



J E E P

S H O W

**A
NOVEL**

**A TROUPER
AT THE
BATTLE OF
THE
BULGE**

ROBERT B. O'CONNOR

CRITICAL ACCLAIM

“It seems odd to call a World War II novel ‘delightful,’ but that’s exactly what you get with O’Connor’s mix of history and fiction as battles rage on and enlisted men entertain the troops.”

– *Kirkus (Starred Review)*

“This refreshing take on military fiction masterfully balances the gravity of war with unexpected moments of fun and camaraderie.”

– *BookLife Editor’s Pick*

“Band of Brothers meets Forrest Gump!”

– *Amazon Review*

“Although a work of fiction, *Jeep Show: A Trouper at the Battle of the Bulge* brilliantly draws upon real people, places, and events drawn from the European theatre of World War II.

A fun and fascinating read from start to finish, one that rises to an impressive level of literary excellence.”

– *Midwest Book Review*

“A very entertaining read.”

– *Richard Killblane,*

U.S. Department of the Army Historian (Ret.)

Dedicated to

James T. Hetzer, U.S. Army,
A. Cleveland Harrison, U.S. Army,
Robert E. O'Connor, U.S. Army,
and George F. O'Connor, U.S. Navy

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The following is an excerpt from *Jeep Show – A Trouper at the Battle of the Bulge* by Robert B. O'Connor. We will begin at Chapter 5. Readers should know that despite a rock-solid deferment, thirty-year-old Jim Tanzer enlists in the Army in 1943, a decision that may cost him his marriage, and his life.

Jim goes for paratrooper but gets assigned to the Morale Corps because of his show business background. He is classified Military Occupation Specialty 442, Entertainment Specialist. Private Jim Tanzer is shipped at the European Theater of Operations and assigned to Jeep shows: three enlisted entertainers are driven to the front lines – where the USO could not go - to put on a small variety shows for combat infantry. Private Mickey Ring leads Jim's Jeep show squad.

www.JeepShowBook.com

© 2024 by OKPI, Inc. All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead offense is entirely coincidental. Jeep is a registered trademark of Stellantis. It is used in this novel in a historical and fictional context. This novel is not endorsed by or affiliated with Stellantis in any way.

JEEP SHOW

A TROUPER AT THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

**A
NOVEL**

ROBERT B. O'CONNOR





Morale is to the material as three is to one.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

Numerous reports have been received of “careless” handling of Billiard Tables. Future distribution of Billiard Tables will be made only to Hospitals, Posts, Camps, and Stations of a permanent nature.

**ADDENDUM TO MORALE CORPS GUIDE,
EUROPEAN THEATRE OF OPERATIONS, 1944**

5.

HOSINGEN, LUXEMBOURG, DECEMBER 15, 1944

15 December 1944

For Brig. General Balmer

s/A.E. Baker

Lt. Col., AGD

Asst. Adj Gen.

Jeep Shows number one to six were attached to VIII Corps Morale Corps Officer on 5 December 1944. Every effort was made to book the teams with the combat troops, close to the front. The benefit to morale projected by the hard work of these performers in putting on as many as eleven shows in one day, in places formerly thought unapproachable with entertainment, has made their outstanding performance of duty exceptionally valuable to this command. This office urgently requests additional Jeep Shows.

THE HEADLIGHTS OF the Willys MB Jeep light up the slate barn in front of sixty GIs sitting on raincoats or cardboard. A handful of sergeants and officers are on their feet in the back.

A squad just returning from patrol looks around for cover. All but one of these men and boys will be killed or captured in the next three days.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Private Jim Tanzer says into a T-30 microphone connected to the Jeep's battery. Empty B-ration cans protrude from the headlight sockets. Exhaust streams thick and white in the cold Ardennes night.

"Company K," Jim continues, "3rd Battalion, 110th Regiment, 28th Division, 13th Corps, 15th Army, 12th Army Group..." He pauses for a beat. "Is proud to present the main event of the evening." Two beats. "A wrestling match, for the catchweight championship of the European Theatre of Operations."

Private Tanzer wears a khaki-colored sweatshirt adorned with a hand-drawn bow-tie, olive drab wool trousers and brown service boots. He looks ridiculous. The desired effect.

"In this corner!" Jim unfolds his right arm palm up towards stage right. "Man Mountain McGillicuddy! A-weighting two tons, four ounces." He turns his eyes right. Wes bounds in from stage left and hits his mark, elbows up, chest out. He wears OD wool three-button long johns and socks. He is shirtless, despite the cold. A few chuckles float out of the audience.

"Introducing the title holder!" Jim continues. "The Mosquito Menace! A-weighting four ounces, two tons." Jim unfolds his left arm, palm up, towards stage left. He turns his eyes left. The short man struts in from stage right.

There is an intake of breath in the audience, a widening of eyes, and involuntary smiles of recognition. It's Private Mickey Rooney of Hollywood, California. Mickey's costume is a sleeveless OD undershirt and boxer shorts cinched at the waist by a khaki pistol belt. His auburn hair is piled three inches above the top of his round head. He mugs furiously, balling and unballing his fists. There is whistling, cheering and laughter.

"All right, boys, I want no fair wrestling in this match," Jim

says. Mickey and Wes pivot to face each other. "Biting, gouging, everything goes. And may the worst man win."

Jim claps them both on the back. They crash heads and stagger back three steps. Mickey does a half turn, revealing a large wrench tucked in his pistol belt. Wes pulls it out, places it on the ground stage left. This move allows Mickey to yank a crowbar out of Wes's long johns and chuck it stage right.

"All right, boys, go to your corners and come out farting." Jim backs away, pulling the mic stand with him. Mickey moves downstage and performs a series of rapid-fire knee bends, feet in second position.

The pantomime goes into slow motion. Every move is exaggerated. As the wrestlers lock fingers, Mickey's face becomes a mask of agony. He escapes, pulls Wes down to the ground, and wraps his legs around Wes's chest from behind, cheating out. Wes grimaces in theatrical pain. A few seconds later, Mickey pounds the ground in distress as Wes gnaws on his left shin. Jim pulls Wes away. From his knees, Mickey silently begs for mercy. Wes pulls him down and slowly pantomimes pounding his head on the ground. A kneeling Jim as referee follows the action with approving nods.

The wrestling burlesque—lifted from *Boys Town*, Mickey's 1938 hit with Spencer Tracy—plays out for another minute and a half. Finally, Jim steps in just as Wes launches a slow-motion roundhouse right intended for Mickey. He hits Jim instead, who slowly crumples to the ground, unconscious. Mickey then drops Wes with a haymaker. While bowing to the audience, Mickey is struck by an errant foot as Wes collapses on top of Jim. Mickey reels and collapses on the pile.

Three beats. The performers jump up, acknowledging applause and cheers. They exit stage right.



ON THE SAME day as this performance in Hosingen, Luxembourg, Private Jim Tanzer was featured in Leeland Adair's local interest column in the *Huntingdon Herald Advertiser*. Adair assured readers that Jimmy still had that old spark and Tabasco, reporting that he and his fellow performers in uniform—including former Hollywood movie star Mickey Rooney—were now travelling up and down the front line in Jeeps, entertaining GI audiences of all sizes.

Adair added that the Jeep show soldiers carry out their morale mission despite occasional German snipers and shelling. Embellishment, perhaps, but accurate about the risk of working so close to the front line. He closed by reporting that Jimmy's wife Stella, Stella Sterling onstage, had just finished a month at the famous Stage Door Canteen in New York, and their four-year-old daughter Betty Jo is with Jimmy's parents, Mr. and Mrs. W.T. Tanzer, of 14 Railroad Street.



MICKEY IS BACK, wearing OD wool trousers, garrison cap, *Ike jacket*, trench knife in his pistol belt. *He* lowers the mic. "Hey kids, let's put on a show!" Cheers and applause. "I want to thank you, K Company, for the welcome you gave us when we pulled into Hosingen. You were down on your knees. What a reception. What a tribute. What a crap game!" Laughter.

He continues: "Jeep shows are about as much like those rear-echelon USO shows—" boos—"as K-rations are to dinner at The Brown Derby. Not as hot, not as fancy, but much more portable!" Laughter. "And what does the USO got that we don't, except beautiful girls! Another example of combat-men getting the short end of the stick." More boos.

Mickey turns to Wes, who has strapped on his accordion. "Hey, McGillicuddy. Is we is, or is we ain't, gonna play 'GI Jive' tonight?"

"We is, Mickey!" Wes says, then squints a little as Mickey says "3/4 foxtrot" to him. They've always done it in 4/4-time, F major.

"We is g'wan do it jump blues style tonight," Mickey says. "De *Billboard's* number one jukebox record las' summa. A l'il race music." Some applause.

Wes begins to play. Mickey proceeds to sing "GI Jive" Louis Jordan-style. R&B. Mickey has done it swing-style, the way Johnny Mercer wrote it, in every show until now. Now Mickey sings behind the beat, growls and scats. Wes has played the song several hundred times. He gets there.

The audience nods and smiles. A couple of GIs begin to sway. Behind Mickey, Jim begins an eccentric dance step. The top half of his body is immobile while his legs impel him around the stage: 1-2-3-4 *kick, jump across and* 2-2-3, 1 *kick back-tap. 1-2-3 tap, start over 1-2-3-4...*

Mickey steps back from the mic. He mirrors Jim with steps more antic yet more precise. He returns to the mic and, with a wink at Wes, switches to 4/4-time for the last verse. Wes pretends to drop his accordion. Mickey ends with a few bars of "My Funny Valentine" in Judy Garland's voice. What Mickey Rooney has can't be called talent. He has something else entirely. Or it has him.

He steps back up to the mic. "Thank you. *Dankeschoen*. Gonna be some show in Germany in 1945, won't it, boys?" he says, then grimaces slightly. The combatmen in the audience don't clap. They've seen that show. "For now, though, your Jeep show buddies are glad to be here with K Company." Mickey sweeps an arm towards Jim. "Jimmy Tanzer. He's from so far up in the holler, Eleanor Roosevelt asked the WPA to pipe in daylight." Laughter and a little applause. Mickey gestures towards Wes. "Wes Novak. McGillicuddy himself, our accordionist extraordinaire, a Spoetzl Bohemian boy from Shiner, Texas. Czech and double Czech." A little applause but no laughter. "Give that one a minute, fellas," Mickey says. "Wes was a

regular on WOAI radio before Uncle Sam offered him this European tour. Jimmy and Wes and I...and let me not forget the guy behind the wheel." He points to the Jeep. "Private Pettigrew."

A few audience members turn towards George Washington Pettigrew, MOS 345 (truck driver, light). On loan to Morale Corps from the 514th Quartermaster Truck Regiment (Colored). He is back behind the Jeep's headlights; they can't see him clearly.

"We've been doing shows up and down your lines yesterday and today," Mickey says, "and I can tell you that the 110th Regiment looks in pretty good shape..." A beat. "For the shape you're in." Ragged cheers. "But I'm not looking so good. Before the Army, I was six feet two." Laughter. "I'm five feet three now. But it's all gristle!" Laughter. "Think of me as Van Johnson at half-mast." Laughter.

"By the way, we had a rough sail over from New York. Besides the 106th Infantry Division and all their gear, we had a cargo of yo-yos." A beat. "The ship sank 167 times before we got to Scotland." Laughter. On cue, Jim and Wes each toss a yo-yo into the audience. The combatmen flinch.

"We were in Clervaux this morning. Nice town. Spas. Pretty girls. Cold beer. So, tell me, why would they pick Clervaux for Regiment Command and stick K Company in Hosingen?" Smiles and boos. "Colonel Franklin sends his regards, by the way. He wanted to be with you tonight, but he had to stay in Clervaux and shine his medal." Laughter, applause. "I don't know how you boys feel about it, but I'm a little impatient these days. 'You'll be home for Christmas,' they told me in September. At the speed this Army is moving now, they musta meant Christmas 1949!"

"This soldier here—" Mickey gestures towards Jim—"says he's found a home in the Army." Loud boos. "I guess that's the slick move, Jimmy. We're never gonna live anyplace else!" Jim keeps the smile on his face.

"My buddy Clark Gable sent a telegram to President

Roosevelt saying..." Mickey switches on his perfect Gable impression. "I want a bigger role in the war effort than bond rallies.' Roosevelt cables back—" Mickey now owns the President's voice—"We need you to stay where you *ahh* and do what you're already *do*-ing. So I send the President the same telegram. The next day he cables me, 'Get o-va they-a!'" Mickey staggers back three steps. Laughter.

"Now, you boys know I'd rather fight than tell jokes," Mickey says. "I'm the only soldier who can look Tojo in the eye." Laughter. "I was gonna be a paratrooper. Glory and five dollars more a month. First jump, red light by the door switches on. I'm too scared to move. Jumpmaster says to me, 'Jump, or I'll put my boot up your keister.'"

Jim, from the wings: "Did you jump?"

Mickey shrugs. "Just a little." Heavy laughter. "Thank you, thank you. Now it's time for one of your own Company K boys to entertain *us*."

A thin, dark-haired young man in a shiny uniform steps up next to Mickey. Rooney takes the young man's M1 rifle, quartermaster's tag still attached to the trigger guard. "Let me hold this while you sing." He turns back to the crowd. "Your Private Levy, Jacob Levy, was a cantor in Newark before the war." Mickey examines the rifle's receiver. "Manufactured by Underwood. And his rifle was a typewriter!" Laughter. "We heard him sing at the Repo Depot a few weeks back. Give him a warm welcome." Applause and calls of encouragement. Levy is a replacement. Most of Company K have never heard his name.

Levy sings "Am I American?" in heavily accented English. He heard the song at the American Common pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair, and then sang it in the PS 34 Glee Club. The song is part of the Federal Theatre Project's *Ballad for Americans*, a cantata promoting the *e pluribus unum* dream of a nation composed of different regions, ethnicities, and religions. Wes plays in on the second verse.

Born in Ansbach, Germany, son of a kosher butcher, Private Levy emigrated to the United States in 1936 at age twelve. He is nervous in front of his fellow GIs. But now they know his name. His chances of surviving the war have increased. He responds to the applause with a truncated "Lili Marlene." Wes can play this one in his sleep.



OBERGFREITER SEPP ACKERMAN puts down his field glasses. His assault rifle is slung across his back. "They will be leaving soon," he says in German to Grenadier Willi Hoch. The two artillery spotters are prone on the ground behind a tree at the edge of a patch of woods, almost two hundred yards east of the barn. Hoch is watching the Jeep show through the telescopic sight of his Mauser.

"Bloody Bucket insignia," Hoch says. "As expected, these are of the 28th Division."

"They were at the Hürtgenwald battle," Ackerman says. "State of Pennsylvania guards. I spoke with one we overtook during a counter-attack. He was from Pittsburgh. A bus driver. Died before the stretcher bearers could treat his wounds. His last words were Arlington Heights, Smithfield, East Carson, Yosephine."

"What a show, comrade," Hoch says. "Mickey Rooney! A wrestling pantomime. Dancing. Singing. The only thing missing is cowboys and Indians!"

"You are a child, Willi Hoch."

"I'd like an autograph."

"We are not here for souvenirs, grenadier." He raises his field glasses up to his eyes.

"We'll go to Hollywood after the peace, Sepp. There will be many movies made about this war. They will need actors who speak German."

"Your Milwaukee accent will be a problem."

"The studios won't notice. And I will play an American soldier if they need me to."

"You'll need Yiddish, Willi. Jews run Hollywood."

"The California Jews speak English, Sepp."

"Fucking Amis! It's not enough they come so far to fight us, bring so many machines and so much gasoline. But to drop Mickey Mouse—"

"Mickey Rooney, Sepp."

"On the border of Moselland as easy as kiss my hand, it's really too much."

"Perhaps now would be a good time to surrender."

"Willi!"

"We are surrounded, after all."

"I'll be denouncing you the first chance I get," Sepp says. Then he thinks, *how am I going to keep this boy alive?* He hands Willi a thick slice of dark red blutwurst. "Bread, please. Willi. We'll take a meal now before the tank chocolate makes us too brave to eat." Their *Panzerschokolade* is laced with methamphetamine.

"Schnapps?"

"Self-sacrifice, Willi! Mission before drinking!"

"I'm more of an entertainer than a soldier, Sepp. Have I told you about my family's trapeze act?"

"Many times, Willi. So many times."

"In 1934, we were in Florida. The Depression. No work. Then we secured a European tour with The Von Duke Circus. There was plenty of work in Germany, with the Back to the Reich movement. We stayed and—"

"I know, Willi. I know. We'll wait an hour after the farmyard clears," Sepp says. "Then find the railroad tracks and be far west of this unlucky garrison before General von Manteuffel turns on the lights. Perhaps one drink apiece, now. We'll finish the bottle after Clervaux falls."

"I'm going to smoke."

"I'll have to stab you, grenadier," Sepp chuckles. "Shooting you would give away our position."

"Ecksteins are half cabbage now, anyways."

"Eat, Willi. We have a hard day ahead." In combat since 1939, Sepp considers himself already dead. His wife, his three children, and his dog were consumed by the Hamburg firestorm in the summer of 1943. He *does* want Willi to live.

Crump!

"Holy haystack! A mortar round!"

"American," Sepp says.



THE JEEP HEADLIGHTS go dark. Mickey runs into the door-frame as he, Jim, and Wes scramble back into the barn. The replacements in the audience look around for cover. The combatmen know what an American .81mm sounds like and just listen for next thing. A second round lands, no closer.

Captain John Quinn, K Company's commanding officer, silently counts off twenty and calls out, "As you were, Task Force Rooney." This will be the captain's favorite order of the war.

A combatman informs Levy in a stage whisper, "Practice rounds, range-finding. Against Division orders."

Things will be said in a citizen army, Quinn thinks, giving no outward indication of having heard this. "You know something that far away is harmless," he says. The Jeep's headlights come back on.

Mickey steps to the mic, rubs his forehead, and says, "That's swell, Captain, but some harmless things'll scare you so much, you hurt yourself." He looks back towards the barn. "Trouble's over, Private Tanzer. Wha'cha waiting for?"

Jim walks up and leans down to the mic. "You told me not to come onstage until you got a laugh." That gets a laugh, then applause.

"I'm glad you think Jim is funny," Mickey says, palms open. "Adjusting to Army life hasn't been easy for him. Before he got drafted, he had a great job in a ladies' panties factory. He was pulling down fifty a week." *Ba-dum-chingggg*. Wes pulls a reedy sting out of his accordion.

Jim leans in to the mic. "I've never been so insulted in all my life."

Groucho Marx Rooney: "Well, it's early yet."

Back and forth they go, ending the double act when Mickey says, "Time to move on with the show. Sing page fourteen."

"There is no page fourteen," Jim says.

"Sing page seven twice."

Ba-dum-chingggg.

As Jim backs away stage right, Mickey does his Jimmy Cagney impression: "You dirty rat. Come back and take it, or I'll give it to you through the door." Then he tap dances while singing "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dogface," adding a verse about riding Ava Gardner. New material, but by now Jim doesn't think *where the hell did that come from?* It comes from Mickey Rooney, whatever that is.

Jim re-enters, holding his mess kit against his chest. "Ladies and gentlemen," Mickey says. "Reason not the need, but lend your ears to Jeep Shakespeare, Private Jimmy Tanzer with a soliloquy from *Spamlet*, his soon-to-flop stage show."

Jim steps to the mic:

*KP or not KP, that is the question
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to taste
The powdered eggs of field kitchen breakfast,
Or to take knife against a can of Spam,
And with canned cow, eat it.*

The audience leans in, catching the Army chow slang, but not sure what the story is. Jim continues his *Hamlet* burlesque.

*The heart-burn, and the thousand farts
 That Flesh is heir to? ...
 But that the dread of marching after lunch,
 The mid-afternoon runs, from
 whose burn no briefs return,
 Puzzles the will, and makes us
 rather bear the chow we have,
 Than eat the others we know not of.*

Captain Quinn, two lieutenants, and one corporal have placed this in the Shakespeare canon and are quietly amused. Mickey is pulling his earlobe, the “pick it up” signal.

Jim skips ahead and winds it up in under a minute, not as quickly as most of his audience would have liked. Novak is ready—Jim has tried this Shakespeare burlesque twice before—and begins “SNAFU Jump.” The bouncy Glenn Miller hit references the enlisted men’s motto “Situation Normal, All Fucked Up,” which Miller bowdlerized to “All Fouled Up” for public consumption.

Now Mickey re-appears on stage, sitting on a wooden milking stool and playing a jerry can like it was a snare drum. He plays rhythm and then solos. Then Mickey and Jim sing “I’ll Be Seeing You.” There is a long silence after the song ends. Then quiet applause.

Jim steps up to the mic. “Thank you, Company K. That’s our show. Mickey will sign autographs. Then we’re gonna get some chow and high-tail it back to Bastogne.”



THEY WEAR THEIR overcoats as they fall to their meal in the dining room of the Hotel Schmitz, K Company headquarters. The enemy took Hosingen’s coal with them when they retreated across the German border in August. For this famous GI and

his squad, the field kitchen has produced pork chops, scrambled eggs, mashed potatoes, carrots and peas, brown gravy, fresh bread and butter, vanilla cake with butterscotch frosting, and hot coffee. Captain Quinn sits at the table with them, drinking coffee and smoking his pipe.

George Washington Pettigrew eats his dinner sitting at the steel counter next to the dishwashing sink in the hotel kitchen. "It's easier for me this way. Easier for everyone," he told Mickey, who was concerned. "You don't risk Southern officers. And I can keep an eye on our Jeep in back, see that the spare tire stays put." He has the distributor in the left-hand pocket of his field jacket. He would be happy to drive this show around for the rest of this war. With Mickey, he gets everything the white soldiers get, including this fine meal. He tips gravy off the slab of cake onto his potatoes. He recalls his wife's biscuits and gravy, then her figure, then consciously pulls his thoughts to tonight's drive back to Bastogne. Blackout headlights, the slight risk of German commandos, the greater risk of being fired upon by an American sentry.

The Army makes a habit of ordering *start right damn now for somewhere else*, so Pettigrew sticks a pork chop between two slices of buttered field kitchen bread, wraps his handkerchief around the sandwich, and tucks it in the right-hand pocket of his field jacket, next to his toothbrush and a hand grenade.

Mickey turns to Captain Quinn. "If my agent knew where I was, he'd be scouting for a new leading man. If he ain't already." He smiles. "I've been meaning to ask all day, what's the 110th Regiment doing here? We can't be more than a fifty-cent cab ride from Germany."

"I can only speak for K Company," Quinn says. "After our deployment in the Hurtgen Forest campaign—" *shit show*, he doesn't say—"28th Division was transferred to Eighth Corps, General Middleton. Sent to rest and refit here in the Ardennes. About three weeks ago." Smoke trails out of his mouth. "The 110th covers the German border here in Luxembourg. We

have company-size strong points in the towns along the main north-south road."

"Skyline Drive," Jim says. "We did shows for all of them, last two days."

Because this Jeep show squad might take a wrong turn tonight and be captured, Captain Quinn doesn't add that K Company can't pinch the gaps between the cavalry platoon screen to the north and B Company in Weiler, the next strong point south of Hosingen.

Mickey smiles. "What's keeping the Krauts from capturing the world's best-looking movie star? I got a kid on the way!"

"Been a quiet sector. It's four miles uphill from the Our River at the German border. Pasture, ravines, wooded draws. We patrol down to the river, maybe a little farther. So do the Germans. The men aren't trading Lucky Strikes for schnapps, but we don't run into them and they don't run into us."

"It'll probably stay quiet," Mickey says.

"Of course, if the Germans ever *did* counterattack in strength," Quinn says, "K Company is parked in front of the road to the bridges over Clerf River." *And the Germans have only rolled through the Ardennes twice before in the last thirty years*, he doesn't say. Nor does he mention the motor noise the mics are picking up from beyond the river, and all the activity a local girl told them she saw on the German side. "You'd really see something, if they came this way," Quinn does volunteer. "Hosingen is just an hour-twenty quick time from the German border."

"What kind of something, sir?" Jim says, tilting his mess kit to slide gravy off his cake.

Quinn pauses to recall the fighting at Vossenack. "You'd be shelled until you're half deaf, the whole town would be lit up by fires, then German artillery stops and you'd hear those bone saws." Jim's hand moves of its own accord over his groin. "42s. German machine guns. Then you see the first wave of those grey men advancing, proper spacing, fire discipline, and

behind them black smoke and motor noise, loud clanking. As the ground starts to shake, you'd see the first Panzer top the crest." *Hair-raising*, he doesn't add.

Jim licks his spoon and puts it in his pocket, leaving the cake on his mess kit, then looks around for the door.

Quinn also doesn't add that there are no American tanks in Hosingen. "Now, a field spotter, if he's still alive, will call in fire from Division artillery." Quinn omits that, per Division, no final protection fire line is established in Hosingen. "We'd get it danger close. But the Krauts have probably pushed through the gaps." He clicks his tongue. "And artillery is already pulling back." The entertainers stare at Captain Quinn but say nothing. "K Company will stand and fight. Krauts will probably just pin us down, go around, and have reserves mop us up later. That's what I'd do. Oh, and you'd see horses pulling German guns."

"Horses?" Mickey says, surprised. "Sounds like one of my jockey movies."

"Pack horses. The Germans have generals, but they don't have General Motors or General Electric," Quinn says, happy to get off battle plans. "They eat 'em, too, the horses. The last fellow we captured said he had been nineteen months in Russia, survived on horsemeat plenty of times."

"Sounds like the MGM cafeteria," Mickey says, pulling the face of a disgusted child.

"He thought Army bread was cake." Quinn says. "Thought we were trying to fool him."

"What do *they* eat for bread?" Mickey asks.

"*Schwarzbrot*," Jim says. "Black bread. My mother—"

"Private Jimmy Tanzer, German spy," Mickey says with a smile.

"Sure," Quinn says, also smiling. "Been quiet so far. We mostly fit in replacements these days. Haven't been Pennsylvania National Guard since Hurtgen Forest."

We lost so many men, he doesn't say. And once again, Quinn

sees First Sergeant Heinie Behr sitting up against a dripping pine tree, staring through Salvator D'Angelo. Sal the medic dabs sulfa powder on the grey skin and pink bone that frame a silver dollar-sized section of Behr's blue-grey brain.

"But the Germans are licked," Mickey says, "mostly fending off the Reds in the east. They can't mount an offensive here."

"Let's hope they don't," Quinn says. He doesn't add that if they did, it would take a battalion to defend Hosingen per Division plan, even if he had enough fire. "It's too cloudy for air support these days."

"But it's quiet here?" Mickey says.

"It's good duty so far," Quinn nods. "The men take turns sleeping inside, water to wash with, hot chow." He restrains himself from saying they're not exhausted, cold, and scared to death now that they're out of the forest.

Stepping out into the darkness in front of the hotel, they hear the Jeep motor before they see it—Pettigrew is behind the wheel, looking straight ahead. "Well, Captain Quinn," Mickey salutes, "it's been like a two-week vacation with pay to spend the evening in Ho—"

They all turn towards the medic running up. Sal salutes the captain. "Sir, Culley. Private Culley fractured, compound, left leg." Quinn waits for the rest. "Moving a tube, sir. Fell down steps." Jim recalls struggling with 81mm mortar tubes at Fort Benning. "On him. I need to evacuate Culley, sir, tonight."

The medic's shadow appears, pointing west. Jim looks down and sees his own. A pale grey light has overtaken Hosingen from the east. Dawn already?

"The Germans bounce searchlights off low clouds," Quinn says, "to rattle us or condition us to it." Turning to Sal, he says, "Bring Culley. Fast. With this light, German snipers may move up from the river."

Concerned the Germans are preparing a spoiling attack, Captain Quinn doesn't release a vehicle, but orders the Jeep

show squad to evacuate Culley. Mickey has to be back in Bastogne for an Armed Forces Radio interview the next morning. Jim loses the coin flip with Wes and will catch a ride with the first delivery truck in the morning.

On the road since five a.m., Jim lies down in his clothes and boots on a long horsehair sofa in the cold lobby of the Schmitz. *You fend for yourself in the goddamned Army*, he thinks. *Unless you're Mickey Rooney.*



AN EXPLOSION JARS Jim awake. No. It was a door slamming. After few minutes, he gets up and moves into the radio room, where there's a coffee pot and a typewriter. He will work on *Spamlet*.

Around midnight, Sergeant Gregory Azadian enters the radio room. The top third of his steel helmet has that blue sheen Jim never sees in the rear echelon. Combatmen use their helmets to heat water for coffee or, occasionally, for shaving. "The north OP hears engine noises," he says to Jim. "Observation post. In the water tower. They think the Krauts are playing records again. Course they can't see twenty yards, now the searchlights are off."

"Guess not," Jim says.

"Gonna go listen," Azadian says. "Come with. Carry these." He points to a walkie talkie battery and a full water bag on the floor. "You're goin' to the front of the front line, Private. Million men and machines stacked up behind you. A story to tell the wife after the war." Jim brushes his hand on the left breast pocket of his field jacket, where his wedding ring lives.

Jim and Azadian walk with shaded flashlights northeast, past empty foxholes covered with white bedsheets, to the eastern edge of the town. "Follow directly behind me now, Private. Flare mines just to our right. See the phone wire? Don't kick it."

Jim feels the looming water tower before he can see it. A three-story hexagon, one hundred feet in circumference, bricks around a steel skeleton. The OP is the cupola circling the top of the water tank.

Azadian shakes his head upon finding the metal door open. He and Jim climb the circular metal staircase bolted to the inside of the structure. "Airish up here," says Jim as they step onto the cupola. Two soldiers are there. "Cold," he adds, putting down the water bag.

Azadian points to the soldiers. "Private Corrigan and Corporal Bromberg. Bromberg is mortar squad. Corrigan is a telephone operator. They were at your show last night." He turns to the two soldiers. "Private Tanzer here is visiting the front line."

Patting the wall, Bromberg says, "Good place for it. Brick shithouse."

Then silence as Azadian listens out into the darkness. "Motorcycle. With these hills, can't tell just where," he says. "I'm gonna bring the lieutenant up. Keep lookin' for lights." He turns to Jim and says, "Wait here," then moves down the stairs before Jim can ask to go with him.

After a period of silence, Jim says, "We're a long way from home, aren't we?"

"Yes, sir," Corrigan says.

"I got drafted," Bromberg says without putting down his binoculars. "In the Division since Louisiana maneuvers, '42. I know Azadian since he was a private. He's a good man. This one—" he gestures towards Corrigan — "green as grass, a replacement. Enlisted. You could be his uncle. What swell idea put you in this cold and dark place, Private Tanzer?"

When Jim hesitates, Corrigan says, "Getting here was a cinch for me. The papers, the radio, my friends, everybody in Waterbury felt the same way about the war: gung-ho, 'Remember Pearl Harbor,' fighting back, the big adventure. It was like a

grand parade passing down my street. I just stepped off my porch, fell in, signed my name. Been in K Company two weeks."

"Turned himself into a grown-up," Bromberg says. "Just like that." He points to Jim. "But you were already grown-up."

Jim begins his practiced explanation. "The world has become a dangerous place for free peoples. I've got a daughter. I wanted to do my—"

"Jesus, Joseph and Mary!" Bromberg says. He puts down the field glasses, picks up the field phone receiver. "HQ, this is first platoon O-P. There are pinpoints of light all along the German side. Either they're shootin' off fireworks or we're about to be shelled."

"First Platoon OP, repeat message."

"We see pinpoints of light," Corporal Bromberg says, "all along the—DOWN!" A freight train noise rumbles up the musical scale towards them, horribly loud. The train flies over the water tower and back down the scale. There's a shocking crack. The water jumps inside the massive steel tank. Jim hears whizzing and clanks as shrapnel hits the tower. The encore rains down on the roof, a shower of dirt clods, stones, broken wood, blasted masonry, half a cat, and a steering wheel. Then the faint tinkling of broken glass. Then more freight trains coming down the tracks. With all his heart, Jim wants to be flat and small.

"Blessed be the Lord my shepherd." It's Corrigan. "My goodness, my fortress, my high tower, my deliverer." Bromberg looks at his watch, whispers "fuck-fuck-fuck" in quarter notes, and holds a whole note, *fuuuuck*, after each explosion.

German artillery walks like a giant up and down Hosingen, each step a frightful blast. There is relief for Jim when it moves away, choking dread and fist-clenching resentment when it returns. *They're trying to kill me!* he thinks. *They don't even know me! My daughter—*

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower," Corrigan continues.

"I lift up my eyes to it, my righteous runneth into it, my rock and salvation."

Jim can't hear that, can't hear anything, but does feel the basso vibrations of the water tank after every blast. A warmth spreads over his abdomen. His heart sinks. *Betty Jo, darling girl, Mutti. Stella. This is a terrible mistake.* He reaches down to touch the wound.

THE PARTHENON

THE VOICE OF MARSHALL COLLEGE SINCE 1898

VOLUME 19, ISSUE 11 / NOVEMBER 3, 1933

NEW STUDENT UNION FUNDING

The majority of the student body has voted to approve a fifty-percent increase in the enrollment fee in order to help pay for the erection of the new Student Union building.

MOO-MOOS TO STAGE ROBOT HAMLET, ORIGINAL PLAY

On November 11 at 7 p.m., the Moo-Moo Chapter of Fi Bater Capper will present their annual stage show at the Hatfield Auditorium. This year it is a play they have written. *Robot Hamlet* is based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the Drama Society's recent triumph, and *Rossum's Universal Robots*, by Czech writer Karel Čapek.

This newspaper has learned that *Robot Hamlet* will dramatize the inevitable conflict between labor and capital in 20th Century industrial America. The all-male cast features freshman James Tanzer of Huntingdon as Hamlet 11-2, and senior Albert Jenkins of Weirton as The Stage Manager. The director is junior Nathaniel Norris of New Berlin, Pennsylvania.

DEAN SHAWKEY WARNS AGAINST ON-CAMPUS DRINKING

Dean of Students Nathaniel Shawkey has reiterated the prohibition of alcohol on campus. He advised that any Buffaloes or Lady Buffaloes found in violation of this edict shall be subject to stringent disciplinary measures. This paper has previously reported on the flood of moonshine in Cabell County caused by ten-cent corn.

6 .

HOSINGEN, LUXEMBOURG, DECEMBER 16, 1944

Every commanding officer knows that boredom can be more dangerous than the Germans. Homesickness, boredom, AWOL, venereal disease, they're birds of a feather, they go together.

MORALE CORPS GUIDE, EUROPEAN
THEATRE OF OPERATIONS, 1944

JIM'S JACKET IS wet but not torn, no entry site, no pain. What happened? Then the urine begins to turn cold against his belly.

A thick cloud of smoke and cordite drifts in. Jim's nose is running and a tear has made its way down his face. His mouth tastes like an ashtray. New horrors fly overhead with a frightful *hee-woo-hee*. "Screaming Meemies," Bromberg says. "Rockets. Welcome to combat, Tanzer. You hear a lot more than you see."

"MOVE DOWN FROM HERE!" Azadian has returned to the OP. He jerks his thumb towards the heavy wooden door to the stairs, now blown open. "They could drop one on the roof. We'll take turns up here observing. Me first."

Jim is on his feet and moving. Guided by the beam of Bromberg's flashlight behind him, he circles down the narrow metal stairs. He cannot move as fast as he wants to.

Only his grip on the metal railing keeps him from falling when the stairs jump against his boots as a shell lands. The water tank turns white as light shoots through the barred windows. *Flash bulbs*, Jim thinks. *Like standing next to Mickey in front of the press pool*. His heart pounds in his ears, but he can hear, "Mother Bromberg don't want her boy in this, no she don't."

Jim's field jacket lights up yellow-orange. He stops at the window. Flames illuminate grey-black smoke boiling out of several buildings. A wall folds in on itself. "Something gonna fly through that window, cleave your skull" comes from behind. Then a hard push forces Jim to jump the last three steps. He drops onto the concrete floor and crawls under the steel staircase. Bromberg wedges in, then Corrigan. Tires explode in the distance, cartoon pops. "Some show!" Jim hears. He reaches down and touches the scabbard of his bayonet. *I can't stab a man*, he thinks. Then, *where is my rifle?*

"This town ain't healthy no more," Bromberg says. Water leaking through small holes in the tank is covering the floor. The fronts of their uniforms are soaked.

"Gum?" Bromberg holds a pack of Wrigley's Spearmint six inches in front of Jim's nose. "Gets the taste out of your mouth. Take a coupla sticks." After the next shell lands, Jim pushes the gum in his mouth and thank-you's the pack back to Bromberg, who passes it to Corrigan.

By 0700 hours, no shell has landed for ten minutes. They sit out of the water on the lower steps. "Might as well be dancing, Showbiz, you're shaking so much," Bromberg says.

"Wet and cold," Jim says, stuffing his hands in the pockets of his jacket.

"First time is the worst," Bromberg says. "Always lousy to be shelled, but the first time is the worst."

Sergeant Azadian appears above them on the stairs. "Gonna check on the mortar squads." He points towards the

staircase. "Bromberg, go up. Full light in an hour. Call in targets as soon as you make them. Channel 50 for now. We'll run new phone lines."

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Hold this position until further orders," Azadian says. "No firing unless you hear Krauts below you."

"They'll be the ones speaking German," Bromberg says to Jim. He recognizes a punchline, but is unable to smile.

"Drop grenades down the stairs before they can shoot up through the floor," Azadian says. He offers a hand grenade to Jim. "You probably didn't bring one with you." It feels heavy in Jim's hand. He eyeballs the pin and spoon, then gingerly puts the grenade into his field jacket pocket.

"You're ready now, Showbiz," Bromberg says, looking at Jim and smiling. "He'll kill 'em with his bare hands, Sarge, comes to that."

Jim looks down at his boots, but looks up when Azadian says, "I'll take Private Tanzer with me. Give him your mess kits and canteens, and he'll bring back hot chow and coffee." Jim's shoulders drop.

Bromberg notices. "You're better off here than standing next to an officer when the shooting starts. I—" He stops at a hard look from Sergeant Azadian.



"TAKE THE WATCH a minute, Jim," Corrigan says. He hands Jim the binoculars and crouches below the wall to light a cigarette. Jim edges out of the faint yellow match light.

To look like he knows what he's doing, Jim scans the one hundred eighty degrees in front of the water tower. Over and back. It's coming on full light. Over and back. The ground fog is lifting. On the sixth over, he stops on a handful of vibrating squiggles. They become a half a dozen small white ghosts. He

must be dreaming. More ghosts appear behind them. "What's that yonder, fellas?"

"POPPA 10, THIS IS MIKE 3!" Bromberg shouts into the walkie-talkie. He gets an answer, lowers his voice. "Company-size formation, cresting the hill, moving west through the beet field half left of OP Water Tower. Range estimate five hundred yards. Adjust fire from Whiskey Poppa. Map 22 Whiskey Poppa Bear. Grid 15342367. Over." He turns to Jim and Corrigan, "One round. HE...high explosive, Jim. Look for fall of shot."

Jim crouches down as low as possible while still being able to see out, his sweaty left hand on the top of the wall, his sweaty right hand on the pineapple body of the grenade in his pocket. He doesn't think he can move an inch, let alone pull the pin and drop it down the stairs. He notices the Germans' winter white uniforms as they begin to move at quick time, silently becoming the size of flies on a ceiling, three groups, each twenty wide, five deep.

A ripping sound starts up in the distance. The Germans bend forward noticeably. "Kraut machine guns. Firing over their heads," Bromberg says. "At our boys. We got a box seat to an infantry assault without armor, thank you Jesus, against a defended position. Krauts must think we were killed by their artillery or we ran."

Over his heartbeats, Jim hears a *ponnkk*. Half a minute later a brown and white geyser erupts in front of the middle German formation, followed by a *pang*. Two Germans drop like abandoned marionettes. A third falls to his knees. The soldiers behind step around them, continue forward.

"This is crazy," Jim says. "What are they doing?"

Bromberg calls in again, then says, "Rifles still at high port. They keep advancing towards our defensive line, ordered not to fire until they can pick out a target. That's discipline." He turns to Jim. "Take some deep breaths, Showbiz. You'll feel better."

Jim hears firecracker pops and a rhythmic chugging. One of the Germans is yanked back, as if by a rope. "Those wavy white lines," Jim says.

"You seen tracer bullets in basic, Showbiz," Bromberg says. "That's our machine guns."

Jim hears more *ponnkks*. "Look how those bastards keep their square," Bromberg says. "Radio City Rockettes couldn't be tighter. Our fire is well sighted, now we—*ooh*." A geyser erupts within the left German formation. Jim hears a faint scream.

"Those guys are getting butchered," Corrigan says.

Butchered. Jim thinks back to Uncle Clete's huge pink and grey pig, big brown eyes focused on corn cobs on the ground. *WHOPP!* The axe poll smashes into its skull. The scream and upwards jerk, snot and blood shotgunned onto his uncle's pants. The red mist in the air, the iron tang. Twelve-year-old Jimmy Tanzer dropping the blood bucket and running for his aunt's kitchen.

"Waste of good infantry, what that is," Bromberg says. Turning to Jim, he continues, "But we don't want them shooting at us through the floor. Do we, Showbiz?" Jim just shakes his head.

He jumps at a voice behind him. Sergeant Azadian is back. "They won't reach a hundred yards from our first defense gun." Jim takes his first deep breath in ten minutes.

"Sarge." Bromberg hands Azadian the binoculars. "Long column north of town. Armor, vehicles, horses, infantry. Fucking bicycles!"

Azadian scans north for thirty seconds, picks up the walkie-talkie. "This is water tower OP. Repeat, tower OP." A pause. "Enemy armor and infantry bypassing Hosingen to the north. Estimate range three thousand yards. Marching pace. ...No sir. ...Yes sir." He turns and says, "Out of mortar range. Captain Quinn will call in artillery. Let's hope our guns are still in place."

Jim looks back east to see one German stop, push his helmet down on his head, raise his rifle, and begin to fire while

stepping backwards. The whole formation follows suit. The little men work their bolt actions six times before turning and trotting back down the hill, leaving several white and red heaps on the ground. One heap is trying to crawl.

"We whipped them!" Jim says, wide-eyed, shivering with relief and cold.

"They'll be back," Azadian replies. Bromberg nods to Jim. "Entertainment soldier gonna earn a combat infantry badge before this day is done."



"SMELLS LIKE GASOLINE and toast," Jim says. He and Sergeant Azadian are moving from the water tower to the company headquarters, skirting around smoldering piles of rubble. There's a haystack-size bonfire in the middle of the road.

"Better to burn our Christmas packages than let the enemy get them."

"Should we leave the fruitcake as a trap?"

Azadian looks square at Jim and smiles. "That's a good one, Private. I see why you do shows."

"When will we leave?" Jim says. "And why..." He looks further down the road, sees two deuce-and-a-half trucks, a tractor, a road grader, and a Jeep facing each other in a circle. Inside the circle are barbed wire coils, shovels, tools, a typewriter, stretchers, rolls of bandages and gauze, two field ovens, several dozen C-ration cans, three one-hundred-pound sacks of flour, and a dozen or so Jerry cans. Anti-tank mines are strung under the vehicles and around the pile. "We're gonna blow up all that?" Jim says, shaking his head.

"Supplies and equipment we can't evacuate have to be destroyed, to prevent their capture by the Germans," Azadian answers. "Plenty more where that came from."

Jim and Azadian enter the Hotel Schmitz. Captain Quinn

is standing in the lobby with Private Levy, the cantor. Levy's uniform is covered with light grey powder. His right hand is wrapped in gauze. After a couple of seconds Jim remembers to salute. Quinn returns the salute and says, "Private Tanzer, your orders are to escort Private Levy running a message to Battalion headquarters in Clervaux, Colonel Franklin. I want him—" Quinn points to Levy—"out of here. Gestapo will be right behind German infantry if we get overrun. We can't spare two riflemen. And you give the Germans someone else to aim at." He smiles.

Missing the joke, Jim says, "I'm an entertainment specialist."

Quinn ignores that. "If one of you is hit, the other render what aid you can, but then proceed to Clervaux alone with the message. You will do what needs to be done to carry out the mission. Understood?"

Levy nods. "Yah, sir." Jim simply stares at Quinn.

"We're surrounded. You're safer on foot. You should cover the nine miles in about three hours, but take to the woods if you need to." Quinn turns to Jim. "Sergeant Azadian tells me you were an actor in civilian life."

"More of a song and dance man, really."

Captain Quinn has already turned to an orderly approaching with a black wool cassock. "Here's a priest costume. Pull the hood over your helmet. The disguise may buy you time to use your weapon."

"Song and dance man."

"Levy, you wear this," Quinn says, and gives him a grey wool monk's cowl and a rope belt.

"Jesuit," Levy says. "My father must never know." He smiles, as does Quinn. Levy has become his favorite replacement.

"Enemy troops are converging on the bridges over the Clerf river—it's here," Quinn says, holding a map up to his chest, indicating with a finger. At the top of the map, above a maroon smear of blood, is the word *Ardennenkarte*.

"Sergeant Azadian took this off a wounded German officer." Jim hears shouts in the distance and a burst of small arms fire. Quinn and Levy seem not to notice. "There are Krauts in American uniforms behind us messing with street signs, so use the map. I don't want to see you back here, unless you arrive in front of a column of Shermans."

"No, sir," Levy says. Jim manages a nod.

Quinn gives directions, tracking the journey on the map with his finger. Jim can't remember anything from map training. He can't focus, hears only fragments: "324...Kreuzgasse... An Der Trieht...Weschbichsbaach stream...Neidhausen." He sees that Levy is getting it. "...then 226 to 18 into Clervaux." Quinn finishes and hands the map to Levy. "The map is the message, private. Get it to Colonel Franklin. Stay away from civilians on the roads."

"Yah, sir," Levy says. Jim rubs his eyes.

"Call out to the sentries when you approach Clervaux. You want to be challenged, not shot. Yell 'Snap Crackle Pop,' or 'Quick, Henry! The Flit!' The Germans know Dixie and the Pledge of Allegiance."

"Yah, sir," Levy replies. "Pop Snapple Crap."

Quinn squints at Levy, then turns to Jim. "You do the talking. Sentries hear Levy's accent, they'll shoot you both for German spies."

"Sir, what if the Germans are already in Clervaux when we get there?" Jim asks.

"Bounce north and head for the Bastogne Road at Antoniushaff. It's on the map." He pauses, looks at Levy, and says, "Circumcised?"

There's a beat while Levy catches on. "Yah, sir."

"Me too," Jim says, not wanting to be left out of any calculations.

Quinn extends his right hand to Levy, palm up. "Your dog tags, Private." Levy hesitates, then pulls off his tags, drops them

in the captain's hand. Quinn brings the tags up to his eyes. "Thought so. Great big H for Hebrew. Private Levy, you might look like some Nazi's idea of a Jew." *No question about that*, Jim thinks. "Don't want your tags to confirm it." He puts them in his pocket and turns to Jim. "Give him your tags, Private Tanzer. Take them back in Clervaux." Quinn turns back to Levy. "When you get new tags, tell 'em you're a Quaker. Your father need never know."

"Yah, sir."

Jim wants to mention his silver chain, decides it can wait.

"Memorize who you are now," Quinn says. "If you both are captured, you—" he points to Levy—"are Private Tanzer." He points to Jim. "You are somebody else. You lost your tags at a bathhouse. You're an actor. Make up a character to be." There's an explosion in the middle distance. "Wait in the lobby for dark. An engineer will walk you through our mines."



"LAST YEAR I played George Gibbs in *Our Town*, my high school play," Levy says to Jim. "My accent didn't go over too vell then either." Levy's German accent reminds Jim of his mother. He and Levy are alone in the lobby, ersatz priest and phony monk facing each other from either end of the horsehair sofa Jim slept on the night before. They can hear sporadic small arms fire in the distance.

"I thought, during your show last night," Levy says, "did you perform in zah Catskills? I vorked at Zah Concorde in zah summer of 1943."

"My...wife and I danced there a couple of times when we were working at Stiers. We weren't married then."

"How did you end up there?"

"We auditioned for a big talent booker in New York, Sam Gold. You know him?"

"No," Levy says. "I'm a *kosher metser*—a butcher." He gives a small laugh. "I don't know every Jew in New York."

"He got us jobs at Stiers. Social staff. We ate with the guests. I know about kosher," Jim continues.

"There was a joke at zah Concord," Levy says. "An iceman makes a delivery to one of zah gentile resorts. He sees his father, an Orthodox rabbi, by zah pool, necking with a beautiful blonde shiksa. 'Papa,' he cries out, 'you, of all people?' Zah old man looks up and says, 'Yes, my son, but I don't eat here!'"

"Hey! You can sing *and* tell jokes, Levy. We could use you in Morale Corps."

"Thank you. What did you do at Stiers, you and your wife?"

"Social staff. We did a Baby Astaires act. Stella also sang and I ended up producing the nightly shows. We had name talent for the Saturday night show."

"Saturday was Able Fur Night at zah Concord," Levy says, referring to the famous rent-a-fur establishment in New York's Garment District.

"I heard that line. We had Fanny Brice: 'I'm a bad woman, but I'm demm good company.' Hey! She closed the show with 'My Yiddishe Mama.' Had half the audience weeping."

Small arms fire erupts again, then quiets. "What we got this morning lays over anything I saw in live fire training," Jim says. "I wanted to crawl up in my helmet."

"My first combat," Levy says, "I was just off watch, sleeping in zah cellar. Zah house was hit. I thought I might suffocate. Took us half an hour to dig out, get to our positions."

"I about pissed myself, I was so scared."

Levy looks up at the ceiling in silence, then says, "Our sergeant told me he did zat zah first time he heard an .88 in Normandy. After zah war, he's going to shoot zah gemeyn mamzer who invented that gun."

"Were you afraid? When the fighting began this morning?"

"Shaking in my boots. Until I got busy. Sarge knew what we needed to do."

"You kill any Germans?"

"I don't know," Levy says. "I could barely see them. I fired a lot of clips." He lifts up his cowl and pulls a K-ration can of Spam out of the hip pocket of his field jacket. "Trade?"

Two crackers and a thumb-sized can opener spill on to the floor when Jim stands as Captain Quinn re-enters the lobby. Quinn returns Levy's salute. "Turns out the German officer we took the map off of is going to live. Levy, I need to keep you here to help me interrogate him. I have to send you alone, Tanzer. Sorry." The last thing a soldier in a combat zone wants to be is alone. "Here." Quinn hands Jim the map. "Good luck. And here's my letter to Private Skoda's parents. I may not be able to mail it." By now Quinn knows he will not be able to mail this letter of condolence. "And one for me, please, since you're getting out of Dodge." A letter to his wife.

Quinn has already reported the details of the map by radio to battalion, and has been told that similar maps have been captured. He suspects that his copy will be superfluous, but his orders are to get it to Colonel Franklin.

"Yes, sir."

"We found a bicycle," Quinn says. "Save you a couple of hours. Walk it up hills and around blind curves, so you don't ride into an ambush."

"Yes, sir," Jim says, unaware his head is shaking slightly, side to side.

"First get the map to Colonel Franklin in Clervaux. Then take my letters to the Regiment post office. If the clerks are already in the fight, mail them at your next stop."



"OKAY, PRIVATE TANZER you say," from a GI two hours later, holding the map in one hand and pointing a rifle at Jim with the other. The GI is Johnny Kucharski, before the draft a soda jerk at the West Philadelphia Rexall's, now mess cook in the 110th Regimental Headquarters Company. Kucharski is deeply unhappy to be on sentry duty east of Clervaux during what rumor and his own ears tell him is an escalating emergency. He is also slightly drunk. "Who don't know the code word, don't have no dog tags, don't know Danny Litwiler plays for the Phillies, nor 'wiz' means 'wiz onions.'"

"I know Rip Sewell and Paul Waner," Jim says.

"Nobody cares about them Pirates."

"Leo Durocher, Cookie—"

"Bums! *Hände hoch!* Keep your hands high," Kucharski says. "Has this German map, dressed like the pope, face covered in blood, shaking like a leaf, no cigarettes. Tell us your story again and better this time, so we don't turn you and your map over to the MPs. Them miserable pricks," he says under his breath.

"I'm just cold," Jim says, untruthfully.

"Krauts don't chew gum, so I'll give you another chance. Here, this'll help the shakes." He hands Jim his canteen. Jim spits his played-out gum onto the ground, takes a pull. Warm coffee and brandy. Delicious.

"Okay Holy Father, save some a dat for Christmas. Now start singing."

"What I said. I'm Private James Tanzer, Morale Corps battalion 6187. I'm from Huntingdon, West Virginia. I'm married to Stella Tanzer...uh, Sterling."

"Make up your mind. Tanzer or Sterling?"

"I've been doing Jeep shows here. Me and two other fellers, Mickey Rooney and—"

"That goldbrick came through last night. Why don't I just call him and check on you."

"Take it easy, Danny," the other sentry says. "This guy's no Kraut."

"We did Jeep shows on Thursday and Friday, here," Jim says. "Hosingen, Weilum, Munshausen. Other places I can't remember." He can hear artillery rounds landing not far to the east.

"Let us know when you do remember, Father."

"I was stuck in Hosingen yesterday. Germans opened up on us before dawn. Captain Quinn ordered me to evacuate with Levy—the runner—and take the German map to Regiment."

"Where is this Levy?" Kucharski points to the map. "Is this his blood? Did you murder Levy, you Nazi bastard?"

"Danny," the other sentry says, lowering his rifle.

"Levy was called back. He has fluent German. My orders are to take the map to Colonel Franklin in Clervaux. You take it. That's better."

"Christ, Danny. Let up," the other sentry says. He looks at Jim. "We're all jumpy. Looks like the whole division is falling back. What's going on up there? They don't tell us nothin'."



"HOW WERE YOU wounded?" The medic shakes sulpha powder on the cut on Jim's cheek and tapes on a dressing. Jim's eyes are twelve inches from the purple stump where the medic's right ear used to be. "Courtesy of a German sniper at Mortain," the medic says, brushing the stump lightly. "Won't get me sent home, but now I can pretend I don't hear chickenshit orders."

Remember that one, Jim thinks. He is sitting up in an armchair in the lobby of the Hotel Claravallis, Regimental HQ. Colonel Franklin and a G-2 have the German map spread out on the front desk. Officers and soldiers are carrying papers out the back.

"I went off the road in the dark, hit a tree just before the turn up to Clervaux," Jim says. "Wrecked my bicycle. I was on

a bicycle." He met only civilians moving west on the roads. An owl's hoot had spooked him into pedaling too fast.

"You are combat wounded, Private. Purple Heart. If things calm down here, talk to the G-1 about putting you in," the medic says, pointing to a personnel officer moving briskly through the lobby.

"I will."

"Okay, Private. Good as new. Get that dressing changed when it gets wet."



"I DIDN'T EXPECT to be danger close," Willie says to Sepp. "I'm covered in plaster dust." Shells are falling close enough to shake the house, even though Sepp hasn't called in the coordinates for what is obviously an American command post in the hotel down the street. Just after 4 a.m. that morning, the two Volksgrenadiers pried open the back door of the recently abandoned Rodesch Pharmacie Clervaux, by chance installing themselves with a direct line of sight to the 110th Regimental Headquarters.

Sepp takes a crouching look out the window by the front door. "The Amis are sniping from the ramparts of the castle," he says. "It reminds me of the Smolensk battle, but without Ivans, thank God. And they are evacuating casualties to the railroad station. A priest just went in to the headquarters. Must be to give last rites to a dying man."

Willie goes to the top floor family apartment. He finds some clothing and a jar of pear preserves. He silently puts the trousers and a sweater on under his uniform. He may need to pass for a civilian. He knows Sepp won't do this, nor want to be told that he has.

Willi scoops half the preserves into his mouth with his fingers. The rest is for Sepp. "To sweeten your day, comrade," Willi

says, coming down the stairs with the best smile he can manage. Sepp grunts in appreciation, puts the jar in a pocket of his field blouse, and bends down to turn on their FuG 5 radio. He doesn't miss Willi's newly padded silhouette, but makes no comment. The boy is only eighteen. He must survive.

"Be quick," Willi says, unnecessarily, for Sepp knows from his Russian service that radio operators can be triangulated and destroyed. "Ask why we are still exposed. The 77th was supposed to be here eight hours ago."

Sepp reaches their artillery battery. "Give me fall of shot, won't you?" the fire control officer says from somewhere east of Clervaux. They both know the problems with Russian guns and German charges.

"If only we could, Hauptmann," Sepp answers. "The Amis are moving house to house. We have to stay ahead of them."

"Give me what you can now!" the officer shouts.

Sepp answers, "Team leader #2, target azimuth" as Willi stamps his hobnail boots loudly. "We must..." Sepp turns the radio to another frequency, and then off. "Right, sure. That would be calling down fire on our own heads. Our mission as forward spotters is more important than shelling American officers."

Willi nods. "As you say, comrade."

"I'll call in this position after we fall back," Sepp says. "No need to target the railroad station aid center. The Amis' resistance will only be weakened by caring for so many wounded." He recalls the most shocking thing he has witnessed in combat. "When the Ivans stopped for wounded comrades, their commissars shot them in the back."

Willi nods. Sepp has recalled this many times. "We might be wounded here ourselves and will appreciate an American aid station," Willi says. "Although I'd prefer to be captured in one piece."

"Remind me to denounce you when we get back to Paris."



COLONEL FRANKLIN WALKS over to Jim. "It's just what Captain Quinn said, Private." He points to the map, which confirms what he's already been told. "The Germans think they're going all the way to the Meuse."

"I'm Morale Corps, sir, not Infantry."

"They'll never pull it off," Franklin says. "But they'll be hard on us before they're stopped. Runner job done, Private. I'll keep the map. You are now attached to this Headquarters Company. Someone will get you hot chow and take you to the aid station. You'll report in there."

Jim notices the now familiar and still dreadful sound of shelling has increased in volume.

THE FEDERAL THEATRE TROUPE

CAMP ROOSEVELT, VIRGINIA

APRIL 3, 1935

JIM TANZER STANDS with the rest of the Civilian Conservation Corps boys as the Blue-Sky Buckaroos play the national anthem. Then the Buckaroos, Muncie, Indiana's answer to the Light Crust Doughboys, play "Cowboy Polka" and "Tiger Rag." The lead singer does a few lasso tricks. He's no Gene Autry, but the campers don't mind. They're starved for entertainment.

The Federal Theatre Troupe's next act is twenty-eight-year-old Pearl Olson, the Teenage Swedish Sweetheart. She will sing "Dear Old Stockholm" and "Farmers Waltz." The name on her Lithuanian birth certificate is Gertroda Lipšicas. Gertroda is twenty-eight. Her jet-black ringlets are hidden under a braided blonde wig. Her breasts push urgently against the bodice of her blue gingham frock, pulling attention from her Slavic features. Gertroda sings on the

beat, keeping an eye on the notes, but Jim can tell she's pushing her voice and is a little sharp.

He manages to pull his eyes off the Swedish Sweetheart and look around to see how the audience is reacting. They are transfixed, smiling, almost in pain. Gertruda could be singing the Brooklyn phonebook, Jim realizes; they wouldn't care. Plentiful food, fresh air, hard work, and testosterone have them primed for her act. Jim recalls Gracie Allen. Pretty girl singers go over.

Next come the Deflation, Cotton Patch, and Soil Conservation scenes from *Triple-A Plowed Under*, the Living Newspaper show. Earlier this same day, Senator Robert Reynolds of North Carolina accused the Federal Theatre Project of spreading the cardinal keystone of Communism—free love and racial equality—at the expense of God-fearing, home-loving American taxpayers.

After the Living Newspaper come a two-man balance act, then an Irish tenor who finishes with “Danny Boy.” Jim sees the campers, most of them younger than him, rubbing their eyes. Sentimental goes over.

Next is a Vaudevillian, Owen O'Dowd. He has a declamation act. This Federal Theatre show is the first non-janitorial work O'Dowd has had since 1930. It's been hungry times for him, professionally and literally. Earlier in the evening, the old man had astonished Jim and several other campers with the quantity of supper he ate and the speed with which he ate it, all the while regaling the table with fabulous yarns from Vaudeville's golden age. It was O'Dowd's best performance of the night.

The Vaudevillian disguises several burps during “The Charge of the Light Brigade:” “Into the jaws of Death, Into the mouth of Hell!” He continues with “Mother o' Mine” and “Gunga Din,” then finishes with a mélange of Shakespeare soliloquies. There is a too-long silence, then respectful applause. The old

man receives it with a bow and times his exit perfectly. Vaudeville is a back number, Jim thinks.

Another venerable act is next, a one-man baseball pantomime by Casimir Modjeska, stage name Eephus Jones. Every CCC boy knows baseball, plays baseball, loves baseball. Baseball routines go over, Jim notes.

The Swedish Sweetheart returns as an Indian squaw. Buckskin vest, no blouse, fringed skirt hemmed a foot and a half above the top of her cowboy boots. The CCC boys sit up stiffly. She wants to be a cowboy's sweetheart, she sings; she wants to learn to rope and ride. The Irish tenor, in a cowboy hat and chaps, joins her. *Whoo-oooh-oooh-doo-di-di*, they yodel through "Cattle Call." The National Barn Dance has come to the Civilian Conservation Corps, courtesy of the Works Projects Administration. The boys remain seated and clap for a solid minute.

The cast finishes with "Happy Days Are Here Again," sung hand in hand, a nod to their President, Franklin Roosevelt, who has conjured up, from airy nothing, paying work for the entertainers *and* the CCC boys.

The campers are in their bunks by evening colors. Jim ignores the rustling sheets and snoring after lights out. The main idea has hit him. Never mind medicine. Never mind heading back to college with help from his family and the CCC wages he's saving. He's going to be in show business. He's *got* to be in show business.

AFTERWORD

Thank you for reading a sample from *Jeep Show – A Trouper at the Battle of the Bulge*. The book is available in printed, eBook, and audiobook formats at **Amazon** and at **BookShop.org**. Or order from your local bookseller.

I will donate \$1 per copy of *Jeep Show* sold to Shields & Stripes, a non-profit supporting mental health and wellness for veterans and first responders.

You can find more information about *Jeep Show* and contact me at **www.JeepShowBook.com**.

Your author,
– Robert B. O'Connor

