on before Packard turned up.

But as we munched our Wehrmacht chocolate, a very sinister thing happened. Another jeep came threading its way down the road, passed through the parked Armour, and slipped quietly off in the direction of Rome. And round the group went the fatal words, 'That was Packard'.

Pandemonium broke loose at once. There you are! Just as Dan had feared. This was the result of standing around wasting time when we ought to have been moving on. Packard was going to take Rome single handed. And as he spoke, Dan got into his jeep and started to move off, followed by a representative of the *Stars and Stripes*.

I looked at Molesworth and Molesworth looked at me. And together we both looked at the General. But the General showed no sign whatever of starting his column for the convenience or protection of AP and UP. Or even for the BBC. As the only Correspondents now present, and the only Europeans on the scene, it seemed up to us to do something. Little as we cared for the internecine struggles of the great American Agencies, it would look rather bad if Europe failed to rise to the occasion, and was left behind at such a moment.

– OK, I said, with some distaste. Let's go. You drive.

We sped down the road towards Rome on the trail of AP, UP and the *Stars and Stripes*, and soon were in close procession with them. It was bright daylight already, and the stones kept announcing in a louder and louder refrain:

ROMA – 10

ROMA – 8

ROMA – 7

Houses were around us now – suburban houses, and minor factory buildings. The inhabitants were beginning to stir, and from one industrial block quite a crowd emerged, running and pointing and clapping their hands:

– Inglesi! Inglesi! Viva, Inglesi!

We bowed and waved as we motored past.

Down a long, gentle slope following the tramlines our four jeeps moved in a stately procession, rounding bend after bend, as the houses thickened up on both sides, and the onlookers grew steadily in number. We were now definitely in the suburbs. Were we really going to take Rome in person?

Then, as they approached a side road, the front three jeeps suddenly executed the most rapid turn around I have ever seen, and roared back the way they had come.

– I wonder why that was? said Molesworth.

– I don't know. But it might be just as well to follow them.

We stopped, and as we did so, there emerged from the side road,



slowly and ponderously, a large German armoured car with a black cross on the turret.

– Christ, look! I shouted. Turn around.

Molesworth stalled the engine.

Moments like this are interesting to look back upon because of their appalling calm. For what seemed like eternity we sat there in the middle of the road, gazing at that armoured car, not twenty yards distant. Molesworth ground the self-starter and fiddled with the throttle, while I stared at the turret waiting for it to swing in our direction.

Now this was very interesting. At best, we were in the bag, and this is what it felt like. I had often wondered, and now I knew. Even if we were to turn round, we couldn't possibly get away now, up that long road and around the first bend. Even if the damn thing didn't chase us, it had only to shoot at us from point-blank range. Indeed, it might be better to get into the ditch at once, and prepare for a polite and – much to be hoped – quiet surrender. Yes, as soon as the turret started to move I would get out.

Then I noticed another very odd thing. The armoured car had come to a halt, half way across the road, and from its rear a number of figures were leaping out and running like hell up the side road. Where they were going I couldn't see, nor did we wait to find out, even though they seemed more agitated than we were. Our engine spluttered into life, and with Molesworth wrenching at the wheel, we were around and roaring back out of Rome. I leant over the rear of my seat, my eyes still fixed on the turret, waiting for it to turn. But it never moved.

Then we had passed the bend, and away ahead of us, three brown streaks were belting up the road – AP, UP and the *Stars and Stripes*. As we followed them, in full retreat, the same enthusiastic locals came out and cheered us.

– Inglesi! Inglesi! Viva – Viva!

Mechanically I bowed and waved as we hurried past.

– Do you know, I said to Molesworth, I have a feeling that those fellows in that armoured car were probably just as surprised as we were.

Back at the tank leaguer there was a nasty little scene going on with General Frederick. There you are! That's what happens when the Press isn't properly looked after! Nice state of affairs when AP and UP might have got shot up, just because the General wouldn't get moving when he was asked. What would the American

people have said if Dangerous Dan and Perilous Packard had both gone into the bag together, and there was nobody left but INS to describe the fall of Rome? Oh, there'd be a few questions in the proper quarter, and make no mistake about it!

Ponderously the first tank moved off to investigate the annoyance; and behind it, another and another and another. The four jeeps sandwiched themselves between with a good deal of shouting and pointing. It was as if a number of small boys had run back to their big brother with a complaint that some larger boys had thrown stones at them. Big Brother would deal with this!

For the third time, the same locals came out and cheered. We were old favourites by now.

The going was slower this time, but there was a new feeling of solid security about it; and as we approached the danger spot it was evident that the armoured car had gone. But now approaching us down the same side road was a large lorry filled with Germans, hanging out over the side and staring at us. This time the boot was on the other foot; and as Molesworth slowed up, I turned to the tank behind. A steel-helmeted head was sticking out of the turret, the jaws munching rhythmically.

- Look, I said, pointing at the lorry.

- What? asked the head above the rattle of the tank.

- Look, I repeated. Gerries.

- What?

- GERRIES! I roared.

The enemy was moving more slowly now, but still coming on.

- D'yew mean Krauts? shouted the American.

I stood up in the now stationary jeep, and hastily got out.

- I don't give a bugger what you call them. DO something.

And I made for the cover of the ditch. The lorry was now only a few yards off and still approaching. The man in the tank slowly drew a revolver. In the ditch I really lost my temper.

- God dammit, that's not what you need, you cretinous ass. What do you suppose the bloody tank is for?

But nobody was listening. The enemy truck had at last come to a halt, and the occupants were getting out. One by one they lined up in front of the vehicle, and put up their hands. Then a transatlantic avalanche went past me and settled on the line of our former foes, like locusts on a harvest. All distinctions of class, wealth, profession and personal need were flung to the wind, and from the most highly paid to the least sophisticated all were

happily going through enemy pockets, and relieving them of watches, belts, cigarette cases and anything considered portable.

It only took a moment, and they were off again, piling back into their vehicles and hooting down the road to Rome. I, too, had done a little pillaging in my day, but only of small-time abandoned stuff. I had not yet developed the business instinct of going through the pockets of men standing with their hands up. Maybe this would come in time.

As I lingered beside the abandoned lorry the horn of the jeep hooted insistently. Molesworth was impatient to be away. The column was on the move, and I dashed after the jeep without waiting for still another vehicle that had arrived upon the scene. It was a Staff car, crammed with Wehrmacht Officers, all peering out in some surprise. The hell with it; this was getting absurd!

The Staff car turned slowly into the main road and disappeared in the opposite direction, wriggling in and out amongst the American tanks. Now and then one of the Doughs would lean over and look inside as it passed.

– Hey! Did you see what I saw?

We did not get very much farther. Indeed it was just as well that this little distraction had affected our proud position near the front of the column; for after a kilometre or two, turning another corner, the two leading tanks were smartly knocked out by a well-sighted 88 that was covering the road. The column halted, and all parties not encased in armour dispersed themselves into the ditches and behind the hedges. From time to time, enemy shells came whistling through. From standing up, we sat down, and then – as the foliage behind us seemed to stir with small-arms fire – from sitting down, we lay down. There was only one thing that gave me a contented glow. Molesworth was not walking up and down this time, twirling his moustache and saying:

– What? Got the wind up? My dear fellow, I don't mind this in the slightest!

On the contrary, he was lying beside me, gripping my leg. And as each whizz-bang came through, his grip tightened and then relaxed. He was a quieter Engineer now – which was to the good.

Before long our little party increased in number, and amongst the newcomers were several more Correspondents. The day was getting on, and our exclusive story was becoming less and less exclusive. From the behaviour of the tanks – now dispersing over the countryside on each flank – it looked like No Rome today.

– There doesn't seem to be much future in this, I said. What do you say we go back a bit and have some breakfast?

The spirit of the old Molesworth revived, and for a moment it looked as if he were going to become annoying.

– Now, Molesworth, I said grimly. This is no moment for nonchalance. Any nonchalance from you, and we bloody well stay!

– Well, I don't mind really. Whatever you say.

– Wisely put.

Waving farewell to those who were still lurking behind the hedge (amongst whom this tactical move produced a strong reaction), we ran for the jeep, and drove back for what seemed to be about half a mile. Opposite the gates of some barracks we met the Army Film Unit coming up and sat down on the tramlines for a brew-up. There was no point in anybody going much farther.

A fine bright Sunday morning with the sun shining, and the birds singing. And as we drank our tea and ate our bits of biscuit and cheese, a wedding party came stepping down the road – Bride, Bridegroom, Best Man, Bridesmaid, and a chatter of miscellaneous relations, arm in arm, in their best clothes. Down the road they came, amidst the clicking cameras of the Film Unit, and went on in the direction of the battle. And that was the last that was seen of them.

\* \* \*

Sitting there in the sun, I soon began to realise how tired I was. Up all night, after a day like yesterday, and three lucky escapes in rapid succession was just about enough for the present. In Valmontone I had stepped into an archway to look at something, and thereby avoided a shell which burst where I had been standing. On Highway Six, some instinct had sent me round by a detour, only to find afterwards that I had avoided an ambush at a blown bridge. And now that 88. It is not profitable to brood on such matters, particularly when one is tired. And anyhow, it cuts both ways. If I had been lucky, I had also been slow witted.

The Germans in that armoured car had been as scared of me as I was of them. If I had stood my ground, I could probably have taken it unarmed. If I hadn't allowed myself to be hustled, I could probably have got into that empty German lorry, and driven it blandly into Rome without a shot being fired at me.

Schoolboy dreams, perhaps, but if I had been a better Correspondent maybe I would have thought of them in time to try. And

as I mused there on my lost opportunities, an Air Force saloon car drew up beside me, and Rex Barlee leant out of the window, a document in his hand.

– Hello. We were looking for you to give you this. Everybody is getting them, after all.

An outburst of shelling broke out down the road, as I read it.

POLICE HEADQUARTERS  
AMG 5 ARMY (CAS)  
29/5/44

Mr D. Johnston (Br) is an Accredited War Correspondent (BBC). He is authorised by Generals JOHNSON and HUME to enter the city and governate of Rome and circulate therein in connection with his official duties. Kindly grant all possible facilities.

J. Pollock Lt Col,  
Chief of Police  
AMG 5 ARMY (CAS)

I started to giggle. It was civil of Generals Johnson and Hume, but it still needed more than their authorisation to circulate in Rome.

\* \* \*

When Godfrey arrived, at the head of the BBC party, I packed up and handed over. The rest of the day was everybody's business, and tomorrow would be as good a bet as any to return to Rome. Meanwhile I might as well take what story I had to the transmitter at Nettuno. It had gone, of course, when I got there, contrary to all arrangements, and the Censors had gone – nobody knew exactly where.

All that I could do was to find a Don R going back to Naples and give him a jaundiced disc to deliver as best he could. And I rolled into bed.

\* \* \*

At first light we rose again and, with the assistance of Ken Best, shifted the recording gear back into the big truck, loaded it up with all we possessed, and bade farewell to the Beachhead.

It was fair going now – Ken and I together, with the truck following along behind – up the same route through Valmontone and past the scenes of yesterday's adventures. Past the waning kilometre stones – past the ornamental gateway and the fatal side-road, past the barracks, and the field with the severed telegraph

poles, past the hedge and the two knocked-out tanks, past the knocked-out 88, and into the city by way of some triumphal arch.

A file of Doughs was trudging along each side of the road, and between them moved the column of vehicles. The sidewalks were packed with cheering Eyties – men, women and children – an impressive Victory procession, although Historians and Film Directors who reproduce the scene should note that what they were shouting was not Viva – Viva! but Sigaretta – Sigaretta! Ken Best scattered presents on all sides like a King – Sigaretta – Biscotte – Caramello! – and the ovation ebbed and flowed around us.

In the midst of these scenes we passed Godfrey and Vaughan coming out. They had been in since dawn, and had covered everything – the Palazzo Venetia, the Forum, the Quirinal. Tony was still with Wally in the Vatican Square. There wasn't really very much left for me to do – unless perhaps the Colosseum. Anyhow, better look up Tony, and we would all meet for lunch.

Through scenes of mounting hilarity, we drove on until we entered the great circular space in front of St Peter's, where we found Tony and Wally with their recording truck. The place was packed with a fantastic collection of cars, jeeps, GIs and chattering Romans. Nobody had made any effort to stop them from coming into neutral territory, but presently a priest approached and asked us to take the truck outside the barriers. The Germans, the priest explained, had never entered Vatican territory with their vehicles, and it was hoped that the Allies would behave with the same correctness. Tony was recording at the time, and I promised the priest that as soon as he had finished, we would move. As for the rest...the priest shrugged his shoulders and smiled hopelessly.

While Tony was finishing his commentary, tired of answering so many questions, I strolled up the steps of the Cathedral and entered the nave, where I found myself staring at the Pieta – a statue to the right, inside the great bronze doors. The face reminded me of somebody – I could not think whom.

\* \* \*

It was warm in the Colosseum in the sunlight, with only a few birds hopping around to disturb my thoughts. There was nobody else there, and after the riotous jabber of the streets it was very pleasant to sit alone on a fallen column, the microphone in my hand, and wonder what there was left to say. How odd, for a

brief half hour to be manager and sole proprietor of the Colosseum. It was stranger still not to feel more elation – some sense of achievement, surely, or even of triumph. Rome is not entered by a victorious army every day. It is not a common thing to have the Colosseum to do what one likes with. Scarcely a moment for melancholy, one would imagine. Yet that was all that I felt. Melancholy, and a deep lassitude – just as I had felt after Vis.

I was sorry to have been late – in spite of my drive the night before last. I was sorry for my missed opportunities – for that lorry – and above all for not caring more than I did.

Hollow the prize, after the excitement of the Effort. How dull it is to have one's prayers answered.

I was sorry not to be with my own particular Army – the Army that had come from the Delta of the Nile, and had borne the brunt of the present battle. Not for it was Rome. It was still fighting somewhere up in the Central Apennines. I was sorry for the old friends who were not with me – for Mark, and for Sean Fielding, for George Haughton, and for Skipper, for Eian Ogilvy, and for Bryant with his mud-laden Indians. I was even a little sorry for the Dead – for Thornton-Bassett, and Dan Pienaar, for Roddy McDonald and Cyril Bewley, for Doc Outfin and Lance Wade – though God knows whether it was necessary to be sorry for them.

And for a long time I still could not remember where it was that I had seen the face of the Pieta – the Mother of God, mourning over her murdered son. The second Eve, they called her. But she had not really set her children free from the sins of our first Mother. She had only offered forgiveness for them, and for what appeared to be errors in the work of creation. But who was going to forgive God? That was just as vital a question. Would there have to be a third Eve to answer that?

Not much material for Arthur Barker so far. There would be grave concern over my reporting of the fall of Rome! No whoops of triumph – no smug rejoicing, discreetly laced with propaganda – no vivid accounts of the crowds showering me with kisses and wine? Nothing but this – the deep, majestic quiet of the Colosseum, into which the distant roar and shouting of the Eternal City hardly penetrated!

And then I remembered where it was that I had seen the face of the Pieta. It was vaguely like a photograph that I had picked up near Maaten Baguish – a country girl, a nice honest blonde that

I had almost forgotten about, but that it was necessary to find some day. It was Anneliese.

Even less of a news spot here!

A cross stands incongruously in the midst of this ancient arena – the arrogant symbol of those who once died here, denying the Gods of another civilisation.

It is not the idols of stone and legend that hold the race in slavery today, but phrases – shibboleths – the catch-cries of dead men – the authority of printed pages as unreal as the Gods the Christians fought, and twice as tyrannical.

Over tier upon tier of empty galleries my eyes wandered as I pulled across the microphone cable and got ready to record. We must shout down the Idols made of Words, and tear up the Talismen of Paper.

– We who intend to live, salute you!

There was no answering roar in reply to my lifted arm. Those tiers have been filled, and perhaps will be filled again. But to me, that Sunday morning, the multitudes were invisible. So turning, I sat down again, and began my day's work.

– This is Despatch Number 181 recorded on the morning of the 5th June. Rome has fallen, and I am sitting here inside the Colosseum. It is very quiet, except for the birds, and in deference to the solemnity of the occasion and the fact that I can't think of anything to say, I am going to read you a fable out of the New Testament Apocrypha that a friend has lent me. As a matter of fact, I think it's rather good. It goes something like this:

When I was a little child  
And dwelling in my kingdom in my Father's house,  
And in the wealth and the glories  
Of my parents I had my pleasure,  
From the West, our home,  
My parents sent me forth.  
And of the riches of our treasury  
They tied up for me a load.  
Large it was, yet light,  
So that I might bear it unaided.  
And they girded me with adamant  
Which is not crushed by iron.  
And they took off from me the bright robe  
Which in their love they had woven to my stature.  
And they made a compact with me  
And wrote it on my heart



That it should not be forgotten.  
'If you will go down into Egypt  
And bring back the pearl  
Which our parents have lost in Eden,  
Then you shall put on your bright robe  
And with your brother, our next in rank,  
Shall be heir in our Kingdom'.

Suddenly the microphone in my hand began to quack.

– Sorry, old boy, came the voice of Wally. I didn't get that. I wasn't switched on.

– Never mind, old boy. I don't believe Arthur Barker would have got it either.



## THE SEVEN HILLS CLAP THEIR HANDS

Le Tibre a sur ses bords des ruines qui font  
 Monter le voyageur vers un passe profond  
 Et qui, de lierre noir et de lichen couvertes  
 Apparaissent tas gris, parmi les herbes vertes.

IN the great Piazza before St Peter's the fountains splashed merrily, and an enormous multitude was assembling in answer to the bell of the Cathedral. From all points of the compass, the people came pouring into the Vatican City until it was hardly possible to move for the pressure of the crowd. From the balcony over the central portico hung a gigantic tapestry bearing the symbol of the crossed keys.

It was an emotional moment for everybody – whatever their faith might be. The Pope was coming out to render thanks for the deliverance of Rome. Not for its 'liberation' – in our sense of that manhandled word – but, literally, for its deliverance from war.

\* \* \*

The children crawled over our motor car and plied us with questions. What is its name? How does it work? Where are the caramellos? But there were many adult questions too. How far have the Tedesci gone away? Is it possible now to write a letter to Naples? Have the prisoners been released? When will they be coming home?

\* \* \*

There was chaos in the Press Room that had been set up in the Fascist News Agency building, because Public Relations, as usual, was much more concerned with wrangling over hotels and accommodation than in bothering about copy.

– Somebody's stolen my typewriter, complained Shan Sedgwick of the *New York Times*. And every paper I possess, along with it! There isn't a guard or a clerk in the entire place.

– Look at that, said Godfrey, indicating a group of GIs a few yards up the street who were engaged in sawing through the lock and chain of a jeep that obviously did not belong to them.

– I know, said Shan. Just some of our good clean boys. I guess one of them has won that prize for an essay on ‘Why We Fight’.

Then, noticing British smiles, an expression of apprehension settled on his face.

– I say, you won’t tell anybody I said that, will you? My people are suspicious enough of me as it is.

\* \* \*

The great bell ceased to toll, and a figure in white appeared on the balcony, raising its hand in benediction. The heir to the centuries – the Vicar of Christ – the Bogey of Portadown – the Prince of the Apostles – the Whore of Babylon – the Servant of the Servants of God – the Archpriest of Apollyon – the Father of the sole, universal and apostolic Church – whose presence and whose prestige had saved Rome from the Allied Air Forces, and from a common grave with the Teutonic supermen.

There he was, speaking into his microphone. And as his voice pealed out across the Square, he gave thanks to supernatural agencies, for all the blessings that so clearly had flown from himself.

\* \* \*

From a domestic quarter of the Vatican City a water bowser emerged, and made its way to the residence of the Japanese Ambassador. The diplomat in question was under siege, with water, light and all other facilities cut off by the Yanks. By a devious route, the German Minister to Italy was smuggled into neutral territory by Kiernan, the Irish Minister to the Holy See, who previously had been doing the same sort of thing for Allied personnel, to the annoyance of the German Minister. Ireland was sticking to its traditional policy of being on the side of the hunted rather than that of the hunter – whoever the hunter might be.

\* \* \*

In one of the better Hotels, Ken Best was getting acquainted with several Duchesses, and a rota of society engagements was being worked out to everybody’s satisfaction. Tony Beckwith – always an expert on shops and shopping – was already on the track of several little women ‘just around the corner’ who had the very article at a very reasonable price. In response to a general appeal

to look for Unicorns on my behalf, he had located something of the kind in one of the Palaces of the Borgias.

\* \* \*

There could be no doubt of the sincerity of that tumultuous ovation to the Pope. The crowd cheered; Vaughan cheered; I cheered. And meeting afterwards on the steps of the Basilica, we clasped hands and sang one of our favourite ballads for the delectation of the Roman populace – the Ould Orange Flute. It may be that this was the first time the Ould Orange Flute had been sung on the steps of St Peter's. Its choice was a sincere tribute to the universality of the occasion. We were in favour of the Pope, and of what he had done for Rome, and it seemed only fitting that we should sing one of our own tribal ballads in his honour, rather than something that was not ourselves.

Anyhow, this is not the first time that barbarians from the west and north have penetrated the gates of Rome and rent the air with their uncouth harmonies. She has a polite and urbane way with intruding foreigners, born of an age-old knowledge of the situation. For all our technology and pride in ourselves, we are only the last of a series that have been here before. We are the Goths – we are the Hohenstaufens – we are Corsican upstarts – we are the Voice of Democracy, speaking with the accents of Liverpool and Omaha. And this City, from the serenity of her seven hills, knows how to take us.

How right, therefore, that she should applaud our simple effort in her honour, and appreciate the emotion that prompted us to serenade her Pontiff. In that tumult, our voices could not penetrate up to the old boy himself. But if they had done so, we were certain that he would have appreciated our affection, and would not have had us sing anything else.

The ould flute was doomed, and its fate was pathetic.  
It was branded and burned at the stake as her-etic.  
As the flames mounted upwards, they heard a strange noise.  
'Twas the ould flute still playing, 'The Protestant Boys'!  
Tooraloo! Tooralay!  
O, the twelfth of July is the Orangeman's Day.

\* \* \*

At a road junction, a short distance out of town, an American Military Policeman on point duty drew his automatic and shot

dead a French officer who had disregarded his traffic signals. In another suburb, an open-air workshop was set up for the repainting and camouflaging of stolen motor vehicles. In the Albergo Citta, near the head of the Spanish Steps, British PR established itself and opened enquiries about Asti Spumanti. The Americans, with their better rations, set up another Press Camp elsewhere. Through the corridors of the Albergo Citta surprised and delighted newspapermen wandered, depressing electric light switches that worked, turning bath taps that did not work, and pointing at real beds with clean sheets that had been made for them by apparently clean chambermaids. Truly the fruits of victory!

\* \* \*

Down the Corso Umberto, with kilts ponderously swinging, came the wild Highland pipers from Anzio. As we drove alongside, Vaughan rose up in the jeep and shouted familiarities at each player in turn, while out of the side of their strained and inflated cheeks they tried to answer him back. For he and they and Ernie and his Boys belonged to the most exclusive International club in the world, and liked each other well. The Romans continued to applaud.

– Poor buggers, said Vaughan, as he sat down and looked around him. They little know what's coming – AMGOT and the Badoglio Government!

\* \* \*

On the neutral territory of the Irish Legation a small party of un-neutral Hibernians gathered to greet the Minister and his handsome, Rabelaisian wife. Out in the yard, somebody obligingly filled the tank of his car with Allied petrol.

– What was the first sign you had that we'd arrived? I asked of Delia.

She tossed her head of black curls, and smiled the smile that must have baffled many an Axis official.

– They call me Your Excellency here. It's the way they have in the Diplomatic, d'ye know. Well, I was out taking a walk in the morning to see what was going on. And there was a lot of lads in uniform lying on the pavement in the front of the railway station, taking a rest, d'ye know. And I thought they were Germans, until suddenly one of them sat up and said, 'Say, sister. Come and park your arse beside me.' So then I knew I was liberated.

\* \* \*

After darkness fell, another member of the Corps Diplomatique – this time a member of the British Mission to the Vatican – decided to exercise his new-found liberty by taking a stroll through the streets. There was silence now, except for the drunken baying of a few American voices, and an occasional shot or two, as some GI gave expression to his deeper feelings. Presently the walker was accosted by a patrol, led by an embittered Lieutenant, who had been told-off for not enforcing some regulation.

Who was he, and what was he doing out at this hour? Didn't he know there was a curfew for civilians? A pass was produced with some smugness, stating that the bearer was authorised to be 'out after curfew'. For a time this pass was studied by the officer.

– Hell, he said. This says you can be out after curfew. But this is during curfew. Run him in, boys.

And they did.

\* \* \*

In the dining room of the Albergo Citta, Godfrey Talbot appeared at breakfast, and addressed his colleagues.

– Boys, we're on the back page now. They've landed in Normandy.

\* \* \*

Well, thank God for that! Now we could take a few deep breaths, and relax in the Eternal City – this superb miniature capital with its Galleries, its Forum, and the lichened monuments along the Appian Way – an undamaged city filled with beautiful and well-dressed women – a City of cafés and bars, with people sitting at the tables in the streets, just as they used to sit in old, half-forgotten days when the world was a better place. Normandy was welcome to all the headlines.

\* \* \*

Among the guests at the palatial home of one of Ken Best's Duchesses was a sad, eager little man who was anxious to meet the members of the BBC unit. He himself had been engaged in propaganda work – broadcasts to England from Rome – and he wished to discuss common problems with his opposite numbers. He hoped that they had heard his stuff. And what had they thought of that piece he had done about the supposed Allied atrocities in Sicily? Pretty good, eh, in spite of all the handicaps that he was working under. He had enjoyed their stuff too: but then no doubt they had none of the difficulties with which he had had to contend.

Those Germans! All the best facilities and gear had always been reserved for Deutschlandsender – only the scraps and rubbish given to poor Rome! It had been heartbreaking. Still, he had done his best. One thing more he did wish to know. Those actuality broadcasts – they had all been faked in the Studio, of course? That was how he had worked too. But sometimes he had felt that the BBC timed their effects very badly. Maybe they were short of good operators. He had just the same trouble...

\* \* \*

Preparations were well advanced for the admission of the Allied Press to a special audience with the Pope, and cameras were being got out, flash bulbs tested, and background material checked by the great Agencies.

– Say, what's this guy's correct name and number?

\* \* \*

At the Kiernans' I was told stories of the fabulous Father O'Flaherty – long sought by the Germans for his help to Allied prisoners and refugees. In some of the religious institutes in and around Rome there had been a visiting day once or twice a week, when curious characters in phoney clerical garb could be seen taking the air and smoking their pipes on the roof-top, and then jumping up with cries of welcome to embrace their wives when they arrived.

But the Kiernans' chief concern was for the safety and comfort of those German and Japanese diplomats whom nobody else would speak to, now that times had changed.

There are many things about my country of which I disapprove, and I have no doubt that Mr Constantinescu would condemn the unrealistic attitude that so often inspires the Irish to get off the bandwagon rather than on to it. But I must confess to finding a certain pride in Kiernan's attitude, and I did my best to help him in his undertakings.

\* \* \*

The Correspondents were lined up in one of the throne rooms, and received final instructions from the Major Domo. His Holiness would enter by that door over there, and would speak from this dais. Afterwards he would pass down the line, and each Correspondent would receive a pair-of-beads.

– An aperitif? enquired an interested voice from the rear.

- No. A pair-of-beads. A rosary.
- Oh. I see (with some disappointment).

Before the Major Domo could be asked what was to be done with the rosaries, there was a stir amongst the Noble Guard, and the doors swung open to admit a procession of Swiss pikemen, various Cardinals, and finally the Holy Father himself. On the appearance of the Pope there was a scene that must be unique in the annals of the Vatican. Led by one Yehudi, an avalanche of cameramen broke loose, and descended upon the Pontiff. Flash bulbs started popping, shutters clicked, and the Noble Guard was jostled aside:

- Hold it, Pope! We gotcha in focus.

The Cardinals flapped their hands - the Swiss pikemen were helpless - the Major Domo covered his horrified face and moaned aloud. But it was no good. Until they had exhausted their flash bulbs, this sacrilegious scene continued, and a shattered Pope stood on his dais, swaying helplessly from side to side with a frozen smile on his face. When some sort of order had been restored, he began his speech of welcome to the Allied Press in Rome.

\* \* \*

In the Via Imperial, an American truck driver emerged from a side road in his lorry, and deliberately ran me and my jeep up on to the pavement. Breathing fire and fury, Hamish Henderson and I pursued his vehicle, and brought it to a stop by getting in front of it. I got out.

- What the hell do you think you're up to? I enquired.

The driver leaned out of his cab, and surveyed the Limey uniform with some distaste.

- We run this f—ing town, he explained.

\* \* \*

In the Audience Chamber, Yehudi was first in the line to receive his rosary beads and his blessing. Then moving down the hall he re-entered the line, and received another string. He was about to go through this procedure for the third time when one of his colleagues said:

- What's the idea, Yehudi? You're not one of the Faithful, surely?

- Boy, he whispered. These are good. You can lay any chambermaid in Montreal with one of these!



At that moment the Anzio pipers' band entered the Square of St Peter's, bent – in the words of the Pipe-Major – on 'gieing Popie a blaw'. It was a nice gesture, and the Holy Father was delighted with it.

All the same, they might have picked on a more suitable tune than Lillibulero!

\* \* \*

Gigli and *Il Trovatore* had been cleared out of the Opera House to make way for Irving Berlin and *This is the Army, Mr Jones*. From the next box to ours, a loud and angry voice smote upon our ears from time to time. For a while we ignored it, because it was purely a domestic row, involving some American Correspondents and a gold-leaf Major. It seemed that the latter had not been through fire and sweat, blood and destruction, and several other hardships, just to provide a bunch of damned newspapermen with the best seats in his box. They might go off and write their pretty little pieces afterwards, but God dammit, he was a Soldier, and it was time some people realised that a fighting man like him couldn't be put out of his seat by a bunch of God damned civilians.

– Let's go round and watch this, I said.

We all filed into the box to take a look.

– General Frederick's Task Force, I presume?

– No. That voice could only belong to AMGOT.

– My bet is that he's here to re-start a brewery.

– As a matter of fact, said the last arrival, I think I know him. He's a dentist.

\* \* \*

– Isn't it an odd thing, said somebody that evening, how surprised and pained our Allies are on discovering that they are not universally popular?

We had had dinner in the PR Mess which had been a little overcrowded, thanks to a considerable number of our American colleagues. They had set up their separate establishment presumably to avoid having to feed us on their rations. But having found that Philip Astley had cornered all the best cooks, they were now crowding back and eating with us. It puzzled me very much, because the aggressive exclusiveness that I had noticed in Italy was so unlike the picture of the easy-going and hospitable race I carried in my memory from College days. To me, America had always been a land of extreme friendliness and of great generosity,

and it seemed hard to reconcile this with these rather truculent and standoffish types.

– You can't deny that in some ways they are unique, somebody said. They're the only people in history who have managed to pass from barbarism to decadence without any intervening stage.

– For a country that is supposed to worship Efficiency, why do they insist on doing almost everything the hard way?

– Because they've got to find out for themselves. They're all from Missouri.

– As a matter of fact, you can't make any generalisations based on Nationality. All races are the same collection of rascals and heroes. The only real difference is the Myth they each have about themselves. We got ours from *Chums*. They get theirs from Hollywood and a very uninhibited Press.

– I know. The American way of life is the biggest and the best.

– That's what most of us think their myth is. But in fairness to them, it's not so naïve as that. What they think is that they're more fortunate than everybody else. Quite an amiable idea, even if it sometimes leads to odd conclusions.

– I wonder what our own really is?

– Whose? We have so many.

– The Middle Classes of our British Isles – the Nice People – the Patrons of the Saloon Bars of Neo-Georgian Pubs – the Players of Shove-ha'penny – the Staff of the BBC. How do you suppose we look to the Yanks?

– Like this, said Vaughan.

And he began to read, as only Vaughan can read, the Middle East Diary of Noel Coward, beginning with the passage that follows his disappointment in the Brooklyn boys in hospital 'with nothing worse than a bullet wound in the leg or a fractured arm'.

'And so I had time to pop along to the other hospital to call on Peter and Bill again... It was heartening talking to these two boys, both of them a million per cent English, both of them Guards officers and both so utterly different from each other and so unmistakable in type... Between them they created an atmosphere of well-bred, privileged England at its best. I had a mental picture of Sycamores, tennis courts, green lawns, and rather yellowing white flannels. "Stands the church clock at ten to three, and is there honey still for tea?"... We are a strange race indeed, and the much maligned "Old School Tie" is as essential a part of our heritage as anything else. In time of war it proves itself again and again to be one of our greatest national assets and one of our

deepest prides. Had a farewell drink with the General and then dined with Ian and went to bed early.'

For a few moments there was a profound silence.

– God, said someone. Is that quite fair?

– May as well face it. No vulgar foreigner is trying to pull our legs. It's all our own – the great soul of the suburbs, assuring itself that it is a Gentleman.

\* \* \*

But we had not yet finished for the evening. Godfrey, too, had written a book, a copy of which had come to hand. I must say that when he saw me with it, a Look passed across his face, and he had the grace to mutter:

– Now you're going to say that I've put down everything to myself, and given no credit to anyone else.

So, naturally, I had to put up with my quota of good-humoured banter, as the contribution of Frank Gillard and myself to the Desert campaign – as seen through Godfrey's eyes – was read aloud and assessed by the company.

Poor Roddy McDonald used to say that nobody believes that anybody is real except himself. So what the hell? We are all the centre of our own picture, and occupy the Star dressing room. And why not? I had no doubt that I would do the same myself some day.

Every man is his own Jesus, and every other man's Jesus is a bore. And, Jesus, what a bore!

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## TUSCAN SUMMER

THE TOWN MAJOR OF PERUGIA was early on the job, and within a few hours of the entry of the Coldstream into the city, he had installed himself and his staff in comfortable quarters in the Grand Hotel. Here, he offered me a glass of excellent brandy, and one end of his table on which to type my despatch. Enemy shells were coming over from time to time and falling on the lower ground around the railway station.

As I typed, I became aware that a minor war was being waged between my host, the Town Major, and the Field Security Officer, who was down the road in another hotel called the Albergo della Posta. It seemed that the Field Security Officer had been going around putting notices on various buildings:

## RESERVED FOR FIELD SECURITY SECTION

and the Town Major had been going around taking them down again. It was the function of the Town Major – the latter pointed out – to say what buildings were reserved for what, and would other people kindly remember this in future. The Field Security Officer had responded by arresting as Fascists the key members of the staff of the Grand Hotel. In this way he was causing chaos in the Town Major's dining room, where three Texan Engineers had, by mistake, been given bacon and eggs, only to have them snatched away again. All the eggs – the Orderly pointed out – were reserved for the Town Major.

This battle of wits was working up to a crisis, when some nervous Eyties came in to inform us that two buildings in the town had been mined by the Germans before leaving, and that they might be expected to go up at any moment.

– Go and tell that to the Field Security Officer, said the Town Major. Mines are his headache.

But they had already been to the Field Security Officer, and he had said that mines were the Town Major's concern.

– Indeed, said the Town Major, picking up the telephone. We'll soon see about that. By the way, which are these two buildings?

– The Brufani, they explained, and the Albergo della Posta.

The Town Major gave a loud cackle of delight.

– Maybe he'll pull his finger out now, when he hears that one of the places is his own hotel!

I was typing away at my script while all this was going on, and on the table in front of me lay a small ashtray bearing the words GRAND HOTEL. There seemed to be something else on it, and as I delved in my mind for words to describe Perugia, I casually fiddled with the thing and turned it completely round – GRAND HOTEL BRUFANI.

– Hey, I said. You'd better pull your own finger out. This is the Brufani – the other place that's mined!

I seldom saw a truce so quickly patched up. The Town Major and the Field Security Officer presented a united front immediately. There was only one thought in both their minds – to find some Engineers at once. But there were no Engineers anywhere in the city – except – yes, unfortunately, except the three disgruntled Texans, who were now filing out after an inadequate High Tea without eggs, and these experts showed no inclination whatever to go looking for mines on an empty stomach. In fact they went so far as to say that they didn't give a bugger what bloody place was mined.

However, after a good meal of bacon and eggs – the Town Major's eggs – they felt better again, and consented to look into the matter. Yes, there were some wires running down the corridors of both hotels. But on careful examination it turned out that these were only telephone wires. However, they had enjoyed their tea very much – especially the eggs – and they would now be getting under way.

\* \* \*

For a time, tempers were not as sweet as they might have been, but it all blew over in the whirlwind of other things that had to be done in Perugia. For the past couple of weeks the advance had moved ahead northwards from Rome, until resistance had stiffened near the Lake of Trasimene.

Beyond the capital the Tiber runs roughly from north to south, dividing the main axis of our advance into two separate thrusts. At first the enemy had got his divisions into an inextricable mess,

and went back at the rate of between ten and fifteen miles a day. There was a brilliant little tank battle, on African lines, about ten miles north of Viterbo, with the 26th Panzers shut off on the wrong side of the river, and unable to come to the support of their opposite numbers on the western bank. This ended in their having to pull out once again, and were it not for the supply situation we could probably have run straight into Orvieto.

This separation of the advance into two main thrusts was the cause of a brief exchange between myself and PR. I liked the east bank of the river because all the news happened to be there. PR preferred the west bank because our friend, Major Verney, and Tac Army happened to be there. As a result, we did not see very much of each other – a state of affairs that would probably not have upset them unduly were it not for the fact that I was the only Correspondent in their charge, except a Canadian of advanced years, and they liked to have somebody to attend briefings. But in the high summer of my career, Tac Army briefings did not hold many attractions for me. I had ways of my own of finding out what was going on that made these daily chats with G2 unnecessary, and sometimes even a little laughable. So PR went its way and I went mine. And, apparently, my copy went no way at all. Because I received a rocket from London via Godfrey, who said:

...they are roaring for stuff from the front – demanding, in fact, DAILY coverage from forward, especially 8th Army. They ask for something each day, preferably recorded in the voice... Let me know how you go?

I was, of course, quite used to being instructed to do what I was doing already, and might have taken this as part of the routine had I not received a further note – this time from Vaughan on the way to Siena.

June 19th.

My dear Muldoon,

Can you beat it? Your despatch marked 'via C/W Highspeed' June 17th arrived here at the 5th Army Press Camp. I opened it anxiously, and to my horror found it contained a cable sent by you full of hard news now out of date. Take it up pronto. Heads should Roll! All is deep calm over here with Mark-Time Clark. My only message is from the Leader – 'Increase your output, men' (not that any of it will be used). Hope to see you in Florence.

Ever thine,  
YOUNG BULLIVANT.

Crossing to the farther shore to ask What the hell? I found the Press Camp engaged in the composition of a protest to the War Office with the help of Ulick Verney. The Corps of Correspondents was remaining in Rome, when it ought to be out in the field making use of the large facilities provided by the Service.

— And look here, my dear fellow, said the Major to me. The General is rather displeased with the BBC too. Why do your news bulletins always mention the Fifth Army before the Eighth? There's been a lot of adverse comment about this among the men. And it's bad. Very bad.

— Maybe it's because the BBC never gets any despatches from the Eighth Army, I answered somewhat brusquely.

— Oh, I'm sure it can't be that. We're not suggesting that it's your fault, old man.

— Neither am I, as a matter of fact.

— It must be someone farther back; so the General has written to Rome to have your man there come out and visit us. Michael Reynolds, isn't it? It should be helpful for him to come out and see actual conditions, don't you think?

— Look here, I said. I went into Perugia with the Guards. Yet I was scooped by Tetlow of the *Mail*, working from Rome.

— Really? What were you doing?

— What was I doing? Looking for someone to take my copy. Finally, I gave it to an Indian on a motor-bike, and it hasn't been seen since. It may, of course, have been published in Calcutta, but . . . .

He held up his hand. He hoped I was not dissatisfied with the arrangements of P.R. An elaborate Camp had been provided for my convenience with a Commandant, an Administrative Officer, a messing Officer, two Censors, a Writer of Handouts, and a High-speed Radio Transmitter. What more could I possibly expect?

All I wanted was a Despatch Rider in Perugia, in the absence of which it would appear that my colleagues were wise to remain in Rome. And I proposed to tell them so.

The atmosphere was painful, but voices, thank God, were never raised. Had I asked for a Despatch Rider? Had I given any information beforehand as to when and where I would require him?

— This is ridiculous, I said. How the hell am I supposed to know beforehand when Perugia is likely to fall?

- Then, dear fellow, said Ulick triumphantly, please don't expect us to arrange to have Perugia captured at an hour convenient to the Press.

I opened and closed my mouth a few times, collected my mail, and went back across the Tiber. When an Englishman propounds an alibi, it requires another Etonian to slap him down. In the old Desert days, when the Press Camp had consisted of the Leprechaun and Private Bailey, they had little enough to worry about. But as an organisation is elaborated, it becomes more and more concerned with the problems of running itself, until, finally, it has no time for anything else. How often we have felt that we could run the BBC so much better if it wasn't for this nuisance of Programmes.

This brings me to the point of the story, which has not been recounted for the mere fun of being petulant. What about my own alibis? If I had been so keen on the fate of my despatches as I was on puzzling out the war for myself, I would have made sure that they got back, even if it meant transporting them personally to Rome. The air would have been ringing with my protests, and Heads indeed would have Rolled. In Television, I never used to rely on other people to do their jobs properly, or shrug my shoulders when they didn't. Why, then, did I do so here? Unless I was no longer interested in Situation Maps, and turning my attention, like Shan Sedgwick's GIs, to the larger question of "Why we Fight".

\* \* \*

The longer this war continues, the duller it becomes as a contest, and the more fascinating it grows as a problem in human motives. For a war in which we are all so vocative about the issues, it has provided too many surprises, developed too many paradoxes, to remain the simple matter of Resistance that it seemed to be in the desert. I am not only thinking of poor Roddy McDonald's analysis of what it is about, or even of the problem of loyalties described on the banks of the Sangro by that Catholic Priest. What, for example, is the meaning of this Triangular War in the Balkans, with the Foreign Office and Cairo on one side, the Eighth Army and Tito on another, and Hitler on a third. Who do we want to win?

Then there are the Poles. Here in Italy, half of them are fighting on our side in order to beat Hitler; but what they really wish



to do is to get back to Poland in order to fight our allies the Russians. The other half, in the ranks of the Wehrmacht, are as a rule much more anti-German than ours are; consequently, they are not fighting the Russians. They are fighting us!

This confusion is not limited to the Poles. We have our own conservatives who have never been able to see what British interests are menaced by the rise of Fascism. After all, they argue – or used to argue until they found themselves in danger of internment – who is most likely to want to smash up the British Empire, Stalin or Mussolini?

In Perugia we found one of these puzzled people – a British Colonel who received us on our arrival, dressed in the remains of a Guards uniform. He was a lifelong friend of Italy, who had done his best to prevent any Anglo-Italian embroglio. Shortly before the outbreak of war, with the backing of a group of MPs, he had brought a personal message of good will from Neville Chamberlain to the Duce. The Foreign Office did not seem to like this in spite of the fact the Neville Chamberlain happened to be Prime Minister at the time, and, consequently, they had been gunning for the Colonel ever since.

Then came the war, and the Colonel stayed in Italy with his wife, still trying to assure everybody of everyone's good intentions, until the Italians joined in, whereupon he was interned. Henceforth, National loyalty drove the Colonel to express a certain disappointment in Mussolini, but he was still greatly puzzled and upset. And here comes the rub: he broadcast once or twice – not propaganda, of course, but just to reassure people at home that all was well, and that the British internees were being properly looked after!

Poor Colonel – he little knew what passions were blowing up in England against anybody whose voice was heard on the enemy radio, no matter what they said! Maybe he was foolish not to have played safe, and kept his mouth shut. But which of us is not foolish sometimes? And when anybody can demonstrate to me clearly just where it is that British interests lie, I shall be prepared to pass judgment on the Colonel. Until then, forgive me if I regard the matter as *sub judice*.

I knew nothing about this at the time. He was just a fantastic figure hiding with his wife in a cellar of the Brufani, who had crept upstairs on the morning of our arrival. Finding that the Lounge was no longer occupied by Germans playing sentimental

Lieder on the piano, he went out on to the balcony with a pair of field glasses, and observed the approach of troops in unfamiliar uniforms along the winding road that comes from the valley. Then, having reassured the women in the cellar, he fetched out his old tin trunk, and shook the creases from what remained of his uniform. He only possessed a tunic and slacks, so he had to make do with a white shirt and black tie. And he had neither hat nor belt – rather an ordeal for a Guardsman! But in this costume he stepped down the road, and was delighted to find that the approaching troops were Guardsmen like himself. Indeed, who was leading the first column but the son of his old friend, Aubrey Hepplethwaite! What a surprise! An obliging truck driver accommodated him with a battered steel helmet, covered with a be-draggled camouflage net. And donning this for the sake of decency, he enquired about his one-time second-in-command, young Harold Alexander, who he understood had been doing well recently.

Thus garbed, he escorted the troops back into Perugia, and recorded his story for me. Before very long nobody wanted to hear his story any more, and he was taken out of uniform and sent to the rear under a cloud. I, myself, received one of my usual cables from Head Office.

YOUR COLONEL STORY USED IN TWO OVERSEAS BULLETINS BUT ACCORDING BEST INFORMATIONS HERE YOU WERE SELLING A PUP STOP PLEASE ACQUAINT YOURSELF COLONELS ANTECEDENTS AND ASCERTAIN HOW VIEWED HIGHEST MILITARY QUARTERS NEWSCASTS BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION ARTHUR BARKER.

Poor Colonel! I hope he came to no harm. Whatever he was, he certainly bore no resemblance to a Pup.

\* \* \*

The other recording that I particularly remember (and which was also a pup in failing to interest my Employers) concerned a group of released women internees, who were sharing the Brufani with us. When going in to supper, I had noticed one of the plainer ones staring in silence at a piano. Finding myself sitting beside her at the table, I asked her why?

She was French, and for three years had been shut up in a prison camp, for espionage. At an earlier stage of her life she had been a pianist of some ability, and this was the first piano that she had seen since she had been arrested.

– Then will you play for me? I asked. To celebrate your release. And I shall record you.

After some demur she consented, and went to the instrument when we had finished our food. For a little while she sat staring at the keys, and exercising her fingers. Then she struck the first notes.

It was Grieg's Piano Concerto, and as I listened to the opening chords, I found myself back on the beach at Alamein on a moonlit night when we were waiting for Rommel.

It begins with a fairly slow passage which she negotiated with care, stumbling once or twice on a note; but on the whole she found little difficulty with it. Then comes a leaping staccato passage, and at the first discord she stopped – and an expression of deep tragedy gathered upon her face.

– I am sorry, she said. I find I cannot play.

It is hard to describe the emotions that this incident evoked at the time – harder still to convey it in a news spot for British listeners – which I am afraid I failed to do. It seemed to symbolise the real situation of these people – the fact that for so many of them the tragedy of their release was even greater than that of their imprisonment. The person that she once was, no longer existed – even though something or somebody else had been set free. But that is not what you want to hear in the news, any more than the problems of that sincerely patriotic Colonel or, indeed, the problem of so many of the fighting men, what about the wife? These are not what I am here to report while the Keeper is manoeuvring around Umbertide. The fact that I have tried to do so, just goes to show how, for all my experience, I am still an Amateur.

\* \* \*

In the village of Panicale, overlooking the southern end of Lake Trasimene, four or five of us set up a private Advance Press Camp of our own, from which we reported the fight of the 78th Division along the west shore of the Lake into Castiglione.

Our little party consisted of the bouncing Ken Best, still full of stories of wonderful girls and wonderful football matches; Beamish, a New Zealander now representing Exchange Telegraph; my Wally Waldron (Here's a rum do); and Bishop Redfern of the *Express*. What the origin of his ecclesiastical title was, nobody seemed to know – possibly it was based on his benign appearance.

He is, indeed, rather a benign person, but he had one very odd peculiarity – that of cursing loudly in his sleep. As we sat around a table drawn over into a corner of the room so as to avoid the large hole in the floor, somebody would look in and say:

– Hello. All well here? Where's the Bishop?

From an adjoining room, a voice would come in accents loud and clear:

– Hell blast and buggery.

– Ah! He's asleep. I won't disturb him.

The story is told that the night before the Sicilian invasion, an American General was going the rounds of the lines of trucks, in between which the invasion force was lying asleep. He had just expressed some portentous opinion on the military situation, when a penetrating voice came out of the darkness close at hand.

– Balls, it said, quite simply. Balls.

The General was naturally taken aback at such a piece of impertinence, but he was in doubt about being able to find the offender in the dark, so he glared around him for a while, and then made off, saying as he went:

– You will hear more about this in the morning.

Of course, it was only the Bishop, fast asleep!

We discussed the evergreen problems of the war, illustrated by our personal experiences.

Assuming the mantle of a Palestrina Choir we chanted choruses, usually supplied by Beamish. The most popular was an Air Force Anthem, of American origin:

I wanted wings, till I got the goddam things.  
Now I don't want them any more.  
I learnt to fly, but they've sent me here to die,  
I've had my bellyful of war.  
They can keep all their Zeros  
For their goddam heroes.  
Distinguished Flying Crosses  
Do not compensate for losses.  
I wanted wings, till I got the goddam things.  
NOW I DON'T WANT THEM ANY MORE!

We constituted ourselves a Synod, and argued religion, beginning with God, the Great Incomprehensible – the only thing that a man is certain he can understand.

By the lakeside, the Reverend Fathers – soon joined by others

from the Main Press Camp – gravely fell out over their anathemas on the several National Heresies of the day: –

the German heresy of Race,  
the Russian heresy of Economic Motive,  
the American heresy of Competitive Success,  
the English heresy of Boredom,  
the French heresy of So-called Realism,  
the Irish heresy of Contradiction,  
the Jewish heresy of Atonement.

And after the Commination of these seven deadly sins, and the singing of the evening Processional Psalm (*Confitebor tibi, Domine, in toto cordo meo*) the Dean of the Sacred College would call the roll, before ending the Council with a solemn Acclamation.

John, Cardinal Redfern, Bishop of Ostia  
(Nocte pilae exprimo)  
His Eminence Cardinal Lumby  
(O Tempora, O Morse)  
His Grace the Lord Archbishop Best, DD  
(Optimus quisque)  
The Very Reverend Canon Beamish, PP, VG  
(Alas desideravi)  
Pastor Waldron (London)  
(Hic mirabilis facta)

We moved on to a new camp at the north end of the lake, on the site of Hannibal's battlefield, from which we pursued the enemy up the next valley towards Arrezzo, against resistance that was stiffening as the Gothic Line loomed up over the horizon.

I drove forward one day with Lumby of *The Times*, and had another instalment of the discussion that goes on for ever. I like Lumby of *The Times* – that perfect English gentleman, though not in Noel Coward's sense of the word. It is with such people that I realise my genuine regard for the English as a race. It may be that he has been to a good school – I don't know. I don't know whether he smells of sycamores, or whether his tennis flannels are slightly yellowing. Whether his watch has stopped at ten to three is a matter that he never disclosed. But what he has is a mature and considered outlook on life – a kind of tolerant, adult viewpoint that I find to be peculiarly English. It is not just a social sophistication. It is clarity of mind – an inborn spiritual

freedom that can only spring from common sense, and a natural understanding of the facts of life. God help me – I gird at them from time to time – at their boredom, at their superiority, at their suave rascality. But I can talk to an Englishman more easily than I can talk to anybody else, with less fear of taboos and inhibitions, and with more prospect of getting a detached answer.

– I hope the Baths of Lucca have not been damaged, Lumby said as we traced the latest line on the map. Machiavelli used to advise the Florentine wives to visit them to induce pregnancy. They were to go without their husbands, of course.

– Wasn't it somewhere up this valley that Dante met Virgil and made his celebrated entrance into hell?

I was trying to bring the conversation round to one of my own subjects. But he was not to be tempted off his ground.

– I don't know my Dante very well. I have always disliked his sentimental attachment to a totally unreal woman. I much prefer that good fellow, Bunyan, and his natural daughter.

– I didn't know that Bunyan had a natural daughter, I said, falling avidly into the trap.

– Oh, yes. Grace Abounding. He wrote a book about her – a much better book than Dante's. In the same way I prefer Mussolini to this nasty mystic we are fighting now. Indeed, the more one sees of the Italians, the more one realises what a remarkable man Mussolini must have been in his heyday.

– Better be careful, I said. I have a friend who has got into a lot of trouble through his regard for Mussolini.

– Oh, I don't know. We mustn't be browbeaten by words that happen to be unpopular. 'Fascism' and 'Dictatorship' are convenient terms of abuse at the moment, but we'll do ourselves harm in the long run if we allow ourselves to be talked into a belief that there's no more to them than what we choose to say ourselves.

– Then who is to tell us what's in them?

– In the last analysis, the Fascists themselves.

– I've heard that argument. Someone once said to me that Christianity must be regarded as what the Christians say it is.

– It's a good idea. We ought never to close our eyes to the virtues of the things we find ourselves having to destroy – even if we do destroy them.

– Then what is Fascism on that basis?

– I would say that it's a readiness to solve by self-help and by

forcible means the impasse that is brought about at a certain stage of civilisation by too much law – by too much protection of the incompetent and the parasite at the expense of the more adventurous souls. It's heroic in the Homeric sense, with both the faults and virtues of the hero. Naturally we don't much like it in other people, but we have always practised it ourselves during our greatest periods.

– Do you believe in it then?

– Not at all. But only because it's largely impractical. As a rule it sets forces in motion that are self-destructive. The man who rides on a tiger can never dismount. But the idea of a certain discipline, and a responsibility in leadership, is a good one, and we can't dismiss it simply by calling it names.

– Here we go again, I said. I once had all this out with a priest. He didn't seem to think that there was right or wrong on either side in this war. It was all just an infliction from on high.

– Of course there's right and wrong. The trouble is that in a great many cases we have as yet no political machinery except war for finding out which is which. Internationally, I mean.

– That's surely a very Machiavellian idea. What it amounts to is that the right side is right because it wins.

– Not at all. The right side doesn't necessarily win – to begin with, at any rate. But we must try to look at these upheavals in their proper historical perspective. Take the Napoleonic Wars. We can see now that they represented the breakdown of the old Aristocratic State and the coming of Commercial Liberalism. Whenever a system breaks down, stresses are set up that result in war, unless there is some sort of political machinery to absorb the strain.

– Would you say that something as simple as that is happening now?

– Certainly. We are reaching the end of our period of Commercial Liberalism, for the reason that it depends on an expanding economy, just as Fascism depends on political expansion. But the world is only a certain size, so there comes a time when commercial expansion has to slow down. Then you have to start planning, whether you like it or not.

– You mean Socialism?

– I mean any name you like to call it. The trouble is we don't know how much it is going to be necessary to plan, and at what point we only make things worse by interfering with natural

rewards. And we'll only find this out by the good old method of trial and error. In the process, a war is hardly surprising, is it? Even a series of them. But it doesn't alter the fact that fundamentally, most people are after the same thing.

– Then you don't believe that it has anything to do with personalities?

– You mean, that it's all Hitler's fault? Not for a moment – except that a certain amount of scum will always float to the surface when everything is in the melting pot. In normal times, people like Hitler would never have got anywhere. I wouldn't flatter such a tiresome ignoramus by regarding him as the real cause of the war. He's just a powder monkey – in the same sense that Germany is only the detonator. The real cause is a disease in the social system, and if our governments could only be persuaded to treat it clinically, like any other disease, there might be some hope of curing it.

– Then you don't agree that all we've got to do is to confess our sins and promise to be better boys?

– On the contrary. It's just that sense of guilt that we've got to avoid altogether. No matter how foully we have to fight, we've got to keep on thinking clinically. What bothers me most is this illusion that something unnatural is taking place – that we can put things to right by punishing the other fellow as soon as we've got him down. That's a very pertinent danger, not for sentimental reasons, but because it's a complete red herring so far as reconstruction is concerned. Punishing people in times like these is just so much hysterical jum-jum. That's why I think that we people on the propaganda side have a frightful responsibility. It's not the ex-Commandos that I dread living with afterwards. It's the hang-over from the present output of the Ministry of Information that will plague us for a couple of generations.

– That's all very well, but do you think that people would fight at all if they didn't have simplified issues invented for them?

– I think they would, if the issues were true. In fact I'll tell you this. I don't believe that people ever do fight seriously until they thoroughly understand their enemies.

– Perhaps ideally so, my dear Lumby. But isn't it rather an impractical argument?

– Maybe, he answered with a smile. But then we English pride ourselves on not being too practical. That's why most of our



institutions work so well. We prefer to leave practicality to our friends, the French.

– I know, I know. ‘Practical men are the scourge of good government’. You English kill me with your damned horse-sense!

\* \* \*

We returned to Passignano, where there was more mail from home. I studied it, lying on a hummock overlooking the Lake. A Corporation Official had been drowned while posting notices about the Water Shortage. On the way to the Phœnix Park, a Turf Lorry had burst into flames, and everything had been consumed except the turf. From hints in another letter, it was clear that my Mother was dying. The last was a Love Letter – or more accurately, one of those communications that sometimes follow in the wake of love letters, and form part of the same sardonic file:

...We have agreed on your behalf that the intention of Term 5 in our offer of the 6th September last was that the minimum sum therein mentioned shall be paid so long as the Petitioner derives an equivalent income from so-and-so and so-and-so...Bill of costs...not yet come to hand...fear it will be formidable...Petitioner’s insistence...advice of her Counsel...There will also, of course, be the costs of these wearisome negotiations in connection with maintenance and so on...

I read no further. These later love letters have a way of going on and on and on without saying anything new, except that it is still going on and on and on.

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CLIO  
OR  
THE FOURTH RIVER

O fret not after knowledge, I have none,  
And yet my song comes native with the warmth.  
O fret not after knowledge, I have none,  
And yet the evening listens. He who saddens  
At thoughts of idleness cannot be idle,  
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep.

IN A HILLTOP CASTLE overlooking the southern shore of the Lake sat the B Echelon of a battalion of the Skins. It was a pleasant spot, and the Irish Brigade was resting after a spell of very hard fighting. Out of one of the upper windows hung a supposedly neutral flag, while inside, in the main hall, we settled down to an Irish lunch. There was a tin of cigarettes for each of us. As large as life itself, a bottle of Jameson stood upon the table. There was even a rumour that I might be able to exchange the spare wheel of my jeep for one with an unpunctured tyre, so saving the trouble of getting the flat fixed.

But as we sipped our cups of coffee after this excellent meal, I noticed that my tin of cigarettes had disappeared, and as I looked around the table for the most likely person to have pinched it, my eye fell upon a great tough Chaplain from Kerry, with the face of Mussolini and a string of decorations for gallantry under fire. This gentle shepherd was slipping my cigarettes into his pocket. He was evidently accustomed to take whatever he wanted from the nearest member of his flock, but I come of sterner stock.

— Oh no, Father, I said. Those are heretical cigarettes. You can't have those.

With a half smile, he let them go, and we settled down to discuss the lift that I was proposing to give him to Assisi. Usually I like

Catholic Priests. I like their bluff, peasant intelligence and their complete lack of the apologetic manner of so many Protestant clerics. That they are rascals, I am prepared to concede – rascals running the tail end of the best racket the world has ever seen. But they are open, honest rascals, and as soon as they know that you do not belong to them, they are often the best of company.

This one was a rougher diamond than the Father I used to taxi around the Sangro, and I did not lay too much store on his conversation. But if I was firm with him, and did not allow any bullying, I had no doubt that a trip to Assisi under his auspices might be quite entertaining.

The Tiber bridges were down, and from the sweet and sickly smell in the neighbourhood, there must have been more than one dead man still lying unburied. Or maybe it was only a mule. Death, the great leveller, frequently reminds us how little is the difference between the smell of a man and the smell of a mule – once they should be in the ground.

Perhaps it was my remarking on this fact to the Father that started him off. Or maybe the cigarettes still rankled just a little. Or maybe it was just the magical atmosphere of the Tiber Valley that lifts the heart, as you journey eastwards over a crazy ford, under enemy artillery observation. The green fields of Umbria – the square church towers – the white towns climbing the hillsides – all these lay before us. And behind them, in all their majesty and mystery, rose the billowing heights of the Central Apennines, a land of Partisans and Poltergeists.

We were now in the bailiwick of Bryant and his 10th Indian Division, beyond which the Hussars roamed in their Staghound armoured cars, and the fabulous Popski with his Private Army might perhaps be found. This was better than Tac Army briefings and cables from Broadcasting House. And it was good to drive along in the sunlight, and tempt the Priest to talk theology by a series of judicious barbs.

– So you're a married man, he said in response to some remark of mine about my children.

– To tell you the truth, I don't know, I said.

– You don't know?

– I do not. There was once a time when I was a married man; and then I left them putting an end to it. But they argue so much and take so long, that I've given up waiting to hear whether they ever finished. So you see, I really don't know.

- Divorce is a terrible thing, he said.
  - So is war. But we all take part in it, because there are other things that are worse.
  - What could be worse than going back on the promises you made to each other before God?
  - I don't think we ever regarded our marriage so seriously as that. It was a private arrangement, with reservations on both sides.
  - And like most private arrangements it broke down. I know. I know these modern marriages. The old thing that's done well enough since the world began wasn't good enough for you. Well, it seems as if you got what you asked for and no more.
  - Fair enough, Father. I dare say we did.
  - And you'll do it again, I've no doubt.
  - No, Father. Next time it will be a marriage out of the Prayer Book. Just for a change.
  - Indeed? So you've managed to learn something from your mistake?
  - There are no such things as mistakes, Father. Who was it called them the Portals of Discovery?
  - It was a man who finished up in the bosom of the Church - Oscar Wilde. That's who it was.
  - Ah, I knew it was a Dublin man.
  - Dublin men, moryah! A raceless, Godless, graceless crew - the lot of you! A City built by Pirates and garrisoned by Cromwell.
  - You mustn't run down Dublin, Father. Remember that the trademark of our brewery is now the symbol of the country.
  - If you were decent sinners it would be better for you. But you have only one real sin and it is the most subtle and deadly of the seven - the sin of Pride - for it leaves you dead to Repentance.
  - Father, I said. May I answer you back? Or do you claim Benefit of Clergy?
- The eyes of the wearer of the Military Cross turned on me for a moment.
- You may answer me back, he said. I'm not sheltering behind any altar rails.
  - Well, I'd like you to understand that I'm not one of the people you can ballyrag with the fear of damnation. What you mean by Repentance is that I've got to be sick or scared - preferably both - before you can do anything with me. But I don't happen to be

either. I'm not afraid of the Church, and I'm not afraid of God. So what can you do about it?

He considered for a while.

– A tough nut, eh? The Spirit that Denies?

– That's right. Assuming that I don't need your help to make my death a happy one, what has your Church got to offer me?

– Oh, nothing much. Except, of course, the accumulated wisdom of the human race. I suppose you think that the Church has been doing nothing at all during these past two thousand years – that she hasn't thought out a better answer to most things in that time than you can work out in your forty? Believe me, it took longer to write the Holy Scriptures than it takes you to deny them. Or at any rate to deny the parts of them that don't suit you. So maybe it would do you no harm, and you visiting the home of the blessed St Francis, to take a look at them for yourself, to see if they answer your questions.

– Maybe I will, Father. I bought a Bible in Jerusalem, and I have it with me still. It shocked me a little when I refreshed my memory for the first time. But I'll try it again.

– Shocked you?

– Yes. It's such a bad-tempered, hectoring sort of a book. I don't mind the Gospel of Love, but you've got to admit that in other ways it doesn't set us much of an example.

– In what ways?

I thought for a while.

– Well, is Hell one of the things I've got to take?

– If you take Heaven, yes. You people always want to have one thing but not the other – just the way children do. Is that fair – to have it both ways?

For a while I drove on in silence.

– I'll have to think out an answer to that one.

With a short cackle of laughter, he rose from the jeep, and stepped into the sloping cloisters of Assisi.

– Well, remember the story of the woman who threw out the baby with the bathwater.

Then, feeling in his pocket, he pressed a small book into my hand.

– Goodbye now, and thanks for the lift. There's something in return for the annoyance of your conversation.

And as he climbed up the flight of stone steps that leads to the upper level of the Basilica, he looked up at the sky and at the

birds curving and sweeping overhead and I heard him declaiming, half to himself:

– Sister Lark, whose conversation is always in the Heavens, and whose intent is always in the praise of God!

I looked at my present. It was called ‘The Mirror of Perfection’.

Be thou praised, my Lord, with all thy creatures,  
Above all, Brother Sun, who gives the day  
And lightens us therewith.

\* \* \*

They said that over on the Adriatic coast the Poles were approaching Ancona. How to approach the Poles was another matter. So I went to consult the 12th Lancers who were operating their armoured cars out on the Indians’ flank. They could tell me little, except that their own pickets were north of Camerino, and that between there and the Poles was a mystery land of Partisans, inhabited by the Nicolo Band and the PPA. This PPA is a peculiar relic of the Desert War, consisting of a number of jeeps heavily armed with machine guns, and operating behind the enemy lines under the command of a British Major with the unlikely name of Popski. Officially ‘PPA’ is supposed to abbreviate some title in Arabic, but everybody will tell you that it really stands for Popski’s Private Army. As this outfit had never been known to hold anything in the nature of a Front, it seemed that the only way of finding out if it was possible to get through to the east coast was to go ahead and try.

Mike Reynolds was due to arrive at Trasimene on his tour of inspection, but before returning there to meet him, I took a run by myself as far as the Lancers’ pickets. It was a strangely exalting experience – alone in the solitude of those mountains, my jeep buzzing up the corkscrew hills, crossing the uplands and dropping down through the tree-filled valleys. A world brimming with gold, in which the silence shut behind me as I passed.

There are too many people in the world – as I think I said before; too many queues; too many forms. We live under the tyranny of Things – bullied by our superfluous possessions. Here a man can carry all that he needs on his back – or at any rate in the back of his jeep. Two spare cans of petrol and a can of fresh water. A bedroll and an electric torch. So much for transport and hotel accommodation. A razor, towel, toothbrush, a scrap of soap

and a roll of lavatory paper, all enclosed in a small vanity case that was once a Gerry ammo box. So much for toilet and personal adornment. A couple of tins of M & V, a few bars of chocolate, and half a bottle of gin. So much for food and luxury. What more could any man reasonably require? – except, perhaps, a woman.

But I am forgetting my profession! I must not forget that in the pursuit of the good life. I also carry a Cairene portable typewriter, in a battered metal case, and a wad of anti-birth-control notepaper, headed:

UNIONE FASCISTA FAMIGLIE NUMEROSE  
SEZIONE PROVINCIALE DI SALERNO

a legacy from Frank Gillard, who professes not to be a marrying man.

The forest, rooted, tosses in its bonds  
And strains against the cloud.

I sang as I drove – all the old favourites: Mick Magilligan's Daughter, I Wanted Wings, Sari Marais, and

Shadows intertwining in the yellow light  
Gave away our secret to everyone in sight.  
Maybe the shadows stand there still  
And, hand in hand are waiting till,  
We meet again, Marlene,  
We meet, Lili Marlene.

A sentimental little piece. Funny to think of the time when I was not allowed to mention it. And now Geraldo has it on the air with a background of marching feet.

Like a theme song that commonplace lilt has pursued me from Alamein. That little drunken RAF officer, with 'England' defiantly sewn on his shoulder, attacking me on the stairs of the Cecil: We love her! You've got nothing like her in the BBC! And that Fighter Ace, Billy Drake, in his desert mess, drawing his gun at the supper table after coming back from that unfortunate sortie: 'Turn that bloody thing off! Turn it off!' And all the boys got under the table except me, who thought he was only joking!

The pavements know your footsteps,  
They hear them every day,  
But mine they have forgotten,  
I've been so long away.

Tell me the truth, O lantern bright,  
Is someone else below tonight,  
With my Lili Marlene?  
With my Lili Marlene?

The wind is full of unanswered questions like that one – the wind with showers on its back. Dear Georg, How are you? Nice little place: I wonder where it is? What, no doves? How is my young friend Harold Alexander getting on? What is the Sphinx smiling at? Who goes to Tito? What's this guy's name and number? Am I a married man?

– You don't know?

Be thou praised, my Lord, with all thy creatures,  
Above all, Brother Sun, who gives the day  
And lightens us therewith.

St Francis of Assisi. The Mirror of Perfection. Poverty...and Salvation from the tyranny of Things. Half a bottle of gin and a bedroll.

I did not come out too well in my brush with His Reverence. The fact of the matter is, I would really like to agree with him. With many of my generation, I have a hankering to talk about Religion, but know that I must not do so, because the subject is suspect; and I am bitter with the Church for not offering a faith about which there is no need to be hangdog. There was a time when Theology could be discussed outside Gospel circles, but that was because it had the burning interest of being true. Christ had risen from the dead in the flesh, and so would everybody else.

If one hopes to do this too, it is of little account that the earliest evidence of such an event is only the Sinaitic Palimpsest. A pun in Matthew is enough to justify the colossal pretensions of the Papacy – if you happen to be Pope. But unfortunately, it requires more than a pun to prove even a Right of Way in the County Court, or anywhere else where proof is taken seriously.

So – let us face it – we believe what we need to believe, and proof is of secondary importance. Suppose then that I do not hope to rise from the dead in the flesh, or inherit an everlasting life which in terms of modern thought is ridiculous? – suppose I want a different deliverance from the fear of Death? and am attached to *this* life? – suppose I want *it* to be eternal? – suppose I want to be assured that none of it is lost through the passing of Time – not past, present or future, or any of its possibilities? – what



inducement have I, then, to strain my credulity with beliefs that are contrary to experience?

– You need not do so, say the Broad Church apologists. It is the teaching that matters. The rest is only true in a spiritual sense.

But is it a Religion at all, if I can only believe half of it, and have to dismiss the remainder with double talk? I do not want Noah's Ark, if it is only true in a spiritual sense – at least not as a Religion. I do not even care deeply about the teaching. I can get that in plenty of quarters. I want a shining Fact like the early Fathers had – maybe not the Resurrection, but something as peculiar to the faith. The Catholics are right. Jesus is of little interest as a very nice fellow of ascertainable parentage, who came to preach the Sermon on the Mount, and to set us an example of impeccable behaviour under very trying circumstances. He was either a wild man from Galilee who attempted to upset Jerusalem, and failed miserably. Or else he was God.

I would happily believe him to be God, if this did not import an intolerable problem about the meaning of Evil – a problem which is fundamental to the ways of Christian thought. If Life is a trap from which He came to save us, and we are all in peril of damnation through Original Sin, then T-B was right. Would I place my own son before an open fire, and allow him to fall in if he chose to do so, even for reasons considered sufficient by St Thomas Aquinas? And if not, does it mean that I have more compassion than my God? Am I on the side of my God, if I really believe him to have placed me in such a situation? Do I want his forgiveness? And if I ask for it, is it for love of his arrangements, or in order to save my skin?

Shaw's Demiurge is bad enough – practising experiments that may or may not come off. But this God is infinitely worse, and if this is what I must believe in order to qualify for words of comfort from the Priest, there is nothing for me to do but to deny and deny and deny.

\* \* \*

By the side of a shot-up Scout car, the Lancer Colonel was looking on, while his Adjutant bound up the head of an elderly Italian. Somebody had shot at him from an ambush ahead. Maybe only a private feud; but the direct route was mined, so I had better follow the Colonel round by Muccia if I wanted to go any farther. In fact he would ride with me.

Another of those professional soldiers who loves his job, he was full of anecdotes of the fighting of the last few days, when his cars took Camerino, using the Partisans as infantry.

– No, we don't know for certain what's to the east. We're pushing up northwards ourselves. But I'm sure if you go on, you can get as far as Tolentino.

– But haven't you got anybody on your flank?

– Oh, various Odds and Sods. This Nicolo band. And then, eventually, the Poles.

– What about Popski and his boys?

– Just a damn nuisance, if you ask me. Come charging into some town shooting off machine guns and making a hell of a din. And then they pull out again, having drawn attention to the place...maybe bring half a Battalion of Gerries down after them; but what do they care? They're away somewhere else by then, and we have to take the rap.

Beyond Camerino we were stopped by a swift-flowing river. The only bridge was blown, and on the farther bank stood a large armoured car that was winching a lorry through the stream by a long steel cable.

– Well, here's the Staghound. If we winch you across I doubt if you'll get back until a bridging party comes up. So perhaps you'd better go no farther.

I thanked him for his company, and went back with my despatch. When I returned a few days later, I brought Michael Reynolds with me. It would be time enough for the Keeper to see him after he had visited the Adriatic.

From Camerino eastwards, the road winds through a series of lovely valleys that might be Scotland, or the less populated parts of the Tyrol. At each village we asked about the road ahead, and in most cases we got the same answer. The bridge was gone, but there was a detour that a small car could probably make. Somebody's vehicles – maybe Popski's – had usually been nosed down the glacis to the bed of the stream, and had crossed on planks that were still there. I would hate to have attempted it in anything but a jeep.

As we entered Tolentino we passed a column of armed Italian regulars coming out. From the fact that they paid no attention to us, we assumed that they were on our side. The next thing that we saw was a Pole defacing a red slogan on a wall. He was a welcome sight. If a Pole could get to Tolentino from the coast,

then we could get to the coast from Tolentino. We did – by one elaborate detour after another, through the yards of farmhouses, and down private lanes; and always with a touch of apprehension, lest one of these Polish detours should stray too far north into Kesselring's territory. Nobody knew who was in Treia.

At last we arrived at Polish Corps HQ and enquired for the Public Relations Officer.

Yes, indeed there were three Public Relations Officers – Hydenhole, Pullemoff and Primp – or names to that effect. This seemed an unduly large number of P.R.Os. And where were they? Ah, that was the question. However, if we would be so kind as to go with this Orderly he would take us to Colonel Somebody who would undoubtedly know. The Orderly took us a couple of hundred yards and then invited us to wait 'for a few minutes', while he did something else.

Exactly twenty minutes later we relocated our original contact. He bowed and smiled, and made as if to pass by, but we barred his way. So all was well. We had found Hydenhole, Pullemoff and Primp? No, we had not. In fact we could not even find our Orderly. But that was most unfortunate. How could such things have happened? He would escort us himself at whatever cost in time or trouble.

For three-quarters of an hour we passed from tent to tent, chanting the Polish Public Relations Litany in a mounting crescendo – Hydenhole, Pullemoff and Primp. At last in a nearby Farm House we found them busily at work at their typewriters. But alas for all, it is true that they were Public Relations Officers, but in the Polish Army, Public Relations Officer does not mean Public Relations Officer. It means War Correspondent. Hydenhole, Pullemoff and Primp were only journalists like ourselves, and were not in a position to put us up for the night. What we must do was to travel a number of miles up the coast towards Vasto, and there we would find a villa with 'British Public Relations' written on the gate. Here we would be hospitably received.

– British Public Relations? I asked.

– Yes, that is right. It means Polish Public Relations.

It was dark when we eventually got to the neighbourhood of British Public Relations (laughably so called) and asked for further directions from another Pole who was seated beside the dry bed of a stream, across which ran some wheel tracks. He told us that the place we were looking for was one of the villas on

the far side, and as we started to move off he added a rider to the effect that it would be better for us to go across at some other place. The tracks ahead of us were mined, he explained. We thanked him profusely, and as we left him it occurred to Michael to ask how he knew. That was simple. He had laid the mines himself a fortnight earlier, as a member of the Wehrmacht!

With the aid of matches we finally located the misnomer on a gate, and arrived rather tired and extremely hungry. We were welcomed with open arms. Would we like a hot bath? Not very much. We were sure that it would be too much trouble; but we would enjoy a little food. No, no; it was no trouble at all. We must each have a hot bath. So a squad of Polish orderlies was put on to the job of heating kettles of water on primus stoves. Vain to protest that we would really rather have a cup of tea. It was no trouble at all, and they would hear no refusal. We had travelled far from Eighth Army Main, and nothing was too much for the allies of Poland.

– But really and truly – just a simple cup of tea.

Tea? Well, they would see what could be done about that too, but it was not easy. They were not very well equipped in the Polish Army, and all the kettles would be needed for the bath. If only they were better off – but as everybody knew, Poland was a poor nation and had lost everything....

\* \* \*

We stayed a couple of nights, during which Michael devoted himself to our hosts, and I teamed up with a British Psychological Warfare Officer to visit the Italian Division that had distinguished itself, to everybody's surprise, by taking a town called Filotrano, without benefit of tanks or even proper artillery support.

In a farmhouse, we talked with a batch of German prisoners – the men sitting bunched and gloomy, the senior NCOs very poker-faced and self-possessed sitting some distance away, with their eyes on the men to see that they behaved themselves according to the book. Their principal complaint was that they had been robbed by the Eyties in Filotrano. They were very earnest and self-righteous about it, making no allegations against the Poles, but expressing the greatest indignation about our co-belligerents.

But that is very like the Germans. There was a middle-aged Sergeant who appealed to me, quoting chapter and verse of the Geneva Convention. He wished to be transferred to British hands,

as the Polish Intelligence Officer was trying to make him answer questions that he was not entitled to put. The old gag of threatening not to report his capture until he had answered was being pulled again. The Pole gave a short, sharp laugh, and asked him if he had heard of the Poles at Cassino who had escaped back to our lines after a German interrogation, with their jaws broken and most of their teeth knocked out? That was very wrong, if it was true, the Sergeant agreed, but he found it hard to believe it of the Wehrmacht. But true or not, it did not prejudice his rights under the Geneva Convention, and he demanded, etc., etc.

– My family are in Poland, said the Intelligence Officer to me as soon as we had left the cottage. They have not known whether I am alive or dead for nearly five years.

– I know, I said. That's what never fails to amaze me about the Germans. The Geneva Convention is for them, but not for anybody else. It's hard to believe that that fellow in there isn't being hypocritical.

– Oh no, he is not at all hypocritical. That is the sinister thing about the German. He is myopic about the wrongs of other people. He quite sincerely believes that everything he does is perfectly reasonable, but that everything that is done to him is an outrage.

– It's a pity, I answered. It means, of course, that the only answer is for us to go into Germany, and give them a practical demonstration of what it feels like.

– We in Poland have known that for a long time, he replied with a grin. Nevertheless, tomorrow I shall send our Sergeant back with the other prisoners, whether he has answered or not.

– I know. We try the same trick ourselves.

\* \* \*

Riga lu Gruppu, riga lu Gruppu, riga lu Gruppu.  
Nicolo, Nicolo, Nicolo!  
Oh bardascette, bardascette gettate i fior  
Eccoci qui siam tutti qua  
Con la speranza d'incontrar. Quei buffoni traditor  
Che scappan via come il tuon  
Come il tuon, come il tuon, come il tuon scappano si  
Scappan via con la brache penzolanti  
Mentre noi andiamo sempre sempre avanti  
Ed esse corrono, corrono corrono ancora corrono  
Oh Italia mia del cuor noi siam qua

Noi siam qua per l'onor, per l'onor, per l'onor, per l'onor  
Già perduto dai fascisti  
Delinquenti accoppiati ai nazisti  
Tu puoi quindi giubilar, che noi  
Tutti che noi tutti ti Vendichiam!

In Macerata we found some of the Nicolo band, including several British ex-prisoners who were among its active members.

In a home up a long, lonely valley we found the Englishman who had led the attack on Camerino. It was a strange household – the Mother, a Countess married to an Italian Officer still fighting on the other side, her pretty daughter, and the usual servants and hangers-on. In the principal bedroom, they showed me the secret cupboard in which their guest had lain concealed whenever the house was being searched.

Now he was back, living openly in his old hidey-hole – his battle won, and the prospect before him of going back to England. His face grew thoughtful at the mention of Lincolnshire. It would be fine to see home again. But somehow – after guerrilla warfare in the Central Apennines, after the glamour of life with the Brigada Spartaca, there was something a little drab about the future. It was a good thing to have won their little war, of course. Yet...

All over these mountains, stray Englishmen are being uncovered in the same way – Englishmen faced with the same problem. For who is a greater romantic at heart than an Englishman? That is why he makes such an excellent brigand.

\* \* \*

Be Thou praised, my Lord, of our Sister Earth  
Which sustains and hath us in rule,  
And produces divers fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Be Thou praised, my Lord, of those who pardon for Thy love  
And endure sickness and tribulations.  
Blessed are they who will endure in peace,  
For by Thee, most High, they shall be crowned.

Be Thou praised, my Lord, of our Sister Bodily Death,  
From whom no man living may escape...

He had something there...little Brother Francis. There is a baby in that bath water, – maybe even twins!

I am lying in the sunlight on the grass outside the great door

of the upper Church, and all around me the children of Assisi are playing, while their mothers look on and chatter one with another. There are no plaster wounds in this Church for the pious queues to kiss. No outstretched Petrine toe, with a money box beside it. Maybe Giotto is not everybody's meat; maybe he has little enough to do with the blessings of Poverty. All the same there is a dignity and a quiet in this place that silences all argument, and has even intimidated the Great Powers into leaving the city alone.

I like this Church, and the Order that has built it. It has not been doing nothing for the past two thousand years. It represents – as he fairly said – the accumulated wisdom of the human race. Perhaps even more than that – its accumulated errors too – its hopes and its bogies.

And why not? For in a sense, the Church *is* the human race, and as such, we either worship it without reason, or deny its word by compulsion. Yet, neither course is good enough, for there is a baby in the bath water, and I can hear it yelling very insistently.

Or maybe it is only these children who disturb me as I lie here, turning over the pages of my cedar-bound book. They say they have to teach these kids Religion before they are thirteen, otherwise they may be lost. I wonder why? What has the Church to fear, that it should have signposted its long history with forgeries, censorship, and the stake? What would we say of any other system of philosophy so nervous of the light of day that it must convince us before we have learnt to think? Are we prepared to fight the Devil, any more than the Germans, before we know him? Is there a Devil at all? And if so, who created him, and why?

Staring at me from the open page are the words of an unknown Prophet.

I AM THE LORD, AND THERE IS NONE ELSE.  
I FORM THE LIGHT, AND CREATE DARKNESS.  
I MAKE PEACE, AND CREATE EVIL.  
I THE LORD DO ALL THESE THINGS.

A startling revelation, and one that I have never heard comments on from any pulpit. Is it the Church – not I – that only wants half?

I read it again, and look up.

If I cannot have the Church's God without its Satan, maybe I need not deny them both, because according to this, they are the same person. There is no God but God, the Father of Night and Day, Creator of Heaven and Hell, who sends us the frost and the

flowers. If he freely confesses to Evil as well as to Good, I can believe in him again, and honour him, for that makes sense. Why he should have created Evil, I do not need to know. I may not like it – I shall do my best to avoid it, as I avoid the winter's wind. But I can take it, because it is not a trap set to destroy me. It is clear that he is neither a bungler nor a demon, and in praising him for all his works, I am praising Creation as he has made it.

Well, now that I am at it, let me pull out the plug, and see what else is left after the bath water has run away.

I do not believe that Jesus Christ was his only begotten Son, because I am his son, too. It may well be that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, but as for the rest, I doubt that God is a performer of conjuring tricks. And if he comes again, it will be neither to judge the quick nor the dead, for, God knows, the race is to be pitied rather than judged.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, but not in a Church that is neither holy nor catholic. I do not know what is meant by the Communion of Saints: the Forgiveness of Sins is self-evident, or alternatively, self-contradictory – whichever way you look at it: the Resurrection of the Body would be both absurd and embarrassing: and although Life Everlasting would be too intolerable to contemplate, I do nevertheless believe in the physical eternity and indestructibility of this life. For Death is only a boundary, not an End – a trick of bodily consciousness, and not of annihilation.

So much for my creed of disbelief. There is plenty still left in this fascinating book. The robust optimism and self-confidence of the Psalms, for instance, when declaimed with conviction from the seat of a jeep.

Fret not thyself because of evil-doers,  
Neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity,  
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,  
And wither as the green herb.

What wouldn't I give to open a news spot in the lovely language of the Second Isaiah – who, with an acute sense of prophecy, appears to have been writing page after page about me! (Didn't somebody warn me about that?)

Listen, O Isles, unto me:  
And hearken, ye people, from far!  
The Lord hath called me from the womb:  
From the belly of my Mother hath he made mention of my name.



And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword:  
And said unto me,  
Thou art my servant in whom I shall be glorified.

The warm-blooded lechery of the Song of Solomon, with its amusing explanatory notes, trying in vain to make it respectable! Apart from the narrative material of the Gospels, there is not so much in the New Testament, with its dreary evangelical letters, full of the fear of women, and that spiteful piece of Hebrew wish-fulfilment called the Apocalypse. But there are things like the Nunc Dimittis; and this profound passage, gleaming like a jewel in the wilderness of First Corinthians:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels  
And have not Charity,  
I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

Charity – one of the loveliest words in the language – now bowdlerised into ‘Love’ in the latest version, in deference to the Nineteenth Century Poor Laws. If such genteel perversion of plain language can take place under our very noses, what other crimes must have been perpetrated on the text since it was first copied? So much for verbal inspiration.

And though I have the gift of prophecy  
And understand all mysteries and all knowledge:  
And though I have all Faith so that I could move mountains,  
And have not Charity,  
I am nothing.  
And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,  
And though I give my body to be burned,  
And have not Charity,  
It profiteth me nothing.

(Christ! There’s a fine, lusty baby!)

Charity suffereth long, and is kind:  
Charity envieth not:  
Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,  
Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own,  
Is not easily provoked.  
Thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity,  
But rejoiceth in the truth,  
Beareth all things,  
Believeth all things,  
Hopeth all things,  
Endureth all things...

I freely and humbly admit to my clerical friend that he certainly has got something there. It is true, and I am glad that it is true. That's the most important thing of all. I have the wit to be glad in it.

Then these Beatitudes – so frequently cited as an example of the superiority of Christian morality. Do we really know what they mean? In the light of its history, does the Church know? Take this:

Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek  
Turn to him the other also.

And this even more puzzling passage:

Love your enemies,  
Bless them that curse you.  
Do good to them that hate you,  
And pray for them that spitefully use you.

Now what, under Heaven, does that mean? Familiar as 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild' since the days of Sunday School, we very properly reject it as the counsel of cowardice – the advice of those who are afraid to hit back, heartily endorsed by Bullies as a rule for Other People. Not even our instructors really believe in it. How can we love our enemies and live? And aren't we intended to live?

Yet there it is – so outrageous that it makes you wonder.

\* \* \*

What, then, does this catalogue of question marks make me? Does it admit me through those double doors, or must I remain outside? If plain words are to mean anything (and God knows, it is time that they did) – a Christian is whatever the Christians say he is. So what am I – since I am obviously not a Christian?

What I say I am, myself?

Must I swallow my protests, and follow the others into the fold of the fisherman. Or appoint myself a rival?

Dion Eblanensis, Episcopus, Servus Servorum Dei, Divina Providentia Papa Secunda. What a title!

Were I to assume it, I think that this would be my first apostolic act – here at the Basilica of the humbly arrogant Little Brother of the Birds: –

To found by the authority committed to me (which authority

let no man deny save at his peril) THE FOURTH ORDER OF SAINT FRANCIS.

As the Third Order has been established for pious laymen of the Roman Faith, so this Fourth Order shall be open only to Protestants, Sceptics, the Unbaptised, and all those who for other sufficient reasons may not pass through those doors.

It shall be dedicated to those who work on the Vasto side of the Peninsula, ranking the effort above the result, finding their reward in the struggle itself, and wearing only the medals that they confer upon themselves.

It shall be self-elective and self-expulsive: for no man or woman can remain in it who is not a Unicorn, or who surrenders to any of the Seven Great Heresies.

Join with me, Sister Lark and Brother Sun, in praise of Francis and his blessed Order. For whosoever from his heart shall love the Order, Pagan though he be, yet shall he at last obtain mercy.

Datum Asisio, die Dominicæ quinto Julii  
anno MXMXLIV, Pontificatus Nostri anno primo.

END OF BOOK TWO



# 3

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## THE EPIKLESIS

The corn is sown again, it grows,  
The stars burn out, the darkness goes.  
The rhythms change, they do not close.

# A CRITICAL EXAGAMEN

by

E. W. TOCHER<sup>1</sup>

ORDINARILY, the graph of a writer's index ascends with ascertainable irregularities to a horizontal line. If such exactitude of application sometimes implies distortion in two directions – up and down – perhaps an illustration will serve to enlarge the surmisal. Where language is unicellular, it follows that all individual Quidditas are concentrated in a physical image, often, though not always visual, while generalised Quidditas are differenced in a stream of sound. The soul of the thing – or to use a more precise analogy, its Whatness – leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance.<sup>2</sup>

The use of such a technique of dominant imagery can be overstressed if the writer's attitude towards a multi-dimensional ethic fails to furnish any context for an association-pattern. As Samuel Beckett points out<sup>3</sup>, 'One cannot insist on complete identification between the philosophical abstraction and the empirical illustration without annulling the absolutism of each conception'. And such liminal ambiguities vividly postulate what has been one of the chief difficulties of this Editor in introducing the present work, in preparing a codex suitable for publication, and in delineating the history of the text.

This *splendid emendax* – to pilfer a phrase – undertaken as a step towards obtaining a Doctorate from any reputable College<sup>4</sup> – is not a virtuoso exercise, but more correctly amounts to a careful collation of such copies of the Quelle, or Source Exordium, as

<sup>1</sup> M.A., Associate Instructor in Semantics, Woolworth Junior College. Author of *A Recapitulation of Phylogony, The Impact of the Unreadable, Instructors' Guide to the English Departments, etc., etc.*

<sup>2</sup> Compare Robert Sage, *Before Ulysses and After*. Shakespear et Cie. See also Irene Hendry in *The Sewanee Review*, Summer 1946.

<sup>3</sup> *Dante-Bruno-Vico-Joyce*, p 3, Paris 1929.

<sup>4</sup> The writer's address can be obtained from the publishers.

are so far locatable. Four of these, for the sake of clarity, I am distinguishing by the mnemonics: 'A', 'A starred', 'BB', and 'Seven'.<sup>1</sup> Owing to the wide dispersal of the remaining copies, still numerically unidentified, a definitive comparison cannot be undertaken without the assistance of an honorarium from some body such as the Ford Foundation or the Irish Academy of Letters,<sup>2</sup> whose interest it is hoped will be stimulated by the extent of the work already accomplished.

This expression, *Quelle* – hereinafter shortened for convenience to 'Q'<sup>3</sup> – is here used to indicate collectively these basic compositions deposited in Libraries by earlier hands under the title 'Nine Rivers From Jordan', and leaving out of consideration any orthographical variations as between copy and copy. 'Q', in its turn, is a graft upon a Prototype, alleged to have been completed in Jerusalem in the summer of 1947, and which either fell or was pushed into the River Dodder shortly after being mimeographed. Retrogressively, the Prototype had as its background a collection of diaries, radio scripts, personal letters, graphitæ and pamphlets, the originals of which are now probably in the United States, and the authorship of which I propose to discuss.

I am fully aware that such a course comes perilously close to the realm of biographical criticism that is rightly frowned upon by the Semanticists.<sup>4</sup> But I may perhaps be excused, having regard to the special confusion that embraces this branch of the exercise, and which was first signalled by French insistence that the entire codex is attributable solely to Otto Suder of Munchen-Gladbach, and may on that account be dismissed.

In the studied opinion of this commentator, such a cachinnation will not bear exhaustive examination, and however skilfully it may be partially equated, it cannot avail throughout. The French are interested parties in the matter, no less than is the writer of the following excerpted letter,<sup>5</sup> who, on his part, would have us accept the stated authorship at its face value.

<sup>1</sup> 'A' refers to the copy in the British Museum. 'A starred' is the Lausanne version. 'BB' is in the Widener Library of Harvard College. 'Seven' is in the Bodleian.

<sup>2</sup> The writer's address can be obtained from the publishers.

<sup>3</sup> This, of course, is the nomenclature already applied by Biblical historians to the unknown Gospel containing the largely didactic material common to Matthew and Luke.

<sup>4</sup> The Editor hastens to express his full agreement with Ogden and Richards when they write: 'A consideration (notion, idea) or an idea is *relevant* to an interpretation when it forms part of a psychological context which links other contexts together in the peculiar fashion in which interpretation so links them. Irrelevant consideration is a non-linking member of a psychological context'. *The Meaning of Meaning*, Kegan Paul.

<sup>5</sup> The quoted letter comes from the person appearing in the story under the pseudonym of *Yourman* – supposedly an old friend.

...At school, he was a very average scholar, finding it hard to express himself simply and syntactically. He never shone at games, but usually managed to get himself into the hierarchy by being available whenever better men were laid up. On the whole he was much better liked in the Dublin Law Library than in literary and theatrical circles, where his manner towards the older generation was typified by an insolent use of the word 'Sir' – a practice that used to infuriate people like the Poet Yeats who was old enough to enjoy being contradicted.<sup>1</sup> The younger generation<sup>2</sup> dismissed him brilliantly with the soubriquet, 'The Last of the Anglo-Irish', which galled him much more than he ever galled his elders.

...As a writer of uneven performance, he attempted to justify his constant use of too many words too many times with a dictum of John Stuart Mill that it is necessary to write clearly enough to be found out.

...In his statements of fact he is substantially accurate, except that events and conversations did not necessarily occur in the manner in which he describes them. He constantly condenses three or four interviews into one, and even three or four characters into one, alleging that the literal truth usually conveys a lie, and that the only way to paint an honest picture in the round, is to 'produce' it by filling in the background, and maybe by adding things that have occurred on other occasions. Whenever he stooped to deception, it was usually by means of the irritating trick of telling the truth, while insinuating that it was really a lie. Whenever he invited one to join him in a laugh at himself behind his own back, it was usually because he meant what he said, but did not want others to believe so.

This account, it will be noted, while attempting to provide the central figure with a credible earlier background, makes no effort to explain the anachronism that must be evident from a study of 'Q', namely, that the compilation is the work of not one, but of several hands. It does not require more than a superficial examination of these schemata to expose this polymanual authorship, and the fact that the 'Writer' is not a person at all, but a Quest-Hero on whose personality there is not even substantial agreement. Sometimes he is represented as a literary acrobat, at others as a naïve candidate for an Officers' Training Corps ready to accept instruction on almost any subject, while in other pages it seems to be the intention to advance the claim that he is the person referred to in

<sup>1</sup> Dr Arthur Duff quotes Yeats as referring to someone he calls 'that fellow, Brinsley Johnson', who was trying to insinuate himself into the Abbey Theatre. Compare Lady Gregory's Journals as edited by Lennox Robinson and requoted in a hostile vein by Peter Kavanagh in his authoritative monograph, *The Irish Theatre*.

<sup>2</sup> See: Thomas Hogan. *Ervey*, August 1950.



the second part of the Book of Isaiah. He is, in short, a Suchenganger, created by the parthenogenic processes of group-representation, for a purpose which I hope to show.

An examination of the many contemporary autobiographies discloses nobody of that name with the Desert Army, apart from two brief references – clearly interpolations – in the account of one who is absurdly supposed to have been a close colleague.<sup>1</sup> War Office correspondence refers only to a William Johnstone as having received a letter of thanks at the conclusion of hostilities, and the BBC official publication, *War Report*, is almost completely silent on the subject of this supposed Correspondent.<sup>2</sup> Nor does any such person appear at all in the War Service Roll of Honour of his alleged old school.<sup>3</sup>

So much for the negative aspect. On the positive side it is significant to note that his first name is that of Dionysos, and that his second name clearly refers to Dublin, the episcopal seat of Archbishop John McQuaid (John's Town<sup>4</sup> – another echo of Joyce). Alternatively, it may be intended to apply to the city in the apocalyptic vision of the fourth Evangelist – the New Jerusalem, where the text was finally fabricated during the upheavals of 1947. His supposed birthday immediately precedes the Summer Solstice, the time of the principal Bacchic rites, which are still recollected in the midsummer dances of the English countryside. His journey, circling from east to west – 'from where it is white to where it will be white again' – is manifestly a Time-Image, analogous to the Orphic day, proceeding not from midnight to midnight, but from noon to noon.<sup>5</sup> This reversal of the prevailing phase-sequence of the western calendar may be regarded as one of the many clues to the Writer's Synthesis as a representative protest against Christo-Roman glosses on more ancient Time conceptions.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Godfrey Talbot: *Speaking from the Desert* (Hutchinson).

<sup>2</sup> A couple of brief references probably refer to this same William Johnstone, but have been amended by a later hand. Had there been such a Correspondent of three years' standing, as we are expected to believe, he would have featured largely in such a book.

<sup>3</sup> St Andrew's College Annual, 1948.

<sup>4</sup> St John, the Alexandrian Eschatologist, is the only evangelist who claims personally to have witnessed the scene at the tomb. Racing Peter there, he purports to have arrived first. This also may have some significance.

<sup>5</sup> Compare Joseph Campbell's view of the Quest-Myth as a circle. The hero, descending from the noon-summit, passes through a nadir of discovery, and re-emerges into the light bearing his prize.

<sup>6</sup> Astronomers have long reckoned the day from noon to noon, in sharp contradistinction to Church and State, and as recently as the 19th Century abortive attempts were still being made to bring the latter into line. The history of the Year is more complex. As an odd bequest from the Pre-Julian Roman Calendar, the legal year still begins on a meaningless date – the Kalends of January, which is near to, but never actually has been at the Winter Solstice. The new rite, above indicated, would appear to run from Summer to Summer, like the Academic reckoning which is in fact practised by most non-agricultural communities.

If 'Q' then embodies the Dance-Drama of an imaginary hero, compiled over a number of years by various votaries, how then, one may ask, has this figure come to be listed in Who's Who? The short answer is a simple one: by precisely the same myth-building process that has placed Isaac Bickerstaff – an invention of Swift – in the Dictionary of National Biography, where he, too, is credited with a number of pseudomorphic plays<sup>1</sup>: by Nature imitating Art under the long-observed machinery of human thought, which never fails to manufacture a background of historical fact for whatever it is necessary to believe.

Indeed, any prolegomena must be careful to distinguish not only this multiplicity of hands, but also the varying levels of analogue in the text, on which the dominant motifs of meaning and proleptic phraseology are simultaneously operating. For example: (1) the biological structure moving from Birth (Cunt of the World) and Baptism (Jordan) to Senility (Snows of Hafelekar), (2) the liturgical format proceeding from Introit to Ite Missa Est, (3) the temporal span from sunset (Mena House) to sunrise (Innsbruck), and (4) the dialectical parallelism revolving<sup>2</sup> from Homer through Blake and Goethe back to the Book of Job. These indicia are by no means exhaustive, and will be further elaborated through other fields when a wider interest in the matter makes such categorical investigations profitable. For the purposes of contemporary analysis they will be found to be largely gerundive.

Perhaps more important is to enumerate the extent of the emendations to the Lausanne 'Q' – the foundation for the present text – which have been necessary to render it publishable at all. Not only has it been altered to conform with this Editor's views on etymology and orthographical usage (*i.e.*, grammar and spelling), but also to bring it into line with accepted notions of titling, philosophy, sociology, defamation, and the standards of good form. The need for such factitious treatment, which a glance at the original will confirm, only serves to underline the absurdity of the claim that such a pastiche of exhibitionism, sentimentality and

<sup>1</sup> The Subject's own supposed plays fall clearly into this category. One need only advert to the point made by Dr Vivian Mercier in *Two Decades of Criticism* (Vanguard Press), and also by Mr Dan H. Laurence of the Washington Square College of Arts and Science, that many of the overtones of *The Old Lady says "No!"* appear to be drawn from *Finnegan's Wake*. The difficult problem raised by the dates of each is at once solved when it is realised that the play is pseudomorphic, and may well be a pre-exercise by the hand that wrote the book. The rest of the plays may be disregarded, with the possible exception of two, both of which are noticeably indebted to two of the acknowledged works of another established playwright, although, again, prior in date. But this is all a subject for another paper.

<sup>2</sup> Possibly the word 'spiraling' would provide a better analogy, if such an expression can validly be applied to parallelism. It will also have been noted that there are four alternative Introductions, relatable to the above.

sophistry, the bulk of which could never have been intended to be read, originates in a Norm of his generation.

Yet as a Norm he must be regarded by those who have conceived him, since only in this view can his experiences have any universal meaning.

A Mirror am I to you that perceive me.  
Now answer to my dancing.<sup>1</sup>

In such a Rite, Everyman is reconciled to the Deity.

I beg to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of a number of people in reading the proofs and in advising on the text. In particular, I would like to mention Dr Oliver Gogarty, Major Dermot Freyer, Mr Peadar O'Donnell, Editor of the *Bell* (in whose pages certain portions have already appeared), Miss Mary Coit, Mrs Bippy, and Private-First-Class Richard T. Heffron. To the late George Bernard Shaw, through the medium of Mr Albert Lowenstein, I am under an obligation for some advice as what to do with the MS. To the Curators of the Royal Library, Copenhagen, and of the Libraries of the University of Natal and of the American Collégé, Beirut, I tender my acknowledgment of their courtesy. Lastly to Mrs Tocher, who did all the typing, I appear to be permanently indebted.

March 1953.



<sup>1</sup>See the Manichaean *Acts of John* (Bonnet, *Acta Apost. Apocr.* II 1) or in translation in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, M. R. James (Oxford Press).

## CONCERTO FOR SIRENS

Drake is going to sea, my lads,  
 Drake is going to sea,  
 I don't know what he's going to see,  
 But Drake is going to sea.

ON the bridge of a Landing Craft (Command) I sceptically hummed an old music-hall air as the dawn grew brighter, and a low, flat coastline appeared before us. Presently we could see the outline of a lighthouse and a few buildings – then a windmill and a line of embankments.

Ours was the foremost ship, except for a small motor boat that fussed away ahead, laying down the buoys and markers on which the plan of the operation depended. Behind us on the slow, oily swell, a miscellaneous armada began to show up in the growing light: LCIs and LCTs, Rocket Ships, Flak Ships, and finally, far away to the west, two smudges said to be a full-grown Battleship and a Monitor.

Leaning over the rail, we drank our cups of tea and speculated on whether they could see us from the shore, and on what the chances were of Bomber Harris having knocked out the coast defences, as he had so confidently promised.

We drew nearer – but still nobody fired, except far to the south where the Commandos' battle was already raging.

I seem to have said very little about the Senior Service in the course of this narrative. Maybe this is just prejudice, or maybe it is because you cannot mention the Navy without some powerful old man pointing out that you have used some wrong word in a wrong way, and that you ought to know better. After all, who cares whether you are 'in' a ship or 'on' it? Who cares whether their damn little flags are 'flown' or 'worn', or whether they are stuck up in the right places or not? Who cares whether the Quarter Deck is

or is not where it was in 1588, or why a tot of rum should be called the Main Brace (assuming that it is)? All this may be very picturesque, but it has nothing to do with the war, as far as I can see.

The melancholy fact is that Nelson's days are gone, and the main business of the modern Naval tactician is to bring a larger ship with a bigger gun to a spot where it can most effectively blow up a smaller ship with a weaker gun, with as little risk to itself as possible. Maybe I am being unfair, but without saying a word against the extremely nice fellows who give me drinks in the ward-rooms, I admit that I do not like Admirals.

Never will I forget that fine old piece of Nautical Nonsense whom I visited in Alexandria in his flag-decked eyrie overlooking the practically empty port. The Navy had cleared out for the greater safety of the Suez Canal, and one would imagine that this was scarcely the time for any Service pomposity. Not a bit of it.

A couple of destroyers had slipped up the coast and flung a few shells into Daba. We had said nothing about the Navy for quite a long time for the reason that there had been nothing to say. Now, we thought, we had an opportunity, so I hurried off to Alex to get some recordings from the seadogs concerned.

There was nobody at all in the local offices of the Naval P.R. So after looking through the cupboards and the papers on the desks, I rang up the port on the Navy's telephone, and was put on to somebody called 'Rear-Admiral Liaison'.

No, he said. He was too busy to see me today, but he might manage it tomorrow if I came out to Ras-el-Tin and asked for him.

Ask for who? I enquired. Oh, tut-tut, that was no question for me to ask over an open telephone line, with all these spies about, eager to find out who Rear-Admiral Liaison was! Had I never heard of Security? An amusing question in view of the telephone I was using.

Next day, he received me in his pleasant, imitation cabin overlooking Ras-el-Tin.

- When is all this talking going to stop? he began. It has lost us half the world already, and it is soon going to lose us the other half.

Passing lightly over the idea that we had at one time owned the world, I enquired about Daba, at which his face immediately became distorted with passion. Here was a tangible instance of the very thing he was complaining about.

- I suppose you have been reading the papers, he said. Well, allow me to tell you that it's all lies. Lies! Better say nothing about the Navy than tell lies!

– Really? I answered in some surprise. Do you mean to say that you haven't shelled Daba at all?

– Of course we have shelled Daba! But you see where it says here that the R.A.F gave air support. Lies! Every fool knows, or ought to know, that it was the Fleet Air Arm that gave air support. How can you writing fellows expect us to give you any co-operation or facilities when all you do is to write lies about the Navy?

– This is terrible, I said gravely. Who wrote these lies?

– See! It says: 'By Our Special Correspondent with the Fleet'. Pah! The fellow never left Alexandria!

Nor did Rear-Admiral Liaison, I would venture to bet. However, I hung my head, and presented him with another gaffe.

– We had hoped to do a small piece about the Navy for the B.B.C. You know – just a plug to keep the Service in the picture.

His face assumed an even stranger expression. Leaning forward, he asked:

– Plug? What is plug?

Hastily I apologised for the use of a technical term. They had a way of slipping in. Even the Navy has its technical terms, and we are a propaganda service. Unfortunately the war had become a propaganda war at the moment, and we were all trying to do our best in the circumstances.

My use of the word 'unfortunately' pleased him. I had meant that it was unfortunate that nobody was doing any fighting, but he assumed that I was apologising for my profession, and he melted. Then, after quoting me two verses of a hymn, he sent me off to one of the destroyers in his private barge (or dinghy or whatever the bloody thing is), and after another day's wait, while the only possible officer was brought back from a cricket match, I duly got my one-and-a-half minute recording on What the Navy did at Daba.

So the more silent the Silent Service chooses to be, the better it suits me.

Still, this seaborne landing on a hostile coast was something not to be missed. Nine forty-five and zero hour! Just nice time for the enemy gunners to have had their breakfast, and to settle down behind their sights. Our battle flag was run up the mainmast, and we led the covering ships forward with an increased speed. Presently the assault craft had caught us up and were making for the shore. Then came flash – flash – flash along the coastline, and we knew that we were in action. So much for Bomber Harris having knocked

out the coast defences! From the rear, our own big brothers started to reply, and columns of smoke arose from the shore as their shells landed.

All over the waters so many craft were moving and so many things were happening that it seemed ridiculous to suppose that anybody would trouble to shoot at us in particular. Indeed this impression seemed also to have affected the professionals, for, about eleven o'clock coffee-time, we pulled alongside the other LCC and had a long gossip from bridge to bridge about everything that was going on. This continued until so inviting a target inspired an enemy battery to land a shell directly under our two sterns, killing the First Officer on our neighbour as he walked along the deck. Having been so successful with one shot, it seemed probable that another would follow, so we began, rather reluctantly, to break up the party by moving off slowly in parallel courses, still talking to each other as we went. Only after a second and a third shell did we separate to port and starboard.

As on land, the nasty ones arrive before you hear them; the whufflers, that send everybody ducking their heads, are all going somewhere else. But the new and exciting experience for me were the rockets as they leapt in sheet after sheet of flame from the odd looking ships that fired them. It was an even more horrifying sight when these rockets fell plumb on the line of our own second wave assault craft, tearing the sea into a raging mass of water spouts around them for what seemed an interminable space of time.

All morning and afternoon, as ship after ship was disabled, we cruised around, picking up wounded and survivors, until it was calculated that four out of five of the covering craft had been hit – not a few of them by ourselves. Meanwhile messages kept coming from the shore reporting favourably on the operations there. Things were moving slowly, but the landing parties were only meeting with small arms fire in most areas. The serious opposition continued to come from the seaward firing of the coastal artillery.

At about four o'clock I approached one of the ship's officers.

– I suppose nothing has been said about how my copy gets away?

– I don't really know. I assume when we touch port again, there'll be somebody from PR to take charge of it.

– When will that be?

– Hard to tell. In two or three days' time, perhaps. We'll probably be hanging around here until then.

– Meanwhile the full story of the landing will have been released at home by the Admiralty tonight?

– I expect so.

Scattered throughout the vessels of the fleet, my colleagues were probably all beginning to ponder over the same problem. It was a good battle, but so far as reporting it was concerned, the Navy had the Press well shanghaied!

– Maybe one of those picket boats would take your copy for you. If you're worried about it, I'm sure they would be glad to oblige. There are always a few going back to base.

A crafty look came over my face – the sort of look that I assume whenever two or three birds alight conveniently near one stone. I had been provided by our engineers with their latest type of portable recording machine, cleverly designed so that no programme man could work it. At an early stage I had discovered that nothing could be done with it. So the time was ripe for me to execute one of my well-tryed leaps to the rear, where I would confound all arrangements by appearing at a transmitter in person, and getting my story into the six o'clock news while my colleagues were still wrangling over the transport arrangements of PR.

A few cables off, another LCC lay wallowing in the swell, her decks almost awash and a couple of holes in her side.

– Is she going back to Base? I asked.

– I think so. She's been knocked about a bit, but she can probably make it. She's got a lot of wounded on board.

– May I go too?

– Certainly, if you want to.

– Yes, please. Any chance of getting ferried over?

– I'm sure that can be managed. Nice to have had you with us. I'm sure she can keep afloat.

As darkness fell, my new ark got under way, and I rolled myself up to sleep in the tiny wardroom. A couple of very tired Marine Officers were settling down in the same quarters.

– D-Day was a picnic to this, said the first.

– I had a much better time at Dieppe, remarked the second.

By hitch hiking from LCC to ML and back again, I managed to get my story on the air the following night. I sat listening with Archie Harding.

– That must have been quite a nasty show, remarked Archie.

– It was, I said. Although, as usual, I was luckier than most.

– How long were you ashore?



– I wasn't ashore.

– Oh, so you were never actually ashore. I see.

His face assumed a bored expression, and I knew that he was disappointed in me. I had stayed happily afloat instead of landing. On shore I would have found the real story.

So that finally disposed of the matter.

\* \* \*

SAVOY.

85 Chambres. 40 Salles de Bain et Cabinets de Toilette.

Derniers Adaptations de l'Hygiene.

Spacieux Aménagements Sportifs.

Préparation et Entraînement au Golf.

Salles de Bowling et de Tir; Billiards,

Tennis.

I am stopping at the Golf Hotel in this Rich Man's Mecca – the Côte d'Azur. For once it is not overcrowded, and although I am a little disappointed at not having my picture in the *Tatler*, sitting on the beach with some expensive society whores, maybe the place is all the more charming on that account. Most of the furniture has disappeared, and because of booby traps on the main staircase, it is advisable to come in by the servants' entrance. The links, too, are said to be sprinkled liberally with anti-personnel mines; so perhaps Entraînement au Golf should be crossed out of the brochure. Moreover, the entire staff is missing and the only other guests are six Japanese who are playing bridge upstairs.

I have never wanted to visit the Riviera – perhaps there was something lacking in me, but I could never quite stomach the prospect of all those beach pyjamas, those shrill feminine cries, or that galaxy of coloured toenails. So I kept putting it off until time has brought me here in its natural progression. Of course, there are still the old ladies who keep going in and out of the Casino at Monte Carlo and who sit around the few tables that are in operation, writing down lists of figures on little cards. But occasionally a shell comes whistling over from Bordighera. And the groups of bearded gentlemen who stand in earnest conversation are no longer concerned with international politics or impending suicides, but are operating the extensive black market of the South of France. This is the Riviera at its best, and not even an occasional eyebrow is raised at my Jerusalem sheepskin, now smelling, alas, like the natural beast itself.

Our group is officially living at the principal hotel in Beaulieu which is also the HQ of the American Independent Brigade holding this front. Oddly enough, it is an Anti-Aircraft Brigade, most of whose personnel are Japanese. Fifth Army, in Italy, is not far off, and we would be closer still to it if this Japanese Anti-Aircraft Brigade had been allowed its way. They have already been beyond Bordighera, but were forced to return to the frontier, not because of any serious opposition from Kesselring or Von Vietinghof, but because of the cries of protest from General Mark Clark. Italy – he said – is his province, and units from France have no business to be there. So, retiring rather sulkily, they turned their attention to the sea, and in due course captured an enemy submarine, only to receive another protest, this time from the local French Admiral who complained that the capturing of enemy submarines is his job, and that Independent Japanese Brigades could bloody well mind their own business.

So it is not surprising to find everybody minding their own business in places like the Golf Hotel, and settling down to play bridge. There is, however, some minor fighting. On the top of each mountain is a fort reached by a long winding military road, from which a splendid view can be had of any skirmishes on neighbouring summits. This afternoon, for instance, the garrison of the fort we were visiting turned out to sit along the roadside in the sunlight, and enjoy the spectacle of some Porto Ricans and some Austrians mortaring each other in the snowfields a few thousand yards away as the crow flies, but at least twenty miles distant by road.

Beyond the Porto Ricans are the Free French, who pass voluminous reports of their doings (written in French) to their neighbours, who translate them into Porto Rican, and then pass them on to the Japanese. These in turn transmit them the rest of the way to Beaulieu or to Menton, in a third language – Japanese. This all makes for security if not for accuracy, and it is no wonder that the Germans show signs of being completely foxed as to what the hell is going on on this front. Nor could they understand why the Brigade ever retired from Bordighera to the frontier, and they came forward to their present positions very gingerly indeed, expecting some elaborate trap at every turn. Their other source of dissatisfaction with this paradise of Aménagements Sportifs is the presence in their lines of our old Italian friends from Libya, the un-sinkable Littorio Division, which definitely adds to the confusion.

Why, the Germans ask, why are the Japanese on the American

side, and the Littorio Division on theirs? Or for that matter, is it at all certain what side the Littorio Division is on? Thanks to this state of affairs we are able to settle down comfortably to our bridge in the Golf Hotel, leaving only one Japanese to watch the moonlit road into Italy. We know that our hotel is in full view of a number of German OPS not very far off, where the valley narrows. However, the odd thing about these OPS is that most of them face the other way for the simple reason that they are more concerned with observing the Littorio Division than in observing us.

Down in Menton I asked the obvious question: Why haven't our co-belligerents over there surrendered long ago? And I found that I had stumbled on a very delicate matter that must not be discussed above a whisper. It appears that they are quite willing to surrender on one very reasonable condition: that they surrender to the Americans and are treated as American prisoners. This, I think, is not so much a tribute to the American Way of Life, as to the reputation of American rations. The difficulty is that the only convenient route through the mountains by which an entire Division might change sides without adverse comment from its allies happens to be held by the French, who will undoubtedly consider the new arrivals as their prisoners. For a time it was thought that this impasse might be got round by shifting the French to another part of the line. But our allies are a race not easily hoodwinked, and immediately smelt a rat and refused to be moved. If anybody was going to have the pleasure of going through the pockets of the Littorio Division, it would be themselves – the French.

So there the matter rests – to the increasing mystification of the Germans and nervousness of the Italians, the deepening suspicion of the French and boredom of the Japanese. What the Porto Ricans feel about it, I have not had an opportunity of finding out, as it is too far around to the next summit.

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## THE THRONE OF CHARLEMAGNE

THERE is snow over Verdun, where, ankle deep in slush, 12th Army Group Headquarters is housed in an old Cavalry Barracks. A bitter wind whistles over the battlefields of an earlier war, as a Military Policeman holds us up and makes us take down the hood of our jeep.

– General Patton's orders.

– But General Patton has nothing to do with me.

– I should worry. These are his rear areas, and if General Patton says, No jeep covers, that means No jeep covers.

I suggested putting it up again as soon as we were round the next corner, but our driver and his buddy were in a hurry to get back for a dance that evening. So we sat and shivered through Longwy, and over the open frontier into yet another country – Belgium.

First it was Peraea and the Land of the Ammonites. Then I crossed the Jordan and passed through the Wilderness of Judaea. By Edom and the Desert of Sinai I had reached the Delta of the Lower Nile – traversed Marmarica and Cyrene and came to the Island of the Knights of St John.

Then over the Middle Sea, by the coasts of Sicily and Calabria, to where I had landed in Apulia, still journeying onwards in search of something that might perhaps have been more discernible if only I had been certain what it was. Through Samnium and Campania, through Latium and Etruria I had continued my search. Umbria knew me, and Picena. Until now by way of Burgundy and the country of Lothaire, I had entered Brabant, and before me lay the lair of the beast, deep in the dark forests of the Mitteleuropa.

The milestones of this journey are like the footsteps of the race. In some odd and rather mystical way they seem to parallel the course of life itself, from childhood to maturity – a journey, maybe, in search of its own meaning.

In the heat of youth we live in a world peopled by giants and pygmies – an exciting and chivalrous affair, full of gaiety and despair. The earth is wide and empty, lit here and there by camp fires, and resounding with songs and revolver shots. It is a universe of heroes and villains, where empires are staked on the spin of a coin. It has a loneliness that can be most profound; but it also has an exhilaration that one never finds again.

This is the beginning of our journey, and it is like the beginning of life too.

Then you grow up a little. You enter a land of chaffering and intrigue, where early romantic values fade away, giving way to cynicism and a series of question marks. In place of the sweat and the fiery dust, there is mud and rain, and long days and slow-moving nights of profitless discomfort. The heroes and the villains are no more. There is nobody now, except Competents and Incompetents – and most of them rogues. The struggle becomes far more profound, and a new note of bitterness creeps in. Death becomes a reality and is no longer a romantic myth.

Yet there are compensations: and although you look back on desert days with some nostalgia, it is unlikely that you would go back, even if you had the chance.

In middle age, too, you begin to think about religion, if you are at all inclined that way. You are past the time when, to lay claim to a personality of your own, it is necessary to be *der Geist des Widerspruchs* – the Spirit that Denies. The accumulated wisdom and experience of the human race ceases to be a thing to be contradicted on principle, and you find that you have become strong enough to separate the kernel from the husk. Even to one who is neither frustrated nor afraid of Hell, Religion turns out to have a meaning. What it is, I am not certain yet; and I shall take nobody's verdict until I have found out for myself.

Maybe that is what I am looking for – here in snowclad old age – in and out of these overheated hotels, with the blizzard beating on the windows, and a well-balanced diet of transatlantic vitamins.

Mir ist es Winterlich im Liebe.

We have nearly gone full circle now, for these Ardennes are whiter than my temples, and after some years' delay, my steel helmet, painted to match the sandhills of El Imayid, is in camouflage again – or would be if I had not lost it long ago. Full circle, and nearly home.

Colour of hair – Black?

Yes, I have the makings of a gnarled old man now – more careful and yet more indifferent, slower moving but farther moving, dashing about far less but covering much more ground. And although I no longer have any of that old urge to be shelled, I am, I believe, far more genuinely nonchalant about my personal fate than ever before. I would like to be luckier than my Mother, and die a violent death. (I hope her grave is being looked after.) Yes – a violent death would be a happy ending.

But not just yet. There are still several things that I must do.

As a Correspondent most of my personal aims have been achieved. I have seen the turn of the tide, and have helped to set a pace that has long outstripped me. There is no argument now as to where our proper place is. Vaughan has recorded over Berlin, and Guy Byam has jumped in Normandy. Stan Maxted has been through Arnhem, and Matthews has interviewed Tito. Indeed, the difficulty now is to be given the opportunity to attempt these things. Everybody is chasing glory, and the hotels are crammed with War Correspondents of all sexes.

It seems that I have been relegated to our allies, the Americans, while the others fight amongst themselves for what they imagine to be the centre of the stage – the British Second Army. I can see from the way they handle the news, that my employers are not in the slightest interested in the American Armies or anything that happens outside the North Belgian area.

But, they are wrong again – dear old smarties – and I have once again got just what I would have chosen.

If the Egyptians and the Arabs were to people my Homeric period, and the British and the children of Machiavelli were to be my companions in middle age, how appropriate it is that this Third Movement should be conducted by the New World...a crowded, fast moving world – cruel yet warm-hearted, with the Big Time Stuff as its watchword.

From now on it is going to be the Americans' war. And now that I am alone amongst Americans and no longer floundering in an area of divided control, I am beginning to notice the qualities that I once knew, and sadly missed in Italy. More important still, I can see that – in the words of one of their songs – they are Going My Way, and will help me to carry out the remaining items of a private programme. I have, for instance, not yet visited Ekartsberga, or found the Dove that will tell me I am home.

How lucky I am not to be expected to entertain the British public every evening from Eindhoven, as all my colleagues wish to do.

\* \* \*

US First Army Press Camp is in a hotel behind the Bubble Baths in Spa. At the reception desk sits an uninterested youth smoking a cigar and reading an illustrated paper. Beside him, a small portable wireless plays a popular tune. He does not know anything about my arrival and cares less. In the Drivers' Waiting Room – occupying the best part of the main lounge – a mass of adolescents are shouting each other down over another radio, and they look with some distaste on this new arrival who has ventured to intrude with an enquiry about morning transportation into Aachen.

My arrival in a new campaigning area has put me back where I started from in the matter of transport. My beloved jeep is still in Rome, and it seems my employers imagine that I will be content to ride with other Correspondents in PR jeeps, towing my recording equipment behind me in an open trailer. This arrangement is intended to free the BBC vehicles (of which there are now great numbers) for the use of the Mammoth Circus at Eindhoven – except for a few that are required by Engineers in Paris and Brussels for other purposes. But they can think again. I know a thing worth two of that.

However, there are some excellent changes. Silken-voiced P R O s no longer regard us as 'guests', and relegate us to the garrets and the cellars, while they reserve the best accommodation for themselves. The Press is considered a legitimate part of the Americans' war. I have a good-humoured and companionable recording engineer called Laurie Heyhurst – a bright and obliging youth with a cupboard full of bottles, and a lamentable thirst for any sort of danger. A vast network of coffee stalls and evening movies make life more tolerable in spite of the weather. And we have, of course, Americans in their thousands, with their own set of habits, tricks, enthusiasms, and peculiar little ways.

As every Briton's ideal is to have an Assistant, so most Americans like to invent Administrative Machinery. With the boundless energy that makes them shout and act tough, they are never satisfied simply with doing whatever has to be done. They love to organise it. Take the Piazza Garibaldi in Naples where there used to be some traffic congestion. They organised that all right. In fact,

they tied it into such knots that a couple of British Redcaps, without whistles of course, had to go down and straighten it out. Then there is this matter of indoctrination. Driving into a ruined town, where most of the roads were impassable, I drew up beside a GI who was on duty in the central square.

– Say, fella, I asked, which is the way out of this town?

– Couldn't rightly say. Ain't been here more'n a day or two myself.

– Well, is there an Information Post or an MP anywhere around?

– Couldn't say for sure.

– You couldn't say. Well, maybe there's an officer or a CP where I could ask a few questions?

– Reckon there must be somewheres.

– Look, bud, what are you doing here yourself?

– I'm on guard.

– Over what?

– Well, I guess the Sergeant didn't say what. I just gotta stick around and see everything's OK.

– Suppose the Sergeant never comes back, what will you do? Where will you go?

– He'll come back. I've got his mail.

– OK, bud. You win.

I told this story to some of my pals as an illustration of what was on my mind about the American Army, and one of them said:

– Ah, but you don't see the point of that. That was really Security. He wasn't going to give away valuable information to any Tom, Dick or Harry who happened to turn up and ask him questions. He's been indoctrinated.

In the Field Post Office at Spa there are two men. One stops and sends back all my outgoing mail because it has an American stamp on it when it is not going to America. As soon as I remedy this, the other steps in and sends it back because it has not got an American stamp on it. I have no sooner cleared the matter up to nobody's satisfaction, when a new man arrives and stops it all over again, because it is addressed to Eire – a neutral country – and he has here on his file a lengthy brochure headed 'Mail to Neutral Countries' that has been framed to regulate the correspondence of GIs with characters in Switzerland and Spain. From Paris another official carries on a long wrangle with both Betty and myself, saying that I should not endorse my envelopes with 'APO 240' as heretofore instructed, but with 'APO 878b', and that Betty should write to me



under the same veil of secrecy. But when we comply, her letters are promptly returned, marked 'Address unknown. Return to Sender'.

However, Betty and I soon managed to find a way of writing to each other in spite of these difficulties. I enclosed my letters in the Paris Press Bag, where somebody usually handed them over to the British; while she wrote to me:

c/o British Liberation Armies,  
Brussels

where some good angel would chew over the name on the envelope and say:

– That's the BBC man. Didn't I hear him on the air from the Yanks? Send it up to Public Relations, Spa.

Of course, both practices were illegal, but you have to be illegal when dealing with American machinery. And nobody thinks any the worse of you when you are found out; because they are all being illegal themselves in some way or another.

But perhaps my most characteristic experience was in connection with a steel helmet. To avoid the nuisance of being continually harassed in General Patton's rear areas for not wearing a helmet, I made up my mind to obtain one of these pieces of headgear, and presented myself at a Sales Store hoping to buy one.

Oh no. I couldn't buy a helmet. Helmets were Issue, and were not for sale. So much the better, I replied. Then please issue me one. But oh no, they don't Issue anything at a Sales Stores. Everything here is for sale. Then where do they issue Helmets? They really didn't know. Check.

– Look here, I said to the attendant, let's get down to fundamentals. You have a helmet yourself?

– Sure.

– Well, where did you get it?

– I got it back in the States.

– Check. Well, let's suppose you lost your helmet in the mêlée of a great battle. What would you do then?

– But I didn't lose it. I'd get into trouble if I lost it.

– My friend lost his helmet once, an interested onlooker interposed.

– Good. What did he do to get another?

– He went to his Supply Sergeant.

– Now we're really getting somewhere. Where is the nearest Supply Sergeant?

- Right across there in the other building.
- Thanks, pal, that's all I want to know.

In the Supply Sergeants' Store I found two extremely unattractive characters brooding over shelf-loads of precious objects – flash-lamps, shot-guns, goloshes, cakes of soap, insect powder, blankets, jeep-cushions, mufflers, and HELMETS by the dozen...

- Please, can I have a helmet?

- We ain't got no helmets.

- Well (pointing), might I have one of those things over there, off that shelf?

His face assumed a malevolent expression.

- What happened to your own helmet?

- I never had one. (This was not strictly true, but I felt that to enter into a description of the Libyan Campaign would be beyond my powers of endurance.)

- Then why do you want one now?

- To please General Patton. He says I ought to have one.

This was definitely too much. They didn't care a damn about General Patton. If General Patton wanted me to have a helmet, let him give me one himself. And anyway those ones there were only the outside of helmets. They were no good without the insides, and they wouldn't have insides till next week.

Checkmate.

I went away to think this over. I was definitely getting nowhere by these methods. Obviously, the difficulty was one that could be met only by the method of the Indirect Approach. So I studied my Liddell Hart for the rest of the week, and presently turned up before another but very similar Supply Sergeant.

- What's on your mind? he asked.

- I want a flashlamp.

- Oh, so you want a flashlamp?

- Yes, that's what I want.

- And who might you be?

- I am a War Correspondent. A *British* War Correspondent.

The enormity of this took his breath away. When he had fully recovered, he started to work on me. These flashlamps, he said, had not been brought four thousand miles through storm and peril just to be given away to War Correspondents – least of all to Limeys. Who did I think I was, expecting to be issued with valuable equipment like a flashlamp? How were his GIs going to get about at nights, maybe to and from the movies, if he was to issue all these

good American flashlamps to anybody who liked to walk in here and just ask for one? Why didn't I have a flashlamp of my own? Didn't they make them in England?

– I am really very sorry, I said, as soon as he had spent himself. You see, I thought this was a Supply Store, where I could get any equipment that I needed.

– Sure, it's a Supply Store. Who said you can't get equipment? That's what we're here for, if it's necessary. But what's necessary about a flashlamp? That's a luxury. And, brother, you'll get no luxuries out of me at the expense of our GIs.

I hung my head. I saw it all now. I should never have come here with such a request. It would have been quite different if I had been in a jam about something that wasn't a luxury? But a flashlamp – oh dear!

– You've said it. There's a war on. We're here to do business. Not to hand out luxuries.

– Of course. It'd be quite different if I was going up forward and hadn't got something like – say, a steel helmet?

– Sure it would be different. That would be reasonable. But not flashlamps!

– Good. Then *give me a helmet!*

I got it. Indeed, before many moons had passed I had a flashlamp too. It only requires time and a little application.

\* \* \*

So, over the frontier and into the Rhineland. Our first contact with hostile civilians was in the town of Eupen. This is one of those places that belonged to Germany before the first war and was taken by Belgium in 1919, and then was taken back again by Hitler in 1940, and is now being liberated for the third time – very reluctantly, if the stony stares are any guide. Maybe too much liberation dulls the taste.

Behind the Dragons' Teeth of the Siegfried Line lie enemy pill-boxes, half buried in soil. This seems to have been the simplest way to deal with them. A Tankdozer approaches, and scoops a great heap of earth over them, and then passes on, leaving the occupants buried, until a convenient moment arrives to dig them out.

But it is Aachen that is the really thought-provoking sight. An entire city wrecked from end to end – the few remaining inhabitants creeping out from their cellars to scrounge for God-knows-what on which to live.

Aachen had been frantically defended from street to street and from house to house – like Ortona and Cassino, but on a larger scale. In a newspaper is the photograph of four small boys, from eight to eleven years, who took part in its defence, and are now the object of much controversy. Are they Franc Tireurs, to be properly executed as civilians in arms? Or members of the Home Guard? Or four extremely brave little boys who were doing their best to protect their homes, and who, if they were British or Americans, in the same circumstances would be remembered as heroes? The consensus of opinion is that they are little gangsters who will have to be taught a lesson. It just goes to show the influence of Hitlerism on youth. So they have been lined up and photographed, before being marched off to some unknown destination.

In the Hurtgen Forest, both sides are bogged down in a savage stalemate, and the shells are bursting in the branches of the trees, thus causing twice as much human destruction. From a slagheap overlooking Eschweiler I pick up another of those pamphlets.

The war is not over yet – it says. Another Christmas in the field. And for what? For the Poles, for the Bolshies and for Tito.

Maybe this Christmas. But I would not mind betting it will be the last Christmas when such a question will arise. Nothing can save them now – not the six SS Panzer Divisions that we know are lurking in the shrubbery – not the Endwaffe – this mysterious final weapon, that we know both sides are racing to acquire – not these flying bombs that roar over our heads day and night on their way to Liège, to Antwerp and to England. All they can do now is to infuriate the people at home beyond the bounds of reason, and make the Peace a terrible one.

As an instalment of which we now have a ‘No Fraternisation’ Order, lest the fighting men should be tempted to show any of their normal good feeling.

God, what a world we live in! What an unfortunate, maladjusted species we are! For it is all inevitable. We must go on into Germany and they must try to keep us out to save their own poor bloody lives. And then somebody will discover the Endwaffe, and after that, I suppose it may be expected that the Human Race will no longer be capable of coping with the problems that its own ingenuity creates.

I suppose God is tired of us. Or maybe we are just tired of ourselves?

\* \* \*

Through the industrial suburbs and slagheaps we work our way in the wake of the slowly moving battle – Laurie Heyhurst, a French Correspondent called Nivelles, and myself. Through rain and snow and continual blizzards, until at last we enter a dreary factory town called Eschweiler that has been in the centre of the battlefield for a considerable time. This, for the Americans, is ‘Thanksgiving Day’ – though what anybody has got to be thankful for it is difficult to see.

I am going through a mass of junk and old files in the ruins of the Police Barracks to see if I can find anything of interest, muttering a fragment of a nursery rhyme in which the name of one of my companions is immortalised.

Le Chien de Jean de Nivelles,  
S'en va quand on l'appelle.

There is the usual hole in the roof, and the stairs are wet and slippery with rain. My hands are full of papers, and I have some fancy police insignia that I feel would be appreciated by my son, if I could ever get them to him. Suddenly my feet slip from under me, and I find that I have no hands to save myself.

At the bottom of the stairs I pick myself up, less hurt than might be imagined. But back in Spa that evening, it becomes increasingly evident that the point of my elbow is broken off...



ERATO  
OR  
THE FIFTH RIVER

Roule, roule ton flot indolent, morne Seine  
Sous tes ponts qu'environne une vapeur malsaine  
Bien des corps en passent, morts, horribles, pourris,  
Dont les âmes avaient pour meurtrier Paris.

NOW I promenade myself along the border of the dark river.

It is nearly the hour of the bed, and I go to the house of me. Here are the steps muddy, smelling of urine, that mount upwards from the Métro. Around me I observe the lights half-cowled of automobiles which pass, the skeletons of trees wintry, and the outline faint and silver of puddles in the road.

It has been a day superb and I have need of boots new. The nurse to me says to go to the shop for them to buy. I make quickly my toilet. I have of coffee-to-milk and of little breads, and I go for to obtain my hat.

It makes of the sun. Let me go myself to march towards the Boulevards. I am impatient to see the shops and maybe of a droll of pictures living. I enter in a magazine of Officers Britannic. What is it that My Lord desires? I desire to see some boots of combat, if he you pleases. The shopman of them shows a pair but they are too pressed. I to him tender the foot. It is very grand. The shopman has fear.

All at a blow he cries, 'Regard'! We burst of to laugh. How much costs this thing? It is to good marched. I shall buy many of presents for to take to the house of me.

Now it makes rain. Call a Taximeter! The automobile stops itself. I mount all and pass by the gate for carriages. This is very agreeable...

\* \* \*

Toi Seine, tu n'as rien. Deux quais, et voilà tout,  
Deux quais crasseux, sèmes de l'un a l'autre bout  
D'affreux bouquins moisis et d'une foule insigne  
Qui fait de l'eau des ronds et qui pêche a la ligne.

Do you ever open your eyes in the dark and wonder where the hell you are? Which way is the window? Where is the door? What bed is this?

An everlasting experience of my own – for almost every bed is a new one these days, and the faint, white oblong of the window is never in the same place twice. Until I can pick up and examine the brain traces of memory I might be anybody or any age.

Unfamiliar sounds from the passage: Is this the table on my left? And then the door opens and a yellow river of light floods in, lapping the opposite wall. There is a rustle of starched linen, and the competent hands of a young woman push a tube of glass between my teeth, before taking my wrist in her fingers.

– Good morning.

I don't quite see what all this has to do with a broken elbow, but the touch of her fingers is pleasant, and I would not change it for the world.

This is what I am going back to, through the murky darkness, beside this river – the fifth of my Muses – stepping gingerly over a dog that piddles with upraised leg against an unlit lamp-post.

C'est le chien de Jean de Nivelle  
Qui mord sous l'œil même du guet  
Le chat de la mère Michel  
François-les-bas-bleus s'en égaie.

I wonder why Verlaine chose to write a poem on Bournemouth?

\* - \* \*

My bedside book is one about Time by a Miss Cleugh. Where it came from I don't know. These things just seem to arrive. In a foreword by L. Susan Stebbing, this second lady – obviously a person of some consequence – says that she has found much profit in reading the book, notwithstanding some measure of disagreement with Miss Cleugh's views. Miss Cleugh on the other hand says that she owes more than she can say to Professor L. Susan Stebbing. I owe them a lot too, as a relaxation from the salacious Autobiography of Frank Harris, my only other piece of reading

matter. A year ago all my colleagues were reading *War and Peace*, and I used to say that I would join them as soon as I had broken a leg and had the time to spare. Now I have broken an elbow, but I find that they have abandoned Tolstoy, and have passed on to *My Life and Loves* – volumes one, three and four (Hélas, M'sieur, le numéro deux n'existe pas) – and the works of somebody called Henry Miller, which apart from a number of dirty words, I cannot understand at all.

So here is Paris – City of Love and Laughter – pillowed by soft Southern voices, while the nymphs Cleugh and Stebbing minister by my bedside and gently play their philosophic lyre. An injury that is not particularly painful, and that is in a respectable and accessible place. What more could a man from Aachen want?

\* \* \*

They say that the Hotel Scribe used to be the resort of gay but unpretentious visitors from England, bent on sport and a brief, hearty holiday. It has neither the plush grandeur of the Ritz and the Lotti, nor is it one of those smelly little places beloved by romanticists in search of 'the real Paris'. On its noisy corner, it provides soft beds in small rooms, lifts that work, a theatre ticket bureau, a bookstand and a cocktail bar.

It is entirely given over to SHAEF Public Relations and the attendant Correspondents. On the ground floor is a wide lounge, filled with desks and typewriters and files of newspapers, most of them several weeks old. Photographs taken by official cameramen are posted on display boards, and typewritten notices inform you that the Censor wishes to see Mr So-and-so, and that the Comtesse de Beri-Beri has a musical afternoon every Tuesday, to which all are invited, and that Mlle Renée Dubois (good knowledge of English) is free to do secretarial work, for particulars apply to...

The thrice-daily Conferences are held in an inner lounge lined with maps of the various sections of the West European fronts, on which a movable red ribbon is supposed to indicate the present position of the line, subject of course to security, errors in the available information, and to somebody having had the time to keep it up to date. On the next floor are the Censors, the transmitting devices, broadcasting studios, Facilities Officers, a British Sergeant who very cheerfully distributes a liquor ration, and my old pal George Haughton, now a Group-Captain.

In the Basement is the cocktail bar – the principal habitat of the



Correspondents and their friends, where a very small glass of pale white wine costs three shillings, and brandy is something astronomical. Guarding the door of the dining room is an American corporal with an expert nose for credentials, for it is assumed by the authorities that, from all over Europe, War Correspondents will be sneaking back to Paris for improper reasons. Here, they will try to put themselves up at the Scribe – a practice frowned upon by those already there. Hence this sour-faced inspection of papers and movement orders.

I am a bit of a problem myself, as I am supposed to be in hospital and am therefore on nobody's Strength, although allowed out every day to attend the Conferences. This baffles them, as it would seem churlish to refuse a meal to a 'casualty' – even when he has come to Paris on his own initiative.

The SHAEF Conferences have an atmosphere all their own. Correspondents are shut in until the end, presumably to prevent them racing each other upstairs whenever an important titbit of news is let fall. No such event has occurred so far in my presence; nor do I believe that any of these Correspondents would be likely to race each other anywhere, as most of them are suffering from acute bronchitis and appear to be largely illiterate. Every place-name must be spelt out very carefully for them, and the pace of the Briefing Officer's remarks usually slows down into dictation speed under the barrage of coughs, 'What was that?' and requests for: 'Repeat, if you please'.

Still, I have to admit that this is big-time stuff. There is no getting away from it. We talk in millions now; not about a few miserable Divisions. There must be a couple of hundred Correspondents – not a mere twenty or thirty; and the principal matter for discussion is no longer, Where do we run to when the expected happens? but, What are we going to do to Germany afterwards? She has got to be Punished for causing all this trouble – not the natural, educative punishment that goes with being marched in on, but calculated punishment designed to tide us over the fact that it is not at all clear what this war is about, or even, in some cases, who we would prefer to win it.

I was brooding on these matters one frosty afternoon in a comfortable little restaurant on the Boulevard Hausmann, and enjoying a plate of excellent oysters that had been obtained from the Germans occupying one of the coastal pockets on the Bay of Biscay in exchange for supplies of cigarettes. Before me were a number of

English daily papers. But they were not affecting me nostalgically. The conversation of my colleagues in the Scribe on the subject of future plans for world peace was nothing to what was building up in the Press.

I had been given a lecture by Ronnie Matthews of the *Herald* on the evils of Irish neutrality – the text being that people who benefit from the blessings of justice and democracy ought to help in their preservation. Fair enough, if we really know it is for this that we are fighting. But do we know it? According to the newspapers, it does not look very like it. Indeed, what that priest on the Sangro said would seem to be true. Evil is a Vampire. When you take arms against it, and destroy it, you find in the end that it is living on in what you do, yourself.

Into the midst of these reflections walked my old friend of many conversations – Mr Constantinescu – dressed up as an American. In fact he *is* now an American, having obtained his citizenship by underground means, in return for services which I have no doubt he very competently performed.

We greeted each other enthusiastically.

– Well, I said, I might have expected this. It's a bad sign for poor old England. Eh?

He smiled serenely as he sat down beside me and ordered a Pernod.

– I became a little tired of this speech that begins, 'For a year we stood alone', he said. I fear that its repetition will become increasingly boring, now that it is England's only asset.

– Well, it's true, isn't it?

– If it is true, it is nothing to boast about. One may win the Grand National on a horse with only three legs if everybody else falls down, but this fact is not a good advertisement for the stable. In the old days England would never have got herself into such a position. But now she continually boasts about things that it would be much better to hush up. Dunkirk has become a great national achievement, and I have no doubt that Arnhem will soon be considered a victory as well.

– So you have decided to throw in your lot with the Four Freedoms?

– The Four Freedoms? he enquired in tones of specious innocence. Oh, you refer to our War Aims.

– Yes. I imagine that the first two are: a Free Fox in a Free Hen-roost.

– I always like your Irish humour, he replied. It is always so sarcastic, and yet so well aware of the main chance – like Bernard Shaw.

I ignored the compliment and continued.

– But how did you manage to arrange this? The ambition of half Western Europe – an American passport, and dollars in your pocket?

– I always try to do my best, he answered a trifle smugly, and to give something in return for my salary. That is what is wrong with most people. They all expect something for nothing.

How true, I thought to myself. And what fools we are to sneer at self-interest – self-interest which in smaller men than Mr Constantinescu would be all mixed up with fear, jealousy or revenge – things that have nothing whatever to do with the intelligent, clear-sighted opportunism that gleams in the candid brown eyes of Mr Constantinescu. He will be an ornament anywhere that enterprise is still rewarded.

– Should you decide to follow my example, he continued, I shall be glad to use my influence with the State Department on your behalf. I have always told you that I am very sentimental about my old friends, although I sometimes have doubted that you believe me.

I lay back and laughed till the tears came in my eyes. I had to thank him. It was no more than his due. At the same time, in my nasty Irish way, I could not resist sowing a few tares amongst the wheat. Such careful reasoning could not be allowed to pass unchallenged, even if my malice might get me into trouble.

– I wonder if you are right? I said. It's all very well to think of tomorrow, but what about the day after tomorrow?

For a while he contemplated me in silence.

– Please explain further.

– We live in times of change, Mr Constantinescu. America is no longer the New World. It is now the last rampart of the Old. Very pleasant for a nostalgic anarchist like me. But it surprises me to find you attaching yourself irrevocably to what may be a doomed economy. Is that wise?

I am pleased to say that for a moment his face darkened, and I knew that my little seed of doubt had shaken him.

\* \* \*

As I wait for the Medics to make up their minds that the only way to get rid of a piece of broken bone is to take it out, I turn for

intelligent conversation to the Provost Officer from Virginia in the next bed, and to the girlish chatter of my two friends, Miss Cleugh and Miss Stebbing.

‘If I were to attempt to answer in a single sentence the question, “What is Time”? the answer would be, “The alogical element in the Universe”, whether that element is manifested under the form of change, of chance or of life. Boodin’s remark that “Time is that property which makes incompatible judgments necessary” may be a little too strong, but he is right when he says: “The Time-character involves precisely the relativity or falsifying of any description which tries to exhaust the real subject-object. Time *creeps into* our world of description and negates it”.’

– Who is Boodin? I ask of my companion. He seems to be an expert in the art of concealing what he’s talking about.

– There’s a lot of crap being written about Time these days. There’s no great mystery about it. The really interesting thing is Observation – the thing that appears to put an arrow on Time, and makes us imagine that we move from a definite Past to an indefinite Future.

– Imagine?

– Imagine, of course. We imagine that things ‘happen’ – as we call it. But that’s as big an illusion as the apparent fact that the Sun moves across the sky, or that our train is moving in the station, when it’s really the train on the other line. Nothing happens.

– You surprise me. So nothing happens?

– Of course not. What we observe as Movement is just an extension in a Fourth Dimension, and Velocity is simply the angle at which it lies. It’s Observation that ‘happens’. And even that doesn’t move. It’s like the Holy Ghost – it ‘proceeds’.

– Does Boodin say this?

He ignores my flippant query, and warms to his exposition.

– Every phenomenon that we know of can be explained scientifically, except the only one that really matters. Why does anything happen at all? And what do we mean when we say that it does? The answer, of course, is that it doesn’t. The difference between one Moment and the next is not one of change in the physical world, but of change in Observation.

– Whose observation?

– That’s quite a problem too. The obvious answer is that it’s each individual’s observation. But this presupposes the fact that we are each an individual person, and there is no evidence of this.

– Excuse, please. I have some evidence on that point.  
– On what point?  
– The point that I'm myself.  
– And always have been? What evidence have you got of that?

– Well, I remember it, for one thing. I distinctly remember being myself yesterday, even if I don't feel quite myself at the moment.

– You mean that you are aware of certain brain traces in the mind which you call Memory. But that no more proves the continuity of personality than the scars you see on the face of the Sphinx prove that you were there at the time when the Mamelukes used it for target practice.

– Look, would you mind stopping this?

– Then there is the further question of other dimensions beyond the four. Mathematically, of course, there has never been any difficulty about this. But in the realm of human experience it suggests the material existence of every other possibility – of parallel Continua, in the Platonic sense, if you know what I mean. These must extend in a Fifth Dimension, from which we draw the material of our dreams, just as readily and as irresponsibly as we draw it from past and future in Dunne's meaning. The difficulty of grasping this, of course, is that we are short of a sense. But perhaps this will be remedied before long by Mutation.

– If I had any sense at all, I say, closing my eyes, I would probably disagree with you.

– You see the importance of this Fifth Dimension, he goes on relentlessly. It not only gives a physical reality to other possibilities, but it also explains the problem of Choice. In fact, it proves that there is no problem here at all, in spite of all the ink that has been spilt on the subject by Free Willers and Calvinists. But what fascinates me more are the other two dimensions. Ouspensky says that there are six in all, but present ideas point to seven.

– Go on, I say. Tell me all.

– The sixth is the real Time Dimension in which our individual observation proceeds in a direction that we call Entropy. The seventh is the universal consciousness of God, which provides an extension for movement in the Sixth Dimension, and so enables Observation to proceed at all. In this all Times are one, which they are not, of course, in the sixth, which is why we can only observe one Time at a Time. You follow me?

I sit up in bed.

– What does this amount to? I ask. That everything is eternal, and that I can still choose my future?

– I suppose that's it.

– How nice. And what about my past? Can I choose that too?

– Why not, if you believe that you can choose your future? It's just as reasonable.

– I'll think about it, I say, lying down again. And I'll let you know. Good night.

– Is there no bright reversion in the sky,  
For those who greatly think, or bravely die?

Do you admire Pope? Of course, he probably didn't understand what he was writing about.

But I have closed my eyes again.

\* \* \*

In the library of the hospital, listening to the piano playing, and looking around at that odd assortment of bandaged men and women, it suddenly came to me that I was glad to be one of them, and that I would not have it otherwise, even if I could have chosen to live at another time.

We are an unfortunate poor bloody generation, when you compare our lives to those of our grandparents, back in the century of Victoria and Peace. We are from Vasto, all right. Yet we would not change our assignment, for some reason that is beyond reason. It is our distinction that we have been chosen to tend the crucible (or maybe the incinerator) – to be the eyewitnesses of this blood-red dawn (or sunset) – even if its principal consolation is only the comradeship of a common crucifixion.

If the purpose of life is to learn and to experience – to seek fulfilment and a knowledge of oneself – well, we have certainly picked the right time. If sorrow alone can give happiness its meaning – if we are to praise God for his chastisement as well as for his blessings – well, we had better start singing at once.

I am no stranger on this earth or in this age, because I know that I am part of it. Its sins are my sins, and its greatness is my greatness. And if it is doomed, I am doomed along with it. O.K. It is a pleasure to have the company of one's own kind, even down the drain.

No, we need not envy our ancestors for anything that they had. This generation of ours may not know all the answers, but we have certainly been provided with all the data!

Not indeed that any of us here can masquerade as battle casualties, in spite of our bandages – if that adds any glamour to our condition. The pretty nurse from Idaho seems to think that it should, and she complains loudly of the fact that most of her patients' injuries have a prosaic background. For a while she cheered up over me, when she learnt that I had got mine in Eschweiler.

– Where is that? she asked.

– In Germany, I said. In the Rhineland.

– Oh indeed? Is that a Combat Zone?

– It certainly is.

– So you got your injury in action?

– Well, I wouldn't say that. As a matter of fact, I fell down some stairs.

– Oh (disappointedly. Then more hopefully) What exactly were you doing at the time?

– Actually, I was giving the Police Barracks a bit of a frisk.

– You mean to say you were looting?

– I wouldn't put it that way. A few souvenirs, maybe.

Indignantly she pointed me out to the Night Sister.

– There he is. The only case in the hospital from a Combat Zone, and he fell downstairs while he was looting! You see what I mean.

\* \* \*

– You won't feel this at all. Just a little prick.

Oh yes, I will. He says that to all the fellows. I shall feel it all right. And I will not go off either. All that will happen is that I shall go into a sort of stupor, where I cannot answer him back. But I shall never lose consciousness. How could I ever lose consciousness because of a prick in the arm?...consciousness is something above reason that cannot be tampered with. I shall just go numb, and all the time I shall know perfectly well what he is doing to me.

– Now count up to ten.

Absurd. Miss Cleugh and Miss Stebbing could tell him that. One. The conscious mind is the immortal part of me, just as the physical body is the eternal part. The conscious mind is beyond the reach of Time – it is the thing that the mediæval theologians would have called the Soul – the thing that directs Thought.

Two. That Provost Officer in the next bed would undoubtedly explain it better. You see, it all centres around the Holy Trinity of the world of the senses. Space is only an aspect of Matter – the

relationship of Matter to itself. It is inconceivable that Space could exist apart from the existence of Matter.

Three. In the same way, Time is only an aspect of Action – the relationship of Action to itself. That is why Time is affected by velocity – why it could not exist either unless Action existed too.

Four. But this is all physical. What about the Third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Ghost that passes all understanding? The Holy Ghost that ‘proceeds’? It is the Observation that is only another aspect of Entropy.

Five. Let us get these things separated, so that we will not get confused and fall into the trap of Serialism. Serialism is only a postponement of the problem and not an answer. Atlas supports the world – but what then supports Atlas? There is no answer in Serialism – in a Time that takes Time. That is why we must separate the persons of the Trinity and not get them mixed up.

Six. In the physical world there is Space and Time, or if you prefer it, Matter and Action – or if you prefer it, the Noun and the Verb. It is easy enough to get the hang of this much.

Seven. But then there is this thing with the arrow which is just another aspect of Observation. If the first two are the Noun and the Verb, I suppose this other must be the Conscious Mind – the Observer. But what is the good of trying to get the hang of that, while we are short of a Sense? The part cannot comprehend the whole.

Eight. Not that it is really necessary to understand. Understanding is the last thing that comes. In the beginning was the Myth. The critics and the commentators, the schoolmen and the sophists follow along afterwards with their explanations that somebody else has to correct in a year or two. I am one of the chaps who starts things – that is all I am: so it is not incumbent on me to do more than provide the Myth. The witness for the prosecution – or maybe for the defence!

Nine. A Mirror am I to you that perceive me. Now answer to my dancing. Behold yourself in me who speak, and seeing what I do, keep silence about my mysteries....

You could not at all have understood what you are suffering, if I had not been with you. For my suffering is your suffering. You have made me as a bed: rest upon me....

When you know how to suffer, you will be able not to suffer. Who I am, you shall not know until I go.

Ten...there is no ten....



## THE WATERLOO BALL

Spring will be a little late this year  
 A little late arriving  
 In my lonely world over here...

DEANNA DURBIN, as an unlikely-looking tart in a slinky black dress, sings to me from the screen of a cinema in the Champs Élysées. A timely song that makes me smile a little; for things have not gone so well with the First Army since I took my eyes off the situation, and rumour has it that some of my old colleagues have arrived breathlessly in Brussels, without even stopping to collect their kit. They were preceded by the Allied Staff of the Luxemburg radio transmitter, who had just completed a wearisome job, sorting the station's gramophone records. The Germans had not destroyed them before leaving. They had merely mixed them up. The station was about to settle down to Psychological Warfare – beginning with a running commentary on the actual execution of a spy – when a little matter of proximate shellfire had sent them, running for their bloody lives, without completing this fascinating OB or drawing whatever moral it was intended to convey.

Back in the Scribe, a halt was called in the conversations over What are we going to do with Germany? owing to this unexpected liveliness in the corpse.

Spring will be  
 A little slow to start,  
 A little slow reviving  
 The music you made in my heart...

Up at First Army we had always known that another Panzer Army was lurking in the background, and that there could be no decision west of the Rhine until it had been committed somewhere. Well, it has been committed now, all right, all right – though how

Von Runstedt managed to do so with complete surprise, on a front held by a single Corps, is something that will have to be explained later. Probably the weather! The weather is always a good alibi.

For a considerable time Mr Morgenthau, Lord Vansittart and Dr Goebbels have been jointly engaged in rebuilding the morale of the Wehrmacht, shattered by the loss of France. Morgenthau has been saying that we must destroy German industry and reduce the country to the level of an agricultural community; Vansittart has been advocating the elimination of Germany altogether as a geographical expression, and Goebbels has been gladly reporting them both in full.

Needless to say, these premature disclosures of what is doubtless intended have had a remarkable effect on the flagging spirits of the enemy, and now they are well on their way back towards the Meuse. I must confess that it was hard to conceal a quiet smile or two. And as George Haughton watched me load up my Humber Utility (wrung at last from my employers by a spate of threats) he mentioned that he had been in to see Tedder.

– And what does Tedder think about it? I asked.

– He said, ‘Of course, all this buggers up the Master Plan – thank God’.

Gangway Press Camp in the Hotel Cravat, Luxemburg – my next destination – was a fur-lined fox-hole and no mistake, with running water, central heating and a view like a Christmas card. I always strike it lucky when assigned to the Birdmen, and the US Ninth Air Force was no exception. A pleasant new set of PRs and Correspondents, a first-class briefing every morning from the G2, Colonel Macdonald, and a legitimate reason for travelling anywhere from Holland to Metz, and even back to Paris, if occasion arose.

Luxemburg had not been directly attacked during the first few days of the offensive (when it could easily have been taken) and now Blood-and-Guts Patton’s Third Army was pouring up from the south, night and day, to take over the southern shoulder of the Bulge, and to push forward in an effort to relieve Bastogne. We had a fine view from the touch-line, as the advance bit deeper and deeper into Belgium. Stories came through of enemy formations in American uniforms and jeeps, infiltrating over the Meuse bridges – of the machine-gunning of American prisoners around St Vith, and of the counter-massacre of enemy parachutists in the hills east of Spa. The weather was fierce. Snow and ice lay everywhere, and a

heavy overcast sky hampered air operations until just before Christmas, when it suddenly cleared.

My old friend, General Patton, had sent out a Christmas card, on the back of which he had printed a prayer for good weather, specially composed for him by one of the Third Army padres. Hardly had this thing been circulated when the skies cleared, and for three or four days our fighter-bombers played havoc with the enemy tanks below.

– That’s just what we wanted, said the Ninth Air Force to Patton. Now, if we could only have another three or four days without overcast, we could guarantee to stop them altogether.

– Print five hundred more of those prayers, ordered the General, like a flash.

By way of Arlon and Sedan, we drove around the perimeter of the Bulge to the Florennes and Charleroi airfields, where the ground staffs were standing by to evacuate at a few hours’ notice. It was clear, however, that the advance was slowing down, and the tension was easing. We were stopped everywhere by pickets who examined our credentials carefully and looked with suspicion into my unfamiliar British utility.

Then on up the Meuse to Liège – still under incessant flying-bomb attack. And from there, for an overnight stop, to my old haunt, the First Army Press Camp, now in a Convent School in Tongres. It has been an unlucky camp, having been bombed on several occasions with fatal results. The usual crowd of gloomy technicians occupied most of the seats at table, and just above my bed some dear little convent girl had written a message on the wall, which read:

GISELLE HANDKARDT CHIE DANS SA CULOTTE.

A baffling message, since nobody could, or would, translate the operative word for me!

\* \* \*

Brussels on New Year’s Eve! And the band played ‘In my sweet little Alice-blue gown’.

Maybe it is a certain nostalgia for the quiet civility of English ways and of English redcaps that makes this city so much pleasanter than Paris. It is probably a deceptive sensation, but somehow one feels more secure in a British area – less likely to be shot at in the streets, less likely to find oneself involved in some

colossal SNAFU. The British manage to create an atmosphere of great practical competence. Or maybe it is just that I know what to expect.

On the other hand, I am not so keen on British conversation in the bars, where my companions of desert and Italian days sit discussing the same old things. Or maybe it is just that I know what to expect. Anyhow, here we are at the Waterloo Ball, celebrating the arrival of a New Year.

It was laid on by NAAFI in the British Officers' Club, where the whisky (while it lasted) could be had for five francs a tot, and the fun was fast and furious. And the band played:

Whispering while you cuddle near me,  
Whispering so no one can hear me,  
Whisper and say that you believe me,  
Whispering I love but you.

Back in Charleroi the other night I could hear the guns of the great tank battle across the Meuse. General Patton – that great, simple soldier – was on the job, with an honest and straightforward plan of campaign; in his own words, 'To kill Germans'. At Planchenoit I had stopped to inspect the memorial to the last stand of the Old Guard of another campaign.

After the whisky had run dry, we turned to beer – a very bad mixture. But what the hell? Was it not New Year's Eve? Ein gut glas Bier – it says on the stone mug I left behind in Spa – very properly, as it wasn't mine in the first place.

The band played:

Say not love is a dream,  
Say not that Hope is vain.

It was my first love, Doris Hickson, who was associated in my mind with that tune. Love indeed had been a dream, for she had wed another – which is not to be wondered at, seeing that I was seventeen at the time and terrified even to address her. I had stopped once again on the rise behind La Haye Sainte, and driven across to the Lion that surveys the battlefield. From the top of the mound, the lie of the land was clear enough. Over there on the opposite side, the stout little Dictator had ridden through the fields on his white horse – his staff and bodyguard cantering behind – while Ney led the thundering cuirassiers – wave after wave of them – up and over the crest of this hill, with eyes blazing and drums

beating – a charge that must have sent many a white-faced messenger clattering back along the Brussels road, like some of my colleagues a week or two ago.

Bill and Bertie had gone out into the street to find some partners, and after a few rebuffs, they came back with a couple of tarts from Antwerp. One of the girls did not care to dance, but the other did her best; and between-while they sat at the table and jabbered to each other in Flemish. They were sceptical about their company.

Just behind the crest of the long rise, the red squares had resolutely fought off the cavalry – while my fellow townsman with the prominent nose cantered from danger spot to danger spot scattering encouraging remarks. In Bastogne, behind a ring of anti-tank weapons, the Yankee paratroopers were sitting pretty too, and answering ‘Nuts’ to any demands for surrender.

The band played:

I left my love in Avalon  
Beside the bay.  
I left my love in Avalon  
And sailed away.

A dull little Cockney nurse with glasses and greying hair came across and sat beside me. She was bored stiff with all this, she said, and she hoped we didn’t think she was butting in. But we had ‘War Correspondent’ on our shoulders, and might be intelligent. Besides, we looked bored ourselves; so she had just thought she would come across. I explained that I was not really bored. This was just my natural expression. It was nice of her to come and talk to us, and she must not think ... No, she wouldn’t have a drink, thank you. Not after butting in like this. Of course, she would have a drink. And I got her one. She took it, and then turned away. English women are not easy to get on with when they think they are at a disadvantage. I made some spasmodic efforts to maintain the conversation, but it was heavy going, and after a time I gave it up, and opened the letter I had received from Vaughan Thomas far to the south, in Alsace.

6th Army Group Forward Press Camp.

Cher Collègue,

I am still here, learning the ape-man language, making friends and even influencing them! Can you translate – off hand – the following headline from ‘Stars and Stripes’? – ‘Patchmen Rhine-slugging K Oed Krauts’. Do you know what a ‘Bird Colonel’ is? Or a ‘Big Picture Man’?

How do you reply correctly when, after you've knocked out a Tiger Tank, your Commanding General arrives and says – 'Climb out of yore Battle Baby, Big Boy. Ah'm gonna kiss you!?' When you know the answers to all these, I'll believe your claim that you have now been taken to the hearts of our volatile cousins.

I am surrounded by them at the moment, and, unreliable Celt that I am, I find them charming when I'm alone with them. And so do you. But I would welcome a change soon. Paris! Ah, that way 1890 madness lies! The big-bosomed charmers, the can-can, the drinking out of silver slippers, the shade of Oscar flitting among the trees of the Boul. Mich!

Quel jours! Ah, the mad nights with Arthur Barker in some little Bistro on the Rue des Quatres Lavabos. Or the sparkle and epigram of Antiseptic Frank in some wild studio party in a Montmartre garret. Or the dance-à-ventre in the Bal Tab. with some Lady Correspondent from the Middle West. Can it be managed? We must try.

Do write again. A civilised voice comes to me in your letters – faintly singing across the Patton-wrecked miles of liberated Lorraine – 'Tooraloo-tooralay. We'll have no superstition round Portadown way'. Let us sing it together – and soon.

Your devoted comrade (and definitely non-working colleague).

YOUNG BULLIVANT.

The band played :

It's a long way to Tipperary,  
It's a long way to go.  
It's a long way to Tipperary  
To the sweet-est girl I know.

Not very up-to-date, are we? But it is indeed a long way to Tipperary. And to Ekartsberga. And to the New Jerusalem. And to Peace with Honour. And to Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. And even to Mr Constantinescu's Two Freedoms.

I turned to watch the flushed and strained faces of the Public School Men as they make whoopee. It would have been nicer for them to have been in the Berkeley with Di or Clarice, but at least they could do their best with what they had. The short sateen skirts swayed and swung, displaying fat knees. Transparent blouses gave hints of Princess slips and modesty vests. Here and there a warm stocking burst into a run. Oh la-la! One or two of the nurses got tight.

The band played:

I'm dancing with tears in my eyes  
For the girl in my arms isn't you.

The entangled Panzers were regrouping beyond the Meuse for yet another drive. Along the moonlit roads, lone fighters were strafing jeeps and trucks, and spraying the advanced Air Strips with bright tracer bullets. The two tarts from Antwerp had already pointed out several times that they had nowhere to sleep, and finally, with a spate of unintelligible Flemish, they took wing to the Ladies, never to reappear. The Cockney nurse was longing to dance, so I danced with her. A drunk New Zealander accosted us as we passed, and flourished a piece of mistletoe over our heads, while emitting cooing noises. It was midnight: and as the clock struck twelve, and the New Year descended upon us – 1945 – Year of Journey's End, I stooped and kissed her. It was New Year and a Party.

The band played :

Should auld acquaintance be forgot  
And ne'er be brought to mind,  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot  
And the days of auld lang syne.

We stood there in a great circle – old men, young men, locals, nurses, tarts – our hands criss-crossed, our elbows moving up and down in time with the song.

We'll fill the cup of kindness yet  
For the days of auld lang syne.

\* \* \*

Title: Kaiserslautern. This is despatch Number 98, lasting about six minutes.

Hello BBC. I am speaking from (CENSORED: Etain in) eastern France. Although the snow had fallen nearly all day, and the skies were clouded, the weather forecast remained persistently good. So we stood by during the first part of the night in the wooden shack that did duty as an Operations Room, and huddled around the red-hot stove. They asked me whether I would prefer an ordinary patrol or an Intruder Mission, and when I chose the second, I was told that I had picked the right thing, and they assigned me to a Black Widow (CENSORED: that was going to try out Rockets for the first time in a Night Fighter, and was also to drop some Napalm on the marshalling yards of Kaiserslautern).

About midnight the skies cleared and the moon came through, and I could feel the atmosphere in that Ops Room relaxing in a

buzz of satisfaction. Big movements had been reported on the German railways, and this sort of job was right in the picture. The wreckage of the exhausted Panzer Army was being withdrawn from the Ardennes bulge, and the western marshalling yards were crammed with traffic.

As we drank our coffee and ate those inevitable doughnuts, the principal question seemed to be, Was there any frost on the wings? Because even a thin layer of ice can easily wreck one of these aircraft, by upsetting their delicate balance during the take off. The Ground Crew, over the telephone, said that they had got most of it off, but the Duty Pilot snapped back, 'Most of it is no good. Get it all off, and that's an order'.

It was more than cold, driving out in a jeep to that ship, at half past one of a January morning. It was bitter. An Arctic wind was sweeping across the aerodrome, chilling the marrows of our bones and slowly freezing up all the vehicles that stood around the office buildings. The Black Widows were parked around the perimeter, some of them already warming up their engines – their strange double fuselages showing up in the pale moonlight, making them look like some sort of odd Siamese birds.

(PERSONAL: I have not got my little paper-backed Dante any longer – there is no point in turning these things into a superstition. But as always in moments of tension, there comes into my head some ridiculous and irrelevant lilt that I keep repeating to myself. On this occasion it was a verse from the *Children's Encyclopedia* that has lain fallow in the back of my mind for nearly forty years, and was to emerge now, of all times! It was called Wynkyn, Blinken and Nod.)

There is not much spare room in a Night Fighter, as I found out when I squeezed in under the sliding hatch, and settled myself down behind the Pilot. Directly behind me sat the Radar-Observer. There was neither room to sit straight nor to lie back in that extra seat, but the view was magnificent.

(PERSONAL:

Wynkyn, Blinken and Nod one night  
Sailed off in a wooden shoe,  
Sailed in a river of misty light  
Into a sea of dew.

'Where are you going? and What do you wish?'  
The old moon asked the three.



'We have come to fish for the herring fish  
That live in the beautiful sea',  
Said Winkyn  
Blinken  
And Nod.)

The Black Widow must be a lovely craft to handle – full of piercing draughts that cut through in unexpected places like so many knifeblades at a few degrees below zero – but to a Pilot, she is swift and powerful and responsive to the controls. And after a little initial trouble in getting the engines started, our Pilot certainly handled her like a lover. As we climbed towards the moon and banked over in a smooth turn, it was the earth that seemed to tip sideways and to spin around below us, while we remained above, smooth and steady as a rock – the sure sign of a good pilot, who knows the ways of his machine.

It was almost as bright as day up there, with the white-blue moonlight reflected from the snow beneath us – so bright that it killed all but the brightest of the stars overhead. The black patches of forest, the villages, the roads and railways, threaded the patchwork as clearly as on the map itself. A few lights appeared here and there – some tall factory chimneys belching wispy dark wool. Before long (CENSORED: we had crossed the battle line, at about 10,000 feet, taking a tortuous course so as to avoid our own flak areas and then) there was Kaiserslautern coming up ahead of us, with its railyard crammed with trains.

They cannot have seen us coming, however naked we may have felt to ourselves, because the scattered lights stayed on, and as we swooped down, the expected flak never came up. Maybe they were too busy. Maybe they underestimated the speed and power of the Black Widow out on her travels on an icebound night in mid-winter. (CENSORED: With a fantastic flash of red light, our first batch of rockets went off from a low altitude at the bottom of our dive, and I could see them shooting and tearing through the lines of trucks, standing on the sidings.) And then almost as part of the self-same movement, we were pulling out of our dive, and sweeping up into the sky again, our first pass successfully over. Then around again in a great circle, and down again for a second pass (CENSORED: this time to drop our Napalm).

Again the lights showed up right below our nose, and again – incredible as it seemed to us – the flak held off. For a second time we roared over the Kaiserslautern yards, and as we pulled out and

swung away I could see nothing but an enormous glare behind us, and flames leaping up into the air – flames that increased and spread out across the snowfields as we swung round and flew away from the scene. (CENSORED : Napalm is a terrible thing.) (PERSONAL : Roosevelt will not allow its use by his Air Force to be publicised.)

But that was not the end of the Widow's work. Once the primary task of an Intruder Mission is finished, the aircraft will usually go on farther, and look for something else to do, until her time is up. We had another batch (CENSORED: of rockets) to get rid of, so we pumped them into one of those factories, and then made a strafing run over a second with all our guns blazing and our bullets sparking and ricocheting over the buildings and through the sullen windows that seemed to stare up at us helplessly.

(PERSONAL:

All night long their nets they threw  
For the fish in the twinkling foam,  
Then down from the sky came the wooden shoe,  
Bringing the fishermen home.  
'Twas all so pretty a sail it seemed  
As if it could not be.  
And some folk thought 'twas a dream they dreamed  
Of sailing that beautiful sea.  
But I shall name you the fishermen three,  
Sartonowitz  
Van Sickels  
And me.)

And then at last we were on our way home again ... back to base picking up the lights of the flarepath sweeping along the frost-covered runway, and very gingerly coming to a halt, as the brakes took control of the skidding, careering aircraft.

The Black Widow was home again after her night's work, and it is reported today that the traffic through Kaiserslautern Railyard has fallen from the high figures of a few days since, to practically nil. So one lady appears to have done her job with grim and expert efficiency. That is all today, BBC, from the Ninth Air Force.

(PERSONAL:

So shut your eyes while Mother sings  
Of the wonderful sights that be,

And you shall see the beautiful things  
As you rock in the misty sea,  
Where the old shoe rocked the fishermen three  
    With Rockets  
    Machine guns  
    And Napalm.)

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## THE APPLE CAKES OF AUERSMACHER

– You can't intimidate me, snapped Howell, the Censor, his pale eyes flashing fire behind his spectacles.

– God forbid that I should try, I said. Maybe you're right. It's just that I don't want to tell the story unfairly some day, when reason supervenes.

For a while his glance bored into me as it must have bored into many a refractory pupil back in his schoolmastering days. Then he drew out his blue pencil, and heavily excised the offending passage.

So now I am going to tell the story of the apple-cakes. And I hope I do it fairly.

\* \* \*

I had come to Alsace and the US Seventh Army in order to relieve Vaughan, who was due for some leave.

His journey northward from Provence (where he had landed with the Seventh Army) has that epic quality peculiar to most of Vaughan's experiences. The reception at Marseilles – the campaign through the vineyards of Burgundy, conducted by General de Lattres de Tassigny on the principle of: Château-bottled districts – small arms fire only, with elaborate detours; but in the neighbourhood of Vin Ordinaire – down with the barrage and forward with the tanks! On the way up, they had liberated various monasteries noted for their liqueurs. In some of these they had found the cloistered community occupying small cells, on the doors of which each monk had a slate on which he was supposed to write up his personal needs while inside at his devotions:

A FLASK OF FRESH WATER AND  
A LOAF OF BREAD.

On their way through to the cellars the Correspondents had usually added a few additional lines, such as:

HALF A DOZEN GUINNESS AND A BLONDE.

Even the General's Order of the Day managed to acquire a humorous slant, when read, not as a congratulatory message to the troops, but as a lover's apostrophe to his mistress:

I do not wait until the end of this rugged and victorious fight before telling you of my joy and my gratefulness. For nearly three weeks I have been giving you no respite, and night and day I called out to you relentlessly and increasingly: 'Forward. It is necessary'. No task was more important and more beautiful. No task was more fruitful in its results. No task more deserving of your generosity and your sacrifices. You have understood this, and covered with mud, cold and exhausted, you have found the extreme energy that has been necessary to overcome desperate resistance. And now we can claim with justifiable pride to have been the artisans of a great National event, of which our children will speak with emotion and respect.

Before leaving for England, Vaughan brought me to spend a couple of nights at the French Press Camp in the hills near Urmatt.

In the hamlet below the villa, a ceremony was going on. It appears that after the last war a Memorial was erected here, bearing a list of names, and the inscription 'Mort pour la France'. When the Germans re-entered Alsace in 1940 they considered (with some degree of reason) that this inscription was incorrect, seeing that all the local heroes (whatever they may have died for) had been in the German Army at the time and not in the French. So they deleted all the Jewish-looking names from the list, and altered the inscription to the equally arguable one of 'Tod für Deutschland'. Now, under the urge of a new liberation, the missing names had been put on again, and the inscription was restored with much pomp to its original form.

The Press Camp itself had that mixture of polite formality and indescribable chaos that seems to be characteristic of the French. The despatch riding and driving was done by a group of ageing lady motorists rudely nicknamed 'Les Bolides'; another party of gay young Vivandières in battle dress performed innumerable duties and were obviously the people to go to if anything definite was required.

Very drunk Correspondents would arrive from Colmar in the middle of the night, armed with captured Lugers and Spandaus, which they would fire off on the front lawn. And everywhere, the feeling of shortage and want, except in the inner sanctums, where every luxury was dispensed with an air of superb, carefree hospitality. It is said that everybody loves the Italians, but that nobody

likes them. Here, I began to appreciate the corollary: that the French are a most likeable people, but that nobody could possibly approve of them.

After Vaughan was waved off, we visited Strasbourg, which had been occupied, evacuated and then re-occupied in various flaps during the past month. Each of these conflicting events had in turn been heralded or explained away by the wireless and loud-speaker vans of an entertaining British Captain called Yurka Galitzine, whose wife was an old friend on the London staff of the BBC. On the strength of this acquaintanceship he took Abe Goldberg and myself to have a look at the Rhine – driving through the deserted dock area, and stooping through a tunnel that runs under the railway embankment at the river's edge.

At the far end of this pipe we emerged inside a Maginot pillbox, and peered out from a loophole across the swirling, muddy waters at the wreckage of Kehl on the opposite bank. There was little enough to be seen, so the French, who are an obliging race, mortared the area for five or ten minutes for our benefit in the hope of stirring something up. But still no response from the unaccommodating Boche; so we all filed out again, climbed into our car, and drove disgustedly into Strasbourg.

The walls bore a set of slogans that were new to me.

ON LES AURA. LE JOUR SE LEVE.  
ICI COMMENCE LE PAYS DE LA LIBERTE.

At Griesheim the band of the Foreign Legion turned out and, after some delay, played the General Salute. A corner of the large school-room, where the Colonel received us, was curtained off, presumably to conceal a bidet; a pennant bearing four medals was supported on a stack of rifles with bayonets fixed. On the blackboard was the inscription

FRANCE D'ABORD



R M L E

LEGIO PATRIA NOSTRA. HONNEUR ET FIDELITE.  
VALEUR ET DISCIPLINE

The Colonel's emotion on the subject of the Legion quite overcame him as he addressed us, and sometimes it made him a little

unintelligible. His ADC was supposed to translate, and did so in a manner that was on the whole incorrect. But in spite of these handicaps, we got a fairly clear picture of what the Colonel had to say.

The Legion is the Best, said the Colonel, because it is so written on its flag in letters of gold, which really are letters of blood. (He indicated the pennant.) That is the meaning of the grenade with seven flames – honoured badge of this happy band in which the citizens of forty-two countries are united in the service of the most generous nation on earth.

To illustrate the spirit of the Legion, he then went on to tell us four stories. As far as I can make out, the first was about a dog whose name was the French word for 'Pimp'. The second concerned the wooden hand of some officer who had served in Mexico, the hand that is now the basis of the 'mystique' of the Legion. The third was about a General Rolle who had no hands at all, and directed a battle wearing slippers and with an umbrella over his head instead of a helmet. Whether this was a Good or a Bad thing I am not certain. Finally there was the story of a remarkable Corporal who committed suicide because he was so overcome at having been rebuked by his Officer. The Officer, in turn, died of a broken heart.

He concluded by asking us always to speak with delicatessen about the Legion. She is a Veille Dame. Then, overcome by passion, he swept aside the blankets that veiled the corner, and revealed – not the expected bidet – but the Flag of the Legion, supported on piled arms and guarded by two sentries. Plumb on the cue, the band outside burst into the 'Marseillaise', and we adjourned to a nearby estaminet for an excellent snack lunch, washed down by red wine to the strains of:

Auprès de ma blonde  
Qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon  
Auprès de ma blonde  
Qu'il fait bon dormir.

\* \* \*

On our way north to Zabern, we stopped at a couple of Concentration Camps. Once the creation of the Gestapo, they are now being used by the French for the internment of Collaborators. Hard as it is in England to define disloyalty to British interests, it ought to be harder still in France, recalling the spirited resistance to the Allies that was universal until after Alamein. However, this does not

prevent the shaving of women's heads, nor the enthusiastic operation of old Concentration Camps by people like this grinning, sadistic officer, who tried to refuse us admission.

– Quel bout? he asked.

But he changed his mind, and ushered us around between lines of abject inmates, respectfully doffing their hats.

At the second, the Commandant was bawling out a number of prisoners in his private office, and we had to stand in the passage for a while, listening to shouts of 'Bread and Water'. Two packets of cigarettes won us our admission here, and we were shown the alleged torture chamber, gassing room and cremation oven, all of which showed no signs whatever of having been used for such purposes. What was certain – and this we could see for ourselves – was the fact that there were two gallows in the centre of the exercise yard, around which the miserable inhabitants were circulating, in their efforts to keep a bit of warmth in their bodies.

\* \* \*

– But it's true, said Yurka that night in Saverne, as we laid out a bed for him on the floor. They *are* murder camps.

– Oh, come off it, I said. People die in wartime – we all know that. But in the privacy of our room let's try to give things their right names, and keep some sort of perspective.

– If you'll come back with me to Strasbourg in the morning I'll show you the pickled bodies that they left behind – bodies they were experimenting upon.

– I'll do nothing of the sort. Even if you did show them to me it wouldn't prove anything.

– It proves what kind of people we are up against in the Nazis. The trouble with you is, you don't want to have anything proved to you.

– I certainly don't want to have it proved that the human race is different from my own experience of it. Hitler tells us that the Jews are monsters, and I don't believe him. Nor do I believe you when you try to prove that the Germans are monsters. I've met Germans.

– But it's a question of fact. You should never have been shown around that camp by a stupid liar.

– You mean we ought to have had a more subtle guide, eh?

– You should have had somebody who could tell you the facts – the facts that you don't seem to want to face. I wonder why not?



– I'll tell you why. It's because the world isn't going to end with this war. At least I hope not. And if we're going to get things going afterwards, we will have to do either of two things. We must either co-operate with the Germans, and build them up again into sensible neighbours, or exterminate them altogether. If we just persecute them like we did last time, without wiping them out, it simply means another war when they have strength to defend themselves. And who would blame them? Are you prepared to wipe them out?

– As a nation, yes. It's the only thing to do.

– Nonsense. For God's sake let's be practical. Do you really imagine that once we've got our tempers back, the public conscience will ever stand for such a thing?

– Have you heard anything of the Allied plans for the treatment of Germany after the war?

– Very little.

– Then perhaps you'd better study them. You'll find them pretty tough. In fact, if the German race ever survives them, they will be a greater people than Hitler said they were.

– All they'll have to do is to survive until the next war starts. Then we'll all be queueing up to get them on our side. The fact is they're a very great people, with qualities that we can't do without.

And so on, through the night we argued. And as we talked, the great people with the great qualities kept shelling us with a great gun. Regularly, every six minutes, a high velocity shell would arrive in Zabern with a sinister bang.

Is a proper loyalty to one's background incompatible with common sense? And if so, is there some point at which we should refuse to commit suicide for the sake of keeping our elected representatives in countenance? Is the myth of the Great Man as great an illusion as the myth of the Monster? And if so, who is fit to exercise sovereignty? Is the need for a Super-State incompatible with the need to be able to alter the Status Quo? And if so, what is going to happen when both sides to the inevitable war are armed with the Endwaffe?

And as the dawn came up over Lorraine, and the voice of the cannon was stilled, Yurka twiddled the knob of the radio, and presently we were listening to the dulcet tones of Con, his wife, making her morning announcement to the peoples of the world. We suspended hostilities to listen to her, with pleased attention.

– The next record will be Vera Lynn singing 'We'll meet again'.

– There she is, said Yurka, his face radiant. I listen to her saying that nearly every day. Let's keep it on for a while and hear her again.

\* \* \*

What, in fact, were the Allies' intentions towards Germany became evident a few days later when we went to Luneville to attend a series of Conferences at Sixth Army Group.

The first to speak to us was Patch – a very good General, but a little nettled by the free-and-easy habits of his left-hand neighbour, George Patton, who has a way of boasting openly about the strength of the forces under his command, which discloses to the enemy the fact that the Seventh Army had been denuded. He was also harassed by the standard of living that the public at home expects for the boys in the field. Indeed, so many things have to be supplied to the American soldier (in contradistinction to the German) that 60,000 trucks are needed to transport them.

Then we had a silly lecture from a Colonel Frank Polish on 'Mines and Booby Traps', during which various small bangs were let off in different parts of the room. As it was extremely unlikely that Colonel Polish would be allowed to blow up a roomful of influential newspapermen without getting into a good deal of trouble, we were not greatly alarmed by this. Then we had a talk from Colonel Bruskins on 'Counter-Espionage', in the course of which two women and three men were paraded before us, on their way to execution. They stood there, looking us up and down, with no sign of either fear or emotion on their faces – five exhibits to a lecture on Counter-Espionage. They were all going to die, and they knew it. And in a way they had the laugh on us, because we are all going to die, only we do not know it.

But the subject on which I took the fullest notes was Colonel Canby's talk on the coming Military Government in Germany. The approach to the civil population is going to be quite different from that in Italy, where we adopted 'a sympathetic attitude towards the people'! In Germany we will not be interested in their personal problems. If their scale of rations has to go down, that will be just too bad for them. No food will be brought in for them, unless their own supplies fall so low that they are liable to get in our hair in the military sense. We will not be interested in restoring their industries, or, in general, whether they get on their feet again or not.

There will be a big Displaced Problem in Germany. The Germans

will be required to provide food, clothing and other services for these people. The DPs must all get 2,000 calories of food a day from the Germans, and the Germans' own scale will be allowed to sink to 1,350 calories before we will do anything about it ourselves. In fact, it will be deliberately forced down as part of our policy.

Our object is to eradicate the 'military taint'. Nobody knows exactly how this will be done, but to begin with, the German Officers' Corps will be abolished. There will be no right of appeal from our Military Courts, which will be set up promptly, and will inflict sufficiently harsh penalties (modelled on German standards of harshness) to impress the people that we mean business. And we hope by exhortation and guidance to teach our own Summary Courts that small fines and penalties are no good at all. No newspapers, theatres or cinemas will be permitted until we are in a position to tell them what to print and what to put on.

If we cannot get any co-operation from the Germans we will just have to run things ourselves, although we do not know how we will persuade enough Allied Civil Servants to come over and do it. Maybe in the end we will just have to turn them over to the French.

\* \* \*

It was shortly after our visit to Luneville that we set off through Lorraine to make some eye-witness recordings of the offensive at Saargemines. The river takes a great bend here, and crossing by a pontoon bridge we drove northwards towards a little village called Auersmacher that had just fallen into our hands.

On the uplands we noticed some odd ventilator shafts sticking through the soil. Thin wisps of smoke were coming from some of them. In the face of a bank overlooking the river we discovered the entrance to a great mine, in the depths of which some fifty men women and children were living,<sup>3</sup> together with their domestic animals, and such of their personal possessions as they were able to save.

The leader of this community told us that they had been sheltering there for over three months, and by the light of a torch he took us on a tour. In the outer passages a crowd of children played, and farther along some efforts at home life were evident. Each family had its own little patch of tunnel with its tables and its beds and its stoves, and an attempt at privacy in the form of makeshift screens and curtains. Deeper in, we passed rows of rabbit hutches and finally came to the cattle and sheep, stabled in the side alleys.

It was all surprisingly clean and neat. There was none of the stench of the great shelter of Lanciano; yet it was dark and windowless, and how the washing that was hanging up on the lines could ever be expected to dry, I cannot imagine.

Some of the children kept following us, in particular a small boy of about ten, who insisted on taking my hand and seemed intensely interested in our uniforms, and everything about us. They asked for nothing, and seemed quite taken aback when most of us produced chocolate and gum from our pockets and handed them round. An old lady, who was cooking some apple cakes in her ersatz kitchen, invited us in and gave me a slice or two to eat. So we sat down and gave them some cigarettes in return.

When we came out into the sunlight, I could sense the mixture of confused emotion in my companions, no less than in myself.

– Well, I dunno, said one of the Security Officers. Maybe somebody deserves it, but I guess it's hard to say who.

– It's a funny war, isn't it, remarked Reuter's Agency, with characteristic understatement.

\* \* \*

It was when I came to write this story as a radio spot that I began to realise what lies before us, now that we are about to assume the role of conquerors. Up to this, I have had very little conflict with Policy. I have, on the whole, been allowed to tell what I see, in my own way. Of course, I have not been allowed to publicise various muddles perpetrated by the military authorities; but this is understandable enough in the circumstances, and it has not affected my belief in myself as an objective Correspondent reporting fact.

But now that we are no longer defending ourselves – now that we are about to do so many of the things that Hitler did when faced with a hostile population – I can sense trouble ahead, as the battle front becomes less important and the policy front grows more questionable.

The troubles of the population of Auersmacher are a minor matter when compared with what others have suffered all over the world. But the reaction of Howell, the Censor, to my comparatively cagey script did give me an indication of new and strange issues that are about to arise – of a new conception that I must put upon my job if I am to remain a compliant supporter of my side.

– What bank of the river was this on? he asked.

– The right bank, I answered.

– That’s the eastern side? Not Lorraine?

– No, it wasn’t Lorraine.

– Then this bit will have to come out. This story comes very near to Fraternisation, which you know is forbidden.

– But I don’t say that I actually accepted the apple cake, I argued. All that I say is that the old lady offered me a piece.

– The whole spirit of the story is sympathetic to these people, he replied. You are trying to show them in a good light.

– I am trying – within the scope of the regulations – to describe the population of Auersmacher. That is what I am here for. To report what I see.

– You are not here to advertise the fact that you have been disregarding the orders of General Eisenhower.

– Let’s get this clear, I answered. If it had been on the left bank of the river it would have been a good story. But since it’s on the right bank, it’s against the law for me to say that I was offered the apple cake. Is that the law?

– Yes.

– And you will be prepared to stand over that afterwards?

For a moment his eyes bored into me, like gimlets.

– You can’t intimidate me, he snapped.

\* \* \*

So now I have told the story. And, of course, in a sense, I see his point. I was opposed to the Non-Fraternisation Order as the excrement of bad-tempered little minds at home, and was starting to work to make it look ignorant. He knew quite well what I was up to, and that my apple cake was only the beginning. So he stopped me – which was wise enough if he believed in it himself.

But he will not get away with it, himself, in the long run, because if that is the law, I am going to break the law. I am going to break it as often and as openly and as ingeniously as I can; because it is a law that I am prepared to be broken for breaking, which to my Irish mind is the acid test for legitimate law-breaking. If I am fined or put under arrest for talking to my enemies or for giving chocolate to their children, that will suit me. But I know that such a thing will never happen, for the men of the Army, on the whole, think as little of that law as I do, and it is they who will have the job of enforcing it.

\* \* \*

Here in Saverne, resting nonchalantly upon a pedestal in the main street, I find, to my surprise, a Unicorn! The presiding genius of the place – full-sized, serene, and unmistakably a Unicorn.

And then I open the letter from London, and find that another stage in a long and dreary pilgrimage has been reached. A five-year-old undefended divorce suit has somehow stumbled to a dénouement – although it is clear that there are still many subsidiary matters to keep the legal fires burning.

First and foremost (I read) I want to tell you that the Decree Absolute has at last been made, despite the fact that the vexed question of the children's tax allowances has not yet been settled. It was pronounced on the 16th instant, and I am obtaining a Certified Copy, which I will keep here or send to you as you direct.

When a settlement has been come to, you will, I fear, have to face some further expenditure in the shape of the Petitioner's costs of these negotiations and of the Order which will have to be made. I think I warned you about this before, and you may rely...

For a while I study it – two thoughts turning over and over in my mind. I have now definitely lost my son. He is legally no longer mine. Even the thin and tenuous claim that I have had upon him for the past seven years is sundered. On the other hand, I am now a single man, free to contract marriage out of the Prayer Book. It means that, somehow or another, Betty and I must get together. And the sooner the better – before I cross that next river, the Rhine.

And so – in Alsace, and at the age of forty-three – I draw out a sheet of paper, and write my first, unequivocal proposal of marriage, to a woman I should have married long ago.



## NOCTURNE PARISIENNE

Amor, che al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,  
 Preste costui della bella persona  
 Che mi fu tolta, e il modo ancor m'offende.

CONSIDERING the amount of time that we spend talking and thinking about women, it is strange that the only female I appear to have ravished between Arabia and Gaul is Old Nobodaddy's pretty by-blow – my Muse! The grass margins of my pilgrimage have been as bare of petticoats as the arid slopes of Monte Cassino. Perhaps it is because there are mines in the margins.

There are not enough women in this book (although it is true that Confucius makes no reference to the sex in the whole of the *Analects*). There are too many in my life and too few on my arm.

Maybe it is only my personal failure. I do not seem to cut much ice with the women journalists, who hastily avert their eyes whenever I appear on the scene. Possibly a little nettled by this, I passed the time of day with a tart on the Boulevard des Capucines the last time I was in Paris, and found her equally fussy about responding to my attentions. Her friend, she said, was first in the rank. Had I been looking for a barber or hiring a taxi I might have accepted this argument, but in the circumstances I was not ready to do so.

This was Paris – City of Lights and Laughter, of soft sinful caresses and the frou-frou of silken skirts, where Circe is expected to call from the shadows. I looked around me at all the other assignations. I observed Abélard and Héloïse, Anthony and Cleopatra, Diarmuid and Grainne, the Bard of Avon and the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, Faust and Marguerite, Juno and the Paycock, Bastien and Bastienne, Dr Goebbels and Fraulein Hyde, John Bunyan and Grace Abounding, Teresias and Teresias, Little Boy Blue and Little Bo Peep, St Francis and Lady Poverty, T. Aquinas and Summa Theologia, Adam and Eve, Victoria and Albert, P. da Verruchio

and F. da Rimini, Josh Jacobson and Mme Potiphar, Tithonus and Aurora, Ananias and Sapphira, Sodom and Gomorrah and all the other great Lovers of history. If they could get off, why should I have an argument about who was first on the hazard?

Ah! not the Iseult that I desire.  
Where is that other Iseult, fair,  
That proud, first Iseult, Cornwall's Queen?

My professional friend, unmoved by these sentiments, changed her ground slightly, and commented on my size. Oddly enough, I had much the same remark made to me twenty years earlier in the *Bal Tabarin*. Only on this occasion the lady had pointed to my fly buttons, and had added coyly:

– Mais une place, vous êtes petit.

There was clearly going to be no *joie de vivre* in an interview that had got off on such a controversial issue, so I bowed myself out and continued on my way to the Scribe.

All my life I have noticed a curious phenomenon: whenever I have to listen to tales of the glamorous demi-monde – which is frequently – they are always told of another period or of another place. Ah, if only I had known Cairo in the twenties! Of course, Rome is as dead as mutton ever since the Vatican did so-and-so, but if we were in Milan even today I could have the surprise of my life. Nobody has ever said to me, 'Listen, there's a gorgeous sink of iniquity round the corner in Grafton Street. Will you come?' Like Alexander, I hear of people getting killed in this war, but I seldom see any corpses.

Even if you do not earnestly wish to see a corpse, it makes you wonder. Am I peculiarly unobservant, or are my informants, on the whole, given to bullshit? Am I alone in my ignorance, in never having consciously observed the outside of a House of Ill-Fame, much less the interior? And is it an all-time low to have been snubbed by a prostitute in *Gay Paree* because of my unwelcome appearance?

One evening, listening with Ian Wilson to the urbane gossip of some of my friends in the Scribe, I determined, here in Paris, to call this bluff, once and for all.

– Thomas, I said, I have had enough of this. I propose to see, personally, one of these places that must be here, if anywhere at all. In fact, you must escort me this very evening. Is this your hat?



His smile immediately froze and I observed what can only be described as a shifty expression creeping into his eyes.

– Of course, one has to have an Entrée.

– Naturally. That is why you must come along with me – as my guest, of course.

– I'd be delighted, old boy; but unfortunately I have to go to St Cloud this evening.

– Then tomorrow.

– Well, actually I'm engaged then too. As a matter of fact I'm terribly busy just at the moment. Otherwise I'd love to take you.

– Then perhaps you will give me the address?

– Well – er – there's always Madame Blanche's in the Rue de Provence. She is supposed to have some of the most beautiful girls in Europe.

– Madame Blanche in the Rue de Provence. What number?

– I'm not quite sure of the number, but anybody will direct you.

– Ian, will you accompany me to Madame Blanche's? We will give Thomas' name as a reference, of course.

– O K, said Ian, I'll try anything once.

– Actually you shouldn't give my name, Thomas interposed. It's some little time, you know, since – and maybe...His voice died away. It might perhaps be better to give somebody else's name.

– Very well, I said. We will go to Madame Blanche's and give General Montgomery's name. He once told me I might use his name if occasion arose. But before we set forth, there must be some general advice you can give us?

– Oh, just the usual, old boy. Everybody will be after your money, of course, so make up your mind just how much you are prepared to spend on the evening, and take exactly that amount along with you. Then whatever happens, you can't be robbed. Steer clear of those pimps that infest the streets and try to sell you things. Even if you don't fall for them, they'll try to make you buy drinks. And be careful of the Police. They are the most dangerous of all. I'm afraid you're in for a rather expensive night, if you don't know the ropes. I wish I could come along too, but you see, it's quite impossible. However, good-bye, old boy, and good luck.

\* \* \*

Madame Blanche! What a picture that calls up! The discreet doorway opening on to a scented and thickly-carpeted hall; the glasses of champagne served by a powdered footman in the antechamber,

where presently the curtains part, and a magnificent figure, gowned in black, appears – a costly diamond brooch (the gift of royalty) gleaming on her bosom, her voluptuous carmined lips and her great green Eastern eyes heavy with mascara – her coal-black tresses piled like a crown above her queenly brows – Madame Blanche herself! My senses reel, as she condescends to take a glass with us, and then sends away the bottle for one of those reserved for her more especial guests – Bollinger '28. Then as we sit there, puffing black cigarettes in long holders, I can hear her very gently, very discreetly, coming round to the purpose of our visit. Yes, her petites filles are eager to entertain us, if we will only pick our fancy. There is Yvette – that lovely statuesque blonde from Brussels; and Dolores, the toast of Barcelona; and Fifi – that playful little minx who broke up the last Government.

But for her more distinguished clients – we must follow her along the plush-lined corridors to the oriental pagoda. Here, to the music of a softly-splashing fountain, the most perfect specimen of Eastern loveliness swings over our heads in a pretty, gilded cage. My senses reel, and the pulses in my temples throb with an almost unbearable insistency. My breath also comes in short pants. Beads of perspiration appear in appropriate places.

– You like my little lotus? Madame Blanche murmurs. She is expensive – but for you, sir...

– Have a care, old man, Ian whispers, laying a restraining hand on my arm.

– No, no, I hoarse, drawing out a wad of notes, the savings of a lifetime. This is no time for caution!

The lovely little creature in the cage kicks up a dainty foot and a small silver slipper comes curling downwards through the scent-laden air. With blazing eyes I catch it, and filling it to the brim with the bubbling, icy Bollinger '28, I drink a toast to her loveliness in one long passionate draught. When I turn around, Madame Blanche and my companion have discreetly vanished.

My senses reel...

\* \* \*

– Are you certain you know where this bloody street is? I enquired of Ian, after the third wrong turning.

We had set forth from the Scribe soon after dinner, in that irritating condition of conscientious hilarity, when one's imagination tells one that one is drunk, but one's headache insists that one is

not. It was not long before we realised we were being trailed by a sinister figure who had appeared out of the murk.

– A pimp, I said. Pay no attention to him. We want none of those low dives – nothing but Madame Blanche for us.

He followed us for a block or two, uttering occasional remarks in the vernacular, and he did not seem at all perturbed by my frequent invitations to him to bugger off. In the end we were melted by his persistence, and allowed him not only to direct us to the Rue de Provence, but also to identify the magic portal of Madame Blanche itself.

We were on the right track, for in the hall we found ourselves faced by a large notice:

OFF LIMITS TO ALL ALLIED MILITARY  
PERSONNEL

By Command of General Eisenhower.

– Pay no attention to that nonsense, I said to Ian. If I had observed all the notices since I left home, I would still be waiting in a traffic block in the south of Italy.

Demurring slightly, Ian followed me to the foot of the stairs, where a theatrical-looking French maid was waiting.

– You see. The drama begins to run to form.

Smilingly, she declined my hat, and I realised that she was referring to the notice on the wall.

– Nous ne sommes pas militaires, I explained. Nous sommes civiles.

She made a pretty gesture of despair, and indicated the stairs at the head of which a little woman stood – a woman rather like a hotel proprietress in Athlone.

– Pardon, m'sieur. C'est defendu d'entrer.

– Are you Madame Blanche? I asked with some pardonable surprise.

Yes, it was indeed the celebrated Procureuse – the wrecker of homes – the purveyor of the heady vintage of Venusberg. And she was rather shocked – nay, pained to find us here beating on her portals. Were we not militaires, and had not General Eisenhower distinctly said No – perhaps through no wish of his own, but at the bidding of the great moral conscience of America? Here we were, seeking admission, quite indifferent to the wishes of General Eisenhower! Was not all this rather reprehensible? And in wartime too!

I explained to Madame Blanche, in my most eloquent French, that neither General Eisenhower nor the official views on sex of the United States Senate carried any weight with me. I bore no allegiance to either of them. His kindly notice referred to 'Allied Military Personnel' and I was not Military. Strictly speaking I was not even Allied, being a benevolent neutral. So it was absurd to imagine that the General's concern about the private life of his troops could extend to me.

– Hélas, M'sieur. C'est ABSOLUMENT défendu.

She meant it too. The name of General Montgomery meant nothing to her. In fact she had never met him. Not even the suggestion that we might go away and come back in pin-stripe lounge suits and derby hats could melt her heart. The gentlemen of the US Military Police frequently came in and examined Identity Cards. (Is that all they examine? asked Ian.) Elsewhere, we might find those pleasures that we sought: But not Chez Blanche. And firmly she showed us to the door – the private side door through which more satisfied customers usually emerge.

– Elsewhere! I exclaimed on the sidewalk. In other words, we're meant to pick up a tart and get the clap. A nice way the Middle West looks after its brave boys!

I found that I was addressing our old friend, the Pimp, who was with us again with bland and friendly gestures.

– O K, I said. We'll listen. Tell us what's on your mind, and how much it will cost.

He had business, and would we please accompany him to some nearby place of refreshment. His name was Mons Jacques, and he knew just where to take us. So grasping my still-virgin cash firmly in my trouser pocket, I nodded assent to Ian, and we accompanied our friend to a small, not-too-clean bar. An American Marine was perched on a stool talking to a couple of Frenchmen, and a quiet-looking brunette sat drinking cognac in a corner with her gentleman friend. Mons Jacques was received with deference by all present, and promptly ordered a round of drinks.

– O K, I said. Just this once. But you needn't think that it will be repeated.

I was silenced by a flood of French and many gestures. It was excellent cognac, he assured us. We must have much of it.

– It isn't bad stuff actually, said Ian, his glass in his hand.

– Maybe not the first tot, but wait for the next. This chap thinks he's going to make us tight at our own expense, and then sell us a

pup. This is just the type that Thomas warned us about. So he needn't think...

Suddenly the place was in an uproar. One of the Frenchmen at the bar had come across and was exchanging blows with the gentleman friend of the quiet brunette in the corner. The lady burst shrilly into tears, and only the prompt intervention of the American Marine prevented bloodshed. Flinging himself between the two antagonists, the warrior interposed soothing words, and everything was returning to normal, when it was brought back to boiling point by the inruption of Mons Jacques – very cross and loud voiced and exceedingly irritating to all concerned. So I thought that I had better take a hand in this myself. After all, we had brought Mons Jacques, and felt a certain responsibility for him.

It was clear to me what had occurred. One of the Frenchmen at the bar had made an insulting reference to the brunette in the corner, and her Squire had risen to defend her honour. But for the gallantry of the tough American Marine (probably a man of Guadalcanal, and always on the side of the Fair Sex) anything might have happened; but now that honour had been satisfied, it was no business of our little pimp to stir up trouble again.

So taking him firmly by the collar, I led him back protesting to our table, and assured him that if anything further was needed the Police would look after it. Incoherently Mons Jacques started producing a number of dirty pieces of paper from his pocket, and handed them around. Ian was the first to realise their purport, namely that *he*, Mons Jacques, was the Police – in fact, he was a figure of some consequence in those circles.

– This is all very confusing, I said, as I tossed off my cognac. Find out what he's up to while I go and talk to this Marine. Tell him whatever it is that he can't have more than 1,000 francs.

I left them together, and crossed back to the scene of the conflict. The riotous Frenchmen had taken themselves off and the Marine and I settled down to another round of cognac, in which we were presently joined by the brunette. To my surprise she turned out to be more contrite than insulted, and full of polite apologies. In fact, I had been all wrong in my ideas as to the nature of the quarrel, and it just goes to show what misconceptions a little bit of miscasting can do. The matter under discussion between the two Frenchmen and the Marine had apparently been the purchase of the Marine's virtue; and a satisfactory figure had just been arrived at, when the agreeable atmosphere had been spoiled by an audible remark from

the lady in the corner, who had recognised the seafarer for what he was, and had commented scoffingly on his habits.

Stung by this slight on their gentleman friend, the Frenchmen had risen in his defence; but not wishing to hit the lady, they had done the next best thing by striking her companion. Being a polite and good-natured tart, she was now very apologetic for causing such trouble in an allied though rival branch of the profession, and she wished to say so.

And now I saw out of the corner of my eye that Mons Jacques was producing large quantities of money from his pocket, and was laying it before Ian. For one wild moment the thought crossed my mind that our own virtue was being bartered away under my very eyes. I had better find out.

So leaving the Marine and the Lady to their happy task of mutual conversion, I returned to our table to ask what the hell was going on?

– We have been wronging Mons Jacques, Ian explained. He is a most generous soul, and insists on us being his guests this evening.

– *His* guests?

– Yes, indeed, said Ian, over a background of ingratiating splutters from our friend. It seems that he is a very important official.

– In the Police?

– Yes, in the Police. So he wants us to sell him some cigarettes.

– To *sell* him?

– Mons Jacques verrry reech, said our friend, leaning across the table and pressing a wad of banknotes into my hand. Many hundreds francs. You have.

I realised that on a mere brace of cognacs this very important official was already showing signs of intoxication. His eyes were becoming watery, his speech thickening, and his manner becoming extremely affectionate.

– You are my friends, he said. You have mooch cigarettes. Mons Jacques give you mooch money. Eh?

– Mons Jacques, it seems that we are both living in a dream world. You imagine that our pockets are stuffed with cigarettes. We imagine that your city is full of beautiful and accommodating women. But we are both wrong. It is all a fool's paradise, eh?

At the mention of women, his face lit up into a bright leer.

– In my house, he said, many beautiful women.

And he started passionately to kiss his finger-tips.

– Come, he said. I will bring you. Mpppt. Mpppt.

– I don't believe it, I said to Ian. Still, we're no worse off if we take a look, are we! Better gather up your money, Mons Jacques. It's a bad thing to leave it around.

Out in the street he halted, still clutching his bankroll.

– Cigarettes? he said.

– Tomorrow, said Ian, if you come to the Hotel Scribe you shall have five packages of twenty.

He resumed the kissing of his finger-tips.

– Tomorrow! Five packets! But tonight, beautiful women. Mpppt. Mpppt. Come with me to my house. Beautiful, beautiful. Tomorrow – five packets. Mpppt. Mpppt.

We proceeded down the street in slow motion, singing a popular song of the Yugoslav partisans. From time to time we stopped, and Mons Jacques would murmur half to himself, half aloud:

– Five packages. Tomorrow at the Hotel Scribe. Beautiful – beautiful. Mpppt. Mpppt. Mpppt!

– Yes, Ian would answer. That is agreed.

At last we arrived at a closed and shuttered apartment house and Mons Jacques began to knock on the door. The street was completely deserted, for the night was now well advanced. It had become obvious for some time that our companion had passed far beyond the bounds of mere tipsyness, and was now as drunk as a coot. Still kissing his fingers, smiling and muttering to himself, he transferred his knocking from the door to a shutter. From inside came no response whatever.

Then suddenly, with an air of stern finality, Mons Jacques fell flat on his back in the gutter, his wad of banknotes fluttering gently over pavement and street and over the person of the Official himself, like gentle leaves upon one of the Babes in the Wood. He closed his eyes happily, and save for his stertorous breathing, he passed from the category of Those Present. For some moments we studied him in silence. Our Cupid – and the stilly night around us.

– Well, this looks like the end of Mons Jacques.

– So this is Paris! City of Love and Laughter. This is the end of our Night of Sin.

– Why? Have you had enough?

– Enough! I haven't had any. Let's go home.

– But we can't leave him here, like that.

– Oh yes we can. We certainly can.

– Maybe we ought to point him out to a policeman.

– Mons Jacques is himself the only Policeman in these parts.

Maybe, if we could find a friendly burglar, he might be persuaded to take him in charge. But there is no point in looking for another Policeman. He would only want to press money on us too.

– Well, at least let's gather up his cash.

By the handful we stuffed it into his inner pockets. High or low, there was still no sign of life – no glimmer of light behind closed windows – no pagan love-call whispered through the shutters – no footfall to disturb the slumbers of our influential friend. Silently we turned in the direction of the Boulevards, and soon were lost once more in the gloom of the Parisian night.





## AT THE GATE OF THE HERCYNIAN FOREST

EVERYTHING is on the move, for the last great cavalry charge of Mittel-Europa is over, and Hitler has shot his bolt. Now all the forces of the rest of the world, welded by his behaviour into an uneasy partnership, are lining up to go in and finish him off.

Everything is shifting to the north, for that is the direction in which the blow is supposed to fall. Twelfth Army Group moves from Verdun to Namur. Patton goes to Luxemburg. And our own little Gangway Press Camp leaps forward to the objective of Rundstedt's dead offensive – Huy on the Meuse.

Bobby Barr, fresh from London, is on his way to the Ninth Army, full of amusing stories of BBC internal machinations. It seems that everybody wants to be first into Berlin, and also wants the key job with Montgomery's Second Army. So a lot of polite selling-down-the-river is going on!

– But they're backing the wrong horse, say I. Montgomery hasn't moved for six months, and if anybody gets to Berlin it will be you, with Simpson.

– Or you, says Bobby. With the Ninth Air Force.

– No, I say. To hell with Berlin. I'm going east with Hodges to meet the Russians. Then I resign, before the politics start.

He gave a snort of Glasgow laughter as Eian Ogilvie came across and joined us. I have hardly seen Eian since the days when he came to live with us on the *Dahabiya*, and now he is a big shot in SHAEF PR and just the man to help me with a personal problem.

– Listen, Eian, I say. Have you got aeroplanes that go to the North of Ireland?

– No, I don't think so. Why do you ask?

– A very deserving reason. I want to get married; and neither I nor the bride have a passport. But if I could get to the North of Ireland I could do the rest myself, and be back in a few days.

– I'm afraid there's no way we can help you. But wait a bit. I think the Americans fly from here to Ulster.

The Americans! Why, of course! God bless the Americans! If anybody can be expected to behave in a big-hearted way in a situation like this, surely it's the Americans. If any power can circumvent the fussy formalities of the Passport Office in the cause of a good wedding, surely it is the great heart of the United States!

- But my passport ... ? I begin.

- All they will bother about is whether you've got American Orders.

- Return Orders, please. Much as I like Ulster, I don't want to have to stay there. Eian, would you be a sportsman, and put my case to the Americans?

- I'll see what I can do. Where will you be in case I want to get in touch with you?

- Probably in Bonn. It looks as though the First Army will get there in a day or two.

- Oke. Bonn. I'll let you know.

- Scots wa' hae!

\* \* \*

Taking my utility and my bedroll, and half a case of champagne, I drove through Liège and Aachen in the wake of Hodge's army. The great autobahn was a mass of traffic moving east, and having crossed the little river that had been our impenetrable limit during the winter's fighting, I found myself in the shambles of Duren, reading a quotation from Hitler painted on one of the walls.

GIVE ME THREE YEARS AND YOU WILL  
NOT RECOGNISE GERMANY

It is unlikely that anybody will recognise Duren for a long time to come. She has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Bruhl had the air of a Convention, with happy GIs riding around on motor bikes and in civilian motor cars, while the population looked on apathetically. To my eye the latter seemed to be more hopeless than terrified. In the Schloss Gracht, outside Leblar, I called on the Count and Countess Metternich. The Countess is an English woman, and spoke to me on that basis, although she has a son in the Wehrmacht. The place had obviously been looted, but they were very restrained about this, shrugging their shoulders over the taking of 'souvenirs', and complaining only about the pointless destruction of their food supplies in the cellars. A very fair point,

it seemed to me, if it is going to be the declared policy of Military Government that these people have got to feed themselves.

Next morning after a briefing, I drove myself into Bonn. There was only one road open, and fighting was still going on in some of the suburbs; but I got in without being shot at. About one-third of the city – including most of the University – had been destroyed, and the streets were a tangle of wreckage, boughs, rubbish and fallen tram wires. Across the swift-flowing river the land still held by Hitler lay in silence and desolation.

Nothing moved, and the Rhine lapped the blown piers of the fallen bridge. In hiding, behind their final redoubt, the Supermen were getting ready for the final test – the only test that we have as yet managed to devise for those who advance such claims.

– Ich lehre euch des Übermensch.

– We come as Conquerors.

Well, that is one way of looking at it. On the other hand, we have the spectacle of those little boys in Aachen, trying to defend their homes with Panzerfausts.

Life casts us in roles – as a Priest once said to me – roles that we find we have to play, without any voluntary election on our part. What is stranger, we generally believe in them, and are far from cynical about their merits, however fortuitously they are forced on us. Archdeacon Paley used to prove the historical truth of the facts on which Christianity is based by pointing to the numbers and the violence of those who had been prepared to lay down their lives for the Creed. People would never fight and die in such a way – he argued – for something which was untrue or that they knew to be a myth.

Yet here we have an entire race that is apparently willing to commit suicide for Hitler! Which either means that the Archdeacon's argument must be unsound, or that Hitler is right. Indeed, I might have imagined him right, myself, if I had been brought up on these Kinderfibeln – a depressing copy of which I have got in the back of the utility.

Wenn un-ser Füh-rer durch das Land fährt, eilt all-es auf die Stras-se. Männ-er und Frau-en, Bu-ben und Mä-del ju-beln ihm zu. Und al-le sind glück-lich, weil sie ihn se-hen dur-fen. Die Kin-der lieben den Füh-rer sehr.

(Photograph of kind, head-patting Superman signing autographs for little fair-haired boys in brown.)

## Nursery rhyme:

Herr, schütze unser deutsches Land!  
Dem Führer, den du uns gesandt,  
Gib Kraft zu seinem Werke!  
Von unserm Volke nimm die Not!  
Gib Freiheit uns und täglich Brot  
Und Einigkeit und Stärke!

If it was the Lord who sent them Hitler, will it be the Lord who takes away their daily bread?

- Sightseeing? asked an American Colonel in a jeep.
- Just going over some nursery rhymes.
- A strange sort of pastime. May one ask which your favourite is?
- One of our own, I think. It goes:

Little pig, little pig, let me come in!  
No, no, by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin!  
Then I'll huff and I'll puff,  
And I'll blow your house in!

Would you take a little Nazi into your home? asks a columnist in a London newspaper. No, comes the unanimous answer. I would strangle it first. The little Nazis who were received into Norway after the last war returned in 1940 to betray it. And so the answer is Phosphorous Shells, and Napalm (which Roosevelt will not allow us to mention) and blind Night Bombing, and Starvation as a point of policy, and finally the Endwaffe (provided that we can invent it first!). The misinformed must be taught a lesson. But maybe in an odd way they have got the best of the deal: because as this life progresses I realise more and more how much less horrible it is to endure than to inflict.

- I see you're a Correspondent, said the Colonel. Would you like to come along to the Rathaus and watch us taking over?

- I would indeed.

His name was Lancer - a sane and intelligent officer commanding an advanced unit of Military Government. And sitting beside him in the Rathaus, I listened to the proceedings, as his men rounded up the few public officials that could be found, and the problems of reconstruction were dealt with one by one.

There was an eager little man in pince-nez with a deprecating manner, who made it clear that he was an authority on the inmates of the City Prisons. In fact he was either a Judge or a Jailer; and

from his conversation it appeared that he was probably both. He had one matter on his mind to which he was most anxious to give expression.

– I am the Prosecutor, he said. And since three days there have been no prosecutions in Bonn. Now have I permission to begin?

Colonel Lancer explained that he had not got permission to begin. There were a number of things to be gone into before the Prosecutor was to start prosecuting again. And this brought us to the next point – the costume that the civil police should wear. One of these officials was produced in his grey-blue uniform, and there were grave shakings of heads over his appearance. Anybody remotely resembling a soldier was liable to be shot at or run in by the conscientious GIs. Yet a German policeman without a uniform was something unheard of – like Tristan without Isolde, or corned beef without cabbage. So another official was brought before us. He was a tram conductor without a tram – and unlikely to have a tram for a very long time to come. So it was decided to put the police into the tram men's uniforms, enabling them to carry on in comparative safety, while, at the same time, keeping face with the population.

Then the usual enquiries were made. How many doctors were left in the town? How many chemists? How many displaced persons? What had happened to the Allied prisoners in Stalag 6? How many days' food in stock? Swiftly the answers came. About one-half of the normal population of 105,000 was left. There were four chemists, and about 2,000 displaced persons, mainly in outlying farms. The prisoners of war had been removed across the Rhine. There was no electricity or gas, but there was running water, and the telephone system was still functioning. Four out of the twenty elementary schools were still open, and they had food for about thirty days. But the bread situation was serious because the principal bakery was on the other side of the river.

Colonel Lancer then outlined the principles on which his government would operate. The administration would be fair, just and businesslike. Every official would be expected to remain at his post, except prominent or ardent Nazis, who would not be employed. They would be expected to feed themselves, and also to feed, clothe and house the displaced persons. All members of the Wehrmacht were to surrender themselves at once. All discriminatory laws against the Jews were abrogated, and they were no longer to be forced to wear any sort of distinguishing mark.

The officials listened gravely to each point without making any comment, except a nod of the head. They were accustomed to take orders. And as the Colonel went on to tell them that the Americans were not tyrannical by nature, and that their government would be severe or easy according to the attitude of the Germans themselves, I rose and stole out, with a brief word of thanks. I had heard a rumour that the Master Plan had once again been bugged up. Some miles to the south a column of the Ninth Armoured had captured a bridge intact, and was already over the Rhine, some weeks ahead of time!

I hurried on to get a full eye-witness picture, beating my way through the traffic jams on the narrow roads. It was a railway bridge, with planks laid across the tracks, and its capture had obviously been due to a mistake on somebody's part. But now the Ninth Armoured were making the most of it, and were busily building up a bridgehead on the farther bank. There was still only one-way traffic, and I knew that if I drove over I might have to stay there indefinitely – a thing that would never have deterred me, in the old days, from grabbing the honour of being the 'first Correspondent to cross the Rhine'.

But I don't know. Maybe it is age and lack of enterprise, but who the hell cares whether I am the first Correspondent to cross the Rhine, except myself? And if I have to choose between that piece of dubious self-gratification and the getting of two good stories on the air, I know my choice today. I might, of course, have walked across, put a foot on the farther shore, and come back on my two legs with a pompous by-line to my credit. But, Christ, isn't it better to be grown-up than to be the first – even into Czernowitz? So I turned my utility and blinded all the way back to Brussels, which thanks to the arrangements of my Employers was the nearest point from which I could tell the world what was happening in the Rhineland!

\* \* \*

Brussels!

The Canterbury crammed with people from the BBC – the street outside filled with their parked cars. There is a Head Man in a special uniform, with a supply of priority whisky from Broadcasting House, and a lot of high-level secrets that can only be communicated to us separately behind locked doors. And there is the Voice of Experience from Cairo, back on the job again. Full circle!

Over dinner the youngest of the new arrivals is anxious to tell me

his credo of War Reporting. It is simply a matter of integrity and of firm objectivity. All that the News Rooms want is the Truth, free from bias and propaganda. If only we could SEE that, we would find our job so much easier. Gravely I consider his flushed and happy face. What an interesting idea!

Malcolm is delighted to have me around for a day or two, and intends to have a word with me after our meal so that he can tell me 'what to say' in my evening spot. Even Chester Wilmot objects to this, and protests that it is none of Malcolm's business to tell me what to say. But of course, this is not really what Malcolm means. It is simply that Antiseptic Frank is also doing a piece on Ramagen and Bonn, and he wants to be sure that mine matches up with it.

– That's fine, I say. Then let Frank match up with me. I've been to Ramagen and Bonn.

And I give him my notice – to use the language of the servants' hall.

But, of course, they never take any notice of one's notice in the BBC, not even when one is thinking of changing sides in this War.

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THALIA  
OR  
THE SIXTH RIVER

O thou whose face has felt the winter's wind,  
Whose eyes have seen the snow clouds hung in mist,  
And the black elm trees amongst the freezing stars,  
For thee the Spring shall be a harvest time.  
O thou whose only light has been the sun  
Of supreme darkness that thou feedest on,  
For thee the Spring shall be a triple morn.

I WISH I could be certain that I remember that thing correctly, but it is such a long time now, that I cannot even remember whether it is Keats or Shelley. But I like it, and I know what it means.

For thee the Spring shall be a harvest time.

– Yes, but which Spring? I used to ask.

Spring will be a little late this year.

Back at Huy, a cryptic message from Eian waits for me: Can fix. So on a sunny day, I drive back to Paris with the windows of the utility wide open for the first time. Der Frühling webt schön in den Birchen.

Eian has a grin on his face, and American Orders for Langford Lodge in his hand.

You will proceed via military aircraft and/or government motor transportation on or about the 15th March, 1945, from present station to Langford Lodge, to carry out the instructions of the Director, Public Relations Division, SUPREME HEADQUARTERS, AEF, and return to Paris, France, within ten days.

By command of General Eisenhower.

Well, God bless General Eisenhower for giving me such excellent commands – even though he would not let me call on Madame



Blanche! It goes to show what he had in store for me, hidden in the recesses of his great heart. With his talisman in my pocket and a rucksack on my back, I fly the morning after next from Villa Coublay in a half-empty transport plane. First check – will we go at all? Second check – we are not bound direct for Langford Lodge, but for Burtonwood in the north of England; and what will happen to me there?

Plenty happened. But in the end I need not have worried, because at 9.30 on the following morning, I hop another Dakota with four leave-going WAACS, and an hour and a quarter later we are in County Antrim, having drinks together in the little village of Crumlin.

Glory, glory to the sun  
Who spends his being  
Caring not what he shines upon  
Nor for who's seeing!

They are charming WAACS, with that easy frankness of American women, and that interest in other people's business that I find so flattering. Dear WAACS, I toast you, and through you, all American womanhood, and the mighty Nation that nobody in their senses could not possibly fail not to recognise as being truly great (a compliment worthy of Warwick Charleton!). It may not be my parent, but henceforth I shall regard it affectionately as my Uncle Sammy.

With a heart and a half, that fine sunny Spring morning in the bus to Belfast, I sing the patriotic song they taught me in Zabern:

If you don't like your Uncle Sammy,  
Go back from where you came  
To that land across the sea  
(Wherever it may be),  
But don't bring the old flag to shame.

If you don't like the stars in Old Glory,  
If you don't like the Red, White and Blue,  
Don't be like the cur in the story,  
Don't bite the hand that's feeding...  
(My country 'tis of thee)  
Don't bite the hand THAT'S FEEDING YEW!

\* \* \*

The Belfast Registrar is unable to do anything for me without a residence qualification. If I am in a hurry, and must be married in Ulster for technical reasons, it should be in a Church by special licence. There should be no difficulty if we are both of the same religion.

How foolish we are to speak of the dour, unfriendly north, when the most entertaining humorists I know are nearly all Scots, and there are few cities with a warmer heart than Belfast! The greetings in the pubs – the hearty handshakes – the growing crowd of friends and advisers that accompanies me from place to place, as I seek out practical suggestions in answer to my problems!

Danny Wherry, that eminent hotelier and student of the drama, knows of a broadminded Presbyterian cleric in Dungannon. Presbyterian! Was it for this, that I sat for years in the Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church with nothing to read but the Ten Commandments painted on the wall, and nothing to smell but the dust of hymn books and the heavy, sickly scent of an aged Elder in the pew in front? Was it for this that Betty had a Scottish grandmother who used to bring her to hear Mr Stewart of Rathgar? Over the telephone to Dungannon, the Rev Stanley Thompson expresses his willingness to perform the ceremony, notwithstanding the fact that one of the parties has a blot on his copy-book.

Last of all, since I may not enter my home dressed in an unneutral uniform, I am fitted out by Jerry Morrissy in a local variety theatre with a superfine gent's suiting. He is an impressive figure of a man, and I would like to think that his clothes might be a little large for me around the waist. But they seem to fit with style and distinction. And so, waved on by the wassails of my pot companions, I board the train, and proceed by sylvan Portadown, by Dundalk of the Red Branch, through Drogheda the fair, past the Lido of Skerries, amidst the green purlieus of Malahide, across the points of the City of Dublin Joint Railway, and into the elaborate marble halls of Amiens Street Railway Station.

On the way I renew my severed acquaintance with my home, by reading all the local papers I can find. And what a pleasure it is to discover that everything is proceeding just as I left it!

The Students' Discussion Circle of the Insurance Institute has debated a motion: That the love of Luxury has undermined Civilisation. In Derry, a Short Pants Union has been formed to abolish stupid conventions in dress and behaviour. Mr Austin Clarke advocates a five-year plan to get away from comic dialect, which he

regards as a form of snobbery. The Bishop of Clogher and a Mrs Tyner have arrived in Dublin from Clones.

In sentencing a Mr Gough to six years' penal servitude for some offence, the District Justice remarked that Gough's behaviour has shocked the world. The prisoner remained outwardly imperturbable with his hands in his pockets.

In the legislature, one or two jarring notes are struck. Senator G. Sweetman says that he wishes to withdraw a statement he had made in connection with a certain turf contract. He has now made enquiries and has found that he has been misinformed. In the Dail, Mr Sean T. O'Kelly points out that if Mr Lemass had had an opportunity of considering his reference to the Bishop of Clonfert more carefully he was sure he would have used different words. It was not always easy to select the right words in the heat of a debate.

But perhaps most nostalgic of all is to revisit the scenes of my first profession in the lengthy reports of the case of *The State versus Shribman and Samuels*.

Michael Moylan, cross examined by John A. Costello, sc (with him D. Bell) for Shribman.

Costello: What was the necessity of Shribman going to Belfast?

Moylan: He got well paid for it. He was to introduce me to the sailor who was to bring the watches to Liverpool.

Costello then asked Moylan had he not been obliged by Shribman on one occasion when he had been in Belfast? Had he not a young woman with him and was looking for a drink?

Moylan replied that he could always get a drink in Belfast. He had, however, had a drink on one occasion in Shribman's rooms with Shribman and two young ladies, but that took place afterwards.

Costello: In what room did this take place?

Moylan: In all the rooms – the living-room, the bedroom, the bathroom. He was in the one room and I was in the other.

Costello: That is very interesting.

Moylan: You are making it interesting. (Laughter.)

Costello: Was the sailor in the bathroom?

Moylan: Oh, there was no sailor. It was too good for him. (Laughter.)

And so on. How good to get back to it all again!

So now before me rolls the grey stream of the Water of Eblana, my Mother Liffey. Like the Spring coming up after the long frosts –

like the sunburst of Cuchulain breaking through the clouds that hang over Lugnaquilla – like the peace of God that is promised after the storms of Armageddon – comes the triple morn. It is not often in this life that one encounters a wholly perfect experience, but I know now as I stand here on this bridge looking up the wide and gracious street, drinking great gulps of the soft Irish air – I know for certain sure that such an experience is mine. Nothing can cheat me now. To the Lord of Hosts who has buffeted me and blest me, I owe my thanks for a damn good break.

From Huy to the Garden of the Hesperides. From the Pyramids of Cheops to the Pillar of the One-handed Adulterer. From the Hippodrome of Philadelphia to the Gaiety Theatre, South King Street. (And the Stage Door of the last was the hardest barrier to pass, it being after nine-thirty, and Harry O'Neill being on guard!)

On my way I had met and talked with Mr Blowhard and Mr Timbertongue, Mr Technical Troubles and Mr Good Contacts, Mr Tell U. Tomorrow and Captain Shady-Bagman, Mr Bland and Mr Bluff, Mr Lovesong and Mr Kickswingers, Giant Blackberet and the Ogre Bloodandguts, the Brahmin Slighty Urdu and his House-fag Raite Impression, Barren Bullshit and Count Yourself-Lucky, Sir Objective Integrity and Sir Frankly Antiseptic, Lady Suspicious and Dr Definitely Doubtful, Father Filcher and the Brothers Bountiful, Mr Bluepencil Priggy and Mr Broadbum Iscariot, Lord Frippery Foragecap and His Holiness the Pope.

And now, on the bridge, the soft handshake and the friendly, plump, damp face of Michael Scott.

– Glad to see you. Have you been away? Oh, but of course you have.

That is one of the things I love about my native city. Nobody is quite certain and cares less whether you have been away or not, and every conversation can be taken up precisely where it was left off twelve months previously. I did not really expect Michael to know that I had been away, and I am deeply flattered to discover that he has his suspicions on the subject. In fact, on second thoughts, he has heard some of my broadcasts.

– Very interesting time you must have had. I sometimes hear you on the wireless.

But my inflation is not for long.

– Tell me, he continues. Did you ever manage to see any of the fighting?

– Oh, you needn't have gone farther than Holyhead, remarks

Your Man, as he sucks at his pipe a few yards farther on – my friend since school days, his greying hair bare to the sky, the frayed cuffs of his sports coat, and the familiar half-cynical smile on his lean Catholic face.

– Slan lath, he says. Welcome back to the Tranquilla Convent. I suppose that absence has made the heart grow fonder for Cathleen ni Houlihan?

The Tranquilla Convent – Ben Howth – Bullock Harbour – Dolphin’s Barn. What magic is in those names to a wanderer returned to Ithaca? What trick of the mind is it that gives them a glamour to my ear, while in another’s they are allergic?

– How are the kids? I ask.

– Fine, he answers. Although I doubt if they’ll speak to you in English. Pity – because I’d like you to hear some of the things they’re being taught by the Nuns.

– The Nuns? You don’t tell me you’ve handed them over to the Nuns?

– I have, he says, with a slightly defiant grin. And they’re getting the works, like all of us.

– Come up to the Gaiety, say I. I want to collect Betty. Then we’ll go into this further.

\* \* \*

– She’s on-stage, I’m afraid, says Hammy Benson. But if you slip round to the back of the Circle you’ll probably be in time to see her getting murdered.

I peer through the glass panel for the first sight of my woman. Then, pushing open the door at the head of the gangway, I slip inside to get a better look. But it does not seem to improve matters. I recognise a well-known figure on the stage clad in Othello’s dressing gown, but this is not the one that I seek. Where can she be?

– Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge had stomach for them all.

– Alas, he is betrayed, and I undone!

– Out, strumpet! Weepst thou for him to my face?

– Oh, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

– Excuse me, I whisper to a member of the public. Can you tell me where the lady is who’s speaking?

– That’s Desdemona, comes the obliging reply. She’s in the bed.

– You mean – somewhere in behind that canopy?

– I think so. At least, that’s where she went some time ago.

- Thanks, I say. I was just wondering.
- Sssh! come several voices.
- Down, strumpet!
- Kill me tomorrow; let me live tonight.
- Excuse me, I say. I think I may as well steal out again.
- But half an hour!
- Being done, there is no pause.

Gently I close the door, and face the rotund form of Hammy Benson.

- I think I'll just step round to the Circle Bar and wait till it's over.

- She's on, isn't she?

- Well, if you can call it 'on'. In behind some curtains with her head down stage.

- You know how it is, says Hammy, with a smile. May I join you in the bar?

- Sure. I only hope she has a book and a cigarette.

\* \* \*

Your Man, still sucking at his pipe beside the counter.

- What's all this about the Nuns? Why aren't you giving the kids the kind of education we had ourselves?

- Those were the bad old days, he answered. You don't suppose John McQuaid would let me keep my job if I allowed my daughters to associate with Protestants?

- I see. So the Blacks are closing in. Does that mean I couldn't get a job myself if I ever want to come home?

- Don't be ridiculous! A West Briton and a Prod! You belong to a lost race. And aren't you the lucky man to have been driven out? I wish to God I could have got away myself.

My friend - envying my excommunication while I long nostalgically for home! The man on the pier covets the fate of the man on the mailboat - and vice versa. The exile from Erin listens ecstatically to the little hell proclaimed by the gentle Angelus. Is it neither Pain nor Rest that we want, but rather the gift of each in its proper course?

- What are you doing, he says, liberating those poor buggers overseas when we have as had a slavery at home?

- If we have, I answer, it's our own choice.

- As if that made it any better.

And then, as if to change the subject:

– Sorry to hear about your Mother.

But he is not changing the subject, and well he knows it. For if he has abandoned his children, he is just as aware of the fact that I have abandoned my Mother. And what is more, I have salved my conscience with the same excuse that I made for my Hegira – that it was forced upon me – that she had once denied me, because I would not conform to certain standards she was accustomed to.

How like my country is my Mother-in-the-flesh! For both of them I have longed, and from both of them I have run away.

Some day, perhaps, I shall be at peace again with both: or if not me, perhaps my children. For the day will come when my countrymen will no longer be servile in their faith – the only servility that is really contemptible – and will readmit the Middle Nation. Meanwhile I must confess I am not greatly upset by the jibe that we who have no part in Catholic Ireland are raceless vagrants. Let my Mother send for me when she is ready. Till then, she will forgive me if I show some concern about not being mistaken for one of the family.

\* \* \*

A patter of applause. The curtain is coming down. Nipping through the pass door, I mount the stone stairs and enter her dressing-room. Presently feet clatter on the steps, and a succession of familiar faces look in.

– Hello, hello. Yes, it's me.

– Bets, comes the voice of Michael calling down the stairs. Do you know who's here?

A smothered gasp and the quickening patter of footsteps.

The door swings back, and the Dark Lady of my unwritten Sonnets is running to my outstretched arms.

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## THE BACK GARDEN OF THE HESPERIDES

IN the far parts of the world towards the going down of the sun there lies a fair verdant isle around which the sea-horses gallop. Bres-Inish a land most noble not accessible to many but far removed from evildoers through the bounty of the Creator.

A pleasure to the eye is that land of plain and swelling mountain-sides where larch and broom crown the slopes and many blossoms both of gold and of crimson droop in the soft air beside the silver streams. Green wolds are there spacious beneath the skies. Nor rain nor snow nor breath of frost nor fire's blast nor sun's heat nor descent of rime may work there any harm. Serene are all those happy fields and winsome woody holts. Fruits fall not there nor blossoms blight but the trees abide forever green as God commanded them.

Splendours of many hues sparkle in the gentle meadows. Joy is known throughout that land and the music of many voices. No rough or harsh sound offends the ear. Unknown is wailing and despair. Unrecognised is sickness and sorrow and death the oaths of angry men the clash of bloody swords on shields. A happy race they are for though they honour failure they love not misery as do the embattled Polacks.

Purity is in that land and a deep piety walks abroad for it is a fair country near to the heart of the Creator dwelling contentedly in its haze. And in its gardens (as Poets tell) infants play together born of sweet virgins whom no vulgar hand hath touched. For the people of that country know naught of the sin and impurity of this life and it is said that a maid can walk alone from Dalraida to Desmond without ever hearing a coarse whistling of the lips or finding aught in her womb that has not entered there with benefit of clergy.

And there is a great City there that is called the Ford of the Hurdles where laughter is perpetual and the wise men sit in the



hostelries drinking the sweet spirits of corn and calling one to another:

Fil dun o thossuch dule  
cen aiss, cen foirbthe n-ure,  
ni frescam de mbeth anguss  
nintaraill int immorbus.

Which being interpreted into the vulgar tongue –

We are from the beginning of Creation  
Without old age,  
Without the consummation of mortality.  
Therefore we expect not frailty,  
And sin must not come amongst us.

Poets are there and doctors of music and bearers of good tidings and teachers of philosophy meeting together for charity and friendship's sake. And to this land came Donnachada flying upon the back of a silver bird his grey beard crusted with the dust of Brabant and his nostrils weary from the scent of slaughter. And Donna-chada was a man bemused but provident in his generation and athirst for love.

Now there lived in that City hard by the shore of the little sea a dark-haired Enchantress. Paler her cheek than the rose fairer her face than the swan upon the wave more sweet the taste of her balsam lips than honey mingled with red wine. And her name was Liliás. And meeting with Donnachada in the place of lights and music she spoke and said:

– Welcome to Baile Atha Cliath O traveller on the wind. Welcome is thy advent. What is thy name and what thy business?

Then Donnachada answered:

– I have been a multitude of shapes and more shall I become after I have made thee my wife.

And taking his harp in his hand he sang the Song that he had learnt in the Valley of the Shadow.

I am a traveller on the wind that blows from the sea.  
I am the bull of seven battles.  
I am a hook that lacerates.  
I am a salt tear in the eye of the sun.  
I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.  
I am the serpent in the garden.  
I am the witness for the defence.  
I am the smile on the face of the Sphinx.

I am the lost son of my mother,  
 And the lost father of my son.  
 I am a shaft hidden in the shadow of a hand.  
 I am the minstrel boy.  
 I am a dog in the blessed manger.  
 I am the waste places of Jerusalem.  
 I am a cat that walks.  
 I am a Bacchus of the mailed Priests.  
 I am Orpheus in search of Eurydice.  
 I am a free fox in a free henroost.  
 I am footsteps on the mountain tops.  
 I am the famous Duke of York.  
 I am the fast-riding dead.  
 I am the cow that jumped over the moon.  
 I am Old Kaspar whose work is nearly done.  
 I am a hiding-place from the wind.  
 And the shadow of a rock in a weary land.  
 I am a few dirty stories.  
 I am a ballad of good counsel.  
 I am a little pig that cried Wee-wee-wee all the way home.  
 I am the unidentified parson who raped the simplest of the Muses.  
 I am the Endwaffe.  
 I am data.  
 I am a page of errata.  
 I am a short tourists' guide to Rome.  
 I am a piece of apple-cake.  
 I am the Unicorn of Zabern.  
 I am Grieg's piano concerto.  
 I am a few words of Urdu.  
 I am the hungry generations.  
 I am the first into Czernowitz.  
 I am the nine rivers of a new creed.  
 I am seed to the sower.  
 I am the watchman on the walls.  
 I am a city that is not forsaken.  
 A mirror am I to you who perceive me.  
 I am Dion that bringeth good tidings.

And when he had finished she took a ball of thread and she cast it over his head. Then he took it in his hand and the thread clave to his flesh and she pulled the cord and drew him to her side and he dwelt there in perfect bliss for many days.

Now in the course of time Donnachada arose and went forth to view the land and to talk with the people of the City of the Plain.

But first he turned to the south to seek and find the grave of his mother. And standing beside it in the fields of Dean's Grange he spoke with her and asked her forgiveness. But what he said to her or she to him is not to be written here nor published abroad. For the words of a child to its parent are secret and a parent's love is beyond reason or understanding when it is so selfless as to forgive ingratitude.

Then went Donnachada amongst the Brehons at the place where justice is given unto all the people. And in the great hall of that place he opened the proceedings with prayer saying:

– Almighty and Eternal Father grant to each one of us your children that we may escape Justice.

Then spake he to his brethren the Brehons and said:

– Happy are ye that dwell in the Fortunate Isle and walk in the byways of peace. Would that I had never left my home to seek misfortune and to be blown hither and thither in the breast of the storm.

But the Brehons answered:

– Nay. We are aweary of our lives and our happiness has turned to sawdust in our mouths. Teach us privily therefore how we may depart from the Land of Youth and come with thee to where we may learn to weep.

And Donnachada said:

– Truly it hath been said that all men are born to be travellers on the highways of the world. For none is content to remain in his own place not even in Tir na nOg.

Others answered and said:

– All that we lack is a chance. Thine is the better fortune for thou hast been granted a chance denied unto us.

– I praise not God, answered Donnachada, for the chances he hath given unto me. Rather do I thank him for the sin of sloth through which I have let most of them slip.

So he passed on and came to the Inn of the Pearl where many voices greeted him saying:

– Come let us listen to the voice of the United Vultures. Hail to the wily picker of the winning side!

And Donnachada was wrath and cursed them saying:

– Better had we striven against each other on both sides as our fathers did before us. For there are none so wily as the Vigliacchi who take neither part and shall lie at last in Limbo tormented by gadflies and wasps.

But Your Man his friend comforted him. And O'Maille also whose face still bore the scars of the Saxons' torture chamber. And Mac Gilla-mor and O'Donnell of Tir-connail two mighty men of the Fianna gave him words of friendship though doubting not that tyranny might triumph these latter days.

But Kavanagh the bard of Oriel spoke and said:

– I am not impressed by this war.

And others seeking to deny Donnachada his heritage mocked him and said:

– Where is thy passport the badge of thine allegiance? Was it not taken from thee when thou journeyed into Egypt? Now thou art a man of no nation as we said thou wert of yore.

And Donnachada answered:

– Be it as you say. I have a City that gave me birth but no nation. For nationhood is a trap set to lure men in pursuit of that which hath no meaning or virtue save in the imagination of the possessed. Behold I say unto you we must not betray our own like Rahab the harlot of Jericho. But for every man of another land who will consent to spit upon his nationhood one of us should gladly deny ours in return. For it is not meet that we should slaughter each other at the bidding of the men of ill-will who are of all nations. Rather should we drive them forth and let them slay each other till we are rid of them.

And Donnachada rose and departed into Tir Eogan. And it was the evening of the Lord's Day and there went with him Liliás the Enchantress and a goodly company bearing fruit and wine and spices and unguents. And they were very merry. But Your Man accompanied them not for he had no talisman to aid him on his way. Therefore Your Man remained in the City of the Hurdle Ford and went not into Ulaid with his friend.

Warmly shone the sun upon Dungannon on the morning when Donnachada and Liliás were wed and there was feasting and merry-making in the streets and in the houses and in the inns. But as they departed out of the Abbey wherein a pious man of God had joined them both together Lo upon a scroll Donnachada read news of battle. For in the other world from whence he had come the hosts of Christendom that very night had broken into the lair of the beast. Then spake Donnachada and said:

– I must depart from this place. For I have tarried too long and am late again as usual.

Now there were in Tir Eogan and Emain Macha many people of

the Sidhe wise people skilled in sorcery and in the reading of the stars. And they said unto Donnachada:

– Thou shalt not surely go from here for that is folly.

But Donnachada answered them saying:

– Why should I remain now that I have accomplished that for which I came?

And the people of the Sidhe spoke and said:

– If thou wilt remain here in Hy Brasail thou shalt know a health without sickness a joy without sorrow a youth without old age a peace without quarrel a freedom without labour a rest without adversity feasting without interruption among nine ranks of angels and of holy folks of heaven in the brightness of the sun in golden chairs in glassy beds in silver stations wherein everyone shall be placed according to his own honour and right and well-doing. Age shall not wither thee and lasting life thou shalt have always. And what came to thee these other nights thou shalt have for all time.

Then answered Donnachada:

– Woe unto me people of the Sidhe for you have shown me that I must leave my love upon my wedding day and journey back into the world from whence I came. For how shall I know joy without the sorrow that gives it meaning? And what good is youth until one is old? Freedom without labour is an honour without glory. And rest is only torment until one is tired out. For this cause must I seek out my silver bird and fly from hence.

But the people replied:

– Beware Donnachada rider on the wind for it is written in the book of fate that if thou alight from that bird and set thy foot upon the level ground of the other world thou shalt surely become an old man withered and blind and in its own time Death itself shall claim thy body.

Then answered Donnachada:

– What else should a man seek at the end of his journey save that which ye promise me? Would that I could stay with the woman of my delight and meet the child that will one day bear my name. But now I know that ye are accursed. For you offer me all things save the crown of life itself. And of that you have no hope yourselves. For behold if your prayers are answered ye are doomed to life everlasting.

And so Donnachada embraced and blessed his beloved and enjoined her to follow him as best she might. And he bade farewell to

the people of the Sidhe. And mounting upon the back of his silver bird he rose into the air and flew off towards the east where reign strife and decay and age creeps on apace until Birth finds its last meaning in Death as is God's will.

That is the end of the story of Donnachada in the Fortunate Isle.

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MELPOMENE  
OR  
THE SEVENTH RIVER

Le Rhin est un burgrave, et c'est un troubadour  
Que le Lignon, et c'est un ruffian que l'Adour.

FROM my glassless bedroom window in the Dreesen Hotel, where the Umbrella Man was sold down the river, the Rhine slips past under the glare of searchlights. For close by is a long bridge of boats that must be brightly lit at night to prevent its destruction by saboteurs.

I have been into the cellars to see if there is a bottle of hock; but they are already empty, having been used to stock every Mess within driving distance during the past fortnight. Indeed, the more permanent contents of the Hotel are now disappearing, and a British Brigadier from SHAEF has distinguished himself this afternoon by driving off with a carload of carpets and choice statuary.

Meanwhile, the advance is being contested mile by mile, and in the *Sunday Graphic* the Reverend Leslie Weatherhead, uttering a Prayer for Today, asks the very pertinent question:

WILL THE GERMANS EVER LEARN?

It must be 'Non-Fraternisation' for a long time to come. We must not let the crusade down. Fair enough. People who are going to be murdered must be taught not to resist, and the question happily shelves the issue as to what the Reverend Weatherhead may have to learn himself. Another gentle Vicar distinguishes himself by sending rat-poison to a prisoner-of-war camp in response to a request for reading matter. And in one of the illustrated papers I am intrigued to see some photographs of what are described as the 'Inhabitants' looting the Rhineland, while Sir Alan P. Herbert roundly denounces those who are not as angry with the enemy as

he is. After all we have been through, he says, we have a right to be angry.

Alas, alas for Hamlyn. Now that her evil geni are doomed, what do I care about guilt? She has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. What does it matter who did it first? The only issue now is, Who does it most?

At Colonel Mac's conference it was evident that a high-level conflict of policy was going on over the issue: Shall we wipe out the Ruhr Pocket first of all – so liquidating the Wehrmacht – or drive straight for Berlin in the hope of getting there before the Russians? I gathered that Eisenhower was the protagonist of the first scheme, to the fury of Montgomery and Patton, who were both alleging that he was lengthening the war by not following the second. On the other hand, the Russians were fighting a war entirely of their own, and did not allow our Air Forces to come within a hundred miles of their front except by special invitation. The only available information about their movements – even on the highest level – came from Luftwaffe Pilots who landed behind our lines, after having been over on the eastern side.

As for German resistance, they were still raising bottom-of-the-barrel Divisions and desperately flinging them into the fight. But in spite of the threats of the Gestapo against collaboration, there was very little sign of an underground movement once any part of Germany was occupied. Indeed, as McDonald said, the conquered people were 'behaving more like sheep than werewolves'. Directions on the German radio, which had previously been to paralyse all facilities, were now changed to orders for complete demolition. If the men in charge have got to die, everybody else has got to die with them. Meanwhile they were building up a National Redoubt for a last stand in the Alps.

Back at the Gangway Press Camp with Laurie Heyhurst, we found everybody packing up – some for Frankfurt, some for Wiesbaden. The two Jewish Correspondents, Levins and Schwab, were getting ready for the most remarkable expedition of all. Schwab's mother had last been heard of in a Concentration Camp, somewhere in Bavaria, and they were going to look for her.

Laurie and I loaded all our available possessions into the utility, and bade our last farewell to Luxemburg. On the frontier bridge at Echternach, a notice warned us that we were entering German territory, and that henceforth we must regard everybody as enemies. There was little enough temptation over the first twenty



miles, for the countryside was a desolation as far as the wreck of Trèves. Then on, up the lovely winding valley of the Moselle.

It was a bright, warm Sunday afternoon, and the population was out taking the air – dozens of old people and young girls walking in pairs, with not a man of military age to be seen anywhere. They stared back at us silently, with cold, expressionless faces. We come as Conquerors.

Coblenz – a heap of bombed and shattered rubbish, with its Imperial statue lying over on its side at the river confluence. Hardly an inhabitant remained, and there was no bridge to carry us across either Rhine or Moselle. We found Military Government established in a Hotel on a hilltop to the south, and browbeat them into giving us dinner. But they could not or would not give us a place to sleep. That was out of the question. So we went on by the only available road to a little town called Boppard, about ten miles upstream, where we were given a room by the Military Police.

There was nothing to eat for breakfast next morning, and we set off at about 8.30, crossed the river by a pontoon bridge, and turned south once again on the far bank, for we had heard that the only bridge this side of Ehrenbreitstein was gone too. At St Goar, we turned up the valley into the interior, travelling with a heavy stream of military traffic by way of Limburg, Weilburg, Wetzlar, Weissen, to the old University town of Marburg, where First Army Press Camp was located.

The feature of the journey was the stream of ex-prisoners and internees tramping back in the opposite direction – those of the more respectable nationalities (such as the French) travelling in lorries decorated with national flags, the others, by the thousand, pulling carts and pushing barrows laden down with possessions.

I shared a room at the Press Camp with a middle-aged Correspondent whom I had not met before and whose name I forget. What I do recollect is his boastful story of how he had terrorised the Postmaster of some neighbouring village into opening his safe, from which he had abstracted all the stamps.

– Of course, I didn't really steal them, he explained, with a surprising lapse into self-justification. He opened it up for me himself.

The more usual target for loot is, of course, cameras – if possible, Leicas – which can usually be obtained by ordering some local Burgomaster to collect them at the Town Hall before a certain hour.

The Ninth Armoured expected to meet the Russians in three days' time, so I arranged to team up with Ted Connolly of

Exchange Telegraph, and to go with him, while Laurie tried to get our decaying utility repaired.

Next morning we set forth in a jeep, driven by a short-tempered youth called Kokaska. In beautiful weather we passed through what once was Kassel, and caught up with V Corps CP at a place called Heiligenstadt. Here we were billeted with some other British Correspondents in a neat little house – ‘Kriegswerkerschaft’ – where as usual everything had been left behind – clothes in the cupboards, family photographs on the walls. The cellar had been turned into an air-raid shelter, with the cradle and a couple of comfortable chairs set out in the safest corner. And as I lay in bed I brooded for a while on the strange things that war brings out in the most ordinary people, with particular reference to a precise, middle-aged companion of Italian days, who was going around smashing crockery with half-maudlin shouts of ‘I hate the Germans!’

Next morning we were soon in the area where the front stretched forward into fingers. Ahead of us lay a spearhead called CCB, and we followed this axis through Arten (where the civilians were being forced to pull down the barricades) and finally reached the forward elements of the Ninth Armoured Division. The advance was slowing down, and there was still no indication of any Russian move in our direction. It looked as if any hope of a meeting on the following night was just another of those stories.

So we turned south, and cut across to the parallel axis of CCA. Uncleared country lay between, and it was clear that ours were the first Allied uniforms to be seen in these parts, because everybody dashed into their houses whenever we turned a corner or approached a village, leaving the streets empty. By the time a few more invaders have passed through they come out to stare: but the first sight of the enemy always sends them scampering. They did not know that it was only me!

We found Ninth Armoured CP dispersed by the roadside – I always get a nostalgic kick out of the HQ of an Armoured Division with its quacking ACVs. Here we learnt that Naumburg had been entered, the only resistance coming from Patton’s Sixth Armoured, who had come in from the south at almost the same time, and would not leave without considerable persuasion. The town had been held by Hungarians who fled on the 11th, and Officer PWs were being closely questioned as to what lay between us and Leipzig.

The name Naumburg stirred my memory, and I puzzled over it that night in Weissensee, where we were billeted with a few other Correspondents in the home of the local policeman. His wife was deeply distressed at being turned out, as she watched us piling into her little nest. Could she take away her potted plant? What about the bedding? But she was soon hustled off by her obsequious little husband, who knew the voice of authority when he heard it.

In the hall hung an illuminated scroll or motto, which read:

Über mein Heim Herr breite die Hände  
Leidvolle Tage segnend Du wende  
Führe mein Tageswerk, und wenn es vollbracht  
Bleibe mein Schutz auch in dunklen Nacht.

Well, the good Lord may have protected his home from bomb and blast, but as I observed it now in our possession, and listened to our drivers holding their evening concert in the upper back return and punctuating their melodies by flinging bottles out of the unopened window, I doubted if the Lord had done much more for the policeman and his wife, that dark night.

This is the Germany that I know so well – the homely Germany that I have always found so hard to reconcile with the other things that I am told – the neat, sentimental Germany that is so unaccountably hated by the rest of the world, and which cannot make out why! Is it probably because they have that fatal quality that makes them good soldiers – a capacity that has resulted in a series of wars being fought in other peoples' countries instead of in their own? The Germans have fought no more wars during the past hundred years than anybody else, but they have always managed to hold them on other peoples' property – an intensely unpopular practice.

What a pity that the incompetence of others should have tempted them with the *ignis fatuus* of imagining themselves the Herrenvolk. It must have seemed so easy. If only they had lost the last war on the battlefield, instead of being starved into collapse, they would probably have known better than to try so soon again. If only they could have managed to lose this one without first scaring the pants off everybody else, they would not be where they are now. For that is the truly unforgivable thing that they have done – they so nearly won! And now, tonight's comment from the cedar-bound book:

Sing, O barren ones  
That thou didst not bear:

Break forth into singing, and cry aloud  
That thou didst not travail with child:  
For more are the children of the desolate  
Than the children of the married wife.

Maybe it is not only the little policeman and his married wife who should ask for shelter from the Evil that has come amongst us.

We have sold ourselves for nothing; but shall we be redeemed without money? I have praised the Lord for the miracle of Life. Was it for this that we were born – to have to praise Him in the end for Death?

\* \* \*

I remember now where I used to read of Naumburg. It was mentioned in those letters written by Anneliese Wendler – the letters that were taken from me long ago by some Travel Censor.

...I am afraid I still cannot send you my photograph. I went specially to Naumburg yesterday but they were not ready.

I have forgotten about Eckartsberga for a long time, yet here it is on the maps, only a few miles from where I am. Christ, what an odd experience to find it here – so close to the terminus of our advance – like some prophecy fulfilled, in spite of oneself.

It is fun sometimes to pretend that one believes in fortune-telling, but although there are certain things that one can know about one's own future, I do not believe that any Wog can read my hand. Not that he said anything about Eckartsberga. It was about depths and summits – about where it will be white again. And then something about a dove!

Well, it is spring now, and there is no whiteness left. Apart from a few minor hills, there are no summits in Thuringia. And as for any birds, there are even fewer signs of any of them descending on me from Heaven than on the day when I baptised myself in the Jordan!

It is Friday, the thirteenth – a day that I shall remember. For it is the day that Ted Connolly, Kokaska and myself reached the river at Weissenfels, and saw an old-time battle going on once again, with artillery properly unlimbered and dug in, and the Wehrmacht putting up its last stand before Germany is cut in half. At 69th Divisional CP we found them in just as great a fog about the probable movements of the Russians as everybody else was. But

here one of the IOs did have something that shows the war is over in these parts.

The original orders had been to continue advancing as far as the Elbe, and to establish bridgeheads there. But now these orders have been changed at some astronomical level. They are only to go as far as the Mulde, and there swing around, face north, and halt!

No word about meeting the Russians! We are just to stop and go no farther. That's a queer kind of war, and an indication that politics have definitely caught up with the First Army. And it starts me thinking about my old friends of the Seventh Army, breasting their way southwards towards the National Redoubt. Soon the Seventh will be the only army that is still on the move. Maybe that's where I ought to be, instead of sitting by the Mulde, waiting for Russians? Maybe that is where the Gotterdammerung is going to be staged, and not in Berlin at all?

However, before I make any move in a new direction, I had better see what is to be found in Eckartsberga.



## THE HARVEST OF DRAGONS' TEETH

I REMEMBER some of the place-names in her letters – Kolleda – Apolda. And what was the name of that village to which she said she was going for Christmas? And I remember a picture post-card that showed that tower on top of the hill. Now it doesn't matter so much that they have taken it from me, because I can see the tower itself as I come up through the pine trees and wind down the slope towards the village in the valley.

How pompous of them to have confiscated her letters! And how hairy I was not to have told them about my rough English translations! These are the woods in which they picnicked together.

...I had begun to think that you, unfaithful man, had forgotten Eckartsberga.

I had forgotten Eckartsberga myself – the snapshots taken on these hillsides, and the face of that young country girl on the photograph taken in Naumburg. 'Not very pretty, she called it, but maybe it has grown in beauty in my imagination. To me it will always be the face that I saw again on the statue just inside the door of St Peter's. I don't know why I should be searching for this woman, because I doubt that I shall ever find her. And even if I do, what will I have to say to her?

– Hello, Anneliese. I'm sorry that I can't give you back your letters, because I was foolish enough to let them be taken from me. And I'm sorry about your Georg, and hope that he's come to no harm. But I really don't know anything about him either. In fact I have come to the conclusion that I don't know anything about anything – least of all what it is that I have to say to you!

An unprofitable conversation with an unknown young woman. It is scarcely worth travelling all this distance to say that!

Or maybe, she has something to say to me?

\* \* \*

Eckartsberga lies in scattered woodland country in the neck of a small valley. There is nothing remarkable about the scenery – a very ordinary Thuringian pastoral landscape. A main road runs through the town from east to west, but the one by which I am approaching is a by-road curving through the forest from the north.

Children playing in the streets stare at me curiously as I drive in; and as they do not run away, I gather that I am not the first invader to enter the place. This is soon confirmed when a truck rumbles in from the west and stops outside the municipal building. An American Officer dismounts and goes inside.

Gartenstrasse is a long meandering road on the side of the hill, lined with cottages and unpretentious houses. In the windows, I can see faces peering out at me as I park the utility and walk by.

Let me see, now. Is it 120 or 140? Or even 160? The number is only on one of the typewritten translations that I have, and even that has been typed over and corrected. At No. 120 an old man and his daughter receive me obsequiously. Yes, her name is Anneliese, but it is not Wendler. They know of nobody of that name in Eckartsberga. There have been many girls working in the town – yes, many of them. They come and go, and now most of them have gone to Weimar.

Farther along the street the people are more stupid or more sullen, none will tell me anything. And then I realise the hopeless nature of my task. I am not a friendly visitor coming to make a personal call on a young girl. I am a representative of a new Gestapo, coming to start another round-up. Everywhere I go, I meet with the same fear and averted eyes. They know nothing, and even if they did, they would not tell me. Probably gone to Weimar. Anneliese is not to be found in Eckartsberga – at any rate, not by one in my position.

Suddenly I feel shy and embarrassed at my role of perambulating Ogre, and I turn back quickly to where I have parked my utility. Beside it is standing a fair-haired boy of ten, with brown shorts and a fancy shirt open at the neck. He is obviously interested in motor cars, and there is something familiar about the shape of his head, the humorous, turned-up nose, the scarred and rather grimy knees. But when he turns to look at me, there is no sign of recognition in his eyes.

I am always imagining that I see my son in these blond German kids, and perhaps his expression is not so wrong, for my son does not know me very well, either.

– Wie gehts, mein junge?

He does not answer, but stands there, staring back at me. The street is empty except for the two of us, but I know that from behind curtains many eyes are watching.

– Dir gefällt er auch? Der Wagen sieht ganz fesch.

Still there is no answer; I am being snubbed. I am face to face with one of the 'little gangsters' who would have defended Aachen if he had been there, and the question is not whether I am going to fraternise with him at the risk of sixty-five dollars, but whether he is going to speak to me! I feel in my pocket, and produce a Hershey bar which I hold out.

– Essen Sie die Schokolade?

His face relaxes for a moment as he looks at it. Then after a deep internal struggle, he puts his hands into his pockets and walks away.

\* \* \*

The American Officer was watching from the Municipal Building down the street. As I approached him I could see that he was grinning.

– You met a tough guy? he remarked.

– He's been told something about me, I answered with a wry smile. It happens.

– You ought to have seen the kid we had in the cage last week. He went for a Sherman Tank with a Panzerfaust, but the thing was too big for him to aim properly, and when he missed the tank he started to cry. Cried all the way to the cage, and then tried to prevent them from doing up his shoulder. It had been badly bruised by the recoil.

– Oh Christ! I exclaimed. Do we have to have this?

– Something's eating you, bud?

– Yes, something's eating me.

For a while he considered the empty street.

– Well, I guess it's a funny war. Looking for anything special here?

– Yes, I was looking for a girl.

– So are we. Got a description here. 'Large dangling breasts and a mole on her left hip.' Do you know, in the two hours after we put out that description in Weimar, the men on the road blocks brought in forty-five women with large dangling breasts, and ten of them had moles on their left hips!



I had to laugh, and we exchanged cigarettes.

– Yes, it's a funny war, he went on. Been down that other road over there?

– No. I've been working up in the First Army area.

– I guess you don't know much about this war until you've been down that way. In fact you might find that girl you were looking for if you went along. Like to try?

– I don't mind if I do, I said. There's nothing more here.

– Then follow me. I'll put you on your way.

Getting into my utility, I followed his truck through the rolling agricultural land, dotted with little woods, brooding as I drove on the spectacle of the prodigal father, denied by his son – a far more poignant situation than the reverse. Yet, I suppose it is a common enough phenomenon.

Your children are not your children,  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
You may give them your love, but not your thoughts.  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies, but not their souls.  
Their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow.  
Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

Alas, alas for Hamlyn. These guns are the pipes that we have conjured up to rid Europe of its rats. But where are they piping the children?

The truck stopped, and I drew up alongside. By the side of the road, an SP gun was parked, and the crew was preparing to have a bite of lunch, apparently oblivious of the fact that a semicircle of urchins was sitting on the ground staring at them and their weapon, in the way that urchins do all over the world.

– See there, my new friend said, with a nod of his head. No fraternisation.

The GIs started to chew, talking morosely to each other, and paying no attention to the onlookers.

– Where is this place I am going to? I asked.

– Turn up that hill to the north of the next town, and drive on till you see a railway line and a big concrete road running through the pine woods. Follow that as far as you can, and you'll find all you want to know.

– Thanks very much, I said. I'll do what you say.

As he started up his engine, he pointed again at the SP gun.

– You see. No fraternisation.

The GIs were still chewing and talking gloomily amongst themselves. The circle of onlookers was still as silent and as distant as ever. But as I passed them by, I noticed the entire semicircle of small jaws was quietly chewing too.

\* \* \*

As I drove through the woods the trickle of Displaced Persons grew in volume, until presently there was a continual stream of them – filthy, emaciated creatures, many of them in those disgusting striped pyjamas with which the SS clothe their internees. The concrete road and the railway track were easy to find; and after passing a bombed-out factory, I was confronted by a great gate in a barbed wire fence surmounted by a black flag. An American sentry kept watch over a pile of rifles, machine guns and other weapons that had been collected by the side of the road, and DPs were milling around on both sides of the fence.

– Say, what’s this place? I asked the sentry.

As usual he didn’t know, except that it was some Concentration Camp overrun by Patton’s boys, and that the DPs were still hunting and lynching the ss guards in the woods. Indeed if I cared to look in any of the ditches...

– Would you like to see over the camp? an English voice enquired at my elbow.

I turned around and faced two internees, dressed in ragged clothes and holding bundles wrapped in sacking.

– Thanks, I said. Are you English?

– Channel Islanders, replied the first.

He introduced himself as James Quick and his friend as Emile Dubois.

– Come with us and we’ll bring you round by the back. Have you got a strong stomach?

Over the main gate I read a defiant inscription:

RECHT ODER UNRECHT – MEIN VATERLAND.

So there had evidently been doubt in somebody’s mind about the rightness or wrongness of this place! On an inner gate a shorter and even more cynical inscription appeared:

JEDEM DAS SEINEM

or in a free translation, ‘To Each what is coming to him.’

I suspected what was coming to me and steeled myself for another recital of uncorroborated horrors. But my guides this time were not so talkative. They were bitter, it is true, on the subject of turnip soup and one loaf of bread a day between five, but strangely enough, they didn't complain so vigorously about their own lot. They had been in a part of the camp that wasn't too bad, they said, because they were still fit to work. But wait until I saw the fate of those who weren't. At which Dubois stripped the corner of a tarpaulin from a lorry that was standing in the yard, and disclosed the interior piled high with emaciated yellow naked corpses.

I used to remark that I had not seen many dead in this war; graves by the hundred, and impersonal lumps under covers; but the unsheeted dead have been limited to those waxlike figures in the houses of Ortona and a few more here and there by the roadside. This was a sight in full measure, and I did not brood on it for long.

– Cover it up, I said, and tell me how it happened.

– It happened all the time, Dubois answered. This is just a day or two's collection. Come and see inside.

I had laughed off that camp in Alsace, and what they said of it, but I could not laugh this one off, for here the most patent efforts had been made to conceal the evidence. In the cellar beneath the crematorium, somebody had tried to whitewash the walls, but the bloodstains still showed up beneath the new colour. They had taken the hooks out of the walls above each gory splash and had attempted to fill in the holes with plaster. But the patches remained, and one great hook had been restored – or left – evidently for some last minute hanging. The stools were still there, and a dented and bloody bludgeon; a couple of the little short narrow nooses, and what to me was probably the most horrible of all – a white coat like that of a hospital attendant, half washed of the blood that had once engrimed it.

– They beat us and hanged us here, said Quick.

Alsace was small time stuff compared to this place. Instead of one furnace there were half a dozen, and in some the charred bones still lay.

– Don't mind those, said my guide. They were put there by some of the prisoners to dress the place up a bit.

– That seems scarcely necessary, I answered, turning away my head.

– That’s what I thought. But some people can’t let bad alone. They’ve got to fix it up for the photographers.

But if the prisoners were being businesslike in their preparations, it was nothing to the neat organisation of the jailers. For here again I was not so much revolted by the fact of death – which must happen sooner or later—as by a hearty painting of a flaming furnace on the end wall of the crematorium, above an inscription that looked like a religious motto or Christmas greeting. But it did not say ‘God Bless our Home’. It translated as follows:

Not a horrible and distasteful warmth will feed upon my corpse, but a clean fire will digest it. I always loved warmth and light, therefore burn and do not bury me.

This was the jolly sentiment that was put into the mouths of the wretches who had not died a natural death, but had been beaten to death or hanged in the cellar down below.

– It’s quite pretty here in the summer, said Quick, as we walked through the camp. They have a little concrete Aquarium just outside the wire, and the trees look nice, don’t they? We even had a makeshift band that used to play in the evenings over by the gate. It really wasn’t so bad – so long as you could work.

– And if you couldn’t?

– If you couldn’t work, or if you got in bad with them, they sent you down to the lower part of the camp.

– And what happened there?

– Would you like to come and see for yourself?

We walked through the camp. Sub-human specimens tottered around, most of them dressed in those dreadful striped pyjamas, but all in a state of indescribable filth. Some were squatting over the open drains with their pants down.

– Dysentery is the least serious complaint we have here, explained Dubois. It only begins with that.

– But where did such people come from? I asked.

– Oh, they were just ordinary people. Most of them were quite well-off before they fell foul of the Party. For instance, that one there was a throat specialist in Vienna, and the one behind him was once the Mayor of Prague, they say.

– Tell me, I said, feeling madly around for an explanation. This state of affairs isn’t normal, of course. This congestion and starvation is a result of the end of the war? – the breakdown of life generally in Germany?

– To some extent, maybe. But it isn't much worse than usual. They usually kept 70,000 people here, and as soon as your working ability was over, what followed was quite deliberate. It doesn't take you long to get to that state at sixteen hours' work a day; and after you've collapsed physically you're just a useless mouth. The sooner you're dead the better. It's a logical Nazi idea. But surely you knew? Haven't you read their books?

– Yes, I've read their books. But somehow ... Never mind, tell me what happened when the Yanks got near. Why did they leave you alive to talk?

– They did their best, but 70,000 people take a bit of killing, you know, and it isn't everyone will do it. On the 11th they mounted eight machine guns over the gate, and we heard that a killer squad of 500 SS men had been sent from Weimar to exterminate the camp. But the Yanks beat them to it by two hours, and at about four in the afternoon we saw the first tanks coming up. At that, the guards and their dogs ran for the woods, and some of the boys have been hunting them since. I'm afraid they've been beating up the whole countryside.

I didn't ask what happened to the SS men when they were caught. I had seen signs myself, on the way up, and it was a good killing.

– Here's the block we want you to see, said Quick. Don't come in if you don't want to.

I went in. At one end lay a heap of smoking clothes amongst which a few ghouls picked and searched – for what, God only knows. As we entered the long hut the stench hit us in the face, and a queer wailing came to our ears. Along both sides of the shed was tier upon tier of what can only be described as shelves. And lying on these, packed tightly side by side, like knives and forks in a drawer, were living creatures – some of them stirring, some of them stiff and silent, but all of them skeletons, with the skin drawn tight over their bones, with heads bulging and misshapen from emaciation, with burning eyes and sagging jaws. And as we came in, those with the strength to do so turned their heads and gazed at us; and from their lips came that thin, unearthly noise.

Then I realised what it was. It was meant to be cheering. They were cheering the uniform that I wore.

We walked the length of the shed – and then through another

one. From the shelves feeble arms rose and waved, like twigs in a breeze. Most of them were branded with numbers.

– Hoch – Hoch – Viva – Viva!

\* \* \*

Recht oder unrecht – mein Vaterland.

Through the gates, under this monstrous sentiment, the American Red Cross orderlies were hurrying in. As I bade farewell to my two guides, somebody bent over the pile of captured weapons on the sidewalk and picked out a Luger.

– How about a souvenir? he said.

The American sentry casually looked the other way. From the woods around us came a distant shot. Staring at the gateway and at the white helmets of the orderlies, I took the gun and shoved it under my coat.

Recht oder unrecht.

This is no fortuitous by-product of the chaos of war. This is no passing cruelty or wanton act of destruction. This is deliberate. This is the intentional flower of a Race Theory. This is what logic divorced from conscience can bring men to. This is the wilful dehumanisation of the species, and an offence against man himself.

Right or wrong – my Fatherland.

Very well. Have it that way if you insist. Your Fatherland is wrong, therefore your Fatherland must be destroyed. That is logic too. Put it to the test, and if you lose – you die.

Unconditional surrender is the only answer.

Oh, I have tried so long to fight against this conclusion, but now – at the thirteenth stroke of a crazy clock – all previous pronouncements become suspect too. Everything else falls into place, and acquires a new meaning in the hideous light of Buchenwald. The words of Winston Burdett – the million shoes of Lublin – that camp in Alsace that I laughed at, because I did not want to believe such things of men – because they were not true of men as I had known them.

Cruelty I have known, and sadism, and the rascalities of red-hot anger. But mass dehumanisation as a matter of planned policy has not so far come my way.

Worse for me is the fact that we have been made fools of. Appeals to reason were just a cover-up for this! Our good will has been used as a means to betray us; and that is as great a crime

as the degradation of humanity, for it means that good will is a mistake – that destruction is our only means of preservation.

How did I ever doubt that there is not an Absolute in Good and Evil?

Oh Christ! We are betrayed. I have done my best to keep sane, but there is no answer to this, except bloody murder. We must slay the Oxen of the Sun whatever the Gods may feel about it. We must break the double gates in pieces and fling down the walls, and whoever tries to stop us, be he guilty or innocent, must be swept aside. And if nothing remains but the stench of evil in ourselves, that cannot be helped!

How horrible that this should be the place that I have been seeking all these years. I thought that it was Eckartsberga, but it seems that it was Buchenwald. And now, on this terrible, this unforgettable day I have found it.

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## THE HIGH COURT ON THE BROCKEN

*A potholed road in the Harz Mountains lined with smouldering farm-houses. It is packed with ghouls and poltergeists, all on the march towards the north-east. Amongst the ruins, jackals prowl – turning over the wreckage with their snouts and howling over the dead meat. In the fætid air a covey of witches, young and old, ride by on glowing curves of red-hot tracer, shrieking as they go.*

## THE WITCHES

Die Hexen zu dem Brocken ziehn  
 Die Stoppel ist gelb, die Saat ist grun  
 Dort Sammelt sich der grosse Hauf  
 Herr Urian sitz oben auf.

*Along the mined verges of the road facetious road-signs wave their impotent arms and point in all directions.*

ACHTUNG AUF DEM ZUG

IT SLOWS OUR BLITZ TO ARRIVE IN BITS

IÇI COMMENCE LE PAYS DE LA LIBERTÉ

ALWAYS BEHAVE AS IF MUSSOLINI WAS WATCHING YOU  
 WHO'S YOUR HITCH HIKER?

KEEP OFF THE SOFT SHOULDERS.

*By the roadside Faustus works blasphemously at the changing of a tyre. On the roof of his Futility sits a familiar spirit – Procktophantasmist, a persistent manifestation with the face of his former wife's Solicitor. With one hand he files a rasping affidavit, and with the other he distributes rolls of perforated Sub Pænas. Faustus gazes up at the sky.*

## FAUSTUS

The mountains are struck with magic. Amongst the birch trees, necromancy stirs.



PROCKTOPHANTASMIST

Verlangst du noch einem Besenstiele? He who comes into Probate,  
Divorce or Admiralty must come with clean hands.

*Wheezing, he holds his own up for inspection. A chorus of witches  
rides by.*

THE WITCHES

The way is wide, the way is long,  
A crazy road for a crazy throng,  
The forks prick and the broomsticks tear  
The children choke and the mothers swear.

FAUSTUS

[*waving them on*]

On they go, over stone and straw.  
As belch the witches, so farts the law!

*Then, turning to his too-familiar spirit he calls out:*

FAUSTUS

Hey, young fellow, Ich wunschte den allerderbsten Bock.

*Anneliese Wendler approaches, mounted on a he-goat, clad only in  
her long, blonde hair, her eyes shining through the darkness – a  
bright Cambridge blue.*

ANNELIESE

[*singing as she comes*]

Der Puder ist so wilder Roch  
Fur alt und graue Weibchen.  
Drum sitz ich nacht auf meinen Boch  
Und zeig ein derbes Leibchen.

Are you there, my dove? I seem to recognise the jersey.

FAUSTUS

Yes, I am your Georg, and you are my dream – a dream of two  
fair apples. Let me climb up and taste them.

ANNELIESE

[*coily exposing her breasts*]

Der Apfelchen begehrt ihr sehr  
Und schon vom Paradiese her  
Von Freunden fuhl' ich mich bewegt  
Dass auch mein Garten solche tragt.

PROCKTOPHANTASMIST

I, too, had a most peculiar dream. I dreamt that I was scrubbing the dirt off the tail of an old blue shirt.

FAUSTUS

[*shouting*]

Be off, Jack-o-Lantern! Can't you see that I am busy with my girl friend? This is the Triple Midnight, when journeys end in Lovers' disappointments.

[*he sings*]

Wenn sich zweie lieben sollen  
Braucht man sie nur zu scheiden.

*With a rustle of bat-wings, the apparition on the roof rises in the air, and makes off for the Blocksberg.*

PROCKTOPHANTASMIST

On maturer consideration you will regret the tone of your remarks.

*Ignoring his departure, Faustus starts up the engine, and invites the lady to sit beside him on the front seat.*

FAUSTUS

Where are you leading me up this winding slope? Where are we going in this unattractive company?

ANNELIESE

To the Court of the Lord Urian. This is the night of General Gaol Delivery.

FAUSTUS

And I am an essential witness. Make way, archimandrites, for an essential witness!

*The machine boils its way slowly up the hill, bumping rhythmically on its tyreless rim. At the summit, Procktophantasmist is already on the Bench, hearing the case of the State versus Shribman and anor. A man called Moylan is in the witness box.*

COSTELLO SC

[*with him, D BELL*]

Would it surprise you to know that invoices can be produced showing that both young ladies were in the bathroom with the sailor? I am pressing the question.

MOYLAN

It is an embarrassing question. A Mrs Tyner and I were expelled from the Short-Pants Union by Mr Austin Clarke for advocating comic dialect.

LAVERY SC

[for the Gilbert Watch Company]

Who stole the Monstrance of Monte Cassino?

MOYLAN

Anything that was done was done solely so that other wicked men would be warned by the example.

*The Voice of Experience from Cairo renders 'Lead me, Gentle Shepherd, lead me'. G. Talbot reports on the distribution of the 'Team' to Arthur Barker.*

THE JUDGE

I have had enough of this case. Take them away!

MR REGISTRAR PHILPOT

Assume a mobile role!

CHORUS

Sentence first and trial afterwards! Shribman's behaviour has shocked the world!

*The prisoners are hustled off to an unknown destination in a jeep with a cover authorised by General Patton, and under safe conducts handed out by Mr Allardyce-Constantinescu. Private Bailey serves black tea with brown thumbs. A Canadian party under Captain Spike (Mervyn) Sprung regroups in a new area. As the Jury is sworn for the next case, the Band of the Royal Artillery renders the popular number, 'Bugger my Comrades', in the town square of Lanciano. The jury consists of a round dozen of the oldest and hairiest Shibboleths, reading from bottom to top, as follows:*

Peace with Honour  
Liberty-not-Licence  
Smrt Fascismu  
Sieg oder Siberien  
Up the Rebels  
Lend to Defend  
Deutschland Erwache  
On les Aura

The Socialist Fatherland  
We come as Conquerors  
Menace of World Jewry  
and If-you-don't-like-it-here-Why-don't-you-go-back-where-you-  
came-from?

\* \* \*

*On the adjoining summit, in the Collegiate Sanctuary of St Augustine-the-hammer-of-Pelagius, the Right Reverend Lord Abbot of Trasi-mene (Dr Redfern) opens the service with the Processional, during the singing of which the Kinsmen of the Fourth Order and the Partisans of Alamein file into the Choir and take their seats to left and right respectively.*

THE PROCESSIONAL

Halok yelek ubakoh  
Nose meshek-hazzara  
Bo yabo' berinnah  
Nose 'alummothaw. . . .

*This is followed by the Canticle:*

Onus Deserti Maris  
Sic turbines ab Africo veniunt  
De deserto venit  
De terra horribili . . . .

*in which the burden of Original Sin is described. Then follows the reading of the lesson of the day:*

Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof. The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish, because they have broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate. . . .

\* \* \*

THE REGISTRAR

General Gaol Delivery. The Case of Schicklegruber and anor.

THE JUDGE

What is the nature of this charge?

THE REGISTRAR

Insulting behaviour and language calculated to provoke a breach of the peace.

PRINCE YURKA GALITZINE ATT. GEN.

[*prosecuting*]

This is a rather painful case, melud, arising out of the disorderly conduct of two middle-aged men in a public place. The first criminal, who is known by several aliases, is an ex-paperhanger and agent provocateur from Central Europe. The second criminal is a member of the parasitic Anglo-American underworld of no fixed business or occupation.

THE JUDGE

Any previous convictions?

GALITZINE

The first criminal has already undergone a term of imprisonment for riotous behaviour in a Munich beer hall. The second criminal, on his own confession, has created a previous disturbance in the Tarts Promenade of the old Empire Theatre, Leicester Square.

THE JUDGE

I have encountered these types before. But can any of this be regarded as evidence in the present case?

GALITZINE

Both criminals ask that it be taken into consideration when passing sentence.

CHORUS

Sentence first and trial afterwards.

2ND ACCUSED

Just a ssschoolboy prank. [*He holds up two fingers.*]

THE JUDGE

Kindly refrain from making these indecent gestures. They will not improve your position. What are the words complained of?

GALITZINE

According to the depositions, the first criminal consistently referred to the second as 'WC' and as a Nonentity. While the second criminal referred to the first as a 'bloodthirsty gutter-snipe'. Blows were exchanged, and eventually a considerable number of the bystanders were forcibly involved.

THE JUDGE

Is there any evidence of provocation on either side?

GALITZINE

Yes, melud. The first criminal assumed a threatening attitude from the start – continually screaming that his patience was exhausted. While the second criminal removed his coat and offered to fight the first on the beaches and in the towns and in the hills.

THE JUDGE

What a lamentable comment on the upbringing and background of this type of public nuisance. What was the actual cause of the trouble?

GALITZINE

It has been suggested, melud, that the real source of the trouble was a difference of opinion between two totally different characters, for whom the present criminals were merely the stalking horses. One of these is a market and currency manipulator from New York, and the other is an unfrocked Divinity student from the Caucasus. It seems that there was a private arrangement between the House Painter and the Divinity Student to burgle the premises of a certain Polish Receiver of stolen goods. Meanwhile the American Spiv, not wishing to get mixed up in any trouble himself, provided the Englishman with lethal weapons to use on the others.

THE JUDGE

Should not all these other characters be added to the names in the Indictment?

THE JURY

Guilty! Guilty! Throw them all in the dock.

LUMBY KC

[*for the Accused*]

Melud, I object.

THE JURY

Throw him in the dock, too!

THE JUDGE

One moment, gentlemen, please. To what do you object, Mr Lumby?

LUMBY

I object, melud, to the entire conduct of this case. And in particular

to the fact that there is no known law under which these Prisoners can be convicted by this Court.

THE JUDGE

Now, Mr Lumby, this is not the time for frivolous objections. Law was made for man and not vice versa. If there is no existing law then we can invent one.

THE JURY

Guilty! Guilty! Sentence first and trial afterwards.

LUMBY

What is more, melud, I object to the fact that the Jury are already shouting 'Guilty'.

THE JUDGE

But surely, Mr Lumby – correct me if I am wrong – this is a Criminal Court, is it not?

LUMBY

Yes, melud, but . . .

THE JUDGE

And surely 'Guilty' is not an unreasonable expression to apply to criminals?

LUMBY

But, melud, how do we know that they are criminals?

THE JUDGE

They are described as criminals in all the documents. It is common knowledge that this is a criminal trial. If they are not criminals, what are they doing in the dock and what is the purpose of this Court? [*Applause.*]

LUMBY

The purpose of this Court is to ascertain . . .

THE JUDGE

The purpose of this Court is to see that Justice is done. And I hope, Mr Lumby, that you are not going to obstruct that estimable purpose by any objections calculated to give countenance to crime. [*Applause.*] Place the additional accused in the dock.

*Amid scenes of enthusiasm, several new parties are added. The pleadings, depositions, affidavits and the essential evidence are amended accordingly.*

\* \* \*

*In the Sanctuary the first part of the Antiphon is sung:*

THE PARTISANS

In the name of the most Merciful, the Compassionate,  
In the name of the King of Judgment,  
We alone do Thee worship,  
Of Thee alone do we ask forgiveness.  
Guide us in the pathway that is straight  
The path of those to whom Thy love is great  
Not those whose only heritage is hate  
Or those who deviate.

THE KINSMEN

From the sanctuary of non-existence  
Serenely we see the heartache and the care.  
We are the hollowness of the vessel  
And the emptiness of the door.  
For us, the skies are open wide,  
And the apprentices of poverty  
Can see the firmament.

THE PARTISANS

Grant us a cause in which to serve  
A sturdy enemy to smite,  
A laurel or a monument  
For him that's wrong and him that's right.

THE KINSMEN

We carry our diamonds in our bosom  
And so we are not robbed.  
We do not know  
And so we know not ignorance.  
We do not boast  
And so we are esteemed.  
We do not dispute  
And so we are not exhausted.  
We do not stand on tip-toe  
And so we are not easily upset.  
We do not hold ourselves in high esteem  
And so we may praise that which is our own.  
We are arrogant in our humility  
Unafraid in our prudence  
And unconquerable in our defencelessness.

\* \* \*



THE JUDGE

What other witnesses have you got, Mr Attorney?

*The dog of Jean de Nivelle is called, but goes away. Major Donald Prater is called, but has not a sausage to add. Dr Desiderio Grunhut is absent in the basement. The Poet Kavanagh is not impressed by this trial. Lallah is at her siesta with a party of Waffle-Asses. Mademoiselle Fifi is engaged in social activities. Lieutenant Bowman is inspecting a pimple in the Forward Areas. The BBC Representative in Cairo regrets that he is a martyr to toothache. Major Guy Mostyn-Owen hasn't been off his feet all day. The Russian Military Mission does not talk to anyone. Captain Warwick Charleton could not possibly fail not to disagree less. Mons Jacques is verry reech and verry drunk. Sir Death-or-Glory Bowles is playing 'Spring will be a little late this year' on a piano in Bari. Captain Howell, Chief Press Censor, 7th U S Army, will not express an opinion until he knows which side of the river we are on. The Dead are called, and sing 'This is our lucky day' led by Sir Lancelot Wade. Faustus is called, and enters the witness box, after presenting his Movement Order to the Usher, T Mockler-Ferriman, who satisfies himself that he has not interfered with the battle. He is vociferously cheered from the jakes of an LCI by a small claue of Jugoslav Female Soldiers with explosive chastity belts.*

LUMBY

Are you the person who burnt all the law books in Casa Calenda?

FAUSTUS

[*embarrassed*]

Oh, not all of them. Only enough to keep out the cold.

LUMBY

I understand that you are a neutral in this war?

FAUSTUS

Technically, yes. But I have always advocated . . .

LUMBY

You have advocated that your country should express its neutrality by taking part as usual on both sides?

FAUSTUS

[*confused*]

In a sense, yes. But it is difficult to explain in a few words the reason for these apparent contradictions.

LUMBY

Is it on that principle that you worked for the BBC in the Middle East by attempting to popularise German radio songs with the Desert Army?

FAUSTUS

Only in one instance. My intention has always been to mitigate the horrors of war as far as the Censors allow me by trying to tell the whole truth. Look at my files! You'll find that I have always avoided horror stories.

LUMBY

Even when they were true?

FAUSTUS

[*upset*]

What do you mean?

LUMBY

You admit, don't you, that such stories are sometimes part of the whole truth? Did you report Buchenwald, for instance?

FAUSTUS

[*mumbling*]

Aren't things bad enough as they are?

LUMBY

Have you asked that of any of the people whom you killed in Sousse?

FAUSTUS

That is an unfair question.

LUMBY

Or in Kaiserslautern? Or up and down the Danube? Or in Civitta Vecchia?

FAUSTUS

That had nothing to do with me. Besides, they started it first.

LUMBY

Assuming they started it first, who did it most?

FAUSTUS

I was just a passenger.

LUMBY

Having been to Buchenwald, I understand that you now believe in collective responsibility?

FAUSTUS

Only to a limited degree. I do not, for instance, consider myself responsible for the aggressive nationalism, isolationism, and irredentism of my own government.

LUMBY

In fact, you only apply the principle to other peoples?

FAUSTUS

If by that you mean the Germans. It can't be denied that certain races have certain characteristics.

LUMBY

Let us examine this further. What was the nationality of the laziest and most incompetent person you met in the course of your travels?

FAUSTUS

An American.

LUMBY

Who was the best company?

FAUSTUS

A Welshman.

LUMBY

Who were the most courageous?

FAUSTUS

Two Jews.

LUMBY

Who made the best jokes?

FAUSTUS

A Scot.

LUMBY

Who was the rudest to women?

FAUSTUS

A Frenchman.

LUMBY

Who was the most accomplished crook?

FAUSTUS

An Etonian.

LUMBY

Who was the most urbane and cosmopolitan?

FAUSTUS

An Australian.

LUMBY

Who was the most sentimental?

FAUSTUS

A German.

LUMBY

Who was the most realistic?

FAUSTUS

No one could ever determine his nationality. That was one of the most realistic things about him.

LUMBY

What conclusions can you draw from this catalogue?

FAUSTUS

That there is no such thing as nationality.

LUMBY

Nonsense. Think again.

FAUSTUS

That race is an illusion.

LUMBY

Worse. Think again.

FAUSTUS

That no generalisations can be based on nationality. That people behave the way they do, because they are that kind of people. And the kind of people they are has nothing to do with race.

LUMBY

What then happens to collective responsibility?

FAUSTUS

I don't know. All I know is that somebody is responsible. And yet I don't believe that the people who actually do the fighting should be blamed. Blame the dirty little propagandists in the rear whose job it is to poison people's minds. It is Dr Goebbels who is the serpent in the garden. Not Goering or the Generals.

LUMBY

And may I ask, what was your job?

FAUSTUS

My job?

REAR-ADMIRAL LIAISON

*[arriving in, but not on, the Destroyer 'Dartington' from the inner recesses of the Suez Canal, wearing appropriate bunting on his ensign staff]*

Pardon me. This man distinctly said to me that he was engaged in a propaganda service.

*[He sings a short hymn, and refuses his name for security reasons.]*

CHORUS

Guilty! Guilty! Throw him in the dock. Sentence first and trial afterwards.

*Amidst shrieks of applause, the occupants of the Press and Radio Box are emptied into the dock, after having been searched for stolen wrist watches and Leicas. Faustus is stealing away, but is caught and brought back, where he is cut by the other prisoners. The pleadings, affidavits, depositions and other evidence are amended accordingly.*

\* \* \*

*In the Sanctuary, the Antiphon continues.*

THE PARTISANS

We are the Partisans of Alamein  
Driving our harrows over the bones of Blake, the Prophet,  
Who, like the bee, had no time for sorrow.  
It is necessary to win,  
But it is still more necessary to fight.

THE KINSMEN

We are the Kinsmen of the Fourth Order,  
Knowing neither weights nor measures,  
Nor the chafferers' virtues—  
Gratitude and Retribution.  
That which we desire we give away.  
That which we soften we first make hard.  
That which we build we build with imperfection.  
That which we destroy we first exalt.

THE PARTISANS

Curst be desire that does not act.

THE KINSMEN

Blest be the prizes that have gone to others.

THE PARTISANS

Curst be the prudence of the fool who does not persist in his folly.

THE KINSMEN

Blest be the prayers that are not answered.

THE PARTISANS

Curst be the eagle that learns from the crow.

THE KINSMEN

Blest be the hours of failure measured by the fingers of the clock.

THE PARTISANS

Curst be the cut worm that cannot forgive the plough.

THE KINSMEN

Blest be the call that never comes.

OMNES

Curst be the blessing of the Epistle.

Blest be the cursing of the Gospel.

\* \* \*

*At the trial on the Brocken, Major Ulick Verney and Air Vice-Marshal Broadhurst give evidence of good character on behalf of certain of the accused. It used to be very late before they got to bed. They had all kept the Mixed Wall at Eton. They were simple, child-like souls, with only one idea – to kill. The Major adds a few words in Urdu. The Reverend Leslie Leatherhead prays for a Peace that Passeth all Understanding. The children of some of the accused are called, to make an appeal ad Misericordiam on behalf of their suffering parents, but cause considerable embarrassment by marching through the Court with drums beating and banners flying, lispng as they come :*

Wir ziehen durch die Strassen  
Mit ruhig festem Schritt  
Und über uns die Fahne  
Die Flattert lustig mit  
Ding dong dong dong  
Diri diri dong.

*From all other parts of the globe tiny voices are heard chanting in parallel as per instruction:*

I promise to do my duty to God and the King.  
We pledge allegiance to the Republic for which we stand,  
One Nation indivisible,  
With liberty and justice for all.

*Giselle Handkardt chie dans sa culotte. Sir Alan P. Herbert urgently requests the right to be angry. A Mr Morgenthau of New York puts in a word for the agricultural life. Lord Vansittart advocates a return to realism and common sense. Since man has a right to be angry, he explains, this exercise of a proper indignation about Evil and its consequences must not be defeated by the eccentric and sentimental point of view that always dictates a greater kindness to our enemies than to our friends. The danger to mankind lies in pity – this irrational emotion that inspires man to spare his beaten foes so that they may destroy him later on. It was not on pity that the Pax Romana was based, but on the complete destruction of Carthage. Pity is not a creditable sentiment, but a bait by which mankind is tempted to an act of suicide.*

*This unanswerable plea closes the case for the defence except for a few words in mitigation of sentence from Counsel and the inclusion of all the above witnesses with the prisoners already in the dock.*

\* \* \*

*After reading the Supplication to the Third Eve, and the singing of a Gradual from First Corinthians:*

SAC.

We shall all be changed.

RESP.

We shall all be changed.

SAC.

Behold I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep,

RESP.

But we shall all be changed;

*the Congregation proceeds to the Litany of the Twelve Witnesses:*

St Lucifer-Bassett, Martyr and Scourge of God,  
Pray for us.

St Scriven of the Healing Hands,  
Pray for us.

The silver-tongued St Winston Columbae,  
Pray for us.

And that sagacious Saint of many names: St. Anonymous of  
Czernowitz,  
Pray for us.

The holy brothers S S Vasto and Trasimenensis, Chaplains to the  
Forces,  
Pray for us.

St Roderick Antipodes, martyred on the mines,  
Pray for us.

And the grave St Lumby Temporum,  
Pray for us.

St Vaughan, the swan of Swansea,  
Pray for us.

St Provost, Doctor, and Confessor of holy virgins,  
Pray for us.

St Yurka, the accuser,  
Pray for us.

And St Yourman, guardian of homes and hearths,  
Pray for us.

Blessed be all these holy Saints, and may they lighten our darkness  
each in their turn.

\* \* \*

*Counsel for the Accused, in mitigation of sentence, protests against the selection of certain of his clients for the pillory. They are only the representatives of the people, whose wishes they are carrying out. There is only one way to govern, and that is to get elected, and only one way to get elected, and that is to persuade people to vote for you, and only one way to persuade people to vote for you, and that is to give them what they want. The fault, if any, lies therefore not in the actions of the rulers, but in the wishes of the people. It is not the hangman who really slays the victim, but the Jury. If anybody is to blame, it is the human race.*



#### THE JUDGE

That is the conclusion that has been growing in my mind for some time. Amend all the documents, extend the dimensions of the dock, and let us come to grips at last with the correct defendants.

#### CHORUS

Guilty! Guilty! Throw them in the dock. Sentence first and trial afterwards.

*The human race is ushered, shuffling and snivelling, into the dock. Complaints are raised about halitosis and congestion. It sniffs continually and cannot be heard through a barrage of coughs and requests for 'Repeat, if you please'. It produces pencils, and writes ill-spelled notes to the Ushers. It makes secret signs to persons apparently in authority. It offers small bribes for better seats. It says it is not feeling very well. It points out that it does not understand the procedure, and is not really to blame.*

#### THE JUDGE

The fact that you do not understand what is going on, is the deciding factor in my mind. It is clear to me that your mental processes are now raising problems that are beyond your limited capacity to solve. Can we have some medical evidence on this point?

*Professor Nathansen, the eminent alienist and martyrologist, is brought from some memorial bugle blowing in Castel di Sangro to give evidence of sanity. He makes an eloquent plea for an early sentence on the basis of the inalienable right of mankind to suffer. He describes the Death Wish as the dominating instinct of the normal human subconscious. True genius is displayed only in the various processes of obstruction. From which we may deduce that the normal response to life is one of distaste and disharmony, manifested in a desire – whether conscious or subconscious – to end it altogether. An early and universal capital sentence would therefore not only be acceptable but very timely.*

#### THE JUDGE

The medical evidence that has just been tendered gives a very lucid explanation of the conduct of the Accused. The verdict therefore is self evident. There is no necessity in nature for the continued existence of any particular branch of the species. What has been

tried without success may be written off, and a new effort made in another direction. The judgment of this Court therefore is ...

*A note is handed up to the Bench from Miss Cleugh and Miss Stebbing.*

THE JUDGE

One moment, please. This further information may affect the verdict.

\* \* \*

*The Acolyte recites the Curse of Eden, and the Lord Abbot from the Dome of the Rock replies with the Fides Dionis, the Congregation joining in unison.*

Credo in Deum Noctis et Dieis Patrem  
Coeli et Inferni Creatorem  
Quum frigidem floresque mittet ...

\* \* \*

THE JUDGE

It appears from this note, passed up to me by two ladies of considerable attainments, that no sentence of death is necessary in this case. For a considerable time the prisoners at the bar have been seeking out a way in which to destroy themselves.

*Sensation in Court. An effort at applause on the part of the Death Wish Section is rigorously suppressed.*

THE JUDGE

We can therefore safely release all the accused, and permit the hangman to devote himself to more profitable employment. The decree of this Court is that they shall have their hearts' desire. Let them have the Endwaffe.

CHORUS

The Endwaffe! The Endwaffe! Give them the Endwaffe!

THE JUDGE

The Court stands adjourned.

*In all directions the onlookers fly shrieking through the sky. On the summit of the Brocken, the accused stand, masters of their destiny, staring upwards at the heavens.*

CALLIOPE  
OR  
THE EIGHTH RIVER

CONFIDENTIAL JEHD V KQL NR I - P - VIA REB FROM KQL 2822 5A TO JEHD GR 45 QXR KQL RADIO JJ DESXXXRPT CMAR BBC CORRESPONDENT CMA PRESS CAMP CMA SIXTH ARMY GROUP HAVE INTERESTING PAREN FROM MORAN CMA CAPT CMA PRO PAREN INTERVIEW FOR YOU TWENTY NINE MARCH JJP. (Note. This message, if classified, will *not* be sent over electrical wires without paraphrasing.)

JUST another of those messages that I get. On the other hand, a more coherent communication informed me that Eddie Ward had been released from captivity, and was on his way in this direction.

I found him in Bad Wildungen, and handed the First Army to him over a bottle of Bushmills from Belfast. He was looking thin and rather yellow, but had had, on the whole, a boring rather than a bad time as a prisoner. Together we visited the Ruhr Pocket that was on the point of surrendering, and on the way to Menden he described how he had approached one of his guards on the last day, and asked him whether he would shoot if he beat it for the woods. Of course not, said the guard. What was more, he would be glad to go with him. Then, no matter into whose hands they fell, the one would be able to explain that the other was his prisoner, and must be treated accordingly.

At Seventh Armoured CP we talked to the Divisional Chief of Staff who had been negotiating the surrender of the smaller pocket; and then we went on into the area itself to take a look at the men who were still trying to make up their minds what to do. An entire German Army had been trickling out all day - most of them marching in column or driving their own vehicles. Inside their

lines, we found thousands of cynical-looking men sitting along the roadside, and in clumps among the trees – all fully armed, and not averse to having a few words with Eddie, who in his turn was more than anxious to say what had frequently (and incorrectly) been said to him.

– For you, the war is over.

– ‘Maybe, answered a taciturn sergeant with a shrug of the shoulders. But what now?

– You’ll find out, said Eddie with a laugh.

All the way back to Bad Wildungen we moved in a stream of enemy lorries, and the people kept coming from their houses or leaning out of their windows to wave and to cheer. Often they waved at us by mistake, and as I waved back, they would correct themselves with some embarrassment. It would be interesting to know what exactly they had to cheer about, or why these lorry-loads of defeated troops going unescorted to the PW cages should be greeted in a manner more appropriate to a Victory March? Broken-down Volkswagens that had dropped out of the procession were being repaired by their occupants, who then hurried on to catch up with their column!

Bidding farewell to Eddie, I set off south with Laurie Heyhurst to seek for what is left of the war. Colonel Mac and the Gangway Camp were now in Wiesbaden – the least shattered city I had yet seen in Germany. And on the morning of the 18th of April he briefed us on the general situation.

One million two hundred thousand prisoners have been taken during the last six weeks; yet the enemy has managed to increase his effectives by 40,000 during the past week, in spite of his losses in the pocket. Three new Divisions have been created: the ‘Potsdam’, the ‘Von Hutten’ and the ‘Scharnhorst’. But what of it? The sooner they are in the field the sooner they will be in the bag. As for ourselves, Third Army had only 200 casualties yesterday.

The Russians are rumoured to be nineteen miles from Berlin, but we have no precise information about them. The enemy’s area of defence is now so compressed that in spite of his loss of guns, those that remain are more concentrated than ever. (*Vide*, what I found at Weissenfels.) Air Force targets are restricted, as we no longer want to destroy rolling stock, even in enemy hands. It is to be kept for our own use later on.

\* \* \*

On the 20th: There has been a counter-attack against the Ninth Army, in the course of which the new Potsdam Division distinguished itself by shooting all the American wounded in the area which they overran. Nuremberg has been cleared, and Stuttgart is almost cut off by the French, who show their greatest vigour when driving towards an area that harbours collaborators.

Later: The Wehrmacht in the fury of its death pangs is still creating new Divisions: the 480th Mobilisation Division, and the Von Clausewitz Panzer Division (which bore the main brunt of the new counter-attack on Ninth Army). A Fokker-Wulf Pilot, who landed through flak on Frankfurt Airport, says that his outfit had only petrol enough for seven more missions, and they were then due to join the infantry.

A captured Corps Commander says that a surrender *en masse* is not possible as there is no central authority in Germany apart from the Nazi Party, which by Allied definition is itself a War Criminal. Von Rundstedt was in favour of capitulation after the Ardennes failure, but the Party wouldn't hear of it, and is now preparing to shoot off any weapon that they can mass in the Redoubt, for as long as they can hold out there. They consider that any of their own civilians who have surrendered are traitors, and if they suffer from their bombardment (or from the use of gas) they deserve it, anyhow.

With Laurie Heyhurst I moved on southwards through Darmstadt to undamaged Heidelberg; and thence up the lovely valley of the Neckar – through Eberbach – Amorbach – Tauberbischofsheim – to the Seventh Army Press Camp at Lauda. Still carrying my Luger, I was now definitely looking for trouble.

But it wasn't the one-armed Christ standing in the midst of the ruined Laurenz-Kirche of Nuremberg that moved me to my finest frenzy. He hadn't come to bring Peace, but the Sword, and if he had got himself damaged in the process he could scarcely complain. It wasn't the wreckage of Rottenburg – bombed by some casual American error – or the mighty holocaust of Wurzburg carried out by Bomber Harris. It wasn't the six SS men lurking in the half-built Nazi Party Headquarters who were taken out and riddled with bullets against a wall – saluting, and shouting Heil Hitler as they went down. They had asked for it, and they had got it, too.

But there was that dog running across the street in Furth that had been knocked over by the truck ahead. As its weeping mistress tried to pull it off the centre of the road, it lay on its broken back

looking up at her, and trying to lick her hand. And all around, we laughed.

– Maybe she ought to see Nuremberg, said Laurie, meaning what the hell is a dog these days?

Christ, what the hell is a dog, indeed? And why the hell shouldn't we laugh? We're Conquerors, aren't we? The French have taken Stuttgart, where they say the Moroccans are having a fine time. An American unit has been sent in to try to establish some sort of order out of that Gallic Fête Galante. So what the hell does a woman matter, or a dog with a broken back? We come as Conquerors and they've bloody well brought it on themselves.

But why must we laugh? And if we must laugh, what is this futility running down my blasted face?

We come as Conquerors, and if as part of the Elect we are expected to view the tortures of the damned and to rejoice, then why doesn't He let us rejoice? He is the Lord, and Nuremberg and Stuttgart are His work at our hands. Why then can't He let us get on with it, without tormenting us? When I said that I would accept His Hell as well as His Heaven, and praise Him for His chastisement as well as for His blessings, I didn't know what Hell was!

\* \* \*

To Lauda the word comes through. Twelfth Armoured has managed to seize a bridgehead at Dillingen. So to this place Laurie and I follow, and set up our gear in the best bedroom of the Hotel Stern.

Somewhere close by is the site of a more gentlemanly contest – the battlefield of Blenheim. And here, before us, roll the swift and muddy waters of a river that is not as blue as it is painted – the Danube.

At intervals during the night, the Luftwaffe tries to strafe the bridge, and the ack-ack guns keep pooping off.

What a pleasure to be once again in an area where the shooting is mutual.

And what they fought each other for  
I could not well make out.  
But everybody said, quoth he,  
It was a famous victory.

As I drove through Augsburg and Landsberg with Abe Goldberg of AP, a bitter wind blew down from the mountains that were now

piling up ahead of us. First came sleet, and then a full-scale blizzard.

– I wonder, said Abe, whether there isn't something in these stories about them having an apparatus in the Redoubt for affecting the weather?

A blizzard from the south certainly seemed odd, but the weather cleared a little as we reached the foothills, crossed a great road viaduct that had been left undamaged, and wound our way up to Ober-Ammergau. All the time – DPs trudging south. Some, too weak to walk, were being pulled along in little carts. The village of the Passion Play was full of them, and Off-limits notices had been posted up on the theatre and on the home of Anton Lang's widow by a Colonel Youell whose trail we had been following all the way from Landsberg. The Widow Lang was thankful for her good fortune, and was wondering how long it would last.

– Here, we are much afraid of the Dark People, she said, meaning the American negroes.

At Garmisch we came up with the 103rd Division CP and Major-General McAuliffe – the defender of Bastogne – a stocky little soldier of the best fighting type, who had electrified the world last December by replying to a pompous demand for surrender with the simple answer, 'Aw nuts'. The boot was on the other foot now, for he had just been ringing up the enemy garrison of Mittenwald, and demanding their surrender. To do this, the call had been put through the Innsbruck exchange, and the latter had very kindly obliged! It looks as though both towns would be delighted to surrender if only the SS would allow them.

In the comfortable villa where we were billeted by Eckelmar, the PRO, we talked late into the night about the extraordinary things that had been happening. How this Division had advanced sixty miles in one day, sending back column after column of unnumbered and unescorted prisoners, and how one of these columns that was seen taking the wrong road was whistled back. Indeed the more conventionally-minded Nazi officers had been a little offended by this cavalier treatment.

A squad of the 411th Infantry had crossed the river at Landsberg, and found an entire Hungarian regiment drawn up as for inspection in the town square under their Colonel, who criticised their style severely, and then turned to the American squad and solemnly surrendered his sabre and his regiment. In Bad Worsheim armed German soldiers had been wandering in the streets long

after the occupation, saluting their own officers but, very correctly, not saluting ours. There has been a good deal of rape, but for some of those reasons tied up with the reactions of the public at home, the US Army is particularly hot against rape, and hangs men for it far more readily than for most other offences.

Then there was this Palace of the mad King of Bavaria, around which all sorts of rumours were centring. It was said that Emma Goering was hiding there, and God knows who else – maybe Hitler himself. And where was that SS Division that had not been located at Munich? Perhaps Linderhof – this Wagnerian foxhole buried deep in the mountains – was the site of our *Gotterdammerung*. The Reccy boys had been part of the way up the valley, but not as far as the Schloss itself.

So Abe and I decided that we would go and see for ourselves. It had been bitterly cold, and the mountain tops were covered with snow. We drove back towards Oberau, and then turned off to the left through a cleft of amazing beauty. On each side of us rose the tree-clad slopes – forests of firs, larches and mountain ash. Enemy soldiers kept passing in dribs and drabs – none of them armed.

At a little inn far up the valley we were greeted by a number of armed DPs who shouted at us in their international language, and pointed the way to the Schloss. Passing through the gates, we drove by the sheathed and sandbagged statues in the garden, and found that an American half-track Scout Car had just arrived ahead of us.

A Colonel, sitting beside the driver, grinned out at us and shook his head. No, there was nobody here that he could find; but the woods above were full of SS men, if that was of any interest.

From the window of the Steward's house a woman called to us. The Colonel dismounted and we walked across with him. She was quite young and very drunk. She had a complaint to lodge. Some soldier had been into her house and had stolen her schnapps.

– Well, said the Colonel, I hope he didn't take it all. I would like some schnapps myself.

Shrilly her voice rose in maudlin protest, but it fell on unsympathetic ears. What did she imagine was going on around here, that she should bother us about schnapps? A sightseeing tour?

As the half-track moved off, the old caretaker opened the doors of the Schloss, and Abe and I went in.



MEICOST ETTAL – an anagram for L'ÉTAT C'EST MOI. Furnishings rich with lapis lazuli; chandeliers of Dresden china; boule and bronze; velvet and Carrera marble; gilded reception rooms; cabinets blue, yellow and lilac; ranks of plush chairs covered with dust sheets; great mirrors in which an endlessly receding line of dirty War Correspondents looked back at one another; the canopied bed; portraits of mistresses on the gracefully curving staircase.

The obsequious caretaker assured us that there were no bunkers, and that no other visitor had called there for many weeks – that the swan lake was dismantled and that there was nothing else to see.

Outside, the snow was falling in a light flurry of mist – falling on the lawn and on the boarded-up statues and on the pillared rococo façade of the Palace – falling on the Capri grotto and on the artificial stalactites, on the stucco Lorelei, on the chairs of coral and on the throne of shell, where the lunatic Ludwig surrounded by his suite, dressed in hides and bearskins, had drunk mead from curved horns, and insisted in the face of all-comers that he was Lohengrin.

Linderhof and the last day of April. Ludwig II and a drunken young woman complaining about her schnapps. The SS hiding in the snowy pinewoods from a Jew and an Irishman.

I raised my fingers to my lips and gave a whistle that went echoing around the hillsides.

But there was no response. Because that same afternoon the Proprietor was taking his life in a bunker in Berlin.

\* \* \*

Back at Dillingen with our copy, we hear it on the wireless, together with an unconfirmed report about 'surrender in Italy and Western Austria'. What this means is not quite clear, since they were fighting bitterly around Mittenwald a day or two ago, and in Seefeld only yesterday.

And Mussolini was hanged a few days ago in Milan.

Funny how little interest or excitement it causes, now that it is announced. A little doubtful scepticism – some mild disappointment that maybe we are not going to meet either of them in person. A certain feeling of interest in Mussolini, who must have been the more remarkable man of the two, considering the material he had to work with! As for Hitler – well, I suppose we can relax; now

that George Gilmore's and Peadar O'Donnell's gloomy apprehensions have been contradicted. The simple methods of dictatorship have not managed to produce results – or if they have, these are the results in their ultimate analysis.

\* \* \*

McAuliffe's CP had moved on from Garmisch, so we drove after it in the late afternoon along the winding road that leads to the old Austrian frontier. The DPs were thicker now – having been held up by yesterday's fighting – and in one of the mountain villages beyond Mittenwald we joined the Divisional Commander for an early dinner.

– There are some civilian refugees coming too, he said. But we won't wait for them. They'll probably be late.

We sat down to eat, and some time after the soup, four depressed, tired-looking Frenchmen and one woman were ushered in. They took their seats at the lower end of the table. The tough little American Major-General rose politely for a moment, and motioned them to their food. As they fell to hungrily, he turned to us and continued his conversation about the war, without paying much more attention to them. It was only after some time that it became evident that these poor relations of the New World had once been names to conjure with in the Old.

They were Premiers Reynaud and Daladier, General Gamelin, General Weygand and his wife.

Dinner continued, uninterrupted.

\* \* \*

Bland West, the G2, had already got into Innsbruck by a circuitous route, accompanied by an Interpreter and an enemy Major – shouting the German transport out of the way as they went!

He had found that the town was largely in Austrian Partisan hands, and that the Wehrmacht CO had been kidnapped and could not be found. This was all very awkward, since it meant that there was nobody whose orders the Wehrmacht would take, and without orders it would not surrender.

While Abe was writing his despatch, with an eye cocked anxiously for the arrival of his principal agency competitor – a certain Mrs Packard – I went downstairs in our billet, and was confronted by the schoolteacher – a young woman with a puzzled,

hurt expression. She beckoned me into a lower room which was in a state of shambles. Cupboard doors hung open, and the contents of every drawer had been turned out on the floor. Clothing, papers and household goods lay everywhere in confusion.

– I wish to show you this, she said.

– Yes, I answered. I see.

– This is what your people have done.

For a while I gazed around me in silence, and then I turned to her again.

– I do not understand, she said. They were not fighting here. Yet they have done this to my home and have taken away many of my things. Do our German soldiers behave like this in the countries which they occupy?

I thought of undamaged Rome, and of well-stocked Paris, and of the punctilious, unobtrusive Wehrmacht stepping down the Champs Élysées, while the Parisians politely looked the other way.

– On the whole, I said, I don't think that they do.

Then I thought of other things – of the farmhouses beyond Civitella where men, women and children had been wiped out as a reprisal for some outrage of the Partisans. And I thought of Lublin, and of Buchenwald, and of everything that I had seen there. And I looked at that schoolteacher whose home had been tossed about, but who was still a human being like myself, and not a wretch squatting over a sewer or laid out upon a shelf.

– Gnädige Fraulein, I said. There is a train of goods wagons on a siding outside Landsberg, and every wagon is packed to the doors with the corpses of people who have been starved to death. That is what your people have done.

Her eyes widened with horror.

– You have seen this?

– Yes, Fraulein.

She sank into a chair and pressed her hair back from her forehead.

– Why do you tell me this? she asked. What has it got to do with me?

– Since you ask me, I will tell you. It has got exactly the same connection with you as this – and I indicated the wreckage of her house – has got with me. No more and no less.

She stood there, looking around her in mute despair.

– Maybe we are both guilty in a sense, I went on. Neither

spectacle is edifying. But I will tell you one thing, Fraulein. I would rather be on my side than on yours.

The tears were welling up in her eyes, and I could see that she was about to answer me. But I didn't want to hear a reply that might raise doubts in my mind, and send me off in a frenzy once again.

I had rediscovered a positive belief in Right and Wrong and was going to cling to it. The trouble with the world of my generation has been that we have abandoned Religion because we know that in its basic myth it asks us to believe a lie. But we have also thrown out with it our old belief in a code of moral conduct, and all that we have had to put in its place is a short-sighted logic based on an idea that Results are the only things that matter – a logic that is only tempered by a fear of the big stick. We are Pelagians arguing on behalf of Virtue on the grounds that it pays!

Buchenwald was the result of that doubt of the existence of an Absolute in Good and Evil. But it does exist, however maliciously successful Life may be in confusing us as to which is which. And having come back to that belief I did not want to have any further argument, that might remind me of all that we were going to do ourselves. And this may have made me over-bitter.

– Oh, I know what you're going to answer, I said. What harm did you ever do to anybody, sitting here in the Alps, teaching pretty children to dance around the maypole? All very charming and innocent. But what is your world built on? Mass dehumanisation and a return to the torture chamber.

– Please, please, she said. If there is wickedness today, isn't there Good as well?

– That is the most monstrous thing of all, Fraulein. For Good has become a mistake these days. Pity has been turned into a trap to ensnare fools and lead them to their own destruction. That is what your country has taught the world, and that is why it can never be forgiven.

– Because some people have been evil, must all the others be evil too?

*(The rantings of Mein Kampf – the satanic realism of Cato and Vansittart – a Priest sitting on the hillside above the Sangro – 'I will tell you how you can recognise Evil'.)*

– That seems to be the way of it. The only thing to do is to kill as quickly and as cleanly as possible. So please don't bother me with the state of your cupboards.

– I can bear it when I hear you blaming me or blaming Germany.  
But I can't bear it when I hear you blaming Pity.

– Then I'm afraid I'll have to leave you. Because I can see no other way out – unless I blame God.

As I left her room, she called after me.

– Then you must learn to forgive God.

I closed the door and walked across the street.

*(The sunlight on the hills of Umbria...the purr of a jeep on its way to Assisi...'It seems to me that when it comes to Repentance, I have got as much to forgive the Almighty for as he has to forgive in me.)*

\* \* \*

In the lower part of a house across the road, where I went to look for a blanket, a woman DP was bending over the form of a man lying half naked on the floor. A candle flickered in the icy air. Her head was covered with a shawl that almost hid her pale, sensitive face, and voluminous rags hung loosely around her tired and melancholy body.

What made me look at her a second time I do not remember, for I had seen many similar sights during the past month, and my interest in them had been dulled. Maybe it was a faint resemblance in her face to somebody I had known.

I did not talk to her because I felt a little exalted by what I had just said, and was in a hurry to put it into some practical effect. Besides, I did not know what language to use. And the strange international language of the DPs is something that I find it hard to understand and irritating to struggle with.

So I left them there, and joined Abe at the jeep.

\* \* \*

On the lip of the descent into the valley of the Inn, a frame house was burning fiercely in the gathering dusk. All the way down we could see it, flaming like a beacon on the hill above us, while from the far side of the river, a column of smoke was mounting into the still air.

In Zirl, where we debouched on to the floor of the Valley, a Task Force was forming up to test what opposition might remain this side of Innsbruck.

Abe was now concerned about the whereabouts of a woman Correspondent called Higgins – a blonde in battle dress and a

helmet, who was said to have gone down the hill ahead of us in the care of the Divisional PRO. It wasn't that Abe was worried about her safety or couldn't trust her with Eckelmar. It was just that, having ascertained that his principal opposition (Mrs Packard) was still back in Mittenwald, he didn't want to risk being beaten at the post by a stray blonde. So we drove along the column making enquiries from time to time. As we moved, it began to move too – at first slowly, then faster and faster. We travelled with it, overtaking tank after tank. On each side of the road tramped the files of marching GIs, chewing nonchalantly and peering up at the surrounding hills. As the evening grew darker, the GIs began to mount on the back of the vehicles – always a good sign – and the procession moved faster still. Houses appeared, flying red and white Austrian flags – an even better sight – for Austrian flags do not fly when the SS is in the neighbourhood. It became certain that we were going to drive right into Innsbruck.

As we drew level with the leading tank, we found ourselves in the outskirts of the town surrounded by a cheering mob of men and women. We halted at a road junction, and the crowd grew greater. Many of them were armed, and wore Austrian brassards. Women threw flowers into the jeep – children waved and clapped. For a while it seemed like old times again, and even some of the doughs on the tanks relaxed, and waved back.

Presently a small touring car drew up beside us, and an elderly Wehrmacht Lieutenant-Colonel got out and addressed one of the Americans. The latter did not understand what he was saying, so he passed him on to me. Very punctiliously we saluted each other, and at once I realised that I was being tendered the surrender of Innsbruck.

– But it is very difficult to make a correct surrender, the officer explained, because of this...

And he indicated the cheering rabble around us.

For a few moments I surveyed my new possession – Innsbruck, a town that I have known and loved for many years, and the snow-capped mountains that I had walked in younger days. I wondered if the Nordkettenbahn was still in operation, so that I might revisit Hafelekar and survey my estate from that proud eminence.

Then Schwab and Levins arrived, having driven through the column on our trail. Levins was slightly wounded, but they were both very pleased with themselves. They had been as far as Czecho-Slovakia together, where they had found Schwab's

mother in a concentration camp, and had triumphantly carried her back to a secret destination, where all would be well with her in the future. A very gallant pair, and – with my good friend Abe – a great day for the Jews – a Day of Atonement!

Then very reluctantly, but with perfect correctness, I turned to my Lieutenant-Colonel, and disclaimed my right to accept his town. He must go to the Commander of the Task Force – probably the ubiquitous Colonel Youell – and surrender it to him. He was up there beside the leading tank.

Gravely, he saluted me once more, and went about his business. It was getting dark now, but the crowd showed no signs of thinning out, and I stood there wondering where I should sleep the night, and staring up at Hafelekar.

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URANIA  
OR  
THE LAST RIVER

TURN on the lights.

Open the windows and turn on the lights!

Turn on the stars! Turn on the moon and the sun, for we have crossed the Inn, and are going up the Brenner.

It was Colonel Donovan Youell who first turned on the lights that soon will be flashing up all over Europe – this same Colonel Youell whose traces we have been following since Landsberg. It was he who took the plaque off Hitler's cell. It was he who placed the holier places of Ober-Ammergau out of bounds. It was his revolver butt that had left its marks on the doors of several good hotels as we drew closer and closer to his heels.

And now, driving up the last valley that leads to Italy, he took a striking and very daring step. Although he knew that the Pass was held – that thousands of the enemy were up there in possession of the summit, and that God knows how many more from Italy were piling in behind them, he had ordered his column to switch on its headlights, and like a swarm of angry fireflies, five miles in length, his vehicles had driven boldly on, challenging any German to fire a shot, if he dared.

Indeed, a single shot might have upset the advance, for the way is tortuous, and a few resolute men might have blocked it – perhaps for days. The feelings of the defenders must have been very mixed as they stared at that long line of arrogant headlamps winding up the valley towards them – lights, after all these years of creeping around in the dark! – and not a hand was raised in opposition.

But we did not know all this to begin with. In fact at half-past five that morning we had toured the streets of Innsbruck in a



fruitless search for Youell and his men. So the only thing to do was to drive on up the valley, and find out for ourselves whether they had preceded us.

Over the river, past the railway station, and up the winding road purred the two jeeps, a guide and a driver in the first, Abe Goldberg and I and another driver in the second. Why Abe had been supplied with a guide by Divisional PR was not at all clear, since the man in question was a young American Lieutenant who knew considerably less than we did, and who had certainly never been up the Brenner before, while, oddly enough, I had. However, it was an act of civility, and there was no point in querying it.

As we approached the first corner, the guide's jeep suddenly reversed and passed us with a screech of gears and brakes. Fingers pointed excitedly up the road. For a moment I thought I was back on that fateful highway leading into Rome. But no – the times were different now, and what matter if a few armed men in German uniform were standing at the corner looking down at us.

– Nonsense, we shouted back to the others. Let's stop taking uniforms seriously. We're going up to see.

We were right, of course. They were Austrian regulars on the hunt for SS men, and they saluted respectfully as we drove by. Farther up the valley the farm houses were flying red and white flags.

– Look, I shouted. That's all right. Let's go faster.

Our guide drove on ahead, and after another five miles or so he slowed down and we drew alongside.

– Are you quite happy? he asked with a smile. I don't want to take you any farther, if you're not, you know.

– Quite happy, thank you.

– These tracks on the road. They're armoured cars.

– I know.

– I can't guarantee that they're ours.

– That's OK, I said. I'll give any guarantee that's needed.

– All right. If you're quite happy, it's OK by me.

As we drove on, Abe grinned and spoke to me out of the corner of his mouth.

– Do you really know? he asked.

– There was a K Ration box by the side of the road, I answered. Abe smiled cheerfully.

– That's good enough.

In the next village, trucks bearing a white star had halted. Then we reached the snowline, and a light drizzle began to fall.

The summit of the Brenner is a cleft in the mountains, containing a number of railway sidings, storehouses, a couple of inns and a barrack. White slopes rose on each side and the branches of the trees were sagging under the weight of the snow. The road was deep in a wet slush, through which little groups of Italian DPs were trudging south.

Plumb on the summit, the trucks and tanks of Youell's column were parked between the houses, and in the lee of the railway station an immense congregation of German troops stood gloomily looking on.

A little farther along, a small obelisk marks the frontier, and beyond this some noisy Eyties were looting the railway station. The snow fell more thickly as we dismounted – our helmets tilted over our eyes to keep our faces as dry as possible.

We found Colonel Youell in the best Gasthaus, where he had established his CP, and he received us while shaving. A wiry, sharp-featured little man with great vitality – probably in the fifties. At the moment he was suffering from lack of sleep, but this did not dull his awareness of the drama that had been enacted, or the fact that he had just come by a sum of three million marks, uncovered in a cache by his men.

– Do you gentlemen realise, he said as coffee was brought in, that only three soldiers in history have ever forced the Brenner? Hannibal, Napoleon and Me.

We did not question either his history or his geography, but toasted him happily as he gave us the details of his night drive. There was the greater part of an enemy brigade here, and thousands more were pouring up from Italy; but they had just stood helplessly by, and had offered no resistance at all. Their pickets were still out on the hillsides, and his next concern was to get word to them that they could come in without being shot at.

More important still was the question: Where were Mark Clark and his boys? Before us lay the road winding downwards into Italy. The Fifth Army was somewhere there, but how far off, nobody knew. And what stood between? There had been a theoretical surrender in Italy, but times were strange, and rumour had it that large masses of enemy troops were across the road in an attitude of sullen defiance. It was not a Surrender, they insisted. It was an Armistice. And while they were not going to assume the

offensive and attack anybody, neither were they going to allow anybody through. Maybe it was something of this kind that was holding up our old friends from the south. Maybe this was why Godfrey was not here to greet me.

On the other hand, my friend Wynford Vaughan-Thomas was clearly on the move in the opposite direction. His bell-like tones were on the air from Hamburg, in a malicious parody of poor old Haw-Haw.

– This is Gairmany calling. But you will not hear views on the news by Mr William Joyce, for he has been most unfortunately interrupted in his broadcasting career!

This is one of the pleasant things about our job. We can always keep track of the movements of our fellow workers, however confused the situation.

A Medic came into the Mess, and I heard somebody ask him:

– Have you had any casualties?

– Oh, yes. One man in with diarrhoea.

Then permission came through from Corps to organise a small scouting party to go down and see what was happening to the US Fifth Army. A Major Rhea was given the task, and he said that we might come along too.

We started off into Italy at about a quarter to eleven. First Rhea and his aides in a couple of jeeps, then two tanks, then ourselves, followed by another jeep containing some of the Divisional PR personnel. The procession was rounded off by an armoured car. It was still snowing as we crossed the frontier and plashed our way to the head of the downward slope.

In a saloon car drawn up by the side of the road sat a civilian, staring up towards the frontier. He appeared to be a person of some importance, and I made a note to see if he was still there on our way back. Small enemy columns were passing us every half mile or so, marching up without their arms. Many young girls were marching with them, as though they were soldiers in the ranks. They stared at us blankly as we passed – a clean-cut, compact bunch of youngsters, with a considerable dignity about them. Maybe if I had been more resolute in my change of side, I would have got out and marched with them. Maybe it would have been better for me if I had. On the other hand, they would probably have given me the cold shoulder.

Little groups of Italians came out from the farm houses and cheered us vociferously. ROMA – announced the signposts and

the kilometre stones. I have seen that before. In fact, this is where I came in.

For about ten miles, we continued down hill, until our little cortège came to a halt in a great cleft opposite a carved stone memorial of the last war. Somebody walked ahead to find out what was the matter, and the rest of us dismounted.

– Who's Emanuele di Savoia? I asked, reading the inscription on the monument. *Sia sacra agli Italiani la via dove passarono i fanti.*

But nobody knew or cared, because Rhea was talking to some excited Eyties, and the burden of their story was that we were close to a place called Colle Isarco, and that five hundred armed Gerries were just ahead of us. As they talked and gesticulated, a German staff car appeared, and an officer got out and saluted. Rhea swiftly relieved him of his pistol, and he explained his mission. The cliff under which we had halted was heavily mined, and since by some error it might explode, he felt it his duty to warn us.

As we pondered over this very civil act on the part of a man who could easily have buried us under some thousands of tons of rock, another vehicle turned the corner to the south. It was a jeep, and in it we recognised, first of all, American helmets, and then the shoulder flash of the 88th Division, Fifth Army.

A loud shout went up and feet clattered down the road. Hands were shaken and backs were slapped. The Armies had met, and the war was over.

They had had some difficulty in coming up, for just the reason that we had suspected. Large sections of the main road were still occupied by the Wehrmacht in a non-co-operative frame of mind, and the Colonel and his friend had had to come by a roundabout route. But his supports were not far behind, and meanwhile he would come back with us to the summit to meet McAuliffe and the Corps Commander, who were due about noon.

So we turned round and drove back, and as we approached the head of the Pass we began to meet little groups of GIs who were going through the packs and the pockets of the enemy marching columns as they arrived. Searching for arms – the saying went, and it was encouraging to see with what care and attention this important task was being pursued. Nothing was being overlooked. And with each quarter mile, one could observe these columns – at first laden with packs and flashing with decorations – assuming more and more that dishevelled and unencumbered appearance that columns of prisoners usually have.

Back at the frontier, I left Abe photographing the Generals, and went back a few yards by myself, for I had business that might or might not be of some importance. A man in civilian clothes, sitting in a saloon car on the wrong side of the frontier, deserved investigation. He might, indeed, be one of those high-ranking Nazis that I had hoped to meet in the Redoubt. And as I walked, I quietly shifted my Luger in its holster from inside my waterproof jacket to the belt on the outside.

When I reached the car, I opened the door and got inside out of the sleet. The owner was still there, staring up towards the frontier where a crowd of GIs had now dropped the striped pole across the road, and a long line of prisoners stood hunched in the wind, their coat collars turned up around their faces, waiting for orders.

– Well, I said. Gruss Gott.

He turned and fixed his eyes upon me. A portfolio of papers was on the seat beside him. A Nazi official, evidently, though possibly not a very celebrated one. He had been just too late to get across the frontier.

It was then that I noticed that he was wounded.

\* \* \*

Sitting in that sedan beside the bleeding Nazi, a curious calm took possession of me. Around us – the hills, with the snow coming down – the tramp of passing feet – an occasional crash of glass from the Eyties looting the railway station – the sound of Yankee voices down the road as they pillaged the marching columns – the clatter of a distant tank.

I remember glancing at his papers and noting that his name was Otto Suder and that he came from Munchen-Gladbach. Then I became aware that he was making moves to get at my pistol.

– I'm afraid you can't have that, I said.

– I wish to finish the job, he answered.

– I can give you another emergency dressing, I said. Or go for the Medics, if you like.

He scowled.

– For what? To make me well enough for a hanging?

– Are we likely to hang you?

– How do I know?

For a while we talked. He had been stripped of his watch and of his Leica and of any money he possessed. Presently his car

would be taken too, and with it would go his last chance of reaching the home that he should never have left.

– It is the end of all order and discipline in Europe, he said. What do you do now?

– There was order and discipline in Buchenwald, I answered.

His face took on an expression of almost maniacal disgust.

– You are so self-righteous, you English and Americans. You blame us for waging total war, but you have beaten us by waging war on a scale that we have never approached. And always with self-righteousness.

– Maybe we have been good pupils, I said. But what have you got to complain of? Your country right or wrong, is your motto. I've seen it myself, painted up over a gate. Well, the world has taken you at your word, and it now turns out that your country is wrong. Do you want to call off the bargain, and apologise?

– What has happened to Germany at least absolves us from any apologies to you.

And as I listened to him, he went on to justify his party. Not that he had always been a Nazi. There had been a time when he, too, had believed in the old Republic – in peace and in justice by negotiation. What good could ever come to Germany by trampling on her neighbours? The League of Nations would right the evils of Versailles. But he had been a fool. Only the strong arm of the Führer had accomplished any of those things that must be done if Germany was to regain her place in the world. And if the Führer had been beaten in the end, it was only because stronger arms had followed his teaching.

– Does this mean, I asked, that when you get the chance you will do it again?

Yes. When the time came – if it ever did – it would be done again. Not by him, for he would be dead: but by those who would follow after, dedicated for all time to the cause of vengeance for every wound inflicted on the Fatherland. Only the strong can live in this world, and everything that the Führer had said on the subject had been proved true by the Allies themselves. The Führer's only fault had been in deliberately sparing his most implacable enemies when he had had them at his mercy.

As I listened to his words, and considered some of our own future plans for Germany – to hang its leaders and, in effect, to starve the remainder out of existence as a nation, I brooded for a while on this paradox of punishment, and the surprising lack of

realism that it displays. We had to do what we had done – and in the way that we had done it. But having taken such a course, and beaten them at their own game, we were now going to deaden our sense of guilt by adopting a moral tone, and by screaming sentimentally for blood. Quite apart from the fairness of such an attitude, this was a childish thing to do.

Whenever our real interest lies in reconstruction, it is a waste of time to concentrate on punishment. Worse than this – as Lumby said – it is an alibi. When we dispense our sentences on wicked men, is it to deter others from similar wickedness in the future, or is it because the only crimes that are unforgivable in others are our own? Realistically, should we not ask whether it is actually going to deter others, or will it simply assure that all future conflicts will be fought to the last drop of blood, as the losers will be murdered in any event?

– I'm not self-righteous, I said. What have we got to be self-righteous about? If you were too soft in victory, so were we the last time. But we're not going to be soft now. Your Concentration Camps were quite small places; but we are going to make a Concentration Camp of all Germany – if we have the time before we start to fight our allies over your corpses. When that begins we may have to ask you for help.

– Then why are we called 'War Criminals'? What right have you to accuse us?

– Never mind, I said. You'll probably look the better in the end. You will be accused of what you have undoubtedly done. But by the oddest of coincidences, nobody will be in the dock except the defeated. And this is all that will be remembered about it afterwards.

– There is no future for civilisation as we used to know it, he said, after a long pause. Germany might have saved it, but now the best are gone, and all that remain are swine.

Swine?

A vision of my son, sitting at the piano on his grandmother's knee, thumping the keys while she sings.

And that was the end of One, Two and Three,  
Billy Pringle, he,  
Betty Pringle, she,  
And the Piggy-wiggie-wee.

A nice theme song for the Endwaffe!

It was obvious, of course, that he must die before he started it all again. He was a lost soul, not only pledged to death himself, but determined to drag the rest of us along with him. Still, a lingering regard for the virtues of my old profession revolted against his despatch after a Mock Trial. If he must go, must the Common Law go with him? What have we left of our institutions, if the forms of criminal justice, laid down over the centuries, are going to be degraded into a ritual of punishment? That is what has happened elsewhere, and it is what our own legal pimps are going to do as soon as the shooting stops.

Turning to him again, I drew out my Luger.

– Are you going to shoot me? he asked.

– I wish I had the guts and the honesty, I said.

– Then perhaps you will allow me to have the gun instead.

It was Alexander who once said that the English-speaking races have a habit of leaving necessary dirty work to other people whenever it is possible to do so. If Otto Suder was going to have to pay for Buchenwald, and was prepared to relieve me of the responsibility by pulling the trigger himself, why should I raise any objections? So I handed him the Luger.

– Yes, I said. You can have it.

Taking the gun, he closed his eyes for a moment, and then opened them again.

– Thank you, he said. I shall do as you are suggesting. But first, Germany has a few scores of her own to pay off.

And very deliberately he turned the Luger on me.

– Now let's get this clear, I said. Suppose we stop for a moment and work out just who is supposed to be shooting who?

For a few poignant seconds his eyes bored into me with unconquerable hatred. And then...

Then he pressed the trigger.



## UZ

IT is a pity that I was killed like that in the Brenner, however inevitable my ending may be. But one cannot deny that it was an understandable dénouement. I carried a gun, which I was warned not to do. I can hardly be blamed for acquiring such a thing after what I found in Thuringia, but the fact remains, if I had not had it, the story would have had a different ending. A Cato untroubled by scruples might have come through unscathed, but that is not what I happened to be, any more than the community from which I came.

Possibly, my real error in judgment was in hanging on to the thing too long. Anyhow, the righteous Judge is now a dead Judge, and I have paid the very natural price for my very natural anger, which, I suppose, is fair enough, even if it leaves Otto Suder the opportunity of masquerading as me for the rest of his life, and editing these papers to his own benefit.

On the other hand, there are certain advantages in having been sanctified by dissolution. Death is not necessarily a deplorable end. It comes in any event, and having graduated, I shall be taken much more seriously. I may be misquoted, but never happily contradicted. I am the Dead – dead in my prime, at the summit of the Brenner – an honourable state, allowing me to be canonised or damned without any fear that I may subsequently spoil the picture.

I am spared the pot-belly and the gobs, the pasty flesh, and the reek of old age that will creep upon Suder in the night, and stay to mock him in the looking-glass.

I shall not live to be a burden and an offence to all my dear ones, or to disappoint my children with the inevitable Noes of parenthood. I shall not live to be a Bore in all the Clubs, and the worst of all bores – the fellow with something on his mind.

I am freed from the reproach and disillusionment of all that is to come – the queues, the forms, the threats of Agents and

Inspectors, and the forced levies to be spent on the spring-sowing of another whirlwind.

I am beyond the grasp of those two dismal Sirens – Excuse and Explanation, and have found rest in a womb that will not throw me out in nine months' time. I have a Mother now to whom I can never prove ungrateful.

I am a Spirit – infinite, eternal and unchangeable, and this is the New Testament in my blood.

So mourn, if you must, but only for yourself, and do not presume to quote me from the hustings. We have trodden the wine-press together, and the wine was the blood of foes, bitter to the tongue. And it will be bitterer still, before the morning. So let us say good-bye, before the men of violence, who are our friends, give place to the men of retribution, whom we do not wish to know.

We have got what we asked for – Justice – and to them and to their vultures, I leave the terrain of my *via dolorosa*. My plated soup-tureen – the gift of the Italian Navy – I leave to my son, when he elects to carry on my pilgrimage. My Papal rosary beads and my autographed grant of the Order of the Deutsch Adler (Dritter Stufe) I leave to those who can get them. To my wife, a much-prized cross of blue enamel – the Mutter Kreuz – which will make her laugh, and perhaps will presage what she has got for me. My grey hairs I shall carry with me, to be a witness for me that I am entitled to my Sabbatical. And this – my translation of that vexed passage in the *Odyssey* – shall fall into residue.

#### THE CRITIC

Sing, pretty Muse,  
Old Nobodaddy's bonny by-blow,  
Sing of your ravisher,  
That man of many minds  
Who looted Zion  
And urinated on the Golden Gate,  
Who wandered loudly in the Wilderness  
Showing the error of their ways to Others.  
Sing of this signpost to the heavenly ladder,  
This shepherd of the sheep  
And of the adder,  
This pilot, who on some unstated day  
Will bring his vessel home –  
The longest way.

ODYSSEUS

How vain your hope  
For all your bitter tongue,  
For fools who slay the Oxen of the Sun  
To feed their anger or to ease their dread  
Shall eat Damnation as their daily bread.

Itē Missa Est.

---

Or would you prefer a different ending?

On the assumptions of Newtonian Determinism, such a question is a ridiculous one. But mathematics have already proved these assumptions to be untenable, so perhaps it is not too outlandish an idea to suggest that we pick an alternative from the great bag of possibilities that Heaven has provided.

Maybe we do not want Justice after all? Maybe we are conscious of the paradox that, however damned Man may be in the mass, we meet with very few individuals who are not fundamentally well meaning – who do not tend to be kind whenever they are faced with flesh and blood rather than with abstractions? If there is something missing from the picture, maybe we can go back and find it – even if this means folding back Time, and for one brief, inspired moment, reversing that arrow on Observation? A miracle, maybe – but are we so simple as to reject that possibility, while believing in the Will at all?

And, since life itself may be regarded as a liturgy – a service in which each man is his own celebrant – perhaps it is not too pretentious to present this alternative, in the guise of the Canon of an unknown Mass.

\* \* \*

*PREFACE: Before the Pieta*

*A Woman in a cellar in the Alps sits beside the broken relics of a Man – her shawl drawn back a little to disclose her face. It is not in a dream that this figure has been seen before. It is the Second Eye, looking down upon the body of her Son. The arm that hangs limply to the ground has hardly stiffened yet.*

ANTIPHON

Mother of God  
Holding in her arms the burden of all grief  
Weep, for Adonis, violet stolèd Queen.

PIETA

Is there any sorrow that can equal my sorrow?  
If misery is the salt of life, I am Lot's wife.

ANT.

Twigs in a breeze  
Hoch – Hoch.  
Viva – Viva  
Hoch – hoch.

ACOLYTE

Hail Anneliese, full of grief.  
We join with you in mourning for the crownèd dead.

PIETA

I do not mourn for him, but for myself.  
This dust is not the thing I loved  
And yet it is dearer to me far  
Than what they made of him before he died.

ANT.

A changeling in Perugia.  
Her hands stumbling on the keys.

ACOLYTE

All guilt must be avenged on earth.  
You shall not weep alone.

ANT.

From the Quick for the Dead.  
To each what is coming to him.  
A Souvenir from Buchenwald.

PIETA

Are my tears not enough?  
Why comfort me with afflictions  
That I already have?

ACOLYTE

Do not ask us to forgive.  
Mine is the holy anger of a sinner confronted by sin.  
Let the living arise and join me in God's work.  
The patience of Job is not enough.

PIETA

Job was not patient  
And I know that there is work to do.  
But I shall not join with you until you have cast out  
The knowledge of Good and Evil.

ACOLYTE

Cast out knowledge?  
What does that mean?

PIETA

Throw away your gun.

ACOLYTE

Throw away the fruit of my maturity –  
The truth that I have come so far to find?  
Does life mean nothing, that I should throw away its gifts  
As soon as they are won?

PIETA

Nothing is of any value  
Unless it can be thrown away.  
Only rubbish should be bought and sold.

ANT.

That which we perfect  
We build with imperfection.  
That which we soften  
We first make hard.  
That which we desire  
We give away.  
That which we destroy  
We first exalt.

ACOLYTE

This is the counsel of contradiction.  
With that piece of wreckage in your arms  
Can you deny the real presence of the Seven Deadly Sins?  
Let us proclaim the truths of Good and Evil.  
We have doubted them for long enough.

PIETA

These truths I do not deny.  
Fight Evil if you will  
But – oh – do not admit the Knowledge of it.

ANT.

Give us a cause in which to serve,  
A sturdy enemy to fight,  
A laurel, or a monument  
For him that's wrong  
And him that's right.

PIETA

That knowledge is the poison of the seed of Adam.  
You were innocent once,  
But now you are innocent no longer.  
You were strong in heart, and knew that you belonged here.  
This was your age and generation  
And you were proud of it.

ANT.

I am no stranger here.  
Their sins are my sins,  
Their greatness is my greatness.  
If they are doomed  
So am I doomed along with them.

PIETA

But now you are changed by Knowledge.  
You are a Conqueror  
And because you know at last that it was worth the effort  
You have thrown away your victory  
And are proclaiming that your enemies were right.  
It is poison.  
Something has happened to you that is more terrible  
Than that which has happened to me.  
You have been bitten on the throat by a vampire.  
You have tasted of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil  
And have been driven out from Paradise.

ANT.

Of the tree that standeth  
In the midst of the garden,  
Thou shalt not eat of it;  
For in the day that thou eatest thereof  
Thou shalt surely die.

ACOLYTE

It was a Fool's Paradise.

PIETA

Happy the fool in Paradise.  
Here is one who was wise.

ACOLYTE

I did not wish to be a Conqueror.  
I never sought for any apple  
And none was forbidden to me.

PIETA

It is not always an apple.  
To you, that gun was forbidden.

[Pause]

ACOLYTE

Is this how my father came to sin in Eden?  
Was the fruit of that tree forced into his mouth  
As this gun was forced on me?  
Is it for this offence that I must be redeemed  
By the blood and suffering of a body on a gibbet?  
Can God make my sins lighter by committing them himself?  
Since I have helped to slay the monster that made Buchenwald  
How can I serve a God who has made Hell?

PIETA (as the Third Eve)

There is no Hell  
Except that which the poison in your blood creates.  
God is less cruel to us that we are to ourselves,  
For he will let us die  
If we insist that life is too hard for us.  
And that is merciful.  
But is it too hard for you?  
Can you not be wiser than our Father, Adam?  
Is there not an innocence that lies beyond maturity?  
Some day will come a generation,  
A generation that has been tempered in the furnace,  
A generation that knows – yet cannot be killed by knowledge,  
A generation that needs no redemption  
And has nothing against the Creator of Night and Day.  
Spit out the fruit of the tree  
And be one of that generation – if you can.

ANT.

Then spake the Third Eve unto Adam  
And said unto him,  
Spew forth the fruit of the tree  
That thou hast tasted  
And thou shalt live in the garden  
And be at peace again with God.

[*End of the first part*]

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*EPIKLESIS: Before the Rock Summit*

*On the lip of the descent into the valley – a frame house burning in the dusk. A task force, winding up the river bank. A cable railway, linked with Hafelekar where the snow is deep, and in the silence of final things, all the overtones of the past can be heard without distraction.*

ANT.

The voice of a Muezzin in Azrak,  
The high, clear note of a lark at Assisi,  
The bell of a Church in Dungannon.

*In the stillness of the dawn standing in the snows of the summit, he looks up into the skies and speaks.*

ACOLYTE

Where is he that mocks the righteous  
And forces his poison into their bellies?  
Is this my reward for being his servant  
And for maintaining his ways before his enemies?  
Cast off that cloak of cloud  
And let my cries pass through.

ANT.

Flung wide be the gates of light  
And opened the doors of glory  
And drawn back the veil that is before the Father's face  
And let him descend.

A VOICE OUT OF THE SILENCE

Who is this that flings blasphemies  
On the airs of the morning?  
Whose feet blacken the carpet of my sanctuary?  
What fury is accomplished in this tempest of malediction?



ACOLYTE

*[kneeling fearfully]*

Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison  
Christe eleison. Christe eleison. Christe eleison.

THE VOICE

Is this the voice that speaks to prostrate Princes?  
The hardy soul that asks to see his God?  
To whom are these oblations offered?  
A. spate of words – a spectacle of bended backsides!  
Why do you grovel there?  
Stand up and state your name and business.

ACOLYTE

*[rising with bowed head]*

Lord, I am your humble servant  
Fighting your battles here below.

THE VOICE

Humble indeed?  
Are you not one who said  
There is a sacred bond between a man and his enemies  
Into which nobody else may intervene?  
Is God less fit to fight his battles than you are yourself?

ACOLYTE

Do not turn my words against me, sir.  
You have driven your wheels across my forehead  
And ploughed it deep enough with furrows.  
You have spread my bed in the darkness  
Where Misery has been my only mistress.  
Sir, that is enough.

THE VOICE

Do not use that word to me.  
Am I a stranger or some sententious pedagogue  
Rumbling with little winds?  
Speak out as one of my household  
And say what you have got against me.

ACOLYTE

Who am I to have anything against the Almighty?

THE VOICE

One who presumes to pray for forgiveness  
When he has it in his heart for all  
Except his Maker.  
Has the Lord no understanding  
That he should not value Absolution too?  
Is he so vainglorious that he can be satisfied  
With words of servility?  
Is he so poor as to require the reassurance  
Of those who do not know what is good for themselves?

ACOLYTE

The worship that we offer is not for the satisfaction of God  
But for our own nourishment.  
Worship is all we have to reassure ourselves.  
Would you deny us that?

THE VOICE

Before you worship you accuse yourself.  
But I say to you, you must first accuse the Lord  
Before he will lend his ear.  
Speak up, therefore, and confess my sins  
Or I shall retire behind the veil of my altar  
And leave you to your empty and defamatory rites.

ACOLYTE

Let the Lord have his way.  
Your servant speaks, and this is what is in his heart.  
You have created Man –  
In whose image of frailty I do not know –  
And set him in the way of temptation.  
You have bidden him to fight for his existence  
And plagued him with a Pity for the things he has to kill.

THE VOICE

In whose image have you created God?  
If you hate Pity, why do you not cast it out?

ACOLYTE

I do not hate Pity  
And though it tear my breast apart,  
You know that I can never cast it out.  
That is the bitterest of all my accusations.

THE VOICE

Is that all?

ACOLYTE

You have created me to long for life  
When death is all that is intended for me.  
You have burdened me with a choice  
That no child of mine would ever have to make  
Were it in my power to make it for him.  
So let me return to the Brenner, and be at peace.  
For on my shoulders is a millstone  
That is too great for dust to carry.

THE VOICE

So you have heard the voice of the Tempter  
And would cast your load into the grave?  
The clay cries out against the purpose of the potter,  
And the fingers of my right hand are oppressed  
By the weight of their decisions!  
O credulous elector,  
I am the Lord, and there is none else.  
What if I choose for you,  
And by the miracle of Grace, my finding is a different one?

ACOLYTE

I shall cry out against your Grace, O Lord,  
And say that your will is terrible.  
Why should I live, if for the fact of being a Man  
I must be punished?

THE VOICE

Is this the boy who left his father's house  
To seek misfortune?  
Did I mistake the voice that prayed for Sorrow  
From the Garden of the Hesperides?

ANT.

What good is Youth till one is old?  
Freedom without Labour  
Is honour without glory.  
And Rest is only a torment  
Until one is tired out.

ACOLYTE

That was my voice you heard.  
But sometimes you answer prayer too well.

THE VOICE

Never too well for one  
Who dares to proclaim himself a son of mine.

ANT.

I do not believe  
That he was his only-begotten son  
Because I am his son too.  
What is this symbol doing on my sleeve  
If I am not prepared to fly to Libya?

ACOLYTE

I am not strong enough for this.  
I have tasted the feast as God has prepared it  
And the wine is bitter to my tongue.  
I have eaten the Host from the patten  
And the teeth have fallen from my bleeding mouth.  
Why, then, command me to blaspheme before you kill me?  
I have nothing left with which to speak to God  
Except this.

ANT.

From the Quick for the Dead  
A Souvenir from Buchenwald.  
A Luger is presented to the sky.

THE VOICE

Was not this thing forbidden?

ACOLYTE

The Almighty knows what was in my heart  
When I broke His commandment.  
If for that offence I am condemned  
This is the only answer that remains.

*A shot fired into Heaven – the report echoing around the hilltops.  
The first rays of a rising sun, bearing in their fingertips the Grace  
of God.*

THE VOICE

Who is this that dresses in his parent's clothes  
And mimics the majesty of my thunder?  
Now, I perceive that I am speaking  
To one of my household.

ACOLYTE

[with bowed head]

Now, kill me.

Kill me. Kill me.

THE VOICE

Lift up your eyes, and look your Maker in the face.

You shall die when I choose, but not before.

Do you know now what your choice is?

And why I have called you back from the Brenner?

ACOLYTE

[looking up]

I do not die?

Not die – after what I have done?

THE VOICE

Did you kill the son

Who would not speak to you?

*The Choir begins the Creed – at first softly, then with gathering assurance.*

OMNES

I believe in God the Father of Night and Day

Builder of Heaven and Hell

Who sends us the frost and the flowers.

ACOLYTE

[looking up]

Now I perceive who my father is.

Only a God could be so infinite,

So unrelenting and so right.

Let me live, Lord,

And though You batter me with rods I will observe Your ways.

Let the measure of my tribulation

Be the measure of my joy in being alive.

OMNES

I praise Him for His blessings

And for His chastisement,

For the joy that is His gift

And for the sorrow that gives joy its meaning.

THE VOICE

Why shall you do my will?  
Is it because you fear my wrath?

ACOLYTE

He who created me will recognise His handiwork.  
He who sent me out from my home  
Will receive me again when He is ready.  
That is my faith –  
A richer faith than one that marches hand in hand with fear.

OMNES

I praise Him for the pains of doing  
And for the stillness of rest,  
And I pray for the gift of each  
In its proper course.

THE VOICE

Why shall you do my will?  
Is it for rewards?

ACOLYTE

What rewards have I had,  
Except the promise of a dove that never came?

OMNES

I praise Him for Desire,  
And for Love, the fruit of desire.

THE VOICE

Why shall you do my will?  
Is it because my will is sensible?

ACOLYTE

That was the way of Pelagius  
And is the error of our generation.  
Sometimes your will does not seem sensible to me.

OMNES

I praise Him for the miracle of life,  
And I praise Him no less for death,  
The crown of life.

THE VOICE

For the last time,  
Why shall you do my will?

ACOLYTE

Why does the hammer do the will of the smith?

OMNES

God be praised for all these things  
And for the wit to be glad in them.

THE VOICE

For that answer, I have turned back the arrow  
That reason tells you cannot be reversed.  
So go, my son, and live in the Garden once again  
Forgetting Good and Evil  
And knowing only Night and Day.

OMNES

May He forgive me as I forgive Him  
And acknowledge me as His child  
By granting His sign that I have been  
At large in His service.

ACOLYTE

But not for ever, Lord.  
Let this life be immortal  
But not everlasting.

THE VOICE

Is that your only prayer, before we part?

ACOLYTE

I have another.

THE VOICE

Be careful. This may be answered too.

ACOLYTE

Lord, I cannot forget my own sins.  
If I may not fight them for Your sake,  
May I not fight them for my own?  
Why was I born to long for greatness  
If I have not the right to do that much?

THE VOICE

My son, you have accused and have forgiven your God.  
Accuse yourself now, if so you wish.  
You may fight your own sins.

ACOLYTE

And what if I am not strong enough  
To forget my sins in others, too?

THE VOICE

O artful suppliant!  
To seek my dispensation at such a moment!  
Fight your own sins wherever you may find them.  
Outboast the vain, despise the proud,  
Neglect the slothful, and rage at the angry.  
These are your own transgressions  
And Pity is the Soldier's way to absolution.  
But, here is my command.  
Avenge all others' sins on me, as you have done this day,  
And leave the human race in peace.  
Come now. Tell me your name.

ANT.

I am a City that is not forgotten.  
I am the first into Czernowitz.  
A Mirror am I to you who perceive me.  
I am Dion that bringeth good tidings.

ACOLYTE

My name is M or N and there is nothing to avenge.  
Here in my hand, I hold this creature –  
The fruit of the tree of my experience.  
Now, as the symbol of my maturity, I cast it forth  
And, like a child in the streets of Ekartsberga  
I reject the inheritance of my father, Adam.

*He flings the gun away, and it goes spinning downwards from the altar.*



OMNES

And this is my act of faith –  
That I cast forth the Knowledge of Good and Evil,  
And the deadly sins that are bred of sin,  
Secure in the promise  
That all things, future and past,  
Hidden and revealed,  
Are in His gracious hands.

THE VOICE

[*in the distance*]

I have harnessed the Unicorn to the plough.  
The range of the mountains was his pasturage  
But now he shall bend his back to the furrow.  
In Famine he shall save you from starvation  
And in War from the power of the sword.  
But keep him hungry till his work is done.  
Will the wild ass bray while he has grass?

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## POSTSCRIPT

– Did you notice a saloon car over on the Italian side? one of the Divisional PR boys said to me.

→ Yes. We passed it twice. I thought of going back to take a look. But then I thought I wouldn't.

– There was a Nazi official of some sort in it.

– Was?

– Yes. He shot himself after he found that he was too late to get through. The Priest knows all about it.

– Thanks for telling me. But if he's dead, it's the end of that story, I suppose.

\* \* \*

In the cleft of the valley outside Colle Isarco, I stood staring at the inscription on the memorial to an almost forgotten War. And suddenly I burst into laughter. The Almighty in His own quiet way is really a bit of a humorist. He had politely ignored me at my self-baptism in the stream of the Jordan; but now at the end of my journey, when I was discovering at last what it was all about, He had sent a dove to reassure me that we were on good terms after all.

SIA SACRA AGLI ITALIANI  
LA VIA DOVE PASSARONO  
I FANTI

Not quite the bird that I had expected: but all the more amusing for that. For an imprecise messenger of slothful habits – an unmistakable fulfilment of a promise! What the rest of it means I am not quite sure. It is not the first pun that He has made, and personally I think that it looks more subtle than His former one.

The heavens did not open, but there it was, waiting for me on the roadside at the spot where the armies finally met. And, to the best of my knowledge, there it remains.

## GLOSSARY

- AAPIU – *Allied Air Photographic Interpretation Unit*
- ACV – *Armoured Command Vehicle. Part of the mobile Headquarters of an Armoured Division*
- AFV – *Armoured Fighting Vehicle. Includes both Tanks and Armoured Cars*
- AMGOT – *Allied Military Government of Occupied Territory*
- APM – *Assistant Provost Marshal. An officer of the Military Police*
- ASC – *Army Service Corps*
- B Echelon – *A forward section of the Supply Services*
- CCS – *Combined Chiefs of Staff*
- CP – *Command Post. The American equivalent of a British Headquarters*
- DMI – *Director of Military Intelligence*
- Erks – *Aircraftsmen – the Privates of the Air Force*
- FDL – *Forward Defended Locality*
- FSU – *Field Security Unit*
- G One – *A General Staff Officer 1st Grade (Lt Colonel)*
- G Ops – *Operations Branch of a General Staff*
- INS – *International News Service*
- IO – *Intelligence Officer*
- JAG – *Judge Advocate General*
- LAD – *Light Aid Detachment, for repairing vehicles in the field*
- LCI – *Landing Craft (Infantry)*
- Leaguer – *A laager of Tanks for mutual protection – close at night, open or dispersed during the day*
- LRDG – *Long Range Desert Group. An intelligence and sabotage unit operating behind the enemy lines in North Africa*
- MAAF – *Mediterranean Allied Air Forces*

- Main Army** – *See note on Tac Army*
- MT** – *Motor Transport*
- OP** – *Observation Post*
- Pongo** – *RAF slang for a Soldier*
- PR** – *Public Relations. The branch of a Service providing facilities for War Correspondents*
- PRO** – *Public Relations Officer*
- PWB** – *Psychological (Amer.) or Political (Br.) Warfare Branch. Department responsible for propaganda directed at enemy troops*
- RAP** – *Regimental Aid Post*
- RASC** – *Royal Army Service Corps*
- RAVC** – *Royal Army Veterinary Corps*
- REME** – *Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers*
- Rozzers** – *British Military Police*
- SHAEF** – *Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force*
- Sitrep** – *Daily Situation Report*
- SNAFU** – *Slang expression meaning general confusion. ‘Situation Normal. All Fucked Up’*
- Tac Army** – *Advanced Tactical Headquarters of an Army, usually occupied by the Army Commander in person and a small operations staff, as distinct from ‘Main Army’, where the principal administrative offices and clerical staff are located. ‘Rear Army’ is still farther back, and controls the supply services*







