

CHAPTER THREE

Part One

i

38,465
words

In a letter from Boston the previous summer, Norman had remarked upon the difference between New England and New Jersey beaches, and in doing so he affirmed old affiliations: "The bathing here is not nearly as good as in Jersey. I never realized how fine our beaches were until I saw these Massachusetts ones." [8/16/42] This loyalty to the Monmouth County shoreline, recalling as it does his years at the now vanished Scarborough, lasted exactly as long as it took Norman to find the Portuguese fishing village of Provincetown, Massachusetts, which he did in the first week of June, 1943.

The two in many ways idyllic weeks he spent there with Bea marked the beginning of what would prove to be a permanent relationship with the place, and he would return in many different ways--and, indeed, with many different partners--over the next five decades. One way of returning was on the printed page, and fifteen years later, in the prologue to an unfinished novel, he memorializes the setting:

The peninsula of Cape Cod is perhaps eighty miles long, and bent in its middle like the knotty, no longer agreeable arm of an old man who once was strong. To the forearm and hand of this coast is given the name of The Upper Cape. . . . At the tip of the Cape, in the palm of the almost closed hand, is one of the last great fishing villages of the world, the place called Provincetown, in winter 3,000 population I suppose, its situation one of the most easterly promontories of the Atlantic coast. Three miles long and two streets wide, the town curls around the bay on the skin of the palm, a gaudy run with Mediterranean splashes of color, crowded steep-pitched roofs, fishing piers and fishing boats whose stench

of mackerel and gasoline is as aphrodisiac to the sensuous nose as the clean bar-whisky smell of a nightclub where call girls congregate. [AFM, 518-19]

Norman would write quite a lot about Provincetown, but over the years he found it a place particularly conducive to the process of composition, and he would write much more in the town than about it. In fact, the least typical thing about his first visit was that he wasn't able to get a significant amount of writing done there. "I'm having a wonderful time," he wrote to the family on a Friday, June 11 postcard, "but I'm not getting much work done. Therefore, I'll come home early next week, probably Tuesday, and work at home."

He did exactly that, leaving Bea in Boston to work for the summer as well as to attend summer school in preparation for undertaking her final semester at Boston University. He was the more ready to part company, no doubt, because of an intermittent disagreement that had been plaguing them for many weeks, and which had even marred some of the pleasure of their time together in Provincetown. They would look back on this period in their letters of the next couple of years, where they recall how it had been a troubled time: for at least a year, Bea had been actively trying to get away from her family home, and, as Norman had mentioned in his Psychology 35 paper, she saw marriage as her best escape route. With Norman now graduated and she soon to join him, Bea wanted to at least discuss the possibility of marriage. Norman, quite simply, did not.

He was locked onto the track of his novel, which he saw himself composing in a race against the arrival of his draft notice, and he was not in any case sure that he wanted to get married. Fiction that he wrote in his senior year, notably "Land Lashed," suggested that he was having trouble imagining monogamous heterosexual intimacy as holding the key to what he, as an artist, was trying to discover. And Bea, after all, was the only woman with whom he ever had an intimate relationship: he had started showing significant--and to her of course annoying--signs that he wanted sooner or later to be intimate with other women. As he continued to resist what he regarded as the distraction of her preoccupation, they began to quarrel. He, apparently, even began to think of breaking off their relationship altogether. Without going that far, he was nevertheless not slow to put a geographical distance between them and to turn to more pressing matters in Brooklyn.

Norman accomplished what he could on the novel, startled to find that it grew on the drawing-boards in a way utterly counter-proportionate to the shrinking prospect of pre-induction time he could reasonably expect from his draft board. The prospective inductee didn't get his notice, however, for all of seven more months--January of 1944--and there is no recorded reason why it should have taken his board so long to get around to him. There is a record of his trying to get a short-term deferment: almost as soon as he got back from Provincetown, he contacted Ted Amussen at

Farrar and Rinehart, supplying him with a sample of the manuscript in progress and asking if the publishing company would petition the draft board to hold off until the novel got done. Amussen wrote on July 9 to say that both the senior partners had "felt it would be an unwise thing to do and, in all probability, would not amount to anything anyway." He apologized for being unable to help, and there is no indication that Norman looked elsewhere for intercession.

NO-Saver wrote letter

Of course there is always the possibility that Uncle Dave Kessler's arm was long enough to reach into and decelerate the selection process for a time; certainly he had some connections there. But it is not unlikely that Norman's own decades-later guess is correct: "The only explanation I can find for such delay is that my draft card must have fallen into the back of the file." [Intro, Transit, p. viii] In any case, he kept quiet and worked almost uninterruptedly right through the fall in a small rented room a couple of blocks from home. The room was "the first of the many studios [he] was to have throughout his life," Hilary Mills records, while also quoting Bea: "He always had to go away to write, and he had a propensity for wanting to be in the strangest places when he wrote." [HM p. 73] Undisturbed by his draft board, Norman proved to have time enough to complete multiple drafts of a novel that grew immensely beyond its author's initial estimates--it finally would run to some 180 thousand words--and would leave almost completely behind the modest "Naked and the Dead" play

manuscript that had been its genesis.¹

It is possible, nevertheless, to trace that genesis into the novel's final form, and to see how the author of both texts pulled the first one apart to get the beginnings of a basic structure for the second. The novel is set at the same hospital as the play, and two attendants still stand at its center. Only one of them, however, Paul Scarr, comes to the job from college, and the other--Joe Cap--is made older, has been on the job longer, and has a very different personal background. The novel's action contains the episode with the rampant young Black patient being tackled by the new attendant--Scarr--and subsequently being brutalized by all the attendants. Indeed, the institutionalization of brutality is as central to the novel as to the play, and so is an elaborate scheme by most of the attendants to unleash a dangerously violent inmate onto a fellow-attendant whom they wish, in one way or another, to eliminate. Nursing Superintendent Louise Tasko is transferred into the novel from the play, as is hydrotherapy room Nurse Marion Gannon, for whose romantic attentions Scarr successfully competes with Cap.

¹. Though never published commercially, A Transit to Narcissus was issued in the form of A Facsimile of the Original Typescript in New York by Howard Fertig, Inc. in March, 1978. The 760 page (plus 88pp appendix) folio volume includes a 2,300 word "Introduction" by the author, and was offered in a printing of one thousand copies at \$100. In 1996, remainder copies were still readily available. This "original typescript" is not to be confused with the final, quite legible typescript that made the rounds of so many publishers in 1944-45. The facsimile reproduces the working, heavily revised manuscript from which the typist produced the final version.

But the novel adds to its action a whole range of dimensions not even suggested by the play. The hypocrisy and inefficiency of the hospital's administration is now accounted for by political corruption and fraud, which in turn is generated by a city-wide Syndicate that has the whole of Boston in its clutches. The Syndicate stands as the target of Paul Cowles, a crusading owner/publisher/editor of a small, left-wing morning newspaper who, with his somewhat saturnine, rather Bea-like wife, supplies the novel with a focus contrapuntal to Scarr and Nurse Gannon. The Cowles couple permit the novel to explore social themes, such as the relationship between capitalism and democracy, between criminality and good government, and to articulate Norman's rather undigested version of the social and intellectual values of the progressive left in America. These issues and these people are entirely absent from the action of the play.

Absent as well is any recognizable counterpart for Joe Cap, the attendant who is most closely associated with Scarr and is his rival for the affections of Marion Gannon. Joe has been working as a kind of loner-attendant at the hospital for about five months when Scarr arrives, and we soon learn that Cap came to the hospital directly from a substantial stretch in the penitentiary. He had been working on an illegal assignment for Syndicate sub-boss "Powderpuff" Fuller--also a character in the novel--when something unspecified went wrong and he was forced to take the conviction. His experience in prison has affected him very much

for the worse, and tough as he is his toughness is periodically (and secretly) overcome by self-doubt, fits of panic, and immersions in hysterical fear so severe as to threaten him with serious breakdown. It is in the tormented aftermath to one of these bouts that Cap rashly reports Scarr to Supervisor Tashko for an infraction of the rules, hoping to get him fired and thus removed from their competition for Nurse Gannon.

In the process of doing this, however, Cap succeeds only in getting himself identified by the other attendants as an informer. They, in turn, conspire to make Cap the target of an arranged attack by a homicidally inclined patient in the violent ward, and a climactic scene in the novel is that in which Scarr--urged on by Nurse Gannon--comes to Cap's assistance during the attack. Between them they subdue the patient, thus thwarting the conspiracy and developing a kind of friendship in spite of their rivalry, but in their violent battle with Cap's assailant they more or less parenthetically beat an innocent and particularly vulnerable patient who happens into the melee. The innocent patient abruptly dies, and both attendants are arrested and charged with manslaughter---a situation complicated by the fact that the prosecutor's office is controlled by the Syndicate, which is already engaged in a struggle with the reformer Cowles.

Important though Cap is in the novel, he is a secondary character to Scarr, and the greatest departure from the original play-version of the action is the difference between him and the

play's hero. In the play, David Land--the autobiographical Norman figure--is simply a decent, rather bumbling young guy who is uncomplicatedly repelled by the presence of brutality, the moreso when he sees signs of it appearing in himself. Paul Scarr, by contrast, passes quickly through a stage of seeming to be like David, and emerges as an almost formal case-study in psychopathic brutalism. At the outset, the most obvious difference between Scarr and David Land is that Scarr stays on at the job, despite experiencing almost exactly the same kind of initial moral revulsion as David.

The apparent reason for his staying is Marion, Nurse Gannon, with whom he begins a sexual affair just as he is choosing between staying or leaving. The affair intrigues him (actually, the woman's characterization as a quite maternal sexual partner in the novel is, for Norman, unusually persuasive) and Scarr quite self-consciously chooses to stay on as an attendant, not only to pursue his affair but also--like attendant Ralph Hughson in the play--to enhance his status as a prospective medical school student. What happens to him seems at first to be just what would have happened to the college-student-attendants in the play and, in Norman's apparent view, what might easily happen to any normal man in such a situation: an otherwise healthy person comes to develop, in a perverse environment, an unhealthy appetite for hurting helpless people.

As we come to know Scarr better, however, we begin to see

that he is not normal, but rather is a man already traumatically "scarred" from having experienced a wholly excessive childhood immersion into fear of his father. Once again, fear emerges as the volatile element in the psychological compound of Norman's fiction, but now we see it beginning to build a cause-and-effect linkage between itself and what up to now has been its apparently polarized antonym element: bullying, sadistic brutalization. A dialectic between the two poles will develop in the Mailerian fictional text from this moment on, and it will discover its vocabulary, finally, in the formulation of the figure of the psychopath.

The historical time-frame of the novel is earlier than the play: it is June, 1938, and Scarr has come to his job at the hospital as a direct result of having failed, out of fear, a special test that he set for himself. He has reneged on a commitment to join the volunteers at that time still fighting on the side of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War. The hospital frightens him too, so he reasons that a success in dealing with the responsibilities of being an attendant will serve to expiate his guilt over not going to Spain, and will perhaps teach him how to overcome his feelings of fear. He strikes us at first as a man in search of self-realization through the process of successful self-discovery, and things start to go wrong only when Scarr's initial rejection of the brutality of the other attendants breaks down, and he begins to beat the patients at least as much as all

the others do.

As he does so, and as his immersion into violence begins to address itself to his previous immersion into feelings of fear, a kind of grotesque inner being begins to take shape and to emerge as his authentic and increasingly destructive "self." While this is going on, Scarr's sexual affair with Marion Gannon develops in an ominously parallel pattern, and he begins to build up a head of violently angry feeling toward her that is triggered into explosion when, with Cap, he accidentally kills the innocent patient and is forced to contemplate prosecution and prison. Held in prison for a traumatizing ordeal of interrogation and manipulation, Scarr cracks completely, just as Cap was doing and had done before. The totemic code-sign for Scar's collapse is a certain hauntingly familiar, deeply schizophrenic dream: He was completely isolated on the most enormous field he had ever seen. He kept walking and came to a barbed wire fence which he started to crawl over very carefully. But then from nowhere, a machine gun started firing at him. He continued to walk until his head lying on the ground saw his body moving forward.

"My God, I'm dead," his head said.

And his body fell over.²[pp. 658-59]

Out on bail and somehow by virtue of his dream enraged at Nurse Gannon, Scarr reels through a kind of Ulysses-in-Nighttown underworld sequence that finally delivers him--armed with a knife and determined to obtain catharsis by killing with it--to his lover's apartment. She is spared, as much by luck as anything

2. The dream is completely new to Scarr, but quite familiar in Norman's work, whose pages it had haunted for over two years.

else, and a totally hallucinated Scarr, inescapably trapped in his mind's dark alley, bleeds to death from a self-inflicted slash across the wrist.

It seems likely that Norman had originally intended to balance the elements of external political/social reality in the novel with the elements of internal, psychological reality, and in doing so come up with an insight into fascism--"Germany is like an attendant!" Land says in the play--as well as into psychosis. As the novel develops, however, its external elements come to be handled more and more mechanically, and in the final product the balance tips sharply toward the internal, across whose psychic landscape Cap and Marion and Scarr move among a population of clinically insane patients whose condition threatens increasingly to become their own. Cap and Marion survive while Scarr goes under, lost to the sane world, but it is clear that in the complexity of his psychopathic identity he commands far more of his creator's attention than do the others.

Once Norman had developed the idea that Scarr was emotionally-disturbed, this fact became the most central concern of the action. But after finishing the book and sending it out for what finally would be a great many publisher readings, its author decided that the idea of the character as disturbed had been introduced into the novel before any plausible action on the part of the character had prepared the reader to believe this of him.. Scarr, that is,

had been real to Norman first as an idea, and from this he had tried to make him real as a person. The more Norman thought about it the more he became convinced that it should have been the other way around. His mistake had been in proceeding before he knew Scarr as a person, and Norman was determined not to repeat his error in his next novel. In this one, because Scarr was so much of a concept-character, there had been a great problem in bringing him into interaction with other people in human situations.

If Norman had a certain difficulty in knowing exactly what to do with his character, he nevertheless clearly found that character compelling in a way that should here be underscored: Scarr is the first full-scale presentation of an emotionally disturbed person in the Mailerian fictional cosmos, and he introduces the beginning of an era there of evolving fascination with dangerously perverse personalities. In this developing vision, even here at its uncertain start, psychosis promises to be luminous as well as agonizing, penetrating as well as opaque, brilliant as well as deranged. Like certain kinds of hallucinogens, certain kinds of madness will come to be presented as doorways to perception, and this thinking, along with the formulation of the actual figure of the psychopath in Norman's work, may accurately be said to have begun with Scarr and "A Transit to Narcissus."

The title refers to what Cowles and other collectivist progressives in the novel regard as an unhealthy, narcissistic

concentration upon--or "transit to"--the figure of the disturbed individual. The figure will assume many forms in Norman's work over the years that follow, and it seldom will be so merely reduced as Scarr is here, but it will always be identifiable somewhere along the thesis-to-antithesis-to-synthesis track of deep fear, followed by angry toughness, followed by reckless psychopathological detachment. Recklessness, most pointedly to risk the hazards of killing or being killed, will almost always be an operative element, and, increasingly, a relationship between these things and violently hostile heterosexual conflicts will be introduced. The association between the climactic moment of orgasm and the dramatic climax of killing, so central to the finally formed Mailerian vision, appears for the first time in "Transit." Unsuccessful as the novel was as a work of literary art, as a seed-bed for Norman's evolving fictional imagination its importance would prove to be immense.

In 1943, of course, Norman thought that he had succeeded with the book, and he was immensely gratified to have completed a book he had never expected to finish in civilian life. He was gratified,, too, for a stroke of literary good fortune a bit earlier in this season: he had succeeded in placing the much-rejected novella he was still calling "The Foundation." It had come back on July 27 from MGM, along with a letter telling Norman that, once again, he was not to be chosen for the studio's Junior Writer's Group. Norman promptly sent the manuscript to Edwin

Seaver, who, in the act of preparing for publication with the L. B. Fisher Company an anthology of work by new American writers to be called Cross-Section, had issued a call for unpublished "novelettes, stories, poems, essays and full length plays."

Over 1400 entries were finally submitted, and among those chosen for inclusion were novellas by Jane Bowles and Richard Wright ("The Man Who Lived Underground,") short stories by Shirley Jackson, Brendan Gill and Ralph Ellison, poems by Isidor Schneider, Oscar Williams, Norman Rosten and Langston Hughes, an essay by Stanley Edgar Hyman, and a play ("The Man Who Had All the Luck") by the little-known Arthur Miller. "In all," says the promotion brochure, "Cross-Section contains 6 novelettes, 2 full-length plays and a poetic drama, 17 short stories, a long critical essay and 25 poems, none of which has been previously published." The Richard Wright piece was his first published since the successful Native Son, but most of the authors in the 300,000 word volume were very much newcomers--young and/or relatively unknown at the time.

Seaver's chief reader, fiction writer Marjorie Stengel, discovered Norman's manuscript among the flood of submissions, liked it very much, and, after a brief interview with him, brought it to Seaver's attention. He wrote to Norman in late August, saying that he admired the "novelette" and that he wanted "to hold it as a particularly strong entry" for inclusion in the published volume. Before accepting it, though, he wanted a better ending and

a better title. Norman supplied satisfactory versions of both,³ and "A Calculus At Heaven" was firmly accepted in September. Somewhat later, Seaver invited Norman to meet with him in New York, and the two had a brief conversation that Norman was not to forget. He recalls muttering "in a small voice that 'A Calculus at Heaven' had been influenced by Man's Fate.

'You admire Malraux greatly?' Seaver suggested.
'I'd like to be another Malraux,' I blurted.
'Well,' Seaver said with real kindness, 'maybe you will, maybe you will.' [AFM p.28-29]

Norman would add some revisions to "Transit" in January, but he closed out 1943 by taking a big break for a final excursion. His recreation time that season had been so limited as to leave almost no record. Through the fall he must have made the occasional trip to Boston to be with Bea, and she might even have come down to New York once or twice, but for the most part they appear to have gone it alone, working hard. Now, though, Bea was all but graduating and Norman had all but finished his novel, so in the next to last week of December they went with a few friends to North Conway, New Hampshire, where their experience was more unqualifiedly idyllic than Provincetown had been in June. They became instant skiing converts, and found themselves growing

17
Gladstone

i ³ It was at this time that Norman changed the title, and changed the ending so that both the Captain and the Sergeant are alive at the end, waiting together for the final Japanese attack. The December 23, 1943 acceptance letter from L. B. Fischer included a check for \$50 as an advance against royalties.

closer together every day⁴.

Toward the end of the week's stay, Norman suddenly proposed that they get married. Now it was Bea's turn to pull back, foreseeing as she could that Norman must very soon vanish into the army, but he made it clear that it was exactly because of the army that he felt they should marry. With his novel now largely behind him (then, as now, he could think of nothing but the writing when a book was in progress), he had begun thinking of how he was going to deal with being a soldier, and he envisioned an important support-figure role for Bea in this regard. When they came home from Conway, they were secretly engaged.

ii

✓ It is possible that when Norman went up to North Conway he had already received some warning of his impending induction notification. Certainly he got his first formal notice no later than Monday, January 3, and he immediately rendezvoused with Bea.

She told Hilary Mills that the force behind the idea of actually going through with the marriage came from Norman, and that while she herself remained unsure, he very much felt the need for "an

⁴ Norman wrote two cards home from North Conway, making no mention of Bea. The assessment of their relationship at the time is based upon their many retrospective references to the trip during their military service correspondence.

anchor on the home front." [HM p.75] That part of the home front occupied by both of their parents constituted a significant impediment to such an action, however, so the couple decided that the best strategy was to present them with a fait accompli. First they paid a visit together to Ted Amussen, who was in the process of reviewing "Transit" for possible publication. He could see that they were "indirectly asking for his blessing of the marriage," and he was happy to give it [Mills, 74]. Then, armed with a dime-store ring and with Norman's blood-test secretly supplied by an ancient physician-uncle of Seymour Breslow [Manso p.73], the couple went up to Yonkers at the end of that week--on Friday, January 7--and were married in a civil ceremony.

Immediately after their return, Norman had a formal interview with his draft board to request a brief extension for purposes of finishing his book. The request was not warmly received, and after a wait of two weeks was not granted. His token appeal of this rejection then got him an extra thirty days, but he knew that he would have to report in late March⁵, and he turned to the completion of his revisions even as he sent Edwin Seaver a biographical note for Cross-Section⁶

⁵ By January 18 a letter to Norman from Martha Keeler, Chief Clerk of Local Board 217, rescheduled an earlier appointment with the Government Appeal Agent. Norman replied with an appeal letter asking for time to finish the manuscript. Correspondence with others reveals that, following an interview, the appeal was tartly denied.

⁶ "I was born in Long Branch, New Jersey, Jan. 31, 1923, but lived in Brooklyn most of my life. I graduated Harvard in June,

Bea's parents learned about the marriage first, and Norman never forgot or forgave the fury of her mother's rejection of both it and him. Bea later argued that Norman's mother had been even more furious when --almost immediately--she got the news, but there is no disagreement that the disapproval was unanimous, including all parents and most relatives. Judging from the way the union was still being discussed forty years later, Norman's aunts, his Cousin Osie, and, indeed, many of the other women concerned with him--friends of Barbara, associates of his Harvard classmates--seem to have assumed that Bea had been the aggressor, and a self-seeking one at that[Manso, passim]. Only the younger sisters of the two principals appear to have been wholehearted--if wholly unheeded-- supporters.

The two overwrought mothers seized a temporary control of the situation by challenging the legality of the entire proceeding. During the six weeks that this took, Bea was confined to the house in Chelsea, and was refused access to an indignant Norman until

'43, and have been working on [a] novel for about a year. (i.e. started it in my senior year.) Besides A Calculus at Heaven, I had several stories published in the Harvard Advocate of which I was one of the editors, and one of the pieces--The Greatest Thing in the World--won Story Magazine's college contest for 1941. That story came out of a little hitch-hiking tour which I embarked upon quite Byronically, and in retrospect, masochistically.

If you want any more, I've worked (for very short periods) as a press agent and flat painter for a small summer theater; as a soda jerk and dishwasher; and as a guard in a mental hospital which served eventually as the base setting for the novel. By the time Cross-Section comes out, I guess you can add that I'm in the Armed Forces."

Seaver reduced the note by about half, but added nothing when he published it.

the question was settled. When both mothers were forced to recognize the perfectly legal status of the arrangement, they did so with heavy hearts and, in accepting it at last, they demanded at least the satisfaction of a proper ceremony.

Thus the couple--angry now at everyone, including each other--was, as Bea recalled for Hilary Mills, "married again by a rabbi under a chuppa," [HM,p.75] at the bride's family home in Chelsea. The mutual family pressure to go through with this was evidently irresistible, but the newlyweds openly detested the ceremony, as Norman reminded his mother in a letter later from Fort Ord[10/29/44]. Not realizing how deeply he would alarm his mother concerning his sister's private life, he cited the experience as an example of the kind of thing that would probably lead Barbara--at that moment in the act of falling defiantly in love with Irish/Catholic Jack Maher--to reject her Jewish identity and marry a gentile. Bea, who detested not only the ceremony but also (if we are to believe Norman's Psychology paper) the house and home where it was held, demonstrated how extraordinarily willing she was to live virtually anywhere else by moving forthwith to Brooklyn Heights, to reside for the time with the Mailer family at 102 Pierrepont Street.

The family's arrival at this Brooklyn Heights address had been relatively recent: Fan decided to move from Crown Street the previous summer--when Barbara went up to Radcliffe and Norman was assuming the status of a Harvard alumnus--apparently as a kind of

✓ signal that the family was coming up in the world. Indeed, years later she remembered mentioning the educational situation of her two children to the landlord, during initial negotiations, lest he not appreciate the quality of his potential tenants[Manso, p.95-96]. A conveniently short walk from the Sunlight Oil Company offices on Court Street, the building had apparently once been a single-family brownstone, but now its recently renovated interior held six one-story apartments, and the Mailers occupied the third floor.[Suess,p.87] Uncelebrated author Arthur Miller would soon occupy one of the other floors, five of which were configured identically: two bedrooms, a kitchen and bath, and a living room large enough, as Fan said--perhaps remembering Norman's "Oh, Don't You Be That Way" party at the end of his freshman year--to allow Barbara to entertain her friends from college.[Manso, p. 95-96]

✓ In March, after a brief pause in a hotel to recover from their ordeal under the chuppa, Norman and Bea moved into one of the bedrooms, and he ran through his final preparations. As part of his nuptial arranging, Norman had taken out a substantial insurance policy with John Hancock (annual premium of \$111.55), and he had a lawyer next door to the oil company draw up a power of attorney giving David Kessler authority to act in all things legal. Finally, having been notified by Ted Amussen that Rinehart did not regard "Transit" as publishable⁷, Norman retained a

⁷The rejection estranged the two friends for the duration of Norman's army service, and Rinehart would eventually contract to publish The Naked and the Dead only after a somewhat awkward reconciliation.[Mills,74]

✓ literary agent. Recommended by Edwin Seaver, she was Berta Kaslow, a young staff agent at the William Morris Agency[12/14/43bk], with which Norman signed a contract on March 6. Berta immediately went into action marketing the manuscript of "Transit," and would represent Norman throughout almost his whole time in the army.

Then the young author packed a few belongings and on Monday, March 27, 1944, took a train out to Camp Upton, a staging center on Long Island, to report for duty.

[#]

L Jarp Norman's time of military service was to last for two years, one month, and five days, when he would be honorably discharged on May 2, 1946 at the Fort Dix, New Jersey, Separation Center. Although he marked his entrance as a private by scoring a dizzying 147 on the standard army I.Q. test, as well as a very respectable 134 in Mechanical Aptitude, by the time of his discharge he was nevertheless again a private, having risen to the rank of sergeant (T-4) for only two months in early 1946. The time between was marked by an initial seventeen weeks of Basic Training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, some three and a half months in California awaiting embarkation orders, followed by the last eight months of the Pacific war, during almost all of which he campaigned with the 112th Cavalry in the Philippines. He was then transferred to Japan, and his troopship arrived in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945, in perfect time for him to witness through binoculars the signing of the formal Japanese surrender on the battleship

Missouri. He remained stationed in Japan for just over seven months, until mid-April¹⁶, 1946, when he took ship for home.

✓ The drama that developed in Norman's life during this whole time is for the most part documented in correspondence: some 450 of the letters he wrote home have been preserved, as have close to 300 letters written to him. Here can be followed the fortunes of Norman's relationship with the military, with a publishing world that spent many months reading and rejecting "Transit", with his family--the various members of which he occasionally had time to address at thoughtful length--and with his wife, who proved indeed to be the anchor on the home front he had correctly thought he would need. Most of all, however, this record preserves an account of his efforts to develop himself as a writer--and specifically the writer of an ambitious postwar novel--while struggling through his army experience as a participant.

[#]

While Norman was spending eleven days at Camp Upton going through the standard testing, taking his shots, getting his uniforms and preparing to receive an assignment elsewhere, he was interrupted by a barrage of telegraph, telephone and postal communication asking that he come at once to New York City[4/4-5/44bk]. After he had delivered the manuscript of "Transit" to Berta Kaslow in early March, she had taken it first to Random House, where senior editor Robert N. Linscott registered a kind of enthusiasm that led Berta and everyone in the family to believe

that the book was about to be accepted for publication. But Linscott, who actually had many reservations about the book, and whose editorial colleagues had many more, only said that he wanted and needed to talk with Norman in person about revisions. In the ensuing uproar Norman discovered for the first time what he would rediscover regularly over the next two years: publishers were often very misleading correspondents, and the army had no interest in the concerns of such people, or of his agent, or his literary career.

Summarily refused a pass[4/5/44bk], he was shipped with a batch of other high-scoring draftees to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for seventeen weeks of Basic Training in the context of specialization training as artillery surveyors. As he entered training, it was not only amidst the flurry of correspondence concerning the status of the book at Random House, but also amidst a flurry of developments concerning Bea. Almost immediately after his departure for Camp Upton she had been notified that her hastily submitted application for officer training in the Waves--the Women's Corp of the U. S. Naval Reserve--had been accepted, and, on the same day Norman left Upton for Fort Bragg, Bea reported for duty as an officer-trainee seaman on the campus of Smith College at Northampton, Massachusetts.

Before either of them could get to their areas of basic training, however, Fan sounded a note that would become a refrain in the family correspondence throughout the war: she asked them

both to council Barbara against her relationship with Jack Maher.

Norman wrote, amid the chaos of Camp Upton:

About Jack Maher, Mother. I'm sorry but I disagree with you on it. I couldn't write the letter you ask me to, to Barbara. I won't interfere, but I think you're wrong, dear. [4/1]

Bea, trying mightily to get along with her new mother-in-law, was in the act of going to Cambridge--en route to Northampton--to deliver birthday presents to Barbara at Radcliffe, but she also declined Fan's requested pledge of alliance. [B4/1]

In any event, Norman and Bea began their military training at almost exactly the same time, though not exactly under the same conditions. Smith College residential housing supplied the officer candidates with comfortable quarters in a beautifully pastoral, springtime setting, reasonably close to the Hartford, Connecticut rail link to New York and Boston. Fort Bragg, by contrast, was the largest military post in the United States. It was a field artillery replacement training center, five hundred fifty buildings set on a 450 square mile tract of sandy Pinewoods country, some twenty five miles north of the South Carolina border; by April it was already passing into the steam heat of summer, and it was, as an additional Spartan touch, an installation exclusively for the training of enlisted men⁸.

Bea's initial reaction to her new setting was that, though

⁸ Norman sent home a 32 page booklet, A Guide to the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center: Fort Bragg, North Carolina, with light annotation showing the location of his area, and the identity of his battery and battalion.

not altogether unpleasant, this woman's military installation was something of a cross between a boarding school and a prison.[B4/15] Norman's first impression--after a twenty-five hour ride in an ancient day coach-- was more global, as well as more stentorian: "Regimental life is horrible," he wrote to his wife. "I know now that no good Communist state could ever be achieved unless regimentation was destroyed." [4/11]

In the course of the next month, Norman addressed himself first to the task of coping with everyday life in his training platoon. In the overall context of a rigorous basic training, his platoon was specifically being prepared in Instrument and Survey duty: placement, direction and photo-analyzing results of field artillery fire. The specific training required unusual levels of skill in mathematics, particularly geometry and trigonometry, so Norman's platoon was an extraordinarily well-educated and intelligent, if not widely admired, unit in the battery of which it was a part.

They slept in a two-story barracks--thirty men to an open-bay floor--and, apart from trying to keep it and all of their equipment meticulously clean and well-ordered, the men divided their 5:30 AM-10:00 PM days between eight hours of class (four in the morning, four in the afternoon) and a grueling routine of physical work and training. While living in the barracks the platoon was said to be in garrison. In its overall seventeen week structure the training took the men through two interim weeks and

aimed at two penultimate weeks of intensive exercises out of garrison, bivouacked in the field, and would conclude with a final week back in the barracks. Reassignment, with a ten-day furlough, would bring the training to an end.

Not unpredictably, Norman found the classes tolerable and sometimes even interesting; was challenged and tested by the physical demands but took some pride in being able to stay the course; and hated the calculated strategy of barracks and equipment discipline--not to mention Kitchen Police-- designed as they were to condition the men to take orders automatically and without question. A barracks-mate recalls that Norman proved so inept at preparing for official scrutiny that some of his fellows routinely reviewed his area and equipment before every inspection, to protect the platoon from the group punishment that his "gigs" might otherwise bring down upon them all. [Manso p.77]

Many, if not actually most aspects of Norman's situation must have reminded him of a combination of the worst features of Boy's High and the Boston State Hospital, and he was, in his cautious attempt to deal with it adequately, very far from being the most extroverted member of his platoon. In a letter to Bea rather admiringly describing the man who actually was most extroverted--one Bernie Schwartz--Norman contrasts his own identity in the group by remarking, "In the barracks I am rather quiet, colorless I suppose," adding that only one of his fellows even begins to know him. [4/30nb] The fact was, as Bea very well understood, that

Norman felt himself at an enormous disadvantage in this unfamiliar setting of crowded masculine hurly-burly and anonymity. The first and in many ways the longest-lasting difficulty he had in enlisted life was that of bridging the distance in his inner-feelings between himself and the men with whom he served.

For a sense of support he turned not to any barracks-mate but outside, to his family, to Bea and, in a rather different context, to his agent. Throughout the seventeen weeks, Norman wrote an average of at least five cards and letters a week, and in return received a steady stream of cards, letters, telegrams and packages containing ingeniously selected foodstuffs, clothing, patent medicines and other supplies. His exchanges with his parents-- Barbara was submerged in her own situation and seldom wrote--were very like their correspondence during the Harvard years, except that now Barney was a more active participant. In late April he landed an appointment as an accountant with the Office of Price Administration, working for the most part out of Washington, D.C., and for the first time a separate, if rather stunted correspondence grew up between father and son.

Uncle Dave and Aunt Nan wrote regularly, and of course Fan, still in charge of the Sunlight Oil Company and accumulating extra portions of food stamps in Brooklyn for her absent husband and daughter, wrote constantly, kept the packages coming, served as contact person with Berta Kaslow, Edwin Seaver, and other literary persons, and hatched futile schemes to get her son special

treatment by the military.

It was Bea however, as Norman had foreseen and intended, who supplied him with the kind of support no other person in his life could offer. Her decision to enter military training at the same time as he did proved a brilliantly successful tactic, transforming her from Fan's passive Pierrepont Street housemate for the duration--a situation that could not possibly have lasted--into Norman's active peer, discovering a new world in a way analogous to his own process of discovery. They had not only old things to share in their letters and plans but new ones, developing for both of them every day, and they must have been one of the rare separated couples during the war who grew closer, in certain basic ways, as a consequence of their separation. Early on, Norman sent her what he called "A portrait your husband in uniform:"

He wears his fatigues all day, which are faded dirty green, a shirt and pants. The shirt flops loose about his hips, and his calves are covered with canvas leggings. His shoes are always dirty and caked. He wears a cartridge belt about his middle and a carbine (short rifle) is slung over his back. His face is tanned and his shirt open at the neck. His hands are always dirty; when he finishes eating he wipes them on his pants. He has a habit of spitting from a dry throat. The spit comes out in a little white ball. He looks very tough and wiry, and his hair is a half-inch long, his eyes are very blue against the dirty tanned face. You cannot see his hair, however, for a steel helmet covers his head, and the chin strap chafes against his jawbone. He looks ready to fight tomorrow. [4/19]

Bea's replies were appreciative and witty, offering in situ self portraits from the cloistered inner chambers of a women's community that were often enough indirectly erotic, and of course

the correspondence on both sides included a substantial dimension of the directly erotic as well. Building on this foundation, and sharing past memories, designing domestic projects for the future, while exchanging their discoveries in the here and now, the young couple had a correspondence that might have been worth saving even if it had not also been designed to serve as a repository for the journal-notes of a writer researching vital material.

As writer, Norman used his voluminous flow of correspondence in a variety of ways, most directly in the form of publisher negotiations, through Berta Kaslow, designed to get "Transit" into print. To say that the book's author took a businesslike attitude in these matters is to understate the case: he and Bea and his mother all felt that Berta might be even more dedicated as his agent if she did not know he was married, so the fact was rather awkwardly concealed from her for some four months, and still more awkwardly acknowledged when, in the normal course of business, it came to the agent's puzzled attention.[6/29,7/14bk] Apparently undismayed by the news, Berta generated heavy correspondence through her near-miss with Robert Linscott at Random House, which revealed the publisher's view that though the novel in its present state was "quite unpublishable," Random House was nevertheless interested in some kind of affiliation with its author. The publishers suggested unrealistically radical revisions of "Transit", but had offered at the same time a small advance in the context of an option contract for the submission of Norman's

"first satisfactory, book-length manuscript." [4/17rl]

Not realizing that this would be the best offer "Transit" would ever elicit, Norman turned it down and went on, while he was at Fort Bragg, to work through negative negotiations with Knopf [5/9bk], Houghton-Mifflin [6/14bk], Scribners [6/6bk] and Harcourt-Brace [8/1bk]. He was also busy tracking and discussing with various correspondents the publication and reception of Seavers' Cross-Section volume, which appeared in early May [correspondence w/ family & Bea, passim]. Norman's most important professional activity as writer while in basic training, however, involved the employment of part of his correspondence with Bea as a writing journal, where he could record notes, sketches, and impressions of his environment that might be of future fictional use. While referring to himself as a colorless figure in the platoon, he told Bea somewhat melodramatically: Let it remain that way. And let it remain that I am not too prominent--it is an excellent observation post. From the observation post to the receiving station will go so much that would otherwise be unnoticed. [4/30]

✓ As the receiving station for Norman's literary observations, Bea accumulated, even in the first few months of his military training, a significant amount of material. Besides notes on his working and living conditions, he sent her verbal sketches of a number of soldiers, recording their speech and social/sexual attitudes as he often quite calculatedly elicited them, and wrote out vignettes and scenes complete with dramatic action and dialogue. The closest thing to an actual friend he had at first

was Meyer Marotznik, an older draftee, more or less unfit for the physical training but extremely good hearted; he was uncritically admiring of Norman, who would sketch him as if he were an artist's model:

He has a powerful chest and body with very spindly old man's legs. His hair is black and thin, beginning to recede. He has a wide forehead, small deepset brown eyes and a good chin, and a broken, flat nose which looks like a European peasant's rather than a prize-fighter's. [4/19]

The extroverted Bernie Schwartz is given similar treatment in the context of something close to a one-act play^{when date} [4/30], and in fact over time the barracks became a kind of artist's studio where, on the easel of his note-pad, Norman produced sketch after sketch to be displayed in the gallery of his correspondence with Bea.

Quite overt about what he was doing, he routinely remarked to Bea that "it's very good having you to write to. Someone to share my secret observations with." [4/19] The only problem was that since Bea also lived in the transient conditions of a military installation, she was not the most secure caretaker of this accumulating archival material. So Norman advised her early on: Told mother I would write part of my letters to you as a journal which you would send on to her. Enables me to write shorter letters home. I'll try to keep such stuff apart from the other sheets where I make my restricted love. Explain to mother that some of my notes will seem a little raw to her. [4/16].⁹

⁹ In fact, the texts of Norman's letters quite often cannot be

Norman's literary activity also included a certain amount of reading. He read J. P. Marquand's 1943 novel So Little Time in May[5/18], quoting passages of it to Bea to illustrate various points about the publishing world, and at his request Fan sent him a copy of Thus Spake Zarathustra, which he began reading.[5/18] He was in the right mood, because even before the Nietzsche arrived his situation moved him to some free-style philosophizing of his own, and he developed a thesis for Bea about the relationships to be discovered between death and rhythm, rhythm and civilization, and civilization and death[5/8] which she said she found fascinating (while noting that quite the opposite of what he argued could just as easily be proved.)[B5/14] Early reviews and notices of Cross-Section began to reach him in May, Fan having sent him a copy of the book, and he was pleased to discover that the Book-of-the-Month Club had chosen it as a selection. Norman was alert, first, for acknowledgements of "Calculus" in the reviews--the BOMC notice did not mention him--and also, somewhat cautiously, he began reading the other items in the anthology,

separated out into literary sketches/notes on the one hand, and on the other his personal, often extremely intimate communications to Bea. Almost as frequently as not, the two dimensions are inextricably combined. The author's wife dealt with the resultant problem of preserving her privacy for the duration by holding on to the file despite her lack of storage space.

consciously measuring himself, as he would always do, against his contemporaries.

Most striking of all at this time, however, was the way Norman's literary imagination processed impressions and information from the world of his training, and transferred the result over into the world of his writing. "I got an idea for a war novel today," he tells Bea:

It came to me when I was thinking of how much I'd know about artillery when my 17 weeks are over, not just shooting them, but how they are aimed, set up, and what tasks each man from the officers to the lowest cannoneers perform during a day's activity on the guns. From there the idea followed naturally. [5/10]

He thought the book could cover the progress of a battery--four guns--that moved into place in a certain valley, aimed at certain targets, struck them, subsequently became engaged in a counter-artillery duel with the enemy--"one of the most nerve-wracking things in modern warfare"--and within a day or two advanced or retreated a few miles to new positions which had been prepared for them. There is an almost blithe quality to his easy transformation of training program fact into writing program fiction:

The book would start with the survey men (me) estimating the terrain a few days before the guns are moved in, and deciding upon the site. Then the arrival of the battalion (three batteries of four guns each) and preparations. Then the rest. What do you think? [5/10]

In the married couple's letters, the most central military refrain spoke of how each of the young trainees tried to cope with

*Rough
draft*

the programs they found themselves in, and how their passionate devotion to one another permitted them to prevail over the otherwise impossible demands of the training. Bea's schedule was apparently even more hectic than Norman's in terms of jam-packed calendar hours and the quite real danger of failing, or "bilging out" of her program. But it was only ten weeks overall and offered an Ensign's commission at its conclusion: she was scheduled to graduate and receive the commission on May 30, along with orders for her next assignment. For many weeks both Norman and Bea would openly fantasize that she would get a brief "Shore Leave" following graduation, which would permit an overnight meeting in Fayetteville[5/15]--just five miles from Norman's station--for a much anticipated reunion.

Their detailed descriptions of training, test scores and assorted military accomplishments and reversals revealed that they were somewhat similar as trainees: their academic text-examination scores were often at the very top of their competition, and Norman sometimes scored high on the carbine firing range and in some of the physical training, but neither of them showed well in personnel or equipment inspections. During a bad week in May Bea got cited at Personnel Inspection three times: once for a crooked stocking seam, once for dust on her coat, and once for a stray lock of hair.[B5/12] Norman admitted that he was in the lowest fourth of his platoon for "chicken-shit" violations, and called down "gigs" on his head (and that of his platoon) for infractions

far greater and wider-ranging than Bea's:
I take showers after hours, I forget to tell the sergeant I am going to see the first sergeant, I clean my equipment in the sinks instead of the big washtub, I forget to shine my shoes before a parade inspection, etc. But in the classes, the physical training, the carbine, the instruments, etc. I am easily in the top fourth.[5/17]

Though Norman was accumulating a military record that would work against him far more than he was able to appreciate at the moment, during this early period both of them survived their everyday reversals by turning, in their letters, to thoughts of one another. It was therefore a bitter pill to swallow when they discovered that there was to be no shore leave long enough to provide time for a reunion at the end of May. Instead, Bea was required to remain at the Northampton station after being commissioned, there to take an eight-week specialization course in communications. At just the time he had hoped for their rendezvous, Norman received instead a visit from Uncle Dave and Aunt Nan, and with a real effort their disappointed nephew did his imperfect best to conceal from them the depth of his state of irritability.[5/28] They went back and, the next weekend, regaled a Pierrepont Street dinner table with anecdotes of Norman's anti-military posture--Bea was there and did not enjoy the experience[B6/1]--while Norman turned his disaffected attention to the here and now at Fort Bragg.

Cross-Section continued to get favorable attention--Philip Van Doren Stern praised it in The Book of the Month Club News, and one Thomas Lyle Collins reviewed it admiringly in the New York

Herald Tribune of May 28, 1944, singling out "Calculus" as "a remarkable achievement for so young a writer." Then on Sunday, June 4, Seaver's collection was the subject of a network radio-broadcast review that glued Barney in Washington and Fan in Brooklyn to their radios, and they were thrilled to hear Norman praised yet again.

As Norman struggled to assure himself that he could keep up with the training and hold his own there in any arena there that he cared about, he conscientiously sought out the opportunity to expand the writer's notebook that he shared with Bea. It was more as a writer than a soldier that he received the news, on June 6, of the Allied invasion of Normandy, and he told Bea how much he wished that he could have been there. (He here for the first time referred to his wish to enter combat as a kind of vice that he had somehow to deal with--he called it his "dirty itch"-- and the subject would come up periodically in the course of his movement, finally, into the status of volunteer combatant.) [6/8]

He wrote a seven page sketch of how two drunken couples in Fayetteville--the men off-duty corporals, the women apparently prostitutes--wandered into a motor-pool parking lot where Norman was standing guard, and variously amused and shocked the young soldiers on guard there with their antics[6/10]. He then wrote of how, on the ride home from that same guard duty, he experienced a kind of vision from the truck of the passing inland landscape as if it were a seascape, with rich sea smells.[6/13] One letter

conjures up an imaginary painting of a dead-empty, silence-filled scene in camp, consciously in the fashion of Salvador Dali.[6/24]

Most ambitiously, perhaps, another letter recounts how on a quiet Sunday afternoon he explored out into the camp, visiting the deserted and oddly peaceful obstacle course, and communing with nature among the isolating dunes. In exploring a wrecked and abandoned building, he is taken back in memory to an exploration of a similar place with Bea two summers earlier near the wreckage of the Scarboro.[6/26]

Norman poured these things out in his letters, adding that his confidence in his ability to create continued to assert itself. Reading Stanley Edgar Hyman's essay in Cross-Section, "The

New War and Peace: A Speculation," he tells Bea that:

I felt the old enthusiasm grow in me, the old hunger and the virile creative juices. So many characters appeared, so many phrases formed, a whole [paragraph] for the beginning, and I had the writer's ecstasy when something is born in his mind, perfect and complete for that moment. I swore to myself that I would write a great novel, and it seemed so easy and positive at that second.[6/10]¹⁰

¹⁰ Hyman's essay is an eighteen page candidate for inclusion in what would become a favored critical genre of this period: the literature of speculation concerning the coming character of post-World War II writing, particularly the novel. ("It seems obvious," Hyman says, "that the novel is the only adequate form for presenting the total effect of modern war.") The new War and Peace, he concludes:

"would presumably be another vast historical novel, written a decade or two after the war. The author would have to be a man of leisure or some means, who has either served in the war or had some comparable military experience. He would probably be a Marxist; probably, although not inevitably, a Russian; and certainly a genius. It would not be his first book, but probably not his last."

Cross-Section, p. 423.

Similarly self-directed is a "set of ideas on character dynamics" that for pages explores how there is an inner core to the human personality formed of all the destructive human impulses and this is contained by an outer-ring of super ego forces that curb the core. [6/22, 7/13]

Earlier in the same week he began an anecdote about how a new sergeant in their Battery had fallen into difficulty by failing to impose disciplinary sanctions in the right way. As Norman sketches the situation, filling in dialogue between the sergeant and the men and analyzing the exchange of their feelings, the presentation begins to assume a more and more formal shape, and, noticing this, the author remarks to Bea that this "would make a nice little New Yorker story." [6/19] In fact, the sergeant in question, identified by Norman as being too understanding and human to function effectively as a "good" training non-com, was non-other than Sergeant Donald Mann, who would provide the physical-appearance model for Sergeant Croft in The Naked and the Dead. (The fictional character was internally changed, as Norman would later make clear, by being made unfair--not to say psychotic--in ways that the actual Sergeant Mann would never have been.) The fact is that after Norman got home from the army and began the formal composition of his novel, he sorted through the accumulated hundreds of his letters, reaping the literary harvest he had sown there. In that process he would retrieve a good deal more than the

physical recollection of Sergeant Mann.¹¹

Though Norman continued to report on the difficult progress of his training, and even began to wonder whether it might make sense for him to give up on his case-study approach and get out of the enlisted ranks through entering Officer's Candidate School [6/19], his correspondence during the month of June is largely divided between his literary notebooking and expressions of his personal, physical obsession with his wife. As this emerges, it becomes clear that Bea served two complimentary purposes for Norman. On the one hand she was, indeed, the relatively passive receiving station for his fiction-writer observations. On the other hand, he was asking her to be a much more active respondent to his often ardent expressions of desire, which were themselves obviously deepened and made urgent by his perception of his limitations as a functioning member of his platoon.

The degree to which he was able to convert his experience into literary material, storing it away in his letters for future

¹¹ Interestingly enough, few of the dozen letters selected out from his Fort Bragg time for possible (and in a few cases actual) use in The Naked and the Dead were the specifically literary letters. Though a couple dealt with how one or another fiction-writing problem could be solved or literary effect achieved, most of the letters from this period that he would later find valuable were accounts of actual experience. An account of men seeking shelter from a lacerating storm in the lee of a truck, and while huddled there breaking into song; the feeling of spending the night alone in a foxhole; the experience of sharing guard duty in the field with another soldier: these were the kinds of things he revisited after he left the army, simply transferring the people from their harsh enough North Carolina context over to the still harsher world of a Pacific jungle.

reference, impressed his wife, as it would in the end impress many others. But almost equally impressive was the price he paid by his submission to the role of enlisted-man membership in a military training unit. The very intensity of concentration that he fixed upon experience in order to convert it to his imaginative purposes, almost fatally distracted him--as participant in that experience--from paying it the practical attention that it required. The result was that he was emerging as at best a marginally satisfactory soldier, and this in turn began calling down on his head if not a storm then a steady enough rain of criticism--from others but also from himself. His consequent, cumulative feelings of inadequacy were what he brought to Bea.

As the weeks wore on, an idealized vision of their relationship and the specific goal of finding his way back into her arms began to dominate Norman's imagination, and the idea of Beatrice, as she always signed herself, took shape as the entity upon which he almost entirely depended. After all, the demands of his training program were--in the way of all basic training--escalating every day, and while this was unquestionably increasing his fiction writer's knowledge, it also escalated his well-founded fear of participatory failure. The thought of escaping into OCS, for example, started to look good even though it would go against his goal of developing a writer's understanding of military experience from the ground up. But it was attractive only if it did not require him to give up his furlough at basic training's end. When

he came to learn, or anyway to believe that acceptance into an officer training program would cost him his furlough and require him to wait another three months before rejoining Bea, he summarily abandoned the idea[6/24].

It is not too much to say that he was becoming obsessed with the prospect of their reunion, and so the effect of her telling him, in a letter on June 25, that she had that weekend experienced a kind of intimacy with another man was really quite dramatic. Their relationship had always been based on an arrangement of mutual confession concerning intimate relations with others--past, present or future--and this was apparently accompanied by a show of progressive sophistication concerning mutual freedom of choice. In reality the two were fierce in their feelings of reciprocal possession, and certainly their current circumstances allowed for absolutely no latitude from the most dedicated mutual faithfulness.

Bea's experience was actually quite funny, in a Woody-Allen-movie kind of way. She had accepted a weekend invitation from former college friends, a married couple who were trying to cope with six months of physical separation caused by a very delicate pregnancy: one that had concluded with a complicated Caesarian-section birth. By the time Bea arrived for the weekend the couple, evidently racked by the kind of cabin-fever that deprives parents of all sanity, had hatched the scheme of asking her--as a special favor to the family-- to relieve the young husband's unbearable

sexual starvation. She refused, but during the weekend that followed the cramped quarters and frantic state of the householders brought about some fleeting and more or less compromising contact, and Bea decided to confess it all to Norman. He reacted initially with an outburst of jealous distress[6/27], but the confession's longer range effect was to drive him totally into the subject of his relationship with Bea, his need for her undivided intimate attention and the necessity of her reassurance in this regard. Virtually every letter Norman wrote through the month of July --amidst all the developing drama of the conclusion of his basic training--addresses itself at least in part to arranging the time, the place, the structure and the most intimate details of their forthcoming reunion. Norman was going to be on maneuvers in the field until the morning of Saturday, July 29. The plan was for Bea to meet him in a hotel in Fayetteville--for weeks the burning question had been: Fayetteville or Raleigh? --on that Saturday, and they would be together for as much of the weekend as she could spare before departing for wherever her new navy assignment was to take her. As a practical matter, they needed to know when and where Bea was going to be sent for this next assignment, and in the absence of such knowledge they could not realistically plan anything. Undeterred, Norman planned it anyway, speculating that she would be stationed in Washington D.C. or somewhere close to it. [7/2,5,10,12,13,14,15,18]

Waiting to find out the facts put them both through an agony of suspense before they learned, in mid-July, that as of August 1 Bea was to be assigned as a communications officer to the huge Naval Base in Norfolk, Virginia.[7/22] The Fayetteville plan was, suddenly, perfectly practical. Bea's letters since the confession had bathed Norman in reassurance of every kind, and he soon stopped displaying signs of actual jealousy, but his very powerful need to join her continued to build through his letters, and it clearly was related to the building drama of his basic training ordeal. He said on Sunday, July 9, that the previous first full week of the month--Monday, July 3rd through Friday the 7th--had been the most difficult he had experienced in the army.

Grueling night marches on Monday and Tuesday had set up a full day in the field on Wednesday when his platoon hand-measured miles of terrain in their "survey" exercise for setting up the heavy guns. Thursday was their time for the Infiltration Course, a trial by fire wherein the platoon had to crawl out of a trench and across a seventy yard field of black dirt--canopied with low-slung barbed wire meshes--while live machine-gun fire passed over their heads and dynamite charges simulated artillery fire all around them. When they fell into a trench on the opposite end, they were routed round and required to crawl over the course again at night, with the guns firing tracer bullets. Norman immediately wrote Bea two letters, the first of ten pages the second of eight, giving a graphic account of the experience and demonstrating that his

apparatus for storing it away was working very well[7/7,8]How he was measuring up to it as a soldier was something else.

The following week, strenuous enough in its own right, was also devoted to preparing for two weeks in the field, where his battery staged a full range of artillery surveys, by day and night, including mock patrol skirmishes. However important it all was for his memory banks, it also tested him personally to something close to his breaking point. Norman returned from the maneuvers on Saturday morning, July 29, stored his filthy equipment, showered, shaved and went into Fayetteville to join Bea for a full day and a half at the Prince Charles hotel. Once in the room and in Bea's arms, he suddenly experienced the full force of the threat he had been living under in the crush of barrack and bivouac. So absolute was his moment of alienation from the external world that he refused furiously to so much as acknowledge its existence: when they needed ice water, Bea had to get it from a landlady whom Norman simply could not face. He would remember for a long time his crushed condition, in which he had refused to speak to or even be seen by anyone but Bea. He would come to read the experience as a sign of how deep and desperate his secret sensitivity really ran, and this evidence of vulnerability would continue both to worry and to influence him.

Bea reported on Monday, August 1, to her new assignment as aide to the District Communications Officer of the Fifth Naval District Naval Operating Base in Norfolk, while Norman, moving

into his final week of basic training, posed with his unit for an end-of-training photographic group portrait, where he appears as an intrepid, hard-nosed veteran of the training. His altogether different picture in Bea's mind had him looking "like a skeleton with his big ears sticking out," [Mills, p. 76] and there can be little doubt that hers was the more revealing likeness. In any case, with his training now over, Norman planned a three-part structure for his ten-day furlough: time with Bea in Norfolk, time with his family in Brooklyn, and time with his agent in New York. He could hardly have divided it less efficiently, spending a whole day alone on a train for a two day New York visit, another day back down to Norfolk for six days with Bea, and then, accompanied by Bea, back up to New York for two days more, most of it spent in conference with Berta.

The furlough concluded with a tense meeting in the offices of Random House, where editor Robert Linscott tried to express his admiration for "Transit" while at the same time explaining why he felt that it was unpublishable.[8/19nb] They discussed revisions--in fact Linscott was left with the impression that Norman had agreed to wholesale revisions--but, whatever Norman said at the meeting (both he and Berta had been very nervous), his visceral commitment was actually to something far other than revising a manuscript written prior to his entering military service. It would take him a while to work out his feelings about the "Transit" project, but at bottom he was committed to looking

forward, and to positioning his new, military experience at the absolute center of his writer's imagination.

✓ | Considering the way the practical, everyday demands of military experience both commanded and divided his attention--between proving himself adequate to it and learning what he needed from it as a writer--he probably had little real choice. Balancing that division was what he needed to do, and thus far he had not done it too badly. He was already richer as a writer than he had ever been before, and he knew he could get much richer if he could keep things in equipoise. As a soldier he had a record already more marred by his inadequacies than he may have realized, but he was still in good standing as an artillery-surveyor candidate, and he hoped to be able to maintain that status as he pursued his private goal. He had, after all, a secret weapon for dealing with the various needs his new life was creating, and he starting writing her a letter soon after leaving the meeting with Linscott. He wrote to Bea from the train he boarded on August 18, heading for San Francisco, telling her all about the meeting. His orders read that he should report to Fort Ord, California; the well-known first step in the process of overseas shipment into the Pacific Theater of military operations.

iii

Norman's days with Bea and the others had in a great many

ways been restorative, but they passed quickly and the stretch of the continent--he had never been west of Scranton--impressed upon him the distance that had so massively been placed between them. Having ascertained that the cost of a Pullman ticket was beyond his means, he crossed the country by day-coach and was actually thrilled to sit at the window and take in the panoramic visual grandeur of the trip.

He made it in the company of fellow-trainee Clifford Maskovsky[Manso, p. 30-32], an eighteen-year-old Connecticut resident who had been so sharp as to have been appointed aide-de-camp in their Fort Bragg platoon. When they arrived in San Francisco the two soldiers tested their orders by not proceeding directly to Fort Ord, deciding first to explore around the city. They checked into an inexpensive "armed services hotel" on Mason Street-- run by Lutherans and called the King George[8/22]--and spent two days wandering over the cityscape as well as taking in both an afternoon burlesque show and an evening production of Porgy and Bess. Maskovsky, who remembers himself as having been somewhat under Norman's influence, was worried that their delay would identify them as having been Absent Without Leave when they arrived at Fort Ord, but Norman's sense that no one would even notice turned out to have been right.

Fort Ord blanketed an area not much smaller than that covered by Fort Bragg, but its location at the top of the Monterey Peninsula, some one hundred miles down the coast from San

Francisco, invested it with an utterly contrasting, romantic air. Ocean vistas, bracing sea breeze, periodic banks of rolling fog, and easy access to the charming streets of Monterey and Carmel-by-the-Sea made it an enviable station. Only the fact that most of its military population was passing through to less attractive destinations made assignment in such environs other than altogether agreeable. Norman and his artillery-surveyor companion, incredulously marking their first exposure to palm trees, rejoined the eleven others who had been assigned from their Fort Bragg platoon, and were initially assigned to an Infantry Replacement Depot. [8/28]

They expected at first to be shipped overseas almost immediately: two to three weeks, Norman estimated on August 28. Because their mail in the final stage would be censored, and they were not supposed to reveal the details of their overseas assignments, Norman worked out a salutation code to tip Bea and the family off to his assigned destination. As soon as he was delivered an "alert" for a specific overseas assignment, Norman's next letter was to signal the fact by opening with a pre-arranged special salutation, differently worded depending upon whether the destination was to be Burma, India, Guadalcanal, the South Pacific Islands, Australia, Hawaii or Alaska. When two weeks had passed, however, and Norman, with his fellow-artillerymen, had been placed in an artillery platoon and begun a program of quite intensive training, they no longer felt so sure of early

embarkation. "Artillery is shipped more slowly than infantry," Norman reported to Fan and Barbara, and he told them of eighteen-mile, eight hour hikes every Wednesday night[9/10], as well as such full scale training exercises as sapping a simulated minefield at night[9/11], overnight bivouacs, working with big gun emplacements, participating in complex survey problems, and heavy assignments of KP. Maskovsky remembers, in fact, that he and Norman were given extra such duty because they were discovered in a Norman-originated scheme to avoid taking the full eighteen mile hikes. Now that he was free of the iron control of Fort Bragg, Norman began adopting what would prove to be a year-long policy of testing the ability of his unit to keep him from malingering. He and Maskovsky would secretly drop out from the hike at a point where they knew the column would eventually pass again, at which time they would rejoin it for the final return leg. When they were caught they were made "permanent" KPs, Maskovsky recalls[Manso. p. 80], and though Norman never mentioned the episode in his letters he did complain about burdensome KP assignments.

Norman did not merely complain, however, and it is clear that while garrison was far from completely satisfying, he nevertheless got his share of enjoyment out of the life he led. He was with twelve people he knew and had trained with for months, after all, and he felt himself part of a community, such as it was. He played football whenever he got the chance, delighting in the hard contact and the bursts of participant and spectator enthusiasm.

His letter-writing was interrupted for several days because of a sprained thumb: "my penchant for scuffling with guys three times my size is disabling me once again," he reported to Bea: "I hit a good-natured ape in the stomach, and wham!" [10/31].

More elaborately, he told her about a mock-battle with a fellow-surveyor one afternoon-- when their platoon was in the field--from which Norman emerged with a scraped temple and a couple of cuts on his hands. He began a wrestling match with Bull-Moose Davidian, enormous and far beyond him in strength, on the soft, dark-brown sand, and "we looked like coal miners in no time." As Davidian bore down on him--"you should see how much like an ape he looks with his head and huge lower jaw hanging loosely, and his oak-tree shoulders swaying"--Norman doused him with water from his canteen, and was doused in return. Then, while all the men cheered and laughed, I jumped him, and quite amazed, found myself on top of him. This could never last of course, and after a minute I was on my back, and his belly was on my head. I could see his sweat-shirt, and I grinned with childish delight. I opened my mouth and bit him in the belly. He roared, leaped about a foot in air, and we were at it again, wrestling furiously in the dirt.

Just then the whistle blew to fall in, and we came running up, putting on all our equipment at once so that everything was awry. We had been dirty first, then wet, and then black-dirty again. We came up late and the officer, grinning dryly, said, 'Now if you two Gold-Dust twins will fall in, maybe we can get going.' [9/5]

By early October, Norman and the other members of his platoon had concluded that they might be staying at Fort Ord for months,

placed at the end of the waiting list, they believed, because none of them had been rated as non-commissioned officers¹². As they settled in and began to learn their way around the area, Norman soon discovered Carmel. After his first visit he dismissed the jewel-box community out of hand, identifying it in a long letter to Bea as a merely cute, bourgeois retreat for affected professionals or businessmen and their families. The attempt of its Chamber of Commerce to identify the town as a haven for artists elicited, from this first-time visitor, an ambitious distinction between art and beauty ("The core of art is not beauty, it is meaning; the core of beauty is simply pleasure."), and he condemned Carmel for being merely beautiful.[9/10] Having dismissed it, however, he proceeded to spend as much time there as possible, clearly enjoying it and its seashore area as places comparable to Provincetown and to Monmouth Beach.

To his mother and sister he wrote:
I like what I have seen of California; it is much softer and less gaudy, commercial than I had imagined. Only the palm-trees infuriate me; they look artificial, as if they were made of crepe paper. But this gray fog covering the land I know. Just think of Monmouth Beach, and the sound of the water, and you will not be too far away from me. [9/10]

Monterey was the largest nearby town and he liked it, calling it a very picturesque little fishing town with a lot of gaudy little bars, and souvenir shops, and some fascinatingly packed little

¹² In fact, massive offensive military actions were beginning in October with the ultimate goal of re-taking the Philippines. Heavy American casualties were anticipated, and Norman's was apparently among the many units being held in reserve to supply, when the time came, replacements for the American dead and wounded.

tumble-down houses. [Fan and Barbara] would like it here, the coast is always the coast no matter where.

On Saturdays, however, Monterey was always jam-packed with roistering soldiers, and Norman preferred the quieter clubs and USOs of tiny Carmel.

Telling Bea of having charmed some Wave officers in a bar there [9/17], he gave her a long account of a dramatic reading in which he participated "at some rich biddy's house in Carmel." [10/31] It was a reading of Claire Booth Luce's The Women, but with all the parts being read by men "(Cute idea--get it.)", and the overcoming of his quite serious stage fright constitutes most of the story's point: "I was really good for a few lines, and I felt a wonderful joy--the tumult inside and the casual, low words." Norman's pleasure, here, was serious: he was measuring himself against that recent moment when he had been too withdrawn to be able to ask his landlady for ice-water, and he marked his progress pointedly for Bea. His more public point, for all the family to share, was that he has been able during this period to discover, if not a family, at least something of a haven in California.

His family continued, of course, to constitute a major point of reference for Norman. Having turned twenty-one just after marrying, he cast his first (absentee-ballot) vote that November of 1944 in the Roosevelt-Dewey presidential contest. He told his mother that he had voted for Roosevelt--of whom she was an ardent supporter--adding, "I have lost my old faith in him, but he is

certainly the lesser of the two evils." [11/4] At about the same time, Fan got after him on the subject of Jack Maher, fearful as she was that Barbara and Jack intended to marry, and she asked Norman to counsel his sister against it. It was on this occasion that, in refusing, he recalled for his mother "that disgraceful exhibition--my marriage ceremony," and unwisely suggested that both he and Barbara had been driven away from respecting their Jewishness by Fan's unreasonable attitudes.

Though he became quite pointed in these criticisms--"If you object to Jack merely because he is a Goy, that makes as much sense as Anti-Semitism"--what ultimately must be most remarkable is the steadily affectionate tone he nevertheless maintains with his mother throughout these exchanges. "Your letter before last put me in a very good mood," he continued after his reprimand, "It was filled with little cute things [and] I enjoyed it." [10/29] He could be adversarial with Fan, and even for passing moments greatly exasperated, but he never expressed or gave any sign of real anger. His letters show almost dramatically that Norman at this time never expressed or, as far as can be seen actually experienced such a feeling for his mother.

His father, up to this year, had been included in correspondence only parenthetically, but since Barney had moved out on his own, living for the most part in Washington D.C. hotels and rooming houses, Norman corresponded with him directly, documenting the relationships separately for the first time. The

✓ new situation clearly set Norman to thinking about his feelings for his father, and at one point this led to some startling, long-forgotten recollections. To Bea, recalling the days when Barney's recklessness had terrified the whole family, Norman recalled his own "old fear of him" when "I was a horribly timid child," and told the story of a bad beating, administered with a leather belt when "Dad lost his temper, which even exceeds mine for rage." [9/5] None of this is recalled in Norman's correspondence with his father, of course, and their few letters from this period contain no hint of conflict, past or present. 9/5/44

✓ The problematic idea of Barney's being off on his own must have been the subject of serious family conference when his job-offer from the Office of Price Administration somehow appeared. He no doubt assured his wife and sister and brother-in-law that he would keep out of difficulty, and that an independent position of his own was needed to keep their affairs in good financial order, but it is incontrovertible that he had continued through Norman's Harvard years to get into trouble because of gambling. Whatever Sunlight Oil Company funds he may have misappropriated--and there was some amount-- would have been comparatively easy for Fan and Uncle Dave to replace. Thus there had been no recent breath of outside scandal to cover up, but there was certainly danger in giving him access to anybody else's money. His position with the OPA, however, would not have put him into contact with funds or securities that would be subject to misappropriation: in his

✓ Washington office and his frequent trips on the road, Barney was auditing manufacturer and merchant prices to see that they were in compliance with OPA regulations, and the low-risk character of such a position probably was what led the family to assume the risk of letting him go ahead with it. In fact, it seems quite likely that

Barney's brother-in-law served as his contact in finding the job.

Living on his own and earning a substantial salary,¹³ Barney for the first time in over twenty years was able to follow his private inclinations, comparatively free of the family's apprehensive scrutiny. He heard empathetic things from Norman: "It must be a very curious sensation--as if you were living over a part of your life twenty years back, and as if you were yourself at thirty." In affirming that he and Barney were very much alike-- "shy, and strong and weak, and proud"--Norman concluded: As time goes by, I feel more and more like you, more and more your son. On outward things we are very different, but I think I understand and sympathize with you better than any other person I know. [5/21]

Norman well knew how completely his parents were fixed upon the question of his ability, under his present circumstances, to develop and prove himself as a writer. Indeed he very much shared their concern, and now that he was free of the tight restrictions of basic training he began to broaden his literary base. He read,

¹³The appointment seems to have been on a Classification-11 level, where the entry-level salary was \$3,800. In 1945 Congress raised that level to \$4,300.

of course, starting with Maugham's Christmas Holiday, which he didn't much like[8/25], and continuing with Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night, which he hated[9/18], and Dostoyevsky--he offered Bea a spirited defense of The Idiot--but his big discovery of the season was Spengler. He got a one volume edition of The Decline of the West out of the Fort Ord library, and wrote to Bea with enthusiasm:

His mind appeals to mine, he is the king of the immense generalization, scorns the petty detail for itself and yet employs it so devastatingly when necessary. Where he will lead me I have no idea, but the book is the most dazzling thing I've come across in many years.

Continuing an excited analysis for five closely-written pages, Norman says that "I am half decided to buy Decline, read it as a bible and annotate it, but it weighs a ton, and there are so many jungles I would have to tote it thru." [9/9] After he got overseas he did in fact send for and carry a copy through the many remaining months of service, drawing upon it in his own special way.

Much more crucially than giving him additional reading time, however, Norman's pre-embarkation months at Fort Ord gave him the chance to do more as a writer. At Fort Bragg, when he could scarcely call his time his own, the best he had been able to set down was his after all extraordinarily rich literary notebook. The way his already sharpened eye and quick writer's imagination dominated his response to basic, and now post-basic training no doubt measurably undermined what the training had been designed to

do to him, but he was answering with an impressive affirmative the most important question that he brought to the world of army experience: was he writer enough to function as such while living the military life?

A persuasive indication of this was the way he proceeded in the relative freedom of Fort Ord. In addition to continuing with notebook-items like his battle with the giant Davidian, he began to carry out actual writing projects. In early October he wrote a sketch that he then passed on to Berta for possible placement in a magazine. In its original letter-form to Bea[10/2-9/44], the sketch was short, perhaps 1800 words, and tells in Norman's own voice how he gets on a bus in Monterey early on a Saturday night to return to the barracks before bed-check. Among the passengers on the crowded vehicle is a slightly drunk Negro sergeant who, just before the bus is set to depart, gets into an argument with a white soldier. When the driver intervenes and quite unfairly puts the blame for the dispute on the sergeant, the quarrel escalates into an angry, yelling face-off, during the course of which the whole busload of soldiers turns in fury on the now-defiant Negro. With the silent exception of the observing narrator, all the passengers are united in something like a frenzy of hostility, and only the summoning of a somewhat unnerved army captain, who in effect arrests the sergeant and turns him over to the military police, prevents a possible riot on the bus. ||✓

The end of the sketch contrasts the happy relief of the bus

passengers, who give off "a roar of satisfaction" as the sergeant leaves, with the frozen reaction of the sergeant himself: He was walking very straight and there was a terrible smile on his face. It was the smile of a man who has discovered once more, after a long hard struggle to create a few illusions, that the world was unutterably evil and unjust to him, and that in the face of this evil there was nothing he could do but smile, for the enormity of it was beyond rage or hope. It was a smile of awful acceptance, the smile where a man understands he can only be evil himself, that he can only follow the rules of an infinitely alien world.

Norman re-wrote the original sketch to a length of about 3000 words, called it "The Smile of Recognition," and had Berta submit it to The New Yorker. When the editors turned it down, Berta reported that, though they liked it, they felt that "the magazine field had pretty well exhausted the possibilities of violence in regard to the Negro problem." [10/30bk]

Another ultimately unused but remarkably ambitious literary project of this period involved a month-long series of nine lengthy letters written in October, narrating the events Norman experienced on a single, early-October weekend pass in the company of his basic-training companion Jerry LeFrancois. The two hitchhiked from Fort Ord northeast to the tiny town of Gilroy, California and back--a total distance of some 100 miles--and did nothing but take in the local sights--road house bars, diners, a broken down hotel-- and exchange confidences with each other to the (for Norman) rare point of approaching an actual friendship. Norman ironically called his narrative "The Odyssey," non-heroic and conventionally trivial as it was, but he devoted at least ten

thousand words to it and clearly intended the effort as a serious experiment in unrelentingly atomized realism. Indeed, this material seemed to him to have such potential that, three years later, after he had completed the final draft of The Naked and the Dead, he sent home from Paris for these letters to see if they might possibly serve as the starting point of his next novel¹⁴. ✓

The starting point for The Naked and the Dead itself, remarkably enough, is also to be found within this Fort Ord time-span. The postwar novel's seed appeared in what at first Norman intended as a modest reconceiving of the idea for a novel, or more accurately a novella, that had struck him in basic training. Now, though, exactly a month after his arrival in California, he had re-thought the concept so that instead of a duel between opposing artillery batteries executing the classic moves of such warfare, he imagines a squad of artillery men sent out on a special and unusual reconnaissance patrol. Their artillery unit is part of an invading American army deployed in a Pacific island's dense jungle, facing an equally invisible Japanese army. Towering above the jungle that conceals both armies is a barren, overhanging ridge, and the patrol is sent up to survey the possible placement of an artillery battery on its heights.

While Norman specifically says that his ambitious, five page

¹⁴They did not, and after several other false starts he proceeded with what eventually would be Barbary Shore. Norman had originally put this "Gilroy Letters" file into his working papers for The Naked and the Dead, but he did not use any of it in that novel, either.

✓ novella-scenario is not for "the [big] war novel I would want to do," [9/21/44] he develops it remarkably more than he did his earlier idea, returning to it twice more while he is at Fort Ord. He envisions his patrol squad--he lists the names and some identifying characteristics of the Fort Ord platoon members he would use as models¹⁵--as at first glorying in having escaped their wretched jungle surroundings, but, when they encounter a much superior Japanese force, they are required to retreat back down into the jungle. The novella's action would consist of the flight and pursuit of the patrol, refracted through the individual points of view of its members. Norman later identified this fictional conception as the beginning in his unconscious imagination of the development of his full-scale The Naked and the Dead, formed as it is around the experiencing of a patrol climbing a steep jungle ridge, and designed to make exactly the same symbolic point.¹⁶ To

¹⁵ In listing some eight or nine members of his platoon as models for fictional characters, Norman was acting on his post-"Transit" principle that a fiction writer must start with real people before developing "ideas" about them. Later, as he got to know soldiers with cavalry combat experience, he would substitute them for his present candidates, but he never stopped looking at his fellow-soldiers as being, first and foremost, possible characters in his fiction.

✓ ¹⁶ In an October 5, 1944 reply to Bea's reaction to the novella's symbolic meaning--she had suggested that the ridge represented death-- he says, in a remarkable foreshadowing of Mt. Anaka in The Naked and the Dead:

"The ridge does not exactly correspond to death, but in a sense it includes it. I mean it to symbolize the higher aspirations of man, the craving for the secret, the core of life, (or as Spengler might say--the Faustian need) for power, and particularly for Godhead and the vanquishing of death. But to attempt to reach so high, to go beyond death is only to court death. . . and in that

follow Norman's many specifically literary letters over the next eighteen months is to discover layer after layer of planning taking form around this original nucleus of a novel, in a process of which he became fully conscious only in its final four months.

So consistently on-track does Norman's creative planning seem, in retrospect, that it would be easy to under-appreciate how hard it was for him actually to bring off. Busy as he was with his writer's work at Fort Ord, he was challenged to the point of preoccupation with concerns about his ability to keep up with present and future military duties. His correspondence reveals that the Bea to whom he sent the enthusiastic conceptual letters about his writing and other literary business¹⁷, was also the recipient of considerably more distressed communication. She sent

sense the ridge is death."

Norman pulled the letter containing this paragraph from the Fort Ord correspondence file after he got out of the army, and included it in his working-papers for The Naked and the Dead. At the same time he pulled and included there: a page from an October 8 letter to Bea recording an epitaph for one of the casualties in his "ridge novel;" a three-page description of his first impressions of San Francisco, written on August 22; two pages on God/fate/combat from a September 1 letter; and, from a letter of late September, two more pages on exhaustion as experienced during an all-night march.

¹⁷ Routine literary business had to do with "Transit." It was turned down by the Atlantic Monthly Press in an October letter praising Norman's talent [amp10/30/44], which tended to lower the novel's stock. On the other hand, Edwin Seaver, having just read the whole thing, asked Norman in November to edit out a fifteen to twenty thousand word excerpt for inclusion in the (proposed) next volume of Cross-Section [bk11/9/44], thus encouraging everybody to believe that the book would eventually win total publication.

supportive replies with faithful regularity, and as it gradually became clear that Norman and his fellow-surveyors might not get their overseas orders for a matter of months, he began, as he had during basic training, to fantasize about reunion. By October 12 he had asked Bea to put in for a leave and to travel cross-country for a rendezvous, and once this proposal was on his mind he referred to it regularly, elaborately embellishing the imagined event as the days and weeks passed. His letters begin more and more to sound a note that first surfaced in the Fort Bragg correspondence: the fear that he will remain for all his life "an essentially unimportant person." [5/18/44]

✓ Though Norman sometimes worried out loud about his writing, his fear of unimportance while he was in the army connected most directly to the Achilles-heel of his situation as a soldier. If the army was a kind of treasure-house of material for him on the one hand, on the other it was an arena where he almost could not help being seen as hapless, marginal and unimportant trainee in comparison to the successful soldiers he saw all around him. Certainly he measured himself as mediocre in such company, and the depressing way this perception affected his own feelings about himself gave him cause for concern. Self-doubt and the contrasting feeling of self-importance are the consistent alternate themes of Norman's letters, where as early as May 18 he had recorded that "It is the greatest proof of our love that each of us needs the other to feel important at all."

His dependence upon Bea to support his self-esteem was, interestingly, much less marked when he turned to her with his writing projects and ideas. She was not a desperately needed muse, but only a good listener and an admiring respondent. We hear the sound of real self-confidence in many of the letters he composed for her as a writer. He would, indeed, often celebrate this identity in a thoroughly Whitmanesque fashion, concluding one four-page Song of Himself catalog of abundant antitheses--all descriptive of himself-- with "I am so many things, that I have met no man whose emotions I have not known at one time or other, and that is my greatest asset and severest fault"[10/2]. Norman's moments of real self-doubt and even self-abasement came when he contemplated his outsidersness as a soldier, and when these moments came he turned with increasing importunity to his absent wife, at one point openly arguing that Bea's remarkably warm reconciliation with her mother--from whom she had been practically estranged while living at home--was inadvisable not only because of what he saw as Mrs. Silverman's various personal inadequacies, but because Norman needed Bea more than her mother did[10/19].

With people being alerted and shipped out all around them, the Fort Bragg surveyor group members had no reasonable basis for planning such things as marital reunions, but Norman urged Bea on, and she apparently decided that there was nothing much to lose: she presented her commanding officer with a request for a leave of absence, for the purpose of visiting her husband at Fort Ord.

✓ 11/11/44 } Surprisingly to her, the leave was granted, fifteen days, beginning November 15, concluding November 29. Norman, as soon as he heard the news, rushed into action and obtained the necessary furlough and the San Francisco and Carmel living quarters they would require, but he also, a few days before Bea's arrival[11/11], wrote a letter home that is so revealing of his feelings toward his wife, his family and, still more, himself that it requires some detailed attention.

The letter is addressed to the quartet of adults who had constituted Norman's Brooklyn support system for so many years, "Dear Mother and Dad, Aunt Nan and Uncle Dave." His letter tells them of the reunion plan, apologizing for the extravagant expense (Bea would spend the first day and night of her leave flying to San Francisco), and his apparent self-indulgence. He thanks them for always having been a source of self confidence for him, saying:

I think all of you know how essential it is for me to believe in my own importance, my own potentiality for greatness--when I believe I shall be really something I am happy and confident; when I do not is when my fits of depression come.

He explains, however, that as a grown man he can no longer draw upon their support for this vital self-confidence--that his "lessening faith in your faith [is] a part of growing up"--and

✓ that this is where his relationship with Bea comes in: Bea is the only other person I have ever known who could give me with such strength what all of you have given me. And indeed there is no one who can make me believe more in my own strength and my own ability to be great. I have a brilliant wife, and I believe a beautiful one, but I think I should love her if she were neither but could still give that essential support.

Norman's explanation goes on to say that the army has been hard on him not because of the harshness and challenge of the training, which he in some ways appreciates, but because of the emptiness, the loneliness, the boredom and the anonymous, meaningless personal relationships in military life--where no one has any real importance to anyone else. We should especially note the distinction he goes on to make here between the army world and the world of the writer, and his expression of concern that his unimportance in the one has the power to corrode his self-confidence in the other.

Frankly I cannot stomach my own insignificance for too long--my vanity which is probably my greatest fault will not permit it. As the months go by I become gloomier and gloomier, despair more and more of ever becoming a good writer. The respect my vanity demands is not forthcoming--the Army respects virtues with which I am not particularly endowed, and my anonymous, mediocre status grates on me.

✓ | Recalling the week he spent with Bea in Norfolk following basic training, he identifies her as the source of his having been refreshed and cleansed, and he sees the need for that yet again.

Once overseas, he feels, his soldiering will involve him in training and action that will distract:
But now, when one year, or as I fear two years lie ahead of me, I am unutterably depressed at times. I have really a desperate need of Bea to refresh and cleanse me again, so that I can go overseas with the confidence that I will not go to seed.

Repeating his apology for the expense, but most especially for having seemed to place Bea over the family in his affections, his letter closes by explaining that its length and detail were

intended to include them in a process that might otherwise seem excluding. Failing to explain fully, he feared, might "hurt you more, make you doubt my love for you all, and that I never want to make you feel."

Bea's plane arrived in San Francisco on Thursday, November 16, and the two divided their full week together between Carmel and San Francisco hideaways, parting on the Thursday, November 23. They used their time consciously to find strength for the separation ahead, and by Thursday they felt that they had found it. That night Norman had to go back to Ft. Ord, and Bea had to take her stand-by chances for return travel--by plane if the crushingly crowded airlines permitted, by train otherwise. (She got a flight, but was "bumped" and forced to switch to the train in Salt Lake City.) The 23rd was Thanksgiving, and the couple shared their holiday dinner before they parted[11/24,27,29].

Two days before Bea left, Norman, along with the rest of his Fort Bragg platoon, was alerted, and the day after her departure he was transferred from Fort Ord to Camp Stoneman, a Bay Area port of embarkation. He was about to sail into a Pacific Theater of Operations that had been the scene of intense land, sea and air combat during all his months in California. A major invasion of the island of Leyte in the Philippines had been launched in early October, and the American fleet protecting the invading troops, under Admiral Halsey, had engaged a series of Japanese naval task forces with devastatingly successful results.

As four American Sixth Army divisions fought their way across Leyte, what remained of the Japanese navy limped off in retreat, its power as an offensive force virtually destroyed. The Leyte Gulf waters where it happened, with its beaches where the initial invasion was launched, were the ultimate destination of The Sea Barb, the small troop ship that carried Norman and his comrades

✓ out of San Francisco Bay on December 8. We sailed at dusk, and the harbor city we left from was so beautiful as night came. It seemed to glow, to emit light in a thousand different facets. . . I couldn't take my eyes away--it was so beautiful and sad. The waters in the harbor were already purple, and the city reflected in it, and we were putting out to sea. [12/8-44]

End Part One Chapter Three

[CHAPTER THREE]

Part Two

i

The small ship was jam-packed with troops and Norman told Bea that he had been depressed, at first "abominably so." He referred to the "tedium and filth and heat and noise, the fact that you are rarely more than three feet from the nearest person," but above all he invoked the knowledge that he was being separated from her in a way that no elaborate schemes of reunion or rendezvous could henceforth hope to remedy. Still, so profound had been the effect of their recent reunion that it almost immediately provided a kind of practical demonstration of its therapeutic power. The demonstration dramatically showed how a rejuvenated Norman was able to weather the overseas voyage, the record of which takes the form of a remarkably upbeat 35 page¹⁴ notebook-

¹⁴. After the war, Norman selected out eight of the pages and proceeded to use a number of them in composing The Naked and the Dead; among other things, he drew upon an elaborate description of a sunset, and a rendering of the pervasive smells on an overcrowded troop ship.

letter that occupied him throughout all of the eighteen-day crossing.

He composed it in installments in a "wonderful place to write" he had discovered: it's on deck, in one of the open places called hatches, but I am tucked away in a corner by the rail, under the canopy of three life rafts inclined toward the sea, and isolated from everyone by stanchions and barrels. Without any effort I could roll right off into the sea, for there is only one rail, about a foot-high, but curiously this place has a great security for me. I know I am not going to roll off, and there is a wonderful view of the sea.

This cave-like retreat seemed too good to be true, and Norman worried on the page about being discovered and evicted, but the place apparently remained secure; indeed, his old travelling companion Clifford Maskovsky was on board, and years later he recalled that for something like two weeks Norman was to be seen only at meals. [Manso, 95] The recluse held onto his retreat, and he was able to produce there, as the days went by, a running record of his feelings as he experienced what was certainly the most radical separation of his life.

Those feelings might best be described as exploratory. As he moved from installment to installment, interspersing them with bouts of reading--the first week out he read all of The Razor's Edge--he explored his ability to transcend the confines of a physically crushing environment by fixing his imagination on other things. He didn't dwell on shipboard conditions, or even describe the daily routine, but rather described staggering sunsets and sunrises (viewed from his special place), and reflected upon the

psychological effects of long, as opposed to short-term travel (in short-term you are controlled by distance traversed and are impatient to count miles in the fastest time, while in long-term the controlling element is time passed and you are impatient with people who try to measure the miles).

He noted that color was different at sea, and wrote for six pages about the phenomenology of color in everyday life. He laughed but did not in the least rage at the "list that has been posted of suitable topics to write about in order not to offend censorship:" it included the ship's PX, its movies, its boxing exhibitions, its church services (none of which he ever wrote about), and he achieved an almost genial tone as he remarked: I am not indignant; I realize ship censorship must be inclusive, but there is always something so terribly droll about lists. Such formal catch-alls, such somber attempts to give miscellany a soul.¹⁵

The prospects for his immediate future were anything but positive: "The Golden Gate in '48!" was the current slogan on the ship concerning hopes for returning home, and received journalistic opinion at this point was that American troops would be required to fight their way from island to island all the way across the Pacific. Norman, however, considered none of this.

With an impressive self-confidence, the letter writer

¹⁵. All enlisted-rank mail sent from overseas had to be read and approved by an officer-censor. Norman's long letter from the ship received no editing from its censor, and, indeed, few of his letters home were ever edited. But while the war lasted, all were stamped as having been reviewed by the censor (save those "free letters" that Norman got smuggled through.)

considered instead the mystique of his relationship with Bea, the contemplation of which freed him from military confines and distractions and permitted him, in the act of writing, to move unrestrained into recollected visions that were sometimes erotic, and sometimes wistful tributes to what he remembered as pure goodness: "What I've been trying to say, my love, was just that I love you in more ways than lovemaking, and that I am not afraid of my future as I sometimes am when I remember myself qua myself." If proof were needed, the notebook-letter proved that Norman had been absolutely accurate in his November 11 letter to Brooklyn explaining why and in what way Bea was necessary to him: to address her was to give him a redemptive sense of himself, and to address her in writing under the extreme circumstances that prevailed was to file his claim to be not only an admired partner and endowed writer, but also a comfortably adjusted inhabitant of an uncomfortable military situation.

Thus impressively armed, though he was sailing on an completely unescorted, highly vulnerable troopship toward hostile geography and an ominously uncertain future, Norman sounded something approximating cheerful during the voyage. He noted that as he began to write, and to call upon recollections of his relationship with Bea, his initial state of depression suddenly disappeared, and "I was happy. This act of setting words down becomes a process of talking to you; I feel so very close at the time I write." Norman as writer, after all, was the identity being

moved toward in this whole venture. If his immersion into the experience he had entered reduced rather than enlarged that identity, then his whole gamble would have been lost. So far, however, he was showing himself as impressively on-track toward reaching this, his most private of destinations.

The Sea Barb's own, and now quite public destination port, ultimately, was Leyte Gulf, the point from which the American invasion of the Philippines had been launched in October, and where the Japanese naval task forces had been so decisively defeated. But Philippine waters were still very much combat-active, and so on Christmas Day, 1944, Norman's ship paused first, if briefly, at the tiny harbor off the town of Hollandia¹⁶ on the northern coast of the recently secured island of New Guinea. The heat was almost overwhelming as the troops--who never disembarked--watched a U.S. Navy frigate swing into escort position and begin leading them up the final 1,300 mile northwestern leg of the voyage to their destination. They reached Leyte Gulf on December 29, disembarked promptly onto the Tacloban beach of the now officially secured island¹⁷, and set up their tents to form themselves into a replacement depot.

¹⁶. Now named Sukarnapura.

¹⁷. The island was not finally secured until May 5, and the "mopping up" undertaken by the Eighth Army about the time Norman's group landed actually took the form of a series of sharp, costly battles with the surviving Japanese. These actions took place far from the beaches of Leyte Gulf, however, and the Sixth Army, to which Norman was to be assigned, having officially concluded the major fighting on the island, was in the act of directing its attention to the invasion of Luzon.

Here they continued their increasingly hungry wait, begun back at Fort Ord in late August, for assignment to an organized military unit. Among the replacements there were perhaps twelve survivors from the original Fort Bragg Battery A platoon, all still privates and all continuing to suppose--or at least hope--that eventually they would be assigned to artillery units in the jobs for which they had been trained. While they waited, living in tents, they "pulled details" like shoveling sand to form campgrounds, digging latrines, and policing the field kitchens that fed them and others. In their off-hours they wandered through the Filipino town of Tacloban and its environs--strategically extended by the natives to bring themselves into maximum proximity to the troops--drinking the home-brewed tuba, paying the children to scale the palm trees for coconuts, and arranging to have their laundry done.

The radio supplied war news to the soldiers, reassuring them concerning the European Theater after the nasty shock of the German breakthrough in the December Battle of the Bulge, and informing them, on January 9, that a gigantic American invasion force was being launched, immediately to the north of them, onto the main Philippine island of Luzon. The invasion itself was led by the Sixth Army, and within two weeks after it landed Norman's replacement pool had been shifted to ready status. On about the 20th of January its members at last started getting assigned to organized units: most of the Fort Bragg surveyors--LeFrancois and

Maskovsky among them--were scattered out to artillery battalions associated with different regiments or integrated into different Sixth Army artillery units. Norman, along with a number of other members of his Basic Training outfit, was ultimately assigned to the 112th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team.

Attached to the Sixth Army's 1st Cavalry Division, the 112th had originally been a Texas National Guard regiment. But by January of 1945 it had seen extensive action--very seriously on Leyte, but with even heavier casualties on New Guinea--and it may be that only about a quarter of its original two thousand men were still with it: the remainder were replacements, of which Norman's little group was to be the most recent. The regiment had long before abandoned its horses and was in effect an infantry unit--Norman called it a sort of miniature division--that, because it was attached to a field artillery battalion, was designated a Regimental Combat Team (RCT)¹⁸. With a group of replacements from his pool, Norman was trucked to an area occupied by the embarkation-ready 112th.

Here, some of his companions were assigned to its artillery battalion, and when Norman was not one of those he may for the first time have become conscious that the shortcomings of his

¹⁸ Edward J. Drea, "Into the Jungle: New Guinea," Chapter 6, pp 108-109, in Pearl Harbor and the War in the Pacific, eds B.C. Nalty, Tony Hall, Smithmark, New York, 1991.

THIS NOTE SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM HYPER TEXT AND BUILT INTO THE
END-OF-BOOK LINE NOTES.

record--presumably his refusals to accept "chickenshit" discipline--had marked him, along with three or four others, for rejection.

These rejects were shoved into a bivouac of Cavalry veterans waiting to board their transport[1/22/45]. Eleven months later he

would recall for Bea:

that wet miserable hour in the mud of the 112th's bivouac in Leyte when we were told that we were infantrymen, would undoubtedly be assigned as riflemen, & were leaving that night for Luzon. We heard the stories of A Troop who had 12 men left at the end of the Leyte campaign, and of B Troop and the bayonet charge up Baker Hill, & we wondered if we would be alive in two weeks. [nb12/15/45]

Once aboard the jam-packed USS Monrovia he was hardly reassured by

his first look at his new comrades:

You could tell they were Texans because they looked ten to fifteen years older than anyone else. They'd been overseas for three years at that point, they'd been allowed to keep their own sidearms, they had handkerchiefs tied round their heads, and they all had jungle rot, these open ulcers on the skin the size of fingernails that they had been painting with iodine. They just stared at me and sharpened their knives.... You could be in the outfit for six months before they'd even nod to indicate they recognized your existence.¹⁹

The first thing Norman learned on shipboard was that his actual assignment was to the regiment's Headquarters Command, where he was limited to a choice between a clerk's position with the command Operations and Intelligence unit, or a rifleman's assignment with its Reconnaissance platoon. He wrote later to

¹⁹From The Lone Star Review, of the Dallas Times Herald, April, 1981, "An Evening with Norman Mailer," by William McDonald, pp. 1, 3.

THIS NOTE SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM HYPER-TEXT AND PUT END OF BOOK.

Bea[nb4/25/45] that his instinct had been to take the rifleman assignment, for which he after all had some significant training and which would bring him closer to what he had entered the army to experience, but in the heat of the hurried moment he went with the less hazardous and more important-sounding Operations and Intelligence position. He wrote home at the time [nb1/22/45: nm-f1/24/45] that he was excited by the prospect of participating in the activities of O. and I. just as the regiment was embarking on a new campaign, and there is considerable indication that he truly was.

Certainly he was relieved to be out of his five month limbo as a replacement non-person, and though he was disappointed to have his elaborate course of surveyor training suddenly rendered irrelevant--and at the same time to be separated from some of the closest personal associations he had formed since college [nb4/23/45]--he at first saw no obvious reason why his new assignment should not work out very well. Several of his companions from Fort Ord had in fact been assigned to the same troop, so he was not entirely among strangers. And the fact that he had no training for the work might be offset by the additional and undeniable facts that he was very bright, had gone to Harvard and could operate a typewriter (though in this last respect his skills needed improvement). In any case his job promised to position him advantageously for learning much about the command realities of an army in battle.

At the start, therefore, he counted himself relatively fortunate when--in the third week of January--their troop ship transported the 112th RCT along with units of the 1st Cavalry to the now fully secured beaches of Luzon's Lingayen Gulf. The Gulf's coastal countryside, which two weeks before had been strategically given up by the Japanese as they withdrew to a system of defensive positions, was split by a highway flowing south to Manila. Defending the road from flanking hillsides had been Sixth Army infantry units, now replaced by line troops of the 112th and the 1st Cavalry who watched as Norman's convoy rolled along the road, conveying RCT Command, among other units, to join the American positions already pressing toward the Japanese-occupied city.

The Manila-stage of the offensive was running behind General MacArthur's time-table, and in response to his expressions of impatience the 1st Cavalry, approaching from the north, had joined with another division, approaching from the south, in a race toward the city. Norman's first job was to help set up and then rapidly move-forward his regimental Command Post, which was at the core of Headquarters Troop. With its infantry line-troops clearing out isolated pockets of Japanese defenders, the 112th RCT, as part of the 1st Cavalry, was positioning itself so as to be able to play a leading part in the coordinated launch of the combined American forces upon the defenses of the city proper. Norman's assignment in the Operations and Intelligence tent--wherever it was set up at a given moment--was to keep track of and

type the constant flow of dispatches and other documents, as well as to keep in motion the maps which were under continuous review by his superiors.

He was one of a handful of enlisted-men clerks who worked, directly, under a Major and a Lieutenant and, indirectly, under the commanding Colonel. The Command Post was, usually, about two miles behind the line units it was deploying, so that while Norman was at all times aware of the surge and indeed the sound of action, his own participation was limited to guard duty assignments and occasional impromptu patrols in response to infiltration alarms. He shared in the excitement that was all around him, caught up in the movement of the combat units and the conferences he could overhear between his young Colonel and the 1st Cavalry commanding General.

NO /

Shortly after his arrival he was able to join an officer, a sergeant and one other enlisted man from his outfit on an off-duty excursion to an area that perhaps a week before had been harrowed by the front line advancing toward Manila. A small Filipino village, situated on the flank of the line, had been so stoutly defended by the Japanese that the American line had to expand and then go around it, leaving it isolated for destruction by follow-up units. Norman reached the village only days after it was overrun, and shortly thereafter he typed up a four-page, single-space account of what he saw. He clearly intended the letter to serve as an important notation for future reference, and indeed

he later pulled it from the files and used it, centrally, in the composition of The Naked and the Dead:

There were dead Japanese lying all about this ridge, perhaps twenty or thirty in all in groups of three or four. And scattered among them were thousands of small pieces of burnt or rusted corrugated steel, and the strong, intense smell of garbage and death. There were rations rotting, and little boxes of equipment all over, half emptied with their contents spilling out. Mangled bits of equipment, shoes and canteens and packs were interspersed everywhere over the tortured, heaving earth. [nb2/24-26/45].

Norman's letter offers an expanded and vivid account of how the action had developed, what the actual combatants had done, and how he and his party reacted to the spectacle.

In writing such letters Norman was consciously proceeding with his work as a writer, but from this moment--the start of his assigned military life outside of the training command--to the end of his time in the army, he would be divided in a problematic way regarding his feelings about his duties. Unproblematically, of course, he had always understood his army experience to be divided: his first priority was to use his duty assignment as a vantage point from which, as a writer, he could learn about the life he was later to address in his fiction. His second priority was, as a soldier, to discharge those duties well enough to permit him to reach the goals of his first priority. He had rejected any interest in other sorts of self-promotion by opting for enlisted-man status in the first place. But the problem with this tidy picture was not simply Norman's inability to keep "mere" self-promotion out of the mix: he had a soldier's ego as well as a

writer's, and he found himself asking for returns from his assignments beyond their yield of raw material for his fiction.

More problematic was the question of how much he was willing, or perhaps even able to give to his assignments in order to hang onto them, and thus employ them for his own purposes. His job in the O. and I. tent went well enough at first, and he was able to learn from it much that he had not known before. The simple fact that he was working with tactical officers, and senior tactical officers at that, was clearly important beyond the naive first impression he reported to his parents:

[I am] closer than I've been to officers since I've been in the army. I don't suppose I've ever said more than two hundred words [to them] in the past which didn't consist of Yessir and No sir.
[nm-f2/1/45]

Working at this level, lowest-ranked private though he was, Norman realized that he was in certain ways quite privileged. As the Commanding Officer's working center, Headquarters enjoyed the best bivouac area, living accommodations and food, and Norman found that Luzon itself--or at least this part of it--was comparatively well-situated. Instead of the steaming heat back at Tacloban Beach on Leyte, where they had been rimmed by oppressively dank swamps and dunes [nb1/29/45], "the climate is wonderfully cool at night," dryer and cleaner than he could have expected. He reported "what a kick you get out of seeing long clear open fields, and a variety of trees," and he compared the terrain between Lingayen Gulf and the Manila area to the stretches

of New Jersey farmland between Long Branch and Freehold and Trenton. [nm-f2/1/45]

This atmosphere, and the pastoral situation of their bivouac-- "The ground is dry and rolling and there are groves of trees that interlace with the fields all the way to the blue hills on the horizon"--made him hope that he had found a kind of home, militarily speaking. It is true that he had been told--perhaps automatically, perhaps after the O. and I. sergeant had seen him at work--that he had almost no hope for promotion, but at this point he claimed he had no interest in that. He was learning a lot, and had even found a hideout analogous to the one he had discovered while crossing on The Sea Barb: the boy from Monmouth

Beach had a private place to swim:

There is a cold fast running clear river about a half mile from here with a hard sandy bottom. To get to it you walk along a trail through some woods and across some corn fields down to the bank which is like a little beach. It is very beautiful and quiet there, and you lie in the water or sun yourself a little on the beach feeling very relaxed and content. I look forward to it every day. [nm-f2/14/45]

Perhaps the strongest evidence that Norman was feeling positive about his new situation was that for the first time since leaving the States, he felt inclined to try his hand at a formal piece of writing. He had of course never intended or expected that he would get much actual composition done while he was in the army. On the contrary. But it seemed to be a kind of symptom of inner stability that in what was a very busy situation he should be able to write formally at all. In addition to his work

schedule in the O. and I. tent, Norman had begun immediately to pull various kinds of guard duty around the Command Post, and--just about the time of his excursion to the battlefield, but almost three weeks before he wrote his letter about that--one such peaceful guard assignment is what he decided to write about. He took advantage of the availability of a typewriter to produce, on four legal-sized sheets of typing paper, a tightly-packed, single-spaced account of spending a long afternoon on guard duty beside the dusty road leading past his C. P.

He set the margins wide on the elite-font machine, and turned out a deliberately-paced narrative of about 3,600 words, in a manuscript cast in the nominal form of a letter to Bea.²⁰ Norman, in the person of a guard sitting in the shade and gradually being coated with dust from the road, watches the traffic on a busy highway in the near distance, and reviews on his own dusty side-road a sort of passing parade of travellers, talking to them in turn and after a fashion recording the fact of their temporary presence. Some of them are military personnel, such as an artilleryman who stops and talks for an hour, partly about the artillery--"I," Norman says, "being just the least bit occupationally homesick"--and then about various women left behind in the States. Later, a jeep with a frightfully emaciated Captain appears--in search of the American Prisoner of War evacuation

²⁰ He wrote the letter on February 5, 1945. Untitled, it became known in his correspondence as "The Philippine Letter."

center--and the guard recognizes the officer as one of the Bataan prisoners just freed from a Japanese prison. I had never see a man before who gave so little impression of life, who appeared so vitiated by physical deprivation and mental humiliation. The war had destroyed him; I thought of some bare field of burnt stubble.

Perhaps the major juxtaposition in this, Norman's initial formal first-hand narrative of an overseas experience, is between various versions of the American military presence--including the guard--and the native Filipino population of the island. One vehicle among the traffic on Norman's road is an ox cart containing a full Filipino family: a very old woman, a few children, a young mother nursing an infant, and, in charge of them all, her husband, who is returning them to their now liberated, still distant village home. Their exchanges with the guard are very friendly, and they stop and spend some time talking to him, discussing the cruelty of the Japanese and the mysteriousness of an American watering-truck which is settling the road dust so that it doesn't blow in and bother the Commanding Colonel in his tent.

The family leaves, and their pastoral simplicity is thrown into a kind of contrasting relief by the appearance of a small contingent of Filipino guerrilla troops, who show the guard their credentials and ask him to help them get a ride from an American army truck. He finally succeeds in doing so, having apparently enjoyed the company of the "rather healthy looking men, with powerful bodies and a physical acceptance of life that had probably given a certain relish to their massacres of Japs."

Certainly he appreciates the contrast with the final Filipino character in the narrative, a sardonic, foppishly dressed young man who, with self-conscious decadence, expresses his desire to go and live the good life in the United States after the war. This closing chord in the piece, however minor, evokes the combination of admiration and irritated disapproval felt toward the Filipino population by the more sympathetic of the American military personnel, including Norman himself.

What is striking about the sketch, of course, is not that it is done especially well (which it is not), but that it got done at all. He sent it to Bea, asking that it be passed on to Berta, but he did so in a vacuum. Norman had not heard from Bea, Berta or anyone else since boarding the Sea Barb in San Francisco--two months almost to the day of his writing--and his opportunities to get himself set for the act of formal composition had been few indeed. The catalyst that moved him to write, quite possibly, was his new assignment and the sense it gave him--despite the regret he records in the sketch at being out of the artillery--of a stabilizing internal orientation. It must have been the more disappointing, therefore, when over the next two weeks his feeling of compatibility was disturbed by a conflict that developed between him and one or more of his fellow clerks in the O. and I. tent: "A series of demeaning and petty squabbles" he called it, while brushing it aside as unimportant.

That army life was especially good at producing the demeaning

and the petty was not news to Norman, of course, but he had long hoped that when he got a regular assignment, in an operating military unit, he would see less of it. He was therefore extremely disappointed to have this conflict arise. His ability to see the problem coming and somehow deflect it may have been especially limited because of a different, and quite distracting coincidence: he suddenly found that though the Command Post kitchen was the best in the regiment, he couldn't eat the food it was serving. The "overseas chow with its heavy biscuits and dehydrated potatoes and stuff" was suddenly unbearable, "nauseating" in fact, as he wrote to Bea in bewildered complaint[nb2/6/45]. His office was extremely busy, since the line troops of his regiment had joined in the broad, frontal attack on the Japanese defenders of Manila, but his indigestion so increased, during two problematic weeks, that after about ten days he finally went on sick-call.

To his surprise, he encountered an immediate diagnosis of "yellow jaundice" and was forthwith confined to a field hospital, populated largely by combat casualties with superficial wounds: One of them showed me his helmet, which had a long crease about half an inch deep, as if you dropped a narrow lead pipe on a leather cushion. A bullet had nicked him that closely, close enough to knock him out. He still has a headache, he says.[nb2/16/45]

Norman remained hospitalized for a full week, writing to Bea on V-Mail stationary²¹ and reporting that, in his inactivity, he had

²¹This was a self-enveloping sheet designed to be micro-filmed and "mailed" in reels back to the States, there to be developed into negative-prints and distributed locally. Norman's V-mail letters, however, were simply sent as regular mail.

produced ten or eleven V-Mails to distant friends and family not previously included in his correspondence. "I'll hate myself when I have to start answering them all," he added, [nb2/21] noting as well that his appetite had fully returned and recovery was apparently to be swift and complete. He seems to have been released on Friday, February 23, and reported back to O. and I., discovering that the office was running on a skeleton crew because yet another clerk was out on sick-call.

Short-handed as they were, however, the people in charge of the unit had apparently decided that Norman was not the replacement they had hoped to get, and in mid-week he got fired. He was transferred to O. and I. at Headquarters Troop--a lower-level office than Headquarters RCT Command--where he lost access to a typewriter and was given significantly more menial tasks: a heavy schedule of guard duty, and such special projects as setting up an outdoor shower for the Troop Intelligence officers. In addition, the sergeant in charge handed him a pile of instruction manuals on the subject of aerial photographic analysis: if he could make himself expert in this, he was told, perhaps something significant could be found for him to do. Trying to soften the blow by remarking to his parents that, in the new position, "I like the guys I'm with more," [nm-f3/4/45] Norman nevertheless clearly felt the rebuff.

In about one month's time, the cum laude Harvard engineer and trained artillery surveyor had in effect been demoted twice, had

discovered that he possessed a vulnerable liver, and had now increased to almost three months the time lapse since hearing from his support system at home. Even before the unwelcome surprise of his transfer he had written to Bea, from the hospital, in what turned out to be a prophetic mood:

I appreciate my insignificance now, and I have lost so many of my destroying vanities. I want only one thing:--to love you in entire nakedness of body and spirit. That is my necessity; it is, I am convinced, the only meaning each of us shall ever have--to share all the life-impulses in us to the fullest extent. [nb2/18/45]

The combat casualties he met in the hospital had been wounded in the ongoing assault upon nearby Manila, and the action there-- in a situation of stubborn stand-off-- had escalated throughout February. Though Norman had now been shunted depressingly to the side, losing the sense of participation that he had briefly known and had very much desired, he remained keenly aware of the furious drama playing itself out just a few miles away. The main Japanese army force having withdrawn from the city to defensive positions in the north, west and south, there was a final, explosive American attack on a Japanese naval and marine rear-guard force, dug deep into the inner-city and determined neither to withdraw nor surrender. The month-long campaign--during which an estimated sixteen thousand enemy troops, and over a thousand Americans were killed--came to a dramatic and bloody conclusion²²: its inner-city

²² Bernard C. Nalty, "The Philippines Reconquered," pp. 219-222: Chapter 13 of Pearl Harbor and the War in the Pacific, see note 5.

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almost totally reduced, a staggering one hundred thousand Filipino civilians slaughtered--trapped between the furious American firepower and the savage frustration of Japanese defenders who knew they were to die themselves--Manila fell on February 28.

On that same day a dispirited Norman, in a kind of ironically contrasting irrelevance, experienced something altogether personal: for the first time since leaving San Francisco he began receiving mail from home. A letter from Bea, mailed just three weeks earlier, reached him, as it seemed, right out of nowhere. "I must have held it for five minutes before I opened it," he told her in his hurried reply, adding after a few opening remarks, "Now to answer your letter. (What a pleasure to do this again.)"

ii

Rather than an isolated accident, the letter was the first drop in a deluge that flooded the month of March with mail, completely washing Norman up out of his depression and onto a dizzy height of self-absorption and self-confidence. Despite the fact that his new assignment at Headquarters Troop O. and I. offered him nothing fruitful to engage his mind or his time, almost every day he would go through his expanding bundles of letters--the day's delivery would vary between three or four to a

high, in one two-day period, of forty-five--happily immersing himself in the three-month time-warp that they represented. He stood his guard duty, tinkered with make-work assignments and conscientiously read through his photography manuals, waiting for the mail-call that would allow him to reenter the haven of his private world. There he could be sure of discovering what his army experience was so remarkably failing to supply: a sense of his own importance in the scheme of things.

He began a systematic withdrawal from the unsatisfying present by plunging deeply into the past, there to mine out with Bea material for planning their postwar future. His past with her, to be sure, didn't offer much of a model for that future, since it consisted for the most part of college-residence intrigues, fleeting weeks in seasonal resorts, and one sweltering Boston summer, in 1942, when they did their best to conceal their relationship from their respective families. It is exactly out of these things, however, that Norman fashioned his postwar model: the young veterans would return for some kind of graduate study to Harvard on the G.I. Bill, would live in a Cambridge Bowdoin Street apartment--where once Bea had an attic room--and they would go back to their Provincetown (actually North Truro) oceanfront lodgings with the screened-in sleeping porch. The screen would be made of gold-color copper mesh, as it had been before, and for good measure they fantasized that they would also screen-in a porch with the same material on Bowdoin street. [nb3/3/45]

Their much-maligned formal wedding in Chelsea had brought them a gift from Bea's maternal grandparents of one hundred silver dollars, which she used to start their funding-for-the-future bank account. From the start, Norman allotted \$50 of his \$75 monthly pay to this resource, and Bea--whose Ensign's pay was twice Norman's, but whose expenses were much greater--scrimped to save even more[bs/rfl3/6/92]. By March of 1945 the account already had a balance of \$1,600, and in their correspondence it served as the center of their planning exercises, which ranged from curriculum selection at Harvard--Norman was inclined toward the philosophy of history and the history of religion [nm-f2/26/45]--to blueprints for child raising. Early in their relationship they had created an imaginary son and daughter--Bobo and Beatty--projected from the inner child they saw each other as containing, and when Norman lofted an argument for raising them as Christians, the better to gain them access to most similarly-raised postclassical western philosophers [nb3/29/45], Bea--who usually indulged him in his notions--firmly, and with some feeling, shot this one down[bea4/9/45].

Norman's basic after-discharge plan, of course, was to begin writing again. But at this point they both assumed that something like a government-subsidized graduate study program would be needed to supply them with everyday subsistence. While their correspondence, once resumed, continued to develop a rich vein of intimate, often emphatically erotic personal exchanges, it drew

with comparable emphasis upon their shared cultural sensibility, and Norman looked forward to a future time when he would be able to learn from Bea how to listen to classical music more effectively than in an episode--recounted over five pages-- of listening in the tent of fellow clerk Steve Szabo to all of Francks' D Minor Symphony on a portable phonograph[nb3/20/45]. Norman's expression of need and dependence in these letters is very marked, and as he moved away from the increasingly unattractive here and now of his regimental world his central direction was not only toward Bea in all of her aspects, but, through her, toward an affirmation of his connection with literature.

Indeed, when it is not the language of love, the language of books is the operating lingua franca of the greater part of their private correspondence. Both of them were reading and reporting on what they read all the time, Bea--along with a good many of the family--was always sending Norman books, as well as selecting them as presents for family and friends, and the subject of literary imagining was seldom far from the surface. By the spring of 1945 Whitman and Lawrence had become standard sources of reference [nb3/22/45], and in March/April Norman was reading and quoting Havelock Ellis on Leonardo DaVinci and the transsexual nature of the artist [nb3/4/45], Bea was buying and sending Norman volumes of Thoreau and Machiavelli and worrying that she should perhaps have included Alice in Wonderland and Candide. [bea4/31/45] After

some difficulty she obtained and also sent off what would be a very slow-travelling single volume edition of Spengler's Decline of the West [bea4/17/45].

She told of having received Black Boy and F. O. Matthiessen's 1944 study Henry James: The Major Phase as presents from Barbara [bea4/24/45], to whom Norman suggested that Bea send, as a birthday gift, some Katherine Ann Porter or "a good edition of The Rainbow or something relatively obscure like Gide's Journal." [nb3/7/45] (Bea actually sent her some Henry James and a collection of WW II writing [bea3/24/45]). Norman recommended A Tree Grows in Brooklyn to his mother as something he had himself recently enjoyed [nm-f3/22/45], and just in this two-month season he and his wife maintained an ongoing discussion of the merits of The Razor's Edge [nb3/11/45], referred to Meyer Levin's The Old Bunch [nb3/19/45] with almost familial familiarity, and by the end of April they were discussing Anna Karenina, which Bea argued was even better than War and Peace. [bea4/28/45] Finally during this time, almost as if to bridge the territory between their love of literature and their love of each other, Bea discovered and proceeded to quote to her husband at considerable length from Walter Benton's treasury of lyric erotica, This is My Beloved [bea3/30/45].

If, exactly because it was located far from the terrain of Luzon, the territory of published literature was attractive to Norman, the landscape of his own literary composition called to

him even more compellingly. He of course knew that by far the greater part of that landscape was reserved for his postwar cultivation, with his army time exactly to be understood as a elaborate preparation for the effort he would make after he got home. And though his plans for the future envisioned the writing of his novel, he evidently thought it would be premature to dwell upon anything so ambitious as that at this time. But he also felt that whenever he could successfully produce some tiny earnest of writing while he was still serving out his preparation time, he should be at pains to do it. It kept him alive to his long-range mission, and of course served as a kind of rebuttal to the galling everyday arguments from his military superiors that he was failing to measure up to their standards. So in addition to his literary thinking, Norman was always looking for a chance to do some actual writing.

His correspondence in March--the month in which he would begin his second year in the army-- reveals in almost poignant sequence his efforts to resume writing, with first mention to Bea coming on the 7th: "I have three prospective novellas and as many short-stories, all good. Maybe I'll get a chance to bat out one of the stories some day--it's a little foolhardy to hope for more."

Four days later he continued:

I started to write a story the other night, but it was no go. As I expected after such a long layoff, I was terribly constipated. But I'm not worried, it always takes several hours to loosen. I'm only annoyed, [and] I want to tackle it again soon. [3/11b]

The next day, still struggling, he reported, "I was just

thinking of how, if I ever did it, I would write a death scene for the movies," and he first of all parodied the sentimental style of hack movie scenes before continuing:

This is the way it should be done. The buddy looks at his dead friend, gazing deeply, without repugnance, at his mangled bloody death-head, and perhaps he touches his shoulder slightly. Then he stands up and looks at him for a last moment. "So long. . . you old shit kicker," he says, and walks away[3/12/45].

In effect, these small compositional starts were calculated primings of the pump, for only two weeks later--and notwithstanding some precipitous ups and downs in the area of his non-literary life--Norman produced a full-scale narrative.

It is over nine double-spaced typewritten pages long, he called it "Nostalgia," and it arrived in Bea's mail with an exquisitely careful cover-note [nb3/28/45]. On one side of this tiny, Red Cross sheet of stationary Norman's pencilled script told Bea what to look for in the story--"just search the emotion you get from it and make it articulate to yourself"--but asked her not to turn over the sheet and "get the answer" until she had read the manuscript. What that consists of is actually more of a lyric mood-piece than a structured story, for it simply presents four off-duty soldiers having a casual conversation at nightfall while sitting on a low wall in a Philippine rice paddy. Like the soldier in Norman's "Philippine Letter" sketch two months before, their regular assignment is to Command Post guard duty, but unlike him

they are veterans of serious and, for three of them, prolonged combat.

They talk first about the music and lyrics of popular songs--the scene opens with them listening to the English language Manila radio station, which dates the story to about the time of Norman's writing--and they then do nothing more than swap anecdotes about soldiers they had known in earlier times. They remember an eccentric mess sergeant, an aggressively illiterate weapons sergeant, another sergeant who once comically insulted an officer and, finally, a funny little foot-soldier who liked to sit in a motor pool jeep and pretend he was driving. Beneath their laughing reminiscence, however, they reveal a tension and exhaustion that has built up in them over the long haul of infantry combat, and they nostalgically yearn--as we see in the consciousness of one of them--for the innocent state of mind they once enjoyed during their States-side training. Then, the drills and chickenshit discipline that prepared them for the ordeal of combat seemed nothing more than a pointless game--a preposterous "conspiracy to make us miserable," one soldier recalls, now knowing all too well what its real purpose was.

On the reverse side of the Red Cross stationary sheet, which is headed "Don't read this side first," Norman explained to Bea that he wanted "the story to be mainly a presentation of some average soldiers who have lived very close to death for a long time." They have come to employ the everyday acts of talking about

music or their less threatening past military experiences as devices for repression and escape from death's psychic presence. The story ends as the men--themselves now completely out of combat danger--are suddenly cut short in their reminiscing by the distinctive sounds of American heavy artillery batteries starting to shell some hills where doomed Japanese soldiers are hiding. Empathetically waiting for the explosion the shells would make when they hit, one of the soldiers says: "Boy, somebody's going to catch hell in about ten seconds." In his letter to Bea, Norman observed that "there are times when [their] constant fear is not completely repressed--as when the artillery goes off at the end and brings their escapism back to their association with death."

He was of course excited at having got the story written, but was also unsure about its quality. "Whether I have succeeded I do not know. It is not a very intense story and I'm not sure of the pace--it may bog down a little. But let me know." Norman covered his combination of enthusiasm and apprehension by offering businesslike instructions on how the text was to be typed and sent on to Berta--who somewhat unenthusiastically had already sent "The Philippine Letter" out to market--for submission to his perennial market-target, The New Yorker. To have had some success with the story was all the more important to him, no doubt, because at the very time he was writing it he was learning that his position with Troop O. and I. had come to a dead end, and he was again being transferred.

Norman had known by mid-March that his new job was a blind alley, for by then he had mastered the photography manuals and could see that telling him to study them had been little more than a tasteless joke: "The decisions to be made from aerial photographs are so important that they'd never let me interpret them," he wrote to Bea, adding, "I have no ambition in the army, but it is a little galling at times to be so utterly insignificant." [nb3/18/45] He was bitter, at this point, about his original decision to join Headquarters O. and I. instead of taking the rifleman assignment with Headquarters Reconnaissance, and wishing that he were in the artillery or, barring that, a combat unit on the line. One week later he was reassigned,

possibly by request:

I've been transferred again, this time to the wire crew in the troop. . . .Of course I know nothing about wire, but that doesn't bother me. There's a certain distinction in being a private all your life. You know then that you've never usurped authority. But what does annoy me is that I have to learn a new job again, and I'm a little weary and distrustful of learning.[nb3/25/45]

The new job involved going out with a crew, in a jeep, and either stringing or repairing telephone wire between the various posts on the line and the rear-echelon positions with which they communicated. "At least now I'll be getting out and seeing some country, and that does break the monotony," he said, though he soon observed: "I can't say I'm nuts about it; my butt is a little too bony to enjoy sparring with the steel seats of a jeep all day. But I get a kick out of climbing trees." [nb3/27/45] The fact is, of course, that the assignment was another step down the ladder of

military positions²³, and it was perhaps a tribute to the restorative powers of Norman's correspondence with Bea that he managed to compose "Nostalgia" in the same period that this change of assignment was coming about. In fact it was just about this time that it began to seem that there was a kind of dynamic developing between Norman's two commitments as a soldier. His surface commitment--the specific duty or assignment given him by his superiors-- seemed to suffer in direct proportion to the prospering of his subterranean assignment as artist-observer, training himself to use his military experience to nourish his creative enterprise.

In the course of his renewed correspondence, Norman discovered that since he had gone overseas Bea had not only adhered faithfully to her vision of him as a literary artist, but had begun to explore the possibilities of fiction-writing for

²³ Norman was consciously aware that he did not measure up to ordinary standards of adequacy as a soldier. After his transfer into Communications he was one of a party of five soldiers occupying an all-night guardpost on the perimeter of his Troop. The men guarded in shifts and while he was sleeping off-shift the man on guard began firing a machine gun into the jungle. It turned out that the man had mistaken a wandering horse for an enemy soldier, but in the uproar, as Norman was jolted out of a deep sleep, he reported his initial, unconscious reaction as being most self-revealing. He felt guilty, automatically assuming that some inadequacy of his had caused the emergency: "This goes so deeply into my army relationship, it is so descriptive of the humiliation to my vanity in finding myself poorer than average at little tasks (which until I came into the army I had no experience with.)" On re-reading this April 22 letter, after the war, he thought it important enough to pull from the general correspondence file and add it to the papers he was assembling for the writing of The Naked and the Dead.

herself. She at first experimented with small sketches, began keeping a notebook of fictional entries, and gradually she evolved the idea of writing a novel about life in the Waves.[bea3/30/45] Many of her letters to Norman dwelt upon her training, her assignments, her surroundings, her colleagues--dwelt, in short, upon the subject of life in the Waves-- and she asked Norman to go through what was becoming an increasingly bulky correspondence file and send back to her those letters that he thought contained material with good fictional potential. More often than not, Norman's response to Bea's sample-writing was supportive, and he criticized, praised, blamed and advised with a resurgence of the old enthusiasm he had shown when his sister started writing.[nb3/31/45] Perhaps, he said to Bea, their postwar years together would be spent as writers, and he dwelt affectionately upon that possibility [nb4/15/45].

It is also the case, however, that Norman began to see how a comparison between their two curves of personal experience in military service led unavoidably to the conclusion that--at least by conventional measures-- Bea had been the one making the affiliation really work for her. Not only did her initial training lead to her ensign's commission and her subsequent training land her an attractive job as a communications officer, but in April-- just about the time Norman was trying to get out of his wire crew job--she got an assignment promotion in the Norfolk communications code room. Norman, foreseeing Bea's continuing success, now as a

fiction writer as well as a sailor, remarked:
I think of you objectively very seldom, but when I do I realize how very talented and clever you are, and how many people look at you with anything from respect to awe. I impress so few people that way when I'm not with you, that I often wonder if I'm really worth anything much at all. [nb3/29/45]

Consciously fighting against his feeling of insignificance by drawing upon his wife for moral support, Norman at the same time found himself struggling with her over a point that, for some two months of their renewed correspondence, he had stubbornly been unwilling to concede. Since marrying, leaving home and joining the Waves, Bea had gradually developed with her parents, and particularly her mother, a warm relationship that had never--at least to Norman's eyes--been in evidence before. In fact, one of the things he had always prized about Bea was her defiant rejection of her parents' values²⁴, and he was angry that she now was failing to join him in being unforgiving of her parents' initial reaction: their rejection of the marriage, and then their having demanded the charade of a subsequent religious ceremony. Because Bea had cooperated with her parents and remained at home in Chelsea, separated from Norman until the second ceremony, he remembered her as having deserted him, and said as much in a mid-

²⁴ With evident satisfaction he wrote of her in his fall, 1942 Psychology 35 paper at Harvard: "At present, her main concerns are with getting away from her family, and getting married. The second is subsidiary to the first, since she has almost accepted about four or five marriage proposals in the last two years just to be free of her home. Her greatest fits of depression today are furnished whenever she realizes that it will probably be a matter of a year or more before she can break free. The very sight of the house infuriates her."

March letter [nb3/15/45].

He was in part reacting against Bea's gentle but repeated suggestions that he write a friendly letter to her parents, and that he forgive and forget what she at one point called the comedy of family errors surrounding the stormily disputed crisis.[bea3/27/45] Norman's problem was that Bea was supplying him with such a broad and solid base of personal support that refusal to indulge her on this one point evidently began to strike him, despite his ongoing irritation, as being ungrateful. He continued to resist until late April, but he finally came round, writing a presumably cordial letter to his mother-in-law at that time. His feelings toward Jenny, as Bea's mother was called in their correspondence, had probably not changed much--in mid-April he was testily reproving Fan for trying to nudge him in the direction of reconciliation [nm4/20/45]--but he nevertheless did it for Bea, to cement their vital relationship, and his concession offered an impressive measure of his dependence upon her loyalty and support.

Within a month of being assigned to the wire crew of the Headquarters Troop Communications Platoon, Norman was transferred again--this time certainly at his own request--to the Reconnaissance Platoon of Headquarters Troop, and he professed himself "happy for the first time since I've come into the Cavalry." [nb4/25/45] He was now a rifleman, assigned to a platoon whose purpose it was to patrol in squads out into the countryside

in search of information about the enemy's position. It was exactly the assignment he had turned down when he chose to go into the RCT Headquarters O. and I. unit, and he told Bea that this originally mistaken choice had now been rectified: You know that decision I made on the boat to go into RCT [as O. & I. clerk] was the wrong one--by all practical standards it was a good break, but what is practical wisdom? The proof that the RCT decision was the wrong one is that I'm now where I would have been anyway. [nb4/25/45]

Far from seeing himself as having finally hit bottom in terms of military position, Norman's perception was that he had extricated himself with dignity from a humiliating situation: If someone like me is going to be in the army, the only job he can have where he can maintain his dignity is as a soldier. I could not escape a certain humiliation and self-disgust as a clerk (RCT) as a servant (which was what [Troop] O. and I. turned out to be) or as a wireman. [ibid]

Cautioning Bea to keep this move into combat-active status a secret from Fan (his mailing address remained Headquarters Troop, 112th Cav., regardless of his movement from O. and I. to Communications to Reconnaissance) he clearly was pleased with the consequences of his decision. Operating out of a bivouac that got hot food only when the road to the rear permitted it, his platoon had a demanding duty roster--sometimes six days of extended patrols before a day of rest--but Norman liked and needed the umbilical interdependence between the squad members when the patrol leader took them out into the field. While they were out on patrol each one of them, undeniably if not equally, was a figure of significance.

Norman's first close-up exposure to combat came in the second week of April, while he was still a wire-man. An order to repair a broken wire led him and his crew into the path of a fire-fight between an infiltrating Japanese patrol and an American roadwork party. Norman's crew joined a group sent to relieve the work party, and was ordered to hold down the crossing of a densely overgrown stream while the main body fanned out and then worked its way back toward the crossing, seeking to drive the Japanese out of cover. Waiting and watching to see who emerged from the jungle, Norman said that he and his fellows experienced a "sensation that was not exactly fear--it was more, well, 'awareness.'

But an awareness so acute that it approached pain and fear. There was a tension like hot steel from collar bone to collar bone that seemed to lock up my throat. I was carrying a gun and a telephone, and partly from that fear-awareness and partly from the heat I was sweating tremendously. [nb4/11/45]

As they waited, and he was tapping into the phone wire strung just over his head--pleased that his tension did not affect his voice--heavy gunfire suddenly broke out all around them. It turned out to be all, or almost all directed against the Japanese, ten of whom were killed before the rest of the American group reappeared--its lieutenant carrying a large, bloody Samurai sword. Norman's crew then proceeded to find and repair the broken wire that originally

had drawn them into the episode.²⁵

Two weeks later, Norman transferred to Recon and a week after that, when his patrol took some direct fire, he-- for the first time had bullets skipping just a little over my prostrate body. Curiously, I wasn't afraid this time. I think I enjoyed it--I certainly was elated on the way back. [nb4/30/45] But most often, on his Recon patrols, he found himself covering ground that has been harrowed by earlier fighting, encountering only the grisly remains [nb5/6/45]. He apparently settled with something like real satisfaction into the Recon context, meeting fellow-recon troopers and finding, despite the routinely exhausting regimen, that he occupied an undisputed and undespised--if not necessarily highly respected-- place there.

By the end of April, Japanese forces in northern Luzon had been driven deep into the mountains, having been violently dislodged and forced back from line after line. There the last of them would remain until the end, contained by combat lines of American troops, including for about two more months those of the 112th. From bivouacs in the lowlands and valleys, American Intelligence reconnaissance units probed systematically forward-- in Norman's case into the lower Sierra Madre hills--making contact for the most part only with reciprocal enemy patrols and isolated pockets of their infantry.

²⁵The letter recounting this experience is one of four written to Bea in April that Norman was to harvest from the file and use in his postwar composition of The Naked and the Dead.

Norman in the field participated in a number of these contacts, recording descriptions of near-misses--the various sounds made by bullets coming very close--but his most vividly described experience was not of contact with the enemy. On a day when he was still convalescing from the grippe, Norman's whole platoon went out, under the direction of a lieutenant, in search of a reported force of seventy Japanese infiltrators. The officer led the men on a grueling march that culminated in a single-file climb up the face of a densely overgrown mountain-ridge. As they approach the top, the platoon was near dropping with exhaustion:

You know, I have always thought that the pride which consists of having the good opinion of others was a weak pride and a vain one, but it took the place of will-power for me on that trail. I was determined that I would never face the shame of quitting because I could not bear to face the others afterward, and that substituted for resolution. I would keep on until I passed out. [nb5/17/45]

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He didn't pass out, the column crawled on, and then someone near the head of it accidentally kicked over a hornets' nest. The hornets swarmed down the column, attacking all the men with an irresistible power. Norman was stung on the ear:

The pain, surprisingly, is maddening; it numbed my ear as if it were frost-bitten. The whole line of men was being stung, and there were all kinds of oaths and cries of pain. Everyone began thrashing the air and beating at himself and the hornets buzzed in and out of the thicket and at us.[ibid]

The trailing end of the file, carrying machine guns, broke and ran back down the ridge, but the main body, galvanized by the pain and by seeing the hornets driving down toward the foot of the column, began climbing up toward the top to escape them. Though the reconnaissance never produced contact with the Japanese, it was probably Norman's worst experience in the field.²⁶

On April 13, the day after President Roosevelt died, Norman seems to have written to Bea of the impact on his troop of the news --he would later compare its power to the effect created by the news of Hiroshima[nb8/8/45]²⁷. Before getting his letter, Bea

²⁶ Over a year after it was written, this nine page, closely packed manuscript was selected out by Norman, along with some six other letters of May, 1945, for reference during his postwar composition of The Naked and the Dead. In this, as in so many other cases, he would put his account of actual experience to good fictional use.

²⁷ Though no letters at all from Norman, to anyone, are preserved on the relevant dates, it is obvious from later correspondence that he had responded to the FDR's death immediately, and that these letters are among a number later selected out from the main file and then subsequently lost.

sent her own account of how deeply this news distressed her and her friends in the Naval Base community where she resided.[bea4/12-4/14/45] Generally speaking, Bea was the one who tracked, in their letters, the unfolding of historical events around them: the advance of the American armies in Europe as the final countdown began there, [bea4/14/45] and the broadcast of a false report of Germany's surrender over U.S. radio networks on Saturday, April 28 (touching off a massive celebration that President Truman broke into, saying it was a mistake[bea4/29/45].)

On May 4, the day before British Commanding General Montgomery actually accepted the German surrender on his front, Norman wrote to his parents that "the Germans will never surrender" [m-f5/4/45]. He later explained to Bea that he had expected individual German combat units to go on fighting "last stands in Bavaria, Norway, etc." for months more to come.[nb5/9/45] In fact, however, Supreme Allied Headquarters accepted the total and final German surrender at Rheims on May 7, and Norman wrote, in his next letter to his parents, "Wasn't it great about VE [Victory in Europe] day? Now maybe this war will speed up"[m-f5/11/45]. He and Bea differed a little about President Truman, with Norman taking the more conventional view that the new president was merely a minor figure[bea4/30/45].

Whatever their awareness of history--its major and minor figures, its great and small events, and its in any case massive control over their lives--the two young correspondents continued

to organize their letters around what they had tried to establish as the unshakable inner-fortress of their personal relationship. Its most intimate dimensions were addressed, by them both but particularly by Norman, in more and more elaborately produced compositions of formal, even classical erotica--the writer referring to them as "free" letters--that he intricately contrived to smuggle past the censorship screen (Bea's letters were not subject to censorship.) "I think sometimes," Norman says at the end of one scenario of gusty passion, "that never have two people equalled both our love and our sensuality. With all others, one must preclude the other." [nb5/10/45] And the two undertook to share as much more as they could: dreams were described in exhaustive detail, moods recorded, along with moments of isolation and depression or, less frequently, of comradeship with colleagues and cheerful distraction.

There was never any mistaking the contrasts in their two, frankly acknowledged, temperaments: Bea was the supporter, Norman the supported; she was patient, he was irritable; she was usually calm, he was frequently angry; she was in control of her institutional situation, he was harried and oppressed by his. Within these broad boundaries, however, there was a spirited give and take. When he complained about her sending him the wrong kinds of snacks or using inappropriate stationary or using the wrong kind of vocabulary to describe psychological phenomena, she pinked him with ironic regrets, and called him to account on his failure

to take an appropriately progressive position on such things as the Filipino ethnic character, or Soviet Foreign policy, or the inequitable way in which women in the American workforce--military and non-military--were required to suffer the stupidities of male discrimination. [6/8/45] Their relationship was too valuable to both participants to allow anything to shake it, and so they stoically absorbed a particularly painful erosion from their thin store of treasures.

In early May, Norman somehow lost his waterproof storage bag containing all of Bea's letters to him "from December to the middle of March."²⁸ [nb5/9/45] Bea had of course been hoping to use some of these letters as material for her still embryonic novel. Throughout the winter she had searched for a way to build into her crowded, community-living schedule a regular time for thinking about, planning and then actually doing her own writing. She produced several very short pieces, including a formal vignette depicting a circus barker in action that Norman professed to like, and she did sketches of several young couples who were clearly candidates for characterization in the novel, but--apart from her

²⁸. Since the existing file reveals an additional gap in Bea's correspondence between late August and early December, 1944, it is possible that this earlier batch of approximately one hundred letters also was stored in the lost waterproof bag. When she got the news, Bea ruefully reported jokes from a fellow-Wave about her erotica offering some interesting reading to the lonely GIs who might find the bag, and she herself pretended to worry that if the letters were found by the enemy, the Japanese reaction to such American decadence might strengthen their will to fight [5/23/45].

almost daily letters to Norman and apparently frequent letters to both of their families-- she couldn't find time to write regularly. Though Norman faced essentially the same problem, and was obviously less disciplined than she in conventional ways, his deeply established inner-identity as a writer held fast under such pressure, and his determination was too strong to allow him to get very far separated from it. An impressive measure of how thoroughly he was storing up his experience in preparation for postwar recapturing is provided by a survey of his letters from this period. In the time when Norman was closest to combat--April, May and June of 1945--he wrote Bea about fifteen letters a month. When he combed through this file after the war, in search of material that he might be able to use in The Naked and the Dead, he selected out at least ten letters as especially promising. In the event, almost all of them were actually used in one way or another, and at least ten others from this period offer evidence of his conscious efforts to broaden the base of his fiction-writer's notebook. As writer, he was making use of his military situation in just the way he had planned to do when he entered the army, and certainly as he had hoped to do when he arranged his transfer to Recon.

In May, he was able to write a genuinely excellent piece as a result of lucking into an impromptu volunteer visit to Manila. There he found himself part of a theatrically composed audience listening to that city's Symphony Orchestra--silent since 1941--

perform both Beethoven's Eroica and Dvorak's New World Symphony in the ruins of Santa Cruz Church. His epistolary account of the experience is a sharply effective piece of journalism, in which

Norman took particular pains with his rendering of the audience: I had the old pleasure of recognition, for all Symphony crowds the world over must look the same. Here were all the old familiar faces, the sensitive boys with the long hair and the effeminate lisping speech, the middle-aged women with the horn-rimmed glasses, the gray-haired young men of thirty who had been brokers in Boston and were now Lt. Commanders. All the old faces--I had not realized there were so many intellectuals in the army in the Philippines.

Having realized it, however, he was careful to dissociate his own identity from that of this population, for he saw himself as part of an altogether different kind of elite: dressed as he was in rumpled combat fatigues, he was one of a handful of cavalrymen trucked back to the concert from the field, and he was proudly aware of standing out starkly in the starched and pressed rear-echelon audience. After the war, he wrote, "there shall be very few authors with combat experience, for all the authors, indeed all the bright young men are clerks in the vast mills of Base HQ."

[nb5/16/45] The Manila letter is done so well--more successfully, perhaps, than anything else he attempted to finish while in uniform--that it should have been offered for publication in the United States. But the event evidently was fully covered by the attendant correspondent corps: indeed, Life magazine, in its June 4, 1945 issue[pp.118-120], published a three-page, four-picture story on the elaborately arranged performance (Mrs. Douglas MacArthur sat in the front row) and if Berta did try to place

Norman's letter as an essay she was not successful.

Perhaps the most significant sign of literary gestation during this month of May, however, was the way Norman's imagination cast back some six months to his "sharp and exquisite little novella," conceived at Fort Ord and destined to be recognized as the source for The Naked and the Dead. When he first got overseas, he had cast round for sketches and short-story ideas to keep himself literarily alive, but this narrative had come back to him now that he was himself going out on patrols not altogether unlike the one that would serve as its centerpiece. "More and more ideas about the novella," he wrote on the first of the month, "I'm afraid it will turn out to be a novel."²⁹ [nb5/1/45]. He may have been "afraid," because at this point he was still seeing this as the wrong time for him to be conceiving of anything as ambitious as a novel. He knew how a novel conception could take over his imagination to the exclusion of all other things, and it may have seemed too early for such narrowing-in. On the other hand, it was also becoming clear that the war was ending: it may

²⁹ "Also a couple of stories about the Japanese," he adds. These incipient stories may never have been developed, but the remark indicates that he was on the lookout for story ideas, and in his next letter home he tells of having found one. On patrol with some Filipino guerrillas, Norman's squad recovered the body of a dead guerrilla and his captured light machine gun, both of which they then carried home in an agonizing effort. The story would not be written for six years, but when he did write "The Dead Gook" it corresponded in exact detail to his original conception of it as recorded in this letter to Bea.

be that digging up his best novel-idea was exactly Norman's way of registering his understanding of that fact.³⁰

Generally speaking, though he had much less leisure time on his hands after he got into Recon, the job somehow produced the closest thing to compatibility with his priorities as a writer that Norman had found since he entered the army, and his files grew progressively richer as a result. At the same time, his correspondence burgeoned with associated literary matters, including the ongoing adventures of his "Transit" manuscript. The novel was still making the rounds, and Berta had entered it in a ten thousand dollar prize contest being conducted by Harper and Brothers. Also, Norman's mother reported that the excerpt from the novel that Norman had prepared at Edward Seaver's request for

³⁰ Norman was still calling the novella "The Ridge Novel," nb5/1/45], and two days later he formulated a five page analysis/presentation of a technique of interior narration he intended to try out in its pages. His overweight character is eating, and consciously thinking only of the food:

"He cut a piece from the beef and flopped it in the gravy. When his mouth was filled with the meat and the hashed brown potatoes and the greens, he took a sip of wine. The garlic in the sauce seemed to flow into the warm breath of the liquor. Good, he thought slowly, this was good. Her body was returning the odor of his body but more gently. The plump buttocks settled on his hand, the breasts and belly spilled over his chest and loins and he felt her mouth as a moist pulsing clasp. He sighed. Nothing like a good meal. Perhaps it was why he was so fat. The children all laughed at the turtle which lay helpless on its back. He was going to reduce. It was bad to like food so much." [nb5/20/45]

Though neither the food nor the feeder from this passage ever made it into The Naked and the Dead--where, indeed, the meals and those who eat them are usually quite Spartan--the multi-level presentation of consciousness would often be employed there.

inclusion in his next volume of Cross-Section had been accepted by the editor. This prompted Norman to remark that if Seaver had rejected the piece "I would have been convinced that Transit was, after all, pretty lousy." [nb6/9/45] Berta was also optimistic about placing "Nostalgia" in one of the many "slick" magazines of the day--she cited signs of interest from the Saturday Evening Post, Ladies' Home Journal, and Esquire [5/24/45berta]--while at about the same time telling Bea that her own "Barker" vignette would never sell [nb5/4/45].

Anxious though he was to position himself on the extreme left margin of the military's high-culture audience--there to affirm his affiliation with combat duty and all it implied--Norman nevertheless remained an identifiable part of that audience, continuing to draw upon music, ideas and, especially, books as a vital source of environmental sustenance. The first two numbers of his long-awaited subscription to The New Yorker arrived in mid-May, and in the politically progressive fashion of the day he praised the magazine even as he deprecated his own enjoyment of it.³¹ He had also been reading Ernie Pyle's two volumes of wartime reportage in the European theater-- Here is Your War (1943) and Brave Men (1944) [nb5/24/45]-- the already enormous popularity of

³¹"Maybe I'm getting mentally torpid, but I enjoyed them so much it's disgraceful." [nb5/19/45]

As writer, of course, he had almost from the start regarded acceptance by the New Yorker as a glittering prize. By the time of the present writing he had submitted to the magazine, and had rejected, at least four manuscripts.

which had been grimly increased by the news, in late April, that Pyle had been killed by Japanese gunfire while observing the American landing on Okinawa ³².

The previous month, Bea provided Norman with a detailed critique of the Francks' D minor Symphony he had heard[bea5/6/45], and in other letters she supplied still more cultural intelligence. She had sent paperbacks of Alice in Wonderland, the New and Old Testaments, and some unnamed other books at Norman's request[bea5/8/45], while remarking on her own readings of Menninger's Love Against Hate[bea5/4/45] Shaw's St. Joan [bea6/11/45] and The Education of Henry Adams [bea6/17/45]. She reviewed movies (Dick Powell in Murder, My Sweet[bea5/17/45]) and plays (John Hersey's A Bell for Adano [bea6/1/45]), and reflected upon the way in which Christian/Judaic morality seemed inevitably defeated by its basic requirement of self-sacrifice, while Marxist/Leninist/Stalinist morality, based upon the concept of self-interest, seemed to stand more of a chance [bea6/21/45].

³² In responding to Pyle's death, Norman wrote on June 16, 1945:
"His virtue lies in the accuracy of his war picture. I think you might read him to understand what the daily life of war is like. He does not hide the unutterable drabness that alternates with the misery, he knows that combat is never the dramatic adventurous charge across an open field or the catharsis of a mighty invasion as all the magazines and Hollywood have it, but merely a skirmish involving always little groups of men against similar little groups fought in a curious darkness and confusion where no one knows ever exactly what's happening, and the personal sensation is a unique band of fear across your throat and a curious vital perception that attaches itself to the earth immediately about you."

Norman had got hold of a digest of Will Durant on Gibbon, and reflected at length about the relationships between historical cycles of progression from ideal to ideal[6/22/45]; at even greater length he wrote about how, while on guard-duty all one comparatively tense night, he fell to thinking about the abstraction from the concrete that the game of chess permitted its players,³³ and how, still more, the operation of mathematics enabled its master to see into the abstract essence of relationships [nb6/25/45] (while parenthetically he lamented his own lack of a classical education and any true sense of the past[nb5/11/45]). He studied and studiously applied his Machiavelli to current world events[nb5/31/45], discovered Robert Graves by reading I. Claudius (especially appreciating its descriptions of military life[nb5/11/45]), and in extended discussion of James Freeman's sturdily progressive, neatly polarized novel Never Call Retreat, expressed his own non-progressive impatience with conventional dualities between good and evil.

For Norman, a more acceptable concept of Godhead would itself embody the most conflicted contradictions, and he said that he sometimes thought of God as being "like a very intense Somerset Maugham." [nb6/4/45]

³³Norman had played chess since childhood, but took it no more seriously than any other board game until he GOT INTO THE ARMY. [YES?] [NAME OF BOOK HE READ THAT GOT HIM INTO IT?]. It would remain a life-long serious interest.

Their freedom as a couple, insofar as Norman and Bea enjoyed any, was largely the product of their internal explorations into the life of the imagination and into the (also imagined) life of one another, while the external circumstances of their lives as members of military units proceeded, of necessity, to parallel the historical circumstances of a war that was clearly coming to some kind of close.

It is not surprising, that is, that as the month of June came to an end, these universal signs of closure began to show themselves in each of their particular situations as well. A month earlier, Bea had put in for a transfer from Norfolk to the U.S. Naval Yard Annex on Staten Island and, discovering in June that it was going to come through, she prepared to conclude her year-long assignment in Virginia. Her plan was to live with Fan at the Pierrepont Street apartment--where Arthur Miller had recently moved into the building as a neighbor--and in her non-duty hours get down to the writing of her novel. Whatever dimension of parent-aversion Bea may have begun with seems altogether to have eroded, and she was just as content to provide her mother-in-law (whose daughter was away at college and whose husband continued to work out of Washington, D.C.) with company as to be within easy

visiting distance of her own parents [bea6/1/45].

While Bea's transfer situation was going forward, Norman--in mid-June having finally risen to the rank of Private First Class--was looking at a regimental change of situation that was genuinely fraught with portent. His platoon had been bivouacked in the field for as long as he had been in it, and he had noticed that by the second week of June he was going on fewer patrols and was spending more of his time on various work details, most of them dedicated to increasing the simple amenities of their bivouac site³⁴. Then, in the last week of June, the whole platoon was assembled so hastily that he was barely able to throw off a one-line "won't be able to write" note to Bea [nb7/1/45]: their orders were to move up into the Sierra Madre, where the forward units of the 112th were dug in, and participate in the evacuation of their regimental comrades from the now-stationary lines.

While the Japanese forces would remain contained in the mountains by newly assigned units, the Luzon campaign had officially been declared to be at an end, and the Sixth Army divisions that had prosecuted it were directed to return to garrison. Franklin Roosevelt's death, Germany's surrender, the end of the Philippine campaign and the inexorably increased

³⁴In two letters, both selected out for The Naked and the Dead file, he described his hard work on a road-building detail, which was intended to keep open their narrow bivouac road so that hot food could reach them[6/20/45]. The other letter describes at some length Norman standing solitary guard one night on into the hours of sunrise, followed by his appreciatively hungry hurry down to the mobile kitchen unit for hot eggs and toast and coffee[6/19/45]

devastation of the Japanese main islands by massive flights of B-29 "superbombers" set the historical stage: some form of the grand finale was at hand, and everybody, everywhere, felt pulled toward their own microcosm of the approaching climax. Certainly this was true of the 112th Regimental Combat Team, and Norman's feelings were suddenly awakened and energized by the spectacular drama of relocating the whole outfit in a single operation. The move so completely engaged him that he was drawn from his customary marginal vantage point into the participatory center of the experience itself.

His platoon moved up into the mountains in radio-equipped jeeps, advancing along steep, treacherous roads to where the line platoons would be withdrawing on foot: here, the Recon radios were to direct trucks up to crude staging areas to meet the troops and transport them down to the next stage of their journey into garrison. Norman's imagination fit more compatibly with the assignment than anything he had encountered since Basic Training. "There was a military education worth so much to a professional," he wrote about the complex logistics of the operation. "I learned such a great deal about what vehicles can and can not do, learned indeed a definition for common sense, for every mechanical impasse represents a challenge and a hard, quick decision." He was uncharacteristically impressed with what his officers were able to accomplish under the demanding circumstances, and he almost gloried in the bird's eye vantage point he occupied in surveying

the same lower Sierra Madre terrain he had slogged through for two months on foot patrol. As he looked down on it all, I was trying to find the pattern of those mountains. For a hill is not isolated--there is a beauty in it by itself, but there is a larger richness when you understand which ridge it belongs to, and what structure the ridges form. Earth has as much shape as the body of a human and its real beauty is grasped only when you are not lost in the details. There is a delight in seeing the streams grow like the moss of body hollows in all the ravines and bosom forth onto the valleys, following the full curve that goes from the climax and turmoil of the peaks into the peace of the plains. It was like having a map come alive to your eyes. [nb7/1/45]

At the same time, Norman marked the effect of perceiving such natural majesty in the context of the screaming gears and sliding wheels of motorized vehicles bent on grinding into and dominating the terrain. The jeeps and trucks transformed the experience profoundly:

What was a fine, quick-running stream became a treacherous shoals when we had to cross it. Every rock was a potential enemy. The stream became malign and ugly to me because my interest was with the machine. We did not see the valleys falling from the ridge--there were too many mud holes and sliding flanks on the road. The forest was mean, for the road was always muddy beneath it, and our jeep would labor sickeningly through its ruts. You do not use a machine, you share existence with it and there is the horror. For now you no longer feel the hills to the farthest extent of your senses; it all constricts into the confines of your mechanism, and you side with the vehicle in that combat.[ibid]

This duality of vision, while it did not keep him from a strong feeling of accomplishment at having completed the evacuation assignment successfully, deepened in a letter written two days afterward. In it he reassumed his familiar identity as an outsider somehow polarized from the military community, explaining that on the way up into the mountains on the evacuation mission he had an accident, failing adequately to get out of the way of a vehicle

backing down the road, and "got my thighs mashed between a Jeep and a Command car."

Though he managed to persuade his officers that the injury was superficial, and was permitted to remain with the mission, Norman offered Bea a broodingly full description of his clumsiness and almost self-destructive lack of judgement regarding, particularly, the operation of machines[nb7/3/45]. Indeed, over the period of a week he became more and more aware of the fact that he actually hated machines:

This aversion is beginning to have pathological traits--a machine depresses me; if I stand by one working for five or ten minutes I feel weary and my legs ache. I feel a constant anxiety about it, even when I'm not working. [nb7/11/45].

✓ In elaborate illustration, he presented a tragi/comic account of how, in garrison, he had participated in the drastic mismanagement of a gigantic water-pump that was in his charge and, amid anecdotes of his own ineptitude, concluded:
You know really my only decent function as a man is to be a lover and/or an author. I really think, quite objectively, that I am useless for anything else [Ibid].

The gesture of giving up, of declaring himself terminally dysfunctional as a soldier had become easy for Norman, and it stood in remarkable contrast to his tenacious determination to give up nothing in pursuit of his mission as a writer. Yet in his most recent rifleman role he had regained some measure of personal confidence (his confidence that he was a writer had developed a

kind of impersonal, apparently unshakable quality by this time in his life) after only two months in the field. Now, with his PFC stripe, his combat pay and his sense of superiority over the rear-echelon army he had left behind, it is possible that a few more months in the not-very-hazardous field would have gone some way to create a balance between his divided identities. In his two months he had developed a pride in what he did, boasting a little about his personal arsenal³⁵, and recording about his Combat Infantry Badge:

"You've probably seen it--the silver rifle on the blue bar with the wreath around it. . . . It is one little medal I am proud to wear" [nb8/5/45].

But self-satisfaction in the context of his assignment was not to be. The Recon platoon was rejoining Headquarters Troop in garrison, and Norman in garrison was almost as useless as he had just "quite objectively" indicated to Bea. After he and his comrades had been transported by the navy down the island to a new location, they quickly figured out that garrison for them constituted a retraining stage in preparation for their next and in one sense or another their final mission of the war. Now, living in tents that had to be kept inspection-ready clean, he was required to prepare for parades, learn to handle his cannon according to the Manual of Arms, and to return to the discipline

³⁵Besides his carbine he was eventually issued an M1 Garand rifle which he called a cannon, a .45 caliber automatic pistol and a Thompson sub-machine gun (prompting him to tell Bea "You may now address me as Dear Machine Gunner" [nb6/4/45].)

of blind and automatic acceptance of orders [nb7/16-20/45]. Norman felt sufficiently disadvantaged and thus demeaned by the new situation³⁶ that he resolved to try to escape it by volunteering for an assignment that, if he received it, would test radically.

The assignment was for an elite program of special--and specially hazardous--Regimental Scout duty, which he thought would at least pull him out of the rut of parade-ground discipline, and incidentally would require him to enter a program of physical training more demanding than anything he had ever undertaken. He liked this idea enough so as actually to quit smoking for two days in anticipation of the rigors of training, but when it turned out that he was not thought good enough to be given the assignment, he resumed both his smoking and his feeling that garrison was an intolerable prison[nb7/26/28/45]). The Scout Training idea had been developed in tandem with a kindred soul who would become Norman's only close postwar veteran friend: Francis Irving (Fig) Gwaltney, a sergeant and chief radio non-com in Recon, whom Norman had met about the time he was trying to get

³⁶Norman did not simply dislike the mentality of garrison inspection, he hated it. Writing of the routine of inspection he first encountered at Ft. Bragg, and which he had never been able altogether to escape, he explained to Bea: "In a way it was like an obsession neurosis where every time you leave your house you're convinced you have forgotten something. I can never remember an inspection where I was confident everything was right--always I had the nightmarish feeling that as the officer approached my bunk I would discover, too late, that a spoon was upside down or there was a spot of rust on my mess gear. The aversion it built up in me is so severe that I would rather undergo a tough fire fight or stand a night's guard in a swamp than have a tough inspection." [nb5/24/45]

transferred into that platoon.

"A Welshman by way of Arkansas," as Norman called him, Gwaltney read a lot and himself harbored hopes of becoming a writer, and Norman--who said that he had about ten fairly good friends in the regiment--liked him from the start. At least two of his other friends dated back to Fort Bragg, one or two others were also literary, but Gwaltney was special in at least two respects: he had some real potential as a writer, and he was a southerner. As a regiment of Texans, the 112th offered Norman an ethnic experience he did not at all enjoy: men from the American south seemed to him to be cold, unsympathetic, clannish and quick to hostility, and it became important to him to discover a relationship that allowed him to break through that mask and prove it to be unthreatening. For some three months the warm and friendly Welshman from Arkansas had been happy to provide this opportunity, and though he was himself accepted into the Scout Training program and left the outfit temporarily, there were to be repeated and important reunions.

Before Gwaltney's departure, Norman had persuaded him to acquire a copy of Malraux's Man's Hope, "and now he is infatuated with Andre and bemoans the fate which made him too young to get in the Spanish Civil War." Norman reported to Bea that he and his new friend were "very simpatico on such things"[nb7/16/45]. The move into garrison from the field, however it may have undermined Norman's sense of self-sufficiency, evidently increased his

opportunity for reading, and during July and early August he made his way through a real literary charcuterie: a volume of novellas by Georges Simenon ("the Dashiell Hammett of French detective fiction"[nb7/14/45]), Charles Jackson's The Lost Weekend ("I realized with some fear that if I'm ever a failure I could become an alcoholic so easily"[nb7/12/45]), e.e. cummings' The Enormous Room ("Figured I'd . . . fill out a little gap in my profound knowledge of Mod Am Lit"[nb7/16/45]), Alice in Wonderland ("I see why you love it so much"[nb7/12/45]), Richard Wright's Black Boy ("I enjoyed it....But there was a note of truculence in it which surprised me" [nb7/10/45]), Mann's Tonio Kruger ("For all his vaunted acuity I think he's stupid and blind about the essentials"[nb7/20/45]), and Kasner and Newman's Mathematics and the Imagination ("If we are to plumb the nature of man we must understand the universe his mind creates and trace it back to his needs."[nb7/8/45]).³⁷

On July 26, after more than three months in the mail, The Decline of the West finally arrived, and Norman and Bea began regularly to quote Spengler to each other[bn7/28/45] [bea8/18/45], with Norman proposing that they make a postwar purchase of one of Spengler's favorite citation sources: the 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica[nb8/3/45]. Norman read the Spengler slowly and

³⁷ Bea's own citations of readings in J. P. Marquand (The Late George Apley) [bea7/8/45], Katherine Ann Porter (Scrapbook) [bea7/28/45] and Ellen Glasgow (Vein of Iron) [bea8/31/45] round out their reading log of this season.

studiously, and always with the question that he asked of everything important that he read: did it help him to illuminate the workings of his own imagination? The sweep of Spengler's mind did remind Norman of his own, and he was both flattered and encouraged to mark and dwell upon that resemblance.³⁸

In the continuing matter of his own writing, Norman had experienced a crucial disappointment: Edwin Seaver reconsidered and withdrew his offer to publish a section from "Transit" in his new Cross-Section anthology. In a June 22, 1945 letter to Berta the editor explained:
When I read the book as a whole I thought it would be possible, but now, reading the excerpt torn out of the book, I find myself having to rely on my memory for the entire work properly to appreciate this bit of it.

At almost the same time, Harper and Brothers, to whom the novel manuscript had been submitted in the context of their annual fiction-prize competition, also sent a sympathetic but firm letter of rejection. [7/12/45hrpr] Persuaded at last that the novel was locked in his past and could not be recovered, Norman would instruct Berta [berta9/14/45] to withdraw it from circulation, and turned his fiction writing attention firmly to the future.

Before doing so, however, he allowed himself a brief detour into the really distant past in the form of a response to Bea's notice [7/25/45] that she had found and read the manuscript of

³⁸ This search for signs of himself is a literary litmus test that Norman would always apply to canonical texts, and helps account for his rejection of, among many others, Thomas Mann.

→ "The Martian Invasion." His long, carefully detailed reply, reciting with perfect accuracy the titles, situations and context not only of the Martian novel of his tenth summer but all the most ambitious childhood pieces of the two summers previous, took Bea over his whole original incarnation as a writer. He called the letter "This Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," and lightly mentioned--evidently for the first time-- that in his eleventh summer, following this peaking of his first artist-identity, "the great six-year drought began." [8/6/45b] His rejection of his own writer-identity had, after all, shaped his life right through the formative years of his puberty, and reclaiming that identity--as well, perhaps, as some of the losses of that puberty period-- had been the story of his life ever since. It is therefore worth emphasizing that this acknowledgement of his early experience as an artist--complete with Joycean title--is cast as a revelation to Bea, whose intimacy with him up to now had not earned her access to this secret.

Notwithstanding his easy final parenthesis--"(Of course it was really a healthy sign, the artist fallow, as Berta might say)"--we do well to mark this casually tossed-off recitation of something that had remained unacknowledged for exactly thirteen years, and in doing so we might also mark a linking detail in a letter he wrote just two weeks later [nb8/20/45], where he abruptly set down: "I have some trauma I cannot recall. Somewhere the cold, tall man with the steel rimmed glasses and the cruel business

man's face hurts me. (Could it be Dad?)" The point is not so much to suggest the existence of a precise traumatic event in connection with Norman's original retreat from his writer's identity. Rather it is to confirm that, in one way or another, the retreat was associable with childhood experience of pain, fear and damage.

The garrison-bound Norman's ongoing focus, of course, was not upon his literary past but his future, and if his detour through his early past had shown a fairly light touch the reason was probably because of his very positive feelings about the timing for his new novel project. On some level he had come to understand that he could go forward with it now; his sense of the impending end of the war--however it was transforming the rest of the world--was transforming his writer's cosmos. It was permitting him to start working in earnest on the project that he would carry with him out of the army and into the postwar world. As long as the continuing war was open-ended, as it had been when he first arrived overseas, a long-range fiction project was counter-indicated. But that project's time had now come, and Norman tore into it with the organized air of a man digging a foundation for a house.

Shelving the "Transit" manuscript required no great agonizing because the new novel--growing ever clearer and brighter--emerged in its first stages as a kind of corrective to the earlier effort. "Transit" had failed, he believed, because it was not

rooted in the existence of real people. His "ridge" or his "jungle novel," as he variously called it, would start with those very people: Norman sorted through his memories of the soldiers he had known as if he were the casting director for a play, auditioning his comrades present and past for the numerous parts. In late July and again in August he reported to Bea that he had found the perfect person to model for one of his most important enlisted-man characters, and explained how this character would help to establish "an effective way to anchor the symbol of the mountain range to the story, and to the emotions of the men in it."³⁹ As a grudging tribute to the way military life had opened up for him literary opportunities that he would otherwise not have enjoyed, Norman concluded his July letter: "Much as I hate the army, I've

³⁹ His character is to be based on Red Matthiesen [sic]: "He's the strong taciturn man, self-sufficient and unloving who seems to crop up in everything I write. . . . But this time I really think I know him, and can do something with him."

In the same letter Norman also sent Bea a clipping from YANK, The Army Weekly of August 17, 1945]: "The picture I'm enclosing is from an article in Yank about that lost trio in Shangri-La, and I thought it rather magnificent; it certainly has some of the emotional and mystic content I want my ridge to possess. So save it for me, sweets." The article concerns the 45 day ordeal and rescue of three survivors of an American military cargo plane crash into a dense New Guinea jungle valley, hidden in the shadow of the towering Oranje mountain range. Evidently the range was pictured in Norman's edition of the paper.

He adds that he is thinking of "having each of my chapters told in the mind of a different character, perhaps using several of them several times. Part of the effectiveness of A Calculus [at Heaven] came from that, and it might aid me in that thought-stream technique we wrote about some months ago." [nb8/19/45]

Norman later selected out both his letter from July 24 and this August 19 letter for inclusion in his Naked and the Dead working file.

learned certain kinds of knowledge in it which would have taken years any other way." [7/24/45].

Meanwhile, Bea had completed her relocation from Norfolk to Brooklyn, settling in late July into Pierrepont Street and her new position as a Communications officer at the Navy Yard Annex on Staten Island. She had also begun preliminary work on her novel, sending Norman some outline material, as well as assorted sketches and vignettes. [bea8/4:8/12/45] Bea's arrival at Pierrepont Street coincided, however, with a development so radical that it in many ways eclipsed not only the significant change in family structure created by her own addition to the household, but even the more general excitement and anxiety created by the questions of when and how the Second World War was going to end. Norman had foreseen the development in mid-July, and in one letter referred to it as "The coming Battle of Barbara." [7/18/45]

Jack Maher, who had been stationed in Panama for most of the time Norman was in the army, had been transferred back to the States, had spent some time visiting with Barbara at Radcliffe, and in July had finally been stationed in or near Durham, North Carolina. Barbara, in turn, secretly went down to join him there at the end of her summer term, and it became clear to them both that they wanted to marry. Fan had of course been aware of and had steadily opposed their relationship, but when her tireless investigations revealed that her opposition had been ineffective,

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that the couple was intimate and that marriage might actually take place, her reaction can only be described as apocalyptic[bea7/25/45]. Bea walked right into the center of the explosion, in which the eighteen year old Barbara was forced-- under the shrieking threat of otherwise causing her mother's death--to refrain from communicating with Jack for two years. Appalled though she was at such a display of unreasoning force, Bea was nevertheless cowed into seeming to support the action, and Norman received two letters from his mother so full of naked fury at his alleged sponsorship of the Barbara-Jack relationship as abruptly and absolutely to silence him on the subject[fan7/25:7/30/45].

It had become the wartime fashion in the family rather to patronize Fan, keeping her in the dark about Norman's exposure to combat and otherwise spoon-feeding her adulterated versions of historical reality, as if her ability to deal with adverse experience had become somehow enfeebled. But the fact of the matter was that the war had not so much defeated Fan as it had detoured her, requiring that her plans for her family be adapted to the dictates of historical necessity. Her fundamental wisdom remained the same: one should form alliances with the most powerful institutional forces in the gentile culture, and through those forces come into possession of one's own. It was the same strategy that had sent Norman to Harvard and Barbara to Radcliffe, and--if against Fan's better judgement--that had sent Norman and

Bea into the alliance of their marriage, in order the better to succeed in supporting Norman while he was in the army.

What the war made dramatically clear, on the other hand, was that these institutional affiliations were risky, that joining at close quarters with the gentile barbarians and anti-Semites that Fan saw all around her--within the ranks of the armed forces and without--must be accomplished with the greatest caution and the clearest understanding of their ability to do harm. For Barbara to threaten marriage with a gentile, and an Irish-Catholic gentile at that, was to trigger not only all of Fan's very great apprehension on the subject of inter-marriage, but her whole only-just controlled hysteria at the dangers they were all of them daily being exposed to. It drove her over the brink, and in her distraught state she frightened the whole family into a state of frozen acquiescence with her wishes.

Fan would seldom, if indeed ever again so openly insist upon her authority as leader of the family. She threw into her children's faces the sacrifices she had made for them, she demanded that they acknowledge how their leisure had been purchased at the cost of her own exhausting battles both with Barney and the family fortunes, and the force of her attack won the day. While her campaign against Barbara's relationship would carry into the postwar period, she would never again so bend her whole family to her will, for only a few years later Norman himself would respectfully but firmly replace her as family head.

In 1945, however, Norman still was best identifiable as his mother's son, and was far from being either able or inclined to explore any alternate possibility.

Norman's father was at this time burying himself ever deeper into his own labyrinth of silence, exile and cunning. Living away from Fan for what would be a span of more than four years, Barney fashioned a largely undocumentable but easily inferable private life. Spending many weekends and all holidays at home with his family, he cultivated his other life as if in a secret, subterranean garden. To secure it, his first strategy was never to acknowledge--let alone advocate--its existence, and his second was, in such surface matters as the debates concerning Barbara's situation, to side with his wife in tones of the most elevated moral righteousness[bea6/24/45]. Since there was no possibility that Barbara could begin to fathom--let alone follow--such an example as Barney's, and since in the final analysis there was no one with nerve enough to defend the proposed union, Barbara was required to join the rest of the family in learning who it was, at least in this wartime season, who still reigned as that family's undisputable head.

While this domestic opera played itself out into early August, the drama of the Second World War was of course unfolding as well. Norman's training, though he could only guess at its ultimate design, was actually part of the Sixth Army's grand master-strategy for the invasion of the Japanese island of Kyushu,

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titled Operation Olympic and preliminarily scheduled to take place in less than three months: on November 1, 1945⁴⁰. When the first Atomic Bomb fell on Hiroshima on August 6, and the second on Nagasaki on August 9, an international shock wave of reaction and widespread anticipation of Japanese capitulation swept the world. Norman and his fellow soldiers fell into a frenzy of speculation as he expressed feelings of personal ambivalence about President Truman's use of such a weapon, regretting that it should have to be employed, while at the same time rejoicing in the prospect of an end to the war. He reported how most of the soldiers agonized not at all over this, but instead over the insistence of the Allied leadership--supported by American homefront opinion polls--upon an unconditional Japanese surrender. [n8/8;8/11/45]

An announcement soon confirmed, however, that indeed the end had come--with a uniformed Bea reporting how amidst the honking of horns on that morning in Brooklyn a passing motorist leaned out to tell her how good she would soon look in a dress[bea8/16/45]. But the elation at the cease-fire announcement by Emperor Hirohito on August 15 subsided quickly, in Norman's garrison community, into a post-climactic mood of something like depression. Having been able

⁴⁰Jacob Neufeld, "Japan in Flames," Chapter 17, p. 278, in Pearl Harbor and the War in the Pacific, op cit. The strategic plan for the invasion was of course completely secret at the time, and Norman and his fellows guessed at all sorts of specific targets. But they all knew that their intended destination was some place in the islands of Japan, and they were able to guess quite realistically at what the experience would be like.

to guess with considerable accuracy what the army's original plans for them had been, Norman and his fellows started by attempting various forms of celebration, but he at least had real trouble getting into the mood:

I felt drained and empty, such a familiar GI experience when you have been sweating something out for too long, and your capacity for feeling it is gone. It reminded me of the way those veterans felt who were going home on rotation when I hit the outfit. They had sweated it for so long, had known so many disappointments and frustrations that when their time came they had no elation left--only the old familiar depression of the GI who knows that nothing can ever happen to him in the right way at the right time. That is so essentially the soldier's knowledge, and I am half a soldier now for I anticipate nothing with either pleasure or aversion so long as I am in the army. [nb8/16/45]

He ended the portentous day with a long, solitary walk in deepening twilight, and then sat alone in a shrouded motorpool jeep as the last rays of daylight died, letting it all sink in. "So," he signed off to Bea with a sort of bruised satisfaction, "So I did have my victory celebration after all."

Having ingested the news at last, the men of the 112th turned with considerable pessimism to wait-out an answer to the question of what would be done with them now that the war was over. In a surprisingly short time they found out: less than two weeks after the August 15th Hirohito announcement, amid feverish journalistic anticipations of the ceremony of formal surrender, Norman and the 112th found themselves on a troopship at sea, their destination the very place where that surrender was scheduled to take place. Shortly after 8:00 AM on September 2, 1945, their vessel steamed into Tokyo Bay in perfect time for them to watch--

VSS
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