

LONG AGO
AND
FAR AWAY

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Hellgate Press



Ashland, Oregon

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S n a p s h o t

HIS GRANDSON RON, NO LONGER THE RONNY of years past, surveyed the six-high bookcases along the spare bedroom wall, now a library den to court himself by himself as did Montaigne in his tower. "You must have every book you've ever read," mused Ron.

"Not every one," he replied with a quiet laugh. "They're my own university. Some are out-of-date now, but mind-openers when read. A few are unreadable but they're to remind me of my ignorance. Each one has a history, and even its own history. You should keep your college books and start a library of your own."

"They take up a lot of room."

"I'll be glad to store them for you. Your books are like the milestones of the early roads that indicated how far you've come and how much farther to go. And it's good, now and then, to see what you've learned, relearned and unlearned. A self isn't found as much as created."

Ron stood up, stretched his six-foot four-inch body, and then bent down to see the snapshot hung on the side of a bookcase. "Is that really you, Grandpa?" referring to himself when a Second Lieutenant in olive drab uniform with Eisenhower jacket and garrison cloth cap.

“Taken on my twenty-first birthday in Germany; and finally able to vote for the first time.”

“You had hair then,” smiled Ron.

“Weighed only a hundred and eighty pounds too. A youth grows up to be a man of seventy-odd, yet the man isn’t the same as the youth, nor is he another person. Strange, isn’t it?”

Ron plopped down in the leather armchair and draped one leg over the armrest. “Where was it taken? Mom doesn’t remember.”

“1946 in Bad Nauheim, the Chemical Warfare Service Headquarters in the American Zone of Occupation.”

Ron’s eyebrows rose. “A long time ago!”

“Ancient history to your generation as World War One was to us at your age.”

“In history class, we saw videos on World War Two, the Blockade and Berlin Wall. Our professor bought to class a brick from the Wall when it came down”

He shook his head. “That wasn’t until the Eighties. The Blockade happened in 1948, when the Russians wouldn’t allow supplies by rail or truck to cross their Zone to feed those in our Zone. The Wall went up in ’61 to stop the East Germans under Communist rule from crossing over into democratic West Germany.”

Ron gave him a puzzled look. “How do you remember all those dates?”

“They’re part of my generation’s history, in which I played a part, a very small part to be sure. Dates in themselves aren’t so important, but you have to remember a few to know the sequence of events to understand their relatedness. Otherwise, everything is a jumble that leaves you feeling like a piece of driftwood going nowhere.”

Ron, defensively, said, “There’s a lot of history on TV Channel 91.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Television doesn’t interest me much.”

“I know,” Ron said with a grin. “You’re a reader like Mom.”

“Nothing wrong with that. The top brass back then had a famous Hollywood director film, “Why We Fight,” shown in basic training to explain why we were at war. Propaganda really. We endured it like everything else, but it was liberating the death camps that educated us to what we were really up against.”

Teasingly, Ron said, “Did you see the movie ‘D-Day’? Won all kinds of awards. It’s so real, Grandpa, you feel you’re right there. We bought the video, and I’ve seen it half a dozen times. Want to see it?”

“Not unless you do. For me, war isn’t adventurous or entertaining. Some twenty-five million died in the First War, and double that in the Second, more civilians than military—women, children, elderly. We did what had to be done, but there’s no glamour in a body bag.” He shifted his weight to favor his right knee implant, which worked well except for occasional stiffness. “Nor,” he went on, “is war all about combat, though it’s the crucible of the soldier. Winning the peace afterwards is a lot duller and humdrum. General Clay, the Military Governor of Germany, was of the same stature as Generals Marshall and Eisenhower to avoid another Pyrrhic victory like Versailles.”

Ron knew better than to ask what Pyrrhic meant. “Where did you learn all this stuff?”

“From historical studies, memoirs, biographies. What I know first-hand was from the bottom-up because that’s where I was. What went on in Washington and Berlin was limited to bits and pieces in the newspapers and on the radio. Getting a view from the top-down about policies and decisions one can’t know and couldn’t know at the time, many top secret, helps to understand what and why things happened, much like turning on a searchlight.”

Ron checked his watch again, swung his legs around, quickly laced up his thirteen-size basketball shoes, and grabbed the car keys on the end table.

“What’s the rush?”

“I’m running late to meet Art at Cinema East. Tonight is a real blockbuster starring Toni Rico.” He tossed the keys into the air with one hand

and caught them in the other." I really want to hear more about what you did over there."

"The five minute or fifty minute answer?"

Ron laughed. "Five suits me. Be back before you know it!"

How condense six months into five minutes, much less fifty? Some memories stay clear as day; some won't go away and be forgotten; some fade beyond recall like the ten-day troopship over and back; and others seem distant and fuzzy like old family movies.

O n e

COLONEL WARREN GILES, European Theatre Commander of the Chemical Warfare Service, greeted First Lieutenant Lew Danforth and Second Lieutenant Paul Mason with a hearty handshake. “Please excuse the packing cases and file cartons. We’re in the midst of moving twenty miles north to an I. G. Farben sales office in Bad Nauheim.” The tall, thin, gray-haired colonel wore the ring of a West Pointer, class of 1919. His slightly stooped shoulders and mild unhurried manner suggested the habits of a staff officer than a field commander.

“Very frankly,” he continued, “we’re looking forward to being on our own. Our problems seem small in comparison to caring for half a million POWs and another half million Displaced Persons. We’re a huge headache to USFET with dangerous lethal chemical agents that can’t be exploded like ordnance ammunition. An attempt to dump toxic shells into the North Sea raised a hue and cry from the fishing industry, and justifiably so.”

They were being assigned to the St. Georgen Depot, the largest and most modern of the five chemical depots in their Zone. It was undamaged, being so well camouflaged the Air Force hadn’t seen it.

The SS Colonel-in-charge had threatened to use gas on our ground troops unless given 24-hours to evacuate. This had been completely ignored by the advancing units, who had found on arrival the SS had fled and the depot deserted.

Complicating the present situation was the hectic German retreat to the Alpine Redoubt in Austria for the last stand that never materialized. The frantic drivers had dumped tons of toxic munitions in the wooded areas from a half-dozen countries, now rusting and leaking.

“We’ve a great opportunity here,” the colonel concluded, handing each of them a Michelin roadmap of Bavaria and a pocket-size *German Word and Phrase Book*. “Winning the peace is as hard, if not harder, than winning the war. Versailles taught us that. As a young officer in our sector of the Rhineland, never could I have imagined being here again twenty-seven years later. We’ve unfinished business to settle once and for all.”

The colonel pushed his chair back and stood at full height. “Gentlemen, history is being made here, and you’re part of it. Welcome to the Occupation and your new duties.”

Both were glad to climb into the jeep where their driver, Sergeant Richmond from the depot, awaited them. All about them lay Frankfurt in ruins of twisted girders, dangling staircases, mound after mound of pulverized rubble in street after street. People shuffled about in drab and shabby clothes, some in partial uniforms—bent, worn, dazed. At night the passenger platforms in the shattered central railroad station became dormitories for bombed-out residents and homeless refugees.

Driving eastward, however, in the wake of the advancing armies from the Rhine, they passed the wreckage of rail yards, factories, and bulldozed paths through towns and villages. Detours were constant.

And late April or not, intermittent snow flurries fogged their windshield and made them shiver and stomp their feet to stay warm.

“When,” Lew asked irritably, “are we ever going to get there?”

“Close to halfway, sir,” shouted Richmond. “We’ll make good time once we hit the *autobahn*.”

Surprisingly, the *autobahn* proved to be a superhighway of four lanes divided by a grassy median. The sun finally peeked through the leaden sky as they traversed plowed fields, rolling meadows, and tall hop vines. Military vehicles were the only traffic, and then merely a wave or a beep. Now and again they were slowed down by a dynamited bridge; and, in four-wheel drive, descended a dirt track to cross a stream and climb back up, slipping and sliding and splattered with mud. Once, off to the right, a German fighter plane sat half-hidden among the trees when the *autobahn* served as a retreating runway.

Paul cupped a hand to his mouth to be heard above the engine and flapping winterized canvas sides. “Let me take the wheel for a while, Sergeant.”

“I’m OK, Lieutenant,” replied Richmond.

“You’ve been driving all day and must be tired.”

Richmond hesitated, but being stiff and a little drowsy, he braked to a stop. Lew remained asleep in the back seat, wedged like a mummy between their luggage and spare jerry cans of gasoline, his cap pulled down over his eyes, his hands buried in his field jacket.

Dusk faded into night. All traffic ceased. On the side roads, their headlights bored holes in the blackness. At a crossroad, Paul drifted to a stop for Richmond to shine a flashlight on a maze of wooden directional arrows.

Lew, half-awake, asked, “Everything all right?” What if they had a breakdown out here in the middle of nowhere?

“Right on target, sir.” Richmond said over his shoulder and then to Paul, “I’ll take it in, Lieutenant. There’s some tricky turns ahead

along with potholes and washouts. Oh, almost forgot!” Richmond unlocked the glove compartment and buckled on a web belt and holster with a Colt .45 automatic pistol.

“Why the sidearm?” asked Paul.

“CO’s orders on trips. Nighttime is when the werewolves come out.”

“Werewolves?” Lew cried out.

“That’s what they call the roving gangs of POWs and DPs who hide out in the woods and steal anything that isn’t padlocked or nailed down.”

Lew nudged Paul in the back to say, “Didn’t I tell you the colonel painted us a rosy picture.”



Paul opened his eyes. Sunlight streamed through the window. He slid his hand along the floor beneath the bed for his watch. Eight-thirty! He hadn’t heard the call for reveille or any noises in the hallway. He must have been dead-tired. Last night’s Charge of Quarters couldn’t find Supply Sgt. Vacchio or Lt. Henderson, the Officer of the Day. They weren’t expected until today, but wool blankets were finally found for them. His skin itched, and he scratched himself until white nail marks showed. He did a dozen pushups and deep-knee bends to work out the stiffness and stay in good shape.

The cell-size room contained a dresser, table and chair, and coat rack. He shuddered to think a dreaded, black-uniformed SS elite officer, perhaps of his own rank, had used this very same room. He stepped over his Val-Pac, opened flat on the floor on which he had dropped his clothes, and found the *Phrase Book*. His equivalent was

Untersturmfuhrer. What a mouthful! But that was then, and today is now.

Something on the wall hung from a shoelace tied to a nail. It was an Emergency Signaling Mirror with a center sighting cross, marked in good Army fashion ESM-I. He adjusted the lace until the cross was at his taller eye level, and smoothed down his rumpled hair. Slipping on trousers and untied shoes, he grabbed his shaving kit and went next door. "Good morning!"

Lew opened one eye. "What's good about it?"

"We're here safe and sound."

"Yea, with only 174 more days to go." Their orders stated that the two officers listed were to report to the European Theatre on temporary duty for 180 days for the purpose of handling captured enemy chemical munitions.

The Mess Hall was next door, nestled among tall pines facing a series of barracks around a central oval in what had been a stand of trees, but now an ugly clearing of crudely cut stumps. Uprturned chairs sat on tables inside a large dining room with a central stage. Upon seeing them enter, the German orderlies mopping the floor snapped to attention. A staff sergeant promptly appeared, saluted, introduced himself as Mess Sgt. Murphy, and led them into a small adjoining officers' dining room.

"Sorry, sir," Murphy said, "no one was here last night to get you something to eat, but we weren't expecting you until today. But we'll try to make up for it."

"Where's Capt. Hartley?" Lew asked.

"He'll be here around ten to sign the Daily Morning and Sick Reports, sir."

"Any idea, Sgt.," Paul asked, "why all the trees outside were cut down?"

“For heat, sir. Last winter was one of the worst on record with coal scarcer than food, electricity rationed, and a poor crop of winter wheat. Blankets are like gold. We wore socks to bed and slept in our winter long johns. Jokers said it’d be warmer sleeping out in the snow. Some people are never happy unless they’re complaining. You know how that is, Lieutenant.”

Murphy was true to his word, and they complemented him when leaving. “We try to make it like home, sir,” Murphy said. “There isn’t much to do off-duty around here, and no place to go without driving a couple of hours.”

Once Paul began unpacking his duffle bag, the room started to look livable and, with a few Modern Library books and pocket-size Armed Services Editions on the table, civilized. Happily, his mother was a reader and loved books. No matter how low the family budget, she always managed to pay the book rental fees at the library, or take him and his younger brother to the used-book sales. Great books, she was fond of saying, never age or grow stale. Certainly that was true of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* discovered oddly during the cramped ten days to Bremerhaven, which he’d found so new and different that he’d laughed aloud at times that had drawn quizzical and lunatic stares. But this hadn’t deterred him. All too often, conversation on board was about how much PX items were worth on the Black Market, or how available girls were with no-strings-attached. Such comments, from officers too, only intensified his resolve never to take advantage of a defeated and destitute people—women most of all.

A jeep screeched to a halt. Paul looked out the window. A stockily built man of medium height got out balancing a coffee mug in one hand, dressed in a lacquered helmet liner and camouflage coveralls

bloused over ankle-high combat boots. Suspended from a webbed belt were a flap holster and canteen.

“Howdy!” Capt. Hartley’s boomed as he rapped on their open doors. “Let’s mosey on down to the Lounge.”

Lew and Paul followed him down the hall to a room with a sofa, armchairs, dining table with chairs, and a corner bar.

“You’re a sight for sore eyes,” Hartley said, pushing his glossy liner back on his close-cropped brown hair. “Me n’ Henderson have been run ragged since we lost Evans and Waddell.” He turned a chair around and sat down, resting his arms on the back. “Sorry no one was around last night, but we weren’t expecting you until today. Saturday we’ll make everything right with a welcome party. You had breakfast?”

“Sgt. Murphy took good care of us,” Lew said.

“One of my best men. We don’t have many or keep them too long. Redeployment is killing us. Not so with the Russians. They’re at wartime strength ready to take over everything, us most of all. How about an eye-opener?”

Lew and Paul declined.

“Think I’ll finish mine Irish,” Hartley said. “Still winter out there.” He went behind the bar and poured a long shot of Canadian Club whiskey into his mug. “Help yourself whenever you like. All first-rate stuff. Here’s to you!” He drained the mug and dried his lips on his cuff. “Have to run, but see you in my office at five. Tell Vacchio to issue your supplies. I’ll sign for them later. Look around all you want, for it’ll be your last free day for a long while. That’s the way it is. See you then.” He went out the side door. The jeep roared off in a shower of pebbles.

Sgt. Vacchio was away in Munich to draw supplies. A German orderly unnecessarily carried everything to their quarters. Capt. Hartley didn’t appear at lunch, but they met First Lt. Henderson, tall,

slender, loose-jointed, with light sandy hair, who spoke little in a slow drawl and ate much before he left.

Lew said, "Real friendly bunch."

"You can say that again," Paul said.

"Real friendly bunch."

They laughed spiritedly. Since meeting at Camp Kilmer, they had spent most of a monotonous four weeks together. Though unlike one another, they had found much in common, little interested in frequenting local bars and clubs, or spending money on brief trips to nearby cities. Lew had been a shipping clerk in a Pittsburgh steel mill before being drafted, and had been married over a year. At twenty-eight, Lew was seven years older. In Paul's basic training company, there was a fellow trainee of the same age, whom they all—at eighteen—had called "The Old Man." Now, three years later, twenty-eight didn't seem that old.

From his window, Paul watched the company file out of the barracks for field duty and climb back into the trucks, which sped recklessly around the one-way oval and disappeared in clouds of dust. Not a person was to be seen. He might as well take the captain's advice and enjoy the afternoon off. He propped up the pillow at the foot of the bed to catch the window light to read, stretched out, and turned to his place in the paperback edition of *The Education of Henry Adams*, the title of which had intrigued him. The preface called it a classic and a great work of art on the quest for a meaning to vindicate life. Though slow and heavy going, he wasn't going to give up on it. But after a few pages, he realized he was merely reading words and laid it aside.

He went next door to see if Lew wanted to take a walk around the place. He was asleep. Impatient to be doing something, he went out by himself and followed the rutted oval road. A light breeze swayed the crowns of the thin dense pines. Someone coming out of a barrack saw him and quickly ducked back inside. He stopped at the bulletin

board beneath the headquarters porch and looked over the duty rosters and crinkled, faded notices. There wasn't much point in making a second circuit. Back in his room, he decided he might as well write home, though there wasn't much to say, other than where he was.

Paul followed Lew along a footpath around the splintered stumps to the Orderly Room. Upon their entrance, the company clerk jumped to attention and saluted. Paul returned the salute and said softly, "As you were," to the very young and quivering soldier. "We're looking for Capt. Hartley's office."

"D-down the hall, sir, on the right."

"And your name?"

"Dix-Dixon, sir."

"I'm Lt. Mason, and this is Lt. Danforth."

"Yes, sir."

Lew opened the door. Tools lay strewn on the desk, rusted shafts leaned against the walls, greasy housings sat here and there on the floor. Draped over chairs were stiff, oil splattered fatigues and muddy socks.

"I hope this isn't it," Paul said.

"Sure looks like a repair shop," Lew said and lit a cigarette out in the hallway.

Paul tried another door and motioned Lew to follow. Lew shook his head. Before long, Henderson strode in and pointed out the captain's office on his way to "warsh" up. On the captain's desk, both IN and OUT baskets were stacked high with file folders. Tacked on one wall was a German map of the depot with numbered buildings. On another wall hung a smudged and tattered road map of Germany West marked with successive heavy black lines of the Final Rhineland Campaign: March 26 at the river; April 15, Wurzburg; April 20, Nuremberg; April 30, Munich; May 4, Berchtesgaden.

“Went fast,” Paul said. “A little over a month.”

Henderson entered combing back his wet hair, slumped down in one of the chairs, and lit a cigarette.

“Which Army was this?” Paul asked.

“Sandy Patch’s Seventh.”

“Where’s the Seventh now?”

“Reassigned from Munich to the Third in Heidelberg.”

Heavy footsteps resounded in the hallway, followed by Hartley’s booming voice, “Hey, Mac, get us some coffee.” He hung his helmet and holster on wall pegs and sat down behind his desk, quickly scribbling his name on several papers. He looked up and yawned. “Everybody all set? Good! Danforth, you’ll take the motor pool and be working with me and Henderson in the field. Mason, you’ll have the Supply Room, mess hall, and security detail. Officer of the Day is rotated with trade-offs being mutual. Any questions?”

Paul wondered what other assignments there were that he and Lew didn’t have. It looked to be a long six months.

There was a light knock at the door, and Dixon came in with a tray of four wobbly mugs. “Good job, Mac,” Hartley said. “Cigar anyone?” Henderson took one, Lew preferred a cigarette, Paul didn’t smoke.

Hartley propped his feet up on the desk and lighted his cigar with a Zippo lighter, which he then tossed over to Henderson. “Nice to have a breather.” He sipped his coffee and puffed on his cigar until a light gray ash formed. “Before we adjourn for happy hour to the lounge, a word of advice. This is an occupation. We’re not here by invitation, but because we fought a war and won it. You’ll hear it all different. Every Kraut claims he fought on the Russian Front; every civilian claims he wasn’t a Nazi and knew nothing about the slave labor and death camps. All innocence and ignorance. “Right, Henderson?”

Henderson nodded.

Hartley studied the end of his cigar and added, "Don't be taken in. I can tell you things and show you pictures that'll turn your hair white. And if you think I'm stretching things, read about the trials going on up in Nuremberg. Liberating the camps showed us plain and simple what we were fighting for, believe you me. Right, Henderson?"

"Something you'll never forget, the smell most of all," Henderson said.

Hartley blew thick smoke into the air, swung around, and planted his feet on the floor. "A final word." He reached over and patted his holster. "I carry a .45 for a purpose. It's the one and only law these people respect. A Kraut is a Kraut. Always were, always will be. What they don't like is taking the same medicine they dished out to everybody else. So remember, no coddling! C'mon, let's go. I'm dry as a bone."

On the portable record player, Glenn Miller's band played "My Blue Heaven."

Henderson sat beside Emma on the sofa, talking and laughing together as if no one else was present. Lew sat smoking in one of the chairs by the front window opposite Martha, who smiled occasionally, as she knew little English. Anna, beside Paul, was their switchboard operator who spoke English with a British accent. Her round face and plump figure were far from his idea of feminine beauty.

Henderson changed the record to the Ink Spots singing "Paper Doll." Lew studied his hands. To make conversation, Paul asked Anna where her family lived.

"Munich," she replied.

"And where did you learn English?"

"At school."

"So did I," he said, but elicited no response.

The minutes ticked on and on.

The lounge door opened, and a tall, attractive blue-eyed girl entered followed by Hartley, who wore a trim dress uniform of pinkish trousers and a green waist-length Eisenhower jacket with two ribbons of decorations called fruit salad. "What is this," Hartley cried, "an old ladies' tea party? Turn the music up. Move that table so we can dance." He turned off the overhead light. "Danforth, Mason, this is Lisa, and don't get any ideas."

Lisa laid her shoulder wrap on the windowsill. "How do you do," she said in a musically accented English. Long gleaming blonde hair almost reached the waistline of her white silk evening gown, the folds of which accentuated a full, youthful figure.

"I'll get the drinks," Hartley said, going behind the bar. "What'll it be Danforth, scotch or whiskey?"

"Either one, with water."

"Mason?"

"Coke or ginger ale."

"How about a beer? It's not that 3.2 stuff from the PX that has to be passed through the horse again. This is the real thing made right here in Bavaria, the beer capital of the world."

"I don't care for beer," Paul said. Hartley shook his head.

Paul smiled to himself as he watched Hartley dance with Lisa, recalling Miss Wellhauser's strident voice at her dreaded dancing school, "No pumping oil, please, unless you're from Texas." Twirling around, Hartley lost his balance and almost fell, but grabbed onto a chair. "Whew!" he said, pulling out his collar. "Getting too old for this. Danforth, Lisa's yours for the next number. I need a drink to cool off."

Lew smiled shyly. "I'm married."

"Your wife can't object to being nice to half the human race. How do you like her gown? Made it herself from a parachute I got her. Some sewer, isn't she? Looks like it's up to you, Mason."

Lisa was light on her feet and glided about the floor easily and gracefully. When the record ended, Hartley clapped and cried, "Again! Again!" Lisa curtsied and extended her hand. Her teeth were perfect, her cheeks lightly flushed. What, Paul asked himself, could someone like her ever see in Hartley?

Before long, everyone grew tired and gradually drifted into two groups, the girls speaking German. At eleven, a mess hall orderly brought in a large tray of lunch meats, cheeses, and salads with pickles and rolls. The girls immediately seated themselves at the table and began eating. Hartley turned on the radio to the Armed Forces Network—the twin voices of Munich and Stuttgart—and offered Henderson a cigar. Lighting up, they began playing gin rummy, a nickel a point. Lew drifted over to watch.

Paul was hungry enough to eat a sandwich, but remained on the sofa. He couldn't help recall the sad and pitiful ending of a Sunday concert in Frankfurt for military personnel. He and Lew had taken a wrong turn when leaving and passed by a kitchen side room where the musicians, mostly thin and pale white-haired elderly men, sat at a table cramming food down in complete silence.

The party broke up at the Cinderella hour of twelve. Lisa and Henderson each took Hartley by an arm and helped him into his jeep. Henderson told a relieved Lisa that he would drive and tossed his keys to Lew to take the others home.

"I don't know where to go," Lew said.

"The girls do. It's only to the compound."

Paul helped Anna out of the jeep and switched on the flashlight to climb the wooden steps of her barrack and down the black unlighted hallway. "Here," Anna said.

He shined the light on the lock. She inserted the key, stepped quickly inside, and shot home the bolt. He stood there with the light still focused on the lock. Of all the nerve!

What did she think she had to fear? Nothing whatsoever from him. A hag compared to Lisa. He spun on his heel and left.

Paul climbed into the truck cab beside Corporal Hunt at the motor pool. The crew of workers sat quietly in back as the truck turned onto the main blacktop road that bisected the depot, a mile square. After a short ride, Hunt shifted into low gear and followed a bumpy two-wheel track to the perimeter stockade fence. The men jumped off with shouts and jibes and carried the tools—saws, axes, shovels, crowbars, sledges, hammers—over to where the work had stopped. Sections swayed back and forth, posts were rotted loose, others with gaps chopped out for firewood or missing altogether.

The crew went right to work. A wispy gray-haired man, an unlighted pipe in his mouth, came forward with his cap in hand and spoke to the interpreter. The interpreter said, “He wants to know if work is good.”

Hunt looked at Paul, who said, “Looks all right to me. Tell them to keep going.” The interpreter translated in a surly, haughty tone. Annoyed by this, Paul asked the older man’s name. When translated, the older man came to attention and said, “Karl Hofermann.”

Paul, having studied his phrasebook, spoke directly to him and said, “*Guten Morgen, Herr Hofermann.*” Hofermann returned the greeting with a nod and a broad smile, showing several gold-capped teeth.

At ten, work stopped for a break. The men sat cross-legged or stretched out on the cushion of brown pine needles. Others leaned back against a tree to nibble on a crust of bread or suck on an empty pipe. Fifteen minutes later, without a word being spoken, everyone was back hard at work. The only superfluous person there was Paul himself. Hunt at least had to operate the front winch of the truck to drag a sapling or hold one in place to be cemented, wired and nailed.

Nonetheless, Paul was pleased to be outdoors, to feel the heat of the sun on his back, to hear the rasp of the two-handled crosscut saw, to feel the bite of the ax notching a tree, to breathe the fresh cut pine-wood with its aroma of turpentine. What a joy to be alive!

Midweek, Paul told Hunt they wouldn't need the interpreter anymore.

"But Lieutenant," protested Hunt, "I don't know any German!"

"Neither do I," Paul said, "but we'll manage with signs and gestures, and learn some of the language too."

The next afternoon, Paul asked Hunt, "What shape is the fence on ahead?"

"Beats me, Lieutenant."

"Think I'll find out."

"There's a little path alongside the fence the Krauts used to patrol on horses. The old stable is boarded-up at the far end of the loop."

"I'd prefer," Paul said quietly, "we say Germans."

"Yes, sir."

Paul followed the faint overgrown path, pleased for the exercise, and promptly forgot about the condition of the fence. Before long, he reached the inner stockade of the compound, topped with barbed wire, where the orderlies, workers and other help lived. In the weed-choked aisle between the fences were a series of empty wire-mesh dog kennels. Hunt didn't know anything about dogs or kennels. Perhaps Karl did.

On a notebook page, Paul drew a stick dog by a string of cross-hatched boxes and pointed to the compound. Karl shook his head. "*Ostarbeiter*." Paul looked through his phrasebook but couldn't find any word close to it.

"It's all Greek to me," Hunt said.

After a hearty lunch, Paul stopped at the supply room next to the Orderly Room. In a chair behind the wall-to-wall counter, a German

orderly dozed with his chin on his chest. Paul tapped on the counter. The orderly jumped to attention.

“I’d like to see Sgt. Vacchio,” Paul said.

The orderly dashed to the back. Vacchio’s small, slim figure approached down the center aisle of ceiling-high shelves, his form-fit uniform neatly pressed and shoes brightly polished. “What can I do for you, Lieutenant?” he asked, his dark complected face impassive except for keen, darting black eyes.

“I’d like to look over the property book,” Paul said.

“Everything is in good order, Lieutenant. We inventory every item on a rotation schedule and spot-check the big movers weekly. Security is foolproof with only one key to the front lock, which I keep on my dog tag chain that I wear even in the shower.”

Paul rested his elbows on the counter. No move was made to lift the hinged countertop entrance to see the storeroom. “Capt. Hartley speaks very highly of you.”

“He’s the best. I inherited one holy mess. Two units were deactivated here, and what records they had weren’t kept up. No one cared because everyone was due to be redeployed. The DPs stole us blind. I worked nights, weekends, evenings, to get things in shape.”

Paul listened patiently and said, “It should be simple and easy then to go over everything. Would you drop the Book off at my room after closing?”

Vacchio leaned back and ran a hand through his sleek black hair. “Capt. Hartley gave strict orders the Property Book was never to leave my office.”

“I’m sure the captain will make an exception in this case for the supply officer, and it’ll be back before you open up tomorrow.”

“If you insist, sir.”

Paul stood up and looked him directly in the eye. “I insist, Sergeant.”