OLIVER FERGUSON

My World War

Virtually every story in this brief account by my father, Oliver Ferguson, of his time as a soldier in the United States Infantry in the last year of the Second World War is intimately familiar to me from my childhood. My brother and I asked him, over and over again, to tell us about the war, and he obliged, with much the same modesty, the wry self-awareness that he exhibits here in these pages (a sensibility that, for me, made the threatening moments feel more genuinely threatening). I wove these different episodes deeply into my young imaginative life—into the games I played with friends after school, the books I read, the comics I adored, the models I built, the toy soldiers I assembled and deployed in our yard, the stories I told myself as I was growing up in the 1960s.

There was, of course, another war in accelerating and terrible progress during that decade, which was closer to me and to my friends in many ways. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was a student at a Quaker school in North Carolina, where my biology teacher went to jail for two years as a conscientious objector (he'd declared the population of the earth—3.5 billion people—as dependents on his Federal Income Tax form), where students were bussed to the courthouses in downtown Durham and Chapel Hill to demonstrate against the war, where one of my friend's older brothers was fasting in order to get a medical deferment from the N.C. draft board, where the whole Upper School watched a showing of "The Battle of Algiers" one afternoon and had frequent gatherings with visitors variously involved in anti-war movements, and where students were doing service work with families of Vietnamese refugees. I recall getting my olive drab, army surplus coat at a shop in Chapel Hill—Uniform of the Day for aspiring members of the counterculture—and picking up a handful of bold

shoulder sleeve insignia from a bin beside the coats. But I also remember the wholly un-countercultural care with which I asked my father what the patches meant, which would be historically accurate for *his* war, and precisely where they belonged on my jacket. I watched my mother as she sewed them on, as anxious about their placement as though I were going to be mustered for inspection at 0600 hours the following morning. My equivocal and ideologically incoherent wearing of that piece of cast-off military clothing serves as a fitting emblem for how I slipped among wars—a protected, privileged child looking over my shoulder at my father's war at least as often as I looked around at the one more vividly in front of me. The war on these pages, told to me story-by-story in my father's voice, was intimately my own, essentially untouched by what my friends and I heard and saw and thought about the horrors of the war in Vietnam and even war more generally. It was also, I need scarcely say, far removed from the realities of the Second World War and even of my father's actual, particular war itself.

As I realized even then—and with more acuity as I came to know other children of less fortunate veterans and children whose families had been decimated in concentration camps—I was privileged to have had a war doled out to me in narrative form by someone who had come through uninjured and psychologically whole, a "war" which thereby became available to me as an imaginative resource rather than as something misshapen or lethal. At any single point in time, in virtually every year of history-in-progress, we live in and with different wars in different registers, some of them more real, closer, often less narratable than others.

As I reread these pages now, I am grateful for my father's fortune and his capacities as a storyteller and for my mother's campaign to get him to write these pieces down. The conversation with his fellow veteran, George Williams, with which he opens this narrative, is the proximate cause of this slim memoir, but the occasion for its writing was helped along by some years of his family's promptings. As his opening paragraph explains, his conviction that his wartime experiences were scarcely worthy of recording, when considered in the balance of all that happened and all that was done in the war, made this short document long in the making

— John Whittier-Ferguson

May 8, 1995

Today I had lunch with George Williams, and we noted that this was the fiftieth anniversary of V-D Day. ("Buddy," he said gravely, extending his hand across the table.) He then remarked that perhaps we should record some of our overseas experiences so that our children and grandchildren could have an idea of how one of the critical events of the twentieth century had affected our lives. I dismissed the suggestion on the grounds that I, at least, could not possibly reconstruct those events of 1944-45 into a chronological pattern. George's words, however, stayed with me; and now, on this anniversary night, I have decided to set down those memories that are still sharp, not necessarily in the order of their occurrence but where possible in some sort of coherence, ignoring chronology when one episode suggests another. Often I will probably have to relate events randomly, without even an associative pattern, however much I regret the disjointed narrative that will result. At the outset, I must confess that an even greater difficulty than remembering and organizing is to try to overcome an embarrassing, almost paralyzing self-consciousness, which leads me to add that--as this account clearly demonstrates--in none of my wartime experiences did I perform heroically. My most noteworthy achievement was that I survived.

I had many strokes of good luck throughout my time in the army. The most critical one came shortly before I went overseas. Following a highly satisfactory nine months at Washington University, in St. Louis, where I had an intensive course in conversational German, I was assigned as a rifleman to E company, 114th Infantry Regiment, 44th Division. Once overseas, the division was a part of the Seventh Army, Lt. General A. M. Patch commanding. Ultimately our area of operations in Europe comprised France, Alsace, Germany, and Austria. Shortly before we went overseas, I was transferred to Regimental Headquarters Company. I had had basic training in the Signal Corps, and when an opening occurred in the regimental message center, I was selected to fill it. At the time I was aware of my good fortune in moving from a line company to Headquarters. The full import of how lucky I had been came in the first week the regiment was committed to combat. E Company, of course, was at the front. On its first patrol, every member of the eight-man squad to which I had belonged was killed, including its very decent leader, Sergeant Wilbern Tottleben. I can remember but not describe my feelings when I read the report that came to the message center the next morning.

Now for some chronology:

After completing advanced infantry training at Camp Phillips, Kansas (where I celebrated my twentieth birthday), the division set out by train on a journey that took several days. I awoke one morning toward the end of it and from the window saw to my astonishment the Union Jack flying from a flagstaff. We were in Canada! In no time it was declared with the certainty that marked all rumors in the military that we were going to be assigned to some unspecified duty in Canada. Hard truth set in when the train turned south, and we eventually found ourselves at Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts, outside of Boston. Our meandering route from Kansas to Massachusetts via Canada had been undertaken to conceal our movement from enemy agents. To this end, we had removed all division and regimental insignia from uniforms, vehicles, etc., and were forbidden to write any letters. (Despite these precautions, when the division subsequently took up its position in northern France, German loudspeakers greeted the troops at the front with "Welcome, 44th Division!" with obvious effects on morale.) The night before embarkation we were given leave. For me and a couple of friends it was an aimless, uneasy time. We went to the cocktail lounge of a fancy hotel, where the sophisticated Chicago native in our group insisted that we order Carstairs and soda (I didn't know what Carstairs, an up-scale bourbon, was). We stayed there until nearly midnight, drinking our Carstairs and listening to an attractive brunette singer with a combo. I kept sending up

requests for favorite songs, and she sweetly obliged.

We embarked from Boston Harbor early on the morning of September 5, 1944. I don't remember much about the voyage. A lot of the men were dreadfully seasick. Miraculously, I escaped, despite the fact that my narrow cot was in a tier four bunks high, in a stuffy, crowded area far below deck. We had one false and one genuine submarine scare. Although nothing happened, scare is unquestionably the accurate word. On September 15, three months after D-Day, we landed in France, at the port of Cherbourg. The city had fallen in late June; the harbor was still crowded with the wrecks of destroyed German ships.

I was quite excited as we marched through the streets on the way to our camp. At my first sight of French shops, French houses, French people, I felt more like a tourist than a soldier. To get a better view of a sign (posted after the Allied invasion) urging "citoyens" to some course of action, I stepped a bit out of line. "Get back in line, Ferguson!" First Sergeant [illegible] bellowed. That he was right to dress me down in no way alters the fact that he was a brutal man, of whom more later. Headquarters Company encamped in a field some distance from Cherbourg. We were in tents; but it was cold in France that autumn, and it was some while that first night before I finally shivered myself to sleep. The next day some of us located a small village nearby, where we got a liter of calvados, the apple brandy of Normandy. That night in my sleeping bag I radiated heat and slept like a baby. On October 16, after a month of training, the 44th was committed to combat in the vicinity of Lunéville, a moderate-sized city in northeastern France.

My introduction to hostile fire came a couple of nights later. In retrospect I can perceive its comic element. The division was to attack the next morning; and the Germans, aware of the concentration of troops, laid down an artillery barrage. Our own artillery answered, so that the entire sky was lit up. The obvious comparison is with a severe thunder storm, with the important difference that there was virtually no let-up in the noise and flashes. The message center was in a large outbuilding, a barn probably. During the height of the barrage, the diarrhea that I had been bothered with all that day necessitated my going once again outside. (Only rarely during my time overseas did I enjoy the convenience of a toilet.) It had been raining for days, and the mud was at a depth and viscosity peculiar to France. (I remember my father, who was a chaplain in France in that earlier World War, remarking on the mud.) I crouched at the back of an army truck. Just as I had dropped my pants and begun to relieve myself, a tremendous explosion seemed to occur directly overhead. I realize now that what I heard was probably one of our own batteries. Later, like everyone else, I became expert at distinguishing between what we termed outgoing and incoming mail, but on my maiden night of action, I did not

have this skill. Instinctively, my pants at my heels, I dived beneath the truck, covered with mud and other matter. I don't remember how or how effectively I cleaned myself. I do remember that I have never felt more miserable in my life. I wanted to go home.

No more chronology for now. As I explained, much of this reminiscence will be associative. The episode just related brings to mind another violent attack of diarrhea. The ailment was common. Given the conditions under which we were living, everyone frequently suffered from the GI's, the shortened form of the inelegant phrase, G[overnment] I[ssue] shits. No one in his right mind would take this complaint to the medics. It was a widespread joke that their standard prescription for everything from headache to VD was footpowder. A cook in my outfit recommended a potion of vinegar and pepper for diarrhea. I don't know that it helped, but I took it religiously every time I was afflicted. The instance I'm about to relate happened in Alsace. Unlike the line companies, who lived wretchedly and dangerously in foxholes, Headquarters Company usually functioned--not as wretchedly or dangerously--in towns and villages. The line troops scorned and envied us, and both they and we despised Division Headquarters personnel, who more often than not were out of enemy artillery range, frequently living in what passed for solid comfort. During their occupation of Alsace, the Germans had forbidden the use of French and had required everyone to speak German. Because of the course in German I had had at Washington U, I became the unofficial interpreter for the company; and one of my tasks was to find housing for everyone when we set up headquarters in a new location. In France and Alsace, where we were liberators, I requested lodging from the civilians, who invariably agreed to take us into their homes. In Germany I ordered the people out of their houses. On the day in question I was going from house to house in an Alsatian town, asking whether any soldiers could be put up. I was sick as a dog. After I had provided for everyone but myself, I knocked at a door and was greeted by an ample, motherly housewife, who took one look at me and asked what was wrong. Immodestly, I told her, somehow remembering that one of my instructors at Washington U (who had served in the German army in World War 1) had told us the word for diarrhea: der Durchfall--literally, "the falling through." In a matter of moments the woman made me remove my boots, put me in a warm bed, and covered me with a feather comforter. Just as I was thankfully on the edge of sleep, a shout from the street announced that we were moving out. Even as I write, I can almost see that dear woman's concerned face as I got out of bed, thanked her, and joined my unit.

I have two more stories about incidents that happened when I was securing quarters for the company. One of them is very sweet, the other--you decide. One day not long after we had moved into Alsace, we drove into a tiny village where we were to set up

headquarters. I went up one side of the only real street and down the other, getting the householders' permission to lodge several soldiers in their homes. One house was so small, so obviously unable to accommodate any guests, that I passed it by on my way up the street and again on my return. I was on the point of trying to fit the four men yet unprovided for (including myself) into one of the earlier houses, when a woman emerged from the tiny house, a small boy at her side. "He's been crying," she said, "because you didn't stop at our house." When I replied that I would stay there myself, the child and his mother beamed. For three or four days this couple and their little boy provided for my friends and me a warm respite from the war. I have no idea what we talked about (I translating for both sides), but I have a clear image of all of us sitting around the kitchen table in the evenings, temporarily members of a happy family.

The second incident also took place in Alsace. It was unlike the earlier, idyllic one in several ways. For one thing, it was deep winter, iron cold, with snow and ice everywhere. For another, the Germans had been in full retreat for several days, so that we were on the move constantly, rarely staying more than a day in one place. We arrived at a forlorn little village one afternoon, and I began my usual search for suitable housing. At one place, the door opened before I could finish knocking, and an exuberant man seized my hand and pulled me into the room. A party was in full blast. It seemed as if every soldier in the company was there. On the stove a caldron of red wine was simmering. Our host and his wife and daughter kept filling tall glasses and adding two or three ounces of schnapps, the German version of calvados. I have a jumbled memory of a crowd, noise, great heat and jollity. The head of the household told me that he had been saving the liquor for the day the village was liberated and that the Germans had left only hours ahead of us, first hanging several townspeople (because they were suspected spies? out of the bitterness of defeat? Or was the tale simply anti-German propaganda, surely unnecessary? I don't know). He then opened a desk drawer and proudly showed me a picture of himself in the uniform of a German submariner, along with a medal he had won in the First World War. This man's story neatly symbolized the tortuous recent history of Alsace: under German control until the Treaty of Versailles, then held by France until it was occupied by the Germans in 1940; and now an Alsatian veteran of the German war machine of 1914-18 was welcoming soldiers from the country that had defeated that army and that was in the process of liberating Alsace from a later, different German army. After a while I began talking with the daughter of the house. She asked me where I was staying in the village. I realized that I hadn't yet provided for myself, having been deflected from that aim by the party. When she heard this, she said--and I quote verbatim, after fifty years!--"Du kannst in meinem Bett schlaffen." I've forgotten my reply, but it was appropriate. At about the time I spoke, a voice shouted from the door that we were moving out

immediately; the Germans had retreated from their position further up the way. The girl and I stood in the freezing cold beside my jeep and--no doubt looking like a latter-day Catherine Barkley and Frederic Henry--kissed farewell, my friends shouting encouragement, the driver telling me to come on. "Maybe we won't be too far," I told her. "Maybe I can come back." But of course we were and I couldn't.

I have another story--this one grim--that involves a girl. At one point we were advancing so rapidly that our company entered one end of a town while the line troops were fighting at the other. We had set up a temporary message center in a house, and the young woman who lived there and I had been playfully flirting. A short while later, as I was in the doorway of a nearby house, for the only time in the war I was the target of, or at least was in the immediate vicinity of, small arms fire. From a nearby church steeple someone was firing at our group. An abandoned tank stood in front of the house, and several of us took cover behind it and returned the fire (another first and only for me). I have no idea whether any of us hit the hidden gunner. I do know that one of my rounds was a tracer and that it went directly into the shuttered steeple. There was no more firing from the church. Our troops had by now cleared the far end of the town; so we were ordered to load the jeeps and move on. As I was leaving, I heard a soldier tell another that a civilian had been struck in the throat by a piece of stone that had ricocheted from one of the sniper's bullets. It was the girl in the house where I had been earlier. The soldier saw her being carried out on a stretcher. He didn't know whether or not she was alive.

The only other occasion on which I was anywhere near small arms fire took place under similar circumstances, this time in Germany. We had entered one section of a town while the line troops were fighting in another. I've forgotten its name. It was fairly large, with some rather elegant houses on the street that another member of my group, Andy Clark, and I had been ordered to check for any German soldiers who might be in hiding. The moment I knocked on the door of a substantial house, as if on cue there was a burst of automatic weapons fire some two hundred yards up the same street. Andy and I threw ourselves on the stoop just as the door was opened by a handsome woman in her thirties who looked down on us with wonder and contempt. Though I was in no mood to appreciate the comedy at the time, I was painfully aware of the ridiculous scene the conquering invaders presented. Trying to sound my most severe, I asked if she were harboring any soldiers. She denied it; but to complete the comedy, Andy and I conducted a fruitless search from cellar to attic.

As I say, these two episodes were my only direct experience with small arms fire. Our great and constant threat was from

artillery, specifically "the superb German 88-mm gun" (to quote military historian John Keegan) that could be fired from a stationary position or mounted on a tank. It was not long after my humiliating introduction to artillery fire that I learned how to distinguish enemy from friendly fire and to know when the former should be respected. One day (still in Alsace) I had stepped next door to a family's house to use some of their hot water for shaving. As I stood by the window to get better light, chatting with the family, we heard an explosion and then the whoosh of a shell. "Schnell, in den Keller," the mother shouted to her brood, herding them toward the cellar door. "It's ok," I assured her. "That was ours." Of course she paid no attention to me. Left all alone, I went on with my shaving, while our artillery continued. Presently the Germans returned our fire. I heard a high-pitched whine, succeeded by an unmistakable flat, very sharp crack--something like, but much louder than, a pile of lumber dropped on concrete. An eighty-eight was placing its shells with impressive accuracy, "walking" them down the next street over. Feeling that it wasn't smart to be so close to the window but realizing that I might as well stay indoors where I was (I certainly didn't want to be in a crowded cellar with a wooden floor overhead), I moved to the far side of the room and finished shaving.

The time I was most afraid under artillery fire was on April 20, Hitler's birthday. We were in Germany by this time, and though the war was progressing satisfactorily, we were still meeting heavy resistance. On this morning our company had been pinned down for several hours by a single Tiger tank armed with an eighty-eight. It was some distance away, hidden in mountainous woods. It would fire two or three rounds, then move to a new location, wait awhile, and repeat the process. We had taken cover in some farm buildings and were waiting for the opportunity to move on. To do so, we would have to go one vehicle at a time down a narrow mountain road, come to a full stop at the bottom, and make a right-angle turn to reach the comparative safety of some woods. The continuous shelling was terrifying. Everyone was on edge, so that when the order for us to move finally came, I was in a way relieved to be doing something. I don't recall any shelling as my vehicle made the turn. Perhaps the Germans had realized that they could play their elusive game for only so long before their position was discovered. Perhaps our artillery had destroyed the tank. In any event, all of us made the drive safely. I was in the back of a jeep with Everett Greek, a good old boy from Missouri, very sweet, the frequent object of scornful jokes from the Yankees in our outfit, who had never encountered Ozark ways before. (Greek taught me the word "slaunchwise," if that's how it's spelled: "Put it in slaunchwise," he advised, when we were packing rifles in cases for shipping overseas.) I turned to him--and I'm afraid I remember my exact words: "Well, Greek, this is it." After all, _something_ had to be said, and Greek was never much of a talker;

that empty cliché served as well as anything, I guess. I can see Greek's slow, scared smile as our driver started his engine. As I say, the aftermath of our ordeal was blessedly uneventful; but I don't think I was the only one who was shaken for some time afterwards.

And there was the shell that didn't explode: One day toward the end of the war, some of us were in the front room of the house we were quartered in. We knew that things were just about done; and I think everyone felt the relief I did, that we had managed to come through six bad and dangerous months and that there was now a real chance to get home. Our idle conversation was suddenly interrupted by a sound none of us had ever heard: a heavy rush of air, followed by something like a low moan or growl. I can hear it yet, but I can't describe it. I had never heard it described, but in that split second I realized that it was an incoming shell directly on top of us, and I knew that I was going to be killed. The next thing we heard was a solid whummpp. The dud had landed in our front yard. Someone speculated that it had been sabotaged by some Pole or Jew, a slave laborer in one of Hitler's munitions factories. I now like to imagine that that is indeed what happened and that my benefactor was one of those on Schindler's list!

Perhaps this is an appropriate place to say something of the officers, commissioned and noncommissioned, in my outfit. I have already mentioned Sergeants [redacted] and [redacted]. The latter, as I said, was not a pleasant or an admirable man. It would be an exaggeration to compare him to the stockade sergeant in the film "From Here To Eternity," but having acknowledged that, I note that the comparison did suggest itself to me. He was first sergeant of the company, so my dealings with him were minimal. The closest I came to having trouble with him was at some little town in Germany. I was displacing civilians from their homes to make room for our people, and for some reason, [redacted] had accompanied me. At one house we were greeted by two women, one of whom must have been eight months and three weeks pregnant. As I began my routine speech, she tearfully interrupted (all this in German) with "Young man, look at me. How can I move?" I translated this for [redacted], who snarled and swore and said something to the effect of "Tell her her people started this goddam war. We didn't ask to be here." I was uneasy about arguing with him, but instead of addressing her, I said, "Jesus, Sarge. We can find another house." To my surprise and relief, even he must have been affected by the woman's condition. We moved on.

On another occasion, we were deep in Germany, when one night I heard our sentry shout a challenge and call for support. Several of us rushed outside, to find him with his rifle levelled at a hapless teenaged boy who was sobbing with fright. There was a strict curfew, of course. In my sternest voice, I asked him what

he was doing out, and he answered that he had been visiting a friend. Well, maybe, but we had been warned about saboteurs, and we had to make sure we weren't dealing with one here. [redacted] decided that he and I would take the boy home and verify his story. He led us through darkened streets for an interminable time, assuring us that his house wasn't too far away. I was scared. We could easily have been set up for an ambush. At one point [redacted] lost patience (he must have been scared too) and with full force jammed his carbine into the boy's stomach. I braced myself to see something horrible. The boy sank to his knees, pleading, and [redacted] relented. Not many minutes later, we came to his house. I stood in the street and shouted for someone to come out, while [redacted] hammered on the door with his rifle. The boy's terrified mother emerged in her nightgown, and when I told her what was going on, she vouched for her son's innocence (his behavior with us had virtually convinced us by this time that he was harmless), thanked me brokenly between sobs, and took her lucky little boy, also crying, into the house.

Each unit of Headquarters had its staff sergeant. Mine was [redacted] [redacted]. All in all, he was pretty good, and I liked him well enough. He had a mean streak, however, which was revealed to me in one of my most painful memories of the war. Sergeant Ed Palffy headed the Reconnaissance group. He was one of the finest men I knew. I don't recall how we became acquainted, but I remember the great pleasure we took in talking with each other. I also remember his proudly showing me his kid sister's photograph, which he had recently got in a letter from home. One morning I came into the message center, and [redacted] greeted me in what sounded a mocking tone with, "Your buddy Palffy got it last night." Was he for some reason jealous of our friendship? Was this his way of conveying his shock and outrage at what had happened? (Palffy was the first of our outfit to be killed.) Whatever, the manner of learning of Ed's death was devastating. I went to the truck where his body lay, and one of his squad told me what had happened. They were on patrol. It was a bright, moonlit night, and everything was quiet. As Palffy raised his binoculars to scan the terrain they were to cover, there was a burst of enemy fire. The Germans must have picked up the glint of moonshine on the glasses.

When we first went into combat, we had an excellent company commander, Captain Thomas Hagerty. As a private, I of course had virtually nothing to do with him, but we all knew that he was a likeable man, always decent and friendly, and he treated all of us with respect. After several weeks of some fierce action, we were stunned to learn that he was being transferred to a line company to relieve that company commander, who had proved to be inept (the rumor was that he was a coward) and who was to take Hagerty's place in our company. To make matters worse, we soon heard that Hagerty had been desperately wounded his first day on the line. On <u>his</u> first morning with our company, the new

captain, [redacted], held an inspection and ordered that everyone shave. We had been under almost constant artillery fire for over a week. Most of us hadn't even brushed our teeth during that time. I am reluctant to tell this next part of the story. I can only plead the strain and the sense of outrage to account for one of the most foolish things I have ever done. That evening Andy Clark and I got drunk and ranged about the streets, cursing [redacted] and saying that we wanted to shoot him. Thank God nobody heard us. I like to think now that we had figured on that, but I can't be sure.

[Last year a veteran of the 114th who is gathering what information he can about members of the division sent me a list of his findings. Hagerty survived his wounds and lives today in Lewistown, Pennsylvania. [redacted] is listed as deceased.]

Naturally, I had little to do with our regimental commander, Colonel Robert Martin. He was a remarkable man and soldier. An enlisted man in the first World War, he earned a battlefield commission, stayed in the army afterwards, and rose to the rank of full colonel. My only direct encounter with him occurred one night when I was on sentry duty outside regimental headquarters. I was listening to American and German machine guns in the distance answering each other, when the colonel strolled out, said hello, regarded the starry sky, and proceeded to give me a pretty informed lecture on astronomy. When years later I saw the film "Patton," I was reminded of Colonel Martin. He was absolutely indifferent to personal danger. Once he and his driver strayed into German territory and were captured. Somehow Martin managed to capture his captors and brought them triumphantly back to our lines. He scorned to use voice code when he was in his jeep, radioing instructions to headquarters. "This is Martin," he would say. "I'm at the bridge just on the edge of town"--at which point enemy artillery would usually zero in. He paid more attention to radio security after his driver was killed by shellfire. A friend of mine who worked in the headquarters building told me that Martin's anguish over this was terrible. This same friend was on duty on V-E night. As everyone listened to radio reports of the German surrender, the colonel turned to one of his majors and said, "Well, you'll be returning to civilian life once the war is over; but what will I do?" What he did was stay in the army. My first year at the University of Arkansas I read in Time that he had been awarded the Silver Star posthumously. He had died trying to take out a Korean tank singlehandedly. His son, a West Pointer, received the award on his father's behalf.

I must make brief mention of Captain Robert Pierce. He was the officer in charge of the message center. A thoroughly nice man and a fine officer, he was nevertheless not always in command of his maps. I remember being with him in a jeep one day, our destination somewhere behind our lines. We were on a narrow road in the middle of an

open field when Pierce, who had been brooding over his map, exclaimed, "We're going the wrong way!" And as German shells began falling around us, he shouted to our driver (I think his name was Willie Gilmore), "Kick it in the ass and get out of here!" This was my most personal experience with enemy artillery: that gunner was shooting at me.

On one terrible night I had trouble with directions myself. It had been an awful day. The front was fluid--actually, there was nothing stable enough to be called a front. We had moved in and out of two or three temporary headquarters, and we had been under artillery fire on and off all day. It was dark when we finally stopped for the night in a small town. I had just made up my bedroll and was gratefully looking forward to an untroubled sleep when word came that I was wanted at headquarters. There I found one of our majors with a GI I had never seen before. He was a driver from another outfit who was trying to find division headquarters, which was located in a town our company had left earlier that day. Since I knew the way, the major said, I would accompany him. I was greatly uneasy on hearing this, and when the major opened a bottle of bourbon and poured each of us a generous shot, I was certain I was in for a nasty time. I was right. We set out in pitch darkness--no lights on the jeep, of course (I didn't see a functioning headlight for almost a year). As we felt our way along the poor roads, I was sick with anxiety. I had a general idea of how to get where we wanted to be, but I had only traveled that road once, in daylight, and then I wasn't trying to memorize the route. A wrong turn would at best lose us hopelessly behind our lines; at worst lead us into enemy territory. At one point, as we slowed for a sharp curve, a voice rang out, "Halt! Give the password!" and we saw the dim figure of a sentry, his rifle pointed at us. We shouted the password in unison and then swore at him for the fright he had given us. A little later we were blinded and deafened for several moments when one of our artillery batteries cut loose about fifty yards from our jeep. Soon afterwards, a faint moon came out, which was a great help. A mile or two further on, I gave a cry of relief and pleasure on recognizing a familiar object: the body of a dead GI I had seen earlier in the day. We completed our journey with no more difficulty; and the return trip was easy, though it was well after midnight before I got my untroubled sleep.

That episode should correct an impression my account thus far has probably given--that I was a full-time housing agent for the company. That was certainly a regular task, but my principal duties were with the message center, which was responsible for relaying communications to and from division headquarters and the line companies. Usually we communicated by radio, though at times via a messenger in a jeep. (One of my friends was captured on such a mission. We didn't learn till months later that he was subsequently freed by advancing troops. When we docked at New York after V-E Day, he was on the pier to welcome us home!)

Almost always we sent and received messages in code. My official classification was "Code Clerk," and my job was to encipher and decipher radio communications. This was done by means of an easily portable, simple to operate machine, which was originally designed for big corporations to protect their confidential information against commercial espionage. Briefly--and approximately: I haven't thought about this for fifty years--here is how it worked: Inside the machine were half a dozen wheels and numbered cogs. Each day, every message center in the division would be given the key for that day's settings. For example, the key might read, "Wheel 1: cogs 2, 7, 10, 25, 32." This meant that those cogs would be moved (like a toggle switch); the other cogs on that wheel would stay where they were. Wheel 2 would have a different set of cogs to be moved, and so forth for the remaining wheels. When the machine was set, the operator would encipher his message, a letter at a time, and the machine would print it out in five-letter groups. (This was to prevent anyone trying to break the code from knowing the actual number of letters in a given word.) Thus, "Send artillery support" might come out "Lepaw ctboy qsidz hrmxv." As I say, the operation was simple, but obviously it was also tedious (I'm sure the present-day counterpart operates electronically). And of course, if a code clerk made a mistake in the settings, he would transmit and receive gibberish. I remember one hectic night in particular. Our troops were advancing all along the line, and the radio traffic was heavy. Every few minutes someone from the radio shack would bring us messages to decipher; just as often someone from headquarters would bring us messages to encipher. About three o'clock in the morning we were horrified when a driver from division arrived with the word that our messages were incomprehensible. I had an awful half hour rechecking my settings and deciphering some of my earlier messages (we kept copies, of course), before discovering to my great relief that the error had been made by someone at Division Message Center, not by me.

It is ironic that the period in which my family was probably most worried was for me and a few of my friends a happy interlude. This was in late December, 1944, the time of the major German counterattack known as the Battle of the Bulge. That critical action was taking place to the north and west of the Seventh Army, and because virtually all of the enemy's resources were committed to that effort, we in effect enjoyed Christmas holidays. On the 22nd we had entered Sarreguemines, a fairly large city in Alsace. One afternoon shortly before Christmas, three or four of us were exploring a section of town that was fairly intact when we came upon two good-looking young women. I opened the inevitable conversation and learned that they were sisters, living with their mother and the child of one of them. Both husbands had been drafted by the Germans and when last heard from were on the Russian front. The women's apartment was a few doors away, and they invited us in. We were warmly received by

their mother, who was tending to a sweet child (gender forgotten) of a year or so. We had a pleasant visit and returned the next evening, this time bringing some food. Our hosts were overjoyed. Years later it occurred to me that their hospitality may have been motivated at least in part by the knowledge that American soldiers had plenty of good food and were generous in dispensing it. If this was the case, it was a fair exchange. (There was never a hint of prostitution.) We had several evenings of warm fellowship, and we gave one another a merry Christmas we wouldn't have thought possible a month earlier. The day before the regiment moved out, one of the more enterprising of our group managed to steal an unbroken case of evaporated milk from the company kitchen for our farewell gift to our friends.

I regret that I can say nothing of interest about what should have been a memorable event. On March 26 or 27, 1945, our regiment crossed the Rhine at Worms. I remember feeling excited, but for anything more, I have only a vague recollection of a cold, gray afternoon and a long bridge over leaden water. I do have a vivid memory of the site of our headquarters [illegible] just before [illegible] the Rhine crossing. It was almost dusk when we entered the small hamlet. We drove down a street flanked on each side by rocky hills: "a perfect spot to get pinned down," I recall thinking as I got out of the jeep. Apart from the potential danger of the situation, the atmosphere of the place was sinister. At the crest of the hill on my left I could see the ruins of a castle, the sinking sun visible through its remaining battlements. An old German was standing nearby, silently watching us. I went over to him and asked the name of the place. "Frankenstein," was his answer.

I don't believe I will ever forget Weinheim, a city a few miles from the better-known Mannheim, both because of what I saw and because of the windfall that awaited us there. When we entered what was left of the city, I was astonished. I realized that until now I hadn't known what widespread destruction was. The city had been almost entirely razed by our artillery. Everywhere were the shells of buildings, piles of rubble, whole blocks levelled. However, a vast wine cellar, filled with French wines taken by the Germans, was intact. I don't know who made the discovery, but the word spread quickly. Soon everyone, officers as well as the rest of us, was helping himself. A particular favorite was the red and white sparkling Burgundy. We would open the uncooled bottles, and the corks would carry all the way across the narrow street. We were lucky there was no German intelligence operating in the vicinity. By nightfall a counterattack would have had terrible effect. The next morning, rather than go the short distance to the company kitchen for water, I brushed my teeth in white Burgundy. As always happened, good things had to be left behind, but when we packed to move out, we included as much of the wine as possible, discarding superfluous items to make more storage space available. I threw

away my gas mask and--like Falstaff at the Battle of Shrewsbury--filled the carrying case with a bottle.

Our good fortune at Weinheim was rivalled, but not equalled, the time we liberated a wheel of swiss cheese, as big as a tire, from a house next door to a microbrewery. And here, now that I have introduced the subject of looting, is the place to mention my two most prized trophies, a typewriter and a Luger. I took the typewriter from a partially destroyed office building in some city. I thought it would come in handy around the message center and could be left behind when it proved troublesome to carry. In the passing weeks, I grew fond of it, though it took some getting used to. Because *z* is a more frequent letter in German than *y*, the *z* and *y* keys were placed exactly opposite from their positions on an American keyboard, with the result that the "zous" and "yeniths" I typed resembled the kinds of messages produced by my cipher machine. When the war in Europe ended and we were packing equipment for our return to America, I included the typewriter. It arrived safely, and I have it today. As for the Luger, that is a different story. At one of the villages in which we stayed overnight, the order was given for all civilians to turn in any weapons in their possession. I spotted a very old man, shuffling toward our headquarters and carrying a large black holster. I stopped him and asked him what he had. He opened the holster and showed me a Luger. It was a beautiful pistol. Judging from its blued steel barrel, its grip inlaid with walnut, and the absence of any plastic, it had obviously been manufactured before the war. "I'll take it," I said. He was unhappy to give it to me rather than turn it in at the official collection point, but he could do nothing but grumble.

[This story has an unhappy ending. After the war I brought the Luger home. I even fired it a few times. (It was in perfect working order.) The year our first son, John, was born, Joanne insisted that I get rid of the pistol. I sold it to a gun dealer in Columbus, Ohio, for $25.]

To put things at this point in perspective, the European war was within two months of ending. The German army, though still fighting, was near total collapse. Consequently events, and we with them, were moving rapidly. I have only a few scattered recollections remaining that are notable. I remember a late afternoon in some burning city. We had stopped, not to establish headquarters but to find out where to go next. I was looking at the clouds of thick black smoke against the crimson skyline when I heard Sgt. [illegible] yelling for me. I hurried over, to find him with a general (the first one I had ever seen) and a distraught middle-aged German woman. "Ask her," the general directed me, "what she wants." To my question she replied that her husband was a high-ranking officer who had been captured that afternoon; she was afraid he would be shot. "Tell her the American army doesn't shoot prisoners." This was in the main true, but it

obviously wasn't what the poor woman had hoped for. We left her looking far from reassured.

At another time, because of circumstances I can't recall, an officer ordered me to man the fifty-caliber machine gun mounted in the back of a jeep. This was absurd. I had had training only with rifles, and I'm not sure I could have fired this formidable weapon; I almost certainly couldn't have hit anything. I took my position behind the gun, and as we proceeded through a nondescript village, the inhabitants--women, children, and a few old men--had lined both sides of the street, their hands raised in surrender. My feelings were mixed: the arrogance of the conqueror--unworthy, perhaps, but I believe understandable; embarrassment at my fraudulent status as a heavy weapons expert; most of all, awe at this spectacle of a nation in collapse.

Not long after this I stood at the side of a hilly road, looking at the body of a German soldier lying beside a German army truck. It would be melodramatic to say that the sight has haunted me for fifty years. It is true, however, that it is one of my most disturbing memories from those months overseas. As I stood there, I heard what had happened. The night before, the truck, carrying several German soldiers, slipped in between the vehicles in one of our convoys, either to avoid capture or to do some damage. It was a bold, even heroic, move. They were discovered, and in the ensuing fire fight, all were captured except this one. He was about my age. He lay on his back, his arms at his side. His face was thin and almost as gray as his uniform. I could see no wound or blood. Although his upper teeth were sunk in his lower lip and his eyes weren't fully closed, he didn't look ghastly, just dead. His legs were slightly apart, and a pool of urine was on the overcoat spread beneath them. If I could draw, I could perfectly reproduce the sight. And if I could find the adequate words, I could describe exactly how my stomach turned over when I first saw him--not from nausea but shock. My overwhelming emotion was pity. The Germans had caused me discomfort, sorrow, and terror for almost six months, and in the abstract I wanted as many of them dead as possible. But there was nothing abstract in what lay before me, and I was sorry he had had to die.

On April the 28th we crossed into Austria. The war was for all practical purposes over. One day as my driver and I were going along a crowded street, I saw a German officer walking with a woman. I shouted for the driver to stop, and he and I jumped from the jeep, rifles ready. Thankfully, instead of shooting I accosted the pair and said something silly to the man, like "What are you doing here?" He was silent, but his companion said to me, "He is blind." Was he in fact? He was wearing dark glasses, and the woman was leading him by the arm. We probably should have taken him as a prisoner of war. Hostilities weren't over, and he was in uniform. But neither of us had the heart for it.

We didn't even debate the matter as we got back in the jeep and drove off.

That pretty much concludes my war stories. According to the official history of the 44th Infantry Division, we were in combat for 190 days and killed or captured over 40,000 of the enemy. Our casualties were 5,655 killed or wounded.

We were stationed in Reutte, Austria, when Germany surrendered. It was here, shortly before the surrender, that I was stopped by an old man who told me that President Roosevelt had died. In early June we bivouacked in the vicinity of Ulm. I observed my twenty-first birthday on June 7 at Mudau. On the 29th we were in the vicinity of La Harve, in a huge camp named Old Gold. (In those days of widespread and carefree smoking, frequently temporary camps overseas were named after popular cigarettes.) We crossed the English Channel on July 1. Two weeks later, we embarked at Gourock, Scotland, for home.

Our return trip was made in style: no ordinary troop ship, but the Queen Elizabeth! (The tier of bunks that included mine was set up in what had been the first-class swimming pool.) Unlike the voyage of the previous September, this crossing took only seven days; and there were no submarines! We docked at New York harbor on July 20 and boarded trains for Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. As I recall, it was early in the afternoon when we arrived. Even so, as soon as we had found our barracks, we were marched to the biggest mess hall I have ever seen and served steak dinners. A few days later each of us went his separate way on a thirty-day furlough. We were to regroup at the end of the month in preparation for the invasion of Japan.

Home was wonderful. I had a few uneasy moments when I encountered the mother or father of a high school friend and waited awkwardly for a sign to let me know whether he was alive. One night I was awakened by a violent thunderstorm, realizing with terror that I hadn't dreamed those eighty-eight shells: they were falling in the front yard. And one afternoon a friend and I were double-dating in my date's living room when someone turned on the big cabinet Zenith radio. In those days before transistors, radios operated on tubes, and often when they were first turned on they emitted a loud hum. When that happened on this occasion, I heard not a set of tubes warming up but an incoming shell. Before my astonished friends I flung myself at full length on the floor. (I should add that this instinctive action made an enormously favorable impression on my date!) One afternoon toward the end of my furlough I was loafing in my room when through my open window I heard a neighbor calling to my mother, "Turn your radio on. We've dropped some kind of bomb on Japan."

When a few days later I reported to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, just

outside of Ft. Smith, I was relieved, thankful, relaxed. I had deliberately tried not to think about the future, but the dark cloud of my awareness hovered over my furlough, and it was not dispelled until that autumn afternoon when we dropped "some kind of bomb on Japan." At Camp Chaffee, we had minimal duties while we waited to be shipped to the separation centers nearest our homes. The government, of course, could not release every soldier simultaneously. As a combat veteran I had a high priority, and I knew my days in the army were numbered. While I counted, one of my tasks was to pack various documents that were on file in the message center. I was soberly impressed to find among them a complete breakdown of a Japanese division, including the names of staff officers. I suppose the unit had been located at a sector our division was slated to hit. November came and I was still at Chaffee, still a soldier. Though I was impatient for my discharge, the time passed pleasantly enough. I took my weekend leaves in Ft. Smith. Had I chosen to spend one of them sixty miles away in Fayetteville, I might have seen fifteen-year-old Joanne O'Kelly on the square.

In mid-November I boarded a troop train to Camp Fannin, Texas. The day before I was scheduled to be discharged, several hundred of us were herded into an auditorium, where a second lieutenant who had obviously been no nearer combat than a quarrel with his fraternity brothers recommended that we consider the advantages of reenlisting, an invitation that was greeted with a roar of derisive laughter. The poor guy must have had to go through this several times a week. He also cautioned us to report at this time any service-related injuries or forever after hold our peace. I considered mentioning the slight hearing loss I had noticed ever since the night of that long jeep ride; but wiser heads among my friends warned that if I did so, it could delay my discharge for weeks.

On November 19, 1945--after thirty-three months of service--I was honorably discharged from the United States Army. I got a train out that same afternoon. Somewhere, perhaps New Orleans, I changed trains. In a crowded coach I took the remaining seat in a facing pair occupied by two male soldiers and a WAC (for the benefit of future generations, a member of the Women's Army Corps). We fell into conversation, and I learned that the three of them were just out of basic training and were probably slated for occupation duty somewhere overseas. They regarded my campaign ribbons and Combat Infantry Badge with awe, and when they discovered that I was going home and returning to civilian life, their envy was palpable. I couldn't have arranged for a better conclusion to my military career.

Addendum

After I had written the foregoing account, I recalled a few other incidents of my stint in the military, along with one or two episodes originally omitted or unelaborated. When some of my family learned of these, they urged me to add this supplement. Also, from the outset Joanne has disagreed with my decision to limit the memoir to my time in combat. Here, then, are some additions to my reminiscences.

Following basic training in a Signal Corps unit at Camp Crowder, Missouri in the spring of 1943, I was sent to Lincoln, Nebraska, as a candidate for admission to the Army Specialized Training Program. ASTP was designed partly to keep American colleges and universities afloat during this period of almost no male enrollment, partly to produce a group of soldiers whose proficiency in foreign languages or engineering would be militarily useful. I had volunteered for military service during my sophomore year at Vanderbilt; because of my college experiences I was a logical candidate for the program. At Lincoln, I took a series of tests on verbal aptitude. I remember one of them: I was given the rudiments of a made-up "language" (something like Esperanto)—vocabulary, basic rules of grammar and syntax—and after studying for a half hour or so, I had to translate and compose simple statements. It was fun, and apparently I did well, for soon thereafter I found myself at Washington University in St. Louis. The almost nine months spent on that attractive campus were idyllic. Our group was instructed in European history, geography, and Italian or, in my case, German. All my instructors were German born. By the end of my time there, I had a working command of conversational German and an excellent accent. (To get ahead of my narrative, I was inordinately proud when an Alsatian girl introduced me to her mother and added, "Er spricht prima Deutsch.")

One decidedly non-military event during this interlude was the musical our company produced. "Don't Tell Omaha"

was a variety show, with skits, solos and group songs, and instrumental performances. (Omaha was headquarters for the ASTP units in the Midwest; hence the title). A couple of the organizers of the show had been professional musicians in civilian life. The chief one, Walter Stein, was a pianist and had arranged for Larry Clinton's orchestra. I was in several of the singing groups. My star bit was as a member of a barbershop quartet. The show ran for two nights, and much of St. Louis society was in attendance. I still have photos and a picture from the St. Louis Post Dispatch of my fellow barbershoppers and me, all in long underwear.

Even during wartime there were frequent musical events in St. Louis. I went often to the Saturday night performances of the St. Louis Symphony. One Sunday I spent the afternoon in the cocktail lounge of the Chase Hotel, listening to the two-piano jazz team of Meade "Lux" Lewis and Albert Ammons. It was near the end of the month, and I was almost completely broke, as were all the friends who might have lent me money. It cost nothing to go to the lounge, but one had to drink, of course. I ordered a whiskey collins, the tallest drink I was familiar with. It cost one dollar, which was considerable in 1943. (To give an idea of how considerable, though Congress had by this time raised military pay levels, my first monthly pay in the army had been $21.) I spent the next two hours self-consciously nursing my collins, while Lewis and Ammons played great boogie-woogie. In ordinary times, I'm sure I would have been politely ejected after a reasonable stay. But it was 1943, and I was in uniform. (That was the first time I was a patron of the Chase; the second was six years later, when I stayed there on my honeymoon.)

The musical high point of my time in St. Louis—indeed, of my life—was Duke Ellington's concert dance held in the municipal auditorium in December of 1943. I arrived early, and there was already a sizable crowd. (Later I read in Downbeat that it was the most heavily attended jazz event of 1943. Unreported was my impression that I was the only white person present.) I worked my way forward until I was standing close to the

bandstand. It was empty, but music stands were in place, as were a grand piano, a bass, and a set of traps. After a while, it was announced that because the train carrying the band had arrived late, there would be a further delay before things got underway. I had been standing for at least an hour when Junior Raglin sauntered on stage and began tuning, then strumming, his bass. He was soon joined by Sonny Greer, who quietly underlined Raglin's tempo with snare and bass drums. One after another of the band appeared and added their various instrumental voices to what Raglin and Greer had started—no recognizable song; rather, by now an increasingly complex series of notes and chords in the same tempo and key. Everyone was waiting for the climactic entrance: Ellington appeared, casually acknowledged the shouts and applause, sat at the piano, and began to noodle about on the keyboard. That is, he seemed to be noodling. In fact he almost imperceptibly led the orchestra into a full-voiced rendition of "Take the A Train."

For some time before this and well into the first half of the program, I had been bothered by a very drunk man standing just in front of me and frequently stepping backward on my feet. Not that he was unfriendly. On the contrary: though he reeked and was on my feet a great deal, he was amiable in the extreme. He seemed especially pleased with me because I was a soldier. He confided that he had been discharged from the army the day before (alcoholism, I wondered?) and had come to St. Louis to meet his brother, who, he said confidently, played in the band. I was skeptical but to respond politely asked who his brother was. "Lawrence Brown," was the matter-of-fact answer. Lawrence Brown had been with the band since 1932, was the lead trombonist and a player of flawless technique and stunning beauty. I warmed to my new-found friend, and we talked between numbers until the intermission. "Come on with me to the stage," he invited. I did so and was forthwith introduced to Lawrence himself. He was affable, but after a few words I could see that he wanted to talk with his brother. I left the two of them and had a friendly chat with Raglin, a

comparatively recent addition to the band and hence unknown to me. Then I wandered about the stage, introducing myself to musicians who had been my idols since high school days—notably Sonny Greer, Ben Webster, Johnny Hodges (polite, but cool and distant), Rex Stewart. I was talking with Stewart, Ellington's great trumpet player, when he drew a silver flask from his hip pocket and offered it to me. I took it, thinking with pride and pleasure as I did so, "I'm drinking from Rex Stewart's flask!"

Stewart then turned to me and asked (this is verbatim), "Would you like to meet the Duke?" He led me backstage and knocked on the door of a dressing room. At the invitation to enter, we went in. Ellington was in shirt sleeves, standing and eating a sandwich. He looked extremely weary, the circles under his eyes deeper than I had seen in any photograph. Stewart introduced me. I wasn't speechless, but I might as well have been. I said something utterly inane to the effect that I was enjoying the concert. Ellington replied quietly that he was glad and added that I could stay on stage for the rest of the show if I wanted. If I wanted! For the next few hours I stood or sat with one section after another—reeds, brass, rhythm, everywhere except on the piano bench with Ellington! I don't remember anything beyond that. I must have said thank-you and goodbye. Except for Rex Stewart's bourbon, I hadn't had anything to drink; I was intoxicated with music.

The logical result of ASTP would have been for the well-trained soldiers in engineering, German, or Italian to be assigned to units that could utilize their special capacities. However, the situation in the European war in the winter and spring of 1944 presented a more compelling logic. Not too long after the triumph of "Don't Tell Omaha," I found myself assigned to a rifle company on maneuvers in Louisiana. The transition from a converted barracks on the campus of Washington University to the wilds of Louisiana was more shocking than that from civilian to army life. I remember a few details, all unpleasant: coming directly from a railway

siding to a truck and then to the woods, where with the complete stranger who was to be my tent-mate I tried to pitch a two-man tent in a cold, steady rain; standing at dawn in a foxhole during a hail storm, ankle-deep in hailstones, as the enemy Blue Forces attacked, shouting like lunatics and firing blank ammunition; the routine each morning of removing engorged ticks from the most intimate parts of my body. Finally, the ordeal was over (Was it two weeks? It seems more), and there was universal relief when we were shipped to Camp Phillips, Kansas, for advanced infantry training.

Here we were in barracks. Instead of occasional sponge baths from helmets full of tepid water, we had daily showers. Slit trenches were replaced by toilets. We ate off plates in a mess hall. And when we didn't go to nearby towns on weekend passes, there were recreation rooms and nightly movies on the post.

Soon after our arrival we were issued M-1 rifles. In basic training I had had an Enfield, the WWI British counterpart of the American Springfield. It was a clumsy, bolt-action piece with a clip that held five rounds. During rapid-fire drill with it, I jammed the clip so hastily into the breech that the shells were forced from the clip and lay scattered on the ground at my side. The extremely decent second lieutenant (a recent Princeton graduate and an even more recent officer) who was supervising the exercise quickly knelt down and fed the five rounds to me as I loaded them one at a time directly into the breech. Thanks to him, I qualified with the second of three rankings--Sharpshooter, Expert, and Marksman. The M-1 had a clip that held, as I remember, seven rounds; and it was gas operated, which meant that with each pull of the trigger, the recoil ejected the spent shell and moved a new one into the chamber. No doubt present-day infantrymen, with their M-15s or whatever, would be amused at this antiquated weapon, but to us it was a marvel.

The training at Camp Phillips was arduous, but much of it was interesting. An obvious difference between basic and advanced training was that almost all of the activities I now engaged in had a purpose directly related to combat: bayonet practice

on life-size dummies; gas drill, which required donning the masks as a thick cloud of something offensive (tear gas?) was released; crawling at night some fifty yards over broken ground under live machine gun fire, the military myth fresh in my mind of the unfortunate who encountered a rattlesnake and leaped up into the stream of tracer bullets). As unpleasant as this exercise was, I was even more uncomfortable with the hand grenade drill. Incredible as it may seem, I can't remember that we practiced first with dummy grenades. I do remember standing in a foxhole, nervously pulling the pin on a live grenade (how much time had the sergeant said we had after throwing it, eight seconds?), hurling it awkwardly, and ducking. The explosion was tremendous, and I was showered with dirt. Though my range clearly needed improving, I was glad I wasn't given another chance. I enjoyed the exercise for urban combat (after all, it hadn't been too many years since I had played such games as a boy). I was issued live ammunition for my M-1 and sent on a walk through a mock village. From various windows, doors, and roofs, cardboard figures suddenly emerged (like the ones in a child's pop-up book), and I shot at them. My accuracy was graded by the number of figures with bullet holes in them. A sergeant, walking warily behind me, measured my reaction time. One of the last of our exercises was the twenty-five mile all-night hike. Quite a few of the company dropped out, from either fatigue or crippling blisters. I finished but wondered how, in a combat situation, I could possibly do battle in my exhausted condition.

American servicemen in the Second World War haed enlisted or been drafted "for the duration plus ninety," a period impossible to quantify. I simply could not foresee a time when I would not be in the army. The Allied forces' victory in North Africa occurred in May of 1943, while I was completing basic training. Each evening after mess, the daily news was broadcast from outdoor loudspeakers. My initial excited reaction to the report gave way to a feeling of desolation as I heard Churchill's voice intoning, "This is not the beginning

of the end; it is the end of the beginning," an assessment that reinforced my conviction that I would be in the army forever.

Once overseas, this state of mind was replaced by the daily question of survival—not when I might be discharged, but whether I would live. I was not, of course, in a constant state of fear. My concern for survival was more an habitual awareness than an active emotional state. As I recall my various feelings during those months overseas, I remember instances of considerable discomfort, of anxiety, and—especially as we were racing across Germany and into Austria, the war clearly winding down—of heady excitement. Part of the time I was thoroughly bored. There were also times of real fear. I have reread my account of the prolonged shelling by the German tank that pinned our company down on April 20, and I find that it doesn't adequately describe my terror—and the terror I felt in everyone around me as we huddled in that barn for even approximately how long I have no idea. That was the main reason this incident was so different from other times of danger. Those were relatively short-lived, over almost before there was time to react. This threat was not only very serious; it was also sustained. Adding to my fear was the knowledge that I was absolutely helpless. All I could do in that interval between ear-shattering explosions—as I sat with my back pressed tightly against the stone wall of the barn, my knees draw up to my chest—was wait and hope that the next shell would not be a direct hit.

I began this account of my wartime experiences by noting how lucky I was not to have been on that patrol on which all my former squad members were killed. This time I was lucky that nothing happened, that none of the many shells fired by that tank hit the barn in which we had taken shelter. My luck held, too, another time when nothing happened. This was the occasion I've previously described when my friend Andy Clark and I searched a house for German soldiers. We had finished going through the rooms on the second floor, when we were dismayed to discover a pull-down ladder leading to the attic.

I hated the idea of searching that attic. The look on Clark's face told me that he shared my reluctance but, like me, knew that we couldn't leave the attic unexplored. What I did next was not the result of ratiocination; certainly it wasn't a deliberate act of courage. It was simply the only practical way to proceed. I realized that a man climbing through that trapdoor encumbered with an unwieldy rifle would be virtually helpless for the first few seconds he was exposed. In addition to my M-1 I had a French revolver I had acquired somewhere. (There was an active trading in "liberated" pistols among us. In addition to the revolver, at various times I had a German P-38, an Italian Beretta, a Belgian automatic of forgotten make, a US Army .45, and the Luger mentioned in the preceding part of these memoirs.) I said to Clark, "I've got a pistol. I'll go first." I climbed the ladder, pushed open the trapdoor, and carefully raised my head and shoulders into a beautifully empty attic.

One more instance of my luck: during my time overseas the Luftwaffe was virtually nonexistent. We were strafed twice, both times by single planes; and I am only technically accurate in saying "we." Although I heard the planes' engines and guns, I didn't feel that I was being shot at. In the first incident the fighter was close enough for Sgt. Joe Dunn to return the German's fire with a fifty-caliber gun mounted on his jeep; the second was less threatening—a short burst of machine gun fire as the plane flew over our encampment at night. Another time I watched antiaircraft shellbursts following a fleeing enemy observation plane. Smoke issued from its tail as it sank out of sight behind a hill. At some point after we had crossed the Rhine, I understood why we were almost completely unaware of the once-feared German airforce. Our convoy passed an airfield on which were rows of fighter planes, idle and useless because there was no fuel.

Once during my time in the combat area, I was given a three-day pass to the French town of Nancy. Were it not for a photograph of me and two girls sitting on a park bench, I would remember absolutely nothing of this interlude—Who took

the picture, I wonder? After VE Day I had a twelve-hour pass to Paris. My introduction to the city was disappointing. There were throngs of soldiers everywhere; and in the brief time I had, I could only walk the crowded streets and drop into various cafes for a drink. In one of these I met Christiane, who was young, pretty, and friendly. Between her English and my French we had very little meaningful discourse, but it had been so long since I had been with an attractive girl that our imperfect communicating didn't bother me. Shortly before I told her good-bye, I gave a sidewalk artist a few francs to draw a sketch of her. I still have it, with his unwarranted embellishment: "Souvenir de Paris. Un Souvenir de votre petite Christiane qui vous aime bien. 24.6.45." Once in my pre-teen years, I was idly and innocently looking through a desk drawer in my father's study when I came across a cigar box. Opening it I found what were obviously souvenirs from his time in France in the first World War, among them a champagne cork and a photograph of a very attractive brunette, signed "Marie." I wish I had made this discovery after my war, so that I could have asked Father about his Marie and told him about my Christiane.

And now there really are no more memories. I'll close with an inconsequential, though pleasing image. Somewhere in Austria toward the end of the war, I turned the corner of a narrow street and came face to face with an American tank manned by Free French forces. I waved to the soldier in the turret and said in my best high school French, "Bientôt la guerre fini!" He smiled and returned my wave.