

MAURICE ROWDON —  
FORWARD TO THE DEATH.  
II pps 153-302 //

# **WAR IN ITALY**

## ***The Hitler/Churchill honeymoon***

© MAURICE ROWDON 2009

Also the proposed Western Front, which we knew Montgomery was due to lead, made us jealous. 'Our' (the Eighth army's) 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured division had already left us to prepare for it, just as the American Fifth army had lost its US 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne division to the same cause.

Yes, Monty would soon be running Operation Overlord (notice the truculent big-scenario title), but this had its plus side because we in the Eighth army, once abandoned by him, would be able to jettison its irritating glamour.

For instance, while encamped near Damascus we got a directive from him which we thought typical of his cockiness, a directive insisting that we do gym every morning at 0700hrs. under officer supervision. We, both officers and men, scoffed at it and did nothing. What we overlooked was that Montgomery had left Italy many weeks before and had nothing to do with it. But in military life that sort of thing doesn't signify. You go on blaming him just the same.

When I met Montgomery after the war I found him one of the least cocky people I ever clapped eyes on. He couldn't help speaking his mind—all the time. And this fact alone was enough to get him his cocky

reputation, in high places and low. For instance, the first words he addressed to me were, Never trust a journalist. As our host at the table ran two hundred newspapers and one or two of his London editors were present it seemed quite appropriate for Montgomery to say what he thought. What would be the point of saying it if they weren't there?

Since army commanders were so remote from us, we made them up. The one and only time we saw top brass was when we assembled in an open Italian field one day under a splendid hot sun and a tiny plane flew out of the sky and landed a few hundred yards away, containing our very own king George VI. He was whisked before us in a jeep, seated on a special little platform that had been made for him, and when he jumped down the hand-full of waiting generals rushed forward to greet him. There was our divisional commander whom we knew vaguely as 'Ginger' even though he was Ginger's successor. And there was General McCreery, our Corps commander, perhaps the only commander in the Italian arena who knew what he was doing (he protected us against any of Clark's battle plans that exposed us unduly), and he had several MCs from the first world war. And now he

leapt round the royal jeep like a child dropped in fairyland, spellbound, while our divisional commander Ginger—or rather his successor—stood there stolidly showing everybody how deeply he was unimpressed by anybody but himself.

The king was dressed in summer khaki and shorts and his knees were very white. He carried a little cane. We sent up three cheers for him as he gazed about him. He talked with the generals for a time, looking very serious and to the point, and then he remounted, settling himself on the platform once more and placing a piece of beige cashmere over his knees against the sun with a fastidious little pat which put a special hush of fascination on us because it seemed to come from a deep deep past that we also belonged to, he being the face and frame of our country and perhaps a reassurance, even a promise, that we still had one.

It was an intelligent idea for him to appear out of the blue, not take a parade or inspect us. Those who devised the visit knew well that he and he alone could make us feel we had someone watching out for us, quite separate from politics. His older brother Edward, whom a lot of us felt had been ousted from

the throne in a rigged abdication because of his vast popularity, had been on a par for us with Gracie Fields who sang Down Our Allie and the American black singer Paul Robeson—they each and all rooted for the poor. Also King George and the queen stayed in London during the blitz and visited the bomb sites next morning, so they had become 'one of us'.

My no-longer-girlfriend's photo in my pocket was decidedly cracked and faded now, hardly more than millions of dots. Stare at these dots as I might they no longer captured her. I kept its tatters in my pocket just the same. She was surely many ardent copulations ahead of me and I realised she had become a reminder for me of what I could only see as images from a past that was unattainable even though it had happened.

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.

so as to create surprise. This was precisely 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. The Germans had just vacated Cava dei Tirreni and it was obvious (though not for us) that they had quickly taken up positions with a perfect view of the valley in which our guns were to be put down---within spitting distance of us, as it turned out.

Captain H., under cover of night, put our four guns down in a small valley flanked with steep vine terraces, a short walk from the town. We did the unhitching as quietly as possible. Then, after putting out sentries, we walked stealthily back into Cava de' Tirreni. We had taken over a big house on the northern side. The idea in war is that you walk into any house of your choosing. Its owners or squatters make a quick bunk or retire to a deep cellar. There is no unfriendliness about it because civilians have little interest in being caught in crossfire. If you move in fast it means, for them, you will probably get out fast too.

This house had an atrium and a balcony looking down on it, and it was this balcony that drew us

—really a large salon beneath yet another storey. Most of the men billeted themselves down here. I shared a tiny nursery room with another junior officer who had freckles and surprised eyes. We took it in turns to sleep in a child's cot, relieving each other every few hours for guard duty at the guns. Once I came in to wake him and as I was doing so I fell asleep slumped over him and we only woke up at dawn. We got some very sharp words from above but senior officers rarely came down on us hard, knowing as they did that there were many battles ahead that would do their own cowing.

To get to the guns one took a winding path that couldn't be observed. Cava de' Tirreni (meaning the quarry or mine of the Tyrrhenian seas, on Italy's western coast) was tiny then—no four-lane highway ran at its side, as now. 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.

The vine terraces where we put our guns had a greater beauty than they would in peace-time because, as I see only now, their silence was so war-deep, devoid of the domestic clatter of normal times. And

of course this silence carried with it a foreboding which enhanced even further the beauty. There were mossy statues and young trees. There were also a fountain and green garden benches where the women who tended the vines used to 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

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 among the leaves, their smoke rolling flatly away, hugging the dew. Jerry must have been able to see the whites of our eyes. Most of his first ones dropped near the benches and statues. A splinter caught a young Italian woman. 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 the crashes came in clusters and the pungent smoke got into our lungs. One of the men shouted down at the woman Shut up! Shut up! in the illusion that she was attracting the fire. He threw himself down close to

me and murmured, She's not hurt as bad as all that. But I think she was screaming at her first realisation that war killed and meant to do so.

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. And things were suddenly quiet and he was dead. My face puckered up against crying in that first compassion, you are crying for all the future ones, whom you will not cry for, as well as for this friendly creature who spoke to you not a moment before so that you still hear him and see his particular way of smiling. He was a man I trusted and he was to accompany me on my F.O.O. missions, we had agreed about that. Just a glance and we seemed to understand each other. No need for orders—he was already there. This in your signaller is precious as gold.

A peasant woman in black stood by the hut door and moaned quietly to herself. The gunners trod about respectfully, thinking. 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, the shit would fall 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 becomes part of that strange assembly of dead men who have gone and live men who might any minute go.

We sat in the balcony area overlooking the atrium and I was asked to give a lecture. All because I let it drop that I had been on the set of a film called The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, which was

shot at the Elstree studios. They wanted to know how a film was made. As all I remembered of that day was hanging about for just one scene—shot in a few inaudible moments—I had little to say. I would much rather have talked about the theatre, how my mother and father used to take me and my two brothers to the working men's clubs when we were tiny. You saw the top comedians in those clubs, on their way up. In my mother's arms I began to know about timing and pace and projection. But these troopers turned it down. They wanted the big screen, the passive sanitised dream.

I enjoyed strolling alone in Cava de' Tirreni's narrow lanes. 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? I expect 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.

It was a restless period for us. I was impatient to get my first F.O.O. assignment over and done with. It would have been useful to get some gen (our word for information) about this. 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 to engage the guns of a whole brigade or division, and the reply had to come back down that hierarchy, so you needed plenty of juice. It was after the word Ready had been passed to you from all the assembled waiting guns that your final order of

Fire! went through and then, almost instantaneously, you heard the baleful whirring of the shells above your head.

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, derived from utter bafflement as to what to expect.

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 15<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadiers or a Hermann Göring division or the 44<sup>th</sup> 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 in the form of quick and heavy support from the rear. 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 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 were whores galore in Naples and 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 proprietess 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 proprietess was a large young body 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, 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

**M**ost of the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 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! 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 from their 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 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 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. 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 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.

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 56<sup>th</sup>, 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 34<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 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 Americans just walked out of the line and went 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

**T**he 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 that 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 to touch gin again.

We sat and drank numberless 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.

We got wind of another show coming up—a very big one 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 dry drollness).

Having secured the northern banks of the river Volturno we were to face General Kesselring's Gustav or Winter line, which was now being prepared 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.

And 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 walk into it. The Aurunci went east towards the centre of the peninsula and stopped abruptly and briefly at the narrow defile in which was contained the road to Rome or Highway 6, and this was accompanied by the Liri river, which gave its name to the defile. Thus the road to Rome could, at this point, be overseen from formidable heights and they also constituted a

natural barrier to any troops bent on frontal assault.

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 was a smaller if 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.

But not even this was enough. The little nut was accompanied, even dominated, by a greater one that covered the summit of the hill and might require an arsenal of nutcrackers to break it, yet was as sweet as Cassino, perhaps 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 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. The whole ensemble in fact 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.

\* \* \*

All this hardly twenty miles north of the river Volturno. By the time we crossed that river the Gustav Line had already been manned, its supply lines (always difficult on heights) secured. Our first trip wire, the Bernhardt line, stretched along the Garigliano river in its western reaches to its tributaries in the east, the Liri and the Rapido, close to Cassino, that is to a defence position set there by nature (and indeed it had been used for many centuries by monks as the narrow gateway to Rome through which no invader could or did pass).

No wonder St. Benedict put his monastery there, and built it like a fortified town. Not an army could ---or ever did---pass it without being mauled and thrown back. One could say it was a divine stronghold which would even if it was destroyed become all the stronger for it (and this we later saw happen).

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 force with what remained of Rommel's army in North Africa.

Hitler's original plan was to let the Italian peninsula go, and concentrate his armies in the north, just under the Alps. It was our extraordinary casualty figures that were so persuasive. He made his decision on November 21<sup>st</sup> 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 (Churchill had after all invited the whole world into this war) but the uncrackable nuts before us required not mass but prowess, and this was something missing from allied guidance at the top—and therefore at the bottom where foot soldiers were.

\*

\*

\*

.

The Big Show was to take place between December 15<sup>th</sup> 1943 and 15<sup>th</sup> 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 mountain range 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 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, which you might say of all mankind. 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. Betrothals were discussed, the marriages to take place when it was all over. Kisses and smiles were exchanged and anything more secret was presumably snatched in remote corners of the cellars because of the presence of elders and us commissioned officers. We officers only heard reports—the girls were at first hesitant with us and only began coming up to us in the street and passing the time of day 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 had tea out).

In that little town 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 dei 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 Volturmo attack I had led my men into hell (at the double)—not that there was 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—would I bring my men constantly into heavy fire, go on losing them? had these first scenes set a precedent? These were the nagging themes. I recognised in myself, during these days of quiet foreboding, a certain dim regret I couldn't trace, 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 Ronaco, 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. Gordon's girlfriend had already become his wife. Of course he knew K. and I pulled out the photo. He looked at it with what I took to be momentary misgiving, but he couldn't have known the truth. The misgiving was I think for both of us.

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

**A**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 mountain 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 20<sup>th</sup> (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, but even when there was plenty of contact later, it altered nothing of a terrain that was serenely indifferent to military protocol.

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 air currents and changing 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 general picture was this. Lying just north of us in our village, and blocking the northern way to Cossino, was a vast lone rocky sentinel of nearly 1000 metres called Monte Camino. Nevertheless our two divisions captured it on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1944 though they didn't get a real foothold for three days, and this foothold was shared by Germans within inches of them.

As for the Aurunci range across the Garigliano there was a much vaster assembly of mountains---Fuga at 687 metres, Maio at 940 metres and then, if we could have but jumped these, a mild Paolino of a trifling thousand feet which offered a gentle walk down to the Liri valley, namely the road to Rome.

This was of course the narrow defile of which Cassino had a sports-arena view---the kernel of the nut we were hoping to crack.

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

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 naïf, 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?

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.

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

**W**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 deep gratitude at our going. There were tears from the young women 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, 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.

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.

\*                 \*                 \*

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 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.

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.

This 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 Rabbit's Ears, which were enormous binoculars of great penetration, taken from a German prisoner.

Our steep path straggled between thickets and saplings so that the moment we set foot on it we were hidden. I was to stay at my post in the hours of light and descend just before first dusk.

At the top we came to the flat shrubby clearing I had been told about. Walking straight ahead as we had been instructed to do we came, after a few yards, to the other, northern edge of the ridge, which had an even steeper slope than the one we had just climbed. This too was thick in bush and sapling, such that you would detect any movement down there by the sound.

Taking care, crouching to hide ourselves, we found my little eerie scooped out of the thick bush between boulders in such a way that it provided a seat and room to stretch one's legs. It was hidden from all but the sky.

And facing me was the abbey of St. Benedict as first built, in wondrous brown-golden state in this the first light of day.

I settled happily in. The weather was now dry and fairly warm. I turned the long-distance lenses on the abbey and set the focus and all at once a

brilliantly clear picture of each window, stone buttress, disposed itself before my eyes.

Those stones were to change each hour to a new subtle tint, russet and rose in the first dawn, white and grandly still at noon. You could gaze at this frail tapestry for minutes on end and less and less give credence to its solidity. War with its great hush between battles restored St. Benedict's abbey to its earlier centuries. In all its thrilling changes of light from mellow rose and damask and cherry-wood to tints of brown so rare that the façade became a veil held dangling in the sky, this abbey was a last point of sanity, an assurance that war may not forever be the shadow that follows us, each and every one of us.

But also, because this was war, the abbey windows had a way of staring down into the valley that could seem to frightened soldiers a bitter grey warning. Its very stillness might make some commanders dream of taking it out on the grounds that Jerry was inside, fully equipped. It only needed a few philistines among them to set a scare going, and they were available.

Intelligence said no such thing. Intercepted messages to the monastery, even personal ones to the abbot from Hitler, corroborated the evidence that the Germans considered Monte Cassino as they considered Rome, as an open city.

And we F.O.O.s were sent up to that eerie (so I believe now) in order to banish any idea of the Germans being inside, since both General Alexander and General Mark Clark were firmly against violating such a clearly understood covenant.

The second morning I sent my signaller away. The silence was all the greater because the plain below never stirred from hour to hour.

I was wary of the slope immediately below me. From time to time I gave sober thought to how I might defend myself should I see those shrubs below move or hear branches crack. The only way was to make a bunk so I recced the path by which I had come and removed any sharp gravel that might make my exit noisy.

My task was a clearly stated one—direct from divisional headquarters: I must report all movements at the end of each day. My reports were, apart from one, 'No movement'.

That one movement was a hand-full of Germans in a motor-bike-and-sidecar. They suddenly appeared from the east and sped towards the river. They got out at its only bridge. I put my Donkey's Ears on them and watched them climb beneath the stone arches. They worked for ten or so minutes, clearly laying mines. Then they drove back to cover—to the east again.

I waited the rest of that day for the bridge to blow up but it didn't. In my report that evening I gave its map reference for our mine detectors, convinced however that no army in its right mind would attack across that plain. I was wrong.

One afternoon at the warmest hour, when my cockpit in the sky was the choicest place to be, there was a rustle of steps behind me and I turned to see a young man in uniform, except that it wasn't a combatant one. We said hullo and at once liked each other. He was a journalist and armed with a notebook. Suddenly we were having a chat like the Kent cottage ones. As then, I made a cup of tea. We talked about books and, I think at one point, Mass Observation, for which I had worked just before getting my call-up papers.

He wanted to know what I'd been doing on That Terrible Hill. I told him a few things that happened and he made some notes and we parted saying how we must meet again, knowing there wasn't a chance in hell of that. A few weeks later I had a letter from my mother saying, What's all this you've been up to? There was a front-page story in the local paper about how her boy was a hero. I can't remember what the heroism was, or how my affable journalist had managed to extract one from what I told him but copy has to be written—and there it was, apparently, under a photo of me. Horace Potter who lived next door to my parents called round. He had just seen it come off the press, he being a sub on the newspaper.

It would hardly bring solace to my parents' unsung nights in the shelter. And the triumphal style of war journalism is a pain in the arse anyway, not least for the journalist. So I closed the subject as quickly as possible in my subsequent letters. And then there was the fact that we were forbidden by the censorship rules to even mention battle in our letters.

No doubt my intelligence report corroborated previous ones from that same cockpit. The fact is

you cannot stare at such a building for days on end without some tiny evidence of military occupation, if it exists. Soldiers inside such a building have a way of forgetting vague orders such as 'Never show yourself beyond such and such a point'. They get used to the silence all round them and it is here that an observer on a distant hill has his chance---unseen, unheard, he is at last discounted. This is when someone in the building shows himself, if only for the fraction of a second.

In that eerie I noticed in myself a desire to say more in my report than my military remit allowed me. I wished to persuade the higher command that the abbey was clearly not a defensive position. But my impressions counted for nothing. Also the absence of movement proved nothing either way. I realised that I knew in my heart that the abbey was doomed.

The danger was that some pressure to bomb might gain momentum, and reach even unto the thrones of the Shakespeare-quoting Roosevelt and Churchill.

## Six

The new attack was to be yet another breakthrough (the very word denotes the tactics of rush and too much weight). And it would take off precisely from where my long-distance lenses had been focussed.

'Rome by Christmas' had become an ideology for the highest echelons of command—every day that passed after Christmas Day was overladen with guilt at not being in Rome and this became a fresh nail in the coffin of military ingenuity.

We were now in mid-January 1944. Having secured a mere seventy-mile advance in over four months, to the tune of at least 10,000 battle casualties a month, not to mention the sick and shocked, it seemed logical, in this mood of self-revenge, to try and repeat those figures.

Not only this but the hardest, most closely defended centre of the Gustav Line fortification, namely Cassino, was going to be, of all unilluminated strategies, our centre of attack.

This time our breakthrough would (ideologically speaking) make it possible for the US 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps, containing our Texan brothers, to cross the Rapido river. As its name suggests, this river was (especially in torrential rain) as fast as the devil, and in winter particularly treacherous. And the rains had started again. The cold was beginning to bite. Yes, this was January, not June.

Our job—that of 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> divisions—was to make a hole in the 14<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Corps that faced us.

So it was that we drove, tyres whirring and slipping in the mud, following white tapes in the dark, to positions as close to Cassino as commensurate with officially declared suicide.

In the dead of night we set down in what appeared to be a very crowded field. We were cheek by jowl with the Texans once more. There was no question of slit trenches here. We moved into feverishly prepared dugouts of the world war one type. We could stand upright in these---with head room to spare. Mine was the size of a large room. We cut a hole in the top of a biscuit tin and then dug it into the mud wall as a grate for a fire. We twisted more biscuit

tins into a chimney that fitted into it and would carry the smoke through the roof. How that roof was made I cannot recollect---perhaps planks but more likely corrugated iron since engineers must have been here before us. I only know we never had a drop of rain inside. We gathered masses of wood and I had that fire blazing white most of the day and night. The walls were soon dry. The puzzle---in view of the incessant shelling we were getting---was that we were allowed to let the chimneys smoke at all.

Every shell that came over made the earthen walls shudder. The lulls in the enemy firing were all the sweeter for being short. The air-burst shells were now so high in the sky (because of our ground-level position) that we rather enjoyed their deafening useless crack. But most of the stuff coming over was heavy 88mm.

We and the Texans renewed our acquaintance and exchanged bully beef for smooth Spam, Players for one of their almost identical Virginia brands. I noticed a certain difference in them. They had seen a lot and I think had begun to wonder what the hell they were doing so far from home. They looked wary now. You could say as an Englishman (admittedly one not quite

right in the head) that you were fighting for England in these fields but as to how they were fighting for Texas in one doomed battle after another up a narrow peninsula in the Mediterranean Basin no one had so far given them a clue.

They gazed, they watched, they smoked, they nodded and said something from time to time but their pauses, like those between the shells, were unpredictable. Of course you could have told them that they were fighting for world power—which is what their nation got out of the war. But I don't think that would have been appreciated as an argument for their death. Those once soft-spoken creatures whom we had learned to love would have demurred, I think—preferred to be with their folks again and to let American markets achieve world power by their natural expansion, not by means of this crazed blood ritual that had fallen in love with its own mistakes.

Our exchanges weren't good humoured as before. One of them seemed offended when I said something like, American spam has converted me to bully beef. There was this edge to the nerves that afflicted us all---and in them perhaps was the shock of premonition.

Of course our guns were out of action in this vulnerable place, so the enemy could fire without fear of retaliation. But it was the certainty of their bombardments---which must come from a very accurate map reference of our position---that made us ask what we were doing so crowded together, one Corps mixed up with another. One thing we did feel certain about and that was our proximity to the front line. It even crossed our minds in giddy moments that we were actually in that line, though without means of assault or defence.

The only practical reason for being crowded up like this must be the coming attack, planned for about 20<sup>th</sup> January (this we knew about). But even so you never assembled troops this way, under the enemy's very noses.

Or the idea may have been that, crammed up against the front line, we—a mixed bag of infantry and gunners and perhaps some Engineers—were being held in reserve so as to be ready to pour into a hole made ready for us by that attack. But again, you simply didn't plan battles this way, your guns stayed where they should always be, well behind the committed lines. Even allowing for the freakishness

of war, this situation surpassed all manner of guessing among senior as well as junior officers.

For one thing, the dug-outs were not of our own making. I have no recollection of my own men digging. So the Engineers must have been involved---and earthworks on such a scale are noisy and smoky and provoke local curiosity. The material had to be transported---roofs, tarpaulins, stanchions. Italian gossip travelled faster than fire. You didn't have to squeeze it out of anybody, it tumbled out of the mouth and into your ear and the job was done. Italians regularly passed with wonderful nonchalance from the enemy to us and back again. They skirted military positions along paths that meandered unseen and unsuspected in low hills and woodland. Produce and family news travelled that way. It was better than spies.

Captain H. was nearby. I paid my visits to him at the double, no question here of dodging here and there to avoid the shell with your number on it. And these bombardments were so concentrated, and of such persistence, that we were constantly convinced that they were a softening-up barrage before an enemy attack. But no attacks came.

In this kind of position no records can be kept. War records cover supply lines and their arrival or not, and of course attacks. But the kind of limbo we were in excites no annals. Our song We're here because we're here because we're here recorded it best.

Meanwhile we were getting more and more reinforcements. A new second lieutenant joined my troop and we shared my dugout. It wasn't good that he came straight into relentless shelling like this. It was too much of a blind fall. Even the boom of our own heavy artillery way back made him jump and then he would half-smile in frightened apology. One day a shell came within yards of the dugout and we threw ourselves down in a corner close to the fire and I found myself on top of him. He was trembling all over with an unusual violence—like that of a fever more than fright.

To have your nerves go at the start means you can't get your self-navigation in proper shape thereafter. We were very lucky that one time, favoured by the fact that the blast went forward of us. But he couldn't take account of degree and nuance. He had a pale soft skin, still a boy, and we

used to sit and talk quietly in the lulls but I think he couldn't accommodate himself to the idea of people blowing each other up. I think it deeply contradicted the life he'd had before, perhaps a village life where everything was ordered and familiar. Even in the lulls he was on guard inside himself. In this state he was sent out on his first F.O.O. mission and was killed almost at once.

\* \* \*

There was suddenly a sense all round us of bustle and movement at short notice. We and the Texans were separated.

The attack started on the night of January 17<sup>th</sup> , three days earlier than planned. Our two divisions got across the Garigliano close to the Cassino defile. But Kesselring threw in his 29<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier divisions and this was a poor omen for the risky Texan assault across the Rapido.

The rains and that river did for our Texan brothers. The river swelled up furiously. The two Texan regiments, already battle-exhausted, were lost almost in entirety. Their Bailey bridges were swept away behind them and they were left stranded in darkness on the northern bank without any avenue of

escape and in mud and near freezing rain under shell-fire all night, exposed in a water-logged trap with neither supplies nor any chance to prepare defence positions, and the few that lived to see the morning must have been near demented.

Mark Clark was indicted in Texas after the war for this but it is difficult to indict commanders who know no other military doctrine than meeting strength with strength, head-on, especially if they can point to this doctrine as having come from above. He was exonerated.

This Texan assault was rebuffed by only five German battalions from the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Regiment, crack fighting troops.

The real trouble that dogged Mark Clark was that he had no battle experience. It is said that General Eisenhower, chief of American operations in Europe, was furious at Clark for insisting on getting his army before he had done a proper stint of battle. But he gave Clark an army just the same—perhaps in consideration of the fact that he himself had no battle experience of any kind, even a view of it through binoculars.

## Seven

**W**e were pulled out of the line—as 'broken reeds'. This was how Mark Clark put it. His use of such expressions caused resentment but he was telling the truth. It was decided that we needed not just a short leave in Rome or Naples, nor even just a long leave, but one far away from any theatre of war.

By marvellous degrees the air ceased to vibrate, boom and whistle with shells departing or arriving, until finally not so much as a distant bombing could be heard.

The further we drew away, in convoy down to Italy's southern coast and then by ship, the more did life seem to have slipped back, by means of a naughty quirk of time, into peace, with all its comforts artfully provided.

Desires stirred that were thought lost, irretrievable. Having reached glittering Taranto—emphasis on the first syllable—at Italy's heel, having glimpsed the deep blue water we were to cross

for an excitingly unknown destination which we knew to be Port Said, we began to realise that at the heart of every great war there is a tourist agency at work, an agency so punctilious, so exhaustive in its knowledge of schedules, that no lay tourist agency could possibly rival it.

Thomas Cook was out-cooked in every matter—accommodation (varied subtly according to the delicate shades of rank), food (no longer 'rations'), attentions of the most civil kind proffered by local populations, as well as entertainment both personal and public, all funded and provided so discreetly that putting your hand in your pocket was now a pleasure because needed so rarely, as for example (dare I draw the curtain aside?) in the case of whorehouses.

Suddenly, from having been the chosen targets of every sort of detonation we were the flattered and cosseted and above all unpaying guests of that very army that had marched us into the shit and intended to march us back into it again.

We leaned over the side of our anchored troopship to look down on Port Said as small boats clustered below containing youths lithe from sea and

sun holding up melons and trinkets, just as if we could access them. The vast port was brassy and dirty and its noises were those you wanted to hear. This was the 'middle' East, bustling with a poverty that looked like riches to us because the beggars were bullet and bomb free and all they wanted was cigarettes and baksheesh. And spring was coming and the warm damp harbour air, laden with spicy smells, was a silent reassurance that to be at ease in limb and heart was all right.

We clattered and bumped down the runway with our kit and marched to a train bound for Cairo that was unashamedly commodious with little mirrors and thick-pile plushy seats in each compartment, and when it set off it made the right clattering sound on the track in celebration of childish trips to the sea. When at last Cairo appeared in the distance I had one of those special déjà vue experiences that say 'You were born here and are only returning' but you can't see how.

The city was a vast officers' mess set partly in gaudy palmy lofty rooms, as in Shepherd's Hotel, and palm-tree gardens with fountains and orderly mellow-yellow streets of houses with balconies, among which

you would find your discreetly unadvertised hotel, room booked, service readily available, a foyer too tiny yet a source of everything you needed to know.

I sat in the huge Shepheard's lounge and found myself one of an astonishing democracy of officers of every rank with top brass walking by you and gazing about them indulgently. You were suddenly in a class, a class that had not long since ruled England and was now the effective proxy government of a bustling Coptic cum Muslim world whose king was at once in rebellion against and amenable to an arrangement which in peacetime he would have called oppressively colonial.

In fact this city was suave and bustling in a last celebration of empire, and without the faintest fear of any competitive American ambitions in that direction. Americans in Cairo were strikingly, you could say abundantly, absent—given the multitudes of them elsewhere.

Yet an American presence was suggested. It sat, in the form of an undeniable authority, in the senior officers whose life was here and who said 'rarely' for 'really' and 'cawfee' for 'coffee' and made 'you' rhyme with 'er' or 'awe'. It was in their charmingly

bland self-assurance, visible in their biologically relaxed gestures, their easy-going rigour of comportment which also included sternness. And it told you they ruled the world.

However, they didn't rule the world. They didn't even rule Britain. For a century and a half they had shared life with a strong middle class and a huge working one, neither of which had much time for this other top class, if only because it wasn't top any more.

Yet it was top. It declared itself, without fuss, to be top. Their fascinating grace of manner said they were top even while you didn't believe it. They carried in themselves the last English authority, and clearly it would not, together with other things English, survive the war.

And this was precisely where America came in—as a kind of eminence grise behind these once-top people, who strangely, uncannily, embraced America. That land was big enough for them.

So top did these English people feel ('English' because they never had Welsh or Irish or Scottish accents) that they seemed to have finished altogether with Britain. The faery islands, made faery by queen

Elizabeth 1, who dreamed of a new spiritual empire that would take in all Europe, undivided by schism and sect, had become too small for them, more in spirit than anything else.

And that was why, in the last years of the nineteenth century, they had begun to look for American heiresses. There was an almost indecent rush to marry them.

And Winston Churchill, the beloved leader chosen by all of us on the Left, was the progeny of such a marriage. His was a great Whig family, and such families, acting in unison, had once been so powerful that they could remove and install even monarchs. They were not to be sniffed at even now.

Which was how a political dream grew in these families that Britain with its vast empire, its dominance of the whole world, should join together with the USA to make a supreme Atlantic state. Neville Chamberlain even suggested exactly that to the American president before the war was even thought about.

So here in Cairo, in this Last Byzantium, we were all stewing in refined juices brewed by an aristocracy that could no longer bear the grim

industrial smoke-hole that Britain had become. But though this Cairo was celebrating lost English authority she was also passing that authority down to those like myself who might be called, from their point of view, the masses. And that authority was all the more convincing because they didn't know their power had passed, much less that it would.

And understandably so---after all, this war was very much the personal invention of one of their top families. By an astonishing topsy-turvy revolution that was neither a palace one nor a people's one no less an aristocrat than Winston Churchill had got precisely the war he (and most probably he alone) wanted. Never was there a war so full of contradictions, of which his own leadership of it was one of the foremost.

So powerful was he that he could snub his own right wing---and the royal family---for wanting to avoid war at all costs on the highly rational grounds that it would bring down Europe and the British empire with it. And to attain this power he happily stood on the shoulders of the Left---that mighty movement for which The Struggle against Fascism was the key struggle of the age (to hell with who led

it).

I remember sitting on the lavatory at the age of 14 or 15 reading W.H.Auden's pamphlet-poem 'Spain' over and over again. Each stanza celebrated the little civil pleasures of life as they had been, and ended with the refrain 'But today the struggle' (later, in New York, Auden excised the poem from his canon).

What made it so haunting for me was the fact that I felt that Struggle so deeply---had done since childhood when I read my first book on socialism. All of a sudden I had seen that the world could be changed. It could be made different from what it was for my parents and all the others on our street who lived in fear of being without money enough at the end of the week to pay for the rent and the coal. The worst times were when my father fell ill. Otherwise, those times could be good as well as bad. We were certainly better looked after than the poor today---in solid three-bedroom flats and houses with sixty-foot gardens. We would never have classed ourselves as really poor. When things were all right we were well fed and slept sound at night in good beds. My resourceful father had a large small-rent allotment

for his vegetables and despite having had one of his hands cut off in a saw-mill at the age of sixteen he could mend our shoes and do the all the carpentry we needed. We had a jolly household full of light and colour and my parents wanted their three boys to go into show business or some such exciting thing without explaining how it could happen (yet it did, in some form, for all three of us).

But now I began to feel that the wonder of our lives together was due solely to my parents' stamina and resilience and fervour, to their will to laugh and love in all seasons---it poured from every room in colours and cosiness and this made me childishly certain that the world could be changed without difficulty into one which didn't make most people in it fear and tremble. I joined the Labour party League of Youth and met communists, and both sides kept quiet about their difference---on behalf of the Struggle.

We believed in our quest so ardently. And who is to say we were wrong? But war came in---and war destroys, leaving behind it solely the wherewithal for the next one.

But who brought war? Did it really come in like a stranger from an unknown land? What about our Struggle against Fascism? Did we think it could be conducted with pea-shooters and pocket caterpaults? People like Hemingway and George Orwell and even Stephen Spender, the least martial of men, talked of the need---maybe---for blood to be spilled. So where was our ardour leading? It could hardly be said to be leading to peace, whatever that poor tired word might mean.

We Labour youths admired the communists because their dream for the future was so sure, they were people you could rely on, they talked with unforced conviction about the new world that was coming soon. And when I met my no-longer-girlfriend's mother she personified all that for me---she who, so it was whispered, knew Stalin and had met Lenin and Trotsky, she who now piloted freight planes to Canada.

And of course we Labour ones would never have felt so solidly together with the communists had they not worked hard for it---had Stalin not master-minded a campaign to win the hearts and minds of all the West as far as the Americas.

Already at the age of 14 I was receiving my heavy unreadable volumes of Marxist jargon from Radio Moscow and feeling proud of the attention.

Yet I couldn't stomach the heart of communist theory, namely that 'the end justifies the means'. Never did so few words speak such malicious intent. If ever there was a doctrine of war, this was one.

So Churchill could hardly be blamed for recognising this in our Struggle against Fascism, which we thought so innocently unassailable. And he may even have been beguiled by the idea that perhaps his own ends justified the most fearful global means imaginable.

However that may be, he adopted our Struggle as his too, and became so popular that once in power he could see off any threat of no-confidence in him in the House of Commons (there were several). MPs dared not topple the people's first and last choice.

\* \* \*

But perhaps the most stunning contradiction in this war so full of them was Chamberlain's declaration of war on September 3 1939.

It came like a bolt out of the blue, spoken so doubtfully.

And then---nothing happened. A few hours later there was an explosion of some kind from the direction of Croydon airport which sent everyone scuttling to their shelters at the bottom of the garden. But only silence followed. And the silence went on for six whole months, such that the American press called it The Phoney War.

The effect this declaration of war had on us Strugglers against Fascism was another baffling contradiction. It made us realise how deeply in love we were with peace! After all, that was the idea of socialism, wasn't it, to make a world given over for ever to peace? Apparently we hadn't realised before that war took you, seized hold of your life and, as its guarantee of your safety, robbed you of everything you had hitherto known in that life. We were suddenly in it and being really and truly in it (with that sickening falling movement of the belly) we saw that the Struggle against Fascism wasn't close to our hearts at all.

After all, who were the fascists? Two small countries, Italy and Spain, and an at present impotent one, Germany. A world war for that?

So if Chamberlain's declaration of war was a frivolous event how much more was our commitment to the Struggle against Fascism, now that we Strugglers realised that we had no stomach for war but indeed believed that it would finish us all, which in truth it did.

So we began to put all our faith into the peace negotiations which we knew to be going on at this very moment. And we felt supported in this faith by the fact that the war declaration had led to---no war at all.

There surely can have been few wars, especially world ones, that continued peace negotiations not simply after a declaration of war but---almost---as a result of it. The very failure of war to emerge proved that the will to wage it was simply not there. So why was the declaration made? There we were stumped. Not in a thousand years could we have imagined that it was we with our Struggle who pushed Chamberlain's hand!

That declaration, reckless and fumbled, certainly had disastrous consequences, none of which were visible to our self-blinded eyes. It was indeed 'tragically ill-timed'. It did indeed 'cause the

deaths of tens of millions of people'. Those were Churchill's words---after the war. But at the time of the declaration he was in Chamberlain's cabinet. And he not only approved that declaration, he was elated by it. According to the French ambassador, whom he phoned a few moments after it, he was so excited he could hardly speak. And he said that this would be a six weeks war.

But neither British nor French troops could get to Poland by any means at all. And the war had been declared specifically on behalf of the independence of Poland. Which seemed to make of the declaration an entirely frivolous event. Yet 'tragically ill-timed' too, seeing that in a moment it trapped the Jewish civilisation in Europe (and Hitler's enemies in Germany) within Hitler's unspeakable regime, and for six long years.

Meanwhile we were blandly convinced that no war had happened because peace negotiations were coming to a head. Indeed, to us, that the war declaration began to look like a simple pawn in the peace game.

No doubt, left to the royal family, that peace would have come about. And given time Hitler would almost certainly have been replaced. For what we

sleepers failed to realise was that Chamberlain's government and foreign office had a great power of choice as to who should run Germany. His favourite for the succession was Hermann Göring. So his attitude to Germany was avuncular and advisory. And Hitler was grateful. Indeed his greatest anxiety throughout the Thirties was 'will Britain approve?'. .

This was why British diplomats went to the nazi rallies, were happy to be photographed with one or other of Hitler's cabinet. In fact they had a great deal to do with making Hitler respectable in the eyes of the German middle classes.

As to the possibility that Chamberlain was pursuing a foreign policy that made the utmost sense for the West we would have laughed. Yet that was the case. The western governments saw in Hitler a man who had miraculously turned Germany from a half-starved ruin into an ordered country with full employment, but above all a man whose chief enemy was the West's, namely the Soviet Union. It was this 'Red Menace' that was in everyone's mind, not a temperamental dictator with hardly one trained division to put into the field. And if we are inclined to sniff at this today we must remember that Chamberlain's foreign

policy was the very same one that underpinned Western foreign policy for nearly fifty years after the war.

So what happened to impede that policy, stop it from reaching a safe end? We on the Left happened. Our pressure induced him to drop his avuncular nursing of the 'German problem' like a hot potato. So Hitler at once fell out of the British zone of influence---into a makeshift pact with Stalin that ended Poland's independence for nearly fifty years.

A (self-estimated) 100.000 of us walked up Whitehall shouting Down With Chamberlain and Chamberlain Must Go, on the grounds that he was 'appeasing' Hitler. There never was a more ridiculous word for what Chamberlain had actually been doing. One appeases strong rivals. Out of fear. There was nothing to be feared from Hitler, nothing strong about his army or defences. His only superiority was in his bomber force, which didn't substitute for a trained army. Indeed, Hitler was careful in the extreme about all his moves in the Thirties. Typically, when he marched into the Rhineland (no doubt with a nod from London) he was careful to give his soldiers dummy bullets and order them to turn

back the moment they saw a French army coming from the opposite direction.

Until we exercised our heavy-handed pressure Chamberlain's government was simply taking, for itself, the sensible line, namely treating Hitler as the first hopeful sign that at least one nation in Europe could in time stand up to Stalin.

But we insisted on Chamberlain's going, quite as if it made any difference to the basics of foreign policy. We really believed that our horror of nazism would vindicate war for the first time as a humanitarian pursuit. We simply couldn't imagine that the actual war as it was about to take place would quickly remove that horror---and the plight of the Jews---from its agenda.

Thus it was that, Chamberlain got rid of, Churchill rose on the shoulders of us his social enemies, namely the Labour and Communist parties. On our behalf he snubbed even his own foreign policy, not to say the peace efforts that were so close to our hearts---and to fulfilment. We would have welcomed even an interim pact with the devil. After all politicians routinely make them. But no, now that Churchill was in the saddle, Hitler's pleas for peace

(now public and urgent) became for the obedient press 'another trick'.

Thus it was too that a fallen aristocracy rushed into alliance with America against not communism or the Soviet Union, their greatest chosen enemies, but against Germany whose greatest enemy was—the Soviet Union.

Eight months before we landed in Salerno, on January 14<sup>th</sup> 1943, Mr. Roosevelt, the American president, announced at the Casablanca conference that Hitler and the nazis and even their bitter enemies within Germany, and even the German nation itself, even the Germans altogether, as citizens, were now to cease to exist. Our Struggle against Fascism couldn't even get a look in. Under the treacherous and fanatical banner of 'unconditional surrender' no German government, not even presumably any Jews who survived the camps and quickly got together such a government, had the right to sue for peace. The war against Hitler and nazism was neatly dead.

\* \* \*

But here in Cairo it suddenly seemed that none of this had happened. Surely we were indeed fighting

Hitler? 'going it alone', as the world had once said of us? The very independence of Cairo the Last Byzantium proclaimed the war to be a cosy affair after all.

And the absence of even a platoon of GIs helped this beguiling fairy tale. And since you saw nothing in Cairo to contradict it, you enjoyed it, the city being both the last jewel in the imperial crown and a backwater splendid and loud with a pomp that must be costing a fearful amount of money—for a country that had managed to slip, with staggering flippancy, from a world power to a small nation in debt.

Stalin and Roosevelt naturally had no time for this 'middle' east of ours. The zone did nothing for their interests or ambitions, only for our dying ones. They were bored by the Italian campaign because it belonged to this 'Mediterranean' zone of ours. At their conferences they even refused to entertain the idea of Britain's head of state, king George VI, attending. They were republicans. And for the purposes of war so was Mr. Churchill, in a quaint replay of the old Whig management of how and who a king should be (in this case, not the head of state).

And so it was that this unholy alliance left the Last Byzantines alone to administer and police their former imperial zone.

And so it was that we soldiers were now to be given a tour of that world—across the Sinai desert into Mesopotamia and Palestine, with the Lebanon and Syria waiting as final treats. Cairo was only the curtain-raiser.

And we were needed, we soldiers, to show the 'middle' East that it was still our military possession. That was why we troops had been preceded, and would be succeeded, by others from Italy. This city, the capital, needed to be manned by formidably experienced soldiers, not merely charming ones.

Hence the Shepheard Hotel's air of unassailable democracy in which young shoulders with only a single pip on them rubbed those that flashed red, a democracy that kept the British empire safe—apart from the equally unassailable consideration that, of the few things that the war had already made clear, the most starkly clear thing of all was the demise of that empire.

In other words this Last Byzantium was run by a patrician class that no longer had any power at all.

But they did the job wonderfully well. What almost no one realised, including themselves, was that they also ran every aspect of the British contribution to the war---with the same bland unerring confidence. It was they who had given us officer cadets our training. Their dulcet bland accents had dominated our mock battles. They were our lecturers, our senior officers. Just as they looked after every detail of our grand Byzantine tour so they had trained every man jack of us. They ran every mess, barracks, battle camp. They gave us cadets the impression that we were gentlemen freely bestowing our time on military matters, and then they threw us to the waiting wolves---the corporals and lance corporals some of whom were vile to the point of sickness. It was an astonishing realistic balance that flattered and tamed in one.

We went to the Pyramids and were served by tall Nubians at the King Minos hotel. We strolled the Cairo streets and took gharry rides. One morning I happened to be leaning over the balcony of my hotel room when I saw just below me, at the window of a house opposite, a girl with long hair, and she was smiling at me. I smiled back. We made an appointment

in sign language. We were to meet below, at the vestibule of her apartment block, at four o'clock that afternoon.

When the time came we went straight upstairs to her apartment and I was introduced to her parents. We had a polite tea in the sitting room and then the girl and I went for a sedate walk. We chatted and we strolled. I now had one of those patrician fly-whisks with horse-hair at the end and this I whisked here and there. She was a plump young lady and the war provided her with a feast of marital possibilities--- here was so ardent a believer in the Last Byzantines that almost anything British and commissioned would do for her. My balcony of course changed personnel every few days. And since she expected decorum to be strictly observed this was probably what she got from successive officers. From behind her shutters she could make her choice and hopefully one day she would clap her eyes on her rightful man. My hunch was that she would marry a local merchant.

I met an English nurse in Shepheard's. We shared a table in the drinks lounge. Nurses were the best people to know because they understood something of the forward lines. Our conversation was easy and

agreeable and no doubt if I could hear it again it would strike me as very much English of a former time, implying a kind of frank reserve, strikingly calm, a particular natural alchemy you get only in the US now.

She took a photo of me in the Battery Gardens which I still have, a cigarette hanging from a corner of my mouth, the eyes narrowed against the smoke, a chic posture of the time. We went for our gharry rides and at night sat under hanging lights in the garden of the officers' club. At the end of my stay we said good bye with one light kiss on the cheek and looked at each other with a certain regret. We might have fitted as lovers but it would have been lustreless. Friendship would have been good. She glanced at me in a solicitous way, thinking of the lottery of death perhaps. I wondered afterwards if she and other nurses had been planted, asked to 'keep an eye' on the youngest officers. If so it was a good civilised idea.

If I look at that photo of me today, cracked and blurred, I see that a certain change had taken place, one I was unaware of because it was so deep. In it I am gazing straight into the nurse's eyes.

The way my cap is tilted and my dress uniform sits on me like a well-made suit (no formal Sam Browne belt) and that cigarette hangs so suavely in the corner of my mouth, making the eyelids close a little against the smoke in a gaze that is pleasantly, jokingly quizzing—I have become, like her, an insider of this war. We both understand its language of screams quite as if that language were a function within the very biological constitution of our brains. The dying to live and the killing to die have a place as acceptable for us as Sunday afternoons and wedding speeches. Destructions are simply present wherever a human is. We need to do nothing, only to be, we who make inroads on other species, decimate them daily without thought, poison the very sources of survival for us all, the seas and soils, reduce even the oxygen content of the air to the point where no proper animal growth, including our own, is possible again. But in that case how is it our responsibility? We are sorry it happens, sorry that we murder millions of our kind, but what means do we have of checking ourselves, since war comes about not from decision, not from thought or plan but a compulsion that spreads according to its own

momentum, a compulsion within, not without. What use are our public demonstrations for peace if the demonstrator has no means of self-alteration?

A real demonstration against war would be a promise to undo every aspect of human life as it has been since the first human emerged. We would have to go out on the streets and renounce our need for fuels and electricity and air conditioning and travel across the skies. Do we expect governments to tell us the truth that without war these things could never be vouchsafed to us? We would rise up against them for telling us so much truth.

To adapt Walter de la Mare's humble lines, What is this life if full of care/we have no time to stand and---wonder who we are?

The cool placid Battery gardens where I am standing proclaim civilisation and at first we think that civilisation and war are opposites. But no such thing. Indeed, it is the civilisations, all of those we know about, that tell us of the high institutional status of war. The first maturely written history book in the ancient Greek civilisation, the cradle of our own, was a military one---Herodotus's history of the Peloponnesian wars, namely an attempt to give

sanity, order and dignity to something bereft of all three. The Greeks made light of war as a bagatelle of behaviour, as they made light of having slaves almost as numerous as they themselves. They said they needed war in order to acquire what they wanted and only someone else had. The bible of that world, Homer's *Odyssey*, ended with a massacre playfully presented as a climax of heroism and glory---those other fictions that battle excludes absolutely because death and dementia are its sole government.

Like our war-memorials and commemorations, our military histories try to make a stately tomb for deaths and dysfunctions which have no sane explanation whatever. They are careful never to dwell on an intimate moment of battle, namely where the shock lies, but wrap it in a camouflage of 'movements' here and 'engagements' there and a 'forced retreat' somewhere else. In this way, from generation to generation, the shameful human sore is never examined in its home within the human brain, but treated to Last Posts trumpeted at tattoos.

Always a civilisation needs war for its safety, which means that no civilisation feels safe from the 'enemy', the everlasting figment that from time

immemorial has haunted the human. When Cesare Borgia occupied as much territory as he safely could---the Lazio, Romagna, all central Italy if possible---he was working for the safety of the Vatican, at that time under his father's pontifical rule. The Borgia family wished to run all Christendom, and the very desire sprouted enemies everywhere.

And here I am in that photo, having made my debonair wedding to this made-up puppet bride. How had it all insinuated itself into my brain? as stylish as the wide steps up to the Shepherd's hotel?

After all, I had once felt gypped and deceived by this war. It hadn't convinced me. Even Churchill's 'rousing' speeches---the ones about how we would all be fighting on the beaches and in the streets---had been a gyp for this smoking youth. They never roused him at all, and as far as he knew they never roused anybody. But in the journalist war archives they went down as what gave us the will to fight---even, of all poppycock, what rescued us from a state of pacifism. We had already been at war a good twelve months. War had become a boring daily fact of thin rations, blackout curtains, air raid sirens. War for civilian

populations is squalid. And far from giving us spirit those speeches scared the daylights out of us, as they were meant to do. We were suddenly being told that Germans could walk up our beaches quite as if we had no Royal Navy and it wasn't the strongest in the world. Overnight, from being the most powerful nation on earth, we were defenceless against all those ships Hitler didn't have. Of course, as Hermann Göring said at the Nüremberg trials, every war leader must frighten the people with his first war speech, otherwise he won't get his war. That is, war must be and always is a gyp.

And when those speeches were followed by the announcement that in the event of a German invasion our government would depart for Canada with the royal family (and the Royal Navy?), it looked like open abandonment.

Other obvious gyps followed. One concerned the death of the Duke of Kent in an air crash in August 1942. The baloney we were first dished up with was that his plane was shot down on its way to Portugal by a German fighter because (yes) a Churchill look-alike was on board. Even for a war story it sounded like a candid can of worms, the truth being that the

Duke was on his way to Sweden (at a pinch Iceland) and crashed on takeoff in Scotland---in a plane notorious for shaky take-offs.

Now Sweden wasn't just another country. It was the chosen place for peace negotiations. And Kent was trained in Intelligence. So naturally a lot of us thought that his death had become a required one, for certain people.

And then there was the famous crash landing in Scotland some months before, on May 10<sup>th</sup> 1941, of Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy. The suspicious thing about this story was that it wasn't allowed to break as the stunning story it of course was. You saw two or three column inches of it hidden on page four. And the next you heard was that he was psychiatric material—not a man we all knew had flown to Britain to put the last touches to a peace treaty (and which, as we now hear, Roosevelt and Churchill went on negotiating with him---as a form of cynical play).

So the phoney botched-up stories provided you with the truth---by declaring so unimaginatively the opposite. Göbbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, was famous for his bon mots and among the most fatuous of them was his 'If you are going to tell a lie let it

be an outrageous one'. Nothing could be further from the truth. Such lies exude falsity like a black tidal wave and only add to the cynicism of war populations that are (often gladly) blinded by them. By an extraordinary twist we need the lies that war depends on. They really keep you going. They give rise to warm and briefly consoling dreams of a past or future time and this is respite indeed.

And here I was in Cairo, a paid-up member of the gyp-and-lie fraternity. My mad wedding was festive yet also bitter sweet, like the smell of apples and fermenting wine in the autumn months of Italy, that go together with falling leaves.

The photo spoke this so eloquently. My dress uniform was like my own specially tailored suit. Indeed it had been specially tailored, at Austin Reed's. I remember looking through the window at Regent's Street far below and recognising giddily, as the tailor pinned here and there, that I was saying good bye to myself.

As a veteran of world war two said recently, war memorials declare that the dead gave their lives but they didn't, their lives were stolen. And I would add, first stolen, then disposed of.

Our grand tour continued. We went in convoy across the Sinai desert which stretched like an eternal garden before us, its wadis gleaming with stones shaped and polished with careful deliberation by the sky, a sky that gazed and knew. These dried-up rivers had become endless avenues where you felt God was born, this being your first acquaintance with a silence that spoke to you.

We slept under the trucks in the implacable hot noon air, and moved only at night. I remember a wooden signpost in the middle of the desert marked simply 'To Baghdad', and how I stood gazing up at it. I resolved to go there one day and a few years after the war I did, to teach at its university.

Our convoy ended in Palestine, another jewel that required our military presence, this time to prevent trouble between Judah and Islam. We settled down in Tel Aviv, vacated no doubt by other troops hardly a day before. I recall sitting in a shaded cool apartment hotly furnished with carpets on the wall, the blinding sunlight squeezing through the shutters. My hostess is interesting and we are talking books, and some politics.

Jews said of Arabs and Arabs said of Jews, They are an ignoble people. The Jewish argument was that the Arabs had no modernity in them, and the Arab argument was that the Jews had. But it was a mild diffident thing, this rivalry, there wasn't yet the mutual demonisation of after years. At that time they lived side by side just as they did in Baghdad when I was later there; and just as they did in Spain before Ferdinand and Isabella banished them, breaking up a three-part medieval discussion that might have led to a civilisation of three religions that marvelled at and increased each other.

Our next stop was Beirut where we found French restaurants too good for us to appreciate, and cafes where you could sit under the awning for hours with the cool wash of the sea close by. And here at last was a brothel for officers-only (more by fact of possession than decree), furnished and presented with tact and taste where there were clever political discussions and laughter and the apportioning of sex to a time after, not before, the discussions and coffee and laughter, so that it drew its juices somewhat from those pleasures. We went there every day as one would to friends, and sat under the

tranquil whirring fans with the coffee cups clinking and the girls rustling to and fro in a sea of giggles as Madame spoke to us in her measured French.

We returned to our tents and transport and this time we stopped at Damascus with its pearl-clear stream bubbling through the street, and we ate huge strawberries and cream. We officers were taken to a local air strip and one by one went up in an Auster, sitting in the second cockpit as the pilot did stunts and invited us to take over the joy-stick and tip the wings. We swooped down over our own camps to within yards of the upturned bored faces. We dived endlessly and looped the loop and travelled upside down, hanging from the cockpit by straps. I remember seeing below a dark figure in a white loincloth behind a wooden plough drawn by a single ox in a brown field below and feeling I would like to talk to him and what a pity this thing I was in travelled so fast and so far above. I took over the controls, that is the joystick, and when at the end of the flight the pilot jumped down onto the tarmac he said with the winning warmth of those who find travelling half a mile or more above the earth without any sensation of speed thrilling, 'I could teach you to fly in a week'.

I wish he could have. Leonardo tried it but came a cropper, jumping off a cliff with wings on. But at least he was trying to fly instead of jumping on machines that did it by proxy.

\* \* \*

While in Syria we learned that our two divisions had been transferred to the British Eighth army, which meant dumping our earlier attitudes of contempt for the Eighth army and replacing them with a kind of bemused self-estrangement.

What we resented about the Eighth army was, apart from the obvious fact that it wasn't the Fifth, all the crap publicity that had accrued to it in the North African desert because of its commander General Montgomery who wore coloured scarves and berets and seemed to us to blow his trumpet too much. Not that we knew a thing about him. Like all other army commanders he was entirely remote from his men. That must be so. There is no time for a commander to travel up and down his lines exhorting thousands of men through his Tannoy system, apart from the fact that soldiers hate to be sped into battle by rhetoric.

class at all. But classlessness in a class world is problematic, and never the actual case, which is one of confusion due to the need to learn unfamiliar habits automatic in other people and forget habits automatic to oneself such as using the fork up-pointed instead of down. Nor did he consider that anybody from the right class would do any better. But what he did know was that the right class had a certain tone, in their writing as in their speech, and that this marked them out for the judging professors as academically OK. All things were and remain social, even the most recondite study, not to say all scientific disciplines.

About this time I befriended John Lehmann, editor of *Penguin New Writing*, who was a conventional Top Person in all outward aspects. A stranger could never have suspected his taste for rough trade. He had at this time just come from a close association with Virginia and Leonard Woolf at the Hogarth Press.

Whenever he invited I to lunch the impeccably groomed Lehmann would stand at the top of the stairs behind a wooden child's gate and say 'Gate toll a kiss!'. It turned I's stomach and the friendship became an epistolary one. Lehmann never invited him to his literary does, which led I to believe that he regarded him as trade, not genius.

I thought Lehmann an inadequate editor and shouldn't have been associated with writing at all. He couldn't break down a certain rigid formality in himself. It stood sentinel at the doors of the imagination. As in the case of most of most of the other literary Top People of the time, it was class that caused this.

I noticed that Dylan Thomas figured little in Lehmann's conversation and few if any Thomas poems figured in the Penguin New Writing.

Lehmann came over as a formidable upper person but in the nouveaux riche style, quite without the softness and bland inner authority of the True Blue. His appearance was too successful, his manners were too impeccably finished for the rough and tumble, the sheer untidiness of editorial life. He had poor literary judgement and no instinct. Penguin New Writing was the opposite of Horizon in its lack of any imaginative adventure, new or provoking ideas. It was narrative reportage-type stuff, though both New Writing and Horizon had a tendency to turgidity (due perhaps to the puddings at Eton).

The inability to access (for writing purposes) a true self, one that wasn't still performing according to club rules, bedevilled the thoughts and work of most of the literary world because of its strict class orientation. Cyril Connolly's genius was to belong to the club and think like the club but have a self that lazily, self-indulgently, luxuriantly followed its dreams and therefore found a steady yardstick of judgement which owed nothing to others. He appeared a snob and mixed with the Best, he was terribly forbidding, especially when he wanted to be, seeing everything with uptilted head and lowered, narrow, distantly gazing eyes, from a distance that could look both reflective and so distant as to chill the bones. But his sense of writing was unerring. If he found a writer no class or nationality came into it, he received and cosseted him and sucked whatever juices he could, as in the case of Arthur Koestler, would have been utterly destitute in a foreign land

had CC not taken him into his house. It was why Dylan Thomas figured a lot in Horizon, not in the later Penguin New Writing. CC was the perfect debtor---he went unerringly for what he liked and never tried to justify it. Democracy in the post-WW2 sense hadn't yet come about, namely control by money, meaning that personality was still the controlling factor. Personality is unpredictable while markets depend on the most precise predictability. Connolly's predictions were invariably correct, and profitable for the magazine, but no market-controlled board could have risked the possibility that he might not be who in fact he was because a market has knowledge only of achieved, not potential success.

\* \* \*

Just before my first term at Oxford I fell in love with Karolina Polanyi, the daughter of Ilona, a Polish lady who led the Hungarian communist revolution of 1922. She was in prison during her revolution, and released by her followers. She had steel-grey eyes and a quiet voice which had the effect of making young people feel irresolute. Her maternal touch was light and her interest in I was delightfully without any family orientation. She talked to him about the Komintern of which she was a member and the day when communism would be realised even in the country most supinely resistant to it, Britain. They would talk about John Strachey's last book and I began to think of communist theory as a kind of fascinatingly intricate abortion poetry. Ilona piloted freight planes

between England and Canada in WW Two and settled in Canada afterwards (with Karolina) in order, as she said to I, 'to witness at close quarters the collapse of American capitalism' (her will and her theory were the strongest things about her and this is a weak vehicle for prognostication).

While living with Kari and her mother in a Kent village I was given (by Stephen Spender) an introduction to Tom Harrisson, who had started Mass Observation. This was one of the most remarkable accounts of what people thought and how they lived ever produced, and Penguin have published but a small portion of the total output. Harrisson, an awesomely courteous young man, asked I to 'cover' the hop fields in the region. When he read I's report he wanted more, this time on an election in the North Country, but the most disgraceful war in human history, which was really the second part of the 1914 holocaust, stopped that.

In England their England I shall examine the Mass Observation archives as a confirmation of certain ideas I'm going to put down about working class attitudes and their nostalgic role in the last moments of Western civilization in so far as there has ever been one. Only fools couldn't recognise that a civilization was going (inside people) but the use of the word 'civilization' was too grandiose for most and they put down the inner change to the dehumanisation attendant on war. Kari hardened quite unconsciously when she took up work in a munitions factory. Her mother's way of recognising the sea change was to say it was the death of capitalism, others saw it in the later presence of Americans troops who

took the wives and girlfriends of absent soldiers (not that British airmen stationed in Britain did too badly), but no one could envisage the possibility of a civilization's end, first because it was still to some extent intact within them and secondly because those who come after a civilization have no way of knowing that it has happened. When inner guidance collapses there is confusion but the subject doesn't know that civilization was the provider of this.

My Kent brutalization was followed by a long Catterick penance in which, in the icy Bedale weather, it was to be finally decided whether we were officer material. I was given up as possibly retarded until towards the end of the course I jumped in a scriptures debate (how is that for an amiable class system?) and talked for five minutes with defiant eloquence about something I've long since forgotten. I was called to the camp commander, a man called Worsley, and with a charm that characterised the most self-assured people of Class, meaning the softest and most genial, he came clean that he had thought me an idiot but was now going to recommend me for a commission. It is an odd concept---that you send people off to be shot dead because they are intelligent, but in that war good sense was suspended from day one and never quite taken up again.

When I reached North Africa I blinked in the desert light and burned my legs so badly that the skin peeled off as a whole. We were in bivouacs in the merciless but fascinating heat, the first real light I ever experienced. I popped my head out of my bivousac one afternoon and heard a surprised voice saying 'Maurith!'. It was Frank Hauser, who has a slight lisp. We lay in my bivouac

and talked about how the war would surely end soon. We knew we would be embarking for Salerno, the Italian beachhead in dire danger of being forced back into the sea. We talked about Oxford. We'd had a long talk in his room once about whether he should work in the theatre. There was foreboding in us, not simply about our survival but the survival of anything we'd known before. It wasn't that we were being nostalgic, or that we particularly remembered Oxford with pleasure, but that our conversation had nothing to do with reality, and that the only thing we knew about this reality was that it was fearful and there was nothing to be said, only fear to be had.

Of all the countries of Europe the U.K. is probably the least aware of what it lost and when, and to what degree western civilization collapsed. The desire to make a new civilization is naturally absent, a fact which has bedevilled the country's relations with what it calls 'Europe'. To I, most of whose adult life were spent in this 'Europe', the idea of a European 'community' was in Italy, Germany and France associated with the idea of remaking a civilization. The desperate need for this was in Italy due to the disciplinary gap left by the fall of fascism, in France because of the 'shame' of German occupation and in Germany because of the guilt carefully heaped on her by nations wishing to hide their own. These three countries wanted to get together to salvage what had been destroyed, without any clear idea of what had been destroyed. It was a spirit easily sabotaged by the 'pragmatic' but in fact hopelessly-adrift-in-mid-Atlantic Britain. At a moment when the community could have come together this country put a spoke

in the wheel, not because of a wilful desire for obstruction (which is also a strong emotion in Britain) but because the ludicrous idea prevailed that a war had been one! This year's 'VE' ghoulish celebrations were equivalent to carousing in an Auschwitz gas oven to recapture its glory. Gaga medalled buffoons were released from care to tell their story of what they remembered of a war that had taken place solely in their imaginations.

In the last days of war I was put on the staff of an emergency prison camp for SS troops. My job was to relieve the officers of their arms. It was a camp near Udine, close to the Yugoslav border. There, as if to rub it in that the world had changed for good, I met Frank Hauser again. He told me that all this time he'd been in the Jewish Brigade and that contrary to popular military opinion they had been committed to battle. We didn't talk about Oxford this time.

One day I had to drive into Yugoslavia to persuade a partisan chief to yield up his German prisoners. I made the civilised error of taking a young German prisoner with me as an interpreter. The chief was naturally so incensed that he screamed abuse at me and nearly shot me. Yet it was a spontaneous act on my part to take the German, probably because I saw no real difference between him and me---we had both been sucked into a mad enterprise in which the word 'enemy' was a fatuous political invention far beyond its sell-by date. Leastways nobody I ever knew on either side ever bought it.

My account of that ignominious war, which should be remembered in shame and silence, is one entirely of personal impressions and events because only in this

way can that dehumanising tragedy be shown. The war removed the Ten Commandments from their admittedly shaky hold on the civilisation, chiefly 'Thou shalt not kill'. Even the implied subsidiary clauses of this law---thou shalt not gloat over torture, thou shalt be thrilled by the sight of death, thou shalt laugh at agony, thou shalt not get a buzz from massacre and random killings and the screams of children---have gone down the drain, quite as if that war trained us in such a way that even our peace would resemble wars all the more fearful for its lack of specific enemies (fifty thousand children killed by gunshot between 1979 and 1995 in the USA).

\* \* \*

I wrote the above a few days before the release (May 19, 1995) of the William Douglas Home documents of 1944, when he refused to fight on the western front. A historian called Corelli Barnett, who knows as much about his subject as an academic can, is quoted in the Sunday Times as saying that the mutiny of certain troops at Salerno and cases like William Douglas Home's don't indicate a 'general malaise' at that time. Which is precisely what they do. I don't know about the case of mutiny at Salerno, though I was there. My chief concern was how long whether the hundred yard strip of beaching we were holding would last. I stood, hardly an hour after landing, in a small crowd of infantrymen who were being addressed by a brigadier. He was whispering because the Germans

were so close. War was such a distant impossibility for me that I thought this was part of a battle course. No doubt so did the mutinying troops, who'd been told they were going to peaceful Sicily. But some deftly aimed mortars from the other side soon showed us where the truth lay. The brigadier told them to fight with their hands or anything but not to give up, not to surrender at any cost.

That we came out of that alive was entirely due to the German policy of slow withdrawal after severe punishment that saved our skins. My division, like the mutinying one, was part of the American Fifth Army, being a sort of lease-package to them in human form. Our second confrontation after Salerno was on the river Volturno, a battle of such confusion that again it was only the German policy that got us out of it at all. Since this was my first active battle, at night, and I had made the mistake of eating normally during that uncanny silence before it broke, that I was running away from shells while vomiting with terror, and was aware of the vomit running down my map case. But clearing my stomach also made me clearer and I was quickly convinced that I, with the handful of men I was in charge of, was running the wrong way because what looked like entire battalions were crowding past me in the opposite direction. I enquired urgently of passing NCOs where the hell was the battle line and everyone confirmed that they were running away from it. I registered the thought that this would surely produce the most mammoth court martial in history but I never heard of any. When I found the line at last, on the southern river bank, the infantry commander to whom I was attached was talking to a German officer just captured and he was

laughing and being generally charming, in a perhaps patronising way, with sentences like ‘You are going to have to move mountains to get to Rome.’ Which was, in fact, as the umpteen divisions who failed to capture Cassino knew, the case.

Douglas Home’s pleasant ditty comes to mind:

An elderly statesman with gout  
 When asked what the war was about  
 In a written reply  
 Said my colleagues and I  
 Are doing our best to find out.

He was court martialled and sentenced to a year in gaol for knowing what I knew---that the war was a rascally set-up job based on attitudes usefully distinterred, with Washington’s cooperation, from World War One. Like Douglas Home I was astonished at the difference between German soldiers and Churchill’s ‘Nazi rats’ as he called them. But this difference was willingly forgotten because of the existence of the concentration camps. These alone pushed people into battles they didn’t want to fight and frequently, unknown to the brass, didn’t fight. There were mild and superficial mutinies throughout the war, viz the refusal of officers (I was one) to conduct a pogrom-like hunt of communists in Greece, where we were sent for a prolonged rest from battle. Such a hunt would have been easy, given the willingness of Greeks to denounce their neighbours. I refused to go on when I was dragged by an informer to the home of a pleasant, terrified couple in the middle of the night to witness their large collection of Marxist literature (some of which I had mulled over with Kari’s

mother).

Few thought that the war would bring down civilization but to the most thoughtful it was obvious that it would bring down Europe, and perhaps most of all Britain. This country Stood Alone then and to its dire cost it is still doing so, for the same reasons. How else but backward, if charmingly, could it appear to visitors? How else but backward could it in fact be?

Yet in this very absence of any relevant idea about the current world there lies the hope of preserving a certain energy for something other than the market which dominates and manipulates this and every other country. A renewal of civilization results as much from the look back as the look forward, and perhaps favours the look back.

Law and order collapse when a civilization falls but not because of a decline in outer discipline. In fact this increases a hundredfold. It is inner discipline that has collapsed but even this isn't a moral phenomenon. A flourishing civilization provides inner guidance of a quite non-moral and non-intellectual nature. This guidance comes into the cells, far below the level of choice, from the earliest months of life, working by a process of unconscious imitation, and it is better than a thousand riot police.

As to whether there was a general 'malaise' not only among German troops but in the euphemistically called 'allied' armies, it extended to the other euphemism called 'the home front', which was a united one because the war could be focussed on the greatest bogey figure since Barbarossa, Hitler, who to

compound matters fitted the figure perfectly. The public relations aspect of the war were devised with great ingenuity, as they had to be, and hardly a British citizen could have recognised in his disgust with the war anything but disgust with Hitler and the German 'race'. That they were paying not only for years of government support for Hitler (expressed to all but the British) and for their continuing support even after the war started, even in a new twisted form throughout the war, simply couldn't have occurred to anyone not working within the Foreign Office---and a few of those placed by birth near the seats of power like William Douglas Home, whose brother became a post-war prime minister.

This home-front malaise broke out after the war as an enormous bitterness which was far more the cause of Britain's penury and low energy than her involvement in a futile war she knew she could never win. The lease-lend Washington deals that had financed Britain's resistance had to be continued to finance the ruins of that resistance. The German plight was so desperate, a matter of getting water and electricity back into supply and the flattened cities built again, that it provoked high energy, immediate action. But the British were mentally in the climate of victory. They looked, especially to visitors who had never witnessed greater violence than a slap in the face, utterly defeated and without the wherewithal of recovery. As to recovering anything like the position of a power with a world empire, the biggest there had ever been, the Class, divided and despised but in large part still filling up the doorways to power, simply didn't have the knowhow needed for that. Their managers, untrained and largely

there by virtue of an amiable nepotism that had worked when all was well (but it hadn't been well since the first years of the century) were out of place in a world where American work methods based squarely on optimism and training were the model.

In those early post-war years, before I left Britain, people often took me for an American or Australian. When I once asked why I was told I didn't look as if I'd just walked out from under a stone. Bitterness extended most to people who showed more than usual energy---the prevalent 'anti-American' feeling (blasted in the correspondence columns of *The Times* by, of all people, Evelyn Waugh) was essentially this. I stood in a bus queue one day near the Ritz and was wearing a light-weight summer jacket rarely seen in Britain then, and suggestive of an American. I was aware of two men close behind me. When I got on the bus I took off my jacket and found they had bored a neat black hole in it with a cigarette.

I was bitter once, when I lost Kari, in the first months of my military training. On my first leave I drank hard liquor and crawled to bed in the early hours night after night. My mother looked at me one morning and said 'What's going on? You look so dissipated.' And another time she said 'You're bitter, it's not like you!'

This is how a civilization guides, even a civilization in tatters. I heard the words all my life. Whenever bitterness cast a momentary foreign shadow on my thoughts it was at once corrected.

The worst aspect of home-front was the class hatred. People with 'upper class' accents were openly and publicly sneered at, so that it wasn't long before they were walking round like interlopers. A bright or slightly extravagant mode of dress, even a dinner jacket, certainly---of all things--- a morning coat with grey top hat were at once a source of scowling and vicious stares. On this wave of resentment, partly supported by an ardent desire to make a New Britain (a strlong item in the bogus 'war aims' which were got up by Anglo-American connivance to counter Hitler's mad ones), submerged Churchill and brought in a pinchbeck Labour government which prolonged wartime 'restrictions' because with no new energy available it was necessary to curb the rewards that flowed in from the old.

Thus a sneering habit became habitual. It led to the sport of ridicule or 'taking the piss', and led in the end to the media game of tearing down 'public' figures and 'institutions', a process which is in climax now. Really this is a process of self-immolation, an assumption of expendable and inexhaustible power which only a nation hypnotised by the idea of having won a war against evil (of all things) could make. It was the media that deliberately sustained this wartime Ministry of Information invention, partly because it believed the myth, partly because its function was to make people feel good enough to buy papers. The transmutation of this into sneering was a natural one simply because the invention was false, and basically every Briton knew it, certainly everyone in the media did. The tearing-down or take-the-piss process is an adjunct of this because the old Britain didn't come back any more than the empire did. Isolated from European

influence, no new pride suffused the old institutions, which were therefore easy game for the piss-takers, as the royal family showed. But of course no European power can afford to gnaw its own entrails before Europe unity has happened.

This existed even in the apparently divided Thirties. Hitler naively depended when on it when he attacked Russia and omitted to invade Britain. Had Washington not had plans of its own which he never really took into account, things might have gone better---that is the people within Germany who wished to get rid of him would have succeeded. But the plan demanded that Hitler and the Germans should be seen as one, and defeated, brought to the ground, as one.

Joan had a True Blue accent, and a voice she rightly never thought of keeping down, so I was constantly in a sweat that she would get a sneer or, worse, become aware of herself as belonging to a condemned and hated class.

A confused people has two choices---to rely on past clarity or pursue new goals. Since a hypnotised nation can't do the latter Britain leaned on its past, and imitated it, and was genuinely respected and even followed for it. In any case it was valuable to have a voice from the past. The effects on the people were disastrous. They had been led into a war by both the Class and the anti-Class camps, a war they neither wanted nor, essentially, understood. Now the unity was no longer there---neither the kind of tense and frictional unity of the Twenties and Thirties with their hunger strikes and marches on London not the improvised wartime unity which accepted accents humourously as what they are, the result not of attitude but childhood conditioning. The little mutiny in Salerno was about

being deceived---the spirit of mutiny in Britain (the low energy level stopped this from expressing) was of the same origin.

Neither the British nor the Germans wanted to fight. As for the Americans youths who should have been at the soda bar at home, they never knew what the hell it was all about, and covered their perplexity, as they were meant to, with by-rote Washington sound-bite material. When I took a section of Germans prisoner once they crowded round me in the darkness and took out photos of their families and they actually said what we (because of Hitler's unthinkable plans for the Jews) never dared to, We never wanted to fight in this stupid war.

None of us would have said that this was the end of our civilization because the tatters and torn ribbons of that civilization were still flapping within us and we had grown up on tatters and ribbons anyway, so we thought wars like this one were somehow not a disproof of that civilization. But the most fearful crime ever committed---at Hiroshima (which seemed to say 'We can do better than the Holocaust')---confirmed a certain sinking feeling.

\* \* \*

W.W.2 is thus the heart of England their England because the collapse of Christian civilization (meaning of Christianity) took place during it. This collapse was felt but not in such grandiose terms. It was noted that wars had an expectable hardening effect on the human heart. Except that the hardening went

on and on until the point (May, 1995) when an advisor the American president would tell him that murders would double soon to about 40.000 a year, due to the proliferation of teenagers in the 'inner' cities. Apparently the behavior of this new wave shocks those of a former generation serving time. They say they are pure 'predators', without guilt or any concern for their own fate, let alone that of their victims.

The spell went out of this strange island world and this can only be described through those impressionable sensors on which all spells work. No archives will show its loss, no traditions or celebrations.

With the arrival of the first GI---not because the poor deluded piece of fodder was felt by the English to be foreign but because he wasn't, and he actually was. How the poor devil got caught up in the war is a long tale indeed. I talked quietly with members of Clarke's Fifth Army (which he was in himself) just under Cassino, when the monastery was still intact. They talked about how to dodge shells. They were sitting in a shellhole. They were all killed, to a man, when Clarke put them across the Rapido river which lived up to its name and swelled up once they were on the other side so they couldn't get back, and were all night long an unresisting target which by morning was still and silent. Clarke's name became possibly the most hated one in Texas.

The fact that the GI spoke English declared him, quite falsely, to be an Englishman of sorts but American society is quite distinct from any society known in Europe, so that, of all Europe's nations, England suffered the most from a

sense of invasion, against which it had no resources because these were friends and brothers invading. The sense of being invaded, the shame of fighting somebody else's war in one's own country was far more traumatic than anything experienced on the Continent through the American presence. In France, Italy and Germany the American could be treated like a monkey behind bars with the proper placating and ingratiating signs that were taken by the invader, whose sincerity and innocence of intent were obvious but happened to go along with implacability of will. Britain never resolved this matter, and even today what happens in the States constitutes a model to a far greater extent than it does in other European countries. From 1941 Britain was fighting a war by proxy, a war it should never have begun, having so stoutly and unreservedly supported Hitler in all things and continuing to do so even during the war.

The war-part of England their England is a highly personal account, in terms of feelings and people and events, because it is solely in this area that a civilization lives and dies. Exactly what it felt like to witness (within) the death of a civilization cannot be described non-fictionally or supported by archives.

I's secret hunches and predictions about the war were supported many years later by Foreign Office archives. Nineteen at the time, he was standing in an officers' mess in Kent during a coffee break in a Nazi-style dehumanisation battle course and read a small paragraph in the Daily Mail, or it might have been the Daily Express. All at once he was utterly sure that all this was a hoax and travesty, an organised and wide-awake determination to exploit the provocation

Hitler had offered. Those few words spoke the truth to him, or rather their hidden sub-text did. They were a release written by Winston Churchill, a man who couldn't lie even when he told the opposite of the truth.

There was no need to pull the wool over the eyes of the people because the Labour movement was committed to war and could be relied on to mass in Whitehall to scream 'CHAMBERLAIN MUST GO!' (I's voice had been among them) and, later, 'SECOND FRONT NOW!', thus falling into a trap a little bit of political astuteness would have sniffed out long before. The trap was compounded by the use of the word 'appeasement' (later to become useful Washington cant) in order to pull a final wool cover over what really happened between 1938 and 1940.

Kari was deeply disappointed in the working class, at least that part of it which I presented to her. This was natural since she was middle class and saw working people as practical and even down to earth, i.e. minus the heart and the quite uneconomic civilization that working habits in fact conveyed to the few outsiders who could overcome their own conditioning (we shall see later that Only George Orwell managed this). They were marvellously attractive to Kari but there wasn't a suggestion of social awareness. I's parents 'canvassed' for the Labour party, attended and sometimes helped organise their 'socials', they belonged to the Cooperative Society which ran whist drives and dances and sometimes shows and lectures but theory had they none. Worst of all there was a kind of natural breeding in them, a predilection for educated and well-spoken

people. For communist theory this was a deviation which might be tragically paid for in the failure of the revolution when it came. Theory saw this revolution as 'inevitable'. This was one of the favourite cant words of the time, linked with the determination of the British labour movement to get its war with Hitler at any price (the Anglo-Saxon world was united in its multiple recognition, from all kinds of quarters, of a war from it could only profit).

Kari looked for the fisty square-jawed proletarian of Soviet posters (the first job model) and found instead people singing round the piano on Sundays and tipping at the Leather Bottle at the end of the street.

Her father was a quiet studious man, a despised 'gradualist' or social democrat. He and Ilona would argue in poisonous dialectical murmurs for hours. Polanyi was so locked in thought at all times that one day when he was revising the proofs of *THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION*, his study of England's industrial revolution for Victor Gollancz, Kari's knickers which were drying on a clothes horse by the blazing fire burned to a cinder without him noticing more than 'a little smoke in the air'.

I resisted efforts to win him to communism but never explained why. His secret thought was that if you signed your name to the merciless 'the end justifies the means' you were swallowed by those means, like the Macbeths. He wasn't to know, at the age of seventeen, that all humanity would be thus swallowed.

My first year at Oxford was much taken up with daydreaming about Kari, who was studying physics at a northern university, and so were my second and

third years, except that she had by now married someone else, a young man I glimpsed I glimpsed in a crowd at the LSE with a gaze so straight and practical my legs nearly gave way. The most painful thing about him was the fact that he had black hair, which seemed to me a kind of double rejection on Kari's part of my blondness. I kept her photo in a pocket of my battledress in and out of the battle line for two or more years, until the print cells of which it was composed seemed to grow bigger and I could no longer decipher her and I think the dots died a damp death at some hole.

The first year Oxford still had a leisurely, reflective, garden-like atmosphere. I had a small circle of friends, of whom Michael Shepherd, later a psychiatrist, and Frank Hauser and John Mortimer and ..... I met Mortimer walking along the High one day and said, 'Hullo, John, what have you been up to?' and his reply was, 'I'm writing a novel, I'm tired of not being famous', a pre-Wilde, even a pre-1914 remark. It was a world away from Dylan Thomas, who needed booze to achieve a similar degree of ease or belonging. I sat close to him at one of his little Oxford readings and heard him murmur to himself, 'My God, what people will let me do!' He was possibly drunker than he appeared. In the same room belonging to the English Society I sat listening to T.S.Eliot who sat reading *The Waste Land*.

John was strangely easy and affable in his manner for one coming from a fairly upper drawer. The key to British poise (class) was self-suppression as an ideal, and the substitution for self of a certain coded behaviour, which people of

other classes and certainly all foreigners were, because of the subtlety of the coding, outsiders to. From within the code outsiders could be recognised with unerring primal skill.

Unexpectedly this held for the literary and bohemian world as it did for the fat cat world of politics and commerce. It may be odd to think of Dylan Thomas and other drunkards as subscribing to this code but they did. Its price was a great deal of suffering---inordinate boose was consolation for the lost self.

There was no really need for Thomas to choke in boose. He had endless imaginative resources which neither the British class code nor America's success code could touch, had he stuck to the resources and not to his image.

One morning I shared a table with him at an Oxford cafe. Thomas was in his usual vast cloud of smoke. I asked him how he thought he would be seen after his death. Thomas gazed into the distance (he looked one in the eye only fleetingly, if at all) and he said after a long while, 'I think---a minor poet, a *good* minor poet.'

*That* was what there was no need for. Thomas simply didn't have a small gift but one that could very naturally have developed into its post-lyrical phase.

Things changed in Oxford after the first year. The reflective, intimate, leisurely feeling went. Not that I had enjoyed it. But he was aware of it. Most of that time he spent daydreaming about Kari, just as his second and third years were haunted by that same daydream, now that she'd married somebody else.

The change in Oxford was because Oxford's class foundation collapsed.

Therefore the spell went. The self-suppression code may seem to us now unfortunate, and it was, but it brought about an astonishing sweetness and composure of personality, a charming selfless interest in other people which weaved a spell in the air and made occasions memorable, humanly so. The mind wasn't yet fixed on a concept of the future when all that one couldn't say or do would be *publicly* fulfilled (a mental feature that has created the huge slush piles of mss).

In the old Oxford (tenuous as it was) Rhodes scholars were beguiled by the spell. By the time Clinton arrived it had long since turned into exclusivity with nothing to guard. Like current Britain it was unable to breach the current world because perceptually unequipped for it. It was a sitting duck for American money and visiting professors. As to England, with the old class quite dead the social mainspring was dead too. France was better off because she had settled this issue with remorseless cruelty in 1789. Also, the Sorbonne was never class encapsulated. Its clerical and medieval self remained, while Oxford's died under generations of drunken blades who scorned the knee-length gown.

Post-war Oxford was another world from the 1940 one. In a self-contradicting way Ken Tynan typified Oxford's democratisation. He used to stand at the bar of the Randolph at lunch time in his burgundy suit (an apocryphal story said that his father was top rag trade and the suits came custom-cut). His attitude was that you had to be everything you wanted to be right now, there was no time to lose. Life was swift, implacable. He was right if you saw the world

falsely, as he did. I agreed with the need for hurry but could do nothing about his predilection for embarking on things he knew would take a lifetime to resolve.

There were too many voices like Tynan's, saying that the ship had sunk. Clearly a world empire was being established by the USA, and there would naturally be a rush to shine there, at 'the centre of the world', as New Yorkers were now calling New York. Really Tynan's feeling, translated, was 'I want it to sink, I hate it' because he had no other England to supply than the dead code one. For the class that was top or upper had lost all authenticity, its accents were sneered at in the post-war streets, there was venomous class hatred, which led historically to the present-day caricature of the 'working man' in the shaved head job gear and grotesque speech. That was why England had died with the arrival of the first American troops, because their presence, the world power they represented shed a light on the code that made it an irrelevant eccentricity, an embarrassing quaintness. Only the American love of a lord and the media notion of British 'tradition' made some ambiguous and gingerly survival possible, producing today's post-class hotchpotch too absorbed in enacting past ideas to notice the present.

There were other voices than the Tynan type saying that only the unwanted England was dead, that it didn't have to be a Washington satellite. But they were few. Evelyn Waugh, who was rude to Americans on the grounds that they weren't upper-class Englishmen, wrote a snubbing letter to the The Times saying that this resentment of the USA must stop: after all, his class was cashing in on lecture

tours and all kinds of victory perks, without the need to actually live there and take the hard working hours, the risk and the demand for sincerity in all things.

Tynan called England a land of the past, where as for I it was entirely new, a dawn. Tynan was talking about himself and the class he identified himself with. Like so many of his generation he subscribed to New World theology---the US as 'the land of the future'. During the cleverly organised Cold War New York was the mecca for Europeans who were willing to sell themselves without ever taking a look at the buyer. It had unfortunate consequences for some---Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were two of the casualties. Europeans didn't see that this meant they were selling themselves as mementoes of another world in the sense of a dead world. Only of John Osborne was this never true. It was why he stimulated a new drama into existence (its first fruit *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf*) even in New York. David Merrick felt close enough to him to tell him to fuck off back to his Queen, to which Osborne said even she didn't want him. Osborne wasn't strapped by the class code that was so fascinating to a people governed, some would say crucified, by money, for money and with money. If you don't want the American suffering it is best to keep out because it will take your claws away---turn them into a safe contrived mannerism.

The face of the nineteenth-century wealth created in Britain remained a class one, despite the fact that money abhors interference (aristocratic, artistic, religious) with its self-accumulation. The old aristocracy, which had frowned on money, shone through its own demise dimly yet gracefully. Wealth was anglicised

in this way but only a fool could have failed to know that English wealth was as angry and implacable and stony-eyed towards humans unsustained by it as American or any other kind of wealth. Paradoxically communist wealth, accumulated by the state, had the same features only more so, neutralizing the humanity of whole populations.

Tynan had a hard, irascible quality that came from something sterile---his affection for the bullfight, like Hemingway's, demonstrated this. Any animal's cruelty to another implies a state of deep bitter disappointment. His only original products were the first 'fuck' on television and a nude show. You could see the man Olivier called 'a little bastard'. He went for the quick rather than the considered (or considerate) thought. But, his critical assassination of Vivien Leigh aside, he was sensitive to the point of extreme irritability. It showed in his eyes. At a barge party on the Cherwell he suddenly rounded on me and accused me of ransacking his rooms that day. We had never met before. A shouting match followed and he realised he'd got the wrong person and his eyes went sad and rather remorseless. He could do extravagant things because he had the money and, very much secondly, because he was brilliant with words. His workaday self was an iron structure coded into his personality but not his own, he being a gentle and rather humble creature, essentially. I had an appointment with him one day and found him sick in bed. It was about some lecture or group meeting they were arranging. His Top People stunt was gone. He talked with perfect sincerity, quietly and actually looked I in the eyes. His sickness was

serious enough to be frightening and yet it provided a deeply needed retreat.

The next time I saw him, thirty years later, leaning against another bar at the National theatre and ravaged in feature, it was clear that the Top Person syndrome had overtaken his body. He looked troubled, suspicious and so toxic I wondered he could stand up. In the years since their bedroom meeting hardness had become *de rigueur* among 'arrived' people. He had been in that sense a pioneer. Even the Royal Court, opened to the real world at last by George Devine and John Osborne, became as arrogantly exclusive as any other---later towards Osborne himself. Tony Richardson taught Osborne, in his first innocent days at the Court, how to read a playscript in a few moments and then say something flip and mean about it, not exactly what Devine intended when he handed Osborne the job. That was the flavour of the time. When in a seat of power you never further questioned your own ideas, which celebrity, in however small a circle, had mysteriously confirmed and corroborated. That was the old class attitude (never complain, never explain) transmuted into bad manners, endless bossing and parner-exchanges. To have a Royal Court visit (e.g. Bill Gaskell and followers) at a provincial rep provided a front seat view of control mania masking as theatrical judgement. It brought the Royal Court so far down from the Devine standard that it deservedly petered out as a place of influence. For people who had abandoned star casting the sense of celebrity was like Cyrano's nose---it went in front by a quarter of an hour. When I had to speak on the phone once with Jill Bennett (Osborne's wife at the time) on a professional

matter she was most exercised by the worry that her phone number would 'get out'. Any form of control or power over others, in this new post-war world, brought the old class code with it (and still does), and was all the uglier for its new deceitful mask. It was said at the RSC that an actor's day could be ruined by a frown one of the two Peter the Greats, and rendered joyous by a smile. The extraordinary pomposity, masked by an air of selfless information-giving, when they get in front of a camera is far beyond even a politician's. The RSC literary manager (busy at his own writing) would send out notes to play agents like 'Who does he think he is, Bert Brecht?' as a judgement of a script with no Brechtian features whatever. It wasn't that Brecht was considered with all that much respect---after all he was very seldom performed---but he had Made It.

When the War ended there was probably not a more cowed people than the British in the whole of Europe, including Germany, which got to work rebuilding itself with a vigour that victory failed to impart to the British, who as time and food rationing went on and the labour government ran cap in hand to Washington for means of survival, were getting to know that they had been no victory at all. Had they but known it, had their media not decided to give them a picture of Britain as a top power with its empire intact (the first instinct of anyone who falls on hard times is to keep up appearances as a possible means of return), they might have panicked as the Germans did and buckled down to facing the new world they were in---which ironically they more than any other people, including the Germans, had produced (despite its involving Britain's destruction). That there

was a vast 'brain drain' to the former colonies and the USA was natural. The clip of poor Harold Wilson arriving on the Washington tarmac with only an official to greet him, nervously putting his right hand in and out of his pocket, blinking with dismay at being on the doorstep of The Greatest Power in the World and (a quote from all presidential speeches) The Finest Nation There Ever Was and not knowing what kind of subsidy he was going to get for being the Loyal Ally, must have sent away quite a few thousand brains all on its own. At least the Top People people like Harold Macmillan did that down at heel act with panache, selling themselves as the only Britain the USA wanted to know---the Land of the Past which had remarkable powers of persuasion in the world and therefore had to be humoured. This wasn't at all the American attitude to Britain, Americans were far too busy working in a world that seemed to them, as it seems even now, so utterly self-sufficient that anything outside it seems a distant and unreal oddity, spewing a few immigrants from time to time who have to learn what it's like to be a real person at last. This attitude couldn't be hidden from the outside world, and created vast resentment---few understood that the puritan or pioneer doctrine that God rewarded the most right and just became natural conditioning as a result of two world wars in which America participated from the good of its heart.

Only in France was there an understanding of the real relationship between Europe and the USA, now that the world had been divided into two exclusive warring camps and human life virtually frozen into an aspect of that struggle. Everyone knew that a false step could bring The Day After, and in effect the

control of ideas in the West was as great as in the communist regimes, only far more bearably because the market found certain new ideas to have a shock value, that is a selling value, so that continuing fermentation remained possible so long as current centres of power weren't touched. It went together with massive educational programmes which produced massive illiteracy by redefining education as the teaching of 'facts'. As Einstein said, first the theory, then the fact, because fact results from theory. It produced a world, finally, where discussion came to seem a form of obstreperousness, emotions a psychiatric phenomenon. The message from the Top was Make Money, and since there was no other way of surviving this is what everyone tried to do. Haight-Ashbury hippies were quickly at it, they cut their hair and hid their chunky trash jewellery, not because they changed but because the kids that were the fruit of their flower people days had to be fed.

When I lived and worked in San Francisco through the Eighties Haight-Ashbury was a hallowed corner, only its buddhist bakery intact. 'We used to keep our front doors open, you never knew who you'd find in your kitchen but you knew you'd love them.'

Osborne's work, unlike *Lucky Jim* and *The Room at the Top* and Golding's books, was a demolition job, though on an England that had disappeared. He spoke from his heart, crooked as it was. The opprobrium that poured down on him over the years, in New York as in London, was because of that. His dramatic formlessness came from that too. He never did the Top People stunt---it is why

his autobiography is a book of ideas, and these, not a safely self-preserving PR revamp ('I was born, some say, in a bag...') purvey his personality.

\* \* \*

My first Oxford year was in the War. His second was after it, and his friends changed, not only in that they were different people from his earlier ones but because they were like a different species. His new friends were harder and supercilious. I learned a literary lesson that lasted him always. One of his group of friends had written a novel. He showed it to another of our group, a medical student whose mother happened to work at a top London literary agency. She read the novel and told her son that he must please undertake to explain to the author (if it were to be done it were better done quickly) that he was one of those people who had no hope of becoming a writer, his work revealed no ability in that direction whatever and it was better for him to know this at the outset so that he didn't wilfully enter into a life of disappointments. My closest friend in this group was James Michie, whom they sometimes called Lucky Jim. That was the title of the book.

This didn't argue a lack of judgement in the lady. She was accustomed all her life to associating literature with a certain class speech and the book was a summary dismissal of any such connection.

In his last year I met Joan, whom he was to marry. In fact, he gave a party

for her in his Walton Street (Oxford) flat, after meeting her in her London room a few minutes after Lucian Freud had left her (for good). She was more than once called the most beautiful girl in London but saw herself as cross-eyed, bow-legged and sloping of mouth. She was far more patrician in body and comportment than most of the other Wyndhams who, I was told, snubbed or avoided her. This may have been on account of her father, Dick. I and she began living together at the Walton Street place and one morning there was a cry from the bathroom. I rushed down the corridor and Joan was holding a newspaper and said, 'Daddy has just been shot dead.' Dick Wyndham was covering Palestinian war for The Observer and was shot by a sniper. I never met Dick. There was a photo of him at Tickeridge with weekend guests, looking taller than the others---Spender, Connolly in Tyrolean outfit with his arm round Spender's shoulder, Tom Driberg. This photo seems to figure in all books about Connolly. The books don't give a date, just 'in the 30s'.

Dick was one of Wyndham Lewis's probably unwilling patrons. Lewis repaid him with a ruthlessly funny lampoon in his APES OF GOD, actually calling the chapter 'Dick'. Lewis would have been England's most remarkable writer after Lawrence had he included himself, or a self at all, in his eloquent denunciations. He had a touch of Baron Corvo. Somehow, strangely, a steady observing self was missing. Only the emotions were included, not the heart of the man.

He was that rarest of phenomena, an Englishman with a mind. Like Patrick

Hamilton, another writer with a mind (fogged with boose), he was looked down the nose at. Indifference was an impregnable class defence against them (though they both belonged to the class). To this day Patrick Hamilton languishes in piecemeal appearances, never a definitive collection. His mind worked in terms of minute personal observations, he sought to follow the vein of madness, usually called evil, in the human, and knew that it sometimes had a highly melodramatic quality---hence the plays which brought him all the money. He was a witness of the death of a civilization at its most sensitive area---that of 'the truth'. All his characters twist it and hide it and pervert it and gently slide round it and, finally, committ it to oblivion. His worst characters became heroes in the aftermath of the terrible war which expressed and fulfilled all their desires and weiles---it was indeed their 'finest hour' (to the sickening tune of Lily Marlene).

When I and his wife left Oxford one of her relatives, Lord Glenconner, a member of the chemical aristocracy (the Tennants were bleach), bought them a house in that village of the burned Polanyi knickers, with the provision that when they sold it (he must have felt the imminent chill of their divorce) he should be paid back. He felt protective towards Joan and probably thought that Dick's bohemianism had flung her into the suburbs of the Wyndham family, apart from the fact that her mother couldn't support her. Christopher Glenconner was a man of enormous gentle charm, with a composure rarely found in the human animal. Charm was a Tennant inheritance that went with the wealth, and perhaps only England could have turned a mountain of bleach into such a non-marketable

quality. The subtlety of English class, the fact that it was the key to what degree of civilization this country ever had, as well as to its worst suffering---and an injustice experienced by no other European country, which treated the 'lower orders' as a foreign population, brought the little island the title 'The Japan of the West' not only for its now-lost tea-drinking ritual but its dependence of ritual in every aspect of life. The working people had ritualised lives such that, as Ethel Mannin said, you could rely on the same things happening in the same way at almost any hour of the day in countless tiny homes in miles of streets. In her novel someone sat down at the table to eat---a warmed-up meal---and, as always when this happened, the tablecloth was put over only one half of the table. It was the same in my own home and every house I knew along the street. I can see my mother folding the tablecloth and placing it over exactly one half of the table and putting down the salt and pepper cruets. At the other end of the table, where the pile cover remained, with the bowl of flowers on its lace doily moved slightly to one side, the studying or reading went on, or my mother sat there listening to my father's description of a work mate as a 'piecan' (a fool) and the boss as a 'bloody talley man's ink bottle' (overdressed).

'I said to him I said don't you bloody well come it with me mate, I'll see you buggered first, I've only got one hand' (the other was cut off when he was sixteen in a wood mill---sixty pounds sterling life compensation) 'but I'll lay it across your mouth if I see you do that again'.

Once when I was caned at school and there were purple welts across my

back with a thread of blood within them he went up to the school on a Saturday morning and marched into the headmaster's office and put his huge gloved handless hand a few inches from the headmaster's face (a dear, mild, henpecked and possibly cuckolded man who left his brutalities to a military batchelor with a demented look of innocence called Captain Hipkins). He told us the headmaster went pale.

With characteristic graciousness Christopher Glenconner decided to help not only Joan but me and invited us to an intimate cocktail party with his wife Elizabeth, who always, for me at least, had the sad expression of someone who knew that gentleness was an anachronism while being her natural mode of comportment. Their guests were Cyril Connolly, Philip Toynbee and Anthony Powell. I was so full of awe I couldn't talk. The only words I spoke were in answer to Connolly's 'What are you doing?' and I said 'Working at the C.O.I' (the Central Office of Information) and Cyril said 'The Church of India?'

I found Toynbee so encoded as to be incomprehensible, with a hard manner that didn't somehow fit his words. Connolly had a way of sitting with his chin raised and looking down his nose with narrowed, rather sleepy eyes, but they never lacked the light of curiosity. Anthony Powell never once addressed a remark to either myself or Joan, or so much as look at us. It seemed to me that he was concentrating on the big game. Ambitious people rarely believe that their motives are transparent to those they feel too young and unimportant to notice.

The launch didn't work out even after Cyril, extending Christopher's

graciousness, invited Joan and me to lunch at Les Etoiles together with George Orwell's wife, Sonya, and Elizabeth Glenconner again. I felt sick and had no appetite but ate what I was given until I felt like vomiting. Sonia Orwell made us feel more at ease than at Christopher's and a few words escaped us, none of them striking. Sonia was easy to get on with for war-streaked youth but I couldn't get over the awe. We all walked back to HORIZON headquarters afterwards, speechless. Cyril said to us as we walked into the sitting room, 'Make yourselves comfortable, I'm going to bed, someone will bring you tea', then he drifted off with Sonia. Joan and I sat sheepishly over our silent, unaccompanied mugs, with not a sound from the rest of the house, and then we crept away.

As I could be silenced by awe but almost never by shyness there was clearly something at work in these people that I recoiled from. It was unusual for my usual voluble self to suffer stiflement for long. Strange to say, one could hear the snobbery in people's voices---not in the sense that it was being applied to oneself but in the sense that it was passing coded messages of solidarity to the addressee. And in this case, in my case, the addressee wasn't solidly with them because of his having a quite other code, which incidentally he regarded as more aristocratic than theirs, more authoritative, with an integrity that wasn't moral and an ardour that wasn't intellectual. D.H.Lawrence was the second writer (William Blake being the first) to give an inkling of this culture which is now lost, i.e. transmuted into grist for the making of a new civilization in the coming millenium.

Cyril was no snob, certainly Sonya Orwell wasn't. Yet it set the tone of

conversation in a manner quite beyond anyone's choice. It lay in clever and slightly cruel themes and tones, it abided there in absentia so to speak. The very cadences silenced any other speech, which was made to sound trite or earnest or emotional or self-obsessed---there were numberless thorns for the newcomer to fall on, whether he be foreigner or Jew or Working Class.

This 'working class' label had a special demeaning ring when delivered by a class-encoded individual, more often than not in its suggestion of a class that was ground down and shouldn't be ground down. It was the one thing that rightly offended and drove away Edmund Wilson when he came to London at Cyril's invitation.

Joan Wyndham writes as graciously as she used to play Scarlatti when we lived for a few brief torn months at Shoreham, Kent, opposite the hill painted by Samuel Palmer, who used to be visited there by William Blake. In the the third book of her trilogy, *Anything Once*, I see a young soldier looking from out of the pages and am surprised to recognise myself. I was just turned twenty and remember exactly what I felt when the photo was taken. It was at Austin Reed's on Regent Street. I was wondering how on earth I had got myself into this strange dress uniform like a ghost from World War One, condemned to fight, of all things, people I had no quarrel with, and for an end I knew nothing about. What could be more ghostly than that? I felt an enormous forlornness as I gazed into the little lens as if it were the loveless future emptily stretching before, bereft of Kari, therefore of life. The small windows and the traffic below were like features of a

kind of rumbling inside me that portended a deprivation I had never known before.

Her marriage to me was referred to variously in the reviews of her book as ‘an unfortunate marriage’ (it certainly was for me) and even a ‘working class’ one. Recently (we have an unbreakable friendship) she asked me like a dowager addressing me from the other end of the Chinese or Tapestry room after dinner, though we were sitting a foot or so from each other, ‘When did you actually give up your working class accent?’. I said something futile about, well, from the earliest age I’d had Jewish friends, who seemed to come into my life at all the points of crisis, meaning that Jews are always classless, however thoroughly they may adopt a class. What I should have said is that I honestly didn’t know what she was talking about, and that to answer her I would have to fit myself into her peculiar way of thinking. I was never, from my own point of view, Working Class any more than a Middle Class person went round feeling Middle Class. The very expression was a code category designed to not to convey information but indicate the kind of people of whom Ottoline Morrell said (quite rightly) that there were too many. And its exploitation by middle-class communists who wished to conceal their innate sense of class (Bert Brecht was a striking example) extended its baneful influence.

The last thing my family ever thought of was being Working Class, and they were typical of every family round them, though their choices were strikingly different from the normal. My brother John was busy at the age of eighteen

wrecking his promise by association with the disreputable Bloomsbury group, my parents were busy announcing their determination to sneering relatives that their three sons must go to university 'so as not to have our lives', this at a time when mention of university-going among Working People was a pornographic reference. As for me, my childhood was a non-stop daydream that drew concerts and plays and library books into its heavenly gates, as if I had a dressing gown like Noël Coward's and a velvety life like Walter Pater's or Birbank's novels.

The class divisions were awesomely strict even in the Thirties but it was this that provided the thrill of the chase for the 'upwardly' mobile, and in fact doors opened with a very slight pressure. You had to know what degree of pressure. This had to be spontaneous, inherited knowledge. You couldn't push with any visible trace of ambitiousness or self-seeking because all the class codes despised this. It was the most vulgar of all vulgarities---and Patrick Hamilton's life study. His work is still not understood because the nature of England's island development isn't (least of all by its inhabitants---I owe my own knowledge of it to the fact that I have spent most of my adulthood in 'Europe' (as the British call it without any working knowledge of it whatever) and many years living and working in the USA.

Had the class divisions remained after the War and become steadily blurred by downfalls above and risings below all would have been well. But a War of that dimension doesn't permit of gradualist solutions. The class system had gone, mnot that anyone noticed, since its shadows survived in the form of vastly

different accents, styles of comportment and inherited attitudes. It was an irksome, unjust system, and when threatened it was merciless but it remained a remarkable initiatory process for anyone with the will (it had to be good will) to penetrate and (above all) enjoy it. There were highly specific conditions of entry. One of these was that should be not so much as a nuance of imitation, which committed one of the indelicate social sins in the book---sycophancy. This was incidentally the hardest condition because so many of the Upper People were so enviably imitable in their gracious ways. There were other complicating factors, for instance Upper People were by no means a unity but deeply divided among themselves. Middle class people did imitate, some were shameless sycophants, but money was a power, which gracious manners weren't. You couldn't even say that the gracious ones were from a 'good' in the sense of old, landed family because these had long since received big injections of the money provided by the Working people, via marriage. There were middle class families with new titles, and 'new' might be a century or more and it might be fifty or twenty years, length of time endowing a proportionately greater chance of graciousness. A newcomer who wanted the creme de la creme in the sense of graciousness was a different beast from the one who wanted solid benefits of the kind obtainable only from the middle class. And then there were the newcomers like myself who wished a pox on all of them, as a collectivity, and chose the ones he liked and if possible loved. There was no way, of course, that a newcomer could choose Working People for his helpmates and guides outside the ghetto: the rules, the daily schedule, the

styles of speech and transaction were entirely different.

In the same period Frenchmen could laugh at such rituals and observances a century and a half after their Revolution. But they didn't live on an island. They hadn't had Prince Albert egging them on to world empire. Above all, their Upper People had failed to maintain cordial relations with the Working people but preferred the Bourbon court and Paris. By default they took a short cut into the twentieth century. So France was, for the Englishmen if he was cultivated enough, a dreamy place with the smell of apples and fermenting wine on the air, and such an air of Class without its irksome realities that you could, like the French themselves, make life up in the most delicious way, dreaming the new civilization into being, and after all all civilization comes from dreams and visions.

The island system was, however, the best one ever devised for the cultivation of individuality. Thus was it possible for a newcomer or intruder to remain entirely himself, if he could get his accent straight.

In London at Cyril's passionate request, Edmund Wilson was mostly irritated by this system, especially when it purported to be thinking and making art of all things. He hugged the walls at parties, even while being received as a lion. The most sycophantic snob of all time, Evelyn Waugh, snubbed him ---'an insignificant American'. But with his host Cyril Connolly he got on like a house on fire. They spent hours alone together talking books (a lost ecstasy now, more an ecstatic exercise in nostalgia).

Wilson saw at once that the people round him with few exceptions were so up-to-the-eyeballs Class encoded as to be virtually automated. A Spender-Peter Quennell conversation with him had a particular sickening effect. When they saw what he wrote about it in *Europe Without Baedeker* these two men didn't have a clue to his meaning, it being a law of codes that they are beyond breaking by the individual automated by them.

There was also the fact that Wilson, like most other Americans of that particular time, had no idea that this class system was nothing more than a survival from a dead past. Its practical social function was lost on him for another reason--that it had in fact ceased to exist and since none of its protagonists had really been aware of its existence, they had even less awareness of its demise back in the war years. It was a class rule, for instance, that class as a subject should be frozen out of all thought and talk.

Wilson was in no mood after a world war for investigating a class system which with no ill feeling whatever treated him as a foreigner to civilization and no doubt, in a sudden egalitarian mood, seeking his knowhow in the matter of nationwide lecture tours and readings in the New World). He couldn't understand why Spender and Quinnell talked about the firemen rthey'd worked with in the air raids on London in terms of the schools they had both attended. Spender and Quinnell saw his observations as those of an 'American' but most of their fellow-Englishmen would have shared his irritation and bafflement. Wilson understood to what degree their admiration of the firemen (the Working Class ones) was

admiration for another breed of mankind---their fellow countrymen!

Once in my early teens, long before I went to Oxford, I phoned Spender and asked him to read some of my poems, which weren't, as I knew, poems at all. He glanced at them and made a perfunctory remark and I was aware that he had only one thing in mind---to get rid of me as soon as possible. He coughed and looked at his wife (they were soon to be separated) and said 'Well, I think we have to go don't we?', to which she replied, 'No I don't think so' which I was too young to take advantage of by striking up a pleasant conversation with her. Her long look gave me to understand that she knew how well I could see his game, while concealing from him all understanding from my part because that was how I was brought up---to repair other people's vulgarities by sparing them your awareness of them. That principle of behaviour wasn't a good one for any world later than 1780. I was soon on my feet and gone, comparing Spender's curiosity, not to say his insight, with Bernard Shaw's. On the other hand there may have been other reasons he wanted to get rid of me, one of them the fact that Working People at that time only had one bath a week.

Not that Spender was to blame. He was one of trio, with Day Lewis and W.H.Auden. They enjoyed a brief fame touched with notoriety, which gave their names an exciting topical ring and excited the right sort of attack, namely from the wrong quarter. There was no exclusivity around them, a sense of 'We have it all' that was surely not their fault, but which gave them an air of looking down on fools, whoever they spoke to. Later, when the War was over, I worked with Day

Lewis and he was the humblest and most diffidently considerate man in the world. He took me to, his club after I published my first book. Richard Church who was told me 'English publishing is being Americanised', which seemed to imply that he was prophesying what actually came about, the death of literature as a concept. Day Lewis was very concerned about this and said quickly 'Don't tell him that, don't discourage him so early!'. As a matter of fact I was disappointed that I couldn't continue the conversation, because I knew what Church knew, that books were coming to the end of their function. What I didn't know was that this had to be, and pointed to something wrong within literature itself, much less that the demise of books would lead to their revival in a new inner form. I was unhappy trying to write novels but wanted and continued to write them. I constantly felt that the life they were about was no longer there. That the way this life was seen was no longer there. At first I thought that the form of the novel must change. It was many years before I saw that the content had gone, that you couldn't organise events into a narrative and developing form if events themselves had ceased to exist.

\* \* \*

Wilson may well have judged what he perceived as snobbery-encoded talk to be a definition of what England was. Working People, when they were encountered at all by visiting American writers, were perceived, naturally enough,

from within the American code, namely as those who had Failed while the Haves had Succeeded. In fact Working People were the last remaining trace of a landed aristocracy long since dead whose retainers, nurses, kitchen skivvies, butlers and labourers these Working People had in former times been. They had a culture in the truest sense of that over-used word because it was inherited and not mentally ingrained. The first negative impression a Working Class Person received on exploring the 'higher' echelons of society was that they were mentally oriented, and even believed that life, or rather their own, was one in which they had a daily rational choice. They might see other animals, and other classes, as incapable of choice but they projected an aura of being in charge, compared with which a Working Class Person seemed happily asleep. They weren't so much in charge as Americans---after all, Americans, the pure Middle Class classless race, were never under the hypnotic influence of the real upper people, their blue blood stretching down the aeons, who seemed in charge of nothing, least of all themselves. The visiting literary from America, from Tennessee Williams to Our Town, hobnobbed with the counts and duchesses and chairmen of companies. Our Town even gave a speech in which he attacked the idea of the 'lord' or 'Herr', as if a whole continent (of which he entirely ignorant) suffered from absurd Don Quixote dreams that must now give way to the workaday realities of American democracy. Hardly an American at the Academy in Rome didn't feel that a new era had begun in which America represented the climax of a civilization shouldering the onerous yet exhilarating task of leading the world out of its

deathly traditions into a freedom it had never so much as dreamed of. They were like a Class that looked down not on an under class, or on the blacks, but the entire world. The war they had been obliged to fight and finance had been not a golden opportunity to create a world empire, and investment possibilities hitherto only dreamed about, was the result of a typical irrational conflict incompetently handled which must never happen again, and America would see to it that this was so. Edmund Wilson could see the holes in that one too, but no one else did, parat from Gore Vidal, who was no less busy than the others participating in the Renaissance which the New York publishing and artistic scene was supposed to represent. And indeed it was true that what came from Europe was tired, hesitant, dark, with no stomach for anything like a goal.

Wilson must have wondered what people like John Lehmann (a lecture-tour star choi) were doing in, of all things, a literary world. He wrote down his views afterwards in *Europe without Baedeker*, which was pooh-poohed as a misunderstanding of the conversations he had heard. In fact he saw the truth---that these men and women simply didn't know that thjeir very language, their school-memories, their assumption of an unquestionable social status which endowed them with the right to judge artistically when most of them had in fact that right in any case, quite non-socially.

It was why Logan Pearsall Smith, Cyril Connolly's mentor and also American in background, rang Cyril up after the publication of Orwell's first book and said, 'There---Blair has beaten you all!'. Orwell simply didn't have that class-

encoded mind. He spoke from himself, while the others couldn't properly realise a self because of the 'education' that had clipped the wings. Even Auden couldn't. His mind was a chaos as a result. It was no good fleeing to America, which simply left his roots unexamined.

Orwell's prose reads as bright and true and direct today as it did then. He could hit home because he decided who he was. He was limited by his thought but it was genuine thought and not unconscious repetition, and he achieved this by giving up all the perquisites of class and being genuinely down and out in Paris and London. His education still peeped through---he sneered at people who drank fruit juices and at anything he would have nicknamed occult or mystical. He was no more tolerant, and no less hard, than his class-coded friends but the only important thing in art is the self that can speak. He was surrounded by people who never fought through to this self because their education said they had already arrived. The commercialisation of writing was an extension of this principle. What an accent and style of comportment did in terms of social influence in the old world a million dollars must do now.

Cyril Connolly understood that there was an element of service and self-sacrifice in real art, that it belonged, however remotely in these damaged times, to a religious context, and that hard ambition was the sign of a willed not born gift. He was unable to write more than fragments because of his sense of art, not his lack of it. This wasn't true of his one book *Enemies of Promise* because it was about the learning of the Top code, namely the most memorable and formative

part of a Top Englishman's life, one on which he could safely build his career, family, business---until World War One that is, and after that it was a simple story of fragmentation: hence Cyril's fragments. Like all beginners he wrote novels about himself, and this doesn't work, because the reason for choosing oneself as the subject is that the ego is the seat of a dilemma, being a thing that hasn't yet taken place yet. There is another reason too---that the characters of a novel or play are an different mixes of the many lives an achieved ego experiences. This supplies the 'objective' tone, because the lives aren't the self, they are witnessed by it.

George Orwell and Cyril were at Eton together. Cyril could have broken through the code in himself as Orwell did. He would probably have said that he was too lazy, too luxuriantly sensual to do it. In a time of punitive moral platitude this made him the most refreshing man of letters of his time. Edmund Wilson could have been that, but puritanism warred with sensuality in him, disrupting the pleasures of the one and the discipline of the other. Thus indecision went together with unimpeachable literary authority, and the persecutions of the IRS didn't help. Cyril lived in a patrician aura woven at school and by using it for his work surpassed it, except when he tried to write novels.

## ADDENDA

The bitterness after the war:

Far from the historian being right about there being no 'malaise' on the battle front, the malaise spread to the home front, indeed engulfed in such a way that fighting fire bombs and rescuing people from the ruins night and day was a protection against it, a last assertion of the old kind of union between people that didn't have to be expressed. It was more this malaise, scornful of promises, bitterly aware of having been deceived by someone (quickly personified by Hitler or the Germans), that produced after the war the state of inertia which made any quick recovery from the national bankruptcy (every resource the country had had was poured into the war) impossible. Yet there was still a lot of power, though it was mostly abroad. Bit by bit it was lost, thrown away---by managers, chairmen of boards, salesmen, diplomats who seemed to lack the necessary energy and understanding of just what a plight the 'country' was in, especially as it was so divided against itself. The word got around (in the tradition of Uppere thinking since the beginning of the century) that the 'new' energy was in the 'new' world, while Britain and Europe must plod along as best a beggar could. That such a feeling could follow victory of all things was a surprise only to those who didn't know what the actual history of the war was, and to what extent everyone had been dragged screaming into it by a surprisingly few men and women. Churchill and Hitler were the best possible people to do the job of dragging, but neither was the real motive force. News of the opposition to Hitler in high places was

consistently kept from Churchill, which meant that no bargains could be struck with them. Hitkler's own aims were ruthlessly disregarded, and a war or nothing attitude adopted and forced on the people. There were plenty, even numberless opportunities for giving Hitler the makeshift peace he wanted, and even arranging with him for a mass-exodus of Jews from Germany, which would have saved so many lives. The German publisher Fischer decided one day in the first years of Hitler's dictatorship to walk into SS headquarters in Berlin and suggest that he and his family and his publishing house leave Germany, without being asked to. All his friends told him he was a fool. But he did it. And he was received with great courtesy. Yes, he could and should leave Germany. I know about that because he later became my father in law. He took his family and belongings to Austria, fled from there with nothing after a tip off from a French friend at that time head of the Surete in Paris, went briefly to Switzerland, then to Sweden where he was put in prison for two months for being a spy for British intelligence (it was a one-off job), then to America after crossing Germany once more and the Soviet Union (arriving at Moscow on the night when Russian and German officers were celebrating the Pact), and finally to America, where he settled in Connecticut close to his top author Thomas Mann, and started the publishing house again. .... had gone straight to Roosevelt and asked for a visa for him, and got it.

It is interesting that before going to the Gestapo he had hired a plane and flown to England to see if he could set up there. He had a good contact with

Heinemann and they gave him a jolly reception of a particularly English kind. That is, he was welcome to come, they would see about his coming, and then not a word more was heard. It seemed that even Hitler's known and tried and, because of their race, committed enemies were to be treated with caution, so strong was the loyalty to Hitler even in the later years of vilification. Almost certainly Heinemann found that the immigration difficulties were insurmountable. And their own sense of utter security would not have endeared them to a financial arrangement with a 'foreign' publisher.

My parents changed. They too began to sneer---at the 'Upper' people, at accents, at the People with Money, in the 'it's all right for people who don't have to go out and work every day' (aimed sometimes at me, though I worked far longer hours than an office-bound individual). In the pre-War world the Labour party and the Co-op had offered an intimate social life without upward-looking or envy because the life, though hard, was good and self-sufficient and there was no reason to believe that other classes had it better except in the one matter of money. After the war they were secure for the first time. My mother told me that fear was the everyday theme of her life as child. You were afraid of shopkeepers, policemen, anybody well dressed or with a commanding tone. You trembled for your survival. That was gone now. It had been decided in the war that the government would have to look after its people better. Medical attention could now be had, my father's new job, far from being under constant threat, carried a pension with

it. Television seemed to provide for them rather than a select few. Revolutions, as the historians say, come from hope not despair. This revolution included David Frost, whom my mother idolised, because he combined their ideal of an university-educated person with the ability to ask the questions the poorest could understand.

The bitterness came from confusion. As to the hope that went with it, that was quite mistaken in its assumption that soon the confusion would end. Everyone had been gypped. The swindle had broken their country perhaps for good. And the hope came from the fact that, in this terrible break-up, everyone was in a new bargaining position. Money, not class spells, was the leveller. It was a matter of getting what you could as the public sources of help multiplied, though in an atmosphere of penury. That situation hasn't changed in any country, being a feature of the fall of all civilizations.

If you wanted the old sense of a civilization you went to America for it. Writers and artists behaved with that wonderful sense of free time stretching before them, assured and supported by eager patrons in the form of galleries and publishers, and if the top ones did tend to dry of drink it was because the dream couldn't be maintained, but must in the end come down to the pure money transaction it really was. America was far closer to the rest of the world than anyone realised. Its people too had been gypped. And Puritan prayer and principle, on which the new country was founded, collapsed in post-civilization might-is-right financial junketting which pulled down law and order and set the

minorities against each other, since money is prayerless and replaces principle by being what principle must have to be of the slightest practical application.

simple reason that wealth wasn't the sole source of influence or mark of distinction. Places like Wandsworth and Battersea had an *appearance* of immobility which froze the hearts and hopes of even the young. But while there was access to public libraries and the possibility of scholarships to universities, and, most of all, cinemas and playhouses and working men's clubs, the imagination could take precedence over all and turn the streets into an exciting, dimly glowing antechamber to those realities that began at Waterloo station, which could be reached from Earlsfield in eleven minutes precisely via Clapham Junction, at that self-same platform where Oscar Wilde, handcuffed, was jeered at. It cost under a shilling.

My eldest brother John was a fringe member of the Bloomsbury group in his teens, which gave me, through awed emulation, not just a tremendous spur to make a life outside the ghetto but the means within. My middle brother Leslie missed university and became an accountant's clerk in the City. He took I to the Old Vic where the darkness before curtainrise was so thick that the stage lights, when they went up, were like the embers of an eternal thrilling fire that had been burning always---and now at last I was witnessing it. The only show I remembered afterwards was *The Tempest* with Charles Laughton, breathlessly inaudible as he came downstage for his prologue, already mannered enough to make the jump to Hollywood. A West End play he remembered for Ernest Thesiger's performance. The theatre had the same dark promise of emerging deep-glow lights, and there were long speeches that seemed not to be about anything but conveyed a sense of

important things being said. Mr had the impression of Ernest Thesiger's long nose being in combination with his rich tenor voice that weaved and webbed its way round the dress circle like a serpent.

His brother John's first novel at the age of eighteen was scorned by Virginia Woolf in a typically cruel manner ('you describe your novel as an experiment---I consider the experiment to have failed'). It had the (for I) peculiar effect of discouraging him for many years, perhaps all his life. I's reaction to all such rebuffs was a surge of new energy.

John published a monograph about Duncan Grant so slim that it felt like a wallet without money in it. He took a diploma in journalism at London university which he never used. Instead he went into the theatre with Aubrey Menen and put on a dramatisation of *The Shape of Things to Come* (before the film) to which they invited H.G.Wells. This was at the Arts theatre when it was still a club. Menen took the main part and, seated alone downstage, almost lying in his armchair, he looked up to where Wells was sitting and began addressing him. Wells was so furious he walked out in the interval. When a scene change looked like going on for a long time I's brother and Menen improvised dialogue in front of the curtain. They were brilliant at that kind of thing, not that the degree of improvisation could escape I's eye even at the age of eight. The critics put the play down but indulgently.

All this meant that in childhood (since John was ten years older) I was in and out of West End theatres and dressing rooms, and meeting some of the West

## BACHMAN'S THEIR (WGN) (TOW)

50's

I was astonished that nobody could see the England work then any more. It was just words attitudes. The guy had nothing to grip onto any more then and when they say 'I love old England!' - it didn't help at all. It started changing in about 1948. And it was this I believe Orwell experienced with so we know and wrote the speech in the form of a public futurist work, calling it 1984 because he heard 1948, or 1948 turned all mind to show its true yet hidden side, which no one saw when he wanted to. It is by 1948 England, could't hear to be the guy now, had nightmares the boy caught them, unable to hear again.

End 'names' like the Stanley sisters and the de Marney brothers and Esme Percy. He walked the stage of the Arts theatre and vowed to himself to have a play on there one day (which was the case). He was awed by all the 'darlings' people said, and how couples embraced and kissed publicly and nobody even looked. The West End felt like a family, and dressing rooms little parlours.

John and Menen also ran a News theatre (long before the News cinema on Victoria station) in which they dramatised and satirised the events of the day. Menen wrote a potboiler about Queen Christina and this helped finance their trip to India, where they stayed seven years working for the radio.

Leslie the middle brother became manager of the Peter Coates theatre company, which was subsidised by two film producers, the Box brothers, but he too went abroad---as press attache to embassies in South Africa, Rhodesia, India. He took the Magna Carta to Virginia, guarding it in his cabin on the Queen Mary. That exhibition is still on.

At thirteen I phoned George Bernard Shaw (egged on by Menen). Shaw's wife answered and handed the phone straight to Shaw. I said he would like to talk about the plays he himself had written. Shaw said 'I think my plays are better known than yours, so let's talk about *them*.' Which they did for twenty minutes, the subject PYGMALION. When I called Doolittle (referring to his soul) a bourgeois Shaw let out a deafening 'Pshaw!' and shouted 'He was a dustman!'

If this wasn't social mobility it must have been due to a curious illumination of but one household within that bleak grid of unilluminated streets. This wasn't

at all the case. The streets were described by a best-selling author of the time, Ethel Mannin, who was also born in them, not half a mile from where the Rowdons lived. This was in her novel *The Venetian Blind*, which gives the streets a peculiar wild thrill full of a deliciously suppressed sexuality. Mannin had a wonderful fervent way of writing. Noël Coward once snubbed her, probably because he took the fervour for sycophancy ('gushing'), in the manner of the class he identified himself with (Woolf's snub of I's brother was of the same origin). The snub wasn't simple rudeness but an inability to perceive the proper meaning of certain expressions and behaviour. People are divided by their perceptions, rarely their thoughts or attitudes.

The artistically successful achieved not great wealth but access to class, which wasn't considered 'upper' so much as class itself. But this access could be marred if their tone wasn't comprehensible to that class. D.H.Lawrence's was a writer of such power that his books emigrated to world status, so that he was accepted into the class without being in the least understood or even appreciated. This European tradition of social rescue for the genius continued a little after World War Two---viz the fact that literary Americans on Fullbrights or at the American Academy in Rome were known only to the Vons and lords and contes and baronesse, almost never to the people who served the coffee (this applied to Tennessee Williams as it did to Rhodes scholars). It was 'their' England. not I's England, that Americans wrote about and sometimes felt snubbed by or rebellious towards. After World War Two Oxford was found to be 'a hotbed of snobbery',

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.

Our steep path straggled between thickets and saplings so that the moment we set foot on it we were hidden. I was to stay at my post in the hours of light and descend just before first dusk.

At the top we came to the flat shrubby clearing I had been told about. Walking straight ahead as we had

been instructed to do we came, after a few yards, to the other, northern edge of the ridge, which had an even steeper slope than the one we had just climbed. This too was thick in bush and sapling, such that you would detect any movement down there by the sound.

Taking care, crouching to hide ourselves, we found my little eerie scooped out of the thick bush between boulders in such a way that it provided a seat and room to stretch one's legs. It was hidden from all but the sky. So someone had sat there before.

And facing me was the abbey of St. Benedict as first built, in wondrous brown-golden state in this the first light of day.

I settled happily in. The weather was now dry and fairly warm. I turned the long-distance lenses on the abbey and set the focus and all at once a brilliantly clear picture of each window, stone buttress, disposed itself before my eyes.

Those stones were to change each hour to a new subtle tint, russet and rose in the first dawn, white and grandly still at noon. You could gaze at this frail tapestry for minutes on end and less and less give credence to its solidity. War with its great hush between battles restored St. Benedict's abbey to its earlier centuries. In all its thrilling changes of light from mellow rose and damask and cherry-wood to tints of brown

so rare that the façade became a veil held dangling in the sky, this abbey was a last point of sanity, an assurance that war may not forever be the shadow that follows us, each and every one of us.

But also, because this was war, the abbey windows had a way of staring down into the valley that could seem to frightened soldiers a bitter grey warning. Its very stillness might make some commanders dream of taking it out on the grounds that Jerry was inside, fully equipped. It only needed a few philistines among them to set a scare going, and they were available.

Intelligence said no such thing. Intercepted messages to the monastery, even personal ones to the abbot from Hitler, corroborated the evidence that the Germans considered Monte Cassino as they considered Rome, as an open city.

And we F.O.O.s were sent up to that eerie (so I believe now) in order to banish any idea of the Germans being inside, since both General Alexander and General Mark Clark were firmly against violating such a clearly understood covenant.

The second morning I sent my signaller away. The silence was all the greater because the plain below never stirred from hour to hour.

I was wary of the slope immediately below me. From time to time I gave sober thought to how I might defend

myself should I see those shrubs below move or hear branches crack. The only way was to make a bunk so I recced the path by which I had come and removed any sharp gravel that might make my exit noisy.

My task was a clearly stated one—direct from divisional headquarters: I must report all movements at the end of each day. My reports were, apart from one, 'No movement'.

That one movement was a hand-full of Germans in a motor-bike-and-sidecar. They suddenly appeared from the east and sped towards the river. They got out at its only bridge. I put my Donkey's Ears on them and watched them climb beneath the stone arches. They worked for ten or so minutes, clearly laying mines. Then they drove back to cover—to the east again.

I waited the rest of that day for the bridge to blow up but it didn't. In my report that evening I gave its map reference for our mine detectors, convinced however that no army in its right mind would attack across that plain. I was wrong.

One afternoon at the warmest hour, when my cockpit in the sky was the choicest place to be, there was a rustle of steps behind me and I turned to see a young man in uniform, except that it wasn't a combatant one. We said hullo and at once liked each other. He was a journalist and armed with a notebook. Suddenly we were

having a chat like the Kent cottage ones. As then, I made a cup of tea. We talked about books and, I think at one point, Mass Observation, for which I had worked just before getting my call-up papers.

He wanted to know what I'd been doing on That Terrible Hill. I told him a few things that happened and he made some notes and we parted saying how we must meet again, knowing there wasn't a chance in hell of that. A few weeks later I had a letter from my mother saying, What's all this you've been up to? There was a front-page story in the local paper about how her boy was a hero. I can't remember what the heroism was, or how my affable journalist had managed to extract one from what I told him but copy has to be written—and there it was, apparently, under a photo of me. Horace Potter who lived next door to my parents called round. He had just seen it come off the press, he being a sub on the newspaper.

It would hardly bring solace to my parents' unsung nights in the shelter. And the triumphal style of war journalism is a pain in the arse anyway, not least for the journalist. So I closed the subject as quickly as possible in my subsequent letters. And then there was the fact that we were forbidden by the censorship rules to even mention battle in our letters.

No doubt my intelligence report corroborated previous ones from that same cockpit. The fact is you

cannot stare at such a building for days on end without some tiny evidence of military occupation, if it exists. Soldiers inside such a building have a way of forgetting vague orders such as 'Never show yourself beyond such and such a point'. They get used to the silence all round them and it is here that an observer on a distant hill has his chance---unseen, unheard, he is at last discounted. This is when someone in the building shows himself, if only for the fraction of a second.

In that eerie I noticed in myself a desire to say more in my report than my military remit allowed me. I wished to persuade the higher command that the abbey was clearly not a defensive position. But my impressions counted for nothing. Also the absence of movement proved nothing either way. I realised that I knew in my heart that the abbey was doomed.

The danger was that some pressure to bomb might gain momentum, and reach even unto the thrones of the Shakespeare-quoting Roosevelt and Churchill.

## 6

**Shudder**

The new attack was to be yet another breakthrough (the very word denotes the tactics of rush and too much weight). And it would take off precisely from where my long-distance lenses had been focussed.

Apparently we were in a rush to get to Rome and the job had to be done right now. 'Rome by Christmas' had become an ideology for the highest echelons of command—every day that passed after Christmas Day was overladen with guilt at not being in Rome and of course this became a fresh nail in the coffin of military ingenuity.

We were now in mid-January 1944. Having secured a mere seventy-mile advance in over four months, to the tune of at least 10,000 battle casualties a month, not to mention the sick and shocked, it seemed logical, in this mood of self-revenge, to try and repeat those figures.

Not only this but the hardest, most closely defended centre of the Gustav Line fortification, namely Cassino, was going to be, of all unilluminated strategies, our centre of attack.

This time our breakthrough would (ideologically speaking) make it possible for the US 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps,

containing our Texan brothers, to cross the Rapido river. As its name suggests, this river was (especially in torrential rain) as fast as the devil, and in winter particularly treacherous. And the rains had started again. The cold was beginning to bite. Yes, this was January, not June.

Our job—that of 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> divisions—was to make a hole in the 14<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Corps that faced us.

So it was that we drove, tyres whirring and slipping in the mud, following white tapes in the dark, to positions as close to Cassino as commensurate with officially declared suicide.

In the dead of night we set down in what appeared to be a very crowded field. We were cheek by jowl with the Texans once more. There was no question of slit trenches here. We moved into feverishly prepared dugouts of the world war one type. We could stand upright in these--- with head room to spare. Mine was the size of a large room. We cut a hole in the top of a biscuit tin and then dug it into the mud wall as a grate for a fire. We twisted more biscuit tins into a chimney that fitted into it and would carry the smoke through the roof. How that roof was made I cannot recollect---perhaps planks but more likely corrugated iron since engineers must have been here before us. I only know we never had a drop of rain inside. We gathered masses of wood and I had that

fire blazing white most of the day and night. The walls were soon dry. The puzzle---in view of the incessant shelling we were getting---was that we were allowed to let the chimneys smoke at all.

Every shell that came over made the earthen walls shudder. The lulls in the enemy firing were all the sweeter for being short. The air-burst shells were now so high in the sky (because of our ground-level position) that we rather enjoyed their deafening useless crack. But most of the stuff coming over was heavy 88mm.

We and the Texans renewed our acquaintance and exchanged bully beef for smooth Spam, Players for one of their almost identical Virginia brands. I noticed a certain difference in them. They had seen a lot and I think had begun to wonder what the hell they were doing so far from home. They looked wary now. You could say as an Englishman (admittedly one not quite right in the head) that you were fighting for England in these fields but as to how they were fighting for Texas in one doomed battle after another up a narrow peninsula in the Mediterranean Basin no one had so far given them a clue.

They gazed, they watched, they smoked, they nodded and said something from time to time but their pauses, like those between the shells, were unpredictable. Of course you could have told them that they were fighting for world power—which is what their nation got out of

the war. But I don't think that would have been appreciated as an argument for their death. Those once soft-spoken creatures whom we had learned to love would have demurred, I think—preferred to be with their folks again and to let American markets achieve world power by their natural expansion, not by means of this crazed blood ritual that had fallen in love with its own mistakes.

Our exchanges weren't good humoured as before. One of them seemed offended when I said something like, American spam has converted me to British bully beef. There was this edge to the nerves that afflicted us all--and in them perhaps was the shock of premonition.

Of course our guns were out of action in this vulnerable place, so the enemy could fire without fear of retaliation. But it was the certainty of their bombardments---which must come from a very accurate map reference of our position---that made us ask what we were doing so crowded together, one Corps mixed up with another. One thing we did feel certain about and that was our proximity to the front line. It even crossed our minds in giddy moments that we were actually in that line, though without means of assault or defence.

The only practical reason for being crowded up like this must be the coming attack, planned for about 20<sup>th</sup>

January (this we knew about). But even so you never assembled troops this way, under the enemy's very noses.

Or the idea may have been that, crammed up against the front line, we—a mixed bag of infantry and gunners and perhaps some Engineers—were being held in reserve so as to be ready to pour into a hole made ready for us by that attack. But again, you simply didn't plan battles this way, your guns stayed where they should always be, well behind the committed lines. Even allowing for the freakishness of war, this situation surpassed all manner of guessing among senior as well as junior officers.

For one thing, the dug-outs were not of our own making. I have no recollection of my own men digging. So the Engineers must have been involved---and earthworks on such a scale are noisy and smoky and provoke local curiosity. The material had to be transported---roofs, tarpaulins, stanchions. Italian gossip travelled faster than fire. You didn't have to squeeze it out of anybody, it tumbled out of the mouth and into your ear and the job was done. Italians regularly passed with wonderful nonchalance from the enemy to us and back again. They skirted military positions along paths that meandered unseen and unsuspected in low hills and woodland. Produce and family news travelled that way. It was better than spies.

Captain H. was nearby. I paid my visits to him at the double, no question here of dodging here and there to avoid the shell with your number on it. And these bombardments were so concentrated, and of such persistence, that we were constantly convinced that they were a softening-up barrage before an enemy attack. But no attacks came.

Captain H. and I found that our chats were short and sweet. I was anxious to get back to my snuggery, he to stay in his. And we had little to say these days. 'Our' war against Hitler and Nazism seemed to us to have disappeared.

As indeed it had. The astonishing thing to me now is that neither of us even knew about the Allied Conference that had removed 'our' war from the scene, namely the Casablanca Conference of January 1943, eight months before we set foot in Italy.

In that conference President Roosevelt had neatly wiped 'our' war out by abolishing Germany as a nation. Germans were now stripped of their rights as a people, if such a thing can be conceived. They were refused the right even to come to peace terms. They were to 'unconditionally surrender'. No distinction was from now on to be made between Nazis and anti-Nazis or between the Jew or gentile. Being Germans all, they were an innately damned people, as they had been in the former genocide,

world war one. This opened the door to any atrocity, as it was probably intended to. And indeed in the same conference the fire-bombing of the German cities was conceived, in order to 'break the morale' of the previously German people.

And here Captain H. and I were sitting in a field where men and materials were crazily massed together under bombardment, with no means of movement, as if even strategic meaning had departed from war.

In this kind of military position no records can be kept. War records cover supply lines and their arrival or not, and of course attacks. But the kind of limbo we were in excites no annals. Our song we're here because we're here because we're here said it best.

Meanwhile we were getting more and more reinforcements. A new second lieutenant joined my troop and we shared my dugout. It wasn't good that he came straight into relentless shelling like this. It was too much of a blind fall. Even the boom of our own heavy artillery way back made him jump and then he would half-smile in frightened apology. One day a shell came within yards of the dugout and we threw ourselves down in a corner close to the fire and I found myself on top of him. He was trembling all over with an unusual violence—like that of a fever more than fright.

To have your nerves go at the start means you can't get your self-navigation in proper shape thereafter. We were very lucky that one time, favoured by the fact that the blast went forward of us. But he couldn't take account of degree and nuance. He had a pale soft skin, still a boy, and we used to sit and talk quietly in the lulls but I think he couldn't accommodate himself to the idea of people blowing each other up. I think it deeply contradicted the life he'd had before, perhaps a village life where everything was ordered and familiar. Even in the lulls he was on guard inside himself. In this state he was sent out on his first F.O.O. mission and was killed almost at once.

\* \* \*

There was suddenly a sense all round us of bustle and movement at short notice. We and the Texans were separated.

The attack started on the night of January 17<sup>th</sup>, three days earlier than planned. Our two divisions got across the Garigliano close to the Cassino defile. But Kesselring threw in his 29<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier divisions and this was a poor omen for the risky Texan assault across the Rapido.

The rains and that river did for our Texan brothers. The river swelled up furiously. The two Texan regiments, already battle-exhausted, were lost almost in entirety.

Their Bailey bridges were swept away behind them and they were left stranded in darkness on the northern bank without any avenue of escape and in mud and near freezing rain under shell-fire all night, exposed in a water-logged trap with neither supplies nor any chance to prepare defence positions, and the few that lived to see the morning must have been near demented.

Mark Clark was indicted in Texas after the war for this but it is difficult to indict commanders who know no other military doctrine than meeting strength with strength, head-on, especially if they can point to this doctrine as having come from above. He was exonerated.

This Texan assault was rebuffed by only five German battalions from the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Regiment, crack fighting troops.

The real trouble that dogged Mark Clark was that he had no battle experience. It is said that General Eisenhower, chief of American operations in Europe, was furious at Clark for insisting on getting his army before he had done a proper stint of battle. But he gave Clark an army just the same—perhaps in consideration of the fact that he himself had no battle experience of any kind, even a view of it through binoculars.

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> 1943 and 15<sup>th</sup> 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 Sessa betrothals were discussed, the marriages to take place when it was all over. Kisses and smiles were exchanged and anything more secret was presumably snatched in remote corners of the cellars because of the presence of elders and us commissioned officers. We officers only heard reports---the girls were at first hesitant with us and only began coming up to us in the street and 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 Volturmo 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 Ronaco, 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.

**4****Apparition**

An 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 mountain 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 20<sup>th</sup> (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 hardest 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 biting 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 naïf, 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.

## 5

**Prayer**

We 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 deep gratitude 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

\* \* \*

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.

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> 1943 and 15<sup>th</sup> 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 Sessa betrothals were discussed, the marriages to take place when it was all over. Kisses and smiles were exchanged and anything more secret was presumably snatched in remote corners of the cellars because of the presence of elders and us commissioned officers. We officers only heard reports---the girls were at first hesitant with us and only began coming up to us in the street and 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 Ronaco, 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.

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 hardest 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 biting cold rain we feared did. My men and I began to shiver in our sopping clothes and of course the cursing began—what the

The gunners were grimy. That was another perplexing thing---why were they here at all, since artillery belongs far behind the forward lines. And if this beach was now far behind the lines, as 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 this was a military exercise---after all, the army could get up to the strangest antics, we all knew that.

These are the customary wishful thoughts of a reinforcement. You had a pleasing picture of battle as a repetition of those safe exercises you had sweated through at training camp.

And then there was the fact that the Germans, so we thought, would soon be pushed out of Italy. Being caught in ~~the trap~~<sup>trap</sup> of a narrow peninsula, hardly eighty miles in width, they would soon find themselves in a trap and would <sup>be</sup> fleeing as quickly as they had come. XII

We had already decided this in our stifling bivouacs in the Algerian desert. Italy was just no use to Hitler, especially with hundreds of miles of coast which <sup>our</sup> allied ships could bombard at any time. ~~we~~

We were badly wrong. Yes, Italy was 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). And this made it easy for the Germans to defend, and the very devil to attack. <sup>In other words</sup> ~~This was because~~ the Germans could prepare their defences carefully, sometimes manning them with only a handful of men for the simple reason that <sup>their position</sup> it was ~~was~~ designed for short-term defence. This you could easily overrun, <sup>say on the left. But</sup> ~~but~~ then ~~behind~~ it you <sup>so</sup> found <sup>instead an</sup> the ambush, ~~namely~~ a toughly held position <sup>which</sup> it was costly to attack.

In fact, if Hitler wanted to lay waste our armies at little expense to himself this was his best chance ~~in the whole of Europe~~. He needed most of his armies to face the Russians---and to see off <sup>any</sup> the allied invasion in Normandy, which he knew <sup>was being</sup> prepared.

peninsula  
/

as the  
whole  
word knew,

~~But~~ Only small, sensible and mistaken fairytales 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. Yet they had a strange way 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 came on a large hushed group of men standing close together in the dusk. 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 very softly. We had to crane forward to hear his words. 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, Jerry's right <sup>here</sup> ~~behind me~~ on the other side of this lane behind me (it lay between trees a few feet back). He said, you're going to stop him crossing this road. Whatever happens, chaps, you're not going to move, understood? You don't move. You stay where you are. [There were nods in the deep dusk. n. 1?

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. She was in love with somebody else, an economics student. 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 a reinforcement who doesn't yet have his unit. I asked myself what am I doing in this bloody war anyway? All we ever knew 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.

The declaration of war hadn't sounded 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 moment the declaration of war was made (with Churchill's gleeful assent) Polish independence was lost!

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

And when I said yes I was surprised at myself---it didn't seem my own decision at all. 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 ( I didn't know that all wars are justified to the hilt, once they've been decided on).

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

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. It was figs that 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 the poor spotless sleeping bag it would be dyed 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 <sup>D</sup>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 this was really war. The enemy was breathing and watchfully close. My realisation brought about <sup>?</sup>---and I cannot explain why---a great turning point in my

↗

life. I became responsible. Thus it is that boys in their early twenties must always man the front lines.

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. <sup>Captain H.</sup> ~~The captain~~ and I quickly discovered <sup>a common belief</sup> ~~how devoted we were to~~ the Struggle against Fascism---words that covered a vast left-wing movement stretched right across Europe, with the Soviet Union as its guide, philosopher and friend. 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.'

<sup>we unknowingly hoisted up</sup> Churchill ~~was hoisted on our shoulders~~. <sup>as our savior</sup> He was the man to do the job.

Yes, it was we of the Struggle who <sup>had</sup> put <sup>Rim</sup> 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---<sup>and</sup> in a sudden 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 <sup>exposed</sup>. They said, You British have war in your blood, it's like you're on holiday.

1  
→ The sense of responsibility they are suddenly woken  
it is fresh, it knows no obstacles. You  
discover the sense of responsibility as a thing that  
has never existed before. You didn't know you  
~~understand~~ had it until it was fresh inside,  
a boy's responsibility such as he hasn't used before,  
for the simplicity that it was to use to anyone,  
learn of all himself. But in battle it suddenly  
springs to life and you are suddenly safe,  
however unsafe your situation is. You could change  
that. It is so suddenly presented to you, I can change  
things.

At no other age does this awakening occur.  
~~The older men have responsibilities at home, they  
had wives for~~

I was allocated [overleaf]...

→<sup>2</sup> And as it happened he was the first and only  
~~the~~ mature man ~~who had a boy~~ I met in  
the army who had a boy's approval to everything.

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. They were at our side all the way up the peninsula.

*And they carried a premonition of this in their eyes →*

Captain H. filled me in with a clear strategic picture of what was happening.

Our division was in charge of Salerno, the town, ~~while~~ <sup>while</sup> 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---<sup>both</sup> from our ~~own~~ <sup>own</sup> supplies of ~~both~~ <sup>from</sup> ammunition and 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 didn't know was that our commander-in-chief Mark Clark wanted to pull out of Salerno and even---because of the huge casualty rate it would involve---from the entire Italian campaign. Yet he proved to be one of the chief instruments of

the vast toll of dead, wounded and shell-shocked ~~in that campaign~~ <sup>at least on our side -</sup> ~~the western side - of the peninsula.~~ <sup>Italy.</sup>

The ugly fact was that the Germans held the dice all the way up <sup>At this</sup> moment we had the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier division facing us, their task being to keep us from the road to Rome ~~for~~ as long as possible.

→ I noted this ~~unconsciously~~ with a real awareness of  
w. A look of premonition the contained <sup>foreboding</sup> ~~for~~  
and resignation together.

On the way up <sup>this side of</sup> K Kaf they were  
at an immediate flank and I imagined to  
myself the...they...were the men I'd see at  
Selons, whereas they were very many; in fact  
an entire division, the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

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 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 <sup>landings,</sup> ~~operation.~~ Our two divisions, plus the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured division and an armoured brigade, were up against at most four German battalions. And, being acutely intelligent like so many unbalanced and depressive leaders, <sup>Hitler</sup> ~~he~~ reckoned he could prolong this agony all the way up ~~the peninsula.~~ He took one gamble---that we the enemy might be as intelligent as he. But he needn't have worried.

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 <sup>which</sup> 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 called all the ~~shots~~ <sup>shots</sup> and ~~knives~~ on our side.*

So one man planned every movement made by our 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 was as good as his word.

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. 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 to the Alps. It was what our newspapers were saying. The Ministry of Information in London was agreed on the grand illusion that was the basis of allied strategy.

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

\* \* \*

Then,  
/ 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 26<sup>th</sup>. But they broke through into 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, ~~so~~ sweetly heavy with that special haunting hot scent of wild thyme that marked the Italian autumn.

We again 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 <sup>artillery</sup> 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 <sup>the</sup> occasional decisive stamp of a cow, <sup>were</sup> ~~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 which 'we' were going to launch on the enemy. 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. 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.

# ONE

## Baptism

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 Allied Fifth Army some days before on September 8. This was the outfit I belonged to and its commander-in-chief was Mark Clark, a Texan.

We jumped down into the shallow wash, having been warned back in Algeria not to make any splashing noises as we waded ashore 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---carefully watching over us as we thought.

Yet the hush was perplexing.

We reached those beaches on D+8---the war dialect for the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, namely eight days ago, when the first landing. I had one pip on my shoulder as a second lieutenant and also I had a photo of my girlfriend in my upper left pocket, that is close to my heart.

We hushed reinforcements 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.

In fact, if Hitler wanted to lay waste our armies at little expense to himself this was his best chance in the whole of Europe. He needed most of his armies to face the Russians---and to see off the allied invasion in Normandy, which he knew was being prepared.

But only small, sensible and mistaken fairytales 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. Yet they had a strange way 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 came on a large hushed group of men standing close together in the dusk. 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 very softly. We had to crane forward to hear his words. 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, Jerry's right behind me on the other side of this lane behind me (it lay between trees a few feet back). He said, you're going to stop him crossing this road. Whatever happens, chaps, you're not going to move, understood? 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. She was in love with somebody else, an economics student. 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 a reinforcement who doesn't yet have his unit. I asked myself what am I doing in this bloody war anyway? All we ever knew 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.

The declaration of war hadn't sounded 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 moment the declaration of war was made (with Churchill's gleeful assent) Polish independence was lost.

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

And when I said yes I was surprised at myself---it didn't seem my own decision at all. 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 ( I didn't know that all wars are justified to the hilt, once they've been decided on).

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. In that time the Jewish civilisation in Europe was virtually removed.

Little did we know that Churchill would one day (once it was all over) agree that this declaration of war was 'tragically ill-judged'. At the time he was elated by it. It would be a 6-weeks war, he told the French ambassador in an excited phonecall.

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.

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). The mortar bomb comes down on you vertically, with hardly a warning swish. It brings 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 over 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.

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. It was figs that 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 the poor spotless sleeping bag it would be dyed 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 this was really war. The enemy was breathing and watchfully close. My realisation brought about ---and I cannot explain why---a great turning point in my

life. I became responsible. Thus it is that boys in their early twenties must always man the front lines.

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 stretched right across Europe, with the Soviet Union as its guide, philosopher and friend. 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. Churchill was hoisted on our shoulders. He was the man to do the job.

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 sudden 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 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. They were at our side all the way up the peninsula.

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 our own supplies of both ammunition and 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 didn't know was that our commander-in-chief Mark Clark wanted to pull out of Salerno and even---because of the huge casualty rate it would involve---from the entire Italian campaign. Yet he proved to be one of the chief instruments of the vast toll of dead, wounded and shell-shocked in that campaign.

The ugly fact was that the Germans held the dice all the way up. At this moment we had the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier division facing us, their task being to keep us from 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 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 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured division and an armoured brigade, were up against at most four German battalions. And, being acutely intelligent like so many unbalanced and depressive leaders, he reckoned he could prolong this agony all the way up the peninsula. He took one gamble---that we the enemy might be as intelligent as he. But he needn't have worried.

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).

So one man planned every movement made by our 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 was as good as his word.

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. 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 to the Alps. It was what our newspapers were saying. The Ministry of Information in London was agreed on the grand illusion that was the basis of allied strategy.

This word 'strategy' means trying to pre-empt the enemy intention but we failed to pre-empt Hitler's sole strategic intention of creating a series of 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 26<sup>th</sup>. But they broke through into 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, so sweetly heavy with that special haunting hot scent of wild thyme that marked the Italian autumn.

We again 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 which 'we' were going to launch on the enemy, 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. 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 tearless ones of the deepest sorrow you have known.

I knew that I wouldn't be with the guns much longer, 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, since I would be miles ahead of them. 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.

The Germans had just vacated Cava dei Tirreni and it was obvious (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, so to speak.

We put our four guns down, under the cover of night, in the bed of the valley, 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 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 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. 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 among the leaves, their smoke rolling flatly away, hugging the dew. Most of the first stuff 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 stone hut and put him face down. He had two deep holes in his back, behind the lungs. I held him in my arms. 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 my signaller 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, indeed in my whole life. 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 had known this. There was a wonderful formality between us that strangely reinforced the sense of a perfect, immediate understanding between us that needed only a nod or a word for a message of eyes that would have required whole sentences in the case of someone else. He was to accompany me on my F.O.O. missions, this was understood between us. Just a glance conveyed all, no need for 'orders'. This in your signaller is precious as gold. And to find your closest, most natural friend who understood you as you understood him quite as if you had hitherto spent all your life in his company.

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. You get so many inner commands in battle, namely in a world you have never so much as dreamed of before.

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.

It turned me into a soldier. I can't explain this. It made me determined to do well. Doing well meant that I would look after the four men detailed to me when I 'went out'. I vowed, with my closest of friends in my arms, not as a thought at all, but the vow simply took place, as I knew afterwards only---I silently and unawares vowed

that my four men would remain unharmed. And that was how it happened. You can make vows in battle in such a way that you have secured the future.

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 couldn't even fire the sodding things. To fire out of that hole you would need a vertical trajectory, your own shit would fall back on you. You have to be a madman to put artillery into the forward lines where Jerry can just look down on you but it was typical of superior officers (meaning those who were majors or more) etc. etc., in that routine grumble we called 'ticking'.

Afterwards there were boring hours. A death isn't forgotten. It becomes part of that strange assembly of the men who have gone and the men who are living and might at 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 came.

I knew the bare logistics of being an F.O.O—you take three or four men with you, including one or two signallers. Your radio equipment has to be with you at all times. This includes batteries and, in very rare cases of unusual proximity, a cable for direct wire-contact with the rear. Mostly you have no chance of recharging the batteries, so while you need to be in day and night contact with your command post back at the guns you have to be economical in radio use. Your firing orders sometimes have to be relayed far beyond your own command post in order to engage the guns of a whole brigade or division, and the reply has to come back down that hierarchy, so you need plenty of juice.

It was after the word Ready had been passed on to you from all the assembled waiting guns that your final order of Fire! could be given and then almost instantaneously you heard 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. The craters are 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 (namely, two divisions, if 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.

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 15<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadiers or a Hermann Göring division or the 44<sup>th</sup> 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 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 Rapedo 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, 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

### Farewell

Most of the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 youth 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 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! 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 from their 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 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 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. 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 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.

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 56<sup>th</sup>, 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 34<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 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 Americans just walked out of the line and went 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

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 20<sup>th</sup> (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 chose.

\* \* \*

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 hardest 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 biting 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 naïf, 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.

## 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.

These beaches had been invaded by the American Fifth Army some days before, on September 8 1943. And I was to join my division here, a British division in the American Fifth Army. It was an unexplained surprise to be in an American army but we accepted our sudden new surrogate identity as a promise of adventure. We sampled their food on the landing craft that brought us over the sea from the virgin white and yellow sands of the Algerian coast. The trip was smooth and unerring and we gasped at the turkey and jam they scandalously deposited side by side on our trays, without our ritual greens and gravy. This boat was clearly another world, a quieter one than ours (as belonging to great spaces perhaps). Who could have expected 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?

I had a long dreamily restful chat with one of the naval officers on the way over. He was from New

England and gazed at me with somewhat solicitous eyes. It was a new sort of conversation for me. My island speech suggested nothing like his born detachment, the way of seeing things from afar. My speech seemed to rush forwards and up and down according to the clamour of my emotions, while space and great distances had given him, little older than my own twenty years, an innately calm mind.

The American hush of the boat with its smooth, non-committal handling of a huge clement foreign basin, continued on that Salerno beach, much to our bewilderment.

We disembarked in a hush, were required to make no splashing noises as we waded to shore in the deepening twilight of a hot autumn day. We were cheerful enough. We felt under observation but I put that aside as an absurdity. The trees higher up, even the fig trees, cast quickly deepening shadows and if we turned and looked back at the sea we could comfort our eyes on the destroyers and landing craft at anchor, carefully watching over us. The hush perplexed us.

We reached those beaches, in war dialect, on D+8, that is to say on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, namely eight days after the landing. I had the first pip on my shoulder as a second lieutenant and would be twenty-one on the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month. And I had a photo of my girlfriend in my upper left pocket.

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 and pleasant. Then the moment we had shaken hands he turned away as if to say we don't need polite exchanges here.

The gunners were grimy, I noticed. I thought, All this hush business is part of a drill. After all, we were allowed to walk around, so clearly we weren't cheek by jowl with the enemy (that dread word). But it seemed odd to conduct exercises in a theatre of war. Of course the army was capable of anything, its motto being, If the men are idle drill 'em. And this enemy, the Germans, would soon be out of Italy. We had decided that in our stifling bivouacs in the Algerian desert close to Philippeville. What use was Italy to Hitler now—a narrow peninsula too cramped for fighting, with hundreds of miles of coast for allied invasion. But this was where we were wrong. Italy is mostly a very close terrain indeed—sudden hills and miniature chasms and rivers galore—providing a surprise every fifty yards. You only had to turn a corner. It was a terrain 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 the armies he could lay his hands on to fight the Russians in the east and the coming invasion by the allies in the west. Also Mussolini's regime in Italy had just collapsed, which meant that the Germans now faced a hostile population. Hitler might think better of engaging his men on three fronts.

remembered her mother's soft patient voice. She had steel-grey eyes but her softness overrode their steely determination. She piloted freight planes to Canada and back. I remembered the talk there had been between us—how fascism was going to suffer a fatal defeat. K.'s mother said fascism was the least bastion of capitalism, which this war would finally destroy. In fact, she said, she was going to settle in Canada when the war was over to witness at close quarters the fall of American capitalism. I didn't believe a word of it. Nor I think did her father. She and her mother saw us, the two males, as wishy-washy pinks while they were a rude and shameless red. My feeling was that communism would die by the sword because it lived by it.

I already had a nervous habit of feeling the photo as if trying to assure myself that my past had really happened. I remembered the joy we two had had—the endless laughter. It was a thing war couldn't eclipse. But it was already eclipsed. We had said good bye, a final and sealing one, on a railway station and now I needed this photo to be a lucky talisman for me. I didn't care about the self deception—it was deliberate, ardent.

The brigadier was saying, Jerry might try something tonight. Keep your wits about you. No sleep, understood?

In that dusk I must have struck anyone who cared to look at me as commendably calm (and next day I was told as much—by the Texans up the hill).

\* \* \*

I strolled back to my area where the fruit trees were, the last of the day's bright sky lighting my way. I began looking for somewhere to put my sleeping bag for the night. 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 rushing like an engineless plane crashing to earth, followed at once by a thunderous metallic crash near by, I thought perhaps this isn't a training camp after all. It isn't far behind the forward lines after all. As yet I couldn't tell the difference between the monster 88mm. shell, which tore a crater in the ground like a bomb from the air, and the small high-trajectory mortar-bomb that burst very few seconds after it was launched from close range (on the other side of that lane, in fact).

Another heavy shell came over and another. And had I been seasoned I might have thought that these were the opening sallies of an enemy attack. But even now I kept telling myself that of course some shells were to be expected in a back area.

The small mortar bombs were preceded by a loud thump when expelled from the cannon, followed almost at once by the quick confined crash of their landing. Thus they gave you no warning. You jumped into a ditch or threw yourself flat for the loud high

breathless shriek of the coming shell but the mortar's high trajectory and low speed of emission mean that the bomb seems to come from nowhere. And now these bombs began raining down, bringing changes in the air from warm to momentarily stifling. They provided my first practical lesson.

Then darkness became complete and there was a lull. I could at last hear silence that rightfully belonged to this beach and olive trees, an exchange of whispers, it seemed.

It was my first experience of Italy, a land at that time still pristine, hardly touched since medieval times, her slopes and copses and streams in secret close liaison with the sky, a liaison I was 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 I did at last know that this was no rest area. Oddly, it was the silence that convinced me, brought the truth. And as I dozed a certain nervousness gathered in me, a foreboding that made feathers inside, though I still clung drowsily to the thought that this war was an exercise, if a dangerous one.

The possibility of being trodden on by Germans in the night didn't even occur to me (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 a thick little purple pool, one of them on my brow. As for my new sleeping

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 woke up to the existence of us reinforcements and 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. This 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 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. 'Twenty-five pounder' meant a gun that sat between wheels with a long barrel like any other long-distance gun but was,

by comparison, light—it could be hitched to an armoured carrier quickly, whisked away from a threatened site with little ado. It made, on arrival at the enemy end, a shallow crater and only if you took the forward blast of its explosion at close quarters were you dead. The true deadliness of the twenty-five-pounder was that it could be fired not only in great numbers but simultaneously, across a wide front, creating not only dead but great panic among the living. Yet it was highly mobile. It could be loaded very quickly and thus send shells into the air in quick succession.

These guns operated in groups of four, called 'troops'. Each troop had its separate command, with two or three officers. There were two troops to a battery, and two batteries in a regiment, so that as a collected unit you were worth sixteen guns, which was formidable when you consider that there were two regiments in a division, the division being the family so to speak where we belonged, an independent unit that could function alone and could make a large hole in the enemy line.

So we thought of ourselves as 46 division, the sister of 56 division, which together made up the Tenth Corps. This corps could thus call up the fire of over sixty guns spread across quite a wide front, and capable of much disruption (to put the screaming and the death mildly, so to speak) but not a destruction comparable to that inflicted by bombers in the air or by the enemy's 88mm. shell.

Still sleepy, I wandered away from our command post up the hill to where Texan infantrymen huddled in their hastily dug slit trenches. 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 but it did to the Texans. They seemed surprised, watching me from below, as who wouldn't to witness a youth strolling about the forward lines with all six feet of him exposed. They told me, You British guys must have war in your blood, look at you, it's like you're on holiday. Charitably, they didn't tell me I was a bloody fool. They knew I was a new boy. Yet I had already, quite unawares, learned something. The evening before, I had seen men throw themselves to the ground when an 88mm. came over. So now, when one fell pretty close, I did the same, though it was still a kind of drill for me. Then I stood up again and the Texans went on gazing at me affably. I was glad to be thought a pre-packaged soldier and 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 that last unthinkable hell close to Cassino.

Hell is bound to happen in a close terrain like the Italian one. A sudden enemy machine-gun emplacement can spring up at your elbow, you find yourself exposed to a lone man whom you can't see but who can call up heavy fire on you. The peninsula south of Bologna is so cut across by rivers and terraces and mountains and lesser hills and hillocks that the defence of a carefully prepared line is

easy, while making a dent in that line is perpetual hazard.

So the Texan youths stared up at me, noticing that I threw myself down for the close ones and just ducked my head for swishes that denoted a safe trajectory. So wasn't it true what they said about me—that I had war in my blood? (They ought to have seen me a few weeks later scratching the earth with my fingernails, under such a rain of metal that only a miracle could have intervened, which it must have done).

From Captain H. I at last got a serious strategic picture of what was happening. Our division was in charge of Salerno the town, but the enemy was still in control of several roads leading down to the coast, where we were. If they managed to storm one of these roads in strength we would be pushed into the sea after being cut off from the rest of our division, just as the Texans on our flank would be cut off from theirs. In that case we would be without supplies of either ammunition or food (in that order of importance).

Had I been more experienced I would have grasped this easily the evening before when I waded onto that beach—you simply don't have twenty-five-pounder guns sitting among forward infantry unless you are in helter-skelter retreat or, as in our case, caught in a wedge or bottleneck. Shell-firing guns are never in the forward lines, that is nose to nose with the enemy. When they are it is almost the end. If I'd had just the slightest experience I would have seen that

we were a hopeless case—a glance at those guns sitting there with nothing but the sea to retreat to, this over eight days after the first landing, would have told me all.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier division was directly facing us, its job being to stop us thrusting to the north, that is to the road to Rome. We now know that the German commander Kesselring had hurried 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 whole of the Italian campaign. Nothing could have been cleverer. He saw he could make full strategic use of the close terrain, which could be defended economically but attacked only at great cost.

In other words this kind of country provided maximum concealed observation. It promised to make our advance deadly slow, with constant surprises from every corner. It meant that our forward lines could rarely be straight ones. A push in one place, if unaccompanied by a push of the same depth on your two flanks will get you into a wedge like the one at Salerno, if not surrounded.

And this was to become a typical situation for us.

Not that we were aware of any of this or were ever told about it in so many words. In a war you have to put two and two together yourself but since you are supplied with zero information that is very difficult.

solely. And that top brass (except for General Montgomery, in his brief encounter with the Italian campaign) never seemed to base their strategical thoughts on Hitler's intention to use the Italian peninsula as a high casualty zone for us.

Strategy is another name for intentions. Once you know what the enemy intention is you know all. Despite this, Hitler had his way, for the simple reason that nobody knew what his intention was, though it was as clear as a beacon shining in the sky.

\* \* \*

Our forward lines moved north of Salerno, leaving us gunners behind with our guns, that is some kilometres in the rear, where we belonged.

We felt happily forgotten. The days, like the Mediterranean, became balmy and sweet. We heard little but the faraway boom of other guns. The fleet made a peaceful sight in the bay, the air so heavy with the special haunting hot scent of thyme that I began to think that this peninsula war might have begun to peter out, as we had all generously promised each other it would.

We heard birds again (they are always silenced by battle). At night leaves stirred in the breeze that came from the sea to the mountains, in the characteristic Italian fashion, the cold sea air is drawn to the still warm mountains. And at dawn the now cold mountain air is drawn back to the already

sun-warmed 'sea. And so this silent and unobserved rhythm repeated itself, a breath as slow as the succession of light from dark.

One day a bombardier rushed into our command post and said, Bring bottles, mugs, anything you've got. An infantryman had found a huge 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 girlfriend's photo. I even showed it to Captain H., hoping that he saw her as my future wife, which might magically banish the utter impossibility of that. In the rosy haze of wine I told myself that believing the impossible was better than nix.

We moved up from the beach into a meadow high above it, cupped round with trees. It lay hushed in its own air. Through gaps in the trees we could watch the sea far below, its occasional tiny white-frothed waves making a twinkling silver ripple in the vast blue. I was so taken by this sight that I asked a young peasant (a *contadino* still living in the medieval mezzadria or shared-halves system) mostly by means of signs, Do you have this every day? and he nodded in the agreeable Italian way that denotes total non-understanding. I simply didn't know that a sea could be blue like that and the air so haunted with scents of pine and elm and beech, with the sky another blue, a blue so deep and domed and infinite, so close, so unassumingly true that I couldn't believe it was anything but magically false.

Up here, in their own silence, there were pebbly streams, virgin cool in the shade, winding through the woods. I bathed in one, standing naked in the middle. The water twisted and bubbled and chuckled round the stones. I came to the conclusion that after all war was an easy matter. I had seen photos of sturdy brown-faced soldiers in North Africa from the days of El Alamein and deduced from them a safe war in which machines did the work.

I strolled through the woods, read a book from my little library, joked with the bombardiers, chewed grass outside the command post, which was now in a barn. I watched the pigeons on the roof of that barn and the cows waiting by the entrance to be milked and the peasant's family coming and going. There was slush at the entrance and hot close wet-hay smells inside. And the occasional decisive stamping of a cow, shifting her great flanks, was a good-luck sign for me.

Of course such peace (lacking as it does even desultory intermittent shelling) betokens imminent attack. That big pervasive silence is easily recognised. It is the greatest achievement of war, a silence you will never experience again. All I knew was that there were plans for a barrage from our side. I didn't know how big the barrage was going to be. I had forgotten that the size of a barrage is commensurate with that of the battle timed to follow it. All I knew was that our guns were on standby, 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 our four guns and the first shift of men was standing to. It was almost dark when H. ordered through the Tannoy loudspeaker system, Take post. The troopers ran out to the guns. This was five minutes before the barrage was to begin. 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). 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 uses 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 the 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 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?

I was yet to learn that to be at the receiving end of a barrage like this one excludes exultation, changing tears of joy to tears of sorrow.

Killing somebody is remote from a soldier's mind. He simply defends himself. Only if the enemy is weak and passive does a soldier's mind turn, like the politician's, to atrocity. But faced by a strong enemy you quickly learn that the killing is reciprocal and the death in an enemy's last gaze is the same as death everywhere. Not a stunning

truth—but one that makes a soldier, is his baptism of fire.

I knew I wouldn't be with the guns much longer, that my real job was in the forward lines. I knew my song would change. Very shortly my role would be to guide these very shells to their destination. I would be at the spearhead of an attack. I would find myself in places where my own fire had fallen perhaps only moments ago. And from this new position I would direct further fire.

I would be in the forward lines but sometimes—but this I did not yet know, and it was never spoken of—I must be prepared to find myself beyond them, in enemy lines.

In a word I was to be a Forward Observation Officer or F.O.O., as we called him. Or, in the words of the army textbook, *The Eyes of the Army*.

And then these guns of mine and my command post would become, being well behind the lines, a rest and refuge for me. Their daily detonations—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 on Guy Fawkes night.

\* \* \*

We were ordered to move the guns forward to a town called Cava dei Tirreni. The move was to be made in separate columns so as to create surprise. This was precisely what it didn't do. Light as their

hard, knowing as they did that there were many battles ahead that would do their own cowing.

To get to the guns one took a winding path that couldn't be observed. Cava dei Tirreni (meaning the quarry or mine of the Tyrrhenian seas or eastern Mediterranean) 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.

The vine terraces where we put our guns had a greater beauty than they would in peace-time because, as I see only now, their silence was so war-deep, devoid of the domestic and street clatter of normal times. And of course this silence carried with it a foreboding which enhances even further the beauty. There were mossy statues and young trees. There were also a fountain and green garden benches where the women who tended the vines used to 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.

We were under observation so close that they must have been able to see the whites of our eyes. 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 among the leaves, their smoke rolling flatly away, hugging the dew. Most of the first ones dropped near the benches and statues. A splinter caught a young Italian woman. 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 the crashes came in clusters and the pungent smoke got into our lungs. One of the men shouted down at the woman Shut up! Shut up! in the illusion that she was attracting the fire. He threw himself down close to me and murmured, She's not hurt as bad as all that. But I think she was screaming at her first realisation that war killed and meant to do so.

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 cigarette 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 the cigarette so that it swelled up and fell with a plop to the cement floor. Then his head fell forward. And things were suddenly quiet and he was dead. My face puckered up against crying in that first compassion which is the true baptism of fire, you are crying for all the future ones, whom you will not cry for, as well as for this friendly creature who spoke to you not a moment before so that you still hear him and see his particular way of smiling. He was a man I trusted and he was to accompany me on my F.O.O. missions. We had agreed about that. Just a glance and we seemed to understand each other. No need for orders—he was

already there. This in your signaller is utterly vital.

A peasant woman in black stood by the hut door and moaned quietly to herself. The gunners trod about respectfully, thinking. We cursed Jerry who had done it because it 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 buggers. To fire out of that hole you would need a vertical trajectory, the shit would fall 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 becomes part of that strange assembly of dead men who have gone and live men who might any minute go.

We sat in the balcony area overlooking the atrium and I was asked to give a lecture. All because I let it drop that I had been on the set of a film called *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, which was shot at the Elstree studios. They wanted to know how a film was made. As all I remembered of that day was hanging about for just one scene, which was shot in a few inaudible moments, I had little to say. I would much rather have talked about the theatre, how my

mother and father had taken me and my two brothers to the working men's clubs when we were tiny. You saw the top comedians in those clubs, on their way up. In my mother's arms I began to know about timing and pace and projection, and my two older brothers, both of whom later worked in the theatre, saw to it that by the age of eight I had theatre in the blood. But these troopers wanted the big screen, the passive sanitised daydream.

I enjoyed strolling alone in Cava dei Tirreni's narrow lanes. Once 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, just 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? where would they start? where would they find the time to turn from battle? Those were my thoughts. What I didn't yet know was that the word 'stranger' in my sense was unknown to the Italian. All that couple wanted was to barter for cigarettes, bully beef, sugar. In exchange perhaps for eggs. Discreetly they might have suggested a girl.

It was a restless period for us. I was impatient to get my first assignment as F.O.O. over and done with. It would have been useful to get some information about this. But none came. It hadn't figured in the training either. Later I learned why—no instructors had experience of it, and the few officers who did were too high up in the command

hierarchy to lecture us. But the real truth was that you couldn't be trained for that constant of the F.O.O., the unexpected.

All I knew was the bare logistics—you took three or four men with you, and they included one or two signallers, and your radio equipment had to be with you at all times. This included batteries and cables. Mostly you would have no chance of recharging the batteries. You needed to be in day and night contact with your own command post and any of your firing orders that required more than your own four guns went up the command hierarchy and then, if approved, came down again.

The only thing you know as a novice is that you will have to observe the country carefully and consult your Intelligence map at all times.

It is also useful for you to know something about the enemy regiments you are facing—what kind of fighters they are and in what strength, whether they are the 15<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadiers or a Hermann Göring division or the 44<sup>th</sup> Austrian infantry (the most amiable of opponents).

Such a man can be a treasure for the infantry since he carried about with him an invisible armour shield. The tendency of infantry officers was therefore to treat him with kid gloves if he was good and turn their backs on 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 be a firing programme lasting a whole night. You communicate this programme with its timetable and

intervals by radio to your own command post, having already given your exact map reference in code.

Above all I looked forward to acting alone, to having the power of lone decision, followed and trusted for my decisions or deservedly thrown away.

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 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.

The French long ago had a more precise word for the F.O.O. and that was *le sentinél 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 the wrong place, which happened to me more than once.

\*

\*

\*

We entered Naples on October 1 1943, namely three weeks after the Salerno landing. At last we had a place where we could go for short leaves, even for half a day. There were whores galore and 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 had been death. There was a favourite apocryphal story that the kids of Naples, in their 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 proprietess 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 proprietess was a large young body 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 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, 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 times and raise the Italian's voice and give him a special easy walk.

A few days later 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 the harbour water, 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 as F.O.O. 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.

# Aristotle — revelation x natural reason

It was always felt that the two  
contradicted each other in the sense of  
being different truths. For naturally,  
natural reason couldn't understand revelation,  
it could find no ground for its existence —  
you can't <sup>have</sup> ~~feel~~ a revelation, see it, hear it.  
This was argued in a discussion between

Abbot and Bernard — . 15

regard of — certain letters, between

St Thomas Aquinas and Sigis

of Brabant: Thomas argued that the  
the two were different but were

incomparable languages: they differ

essential diff. kinds of truths. There

was a man who said now the ~~of~~ <sup>any</sup>

the truth to keep the Church

together while also — talking it. But —

→ ...

\* Thus the world be as at, ~~as~~ as  
the situation in music. By emanate self for  
a series of visions the world is transforming.

So, his vision had to be adjusted by the  
Church to make its doctrine. The  
fixed this it became.

Why did we say, Martin and  
Christian, ~~with~~ the his vision of  
revelation? Because it is very important to  
a religion to keep its prophecies safe  
and protected, in the sense that revelation  
must be seen to be emanating from his  
work. There is to be it is of the  
faithful - ~~the~~ revelation can only  
come from the prophet.

For find the civil the slightest  
division between revelation & natural man.

The distance is entirely accepted. It  
is one of the deepest formal principles  
within the way we are thinking process the  
world, be all new science, and revelation  
~~any~~ about visions.

But this is no exclusion of vision ~~is~~ is vision at \*  
visions are accepted, unless the heart is not there

①

Space, time & reality sound important but they are fundamentally empty. They are like the self: they cannot be detected, accessed, visualized in any way let alone touched, seen, heard. And they are so because they need not <sup>be a self</sup> be a self. The self <sup>is a self</sup> ~~is a self~~ is a situation in order to feel itself. At the time, it never occupies a place in it — the study is of an event. In space it never occupies it — the study, yet, will be <sup>an experience</sup> an event. And as to reality, ~~the is a word~~ in other words, space, time & reality or aspects of the self, they ~~are~~ are a experience = the study of them will lead you back to the self and never to the 'rejection'.

moves is a created  
 world - our moves' is  
 in time & in space -  
 well well 1/4 1/4 & the relief will  
 as well the better  
 2

Space Time & relief aspects  
 of the self: they mean <sup>human</sup> experience,  
~~of a world outside see from~~  
~~side~~ Karl had problems with  
 being able space & time a 'the  
 absolute conditions' all (~~human~~)  
 precept! He was the conditions  
 of all animal precept; however,  
 is dead; the precept of the  
 printed mind because the human =  
 by or simply useful words to  
 describe the ~~secondary~~ human  
 world, its <sup>special</sup> experience of life the

shells were, our guns still made a hell of a racket getting hitched up and set down again. The Germans had just vacated Cava dei Tirreni and was obvious (but not for us) that they had quickly taken up positions with a perfect view of the northern outskirts of our town, close to our guns. In fact they were within spitting distance.

Captain H., under cover of night, put our four guns down in a small valley flanked with steep vine terraces, a short walk from the town. We did the unhitching as quietly as possible. Then, after putting out sentries, we walked stealthily back into Cava. We had taken over a big house on the northern side. The idea in war is that you walk into any house of your choosing. Its owners or squatters make a quick bunk or retire to a deep cellar. There is no unfriendliness about it because civilians have little interest in being caught in crossfire. If you move in fast it means, for them, you will probably get out fast too.

This house had an atrium and a balcony looking down on it, and this balcony was really a large saloon beneath yet another storey. It was here the men billeted down. I shared a tiny nursery room with another junior officer who had freckles and surprised eyes. We took it in turns to sleep in a child's cot, relieving each other every few hours for guard duty at the guns. Once I came in to wake him and as I was doing so I fell asleep slumped over him and we only woke up at dawn. We got some very sharp words from above but senior officers rarely came down on us

These small sensible arguments crowded into my mind to explain the hush that lay over Salerno.

I saw corpses in the distance. They were close to the wash of the waves. Exactly as they had fallen. They were ours. I told myself that out of the thousands of men that had disembarked on D-day these dead were the unlucky exception.

As darkness gathered I walked up the sloping beach to where the trees began. I could see a large group of men standing together apparently silent. I was curious. As I came nearer I saw that a brigadier was talking to them in a low voice. I could see the red tabs on his shoulders. I thought it remarkable that a brigadier should be addressing Other Ranks man to man. That was a lieutenant's or a captain's job, a major's at most. At this point I became convinced that this was a training camp well enough behind the lines to allow for manoeuvres.

The Brigadier was saying in his careful murmur, almost a whisper—we had to gather closer to hear him—Jerry's just behind me, on the other side of the road (a lane between trees ran a few feet behind him). He said, You're going to stop him corssing 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 left pocket, over the heart. She was Viennese, the daughter of a woman who had led a communist revolution in eastern Europe and been released from prison by it. I

All we knew was that we were trying to advance up a very narrow peninsula. Therein lay our principal delusion. One man was planning was planning every moment of our military lives and he was General Kesselring on the other side. This wily man was even at this moment (unknown to us of course) ordering his army to make a teasingly slow 'disengagement', as he teasingly called it, from the Salerno area to the difficult river Volturno north of Naples. So we weren't pushed into the sea purely by his choice.

He had even set the timetable for our attack on that turbulent river. He told his troops to hold it until mid-October.

That plan was why, on this my first day on the beach, the mortar-bombs and shells that came over were not followed up with an attack. For that reason alone I hadn't woken up under the heel of a German boot.

We had our own fairy-tale to cover these events. We thought it was our naval gunfire and nearly two thousand air sorties that had done the trick. It wasn't exactly misinformation, since it didn't come from higher up, but simply how we chose to see it. Just as the German youths opposite us believed the fairy tale that they never retreated but voluntarily 'disengaged', so we believed that we were pushing them remorselessly towards the gates of Rome.

Perhaps our ignorance (really sublime innocence) was why our casualties were so hair-raisingly high. The prevailing wisdom was that the whereabouts and intentions of the enemy concerned top army command

**FORWARD TO THE DEATH**

**© MAURICE ROWDON 2003**

new first print-out  
march 2010

4

## Apparition

**A**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 mountain 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

## 1

*Figs*

**W**e 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.

These beaches had been invaded by the American Fifth Army some days before, on September 8 1943. And I was to join my division here, a British division in the American Fifth Army. It was an unexplained surprise to be in an American army but we accepted our new identity as a promise of adventure.

We sampled their food on the two-day journey that brought us from the virgin white and yellow sands of the Algerian coast. The trip was smooth and unerring and we gasped at the turkey and jam they scandalously deposited side by side on our trays, without our ritual greens and gravy. This boat was clearly another world, a quieter one than ours (as belonging to great spaces perhaps). 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?

Not that the Fifth Army was really American. It was just what we called it, no doubt because its commander Mark Clark was American. Officially it was the Allied Fifth Army, meaning that its troops came from all over the world.

I had a long dreamily restful chat with one of the naval officers. He was from New England and it was a new sort of conversation for me. My speech seemed to rush forwards and up and down compared with his. Space and great distances had given him, little older than my own twenty years, a calm mind.

The hush of that landing craft, its smooth, non-committal handling of a huge clement foreign Basin, drew us to those strangely silent Salerno sands, much as if the hush of the boat had chosen to come ashore.

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. We were cheerful enough. We felt under observation but I put that aside as an absurdity. The trees

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?

Not that the Fifth Army was really American. It was just what we called it, no doubt because its commander Mark Clark was American. Officially it was the Allied Fifth Army, meaning that its troops came from all over the world.

I had a long dreamily restful chat with one of the naval officers. He was from New England and it was a new sort of conversation for me. My speech seemed to rush forwards and up and down compared with his. Space and great distances had given him, little older than my own twenty years, a calm mind.

The hush of that landing craft, its smooth, non-committal handling of a huge clement foreign Basin, drew us to those strangely silent Salerno sands, much as if the hush of the boat had chosen to come ashore.

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. We were cheerful enough. We felt under observation but I put that aside as an absurdity. The trees

higher up, even the fig trees, cast quickly deepening shadows and if we turned and looked back at the sea we could comfort our eyes on the destroyers and landing craft at anchor, carefully watching over us. Yet the hush did perplex us.

We reached those beaches, in war dialect, on D+8, that is to say on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, namely eight days after the landing. I had the first pip on my shoulder as a second lieutenant and would be twenty-one on the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month. And I had a photo of my girlfriend in my upper left pocket.

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 and pleasant. Then the moment we had shaken hands he turned away as if to say we don't need polite exchanges here.

The gunners were grimy, I noticed. I thought, All this hush business is part of a military exercise. After all, we were allowed to walk around, so clearly we weren't cheek by jowl with the enemy (that dread word). But it seemed odd to conduct exercises in a theatre of war. Of course the army was capable of anything, its motto being, If the men get

bored organise a manoeuvre. And in any case, this enemy, the Germans, would soon be out of Italy. We all that. We'd decided it in our stifling bivouacs in the Algerian desert close to Philippeville. What use was Italy to Hitler now—a narrow peninsula too cramped for fighting, with hundreds of miles of coast for allied invasion?

But this was where we were wrong. Italy is mostly 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 were observed. It was a terrain 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 the armies he could lay his hands on to fight the Russians in the east and the coming Normandy invasion by the allies in the west. Also Mussolini's regime in Italy had just collapsed, which meant that the Germans here risked facing a hostile population. Hitler might think twice about engaging his men on three fronts.

These small sensible and mostly mistaken arguments crowded into my mind 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 told myself that out of the thousands of men that had disembarked on D-day these, dead, safely distant from us, were the unlucky exception.

As darkness gathered I walked up the sloping beach to where the trees began. I could see a large group of men standing together apparently silent. I was curious. As I came nearer I noticed that a Brigadier was at their centre, addressing them. He was talking in a low voice. I could see the red tabs on his shoulders. I thought it remarkable that a brigadier should be addressing Other Ranks man to man. That was a lieutenant's or a captain's job, a major's at most. At this point I became convinced that this was a training camp well enough behind the lines to allow for manoeuvres.

The Brigadier was saying in his careful murmur, almost a whisper (we had to gather closer to hear him) Jerry's just at the back here, on the other side

of the road (a lane between trees ran a few feet behind him). He said, You're going to stop him 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 left pocket, over the heart. She was Viennese, the daughter of a woman who had led a communist revolution in eastern Europe and been released from prison by it. I remembered her 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 my past had really happened. I remembered the joy we two had had—the endless laughter. It was a thing war couldn't eclipse. But it was already eclipsed. We had said good bye, a final and sealing one, on a railway station. She said something incomprehensible to me—'Being calm isn't everything'. And now I needed this photo to be a lucky talisman for me. I didn't care

about the self-deception. And I might soon feel grateful for that calm I was supposed to have.

I felt bolshie all of a sudden, in the lonely manner of the reinforcement who has not yet joined his crowd. I asked myself what am I doing in a war anyway? I hadn't wanted it. All we ever knew about it was that it was suddenly on. We just found ourselves in it. A bolt from the blue. Not a by your leave or explanation. It didn't sound right even when it was announced. Chamberlain's voice wobbled on the radio as if even he was puzzled.

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

And I realised before I spoke that I really didn't know, I hadn't made my mind up. So when I said Yes I was surprised at myself---as if it wasn't my own decision.

The moment I said it I was asking myself an impotent Why? And the answer came swiftly, unambiguously: I'm going into this war because of the Nazi concentration camps, because---as a Gentile--- I'm horrified to see the Jewish civilization in Europe about to be extinguished. It was this one

thing that made the war different from all the others. And I think that was in everyone else's mind too---that this war unlike all the others had a justification.

What we didn't see was that in fact the Jewish civilization in Europe had already been sacrificed. The declaration of war simply trapped the Jews inside Hitler's regime, and all over Europe, for six long years.

I strolled back to my area where the fruit trees were, the last of the day's bright sky lighting my way. I began looking for somewhere to put my sleeping bag for the night. 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 rushing like an engineless plane crashing to earth, followed at once by a thunderous metallic crash near by, I thought perhaps this isn't a training camp after all, we weren't far behind the forward lines after all.

As yet I couldn't tell the difference between the monster 88mm. shell, which tore a crater in the

# **FORWARD TO THE DEATH**

**© MAURICE ROWDON 2004**

Subj: FW: RIGHTS REVERSION/MEMBERSHIP  
Date: 2/27/2004 14:26:08 PM GMT Standard Time  
From: JHodder@societyofauthors.org (Jo Hodder)  
Reply-to: JHodder@societyofauthors.org  
To: Rowdoxy@aol.com

67) HAMS PRESS  
WAR STORIES WW2  
Now Read Elsevier Group

Dear Mr Rowdon

Thank you for your email of 27 February.

If you have put Random House on notice of reversion of your rights and that date has lapsed then your rights have reverted and you are free to handle any available rights yourself. Saying that some secondary publishers insist on formal confirmation before they sign a deal. This can be sensible as you can request details of any sub-licensed deals (as you may know these contracts do not revert with the head contract) that have been made.

The termination clause in your contract dictates how and when your rights revert - so I am a little perplexed as to what procedure you are referring to. Random House cannot impose new contract terms.

If you would like to reply with a note of the titles, the termination clauses you signed and the date of your letters, I will be happy to write to Cara Jones (who we have found to be very efficient in the past).

Yours sincerely  
Jo Hodder

Cara Jones

always contact your account  
When I come to revert rights  
Weird old

—Original Message—  
From: Alison Watson [mailto:info@societyofauthors.org]  
Sent: 27 February 2004 13:34  
To: Jo Hodder  
Subject: Fw: RIGHTS REVERSION/MEMBERSHIP

Anysee this is one title  
among the three is a  
Book Club pick.

Hi  
I've requested a card for him (which he should get in a few weeks) and he is a full member, but could you offer him some further advice?

This is I know I wrote the  
book of this matter. I think  
could there be any sub-licensing? I think  
have?

Thanks  
A  
— Original Message —  
From: <>  
To: <info@societyofauthors.org>  
Sent: Friday, February 27, 2004 1:24 PM  
Subject: RE: RIGHTS REVERSION/MEMBERSHIP

> Membership ref. 00038994  
>  
> I have found your softly, softly advice on rights reversion rather  
> unavailing. I accepted Random House's assurance that the reversion of

P.11

Grime 22 Amey  
Grime 23 Lost Books

70 True Stories of the Second WW

Odham Press Ltd

£5 price Lost Books

orders@lostbooks.net

Tel: 01760 725260

Andrew Franklin

0207 404 3001

rights on two  
> books of mine would take six months. At the end of six months, on 15th  
Jan., I  
> sent another signed-delivery letter. In the lack of response to this I  
then spoke  
> with the contracts dept. involved and received every assurance that the  
> matter was receiving attention. I put two more calls in, the last a couple  
of weeks  
> ago, and was assured that the thing was virtually in the post. All  
> conversations conducted not just affably but with ripples of mirth.  
> Since then Random House has changed its procedures (I am seeking reversion  
on  
> a third book with a different imprint within this conglomerate) and have  
put  
> together a rights reversion recording which sounds at the beginning like a  
> croak (as in 'he croaked'). I've derived a laugh or two over all this and  
> nowadays this is always a plus.  
> Was laughter really the meaning of your softly, softly advice?  
> Let me bolder--was even my membership of the Society of Authors mirthfully  
> intended? I have before me a Temporary Membership Card and wonder what I  
have to  
> do, short of giving you the money all over again, to become a real member.  
Or  
> is this (I am already laughing) an extension of your softly, softly  
policy?  
> With best wishes Maurice Rowdon.  
>  
>  
>

----- Headers -----

Return-Path: <JHodder@societyofauthors.org>  
Received: from rly-xj03.mx.aol.com (rly-xj03.mail.aol.com [172.20.116.40]) by air-xj01.mail.aol.com (v98.10) with ESMTP id MAILINXJ13-513403f53742b6; Fri, 27 Feb 2004 09:26:08 -0500  
Received: from titania.nsmi.net (titania.nsmi.net [62.216.64.9]) by rly-xj03.mx.aol.com (v98.5) with ESMTP id MAILRELAYINXJ39-513403f53742b6; Fri, 27 Feb 2004 09:25:57 -0500  
Received: from societyofauthors (host217-45-139-4.in-addr.btopenworld.com [217.45.139.4])  
(authenticated bits=0)  
by titania.nsmi.net (8.12.3/8.12.3/Debian-6.6) with ESMTP id i1REPTsX016621  
for <Rowdoxy@aol.com>; Fri, 27 Feb 2004 14:25:56 GMT  
Received: from Jo [172.16.100.122] by societyofauthors.org [172.16.100.1]  
with SMTP (MDaemon.v3.5.4.R)  
for <Rowdoxy@aol.com>; Fri, 27 Feb 2004 14:15:30 +0000  
Reply-To: <JHodder@societyofauthors.org>  
From: "Jo Hodder" <JHodder@societyofauthors.org>  
To: <Rowdoxy@aol.com>  
Subject: FW: RIGHTS REVERSION/MEMBERSHIP  
Date: Fri, 27 Feb 2004 14:30:57 -0000  
Message-ID: <000201c3fd3e\$50ec29c0\$7a6410ac@SOA.local>  
MIME-Version: 1.0  
Content-Type: text/plain;  
charset="iso-8859-1"  
Content-Transfer-Encoding: 7bit  
X-Priority: 3 (Normal)

X-MSMail-Priority: Normal  
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook CWS, Build 9.0.2416 (9.0.2911.0)  
Importance: Normal  
X-MimeOLE: Produced By Microsoft MimeOLE V6.00.2800.1165  
X-MDRemoteIP: 172.16.100.122  
X-Return-Path: JHodder@societyofauthors.org  
X-MDAemon-Deliver-To: Rowdoxy@aol.com  
X-AOL-IP: 62.216.64.9  
X-AOL-SCOLL-SCORE: 0:XXX:XX  
X-AOL-SCOLL-URL\_COUNT: 0

~~was written~~ the 27<sup>th</sup> in.

[A] Please hold a comment +  
Case at C & W. The mention of possible  
sub-licensed deal is not it; as  
I found next of the C & W had made  
a deal + Odhams Press, the hip mag,  
people of the 1950s. Some copies can  
be traced to Ameyn or search  
for me. MA of say Car is efficient  
to let me write the this + I will  
do. I will give me the ~~book~~  
with ~~book~~ on this. So I'd like  
to take a nice check at ~~of you~~  
coming in Friday. I don't know  
why ~~it~~ will be  
necessary.  
I mentioned Trade House because  
it calls it a third work - this +

Henneman - He left a message  
called me from the  
details of how to get the records  
& since the 1 has been referred to  
reversing gets recorded in the  
and promise will get back to you  
in detail ~~later~~

~~Part of what~~  
to see the time span is  
two years of me know copies of  
the report which, App and there  
from 3 months and handled  
of agents, while the subsequent  
men.

MIME-Version: 1.0  
Content-Type: text/plain;  
charset="US-ASCII"  
Content-Transfer-Encoding: quoted-printable  
Subject: RE: F.O.O.  
Date: Wed, 25 Feb 2004 18:37:33 -0000  
Message-ID: <6ABF02694820E146AEF8B320CF9174C1E4D218@qsmail.faberqs.faber.co.uk>  
X-MS-Has-Attach:  
X-MS-TNEF-Correlator:  
Thread-Topic: F.O.O.  
Thread-Index: AcP2/V74CepoFs3GSUyHr/QYcXnWvADODXPw  
From: "Julian Loose" <julianl@faber.co.uk>  
To: <Rowdoxy@aol.com>  
X-AOL-IP: 212.125.75.4  
X-AOL-SCOLL-SCORE: 0:XX:XX  
X-AOL-SCOLL-URL\_COUNT: 0

found many bridges and tie-ins  
lacks.

Structure tips do a total work -  
~~sometimes it is said the work~~

~~However the battle scenes  
mean the help the work and it  
is difficult to see the there are it  
of the last road they~~

I was a little surprised as you find it OK  
I have since revised the whole script and

[A] The first tip I have to say is  
the how deep I have always appreciated  
of dedication to the work,  
and persistence and speed  
tenacity and somewhat patience will.  
and I appreciate & remember it still

~~I imagine the purpose of a script  
is to the way to be  
+ I have to say, have a purpose~~

A collection of class lectures & explanatory  
texts of students of Raja Yoga Allen  
in Univ. 1963

Raja Yoga ananya in 1924

Patanjali

www.Columbiaground.ca

It is not + 2 editions  
of the work.

Had I ever guessed that some  
therapist

I no email ~~into~~ a hole of the blue -  
I ~~had~~ began to feel this was the case  
some time back. A Patanjali I looked up the  
second version. However the better than  
edited the whole script of it. ~~It is not~~  
Then it is + pub. of the

I also remember the email I got for ...

Dear Julian, Your email wasn't a bolt from the blue—I began to have a feeling of implosion, so to speak, a couple of weeks ago. But the first thing I want to say is how deeply I have always appreciated your dedication to the book, your tenacity and persistence and speed, and I appreciate and remember it still. Publishing is surely the strangest business in existence. What I take from your letter is that two editors at Faber espoused my book and the rest isn't truthfully my business. I think enthusiasm can sometimes evoke the opposite, as a natural process—try earnestly to unify and you set off disunity etc etc. One could go on trying to analyse this kind of thing but this is the business we are in—a certifiable element is always there, wandering loose and unexplained. Julian, I will gratefully take up any offer of help you feel might be useful for me. We must surely meet, this time on me. We may even permit ourselves to laugh. With my best wishes MR

Odham

→ I know you understand the  
@ - W did a deal on the other books of

The stranger - existence.

know.  
to H - actual deal + the foreword  
Maggie only?  
the time.

www.constabletrivium.com

Magna.co.uk

0208 636 9200

Dear Dr Hodder,

Thank you for your letter of 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. (A)

My approval to Cass Jones on 2  
books, dated ... I have no

entireties of these ~~at that time~~ but I  
assume for Cass' says that all was  
clear & ready to be signed (I

this = signature = by Cass) & that  
the version was a simple routine one.  
Hold - a bit, I'd use first he some  
more time, & if not, entire is

hope I will ~~be back to you~~

grateful for a letter to if ~~it~~

not write to me. Let y know, →

A K Henricson,

198      book &

by an agent, while the mes & bus,  
= final case

this was a  
I think handled

# The Society of Authors

84 Drayton Gardens, London SW10 9SB

Maurice Rowdon  
44 Brookwood Road  
London  
SW18 5BY

27 February 2004

Dear Mr Rowdon

As you may know, the Society of Authors' website ([www.societyofauthors.org](http://www.societyofauthors.org)) has recently been revamped. As part of its 'facelift', it now offers an updated online database of members, which can be accessed by anybody searching for a particular author.

Whilst at the time of your election to the Society this section of our website was still undergoing major work, I am delighted to say that this has now been completed. I would therefore like to offer you the opportunity to be listed on our online database, and enclose the appropriate form for you to fill in. Please note that listing is entirely optional, and you are under no obligation of returning the form; however, no details will appear if the form is not returned.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me either by email ([NVitamore@societyofauthors.org](mailto:NVitamore@societyofauthors.org)) or by telephone on 020 7373 6642.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely



Nicoletta Vitamore  
Website Manager

tel 020 7373 6642  
fax 020 7373 5768  
email [info@societyofauthors.org](mailto:info@societyofauthors.org)  
website [www.societyofauthors.org](http://www.societyofauthors.org)

President Baroness James of Holland Park OBE  
Chairman Antony Beevor  
General Secretary Mark Le Fanu

2 books Hellblome  
of Sins } Chatter

1956 Perimeter West Heinemann

All the categories mixed with refer to books  
published, and in the case of drama/plays to  
plays I have produced. <sup>The</sup> Mind, body, ~~and~~  
spirit <sup>reference is</sup> ~~refer~~ to <sup>the</sup> breath therapy 1981-90 in  
~~N. Calif. and~~ 1981-90 N. California,  
~~and~~ afterwards in the med. director's unit at  
Hale Clinic, Wash. D.C. ~~The unit was~~  
~~integrated into a category - 1981-90~~  
~~a by working - worked. a fellowship goldmine~~

Marginal —

The events in POSTAR's file —  
Harriet etc.

2.

It was a perfect idea in the run-up to the Iraq war was waged by the USA and Britain. There were various ~~official, suppressed~~ ~~and~~ ~~White House~~ ~~government~~ explanations of why war against Saddam Hussein was ~~needed~~ 'justified'. These included diddled lethal weapons (WMD!) of mass destruction he was supposed to have - & the war, officials, ~~proving~~ that he had them. There was no proof. Then the - Rumsfeld - came out, as the accusation came - that the 2 governments had lied - that is we ripp the 9/11 shod news lyll on Saddam. He is, Leuchter did not would be a ~~the~~ salutary statement for as Bush would the took notice of extreme actions (Iraqis said ~~to~~ to heed Saddam's)....

But it was obvious for the beginning. He was was felt to be needed. And the lies were ~~latched~~ latched. And the electorate weren't 100% committed. As to the WW2, there was a sense - a truth & fatal evidence - and so any lie could be aired and it be true (of late generations too) a gospel-white truth.

The used deduction of now —  
used a totaly false — printed —  
and I wish express to know the  
Command —

By the deduction of ~~the~~ that  
with had been supplied the — the  
print. Because of the date,  
that were, I just put, the  
Serial this.

~~The fatherman who was planning all  
us movements - where, & how long, with the  
armies - namely General Kenelby was not  
really fully in charge of the Italian question~~

The Gen chief until the end of  
the war. (21)

~~being criticized with appreciation his 'disengage-  
ment' tactics, and how early they were to the enemy,  
but not just his 'skill' change but gave him~~

half  
chap

It was the beginning of the way to the

Americ had one goal for the  
production of its hands to get

strategic Britain not of its hole

the  
all  
of Koubou's  
revenue  
any -  
N. Africa

~~at and where the way to~~  
itself to a political fairy

title to describe a war-  
dual between Roosevelt &

Churchill the closed the war

tells but it is being

the work has ~~started~~ →

— you were ~~not~~ part of the  
debt — not been a case of  
the most ~~likely~~ <sup>likely</sup> ~~people~~  
& necessary ~~article~~ <sup>article</sup> .

---

1917

~~to the whole of the~~

~~Close terrain make defence simple and cheap,  
attacks complicated and costly. For instance, <sup>two</sup> two divisions,  
~~the~~ the British were the 5th Army ~~plus~~ plus  
the 7th Armoured division and an armoured brigade, were  
up against at most ~~for~~ four battalions of the German  
1st Army. ~~They~~ ~~did~~ ~~it~~ ~~in~~ ~~11~~ ~~days~~ ~~until~~  
September 26<sup>th</sup> ~~to~~ ~~get~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~line~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~  
the Salerno position~~

NOTE

as if war was  
a cutting or  
bleed,

we  
demerit of it and we are financed, worried by it,  
and any step and truth we take depletes the world,

It was a documented step too far. ~~Peace~~  
~~never returned~~ ~~things I have seen after the~~ ~~Peace~~  
~~means the weighty mind of subjects after the~~  
~~fell and people suggest order, means the sense~~  
~~of an order at the bottom of nothing, and you have~~  
~~lost the progress we since, vital to the~~  
~~the spirit and war and so it has been this state~~  
~~disorder within them, after the way you were~~  
~~happy life and enjoying it, the decision was~~  
~~the peace disrupted, it being to be made~~  
~~again, the world was too far to be~~  
~~disrupted in all its parts, people stopped~~  
~~looking outside~~ If peace is a sense of order at the  
bottom of nothing, ~~then it never returned~~ ~~and that is~~ ~~and that is~~  
then it never returned ~~of the way~~ ~~and that is~~  
disorder ~~is~~ ~~as the~~ theme of life took its place.

~~until the very idea of war~~ as if war had become  
the very germ of life, rendering itself no longer  
necessary. By such opposite life changes perhaps.

at last. There are strange opposites, but the  
the human, of all the animals, is the most  
strange. Governments began to come themselves  
stronger a weak strip according to their  
power of lethality. War settled in, do to  
speech, and ~~destruction~~ = the steel →

~~Again it is like ~~the~~ ~~same~~~~

→ the lives of the millions who  
demonstrate, with all the good  
will in the world, against it are  
financed and sustained by it.

It is like ~~the~~ ~~same~~ ~~thing~~  
they are sneering at. The words,  
now ..

And a moment of life passes  
with this its toll in ~~the~~  
on ~~the~~ ~~ground~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~world~~  
the world.

Law. Byzantium ~~excerpt~~ insert

~~So who was the creature who had gone to war - decided to do so - sat in the little Oxford room facing a softly spoken man on the other side of the desk who asked whether he was willing to join His Majesty's forces? The creature had no idea - the war was a way of defending Britain, since after all mankind needs attacks - and I didn't think a war so long after the first 1914-18 disaster was necessary. Yet I said yes. Why? Because, solely, of the love~~

~~So who was the man who had decided to go to war - agreed, in a little Oxford room facing a softly spoken man on the other side of a desk in a tiny Oxford room who was asking him, willing to join His Majesty's forces!~~

Who had happened to the boy who had looked up at the sky over London and watched a thousand German bombers, tiny tiny silver-glittering fish in formation, one wave after another, on their way to bomb the docks of a sunny Saturday afternoon? The ~~an~~ all-~~all~~ guns on the ground were firing like mad but their shells came no closer than the

On the Monday following my father went to work as usual - he was a dockers' clerk - and found the docks condemned. It is no longer existed. But he did. And <sup>had</sup> Hitler was decided to bomb - a Saturday afternoon ~~he would have been dead, vital date.~~ ~~He came home at once and said, well, that's my job gone. But it was over and the~~ ~~The C. B. company, the food ~~store~~ is perfect and retailers (Mrs. & Stockwell, had guaranteed his work of life. At the age of 16 he had - got on the job of - Justice, close to home too.~~

And I think like that. I felt sure the Hitler made the decision in order to spare life. And this is the means, for us, that he was still negotiating for peace with Britain. We all knew - or hoped - the peace negotiations had been going on. We knew - or felt we knew - that the British declaration of war on Sept 3 1939 - was followed by six months of no war at all. The American press called it the Phony War.

I remember the ~~fact~~ evening nation of Chamberlain's broadcast, saying that war had been declared. It didn't see it as a war, or a necessity. ~~It was a certain declaration. It was~~

(www) theatre producer

Centroline Productions

Produce Jenny King

Gen. manager Janet Powell.

Trafford Publishing &  
Proprietors.

as ETA from

Atlanta | Delta 10-01K

Gatwick | 11-10 a.m. Monday

or bodily injury and for baggage loss, delay or damage. However, in the event of an accident resulting in the death or injury of a passenger whilst on a flight operated by Ryanair or a European Community air carrier, the amount of damages payable is not subject to any financial limit unless the carrier concerned can prove that the damage was wholly or partially due to the negligence of the deceased or injured passenger. For damages in excess of 100,000 Special Drawing Rights (approx €140,000) Ryanair or such European community air carrier may be exonerated if it can prove that it and its agents had taken all necessary measures to avoid the damage or that it was impossible for it or them to take such measures. In addition, in cases of death or bodily injury, Ryanair and other European Community air carriers will make prompt advance payments to the person entitled to compensation, if required to meet immediate economic needs, in proportion to the hardship suffered and not less than 15,000 Special Drawing Rights (approx. €21,000) in the event of death.

----- Headers -----

Return-Path: <itinerary@ryanair.com>  
Received: from rly-xi02.mx.aol.com (rly-xi02.mail.aol.com [172.20.116.7]) by air-xi03.mail.aol.com (v95.13) with ESMTP id MAILINX134-4c73f6decf8151; Sun, 21 Sep 2003 14:25:29 -0400  
Received: from relay02.mail.esat.net (relay02.mail.esat.net [192.111.39.21]) by rly-xi02.mx.aol.com (v95.1) with ESMTP id MAILRELAYINX123-4c73f6decf8151; Sun, 21 Sep 2003 14:24:56 -0400  
Received: from (imail) [193.120.147.34]  
by relay02.mail.esat.net with esmtp  
id 1A18tD-0006dS-00; Sun, 21 Sep 2003 19:24:55 +0100  
Received: from europe1.openres.openskies [10.60.1.1] by imail with ESMTP  
(SMTPD32-6.06) id ACEE337F00DC; Sun, 21 Sep 2003 19:24:46 +0100  
Message-Id: <ept25008.filés.ryanair@europe1.openres.openskies>  
Date: Sun, 21 Sep 2003 19:25:17 +0100  
Mailer: MAIL [Version: A.01.77]  
From: itinerary@ryanair.com  
To: rowdoxy@aol.com  
Subject: Travel Itinerary  
X-AOL-IP: 192.111.39.21  
X-AOL-SCOLL-SCORE: 0:XXX:XX  
X-AOL-SCOLL-URL\_COUNT: 0

001 (619) 226 8655

Blaine Hellingson



Ende could follow in the

- however and it's not the subject may  
come on top of the. I also would be  
clear on another aspect - I am in  
in - despite the duration of a major  
pulling house. Try and to get  
all the number tie-ups with  
file - before going to trial. And  
I have heard - better to words,  
~~the only I am trying to find~~  
- and would not be a call my  
eyes all in one booklet.

~~FOO~~ This work is <sup>classification</sup>  
and - by - want access of little,  
~~of the FOO~~

Intentional - has of these  
we examined use file titles.  
new design.

DragonDev ISP of small businesses  
→ info@royalcourttheatre.com

New Writings - Live Theatre  
Traverse Theatre

TRICYCLE  
£12  
(6 weeks) + SAE  
info@tricycle.co.uk

## Star Night

Star Night

Hampstead Theatre

Btn Avenue

Swiss Cottage

London

NW3 3EU

Artistic D's

Anthony Clark

17<sup>th</sup> June

literary@hampsteadtheatre.com

has on 17<sup>th</sup> June last

I wrote you a letter the copy of mine called →

→ GENE's child was ready hospitalized before  
Dwight Clark took her. I enclosed an  
~~attached~~ ~~address~~ SAE ~~to her~~ <sup>originally</sup>  
~~was no contact with her - this is~~  
~~a very topical subject.~~ My ~~year~~  
Michaela Steiner admitted the  
play child, as I explained in my letter  
last <sup>have been</sup> kept and revised. ~~Since~~  
~~it was to go to the~~ ~~house~~ of your mother  
M.R.

Dear -

~~I phoned you a month  
ago to try & persuade you  
to take a course in the  
end of the day and I did think  
it possible~~

I phoned you a month ago  
and was a month ago he  
it on the end of the day &  
I did think I expected myself  
very well

I would like to see you  
for this is a literary work &  
~~it is the only one I can~~

Cancer Care Roundtable (info on  
alternative/integrative  
treatment)  
Bumail Comets 2003 WWC.gip  
(34239.gip)

LAETRIE

Email Comets 2003 WWC.gip (34239.gip)

→ LAETRIE

Thomas P. ...  
Admin-strate ...  
I have spoken to the  
Deerwood Roundtable  
about the 'new  
Deerwood charity - 'Physiquest' release'  
Roundtable the advertisement  
in your behalf.  
22 Fitzroy Square Can you give  
Linda WIT GEN Sue Jones  
in to all  
this?

Email Comets 2003 WWC

Oxygen Rpt Can ply -  
I am that a part of  
belong to the upstairs  
and to I would know  
how to try to get in  
the way the better  
having a product copies

**Young Vic**

2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	% increase
779,165	887,777	909,971	956,000	7.7

The Young Vic produces a programme of major classical works and contemporary plays, hosts leading international companies and receives additional funding for national touring. The company plays an important role in training and developing young directors and designers, and runs an extensive education and outreach programme in local boroughs. Our funding supports the organisation's core costs.

James Earl Jones

Shere Khan Wally Kowalski

me who DAVID  
MERRICK?

So the year is the  
horses side of by a  
scripture do you see the  
of the theatre work? Forwarded  
in dreamer - Felicity Fair

Society?  
The / Auction tells of  
a 'masterplan' of  
you - March with  
specifying the year. Can  
you help me here? In it  
more news a book write  
script! Set a script is no  
passport to get - / by a -  
believe me. XN ever a  
agent can do it (I  
have one) - L

### Women's Radio Group

2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/2006	% increase
22,930	24,535	To be announced at a later date		

The group provides training in broadcasting skills, including writing, presentation and production, and works with women from a range of ethnic minority communities, including Punjabi and Somali, to develop careers in the sector. Our funding supports the core costs of managing, promoting and delivering this programme.

### Yaa Asantewaa Carnival Group

2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	% increase
19,465	20,268	30,000	36,294	79.1

Yaa Asantewaa is a Black-led arts centre, programming performances, exhibitions, conferences, cultural events and participatory activities, focusing primarily on African and Caribbean cultures. Our funding supports the carnival band and linked carnival activities. The organisation is developing a £2.75 million refurbishment of their premises for their carnival art programme.

Y  
2

||



| [Plays](#) | [Writing](#) | [Education](#) | [The Theatre](#) | [About us](#) | [Connect](#) |

[Home](#) / [writing](#) / [policy](#)

| [Booking](#) | [Access](#)

/  
writing /  
policy /  
tag /

## Passionate about new writing

accessible version of t

Hampstead Theatre exists to take risks and to discover the talent of the future. New writing passion. We consistently create the best conditions for writers to flourish and are rewarded with diverse award-winning and far-reaching plays.

For over forty years Hampstead Theatre has been the proving ground where 'interesting' writers transform themselves into important young writers. In the past Pam Gems, David Hare, S. C. Jeffreys, Mike Leigh and Harold Pinter have all had breakthrough plays produced here. We also employ the most talented and skilled young actors and put them on our stage.

The careers of Jude Law, Alison Steadman, Jane Horrocks and Rufus Sewell were launched at Hampstead Theatre. Our new building is an intimate space with a flexible stage and an auditorium which can expand to seat 332. Our artistic policy remains the same. We will continue to look for the best of new writing, but now we have a greater opportunity to push theatrical form.

Our commissioning policy is based on our desire to produce the best British and international plays.

Each year we invite the most exciting writers around to write for us. At least half of these plays will be emerging writers who are just hitting their stride - writers who we believe are on the cusp of establishing themselves as important new voices. We also ask mid-career and mature playwrights to write for us on topics they are burning to explore.

Each commissioning meeting is different but each one explores three central principles: we encourage commissioned writers to identify lucidly and frankly their particular passions; to be courageous and original in their ideas; and to respond with ambition to the formal challenges of the new theatrical space.

We believe that new plays can test the temper of the times and sharpen our engagement with current ideas and world events. We need writers who can help us think more deeply, who can tell us why we love, why we hate, why we make love and why we go to war.

*Production@hampsteadtheatre.com*

[Plays](#) | [Writing](#) | [Education](#) | [The Theatre](#) | [About us](#) | [Connect](#)

Website sponsored by [Dragonnet](#) - the ISP for small business



the party I ~~had~~ with ~~work~~ is how you  
 arrive at these plays? Do you do so by  
 means - examine the following reform -  
 you start pile? The ~~whole~~ P. house  
 is covered with it - we've seen the  
 a play for it, they say, so they do their  
 former tradition of ~~reform~~ in present  
 the theatre is 2 parts, the hit  
 Muppet and the Artist's Director,  
 = and say as the train will reveal  
 if you need?  $\rightarrow$  A

I was worked really by someone  
 who works at your theatre - I know - he  
 because he for the - i - (as & I see

### Young Vic

2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	% increase
779,165	887,777	909,971	956,000	7.7

The Young Vic produces a programme of major classical works and contemporary plays, hosts leading international companies and receives additional funding for national touring. The company plays an important role in training and developing young directors and designers, and runs an extensive education and outreach programme in local boroughs. Our funding supports the organisation's core costs.

BBC  
made an on air sur de Venice, she asked  
me to send my letter ply to the theatre,  
I like to write of myself as a mature  
theatre man - double - theatre since my  
very earliest years, ~~I did not~~ ~~understand~~ me  
give me the ~~name~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~company~~ ~~which~~  
~~was~~

~~The ply had to use my name~~  
~~based on the fact that club~~

[A] By 2004 I will be getting £2,000,000 [A]  
for the Arts Council and of course you are  
obliged to present it in the con-  
ventional manner, ~~and~~ the stack pile is  
presented as a viable means of funding  
a ply long notice. Perhaps it is viable  
in your case. But, ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~letter~~ ~~to~~ ~~me~~ ~~last~~  
week ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~10~~ ~~last~~, the it can't be -  
the "i" word, it is a simple matter of time  
of a serious playwright ~~and~~ ~~a~~ ~~ply~~ ~~he~~  
is ~~certain~~ ~~is~~ Royal Court play to send

[A] acting to [A] ~~to give the full~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~experience~~  
again (perhaps in the sense of my individual)



### **Women's Radio Group**

<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/2006</b>	<b>% increase</b>
22,930	<b>24,535</b>	To be announced at a later date		

The group provides training in broadcasting skills, including writing, presentation and production, and works with women from a range of ethnic minority communities, including Punjabi and Somali, to develop careers in the sector. Our funding supports the core costs of managing, promoting and delivering this programme.

### **Yaa Asantewaa Carnival Group**

<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>% increase</b>
19,465	<b>20,268</b>	<b>30,000</b>	<b>36,294</b>	<b>79.1</b>

Yaa Asantewaa is a Black-led arts centre, programming performances, exhibitions, conferences, cultural events and participatory activities, focusing primarily on African and Caribbean cultures. Our funding supports the carnival band and linked carnival activities. The organisation is developing a £2.75 million refurbishment of their premises for their carnival art programme.

### **Yellow Earth**

<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>% increase</b>
105,000	<b>130,000</b>	<b>131,500</b>	To be reviewed	

Yellow Earth produces high quality ensemble physical performance works using the traditions of east and west. Yellow Earth explores and celebrates multicultural and multilingual heritage and the contemporary east Asian experience by reinterpreting traditional texts and developing new work. Our funding will enable it to tour nationally.

### **Young Concert Artists' Trust**

<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>% increase</b>
-	-	<b>30,000</b>	<b>30,750</b>	<b>N/a</b>

This organisation provides invaluable support for emerging professional artists. It selects and supports a portfolio of young soloists at the start of their careers. Our funding supports the organisation's core costs.

### **Weekend Arts College**

<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>% increase</b>
83,245	<b>78,372</b>	<b>87,000</b>	<b>100,000</b>	<b>27.6</b>

The college provides low cost training in the performing arts for five to 25 year olds, especially young people who have failed in mainstream education and those at risk of exclusion. Projects include facilitating video making by groups of refugee children, and a partnership with Camden to deliver out of schools projects. Our funding supports its programme of arts and media classes.

### **Whitechapel Art Gallery**

<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>% increase</b>
743,578	<b>765,885</b>	<b>805,000</b>	<b>825,258</b>	<b>7.8</b>

Whitechapel Art Gallery presents exhibitions, working with international, national and regional partners to bring contemporary ideas and art practice to a diverse audience. The gallery runs an extensive education and outreach programme, and a wide range of talks, events and film screenings, as well as a café and bookshop. Our funding goes towards its core costs and the artistic programme.

### **Wigmore Hall**

<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>% increase</b>
280,000	<b>300,000</b>	<b>310,000</b>	<b>320,000</b>	<b>6.7</b>

Wigmore Hall presents chamber music concerts all year round, many of them broadcast, and runs a busy education programme. Wigmore Hall has always been important for artists making their debuts, but it is also a cherished venue for major international artists, who draw capacity audiences to the Hall. Our funding supports core costs and subsidises concerts in the Wigmore Hall.

### **Wimbledon Studio Theatre**

<b>2002/03</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>% increase</b>
30,000	<b>30,000</b>	To be reviewed		

Housed in what was the Ballroom of the Wimbledon Theatre, the Studio is part of the small-scale touring circuit and offers a broad range of theatre and arts activity. The theatre plans to develop creative partnerships with a number of key companies, to provide new work for its catchment area and particularly for young people over the age of 13. Our funding supports the artistic programme.

~~propose to find a 'technique' a tendency to  
the 'exposition', rather the right way, and  
a lack of sufficient dramatic~~

I am not going to dwell on the letter - it is  
too cynically the letter and I feel the  
partially read a public record script.  
But the use develops dramatic type, I  
all this 'sub-text' (an old-hat action  
usage refers to ~~the~~ all the things that he  
must do and feel beneath the words)  
words) I do not know. But the letter suggests  
my play is lacking in dramatic act. ~~that~~  
One kind of the play is devoted to  
scene in itself

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 tearless ones of the deepest sorrow you have known.

I knew that I wouldn't be with the guns much longer, 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, since I would be miles ahead of them. 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.

The Germans had just vacated Cava de' Tirreni and it was obvious (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 ~~of~~ within spitting distance of our noses, so to speak.

L✓

The enemy was

We put our four guns down, under the cover of night, in the bed of the valley, 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-storied 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 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

## 6

**Shudder**

The new attack was to be yet another breakthrough (the very word denotes the tactics of rush and too much weight). And it would take off precisely from where my long-distance lenses had been focussed.

Apparently we were in a rush to get to Rome and the job had to be done right now. 'Rome by Christmas' had become an ideology for the highest echelons of command—every day that passed after Christmas Day was overladen with guilt at not being in Rome and of course this became a fresh nail in the coffin of military ingenuity.

We were now in mid-January 1944. Having secured a mere seventy-mile advance in over four months, to the tune of at least 10,000 battle casualties a month, not to mention the sick and shocked, it seemed logical, in this mood of self-revenge, to try and repeat those figures.

Not only this but the hardest, most closely defended centre of the Gustav Line fortification, namely Cassino, was going to be, of all unilluminated strategies, our centre of attack.

This time our breakthrough would (ideologically speaking) make it possible for the US 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps,

containing our Texan brothers, to cross the Rapido river. As its name suggests, this river was (especially in torrential rain) as fast as the devil, and in winter particularly treacherous. And the rains had started again. The cold was beginning to bite. Yes, this was January, not June.

Our job—that of 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> divisions—was to make a hole in the 14<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Corps that faced us.

So it was that we drove, tyres whirring and slipping in the mud, following white tapes in the dark, to positions as close to Cassino as commensurate with officially declared suicide.

In the dead of night we set down in what appeared to be a very crowded field. We were cheek by jowl with the Texans once more. There was no question of slit trenches here. We moved into feverishly prepared dugouts of the world war one type. We could stand upright in these--- with head room to spare. Mine was the size of a large room. We cut a hole in the top of a biscuit tin and then dug it into the mud wall as a grate for a fire. We twisted more biscuit tins into a chimney that fitted into it and would carry the smoke through the roof. How that roof was made I cannot recollect---perhaps planks but more likely corrugated iron since engineers must have been here before us. I only know we never had a drop of rain inside. We gathered masses of wood and I had that

fire blazing white most of the day and night. The walls were soon dry. The puzzle---in view of the incessant shelling we were getting---was that we were allowed to let the chimneys smoke at all.

Every shell that came over made the earthen walls shudder. The lulls in the enemy firing were all the sweeter for being short. The air-burst shells were now so high in the sky (because of our ground-level position) that we rather enjoyed their deafening useless crack. But most of the stuff coming over was heavy 88mm.

We and the Texans renewed our acquaintance and exchanged bully beef for smooth Spam, Players for one of their almost identical Virginia brands. I noticed a certain difference in them. They had seen a lot and I think had begun to wonder what the hell they were doing so far from home. They looked wary now. You could say as an Englishman (admittedly one not quite right in the head) that you were fighting for England in these fields but as to how they were fighting for Texas in one doomed battle after another up a narrow peninsula in the Mediterranean Basin no one had so far given them a clue.

They gazed, they watched, they smoked, they nodded and said something from time to time but their pauses, like those between the shells, were unpredictable. Of course you could have told them that they were fighting for world power—which is what their nation got out of

the war. But I don't think that would have been appreciated as an argument for their death. Those once soft-spoken creatures whom we had learned to love would have demurred, I think—preferred to be with their folks again and to let American markets achieve world power by their natural expansion, not by means of this crazed blood ritual that had fallen in love with its own mistakes.

Our exchanges weren't good humoured as before. One of them seemed offended when I said something like, American spam has converted me to British bully beef. There was this edge to the nerves that afflicted us all--and in them perhaps was the shock of premonition.

Of course our guns were out of action in this vulnerable place, so the enemy could fire without fear of retaliation. But it was the certainty of their bombardments---which must come from a very accurate map reference of our position---that made us ask what we were doing so crowded together, one Corps mixed up with another. One thing we did feel certain about and that was our proximity to the front line. It even crossed our minds in giddy moments that we were actually in that line, though without means of assault or defence.

The only practical reason for being crowded up like this must be the coming attack, planned for about 20<sup>th</sup>

January (this we knew about). But even so you never assembled troops this way, under the enemy's very noses.

Or the idea may have been that, crammed up against the front line, we—a mixed bag of infantry and gunners and perhaps some Engineers—were being held in reserve so as to be ready to pour into a hole made ready for us by that attack. But again, you simply didn't plan battles this way, your guns stayed where they should always be, well behind the committed lines. Even allowing for the freakishness of war, this situation surpassed all manner of guessing among senior as well as junior officers.

For one thing, the dug-outs were not of our own making. I have no recollection of my own men digging. So the Engineers must have been involved---and earthworks on such a scale are noisy and smoky and provoke local curiosity. The material had to be transported---roofs, tarpaulins, stanchions. Italian gossip travelled faster than fire. You didn't have to squeeze it out of anybody, it tumbled out of the mouth and into your ear and the job was done. Italians regularly passed with wonderful nonchalance from the enemy to us and back again. They skirted military positions along paths that meandered unseen and unsuspected in low hills and woodland. Produce and family news travelled that way. It was better than spies.

Captain H. was nearby. I paid my visits to him at the double, no question here of dodging here and there to avoid the shell with your number on it. And these bombardments were so concentrated, and of such persistence, that we were constantly convinced that they were a softening-up barrage before an enemy attack. But no attacks came.

Captain H. and I found that our chats were short and sweet. I was anxious to get back to my snugery, he to stay in his. And we had little to say these days. 'Our' war against Hitler and Nazism seemed to us to have disappeared.

As indeed it had. The astonishing thing to me now is that neither of us even knew about the Allied Conference that had removed 'our' war from the scene, namely the Casablanca Conference of January 1943, eight months before we set foot in Italy.

In that conference President Roosevelt had neatly wiped 'our' war out by abolishing Germany as a nation. Germans were now stripped of their rights as a people, if such a thing can be conceived. They were refused the right even to come to peace terms. They were to 'unconditionally surrender'. No distinction was from now on to be made between Nazis and anti-Nazis or between the Jew or gentile. Being Germans all, they were an innately damned people, as they had been in the former genocide,

world war one. This opened the door to any atrocity, as it was probably intended to. And indeed in the same conference the fire-bombing of the German cities was conceived, in order to 'break the morale' of the previously German people.

And here Captain H. and I were sitting in a field where men and materials were crazily massed together under bombardment, with no means of movement, as if even strategic meaning had departed from war.

In this kind of military position no records can be kept. War records cover supply lines and their arrival or not, and of course attacks. But the kind of limbo we were in excites no annals. Our song we're here because we're here because we're here said it best.

Meanwhile we were getting more and more reinforcements. A new second lieutenant joined my troop and we shared my dugout. It wasn't good that he came straight into relentless shelling like this. It was too much of a blind fall. Even the boom of our own heavy artillery way back made him jump and then he would half-smile in frightened apology. One day a shell came within yards of the dugout and we threw ourselves down in a corner close to the fire and I found myself on top of him. He was trembling all over with an unusual violence—like that of a fever more than fright.

To have your nerves go at the start means you can't get your self-navigation in proper shape thereafter. We were very lucky that one time, favoured by the fact that the blast went forward of us. But he couldn't take account of degree and nuance. He had a pale soft skin, still a boy, and we used to sit and talk quietly in the lulls but I think he couldn't accommodate himself to the idea of people blowing each other up. I think it deeply contradicted the life he'd had before, perhaps a village life where everything was ordered and familiar. Even in the lulls he was on guard inside himself. In this state he was sent out on his first F.O.O. mission and was killed almost at once.

\* \* \*

There was suddenly a sense all round us of bustle and movement at short notice. We and the Texans were separated.

The attack started on the night of January 17<sup>th</sup>, three days earlier than planned. Our two divisions got across the Garigliano close to the Cassino defile. But Kesselring threw in his 29<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier divisions and this was a poor omen for the risky Texan assault across the Rapido.

The rains and that river did for our Texan brothers. The river swelled up furiously. The two Texan regiments, already battle-exhausted, were lost almost in entirety.

Their Bailey bridges were swept away behind them and they were left stranded in darkness on the northern bank without any avenue of escape and in mud and near freezing rain under shell-fire all night, exposed in a waterlogged trap with neither supplies nor any chance to prepare defence positions, and the few that lived to see the morning must have been near demented.

Mark Clark was indicted in Texas after the war for this but it is difficult to indict commanders who know no other military doctrine than meeting strength with strength, head-on, especially if they can point to this doctrine as having come from above. He was exonerated.

This Texan assault was rebuffed by only five German battalions from the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Regiment, crack fighting troops.

The real trouble that dogged Mark Clark was that he had no battle experience. It is said that General Eisenhower, chief of American operations in Europe, was furious at Clark for insisting on getting his army before he had done a proper stint of battle. But he gave Clark an army just the same—perhaps in consideration of the fact that he himself had no battle experience of any kind, even a view of it through binoculars.

## Seven

e were pulled out of the line—as 'broken reeds'. This was how Mark Clark put it. His use of such expressions caused resentment but he was telling the truth. It was decided that we needed not just a short leave in Rome or Naples, nor even just a long leave, but one far away from any theatre of war.

By marvellous degrees the air ceased to vibrate, boom and whistle with shells departing or arriving, until finally not so much as a distant bombing could be heard.

The further we drew away, in convoy down to Italy's southern coast and then by ship, the more did life seem

to have slipped back, by means of a naughty quirk of time, into peace, with all its comforts artfully provided.

Desires stirred that were thought lost, irretrievable. Having reached glittering Taranto—emphasis on the first syllable—at Italy's heel, having glimpsed the deep blue water we were to cross for an excitingly unknown destination which we knew to be Port Said, we began to realise that at the heart of every great war there is a tourist agency at work, an agency so punctilious, so exhaustive in its knowledge of schedules, that no lay tourist agency could possibly rival it.

Thomas Cook was out-cooked in every matter—accommodation (varied subtly according to the delicate shades of rank), food (no longer 'rations'), attentions of the most civil kind proffered by local populations, as well as entertainment both personal and public, all funded and provided so discreetly that putting your hand in your pocket was now a pleasure because needed so rarely, as for example (dare I draw the curtain aside?) in the case of whorehouses.

Suddenly, from having been the chosen targets of every sort of detonation we were the flattered and cosseted and above all unpaying guests of that very army that had marched us into the shit and intended to march us back into it again.

We leaned over the side of our anchored troopship to look down on Port Said as small boats clustered below containing youths lithe from sea and sun holding up melons and trinkets, just as if we could access them. The vast port was brassy and dirty and its noises were those you wanted to hear. This was the 'middle' East, bustling with a poverty that looked like riches to us because the beggars were bullet and bomb free and all they wanted was cigarettes and baksheesh. And spring was coming and the warm damp harbour air, laden with spicy smells, was a silent reassurance that to be at ease in limb and heart was all right.

We clattered and bumped down the runway with our kit and marched to a train bound for Cairo that was unashamedly commodious with little mirrors and thick-pile plushy seats in each compartment, and when it set off it made the right clattering sound on the track in celebration of childish trips to the sea. When at last Cairo appeared in the distance I had one of those special déjà vue experiences that say 'You were born here and are only returning' but you can't see how.

The city was a vast officers' mess set partly in gaudy palmy lofty rooms, as in Shepherd's Hotel, and palm-tree gardens with fountains and orderly mellow-yellow streets of houses with balconies, among which you would find your discreetly unadvertised hotel, room

booked, service readily available, a foyer too tiny yet a source of everything you needed to know.

I sat in the huge Shepherd's lounge and found myself one of an astonishing democracy of officers of every rank with top brass walking by you and gazing about them indulgently. You were suddenly in a class, a class that had not long since ruled England and was now the effective proxy government of a bustling Coptic cum Muslim world whose king was at once in rebellion against and amenable to an arrangement which in peacetime he would have called oppressively colonial.

And indeed this city was suave and bustling in a last celebration of empire, and without the faintest fear of any competitive American ambitions in that direction. Americans in Cairo were strikingly, you could say abundantly, absent—given the multitudes of them elsewhere.

Yet an American presence was suggested. It sat, a mellow easy authority, in the senior officers whose life was here and who said 'rarely' for 'really' and 'cawfee' for 'coffee' and made 'you' rhyme with 'er' or 'awe'. It was in their charmingly bland self-assurance, visible in their biologically relaxed gestures, their easy-going rigour of comportment which also included sternness. And it told you they ruled the world.

However, they didn't rule the world. They didn't even rule Britain. For a century and a half they had shared life with a strong middle class and a huge working one, neither of which had much time for this other top class, if only because it wasn't top any more.

Yet it was top. It declared itself, without fuss, to be top. Their fascinating grace of manner said they were top even while you didn't believe it. They carried in themselves the last English authority, and clearly it would not, together with other things English, survive the war.

So top did these English people feel ('English' because they never had Welsh or Irish or Scottish accents) that they seemed to have finished altogether with Britain. The faery islands, made faery by Queen Elizabeth 1, who dreamed of a new spiritual empire that would take in all Europe, undivided by schism and sect, had become too small for them, more in spirit than anything else.

And that was why, in the last years of the nineteenth century, they had begun to look for American heiresses. There was an almost indecent rush to marry them.

And Winston Churchill, the beloved leader chosen by all of us on the Left, was the progeny of such a marriage! His was a great Whig family, and such families,

acting in unison, had once been so powerful that they could remove and install even monarchs. They were not to be sniffed at even now, in the famous 'darkest hour'.

So here in Cairo, in this Last Byzantium, we the battle-soiled had a chance to stew in refined juices brewed by an aristocracy that could no longer bear the grim industrial smoke-hole that Britain had become (and which had given birth to us). And though this Cairo was celebrating lost English authority she was also passing that authority down to those like myself whom they would call, embarrassed, the masses. And that authority was all the more convincing and generous because they didn't know their power had passed, much less that it would.

And the absence of Americans helped this beguiling fairy tale. And since you saw nothing in Cairo to contradict it, you enjoyed it, the city being both the last jewel in the imperial crown and a backwater splendid and loud that must be costing a fearful amount of money—for a country that, far from being the top world power it had been only yesterday, was frankly bankrupt.

Defiant, Shepherd's had an air of unassailable pomp and circumstance in which young shoulders with only a single pip on them rubbed shoulders that flashed red and were keeping the British Empire safe, even though, of all the grim signs that the war had already made clear, the clearest was the future demise of that empire.

Yet these men were in large degree running the war. And they did it better than anyone else could. Their dulcet bland accents had dominated our mock battles in officer-cadet training. They had been our lecturers, our senior officers. It was they who were best at talking to the Americans (Chamberlain had even suggested an Atlantic Union before the war). And it was they who saw to every detail of our grand Byzantine tour, which went as smoothly as a show at the London Palladium.

We went to the Pyramids and were served by tall Nubians at the King Minos hotel. We strolled the Cairo streets and took gharry rides. One morning I happened to be leaning over the balcony of my hotel room when I saw just below me, at the window of a house opposite, a girl with long hair, and she was smiling at me. I smiled back. We made an appointment in sign language. We were to meet below, in the vestibule of her apartment block, at four o'clock that afternoon.

When the time came we went straight upstairs to her apartment and I was introduced to her parents. We had a polite tea in the sitting room and then the girl and I went for a sedate walk. We chatted and we strolled. I now had one of those patrician fly-whisks with horse-hair at the end and this I whisked here and there. She was a plump young lady and the war provided her with a feast of marital possibilities---here was so ardent a believer in

the Last Byzantines that almost anything British and commissioned would do for her. My balcony of course changed personnel every few days. And since she expected decorum to be strictly observed this was probably what she got from successive officers. From behind her shutters she could make her choice and hopefully one day she would clap her eyes on her rightful man. My hunch was that she would marry a local merchant.

I met an English nurse in Shepherd's. We shared a table in the drinks lounge. Nurses were the best people to know because they understood something of the forward lines. Our conversation was easy and agreeable and no doubt if I could hear it again it would strike me as very much English of a former time, implying a kind of frank reserve, strikingly calm, a particular natural alchemy you get wherever there is world power.

She took a photo of me in the Battery Gardens, a cigarette hanging from a corner of my mouth, the eyes narrowed against the smoke, a chic posture of the time. We went for our gharry rides and at night sat under hanging lights in the garden of the officers' club. At the end of my stay we said good bye with one light kiss on the cheek and looked at each other with a certain regret. We might have fitted as lovers but it would have been lustre-less. Friendship would have been good. She glanced at me in a solicitous way, thinking of the

lottery of death perhaps. I wondered afterwards if she and other nurses had been planted, asked to 'keep an eye' on the youngest officers. If so it was a good civilised idea.

If I look at that photo today, cracked and brutalised, I see that a certain change had taken place in me, one I was unaware of at the time because it was so deep. In it I am gazing straight into the nurse's eyes.

The way my cap is tilted and my dress uniform sits on me so comfortably (no formal Sam Browne belt) and that cigarette hangs so suavely in the corner of my mouth, making the eyelids close a little against the smoke in a gaze that is pleasantly, jokingly quizzing—I am gazing at the nurse whom I like so much, since she is taking that photo.

The cool placid Battery gardens in which we stand are civilisation itself and at last I am a fully paid-up member of its latest war against itself. Yes, I've been absorbed by the war at last, made one of its own. My mad wedding is festive yet also bitter sweet, like the smell of apples and fermenting wine in the autumn months of Italy, that go together with falling leaves.

The photo speaks this so eloquently. My dress uniform is like my own specially tailored suit. Indeed it was specially tailored by Austin Reed. I remember looking through the window at Regent's Street far below and

recognising giddily, as the tailor pinned here and there, that I was saying good bye to myself. And now, it seemed, I had recovered myself. I fitted in. The Last Byzantium had worked its charms.

\*                     \*                     \*

We went in convoy across the Sinai desert which stretched like an eternal garden before us, its wadis gleaming with stones shaped and polished with careful deliberation by the sky, a sky that gazed and knew. These dried-up rivers had become endless avenues where you felt God was born, this being your first acquaintance with a silence that spoke to you.

We slept under the trucks in the implacable hot noon air, and moved only at night. I remember a wooden signpost in the middle of the desert marked simply 'To Baghdad', and how I stood gazing up at it. I resolved to go there one day and a few years after the war I did, to teach at its university.

Our convoy ended in Palestine, another jewel that required our military presence, this time to prevent trouble between Judah and Islam. We settled down in Tel Aviv, vacated no doubt by other troops hardly a day before. I recall sitting in a shaded cool apartment hotly furnished with carpets on the wall, the blinding sunlight squeezing through the shutters. My hostess is interesting and we are talking books, and some politics.

Jews said of Arabs and Arabs said of Jews, They are an ignoble people. The Jewish argument was that the Arabs had no modernity in them, and the Arab argument was that the Jews had. But it was a mild diffident thing, this rivalry; there wasn't yet the mutual demonization of after years. At that time they lived side by side just as they did in Baghdad when I was later there; and just as they did in Spain before Ferdinand and Isabella banished them five hundred years ago, breaking up a three-part medieval discussion that might have led to a civilisation of three religions that marvelled at and increased each other.

The next stop was Beirut where we found French restaurants too good for us to appreciate, and cafes where you could sit under the awning for hours with the cool wash of the sea close by. And here at last was a brothel For Officers Only (more by fact of possession than decree), furnished and presented with tact and taste where there were clever political discussions and laughter and the apportioning of sex to a time after, not before, the discussions and coffee and laughter, so that it drew its juices somewhat from those pleasures. We went there every day as one would to friends, and sat under the tranquil whirring fans with the coffee cups clinking and the girls rustling to and fro in a sea of giggles as Madame spoke politics to us in her measured French.

We returned to our tents and transport and this time we stopped at Damascus with its pearl-clear stream bubbling through the street, and we ate huge strawberries and cream. We officers were taken to a local air strip and one by one went up in an Auster, sitting in the second cockpit as the pilot did stunts and invited us to take over the joy-stick and tip the wings. We swooped down over our own camps to within yards of the upturned bored faces. We dived endlessly and looped the loop and travelled upside down, hanging from the cockpit by straps. I remember seeing below a dark figure in a white loincloth behind a wooden plough drawn by a single ox in a brown field and feeling I would like to talk to him and what a pity this thing I was in travelled so fast and so far above. I took over the controls, that is the joystick, and when at the end of the flight the pilot jumped down onto the tarmac he said with the winning warmth of those who find travelling half a mile or more above the earth without any sensation of speed thrilling, 'I could teach you to fly in a week'.

While in Syria we learned that our two divisions had been transferred to the British Eighth army, which meant dumping our earlier attitudes of contempt for the Eighth army and replacing them with a sense of bemused self-estrangement.

What we resented about the Eighth army was, apart from the obvious fact that it wasn't the Fifth, all the crap publicity that had accrued to it in the North African desert because of its commander General Montgomery who wore coloured scarves and berets and seemed to us to blow his trumpet too much. Not that we knew a thing about him. Like all other army commanders he was entirely remote from his men. That must be so. There is no time for a commander to travel up and down his lines exhorting thousands of men through his Tannoy system, apart from the fact that soldiers hate to be sped into battle by rhetoric.

Also the proposed Western Front, which we knew Montgomery was due to lead, made us jealous. 'Our' (the Eighth army's) 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured division had already left us to prepare for it, just as the American Fifth army had lost its US 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne division to the same cause.

Yes, Monty would soon be running Operation Overlord (notice the truculent big-scenario title), but this had its plus side because we in the Eighth army, once abandoned by him, would be able to jettison its irritating glamour.

For instance, while encamped near Damascus we got a directive from him which we thought typical of his cockiness, a directive insisting that we do gym every morning at 0700hrs. under officer supervision. We, both

officers and men, scoffed at it and did nothing. What we overlooked was that Montgomery had left Italy many weeks before and had nothing to do with it. But in military life that sort of thing doesn't signify. You go on blaming him just the same.

When I met Montgomery after the war I found him one of the least cocky people I ever clapped eyes on. He couldn't help speaking his mind—all the time. And this fact alone was enough to get him his cocky reputation, in high places and low. For instance, the first words he addressed to me were, Never trust a journalist. As our host at the table ran two hundred newspapers and one or two of his London editors were present it seemed quite appropriate for Montgomery to say what he thought. What would be the point of saying it if they weren't there?

Since army commanders were so remote from us, we made them up. The one and only time we saw top brass was when we assembled in an open Italian field one day under a splendid hot morning sun and a tiny plane flew out of the sky and landed a few hundred yards away, containing our very own king George VI.

He was whisked before us in a jeep, seated on a special little platform that had been made for him, and when he jumped down the hand-full of waiting generals rushed forward to greet him. There was our divisional commander whom we knew vaguely as 'Ginger' even though he

was Ginger's successor. And there was General McCreery, our Corps commander, perhaps the only commander in the Italian arena who knew what he was doing (he protected us against any of Clark's battle plans that seemed to expose us unduly), and he had several MCs from the first world war. And now he leapt round the royal jeep like a child dropped in fairyland, spellbound, while our divisional commander Ginger—or rather his successor—stood there stolidly showing everybody how deeply he was unimpressed by anybody but himself.

The king was dressed in summer khaki and shorts and his knees were very white. He carried a little cane. We sent up three cheers for him as he gazed about him. He talked with the generals for a time, looking very serious and to the point, and then he remounted, settling himself on the platform once more and placing a piece of beige cashmere over his knees against the sun with a fastidious little pat which put a special hush of fascination on us because it seemed to come from a deep deep past that we also belonged to, he being the face and frame of our country and perhaps a reassurance, even a promise, that we still had one.

It was an intelligent idea for him to appear out of the blue, not take a parade or inspect us. Those who devised the visit knew well that he and he alone could make us feel we had someone watching out for us, quite

separate from politics. His older brother Edward, whom a lot of us felt had been ousted from the throne in a rigged abdication because of his vast popularity, had been on a par for us with Gracie Fields who sang Down Our Allie and the American black singer Paul Robeson—they each and all rooted for the poor. Also this present King George and his queen stayed in London during the blitz and visited the bomb sites next morning, so they had become 'one of us'.

Sad that despite being our head of state he was excluded from the war conferences by our two republican allies. Not that we noticed it. The conferences came and went, like the leaders in them, and our kings and queens didn't, thank God. But it wasn't done for us to be overtly pro-royal. The matter had to do with feelings.

Most of us felt that the king belonged to us as we belonged to him in a not quite earthly connection too subtle for our times.

My no-longer-girlfriend's photo in my pocket was decidedly cracked and faded now, hardly more than millions of dots. Stare at these dots as I might they no longer captured her. I kept its tatters in my pocket just the same. She was surely many ardent copulations ahead of me and I realised she had become a reminder for me of what I could only see as images from a past that was unattainable because it had never happened.

## Eight

ll the way across Mesopotamia and Palestine and the Lebanon we picked up news about Cassino.

A We were hungry for any detail, not least because of an anxious suspicion that we might be called back there any minute. In fact battle news came to us faster and

seemed better informed than it ever had on the battlefield.

At the back of my mind there was always the Benedictine abbey, a tapestry hung low in the sky, so impregnable and everlasting that it looked fragile.

It was chiefly, we heard, the commander of the New Zealand Corps, General Freyberg (described by his second-in-command as having neither brains nor imagination) who clamoured most for its bombing. Having won the VC in the 1914 war, as well as knowing Winston Churchill personally, he was a man to be feared even by General Alexander (whom the second-in-command described as 'a flashy ignoramus'). For both Alexander and Clark the bombing they knew to be without rhyme or reason became a political necessity. They had to consider what would happen to their careers should Intelligence, by the remotest of chances, be wrong.

American bombers already had a bad name for inaccuracy after persistently attacking a small town in error for Cassino a month or two previously. Venafro was the town, and the headquarters of the American VI Corps was on its outskirts. There were fifty or so American casualties from the first bombings. And three months later, having been told to get their map-reading right, the pilots again missed Cassino and again bombed Venafro, this time so accurately that they caused the death of 96

of their own soldiers and 140 civilians, with hundreds of wounded. The place was reduced to rubble.

We on the ground never, as far as I know, requested air support, it being within our power as soldiers, even at as low a level of command as mine, to politely decline the offer should it come through when we were forming up for an attack.

I don't remember a single battle where air support was involved. Battles are too localised and mobile for any effective support, let alone from the air. Planes are here one instant and gone the next, and too far up for any but the most extended targets. Although I now read about twenty, fifty sorties having taken place at various stages of the Italian campaign I don't remember seeing or hearing a single one of them.

Fighter planes were a different kettle of fish. They kept German bombers off, which is why I don't remember a single one of them either.

\* \* \*

In the bombing of Cassino and its abbey on February 15<sup>th</sup> 1944 many bombs went astray, some of them on Freyberg's own Indian Division. There were about twenty casualties from these strays, none of them fatal. General Mark Clark, seventeen miles away from Cassino at his trailer headquarters, had sixteen bombs planted in his front garden, so to speak.

---

A great cheering and gleeful throng of soldiers and nurses from behind the lines gathered to witness that bombing---apparently everyone knew exactly, to the second, when it was going to take place. The fireworks display was not to be missed because, like all of our plans to punch yet another hole in the enemy line, it would beyond doubt open the road to Rome and finish off the Germans for good.

Whereas that bombing turned our subsequent strategy into a prolonged funereal calamity.

It was planned to synchronise with vital movements on the ground. The commander of the Indian Division (no less than the gentleman who more than anyone else had instigated the bombing) was to move into the rubble of the abbey the moment the last wave of bombers had passed. He was to receive notice of the first wave from air command, and order his men to the start line. But no such notice came. The first he knew of the bombing was when the bombs fell. He rushed out of his command post asking what the hell the noise was. As for his start line he was nowhere near it. And you cannot assemble battalions on their start line after the event.

In other words he knew less about the timing of the bombing than the watching bloodthirsty festive crowds.

As to his advance on the rubble of the abbey it was thus delayed a whole day, during which time the German 1<sup>st</sup>

Parachute Regiment moved comfortably into their new impregnable quarters. His subsequent attack on those quarters was seen off with ease.

That is the trouble with bombing missions---they raise an impressive hell in a second and problems for years. This is why the foot soldier is rarely heartened by raids from the air. They are over-destructive. They bomb the house you want to move into, destroy the roads your supplies must come up on. And they may rob you of a vital source of succour and information---civilian friendship.

The front-line soldier is only 1 in 7 of an army. The rest of that army is there to sustain, supply and if necessary hospitalise him. Yet in strategies that include bombing, and even in many that do not, that soldier is the last person to be considered. He cannot take part in your bomber pilot's drama in the air, as the bomber pilot cannot take part in the drama of a speck on the ground.

Only monks were in the abbey when it was blown to pieces—and apparently two children who couldn't be evacuated because raising them a few inches made them scream with agony and no sedation was available (they were both dying, a boy and a girl).

The stricken abbey was now an unbeatable place for both observation and defence, a marriage which is deadly indeed for the attacker. Our friends who rained terror

from the skies had provided the enemy with a positive bee-hive of impregnable bunkers---as well as the moral right to occupy those still consecrated fragments.

Naturally all this news sounded to our ears like home sweet home. But there was more deadly stuff to come. In order to exact revenge on the crassness of the Cassino bombing it was now decided in a kind of hara-kiri mood to altogether smash the town of Cassino, and thus turn not simply the summit of that hill but every inch of its southern slope into a buzzing fortress.

On March 15<sup>th</sup> 1944 a huge allied bombardment took place—1400 bombs from the air (1000 tons-worth) and 190.000 shells from the artillery. And the idea behind it was the same as that behind all previous bombardments and assaults, namely 'to dislodge the enemy in and around Cassino'. It provided them, on the contrary, with a lodging more secure than any before.

Just three German battalions crawled out of their holes again and poured down lethal fire on the poor devils (New Zealanders this time) trying to cross the Rapido (yet again?) after their first Bailey bridges and even the replacement ones were destroyed, such that on March 20<sup>th</sup> General Alexander, suddenly appalled by the casualty rate, decided to give the New Zealanders just a day and a half to regain their positions or withdraw.

And indeed they withdrew, on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, but so badly mauled that the New Zealand Corps could not be said to exist any more. It was formally disbanded and its remnants distributed to other units.

We thought, well, this must certainly be the end of frontal attacks against a proven unbeatable line but no. In the prevailing aberrant logic of the Italian campaign the punishment meted out by such a small German force had to be requited a third time by incurring even more casualties on our own side.

It was now the turn of the valiant Polish Corps (the presence today of the Polish cemetery just north of Cassino is living testimony). But valour was impotent to turn a thrice-doomed strategy.

That attack happened on May 11<sup>th</sup>. The Eighth army to the right flank were going to put in a simultaneous drive towards the Anzio bridgehead in order to relieve that beleaguered landing. The British 13<sup>th</sup> Corps were going to advance on Sant' Angelo in Theodice, close to the road to Rome and the Liri defile.

Again there was a massive artillery bombardment, though, as if in blushful contrition, the bombing from the air was now concentrated (naturally to no avail whatever, destroying only roads and ditches) on the German supply lines. Having not realised their objectives

in the earlier bombings, it was simple logic to attack other targets as if they had.

Those attacking Poles could be seen from just about every house, now turned to rubble, in Cassino. So you could neither get through the town nor take it from a flank.

So at last Cassino was left to the Germans. It became a town of ghostly patrols by night—these would brush each other in ruined kitchens and corridors and shoot point blank. And the German defenders, compared with the sum total of the forces thrown against them a tiny band of men, remained.

And, just think, it suddenly occurred to the top command to allow the French commander General Juin to do what he (and we) had always said was the only practical one.

Without fuss or fury he followed the plan he had tried unsuccessfully---in that jeep---to bend Mark Clark's ear with seven months of blood sacrifice ago.

Having quickly got his Free French Corps across the mountains Juin sent his Goums, fleet of foot in mountains as no one else, on a separate curving action towards the Liri defile that contained the road to Rome. This silent and unsupported action barred the Germans from their only avenue of escape.

But, by one of war's terrible ironies, that Goum action opened the defile containing the road to Rome to guess whom? No less than General Mark Clark who, instead of sticking to the strategy he had been ordered to follow, slipped off the road and into Rome as its American Liberator.

General Alexander (once described as a 'fifth wheel') complained bitterly upwards about this unmilitary conduct but no reprimand, least of all a court indictment, came forth, it being a rule of this particular war that if by pulling a fast one you made headlines no one would complain.

What actually happened was far worse than a mere unmilitary change of direction. The moment the Goums opened the way to Rome for him Clark urged his own General Truscott, commander of the Anzio operation and perhaps his best general, to break out of his bridgehead eastwards and cut off the Germans in and north of Cassino. Truscott did this swiftly. In fact he cut off a great part of the German army. But just as he was about to do his mopping up operation an order came down from Clark that he should pull out at once and turn his nose to Rome. Truscott refused to believe it. He checked with army HQ at once. But there was no one of authority to speak to. Clark had gone on his liberation quest. So

withdraw Trustcott had to, leaving thousands of Germans to fight another day---against us who were on our way.

\*                     \*                     \*

We disembarked at Taranto, clattering down the gangway fitter and brighter and more boisterous than when we had clattered up it.

And we even got more leave, this time in Rome, now that by courtesy of our former commander it was ready to receive us. I stayed at the Hotel Inghilterra. The hall porter looked after our sexual as well as tourist needs without complacency or connivance or implied disdain, his born Roman tact turning it into a simple market operation, with the name of the lady, the address and the price set out clearly on a piece of paper (not that anything is this simple for a Roman—he set the price down with a special dark contempt known only to his city).

From the Piazza di Spagna I took a rocking, sliding, forward-falling ride in one of the city's tiny canvas-topped cabs in which a handful of people stood crammed body to body clinging to an unsteady steel frame. It was an ideal personal introduction medium. Should a woman press harder than each collective free fall justified it was a come-on sign. The pope forlornly appealed to the women of Rome to behave with more discretion, meaning that they shouldn't perhaps open their legs at the drop

of a hat. But how did he know what they were privately doing? To judge by their behaviour in fully-dressed encounters you could think it was going to end that way but it didn't necessarily or even mostly. What the pope was unable to add, because it might have seemed an indiscretion, was that the women of Rome were virtually starving and had to feed their men-folk and children somehow.

Well, at the end of this little cab journey in search of what I understood would be many hours of mutual languorous self-indulgence, I found two ladies in an eighteenth-century setting. They greeted me at the door of a large apartment with tall windows and parquet floors, both looking not only like school teachers but spinsters. They smiled and invited me in for some ersatz coffee. We sat chatting and the hours passed and any thought of the mingling of seed, let alone hours of it, was no more in the air than were smells of roasting meat. They were thin, they were anxious. I paid them what I had been told to pay, we shook hands with great friendliness after such a nice long talk, and I once again did the free-fall journey. And I thanked the hall porter—and this time his Roman thoughts were wrong.

Somewhere north of Rome, well east, high in the hills where thick snow and ice were in the air, we settled in a townlet that treated us not as guests but

sons and brothers. We had never eaten so well in all our lives. Where the food came from, it being an amalgam of our rations and local cellar stores, I was never told and never enquired about.

One of my gunners who had a cheerful placid face unmarked by F.O.O. duties told me that a local couple had adopted him. He was in their house for all meals. They doted on him because they had no children, he said. He was the son they had always dreamed about. And then one day he asked me a question—The man can't have children and they've begged me to give his wife a child and what should I do? The woman had quietly opened the door of their bedroom and shown him the double bed, and on the wall at its head was a madonnina with a candle flame before her, such as you saw in every such bedroom, and at every wayside.

Good  
story  
was that

I said, Give them their child. And as far as I know (he never spoke of it again) this is what he did.

And all this took place in two weeks.

No one could say we weren't ripe for more war. The fitness we exuded cried out to be used. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, we were told to move. We stealthily dressed and when we were kitted up to go, with the engines revving outside, I tapped on my host's door, behind which no fewer than four slept in the one bed. They blinked at me with bewilderment, thinking it was an

alarm. I said good bye with a smile and all they did was blink at me more from within their deep Italian dreams, and next morning I swear none of them remembered my little visit.

The familiar feathers in the belly returned quite as if war had a direct line to the nervous system.

The press rooms, those chief engines of war, were meanwhile being festive about the 'liberation' of Rome. In a ghoulish gloating language of pure illusion they described how the Fifth army was 'racing' and even 'storming' up Italy in pursuit of an enemy that was 'fleeing' for dear life under the 'pounding' of an 'air blitz'---a retreat so swift that 'our boys' couldn't keep up with them, though the said boys were of course 'at grips' with them, 'clashing' with them and 'smashing through' or else 'locked' with them in fight.

Of all languages this is one which can never capture battle in its truth, and of course it isn't meant to. The function of press rooms in war is to conceal, camouflage and corrupt the truth when it threatens the reader's determination to go on with that war. They must keep the story of the war rolling. Without it no war can run its course.

Press rooms thought and wrote in exactly the same manner as we did. Their language was grandiose in a manner that fitted war-dementia perfectly. So we needed

it. We needed to see ourselves as 'getting to grips with' and 'clashing with' the enemy. That language made us feel momentarily, if pathetically, exalted. In its necessarily shallow light we saw ourselves as 'running the show', deciding on whether to rush the enemy with tanks or machine gunfire or bombs from the air. The giddy funfair that newspapers turned the war into suited us. Above all, the very ignorance that underlay newspaper reports was ours too. We really did think that at this moment, with Rome taken, Jerry was fleeing for all his worth, and that we were chasing him for all ours.

In fact we sleepwalkers now had the Trasimene Line before us, and the Arno Line beyond that, then the Gothic Line and lastly the river Po. These were the traps Field Marshal Kesselring was now preparing (in a mood, surely, of ruse and party game).

He was a singularly fortunate general. He could devise his strategy fully confident that Hitler was behind him---a luxury no commander on our side could expect. Divide Hitler into three allies each of whom had different designs and Germany would have capsized by 1942.

Stories about how our motley assembly of 'allies' argued and bickered about almost everything trickled down to us on a regular basis. But what did we expect? As between a Britain about to lose its world status, a

communist power bent on getting world status and an America impatient to write off the European war zone and move on to its real area of interest in the Far East, where was there room for the single command on which battle, however extended, depends?

As for me, I found myself full of zest for what was to come. I was no longer the one-pip officer who had led a ½-mile-long convoy into a cul de sac. An irksome memory, that—the unhitching of the guns and their laborious reversal, curses all the way down the column such that though I usually drove up and down said column on my motor-bike I now found myself with plenty of paper work to do at the column's head, now the tail.

We travelled north of Rome, skirting the Trasimene Lake as Hannibal did nearly two and a half thousand years before. And we set down our guns for another wait, which allowed the feathers to settle into the belly. They became, as before, a constant, even in sleep, which was one of fear's mercies, that there was a way to live with it.

But in the meantime, while we waited, I had a secret debt to settle, in Cassino. I didn't know what it was, only that I must pay that town a visit.

# **FORWARD TO THE DEATH**

**© MAURICE ROWDON 2004**

FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF WAR BOOK, REVISED IN 2009

Page 2 War between friends  
Mounce

To find

~~2003 version → F to Death / no chap  
titles, must be right before the version  
he submitted; go to ZIP disc 1  
WAR →~~

Go copy of Zip + floppy disks 1 - Nov 2008  
Key

Go to Disk Bundle 1 → Zip Disc 1 →  
War → F.OO. Doc

# **FORWARD TO THE DEATH**

**© MAURICE ROWDON 2004**

him). He said, You're going to stop him 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 left pocket, over the heart. She was Viennese, the daughter of a woman who had led a communist revolution in eastern Europe and been released from prison by it. I remembered her 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 my past had really happened. I remembered the joy we two had had—the endless laughter. It was a thing war couldn't eclipse. But it was already eclipsed. We had said good bye, a final and sealing one, on a railway station. She said something incomprehensible to me--- 'Being calm isn't everything'. And now I needed this photo to be a lucky talisman for me. I didn't care

about the self-deception. And I might soon feel grateful for that calm I was supposed to have.

The American hush of the boat with its smooth, non-committal handling of a huge clement foreign Basin, continued on that Salerno beach, much to our bewilderment.

We disembarked in the same hush, were required to make no splashing noises as we waded to shore in the deepening twilight of a hot autumn day. We were cheerful enough. We felt under observation but I put that aside as an absurdity. The trees higher up, even the fig trees, cast quickly deepening shadows and if we turned and looked back at the sea we could comfort our eyes on the destroyers and landing craft at anchor, carefully watching over us. The hush perplexed us.

We reached those beaches, in war dialect, on D+8, that is to say on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, namely eight days after the landing. I had the first pip on my shoulder as a second lieutenant and would be twenty-one on the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month. And I had a photo of my girlfriend in my upper left pocket.

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 and pleasant. Then the moment we had shaken hands he turned away as if to say we don't need polite exchanges here.

I thought, All this hush business is part of a military exercise. After all, we were allowed to walk around, so clearly we weren't cheek by jowl with the enemy (that dread word). The gunners were grimy, which I took as a sign that, being well behind the forward lines, discipline was lax. But it seemed odd to conduct exercises in a theatre of war. Of course the army was capable of anything, its motto being, If the men have time on their hands---fill it any way you can. If necessary with drill.

Also the Germans would soon be out of Italy. We reinforcements had already decided this in our stifling bivouacs back in the Algerian desert close to Philippeville. We said what use is Italy to Hitler now—a narrow peninsula too cramped for fighting, with hundreds of miles of coast ideal for allied landings?

But this was where we were wrong. Italy is mostly (right up to Bologna) a dense 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 were observed. A terrain 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. But we had no idea of this. Nor (as it transpired) did our commanders. Or rather, if they did, they never once acknowledged it in their strategy.

And what was I doing in a war anyway? Like everyone else I hadn't wanted it, didn't believe in it. All we knew was that it suddenly started. We found ourselves in it. ~~Chamberlain's declaration of war came to us like a decision made on the basis of a whim---even his voice wobbled on the radio. He didn't seem certain of it (and now we know why).~~

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

And I realised before I spoke that I really didn't know, I hadn't made up my mind. So when I said Yes I was surprised at myself---at a decision I seemed to have ~~had~~ no part in ~~making~~.

~~But~~ <sup>And</sup> even as I said it I was asking myself an impotent Why? And the answer came swiftly,

unambiguously: I was going into war because of the Nazi concentration camps, because---as a Gentile---I was horrified to see the Jewish civilization in Europe about to be extinguished. It made it seem that this war unlike all the previous ones was justified.

I saw corpses in the distance. They were close to the wash of the waves. Exactly as they had fallen. They were ours. Quickly I told myself that out of the thousands of men that had disembarked on D-day these dead were the unlucky exception.

As darkness gathered I walked up the sloping beach to where the trees began. I could see a large group of men standing together apparently silent. I was curious. As I came nearer I noticed that a brigadier was at their centre, addressing them. He was talking in a low voice. I could see the red tabs on his shoulders. I thought it remarkable that a brigadier should be addressing Other Ranks man to man. That was a lieutenant's or a captain's job, a major's at most. At this point I became convinced that this was a training camp well enough behind the lines to allow for manoeuvres.

The Brigadier was saying in his careful murmur, almost a whisper (we had to gather closer to hear

him) Jerry's just behind me, on the other side of the road (a lane between trees ran a few feet behind him). He said, You're going to stop him 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 left pocket, over the heart. She was Viennese, the daughter of a woman who had led a communist revolution in eastern Europe and been released from prison by it. I remembered the mother's soft patient voice. She had steel-grey eyes but her softness overrode their steely determination. 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 my past had really happened. I remembered the joy we two had had—the day-long laughter. It was a thing war couldn't eclipse. Except that it had already done so. We had said good bye, a final and sealing one, on a railway station. She said, Being calm isn't everything. I didn't know I was calm. I felt turbulent most of the

time. I think she meant dreamy---I was nearly thrown out of cadet-officer training for it.

And now I needed her photo to be a lucky talisman for me. I didn't care about the self-deception.

The brigadier was saying to his men, Jerry might try something tonight. Keep your wits about you. No sleep, understood?

And since he was talking to infantrymen, not me, a gunner, I could continue with my illusion that this was a training camp and the Brigadier's hushed tones a performance.

I was certainly calm now, as he said those words in the darkening dusk. Commendably calm. And in fact next day I was told as much---by the Texans up the hill.

I strolled back to my area where the fruit trees were, the last of the day's bright sky lighting my way. I began looking for somewhere to put my sleeping bag for the night. 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 rushing like an engineless plane crashing to earth, followed at once by a thunderous metallic crash near by, I thought perhaps this isn't a training camp after all, we weren't far behind the forward lines after all.

As yet I couldn't tell the difference between the monster 88mm. shell, which tore a crater in the ground like a bomb from the air, and the small high-trajectory mortar-bomb that burst very few seconds after it was launched at close range (for instance, from the other side of that lane).

Another heavy one came over and another. And had I been seasoned I might have thought that these were the opening sallies of an enemy attack. But even now I kept telling myself that of course some shells were to be expected in a back area.

The small mortar bombs were preceded by a loud thump when expelled from the cannon, followed almost at once by the quick confined crash of their landing. Thus they gave you no warning. You jumped into a ditch or threw yourself flat for the loud high breathless shriek of a coming shell but the mortar's high trajectory meant, despite its low speed of

emission from the spout, that the little bomb came down with one quick whack, so throwing yourself down was already too late. And now they began arriving in quick succession, bringing changes in the air from warm to momentarily stifling.

Then darkness became complete in the Italian manner---swiftly, a depth of darkness we had never known in our over-populated islands. There was a lull in the firing. At last we could hear the silence that rightfully belonged to this beach and the olive and fig trees, an exchange of whispers, it seemed.

It was my first experience of Italy, a land at that time still pristine, hardly touched since medieval times, her slopes and copses and streams in secret close liaison with the sky, a liaison I was 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, brought the truth. And as I dozed a certain nervousness gathered in me, a foreboding that made feathers

inside, though I still clung drowsily to the thought that this war was an exercise, if a dangerous one.

The possibility of being trodden on by Germans in the night didn't even occur to me (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 a thick little purple pool, one of them on my brow. As for my new sleeping 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 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. '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 if you took its forward blast at close quarters were you dead. The true deadliness of the twenty-five-pounder lay in the fact that its shells could be fired in great numbers and

simultaneously, across a wide front, creating not only dead but great panic among the living. Yet it was highly mobile too. Its breech could be loaded very quickly and thus send shells into the air in quick succession.

These murderous weapons operated in groups of four, which were in the hands of a 'troop'. Each troop had its separate command, with two or three officers. There were two troops to a battery, and two batteries in a regiment, so that as a collected unit you were worth sixteen guns, which was formidable when you consider that there were two regiments in a division, which made 32 guns. Thus the division, more than the regiment, was the family you belonged to. While too big a family to warm the cockles of the heart it moved into attack as one unit, its parts coordinated space-wise and synchronised time-wise, so that it could make a large hole in the enemy line.

Not that we ever saw our divisional commander. He was too busy with the intricate business of supplying daily food, ammunition, clothing and mail to the battle area from the rear 'B' Echelons. This became especially hazardous when you had to reach forward lines that themselves were on the move.

So we thought of ourselves as the 46<sup>th</sup> division, the sister of 56<sup>th</sup> division, which together made up the Tenth Corps. This Corps could thus call up the fire of over sixty guns spread across quite a wide front, and was capable of much disruption---to put the screaming and the death mildly. But it did not achieve a destruction comparable to that inflicted by bombers in the air or by the enemy's 88mm. artillery shell. So you might say that its bark was worse than its bite, except that it bit often and deep. After all, the explosive and the human have been in a progressively grim brotherhood since the first one came into being. The frightful sound, the smoke, the shattered environs, increased its influence on the mind the more it was used, until the insanity which first found it necessary was lost to view.

But in the forward lines that insanity betrays itself with marvellous candour in the form of hallucinatory states and tremors of presentiment, in a haunting unreality that is the most real thing you have ever known, so that far from experiencing insanity as a state separable from yourself you find it has found easy residence in a place within, locked arms with what you deeply know.

Still sleepy, I wandered away from our command post up the hill to where Texan infantrymen huddled in their hastily dug slit trenches. 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 but it did to the Texans. They seemed surprised by my presence, watching me from below, as who wouldn't to witness a youth strolling about the forward lines with all six feet of him exposed. They told me, You British guys must have war in your blood, look at you, it's like you're on holiday. Charitably, they didn't tell me I was a bloody fool. They knew I was a new boy. Yet I had already, quite unawares, learned something. The evening before, I had seen men throw themselves to the ground when an 88mm. 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 gazing at me affably. I was glad to be thought a pre-packaged soldier and 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 that last unthinkable hell of theirs.

Hell is bound to happen in a close terrain. A sudden enemy machine-gun emplacement can spring up at your elbow, you find yourself exposed to a lone man whom you can't see but who can call up lethal fire on you. The peninsula south of Bologna is so cut across by rivers and terraces and mountains and lesser hills and hillocks that the defence of a carefully prepared line is easy, while making a dent in that line is perpetual hazard.

So it was that these Texan youths stared up at me, as if I were ancestrally guided. They saw that I threw myself down for the close ones and just ducked my head for swishes that denoted a safe trajectory. So was it true what they said about me—that I had war in my blood? They ought to have seen me a few weeks later frantically scratching the earth with my fingernails to make an instant man-size cave for myself under such a rain of metal that only a miracle could have intervened to save us. Which it must have done.

From Captain H. I at last got a serious 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. If they managed to storm one of these roads in strength we would be pushed into the sea after being cut off from both Salerno the town and the rest of our division, just as the Texans on our flank would be cut off from the rest of theirs. In that case we would all be without supplies of either ammunition or food (in that order of importance).

Had I been experienced I would have grasped this easily the moment I first waded onto that beach—you simply don't have twenty-five-pounder guns sitting among forward infantry unless you are in helter-skelter retreat or, as in our case, caught in a wedge. Shell-firing guns are never in the forward lines, that is nose to nose with the enemy. When they are in the forward lines it is almost the end. Such guns must be well behind the lines. If I'd had just the slightest experience I would have seen that we were a hopeless case. A glance at those guns sitting there with nothing but the sea to retreat to, this over eight days after the first landing, would have told me all.

Salerno was in any case ill-chosen as a landing place. You could see why on the map. A big force

could be throttled just by the terrain, its exits squeezed with ease. Our army commander, Mark Clark, wanted to pull out, as he later---because of the high casualty rate---wanted to pull out of the whole Italian campaign. Yet he proved to be the chief instrument of the vast toll of dead and wounded and shocked.

The Germans held the dice all the way up the Italian peninsula. At this moment the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier division was directly facing us, its job being to stop us thrusting towards the road to Rome. 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 whole of the Italian campaign.

Nothing could have been cleverer. Hitler felt he should perhaps (and it was still, for him, perhaps) make full strategic use of a terrain that could be defended economically but attacked only at great cost.

He must have noticed, for instance, that in the Salerno operation our two divisions, plus the 7<sup>th</sup>

Armoured division and an armoured brigade, were up against at most four German battalions. And he rightly concluded that he could perhaps prolong this typical situation all the way up Italy.

After all, every metre of this terrain, offering as it did lethal observation potential for the enemy, required on our side keen eyes, nimble feet and much savvy. And that had to be exercised at the lowest levels of command. It meant our forward lines could rarely be straight ones. A push in one place, if unaccompanied by a push of the same depth on at least one flank, would get you into a wedge like the one at Salerno, if not surrounded.

We were aware of none of this. We didn't even cotton on to it by slow degree, later. From our point of view we were just trying to advance up a very narrow peninsula and it depended solely on the quality of our fighting and our good luck whether we did it fast or slow. Therein lay our principal self-disabling delusion, and the result was an unthinkably high casualty rate.

The fact was that one man planned our every move and he wasn't on our side. Even at this moment the wily 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 the first big casualty-toll was designed to take place. And Hitler was paying attention to his every move, and the more we entangled ourselves in Kesselring's traps the more he was impressed by Kesselring as the right man to run a long and bitter Italian campaign. Only this persuaded him to stay in Italy at all---namely our stupendous blindness to what was going on.

That was why nothing disturbed us reinforcements as we waded onto this beach. And why the mortar-bombs and shells that came over were not followed up with an attack. For that reason alone I hadn't woken up under the heel of a German boot.

Kesselring had a much better trap waiting for us on the river Volturno. But our version of events was that our naval gunfire and nearly two thousand air sorties had kept the Germans off. Not that this information came from higher up. It was simply how we chose to think. We believed we were pushing Jerry remorselessly towards the gates of Rome, and whenever he fell back it was because we pushed him. All the way up Italy we lulled ourselves with this daydream.

Strategy is another name for pre-empting the enemy intention but we failed to adapt our modes of attack to Hitler's sole intention of creating a death-trap for us.

\* \* \*

All of a sudden, a week after we landed, there was no further risk of our being pushed back into the sea. Our forward lines moved north of Salerno, leaving us gunners behind with our guns, that is some kilometres in the rear, where guns belong.

Our forward lines 'broke through' to the road to Naples on September 26<sup>th</sup>, three days after the Germans simply vanished from their positions in the course of a night, leaving mined bridges behind them. It was all of sudden peaceful on our beach. Our battle cruisers looked like pleasure boats in the calm waters.

We felt happily forgotten. The days, like the Mediterranean, were balmy and sweet. We heard little but the faraway boom of other guns than ours. The fleet made a peaceful sight in the bay, the air so heavy with the special haunting hot scent of wild thyme that I began to think that this peninsula war might have begun to peter out already, just as, back

in Phillippeville, we had generously promised each other it would.

We heard birds (always silenced by battle). At night leaves stirred in the breeze from the sea. In a characteristic Italian rhythm, the colder sea air of nightfall is drawn to the still warm mountains inland, just as at dawn the chill mountain air rushed to the sunlit and already warm sea. And this silent and unobserved exchange repeated itself each day like one long breath, an inhale at nightfall and 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 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 utter impossibility of that.

We moved our guns north, troop by troop, each convoy leaving separately. A certain care had to be exercised in this operation because no one could say

OLD

1  
FIGS

SCRIPT

have expected 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?

I had a long dreamily restful chat with one of the naval officers on the way over. He was from New England and gazed at me with somewhat solicitous eyes. It was a new sort of conversation for me. My island speech suggested nothing like his born detachment, the way of seeing things from afar. My speech seemed to rush forwards and up and down according to the clamour of my emotions, while space and great distances had given him, little older than my own twenty years, an innately calm mind.

The American hush of the boat with its smooth, non-committal handling of a huge clement foreign Basin, continued on that Salerno beach, much to our bewilderment.

We disembarked in the same hush, were required to make no splashing noises as we waded to shore in the deepening twilight of a hot autumn day. We were cheerful enough. We felt under observation but I put that aside as an absurdity. The trees higher up, even

the fig trees, cast quickly deepening shadows and if we turned and looked back at the sea we could comfort our eyes on the destroyers and landing craft at anchor, carefully watching over us. The hush perplexed us.

We reached those beaches, in war dialect, on D+8, that is to say on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, namely eight days after the landing. I had the first pip on my shoulder as a second lieutenant and would be twenty-one on the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month. And I had a photo of my girlfriend in my upper left pocket.

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 and pleasant. Then the moment we had shaken hands he turned away as if to say we don't need polite exchanges here.

I thought, All this hush business is part of a military exercise. After all, we were allowed to walk around, so clearly we weren't cheek by jowl with the enemy (that dread word). The gunners were grimy, which I took as a sign that, being well behind the forward lines, discipline was lax. But it seemed odd to conduct exercises in a theatre of war. Of course

the army was capable of anything, its motto being, If the men have time on their hands---fill it any way you can. If necessary with drill.

Also the Germans would soon be out of Italy. We reinforcements had already decided this in our stifling bivouacs back in the Algerian desert close to Philippeville. We said what use is Italy to Hitler now—a narrow peninsula too cramped for fighting, with hundreds of miles of coast ideal for allied landings?

But this was where we were wrong. Italy is mostly (right up to Bologna) a dense 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 were observed. A terrain 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. But we had no idea of this. Nor (as it transpired) did our commanders. Or rather, if they did, they never once acknowledged it in their strategy.

And what was I doing in a war anyway? Like everyone else I hadn't wanted it, didn't believe in it. All we knew was that it suddenly started. We

found ourselves in it. Chamberlain's declaration of war came to us like a decision made on the basis of a whim---even his voice wobbled on the radio. He didn't seem certain of it (and now we know why).

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

And I realised before I spoke that I really didn't know, I hadn't made up my mind. So when I said Yes I was surprised at myself---at a decision I seemed to have had no part in making.

But even as I said it I was asking myself an impotent Why? And the answer came swiftly, unambiguously: I was going into war because of the Nazi concentration camps, because---as a Gentile---I was horrified to see the Jewish civilization in Europe about to be extinguished. It made ~~it seem that~~ <sup>it</sup> this war ~~unlike~~ <sup>different from</sup> all the previous ones <sup>it</sup> was justified. ~~And over the~~

I saw corpses in the distance. They were close to the wash of the waves. Exactly as they had fallen. They were ours. Quickly I told myself that out of the thousands of men that had disembarked on D-day these dead were the unlucky exception.

~~and I felt this I doubted it  
with knowledge only~~

→ But we were already at war, so the war  
gubbly was?

As darkness gathered I walked up the sloping beach to where the trees began. I could see a large group of men standing together apparently silent. I was curious. As I came nearer I noticed that a brigadier was at their centre, addressing them. He was talking in a low voice. I could see the red tabs on his shoulders. I thought it remarkable that a brigadier should be addressing Other Ranks man to man. That was a lieutenant's or a captain's job, a major's at most. At this point I became convinced that ~~this~~ <sup>Salerno</sup> <sup>(how)</sup> was a training camp well enough behind the lines to allow for manoeuvres.

The Brigadier was saying in his careful murmur, almost a whisper (we had to gather closer to hear him) Jerry's just behind me, on the other side of the road (a lane between trees ran a few feet behind him). He said, You're going to stop him 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 left pocket, over the heart. She was Viennese, the daughter of a woman who had led a communist revolution in eastern

Europe and been released from prison by it. I remembered the mother's soft patient voice. She had steel-grey eyes but her softness overrode their steely determination. She said fascism was the last bastion of capitalism, and this war would destroy

them both. *As my mother said*

*people said she knew Stalin, Lenin, and Trotsky*  
*and was on the*  
 I already had a nervous habit of feeling the photo as if to assure myself that my past had really happened. I remembered the joy we two had had—the day-long laughter. It was a thing war couldn't eclipse. Except that it had already done so. We had said good bye, a final and sealing one, on a railway station. She said, Being calm isn't everything. I didn't know I was calm. I felt turbulent most of the time. I think she meant dreamy---I was nearly thrown out of cadet-officer training for it.

And now I needed her photo to be a lucky talisman for me. I didn't care about the self-deception.

The brigadier was saying to his men, Jerry might try something tonight. Keep your wits about you. No sleep, understood?

And since he was talking to infantrymen, not me, a gunner, I could continue with my illusion that this

was a training camp and the Brigadier's hushed tones a performance.

I was certainly calm now, as he said those words in the darkening dusk. Commendably calm. And in fact next day I was told as much—by the Texans up the hill.

I strolled back to my area where the fruit trees were, the last of the day's bright sky lighting my way. I began looking for somewhere to put my sleeping bag for the night. 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 rushing like an engineless plane crashing to earth, followed at once by a thunderous metallic crash near by, I thought perhaps this isn't a training camp after all, we ~~were~~<sup>arent</sup> far behind the forward lines after all. X

As yet I couldn't tell the difference between ~~the~~<sup>this</sup> monster 88mm. shell, which tore a crater in the ground like a bomb from the air, and the <sup>much</sup> small <sup>but also deadly</sup> ~~high~~ ~~trajectory~~ mortar-bomb that <sup>came down almost vertically,</sup> ~~burst very few seconds~~

having been ~~just~~ after ~~it was~~ launched at <sup>Very</sup> close range (for instance, ~~from~~ the other side of that lane).

Another <sup>huge</sup> ~~heavy~~ one came over and another. And had I been seasoned I might have thought that these were the opening sallies of an enemy attack. But even now I kept telling myself that of course some shells were to be expected in a back area.

The small mortar bombs were preceded by a loud thump when expelled from the cannon, followed almost at once by the quick confined crash of their landing. Thus they gave you no warning. You jumped into a ditch or threw yourself flat for the loud high breathless shriek of <sup>the 88mm</sup> ~~a coming~~ shell but the mortar's high trajectory meant, despite its low speed of emission from the spout, that the little bomb came down with one quick whack, so throwing yourself down was already too late. And now they began arriving in quick succession, bringing changes in the air from warm to momentarily stifling.

Then darkness became complete in the Italian manner---swiftly, a depth of darkness we had never known in our over-populated islands. There was a lull in the firing. At last we could hear the silence that

rightfully belonged to this beach and the olive and fig trees, an exchange of whispers, it seemed.

It was my first experience of Italy, a land at that time still pristine, hardly touched since medieval times, her slopes and copses and streams in secret close liaison with the sky, a liaison I was 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, brought the truth. And as I dozed a certain nervousness gathered in me, a foreboding that made feathers inside, though I still clung drowsily to the thought that this war was an exercise, if a dangerous one.

The possibility of being trodden on by Germans in the night didn't even occur to me (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 a thick little purple pool, one of them on my brow. As for my new sleeping 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 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~~. '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 if you took its forward blast at close quarters were you dead. The true deadliness of the twenty-five-pounder lay in the fact that its shells could be fired in great numbers and simultaneously, across a wide front, creating not only dead but great panic among the living. Yet it was highly mobile too. Its breech could be loaded very quickly and thus send shells into the air in quick succession.

These murderous weapons operated in groups of four, which were in the hands of a 'troop'. Each troop had its separate command, with two or three officers. There were two troops to a battery, and two

→ We neither of us knew what friends we would become.  
He kept his distance, being two pips above me. But  
also I think he was aware

→ He kept his distance, being two pips above me in rank.  
Command

batteries in a regiment, so that as a collected unit you were worth sixteen guns, which was formidable when you consider that there were two regiments in a division, which made 32 guns. [Thus the division, more than the regiment, was the family you belonged to. While too big a family to warm the cockles of the heart it moved into attack as one unit, its parts coordinated space-wise and synchronised time-wise, so that it could make a large hole in the enemy line.

*n.p.*

Not that we ever saw our divisional commander. He was too busy with the intricate business of supplying daily food, ammunition, clothing and mail to the battle area from the rear 'B' Echelons. This became especially hazardous when you had to reach forward lines that themselves were on the move ~~and in the state~~.

So we thought of ourselves as the 46<sup>th</sup> division, the sister of 56<sup>th</sup> division, which together made up the Tenth Corps. This Corps could thus call up the fire of over sixty guns spread across quite a wide front, and was capable of much disruption ~~to~~ (to put the screaming and the death mildly). But it did ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> achieve a destruction comparable to that inflicted by bombers in the air or by the enemy's 88mm. artillery shell. So you might say that its bark was worse than

its bite, except that it bit <sup>in clusters (therefore)</sup> ~~often~~ and ~~deep~~. After  
 all, the explosive and the human have been in a  
 progressively grim brotherhood <sup>for many centuries now.</sup> ~~since the first one~~  
~~came into being~~. The frightful sound, the smoke, the  
 shattered environs, // increased <sup>their</sup> ~~its~~ influence on <sup>our</sup> ~~the~~  
 mind <sup>s/</sup> the more <sup>they happened,</sup> ~~it was used~~, until the insanity which  
 first found <sup>them</sup> ~~it~~ necessary was lost to view.

~~But~~ In the forward lines that <sup>same</sup> insanity betrays  
 itself with marvellous candour in the form of  
 hallucinatory states and tremors of presentiment, in  
 a haunting unreality that is the most real thing you <sup>will</sup>  
<sup>ever</sup> have ~~ever~~ known, so that far from experiencing  
 insanity as a state separable from yourself you find  
 it has found easy residence in a place within, locked <sup>ing</sup> ~~ed~~  
 arms with what you deeply know.

Still sleepy, I wandered away from our command  
 post up the hill to where Texan infantrymen huddled  
 in their hastily dug slit trenches. 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 but it did to the Texans. They seemed  
 surprised by my presence, watching me from below, as  
 who wouldn't to witness a youth strolling about the  
 forward lines with all six feet of him exposed. They

→ We ~~never~~ quickly became accustomed to the  
detonation both of gun being fired and  
shells arriving. After all,

told me, You British guys must have war in your blood, look at you, it's like you're on holiday.

[Charitably, they didn't tell me I was a bloody fool.

They knew I was a new boy. Yet I had already, quite unawares, learned something. The evening before, I

had seen men throw themselves to the ground when an 88mm. came over. *(the shriek of flight did the trick)*

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 gazing at me affably. [I h. p,

was glad to be thought a pre-packaged soldier and 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 that

last unthinkable hell of theirs.

Hell is bound to happen in a close terrain. A sudden enemy machine-gun emplacement can spring up at your elbow, you find yourself exposed to a lone man whom you can't see but who can call up lethal fire on you. The <sup>Italian</sup> peninsula south of Bologna is so cut across by rivers and terraces and mountains and lesser hills and hillocks that the defence of a carefully prepared line is easy, while making a dent in that line is perpetual hazard.

So it was that these Texan youths stared up at me, as if I were ancestrally guided. They saw that I threw myself down for the close ones and just ducked my head for swishes that denoted a safe trajectory. So was it true what they said about me—that I had war in my blood? They ought to have seen me a few weeks later frantically scratching the earth with my fingernails to make an instant man-size cave for myself under such a rain of metal that only a miracle could have intervened to save us. Which it must have done.

From Captain H. I at last got a serious 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. If they managed to storm one of these roads in strength we would be pushed into the sea after being cut off from both Salerno the town and the rest of our division, just as the Texans on our flank would be cut off from the rest of theirs. In that case we would all be without supplies of either ammunition or food (in that order of importance).

Had I been experienced I would have grasped this easily the moment I first waded onto that beach—you simply don't have twenty-five-pounder guns sitting among forward infantry unless you are in helter-skelter retreat or, as in our case, caught in a wedge. Shell-firing guns are never in the forward lines, that is nose to nose with the enemy. When they are in the forward lines it is almost the end. Such guns must be well behind ~~the lines~~. If I'd had just the slightest experience I would have seen that we were a hopeless case. A glance at those guns sitting there with nothing but the sea to retreat to, this over eight days after the first landing, would have told me all. X

Salerno was in any case ill-chosen as a landing place. You could see why on the map. A big force could be throttled just by the terrain, its exits squeezed with ease. Our army commander, Mark Clark, wanted to pull out, as he later---because of the high casualty rate---wanted to pull out of the whole Italian campaign. Yet he proved to be the chief instrument of the vast toll of <sup>our</sup> dead and wounded and shocked.

The Germans held the dice all the way up the Italian peninsula. At this moment the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier division was directly facing us, its job being to stop us thrusting towards the road to Rome. 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' <sup>in his</sup> ~~for the~~ ~~strategic planning.~~ ~~whole of the Italian campaign.~~ *Meanwhile, pinning us down, he had time to think things out.*

Nothing could have been cleverer. Hitler felt he should perhaps (<sup>but</sup> ~~and~~ it was still, for him, perhaps) make full strategic use of a terrain that could be defended economically but attacked only at great cost.

He must have noticed, for instance, that in the Salerno operation our two divisions, plus the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured division and an armoured brigade, were up against at most four German battalions. And he rightly concluded that he could perhaps prolong this typical situation all the way up Italy.

After all, every metre of this terrain, offering as it did lethal observation potential for the enemy, required on our side keen eyes, nimble feet and much

savvy. And that had to be exercised at the lowest levels of command. It meant our forward lines could rarely be straight ones. A push in one place, if unaccompanied by a push of the same depth on at least one flank, would get you into a wedge like the one at Salerno, if not surrounded. *And perhaps Hitler had a*

*Perhaps Hitler, in his canny way, guessed this — after all, →*  
 We were aware of none of this. ~~We didn't even~~

~~cotton on to it by slow degree, later.~~ From our point of view we were just trying to advance up a very narrow peninsula and it depended solely on the quality of our fighting and our good luck whether we did it fast or slow. Therein lay our principal self-disabling delusion, and the result was an unthinkably high casualty rate, *which never became public knowledge.*

The fact was <sup>this</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>was</sup> ~~one~~ <sup>man</sup> ~~planned~~ our every move *in 11/2*

and he wasn't on our side. Even at this moment the <sup>General</sup> wily 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 the first big <sup>- out -</sup> casualty-toll <sup>^</sup> was designed to take place. *[And Hitler*

*was paying attention to his every move. And the more*  
 we entangled ourselves in <sup>General</sup> Kesselring's traps the more *Hitler*  
~~he~~ was impressed by Kesselring as the right man to

\* better understanding of us than we did ourselves. His attacks in Belgium and France had been swift, light,

→ his swift attacks in Belgium, with very small forces, had invaded France. We failed to cotton on to any aspect of the we were up against - and therefore what we must do. We didn't see cotton on by slow degrees, later on from our...

→ out of

run a long and bitter Italian campaign. Only this persuaded him to stay in Italy at all---namely our stupendous blindness to what was going on.

That was why nothing disturbed us reinforcements as we waded onto this beach. And why the mortar-bombs and shells that came over were not followed up with an attack. For that reason alone I hadn't woken up under the heel of a German boot. ~~Belts the pressure to us~~

Kesselring had a much better trap waiting for us on the river Volturno. But our version of events was that our naval gunfire and nearly two thousand air sorties had kept the Germans off. Not that this information came from higher up. It was simply how we chose to think. We believed we were pushing Jerry *h.p.* → remorselessly towards the gates of Rome, and whenever he fell back it was because we pushed him. All the way up Italy we lulled ourselves with this daydream.

Strategy is another name for pre-empting the enemy intention but we failed to adapt our modes of attack to Hitler's sole intention of creating a death-trap for us.

All of a sudden, a week after we landed, there was no further risk of our being pushed back into the

...

...

→ We thought like a men room - it cliché and  
boring. This was why we loved to read  
the trash they wrote about us. ~~It's very~~  
~~mundane helped us. After all, we had to~~  
~~accept some dignity - the opinion was~~  
~~it's~~

We got orders to move and there was the sound of unbroken and →  
 sea. Our forward lines moved north of Salerno,  
~~we were to retreat~~  
 leaving us gunners behind, with our guns, that is some  
 kilometres in the rear, where guns belong.

Our forward lines 'broke through' to the road to  
 Naples on September 26<sup>th</sup>, three days after the  
 Germans simply vanished from their positions in the  
 course of a night, leaving mined bridges behind them. →

[It was all of sudden peaceful on our beach. Our  
 battle cruisers looked like pleasure boats in the  
 calm waters.

We felt happily forgotten. The days, like the  
 Mediterranean, were balmy and sweet. We heard little  
 but the faraway boom of other guns than ours. The  
 fleet made a peaceful sight in the bay, the air so  
 heavy with the special haunting hot scent of wild  
 thyme that I began to think that this peninsula war  
 might have begun to peter out already, just as, back  
 in Phillippeville, <sup>North Africa,</sup> we had generously promised each  
 other it would.

We heard birds <sup>again</sup> (always silenced by battle). At  
 night leaves stirred in the breeze from the sea. In a  
 characteristic Italian rhythm, the colder sea air of  
 nightfall is drawn to the still warm mountains  
 inland, just as at dawn the chill mountain air rushed

hitching and the surviving engines. Our infantry was to move  
north of Salerno, ~~and we the gunners would follow~~  
leaving our gunners behind. ~~That's~~ That is, some  
kilometers ... > not

→ ~~The ~~press room~~ they didn't break through at all, unless~~  
unless 'break through' meant passing it as a hole they  
did no such thing. The German saps were no  
longer there.

to the sunlit and already warm sea. And this silent and unobserved exchange repeated itself each day like one long breath, an inhale at nightfall and 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 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 utter impossibility of that.

We moved our <sup>+</sup> guns north; <sup>+</sup> troop by troop, each <sup>+</sup> convoy leaving separately. A certain care had to be exercised in this operation because no one could say for certain if the enemy hadn't left pockets of resistance behind, as they had left mined bridges.

The Salerno beach when we looked back at it had a drowsily alluring, never-to-be-seen-again peace. We ~~went high~~ <sup>ascend ~~of~~ ground away in slow low gear</sup> into the hills and found ourselves in a meadow high above the sea, cupped round with trees, hushed in its own scented air. Through the trees we

Law of innocence and compassion the  
any animal is destitute in that: and  
in his destitution he was defiant,  
laughing, ~~negative~~ the soul of negativity,  
the one we always called (a near-secret  
word) Reaction. ~~Had joined the~~

positively,

— the movement <sup>had</sup> ~~the~~ dominated the  
Thirties right across Europe. I think  
~~that~~ we knew what a fascist was —  
he flaunted the law ~~and then the~~  
~~clashes~~ the law within, that essential

→ He and I were ~~slowly~~ becoming friends very fast,  
we had learned something momentous and each other.  
We were both devotees of the struggle against  
Fascism & politics, we were utterly together and  
USE the way up the peninsula was common  
→ first discussions filled the hours and dulled  
TER the fear. We talked about Victor Gollancz's  
Left Book Club. I had been a member since the  
age of 14. We idolised the Soviet Union —  
with the reserve that we were no communists.  
→ I had been in the house, behind the Party's  
keeps of youth since the age of 14, sold  
broadsheets like 'Spain' and 'Russia Today' ←  
outside the railway stations.

~~He and I knew we had been the  
most vociferous that we had hoisted~~

\* \* \*

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 had never breathed an air haunted with pine and elm and beech, with the sky yet another blue, so deep and domed and infinite, so close, so unassumingly true that I had to believe it false. [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 that agreeable Italian manner <sup>that</sup> denoting <sup>as</sup> utter bafflement. n.p.

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 came to the conclusion that after all war was an easy matter. I had seen photos of sturdy brown-faced soldiers in North Africa from the days of El Alamein and deduced from them a safe war in which machines did the work. famous the battle of

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 by the entrance to be milked and the peasant's family coming and going. There was slush at the entrance and hot close wet-hay smells inside and the occasional decisive stamp of a cow, shifting her great flanks, and it was all a good-luck sign for me.

Of course such quiet (lacking as it does even desultory intermittent shelling) betokens imminent attack. The big pervasive silence is easily recognised by those whose ears are attuned. I'd got wind of a coming barrage---from our side---but not how big it was going to be. I wasn't even clear about what the word 'barrage' <sup>meant.</sup> ~~involved~~. And much less was I aware that the size of a barrage is commensurate with that of the battle timed to follow it. 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 <sup>(the war right at the stall)</sup> ~~18~~ 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?

I was yet to learn that to be at the receiving end of a barrage like this one excludes exultation,



changing tears of joy to tears of sorrow. This sudden  
 silence was only for us, <sup>not for the receiver,</sup> Not yet had I cringed from  
~~their~~ <sup>that</sup> horrifying precipitate sloop to earth <sup>of the shell</sup> and heard  
 the screams, the ones of the living and the ones of  
 the dying.

Here, miles behind the forward line, we were in  
 little danger of retaliation. If it happened at all  
 it came after perhaps a day's delay, during which the  
 enemy would have calculated our map reference---with  
 a large margin of error.

Also those shells of ours were aimed at the  
 enemy's forward positions, which responded <sup>with fire</sup> not <sup>on</sup> to us X  
 distant guns but <sup>on</sup> ~~to~~ those directly facing them in the  
 form mortars and hand grenades and Sten guns.

~~But~~ <sup>Yet</sup> killing somebody is remote from a soldier's  
 mind. He simply defends himself. Faced by a strong  
 enemy you quickly learn that the killing is  
 reciprocal and the death in an enemy's last gaze is  
 your death too. Not a stunning truth—but one that  
 makes a soldier and is his real baptism of fire.

The forward lines thus induce mercy. It is rear  
 troops whose thoughts may dwell on revenge, atrocity.

 <sup>\*</sup> <sup>\*</sup> <sup>\*</sup> I knew I wouldn't be with the guns much longer,   
 that my real job was in the forward lines. I knew my

song would change. [Very shortly my role would be to ~~would remain of the land,~~ guide these very shells to their destination. 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 this new position of death and ruin I would direct further fire.

I would be in the forward lines but sometimes (this I did not yet know, since it was never spoken of) I must be prepared to find myself beyond those lines, in enemy ones.

In a word I was to be a Forward Observation Officer or F.O.O. as we called him. Or, in the words of the army textbook, The Eyes of the Army. X

And then these guns of mine and my command post would become, being well behind the lines, a rest and refuge for me. Their daily detonations—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 on Guy Fawkes night. X

*suddenly*  
 We were ordered to move the guns forward 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 precisely 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. The Germans had just vacated Cava de<sup>)</sup> ~~de~~ // X  
Tirreni and it was obvious (though not for us) that they had quickly taken up positions with a perfect view of the valley in which our guns were to be put down---within spitting <sup>distance</sup> distance of us, as it turned out.

Captain H., under cover of night, put our four guns down in a small valley flanked with steep vine terraces, a short walk from the town. We did the unhitching as quietly as possible. Then, after putting out sentries, we walked stealthily back into Cava de' Tirreni. We had taken over a big house on the northern side. The idea in war is that you walk into any house of your choosing. Its owners or squatters make a quick bunk or retire to a deep cellar. There is no unfriendliness about it because civilians have little interest in being caught in crossfire. If you move in fast it means, for them, you will probably get out fast too.

This house had an atrium and a balcony looking down on it, and it was this balcony that drew us

—really a large salon beneath yet another storey. Most of the men billeted themselves down here. I shared a tiny nursery room with another junior officer who had freckles and surprised eyes. We took it in turns to sleep in a child's cot <sup>(the firm of mugs we curled up in),</sup> relieving each other every few hours for guard duty at the guns. Once I came in to wake him and as I was doing so I fell asleep slumped over him and we only woke up at dawn. We got some ~~very~~ sharp words from above but senior officers rarely came down on us hard, knowing as they did that there were many battles ahead that would do their own cowing.

To get to the guns one took a winding path that couldn't be observed. Cava de' Tirreni (meaning the quarry or mine of the Tyrrhenian seas, on Italy's <sup>or Mediterranean</sup> western coast) was tiny then—no four-lane highway ran at its side, as now. 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.

The vine terraces where we put our guns had a greater beauty than they would in peace-time because, as I see only now, their silence was so war-deep, devoid of the domestic clatter of normal times. And

of course this silence carried with it a foreboding which enhanced even further the beauty. There were mossy statues and young trees. There were also a fountain and green garden benches where the women who tended the vines used to 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.

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 among the leaves, their smoke rolling flatly away, hugging the dew. Jerry must have been able to see the whites of our eyes. Most of his first ones dropped near the benches and statues. A splinter caught a young Italian woman. 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 the crashes came in clusters and the pungent smoke got into our lungs. One of the men shouted down at the woman Shut up! Shut up! in the illusion that she was attracting the fire. He threw himself down close to

me and murmured, She's not hurt as bad as all that. But I think she was screaming at her first realisation that war killed and meant to do so.

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. And things were suddenly quiet and he was dead. My face puckered up against crying in that first compassion, you are crying for all the future ones, whom you will not cry for, as well as for this friendly creature who spoke to you not a moment before so that you still hear him and see his particular way of smiling. He was a man I trusted and he was to accompany me on my F.O.O. missions, we had agreed about that. Just a glance and we seemed to understand each other. No need for orders—he was already there. This in your signaller is precious as gold.

A peasant woman in black stood by the hut door and moaned quietly to herself. The gunners trod about respectfully, thinking. 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, the shit would fall 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 becomes part of that strange assembly of dead men who have gone and live men who might any minute go.

We sat in the balcony area overlooking the atrium and I was asked to give a lecture. All because I let it drop that I had been on the set of a film called The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, which was

shot at the Elstree studios. They wanted to know how a film was made. As all I remembered of that day was hanging about for just one scene—shot in a few inaudible moments—I had little to say. I would much rather have talked about the theatre, how my mother and father used to take me and my two brothers to the working men's clubs when we were tiny. You saw the top comedians in those clubs, on their way up. In my mother's arms I began to know about timing and pace and projection. But these troopers turned it down. They wanted the big screen, the passive sanitised dream.

I enjoyed strolling alone in Cava de' Tirreni's narrow lanes. 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? I expect all ~~the~~ <sup>that</sup> 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.

It was a restless period for us. I was impatient to get my first F.O.O. assignment over and done with. It would have been useful to get some gen (our word for information) about this. 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 *your own command post in* with the rear. Mostly you would have no chance of recharging the batteries so while you needed to be in day and night *radio* contact ~~with your command post back at the guns~~ you had to be economical in *your O's.* ~~radio~~ use. Your firing orders had sometimes to go far beyond your own command post to engage the guns of a whole brigade or division, and the reply had to come back down that hierarchy, so you needed plenty of juice. It was after the word Ready had been passed to you from all the assembled waiting guns that your final order of

Fire! went through and then, almost instantaneously, you heard the baleful whirring of ~~the~~ <sup>your own</sup> shells above your head.

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, derived from utter bafflement as to what to expect.

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 15<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadiers or a Hermann Göring division or the 44<sup>th</sup> 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 in the form of quick and heavy support from the rear. So the tendency of infantry officers was therefore to treat ~~him~~ <sup>the F.O.O.</sup> 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. X

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 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 were whores galore in Naples and 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 proprietess 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—*in fear not of offending us but of disobeying ~~our~~ <sup>their</sup> ~~own~~ <sup>own</sup> deep-laid laws of fact.*

*(an old word nearly a synonym)*  
The proprietess was a large young body 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, 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, *an echo of summer.*

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 ~~my turn~~ 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

**M**ost of the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 x  
<sup>southern</sup> 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 <sup>even</sup> stronger line would give him time to prepare a truthfully impregnable line <sup>on</sup> which whole divisions, whole corps could decimate themselves to the point of self-disbandment (and did), thus breaking both head and heart. x

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 <sup>already</sup> 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 Naples-Rome highway passed just ahead <sup>of us.</sup>

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 <sup>over</sup> 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 <sup>surely</sup> 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. X

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! 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 from their 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 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 <sup>^</sup> 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. 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 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.

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 56<sup>th</sup>, 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 34<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 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 Americans just walked out of the line and went to town. Mark Clark <sup>as commander,</sup> 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 <sup>veterans of the Africa campaign and</sup> ~~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

North

h.p.

one sleep at night, it being the case that what the  
eye doesn't see the heart doesn't grieve after.

## INSERT 60

Why did we do it - drink ourselves unconscious?  
Wasn't there to be hidden so deep? ~~Had it needed to~~  
~~be drunk away?~~ ~~We knew, <sup>it was a</sup> ~~long time~~, ~~that we~~  
~~were depressed.~~ We were doing this we didn't  
understand, ~~for papers and other reasons.~~ ~~Want in no~~  
~~churches.~~ We were doing a lot of this we  
knew; ~~we knew~~ ~~to~~ ~~do~~ ~~this~~ we were told  
also. ~~Of course~~ Of course we talked about how  
~~wanted~~ ~~wanted~~ the struggle ~~with~~  
Russia was our movement, our life  
choice, the way out in a line had just  
Churchill had been, as I said, stole  
- we'd say I cared - for the  
country part, that's the factory  
part, I cared of the dust! But how  
could there be? How could a man~~

So you tell what on the ... must  
ad ...

change when this way? and why  
should he? why did on this he was  
under an object to do so?

~~... ..~~  
~~... ..~~

{ 200,000 people ... - K ...  
{ He came on ... shoulder.

We didn't realize ... one thing  
in the men who still hoped for peace  
still started ... the ... the ...  
knew were going on, & caused  
the Phony War - 6 months ...  
peace.

But why had he ...  
huge ... of ...  
to ... part of the ... with  
remember ... to ... all the  
people, of the ...! ...  
of Little ...  
... ..

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 <sup>^</sup> because I was starting to suffocate. X

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 to touch gin again. *On my side, I kept the*

INSERT  
60

We sat and drank numberless 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 ~~with~~

~~because~~ *unreluctantly* ~~because~~ *because* their deaths could not be seen. I heard from my parents the very middle months <sup>Len</sup> friend had fallen for the sky over Germany, →

~~friend~~ who told me once, in the  
me of my school friend, ~~the~~ I remember saying  
+ a wistful look it's spacy, 'I'd be cool if I killed - I'd self  
dub!

→ with no time, to a ~~perhaps~~ strength, ~~to~~ activate  
his parachute. <sup>the same</sup> happened to ~~me~~ ~~a school friend~~

\* \* \*

We got wind of another show coming up—a very big one this time. We were again to punch a hole in the enemy defences but this time our armoured division would pass through <sup>the hole we made</sup> it (an expression that took on, in the course of the Italian campaign, a certain dry <sup>tragic</sup> drollness).

Having secured the northern banks of the river Volturno we were <sup>now</sup> to face <sup>Field Marshal</sup> ~~General~~ Kesselring's Gustav or Winter line, which was <sup>he ever</sup> ~~now~~ <sup>being</sup> prepared 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, <sup>so we would first have to</sup> →

~~And~~ <sup>It</sup> 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 <sup>adapt</sup> ~~walk~~ → into it. <sup>h.p.</sup> [The Aurunci went east towards the centre of the peninsula and stopped abruptly and briefly at the

narrow defile in which was contained the road to Rome. <sup>his</sup> ~~was called, in dull military phrase,~~ or Highway 6, and this was accompanied by <sup>levels</sup> ~~(the)~~ Liri river, <sup>this land ran at the side of</sup> ~~which~~ gave its name to ~~the~~ defile. <sup>h.p.</sup> (Thus the road to Rome could, ~~at this point,~~ be overseen from formidable heights <sup>— which</sup> ~~and they~~ also <sup>presented</sup> ~~constituted~~ a

→<sup>1</sup> to pop this lesser hurdle.

→<sup>2</sup> ourselves to his design.

## 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 that it ~~made~~<sup>turned</sup> the thick rain clouds <sup>into</sup> a white fluffy sheet, and our gun site, within its green walls, began to feel immune to war, especially as <sup>all but the closest</sup> sounds were muffled too.

You never heard so much laughter. Laughing was the most of what we <sup>soldiers</sup> 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 <sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> We were children again, Captain H. no less than the rest of us. <sup>3</sup>

Army commanders were astonished at so much laughter in the forward lines and I think they put it

<sup>1</sup> → The dead and the dying are always with you,  
just as...

<sup>2</sup> → proclaiming the joy and light that death is,

<sup>3</sup> → He giggled and his buck teeth showed  
more than usual. Hardly a word or gesture  
didn't ~~excite~~ cause a laugh.

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. <sup>And</sup> they don't laugh about the dead. <sup>Deaths</sup> 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. ~~at the night~~ 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

deadly insurmountable ~~natural~~ barrier to any ~~troops~~ bent on frontal assault, as ~~was~~ were. ~~for this except~~ Columander

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 ~~was~~ <sup>lay</sup> a smaller ~~it~~ <sup>but</sup> steep hill and on this

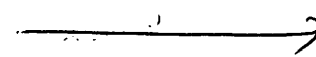
sprawled, in the sweetest manner, a slumbering

medieval town called Cassino, which ~~this~~ looked

benignly down <sup>toward</sup> not only ~~on~~ the mouth of the defile

with its precious road ~~to~~ Rome but ~~on~~ <sup>to</sup> the plains that

stretched before it in a southerly direction. This

town was the central nut of the Gustav Line, 

~~But~~ <sup>And</sup> not even this was enough. The ~~little~~ <sup>steeply</sup> nut was accompanied, even dominated, by a greater one that

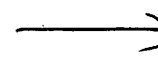
covered the summit of the hill and ~~might~~ <sup>would</sup> require an

arsenal of nutcrackers to break it, yet was <sup>just</sup> as sweet

as Cassino, ~~perhaps~~ 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 ~~will~~ <sup>with</sup> 

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


was after all ~~the~~ no less <sup>— had</sup> for been for  
a thousand years and more — the Vatican's  
southern gate.

→ a nut snugly and snugly a lever for its  
the defenders, with wriggling lanes and  
houses clutched together in ~~as~~ a  
centuries-old entrance, but a nut which  
even if y-destroyed stone by stone and  
tile by tile would remain — indeed become  
= finally <sup>so</sup> more — a nut too deadly to  
approach, and beyond human power to  
= filtrate.

serve ~~of~~ spiritual ends and resist impreguably  
any foreign invader from the south, if their

front of it, and later it did.) <sup>in fact</sup> The whole ensemble <sup>of the hill</sup> ~~in~~ fact 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 <sup>fully</sup> enemy's Gustav Line had already been manned, its supply lines (always difficult on heights) secured. Our first trip wire, the Bernhardt line <sup>the way is direct, it,</sup> stretched along the Garigliano river in its <sup>Mediterranean</sup> ~~western~~ reaches to its tributaries in the east, the Liri and the Rapido, close to Cassino, <sup>namely</sup> ~~that is to~~ a defence position set there by nature ~~(and indeed it had been used for many centuries by monks as the narrow gateway to Rome through which no invader could or did pass)~~ 

No wonder St. Benedict ~~put his monastery there,~~ <sup>his temple monastery</sup> and built ~~it~~ like a fortified town. ~~Not an army could~~ ~~or ever did~~ ~~pass it without being mauled and~~ ~~thrown back.~~ One could say <sup>the</sup> it was a divine stronghold which would even if it <sup>went to</sup> ~~was~~ destroyed <sup>would (as it did)</sup> become <sup>all</sup> the stronger for it ~~(and this we later saw happen)~~.

draw a circle of Benedictine filled  
to it. So then you had it — a spiritual  
~~stronghold~~ ~~the~~ stronghold the only  
atheists would, and did, decide to face  
headlong, and we try to destroy.

→ with such deftness and attention to the finest  
detail that ~~the monks were~~ the Benedictine  
monks were no more in need of arms than  
archangels were.

After they were all even there, they were  
more absent of as long as a century and a half —  
so confident was this place that one looked at  
it from below from a hopeful invader would  
inclined to desert. Only one man decided  
to invade — and he was turned back by —

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 <sup>strength</sup> ~~force~~ with what remained of Rommel's army in North Africa.

~~Hitler's original plan was to let the Italian peninsula go, and concentrate his armies in the north, just under the Alps. It was our extraordinary casualty figures that were so persuasive. He made his decision on November 21<sup>st</sup> 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 <sup>mountain</sup> clothing, not even <sup>mountain</sup> special rations. Polyglot as an army we might be (Churchill had after all invited the whole world into this war) but the uncrackable nuts before us required not mass but prowess. <sup>A</sup> And this was something missing from allied guidance at the <sup>political</sup> top—and therefore at the bottom where <sup>we</sup> foot soldiers were.

\*)\*)\*)

The Big Show was to take place between December 15<sup>th</sup> 1943 and 15<sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>Aurunci</sup> mountain ~~range~~ <sup>^</sup> 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, <sup>North of us</sup> 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, ~~which you might say of all mankind.~~ <sup>In Sessa</sup> 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. <sup>^</sup> Betrothals were discussed, the marriages to take place when it was all over. Kisses and smiles were exchanged and anything more secret was presumably snatched in remote corners of the cellars because of the presence of elders and us commissioned officers. We officers only heard reports—the girls were at first hesitant with us and only began coming up to us in the street and passing the time of day <sup>with us</sup> 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 *in these places* fact that *we had tea out*).

In that little town *of Jessa* 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).

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 Ronaco, 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. <sup>It gave us our first lover.</sup> For the first time I started doing well in exams. They got me to

Oxford, <sup>A</sup> and Gordon got to Cambridge. ~~Gordon's~~ <sup>this first love</sup> ~~girlfriend had~~ <sup>was</sup> already ~~become~~ his wife. Of course he <sup>my girlfriend</sup> knew <sup>A</sup> K. and I pulled out the photo. He looked at it with what I took to be momentary misgiving, <sup>perhaps</sup> ~~but~~ he ~~couldn't have known~~ <sup>ever</sup> the truth. ~~The misgiving was I~~ ~~think for both of us.~~ <sup>of thought I didn't.</sup>

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

## Baptism

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 Allied Fifth Army some days before on September 8. This was the outfit I belonged to and its commander-in-chief was Mark Clark, a Texan.

We jumped down into the shallow wash, having been warned back in Algeria not to make any splashing noises as we waded ashore 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---carefully watching over us as we thought.

Yet the hush was perplexing.

We reached those beaches on D+8---war dialect for the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, namely eight days after the first landing. I had one 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 hushed reinforcements 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. And if this beach was now far behind the lines, as 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 this was a military exercise---after all, the army could get up to the strangest antics, we all knew that.

These are the customary wishful thoughts of a reinforcement. You had a pleasing picture of battle as a repetition of those safe exercises you had sweated through at training camp.

And then there was the fact that the Germans, so we thought, would soon be pushed out of Italy. Being caught in a narrow peninsula, hardly eighty miles in width, they would soon find themselves in a trap and would be fleeing as quickly as they had come.

We had already decided this in our stifling bivouacs in the Algerian desert. Italy was just no use to Hitler, especially with hundreds of miles of coast which our allied ships could bombard at any time.

We were badly wrong. Yes, Italy was 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). And this made it easy for the Germans to defend, and the very devil to attack. In other words, the Germans could prepare their defences carefully, sometimes manning them with only a handful of men for the simple reason that their positions were designed for short-term defence. This you could easily overrun, so you thought. But you found instead an ambush, a toughly held position it was too costly to attack.

In fact, if Hitler wanted to lay waste our armies at little expense to himself this peninsula was his best chance. He needed most of his armies to face the Russians---and to see off any allied invasion in Normandy, which he knew, as the whole world knew, was being prepared.

But only small, sensible and mistaken fairytales 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. Yet they had a strange way of remaining there---somehow

they kept plucking me by the sleeve. And I looked again and again.

As ~~darkness~~ <sup>dusk</sup> gathered I walked uphill to where the trees began. I came on a large hushed group of men standing close together, ~~in the dusk~~. 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 very softly. We had to crane forward to hear his words. 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, Jerry's right here on the other side of this lane behind me (it lay between trees a few feet back). He said, you're going to stop him crossing this road. Whatever happens, chaps, you're not going to move, understood? You don't move. You stay where you are.

There were nods in the ~~deep~~ <sup>as</sup> dusk. ~~deepened and then we deepened~~  
~~The trees around me disappeared - I was standing alone, and I was alone.~~  
~~travelling on my,~~

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. She was in love with somebody else, an economics student. 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 a reinforcement who doesn't yet have his unit. I asked myself what am I doing in this bloody war anyway? All we ever knew 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.

The declaration of war hadn't sounded 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 moment the declaration of war was made (with Churchill's gleeful assent) Polish independence was lost!

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

And when I said yes I was surprised at myself---it didn't seem my own decision at all. 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 (I didn't know that all wars are justified to the hilt, once they've been decided on).

What that declaration of war did was to trap the Jews inside Hitler's regime (it stretched as far as the Ukraine) for six <sup>long</sup> ~~whole~~ years. In that time the Jewish civilisation in Europe was virtually removed.

Little did we know that Churchill would one day, <sup>when</sup> ~~(once it was all over)~~, agree that this declaration of war was 'tragically ill-judged'. At the time he was elated by it. It would be a six-weeks war, he told the French ambassador in an excited phone call.

~~We nodded in the dusk and each of us~~ I ~~strolled~~ <sup>walked</sup> back ~~to~~ <sup>my assigned area</sup> where the fruit trees were, the last of the ~~day's hot~~ <sup>twilight</sup> 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.

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). The mortar bomb comes down on you vertically, with hardly a warning swish. It brings 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 over 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.

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. It was figs that 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 the poor spotless sleeping bag it would be dyed 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 this was really war. The enemy was breathing and watchfully close. My realisation brought about---and I cannot explain why---a great turning point in my life. I

## 3

**LAUGHTER**

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 features of battle that it stirs laughter pure and spontaneous. It isn't in spite of the dying, nor is it 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 to touch gin again. But we 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.

## 2

**Farewell**

Most of the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 youth 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 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 me, 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! 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 from their 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 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 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. 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 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.

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 56<sup>th</sup>, 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 34<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 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 Americans just walked out of the line and went 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.

## 3

**LAUGHTER**

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 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 features of battle that it stirs laughter pure and spontaneous. It isn't in spite of the dying, nor is it 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 to touch gin again. But we 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.

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> 1943 and 15<sup>th</sup> 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 Sessa betrothals were discussed, the marriages to take place when it was all over. Kisses and smiles were exchanged and anything more secret was presumably snatched in remote corners of the cellars because of the presence of elders and us commissioned officers. We officers only heard reports---the girls were at first hesitant with us and only began coming up to us in the street and 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 Ronaco, 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.

# **FORWARD TO THE DEATH**

**© MAURICE ROWDON 2004**

Retail Admin Support  
Savings & Customer Operations  
Nationwide Building Society  
Northampton Admin Centre  
Kings Park Road  
Moulton Park  
Northampton  
NN3 6NW

Telephone: 08457 30 20 10

Tuesday 5 April 2011

[www.nationwide.co.uk](http://www.nationwide.co.uk)

Miss C Nash  
76 Chorley Road  
HIGH WYCOMBE  
HP14 3AR

Dear Miss Nash

Thank you for your registration request.

**Internet Banking Registration reference: REG45654929**

Unfortunately we couldn't process your request because the address you entered on the registration form doesn't match what we hold on our records. This may have been because you entered something slightly different on the registration form or our records are incorrect.

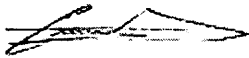
To make sure we have the correct information please contact us on 08457 302010 or visit your local branch quoting this registration reference number.

If our records are incorrect they can only be amended at your local branch and you'll need to take some identification with you (such as a driving licence or passport).

Once your details are correct please re-register at [nationwide.co.uk](http://nationwide.co.uk).

I'm sorry for any inconvenience this may cause you, but for your security it's essential that we can confirm your identity before we allow online access to your accounts.

Yours sincerely,



Glenn MacAndrew  
Retail Admin Support  
Savings & Customer Operations



Retail Admin Support  
Savings & Customer Operations  
Nationwide Building Society  
Northampton Admin Centre  
Kings Park Road  
Moulton Park  
Northampton  
NN3 6NW

Telephone: 08457 30 20 10

Tuesday 5 April 2011

[www.nationwide.co.uk](http://www.nationwide.co.uk)

Mr A Brotherton  
2 St. Johns Street  
NEWTON ABBOT  
TQ12 2DQ

Dear Mr Brotherton

Thank you for your registration request.

**Internet Banking Registration reference: REG45654614**

Unfortunately we couldn't process your request because the address you entered on the registration form doesn't match what we hold on our records. This may have been because you entered something slightly different on the registration form or our records are incorrect.

To make sure we have the correct information please contact us on 08457 302010 or visit your local branch quoting this registration reference number.

If our records are incorrect they can only be amended at your local branch and you'll need to take some identification with you (such as a driving licence or passport).

Once your details are correct please re-register at [nationwide.co.uk](http://nationwide.co.uk).

I'm sorry for any inconvenience this may cause you, but for your security it's essential that we can confirm your identity before we allow online access to your accounts.

Yours sincerely,

Glenn MacAndrew  
Retail Admin Support  
Savings & Customer Operations

notes to myself - March 4, 2010

~~sections~~

① Maurice revised the first three chapters, including their titles - shortened them.  
~~This is in~~

From 4 onward he has gone back to the 2004 completed text -

② He has changed the name of the book to

WAR IN ITALY  
Hitler + Churchill/Honeyman

he has changed the font -  
go back to New Courier font / change  
page numbers of

War in Italy - Different  
Versions

12/2/13 DK.

2007

2<sup>nd</sup> Version

Chapter 1 (31 pages)

Chapter 2 (13 pages)

## 1

**Baptism**

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 Allied Fifth Army some days before on September 8. This was the outfit I belonged to and its commander-in-chief was Mark Clark, a Texan.

We jumped down into the shallow wash, having been warned back in Algeria not to make any splashing noises as we waded ashore 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---carefully watching over us as we thought.

Yet the hush was perplexing.

We reached those beaches on D+8---war dialect for the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, namely eight days after the first landing. I had one 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 hushed reinforcements 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. And if this beach was now far behind the lines, as 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 this was a military exercise---after all, the army could get up to the strangest antics, we all knew that.

These are the customary wishful thoughts of a reinforcement. You had a pleasing picture of battle as a repetition of those safe exercises you had sweated through at training camp.

And then there was the fact that the Germans, so we thought, would soon be pushed out of Italy. Being caught in a narrow peninsula, hardly eighty miles in width, they would soon find themselves in a trap and would be fleeing as quickly as they had come.

We had already decided this in our stifling bivouacs in the Algerian desert. Italy was just no use to Hitler,

especially with hundreds of miles of coast which our allied ships could bombard at any time.

We were badly wrong. Yes, Italy was 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). And this made it easy for the Germans to defend, and the very devil to attack. In other words, the Germans could prepare their defences carefully, sometimes manning them with only a handful of men for the simple reason that their positions were designed for short-term defence. This you could easily overrun, so you thought. But you found instead an ambush, a toughly held position it was too costly to attack.

In fact, if Hitler wanted to lay waste our armies at little expense to himself this peninsula was his best chance. He needed most of his armies to face the Russians---and to see off any allied invasion in Normandy, which he knew, as the whole world knew, was being prepared.

But only small, sensible and mistaken fairytales 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. Yet they had a strange way 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 came on a large hushed group of men standing close together in the dusk. 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 very softly. We had to crane forward to hear his words. 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, Jerry's right here on the other side of this lane behind me (it lay between trees a few feet back). He said, you're going to stop him crossing this road. Whatever happens, chaps, you're not going to move, understood? 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. She was in love with somebody else, an economics student. 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 a reinforcement who doesn't yet have his unit. I asked myself what am I doing in this bloody war anyway? All we ever knew 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.

The declaration of war hadn't sounded 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 moment the declaration of war was made (with Churchill's gleeful assent) Polish independence was lost!

Grumbling to myself I remembered the recruiting interview I'd had in a little college room in Oxford.

The man facing me was disarmingly deferential. Would I fight in this war?

And when I said yes I was surprised at myself---it didn't seem my own decision at all. 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 (I didn't know that all wars are justified to the hilt, once they've been decided on).

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. In that time the Jewish civilisation in Europe was virtually removed.

Little did we know that Churchill would one day (once it was all over) agree that this declaration of war was 'tragically ill-judged'. At the time he was elated by it. It would be a six-week war, he told the French ambassador in an excited phone call.

The Brigadier walked off and we dispersed. I strolled back to my area where the fruit trees were, the last of the twilight 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.

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). The mortar bomb comes down on you vertically, with hardly a warning swish. It brings 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 over 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.

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. It was figs that 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 the poor spotless sleeping bag it would be dyed 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 this was really war. The enemy was breathing and watchfully close. My realisation brought about---and I cannot explain why---a great turning point in my life. I became responsible. Thus it is that boys in their early twenties must always man the front lines. You discover this sense of responsibility as a thing that has never hitherto happened. You didn't know you had it until it was fresh inside, a boy's responsibility such as he hasn't used before, for the simple reason that it was no use to anyone, least of all himself. But in battle it suddenly springs to life and you are suddenly safe, however unsafe your situation is.

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. And as it happened, he was the first and only mature man I met in the army who had a boy's approach to everything.

Our command post, set behind four twenty-five-pounder guns, quickly became a home. Captain H. and I quickly discovered a common background tie---the Struggle against Fascism---words that covered a vast left-wing movement stretched right across Europe, with the Soviet

Union as its guide, philosopher and friend. 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'. Thus did we unknowingly hoist up Churchill as our saviour. He was the man to do the job.

Yes, it was we of the Struggle who put him 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---and in a sudden 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 in 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. They said, You British 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. They carried a premonition of this in their eyes. I noted this without real awareness of it.

On the way up this side of Italy the Texans were at our immediate flank and I imagined to myself that they were the men I'd see at Salerno, whereas they were very many, in fact, an entire division, the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

Captain H. filled me in with a clear strategic picture of what was happening. Our Division was in charge of Salerno, the town. 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---both from our supplies of ammunition and from 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 didn't know was that our commander-in-chief Mark Clark wanted to pull out of Salerno and even--

-because of the huge casualty rate it would involve---  
from the entire Italian campaign. Yet he proved to be one  
of the chief instruments of the vast toll of dead,  
wounded and shell-shocked at least on our side---the  
Western side---of the peninsula.

The ugly fact was that the Germans held the dice all  
the way up Italy. At this moment we had the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer  
Grenadier division facing us, their task being to keep us  
from the road to Rome 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 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 landing.  
Our two divisions, plus the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division and an  
armoured brigade, were up against at most four German  
battalions. And, being acutely intelligent like so many  
unbalanced and depressive leaders, Hitler reckoned he  
could prolong this agony all the way up. He took one  
gamble---that we the enemy might be as intelligent as he.  
But he needn't have worried.

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 shared the principal self-disabling delusion of the entire polyglot army which 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).

So one man planned every movement made by our 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 was as good as his word.

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. 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 to the Alps. It was what our newspapers were saying. The Ministry of Information in London was agreed

on the grand illusion that was the basis of allied strategy.

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

\* \* \*

Then, 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 26<sup>th</sup>. But they broke through into 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, sweetly heavy with that special haunting hot scent of wild thyme that marked the Italian autumn.

We again 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 artillery 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 the hot close wet-hay smells and occasional decisive stamp of a cow were 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 which 'we' were going to launch on the enemy. 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. 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 tearless ones of the deepest sorrow you have known.

I knew that I wouldn't be with the guns much longer, 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, since I would be miles ahead of them. 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.

The Germans had just vacated Cava dei Tirreni and it was obvious (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, so to speak.

We put our four guns down, under the cover of night, in the bed of the valley, 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 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 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. 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 among the leaves, their smoke rolling flatly away, hugging the dew. Most of the first stuff 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 stone hut and put him face down. He had two deep holes in his back, behind the lungs. I held him in my arms. 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 my signaller 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, indeed in my whole life. 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 had known this. There was a wonderful formality between us that strangely reinforced the sense of a perfect, immediate understanding between us that needed only a nod or a word for a message of eyes that would have required whole sentences in the case of someone else. He was to accompany me on my F.O.O. missions, this was understood between us. Just a glance conveyed all, no need for 'orders'. This in your signaller is precious as gold. And to find your closest, most natural friend who understood you as you understood him quite as if you had hitherto spent all your life in his company.

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. You get so many inner commands in battle, namely in a world you have never so much as dreamed of before.

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.

It turned me into a soldier. I can't explain this. It made me determined to do well. Doing well meant that I would look after the four men detailed to me when I 'went out'. I vowed, with my closest of friends in my arms, not as a thought at all, but the vow simply took place, as I knew afterwards only---I silently and unawares vowed that my four men would remain unharmed. And that was how it happened. You can make vows in battle in such a way that you have secured the future.

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 couldn't even fire the sodding

things. To fire out of that hole you would need a vertical trajectory, your own shit would fall back on you. You have to be a madman to put artillery into the forward lines where Jerry can just look down on you, it was typical of superior officers (meaning those who were majors or more) etc. etc., in that routine grumble we called 'ticking'.

Afterwards there were boring hours. A death isn't forgotten. It becomes part of that strange assembly of the men who have gone and the men who are living and might at 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 came.

I knew the bare logistics of being an F.O.O.---you take three or four men with you, including one or two signallers. Your radio equipment has to be with you at all times. This includes batteries and, in very rare cases of unusual proximity, a cable for direct wire-contact with the rear. Mostly you have no chance of recharging the batteries, so while you need to be in day and night contact with your command post back at the guns you have to be economical in radio use. Your firing orders sometimes have to be relayed far beyond your own command post in order to engage the guns of a whole brigade or division, and the reply has to come back down that hierarchy, so you need plenty of juice.

It was after the word Ready had been passed on to you from all the assembled waiting guns that your final order of Fire! could be given and then almost instantaneously you heard 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. The craters are 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 (namely, two divisions, if 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.

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 15<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadiers or a Hermann Göring division or the 44<sup>th</sup> 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 more unlucky is that handful of men who become your favourites, the kind of men who, try as they might, cannot help being unreliable. 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, 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.

## 2

**Farewell**

Most of the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 youth 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 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 me, 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! 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 from their 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 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 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. 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 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.

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 56<sup>th</sup>, 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 34<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 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 Americans just walked out of the line and went 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.

## 3

**LAUGHTER**

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 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 features of battle that it stirs laughter pure and spontaneous. It isn't in spite of the dying, nor is it 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 to touch gin again. But we 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.

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> 1943 and 15<sup>th</sup> 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 Sessa betrothals were discussed, the marriages to take place when it was all over. Kisses and smiles were exchanged and anything more secret was presumably snatched in remote corners of the cellars because of the presence of elders and us commissioned officers. We officers only heard reports---the girls were at first hesitant with us and only began coming up to us in the street and 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 Volturmo 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 Ronaco, 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.

**4****Apparition**

An 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 mountain 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 20<sup>th</sup> (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 hardest 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 biting 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 naïf, 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.

## 1

*Figs*

**W**e 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.

These beaches had been invaded by the American Fifth Army some days before, on September 8 1943. And I was to join my division here, a British division in the American Fifth Army. It was an unexplained surprise to be in an American army but we accepted our new identity as a promise of adventure.

We sampled their food on the two-day journey that brought us from the virgin white and yellow sands of the Algerian coast. The trip was smooth and unerring and we gasped at the turkey and jam they scandalously deposited side by side on our trays, without our ritual greens and gravy. This boat was clearly another world, a quieter one than ours (as belonging to great spaces perhaps). 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?

Not that the Fifth Army was really American. It was just what we called it, no doubt because its commander Mark Clark was American. Officially it was the Allied Fifth Army, meaning that its troops came from all over the world.

I had a long dreamily restful chat with one of the naval officers. He was from New England and it was a new sort of conversation for me. My speech seemed to rush forwards and up and down compared with his. Space and great distances had given him, little older than my own twenty years, a calm mind.

The hush of that landing craft, its smooth, non-committal handling of a huge clement foreign Basin, drew us to those strangely silent Salerno sands, much as if the hush of the boat had chosen to come ashore.

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. We were cheerful enough. We felt under observation but I put that aside as an absurdity. The trees

Straits of Gibraltar by smaller craft which we could see all round us from the decks, we would land so to speak in America?

I had a long dreamily restful chat with one of the naval officers on the way over. He was from New England and gazed at me with somewhat solicitous eyes. It was a new sort of conversation for me. My island speech suggested nothing like his born detachment, the way of seeing things from afar. My speech seemed to rush forwards and up and down according to the clamour of my emotions, while space and great distances had given him, little older than my own twenty years, an innately calm mind.

The American hush of the boat with its smooth, non-committal handling of a huge clement foreign Basin, continued on that Salerno beach, much to our bewilderment.

We disembarked in the same hush, were required to make no splashing noises as we waded to shore in the deepening twilight of a hot autumn day. We were cheerful enough. We felt under observation but I put that aside as an absurdity. The trees higher up, even the fig trees, cast quickly deepening shadows and if we turned and looked back at the sea we could comfort

higher up, even the fig trees, cast quickly deepening shadows and if we turned and looked back at the sea we could comfort our eyes on the destroyers and landing craft at anchor, carefully watching over us. Yet the hush did perplex us.

We reached those beaches, in war dialect, on D+8, that is to say on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, namely eight days after the landing. I had the first pip on my shoulder as a second lieutenant and would be twenty-one on the 20<sup>th</sup> of this month. And I had a photo of my girlfriend in my upper left pocket.

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 and pleasant. Then the moment we had shaken hands he turned away as if to say we don't need polite exchanges here.

The gunners were grimy, I noticed. I thought, All this hush business is part of a military exercise. After all, we were allowed to walk around, so clearly we weren't cheek by jowl with the enemy (that dread word). But it seemed odd to conduct exercises in a theatre of war. Of course the army was capable of anything, its motto being, If the men get

bored organise a manoeuvre. And in any case, this enemy, the Germans, would soon be out of Italy. We all that. We'd decided it in our stifling bivouacs in the Algerian desert close to Philippeville. What use was Italy to Hitler now—a narrow peninsula too cramped for fighting, with hundreds of miles of coast for allied invasion?

But this was where we were wrong. Italy is mostly 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 were observed. It was a terrain 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 the armies he could lay his hands on to fight the Russians in the east and the coming Normandy invasion by the allies in the west. Also Mussolini's regime in Italy had just collapsed, which meant that the Germans here risked facing a hostile population. Hitler might think twice about engaging his men on three fronts.

These small sensible and mostly mistaken arguments crowded into my mind 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 told myself that out of the thousands of men that had disembarked on D-day these dead, safely distant from us, were the unlucky exception.

As darkness gathered I walked up the sloping beach to where the trees began. I could see a large group of men standing together apparently silent. I was curious. As I came nearer I noticed that a Brigadier was at their centre, addressing them. He was talking in a low voice. I could see the red tabs on his shoulders. I thought it remarkable that a brigadier should be addressing Other Ranks man to man. That was a lieutenant's or a captain's job, a major's at most. At this point I became convinced that this was a training camp well enough behind the lines to allow for manoeuvres.

The Brigadier was saying in his careful murmur, almost a whisper (we had to gather closer to hear him) Jerry's just at the back here, on the other side

of the road (a lane between trees ran a few feet behind him). He said, You're going to stop him 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 left pocket, over the heart. She was Viennese, the daughter of a woman who had led a communist revolution in eastern Europe and been released from prison by it. I remembered her 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 my past had really happened. I remembered the joy we two had had—the endless laughter. It was a thing war couldn't eclipse. But it was already eclipsed. We had said good bye, a final and sealing one, on a railway station. She said something incomprehensible to me--- 'Being calm isn't everything'. And now I needed this photo to be a lucky talisman for me. I didn't care

about the self-deception. And I might soon feel grateful for that calm I was supposed to have.

I felt bolshie all of a sudden, in the lonely manner of the reinforcement who has not yet joined his crowd. I asked myself what am I doing in a war anyway? I hadn't wanted it. All we ever knew about it was that it was suddenly on. We just found ourselves in it. A bolt from the blue. Not a by your leave or explanation. It didn't sound right even when it was announced. Chamberlain's voice wobbled on the radio as if even he was puzzled.

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

And I realised before I spoke that I really didn't know, I hadn't made my mind up. So when I said Yes I was surprised at myself---as if it wasn't my own decision.

The moment I said it I was asking myself an impotent Why? And the answer came swiftly, unambiguously: I'm going into this war because of the Nazi concentration camps, because---as a Gentile--- I'm horrified to see the Jewish civilization in Europe about to be extinguished. It was this one

thing that made the war different from all the others. And I think that was in everyone else's mind too---that this war unlike all the others had a justification.

What we didn't see was that in fact the Jewish civilization in Europe had already been sacrificed. The declaration of war simply trapped the Jews inside Hitler's regime, and all over Europe, for six long years.

I strolled back to my area where the fruit trees were, the last of the day's bright sky lighting my way. I began looking for somewhere to put my sleeping bag for the night. 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 rushing like an engineless plane crashing to earth, followed at once by a thunderous metallic crash near by, I thought perhaps this isn't a training camp after all, we weren't far behind the forward lines after all.

As yet I couldn't tell the difference between the monster 88mm. shell, which tore a crater in the

ground like a bomb from the air, and the small high-trajectory mortar-bomb that burst very few seconds after it was launched at close range (for instance, from the other side of that lane).

Another heavy one came over and another. And had I been seasoned I might have thought that these were the opening sallies of an enemy attack. But even now I kept telling myself that of course some shells were to be expected in a back area.

The small mortar bombs were preceded by a loud thump when expelled from the cannon, followed almost at once by the quick confined crash of their landing. Thus they gave you no warning. You jumped into a ditch or threw yourself flat for the loud high breathless shriek of a coming shell but the mortar's high trajectory meant, despite its low speed of emission from the spout, that the little bomb came down with one quick whack, so throwing yourself down was already too late. And now they began arriving in quick succession, bringing changes in the air from warm to momentarily stifling.

Then darkness became complete in the Italian manner---swiftly, a depth of darkness we had never known in our over-populated islands. There was a lull

in the firing. At last we could hear the silence that rightfully belonged to this beach and the olive and fig trees, an exchange of whispers, it seemed.

It was my first experience of Italy, a land at that time still pristine, hardly touched since medieval times, 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, brought the truth. And as I dozed a certain nervousness gathered in me, a foreboding that made feathers inside, though I still clung drowsily to the thought that this war was an exercise, if a dangerous one.

The possibility of being trodden on by Germans in the night didn't even occur to me (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 a thick little purple pool, one of them on my brow. As for my new sleeping

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

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, the vast left-wing movement of the Thirties that stretched right across Europe.

I told him how in 1940 my girlfriend K. and I had marched up Whitehall in a huge crowd 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. Why was I carping about being in it then?

'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 if you took its forward blast at close quarters were

you dead. The true deadliness of the twenty-five-pounder lay in the fact that its shells could be fired in great numbers and simultaneously, across a wide front, creating not only dead but great panic among the living. Yet it was highly mobile too. Its breech could be loaded very quickly and thus send shells into the air in quick succession.

These murderous weapons operated in groups of four, which were in the hands of a 'troop'. Each troop had its separate command, with two or three officers. There were two troops to a battery, and two batteries in a regiment, so that as a regimental unit you were worth sixteen guns, which was formidable when you consider that there were two regiments in a division, making 32 guns. Yet it was the division, more than the regiment, that was the family you belonged to. We moved forward as a division and held the line as a division. While too big a family to warm the cockles of the heart it moved into attack as one unit, its parts coordinated space-wise and synchronised time-wise, so that it could make a large hole in the enemy line.

Not that we ever saw our divisional commander. He was too busy with the intricate business of

supplying daily food, ammunition, clothing and mail to the battle area from the rear 'B' Echelons. This became especially hazardous when you had to reach forward lines that themselves were on the move, and you could only move in darkness.

So we thought of ourselves as the 46<sup>th</sup> division, the sister of 56<sup>th</sup> division, which was the source of the liveliest hatred in our battle lives. On the two or so occasions when, in order to relieve the other in the line, we passed each other in single file on the relief road, we felt a contempt that we never for a moment felt for the enemy.

Our two divisions made the Tenth Corps. This Corps could thus call up the fire of over sixty guns spread across quite a wide front, and was capable of much disruption (to put the screaming and the death mildly).

But it did not achieve a destruction comparable to that inflicted by bombers in the air or by the enemy's 88mm. artillery shell. So you might say that its bark was worse than its bite, except that it bit often and deep. And the sight and sound of its impact had a madness to it which so to speak perfectly reflected the madness capable of producing it. But

the explosive and the human have been for centuries in too close a brotherhood for the insanity to be felt any longer.

But in the forward lines insanity shows itself at once with marvellous candour in the form of hallucinatory states and tremors of presentiment, in a haunting unreality that is the most real thing you will ever have known, such that far from appearing in any way insane it finds easy residence in you, locks arms with you in the sense that you know it already, in a very deep place.

But on that beach I had utterly no presentiment of this experience about to unfold. How could I if it had never been described?

Still sleepy, I wandered away from our command post up the hill to where Texan infantrymen huddled in their hastily dug slit trenches. 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 but it did to the Texans. They seemed surprised by my presence, watching me from below, as who wouldn't to witness a youth strolling about the forward lines with all six feet of him exposed. They told me, You British guys must have war in your

blood, look at you, it's like you're on holiday. Charitably, they didn't tell me I was a bloody fool. They knew I was a new boy. Yet I had already, quite unawares, learned something. The evening before, I had seen men throw themselves to the ground when an 88mm. 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 gazing at me affably. I was glad to be thought a pre-packaged soldier and 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 that last unthinkable hell of theirs.

This hell was bound to happen in such a close terrain. A sudden enemy machine-gun emplacement can spring up at your elbow, you find yourself exposed to a lone man whom you can't see but who can call up lethal fire on you. So cut across by rivers and terraces and mountains and lesser hills and hillocks is the Italian terrain below Bologna that the defenders can call all the shots, especially if you never trouble (because you have enough resources to

destroy all the earth, and seem hell bent on doing it) to think up the right strategy.

That was why these Texan youths stared up at me now---as a part of the madness they would never fathom, and which would later consume them utterly.. Of course they thought me ancestrally guided---I seemed to have been here before. They saw that I threw myself down for the close ones and just ducked my head for swishes that denoted a safe trajectory. So wasn't it true what they said about me---that I had war in my blood? They ought to have seen me a few weeks later frantically scratching the earth with my fingernails to make an instant man-size cave for myself under such a rain of metal that only a miracle could have intervened to save us. Which it must have done.

From Captain H. I at last got a serious 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. If they managed to storm one of these roads in strength we would be pushed into the sea after being cut off from both Salerno the town and the rest of our division, just as the Texans

on our flank would be cut off from the rest of theirs. In that case we would all be without supplies of either ammunition or food (in that order of importance).

Had I been experienced I would have grasped this easily the moment I first waded onto that beach—you simply don't have twenty-five-pounder guns sitting among forward infantry unless you are in helter-skelter retreat or, as in our case, caught in a wedge. Shell-firing guns are never in the forward lines, that is nose to nose with the enemy. When they are in the forward lines it is almost the end. Such guns must be well behind the lines. If I'd had just the slightest experience I would have seen that we were a hopeless case. A glance at those guns sitting there with nothing but the sea to retreat to, this over eight days after the first landing, would have told me all.

Salerno was in any case ill-chosen as a landing place. You could see why on the map. A big force could be throttled just by the terrain, its exits squeezed with ease. Our army commander, Mark Clark, wanted to pull out, as he later---because of the high casualty rate---wanted to pull out of the whole

Italian campaign. Yet he proved to be the chief instrument of the vast toll of dead and wounded and shocked in that campaign.

The Germans held the dice all the way up the Italian peninsula. At this moment the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier division was directly facing us, its job being to stop us thrusting towards the road to Rome. 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 whole of the Italian campaign.

Nothing could have been cleverer. Hitler felt he should perhaps (and it was still, for him, perhaps) make full strategic use of a terrain that could be defended economically but attacked only at great cost.

He must have noticed, for instance, that in the Salerno operation our two divisions, plus the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured division and an armoured brigade, were up against at most four German battalions. And he rightly concluded that he could perhaps prolong this typical situation all the way up Italy.

After all, every metre of this terrain, offering as it did lethal observation potential for the enemy, required on our side keen eyes, nimble feet and much savvy. And that had to be exercised at the lowest levels of command. It meant our forward lines could rarely be straight ones. A push in one place, if unaccompanied by a push of the same depth on at least one flank, would get you into a wedge like the one at Salerno, if not surrounded.

We were aware of none of this. As for Captain H. and I, the bright buttons of the Struggle against Fascism, we didn't even cotton on to it by slow degree, later. From our point of view we were just trying to advance up a very narrow peninsula and it depended solely on the quality of our fighting and our good luck whether we did it fast or slow. Therein lay the principal self-disabling delusion of the entire polyglot army that Churchill had urged to join in with us---New Zealanders, Indians, Moroccans, Australians, Canadians, Poles and Frenchmen and Americans and Russians (yes, even Russians kept a presence in Italy). The result was an unthinkably high casualty rate.

\*

\*

\*

The fact was that one man planned our every move and he wasn't on our side. Even at this moment the wily 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 the first big casualty-toll was designed to take place. And Hitler was paying attention to his every move, and the more we entangled ourselves in Kesselring's traps the more he was impressed by Kesselring as the right man to run a long and bitter Italian campaign. Only this persuaded him to stay in Italy at all---namely our stupendous blindness to what was going on.

That was why nothing disturbed us reinforcements as we waded onto this beach. And why the mortar-bombs and shells that came over were not followed up with an attack. For that reason alone I hadn't woken up under the heel of a German boot.

Kesselring had a much better trap waiting for us on the river Volturno. But our version of events was that our naval gunfire and nearly two thousand air sorties had kept the Germans off. Not that this information came from higher up. It was simply how we chose to think. We believed we were pushing Jerry

remorselessly towards the gates of Rome, and whenever he fell back it was because we pushed him. All the way up Italy we lulled ourselves with this daydream.

Strategy is another name for pre-empting the enemy intention but we failed to adapt our modes of attack to Hitler's sole intention of creating a death-trap for us.

All of a sudden, a week after we landed, there was no further risk of our being pushed back into the sea. Our forward lines moved north of Salerno, leaving us gunners behind with our guns, that is some kilometres in the rear, where guns belong.

Our forward lines 'broke through' to the road to Naples on September 26<sup>th</sup>, three days after the Germans simply vanished from their positions in the course of a night, leaving mined bridges behind them. It was all of sudden peaceful on our beach. Our battle cruisers looked like pleasure boats in the calm waters.

We felt happily forgotten. The days, like the Mediterranean, were balmy and sweet. We heard little but the faraway boom of other guns than ours. The fleet made a peaceful sight in the bay, the air so heavy with the special haunting hot scent of wild

thyme that I began to think that this peninsula war might have begun to peter out already, just as, back in Phillippeville, we had generously promised each other it would.

We heard birds (always silenced by battle). At night leaves stirred in the breeze from the sea. In a characteristic Italian rhythm, the colder sea air of nightfall is drawn to the still warm mountains inland, just as at dawn the chill mountain air rushed to the sunlit and already warm sea. And this silent and unobserved exchange repeated itself each day like one long breath, an inhale at nightfall and 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 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 utter impossibility of that.

We moved our guns north, troop by troop, each convoy leaving separately. A certain care had to be exercised in this operation because no one could say for certain if the enemy hadn't left pockets of resistance behind, as they had left mined bridges.

The Salerno beach when we looked back at it had a drowsily alluring, never-to-be-seen-again peace. We went high into the hills and found ourselves in a meadow high above the sea, cupped round with trees, 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 had never breathed an air haunted with pine and elm and beech, with the sky yet another blue, so deep and domed and infinite, so close, so unassumingly true that I had to believe it false. 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 that agreeable Italian manner denoting 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 came to the conclusion that after all war was an easy matter. I had seen photos of sturdy brown-faced soldiers in North Africa from the days of the El Alamein battles and deduced from them a safe war in which machines did the work.

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 by the entrance to be milked and the peasant's family coming and going. There was slush at the entrance and hot close wet-hay smells inside and the occasional decisive stamp of a cow, shifting her great flanks, and it was all a good-luck sign for me.

Of course such quiet (lacking as it does even desultory intermittent shelling) betokens imminent attack. The big pervasive silence is easily recognised by those whose ears are attuned. I'd got wind of a coming barrage---from our side---but not how big it was going to be. I wasn't even clear about what the word 'barrage' involved. And much less was I aware that the size of a barrage is commensurate with that of the battle timed to follow it. 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?

I was yet to learn that to be at the receiving end of a barrage like this one excludes exultation, changing tears of joy to tears of sorrow. This sudden silence was only for us. Not yet had I cringed from their horrifying precipitate swoop to earth and heard the screams, the ones of the living and the ones of the dying.

Here, miles behind the forward line, we were in little danger of retaliation. If it happened at all it came after perhaps a day's delay, during which the enemy would have calculated our map reference---with a large margin of error.

Also those shells of ours were aimed at the enemy's forward positions, which responded not to us distant guns but to those directly facing them in the form mortars and hand grenades and Sten guns.

But killing somebody is remote from a soldier's mind. He simply defends himself. Faced by a strong enemy you quickly learn that the killing is reciprocal and the death in an enemy's last gaze is your death too. Not a stunning truth—but one that makes a soldier and is his real baptism of fire.

The forward lines thus induce mercy. It is rear troops whose thoughts may dwell on revenge, atrocity.

I knew I wouldn't be with the guns much longer, that my real job was in the forward lines. I knew my song would change. Very shortly my role would be to guide these very shells to their destination. 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 this new position of death and ruin I would direct further fire.

I would be in the forward lines but sometimes (this I did not yet know, since it was never spoken of) I must be prepared to find myself beyond those lines, in enemy ones.

In a word I was to be a Forward Observation Officer or F.O.O., as we called him. Or, in the words of the army textbook, *The Eyes of the Army*.

And then these guns of mine and my command post would become, being well behind the lines, a rest and refuge for me. Their daily detonations—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 on Guy Fawkes night.

\* \* \*

We were ordered to move the guns forward 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 precisely 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. The Germans had just vacated Cava dei Tirreni and it was obvious (though not for us) that they had quickly taken up positions with a perfect view of the valley in which our guns were to be put down---within spitting distance of us, as it turned out.

Captain H., under cover of night, put our four guns down in a small valley flanked with steep vine terraces, a short walk from the town. We did the unhitching as quietly as possible. Then, after

putting out sentries, we walked stealthily back into Cava de' Tirreni. We had taken over a big house on the northern side. The idea in war is that you walk into any house of your choosing. Its owners or squatters make a quick bunk or retire to a deep cellar. There is no unfriendliness about it because civilians have little interest in being caught in crossfire. If you move in fast it means, for them, you will probably get out fast too.

This house had an atrium and a balcony looking down on it, and it was this balcony that drew us—really a large salon beneath yet another storey. Most of the men billeted themselves down here. I shared a tiny nursery room with another junior officer who had freckles and surprised eyes. We took it in turns to sleep in a child's cot, relieving each other every few hours for guard duty at the guns. Once I came in to wake him and as I was doing so I fell asleep slumped over him and we only woke up at dawn. We got some very sharp words from above but senior officers rarely came down on us hard, knowing as they did that there were many battles ahead that would do their own cowing.

To get to the guns one took a winding path that couldn't be observed. Cava de' Tirreni (meaning the quarry or mine of the Tyrrhenian seas, on Italy's western coast) was tiny then—no four-lane highway ran at its side, as now. 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.

The vine terraces where we put our guns had a greater beauty than they would in peace-time because, as I see only now, their silence was so war-deep, devoid of the domestic clatter of normal times. And of course this silence carried with it a foreboding which enhanced even further the beauty. There were mossy statues and young trees. There were also a fountain and green garden benches where the women who tended the vines used to 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

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 among the leaves, their smoke rolling flatly away, hugging

the dew. Jerry must have been able to see the whites of our eyes. Most of his first ones dropped near the benches and statues. A splinter caught a young Italian woman. 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 the crashes came in clusters and the pungent smoke got into our lungs. One of the men shouted down at the woman Shut up! Shut up! in the illusion that she was attracting the fire. He threw himself down close to me and murmured, She's not hurt as bad as all that. But I think she was screaming at her first realisation that war killed and meant to do so.

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. And things were suddenly quiet and he was dead. My face puckered up against crying in that first compassion, you are crying for all the future ones, whom you will not cry for, as well as for this friendly creature who spoke to you not a moment before so that you still hear him and see his particular way of smiling. He was a man I trusted and he was to accompany me on my F.O.O. missions, we had agreed about that. Just a glance and we seemed to understand each other. No need for orders—he was already there. This in your signaller is precious as gold.

A peasant woman in black stood by the hut door and moaned quietly to herself. The gunners trod about respectfully, thinking. 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, the shit would fall 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 becomes part of that strange assembly of dead men who have gone and live men who might any minute go.

We sat in the balcony area overlooking the atrium and I was asked to give a lecture. All because I let it drop that I had been on the set of a film called *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, which was shot at the Elstree studios. They wanted to know how a film was made. As all I remembered of that day was hanging about for just one scene—shot in a few inaudible moments—I had little to say. I would much rather have talked about the theatre, how my mother and father used to take me and my two brothers to the working men's clubs when we were tiny. You saw the top comedians in those clubs, on their way up. In my mother's arms I began to know about timing and pace and projection. But these troopers turned it down. They wanted the big screen, the passive sanitised dream.

I enjoyed strolling alone in Cava de' Tirreni's narrow lanes. 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? I expect 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.

It was a restless period for us. I was impatient to get my first F.O.O. assignment over and done with. It would have been useful to get some gen (our word for information) about this. 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 to engage the guns of a whole brigade or division, and the reply had to come back down that hierarchy, so you needed plenty of juice. It was after the word Ready had been passed to you from all the assembled waiting guns that your final order of Fire! went through and then, almost instantaneously, you heard the baleful whirring of the shells above your head.

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, derived from utter bafflement as to what to expect.

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 15<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadiers or a Hermann Göring division or the 44<sup>th</sup> 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 in the form of quick and heavy support from the rear. 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 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 were whores galore in Naples and 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 proprietess 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 proprietess was a large young body 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, 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.

## 2

**Crater**

**M**ost of the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 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! 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 from their 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 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 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. 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 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.

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 56<sup>th</sup>, 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 34<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 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 Americans just walked out of the line and went 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 court-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.

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.

remote parts of the building, were the prison's raison d'être quite as if the Italians had devised it as the last earthly festa.

One of my tasks was to search the officers as they came in, immediately they came in. I was constantly called out of my bed which, because the whole experience was deeply restful for me, I accepted happily as one would an on-going Family Do. I would have to dash along the corridor to stop a quarrel over food. Or there was trouble over a woman prisoner—this was routine. All of us officers were on constant call in an orgy of social engagements, and in the quiet moments we sat together turning over the watches and cameras and binoculars that resulted from our 'searches' (a euphemism from higher up which meant stripping the prisoner of all but very personal items like underpants and bootlaces). Since we treated this as a joke, and strangely the joke seemed to be shared by the enemy too, we never felt predatory or acquisitive about it. Besides, there was such a glut of these victory gifts. What is the point of seventeen wrist watches on your arm?

An open German car pulled into the prison after midnight and a thick-set officer with a truculent

gaze jumped down from the dashboard clearly intending to walk straight into the barracks and leave the vehicle where it stood. It contained three or four women. What about these women? I asked him. What about them? he said in English. Where are they supposed to stay, I asked, with you? as fellow prisoners? are they German? His answer was, Will I need women where I'm going? Then, half addressing the SS officers standing around, he translated what he'd said into German, which got a big laugh from the enemy.

The girls, as it always turned out, were mistresses and prostitutes, which filled us officers on the victorious side with a quiet green glow of retrospective envy, when we considered that we could have advanced up the Italian peninsula in constant concubinage. Yet those German armies had lived much more frugally than we had. They had used about half the supplies we used, from food to ammunition. They wasted infinitely less equipment (such as empty petrol cans). Endless resources make you throw half of them away.

During an otherwise calm night one of my men ran into the guardroom and asked me to come quick. We

nipped along the corridor and up some stairs and I heard a woman screaming. I pushed open a door into a long hall with pillars and there before me, perfectly at their ease, sat an SS officer and a middle-aged German woman. They had an oil lamp between them, on a small table—a Victorian picture called Contentment at the End of a Long Day. I eyed the oil lamp, realising that what those officers handed over was probably about equal to what they didn't. A woman was lying on a camp bed at the end of the hall, in half darkness. What's the matter with her? I asked. The officer shrugged. I asked the woman opposite him, You're German aren't you? She nodded and said, She is frightened. Why did she scream? I asked. She is Italian, she said, very excitable, she calls for her husband. I walked over to the Italian woman and told her to come with me. Then I asked the officer, Was it you who frightened her? And he shook his head with mock solemnity. The Italian woman was still shaking and sobbing. She said, I'm Italian and in my own country. She said her husband was a doctor. Where is he? I asked. In the south, she said. Why aren't you with him? I asked. I've come from Austria, she said. That was all the explanation you ever got from the

women—I'm here because I'm here. I took her to the guardroom and got her a bed. By the morning she had gone. She must have solicited a hitch from one of our drivers who no doubt struck a fleshly bargain with her.

Further north, close to the Tarvisio Pass into Austria, there was a huge concourse of various peoples—Caucasians, Domanov Cossacks, Hungarians who had served under the Germans, Chetnicks (who had fought the Germans within Yugoslavia), Croats, Slovenes, Cossacks under General Pannwitz and Yugoslavs who had fought for Germany under General von Seeler. Tito's agents were trying to take a lot of them prisoner. This had been agreed with the allies but the Yugoslavs were also trying to occupy southern Austria and the Venezia-Giulia area for keeps, which had definitely not been agreed.

The Yugoslavs seemed too truculent to become friends. They were on what I thought a moral high horse and deplored the way we treated our prisoners like guests. Their attitude to Germans, as to Italians, was that they were trash. I had to drive into Yugoslavia one day to talk over a welfare question and was indiscreet enough to take a German

soldier with me as interpreter. It nearly got me arrested inside the Yugoslav border. The officer who received me was so enraged he could only glare at me, and he refused to hear or address the German youth. For him the war was a moral struggle. And as it was supposed to be the same for me I realised he was right—for himself. As for myself, the morality junk had all washed away in blood.

I little thought that this man might have reasons other than moral ones. I doubt if I even knew that Yugoslavia had been occupied by the Germans since 1941. And how could my 22 years know that 10% of the population (which at that time was around 16.000.000) had been tortured or whipped or starved or strangled or knifed to death in atrocities?

The allied rule was that the peoples who 'faced' us were our prisoners, while those who 'faced' Yugoslav forces were theirs. So there was no doubt where most of these displaced peoples wished to face—camps like ours: hence the fact that so many poured down into Italy—flying from Soviet troops but also from the equal threat of imprisonment and worse from Tito's men.

All around the search-shed there were piles of German bank notes swirling in the breeze. They had suddenly been declared defunct and useless, so prisoners stood gazing wistfully at piles of notes which not a week before would have made them millionaires, and when no one was looking they made a vain hoard.

Every time I confronted a new batch of officers I made a set speech—an interpreter translated. I said, You must give up your fire-arms, ammunition, maps, compasses, military documents, binoculars, and obviously since there are so many of you I must rely on your honour as officers to hand these things over. They seemed to enjoy this appeal to what they felt was the Aryan in them, and naturally held certain things back.

These SS officers were mostly tall, healthy young men—the first I had yet seen of that imaginary German army cooked up by the British media as strapping, implacable and drilled to robot status, so different from that strangely inoffensive collection of clerks, academics and youths of every shape and size, more bewildered than determined, more lost than indoctrinated, that made up the armies against which

we actually fought. Gertrude Stein's experience of the German soldier in occupied France was exactly the same. She couldn't believe how unlike the invented 'Nazi troops' these boys were, and how like they were to the boys at home.

One day some officers came in bleeding and bandaged. They complained they had been stoned by our Jewish Brigade. They looked to me for redress. I told them, You're lucky not to be massacred for what you did to the Jews. It was astonishing to see their hurt righteous faces without the slightest grasp of what I was saying.

In the afternoon heat a crowd gathered in one of the smaller quadrangles. Two Russian women were screaming hysterically. I stood watching them from the back of the crowd. I recognised one of the SS women standing close to me and I called her over. What's going on? I asked. She said these women have just heard they're going to be sent back to Russia which means they'll be shot for having attached themselves to a German column. The Russian women were looking about them, sobbing, talking to everyone, and no one understood them. We all lost interest.

\* \* \*

A few weeks later we were driving in convoy through the winding mysterious Tarvisio Pass. For the second time I felt I was journeying back to a place I knew deeply without having set foot in it. During our halts the mountain hush closed about us. We came to Villach, then Klagenfurt, then Graz. We bathed in the Wörthersee and took photos.

It was the British 5<sup>th</sup> Corps under General Sir Charles Keightley that halted the Russians in Austria. That is, the two armies sat down cheek to cheek, with simulated bonhomie. Of course they knew that they would have to move back to their internationally agreed lines when the war was officially over. It was the least of allied problems. Southern Austria was milling with different nationalities. Thousands of German soldiers were waiting to be registered as prisoners of war, many of them sick (a whole group had been left unattended with gangrene). There were various Cossack formations, whole corps of Hungarian soldiers as well as non-communist Yugoslavs under German command (like the Slovenes in the Russky Corps) and a whole Bulgarian army. And they were mostly going in different directions.

At last we were among people who had nice lamp shades and carpets and knew about tea and were blond (apart, as in our own case, from the dark ones). We felt acknowledged and even, almost, repatriated.

I sat in my room in a little village near Klagenfurt and read newly arrived books from England behind curtains in the evening, on a silent lane.

My first duty in this strange allied peace was to help exercise the Cossack horses that had come to us as a special gift from the Soviet government. Why and how we had become candidates for this gift we didn't know but we hauled up sacks of corn for our welcome guests, we watered them and sheltered them and with beautiful tackle (another gift) and divinely comfortable saddles (yet another) we mounted them. Those who like me had never ridden before learned in a matter of minutes under the eye of a reticent young major who indicated how to mount, how to sit, how to hold the feet in stirrups, how to canter, trot and gallop, how to brush down, how to remove tackle and saddle and muck out the stables, all by means of a series of differently modulated grunts. We learned how to measure the right degree of tightness in the girth by putting a wary hand underneath, how to heave

ourselves onto the horse's back in one clean jump, hands gripping the saddle and one leg over. We enjoyed the way our horses moved round impatiently before we even had both feet in the stirrups. And the man who grunted his horse wisdom at us had a whole regiment of officers to instruct.

The Cossack horses were small and swift and once in the gallop all but impossible to rein in, having been taught to do this in service of the blind headlong Cossack attack. I galloped alone through the woods. One day my mare, who had a distressful habit of twisting her haunches when at speed (this also taught) sent me flying off with my left foot still in the stirrup and dragged me along for quite fifty yards with the back of my head bumping on the gravel path. My riding major simply grunted, These horses are made for grass.

We soon realised how we had come by these gifts. One day we were put in charge of a long convoy consisting of Cossack families to be conveyed back to the Red Army at Judenberg.

It seemed to us outrageous that these simple people should be returned to a regime which we all knew would kill the lot of them. We were up in arms

about it, senior as well as junior officers. Even the war minister P.J.Grigg, as we now know, complained to the foreign secretary Anthony Eden. Churchill, always careful about matters of common humanity, suggested to Eden that we should stall on the hand-over, in the diplomatic manner. But Eden wouldn't have it. An official war diary of the period (that of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Welsh Guards) called the whole thing 'an act of unparalleled duplicity'.

These Cossacks could be brutal. In the Venezia-Giulia area a group of them had kicked a priest to death. But they weren't being sent back for brutality any more than for being simple kindly folk, which they also were.

The lie that won us over was that everything had been settled with the Soviet authorities. These men and women and children were being conveyed to Judenberg in order to be rehabilitated as Russians. Stalin's people had assured us that this was a serious promise because farmers were so badly needed in the Soviets now. And we swallowed it. And it may have been true. Or not. Even certainly not.

The Cossacks seemed happy in our convoy of trucks, waving to us from the back, holding their

children up to wave to us. They had been fed with a lie too, a different one. While for us they were giving themselves up happily to the Red Army, they had been told that under no circumstances would they be given up to the Red Army.

After travelling some miles we began to slow up. The Cossacks craned round the side of the trucks, curious to see where they were going to be housed. And what told us the truth about their fate was their sudden confusion, their eyes wide open with fear, their last-minute searching round for avenues of escape, as they recognised this Red Army road-block that was virtually the Soviet frontier.

They began chattering wildly among themselves, turning round to look at us, unable to believe it. Yet they seemed to understand that we soldiers weren't responsible. They began beckoning to us, not to save themselves but to give us their possessions, they were holding out their trinkets and gaudy shawls for us to take, their arms laden, but of course we only mimed back to them, No, you're going to be all right—divided as we were now between the truth and the low-down lie.

And then, as their trucks moved and ours stood still we sat back and in common with those Cossacks mourned. This time it was too late for mutinous attitudes. But our feelings about it were shared all the way up the military command. Only this time there was no answer. The job had been done.

Our days were now a round of idleness. I spent much time driving my jeep here and there unnecessarily. We had no administrative duties because the Austrians ran their own lives. I went to the opera in Graz, had fun going round afterwards to the dressing rooms and talking with the girls.

One day in Klagenfurt I saw a young man walking along in a British uniform which clearly didn't fit him, and which didn't bear any insignia. I drew up beside him and asked him sternly, What are you doing in that uniform? He blanched and stared at me and at first couldn't get his words out. It transpired he had just been released from a concentration camp, he was Jewish and this was what they had given him to wear. He was all but trembling, staring at me to see what new nemesis this was. And now I had the task of retracing my steps with placatory smiles and useless words that he couldn't understand, and for the life

of me I couldn't bring a smile back on his face, and my expecting a smile was another preposterous emotion in me. Finally after shaking him by the hand I drove away slowly and didn't want to drive, only sit there and put my head down on the steering wheel and wonder what the devil, what the devil? where has all this led me?

German's eyes before being thrown off his feet by the blast of a shell. His face wobbled as he spoke, a face that had hitherto been a comedian's. He described it in outrage. He seemed to be saying ~~in~~ his outrage that no one should be asked to witness such things. We all had to hear about the scandal of war. <sup>Yes!</sup> We listened like neighbours in a narrow street when something bad has happened across the way. We sat hushed with disbelief at what we knew a thousand times better <sup>than he</sup>. And I think we almost laughed.

Yet he was right. He made me feel ashamed of my having entered the very method of this madness, and allowed myself to be inured to it, *and we play tag in a*

My curiosity about the Germans intensified, if anything. I would reach an enemy post just vacated and stare at the black smouldering shell-holes and ruined rooms, pick my way along, on the look-out for mines, trip wires. There would be no birds. Battle and birds have no association. Scents have gone, other than the smoke that chokes you a little. Did I expect to inure myself? Shouldn't my cheeks wobble like the bombardier's, with the scandal of it?

Whenever we came to deserted or ruined houses we took whatever we wished and, usually, sent it home.

We had no thought of pillaging. The word would have offended us. For us the stuff belonged to a vague caravan of nomads who would never return.

If a door didn't open you pushed it open. You slept in babies' cots under the wondering eyes of the mother, you took over kitchens, you fed on the grapes that were coming to fermenting fullness in a last autumn heat. And you easily overlooked the anxious thwarted hunger of those who were being charming to you, charming in a way that, helpfully for us, made it seem that war was somehow not happening, *as passing* illusion. That was gracious of them.

Once I was in an open field, it must have been after an attack had moved forward because there were prisoners of war standing about, trenches had to be dug for some reason and a few prisoners of war were digging here and there. I took a shovel and handed it to a prisoner who was idle and he shook his head, flat refused to take it. I shrugged. Prisoners weren't under our orders. It took me much puzzling to find out why he refused—I suddenly tumbled to it—he thinks it's for his own grave. Perhaps he had so much death in his <sup>*belly*</sup> ~~system~~ he believed that when you get

caught by the enemy they shoot you. We stood staring at each other without comprehension.

I remember driving a jeep in pitch darkness under a downpour of rain with a fierce bombardment going on, I drove through the swirling mud between two white guiding tapes, swerving and crashing into potholes to avoid the flak and <sup>the</sup> blast<sup>s</sup> that seemed everywhere—and I did it in a calm I couldn't understand, I thought I'm going to get through and the more impossible it gets <sup>and</sup> the more death seems certain, the more I'll get through. As if the war had come to me at last, ~~taken me with proud confidence,~~ taken me on its side, recognised me as its rightful component ~~of its essential nature~~

~~I wonder if that was why we officers were always being told to conduct War Aims discussions in free hours. <sup>Frankly</sup> I mean, the ~~very~~ <sup>or</sup> thought of there being any was, ~~so~~ <sup>for us,</sup> damned silly. <sup>2</sup> But it gave us officers~~

~~something to apparently and seemingly talk about in those 'discussion' hours that yawned with vacuity. <sup>So</sup> We would start talking about The World We Want After It's All Over and before two words were out we seemed to register collectively that it was all a lot of~~

balls. <sup>So</sup> we quickly trailed off into silence and

because the moment you get back to Civity Street your job and, hopefully, your wife and children would ~~take off certain~~ ~~at the whole stock~~ ~~at the time you wanted~~ ~~until death did your~~ ~~actions~~

adopted

programme of moral queries, and it did favour officers  
a chance to fill the emptiness of <sup>the</sup> ~~the free hours, the~~  
~~neither given~~ 'discursive' hours, the yawned with vacancy,

→ It was hardly surprising for commanders and ~~for the~~ <sup>the</sup>  
practical visitors to their command posts that we killed  
and escaped killing as if it were the all of life. ~~After~~  
~~all, War is a story that hopes to end~~ We needed  
to be reminded that, after all, war meant something —  
we so clearly found no meaning in the war, and  
the killing and ~~the~~ being killed. So we <sup>officers</sup> were  
constantly invited to ~~discuss war aims...~~

<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>2</sup>  
→ Not that we couldn't be ~~relied~~ <sup>repeated</sup> ~~the~~  
~~ly note that it was to end~~ ~~region and concentration~~  
~~camp~~ and we knew the ~~aim was to get rid of~~  
obvious aim — of getting rid of Hitler for example — but  
war aims suggested an altogether more elevated

then started saying whatever came into our pleasure-craving heads.

But the idea of getting us to discuss War Aims was nevertheless a devilishly clever one <sup>because</sup> ~~since~~ it planted in us the idea that there were any—and the acceptance of a ~~#~~ falsehood is hardly easy to thrust on multitudes. No wonder, when <sup>After</sup> ~~he~~ heard from his Intelligence sources about War Aims on our side, ~~Hitler~~ <sup>he</sup> promptly ordered his armies to discuss them. ~~Here~~ →

Naturally his ~~war~~ aim to eliminate the Jews would not come under discussion, whereas it offered us Gentiles on the other side an ocean of empty avowals. <sup>bitter</sup> ~~He~~ had to be careful with a <sup>pogrom</sup> ~~programme~~ <sup>that was</sup> ~~so~~ <sup>extensive</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>he</sup> extreme, ~~and~~ was therefore particularly anxious that his soldiers were never stationed close to a concentration camp. The screams were noticed. It had happened once. And he made it his personal order that the two must henceforth never meet.

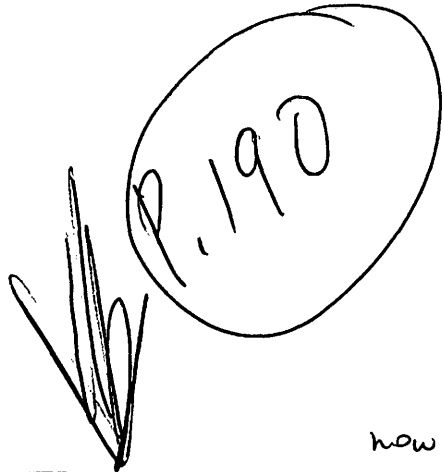
Otherwise War Aims were as useful to him as they were to us. They introduced the idea that we were here in battle not simply to kill each other but for a purpose which rendered our deaths if not desirable at least worthwhile. And what government clean or foul could resist that?

alm

→ he had <sup>the</sup> an advantage ~~because~~ of simplicity. <sup>there was</sup> ~~just~~  
~~this~~ <sup>only me</sup> ~~was also concerned~~ the creation of the Third  
Reich which would <sup>dominate the world for</sup> ~~last~~ a thousand years, ~~and the~~  
~~annihilation of the Jews down to the last remaining~~  
~~child.~~

And Hitler did have <sup>another</sup> A War Aim which his troops could talk about—one fixed military <sup>and domestic</sup> purpose which <sup>R</sup> bestrode all others, namely the destruction of communism.

And the one clear and demonstrable thing his politics achieved was the first communist empire.



**Ten**

**N**ext day, late afternoon, <sup>now the Castel Poggiolo was taken,</sup> we moved beyond ~~the~~ <sup>its</sup> ~~castle~~ <sup>story from</sup> to ~~yet~~ another farmhouse. <sup>We settled down and</sup> I had just told my signaller to start up radio contact.

I heard him acknowledging the first signals and then he said to me, handing me the mike, Officer to speak. I got the order to leave The Major at once. I was to

find another Company which would be going into attack at precisely eight o'clock that evening.

The Major looked at me in surprise, presumably at having his F.O.O. snatched away. I told my signaller to close down. Then I called out to my other men, Prepare to move. The itinerary I had been given was the vaguest possible. I had little daylight left to find my way. It meant crossing to the other Company at a flank, without any of us in the forward lines being clear as to what was happening on that flank. But I didn't get into a grumbling mood—it appeared those days were firmly over. And in any case we never questioned vague orders. Everyone—including the officer giving you orders—had to rely on the latest scratch Intelligence which could be flat wrong. ~~And even~~

The house we had just moved into was on the southern slope of a <sup>hill</sup> ~~valley~~ that stretched magnificently before us, with woodland on its right side. We were to take a path through those woods—~~if that path~~ lay clear before us in the deepening dusk and nothing could appear safer.

We walked with the usual clinking of metal from our belts and packs. We were sharp and taut, alert

As the dusk deepened  
for every sound. There was a burst of very loud  
machine-gun fire to our left, the sound amplified to  
an extraordinary deafening echo by the valley. I  
couldn't ~~tell~~ <sup>say</sup> from which side it was coming. Which  
told me that the path we were taking was in the  
direction of the enemy, <sup>not a friendly battalion.</sup> That was my first thought but  
I put it aside as absurd.

I thought we would soon find white tapes,  
those infallible guides portending and attending  
battle. But there was no sign of them. I was used to  
piecemeal Intelligence. It could come from false  
intelligence or an exhausted officer. And as always  
in this kind of terrain the words 'front line' were a  
euphemism for what could in minutes become a  
semicircle.

The only trouble was that <sup>I was accompany</sup> ~~we were to~~ ~~be with~~ an  
<sup>So as the hour drew nearer</sup> attack going in at 20.00 hrs. I made up my mind to  
stop at the first house and ask where Jerry was. The  
Italians always knew. When we came to one, at the  
edge of a clearing, about half way up the slope, I  
thumped quietly at the door. There was an instant  
hush at my knock, then nothing. This time I thumped  
more insistently but not more loudly and at once the  
door opened an inch or two. I could see the man's

eyes. He was scared but when I pushed firmly on the door to indicate that I wished to speak to him, whether he liked it or not, he opened up so that I could see all of him. I asked him in our awful clipped gibberish, *Inglesi? dove?* He made one of those Italian shrugs with the eyes turned up, that ~~shred~~ denote ignorance of just about everything. I put my <sup>foot</sup> ~~foot~~ in the door and repeated my question and perhaps he grew more scared of being ignorant than of cooperating with me because he pointed quickly behind him, up the hill. Are you sure? *sicuro?* are the *inglesi* up there? and he made a noncommittal nod and was about to close the door when I said, OK, you take me there, you. At first he refused and began to back up but ~~I advanced my boot a little and~~ <sup>shitt faster</sup> repeated, You, *voi, voi*, take me to the *inglesi*. He pulled on a coat quickly and came outside, not even telling his wife or whomever was there. It was really dark now.

I had him with me at the head of the column, close so that I could grab him if he tried to run, and we all tramped through the steep woods in silence. How was it that the Company we had left was a mile back and still neither battle nor white tape were in sight? <sup>— for it was past eight by now?</sup> There was a chance that the forward

→ It didn't occur to me to ask, were they the point,  
where the Germans were.


line was on a loop or bulge. And there was also the thought that we might at any moment walk smack into crossfire.

We reached the crest at last and stopped just short of a gravelly road crossing from left to right. It was a moonless night and we could hardly see across the road—and how lucky that was. ~~But~~ <sup>O</sup>pposite us appeared to be a tall white house with a drive, though ~~it~~ it was impossible to be sure. A soft breeze played in the leaves around us. The man said in an urgent whisper, *Inglesi, inglesi*, pointing across, and at once a shout, more a scream, came from the other side of the road, HALT! and it was German not British. X

I caught hold of the Italian's sleeve and hissed, You've got us in the Bosch line! and he tore himself free and with the most miraculous leap I have ever heard (for we saw nothing) he jumped high in an arc and landed so far down the slope behind us, and so softly, that you couldn't hear the impact of fall. I stood for a swift moment undecided and then dashed across the road <sup>diagonally</sup> to the right of the sentry's voice onto the road's soft shoulder, fearful that the racket of our boots would make us easy targets. And

then I started running faster than my legs had ever carried me—along that soft shoulder. God alone knows what made me choose to run right instead of left. I could hear my men panting and stumbling behind me and in a matter of a second or so as I glanced down I saw phosphorus-painted notices sticking out of the earth and they were marked in big letters MINEN, with a skull and crossbones. They stood every few yards and I began leaping over them one by one, unable to leave the soft shoulder because Jerry would target the sound of our boots while, this way, silent on the soft earth, the chances were that the sentry was confused or terrified and that we wouldn't set the mines off. But with the first few leaps it went all right, otherwise we would all be finished by now. So I jumped higher and higher and hoped that my men were doing the same. My batman was immediately behind me (on his first F.O.O. mission) and he kept saying frantically, trying to keep his voice down, Sir, sir, it's too heavy, it's too heavy, I can't keep up! But keep up he did and I wasn't about to stop for any man. I reckoned he would keep up with twice the load if he had to. And he did. And all of a sudden I saw a vast barn on the other side of the road and veered

towards it. Clattering across the road we rushed into that barn and in a moment were lying breathless in the straw, the radios and batteries and maps and belts thrown down, and all we could hear for the next few minutes were our heavy choked breaths. And very gradually we began to hear the beloved silence of the night and saw the clement merciful stars through the tall open barn door, and we sank further and thankfully into the straw feeling almost merriment but still wary because of Jerry's closeness, with the thought that he might send a patrol out any minute. We didn't like those Schmeizers of theirs, fired from the hip with a deadly rapid spray of bullets. But the silence went on closing its arms round us and there was another better thought—that equally Jerry might want a peaceful night too. As for the mines we thought about them but we didn't, then or thereafter,

talk about them. To think, there had been five pairs of boots jumping over each sign. But we <sup>always</sup> banished <sup>such things</sup> ~~it~~ from our minds because we had a superstitious horror of ever mentioning again an escape beyond belief <sup>especially</sup> in 

And then other moods encroached on us as we lay on the quickly warming hay. My batman at my side murmured to me, I wouldn't have thought that of you

how can I see <sup>understand</sup>  
~~later~~ ~~could later~~

→ a situation beyond beliefs. Only ~~now can I see~~ the ~~that~~ ~~was~~  
the mines were directly under the signs, and the they ~~had~~  
Germans had <sup>been</sup> put them there to deter a delay <sup>until</sup> an attack  
~~from the unexpected area~~ ~~from a little expected~~ from  
the slope we had emerged from

sir, leaving me with all that stuff. And I hissed back, I've got all the forward positions on my map, do you think I'm going to get myself captured? But I didn't convince myself. He had sewn the thought in me, coward. And it wouldn't leave me, interfering with the other thoughts I had in my head—that we were in enemy lines and I would have to move on and I didn't even know if the direction I'd taken was right, and perhaps we were now even deeper in Jerry lines. We listened in case a tank started up with its hungry crushing roar, and we waited for a headlight to be shone into the barn. I told myself, All I did was run. My feet did it for me. What else do you do with a German sentry a few feet away? do you stand arguing the toss about who's going to carry what? What was my batman blaming me for? After all, he'd got here, hadn't he, he was alive and well? he hadn't been taken prisoner or shot dead had he? He said nothing more. Perhaps he had already made peace with me. But I couldn't shake it off—this shame that set in like a nausea just when we'd had a reprieve. Happily for soldiers, moods die the quickest death of all.

I rarely consulted my signallers about what was to be done in a tight spot. They were with me for the radio signals after all, not the decisions. Usually I let a decision develop inside me—I left it alone—waited for it to settle. What else could you do? If I had taken the wrong direction I was committed to it now, up to my eyeballs. I might be even deeper into enemy lines. And going further in. Because I knew I was going to stay near that road, and keep in the same direction. We might end up as prisoners and in that case it would be the end of the war for us. These were ~~my~~ <sup>my</sup> thoughts. But none of us wanted to be taken prisoner. The idea brought a peculiar foreboding inside, a strangeness too terrible. So I had to be sure of the right direction. You couldn't have conferences about it. I had to get us out of this. I relied on my decision just as they did, and still I didn't know what it would be.

I walked to the barn door and looked out and standing there I realised we had got to walk straight on. At a little signal from me they quickly gathered at the door behind me. I took them parallel to the road, which lay on our left now. Our boots made hardly any noise. The marvellously unrushed orbs of

~~871~~ 871 9655

the sky continued to be there. After about a hundred yards we came to a path veering to the right and I decided to take it, stepping carefully, as it was narrow. In a few moments I stopped, hushed the others with a sign. We pressed ourselves against a wall.

There was a man standing close to me, in the tiny garden of a house. You couldn't say in this degree of darkness whether his clothes were a uniform or not—he was in shirt sleeves, hatless. And he was sharpening a long knife. He began walking up and down. Sometimes he came within inches of us. Now and then he looked up at the sky, his face large and round and seemingly pale—a German, an Italian?

Whenever he looked up he appeared to be smiling but it wasn't a smile. Then he swiftly turned and went back to the house behind him soundlessly. He went in, closing the door *silently like a ghost.* We crept on, still hugging the wall to our side. In a few minutes we emerged close to the road we had abandoned further back, only it was wider now, more important.

A burst of machine-gun fire echoed to the left, that is the north. I couldn't tell if it was a Bren or a Spandau but opted for the Bren and told the others so. It shed a little hope. Burst after burst

~~into~~<sup>across</sup> went ~~into~~ the sky. Then there were rifle shots and x  
the tiny muffled thump of mortar bombs. It seemed there might be a valley on the other side of the road. It would explain the muffled nature of the sounds. Suddenly mortar bombs were exploding right behind us and we threw ourselves to the ground. Most of them fell on the road. Ahead of us there was a field full of craters and as soon as the mortar-firing died down we dashed to the biggest and deepest one.

We lit cigarettes under our blouses. We heard a track vehicle on the road, just a few yards away, not a tank. Inching myself up to the edge of the crater I saw a mansion-size house on the other side of the road. In its forecourt were vehicles. But the more I stared the less I saw. You can't stay mute for ever and I whispered to the others that the house must be an HQ—come and have a look, I said, is it ours or Jerry's? can you recognise the trucks? are they armoured carriers? They all peeked over the crater's edge and like me got nowhere. Sometimes the vehicles looked like jeeps, sometimes they seemed German. We watched that place on and off for an hour or more. Sometimes it was obvious that the house was British

held, sometimes more obvious that Jerry was there. In that case, if it was German, we had simply walked deeper into their line and were in cross-fire land. So where was the attack? Our people must already be far beyond their start lines. If so, where had the opening barrage got to? and surely shouldn't that barrage be falling right where we were? We stared at the house, studied it. All we saw were our fancies. Not a sound came from that courtyard. We could detect no armed sentry there, no one walking about. The moment I was certain I had identified a vehicle it became floating shadows again. I knew I would walk over to that house sooner or later. I would have to. The only other option was to roam all night and the consequences might be worse than capture. If I found the vehicles to be German was I going to walk into that house just the same? I couldn't answer that one. All I wanted now was for this to end, and I think the men did too, we were sick of the waiting game, our nerves weren't up to it any more. But we still didn't know if our fatigue was the sort that would make us want to give ourselves up.

It was in that moment of wanting the suspense to end that I felt a spasm of confidence. I jumped up

and beckoned to them and waited for them to form up behind me. Without troubling to be stealthy—who gave a shit now?—I walked across the road and among the vehicles. There wasn't a jeep among them but there were 5-cwt. trucks and armoured carriers and they were British. I pushed open the door and we beheld a huge room, brilliantly lit by dags, full of infantrymen, some on sleeping bags, others sitting round. To the left as we went in was a long trellis table with phones and a young officer sat there with two or three men. He looked up at me and suddenly smiled and the first thing he said was 'Hullo, weren't we at Oxford together?'

Battles are never militarily proper. Somewhere the human, the most helpless of animals, will always come forth. Between happiness and astonishment and trying to believe that this wasn't another life, we stood there smiling and nodding. I wracked my brains as to who he was—from an Oxford life that had become a lost lonely dream in a finished epoch. The room with its noise and crammed life whirled about us, a reprieve which had come direct from somewhere bountiful, a somewhere we had no part in. Quickly we moved on to the subject of the Company I was looking

for and the young officer said, jumping up, I'll send a runner with you but they're all out, one'll be back shortly, so we sat about smoking and drinking char. The sounds of battle were plentiful on this side of the house. We were indeed on the crest of another valley and the battle must be happening to the rear of the enemy house whose sentry we had fled from. ~~So these~~ <sup>those</sup> ~~mines~~ <sup>mines</sup> →

A runner came and we set out behind him. A drenching downpour had started. We soon reached the white tape, much of it already trodden into the mud. There were flashing dimmed torches and men carrying supplies and armoured carriers in what seemed a meaningless mess. The sounds of machine guns and mortars came from every angle, or so it seemed to our foolish heads. We passed ruined farmhouses with men standing in the doorways, there were cattle dead at a trough, the familiar corpse stench in the air, the trees had been torn up and we heard anguished weeping—from a soldier? an Italian? I began to understand why I had been pulled out of The Major's company. I was needed here as a reinforcement, an emergency, quickly.

I remember we reached a house, presumably where my new Company commander was but I don't remember the

→ we had 1 capt over had been a precaution against unexpected rear attack. It was certainly odd to reflect that we had —  
sold by following ~~a path~~ ~~advised~~ an order — ended up  
~~behind and not facing the enemy~~ ~~with the Germans facing us~~ <sup>behind and not facing the enemy</sup> ~~with the Germans facing us~~ <sup>then</sup> could a front  
line unit in a trap in the Italian terrain.

rest of that night—except for one brief picture of myself. I am at the back of a big house, alone, standing there in pitch darkness. I don't know how I got here, but the house is where my men are. I step forward and feel something soft under my foot. I look down and see a dead German. I keep straining my eyes to make out his shape but he is sunk in the mud. I put my foot forward and there it is again, the yielding nature of a body and I can't understand what I am doing there, what puzzle I am trying to solve but I go on puzzling just the same—is that his face, how pale he is, how helplessly he looks up, how yielding he is. Why do I need to establish his presence better for myself, what is there to say between us, why should I now, after we have survived by the grace of God, be moving my foot in this way and mournfully gazing down as if I should speak to him, recall him to this bitter field?

It was about this time that Captain Maugham came into my command post back at the guns and told me he was off on an F.O.O. assignment. He had lost his helmet and could he borrow mine? He smiled in that diffident yet self-possessed way of his and I said, Of course you can, I never use one anyway, never

have. Are you sure? he said. I pulled out the tin hat and gave it to him and as he turned to leave I said, Come back, in the half-joking way we all had. He stopped. I hope so, he said with a moment's diffident blink. And then he went off.

He didn't come back. I heard he died complaining about a pain in his arm, everyone thought he was all right, no wounds visible. I thought of his wife. He never talked about her but you get a feeling of how it is with some couples—lost unless they're close by, missing the precious one like life always beckoning from another place to where the life and light is, leaving you incomplete.

## Eleven

P. 206

**T**he Eighth army moved north-east from Tuscany. We were now in charge of the east side of the peninsula while the Fifth army stayed on the left. We were sorry to be obliged to skirt Florence and resented the missing the chance of opening, like the first words of an enchanted book,

To P. 256

law chap —

Churchill's speeches —

the gates of a ravishing city we seemed already to know ancestrally, as it were.

You couldn't help feeling that the Fifth army was getting all the plum towns—Naples, Rome, Siena, Florence and no doubt, by the time we drew level to it, Bologna as well. It would have been nice to bad-mouth that army but we had too recently been in it, and soldiers like to have their hatreds unalloyed.

25

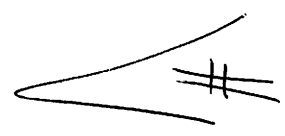
Thus it was, by being rudely pushed to the right, that we came within sight of the road that led from Forlì (emphasis on the second syllable) to Cesena (also on the second syllable), ending in Rimini on the coast and the deep blue glittering Adriatic, whose wash was so much less hauntingly suave than the Mediterranean's. Adriatic waves were thick and buxom and deep dark blue—a more bustling sea than most because narrow.

here  
13

One day I stopped my jeep and walked down to a stony narrow Adriatic beach and couldn't believe that north and south of me, east and west, there wasn't a soul or vehicle to be seen or heard, only the saucy emphatic crash of the waves.

1004  
12/11

For a moment I had all I saw to myself, yet a road went by a few metres behind me. I knew I would never see or hear a world like that again, no sounds, no human presence.



I was once more detailed to The Major. We were under shell-fire all the way up to the line and finally occupied a house on a slope, with the enemy further up. The Major wasn't satisfied with our position, exposed as we were on both flanks—and with danger from the rear if Jerry was clever enough. We put our sleeping bags down but The Major was restive. However, to withdraw and once again cover the shell-holed road we had come up by could be more costly than staying put. I persuaded him to stay. He agreed only if I shelled the house further up the hill intermittently through the night so as to pin the enemy down, should he be there.

In the course of my night's shelling the house ahead caught fire and we could see the fields surrounding it in a bright orange glow. Which assured us that any enemy patrol coming from behind that house could be picked off at once. At dawn the Major put out a well-armed patrol and prisoners were quickly taken. We moved up beyond the burning house, leaving it there to smoulder. We pushed through fences and broken gates to our new position.

When the battle noises died down in the evening I strolled back downhill to that burning house. The

bushes round it were still smouldering. The upper floor had collapsed altogether. The kitchen door at the back, as I came down to it, swung open. I walked towards it. A dead German officer lay just by it, raised up ~~and~~<sup>yet</sup> all but buried in the debris. I thought I saw a movement in the bushes and jumped round to the side of the house. I heard a woman's voice. I walked back to the door and pushed it open and in the dark hot kitchen I found two elderly women. One was sitting by the table but she didn't look up when I came in. The flesh of her leg was open. I could hardly see across the room for a thin white smoke. Then the other woman cried out as I came further into the room but not with fright and they managed to raise themselves and come towards me, their hands clasped together in prayer and they began crying out, *Aiuto, aiuto*, that cry for help we heard all the way up this stricken peninsula sacrificed to madness, every soldier knew that word. All night they had sat there in the flames—my flames—flames devised for our night-long safety.

I ran back up to headquarters, knowing my youth was unable to deal with this, and grabbed hold of The Major. They've been there all night, I said. He knew

~~my youth wasn't up to handling it.~~ Together we ran back down, calling stretcher bearers to follow. The Major stood in the kitchen white and appalled and with his arms round those women he shook his head again and again saying, No, no, no, no, no, no.

We saw the truth of the dead and dying now because our assaults were quick and sudden. You came across enemy gun emplacements and dug-outs just vacated by Jerry. You might see his mug of coffee still there, half full, steaming. I would stare at his quaint mobile kitchens and once when I came across one turned on its side from a shell-burst I opened the covers one by one with the food spilled and cold inside. Another time I ran into a hay barn just abandoned by an enemy rearguard and thought I smelled their cigarette smoke still in the air.

Always this unanswered question, who is this enemy? how did it come about that <sup>this word that haunted us</sup> ~~he~~ had achieved human form, <sup>whom we knew not to be demons but →</sup> ~~so many~~ millions of demons <sup>this 'enemy',</sup> ~~now cast~~ ~~aside?~~ [So it was that we turned over ~~their~~ wallets and watches and photos from home, trying to discover more about demons, how they talkèd and laughed. And all because we knew <sup>they weren't.</sup> ~~it wasn't true~~

children and working on their good faith.

→ Germans namely a neighborly people we had no quarrel with — my haunted pictures of — fragments and nightmares planted in our poor weak brains by — whom? We didn't know. He had just come about in our brains and my the fact that we gave it a deeply respected ~~name~~ and hallowed name, war, made it all seem all right which we knew it wasn't. Yes, each of us had his underneath war, show the truth lay, and since we couldn't wear put into words. A fragment planted in —

## Eleven

he Eighth army moved north-east from Tuscany. We were now in charge of the east side of the peninsula while the Fifth army stayed on the left. We were sorry to be obliged to skirt Florence and resented the missing the chance of opening, like the first words of an enchanted book, the gates of a ravishing city we seemed already to know ancestrally, as it were.

You couldn't help feeling that the Fifth army was getting all the plum towns—Naples, Rome, Siena, Florence and no doubt, by the time we drew level to it, Bologna as well. It would have been nice to bad-mouth that army but we had too recently been in it, and soldiers like to have their hatreds unalloyed.

Thus it was, by being rudely pushed to the right, that we came within sight of the road that led from Forlì (emphasis on the second syllable, as denoted by the accent) to Cesena (also on the second syllable), ending in Rimini on the coast and the deep blue glittering Adriatic, whose wash was so much less hauntingly suave than the Mediterranean's. Adriatic waves were thick and buxom and deep dark blue—a more bustling sea than most because narrow.

One day I stopped my jeep and walked down to a narrow stony Adriatic beach and couldn't believe that north and south of me, east and west, there wasn't a soul or vehicle to be seen or heard, only the saucy emphatic crash of the waves. For a moment I had all I saw to myself, yet a road went by a few metres behind me. I knew I would never see or hear a world like that again.

\* \* \*

I was once more detailed to The Major. We were under shell-fire all the way up to the line and finally occupied a house on a slope, with the enemy further up. The Major wasn't satisfied with our position, exposed as we were on both flanks—and with danger from the rear if Jerry was clever enough. We put our sleeping bags down but The Major was restive. However, to withdraw and once again cover the shell-holed road we had come up by could be more costly than staying put. I persuaded him to stay.

He agreed only if I shelled the house further up the hill intermittently through the night so as to pin the enemy down, should he be there.

In the course of my night's shelling the house ahead caught fire and we could see the fields surrounding it in a bright orange glow. Which assured us that any enemy patrol coming from behind that house could be picked off at once. At dawn the Major put out a well-armed patrol and prisoners were quickly taken. We moved up beyond the burning house, leaving it there to smoulder. We pushed through fences and broken gates to our new position.

When the battle noises died down in the evening I strolled back downhill to that burning house. The bushes round it were still smouldering. The upper floor had collapsed altogether. The kitchen door at the back, as I came down to it, swung open. I walked towards it. A dead German officer lay just by it, raised up and all but buried in the debris. I thought I saw a movement in the bushes and jumped round to the side of the house. I heard a woman's voice. I walked back to the door and pushed it open and in the dark hot kitchen I found two elderly women. One was sitting by the table but she didn't look up when I came in. The flesh of her leg was open. I could hardly see across the room for a thin white smoke. Then the other woman cried out as I came further into the room but not with fright and they managed to raise themselves

and come towards me, their hands clasped together in prayer and they began crying out, Aiuto, aiuto, that cry for help we heard all the way up this stricken peninsula sacrificed to madness, every soldier knew that word. All night they had sat there in the flames—my flames—flames devised for our night-long safety.

I ran back up to headquarters, knowing my youth was unable to deal with this, and grabbed hold of The Major. They've been there all night, I said. He knew my youth wasn't up to handling it. Together we ran back down, calling stretcher bearers to follow. The Major stood in the kitchen white and appalled and with his arms round those women he shook his head again and again saying, No, no, no, no, no.

We saw the truth of the dead and dying now because our assaults were quick and sudden. You came across enemy gun emplacements and dug-outs just vacated by Jerry. You might see his mug of coffee still there, half full, steaming. I would stare at his quaint mobile kitchens and once when I came across one turned on its side from a shell-burst I opened the covers one by one with the food spilled and cold inside. Another time I ran into a hay barn just abandoned by an enemy rearguard and thought I smelled their cigarette smoke still in the air.

Always this unanswered question, who is this enemy? how did it come about that he had achieved human form, so

many millions of demons now cast aside? So it was that we turned over their wallets and watches and photos from home, trying to discover more about demons, how they talked and laughed. And all because we knew it wasn't true.

It is the enemy dead who convince us they are nothing of the sort. One lies akimbo with his last horrified grin. Always round the corner they appear, in barns as you rush in, sometimes head down, in a clean death, one that came too soon for the grimace of shock. So battle instils the opposite of what made you enter it. It softens and then quite steals away your deathly recrimination.

And the tiny women clinging to their burning home—what sort of enemy were they? how did they deserve to be there in the fire and how did I deserve to cause it?

## Twelve

These days I hardly had time to rest between missions. I was quickly ordered to join The Major again. This time he was already installed in a splendidly stout country villa behind tall iron gates. The road of approach at its side was deserted and still, too open and innocent for my choice. On an impulse, as there was intermittent

shelling, I led my men, five or six in all, into the ditch at the roadside. It gave us better cover in the event of our having to throw ourselves down.

Then I took it into my head that I was going to catch a packet if I continued walking at the head. I suspected there might be a sniper somewhere (it was quite impossible) as the view was open all sides except the one that was in our hands. But I thought the two pips, as they now were on my shoulder, denoting a full-blown lieutenant, stood out. So I waited for my men to pass me and took my place in the rear. This was one of the million sops to blood-thirsty Cerberus that each of us made every day—jumping up to stroll to another spot, leaving one room for another, touching every other tree we walked by, in this way we cheated the eye vigilant for our demise.

I spent the first evening at the villa at an upstairs window listening to the voices of a platoon The Major sent out at night-fall. They were to capture a white cottage about a hundred yards forward, a peaceful jewel, not a farmhouse but set there for pleasure. It hadn't so far been touched by shrapnel. There was no firing. I heard one of our patrol call out in a high-pitched voice, Come out you bastards! It was a strange voice. There was a disturbing allure in it, invitation more than menace. We knew a Spandau was waiting round the

corner of that house. And then again—Come out! he cried. Almost a woman's voice. The rest of the attacking platoon seemed to be lying low, waiting. And once more—Let's have you Jerry!

The voice belonged to one small wiry man. Everybody round me was listening too. They always did when he went out. Especially The Major listened. He knew the capacities of this one small slight ferociously strong cockney who everybody said was rich from the merchandise he stole on such nights. He went out with a clear resolute head, a plan of his own. He neither needed nor heeded others. He showed neither fear before nor satisfaction after. He didn't speak—except to the enemy in his unnerving siren voice. And the men were chary of him, respectful but chary. They never questioned him, only gazed, riled him a bit, cautiously.

A short time back he had taken six prisoners single-handed. He told them to line up and lay out in front of them everything they had—money, watches, pens. Then in a single burst of fire he shot them dead. That was a story told about him. But it wasn't his customary way of killing. He used a knife. He would come up slowly and silently behind Jerry and slit his throat. And he was able to throw his siren voice to somewhere else, so that a shot in his direction would miss. Those were the stories about him.

There was sudden fire from the enemy and then in the hush that followed we heard a scuffle and a groan. We could just make out the platoon running forward, closer to the white house, then came another burst of gun-fire. It went on thus for an hour. At last they trooped back, led by the small wiry one, who had a bullet wound in the calf of his right leg. He sat down and tended the wound, his eyes restless, excited, also resentful in case another trooper should come near him. You felt everyone was the enemy for him, he didn't make allowances for nationality or allegiance. A trooper came over and said, Here's a dressing, holding it out. All the cockney said was a quiet, Fuck the dressing, without even looking up, making The Major smile.

I arranged with The Major for another attack the next morning to smother the enemy gun. I was to lay down some fire and we would bring a tank up. The wiry cockney was insulted by the idea of a tank. It wasn't the way to fight. He said he was going out again, tonight, in his slippers as always, his face black. But he spent all night moaning with pain. He was eventually stretchered out. During the night I ordered intermittent fire from the guns. My head kept slumping forward with fatigue as I passed the orders down—Fire by order...10,9,8,7... At dawn the tank came up, fired its cannon twice while a fresh

platoon moved forward. Enemy shells began to pester us and the tank moved back, the platoon retired.

It became sunny and I walked outside where a pleasant bordered courtyard made it seem a war-free zone, especially as it was hidden from Jerry. The shade of the trees, the motionless well-tended borders and the mellow response of the stone walls to the sun made a place where, unobserved, so we thought, you could smoke quietly and chat.

I saw three officers talking together and joined them for a bit. Then I wandered off. Just as I turned the corner of the house a mortar bomb fell smack in the courtyard where I had just been. I walked back and one of the officers I had been talking to lay on the ground, his eyes staring aghast. He was grey, trembling violently in the last throes. A stretcher came up and took him inside. When he died one of the officers brought a blanket and covered him. And this officer kept coming back to turn the blanket down from his face and gaze at him, then replace it, in a vigil that lasted till dusk.

You can't get used to the unexpected, expect it as you might. Of course you know that the bell is always tolling and it may or may not be for you but it tolls so madly, so minute by minute, it is bound to seem to be always in some measure tolling for you and there is no

escape from it, even when it has tolled, in a split-second choice, for someone else.

By the middle of that afternoon we were a mile behind the forward line, so quick was the advance on our flanks. Peace came to that indolent mansion that basked as ever, flaunted its borders, whispered with the breeze.

I rested in that patrician home, sure that my regiment wouldn't require me for another mission just yet. Which of course was a premonition of the opposite. Twigs were burning in the hearth from something fried or boiled. Occasionally I asked for a glass of Marsala from the cellar where the family hid. They were prodigal with their store.

The order had been given for B Company to pass through us. Being fresh, they would occupy positions well forward, in the thick of the fighting that was now going on ahead of me. Our small wiry man with the bullet wound had been taken to a first-aid post, whence he would be taken to hospital.

The Major told me he didn't envy B Company, they were in for a bad time. We ate lunch from our mess tins, waiting for them to come up. Nothing happened for about fifty minutes. Then a signal came over my radio. My signaller started, probably with thoughts close to mine. He looked up at me and said, Officer to speak.

I went shaking to the mike, no doubt looking calm and ready, and I was told, You will join B Company, you will get all the tactical information from the commanding officer of the company, you will prepare to move now, any questions? No sir.

I threw the mike into the signaller's lap and called out to the others, Prepare to move, and there was the long groan we all knew so well. And to my signaller I said, You can close down. I felt like calling the duty officer at Battery HQ and giving him a piece of my mind but of course I didn't. Instead I told The Major as casually as possible that I'd been detailed to B Company and he said, Christ, off again?

My batman shouted for me from upstairs. Where did I wish to sleep that night? He was unrolling my bag. I said, Prepare to move, didn't they tell you?

When I heard B Company outside I went to meet the major in command. He was tall with an easy-going, non-committal, perhaps vague manner. He told me there was an assembly point we all had to move on to. It was clearly going to be something big. He spoke pleasantly, distantly. We were to move at dawn next morning.

We were outside before dawn, puffing and blowing against the chill. The C.O. and I walked ahead. We went by a copse charred at its edges and a farmhouse with its roof caved in. The assembly point was a moderately sized

house, walls intact. Every room was already crowded. A few radios had been set up. Men were playing cards. I recognised some old faces. It was a cheerful, not to say festive atmosphere as companies arrived fresh from the rear while others departed for the forward posts. Then we of B Company moved on.

After a time we reached fields that had the stillness of a battlefield to be.

Our designated house was open to the enemy on three sides, with only the rear approachable. It was in a steep dip below us. We had to be mindful of the noise we made, over sixty of us, as we dropped down into a ditch behind the house, then scrambled up it to reach the entrance of a great cattle shed. There was one mercy—no one could have seen us occupy it.

Also the house stood on its own single hillock, giving us commanding views to the front and our left flank. Our concealed avenue of escape at the rear, through rising woodland, was our best asset, balancing our precarious tactical situation—we all knew we were sticking out in enemy territory—with this assured escape route.

Two Germans lay dead in the cattle shed, under a cobwebbed window. They each had their arms held rigid in the air, vertical, and that was how they remained while we were in possession of the house. Further on, opening

from the cattle shed, you came to a vast room that took up pretty well the whole ground floor. It gave off to tiny rooms which we used for observation, behind tiny windows dark with dust.

We shed our equipment. I liked the Company commander. He had a quiet geniality. Yet he seemed to observe things distantly rather than taking charge. By now it was a sunny morning. We felt sure we had entered the house unobserved but one never knew— uncertainty was to dog us all the time we were there.

I set up the radio in one of the tiny rooms where hams had once been hung. From here we could see, immediately below us on our left flank, not more than thirty yards away, another, smaller house. A thick barrier of bushes lay between us. We could gaze down into the house's rear courtyard and were grateful to see a British armoured carrier there. It was a boost to find our left flank covered, even though we, both they and us, might still be sticking out like the tips of sore thumbs into enemy land.

It didn't take us long to discover that in fact we were well inside enemy land, all sixty of us. I think few F.O.O.s could ever have found themselves in German lines with so many well-armed men round them.

If I wanted to observe the area straight in front I had to put myself in a much bigger store-room with long

barred windows. These gave me an ample view left and right as well as forward and, being dusty and cobwebbed, they made us invisible from outside.

A long table right under these windows ran the length of the wall—convenient both for its view and for positioning a Bren gun. I kept my radio and signallers in the big room because at this lookout window silence was essential.

The field before us sloped very slightly downwards, then proceeded flat for a hundred yards or more to a road that crossed from left to right a hundred yards or more ahead.

Preparing for a long stay I set myself up with a machine-gunner at my right side. I saw this grimy nook as the house's principal look-out post, and this it certainly turned out to be. Together the machine gunner and I sat in the hush and waited for events to present themselves. Our question, Does Jerry know we're here? was quickly followed by, Of course he does (but we never found out if he did).

My signaller in the big room quickly coded our map reference and sent it back to my command post. I wanted to register a target in the field ahead. This much self-exposure was necessary. I waited for Guns Ready and gave the order to fire. After a few moments there was a mounting swish above our heads and a shell landed just

beyond the road that lay before us. I ordered the target to be registered, then I registered the fields to the left and right flank.

We all expected an attack that evening. There was an uneasy atmosphere, especially as we could hear the grind of nearby enemy tanks, perhaps the most feared noise in battle because a tank can crush you without pause, not to say push down without effort your walls.

When dusk came double sentries were posted at the windows and the barn door. After a time I went to sit with my men in the big room. Pretty well the whole Company was gathered there now.

Armchairs and settees had been brought in from the other rooms. Suddenly there was a crash and a scream. Part of the cattle shed wall next door had been blown in. Brick dust came drifting through. I hoped this wasn't an answering shell to my registration one. It would mean Jerry had seen us coming in. A stretcher was rushed to the wounded man, one of our sentries. He was put down next the dead Germans. We thought he had little hope of life. He kept crying out to be brought in among us. Our commanding officer did nothing. So the stretcher bearers brought him close to our door, where he could hear us, though this exposed him to greater danger.

People weren't obeying the commanding officer. I think The Major had told me that this man was a

replacement, perhaps even a reinforcement, i.e. entirely fresh to the game. I began to dislike him, making an unjust shift in my affections of the kind soldiers are good at. The hole in the stable wall turned out to have been made by a bazooka, which is fired from the shoulder. And this posed the problem of where it could have been fired from, if not from the rear, namely from behind the British-occupied house at our side. At that rate the soldiers in there were even more exposed than we.

But a bazooka was better news than artillery, from the lethality point of view. At least I was satisfied that Jerry wasn't answering me.

Somehow, without an order having been given, we sixty-odd men came to a collective understanding that even though we were probably being observed we must behave as if we weren't. The bazooka shot might have been a try-on to provoke response. So we mustn't respond.

In the absence of any orders from our infantry commander I put it around—as if I had already taken the command over—that our machine gunners should be careful not to respond to fire. The sentries didn't move.

There was another crash—this to our left flank. Sentries reported that a Jerry patrol was out. But if so they didn't come near us. The evening passed without event.

Once the sentries had been changed we put down our sleeping bags. The men's spirit seemed to be going. This happens when the leadership crumbles—a lightning transformation into listless gloom. Dr. Johnson once argued that subordination was essential to mankind. In battle the moment it collapses the field is lost. Our sentries sat smoking cynically. The predicted attack didn't happen. But all night we heard the jarring scream of Jerry tanks. In the case of our having to run it would be messy escaping via the back—sixty or more men clambering up a narrow strip of hill, however concealed. And we had nothing so useful as a bazooka, the only hand-held instrument in existence with armour-piercing capacity.

At first light I went to the tiny window overlooking the house on our left. The armoured carrier was still there. We ate, sat in silence, confident that nothing would happen in daylight. In this we were mistaken. In the early afternoon there was the screeching roar of a tank and it was coming nearer. I had just sat down by my machine gunner and heard him gasp. Straight ahead, on the road that cut across the field before us, a German tank was moving from left to right, a mighty towering structure indeed, and slow. Then it stopped, dead in front of us. And a Jerry patrol, perhaps eight men, appeared from behind it, looking straight in our

direction. It was something you never saw, a bunch of enemy apparently unaware of you in broad daylight, and so close. But why had the tank stopped if not because Jerry was perfectly aware of us? Well, they might be thinking that only the house next door was occupied. After all, they had probably been chased out of it.

So my non-response policy was continued, especially as the tank rendered defence on our side useless.

Very slowly the tank's long gun began turning. It turned on us. It stopped, dead on us, our house. We sat utterly motionless. The mouth of a big gun holds you. We stared into its black hole, without even thought of resistance. One cannon would do for us with ease. We were goners. And to our bafflement that gun turret moved back again, away from us to the left, and in its leisurely ponderous way it drew to a halt on the British-held house to our left.

The moment this happened the Jerry patrol ran forward and lay down in the furrows, conspicuously, making signs to each other. And they waited for the tank to send its cannon shot. It fired once, emitting a white lazy puff of smoke, and its cannon missed. Then it fired again and was smack on target and our own house wobbled in the massive crash as a yellow cloud of rubble went up. Covered by it the Germans ran forward. They came across the field one by one, each giving cover to the other,

swift, in perfect drill. It was a model tangential attack. They disappeared from view immediately below us, closing on the house at our side. The machine gunner and I looked at each other and blew out the air as if we shared the same breath. A reprieve again, not to be believed like all of them so that you always ask, Were we really saved or shifted to another life?

Our sentries came and reported that the British had run out of the other house, some of them hatless, they had disappeared in the trees of the slope behind. I dashed to the side-window and saw one of the Germans stroll out and gaze at the armoured carrier, moving round it inquisitively. I could see every feature of his plump face. Why did they seem so sure that we weren't here? He would never have strolled out of the house in such a casual fashion otherwise.

Why didn't they do a quick recce on our house? But this, surely, they must be leaving to the dark hours. They could never risk another daylight operation. Then why had they risked one just now? And surely that operation argued that they knew nothing of our presence here? So our thoughts tortured each other.

I decided to treat an attack this evening as a certainty. In that case I must prepare for it. The enemy tank was principally on my mind—the appearance of one

meant an armoured division not far away. I had to make sure that somehow those tanks were pinned down.

When the owner of our house went outside to draw water a Jerry machine-gunner opened up on him with blue tracer bullets from the house next door. A bad sign. But it made an attack that evening look more certain. The farmer lost some flesh off a finger. Then the bullets came showering over the house, smashing the windows. So they did know we were here. We cursed the farmer out. He cowered back to his hiding place. Civilians rarely had any idea of what the soldiery was up to. For him we were just sitting it out in his house. Proprietors who kept to the darkness of their cellars fared best.

To our bafflement, despite having fired bullets at us, the Jerry patrol appeared again—right under our noses, as before, hardly twenty yards away. They were chatting, huddled together in the natural way we soldiers had because nature's binding guarantee of continued life had been withdrawn.

The machine-gunner and I sat gazing at them in disbelief. We could almost hear their voices. They had no way of escaping us. We could have had them all dead in a second. The sensible, practical thing was to kill them. I made a very quick calculation. It was practical but not sensible. It would bring down immediate retaliation on us. Tanks would finish us off, every man of us.

The truth was also that I didn't believe for an instant I would kill them, I didn't want to do it, I refused to do it. I saw their families before my eyes—an involuntary image, I did nothing to call it up. I put my hand on the machine gunner's arm and mutely shook my head. No firing. And he nodded. That was the best thing I did in all my life. It wasn't strategy on my part. My gunner's quick nod showed he felt the same. No death in cold blood. A thousand times in my life, all through these years, I have offered up thanks for that hand on my gunner's arm.

The Germans crossed the field on the same diagonal line as their attack, without the smallest effort to take cover. They got to the road again and disappeared. But almost certainly they had left a strong force in the house at our side, and this had entered the house from the extreme left flank, hidden to us.

Our Company major had been sitting in the big room all this time just staring in front of him. The orders he gave came from trembling lips and made no sense. His voice had all but gone. He sat there with an almost green pallor, close to the chimney, his eyes sightless. He was clearly in shell-shock true and proper. His hands trembled violently. Shell-shock is muscular paralysis. There is almost no awareness of what is going on, just a state of blindly staring shock.

The sergeant-major, legendary for his firmness, lay under the staircase in a doomed stupor. I had to step over his body to get to my look-out post and he hardly stirred. Among soldiers the collapse of one man's nervous system, especially an officer's, is a deadly contagion that spreads.

An army cannot stop to attend to such cases. A stretcher will not be called because the man is to all intents and purposes still whole.

An army is a vast moving city of destruction and necessarily it looks away from shell-shock cases. It has never studied them, never produced a technique for their management. An army cannot sympathise too deeply—especially with a state that arises from its own destructive identity, the deeply unstated madness at its heart. It might slip, all too fatally, into its own identity. It is why shell-shock quickly spreads, a miracle virus, seizing the limbs and with secret healing smile immobilising them.

Thus it was that we no longer looked at the major, never so much as thought of him again, or spoke to him. During all that transpired in the next few hours he remained where he was near the chimney, his trembling only accelerated by the noise and debris, and I think none of us knew what happened to him afterwards.

In me his collapse induced a certain excitement (so artfully does war work its mystical charms). I could take command. I could devise the evening defence of our position. I trusted myself if I acted alone. I trusted my own orders because they came from guidance, not from me. I let them happen.

Then one of my signallers (the same tall youth who had tried to run away on the mountain) came stumbling over to me and said, trying to hide his voice from the infantrymen, Let me go back sir, I can't go on. His lips were quivering. He couldn't have fallen better into my scheme of things. I feigned anger and this anger was another aid for me. If the major's lonely staring state wasn't going to spread I had better do something about it quick.

That tall youth served my purpose. He was trying to say something to me and I couldn't make it out. I shouted, What? what?, intending my voice to carry. He went into a kind of crouching position by my knees and what with tanks grinding in the distance I leaned down to him to hear better. The infantrymen had their eyes on us. I pushed the boy away and yelled, I don't care who hears this, I don't care if Jerry hears—you're disgusting to me, I don't want you near me, I said. Look at you grovelling. Two of my own men came over and tried to draw him away, whispering to him. But he persisted, he said he

had to be sent back, his nerves had gone. And I went on saying, Get away from me, come back when you're human (the poor soul was being altogether this).

And I wasn't angry. Not in the least. He just gave me the chance to show an impatience that sounded like anger. I felt the boy was safe—this was just his way of taking breath for the next hell, a sort of surrogate shock. So when I shouted at him I seemed to be telling him that he was really all right, he would make the transition.

And of course I was doing this for the other men too. I meant the sting of my rebuke for them, for the simple reason, as I knew, that their spirit had gone to the dogs. A sense of theatre came over me from my childhood—I knew suddenly how I should be in this crisis. I told my signaller, still in a loud voice, to contact my command post, put an officer on, I must speak soonest, I said. And when he reported to me, Officer speaking, I took the mike and said, I want all the guns of the sector to stand by, repeat all guns. An attack is expected this evening, repeat this evening. It will be supported by tanks. I wish to set up a programme of fire across the whole divisional or Corps front. All guns were to stand by at sundown, I said. I myself will give the order to fire, the target reference I will be giving you is the house in which we are at this moment. You will

fire on this house. This house is within yards of another house on our immediate left flank, it was this morning attacked and reoccupied, repeat reoccupied, and it is now in enemy hands.

I said I wished to ask the gunners across the whole front to exercise care in carrying out the programme. They would have to raise their trajectories very slightly above my map reference so that shells would fall as much as possible on the fields immediately north of us, though some must inevitably fall either on us or very close.

The word Understood came through from the other end of the line. Then I waited and everyone else waited too. By late afternoon my plan was confirmed: all guns will be on standby by 18.00 hrs. I repeated this in a loud voice for everyone in the room to hear. The guns will be on Stand By at 18.00 hrs. The eyes of every man except the poor commanding officer were on me. By five o'clock I had worked out the firing programme and relayed this to my command post.

Then I jumped up and began walking among the infantrymen. I felt great elation and started pointing at them and ridiculing them, I did some mock trembling, I laughed at the way they were lolling and slumping. I started addressing them. I told them I can save you if you want me to. I said I can do this by bringing down heavy fire so near this house that our lives will be in

great danger. Many of the shells will hit this house. I therefore require your permission. I have to have your agreement. Will you risk it? There is no other way. We're in too tight a spot. We're in enemy lines. You have to put yourselves in my hands. If you do, if you're prepared to leave everything to me, I will save you, I will get most of you out of here alive. And finally I said, You're good men, all of you, so for God's sake don't give up.

I was throwing out my voice like an actor and yet I wasn't acting at all, I wasn't even responsible for my words—they were quickly fed into my head. Some of those men might be five or more years older than I but they didn't seem so. I was taken aback by the power I had over them, which was the power they gave me, and it happened without the slightest effort on my part. It felt like a role that had been decided on and which I had been awaiting and even, unknown to myself, planning, and here I was obediently fitting into it, a stranger to what I was doing, facilitating it only. No courage happens at such events. You are simply taken over.

Sometimes your own life comes forward and lets itself be taken over and you know nothing about it until it happens, and then, even then, you are a spectator.

I seemed to have more energy than all the men put together and I think this was because, with every word I spoke, I felt more and more convinced that, yes, we were

OK now (how much easier it is to lead than to be led). And also I felt that this confidence of mine was due to the fact that I and I alone was in charge, I was free and no commanders, no headquarters controlled this battle, the outcome of which might even decide the fate of the whole sector. And these men were making this possible for me. Their assent was feeding me.

They agreed. I made sure that not one man objected. And this energy of mine also came from my own simple wish to survive. What we call courage lies very close to what we easily call cowardice. Neither word is appropriate to battle. The two words simply describe two different kinds of shock—the one impels you to flee and the other impels you to stand firm. The one grows out of the other. It is like the actor who sweats with fear as he makes his first entrance on first night. If he didn't sweat a bit all would be lost. There is much the same tension in the forward lines, springing readily from great fear.

I now had a roomful of eager men who wouldn't fuss, much less panic. They returned to their sentry posts as the sun went down. The signaller who had crumbled not many hours before came over and said, I'm sorry, I'm all right now. I simply said, Go to your post.

Most strangely of all, I found I didn't believe in the success of my plan. I was astonished at this. I thought the Germans will blow holes in our walls with

their bazookas, throw hand grenades in at the windows. They will easily, with the implacable strength of tanks behind them, surround us and take the few survivors among us prisoner. And somehow this solid conviction managed to lie under a weight of total confidence—which confidence revealed itself in my calm, my good cheer, not my thoughts.

Radio contact started. The count-down from 10 to zero drew near. Headquarters wanted to know, Will you take responsibility for the closeness of the target? Yes, I said, I will take responsibility. I made sure my voice was heard all over the room. It was almost nightfall. I waited for the guns to report Standing By. This took some time as the word had to be repeated from the guns to each command post on the entire front, and from them further up. When the word Ready came at last—for this had to trickle down the hierarchy too—I gave the order Fire.

In what seemed only a few seconds the first whisper came, then the next, then there was a full metallic shriek in the sky and the first shells crashed down just behind the house. Then the second wave came, the shells began to fly over in choirs, with a ceaseless thunder that shook the walls and the men began to shout and the choking stench of cordite filled the rooms as shells fell smack in the entrance of the cattle shed and the poor devil on his stretcher screamed to be brought in—for

God's sake why was he out there at all, what the hell were the stretcher people doing? But in such noise his voice made but a murmur, the shells hit our walls causing showers of rubble, everybody was coughing as dust cascaded down the roof and into the chimneys. It seemed to go on endlessly—if I wished I could stop the firing at any moment, within a minute, even thirty seconds it would stop but I was waiting for a sign and at last I heard a shout from a machine gunner at one of the windows, They're outside, outside! Jerry's outside!

I heard another shout, Fire you silly bastard! At once a machine gun sounded out and in reply came a shower of blue tracer bullets from the neighbouring house, lighting up the clouds of rubble and dust. Somebody shouted for me and I jumped up, scrambling across the room—who wants me? who wants me? A trooper at one of the windows caught hold of me and said, A German's just looked in, he stared down my gun, there's a whole bloody section out there!

The shell-fire was beginning to abate and I rushed back to the radio and gave the order, Repeat, repeat. And within a few moments the same choirs came over, several shells falling together, then a rain of dozens. Flak was hitting the ceiling and the machine guns started to fight it out again. Then at last voices at the windows, with the word that brought balm and safety and joy and

thanksgiving to us all, Kamerad, Kamerad, Kamerad! and a sentry shouted, They're got their hands up. Somebody else shouted back, Keep your gun on 'em! I scrambled to my radio as the Germans came in, bunched together, anxious to be among us as we were to have them. I grabbed the mike and shouted, Stop firing, stop firing, stop firing.

And at last the fields outside were silent. We started chatting with our prisoners and they took out their photos. We agreed in dumb language that war was bloody silly. I would have liked to ask them questions about what they had known of our presence here but they were quickly whisked off to the rear echelons.

I was pulled out of the line a few days later and when I got back to the guns I was asked to write a description of everything that happened that night. Our colonel paid my command post a visit and took a look at me. I was told that writing a description was the preliminary to being put up for a medal. I didn't refuse to do it, I simply didn't do it. I had no more thought of putting down words on the subject than I had of shooting myself.

I knew of two officers who had written themselves up after an exploit, and I thought that was shameful, and they both got their decoration. For me it was just an ignominious thing to sit down and play the reporter with

It is the enemy dead who convince us <sup>they aren't</sup> ~~they are~~  
~~nothing of the sort~~. One lies akimbo with his last  
 horrified grin. Always round the corner they appear,  
 in barns as you rush in, sometimes head down, in a  
 clean death, one that came too soon for the grimace  
 of shock. So battle instils the opposite of what made  
 you enter it. It softens and then quite steals away  
 your deathly recrimination.

And the tiny women clinging to their burning  
 home—what sort of enemy were they? how did they  
 deserve to be there in the fire and how did I deserve  
 to cause it?

## Twelve

**T**hese days I hardly had time to rest between  
 missions. I was quickly ordered to join The  
 Major again. This time he was already  
 installed in a splendidly stout country villa behind  
 tall iron gates. The road of approach at its side was  
 deserted and still, too open and innocent for my



---

Julien - tried to know the  
inhabitants of work, ~~they're there~~  
~~if it's a certain~~ I do hope  
it's <sup>best</sup> going to be OK.

---

Madole

1.

~~The~~ The human animal has a  
lower intelligence than any other species

---



exhausted. The solution to  $y = \text{puller}$  will arrive very slowly, partly because  $y = \text{we}$  are confined by old duties & habits. Their distances  $y =$ . It will take a change of heart to recognize the truth, but all will turn out well in the end.

Is there a conflict of F. & P. between the old club, designed for the earlier version, and the v. di. / event one regard to my new version?

[Sojourning 56, the wandering sage. King inspecting the borders. In case outside the normal network, or a guest of your own. Be small & flexible. Adopt to whatever comes. Through this, reason.

And my in the alt to F & F be the they are still friends & my work and will his in the formation?

[Return 24. Love & spirit return after a diff. time. This is emergence & return. Return to the source. Let things come back & without pressure. Partners come into skull. 7th day comes - return (follow up)

Are you finally saying the F & F are still my working on the book is a positive manner?

[2 hex 0 - 17th situation correct center, 18th Great growing area correct (9 in 5) = NEARING (Approved)  
 19 - Purpose moving, correct indeed.  
 20 - One in way correct: presence  
 21 - ~~being~~ - ~~just~~ not party has  
 'correct' = realizing

What is the degree of confidence [2] Gnawing / biting: 'He does  
do the calculations for F & F here not hear clearly! Stop  
the way work will ~~flourish~~ succeed i up his ears. Why?  
the <sup>book</sup> marked:

Is therefore my deepest belief the  
F & F are <sup>unwillingly</sup> committed to the work  
the true one:

[62. Small fraser, meaning - transition  
through a series of seemingly unrelated  
varieties of details. Its symbol is the  
little bird flying under the nets to avoid  
being ensnared. Adapt to catching in turn.  
This is a true sign of small things. This  
generates great good fortune. Trustworthiness.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Would I not, be a simple  
email to Julian Tanows,  
make his remarks  
and of myself?

[points to 3 'Above - below concord'   
statements.

just a  
The Delia - ~~assisted~~ word - is all over with  
the book, as an 1 year to be put in? OK  
to his eye? → Confusing



~~Her email  
10/16/03 5:45pm cd~~

Julie.duffy@penguin.co.uk

Do you have any  
~~things~~ please tracing back  
to my email in early January

the way to award 'Bless',  
return. The way explicitly a book

of mine in which she expressed  
interest (the email 10.15.03) - do you have any  
her head with

since the email of mine  
which received an automated  
reply. ~~for an award in the~~

~~the way to award~~ Ben Meire  
Kovch

To be ~ become to do this by the  
radio and effort help less -  
work ~ the amount. And ~~from~~

It was an error that had led  
to = that finally to work  
join with lie on to be an  
after this charted dollars  
that now has ended.

# Reversin

Weidenfeld ✓ Emily Cooke

Macmillan ✓

Constable ✓

Heinemann / Randm House ✓

Gollancz Emily Cooke ✓

---

Zelia

①

In this case apparently the I do not  
use agents ~~and must be~~ ~~act~~  
the - the I must be me myself,  
and in the verb - tends of any  
direction....

My patience, while not ~~strongly~~  
~~very~~ exhausted, is turning into

21:50 msg. Would I be the 1st  
 elsewhere 2nd in ~~1st~~. In  
 will understand the size I did  
 use agents I must be my own.  
 And in the last interests of my  
 client I must act, once more,  
 for clarity. ~~But MR~~

And this is magnitude of  
 practice. Some things require the  
 practice of years, ~~but others~~  
~~require~~ of others > not. ~~to be~~  
~~case~~ Just as you ~~can't~~ <sup>can't be expected to</sup> stop  
 publishing on my behalf <sup>to</sup> <sup>do</sup> <sup>1</sup>  
 can't stop <sup>can't be expected to</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>3</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>5</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>6</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>7</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>8</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>9</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>10</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>11</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>12</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>14</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>15</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>18</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>19</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>20</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>21</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>22</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>23</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>24</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>25</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>26</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>27</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>28</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>29</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>30</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>31</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>32</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>33</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>34</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>35</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>36</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>37</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>38</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>39</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>40</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>41</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>42</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>43</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>44</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>45</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>46</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>47</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>48</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>49</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>50</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>51</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>52</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>53</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>54</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>55</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>56</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>57</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>58</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>59</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>60</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>61</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>62</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>63</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>64</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>65</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>66</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>67</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>68</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>69</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>70</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>71</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>72</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>73</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>74</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>75</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>76</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>77</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>78</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>79</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>80</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>81</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>82</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>83</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>84</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>85</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>86</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>87</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>88</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>89</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>90</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>91</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>92</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>93</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>94</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>95</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>96</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>97</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>98</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>99</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>100</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>101</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>102</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>103</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>104</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>105</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>106</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>107</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>108</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>109</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>110</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>111</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>112</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>113</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>114</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>115</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>116</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>117</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>118</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>119</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>120</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>121</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>122</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>123</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>124</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>125</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>126</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>127</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>128</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>129</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>130</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>131</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>132</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>133</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>134</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>135</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>136</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>137</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>138</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>139</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>140</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>141</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>142</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>143</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>144</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>145</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>146</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>147</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>148</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>149</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>150</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>151</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>152</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>153</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>154</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>155</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>156</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>157</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>158</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>159</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>160</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>161</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>162</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>163</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>164</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>165</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>166</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>167</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>168</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>169</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>170</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>171</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>172</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>173</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>174</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>175</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>176</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>177</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>178</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>179</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>180</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>181</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>182</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>183</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>184</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>185</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>186</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>187</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>188</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>189</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>190</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>191</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>192</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>193</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>194</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>195</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>196</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>197</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>198</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>199</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>200</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>201</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>202</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>203</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>204</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>205</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>206</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>207</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>208</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>209</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>210</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>211</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>212</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>213</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>214</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>215</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>216</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>217</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>218</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>219</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>220</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>221</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>222</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>223</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>224</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>225</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>226</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>227</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>228</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>229</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>230</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>231</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>232</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>233</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>234</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>235</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>236</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>237</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>238</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>239</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>240</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>241</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>242</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>243</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>244</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>245</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>246</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>247</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>248</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>249</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>250</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>251</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>252</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>253</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>254</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>255</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>256</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>257</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>258</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>259</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>260</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>261</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>262</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>263</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>264</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>265</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>266</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>267</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>268</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>269</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>270</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>271</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>272</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>273</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>274</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>275</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>276</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>277</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>278</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>279</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>280</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>281</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>282</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>283</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>284</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>285</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>286</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>287</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>288</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>289</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>290</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>291</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>292</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>293</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>294</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>295</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>296</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>297</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>298</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>299</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>300</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>301</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>302</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>303</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>304</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>305</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>306</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>307</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>308</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>309</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>310</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>311</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>312</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>313</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>314</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>315</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>316</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>317</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>318</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>319</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>320</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>321</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>322</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>323</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>324</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>325</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>326</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>327</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>328</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>329</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>330</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>331</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>332</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>333</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>334</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>335</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>336</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>337</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>338</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>339</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>340</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>341</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>342</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>343</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>344</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>345</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>346</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>347</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>348</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>349</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>350</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>351</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>352</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>353</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>354</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>355</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>356</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>357</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>358</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>359</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>360</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>361</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>362</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>363</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>364</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>365</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>366</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>367</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>368</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>369</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>370</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>371</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>372</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>373</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>374</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>375</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>376</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>377</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>378</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>379</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>380</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>381</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>382</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>383</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>384</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>385</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>386</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>387</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>388</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>389</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>390</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>391</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>392</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>393</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>394</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>395</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>396</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>397</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>398</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>399</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>400</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>401</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>402</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>403</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>404</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>405</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>406</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>407</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>408</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>409</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>410</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>411</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>412</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>413</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>414</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>415</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>416</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>417</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>418</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>419</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>420</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>421</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>422</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>423</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>424</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>425</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>426</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>427</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>428</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>429</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>430</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>431</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>432</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>433</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>434</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>435</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>436</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>437</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>438</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>439</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>440</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>441</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>442</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>443</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>444</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>445</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>446</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>447</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>448</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>449</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>450</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>451</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>452</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>453</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>454</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>455</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>456</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>457</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>458</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>459</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>460</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>461</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>462</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>463</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>464</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>465</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>466</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>467</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>468</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>469</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>470</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>471</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>472</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>473</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>474</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>475</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>476</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>477</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>478</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>479</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>480</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>481</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>482</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>483</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>484</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>485</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>486</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>487</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>488</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>489</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>490</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>491</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>492</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>493</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>494</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>495</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>496</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>497</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>498</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>499</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>500</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>501</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>502</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>503</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>504</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>505</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>506</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>507</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>508</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>509</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>510</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>511</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>512</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>513</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>514</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>515</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>516</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>517</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>518</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>519</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>520</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>521</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>522</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>523</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>524</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>525</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>526</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>527</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>528</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>529</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>530</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>531</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>532</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>533</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>534</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>535</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>536</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>537</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>538</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>539</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>540</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>541</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>542</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>543</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>544</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>545</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>546</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>547</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>548</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>549</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>550</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>551</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>552</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>553</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>554</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>555</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>556</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>557</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>558</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>559</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>560</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>561</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>562</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>563</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>564</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>565</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>566</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>567</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>568</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>569</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>570</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>571</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>572</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>573</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>574</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>575</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>576</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>577</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>578</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>579</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>580</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>581</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>582</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>583</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>584</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>585</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>586</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>587</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>588</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>589</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>590</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>591</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>592</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>593</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>594</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>595</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>596</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>597</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>598</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>599</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>600</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>601</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>602</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>603</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>604</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>605</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>606</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>607</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>608</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>609</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>610</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>611</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>612</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>613</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>614</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>615</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>616</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>617</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>618</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>619</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>620</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>621</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>622</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>623</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>624</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>625</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>626</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>627</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>628</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>629</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>630</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>631</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>632</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>633</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>634</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>635</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>636</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>637</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>638</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>639</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>640</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>641</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>642</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>643</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>644</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>645</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>646</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>647</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>648</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>649</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>650</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>651</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>652</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>653</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>654</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>655</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>656</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>657</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>658</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>659</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>660</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>661</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>662</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>663</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>664</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>665</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>666</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>667</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>668</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>669</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>670</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>671</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>672</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>673</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>674</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>675</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>676</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>677</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>678</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>679</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>680</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>681</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>682</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>683</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>684</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>685</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>686</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>687</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>688</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>689</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>690</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>691</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>692</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>693</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>694</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>695</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>696</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>697</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>698</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>699</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>700</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>701</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>702</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>703</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>704</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>705</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>706</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>707</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>708</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>709</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>710</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>711</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>712</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>713</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>714</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>715</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>716</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>717</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>718</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>719</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>720</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>721</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>722</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>723</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>724</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>725</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>726</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>727</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>728</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>729</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>730</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>731</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>732</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>733</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>734</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>735</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>736</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>737</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>738</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>739</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>740</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>741</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>742</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>743</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>744</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>745</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>746</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>747</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>748</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>749</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>750</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>751</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>752</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>753</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>754</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>755</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>756</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>757</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>758</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>759</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>760</sup> <sup>stop</sup> <sup>761</sup>

# Review of Madoka

Chapter 1

He can be seen by his performance to have low faculties - he doesn't know how to comfort himself.

But while this is clear evidence the greater evidence of his faculties (in its degree & speed of evolution) lies in his high his frantic degree of a depth.

Francis A. Yates

Giordano Bruno & the Hermetic Tradition

5/02554  
0845 6023443

~~You will be holding~~  
Price per £250  
Time covered  
(over £74)  
(cancel)

£80.72 c  
nett?

UK  
UK health insurance  
UK health insurance  
UK health insurance

Your email was a bit of a bomb for  
the time - I felt the implosion a couple of  
weeks ago.....

Perhaps enthusiasm has a way, sometimes  
of evoking its opposite, as a quite natural process, with  
no bad (much less good) will involved. There will be unity,  
I think, in the market - in the time.

We may well have a number of people in the MR.

~~has a kind of... important to...~~

~~divided... division... British~~

is a funny old game - by the fact that the  
owner-publisher was all ~~of~~ certified a man.  
I lived for 27 years ~~to~~ close to pulling <sup>(voluntarily)</sup>

~~with made... to... and~~

~~sanity... case = parties~~ and  
I can see I never saw an example of sanity,  
not of a moment. One mad decision was made  
a top of another one, compounding madness so  
seriously but an explosion, ~~at predicted~~ <sup>at predicted</sup> re-day  
in terms, was inevitable - the whole thing called  
Mr. & god's sake get rid of the bloody <sup>denig/wr/dal/editors etc -></sup> ~~man's~~ u.



RE: Reversin g Rights / sub-licensing

Dear Cara,

My research on the C-U sub-licensed  
except for ~~Charles~~ <sup>of Sius and White</sup> ~~Ward~~ <sup>H. Odhams</sup> (now  
Reed Blewies). ~~The~~ <sup>to</sup> ~~document~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~at~~ <sup>the</sup>  
Society of Authors has alerted <sup>me</sup> to the possibility  
that <sup>the</sup> sub-licensing ~~could~~ <sup>may</sup> contain ~~some~~ special  
clauses (if understood properly). ~~may~~ <sup>have</sup>  
contain special clauses. Could you clarify please?  
A copy of the Odhams book is in it way to me.

With kindest

Random House  
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road  
London SW1V 2SA

(i.e. the revised  
Guidelines refer to  
a published guideline)

~~The~~ ~~category~~ ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~of~~ ~~which~~ I have  
circled the categories must be  
indicate that I have published books that fit them  
or have produced plays <sup>guided (draw) (play)</sup> ~~by~~ <sup>my</sup> ~~guidelines~~ The books ~~that~~  
might be <sup>recognition</sup> ~~very~~ ~~first~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~category~~ were due to ~~the~~ ~~fact~~ ~~that~~  
the Italians - naturally, with due then involved would not history.  
My books, after the first 11 claim me, were largely commissioned.  
My Mind, Spirit & Body category is no exception - it refers  
King health threats, Oxygen, which I taught for 8 years in N. Cal,

How  
How  
01442 26112

work for a time in San Francisco, & later to England, where  
worked as part of the Medical Director ~~office~~ unit at  
the Anti Clinic, Regent's Park. He was also willing  
to do workshops upon ~~the~~ ~~subject~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~subject~~

House manager  
Monday  
9.30 - 3.00

Calls

Coville & Walsh ✓

Inland Revenue ✓

James Michie ✓

Polyanna

~~R-med~~  
~~Launceston~~

Papaya

Set up dialogue box  
Pinter's dialogue box  
(panel)

Admin

Gov Hydro Afternoon Tuesday ✓

Boss: ear plugs + band-aids ✓

Key to Sarah

Send cheque Inland Revenue ✓

Heath Shop  
Putney - honey, wheel fern oil ✓ calcium

National day credit.

Post MS

Medicine on time

16 weeks to be  
also Feb. 23.

magnesium

Southern  
Fishwick

## Seventeen

The <sup>Tag</sup> sitting room. Gina A  
is alone - the door is  
the staircase is open.  
She is doing a sketch for  
a door. There is a sign  
on the <sup>door</sup> door-bell. She  
goes to the answer phone  
~~and~~

Gina: Yes... Come up.

She enters to the design.

The house-phone rings  
and this she answers  
too.

Gina (cont.) ~~The~~ Hello... The call just... a  
woman - doesn't see a reply early to be

<sup>if</sup>  
~~The door~~, I mean client can be really  
like sometimes... Are you there, as by as  
you do mind.

Mary Ad appears at the  
staircase door, she is in  
a white string dress this  
time. Criss looks up with  
delight.

Criss: (with I'd designed that!

Mary Ad (sitting on the sofa) Don't be mad,  
it's not my complaint with your work.

Criss (going towards Mary Ad to be seated  
with her) How do the all of them?

Mary Ad: Her bet-styled gown?

Criss: Oh I'll be used?

Mary Ad: Not at all. I'm very  
interested in you, Apparent - my

Come Helen - he ~~takes~~ takes a dinner  
out in a gala, with bygone story, well,  
they'll stay over a bit.

Gene: Also Duke takes ~~on~~ <sup>all your stuff</sup> ~~should~~ ~~at~~  
~~celebrate~~ ~~but~~ ~~how~~ ~~many~~ all celebrate  
too, and he a little dinner too. Could  
you work me of your 2 papers next  
pages:

My ad: 4 pages -

Gene: How the three of us - 2  
and 1 Duke.

My ad: 2 volume "Brief", and one  
self in your world of duty?

Gene: Well (pushy + pleasure) (didn't  
want to be pushy due to).

My ad: 2 in pushy by nature of the ad  
both will alternate. (Big snick of Gene)

One day to lose h - h' - devastated,

to tell the truth.

Gene: I'll be a dull militate.

Marydell: Oh please - no more of the self-effacing!

Gene: I mean it. She's (trivial) - if ~~it~~

~~Marydell: I know.~~

Marydell: I mean you can't put her out of your mind of a woman like she's dead,

and that become a drug, (with a sigh) she was a step of a girl she she just visited me.

(BRISKING UP) but ~~she'll still be~~ she'll visit you, and so don't you I can ~~attend or be at her~~ be content it be

little end - (she'll have all his own -

thank, ~~but you may be so sure~~

Gene: I'll visit the Duke. He seems to have let his practice go.

Marydell: He's because of his work at the school!

Can she be expected to bring satisfaction?

Gene: I suppose I may be allowed - few regrets

on my side:

Mary: I'm your dear. (König) So it's  
fixed. A girl every Friday. ~~There~~

One is she due to her?

Chris: I'm going to be at six o'clock  
and the man of Sunday's come at seven  
o'clock to take her to the restaurant.

Mary: (jein) Z'u be me of cocktails?

Chris (noting her sketch) of course.

Richter

Two men open out with  
with GINA we

Richter. He finished

HARRER down is lying on  
the sofa. He's peeping in

in the storage door -

is he making clothes. He  
goes on to the door and

holds up a piece of cloth

duce + it to the mirror  
and ~~then~~ holds it before  
her. GWA yawns +  
stubs saying it her.

Gwe: Z like it.

David: It's about too much - the deyclo tag!  
It's so deep.

Gwe: 16 " für 2 - so cutt to work it.

David: He says he's for - kipped her  
- his pants (as ~~she'd~~ Gwe takes the  
down).

Gwe: A kipped her?

David: Well, y know, wot's it, jg =  
on... ~~...te~~. Z could capture me ~~...te~~  
and he'd work things there.

Gwe: But is the one of our?

David: Don't y see?

Gwe: Z in OK + celibacy?

Haniel: Well der (as the slips off the  
down) the never der off election P?  
Congry & honey well they not go long!  
Cine: She's just arrived - you'll see her  
~~in the kitchen~~ downstairs. She's preparing  
the dinner for the night. I feel a bit  
no longer.

Haniel: ~~Yes, she said. I can't believe you're~~  
~~all celebrating because~~ we - I suppose you're  
all going to celebrate me going!

Cine: Do you really mean that?

Haniel (suddenly almost in tears) No! I think  
you all love <sup>me</sup> and I think that - in a truly  
kind of way way?

Cine: ~~believe~~ <sup>believe</sup> you do!

~~The dinner~~ with dinner  
has to be the dinner to us  
factor of the dinner  
dinner