CHAPTER 1

The Crucible of War

In December 1944 I was the rawest second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, a 19-year-old shavetail trying to keep my platoon (and myself) alive as we pursued the retreating enemy into Germany. But 18 months earlier, I had been just another confused, nebbishy teenager, recently graduated from Los Angeles's Dorsey High School. Unmoored, unsure of who I was, let alone who I wanted to be, I didn't have interests so much as a handful of obsessions. The healthiest, by far, was my quest to build a comprehensive collection of the great pop music of my time. At least once a week, I would liberate 35 cents from the till in my father's struggling malt shop at the corner of Slauson Avenue and Rimpau Boulevard. Even in Los Angeles, it was the rare and privileged youngster who had a car of his own, and I was not one of them. I would catch the bus for the half-hour ride into Hollywood, where a half dozen first-rate record stores beckoned me.

Thirty-five cents would buy one of the oversized 12-inch discs, normally reserved for classical music, required to capture such extended-play masterpieces as Benny Goodman's "Sing Sing Sing." An aficionado, I could name every musician in the big bands of

Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Harry James, and Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey. But I also knew who jammed with such lesser-known greats as Bunny Berigan. I did not make my weekly purchase lightly. I had a curator's confidence that I would know what I wanted when I heard it. So before I invested my father's hard-earned money, I would sequester myself in one of the shop's listening booths, don the oversized earphones, and lose myself in the latest Charlie Christian guitar solo or Lionel Hampton on vibes or Chick Webb on drums. Some weeks I allowed myself to be transported by the great women artists of the era—Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and Jo Stafford. Music mattered to me as few other things did, and I followed the richly varied scene the way most of my classmates followed sports teams. I even subscribed to several music magazines, including *Metronome* and a British periodical with the word *Sounds* in the title. Looking back, I see that pop music was my therapy, as it has been for so many young people who yearn for something they can't yet articulate, something grander than their lonely, mundane lives. The listening booth was my sacred space. When the sounds of Duke Ellington or Stan Kenton flooded my consciousness, they drove out anything that was dull or painful or perplexing.

Like so many other millions, my father lost his last real job as a shipping clerk in 1932. From then on, he supported my mother, older twin brothers, and me working as a process server, loading illegal booze for the New Jersey mob, and, finally, opening a soda shop that also sold magazines and comic books. My dad worked tirelessly, but he had no more talent for business than I had for football. Hoping a change in geography would change his luck, he moved us from New Jersey to Southern California, where a family friend owned a wildly successful drugstore in Beverly Hills. In Los Angeles, my father opened a malt shop that also served sandwiches. It wasn't much of a financial success, but it bettered my life as a

teenage transplant from the East Coast. High school classmates began to stop by the malt shop after school to play the pinball machine and get extra scoops of ice cream when I was working the counter.

The U.S. economy had finally begun to expand after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. By 1944 the protracted desperation of the Depression had given way to a busy, purposeful America largely defined by the war being fought in Europe and the Pacific. Although it didn't feel like a formative experience at the time, I was one of the millions of Americans lucky enough to experience the inspired leadership of Franklin Delano Roosevelt firsthand. Like most Jewish, working-class families, my relatives were more or less born Democrats. But it was soon clear that FDR was no ordinary Democrat, no ordinary politician, no ordinary leader. Despite Roosevelt's aristocratic background, most Americans quickly came to believe that he was the one man they could put their trust in, the one who could solve the nation's dire economic problems and, later, see the nation through a terrible global war. In his occasional fireside chats, FDR spoke to each of us directly via the big radio in our living rooms. It was only recently, when I read Jonathan Alter's marvelous book *The Defining Moment: FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope,* that I understood how Roosevelt achieved the unprecedented sense of intimacy he inspired in those he led. FDR used his imagination to project himself into our living rooms. In preparing for each fireside chat, the president recalled, "I tried to picture a mason at work on a new building, a girl behind a counter, a farmer in his field." According to Alter, Frances Perkins—FDR's secretary of labor and the first woman of Cabinet rank—said that he "saw them gathered in the little parlor, listening with their neighbors. He was conscious of their faces and hands, their clothes and homes."

Technology, in the form of radio, allowed FDR to enter Americans' homes. As Alter reports, the number of radios in the country had grown from several thousand in 1921 to 18 million by 1932. Astonishingly, 60 million people heard the first fireside chat on Sunday night, March 12, 1933. Morally neutral, radio was the servant of Hitler as well as FDR. The Nazis distributed free radios in every German town, radios pretuned to both a propaganda station and one that broadcast music acceptable to the Reich. Radios also helped the regime maintain social control. Any German heard listening to "degenerate music" on the radio, especially the color-blind jazz I loved, risked being turned over to the Gestapo.

It was FDR's empathic imagination, not technology, that allowed him to create the remarkable impression that his fireside chats were meant for your ears only. As one observer said of the president's audience, "They were ready to believe FDR could see in the dark." The power of the bond that FDR forged with ordinary Americans is captured in one of my favorite stories about him. As the grief-stricken masses waited on Constitution Avenue for Roosevelt's funeral cortege to pass by, a well-dressed, middle-aged mourner fell to his knees, sobbing. When he finally regained his composure, a nearby stranger turned to the grieving man and asked, "Did you *know* the president?" "No," he replied, "but he knew me."

At our president's urging, we wartime Americans clipped ration coupons; ate Spam; recycled metal, rubber, and paper for the war effort; and bought the victory bonds urged on us by patriotic celebrities whose pitches were screened at movie theaters between the serials and feature films. Like other boys my age, I put maps of Europe and the Pacific up on my bedroom wall so I could track the Allies' progress as reported on the radio, in the newspapers,

and in the Movietone newsreels that were an eagerly anticipated fixture of Saturday matinees. Although both coasts were patrolled for enemy ships and submarines, and the skies were constantly scanned for enemy aircraft, the war often seemed far away. Then, one afternoon, a two-and-a-half-ton Army truck pulled up in front of the fruit and vegetable store next to my father's malt shop. Jeff, the store's Japanese American owner, ran in, emptied his cash drawer, and stuffed the money in his pocket. Then he pulled down the metal screen that protected his business at night, and hung a CLOSED sign on the door. Still wearing his apron, he climbed into the back of the truck, where a dozen other Japanese men and a few women were already standing. The truck pulled off, and we never saw Jeff again. No matter how distant the front, the war could reach into the neighborhood at any time. Even if your own family hadn't been touched, everyone had a friend with a father or older brothers in harm's way. And you couldn't help but shiver every time a new gold star appeared in a neighborhood window, proof that another mother had lost a child in uniform.

As my 18th birthday neared, I decided to enlist in the Army Specialized Training Program. Everyone knew you had to do well on an aptitude test to qualify, so the program had a certain cachet. I scored the requisite 130 or better and was accepted. The program began with basic training, then four years in college acquiring skills the military needed. I didn't think much about what would inevitably happen when I completed the program—that I would be sent to fight the brutal war that continued to rage on two fronts. I was eager to see what college was like. In high school I had been a good but not exceptional student. And my subscription to a British music journal notwithstanding, I wasn't terribly intellectual. The first serious novel I remember reading during the 1940s was a much praised first book by a writer named Saul Bellow, titled

Dangling Man. While I waited to go into the Army, I took a job at the Lockheed plant in Inglewood. Lockheed and its subsidiary Vega cranked out almost 20,000 military planes between 1942 and 1945. In Inglewood, I worked as a riveter, assembling fuselages for P-38 Lightning fighter planes, the scourge of Japanese pilots. On the Lockheed assembly line, young men were outnumbered a hundred to one by Rosie the Riveters, who had no idea their jobs would disappear the moment the war ended and their boyfriends and husbands came home.

By December 1944, I was somewhere in southern Germany, a teenage replacement officer in the U.S. Army's 63rd Infantry Division. My superiors said they thought I was the youngest officer in the European Theater of Operations. I arrived in theater as American forces were in the final throes of the Battle of the Bulge, that murderous last-ditch effort by the German military, whose thousand-year Reich had less than six months to live. Back home in Southern California, I might have felt half-formed and insecure. But in Germany, I was about to become a leader of men, ready or not.

If you saw *Band of Brothers* or *Saving Private Ryan,* you have an idea of what World War II looked like. The war in Europe may have been just, but it was no glorious struggle against the forces of evil. It was a series of vicious encounters that were as grotesquely ugly as any painting by Hieronymus Bosch. War presents you with images normally seen only in nightmares and horror movies, and the worst of them remain in your memory as long as you have memory. I never got used to the broken, eviscerated bodies of boy soldiers or the acrid stench of burning human hair. By the end of 1944, Germany's war machine had devoured most of its men. The dead German soldiers we came across were often no more than 14 or 15 and looked like the children they were. Often, the only

ammunition they had left to shoot at us were wooden bullets that splintered on impact.

No matter how many newsreels and miniseries about the war you've seen, you can't imagine how terrible it *felt.* That misery was reserved for those in combat. The first shock was the cold. The cold that winter was wet, wind-driven, brutal, relentless. Later we would find out it was the coldest winter in almost a half century. For the infantry, who lived mostly outdoors, the cold was as real an enemy as the Germans. We were never truly warm that winter, and we shivered in the dark most of the time. I mean that literally. As a transplant to Southern California, I was accustomed to long, sunny, near-perfect days. But the war was being waged in the northern latitudes, which meant pitch-black winter nights that lasted hour after hour—more like Canadian winters than the Mediterranean-like ones I was used to. Our orders were to capture or kill German soldiers and to clear the towns they had occupied and reluctantly abandoned as they retreated. When we were on the march, which was most of the time, we were cold, wet, exhausted, and often hungry, desperate for anything hot. And we were often filthy—showers were as rare as hot meals. At one point I realized it had been three weeks since I had had an honest-to-God shower.

At their worst, the daily lives of infantrymen were not that different from those of animals, albeit animals with weapons, helmets, and half-empty packs of Camels tucked in their pockets. But when you are being shelled or trying to grab a few minutes' sleep in a foxhole, you are focused solely on staying alive, doing your duty, and finding some modicum of comfort. Although none of us knew it, Abraham Maslow had first described his hierarchy of needs in a 1943 paper titled "A Theory of Human Motivation." In it, Maslow—who later became a dear friend—lists the most basic requirements for human existence: breathing, homeostasis, water,

sleep, food, excretion, sex, clothing, and shelter. In combat, infantrymen struggled to meet eight of those needs—sex was out of the question.

My first moments as a leader were low-key to the point of invisibility. Ordered to assume command of a platoon on the front lines, I arrived around midnight. The men were sleeping in the ruins of a house that had taken a direct hit. The platoon's runner, Gunnar, took me into what remained of the kitchen and showed me a bench where I could sleep. At that moment, I made my first important leadership decision. I chose to put my sleeping bag on the floor alongside my men. There was shelling throughout the night, and I was too nervous to sleep, but I pretended to nod off. As morning neared, one of the sergeants asked another who the new arrival was. Told I was the new platoon leader, the sergeant said, "Good, we can use him." Without knowing exactly why, I had done a couple of things right. I had made a quiet, unobtrusive entrance, not one of those flashy, arrogant entrances that so many officers made and that enlisted men despised. I wonder how many American officers failed to survive the war simply because they couldn't stop rubbing their superior rank in the faces of their men. I had also learned that the men needed me. God knows I needed them.

The Battle of the Bulge had taken a dreadful toll on my platoon. We were down to two dozen men from the normal complement of 48. And there were only two officers left—a full complement was six—in the entire company of four platoons. At 19, and an unworldly 19 at that, I was enormously lucky to have joined a company of seasoned soldiers. Although no one came out and said it, the men had apparently decided to teach me how to be a leader. They started at once. Before the sun broke through the morning fog, the first sergeant told me, "We'd like you to follow

the captain around for a couple of days, just to see what he's doing." They had probably taken one look at me and decided I was far too green to make it on my own, a condition that would have put their own lives in danger. That was my introduction to the commanding officer, Captain Bessinger. There is a line that I've never forgotten from a fine movie about British abolitionist William Wilberforce, titled *Amazing Grace.* A former slave, trying to explain how he survived the horrors of the Middle Passage, says to Wilberforce, "Your life is a thread. It breaks or it does not break." A battlefield is like that as well. But, thanks to Captain Bessinger, my first and most important mentor, I went to war with better odds.

As a civilian, Bessinger had been a caretaker at the Vanderbilts' Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. At 34 he was elderly by Army standards. He was also one of the finest leaders I have ever known. A few years ago I heard General Eric Shinseki, who courageously spoke unwelcome truths about the Iraq War to the George W. Bush administration, say that the military has to love the young people it sends into battle. More than 60 years after the fact, I now realize that Captain Bessinger must have felt that way about those under his command. One of the most important things he did as a leader was to listen to his men—a good way to get valuable information but also evidence of his respect for them. And he did everything he could to keep them safe from the potentially deadly bad decisions made by the brass. To this day, it stuns me that I never knew Captain Bessinger's first name.

If Bessinger had a weakness, it was a physical one. He was quite deaf as a result of too much exposure to too many decibels in too many battles. The first, most critical thing Bessinger did for me was to give me the short course in survival on the front. By example, he taught me how to navigate the always potentially lethal terrain of war—to distinguish different German artillery by

their characteristic sounds, to fall into a hole in the ground or to get behind something—anything—substantial whenever shelling began. Unfortunately, because of his deafness, he always responded a few seconds late to artillery fire. And, of course, I was always a second or two later than he was. This prompted any nearby enlisted men to howl with laughter. But the men quickly seemed to accept me, even like me, and I soon felt comfortable, even safe with them. Trust, a kind of love, and the knowledge that you share a common fate forges the bond between soldiers. Courage is so often a function of that sense of belonging, and sometimes so is cowardice.

American G.I.'s were citizen soldiers, and, as such, they had to obey their officers, but they didn't have to respect them. Most new officers had no idea how important it was to win over their men. The lucky ones had the empathy and emotional intelligence (although Daniel Goleman, not yet born, had yet to coin the phrase) to realize that their acceptance was not a given and to signal their respect to those under their command. I had already been in the Army a year when I applied for Officer Candidate School and was accepted. (The Army Specialized Training Program was all but disbanded within months of my entering it, and I had been serving in an infantry division.) Our instructors at Fort Benning, charged with the unenviable task of turning raw material into officers, had tried to warn us how important it was to prove ourselves to those we led. It was one of countless ways they tried, at record speed, to create officers who inspired trust and, thus, might stay alive long enough to win the war. You can't command respect, they warned us: "Don't flaunt those gold bars. You have to earn them."

By January 1945 the Germans were in retreat but still deadly. The 9th Army, fighting in the north and moving into the heart of

Germany, got the worst of it. My division, part of the 7th Army, had it easier in the south. Probably the most dangerous thing we did was fighting house to house. Because there's no clear battle terrain in a town, going house to house, you have no idea what might be waiting for you. Some civilians hung white flags in their windows to let Allied soldiers know they were peaceful, but so did German troops hoping to trick us. If you managed to reach a house without being fired upon, you had your people surround the building and throw grenades through the windows. If you were lucky, unarmed civilians quietly streamed out. But there could as easily be heavily armed enemy soldiers inside. Then the first thing you might see poking through the window at you was the barrel of a German submachine gun. As nerve-wracking as clearing villages could be, we much preferred billeting in half-ruined houses to digging foxholes. A battered building got you out of the rain and snow and provided a bit of shelter. Often the homeowners left food behind when they fled, and we were always grateful for any edible that wasn't government issue. Abandoned bottles of wine and liquor were even more welcome. Houses might also contain hidden valuables. Looting was officially forbidden, but it happened all the time. German Leica cameras and Luger pistols were especially coveted.

When we were not fighting or trying to get warm, we did what soldiers have always done. We groused. Captain Bessinger listened patiently as I ticked off my growing list of complaints about the Army—from the inadequacy of our air support to the woeful quality of the food. One day, almost sputtering with disgust, I began to rant, "I, for one, don't know how the hell we're going to win this f---ing war . . ." At that point, Captain Bessinger had apparently had enough. In true Southern fashion, he preferred chewing tobacco to cigarettes, and as usual he had a cheekful of Red Man.

Perhaps to emphasize his point, he spat out his tobacco and said, "Shit, kid, they've got an army too."

Although I didn't appreciate it sufficiently at the time, I was lucky to have been trained as an officer at Fort Benning. There, near the Georgia-Alabama border, I had successfully completed an updated version of the same grueling, legendary Infantry Officer Basic Course that polished the military and leadership skills of Dwight D. Eisenhower, George Marshall, and, later, Colin Powell. The infantry's motto was emblazoned on a huge banner that hung over the base: "I am the Infantry, the Queen of Battle. Follow Me!" At the Benning School for Boys (as we called it), we trained for 17 weeks in weapons, communications, land navigation, tactics, physical fitness, vehicle and equipment maintenance, and, above all, leadership. We learned how to fight the enemy under the most realistic conditions the Army could simulate. Thanks to Benning, I didn't have to master the tricky business of fighting house to house in France or Belgium or Germany. We first learned the science if not the art of it in the replica of a European village the Army built on the red Georgia clay. There I learned skills and habits that have served me well my entire life. I learned the value of organization. I learned how to work as part of a team. I learned that one of my most important jobs was to take care of my people. I also acquired some skills that have been of absolutely no use to me in civilian life. Oddly enough, since I left the Army in 1947, no university or other organization has taken any interest in my gift for accurately firing a mortar, a talent that earned me the nickname at Fort Benning of "Bubble" Bennis—a reference to the mortar's aiming system.

Fort Benning was exhausting and demanding. Our instructors examined us as if we were under a jeweler's loupe. The prescribed

distance between our uniform shirts as they hung in our lockers was verified by an instructor brandishing a ruler, and woe to the candidate who was a quarter-inch off the mark. But I found a lot to like at Benning. The military was a great equalizer, and Benning was as close to a meritocracy as I have ever known. You could come from the wealthiest family and be a disaster; you could come from the poorest family and be a success. All that mattered was performance—and attitude. As I've said before, my education there was the best I've ever had, if the criterion for a good education is preparation for what needs to be done. Most of the lessons were experiential, and of the highest order. I never heard anything at MIT or Harvard that topped the best lectures I heard at Benning, no doubt because I knew they might save my life.

Not long ago, I found a letter I wrote to my folks from Fort Benning. When I was in the Army, I wrote content-free letters home whose only purpose was to assure my parents that I was okay. Dated November 6, 1944, the Fort Benning letter lets my parents know that I had had a particularly good training day, acing a mortar-fire exercise in the presence of my tactical officer. I then report on what the Army seems to want in its officers and a flaw in the evaluation process, pretty shrewdly, I think: "You see your tac officer continually writes observations on everything about the men. He actually determines your fate. There's three things the school wants out of us officers: Academically sound, Physically fit, and Leadership. Lack of the latter washes the majority out. Everything you do in the field decides for the T.O. whether you have leadership or not. Another point, if you have everything and he still doesn't like you, you're still out!" I then tell Mom and Dad about my plans for the upcoming weekend in language whose very punctuation I regret: "Going to a dinner-dance Friday night—a sorority at Auburn U. is supplying the chicks!"

I don't really know now why I volunteered for Officer Candidate School. When I heard that my twin brothers—almost ten years my senior—were going to be drafted, I was half-sick with concern for them. There were no early indications that I would develop a fascination with leadership or even the stomach for it. I remember reading *Julius Caesar* in junior high school and thinking it was a cautionary tale. Being a leader might make you rich and famous, but it could also get you killed. That seemed like a pronounced downside to a child afraid of almost everything, from dogs to lightning. I've always believed that fear is as contagious as measles or chicken pox, and my mother was the perfect vector. She was the least calm person I've ever known (even my father called her Calamity Jane), and I think I caught my early fearfulness from her. Oddly enough, I was rarely afraid as a soldier. That was true even though I knew that the average platoon leader had only six weeks to three months before he was seriously wounded or killed. I rarely thought I would die, even when we were under fire. I didn't pray. In fact, I was far more anxious as a new university president than I ever was in combat.

My lack of fear may have been directly related to the role I assumed as a second lieutenant and later as a platoon leader. That role required me to appear calm and unafraid to my men. (At that point, cognitive dissonance may have kicked in, causing me to feel calm and unafraid because I was acting that way.) Far too often we look to psychobiography, not role, to explain human behavior. Look how often observers have linked George W. Bush's drive to become president to his need to best his more illustrious father, George Herbert Walker Bush. Look how often analysts traced Bill Clinton's hunger for public acclaim to his unhappy history as the stepson of a violent alcoholic and a mother whose job often took her away from him. I am not saying that our pasts don't matter.

But the older I get, the more apparent it becomes to me that the roles we play in the course of our lives have more to do with our successes or failures than our personal histories. During the war, being a soldier had considerable panache and came with an impressive costume—my handsome new uniform. And much as a good actor does, when I put on that uniform and the gold bars that went with it, I instantly became an officer in the U.S. Army. The role I stepped into prescribed certain attitudes and behaviors, and it also provided models for how I was to act. It empowered me to try on selves that nothing in my past had suggested to me. I was expected to lead my men and give and enforce orders and so I did, without any of the hesitation or insecurity that was natural to the boy I had been as a civilian. The uniform gave me permission—required me, really—to observe the officers around me and to find potential strategies for being a successful officer in their example. Nothing in my previous life had indicated there was a leader in me waiting to emerge. But the uniform gave me entree into the leaders' world (including, when we were not on the front lines, the officers club), it created expectations of leadership that I was eager to fulfill, and it gave me an ideal vantage point from which to observe good leadership and bad being played out in real time for the highest possible stakes, human lives.

If I had been more self-aware then, better equipped to analyze the remarkable circumstances in which I found myself, I might have asked myself if I was authentic in this new role. But I have no recollection of thinking deeply and analytically about anything that was happening to me. As everyone does in war, I lived entirely in the often miserable present. But in an almost magical way, the uniform seemed to bestow on me the ability to do what I had to do. It was talisman and inspiration, a symbol of my new authority and a mark of my new responsibility. More than 40 years later,

Sydney Pollack, the director of such much lauded films as *Tootsie* and *Out of Africa,* told me how he turned himself into a director by playing the role of director. "The first time I directed anything," he said, "I acted like a director. That's the only thing I knew how to do, because I didn't know anything about directing. I had images of directors from working with them [Pollack was also an actor], and I even tried to dress like a director—clothes that were kind of outdoorsy. I didn't put on puttees, or anything like that. But if there had been a megaphone around, I would have grabbed it." The role and a persuasive costume from L. L. Bean allowed Pollack to behave like a director until he truly became one.

Most days of the war are foggy in my memory, literally so. Mornings, which dawned late, almost always seemed to take place behind a veil of fog. As we moved deeper into southern Germany, more and more German soldiers surrendered, but the holdouts were as lethal as ever. Our daily lives were almost unbearable. We were completely cut off from the rest of the world. We had no idea when the war would end. No mail. No showers for weeks at a time. The food was tasteless at best. We mostly ate hard, bland forerunners of today's energy bars. If we were lucky, we had C rations—a can of soup or beans we could heat up in our helmets. If we were really lucky, we had a few crackers to crumble into the soup. When we were on the march, we were bone-weary. I've said how hair-raising it was to clear a town or a village, but living in foxholes was far worse. We were dug in one day when we came under heavy mortar fire. A mortar shell filled with white phosphorus burst next to me, and the burning phosphorus poured onto my hands. For more than 60 years I bore a reminder of how lucky I had been that day. The only sign that I had been injured was a thin red line around my cuticles. Not long ago, I looked down and saw that the red line had finally faded away. I almost regretted losing that reminder that life is a thread.

In the field, one of the dangers our G.I.'s faced was a horrible condition called trench foot. For their march across Europe, the men had old-fashioned leather boots, not the rubberized ones that would be standard issue later. Their boots and socks would quickly become soaked through as they slogged through the snow. In a vain attempt at keeping their boots dry, they would wrap them in burlap sacks. That only kept the moisture inside, making the situation worse. Soon their feet would become infected. If they weren't tended to properly, their toenails fell off, their feet eventually turned black, and they developed gangrene. Frostbite might cost you some toes, but trench foot cost soldiers their feet, even their legs. The problem was enormous, especially for those soldiers stuck in water-filled foxholes for weeks at a time. Stephen Ambrose writes in *Citizen Soldiers* that in the winter of 1944–45, 45,000 American fighting men had to be taken off the front lines of the European Theater of Operations because of trench foot.

Some officers thought the men were goldbricking, getting trench foot on purpose in order to be relieved of duty. Given how agonizing and potentially crippling the condition was, I found that hard to imagine. I had been warned of the seriousness of trench foot by one of the doctors back at the regiment's makeshift first-aid station. He said that the only way to avoid it was to take off your boots and socks, wash your feet, and then dry them carefully, toe by toe, preferably by a fire. Given the bitter cold and the men's ambient level of exhaustion, they were loathe to bother with this complicated nightly toilette. After all, it meant heating water from their canteens in their helmets, draping their wet socks around their necks to dry overnight, washing and meticulously drying their feet, then putting dry socks and their boots back on. But I had taken the regimental doctor's warning to heart. Other companies were losing a lot of men to frostbite and trench foot. I decided I would

preach the gospel of meticulous foot care to my men. My crusade didn't have a heroic ring to it, but it would serve two important purposes: it would save the men from suffering, and it would limit the company's losses to those caused by German snipers and other perils we couldn't avoid.

This wasn't the kind of campaign you could wage by fiat. Every night I would go from squad to squad, making sure each man took off his boots, washed his feet, dried them carefully, and put on dry socks before he put his boots back on. And my initiative did what it was supposed to do. None of my men got sent back because of trench foot. In retrospect, it is one of the things I am most proud of doing during the war. It sounds compulsive, even fussy, but it was an example of an officer fulfilling one of his most important obligations—taking care of his men. To this day, I think of those soldiers every morning after I shower and carefully dry between my toes.

As I said before, we were completely isolated during the war, cut off from the rest of the world. I think the only newspaper I saw until the war ended was *Stars and Stripes.* Even as we got deeper into Germany, we had no idea of the nature or scale of Hitler's war against the Jews and others the Nazis deemed undesirable. We didn't know about the death camps. But one day when we were on patrol, we came across a group of perhaps a hundred dazed, emaciated men in filthy striped uniforms. They were wraith-like, so frail from hunger and God knows what else, they looked as if they would snap in two if you tried to pick them up. We wondered what the hell was going on. The men didn't speak German or English. I think they must have been Poles sent to Germany for slave labor. Horrified, we handed them over to our Medical Corps. I wonder how many survived.

During most of the war, I did as I was told. You were given an order, and you obeyed. It was as automatic as responding to a traffic

light. Combat was a bloody blur. You killed the enemy when you had to because you knew he wouldn't hesitate to kill you. It shocks me how vivid but shallow my memories of combat are. As an academic—as an adult, for that matter—I scrutinize everything that happens to me for meaning, for nuance, for the lessons the moment might contain. But as a young soldier, I experienced the war without processing it, as therapists say. We now know that the teenage brain is not fully developed, that the areas of the frontal cortex that analyze and make judgments don't mature until a person is in his or her twenties. In that sense teenagers make ideal soldiers. Their fit young bodies can perform the demanding physical acts of war while their immature brains don't probe too deeply into motives or consequences. But the enormous emotional weight of war doesn't go away. It just gets pushed to the side. I didn't feel the full impact of what happened to me in 1944–45 until 2009. I went with my wife, Grace Gabe, to see an exhibition of German art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. As I stood in front of a stark black-and-white photo of the German countryside, all the old images came flooding back. This time, I did what I couldn't do then, and tears streamed down my face.

By April we knew the war had to be over soon. And at that point, we got really scared. The one thing nobody wanted to do was to die on the last day of the war. We didn't want to die stupid. By the end of April 1945, we had just one more town to take—in Bavaria, near the city of Ulm. The town had been bombed by Allied planes, but there were still enough tall buildings and church steeples to shelter German snipers. My platoon was between two others whose orders were to cross the small airfield and take the town. It was clear that we would be vulnerable to enemy fire if we went in without armored support. So one of my two forward observers used his walkie-talkie to call for tank support. In time,

the tank commander arrived, took one look at the exposed airfield, and refused to lead us in. I don't know what got into me. But after some unflattering conjecture about the tank commander's paternity, I told him that he would most certainly be leading us in. I had already drawn my pistol. The man was considerably older than I was—I had just turned 20 in March—but he was apparently persuaded by my argument. We swept into that little town near the Danube behind three tanks, with his in the lead. For reasons that were never completely clear to me, my superiors decided I should receive the bronze star for my soldiering that day.

I stayed in the Army after the war was over in Europe and ended up in Frankfurt. I was assigned an office in the former I. G. Farben building where General Eisenhower had been headquartered. The building had a marvelous elevator that constantly ran between the bottom and top floors. It had no doors and never came to a complete stop, so you had to jump on and off. I never tired of it. Like every shavetail who lived long enough, I had been promoted to first lieutenant. In Frankfurt my work load was light. I did participate in one project that I now see may have planted the seeds of my later professional interests in leadership and the social sciences. I worked with a pair of social psychologists interviewing soldiers about their morale, the quality of the leaders they served under, what they wanted to do in the future, and the like. I also spent a great deal of time in the officers club. The club had white tablecloths and obsequious waiters who catered to our every whim. It seemed like a dream to a young man who had been slurping government-issue soup out of his helmet not long before. There I began educating myself for what I hoped lay ahead. Without being obvious, I observed which forks and spoons the other officers used for which courses. It was in the officers

club that I began to be a first-class noticer. A wonderful older woman—a member of the Women's Army Corps who must have been all of 28—joined me for weekends spent exploring European cities blooming again after the long Nazi winter. I learned to make a *very* dry martini.

On August 6, 1945, I was on a base in the beautiful university town of Heidelberg. I was officer of the day, and my duties included inspecting the men at each of the guard posts on base. At one, a soldier, wild-eyed and flushed with excitement, saluted and blurted out, "Sir, sir, did you hear the news? It's on Armed Forces Network." I told him to calm down, but he was unstoppable. "Sir, we've dropped 20,000 tons of TNT on Hiroshima. Hiroshima's gone. They say the Japanese are going to have to surrender. Do you want to come in and hear it yourself on the radio?" I thanked him for the report. He saluted and said, "Thank you, sir." Then he smiled and said, with a look of pure joy on his face, "Now we can have our lives back."

At that moment I realized I didn't want my old life back. I wanted to invent a new one.