INSERTS FOR
~~THE~~ THE APE OF SORROWS
and FOR
WAR IN ITALY

A War between Friends
draft pages

12/2/13 DK.

7/4/13

Guide to Hitler's Austrian HQ

– mentioned in that story –

"Adolf Hitler's House"

Nr. 1 AUFGANG ZU VERWALTUNG UND BORMANN-BUNKER
ENTRANCE TO THE ADMINISTRATION AND BORMANN-BUNKER

2 MASCHINENGEWEHRSTÄNDE
MACHINE GUN POSITION

3 ABGANG ZU BELÜFTUNG UND HEIZUNG
" ENTRANCE TO THE HEATING AND FRESH-AIR-SYSTEM

4 HUNDEZWINGER
DOG-KENNELS

5 NOTAUSGANG
EMERGENCY EXIT

6 BADERAUM FÜR LEIBWACHE
BATH-ROOM FOR THE BODY-GUARD

7 TOILETTEN FÜR LEIBWACHE
TOILET FOR THE BODY-GUARD

8 LEIBWACHE
QUARTERS OF THE BODY-GUARD

9 SPEISEZIMMER
DINING-ROOM

10 LEIBWACHE
QUARTERS OF THE BODY-GUARD

11 ADOLF HITLER'S BADE-, SCHLAF-, WOHNZIMMER
ADOLF HITLER'S BATH-, BED-AND LIVINGROOM

12 HITLER'S LEIBARZT DR. MORELL
QUARTERS OF HITLER'S PERSONAL-DOCTOR, DR. MORELL

13 EVA BRAUN'S BADE-, ANKLEIDE-, SCHLAF-UND WOHNZIMMER
EVA BRAUN'S BATH-, DRESSING-, BED-AND LIVINGROOM

H O T E L T Ü R K E N
Neben Hitler-Haus

HOTEL TÜRKEN * NEBEN HITLER-HAUS *

ES FOLGEN: STAATSARCHIV, TELEFONZENTRALEN, KÜCHE, RÄUME DER LEIB-STANDARTE BÄDER U. TOILETTEN. DIESE SIND JEDOCH NICHT ZUGÄNGLICH.

FURTHER THERE ARE THE STATE ARCHIVES, TELEPHONE-CENTRAL, KITCHEN, BATH-ROOM AND TOILETS OF THE BODY-GUARD UNIT, WHICH CAN NOT BE VISITED DUE TO THE LACK OF LIGHTING.

Addenda to Of Sins and Winters —
Lots of detail.

29/3/13

Note Could Captain H be
Captain Hazlitt?

30/4/13 DK

OF SINS AND

WINTER

ADDENDA

DATED

GENERAL — SIFT FOR USE

INDEX TO BATTLE POSITIONS:

→ an engagement tactical Imp. A meeting like the crossing of a river might take a whole night, but otherwise the encounter was spent in a few hours. The rest was watching, sudden alarm, waiting → 2
to withdraw (by now we were now used to then fully back to another prepared line) — ~~not because~~ since a daylight
reconnaissance of the kind, not long or heavy enough to be the herald of an attack, was of the sight of a coming attack
after dark. I was in a meditative frame of mind quite unlike my alarmed and confused state I remembered,
in the previous campaign, south of Rome. ~~And~~ /
~~I was in another way.. but~~ ~~I was~~ while then we had been in the fighting —
we knew exactly or big, wide front
attack in any day division had on the
piercing of the line-change in every line —
the way by night is only to dark, so
full of surprises ~~for the flank and the~~
with plan to hide ~~explosion~~ in which each
~~the enemy, might be the~~
~~very day of~~

Also turn is a different day. In the
night we seemed much more mobile, not more
concentrated as we seemed to be in the night
on long, wide, frontal attacks all written out
of the piercing of the line-change in every line.
What else could be done in ~~no~~ dense country, so
dense, ~~so full of danger~~ with a potential
ambush in every mile?

~~the~~ ~~Enemy~~ digging with alarm ~~of the~~ ~~Enemy~~ ~~in~~ ~~human~~ ~~multiple~~ anger with its claim...

→ It like me, ~~accepting~~ ~~losing~~ we go through ~~the fingers~~
~~of shadow and~~ the river reveille — its claim, ~~to retain and~~ INSERT 4½ A
~~drowned and~~ and drowned, their's of mine an earlier
~~cattle~~ not to ~~be~~ Raglan / the ~~A~~ belonged to ~~a~~ ~~of~~ ~~fame~~, ~~in~~ ~~Wolseley~~
like always to have known him he had

reconnaissance, tactic defence, being accustomed to the peculiarly formal choreography of attacks, ~~not~~ ~~practice~~, ~~with~~ it is a cacophony of screeching metal and cracking flak and shrieks. Nor the →

→[2] ~~and~~ hiding to the the leathery fear in the belly remained a constant.)

INSERT 4½ B

Had it been aware of second lieutenants,

~~Headquarters~~ ~~Commander~~ might have said that I was now properly at war, and conscious ~~I was bent on action — no longer learning~~ ~~After I was bent on action — not taking it all in~~ not learning ~~but all the~~ ~~See sights and sounds meant, not accommodating myself to unexpected shocks. That is, I took no~~ ~~further account of the~~ ~~I was in,~~ ~~and knew specifically what I was doing. Then I saw that now~~ ~~he was gone and that I did it with a strange~~ ~~remove from myself. Then he was~~ ~~at a strange remove from me —~~ ~~was my function. The way~~ ~~The care with which~~ ~~I now~~ I did things on my own initiative ~~as~~ ~~or I was expected it now — was all at a~~ ~~strange remove from me.~~ I was used to the dead and the dying. Which was also to say that I was used to the idea of me dying. Which in turn made for a certain, calm, alert nonchalance. I may well have appeared

Would have looked from the outside like an acceptance of war on my part. ~~But I had little~~ But I had precious little to do with the I did. It felt as if someone else was doing it. Rightly was all a strange second remove from me. Which meant I did it better. I was now used to the dead...

Which reminded me of the captain on his, how I had met at Salerno. I understood his non-committal, understated ways. And I think he had got →

INSERT 4½A

Copped it, as we used to say. He had left on an 800 jet and there was some question of his not being missing. I said 'Take mine, I never use it', from the first moment of Saturday I had a superstition about putting the flip on my head (said) always wore a beret. I handed it to him and he gave me a ~~wonderful~~ gracious, (Rather diffident) (Then) a smile. I said, 'Come back', and — with ~~before forbidden that~~ smiling ~~March structure~~ — he said, ~~still with the~~ 'I hope so.' They told me ~~but he was not~~ he was still not nobody knew more. He complained of a pain in his arm ~~since they began~~. He probably thought that was all he had — a splintered wound. He died in a few moments. I am glad he thought he was all right. His name was 'Maughan'. He was ~~his exact degree~~ a few years older than mine — a small difference that made a ~~vast degree of authority~~ chasm as far as authority went. It took on his dereliction and ~~of~~ humbug. (How many once ~~many~~ elegies are spoken

~~How many such elegies must have spoken since in this deadly business it's called war.~~

is war) ~~unheard~~ ~~unheard~~ ~~heard~~ ~~have to be heard~~).

INSERT 169½ (2)

do you know something? — I think that's my dad! I press charges! ~~I don't care what you say at my mouth — and does it feel good! BEAT IT Bert.~~

A ring at the bell. Bert (rushing towards the front door) It's ~~Saturday~~! It's the big day Crane! Him and Marigold — the cream of London chic!

Crane: I think you may be right!

The front door opens and all of a sudden SAMBERRY is marching in. As he's arrested by the pictures.

Crane (cont.) Please take a seat Samberry! You like the pictures Samberry.

Taking not the slightest notice) Sir just stares at the pictures Samberry sinks into an armchair that will give him the best view) there.

Samberry: No aeroplanes. No motor car. It's lovely! And I can see Ethel! She's loosening her stays — we always used to say wait for the explosion!

Bert: Can I get you an orange juice Samberry?

Samberry: Be quiet, I'm listening to the birds!

Bert: These pictures cost half a million each Samberry!

Samberry: They aren't pictures! I can hear them! Can you hear the little mice? (Suddenly, to Bert) Why's there woman who's supposed to look like a man?

Crane: She's coming Samberry. She found me these pictures, she's in art in a very big way.

WW2 cannot count as the essence of War.

This Theory of War acceptance

(1)

[But Britain became the land of Terraced Houses like no where else in the world — streets and streets of dreary, dreary symmetry. But many if not most were solid structures — the 3-bedroomed ones with pleasant gardens and lots of good middle-class prices. An element of fear mixed with the desire to forget for an unprecedented hour — the hideous indecency — the fear that we could no longer trust working people as they had been trained in the war, armed and trudging heavily loaded and the fulcrum existence upon their existence upon their natural acceptance, while the offices (including the 'Temporary gentlemen', as they were called, meaning the guileless middle-class people) were where a share military necessity, for it was weighed in numbers for needed of Terror or attrition warfare. Hitler by ~~not~~ declaring unlimited general total war the only meaning kind of war there could be.

In this way, therefore, finished by

→ In the first world war the war time slogan 'war aim' fell. Boys died for the purple (~~of the water~~ were told that they had both, after the war, a huge housing programme (of course a vast number of the men ready this kind of thing in the newspapers would be dead & the true lie — as the articles always reminded them — that first had to the glory and the sacrifice, but yes a war on the head would be a guaranteed thing of the purple days the glory needed and the sacrifice.

To day the glory and sacrifice ads sing do not work, as the (young) talk tell us — 18-26 year olds actually no drugs better only, and use no sense of 'their' body. In fact no one of them would like thinking it.

Does mean that the ~~state~~ very system of war as an accepted human and even venerable institution has collapsed to the ground — and with it the technology of lies built on lies that made the institution workable.

WW2 cannot compete in the interest of WW1

(2)

of the second world war — of how to have the people's consent — which meant that the liars had to be ~~had to be~~ peddled / ~~that also~~ convincing, and they had to be ~~done~~ in with ~~of~~ certain deceptions. And of this task were like Churchill and Beaverbrook — politicians — from — were always at the point of genius. Beaverbrook, ~~Churchill~~ after ~~the~~ earlier ~~Churchill, enemy and~~ an ardent enemy of a war that could easily have been averted, and therefore an ardent enemy of Churchill, performed his ~~rapid~~ volte face with speed, once he saw that the peace party was going to lose and Churchill, supported by ~~all people~~ the labour party and the communist party, was a strong left wing howling for war, was going to win. ~~It is this way that Churchill, we~~ ~~Churchill~~ ~~trying because it was~~ ~~make war~~ ~~because~~ In this way war puts the unlikeliest people sitting side by side in the same feather bed. The labour party was invited to join the government — there, it was, ~~government~~ — ~~and~~ ~~accepted~~ ~~labour~~ ~~ministers~~ maintaining a coalition government, to which the labour party ~~supported~~ ~~labour~~ leaders with patriotic ~~men~~ labour ~~ministers~~ have ~~and~~ like ~~scattered~~ ~~scattering~~ ~~to the dogs~~ ~~about~~ ~~more~~ / ~~sudden~~ ~~deserted~~ = the dogs of power, having lost the previous election. The peace party — its ~~protagonists~~ protagonists included members of the royal family, if not all of the royal family, were lost. ~~Not~~ the Duke of →

wartime
pursuit — to fly while in England: otherwise the adamant[ly] put it out that he was not = the master of any flying returned, & returned room.

death too — in a Sunderland flying boat, & his pilot was able to get the plane in the air despite fatally air-flaps (the Duke) Kent plane is said when its air-flaps injured with, so is the Sikorski plane). ~~The~~ ~~Gaulle replied~~ This was the one time de Gaulle agreed — more reluctantly

~~this~~ a war always enclosed ~~contain~~ a a covert war & the single reason the some people will not stand & some? the lies: if they told principal politics they have to go. De Gaulle warning escaped

→ If Kent was suddenly 'shot down' in a plane (we were first told it was a plane so) in Portugal) the also carried a man who looked like Churchill. We never learned ~~it~~ until years after the how a flying in Sweden (the center of pro-nazi activities + Hitler) in the same kind of accident — in a Sunderland flying boat, which also had some difficulty in like-of — that befell Churchill. Other enemy, Sikorski.

We must be surprised at once this —

The tall haystack in front of the house caught fire from some schrapnel. I had just turned to look at the men crowding together under the stairs—they were making it difficult for my signaller to get through to the kitchen—and suddenly everything became lit up with a bustling generous yellow light followed by the sharp crackle of hungrily burning hay. The men at the windows were shouting, Jerry's in there, shoot for christsake, something's moving! The Bren gunner put a burst into the flames as The Major pushed his way through and said What are you shooting at? And then someone shouted Look! and we heard a woman's long scream and again the gunner put in a burst of fire and he was about to fire again when a girl with long hair ran out of the flames and stood between the house and the burning hay unable to move from terror.

Come in, come in, we shouted—*venire, venire!* Which only made her shriek the louder. And then, just a moment before the haystack began to tumble down an old man and a boy dashed out, then came the rest of the family and without ado the old man, after a moment's thought, took to his legs which were suddenly youthful and in a flash was behind the house and down the hill with all the family, ~~including the~~ old women and children and the screaming girl running after him. It was the first and last we saw of them. ~~The person who invented the joke that when finally the globe has been destroyed by nuclear fission there will be one survivor, an Italian, knew something indeed.~~

The hay continued to burn but sulkily now. The Bren gunner ~~had~~ left his gun pointing at the castle as

P. 42: The 2 women. This comes after 'we moved to Rimini' + the 5th Army at our left flank.

'After a little (P. 42) I could wander like this smouldering down ferlim... Reminds of Stein at the demonised enemy: possession'

The Bill dominates & Comm[illegible] Greeks then Nero & am — I could see this for the way they regarded us & in both the prisons — they were only the same type of human as the rest, & refer it to Greece they called the pers. of Jews in us — the evil & most hateful spectre - myth, used with Applied Black cynicism by the Nazis. Which →

→ both of these wars, like, for the
French would become very
much its own, as it did,
especially to the eastern ones
and also Russia.

ADDENDA FROM OF SINS AND WINTER:

1] Salerno: first moments P.6. ('I joined my regiment at the beaches of Salerno') The first artillery barrage there P.7 ('During my training as a novice...') after we moved to CAVA DEI TIRRENI: 24 guns from my regiment alone... (P. 9.) Description of how the guns are fired. See [8] below and [10]

2] Volturno: NB para top P. 14 — Imp 'several' men going-back-musician. See BELOW [7]

3] Cava dei Tirreni — after bombardment — P. 15 — the loss of my signaller: 'My baptism took place...' The screaming girl. The signaller's death not described. One of two hit. See [11] below

4] The house + the (cockney) Major when we could see a white cottage ahead (also near Faenza?), P. 24 = the 19-year-old crying, and Major comforting him. He was saying he couldn't go up in the attack... He was killed. Of Term?

5] Description of FOO, P. 27. Called at many fortnights or so.

6] The farmhouses we lived in: P. 29/30: the 14.00 hrs bombardment: I do not mention outcome. One can say the probably the men scattered. It was amazing how close to dead ground and death you came — yet when the smoke + stench of cordite died you picked yourself up like for (the beginning of another) round dread. Echelon carrying the FOO life with the Command post, where all was unreal.

7] The Volturno Operation. P. 46.

8] SALERNO: P. 49 where he sees [illegible] turn & run. The turn dived to the ground — and I carried to turn dived down.

9] "Cerasola" — the Guards' Hill? P. 49 "Feb. 1944"

I mention — at Cassino — [illegible] Monastery Hill > Monte Cairo.

ADDENDA FROM OF SINS AND WINTER

10] SALERNO – the officer talking to me is a major P.53

11] CAVA DEI TIRRENI – 2nd para P. 53

12] "MY LAST REBELLION" DEC. 1944 (WRONG – 1943) P.54.
"I flew into sudden rages... hard stares... walked out moodily..."

13] "~~A friend~~ MONTE CERASOLA – a few days before Christmas..." P. 55. Christmas Eve – Re leaves the mountain. To P. 58
The others think they saw me dead P. 59.

14] CERASOLA – From last para P. 60 to P. 62 Also. last para P.63 We are shelled by our own guns... The prisoner who panics... P.64, P.65 a sniper runs away, I shoot him etc.... P66 – P.67 I am clever at finding safe places, ponder them until they are chosen for me, until I have nothing to do with it –

~~15~~ 15] ~~P~~ POST-CERASOLA – at the guns – P. 66 – four 'when I came back from [Cerasola]' – he has a kind of post-Terror in his bivouac – the nerves rip & riot with foreboding of a shell – P.67/68/69 – we are suddenly taken out of the line to Egypt.

16) CASSINO (Castel Egypt) – P.69, last para /70/

17) CASTEL POGGIANO – P.73

To P. (3)

I was astonished that no one pulled me up over this and the truth never occurred to me, namely that I looked neither a child nor a man but was much closer to childhood, especially to senior officers. They made allowances, knowing it was in a quick maturer.

NB CAPTAIN MAUGHAM —
around Cortina? In Tuscany?

ADDENDA FROM OF SINS AND WINTER

(3) A DELIRIUM

18 The winning of the River Po P. 90–103 (mis-called 'the next operation' after the one above, & the second time, I got back in German lines. Note 'counter-attacks' that followed, making in very bitter what should have been — & nearly was — an easy mopping-up operation leading straight into an undefended Austria. This operation shows why heroes IS NOT in pieces. like those of the British commando who has been decorated & gallantly 3 times, and I-Ching. and glanced back. Were we, underneath, the 'Christian Soldier' marching as to war in the most idiotic of hymns? Was it all a mistake like a lying wilful picture of the human soul & no purpose than destruction (& there were Germany, Poland, France, Britain, USA now, there was Europe?) as a hero chosen, of all times, by God? In the case Oscar Wilde was beautifully right when he said that God, in creating man, had taken his reputation into his hands. RE-READ

IA p.103 with the Major agent: on this part, the earlier operation round Poggiolo? No, separate IV. — we moved eastwards, so that now the Eighth army covered the right side, the Adriatic peninsula, the 5th Army the Mediterranean side. RE-READ (& details such as the women who gazed at me)

Re-read & details

FOR CASSINO

BATTLES

Appendix to be published in the Texan,

~~to the~~

The worst case of tragedy befalling large ~~numbers~~ numbers of men caught with no avenue of escape was that of the ~~Hitler~~ German 65th Infantry Division which seemed to exist mostly of teenagers who had no battle experience. ~~Montgomery~~ General Montgomery received Ultra a decryption of a German message which showed the Nisi Sangro ~~to be~~ in the division's sole hands. They were very well dug in, with underground passages. Montgomery ordered a barrage ~~of artillery fire~~ that sent over ~~five~~ six thousand shells, and many of the gunners were killed were in their dug-outs. A battalion 'broke', in military language, in the words punished and fled along the passages to the rear — Shortly were then shot down by waiting soldiers of the 78th Division of the Eighth Army.

p. 45
A War
between
friends.

~Sex in
Warfare

12/2/13

anywhere, even the latrine. He was beginning to bald and I still see today his slightly buck teeth as he laughs. He already had a family, so was very grown-up for the rest of us.

Our command post, set behind four twenty-five-pounder guns, quickly became a little home, our warm useless political discussions its heart. We quickly discovered how devoted we had each been to the Struggle against Fascism, ~~in my case from the age of fourteen. That was~~ the vast left-wing movement of the Thirties, ~~It~~ which had stretched right across Europe.

I told him how in 1940 my girlfriend K. and I had marched up Whitehall in a huge crowd ~~of 100,000 people~~ yelling Down With Chamberlain and Chamberlain Must Go. Yes, it was we of the Struggle who had put Churchill there. He was hoisted up on our sole shoulders. ~~So~~ This was very much 'our' war. ~~So~~ why did I carp about being in it?

'Twenty-five pounder' means a gun that sat between wheels with a long barrel like any other long-distance gun but it was, by comparison, light—it could be hitched to an armoured carrier quickly, whisked away from a threatened site with little ado. Its shell made a shallow crater and only

bag the stains would remain its whole lifetime. I picked myself up and stumbled with my kit to another fig tree and there I fell asleep, as if moving had done the trick. Even the feathers in my belly went and my slumber was an expanse of stillness of the kind you wake from suddenly but fresh.

* * *

At first light my division also woke up, especially to the existence of us reinforcements. We were conducted by runners to our various command posts. These were still close to the sea, in earshot of its leisured wash, but on higher ground. A major told us in clipped tired tones that we could easily, at any time, be pushed back into that wash. We were hanging on by a tight strip of land, he said. It was all that was left to us.

So it was true. This was war. The enemy was breathing and watchfully close. My realisation was—and I cannot explain why—a great turning point in my life.

I was allocated to a troop—four guns under the command of Captain H., a Yorkshireman of thirty or more who walked with his feet splayed out and his head forward as if greatly excited to be going

Thus the road to Rome could be overseen from formidable heights---which also presented a deadly insurmountable natural barrier to any commanders bent on frontal assault, as ours were.

This was not all. On the other (eastern) side of the defile there was another range of peaks almost as formidable. And even this wasn't the worst news. Within touching distance of the defile, so to speak, there lay a smaller but steep hill and on this sprawled, in the sweetest manner, a slumbering medieval town called Cassino which thus looked benignly down not only on the mouth of the defile with its precious road to Rome but on the plains that stretched before it in a southerly direction. This town was the central nut of the Gustav Line, a nut snug and smug for its defenders, with wriggling lanes and humped houses clutched together in a centuries-old solitude, but a nut which even if you destroyed it stone by stone and tile by tile would remain indeed assert itself infinitely---as the nut too deadly to approach, and beyond human powers to infiltrate.

And not even this was enough. The sleepy nut was accompanied, even dominated, by a greater and more imposing and especially reinforced one that covered the summit of the hill and would require an arsenal of nutcrackers to break it, yet was just as sweet as Cassino, indeed the origin of her sweetness——more, the very cause of her lazy presence here, being no less than a vast abbey dedicated to Saint Benedict, its founder, and built to serve its spiritual end by resisting foreign invaders from the south, a Keeper of the Vatican's Southern Gate, so to speak.

And this abbey's windows gazed down on the plain before it so frankly that it must put a shiver down the spines of any infantrymen trying to cross in front of it, and later it did. In fact the whole ensemble of that hill serenely begged us to throw ourselves at it and if necessary break heads and hearts on it, and in the hardest of winters, and the stupefying thing is that this was precisely what we did.

* * *

And all this hardly twenty miles north of the river Volturno. By the time we crossed that river the enemy's Gustav Line had already been fully manned, its supply lines (always difficult on heights) secured. Our first trip wire, the Bernhardt line that lay in front of it, stretched along the Garigliano river in its Mediterranean reaches to its tributaries in the east, the Liri and the Rapido, close to Cassino. Namely a defence position set there by nature with such deft attention to detail that the Benedictine monks were no more in need of arms than archangels were.

Often they weren't even there. Once they were absent for a century and a half, so confident was this place that one look at it from below would discourage attack.

Only one man decided to do so and he was turned back by a dream in which St. Benedict spoke to him advisedly. So there you were---a spiritual stronghold that only atheists in the deepest sense would, and did, try not only to attack head-on but destroy for ever.

No wonder St. Benedict his temple in such a way that even if it was destroyed would become all the stronger for it (and this we witnessed it do).

It was now November, a decisive month for us all in that Hitler decided, having observed the success of Kesselring's disengagement-when-ready policy, to give him full command of Italian operations. And not only this. He undertook to increase Kesselring's strength with what remained of Rommel's army in North Africa.

Hitler made his decision on November 21st 1943, just as we were preparing to move up from the Volturno area.

This time it wasn't a matter of crossing water without boats. We were now to fight in mountains with no mountain equipment, no adequate clothing, not even special rations. Polyglot as an army we might be the uncrackable nuts before us required not mass but prowess. And this was something missing from allied guidance at the political top—and therefore at the bottom where we foot soldiers were.

* * *

The Big Show was to take place between December 15th 1943 and 15th January 1944, and to prepare for this we moved fifteen miles up from the northern banks of the Volturno to a tiny hill-top town called Sessa Aurunca, which took its name from the Aurunci mountains that placidly gazed at it across a valley of flat green land.

From Sessa, as we came to call it, you had a bird's eye view of that range's foothills, with the broad Garigliano, the Gustav Line's watery

protector, running before it and reduced from our point of view to a curling thread of mirror.

It was a cosy town, cobbled and clean. And that mountain barrier north of us became familiar, being a pleasure to watch for its mists and changing degrees of colour and shade.

With so much leisure and the heavy rains that had been predicted we also came to know our hosts, we tasted home-cooked food, exchanged bully beef and cigarettes for eggs and, in the case of us officers, took over their best rooms. The houses that lay on each side of the narrow main street were ours, just as if we were the town's elected administrators.

Strictly speaking there was a non-fraternity rule between us and them. We were to look on Italians as ex-fascists and ex-enemy, and to be watchful of our speech in their hearing. An army booklet warned us that, while a people of great affability, they could on occasion be treacherous.

What the booklet didn't tell us was that Italians had fraternity planted in them at birth, whatever disprezzo or malicious aforethought lurked in them. In [illegible] over. Kisses and smiles were exchanged and anything more secret was [illegible] elders and us commissioned officers. We officers only heard reports—the girls [illegible] passing the time of day with us when they saw we didn't bite and were exactly

like those vile Germans, namely cosy and cheerful and humane. You could see the relief on their faces.

Among the tantalising cries of joy that came up from the cellars in Sessa Aurunca there was sometimes the busy hushed sound of commercial transaction. The Italians were hungry.

Since we led a healthy life in the open, eating like pigs, you would have thought we officers might have suffered from this daily prevalence of women and the lack of them in bed. But the genitals were strangely non-combatant. We put it down to 'the bromide they put in your tea'. Only later in the brothels of Egypt and Beirut and Palestine during our first rest period did we use the contraceptives we were supplied with (which you could explain by the fact that we took tea out).

In that little town of Sessa I felt sad to be an officer. I rarely saw my men unless they were on duty, so deep were they in surrogate family life. And, though nothing was said (in the army nothing is said about almost everything), a second lieutenant came quickly to realise that he must never become loquacious with Other Ranks or join in their pranks and peccadilloes. I sat in my room yearning for the laughter I heard coming from the cellars. And my men told me their adventures (that was the right conduct for an officer—to listen).

I still preferred to be an officer, though. I wanted to lead because I felt that in a dangerous spot I could bring things to a good conclusion. I thought

that under someone else's guidance my instincts would dry up, I might be dragged into someone else's slowness of response.

One of the bitterest aspects of losing my signaller at Cava de' Tirreni was that I felt responsible for his death. Had I not been so helpless a novice I would have briskly shouted my men to cover, and shown them where that cover was. And in the Volturno attack I had led my men into hell (at the double)—not that there had been any choice but I still taxed myself with this unjust idea. It was the beginning in me of the guilt that goes, for better or for worse, with self-training.

I hoped earnestly that my signaller's death hadn't been an omen for the future—that I didn't carry a magnet in my pocket that would attract fatal enemy fire (this was how I described it to myself). I hoped the men I chose for my missions wouldn't look askance at me as the one who took them by a nasty turn of fate into the thickest shit of all. And of course I feared this in myself too. It just seemed to me that the omens so far weren't good. It was a tic of worry I was never without.

* * *

One morning I walked down to the foot of Sessa's steep hill in the bracing early sunlight. Here, in a small group of houses at Ponte Romeo, which bridged a little rivulet from the Garigliano, we had put our guns and installed a kind of command post. The guns were under camouflage nets and out of use.

And suddenly I turned and saw a close school-friend of mine walking towards me with his characteristic slim-lipped smile as if about to laugh. He

said, I saw your name in an officer-list and thought I'd drive over and see how you were. We stood gazing at each other, confused, rather shy. I remembered how he used to spend his days listening to Wagner on scratchy records and reading the plays and prefaces of George Bernard Shaw in a church-house belonging to his future in-laws in the Hampshire hills. He and I had found our first loves in the same village, at the same time. It was surely the most marvellous of bonds at this moment.

We watched a dog fight high above us. The two planes dived and circled spraying bullets at each other. There was the muffled whine of their engines and the tiny-toy echo of their machine guns. The war was rendered cosy for a moment as we stood there, quite as if Sessa's steep hill was one of southern Hampshire's.

This war had brought Gordon and me a lot of good. We would never have seen the Hampshire hills at the age of seventeen had we not been evacuated from London because of the bombing. It gave us our first taste of wholesome air and silence. For the first time I started doing well in exams. They got me to Oxford. And Gordon got to Cambridge. His first love was already his wife. Of course he knew my girlfriend K. and I pulled out the photo. He looked at it with what I took to be momentary misgiving. Perhaps he knew the truth, or thought I didn't.

The planes above suddenly broke from each other and flew in opposite directions—two lives saved. Gordon and I said good bye. I watched him drive away, south. I discovered it wasn't lovely memories that his visit filled me

with. My memories had lost all the warmth of the recent. That was the trouble. They were simply images. As if, though they had happened, they hadn't happened to me. That was what Gordon's visit made me understand—you haven't got a past, it happened but it extinguished itself. It no longer needed me.

Later that same morning a bombardier in my troop came running over and said, I've just had a horrible time. How's that? I asked him. It concerned a girl in the village. They were in love with each other. She was a lively girl with a romping manner and strong thighs and a firm chin and provocative eyes. And early that same morning they had kissed seriously for the first time. And it had disgusted him. Her mouth had tasted horrible, he said. Her breath was abominable. His face wobbled with dismay. I listened, shrugged. I knew her and guessed that the undrinkable ersatz coffee and her half-starved state had something to do with it. I gazed at the bombardier's face wobbling with disillusion. He thought girls were nice and fresh and stinks belonged to him. It occurred to me that he hadn't seen action yet. He was to do so later. The girl had a wonderful bright directness but he would have none of her. He was lucky, I suppose, to have kept his Civvy Street disgusts. They were due to be blown away.

Four

n Intelligence picture of how the enemy was feeling in the Aurunci mountains and on Monte Camino trickled down to us. They were well-clothed for Amountain extremes and commodiously dug in with regular food kitchens on secure supply lines.

The same could never have been said for us. It was one thing to send us up there in the winter but another not to provide us with clothing to cope with avalanches of rain and low temperatures. To cap the folly the thing was called Operation Raincoat. Would to God we had had them.

The story is that General Eisenhower ordered special mountain wear back in October but it didn't arrive until November. Not that its arrival changed matters. Not even by the end of December had it reached us and by then our attacks were petering out in attrition.

My map showed me that on the east side of the peninsula the Eighth army under General Montgomery was at this moment bogged down in rain and mud and blocked by swelling rivers. His big attack on November 20th (the day before Hitler gave Kesselring full powers) ran into bad trouble, though he had five times the strength, in men and munitions, of the Germans facing him. His advance from the southern tip of Italy had been cautious in the extreme, which Hitler took note of. Montgomery complained that no effort was made to establish contact between his army and our Fifth. This was really a complaint about General Alexander, commander of Italian operations, whose job it was to bring unity to a situation that promised disarray. In the Alexander Clark Montgomery combination alone you had three biological opposites---an English aristocrat in Alexander, a brisk Biblical man in Montgomery and a Texan in Mark Clark so different from the other two as to call for interpreters.

But even the utmost contact could alter nothing of a terrain that called solely for stealth units. To try to pass a huge concourse of men and armour and

supplies along provincial pot-holed lanes that wound uphill and downhill damned whatever strategy you might choose.

* * *

The Big Show opened on December 2 1944 with nine hundred of our guns delivering over four thousand tons of shells on peaks that stayed exactly where they were. The normal margin of error in shell-delivery was also much increased in mountainous conditions by the varying air currents and pressures. And the very thinness of the enemy line (a few men in command of a whole ridge) rendered map references null from the artillery point of view.

Ridges are contested by soldiers within earshot of each other, and boulders big and small provide excellent cover. The shells found not earth but stone, and did their worst in empty air.

The first F.O.O. mission our battery sent up was on the Aurunci range. And Captain H. was the chosen officer. He went off with boyish good cheer. In the next few days confused messages came down from him but never a map reference on which to fire, no doubt because any bombardment of a ridge got our own troops too.

One morning the Battery command post called me to say that Captain H. must be relieved at once and by me. I gathered my signallers and we put on as much heavy clothing as we could get together and started on our trek.

After crossing the plain and the Garigliano we began to climb a series of winding paths, many of them through woods and thus safe from observation. The rocks that jutted out starkly white and grey on either side of our path, the

steepness of the woods we passed through and the view when we suddenly turned to look at the placid world far below, made up a kingdom of heaven here and now (as Giordano Bruno said of this same landscape over a half a thousand years ago, and was roasted alive for it and other divine attributions to material earth).

This was still ancient Italy, a last appearance perhaps, and we the harbingers of her future dissolution.

It was by now a few days before Christmas. We trudged from village to village with our kit, bending forward the more as the path grew steeper. Loaded donkeys stumbled ahead of us. We went from one farmhouse to another, each looking dirty under its snow. The rations we had weren't sufficient. The wind came like a dart from the sea. We felt irritated and childish. I insisted on setting my men a good example by striding ahead of them but it probably exhausted them unnecessarily. Leading is never a matter of image. The silence grew as we rose, hugged all round as we were by the trees.

I had a fit of embittered fury, which happily I kept to myself, when I saw the legs of a dead German sticking out of the ground. Why the hell wasn't he buried? It didn't occur to me that he may but recently have been blown into the air, already dead, then half buried in the fountain of earth. And who was there to see to burials on slopes inaccessible to vehicles?

We looked back once more and saw the fields below Sessa Aurunca and the plain further south to Capua, and I thought I could see the Volturno hidden in low mist. The men were lagging behind me and I petulantly called down to

them to hurry up, only because I wished, as they did, to slow down. The youngest of them, loaded as he was, strode up the hill and passed me, forcing himself up just to give me a lesson, which of course angered me more. I then hung back, not caring. I was beginning to realise what a child I still was. Yet it wasn't the child that filled me with pouting anger and rebellion and sullen defiance but the fact that I was still a learner of the tricks of this deadly trade. I was inadequate.

As the air began to cool with the approaching heights beyond the tree-line we cooled too and only thought of what would greet us at the top, and if a hot meal was on the cards.

We came at last to what must surely be the summit. The steep slope above us, meeting the sky, shone with boulders vast and small. Little popping noises came from the ridge followed by a tiny drift of smoke——hand grenades lobbed over from the other side. The slope was in the care of our hardiest and most dependable troops, the Guards. We could see them here and there behind makeshift shields of pebble and stone. And in the middle of the shining white hill there was their tiny command post, under a massive jutting rock. A Bren gun was mounted to one side of it to provide any covering fire that might suddenly be needed at the ridge.

The Guards were in somewhat somnolent mood. They told me you have to be careful how you step over the pebbles because they aim at noises. At the ridge the Germans were so close you could hear them cough. So at the ridge

you talked in whispers. One sometimes saw the hand that lobbed the grenade over from the other side.

Captain H. came down the slope and we greeted each other. He was over-excited and tired. He said the Germans had stormed the ridge the previous day. He had killed one of them with his revolver, then seized his gun——I think the deadly quick-firing Schmeizer——and turned it on the others. He later got an MC for this, cited not exactly for being an F.O.O., which wasn't feasible in these conditions, but for becoming an infantryman in a matter of seconds. He made it sound like an adventure, as if he couldn't believe the events——the sudden appearance over the ridge of firing Germans, his killing one of them, his seizing of the Schmeizer. It was like a dream he had nothing to do with, he wondered at it himself as he spoke, flushed and gushing like a boy.

I watched him walk down the slippery jagged slope to the path home, his feet splayed out in that questing way of his, his men shuffling behind him, glad to be gone. The Guards were sorry to lose him——as, I felt sure, they were sorry to get an untried youth in his place. They had lost most of their officers and needed all the leaders they could find and Captain H. was a born one, and above all an older man.

I talked to the commanding officer under his jutting rock and, being a career Guards officer, he gave the dazzling slope, with his soft singing patrician accent, the air of a St. James's club. Mortar-bombs and sudden enemy appearances seemed, as you sat with him, no more risky than crossing the Mall. He chatted easily without any sense of a difference of rank, and far from

conveying disappointment at getting a raw youth in place of Captain H., he seemed to thank me for coming, and at such a bad time, you know.

One felt very vulnerable from the air, none of us being dug down, but happily air-burst shells—those we feared most because their down-flying flak covered such a large area—were ineffective in the mountains as they tended to burst too high, with the result that they weren't sent very frequently either. My men and I were also nervous about having nowhere to put ourselves except in the open. I chose a position low on the slope, below the Guards command post, where we could build a defence of small boulders against bullet at least.

The Guards were preparing for another attack that evening. When I had finished settling us in our little roofless half-circle home I crawled up to the ridge and lay down by the most forward man with his Bren gun. We whispered together. How am I going to see over the crest? I asked him and he said, If you put up a finger they'll have it off in a second. He said, Listen to their voices. I was surprised how easily the Germans were murmuring to each other. Those further down the slope behind them even shouted at times.

It was when a hand-grenade came over that you realised how close they were, lying exactly like us, a few inches from the top. My Guardsman began talking about the officers. He whispered, They've got pictures of their granddads on the wall at home, the ones who got killed and they want to do the same, it's an honour, they go out on a patrol and you'd think they were walking round their parks, they're talking at the top of their voices and a Jerry patrol might be two feet away and of course Jerry fires at the voice, and as fast

as one officer gets picked off another one takes his place——I've never seen anything like it, they think it's a party, they don't know what fear is, they've inherited it, we've hardly got an officer left, they call each other Nigel and Miles and Darcy, they grew up together, they know each other's families, it's like a big party and it scares the shit out of me but you've got to have officers haven't you?

The attack didn't come but the heavy bitingly cold rain we feared did. My men and I began to shiver in our sopping clothes and of course the cursing began——what the hell do we do without bivouacs, beds, tools to dig with, tarpaulins? The ridge began flowing with icy water and low on the slope it soon came down in a steady torrent. It poured in a wide shallow waterfall over our boots and in seconds our socks were sponges and our half-circle home a running stream. I told them, Get the blankets out before they're soaked. Then I told them to strip, take off every inch of their sopping wet clothing, and to lie down actually in the torrent, where it was shallowest, and to make pillows with our clothes and lie side by side naked so that maximum heat would be generated, and in that position we pulled the more or less dry blankets over us.

We slept without moving all night long, in a warmth like summer, in all that water, which must have warmed with our four bodies. And we rose in the first merciful sun to put on our drenched clothes and in the next few hours we stood steaming as the heat rose to midday fullness. The blue dome of the sky came down and touched us. The rocks steamed and then gleamed and by the end of that day, after we had made a fire behind a wall of boulders and cooked

our meal, we were as dry as boards and not a drop of water remained on the friendly stones. We were lucky to be in the south where Christmas day is warm and still.

Next morning I was called up to the ridge and told I could run, make as much noise as I liked. At the top an officer was standing there with a smile, actually standing at the very top, and he told me, They've asked for a truce to bury their dead.

I walked over the ridge and stared down into enemy land extending far, far below in the bright sun, then sweeping slowly up to a distant stony horizon, and there before me, about fifty yards down, a small ungainly German medico bearing a white flag on a pole twice his height was coming up. The moment he saw me he began calling out Nein! Nein!, gesturing me to fall back. I remained there, not understanding. He came level with us and as he did so I took a leisurely look at the enemy slope, more from curiosity than a wish to see their dispositions. Besides, all you could see was boulders. And when the tiny flag-bearer reached us he too looked round freely at our set-up, which confused me even more as to the meaning of his shouts and gestures. That he recognised me as a gunner officer, fearful that I was working out future targets, is just possible since my insignia were different from those of the Guards. But more possible is that he was afraid I might walk down into their lines, which would have ruined the truce before it started, and perhaps got both of us killed.

We stood around talking. He spoke excellent English and came further down our slope. I would have kept him at a distance but the Guards officer was

easy-going (if death has no sting you can take your ease). The German asked for plenty of time to bury their dead and see to the wounded, whom they had still not brought in. They would need a day. From now through the following day, until nightfall. It was music for us.

We lay about all that day, smoked without worrying where the smoke drifted to, talked in normal voices, stood about in groups. Sometimes we heard the enemy calling to each other as the stretcher bearers did their work. At the first hint of nightfall I began to fear an attack because the medico had taken such a good look at our positions. But we all slept soundly——on both sides, I think.

Then next morning all hell came our way. Heavy stuff started screaming over. The ridge was sprayed with Spandau bullets. A Guards patrol had gone out the previous evening and it hadn't come back. The command post was empty. I took my men down to a narrow defile between high white rocks where we hugged the walls to avoid the flak. There was talk of our having breached the enemy line.

In a sudden lull we moved again and came across an officer and seven or eight of his men. This was at the edge of a wooded area well below our ridge. The officer and I exchanged a greeting. His men were tense and unnerved, looking round them. He and I chatted for a bit. They had been separated from their company and the officer was moving his men around just as I was. I was itching to move on and could see he was too. If you keep moving you have a better chance (why you cannot specify).

We separated and went our ways. There were quite a number of dead. As my men and I climbed we kept on hearing remarks—They've got old so-and-so, so-and-so Company's pinned down. It seemed we were all in separate small units on that slope, cut off from each other by the suddenness of the attack and without central command.

We passed a guardsman sitting close to a corpse. He was staring in front of him. The dead soldier, right by his ankles, had his genitals torn out. The blood was new, bright. The guardsman didn't look to left or right. He had no fear of shells now that his best pal was gone. We passed him in his vigil.

Such a vigil has many variations, being a last long dialogue. Asking why. What became of you? What is to become of me? So quick.

In a fidgety mood I took my men back to our first rocky shelter and left them there smoking, then I went for one of my lone strolls. I climbed to a flank where our patrols crossed to approach the enemy ridge from behind. I wondered how open this flank was. It had a silence of its own. There was the white gleam of stone behind the last trees, and then when I got beyond the trees there were great joyous dazzling stretches of stone as far as the eye could see. These lone sallies of mine were very important to me. I felt I sussed out the closeness of the enemy this way. But most there was my obsessive curiosity about him—how do his cigarettes smell, why is his uniform that funny blue?

I walked back through the woods and came to the clearing I had left and there was the same officer I had been chatting to earlier. He and his men were sitting side by side on a huge tree trunk and they were looking up at me. I

noticed as I came further down that they were beginning to stare. One of them nudged the officer and he too looked up at me, staring. Their expressions were ones of shock. They stared harder and harder as I came close to them.

But we saw you! the officer called out to me. We saw you dead! Up there! Just where you've come from. We were talking about it! Saying what a bloody shame.

Not even when I stood close to them did they believe I was there. Nor even when I sat down among them. It was you! they kept on saying, shaking their heads. No, I said, here I am, with a smile. But I was strangely unconvinced, as if death could come and go and the dividing line wasn't strict. And I also found myself moved that they should have sorrowed for me, given their attention to my death, among so many.

Then I began to feel I had indeed been killed and this life I was sharing with these men on a tree trunk was a new life, a life after death as all life is, and simultaneously there came the question I knew to be naif, how is it I am back with the same men, on the same tree trunk I left? How is it that my memories——of K. and the little Kent cottage and her mother talking about the coming revolution——are still in my head if this is a new life?

But then, I thought, if you can go in and out of death it must be easy for the new life you find yourself in to provide you in a flash with all its memories so that you never know if you've been translated into another life or not.

And then all of a sudden my thoughts on the subject ceased, and were finished and done with. And I was left with my life as it was, new or old. I

thought instead of the man whom they had mistaken for me, he who had died in my stead.

It appeared that our line hadn't moved after all. We hadn't penetrated their western flank where I had done my stroll.

Another day shells began falling and they weren't German. Someone touched me on the shoulder. He was a runner from the command post. He said, These are your guns. I heard guardsmen grumbling 'as if Jerry isn't enough'. I snatched the mike of my radio and said, Stop firing, stop firing, but the shells went on because the radio was dead. The firing only stopped when the guns got to the end of their programme. I pointed out that I hadn't ordered gun support because of the inaccuracy of all fire in mountain areas, that my radio was dead, that in any case the C.O. hadn't asked me for fire. But the incident was past. Nobody had any further interest. And, in the way of the world, they didn't believe me anyway.

On Christmas Eve a runner told us that a church service was going to be held in the kitchen of one of the farmhouses below. I walked down there in the hope of getting a nostalgic reminder of my long stint as a choir boy. The singing was coarse and dismal, the padre's sermon idiotic, the colonel's cheering words paltry chit-chat. I returned to our stone warrens relieved to be back, under the blue pristine dome that made light of it all.

I was getting bolshie. There was nothing for an F.O.O. here. I remember passing a prisoner coming along one of the mountain paths. He was about my age. I stepped aside to let him through, he was wet and exhausted. I gathered

the spit in my mouth to aim it at him but I swallowed it again and found I had no real intention of doing it. He flinched back from my gaze. I was accusing him of things I myself was doing——I blamed him with my stare for mortar-bombs, for pebbles that slipped under the feet, for the inadequacy of our rations and the big fires we couldn't risk lighting because of the smoke, and I blamed him for the dying. Never in my life had I looked at a fellow human that way and for months I remembered how he flinched back, and gradually from my guilty memory of it came self-correction——Don't dare repeat that kind of thing. I saw his big round frightened eyes again and again. Unless you see yourself as the enemy, him in you and yourself in him, you are going to go have a bad war of it. I was glad to have caught myself in time.

One day I joined a Guards patrol with my men. I think the idea was for us to establish a foothold on the flank which I had explored all alone. From that flank I might bring down fire on the German supply lines. I was once more in radio contact. We watched the Guardsmen buckling on their belts and ammunition pouches. We assembled in a white hollow under our own slope, silent. Then we moved forward in single file and as we did so a barrage started, with mortar bombs coming very close, making us hug the mountain side. Suddenly one of my signallers ran back and threw himself trembling under a tree. I ran after him and shook him by the shoulders. He was pale and the skin of his face was typically loose. I pulled him to his feet and realised that in this way I was mastering my own fear. I took him by the belt and drew him close to me. He hung his head. I unbuttoned my revolver holster and lay the revolver at

the end of its lanyard in the palm of my hand, my back to the other men. And I said to him very softly, You're going to follow me, do you understand that? And he did. Why on earth I pulled out my revolver I couldn't fathom even at the time. I suspect some delirium was present on that mountain.

The incident gave me a chance to be a leader on a mission that had turned out not to need one. So it quite bucked me up. As to what happened on that patrol I have no recall, and I think I never had. Since you never talk about battle events afterwards there is nothing to give memory a form. It appears that certain things are dumped and you don't know why.

We were bedraggled and of course there was no chance of a bath. Nor did we try for one. As we felt neglected so we neglected ourselves. I watched one of my signallers as he hobbled down the hill saying, I've got frostbite, I can't get my boot on, I'm going back, I'm sick. I made little effort to stop him and was astonished at myself. We received no messages from our regiment. No orders. No questions. And this forgetfulness on their part helped me. Christmas was now over. My earlier appeals over the radio to let us come down at least for Christmas had gone naturally and rightly unheard.

In the end I too decided to walk down——with the rest of my men. I appeared at our gun position dishevelled and dirty and angry and luckily the first man who saw me was Captain Maugham, that uncommonly serene man, reticent, diffident. He smiled sympathetically——Where have you sprung from? And then, after standing gazing at me for a moment, he added, You'd better go and smarten yourself up. And that was that. Nothing more said.

* * *

We heard later that the French chasseurs, as we called them, under General Juin—mountain troops for whom we had a special regard—had taken over the Guards positions.

We all knew that Juin was the only man who could clear those peaks without any trouble. It was the only time I remember our being right about anything. His men were Moroccans who had grown up in the mountains, while the Germans, well fed and well equipped though they were, lacked the smallest mountain training. We all knew that the Goums, as these Moroccans were called, would do the trick in a thrice. They would work behind the German line and thus break the gridlock round Cassino.

But our news was inaccurate. It was what we wanted, not what happened. General Juin's Free French Corps had been used briefly back in November and the Goums made a deep impression on our army commander—as being entirely unconcerned about the matter of death. But that was where it had ended.

As we now know, General Juin sat in a jeep with General Clark for quite a long journey at about this time and throughout the journey he tried to persuade Clark that a simple outflanking movement by his men was the only way to turn the battle. Juin said afterwards that he had the impression that Clark was thinking of other things.

The Goums were frightening for all of us, including the Italians. Everyone knew how they returned from battle with the trophy of one ear from

each of the enemy killed. It had a bizarrely shocking effect on us——we who blasted people to pieces. The taking of an ear seemed to us a breach of lethal etiquette.

We were even chary of having them on a flank. And the Italians, for whom explosives were one thing and a long knife in the back quite another, would anxiously ask, E i marochini, dove sono? where are they?

Because the Goums weren't (yet) used, the Fifth army sustained in the one month from December 15 1944 to January 15 1945 15.000 battle casualties, American and British.

And there were no fewer than 50.000 non-battle casualties, namely the sick from exposure, exhaustion or shock, and frequently all three.

Five

e moved at last from our hill-top parlour, Sessa Aurunca. We said good bye to our hosts, trying to determine whether they were really in sorrow or Wdeepgratitude at our going. There were tears from the young women who had kissed and fondled all but officers like me, and also from those matronly ones who had found a son or two. But gratitude could still be beneath the tears, even promoting them, especially as they were Italian tears.

The mountains were forgotten, presumably shrugged off by the high command. We mounted our vehicles and moved in slow convoy eastwards, for reasons we knew nothing of.

And, as always, Italy protruded with her message that life was stronger than war. No matter where we turned the Italian story was there. Her sky and soil seized on each other with unswerving hot certainty and from a seed came, within hours it seemed, a sudden pugnacious bud and stem that bounded into life with a reckless festive clamour. A terrain that was surely our nightmare was our heaven.

Day and night we soldiers lived in the midst of that sky and soil, unknowingly open to its fevers and favours. And the Italian people seized on

you too——without intent, unhurried, just like the sky and soil. This people of many mysteries seemed without the slightest knowledge of who they were, how they were composed, and of course this had to be so. Least of all did they know that the life they conveyed to us was life as it had always been intended to be. And just as their terrain was heaven and hell, so were they. They weren't a happy people, not at all, yet they demonstrated little else.

They were even sullen and bitter, yet these moods came to us from them as impersonally as weather, sometimes damp and drizzly, sometimes that hot open glory of sunlight that seemed made for them and, more strangely, by them. You could see how fascism had started among them. It was a revolt against their very passivity. That was why we called fascism 'reaction'. It was precisely that---against the life that brought them hurts and bitter delusions they did nothing about because it was in their makeup to 'carry on', those bitter words used in Britain throughout the war. So the fascists assaulted the conventions, disrupted, beat people up, were rude where they formerly had been mild. In the words of a fascist I knew, people needed to be beaten not with sticks of wood but sticks of steel.

They were all experiencing the daily gnaw of hunger. Not that they starved. They all, town and village dwellers alike, had family connections in the farmlands. The labourers had a nimble resilience even in the forward lines, quickly tending maize, vines, the precious olive tree. They nipped out of the house in a lull and scraped and rustled where they couldn't be seen. They never forsook the land.

* * *

We moved eastwards and astonishingly we were set down at sweet Cassino's doorstep. Of all forbidden things we actually came within sight of her. Sprawling higgledy-piggledy down the southern slope her curling domestic smoke consoled and menaced us equally.

And the valley that lay before her---the lush green plain---with its little roads and a river that crossed it as straight as a dye, and its one tiny bridge, added something hypnotic to Cassino's wistful invitation to us to visit it, at the price of death.

And then, as if to give that invitation a certain compelling edge, there was the vast abbey that hung over and a little behind the town, yellow-white and placid in the southern sun, quite as if it wished to confirm military impregnability with blessing and prayer, its serene deeply silent stones being in homage, after all, to a saint.

The allure here grew tragically overpowering. For this abbey was the size of a sturdily built town, with cloisters and chapels and libraries and dormitories and halls. And though they were dedicated to a man who founded a highly reflective order of monks fourteen hundred years ago, they spoke only one thing to warriors and that was 'I am a military bastion'.

That abbey shimmered like a gentle tapestry, mellow and still, an adjunct of the sky, without substance, overseeing all below it as if older even than the earth, and truthfully those trees and rivulets below gave the impression of having adopted the abbey as a long-awaited saviour.

And equally it was a perfect defence position---had always been, was intended to be from the moment Benedict set foot on the hill and saw that this was truly the Vatican's southern gate. And he emphasised this by destroying quite unnecessarily a temple to Apollo and respecting an ancient Roman tower, which showed a certain military predilection.

And now that abbey had become the benign and sweetly watchful protector of the valley before it. Or rather this was how you were likely to think if, say as an F.O.O., you were asked to observe it---and for several days, during the hours of daylight.

And that did indeed become my job. The Eyes of the Army had a peaceful role at last.

I was to do my observing from a ridge that faced it at a distance of a kilometre or two, not in order to register targets but to report any movements I might see in and around the abbey.

My ridge was lower than that on which the abbey sat but since it looked straight at the abbey's southern windows it gave the impression of equality.

And spread between the abbey and me was the tranquil green plain with its river, at present entirely in enemy hands, as was the forward slope of this ridge from which I was to do my observing.

We had moved our guns to behind this ridge, namely behind its southern slope, so that all I had to do to return to the guns was to clamber down a steep cliff covered with bushes and saplings thick and high enough to block our guns entirely. On the other three sides we were hidden by tall thick trees. Which

alchemy thrust a wonderful inactivity on us. If spotted from the air we could go to cover easily. Never had we been so snug as in this green drawing-room with its captive sky. We slept long and deep. No longer did we addicts of the deafening dag haul our sleeping bags close to it. Its engines were muffled here, their sedative powers redundant. You were pulled deep into the silence the moment you shut your eyes. And as for the shell that had your number on it, what guns could reach you?

We felt an unusual benevolence amid all these dank leafy perfumes that smelled so far from the world outside. You stepped into this green haven suddenly: a road wide enough for our armoured carriers and guns debouched without warning straight into its embrace—and ceased as a road the moment it arrived.

Just before dawn one day I was told to take a signaller with me and climb the ridge to an observation post that would reveal itself to me across a narrow clearing. I was to establish radio contact with my command post below, and this would be done by cable, not radio. It was my signaller's task to unroll the cable as we climbed.

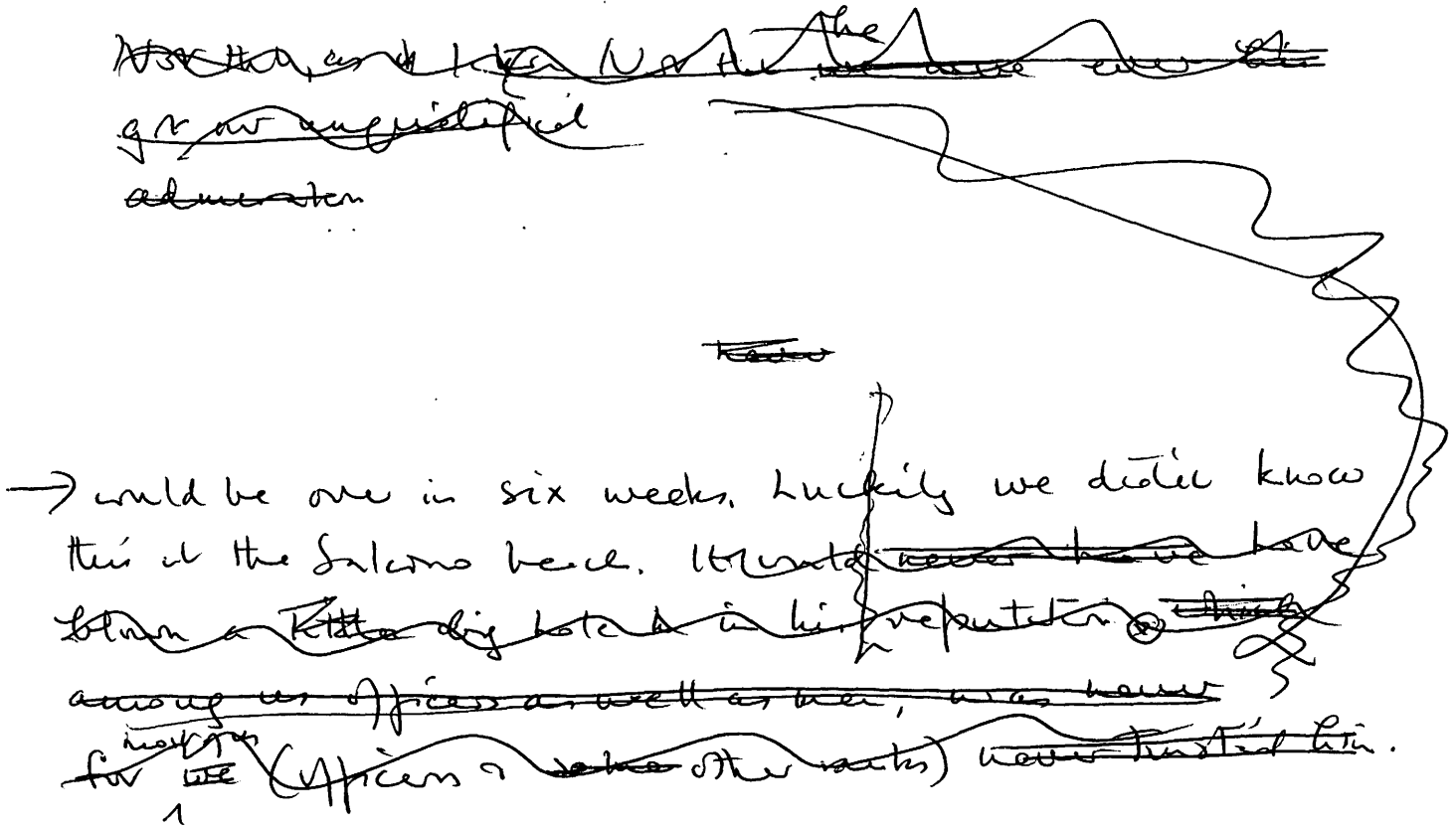
I was to keep my eyes on the abbey and somewhat on the plain below me, and I was to report the slightest movement, and for that purpose I was provided with a huge pair of Rabbit's Ears, which were enormous binoculars of great penetration, taken from a German prisoner.

crossing this road and whatever happens, chaps, you're not going to move, understood? Whatever happens you don't move. You stay where you are. There were nods in the deep dusk.

I felt my girlfriend's photo in my pocket. She was Viennese, the daughter of a woman who had led a communist revolution in Hungary. I remembered that mother's soft patient voice. She had steel-grey eyes but her softness overrode their steely single-mindedness. She said fascism was the last bastion of capitalism, and this war would destroy them both.

I already had a nervous habit of feeling the photo as if to assure myself that she was really my girlfriend, which she wasn't. We had said a last good bye on a London railway station. But I needed her now as my lucky talisman. I didn't care about deceiving myself (and others), it was easy.

I felt bolshie all of a sudden--in the lonely manner of the reinforcement who hasn't yet joined his crowd. I asked myself what am I doing in this bloody war anyway? All we had ever known about it was that it was suddenly on. We just found ourselves in it. A bolt from the blue, without a by your leave or explanation. It didn't sound right even when it was being announced on the radio by the prime minister. Neville Chamberlain's voice wobbled as if the matter hadn't been thought about at all. Which it hadn't, seeing that war was declared to protect the independence of Poland, which the French armies, not so say the British ones, couldn't possibly reach. So the minute the declaration was made (with Churchill's gleeful assent) Polish independence was lost at once.



→ would be over in six weeks. Luckily we didn't know
this at the Salerno beach. [illegible]
[illegible]
among us Africans as well as them, was known
for use (Officers [illegible] other ranks) never trusted him.

WAR IN ITALY

The Churchill/Hitler honeymoon

One

We were dropped off at the Salerno beaches south of Naples by an American landing craft in the late afternoon, as close to dusk as possible and in a calm sea silence and a soft still warmth. We were reinforcements---urgently needed. It was September 1943 and I was twenty.

These beaches had been invaded by the American Fifth Army ~~some~~ days before, on September 8. ~~It was an unexplained surprise for us to be in an American army but we thought of it as a kind of exotic privilege.~~

Not that the Fifth Army was really American. It was just what we called it. And what its commander Mark Clark, who was from Texas, called it. Officially it was the Allied Fifth Army, meaning that its troops came from every part of the world.

We sampled their food on the two-day journey to the virgin white and yellow sands of the Algerian coast. We gasped at the turkey and jam they scandalously deposited side by side on our trays, without our ritual greens and gravy. Who could have dreamed that, leaving a Scottish port in a crammed trooper ship and being escorted through the Straits of Gibraltar by smaller craft which we could see all round us from the decks, we would land so to speak in America?

We jumped down into the shallow wash, were required to make no splashing noises as we waded to shore in the ~~deepening~~ twilight of a hot autumn day. The trees higher up, even the fig trees, cast quickly deepening

shadows and if we turned and looked back to sea we could comfort our eyes on the destroyers and landing craft at anchor that carefully watched over us. Yet the hush was perplexing.

We reached those beaches, in war dialect, on D+8, that is to say on the 16th of September, namely eight days after the landing. I had the first pip on my shoulder as a second lieutenant and I had a photo of my girlfriend in my upper left pocket, ~~that is~~ close to my heart.

We reinforcements (told to keep our voices down) went to our various assembly points. The captain who welcomed me—with a nod as if we already knew each other—was modest, pleasant. Then after my second salute he turned away as if to say we don't need polite exchanges here.

The gunners were grimy. That was another perplexing thing---why were they here at all, since artillery belongs far behind the forward lines? But if this beach was now far behind the lines (I had already comforted myself ~~that it was~~) why were we hushed quiet by higher officers, as if ~~the~~ enemy could hear us? I began to think that it was a military exercise. After all, the army could get up to the strangest antics, everybody knew that.

And then there was the fact that the Germans would soon be pushed out of Italy, they were caught in a trap and were fleeing as hard as they could. We had already decided ~~that~~ in our stifling bivouacs in the Algerian desert. Italy was just no use to Hitler, being a narrow peninsula too cramped for fighting, and with hundreds of miles of coast which we allied forces could invade at the drop of a hat.

We were badly wrong. Yes, Italy is indeed a very close terrain——sudden hills and miniature chasms and rivers galore, providing a surprise every fifty yards. You only had to turn a corner and you could be under enemy observation (as I quickly found out). But this made it easy to defend and the very devil to attack. If Hitler wanted to lay waste our armies at little expense to himself, this was his chance. On the other hand, he needed all his armies to face the Russians---and the allied invasion of Normandy which he knew was imminent.

These small, sensible and mistaken arguments crowded into our minds to explain the hush that lay over Salerno.

I saw corpses in the distance. They were close to the last wash of the waves. Exactly as they had fallen. They were ours. I thought they were an unlucky exception. But the way they had of remaining there---somehow they kept plucking me by the sleeve! And I looked again and again.

As darkness gathered I walked uphill to where the trees began. I saw a large hushed group of men standing close together. As I came nearer I noticed that a Brigadier was at their centre, addressing them. I could see the red tabs on his shoulders. He was speaking in a low voice. I thought it remarkable that a brigadier should be addressing Other Ranks man to man. That was a lieutenant's or captain's job, a major's at most.

The Brigadier was saying in his careful murmur, almost a whisper (we had to gather closer to hear), Jerry's right behind me on the other side of this lane (it lay between trees a few feet away). He said, you're going to stop him

Grumbling to myself I remembered the recruiting interview I'd had in a little Oxford room. The man facing me was disarmingly differential. Would I fight in this war?

And when I said yes I was surprised at myself---it didn't seem my own decision. But it was. Unhesitatingly. I was going into this war because of the Nazi concentration camps. This alone made the war different from all others---it was justified.

But what that declaration of war did was to trap the Jews inside Hitler's regime (it stretched as far as the Ukraine) for six whole years. And this for six long years. Little did we know that Churchill would one day agree that this declaration was 'tragically ill-judged'. At the time he was elated by it. It would be a 6-weeks war, he said.

I strolled back to where the fruit trees were, the last of the day's hot sky lighting my way. I began looking for somewhere to put my sleeping bag (being a gunner, not an infantryman, I had no watch duties). I chose a soft leafy place right under a plump fig tree, overlooking the fact that, this far south, figs ripen early and fall from the branches with a plop.

But when, breaking from the sky like a monstrous hot breath, there came the sound of what seemed an engineless plane crashing to earth, followed at once by a thunderous metallic crash near by in the woods, I thought perhaps this isn't a training camp after all, we aren't behind the forward lines after all.

Another heavy one came over and another. And had I been seasoned I might have thought that these were the prelude of an attack.

vertically down too

Small mortar bombs began coming over in quick succession. These were preceded by a loud thump when expelled from the cannon (from just across the little road). They were pointed almost vertically, so that they came down on you vertically, with hardly a warning swish. They brought changes in the air--- from warm to stifling.

Then darkness came with the characteristic Italian swiftness. The firing stopped. No attack came. At last we could hear the silence that rightfully belonged to this beach and the woods that watched over it. It was like an exchange of whispers.

Italy was still in its pristine mediaeval state at this time, her slopes and copses and streams in secret close liaison with the sky, a liaison we were to live with for two years.

~~I felt drowsy.~~ I slipped down inside my sleeping bag, that little womb I was to carry unwashed to the top of Italy and beyond. Night came and I blinked in the dark.

By now even I knew that this was no rest area. Oddly, it was the silence that convinced me. And as I dozed a certain nervousness gathered in me, a foreboding that stirred sleepy feathers of fear inside.

The possibility of being trodden on by Germans in the night didn't occur to me, though it was in almost every other mind on that beach. Figs were what gave me trouble. They plopped down on me. In full autumn maturity, they made thick little purple pools, one of them on my brow. As for my new sleeping bag the stains would dye it for its lifetime. I picked myself up and stumbled with my kit to another fig tree and there I fell asleep, as if moving

had done the trick. Even my belly-feathers of fear went, my slumber an expanse of stillness of the kind you wake from suddenly---and utterly fresh.

With first light my division also woke up, especially to the existence of us reinforcements. We were conducted by runners to our various command posts. These were still close to the sea, in earshot of its leisured wash, but on higher ground. A major told us in clipped tired tones that we could easily, at any time, be pushed back into that wash. We were hanging on by a tight strip of land, he said. It was all that was left to us.

So it was true. This was war. The enemy was breathing and watchfully close. My realisation was——and I cannot explain why——a great turning point in my life.

I was allocated to a troop——four guns under the command of Captain H., a Yorkshireman of thirty or more who walked with his feet splayed out and his head forward as if greatly excited to be going anywhere, even the latrine. He was beginning to bald and when he laughed you could see his slightly buck teeth. He already had a family, so was very grown-up for the rest of us.

Our command post, set behind four twenty-five-pounder guns, quickly became a home. The captain and I quickly discovered how devoted we were to the Struggle against Fascism---words that covered a vast left-wing movement that had once stretched right across Europe, with the Soviet Union as its ~~chief~~ guide, philosopher and supposed friend. We Strugglers had a lot to do with starting this war. I proudly told Captain H. how I had walked up Whitehall with my

girlfriend and a hundred thousand others yelling Down With Chamberlain and Chamberlain Must Go.

Yes, it was we of the Struggle who had put Churchill there. We hoisted him up on our sole shoulders. His own party would have had grave doubts. Here was as right-wing and war-minded man as you could find--- in a love affair with the left. So this was very much 'our' war.

Still sleepy, I wandered away from our command post up the hill to where Texan infantrymen huddled in their hastily dug slit trenches. They seemed surprised to see me, watching me from below, as who wouldn't to witness a youth strolling about an observed area. I stood talking to them, looking down at their heads level with my boots. It didn't occur to me that I made a perfect target, with all six feet of me exposed. They said, You British must have war in your blood, it's like you're on holiday. Charitably, they didn't tell me I was a bloody fool. Yet I had already, quite unawares, learned something. The evening before, I'd seen men throw themselves to the ground when a big one came over. So now, when one fell pretty close, I did the same, though it was still a kind of drill for me, with a touch of tomfoolery. Then I stood up again and the Texans went on talking affably. I was glad to be thought a pre-packaged soldier. I listened to their soft, low, strangely consoling Southern voices. I think probably none of them survived. I was to meet them again just before the last unthinkable hell that did for them.

Captain H. filled me in with a clear strategic picture of what was happening. Our division was in charge of Salerno the town while the enemy

was still in control of several roads leading down to the coast, i.e. to us. So they were in a good position to cut us and the Texans off from supplies of either ammunition or food (in that order of importance).

Salerno was ill-chosen as a landing place. You could see why on the map. A big force could be throttled just by the terrain, its flanks and retreat exits squeezed with ease. What we did not know was that our army commander Mark Clark wanted to pull out of Salerno but---because of the consistently high casualty rate---the entire Italian campaign. Yet he proved to be the chief instrument of ~~the vast toll of dead and wounded and shocked in that campaign.~~

~~The ugly fact was that the Germans held the dice all the way up the Italian peninsula.~~ At this moment we had the 16th Panzer Grenadier division facing us, their task being to keep us from our objective, the road to Rome, for as long as possible. The German commander-in-chief of Italian operations, Field Marshal Kesselring, had already rushed three of his divisions to our area, Hitler having told him (on August 22, a fortnight before the Salerno landing) to treat Salerno as 'the centre of gravity' for the defence of Italy.

Hitler ~~saw~~ had seen at once that such a terrain could be defended economically and attacked only at great cost. This was perfectly illustrated in the Salerno operation. Our two divisions, plus the 7th Armoured division and an armoured brigade, were up against at most four German battalions. And, being acutely intelligent like so many unbalanced leaders, he Hitler reckoned he could prolong this agony all the way up the peninsula. He took one gamble---that his enemy might be as intelligent as he. But he need not have worried.

We were aware of none of this. ~~From our point of view we were simply advancing up a narrow peninsula and it depended solely on us whether we did this fast or slowly~~. As for Captain H. and I, two bright buttons of the Struggle against Fascism, we didn't even cotton on to the truth by slow degree. We thus shared the principal self-disabling delusion of the entire polyglot army that Churchill had got together with reckless zeal---New Zealanders, Indians, Moroccans, Australians, Canadians, Poles and Frenchmen and Americans and Russians (yes, even Russians kept a presence in Italy).

One man planned every movement made by this vast concourse and he wasn't on our side. Even at this moment Kesselring was ordering his army to make a teasingly slow 'disengagement' (as he himself called it) from the Salerno area to the difficult river Volturno, north of Naples, where he was planning our first big casualty-toll.

And Hitler was paying attention to ~~his~~ every move. The more we entangled ourselves in ~~the Kesselring~~ traps the more he was impressed by Kesselring as the right man to be commander-in-chief of Italian operations.

Solely for this reason we on the Salerno beaches hadn't woken up under the heel of a German boot. But our version of events said that our naval gunfire and nearly two thousand air sorties had done the trick. It had made it possible for us to 'chase' a harried and frightened German army off. It was what our newspapers were saying, after all, ~~quite as we and the Ministry of Information, as it was called, were agreed on the illusion we must follow as the basis of allied strategy.~~

This word 'strategy' means trying to pre-empt the enemy intention but we failed to understand Hitler's sole strategic intention of creating death-traps for us.

* * *

All of a sudden, just seven days after we reinforcements had landed, Salerno became a backwater. Our forward lines 'broke through' to the road to Naples on September 26th. But they didn't break through anything but emptiness. The Germans had quit three days before---to be exact, in the course of one night. What kind of 'chasing' was this?

Our beach was a holiday beach again and our battle cruisers looked like pleasure boats. We felt happily forgotten. The days were balmy and sweet, the air so heavy with the special haunting hot scent of wild thyme that we began to think that this peninsula war might have begun to peter out already, just as we had generously promised each other on another, Algerian beach.

We heard birds (always silenced by battle). In a characteristic Italian rhythm the colder sea air of nightfall was, each evening, drawn to the still-warm mountains inland. And at dawn the chill mountain air rushed back to the sunlit and already warm sea---an inhale at nightfall, an exhale at dawn.

A bombardier rushed into our command post and shouted, Bring your mugs, anything you can lay your hands on. An infantryman had found a huge cement vat of red wine and bored a hole in it. We drank and lazed drunkenly and talked by the light of our oil lamps, we wrote letters and I secretly touched my no-longer-girlfriend's photo. I even showed it to Captain H., hoping that he

saw her as my future wife, which might magically, in the rosy haze of wine, banish the impossibility of that.

We moved our guns north, troop by troop, each convoy leaving separately. Captain H. led our troop into the hills and we found ourselves in a meadow high above the sea, cupped round with elm and beech and cypress, hushed in its own scented air. Through the trees we could watch the tiny white-frothed waves far below. They made a twinkling silver ripple in the vast blue of the harbour, a blue I had never seen before, just as I'd never seen a sky so deep and domed and infinite, yet so close, and so unassumingly true that I had to believe it false. In fact, I turned to a peasant not much older than I and asked him with dumb signs and grunts, Do you always have it like this? and he nodded in the agreeable Italian manner that denotes utter bafflement.

Up here, in their own silence, there were pebbly streams, virgin cool in the shade, winding through young woods. I bathed in one, stood naked in the middle. The water twisted and bubbled and chuckled round the stones. I strolled through the woods, read a book from my little library, joked with the bombardiers, chewed grass outside the command post, which was in a barn. I watched the pigeons on the roof and the cows waiting to be milked and the peasant family coming and going. There was slush at the barn entrance and hot close wet-hay smells and the occasional decisive stamp of a cow, and it was all a good-luck sign for me.

Of course such quiet betokens imminent attack and is easily recognised by those whose ears are attuned. We had wind of a coming barrage---from our

side---but as yet we knew nothing of its size. I wasn't even sure what the word 'barrage' implied. Much less was I aware that the size of a barrage is commensurate with that of the battle timed to follow it. Which meant that this attack was ours. All I knew was that we were on Stand By, and so was the rest of the division's artillery.

When dusk came, as I was wandering past the barn entrance, Captain H. called to me sharply to stand by for any emergency. I nodded, my hands in my pockets. Shells and cartridge cases lay in tall piles behind each of our four guns and the first shift of men was standing to.

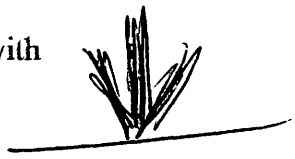
It was almost dark when he gave the order Take Post through the Tannoy loudspeaker system. The troopers ran out to the guns. This was five minutes before the barrage was due. I was a little bored, expecting nothing. A runner came to the command post with a message to say that the infantry were on their start line (those two words were later enough to make me shiver with foreboding, and they still do, somewhat).

Captain H. looked at me from inside the command post—Stand next to the guns, he told me, be ready to relay my orders if the Tannoy breaks down. I took a megaphone with me and it seemed to amuse the gunners (etiquette said that one only used the voice).

I heard a faint order Fire! from a field to our flank, then it was taken up again and again until it came from the loudspeakers behind me and the dark starlit night moved and a swollen booming and crashing chasm took the place of the sky, surging far ahead and spreading in a wide fathomless sustained

deafening roar along the whole front and I started awake at last, mouth open, stunned at the endless blue and yellow flashes across the spaces with the earth rocking and leaping and rumbling from the gun's detonations and the night itself shaking. I stood in this illuminated arc that surely was the world gone mad in a last thunder of the universe and I began to feel an exultation I had never known before, I let myself go in this last hour of the universe such that God must take notice, yes, there must even at this eleventh hour be God to take notice.

The men were pushing the shells home with their ramrods, tight-closing the steel doors of the breech, standing back for the mighty spout to recoil and give forth its demon flying death while the meadow all round was lit by simultaneous flashes (taking kindly to the light as meadows do). I was no longer a spectator, I itched to be at one of the guns pulling the hot lever with my lanyard after the sergeant's order Fire!



But the silence afterwards, the way the leaves and trickling of water returned to themselves and the acrid cordite smell gave way to the hot scent of wild thyme, and the way the trees stood placid and still again, was a disappointment to me. What had it all amounted to if everything became as it had been before, with the silence, into which all sounds die, victorious? if nothing remains recorded?

But this sudden quiet was only for us. Not yet had I cringed from the horrifying precipitate swoop of a shell to earth and heard the screams, the ones

of the living and the ones of the dying. Not yet had I learned that a barrage at the receiving end changes tears of exultation to ones of sorrow.

Yet I knew perfectly well that I wouldn't be with the guns much longer, and that my real job was in the forward lines. I even knew that my song would change. Very shortly I would be guiding these very shells to their destination, I would be calling for the barrages by radio. I would be at the spearhead of attacks. I would find myself in places where my own fire had fallen perhaps only moments ago. And from there I would direct further fire.

I would not only be in the forward lines but must be prepared to find myself beyond those lines, in enemy ones.

That is, I was to be a Forward Observation Officer or F.O.O., as we called him. The army textbooks called him The Eyes of the Army.

And then these guns of mine and this command post would become for me a haven I rarely tasted, being well behind the lines. The roar of a firing programme—the shell slipped so easily into the breech, the hot lever pulled to make the gun leap forward and try to fly beyond the blocks that braked its wheels—would be no more to me than fireworks.

We were ordered to move yet again to a town ten kilometres up from Salerno called Cava de' Tirreni. The move was to be made in separate columns so as to create surprise. This was just what it didn't do. Light as their shells were, our guns still made a hell of a racket getting hitched up and set down again.

Cava was, we would have been in any other season, the loveliest of places to be, with its many-flowered villas and narrow walks that breathed only one word, 'peace'. It made us sleep more deeply, till it threaten our wakefulness in the dead of night when we had to stand duty at the guns—one officer and a few gunners.

The Germans had just vacated ~~Cava dei Tirreni~~ this town I delightful and it was ~~obvious~~ clear (though not for us) that they had quickly taken up positions with a perfect view of the valley in which our guns were now put down---within spitting distance of our ~~noses~~ eye-balls, so to speak.

So we put our four guns down, under the cover of night, in the bed of the ~~valley~~ a tiny rolling enclosed valley all round by ~~that rose northward, so as~~ (an open target indeed, n.p.) ~~with steep vine terraces rising ahead of us and on both flanks.~~ Then, after putting out sentries, we walked stealthily back into Cava de' Tirreni, where we had taken over ~~a big~~ many-floored house. I shared a tiny nursery room with another junior officer. We took it in turns to sleep in a child's cot, relieving each other every few hours for guard duty at the guns. To get to the guns all we had to do was to ~~take~~ walk a winding path that couldn't be observed. It all seemed so safe.

Cava de' Tirreni (meaning the quarry or mine of the Tyrrhenian seas, on Italy's western coast) was tiny then. Its humped houses appeared to be piled on each other and it smelled the same as all Italian war-time towns—sun-dried herbs and old walls and wood smoke and sewage and chicory.

Also those vine terraces where we put the guns had a great beauty. There were mossy statues and a fountain, and green garden benches where the women who tended the vines would sit. We started digging ourselves in during the night but by dawn, that first morning, we were only down a few inches. We camouflaged the guns as best we could. Then we returned just before ~~dawn~~ first light. n.p.

~~But~~ the moment the sun put its first blinding tip an inch above the horizon there was a swift hoarse breathing in the sky and mortar-bombs ~~crashed~~ came crashing among the leaves, their smoke rolling flatly away, hugging the dew. Most of the first stuff

pungent

fell near the benches and statues. A splinter caught an Italian girl. She screamed frantically. Somehow her screaming seemed to inspire the enemy and the bombs spread to the terraces where we were and we began scrambling up and down them, flung ourselves to the wet earth and as quickly jumped up again as they came down in clusters and the ~~pungent~~ smoke got into our lungs. One of the men shouted down at the girl Shut up! Shut up! in the illusion that she was attracting the fire. He threw himself down by me and murmured, She's not hurt as bad as all that.

I lost two men in that sacred green hollow. One was ~~my own signaller,~~ too badly hurt to scream. We got him into a hut and put him face down. He had two deep holes in his back, behind the lungs. One of the troopers asked him if he'd like a smoke and he managed to raise his head. The trooper put a cigarette between his lips and was about to light it when ~~the man~~ coughed blood into it so that it swelled up and fell with a plop to the cement floor. Then his head fell forward.

~~This was a man I felt closer to than anyone I had met in the army, or even perhaps before.~~ He was older than I, probably no more two or three years, but it made him seem mature to me. He was to be my chief signaller throughout the war. Both of us knew this. There was a wonderful formality between us that strangely reinforced the sense of perfect, immediate understanding ~~between us~~ that needed only a nod or a word for a message of eyes that would have needed whole sentences in the case of another person. He was to accompany me on my F.O.O. missions, this was understood between us. Just a

the years we now have children in the forward lines — at the very front of fire.
required children to undertake
responsibilities, but a few more years bought 'family responsibilities'
the years for merely because of fear & the beloved at
home. And this saps your resolve and mortifies

It turns the boy into a willing fighter. It creates his steady resolve to

on the very day of my acceptance of war, my resolve to do my best in it. That is the true baptism of fire, — the child has been won for war. Thus all of you. And, it is

I say 'my own signaller' because I never met before or after him a man with whom a wonderful respectful formality went with an avid acceptance of whatever the other said, as if it came to us as news, yet was already known to us. He was my chosen signaller as naturally as I was the callow officer to whom he was seconded. And I took him at once.

INSERT A 18½

Not for years (until this very moment of writing in full) did I truthfully absorb the enormity of the happened. Until now, my memory has cancelled out all memory of the fact that I lost the man who could have been my friend of all seasons, living & our life.

But now this is the core of the truth about his death. He brought me, even in his death, the resolve that I would never again in battle lose another man. And in truth this I regarded, and still do,

INSERT A p. 18½

My resolve to look after my fortune — ~~the future,~~ I later learned that this 'looking after' meant... It was to sustain them when they were making down — in complaints, even tears, even to his own character. How was it possible for me, in my twenties, to do this for me also in their twenties? NW all because because my powers, it lay solely and completely in my being their accredited leader. That alone endows you with a special resilience and security — ~~for it gives you freedom,~~ it depends on your own resources, and if they are sufficient to the day all ~~of~~ ~~well as the is well is~~ ~~defer on it with can~~ is safe — in a daily life of ~~unsafety~~, unsafety.

glance conveyed all, no need for orders. This in your signaller is precious as gold.

And I was holding him in his dying. I must have known that no man could survive such deep wounds in the rear of the chest. Tears flooded to my eyes and I held them back because you somehow get the command to do so, from within.

This is the true baptism of fire, not the shock of shells or the screams or the terrified eyes of friend or enemy but the first death and if it is the death of someone closer to you than almost any man has been in your life then this is a baptism deep indeed.

And things were suddenly quiet. My face still puckered up against the tears, you are crying for all the future ones too, the ones who are going to die, for you will not cry again, yet they were talking to you but a second before and now they lie with the ashen stare of shock that denotes the last breath.

A peasant woman in black stood by the hut door and moaned quietly to herself. The gunners trod about respectfully, thinking, bitter. We cursed Jerry who had done it because cussing gave us an outlet. The other wounded man got it in the arm but it was a bad one just the same and he was stretchered away to hospital, and I think died later.

In the manner of soldiers we griped and belly-ached. We asked how the hell could anybody have thought of putting twenty-five-pounder guns into a bloody soup-bowl like this, where we can't even fire the sodding things. To fire out of that hole you would need a vertical trajectory, your own shit would fall

→ the first ~~self~~ adjustment to hurtling shells and the first crap.
It is the first death, then, as I say, the tears are snatched
back from the eyes because this is no time for self-
indulgence, or any self. You can do this when you are
still, virtually, a child. It is why those in the front
line must be in their early twenties. ~~It must always~~
~~be a time of most forgot human invention called~~
~~war.~~

back on you. You have to be a madman to put artillery into the forward lines where Jerry can just look down on you etc. etc.

Afterwards there were boring hours. A death isn't forgotten. It simply becomes part of that strange assembly of dead men who have gone and live men who might any minute go.

I enjoyed strolling in Cava de' Tirreni's narrow lanes, with a silence all round you never get in peace. One morning I looked up at a window and a man and woman were beckoning to me to come upstairs. In sign language they were telling me to push the downstairs door open and, stranger from another land as I was, walk up. I waved back and smiled and walked on because once up there, for all I knew, I might disappear, then who would look for me? All the harmless couple wanted was to barter for cigarettes, bully beef, sugar. In exchange perhaps for eggs. Discreetly they might have suggested a girl. I hadn't yet learned that Italians were as straight as a die, even when crooked.

* * *

I was impatient to get my first F.O.O. assignment over and done with. It would have been useful to get some gen (pronounced with a soft 'g'), our word for information. But none came. It hadn't figured in my training either. You could be trained for surprise but not for the surprises when they actually came.

I knew the bare logistics—you took three or four men with you including one or two signallers. Your radio equipment had to be with you at all times. This included batteries and, in very rare cases of unusual proximity, a cable for direct wire contact with the rear. Mostly you would have no chance of recharging the batteries so while you needed to be in day and night contact with

your command post back at the guns you had to be economical in radio use. Your firing orders had sometimes to go far beyond your own ~~command post~~ four guns to engage the guns of a whole brigade or even division, and the reply had to come back down that hierarchy, so you needed plenty of radio juice. It was after the word Ready had been passed down to you from all the assembled waiting guns that your final order of Fire! went through and then, almost instantaneously, you heard from your forward position the baleful whirring of the shells above your head.

These 'twenty-five-pounder' guns of ours were, for artillery, the lightest you could find. They were General Montgomery's favourite weapon, he being an unusually humane commander. The shells fell in clusters ~~and you had to be very close to their forward blast to catch a packet.~~ What they did do most effectively was create panic---the air becomes full of blinding cordite smoke and the crashes are ceaseless and relentless. Yet the craters were the shallowest made by any form of artillery.

It was these shells that as an F.O.O. I could call up at a moment's notice but I also had access to the other heavier artillery available both in the division and the Corps (two divisions) ~~when they happened to be working together).~~

The only thing you know as a novice F.O.O. is that you will have to observe the country carefully and consult your Intelligence map as you move across it. But that isn't much of a training. So your state of trepidation as your first F.O.O. assignment draws near, like mine now, came from utter bafflement as to what to expect.

→ who thought ~~first~~ / ~~not~~ alone ~~what the success or failure of his campaign but~~ the safety of his ~~own~~ men.

Obviously an F.O.O. must know something about the enemy that faces him. After all, he must develop so to speak an intimacy with him. He must know what kind of fighters these particular enemy regiments are, and in what strength they are at the moment, whether they are the 15th or 26th or 29th Panzer Grenadiers or a Hermann Göring division or the 44th Austrian infantry (the most amiable of opponents).

Such a man can be a treasure for the infantry since he carries about with him an invisible armour shield. So the tendency of infantry officers was therefore to treat him with awe if he was good and amiably disregard him if he wasn't.

Once in a new position the F.O.O. must help consolidate it with so-called SOS targets, which may involve a firing programme lasting the whole night. You communicate this programme, with its timetable and intervals by radio, to your command post, having already given your exact map reference in code.

There was one thing I looked forward to—being my own master. I would be trusted or spurned for my decisions alone. I even felt a need to witness war at its demented heart. And for this the role of F.O.O. seemed exactly placed.

Before you get your first assignment the eyes of senior officers are on you, sizing you up. The respect of your gunners (very few of whom saw the forward lines) is much enhanced if you go up, and it grows the more you go up. The unlucky ones among them are those who have to accompany you. But

→ So you are inspired to be good – if you wish for ~~[illegible]~~ the survival of your men. It is how you are dragged its way. Not by orders or commands but by your own very self.

more unlucky is that handful of men who become your favourites, the kind of men who, try as they might, cannot help being reliable. Never was there a better argument for that devoutly observed military rule—never volunteer.

Likewise if the F.O.O. was good he was always in demand. If he wasn't he stayed with the guns.

The French long ago had a more precise word for the F.O.O. and that was le sentinel perdu. He is to all intents and purposes a lonely (and frequently lost) spy. Much of the Intelligence given to him about enemy dispositions is likely to be wrong though his life largely depends on it being right. But it is impossible to have good Intelligence about forward lines because they move so fast, especially in close terrains like those in Italy. So it is the F.O.O. who keeps the map up to the latest date. The danger for him is that being very mobile, with at most four men, he can easily get lost, and in enemy lines, which happened to me and mine more than once.

We entered Naples on October 1 1943, namely three weeks after the Salerno landing. And these weeks cost us 12000 casualties, 5000 of them American, nearly 7000 British. And we were here solely because Kesselring's new defence line was now ready for us.

But at last we had an official fleshpot where we could go for short leaves, even half a day. There was the chance of a dance and Lilly Marlene being sung. The copper wire laid by Fifth Army engineers for new telephone systems at once disappeared. That hadn't happened under the Germans because their penalty for stealing copper wire had been death. There was a favourite

apocryphal story that the kids of Naples, in this new lawless democracy, unscrewed the nuts and bolts of an allied ship until one night it sank elegantly out of sight.

I drove into Naples several times alone. I sat in a tiny restaurant tucked into a side street with the sun blazing through the entrance. I ordered chicken but was aware after a few bites that it was cat. Why did I order chicken after being told so often that it was always cat? The place became empty and I started to talk to the proprietress in my poor army Italian which always got the accents hopelessly wrong——we called the Rapido river the Rapeedo whereas it is accented on the first syllable as in 'rapid'. We did the same with 'Taranto' and 'Brindisi', both of which carry their emphasis on the first syllable. And no doubt if we had ever wanted to talk about the Medici we would have made the same mistake (most Anglo-Saxons still do). But it was our rule and no Italian dared correct us.

The proprietress was a large young woman with black curly hair and an easy sisterly manner. She asked me if I was lonely and I smiled, refusing this offer to bed down with her. I told myself that I didn't find her attractive but in fact I was afraid of a dose of clap. Also we were warned not to separate ourselves from our clothes, ever, not in Naples at this present half-starved time.

She and I sat with our elbows on the table gazing into the blinding light of the entrance and I found in myself a resolve that I would one day make this country my own (which I later did). I left her some cigarettes, which were considered gold.

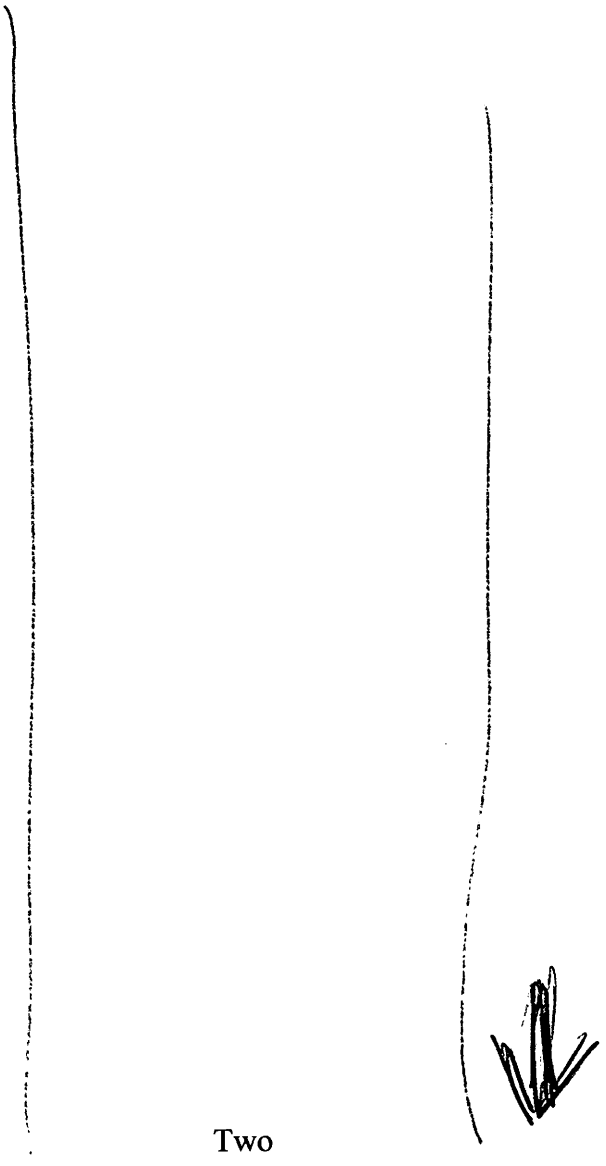
A few days later I sat with five other officers in a barracks on the city's outskirts, high above the sea silver and flashing ~~far below~~, the light failing.

The Battery commander said, We shall have to decide who is going up with this one. I held my breath, my heart beat faster, I gazed at the wall and held the leg of the table. The day had been one of those autumn days that lazily replay the earlier sweltering season and raise the Italian's voice and give him a special easy walk.

Not many days after that I sat once more in an officers' conference, this time in a room with a parquet floor and tall windows high above the deep still blue of Naples harbour, lightly ruffled with white-flecked waves, where our battle cruisers looked like clever intricate toys. The windows gave on to a balcony from which a grateful evening breeze wafted in, then spent itself until the next one, in an hallucinating rhythm I had never known a hint of in my former life.

No sounds came up to us, so removed were we from city and sea. The captain who had welcomed me at Salerno with a gruff but solicitous nod, Captain Maugham, said he thought I should go up in the next show, being the freshest among us. The major smiled at me and said he agreed it was time to break me in.

I smiled too but I was mortally afraid. Yet excitement went with it, even increased it. I was to stand out, perform, perhaps earn better smiles——more earnest ones. It is wonderful what human association does for us, being able to render sane and even orderly what our trembling limbs know to be otherwise.



Two

Most of the 13th day of October 1943 I leaned against a warm haystack facing south. There were flat fields all round and a breeze intermittent like a series of broken sighs that breathed a message to me I couldn't decipher—whether warning or solace. I was alone, reading a novel about a man of twenty-one (just right) who was deeply in love, and how his love, after a long time of anguish, was requited. And since it was thoughtfully written, taking me back to a style

of speech I would never hear again (everything pre-war was now a remote never-never land), the words melted in nostalgically with the scented autumn day and the hush that the sound of bees and flies only made deeper.

The silence brought a fear that awakened suddenly and died again, as if these fields knew what lay ahead, this very night. It made me look up from the pages and as quickly sent me back to them. It merged with the words I was reading—with the hero's horror that he might not be loved by the girl. And this in turn helped that southern hush to be valedictory.

Now and then and I gazed at Vesuvius in the far distance sending its straight white volcanic smoke unresisted into the blue. It curled very slightly at the top with such a leisurely and domestic air. Like any curling smoke you might see. There wasn't a gun to be heard, not in the remotest distance. Yes, when an attack has been prepared, and the enemy is waiting as you are waiting, with death in mind, all the trees and grasses join in.

We were to make a bridgehead over the river Volturno, a name which suggests currents that turn in on themselves—volto with its idea of turning round, turno that of returning. And it was the river Field Marshal Kesselring had chosen for us to break our heads on (his words). But wait---this river was also useful for him in so far as it gave him time to prepare an even stronger line further north. But wait again---this stronger line would give him time to prepare a truthfully impregnable line which whole divisions, whole corps could decimate themselves to the point of self-disbandment (and did), thus breaking both head and heart.

Thankfully we knew nothing of this but even if we had we would have rejected it. As a soldier you have to believe that your enemy is confused and surprised by your every approach.

I was to assemble with my four men at infantry battalion headquarters in a pre-arranged area south of the river Volturno. I was to await dusk there and the time appointed for the opening barrage from our side. The moment this barrage ceased I was to go forward and make contact with our attacking infantry company at its start line.

Those were my orders and I didn't have the experience to see that they didn't make sense. Clearly my permission to move was too late, being the moment when the company assigned to me would be committed to battle. The order thus put me far behind the start line---into the tail, not the spearhead. Which meant that I would spend the crucial first stage searching for my infantry commander. Without him I had no job or place to go. Without me he had no retaliatory power against the flak.

Not only that but our army too was inexperienced. This was the first set-battle of the Italian campaign. The Salerno operation, having been a mostly defensive action (landing stores and equipment under fire), offered no lessons for what was coming up.

Jerry was in some strength now—three divisions faced us and were particularly lively on our sector because the ~~main~~ important Naples-Rome highway passed just ahead.

I was there with my men at the appointed time. I remember young woodland---good cover. We stood together, my men and I, five of us, waiting in the dying light. The barrage from our guns started up to the second, a huge mounting thunder from behind us, followed at once by the screeching of shells arching overhead into enemy lines. The earth trembled because we weren't a great distance from the river and we fell into the usual pre-battle elated illusion that such a shattering orchestra must leave not a yard of enemy earth alive. The fact is that, especially in close terrain, the enemy pops out of his holes at the first lull and starts lobbing the stuff back. And that would be happening within moments.

It was ten o'clock and dark before my signallers and I got the order to move and we advanced in single file, keeping to one side of a broad crowded causeway between the trees. Then as soon as enemy shells began falling close we started running, trying to get to the ditches which we knew to be just short of the river. Stupidly I had eaten a late meal and started vomiting as I ran, turning my head to one side so that my tunic and map-case wouldn't get soiled. As we ran the enemy launched its fearsome Nebelwerfer or Organ Grinder mortar bombs right where we were so that hot breaths of suffocating cordite rushed into our faces. Clattering enemy machine-gun fire opened up from the river, presumably on our men trying to cross.

A mine-detector outfit went ahead of us as always, laying white tape down as a safe guide for us. Infantrymen were losing contact with each other, calling out to each other between the deafening bursts, afraid of losing touch.

Everyone was dazed, some men were just wandering here and there, others were on the ground and calling for the stretchers or just screaming, sometimes a man would dash for the ditch at the side of the causeway as if he had decided to do no more running.

Something was going very badly wrong. There were more men running towards us than there were with us, in fact growing masses of infantrymen ~~all~~ running in the wrong direction, away from the line. We were bumping into them and for the life of me I couldn't understand how men running away from the line could be obeying orders of any kind. They were calling out to us, You can't go up there! they shouted, it's hell up there! I dashed over to one of them and grabbed him by the arm——Where are you going? He shouted, You can't get through! Thinking I might have mistaken the route I shouted back, Where's the river then? and he said as he ran on, Back there, there's all hell up there, you can't get through!

Stretcher bearers were rushing past us——it seemed a whole army was on its way out of the line. My four men were waiting for my order and I shouted into the shattering noise Come on! and we started running forward again.

We were quickly in the thick of it. The Nebelwerfers were concentrated here. A Nebelwerfer puts six bombs at a time into the air and their ~~trajectory makes a terrifying howling noise like a vast~~ barrel organ in the sky ~~which~~ turns into a dense hungry roar close to your ear as the bombs crash ~~to earth~~ down from ~~their~~ an almost vertical trajectory.

There was such a thick wall of detonation and tracer bullets and darkness and men bumping into each other that all you could do, once you

were close to the river, was run from one deep 88mm. crater to the next until you found an empty place to throw yourself into, elbow to elbow as the screams of the wounded came over, that terrible Help! Help! Help!, ~~that~~ the imploring scream to the enemy guns to Please, please stop! And then the shouts of the stretcher bearers, Give us a hand you blokes, for christsake help! but the only thing that happened in our brains was let it not be me, let it not be me, and when at last we managed to scramble down into a crowded crater and throw ourselves down I found myself scratching frantically with both hands into the freshly scorched soil, trying to make a hole for myself of all grotesque idiotic things to do but knowing how crazy it was didn't stop me doing it, I was clawing the hard black earth with nails all too frail and I knew I was doing it and how crazy it was but the hands kept doing it and ~~I swear~~ my men on either side of me were doing ~~it too, the very same silliness~~ the same because — our. I saw ~~my~~ actions so clearly, stood away from myself because these were my last moments on earth---that was how it was for me and every other man in that crater and the screeches of Wailing Winnie over our heads and that ghastly angry hot descent of the bombs shattered our last hopes and, as always for the soldier, made us doubt afterwards that we did get through and weren't in a new deadly life that contained a trick that made it seem life when it wasn't.

And simultaneously we were listening to the stretcher bearers and I was thinking urgently should I take my men and help with the stretchers but that would mean running back, wouldn't it, running away? And because these were our last moments on earth our thoughts were sharp and clear and intensely

observant, I was aware of my men on either ~~both~~ sides of me and how they were living these last moments too and they like me were silent and like me they had their eyes closed ~~and I was sure~~ they too were scratching crazily into the earth because you never do anything individual, not at the extremity of extremities.

How long we were in that crater, how and when we got out, even whether the mortar bombs and shells were still falling when we jumped up and ran, even whether we ran, I cannot recall and never did recall, not even right after. And I cannot recall today.

All I know of that night was being in the crater in our last moments and then, as in a dream that jumps whole hours in a flash, I am standing in the first dawn light at the river's edge, a few inches from a handsome German officer with thick black hair who is saying in English with easy confidence, In Rome for Christmas? You won't be there for months, if ever.

My Company commander was standing just to the left of me and all of us listened to the German diffidently, disappointed that our success in breaching the river should excite this clear-spoken well-meant smiling ridicule, and we believed him not because we were gullible but because in such extremities one knows the truth, and this was the truth. It was indeed many months of mostly useless costly struggle through mud and cold, in strategic positions that spelled disaster, before we reached Rome depleted and worn out.

Perhaps it is this preliminary dying that you go through in your last moments which turn out not to have been your last---perhaps it is this that induces amnesia. Perhaps amnesia is a thankful device to expunge how you

got out of that crater so that you may carry on this life not half-crazed or wandering in your mind for the rest of your days. And suddenly the German officer is there, a friend, talking without emphasis in this bountiful dawn silence, and his very voice is a balm.

A few feet before us was the swollen fast river, the opposite bank deserted except for four English soldiers lying side by side, faces down as if gazing into the earth, in perfect order and neatness, their tin hats undisturbed, their weapons under them, in an identical shared death. They must have jumped to the bank close together and in that jump gone down in one burst of machine-gun fire. For several days they stayed there, clean and obedient.

Apparently our division had been given not only the most intensely defended but the most exposed part of the river to tackle. On our left flank was our sister division, and on their left were the Americans, presumably the Texans we had known at Salerno. Our sister division, the 56th, hadn't got across.

I couldn't work out, in that dawn, why my Company commander was still on the southern shore when the opposite bank was already in our hands. I expected a bridgehead to be something you could see right away. But Bailey bridges have to be loaded and transported. Engineers to build them have to be available. And building a bridge in daylight, especially in the first vulnerable hours after a battle, would be suicide.

For the moment there was only the tired dawn silence that follows a rough night. Both sides are taking time off to lick wounds. A cup of char reassured us, the steam blew up into our faces with each breath.

We were lucky because the Nebelwerfer or Wailing Winnie, fearful though it sounded, was also inaccurate. Its bombs dispersed over a large area and they took more seconds to land than other mortar bombs. Their terrifying chorus in the sky was thus achieved at the expense of accuracy. Their aim was to create extreme panic. This they achieved in the case of an entire battalion of the US 34th division. They scattered and it was a whole day before they reassembled. No cowardice was involved. They just thought it was something other than war and was coming out of the sky—the frightful Secret Weapon constantly promised by Hitler. By far the greater number of casualties in battle come from shock and are called non-battle casualties because wounds do not figure, so there was reasoning behind Wailing Winnie.

Of course mortar bombs that fall inaccurately still fall, and they fell among us, just short of the river. But machine-gun fire, not these bombs, was the nemesis of the men trying at that moment to cross the river.

We all believed, as men in the first world war did, that the shell that got you had your army number on it. The idea reassured and terrified in equal measure.

* * *

That bridgehead was at the cost of a thousand casualties in one night.

As for our sister division it was pinned down by shellfire. Its Ox and Bucks battalion disguised themselves as peasants but the moment they broke cover to approach the river they had 80 casualties in a few seconds. They tried to cross in boats but most of these were at once destroyed, this time with 40 casualties.

Really the ~~American~~ Allied Fifth army was in no position to cross that river. Its divisions only had boats enough for one battalion, namely two companies of about sixty men each. And that was hopelessly inadequate for a whole front.

I never learned how the men I saw running away from the line that night re-joined their units, or if they did. To my mind they were deserters and would have been rounded up as such. You just can't rejoin your unit a whole night late. There were no officers among them as far as I could see. Which made desertion even more likely.

In fact, though we didn't know it then, the Fifth army had a desertion problem. The 'Naples stroll', as it was called, started about this time—some delayed Americans just walked out of the line and ~~went~~ walked to town. Mark Clark sensibly accommodated himself to this by organising rest areas close to the line, to which the tired and shocked could be sent. You could hardly throw men into prison for suffering the results of the pressure you were putting on them, such as tackling water without something to float on.

The British were less wise. We now know, as a result of the publication (in 1994) of the courts-martial of that time, that 197 soldiers mutinied 'at

Salerno'. 179 of these were put in prison for a year or so while the ringleaders were given five years. They mutinied because their officers had told them they were going from North Africa not to Salerno but Sicily, where there was no fighting. The men were already battle exhausted and considered this a calculated lie which exposed their officers as unfit to lead. I never heard of any mutinies on the Salerno beach. It would have been difficult to mutiny and get arrested within earshot of the Germans. So I am inclined to believe that those men I saw running in the wrong direction were those who were court-martialled.

The fact that we heard no more of those men meant nothing. No battle events were ever, in my memory, discussed afterwards. Also we were used to disappearances. Soldiers, in groups or singly, were posted off constantly. There was never a better application of the divide-and-rule axiom. Unwanted elements could be dissolved into thin air. And this, by the law of war, is how it has to be. The comfort of being in an army is its delegation of moral choice to staff officers remote from scrutiny, which helps one sleep at night, it being the case that what the eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve after.

Three

The weather changed and I was back with the guns. We found ourselves camped out behind thick hedges in a mist of warm rain under a reluctant low lazy sky. The sunshine was so dazzling it made the thick rain clouds a white fluffy sheet, and our gun site, within its green walls, began to feel immune to war, especially as sounds were muffled too.

You never heard so much laughter. Laughing was the most of what we did, it being one of the many unknown things about battle that it stirs laughter pure and spontaneous. It isn't in spite of the dying or the beckoning death, nor is it a defence against the screams. Laughter is an accessory to both, just as in the funeral wake the dead are present even as you drink and sing, they being the silent provocateurs of this unexpected joy. We were children again, Captain H. no less than the rest of us.

Army commanders were astonished at so much laughter in the forward lines and I think they put it down to grit, which it had nothing to do with. Army commanders are remote from their armies because they have to deal with the big scenario and turn it into individual actions on the ground, and they don't laugh about the dead. It makes them cautious and strangely it makes them reckless, and there was in our particular army commander something of the latter, and that didn't promote laughter.

We were awaiting orders, meaning we could pass the day as we chose. The guns were snugly camouflaged and out of action. The distant boom of big artillery was muffled, spread out comfortably, conferring death on others—and on us a sense of reprieve.

For me 'the guns' were already another way of saying safe haven. They were pinpointed sometimes by enemy artillery but on the whole shells fell wide of us, though not always so wide that we could forget them.

Our all-day and sometimes all-night firing programmes were no more disturbing to me than the so-called dags with which we recharged our radio

batteries. Their engines were going all night and made a deafening noise, and some of us (I was one) liked to put our beds close to a dag in order, of all things, to sleep soundly. That way, too, you wouldn't hear the rush of the shell that had your number on it.

Captain H. and I got hold of a bottle of gin and began drinking close to my bivouac one late afternoon. I passed out and woke up twenty-four hours later with my bivouac collapsed over me and my legs outside. I thought the dusk was the previous dawn. I only woke because I was starting to suffocate. Captain H. must have tripped over my bivouac pegs as he staggered away, unless he pulled them out for fun.

We had a laugh afterwards and resolved ~~never~~ not to touch gin again. But we n.p.
didn't ask ourselves why we had drunk to unconsciousness. Sometimes we talked about Churchill---how we of the Struggle against Fascism had put him where he was---hoisted on our sole shoulders (his own party would never have put him there) ~~he was at our beck and call~~, leased from the 'reactionaries' solely for the duration of the war. The thought that Churchill was acting entirely on his own never once occurred to us.

We sat and drank numberless sobering mugs of char and I had a letter from home saying 'Well son we had our windows blown out today'. I never wrote home any but the vaguest footnotes to my present life since I didn't wish to suggest heroics to people under nightly bombardment from the air, without choice of fight or flight, no medals posthumous or otherwise, no extra rations or rest periods or worst of all any personal encounter with the enemy, who

remained at a great inaccessible height and were hated because their deaths could not be seen. I heard from my parents that Len, my middle brother's closest friend, had fallen from the sky over Germany, with no time or perhaps strength to activate his parachute.

* * *

We got wind of another show coming up——a wopper this time. We were again to punch a hole in the enemy defences but this time our armoured division would 'pass through' it (an expression that took on, in the course of the Italian campaign, a certain tragic drollness).

Having secured the northern banks of the river Volturno we were now to face Field Marshal Kesselring's Gustav or Winter line, which he was even now preparing for us. To protect his busy engineers he began building a makeshift line (the Bernhardt) which stretched from Minturno on the Mediterranean coast across a range of peaks called the Aurunci, ~~so we would first have to hop this lesser hurdle.~~

It was these peaks we were now invited to tackle. Anyone could see that we were neither trained nor equipped for mountain warfare but Kesselring had devised the trap and it seemed our destiny to adapt ourselves to his design, in other words walk smack into it.

The Aurunci went east towards the centre of the Italian peninsula and stopped abruptly and briefly at the narrow defile in which was contained the road to Rome. This was called in dull military phrasing Highway 6 and it was accompanied by the enchanting Liri river, which gave its name to the defile.