

CHAPTER ONE

CALLED UP IN CHICAGO

I HAD just turned into my twenty-second year, and I was healthy, fast food for the slaving Army. Seventy-three days after Japanese airplanes had dismembered the American Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, Draft Board Number 9 of Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, USA, called upon me to go redeem the National Honor. It was a simple procedure: send this specimen a piece of paper in curt summons; the postman enjoys delivering it: 1235 Addison Street, the two-story grey stone house, the one with the not always amiable black dog.

The day was February 19, 1942, downcast skies, the temperature freezing. On the same day, a tentacle of the giant Japanese octopus was reaching in to partially destroy Darwin, Australia; another tentacle even touched India. I arose before dawn, leaving the warm body of my girl Jill slumbering upon our jouncy bed in the little room in back. (It was a sign of the times that unmarried young lovers might sleep together in a respectable family setting.) All dressed, I bent down to kiss her one last time. The black dog by the bed wagged his tail limply; no low whistle to get him up today. My two young brothers were sleeping in the front bedroom; their call to arms would come one day, unlikely as it appeared just now.

My mother, more dutiful than my consort, was up frying bacon and eggs for me, made toast, poured juice and coffee; we had agreed that she would not provide anything so special as waffles or hash. My father had preceded me to the washroom, where I, soon to become EM #3631-9558, now shaved. It was considered that seeing the soldier off to war was a man's job - said with a smile; the Dad wouldn't have it otherwise. Little else was said.

The draftee was in a decent mood. Maybe no time was a good time to join the Army, but for me it was high time. I felt that I had been procrastinating, considering how strongly I supported the President's provocations of the Axis. Myself, I had been inclined toward a Holy War against Fascism since 1936, even as a boy.

A private in the Army? I didn't mind that either, though people with lots of education were supposed to be officers, somehow. Leaving Jill did give me pain. We had been spit-fire lovers for nearly two years, splitting sometimes, then clanking together like hitching freight cars. I had lots of ideas about winning the war and could imagine that I should have been put in charge, directly under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Commander-in-Chief, say. Next best thing was to be a private, and rise from the ranks, for promotions came fast and there seemed to be little enough to be done to win the war at any rank below General. He was a dreamer, our lad.

My father walked alongside me up the cold pavements, north on Herndon, then over toward Clark Street. The ragged City was looming up, shaping itself out of the dark, about to lurch heavily into the War Effort. A clutch of types slouched disconsolately about the premises of the Draft Board. Soon we were all made to pile into a trolley car. Then off we went, with an electric hiss and metallic clatter, past Wrigley Field: "Home of the Chicago Cubs." Dad was left standing.

The Dad felt things strongly, didn't say them, especially not now, but practically never anyhow. (I hadn't wanted him to come: it would be a lonely walk back for him.) A son is a son, each was as the Only One - so he would say when he erred, and called me by one of the others' names - Bussie, Ed, Vic. He wouldn't have liked to lose one and I knew that he felt that I was the kind of son who would get to shouting "Banzai!" or "Geronimo!" or whatever the guys are supposed to shout who are up ahead and get shot first. So the Dad didn't feel too good about it all, and would not have sensed his usual elation at going out in the morning, first in the neighborhood, never because he had to leave the house, but because he wished to greet life at dawn.

Whereas I, the Recruit, now riding the streetcar, was pulling myself together as a soldier, getting into the mood, the role, the act. How do you behave - unsurprised, uneager, unashamed, not too sympathetic, unaggressive, not too much of a groupie, not snappishly for or against orders, not ideological, not up-front, not a laggard - exhibiting little of your education, loves, travels, workaday life, or any military experience.

Military experience! My 106th Cavalry Regiment had gone South, someone told me - our old friends, our horses, the large, black, big-bellied steeds, had been taken away from their riders, from Johnny Dearham, Jim Cowhey, Frenchy Duvall, Bassdrum Beck - hey, guys, how're the shit-kickers doing now in the hot swamps? I hadn't learned much, ridden some, gentleman's outfit, but no gentlemen, just nice guys with a plain spacious club at the Armory off Chicago Avenue near the Lake. I had been too busy with my rag-bag of jobs and making love to my beloved to spend much time drinking and card-playing, or even riding with the gang.

There had been the days of fooling around with a machine-gun, and ammunition belts, loading my horse with the antiquated military gear of cavalry - I loved horses, but believed in the superiority of infantry. The Romans won on foot. Discipline did it. Even more, the machine-gun - it was amazing how fast and hard it exploded death - and, of course, the tank, as an iron horse: these finished off the battle-horse. And now the infantry rode to battle in trucks, quarter-ton, half-ton, one and a half tons, two-tons - some armored - that's about all I knew. Ridiculous that I knew more about horses than about trucks. What explained the Black Horse Troop? - mossback generals, romance, politicians, playboys, fun, parades. Why did the Battleship persist, the Dreadnaught, a sitting duck for warplanes, hadn't the Japanese just knocked out two British capital ships?

Then I had gone off to Columbia University Law School and had to quit, and while I was there, the Black Horse Troop had gone South without me.

I had closeted my trumpet for "the Duration" (a good word, that, it meant for so long as the War might last). The day before, I had packed it in with a few final tunes. O, to blast your trumpet over the laid-back ears of one of these mean black steeds: damn, how it hurt when the animal's skull tossed back and bumped the horn and drove the brass mouthpiece against your lips, leaving them bleeding and swollen.

By the time the trolley car was rattling across the Chicago River bridge, I had regressed in thoughts to marching bands, at high school and in college, drill, uniforms, khaki, olive drab (I had worn it), the bugle calls - "Come to think of it, I can play them all." I would have scorned to recall my longest military experience, the years on the parlor floor with the lead soldiers. Our parlor held no place for the braggadocio of militarists of Bolivia and China and Germany, captured by the newsreel cameras and the chocolate-colored rotogravure section of the newspapers, but I distilled and acted out their fury of riot and battle. Our dear old friend, Mrs. Villiers, conducted for me a tiny tot's tour of the Civil War battlefields via her great heavy picture book and her father's memories transmitted over sixty years. And "Give a Big H for Hollywood:" *Over the Top, All's Quiet on the Western Front*. Harken, also, to the jeering child singing:

*You're in the Army now,
you're not behind a plow,
you'll never get rich,
you son of a bitch...*

I knew all about it.

What of the drunken soldiers quarreling with me and Bob King when we, the students, were sauntering along the whorehouse strip of Madison Street one night? I knew the low prestige of the peacetime army.

The theory of warfare, yes, even that I had touched upon - in my writing an honors paper on the Italian aggression in Ethiopia, in arguing over the Spanish civil war, sorting out the ideas of war and peace conveyed by the lower schools and at University, in playing the cold Machiavellian, who

portrayed violence conquering virtue, and admiring the Clausewitz dictum that war is “the conduct of politics by other means.”

Surprisingly, a pacifist current was still running strong beneath all this: war is hell, butchery, un-Christian, stupid, unnecessary; all men are equal and brothers. But there was a time for peace and a time for war, said *Ecclesiastes*, and so argued I. With myself. Seven years of indignation without action were ending. My war against the Axis began in 1931 at the age of eleven when the Japanese invaded Manchuria and in 1933, at thirteen, when Hitler became *Der Führer* of Germany.

THE PATH OF WAR and RESPONSES OF OUR CITIZEN

1. Hitler becomes Full Dictator while He, in High School, debates vs. Fascism. (1934-35)
2. Japan resumes China Aggression, which He denounces. Enters University. (1935)
3. Mussolini invades Ethiopia, against which Aggression He writes Thesis. (1935-36, 1938)
4. Spanish engage in Civil War; He opposes Spanish Falangists. (1936-39)
5. Austrian Anschluss occurs, which He opposes. He visits Europe twice (1938-39).
6. Munich Pact appeases Hitler and He denounces Czech Dissolution. (1938-9; A.B. 1939. Joins 106 Cavalry Reserve.)
7. Nazi-Soviet Treaty signed and makes Him intensely hostile to Stalinism. (August 21, 1939; He is Grad. Res. Asst., 1939-40)
8. World War II begins, whereupon He voices strong Support for Allies. (September 3, 1939)
9. Soviets Invade Finland, and once more He denounces Communists. (November 30, 1939)
10. Destruction of Allied Armies impels Him to join “Help-Britain” Committee. (May-June, 1940; He falls in love; goes to Columbia University in November.)
11. Germans invade Soviet Union and He echoes Churchill on giving Soviets Aid. (June 22, 1941; back in Chicago, researches & teaches at Indiana U.)
12. Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor and He begins personal Steps to War. (December 7, 1941, whereupon He moves and stores Belongings.)
13. Japanese reach Australia & India, on which Date He enters Army.

So, surprisingly, a full mental and physical war-kit had been provided this peaceable citizen - myths, skills, information, and attitudes - and then these thirteen steps had carried him straight into the great conflict. A typical peaceable-bellucose American I was, for actually America was not a peaceful nation; it just pretended to be pacific while it continually carried on warfare, on both a large and a small scale; hardly ever was America truly at peace.

On December 7, 1941, the crisis had finally climaxed while Jill and I were reading newspapers, brunching in the large old kitchen of the first floor at 5479 South University Avenue, listening to a concert of classical music on the radio. The apartment was next to the University of Chicago, two large rooms and bath, premises handed along to us by my brother Sebastian and Miriam, his wife. Bro Bus had entered the Foreign Broadcast Monitoring Service of the Federal Communications Commission in Washington and was working at the analysis of radio broadcasts from Berlin and Rome, along with Fred Schuman, John Gardiner, Goodwin Watson, Ed Shils, Nathan Leites, Hans Speier, and other high-brows.

The attack was still going on when the concert was roughly interrupted. I was incredulous. I felt that I should leap to the roof, swoop off into the blue and counterattack. I put my crazed imagination onto the enemy: “The Japanese are crazy!” I shouted, “I can't believe it!” After hearing another hour of the bad news, we betook ourselves to the apartment of our friends Jay and Ruth Hall, down the street, there to expostulate noisily, and thence to Steinway's Drug Store on 57th Street, where we would be sure to find people like ourselves, disgorging novel expressions, like “The Japanese must be crazy. I can't believe it!” We waited upon fresh newspapers, which, arriving finally upon breathless headlines, added nothing to the instant flow of information and directives emitting from everyone's turned-up radio.

I had been paying attention to Europe, had expected to be drawn in there. Just two days before, the *Chicago Tribune* had exposed a secret top government plan, envisioning an army of five million men to be landed in Europe to fight the Germans - and the Italians, if they were still around. I discounted the isolationist newspaper as a reliable source, but was nonetheless pleased with the

forward thinking of the White House and Pentagon. Then the attack came instead from Japan, what a shock! Nor could we grasp then how serious was the defeat at Pearl Harbor.

Or dream that a Japanese army might cross to Southeast Asia so swiftly, and even take the Philippines, and invest, indeed, the whole of the Chinese and Malayan worlds and venture towards India and Australia, even while I was squaring away to join the Army. The Japanese were plaguing the Dutch East Indies, attacking on the Road to Mandalay, and closing in upon Manila.

Hardly had I left home when President Roosevelt ordered General Douglas MacArthur to escape from the Philippines, where a mostly Filipino Army still vigorously but hopelessly resisted the invaders. The first great credit of one billion dollars had just this moment, finally, been granted the Soviet Union to cover purchases of whatever was needed wherever it could be found. The Red Army had stopped the Germans for the Winter, within sight of the Kremlin's towers, and was counterattacking with amazing success. In North Africa, within the space of several weeks, the British forces had swept the Axis army through Libya and had been just as untidily brushed back.

The Western Front, somnolent after the destruction of the Allied Armies there in 1940, awaited this Hero. The seed of the greatest armada in history was just now being planted: the U.S. War Plans Group was issuing (in secrecy, of course, and absurdly, it happened) a "Plan for Operations in Northwest Europe," foreseeing a small-scale invasion, to be termed "Sledgehammer," by Fall of the year 1942, if the Soviets showed signs of collapse, and a main invasion termed "Roundup" to be launched in the Spring of 1943. If this was far from reality, even farther out was the 1942 "Declaration by the United Nations" that was signed on the first day of the year. Still, I agreed 100% with all of this, as I had with the Four Freedoms, which Roosevelt had proposed to the "Congress for the World" on January 6, 1941, two years earlier.

When, on June 22 of the year just passed, the Soviet Union had been attacked, and Jill and I gaped at the headlines on the newsstand in front of Steinway's, where we had gone to breakfast, I had been heartened, and wondered at the temerity of Hitler in opening up a Second Front, a "No-No!" to all strategists since Napoleon. Yet when I then spoke with that awesome authority on things European, Professor Nathan Leites, I found him most pessimistic: the German armies, Leites predicted, would knock out the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the several months before the onset of winter, so weakened were the Soviets by Stalin's mass purges of the nation's leaders, and by the population's general incompetence and backwardness. Leites had been barely wrong.

Fallen in love and distracted by this worldwide conflict, I could hardly have been expected to stay on at the Law School of Columbia University or persist at philosophical researches or count off a day-by-day routine on a civilian job. In the two years just passed, I had done a lot of creative work, but knew that I would not be able to go on. I was teetering; it was only a question of who would make the first move to tip me over.

But why didn't I enlist earlier? Perhaps because it would seem like the act of a farm-boy or hill-billy: these were forever enlisting. Or a romantic; I would not play the hero; it embarrassed me. I asked about direct commissions, not avidly but diffidently; I made a mild attempt at a job under my former Professor, Harold Gosnell, that would fit me into the War Effort at Washington, because that was the way most of the University was going: intellectuals were not soldiers. In sum, I couldn't think what to do, so I shilly-shallyed. Being inextricably in love did not help matters; though I did not speak of it, the thought of breaking up bothered me continuously.

But, hell and ye gods, in fact I was a soldier, a warrior, and it was with relief that I got the Call: I knew what the War was all about and I felt at home in the Army even as we boarded the trolley car. I looked with a maternal sentiment upon the civilian lads around me. Naive, quite unconvinced about the War, except for a simplistic, readily stimulated anger; knowing that their sentiments were shared by all, they might assuredly curse the "treacherous Japs." The media, the government, the elite of the Great Republic generally saw to it that the impression of unanimity over the Yellow Peril had logically to take in the Nazi Germans, the Italian Fascists and all their minor allies, so that, if anybody doubted himself or the unanimity of public opinion, he would think himself to be an odd exception who had better shut up. This despite public opinion polls that showed an isolationist

sentiment prevailing among half the citizenry.

There were a dozen or so recruits in the trolley car, and shortly we paused to pick up another gang. We were all ordered off at the southern end of the Loop and led to a dilapidated building. It was an area where small loft businesses and marginal enterprises might hold a losing grip on the Chicago economy. I had actually worked only a few steps away for a couple of months just recently, with Franklin Meine and Harold Hitchens and the rest of the crew that was revising *Nelson's Encyclopedia*, and these characters would in a few minutes be arriving at work, unknowing of my fate. I felt a pang of nostalgia, one of my weaknesses.

As the rookies approached the decrepit elevator shaft, a sign greeted them with: "Civilians only! All others walk up." I tried sarcasm: "Now you guys know what you're in for!" and they laughed; they knew, alright. So up the iron stairs we trudged to where a lot of men congregated, and we turned over our identity slips to some clerks who were continually hollering out names, and I met one of my former students, from East Chicago, where I had been teaching American Government, at Indiana University there, last semester. I had left this guy in the classroom: "Poor chap," I was thinking, "I have left a lot of living behind me, but he feels worse, probably, than I do, because what he left behind him, it took a lot for him to get - you can see it in his Slavic working class features, in his toughened hands, in the tired expression on his face, and he knows he hasn't much on the ball, and he is several years older than I".

I had now left that scene too, but not before the Dean at Indiana had given a little tea party in my honor, sending me off as a hero; the faculty and staff felt just fine at making this sacrifice on behalf of the War Effort. I said ironically to my former student: "Well, now you can see the practical side of American Government."

We rode out to Camp Grant together, a couple of hours from the City, so the man, my former student, came to feel better, but that was the last seen of him. I was used to High Mobility, and would have much more of it - "the last I saw of him was..." it would match thousands of encounters to come, companies, battalions, boat loads, landing party loads, visiting parties, gangs on leave, detachments, friendlies, allies, enemies, co-belligerents, crowds of faces of all degrees of cognizance, as expendable as ammunition.

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