HERE WE ARE TOGETHER

" Here we are together defending all that to free men is dear. Twice in a single generation the catastrophe of world war has fallen upon us. Do we not owe it to ourselves, to our children, to mankind tormented, to make sure that these catastrophes shall not engulf us for the third time? Duty and prudence alike command first that the germ-centres of hatred and revenge should be constantly and vigilantly surveyed and treated in good time, and, secondly, that an adequate organization should be set up to make sure that the pestilence can be controlled at its earliest beginnings before it spreads and rages throughout the entire earth."

WINSTON CHURCHILL, SPEECH BEFORE THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES, DECEMBER 26, 1941

Here We Are Together

The Notebook of an American Soldier in Britain

by

ROBERT S. ARBIB, JR.

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TO THE MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN
OF BRITAIN, WHO PROVED TO US THAT
THE COMMON DENOMINATOR OF MAN-
KIND IS NOT RACES NOR PEOPLES NOR
NATIONS, BUT MAN HIMSELF

FOREWORD

ALTHOUGH this collection of impressions is labelled a notebook, it has not been transcribed from any collection of notes jotted down on the spot during the writer's two-year stay in England prior to D-day. It was written many months later, and in another country, partly from a jumble of memorabilia found in the bottom of his kit, but more from things that remained in the far corners of his memory. During the intervening months the writer was more-or-less involved in many things: the campaigns in Normandy and Brittany, the liberation of the Continent, and the " war of supplies " that enabled the Allied armies to invade, wreck, and bring about the final surrender of Germany.

Since it was written far from its scenes of action—in both distance and atmosphere, the exacting reader may be horrified to find here and there a slight factual error—perhaps a High Street in a town that has none, a 11.17 train that actually departed on 11.15, or a mention of a restaurant serving " sausage and mash " when he knows by experience that it serves none. It is to be hoped that these errors are few—but that is the risk one takes when writing from memory, and far from references. May they give the reader as much delight in the finding as they will give the writer pains in the discovery.

This is no attempt to speak for all the American soldiers fortunate enough to be stationed in England during the war. It cannot give, except by inference, the thrilling life of the bombardier who flew out over the Continent from English bases, or the gruelling life of the infantry soldier who trained on the Devonshire downs, or the exciting days of the ack-ack gunner who shot at buzz-bombs over the Kentish coast. It will inevitably miss a thousand other facets of the American invasion of Britain, which made up our life here, but not necessarily my life. It is rather the experience of one non-combatant soldier who considers himself fairly typical in his American outlook—what he saw, where he went, whom he met, and what he thought of things.

Since this is not a diary, the chapters are not always in strict chronological sequence, and the reader may occasionally find generalizations which cover events not yet mentioned. But in general it follows the writer through his engineer days in Suffolk,

thence through a variety of travels and episodes connected with later days at Watford, Hertfordshire, to D-day and beyond.

The writer is indebted to the many persons who have been instrumental in one way or another in the completion of this notebook : Colonel Herbert A. Hall, and Major Jere Knight of the U.S. Army, who encouraged him to finish it, sight unseen ; to others at various earlier stages in his life who instructed him in the job of putting words on paper, and above all to his father and mother, who have throughout his life supported him with their faith and understanding and infinite patience.

PARIS, *August* 1945.

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I

ARRIVAL IN SCOTLAND

OUR arrival in Great Britain was marked by one of the most ignominious moments in what my friends refer to sarcastically as my Army career. It found me kneeling in the middle of a main street in Glasgow, trying to salvage the scattered contents of seven cartons of cigarettes which were strewn in the path of the on-marching battalion. This chaotic predicament was witnessed by every member of the battalion; each had a comment as he passed. It was the source of much wonder and a certain amount of gentle raillery by the casual bystanders who had come to welcome and applaud us as we marched, the New Saviours of Mankind, from our transport. I ruined the show.

But this catastrophe was near the end of that memorable day which had found us at dawn off the Irish coast, heading down through the bright calm of the sheltered Irish Sea to Scotland. It was the 17th day of August, 1942, and our ship, the *Monterey*, was a component of the largest troop convoy thus far to be transported overseas. Four thousand of us—unhappy, eager, and excited, were packed aboard this vessel which had been designed as a pleasure cruise ship for seven hundred passengers. If there had been four thousand possible ports of debarkation, there would have been that many convictions on board as to our destination.

"I'll bet it's the tropics," said Tommy Williams, who was surer about most things than many of us. "They gave us yellow-fever shots, didn't they? They gave us mosquito nets and head-nets too. It's the West Coast of Africa, sure as Sin!"

But as day followed day and the weather remained stormy and cool, and it was obvious in spite of our zig-zag course that we were headed generally north-east, we remembered that we were carrying all our winter equipment too—our mackinaws, overshoes, woollen clothing, heavy woollen socks. "It's Greenland or Iceland," ventured Tom Stinson, who would have taken his transit and level rods to Hell if the Army had ordered him there.

"Or Russia or Ireland, mebbe," added Shorty Weathers, who would have followed Tom to Hell if Tom had been ordered to survey the place for an army camp.

"I still say England," I argued, displaying a tattered clipping

from the *New York Times*, saying that one hundred and fifty aerodromes for the American Air Forces were urgently needed in England, and would be built by American soldiers. " Airfields in England. That's us." For once I was right. That was us all right—airfields in England.

It was fine to have calm seas and sunshine again, and land far off on both horizons, after our twelve anxious days on the sub-infested North Atlantic. It was better yet when two silver fighters dived down from the blue and welcomed us with exuberant sportiveness. " Spitfires ! " we all shouted, for that was the only English airplane we knew by name. We came to know that graceful whistling little aeroplane quite well later, and all the other British aircraft too—and those first to greet us that morning *were* Spitfires after all.

By then the marathon poker and dice games had ended, and we had bolted our last meal in the steamy dining hall, and heard the soldier-waiters urging us on for the last time with their shouts of " *Get it down now and look at it later !* " We crowded the rails, looking with wonder at the strange shore as we drew nearer. Each new landmark, each more-clearly discernible point of interest drew its attention and comment. It wasn't the ice-bound coast of Greenland or the bleak rock of Iceland, it was the incredibly green and trim landscape of Scotland—the Firth of Clyde.

Ed Higinbothom and I had sneaked up unnoticed to the sun deck " Strictly Reserved for Officers" and were standing by the rail, fascinated and bemused. The *Monterey* wound its slow way up the Clyde, past Ailsa Craig with its white frosting of gannets, past the big harbour of Gourock and then Greenock, and into the narrower waters of the river that runs into the very heart of Glasgow. Everything was new, every detail was noteworthy. We were in a war zone at last ! We stared at our first barrage balloons, moored to barges in the river. We saw a freighter with a gaping torpedo hole at the waterline. We noted little camouflaged naval craft and one large aircraft carrier moored in Gourock harbour.

" Looks nice," said Ed, echoing my thoughts as we looked at the grey stone houses, the neat hedges and at the green and brown hills above.

" Seems quiet, almost empty," I added, searching for some signs of life on the shore. Now and then a red tram car would run along the road following the river, but there were no automobiles, no people walking along the river bank. Little trains whizzed up and down the tracks along the river, their engines hitched on backwards.

" Just like the British," said Ed, who was a proud Maryland Irishman. " Always doing everything hind-end-to."

" Tiny little trains, aren't they ? " I answered. We walked from one side of the deck to the other, looking for new sights, absorbing hungrily what we saw—trying to peer ahead into our unknown future here and the new life that we would be leading in this strange land. We looked for traces of war, and discussed the evidence of bomb damage that lay all around us. But we hadn't heard that Glasgow had ever been bombed, and we were not certain that the occasional open space between buildings, or gutted buildings, were signs of the blitz. We soon discovered that they were indeed bomb damage, but we needed further verification for this first encounter. We noticed that all the factories and workshops, chimneys and water-tanks were camouflaged in dirty shades of green paint. But the camouflage seemed old and neglected, as if it had been hastily applied during the early days of the war, and then had been found useless.

As the river narrowed we moved between the great shipyards for which Glasgow was famous to us. There were many ships and landing craft there, in all stages of construction, but where were the swarms of workers we expected to see ? We wondered where everyone was. There was some noise and activity, but the excited clamour and bustle of the waterfront was missing. It was a quiet, peaceful summer day. Whistles blew from some of the workshops as we passed, and a few workers ran out to wave. Many were women, and we noticed that they were somewhat grimy and muscular. They were more workers than women, in their slacks and sweaters and overalls. They seemed sincerely glad to greet us.

It was mid-afternoon when we finally made fast to our dock, and we hung over the rails and out of port-holes to talk with the men on the quay. British soldiers stood below, and joined in the sport of jumping for apples, oranges, and cigarettes that we tossed down. We didn't know that these would be the last oranges we would see for more than a year.

We were in good spirits now, and we looked at the British soldiers curiously. Strange uniforms . . . strange caps . . . strange shoes. For a time we were silent, for we did not know what to say to them.

" Where are we ? " someone called.

" Glazzga," answered a native.

" How are the women ? " someone shouted tentatively.

The soldier smiled. " Yew'll soon find oot," he returned, in a voice that had been dragged through a bed of thistle.

" When does the next boat sail for America ? " shouted Johnny Ludwig.

" Canna taell ye thot," replied the Scottie. " Bu' ah can taell ye thus . . . yew'll no' be on ut ! "

" This way for the circus ! " said Cooper, when it was announced that we should return to our staterooms, load our equipment, and stand ready to disembark. Cooper was an old-timer, not in army ways but in life, and he had merely to look at our young, inexperienced, unsure officers to know that no matter how simple the task, it could be made complicated and exasperating if you only tried hard enough. Our officers certainly tried hard.

Twelve cursing soldiers were crowded into our stateroom (during the journey across we rotated in two groups of six—twenty-four hours below, and twenty-four hours on deck) which would have been uncomfortable for two agile midgets, with our entire belongings stacked on our complaining shoulders. It was warm, and none of us could move without a struggle that involved three or four others. We stood in awkward positions for hours, and the comments began to coarsen. Our names had been checked and re-checked, we had been given orders and instructions, the gang-plank was down. We were ready and willing to leave the ship. " What the —— hell are we waiting for ! "

But when the moment came to move, we instantly knew that we should have been patient. For we didn't move directly off the ship. We marched around it. We climbed to the top deck and circled it twice. We marched in single file down the stairs and around the lower decks several times. Eventually we found ourselves back on the top deck again, wondering audibly when this nonsensical merry-go-round was going to end and what blithering idiot was responsible. Finally, when we were dizzy enough to pitch into the river at the first sight of water, we came face to face with the gang-plank. We staggered across it, our feet touched the quay. We were on the solid soil of Britain !

All I retain of the long and exhausting hike through Glasgow to Bellahouston Park, where we spent the night, is a vision of empty, quiet, almost deserted streets, except for a few children who followed the haggard lines of laden soldiers, crying for " souvenirs " and giving us the then-unfamiliar " V " sign—and, of course, my " incident ".

As a sergeant in headquarters platoon of headquarters company, I was well forward in the battalion column. In my left hand I clung

to a dearly-prized package, a bundle of seven cartons of cigarettes and twelve packets of pipe tobacco, tied together with a piece of well-knotted (so I thought) cord. But alas, the knots were not. As I plodded along the cobblestones with my eighty-pound load, the package bounced in my hand, the knots jarred loose, the cartons sagged precariously to one side, and then—fell! A good sergeant would have let them go, and continued the march. But I was a poor sergeant, and determined not to lose the last cigarettes and pipe tobacco I might see for months. I booted the boxes out of the way with a mighty kick, and then I got out of the line of march myself, but not before three men behind me had stumbled and nearly gone down.

The next few moments were high agony and low comedy, as I crouched in the street, gathering up the scattered packets, trying to keep my rifle on one arm, my pack and blankets and overcoat and extra shoes on my back, my gas-mask on my other arm, and my helmet on my head. Somehow I managed to stuff the packets into my shirt, and fall in with the last man in the column. The remarks dropped by the passing men were vivid and sarcastic. The Scottish audience was polite but amused. The lecture I got from Lieut. Bremkamp, the company commander, when I finally caught up with him, was not altogether in a light vein. I had made a spectacle of myself during our first half-hour ashore. I was a disgrace to the American army.

" Fine lot of heroes we looked like," added J. C. Rogers later in the hut. " There's Arbib out in the middle of the street, equipment all over the place, gathering cigarettes like an old squaw-woman in a field picking peas. The mighty American army comes to Scotland. Goddam poor performance."

I thought so myself.

2

LIFE IN THE MAZE

THERE was some idea, when we moved into the ' Maze,' after that long train trip down from Scotland, that we would carefully observe all the rules of camouflage and concealment in which we had been indoctrinated during our months of training. After all, here we were, only a few miles from the east coast of England—

probably not more than a hundred miles from the nearest German aerodrome. We were, we thought, an ideal target.

"Don't worry," Ed Higinbothom said, "the Germans already know we're here. I wouldn't be surprised if they came around to-night and dropped cards saying '*Welcome 820th Engineers. Hope you get your airdrome built soon. We'll wait until it's completed before we bomb it.*'"

But meanwhile we weren't taking any chances, and we tried to cover up. From the road, even from the very edge of the little narrow strip of wood we called our home, you could not have known that there were two companies of engineers inside. Except for the thin lines of smoke that drifted from the kitchen at the northern end, there was not a trace of the crowded life that went on within. At first we were allowed to enter and leave the area only by certain holes cut in the underbush, and we were ordered not to shine any bright objects, or wear white clothing, or loiter or congregate outside the wood.

The wood, less than 40 yards across at its widest point, tapered at the extreme end to perhaps 10 yards. The length of the strip was about 150 yards.

Once you stepped into this narrow, cramped space, you found a maze of tents, ropes, wires and guys, which criss-crossed in every direction from the ground to the height of ten feet. Through this clutter of ropes a path had been marked—a path that was fairly practicable during daylight hours, when you could stoop and duck under branches and step over ropes without running the danger of being garrotted or tripped too often. But at night the maze became almost impassable. For in the leafy glade at night, with tall trees overhead, and not even the flicker of a match allowed outside the tents, there was utter darkness. A walk from one end of the camp to the latrine buckets at the other end became a daring mission.

During the day you tried to memorize the twists and turns of the path. Here it became narrow between two tents, and there were low guy-ropes that must be stepped over. Here, if you reached out your left hand, you could feel a stout beech bole, which must be circumnavigated. There was an overhead rope, just five feet high, which would snap your head off if you ran into it too quickly. The smell of the cook tent, the sergeant's famous snore, the rough bark of an oak tree, the slash of a certain bush across the legs, were all landmarks to be learned and remembered.

You walked with eyes wide open and straining, although you

couldn't see the fingers of your hand six inches before your face. You shuffled your feet forward, ready to step over the lowest ropes, the tangled roots and vines on the ground. You bent your head low to avoid the higher obstacles. Even then you would always get trapped, tripped, or lost.

Every night had its incidents. Cries would come from the dark. " Where the hell am I ? " " Get out of our tent ! " " Somebody come and pull me out of these bushes ! " There were vague, indefinite sounds, as lost souls struggled to free themselves from some web, or found themselves ploughing lengthwise through a dense hedge.

Two features that were not present in the earliest nights of the Maze were soon added, one by nature and one by man. The natural hazard that soon came was the mud. The paths, indeed the entire area, soon became an oozy quagmire of soupy mud, puddles, and bottomless holes. This mud became an important feature of our lives. It got into the tents, it gummed our shoes, caked our trousers, and found its way even into our food. The other hazard was foxholes, which were dug next to each tent as a protection in time of air raids. The troubles at night were then multiplied, for any deviation from the invisible and trap-strewn path was likely to result in a sudden plunge into a five-foot pit. Curses increased on the night air.

Bill White (which was not his name) essayed what was perhaps the greatest single attempt at running amok during our stay in the Maze. He came back late one black night, aided and fortified by the ingestion of several pints of what the proprietor of ' The Dog ' liked to call beer. The obstacle course that was our home, for a man in his condition, should have proved a terrifying prospect. But not for Bill. It served only to increase his confidence, and his twice blind faith in his own capabilities. Bill stepped in through the entrance to the Maze, and into a maelstrom.

Dense hedges were his first obstacle, and he took them like a bulldozer takes a minefield. Not with an attempt to penetrate, but to uproot and destroy. He slashed out madly, pitched and flailed, but his progress was slow and uncertain. He stepped, finally, out of the hedge, less a hat and some parts of his jacket, to plunge promptly into a foxhole that had a foot of water at the bottom. Thanks to the magic that shields drunks, he managed to claw his way out and continue.

His next effort was to climb into a lattice-work of ropes that

supported two tents not three feet apart. A fly in a spider web, he fought and struggled. The ropes held, but the tents began to buckle. Loud and rude voices assailed him from within. He clawed and fought his way madly on. He reached the end of this obstacle, pulled himself free, and whirled headlong into a solid oak. There was a dull thud and Bill sat down to think, in six inches of mud.

He was on the path now, he felt sure, and it couldn't be far to his tent. He hauled himself up out of the mire, and felt his way cautiously forward. Ah, at last, here was his tent. He pushed open the flap and crept inside, then made a plunge for his bed. A muffled howl of anguish rose from the bed. Captain Trumbull, the battalion executive, was the man in the bed. Unprintable words not found in the Officer's Guide told Bill that he was in the wrong tent. He hastened to depart, and lunged across the tent to the opening. But once again he was foiled. Suddenly another bed appeared where the opening should have been, and the grim voice of Lieut. Preston spoke close to his ear. Bill was discouraged. He was tired. He felt sick. He got sick, right there and then.

Somehow they got him back to his tent. But Bill was a shattered man. His jaunty, cocky spirit was gone. His week spent digging latrines did not increase his stature in the eyes of his fellow soldiers. Bill's blitzkrieg was the subject of extensive comment in the tents for many evenings. And it wasn't until we moved to our new, air-conditioned quarters at Site 4 that Bill regained his composure and became a man again.

3

WELCOME AT 'THE DOG'

Our official welcome to England did not come until our third night at Debach (we pronounced it Deb'-itch) in eastern Suffolk—when we decided to wander, against strict regulations, into the countryside, and see just what this England was like.

It was a joy just to walk through the soft Suffolk countryside those late August evenings. The site for our aerodrome was on top of a plateau of high ground—a rounded hilltop perhaps two miles across. In all directions the roads wound down from it, curving between high hawthorn hedgerows lined with ancient trees, between fields that were ripe with grain, fields that were a sea of clover, or

the bright sulphur of mustard. Most fields were cultivated and ready for harvest, but a few were left for cattle to graze, and these were the brightest of emerald green. The cattle were sleek and well tended; the horses, those red-brown, blond-maned Suffolk punches, were sturdy and capable.

Here and there farm cottages were hidden behind the hedges and masses of rose vines, with thatch roofs and plaster of that pastel pink or yellow which is so typical of the East Anglian scene. And over all, a pastoral sweetness in the air—mingled with the remote, half-imagined tang of the sea.

It was an age-ripened countryside of almost park-like neatness, and it seemed remote from the war, those first few days. As we walked down the lane towards the village of Grundisburgh, people nodded to us from their gates and waved from their bicycles, and everyone said "Good evening." We remarked how very incongruous we must have looked—American soldiers in the midst of this most British, most bucolic magnificence.

The road curled down the hill around a rambling farm, made several lazy turns in a hollow, climbed up against the side of the ridge between rows of cottages, and brought us to a crossroads, marked by a bright-red telephone booth. This crossroads and its half-dozen houses was Burgh. At the crossroad we took the right fork, and the lane dipped swiftly downhill between high hedges, made a very sharp and narrow turn right at the bottom, where an indiscreet truck would (and later did) take the corner off a pretty cottage. A left turn then, across the bridge over the brook, a right turn, a left past Grundisburgh Hall, where local legend said that Keats wrote some of his poetry, and you were in the village of Grundisburgh.

Grundisburgh (if you lived there long enough you called it *Grunsbra*) was a compact village of brick cottages, with a church, a general store-post office, and a public house called 'The Dog' all surrounding a triangular green, through which flowed the brook.

It was at 'The Dog' that night that we were officially welcomed to England. There were about seven of us, headquarters Operations Section men. Tall, lanky Tom Stinson, chief surveyor from North Carolina, was the leader. Shorty Weathers of Alabama, the hard-working bantam surveyor, was there. And so was Tommy Williams, and noisy, talkative Harold Ammerman, the computer, both from Pennsylvania, and Frank Repair of West Virginia, young

Johnny Ludwig of Philadelphia, and red-headed Charlie Gay, the old soldier from Arkansas.

When we entered the little pub, it was almost empty. We found three or four small, plain rooms with wooden benches and bare wooden tables. Each room connected somehow with a central bar —either across a counter or through a tiny window. One of the rooms had a dart board, and another had an antique upright piano. We went into the room with the dart board and ordered beer. " What kind of beer ? " asked the man behind the counter, a ruddy, pleasant man whose name was Mr. Watson.

" Oh, just beer," we said. " Is this American money any good ? " We conferred about the money, and Mr. Watson finally decided to accept it, after counsel with his wife, at the rate of four shillings to the dollar. He agreed to repay us later if the exchange proved to be higher, and he did.

We tried the mild beer. It was weak, watery, and warm. " Haven't you anything stronger ? " we asked.

" They're all about the same now," he answered. " War-time quality, you know. Pretty weak." We tried the bitter. It was weak, sweet, and warm. We tried the brown ale. We tried the stout. We tasted the Guinness. We ended by drinking the light ale, which was the only variety that seemed strong enough to put a foam on the glass. Later, we came to like, or at least became accustomed to, the other types of English brew, and would sit like the natives and talk over our pints of mild, or bitter, or 'arf and 'arf.

Someone must have seen us go into ' The Dog ', for soon the villagers began to arrive. By ones and twos they came, and sat themselves down in their accustomed seats. The front room with the dart board filled with the younger men—the farm workers in their rough clothes, talking their musical dialect that puzzled us. In Norfolk they call it " Norfolk canary." But in Suffolk it is a twittering close-lipped sing-song too.

The back room filled with the old gaffers, and their evil-smelling pipes filled the room with blue smoke and the smell of burning seaweed. Here the conversation was slower—in fact it bordered on paralysis in social intercourse. A remark was made at one side of the table. Then would follow a long silence. Finally from the other side of the room would come the answer. A chuckle, glasses would be lifted slowly, quaffed, carefully set down, the pipes would be sucked, and then the third comment would come from deep in the corner. There was no need for these old men to hurry. Decades

of hard work had brought them a deserved time for relaxation. Here was contentment, companionship, a time for thinking, and for the slow exchange of ideas. For years they had occupied the same chairs, drank the same pint of bitter from the same silver mugs, talked about the crops, the weather, the latest village gossip, and now another war. Mr. Watson could set his old clock by their entrances. He handed them their brimming mugs of " the usual " with the expected and customary greeting, took their coppers with a nod. These were his " regulars."

The other two rooms—the front room or " saloon bar " and the back room with the piano—were for family groups, for casuals, for young couples, and for the women. There was plenty of high-pitched chatter here ; there was music, and the beer disappeared faster, with less philosophy.

But this Saturday evening there was excitement and a high tempo in every room in ' The Dog '. The Yanks have arrived ! There are seven of them in ' The Dog ' right now ! People came in from all the farms and cottages and they filled the old public house with a carnival spirit. By eight o'clock there was standing room only, and by nine o'clock even the dark narrow hall between the rooms was full, and you could hardly turn around. The smoke was thick, and the conversation excited.

The Yanks have arrived ! The work on our aerodrome is about to begin at last ! It has begun already ! Right here, in changeless old Grunsbra we are going to have a great new bomber aerodrome, and thousands of American soldiers and airmen ! And bombers flying right over Berlin to pay those Jerries back ! Surely the tide of war is turning to-day !

And so they flocked in, and they questioned us, and answered our questions, and we listened to stories about the blitz, and heard about Dunkirk from men who had been there, and we sat in the little back room with the piano and bought a round of drinks for everyone who joined the group.

First there were seven of us, and then ten, and then twenty-one drinks to the round, and then twenty-eight. We started to sing, and a girl named Molly tried to play the piano, but she wasn't very good and the piano was very old. Nobody asked her to stop. We all sang the songs we knew and the people of Grunsbra joined in, humming when they didn't know the words. Johnny Ludwig was grinning at a tall, cross-eyed girl sitting across the room, who smiled back at him. But the old lady sitting almost in Johnny's lap warned

him. " Stay away from that hussy," she confided. " She's got a bad name and a bad reputation. Went bad almost the day her husband went away to the Middle East. I know, I'm her mother-in-law." The cross-eyed girl didn't quite look like the siren type, and Johnny Ludwig was feeling good enough to roar with laughter at her coy glances, so the warnings were needless.

The last round we bought from the harassed Mr. Watson was for forty-seven drinks. There had never been anything like it before in the long history of ' The Dog '. Everyone was shouting, everyone was singing and milling about, holding hands full of glasses over their heads as they pushed through the crowd. The word " Yanks " was on everyone's lips, and if you turned away from someone it was to answer someone else shouting in the other ear.

The last act, just before closing time, was a speech by Tom Stinson, who by that time was feeling no pain. Tom jumped up on a table, held his hand over his head for silence, and then addressed the crowd. I don't remember what he said, except that he started off " Friends, Britons, and countrymen ! " There was a little bit of Julius Ceasar in it, a smattering of Macbeth, a dash of W. C. Fields, a touch of Hamlet, and a slice of pure ham. It was a speech of thanks, I believe, and a speech welcoming these people to England. It was greeted by roars of approval, and Tom managed to stay on his feet, which was more than many of us expected, though he did kick over three of Mr. Watson's precious beer-glasses in his descent.

Just about that time Mr. Watson raised his closing-time chant, and a powerful call it was to cut through the din that rocked the rollicking old ' Dog ' that night. " *Time, please, Gentlemen* ! " rang through the house like a brass gong, and I suddenly realized with surprise what those lines in T. S. Eliot's " Waste Land " poem meant. " *Hurry up, please. It's Time* ! " I heard that line a hundred times in dozens of public houses after that first night in ' The Dog ', and I never quite got over the feeling that the publicans were quoting the poem, and not the other way around.

That was our first welcome to England. We said good-night to our new friends many times inside the pub and many times outside, and how we got home up the pitch-black country lanes to our tents in the Maze, I cannot quite recall.

We were the first of many American soldiers to spend a friendly evening with the light ale in the Grundisburgh ' Dog '. But none of the nights quite equalled the enthusiasm and abandon of that

first visit of our gang. Mr. Watson told me that himself many months later.

That was Saturday night . . . that welcome at ' The Dog '. On Tuesday night ' The Dog ' went dry—stone dry, and Mr. Watson hung out a sad little sign on his door—"No Beer"—and closed his inn for the evening—the first time in 450 years of ' The Dog's ' history.

The Yanks had come to England.

4

FIRST AIR RAID

OUR first air raid occurred in the first night we moved into the Maze, but I didn't hear it. I slept soundly through it, and firmly refused to believe that there had been one when it became the main topic of conversation at breakfast the next morning. " I'm a light sleeper," I contended, " and if there were all these fireworks and excitement in the sky I would have surely wakened."

But the talk was all about ack-ack, and incendiaries, and German aeroplanes circling overhead, and I was duly convinced that there had been an air raid after all. For the next three nights, according to the men, the same process was repeated, and there was some talk of sleeping in the fields, of wearing the steel helmets to bed, and of getting up to disperse in the ditches when the alarm sounded. The foxhole-digging project started as a result of these raids. But I soundly slept through them.

After we had been in England about a week I finally experienced, consciously, at any rate, my first raid. The alert sounded at about 11 o'clock, just as it had the other nights, and just about the time that the sky was darkened. (Britain was on " Double Summer Time "—two hours of daylight-saving time, and darkness, even in late August, didn't come until almost midnight.)

The sound of the sirens was to me, then, as it remained to the end, mournful, ominous, and sad. The quavering wail carried by an east wind, would be heard far off across the woods and fields, and would be immediately augmented by other sirens, coming from the other villages. It reminded me of the choruses of howler monkeys in the jungles of Panama heralding the approach of rain. One little band would set up their howl in one tall tree, and before long there would be the roar of monkeys on all sides.

Five minutes later we could hear the faint, uncertain hum of the motors, now fading, now getting louder, throbbing with a rough, unrhythmic sound, not exactly like our own planes, but not so different that they couldn't be mistaken. Fifty or a hundred searchlights would suddenly flash on, ploughing the sky on every side, converging on invisible points overhead. And then came the regular *crump-crump* of the ack-ack guns in the distance.

The German aeroplanes seemed tantalizingly leisurely and slow about their raiding. The sound of the motors would fade, and then grow strong—suddenly seeming almost overhead, and then disappearing to be heard again in the distance. Occasionally there would be the crescendo hum of a dive, but it was not until the first brilliant yellow flare burgeoned in the sky ("Right over Ipswich!" said Earl) that the diving meant bombs would follow.

By now the bursts of our guns were frequent and seemed to be all around us, and mingled with their low *crump* was the sound of machine-gun fire, and the bright red sparks that seemed to be part of explosive anti-aircraft shells. We stood out in the wheat field with our helmets on, watching the whole performance as if it were a show. We had never seen real bomb damage, and this aerial spectacle seemed far removed from actual danger. The few British people with whom we had talked seemed so completely unconcerned about the bombings that we were deceived into adopting their outwardly careless attitude. We learned later that they had a healthy respect for all air-raids, and were not ashamed to scurry for the shelters when the sirens sounded. This, we found, was particularly true in London and other badly blitzed cities. The country people, as in Suffolk, believed that their individual chances of being hit were small indeed, and preferred to watch the proceedings from their gardens. Most of them had no shelters at all.

Mr. Creagh, our neighbour, and on whose land we were to build most of our aerodrome, explained his philosophy to us one afternoon a few days after we had arrived. "He doesn't drop many bombs out this way any more," he said. "Just a handful, compared with what used to fall. And after all," he said, "there's lots of space in England. Now, if he were dropping pound notes instead of bombs, and they had all this area to drift down, you wouldn't go running out and looking for one, would you? You'd know you'd have damned little chance of finding one, much less have one drop into your pocket. That's the way it is with bombs. It's a

million-to-one chance against getting a direct hit, and after all you won't even feel a direct hit."

After the German planes had circled for what seemed like a recklessly long time, the first loud *bams* of the bombs were heard. From where we stood we could see nothing but a sudden brighter flash in the east, and then a dull, wavering red glow.

" Set something on fire there," we agreed sagely. And then to our left suddenly appeared a greenish, lazy, slow curtain of incendiaries, falling through the sky like a shimmering waterfall. They may have been dangerous enemy weapons, but they were a beautiful spectacle.

" They're trying to burn up the crops," said the voice of Sheriff Moody. But we didn't see any fires start, and soon the throbbing of the motors faded into the distance and the wail of the siren chorus announced that the raid was ended.

My next experience with enemy air raids came about a week later while I was riding home on my newly-acquired bicycle 'Hope'. (It was an act of faith to buy the thing in the first place, and an act of charity to dignify it by the name of bicycle.)

I was coming back from ' The Dog ' trying to bring half-way home or near, a couple of pints of Grundisburgh beer, and what a less modest writer would call " all hell " was breaking loose in the surrounding sky. At any rate there were a few enemy planes buzzing about, and a lot of flak creasing the sky, a veritable forest of searchlights, and some noise. But I was intent on getting those two pint bottles of Tolly's Light Ale safely home, and I pedalled my way furiously along the lane with seventeen turnings, with no more than an anxious look over my shoulder every five seconds.

From the few cottages I passed there came no trace of light or of life, but in one or two gardens I could discern the dim, uncertain shapes of the cottagers, who were out watching the performance. I began to wonder if my conduct actually made much sense. Perhaps I should be crouching by the side of the road in some ditch. Certainly these bombers overhead were carrying bombs. And certainly, too, they were going to drop them any minute now. " I'll be damned if I'll make a fool of myself for any Jerry pilots alive," I thought to myself, staunchly. " I'll just keep on pushing this bike home."

Just then there was a loud whistle in the sky above—and at the same time I heard a voice from a small apple orchard in front of a cottage. " *Get down, mon!* " it said excitedly. That was all I

needed. I let go of my balance, of Hope, and the bottles of Tolly simultaneously. There was a resounding crash as the bottles, Hope and I splattered all over the road. There was an echoing but lesser thud in the field nearby. And that was all.

When I had regained my composure, I picked myself up and collected what remained of the bicycle. " What was that ? " I asked the voice in the orchard.

" Nothing much," it drawled. " Moight 'uv been a dud bomb, or the fuse uv an ack-ack shell, or then it moight uv been a Jerry whose parachute didn't open. Best to play it safe, lad ! "

" Sure is," I agreed, wryly, thinking of the lost ale. At least I had carried it halfway home. Even the Shropshire lad hadn't done better than that.

5

DESPOILERS OF THE FIELDS

WHEN I arrived in England my official title in the battalion's T/O (Table of Organization—a plan for every type of army unit showing just how many soldiers it should have and the job and rating of each) was Battalion Camouflage Technician, with a rating of Staff Sergeant. I was a member of headquarters company ; I worked at battalion headquarters in the S-3 Section—the operations or engineering office. I had two assistants, Nick Zorbo and Al Seigrist, both corporals.

Our assigned task was to act as instructors of the men of the battalion in camouflage technique and camouflage discipline ; it was to act as technical advisers to the battalion in matters of camouflage ; it was to be designers of camouflage when there was need of planning ; and to be foremen of the work when our plans were approved and put into practice. That was the way it showed in the books.

For the first week of our stay at Debach we were excited about our job. Here was a real problem to tackle—a monster aerodrome just a few miles from the North Sea coast, a few minutes' flight from the nearest German aerodrome in Holland. Here was something we could sink our teeth into, and show our mettle. Here was perfect terrain for large-scale camouflage—fields, woods, houses, hedgerows—the typical patch-work quilt landscape which is so deceptive from the air above. Our aerodrome, we decided, would be a masterpiece of camouflage.

This delusion lasted just one week, and then the truth dawned upon us. There would be no camouflage. It would take a second battalion of men working all the time to make even a fair attempt at camouflaging a job as large and destructive as this one. We had neither the time nor the manpower to hide each of the hundreds of pieces of heavy engineering equipment and vehicles each night. In one week the fair Suffolk countryside had been scarred and marred beyond all repair. Whatever camouflage would be finally done, would be done when the field was completed, at the advice and direction of the British Air Ministry, from whose plans we were doing the job.

I enjoyed that first week when camouflage was still a bright dream. Every day I walked alone across the fields and along the lanes with a map. On this map I noted in minute detail the aspect of each field. Here the hedgerow was ten feet wide with a deep ditch on the north side lined by scattered trees. Here were three haystacks—there was a farm shed. Through another field wound a footpath ; I drew it on the map. I wandered through fields of wheat and oats, barley and clover, mustard and cabbages. I flushed rabbits and pheasants along the hedgerows, and coveys of partridges in the grain. I had numbered each field systematically, and took copious notes on the appearance, texture, and tone of each. I made little sketches of special points of identification that we could later paint across runways and perimeter tracks. With my notes, drawings, and special ideas, I felt that we could perfectly simulate the terrain as it had been before we moved into Debach. I pressed the battalion commander and the engineer officer for aerial photographs of the area. I begged to have them arrange a ride over the area in an aeroplane, so that I could see for myself how it looked from the air.

The dream lasted a week. There would be no camouflage. Nick Zorbo, a commercial artist from New York City, a modest, quiet, talented man who weighed 110 pounds and had a bad foot and whose very presence in uniform should have embarrassed any deferred athlete, was taken to become a checker. Al Seigrist, who was also a commercial artist—tall, sarcastic, and volatile—was also designated as a checker. Their job was to stand out at the gates and check the civilian contractors' trucks as they came into the area with loads of sand and gravel, and see that they brought full loads and did a full day's work. They came to me and begged that they be allowed to continue camouflage and I in turn begged the officers. But it was of no avail. A week later I too was finished

with camouflage, except for one minor job later when we disguised a field where shiny white sections of drainage pipe were stacked. I was to be the battalion postal clerk.

I didn't give up the fight immediately, even when I saw what a monstrous job it would be to camouflage our operations. As the fields became slashed and churned by our bulldozers and trucks, I suggested that it would be comparatively easy to repair this damage by the simple expedient of periodically ploughing the fields. Most of the fields in Suffolk were being ploughed at that time, and they showed dull brown against the sky. We had tractors and ploughs that could smooth over the scars quickly and frequently. My suggestion was brushed aside with considerable annoyance. The hell with camouflage! We were behind schedule now! Two months later a directive drifted down from higher headquarters recommending ploughing as the best and quickest method of camouflage. Frequently other reminders came down that camouflage was an important part of the job. But we never did anything about it—we couldn't. We had neither the men nor the time.

Our aerodrome was only bombed once, at that. Three days after we had moved to a new job a German bomber that had been unable to locate Ipswich happened to fly over the field, saw a gleaming white runway, and let go. One bomb blew a beautiful big crater in the centre of the perimeter track, which was repaired in three days. The other bombs and incendiaries fell harmlessly in the fields. But the negro battalion that had come to take our place thought it was a very poor welcome and were quite willing to let us come back and finish Debach. We thought it was an excellent joke.

My walks about the aerodrome area during those first days at Debach left me with one vivid and lingering impression. With those walks of exploration came a feeling that I knew this plot of English ground as it had existed almost without change for centuries. It gave me a suggestion of the feeling that I had lived there, on intimate daily acquaintance with every shrub and every tree.

And so it was with regret shared by many of us, that I watched it slowly disintegrate and disappear before my eyes, as a result of our relentless handiwork. As each new field was invaded by our crushing machines, as each new hedgerow was smashed and uprooted and shattered, as each great oak succumbed before axe and dynamite and bulldozer, we felt a pang. For there is nothing quite as final, quite as levelling, as an aerodrome. Every growing

stick was beaten down and uprooted. Every patch of cover for rabbits and partridges was flattened. Every graceful contour, softened and smoothed by centuries of wear by little brooks and by wind and rain, was hacked and shoved and levelled. Whatever had stood there before was now lost. It was as if a flood had risen and hidden a beautiful landscape, and then subsided, leaving a desolate waste land where there was no life and no motion.

Perhaps it was over-sentimental to feel this way. Perhaps we should not have felt apologetic to the natives who must have loved this land better than we ever could. The realists among us, like Shorty Weathers, saw it as a job to be done, and went to work with no remorse.

Shorty was out with his transit one day, working cross-country, and broke through a hedgerow into a field of beet, which would shortly be smack in the middle of Runway Number 2. The farmer was in his field, patiently working with his hoe.

He told Shorty to take his damned instrument and get out of there—that there would be no damned runway through his beet field while he lived. Shorty replied, " You're wasting your time, old fellow. You might as well throw that hoe away right now. You'll never get a beet out of this field—there's a runway coming through here to-morrow ! "

The farmer chased Shorty out, and Shorty had to get a written order before he came back the next day to continue charting his line. But that farmer was an oft-repeated symbol—a sad man clinging to his heritage, refusing to believe what he knew was true, that the field that he had ploughed for years, the soil that he had nourished and tended, the beets that he had planted and hoed and weeded, would soon be under eight inches of concrete ; that the cottage in which he and his grandfather and his great grandfather had lived and died would disappear before his eyes.

The war wrecked this man's monument—his family's monument, just as surely as bombs wrecked the monuments of architects and stonemasons when they exploded beautiful churches in London. For a farmer's fields are his masterpiece ; you can see but a trace of the work that has gone into them in the straight hedgerows, deep drainage ditches, even furrows and the tall crop. But the sweat of centuries has been poured into that ground to bring the tall crop, and centuries of faithful and ceaseless toil in rain and snow and fog and wind are buried there.

Some day perhaps this man, or another farmer, will get back those

level fields, and perhaps in a hundred years' time, if the world forgets war, tall oaks and colourful thorn hedges and tawny fields of grain will grow again on Debach aerodrome and the hundred others like it. The man who works in the field will have forgotten the foreign soldiers who invaded the land and ran their crushing roller over it.

But to the man with the hoe in the beet field with the bitter taste of despair on his tongue, we can only say, " We never wanted to do this. A power greater than any one of us brought us here—and this destruction we wrought helped, in a small way, to save you."

6

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

THE American soldier arriving in Britain for the first time sees many things that seem to him strange, unusual, perverse, and often amusing. He is likely, because he has not yet seen more than a fragment of the whole picture, to confine his attention to the small and the unimportant differences and to magnify them. Since that is human nature, he might often ridicule them merely because they are alien to him. It is only when he has been in England for some time—when the novelty wears off, familiarity smooths the rough edges and time shows the reasons why—that he begins to accustom himself in his new environment and remarks at the disparities only when he discovers himself involuntarily following the new pattern.

He ridicules the monetary system the first time he changes a pound note and finds himself with a slight list to starboard as his pocket is filled with weighty half-crowns and enormous pennies. The pounds, shillings and pence, and above all the apparently superfluous guinea seem unnecessarily and aggravatingly complex, and he solves the matter by offering a note in payment for every purchase, accepting the change without question. But after his first poker game, when he must make lightning and intricate transactions with the coins, he has no more trouble. Before long he is talking about " bobs ", " florins ", and " quid " like the natives.

He remarks caustically about the left-hand driving, and at first he holds his breath every time he passes another car on the road, but soon he is driving with ease in London traffic and cannot see any particular reason why left-hand traffic is any less progressive

or any more difficult than his accustomed way, provided the automobiles are built to conform to it. Unfortunately his own are not, and at first he has more than the normal number of accidents—for he is driving from the kerb-side of the car and not the traffic side. But being adaptable, he soon learns to judge his distances, and the accidents decrease.

He makes derisive remarks, and often audible ones, about the upside-down stripes on the arms of the British soldiers and airmen, but he finds himself accused of the very same thing—and it is never completely settled just who is wearing his stripes the wrong way.

The language question is a constant source of interest and some amusement. "I thought these people were supposed to speak English," he complains, when he has lost the drift of a native conversation. "Someone should teach them how to speak their language," he says, "and how to spell, too." And then one evening he is caught in the defence of the Mississippi drawl or he hears some Lancashire lad mockingly speaking Brooklynese, and it dawns on him that of the hundred and one dialects of the King's English, America has claim to probably more than half—and that these half are surely as much at variance with whatever might be considered perfect speech, as Devonshire, Yorkshire, or Cockney talk. One day, too, he is astounded to hear himself say "I'm browned off," or "I take a pretty dim view of that." From that time forward he thinks no more of the subject, and considers it quite natural to say "Cheerio" instead of "So long," "Ta" instead of "Thanks," and "Oi, Mate!" instead of "Hiya, Jack."

There are other impressions that remain with him longer and more consciously. He no longer smiles when he sees an Englishman talking while a cigarette dangles from the corner of his mouth. But somehow he never becomes adjusted to the sight of women walking along the streets smoking, or even sailing along on bicycles with a cigarette in that familiar drooping English position.

The telephone system is a constant bafflement. Not merely for the complexity of Button A and Button B, but for the unpredictable results obtained from manipulating these gadgets, and the familiarity with which he can converse with the unseen operator at the other end of the line. Accustomed at home to hear nothing from these impersonal, stylized voices that is not strictly business, he is amazed and often delighted to get advice, consolation, humour, backchat, and philosophy for his two pennies, even though he might fail to get through to his party. And strong rumour had it that in rare

cases, if he knew the right words and the right sequence of questions, he might even get the age, colour of eyes and hair, approximate size, name, and lastly a date with the smiling voice at the switchboard. This, definitely, was not the American way.

There was the evening in April when I was in Berkshire, and tried to get a call through to Suffolk. It was a lovely soft spring evening, and the girl at the switchboard was in a friendly, communicative mood appropriate to the season and the weather.. She took my number, told me there would be a wait because the lines were so busy at this time of night, and then, feeling that I should not stand there for minutes at a time holding a dead receiver, " Beautiful night, isn't it ? " she ventured.

" Yes, it certainly is."

" I suppose you're calling your girl now, aren't you ? "

" Yes, I am. How did you know ? "

" Oh, all the fellows are calling their girls at this time of night. That's what keeps us so busy. I can always tell when it's a young American voice there'll be a girl waiting at the other end. I suppose she wishes you were there in Suffolk ? "

" Yes, I think she does."

" Well, she'll be glad to hear you. But she'd be happier far if you were there. It's a lovely evening. There's going to be a moon later. Ah, now here's your call coming through. You're only allowed six minutes, remember."

" Only six minutes ? "

" Well, we'll make this a long six minutes to-night, just as a special favour."

" Thank you ! Thank you ! "

No, this was not the American telephone system.

There were other little differences, too. The unfailing English practice of giving every home a name, whether it was a baronial mansion or a tiny workman's cottage in a row of identical houses. Highfield, Bellevue, Oakdene, Raeborne, Woodmount. These names abounded, and others more exotic and less pronounceable to us. They seemed relics of a Victorian age, and we wondered why people bothered, when they had street numbers as well to guide the postman. Was the house given a name merely so that a name could decorate and elevate the owner's stationery ? Or did the owner have stationery printed with the name solely because his house was so strikingly called Clamella ? For in all the time we were in England we never heard an Englishman refer to

his home by the name on the door—and say of it fondly, " Come on over to Knollwood to-night."

There were other impressions that brought an immediate and favourable response. We marvelled at the economy of land and searched in vain for a field or a strip of pasture or a wood that was not being fully worked and used. We remarked, ever since our first glimpse of them in Glasgow, on the use of vacant plots in towns as " allotments "—as " Victory Gardens " where the citizens worked side by side, almost as in feudal times, to plant and hoe and harvest a narrow plot of land. Surely, seeing this, we could be certain that no food would go to waste in England, that our lend-lease shipments were essential—even had we not noticed the queues in front of the butcher, the baker and the fish market each morning. The effect on us was drastic. Food waste at our own mess hall virtually disappeared—and more often than not the collected garbage for a meal for our entire company of two hundred men did not cover the bottom of a small water-pail. Even what we left was collected and used as swill to fatten English pigs. It is true that there were constant exhortations on the army's part to economize in food; there were posters and rules and the watchful eye of the mess sergeant. But it takes more than mere rules to make an American economical with food—he has lived too long in an economy of plenty and an atmosphere of waste. What turned the trick in England was the constant reminders of the full utilization of the land, the food queues, the monotonous and meagre civilian fare, and the monthly totals of ships sunk in the Atlantic.

We were surprised, too, after all the stirring and dramatic stories we had seen in American newspapers of " The Blitz " that we found no signs of nervous derangement among the citizens of London. When we visualized the fierce and relentless bombings, the city in flames, the thunderous tumult of sound, the collapse of buildings and even shelters in heaps of rubble, we supposed that this nightmare life would have a psychological effect on its victims. On our first visit to London we searched faces to find some signs of strain—to find a prevalence of nervous tic or a sign of hysteria when the sirens sounded. But we could detect no sign—no trace of fear or panic or derangement in the impassive, almost confident faces of the men, women and children that we saw. This, too, made a lasting impression.

It must be remembered, too, that we left the United States on 5 August 1942, at a time when there were few Americans overseas,

when America was not yet fully mobilized, when America was still a land of unbounded plenty. We had never seen an American girl in uniform (except for our nurses) when we left home; we had never seen a shopping queue or a ration card or heard of price control or travel priorities. The American people then, we all agreed when we saw England, "did not know there was a war on." To an American arriving in England two years later, the impact of an England fully-mobilized would not be so marked; the disparity had been levelled off (or so our newspapers told us.)[1]

But in those days we were astonished at the number of women working everywhere, and the variety and hardship of their jobs. There was the girl barber in Ipswich, whose husband was a prisoner-of-war in Italy. There were girl conductors ("clippies") on buses everywhere, and they usually shook their heads when we offered to pay our fares. There were girl truck drivers on our job, bringing in loads of gravel and sand and cement. There were girl porters in the railway stations, pushing huge dollies of mail and baggage, and girl crews on the barges in the canals, straining their hardened backs against the weight of the lock-gates. There were girls in all the factories, and girls in all types of uniform, and there were even girl announcers in the railway stations—their languid voices drawling, "Next trayun on Platform Fiyev, departing at fower-fifteen, calling at Northampton, Nuneaton, Rugby, Crewe, and Manchester. Manchester trayun!"

And then, too, there was the deflation of our egos before the veterans of Dunkirk and the commando raids and Dieppe and the blitz. Just to be overseas in a war zone made us heroes to a minor degree at home! But here, we could not even make conversation! What had we done that was exciting? Let's see now, there was the hunting trip in the Panama jungle, there was the time we were knocked spinning by lightning, there was the hurricane of 1938, and that fire at sea. . . . But can we be but humble and silent before a man who has swum to safety at Dunkirk, or went ashore at Dieppe, or even before a child whose home was blasted at Plymouth?

Yes, there were many things to notice, and to see and to learn and to criticize, too, in those early days. But the more we saw and the more accustomed we became to the little things, the more our

[1] A prominent American politician, speaking before an astute assemblage of British and American correspondents in Paris late in 1944, was laughed at when he stated that America's manpower was as fully mobilized as Britain's. It wasn't then and it never had been, for Britain had a National Service Act. Britain had drafted women into the forces and into industry and onto farms, and had sent boys to work in the mines.

eyes lifted to the larger aspects of the life in England. And it was here that we found things to admire, and here we found people and an ideal of living not so different from our own. Not so different at all.

We did not know it then, but we were slowly coming to like this land of England. We couldn't help it.

7

SHERIFF MOODY

In and out of the darkness and laughter of our days at Debach moved the figure of one man, a quiet, soft-spoken, pink-cheeked, blue-eyed man in a high-collared constable's uniform. Sheriff Moody was the first Englishman many of us met, and throughout our months at Debach, he more than anyone else represented England to us, and interpreted for us in everyday terms the simple, hard lives of the Suffolk villages and farms.

He was there, standing by his bicycle, when we first jumped off the trucks that brought us up from Wickham Market to the ' Maze '. He first showed us specimens of English coins and told us what they would buy. He first oriented us in our new geography, and told us how far we were from town, and how long it took to get there. He gave us our first air-raid instruction. And from then on, he was there. Rare was the day that would not find Mr. Moody in a dozen different places on the site, watching the men work, marvelling at the destructive powers of the American bulldozers, or suggesting a better plan for the drainage of a field.

You were standing in the field next to the ' Maze ', watching an air raid over Ipswich, and out of the darkness would come a melodious, reassuring voice, and it would be Mr. Moody, properly dressed in his warden's tin hat. You would be walking back across the meadows from the village, and there would be Mr. Moody, conferring with a farmer about his harvesting. You would walk into the back room of ' The Dog ', and presently Mr. Moody would be at your elbow, with a word about the weather, and last night's " incident ".

We never discovered the secret of his omnipresence, but we did feel that he covered his beat remarkably well. Sheriff Moody, we called him, or Mr. Moody, or sometimes just " Sheriff ". He brought

to his job of constable for the village a quiet dignity and sense of authority, and although he carried no weapon—not even a stick—we respected his word. It was not infrequently that he helped one of the men who had got lost or drunk, or into some kind of trouble, and brought him back safely into the fold. But it was rarely that he brought the matter before the man's company commander. "My job is to help the lads stay at work," he explained, "not to get them into trouble. They work hard, these Yanks."

As the work progressed, and an aerodrome began to take shape from the chaos that we had perpetrated on the face of the Suffolk landscape, Mr. Moody began to look upon the job as his own personal charge. He spent part of each day out on the field, standing by his bicycle, a solid, smiling figure in high-collared blue. Now and then he ventured an opinion or made a suggestion to the officer in charge. But mostly he would just watch.

A few of the younger lieutenants, I am afraid, objected to the ubiquitous Sheriff, and mumbled to themselves about "that damned meddlesome Moody." But the soldiers were his friends. It was he who always brought the first news of a dance in the village, and with it invitations from the girls. If you wanted to buy a bicycle just ask Mr. Moody, and he would scout around the neighbouring villages and find a farmer with one to sell. And then see that you weren't charged too much for it. Mr. Moody was the man for the latest method of combating incendiary bombs, just as he was the man for the latest gossip in the neighbourhood. After each air raid, he would appear, hold out his hand, and there would be a fragment of the bomb. He had been there. He had helped where help was needed, and then filled out a proper report. He had been on the job.

His job—it was no longer the leisurely one it had been before our battalion arrived and began carving up his pleasant countryside, and making other more subtle changes in the Suffolk scene. Now, instead of one small village and its outlying farms, he was charged with a community—a roaring pioneer community of seven hundred young, hardworking, and hard-playing soldiers. There were incidents in the meadows and behind the hay-stacks at night, and angry parents and sad girls to be somehow straightened out. There were the big speedy American trucks careening over the narrow one-way lanes, and that meant accidents. There were the men who went down the hill to 'The Dog' or 'The Crown', or 'The Turk's Head', and who could not quite find their way home. But Mr. Moody

carried on, and brought his soft-spoken, polite patience to bear, and somehow things went more smoothly for it.

Our battalion moved to another aerodrome job before Debach was finished, and other troops came in to take our place. I didn't see Sheriff Moody for almost a year after we moved away, but I managed to come back the day the aerodrome was dedicated.

There were generals present to make speeches, and colonels to introduce them, and bands played, and troops marched, and there was a presentation of medals. There were cameramen and reporters present, not to see our aerodrome, but to take down the words of the generals. Bunting flapped in the wind on the reviewing stand out in the middle of Runway Number One, where wheat had been brushed by that same wind not so long before. Though I once had known every foot of that ground, I found the place hard to recognize. Gone were the rolling fields of clover and barley and mustard, the high hedgerows and the winding lanes. Now all was level and green, with wide, straight runways and huge black hangers. Mr. Moody's precinct had gone to war—on the offence now.

I spied Mr. Moody near the edge of the crowd of villagers and farmers who had come to watch the show. He was standing, as always, by his bicycle. He grinned when he saw me, and shouted, "Hi there, come back to see our aerodrome go into business?"

We stood and talked for a few minutes, and he told me how he missed the boys—his first Yanks—our battalion. "How are they all now?" he asked. "Whatever happened to Tom Stinson, and Shorty Weathers, and Tommy, and that young Johnny Ludwig? And old Frank Repair? They'd be glad to see our little old aerodrome to-day, not by half. They did a fine job here."

"Our field," he had said. Yes, I thought, this is *our* field. Mr. Moody wasn't out there on the reviewing stand, but he should have been. It was his field too—this was his parish that we had armed for war, for he had shared in the pains of its building. We were both proud of it.

And I'm certain that, as the Liberators came and went on their missions to the east, Sheriff Moody was somewhere—everywhere around, standing by his bicycle, talking to the Yanks—to the fliers who inherited Debach aerodrome from the dirty engineers who built it, and that now he is sad they have gone.

8

SUFFOLK CROSS-COUNTRY

SOMETIMES, as in all large organizations, the American Army makes little mistakes. Just a very minor one now and then, but none-theless a mistake. It was a minor mistake on the army's part to select me for training in the Corps of Engineers that snowy day in February 1941. Of course at that time the army wasn't trying very hard to find a spot where I could be useful, and then, too, my qualifications for any particular army job were about equal: I had none.

How I actually became camouflage technician and staff sergeant with the 820th Engineer Aviation Battalion is a short, sad saga that will explain, eventually, why I became battalion errand boy and how it was that I found myself with the most pleasant job in the battalion soon after our arrival in England.

It involves a major at Camp Upton, New York, who turned an office inside out looking in his files for the records of a soldier—the mythical hero of a publicity release I had prepared. He was understandably vexed when he found that there was no such soldier, and he sent me as far away from Camp Upton as he could send me, to repent with the engineers at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. You don't, I discovered, write publicity stories about hypothetical soldiers. A year later, with callouses on my hands, unusual muscles in a number of places and an expanded vocabulary, I was still in the engineers, with a good deal of engineering training behind me, but I still was no engineer.

Then I was thrown out of the Engineer Officer Candidate School. I had entered the school at the behest of my colonel, who mistakenly believed that a man with a university degree in biology should be something more imposing than a corporal in the Engineer Corps. I lasted seven weeks. I produced something of a unique record for the school: A's in my class work, and Z's on the drill field. In the academic work I was a model student; I could draw beautiful contour maps, I could quickly compute stresses and strains on a bridge, I could rapidly calculate the charge of explosives necessary to blow up a railway line. But on the drill field my voice would not carry, I had two left feet, and the officers looked upon me as something spawned in a family of crabs. The *dénouement* came when, as Battalion Guide for the day, I completely fouled up a parade

under the horrified gaze of the general and thirty-three bright young West Point lieutenants.

They sent me as far away as possible, to Arizona, where the 820th Engineers were being organized. Here something in the nature of a retribution took place, for my company commander took one look at me and said, " You've been to Officer Candidate School ? "

" Yes, for a while."

" Then you'll be drill sergeant. You had lots of drilling there. Your job will be to drill the recruits."

So I drilled the recruits under the hot Arizona sun, while my erstwhile companions at school, who had subsequently joined the same unit as officers, and were (presumably) drillmasters all, spent their hours teaching explosives, and bridging, and how to draw a map. No one thought this particularly strange.

From Arizona we moved to Oregon, and then to the state of Washington, and then we were alerted for overseas. We all thought, being in the Pacific North-West, that our destination would be Alaska, or possibly the South Pacific or Australia. One night I telephoned home, and without saying it in so many words, the conversation was a fond farewell. Three days later I surprised my family in New York by walking in on them unannounced, and a month later I was on my way to England.

The 820th Engineer Aviation Battalion was a specialized labour unit, designed to build hasty landing strips of metal planking close behind the front lines. In England it was given a job for which it was totally unequipped and untrained, the building of large, permanent bomber fields, with miles of broad concrete runways and hundreds of brick and wooden-buildings, drainage systems and wiring systems, water pipes and big steel hangars.

The last man they needed in a unit of this type was an ex-biology student who had more recently earned his living writing little slogans for crêpe paper, shoes and wedding rings. I could use a typewriter, it was true, but they had trained clerks who could type better, who had been specially schooled in the complex forms and procedures of army paper-work. Out on the job the need was for construction men—for concrete experts and bricklayers, for surveyors and carpenters and mechanics and cat-skinners and just plain labour. I was of infinitely less use than one good ditch-digger.

So what can you do with Arbib, who somehow has a college degree, but doesn't even know how to handle a shovel?

Well, you can make him a camouflage technician, which looks fine on paper.

But there was no camouflage work to be done. So I was left on my own, to find for myself a variety of other jobs. I spent my afternoons making little calculations for the engineer officer. He had nineteen charts on his wall, and he had about fifty reports to make—daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly. The most important of these were progress charts showing how much work we had done, and how much remained. There were also efficiency charts and manpower charts and effective-labour charts and project charts, not only for the battalion as a whole, but also for each of the four component companies. Reports came in daily from each company, and from these I culled figures, made hen-tracks on paper, practised prestidigitation with a slide rule, and arrived at a very doubtful set of statistics.

Another job that was only slightly more interesting was my role of itinerant faculty for the battalion. A day was set aside each week for military training (a different day for each company) and on these days I circulated from company to company, giving lectures on identification of aircraft, on the sowing of mine-fields and the detection of booby-traps, on camouflage, and on chemical warfare.

But the job I liked best was my morning assignment. I was the battalion postal clerk and errand boy. Every morning I hitched a pistol to my belt, took a little vehicle, and drove through twenty of the loveliest miles of Suffolk scenery to Sudbury, where our army post office was located. I also stopped at banks, laundries, dry-cleaning establishments, stores—anywhere official business sent me, and a few it didn't.

Every morning for almost eight months I made that forty-mile trip. My constant companion on this mail run was Earl McConnell. Earl was a good companion. He was a good driver too, which was the prime requisite along those twisting narrow lanes. Slow to speak, he would often remain silent for miles, and then suddenly come forth with a quick and pointed quip. His comment was invariably short and to the point; his broad grin with pipe clamped in his teeth became a fixture of the Suffolk landscape. Earl's ambitions in life were modest. He had been a fireman in a great distillery in Kentucky. He liked the job and planned to go back to it after the war. The boilers were automatically fed, you didn't work too hard, you just watched the dials and meters and kept things clean

and humming. You had time to sit and think, smoke your pipe, play a game of chequers, and enjoy life in a quiet way.

We came to know every house and every tree along that road, and soon our programme evolved a definite routine, adjusted to suit our own convenience and whims. We did our job, came home every afternoon with the required results, and no one asked questions. We were a little team, quite content to be errand boys. Although we had worked out a suitable routine, almost every day brought its adventures, and its pleasantries. Best of all, we were getting out of camp, getting out of confinement, and getting to know our English neighbours.

Sometimes as we went along the road down the hill from camp, we passed farm children on their way to school. Then we stopped, and I jumped out and tossed them, squeaking with delight, into the back of the truck, and let them ride with us. Down at Tuddenham every morning we ran into the same farmer leading his cows into the meadow. We stopped to let the slow-moving beasts pass. And often on the hill beyond Tuddenham we found the Ipswich bus stalled because it couldn't make the steep grade with a load. The passengers alighted, we stopped, and we all pushed the bus up the hill.

In Ipswich, our first stop, we also had a routine. Our first stop was the Y.M.C.A., where we could shave and wash in that greatest of luxuries (to us then)—hot water. Then we went upstairs and had breakfast for a few pennies. Coffee and hot buttered toast, with jam, and a few pleasant words from the girl in slacks who worked behind the counter.

If we had errands in Ipswich, we would attend to them. The dry cleaners, usually, for we always had a load of filthy clothes. Vera, at the shop, was another friend, who could do the impossible and rush our most urgent orders through in not the usual ten days, but in two—or if we spoke nicely—perhaps even one! And there was always the beautiful girl walking up the hill to work—who always smiled and waved to us.

Then off we went towards Sudbury. Up the hills and around the turns, through Hintlesham, where we might give lifts to the convalescent British soldiers in bright blue suits and red neckties who stayed at the Manor there. And winding up past the big, immaculate farms with their fine cattle and horses, and between the high thorn hedges, and then down into the valley again at Hadleigh. Time-worn, mellowed buildings—empty streets—Hadleigh was old, it had

seen its prime when it had been a great wool centre, centuries ago. Now, of all Suffolk villages, it seemed tired and old and almost deserted. There were few young people in the streets—few people at all—in Hadleigh. We raced through it.

More winding lanes, more little farmhouses for landmarks—a hundred turns, and then Boxford, the prettiest village on the road. One narrow winding street, two beautiful inns, an old church by the river, a winding hill, and our two girls at the big house.

Of all the friendships made in England, the one with those two girls in the big house at Boxford was the strangest. It began almost the first day we made the trip—when we passed the house on the hill, and saw, at an open upstairs window, two girls dressed in blue. They waved to us and smiled as we passed, and we waved back.

From that day on, every single morning, whether it was nine, ten, or eleven o'clock when we passed the house on the hill, the two girls would be at the window, and wave and smile. One was a thin, pale, blonde-haired girl—and one was dark-haired and wore glasses. Sometimes both would lean out and wave—sometimes just one. But someone was always there to wave the morning greeting.

Those two girls were a baffling mystery. Was the big house a home, a school, or a hospital? Why did we never see anyone else around it? Why were the girls never downstairs, or in the garden, or out in front at the gate, where they could speak to us some morning as we passed? Were they nurses, or teachers, or housemaids, or daughters confined to an upstairs room?

For weeks and months our daily rendezvous was kept—and our greetings hardly varied from the original one. But one day we decided to break the mystery. On our way to Sudbury we would drop a note at the gate, and ask them to explain the secret of the big house on the hill.

We stopped that day as we waved, and we showed them the note—and then placed it in an angle of the gate. They watched us from the upstairs casement, but they didn't say a word. And then we drove on.

Several days later, in the post, came a letter, written in pencil, addressed to "Bob and Earl." It was from our girls in the window! It explained to us the mysteries of the big house. The house was the private residence of one old man—a Sir Somebody-or-other—and the two girls were upstairs maids. The reason they were always upstairs was that they lived in that room, and stayed there when their work did not call them elsewhere. One old housekeeper was

the only other resident of the house. They asked where we went every morning at the same time, and they explained that they were not allowed to come outside to talk to us and, finally, that their names were Eva and Betty.

That ended the mystery of the two girls. We continued to wave to them as we passed, and for more than eight months they returned our greeting. We never found out which was Betty and which was Eva, and we never actually spoke to them. Our relationship had become so traditional and so casual that I doubt if we would have had much to say to them if we had suddenly found them down on the street in Boxford. We often wondered whether either of them had pretty legs, but in all the eight months we never saw more than heads and shoulders in the window, a white handkerchief, a white cloth, or perhaps a yellow scarf fluttering there, and always that warm smile of friendship.

From the valley at Boxford the road wound up and over the hills to a broad plateau, with fewer old trees and larger fields, and fine, wide vistas. It made more turns than ever in this countryside—it was doubtful whether there was fifty yards of straight road on the entire stretch. But here, too, were daily landmarks—the broad field that always had its flock of magnificent black and white lapwings, most beautiful of English plovers, some sailing across the ploughed land like big black-and-white butterflies, some standing erect and motionless, their cocky plumes blowing in the wind.

Down at the corner where the road turned left for Polstead, the scene of the famous Murder of the Red Barn, we turned right, and every morning—there was the "Old Bearded Man." Ancient he must have been, nearly ninety, but still stout and hale, big broad white beard, big broad black hat, taking his slow walk along the road, waving his cane in greeting to us as we passed.

Then to Newton Green, where there was a tiny golf course and an inn called 'The Saracen's Head.' And then straight along the road, past the farm where the beautiful girl with the blue eyes lived, past the farm where the tall, blonde girl worked, and into Sudbury.

Do you remember, Earl, the first day we made that trip, and how the Land Army girls waved to us from the apple orchard, and from their ladders in the plum trees? The trees were ripe then in September, and we were tempted to stop and talk, and take an apple or two. But we never did. We saw that orchard ripen, we watched the girls slowly move across it each day and finally harvest it. We saw it lose its leaves and lie bare and open in winter, and bowing

under the winter rains. We saw it turn green again in spring, and the beautiful white blossoms powder the road.

Do you remember the sign along the road that said " Beware of the Bull " and how we tried for weeks to find the bull that was so dangerous, and never saw him ? Do you remember the day we had to drive through floods and cloudbursts into Sudbury, in water two feet deep on the road near Newton—the water up to the doors of the farmhouses ?

Do you remember our first and favourite vehicle, the little weapons-carrier ? And later the little English van, and then the jeep, and then the big windy weapons-carrier that we hated, and then the big truck that we drove when we had so many sacks of mail at Christmas time ? Do you remember the icy wind, and the rain beating in, and the days when the fog was so thick that we had to stop and wait for it to lift ? Do you remember the white rooster we hit and the great explosion of white feathers it made, and, the sickly sweet smell of the sugar-beet factory, and most poignant of all, that lowering day in winter, when the German bomber came down the road behind us, just above the trees, and swept on in front of us, its under-turret guns waggling but silent ? How the sirens were sounding in each little village as we passed that day, and how sixteen were bombed or strafed haphazard ?

And how we watched the people, through the seasons, harvest and plough and sow and plant and reap . . . and the landscape turn from green to gold to brown . . . the wheat cut and then stacked, and then threshed with the farm girls and the schoolboys and old men all working, with the big steam-engines puffing and smoking along the roads and then the haystacks thatched and prepared for winter. . . . And the tall trees dripping with rain and wreathed in fog, and the hedgerows suddenly alive with red-breasts and then empty . . . and rooks overhead, cawing in the empty groves ?

I will go back down that Ipswich-Sudbury road again, go down it slowly, some day, and look for my old friends. The girls at the window at Boxford will not be there, the convalescent soldiers of Hintlesham will be gone, there will be no German bomber streaking down the road, and the old bearded man will have gone to his long home. But the rolling fields, and the bright yellow straw stacks, the empty streets of Hadleigh, and the ancient thatched cottages will be there, and lovely lapwings will wheel over the fallow fields, and I shall almost feel at home, and among old friends again. For here we were close to the heart of England.

9

WATCHERS OF THE SKY

If you looked out across the tranquil valley where the village of Grundisburgh was hidden under the tall trees you might discern, on a hill on the opposite side, a strange landmark. In the distance it looked like the last surviving battlement of a ruined castle, a solitary Norman keep standing guard over the countryside. Standing guard over that countryside it was, but the round grey stone tower was an ancient mill, now used as an observation post by the Royal Observer Corps.

I spent an afternoon one day in autumn atop the old tower of Grundisburgh, learning about aircraft identification from the watchers of the parish. I learned here about the men who had spent five years in posts like this, and at far more desolate ones all over England, keeping the watch. Here, in trust to a peaceful countryside, were the ears that were ever keen, and the eyes of England that were never closed in sleep.

My visit to the old mill arose from my job as lecturer-itinerant to the various companies of the battalion. One of my subjects was aircraft identification, and what better way to learn its finer points than to seek advice from the practising masters of the art? My visit was duly arranged, and one afternoon I walked down the lane of seventeen turnings, and at the ninth I turned in at the gate, and knocked at the old mill door.

I was ushered in, and followed my guide up sturdy wooden stairs inside the tower, past several floors where the giant wooden machinery of the mill now lay in dusty disuse, to the topmost room. Here the observers kept house—in a small room lined with photographs, drawings, and charts of aircraft, with models hanging from the ceiling and piled on tables. A few battered pieces of furniture, a stove, a telephone, and the usual oddments of report forms, old magazines, newspapers, and foul-weather clothing completed the picture. A ladder led up through a trap-door to the parapet, where the observers kept watch.

Up on the parapet I met Vic, a prosperous farmer, who was senior observer on the post, and Harry, local blacksmith, who was Number Two. They had been on guard for four hours, and had more hours before completing their turn.

We stood on the tiny parapet and looked out over Suffolk fields and Suffolk woods, and talked about the art of aircraft identification. The stone wall came up almost to our shoulders, and above it was a sliding glass wind-screen, which was removed at night and at most other times, because it somewhat obstructed the sound of distant motors. Over our heads was grey sky.

It was not a busy afternoon for traffic in the air, and Vic was able to give me a full explanation of the entire process, and much of the history of the post. The Burgh Mill, as it was called, was one of the first observation posts in the country; aerial observation had been going on from that mill without a moment's pause since the week before war was declared. As a matter of fact, the mill had served the same purpose in the last war.

The post atop the mill was linked by telephone with headquarters, and with the neighbouring posts. Thus the observers would be warned of the approach of an aeroplane, and could trace its course from the time it first was spotted until it had crossed the circular area within their precinct, and off the map into another orbit of sky belonging to another post.

The chief instruments in spotting were still the eyes and ears of the observers. It was these faculties, sharpened and skilled by years of keening and peering into the sky, that had helped save England in the blitz. The mechanical aids to these instruments consisted of a pair of binoculars, and a sort of simplified transit that revolved over a map, with which somehow one could calculate the altitude and distance of the aircraft.

"This new radio apparatus is bloody good," said Vic. "You know, our boys on the coast now, they can hear those Jerry planes in Holland. Hear them when they start the motors, and when they take off from their aerodromes. And that's about a hundred miles away. Of course, we don't sound the alert each time, because mostly Jerry is just flying around Holland, or along the coast, and it doesn't always mean a raid on England. It's only when they seem headed straight for England that they sound the alarm. Then after they cross the coast, the work of following the planes around is up to us.

"We're wholly busy though, because we've got to track and report every plane in the air at all times. Even when it's a little training plane circling around Martlesham field down there, or a Walrus rattling along on coastal patrol. We track them all."

Just then a distant speck appeared on the horizon three or four miles off to the south-west. "What would you say that was?"

asked Harry, handing me the binoculars. I peered through them. " Looks like a Hurricane," I ventured, cautiously.

" Bet a quid not," said Vic, who had seemed scarcely to glance at the speck.

Harry nodded. " Vic's right. It's a Deffy—a Defiant." " When it comes closer you'll see that old triangular tail. Coming at you, you can just see the big glasshouse for the gunner up behind the pilot."

I peered through the glass again, and as the plane swung in an arc low over the trees, glimpsed the triangular tailplane. But how could Vic and Harry have seen that on a speck three miles away, without the 'scope ?

" We've been looking at planes for five years now," Harry said. " Defiant, Joe, sector 82, about 1,000, looks like that Martlesham job—coming in for a landing now," he added into the telephone. Harry swung the instrument round, and sighted on a sound above the clouds off to the north.

" Sounds like a Wellington," Vic said.

" Wellington," said Harry into the telephone. " Yes, above the overcast about 3,000, I'd say, north-east course. Did Alf call it a Wellington ? "

" Do you mean to say you can identify that plane by sound alone ? " I asked.

" Easy," said Vic. "For most of them. Anyway, Wellington's one of the easiest. It's got a peculiar loud hum with a whistle above it. That's about the *only* way you can identify them at night. But it's not harder than by sight. Every motor has its own sound—and the German planes all have a different sound from ours."

" Have you had many German planes over at this post ? "

" Lord," laughed Harry. " Ever heard of the blitz ? Those ruddy bombers flew over here day after day, night after night, by the hundreds. I could tell a Junkers or a Heinkel 111 in my sleep now—all of us could."

" Many bombs around here ? "

" Not many really. I think we've had about three hundred bombs fall on the parish. Not counting incendiaries. But they were all accidental—more or less. Bombers coming back from London would make a big sweep north and then out across here, and sometimes when our fighters were giving them a chase, they would drop them anywhere, and 'op it. Remember Coventry, Harry ? "

Harry remembered Coventry night very well, and described the

procession of German bombers, every one of them directly over the Burgh Mill, filling the sky with the rough guttural of German motors. "Thought we were for it, that night," said Harry—"buggers kept coming, and some were so low they nearly scraped their bellies on the tower here. Yes, we've seen our fill of the Jerry."

Vic adjusted the instrument again, glanced at the map, and said into the telephone, "Nine Spits, course west, about 5,000, going off my map at 58 Joe. Got them, Giles?" Giles, at another post ten miles southward, answered affirmatively, with sarcasm. "Well," said Vic, "just wanted to make sure you weren't asleep down there."

Harry went below to make tea, and we stood and looked out over the landscape, and listened. It began to rain, and Vic turned up the collar of his mac. "I guess you see a lot of weather up here."

"We see it, we eat it, we live in it," said Vic, quietly.

I saw Vic that moment in my mind, with the wind whipping in from the North Sea, biting and swirling around the ancient mill—his collar up, his ears straining in the night for a sound. It was a reassuring thought. I liked Vic, and Harry for that image, and with them, all the watchers, day and night, that scanned the skies over England, and kept the faith.

One morning a week later I was giving a talk to Headquarters Company, standing before a blackboard in the mess tent, sagely explaining the difference between the Hurricane and the Defiant. The alarm had wailed a few minutes earlier.

"And the Defiant," I said, "you can always tell—by that prominent triangular rudder. . . ." Suddenly there was a resounding crash, the earth trembled, and the men around me gulped, looked at one another, and then at me questioningly. I took a deep breath, paused for a moment, and said, "I guess we'd better concentrate on enemy bombers for a while . . ."—hoping my baggy trousers would conceal the quiver of my knees.

The class continued with a laugh. But the bomb that fell on Wickham Market that morning killed and wounded some of our neighbours. There was still plenty of work for Vic and his grey-clad, grey-haired comrades of the R.O.C. And I thought of them often, on the dark, wet, howling nights that winter. . . .

10

IPSWICH EVENINGS

PERHAPS it was just a coincidence, perhaps it was a touch of clairvoyance, but the only book I brought with me from America—a book hastily purchased in New York City for shipboard reading—was Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. I had space in my duffle for just one book; I wanted one that was amusing, lengthy, and yet compact, and concerned with England, which my hunch told me was our destination.

It was a happy choice, for I found myself lying in the cramped stateroom or on the crowded deck rediscovering half-forgotten treasures in the adventures of Pickwick and his company in London, Bath, Bury St. Edmunds, and Ipswich. It was even more apropos, I decided a week after our arrival in England, when I found myself walking down the streets of that same Ipswich and stopping at a hotel for a beer—a hotel named the Great White Horse—the very same hotel, I recalled with delight, where transpired that epic incident of the Lady with the Yellow Curl Papers.

I will not remember Ipswich, I am afraid, because of Pickwick. No city could have been farther removed from that Dickensian world than Ipswich in the autumn and winter of 1942. Dirty, crowded, noisy, evil-smelling, it was then a composite of the smaller English provincial metropolis at war. Though it retained to some degree its basic East Anglian character, it was now in addition a roaring industrial town, a busy port, and an amusement centre for troops of a dozen Allied nations. Nine miles from our camp at Debach, it became the destination for most of us on our weekly twenty-four-hour leaves, and the source of many an evening's adventure. We thronged it, we criticized it, and we admired it. We changed its life considerably.

The evening liberty truck left camp promptly at seven o'clock, overflowing with soldiers dressed up in their only suits of clean, pressed clothes. The truck was designed to carry fourteen men, but usually there were more than twice that number crowded in the dark interior, squatting on the floor, sitting three-deep on each other's lap, hanging over the edge of the tail-gate and standing stooped under the low tarpaulin hood. We were allowed 15 per cent of the company each night, which was thirty men, but we were also

allowed one truck, for gasoline economy. But we didn't mind. We were on our way to town. We bounced and careened over the winding road to Ipswich, a trip that often took forty minutes in the unfamiliar black-out.

The truck parked in Princes Street, and the human cargo spewed forth into the street, breaking up into little groups of two, three, or four. These were hard-driving engineers, men who had been working from dawn to dark all week under the worst possible physical conditions; men who were homesick, and longed for companionship that was not circumscribed by an olive-drab uniform, men to whom being overseas meant a release from the inhibitions that would naturally bind them in their own home communities. They wanted relaxation, they wanted release, they wanted a change from the gruelling drudgery of the job.

There were the motion picture palaces—but often the films which were being shown were old ones that we had already seen in America. Then, too, the evening performances had already begun before our truck arrived in town. There was an occasional concert at the Public Hall, but the number of devotees to classical music within our midst was a definite minority. What was there to do?

The obvious and most convenient answer was the publie house. Ipswich boasted nearly two hundred of these; if the beverage served was not exactly to our tastes, at least the pub was a place to escape the rain, and to sit down, and often to meet people. You had to imbibe a truly impressive quantity of the beer to acquire a degree of inebriation, but strangely enough a number of soldiers found that it was indeed feasible. There were all types of public houses in Ipswich. The most popular of these were the ones where girls congregated—'The Cricketers', 'The Great White Horse', 'The Mulberry Tree', and these were usually bedlams of sound and excitement while the beer lasted. There were the more sedate places like 'The Crown and Anchor' and 'The Golden Lion' and 'The Unicorn', where the American would occasionally enjoy a quiet hour in less frantic surroundings. There were the less-imposing pubs like 'The Fox', 'The Plough', 'The Blue Boy', and 'The Waggon and Horses', where there was less formality, and which were "Off Limits" to our troops at various times. There were others—family pubs, workers' pubs, railway pubs, seaport pubs, large and small ones, clean and dirty ones; with names like 'The Queen's Arms' and 'The Welcome Sailor', 'The Running Buck', and 'The Spotted Cow', 'The Griffin', and 'The Saracen's Head',

and we explored most of them. As we grew to know Ipswich, each of us had his favourites, where he knew the barkeeps, the regular customers, and the local traditions.

A popular alternative among the younger soldiers was dancing. There was a dance at Ipswich almost every night in the week, either at the Co-operative Hall or St. Lawrence's Church Hall. At both these halls soldiers came in groups, and the girls came unescorted and paid their own way, which resulted in a somewhat variegated choice of partners, ranging from pretty children of not more than fourteen to middle-aged spinsters, and offering an equally wide range of dancing styles. The music was loud, the dance floors were crowded, and in deference to British custom and to the mixed ages and nationalities of the dancers, there was a master of ceremonies, who announced each dance. Many of these dances were unfamiliar to us; at first we stood aside and watched with interest group dances such as the 'Palais Glide', the 'Cokey-Cokey', the 'Boomps-a-Daisy', and 'St. Bernard's Waltz'. Many of us were frankly terrified by the prospect of a 'Ladies' Invitation Slow Fox-Trot', when the girls had the opportunity to pick partners, an experience that we had never suffered before. We found later that the 'Ladies' Invitation' was apparently a measure arising out of the surplus of women, enabling the least attractive of these to dance with a male partner at least part of the time; all-girl dancing couples were prevalent here, a practice frowned upon at home. But we never quite liked the 'Ladies' Invitation' dances; male vanity will not suffer the popularity contest in which the woman has willingly competed since time began, and many a soldier who fancied himself as a Don Juan must have forsworn English dances forever the first time he found himself, unwillingly, a wall flower.

Perhaps the chief attraction of Ipswich was the girls. It seemed to us then a town of girls, with a high proportion of young and pretty ones, and their behaviour was nothing like that of girls we had known at home. In the evening they walked along the pavements in pairs, smiling, swinging their supple hips in short skirts, looking after the soldiers, whispering "Hi, Yank!" or whistling a phrase from "Yankee Doodle." Many were young—fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen, though we could not judge how old they were, and they always said they were eighteen at least. They had beautiful flowing hair, they wore tight sweaters and flat-heeled shoes, and they spoke that sing-song Suffolk dialect that often we could not

fathom. They went unescorted to the dance halls and to the public houses, and it was there that we met them.

Early in the evening it was pairs of girls and pairs of soldiers in the streets, but by nightfall the pairs were usually then a soldier and a girl. But sometimes it was still a pair of girls, and you would be bumped in the darkness, and hear a peal of laughter, a snatch of song, or a whispered, " Hi, Yank." It was not quiet on the Ipswich streets after dark. At ten o'clock, when the public houses closed, there would be singing, laughing crowds in the streets, shouts, and now and then some scuffling or a fight.

It was a dirty, smelly, crowded old town after dark, this Ipswich of the war. Little streams of urine ran down from doorways into the gutter, and in some doorways there were the dark forms of a boy and a girl pressed close together. The night air had a musty, old, stale smell; the smell of fried fish, of coal smoke, of horse manure and of fog, and the sea. It smelled of beer and rain and aged, mouldy stones. The flat-paned windows were gaping and vacant, the streets narrow, cobble-stoned, and dark. It was not until midnight that they became silent and empty and you could hear again the echo of your own footsteps, and far down by the River Orwell the clanking and screaming of the trains.

The trucks left the parking lot in Princes Street at eleven, and here were soldiers and girls saying good night, and other soldiers loudly cal ing the names of their fr ends, trying to locate their own company truck. Occasionally a bellyfull of " bitter " played tricks, and a soldier would awaken the next morning in a strange bed at the wrong aerodrome, and sometimes not at an aerodrome at all, but in an even more unfamiliar bed at the Ipswich Police Station.

The truck ride home was an ordeal; the same thirty men were on board, but it was eleven o'clock now and not seven, and there was shouting, and laughter, and singing, and loud, violent arguments about nothing, and occasionally a scuffle, and always a few men asleep. The truck roared through the silent villages of Suffolk, leaving a bellowed wake of " Bell-bottomed Trousers," or " God Bless America ", and the persistent monologue of one raucous soldier, describing to a disinterested world the details of a probably imaginary door-way romance.

There was nothing restful in these nights in town; there was little relaxation; there was little inspirational, and nothing of beauty. They served merely for an escape, a blowing off of steam,

a release from confinement, and they were the only diversion that the world could offer us at the time.

Many of us, and certainly many people of Ipswich, were disturbed by what they saw and heard, and by the easy familiarity of the young girls that roamed the streets and frequented the public houses. We had many a long and serious discussion on this topic in Hut Seven, but we never came to any conclusions. Was it war-time excitement and the ever-present threat of death from the sky that had induced this " gather ye rosebuds " attitude ? Was it a relaxation of parental influence caused by the absence of fathers, by working mothers and the lack of family life ? Was it the sudden presence of a crowd of strange and care-free men in uniform ? Or was it all these things that, summed up, were the impact of war on this town and inevitably brought with it new, and lowered, standards ?

Was it happening in other towns in England, and in other countries in war ? Was it happening at home, in our own land, in our own home town ?

We hoped that it wasn't, but we feared in our hearts that it was.

II

EVENINGS IN A NISSEN HUT

SINCE we were limited by regulation (wisely to avoid overcrowding in the towns) to fifteen per cent of the company on pass each night, which gave each man a night out once a week, not all of our evenings were spent in the public houses and streets of Woodbridge and Ipswich. Most of our evenings found us around the camp, and that meant, after we moved out of the ' Maze ', in our hut.

We lived, as did many American soldiers who came to the British Isles after us, in the famous Nissen huts. The difference was that we built these huts ourselves, and because it was November and a tent was no longer a pleasant place to live, even for engineers, we moved into them before they were completed.

A Nissen hut is not a difficult thing to build. You put down a rectangle of concrete for a floor, you place spanning arched ribs across the longer dimension, bracing them with longitudinal stays. You cover inside and outside of these ribs with thin sheets of corrugated steel. You seal up the ends with bricks, wood, or concrete. A couple of windows and a door at each end, and you are ready to take up residence.

We moved into the huts before the ends were bricked in, while they were still open half-cylinders of steel; we draped old tents over the ends, hoping that the winds would be partially foiled. But the gales of November howled through these open ends, lifted the tents and flung them about. It was like sleeping in a wind tunnel with all the fans on. We hastened with our brick ends.

During the first weeks in the huts we went to bed early. In addition to wind and cold, there was another factor that encouraged early hours. We had no lighting. Each hut had been wired when it was built, but it was some time before our camp was connected with the local source of current several miles away, and still more time before each hut was furnished with its quota of two weak, ineffectual bulbs.

Our hut, near the top of the sloping field that was our company area, was Number Seven, and we named it, appropriately, ' Seldom Inn '. To it, partly by chance and partly by pre-arranged agreement, came a congenial group of headquarters men. " J. C." Rogers, the company first sergeant, was one. Ed Higinbothom, battalion sergeant-major, Dave Cooper, personnel sergeant, Clarence " Red " Bowers, the clerk general, Bill McArdle, the company clerk, Earl McConnell, the mail clerk, Joe Howard, the message centre sergeant, Walter Hatzenbuehler of Texas, who became message centre sergeant when Joe Howard left us, Chet Kalwarski, who succeeded " Hatz ", Harry Loy and " Nappy " Napikoski, formed as representative a group of Americans as you could find in any one Nissen hut in England.

" J. C." Rogers was a tall, slim, hawk-nosed blond kid, with a loose-hipped Western gait and a good-humoured drawl salted with Oklahoma similes. He had a gift for blasphemous vituperation that could make our company snap to attention, but he usually spoiled it with an apologetic and winning grin at the end. It was never merely dark to J.C. It was dark as six feet down a bear's throat. J.C. was never merely busy. He was as busy as two pups in a mitten. J.C. would never say he didn't believe your elaborately-planned alibi. He would just look at you with one eye-brow cocked and say, " Why, man, you're as full of crap as a Christmas turkey ! " Unfortunately, these samples of his poetic gift are somewhat emasculated, and the best of his four-letter-word gems cannot be effectively transposed for print.

Edward Delaney Higinbothom, " Ed", or " Hig", was a brilliant Marylander who had won top honours in law, which he had studied

at night while editing the weekly newspaper in his home town of Bel Air. But he never was too busy to deny himself the pleasure of visiting the local racetracks when the horses were running, and while we were in England he profitably transferred his affections to the Ipswich dog-track. Small, dainty on his feet, Ed always seemed to be walking on tiptoe. Cynical, with the prejudiced mind of most Irishmen when regarding England, he slowly grew to like England, and to defend it in our arguments.

Earl McConnell, my taciturn companion on the mail run, occupied the bed next to mine. "Red" Bowers was from the Midwest—from Liberty, Indiana. He had worked, like his father, on the Wabash Railroad. Honest, open of face, with blue eyes and a shock of red hair, he was one of our younger members, but he could hold us all spellbound by his tales of the rough and bloody brawls among the gandy-dancers and the railway section hands at home, and the lurid lives of the Mexicans and negroes with whom he had worked. He had a ready laugh, he was handy with his fists, and he wanted to be a flier.

In the bed next to his, and his inseparable companion, was Wild Bill McArdle, one of the most amiable, placid, good-natured, likeable big fellows that ever drew up a company pay-roll, for like "Hig" and "Red", "Chow-Hound" McArdle, in addition to being a noteworthy eater, was an expert clerk. Our battalion records were always letter-perfect with his team. McArdle forever had a smile or a laugh; he laughed at everyone's jokes and more often at himself, and though we chided the big man for his prodigious appetite and his expanding girth, we all enjoyed his company.

Dave Cooper was a Philadelphian. Dave had been a fairly prosperous motion-picture salesman, and was a settled bachelor in his ways; of all of us he missed his comfort the most. On his days off he reserved a room in the best hotel in Ipswich, slept late, indulged in a luxurious bath, and came home by taxi. Dave was a shrewd poker player with a sense of humour, and he was banker for all of us when we struck parlous times. Dave and Hig and I argued over every possible subject, and often had sharp words of anger, but we remained friends and understood one another always.

Dallas, Texas, was the home of "Hatz"—Walter Hatzenbuehler, and he never let you forget it for a moment. Hatz was the oldest member of the gang, and the only one of us who was married. He had worked in an automobile agency in his home town, and was handy with tools and electricity and machines. He alone among us

hated England—or so he said—but his hate for England was not much more than a firm belief that there was no place in the world to compare with Texas, and that while nearby Oklahoma was bearable, this little country of limited vistas and conservative ways was just too incredible to believe. Actually, he rarely left camp, and then only for a hasty, somewhat terrified visit to a barber or a motion picture in Ipswich, followed by a precipitous flight back to the Americanized haven of our camp. Like J.C. he had a stock of salty, unprintable phrases, but I remember him most for his unvarying answer to any question starting with "Who . . ." His reponse was always, "Man by the name of Honeycutt."

Chet Kalwarski was a Pennsylvanian Pole, and youngest of the crowd. Girls were his dish. Tall, strong, with a loud, raucous laugh, he had a good time on his days off, and was involved, with McArdle and Red Bowers, in a series of fabulous adventures that kept our hut in a constant state of panic and merriment.

Joe Howard did not stay with us long after we moved into the huts. Joe was an educated Tennessean, and was the first man chosen by the battalion commander to attend the Officer Candidate School that was established in Shrivenham. Joe was a stocky, sturdy man with a bull-dog pipe in his teeth and a cocky strut in his walk, and he joined in the forensic fireworks that usually involved Dave Cooper, Hig and myself. His post-war plans, he staunchly maintained, were to buy himself a shanty boat on the Tennessee river and just sit, or if he felt especially ambitious, sit and fish. But these plans never seemed to be quite appropriate to the man whose reading was the widest and most intellectual of us all. Joe, too, derided England when he first arrived, with an enthusiasm that almost matched that of Hatz. But I met him in Paris two years later, a first lieutenant now, and he told me how he had changed his mind, how he wished he were back in London, and how many fine English friends he had made.

Two more rare birds filled out our hut. One was Harry Loy, a tall, quiet truck driver from Ohio. Harry, to my knowledge, never left camp once during the ten months I knew him. He went to bed early each evening, spent his day off doing little household chores, and saved his money. He had no curiosity whatsoever about this country in which the war had set him down. He was content to work hard, dream of home, and go to bed early. He never entered our arguments or our escapades, but we liked him. The last of this group, a man who lived in the hut but was not actually a part of

the group, was "Nappy" Napikoski. Nappy was also a truck driver, a roly-poly Pole whose life revolved around beer and a girl if he could find one. Nappy's life was simple and uncomplicated by problems or worries, and he always had a smile. Like Earl and Harry Loy, he was not quite equal to the philosophical disputes at the other end of the hut, but he was a slick poker player and an uncanny crapshooter.

Our evenings in Hut Seven were never quite alike, because each night someone else would be away on pass or working late, but as winter wore on they followed a regular pattern. It was dark before we were home from our day's work, and the first thing we did when we returned to Site Four was to have supper. After supper the first man back to the hut built the fire, if we had any fuel, and put up the blackout screens. Our heating plant for this airy, uninsulated steel shed was one small iron stove. To get the fire going entailed a ritual that involved profanity, sweating, a half-dozen false starts, and a hut full of smoke. Often it meant someone pounding the chimney with a board, or climbing on the roof to drop a stone through the flue, a practice in which we had mystic and unfounded faith. In the end the fire would burn, the stove would glow, and after an hour or two your frosty breath would disappear, if you stood close enough to the stove. We were not allowed to keep a fire in the stove during the day when we were all out working. Our coal was strictly rationed, and our hut was always damp and cold when we returned at night.

Mac and Red and Chet would rush in from supper, take down their least-muddy and best-pressed trousers and khaki shirts and low Oxford "good" shoes, and dress for town and another exciting instalment of their adventures which centred about 'The Racecourse Inn' in Ipswich.

Cooper, J.C., Hatz, Earl and I would gather around the bed nearest the light, and start a poker game. Hig would read a book. Loy would write a letter or perhaps just crawl into bed and sleep. Nappy, too, would be off to town, when he wasn't working the night shift, or occasionally join the game. The game itself would be good-natured, but deadly serious. We knew each of the other players well, and knew how each played, and we prided ourselves on our skill, so the game became more one of applied psychology than of cards. Sometimes it was an evening of chequers, and here Earl showed his craft and his wit. Sometimes we would just lie on our beds and talk. Sometimes there was horseplay, and if someone

got a package of snacks from home there was an evening feast for all. We never stayed up very late, for our days began early and by nine o'clock we were tired. Often by that hour the lights were out, though we were allowed to have them on until ten-thirty.

At eleven o'clock the air-raid siren would sound. Higinbothom, as hut leader, was supposed to wake us, and turn us out, helmeted, into the deep ditch that ran behind the hut. That happened once. We swore at him, got half-dressed, groped for our helmets, and stood around just outside the door. Hig himself, to set a good example, crouched in the ditch, feeling like a fool, and shivering with cold ,calling ineffectually for us to "Disperse, dammit, disperse ! "

After that we all stayed in bed, listening to the moan of the sirens, and then to the hum of German motors overhead, then to the crump-crump of the ack-ack and the shuddering boom of the bombs. If the raid sounded noisy or near, one of us went to the door to give a play-by-play description to the others. Mostly we slept through the raids, for they were a nightly performance that winter, and every morning the London newspapers commented briefly, " Enemy aircraft were over East Anglia again last night in small numbers. Some damage and casualties were reported. . . . "

Not always was the sound of motors German. Often, these winter nights when the lights had been turned off, and we lay in our beds, we could hear the distant hum of motors, high up, far away, hanging in the sightless sky, moving out eastward towards Germany. The sound of the motors would grow, then fade, and then grow again and pass overhead, with a lingering insistence, and then fade to silence. Before it had quite disappeared, another would come, and then two and three at the same time, in different corners of the sky. Eastward they were going, and we would lie awake and try to count them from the sound, and say, " RAF is out again. RAF is out to-night, and it sounds like a big one."

The sound of the passing bombers would continue for perhaps an hour, as the unseen hundreds throbbed slowly eastward, and we would be asleep before it ended. Later in the night, perhaps three or four or five hours later, we would hear them coming back, if we wakened. This time lower, this time louder, often limping home just above the tree-tops with a motor missing or the rough sound of engines in trouble. We would not fully wake at the sound, but we would be aware of the sound of the motors, we would stir, and hear the other men stir, and think to ourselves, " Well, there's one

who got back. . . . The fire's gone out. . . . It's raining again. . . ." And then we would sleep.

I cannot forget those nights in Hut Seven, that now seem so much like a vague, half-incredible dream, parts vivid, parts dim. I cannot forget the group of half-dressed, unshaven men sitting around a bed playing cards in a world bounded by the wan yellow light from one bare electric bulb, which did not reach the corners of the hut. I can't forget the mud and the water on the cold concrete floor. Or the mice that ran around each night between the inner and outer shell of the hut, and nibbled the food that we hoarded in our barracks bags, while we slept. I will not forget the hum of the German bombers low over the roof on rainy nights, and the red glow of fires against the clouds, and the clinking of ack-ack shrapnel on the metal roof, or the steady drum of the rain.

I will not forget McArdle's roaring laughter, or J.C.'s sardonic humour, or Cooper's fancy civilian underwear, or the flickering glow from the fire throwing weird shadows on the sombre vaulted roof of the hut as we lay in our beds.

Or that night during a particularly spectacular raid, when Captain Kelley, the new company commander, helmeted and breathless, raced through the hut, shouting to J.C., " Are your men all up and dressed, Sergeant Rogers ? "

" No, sir," murmured J.C. " We're all in bed, sleeping." And Captain Kelley rushed through the back door without a word.

Rhode Island, New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Indiana, Texas—America in England. They were good companions—Hut Seven.

12

A DEBACH DAY

Our aerodrome at Debach was a busy place throughout that winter. The day started with reveille by flashlight at 5.30 in the morning, and it was followed by breakfast at bare board tables, from aluminium mess kits, in a dimly lit Nissen hut. When we had finished eating the heaping piles of food that engineers need in England's winter climate, we washed our mess-kits in a row of steaming pots of soapy water, the smoke from the coal fires stinging our eyes.

Then it was a race back to the hut to wash, to make beds, to sweep up and empty the ashes from the previous night's fire. Promptly

at seven o'clock Sportelli, the comedian bugler, blew something vaguely resembling " Assembly ", the company gathered on the concrete strip at the lower end of the area, and roll call was taken.

The company split up here into work units. The truck-drivers marched off in one group, the mechanics in another, the administrative office personnel in a third, the engineering section and surveyors in a fourth, and in the grey light of dawn we walked along Sparrow's Lane to our work.

By the time it was light enough to see, the great machines out on the job were already clanking and roaring across the aerodrome site. A Company was working on paving a runway. B Company was building huts and creating living sites. C Company was gouging drains and clearing timber for future runway construction. Headquarters Company—specialists in many technical and mechanical jobs—were split up in a dozen groups wherever they were needed.

All day a constant stream of trucks, driven by civilians, and loaded with gravel, sand, cement, rubble from bombed cities, and cinders, rumbled along the narrow lanes and deposited their loads in the stockpiles that rose like small hills on the landscape. Cranes, operated by headquarters company men, loaded our own trucks with these materials. Each truck stopped three times ; for its gravel, its sand, and its cement, in correct proportions. Then the trucks would drive off to the giant paving machine.

The dirtiest of all assignments on the aerodrome was that of the cement gang ; all day long they stood on their platform and emptied hundred-pound sacks of cement into the trucks that rolled up to them, one a minute. Not only were their sacks heavy ; they worked in a cloud of powdery cement—it blew into their eyes, their nostrils, filtered into their clothes, got under their skin. It transformed them from men into grey-green, ghostly automatons. It was the *bête noire* of the battalion. It stood as a constant threat to miscreants.

The big paver was the most fascinating sight on the job. Once each minute, when things were running smoothly, a truck backed up to the great shovel-like skip, deposited its aggregate, and moved off. The skip rose, the contents flowed into the barrel of the mixer, water rushed in, the barrel revolved for exactly sixty seconds, and then the concrete poured out into the bucket. The big bucket skidded out along a boom, and, at the proper point, let go with a huge slopping load of soft concrete.

Men in boots, with long-handled shovels, spread the concrete rapidly between the rails—called " forms ". Behind them, running

on these rails, was the screed—a machine that acted like a plane—creeping forward, smoothing and tamping the wet concrete with a scissor-like action of two smooth steel beams.

Behind the screed were two men perched on a wooden trestle laid across the concrete, smoothing over the rough spots by hand with trowels. Behind the men on the trestle came a crew to spread straw over the wet concrete—to keep it from freezing or from drying too quickly.

It was a complicated and beautiful process when it was working like clockwork, with the big paving machine slowly crawling across the landscape—every man with a job that was as important as his neighbour's, and the entire group dependent upon each man's keeping the pace. If the paving machine moved 100 feet in an hour, it was going well. Often it paved 1,200 feet of the 20-foot-wide strip in a ten-hour shift.

But to put a runway down, 3,000 feet of smooth concrete, 150 feet wide and 8 inches thick, straight as an arrow across that rolling country, took more work than the production line at the paver showed. It started on the Air Ministry maps, and it continued with the stakes and markers driven into the fields of wheat and mustard by Tom Stinson and his surveyors; it depended on accurate calculations by the back-room boys in the computing office.

And then when the stakes were driven, and the "blue-tops"[1] marked, the men who drove the bulldozers and the graders and the big power shovels had to gouge out the earth, filling a low spot here, cutting off a mound there. It meant work with axe and pick and dynamite, and tractors and chains where there were hedgerows and trees and houses on the runway line. It meant ditch-digging, and the laying of tile drains, of telephone lines and electric cables, and of demolition charges ready to destroy all this work at a moment's notice. And finally the big motor graders crawled along, smoothing the right-of-way down to the last tenth of an inch, and the rollers packed it hard.

Even then the preparations for the big paving machine were not complete, for the forms had to be laid, which meant more surveying, and hauling and spiking the heavy rails on which the screed ran, and between which the concrete was poured.

It was a monstrous job, and even to us who lived in its midst, and knew every man's purpose, it often seemed so vast and complex that the war would surely end before the first Flying Fortress winged

[1] Blue-top—a stake placed by the surveyor showing the desired level of the ground.

upward towards Germany from our runways: graders, bulldozers, rollers milling around, civilian trucks in an endless stream with the raw materials, our own trucks with the concrete mixture, the surveyors everywhere on the job, small groups of men digging deep ditches, other groups slashing at the brush and felling the trees.

Dinner was served in the field to save time—brought out in containers on trucks to the men, who perched on their machines or on the ground to eat the food, racing to get it inside them before it was cold or waterlogged by the rain.

It was even more impressive at night; for we worked in two ten-hour shifts throughout that winter, whenever the weather would let us. The paving machine was a giant monster then, and the great skip a grotesque hand as it rose into the air, hour after hour. Lights, strange and disturbing in the English blackout, made weird shadows across the groups of men bundled in their rough work clothes. The machines were only idle two hours out of every twelve during those days, and during those two hours between shifts the mechanics swarmed over them, to keep them oiled and repaired.

We often joked about the progress of the work. Throughout that rainy winter we boasted that we were Hitler's secret weapon—that our " underwater aerodrome " would be eventually used as a harbour for seaplanes, that a periscope had been sighted somewhere near the " 12 plus 75 " mark on Runway Number Two, that Hitler knew all about our work, and encouraged our futile efforts as a laudable waste of materials and manpower; that we were really not building an aerodrome at all, but just simulating the work in the hopes that Hitler would waste bombs and bombers trying to destroy it. That is what we said among ourselves, but just let some outsider or some member of a rival engineer battalion scoff at our work !

The runway paving work was only one part of the aerodrome job—the building of houses, buildings of all types, of roads, drains, sewers, perimeter tracks, and hard-standings[1] scattered the battalion over the two-mile circle of the Debach area. It was, in the words of more than one of the boys, one hell of a mess. And yet out of that mess, a form and a purpose, and an ultimate goal, could be seen slowly emerging. It was a tremendous job, unknown to the world at large, except perhaps to the few farmers who lived in its precincts, and who watched, almost in awe, the steady stream of trucks, the upheaval of the local scenery, the disappearance of familiar land-

[1] Hard-standing—a paved parking space for a bomber. There were fifty hard-standings scattered around this aerodrome.

marks (and beer in the local pub) and the increasing deterioration of the lanes and by-ways.

And yet it was a job that was going on, with feverish activity, in a hundred isolated spots throughout the eastern counties. It was one of the most important jobs in the world during those days, for without those aerodromes we could never have brought the giant fleets of bombers overseas and sent them out for the softening of Europe that preceded the invasion.

We who worked on the field, and counted the day's progress in the hundreds of feet of concrete we paved, or in the linear feet of ditches dug, or the number of Nissen huts thrown together, knew the long and thorough preparation that was necessary to turn the wheel of war from defence to offence—we laughed, perhaps bitterly, at the prophets at home that predicted the war's end to be " at the end of 1943 ", or the spring of 1944 at the latest. Why, our aerodrome was not scheduled to be complete and operational until September 1943 ! And it would take another six months of heavy bombing, at least, before we could attack !

So we worked, in our padded, dirty, greasy fatigue clothes, with mud dripping from our boots, throughout the winter, coming back to civilization one evening a week, when we put on our cleanest uniforms, and descended on Ipswich or Woodbridge, or towns farther afield, in our trucks for an evening of come-what-may. And when a British soldier, standing at the bar, asked us what time we had reveille, we would answer, " Oh, five-thirty for the day shift or midnight for the night shift"—and we were quietly proud when they lifted their eyebrows, and said, " Oh, I say, that is primitive . . . we have reveille at 7.30, you know." Our word for it was " rugged."

And months later, when the aerodrome was completed, a beautiful expanse of camouflaged concrete stretching into the distance, a sizable community complete and ready for occupancy—we wearily (and perhaps proudly) marched in formation in pressed uniforms—dirty engineers no longer, soldiers for a day, marching across our own monument behind our fluttering red-and-white banners for the dedication. The generals would arrive in their sedans, the air marshals would be there, the band would play, the dignitaries would line the hastily-built platform, their solemn words would float out over the massed ranks. A Spitfire would swoop over and land. Our aerodrome was in operation ! Our big job was complete ! Our dream was a reality !

And the next day the newspapers would tell the story. " Our

Air Forces will bomb ninety German cities," says Air Marshal Harris, followed by ten paragraphs of Bomber Harris's speech, and at the very tag end the sentence, "The occasion was the dedication of another heavy bomber aerodrome, built by American labour (not even soldiers !) somewhere in eastern England."

"That's us," said Shorty Weathers, with a wry smile. "Where do we go from here ?"

13

DANCE AT WOODBRIDGE

"THE Warrant Officers and Sergeants of the 7th Battalion Highland Light Infantry request the honour of your presence at a Dance, Crown Hotel, Woodbridge, Saturday evening, September —th, at 8 p.m."

Thus was worded the invitation to the first and probably best dance I attended in England. To us, a rough crowd of "labour troops", who worked in fatigue clothes, lived in ankle-deep mud, as part of a unit that was still but a few months old and distinguished only by the number "820", this elegantly engraved card had a touch of glamour about it. It was the first time, too, that our sergeants had ever been singled out for social honours. Our officers had a club of sorts—a room in a nearby farmhouse where they could sit in comfortable chairs—but our sergeants were undistinguished, except for their stripes, from the men. They ate with them, slept with them, were vociferously admonished if they "bucked the chow-line"[1], worked with them, and went out for an evening's entertainment with them. We were all promoted from the ranks, and we kept our friends no matter what our relative ratings might be. But now we were invited to a sergeants' dance !

Perhaps the crested invitation over-awed some ; perhaps others could not get passes that evening, but when I arrived at the Crown Hotel for the dance, I found myself to be the only American present. The dance hadn't started yet, and two sergeants, whose names were Paul and Arthur, welcomed me and escorted me to the bar.

We had whisky all round, and the usual questions were asked. "How did I like England ? What did I think of the weather ? Had I ever been to Scotland ?" I was diplomatic and they were friendly,

[1] Went to the head of the mess-queue, which was their privilege.

and after the second drink we were buddies. The privates behind the bar eyed these sergeants of theirs with respect. Most had been sergeants for a long time, they were old soldiers, they had been through campaigns and then Dunkirk. They were older, steadier, family men, tried and tested. There was nothing haphazard, you judged, about their selection as sergeants.

By ones and twos the young ladies arrived; few if any were escorted, and soon the music sounded in the big hall downstairs and we went down to join the dance. Some officers had arrived as guests of their sergeants. They were immaculate in their jackets and kilts, or trousers of dark green tartan. Their brass sparkled and their leather shone; they were polished, correct, formal, and yet they had a friendly, comradely word for everyone.

Somehow I caught a feeling here, with this first British army unit I had known, that I had not yet experienced in our own new army. Above the band, on the wall, was the H.L.I. crest, noting the battles where the regiment had won honours in wars long past. I felt a high spirit of morale, of good fellowship, of comradeship and mutual respect which our own unit was some day to learn, but which we had not yet found.

The dance was fun. There were all kinds of dances new to me, dances which I later learned at the Ipswich dance halls—the " Chestnut Tree " and " Valeeta " and the " Boston Two-Step " and the " Barn Dance," and the rest. And later in the evening the battalion bagpiper came out, resplendent in his full attire, with kilts and white leggings and the big-buckled belt with the sporran dangling in front, the dirk in his stocking and the glengarry on his head. He blew the strains on the pipes, and the band joined in, the dancers formed a ring, and I saw a Highland Fling.

It was wonderful to watch. It matched any American jitterbug dancing I have seen for agility and excitement, and it had the added fun of being a group dance. One diminutive major was a star performer and took the centre of the ring, performing amazing feats of spryness. I watched with mingled admiration and jealousy, for it was plain that I'd never be able to do a real Highland Fling, and, what's more, even if I could, I'd never look the part.

At eleven o'clock there was an intermission and we went upstairs again for a buffet supper. We stood about with plates and glasses, and talked again. I found myself talking to a pert, pretty girl whose name was Polly. I was still the only American present, and everyone seemed determined to make me feel at home, without seeming to

try. It was a knack that group had, a natural talent for hospitality.

I danced the remaining numbers with Polly, or at least we struggled in time with the music. Anyone who has witnessed my efforts on a dance floor knows better than to call it dancing, but Polly was very encouraging and extremely patient. Before the evening was over we had made a date for the following Wednesday evening. I borrowed a bicycle and wore my least-soiled trousers and shirt, but she didn't appear. I had hardly expected her to, after that last grim attempt at a tango. But I waited for an hour, got lost coming home, and cursed the fickleness of English womanhood. It was my first date with an English girl, and the only time I was ever left standing on the corner.

I went to many English dances after that first one at 'The Crown' at Woodbridge. There were dances at our camp in the big Nissen hut, the girls from Ipswich and Woodbridge and the WAAF.'s from Martlesham aerodrome arriving in laughing, chattering truck-loads. There were the dances in St. Lawrence's Church Hall or the Co-op. in Ipswich. There were dances at Victoria Hall in Sudbury and the village hall in Ripley—and at these dances we often enjoyed ourselves, dancing with women of all ages, trying to master the infinite variety of old-time dances that in England are never forgotten.

There were dances, too, at the Overseas League in London on Saturday afternoons, where you could count fifty different uniforms. Here conversational agility was at a premium, for your dancing partner one moment might be a WAAF from Rhodesia, then a nurse from New Zealand, then a French Army girl, then a Canadian WAC, and then a WREN from Dundee. Here you saw the amazing spectacle of Indian lasses in *saris* joining the conga line, and here the door prize was a treasured bottle of whisky. There were dances at the Watford Town Hall, which varied from informal troop dances (admittance one shilling) to elegant balls (admittance ten shillings) at which a few of the girls even wore trailing, pre-war evening gowns, and there was a buffet, a bar, and a charity benefit with games of chance.

I remember dancing with a lithe, strong Land Army girl at Ipswich, who had come to the dance fully armed with a long and evil-looking dagger at her hip. I remember a pretty girl at Hull, and how flattered I had been that she had asked me to dance, until she said, quite innocently, "My girl-friend dared me to dance with you." There were dances that went on uninterruptedly in London

during air raids, when you weren't certain whether you were dancing in time to the music or the anti-aircraft fire. And there were the private swing-sessions long after midnight in the little house in King's Langley, with Bessie and Joe forever dispelling the myth about British reserve.

I enjoyed myself at many of these dances, and was bored at others. But at none did I again feel that spirit of good fellowship that prevailed at the first dance with the Highland Light Infantry.

The air-raid siren sounded once during that dance, but no one paid any notice to it; the band played on, the dancing continued, and the little groups at the bar didn't even remark at it. I stepped outside, and the cool night air stroked my face like a clean knife edge. It was pitch dark, a cloudy night, with a wet oily sea smell, and the gunfire sounded far away. I stood outside and listened for the length of time it took me to smoke one cigarette, and then I went in to the animated colourful scene within.

Our conversation was not easy that night, for the Glasgow burr of these Scots was unfamiliar to me, and when they talked fast it was a foreign tongue. When I mentioned it, they said, "Wait tul ye heeer ourre bagpiperrrr. There's a mon can rrrreally talk the Scotttish dialect. We canna half understand him ourrrsels." I heard the bagpiper talking later in the evening, and it was true. I couldn't understand a word.

I don't remember a single word of any conversation that evening —what we talked about or laughed about or what we toasted with our glasses of "whusky." All I remember is the encompassing comradeship and the knowledge that I liked these staunch, witty, smiling Scots, with their good manners and their confidence. It was a strange place—this dance—to first encounter the spirit of the British Army. But here began a respect for the Briton as a soldier that increased as time went on. I would have been proud, I thought to myself, to fight beside men like these, and nothing I saw later, in England or on the continent, changed my mind about them.

14

"YOU'RE LATE NOW . . ."

THERE were many good men and good soldiers, too, in the assorted collection that made up our engineer battalion. It was not only a cross-section of America from California to Maine—it was a samp-

ling of all the racial strains that have gone into the American melting pot. There were English-American names like Huddleston and Johnson, Dew and Gay, Edwards and Wainwright. There were Irish names like McConnell and McArdle and McGreevy. There were German-American names like Ludwig and Huntsinger and Hatzenbuehler, Jewish-American names like Silver and Goldman, and Italian names like Sportelli, Loparco and Zorbo. Tom Stinson and Bill Ohlmsted boasted Scandinavian blood, Tommy Williams talked about his Welsh ancestry, and Labruère Marchessault could only be called " Frenchy." There was " Scotty " Gordon, there were men like Kalwarski and Napikoski who had Polish antecedents, and there was Chin, the Chinese truck driver.

George Silver was born in Odessa and was modest, intellectual, and interested in labour unions. Salvatore Sportelli was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and was the beloved company buffoon. Bill Huntsinger was born in Texas and was a quiet, capable engineer. "Frenchy" Marchessault was born on the Canadian border and knew lumbering and the northern forests. Roddy Dew came from "Southern aristocracy" and he was an unreconstructed rebel. Charlie Gay called himself an Arkansas hill-billy, but he was an " old soldier," and the army was his home.

No man was a typical American, and each had a story, and a different history. But, taken together, they were Americans, and a worthy crew.

If, for some reason, you wanted to select the " average American soldier " from that group, your choice would be a difficult one, and it is probable that you would overlook a quiet, modest, self-effacing fellow named Thurman Weathers, but " Shorty " was your man. No soldier in the battalion worked harder or with more sincerity than Shorty, and none had a more important job. Certainly no man was better liked.

" Shorty " was one of those small, wiry, unbeatable little guys who makes the wheels turn smoothly, who makes things click, who goes out and gets things done while others are talking and making plans, and commands leadership and respect not for his words, but for his deeds.

When we first came to Debach Tom Stinson was the chief surveyor of the battalion and one of the key engineers on the project, and Shorty was his star " instrument man." It was Tom who did much of the early planning, and who was responsible for redesigning the drainage system of the project, a plan that resulted in more

efficient drainage with five miles less of pipe. When Tom was rewarded with a trip back to the United States to become an officer candidate (" He should have got his commission on the spot," we all agreed,) Shorty stepped up into Tom's sizable boots, and became chief surveyor.

Under his direction were a dozen trained men, instrument men who operated the transits and the levels, computers who worked with figures in the office, rod-men to help the instrument men, and axe-men to clear brush and drive stakes. The surveyors went forth each day on different assignments in little teams that covered the aerodrome site in thousands of criss-crossed surveys.

One team, perhaps under Roddy Dew, was out running a line of levels up from our only established altitude marker at St. Felix's Church. Another team, under Frank Repair, was out on a hut site, plotting and placing the future locations of buildings, of water and drainage lines. Another team, led by Tommy Williams, was working on the runway, driving level stakes for the grader operators that measured the grade to a tenth of an inch, and kept the paver true to the line of the runway.

But Shorty was everywhere. You could not go far on that aerodrome without finding him, the smallest soldier in the battalion, trudging across the landscape with a transit on his shoulder, or squinting through it with a practised eye.

The other surveyors were amazed at Shorty's speed, and the men that worked on Shorty's team had to run to keep up with him. The man with the level rod, a hundred yards away, had to run to his post to get there before Shorty was lined up and ready to go. Shorty peered into the eyepiece, and shouted across the field to his rod-man. " Left ! " The rod moved left a foot. Shorty cried again, " Left a hair ! " The rod moved a few inches. " Left a whisker ! " Shorty shouted again, waving his handkerchief in his left hand. The rod moved imperceptibly. " Right a fuzz ! " came the cry, and then, as Shorty waved both hands, "*On the money!*" The rod-man drove a stake into the indicated spot on the ground, and " on the money " it was.

Then Shorty swung his eyepiece over in a 180-degree arc, to obtain a " back-sight " check on his previous stake, and then off across the mustard field, transit on his shoulder, to the next mark. Shorty covered miles every day—winter and summer. All but the darkest, foulest weather would find him on the job, mud up to his knees, wiping the eyepiece of his transit when the rain obscured his sight.

Shorty came from Alabama, where he had worked as a surveyor for the State. His weather-tanned, wizened face told you immediately that he had spent most of his life outdoors, and that he liked it. Long letters went back and forth across the Atlantic to the girl who was waiting at home for Shorty, waiting and also completing the involved transactions that were taking place in Alabama in Shorty's absence. For Shorty was investing his pay in America. During his years as surveyor he had noted many beautiful and likely farming tracts, and whenever any of these lands were put up for sale, Shorty, through his girl, bought them. Shorty had plans for the future, and he watched with interest the farming methods used by the Suffolk farmers. "You know," he would say, "I reckon that little old saw that these farmers use to cut hay in their stacks is a pretty good idea. I'm going to try that, some day."

Shorty liked to work in the field with his men, but often the work of a surveyor must be done in an office, with a slide rule and graph paper and mathematical tables and maps. Often Shorty and Harold Ammerman, the computer, would argue for hours over figures from Shorty's little black book; they would compute cut and fill, cubic yards of earth; figure out the complex curve of a perimeter track; just where this hill should be sliced away and that duck-pond filled in. Often Shorty would push back the little peaked cap on his forehead, scratch his head, and say in disagreement, "Well, I be damned if *that's* so!"

But in the end it was Shorty's figures they used, and Shorty's stakes that the bulldozer operators watched like hawks (Shorty was a tyrant with catskinners who knocked over blue-tops), and it was Shorty's calculations that set the lieutenants and their platoons in action. And when the curve in the perimeter track was laid out, and the bulldozers and graders and rollers and the big paving machine had gone through, Shorty would go out to look at his curve, and push his peaked cap back on his head, and say, "Well, now, I be damned if she ain't a beauty after all!"

Shorty's speed at work, and his ability to stretch the legs of longer-legged men than himself became fabulous in the battalion, as did his constant cry that echoed across the fields that winter. Everywhere you went, you heard Shorty exhorting his teams to great speed, and always it was "*You're laaaaaate NOW!*"

That cry, "You're late now", became almost a battalion slogan for these men who were trying to rush an aerodrome to completion, who could look ahead (as many men in those days could not) and

see twelve more months necessary to complete the needed bases for our air forces, more months still to render Germany powerless by air, and more months for a cross-channel conquest.

They could see the long road ahead, even as they dug deep into the ground to lay drain pipes, or queued up in their trucks behind the paving machine to deliver the concrete mixture. To them, Shorty's cry was appropriate. "Let's get going. Let's get it done faster. You're here to-day, you're on the job but—*you're late now!*"

15

ANY OLD WEATHER

I MADE the acquaintance of "Iris Harding" the way many an American soldier met many an English girl—at a public house. Iris was the first English girl I met, not counting the fickle Miss Polly of Woodbridge, and the first one to give me a glimpse of what English women were doing to help win the war.

I met Iris one evening, not long after our arrival at Debach, in the tiniest room of the liveliest pub in Ipswich, 'The Cricketers'. It was a little room where four persons could stand with some crowding—a room accessible by the back entrance, where the more modest members of the female sex could enter, have a drink, and retire without parading through the noisy, jam-packed front rooms. Iris was there that night with a friend, and I was there, too, with Earl Huddleston, who worked in our operations section.

We got acquainted as most people get acquainted at bars—by breaking into a conversation with a casual remark, and we continued our acquaintance by offering cigarettes, a drink. Iris was not a beautiful girl, but had a clever look about her, and a nice smile that crinkled her nose and curled the corners of her mouth. Whatever it was I said to her, she had a quick answer, and one that made us laugh—and from then on we were friends.

When 'The Cricketers' sounded the inevitable tocsin at ten o'clock, we were hungry—and Iris knew a place to go. The only place in Ipswich it was possible to eat after closing time—the Rainbow. "Would you like a spot of fish and chips at the Rainbow?"

We would.

So we stumbled out into the blackness, holding hands so that we wouldn't lose each other, and Iris led the way to the Rainbow. It

was a crowded restaurant, empty five minutes before ten o'clock, and crowded five minutes afterwards. Here, for a few shillings, they brought us a heaping plate of tender, crisp fish, surrounded by a mountain of " french fried " potatoes—chips. We stuffed ourselves. And over the fish and chips I learned that Iris was a factory worker —that she operated a huge machine which punched holes of various sizes in sheets of steel, in Ipswich's largest industry, the Ransomes, Simms & Jefferies farm-machinery plant.

Iris was one of ten thousand employees. Her work started each day at dawn, when she rolled out of bed, prepared breakfast for her family, put on her working clothes, and walked the half mile to the plant. For eight, nine, or ten hours a day she stood at her machine, getting her hands thoroughly grained with black grease and chilled by the liquid foam that cooled and lubricated the drill. Iris had a younger sister who worked at the local cigarette factory. Together they helped support the little family—and lived in bare sufficiency in a small brick house, one of a row of grimy brick houses down a mean street behind the gas-works.

Iris was in the war to the full. She enjoyed her work, tiring as it was—though heaving steel plates up to the drill all day meant aches —though grease and grime meant a bad complexion and hands that would never be soft, never be clean. She was not an Ipswich girl— but had come down from London with her family to avoid the blitz. " Down from London to avoid the blitz " seemed ironical to her then, for Ipswich that winter was a favourite German target, a barrage balloon was anchored in the lot behind her house, and if one of the huge gas-holders near her house had been hit, it would have scattered the row of brick houses like chaff.

But Iris didn't mind the raids—too much. At the factory they had a double warning system. When the sirens went, everyone continued work. That was merely the warning. It was not until the " cuckoo " warbled—*Raiders Overhead*—that the workers scrambled for shelter. That cut down the loss of time—it meant more ploughs, more reapers, more binders, and more shell casings for England. Iris slept with her sister under the Morrison shelter in the living room. There was no place to welcome visitors. The Harding girls never brought their boy-friends home.

But Iris had a good time, and made the most of her evenings out. The war had hardened her physically, but she had not lost her purpose or her ideals. She could boast biceps that were not ladylike, but she could also boast good health. For many an evening after

our first acquaintance, Iris and I made a date to meet at seven o'clock on the triangular patch of pavement that stood in the centre of the crossroads of Ipswich, called the Cornhill. And always, the conditions of our meeting were the same. " Same time—same place —any old weather."

And almost always, through October, November, and December of 1942, that weather was any and old. I jumped off the truck with the crowd at Princes Street, and walked to the little triangular patch of pavement. Usually I waited, for Iris had to get home from the factory, eat, and change, before she came downtown to meet me. As I waited there, buses would pull up to the pavement, momentarily making the place bright with their lights, the queues would surge forward, the buses would fill, and go off with a whine from the overhead trolley in the gathering darkness. Gradually the crowds on the plot would thin, and I was alone with a few others walking and waiting there. The sky was black, and rain would seep down from it—or if it was not raining a dozen searchlights would be probing in the clouds above. I walked back and forth, and then suddenly there would be someone at my side in a white raincoat, taking my arm, and saying, " Hello, there." Not once, in all our meetings, did I see her or hear her coming.

Not often, after our first meeting, did we go back to the crowded ' Cricketers ', for Iris had another favourite, ' The Unicorn ', a less noisy, more sedate place, off the beaten track for soldiers. A " family pub ". Here we sat in a beautifully panelled room, with polished brass trays and plates on the walls, with copper vases of chrysanthemums on the polished mahogany tables. Iris sat up very straight in a high-backed chair, and looked about the room with an air of *noblesse oblige*, and sipped her beer from a silver mug more like a princess at a banquet than a factory girl at a public house. I liked Iris ; for every quip of mine about the queer ways of the English she gave me back double.

Sometimes we went to ' The Saracen's Head ', or ' The Running Buck ', or ' The Mulberry Tree '. And other evenings we went to the film at the Regal or the Odeon, and I would patiently and with some embarrassment explain that America was really not much like that after all.

And after it all—into the dark, damp streets to the Rainbow for a late supper, or to walk Iris home.

It was a long walk, and we would walk quickly, along the narrow, rough streets, with searchlights weaving overhead, and sometimes

the whine of a German plane. We would stand at the corner of her street to say good night and to make a date for next week. " Same time, same place, any old weather." And then I would stand at the top of the street and wait until she flashed her light, which meant that she had found the key and was safely in—and then I would turn and walk—and sometimes run through the darkened streets of Ipswich to our truck.

Wind humming through the wires, and the blackened panes of the windows staring like silent, watchful eyes. Boots against cobblestones, echoing in silent streets of old England. Ipswich, Sudbury, Peterborough, Lincoln, Hull. Everywhere in England I heard that sound—one of the most poignant of all the memories that come back. I would hear my footsteps, and hear the echo at the end of the narrow street, and pause to listen—hear nothing—and then go on.

Back at the parking lot on Princes Street the trucks would be absorbing their loads of soldiers, some silent, some noisy, some sober, some drunk, and a weary hour later we would be crawling in between our blankets in the Nissen hut—with reveille a mere five hours away.

The last time I saw Iris was on New Year's Eve of 1942. We went to an " Anglo-American New Year's Eve Ball " at the Public Hall in Ipswich. It was not a happy occasion. For me, New Year's Eves never are, for they are times when I perversely look back rather than ahead, and say " Well, that was another year. Of all the things I wanted to accomplish in that big year—I did few of them. I am a year older than the last New Year's Eve, and no wiser nor better." New Year's Eve—it is a time of closing the books—and writing Finis to a story that is not yet ended, that has reached no climax, and found no solution. I wanted to be somewhere, as I had been during every other New Year as long as I could remember, where I could telephone home on the stroke of midnight and wish everyone a Happy New Year. And here I was at an uninspired dance, celebrating a holiday that was not a holiday in England at all, stark sober at midnight, and far from home.

We said good night shortly after midnight, and though I promised to write a note confirming our next date, we both knew that there would be no other date. Perhaps New Year's Eve had worked a disenchantment. Perhaps it was the fun I had had on Christmas in Sudbury. And perhaps my head was full of a new girl—a girl named Joan. . . .

But I never saw Iris again.

16

" IN ENGLAND THE GIRLS ARE DELIGHTFULLY PRETTY "
—Erasmus

I DO not know who mentioned it first. Perhaps it was Earl, who always had a weather-eye cocked for a pretty girl, or I—never far behind in the critical appreciation of beauty. But one day early that autumn one of us said, " You know, this little village of Sudbury has more pretty girls per square foot than any town I've ever seen ! " And the other agreed.

Our errands around Sudbury each morning introduced us to many of them, and the rest turned our heads as we walked through the Market Hill or down North Street on our business. We could never solve the enigma of where the pretty girls came from, or why on this island of attractive girls Suffolk seemed to stand out, and, in Suffolk, Sudbury above the rest. But we were sure we had found a secret and unexplored paradise. " Perhaps they take all the ugly girls out in the woods when they are three years old, and exterminate them," I once said. The suggestion was heatedly denied by several natives.

Often on our way to town, Earl and I argued the matter. Perhaps it was some peculiar combination of racial heritage. Perhaps it was a rare and salubrious climate known only in this part of the world. Perhaps it was just a felicitous accident. We never did reach a plausible solution, but there it was—which nobody could deny.

When we stopped in for our morning coffee at Mrs. Searle's bakery and tea shop, there was Peggy, a pert, blue-eyed blonde of eighteen, and Millie, a quaint, shy, dark-haired, large-eyed girl with a soft low voice. There, too, was Thelma, a tall, willowy, pale-skinned, chestnut-haired, blue-eyed girl, and Fay, red-haired, sparkling with laughter.

It was like a gallery ! Peggy always had smart talk with the customers, and twitched her skirt between the tables in the back room—and Fay had a captivating twinkle—but little Millie just smiled shyly—and one day, when she had asked me what had become of an American sergeant of whom she had become fond, and I answered he had been transferred, she looked at me wistfully with her large black eyes, and said pensively, in her musical voice, " Just when you get to know someone . . . they always go away. . . ."

At the Post Office we were waited on by Olive, of the heart-shaped face and the cascade of black hair—Daisy, snub-nosed, red-haired, pixie-eyed, and saucy, and Joan, graceful, slender, blue-eyed, and the darling of the town.

At the Board of Inland Revenue—there we found tiny Pat with a head of beautiful curls, and Kay, tall, blonde, grey-eyed and graceful. At Boot's the chemist we were served by Molly, who would be judged a blonde beauty in any town around the world. At Cundy's the florist we would admire Audrey—tall, raven-haired, and darkly beautiful. At the Gainsborough House, though still a child, there was beautiful Marie. At the milliners there was another pretty one, whose name we never learned, for, alas, our errands never took us to the milliner.

And then, too, there was Daphne.

Earl and I first met Daphne one morning in the dry cleaner's shop, where we had brought our usual armfuls of filthy uniforms to be renovated as best they could. We were talking to Ethel, the proprietor of the shop, and as we talked a small blonde in a blue smock appeared and sat down for a few minutes of morning conversation. Brown eyes, a pert, wise, striking little face. We stared. The girl paid us no notice, and soon she said, " Well, I must run back to the shop," and she disappeared as quickly as she had come.

" Who was that ? " we both asked at once.

" Oh, that was Daphne ! Haven't you boys met Daphne ? I thought you knew each other."

" Now there's one ", we said, " that we really would like to know ! "

" That's easy," said Ethel. " Next time you come in I'll introduce you. She just works up the road, at the butcher's. We're old friends and she drops in almost every morning for a bit of gossip . . . whenever old man Cook[1] isn't looking. Daphne's a brick. Good fun. You'll like her." We did.

We came back the next day, and Ethel said that she had seen Daphne, and Daphne had asked who *we* were. So—*she* had noticed *us*—that pretty girl ! And the next day she was there. We met, we talked and had our inevitable Yank joke, and a week later, on Saturday night, I took the first of many Saturday evening buses from Ipswich to Sudbury, this time to meet Daphne Dicks.

Like Iris, like Joan, like all the English girls I ever knew in those

[1] " Old man Cook ", we later learned, was a highly respected member of the community—a councillor and former mayor.

months, Daphne worked, and hard. Her job was driving the little white van that delivered the meat to Cook's customers, scattered around all the lanes and by-ways for miles around Sudbury. Often the little van broke down, or there were muddy ruts and ditches, and there were dogs at every farm gate to make life hazardous, and there were long hours after dark. But Daphne went about her work gaily—dressed in corduroy slacks, a bright sweater and an old coat—and had time for fun in the evenings, too.

There was not much to do in Sudbury, but we managed to have pleasant evenings. Perhaps it was a movie at the " County " or the " Gainsborough ", or a few beers at ' The Christopher ', or we would play the pinball machine and drink our ales at ' The Bear '. And sometimes it was a walk along the river bank and out across the meadows. Often, when I came to town in the morning, Daphne was out in the van, and I would leave a letter for her with Ethel, and pick up a letter from her, in her sweeping, round, bold hand. " See you Saturday night "—it said. Signed " Dee."

And sometimes, as we were walking across the market, or driving through town, we would hear the sudden din of a car horn, and there would be the little white van, a pert smile, and a bright blonde good morning. Then again, we were grateful for England, for Suffolk, and for Sudbury.

Daphne was not properly a Sudbury girl, for she had been born in London. But she had moved to Sudbury with her mother when she was fourteen, and lived in a tiny cottage on the meanest street in town, supporting, with her slim wages, both of them.

I went to dinner on Sundays, now and then, at Daphne's house. I resisted the first invitation, and evaded the second, because we had been told how scarce food was in England, and how it was rationed, and that we should not eat food the civilians needed for themselves. But I could not resist the third, for Daphne wanted me to test her cooking, and she assured me that she and her mother had more than enough to eat. " See ! I'm getting fat ! " she said—hands on hips, slowly turning her slim figure for me to admire.

So in the end I gave in. I knocked at the little cottage door just before noon one Sunday, and Daphne called from upstairs for me to come in, and make myself at home. I stepped through into the tiny room where Daphne lived and entertained. It was a small room, there were no deep carpets on the floor, or tapestries on the walls—or carved oak furniture. But it was a friendly, lived-in,

comfortable room, and you felt it was a home. So this was where the beauty hid!

I lounged in an easy chair before the fire, and stroked Daphne's huge silky black cat, as Daphne busied herself in the kitchen. Soon the table was set before the fire, and heaping plates of food were set down. A run next door to 'The Half Moon' resulted in two bottles of ale—and we sat down to a dinner that would have made the chef at the Savoy smile with pride. Daphne was pretty in a blue dress—sitting by the fire on a little stool. We ate, and talked and drank, and listened to the Sunday favourites on the radio by the window. Up on the hill the bells of St. Peter's chimed the hours and half hours, and here in this little room in this little cottage—here, too, was a corner of England.

Only much later did I learn that the meat that had heaped our plates was the family ration for the week, and the butter had been most of it, and the delicious tarts had consumed the better part of the jam ration. And that, too, was something to remember.

17

MY FAVOURITE ENGLISH INN

THE country of East Anglia is well-endowed with historic old inns, and most of them have preserved the Olde Englishe Quaintnesse one expects to find nowadays only on Christmas cards and in antique prints.

In the little region of Suffolk that I knew best, the tourist guides undoubtedly point out as rare treasures 'The Bull' at Long Melford, the Lavenham 'Swan', the Thetford 'Bell' (across the line in Norfolk), and the Martlesham 'Red Lion', the Woodbridge 'Crown', and the Bury St. Edmund's 'Angel'. In all of these, and many more, you can find the low-beamed ceilings, the capacious fireplaces, the polished copper saucepans on the wall, the hunting prints, the winding, uneven staircases, and the leaded diamond windows that are so dear to British hearts and the LNER poster artists.

But my favourite Suffolk inn had few of these attributes. True, it had a winding staircase, and it had old oak beams, and a copper saucepan or two. But I liked it for other reasons—for warmer, more human things. I liked it for its personality. Because I was never a

guest there, but always one of the family. I stopped there many a winter's and summer's night, going and coming across England. No matter where I was, it was a magnet that drew me back—and in those days when it was possible to search an entire county without finding a place to sleep, it was comforting to know that I could make a slight deviation in my journey and always find an excellent meal, laughter, and a soft deep bed waiting for me.

The little inn I loved was Gainsborough House, in Sudbury. The personality and the hospitality of the place centred mainly about Winnie Offord, the twenty-three-year-old girl who ran it, who acted as manager, chief cook, chief steward, cashier, hostess, and even upstairs maid. Winnie Offord was too busy to be seen about the streets of Sudbury much, except for a morning sortie for provisions, and perhaps a quick evening run across the street to 'The Christopher' for an ale. Winnie was not in Sudbury 'society' either. But she certainly was one of Sudbury's most important people, and although she had constant alerts and warnings from the National Labour Service Board, their deferment of her transfer to a factory was one of the wisest decisions that august body ever made. I like to think of Winnie as one of the thousands of English girls who coped with a job big enough for several men during the war, and always had time for fun and laughter. Many times, many of us were boundlessly glad that Winnie was there, doing cheerfully an amazingly big job.

Winnie's domain, Gainsborough House, stood on Gainsborough Street, which wound down to the river from Market Hill, where stood the statue of Sudbury's most famous native son. Gainsborough himself was born in this house in 1727, you were told by a plaque on the wall. The house was an old one; it had been a home and then an inn long before Gainsborough's father, a minister, had moved in. And now the full cycle had come round, and the home was now an inn again. The front had been modernized, and it was only from the garden side that you could admire the old and pleasant proportions of the house.

The rooms in the Gainsborough House interested me for two reasons. First, because they were all on different levels, with two steps up or three steps down to each one. And second, because they were each named after one of the master's paintings.

Thus it became possible for me, after I was acquainted with the peculiarities of each, to shock innumerable post office girls in Leicester, Peterborough, Norwich, and Cambridge, by sending tele-

grams ahead to Winnie, warning her of my arrival. " Please reserve the Duchess of Devonshire for me Saturday night " never failed to raise eyebrows across the post-office counters. " Want Mrs. Robinson to-morrow night " brought a pretty pink to the chaste cheeks of the damsels in Colchester. But in the end I usually slept in the " Market Cart " at the top of the house, where the stairs wound so close to the roof that you had to kneel to get up, or " Cornard Wood," or perhaps, if I was lucky, the " Gainsborough," the biggest room in the house, the very room where Gainsborough was born and where his ghost was said to dwell.

Life in Gainsborough House centred about the kitchen, for it was there that Winnie reigned over her court of young helpers. The kitchen was always warm and always busy, and if I came into town late and unsuppered, Winnie would have a cup of tea for me in two minutes, and I would sit at the kitchen table and talk as she prepared a meal that couldn't be surpassed in all Suffolk.

Even when I was on time for dinner, Winnie would offer me the choice of sitting in the dining-room with the elderly evacuees or coming back to the kitchen and making myself at home. The latter choice also meant the best cut off the roast, and I never turned the offer down. In the kitchen, too, Winnie would iron my trousers if I was going out that evening, and more than once she took my dirty shirts and socks and laundered them in readiness for my next visit. It was a different inn from most.

The kitchen too was the secret entrance to the house if you arrived in town later than eleven in the evening. By that time Winnie, like the rest of Sudbury, had gone to bed, and the front door was locked, and it was no use to ring the bell—or shout for help. But around on a side street there was a green gate, and it opened from the inside—and then you followed a narrow path, and climbed some steps, crossed the garden, and you could get in the back way—light matches to find your way, and climb to your room in the darkness. More than once I came in from some remote part of the countryside after locking-up time—slept in my room, and left in the morning before anyone was up. Sometimes I left a note and my money for Winnie, to assure her that it was not the ghost that rumpled the bed in the " Gainsborough." But often I did not settle my account until a month or two later on my next visit. Yes, it was a different inn from most.

On summer evenings it was pleasant to sit out in the garden, and watch the tennis on Sudbury's best courts. There were none of the

garden parties and the iced drinks that made the Gainsborough garden so popular in peace-time—and the tennis was not of pre-war calibre, as when the boys were home. But it was still a retreat—a sanctuary far removed from the Nissen huts and the mud, the bull-dozers and the progress charts and dawn reveilles, and all the dreary ugliness of our private Debach war.

When I moved from Suffolk I could not spend as many week-ends in Sudbury and Gainsborough House. But I managed to come back now and then—getting the last train up from London, walking alone through the cobbled old streets—knowing that hospitality and friends waited in the little inn below the Market Hill. And one beautiful October day I made a special trip to Sudbury—not as a paying guest at the hotel this time—but as a guest at Winnie's wedding.

Winnie married her boss that day, Pilot Officer John Merricks of the R.A.F., who owned the inn, in a beautiful rural setting of the chapel at Edwardstone, overlooking the magnificent Suffolk countryside. We came back to Gainsborough House for the wedding dinner, and stuffed ourselves with food and drinks, and toasted the couple and danced and laughed, as had been done at many another Suffolk wedding for many a century past. But this time the cakes and the fine foods that were set before us had meant weeks of sparing and saving for the whole family—a battle with rationing and with substitutes. We ate all we could of that noble wedding feast, but there was still enough left to feed the Offord family for another week or more. And in thrifty Suffolk and war-time Britain that is just what it did.

I can think of many pleasant nights in the old inns of England—the New Inn of Gloucester (new in A.D. 1450), 'The Peahen' of St. Albans, 'The Peacock and Royal' of Boston, the inns of Canterbury and Salisbury and Newcastle and Lincoln, rooming houses from Nottingham to Bristol, Red Cross clubs from Glasgow to Bishop's Stortford. But Gainsborough House is still my favourite English inn.

18

VIVIAN GOODMAN

VIVIAN GOODMAN was one of my first English friends, and through him too, I came to know England. Though with others I began to understand England through observation and through friendship

and through common experience, with Viv Goodman it was through the medium of good solid discussion.

Viv was the assistant manager of the branch of the Midland Bank that stood on the lower corner of Market Hill in Sudbury, and it was to him that I came each morning to change our American money into pound notes, to cash cheques, and to transact whatever banking business our battalion required.

We soon became friends, and I looked forward to our daily meetings over the big oak counter with the polished brass balance scales, when we would follow the meticulous patterns of English banking with almost ritualistic exactness. Each day we would discuss the news of the day, the course of the war, the weather, (and especially its effect on the Suffolk crops) and other matters of importance. Vivian had a vast curiosity about Yanks—why they behaved as they did, where they came from, what they thought of England—and he was anxious that they should know and appreciate his country—for he loved it.

He lived a well-ordered, well-planned, full life. A house that was just the right size for himself and his family, a garden that was just big enough to keep him extremely busy, a safe and secure job in the bank, the comfortable amenities of an occasional beer and a bridge game at the Institute Club, a dance at the 'Four Swans', a walk along the river or up over the hills, a game of tennis on the courts behind the 'Gainsborough'—these were the well-ordered landmarks of his life.

He played seriously and quietly at this game of life—he was a solid young business man, a good family man, he had time to read good books and the farmers' magazines, to listen to the radio, to play with his two beautiful young children, and to serve on the local committees that organized the fêtes, the charity dances, and the entertainments for Allied soldiers. His life was exceedingly well-organized. He gave me a glimpse of the more normal side of English life as it had been before the war, for he represented at its best the conservative, respectable, hard-working middle-class, satisfied on the whole with life, but working hard for the future—for a better world for his children, and for the other children of Sudbury as well. True, his little family automobile was up on blocks in the garage and he rode his bicycle to work; he grew potatoes and onions in his garden instead of roses and tulips, and his vacations were spent at home and not on the beaches of Cornwall or in the hills of Wales. The smooth course of his life was altered

by the war—but the goal was still there, steadfast and plain to see.

I visited him at his home many times, sometimes spending the week-end with him, and at other times coming up for a Sunday dinner and an afternoon in the garden, or at a game of chess. Viv was an ardent gardener; he had been born in Lincolnshire. "Ah, Bob, that's where the real farming land is—the rich dark earth. Marvellous stuff, that Lincolnshire earth! Best crops in England—and highest yield per acre!" His little plot was carefully planned to supply him with vegetables throughout the year—so many rows of brussels sprouts, so many rows of peas, a little plot of onions, carrots, beetroot, potatoes, currant bushes in the corner, a good compost heap, and everything in its proper place. After the day's work at the bank it was a relaxation for him to put on a dirty pair of corduroy trousers and get out into the garden; and he carefully explained to me the high arts of spading earth for potatoes, the types and kinds of fertilizers, the methods of combating wire-worms, and the best brands of onion seeds. Like most passionate farmers, he was jealous of his little plot, and wanted no one else's hand to interfere; the only time he allowed me to help him was in ruling off rows for the onion seeds. I think he was somewhat surprised when the onions sprouted in straight lines after all.

"Dig deep, Bob, dig deep—that's the secret of really preparing the earth for potatoes. Put your whole weight behind the spade and turn over a good foot of earth—no half-way measures for potatoes!"

On rainy Sunday afternoons we stayed indoors, drank a glass of beer, and discussed the differences between the American and English sense of humour, the prominent authors of America to-day, the English educational system, the negro problem in America and how I thought it would be solved, the merits of the Coalition Government, and religion. We would sit before a glowing fire, deep in our armchairs, and put our minds to work on these and other weighty matters. There would be books and photographs to show me, and the talk would turn to pre-war England—the things that I had missed that he hoped I would return some day to see—the great festive markets on Thursdays when the big, prosperous farmers came in to town and consumed fabulous roasts and gallons of beer at the West Suffolk Hotel, the cricket matches on the sports ground on Sunday afternoons, the picnics to the beach at Clacton-on-Sea, the tennis and tea under the trees at Gainsborough House. And he would tell me of some of the other things I should not miss

before I left England—the great cathedrals, the historic old villages, and where there was an exceptionally beautiful landscape.

" Some day you should go over the hills to Lavenham, Bob—there's the most beautiful little Elizabethan village in England. The old Guildhall, the beautiful lath-and-plaster houses, all bright pink and yellow, the wool church. And there's one man left of the old wool-weavers, one man who carried on the trade that made Lavenham rich and famous ! You can still buy from him (if you could get the coupons and if he has the material) the real English home-spun tweeds—and there's none finer in the world, Bob, none finer in the world ! Some Sunday we'll go out to Lavenham on our bicycles and I'll show you around the town and we'll have a drink at 'The Swan'—there's a real old English inn for you ! "

Later in the afternoon Mim, his wife, appeared, and set out large trays before us, and we would have tea and bread and jam and cakes, or often, for my special benefit, coffee instead of tea. Then Michael and Anne would come in to visit. Michael, twelve, handsome, bright, interested in birds' nests and birds' eggs, first in his class in school (" but this local school doesn't measure up to my old school, Bob—Stamford was a good school ! ") and little Anne, too —shy, freckled, snub-nosed and charming. Quick to smile, quick to quarrel with Michael, and quick to weep in remorse when she was reprimanded (or when she had used a Suffolk accent) and then quick to smile through tears.

Many were the days I was indebted to Vivian and Mim and the two children for a restful day remote from all reminders of the army and its regimented life. In the midst of this happy family group I felt at home, at ease, and felt too a sense of freedom and comfortable release. And that is a joy to a soldier in a strange land. Whether I came alone to spend the week-end, whether it was to come with Joan for Sunday tea, whether it was to borrow a bicycle or a book or walk to lanes with Vivian or bike with him to Lavenham, or have a drink and a game of bridge at the club, or to seek his advice across the counter of the bank, he added immeasurably towards making me feel at home in England.

The story of my friendship with Vivian Goodman and his family is bound up with the story of Anglo-American friendship in Sudbury, for there were many other people of this town who were doing the same service for other American soldiers. The story of this friendship is an interesting and happy one, and its success was due in part to the efforts of people like Vivian.

During the first few months after our arrival in England American soldiers were still a novelty in town. The only army unit actually stationed in Sudbury was a tiny post office detachment; and to it each day came perhaps a score of unit mail clerks from the engineer battalions and other scattered army units around Suffolk. Although the people of the town no longer stared or screamed (as one old lady did the first day I walked down North Street) " Why, he's the first one I've seen ! " the few Americans that did frequent Sudbury were easily absorbed and life went on without change. Few soldiers ventured here on their days off; to them it seemed a small, " dead " place, not as accessible as Ipswich or Bury St. Edmunds; there were no places to eat on Sundays, and as yet there was not even a Red Cross Club.

The few Americans that made friends early here found themselves swamped with hospitality, but for the majority Sudbury was unknown—a quiet country market town. As the months went on more and more soldiers came to know it, and to make friends with the people; there was an occasional Allied dance at Victoria Hall; there was a baseball game arranged as a feature of " Wings-for-Victory " savings week, but relationships were still casual and easy. The flood had not yet come.

Those of us who knew what was in prospect for the little town were somewhat uneasy. In a few short months, when the aerodromes were completed, Sudbury would be engulfed by an overwhelming tide of men in olive drab—and the sleepy, serene life of the town would be ended. There would be four aerodromes and a large hospital within easy reach of Sudbury, and there would be others within visiting radius. That would mean 15,000 to 25,000 carefree young fighting men swarming into Sudbury—it would mean the ceaseless roar of Fortresses and Liberators overhead, it would mean trucks careening through the streets day and night, it would mean crowded public houses. And it might mean, now and then, fights—and perhaps even the pretty young girls of Sudbury roaming the streets and clucking at soldiers, as they did in Ipswich and other larger towns. What would be the result of this sudden impact—this American invasion? Would this quiet life be submerged completely? Would the good people of Sudbury batten their hatches and retire behind garden gates and closed doors to wait for peace and a return to normalcy? Would Sudbury, bulging with Americans, begin to groan and ache and long for their departure?

There was a time when I thought this was happening. I had been away from Sudbury for almost a year, and when I returned the American invasion was at its peak. American soldiers were everywhere—on the street corners, in the public houses—in countless aeroplanes overhead; and in trucks and jeeps on the streets. I heard a comment here and there: every American pilot seemed to have a girl in Sudbury, and showed his affection once a day by "buzzing" the town; the public houses were closing earlier and more often; Viv Goodman himself had stopped taking part in Allied activities, "to safeguard his home." Then, it has happened, I thought. Sudbury has had a surfeit of Americans.

But I was dead wrong. Nowhere in England had a finer or more friendly relationship been established than here in my favourite English town. Everywhere were evidences of it. An Anglo-American club had been established, and people like Vivian's friend, Mrs. Newstead, had put days and weeks of work into making it a success. The soldiers came for parties and dances with selected girls in the community, and behaviour was exemplary. Americans had given exhibition baseball games for charity. Americans were being married in Sudbury churches. They had been invited to use the local swimming pool and had reciprocated by teaching Sudbury children to swim and dive. There had been countless personal friendships formed. There were chess matches and bridge parties and tennis meets between the people of Sudbury and the soldiers. There were dinners for Sudbury guests at the aerodromes and dances for Sudbury girls at the hospital. There were picnics and fêtes; sometimes a group of Sudbury people invited the soldiers, and sometimes the soldiers invited Sudbury children for big parties—as they did at Christmas-time. Americans had fallen into the swing of Sudbury life and were taking part in it; few Sudbury homes were lacking in American friends.

Vivian explained his own reason for restricting his once-active part in the activities. "It wasn't a sudden dislike for Americans, Bob. It was just the opposite. We had so many friends, we had so many invitations, there were so many committee meetings, that we found our family life to be suffering. One night dinner at the aerodrome, the next night a tennis match, the next night a committee of some kind—our children began to be strangers to us. We just had to stop to devote more time to our home and to Michael and Anne. We couldn't keep the pace and we couldn't return the invitations; for we hadn't the rations to do it. But never were friendships

stronger, Bob, and never feelings better between us and you Americans.

" And in spite of the thousands of them here ; in spite of what people feared, they behaved themselves here in fine fashion. I think you'll find that true everywhere. People take a hint from the standards set for them. Here we did everything to set a high standard, and you boys responded. No, there were no regrettable incidents with the young girls—well, perhaps one or two in all those months. But I can't recall a single fight in town. When a chap appeared at the Anglo-American club slightly the worse for beer, two of your lads quietly escorted him out, and that was the end of the matter.

" Why, we've had Sudbury girls marrying American soldiers, and I know of at least one American who is going to stay here after the war and take up farming in East Anglia !

" No, Bob, any fears we had that Americans would spoil Sudbury or change it for the worst, were proved wrong. You've given us a lot of fun, and some new ideas, and perhaps even a new spirit here. We've got a lot to be thankful to you for, and there were lots of fine lads who flew out from Sudbury and didn't come back. We're not going to forget any of it.

" And I'm still coming out to America to visit you after the war ! "

19

IS YOUR JOURNEY REALLY NECESSARY ?

My first taste of austerity travel on the railways of Britain came the day following our arrival in Scotland. The date was 18th August, and the newspapers were full of the first American air raid on France. Late that evening we marched down from Bellahouston Park and loaded our duffle into a long, dirty troop train. We did not know how long the journey was to be, or where we were going, but we did know that we would be sitting up eight men to a compartment throughout the night.

As the train pulled out of the station the sky was growing dark, and we looked out of the windows curiously, noting with interest each feature of the hilly, quiet countryside of Lanarkshire. But it soon blackened, and as we strained our eyes through the windows we could see nothing, not even a single light. It was like a continuous ride in an endless tunnel, and it was vastly impressive. This

was our first experience with the blackout. We marvelled at its completeness.

The compartment became hot and uncomfortable, and sprawled, snoring bodies soon made it almost unbearable. One by one the men moved out into the passage, and lay down on the dirty floor to sleep. I found that the next car forward was an empty baggage car, and spread my shelter-half[1] on the floor. When I awoke the next morning, stiff and bruised, I found the floor of the car covered with other sleeping soldiers. We were at Ely—high up on a hill overlooking the flat farmland stood the ancient cathedral.

"Ely! Where the hell is that?" someone asked. I drew back in my memory and scrawled a rough map of England on an envelope.

"It's just about here," I said, "and I can't figure out why we are going through Ely. I thought we were headed for the south of England."

The countryside flew past, and more familiar names of unfamiliar places flashed by. Newmarket, Bury St. Edmunds—Ipswich! We stopped at Ipswich for some time, and then moved off again. Finally the train drew into a little country siding, and the sign said Wickham Market! Here we were then. Who ever heard of Wickham Market? New York, Halifax, Glasgow, Wickham Market! That was probably the first train in the history of England that had gone non-stop from Glasgow to Wickham Market, Suffolk, but trains were doing many strange things in those memorable days. And we were to experience even stranger things than that during the following two years.

Travel around Britain by train was a confusing proposition to the foreign soldier. Not only were the stations unmarked, but the station porters who called their names were almost unintelligible to us. I remember one of the first trips I made, travelling up from London on a suburban line. I was destined for a town that we shall call Wentbridge. I bought my ticket, and as I walked through the gate I asked the girl how far it was. "Change at Swumley," she said (I thought). "Third stop."

I got into the train and started looking for Swumley. The first station had a large sign that said "*HOVIS*." That was obviously not Swumley. The second station was marked "*VIROL*" in equally prominent letters. Sounds like a medicine, I thought. Funny name for a town. The third stop had no distinguishable name at all, but the porter cried out "Walloop!" That, too, couldn't possibly

[1] Ground-sheet.

be Swumley. I began to feel trapped. Surely we had passed the station where I was to change. The next station was clearly marked "*HOVIS*" again. By then I was desperate. I swung off the train and asked the first person I saw, "Is this Swumley?"

"Swumley?" he asked, politely. "There's no place by that name on this line."

"It's where you change for Wentbridge."

"Oh! You wanted Swamberleigh! That was the last but one. I'm afraid you've passed it. But if you wait here you can get another train back in about three hours."

But how was I to know that Hovis and Virol were not stations, but products that the "Best Bakers Bake" and that "Nursing Mothers Need," respectively? How was I to guess that the names of the towns might be found—sometimes—on little signs one inch high that were invisible at night?

During those early days railway compartments were interesting places, because the appearance of an American in uniform immediately became the cue for conversation, with everyone taking part. British reserve was only slightly in evidence in those days. Your entrance into the compartment was greeted by smiles. For the next few minutes everyone looked at you, friendly, curious, anxious to start talking, but yet hesitant to be so outspoken as to say the first word. Finally the American cigarettes would appear and be passed around, to be accepted with thanks, and then the first, inevitable question, "How do you like this country?" If the answer was "I like it," you were accepted—the conversation from then on never slackened to the end of the journey. It started on general topics, the weather, the course of the war, the landscape, the English food and the English beer. It was dotted with questions about America, "Are you from Texas?" "Have you ever seen a gangster?" "Do you live in a penthouse?" Negative answers to all three questions were obviously disappointing, but as time went on the British travelling public began to realize that there was much more to America than Hollywood had ever permitted them to suppose.

If it were a long journey, the conversation eventually got around to personal matters, and war experiences would be encountered, air-raid advice, recommendations for sight-seeing tours, and finally —usually at the last hasty minute of arrival, and exchange of names, addresses—"Look me up if you are ever in Bournemouth."

But short or long, these journeys by rail never failed to provide

entertainment and companionship and often that rarer good fortune, friendship and understanding.

There was the little old lady and her husband who questioned me on the night train out from Reading, and told me, when I admitted that I missed my own country, that their son had been in the Middle East for four years, and how well they knew what it meant to be away from one's family.

There was the young ATS girl who told me all about her life in the army, and how she was a cook at an officers' mess, and how dull it was to be a cook, but fortunate too, because you could eat so well. And how she had been home to Manchester on leave to see her mother, who was all alone, and how glad she would be to get out of olive drab khaki and into the brightest red dress she could find. She was a pretty girl with brown hair, and her name was Jessie.

And there was the young woman with the baby going down to London to meet her husband, a sailor just home from the Mediterranean, and embarrassed when her baby wet herself, and still more embarrassed, but grateful, when I helped her change the child on the compartment seat, getting myself well soaked in the process.

There was the " awfully nice " girl from Harpenden, who had never talked to an American before, because her mother didn't think it was proper, because of what some people said about Americans. She, too, was in the ATS, and she, too, had been home for a week-end. And we talked about many things, modern music, and the difference between theatres in America and in England. And I tried hard to prove to her that there were all sorts of Americans—good and bad—in this great huge democratic army of ours. And I think I succeeded, because when we parted at Euston station she was on the very point of giving me her name, and she did say, " I wonder what my mother would say if you should come for dinner Sunday sometime." And then she thought it over, and shook her head a little sadly. And then took her week-end case from my hand, turned, and walked away, with a lingering smile and a hesitant, reluctant wave of the hand.

There were others ; the two Guards soldiers who told me the inside story of the Conservative Party, and why Winston Churchill would be out after the first election. . . . The gentleman farmer on the train from Lincoln, who told me the secrets of growing healthy potatoes and lovely tulips. . . . And the two Suffolk lads on the Newmarket–Ipswich train who asked me all about the " Yon-

kie Army ", and laughed because I couldn't understand their talk, and told me that they had not been allowed into an American camp. " Thocht Oy moyt be a jeerie spoyee, ee did ! Whoyee, oyee speak English, dun't oyee ? " But then they saw me smile, and I looked around the compartment, and the others were listening and smiling too. Yes, we all speak English, don't we ? Not 'arf !

And there were others. The young Land Army girl on the Birmingham train—so slight, so fair, such a sensitive young face. Talking to me about milking cows and pitching hay and picking plums—telling me how toughened and hardened and rugged she had become with her outdoor life ; but she gave herself away, and she knew it, when she gasped with delight as we passed a wheat field drenched with the bright blood of poppies.

And you, tall, amber-eyed girl from Clare. Do you remember that evening train down to London ? The book you were reading about ballet dancing ; and how surprised you were when the dirty dusty soldier next to you in the unpressed uniform asked for the book, and told you that he had seen some of those ballerinas once, and how the conversation led from ballet to Degas, and from French paintings to landscapes, and from landscapes to the soft Suffolk countryside, and then to the brilliant, colour-spattered deserts of Arizona ? No, you don't remember, you could not remember how your amber eyes grew wide as you imagined these things, and then soft with the longing that was in you to see them yourself one day. You were lovely that evening, my tall slender girl from Clare. I never knew your name, and we shall never meet again—but the miles sped quickly to London that evening, and I hope that you will see our Arizona in April some day when the palo-verde blooms.

We rode " Third Class " in those days, because that is what the furlough-rate ticket called for, when you were just a sergeant. It was more fun, too, third class, because the talk came quicker, and the laughter more often, and you met the very best people of the kingdom here. People like Peter, leading aircraftsman, who bought me a beer with his last shilling in Paddington. And the young couple from Northampton, who shared their sandwiches and apples with me, and told me why they were living in Northampton now, after three houses had been bombed out in London. And blonde Peggy of Piccadilly, the candid prostitute.

Several memorable journeys stand out among the hundreds that I made during those two years. There was the ghost passage that

I made one night on the last train down from Cambridge to Sudbury on a Sunday night in winter.

The porter at the station directed me to the train, standing in a siding on the far end of the station. I climbed into a compartment, and waited. Already I was an hour late, but apparently the train would be later than that. Two hours after its scheduled departure time it slowly, silently, without warning glided out of the station. My compartment was darkened, like the rest of the car. I tried all the switches, but none would induce a light to come on. At each station the stationmaster was walking up the platform, swinging his lantern, calling out the name of the stop. But no passengers got off, and none got on. I was alone in my compartment, and (I soon discovered) all alone in the car.

Our train muggered along through the darkened Suffolk landscape, stopping at all the little stations dutifully, obediently—waiting patiently for the passengers who never arrived. I began to wonder whether there were any other passengers at all on the silent, dark, mysterious train. I sat in the darkness and waited.

Finally we arrived in Sudbury. No whistle—no stationmaster. I climbed down from the train. Not a soul in sight. Out of curiosity I walked forward to the engine, to see who was driving this ghost train. There was no one in the cab! I turned and walked up the steps, over the bridge, down the steps, and out of the station, my ticket still clutched in my moist palm. No one was there to take my ticket. And as I turned up Station Road towards my room at Gainsborough's House, I heard the slow clacking of the wheels as my crew-less, passenger-less, ghost train moved off into the darkness towards Marks Tey.

I let myself in by the little green gate, climbed to my cubby-hole room and went to bed, without having seen a soul. The next morning I told Winnie of my weird, unbelievable journey. "Why," she exclaimed, "there's no night train scheduled from Cambridge on Sundays! That ten-thirty is a week-day train! You must have been dreaming."

"Look, Winnie," I said, "I'm here! And yesterday noon I was in Lincoln! And I didn't walk." But to this day no one will believe my ghost-train story.

Travelling the length of England, or out anywhere from London was difficult enough, but the train-traveller never experiences real trouble until he tries to go cross-wise through England. It is then that he discovers the really forgotten spur lines, then that he learns

real patience, and wonders and marvels, and finally learns why it is that most people prefer to travel hundreds of miles down to London and then return by another line rather than travel fifty miles cross-country. One argosy of that type brought Peter Lashe and me, one rainy afternoon in March, to the last home of the iron horse, a wooden shack flaunting the name of Dukeries Junction.

Our trip had started in an incredible fashion. We had raced to the Peterborough station, hoping to catch the 10.15 train north. We tore through the station, asking the RTO for directions, and then raced, puffing and panting, to platform five. A train was just pulling out. We asked the inevitable porter, "Is that the 10.15 to York?"

"No," he said. "That's the 8.20. The 10.15 will be the third train in on this platform. Plenty of time." We looked at the clock. It was 10.35.

The 10.15 finally pulled in, and we wedged our way aboard. Sometime later, and much dirtier, we found ourselves at Doncaster, and an hour later, at Dukeries Junction, somewhere out in the middle of the Yorkshire Moors. Our train to Hull would arrive in another hour. We walked the platform. There was nothing to see but high embankments on both sides. It started to rain. A train came down the track. It didn't stop. Another train came down the track. It was a freight train. An hour went by. We sat in the little shed, listening to the talk of three old railroaders, talking about the comparative merits of the British and the Yankee engines. They had many criticisms of the Yank engine—the brakes—the location of the gadgets, the power—but in the end they came to an agreement. "It's a good little engine," they said. They talked about the young, irresponsible boys that were working on the railways, against their will, these days. No sense of duty. Didn't care whether a train was on time or five hours late. Sometimes didn't even bring the train through at all. Not like the old days, no, not like the good old days.

And still it poured, and still we ran out of the shed at the approach of every train, and still they all went past. Finally we decided that we had had enough of Dukeries Junction, and that we could catch the first train in either direction—no matter where it was going.

And just then, our train, all two cars of it, chuffed in. A couple of hours later we were in Hull. We were five hours late, it was dark and raining, and how we got a place to sleep in that crowded town that night is another story.

I loved to ride on those trains, though they angered me and tried my patience every time. When I was riding the LNER I was certain that this, of all the railways I had ever seen, was the worst. When I was riding the LMS, I wasn't certain after all but what this was even worse. And certainly, the Great Western seemed no better. But when we thought about the incredible Conditions under which railways were operating in those days, we forgave them. There was the time on the LNER when a lucky bomb had split the centre of an embankment between Chelmsford and Shenfield, just ahead of a train. It took three days to fish that locomotive out of the hole with cranes. Everyone said, " Why don't they just blow the thing up and fill in the hole ? " But every locomotive was needed and they worked on it night and day for three days, and shuttled passengers around the obstacle by bus.

There were the trains that came into Peterborough North—and the connecting train left from Peterborough East, a mile away through the town, just twenty minutes later, and no way to get there but to run, dragging your baggage behind you like a mule hitched to a balky plough.

There was the time in the train going out to Watford, when I closed my eyes and dozed off, to be suddenly awakened by an ominous roar, to find everyone else crouched on the floor. Showing my usual lightning reaction to danger, I froze where I was, and the buzz-bomb passed overhead to crash a mile away. Brave, these Yanks. Don't know what fear is !

There was the train in Scotland that got completely bogged down somewhere between Loch Lomond and the Glasgow station, when I had just one hour to catch another train to Gourock to meet a third train that was taking an Air Force squadron to King's Cliffe, on which I was to be escorting officer. My flight to catch that last train will ever be a nightmare in my mind, involving a jump from a crawling train, a run for half a mile along the track, a slow tram-car into town, the last bus to Gourock, and then another mile run to the pier . . . just in time to swing aboard the already-moving troop train to King's Cliffe.

Yes, train travel in England was fun those days. Is that a grey hair I see, just above my wrinkled brow ?

20

LONDON AFTER DARK

LONDON during these months was one of the worst crowded cities of the world, and one of the most fascinating. It was full of people during the week days and on week-day evenings. It was even more crowded on Saturdays, and on Saturday evenings it was almost bedlam, especially in those parts of town where Americans on leave congregated. I always thought of London as the hub of the world in those days. Here was not only the throbbing heart of the British Empire, but here too was the capital-in-exile of half a dozen other nations. Here the strategy and plans were being conceived, from here the vast armed forces were being marshalled and directed, and on London were the eyes of the world. Battered and dirty, worn and scarred, it swarmed with scores of different uniforms, and it spoke in a hundred different tongues. No matter where you were going in the United Kingdom, you had to go through London, and no matter how long you stayed you never saw it all. London was the Babel, the Metropolis, the Mecca. London was It.

The centre of London on a Saturday night was Piccadilly Circus. Here was a microcosm of the whole—a combination of crossroads, entertainment centre, restaurant centre, and meeting-place. Here was a bawdy, rowdy ant-hill that moved in three dimensions and on four levels and in a dozen different spheres. You could not see it all at a glance—it was a shifting kaleidoscope that only now and then came sharply into focus and then blurred again, leaving fleeting images on the mind. Piccadilly had everything.

It had soldiers, sailors, and airmen in uniform, looking for fun. Americans, British, French, Canadians, Norse, Poles, Belgians, Czechs, Dutch—you could run down a roster of Allied nations and find all their representatives here in a moment or two. The Americans surged in a never-ending tide around the Rainbow Corner—milling their way in and out of that mammoth beehive, in search of friends, food, dancing, of an hour's sleep before a train left, or of a bed for the night.

From the Rainbow Corner the Americans flowed out and around the Circus. Some were in search of restaurants and theatres. Some were in search of bars and beer. Some were looking for girls.

The girls were there—everywhere. They walked along Shaftesbury Avenue and past the Rainbow Corner, pausing only when there was no policeman watching. Down at the Lyons' Corner House on Coventry Street they came up to soldiers waiting in doorways and whispered the age old questions. At the Underground entrance they were thickest, and as the evening grew dark they shone torches on their ankles as they walked, and bumped into the soldiers, murmuring, " Hello, Yank." " Hello, soldier." " Hello, dearie ! " Sometimes they were drunk and then they would stand and shout at each other, and sometimes come to blows. Around the darker estuaries of the Circus the more elegantly clad of them would stand quietly and wait—expensive and aloof. No privates or corporals for these haughty demoiselles. They had furs and silks to pay for.

Down in the Circus, standing on the kerb, were the men who pretended to sell newspapers. " *Poybeeb ! Poybeeb !* " they shouted, " *News . . . Standard . . . Star* ! " But if you walked close to them you could hear them mumble about something else they were selling, and if you asked them for a newspaper, they turned and growled, ' *G'wan beat it !* " There were other salesmen, too. There was always a man who came up to you and offered to sell you a bottle of whisky, for four pounds or more. There was the man who could take you to a " bottle-party " where you could drink and dance as late as you pleased. And there was the man who would buy your fountain pen.

The people surged everywhere. At the Newsreel Theatre they look at the framed pictures on the bill-board for a moment, and then went in to pass an hour. At the Brasserie across the Circus they looked askance at the burly doorman, and ducked in for a quick meal. At the shop across the street there were huge sandwiches of meat paste—or was it fish? At the " Swan and Edgar " corner two ATS police girls stood with red bands on their hats—prim, austere, guardians of the gentler sex in uniform. Bobbies, too, moved among the crowds, their coal-scuttle hats standing above the heads of the people. In pairs and in fours the white-helmeted American police patrolled the streets, and the girls whispered at them " Snowball ! " There were frowsy women who lurched along in a private dream, muttering to themselves, and beggars playing the violin for pennies at the theatre queues ; there were people standing in the streets shouting at taxis that would not stop.

There were little bars and public houses down Denman Street

and Dean Street where the prostitutes drank and got drunk and forgot their profession, to wander home alone to their little rooms in the alleys back of Tottenham Court Road. There were the shiny, brightly-lighted restaurants in the hotels where bands played and the atmosphere was sultry and the waiters were dressed in black, and the bill was large. Up on the roofs of these buildings there were lonely men and women standing on fire guard waiting for the sirens and the bombs that might follow them.

Down below the ground, too, the activity is intense. On the first level of the Underground there are swarms of people moving in all directions, people waiting by the telephone booths and pondering the ticket-machines. This is where you kiss your girl good night and where the sailors burst into song and where the military police stop soldiers and ask to see their passes.

As you take the long escalator down to the second level there is always someone sitting on the moving steps, and always a Canadian soldier who is lost. And then the third level where the wind blows dust in your face, and more steps to run down, and then the fourth level, hundreds of feet underground, where the trains run to Watford. Here is Pat in her grey smock, with her back to the tracks, hands in her pockets, running the show. "Stanmore Line! All stations to Stanmore! No, this is not the Watford train! Hurry up, please, there! Step lively now! Mind the *Doors*! Mind the doors, please, there! Stanmore train! Last train to Watford is 11.37. Hurry up, please!"

Pat stands there by the hour, being shoved and pushed and yelled at, and not too tired to have her little joke. "Austerity travelling there," she shouts. "Move right down in the cars, please!" There's the tall, blonde girl in an evening wrap who suddenly breaks into an operatic aria down in that windy tunnel! Everyone stops to listen, and when she finishes they all applaud—even the austere old British colonel! And when the Watford train comes at last, there's a fellow in the car playing a violin. Just playing it for music, not for money. And when he leaves at Baker Street, a sailor comes in and starts to sing. He dances up and down the aisle, favouring each passenger with a tune and a smile, and soon everyone is singing together. "I'm Just a Little Sparrer," we all sing. And "Dear Luvverpool!" And "I Belong to Glasgow" and "Nellie Dean." We all sing, the moustached man in spats with the silver-topped cane, the labourer with the smudged face and the burlap bag on the floor between his legs, the four sailors and the French soldier who

doesn't know the words, the sentimental middle-aged lady and the little fellow with the big pipe. They all sing, all but the lovers in the middle seat. They just sit and hold each other tightly, the girl looking up at him dreamily, lost in clouds. They hear nothing, they are far away ;—this RAF pilot and his girl.

But back in the Circus, up on the surface, there is life still. It is getting late now, and the other sections of London are quiet now except for an occasional footstep, but there is yet life in old Piccadilly. There's a commotion down towards Leicester Square, and a shout is heard, coming closer up Coventry Street. And then into sight comes a strange group-two Bobbies, and struggling between them, his arms flung out as if he were being crucified, a wild-haired, pale young man. He flings his head from side to side, he kicks out his legs in all directions, but the Bobbies have a firm grip and they move slowly across the Circus. As the writhing figure moves, he bawls at the top of his voice, " COMMUNISM ! COMMUNISM ! COMMUNISM ! "

A voice at your elbow says quietly, " Whut oi'd loik to know is—is he *for* or *against* ? "

As the bars and public houses close there is a brief flood of people again. This is the second of three tides. The first came when the theatres emptied their crowds at half-past nine. The " Closing Time " crowds are the second. And the third will come an hour later with the rush for the last train home. After the last trains leave, there are still a few girls walking the streets, still a few maudlin groups of soldiers—like-as-not lost, like-as-not unconcerned about it—progressing with determination toward some uncertain goal. In the dark shadows of Air Street a soldier leans against a doorway and goes to sleep. Down in Great Windmill Street a late lingering girl, quite drunk, tries to convince a timid airman to come home with her—for seven quid.

Now and then the pale blue glow of lights moves through the streets and disappears to a chorus of " TAXI ! " from all sides. Piccadilly Circus is almost through for the night now. There are a few night clubs open, if you have the money and know where they are. But they are hot, noisy, cheap—their music is bad and the liquor that you must buy by the bottle tastes like the bottom of a tanning vat.

The Circus is almost quiet now. In the distance a pale grey " S " hangs from the doorway of a shelter, and the tiny lights on the avenue click from red to green, but the rest is darkness. The wind

blow scraps of paper and refuse across the pavement, and in the distance you can hear the piping note of a policeman's whistle. On the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue are two sailors and two girls singing. One of them has an oil lantern in his hand. He walks out into the precise middle of the street, swinging his lantern from side to side, and he urinates.

This is London at war, this is England—or a small part of it—with its hair down. Piccadilly—dirty, maudlin, tumultuous—fascinating, obscene.

Good night, Piccadilly—time to call it a day.

21

AMERICANS AND BRITONS

MUTUAL understanding came slowly to the people of England and to the American soldiers among them, and in three distinct stages. These stages were not universal throughout the country, but highly personal, individual experiences for each Briton and each American, moving in slow progression from the first stage (sceptical regard based on preconceived ideas and first impressions) to the second stage (new discoveries arising from personal acquaintance) and then to the third stage (new conclusions drawn, based on actual experiences). Thus the arc swung from the general to the specific, and then back to a new, revised general again.

For each person, British or American, this path took a different course. Some few never got beyond the first stage. Theirs was a preconceived notion, fixed in the mind by their schooling, by fiction, perhaps by motion pictures—by all the things that give the peoples of one country a mass personality in the eyes of another country. To the American, Britain was a small, backward country (all old-world countries are backward to Americans), peopled by a conservative, formal, law-abiding, intelligent race of whom we must be slightly suspicious (remember the phrase "Perfidious Albion" and remember the American Revolution and the non-payment of the last war's debts and the hidden power of the British Empire.) To the Briton, the American was a representative of a big, noisy, awkward young country, not quite civilized, somewhat lawless, and always boastful. To the closed minded, the impatient, the unyielding on both sides, the idea was to shut the eyes to anything that might

alter these notions; accept only evidence that would fortify these conceptions, and stay as far from the ruddy Yanks or the damned Limies as possible. And so, for some, the first stage was never passed.

Fortunately, there were many more who went beyond—many with curiosity and open minds, who saw in this unparalleled mass migration an opportunity for peoples, for the first time in history, to get to know each other as they really are. Not merely the moneyed tourists, not merely the intellectual and the political ambassadors, not merely the distorted caricatures on the screen or in the Wodehouse novel; but the common man, the man in the street and in his home—not coming as an invader or an army of occupation, but as a friend and an ally, and fighting for a common cause. For these many the understanding progressed to the second phase, which was personal acquaintance.

The tall man behind the bank counter becomes Mr. Goodman, adviser and counsellor, and then he becomes Vivian, genial host, raconteur, passionate gardener, family man, and friend. The Yank sergeant becomes Sergeant Arbib, New Yorker, and then he becomes Bob, amateur naturalist, writer of advertising, part-time clown, and friend. With the discovery, made thousands of times, came the realization that the Americans in Britain were not a homogeneous mass, looking, thinking, and acting alike, but that there were as many personalities among them as there were numbers, and that each must be judged individually, on his own merits and by his own standards. And the Americans discovered at the same moment that the British were not an amorphous national mass—that it was just as false to group Vivian Goodman with Sheriff Moody or Iris Harding with Major Sir Jocelyn Lucas, as it was to lump us all together under the anonymous heading of " Yank soldier ".

The discoveries of this second stage came as a pleasant shock to millions of people on both sides. For the British, it was a shock to find that we did not all swagger like West Texas cowboys, that we were not all facially equipped like Hollywood idols, and that we did not speak much like gangsters from Chicago's South Side. Somehow we represented all America, but each of us only represented his own community and his own environment—himself. We came from little places like Bethel, Maine and Las Cruces, New Mexico and Jeanette, Pennsylvania. We had been rich, poor, intelligent and ignorant, good and bad. We had to be judged individually and known individually before we could be judged. You had to look

behind the uniform and the bright decorations that didn't (yet) represent mortal combat—and look for the man.

When you asked about the political situation at home, or the negro problem, or the state of education in America, you had to shrewdly judge the man you were questioning. Where did he come from? How much of America did he know? What was his background and for whom could he speak? The answer was always the same. He could speak for himself alone.

The Americans were experiencing the same pleasant shock for themselves. They found that they had been utterly misled by what they had heard and read of Britain. We found that there were other groups in Britain besides an arrogant aristocracy, an ignorant, comical class known as "cockneys" and the ubiquitous English butler. We began to note variations in speech and behaviour, we began to form bases for judging the people we met, and we came to the realization that Britons were not just a bunch of Limies, but individuals just like ourselves.

With this second stage came a truer international understanding than two nations have ever had before. Never, certainly, had so many citizens of one land come to live, work and play side by side with the people of another. It is true that on neither side were conditions truly typical. The American representation was a selected group from the national life—predominantly male of certain ages, separated from their homes, living under military conditions, training and being primed for a fight. They lacked the softening influence that comes from homes, wives, mothers, and families, and the restraint that is imposed by the home community, where one must live in harmony with his neighbours. But in representing all social groups, all geographic areas, all walks of life —it was a true cross-section. On the British side, too, life was not normal. It was a country changed by war, a country in which a large section of the male population was missing and in which normal family life was disrupted. But still, the British character and the British way of life remained for us to see.

After the second stage, which is continuous and cumulative, came the third stage, of evaluating these impressions and friendships, and going back to remould our generalizations. But now our conceptions were based on the firm rock of real experience, and not on legend.

The British were reserved and formal, we had heard. But now, as we looked back to the ten, thirty, fifty English people we knew best—were they cold, unfriendly, distant? The British were proud,

arrogant, and unbending. But did that apply to the shelterers in the Russell Square underground station, or the factory girls of Ipswich—to Joan or to Frank or to Eric? The British were tough, stubborn, courageous. Yes, perhaps now that you knew them individually you could see that. Iris, driving herself hard each day at her war job; Philip, the slight, slender, boyish test pilot; Fred, soft-spoken and modest and a veteran of two commando raids—yes, when you thought back on those you had known, this was a legend that might be based on fact. But you could not tell by looking at them. You had to know them—each by each. The Americans were noisy and boastful. But surely not modest, hard-working George Silver. Surely not Ralph from Detroit, who played the violin with the local orchestra on his evenings off. The Americans were spendthrifts and carefree. But what about Shorty, who was buying farmland in Alabama, or Harry, who never left camp? The Americans were not quite civilized. But what about Joe Howard and his books, or Hig and his methodical brilliance, and what about Meredith and the poetry he wrote sitting in the cab of his truck?

No, we found, you could not tell just by looking at them. You had to know them, each by each.

22

EVENING ON THE RIVER

SUDBURY's river is the Stour, pronounced "Stoor", and it is a lovely river, made justly famous by the paintings of Suffolk's two native sons, Constable and Gainsborough. From Sudbury to the sea it winds its way through a verdant valley, with rolling slopes on both sides, dotted with red-roofed villages, squat, square grey churches, and the neat Suffolk fields, enclosed in their modelled hedgerows, curving up to the sky.

From Sudbury it winds down through willow groves, where primroses make golden carpets in spring, down past big old mills, under arched stone bridges, evenly, smoothly, past old Bures, and the Colnes to Bergholt and the marshy reaches of the sea at Manningtree.

By American standards it would not be a river at all, hardly more than a brook, a stream, or a creek—but in England it is a river indeed—with as much personality in its quiet way as the Hudson,

the St. Lawrence, the Susquehanna. It is a stream for leisurely fishing, for idle boating—a haunt for swans and for moorhens, for slow walks along the river bank, and for meadows where the village cattle graze.

At Sudbury the meadows are broad and green, and the river flows close to the edge of the old buildings that spring up from its eastern bank. You can walk down to the river across the green in front of St. Gregory's Church, cross a little bridge and sit on a bench under the plane trees, and look out across the meadows to the fields that rise beyond them, and the line of tall trees crowning them. You cannot get much closer to the heart of England anywhere.

I spent a quiet hour under the plane trees by the River Stour one October afternoon, waiting for the time to come for my train to take me back to Ipswich.

It was warm, and the waning sun cast a glow on the meadows, caught and held the topmost leaves of the elms around the tower of St. Gregory's, shone on the still water of the river. It was a pale, hallowed, golden glow that John Constable had seen many times in this river valley. Thomas Gainsborough had painted it, too, and my friend Vivian Goodman often spoke of it as if there were a peculiar arc of sky that somehow lingered exclusively over the Stour river valley. And perhaps he was right.

I sat and looked over the meadows, and lit a cigarette. Presently an old man came along with a dog, leading his cows. The cows stopped and eyed me, slowly and patiently, each in their turn, and then moved off down the path and turned over the bridge, paused, and then lumbered out on to the meadow. "Evening," said the old man.

"Evening," I answered.

A boy came along with a basket of apples, and offered me an apple, turning his basket to find me a bright red one. "Cox's Orange," he told me. "Good eating apples. You can tell when they are ripe if you hear the pips rattle." So we shook the apples until we heard the pips rattle, and then we each ate one.

We sat very still for a moment, both of us enjoying the quiet scene, and watching the swans preening in the reeds at the river edge. "I was doawn here this morning," the boy said, "just afore sun-up, to gather mushrooms. Lots of mushrooms on the midders this toim of year," he explained. "But you've got to get here early to find them. Everyone comes early for mushrooms."

I pictured the meadows in the grey dawn, with slow-moving

figures bending to gather mushrooms—here was a picture Constable had missed.

" Well, tea-toim," said the boy. " Cheerio, then," and he walked away.

Two young lads came up the path, well dressed in grey flannel knee-length trousers and school jackets with little green peaked school caps, and threw stones at the swans and wondered audibly why someone had not caught them and eaten them. The swans paid little attention to their pebbles and presently the boys ran off across the bridge and up the hill.

More small boys appeared, ragged and dirty. They stopped and said, " Hello, Yank . . . want some walnuts ? " They showed me their stuffed pockets, and the brown stain that walnut-gathering always makes on the hands. " Takes days to come off," they said, proudly. " Do you gather walnuts in America ? " We talked for a while about America, and I accepted a handful of walnuts, and then they, too, said good evening, and left me.

The shadows had lengthened across the green meadows, and the water in the Stour river had darkened almost to black. For once, there was not a plane to be heard in the sky, and the only sound was the pleasant curl of water under the bridge, and somewhere in the distance a robin singing his tentative, dreamy evening song.

You would never have known that there was a war being fought on this island and elsewhere in the world. Or that this was the twentieth, and not the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Not until you looked across the meadow again, and saw, white and ugly under a copse of willows, like one monstrous overgrown mushroom, a concrete pillbox.

Perhaps some day soon they will uproot those ugly mushrooms, spaced almost every hundred yards down the river valley all the way to the sea, hiding behind knolls, lurking in the underbush, under the willows. Perhaps they will be left there, to gather moss and then grass and then to be split up by the roots of trees, as relics of an age, a strange, incongruous footnote to Suffolk history.

The bell in St. Peter's tolled, and I rose to go for my train—making the most incongruous note of all—a man in American soldier's clothes, moving slowly through an English scene. . . .

23

SUDBURY CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS is a quiet, family, churching day in Sudbury, a day to be spent at home, in visiting friends, and in walks about the countryside. But Christmas evening and Boxing Day—the day following Christmas—are the times for feasts and revelry in Sudbury, as they are in all England.

I got quietly and happily unsober on Christmas night in Sudbury, in keeping with the prevalent spirit of the town, which was not one of strict sobriety. It started at Daphne's house, where we had had a big Christmas dinner and had fallen asleep in chairs around the fire, passing a wet, cheerless afternoon in quiet comfort. Later in the afternoon we had some tea, with whisky to go with it. And then some more tea and more whisky.

Then we went next door to 'The Half Moon', and went in the back door, because Daphne's friend, Phyllis, was the publican's daughter. We sat in the back room of 'The Half Moon' drinking ales and ' gin and bitters ' and playing with Phyllis's handsome son, Rodney. Phyllis had given him a box of coloured cardboard squares and discs for Christmas, and I thought it was high time that Rodney, aged two, should be able to tell red from yellow and green. But it evidently wasn't.

We sat around the back room, Daphne and Daphne's mother and Phyllis, whose husband was in the Middle East, and Phyllis's father and mother, and Rodney. And presently others came—Doreen and her sister from across the street, and a young man I never saw again, and presently, old George. Old George was eighty, a big, bluff, ruddy man, and his old pewter mug was filled with a pint of dark. He sat by the fire, leaning on his cane, and never said a word.

Daphne kissed him good evening, which he liked, and his eyes followed the blonde girl wherever she went. When he felt like a sip of the beer, he would nod at the mug, and Daphne would hand it to him from the table, and he would drink, and hand the mug back to Daphne. Doreen played a few songs on the old piano in the corner, and we sang. Phyllis's father got out the bottles of whisky he had been saving for Christmas and we had drinks all round. Then each of us bought another round of drinks and we laughed a lot about the sprig of mistletoe under the doorway.

Presently Rodney was put to bed, and Daphne and Phyllis and I stepped out into the rainy black night, and went down to 'The Royal Oak' to see who was about. But first we stopped at 'The Christopher' and had a 'bitter', and then we stopped at 'The Bear' and said hello to everyone and played the pin-ball machine. And then we went on to 'The Royal Oak.'

'The Oak', as it was popularly called, was an old oak-beamed, low-ceilinged pub with tiny rooms, but it was always popular, crowded, and considered one of the better-class pubs in Sudbury. . . . To-night it was jammed, and noisy, and clouded with blue smoke, and decorated with evergreens and holly. Everyone was talking, shouting, laughing, singing; you need not know anyone or introduce yourself or feel strange in 'The Oak' on Christmas night, for once you stepped into the room a drink was thrust into your hand, and you were in a roomful of friends. Each one tried to out-shout, out-laugh, and out-drink the other.

We met Clem here—a local merchant, and he joined our threesome with an armful of glasses. The smoke thickened, the noise and the heat increased, and the whole room spun about. Outside it was black, wet, chill, but there were occasional sounds of singing from the street. Sudbury was having a ruddy good Christmas. Only the observers on the rooftops faced the mist and listened with sober, thoughtful, keening ears and eyes. There had been an alert earlier in the day—the bombs had dropped somewhere in East Anglia, as they did almost every day, but to-night, all was quiet—above.

It was inside these islands of good cheer—the little cells of life and excitement and fellowship—at 'The Royal Oak' and 'The Bear', 'The Black Boy' and 'The Red Cow', 'The Anchor' and 'The Railway Bell' and 'The Waggon and Horses', 'Half Moon', 'Four Swans', 'Christopher', 'Green Dragon' and 'The British Volunteer'—in the public houses—that the common folk of Sudbury forgot the war and got royally drunk on Christmas night.

"Time, please, Gentlemen!" the publican shouted at 10 o'clock. We fumbled with the blackout curtains, shouted boisterous greetings and partings at everyone, kissed all the girls and women in the room, and then plunged out into the pitch inky envelope of night. "Are you there, Daphne?"

"Here I am, over here. Strike a light." And we danced, arm in arm, down the narrow Sudbury streets, bumping into poles, walls, people, doorways, stumbling over kerbs. "Merry Christmas, everyone! Merry Christmas!"

Clem took us to his little office, and we tried to drink some more whisky he had saved for this occasion. It made no difference that we had all had more than enough. He had saved this bottle for Christmas and drink it on Christmas we must.

Finally we found our way back to Daphne's house, and Daphne and Phyllis had a hilarious time cooking eggs for our supper, while we collapsed before the dying embers of the fire. We had talked, laughed, drunk, kissed, danced in the streets, greeted all our friends, toasted Victory and England and America and the RAF and the Yank soldiers and the King and Churchill and Roosevelt, and now grew quiet and tired. We ate in silence. We sat before the fire, and the warmth of it and the whisky in us made us sleepy.

So Clem and I said good night, and I went back to the Gainsborough House and stumbled up the winding stairs and banged around from wall to wall, and finally found my door and the big sign on it saying " Mrs. Robinson ", which seemed very funny and very tragic at the same time, for the room was empty and the bed cold, and I tumbled on to it, and rocked once or twice on great rolling billows and I was asleep.

For the first time in England I had " had it."

24

IN DEFENCE OF ENGLAND

It was not a specific interest in coastal defences, or a sight-seeing tour of a resort town, or idle curiosity that drew me to Felixstowe that day—a bright, cloudless, rare winter's Sunday. It was sheer yearning, the kind that I believe peculiar to those of us who have lived most of our lives within sight, sound, or at least smell of the ocean. I wanted to smell salt water and I wanted to look out across limitless, motionless, and yet ever-changing horizons. I wanted to see the sea again.

True, several times I had wandered down around the Orwell at Ipswich and watched the black-headed gulls wheeling and screaming, and listened to the boatmen who ran the coasters up to Yarmouth and Newcastle and Hull, and down to London, and I had even debated whether or not I could make the trip to London with them one day. I had stepped in at 'The Griffon' and 'The Steam Packet' at the harbour's edge, and listened to the talk of the old

coastermen and the young boys who made up their one-man crews. I knew I would be welcome on board—for the big boats were hard work for two men. But I never joined them on a trip, because they could never guarantee, what with bad weather, fog, and other war-time difficulties, that I could sail down to London with them and get back to Ipswich within one twenty-four-hour pass.

The Orwell, though it had boats and sailors and seagulls, was not the sea, and it had been six months at least since I had looked out across open water. So one Sunday I got on a bus at the Cattle Market in Ipswich, and half an hour later I was at Felixstowe, standing above a grey, cold, forbidding-looking ocean that spread eastward towards Holland.

I walked through the town, which seemed deserted of civilians and correspondingly full of Wrens, Ack-Ack and balloon crews, and coast-defence soldiers. I walked to the park that covers the side of the steep bluff coming up from the narrow beach, and I walked down to the beach—or as close to it as I could get. I inhaled. The air was a little salty, a little fishy, a little bit like iodine, a little bit wet and clammy, but it was familiar and fine. It was the ocean!

I walked the length of the promenade, past the boarded-up bathing houses, the empty hotels, past the great rolls and tanglements of barbed wire, and the ominous signs that read "Danger—Keep Off" "Absolutely No Trespassing." Out on the beach I could see steel spikes and other gadgets of death. The innocent sands looked harmless to the eye—but there was death under almost every foot of them.

As I walked along the beach, I heard the sirens sound an alarm. "That's strange," I thought. "Bright afternoon, cloudless sky. This is no time for German raiders to appear." I waited and watched. Five minutes later came the faint hum of motors, high, very high, almost invisible, coming straight in from the ocean. Another two minutes and a thin, white featherline appeared in the blue. The aeroplane itself was an unseen speck. All that was tangible was that thin, silver wisp streaking across the heaven, and the faint, high hum.

Straight in across the coast the raider streaked. And just then I noticed two more wisps in the sky—even higher, even more faint, and the hum from their motors was remote, as if coming miles over water. The first streak must have seen them, for it turned—it made a sharp U in the blue, and started back across the coast. The two other streaks followed—and then, as I watched, one of them dived. The other followed above.

Suddenly then there was an end to the first streak—the foolhardy raider that had streaked in across the coast. It just disappeared. And that was all I could see.

Five minutes later the All Clear sounded—a clear, braying horse-laugh. But for almost half an hour perhaps you could follow that brief, almost dream-like drama of the heavens above, for the feathery streaks remained motionless, painted on that azure canvas—but finally the wind came, and the white paint spread and grew, and then dissolved.

They were talking about that sky-fight all afternoon in the pubs in Felixstowe, and the story grew and expanded until everyone had a complete eyewitness account. I never did know the details, but newspapers the next day reported a raider shot down into the sea off Clacton by two Spitfires piloted by Polish fliers. The local rumour said that two men had baled out of the plane—reported to be a JU88—and one had waved to the fighter pilots as he sailed down into the ocean.

That brief, simple, text-book dogfight, 30,000 feet overhead in the bright blue sky, was the only actual occasion that I saw a German raider brought down. And I didn't really see it—all I saw was the symbolic marks on the sky—the incoming streak, the two other streaks appearing on the scene, the hasty turnabout and flight, the dive of one streak—and then nothing. It was a mystery, a remote, unbelievable, far-off dream with all the aspects of a fantasy. It seemed impossible that a life-and-death battle should be taking place up there in that clean cold expanse. And that down here on the streets of Felixstowe the housewives had not even left their shopping queues to watch. The milkmaid in her white van had never paused in her rounds.

But there was quiet pride in the pubs in Felixstowe that afternoon. "That'll teach 'em to come over here in daylight," was the general sentiment. "Brash 'un, oint 'ee, to come sailin' in 'ere out o' the blue all by himself." "Good shooting too, that," said another. "One dive—plonk—and Jerry came a cropper."

But what it meant more than anything to me was that England's defences were once again equal to the attack. England was getting to be a tough little island to crack. East Anglia, that had been considered easy meat, was easy no longer. Gossip around Suffolk had held that the Germans used these coastal sorties and quick raids over the East Anglian coast as a final training ground for their bomber pilots—a touch of flak, some searchlights, a few fighters, but nothing

serious, nothing to worry about. But now Jerry was losing planes whenever he came over England and wherever he struck. England was a training ground no more.

Up on the top of the cliff again I had a talk with two men of the Artillery unit that was guarding the coast. "Things have changed since Dunkirk," they told me. "We're ready now for anything that Jerry can throw over this way. Not that I think ee's fool enough to try. But we're ready. No one really knows yet what shape we were in back after Dunkirk. Why, along this coast we had one machine-gun only every 1,500 yards—1,500 yards, mind, nearly a mile for each MG. And some of our coastal guns were not even machine-guns or artillery worth anything at all. I've seen Japanese naval guns, year of ought three, mounted along this coast! Lot of good they'd have been. Those were the days, believe me. Everyone out in the streets digging ditches, everyone filling sandbags—children included—everyone helping with the road-blocks, taking down the signs and road-markers, everyone painting out the signs over shops. We thought we were for it, sure. Couldn't understand what old Hitler was waiting for. Home Guard called the L.D.V. in those days. (That's for Local Defence Volunteers.) Armed with pikes and staves and shotguns and what not. Fairly pathetic it was. But everyone pitched in and shared the work. Everyone. It was that urgent."

"Thank God we still had the Navy," put in the other lad.

"Yes, I reckon it was the Navy that scared them off—and then the lads in the RAF. Showed them a trick or two in the blitz. By that time things were a little better organized. And we started getting guns from you chaps—old Springfields and Remingtons and Winchesters like this one. That helped. And then the barbed wire and the blockhouses got going, and things began to shape up, and we thought we might put up a spot of fight at that!"

"Don't you think Churchill helped, when he told Hitler he'd keep on fighting on the beaches and in the villages . . . ?" I asked.

"Best little piece of bluff this war has had!"

"Or the world has ever seen," said the other. . . . "Churchill knew we couldn't stand an invasion. Everyone in England knew it—or at least feared it. But old Churchill stood up on his hind legs and just about dared Hitler. I've always believed that one speech of Churchill's did the trick. Told 'im he'd have a fight on his hands. Made 'im think we had the defences, the arms, and the army. Why, we didn't have anything!"

" Except the Navy."

" Yes, we still had the Navy. That's true. We still had the Navy."

Yes, lads in battledress with the red ack-ack shoulder-flash. Still the Navy, and a handful of fliers, too. And something more than that. Surely something more than that. The hidden something . . . call it intestinal fortitude, call it guts, call it honesty and integrity or love of Country and of King. Call it sheer bravado, or a sense of the dramatic, or a sense of defiance—the kind of bravado and dramatics and defiance that has placed all the heroic lost causes first in the hearts of England—the Charge of the Light Brigade, the battle of Bunker Hill, the breaking of the British Square, the Retreat from Dunkirk—that all through your history has honoured the charge into certain death—the fighting defeat—the doomed stand—the thin red line. Here it was again—Dunkirk, and the famous " Few," and now all England on the battle line. Call it courage, call it what you will. Say it is not an exclusive British quality—say that other nations and other soldiers and sailors and airmen equally have proved themselves courageous, foolhardy, brave, tough, stubborn, unyielding and magnificent. But never deny that England knows not gallantry.

Coming home that evening in the bus I looked around me out over the English countryside. I had noticed it before, many times, but was never so keenly aware of it: the country was a fortress—and these coastal counties were a Siegfried Line. At every turn of the road were concrete pillboxes. The railway lines and the aerodromes were lined and ringed with mountainous piles of rusting barbed wire ; at every narrow intersection and in the village streets and at bends in the road were big cylinders of concrete, pyramidal blocks of concrete, V-shaped stacks of iron rails ready to be formed into tank obstacles. Every flat field had its poles and its wires strung out to snare and wreck gliders and airborne troop-carriers.

We marvelled at the numbers and the cleverness of the camouflage of the pillboxes. Some were disguised as farm buildings, with thatched roofs and painted sides. Some were made to look like brick outbuildings, some to look like workmen's shacks. One near Ipswich was painted black, covered with tar-paper, for all the world like a construction-foreman's shack by the roadside. In big white letters on the walls were painted the words, " A. Mole, Tunnel Contractor, Deepdownham, Suffolk." Another large pillbox near Woodbridge looked like a triangular billboard. One side had the inviting advertisement for the " Hotel Continental—Warm Recep-

tion Guaranteed for Visiting Troops." Some others had grass growing on the roof; many looked like haystacks and water-tanks. They were everywhere. Each main crossroad had at least one—some had two, three, or four. They lined the main roads, the railways, the river valleys, the easiest routes for an invasion force into the heart of England. Some were deep in groves and copses—others were out in the middle of fields. Their fire overlapped, interlocked, and covered the landscape with a lacework of death. Everywhere scattered between the concrete pillboxes were the little dug-outs in the hedges, lined with sandbags, concealed with bushes and vines and weeds. In the towns, garden walls were pierced with slits and reinforced with concrete, and ready for the defenders' guns. Even the Market Hill in Sudbury had its sunken and reinforced machine-gun pits. The defences were everywhere. And the men were there to man them—the barber, the butcher, the banker. Trained in the use of new weapons. Familiar through life-long intimacy with every field, every hedge, every sunken gulley and wooded cover, vantage points, observation posts, the obstacles, the traps, the ambushes.

The invasion might have come. It might have succeeded, and the German tanks and the artillery and the planes might have crunched across England and flattened it. But it would not have been a holiday or a parade. It would have been an historic, bitter, last-ditch fight, and it would have been gallant and heroic to the end.

25

THE GIRL JOAN

I DO not quite remember when it was that I first saw her, but it must have been early in the autumn of 1942, just after the daily visits to the Sudbury post office began. There were other young faces smiling at us from behind that counter and there were other pretty faces about the streets and in the shops of Sudbury, and perhaps I did no more than smile at her and think to myself—"Hello, you pretty child" but for a while, that was all.

Every morning Earl and I stumped into the Sudbury post office in our muddy boots and our grimy field clothes, bought stamps, despatched our cablegrams, mailed packages, smiled and departed. We got to know the names of the girls who served us—the pleasant,

low-voiced, dark-haired girl was Olive; the ginger-haired, pert young girl was Daisy ; the tall girl was Jean ; the talkative, friendly slim girl was Fay ; and the slender elfin blonde was Joan. Usually it was Fay who greeted us, shook her head and laughed as we entered, joked with us about " you Amihugs " (for that was the cable word for our APO) and sent us on our way with a friendly wave.

As the weeks of autumn went by we began to look forward to those few moments in the Sudbury post office as something special. With our coins and our letters we tossed chewing gum and candy across the counter, and received in return the smiles and the laughter that were reserved for favoured customers. We liked little Peggy and Milly at Searle's tea shoppe, and we fell for blonde Daphne in her little white van. But the brightest moments of those adventurous mornings began when we stepped into the Sudbury post office. And though I did not recognize it at first, its atmosphere was softened, and lightened, and made special by the presence of the girl Joan, because of her warm smile for everyone, her soft, friendly turn of speech, and just because she was the girl Joan, whom everyone loved.

I suppose by that time I loved her, too, though I did not think of it that way. I just knew that I looked forward to seeing her every day, that I felt a sudden apprehension and quickening of the pulse before I walked into the post office, and a sense of elation when I saw that she was there, and an impulse to shout when she looked up, saw me there, brushed the hair back with her forearm, and smiled.

One day on the way over in our little English van, Earl and I were talking about girls, as we often did, and we mentioned the slim young thing whose name was Joan. " I've just about decided that she's the nicest one in the town," I said.

" Yes, she's nice," said Earl, which was high praise from his critical lips.

" I'd ask her for a date, too," I continued, " but she's too young, darn it."

" She's not too young—she's twenty."

" I'll bet she's not a day more than seventeen," I answered, hoping I was wrong. We agreed to bet on it, and to ask her.

That morning when our business was done, I leaned over the counter, and asked Joan to settle our argument. " I'm nineteen," said Joan, and I smiled. The next day I left her a note, asking to come and see her some Saturday evening. She answered with a

note, which possibly didn't say yes, but definitely didn't say no. But two weeks later I had my first date with the maiden named Joan.

And through that winter and spring, and into the summer and the year to follow, Joan, more than anyone else, brought to me a feeling and an understanding of England, and a sense of gratitude for many things.

First, for a feeling of acute awareness of history and continuity of life that is fully felt by most Britons but only rarely experienced by an American. It is a feeling that comes from being born to an environment that has been tempered for one's arrival for many centuries—that has a continuous and very evident flow of history in it. The average American knows his history well but it is a short one, and around him are but a few of the physical reminders of that history; scattered around the countryside a few relics of colonial days, a few mementoes of the first transplanting of civilization to the new world—of the aboriginal life that preceded it almost nothing.

But he does not feel this sense of history keenly because it goes back three centuries at best—and much less in many parts of the country. And few American are sedentary; the farmer of Nebraska may still see the cottonwoods planted by his grandfather, and the rancher in New Mexico may see traces of the Santa Fé trail that crossed his land less than a century ago. But the shopkeeper in John Day, Oregon, built that shop himself, and moved there from Hoboken, New Jersey, not so many years ago. Around him is a history-less expanse of inspiring scenery. He knows that Indians lived here once—he can find their relics; but they are not his history. He himself is a transplanted alien, a discoverer, a pioneer. The stockbroker who walks down Wall Street and Nassau Street in New York is no descendant of the Dutch burghers who once strode those streets; the Polish tobacco farmer of Connecticut may be proud, but feels little sense of history in knowing that one hundred and sixty-five years ago George Washington slept in his old house. The history is there, but the continuity is often lacking.

Joan Ramsey belonged to her countryside and she was a part of its history, and for that history, in its continuity, she had an unconscious feeling. She was a product, too, of that history, and she belonged to that Suffolk village and in that Suffolk landscape just as surely as the bluebells in Aga Fen or the oaks on Sudbury meadows or the most carefree skylark in the skies above those meadows. Knowing her, you felt you knew England.

For in her beauty Joan was a distillation of all the qualities that had gone into slow centuries of English breeding, tempered by centuries of English climate. In her you could see the Saxon and the Dane, the Anglian and the Norse that had come in ages past to England's eastern shores. Her hair was straight and silky, blonde with a few darker streaks; her eyes were English—large, pale, grey-blue, under long lashes. Her face was small and heart-shaped.

In stature, too, the girl Joan was English. Small shoulders, slim, high waist, straight, long, coltish legs. Even her Christian name—"Joan"—was a frequent one, and her surname—Ramsey—an ancient East Anglian one. Her speech was soft and musical, her accent slightly touched with the sing-song Suffolk and the poetic turn of phrase. Her special charm was that of shy innocence, spritely grace, and a warm sensitivity.

Joan never needed a reminder that she was heir to a long history of which she was a part and a link. She lived it, and in it. All around her in her world were little churches that had been standing in the same verdant lushness for seven centuries. The same cobblestones on which she rode her bicycle had marks of wagon wheels, the same inns and stage-coaching taverns were still standing and the heirs to them were still drinking their ale from pewter mugs in them. The same Thursday Market days brought the farmers in to Sudbury as they had for countless years; the house where Sudbury's famous son was born was still standing and occupied, the pink-plastered cottages still stood in the valleys and the lanes as they had always stood, the mushrooms still sprouted on the meadows at night and were gathered at dawn. The soldiers that roamed the streets at night were in new uniforms, they might be called London Scottish or American Eighth Air Force, but they were the same strangers who had been quartered there a century ago; and did not, could not, each Sudbury family, if it only knew, tell of sons who fought for Cromwell and, before Cromwell, for Drake, and before Drake for the York dukes, and before them, long before—for Queen Boadicea? And when they came home from their wars and their crusades and their sea-fights, was there not a Maid Joan waiting at the pink-painted cottage?

There was more to it than the physical reminders, both in Joan's own person and in the Suffolk countryside, with which she had such intimate acquaintance.

Joan knew all the local and ancient superstitions, the proverbs, and the counting-out rhymes that were centuries old. She knew,

too, the old country dances, just as she also was swift in acquiring the jitterbug and the rhumba. She observed, with almost unconscious ritual, the age-old customs of England some of whose origins are lost in pagan antiquity. In winter she knew where to go to find the mistletoe and the holly to decorate the house; in spring she would go Maying as did Corinna many centuries ago; in summer there were the special flowers to be gathered in the special places. It was the countryside that Joan knew best of all, and with a conscious love that was nurtured by an environment to which she was perfectly attuned.

Her nineteen years of life had been that of almost every girl of her age of that town. She had attended the local girls' school, she had been a good athlete and a member of the hockey eleven, she went to church on Sunday mornings and for walks on Sunday afternoons. She went up to London rarely, and then for a holiday treat or a shopping trip, and before the war she went down to the beaches of Felixstowe or Clacton in summer. She went to visit with her relatives and her grandparents who lived in the surrounding villages. She had fallen in love once, with a young lad she had known for many years.

The war had come before she was hardly out of school, and she had never been able to buy an evening gown because of the rationing. She complained that before the war it had been school uniforms, and now it was utility clothes, and that she would be no longer young by the time she could own pretty things to wear. But she didn't worry too much about that.

Joan worked from sixty to seventy hours each week—often until nine o'clock at night, always on her feet, and she was paid by the General Post Office £2 10s. each week, with a chance for a two shilling rise once a year if her work was satisfactory. The crucial time was always the evening, when the books were balanced, for if her big ledger did not tally exactly, she must pay the difference out of her own pocket. A post office clerk in a British post office deals not merely in stamps and in parcels. She sells money orders. She sells postal saving stamps and war savings stamps and certificates. She deals in pensions and other forms of government benefits, such as army allowances. She takes telegrams and cables. She collects telephone bills. Joan was part of a department store with many times the detail of an American post office, and her stamps and money were her personal accounts—on which she lost money if she did not watch each penny. And once each week she worked

until midnight up at the Sudbury aerodrome—taking telegrams and money orders from the Irish labourers who were working there.

But Joan was not unhappy in her work, and enjoyed the company of the other girls, laughed all day long, had a smile and a pert hello for everyone, and her biggest regret was that the post office would not release her to join the WAAF. Joan wanted to serve her country.

Our week-ends together followed a simple country pattern. They started early Saturday evening, before dinner, when I would flee from the little hut at Debach where we kept our charts and made our calculations, and run down the steep hill a half mile into the cross-roads of Clopton. There, presently, a country bus would come along, I would climb aboard, and in a half hour I would be standing in Ipswich, waiting for the last bus of the evening to take me over the familiar road to Sudbury.

It was seven o'clock then when we turned into the Market Hill, and I ran down to the Gainsborough House, said hello to Winnie, had a cup of tea in the kitchen, and then went round to the post office.

The post office was closed, but the girls were still there, in high spirits, balancing their books for the week, I tapped on the window, the letter-drop cover flipped open, and Joan's voice would say, " Just a minute, Robert." And then she would come out, laughing and posing like an elf, to tell me the progress of the work, and how long I must wait before she would be ready.

It was usually nine o'clock before she was done, and then I would put my hand in hers, and we would walk home, pushing her bicycle between us. Up across Market Hill, up North Street to Queen's Road, and then down to the little house with the blue trim where Joan lived with her Mum and her older sister Hilly.

Supper would be ready, and Joan and a hungry Robert would sit down to enjoy what Mum had prepared. The week's news would be related, the latest adventures in Sudbury, the latest appearances of Yanks in the post office, the latest war stories that were going around, the results of the latest raids in the neighbourhood, and all the local gossip. The radio would be turned on, and we would listen to the solemn B.B.C. voices, or if it were still light we would go for a short walk down to the river, or up in the meadows above the town. But mostly we would just talk, and marvel over the American magazines I had brought, and sit by the fire. Just before eleven o'clock it was time for me to go, and when we had said good

night I walked slowly back through the town, listening to the wind humming in the wires, listening for the air-raid siren, to my own footsteps on the cobblestones, and whistling through the dark alleys, until I reached the little green gate, let myself in through the kitchen of Gainsborough House and stumbled my way up to bed.

By midnight all was quiet in the town, and I was asleep in between sheets, on a soft mattress—and miles from our chill Nissen hut.

The next morning I slept late, and went around to the house just before noon. After a big dinner, Joan and I would have our Sunday walk. And here it was that the real Joan, the real English girl, was in her element. Every time we walked we went by different paths. Sometimes it was down along the river, across the meadows, up through the Five Fields. We walked to Borley Rectory, and Joan told me about the nun's ghost that haunted the garden. We walked by devious routes to the water tank, high on the hill; we walked to Little Cornard and to the Five Fields, we walked to Long Melford, we walked up the Gol, and out past the Targets. We walked up to the playing fields and talked to old George the caretaker, who was an old friend of Joan's, and who told me that little Joan had been the best girl cricket bowler he had ever seen.

Sometimes we stood on the bridge and watched our reflections in the gently flowing Stour. Early in spring we went where the primroses grew, and later I learned how to open and unfold the poppy buds. We climbed stiles and walked through lanes bordered by hawthorn. I learned where the holly grew, and Joan taught me the names of a hundred flowers and trees and paths—of fields and hills and houses. Joan was a part of this landscape; she knew every inch of it as an old friend, and she loved it. With her hair blown by the wind, taking long, graceful strides by my side, stopping now to pick a flower, swinging prettily over a gate, laughing and swinging my hand as she walked, she was the maiden Spring herself.

Everywhere we walked we met other people of Sudbury out walking, other people enjoying the countryside and the land in which they lived. And everywhere we passed they would nod and say "Hello", or more often, "Hello, Joan." Old and young, boys and girls and young men, from the ages of ten to seventy, they greeted Joan affectionately and fondly, and smiled at us their greeting. I often said to Joan, "Do you know everyone in this community?"

"Well, almost everyone," she said, "but then I've lived here

twenty years and they all see me at the G.P.O. ! " and then we would bet whether the figures in the distance would greet her as we passed.

I always won. Always they passed and said, " Hello, Joan."

Yes, I found gradually, this slender gamine of a girl was the darling of the town. It had been natural that she had been chosen " Queen of the May " when she was a child. Natural that she should go gathering bluebells in the spring and holly at Christmas, and should laugh to hear the skylarks and write poetry when she was alone in her room, and long for a pretty party dress she had never owned, and wanted to join the WAAF to serve her country. Seventy hours a week ! Oh, the post office ; oh, Gee, that was just a job ! Natural that she should sew her own clothes, and serve in the canteen for soldiers in her spare time, and manage to save ten shillings a week out of her pay. Natural that she should love the world and the people around her, and they should love her.

Do you remember, my girl Joan, the many evenings that I came to Sudbury during this war—and the many ways I found to come to you on Saturday evenings ? There were the buses westward from Ipswich, and the trains from London to Marks Tey, and then the change to Sudbury on the train that went up the beautiful Stour Valley past Colne and Bures ? And the train eastward from Cambridge down through Clare and Long Melford ? And the bus from Wattisham that went over to Lavenham and Long Melford ? And the farmers who brought me in as a hitch-hiker from Bury St. Edmunds and north from Braintree. And the bicycle that brought me down through the fourteen most beautiful miles of Suffolk countryside from Wattisham to Bildeston and through Chelsworth, Monks Eleigh, Little Waldingfield and down the long hill into Sudbury ?

Do you remember the spring evenings after I had moved to Wattisham, when I would set out on my bicycle, and you on yours, and we would meet at Little Waldingfield ; and how you tasted your first beer at 'The Swan' there ? And how we walked around the lanes and then you waved good-bye, standing by your bike with your fair hair, bottle green slacks, pink blouse, a picture there waving to me until I was out of sight ?

Do you remember the day we went to Foxearth to collect the rent from the little cottage of your father's and how we got lost coming home ? Do you remember the day we walked through the meadows when they were ankle deep in water, and how later that afternoon I met your father for the first time, standing barefoot in his living room, while our shoes dried ?

Do you remember the day we walked across the meadows when the Home Guard was having battle practice, and provided the comic picture of Sunday strollers in the midst of a skirmish, being chased from the field of battle by an indignant officer?

Do you remember the suppers we had at Gainsborough House, and the evenings we spent watching American movies in the balcony of the little Gainsborough Theatre and marvelling over the wonders of America? Do you remember the letters we wrote each other, delivered by "special messenger" each morning, and the evenings that I walked a mile or two to the telephone just to hear you say, "Hello there, Robert?"

Do you remember the country fair at Long Melford, and the haunted rectory at Borley, and the dances in Victoria Hall, and the evening you came over to Ipswich, and the day we had together in London?

Perhaps these were small incidents to you, things that you had done before, things to be soon forgotten. But to me they are moments that will never be repeated, and never be forgotten. For they were new and fresh, they were flawless and perfect, they were true and good—to be cherished and loved by a soldier.

26

THE SEARCHLIGHTS

ONE of the more memorable aspects of those nights of the winter of 1942–3 were the wonderful and yet terrible searchlight displays that suddenly burgeoned in the darkness—silver-blue shafts of awesome grandeur.

About Suffolk, they were scattered by the hundreds, especially along the coast, and on nights of air raids they made a geometric forest of light above the darkened landscape. Moving slowly across the sphere of heaven, marching forward, converging upon an invisible focus, they were to me probably the most beautiful of all manifestations of the war in England.

I remember walking down lanes in the darkness, and suddenly being aware of my own shadow on the ground, and looking up to find the spectacular luminous network overhead. Often there were dozens of beams visible at once, shifting and moving in slow cadence. I remember one night with Joan on an evening walk when

we counted more than fifty shafts sweeping and swirling through the air, on all sides, converging on half-a-dozen moving points in the sky. The silver fingers played a silent concert that reached out to infinity on all sides. As the points of focus moved out of reach, some of the fingers would fade into nothing, and others would suddenly appear and take up the slow symphony.

The sudden appearance of the searchlights in the sky on an ink-black night did something to the world; they gave it three dimensions again—when the clouds covered the stars and the roof of the world seemed to be whistling just above the rooftops, and only the cobblestones near and real, they suddenly pushed back the heavy vault of heaven and made man and his villages small and in proper perspective again.

Often, on practice nights, the entire Suffolk coast seemed to be a wall of light, a picket fence of prying beams that would act as a barrier to any enemy raiders. RAF planes were up, flying high, their engines sounding only a remote, insistent drone, and when caught—a white pinpoint like a lonely moth. It was hard to imagine living, breathing, talking (and probably cursing) men in those slow moving, white specks. They seemed distant, unreal, mechanical—an illusion flashed on a darkened screen.

The lights told stories, too—on nights when our own aircraft had gone out over Europe. Everywhere they called up from the aerodromes, as they stood like pillars in the night, to guide the bombers home. Sometimes they formed pylons of three or four converging beams. Sometimes there was merely a solitary beacon that flashed on and off. Sometimes they would sweep the sky in slow circles.

Often, on winter nights, after an afternoon raid by our Fortresses, those single beacons flashed a persistent, hopeful welcome to the stragglers, the stricken, the lost returning bombers. Sometimes, long after the formations had come wheeling in to land, the flashing lights would call out into the night—one hour . . . two hours . . . three hours overdue—and still they held forth hope. And then, slowly, reluctantly, one by one, they would give up, the lights would check out, the sky would be dark and silent and windswept again. Somewhere out there, eastward, we had lost another bomber.

But we always hoped that it had got back safely somehow, and landed at another field. That was always the hope and the prayer . . . perhaps it got back after all. Yet the sight of those lonely,

patient beacons waiting for and then finally despairing of the hum of motors was a lingering sadness.

The life of the searchlight crews was a lonely and rarely exciting one. Air defences in England were divided into zones. In the most important areas every form of defence was used, ack-ack, balloons, searchlights, and night fighters. In others the defence was primarily ack-ack and searchlights. But in the wide spaces between the ack-ack concentrations, the defences rested upon the searchlights scattered through the countryside, whose job it was to keep in contact with the enemy and " pass them along " from one light to another, to keep in contact with them until the fighters arrived, or until they reached a stronger defence zone.

Many of the searchlight sites were in lonely out-of-the-way spots —a little shack or two in a pasture or field—a small crew, and the light—a constant vigil, and that was all. In the little villages where the only immediate weapon of war was the searchlight, the villagers spoke proudly and with affection of " our light " and did what they could to make life more tolerable for the crews.

Joan Ramsey took me to see her light one day. She knew the crew members by sight, and she felt a proud thrill when her street was suddenly bathed in the bright blue glow. " There's our light ! There's our lovely light ! "

We often talked about the lights, and spoke about how much they added to the beauty of the night scene. " I wonder why it would not be possible to illuminate entire towns with them after the war ? " I asked. " Just three or four of them, forming a pyramid above a town, would throw enough light into every corner of every street and illuminate it clearly with a sort of artificial moonlight, much simpler than thousands of street lamps. And much more dramatic ! "

" Well," said Joan, suddenly practical, " It might be a bit expensive."

" And it might be confusing to aircraft."

" But I hope they try it, anyway," we both said together. An England without those shafts of cold, candescent light will not be the England I knew. Yes, I hope they keep the searchlights.

27

WATTISHAM DAYS

LATE in April the entire battalion was ordered to pack up and move. While army life is always uncertain, the sudden abandonment of our Debach project just when our winter's toil had begun to show results was both discouraging and demoralizing. The mud had been conquered, the huts were now beginning to be comfortable in the spring weather, one runway was complete and we had pilot strips completed on all the others. Our guesswork calculations showed us to be merely 28 per cent finished, but now at last we were a smooth-functioning organization with a knowledge of our job and how to do it, and the rate of progress was accelerating.

Now we were to move; to let someone else come in and finish our aerodrome, to pioneer on something new at this late date. We were unhappy as we packed and crated our belongings and stowed them away in our trucks.

The move proved to be a short one, to another Suffolk aerodrome only twenty miles away. This time we were moving into an established and operational aerodrome, where there were comfortable living quarters, theatres, Red Cross clubs, indoor dining-halls, and a large RAF complement already installed. The name of the field was Wattisham, and our job was to convert it from a grass-covered fighter field to an enormous bomber and air force supply base. Our job would be to lay down the runways, the perimeter track, and the hard standings for the bombers. Other battalions would come in later to add living sites, hangars and roads.

The battalion commander managed to "swing a deal", and the battalion moved into comfortable brick buildings. Headquarters company found itself miraculously quartered in a street of modern brick flats which had originally been designed as living quarters for RAF married non-commissioned officers. Each flat was a complete unit, with kitchen, bathroom, and bedrooms, and even a kitchen garden. We set up housekeeping, and marvelled at the most luxurious quarters we had seen since the battalion had been formed a year before.

Hut Seven transferred itself almost intact to Flat No. 33, and happily set up housekeeping. Earl and I moved into a little upstairs room that was complete with rug, table, locker and beds. In the

other room upstairs, Higinbothom, Cooper, and J. C. Rogers made their home. Downstairs, the Three Musketeers—McArdle, Bowers, and Kalwarski—filled the front room, while Hatzenbuehler and Loy put up beds in the kitchen.

Here, at last, we had a home, and for the short period we were allowed to keep it we made the most of it. Here we had such luxuries as a bathtub and hot water (if someone remembered to fire the stove), plenty of closet space, the comparative privacy of two or three to a room, and the congenial atmosphere that comes from eight old-friends living together in a little house, with plenty of packages of food from home to share and the possibility of poker games going on all night long undisturbed.

To add to the comforts, Joan had found a radio for me in Sudbury, and nightly we listened to " Calais one " and " Calais two " and laughed at " Lord Haw-Haw " and his clumsy attempts to create Anglo-American animosity. We even reached the stage of domesticity that found washing hanging out on the line, and found us weeding the kitchen garden, which had been planted with carrots by the former occupants, and which were presumably enjoyed by the occupants that followed us. We knew that our little heaven wouldn't last, for the moment the Air Force moved in, we would be expelled from our comforts and exiled to tents or other quarters more appropriate for the working classes.

But life in Wattisham was good those spring months. Each morning the engineer section went down to a farmhouse on the other side of the field and then went out on its various jobs. The nineteen charts flourished anew, more complicated than ever, but this time with encouraging results. Before long the paver was moving steadily across the fields and through the hedgerows, and in the woods the sound of dynamite was heard where we were uprooting age-old trees, and the stockpile mountains grew with rapidity. We were old hands now at aerodrome-building, for this was our second one. The big paving machine marched forward without delay.

I liked Wattisham for several reasons. This was even more beautiful countryside than that about Debach, and it was closer to Sudbury and the girl Joan. True, I had to work out new lines of communication; but I discovered that if I walked cross-country two miles to Bildeston I could catch a bus Saturday evenings that wandered through the lovely valleys to Brent Eleigh, to Lavenham, to Long Melford, and finally to Sudbury. Or I could try to hitchhike to Sudbury by the road that went down through Chelsworth and

Waldingfield. Or I could go from Chelsworth across to Hadleigh and pick up my old Ipswich-Sudbury bus there. Or I could ride my bicycle all fourteen miles. This was perhaps the most enjoyable method, and I came to know every twist and turn and every landmark along this sheltered, picturesque road.

Here there was a long hill that gave a view across ten miles of rolling countryside where you could count eight church steeples. There was a stump where a little owl liked to perch in the late evening hours. Around that bend was a bean field in full bloom, its heavy, sweet fragrance pervading the air from thousands of waxy white blossoms. And at Chelsworth, one of the loveliest small villages in England, there was a small child standing at the gate who would smile and wave as I passed. It was a long, hard ride, and three hills that I must walk up, but in the end I managed to cover the distance in just over an hour, and came down that last long hill into Sudbury in a whirl of speed. Swifts were screeching in the air, people were standing in their yards or clustered around 'The Pheasant' at Chelsworth or 'The Swan' at Little Waldingfield, and cars were few and far between. Three airfields were being built on that fourteen-mile stretch of road between Wattisham and Sudbury.

Coming back was more difficult. By bicycle it was uphill most of the way, and a long and lonely plod late at night, with only the hoot of tawny owls or the scream of lapwings in the fields for company. But the only other way home was to catch the evening train to Marks Tey, change for the Ipswich train, and then board the last liberty truck back to the camp. Roundabout—four hours for the fourteen miles—but then most of my travels to and from Sudbury were involved and complicated, and dependent on several modes of transport. Somehow, miraculously, I always made it back on time.

I remember several things about Wattisham. The Tannoy system with which the field was equipped, and how Captain Kelly caused a furore throughout the dozens of units on the field when he used it the first day, announcing that "All drivers report to headquarters immediately". Every driver in the camp showed up at every company headquarters, and Captain Kelly was given a short talk by the airbase commander on the exclusive rights to the Tannoy system that he did not enjoy. And the twice-or-thrice-daily message that came over the system by the cultured, unruffled voice of the British operations sergeant, "Air raid message . . . *red*. Air raid message . . . *red*." Followed, in the far distance, by the sirens of the villages, by the sound of motors, by the sound of bombs, and then, calmly,

with great dignity: "Air raid message . . . *white*." "Air raid message . . .*white*."

All in all it was a pleasant, profitable, and happy spring. The battalion was comfortable, it was working smoothly and efficiently and the progress of the work could be measured tangibly, day by day. We were given a day off a week—sometimes, and the men could go in to Ipswich evenings for a short session with the beer or the girls. Apart from the fact that we were far from home, and could look ahead to many months more of separation and harder days of actual war ahead, we had few complaints.

I remember with pleasure the back road that meandered across country from just behind our row of flats. Several evenings I walked along that road, enjoying the June evenings, exploring again the Suffolk lanes. Down the road I found a little parish church, set back among fields on the side of a hill, and here I would sit on a wooden bench on the church porch and write letters. Here I was shown through the church by the sexton, and was taken to the cemetery, where in a lonely corner of the field there was a row of graves set apart. Seven white crosses, and on them German names—a bomber crew that had come down in flames the year before. Like all soldiers' graves in foreign fields, they seemed lost and desolate in this poppy-strewn English meadow.

Here, too, on this same church porch I wrote a fond and regretful farewell to the girl Joan. For the enchanted spring was turning to summer, and with it came a realization—a sad and bitter one—that this companionship—these good times that we had had, were transitory. The time had come to say the words that neither of us wanted to say—to put into words for the first time what we had secretly known; that this must some day come to an end.

For in spite of the rosy dreams, we knew that she was too perfectly attuned to this Suffolk life to change; that she could exist nowhere else with such harmony and such happiness. That she was young—this was her youth! And that it was early—too early—to become tied to a future that was unknown, distant, alien, and uncertain at best. For I was a soldier with a war ahead, and perhaps many years of a soldier's life; and America was my home and my life, and someday, surely, we must come to a parting of the ways.

It was with a sense of sadness then, and outrageous loss, that the realization came to me; and with misgivings that we agreed to see each other less often. I saw Joan many times after that June farewell, and we wrote intermittent letters back and forth over the months

that followed. I loved Sudbury and its people too much to stay long away, and somehow I managed to plan my frequent trips into the field from Watford so that I would be within (always inconvenient) travel distance of Sudbury. I came down to Sudbury from Honington and from Eye and from Norwich and across from Huntingdon and from Cambridge, and up from Gosfield and Braintree and Birch and from Bury St. Edmunds and from Ipswich again. And occasionally I came all the way from London, to find Joan waiting at the station, with a heart-warming smile, and a " Hello, Robert, " in her musical voice, and then we would repeat the week-ends of the past, just as if we were the only two people in the world. But as the months went by I found it harder and harder to get to Sudbury, and my visits were measured by months instead of by weeks. And at the end, although our letters never stopped, I did not come back to Sudbury at all.

28

THE SPORTING LIFE

My first and only furlough in England began on an appropriate occasion, " Derby Day ", and as an old improver of the breed with diplomas from Belmont Park, Jamaica, and Aqueduct racetracks on Long Island, I was determined to add a war-time Derby to my sporting experiences.

I caught the bus from Wattisham to Ipswich, the train from Ipswich to Newmarket, and walked the remaining three miles to the site of the debacle. It was a warm June day and the sun shone, and I was in one of those expectant moods—the somewhat elated, " anything-might-happen " mood that accompanies one to racecourses and then silently steals away immediately after the last race. In spite of travel difficulties there was a crowd of about nine thousand at Newmarket that day, all obviously in the same mood. They had come by train from London to Cambridge and Newmarket; some had hitch-hiked, others had walked, and some had come on bicycles, of which there were hundreds stacked in fields beside the grandstand.

I looked around me at my fellow enthusiasts; they seemed identical to the racegoers I had known in America. The binoculars were slung on their shoulders; they had cane seats and umbrellas and baskets of lunch. Tipsters were everywhere, including one tall

blackamoor in an outlandish robe decorated with the signs of the zodiac and topped by American Indian feather head-dress. " I got a horse. . . . I got a horse ! " he chanted.

That was more than I could say. Though I had scanned the morning papers carefully, I suspected that I was destined for a disastrous afternoon. The reassuring bulk of a Racing Form did not stretch my pocket. The delightful pastime of calculating winners from complex data was unknown in war-time Britain. I could take the selections of " Our Racing Correspondent " in *The Times*, who favoured an animal called Way In, but admitted that " I really do not know what to make my selection ". The columnist for the *Evening Standard* had picked on a horse called Pink Flower, " because he stuck it out so well in a recent gallop that I am now convinced that he will stay the mile and a half." But beyond that I was on my own.

I bought my entrance ticket for the grandstand and passed through the fatal gates. Another lamb to the slaughter ! But only after a brief lunch at the counter did I feel equal to the task of picking a winner for the first race.

I looked at the race programme, and paled. Eighteen horses were going to the post, and I knew the name of not a single one of them ! In the end I closed my eyes, jabbed at the card with a pencil, and found that I had selected a steed named Foire de Lyons. I went to the parimutuel window, bought a ticket, and then staggered to the stands to wait.

The bugle sounded, the horses paraded to the post. It was all familiar, a nostalgic ritual. Sleek bay horses and chestnut horses and roan horses and there a big black stallion. Bright silks and little peaked caps like coloured buttons. But eighteen of them in one race ! The horses disappeared down the track. I presumed that it was the track because it was bounded by a fence and it passed the grandstand. But it was covered not by dirt, but by turf ! Here was a novelty !

Eventually a bell rang, an announcement came over the public address speakers, and we were notified that the race had commenced. No one stirred ; there was no excitement ; there was nothing to see. Somewhere out on those prairies a horse race was in progress, but the nine thousand spectators could have been in Piccadilly Circus for all they were seeing of it.

A minute passed in silence, another minute dragged by, and then far down the track appeared a bounding, leaping mêlée of tiny figures —the horses ! They were coming straight at the grandstand and

they were still far away, so it was no use guessing which was in front. But with the appearance of the horses the crowd was electrified; everyone started to shout and kept on shouting. Each man fortunate enough to own a pair of binoculars was commentator for his immediate neighbours. But since the angle of approach was deceptive and the pack closely bunched, each binocular-commentator was giving his audience an entirely different version of the race. Finally, in a last five-second rush, the roar of the crowd reached a crescendo and the horses swept in front of us—and then it was all over. A minute later the numbers went up, and I realized for the first time that my number—my horse—had won it! I walked down to the window and collected thirty-six shillings for my ten. Why this was easy!

That was the only race I won all day. From then on my guesses turned from quixotic to wild and from wild to impossible. I listened to the sage remarks of the people in the crowd. I watched the odds carefully as they changed on the boards. I went down and stood near the bookmakers and watched to see who was doing the heavy betting and on what. Then I made my little bet, and lost.

For each race the number of entries seemed to grow. At home I had always been wary of races with more than eight or ten horses as a poor risk, but here there were sixteen, eighteen, twenty choices in each race. For the Derby itself you could pick from no less than twenty-three entrants. This would be no race, this would be the charge of the Light Horse Troop!

I passed over Way In and Pink Flower for the Derby, and plunged on two horses, both of them last-minute hunches. Their names were Runway (obvious bait for an engineer!) and Booby Trap (after all, I had even lectured on booby traps). When the race was run their showings were magnificent. Runway was the better [redacted] two. He came in next to last. It was small consolation that "Our Racing Correspondent" and the other experts had fared little better. And after all, it is something of a feat to pick the worst two horses in a twenty-three-horse race!

But I never saw the Derby. It was run on an L-shaped course far across the meadows, and only the last quarter-mile was in view. The last straw, I thought, was that the entire home stretch climbed a small range of mountains unmentioned in the tourist guides of these parts. But it was an instructive afternoon. I was amused by the wig-wagging of the bookmakers to their agents in the stands, which I learned was called tic-tac and which seems to be a compli-

cated semaphore system done very rapidly with hands, arms, racing cards, and the head. I learned, too, the names of the eight worst horses in Britain and carried away ticket-stubs to prove it. I saw nine thousand people punish and torture themselves to get to a race which was run out of sight behind a hill.

But in the end, I suppose, there is enjoyment in it, if you go home with a few winners. There must be some incentive for this mass masochism. But I decided there at Newmarket that I would wait a long time for my next venture at horse-racing, until I could visit a track where the horses ran in a neat oval visible throughout, on a carefully prepared dirt track without a trace of valleys and hills and dales. Where, too, I could go fortified with a Racing Form and its complex, mathematical, detailed charts which were so comforting and so deceptive.

I rode back to Cambridge that evening on the most crowded train I had ever seen. I rode standing up on the seat of the toilet in the lavatory. I couldn't even assume the dignity of a sitting position, for there was no room for my legs. We closed the door to make extra room for an additional passenger, and that is how five racing enthusiasts journeyed from Newmarket to Cambridge. There were many, I think, less fortunate.

This was sporting England during the war. This was Derby Day, 1943. I think there will be other more exciting Derbies. " Our Racing Correspondent " was forced to admit the next day that " the start of the race could not be seen from the stands, but when the field came into view Persian Gulf was in front . . .", but he concluded by calling it (clairvoyance, no doubt) " one of the most exciting Derbies of my time ". But no matter how often I go to the the races again, I will always consider Newmarket the craziest race-track I have ever seen, and the 1943 Derby the craziest race day of them all.

29

THOUGHTS AT CAMBRIDGE

SOMEONE once said that the River Cam along the Cambridge " backs " was the most beautiful half-mile in England. Standing now on the carpet of green lawn of King's College on that bright June afternoon, I was in no mood to disagree. Here, if anywhere in England, was a spot where tradition, architecture, history and landscape

blended into a perfect, harmonious whole. Here was the past in the magnificent old chapel and the perfect classic proportion of the adjacent Clare; here was age and beauty. Here, too, overhead was the present, as British bombers wheeled and manœuvred in the afternoon sunlight. Here, too, was the future, walking about the courtyard in the uniform of air cadets—talking from window to window across the court—lazing idly at the river bank. Here all ages met.

Cambridge University, if you excepted the sky above it, which invades all sanctuaries, was an island of peace and contemplation set in the stormy sea of war that swirled around Eastern England. The streets of the town were crowded with British airmen, WAAFs, farmers come to market, Americans who flocked to their club in the Bull Hotel. But once inside those massive iron gates, you left the noise and hurly-burly of the world outside; you entered a cloistered, ordered, and somehow a remote world where every stone and every blade of grass cried out "I belong here . . . just here!"

Only the aeroplanes in the sky above seemed out of place. Rooks, yes, wheeling and turning above the tall trees across the river. But not Lancasters, Halifaxes, Wellingtons and Ansons. Could a man seriously ponder his Horace or his Newton with this new-celestial roar in his ears?

As I stood and thought, a voice behind me asked politely, "And what do you think of our college?"

I turned to see a thin, rather bent man in a shabby jacket and baggy trousers, with a three-day growth of beard, who was also admiring our surroundings, and puffing damply on a pipe. "I think it's a beautiful place," I said. "I thought of coming here to study once—seven years ago. And so now I thought I'd like to come and see what I missed."

"And does it meet with your approval?"

"Unqualified," I said. "I can't imagine more perfect surroundings for study and for education. Although I suppose it was a bit more conducive to thought when those things were not overhead all the time."

"You get quite used to them, you know," he said, belching loudly by way of emphasis. "Of course, there's still a lot to be desired in the way of improvements, but in some ways our system does give a man a sort of polish, and if he exposes himself to it enough—a fairish education."

Our talk continued and led to American universities, which this

disreputable looking character had once toured (and where, I thought, he probably had got his last haircut!), and to the various differences between American and English university life, to architecture, and back to the Cambridge scene before us. "I suppose you'll want to go along the river to Granchester," he said, belching again with great unconcern. "Most Americans do. Rather a nice walk—Rupert Brooke, who lived in this college, made it quite sought after."

"I hadn't thought of that," I admitted. "I'd like to see the rooms of some of my other Cambridge favourites though, Spenser and Herrick and Coleridge and even Milton."

"Quite. Yes, you'll doubtless enjoy seeing them, though there may be some young lads installed there now who have changed things around a bit. Well, getting late. Must be going. Glad to have seen you." And he was off.

Later that evening I asked Clement, my host, who this strange, unkempt, informal character could have been. I described him carefully, while Clement pondered a moment and then smiled . . . "Oh, that must have been old ——, he's a brilliant scholar really. One of the country's leading authorities on his subject. A bit eccentric, but a good fellow. Knighted quite recently, as a matter of fact."

The next day Clement took me on a tour of the university. Though it was between terms and most of the students were gone, I enjoyed that walk around the university grounds and through the quiet courtyards. Here was the ancient Elizabethan brick of Queen's, here was old Trinity with its host of famous names, here was the dark, crumbled stone of Magdalene . . . raftered dining halls with their carved oak tables black with age, and their ancient nameless portraits on the walls. Here was a place for a young man to live and let history and knowledge and manners seep into his skin and run in his blood. Here while he studied he could see for himself the qualities that had slowly brought this gem to England and England its prominence in the world. He need not be taught English history here—it was all around him, and if he listened he might still hear the whispered voices of Wordsworth and Newton, Darwin and Pitt, Cromwell and Milton and perhaps even Chaucer!

You couldn't help doing some thinking here at Cambridge—and that, I suppose, is just what it is for.

30

END OF A CHAPTER

THE Suffolk chapters in this notebook come to a reluctant and unexpected close in June, 1943, when I returned from a five-day furlough to Newmarket, Cambridge, and Manchester, and found myself, all in the space of twenty-four hours, successively a staff sergeant and then private in the Engineers, and a staff sergeant again in the Public Relations Office of Eastern Base Section, our next higher headquarters.

I went away on a furlough in an impatient and disturbed state of mind. I was not satisfied with the share I was contributing to the building of the aerodrome, and I was exasperated by the ceaseless juggling of figures, and the weighing and multiplying and adjusting of guesses, all done with slide-rule accuracy. No one else saw the comic aspect of all this pseudo-accuracy—the hundred estimates that came across my desk each day for final analysis, each based on the larger guesswork that was the total job, and each one added up and calculated with the slide rule down to the fourth decimal place. True, someone had to do this work, because higher headquarters demanded the daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly reports, which were (as I suspected and later proved) checked, re-calculated, charted, and filed away by a corporal.

But I couldn't see why I had to be the culprit, and a dozen times that spring I made up my mind to ask for another job in the battalion —anything that would be more useful, constructive and part of the producing end—driving a truck, loading cement bags, pounding stakes for the surveyors.

These guesses (called " estimates " in engineering parlance) were all based on the original, overall guess as to how many hours would be required to complete our job. That it was pure unadulterated guesswork was proven by the original guess—three months—which was later " adjusted " to six, and then nine, and then to fourteen months. But someone had calculated that the job should consume 1,500,000 man-hours. Divide that by 720 men in the battalion, subtract 40 per cent for non-effectives (men absent, sick, overhead personnel, etc.) and you get roughly 3,700 man-hours per worker. At 10 hours per working day per man, you get roughly one year for the job. You had to get 4,320 man hours of work (432 effectives

by 10 hours a day) done each day or you fell behind the guesswork schedule.

To calculate the day's progress and efficiency then, you must estimate in just the reverse way—you must convert actual work back into man-hours. Each foot of pipe laid should consume just so many man-hours, each 1,000 bricks laid so many more, each hundred square feet of paving another sum of man-hours. Thus, at the end of the day, you found yourself adding 1.56 Nissen huts to 156 linear feet of drainage ditch, to a half mile of telephone cable to 1,500 square feet of runway paved, to six stumps uprooted. And the answer should always be at least 4,320 man-hours. If it wasn't, we fell behind in our efficiency. The guesses were meaningless, the calculations were meaningless, the charts and graphs and reports were meaningless, and the time we put into them was a waste. The only reality was the concrete paver crunching slowly forward across the fields, the green roofs of the Nissen huts beginning to dot the landscape, and the sweat and grime on the faces of the soldiers who were working. The only accomplished fact was the date that the first aircraft landed on the runway, and we were ready to announce to a waiting Air Force, " Take over, men, our work is done."

When I came back from my furlough I found that others besides myself had tired of my work in the engineering office. It seemed that some of the nineteen charts and graphs showed our progress to be less impressive than was deemed correct; that some of our reports to higher headquarters had been late; and that specifically my interpretation of an ammunition requisition, a masterpiece of confused army jargon which had been interpreted in five different ways within our battalion, had not agreed with any of them. I was on the spot, and a few hours later I was on the carpet in front of the battalion commander, being told just what a poor specimen of an operations sergeant I was.

I will not dwell on the details of this interview, except that it resulted in my leaving the office outwardly humble—an abject private, to repent my ways and learn my lesson. Another, braver soul would fight the battle of the nineteen charts and the fifty reports. I was going to join the surveyors in the field. But I was secretly delighted. Here was the release I had longed for! Here was a chance to really work—to carry the poles, or cut the stakes, or learn to operate a transit—to do something actively connected with building the aerodrome. No more slide rule! No more graph

paper! And though I was leaving these symbols of futility under a cloud, it was a cloud with a bright silver lining!

The reaction back in the barracks was surprising and genuine. To a man headquarters company was shocked and disturbed. What had I done? Hell, a staff sergeant has to really do something disastrous to be broken to private! Had I sassed the boss? Had I committed a major crime? "Damn it," said Tommy Williams, "How can they expect our morale to be any good after this? Why, there's no non-com in the outfit who's sure of his stripes any more, if you're broken!" It made me feel even better to hear this, though I knew it wasn't true. I *had* been a pretty poor operations sergeant, at that.

Early the next morning I walked into the headquarters building. "Hey, you lucky guy, put those stripes back on," shouted Bill McArdle!

"What!" I said, not believing my ears.

"That's what I said. You're not a private at all. You're a staff sergeant, same as before!"

"I'm a private and proud of it—the best little axeman the surveyors have ever had!"

"You're a staff sergeant, I said," laughed Bill. "And you're not even a member of this outfit any more. Your transfer to E.B.S. came through this morning, and it was dated the 24th, and that means you weren't a member of this outfit *yesterday*, so the major had no authority to bust you. We're writing an order now rescinding your bust. Honest!"

He had to show me the papers before I believed him. For a puzzled moment I couldn't think how this stroke of luck, good or bad, had come about. And then I remembered the application. Weeks ago, possibly six weeks, a letter had come from E.B.S., asking for men with newspaper experience to fill in a questionnaire, for possible transfer to a new Public Relations Office that was just being organized. Old Cooper had tossed the letter down in front of me one day, and said, "You don't want to fill this in, do you? You haven't got a chance anyway, not much newspaper experience and probably thousands of guys want the job."

I looked the questionnaire over. I agreed with Cooper. I hadn't ever actually worked on the staff of a newspaper. My experience was very sketchy. No sense in filling out the questionnaire.

Two days later, having thought the matter over, and in a moment of anger against the world at large, I went back to Cooper, and asked

him if he still had the questionnaire. "It's too late now," he said.

"No it isn't," I said. "I remember reading that no negative report was required. That means that you haven't sent anything back. Give me the questionnaire. I can't lose a thing by it."

And that questionnaire, now forgotten, was what cancelled my demotion, took me out of the engineers, out of Suffolk into Watford, and into Public Relations—the most maligned of army occupations.

In many ways I was sorry to leave the 820th Engineer Aviation Battalion. You cannot live with a group of men, work with them, play with them, argue and fight and drink and be friends for more than a year, without feeling a sense of loss when you say good-bye. I had many good friends in the battalion, men whose friendship I would want to keep in future years, although I knew that any meetings we might have would be highly fortuitous. And although our work in England was important, the job that was to come on the Continent—the job for which the battalion was designed—was yet to come. These men that I had come to know and come to live with in harmony would be landing on the Continent on D-day plus one, and I would not be with them, as I was not with my first engineer outfit when they landed in North Africa. This was the second time that I had missed the boat.

I was sorry, too, that I was leaving the Engineer Corps. Perhaps I never should have been assigned to it in the beginning, but in two and a half years I had grown proud of the engineer castle insignia on my collar, and the red-and-white engineer braid on my cap, and the proud tradition of the Corps of Engineers through every war that somehow makes up for the dirty, back-breaking, unglamorous and never-ending work. All this I was leaving behind, for another job in another type of organization—an unknown quantity.

But the army is like that—where it sends you, you go.

31

INTRODUCTION TO A NEW LIFE

COMING into the suburban community of Watford after the rural atmosphere of Suffolk provided an extreme change, but an interesting one. I found myself assigned to the Public Relations Office of Eastern Base Section, a small but growing headquarters. Eastern Base Section, or "E.B.S.", as we called it, was one of five similar

headquarters which were in administrative control of all supply and service troops in the United Kingdom. Our own area roughly corresponded to that controlled by the British Army's Eastern Command, and comprised all the counties north of the Thames River, south of the Scottish border, and including the eastern Midlands. The other Base Sections were named Western, Southern, Northern Ireland, and Central, the latter comprising the London area.

Under the command of Eastern Base Section were all the engineer units building aerodromes in East Anglia, all the hospitals in that area, large quartermaster, ordnance, signal, and other supply depots, port battalions and a hundred other types of units that make up the complex supply organization of the American Army, from small, isolated postal units to military police detachments and laundry companies. Although this was England, we spoke jealously of this part of it as " our territory," and indeed in its official life it was a superimposed world with its own government, laws, police, food supply, and perhaps even language. The only American units not under our jurisdiction were the Air Forces, to whom we were only responsible for what the Army terms " common items "—the food, clothing and other supplies not specifically Air Force equipment.

The biggest job in E.B.S. at that time was aerodrome construction. At a score of different locations throughout the area, engineer battalions and regiments were racing on jobs similar to that of the 820th, which I had just left. The names of these aerodromes became a familiar roll to all of us . . . Chipping Ongar, Stansted Mountfichet, Gosfield, Glatton, Honington, Eye, Horsham St. Faith, Debach, Birch, Wattisham, Great Dunmow, Great Saling, Matching, Raydon, and the rest . . . here was the primary mission. Of secondary interest then were the hospitals and other supply organizations, whose job it was then merely to implement the main task. Their big work would come later.

For this sizeable and rambling area covering almost one-half of England, our little office was entirely responsible for the army's public relations. Public relations was something new to us in June 1943. No one was certain what our job was—how much leeway we had, or how we were to operate. But as the weeks of summer went by we evolved by trial and error a policy and a plan, and found ourselves even busier. We felt that we were pioneers in the field. We could afford to experiment ; we had a free hand, and out of our fumblings and mistakes a system and policy arose.

Life in Watford was almost heaven after the engineers. There were no more air raids. There were no long truck rides to town for our evening's entertainment. Here we were stationed in town, within walking distance of theatres, concerts, dances, parks and pubs, and at the end of the Bakerloo line to London. We were billeted in private homes that had been requisitioned in a leafy and quiet part of town. Our headquarters building was a big roomy schoolhouse on Langley Road, which we had painted, scrubbed and polished until it shone.

Nor was the daily routine at Watford a rigorous one. Reveille was at six o'clock—not at five or four-thirty. The billet leader blew his whistle and the men in Alexandra arose, dressed, and formed a column in the street. We marched up Langley Road, where other men from other billets joined us in the morning roll call. One by one the billet leaders reported: Alexandra, all present! Essex Road, all present! Station Road, one absent! 32 Langley, all present! Malden Road, two absent!

Then came a strange sight for any stray civilians who might be astir at this hour—that of two hundred American soldiers doing physical training in this quiet suburban street while the rest of the populace slept. From calisthenics we marched to breakfast, and as we were dismissed there was a wild rush for the chow-line, for the first man in line saved twenty minutes of waiting.

Some of us, I fear, ate very few breakfasts in the mess hall at Watford. We had discovered a friend in the person of Mrs. Gregory who seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of the things we most craved—fresh eggs and fresh milk. Every morning a small group of renegades rushed down to Mrs. Gregory's kitchen, and sat around the big table, calling loudly for their eggs, their bread and jam, and their coffee and milk. Mrs. Gregory worked hard and fast from half-past six until eight each morning, for as soon as a place at the big table was vacant another soldier filled the empty chair. The price she charged us may have been high, but then there was the comfort of a warm room with a fire in the grate, the added attraction of a newspaper with breakfast, of chinaware instead of mess kits, and of avoiding that mess line. Mrs. Gregory let you run up an account if you were short of funds, and if you left a bundle of laundry under the kitchen sink it was cared for. It was like a private club, although only officers were unwelcome. It was not strictly military, and there were rumours from time to time that it would be outlawed. We never questioned where the milk and eggs

came from, but we were assured everything was legal and correct, and we were all very grateful for the hard-working Mrs. Gregory, her eggs, her coffee, and her fireplace.

To the Public Relations Office were assigned at that time two young lieutenants, Bob Dehler, of Cleveland, Ohio, and Len Levy, of Englewood, New Jersey, and two enlisted men, Joe Klasen, of Syracuse, New York, and myself. Working in the same office with us was Sam Fleming, who was clerk for our boss, Lt.-Colonel Robert H. Betts, the Intelligence Officer. Colonel Betts was also Public Relations Officer, making Sam one of our group. There was a sixth person in the office, our Scottish charm girl, Joan Macintyre, who was secretary to the colonel and to all of us counsellor, friend, glamour girl, and chief reason for our constant stream of visitors.

These six persons were crowded into the smallest office in the building; a tiny room on the top floor that was big enough only for a file cabinet, three tables and a few chairs. When we were all there together work was impossible, so we devised plots and plans for having one or more of us always out on business. Even with four of us remaining there was chaos, and so often did we move furniture around in a futile effort to increase the space that the colonel in the office below threatened to have us evicted.

As the weeks went by we worked out our routine. Our job was two-fold. First we were responsible for gathering news items from all the organizations under command of E.B.S. and passing them on to London for dissemination to the American Press. Second, we were responsible for the relations between American forces in our area and our English hosts—both in the provision of news and in the arranging of such ceremonies, celebrations, and social events as concerned us both.

In those days everything about American soldiers in England was news at home. Each new type of army unit arriving in England was a story—a story that newspapers and magazines at home wanted and could not otherwise get. Who had ever heard of an engineer aviation battalion? What are they doing in England? What is their life and how do they work? What is a mobile bakery company? What does a port battalion do, and how is it important right now? Did you ever hear of a quartermaster salvage and repair company? Or an ordnance medium maintenance unit? Or a traffic regulating station? What are the military police in Colchester doing? And here's our first hospital train!

All these questions we tried to answer. Our clues came from the weekly unit rosters that listed all new arrivals in our area. When we found a new type of organization on the list, someone travelled out to the unit, lived with it for a day or two, watched it in operation, and then returned to write its story. Usually we combined visits to several units in the same vicinity and took a photographer with us, and then returned to write a dozen stories before we took to the road again.

Stories were easy to find in those days. Almost every unit would offer six or more. There was always one " unit story " concerning the work of the entire organization, loaded with names of soldiers and their home-town addresses. Then there were several shorter individual stories. Here was a soldier who had devised a new piece of equipment which saved both time and money. Here was a sergeant who had invented (so he said) a method of preparing tasty powdered eggs. There was a soldier with a pet crow which answered to the name of Pete. Not world-shaking news, but good for an item and a picture in the soldier's home-town paper, and fine for his morale and the spirits of his relatives.

We almost never knew, when we embarked on these excursions, just where our best stories would be found. Sometimes a tip would come in by telephone: " There's a human interest story about a group of nurses in the umpteenth general hospital." We would search it out, often to find that the nurse story wasn't remarkable after all, but that a doctor in that hospital had devised a new method for treating an old injury, and here was a magazine feature!

In a way it was a wonderful life—unparalleled for an army sergeant. You looked through the unit roster, you looked at the map, you picked out the units you were going to visit and the routes you were going to follow. You consulted the " future book " for tips and ideas. You told the lieutenant, " I'm going up to Lincolnshire to-morrow with Hank and get that new engineer outfit and a couple of quartermaster units. Be back Saturday." You packed a little field bag, arranged for a car and driver, told the first sergeant not to expect you until Saturday, and then you were away, driving through the beautiful heart of England on a quest for news.

That way, for the next year, we roamed at will across eastern England, crossing and recrossing the land countless times; visiting almost every village and town; coming to know the roads and lanes, the church towers, and the inns and taverns and farmhouses where we could get a meal and tarry for the night. We were on our

own, no one bothered us or stopped us or asked questions. Usually we ate and slept with the units we visited, but there were many times at nightfall when we found ourselves miles from the nearest army camp, and (because there was a convenient rule that forbade driving in the blackout) we would search out the nearest town, Red Cross club, or if there were none, a local inn. We came to know all of East Anglia that way—and Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire, and Nottinghamshire, and the other counties—know them as we knew our own native land.

Colonel Betts and our lieutenants trusted us, and we dared not abuse our freedom. If we were delayed, we telephoned and explained our absence. All that was required was that we return with the goods—and that meant stories and pictures and a week of hard and fast writing in the office before we could go forth again.

It seemed to us often that it was a wholly unimportant job that we were doing, writing these news stories that we so rarely saw in print. We were often filled with embarrassment when people asked us what we did, and when soldiers remarked at our fortunate state, "Some people have all the luck," they said. "Who do you have to know to get such a break? Do you mean to say you get paid for that job?" Even the soldiers in our own headquarters never really knew what we were doing. They only knew that we were away on trips often, that we toured England, that we usually missed reveille and training days, and that we could eat and sleep at inns far from the eye of an M.P. "How do I get into Public Relations?" they asked.

It was not often that we saw the physical results of our work, for clippings and comment drifted back slowly from America, and the stories that appeared in the British Press and in our service publications were a minor part of our job. But it was rewarding in the end, when we visited a unit for a second time, and were welcomed like visiting dignitaries, and soldiers swarmed around us. "Hey, take my name too, will you? Hey, will this story get into the *Pottsville Gazette*? Hey, are you the fellows that wrote about our battalion once before? . . . My wife saw that story and it was the first time she knew what I was doing in England!" And then out of the wallets would come a dozen dirty, dog-eared clippings, to show us that we were not working in a vacuum, and that there was some purpose after all to our job.

We were pleased and astounded, too, when we were singled out by our headquarters in London, and other Public Relations Offices

were asked to learn how we worked and follow our routine. We were doubly proud when we were asked to write a little guide-book on public relations for their use. Little did they know that a couple of sergeants and a lieutenant were having the time of their lives on this job—laughing, joking, burlesquing violent love to their Scottish lassie as they worked. For ours was the most unorthodox, most unmilitary and most carefree group ever assembled under one roof and in the shadow of a set of army regulations.

We wondered what the other Public Relations Offices were doing.

32

A RARE KETTLE OF FISH

LIFE in the Public Relations Office in Watford was a comic fantasy with an improbable cast of characters, a nonsensical dialogue, and no apparent plot. Yet behind the smokescreen of banter and burlesque, ideas were hatched, and an invisible discipline was maintained. It was a surrealist painting, it was a Marx Brothers film, it was a Dagwood sandwich, and yet it was probably the only plane upon which these players could work in harmony.

The man who pulled the strings, who prompted the players from the wings, who gave purpose and direction to the cast was Lieut.-Colonel Bob Betts, the Public Relations Officer. Colonel Betts himself was a fraud, an illusion, and a wonderful fellow. To the casual acquaintance or to the unwary, this sleepy-eyed, smiling, slow-drawling southerner was just about two points south of a moron. But it was all an act. Behind that sleepy mask worked one of the sharpest minds, one of the quickest intellects, one of the soundest judgments, and one of the smoothest diplomats in the army game in those days.

You discovered that almost the first time you met him. You walked into his office to find him slouched back in his chair, his eyes half closed. You started to expound your proposition. You got no answer. You continued hopefully. The sleepy eyes gave no sign. You thought suddenly to yourself, "He's not even listening. . . . I'll never get anywhere this way." And at just that moment the sleepy eyes would smile, the slow drawl would interrupt, and in a few casual words Colonel Betts would anticipate the rest of your proposition, point out the weak spots, suggest logical improvements,

and then he would go on to pick up the telephone, call precisely the right man concerned, call him by his Christian name, and close the deal, get the permission, or whatever else was wanted. For cutting through red tape, for getting to the heart of a problem, for clear direction in threading through the maze of army regulations, protocol and policy, Bob Betts was a master.

Seemingly he exercised little control over the men in his section. He made no boasts about their work to his superior officers, as some section chiefs did; he never exhorted us to work harder or produce more. He made us indebted to him for his tolerance of our whims and his generosity with our failings, and he was careful to see that we got credit whenever we had really earned it. We were totally unable to fail him. It was his practice to give his men plenty of rope, and then let them either hang themselves or hoist themselves. Although we sometimes strained the rope to the limit, there was always the restraining pull of respect and friendship that brought us up sharply. And that, in my limited army experience, was the most effective policy of leadership I had ever known.

Senior player in the public relations "sweat shop" was a good-natured, good-looking blond giant, Lieutenant Robert J. Dehler, of Cleveland, Ohio. Dehler had somehow drifted into army public relations through the rather doubtful civilian experience of having operated a resoundingly unsuccessful school in radio acting. His specific assignment was assistant to Colonel Betts. He was thus part-time public relations man, part-time intelligence officer, part-time historian, and liquor salesman. The latter task fell to him through Colonel Betts' added post as controller of the officers' whisky ration, and it was Dehler's unfortunate duty once each month to visit London and come home with a truckload of "spirits" from a London warehouse.

Then followed a hectic session at the telephone, during which all work in the office ceased. Dehler would get on the wire and call each of the units in the Base Section entitled to a ration. "Give me the office of the mess officer of the officers' mess!" went the monologue. "Hello! Is this the mess officer of the officers' mess? This is Lieutenant Dehler, public relations, E.B.S. No, Lieutenant DEHLER! D for Dog, E for Easy, H for How (chanted chorus in the background, with Joe Klasen up on a table, shouting 'Heyeee! Getcha hot roasted popcorn, hot dawgs! Get 'em hot, lady. Programme! Programme! Popcorn, peanuts, hot roasted peanuts!")

"No!" repeated Dehler, "D . . . D . . . D . . . for dog.

You know, dog, like in terrier. Well, never mind my name. I just wanted to tell you that you are entitled to three-and-a-half cases of Irish whiskey, at eighteen pounds, eleven shillings and eightpence a case! I said Irish whiskey! Yes, oh this isn't the mess officer? Who is this . . . the chaplain! Well, will you have him call me . . . this is Lieutenant Dehler, D for Dog. . . ." (Joe Klasen still shouting, " Come on in folks, only ten cents, sixpence, to see the smartest little trained dog in the world! He talks, he sings, he walks on his hind legs like a lieutenant! Only sixpence folks, step right up! ") Beads of honest sweat would now be standing on Dehler's creased brow, he would be waving for silence wildly with one hand, and then the telephone would go dead. This same procedure, with variations, continued throughout the day.

Dehler was famous too for many another episode. There was the time he went on a job to Sheffield, spent twelve pounds for expenses and then couldn't remember how he could have possibly spent more than five. He never did make up a plausible expense account, and since the money had been paid out of Colonel Betts' pocket, plausible accounts were necessary. There were the Saturday mornings before the weekly office inspection, when Joe and I were too busy (so we said) writing stories, when he would get out the mop and pail and go to work cleaning the floor while we typed serenely on . . . and gave directions! There were the times when, in a fit of feigned anguish, Joe would point an accusing finger and scream, " You . . . pickle salesman! Just you try to get a job from me after the war! " And Dehler would plead for just one more chance. Dehler had also been at one time a salesman for a food-packing concern and Joe never let him forget it.

Lieutenant Leonard Levy was with our group only for a brief period, but he added a special tone of hysteria to the atmosphere, with fervent arguments about every topic under a newspaperman's sun. Len had been a reporter; he was a live-wire, fast talker, quick thinker, with an idea each minute and words that came so quickly that he sounded breathless as he spoke. His chief contribution to the excitement in the early months was in the planning of a weekly newspaper which he hoped to publish for units of the Base Section. We got as far as a dummy copy and printing estimates with this project before it was struck down still-born by an official edict, but there were heated arguments over the choice of a name. Len held out for " G.I. Joe ", while Joe and I maintained that it should be " Over Here—The Overseas Edition of Over There ". Len also

added the romantic interest, for promptly at one o'clock each day his girl Helen called him, and then would follow a few minutes of sweet somethings, punctuated by fevered explanations for that girlish voice in the background (Joe again) which was crooning, "Oh, Leonard, take your hand off my knee, puhlease! Oh, Leonard!" Len left us, to work in London (and later to marry Helen), but his frequent visits were always accompanied by argument and high laughter.

In his place came tall, cadaverous ("macabre," Dehler called him) Lieutenant Frank Walin, of Toledo, Ohio, and other points around America. Frank was an ex-reporter, ex-hobo, ex-dishwasher, and ex-manager of a dosshouse for Cleveland tramps. Completely modest, completely sincere and likeable, Frank soon fell into the fantastic aspect of the office. Frank too joined the mop-and-pail brigade on Saturday mornings when Joe and I demurred. Frank was our Press Chief, but worked just as hard writing stories and editing copies as we did, and he and Joe continually battled over Joe's pretended persecution, when Frank was accused of cracking the big bull whip. "Oh, the irony of it all," cried Joe, "to be exploited, to be enslaved, to be overworked—just because I'm low man on the totem pole—and by this—this—this refugee from a bread-line!" Frank's speciality was writing stories about the engineers, and it is probable that editors in America came to know his favourite phrase by heart. Somewhere, for the first aerodrome dedication, Frank had coined a sentence about "springboards of democracy" and "another coffin nail for Hitler", and thenceforth "springboard" stories, to our combined and vociferous derision, spun from his typewriter like shells from a mortar.

The central character of the play, the man who was largely responsible for the unreal atmosphere and the better part of the fun (as is already obvious), was little Joe Klasen, the nonpareil. Wit, clown, cynic, crack reporter, lover of horses, dogs, carnivals and people, Joe's presence anywhere was a guarantee of a good time and a good laugh. Outwardly he had the physical requirements of a jester—small, with a strut like a turkey-cock, hook nose with chin to match, humorous eyes behind steel-rimmed glasses. Topped with a shock of moth-eaten hair that refused to stay put. A bantam rooster, a tufted puffin, an elf owl—Joe was an ornithologist's item—a rare bird, indeed. His comedy took the form of burlesque, the comedy of "two-and-twenty-troubles," of the down-trodden, overworked, brow-beaten Private, first-class, to whom everything happens, for

whom no uniform would fit, and nothing would come right. When he wasn't harassing the pickle salesman or the Toledo tramp, he was making passionate propositions to Miss Mac which were resoundingly unsuccessful.

" Joan," he would begin. " If you come with me to America, to a little town which is the centre of the world—namely, Rome, New York, I will make you my queen. There, in our little cottage behind the railway yards, and just a step from the Greasy Spoon Café, you and I will spend the rest of our happy days together ! You, happily at work over your washing board, and me out driving the laundry wagon. Ah, what a perfect life ! The Klasen Laundry Company. I can see it now, painted on the side of that wagon. And if you are very good, and work very hard for the first five years and the business thrives, then I'll buy you a washing machine one Christmas !

" And every spring you will have a new fur coat. Because every Easter, in Rome, New York, all the girls join the b'ar wrestling contest. The first lucky girl to successfully wrestle the b'ar wins herself a fine new b'arskin coat . . . all the lovelier because she has caught it, skinned it and dressed it all herself ! Oh, happy day ! "

" What happens, Joe, if I fail to kill the bear ? "

" Nothing to worry about, my love. You'll still be wrapped in b'arskin."

From Frank Walin : " Joe Klasen, get back to work ! I want six stories from your desk to-day ! "

Joe, meekly : " Yes, boss. (You slave driver !) "

Joe was the kind of person who would ask a girl he had just met to " Please walk up and down in front of me a minute " (studying her ankles), " I want to see if you are the girl I whistled at in the black-out last night." But he would have died rather than whistle at a girl. He was the kind of person who loved horses and dogs, and who liked to go to circuses and variety shows because he liked the carnival thrill and crowds of people. He liked to buy books with good illustrations and good typography, and liked to smoke cigars. He was a master at puncturing inflated egos and piercing pomp and affectation, and in seeing the ridiculous in the over-stuffed, the over-important—the phoneys that abounded in the Army. He was known to all the men as " Little Joe ", and was always the centre of a crowd. I can't describe Joe adequately ; I can't do the little guy justice ; but I can't ignore him in this notebook.

The object of his outrageous affections was Scotland's gift to international relations in our office, the pretty lend-lease lassie named

Joan Macintyre—Miss Mac, Joan, or Daisy Mae. Joan's quiet manner, her soft musical way of answering every wisecrack with the perfect reply, her round blue eyes that widened like a child's when she was amazed or astonished or dreaming of something fine, combined to give the one touch of sanity to our otherwise lunatic world. Best of all was her modulated voice into which every colour of the rainbow could be painted. She could say "No", one of us said, and make it remind you of a bouquet of wild flowers. We were all a little in love with our Scottish lassie; we were fiercely jealous of the suitors that came in droves to our office, and highly critical of her choice of men-friends. She repaid us with cups of tea which she brought upstairs every afternoon at three-thirty, and we became staunch tea-fiends, howling for the golden brew if it were five minutes late. She repaid us with smiles and Scottish wit and a bright red sweater, and with invitations for quiet evenings at her home with her proudly Scottish father and her solicitous mother and her wee sister Nancy. She did our typing and our filing for us, if we begged and pleaded and behaved ourselves, and she ended by marrying one of us. As Joe put it, "We certainly put one over on the British Empire when we got Joan in exchange for those six cans of spam!"

Our little front room on the second floor was an impossible place to work, and finally, thanks to persuasive diplomacy on the part of Colonel Betts, we moved to a large double room on the third floor, the now-famous 308. After many false attempts, we arranged our furnishings to suit everyone but Joe, who howled because he was not allowed to sit next to Joan. And here, for the next six months, public relations made its incredible home.

Life still followed the pattern laid down in our former office. Joe and I divided our time between the office and trips in the field. Frank Walin made occasional journeys too, to "get things organized" and to spread the gospel of public relations. But most of his time was spent at his desk, editing copy that came in from our numerous "unit correspondents". He too kept a log of our work, snapped the whip over our heads, and mapped out future assignments. Bob Dehler was in charge of special projects; he worked up plans for ceremonies, he took charge of visitors, he slaved over the Base Section history, sold liquor, wrote speeches, recited poetry, tried to maintain discipline, and censored our mail, the latter job bringing roars of laughter if the letters were Joe's, or roars of anguish if they were mine.

In practice Joe and I were completely independent, making our own plans, and even carrying on correspondence with unit public relations officers. More than once Walin opened a letter, scratched his head, and tried to recall writing a letter censuring, instructing, or encouraging some harassed officer in the field. Finally he shouted "Which one of you jokers wrote a letter to the 999th Quartermaster Depot asking for more details about a parade in Kettering? Dammit, tell me when you sign my name to a letter!"

"Hey, toss that over here, will you? I've been waiting for that for a week," would be the answer, and shaking his head sadly, Frank would comply.

"There never was an army like this one," he murmured. "Never!"

As new units arrived in our area it became impossible for us to cover them all merely by our infrequent visits and the stories we wrote ourselves. A new system was inaugurated, whereby each unit appointed its own public relations officer or enlisted man. His job was to cover the unit as we had done, sending in short personal items about individual soldiers or longer stories about the unit as a whole, and to notify us in the event of any important happening. Their stories were forwarded to our office, where we did what editing was necessary and dispatched them to London for final release in American papers.

To keep these public relations men going, many of them amateurs at newspaper work and all of them burdened with other tasks, we had two major goads. The first was a personal visit from one of us, during which we explained procedures and routine, and indoctrinated him with the "P.R.O. mission." The second goad was our weekly "News-Notes."

This latter scheme was a weekly mimeographed news letter, which was sent to each unit commander with instructions to pass it along to his public relations officer. The News-Notes combined clues and hints on where to look for news with instructions on how to write stories. Its headlines shouted, "A GI Inventor in Your Unit? Send us his Story!" "What Is Your Unit Planning for Christmas?" "Don't Forget Full Names and Addresses!" "Ninety-seven per cent of Your Stories are Being Used by American Newspapers!" and other inspiring data.

The most important feature of "News-Notes" was the honour roll, which listed the names of unit P.R.O's with the best records during the past week. The honour roll had immediate results,

although it is to be admitted that Joe and I sometimes chose winners more in an effort to encourage new officers who were trying hard, and to judiciously spread the glory, rather than to reward true accomplishment. Had we not, the same men would have won each week, and spoiled the game. But P.R.O's (and commanding officers too) took great interest in our little lottery of fame, wrote letters asking why they had not been named, proudly posted the " News-Notes " on their bulletin boards when they had won, and at least one lieutenant was promoted because of it. We wondered what would have happened had the colonels, captains, and lieutenants to whom we addressed our weekly advice and exhortations discovered that they were being prodded by a sergeant and a private, first class.

Our job, besides being merely reporters, had many other interesting ramifications. There was the matter of speech-writing. Whenever there was an " occasion " we had to write a speech. Dehler and I sweated out these orations—hacked and hewed them into what we considered simple elegant prose—usually to hear them disappear in a cloud of cigar-smoke and wind. A far more interesting job was the escorting of war correspondents representing American or British newspapers on visits to our units. Then we had all the fun of a trip with none of the bother of writing our own stories, and usually, on the strength of our distinguished companions, we ate at the officers' mess.

We had other jobs, too—we wrote a movie script about aerodrome construction entitled " Paving the Way to Victory ". When the American Forces Network began broadcasting to our troops we had radio programmes to audition, rehearse, script, stage, and direct. And because it was felt that soldiers in England missed the familiar commercial announcements we wrote (under duress) little squibs on " Wearing the Uniform Properly, " " Careful Driving, " " Sending Your Money Home, " and " Consuming More Lemon Powder. "

On top of all this, we had to fight the continual battle of most army public relations men, the fight for the little man—for G.I. Joe. For it was unfortunate, but true, that the average commanding officer judged his unit's P.R.O. by the number of times his own name was mentioned in each story, and by the number of flash-bulbs that blazed in his face.

All of us at Watford fought this battle with guile and determination. We were for the little guy, the man in the ranks, the privates and sergeants who needed, and deserved, the glory. Although it was customary to start most stories with " An engineer regiment com-

manded by Colonel Charles Brasshat, of Omaha, Nebraska, to-day completed somewhere in England . . ." we were careful to drop the colonel at once and dwell upon the exploits of his men. And though cameras clicked and pencils wiggled as the generals and the colonels spoke before local women's clubs, it was an even chance that there was no film in the camera and merely doodles on the pages of the notebook. We compiled our own secret lists of " lens-lice " and publicity seekers, and we did our best to thwart their efforts at personal aggrandizement (and also effected neat economies in paper and photographic supplies.)

Though there were inevitable failures, we held to that line as best we could. Often, in spite of our efforts, the big names stole the headlines from the men, or from the Army, because in the end it is names that make news. But we fervently hoped that somewhere in a newspaper at home the words that we had written about our men had been published as we had written them, and that somewhere a family was proud and a soldier was proud because of them. For that, to us, was the major justification for our jobs.

33

" 'TIS THE GRIM, GREY HOUR ! "

IT was Miss Mac who introduced us to 'The Unicorn' soon after our arrival in Watford. Although she never accompanied us, she told us where to find this rare specimen of a public house, for which we were eternally grateful. For 'The Unicorn' provided many an evening's entertainment, and it was there that we met some of our best English friends.

We liked 'The Unicorn' immediately, for a variety of reasons. Perversely, we liked it because it was sufficiently remote from town to insure it against overcrowding by fellow Yank soldiers, which was a besetting evil in the populous pubs along Watford High Street. Here we could repair for a quiet evening of good conversation, a game of darts, or " shove-ha'penny, " and not suffer the indignity of a visit from the M.P.'s, or the raucous shout " No More Beer ! "

' The Unicorn ', too, had what seemed to be the most amazing liquor display we had seen in England. All the way across the shelves behind the bar were bottles of Drambuie, of Brandy, Cock-

tail Mixtures, Liqueurs and other rarities. True, the price of a nip from one of these prized bottles was beyond our purse, but it was a mellowing and comforting experience merely to gaze raptly at the display, including one hallowed, almost untouchable bottle of 1811 Napoleon that was gathering dust in a place of honour. We had plans for that bottle—it was our Victory Bottle—and we fervently hoped that it would remain virginal until that glorious day. (But it didn't. Some heretic stranger committed the sacrilege of sampling it long before D-Day, and it was gone the last time I visited ' The Unicorn '.) In addition to the " spirits " ' The Unicorn ' maintained a varied supply of beers, and it was here that we came to consider ourselves connoisseurs of mild, bitter, light, dark, new, old, lager, Bass, stout, I.P.A., Main Line, Burton, and all the other categories of malt brew found in the English realm.

But it was not merely a well-stocked cellar that brought us out by bus or on bicycles to ' The Unicorn '. The little country public house had a special atmosphere that we found nowhere else—a light-hearted, friendly, hospitable, improbable atmosphere, where the customers joshed the management, and the management bullied and bedevilled and sassed the customers.

You hadn't been in ' The Unicorn ' very long before you were one of the family, calling the boss Dora and the chief barman Jimmy, and being called, " My Yank, " or " My young Correspondent " (from the shoulder patch the public relations men wore), and eventually " Bob " or " My dear! "

Dora, a sturdy, good-natured blonde, ran the place for her husband, Hugh, an army officer. Dora knew all the regulars by name, and there was conversation with each, often a joke, always a laugh. But the centre of the stage behind the bar was dominated by her brother Jimmy—whose choicest epithets were reserved for his favourite customers, who never failed to accept an offer to share in a round, who rolled his eyes and put his finger slyly on his nose when asked a difficult request, but who always filled the order. Jimmy's handling of funds was erratic, and he had a heavy hand in pouring drinks, which was profitable for the guests but costly for the management, and his closing-time histrionics were famous for miles around.

' The Unicorn ' has four little rooms in which to drink. At the public bar, a plain room with plain benches and tables, beer was a penny less and it was definitely a beer-drinking crowd, with a dart board thrown in for sport and conversation. On the other side of the old house (four hundred years it had stood there, Dora said)

was a garden room with metal tables and a gay atmosphere, for the " tourist trade. " In the middle of the house was one larger room for a lounge, tastefully furnished with carpets, upholstered furniture, polished brass on the walls, and a quiet, refined atmosphere. The lounge was for the upper crust ; when you sat here you talked in subdued tones and ordered whisky. The lounge was not for us.

Our favourite corner was the middle bar—a tiny room scarcely ten feet square, with space for perhaps a dozen people to sit, and an unparalleled view of that magnificent bottle display. It was here that the crowds gathered to the overflowing point ; and we often counted as many as thirty-eight paralysed (from the crowding—not the drinks) people. When there was room for it, " shove-ha'penny " was played here, but more often it was impossible to do more than stand in one spot and converse with the nearest dozen neighbours. Here it was that the local Home Guard congregated on Sunday noon after the weekly exercises, and here that the privates told the sergeants and the officers what they thought of their leadership and held a post-mortem on the day's work. It was here that the Canadians came down from the nearby hospital and mingled and traded stories with the RAF men from the aerodrome and the occasional Americans, Poles, Czechs, New Zealanders and Australians who discovered this bright haven. But this was a suburban locale, the civilians usually outnumbered the men and women in uniform, and there was more talk about the pig club, the cultivation of roses and politics than there was about matters military.

It was the custom at ' The Unicorn ', as in most English pubs and clubs, for each member of the group to pay for a round of drinks in succession and to be duly toasted by all other members of the group. Thus both economy and hospitality were appeased ; one was toasted at least once during the evening—although the infrequent American visitors found it difficult somehow to get to the bar and order from Jimmy ; and it was usually a combination of intrigue, guile, and sheer blackmail to be allowed to buy a round. Solitary drinking was not encouraged in this room—if a uniformed stranger walked in it was only a matter of minutes before he was befriended and included in the group.

There was also, I am afraid, a little conspiracy behind the counter in favour of the regular customers and the neighbours, for there were two distinct groups of people who visited ' The Unicorn '. Some were those who made the long trek by bus from Watford, and others were those who lived within walking or cycling distance.

The favoured drinks sometimes, but not always, were hard to get, or " ran out " before nine o'clock, when the last bus back to town half-emptied the rooms. Immediately thereafter another bottle or two of whisky was accidentally discovered under the counter, and the party continued unabated. It was considered a great joke by the locals.

' The Unicorn ' was a little better in most ways than the average English public house, but it was typical of this entirely British institution none the less. Here was a topic on which all Americans were agreed; that the pub was a good thing, a great idea, both a social and democratic institution. The public house means much to England—as a meeting place, a poor man's club, a public forum, a sanctuary and retreat; it fills a need for companionship and social life in villages where there is little other, or in communities where the average home is not pretentious enough to welcome guests. It seemed strange to us at first that there was so little " visiting " in England compared with America—so little porch-settin' and " dropping in of an evening " with friends and neighbours. But the public house provides a common living room for all friends, and thus provides the opportunity for get-togethers without any invasion of the privacy of the home. It is founded upon an entirely different system of living, and those Americans who dallied with the idea of introducing the public-house institution to American life soon realized that it would never work.

It would never work for the reason of the more-favoured " visiting " and evening dates between friends and the " open house " welcome of the American home, but it is also founded on the surprising—to us—fact that the Briton drinks far more, and more frequently than the American.

The visit to the community pub is a daily ritual for the average Briton, but the visit to the corner bar of the " cocktail lounge " is daily practice only for a small minority in America. While in England the public house is the centre of community social life next to the Church, there are thousands of small communities in America where there is no place at all to drink in public—in fact that is the rule rather than the exception in the rural hamlet. But in Britain, every country crossroads has its pub, and some have three or four.

In my own town, for example—a residential suburb with a sizeable shopping neighbourhood—whose population is close to seven thousand, there are, if memory serves, no more than six licensed drinking places. In Sudbury, Suffolk, whose population is roughly

equivalent, there are thirty-seven public houses, and they all have been operating successfully for a long time. The six bars and saloons in my home town are crowded on Saturday night, they are moderately popular on other nights, but the vast majority of the residents of the town have never been inside any of them. The thirty-seven pubs of Sudbury are regularly filled every noon and every evening, and they overflow into the streets on Saturday nights. This does not mean that there is six times the drinking in Sudbury that there is in my home town, or six times the drunkenness. For drunkenness was rare indeed among the natives of Sudbury. It is just that drinking customs are different, and based on an entirely different idea of social gathering—and the surprising fact that the Briton, especially the rural Briton, is a far more gregarious soul than his American counterpart. No, we concluded, the public-house idea would never be a success in America, much as we liked it in its native environment. For we liked the public house, not merely because we could drink here (as it often seemed), but because here it was, for better or worse, that we most frequently met and came to know the English people.

It was at 'The Unicorn' that I met Joe and Elsa Clode, and Mervyn and Bessie Loverock, and Jim and Alice Simmons, who were among the finest and most loyal friends I made in England. We did our most serious thinking here on Allied problems, on the course of the war, on the social problems of Great Britain, on politics and education, economics and music, on books and art, and in fact the whole range of the world's interests from coarse humour to theology. I later visited these friends at their homes, ate at their tables, slept on couches in their parlours, went to parties and dances with them, and walks and rides; took baths in their tubs and made myself as completely at home as I ever was in someone else's house. But it was in the reeking blue atmosphere of the middle bar of 'The Unicorn' that we met and where we spent many of our friendliest hours.

And though there will be many things about England that I will forget, and others that memory will soften or distort, I will never forget Jimmy's closing-time chant, accompanied by flickering lights, ribald comment, and an extreme reluctance on the part of the clientele to depart. It went like this:

"Ladies and Gentlemen: 'Tis now the grim, grey hour! Come along now, everybody, it's *Time*. Time, please. Everyone! Come along, you ropey types, get along home with you. Come along,

Bessie ; come along, Joe ; come now, my young correspondent, let's be on off home to our beds. Time, Please ! Oh, please, good people, will you go HOME !

" Come along now, you odds and sods, come along there, young Alice, think of our licence ! Oh, what will we do if we lose our licence ! It's way past time now, please. Please go home, everyone. TIME ! Not one more drink will you have, my good Freddie. Not even one tiny little wee drink. I said TIME ! Must I throw you all out into the night ! Get along home there, everyone. . . . You've had your fun, we've had your mun, now *bugger off* ! "

34

GOOD FRIENDS AT HOME

It was at ' The Unicorn ' that I met the small group of friends who did so much to make me feel at home during the year I was at Watford, and though perhaps nothing that we did together was particularly remarkable, it was in their company that I was most at home in England, and since they became my closest friends it would be an error of omission to leave them out of these pages.

The members of this group were six : Joe and Elsa Clode, Mervyn and Bessie Loverock, and James (Pop) and Alice Simmons. Joe and Elsa were a young, fun-loving couple who lived in a big house at Chipperfield, two miles away across the valley from ' The Unicorn '. They had two young children—Pat, aged seven, and Peter, aged three. By war-time standards they were well-off—the button factory that Joe owned was operating full-blast in his garage ; he had permission to use several cars on business ; he had a large garden which supplied fresh vegetables and fresh eggs in abundance, and there was also in the *ménage* an elderly couple named Walker and Mrs. Walker, and a nurse for the children called Jean, a dog, a cat, and three goats.

Bessie and Mervyn were a couple of youngsters who had met and married during the war ; both were working hard as civilians. Mervyn was a handsome Dublin-educated Orangeman, with a rich, rolling voice with a bit of the brogue polished off. He was a civil engineer who had worked all over England and Northern Ireland for contractors who were building aerodromes and underground factories and were excavating coal in Yorkshire. Bessie worked too,

at a drafting table in the office of a civil engineering concern at the nearby Leavesdon aerodrome. She was a striking blonde of twenty-two, who wore clothes with a flair and had a sparkling smile.

She and Mervyn lived four doors from ' The Unicorn ', with her parents, " Pop " and Alice Simmons. The Simmons's were a Lancashire couple and as staunch and true friends as ever I had in England. " Pop " with his garden that kept him busy, and his Home Guard, and his pig club and his regular job for the railway—and the house that continually needed " luikin' after, " and Alice with her Lancashire talk, and her jokes and laughter, and the laundry that she washed and ironed for me, the suppers that she fed me, and the thousand acts of generosity and hospitality that she sponsored and arranged—were a perfect team.

Completing the household at the Simmons's were the two children. Young James was a lanky boy of fifteen, a member of the Air Training Corps and crazy about aircraft—noisy as are most boys of fifteen, a dreamer whose interests were definitely not centred about the school where he was waiting out the months until he would be old enough to join the RAF. And lastly, one of my favourite English persons, and at twelve a real personality—little Miss Barbara, the kid sister, who played Beethoven sonatas for me, and did sewing for me, and who took me to see bluebell woods in spring, and always waved to me from her upstairs window when I came visiting of an evening after she had gone to bed. Barbara was a serious, wistful child with a shining shock of blonde hair, and she was prouder of the tomatoes she was growing in the garden than of the fact that she was first and youngest in her class at school, upholding the family honours of the brilliant Bessie.

These were the good, solid, middle-class people of England, and among them I spent some of my most enjoyable hours. Sometimes I visited them alone, sometimes Bob Dehler was with me, or Frank, or little Joe. But most often I was alone when I took the bus or rode a bicycle to King's Langley to see " the folks. "

It was at Chipperfield that I helped Joe and Mervyn corral Joe's three goats—the goats that Elsa threatened to kill if they didn't stay out of her lettuce garden. It was at Chipperfield that we lay in the sun in summer, and had our teas on the lawn, and I played Onesy-Twosy on the porch with the indefatigable Pat and romped with the tireless Peter. It was to King's Langley that we returned when Jimmy had thrown us out of ' The Unicorn ', with a few extra bottles of ale under our arms, to continue the party and dance to

the radio and then to records, and eat snacks and drink coffee until the small hours of the morning—going home to bed only when there was no more music, no more to eat and drink, and when Joe and Bessie had exhausted themselves jitterbugging in a fashion that shamed the lone American representative.

It was at King's Langley that we had the New Year's Eve party, when the American was given the honour and (they said) the good luck of knocking on the door—the dark stranger—to be let in on the stroke of midnight. It was at King's Langley that I one day kept house when the whole family was away, and ordered an unwanted cord of wood from a pedlar—and then was forgiven. It was at Chipperfield that we played baseball and then cricket on the lawn with the same tennis ball and croquet stick, and Chipperfield where I lost two of Joe's precious golf balls in the cornfield. It was at Chipperfield that we had the long, noisy, and hilarious monopoly games on rainy Sunday afternoons, and where Elsa presided over the well-but-wartime-stocked Sunday dinner. And it was King's Langley where we sat down to the bright Sunday afternoon teas, and it was at both houses where I spent many a night (when I should have been in the barracks in Watford) on the sofa downstairs or in a bed that was always waiting for me at one house or the other. And sometimes the next morning I would board the first bus back to camp, making my own breakfast in the kitchen from materials that had been left for me, or sometimes borrowing Bessie's bike, or James's, or Joe's.

It was Mervyn who was most interested in America and in American opportunities and the American future, and what the Americans thought of England, who admired the American way of getting things done and with whom I had the lengthiest conversations. But there were many nights, too, when Joe and I sat before the fire with glasses of whisky in our hands, and considered gravely the state of the world and the course of the war and the virtues and faults of the men who were running it. From Pop, too, I learned about life in England in the good old days and how things were in the last war when beer was a penny a glass and a man could raise a family on about a pound a week. With Elsa I discussed manners and morals and with Bessie I talked music and the theatre and books and sports. And in this way, too, I learned about England.

There were so many little human everyday things with these people that sound so ordinary when they are told, but that meant so much in friendship when they happened. Their delight at my promotion.

"That's chompion, Bob, that's chompion," said Pop. And the morning Pop and Mervyn came back from the all-night Home Guard problem howling with laughter and boiling with rage at the same time. "Well, Bob, I've seen some domned silly things, but that sitting out in a domned ditch for twelve hours with no relief and nothing to see and nothing to do—that's the most fulish I've ever seen!" And Bessie urging Mervyn to go to Home Guard after he had volunteered, but Mervyn refusing to appear until he was issued with a proper pair of trousers. And Joe's trouble, too, with Home Guard, or rather with his gardener, to whom he must give orders with great diplomacy, for Joe was a private and his gardener was his sergeant!

And there was the buzzbomb that landed nearby on the Saturday night and shook plaster down on our heads, and there was Joe at the March Hare's Ball—who had not had many drinks but had had one too many for a Conga whip, and who seemed to be spinning across the dance floor on his ear every time I looked for him. "I'm just a shell of a man," said Joe, "a shell of a man!" And there were rugby games in the living room at two a.m. on Sunday mornings, with fair Bessie for a ball. And there were the feuds between Joe and 'The Unicorn' whenever the whisky ran short, Joe taking the shortage as a personal insult and his trade down the hill to 'The Dog and Partridge', which didn't have any whisky either.

And there was the afternoon that Pop and Mervyn took me to Lord's to see cricket as it is played—and there were the times that we spent our afternoons walking along the lanes of Hertfordshire, and there were the crowded evenings in the middle bar of 'The Unicorn', again, where I had to fight Pop and Mervyn and Joe and a dozen others (and Jimmy, the barman, too) to buy a round of drinks.

There was the good advice that Elsa gave me when I needed it most, and there were the food rations that I was almost forced to consume, and the Christmas gifts that I couldn't return, and the letters of cheer that were written home to my family.

And above it all a sincerity and a hospitality and a warmth of friendship that the American guest hopes that some day, some how, he will be able to repay.

35

THOUGHTS ON BRITISH CHARACTER

To the visiting American, the most noticeable of John Bull's characteristics is the underlying reticence, modesty, and understatement that is found in all phases of British life. It is especially noticeable to Americans, who come from a land where exaggeration and overstatement are the accepted idiom, where one is more likely to introduce one's friend by saying, " I'd like to have you meet Joe Blow ; Joe here is the best little tennis player in the world ; " or " I'll ask Harry about it, Harry's the greatest little privy-builder in Sagamon County ; " where anything less than a superlative is a condemnation, and more records are broken per square mile per hour than can be tabulated ; where a wedding by parachute or a six months' squat in a tree or a novel without the letter " e " is news because it is the best, the highest, the longest, or the most something. This constant striving for fame or notoriety has had a tremendous effect on America. It has been in a perverse way responsible for her greatness in industry, in invention, and in progress, and her prowess in sports. It is no accident that baseball, America's national sport, is one that most thrives on records and statistics—hundreds of them.

The American is bewildered and confused in Britain, where everything is reversed, where he is likely to be introduced to the Bishop of Paddington in mufti merely as a chap named Will Potter, or told that some gem of architecture is a " rather fair " example of Tudor style, or hear an apology for something because it is " quite old, actually, " when in reality it is the only extant example of an art that goes back seven hundred years. He has no guidepost and no scale of values in a land where " decent sort of fellow " is the highest praise, and the nation's most-respected newspaper covers its front page with personal notices and classified advertising.

The Englishman seems never to boast, to brag, to advertise. His way is the way of the oyster, you must crack open his shell to find the pearl, and he will sometimes resist that forcing. Outwardly, he believes in conformity with tradition and with the accepted mores, inwardly and privately he is an individualist who is intent on cultivating his own life and character in his own personal way for his own enjoyment.

You notice this slowly, and in many ways. In the suburb of Watford, for example, the streets in the residential areas are all bordered by high fences, walls and hedges. As you walk along the pavement, you see nothing but these fences and hedges, and perhaps the upper storeys of the homes, which all look alike from the outside. It is not until you are invited in through the gate that you find yourself in a lovely garden—carefully and lovingly cultivated, individual, personal—a thing of beauty that exists for the owner alone, for his family, and the few (or many) chosen friends who are invited within. The lawns of American suburbs that stretch to the pavement, with the gardens for all to see, this is not the English way.

The commonly offered explanation—that his is a crowded little island on which life would become unbearable without a high respect for personal privacy—is untenable. Though the average population per square mile of Britain may be much higher than that of the United States—actual crowding is no greater, and often it is less. The difference lies not in proximity of neighbours, but in the vast areas of wilderness and unexploited land in America. Surely America's big cities with their vertical as well as horizontal development are more crowded than London—England's chief population centre.

The passion for privacy cannot be entirely attributed to the crowding, for the sanctuary idea is strongest where the crowding is least. It is possible (and more than likely) to motor from one end of England to another and never catch a glimpse of one of the great homes and manors that abound on the larger estates. They are not perched on knolls and hills commanding the landscape for all to see and admire. They are hidden deep in the forest—far back from the commerce of the highways, and discreetly screened by careful plantings. It is only when you travel over England in an aeroplane that you discover to your amazement the great numbers of these mansion sanctuaries. Here again modesty, understatement, distaste for ostentation, for notice.

You see it in the dress of the people. Surely it is a mystery that the fame of the beauty of the Englishwomen has not spread around the world—for it is a beauty rarely equalled. But no one talks about it, no one advertises it. The English beauty clothes herself in coarse tweeds of unflattering cut, she ruins the lines of her legs with "sensible" flat-heeled shoes, she condescends to comb her unsurpassed locks, but that is about all. Yes—you have heard that she has a beautiful complexion, but it is the women of France, the women

of Spain, the women of a dozen other countries whose very mention has always set the imagination afire. You must look past her modesty in dress and past her obvious and perverse desire for anonymity and conformity and you find yourself saying, " Now, there's a girl who could be beautiful—if she only gave herself a chance." And when you have said that a hundred times you become aware of the secret fact—the unmentioned discovery—that English womanhood is beautiful after all. But not for you, not for the casual bystander—not to be advertised—not to be displayed, except for the initiate invited within the gates of the private English garden.

You notice the trait in conversation. You might think that you have made friends with Jim Miller over the counter of the ironmongery store, or, over the " shove-ha'penny " board in the Lion Inn, you will have talked and possibly argued and had little friendly jokes. But you will know Jim for days and perhaps weeks before you will be invited to his home, and only then will you discover that Jim has a rare collection of old coins, or a high degree of skill in making roses bloom. You may have even been talking about coins or about roses, but Jim never once let you guess, by any implication or suggestion, that he knew more about the subject than the average man. He lets you find it out for yourself—in due time.

The British advertising, on posters and in magazines and newspapers, strikes you as a masterpiece of negation. " Pardon us for mentioning it," the ads. seem to say, " but we think you'll like our product." " Sorry to intrude on your privacy, old fellow, but if by any chance you need sausages, why we've been making them for four hundred years." " We don't want to influence you in any way, of course, but we make beer, too."

This combination of innate modesty and dislike of ostentation and boasting and the need for advertising one's wares results in a highly confused and often amusing state of affairs, and gives the American visitor the impression that British advertising is about thirty years behind the times. Where modesty overrules everything else, advertising is likely to degenerate merely to an announcement of the name, without even a clue as to the nature of the product. Thus the American finds himself wondering what is the meaning of such slogans as " What We Want is Watney's ! " " You are now in the Strong Country." " Players Please, " " Ah, Bisto ! " not to mention Hovis, Virol, and the other non-committal names.

Even when there are slightly more hints as to the nature of the product (with pictures or descriptions) the same old inhibitions lead

to confusing results. Possibly the gems of these are the signs in the non-smoking cars of the London Underground which say, " No Smoking—Not Even Abdullahs, " by which the Abdullah people accomplish two feats : they suggest that Abdullahs are really something less than bona-fide cigarettes, and then they advertise this product in one of the few places in London where non-smokers can segregate themselves !

I suppose it is a sign of civilization, but in Britain only in a rather distasteful type of medical advertising is modesty thrown aside. A product with the lovely name of Bile Beans is a prominent feature of the landscape, and up in Suffolk there is a medicine (for animals ?) advertised by the name of Constitution Balls. But my favourite was always the highly-evocative product for " Arteries, Blood, Veins, and Heart," called *Elasto*, which boasts, " Take it and stop limping ! "—immediately bringing visions of a liquid which turns one's blood to chewing gum and sends the crutches flying while the patient does handsprings on the wall.

The great majority of billboards and posters and car-cards, however, are of war-time origin, and are simple commands from the various governmental agencies and other public services to " Keep on Saving," to " Dig for Victory, " to " Stagger Working Hours and Save the Rush, " to " Shop Between 10 and 4, " and " Is Your Journey Really Necessary ? " These are usually modest, polite, and clever, and seem, too, unusually successful.

Modesty, politeness, cleverness ; these are the clues, three of the keys that will open the gate into the British garden. Understatement, reticence, a development of one's personality from within—these are the British qualities. War and the advent of the Americans caused a slight and painful change. Under the impact of continual prodding from the exuberant Americans—to each of whom his own country, his own state, his own town or farm was the best in the world—the Englishman had to fight back somehow. It came unnaturally to him, and strange, and he did it in a subtle, modest way ; as if to say, " That is true, of course, but don't forget that we, too, here in England, were the original inventors of that machine ; we had a law to cover that at least a hundred years ago ; we rather like our product along that line."

Urgent cries appeared, too, in the Press to forget modesty for the moment, to tell the world something of the accomplishments and the virtues of England. But even then the reminders were printed not as boasting, nor as advertising, not in the spirit of

competition—but merely as stated and slightly embarrassing facts, as something for which the Briton has a typical phrase—"pardonable pride."

36

DAY AT ST. ALBANS

I WAS sitting under the crossing of the cathedral, looking up into the cream-coloured stone tower, as the sun streamed through the windows high overhead. The massive nave was empty now and there was no echo in the high arching Norman vaults—but I was surrounded with a host of people who passed beside and around me without word or sound.

Some of us go to ancient cathedrals to worship, some go to admire and study the architecture, the sculpture and the glass, and some go to meditate. But sitting here under these time-worn stones in this empty hall, I was dreaming—lost in fancy. I had forgotten my uniform, forgotten why I had come here, forgotten even my name; but the great columns, the vast silent aisles, the worn stones of the pavement, unchanged by centuries, had taken me out of the present and into an ageless dream transcending time and reality. Here around me was a silent concourse of the past—here visible to me in the original setting, and just as visible as these stones before me, were the figures that peopled this place in the past, moving in a ghostly pageant.

Here were knights in polished steel, helmets in hand, sword jingling on the stone as they kneeled before the altar. Here was a family of peasants in rough homespun and leather of brown and black, gaping in awe at the magnificence of this mighty abbey. Here were monks in black cassocks and leather sandals, here were toothless old women in blue shawls, praying for soldiers in other wars, here were bearded sailors who knew canvas and halyards and cannon and who had sailed to Cadiz and to Brest and to Jamaica. Here a bishop in his rich robes, there a king with blue eyes and a pale complexion and blood running from his throat; but the thing that I most noticed was his arrogant smile. Now it was Sunday in another century and the great nave was filled with women with plumed hats and men with narrow trousers and stiff high collars. They were all here before my eyes, and the sun shone through the windows down on the soldier of Queen Elizabeth, the child of the

fourteenth century and the eighteenth century coachman alike. Here had come multitudes, some to be christened, some to be wed, some to plot and scheme, some to pray, some to be crowned, and some to die and be buried under these stones they had trod. They were all around me, these people of the past, and if I closed my eyes I could almost smell the rain on their woollen coats, the lavender in the skirts of the ladies, the mixed sweet smell of incense and roses and the sweat of horses, of snuff and of candlewax and dust. What were their problems, these people who had never heard the name America, who had never heard the word democracy or had never even seen a gun ? For whom were their prayers, for what were they hoping or dreaming ? What were the words they used, and what music played as they sang ?

The reveries ended with the hum of an aeroplane overhead, and the ancient cawing of rooks in the tower. I was in St. Albans Cathedral, and it was 1943, and the third button on my jacket needed polishing.

I had come to St. Albans on the recommendation of my frined Newton Calhoun, who had been with me in the Engineers and had gone to Watford before me. " Doc " Calhoun was a graduate of Yale, Harvard, and Chicago universities, intelligent, well-read, and good company. He had come to the Engineers from a job teaching the polite little aristocrats at the Groton School. He was amazed and horrified by the rough life of the Engineers and had left it for E.B.S. soon after we arrived in England. He was an indefatigable tourist, and I valued his judgment. When he said, " You must see St. Albans ; it is a wonderful little town with the entire sweep of English history in it "—I had made my plans.

But you cannot go back into history in a gang, and so I had gone to St. Albans alone. That was the way I liked to see these old towns best, and all my excursions—to Canterbury, Lincoln, to Windsor, and to Salisbury—were solitary ones. That way the reveries could come uninterrupted, the programme could fit the mood, and then too if I wanted to talk to the people of to-day it was always easier when one was alone. A group is self-sufficient and independent, but people somehow take an interest in a lonely stranger and immediately befriend him, give liberally of advice, guidance and friendship.

The magnificent old Abbey of St. Albans, standing high at the top of a park with its long nave and its square tower made of flat Roman bricks, was alone worth my trip to St. Albans. But inside

that quiet nave was not the only place where I saw, or dreamed, the whole scope of British history.

I went to lunch at an old inn, 'The White Hart,' which had been a famous staging hostel in old days, and here, too, was the same lively pageant, the courtyard filled with the sound of hostlers and coachmen and dogs and horses and maids. Here in this dining-room Hogarth had sat and sketched a famous murderer who was being taken to London to be hanged. Here at the bar the squires of the neighbourhood had stood and drunk their ale and talked of hunting and of horses, of taxes and of the latest news from the Court.

And in the market-place this Saturday afternoon were the same booths and stalls and hawkers of merchandize that had been there every Saturday for centuries. Selling the same bolts of cloth, the same pins and ribbons and beans and tomatoes, with the same pens for the pigs and sheep and poultry. Here was the vendor of a cure-all, the seller of religious tracts, the itinerant tinker, the girls with baskets of flowers, the women with bunches of herbs. They came now in buses and on bicycles in from the farms and villages to buy, they had ration books as well as coins to deal in now, but except for their dress they were the same people who had come in on foot, in carts and wagons years ago. It was the same market-place, and the ancient houses along French Row still leaned at the same drunken angles as they did in the fifteenth century, when the French soldiers of the king were billeted here, and the old clock tower still counted the same hours as it had the day Queen Eleanor stopped through here on her way to London, and had looked up to see if her carriage was late.

Walking down to the river, I passed 'The Fighting Cocks', which advertises itself to be the oldest licensed house in England. Here again were the ancient people talking under the trees, or sipping their ale in the tiny oak-beamed rooms. You cannot escape the past in St. Albans.

Down at the river the older history begins, and this too crowds your mind with figures and with dim forms. Here is a fragment of a wall that was part of the Roman town of Verulamium, when it was an important outpost of the Roman Empire. Here is Watling Street, a winding, tarred road now, but it had once been paved with stones, and cut straight as an arrow across the countryside to the northern garrisons, crowded with traffic, the wagons and the marching men of the legions, the rough-clad natives, the poor and yet proud peasants who watched these strange domineering foreigners

and were forced to help build their great towns, their temples, their theatres, their villas—watched them come and survived their departure as the empire crumbled at the heart.

Here, in the museum, are the relics of that distant and almost forgotten past. Taken from the soil under the meadows by the river are the little intimate objects of everyday life in Roman Britain —oil lamps and pottery, hairpins and buttons and earpicks, combs and nails and glass perfume vials iridescent with age, bronze figurines and parts of leather sandals, finger-rings and necklaces, coins with the same figure of Britannia as the pennies to-day. The people who fashioned these curios were not here to haunt this modern building—many of these items had been made in other lands—the pottery was from parts of Gaul, the coins from Rome. This was not ancient Britannia but a sad collection of displaced objects under glass.

But out in the Roman theatre, under the sky, with a view across the fields and hills of Hertfordshire, here the multitudes flocked back again. I stood there alone that sunny afternoon, and I could see the masked players on the stage, perhaps a travelling company, playing the same show now in the provinces that had been the rage in Rome the year before. And the audience was there to applaud, dressed in Roman style, with the rich and the wealthy and the fashionable down in front—the governor and his entourage in purple-bordered togas—and up above them the lesser Romans of the town—the merchants and the teachers and the students. Where were the real natives of England in those days—the men of the Briton tribes that lived here? Were they admitted to the outer fringes of the amphitheatre, like country cousins, to gape at a performance whose words and gestures meant little to them? What had happened to this theatre when the Romans departed—had it lain untouched and crumbling for generations? Had the natives come back and hauled away the stones to build houses and churches for the new religion? What was the exact year when there was no longer any visible trace of this theatre, when there was no longer a living soul here who remembered—or remembered how his grandfather had once mentioned it, long, long ago, in his childhood? You can do a lot of dreaming in a place like this.

But this is not the oldest age of St. Albans' history. Up under the roots of the trees in Prae Wood there had been another older town, built long before the coming of the Roman legions. Here was a stockaded village with rude wooden houses that must have

resembled one of our American frontier pioneer settlements. But there were no traces now, and this age, fascinating though it was, did not come alive again. Perhaps you might find, in the faces of the St. Albans children of to-day, the faintest suggestion of that old breed of men, but what these people looked like, how they lived and worshipped in the forests that covered England was lost in time.

In the meadows below Prae Wood a cricket game was in progress, and I sat down in the grass to watch. Next to me was a British soldier, and we traded cigarettes and started to talk. His name was Eric, and as we watched the leisurely game play out its slow pattern, Eric told me of his army life to-day in Warwickshire. Later we walked together down to an inn called ' The Ancient Briton ', and over beers he told me of Dunkirk, and how he had been rescued by a French coastal barge loaded with coal which had put into Dunkirk from Bordeaux, unaware that a crisis was at hand. How they had been aboard that coal barge for two weeks, with the French captain not knowing where to go or what to do, afraid to go back to France—afraid to land in England. How they had completely circled Ireland, and had wandered the ocean, sleeping in the open on the coal, finally to put in to Southampton, hungry and black—the last boat home from France. Then our talk turned to the war to-day, the chances of an early invasion—the campaign in Italy—the bombers that were even now going overhead.

Here in these short hours in St. Albans and in Verulamium I had come the full circle, from the bus that brought me into town from Watford, back through the centuries to the days of the earliest Christians, and then back still farther to the Roman invasion, and farther still to the days of Druids and the pagan Belgic tribes. And now I was sitting here talking with a soldier of to-day, and we were considering an invasion of the Continent, the end of the war, the England of the future. We were not thinking of the past now, but of to-morrow.

Yes, you need not go to the books to find history in England, because the book is spread there before you, with the pages open. Perhaps my friend in the Engineers who said, " Hell, this isn't a country, it's a goddam museum " was not being wholly fair, but certainly history is on all sides, and that to some small extent it must temper the thoughts and the actions of the people. Perhaps this, then, is one clue to England's stability, its patience, its slow, even march towards the future. Perhaps, living in a land like this,

surrounded and haunted by the past, where you can look around you and see clearly where you have been and how far you have come, you have fewer doubts about where you are going.

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TOURIST DAYS

AFTER the excursion to St. Albans I made several other one-day trips to other historic towns in England within reach of London. There was the day in January when I went down to Kent and walked through blitzed Canterbury. Here again was a town filled with the evidence of history—ancient weavers' houses along the river, the sign that said " Falstaff Hotel—1403, " the early Christian ruins of St. Augustine's Monastery, and the Roman arches in the cathedral yard.

Canterbury, unlike St. Albans, was scarred and hollowed out by war—badly hit in a Baedeker raid and again at other times. Although the cathedral, except for the library, was spared, the business district was gutted—a barren waste land where weeds were growing and where there were little signs planted in the rubble—signs like " Walker, bootmaker, now at 2, High Street ", " Jones, Established 1750, still on the Parade. "

There were barrage balloons now over the Close, but the cathedral itself was still a thing of beauty. I joined a group of British and Canadian soldiers touring the cathedral under the guidance of a lady verger, and together we gaped as she showed us the spot on the floor where Thomas à Becket had been murdered, and the chapter house where the " Murder in the Cathedral " had been first performed. We stood and looked at the tomb of the Black Prince and the Fair Maid of Kent, and then we stopped before the tomb of Simon of Sudbury.

" Here, " said the lady verger, " is a strange tomb. Simon Theobald, or Simon de Sudbury, was the Archbishop in the fourteenth century, who unfortunately sided with the aristocracy in Wat Tyler's rebellion, and was beheaded by the irate peasants in 1381. His body is buried here, but in place of his head there is a leaden cannonball. His head is now in a church in Sudbury, where he was born. I forget the name of the church . . . St. . . ."

" St. Gregory's," I said, from the back of the group.

"That's right," said the lady verger. "There's a soldier who must come from Sudbury. Why!" she said, looking up, "You're an *American*! How did you know that?"

"I've been in the church, and seen the skull in a little niche in the chantry wall," I said.

"Trust a bloody Yank," murmured an English sergeant.

It was a summer's day when I went to Windsor—and I went with every intention of going to the race-course (in spite of my Newmarket resolution) and losing some pounds and crowns. But when I got off the train at the station and glimpsed that grey castle towering over the town, I knew that the horses would have to wait, for I must see Windsor Castle. But when I walked up the hill to the gate, I found that I could not be admitted alone; that I must come with a group. "A tour is just going through now," said the guard. "I'll see if I can arrange for you to join it." Five minutes later I was standing in awe in St. George's Chapel, surely one of the most beautiful rooms in England—not mere cold carved stone, but bright and alive with colour, with emblazoned arms on the stone and silken banners of the Knights of the Garter hanging in the choir. We saw the old Tudor houses of the pensioners which formed a setting for "The Merry Wives of Windsor," we saw the great keep, we saw (from the outside) the royal apartments. We were shown the Victory garden where the two princesses were growing vegetables, and wondered whether they hoed and weeded it themselves.

I had lunch in a little tea-room that called itself the Nell Gwynne House (there are as many original Nell Gwynne houses in England as "George Washington Slept Here" houses in America,) and in the afternoon walked down across the river to Eton.

I was disappointed by my first glimpse at the famous school, and confounded by the outlandish garb of the students, which seemed to be swallow-tailed coats, badly in need of cleaning, long scarves which almost dragged the ground, dirty, unpressed grey flannel trousers, top hats and tennis sneakers. Here, it seemed, tradition has gone a little off the deep end. Character-building, self-immolation, or not, there is no need for these scarves in summertime—and there seemed little point in dressing these future rulers of the realm like refugees from a travelling circus. Certainly nowhere else in England did I witness such an unkempt, disreputable standard of dress, or a more obvious need for a good dry-cleaning establishment. But then, I suppose, the education is good, and character comes out on the playing fields, and these same ragged urchins of destiny will

soon be immaculately-groomed ambassadors of England and English tailoring at its best.

I visited Lincoln on a foggy, rainy day, and the cathedral, said to be one of the most perfect in England, was cold, damp, and dark. Perfect it was, of a uniformity of design rarely found, but of a style and a stone more ornate and less airy than the earlier Norman that I prefer, or the later, lacier Gothic that I like best of all.

I had a haunting moment in Lincoln. I had walked into the castle grounds, which are a park (I was the only visitor on that wet and dreary morning), through a gate in the wall of the castle, through the inner moat, climbed through another door, and found myself in a deserted prison. Here were banks of cells empty and silent, here was the guard's walk, the dark, gloomy cells for solitary confinement. I climbed the stairs, my footsteps echoing in the big tomb-like room, found a winding passage, and walked through it, into the prison chapel. Here was an odd little room, the pews arranged in semi-circular rows like a theatre, with each pew boxed in a stall, so the parson might see the congregation but the worshippers could not see or speak to their neighbours. Names and initials by the thousands were carved in the wood of the stalls—some of them decades old. It was a lonely, remote place, like the farthest gallery in an abandoned mine—an ideal setting for a violent murder, I thought to myself. As I stood there, I thought I heard footsteps down the passage. I listened. The footsteps stopped. There was nothing but the rain against the windows. And then through the passage came an eerie wailing—Whooooo! Whoooooo! WHOOOOO! I rushed up the stairs, out of the chapel, and along the passage into the great prison hall. And there, high in the eaves overhead, were two pigeons, preening themselves. Whoooo! Whoooo! they mourned again. I was glad to leave them in their deserted, haunted cote. I walked back through the rain down the hill, and revived my spirits at the first public house I saw.

That, and the rain and the fog, and the old Jew's House on Steep Hill, were all I remember of Lincoln.

Colchester is another ancient town, like Lincoln and St. Albans, full of Roman relics, and narrow streets with venerable houses, old staging inns and a castle that dates back to Norman times. But to me the most fascinating aspect of Colchester was a contradiction. It was the Roman wall which runs along the north and east sides of the town below the hill down which the town flows like sauce on a pudding.

This wall, built in thin Roman bricks and stones of various sizes is in almost perfect condition for many long stretches, and walking below it along the path you almost expect to see the helmeted head of a Roman legionary suddenly appearing over the battlements. But the fascinating part of the stone wall is not the 1800-year-old bricks and stones, but the three-year-old concrete pill-boxes, which have been incorporated at regular intervals along its length. "There is nothing new under the sun," sayeth the prophet, and here the citizens of Colchester had set out to prove it, by preparing to fight and defend their city now, in 1943, behind defences built perhaps in the second century. And there is no doubt that the Roman wall at Colchester would have made an excellent defence line for to-day. In some places it was fifteen feet thick at the base, and almost twenty feet high. It would have been an impassable barrier for vehicles and tanks, and a costly objective for infantry. With the Englishman's veneration for things aged, the concrete pill-boxes along its length will probably be removed, but if I am permitted to cast one vote, I would like to go on record for their preservation, as one of the more unusual forms of historical jokes, and if only for the bafflement of future archaeologists.

The tourist in Colchester cannot miss the Castle, which is now a museum; a moated, turreted stone structure built on the site of what was once a Roman temple, with some of the tessellated pavement still in place. Here, as in the museum at Verulamium, are the familiar everyday relics of the Roman occupation of Britain—the utensils, the ornaments, the coins, the pottery containers, the crude nails and pins and beaten metal objects. Many of these objects were found buried in people's gardens and in other places around the town, and it must give an added zest to Colchester's citizens to know that as they dig for potatoes or for a new cellar, or a bomb shelter, they have a chance of turning up a beautiful glass vase, an Etruscan red urn, or a hoard of Roman coins.

This whole country of East Anglia abounds in underground wealth, it was said, and the mementoes of history found at Colchester and other scattered places, the magnificent Viking burial barge unearthed in Suffolk, and the Saxon relics discovered near our own Debach aerodrome, give the spirit of discovery to all earth-turning work. It has its counterpart in America, where the sharp-eyed ploughman can often pick up an Indian quartz arrowhead, a spearhead or a flint knife.

In East Anglia the history was longer—the stakes were higher,

and no one in our battalion thought it particularly strange when we received a letter from a local historical society stating that since we were doing large-scale excavations, it was probable that we would uncover buried relics of great value, and would we please keep a keen watch for these things ? But though the flint stones of Suffolk came in amazingly odd shapes, and we picked up hundreds to examine, we never found anything of interest. I, for one, was keenly disappointed.

There was something else, more sinister, to be found in this East Anglia soil, and particularly that of Essex. Another letter to the battalion informed our surgeon that because this soil had been fought over for so many centuries, because so much blood had been shed here and so many people buried (or was this the reason at all ?) the soil of Essex was extremely tetanic—that there was a great danger from tetanus infection from cuts and sores. We had all been inoculated against tetanus, so the information was merely of academic interest, but we did hear of cases among the local civilians during our stay in East Anglia.

I visited Colchester more than once, and found it a busy, bustling market town, full of soldiers and wartime excitement, and like all east coast towns, the spirit of " living dangerously. "

One day in the autumn of 1943 I went up to Colchester to watch the breaking out of the American flag—a gift of the town—at our district headquarters there, and the Mayor of Colchester spoke of the warm feeling that the people of the town had for their American visitors, of the fine associations and friendships that had been made. The District Commander replied by thanking the Mayor and the town for its hospitality and help and fine spirit. These were no mere empty words—they brought spontaneous cheers from the townsfolk and the soldiers gathered round.

Of the other great cathedral cities of England, I visited Peterborough, Ely, Gloucester, Salisbury and Norwich, and found in each beauty and inspiration. I saw the gaunt skeleton of the wrecked Coventry cathedral, but I missed Winchester, Wells, York Minster and other famous ones. My favourite English church, and perhaps one of the most spectacular sights in England, is Durham, but more about that elsewhere. If this notebook is not representative of the whole of English monuments (it even neglects Stratford-on-Avon and Westminster Abbey !) it is because travel difficulties and lack of time prevented me from visiting the south and west of England. But then, this never was intended to be a tourist guide !

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MOVIE-MAKING AT ELSTREE

THE average American soldier, we were surprised to discover, spoke as if he had a Texas cow-girl for a mother, a Chicago gangster for a father, as if he himself were born in Brooklyn and raised in Dixie and spent most of his time in company with a bobby-socked swing addict. We discovered that amazing fact one day in the course of one of the more unusual jobs that drifted the way of the Public Relations Office. We had been invited to give technical advice for a film that was being produced in England in which scenes of American soldiers were predominant.

When we read the script, we came upon such sentences as " Hiya, honey-chile, how's about you and me cuttin' a little rug, down in that little jernt on Thoid Street? Okay, you-all? Don't be late, or I reckon I'll pick up another skoit, see babe? "

We made some minor changes in this dialogue, and then we were called in to be present at the actual filming—to see that uniforms, gestures, military procedure, were correct, and the dignity of the American Army was safeguarded. And later some of us had the great honour of playing in crowd scenes as extras. Bob Dehler even had a speaking part. He was never to live this down, following an afternoon during which he disrupted all work at the office by striding up and down rehearsing the proper inflection and mannerisms of his part, which consisted of the simple line, " All right, you men, come with me."

With a derisive audience of Joe Klasen, Frank Walin and myself as critics, Dehler soon wished he had never started down the flickering road to fame, and the (plagiarized) reviews that we posted on our bulletin board of his great talent and ability, and his promising future, seemed to deter him even more. " Although other actors played their parts magnificently," we wrote, " it was the acting in a minor part by one Robert Dehler that alone justified the low price of admission."

" The playing by Robert Dehler was good," we wrote, " but the sick cart-horse in the stable sequence was better."

" If it were not for the appearance of Robert Dehler in this new screen-play," we jibed, " it might be merely rated excellent. But his brief entrance alone justifies us in using the rarely-deserved encomium of stinko."

It was fun to go over to the studio at Elstree and watch the film progress. We were amazed at the simplicity and lack of fanfare that attends the filming in a British studio, compared with the array of technical talent that swarms about the simplest American production. Here were a few simple but carefully accurate sets, here were actors and actresses wearing no make-up at all, and here were perhaps a dozen other people—for the camera, the sound track, the lighting, the properties, and the script. Everyone sat around drinking tea and talking, and then suddenly the director's assistant called out in a very polite voice, " All right, everyone. I must ask for complete silence. This is a take ! Silence, please, for a take ! "

The actors assumed their positions, spoke their lines, and in a minute or two the scene was all over. Sometimes there were accidents or delays—someone would bumble a line, an aeroplane would fly overhead and intrude on the sound track, or a director would stop the scene for a change of camera angle or of interpretation. There were no signs of temperament, no gaudy, elaborate banks of lights or crowds of assistants. Here was a straightforward, honest little film being made, in perfect accord with the war-time tradition of economy both in personnel and in equipment.

And yet when the film appeared several months later it surprised us all, for it compared favourably with the less pretentious among American productions. Although we knew all the lines by heart by then, we actually enjoyed watching the completed film. And when Bob Dehler appeared on the screen and said his historic line, we stood up in the theatre and cheered. It might also be added that Frank Walin's left ear (rear view) makes an equally dramatic appearance in this scene.

I noticed it first in the filming of this picture, and noticed the same thing later in other British films that I have seen—that the basic approach to the art of the motion picture is different in Elstree and in Hollywood. In America the motion picture is an art almost entirely divorced from the theatre—in its use of camera, of angle, and perspective, in its choice of scenes and in its broad sweep it has moved, for better or worse, into a sphere far beyond the limitations of a stage.

In England the motion picture is the lineal descendant of the stage play, with which it maintains strict kinship—its action and scenes and its entire effect is in the tradition of the play acted upon a stage, moving in a small compass—leaving more of the transition passages and the explanatory scenery to the imagination—concentrating on

plot and action and above all dialogue. I am not choosing between one approach and another, or criticizing either. It is just an observation made in passing of an interesting divergence of technique.

The great climax of the film job at Elstree came the day Joe Klasen acted as shepherd to a group of thirty men who had volunteered to spend their day off by appearing in the film as extras in a crowd scene, and as participants in a village dance. Joe returned that night well pleased with himself. The boys had behaved, they had not caused a riot by swarming the pretty little ingenue, and they had acted their parts quite simply and unaffectedly, except for one star-struck lad (a potwalloper in the enlisted men's mess,) who somehow managed to drift towards the camera no matter where he was placed. The distressing part of the day, from our point of view, was that Joe himself refused to appear in the scenes, and thus his immortal physiognomy missed its first chance to be recorded for posterity. It appears that the public will have to wait a long time for its first glimpse of the fabled Joe Klasen.

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A LOOK AT SCOTLAND

ONE of the fortunate aspects of working in public relations was the the fact that we never knew what kind of job we would be called upon to perform from day to day, or where in the British Isles it would take us. Therefore, it was with delight, but not surprise, that I learned one day in September that I had been chosen among a number of others to go up to Scotland and act as escorting officer for an air-force unit that would shortly be arriving at Gourock.

The task of escorting officer was quite simple. You merely accompanied the unit on its troop train southward to its new station; you instructed the unit officers on troop-train regulations such as blackout enforcement, you answered any and all of their questions about their future life in England, you saw that they were properly alerted in time to be ready at their destination to leave the train immediately and move away from the station (for unloading troop trains was dangerous, and favourite German strafing targets.) In our party were thirty-five officers and four sergeants, each of whom would be in command of a train, and those thirty-nine trainloads represented just one part of one convoy. Yes, the troops were

beginning to pour into Britain, and the volume was already increasing with each passing week.

When we arrived in Glasgow we were " briefed " by the officers of the port, and I found that my unit would be one of the last to be " entrained," that in fact I had almost two days to wait—almost two free days in Scotland to spend as I liked ! Fortune had grinned again.

The first day I spent walking around Glasgow in the rain. It was a big, bustling, busy, dirty city—a city of industry, sprawling out over the valley and on both sides of the river Clyde. In appearance I found little to recommend it, although it reminded me strongly of the English-speaking parts of Montreal, and not without reason. Here was the same predominance of red hair, the same Scottish names on the stores, the same Scottish faces, the same type of sturdy northern architecture, the busy narrow streets with their trams and buses, the same beautiful surrounding countryside.

But it was the people of Glasgow that I liked immediately. I had been told beforehand, of course, that I would like the Scottish people, that their hospitality and friendliness were famous. Everywhere I went that day I was approached by people on the street who stopped to greet me, who asked me to come in to the nearest pub for a drink, who asked me if I needed advice or directions or help. One such person, whose friendship I could not refuse, turned out to be a character named Danny MacLain, a small, wizened man who had fought with the " Ladies from Hell " in the last war. He insisted that I have a drink with him in the corner pub; he called together all the other Scottish soldiers who were standing around the bar—he had us introduce ourselves all around, he paid for all the drinks, and then he pressed upon me, as a little gift, five pennies that he had found in his pocket that morning, which " quite by chance " bore the heads of all the monarchs of England back to Victoria in her youth.

Then, discovering that I wanted above all to see a real Scottish variety show, he suddenly remembered that he knew the entire cast of the best show then running in Glasgow, and proceeded to provide for me, at no expense to either of us, a private box.

It was an amusing show, I think. The comedians had the audience roaring with laughter most of the time. The songs were well sung and clever. The bagpipe band of kilted Scottish lassies was attractive and loud. But of the repartee on the stage—the stories, the jokes, and words of the songs, I did not understand anything. I

listened and concentrated, and tried to decipher this rapid Scottish dialect, but I was lost. It was a completely foreign tongue.

" Wud' ye like t' meet one of the pretty lassies ? " asked Danny MacLain in my ear.

It was a rhetorical question.

" Coom bockstage, then, and you can take yourrr pick ! "

We went backstage, and stood in the wings as the bagpipes wailed and the drums beat on the stage. Danny introduced me to the leading members of the cast, and to all the girls of the show. An hour later he had said gude necht and gude luck, and I was waiting, a veritable stage-door Johnnie in the darkness, for a pretty petite brunette whose name might have been Billie MacDonald.

Billie turned out to be a shy, modest, friendly youngster, and as I walked her home we talked about her life in the show and Glasgow, and we looked in vain for a fish-and-chip shop. And I told her how I had met Danny MacLain on the street, and how friendly he had been, and I asked her who he was and what connection he had with the theatre and the cast—that he could arrange a box for me and take me backstage to meet all the players.

" I'm sure I don't know," said Billie. " No one there had ever seen him before, I'm sure. But that's our Scottish way—to be friendly, and we always like to meet strangers. Why, do you know, you're the first American soldier I've ever talked to ! "

I said good night to Billie at the corner of her street (she didn't want me to see the poor house where she lived) and I promised to write. And for several months after that her letters drifted down to me, charmingly written, full of solicitous, motherly advice and warnings, in a fine Victorian hand on lavender notepaper. But then they ended, and I've never heard from her since, and I'd never even kissed my pretty Scottish lassie !

The next morning I debated whether to spend a few brief hours in Edinburgh, which everyone had said was the pride of the North, or to take a trip out into the Scottish hills. The penny fell heads for the hills, and I boarded a train which was to take me to Loch Lomond. One hour later I was aboard the little steamer in company with about a hundred other hardy tourists, standing on the deck in the rain and looking out over the magnificent Scottish scenery. It seemed incredible that this dark lake, set in the midst of this lonely, majestic wilderness, could be just an hour distant from the noise and commerce of Sauchiehall Street.

The little steamer moved serenely up the narrow lake, stopping

at little quays along the shore—picking up passengers at one and dropping others at the next. Apart from a few isolated dwellings along the shore, the country seemed deserted. Just miles of bright, green hills, soaring up from the shore, covered by low shrubs and by heather, dripping with rain, lost overhead in the low-lying mist, in which no animal moved, from which came no sign, over which seemed to run no roads or tracks or even trails. How far this desolate wilderness extended, one could not tell. Perhaps over the next ridge, in the hollow, there was a little town. Perhaps one could follow some invisible path back into the mountains, for mile after mile, and find a lonely hunter's lodge, or a crofter's cottage, or a shepherd's hut. But from the water's edge there was nothing to see but wilderness. Here, hidden in a leafy glade above the shore, was a beautiful white waterfall—and there, was a little sailboat moored to a dock.

Once, when we stopped, there came from the silent, shrouded hills above the wailing, plaintive sound of the bagpipes, far-off and remote, drifting down through the rain. Was this premeditated tourist-inspired atmosphere like the native I once heard playing the guitar behind the ruins of the church at Old Panama ? Or was there somewhere up on those hills a bereft piper, in tune with the mist, the rain, and the sullen hills ?

It was an odd, and yet strangely memorable day. There were the people who waited most of the day below decks, standing in a queue to be allowed to enter the dining-room and partake of a lunch that consisted of one leaden meat pie and a cup of tea. There were the others who sat all day below decks and sipped ale at the bar. There were the others, like myself, who stood all day on the deck in the rain—and gazed out over the water spellbound by the hooded, encircling mountains. At the end of the lake there was the ugly little inn where the people queued again for cakes and tea, or walked through the woods and picked heather, or just sat and waited for the boat to start back again.

Piper on the hillside, black waters of Loch Lomond, green barren hills rising into the clouds, and a stuffed loon in a glass case at the inn at Ardlui, these are my pictures of the Scottish highlands. And above and about all are woven a pervading mood of great loneliness, of sadness, of a melancholy approaching despair that seemed to me to be the essence of Scottish atmosphere. I am glad that I did not see the Highlands in bright sunlight with birds singing and clouds floating in a blue sky. This, I thought, was a truer picture.

The trip back to Glasgow, and the mad, wild dash to Gourock to catch my troop train is mentioned elsewhere. I have never been back to Scotland, but until I return it will always remain in my mind as a country where it always rains, where the people are always friendly, the children usually red-headed, where dwellings of the workers along the Clydeside are squalid and unlovely, but the mountain scenery melancholy and magnificent. Some day I will go back for a second and longer look.

40

THANKSGIVING AT BOSTON

GOING to Boston ! I was going to Boston ! As the automobile sped across the level landscape on a road that was raised above the fields, now ploughed and waiting for winter, I tried to justify the excitement that filled me. For by now I was no newcomer to England. I had been here fifteen months now and had crossed the land many times, from Scotland to Wiltshire and from Norfolk to Kent. I had lived in the smallest of Suffolk villages and in the largest city of the Empire. But somehow I had always wanted to see Boston, and had always missed it.

The first reason for that longing was the picture in my mind of the tower of St. Botolph's Church, known far and wide as the Boston Stump. For four years I had lived under the shadow of its replica in America, the lovely Harkness tower in New Haven. For four years I had admired that tower in sunlight through the tracery of spring-green leaves, and in winter black against a sodden sky. I had known a pair of pale barn owls that had haunted that tower, and I had listened to its carillon each evening, ringing out the slow melody of the fine old spiritual that we know as " Goin' Home." So this was a pilgrimage in one way, a pilgrimage to the Boston Stump, under whose alter-shadow I had studied and dreamed long ago.

But I had another reason for my urge to visit Boston. Something there is in the remote corners of the land that are by-passed by the main stream of traffic, and off the beaten track ; something in the lowlands that expand flat and endless under a tremendous arc of sky, something of the smell of the sea and the muddy margins of estuaries that appeals to me. Perhaps there are not many people in

the world who find fascination in a marshy canal-crossed, dyke-shored land. But I had lived my life in land like this, and spent many of my days following canals in small boats—seeking out the heron, the wild fowl, the curlew and plover that live here. The canals of the Fen country and the bays and inlets of Long Island are not so far apart; the windmills of Lincolnshire and the windmills of my home turn slowly to the same sea winds. This was a part of England that drew me irresistibly, and Boston was its heart.

I remember only a few of the names of the towns and villages we passed on our way to Boston. I remember Melton Mowbray for a lovely church. I remember Market Deeping only because it is a name one cannot forget. But most of all I remember the skyscape, the tree-lined roads across the fens, the dykes with ancient names, a windmill standing on the skyline, and here and there a steeple sprouting from a clump of trees. "Yew canna miss Boston," they told us at Spalding. "Gaw strett on, strett on this rawd, an' yew'll see Aould Stoomp!"

It was almost evening this November day. It had been a sunny day; only now were clouds growing in the sky, which still held a wan winter glow, when we first glimpsed the "Aould Stoomp." Caught in a last shaft of sunlight that could not reach the earth beneath, it shone across the fens like a white beacon lighting our way. So it must have looked to those other older pilgrims who, not coming to Boston, but leaving it, had seen it shining across the fens three hundred and more years ago.

We were going to Boston this day because the town had invited the American Army to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday as their guests. A hundred soldiers were coming. They would attend a service in St. Botolph's Church, where the Archbishop of Canterbury would preach the sermon. They would dine at the Assembly Halls, Boston homes would be open to them, and there would be a dance in their honour.

We came into Boston that evening in the darkening twilight, and it had been market day. Just as I had dreamed it the old houses stood about the square—and there was the statue to the local hero, the windmills by the canal, the carts and stalls now departed, but a flock of sheep still stumbling through the Little Bargate. And dominating all the grand old Stump floating up against a now-lowering, racing sky.

We found a café that was open, and had a supper of Welsh rarebit and tea. We found a room in a small hotel. We left our baggage

there, and walked back to the market-place as it started to rain. We ducked into a public house called 'The Rum Puncheon', and sat drinking pints of bitter, talked to the men of the Lincolnshire Regiment who were playing darts, and listened to a tipsy bearded sailor singing "White Christmas". "Why don't you go across to the hall to-night, boys," said the buxom barmaid. "There's a good dance on. United Canners. You boys are the first Yanks to come to town. You'll have a fine welcome!"

A fine welcome we had. Though the celebrations and the official guests were not due until the morrow, our arrival was the signal for a jubilee. Everyone wanted to talk to us, to buy us a drink, to see that we danced every dance. We became involved in the friendly rivalry that seemed to exist between the girls who canned beans and the girls who canned carrots and peas. "Pay no mind to that one," confided one bean-girl in my ear, "she's carrots and peas!" We listened to the lovely Lincolnshire talk and danced the "Cokey-Cokey" and the "Spreading Chestnut Tree," and had a fine time.

The next morning was Thanksgiving Day—and the ceremonies began at ten o'clock with a reception in the Council Chambers. We crowded into the big panelled room with its old portraits on the walls, and the dignitaries filed in—the Mayor, the councillors, the town clerk in his wig, the magnificent chief constable. "Silence," cried the constable, "for his worship the Mayor, and honoured guests!" Drinks were passed, the Mayor welcomed us with a toast, and then we filed out again.

From the Council Chambers a procession marched through the streets of old Boston, through the crowded market-place to the church, witnessed by the entire population of the town, and thousands more. It was a colourful parade: the Archbishop in his robes, the Bishop of Lincoln too, other church officials in full attire, the Mayor and his entourage in robes and chains of office, the band of the Lincolnshire Regiment, detachments of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, the air-raid wardens, ambulance corps, nurses, sea scouts, boy scouts, fire service, the women's volunteers. And the American guests. Children scrambled to the top of the air-raid shelter in the centre of the market-place, and flags were flying from the buildings surrounding it.

Inside the church November sunlight filtered through the windows and fell in gauzy gold on the garden of colour that filled the floor. Not a seat was vacant, and behind the seated congregation the people of Boston were standing. Here were blocks of olive

drab, of navy blue, or brown, air force blue, of tan, and here and there a spot of white, or black. The choir lifted its sweet chant, the organ rolled, the words of the prayers and the sermons echoed bell-like through the church. Here, I thought, is the pure essence. Here is the return of John Winthrop and his company—the pardon, the blessing, the warm welcome. Here we were united again, working and fighting and now praying side by side—celebrating here in England an American holiday. And when by some quirk of fate the organ pealed the strains of "Goin' Home," I was back in Connecticut again; there was no Atlantic Ocean, and for that moment no difference at all between old England and the new.

There were other events on the crowded programme. There was a banquet at the Assembly Hall, where we were served by the bustling ladies of the Women's Volunteer Service and the A.R.P. There were speeches and toasts, each announced by the stentorian voice of the chief constable. But when the constable spoke those famous words, "Gentlemen may now smoke!" I had to leave and miss the oratory. I spent the next hour and twenty minutes in a telephone box on the market-place, dictating my story to London from a jumble of notes, and saying to the operator every three minutes, "Yes, this *is* a Press priority call, and I'm *not* finished yet."

When I staggered out, damp and hoarse, the dinner was over, and the American guests, already overwhelmed at their reception, had scattered to a hundred Boston homes to meet the mothers, the fathers, and the daughters of the town, to sit around the fireplaces and tell about Oregon and North Dakota and Louisiana, to sip tea and nibble cakes, and then to stay for supper. After supper there was the dance—the official Thanksgiving Day Ball this time—and they danced until midnight. And when the music stopped and it was announced that all Americans must now return to their trucks, one grateful soldier shouted, "I don't want to go home! I'm having a swell time now!"

This was our celebration of Thanksgiving in Boston in 1943, and for me the most memorable of any I can remember. It was not quite the same as sitting at one's own hearth with one's family, and the festive board was not the same as our own with its traditional turkey and trimmings, the cranberry sauce, the pumpkin pie, and the cider. It was a different Thanksgiving, for we were guests in another land. But it was the same spirit, the same people, the same feeling of good will and hospitality and friendship. The American flag was a guest flag, but it looked fine and proud fluttering in the wind over the

market-place. It seemed to belong there—and in some small way perhaps it was born there. We hoped fervently that it would always be a welcome flag, and flutter there on many another American Thanksgiving Day.

41

THE CHILDREN OF BRITAIN

ONE of the qualities that most Britons noticed about Americans and continually commented upon was their sincere fondness for children. This was something we discovered about ourselves, too, for we had never noticed it before.

There were several good reasons why the American soldiers devoted so much attention to the children of Britain, and got along so famously with them. First, because these were for the most part young men, and children figured somewhere in their present lives or in their dreams. The friendship of these handsome children provided a vicarious enjoyment, without the attendant worries and troubles. Then, too, the children of Britain were an unfortunate group. Even the luckiest among them had few toys and games, they had but a tiny ration of candy, they had completely missed the joys of oranges, bananas, ice cream, of holidays and circuses. A great number of these children were displaced; they were living with strange families or they had not seen their fathers for years. Many were less fortunate than that—they had been bombed; they had lived through the hell of the blitz; they were war orphans; they were wearing handed-down clothes from the " Bundles for Britain, " and some were huddled each night on the dusty, dank floors of the Underground—a sight that tore our hearts and made us shake our heads in pity and in shame.

Above it all, these children were charming. They were well-behaved and modest, they were friendly and yet respectful. They were being robbed of their childhood, so little kindness meant so much to them, and yet they were good fun and good company.

So we saved our candy and chewing gum from the weekly canteen ration, and when we visited town there were always cries of " Any gum, chum ? " and " Candy, mister ? " The response was so thorough and immediate that there were anxious questions in the Press : will not this new American habit be harmful to the jaws and teeth of young England ? As the gum craze grew the demand exceeded

the supply, and Americans often ran a squealing gamut, shouting, " No gum, chum ! No candy, no coppers, no cigarette packets, no American coins ! " Since for every problem there is usually a solution, one enterprising youngster of my acquaintance, seeking what he thought to be the American approach, dressed himself in gangster togs and waylaid soldiers with a wooden pistol, holding them up with fierce ruthlessness and the terrifying demand, " Your gum or your life ! "

But there were other and more important ways in which Americans provided comfort and even security to the least fortunate of these children of Britain. There were the hundreds of war orphans which were sponsored by American army units in a programme organized by the American Red Cross and the newspaper *Stars and Stripes*. Units which collected £100 could adopt for one year an orphan from a list of needy ones—and even specify " a blue-eyed girl of five " or a " red-headed boy of seven. " It was always a great day when these adopted children visited their new uncles. Parties were arranged—there was a new uniform, a big dinner, games and entertainment, and then he was sent home laden with candy and enough chewing gum to last a year.

There were other instances, too, of spontaneous friendship. There was seven-year-old Billy, of Leicester, who came from a poor family and had lost a leg through illness. Billy hopped around on crutches, and so endeared himself to a detachment of hard-boiled military police that they adopted him on the spot. Soon Billy was eating his meals at the mess—and his thin body filled out. He was fitted with a special uniform, and promoted to the rank of sergeant, reporting for duty each day to the commanding officer. Billy helped inspect the barracks, he stood in line for his food with the men, and he even reprimanded delinquent soldiers, as good sergeants should. " You need a shave, Private Rowe. Get one before noon." And Private Rowe complied. The men loved it, and they pooled their funds and purchased Billy an artificial leg. The crutches were thrown away for a cane, and then one day quite by accident Billy responded to a soldier who called from across the room, " Come here, Billy." And without his cane, without thinking about it, Billy walked across the room. And that was just one instance.

The Christmas parties were spontaneous too. In America Christmas is the most festive holiday of the year, and it is a family affair at which children are always in evidence. You just can't properly celebrate Christmas without children around—without Christmas

trees and Santa Claus and presents and ice cream, cake, and candy!

Early in October units of Eastern Base Section, and throughout Britain, began to make their plans. Our job in public relations was to act as a clearing-house for ideas, for programmes, and for suggestions. But it was for each unit and the soldiers of that unit to organize the parties, prepare the gifts, collect the candy rations, and issue the invitations. For weeks the preparations continued. In many of the units soldiers were spending evenings and free time making wooden toys—dolls, models and games, and in other units every man was writing home to tell his relatives, " Don't send me presents this year—send me a box of toys for the kids." In our office we hastily drew up plans for easily-constructed toys and sent them forth to units that requested them.

I went around East Anglia that Christmas, visiting a few of the many celebrations that were being held all that week. At Newmarket our district headquarters was host to a group of thirty orphans from a nearby Dr. Barnardo's home. The children in their grey uniforms were almost overwhelmed with the afternoon's programme—the Christmas dinner with real turkey and ice cream—the present-laden Christmas tree, the Mickey Mouse films. They were joyous and yet shy, these orphans, and I noticed a touch of sadness and restraint, of almost unbelief in the good things that had suddenly come their way.

In Huntington the engineer depot was giving a party for twelve children, and a roving Santa Claus and other entertainers visited a local hospital where they had distributed gifts and played for the crippled children there.

Up at Honington, on the estate of the Duke of Grafton, all the children from the orphans' home housed on the Duke's estate were invited to the party. Here in a big Nissen hut that was decked with pine boughs, a hundred children watched a show, sang Christmas carols, played games, and were carried around on the shoulders of their hosts, clutching toys in their hands.

At the hospital at Botesdale there was an even larger party, for here all the children of the neighbouring villages had been invited. Hundreds appeared, from tiny ones in their mothers' arms to boys and girls of twelve. They swarmed the jovial colonel who was in competition for popularity with the pillow-stuffed corporal Santa Claus. They, too, gobbled ice cream and cakes, and late that afternoon all along the country roads and lanes were little groups of children walking home, their arms laden with boxes and parcels of toys and sweets to eat.

There were other, even larger celebrations. At Bury St. Edmunds 1,500 children swarmed the largest hall in town for an afternoon of riotous entertainment, and at Ipswich there was a similar party for 1,100 more. At some airfields Santa Claus arrived from the sky in a Flying Fortress, and at other camps they appeared in the inevitable jeep. At Kettering there was a special party for six children who had somehow been left out of the first party for seven hundred. At Hull there were plays and pantomimes at parties where each child was adopted by an American " pal, " while at Bedford the American soldiers were " buddies, " and at Colchester the military police entertained ninety children—all of them with fathers who were prisoners of war.

At Watford our own headquarters held a party for fifty children from the Foundling Hospital, and here as elsewhere the children contributed as much to the gaiety of the occasion as the soldiers. Dressed in their quaint costumes—the girls in their brown smocks and white aprons, the boys in their trim suits with big white collars—they delighted the soldiers with their games and dancing and singing of Christmas carols.

There were stories in all the provincial newspapers that week, with headlines that read, " U.S. Hosts to Northants Children, " and " American Visitors Entertain More English Children, " and " U.S. Santa Claus Revisits Kettering, " and " Yanks Play Santa Claus at Wellingborough, " and " Thanks to the Yanks. " But the truest one of all, I think, appeared in the *Rushden Echo and Argus*, and it said " Americans Revel in Children's Visit. " For that, in the end, was just about the way it was.

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THE GENTLE ART OF BED-FINDING

Our vagabond excursions around eastern England often took us off the beaten path, and although there were many times when we could conveniently come to roost for the night in an American Army camp, knocking on the gate and asking for sanctuary and succour like the pilgrims of old, there were also many occasions when nightfall found us adrift on a road map, with no idea where the next meal or the next bed was to be found. But never once did England let us down.

It was no problem in the southern part of our area, for East Anglia

was full of army camps and American Red Cross clubs, and then, too, there was always the centrally-located Gainsborough's House at Sudbury stretching forth the enticing welcome of a warm kitchen and a soft bed. But when we went farther north the army camps were scattered and few—there were no Red Cross clubs, and darkness and with it rain, wind, and fog, had a strange habit of playing tricks with us on the Yorkshire moors or the north Lincolnshire fens. Then came the lonely search, the scanning of the map under the light of a torch, the choosing of the nearest likely town, the absence of road signs, the wanderings down endlessly-winding country lanes, the tiny village, darkened, lifeless, the beating on doors, the familiar phrase: "So sorry, but we're full up to-night. Why don't you try 'The Hay Mow', five miles down the road? They might have a bed or two."

Down the road we went, and likely as not 'The Hay Mow' would be full too, and the landlord would suggest going into Grantham, where there were many hotels. By now the fog would be a thick cotton blanket, and Bob Baker would be driving with his head out the window, and the ten miles to Grantham would take hours, or so it seemed. And in Grantham the same story. "Full up." "Sorry, no beds." "Sorry. Try 'The Blue Ram' down the street." Knock on five doors, knock on ten, and still no place to sleep. Try, as a last resort, the Police Station—if they can't help you, no one can. At the Police Station the sergeant makes his calls. Stand and wait, as one by one he checks his list. And in the end you walk out to the car and tell the others. "Looks like we'd better try for Stamford to-night."

Crawling along in the fog again, in the utter silence and loneliness that only fog at night can bring, we draw on flame-tipped cigarettes and speculate. Well, if there's nothing at Stamford we're done for the night. We can't drive through this fog any longer, and Bob's getting too tired to drive any more, anyway. Nothing but that soft white wall on either side; like moving through a sea of milk with now and then the looming darkness, magnified in the fog, of an overhanging tree like a huge seaweed floating in this underwater world.

But Stamford would be no better. Drive through the ancient town with its staring windowpanes and its narrow cobbled hilly streets, and turn around and drive back. Not a bed in town. Not a place to sleep for three weary travellers. But wait a minute, here's a faint light, that says OPEN . . . it must be a café or a public

house! Stop, walk in, push the blackout curtains apart, and the first sight we see makes us shout for joy. An American soldier! "Where, soldier, do we get a bed in this forsaken country?"

"Where? Why I'm on my way back to camp now, and if you'll come with me I think our top-kick can put you up. Can you give me a lift out to camp?"

And there it was, simple as that. You find the Yank, and he takes you out to camp with him, and in half an hour you are sitting in a steamy Nissen-hut kitchen watching the pork chops sizzle in the pan, smelling the coffee curl out of the pot, watching Chuck, the cook, cut huge slabs of bread for you and slice open a tin of fruit with his cleaver. And in an hour you are warm and contented, sitting on the bed of a boy named Ferguson from Oklahoma, who is down in London on pass, and you are talking to three boys named Pinky and Ralph and Roy, asking them about their work as Air Corps weather men, promising to write a story about them in the morning, and then falling off to sleep as the smoke swirls and the fire in the grate glows, and the talk drifts around to squirrel hunting in the Tennessee hills.

Some evenings we were luckier, and found a ready bed and a supper in little places called Sleaford, and Tuxford, and Marston Moor, and Wisbech, where you could almost guess, from the look of the landlady or the size of the town, whether or not the breakfast plate would gleam with a fresh fried egg. And there were times, even in the larger towns, when the hunting was lean, and even the Red Cross clubs were full, towns like Hull and Cambridge and Sheffield and Nottingham. At Hull one night we were told by a soldier, "It's easy to find a place to sleep, mate. Just go on down to 'The — — ' and ask the first two girls you see in the bar. You're sure to find a bed that way." We didn't go to 'The — — ', but we found beds elsewhere at the frugal home of an elderly couple. And at Sheffield another night it was on cots in a stable, and at Cambridge it was on a window seat in the bar itself. But we always managed to sleep under a roof and safe from the rain and the fog.

It was at Chesterfield one evening that we learned gratitude and admiration for the English police—the sturdy, courteous, helpful "Bobby" whom we had heretofore thought as a somewhat extraneous, unheroic figure—and quite unnecessary in this law-abiding land. But in Chesterfield we had been licked, we had gone down one street and up the next, we had combed the town,

referred by one landlord to the next without success, and it was getting later all the time. And when we found ourselves at full circle, back to the first hotel we had tried, we threw ourselves on the mercy of the police. Once again the bright, clean office, once again the sergeant on the telephone, and then, to our relief—the great good word. Two miles out of town there was an inn—and there were rooms waiting for us, with supper, if we wished! 'The Peacock', I think it was, or perhaps 'The Red Lion', but we found it a haven and an oasis, with barley wine at the bar, and a crew of domino players in the backroom, the beds turned down and wating up above. We lingered late that night over our barley wine and our domino board, and we talked to the Yorkshiremen long after the bar closed, and the landlord had gone off to bed, muttering about these people who drink all night at another pub and then come in for the last "one for the road" to linger way past "Time".

London, too, was not easy hunting, when we were coming back from a trip afield, had made no reservations and had missed the last Watford train. There were the Red Cross clubs too—but they had quotas for each unit, and were soon filled; then, too, you had to have a London pass. There was the Overseas League, that, too, was a popular and crowded hostel. There were the big hotels—but not a chance without a reservation days ahead. But when you knew a city you always kept one certain last resort, and in London it was the Tavistock Club. A "Residential Club for Men" they called it. Ten shillings for bed and breakfast—a quiet, respectable, clean place—a haven for elderly bachelors and a few men in uniform on leave.

But there was one night in the Rainbow Corner when I asked the pretty English volunteer how to get to Tavistock Square to my club.

"You don't want to go there!" she said, implying that it was a scandalous question.

"Yes, I do," I said. "I'm going to sleep there to-night."

"Not Tavistock Square," she said, shaking her head to discourage me. "Why don't you go up to one of the clubs? You can have a bed at the Mostyn to-night, or the Hans Crescent! You don't want to go to Tavistock Square!"

"I *do* want to go to Tavistock Square and I *do* want to sleep there, and I don't want to sleep in a dormitory with seven other men, and I don't want to have to get up at eight in the morning. I'm desperate for undisturbed sleep. Now where is Tavistock Square?"

"I won't tell you," she said. "I won't help you at all. If you are going to Tavistock Square you'll have to find out how to get

there from someone else," dismissing me for a pariah and a reprobate.

I did find Tavistock Square that night, and slept through two alerts, and I had to smile the next morning at breakfast, looking around the room at the stiff-collared, white-haired old gentlemen reading their *Daily Telegraphs* and conversing in hushed, reverential tones over their dry toast and tea.

What is all this nonsense about Tavistock Square, anyway?

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STRANDED IN STAFFORDSHIRE

DUDLEY was the worst and perhaps the best of my experiences at finding a bed for the night in a strange town. I arrived in town by bus one bitter February night, with a biting wind at my back, ice and snow underfoot and no idea where I could spend the night. The man I had intended to meet had not appeared, the room that he had promised to find for me was occupied by an earlier arrival, and I was at a loss to know what to do. I was hungry (my last meal had been ten hours before in London,) I was tired, I was chilled to the bone, and I was as dirty as one can get on an all-day train ride. And I was homeless.

I wandered the icy, gusty streets of that dark town, trying first the hostels, and rooming houses, and then the public houses. No rooms, sorry. All filled up, sorry. Full up, soldier. "Never take Americans," said one old witch through a tightly-held door.

I went back to the police station. The sergeant looked at me doubtfully, shook his head, tried two or three numbers, and then shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose you'll have to sleep in the waiting-room down at the railway station."

"Is it heated?" I asked.

"No; but at least there's no wind."

I closed my eyes. Dudley, eh? What foul twist of fate had brought me to this forsaken spot? I saw myself huddled under my coat on the wooden bench in the waiting-room, shivering through the sleepless night. "Thanks," I said, "I'll make the rounds once again."

"Good luck," said the sergeant.

I went back through the hotels, pleading for a bed, a couch, a place on a rug near a hearth. But there was no room to be had, and

no mercy in Dudley that night. I went back through the public houses again, asking each landlord if he could possibly put me up for the night. I was getting nowhere, the pubs were closing down, the streets were now silent and empty, and the wind an icy knife. The wooden bench in the frigid waiting-room loomed large and hard.

One more pub, I thought, if I can get in. I walked into the last one, and through the halls to the back room. There were a few people there, talking. " We're closed, soldier," said the landlord. " Way past Time."

" I wondered, " I began, " if you had any room vacant, or any place at all to sleep, for one disreputable soldier of questionable character ! I've tried every hotel, inn, rooming house and pub in town, and even the police—and it looks like the waiting-room at the station is the only place open."

" Sorry," said the landlord, " I have no place at all. Aren't you the soldier who was in here two hours ago ? "

" Yes," I answered, " but I've had no luck. It's the same story everywhere. Full up. Should have made reservations. No Room." I turned to go.

" Just a minute, soldier," said a woman's voice. " I think I can help you." I spun round. " Would you care to come home with me ? " And then as I hesitated politely—but just long enough—she added, with a laugh, " Oh, it's all right ; it's a proper invitation, this is my husband here, and we're going home in a few minutes, and our son's room is vacant now. You can come home with us, if you'd like. "

My grin cracked the frozen corners of my face. " You've saved my life," I said, and the wooden bench in the railway station faded into limbo.

Half an hour later the most grateful American soldier in England that night was sitting before a glowing fire, gulping down steaming cups of tea, and making a shambles of a never-ending array of food that was being set before him faster than he could consume it. This was the most beautiful room, the most delicious food, and the two finest people I had ever known ! We talked of wartime England, of the difficulties of getting accommodation, and of the absent son, a member of the R.A.F. We talked of America, and of my family, and of what I thought of England, and the beauty (or lack of it) in the Black Country. I went up to bed with a warm, rosy glow and slept on a soft bed, and dreamed that I was at home in my own bed that I had left so long ago.

The next morning there was a cup of tea by my bedside, and a golden egg smiling up at me from the breakfast plate. And when I left there were invitations to come back—to spend a week-end with my hosts; to come again and soon. I knew I would not be back, and I never did go back, but when we parted at the bus I shook hands with my host, and sincerely wished him well.

No, I do not remember Dudley with fondness—but to the Walfords of neighbouring Tipton, Staffs., and to all English families who befriended lost Yanks, who took them to their homes and fed them, gave them hot baths, and soft beds, and who warmed them, cheered them and sent them on their way with blessings and good luck, here is our acknowledgment of gratitude.

44

THE PORT AT WAR

FROM across the water the town of Hull lies low, with scattered church spires above the red brick houses, reminding us of old prints of New York in the eighteenth century looking across the bay from Brooklyn. But in place of spars and sail in the waterfront sky, there were the thin steel fingers of the cranes, reaching across the horizon, moving in a slow sign language that had but just one word.

The town of Hull itself was bruised and battered and scarred by war. German bombers had blitzed it, and the worst raid had eaten out the heart of the city, and left it as though some enraged giant had hacked it with a mighty rake. The business centre was a wide expanse of empty space where brick dust swirled in the wind, and there was no street anywhere that did not have its patched roofs, its gaping, windowless shells of buildings, or its ugly gaps where a bomb ripped out one of a row of cottages, leaving a gap as conspicuous as a missing front tooth.

But the streets of the business centre were crowded with people, and in the cottages that remained, in the offices left standing, and along the waterfront, there was just one important word. The word was whispered across polished tables in the lobby of the New Station Hotel, it was shouted on the docks and in the railway yards, it was cursed in the barracks out on Anlaby Road, and in the holds

of the ships, and it was spoken of lovingly in the row of brick cottages in Gipseyville. The moving fingers of the cranes wrote it; the flying wheels of the winches hummed it, the whistles of the railway locomotives wailed it. The word was " Cargo. "

For here at Kingston-upon-Hull, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, in the autumn and winter and spring of 1943 and 1944, a fantastic and daring gamble was being risked. The stakes were high—hundreds of thousands of tons of war materials and lend-lease cargoes—a stockpile for the invasion of the European continent ready perhaps weeks earlier if it succeeded. But if it failed—there were lives lost, ships sunk, precious cargo destroyed and time wasted. It was a gamble, because in sailing in to Hull the ships had to venture down the length of the North Sea with its U-boats and mines, and always within a few minutes from enemy bomber bases in Holland. Here at Hull there would be no warning, no raiders crossing a coast as they must to get to Glasgow or Liverpool or Belfast. Here, on the open exposed east coast, they might streak in, wreck the port, sink thirty ships and get away in a few minutes.

You would know, seeing this bustling, teeming port unmolested under the very nose of the enemy, that the Luftwaffe was nothing but a shell, and you were glad. For if this tempting target was not threatened, it was impossible ever again for the Germans to blitz England.

But so great was the confidence in our defences, and so great was our need to take this risk, and so little did we think by this time of the Luftwaffe, that the risk was taken, and the big ships came in to Hull to unload—not merely by day, but by night as well, under the dim, shielded glow of " blackout lamps ". And the gamble paid off in the end, for not one ship was sunk at Hull, not one ton of cargo lost, and only a few half-hearted, ineffectual attempts made to bomb the port.

You felt the tense, race-against-time, striving activity and atmosphere of the port the moment you entered Hull. The streets themselves were thronged with a motley crowd that would have been incongruous even then in any other town in eastern England. Here were American and British soldiers and sailors, Norwegian and Dutch sailors, American coast guard gunners, Navy Shore Patrol, the Wrens, and the WAAFs, and the Chinese cooks and the Malay messboys from off the ships, and the negro steward in a brand new zoot suit!

And racing through the streets were trucks and trailers loaded

with the goods of war, M.P. jeeps and motor cycles keeping traffic moving, and even horse-drawn drays loaded with lend-lease food in big wooden crates. In the railway cars that moved along the docks, in the sheds that lined the piers, in open fields and under canvas, the word again was Cargo. In long lines of railway cars moving slowly from the docks you saw artillery pieces and aeroplane engines and crated gliders on their way to southern England. In the long sheds on the piers were mountains of cargo—thousands of tubs of butter, thousands of casks of tobacco, square hills of sugar sacks and bean sacks and monuments of tinned fish from Oregon and meat from Illinois and cheese from Wisconsin. Here were the familiar brands of American foods, here was a roster of American states, here was the tangible, visible, overwhelming and awe-inspiring evidence of America's fabled productiveness. Yes, we had been away from home much more than a year now, and had to be reminded again of the productiveness of our nation. We were a little proud, and we remembered it when we saw a can of spam in the corner grocer's shop, or a sign painted in white on a window, " American tinned fish ration to-day ". But here it was in bulk, stretching as far as the eye could see—pouring up out of the holds of a dozen ships at one time—moving in an endless stream out of the port, up the river, away to the cities and the depots and the people of England and the soldiers of America alike. Here at once was the most encouraging evidence you could find in the world that day—here was the proof of America's full support in the war, here too was the proof that it was reaching England in spite of submarines, and here it was being unloaded in a veritable nose-thumbing gesture at the German air force, to add to the huge stockpile of supplies needed for that fast-approaching day when we would leap across the Channel. You could not help being thrilled by what you saw at Hull in those days.

" Give us guns, give us planes, give us tanks and gliders, and engines, and bulldozers and locomotives and railway cars, and surgical instruments and medical supplies and metal planks for runways and bombs and bullets ! " cried the American Army in England. " Give us guns and tanks and food, and steel and aeroplanes," said the British Army. " Give us food," said the British people. " Not the luxuries, not the delicacies, just food for work, for getting on with the war, for life ! "

" Hurry ! hurry ! hurry ! " said the chorus in Britain. More, more, more, faster and faster. Quicker turn around in the ports,

better loading of the ships, fast clearance of cargo from the ports to depots, faster unloading of the ships in port. How many tons can we take from a Liberty in a day, if we work our men twenty-four hours? How many days must we keep a ship in port before it can turn around and race for home again and another load? Eleven days, ten, eight, seven, *five*? Make it five, then, comes the order. Try to make it five. An hour saved now means a life saved later. Cargo!

The sweaty, dirty, denim-clad American soldiers in the holds of the ships were the men on whom the first burden fell. Theirs was a back-breaking job of heaving, of fastening the cables, of filling the nets and loading the big wooden trays that were let down into the holds from above. They cursed the cargo, they cursed their luck, they would have preferred the infantry, the Rangers, anything in the world but this. Here was no glamour, here was no glory. Here you heaved bombs out of a ship flying a red flag, and if Jerry came over you tried to scramble for shore and safety, knowing you would never have a chance. "What was our tonnage yesterday, Spike? 200 tons from this hatch? And all of it small stuff, crates of tinned jam, and pickles, and C-ration, and guess what—tea!"

The men in the hold did the heaving and the straining, but the men up on deck, the winch-operators and the checkers, worked there all day in the chilling wind and the rain that ran down the necks of their mackinaws, and the men who loaded the lighters tied up alongside or the freight wagons sitting on the tracks on the other side, they, too, cursed the cargo and the targets and the never-ending rush. It was hard work enough on the day shift, but at night the rain was colder, the decks more slippery, the winches heaved and groaned and the booms loomed large under the faint gloom of the working lights. Up on the bridge the sergeant had the stowage plan —he knew where every item and every crate was in the five holds of the ship, and he knew where it was destined and when it came up. And in the shack under the shed were other checkers, making certain that as cargo came off the ship it went to the right places—by boat, by rail, by truck, or under its own power.

On the shore, working like a crew of ants, were the technical experts. Here is an ordnance crew watching a brand new truck sail through the air held by nets under the wheels. The moment the wheels touch ground they swarm over, in, and under it. "Time us!" they shout. You look at your watch. The hood is lifted, wires are connected, protective coverings are ripped from the windshield,

a dozen jobs are done, and then, incredibly, the sergeant starts the motor and the truck drives off under its own power—ready to join the Army. You look at your watch again : two minutes and twenty-eight seconds ! Hurry ! hurry ! hurry ! Another truck soars into the air and down to the dock.

Behind the big shed which is loaded with the 300-pound tobacco casks from Virginia is the engineer crew, hard at work assembling cranes, power shovels, bulldozers, and rollers for the heavy engineering work ahead. Across the water are other ships tied up to the George Docks, and the Victoria Docks, some being unloaded by American soldiers and some by civilian stevedores. The ships lie side by side. Some have all-army cargoes. Others are all lend-lease, and some are mixed. Beside the prevalent Liberties are other smaller vessels—and here is the Union Jack, the Norse flag, the Danish, Polish, the Dutch flag. The port of Hull is a busy place. There's a job to be done and the monster War to feed.

I visited Hull several times and wrote stories about those hard-working army stevedores and the vital work they did. I ate with them on the decks of their ships, I talked with the coast-guard gunners and the merchant seamen who had been torpedoed two and three times. I sat in the dignified lobby of the New Station Hotel and talked with the port commander and his men and heard about tonnage and turn-around and " commodity loading. " I made a tour with the M.P.s one night and saw the dirtiest, meanest pubs in Hull and the dance halls, and the air-raid shelters where the lovers liked to go. I went to a dance at the Beverley Baths, where there were many more girls than men, and many more pretty girls than plain. I drank with the C.I.C.[1] men in the little bar where the naval officers swarmed and we listened for " careless talk " and looked into the violet eyes of the most beautiful girl I ever saw in England.

I talked to an engineer captain whose men were building a barge for a 100-ton crane, and he told me how he had earned his living in civilian life, drawing cartoons. And he said, " Come up to-morrow morning to my office and talk to me, it's on Anlaby Road, and it used to be a riding academy or something." I found him the next day in a shop under a sign " East Riding Equipment Company, Ltd."

Here in Hull I met a tiny girl with a soprano voice like a golden flute, and here in Hull I slept in a deserted stable when there were no other beds in town. Here in Hull the streets at night were

[1] Counter Intelligence Corps.

crowded with people, and the Yorkshire girls swarmed around the soldiers' billets and waited for them to come out. Out over the Humber river the gulls wheeled and screamed, and above them the barrage balloons floated silently and complacently in the darkness. The locomotives wailed all night long, and the men in the grey-green denim moved like automatons under the pale yellow glow, and the cargo—the goddam, wonderful, bloody, lovely cargo—moved off to war.

Yes, Hull was a wonderful place that winter.

45

DEMOCRACY WORKS HERE

I VISITED the Houses of Parliament twice during my stay in England, first as a tourist, under the intelligent and witty guidance of Major Sir Jocelyn Lucas, Member for Portsmouth, and one of the mainstays of the Overseas League, and second as a curious student of British democracy at work, at the invitation of Mr. Lees-Jones, M.P. for Manchester.

The first tour came by accident when, during our first visit to London, Joe Howard and I found ourselves standing at the door of the buildings, wondering how we could get inside to look around. And just at the moment a mixed party of soldiers and sailors and Wrens appeared, to be met by Major Lucas for a scheduled tour. Hasty consultation with the friendly guard at the gate and urgent representations to Major Lucas followed, and we were allowed to join the party.

What impressed us most during the tour was the wealth of history and anecdote connected with almost every part of the building and the reverence for age-old tradition behind every move that is made in British parliamentary practice.

We were shown the great Westminster Hall and told about the coronation pageants that have taken place there—with the King's Champion on his white steed loudly challenging the assembled multitude to mortal combat. We saw the Star Chamber, where the Lords now met, and the House of Lords, where the Commons now met, and the bombed out House of Commons. Under the Major's direction we acted out a session of Commons, with a sailor for Prime Minister, a Canadian WAC for Speaker of the House, with British

soldiers for members, and with a reluctant Joe Howard as usher. We sat upon the Woolsack and we saw the imaginary line where all members bow as they cross—we heard about the door that is slammed three times in the face of the King to symbolize the independence of the Government and we were shown the colourful crypt of St. Stephen's Chapel, the Members' library (where the tempting souvenirs of stationery embossed " House of Lords " were left lying about) ; and we walked out on the members' porches overlooking the river. In everything we saw a respect and reverence for age—for the hallowed, traditional way of doing things, that seemed to be a staunch insurance against sudden change and a bulwark of stability. Certainly this old building with its established ritual had a mellowing effect on the men who worked here—certainly in a form of government where even a radical member must observe to the letter a medieval code of ethics there is bred a certain restraint, a certain thoughtfulness and a reluctance against brash and ill-considered action. The age of this institution and the invisible weight of its history seemed to give an almost religious aura to the whole process of government. You might conceivably visualize revolutions taking place in England, as they have, but surely these revolutions must stem from outside the government —from a mass of people some where, perhaps, who had never seen Westminster—and never from their elected representatives. You could not conceive of revolt and bloody plots, of sudden, overwhelming reform within the hallowed precincts of these halls. Looking around you, you were certain that the British Government was solid as a rock, and that even the most drastic of upheavals would come slowly, with weighty consideration, with full and elaborate ceremony, and with all due regard for tradition. And that is perhaps one small reason why the most ambitious liberals and the most fervent revolutionaries in Britain's history, once they entered Parliament, slowly but inevitably mellowed and softened—and bowed in the end to the final victory of history and tradition—to accept a peerage to become lords and knights of the King.

On my second visit I saw this ritual in action and watched the processes by which the Empire is governed. And I was surprised. For I found that it was entirely possible for a man to bow to the unseen fetishes and meticulously observe the unwritten traditions, and still drop a hot chestnut down the shirt of an embarrassed minister. The debates, except for the polite rumblings of " hear,

hear" or "no, no", seemed very much like those in our own senatorial chambers, but it was the question period that supplied the mental acrobatics. At first glance, many of the questions put to the members of the Government seemed trivial—the kind of matters that would be dealt with in America by much less august bodies—by city councils or state legislatures, but never by Congress. There were questions about the current prices of baby carriages, and about the sad case of two women from the island of Jamaica, and about the roofs of the bombed houses of Dover. But two reasons soon became apparent behind the seeming triviality of these topics. First, that England is a small country without the separate state legislatures that would normally handle many of these questions—and that its laws are uniform throughout; and second, that a very real control over the various governmental agencies was being exercised by the legislative body itself. The Minister of Works and Buildings ("Works and Bricks," as he is irreverently called) and the Government in the narrower sense—meaning the Prime Minister and his ministers—were being taken for a rough ride that day and members of all parties were asking embarrassing questions—and would brook no delay or hedging in their answer. Why were certain matters behind schedule, why were certain steps not being taken, and just what did the Honourable Minister propose to do in the immediate future to correct this matter? In the end, in no uncertain terms, he was told to get the required information and have the requested solution—not sometime in the future but the next sitting, which was to-morrow. And that, of course, is a competent way of getting things done, a device that might be tried in America, where members of the Cabinet and heads of important governmental agencies are answerable only to the President, and are not regularly or publicly called to account as long as they remain within the broad bounds of the constitution.

We discovered other aspects of the British form of democracy at variance with our own. Perhaps outstanding is the fact that a Member of Commons need not be an inhabitant of the district that elects him. This seems to place a much greater emphasis on the party, the party leaders, and the party programme than on the individual candidate, when it comes to winning the voters' approval. Since even the Prime Minister must run for election to Commons as an ordinary candidate, only one constituency can vote directly for him, and the only way the rest of the electorate can insure his survival is to vote the party ticket in their own districts.

This system further results in an absence of regional blocs within Parliament (except for minor Scottish and Welsh parties,) for very often the candidate selected by the party is unknown in the district where he is running, and voters with local axes to grind can merely vote for the party programme that seems (generally, not specifically) to most suit their needs, and then hope for the best. It results in a certain stability and continuity in government, for the party can insure the continuance in office of prominent or key men by selecting for them " safe " districts which are only in danger in cases of a national landslide.

This does not, however, seem to be as true and personal form of representation as the American method, where the representative from Maine will speak for the people of Maine, and the senator from Colorado will be an expert (it is hoped) on the problems of mining, and the representative from Iowa will have the welfare of the farmer foremost in his mind.

There is also a House of Lords, which, we were informed, acts as a sort of keel to the ship of state, giving it added weight, stability, and balance. The House of Lords serves as a Supreme Court on matters of constitutionality, and is also a pool of experts on various subjects. It cannot be asserted that the House of Lords is a democratic body, but then it is not to any degree as important a part of government as the American upper chamber, and comparable to it in few respects.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of American soldiers must have visited the Houses of Parliament during their stay in England. In its ancient forms and customs we found the origins of our own governmental processes, we found things both to admire and criticize. But we came away from these visits with a new understanding and a new respect for a very real and working form of democracy.

46

NOTES ON EXILE

With every week of our separation from home the longing grew, that was not merely home-sickness, but a feeling of exile and a loss of touch. Not that we were merely in a foreign land, in a strange atmosphere, for we soon became adapted to these—but because we began to feel that America was changing, and that when we returned it would not be the same place that we knew and loved.

Our only contact with home then were our letters, and the pictures of American life that reached us in our service newspaper and in the British Press. These pictures were disturbing. Never did there seem such an incredible country as America, when we looked at these newspapers! We longed for scenes of home as we knew it to be—for family life and normal living. But instead we found lengthy accounts of fantastic trials in Hollywood, and crazy disturbances all over America. There was suddenly race rioting in Detroit and in other cities, and threats of them in New York and Boston. There was zoot-suit persecution in California, and what did a zoot-suit look like?

There were girls and grown women suddenly acting like fools because of a young singer we had not heard of, and then there was a crazy song called "Mairzy Doats" that seemed to be sweeping the land. There were thousands of tourists bitterly complaining because they were stranded in Florida, and there were always strikes. How could we explain these phenomena when the Britons asked?

"That never happened when I was home," one would say. "I don't know what's come over the country. But they seem to be turning out the war-goods, and the soldiers too." Secretly he wondered, and he wrote letters home asking for reassurance. The reassurance came, nothing had changed, the country was at war, but life in his town, in his street, and in his family, went on as best it could.

It was only then that the slow realization came to him that it was the fault of his newspapers; that it was always the exotic, the bizarre, the fantastic that made news, and that this nether side of American life, in reality as small a part as ever, was exaggerated in the overseas Press. He was glad when pictures like Saroyan's "Human Comedy" came to the County Theatre in Sudbury, so that he and his English friends could see that there was a normal, human way of life in America after all.

But still the feeling clung, that in his absence the face of America was changing—that the mountains and the forests and the white beaches and the little streets that he loved were still there, but that a slow change was coming over the land, and that with each day he was more alien, more a stranger—and with much to learn when he returned. And always, deep in him, he longed for that return. For no matter how much he grew to like this land and its people, his own—his America—was God's country to him, and his heart was at home.

47

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO CRICKET

I WAS initiated into the mysteries of cricket at Lord's, the famous arena in London, by Mervyn, Bessie, Pop and Alice, one cloudy Saturday afternoon in May. I went in anticipation of seeing what Pop had promised to be a good match played by experts, to learn the rules and be demonstrated some of the finer points of the game. But I found that " session " is a more precise word for cricket than " match, " and " pastime " is a more appropriate word than " sport. "

Cricket, I decided that day, is a performance in which twenty-two men in white go through an intricate ritual on a beautiful green lawn, witnessed with supreme indifference and boredom by a large audience a half-mile away. It is a game that apparently has neither beginning nor ending—created by spontaneous apathy when a group of fellows in white flannel find themselves on a field together, with a ball and bat handy, and witnessed by a lot of people who would rather sit outdoors than stay at home with grandmother. It ends when one of the players says, " What say, chaps, I'm a bit dry. How about nipping off to ' The Queen's Arms ' for a pint ? " Then the players come together and shake hands, exchange names, give a short cheer, which wakes up the crowd, and everyone drifts on home.

We arrived at Lord's about two-thirty in the afternoon—just about the proper time for a ball game to begin in America—to find that the game had already been in motion for some hours, and that one team was labouring under the seemingly hopeless disadvantage of trailing by a score of 214 to zero.

" We might as well go to a movie," I said to Mervyn. " The game is already over. With such a huge score against them the Army will concede the match any minute."

" Oh no," laughed Pop. " Why they haven't even had their innings yet ! "

In cricket, it seems, each team comes to bat once, with every man taking his turn at bat (his innings) before the other side gets in a lick. The batter (or " batsman "), as it was explained to me, stays up there and swings as long as he is not put out (" down "). If he hits the ball a good crack, he can run down a little path (the " pitch ") to the other wicket, and back to his own wicket. This counts for

two runs. If he really wallops the ball out of the park, the equivalent of our " home run, " he can run up and down the path six times, scoring six runs, or " hitting it for six, " which will win for him a modest burst of handclapping from the crowd. Even if he hits the ball, he need not run if he'd rather not risk being thrown out by a fielder. His job is twofold—to protect his wicket and to score runs.

The batsman is out only if the pitcher (" bowler ") succeeds in tossing the ball past him and hitting the wicket, which consists of three low stakes set in the ground behind him, across which are balanced two little horizontal sticks called " bails. " It is of the utmost importance to know that these sticks are called bails. Every one of the many people who tried to explain cricket to me whispered the magic word " bails " with the air of letting me in on a real secret. The batsman is also finished if one of his batted bails is caught on the fly, if he is thrown out at the wicket (" stumped "), if he does something called l.b.w., which apparently is not quite cricket, and under several other conditions. If the wicket is hit the bails go flying off, the batter has been " bowled, " and this time the bowler receives the polite and scattered recognition of the audience.

The game is complicated and considerably delayed by the fact that there are two batsmen, one at each wicket, and after the bowler has tossed the ball six times at one wicket (an " over ") everyone on the field moves around to new positions and the bowler faces the batsman at the other end of the pitch. Thus it often happens that an expert batsman continues to play for hours, while less fortunate or less enthusiastic members of his team come up, score a few runs, and retire. It is quite possible for two good batsmen to exercise all day, leaving the rest of their team to wonder why they didn't spend the afternoon at the beach or at home by the radio. However, even in high-quality play, a one-man score of one hundred runs (a " century ") is an item worthy of the sporting columns in the newspapers the following day. Since the ball can be hit fairly in any direction, batting becomes a science of placement, of " hitting it where they ain't, " and there are, it was averred, many fine points behind that peculiar batting stroke which looks like a combination mashie shot and a man chopping down a tree.

For the bowler, his object is to set those bails flying, or somehow induce the batsman to give up and walk slowly towards the pavilion (club house). The bowler's delight, the " no-hit " game of cricket, is the hat trick, when he takes three successive wickets with three straight balls. I don't know what the record is for the least number

of balls thrown during a game by a bowler (par would be ten), but it was undoubtedly set the day a British Army team played an American Air Force team, which amassed the modest total of 29 runs, all out.

All this I learned, not by watching the game, but by being told about it by Mervyn on my left and Pop on my right (and further confused by reading the *Encyclopædia Britannica*). As for the game we were attending, all I could see were tiny white figures far across the greensward, moving constantly from position to position with long pauses, like a set of self-propelled, legged billiard balls on a green table top. The crowd seemed distant and apathetic, the atmosphere was one of dreamy lethargy and patient ease.

Mervyn told me that cricket is played both by amateurs and professionals, sometimes in the same team, but in these cases segregated to special dressing-rooms because the professional, his hands tainted by fees, is on a somewhat lower social stratum. Although war-time games had time limits, the normal game goes on until everyone has batted, or a game is won (whichever comes first), which might well take two or three days, with interruptions for dinner, for tea, and presumably so that the players can go home to sleep and the crowd can rouse itself to go home.

Even during these unlimited matches there are times when not every batsman gets a chance to show his prowess. Hence you hear of a batsman who secured a total of " 67 runs not out ", meaning that the game ended while he was still batting, I think.

I am afraid that I am in little danger of becoming a cricket-fiend following that exhibition at Lord's. To me it lacks the drama, the high pitch of enthusiasm, the spirit of mass festival and crowd participation and rivalry that make the dullest, most inept American baseball game exciting. I missed the arguments with the umpires, I missed the pep-talk and chatter of the players on the field, I longed for the popcorn and peanut vendor in the stands and the shouted banter of the crowd. At best it was a formal exhibition of skill, an exercise in technique, a distant, stylized ballet played before a respectful audience of critical but not-too-attentive devotees. The players were too far away for personalities to emerge, the play was too polite for heated rivalry to develop, and the limitations of the game itself precluded those crowd-electrifying thrills that one gets from the variety of sequences and possible combinations of strategy in a baseball game.

To me, cricket is a game almost without climaxes, without tied

scores, without see-saw changes of advantage or evenly balanced duels. In a more monotonous way, it produces the lack of suspense that would result in a baseball game if each team batted through nine innings uninterruptedly, or if in football or basket ball one team kept the ball for the offensive for an entire half. Here again, as at the invisible horse races at Newmarket, the only thrill comes in the last few moments, and then only if the score is very close.

We departed after about three hours with the game still in progress, and the next day I looked for an account of it in a newspaper, to find out who, if anyone, had been the winner of that sleepy session. I was amazed to read, " In one of the most exciting and well-played matches seen at Lord's during the war, a team representing the Civil Defence Services . . ."

At a cricket match any less exciting, I am certain, the average American would be the Dormouse at the Tea Party, and contribute to the spirit of the occasion with loud and conspicuous snores. But then, it might be fun to *play*.

48

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY 1944

" REMEMBER, in these cloisters, which were finished in his day, John Washington of this county, Prior of this Cathedral, 1416–1446, whose family won an everlasting name in lands to him unknown."

The two flags slipped from the new stone plaque mounted in the wall of the cloisters of Durham Cathedral, and the white-haired Dean, the Rev. Dr. Cyril A. Alington, read his words to the assembled group, as an American soldier and a British soldier shook hands beneath the stone, and the cloisters rang to the martial music of the National Anthems, played by a guard of honour of the Durham Light Infantry.

This was the 212th anniversary of Washington's birth—22 February, 1944, and the unveiling of the plaque, with its cadenced message and its two bright coats-of-arms, was the climax of a day-long celebration in this land where the family of America's first President found its earliest origins.

For Bob Dehler and myself the ceremonies had begun the day before, with our arrival in Newcastle to make final arrangements for our visiting party, to work out details of the schedule with the

local officials, and for me to write the advance story and notes for two speeches for the colonel, who was to arrive that evening. Later in the afternoon we had called on the Dean in his beautiful rectory and had concluded our plans over cups of tea. But though I helped with the preparations and had worked on the programme, I was unprepared for the series of poignant moments that the next day held in store.

They began the next morning when we drove down to the little mining town of Washington in a long procession of official automobiles. It was an impressive party—our Colonel Grower and his group, Major-General Petre, Commanding General of the Northern Command, Mr. Colville, the representative of the American ambassador, Mr. Lawson, the local Member of Parliament, town and county councillors and mayors, newspapermen who had come up from London, men from the B.B.C., and photographers.

But it was not these officials, or their speeches on Anglo-American unity that won the applause at Washington that day. In the little Biddick School, the sons and daughters of the farmers and the miners staged a pageant, acted out on a flag-draped stage, and dressed in home-made costumes of paper. Here, in a high Durham dialect that was a quaint anachronism, they recited the memorable words of some of America's most famous declarations. The children solemnly went through their parts—there was a little boy who had to be prompted from the wings, and there was a girl Liberty whose extended right arm tired and drooped and then extended and then drooped again. And best of all there was the old schoolmaster in his Sunday suit and his high collar who acted as master-of-ceremonies, who had written the pageant and rehearsed the children and designed the costumes and staged the play—and now was making the most of his moment in the limelight. He made a little speech at the end, that began with an account of the Washington family and their place in local history, and dwelt simply and eloquently on the friendship everyone had for America, and then somehow got on to the subject of the repairs that were needed for the Manor House, and the sum of money that was required to make it a worthy shrine. It wasn't on the programme, and it might not have been quite politic, but we liked him for his simple directness and his honesty, and when he ended there was long and sincere applause. Everyone sang the National Anthems, with the children's voices ringing loud and clear in "Oh say can you see," and then there was a rush, as they broke ranks to beseige the astonished American

guests with bits of paper and pencils for our autographs! But the most sought-after of all was not the colonel or the general and the dignitaries, but the autograph of a bewildered American sailor, who had found himself in Washington looking for relatives that day, and had somehow been swept up in the celebrations.

It was not, furthermore, the procession of dignitaries that one remembers as the convoy moved down the streets of Washington to the church where, centuries before, the ancestors of the illustrious George had been baptized in the Saxon font, and to the house next door, where they had lived. Here it was the crowds of villagers lining the streets, who had come to take part in the celebration and to cheer for this American holiday.

The Washington Manor Hall itself was an old, empty brick building. It had been originally built as a Manor Hall by the Washington family in 1183, but had fallen into disrepair and had been virtually destroyed. Centuries later, in 1613, a new house was built, incorporating parts of the old one. This new house had seen many tenants, but had finally fallen upon evil days, and its last use many years ago had been as a two-family dwelling for the poor. Now, flying one little American flag, it was a sad thing, crying out for repair and respect—weed-grown, with gaping cracks in the walls and plaster lying on the dusty boards of the floor. A shrine perhaps, but a needy shrine, a destitute, decaying, almost-forgotten old building falling to ruin because the people of Washington were poor people who could not restore it, and because the people of America who had their Mount Vernon and knew their Sulgrave Manor, had not yet come this far back along the Washington trail.

And yet, I think, if the people of America wanted to donate funds for a shrine in Washington, Durham County, England, they could do better than to bring back this ancient shell of a house to respectability. If they wanted to contribute the thousands of dollars it would take, they could do no better than to provide something living, something worthwhile—not to the forgotten ancestors of the father of his country, but to the needy descendants—they could build a new school for the children, or a clinic—or a few new homes. This was not the intent of the old schoolmaster when he talked to us, but it was the more eloquent plea in the eyes of the children themselves, and in the mean dwellings and the ugly slag heaps in this needy town. But that is always the way; we are always putting up monuments to the dead, while the living go on living in slums.

After lunch at the inn in Durham, the ceremonies began again, this time in the cathedral. There were more speeches in the old Chapter House, where the Dean, dressed in a five-hundred-year-old cope (which he believed had been worn by John Washington himself), spoke of the common ancestry of the two nations, their common heritage, and the fellowship that was being forged anew by war. The colonel added his humble words, and so did others, and the noble sentiments resounded among the ancient stones. But I could not help thinking that while it was important and worthy that this good will and friendship should be well expressed and oft-repeated on these high intellectual levels, that a less articulate but equally important understanding was being forged on a less high plane.

For in the end it was the friendship of the American sailor and the school children that told the story, it was the handshake of the two soldiers under the plaque, it was the other signs in other places. Conversations on street corners in London and in public houses in Glasgow and in the homes of Boston—yes, and in the evenings under the willows along the Stour River. And deeper than that—it was the Spitfires that escorted our bombers out over Germany, and the air-sea launches that rescued our ditched flyers, and the Royal Navy that guarded our convoys, and it was the Americans who helped with the air-raid rescue work in London and contributed their pay and their candy-rations to the war orphans that was welding the unbreakable ties.

After the plaque had been unveiled and the guard of honour had marched away and the guests departed, I wandered alone about the grounds of the ancient cathedral. Books have been written about Durham, and there is little that I can add. I remembered then the conversation with the man in the train coming north: "Yes," he had told me, "Canterbury is fine, and Lincoln is elegant, and Salisbury and Winchester and York Minster are good too. But you can have them all. For me there is only one real cathedral in England, and that is Durham."

Walking about the place now, I was beginning to agree. Something about the very massiveness of the great cylindrical Norman columns, something about the way the light sifted down golden from the Clerestory windows, something that spoke of great age and of staunch, buttressed resistance against wind and weather. And there is magnificence in that unique setting, soaring high on its hilltop battlements above the river on three sides.

A young don of the college joined me, and pointed out the details

that I would have missed, and told me the history and the legends of the place as we walked. Here he showed me the old crest of the Washington family, with its three stars and five stripes—certainly the true origin of the American flag. He took me out on the west porch, which extends to the very edge of the cliff, and we looked out into the top branches of the trees and down into the river far below. We walked through the cloisters again, and then across the quiet sanctuary of the Close, surrounded with its old houses, and we toured the college and the castle grounds.

And then I said good-bye and thanked him for the hours he had so generously given me, and I walked slowly down the path to the river, with the great cathedral above, its battlements and towers soaring like a great fortress overhead, its towers leaning against the moving sky like a mighty ship at sea.

And so this, too, becomes a cherished memory.

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FRIENDSHIP IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

It was a sunny day in summer when I took the bus over the hills from Watford to Chalfont St. Giles. Once again it was at the suggestion of Newton Calhoun, who had found much to interest him in this quiet corner of Buckinghamshire. There were several attractive lures to the place, but most of all I wanted to visit the Milton cottage. For John Milton had been long one of my favourite poets. Not, truly, one whom it is possible to love immediately, but one for whom (like so many things British) admiration comes slowly and with long acquaintance. I wanted to visit the shrine of the blind genius who had written in " Samson Agonistes "—about a blinded giant—surely some of the greatest lines in the language.

It is a pleasant little village, Chalfont St. Giles, and I found the Milton cottage exactly as I had pictured it—old, quaint, vine-covered, filled with books and prints and furnishings and pictures and other souvenirs of the great man. I signed the register and I bought some postcards, and I spent a thoughtful hour among the relics. Then I set out through the town in search of a place to lunch. I found a tea shop and sat down to a cheerful meal, and here it was that I met my friend, Frank Harris.

Frank was sitting alone, but soon came over to ask if he might

join me, and we began the usual conversation between an American and a Briton who are meeting for the first time. But when he discovered that I was a " sight-seeing " soldier with an interest in the countryside, he immediately took a personal interest in my welfare. This was Saturday, and if I would like he would take the rest of the afternoon and show me the neighbouring countryside. There was an even prettier village than Chalfont St. Giles close by, called Jordans. There I could see the old Friends Meeting House where William Penn was buried, and see the Mayflower Barn—said to be constructed of the timbers of the original pilgrim ship. Would I like a guide? I would, indeed. So Frank and I set off by bus for Jordans.

I liked the things Frank showed me that day—the perfect Georgian brick meeting house in its setting of ancient old elm and green lawn, with the unadorned headstones of the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania and members of his family. I examined the Mayflower Barn and its beautiful gardens, and we declined an invitation to attend a song recital that was being held there that afternoon. We walked the pleasant lanes of Jordans, and talked of many things. We went up to the Youth Hostel in the woods and talked to the young couple who were running it, and who told us of how many young people of England were still spending their vacations on foot or on bicycle —hosteling—and that I could spend the night there any time I was passing by.

Then we walked up to the rose-covered retreat of a friend of Frank's—a man named Montague Fordham, who, I learned, was an authority on agriculture and an author of many works on farming and farm economy. The host was not in, but we made ourselves at home, and the housekeeper provided a fine tea.

Our host came in in the middle of this repast in his study, and we talked with this bearded philosopher, discussing the farms of Suffolk and the future of England, until it was time for me to leave. I walked across the fields and down the roads, and caught a train for London at a station called Seer Green Halt.

That was the only time I ever saw Frank Harris—those few pleasant hours on that Saturday in the summer of 1943. And yet we became firm friends. Periodically his letters and cards came to me—at Watford, at London, and later in France. They were filled with many things—with advice and with anecdotes, and with personal news, and with clippings and booklets and little books that he thought I might like to read. He was interested in America and

Americans in England, and he wanted us to see the best that was in England, and take back with us a lasting friendship.

A year later in France, in one of the first letters I received from anyone, he wrote :

> " I see that nearly three months have lapsed since I last wrote you, and events have become so crowded in that time . . . that neither you nor I can possibly have noticed this interval . . . I paid a visit to a famous spot in Grosvenor Square last Saturday in order to make use of the library provided there for the English and other visitors. . . . The couple of hours I spent there just flew ; there were many familiar magazines and periodicals—at present not available for purchase over here, and crowds of other books and material which interested me enormously. I shall certainly pay another visit. It is an excellent scheme. . . . I trust that you are safe and sound, and that you have satisfactory news from home . . . and all the best wherever you are when this reaches you."

A later letter added typically :

> " I wonder whether the book I sent you has found its way to your new and complicated address ? It was not altogether a surprise to me to learn that you had left this country. I can only hope that you have not found things too ' troublesome ' where you are stationed, although these campaigns (are) a very serious business. . . . Do let me have some news from you and be sure to let me know if there is anything I can do to assist you at any time. . . ."

This friendship was what I took away from my visit to Chalfont St. Giles. More than the visit to the Milton cottage, more than the memory of the Quaker Meeting House under the elms, or of the pleasant village green, or of the historical reminders of America's origins in Britain. It is these personal ties—these meetings with the friendly and the hospitable and the interested people themselves—be they the Harrises of Buckinghamshire, the Walfords of Staffs, the Goodmans of Suffolk, or the thousands of others everywhere who were helping to make Americans " at home " everywhere we went in England.

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PRELUDE

ALL through the winter and spring of 1944 it became increasingly obvious that the long-awaited invasion of the Continent was imminent. The signs were everywhere to be seen—the results of the long planning and preparations and waiting were beginning to materialize and the shape of things to come was beginning to be apparent.

The increasing weight of the air power had been slowly turned from the coast of France to the Ruhr, and from the Ruhr to Berlin and the very heart of Germany—and then everywhere on the Continent. These were visible signs to everyone. By day the hundreds of Fortresses and Liberators and Marauders soared up into the sky, climbed ever higher on an invisible track, circled until the entire flight had formed, and then droned off to the east or south. The sky over eastern England in those months was as full of traffic as Piccadilly Circus—there was never a time, except during the worst weather, when one could not count a score, fifty, or a hundred aircraft—coming, going, circling in small formations—the swift fighters, the thunderous bombers, the droning, lazy Walrus of the air-sea rescue, the trainers, the liaison planes. In the evening the tight formations of the American bombers and the American and British fighters would return, their lights making a moving galaxy of stars across the sky—and at the aerodromes the ambulances stood by—watching for the red flares that meant " wounded aboard ", and they would pass, on their way home, the huge dispersed flocks of Halifaxes, Lancasters, Wellingtons, as the RAF went forth to continue the air siege of Europe.

Visible, too, down in the south of England, were the countless thousands of American soldiers, their numbers ever increasing, who spent their time in rigorous training out in the bogs and moors or in coastal manœuvres and flooded the villages and towns on Saturday nights. At the great ports of Liverpool and Glasgow and in the Bristol Channel, there was beehive activity as the convoys moved in endlessly, and the long trains rolled away, with tanks, and artillery and the supplies of war. These, too, were visible to everyone, as were the crowded highways with their truck convoys and racing jeeps.

London, too, seemed bursting its seams—its streets, its railway

stations, its buses, crowded with soldiers of every allied nation. Americans and British predominated, but there were thousands of Canadians and colonials, French, Norwegian, Polish, Belgian, Czech, Dutch—sailors, soldiers, and airmen. It seemed that everyone was in uniform and a civilian was almost out of place. And there were suddenly floods of special people in American uniforms who wore no insignia. Military government? Propaganda? Relief?

In every corner of the British Isles the signs were there—in the scattered villages of Wales and in the Midlands and in the home counties around London, there were army units—hospitals springing up to prepare for the coming casualties, fields covered with engineering equipment, forests and roads stacked with bombs and shells and ammunition of a thousand types, warehouses and sheds stored with food and uniforms and guns. Yes, England was an unsinkable aircraft carrier, but it was an armed camp, too—bulging, heavy, aching with the millions of men and women working and waiting for the signal.

"If just one more soldier moves to southern England," we joked, "this little island will lean over and capsize." But still more came. And more.

And then the coastal areas of England were closed to visitors—and that meant secret preparations were under way, and it was a good sign. And then the formation of the Allied Command was announced, with General Eisenhower as Supreme Commander. And that, too, was a sign.

There were those, not an insignificant number, who kept saying, "I don't believe even yet there will be an invasion. We can never do it. We'll never risk the men. We're trying to bluff Hitler."

But if you looked around, and saw the signs, you knew that it was coming, and coming soon. In our office, as in many, we made a pool, and each of us picked a date as our guess for D-Day. We made this pool early in October, and we were all proved optimists. April 1st was our latest guess—until March 1st, when we all revised our schedules. My own last guess, carefully worked out in connection with the moon and tides and the number of divisions and the length of the summer weather we would need, was May 17th. I, too, was no strategist.

As the weeks went by the tension increased. London, it seemed, became the very hub of the world—the place where the entire organization and planning of this immense venture was centred. Out in Bushey Park, under camouflaged buildings, the Supreme

Command feverishly worked on plans; and in a thousand other buildings scattered in and around the Metropolis, men were working day and night to be ready for the signal. The air was electric with expectancy—it could only now be a matter of a few weeks, perhaps of a few days, until it happened, until this great thing that had brought us to England twenty months ago had sprung into being.

Late in March I was sent to London as sergeant-major of a small group of officers and enlisted men who formed the "forward echelon" of our future organization, which was to be renamed Base Section Number One. Here we were all carefully investigated for our trustworthiness (they called it being bigoted), and we were allowed to know some of the great secrets at last. We read through the monumental plan called "Overlord" and the plans that had preceded it. We were amazed even then at the gigantic thoroughness with which the mission had been worked out, down to the last man, the last round of ammunition, the last bandage. We learned that our own particular Base Section job was to act as the central supply area for all our forces, located in Brittany, that at approximately D plus 30 we would go to the "Far Shore", and that by D plus 57, when Brittany peninsula was to be cleared of the enemy, we would start development of the four ports—Brest, St. Malo, Lorient, and "Q"[1] Bay. Our headquarters was to be at Vannes on the southern shore of the peninsula, and we even went so far as to select the buildings where our headquarters was to be housed.

In the end, of course, the Brittany campaign did not work out as the Overlord Plan envisaged, and Base Section No. One never did accomplish its planned assignment. St. Malo and Brest were completely destroyed in hard fighting before they were finally captured. With the sudden and unexpected surge of our armies through France, which gave us, in addition to Cherbourg and Le Havre, the undamaged prize of Antwerp, we never exploited these too-distant Brittany ports or even bothered to capture Lorient with its tough defences and strong garrison. But it was exciting then in March to believe we knew exactly the name of the town, and even the street, now confidently overrun by the Germans, where we would be walking and working.

London held one other excitement in those spring days; the return of the Luftwaffe in the "baby blitz" and the "scalded cat" raids. Though they were not so disastrous as the 1940–1 raids, they were by all accounts noisier—for London then was a nest of anti-

[1] Quiberon Bay.

aircraft and rocket-gun defences. We lay in our beds on the top floor of our billet in Cadogan Place and listened to the boom and crack of the guns, and the tinkle of shrapnel on the roof, the crump of the bombs, and the sudden, terrifying swish and roar of the rocket salvos, and we were glad, after three weeks, when our forward echelon returned to Watford.

They were difficult days then, for now we had a secret to keep. We knew everything about the invasion but the date; we knew the numbers of men involved and the plan of battle; we knew the locations and even the names of the beaches that would be used. We had seen the hypothetical battle lines from D-Day through D plus 120, and even then men were working on the plans up to D plus 270. No longer could we argue in public, or anywhere, the fascinating question of whether the invasion was coming, and where, and when. No longer could we accept another drink at 'The Unicorn', because that last one might be the one that let the wrong word slip. Suddenly, then, we became silent and uncommunicative. If Pop and Joe and Mervyn argued and discussed, and then turned to me for support, I could merely smile and shake my head and say, "I really don't know."

And they would laugh, and say, "He thinks he knows! He's been to London and thinks he's got inside information! And he really doesn't know a thing!"

As the days after May 17 passed, the nervous tension for me, and for all of us, increased. It was any day now, it couldn't wait any longer, it just *must* absolutely be to-morrow. We stayed close to the radio, we snatched at the newspapers, we watched the sky and the weather. On the first of June I made a trip up through the heart of England, along the Great North Road. Everywhere along that road, and all the others in England, there were endless convoys of army vehicles—miles and miles of them, moving south and east, rolling along almost bumper to bumper—division after division—Americans, British, Canadians. And somewhere along the road, somewhere mixed up with this endless stream of vehicles, I suddenly met and passed my old outfit, the 820th Engineers. They had pulled out of their aerodrome in Suffolk, and were headed south, to take part in the invasion. As the bulldozers rumbled past, and the motor graders and the shovels and the trucks, I stood up in the back of the jeep and shouted and waved. "Solong, Pete! Good luck, Tommy! Hi, Hoover, where you going? Solong, Red! Take it easy now, John boy. Good luck, good luck!"

And then, on the night of the fifth, we heard the planes go out. It seemed that they were going out in thousands, overhead in the blackness of the night. We turned over and went to sleep again—perhaps this was just another big raid going out—perhaps this was not it after all. But then again it might be ! Listen !

We were standing at the window of the office the next morning, wondering what had happened. The morning newspapers had had no word about the tremendous flight the night before, but we felt in our bones that something important had happened. The radio droned on in the familiar manner—bombers had been out again, destroying railways and bridges along the coast of France.

And then a roar of planes was heard—we looked up into the blue sky, and a flight of fighters raced across the horizon.

" That's funny," I said to Colonel Betts. " Those Mustangs. Did you see that ? Those Mustangs had broad black-and-white stripes on their wings. I never saw that before ! "

" Black-and-white stripes ! " shouted Colonel Betts. It was the only time I had ever seen him excited. " Then it's to-day, man ! To-day ! To-day is D-Day ! It's started ! "

And then, as we talked excitedly, and the word raced around headquarters, we heard, over the B.B.C., that first, unforgettable announcement : " *Under the command of General Eisenhower, Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing Allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France.*"

D-Day !

Never, we thought, had so much been said in so few words !

Our long months of waiting and of preparations had ended, and here the battle was now joined. Soon, in a few weeks, if all went well—(and it must succeed)—we too would be leaving England, and we could ring down the curtain on a period in history, and in our lives, that we would never forget.

" Good-bye," we murmured. " Good-bye, fish and chips ! "

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RETROSPECT

AND so it was just two weeks less than two years after that first arrival in Glasgow that I boarded the transport again at Southampton, destined for Omaha beach and the war. England was no longer a strange, unknown land ; its towns and villages, its countryside

and its cities were familiar now ; its way of life had almost become our way of life and its people were my friends. During these two years I had seen many things to remember, a few things to criticize, a lot to admire, and some things to love. Yes, we were as eager now to get to France and into the thick of the battle as we had been two years earlier to get overseas and get into the war. And just as we had been reluctant to leave America then, we were reluctant now to say good-bye to England, where we had, in army parlance, " found a home ".

There were many things that we knew we would never forget as we looked back on those two long years. The earliest days at Debach and the rain that seeped through the British tents. The British Army rations that we ate for six weeks—carrots, mutton, cabbage, rice and dates, with a liberal sprinkling of mud and live bees and rain, and how we marvelled at the stamina and health of the English soldiers who were thriving on this diet. The German raiders that slowly circled in the clouds over Ipswich and the curtains of green incendiaries that they dropped. The reveille in the inky blackness of dawn and the days out on the runways in fog and rain. Our first taste of English beer and our first visit to war-time London, and the morning rides to Sudbury when the two girls waved from the upstairs window.

There were other sights that moved us : flowers and weeds growing in the empty cellars of Coventry and Bristol and Chelmsford and a hundred other towns ; the classic steeple of St. Bride's in Fleet Street standing above the gutted shell of its church ; the silver fleets of Fortresses droning through the skies like lines from a feather brush ; the tower of the Boston Stump like a white sword across the fens ; the dank wind from the passing trains flapping the blankets about the thin forms of old women and babies in the underground stations ; the blood red of a wheat field brushed with poppies in Hertfordshire, and the sulphur of a mustard field in Suffolk ; there were the dawn calisthenics in the quiet streets of Watford, and the midnight meetings around the fire in the Nissen huts at Debach.

There were sounds, too, that will linger : the piper in the mist-shrouded hills of Loch Lomond and the boom of Big Ben on the B.B.C., the skylarks' songs as they danced over the English meadows and the lapwings' lonely cries at night in the fields around Wattisham. There was the endless drone as the RAF bombers went out at night, and there were rooks cawing in the rain on a winter's day. There

was the echo of steelshod shoes on the cobblestones of the villages at midnight, and the lonely hum of the wind in the telephone wires. And, above all, there were sirens at dawn, at noon, in the evening, and at night. Will you ever forget that mournful wailing cry of Doom?

Yes, there were the smells too. The fresh clean smell of a clover field at Debach; the heavy, sour smell of smoke and the fog of London; the smell of the sea at Felixstowe and the sickly-sweet smell of a sugar-beet factory at Ipswich; the smell of a fish-and-chip shop suddenly permeating the damp air in a blacked-out Ipswich street, the smell of beer through the rain in Reading, and the smell of pipe tobacco like burning seaweed in a Suffolk bus.

Nor would we forget the people: the hard-working factory girls like Iris, and the office girls like Bessie and Joan, and the other workers like Winnie at the Gainsborough, and Daphne with her butcher's van, and like Pat at the Piccadilly underground station, and the porters at railway stations, and the clippies on the buses. And staunch men like Sheriff Moody and Vic of the R.O.C., and John of the A.R.P., and Albert of the N.F.S. of London; like the tired miners of Washington, and the slow-moving farmers of Suffolk and business-men like Vivian and Pop working in the evenings to grow vegetables and drilling on Sundays with the Home Guard; there were the grimy girls of Glasgow and the old men of Hull who had come off retirement to help unload the cargo, yes, and thousands of others like them.

There were the quiet heroes: in the Army hospitals and in the holds of ships and on the wind-swept aerodromes of Norfolk; there were the crews of the lonely searchlight posts and the coastal batteries and in every town that was bombed or strafed or shelled or raided with robots or rockets. There were the loyal women who went, like Mrs. Ramsey and Mrs. Hartley, to the railway station each Saturday night to keep a vigil for their men, and there were women like the lady-barber in Ipswich and a thousand others who kept a more desperate vigil—for a husband or a son or a brother missing in Singapore or Italy or Africa. And there were others too, their gallant stories told in the agony columns of *The Times*. "Lady Margaret 'Blank', widow of Sir Eric 'Blank', who was killed in the Second Battle of the Marne, regrets to announce the loss of her only son, Flt.-Lt. Roger, D.F.C. (RAF), aged 29, in action over Germany on March 21. Mourned also by his wife, Penelope (*née* Jones) and their son, Peter, aged 3 months." History repeating

itself with a hollow laugh, two generations of fatherless sons (and more perhaps ?) and two women, keeping a lonely trust.

Yes, there were terrifying moments too after D-Day, when the distant hum became a nearer throbbing and then a swelling roar, and the roar stopped and your heart stopped as you waited, crouched, for the crash of the mechanical monster. There was the night in Watford when a street of workers' cottages disappeared in a cloud of smoke and forty dead were found in the ruins. There were the bright racing streaks in the night and the distant explosions on all sides, and the one that nearly missed headquarters. You never knew whether it was an All-clear or an Alert or what that crash without warning had been.

There were all the men and the women in uniform : soldiers like Arthur and Paul of the H.L.I., and Eric of the Warwickshire Regiment, and James of the Royal Engineers. There were RAF lads like Fred and Pat who had spent five years in the desert, and sailors in from the North Sea minesweeper fleet. There were the tanned and healthy-looking girls of the Land Army and there were WAAFs like Helen and Marion, and young WRENs like Kay. And they were all of them doing a job, all of them working for the war, all trading their youth and their homes and families for freedom and the future.

There were pretty English faces to be remembered—Joan and Daisy and Olive and Kay and Miss Mac, and Audrey and Joy and Peggy, and the girl on the train from Clare and the violet-eyed girl in Hull. And Gloria and Daphne and Marie and Millie and a hundred others everywhere. There were the children too : handsome Rodney and pert Anne, and bright Michael and Pat and Peter and Wee Nancy, and to all of them you were " Uncle Bob ". And there were the thin-faced children of Durham and the happy farm children of Suffolk and the quiet, well-mannered children of the Foundling Hospital, to whom so little meant so much. There was Billy, with his new leg and his new-found confidence, and little Rita with her new uniform and her delighted smile. And there was the little boy who screamed in terror that day in Ilford when the sirens sounded.

There were the long queues for buses that were late, and there were housewives' queues for fish, for bread, and for tomatoes. There were the shabby clothes and the girls without stockings, and the monotonous rations and the meals without butter. There were the crowded trains and the telephones that didn't work, and the thousand things that couldn't be done, that had to be suffered, that

must be sacrificed; there was the stolid English patience that took it all and then apologized, politely, " There's a war on, you know."

And through it all there was hospitality and friendship; the housewives that worked evenings in our Red Cross clubs; Boston and its open house and open heart; Frank Harris and his friendship at Jordans; the Walfords and their hospitality at Dudley; there was the month's egg ration on the breakfast plate and the week's meat ration on the table for Sunday dinner. There were the drinks you couldn't buy for others in the pubs, and the bicycles and books you were loaned and the beds that were kept in readiness for your visit. One soldier says, " I remember of all things the old men who used to stand on the blind corners of the little lanes in Suffolk and signal to us as we were driving so that we wouldn't meet another truck head-on." And another soldier says, " I remember the simple ceremony we had in Cransley Church when they dedicated that stained-glass window given by our battalion." And a third speaks, " I remember the way the villagers came on Sundays to our cemetery at Cambridge and decorated the graves of our fliers with fresh flowers; " and a fourth, " I remember the whale of a week-end I had staying with a family in Torquay." And a fifth: " I married that little girl from Derby—the one I met at the dance."

And the last one remarked, " Every Englishman you meet apologizes. They all say, ' Too bad you are seeing England in wartime. Too bad you cannot see England at her best.' And dammit, this is England at her best. Right here and now ! "

Yes, this was England at her best. Perhaps the streets were dirty and the shopfronts needed paint. Perhaps there were gaping wounds in the cities and the trains all ran late. Perhaps England is prettier when the iron-railings are back around the parks and the lights are on in London. Perhaps life will be more comfortable when there is plenty of food once more, and plenty of hot water and soap is no longer rationed. Perhaps, too, the girls will be prettier when they can buy new clothes and wear stockings again and the grime disappears from under their finger-nails and the hard muscles from their arms and legs. Perhaps too life will be more pleasant when you can take out the family car and go down to Brighton for a Sunday, or up to Southport for the week-end; when there are no air-raid signs to flash on in the theatres and no Anderson shelters to disfigure the garden, or Morrison shelters to crowd the living room. And perhaps it will be a more interesting place when the newspapers are full-size once more and the paintings go back to the

National Gallery and the Crown Jewels to the Tower, and the Trooping of the Colours is held once again at St. James's Palace. Perhaps then once more the students and the schoolteachers and the other summer tourists can come back and "do England" in a month or two—and see England—Stratford-on-Avon and Stonehenge and Oxford and the Lake Country, Hampton Court, and certainly have kidney pie at the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street. Perhaps this *will* be England at its best.

But to some of us, who remember other things—who knew a country wholly united behind one purpose, a country where danger made all men friends, where sacrifice came not only to the soldier or catastrophe came only to the poor, where everyone shared in the work, where terror and trouble could not subjugate humour and wit, where gallantry and heroism was the man standing next to you at 'The Rose and Crown', where patience and loyalty was the woman in front of you at the post-office window, and where democracy was the duke on the bicycle and the farmer in the car—this was a nation at its best, this was an experience to be shared with pride, this was a time of greatness, and Britain a wonderland indeed.

FINIS