

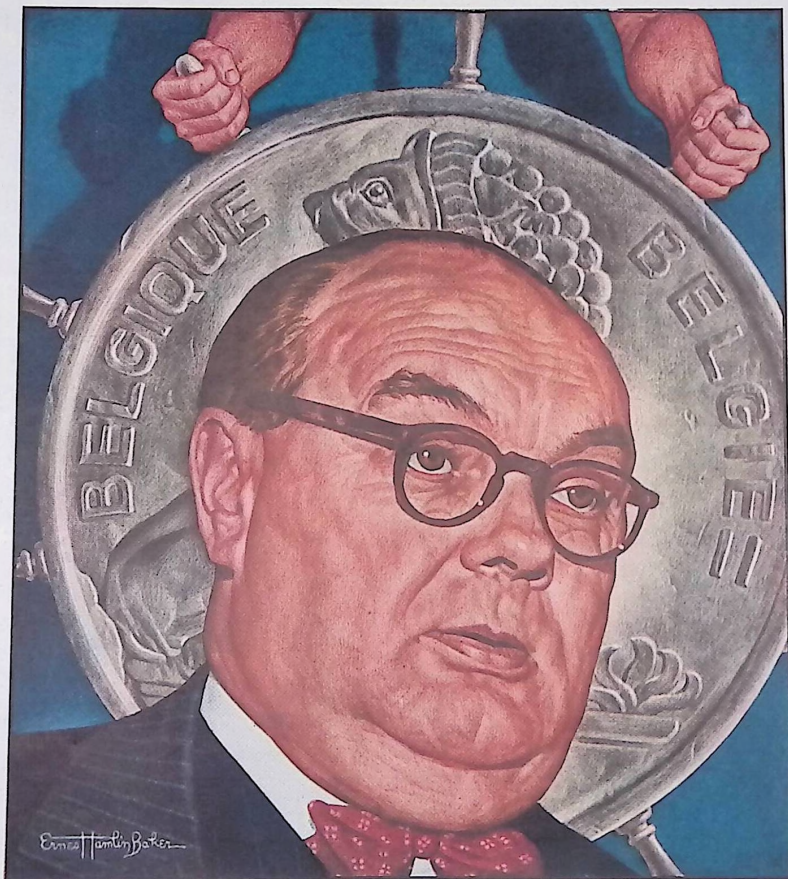
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THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE



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BOOKS

War & No Peace

THE NAKED AND THE DEAD (721 pp.)—Norman Mailer—Rinehart (\$4).

A 25-year-old Harvard graduate who fought at Leyte has written perhaps the best novel yet about World War II.

It is distinguished primarily for simple realism, a forthright, almost childlike honesty, a command of ordinary speech, a cool and effortless narrative style, quickened here & there with a mild, understated humor. The battle scenes are so vivid as to suggest Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, the common soldiers as clearly visualized as Tolstoy's peasants. Unlike Tolstoy's masterpiece, it is all war, not only in the sense that there are no scenes of peaceful life poised against the scenes of war, but in the sense that a knowledge of the meaning of peace is absent from the psychology of the characters. They seem never to have known anything else.

War Without Dignity. It is all war, war on the Pacific island of Anopopei, which a force of 6,000 Americans is attempting to take, war in headquarters bivouac and on the trails through the jungle, war between Private Red Valsen and Sergeant Sam Croft—war without dignity and without purpose, war for position or prestige, war to save face, or to satisfy an inward sense of superiority, or war that is merely the psychological ricochet of the greater conflict off stage.

Even when the characters think back upon their own lives, or when the author condenses their experience in brief little biographies, the content of their doing is still war—war on the streets and at the parties, the wisecracks whining like rifle shots, the love affairs like ambushes.

The characters of *The Naked and the Dead* are the members of a platoon, six of them survivors of a rubber-boat disaster at Motome, wearied, embittered, haunted by a premonition of death, snarling about the newcomers and (occasionally) feeling a grudging responsibility for them, nervous, profane, lecherous. Their conversation is recorded with the fidelity of a recording machine. Indeed, it is almost too exact and too tough to be quite accurate.

The men have a faint sense of pride in the platoon, not so much in the sense of liking the members of it, as of respect for what it has gone through. They have a mild pride in (partly fear of) a good officer, and a hesitant, partly exasperated approval of the democratic process that has placed them, Jews and anti-Semites, intellectuals and illiterates, in the same unearthly, uncomfortable place. They fight shy of any speechmaking about any of these things. Democracy is not a faith they fight for; it is a sort of punishment they take for not having believed in it before.

The little group sets out on a mission as weird in its way as the quest of Ahab for the white whale. Hennessey is killed in the landing. The others take part in checking a Japanese assault across a narrow stream, get drunk, shoot prisoners, and prowl among the Japanese corpses for souvenirs. They are certain that their wives back home are unfaithful to them, from their own success in seducing other men's wives, and from the number of letters from the States which arrive, telling them that all is over.

Nightmare in a Wonderland. In an atmosphere of uncomprehending misery, the platoon is ordered on a reconnaissance patrol on the far side of the island, over



G. Maillard Kessler

NORMAN MAILER
An old method, new alchemy.

the vast peaks of the Watamai Mountains. It is in itself an incident in the war superior to most war fiction, the patrol through a wonderland of grass growing higher than the heads of the men, spiders, and endless spider webs, gnats, buzzing silence, rain and sunlight, golden sand and indigo trees—a nightmare in which one after another is killed. What deepens the irony is that the campaign is successful without the benefit of either General Cummings' strategy or the heroism of the platoon.

Author Mailer has borrowed his method from Dos Passos, modifying and adapting it, alternating his narrative with flashbacks which he calls *The Time Machine*, and with choruses of the men's tedious-cloacal comments. By some alchemy, his book moves and lives despite the similarity of the biographies (quarreling parents, first sexual experience, unhappy marriage, pretty good job, the draft), its too great length, and the narrow political bias of the views set forth in it.

The Author. Norman Mailer attended public schools in Brooklyn, at Harvard studied engineering, shortly after graduation married Beatrice Silverman (later a lieutenant in the WAVES). During the war he served in Leyte, Luzon and Japan, as a clerk, an aerial photograph expert, a rifleman in a reconnaissance platoon, a cook, a baker. Discharged in 1946, he wrote *The Naked and the Dead* in a year and a half.

Household Hints

ARABESQUE (312 pp.)—Geoffrey Household—Little, Brown (\$2.75).

Geoffrey Household is an Englishman with a quiet gift for telling tales. He made a success in 1939 with a story about a big game hunter's attempt to stalk Hitler with telescopic sights. After that book,

Rogue Male,* he went to the Near East as an intelligence officer, seeing action in Greece and intrigue in Syria and Palestine. *Arabesque* is mainly a pleasantly concocted adventure story. A bilingual beauty named Armande Herne, stranded in Beirut in 1941, piques the curiosity of both French and British Intelligence. Odd though it seems, she is neither a *poule de luxe* nor a Nazi agent—just a lonely woman. No sooner have the security police made certain of this than they succeed in putting ideas in her pretty head: she should use her charm to strike a blow for Britain.

The serpentine affair into which this innocent adventuress lightly steps takes her to a Lebanese mountain village, then to Jerusalem and to Cairo. Sardonic Sergeant Prayle of British Field Security tails her with amusement, with concern, and finally with love. Along the way the reader is treated to crisp descriptions of an ancient and holy landscape, of types ranging from a touchy Gaullist officer to an Orthodox archimandrite and his mistress.

Near the end of the novel a Jewish terrorist pointlessly murders the most powerful and fervent of the older Zionists—a man who had sworn that Jews would never kill Britons. *Arabesque*, like the Middle East adventure stories that Eric Ambler spins, is no great shakes as a work of art, but it manages, along with romance, a dispassionate little picture of the way the tide was running toward the recent desperate events in Palestine.

Unlighted Places

INDIA CALLED THEM (418 pp.)—Lord Beveridge—Macmillan (\$4.50).

"Now India," said Kipling cynically, "is a place beyond all other where one must not take things too seriously—the midday sun always excepted. Too much work and too much energy kill a man just as effectively as too much . . . drink . . . Good work does not matter, because a man is judged by his worst output and another man takes all the credit . . ."

But Lord Beveridge's book about his father and mother, who spent most of their working years in India, shows that some, at least, of the Anglo-Indians were not indifferent to the country and to their jobs. In 1857, when he was 20, Henry Beveridge went to "the dustbin of Bengal" as an administrator. In those days a man's best qualification for the Indian Civil Service consisted mainly in being able to answer such questions as: *Write succinctly and in Latin biographical notices of the following personages, stating the date and place of birth of each: Theramenes, Polybius, Poseidonius, Arcesilaus, Parmenides, Eratosthenes.*

Henry remained in India for 35 tortuous years. He married Annette Arkroyd, who had come to India with the naive but passionate determination to educate and emancipate the women.

An Unsafe Man. Husband & wife were equally well-read, equally opposed to pedantic thinking ("Anything clear and * Which became the movie *Man Hunt*."



Associated Press

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