NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Other Times, Other Manners: An Historian Overseas, 1944*

Let no one attempt to set back the clock. It seems to me only yesterday that I stood by the doorway of our London hotel, in the late summer of 1939, awaiting the taxi which was to take my daughter and me to their Majesties' garden party at Buckingham Palace. In ruminative mood I said, "In 1840 when Henry A. Muhlenberg was journeying from Reading in Pennsylvania to assume his post as first Minister to Austria, he and his daughter attended a Royal garden party. It may be that you are the only Reading girl to attend a Palace garden party since that time." Whereat my daughter, who had just concluded a tour in Germany, answered, "Does it occur to you that I may be the last one?"

Since then much water has gone over the dam and I have often reflected on the prescience of the reply. And yet, a few days later, when the Normandie took us back home, the voyage passed in the usual pleasant frothiness of cruise routine. We could not guess that it was to be the Normandie's last untroubled crossing, or that after another harried, darkened trip she would remain moored to the dock until disaster overtook her. The ruptured career of the Normandie finds counterpart in the lives of most of us. But we obstinately assume that some day all will commence again along the pleasant lines which obtained before the break.

So, some weeks ago, when I was unexpectedly assigned to a short official tour of the Channel ports, I vaguely thought that I was returning to the conditions of 1939. Never was there a more fatuous assumption. The fawning courtiers assured the Danish monarch that he could regulate the elements; he rebuked them by taking his place on the beach in the path of the rising tide. The tragic transitions of our time are no more to be resisted than were the waves which swirled up against the curule chair of King Canute on the sands of Deal.


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October 7, 1944.

Once arrived at Boston I was met by our local Coast Guard authorities and whisked across the maze of docks to where our transport loomed high, grey and ominous above the line of shedding. The officer who accompanied me kept singing the praises of this fine ship and proclaiming the pride of the Coast Guard in being assigned so important a unit, one which they were conducting so efficiently.

How different an aspect this craft presents from the last time I saw her in the palm-fringed harbor of Acapulco. Then she was flag-bedecked and flamboyant with eager gesticulating tourists leaning over her rails. No pomp now. Her luxurious trappings have been ruthlessly stripped away. One mounts on ladders, clutching chains instead of oaken balustrades. The iron walled rooms, clean and comfortable, give no suggestion of the swank of other days.

When assigned to my cabin and after I had wrung from the gangway officer the usual grudging admission that the ship would probably not sail before midnight, I was at liberty for an afternoon in Boston.

Mark Howe was not in his office of Director of the Athenaeum but I trailed him to his lair in quaint Louisbourg Square, where I first knew him when he was editor of the Atlantic. I found him, no younger, to be sure, but mellowed and affable, reaping a harvest of philosophic contentment in the twilight of a life so replete with achievement. We chattered and reminisced, recalling a hundred incidents of old Pennsylvania days when he lived at Reading, and went to the military school at Selwyn Hall, the institution which his father, Bishop Howe, had sponsored.

On out to Chestnut Hill to visit Mrs. S. The trees on the campus of Boston College have grown majestically. Is there a finer group of Gothic buildings in America than those of Boston College? Or a lovelier prospect than the view out over Brookline? Mrs. S. seems as vigorous as when we walked together over the long Nile dam at Assouan in the midday heat. She was surprised, of course, at my overseas mission. We talked about the tours of other days and about the career of her eminent son, the Governor, and of her plans to spend some weeks each year in Washington when an appreciative Commonwealth shall have elected him to the Senate.
It was quite dark when I returned to the quayside and the great pier was ablaze in light and full of bustle. Troops were pouring up the two gangways in a steady stream. The searchlights blazed down upon them and a band enlivened their progress. Many of these were Negroes who had never seen a ship before; most seemed stunned at the apparition. One had an axe strapped to his pack. When I asked as to its use he replied that he intended to kill Hitler with it and then, reverting to his rapt scrutiny of the towering structure beside him, "Say, Boss, wouldn't she make a commotion if she went down?"

October 14, 1944.

Despite the number of voyagers this trip has a ludicrous suggestion of a trip on a private yacht. As I am the only Coast Guard officer not attached permanently to the ship I have the liberty of the bridge and may inspect the radar apparatus, so marvelous a development in modern navigation. Sometimes, in the enjoyment of the freedom thus accorded me, I think of a story of Kit Morley's in which the hero mounts the bridge of a huge liner, abandoned save for him, and directs it as his whim dictates.

In the wardroom all is attuned to a punctilious pattern. The Skipper seldom appears but the Executive presides with becoming dignity. None are seated before his arrival and all seatings are in the correct order of precedence. As I look about me at these keen, alert, self-confident, young Coast Guard officers, I reflect what a splendid example of the vigor of America they constitute. Nearly all have seen active service and have a gripping tale to tell, if one can only induce them to talk.

I have tangible evidence of this efficiency when late in the third evening our routine is rudely broken by an alert. It is some minutes before I can put on my life preserver and mount to the boat deck and in that short time the transport has become a battleship. We slip through an oily sea. The only light is that which serves the steersman but a faint moon outlines our general contour, showing the guns uncovered and poised and the officers walking between the stations.

October 16, 1944.

The lights on the coast of Kerry have been blinking a welcome to us for some hours. I recognize the revolving light near the "ould"
head of Kinsale. Pointing to it, I remark to the Coast Guard officer who stands behind me on the darkened bridge, that just here the *Lusitania* sank. He affects a polite interest but soon begins to wonder if we shall arrive at our port in time for his date with a pretty Wren whom he met last voyage.

We are still darkened but some of the ships which pass us, outward bound, are fully lit, in defiance of the submarines, and present a novel spectacle after the gloom of five long years. We are no longer alone. In the late afternoon, two lean, rakish destroyer escorts appeared out of nowhere and ranged themselves on either side of our bow. They are out there now, flashing occasionally as if to reassure us of their protective presence.

*October 17, 1944.*

It could not be an appropriate arrival without a dash of English sleet and rain. And yet I could have wished for some sunshine for our poor lads from the sunny bayous of Louisiana, peering now with much misgiving at the fog-bound city to which destiny had transported them. There is little time for reflection. Already the gangplanks are out and long lines of infantrymen are carrying their gear out into the drizzle. The Colonel in the next cabin comes, very business-like in helmet and field dress, to say goodbye and express the hope that he will see me at the next Cornell reunion. Below, on the pier the huge cranes are swinging out material into the maws of the waiting trucks; the war has suddenly engulfed us.

*October 18, 1944.*

I have my first overseas assignment, a bizarre contribution, surely, to the winning of the conflict. It is none other than the reception of Jack Dempsey’s cat which goes back to America with the ship and has been sent up from London under the special care of a yeoman. Commander Dempsey, after a triumphal tour of the camps, has arrived back in Great Britain. Last night he refereed an important servicemen’s bout at Glasgow and now he is to sail in this same ship. The cat is a vicious green-eyed Siamese monster who has clawed off part of the side of his paper cage. Everyone at Coast Guard headquarters is in awe of the beast, until Jack arrives, takes the cat in his arms and pulls his tail in complete unconcern. He (Jack) has
somehow acquired a feline facility for seeing in the dark. At night he strides up through the darkened streets of this harbor town, even disdaining a torch, while the rest of us, as yet unenured, follow on as best we can.

This afternoon our Captain was invited to bring some officers to take lunch on the celebrated warship *Duke of York*, the craft which so distinguished itself in the sinking of the *Scharnhorst* off the coast of Norway. Little did I suppose when following that action in our newspapers that I was ever to have the opportunity to sit in the direction-turret of the *Duke of York* and have the chase outlined to me with accompanying illustration by the actual apparatus which achieved the victory. The Captain of the *Duke of York* told us that at the height of the chase the *Scharnhorst* was actually drawing away at a speed of 30 knots compared with 28½ knots the best speed the pursuer could obtain. Then a lucky shot slowed the Germans down and gave time for the English destroyers to close in for the final kill. One of the officers, the ship’s doctor, Commander K., had been in Philadelphia two years ago while the ill-fated cruiser *R.* was undergoing repairs at League Island. We discovered that we had met previously during a party at the Philadelphia Racquet Club. As we drove back to our ship our Skipper pointed out the gaping walls, roofless buildings and shattered hulks along the waterside, relics of the “blitz” of two years ago.

There has been some confusion in my orders, some question as to whether I should await my superior, Captain R., here or should proceed to London and contact him there at our Coast Guard office. This morning I am told that the Captain is coming down to visit our ship and confer with our Skipper, and that I am to journey up to London in his company this afternoon.

Meanwhile our ship which has been strangely silent with the departure of the soldiers is again filling up. Down into the same holds and occupying the same bunks where our American infantrymen slept, files a motley horde of prisoners. These are of all ages but counting in their ranks a large proportion of very young boys. They are nevertheless ranked as first-line troops and are mostly from the army captured at Mons, the force whose duty it was to defend or at least destroy the dock installations at Antwerp. I am told that their cutting-off and final surrender is a crowning tribute to American
field tactics, a feat which when analyzed by the future historian will measure up to the most daring and brilliant achievements of our cavalry leaders in the Civil War, of Sheridan, of Gregg, or of Jeb Stuart himself.

Nearly all the mature prisoners wore the broad black-fringed ribbon which betokens service in the Russian campaign. Some, during their weeks of confinement in Belgium and France, had managed to hold on to their caps and overcoats, and still preserved some vestiges of smart soldierly bearing. Others, bent, grey-haired men in the late fifties, had not been so fortunate in retaining their gear; or perhaps the more able-bodied of their fellow captives had robbed them.

From long practice the personnel of this wharf has grown very proficient in the handling of prisoners. As the trains draw up upon the covered platform, the prisoners who had been cramped in, ten to a compartment, emerge in batches of fifty and assemble in columns of four. A curious assembly of Coast Guard gobs, station officials and red-cheeked English Red Cross girls watch the performance. The American guards, absurdly few for so large a contingent, seem frankly glad to get rid of their charges and inquire as to the time of chow.

The detachments now marched along the platform and as each reached the canvas-covered bridge to the boat they were halted while a German-speaking American sergeant explained to them their routine as to hours of meals, time in the open air on deck, regulations as to silence, etcetera, ending with the adjuration that they would be treated exactly as their conduct during the voyage merited. The first section listened attentively and united in an earnest *Ja Wohl.* Accordingly each succeeding group echoed this response. The Teutonic facility for being led or regimented, for good or for evil, an attribute which has brought so much woe to a war-torn world, was never more manifest.

In the evening I descended the iron ladder and stood with the guard while a group of unshaven ragged captives gathered about me. The horrible stench almost turned my stomach. I began to question the more juvenile prisoners as to their age. In this enquiry I was not particularly successful. I addressed a dozen round-faced, long-haired lads who looked fourteen or fifteen, but not one of them would confess his age. "Achtzehn" was the stereotyped response, no varia-
tion. So I gave up the endeavor. Nor was I any more successful in evoking an avowal from the older prisoners that they had lost confidence in their authorities. Some indeed agreed that the cause was lost but none would profess lack of confidence in the Fuehrer or express regret over his advent.

Indeed the only information of any value came from a former resident of Aachen who had somehow learned that his city was half invested and about to fall. News is rigorously excluded from the prisoners but it appeared that in one of the many English stations through which the prison train had passed an illustrated paper had somehow wafted into the carriages. It contained a picture of a bombarded street in Aachen which this particular prisoner recognized as one in which he had conducted a little Kegelbahn or bowling alley. This apparition brought doleful dismay to the prisoners in general and to my “Aachener” in particular. I tried to ingratiate myself by telling him of a vacation I had once spent trout fishing in the neighboring Aar-thal, and at this he brightened up and became palpably more informative.

October 22, 1944.

In London: A Sunday devoted to long walks and bus rides about this stricken city. My heart sank at the desolation in the Temple and in the East End. Such a strange aspect St. Paul’s presents rearing up in the surrounding emptiness! Only now can one appreciate the nobility of its proportions. It is planned to perpetuate this perspective by not rebuilding the oval to the East, thus allowing the Cathedral to be seen with the same advantage that our own St. Patrick’s enjoyed when the square opposite it was denuded to make room for Radio City.

What an odd experience to pass the site of a well-remembered antiquary or shirt maker and find only a newly built brick wall surrounding a cellar half filled with water! My club in Pall Mall has been miraculously preserved although the building beside it is utterly destroyed as though some gigantic knife had descended directly upon the line of cleavage between the two structures. Plenty of heartaches during my promenade. My favorite Christopher Wren church in Piccadilly where Governor William Franklin had his infant son baptized before going out to the administration of New Jersey
is now roofless and ruined. A courageous proclamation announces
that services continue in the south aisle. I hope that they will never
completely cover over the holes in the pediments of the historic
building but rather leave them as mute testimonials of heroic
endurance.

High light of the day, my reunion with my officer son Jimmy whom
I have not seen for two harassing years. A married couple of his
acquaintance invited us to share some venison, a dainty which they
have generously saved for this reunion; they even produced some
apples. As we sit, there suddenly intrudes the ominous buzzing
which I have already heard twice this day and know will be suc-
cceeded by an explosion near or far. I look about me for some cue but
my fellow diners stay in their seats and begin to wave the buzz-
bomb on. It passes, sure enough, but accompanied by a crash of
china across the area way. We look at each other inquiringly but
only next day, by mere accident, is an explantion forthcoming. I
was lunching at the mammoth American commissary known as the
“Feed Line” when a Colonel began to speak of the passing of the
bomb. “We were at table and all dived under it. One of the girls
grabbed the tablecloth and down came the china.” “Was it near
No. 12 Park Street,” said I? “Right back of it,” he replied.

October 23, 1944.

Today Jimmy took me out into the suburbs to the group of build-
ings where he works and where the invasion plans were formulated.
He tries to picture to me the monumental thought and labor which
went into the achievement but I doubt if the human mind can grasp
the stupendous scope or detail. An officer of the Engineers who
joined us at lunch spoke of the building of the “Rhinos” which were
later sunk to make the artificial port off the Norman coast. He told
us how difficult it was even to find room for their storage and how
they clogged up the harbors of the South Coast. The marvel is that
with so many thousands necessarily cognizant of the plan and of
the imminence of its execution that the secret should have been so
well kept. Eisenhower’s former headquarters are still pointed out
together with the slit trenches where the officers took shelter in air
raids. However, this place has largely lost its significance since most
of the bureaus have moved across Channel on the trail of the retreat-
ing Boche. Only in the map room with its marvelously detailed delineation of the fighting front does there remain any opportunity for mental reconstruction of the feverish weeks before D-Day when all the great Allied leaders were gathered here in momentous consultation. What a historic shrine these rambling buildings will constitute for future generations!

October 24, 1944. Cherbourg.

Now that my mission in the English ports has been accomplished, my superiors deem it best that I pursue my task in some of the continental ports which have fallen to us. So here I am in Cherbourg.

The flight over the Channel was one of indescribable thrill and interest in beautiful weather. Just off the coast a convoy was proceeding in echelons regular as a checkerboard, with two destroyer escorts dashing to and fro, marshalling the ships as a shepherd dog does his flock. I sat for awhile in the co-pilot’s seat and noticed that our pilot kept a wary eye to the southwestward where Alderney, still held by the enemy, loomed through the haze. The Channel Islands are garrisoned by about seven thousand second-line German troops and no one pays much attention to them. Every now and then, however, they manifest some activity. Only yesterday, it appears, one of our cross-channel planes was attacked from Alderney and limped into Cherbourg. Any inquietude over this information was speedily dissipated by the announcement that we were approaching the two beaches which the Americans had seized in their initial attack and from which they still dispatch munitions to the front. There, clearly defined below us, lay the cliffs which will live in history with Thermopylae or the pass of Roncesvalles. The artificial harbor was plainly to be discerned with a row of Liberty ships herded behind it. This harbor had been made during the early hours of D-Day by sinking a line of antiquated steamers so as to afford a breakwater behind which the landing craft could operate. It is probable that this clever conception was largely responsible for the success of the invasion. The Americans claim the credit for the idea and so do the British. It scarcely matters.

We could descry the funnels of the old *Centurion*, a British cruiser at one end of the improvised breakwater and the masts of the other ships sunk in an orderly row, a strange sight. On the summit of the
cliff, won with such expenditure of heroic lives, clusters the polyglot
tent city which harbors the army of stevedores. We were not given
much time, however, for further scrutiny as just beyond the beaches
our plane began circling for the landing at Q——, the airport of
Cherbourg.

October 25, 1944.

The salient feature of Cherbourg is the mud, mud in the streets,
on your clothing, in your eyes. Crossing the street is a dangerous ven-
ture since apparently every four-wheel driven vehicle from America
is centered here; the ordinary touring car would be useless except on
the central highways. And many of the vehicles seem to be at least
thirty feet long, being either a “duck” or amphibian or portable
-crane. How changed from the tourist port of other days. Then we
used to give the town a passing glance as we stepped from the boat-
train to the Quai Maritime and from the Quai to the tender which
was to take us and our baggage out to a luxurious liner which lay
awaiting us out by the mole which Colbert built, long ago. Now the
Quai is a hideous wreck. The Nazis with an eye to theatrical effect
which Hollywood might envy, loaded railroad cars of explosives at
each end of the long shed and then pushed them together at top
speed with express engines. The little Hôtel du Casino, where we
sometimes enjoyed a hurried libation while waiting for the baggage
to be unloaded, is in ruins. It was blown up on the last day of occu-
pation, no one knows exactly why, for it had no strategic value.

Some of the voitures de luxe are still on the rails but they are filled
now with wounded from the Luxembourg front. For just here begins
the famous “Red Ball Line,” that tribute to the American faculty for
organization, the truck route which leads across France and Belgium
to the front, just as the Via Romana used to link the misty High-
lands with the Eternal City.

Our Port Captain has an ingenious way of measuring the success
with which material is being expedited on its way. The bales and
crates are piled all along the water front but seem to focus about
the equestrian statue of the first Napoleon. When the piles of boxes
reach only to the sword with which the Emperor is pointing in the
general direction of the glorious field of Marengo, Captain B. is
tolerant. But when the pile begins to hide the Emperor’s tricorne hat
he gets busy on the phone and uses energetic language.
Whenever my duties permit I stroll along the waterside, a promenade of recurrent wonderment at the magnitude of the task of unloading and of reloading. Perhaps my walk would have been more enjoyable if I had not met a Colonel of Engineers from my neighboring city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, who indicated to me the marks which denote high explosives. And when I stood aghast at the way in which the German prisoners were pulling these packages over the uneven pavé, he explained that they "were very carefully packed." Had I ever seen a stick of dynamite burn? "It burns with a curious green flame!"

I evinced no interest in the experiment but asked his permission to speak to the prisoners. In this endeavor I got nowhere, receiving only guttural responses which were utterly incomprehensible. "Ask the tall fellow," suggested the Colonel. The "tall fellow" had a command of German of which a boy in an American secondary school might boast but he comprehended my difficulty. Pointing to one group he enunciated "Ukrainer" and to another "Ruthenian." Then he indicated a neighboring car where labored a curious slant-eyed Mongolian detachment, still in the field gray uniform of the Wehrmacht. It was a conglomerate outfit which the Nazis left to defend Cherbourg.

The stevedores, other than prisoners, are mostly American Negroes and these predominate on the streets and in the well-run Red Cross Station which occupies the site of the former Ratti department store. I commented on the fact that so many articles were still behind the glass doors of the sales counters. At this the very pretty and intelligent young colored girl who presides over the station, showed me that the boxes and phials which formerly held cosmetics, perfume or tooth paste were all empty or filled with water. The thrifty Nazis of the army of occupation had squeezed out the contents and sent them back to Germany. In contrast to the American Club the neighboring English recreation room has no fine appointments. Indeed I met two English girls out in a jeep gathering up bits of fire wood.

October 27, 1944.

I am pretty well accustomed to port routine by this time, I live up back of the town with Captain B. in a stone house which formerly
was the headquarters of one of the Nazi officers. Monica the cook, an
Auvergnat, affects to be very disdainful of her former tenants, but
I have a shrewd suspicion that like some of the townspeople she
got on well enough with the Germans and was not averse to turning
a penny by keeping house for them. Nearly everyone who remained
during the occupation admits that at first the conduct of the occupy-
ing army was scrupulously correct. That was in the early months
when the war was going well for them. After affairs in Russia took
turn for the worse there was a noticeable change in their demeanor,
terminating in surliness and barbarity.

We spend comfortable evenings in the Captain’s sitting room. It is
dangerous to go out for there is still sniping in the dark streets. The
German tenants had rigged up a serviceable lighting system which
now functions fairly well from the Diesel engines of a partly sunk
ship in the harbor. I say fairly well. The lights go out periodically
and then we muster patience and wait. Sometimes as I sit there in
the darkness watching the glow from Captain B.’s pipe I can almost
feel that the spirits of the young Nazi officers still haunt this room.
On the wall is emblazoned Bismarck’s motto “Ich habe mich immer
bemüht meine Pflicht zu tun.” Some of the books with which the offi-
cers beguiled the tedium of the occupation of a provincial town still
remain—Sudermann’s India Lily and some garrison stories by Frei-
herr von Zobeltitz, a popular military novelist of three decades ago.
What a commotion must have ensued in this very chamber when the
news came that the Americans were debarked upon the beaches!
Probably few of those who boarded here on that fateful night still
survive. Or if they do it is as prisoners in America. No pity need be
wasted upon them for they, or their like, were responsible for the
massacre of helpless hostages and for the execution of the martyrs
of St. Lo. And yet there is a plaintive simplicity about some of the
half-written letters which survive:

Dearest Minna:

It is cold, cheerless and windy here on the Norman Coast. I often long to be with
thee once more in our canoe on the Lahn “———.”

Monica avers that they were very homesick and, after songs of
the Fatherland, the younger officers would sometimes cry. Their
life it appears was not harmonious. There were bitter debates in
this same chamber. Perhaps this dissension explains the German bodies which floated in the submarine pens at the time of the arrival of the Americans. Certainly all the havoc in the pens was not caused by our bombs. The thick concrete roofs remain almost intact and it is said that the only damage felt by the submarine crews beneath them was a temporary deafness. What then is the reason for the half-submerged submarines at Brest and for the floating bodies at Cherbourg?

Early this morning, in my drowsy half-awakened state I fancied that the Boche had returned for I heard a sound which has no counterpart on earth, the precise clang of marching German feet. I rushed to the window and there, in column of fours, was a long line of prisoners. These were evidently fresh from the front as they still wore their medals and insignia.

October 29, 1944.

Captain B. has been delegated to represent the Coast Guard at the religious and civil ceremony which the municipality has organized to commemorate the liberation of Cherbourg. As he speaks little French he asked me to take his place and so I found myself in the front pew at the pro-cathedral flanked by an American General and a British Colonel, with the higher ranking naval dignitaries in a parallel pew.

It was a most colorful and inspiring spectacle. When the historic banners appertaining to the port (some centuries old and carefully hidden during the occupation) were brought in solemn procession up the central aisle for a sort of reconsecration at the high altar, many in the crowded church wept. The Bishop, in his discourse, was simple, manly and effective. As the Allied officers left the church the local detachments of Maquis, whose efforts contributed so much to the liberation, saluted with presented arms.

In the afternoon came another imposing episode, the calling of the names of the martyrs before an assemblage which packed the great square. This same plaza, dedicated to the pompous Duc de Berri, brother to the Bourbon monarch, who paid Cherbourg a half-forgotten visit a century ago, was in gala array with the cross of Lorraine much in evidence. We Allied officers were marshalled upon the tribune. The Préfet’s speech, a trifle bombastic, did not contain
a more fervid eulogium of De Gaulle than we had expected. Then came the climax. A sonorous unseen orator pronounced the successive names of the martyrs of Cherbourg. As each name was given, another voice rejoined: "Mort pour la France." This, in absolute silence from the throng which occupied every inch of the Square and of the rooms and windows which give upon it. Then we in the tribune saluted, the colors of the three nations were raised and the crowd united in a soul-stirring rendition of the Marseillaise.

October 30, 1944.

Early this morning my driver and jeep arrived to take me to the beaches. I was swathed in overalls which was just as well for the mud engulfed us as soon as we left the city limits. We picked our way between the shell craters which pitted the highway, watching carefully the while so as not to disturb the course of any Red Ball Convoys of which there were many. These convoys have absolute priority. The drivers are armed and will shoot at any vehicle which persists in obstructing their path.

Our first stop was at the robot bomb emplacement which the Germans had almost finished at D-Day. This particular foundation, the largest heretofore uncovered, was designed to launch bombs of formidable size. The neighboring innkeeper informed me that the Nazis had pushed the work with feverish haste, paying as high as one thousand francs a day to French laborers who were skilled in the art of making and pouring concrete. The site is well chosen, being protected by a low hill and served by a narrow gauge railway which was to transport the bombs to their launching platform. It points threateningly in the exact direction of Southampton and the Allies may consider themselves fortunate that it was never operated.

How changed, this tortured countryside! Often in the happy days of peace we would drive into this territory from Deauville. I remember that there was a farmer near St. Mère l'Eglise who vended a superior brand of Calvados which mixed well with after dinner coffee. Then on the way home we would make a detour to Isigny for some of the famous beurre d'Isigny. Isigny lies sadly battered now, and the church at St. Mère l'Eglise is a ruin. But one grows callous to devastation. Interest somehow begins to center not upon the succession of burnt-out villages, one just like another, but upon
the teeming military spectacle. Soldiers everywhere, warming themselves at fires, mounting into trucks or marching down the road in the insistent drizzle to take an enforced shuddering shower bath at improvised douches.

In the narrow bylanes one must keep a rigorous course. The old German warnings "Achtung! Minen!" are still to be observed and with them the terse proclamation "Mines cleared to the hedges!" So when it became necessary to visit a post somewhat removed from the highway we left the jeep and picked our cautious way across an orchard.

Here, rather unexpectedly, we came upon the enemy, eight of him, a labor squad. Their picks and shovels were laid aside and they were squatted by the path devouring apples. The Negro guard was exploring the upper branches with his rifle barrel in an effort to shake down more fruit. These were alert, sinewy men very different from the hybrid captives on the docks of Cherbourg. Also, a rare occurrence, they were all from the same place, the garrison town of Plauen in Saxony. When I greeted them with my usual witticism "Kraft durch Freude" (Strength through Joy) a tall bespectacled man, a former teacher in the gymnasium or high school at Plauen, had an alliterative retort "Krieg durch Fenster" (War through the window) which made everyone laugh. And when in the inevitable discussion I accused the Germans of having gratuitously provoked a general cataclysm, one of the prisoners, a philosopher in his way, stopped munching his apple long enough to enunciate "Wer verliert ist immer der Anfaenger" (He who loses is always the beginner).

Crossing the estuary of the Vire and winding our way along the hedgerows we came to the ruins of the bathing resort of St. Guingamp les Bains. It had never been a fashionable place like Trouville or Deauville but had afforded the opportunity of inexpensive vacation days by the sea to the families of small merchants and government functionaries of the better class. Certainly the occupants of these flimsy and garish little villas could never have dreamed that the armed might of half the world was suddenly to focus upon their obscure beach with its lobster pots and striped bathing wagons. Whoever named this beach "Omaha" has created a designation which will endure as long as recorded history. Here on this beach and on the high weedy dune which dominates it and in the fields
and villages behind, the destiny of mankind hung in the balance for fateful hours.

I climbed down to the concrete bastion which the Germans had constructed with such scientific skill, peered through the embrasures and noted how murderously the fire of the 88’s, installed here, could rake the beach. The driver of an amphibian came to join me in my survey and to explain the action of June 6:

There is another fort down there at the other end of the beach which enfilades it from that direction. All along the cliff are machine gun nests with tunnels, some a mile long, which lead back to their ammunition dumps in the rear. Our first prisoners told us that their officers used to boast that a cat could not attempt to cross this beach and live. Can you play tit-tat-toe? Well that morning the German guns laid down a pattern like a tit-tat-toe diagram up and down this sand, while our First and Twenty-ninth Divisions were crouching there. Our big naval guns helped a lot but it was one of our heroic destroyers which saved the day. She came in just where you see the line of sunken ships and silenced the machine guns in the cliff.

We mount into the jeep again and drive along the beach until we are opposite to the line of sunken boats which I had observed from the air in my flight to Cherbourg. Here is the unloading pier, a busy scene. I admired the dexterity with which our amphibians are brought up beside the Liberty ships, loaded with bales, boxes and barrels and again unloaded on the beach. A troopship is unloading and the soldiers assemble on the beach and look curiously about them as though marvelling that they should be brought into Europe by so unwonted a gateway.

My tasks on the beach consumed the remainder of the morning and then at noon I scaled the muddy goat-path to the Naval Salvage mess on top of the cliff. Panting and slipping in the oozy track I pause halfway up to wonder how the advancing waves of American infantry ever scaled this height under fire. No wonder the Germans considered it impregnable. Montcalm could not have been more confident of the invulnerability of Quebec.

*November 5, 1944. Paris.*

The war seemed very near to us as we circled down to our runway at Orly airport. The Germans had hit a munitions train at the day before and it was still smoking. Otherwise the Paris suburbs seemed unchanged, in happy contrast to the stricken Norman
villages. Strangely enough the most striking evidence of the Boche occupation to be observed in our bus ride to the Place Vendôme was the newly gilded statue of Jeanne d'Arc on the Rue de Rivoli. I remembered the statue as rather worn and rusty but now it shines like a new penny. This unlooked for manifestation of the conqueror's largesse is to be explained on the theory of a crude attempt to enlist popular sympathy against England by glorifying the Maid of Orleans who lifted the English yoke; the workings of the Teutonic mind are devious indeed.

I signed in at Navy Headquarters near the Etoile. This whole quarter has become a little America, since the adjoining hotel and many of the apartment houses have been taken over by our various bureaus. The wide avenues are fenced off and only American official traffic is permitted. There is little French transportation at any rate and such of the local drivers as approach the barrier look dubiously at this drastic occupation, shrug their shoulders and resign themselves to a detour.

The Navy housed me in a palatial hotel, the same in which I saw General Pershing when I came to consult with him on graves registration in 1938. I have a marvellously appointed bathroom and the meals are excellent but we are never warm. The bar in the basement, where drinks are distributed at the inflated Parisian rate of the present day has a suggestion of heat; so, occasionally, does the dining room. When not eating or drinking we sit in the lobby shivering in our overcoats and disconsolately thumbing over magazines which were printed long before I left America. Last night they gave us a cinema in the hotel. Admiral ——— who conducted the landing on D-Day was to be present. I had many messages for him from his old friends at League Island, but unfortunately the picture was not scheduled until nine o'clock and I finished my dinner at eight. I was getting colder and colder in the lobby so presently I went out onto the dark avenue and walked up and down thrashing my arms in an endeavor to engender some circulation.

Each afternoon, after my routine is concluded, I walk to the home of one of my former friends and try to piece together the thread of pleasant relationship, so rudely ruptured five years ago. Yesterday I penetrated to our amiable, slovenly, much beloved hostelry the
hotel *France et Choiseul* on the Rue St. Honoré. The concierge gave me a joyful reception and I was led in triumphant procession to the well-remembered dingy office where our old proprietor embraced me and abounded in woeful recital. His enforced stewardship to the occupying army has brought him much tribulation. But his chief complaint was not of the *Panzer Abteilung* who had first been quartered upon him but of the female clerical division which had succeeded them. “If Monsieur could but have seen them! Such coiffures and such clothes! Mon Dieu! And how women who were always searching for bargains in perfume could smell so foul was une vraie merveille. And if Monsieur could only have seen the *amants* they brought in to sleep with them. *Canaille! The Scum of the Earth.*”

What puzzles me chiefly in this city, where living conditions were once upon so reasonable a scale, is the expense in everything. Even the bookdealers in the boxes along the Quai seem to have taught themselves to think and demand in units of one thousand francs. If one is fortunate enough to have dollar notes or pounds sterling he can of course quadruple the fixed military rate which allows fifty francs to the dollar. This traffic, however, is strictly banned and anyone caught attempting such an exchange is subject to court martial. Rumor has it that the American Provost Marshal has plain clothes men who lounge innocently at the counters where perfumes are dispensed and then summarily arrest the man or woman in uniform who attempts to make his purchases with any medium except legal francs.

Another form of currency in the great game of barter now going on in the Parisian *marché noire* is American cigarettes. Packets of the popular brands have a commercial value which is subject to daily quotation and rises and falls like the price of stocks. Ordinarily the packet of Chesterfields or Lucky Strikes which is dispensed to the G. I. at about five American cents commands a buying value of an enhancement of 2000%. Inasmuch as only seven packs a week are issued to each member of our armed forces it might be supposed that those receiving this allotment would be free to use their cigarettes in barter if they so desired. The authorities, however, have taken the view that traffic with cigarettes is no more legal than traffic with currency.
November 6, 1944.

In all this war-torn environment I am not without some reminders of my old pursuits and hobbies. This morning I was bouncing down the Faubourg St. Honoré in a jeep when I chanced to notice a portrait exposed in the show window of a dealer in antiques. I felt sure that it was a likeness of Benjamin Franklin and called excitedly to the sergeant who was driving me. He stopped, nothing loath of the opportunity to smoke a cigarette, and I walked back to the window. It was Franklin, to be sure, a real find, an original dating from 1778, beautifully painted from life during the Sage's stay in France. It had been for one hundred and fifty years in the family of Madame Helvetius, Franklin's Swiss friend and correspondent. The chateau where it reposed all this time had been bombed during the invasion and the picture was sent up to Paris in the hope that its sale might recoup the family fortunes of the owner. I got much excited, procured a photostat, and sent it on to the American Philosophical Society thinking that they might want to buy the picture.

November 7, 1944.

Here I am back in London again and reminded that this is Election Day at home. At breakfast in the club there is as much speculation over the outcome as if we were in America. The newspapers subordinate the war news to hopeful prophesies of Roosevelt's triumph. Only the Thunderer, conservative as always, warns of Mr. Dewey's strength. This irritates my table-neighbor, a rubicund Admiral who remarks that the Times is always "in a bloody funk," and appeals to me as the only American in the room. When I tell him that I am inclined to agree with the Times and that it is a near thing, he subsides to his kippered herring with a growl of dissent. Up in "Yankee Square" the same tension prevails. All the officers are in a state of feverish speculation; we compute the difference in time and wonder how late it will be before we can get some definite news.

November 8, 1944.

This morning, before office hours, that is to say almost before dawn, I carried out a project which I have had in mind for some
days. I visited Ben Franklin's former residence at 35 Craven Street, Charing Cross. I had promised Dr. Conklin of Princeton, head of the American Philosophical Society, that, if I ever got back to London, I would try to get a fireplace or a bit of panelling for display in our Philadelphia museum. The narrow street looked especially cheerless in the half light, and to my dismay I saw that all of the upper side including the former Franklin residence had been badly blitzed. The tablet with which the London County Council had marked the house was still there and the front, though cracked, was fairly intact.

After much beating up of sleepy janitors, I was told that the Southern Railway had bought up all the houses on that side of the street, that their own offices had been bombed out and were now removed to Maiden Head, and that I must apply there for a key if I wished to enter the Franklin house. I was turning away when an old woman, who lived above a tailor shop, appeared brandishing a key. I did not enquire how she came by it but took it gratefully and let myself in. All the windows were out, the walls seared, and the stairs twisted to a perilous angle. I mounted to the second story front, watching warily for falling beams, and entered what had been Dr. Franklin's sitting room, the erstwhile cozy parlor, where he had entertained so many notabilities. As I looked about at the poor tortured chamber, I recalled the cheerful Christmas party which the Philosopher had given in this same room when he returned from his Scottish trip of 1771. What would he think, this kindly man who abhorred war and loved peace, were he permitted to revisit such a scene of desolation?

November 9, 1944.

Worked until noon on my report to Admiral Donohue. Then took a train to Reading, parent city of my own Pennsylvania town, for the inauguration of the new Lord Mayor which occurred today. I had been advised of this event by my old friend ex-Mayor Sainsbury who visited me when he came to Reading as our municipal guest, fifteen years ago. Much water has gone over the dam since then and the notabilities whom we called upon in his triumphal progress are no longer in the public eye. President Hoover, Governor Smith, Governor Pinchot, Mayor Mackey in Philadelphia, Jimmy Walker
in New York—who thinks of them now? I wondered how much the ex-Mayor would have altered, but when I met him on the long platform at Reading station, he was little changed. He has the rank of Major now and seems somewhat saddened. His only son—the lad in curls and velveteens, whose picture he pulled out so delightedly to show to Mr. Hoover in the White House—went out with the Expeditionary Force and was last seen on the sands of Dunkirk.

We walked up to City Hall, elbowing American soldiers at every step, and were just in time for the procession of state to old St. Lawrence's Church, dating back to the Reformation, where prayers were offered up for the incoming chief magistrate. I found that I was to be no ordinary visitor but was acclaimed as the official representative of Reading overseas, the generous daughter town which had sent so many ambulances and rolling kitchens to serve during the blitz. I marched between the new incumbent and the out-going Mayor, both resplendent in fur-trimmed robes and gold chains of office. A magnificent mace-bearer preceded us through the Gothic portal. The nave where Bloody Mary had once attended a Mass was well filled with a colorful assemblage.

Returning to the Council Hall we heard the report of the retiring Mayor who admonished us not to forget that he had been able to turn on the street lights of the good town after four years of darkness. Also with proper pride, he informed us that during his administration Reading had been honored by visits from the Queen and by "Monty." In humorous vein he recalled to the assembled citizens that on this very day, three hundred years ago, the then Mayor of Reading had been taken prisoner by the Royalists and carried off to King Charles I's Camp at Oxford. He hoped for a better fate for his successor, now to be installed.

At the end of all this pageantry I spoke briefly to convey the greetings of Reading in Pennsylvania. Then, rather to everyone's relief, we adjourned to the municipal banquet and some excellent ale specially saved for the occasion.

November 10, 1944.

This afternoon I went out to a brilliant reception at the Soviet Embassy. The Ambassador, Maisky, who first came to London as a refugee and was nearly barred from the realm because he had not
the £5 necessary for entry, now entertains with a lavish hospitality which has little suggestion of Bolshevist simplicity.

The embassy at Kensington Palace is a dignified spacious mansion. The Soviet uniforms, in the receiving line, were resplendent but seemed somehow inappropriate. Perhaps it was the personality of the square-headed, burly commissars. If one is so obviously of peasant stock it would seem more impressive to retain an independence in dress. Surely our Franklin in his fur cap was a far more impressive figure at the Bourbon Court than if he had attempted to ape the foppery of Versailles. The rooms soon filled with the flower of governmental and diplomatic society. In years past when it was not the mode to demonstrate cordiality to Soviet Russia, these same rooms had been half empty upon similar occasions, but there could be no doubt of the sincerity of today's tribute. Cabinet Ministers were there, Royalty in exile, Sea Lords and Chancellors.

The refreshments were varied but we drank vodka and ate caviar because we tactfully wished to be in accord with our surroundings, although the vodka made us cough and the caviar came from New Jersey.

A Norwegian Admiral asks me to elucidate the service ribbons which our officers wear. I try to explain the more obvious of them and then he enters into an interesting discussion of our point of view on decorations as compared with that of our English allies. The British it appears cannot understand our lavishness in distribution of these emblems. Nor can they comprehend why an officer should flaunt a yellow ribbon because he happened to be in the service before a certain date. There is a comic skit now running at the Palladium. The English rookie is getting his equipment from the Quartermaster Store, his boots, tunic, shirts, etcetera. At the end he says, "Now, please give me my medals." "Oh!" says the Quartermaster, "That is another army." The roar of laughter with which the audience greets this response shows that they have no doubts as to which army is meant.

November 11, 1944.

I have completed my task at Plymouth and now am being sent North to the Scottish debarkation ports. At Euston I duly complied with the time-honored fiction of presenting a government order for a
first-class sleeper. The clerk at the booking office carried out the farce of looking for a first-class reservation although he well knew that he had not had one for weeks. Then he offered me a third-class couchette which I gratefully accepted just as I had intended to do all along.

There are four of us in the compartment each reclining on his shelf covered by the blanket provided by a parental railroad which will claim first-class fare for the accommodation. I can touch anyone of my roommates by simply stretching out my arm. They are all Polish officers, handsome boys in natty uniforms speaking with a strong Scottish accent as well they may, for they have been quartered in North Britain for many weary months.

This Polish occupation of the eastern provinces of Scotland is as complete in its way as the recent American conquest of North Ireland. So many Scottish girls have married Poles that there is a growing feeling of resentment that these unions should be contracted at a time when the Scottish boys, the logical spouses for these same girls, are far away in the service. A similar problem in the English counties where Canadian troops were long billeted finds its expression in the frank suggestion that at the advent of the next war no expeditionary force need be sent from Canada, only the uniforms. As the train jolts its way northward I discuss this subject with my fellow passengers and find their viewpoint very moderate and rational. They inform me that had there been an invasion in the dark days of 1941, the defence of Fife and the east coast would have fallen upon the Polish detachments. If they are good enough to defend the land, argued my officers, they are worthy to marry its daughters.

Glasgow was enveloped in the sepulchral gloom of a Scottish Sab- bath as I rolled into it in a driving sleet storm. Fortunately we did not have to stay long; our local Coast Guard officer met me at St. Enoch's and we drove up the Clydeside to the refrain of jangling church bells. It was a bitterly cold day with gusts of sleet. Across the Clyde Dumbarton and the hills of the north bank furnished a foreground for the majestic glory of snow-covered Ben Lomond. Also to be observed on the further bank is the great S. plant which the Germans tried so hard to ruin in the great blitz. Their shooting must have been incredibly bad for the plant stands proudly intact in an encircling swath of rubble.
From our headquarters in the port of G., I have a bird’s-eye view of a glorious harbor. Here hundreds of thousands of American boys have caught their first glimpse of Europe. How often, during the voyage, they must have striven to envisage the Old World and how fortunate those were who viewed it under such inspiring conditions. As we sip our tea I count forty ships moored in the wide loch beneath us. Some of the larger ones I recognize despite their camouflage as well-known tourist ships of the ante-bellum period. Lt. G., our Coast Guard representative, tells me of the recent loss in the devious channels of the Hebrides of a Liberty ship laden exclusively with lip stick, cosmetics and underclothes for the Wacs in foreign service—surely one of the major tragedies of the war.


It is hard to believe that there are only a handful of American officers resident in Edinburgh, for my countrymen (and women) seem to be everywhere. They besiege the tweed shops, pass in steady file through Margaret’s chapel and Holyrood Palace. The High Street in the Old Town is crowded with them. The answer is that Edinburgh is by far the most popular place in the United Kingdom for the taking of a period of leave. And those who come once inevitably return.

I arrived in the evening and groped my way up through the darkness of Prince’s Street (Edinburgh is almost as dark as London) to the New Club. I hoped that Sir Walter Maxfield Scott would be there but he is at Abbotsford and unable to come up. Went to see Professor Grierson, Sir Herbert Grierson now, who lectured at Harvard some years ago. He produced a bottle of old ale and we had a cozy chat.

The following afternoon the ranking American Major in Edinburgh loaned me a jeep and I went out to Musselburgh to visit Lord Elphinstone at Carberry Towers. I had noted that old Lord Strathmore, father to Lady Elphinstone (and to the Queen), was dying. So was not surprised to hear that Lady Elphinstone had gone north to Glamis Castle and that her royal sister was to meet her there. Elphinstone and I walked about the estate and discussed the crowding events of the five eventful years which had elapsed since we last met. He has been assigned to the rather thankless task of passing
upon the scruples of conscientious objectors; for it appears that they have objectors in Scotland as well as in America. His son, the Master of Elphinstone, is a prisoner of war in Germany.

It was a grey November day but I thought that the gardens never looked lovelier. Some admiring comment of mine evoked from him a pessimistic consideration of the prospects of anyone being able to keep up a similar establishment after the war. No one in England is allowed an income of over £5,000. Out of each pound above that sum the government takes nineteen shillings, six-pence, leaving six-pence to the owner.

November 14, 1944.

My last evening in London and I spent it dining with my old friend General Francis Alston of the Scots Guards at the Guards Club in Brook Street. Nearly everyone in the club was in uniform and Alston entertained me with anecdotes about the old guardsmen whose portraits garnished the walls. Just above our table, painted in the uniform he wore in the Crimea, was the centenarian General Higginson, born in 1828 and surviving until 1927. Alston said that the veteran had been very anxious to witness the unveiling of the Guards Monument at Hyde Park Corner before he died. Alston, as chairman of the monument committee tried to reassure him with the statement that the work would soon be finished and that it would be “a very nice monument” whereat the patriarch then ninety-nine years old replied, “One does not describe a monument as ‘nice.’”

My host spoke with sincere affection of his former superior officer, Honorary Colonel of the Scots Guard, the late King Edward, now Duke of Windsor. Never, he declared, had a Commanding Officer been more solicitous for the comforts of his men. Frequently on cold or rainy evenings the Prince, as he then was termed, might be observed making the rounds of the sentries posted about St. James’s Palace to assure himself that they were warmly clad.

As I groped my way down Brook Street I reflected on what a change the war had wrought in England. The uses of adversity are sometimes obscure but one thing is certain, the nation has found its soul. “A race of shopkeepers” Napoleon termed them. Perhaps this deprecation was not confined to foreigners. It may well be that there
were many in Britain itself who harbored misgivings in 1939, as narrow-chested clerks from the counting houses of Aldwych went out to range themselves against a people who had subordinated everything to physical development. Those doubts exist no more. And if anyone on this side of the water is still skeptical as to the measure or quality of British fortitude, a stay amongst these gallant, patient, war-worn people will resolve his qualms.

November 15, 1944.

My day of departure. We were commanded to be at Headquarters at seven and to stand by. Officers kept rolling up in taxicabs and jeeps until some fifty of us were assembled waiting for the busses which were to transport us and our gear to the boat train.

It scarcely seems possible that a bare five weeks have elapsed since my arrival in England; so many thrills and novelties crowded into so short a space of time. It came on to rain about Rugby but as our train rolled into Crewe Station the sun appeared. The sky was filled with the feathery streaks which we knew betokened the paths of airplanes rising to assume their battle formation. Presently the squadron assembled, circled a few times to re-form its ranks and then soared majestically southward in the direction of the Channel, a happy farewell gesture, we all thought, and a bright augury for the future.

Reading

LT. COMDR. J. BENNETT NOLAN, U.S.C.G.R. (T)