

THE WHITE HORSE LOOKED DOWN

By Barbara June Mann

In the spring of 1942, just a few months after Pearl Harbor, Brigadier Pearce-Howard of the Royal Artillery was showing the American General Delmer over the garrison which he had commanded for some twelve months. Towards the end of the tour, the Brigadier suggested they climb to the highest vantage point – a clock tower atop one of the big barrack blocks. From there they had a fine view across a lush valley to some chalk hills beyond. General Delmer pointed to a strange-looking large white horse carved on the north face of the hills, which are called downs in that part of England. “What in hell is that?” he asked. The Brigadier told him that this curious elongated and stylised horse, some 4 miles away, had been carved out of the chalk by King Alfred and his men after the nearby Battle of Ashdown in 871 AD to celebrate their victory over the Vikings. “Well,” said General Delmer, who had privately already decided that this modern garrison was just what he had been seeking to form a Battle School for the US Army in England, “then I guess if it was good enough for King Alfred it’s good enough for us.” And he indicated his readiness to descend to his car, where after the usual courtesies of salutes and farewells had been observed, he left on his way to report to HQ in London.

The garrison was adjacent to the small village of Shillingham and in the centre of the beautiful Vale of the White Horse; a broad valley edged on either side by tall downs and through which flows the River Thames. It is in the county of Berkshire but spills over into Wiltshire at its western end and Oxfordshire at its east. Along the crest of the downs to the south, runs an ancient track called the Ridgeway which was a highway far back into the mists of time – probably as far back as the Neolithic Period. Roman legions had marched there. Anglo-Saxons had camped there.

Just below the Ridgeway and beside the White Horse lies Uffington Castle – an Anglo-Saxon fortification, while a mile or so to the west is Wayland’s Smithy – a Neolithic

burial chamber built about 2,800 BC. In the Vale below the Horse is the Blowing Stone – a large Sarsen stone with a hole in the top, which when blown with gusto produces a foghorn-like noise and was almost certainly dragged down at some period from the vicinity of the White Horse. The Horse itself is an enigma. Its purpose and its builders are lost in history. A popular theory – the one Brigadier Pearce-Howard had told – has since been superseded by another revealed by air photographs which show the outlines of an earlier horse which some historians put back as far as 1800 BC. King Alfred may well have dug over an earlier horse. Who is there to disprove this? Whatever its origin or date, it remains to this day a silent guardian of one of England's most beautiful vales.

Farms and villages and irregular shaped fields dot the valley floor. Large clumps of old oaks and elms shade houses and villages and add to the myriad hues of green. Small market towns are found here and there; formerly the focal points for trading agricultural produce and for social gatherings. The large estates of noblemen stand cheek by jowl with the cosy thatched cottages of the villagers. Most of the villages are built of cream-coloured stone with either thatched or tiled roofs. Shillingham is a typical one. It has a wide main street with Linden trees growing along between roadway and pavement. It has a fine old stone church with a clock tower and bells that peal for services. It has a school, four pubs and a small dark Post Office; a village hall a recreation field. The local doctor's house is a small but perfect Georgian building opposite the vicarage. At the eastern end of the village is Shillingham House where the local aristocrat, Lady Elford lived in a more modest style than the size of her house would indicate. In 1942 there were hardly any servants to be had to help with household chores or to tend gardens. All of England was mobilised for war and every able-bodied man and woman doing war work. At the far eastern end of Shillingham is the garrison that General Delmer had chosen to be the American Battle School. It was newly built. In the 1930s when Winston Churchill and a few far-sighted men were predicting and warning about the rise of Nazism and possible threats to the security of Europe, the War Ministry was instrumental in buying Beckett Park Estate from the executors of the last Lord Barrington. They wanted to encourage recruits to the then peacetime Army and try and build its strength. As there was no conscription

yet and England could not even contemplate another war, the only way to encourage recruitment was to give the soldiers who signed on, every comfort and modern facility. This had been done at Beckett. The garrison was built of red brick with four large barrack blocks in the Georgian style. Administrative buildings and large storehouses were built likewise. Officers' quarters, instead of being built, as is so often the case, in row, were scattered among the woodlands in pleasant avenues whose names are self-descriptive – Medlar Road, Beckett Drive, Lake Road and Park Avenue. Beckett Hall, the residence of the Lord Barrington, had not been altered, and was used as the Officers' Mess. It was a large and imposing stone mansion surrounded by tall old trees and with green lawns stretching down to a crescent-shaped lake on which swans and ducks swam and pink and white-water lilies grew. At the end of a gravel walk from Beckett Hall to the lake was a square small house built of stone with an oriental-style overhanging tiled roof. It had just one large room with windows facing all ways. Known still as the China House, it had been built to house Lady Barrington's collection of Ming China. Just below the China House, the lake was spanned by a hump-backed white wood bridge. A path using this bridge shortened the walk from Beckett Hall to the side entrance of the garrison nearest the village. The whole garrison stretched for about a mile round the approach to Shillingham from Oxford and was clearly visible from the high Ridgeway. In 1939 when Hitler's invasion of Poland sparked off World War II, the building of the garrison was barely finished. It was first used as a school of anti-aircraft defence and an officer cadet training unit by the Royal Artillery while also housing large food and other stores for the Royal Army Service Corps. It was to this garrison and thus to this little English village that some 7,000 U.S. soldiers came in the late spring of 1942 to form the American Battle School to train other Americans for their coming role as co-liberators of Europe.

On the day when Brigadier Pearce-Howard had been showing the American General around, Major Carter who was in charge of the Command Supply Depot of the Royal Army Service Corps there, came home to his quarters in Lake Road a little later than

his normal 6pm. He was an old soldier who had served in the British Army since 1910 – through two World Wars., as his row of medal ribbons showed. Mrs Carter had dinner ready on the table and their three daughters were sitting waiting to begin the meal. The eldest, Rosemary, was a slim, vivacious brunette of 22 with smiling hazel eyes and a “peaches and cream” complexion. Her sister Marjorie, who was 20, had similar colouring and a trim athletic figure. Ann the youngest, aged 14, completed the trio but she was a redhead with freckles. The two older girls were schoolteachers and thus exempt from military service. They both taught at the village school in Shillingham so that, unlike many families in war time, they could all live together. Their father came in and after taking off his Sam Brown belt, sat down to dinner. “I have some bad news for us” he said, not wasting words as was his normal custom. “The Brigadier has been showing some high-ranking American officer over the garrison and I reckon we shall all have to go.” This was a blow to them, as there were few garrisons in all England where there were quarters available in wartime for wives and families. They knew that if their father was posted, it would probably mean the splitting up of the family. It would also mean saying goodbye to their many friends in the Royal Artillery and most of all, leaving the garrison they had come to love. Rosemary especially would miss the walks and bike rides she liked to take to all the historical places nearby. However, being an Army family, they were used to being uprooted and realised it was something they would have to accept. Only Marjorie voiced an opinion. “I hope if the Americans do come, they won’t spoil this place by leaving chewing gum all over the pavement and pop bottles in the woods.” “Whatever happens” said Mrs Carter, “don’t repeat what your father has said. For one thing it’s secret and secondly it may not be true.” She was a kind, friendly person and a great homemaker. Her family was her all and she inwardly dreaded the thought of having to separate from either her husband or daughters.

Fate had other plans. The R.A.S.C. storehouses were the means of feeding and supplying a great number of troops in the South Midland area of Britain. When high level talks at the War Office in London were being held about handing over Beckett to the U.S. Army as part of the Lend-Lease programme, it had been decided that it would be impossible for the British Army to do without the cold storage and feeding facilities

therein. A compromise was then agreed upon. The U.S. Army would allow the R.A.S.C. to continue to use these facilities and so a small British unit found itself in the middle, so to speak, of a large U.S. post.

Almost as soon as Major Carter had his orders to remain, the Royal Artillery had theirs to move to North Wales. One by one, farewells were said and the Carters waved sadly as their friends departed with their worldly goods for all corners of the British Isles. The last to go was Brigadier Pearce-Howard. One morning in May, his driver brought his car outside his quarters, which were immediately opposite the Carters. Major Carter was just coming out to go to his office, when he saw the Brigadier coming across the road towards him. He gave a smart salute. "Good morning Sir, this I'm afraid, is a sad occasion". Returning the salute, the Brigadier held out his hand.

"Yes, Carter. May I wish you the best of luck. You appear to be the last of the Mohicans! Please say farewell to Mrs Carter and the girls for me."

"I will Sir and good luck to you," and saluting and standing at attention, the older soldier watched as the Brigadier's car drove away for the last time.

One evening later on, Rosemary and Marjorie were walking back by the side of the lake to their home. They had been playing tennis on the grass court outside the now deserted Mess. The oak and beech trees were like green lace overhead. Primroses and bluebells covered the ground beneath. A family of swans with their three cygnets sailed across the lake. It was so peaceful that it was very hard to imagine the terrible bombing and destruction that the enemy had wrought on London and Coventry and other parts of England.

"I wonder what they will be like?" said Marjorie.

"Who?"

"The Americans of course."

"I wonder too, and I hope they will appreciate this beautiful garrison and take care of it as well as the Gunners did."

"One thing is certain. If any of them come from big cities, they are going to find this place a bit of a backwater but I suppose they will bring their own entertainment with them. They are sure to have their equivalent of our **E.N.S.A. shows.**"

“Well, I know another thing for certain” added Rosemary “I’m not going to get deeply involved with any of them. I don’t want any here today and gone tomorrow romance!”

“You sound like a sailor’s daughter” laughed Majorie “but I take your meaning. I hope you keep your word.”

“Oh I shall. If I become friends with any of them, I shall keep it light and platonic.”

“Famous last words. I’ll keep my fingers crossed” said the younger sister as they passed the empty quarters in Beckett Drive and turned into Lake Road, which, except for their home at No 1 was also deserted.

They came in trucks and on foot. They came mostly at night when troop movement was not so visible to enemy bombers. They came from every State in the U.S.A. They came from all branches of the U.S. Army. Their ages ranged from 18 to above 60. They had crossed a submarine-infested Atlantic. They had come from ports in Scotland about 400 miles away without sleeping, in slow trains, seeing for the first time the results of enemy bombing on British cities. They had read a War Department booklet on “How to get on with the British”. They were tired, and some were bored and homesick but they all shared one aim. As Sgt, Don Scherwin put it, “To get this goddam war over as quickly as possible and to get back Stateside faster ‘n’ hell.”

They were not only strangers to the villagers of Shillingham but to each other, for they had been gathered together only about ten days before leaving New York. Although strangers, they acted like buddies and usually went about the village in twos and threes. The older inhabitants of Shillingham were a little slow in accepting this Yank invasion. Many of them had preconceived ideas about “Yanks”, which they had gathered from the movies. To them a Yank was either very rich, living in a fashionable penthouse suite, or a cowboy, or a gangster from a sleazy city slum. They hadn’t thought of them as the smartly dressed soldiers they met in the village streets or on the buses. They hardly knew how to reply to the soldiers’ friendly “Hi”. They met them at close quarters in one or other of the village “pubs”, where they were not

amused to hear criticism of the “warm” beer and the “funny” money. “Say, what’s this coin you call half a crown,” said Sgt Rod Baker in the Barrington Arms one warm summer evening, where he and a dozen friends were gathered round the brown-painted bar. “That’s two shillings and sixpence in my reckoning” replied the barman. “Well then, what about this smaller piece, there’s not much difference – you could fool me anytime”.

“Now that’s a two-bob piece” said Joe Fletcher, the village milkman, “but it’s real name is a florin. You’ll see that written on it”.

“I guess we’ll learn the system one day but it’s sure more confusing than dollars and cents”.

Big Bill Exley, the blacksmith, wasn’t going to hear his coinage criticised so he grunted, as he puffed at his old pipe, “you’d soon learn the difference if you had to work as hard for it as we folk do” and with that he turned his back on the soldiers and went to do his nightly stint with the local Home Guard detachment, helping to guard the downs against enemy parachute landings. The soldiers then turned their attention to a game of darts that was going on in the crowded bar. Nobody asked them to join in but when that particular game was over Don Scherwin asked the barman if he and his buddies could have a go.

“You better put us right on how to score” he said. “You see we never have played this game before”.

Now a plea for help was a different thing, and several of the former players came forward and were glad to show the Yanks how best to stand and to throw and to score. So the ice slowly melted and when drinking time came to an end at 10.30pm, with the time-honoured shout from the bar “Time gentlemen please”, Rod Baker and Don Scherwin and the rest were treating all and sundry to that night’s last pint of “mild and bitter”. After the pubs closed there was nothing to do but return to the garrison, now called the post. They had not yet time to find the dames!

If the older folks were a little hesitant about accepting the Americans, then the children were not. They soon learned that to go up to any soldier with the phrase “Got any gum chum?” would lead to a handful of Wrigleys being given them and maybe if they were lucky, a Hershey bar. Many of the men had left a newborn baby at home or were

already fathers of growing or even grown-up children. These were the ones who would stoop down and talk to the kids with such tenderness as only can come from one who is away from children of his own.

“What’s your name big boy?” they would say to a tiny boy trying to kick a football around and if the “big boy” was too shy to tell them, then the Yank would be initiated into the British game of Soccer and friendships forged that lasted till the war ended. These soldiers – fathers soon got to know where the kids lived and would make a point of walking down that way with pockets filled with candy. Candy was hard to come by in England, for rationing was severe and when the kids would come rushing out to meet their new friends, the parents would walk out and thank them, for kids are great catalysts. The soldiers soon became one of the family. They were invited in for tea on Sunday where perhaps the whole weeks butter ration of 2oz per person had been saved to spread on bread for them.

Meanwhile, while fraternisation was going on outside the post, things were taking shape inside, too. To get 7,000 troops into a place is one thing; to organise an efficient Battle School is another. The task fell upon a veteran Colonel from the Army Reserve; a dour New Englander who was not popular. He was determined to see that the officers and men as tough as he could make them. He clamped down on everything he could. No transport whatever was allowed for any but the most urgent military use. This was particularly hard on the men, coming as they did from a country where the car is looked upon as the commonplace and then being dumped in this small village with only one bus an hour to the nearest town. As this bus held about 36, even with all standing room taken, a visit to town became an exercise in logistics. The only thing to do was to buy a bicycle if you could get one.

A Headquarters Company of 700 was formed to administer the post. Fate had it that the Company Commander, a young infantryman from Seattle, had by chance, crossed swords with the Colonel coming over on board the same troopship. As officer of the day, Capt. Manning had to make a roster of officers for submarine watch. When it was the Colonel’s turn, he was found asleep in his bunk and said he wasn’t going to do any goddam watching. Nobody else had refused to take his turn, so when the

Capt. and the Colonel met for the first time at Shillingham it was rather embarrassing for the latter.

Gradually all the different schools emerged. The Army Nurse School was set up, a Military Police unit was formed, a Quartermaster Company; an Infantry training unit; a Post Dispensary and so on. The sidewalks were painted white to enable them to be seen more easily at night during the blackout. The soldiers were given their quarters in the big barrack blocks while the officers had theirs in the former British family quarters. Instead of one family to a house, they became dormitories for 6 or 8 officers who slept one in each room and walked to the Mess for meals. A Post Exchange (shop) was established where most things not provided by the Army could be bought. Church was held in the gymnasium. The village vicar, the Reverend Gilbert Harford, used to go in and take Sunday worship in the absence of a U.S. padre. A very tall and imposing figure, who invariably wore a long black cape, he was popularly referred to as "the Cardinal". In contrast, the diminutive figure of the Roman Catholic padre, Father Mackay, could be seen taking his Sunday worship in a wooden hut.

Sandbagged sentry boxes guarded all entrances to the post and passes had to be shown to the guard on entering and leaving. Only residents and people on military business passed through the gates. The air raid warning system followed the pattern of that which covered Britain. The air raid "red alert" was sounded on a long wailing siren with notes rising and falling. This meant enemy bombers were 4 minutes away. The "all clear" was sounded on the same siren but with a continuous wail. Various units, such as fire fighters, were always on standby. Although not a primary target, the post had its share of incendiary bombs which fortunately had always been extinguished by the post Fire Fighting Service before they could cause a huge conflagration. There were few air raid shelters and each person not on duty during a raid had to take cover as best he could. Most air raid alerts sounded because enemy bombers were passing overhead on their way to bomb the industrial cities of the Midlands like Coventry and Birmingham. At night a strict blackout was enforced. Vehicles had most of their headlamps reduced to a small chink of light so that travelling by dark was slow and hazardous. All windows had to be covered with

thick curtains. Flashlights could be used with care. All road and street signs were removed so that if the enemy invaded, his progress might be impeded. Cities were being bombed and short furloughs to London were like tickets to bomb alley. The Americans had left a country at war. They were now living in a war zone.

In a village as small as Shillingham there was a shortage of eligible girls. In fact there was a shortage of girls – period. Only a few of the luckier Yanks had been able to get a date locally. The more unlucky ones had to travel somehow to the nearest town of Swindon, some 7 miles to the west, or to Faringdon, a much smaller town 5 miles east. Private Frank Zabrowski had shared a taxi one night soon after his arrival and had gone to a dance in Swindon. He was from the backwoods of Kentucky and had not had much schooling. He worked as a sharecropper with his father at home. He had met a girl at the dance called Lily who lived in a small terraced house in Swindon with her parents. They had danced together and shared a drink or two. Frank asked if he could walk her home. “Oh Frank, I don’t know what Mum would say. You see I ain’t been out with a Yank before”.

“Well no harm in walking home with ya, is there?”.

“Not if you promises to go straight home and no larkin’ about”.

“Of course not Baby. I only want to see you safely back, which is only natural, seein’ we bin dancing and had so much fun and all”.

“Alright then Frank. I’ll go and get me coat on” and with that the blushing Lily went to the cloakroom. and, patting some powder on her freckled little nose, she came up to the dingy blacked-out doorway where Frank was waiting, his forage cap set at a jaunty angle. He took her arm to guide her through the blacked-out streets. When he moved his arm round her girlish waist, she giggled shyly. Frank was doing O.K. He hadn’t been so close to a girl for eight weeks; not since leaving home. Things were happening to him. “How far do you live, Baby?” he asked, trying to keep his cool. “About half a mile down by the railway sheds” replied Lily. Her father, like many

others in that town, worked on the railway and they occupied what were called railway houses.

“How are you going to get back to Shillingham, Frank, if you walk all this way with me?”. That was a bridge he was going to cross when he came to it. He had not arranged to meet the guys he’d come in with and they might have gone back by now. “Don’t you worry your head about that. I’ll find someways. In any case if I have to walk, it’ll be worth it.”

“Oh Frank, you do say some nice said things” said Lily at which point Frank stopped in a convenient doorway and putting both arms round her, gave her a kiss. She didn’t object and Frank would have been willing to do it again but she said “now you promised to take me ‘ome and no larkin’ about” so not wanting to push his luck too far, he resumed holding her arm until they arrived at her home. In the moonlight he could see that although it was a shabby little house, blackened by train smoke, it had a tiny front garden about the size of a pocket handkerchief with a lawn in the middle and a border of several different kinds of flowers. The iron gate squeaked as they opened it.

“I see your Dad likes flowers and his garden” said Frank, whose knowledge of the earth and its fruits were perhaps the things he knew most about.

“Oh not half. You should see out back. On a Sunday, if he’s not out shunting engines, he spends his whole day out there. We got potatoes and carrots and peas and onions and beans and everthin’. Mum says she couldn’t feed us without all the stuff Dad grows”. She lowered her voice as they got nearer the front door which Frank knew she didn’t want her parents to know she wasn’t alone. He realised that if this friendship was to ripen, he must take things easily, so he said

“I sure have had a swell evening. When can I see you again?” Lily had enjoyed this nice young man’s company. Unlike some of her boyfriends, he hadn’t started “larking about”. He had walked on the outside of the pavement too and she thought this was really polite. She said, “Well Frank what about the dance next Saturday night?”

“O.K. Baby. That will be swell. Shall we say same time at the hall entrance?”

“Yes, that will be lovely” said Lily and he took her in his arms and kissed her on the lips for the first time.

“Oh Frank - I must be going in” she said and as she whispered “Good night” she quietly turned the front doorknob and slipped inside. Frank turned on his heels, whistling to himself, and hoped he’d find his way back to the post. In the end he got lost, couldn’t find a taxi, and walked the 7 miles to Shillingham finally going to sleep about 3am dreaming of Lily and what might become of them as time went by.

Sgt Rod Baker was baker by name and by trade. He was in charge of a cookhouse on the post. A thick-set red-haired man of medium height, he had lived all his life in Chicago where he had worked as a chef in a big hotel. He lay on his bunk one Saturday evening in July, surveying the pin-ups which he and the other Sgt who shared his room had arranged on the bare walls to liven up their lonely existence. There was Betty Grable displaying her gorgeous legs and Rita Hayworth her come-hither smile. There was Dorothy Lamour in a sarong and an unknown nude or two. Rod was missing female company and lying there smoking and listening to Glenn Miller’s Band on the American Forces network, did not help. He decided to go out for a stroll in the village. He shaved, washed and dressed in his Class A uniform. He kept his pants well-creased by keeping them under his mattress. He patted after-shave on his face and looking in the mirror, was not at all displeased with what he saw. His buttons were shining, his pants creased like a knife-edge and he felt and looked every inch a soldier. The week before, he had been walking along a side street in Shillingham and had seen a blonde of about his own age leaning against the open door of a cottage. There was something about her, he didn’t know what, that had made him think she would be easy meat. He hoped she would be there tonight. He walked briskly out through the sand-bagged Main Entrance and turned in the direction of Shillingham. After a ten-minute walk, he found himself at the end of the small street leading up to the blonde’s cottage. To his surprise and dismay he saw that although she was there at her doorway, four children were running in and out playing. By then he was almost abreast of the cottage and she knew that he was looking at her. Their eyes met and he said “Hi” and hoped it was not too obvious that he had come to seek her out. She straightened herself and came down the short garden path towards him. He was surprised to hear her reply in what he had already learned was a London cockney accent. “Hello to you. You looking for someone?”

Ada was indeed a London cockney. She and her husband, who had been declared unfit for military service because of a leg injury, had been evacuated, along with thousands of others from London during the Blitz. They and their four children had been allocated this small cottage. The husband had been taken on as a night worker in a nearby munitions factory. Ada hated the country. Free from Hitler's bombs it might be, but there was nothing to do. Her husband was sleeping all day and she had to keep the kids quiet and then feed them all and put them to bed. She then had to get her husband his meal before he set out on his bicycle to go to work on the night shift. After that there was no old friend to gossip with over the fence, no cinema, no fish and chip shop and most important of all, not much sex in her life. She wasn't good looking. Her hair was self-dyed and only blonde in streaks, but she had a good figure and knew how to show that off to best advantage. She favoured tight blouses and short skirts and high-heeled shoes. She had blue eyes but she also had buck teeth and she exaggerated the shape of rather thick lips with too much dark red lipstick. To Rod on that July evening, however, she looked not too much different from the pin-ups he'd just left. To her question of "You looking for someone?" he answered "Why yeah, Baby. Someone nice like you".

From the way he said that Ada knew her lonesome nights would soon be over, and Rod felt like he'd struck oil. She sidled sensuously close up to the little wooden gate with the broken hinges and said "What's your name, soldier? Mine's Ada".

"Just call me Rod" he replied.

Just when the excitement of meeting each other was mounting, Ada's four children came running up to the gate and asked "Any gum chum?"

"You kids get back indoors and start getting ready for bed or I'll tan yer backsides each one of ya. Do you hear me?" Ada bawled at the kids. They were used to feeling the stinging slap of their mother's hand or wooden spoon on their bottoms, so they immediately did as they were told and ran indoors.

"Blasted kids" said Ada, but then turned to Rod and putting on her best smiling face, she whispered "Come back when it's dark and the kids are in bed and the neighbours can't see and we'll get acquainted better."

“O.K. Ada,” said Rod. “See ya”. And he went down to the “Prince of Wales” pub, nearby, to while away the remaining daylight hours. He could hardly believe his luck. At about 10pm he returned to Ada’s house and walked as quietly as he could through the little broken gate up to the front door. He’d had just enough of the warm British beer to take the edge of any inhibitions he might have had. Ada was lying on a couch with the front door ajar. She saw him approach and called softly for him to come in. there was no light in the little room with the low-raftered ceiling, but as he got near her and she stood to greet him, he could sense she was all for action with not too many preliminaries. She put out her arms towards his and as he kissed her, he slipped his hand through her blouse and gently felt her warm breasts. She drew him on to the couch beside her. Ada had never been made love by anyone with as much experience as Rod and she responded to his moves just as he would have wished. Instead of getting up and leaving her when it was over, he continued to hold her in his arms and said:

“Baby, you are the greatest. Say you’ll save yourself for me. I should sure hate to think or any of those other guys with you.” Ada was flattered and glad he had found her as exciting as she had him. She was also glad that his remark implied that there were further visits in store from him.

“O.K. Rod, it’s just you and me from now on. But remember, you gotta come only when it’s dark and when I’m alone, or the kids will get talking and this village is full of a lot of nasty bitches that would have me turned out of this cottage if they could.”

“Don’t worry Baby. I’ll keep it careful and don’t worry about those gossips. They are jealous because they haven’t got what it takes, like you have.”

It was near midnight when Rod had straightened his uniform and combed his hair. Kissing Ada goodnight, he walked back to the post. The moon came out from behind a cloud and the landscape was bathed in the bright moonlight. The far downs were visible and Rod fancied he saw the White Horse wink at him as he went up the path to his barrack block.



Beckett Hall was one of the smaller stately homes of England. Even so, it was typical of what anyone from overseas imagines a baronial hall to be. One approached it down

an avenue of old cedars. Over the main entrance was the Barrington coat of arms carved in stone, while two stone lions "couchant" guarded the door. Inside it was oak panelled with high ceilings, from which hung clusters of wrought iron chandeliers converted to electric lighting. The fireplaces in each room were of finely carved stone and large enough to take big logs. The entrance hall boasted several suits of armour displayed as though they were knights dressed for battle. These were standing in stone niches round the walls. The floors were of old oak, shining like gold through many years of waxing. One went through the entrance hall to the main living room, which was covered with Persian carpets and furnished with comfortable leather armchairs and small tables arranged in groups. It had four large windows with small square leaded panes looking out over the green velvety lawns, to the lake below. At the left of this room was what had been the billiard room but was now the bar. This also had windows facing the lake. Straight ahead from the hall, was the large dining room furnished with long tables. There was another room adjacent, which had once been the small drawing room of Lady Barrington but had been pressed into service as a second dining room. These two rooms faced the side of the lake where the China House and the Yew Walk were located. The kitchens were hidden away in the corner behind the entrance hall and the dining room. A beautiful wide stone staircase with ornamental handrail rose from the entrance hall and lead to bedrooms and bathrooms on the two upper floors.

The new occupants regarded their Mess with mixed feelings. Most of them appreciated the beauty of their surroundings and certainly the Mess, along with the whole post, was maintained immaculately. Some of the younger officers found it outdated and confining, especially when the Commandant was present. One morning, soon after their arrival, the officers were having breakfast. Col Powell was seated at the top table along with major James Donnelly and Major John Kenny from Infantry, Major Grant, a Medic, and Bart Manning from H.Q. Company. The Mess Officer, Capt. Hank Stein, hovered discreetly in the background, seeing that the silverware was shining and the white tablecloths smooth and clean and that the food was hot when brought from the kitchens. The Colonel had a stomach ulcer and had ordered

that no salt was to be put in the porridge. He put his spoon in his bowl of mush and stirred it round to mix the milk he'd added. Suddenly he shouted for the Mess Officer. "Stein, I thought I told you there was to be no salt in the mush". Hank swiftly reached the C.O.s chair.

"Sir, your order was carried out to the best of my knowledge".

"Well, whatever the best of your knowledge told you there IS salt in this mush".

"Sir, I personally watched it being made and no salt was added." Hank was not going to get intimidated by the C.O.s raging in front of the whole Mess.

"Are you calling me a liar, Stein?"

"No Sir, but I do say there is no salt in that mush."

"Well, I say there is, and you'd better be here good and early in the morning and see the K.P.'s obey your commands."

"Yes Sir," said Stein. He was inwardly fuming but realised no good would come of trying to argue with the C.O. All the others were used to his unreasonable orders, and sympathy for Hank, who did a good job with the rations, was felt by all. Only the previous week Bart Manning had been sent an inspection report that one hair had been seen in a bathtub in one of the barracks. Jim Donnelly, an experienced Infantry instructor, had been bawled at, in front of the whole Infantry Training Staff. Powell fumed that the training squad had advanced across open country without trying to take cover. It was no use Jim trying to tell him that sometimes infantry did have to advance without cover. Powell listened to no one, and worse still, corrected senior officers in the presence of their juniors. It was no wonder that a sigh of relief could almost be heard when he had finished his toast and coffee (having left his mush) and walked out towards his office.

"Well, that beats it all" said Doc Grant, "so we are all going to be served inedible mush because of his ulcer."

"Hank, I thought you stood up to him well."

"Someone should tell him there's a war on out there somewhere".

"Say, he must have relatives in the War Department to get him this command."

"Haven't you heard. He's bucking for promotion."

The good-natured remarks of the others helped Hank to get over his embarrassment at being shouted at in front of them all.

A latecomer to breakfast, Carl Nielsen arrived. He was a tall, thin Scandinavian with blonde hair and blue eyes, who was a bit pompous and was enjoying living in the Mess. He had packed his violin when he left home in Minnesota. Luckily for him he'd been posted where he could play it. It would have been more difficult if he'd gone to the Pacific theatre of war. He came up to take an empty seat next to where Powell had been seated.

"What's with the Colonel this morning?" he asked. "I passed him in the drive and he looked like thunder." They told him what had happened.

"Sure glad I missed that" said Niels, as he ordered his breakfast". John Kenny asked, "Well Niels, what's new with you?"

"Oh yes - an invitation. I was walking past Shillingham House last evening and Lady Elford, who lives there, came out and we introduced ourselves and she has kindly invited me and two others to afternoon tea on Sunday. Why don't you and Jim come?"

Jim Donnelly and John Kenny were of Irish descent. They were both rather short and plump, full of fun and often went about together. They were called "Tweedledum and Tweedledee" by the others. Always ready for a joke. Jim nudged John under the table and said, "O.K. Niels, we'll come".

In all sincerity, Niels replied "how does one greet a member of the aristocracy like Lady Elford?"

This was the chance John had been waiting for.

"You give a low bow from the waist, me boy, and kiss her hand and say, "Good afternoon my lady!" The others managed to look dead pan while Niels swallowed the joke whole.

"Oh really. Well I shall certainly have to practise that."

"Anybody got a copy of Emily Post on "Etiquette"? asked Doc Grant with mock solemnity.

Having finished the meal, the others left to go to the day's work. Once outside they laughingly speculated on whether Nielsen would really go through with the bowing and kissing hands on Sunday and, more to the point, what lady Elford would do at the receiving end.

Meanwhile, Colonel Powell was in his office and working on a report to H.Q. U.S. Forces in Europe. He wanted to inform H.Q. that he had established a Battle Training School efficient from every aspect. He had his clerk call Bart Manning at H.Q. Company.

"Manning, I think the School should have a motto. I have decided on "Melior Quam Optimus". Will you have the best signwriter you have, write it out on a wooden mount."

Bart replaced the phone and looked at the three Latin words he had scribbled on a pad. He mentally translated them "Better than the Best" he said to himself. "Well, that figures for sure". Already he was getting impatient with the pettiness of the old man. He wished he could be posted to a combat outfit. He could see the immediate future only as a long line of one frustration after another. He couldn't see himself in the role of airborne infantry. He was young and he was active. He wondered what quirk of fate had given him this job, but like the disciplined soldier he was, the immediate task on hand soon occupied his thoughts. Soon afterwards P.F.C. Ramirez, a skilled carpenter, and Corporal Blum, a painter, were busy at work making the new sign.

"When I was drafted and left N.Y." said Louis Blum, "I never thought I'd end up making fancy mottoes for a goddam battle school."

"Don't gripe Bud" Ramirez answered, "it sure beats making wood crosses we could have been doing on some god-forsaken Pacific island."

When Rosemary Carter walked out through the side entrance of the post to collect a book from Shillingham School on that warm summer evening in June, she never dreamed it would be any different from any other evening. The Linden trees lining the village street were in flower with that sweet fragrance which attracts so many bees. They were buzzing in the trees as she walked beneath. On the long summer evenings they worked till the shadows lengthened. Rosemary was thinking of a poem and in her mind she quoted "and live alone in a bee-loud glade". English literature, poetry

and history had been her major subjects at school and she found it easy to fit mood or happening to a favourite quotation or poem. She passed several G.I.'s some of whom whistled at her, but she had learned that it was an American custom for a girl to get a wolf whistle from a G.I. and she merely hastened her steps and tried not to look as self-conscious as she felt. The clock on the Church tower chimed eight as she reached the school. The sound reverberated in the old stone belfry and several doves who were perched there, fluttered down. As Rosemary's gaze went from the Church to the school across the road, she saw that a handsome young Captain was at the schoolhouse door talking to the Headmaster and his wife. Mrs Dale was holding a small, black kitten. She called out:

"Rosemary, come and meet Capt. Manning. He has just rescued this kitten from being run over by a car."

Bart Manning and Rosemary were introduced and the Dales told how he had chanced to see the kitten run out towards a passing car and had caught it and taken it to them as they stood by their door. The four chatted for a while and then after Rosemary had been to fetch the book she had come to get, Bart asked if he could walk her home.

"That will be easy for you" said Mr Dale, his blue eyes twinkling beneath grey bushy eyebrows, "she lives near you. In fact, right on the post."

The Dales said their goodbyes and Bart and Rosemary walked down the three stone steps on to the pavement together. He spoke first. "How come you live on the post?" "My father is in the British Army. I imagine you'd call me an Army brat in your country," she joked. He looked at the lovely girl beside him. He couldn't think how he had missed seeing her on the post.

"No, I think you'd be called an English rose in anybody's country".

"Oh, Captain Manning, that was a sweet compliment".

"My friends call me Bart".

"Then I will too. Where is your home Bart?"

"I come from Washington".

"Washington the Capitol?"

"No. Washington State. It's way over on the Pacific coast, just south of British Columbia."

"Strange you should come to England. It would seem you were almost bound to be sent to the Pacific from where you lived. But if your Army is anything like ours, then it does the most illogical things."

"I guess all Armies have that in common. I was actually in California at a post there when I had orders to come over here. But right at the moment I'm awful glad I did." Rosemary blushed. She looked up and Bart was glancing at her. She noted his immaculate appearance. He wore his uniform easily as though he was used to it. His insignia shone and his pants were creased perfectly. His well-polished shoes were English brogues. His shoulders were broad and his waist thin. He was taller than her. She would guess he was almost 6 ft. His black hair was just greying at the temples which gave him a certain air of distinction. He had a fresh complexion as though he'd led an outdoor life. His eyes were almost amber coloured and his strong jawline made him look entirely masculine. She thought he was the most handsome man she had ever seen.

"From what little you've seen, how do you like England?" enquired Rosemary.

"I think it's beautiful, especially this corner. My mother's folks came from England - from the North."

"Oh, well, you're practically one of us".

By this time they had reached the village entrance to the post. The guard and Bart exchanged salutes. He had examined Rosemary's pass several times and knew by now she was a post resident.

"Where do you live?" Bart asked.

"In Lake Road, opposite Col Powell's quarters."

"Do you have to go straight home or couldn't we talk a little -that is if you'd like to?"

"I would absolutely adore that" said Rosemary with unashamed enthusiasm. "I'll show you Lady Margaret's walk - it's on the other side of the lake and is through Beech woods to where the post ends and the neighbouring farmlands begin. Last week I found the swan's nesting site down there."

"The same swans that we see on the lake every day with their new cygnets?"

"That's right. Did you know the father swan takes turns in sitting on the eggs with the mother."

"Oh really?"

"Yes. Swan world is a kind of matriarchal society, as I believe your country is supposed to be."

"You know I'd never thought about it in that light. Incidentally why is this called Lady Margaret's Walk?"

"Oh something to do with the Barrington's past history I suppose. I'm afraid I can't guarantee we'll see Lady Margaret's ghost or anything like that."

Bart smiled as Rosemary lead him away from the gravel path and on to the grass track on the far side of the lake. As she walked in front of him, where the track narrowed through a clump of yew trees, Bart was able to take a long look at her. She was tall and slim, with a 36-26-36 figure. Her brown hair fell in loose curls on her shoulders. She had the best legs he'd ever seen. Her freshness and vitality were appealing. He found he'd forgotten about H.Q. Company and its problems and Powell and his pettiness. She was so easy to talk to, he felt he'd known her a long time. Yet he realised he really knew very little about her. It was all too good to be true. Here was this swell girl living on the post near him and he was her sole escort on this fine summer evening. Beckett Hall stood out across the lake and nightingales were singing in some tall trees not far away. The sun was going down and its last rays were glinting on her hair. He felt he must be dreaming and that he would wake up suddenly and she would be gone. At least, he thought, she must be engaged or "going steady" with someone. The path widened again and Rosemary turned, smiling and said:

"You are very quiet Bart. A penny for your thoughts."

"I was just going to ask you who is the lucky man?"

"What ---oh eh --" She hesitated a second before getting his meaning.

"Oh my lucky man? There is no one special if that's what you mean. I am foot loose and fancy free. Talking of luck, though, that black kitten you rescued is a good luck symbol. Do you think that is a good omen?"

"I hope so but yet in my country a black cat is just the opposite. It's a bad luck sign."

"Well, we are in England now, so let's regard it as good."

"Honey, I couldn't regard it as anything but good, for it brought us together."

Bart put his arm round her waist and they continued their walk, with heads close to each other. He told her of his life at home and how he had gone to military academies in Georgia and New York before going to college and then into the Army. He told her

he was 30 and a bachelor. She filled in her life's story too and they found conversation flowed easily between them. When they reached the boundary of the post, dusk began to fall. By the time they had retraced their steps, it was dark. They stopped on the white wooden bridge over the lake to admire the moonlit scene before them. Suddenly the air raid siren wailed. Almost at once the sky was pierced with searchlights probing for enemy planes. As the sound of German bombers droned nearer, the staccato "brrmp brrmp of nearby anti-aircraft guns broke through the air. In the distance the whistle of spent shells and flak could be heard. One piece whistled down not too far away and Rosemary involuntarily clung close to Bart. Although she said nothing, he could feel her trembling with fear. He put both arms round her as though to shield her and said "Hey, hey, Honey, where's that stiff, British upper lip? You just think of those German pilots up there. They are much more scared than we are. They are over enemy territory and all hell is loose trying to get them and they don't even know exactly where they are. At least we are on good friendly soil - British soil at that." Rosemary's momentary tension was eased at once and she felt his courage passing to her. She smiled up at this kindly American, who, like all the rest, had come thousands of miles to help win the war and who had sensed her need for comfort and confidence. Thoughts of merely platonic friendships left her. She didn't notice that the drone of the bombers had diminished or that the ack-ack was silent and the searchlights gone out. All she could see was the tenderness in Bart's eyes and all she could feel was the strength of his arms as he bent to kiss her. She laid her head against his shoulder and he gently kissed her cheek and hair.

"This is a heck of a way to fight a war" he said.

She was thinking of the lovely melody of "Claire due Lune" as they watched the path of moonlight reflected in the water and she replied "Yes it is, Bart. Our first kiss, with setting by Debussy. You know we seem to have such bright moonlight lately. We call it "bombers moon". Don't you think that the moonlight on the flake beside the China House is a beautiful sight?"

"Honey Chile, I can't get my eyes past you," said Bart. Rosemary turned towards him and stretched her arms round his neck. As they kissed, Bart could feel the youthful curves of her body pressed against him. All she could say was "Oh Bart - darling" but she would remember this moment for as long as she lived. The wail of the "all

clear” siren brought them back to earth and as they continued their walk home through the woods, Bart knew that he had come to a war but found a pearl.

M/Sgt Don Scherwin was writing a letter home to Yonkers N.Y. Before enlisting he had been with a firm of sports publishers in Brooklyn, being particularly interested in baseball. Ebbets field, the home of the world-famous Dodgers team, was near his office and he never missed a game there. When his Company Commander got to know of his keenness, it was only natural that he had been chosen to pick a team from H.Q. Company. He was in his element and immediately became the trainer-manager of the “Spartans” as he and Bart had decided to name them. He wrote:

“Dear Mom and Dad,

Thanks for your V. mail letter of last week with all the news. Great to hear you are both O.K. and watching the ball game results for me. Your son is once again deeply involved in that grand old game. As I’m sure you saw in my last letter, we are living on a post somewhere in England. Security forbids me to tell you more but suffice it to say that we are kind of isolated from civilisation, and there is not much for the guys to do in the way of recreation. We have a swell Company Commander. He has all the boys’ welfare really at heart. Asked me to see what talent there was about to get a ball team going. We are a large outfit and by trial and error and much patience, we have a great team. Call them the Spartans. We made a ball field out of one of the British cricket pitches. Now that must be sacrilege to an Englishman, I guess! Anyhow, the turf is green as only English grass can be. We are out there practising most nights except when it rains. Your son may be seen in the bull-pen giving ‘em hell if they drop catches or get run out. You’ll be sad to hear I lost my front tooth to a stray foul ball but the Dentist did a swell job in giving me another. That’s the total extent of my war wounds so far. Guess it won’t get me a Purple Heart though. We’ve got caps and shirts stencilled with “The Spartans”. We plan to play other outfits and hope a kind of league will evolve over here. We are already well known and get quite a crowd of spectators at our games. The Company Commander never misses. He is a real supporter. Recently he’s been bringing his British girlfriend along and I hear she’s

one of our fans. Last week the local British village was having a War Bond drive. We were asked to put on an exhibition game in their recreation field. That was really something else I guess the whole population had turned out and stood or sat on the grass all around us. The local Church of England Vicar, taught by the Company Commander threw the first ball. I was at the public address microphone, trying to explain the game. The natives were so quiet and reserved it was unbelievable. If there was a bad error, they would murmur "Oh, good try!" and they really applauded the home runs. If the crowd at Ebbets Field had seen them they would have thought it was a Sunday School outing! The Vicar came up and asked me why the catcher had to wear what looked like to him a monkey cage! I told those balls can really sting. He said that cricket balls are even harder, but that the guy behind the stumps only wears leg pads and gloves. I had no answer to this. The old boy went away shaking his head. I could almost hear him thinking "It's definitely not cricket"! After the game the schoolmaster thanked the teams and asked the crowd for "Three cheers" which they gave vociferously. The local ladies then passed round beer and sandwiches. I got a buddy to take some pictures and I believe the Press took some too, so I will send them when I get any. If this sounds like we are "goldbricking" all the time, then that's not true. We work really hard seven days a week. Discipline is strict and the "old man" sure enforces the rules. I haven't had enough time to get about and see the country much but I hope to make up for this when my first local furlough comes up. This place is really beautiful and there are several ancient and historical places nearby which I hope to visit. The big clinker is transportation. Gasoline is strictly rationed. The buses are overcrowded and it's not often possible to get on one. Bicycles are hard to get. No new ones are being made, and used ones have all been bought. My two big flat feet will have to take me and I bet I won't have the weight problems I used to get at home. I sure do miss my old Ford and could really use it to advantage over here. It hardly seems possible I've been away from you for two months. Don't worry about me, Mom. I'm fine. Eating and sleeping well as usual. Say hello to all the family for me. I may get around to writing to them one day. Our letters are censored of course, so hope all this comes through. Take care now, Your loving son Donald."

Another letter was being written from Shillingham to a far-off destination. Mr Dale was writing to his son Peter, who was serving in the Indian Army in Burma. Although he only had an A.P.O. for the address, Mr Dale had a good idea that Peter, a Captain with a Ghurka Regt, was in the thick of the fierce fighting somewhere near Imphal. The Dales had been at the village school since 1920 when Mr Dale came home from the first world war. He was a typical old soldier; loyal, erect in his walk and appearance; as well as being a typical country headmaster; scholarly, yet warm hearted and very knowledgeable about nature and the history of the countryside around him. When World War II started, he immediately volunteered to serve with the Home Guard - that band of civilians who gave their nights and all their spare time to guard England's shores and open spaces and vital installations for which regular soldiers could not be spared. It may be assumed that Winston Churchill had these part-time soldiers very much in mind when he made his famous speech "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight in the streets, we shall fight in the fields" etc continuing "We shall never surrender". The Shillingham Home Guard had among other tasks, that of watching over the lonely downs around the White Horse and Ridgeway for possible enemy parachute landings. To this end a section, squeezed into Mr Dale's little Ford, would set out every evening to man their look-out points. Winter and summer, in all weathers, nighttime would find them doing their two hours on and to hours off guard. Those not on actual watch would try and sleep on straw mattresses in a little timber hut they had erected beside the White Horse. Those on watch had powerful binoculars and would scan every corner of the downs, especially during air raid alerts. Mr Dale had been made the local commander because of his knowledge of soldiering from World War I and wore a Captain's insignia on his khaki battledress. Many of the men had been his pupils. He remembered Bill Exley, the blacksmith, as a tubby little boy with inky fingers and not too good at arithmetic but good at boxing and football. Joe Fletcher had been an excellent scholar and had been a prize-winner in the school gardening competition as well. Now they all worked a full day at their various jobs and their nights and weekends were spent with the Home Guard. Mr Dale himself would come home at dawn each morning, change from his khaki uniform, shave and wash, have breakfast and go to face another day in the classroom. Whether he was up on the White Horse hill in the teeth of a Force Eight

gale, or back in the school, and felt himself grow weary for lack of sleep, he would be ever mindful of Peter fighting against all odds in the steaming jungles of Burma. Not alone did he have to contend with the fanatical Japanese, but with the heat and the humidity, mosquitoes and snakes, malaria and dysentery. How different, thought his father, from the green smiling valley and downs of his youth and his home. He never missed a week without writing to his son and when he received a reply, his day would indeed be a red letter one. Today he wrote:

“My Dear Boy,

Your Mother and I were so happy to have your aerogramme written from your tent in the jungle. We listen avidly to all the news from your quarter on the radio and I think I have a good idea where you may be. We pray for your continued safety every night and of course are longing for the day of your return. Mother is rearing a young rooster, whose feathers are red like your hair, to kill for your first meal here. Yes, I remember the very high reputation the Ghurkas had in World War I. Your faith in them is understandable and I am glad you feel such a loyalty towards them. I can imagine how quick they can be with their kukri knives and how they need to be with the Japs infiltrating your lines at night. Mother and I are well. She is teaching the 11- and 12-year-olds now, as Bob Rawlinson, who you will recall had that class, left to enlist in the Berkshire Regiment and of course we couldn't get a replacement. Rosemary and Marjorie Carter are still with the junior classes, so we are a two- family staff. We all get on so well that it helps the work along. You would think you were almost in U.S.A. if you came home now. The Americans have quite taken over the village in the nicest possible way; in fact it's hard to remember when they weren't here. They are a smartly turned-out crowd and the garrison is looking even better than when the Gunners had it, if that is possible. If you came back now you'd find a shortage of girls and a shortage of beer! There's hardly a home in the village that doesn't have a favourite American visiting. Your Mother and I do our share of entertaining. A Captain from Minnesota comes with his violin and, with Mother at the piano, they have musical evenings. Another, a Lieutenant, Derek from California, has a good tenor voice and he comes and joins in sometimes.

The soldiers are favourites too with the children, who gratefully collect chewing gum and chocolate bars from them whenever possible. I've had to lay down the law about pupils sticking chewing gum under the desks as the school cleaner tells me it's awful stuff to remove. Lady Elford told me that she asked three of them to tea and they walked up her drive while she was dressed in her old burlap apron, planting out wallflowers. One of them, apparently wanting to do right by the aristocracy, gave her a low bow and kissed her hand. You know how natural she is. She didn't want to offend him so she dipped her apron in a curtsey to him and proffered her rather grubby hand to be kissed. Thus you see the old world is meeting with the new, and I hope to the lasting benefit of both!

The Home Guard is as staunch as ever and we reckon we still have a few tricks up our old sleeves for Hitler if he should drop in on the White Horse any night. We are gradually using our stock of "Molotov cocktails" which you may remember were old wine bottles filled with petrol and stored in the downstairs W.C.! This upset Mother as she could not go in there and had to run upstairs each time. Now we have at least cleared a path to the throne for her and any guests we may have.

Well Pete, take care of yourself. You are always in our thoughts and although the news headlines may call you "the forgotten army" you are never forgotten in this house and neighbourhood. Mother joins me in sending our dearest love and prayers for your safety.

As ever - Dad"

Soon after receiving this letter, Peter Dale was shot through the stomach by a Jap sniper and spent the rest of the war in hospitals in Calcutta and Bombay before going home to his roast chicken dinner.

Bart Manning had managed to buy a second-hand bicycle and whenever his duties permitted, he and Rosemary would set out together to explore the surrounding

countryside. One of their favourite rides was to the small village of Woolstone which nestled at the foot of White Horse Hill, and whose 300-year-old thatched-roof pub was aptly named "The White Horse Inn". Here they would stop for a drink, before walking their bicycles up the steep track to the Ridgeway, passing near the White Horse as they went. From this proximity, it did not resemble a horse at all, but merely large tracts of white chalk over which sheep were usually grazing. Owing to the exposed position, it was always windy up there and he would be glad he'd worn his field jacket and she, a headscarf. A partly demolished haystack beside the Ridgeway and near the Horse was a favourite stop for a picnic when the weather was good enough. Rosemary would have the sandwiches in her bike basket and they would rest their bikes against a hedge and find a sheltered spot in the hay, away from the wind. The whole valley would seem like a chequerboard set out before them, with the post like rows of toy houses, in the centre. They were here admiring the autumn colouring one Sunday afternoon towards the end of October. He had phoned her the previous night and said "Honey Chile, I've changed the colour of my spots".

"Oh, Darling how wonderful. I do congratulate you and please let me be the one to pin your gold leaves on".

"O.K. if you'll come for a ride somewhere tomorrow if this good weather holds".

She took special care with the picnic preparations next day, managing to raid the pantry and get two hard-cooked eggs and a precious tin of corned beef with which to make the sandwiches. She had them ready in her bike basket when he came cycling down the garden path. He had thoughtfully still kept his Captain's insignia on so that she could have her wish to pin on his Major's gold leaves. Rosemary went to the front door and hugged him.

"Darling, I'm so proud of you" she said. "Where are the new spots?"

Still holding his arms around her waist, he said

"You'll find them in my pocket".

She tenderly removed them and taking the silver bars off, she pinned on the new leaves.

"May I keep the old ones?" she asked

"Why sure, if you want them".

"I shall keep them with me always and they will be one of my most treasured possessions".

As they rode off together, he thought how little it took to make her happy and how much she had come to mean to him. After a good half hour of pedalling and another of pushing their bikes up the steep rutted cart track, they were glad to get to the shelter of the haystack. Bart lay on his back with his hands tucked behind his head. Rosemary sprawled beside him. The smell of wild thyme and sweet hay was a heady mixture.

"Bart, I shall never again smell hay and wild thyme without thinking of all the wonderful times we've had here. It's like coming up to our own little world. You could almost forget the war up here".

"Yes, Honey. I don't know what I'd have done without you and your smile these last months. Things get pretty frustrating on the post at times although I'm sure they do in all jobs."

"Yes, Darling. Can't you imagine those Roman Legions marching along this track and being frustrated by the weather and the natives and longing for the blue skies off Italy."

"Well now. That's a thought. Of course life has its lighter moments. Like yesterday when the guys who use the bus into Swindon complained that a Private Zabrowski frequently carried something in a sack that smells to high heaven and nearly nauseates them. I had him in my office and asked what he was carrying in the bus that smelt so awful. He told me it was "vanure" that he collected from time to time in the field where those horses graze next to the far barrack block. I asked him why on earth he was taking manure into Swindon and he told me it was for his girlfriend".

"Oh Bart, I should have died laughing at that point".

"Well I very nearly did, but I asked him why his girlfriend wanted manure and he said it was for her father's garden".

"Now there's a positive gift to help the war effort! Have you seen the posters exhorting us all "to dig for victory" and grow our own vegetables".

"Yes I have, but I had to ask the guy not to stink the bus out and try and get his manure sack there by other means".

"I suppose he comes from a farming background and that would be the logical thing for him to value".

"That's right Honey. I think he is a sharecropper in Kentucky in peace time."

A small plane flew overhead and Rosemary and Bart followed it with their eyes.

"Looks like a Piper Cub" he said, "guess they are using them for training."

"Shall we eat now, Darling?" she asked. She spread a small cloth on the hay and they had the food she'd brought. Replete and content they lay back on the hay. Rosemary raised herself and cupped her chin in her hands, to face Bart. She was now so deeply in love with him, that it showed in the sparkle of her eyes and the tenderness in her gaze. He pulled her towards him and told her how much he loved her and how much he wanted her.

"Honey Chile, if we don't back on those bicycles, I'm afraid I shall do something I shouldn't."

"Why shouldn't you, Darling? Let me tell you a verse I like very much. She quoted:

"Lovers in peace time with 50 years to live

Have time to tease and quarrel

And question what to give.

But lovers in war time, better understand

The fullness of living with death close at hand".

"When I am near you like this, Darling, those are my sentiments too."

She let Bart embrace her and their love reached its logical conclusion. She gave herself to him lovingly and freely and Bart had never accepted a sweeter gift. He made up his mind to ask her to marry him after the Thanksgiving Ball that was to be held at Beckett Hall.

Hank Stein and his staff had been working on the plans for this first Thanksgiving dance to be held in England. The Colonel had only grudgingly given his approval and had then demanded that he personally scrutinise the names and addresses of the lady guests. This had almost caused a revolt. Perhaps in spite of this the preparations went ahead with greater impetus. Beckett Hall had been decorated with flowers and green ivy and balloons. A magnificent buffet supper was laid out in the small dining room. The bar was stocked with as much liquor as could be had. H.Q. Company provided the Band. The guests began arriving at about 8pm. Col Powell escorted Mrs Carter on to the dance floor and started the dancing. Rosemary, wearing a white

formal gown with an orchid corsage, came in on Bart's arm, and as they danced together, he told her she was the cynosure of all eyes.

"Oh you flatterer, you," she replied, "but if I am it's because I have stars in my eyes reflecting my love." Just then the Band played "You are always in my heart" and as she softly hummed the first few bars, Rosemary said "Darling, that must be "our tune" and Bart nodded his approval. They visited the bar where he introduced her to a Cuba libra, the meagre supply of scotch having run out. After that they went to the buffet and Rosemary told him she had never seen so much delicious food since 1939.

It was a great success. At 1 am the Band played both "the Star-Spangled Banner" and "God Save The King" and the guests left for their homeward journeys.

Rosemary and Bart walked slowly, loth to say goodnight, down towards the China House. When they were alone and could no longer hear the crunch of gravel, where people were walking past, he took her in his arms and said:

"Honey Chile, there's something I want to say - to ask you. I've thought about it for a long time and I know it's what I want. I only hope you may want it too. Will you marry me? Will you come halfway across the world for me and make us a home wherever Uncle Sam posts me?"

"Oh, yes, yes Bart my Darling" she whispered, "it's something I've been hoping you would ask me and my mind has been sure for some time. You are my dream lover and my ideal in every way. Oh Darling, I'll do anything to make you happy. I'll gladly make us a home wherever duty calls and devote my whole self to you and - I love you with all my heart".

Their lips met in a perfect kiss and as they were young and so in love, neither thought for one minute that the war might shatter all their dreams. When they finally walked home, Bart thought of his home in Beautiful Washington State and of the letter he must now write there. It was the best Thanksgiving Day he had ever spent.



A directive from the Commanding General lay on Colonel Powell's desk. It was from London and dated December 14th 1942. It stated that Christmas was first and foremost a religious festival and all posts and installations must treat it primarily as such. Not

to be outdone by any other outfit, Powell requested that Father Mackay report to him next day. At that meeting the Roman Catholic padre was only too happy to acquiesce in arranging a big Christmas Eve midnight mass service in the largest available building - the gymnasium. The Colonel then called Bart Manning about setting up the altar and seating and public address system. The Chief Nurse was a Catholic girl from Boston and she agreed to decorate the altar with the only flowers available - white chrysanthemums. All greenhouse owners had to grow food crops like tomatoes or cucumbers. Flowers were an almost forgotten peace-time luxury in those dark war days. Four enlisted men volunteered to act as acolytes and Lieutenant Derek Naylor, who had a fine tenor voice, was to sing the Ave Maria. Notices of this service were posted near all the mess halls and soldiers of all faiths were invited. Having seen that this was in order, Powell then had Bart come in to him to hear what other special arrangements were contemplated.

"Well Sir, Headquarters Company would like to entertain the children of Shillingham to a Christmas Party".

"That sounds O.K. Manning. Where and when are you thinking of holding it?"

"I thought we might use the gym after all the equipment for the Mass has been removed and suggest December 27th."

"How do you propose informing the children and getting them here?"

"A telephone call to the Headmaster of the school would be the best form of invitation and I thought we might ask the Motor Pool to supply trucks or jeeps to bring the children up and back".

Powell stood up, as if to add strength to his remark.

"Absolutely not. I thought you knew my policy by now of not using transportation for anything --and I mean anything, --but the most urgent military use".

"But, Sir, the school is a good mile from here, and some of those kids are only five years old".

"That doesn't alter a thing. They must get here somehow but not in military vehicles". Bart had planned to have "Santa Claus" (alias Don Scherwin) arrive at the kids' party in a jeep, converted to a "sleigh" but he'd be damned if he was going to beg Powell's permission to use that. He made up his mind to authorise the jeep from the Motor Pool himself and take the consequences. He continued, "We have a special Christmas

menu and, as usual, all the officers will be eating with the men on December 25th. Did you wish to have the meal there, or do you have other plans?"

"I will be there," said Powell, rather condescendingly. "Have you thought about the post hospital, Manning?"

"Yes Sir." It will be decorated like the mess halls and Captain Gertrude Kelly and Major Carter's daughters will serve dinner and hand out gifts to the patients. Also, the enlisted men are having a dance on December 31st in the east mess hall".

"Well, I shall hold you personally responsible for the men's conduct at these functions. I will not tolerate any drunken-ness or rowdy-ism. Remember, the war does not stop for Christmas and this is only a small respite in our training programme".

"Will that be all, Sir?" said Bart, and when Powell nodded his assent, he saluted and left as quickly as possible.

The next two weeks were busy for everyone. On the day before the children's party, Rod Baker was working late in the cookhouse, frosting cakes and making jellies and cookies and ice-cream. The little guests had not seen such goodies since the introduction of rationing in 1939. When their mothers had to cope with one shilling's worth of meat per person per week, plus four ounces of margarine, eight ounces of sugar, two ounces of butter, two ounces of tea and one egg, it was no wonder the children were looking forward, with great anticipation, to their first "American" party. Through his contact with Ada's family, Rod knew this, and he and the other cooks worked that night with a will. When all that could be done was done, Rod gathered a few of the frosted cakes and put them in a bag. He set off for Ada's. He was by now "one of the family" and her kids called him "Uncle Rod". Even Ada's unsuspecting husband, Tom, welcomed him. Tonight though, the husband was at work and the kids in bed. The little Christmas tree he'd bought for them, stood in a corner, bereft of the packages they'd enjoyed. Ada was waiting for him. Instead of coming towards him, as she normally did, she put her head in her hands and burst out crying.

"Why Baby, whatever's the matter?" he said.

"Oh Rod," she sobbed, we've been too careless or something and I think I'm gonna have a baby".

"Don't cry, Baby. Come and let me dry your eyes".

He put his arm around her and took out his handkerchief and dabbed her eyes. He then sat on the couch and comforted her.

"How can you be so sure?" he asked.

"Well I've gone eight weeks without a period and I know from before what that means. Oh, Rod, it's awful".

"Now listen, Baby. Even if you are, nobody knows it might be ours".

"Oh, don't they. As soon as they see me getting fat, the whole damn village will be talking, I know they will".

"Well if that's all that's making you weep, forget it. Sure, it will be a nine-days wonder at first, but they will get used to it. Have you told Tom?"

"Not yet. I wanted you to hear it first, as I just know it's ours".

"Thank heavens he doesn't know and Baby you gotta be brave and not let him know there's anything unusual at all".

"But Rod, you won't want to come and see me again when I start getting fat and all, and oh - I shall miss you so much."

"Of course I'll still come and see you - fat or no. You don't think I'm gonna leave you now, do you?"

"Oh, Rod, I feel better now we've talked. Give me your hanky again and let me dry my eyes and powder my nose, then I'll put the kettle on and we'll have a cup of tea."

"That's my girl." He said as did what most of her country women do in any crisis - put the tea kettle on to boil.

1943 saw the turn in the tide of the war for the Allies. It was, as Winston Churchill said, not the beginning of the end, but the end of the beginning. General Eisenhower had assumed command of the vast armies that were to be built for the final invasion and defeat of Germany. Together the British and Commonwealth and Allies had joined hands with their American comrades in driving the enemy out of North Africa and were poised for the conquest of Italy. Stalin was pressing for an invasion of France across the English Channel to draw German troops from the hard-pressed Eastern

Front. Troops were badly needed for the Burma fighting and for the Pacific Theatre. Everywhere the call was for more men. Training establishments were being pruned of younger men. Shillingham was not to escape. Each month saw the departure of groups of men. By July, Headquarters Company was down to 500 men.

The baseball team, which had reached the final of the European Theatre League and had gone up to play in triumph in London, was gradually losing its players. Don Scherwin could see the time coming when he, too, would be drafted to another place. On his next local furlough, he and some of the remaining players took the slow bus trip to Oxford. This lovely city of tall spires and old mellow college buildings had so far escaped heavy bombing and The High, (as the main street is called) still had antique shops open for business. It was to one of these that the G.I.s went. They were looking for a farewell gift for Bart Manning. They saw some old silver in the bow window of a little shop. As they opened the door, a bell rang and they found themselves in a low-ceilinged room full of old china ornaments, rugs, furniture, books, pictures, marble busts and bric-a-brac of every description. The shop had a musty smell and they felt like they had actually taken a step into the past. An elderly man, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, stepped forward.

"Good morning gentlemen. May I help you?" he said.

"Hi. We wanna take a look at some silver," said Don. "Something to give as a farewell presentation to our commanding officer."

"Well now, may I ask if the gentleman smokes?"

"He sure does."

"Ah, then may I suggest this solid silver cigarette box?"

"He went to a glass-fronted Chippendale cabinet and brought out a good-looking silver cigarette box and explained to the men about the Hall Marks. He gave them a magnifying glass to look at this particular Hall Mark which told that this article had been made in London in 1901. Don and the boys were interested.

"Does this mean that you can tell the age of a silver article by its Hall Mark -whatever it is?"

"Yes and if it doesn't have a lion on it, the chances are that it is not true silver".

"Well. I'll be doggone."

The boys handled the box. It was lined with cedar wood and was really nice.

"I'll guess we'll take this. How much is it?"

"Ten guineas" said the old man.

"Now what the heck is that? asked Don in amazement. He thought he'd mastered the coinage but had never met a guinea yet.

"That is ten pounds and ten shillings. You see a guinea is worth one pound and one shilling. We don't mint them anymore but we still use the term when selling better class articles." "Well whadda ya know."

"May I suggest you might like it inscribed if it is to be a presentation gift."

"Oh yes. Why sure. Are you able to do that?" asked Don.

"No, but I know where I can get it done. If you gentlemen have other shopping to do, I can have it ready in an hour."

"Why that would be swell."

Turning to his teammates, Don asked them what they should have inscribed. After a brief consultation they decided on "Major B Manning—in appreciation of your encouragement and loyal support—from "The Spartans". England 1943."

They then asked the shopkeeper if he could suggest somewhere they could go sightseeing to while away the waiting hour.

"Why now, as you leave this shop, turn right and walk straight down The High. You will pass Merton College and, on your left, at the river's edge, is Magdalen College with its famous tower. The river Isis flows under Magdalen Bridge. You could then retrace your steps and walk up to Carfax., the tower with the clock on top that has given its name to the street at right angles to The High. Follow Carfax north and you will come to other colleges as well as the famous Bodleian Library." Thanking him, the boys left the old-world atmosphere of the shop and went out into the bustle of the High. Like almost every other town in war time England, its pavements were crowded with men in uniform; Americans, Canadians, Englishmen, Free French; the sailors wearing their distinctive berets with the pom-poms; Free Poles, Free Dutch and Free Norwegians and Danes, and as well tall, bronzed men from Australia and New Zealand. The girls in uniform were there too; the naval W.R.N.S. especially smart in their navy-blue uniform with their tricorne hats. Intermingled with them were college professors and students on bicycles weaving their way through traffic which was

nearly all military. Civilians were hurrying along with their shopping baskets, trying to get to a fish shop perhaps, before it had sold all its allocation of fish. It was so different from the towns they had left in the States. Those who saw England at war would never forget it. Every shop window was criss-crossed with masking tape to try and prevent the glass flying, if it was hit by bomb blast. Large letter "S's" every few yards marked the entrance to air-raid Shelters. Even the famed British policemen had changed their distinctive helmets for steel ones. Weaving their way along, the boys took in all the sights recommended to them by the shopkeeper, and having fetched their purchase, had to run to catch the last bus back to the Post.

Next day in a moving little ceremony, Don and the remaining "Spartans" gathered outside their Commanding Officer's room and presented him with the silver box. Bart, never verbose at any time, and self-effacing always, was almost at a loss for words. However, he managed to convey his gratitude and said it would always have an honoured place in his home. Don then gave Bart something which brought him almost greater pleasure; a new baseball for Rosemary on which was written, in Don's bold handwriting "To our fairest fan from "The Spartans" 1943" and then the whole team had autographed it. Bart called Rosemary as soon as work was over and told her he had something special for her. He arranged to see her that evening after dinner. He was just about to leave his office, when the phone rang. It was an Army friend of his from his former Infantry base in California. Buddy Macoll was in "Movements" and had seen Bart's name on a list of personnel to move from the Battle School to an Infantry Brigade south of Shillington at Tidworth. Bart was delighted to be going back to an active soldiering outfit and thanked Buddy for this prior information. "It will probably mean a silver leaf too" added Buddy

Bart looked round his office as though seeing it for the last time. He thought of all the frustrations he had had there. He was glad to get out, but his eyes were drawn to the new baseball he held and he thought then of Rosemary and how heavy his heart was at the thought of having to say "au revoir" to her. She had come to be a part of his heart, and life without their almost nightly dates, would be bleak indeed. He hated the idea of telling her how glad he was to be going back to real soldiering, because he

had a good idea of just how much she adored him, and yet he knew her well enough to know that she would want only what he wanted and, being a soldier's daughter, would understand about postings being something beyond a person's control. Nevertheless, their parting was worse than he had ever dreamed. Both knew that in all probability he was being sent to the assault on France which everyone knew was inevitable, and only a question of time. Even the newspapers discussed the timing. On their last day together, they went up to the White Horse Hill and lay in each other's arms. Rosemary clung to him as though to keep him in her arms for ever. "Darling, I'll pray for you every night" she said "and if there is a God, He will bring you safely back to me".

"Honey Chile, I will write as often as I can and I will never forget you. When this war is all over, we will go over to Seattle together and make up for any partings by spending all the rest of our lives side by side. I know my folks will just love you as I do".

"Oh Bart, I will cling to those thoughts while you are away and try not to cry with loneliness every day".

"Don't cry at all Honey. I just can't bear to think of you sad".

"How could I be anything but sad without you, my love".

"Well, just you keep busy as I know I shall be and write to me as often as you can. Besides if I am only at Tidworth, maybe I can get some local leave and come back and see you".

"Darling, that will be lovely. Kiss all my tears away now and when we get back and you have to walk away, don't look back. Just keep on going or my legs will make me run back to you".

He whispered "O.K." as they clung to each other in a farewell kiss in which his tears mingled with hers.

News of the Allied invasion of France came to Shillingham on an overcast June day in 1944. School was in session and Mr Dale had gone into the schoolhouse adjoining his classroom, to see if there was any mail from India. He guessed something big was afoot. The whole of southern England was jam packed with troops. Air activity had

greatly increased and he had even noticed R.A.F. gliders in the sky. He switched on the little old mahogany-cased radio and instead of the usual "music while you work", he heard the clipped English voice of the B.B.C. news-reader telling that Allied troops had made landings on several beaches in the Normandy area of Northern France and that the battle, commanded by General Eisenhower, was so far going as planned. His knowledge of soldiering gave him some idea of the enormity of such an undertaking and of the sacrifices were making even as he stood in his quiet room. He prayed mentally that the lads would not have it like he had in the trenches and mud of Flanders in World War 1. He hurried back to school to tell his wife and Rosemary and Marjorie. Rosemary was giving a reading lesson. One of Ada' little girls was out at her desk doing individual work. She was repeating "Old Bob had a farm. It was called Little Down. He had some cows and a pig." but Rosemary's attention left her pupils for an instant. She thought of Bart and of whether he was in the sort of terrible fighting she could visualise.

"Teacher, what is that word?" Asked Patsy by her side. She forced her thoughts to return to her work, and the reading lesson continued. The tall figure of the Reverend Harford passed her window en route to Mr Dale's room. He had a discussion with the headmaster who then called for the whole school to assemble in his room where they were told the news and where the vicar said prayers for the safety of the soldiers across the channel. Many of the pupils' fathers might be there. Nobody knew for sure, as security had been so tight.

Back on the post, Major Carter, whose last six months had been hectic, listened to the radio at home while he lunched with his wife. Like Mr Dale, he hoped the boys on the beaches and inland would not have it like he had at Gallipoli in World War 1. The post was now almost empty of Americans. The Battle School had closed. The Americans who had got to know this part of England so well, were now in units scattered far and wide. Many of the people in the village who had come to look upon them as one of the family, had a photograph of "their" Yank on the mantel-shelf and each one, as he or she heard the news on the radio, would glance at the photo and say a silent prayer for his safety as well as the safety of their own family and loved ones.

All kept their radios tuned to the B.B.C. who gave news as and when it came through. Even the bars at the "Barrington Arms" and the "Prince of Wales" were subdued, as the radio became the focal point of everyone's attention that evening. It was indeed a very long day. How could Englishmen sleep soundly in their beds when the battle, that each hoped would preface the end of the five long years of siege of their island fortress and slavery for much of Europe, was raging just across the water. Many of them guessed this might be the beginning of the end but they had been at war for so long, that they were weary and tired and hardly dared think about peace.

Ada was nursing her baby while Tom was still at his munitions factory. She could see Rod's likeness in the child more and more as each day passed. It even had his red hair. She knew she would never see him again and tears dropped on to the baby's shawl as she listened to each news item as it came over her radio. She was so lonely for him and wondered if he ever thought of her and his child. How flirtatiously it had begun, but now it had ended and she would have a living reminder for the rest of her life. "Poor little bastard" she whispered as she and the baby went upstairs to bed.

In Shillingham House, Lady Elford sat up late beside her radio. Her only son and heir was the leader of a Royal Marine Commando. She knew he was almost certain to be in action at that minute. She looked at his father's picture in its silver frame on the sofa table beside her. She always kept fresh flowers in a crystal vase beside it. He was in dress uniform of a Colonel of the Grenadier Guards. She had kissed him goodbye at Shillingham station in 1915 and had never seen him again. He was killed in action at the battle of Ypres in World War 1. Tears welled in her eyes. "Oh God" she whispered to herself "please let David come home safely to this house and to me. You took Ralph. Surely one of my two men is enough sacrifice. So saying, this gracious lady switched off her radio and sadly went through the big old house to her lonely bedroom. She noted how shabby the stair carpet had become but because of heavy taxation could not contemplate replacing it. She was now working harder than ever in house and garden. No more would there be a gardener and a cook and a parlourmaid to help her. She wondered if she could even keep on the house if David did not return. It was the end of an era for her and those of her class.

At Swindon, little Lily slept fitfully. She had dated Frank ever since she first met him and there was an understanding between them that when the war was over, he would return and they would be married. Her parents liked Frank but did not want Lily to be married while the war was on. "We don't want no widders before she bin a wife six months" was how her father put it to Frank. "I seen some of those young widders in the last lot when I was home from France and I don't want fer our Lil to be like that". Frank could see the point and also knew that as a Private, his marriage application might not have much chance of being granted, so he and Lily decided to wait until he hopefully was a civilian and could come and fetch her back to the little homestead in Kentucky. He had given her a picture of himself and his folks and his home and Lily kept these in a prominent place on her dressing table. She hoped Frank was not in the fighting that she had heard about on the radio but as his address was only an A.P.O. number, she had no way of knowing. She had had a letter from him only the day before when he said he was fine and not to worry about him. But then Frank was unselfish and would not have had Lily worry in any case.

The Home Guard was on duty up on the White Horse Hill as usual. In fact their vigil was the greater for fear of a German airborne landing in retaliation for the Allied invasion. Bill Exley and Joe Fletcher were on lookout at midnight. They marched side by side along the top of the Ridgeway, their heavy army boots making a steady "crunch crunch" as they walked. Bill spoke, "How quiet 'tis up here Joe. Can almost hear yerself think. Seems wrong some'ow that we are safe and sound while those poor devils are fighting and dying on those bloody French beaches."

"I was just thinkin', the same Bill, and wonderin' how many of our Yank pals are lyin' there all mangled up."

"Yea. You know twas amazing how quick we got to know those fellows. First week or two I didn't quite know what to make of 'em, but when you really got to know 'em, they was just decent human beings like ourselves. Missus and me, we had a corporal called Joe Ramirez used to come and play so nice with the kids. He fair enjoyed coming in the forge and would tidy up after me or blow the bellows or any other job he could. Fitted in with us all, he did. Showed us pictures of his wife and kids down

in Arizoney or somewhere. Real nice little family he 'ad. God, if anything would happen to 'im, 'twould almost like loosin' me own brother".

"I know jest what you mean, Bill. We had two of 'em used to bring the kids sweets and chewin' gum and cigarettes galore for me and wouldn't take a penny back. When we went out for a drink they'd tell me to keep me money in me pocket and let them use it as it would be no good to them back home. I guess they were jest about the most generous chaps I ever met."

"Well, God help 'em all tonight and for the next few months. All I know is that we would never have got that army across the channel today without all their guns and tanks and stuff like that and their help. Thank God they came when they did".

"That's right, Bill, and I tells you this. I for one aint never gonna hear no bad against America. If a country can send over chaps like those we got to know, then it can't be such a bad place".

"Funny that it took a blasted war to make us two English-speaking countries so close. Please God it stays that way. We don't want no third world war and the way I figure it, the more friends we have around the world, the better for us all".

"Well anyhow, I'll be damn glad when tonight is over. Let's hope the news in the mornin' will be good. I reckon, once they can break through the coast defences, the going will be a bit easier. You can bet your life Jerry will have built some bloody thick gun emplacements on that coastline that will take some breakin' down".

"Well look up there now. There's another wave of our bombers goin' over. Give 'em hell boys! Remember London and Coventry", shouted Bill.

"Reckon our work up here is nearly over. Can't see Jerry able to use planes for bombing us anymore. Excepting for those blasted rockets, he'll be too busy with our fighters over Germany and the battle zones".

"Twill be nice to sleep at 'ome in a bed again and not have to black out those blasted lights every night".

"Yes", replied his comrade, London aint the only place that's gonna get lit up when the lights come on again". And so saying the two Home Guards did an "about turn" and marched slowly back to the little hut beside the White Horse.



After the initial anxiety of those first days after "D" Day (as it was called) Shillingham settled down to its normal routine. Several times the telegraph boy had to deliver the dreaded "Regret to inform you" telegram to announce the death of a beloved father, husband or son, and even in one case, a daughter while she helped man a searchlight unit near London. Even more frequently he had to deliver a "missing in action" or "wounded in action" message. Neighbours would rally to offer sympathy and support, for those who had, as yet, no bad news, and never knew for whom the bell would toll next. There was, of course, no official news of their American friends for the villagers. They would receive sporadic news from hastily written letters from France with an A.P.O. number, which told them nothing. They could only guess that if the letters stopped, their friend had been killed or injured or shipped home in a hospital ship or even taken prisoner.

Rosemary would run to the front door every day to see if the familiar writing of Bart was on one of the letters dropped on the mat by the postman. She was jubilant when they arrived and would go up to her room and read and re-read every syllable. He had been promoted to Lieut-Colonel and was with an Infantry Division in the forward lines. She did not know that his unit found itself facing the Ardennes Forest during the bitter winter of 1944. She did not know he was in the fore-front facing the desperate German counter-offensive in that area. She could not guess that the last letter he ever wrote her was from a town whose name was to hit the headlines; Bastogne. She had the news in a loving letter from his Mother, several weeks, of course, after it had happened. She had just returned from school and the letter was on the old oak chest that stood in the hall. Mrs Carter had placed it there, not dreaming of its contents, so that Rosemary would see it immediately she came in the door. As her eyes followed the lines of the letter, she could not believe what she read. "Oh no, oh no" she sobbed to herself, "it can't be true. This is a horrible nightmare from which I shall awake". She was not aware of anything. The time of day. The place she stood in. There would be nothing now. How could she live in a world without Bart? What was the use of life or victory or defeat? She wanted to die. She must go somewhere to find him. But where? Hardly knowing what she was doing,

she got her bicycle from the garage and started pedalling as if in a trance, away from the post up the lonely road towards the White Horse Hill. Tears blinded her eyes. The winter afternoon was cold but she did not even have her gloves on. She was numb all over. She felt nothing but her broken heart which overwhelmed her. She guided her bike almost by instinct. At last she reached the steep slope up to the Horse itself. She could no longer pedal so she left her bicycle against a farm gate. Something seemed to draw her towards the White Horse. In the gathering twilight, she half walked, half crawled her way up to the big expanse of white chalk which was the head of the Horse. She could go no farther. She turned and looked over the valley. Somewhere down there was the place where Bart had taken her in his arms and told her he loved her. Down there she had known the warmth and joy of his company. Over to her left was the place where they had known the ecstasy of their physical love. She was glad they had had that wonder to share. Memories came crowding in as she recalled each tender moment shared with this man she loved more dearly than life itself. But now it was all over. She would walk alone where they had planned to walk together. The grass was already wet with frost when she threw herself down and sobbed Bart's name over and over. When she could cry no more, she suddenly realised it was dark and she could see Mr Dale's little car wending its way toward the lookout post. She somehow regained the track and started down the hill. She thought of Bart's mother and of how she must be feeling. She would have to write to her. Life would have to go on somehow. As she reached her bike, she noticed how bright the White Horse appeared in the first moonlight. It appeared to her at that moment almost like a link with Bart. It was certainly a link with all that had happened in the past. It was the only thing she could think of that had not changed. The White Horse looked down. It had seen everything.

The words written below are on the front of the original, hand-typed, manuscript. After that is a note from the transcriber who digitised it.

THE WHITE HORSE LOOKED DOWN

THE AUTHOR IS INDEBTED TO MR. AND MRS. EARL HENNIS FOR THE USE
OF THEIR TYPEWRITER AND FOR OTHER KINDNESSES TOO NUMEROUS
TO MENTION.

ALSO TO MRS JOHN YOUNGKIN FOR DUPLICATING WORK.

Approx. 300 words to a page.

Approx. 17,000 words.

For C.W.M. who alone knows the reason

By Barbara June Mann

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ADDENDUM

By Transcriber Mrs Vivien Moss of Shrivenham (June 2026)

During the last 60 years I have been interested in the history of Shrivenham from very early times through to recent years. The memories of the older local people who have spoken of life in the 1920s, the 1930s, and the 1940s have given me particular pleasure because they were living history and added an extra dimension to my knowledge. In 1984 I glanced at "The White Horse Looked Down" and deciding that because there were no facts or figures it was essentially a war time romance, albeit with a superb description of Oxford in the 1940s. However, I feel suitably humbled over 40 years later in 2026 when, digitising this document for the Heritage Centre in Shrivenham, I saw "The White Horse Looked Down" in a totally different light.

The author has given Shrivenham the fictional name of Shillingham, maybe for security reasons. I suspect the subjects of the three love affairs have fictional names too. Certainly, the Headmaster and the Vicar bear unfamiliar names. Shrivenham is easily recognised from the geographical descriptions of its position.

Four days after the attack on America's Pearl Harbor in December 1941 President Roosevelt's lend-lease policy came into operation. This served America's interest in defeating Nazi Germany without entering the war, for the Allies defence was vital to America. The policy enabled the Allies to buy on deferred payment tanks, planes, ammunition and medical supplies. Half of the 50 billion dollars went to the UK. I mention this since the first date we hear of the Americans arriving in Shrivenham is in the Spring of 1942.

The author skilfully points to the difficulties experienced by both the Americans and the suspicious villagers when they first meet but which are soon overcome and friendships established. She identifies the problems in feeding families in war-torn, rationed England. All this is already authenticated by the villagers' living history. Several families offered what hospitality they could to "their Yank". The Americans

were very generous, giving chewing gum and sweets to the children, cigarettes to the adults. They too, had suffered irreparable losses in this war.

Life has a way of throwing unexpected things at one. I experienced this just after I had finished digitising "The White Horse Looked down" with the conversation between the two Home Guards on duty on White Horse Hill on the eve of the D-Day landings. The author has used this powerful conversation, in the Berkshire dialect, between the two Home Guards, Bill the local Blacksmith and Joe the Milkman, towards the end of the document to convey the piece of gold that the article has given us. To relax I switched on the TV to find a re-run of the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings was being shown. That too was so evocative. Showing the amphibious craft landing men with heavy haversacks on the Normandy beaches on 6 June 1944. The tears just streamed down my face at what both the British and American soldiers had done for us.