

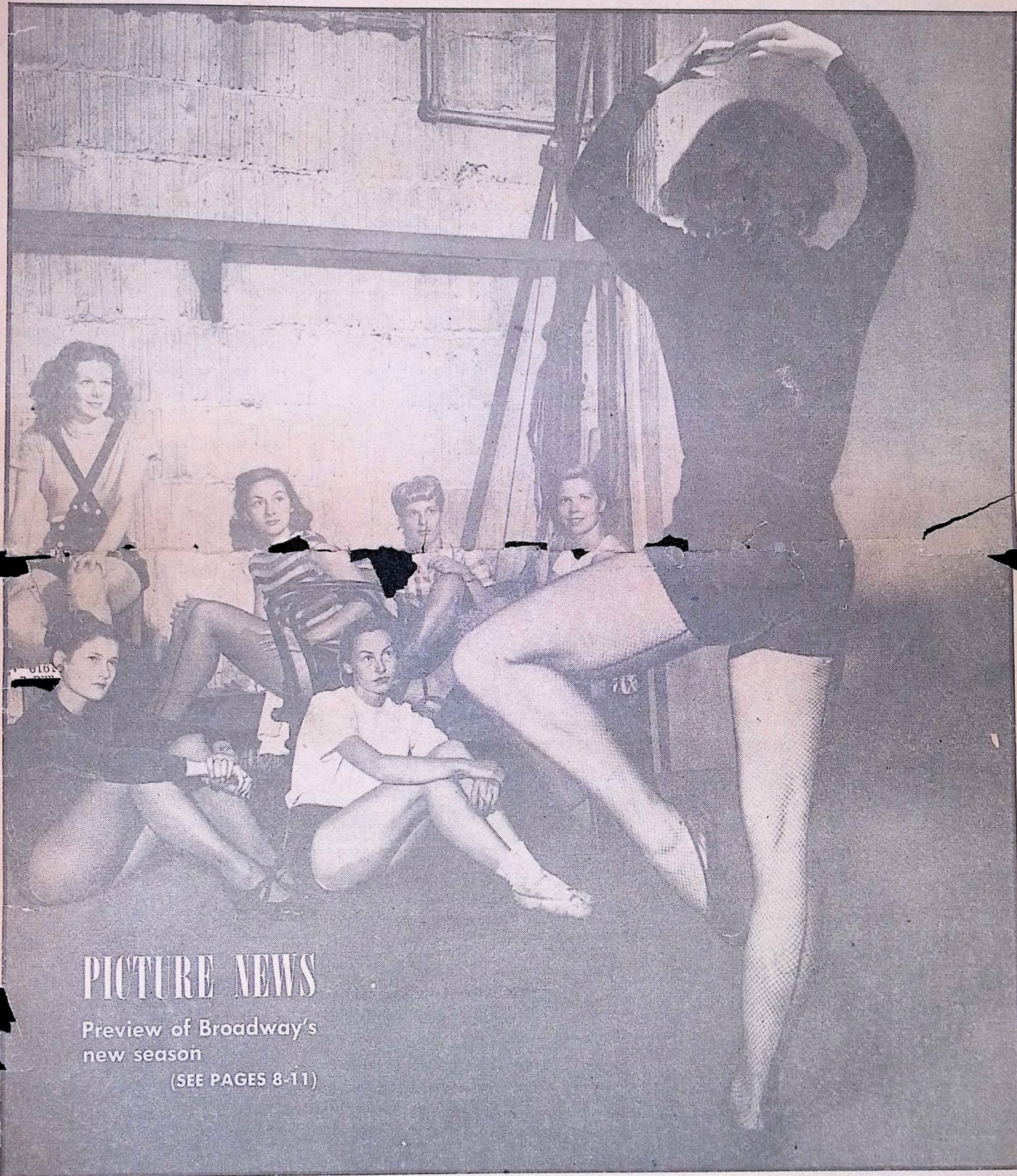
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PICTURE NEWS

Preview of Broadway's
new season

(SEE PAGES 8-11)

STAR Photo by Irving Haberman

THE NAKED AND THE DEAD:

An Episode From the No. 1 Best Seller and an
Exclusive Profile of Its Author (See Page 3)

By Louise Levitas

The naked are fanatics and the dead don't care

**To Norman Mailer, the third lousiest GI
in his platoon and author of the No. 1
best seller, war is a four-letter word**

IN THE winter of 1943 the Army drafted Norman Mailer, age: 20; residence: Brooklyn; education: B.S., Harvard, '43. The Army got a slight, medium-sized rookie with intelligent eyes in a thin, pointed face—the brainy type, a little incongruous in khaki. "I was," says Mailer, looking backward five years, "an arrogant, nasty young man. I thought I knew everything."

Being drafted suited his plans exactly. Because, as he told his bride of two months, after that he intended to write *THE War Novel*.

Four years later he finished writing *The Naked and The Dead* which, besides becoming Number One on today's best-seller list, has been hailed as THE novel of our War. But it was not the book of heroic adventures with death that Mailer once had confidently in mind.

Instead, it turned out to be about anxious, tender, uncertain men ground down by the Army's "humbling process," made brutal by terror, sweat-grimed, cursing, and facing death, "with your bowels dropping out of you."

The graphic foxhole minutiae, it was clear when he talked about these things last week, came from his own misery as a Pfc. "To this day I don't like officers."

"I was the third lousiest guy in a platoon of 12—it got so I thought there wasn't anything I could do as well as anyone else."

Slangy, adult talk

He smiled in deprecation the way young men do when they can look back and see how much they've learned since a year or two ago. He was sitting in the large, old-fashioned living room of his mother-in-law's home in Boston, a comfortable place with family pictures on the grand piano and tall, awning windows from which you could see sunlight on the lawn outside. Mailer and his wife, returned from Europe 10 days before, were on a brief family visit. In slacks and a T-shirt, he sprawled on the couch, looking like a collegiate on vacation, but his slangy, Brooklyn-accented talk was unexpectedly adult. He was telling how peacetime, 1946 and '47, had affected him while he was writing *The Naked and The Dead*.

"I never even thought of its being an anti-war book, at the beginning. But every time I turned on the radio and looked in the newspapers, there was this growing hysteria, this talk of going to war again, and it made me start looking for the trend of what was happening."

"It seemed to me that you could get men to fight again. They came out of the war frustrated, filled with bitterness and anger, and with no place to focus their anger. They would begin thinking, 'I don't give a goddam, I'll go into it, at least it'll be a change!' They would start remembering the good things about being a soldier, the furloughs with money in their pockets, how swell it was to be

walking around in a uniform in a foreign city, and to be the most important men in that city just because they were in that uniform."

"That really formed the book—the feeling that people in our government were leading us into war again. The last half was written on this nerve right in the pit of my stomach."

Out of that disgust came the sharp outlines of Mailer's General Cummings, the fastidious, dictator-minded intellectual who, while commanding a Pacific island campaign, planned the militarist future of America.

"The chances are that there's not a single general in the U. S. Army who's like him. But there could be! He articulates a kind of unconscious bent in the thinking of the Army brass and top rank politicians. He's an archetype of the new man, the coming man, the one who's really dangerous. I still think that half the guys in the State and War departments have the same psychology."

Some of this analysis, Mailer confessed, was hindsight, realized in Europe where he had gone immediately upon finishing the manuscript of his book. With GI Bill assistance he and his wife, an ex-Wave officer, had studied at the Sorbonne and then traveled around. In France, Italy, Spain and England, because the conflict of economic ideas was sharper than in the U. S. A., he had glimpsed what the future might hold.



Aged five, a Brooklyn playboy.

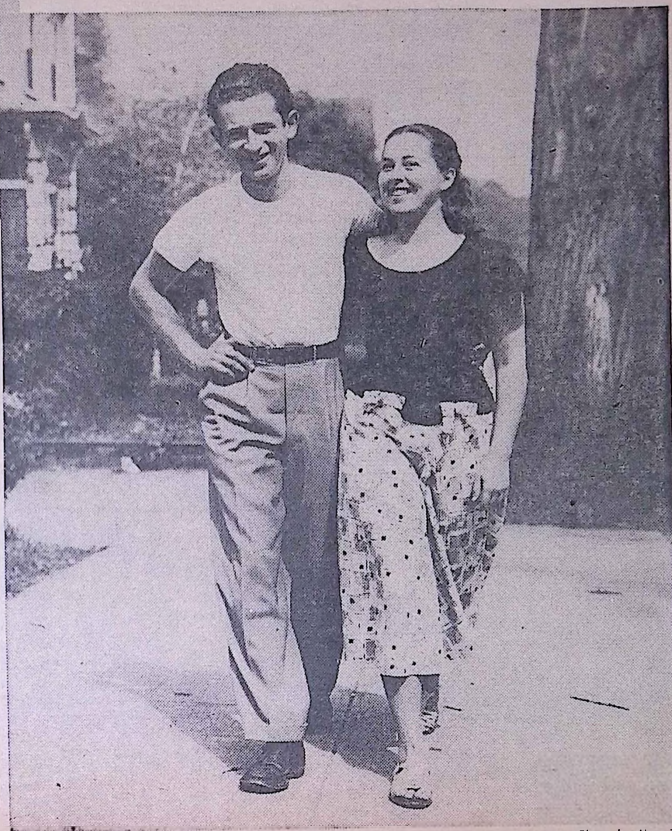


Photo by Maguire

The author, ex-Pfc. Norman Mailer, with his wife, Beatrice, an ex-Navy lieutenant.

He thought now that he had written his book in a political vacuum. "There's a tendency among too many leftist writers—and I think I'm a little guilty of it in *The Naked and The Dead*—to avoid a lot of the problems. The hero generally functions in a politically colorless frame. He sees only the things that are obviously bad and he tries to correct them. But that's false. Very few Americans live in such a clearly defined world."

The Naked and The Dead, he said, had a negative sort of politics. "I mean, I knew everything that terrified me, like Cummings. But at the time I got out of the Army I didn't believe in any kind of collective action, whereas I do now."

"I just had such a fantastic hatred of the Army, I had known that particular organization so damn well, I thought that all organization was bad—political parties, charitable institutions, what have you. Organization brought out the lowest common denominator."

"I thought of myself, naively, as an anarchist—that is, without reading books about it or knowing any other people who were. I didn't belong to any group—political or even literary. I was just sitting in my room in Brooklyn, writing. All I knew was what I read in the newspapers."

Elliptical conversation

Mailer's voice was mellow, husky, rapid and as he spoke he seemed to be aware of so many things at once that his conversation was almost elliptical. His words crowded each other, skipping the usual prefaces, trying to get to the heart of what he really meant.

His wife, a pretty, dark-haired girl, very shapely in a cotton dress and sandals, sat on a footstool as he talked. His mother-in-law, Mrs. H. I. Silverman, came in now and then to listen. She had diligently read *The Naked and The Dead* and had more than a parental interest. Her husband had been in the first World War; and Mrs. Silverman was a past president of the Jewish War Veterans auxiliary.

The Mailers teased her about that. Her young son-in-law didn't hold much sympathy for veterans' groups. He had, as he said, misgivings about all organizations, although he had changed his mind about political ones.

"Granting the corrupting effects," he said, "if you are going to accomplish any-

thing in your own framework of time, you just have to work with them."

After he had finished his book, even before he went to Europe, he had joined the Progressive Citizens of America. He is so convinced now of its importance that he is delaying his next novel until after the elections in order to work for Wallace. The fact that there might be Communists in the same organization didn't bother him; he hadn't met any of them in PCA. And what he had seen in Europe gave him a sense of urgency.

"Italy is pretty bad right now, a pretty ugly country. The Marshall Plan definitely is keeping in power the smartest, dirtiest, old-time politicians, the broken-down aristocracy that would normally have been kicked out. Italy would be better off under communism than under the kind of very bad capitalism they have there. You don't have to be a Communist to see that."

"About France and England, I don't know. As far as the countries of eastern Europe go—like Poland, where they had one fascist dictator after another—they're better off. Czechoslovakia—I don't know what the score is there."

As if he were answering an unspoken argument, he added quickly, "The thing is, America is one of the very few countries that has a tradition of intellectual freedom, and that kind of freedom can only exist in a country with a high standard of living."

Beatrice Mailer had been regarding her husband during the conversation, sometimes with solicitude, at times with amusement. Interviews were still rather new. The Mailers had been removed from the fuss that the author of a prominent first novel stirs up. Clippings of the reviews had been mailed to them in Europe. And a cable had brought the news that *The Naked and The Dead* had reached the Number One best seller spot. "I felt kind of blue the rest of the day," Mailer said. "A lot of people I'd like to like the book are set against it, because it's a best seller."

For a writer, all this fuss could be a handicap, he thought. As an unsuspected, unsuspected author in the Army, he had been "a neutral and unimportant guy. It was a marvelous state for writing. I ab-

Continued on next page

greater and greater consolidation of power. Physical power for this century, an extension of our universe, and a political power, a political organization to make it possible. Your men of power in America, I can tell you, are becoming conscious of their real aims for the first time in our history. Watch. After the war our foreign policy is going to be far more naked, far less hypocritical than it has ever been. We're no longer going to cover our eyes with our left hand while our right is extending an imperialist paw."

Hearn shrugged. "You think it's going to come about as easily as that? Without resistance?"

"With much less resistance than you think. In college the one axiom you seem to have carried away is that everyone is sick, everyone is corrupt. And it's reasonably true. Only the innocent are healthy, and the innocent man is a vanishing breed. I tell you nearly all of humanity is dead, merely waiting to be disintegrated."

Unpleasantly eloquent silence

"And the special few?"

"Just what do you think man's deepest urge is?"

Hearn grinned, his eyes probing Cummings. "A good piece of ass, probably."

The answer grated, made Cumming's flesh tingle. He had been absorbed in the argument, temporarily indifferent to Hearn, concerned only with unfolding his thesis, and the obscenity stirred little swirls of apprehension in him. His anger returned again.

For the moment, however, he ignored Hearn. "I doubt it."

Hearn shrugged once more, his silence unpleasantly eloquent.

There was something unapproachable and unattainable about Hearn which had always piqued him, always irritated him subtly. The empty pit where there should be a man. And at the moment he desired, with an urgency that clamped his jaws together, to arouse some emotion in Hearn. Women would have wanted to excite some love from him, but for himself—to see Hearn afraid, filled with shame if only for an instant.

Cummings went on talking, his voice quiet and expressionless. "The average man always sees himself in relation to other men as either inferior or superior. Women play no part in it. They're an index, a yardstick among other gauges, by which to measure superiority."

"Did you arrive at that all by yourself, sir? It's an impressive analysis."

Hearn's sarcasm riled him again. "I'm quite aware, Robert, that you've worked out the ABC's of something like that, but you don't carry it any further. You stop there, go back to your starting point, and take off again. The truth of it is that from man's very inception there has been one great vision, blurred first by the exigencies and cruelties of nature, and then, as nature began to be conquered by the second great cloak—economic fear and economic striving. That particular vision has been muddled and diverted, but we're coming to a time when



There was Hearn before him now, sprawled in a camp chair, his large body not so nearly relaxed as it seemed, his sullen eyes, his cold mouth staring back at him.

our techniques will enable us to achieve it." He exhaled his smoke slowly. "There's that popular misconception of man as something between a brute and an angel. Actually man is in transit between brute and God."

"Man's deepest urge is omnipotence."

"Yes. It's not religion, that's obvious, it's not love, it's not spirituality, those are all sops along the way, benefits we devise for ourselves when the limitations of our existence turn us away from the other dream. To achieve God. When we come kicking into the world, we are God, the universe is the limit of our senses. And when we get older, when we discover that the universe is not us, it's the deepest trauma of our existence."

Hearn fingered his collar. "I'd say your deepest urge is omnipotence, that's all."

"And yours too, whether you'll admit it or not."

Hearn's sharp voice softened a little with irony. "What

moral precepts am I supposed to draw from all this?"

Cummings's tension altered. There had been a deep satisfaction in expounding this, a pleasure apart from all the other concerns of this discussion with Hearn. "I've been trying to impress you, Robert, that the only morality of the future is a power morality, and a man who cannot find his adjustment to it is doomed. There's one thing about power. It can flow only from the top down. When there are little surges of resistance at the middle levels, it merely calls for more power to be directed downward, to burn it out."

Hearn was looking at his hands. "We're not in the future yet."

"You can consider the Army, Robert, as a preview of the future."

Hearn looked at his watch. "It's time to go to chow." Outside the tent the earth was almost white in the glare of the overhead sun.

poor; after that, well, it was kind of a squeeze on my parents to send me to Harvard."

Being at Harvard was lucky too, for a writer. "It's an extremely complex place," he said. His fellow students came from all over the country, poor and rich and average, the socially elect and the outcasts, giving abundant variety to his college life. Mailer was studying engineering science. "When I was a kid, I used to build model airplanes, so I decided I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer. But by my sophomore year I got much more interested in writing than in engineering."

The novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevski absorbed him. He thought *Anna Karenina* was the greatest book ever written. "I took a lot of writing courses at Harvard. I think they can help you. You can learn what not to do."

Two early novels

In his junior year, he met Beatrice at a Boston Symphony concert. That year, at 18, he started his first novel, which he now describes as "very bad." It was about Jews in Brooklyn. He wrote his second novel about an insane asylum where he had worked one summer vacation. "It was a very large and overly-ambitious manuscript; it was supposed to be an anatomy of brutality." Both novels were rejected by a great number of publishers.

Six months after he was graduated, he went into the Army, which trained him to be a surveyor for the artillery. But when he got to Leyte shortly after that, he was assigned to the intelligence section of an infantry regiment. "The night I hit them, we were sent on to the invasion of Luzon."

Mailer's job was at the combat team headquarters, typing reports in quintuplicate. He wasn't a good enough typist, so the Army put him in another office, interpreting aerial photographs.

After the Luzon landing, the fighting receded to a comparatively safe distance from regimental headquarters. Miserable in his clerk's job, Mailer, who had always wanted to experience combat, asked and received a transfer to a reconnaissance platoon. The platoon was attached to a regiment deployed into the mountains as a protecting flank for the division fighting its way into Manila. There were Japanese troops in the mountains, and Mailer soon had reason to regret his transfer.

"Going out on patrol every day in the Philippine sun, carrying a heavy pack on your back, that kind of ever present fatigue and diarrhea and just feeling generally awful, broke down any desire I had for action and adventure. And also the feeling that you're going to be killed—I became emotionally convinced of it, and I didn't care much anymore what happened."

"But I didn't see too much combat—a couple of fire fights and skirmishes." The platoon's most eventful patrol had occurred before Mailer joined them. "They had a three-day patrol behind the enemy lines, and I kept hearing about it the whole time I was with them." Finally transmuted by Mailer's own literary purposes, this patrol became part of *The Naked and The Dead*.

The military action in the book was a composite of incidents he had heard about and those he himself had experienced. "Everything in the book really happened somewhere in the war." The average foot soldier didn't get to know

why he was slogging up some mountain trail. Mailer had glimpsed the general's eyefield of what was happening while he was typing battle reports and looking at aerial photographs.

"Besides," his wife said, "he's a natural born military strategist."

"A natural born general," he said with enjoyment. "My favorite reading during the war was the *Infantry Journal*. That's where you pick up a lot of information about strategy and tactics."

At least half of the characters in *The Naked and The Dead* were taken from the men he had soldiered with, although they had become quite changed in the writing. The officers? "Oh, you always get to know them. Working for them—there's no other kind of knowledge that can substitute for it. You generally operate on hate, and hate is the best aid to analysis."

He could afford to be grateful now, even for the officers he had despised.

"Most of the guys who wrote war novels were working from the top down. If I had had one of the jobs they had—writing for *Yank* or working in Special Services, taking a quick trip to the front and talking to some GIs and then getting back to a typewriter to write about it—I would have written their kind of book."

A T/4 and a cook

"I literally functioned as a GI. I hated officers. I had the holy sense of importance that a GI has." Maybe the bitterness of all his experiences came after the war ended and his outfit was stationed in Japan. In order to get out of drills and other Army annoyances, he became a cook; and as a cook, he finally made his stripes. He got a T/4 rating.

But in a fight, one day, the newly-made T/4 used a few unprintable words to tell his top sergeant what he thought of him. When Mailer refused to take them back, the sergeant reported the matter to the captain. "The captain ordered me to apologize," Mailer said. "It was just a week before I was going home. So I crawled—the way Hearn did in the book." (Lt. Hearn, the general's aide in *The Naked and The Dead*, is ordered by the general to pick up a cigaret butt.)

"So after I apologized, I spent the night crying and angry. I saw how much the stripes had meant to me, just how I had been corrupted by the Army, and how weak I had been acting for a long time. And the next morning I went to the captain and said I wanted to give the stripes back. But, because he was the kind of man he was, he said, 'You're not giving them back. I'm taking them back!'"

Mailer looked uncomfortable for a moment. "I got a kind of poetic punishment which I deserved," he said. "It was good the whole thing happened."

All the humbling experiences that a GI endures were good for him as a writer, he said; but being a writer had increased his troubles as a soldier. "I was brought up on those war hero novels. Of course, all the war ideals you had were quickly lost about a week after you got into the Army. But all the time I was overseas I had these conflicting ideas—wanting, the way everyone else did, to get the softest, easiest job, to get by with the least pain—and also wanting to get into combat and see it. The only time I could make up my mind was the time I asked to go to Recon."

"And it paid off, in a kind of curious way." END