

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."¹⁶ [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 be that digging up his best novel-idea was exactly Norman's way of registering his apprehension of

¹⁶ "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.

THE NEXT SECTION OF THIS NOTE MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHAPTER THREE

"The Dead Gook" was to appear first in Discovery No. 1, edited by John Aldridge and Vance Bourjaily, 56-76. New York, Pocket Books, December, 1952. Norman's temporary return to the short-story form at this later time occurred in the context of a reversal in his fortunes as a novelist, following the publication of Barbary Shore in 1951.

that fact.¹⁷

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 inclusion in his next volume of Cross-Section had been accepted by the editor. This prompted Norman to remark that if Seaver had

¹⁷ 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: X

"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.

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 remains 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.¹⁸ He had also been reading Ernie Pyle's two volumes of wartime journalistic reportage in the European theater-- Here is Your War (1943) and Brave Men (1944) [nb5/24/45]-- the already enormous popularity of which had been grimly increased by the news, in late April, that Pyle had been killed by Japanese gunfire while

¹⁸"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.~~ *this magazine had rejected him four times.*

observing the American landing on Okinawa ¹⁹.

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].

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

¹⁹ 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."

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,²⁰ 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]

iii

which recalls
Sergeant's comment
in The Den Park
about God & man:
"man is no better
than he ought to
be"

Their freedom as a couple, insofar as Norman and Bea enjoyed

²⁰Norman 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.

Transition
problem to
p. 112

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 in 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 apparently 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 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 site²¹. 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 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

²¹In 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]

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 really 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 arsenal²², and recording about his Combat Infantry Badge:

²²Besides 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].)

"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, ^{way} 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 of blind and automatic acceptance of orders [nb7/16-20/45]. Norman felt sufficiently disadvantaged and thus demeaned by the new situation²³ that he resolved to try to escape it by volunteering for an assignment that would test how much his long-range military record had been turned around by his two months the field.

The assignment was for an elite program of special--and

²³Norman 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]

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 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]).²⁴

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 studiously, and always with the question that he asked of everything important that he read: did it ~~help him to illuminate~~ ^{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.²⁵

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

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ 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.

*got it
regularly cites
The Mount
Eater*

*needed
?*

fiction-prize competition, also sent a sympathetic but firm letter of rejection. [7/12/45hrpr] Persuaded at last that the novel was irrecoverably a part of his past, 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 "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 pain, fear and damage, a cause before most other causes of certain subsequent commitments in his adult life.

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 an impending ending for the war--however it was transforming the rest of the world--was transforming his writer's cosmos by 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 had first arrived overseas, a long-range fiction project was counter-indicated. But that project's time had now come, and Norman dug into it with the

organized air of a man excavating a foundation for his new 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."²⁶ As a grudging tribute to the way military life had opened up for him literary opportunities that he

²⁶ 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 [prior August 19, 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."

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.

would otherwise not have enjoyed, Norman concluded his July letter: "Much as I hate the army, I've 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 the relationship from its inception, but when her tireless investigations revealed that her opposition had been

ineffective, 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 tyrannical 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 a recent 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. The war, after all, presented her with an immovable, irresistible force, adversarial in the most absolute way to her hopes for the lives and fortunes of her family, and the family in turn saw itself as trying to soften the blow thus delivered to her.

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, however, 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 in this anarchic historical time. It drove her over the brink, and in her extraordinarily 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, and her furious throwing in her children's faces the sacrifices she had made for them, her demanding that they acknowledge how their leisure had been purchased at the cost of her own exhausting and endless efforts to control both Barney and the family fortunes, was truly anomalous. While her campaign against Barbara's relationship would carry into

the postwar period, no second mushroom-cloud detonation of absolute matriarchal authority would devastate the clan before, only a few years later, Norman himself respectfully but firmly replaced her as family head. In doing this he would draw in significant part for his paterfamilias role upon qualities he found somehow represented in his father. In 1945, however, Norman still was best identifiable as his mother's son, 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 the possible exception of Jack Maher's much misrepresented mother--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, titled Operation Olympic and preliminarily scheduled to take place in less than three months: on November 1, 1945²⁷. 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 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 ^tover 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

²⁷Jacob 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 point in the islands of Japan, and they were able to guess quite realistically at what the experience would be like.

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 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-- while an armada of four hundred B-29s roared across an overcast sky--the surrender of the Japanese High Command to General MacArthur and his entourage on the forward deck of the battleship Missouri.

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[End Chapter Three Part Two]

After watching the surrender ceremony and listening to the latest Pacific Radio accounts of its significance, Norman's reconnaissance platoon joined the rest of the troop in loading their gear and disembarking onto landing craft that headed towards the beach. At the shallow end, Norman jumped in to wade ashore and Norman, clumsy under the weight of his equipment, stumbled and fell backward into the water. As he staggered up to the beach, straining and swearing, he saw that the troop was being greeted by an unexpected presence:

There was a reception committee of about ten Jap civilians all lined up very correctly and wearing American rock white, green coats and yellow pants and red neckties and Jap hats. All eyes, all at attention. They looked like a reception committee from the Mayor's office, and turned out to be press correspondents. (Daily 3/4/45)

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[CHAPTER THREE]

Part Three

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There was a reception committee of about ten Jap civilians all lined up very correctly and wearing American zoot suits, green coats and yellow pants and red neckties and Jap hats. All neat, all at attention. They looked like a reception committee from the mayor's office, and turned out to be press correspondents. [family 9/4/45]

The Americans had landed near the tip of a sweeping, mountainous arm that reaches down almost to enclose Tokyo Bay; just short of this peninsula's end, guarding the channel that protects the great Bay from the sea, sits the modest town and

harbor of Tateyama. This town area, with its adjoining military air base and coast-guarding piers, was to be garrison for Norman and his regiment during the first season of his stay in Japan. The 112th moved into a cluster of recently abandoned Japanese army barracks, scrubbing, scouring and sweeping in exactly the way that they would always do wherever they went, and with the usual lack of reference to their larger human location. "It's hard," -Norman noted ruefully to his family on his third day ashore, "to believe you're anyplace but in the army. Even the Lamaseries of Tibet would be dull in the army[ibid.]"

It is, of course, quite possible that this levelling routine, humdrum as it no doubt was, served a certain purpose. Considering the fact that a bare month before, Norman and his fellows were training for a Japanese invasion action that promised casualty figures even greater, it may be, than the ones they had imagined, and considering that the stunned Japanese population was still reeling from the concussion of bombings so unimaginably savage as to transfix the world's imagination for the following fifty years, it may have been just as well that for a while both the occupiers and the occupied all across these islands should nourish their imaginations on the plainest possible diet. In any case there was nothing war-torn about Tateyama, which had been spared the bombings, and whose airstrip was already in use for light-plane traffic.

Norman soon proceeded out on routine assignment with the 112th Headquarters recon platoon, exploring in jeeps for navigable roads

("a northwest passage") through the beautiful mountain range that divided the Tateyama bay-side of the southward sweeping Boso-Hanto peninsula from the Pacific ocean-side. The cool, brilliantly clear Japanese air revealed both a topography and a society to engage his gradually awakening perceptions, and Norman began to record his discoveries with quick enthusiasm. Driving up the Pacific shore, through villages, "I saw an old woman grinding some meal in a great stone bowl in the middle of a stone floor. The action seemed a thousand years old, and the village as something out of the middle ages." The country transfixed him as much as the people, and he told how the hills facing the Pacific "become very steep here and drop in long, fearful plunges down to the ocean." He registered his excitement to see how "the little fishing villages, cramped and fearful on the narrow ledge of beach," were built of light-hued stone whose "colors were grays and lavenders and dark greens," and how the "the magnificent contrast of a contorted wrathful earth" created a "palette of color-tones as striking as anything I've ever seen."

A spot that struck him--even more powerfully, as he said, than Provincetown--offered a twin-peaked hill of great, steep rock some two hundred feet out from shore. He told Bea that "in a saddle between the fifty foot peak and the one hundred foot one was a little shack, looking out to sea. I cannot imagine a more perfect place to write a book, or when the tide is high, to make love on the ocean side and know you'll never be disturbed.[nb9/11/45]" Norman's sense of being in a place of discovery, where he could

sharpen his senses by coming alive to the unexpected and the new, would supply him with a stabilizing element that he would draw upon over and over again during his stay in Japan. He swam in the Tateyama bay almost daily, gathering shells and writing descriptions that he sent home to Bea, declaring within a matter of weeks that he loved the country and "the steady source of pleasure" that it gave him[nb9/16/45].

He would have reason to be grateful for it, since there was much else that would bring him disquiet and distress during these continuing months overseas. Perhaps his most unfailing source of anxious distraction was shared with all of the regiment: how soon could they expect to start for home? Just after the surrender of Germany, in May, the Pentagon had initiated a widely-approved plan for discharging veterans and, over the course of the summer, its administrators had been more than meeting the plan's quotas[BestYrs, 23]. But Pentagon planning rested on the assumption that the surrender of the Japanese would not come for a full eighteen months after the fall of Germany, so that when it came instead in barely three an administrative overload developed that would grow, by the first of the year, into something close to pandemonium.

For now, though, the carefully worded official estimates in mid-September suggested to Norman that he could himself hope to leave Japan sometime in March of 1946, and could in any case be quite confident of being back in the States by summer[nb9/1/45]. As a unit, his regiment was scheduled to be sent home somewhat earlier

than this, but really long-term veterans in the 112th were being selected out for return on something like a weekly basis, while enlisted men much younger in service than Norman began joining him in recon as replacements. In the context of this movement, rated non-commissioned officers began to disappear, and the question that he had long ago tried to erase from his mind came back to trouble him: Private First Class Norman Mailer, proud of his stripe and of his record as a rifleman in the field, began thinking about rising in the ranks.

It was a fatal thought. What modest success he had shown as a soldier was in the special conditions of the field, alive there to his responsibilities as a member of a squad on patrol, honorably exhausted with his comrades when the grueling day was done. As soon as recon joined the troop in garrison on Luzon, he had tried to legitimize his inability to respect the chickenshit requirements by volunteering to train for that hazardous scouting assignment to escape it. But when he was rejected as a volunteer he might have got the message about his questionable record as a garrison-soldier in the Philippines and before. Now, in Japan, it was again as a garrison soldier that he would be reviewed for possible promotion, and it required some self-delusion for him to suppose that the results would be any different. Indeed, precisely to avoid garrison routine in Japan, he had almost immediately volunteered for another assignment that would, as he explained to his family, get him out of "all details, all inspections, all training (naturally the 112th still has classes on weapons and gas mask drills.)"

Along with another soldier, he took on the job of troop laundry man: in exchange for doing the laundry of all the platoons in the troop, the two were not only to be excused from all other assignments, but would each be paid a cash premium which Norman estimated (unrealistically) at \$30 to \$35 a week. In his letters home Norman had remarked frequently on his various strategies for escaping the daily assignments that came his way in garrison, and on the present occasion he freely acknowledged that actually carrying out the laundry job would be a discipline for him, "for I have fucked-off on any work I detested in the army for quite some time now[9/15/45]." Yet, acknowledging this frankly, he seems not to have understood that in the eyes of his non-coms his accepting the laundry job might well amount to little more than a fairly fortunate solution to their problem of finally getting him to do some work. They would not likely have seen it as evidence that they should recommend him for a promotion, and in fact they made no such recommendation.

The laundry job, whatever its apparent advantages, proved to be enormously hard work and brought a cash return of only about half of what Norman had expected. He sent the money to Bea, to be added to their postwar savings account (now approaching \$3,000, not including War Bonds) and when the month's promotion list showed that he had been passed over for a rating in recon, he angrily looked elsewhere for assignment. Brushing aside an opportunity to edit the post newspaper ("a seven-day-a-week job") he set off in quite a different direction. The turnover in experienced personnel

was affecting not just recon but every unit in the troop, including food service. Norman had worked in kitchens regularly through all his time in the army, and though he disliked Kitchen Police duty he did not especially mind the environment of the kitchen.

So when the Mess Sergeant in Norman's troop posted a notice calling for volunteers to become cooks Norman came forward, and was pleased to have the unusual experience of hearing a sergeant say that he was glad to have him on board. The sergeant was quick to warn Norman that there was no potential for promotion in the position--the few ratings that were available would certainly go to men with some background in food service--but there were advantages, including a work schedule of one day off for every day on the job. It is true that Norman's experience in army kitchens was confined to the lowly level of the K.P.--he certainly had a great deal of that--but he was confident that he would be able to learn how to cook, and he liked the idea of working at something as a kind of craftsman. Certainly he was pleased to be able to escape the embarrassment in recon of being outranked by raw replacements, but by far his greatest incentive was that he would now have time to address his novel.

At the outset, however, he was faced with what he regarded as a serious problem: he was ashamed of how his new identity would demean him in the eyes of his admirers at home. In the pecking order of army prestige, the role of combat rifleman could be regarded as close to the worst position in the world, but it could also be seen as close to the most honorable--it depended upon one's

point of view. No such division of opinion, however, could be found concerning the prestige of cooks: all folk-wisdom insisted that the job was to be universally despised as the lowest enlisted assignment the military had to offer. Certainly this had been Norman's understanding, and until now he had subscribed to it as automatically as to the parallel enlisted man truth that all officers were enemies. Thus the heavily-armed trooper who only the previous June had told Bea that he might appropriately be addressed as "Dear Machine Gunner," wrote, on October 1: "You were proud of me as a rifleman--you will hesitate to tell people now that I am a cook."

In the same letter, however, he explained that not only did the honest work of cooking have some positive appeal to him, but its conditions would blessedly protect him from developing any humiliating hopes for promotion in a system that he after all despised. And finally, even more than either of these things, the new work schedule would free him to do the things that he really wanted to do with his time in Japan. In addition to the question of his novel:

I want free time so very badly. Friday, Saturday, and then Sunday I've gone exploring into the hills. It's breath-taking country, magnificent, and I'm completely happy. I want to get to know these back forests the way I learned the foothills of the Sierra Madre in Luzon. And with those alternate free days I can do that, and I can read. It's disgraceful how little I've read in the last two months[nb10/1/45].

In her reply, Bea of course indignantly denied having any negative reaction to the new job assignment, and while commiserating with him about his lost promotion, she expressed confidence that he

would enjoy both the change of occupation and the freedom that it brought[bea10/17/45].

She proved to be quite right on both counts. Norman's enjoyment and even love of the local countryside became one of the most striking things about his record of experience in Japan. He climbed alone into the mountains at the tip of the Bosa-Hanto peninsula, looking down on water that was "a magnificent blue, lined with a white foam along the sweep of the cove." Then he explored on down beyond the ridge:

The trail was a soft one of trampled grass, and it passed through a forest of dark green, so dense it might have been jungle. It wound up and down over the hills, and there was an intense sensation of solitude that I found a little frightening--aloneness is so unique in the army that you're uncomfortable at first.

He came down out of the forest to find a narrow stream of a rice-paddy at the foot of the hill, "ready for harvest now, and turned to a golden yellow. The trail curved along a ten foot bluff above the thin creek of grain, and the gold in it shone oddly and brightly as if the sun was open upon it." He followed the trail:

Sometimes my rice stream was five yards wide, sometimes twenty, but never could I see it for very far ahead. Occasionally it would remain in sight for a hundred yards before it veered sharply around the next hill set against it.

And then he cut back on a trail that intercepted his own, pleased that he knew where he was and could find his way out. He told Bea that this "is the one knowledge I have gained overseas. I can walk into hills now, tread a forest maze, and come back to my starting point[9/29/45]."

Norman revelled in these solitary excursions, and in the lift

of mood that they supplied him he addressed his new job with something like real enthusiasm. "It's hard full work," he told Bea, "that makes the working day pass quickly." Baking bread and gutting chickens really was demanding, he wrote, but he didn't mind, and he positively enjoyed serving up the food on his side of a chow-line that fed 160 men:

I know all the guys (I've been in every platoon in the troop) and I roar at them when they bitch about the food and threaten to put them on K.P. and they sass me back. The cooks like me--I'm a tough guy from Brooklyn (the thousand roles I assume) and I work hard[10/11/45].

There was a dark dimension, as well, but it was one that took him out of himself as he addressed it, and he sounded very much like a writer as he explained it to Bea.

The cooks are no great shucks but they're men and quite individualized. Like almost all G.I.s they have the frightening bitterness that I know myself. They are bitter against officers, they are bitter against women and there is so much cruelty here, and they are bitter against Negroes, and here it is very ugly[ibid].

Yet, he said, the cooks were likeable too. "I have found that the credit side of nearly all men is not in any goodness they possess but in some charm or idiosyncrasy." Bea had, earlier, suggested to Norman that his attitude toward Filipinos revealed an element of unconscious prejudice, and in discussing the question he had acknowledged some truth to the charge, explaining that the ongoing human conditions of army life, especially in the field but actually anywhere, worked to erode tolerance and moral sensibility[nb7/26;8/21/45]. He developed the point much further here, using their correspondence as he had so often done as a kind of writer's memo-pad. He was writing of a Chicago gang-rape that a

fellow cook described to him:

I'll tell you about it if you remind me, for I shall not forget it. But it was brutal, baby, inconceivably so. Indeed, the wonder is that I was startled by it. I have seen so many brutalities, heard of so many more. Whores are bullied out of their ass every day in the week, Negroes are shot by MP's on the smallest pretext. Remind me that I have a story here. And a story of York and the whore he fucked twice before an audience. You and I are awfully healthy, baby. It took the army to show me that[10/11/45].

Norman indicated that one of the reasons that he became a cook was the time it would give him for reading, and he was right to recall that his once prodigious appetite for books has faded since he got to Japan--indeed it quite understandably began fading in early August, when his attention was commanded by the news of the A-Bomb, the cease-fire, and then the hasty transplant of the regiment to its present location. The last text he mentioned having looked at in the Philippines was The Decline of the West, and it was this tome to which he returned with his new-found leisure, noting that after considerable effort he was still just halfway through the First Book. The only earlier reading in Japan that he recorded was the 1940 best seller The Ox Bow Incident, read in a single sitting in mid-September. He called it "a perfect novel," and especially credited Walter van Tilburg Clark's profound insight into the individual and group psychology of Southwestern American men, so many of whom were to be found in the 112th. Like a very great many other things he read during his time in the army, Norman used Clark's story to take himself to the drawing board of his own

work--his novel, now very actively in a state of conception.¹

He did the same thing, but more insistently, with Jules Romains' Verdun ([date]), read in mid-October, and James Ramsey Ullman's 1945 Book-of-the-Month selection, The White Tower. In the case of the Romains--"which was a helluva good novel, and a stimulating one for it set my brain to churning up new ideas again, and more important made me feel like writing once more"-- Norman's commentary was completely admiring:

The thing about Verdun is its magnificence as a war novel. I've always heard of Romains as a Humanist, a liberal with the Mann kind of optimism, and I've dismissed him as such. But if he does believe in a better world it is not in this book. There is the deep pessimism that comes always from regarding war too closely, and beyond that a universality about it which if the names and the idiom had been changed, could have been a novel of Americans in this war[nb10/18/45].

In clear stages, Norman moved from the world of the novel to his own world, which he used, here and always, as the measure for determining literary relevance:

One scene--the end of a long infantry march where a battalion comes into sight of Verdun at midnight and sees the city afire--is quite magnificent. There is so very much of the exhaustion-nausea, and with it the curious exaltation that war gives when one beholds it as a spectacle[ibid].

Norman explained to Bea that the novel's main character "thinks a little like me--I felt close to many of his observations, and the

¹ Just about this time he heard from Berta Kaslow, who had followed his instructions to put "Transit" on the shelf for now. She informed him that she was leaving New York and moving to Hollywood to try her luck as an agent in the world of movie-making. She passed his account along to Helen Strauss, another William Morris agent in New York, but after some further exploration Norman decided to proceed without the services of a agent--at least for the time being. On June 3, 1946, he would co-sign a letter of mutual release with the Morris Agency.

talk he has with [his friend], toward the end was brilliant for me--perhaps because I have just gone through a war."

Going on to say that the French novel had set him to re-examining the conception he had been working on for his own, Norman's letter records the story of a card game that he wanted to build into his book, along with a scene in which a sergeant shoots an attacking Japanese soldier in order to save one of his own. Since late September Norman had resumed active planning for his novel, starting with a vivid description of the actual explosion of a large Japanese ammunition dump in his Tateyama barracks area on September 20--he wanted to preserve such serendipitous reality for good fictional use--and going on with symbolism ideas, plotting devices, and more casting-ideas for transforming various real soldiers into novel characters. "I can make this a good novel," he told his wife, "I know men so much better in their particulars now."²

Norman addressed his novel while apparently doing many other things--hiking, working at his job in the kitchen, writing love letters to Bea--but the activity that most consistently put him in touch with it was reading novels by other people. An important example of this is his response to The White Tower, though he judged this novel to be, unlike Verdun, a failure in its own terms.

²These matters are to be found in letters to Bea of September 20, and 25 (approximately dated), and October 3, and 7, as well as the October 18 letter about Verdun. After he was discharged and at home actually composing his novel, he selected out two pages from the Verdun letter, along with the texts of all the others, and used them in his process of composition for The Naked and the Dead.

He characterized it for Bea as being "about a mountain in Europe which impels five or six people to climb it." Norman's own novel-in-embryo would require soldiers to do some serious climbing, and so "naturally I was interested in anything which had to do with a symbolic mountain." Deeply as he was drawn into the book's detailed presentation of the discipline of climbing, he rejected the novel otherwise, making in the process an interesting comparison with his own much-criticized "Transit to Narcissus":

Everything about this White Tower is spurious, cheaply felt and the cheapness embedded in language which is too elegant. Indeed I think this was the trouble with Transit, why it was a romantic novel in the worst sense of the word. It had not characters but idea-symbols with faces & I don't believe you can work that way[nb11/12/45].

Two days later, having finished reading the novel, he wrote about it again, now completely brushing aside its artistic pretensions while being eagerly drawn to its adventure:

As you might have expected, I am infatuated now with mountain climbing. The White Tower was an awful novel, but its descriptions of mountain climbing caught me, and I know I want to do it. Indeed I read as a ten year old might read an adventure novel, fuming at the love interruptions (what an awful love story in there) and impatient for the climbing to start again[nb11/14/45].

The practical realities of climbing were the elements in the work that Norman found reliable, and their most immediate effect was to lead him directly back into his own novel-planning, requiring him to rethink "some thorns of probability in my novel:"

I must reduce the scale of my mountain range for I cannot have snow, or too improbable ascents. My G.I.s with their M-1's and grenades & rations and ponchos, with their diarrhea and jungle rot and clap, malaria & dengue would not get far at all in a tropic sun, and they would not carry mountain tools. The range will still be high, fabulously high for them, but it must be after all, a minor series of mountains[11/14/45].

In its earliest incarnation, Norman's "Ridge Novel" plan envisioned an artillery platoon climbing out of the jungle up onto an exposed ridge, only to discover that their movements were visible to the Japanese in the cover below: the action was to be their effort to get back down and under cover of the jungle before it was too late. Now, however, Norman had recast it so that the mission, undertaken by a Headquarters reconnaissance unit, was as he explained it to Bea:

The platoon's original mission is to see if the Japs are guarding the pass through the mountain spine of the island where the fighting is taking place. When they discover that the pass is covered, they attempt to cross the mountains by another route and fail because of the mightiness of the mountain. I have no more story than that yet, but I wish for no more--the details, the incidents will come out of the men --of that I am certain[nb11/12/45].

If he needed no more "story" than this, Norman very much felt the need at this stage for creating the identities of the men who would make up the platoon. Authentic identity, which he had decided was missing from "Transit," was now his primary goal, and he thought he knew how he would create it.

He was going to draw the characters "from men I've known like Amerson & Matthiesen and Martinez," whose separate realities for him were completely sharp in his mind's eye: "so clear & real that I don't see how I can miss when it comes to putting them on paper. [11/12/45]."

What I'm going to do when I get home is to list the names of every man I can remember clearly in the army--there should be several hundred. Out of them will come a few as themselves, and a half dozen more as synthetics of several. (I want to wait till I'm out of the army so that the men I'm with now will not have an undue prominence.) [ibid]

With Bea as his auditor, he projected still further the work he would do on the novel when they were back together:

I'm going to make a table with my dozen or so men in which I work out for myself their relation & attitude, toward each of the other men, and their view toward the mountain. That ought to lay bare the many as yet unposed problems, and more, in investigating relationships should generate story business. This story must grow out of the characters, and I've worried very little about the details so far[ibid].

Norman did worry a little about the identity of a single not at all concrete figure in his tale, who he at this point was reduced to calling "the youth with the vision," but before the end of this month his letters show him returning to the question of central figures with confidence. He had, in fact, begun planning the creation of a certain kind of sergeant:

I've finally anchored my vision hero. He'll be the platoon sergeant or a squad sergeant, a cruel hard man (remind me of Freestone & his Natl. Guard service) with an inarticulate tension that fastens at last on the ridge which he tries to climb after the lieutenant is killed, because it serves in his mind as a personal affront. His character will have the frightening paradox that Captain Bligh's had, the cruel tyrant who alone has strength to lead men through an over exorbitant travail[nb11/28/45].

Having set all this down, Norman turned with a burst of feeling to address Bea directly: "It'll be so good when we can talk about it, and really darling, I count on you so much in the planning of it."[ibid]

All along, in fact, he had counted on her for still deeper support than this. It is certainly a signal achievement that Norman had been able to plan his way so far into his great postwar novel project--and he would plan farther still before his army time was done--but his truly premiere achievement went beyond the literary,

and was the accomplishment of nothing less than survival. By the time he went into the army at the age of twenty-one he had already developed an impressive inner identity as a writer, but he had accomplished this under circumstances far different from those he was about to encounter. He had rediscovered his crushed and buried childhood identity of imaginative creator thanks at first to an institutional experience at Harvard that could hardly have been more liberating, protective and nurturing. Then, in the context of this already powerfully protective masculine sanctuary he had found Bea, an embracing female presence almost miraculous in its unflinching commitment to his life as a man.

Both had been sources of empowerment to his sense of himself that not so much created as protected his own headlong affirmation of an artist identity, but neither would be available to him as he risked another crushing, this time by a ponderous military world that--by the paradoxical dictates of his identity--he needed as artist to be able somehow to inhabit and make his own. If Norman may be said to have in a sense smuggled his Harvard education with him into the army, in a much more literal sense he also undertook to smuggle Bea. They had been divided by the dynamics of their post-college relationship while in Provincetown and Boston together in the weeks surrounding Norman's graduation--she wanting to get married, he so appalled at the idea as apparently to have considered breaking up altogether--but by the end of 1943, in their snow-bound retreat in Vermont, it was Norman whose insistence carried a reluctant Bea into the elopement. With his Draft Board's

summons nearly in hand, he must have come to understand the clear and simple truth: he might not be able to survive the army without her.

How much help Harvard provided to Norman in his two-year struggle to sustain himself in the army is difficult to say: he owed the university a lot, surely, but just as surely it had done little to fit him for the levelling trials the army held in store. On balance, Harvard's influence in this respect may have well been malign. Bea, by contrast, was in one sense or another his secret weapon all the way, bringing him a life-giving erotic presence that allowed him--however battered and reduced--to power his way either through or around every obstacle. She had posed like some dazzling image of carnality at the end of the tunnel of Basic Training, alluring in her transparent guise of Wave officer, and their fleeting ten days of contact at this time, combined with their San Francisco tryst before he sailed for the Pacific, produced a corpus of memories that would radiate far more energizingly than the couple's actual, in-the-flesh experiences could ever have done.

Indeed, once separated beyond even the wildest hope of physical reunion, the two imaginative young correspondents stored up every intimate moment they had ever had--Dunster House, furnished lodgings in Cambridge, Provincetown, Conway and even their wretchedly beleaguered honeymoon--for the purpose of collaborative replay in their great cache of secret letters. (Norman's schemes for getting his past the overseas censors had been his constant preoccupation.) While he was in the Philippines,

d/ he scorned and was truly appalled by the squalid substitute for erotic experience offered by the local prostitutes. In fact, his only consistent claim to masculine pride while serving in the army was his almost hypnotically reasserted affirmation of his command--his frankly superior command--of the inner-reality of true carnal knowledge.

In this respect and perhaps in this respect alone Norman regarded himself as not only the equal but the superior of the mass of men around him. (His power as an artist, in this company, constituted not so much a source of strength as an Achilles heel--which he had constantly to cover in order to protect.) Bea's letters show just as clearly as Norman's a passionate understanding of how deeply they could erotically empower one another through this medium: there can be no doubt that this was the resource that permitted Norman both to survive and, within important limits, even to prevail as the inhabitant of an alien, potentially annihilating military environment. Bea's presence carried him through his eight month period in the Philippines with remarkable success, leaving him at the end of that suddenly terminated time feeling stronger and better than his almost constantly debilitating encounters with the military could otherwise have allowed.

After Norman's removal to Japan, looking toward a reunion that could now be realistically imagined in plans of the most life-giving plausibility--and with military censorship blessedly suspended--the two correspondents proceeded to outdo themselves. For them the language of erotic love drew tirelessly on the

vocabulary of costume, and they designed whole wardrobes--for one another, but especially for Bea--that would sustain them through their elaborately dramatic sexual scenarios. They intended it to be breathtaking and it really was, as on an average of twice a week--each wrote to the other seldom less than five times weekly--they passionately proved themselves in their marvelously wrought identity as heroic lovers. In this exchange, Bea had said that she could never imagine him, under any circumstances, having to hire a prostitute. She admitted to thinking it probable--he being such an attractive fellow--that some discerning woman in the Philippines or, now, in Japan, might have invited him into what could have been an acceptable temporary arrangement. Their sexual fantasy letters recorded such imaginings quite frequently. But since this was apparently not going to happen in real life, it now seemed that they would each have the pleasure of personally relieving the other's enforced physical abstinence.

About a month later, however, Bea received a somehow-delayed letter that Norman had sent six weeks before. In it, experiencing a moment of depression, he remarked:

Sometimes I'm close to going to the geisha house. I know you will tell me to go, even want me to, but I dislike to yield. Remarking that in addition to a whole list of other reasons to abstain, he would be "accepting the double standard, for I could not tell you to take a man," he in any case abruptly shifted his mood and returned to their imagined lovemaking-by-mail with redoubled ardor[nb9/25/45]. In her reply, Bea employed the coolly self-confident voice of a woman who had been absolutely in charge

of this desperately passionate relationship for nearly two years[bea2nov45]. She told him that while she would still be against his going to a common prostitute, a Geisha House could by contrast be properly regarded as a kind of opportunity for cultural experience. If he should become interested in having that experience, he must have no fears that she would feel threatened in any way. With striking nonchalance, she in effect invited him to be her guest.

This early-November carte blanche must have reached Norman just before Thanksgiving--a Thursday distinguished not only by the fact that it was a famously demanding day to be a cook, but also by being the anniversary of their last parting in San Francisco--and, on the Sunday following, he wrote a long letter in reply. It began:

Curiously enough, I feel a little hesitation,
even embarrassment in writing this letter.
Nat Ellis & I went to a geisha house yesterday,
and I got the time-honored American purchase--
a piece of ass.

[nb11/25/45]

ii

From the start of their relationship and all the way through their marriage, Norman and Bea had of course held fast to their doctrine of unrelenting mutual candor concerning all sexual dealings with other men and women. The fact that up to now neither of them had anything very substantial to be candid about did not lessen their commitment to this principle, and in the course of his long letter about his (more or less satisfying) Geisha House

experience, Norman invoked the principle several times. In their follow-up correspondence he even boasted a little about how his intention to give Bea a full account of the experience had shocked his comrade/companion, the also-married Nat Ellis[12/15/45].

Bea's reply to Norman's report, while notably lacking in nonchalance, was carefully even-tempered and understanding: above all she showed a thoughtful awareness of what an important resource they had built-up through their vicarious intensity, and of how necessary it was that they keep it intact. Norman, in turn, clearly acknowledged his awareness that proceeding as freely as he had might have cost them much of their shared richness of rapport, and he expressed audible relief when Bea's absolving reply to his confession arrived. The two of them then began, somewhat self-consciously, to recultivate their original secret garden. Even while doing so, however, they had to be aware that a significant measure of the pressure that had driven them to create it in the first place had begun to be relieved. Surely this perception of lessening-pressure had contributed to Bea's self-confidence when she authorized Norman's excursion, and now, even as they mended their private fence, they both seemed just a little less apprehensive about their fortunes than they had been in the past.

For one thing, they were now being pulled into the festivities of the first post World War II holiday season, and even though they had to be apart during its celebration they both reacted to its spirit. The rollicking Christmas of 1945 was to be a hail and farewell for the 112th, which as a unit would sail for home before

the end of December, and, however qualified Norman's sense of belonging to this cavalry regiment may have been, in eleven months that sense had grown very strong. His regimental command, searching as always for things to occupy the troops during their diminishing time overseas, decided to offer them a range of high-school-level academic courses, and in November Norman was invited to teach a class in American history. Despite his oft-repeated resolve never again to look to military assignments as a source of what he called his "self-respect and confidence," he accepted with pleasure. The first session met on November 31, when five students out of the ten registered appeared in class (by contrast, 250 showed up for Automotive Mechanics) and Norman decided to continue--on a daunting five-day calendar of two classroom hours a day--for as long as the attendance held up.

He had never taught, never taken a history class at Harvard, knew very little about American history as such, and was able to stay ahead of the class only by an extraordinary daily effort, but he had been flattered to be asked and he stayed with the assignment for as long as his circumstances allowed. He was touched by the fact that Fig Gwaltney sat-in on the class, thus helping to sustain the enrollment. Norman's ongoing duties as a cook began to seem unattractive compared to the teaching, as well as to another possibility that suddenly was dangled before him like an ornament on a tree: a G.H.Q. staff job in the Tokyo offices of the influential military newspaper Stars and Stripes. Nat Ellis, who also was staying behind the regiment in Japan, had landed a

position with the paper and got Norman an interview with its managing editor. After the two met--on a memorable first trip to the great, ravaged city--Norman became optimistic, and remained so when, on December 15, still another unexpected development was added to this half-carefree, half anxiety-ridden season.

Norman had nearly forgotten how, during the previous May, when the 112th was evacuating its line-troops from the lower Sierra Madre, he had got both thighs badly scraped when he clumsily allowed himself to get caught between a jeep and a passing command-car. The neglected abrasions developed infections as time passed, and by December these had drained into his lymph gland, causing a fever and a painful swelling in his groin. Not knowing the cause, and being of course apprehensive concerning his recent Geisha House sojourn, Norman reported for sick call and was forthwith assigned to the regimental hospital, where he was pleased to linger for some ten days while recovering from his lymphitis. He spent the period letter-writing and receiving visits from departing regimental friends--Gwaltney prominent among them--who brought beer, candy bars and other contraband, but who also brought the disappointing news that the Stars and Stripes job has fallen through.

It really was a disappointment, of course: he had sampled enough of the possibilities of social life in Tokyo during his brief visit to know that he would have liked to spend more time there. On the other hand, he didn't want to take time away from the planning of his novel--which was far and away the central priority of his declining months in Japan--and that would have been a risk

amid the distractions of the great city. In undistracting Tateyama, just since Thanksgiving, he had accomplished a good deal on the project, conjuring up scenes, reexamining characters, reacting to other novels and even assembling a set of books that he might use as partial models for his own creation. He continued to explore the inner reaches of his Captain-Bligh-like sergeant, "inarticulate, capable and brooding," discovering in the man's sometimes ecstatic megalomania a literary origin ambitiously beyond that of The Mutiny on the Bounty:

It is the mountain which really seizes him. Its immensity is like an affront to the cruel ordered scheme he has achieved, and he cannot brook it. He becomes demoniac in attempting to cross it, like Ahab in Moby Dick, and is stopped only by the mass pressure of the other men--the inertia of the mass in any sustained effort. [nb12/22/45]

As a way of setting the tone for his novel's planning, Norman reminded Bea of one of their favorite epigrams from Robinson Jeffers:

Life is rather ignoble in its quiet times, mean in its pleasures, slavish in the mass, but at stricken moments it shines terribly against the dark magnificence of things.

adding, "I want to get that across, as indeed I must in all my work--I could use that phrase as a guide for anything I write." [nb12/21/45] And he proceeded on this broad, thematically inclusive level of conception by remembering a sunset that he had described in his Sea Barb journal-letter of exactly a year before, asking Bea to look it up and see if it might serve as the beginning for his platoon's all-night circumnavigation of their island as they launch their patrol. The patrol itself he intended to represent a thematic significance which would partake--he hoped not

excessively--of an allegory of the human birth-struggle, followed by implicit thematic stages suggesting the newborn fighting its way into a full state of life. These depths of meaning would remain hidden from the men of the platoon:

The [focus of the] novel itself will be on the inarticulate [surface] feeling of the men with a suggestive shadow here & there of the deeper meanings of their lives that most men never see, and the few who do, see only at isolated, stricken moments.[12/21/45]

Norman continued to find that reading other people's novels was a good way of supplying himself with insights into planning for his own. Since he knew his was going to be anything but heroic, and would require him to delineate realistically the diminished virtues and vices of his people, he was particularly attracted to a quality he had identified while reading Georges Simenon's Home Town, "which has some very subtly created insights into the weakly Evil, the men who are small of soul & afraid rather than malign." He decided, therefore, to keep this volume on a small private shelf of fiction that he would systematically consult while writing his book, and to accompany it he nominated three more novels from his recent reading. All of them, he explained to Bea, were as different as possible from John Hersey's widely praised, A Bell for Adano (1940):

What a stinker! It has got a little warmth (which is what the old farts like J. Donald Adams went overboard on I suppose) but there's no balance, a book in which everybody's good is as flat as one in which everybody is bad. And Hersey writes like a cross between Hemingway & Steinbeck which is an affected mongrel. And more, there's no resolution. I don't mean of plot, but you must have a resolution of character--your book's revelations about the people must build up to a more final one about each of the main characters. The love affair is an example of this. I get the feeling of a book in which the first half was written before he knew how the second half

would go. And the people don't really come across--there's not one with any variety of dimensions--compared to The Cross & the Arrow which is also affirmative. It's a piss-poor book. I get discouraged when I read the things that draw praise. [nb12/27/45]

The Cross and the Arrow was a new novel by Albert Maltz, whom Norman identifies as "one of the minor but more brilliant proletarian writers that fall in the age gap between Edwin Seaver [Norman's Cross-Currents editor] & Paul Peters [a Cross-Currents drama contributor in 1944, younger than Seaver.]" Maltz, who after the war would achieve a sort of fame as a member of the "Hollywood Ten," had written a novel about the war in Europe that Norman thought striking "because it is the first believable novel I've read about Germans, without heroics, without blackguards, and without a Hollywood underground." It was this achievement of credibility that made the novel important: "He gets people across, and he creates the impossible--he has a good man in his book who is believable [and] loveable." Though Norman would have second thoughts later--about this and some other of his first choices--for the moment it seemed that The Cross and the Arrow was good enough to deserve a place on his most special shelf.

One of Norman's most striking reading experiences of this time was Liam O'Flaherty's 1923 novel The Informer. It's most useful virtue seemed to be the way it solved the very problem Norman had been addressing in sorting out the twelve or fifteen members of his platoon patrol: giving particular identity to each individual in a group of characters.

At least twenty people have been described by [O'Flaherty] so far, and in a page or two he's caught each of them and made you feel

them. He starts off with an intense description of feature and body that makes you see them, and then with one large caricaturish stroke, he exhibits the basic pattern of their action, and makes them move. [nb12/1/45]

Offering Bea several examples of this achievement, Norman identifies The Informer at least for now as another that he intends to place on his special shelf of problem-solving exemplars.

There would be no second thoughts about Norman's final choice for a place of honor: Anna Karenina, because "I want to re-read [it] and steep myself in [its] good humanistic mood." He had discussed both Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky with Bea many times in the course of planning his own work--Norman took the two Russian masters to have, between them, defined the form of the modern novel. His dark and brooding "Transit to Narcissus" had attempted a Dostoyevskian inner-journey, and what would be The Naked and the Dead was consciously Tolstoyan, embracing the external world of action and interaction within groups of people gripped by forces far beyond their individual control. When Norman returned to the United States the following spring, he would spend the whole transpacific voyage re-reading Anna Karenina.

Norman's stay in the Tateyana hospital had given him the opportunity to record most of this novel-planning in letters home before going to his next assignment. This was to be in the seaport city of Chosi--some one hundred miles north, up the Pacific-side of the peninsula--to where he would follow a number of other refugees from the 112th. There he was to join the 649th Ordnance Ammunition Company for the remainder of his stay overseas. The prospect left him wary, but, on the whole, not unduly pessimistic. Checking out

of the hospital on December 27, he wrote Bea a letter recording his new mailing address, and also detailing more material for the novel. Then he packed his effects, and, bidding farewell to the Tateyama terrain he has so much enjoyed, embarked on what proved an uncomfortable and isolating all-day train ride to the north:

I had a military coach all to myself and the women & children & old men were crammed into the other shabby coaches like too many clothes in a suitcase. I told the conductor I'd like to have some of them sit in my empty coach, but he said it was forbidden. [nb12/29/5]

Chosi--which had "caught a B-29 raid and the core of the city is very flat with the rust-color of the war junkyard"---presented a bleak enough prospect, initially, but Norman was approaching his new situation under a compensatory head of steam. He had enjoyed and taken pride in his brief experience as a teacher, he felt secure in his proven competence as a cook, his bridge with Bea--having survived an experimental test without significant damage--still offered him the richest kind of secret support, and his novel actively continued to take shape within his imagination. Indeed, setting up propitious domestic conditions for composing the novel had been one of the chief burdens of his correspondence with Bea ever since Norman's arrival in Japan. Before then, their postwar civilian life was imagined without nearly so much reference to practical possibility, but as the prospect of reunion became more real, their planning matured accordingly.

Its first model had seen them back in the same university setting where, after all, Norman had done most of his writing to date. Under the cover of variously imagined courses of Harvard

graduate study--Norman continued to favor for himself a curriculum in the history of philosophy and religion--he would produce his novel, which in one sense would be modest in its design: "I wanted to write a short novel about a long patrol"[t1p] he remembered, years later. But in another sense its embryonic ambition would be great. Norman wanted to prove, to himself and to all others who needed to be convinced, that the rest of his life not only should but could be devoted to the production of literature. He knew he was an artist; he wanted to know if he could make his living at it.

The more they thought about it, however, the less the idea of an academic graduate program seemed necessary to the young couple. They would have saved over three thousand dollars in cash, there was also a nest egg of War Bonds, and it was now clear that there was to be a real program of government support for veterans in addition to the GI Bill. Furthermore, Uncle Dave Kessler had with increasing insistence been offering to underwrite their expenses for as long as it took Norman to write the novel. It seemed realistic under these circumstances not only for Norman to abandon the graduate-study plan but for Bea to do so as well. Why shouldn't she test out her ability to write a novel? She had made something of a beginning already; she really wanted to find out what she could do with it; and they thought that the complementary character of their mutual undertakings could only serve to increase their intimacy.

They proceeded, therefore, with a plan that had three immediate stages: first, a short but desperately desired vacation;

second, a working summer in Provincetown; third, an autumn apartment in Brooklyn or New York, which they could use as a base for their writing. The vacation really required no planning; just a room and bath in Brooklyn, New York or Boston--it hardly mattered, as long as it was a place where they could be alone until the summer began. Because they expected to be out of uniform no later than early April, they would just vacation-away whatever time remained before their summer lease began. That lease was already in the process of being arranged in consultation with the Provincetown Chamber of Commerce, on the one hand, and Mr. George Barnes, proprietor of the Crows Nest Bungalows--just outside Provincetown--on the other. They had stayed at Barnes' North Truro establishment in June of 1943, and Bea had already written asking him if he could provide something that would serve their purposes for the whole summer. At the same time, she wrote to the Provincetown Chamber of Commerce asking for other recommendations. One way or another, they were confident that they could count on Provincetown as their summer setting. And during this time, they could press forward with a search for a suitable post-summer apartment.

Self-confident in many ways though he felt, It would be surprising if Norman had found Chosi a very attractive station, and in fact he did not. For an almost pastoral town he now exchanged a darkly strange city, and his new organization seemed an even worse bargain. For almost all of the year he had been overseas his affiliation had been with a crack cavalry regimental combat team, commanded and staffed with tested, proven officers and non-coms. He

may have resided in its lowest echelon, but it was his outfit and he was used to its organizational environment. Even as it infuriated him with its tireless efforts to keep every soldier busy, and even as he became known as an inadequate performer in most if not all of its Headquarters platoons, he depended upon its disciplined way of life.

Now he found himself with an isolated, butt-end "ordinance" outfit of only sixty men who pretended to load disposal barges with condemned Japanese ammunition while civilians did the work and everybody else did nothing. Before becoming a cook, Norman took pride in--to put it politely-- evading what he regarded as arbitrary work assignments; so that suddenly to be in an outfit where few were required or even able to do anything at all was for him punishment of an elegant, almost Dantean sort. He, who had railed against the cleanliness-obsession of his various platoon sergeants, was suddenly nauseated by the filth of grossly neglected barracks. Former members of the 112th who had preceded him to the 649th told Norman hair-raising stories of rampant alcoholism and epidemic venereal disease, and he recorded for Bea the words of a former recon-mate named Nelson:

I'm about to blow my lid, Norm. I've had two weeks of it, and I'm going crazy. In Tateyama, I went to a geisha house once; here I've gone already six times. Half the guys around here I've never seen sober.[nb12/29/55]

Finding that the 649th's disorganization was such that he might have been able to lay-low almost indefinitely before getting assigned to duty, Norman all but rushed to the mess sergeant and asked to be put to work. The company kitchen proved to be in such

a state of disarray that within two days he got appointed First Cook on the day shift, in charge of another cook and the K.P. staff, and was at first relieved and then positively proud to discover that he was up to the task. As he told Bea:

I'm pleased with myself & I'm getting confident & capable. It is a responsibility being a first cook, & yet I did not fret over it and I got my supper out quite on time. In fact I like responsibility--you know that brief bit of teaching must have done me a lot of good.[nb12/31/45]

Furthermore, when he followed the flow to the Giesha House (it was the only place in Choshi that his soldier-companion that evening knew how to find), he told Bea that he had an awful experience:

I had my second intercourse since I've been overseas (I call it intercourse because I dislike the word, and it's a shame to dignify it by calling it fucking.) Anyway, baby, the novelty was off this time and I had a very drab time and a very passionless bedding. I had a unique emotion afterward--disgust at myself and at fucking.
[nb1/1/46]

Part of his problem, he realized, was that unlike his earlier seasons overseas, he now was very close to going home and "patience is strained, & I'm far more prey to monotony[1/1/46]." The monotony inclined him dangerously toward a feeding of "my self pity against the bleakness of this momentary environment[ibid]." Thus he resolved to stay away from the geishas for two weeks, reasoning that "in two weeks I'll have adjusted myself to the barrenness of this life here, and I imagine I'll be able to do without them [altogether]" for the rest of his time. His plan was to work hard in the kitchen and "go healthy, take long walks" when he was off duty, and spend most of his off-duty hours working on the novel. After all, as he said, "I have about ten or eleven more weeks in

Japan, and I want to make them go fast[12/29/46]."

iii

Ten or eleven weeks would translate into a mid-March departure, and it turned out that this estimate was no mere rule of thumb for Norman: perhaps without his fully realizing it, the distance to mid-March had become for him the exact length of his remaining emotional rope. He could wait that long for his orders to go home; he could not wait longer.

Norman had watched and worried over the operation of the discharge system since September, and when the inevitable backlog began to build, leaving him in the unhappy company of men who should, by original estimates, already have gone home, he came to see that his own estimated return-date was in danger. By November he was suggesting to his mother and to Bea that they investigate the possibilities of various kinds of intervention on his behalf. He thought that his mother's allegedly poor health--which the quite healthy Fan sometimes affected as a rhetorical weapon in such family disputes as Barbara's stubborn desire to resume her friendship with Jack Maher--might be invoked in the form of an appeal to the Red Cross to get him an emergency leave.

When this was attempted and failed, they all--Norman included--wrote letters to congressmen and senators, and Bea's mother employed her considerable network within the Jewish War Veterans organization, all of them identifying various reasons why Norman

should be given special consideration in the prioritizing of discharge candidates (their most original special plea was that extra discharge-points ought to be awarded to the overseas partner of couples who both were in uniform.) With Norman's urgent encouragement, his mother gradually developed into a formidable one-woman lobby, directing letters toward legislators, newspapers, syndicated columnists and assorted other public and private targets³. In doing this she displayed her particular indignant, impatient caste of mind, but on this occasion she turned out to have been a remarkably accurate representative of the temper of her times.

Throughout the war, an effective common-cause had been declared among such traditional antagonists as the three branches of government, the military establishment, private industry, organized labor, religious, ethnic and racial interest groups, and the public information media. Peacetime conditions permitted these entities to resume the pursuit of their diverse, often-conflicting goals, and a point of particular division among many of them was the formation of policy regarding the administration of the armed forces. The Pentagon, caught flat-footed by the premature conclusion of the war, of course wished to proceed with a policy designed to conserve the organizational effectiveness of its

³ The remaining file contains copies of Fan's letters to Drew Pearson, Walter Winchell, New York Times columnist Anne Ohare McCormick, New York Senator Robert F. Wagner, and two congressmen from her Brooklyn district, James J. Heffernan and John J. Delaney. Fan also "ghosted," over the signature of one of her sisters, other letters to Senator Wagner and Manhattan district Congressmen Sol Bloom and Joseph C. Baldwin.

military forces at home and abroad, and President Truman's administration was committed to a postwar policy that supported this goal. The issue of a calendar for the processing of military personnel back into civilian life, however, proved to be the rock upon which this policy would founder.

Both houses of Congress were swamped by constituent mail demanding "the return of our boys by Christmas," and the White House in turn was flooded by twin streams of petition from the embattled Congress and directly from the constituents themselves. Both management and labor leaders demanded the return of basic industry workers to run the railroads and dig the coal, and the Wall Street Journal and the Chicago Tribune editorialized for the drastically accelerated demobilization of the twelve million-man armed forces. Every command in the army experienced preliminary tremors of apprehension from its increasingly restive enlisted men, and in the midst of this growing expression of grass roots concern, in the first week of January, Secretary of War Robert Patterson announced that the military had to renege on its promise that all men with two or more years of service would be brought home and discharged by the late winter of 1946. He pushed the discharge date for two-year men back to July 1, 1946. [BestYrs 22-29]

The reaction to this announcement, at home and abroad, was explosive, and for the better part of January a kind of pandemonium ruled in the military and in the vast portion of the civilian population which had already been engaged by this issue. Patterson, who began a tour of Pacific bases just as his statement was

released, reaped the whirlwind:

When he arrived in Guam, angry demonstrating soldiers burned him in effigy. At each stop thereafter worried commanders arranged for him to meet soldier delegates to vent the GI ire. On successive days in Manila he faced shouting mobs of up to 10,000 soldiers and sailors. The Pacific edition of Stars and Stripes bannered PATTERSON CALLED NUMBER ONE ENEMY BY JEERING MOB. [BestYrs 30]

These scenes were reflected in the European theater of operations, where "Military police noted sharp increases in arrests for drunkenness, reckless driving and slovenly dress, [and] hundreds of GIs marched down the Champs Elysees waving magnesium flares and shouting 'scab' at men who wouldn't join them."

These reports triggered, in turn, alarmed perceptions at home of "Communist agitation" within the armed forces, and Congress, spurred on by this and by new waves of constituent distress, turned on the President and the Pentagon with something like confrontational fury. Only a dramatic appearance by Commanding General Eisenhower before a joint-session of Congress was able to restore order. Having just issued a general-order for military personnel to end demonstrations upon pain of court martial, he brought his tremendous prestige before the Congress on January 15. In a carefully worded presentation, he apparently convinced its members--and enough of the huge radio audience who listened-- that he would deal with the matter of hurrying up the discharge process; but that he would do so only in a way consistent with the mission that had been entrusted to the military by the Congress and by "the people of the United States." By the end of January the fire-storm had burned out, and in its wake the Pentagon and the War Department quietly tried to meet their original deadlines, despite the fact

that the price they had to pay was a gutted postwar military force, barely the shell of what they wanted and what their diplomatic strategies required.

And Norman? Norman threw himself into such a state of furious distress as to recall, at least on his bad days, the most polarized depths of his worst times back at Fort Bragg. For a period of perhaps a month his painstakingly-achieved, always fragile sense of self-possession as a soldier seemed near to failing, often obscuring in the process his still stable operation of novel-planning and, indeed, his also stable situation of responsibility in the kitchen. In the deepest depths of his bad days--the days when he was not working on the novel or getting his job done in the kitchen--he even imagined that a discharge-delay would put him in danger of losing Bea. When he got the preliminary news of Patterson's announcement, and knew only that there would be a slowdown of some duration, he was at first struck dumb. Having written to Bea almost daily since mid-December, his New Year's Day letter was abruptly followed by seven days of silence, as he attempted to recoil from the shock of hearing that a major calendar announcement was about to be issued. Then this on January 8:

You've got to forgive me for not writing for several days but the news of the army's discharge slowdown made me so sick and furious I did not want to get it on paper.... Yesterday, the news of the G.I. riots in the Philippines made me feel better if only vicariously. I could murder any General with the utmost pleasure. I hate brass now more than I ever hated the Nazis.

Though Norman urged Bea to take immediate action in the form of letters of protest, the full force of the Secretary of War's announcement did not hit him until January 10, when he saw the

details of the proposal, and wrote on the next day:

Yesterday was awful. When I heard the news--2 year men home in June, I was closer to weeping than I've been since that last [Thanksgiving] day when we cried in each other's arms. The wildness and the numbness of the days before when I didn't know what the new schedule would be was gone--I was just miserable.

Ominously, he concluded the letter by saying, "Wait for me, will you darling? If you fell in love with someone else, I should want to die." This feeling of being forced apart from Bea is ominous because it required nothing from her to feed the feeling: in fact no mail had reached Norman since his departure from Tateyama, and it was not until January 19 that "the rains finally came" and he was handed a batch of ten letters from his wife. Unfortunately, since they were all written before the explosion of bad news, some of them contained details they might not have included had Bea known Norman's state of mind.

Bea--who subscribed with Norman to the policy of total candor regarding all erotic exchanges--had met and occasionally been seeing a couple of veterans of the Spanish Civil War. Communist in their politics and their circle of friends, these men were attractive to her--Bea was powerfully drawn to the political left at this time--and she of course told Norman all about it. Indeed, consistent with their policy, she mentioned a few details in this relationship that identified her as the object of considerable carnal desire. In doing so she set Norman's "demons" of jealousy into active motion, and for the next few weeks he returned to the subject often. It became linked to his feelings of desolation created by the prospect of the army's delay of his discharge, and

he fed it still more by a drunken night with a geisha girl who came back with him to his barracks. In a revealingly complete break from his past representations of such experience, he boasted of how accomplished he has been as the girl's sexual partner, and how thrilled she had been with the experience[2/1/46].

His own ironic follow-up to this adventure was to emulate the many married soldiers he had observed after they had visited the geishas: he developed dark suspicions concerning his wife's fidelity. Though Norman professed to try, he could not refrain from falling into regularly repeated fits of jealousy, until Bea finally told him, in level tones she had never quite employed before, that when he returned he had better not act-out such feelings with her because she would not stand for it[bn2/18/46]. Tempered though it was with assurances of devotion, her reaction was more than enough to re-fuel in Norman the fear that he might be losing her, and his letters continued to cloud the air with horrific fears of both breakdown and break-up. At the same time, further pressure was applied to Bea by Fan's frantic advocacy of Norman's discharge appeal: she was becoming very hard for her daughter-in-law to live with, and, in reaction, Bea at one point confessed to panic and a terrible desire to flee the whole unbearable business[bn1/18/46].

It was a business that lasted no longer than a month, hardly more, and then the wild, uncontrollable swings of circumstance fell back into a tolerable arc: though their various distresses subsided variously, the whole family was soon again able to manage. Stability got restored through the operation of three factors, the

first of them external. President Truman's government, preaching one policy but practicing another, had cast military considerations to the wind in a determined political effort to get demobilization onto a faster track. By mid-February the Pentagon offered reassurances that delays in the originally published schedule would not, after all, be a matter of months. More likely, it would be only weeks--four or five at the most. Norman welcomed such information regarding his own status, and happily wrote to his mother that he expected to be sailing no later than early April:

you know that I appreciate all of the letters you wrote. I think it was that which got my homecoming moved up from June. Because you know, my dear, that storm the army raised really frightened them, I think. It put their discharge program under a strong light, and they have not been able to hold their surplus men as easily. So take a bow, mother.[fam2/23/46]

Insofar as his mother's lobbying had been representative of the spirit that informed American public opinion in general, Norman was no doubt correct in giving her credit for the u-turn in government policy. Certainly the policy-change contributed hugely to restoring his good humor, but his instability had never extended so far as to undermine or even decelerate his work on his novel. The day after his agonized letter of despair at Secretary Patterson's announcement, for example, he wrote Bea a three and a half page letter that never even mentioned the calendar delay. It closed with an affectionate reminder that he had completed his two week period of abstaining from the gieshas, and offered a pastoral account of a trek to an ocean-front fishing village, but principally it dwelt on his energetic novelistic labors:

I sat me down last night and wrote out names, one-hundred &

sixty-one to be precise-- the names of all the soldiers I've known since I've been in the army about whom I could discourse at some length & some understanding. There are others, perhaps another 50 whom I didn't recall last night, but I'll add them as they come up.

Originally I had planned to do that kind of work when I got home, but it is difficult to think much about the novel until I've sketched out the main characters to myself. Once I've done that, incidents will flow out of them.[nb1/12/46]

His letter goes on to say that his process of recollection had provided him with the physical model for "my vision-sergeant"--the character he had earlier compared to Captains Ahab and Bligh-- and he describes the face and body of platoon sergeant Donald Mann from back at Fort Bragg. Norman then offered the story of something that happened to one of the veterans in the 112th during the regiment's New Guinea campaign, explaining that he intended to make the experience part of his vision-sergeant's own history:

[He] had to sit in the darkness, listening to the Japs who were forming on the other side of the river for an attack, and having to wait and bear their taunts, for he could not see them, and dared not open fire. "Yank. . .Yank. . .we're coming to get you, Yank."

After this night he hated the Japs with utter malignancy, for they had made him feel fear for the first time in his life & he could not forgive them that.⁴

It is clear that Norman's work on his novel supplied him with orientation during the period of his distraction, and so also did his particular duty-status within the 649th. Under two captains and a few lieutenants, the company had been assigned to Chosi--where no other troops were stationed--to supervise loading the Japanese ammunition onto barges that then dumped their cargo out to sea. This activity was actually divided between Chosi and Onahoma, a

⁴This letter of January 12 was later transferred to Norman's The Naked and the Dead working file.

much smaller harbor some two hundred miles to the north, and the outfit had thus divided itself between the two: some sixty men at Chosi under one captain, and a detachment of perhaps thirty at Onahoma under the other. Norman cooked at Chosi until January 21. During this time he was racked by his feelings about demobilization, and they distracted him from almost everything but his novel-planning. He also stayed with his kitchen schedule, however, getting his job done and--hardly aware that he was doing so--gaining the confidence of his mess sergeant.

Thus when the need developed for a cook up at Onahoma, Norman was sent out on the assignment, and began cooking there on January 23. He had been on this job for barely a week when, out of the clear blue sky, he was notified from Chosi that he has been promoted: PFC Norman Mailer suddenly found himself with three stripes on his arm and the title of Technician-4. He was suddenly a sergeant, with the additional responsibility of acting as the Onohoma Mess Sergeant, in charge of another cook and a staff of four Japanese kitchen workers. The totally unexpected promotion made a tremendous difference to him. As he put it years later in a story, characterizing himself as he had been back at the moment:

On the surface he was happy; beneath the surface he was overjoyed. It took him several weeks to realize how grateful and delighted he felt. [AFM, 124]

The promotion went far toward restoring Norman's emotional self-control and thus his ability to rise above the panic generated by the delay in his separation. In the week or so that it took him to learn about his re-accelerated discharge calendar, and to thus

climb down completely from his moods with Bea, he had a good number of compensations. Not only was he now actively at work on his novel, but he was discovering a new, Tateyama-like terrain where he could enjoy some serious climbing. One of his kitchen workers -- Oyamada--offered to serve as a guide and climbing companion, and the captain in charge of the detachment was sympathetic. Indeed, when his new mess sergeant asked him for a jeep to travel the fifteen miles to Mt. Yokoyama for a climb, he not only supplied the vehicle but asked if he could come along, and the whole experience turned out for Norman to be quite satisfying:

The hill kept stretching above us. The captain is about 35 or 40 and in poor physical condition. He was badly fatigued, and tactfully we would halt every hundred feet to let him regain his wind. I felt quite good. My breath was free, and my legs full of snap, and I had the mountain in my teeth--every time we halted I felt a tension to go on.⁵

Norman's account of the prospect from the summit makes it clear that the majesty of mountain climbing, so much on his mind in connection with his novel planning, had captured his imagination in real life as well.

To the East was Onahoma & the other towns and miles and miles of hills and rice paddies. . . .And to the West, more hills and paddies in the light and dark browns of Japan in winter, and far in the distance, maybe 50 miles away, were some tremendous mountains, a host of them standing in line and bearing away to the north-west, steep and tessellated, wholly white with sharp, articulated ridges and deep skeletal hollows with dark purple and steel blue shadows. I would turn in a circle, and for the first time in my life I could see for a hundred miles.[nb 1/28/46]

He told Bea that they must learn to climb together:

⁵Norman tore off the part of his January 28 letter to Bea that contained this passage, marking it for special attention and--months later---selected it out for inclusion in his Naked and the Dead working file.

Ah, it was such a marvelous feeling, darling. Somehow, it seems the most purposeful activity I have found (outside of fucking.) I feel a purity and strength and joy, and a sense of achievement that leaves me happy for many hours.[ibid.]

The captain having recovered his wind, the descent of the party brought the excursion to a high-spirited conclusion:

Going down was a romp, a dangerous romp. The snow hid the rocks which were slippery, and we skidded and jogged and tumbled down the trail, skiing without skis and laughing and yelling "Abunai" (Dangerous) as we pointed to the rocks.

When they reached the jeep "we were happy and tired and merry. The trip back was a delight."

Back at Onohoma, Norman remained for some weeks in a similarly festive state of mind. He was actually staging a kind of celebration in the little mess hall that had, as he felt it, become his own personal property. It was a warm room, filled with sunlight, and he recorded that the very sight of it brought him pleasure. Almost at once, he started trying to upgrade the whole project: fresh eggs and toast prepared to order in the mornings; double desserts at lunch and dinner; garlic and paprika rubbed into the roast chickens; meat pies instead of stew. He looked in one stroke to completely change the quality of the army eating experience.

What he was really trying to do, no doubt, was make the men of his detachment look up to him, thank him--perhaps even to love him. The probability is that he was trying too hard, but in any case such a goal was actually unachievable. Not even double desserts could wipe away the power of military folklore, and that folklore asserted two principles: army chow was lousy, and army

cooks were aliens. Norman may have impressed his mess sergeant but he couldn't impress the men he fed. Before long their indifference to his efforts began to anger him, he pulled back from them in turn, so that in the brief month of his stay at Onahoma the initial sweetness started to sour. In doing so it set the stage for an experience entirely new to Norman, and one that left a lasting mark on him.

The detachment was approaching the date of its return to the outfit in Chosi, and some twenty of the thirty men were planning a farewell fish-fry at the local geisha house. Because they needed five-gallons of cooking oil, they sent a spokesman to Norman to get him to donate it from his pantry, and he, stung by having been excluded from the party, surprised himself and everybody else by refusing. Suddenly he was an alien indeed: surrounded by over a dozen angry men, he stood accused of selling so much of the mess hall stores on the black market that he had nothing left to contribute to the recreation of his own people. Since his actual reason for refusing was that he and his past efforts were not appreciated--he certainly had never sold anything on the black market and actually had plenty of oil in the pantry--Norman was outraged by the charge and denied it. When for a reply he was called a liar to his face, he had no choice: throwing aside his pencil and clipboard, he went to hurl himself into the first fight in anger of his entire military--quite possibly, indeed, of his entire adult life.

Five years later, recollecting the whole thing in comparative

tranquility, Norman wrote it up in a confessedly autobiographical short story. As he remembered it--and a contemporary letter to Bea [nb2/20?/46]backs him up--there were two really important things about this experience. The first was that he had really been ready to fight in response to being deliberately insulted, despite the fact that Hobbs--his attacker--was the among the biggest, toughest men in the detachment:

He had no hope of beating him. He merely intended to fight until he was pounded into unconsciousness, advancing the pain and bruises he would collect as collateral for his self-respect. (AFM, 129)

For a man who had worried until now that his physical cowardice as a child would dog him into the army, this was a landmark development.

The second thing was that after the fight was prevented by a (to Norman) welcome intervention, and the conflict over the oil averted in such a way as to earn the mess sergeant a group apology from his men, Norman started to become friends with his erstwhile antagonist. The friendship seemed very close to happening when Hobbs, a southerner and a farmer, personally apologized and even offered--as a courtesy-- to fight Norman if he required such satisfaction. Amazed and delighted, Norman reached too quickly for the friendship he saw being offered. Re-insisting that he really had never sold anything on the black market, he confessed that he had never wanted to fight and had been relieved when it was stopped. Perhaps he supposed that his new friend would admit to the same, and that their admissions would seal their friendship. But since Hobbs himself regularly sold army gasoline on the black

market, and would have been perfectly content to go ahead with the original fight, he was merely puzzled by Norman's response. Hobbs was not unfriendly thereafter, but Norman could see that he had said the wrong thing--that he simply had not known how to talk to the man. The story concludes when Norman says of himself:

[He] began to wonder about the things which made him different. He was no longer so worried about becoming a man; he felt that to an extent he had become one. But in his heart he wondered if he would ever learn the language of men. (AFM, p. 132)

Norman's self-characterization in "The Language of Men" had been accurate as far as it went, but it left out one crucial thing: unlike his fictional counterpart, the real Norman was not simply carrying out his kitchen duties until he could get out of the army; he was also preparing to write a novel. As novelist, Norman had hardly broken stride, despite the distractions thrown in his way since he arrived in late December at Chosi. It actually sometimes seemed as if he existed simultaneously in two entirely different dimensions: the here and now of his various army experiences, and that other place where he worked in solitude on the evolving vision that would eventually be formed into The Naked and the Dead. Throughout his February stay at Onahoma he produced a series of planning letters, most of them taking his real-life-based characters deeper and deeper into the developing drama of their long patrol.

Sergeant Julio Martinez[2/9/46], the scout, kills a Japanese sentry in a failed attempt to facilitate the patrol's progress; the laconic Red Valsen[2/15?/46], nauseated by the k-rations in his pack, angrily throws them into the bush rather than carry them any

farther; and the pariah character--at this point called Frankenheimer[2/25/46]--laments his failure to win respect from any of his fellows. Norman adds to these working memoranda a short dissertation about how enlisted-man vernacular is virtually dependent upon excremental reference to address any situation, whether serious or comic [2/7/46]. A measure of the effectiveness with which he was addressing his writing during his Onahoma stay is that all three of the episodes he developed at the time, after being extensively recast, actually found their way into the novel's final version. Productive work for a sergeant who at the same time was feeding thirty men in his mess hall, climbing new mountains and exploring a new seacoast, and was also tracking the army's progress toward getting him back to the States before summer. While sending his memoranda off in the form of letters to Bea, he directed the close-down of his part of the Onahma base, and on February 24 moved with the rest of the detachment to rejoin the company down in Chosi.

iv

If Norman's writing world produced an unchanging, steadily mounting continuum of effort on his novel, the amount of change in his military world would be hard to over-contrast. Between that early January time--when he had been stunned by the news of his discharge-delay--and the time of his return to the outfit from Onohoma in late February, change had become the norm. From a badly

shaken, reckless pessimist of a PFC he had been transformed into an ascertainably responsible, self-confident non-com who, in a company of ninety men, was ranked only by the company mess sergeant and the first sergeant. In returning to Chosi when he did, Norman discovered a situation that had also changed remarkably: the previous commanding officer, a captain, has been replaced by an old-army officer of the same rank who had taken a more authoritative command of the company. Before, there had been no recreational facilities supplied by the outfit, and the men had called the local Geisha House "the day room." Now there were regular movies; an actual day-room with magazines, newspapers and a pool table; an improved mail service and much-improved living quarters for all--especially for Norman, who has been additionally upgraded in keeping with his new rank.

He seemed comfortable with his situation, including his new kitchen assignment as dessert baker. Six evenings a week he put in a short shift after dinner, baking "pies or cakes or cookies or turnovers for dinner & supper the next day," as he explained to his parents in mid-March. His only other responsibility was seeing to the Japanese civilian K.P.'s cleanup and closing of the mess hall.

It's not bad--I'm nearly always finished in three hours, and I've fallen into the habit of sleeping away the morning. That way there's just the afternoon to get through, and then work again & bed, and a day is gone. . . . March, always a long month, has been passing quickly. [fam3/18/46]

He took at least two overnight trips to Tokyo, once to order new glasses, the other to pick them up and have a kind of final fling with Stars and Stripes staffer Nat Ellis. Their evening, ever-

candidly described, was marked by Norman's fourth and final overseas session with a Geisha girl (whom he believed to have had three orgasms). Notable by their absence from his letter-of-report to Bea, however, are the cries of anger and jealous anguish that ran through so much of his correspondence little more than a month earlier. In their place we hear the steady, self-confident voice of a man who regards himself, in all important respects, as moving out of the woods[nb3/9/46].

Indeed, Norman's soldierly accomplishment seemed to free him in many ways. He was able for the first time in months to hear the sounds of unhappiness and resentment in Bea's life, and he did his best to be interested and sympathetic[nb3/21/46]. He tried also to make some amends for his complaints and especially his expressions of jealousy by explaining that he had not been himself. He was reasonable and respectful, caring and warm[nb3/29/46]. But his most remarkable claims to self-possession in his soldierly role appeared in an overtly autobiographical meditation. Noting that he was changed in some ways as he passed his second year in the army, Norman assured Bea of his emergence from a long-characteristic social timidity:

I couldn't go on forever having you talk to the landladies and asking for the icewater. I do feel physically stronger, tougher; I can tell a man to blow it out his ass now without keying myself up for the effort. In a way that means I'm less sensitive and it worries me as far as it may hurt my writing, but for the rest I'm glad of it. I did need social poise even if it was of the variety, 'Don't mess with me, Howell, or you'll be eatin' out o' yore ass-hole.' [nb3/24/46.]

Most importantly, perhaps, Norman perceived a recent change in his soldierly persona, wherein he had grown much more like his

comrades. "I have the everyman facade," said the formerly stand-offish private: "I mouth comparative platitudes without wincing (I just smile internally)." Looking back on his former isolation with a kind of nostalgia, he compared it to his current, slightly embarrassing conformity:

I make definite statements about anything in conversation without the soul-searching I used to do. When I first came in the army I was tongue-tied. How could I ever give an answer when there really was none. Now I'm comparatively tongue-lazy and brassy. Sgt. Mailer. I guess that was the push I needed to become the Compleat Ass-hole.[ibid]

Thus Norman acknowledged his new situation in the army, where perhaps for the first time he was not painfully divided between a surface life of institutional failure and a subterranean life of imaginative exploration and creation.

His month-of-March progress in that subterranean world was the greatest he had made in Japan, and by the end of the month he had moved from planning to actually writing parts of the novel. He carefully records a harrowing, cliff-hanger experience from up at Onahoma, when he had climbed, alone, up and across the face of an oceanside chalk cliff and got stuck on an ever-narrowing ledge:

I kept creeping along it for a few minutes, and then I made the mistake of looking down. It seemed like I was 150 feet above the ground which fell in a sheer drop to some very vicious rocks on the beach. I looked ahead, and the ledge which was now about six inches wide, seemed to narrow into nothing. I held onto the cliff wall, and felt nausea. The walls were of a soft slimy rock that seemed to breathe like the skin of a seal. I felt more than a little panic. It was really a bad spot, and the odious flesh-like sensation of the cliff's rock added to it. I turned around to go back, and had a hell of a time....[3/2/46]

Norman later converted the account into fiction, marking the appropriate passages and finally drawing upon them for his novel's

account of the ascent of Mt. Anaka.

In another working memo he revisited this question of attempting to "read" the terrain, this time in his characterization of the demonic Sergeant Croft:

It is difficult to explain how well Croft knew land, how quickly he sensed the torments and torsions which had erupted it, the attritive abrasions of wind and water upon it....Croft certainly could never tell what prompted him in circling a bluff to decide on an upper or lower ramp when both spiralled up the disappearing walls of the cliff. He knew only that the one he had not chosen would end in a deadfall--the lower might narrow into nothing, the upper lose itself in an isolated knoll or outcropping....Perhaps it is a device to say that Croft sensed the nature of rock and earth, knew as well as he knew the flexing of his muscles, how in some age of cauldron and tempest, the rocks had strained and growled and surged until in the ecstasy of declaration the earth had shaped itself. He had always a feeling of that birth storm when he looked at land; he almost always knew how the hill appeared on the other side. He had the kind of knowledge which felt intuitively the nearness of water, no matter how foreign the swatch of earth might be over which he was walking.⁶

Methods for the presentation of Sergeant Croft's character were much on Norman's mind that March, and in a letter of the 14th we learn more about it through listening to a dialog between an eyewitness talking with some other men in the platoon about how Croft had dealt with a prisoner:

So Croft says to me, 'Give him a can of rations.' Give him a can of rations! I almost shit, Croft saying that.

Wha'd you give him?

Meat & Vegetable Stew. What do you think I'd give him? It killed me anyway, carrying that can for two days, only to end up givin' it to that Nip.

Well, Croft gives it to the miserable little mother-fugger, who's shivering and shaking and bowing, and saying 'ah-re-gas-to,

⁶ In this letter of March 27--which was later added to working file-- Norman added to Bea: (As you may have guessed, I have a little of the Croft sense, enough to extrapolate it to infinity.)"

ah-re-gas-to,' or something like that. I'll tell ya, that Nip really had the fear of death in him. He kept shaking all the time he ate, and you never saw a man eat just that way. Like an animal, like a coon's dog.

Later, having seen the prisoner cruelly killed, this same witness had watched Croft interact with other men in his patrol:

You know, he'd be very quiet, just sittn' there like he always does, only he'd keep getting up all the time, and walking around as if he couldn't sit still. And then, every now and then, he'd roar and roar at something someone said, laugh just to beat the piss out of himself. I tell ya', I never seen Croft so...well, by God, so happy. He's a funny guy, that Croft. I wouldn't want to mess with him.

Other of Norman's forays into the novel during this month include the creation of a major sub-plot to counterpoint the structure of the patrol's progress across-country,⁸ and a soaringly ambitious expansion of his birth-struggle theme into a five-part elaboration of the metaphor.⁹ Such deep involvements in the novel as these made him more conscious of the fact that his letters were going to be indispensable to him when he got back home, and for the first time he asked Bea to begin organizing his correspondence to

⁷ This March 14 letter--later included in the working file--concludes with a question that will come up often in the course of the novel's development:

"The only question is how much profanity I'll be able to get into print. I do believe, darling, it's impossible to get the G.I.'s speech across without larding in the fuck, piss, cock, shit, cunt which flows so naturally into the most basic sentences."

⁸This letter of March 8, written (with a hangover) from Tokyo, was eventually included in the working file. It planned the narrative of the evacuation party that left the patrol to try to return a wounded comrade to safety.

⁹Written on March 3, this letter develops the idea of a five-part allegory of meaning in the patrol's action: Birth Pangs; The Enveloping Womb; The Canal; The Retaining Brush; A World of Light and Noise and Pain. Like the others, the letter was made a part of the planning file.

form a file of working memoranda:

Darling, as a little project, will you separate all my letters that have things written about this novel in them? I think I first conceived it back in Ord in October[3/3/46].

That Norman should have so increased his capacity for work as a novelist while at the same time adjusting to army life so comfortably, must have seemed to him to write finish to his two year ordeal of often tortured division. He sent Bea one more letter in March--on Friday, the 29th--remarking that though the 649th was to be sent home on April 15 his own return would probably be a little later. Most of the letter was devoted to an anatomizing of their love for each other and an expression of how very much it meant to him. He was no longer afraid for their relationship nor, indeed, for anything. He was simply ready to start for home. Nowhere in his letters since his return to Chosi did he mention that, as the weeks passed, he had been having a small but real problem with his feelings about the new commanding officer. Quite probably, Norman thought the matter too minor for mentioning.

When Norman had acted as mess sergeant at Onohoma, the friendly captain in command of the detachment left him and his mess hall alone. That officer had left the outfit, however, and the C.O. in Chosi liked to cultivate his non-coms: in Norman's case this took the form of a special arrangement for the captain's evening meal. The man was a drinker, and was usually not ready to eat with his lieutenants during the established dining hour; he would instead come in during the baking or the clean-up, saying "Make me something special, will you Mailer?"[nb4/4/46]. Norman didn't like

the way he "always smiles sweetly at me" in this ritual, and indeed he disliked the captain not only for his solicitous style of command--which Norman thought insincere--but because he was a certain kind of man:

He has the real Army mentality, and more, he's the kind of old fart who talks maliciously about Russia & England--according to him we won the war by ourselves.[ibid]

Norman did save dinner for the captain, of course, but he so disliked serving it --"I loathe the idea, [and] writhe at my inability to refuse him"--that he would sometimes try to be finished up and out of the mess hall before the captain arrived, leaving him to serve himself either while or after the Japanese K.P.s completed their clean-up.

The captain made arrangements for having his dinner saved for him on the night of Wednesday, April 3. Since the 649th was due to ship out in less than two weeks and Norman figured to follow shortly after, there must have been a certain atmosphere of termination and departure affecting everyone. In Norman's case his sense of non-com responsibility was starting to get tested by the captain's manner. Under the pressure it placed on Norman, he seems to have begun feeling the pull of his old, long-familiar state of subterranean alienation. On this evening, certainly, he felt the pull strongly enough to want to avoid contact with the C.O., so he made a point not only of leaving the mess hall as soon as he could but of going straight to bed.

He recollected--in one of two letters written to Bea the next day--what happened an hour later when, half-asleep, he was roused

by his mess sergeant.

'Get up, Mailer, & get dressed.'

'What? Why?'

'The kitchen's filthy. I've just had my ass chewed by the Captain, & I want you to see how it looks.' The mess-sergeant is a pretty boy about my size who's very unpopular because he sucked-ass to get his job and did it very obviously. I vary between pitying him & disliking him. Right now, I disliked him.

'O.K. So it's dirty,' I said. 'You clean it up, & chew my ass in the morning.'

'You're cleaning it up.'

'Aw, go fuck yourself,' I said, & turned over.

'Are you getting up?'

'Go away,' I said

He did and came back in two minutes with the first sgt., a chunky, pleasant southerner who lives by the book, & is not too good a topkick because his main worry is to please the captain rather than to look out for the men.

'Mailer, get out of bed,' the first G said.

'No.'

'I'm giving you a direct order to get out of bed,' he said.

I sat up. I was very angry. 'I'm damned if I'll lose my stripes over this,' I said. 'I'll get up, but you're both chickenshit sons-of-bitches.'

'You can take that back, Mailer,' the topkick, Borchers, said.

'I'm not.'

'You're going to stick by it?'

I was angry again. 'You're fucking aye, I am.'

'All right, you asked for it,' he said, & stalked off.

Norman's letter goes on at considerable length, but what it comes down to is that the first sergeant went to the Commanding

Officer and that, in a manner of speaking, was that: the beginning of the end of the illusion Norman had been living since his promotion came through in early-February. Two months, almost to the day, was as long as he lasted in the balanced posture of responsible non-com on the surface, and monitoring artist-observer buried below. His own account of what happened, along with his reflections on the meaning of it all, is recorded in two letters written to Bea the next day--April 4--and these are reproduced in their entirety in Appendix 00. To quote them at length here, however, would require us to contemplate a Norman who for the moment had reverted to the state that gripped him during his first week of Basic Training in Ft. Bragg, two years before.

The army was again an alien monster with which he rejects all reciprocal association. So far as Norman was concerned, the conflict between him and the two non-coms in the chain of command above him had been purely personal, and was in no way to be considered a military matter. When they and then the captain insisted on treating as a military matter, and the captain furiously required an also-furious Norman to apologize to the first sergeant, the chain broke for Norman. All of the things that had meant so much to him in the previous months--the sense of accomplishment, of joining and being joined, the pride he had taken in proving himself--were lost as he was swamped by his feelings of personal outrage and humiliation.

He spent the rest of the night of April 3 composing his thoughts, and the next day appeared as ordered in the C.O.'s

office, where were present all three of the company lieutenants and the two ranking sergeants. The hearing may have been intended only to issue a reprimand--so thought the mess sergeant-- but Norman insisted on a gesture of moral independence: he tried to turn in his stripes. Refusing to allow Norman the theater for such self assertion, the captain instead took the stripes from him, and all present promptly adjourned to resume their packing for home. Ironically, the trigger for Norman's downfall was the conduct of the Japanese K.Ps, whom he had always treated with special kindness and consideration. He seldom bothered to check on them because he trusted his relationship with them so absolutely. He explained to Bea that on this evening they had simply forgotten to clean his mess hall, leaving it in a state of pristine chaos he did not go to see until it was too late. But Norman did ^{not} ~~he~~ blame them when their failure was finally discovered, reserving his anger instead for those in authority over him who--shocked and angered by the filthy state of the kitchen--were unwilling to concede the inviolability of his personal space.

His sudden, truly wild championing of the sovereignty of that space is perhaps best understood as a kind of breakdown. Norman didn't simply lose some stripes, after all, he lost the whole painfully earned, carefully hoarded proof to himself that he could do a man's job in that man's army and could, indeed, do it through using and understanding the language of men. His disappointment

would haunt his metaphors for years.¹⁰

Damaged as he was by the experience, however, it was not powerful enough to separate him from his engagement with his novel. On the contrary, he turned to that engagement in the way that he turned to Bea, as an obvious avenue away from the point of his pain and toward the process of his healing. His two long letters to Bea on April 4, written after the disciplinary hearing in the Captain's office, were followed by a working session on his novel which lasted, he would tell her two days later[nb4/6/46], well into that night. He would continue to address the novel in letters written over the following week--having been notified the day after the hearing that he would be scheduled to ship home almost immediately--and if this novel-planning was colored in its choice of detail by his feelings about his demotion, it was novel-planning still. Nothing stopped it; no need proved stronger than the need to write.

Norman began addressing himself to the two characters on his drawing-board who were (as Bea had pointed out) closest to himself in their points of view. Red Valsen--the proletarian everyman figure who had refused on principle to accept promotion in the novel's Reconnaissance platoon-- and the Harvard-educated Lieutenant --who (until his death) commanded the platoon's patrol--

¹⁰ In 1959 he wrote in Advertisements for Myself about his days in the reconnaissance platoon: "Through most of the Great Wet Boot which was World War II for me, I kept a cold maniacal thing in my heart, sharp as a shiv. I would listen to other G.I.s beating their gums about how when they got out they were going to write a fugging book which would expose the fugging army, and I would think in my fatigue-slowed brain that if they only knew what I was going to do, they would elect me sergeant on the spot." [p. 29]

emerge as in some ways the least similar of any two people in the book. But in the extremity of his present situation Norman was drawn to them, no doubt because each character in his separate way truly hates the army, identifying it unforgivingly as the source of some outrageous personal humiliation.

Certainly it is this aspect of their personalities that now claimed their creator's attention, and he sets these partly-autobiographical characters against each other in irreparably bitter opposition. Red undergoes the experience of a court-martial--"on a set up," Norman explains, "fairly similar to mine"--which causes him to hate all officers implacably, including the one commanding the patrol. Red is, however, also the only person on the patrol who has anything like the capacity to understand and sympathize with the lieutenant's particular kind of loneliness and isolation. When the young officer is killed, therefore, Norman makes the acrid point that "the one man who might have understood him and grieved for him a little, hates him with the blind rage of the deeply wronged."¹¹

"Deeply wronged" is certainly the best description of Norman's own feelings at the time, and his way of acting them out was to go around the company--where he had been touched to receive a vote of affectionate confidence from his sympathetic fellows¹²-- giving

¹¹Norman's planning letters of April 6 and 9 were eventually included in his working file.

¹² In an April 7 letter to Bea, Norman reported: "There's Lesser, who came running up to me after I got busted and said, 'Mailer, you're the best fuckin' guy in the outfit--you're the only one who's got any Goddamn guts.'

away his few, hard-won badges of recognition. He gave them to people who in many cases had not earned the right to wear them, assuring everyone that he wouldn't be caught dead wearing them himself: the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with star, the World War II Victory Medal, the Good Conduct Medal and clasp, the regimentally awarded Bronze Star, and finally his beloved Combat Infantry Badge--which went to a youngster who had entered the army after the war. Norman even gave away his old overseas cap with the yellow piping that signified the cavalry.

The whole lot defiantly disposed of, he got himself into a uniform with no distinguishing marks whatever, turned down in advance the possibility of a final PFC stripe that was almost automatically issued to anyone about to be separated, and in this state presented his travel orders at a staging depot in Yokohama. There he chanced to meet his old comrade Clifford Maskovsky, with whom he had traveled across the United States after basic training, crossed with on The Sea Barb and whom he had last seen on Leyte. Maskovsky was the walking embodiment of everything that Norman was not: distinguishing himself in basic training, he had been assigned as an artillery surveyor, and gone on to amass a stunning military record. Indeed, he was to be appointed Sergeant of the Guard on board the U.S.S. Grant, bound for Fort Lawton on Seattle's Puget Sound, when he and Norman shipped out on her the next day-- April 16.

"There's Motti who says, 'Call me a chickenshit son of a bitch, you private you, & I'll go to the Captain.'"

The two stood there, looking at each other in that crowded Yokohama staging barracks: Norman as naked in his unmarked uniform as a peeled egg, Maskovsky resplendent with decorations and in the full regalia of a Battalion Sergeant Major. Norman spoke first:

Whose ass did you kiss to get those stripes?

[END CHAPTER 3 PART THREE/ END CHAPTER 3]

APPENDIX I

[Here append the texts of the two letters to Bea of April 4, 1946]