1

BACK TO SCHOOL

Our appearance is hardly likely to inspire confidence, embraced as we are by dust, dirt, and mud, our inseparable companions. The habit of cleanliness, only a recent development in human history, is quickly lost in the combat zone because it is dependent on the availability of water. Here water is a precious substance we keep under guard, transport in our olive drab truck, purify, and use almost entirely for cooking and drinking. There is not enough for showering or bathing.

One of the first truths I learned in the Army was that survival was not contingent on washing more than once a day. Here, each morning, we transform our helmets into washbasins—the "baths." Shaving is a hardship to be postponed whenever possible. But my addiction to concepts of antisepsis still compels me to rub a few drops of heavily chlorinated water over my hands whenever they become unbearably sticky.

Sometimes weeks or months would pass before someone would chance upon laundering or bathing facilities and it was expedient to make use of them. Last week, in an almost completely deserted French village close to the German border, one of our enterprising men negotiated an agreement with a withered widow who gratefully scrubbed everyone's clothes in return for several bars of soap and boxes of C rations. We carefully packed the clothes into our musette bags.

Then two days ago, we heard of a shower room in a power plant converted into a commercial venture by a resourceful elderly German couple. We took turns, gamboling noisily beneath the beautiful hot water, then luxuriated in our still-fragrant clean clothes. As we were leaving, four gaunt, bedraggled, weary, menacing-looking men—displaced persons—entered the grounds.

The obese German lady waddled over to us.

"Please," she whispered. "Please. Stay a little longer. They are Russians and will take everything."

We paid for the showers. I climbed into a jeep with the company CO and two of the men. The CO ordered the driver to leave.

No one turned to watch.

As the war continues, more of these homeless wanderers abandon their hiding places in desolate hills, dismal caves, and gutted cities. Going somewhere, trudging slowly, they carry packs and bundles, or push small carts and baby carriages. They roam nervously through the countryside like suspicious dogs alert to the presence of enemies, sniffing for food smells, evaluating the terrain for potential shelter. There is a sameness to their appearance: I can guess their nationalities only from their languages, not from their facial features or clothing. They are thin, pale, hungry, tired, and dirty, probably as dirty as we are, and for the same reasons. They ask for food and cigarettes. Unhappy, morose people.

I find it difficult to realize that they were once loved, indispensable to their families; that our parents, wives, and friends would look and behave the same way if they had been the dispossessed, if they had just emerged from years of drudgery in slave labor camps.

Sometimes German civilians ask us to protect them from the wanderers, but we cannot help them, and the enlisted men make the routine response:

"They are your problem. You brought them here."

Tonight I am sitting in a blacked-out room illuminated by a Coleman lamp. I am again dust covered and mud splattered, but unaware of my appearance. Nor am I thinking about the plight of civilians. My attention is on stud poker, a game that is almost always in progress when business slackens in the "Station," as it has today.

The Station, the treatment room for the sick and wounded, is the heart of the medical collecting company, open twenty-four hours a day—except when we pack and move to a new location. A medical officer and a cadre of medical corpsmen are on constant duty. I am the medical officer of the day.

The room is jammed with medical and surgical equipment. I

am so used to the stench that I do not notice the sweet wintergreen scent of methyl salicylate that the sergeant has recently used to rub down a soldier's aching back, nor the extramedical smell of French fries floating in from the adjacent kitchen, nor the chronic locker-room odor of unwashed soldiers.

Only three patients since noon. The first soldier was dead on arrival; he had been playing with a German bazooka, and his legs and half his face were blown off. Everyone was upset; his body should have been sent directly to a burial registration unit. The second needed a hernia repair and was evacuated to a rear echelon hospital. I was able to return the third patient to duty after deciding that his trench foot was mild and would respond to treatment.

Now another patient, I think, as I hear the sound of a jeep; but he cannot be in serious condition, otherwise I would hear the roar of one of our ambulances.

The soldier who enters is not a patient; he is a courier from Battalion Headquarters with a message for me. This is a surprise. I am a quiet, undistinguished first lieutenant; I cannot imagine why anyone would send me a message.

But my astonishment is not overpowering. As I temporarily withdraw from the poker game, I retain enough presence of mind to count the number of matches in front of me; each match is worth one franc. I acquired this savoir faire as an intern, at the poker games at Kings County Hospital, where I had to leave at a moment's notice to take care of patients who overfilled the Emergency Ward of that gigantic hospital. That was three years ago, but the habit persists.

I sign for the message. It is very brief. I am to report to Division Headquarters at 1100 hours, 15/3/45, taking along only my mess gear and sleeping bag, which means I won't be there long. The runner, now happily warming himself in front of our prized potbellied stove, informs me that 15/3/45 is tomorrow.

These special numerical symbols are used by the military to indicate a moment of time, and after all my years of service I still have to resort to laborious digital translations to understand whether they represent A.M. or P.M., or month-day or day-month. In this case, the 15/3/45 figure is easy: I know it is the fifteenth day of March, 1945. It cannot be the third day of the fifteenth month unless somebody has changed things.

Of course, I question the runner, who tells me that his sergeant-

who-knows-everything (modern computers evolved from top sergeants) says that I am being sent to school, but that is all I can extract except for the location of the administrative center back in France, top secret, naturally. Then the messenger, like the moving finger, moves on.

Unimaginative witticisms and mundane platitudes are aimed at me by my comrades, and then wearied by the dullness of the day, I think about retiring for the night.

There has been no action near here today. I hear only the mean, cold winter wind whistling through the hills, the occasional boom-whistle of one of the big guns, and the reassuring, intermittent rumble of planes: reassuring because they are ours.

One of the corpsmen carefully puts away the greasy, overly fingered deck of cards, the candy bars and liquid refreshments. I look at one wall where a crucifix hangs and at another where a sign is posted asking the former German military patients, *Hast du nach Hause geschrieben?*

Nein, I answer. I have not written home today. Not yet. The only positive value of war is its revival of the craft of letter writing, and in this outfit almost everyone writes daily or two or three times a week. I know because I have to take my turn censoring the letters, but the censorship is purely one of names of cities and unit numbers. We cannot tell anyone at home where we have been until two weeks have passed.

So I write the heading, "Somewhere in Germany"; this is still refreshing because it has been "Somewhere in France" for months and months until five days ago. But the company has not advanced very far. The Station is in a former German convalescent hospital operated by a Catholic order, in the tiny town of Kleinsblittersdorf. In the daytime I can still see the Saar River, and on its French side the big sister city, Grossblittersdorf. Patches of green forest and pine trees are visible and every inch of land seems to be under cultivation. It would be pleasant to go sightseeing, but this impulse is throttled by the knowledge of surrounding mine fields and the fear of booby traps and nervous sentries.

In my letter I describe the terrain. I doubt whether the information will be appreciated, but I mention that on the French side there are unending piles of manure on the ground, and here, on the German side, I do not see any manure piles. Perhaps a difference in farming techniques. I mention the quietness, the lack of action, and the volleyball game that everyone participated in this

morning in front of the damaged chapel. I write about the Germans who have stayed here, the caretakers, and the nuns, and describe their fleeting black shadows.

No one has initiated conversation with them because our version of the nonfraternization policy is to grunt and bark our orders and questions.

"We stay here." "Where is the water?" "Does the electricity work?" This is the extent of the dialogue, and none of us realizes that our interpretation of the policy makes us sound rude and authoritarian.

I also tell my wife that I was able to send her $81 by the PTA (personal transfer of accounts) method, after giving the finance clerk 4,015 francs. French currency is still in use. When the order comes to exchange francs for marks, I will know that the Division brass feels secure on this new soil.

I reassure my wife that there is little danger here, largely true. Then I end the letter by saying that I am going back to school, I know not why or for what, and I retire into my sleeping bag, a little boat in a little bottle.

The earsplitting noise begins at 0100 hours (let's see, that is 1:00 A.M.) when the 7th Army opens its attack on the mighty Siegfried Line, the supposedly impenetrable barrier to Germany because of its innumerable concrete pillboxes and wedge-shaped antitank obstacles, the dragon's teeth. All the artillery in the world seem to be on our backyard; the 155s and 105s roar themselves hoarse. For miles around, the earth is illuminated by the artificial moonlight of immense, dazzling searchlights. The gunners must be proud. They make the earth tremble and shudder and further humiliate our few remaining windowpanes.

I listen to the challenge of the guns. I watch the blazing lights. Armageddon? It takes more than this to keep an experienced soldier awake.

The usually considerate mess sergeant has concocted an unfriendly batch of powdered eggs for breakfast, but this is better than C rations, and his coffee is acceptable. So I have little to complain about as I depart by jeep for the new school—except the cold weather, the early hour, and the rotten roads.

At Division Headquarters, I am directed to a nearby displaced persons—DP—camp, a cluster of run-down buildings. I enter a makeshift classroom where other officers,

lieutenants and captains, are waiting. Most of them wear infantry and cavalry insignia; a few are from the Medical Corps. I recognize no one.

A small table and a faded blackboard are at the front of the room; a large four-color map of Germany is tacked to a wall. Through the window I see DPs walking back and forth, waiting for breakfast.

We come to attention as a colonel with a no-nonsense demeanor strides in, introduces himself, points to the map, and announces, "This is Germany!

"In Germany," he continues, "there are ten million displaced persons—DPs. YOU will take care of them!"

The officer sitting next to me is busy counting heads. He whispers that each of us in the room will have to take care of a half-million DPs—if the speaker's figures are correct. (In fact, they were incorrect. Historians later showed that a total of 13.5 million DPs were handled, half by the Americans, English, and French in their sectors of Germany, and half by the Russians in their sector.[1])

We learn the difference between refugees and displaced persons. Refugees are civilians in their own country who want to return to their homes but, because of the chaotic conditions created by the war, need help to do so. Obviously, homeless Germans in Germany are refugees, but not our responsibility unless they are concentration camp survivors. DPs are people outside the boundaries of their own countries who, because of the war, need help to survive and later to go home or to some other country. There are many categories of DPs, such as stateless persons, political prisoners, fugitives, enemy and ex-enemy nationals, and ex-prisoners of war. However, most of the DPs will be the people driven into Germany by the Nazis and used by them as laborers.

When the need arises, small "combat DP teams" will be formed and we will be placed on detached service with them for an indefinite time. We will take orders from G-5, the new section of the Army that handles civilian affairs. The term "G-5" stirs my long-dormant imagination. Intrigue? Romance?

As the Allied troops advance and German military and civil controls deteriorate, DPs and refugees will be forced to search for food and shelter, thus blocking the highways. This cannot

be allowed. These channels must be kept open to permit the Allies to continue their pursuit and destruction of the enemy.

Initially, orders will be transmitted to DPs in a newly liberated area to remain where they are. Military police will then route them to collecting points and temporary camps. DP teams might take over at these locations, but more likely at larger "assembly centers" where DPs will be housed until they are repatriated.

A ten-minute break. I think back to the last Army school I attended. Shortly before going overseas, I was assigned to a camp in Texas where I helped train black medical corpsmen in battalion aid station duties and first aid principles. For seemingly endless days, as we camped on dusty and wind-swept plains ("maneuvers"), the men packed and unpacked medical chests and bandaged each other. Between drills everyone played poker, and in the evenings, under the dim light of a lantern, I read and reread my Army training manual.

Be forceful, it said. Avoid lecturing. Use action, visual aids, demonstration, participation, and repetition. Little was left to the teacher's imagination. In practice, this method seemed to work well because the poor teachers achieved results by using the recommended tactics, while the competent teachers were not shackled.

The instructors here must have been exposed to the same manuals. They use all the accepted techniques, except repetition, but only because there is insufficient time to present the material twice.

The recess is over. As the hours pass, it becomes more difficult to concentrate because the classroom is next door to a kitchen in which dinner is being prepared. Shrieks, murmurs, and gurgles penetrate the walls, distracting but pleasant, the long-forgotten sweet sounds of domesticity. I can see a young girl hurrying toward the kitchen carrying a handful of trays, and I have to wrench my mind back to the subject under consideration.

The information we receive falls into several categories.

Characteristics of assembly centers. We should select clusters of buildings located at outskirts of cities or towns, close to high-

ways, large enough to accommodate at least 2,000 men, women, and children. If the rooms are overcrowded, epidemic diseases may spread rapidly—I think back to the contagion units, distant memories of smallpox, typhoid fever, and other communicable diseases.

Washrooms, a laundry, kitchens, warehouses, offices, examining rooms, a dispensary, and a hospital are essential. We should consider the adequacy and safety of the water supply, waste disposal system, and electrical circuits.

Care in assembly center. Violently uprooted from their homes, forced to labor under appalling conditions, grudgingly given a minimum of food and a token of medical care, the DPs deserve our consideration. They may be helpless or sick; we will need to provide care for them. Food is vital—everyone is to receive a minimum of 2,000 calories a day; we listen to a discussion of dietetics.

We must provide many community services as well as opportunities for counseling, education, recreation, and religious activities, all denied by their former masters. Red Cross workers should be permitted to work with the DPs; they will be particularly welcome because of their lines of communication to most European countries, permitting many DPs to contact their families.

Supplies. We will need to requisition the hundreds of items needed to support a modest existence. Foods, medications, clothes, bedding, dishes—the lists will be lengthy. Also, the little things that make life pleasant, such as soap, toothpaste, stationery, candy, and cigarettes. (The last two were highly regarded.)

No warning. The instructor drops his bomb.

Our mother and father, the United States Army, will not provide supplies. All materials and services for the care of DPs are to come from German sources only—"existing local resources."

Everyone in the room is now listening carefully.

We will request. They will supply. The policy is simple. We are the occupiers: the occupied do as we say. There will be no problems.

The lecturer pauses. It may be, he says, that the supplies requested may not be available or the facilities selected may be inadequate. If so, IMPROVISE.

How does one improvise? I wonder. For the last few years, everything I have ever needed for my patients has been furnished by the United States Army. On the spur of the moment, will I be able to provide life-sustaining services and material for thousands of deprived people from a war-ravaged country depleted of its resources and manpower? Do the other students feel as uncomfortable as I do?

Self-help. We are to involve the DPs to "a maximal extent" in community activities. Many DPs will be mentally and physically ill, the inevitable consequence of years of slavery. Full- or part-time participation in the operation of the center will speed their recovery and rehabilitation; they will realize that they are no longer working for the Germans, but for themselves.

There are other considerations. Our teams will be small, and we can use all the help we can get.

And mischief springs from idleness: we need to keep the DPs busy.

If the DPs cannot provide all the skills needed for the operation of the centers, existing Army labor policies allow for employment of civilians with these abilities.

Military control. Civilian employees of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration may be working with us when the fighting abates; eventually they may replace us. Regardless, the Army remains in charge.

Although DPs are under the jurisdiction of American Military Government (MG), they must also obey the laws of their host country and the rules we establish for assembly centers. We will find that if we share the responsibility for maintaining law and order with the DPs by permitting their leaders to enforce regulations and administer justice, life will be much easier for us.

We are in favor of the easy life.

Late in the afternoon, I walk to the transient officers' quarters with two classmates, one a tall, quiet Iowan, the other a short, garrulous Puerto Rican who can bellyache more than anyone I know.

In the service, a certain amount of grousing is normal; an uncomplaining soldier is in danger of being referred for psychiatric evaluation. The expressions of discontent touch all aspects of

military life: foul-ups, food, roads, weather, mail deliveries, pay, sleeping facilities, equipment, lack of equipment, discipline, lack of discipline, filth, latrines, rank-pulling, slowness of promotion, incompetence of replacements, delay or injustice in the granting of furloughs, absence of women, and ingratitude of civilians. My complaints usually skim lightly over the outdoor life, cold coffee, C rations, Spam, and the fig bars in K rations.

Nothing is achieved, of course, except a reduction of inner tensions.

My Puerto Rican acquaintance loses my good will when he informs me that not only does he dislike DPs but, furthermore, he intends to return to his native land after the war so that he can never again be drafted into the United States Army. The Iowan, about twice as large as the Puerto Rican, lets us know that he too does not like DPs, nor for that matter does he have any use for "spiks." Nothing personal, he adds; they are all lousy foreigners. The Puerto Rican bristles, then explodes in Spanish. I think he is contemplating homicide.

I avoid them at supper. Afterward, I try to read a few pages of a mystery story by Dorothy Hughes, *The Fallen Sparrow*, but do not succeed. My mind wanders to the residents of the DP camp and I wonder if they are like the men and women I knew in New York City. I grew up in a brownstone section swarming with noisy, excitable, bargain-hunting, price-haggling, bundle-carrying people. Across the street lived a fat Italian lady who often sat in her living room in front of an open window, drying her hair, her ample breasts inadequately supported by the windowsill. I remember the Polish iceman, the Irish policeman, the wandering Gypsies, the German marching band, and the Sicilian organ grinder and his gaily dressed monkey. There were ethnic social clubs and lodges, crowded one-owner shops, holy days and processions, and picturesque parades in which the marchers sported decorative old-world costumes. Food was everywhere, possibly because memories of hunger or starvation were still strong. I recall pushcarts bulging with freshly watered vegetables and fruits, propelled by burly, sweating Italians. Every block had restaurants and delicatessens, their Hungarian, Jewish, Romanian, and Italian owners proud of their mouth-wa-

tering specialties. Then there were the bakeries, their shelves filled with the artistic and exotic pastries of German and French bakers.

My school friends and I played stoopball and stickball on the bustling streets. Sometimes I visited their homes, heard their parents lapse into foreign tongues, and became aware of their anxieties and fears: starvation, persecution, Hell, unemployment, eviction, an unmarried daughter, loss of funeral benefits, inadequate education for their children. For some, sickness was an evil invoked for a misdeed, a curse; hospitals were death traps. As an intern, I discovered that often their credulity and superstitions interfered with the medical care that could have helped them. They were overwhelmed by death, their weeping in the hospital corridors and streets was loud, unrestrained, unnerving. I learned to like these people with their quaint customs, to savor their inexpensive gifts when I helped one of them get well: homemade bread, tortes, or wine—life symbols, I suppose.

Perhaps I should tell my classmate from Iowa about them, that they were neither better nor worse than his mother or father, but I do not think he will believe me. I hope I do not have to work with him, or with others like him: people concerned only with their own problems. I prefer my comrades at the collecting company, who, despite their griping, feel as I do, that there is an important job to be done. I reflect that I was one of those on the long, cold line that gray December day following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but orders did not arrive until 1943, after I completed an internship. Then, after a succession of posts at general hospitals in Hot Springs, Arkansas and Santa Fe, New Mexico, a training session in Memphis at the University of Tennessee, and a fortunately brief stay at an unsympathetic camp in central Texas where recreational opportunities were limited to revival meetings and whorehouses, I left for the European Theater of Operations.

It has been a long time, but perhaps soon I will be taking care of the distant cousins of the people I used to know in New York.

The next morning all the students return, including the Iowan and the Puerto Rican; no knife wounds are evident. Another important subject is to be discussed—*Records*.

"Of course," says the new speaker, "there will be a few forms to fill out, but these will be rather simple and kept to a minimum."

I have heard this before.

Personal information about each DP is to be listed on index cards and registration sheets: name, date of birth, marital status, names and ages of children, nationality, previous address and employment, and destination. Records are to be kept of supplies obtained and disbursed, relief payments, requisitions, vouchers, inventories, loaned equipment, and lost, damaged, or destroyed material. Other printed forms are demonstrated, such as the AEF DP Meal Record Card, Assembly Center Weekly and Daily Reports (census, national characteristics, and camp problems), DP Free Issue Voucher, and Memorandum Receipts. We will also be making regular reports of our activities and recommendations, and special reports when repatriation begins.

As a medical officer, I doze through these bookkeeping minutiae, hoping that my time will be devoted to professional activities. But I do listen attentively to information about monthly narrative medical records, medical clearance records, and reports of treatments, immunizations, disinfections, food handler examinations, and inspections of facilities for sewage disposal and water supply.

Reams of paper to fill out, undoubtedly in duplicate or triplicate. My mind wanders, and I tell myself that if I ever get to a post exchange, I must remember to buy another fountain pen and more ink. I carry two pens at all times, but one of them leaks slightly, and after studying others I have concluded that it needs to have a tiny hole drilled in its cap. Probably body heat causes the air column in the cap to expand and suck up the ink. I am going to contact a dentist for this operation but only after I write to my wife and present my hypothesis to her. My weakness in college was in physics; particularly puzzling were the relations between pressure, temperature, and volume of gases.

But my wife has a scientific mind. I am sure she can analyze my hypothesis. She will probably write back that I need a hole in my head. The situation is not simple. I have looked at other such pens and some do not have tiny holes in their caps and do not leak. I prefer to use this one; it was an anniversary present,

but lately I have been using another with a thicker point, one that does not write as smoothly.

I am not the only one who worries about trifles like pens and ink. They present a problem under field conditions because sometimes they disappear, sometimes there is no ink. Perhaps a fountain pen is a link to the other, distant world. Perhaps writing letters is an act of catharsis.

I recall a friend in a tank repair and transport squadron who became very disturbed during the frenzied activities on the Normandy beachhead: because he had lost his pen, not because of the fierce enemy resistance. Unable to do anything useful, he spent the day calling battalion, regimental, and division headquarters on his frustrating, hand-cranked field telephone, hoping someone would hunt for his pen in the area where he had been the day before. No sleep that night, not from worry about the dangerous foe lurking close by, but from anxiety about his missing pen. The next day he asked for permission to look for his lost treasure and, as he was worthless to his company, his request was granted. He returned to the beach and found his pen where he had left it, still in good condition. His agitation vanished, and he was able to work again.

My daydreaming is over, and I focus on the speaker who is talking about repatriation, the ultimate goal of our efforts, to be achieved as rapidly as possible. To hasten the homeward movement we will have to keep the DPs in good health and out of jail. Discipline in the camps would be facilitated by housing the DPs according to their nationalities. Stateless people will have more problems than others—they will suffer because they have no legal protection, may not be able to live where they wish, and will be entirely dependent on such unpredictable governmental attitudes as generosity.

At all times, whether in assembly centers or repatriation camps, we should strive to improve the standard of living of the DPs, at the expense of the Germans. The DPs are to receive preferential treatment—this is official policy.

We are taken on an inspection of the camp and now I am not sure what preferential treatment means. The overcrowding of barracks and small and large bedrooms is apparent, and in these

quarters Russian and Polish women, smelling of onions and sweat, sit and do nothing, or keep busy with minor jobs, or with games, particularly sexual. Despite primitive curtains strung about dilapidated beds, such activities are blatant. Neither the adult nor the young residents in the area seem interested, but the visiting students stare with embarrassment.

The DPs chatter, gossip, laugh, squabble, grumble, wail over the past, watch each other, but they seem detached—they are not interested in what we are doing. Their bathrooms and washrooms are inadequate, the storerooms, nursery, and clerical and administrative sections cramped, but the kitchen is clean and busy, tantalizing with its fragrance of fresh baking bread. I pay special attention to the rooms and equipment used for medical examinations, immunizations, and disinfection.

It is a real camp and the men and women here are protoplasmic truths; they breathe and walk and eat, but everything here seems remote to me, cloudy and blurred, a strange, alien world not relevant to my recent existence in a collecting company where I was immersed in the excitement—or dullness—of battalion activities. Still, part of my mind recognizes that the latter is unreal, and the former a truer representation of humanity, albeit under stress.

We return to the classroom. Part of the teaching ritual is to review all of the material that has been presented before the students rush away and forget everything, in the hope that something will be retained, and a major attempts a short summary.

For a few minutes he emphasizes the basic policies, stressing the need for an effective organization. Then he excites everyone's curiosity. The teams will expand in size as additional personnel are assigned—Allied liaison officers, French nurses.

Très intéressant, I think as I reach back many years for my high school French. What was that proverb that hung on the wall? *Honi soit qui mal y pense?*

I must obtain a French-English dictionary *tout de suite*.

A liaison officer is an accredited Allied officer who will work directly with his nationals and with us. Perhaps relations will not always be simple and tranquil, but it is our job to get along with him, and his to speed our operation and prepare his countrymen for repatriation.

Then our instructor asks for questions, another part of the Army teaching ritual, and I know that we are almost through.

"Suppose you can't obtain one-half ounce of sugar daily. What should you do?"

"Use a substitute. Jam. Improvise."

The magic word again. The stress on principles, not particulars, the reiteration of the need for flexibility in administration and organization.

"Can I have a DP shot if he tries to escape from the camp?"

"You are not running a prison. DPs should have freedom, but they have to obey military rule. Remember that most of them have been brought into Germany forcibly as slave laborers."

"Why won't the Army furnish us supplies?"

"The DPs were brought here by the Germans. Therefore it is the Germans' responsibility to provide for them. They must furnish all the supplies, materials, services, and facilities that you consider necessary for the proper care of the DPs."

There are other similar questions, then the instructor distributes two booklets. One is a *Guide* for the administration of assembly centers, containing organizational and operational policies and valuable, occasionally exciting, medical, sanitation, and nutritional data. For example, one way to convert a diet from 2,000 to 3,000 calories is to add 5 ounces of wine to the basic diet, increase the sugar from ½ to 1½ ounces, and increase the bread from 11 to 24 ounces. Five gallons of rice pudding will feed 100 people in an "eating center." "Underknickers" is synonymous with "underpants." [2]

I make up my mind to read this pamphlet in detail—it is more interesting than the first aid pamphlets I used in Texas.

The second booklet contains instructions in about twenty European languages for obtaining registration information from DPs.

Then a parting word.

This is the last time we will be together, the last time we will see our instructors. When the teams are activated, life will be different for us because we will have added responsibilities and no detailed protocol for guidance. We must expect internal conditions and problems to vary from place to place and we must adapt to these environmental changes. But one thing is definitely forbidden—regardless of circumstances, we are not to permit our camps to be converted into whorehouses.

School is over and we are dismissed, to return to our regular units.

As I leave the school I wonder about the information given to us. How do the military authorities know that there are ten million DPs in Germany? I am troubled by the thought that at this late time, March 1945, the Army has just begun to form units to handle civilian problems. And I have other misgivings, brought on by the questions asked in the classroom, which revealed our lack of understanding of the problems of homeless and persecuted people, and our astonishment at the emphasis on improvisation. But the instructors were undisturbed. Our naïveté, ignorance, lack of sympathy, and, in some cases, intolerance did not seem to bother them.[3]

Perhaps I would never be called to become a shepherd for the uprooted sheep—one does not always use the abilities and knowledge acquired in Army schools. Even so, the time had not been wasted. A portable shower unit was situated next to our quarters, and, happily, I washed away the accumulated grime and dust of many waterless days. The Army thinks—or tries to think—of everything.

2

THE DRAGON'S TEETH

I reach my collecting company by suppertime.

At first I am on the receiving end of gross sallies about my future role in the Army, remarks that emphasize fundamental instincts. I will be bedecked with garlands of flowers, surrounded by dancing natives, the liberator in the midst of frustrated, grateful Cinderellas. My camp will be a harum-scarum harem. My assigned C rations will be donated to the unenlightened, and I will dine elegantly and sumptuously in Continental style, bathed by Gypsy violin music. One of the enlisted men whispers to me that he can be very useful in my new unit because he grew up in the Polish section of Chicago. Can I arrange a transfer for him?

My homecoming is celebrated with wine and champagne, both in great abundance here. However, I soon fall into the old routine, characterized by occasional bursts of hyperactivity interspersed with the more usual long periods of dullness and tedium. At night, card games by candlelight or lantern and then to sleep. During the day, if there is no work to be done, I sleep late, skip breakfast (thereby losing 25 cents), write letters, read old magazines and books shipped from home. At the moment I am reading *The Late George Apley* and *War and Peace*. The Army newspaper, *Stars and Stripes* (Nancy edition), is free, but usually two to five days old when received. Then games, usually poker or casino, or volleyball if possible. Letters from home are read and reread but the intervals between mail deliveries are too long. Radios are rarely useful because of the lack of electricity.

Anything is acceptable if it relieves the boredom. One of the men blasts away with his cornet. No one complains. My recorder is tolerated. This was not true when I was stationed at a

general hospital in Arkansas, where my fellow officers found the soft, soothing (to me) sounds of my recorder irksome. But not here.

At one of our installations we find an ornate piano that has two gold-colored candleholders protruding above both sides of the keyboard. An old German—we have permitted him and his wife to remain in the building—hesitatingly opens the piano for us. He tells us that he locked it three years ago, the day his son died. He rushes away before the music starts.

Suddenly we have a quartet: two violins—one bought, one borrowed—a guitar, and the piano. Later a corpsman unwraps his saxaphone, another discovers a drum, and a battalion soldier arrives with his trumpet. We have music and dancing.

There is no great distinction here between officers and enlisted men; a sense of togetherness exists different from rear echelon or stateside units. I can see a medical administrative officer playing cards with the mail clerk, a corporal, and this would be impossible except in the combat zone.

Every day free cigarettes, canned beer, peanuts, and candy are distributed. No one has a choice, and I usually wind up with peppermint patties, which I despise. Twice a month copies of *Life*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, *Western Stories*, and *Omnibook* are distributed, and these circulate through the company.

But escape from boredom demands more than this, and the card games become noisy, violent sessions. Some of the men parade around in unusual attire. One carries a gaily colored parasol, another wears a dignified silk high hat, a third dons a striped black and white jacket; he calls it his new "fraternity jacket." A corpsman wraps a blue silk bandanna around his head. Forever afterward he is known as Long John Silver.

Souvenir hunting also breaks the monotony, and most everyone has a German bayonet, gun, helmet, camera, or binoculars.

Our men are litter bearers, ambulance drivers, and treatment personnel, and in administration and maintenance. They have varied backgrounds. One worked in a shoe shop in New Hampshire. Another was a drug salesman for Lederle Laboratories in the New England area, and even now launches into a talk describing the benefits of refined liver extract and globulins for measles. Unconsciously, he seems to reach for his sample and brochure case. A top NCO managed a milk farm in New Jer-

sey; he speaks German fluently. Another is a former chiropractor from Ohio, and occasionally we discuss the intricacies of the sacroiliac joint. After the war he is going to move to Long Island, "where the money is."

One of the men practiced law before he was inducted. Here he is called the Shyster, which amuses everyone and does not offend him. Sometimes he is accused of ambulance chasing, his real function now, and the smiles break through.

Laughter is a rare flower, which we all cherish when it blooms.

A letter arrives from my wife, who is a resident physician in pediatrics at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Sometimes she writes about her patients, and I am delighted to read about a two-year-old who stuffed raw meat up her nose and was brought to the hospital by her inebriated father, lamenting the loss of good "red points." (Food was rationed during the War; meat could be procured only with these points—red food stamps, a certain number given to each person by the Ration Board for a one- or three-month period.)

The letter also mentions Frank Sinatra's classification by the Draft Board—2F: deferred as necessary to the war effort? I read parts of the letter to my comrades. We share our treasures with each other.

A collecting company collects wounded and sick patients from frontline battalion aid stations, and transports most of them to clearing companies in the rear. We are usually located from one-half mile to five miles from the front. The medical and surgical care we dispense is uncomplicated. We examine, change, or reinforce splints, dressings, and tourniquets, administer morphine, plasma, and antitetanus agents, and only in life-endangering conditons attempt emergency operations. Those patients with minor problems are returned to duty.

I am glad to be back, not only because my friends are here, but because I can find out about the attack on the Siegfried Line. The Division has been blasting through part of the West Wall of this formidable barrier, the last obstacle to the Rhine. Endless lines of jeeps, tanks, half-tracks, and trucks have been rumbling through devastated villages, spewing clouds of yellow dust. By March 21, our armored columns are loose in Germany.