THE APOCALYPTIC ADVENTURES
OF PRIVATE WINFRED SCOTT BIEGLE
THE APOCALYPTIC ADVENTURES
OF PRIVATE WILFRED SCOTT
BIEGLE;
OR, BULLYING TO THE END

By Clifford Davidson

LOGRES
CONTENTS

I. Call to Arms. .................................... 1
II. The Engraved Cigarette Lighter. ................. 17
III. The Camp Celebrity. ............................ 55
IV. Getting There. .................................. 88
V. The Valley of Death. .............................. 98
VI. The Highest Honor.............................. 134
Epilogue............................................. 150
Afterword, by Oscar Haugen........................ 153
“When the soldiers asked, ‘What ought we to do?’ he replied, ‘Do harm to no person, do not make false charges against anyone, and be content with your wages’.”
CALL TO ARMS

“Trailing clouds of glory do we come.”— William Wordsworth, Ode; Intimations of Immortality

The day was in late May, one of those enigmatic afternoons when no one knows if the sun will shine or if rain will come, when Our Leader stepped from his plane at New Padua, a provincial capital in the vast and prosperous land of Atlantis. The military band had been playing for an hour before he arrived, and people had stood about in small groups. Now the music blared forth in the national anthem, Atlantis Will Conquer Forever, while overhead the flag with the great yellow star floated proudly in the breeze. Our Leader was walking briskly through the crowd, occasionally stopping to greet old friends, and then mounting the platform which was ready for him. The band shifted to a march arrangement of Hail to Our Leader. In spite of the holiday atmosphere, underneath the sensitive observer was able to detect a more serious mood.

Perhaps a few of those in the crowd knew that across the high wooden fence security guards were beating a dozen or so young dissidents who carried signs on which they had written one single but inflammatory phrase: “Peace in our time!” As the sun moved from behind a cloud, its rays caught a uniformed man’s club raised to strike the bleeding head of a young student. Fortunately, all of this was screened from the audience and from Our Leader, who appeared so handsome and virile in his neat army uniform, literally glittering with bejewelled medals and ribbons. The band was silent now, and Colonel Cadaveri rose to introduce the man who needed no introduction.

Our Leader stepped up to the lecture stand. The sun was suddenly covered by a cloud, and soon a few raindrops were felt. He began to speak, softly and reasonably at first, then he raised his voice in anger against those who dared to question the wisdom of the government’s actions. “Peace has been achieved,” he said, “at the price
of a few skirmishes daily in distant lands. It is a small price to pay for
peace, and we must pay it gladly. Our boys go to their duty gladly,
sacrificing their lives so that others here might live in peace and
prosperity. It is a small price, when we consider that the enemy which
we meet there is not of our race or creed. Our society is the greatest
ever achieved by man. Nowhere else in the whole world are men so
rich and so well stocked in goods which make life worthwhile. It is a
small price to pay for such great rewards.”

He paused. Applause greeted his ears. The words of the speech
marched on like soldiers in a military formation. The words were
reiterated: “It is a small price to pay. . . .”

There was a threat to our country twenty years ago, he ex-
plained. Boys had come from schools and jobs to save the fatherland
then, and the need was the same today. Though the fighting be far
away, it is necessary to protect our freedom. “It is a small price to pay
for the freedom we seek to preserve.”

He raised his hand. “Today,” he cried, “is the crisis. Upon the
present time lies the hand of responsibility, and our decision will
determine whether we can continue to keep the peace or whether we
fall into national dishonor. I call upon all the young men of the land to
offer themselves as living sacrifices wholly and fully acceptable to
your land and to your Leader. No duty is higher than that which is
imposed on you by the patriotism which binds you to Atlantis: we must
all give ourselves to the cause which is just.”

This was Our Leader’s famous “call to arms” speech that
would be praised in the history books for generations, according to all
the newspaper editorials.

“The enemy is knocking on our door,” he continued, “but we
will not let him in. He is hungry, but we will not feed him. No, we will
press past this critical point in our national destiny to victory, victory
which will make our future bright for our children and our children’s
children. There are those in foreign lands who want what we have,
aliens who hope to take from us the fine things and the way of life
which we have made for ourselves. No, this cannot happen.

“Indeed, the sacrifice will be small, but it must be made. It is
a small price to pay.”

Reporters were scribbling down their Leader’s words, anxious
lest any should be lost from their accounts, which would be published
in all the State newspapers around the nation. Photographers’ cameras
clicked. Surely this was destined to be the Story of the Year.
Waving his left arm, Our Leader chanted, “Today I must call the nation to arms. We have fought on the islands long, and now we must repel the aggression that threatens us upon the Continent.”

There was more applause, but it was hesitant and apprehensive as the audience awaited Our Leader’s next words.

“Today I have come to announce to you that our troops, our heroic forces, have landed on the mainland. This is a clear warning to the enemy that his arrogance will not be tolerated. Atlantis cannot permit herself to be disgraced by these terror tactics on the part of foreign insurgents. Propagandists in other lands will say that we have invaded, but I say to you that we are doing all that is necessary to repel the sinister threat of forces contrary to our interests.

“Every Atlantan boy and every man, yes....” He paused, then added, “Yes, and many women too will now desire to serve the flag by joining the branch of service of their choice. The call to arms is a compulsion upon us all, and it is a small price to pay for our precious freedom.”

Intently, all over the nation, citizens had been listening to their Leader’s speech over the state radio or state television. Everywhere the speaker’s hand was on the heartstrings of the nation, and everywhere people were responding to his call to arms. A fever of patriotism gripped everyone. Men, who had been watching their television sets from the most comfortably cushioned chairs, rushed out of their houses to display the flag on their lawns. Everywhere the giant yellow star was flying, and hearts were lifted up with love of country.

The speech was over. Our Leader saluted, while the military band once again struck up Atlantis Will Conquer Forever. Now was the time for rallying behind Our Leader.

On radio and television, commentators were analyzing the implications of the speech and showing its relevance to the condition of the whole world. Opinion was unanimous, according to the government broadcasts, in favor of Our Leader’s heroic action in the East. After pauses for station identification and spot commercials, the barrage of words continued. “It’s a small price to pay,” all the commentators agreed. “Blusto detergent gets the diapers clean,” an actress in housewife’s garb bragged. “It’s three-forty-seven at the tone,” the announcer said.

Transistor radio in hand, Winfred Scott Biegle paced the furrow which was opening up behind the plow. It was a remote
province of Atlantis where the soil was thin and the fields rocky, but he was listening with all his powers of attention to the speech being delivered by Our Leader. There had been rain; the furrow was an ooze of mud. Occasionally he slipped, almost falling in the heavy and sticky mud beneath his feet. The horses plodded onward across the field. A crow made distinctive noises in the tree on the north side of the rock pile beside the gate.

Our Leader came to the climax of his speech, a call to arms. Biegle’s response was normal and immediate. “I want,” he cried, “to serve my country!” Indeed, the cry was so loud, such a bellow, that the horses, frightened, lunged into a gallop, running obliquely across the field and up the hill. The crow jeered even more loudly. Biegle, his hands tangled in the reins, was dragged to the ground; he shouted in pain. Only when they reached the top of the hill did the horses stop, standing in docile obedience beside the broken plow and a much-bruised Biegle, who collapsed in the mud. Nor did they move until, perhaps an hour later, the family dog, Nemesis, found its way to Biegle’s side. With a start, the young man sat up.

It was the same cloudy afternoon, but everything was changed. The fields and the woods nearby had received a golden glow, punctuated by silver glints from off the rocks scattered around the field. Biegle knew now that his land, Atlantis, was sacred and that he was walking on holy ground. And he knew where his duty lay: he must enlist in the army to save Atlantis from the terrorists and mongrel hordes on the alien Continent.

Back at the farmhouse, Biegle’s father, martini glass in hand and pipe in mouth, had been watching Our Leader on his color television set, which he had purchased on the installment plan only a week before. “Bless me,” he told Mrs. Biegle, “but I almost feel like getting on my old uniform and going out there. What do you think about those bastards anyway? They act like we don’t have any rights at all.” He paused, then spoke pensively. “Now, if our son weren’t such a clod, dropping out of school like that in the fourth grade. . . .”

“I would love,” his wife chimed, “for my son to go and sacrifice himself, the way Our Leader said young people should do. It’s so splendid of all our young people to rally around the flag like that. It just brings back all your youthful optimism and makes you believe in mankind again. I hope he will go.”

“He isn’t much help on the farm anyway,” Mr. Biegle noted, nodding philosophically and tapping his pipe against the sole of his
boot. “If he wants to go, I suppose they’ll take him.”

“Of course they’ll take him. And he’ll be just as good a soldier as his old dad.” She affectionately patted her husband on the shoulder with her left hand.

“But, you know, the boy has problems. Did you see the way those horses ran away up on the hill this afternoon? Why, if he can’t control himself any better than that, I wonder.” He lowered his martini glass. “Yes, I’ll speak to him,” he announced.

Running his fingers through his hair and then pulling a cap onto his head, Mr. Biegle stepped forth across the farmyard toward the shed where his son was unharnessing the horses. He stopped before entering the building so that he might prepare himself to look angry. When he saw his son’s clothes muddied and torn, he exploded, “Why don’t you join the army?”

“Gee, can I?” Biegle asked. “That would be fun. I can just see me now, just like the commandoes on TV. Ae–ae–ae–ae! Just watch them fall. Ae–ae–ae–ae!” Wildly waving his lanky arms, his imagination sprayed bullets everywhere. “Just wait till I get a gun in my hands. I’ll kill those bastards. I want to serve our country, dad!”

“That’s a fine spirit, lad,” his father said, his naturally placid calm having returned to his face. “I knew you’d do it. Goodbye, then.”

Biegle was stunned by his father’s abruptness as he held out his hand to bid farewell to his son. “I’m sorry I planted salt with the wheat last spring,” he said, “and that I let the horses run away today.”

“That’s all right, boy,” his father said. “Now you can go in the house and say goodbye to your mom, and you can go right along.”

“Do you mean you’re not driving me to the recruiting station?”

“What for?” his father snapped.

It was eight miles to the town of Eden, but Biegle started walking alone, suitcase in hand. Still muddy from his accident in the field that afternoon, he was responding to the country’s need in time of trouble. Yet no motorist stopped for him, and his feet gave him pain while his arm ached from the weight of the suitcase. Then he arrived in Eden.

A life insurance salesman was walking along Primrose Street when a much-bespattered and dusty country boy accosted him with a question: “Where do I go?”

The salesman understood at once, of course. “The recruiting station is down the street toward the foundry,” he said.

just left a wonderful mother, and we must protect our mothers. Isn’t it wonderful to have a war so we can protect our mothers?”

The life insurance man agreed, but observed that he couldn’t sell policies that would cover the risks involved in war.

Swinging his suitcase, Biegle began to trot down the street in the direction of the foundry. He stopped at a traffic light. A policeman laid his left hand on Biegle’s shoulder. “Son,” he said, “does your daddy know where you are?”

“Sure,” Biegle responded. “He told me I could go serve our country. He really didn’t want me around the farm anymore.”

“Now,” said the policeman, apparently a very kindly man at heart, “I don’t think your daddy would feel that way. Maybe…”

“He does, he does,” Biegle insisted. “I let the horses run away and wrecked the crop by planting salt. Now he says I can go fight those bastards over there on the Continent.”

The policeman was puzzled. “We’ll have to see about this,” he said.

Biegle pointed. “Isn’t it down there?”

“You better come with me,” the policeman said. “I’ve got to take you to my boss.”

“What for? Don’t you know where the army station is?”

“No, I don’t. You come with me. I’ll help you find it.”

Biegle remembered that his teachers in the little red schoolhouse in the country had lessoned him about policemen. They always helped you if you were in trouble. Sheriffs, of course, were different, as Biegle knew from his own experience after he had behaved badly before little Connie Garnet, the neighbor girl, and had been expelled from school. Not that he was sorry about taking off his trousers right in front of her. What fun it had been to see the astonishment on her face! He followed the policeman to the great stone building with bars across the windows.

The interior of the jail was dark and damp. Little streaks of light penetrated between the bars, but Biegle was hardly able to see where he was being taken. Suddenly the policeman gave him a push, a steel door clanged, and he was alone. Maybe he hadn’t been nice to the policeman, he thought. Now, of course, he was sorry, but how could he inform the nice policeman of his penitence? “I’m sorry,” he said. No one answered. “I’m sorry!” he shouted.

The halls were full of echoes which reverberated with the sound. Someone in another cell began praying aloud for “the stone
walls to fall on him to keep him from the heavy wrath of God.” Biegle was not able to see him.

The young farmer’s son sat down on the stool to think, and was still sitting there when the jailer, a member of the elite SOS Corps, opened the door of the cell to thrust a bowl of cold oatmeal at him. “I’m sorry,” Biegle said. “I didn’t mean it.”

“Do you want to sign a statement?” the jailer asked. He brought a tablet of lined writing paper, the kind children use in primary school, with a picture of the Lone Ranger and his horse Silver on the cover.

“Now,” said the jailer, “what is it that you want to confess to?”

“Just say I didn’t mean to do it.”

“Do what? You’ve got to say what it was, you dissident, so I can write it down.”

“I don’t know.” Biegle was confused.

“Come on, now: think hard.”

“I can’t.”

The jailer closed the tablet. “You’re a hard case, Buster. Maybe the blackjack will bring you around. The blackjack,” he said philosophically, “always brings them around.”

“I just wanted to join the army,” Biegle said, hanging his head.

“Well, do you want to confess? Or not?”

“I, I don’t know.”

“Oh, there is plenty of time,” the jailer muttered as he walked away.

The next day the jailer took Biegle down an unlighted stairway to the basement of the building. They stopped in a small room. “Wait here,” said the jailer. Biegle sat down upon his suitcase and waited. Shortly the jailer returned, blackjack in hand. “How much money do you have?” he asked.

Biegle confessed. “Seventy-seven centimes.”

The man’s face became black with anger like Herod of old. “Let’s see,” he said.

From his pocket Biegle drew his wallet, opened it, and counted out seventy-seven centimes, in half-centime pieces. The jailer was genuinely astounded. “Is that all you’ve got?” he shouted.

“Where is the army from here?”

“The army?”

“All I really was doing was going to the army to help shoot
those bastards over there, just like Our Leader asked us all to do. That’s all, I swear to God. I just wanted to go to the army recruiting station and volunteer.”

“Okay. You give me the seventy-seven centimes and I’ll tell you where to go.”

“You’re sure?”

“You bet. Just give me the seventy-...”

Biegle emptied his wallet again on a bench. “Now,” he demanded, “tell me where the army is.”

The jailer swept the half-centime pieces into his pocket and stood upright. In imitation of Our Leader, he said, “It’s a small price to pay, my son: only your life for those grand ideals of patriotism and the flag. You merely go up those steps to the outside, and then turn right onto the sidewalk. It’s Primrose Street. Just follow it down to where the foundry is. That’s the end of the street. The army’s camped out there, so you’ll recognize it by the tents."

“Tents?”

“Yes. It’s a bivouac area, as you’ll see. That means the army is camped out. They will be very glad to see you. Everyone is doing everything he possibly can for the war effort. Why? It’s the cause of freedom. How would you like the enemy to get their hands on you? Sure makes you appreciate our wonderful country, our wonderful land. Gee, I sing *Atlantis Will Conquer Forever* all the time. It’s a great song.” The jailer had grown positively chummy.

“I sure appreciate all you’ve done for me,” Biegle gushed. “Oh, no trouble at all. Just remember what a wonderful bunch of guys us security guys are. We even got a great slogan that I hope you won’t forget: *Support your secret police and anti-terrorist volunteers*. That’s Our Leader’s idea, sure enough. He’s great on slogans.”

“Tents, tents,” Biegle muttered as he sauntered down Primrose Street. Now and then he began in his excitement to run, but he always returned to his original pace, for his left shoe was irritating his foot. At last, sitting down on the curb, he unlaced the shoe and then removed both shoe and sock. There was a two-inch-round blister on the top of his foot. Since he was accustomed to occasional barefootedness on the farm, he did not replace shoe or sock, but tossed both into his suitcase. Later, changing his mind, he retrieved the sock and, sniffing at it, held it for a few moments in his hand. When he rose to his feet, he poked the sock into his rear left pocket. “Tents,” he muttered as he continued walking down the street toward the foundry. One shoe was off and one
shoe on: people stared at him. He was staring directly forward and was dreaming of his destination.

At one point, a crowd was waiting to board a streetcar, but Biegle in his single-minded determination failed to notice them. Crashing into their midst, he slammed his suitcase into an old man’s shin. Clutching his leg, the man dropped the paper bag he was holding, while Biegle stopped for a moment only to look into his eyes. “Tents,” he murmured. “That’s the way, isn’t it?” He pointed toward the north with his index finger.

“Oh, my,” the man groaned, shaking his cane. “I do believe you’ve broken my bottle. Dear me! Filthy lad, now you’ve done it to me.” He wailed, “How . . . what . . . what shall become of me now? The horror, the horror! Get away from me!”

The bag was wet on the sidewalk. Biegle, attempting to be kind and considerate, reached down for it, but when he tried to give it to the man, his offer was rudely rejected. “You’ve smashed it. You’ve completely ruined it all, and now you want me to take it back. Dear me, you must be a foolish young man.”

Feeling resentment rising within him, Biegle proudly announced that he was on his way to join the army and was going to smash the enemy bastards “just like I busted that bottle in the bag. Let them try to stand up, the bloody godless terrorist communist shirkers.”

“But, my dear young man. You have broken my property.” Biegle was still holding the paper bag. The man raised his cane.

“I don’t have a centime. I didn’t do it on purpose, no, I didn’t. It was accidental,” he gasped.

“Now, we’ll have no more of this. I think you had better go on your way, since you are in such a bloody hurry in any case,” the old man ordered.

Snatching up his suitcase once again, Biegle ran away from the threatening old man. In panic, he did not see the recruiting office in the building immediately south of the foundry. Indeed, he hurried on past the foundry, beyond the city limits of Eden, to the railroad yards. “Tents, tents,” he was still muttering.

The street ended at the railroad tracks which crisscrossed their pattern across the freight yard to the left. On the track farthest from the end of the road empty boxcars were standing, and a switch engine was stopped on the other side of the military warehouse. Biegle, without hesitation, crossed to one of the empty boxcars and peeped inside. A man was sleeping there, his head propped up on a pile of broken
cardboard containers.

“You aren’t in the army, are you?” Biegle asked.

The man looked up, staring over Biegle’s head at an invisible eye of judgment which was glaring at him out of the clouds. Biegle repeated his question.

“No,” he answered, relaxing again into sleep.

There was puzzlement in Biegle’s face as he stood looking into the boxcar. “Tents, tents,” he muttered. He was exhausted by all that had happened. His left foot was now aching with pain, for it was bruised and sore from his hurrying along concrete sidewalks and streets. Yawning, he tossed his suitcase into the boxcar and soon likewise fell into a very deep sleep.

Lost in sleep, Biegle in his dream envisioned a long, long ride on a troop train through a foreign land where he was destined to fight for his country. Soldiers dressed in special uniforms sat on benches on each side of the coach: they were holding their rifles tensely, in expectation of heroic deeds. Light trailed along the path of the train, turning in brilliant hues of red, yellow, orange, and blue. Or were they merely the colors on his medals and ribbons which he wore on his chest? He was returning from war, surely, a hero back from the front.

He was awakened by the movement of the boxcar in which he was sleeping, but the illusion of the dream was still strong. He was filled with wonder as he brought to mind the vision of heroism which had been revealed to him. Then he knew that he was intensely uncomfortable, for his head was resting against the bare floor of the boxcar. The train stopped, and he raised himself up to look for the door. There was no light. He tripped. His suitcase had been lying across his path. The train began moving again: a bell clanged as it moved through an intersection. When daylight arrived, Biegle found that he was alone, sitting in one corner of the boxcar with a soiled fragment of a red handkerchief clutched in his hand.

Outside, the sun began shining down in all its glory upon the green countryside. The train was stopped at a siding. Biegle stood in the open door of the boxcar and looked out upon the dew sparkling in the grass. Perhaps a quarter of a mile down the track a trainman was walking. His eye caught sight of Biegle, and he began running along the train toward him. Biegle heard the trainman shouting at him but could not understand his words. “Get off!” the trainman was crying. There was obviously panic in his face, for the train was carrying munitions and supplies for the soldiers overseas as well as equipment
of the elite SOS Corps. Four of the boxcars also were loaded with top secret weapons, some of them designed to circumvent international arms agreements. “Get off!” he shouted.

At last Biegle was able to understand the words. Frightened, he clasped his suitcase and jumped from the other side of the boxcar into a ditch. He quickly climbed the embankment, crossed a highway, leaped over a fence, and found himself in the midst of a pasture.

No one seemed to be following him. It was almost as if the idyllic surroundings precluded further pursuit on the part of the trainman. Sitting on a tree stump to rest himself, he watched a picturesque herd of black and white Holstein cows outlined against the green hillside. The sky was a perfect blue. He slept again, at first sitting and then lying on the morning grass.

There was, however, the sound of a bull bellowing across the Arcadian scene at the unfamiliar sleeping youth.

Biegle leaped to his feet. Leaving his suitcase behind, he ran through a patch of thistles toward the nearest fence as the bull charged behind him. There was a gopher hole hidden in the grass not very far from the fence. Biegle’s foot sank through the opening into the earth. As he fell, he thought that his leg was broken. From his pocket he drew his only weapon, a penknife. The steely taste of fear was in our hero’s mouth.

The beast, fierce and dangerous in appearance, rushed past him, stopped, and returned to his suitcase. Piercing it with his horn, he lifted it high into the air, flung it from him, and then trampled it into the earth. In the meantime, Biegle had extricated his leg from the gopher hole and was crawling toward the fence.

He sat down upon the now-deserted railroad track to remove the thistles from his left foot; then, having lost all his worldly goods, he set out to seek once more the heroic life of the soldier. He moved very slowly down the track toward the hope that he knew would lie ahead.

Once again it was night when Biegle trudged into the small town of Porta which, settled in the moonless night and surrounded with the dark wood, seemed particularly sinister. He was weak from the lack of food now, and his stomach was queasy from drinking stale ditch water along the way. The shadows seemed to leap up at him, engulfing even the gigantic pictures of Our Leader that looked down from the billboards. Crickets ominously chirped in the grass, and he even saw some bats fly past a dimly lighted window overhead. Were they
infected with rabies, he wondered. There might also have been a dog, perhaps named Savage, baying at the moon. No street lights illuminated these streets. A dark shape crossed his path. “Go away,” he whispered. His voice was very hoarse.

More shapes seemed to move around him, and he caught the glinting of their eyes. They were cats, circling about one another, soon emitting hisses and moving more closely together. There was a growl, and the shapes lunged at each other, fighting and screaming and crying all around Biegle in the heavy night air. He also screamed.

The sound had burst like an enemy shell in the street beside the municipal recreation facility, which was in actuality a pool hall. On the second floor a window opened, a head issued forth, and a voice shouted. “Shoo!” At first there was no effect. The voice shouted again, and then broke into a sound that imitated the barking of a dog.

Biegle was left standing alone in the street, his left foot and leg scratched and bleeding from the recent fray. From above, coarse feminine laughter floated down, tinkling like a golden bell in the heavy curtain of the night until the window slammed shut. It was as if he were being disgraced and his honor was hanging in the balance. He shouted up at the second-story window above him.

The window opened again without any delay.

“Hey,” Biegle shouted, “I’m starving. Be merciful to me. In the name of Our Leader, help me!”

An electric lamp flashed on behind her, and Biegle gazed at her as she stood at the window in her filmy nightdress. She was beckoning to him to come up to her.

“I only wanted to find the recruiting station,” Beigle wailed, as he lay beside her in a monstrously large bed. Scenes of the World War, in full color, were flashing across the television screen. He had lost his innocence while she had remained intent on watching the movie, imagining its hero to be the young man who was actually having sex with her. Now she lay still beside him, gently smiling at the movie actor embracing the actress at the foot of her bed. She embraced Biegle again, drifting once again in the movements of her imagination.

The alarm bell awakened them, then Biegle heard her moving about the room and shortly thereafter sniffed the inevitable but welcome odor of coffee. At last she called, “Come and have breakfast,” and whispered, “Clark Gable.” In her mind she had received him as the movie star, her hero, the man of her dreams. Now she would not look upon him except in loathing unless her imagination superimposed the
beloved face over the face of Biegle. “Come, dear, and have breakfast,” she said, touching him on the shoulder. As they were eating, she burst into tears. “Oh, Clark, I love you so and now you must go and leave me.”

“I’m sorry,” Biegle answered. “I was on my way to join the army. It’s the patriotic thing to do.”

Her weeping ceased. “Join the army?” she said. The thought reminded her that she was in reality the casual mistress of a casual guest, and her illusion collapsed about her. The house which was her heart was now a shambles. Clark Gable was no longer having breakfast with her.

“Sergeant Mephostophilis will be back in town today,” she offered. “I’ll take you to him, to the recruiting station.”

She was still wearing her provocative nightgown, which Biegle could now see was stained in front with spots of egg yolk and coffee. Remembering the night before, he wanted to ask her to come back to the bed, but he saw that her whole manner toward him had changed. There was now a hardness in her voice that was not present before, and she sharply ordered him not to sit on a particular piece of furniture with his soiled clothing. A few minutes later, she sent him off by himself to find the local recruiting station and Sergeant Mephostophilis.

BIEGLE’S HEART THUMPED. Inside the building was the recruiter who would open the gate of opportunity for him. Yet he was fearful, for he did not know exactly what to expect.

The door, however, was locked. Clearly it was too early in the morning. What time was it: Biegle did not carry a watch, nor had he ever learned the fine points of telling time. His teacher had despair of teaching him to differentiate between the short and long hands, and then he had been expelled from school, as we know. Patiently he sat on the curb before the building. Farmers drove by as they brought their daily milk to the creamery. Finally the stores along the street began to open their doors to customers.

It was mid-morning when the recruiting officer drove up in his red and green army vehicle with the great yellow star painted on its doors. Immediately Biegle snapped to attention as he had observed men doing in the war movie that he had seen on television last evening. “At ease,” the recruiter said, unlocking the door with a great iron key. When the door swung open, the unoiled hinges gave forth a grating sound. Biegle, still saluting, followed the sergeant into his office.

A strange odor was in the room, as if someone had been
burning a particularly pungent kind of incense. Biegle noticed that his lungs began to give him pain when he tried to breathe. He coughed once or twice. Sergeant Mephostophilis took a cigarette from a pack in his desk. Pulling a sulfur match from his pocket, he watched it as he held it in mid-air and as it burst into flame. He lit the cigarette. “What can I do for you?” he asked.

“I want to join the army.”

“Then you’ve come to the right man.” An oily smile crossed his face as he spoke.

“I guess so.” Biegle only wanted to be pleasant.

“Now, young fellow, what can I tell you about the great careers available in the army? It’s a great time to enlist, you know. It’s not only the patriotic thing to do, but Our Leader is offering fifty francs to everyone who signs his name on the dotted line.”

An illuminated picture of Our Leader looked down benevolently from the wall over the sergeant’s desk.

“What do I do? If there’s a paper to sign, I’ll do it. I’ll write my name, my signature. I used to have to print, but not any more.” There was pride in his voice.

“Say, you don’t have to salute like that. Besides, it’s just officers that you salute.”

“Aren’t you an officer?”

“Well, I’m a sergeant, and a sergeant is pretty essential to the military system, but you don’t have to salute a sergeant.”

“Where’s the paper? I want to sign. Give me a crack at those bastards. I can sign my name,” he reiterated.

“The army needs you,” Sergeant Mephostophilis said. “The army needs men who are intelligent and know how to write. You won’t need to spend all your time in an ordinary job if you can write. It’s not everyone in the army who can write, you know.”

“I’m not so good,” Biegle said, modestly, “but I can write my name.”

“There are literally hundreds of opportunities open to you, then. Hundreds of fields.”

“Fields? Now, look here, sarge, I want to join the army to fight.”

“No, now, I meant there is lots of things you can do. There’s the infantry where you can march right up to the front line and shoot the alien bastards. There’s the artillery, where maybe they’d honor you by letting you pull the trigger on those real big guns.”

14
“Can’t I just join the army? The infantry may be okay, but I want to kill, kill, kill, kill!”

The sergeant puffed smoke into his face, then lifted a live grenade from the top drawer of his desk. “See this?”
“Yes.”
“It’s a hand grenade. You take it in your hand like this, pull this pin, and throw it. Then what happens? D’you know?”
“Hey, I’ll bet it blows up.”
“Right! That’s the spirit.” He returned the grenade to his desk drawer.

“Boy, I’m excited,” Biegle admitted.
“You’ll be a great soldier. I’ll bet you come home a hero before the end of the year. Just envision yourself standing up there with your mother and Our Leader: he’ll pin those medals on you and then make a little speech and everyone will applaud and cheer.” He opened his filing cabinet and, pushing aside a box of poisoned dog food, removed a folder containing forms entitled *Application for Enlistment: Army of Atlantis*. He laid one of the forms on his desk and stamped across the top: “Recruited by Sgt. Mephostophilis.”

“Last name?” he asked, putting the sheet into the antique manual typewriter.
“Biegle.”
“First name?”
“Winfred Scott.”
“Scott your second name?”
“Ya, I guess so.”
“Age?”
“Nineteen.”
“You’re sure about that? I wouldn’t want you to kid me, you know. Our Leader wants everything to be absolutely legitimate, you know. Got a birth certificate?”
“A birth certificate?”
Biegle, with sad eyes and fearful, shook his head.
“Oh, that’s all right, all right. I’ll say I saw it. Date of birth?”
“What?”
“When were you born?”
“I don’t know. Let’s see. Dad says it’s May nineteenth, but mom never agrees with anything he says. According to her, it’s the seventeenth.”

“Seventeenth of May? On Norwegian Constitution Day?”

15
Sergeant Mephostophilis frowned. Anyone born on this day was automatically rejected by the Army of Atlantis.

“No, July.”

A sigh of relief issued from the sergeant’s mouth, an actual sound like a wheezing steam engine releasing steam. He puffed on his cigarette. “Where were you born?”

“On our farm near Eden. The farm’s east of there, and I guess that’s where I was born. I can’t remember, exactly,” he joked.

“Okay. Are you in good health? Do you feel all right?”

“Sure, I feel fine.”

“Married?”

“Naw.”

“The sergeant smiled now. “Got a girlfriend?”

After a moment’s hesitation, Biegle said, “Naw, the girls don’t like me, not even that one. I’m not very good looking, you know. In fact, I’m ugly. They always said I was uglier than Nemesis, our old hound dog back on the farm. More’s the pity.”

“The army’ll fix that. It’s the gate to popularity. Lots of real friendly girls around every camp. Real patriots, those girls. Father’s name?”

Sergeant Mephostophilis finished at last typing Biegle’s responses on his manual typewriter, and the new recruit signed his name in his own blood at the bottom of the fourth page of the application form. He was in the army now. He had joined the order and company to which Sergeant Mephostophilis himself belonged. There was rejoicing in the back room as recruiter and recruit joined to drink a toast of imitation pink champagne to Our Leader.
THE ENGRAVED CIGARETTE LIGHTER

“But now thou must . . . write a deed of gift with thine own blood.”
—Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus

Biegle disappeared through the door of the Induction Center. Carved in stone over the doorway were the words “Through me is the road to courage: All ye patriots enter here.” Sergeant Mephistophilis returned to his car, a model painted in army green but sporting very large red tail fins; he started the engine, and drove away in quest of further recruits for Our Leader’s army. Dark smoke billowed from the tailpipe. Biegle stood at the desk, papers in hand, waiting for a heroic future.

But there were more questions. When all the answers were provided, no facet of Biegle’s life was unknown to his interrogators. Then a lieutenant asked a routine question: “Are you a conscientious objector?”

“Huh? What did you say?” Biegle queried.
“Are you a conscientious objector?”
“Conscious objector? What’s that?”
“That means,” the patient voice explained, “do you belong to any organization that is so foolish as to disbelieve in war?”
“I want to fight for my country. I’m proud of my country, and I resent that treasonous question,” Biegle responded.

Then he was handed a paper with writing on it, and a faceless lieutenant said, “This is the Attorney General’s list of Subversive Organizations in Atlantis. Read it carefully.”
“Read? Read this?” Biegle said.
“Yes, read it carefully. If you have ever been a member of any of the aforementioned, named, or listed organizations, please put a check by it.”

Biegle’s eye caught some words near the bottom of the sheet: The Society for Support to Bedelsky (SSB). Now, we all know that Ivan Bedelsky was a notorious traitor who advocated appeasement twenty years ago when he was a candidate for President and then was hanged, but Biegle misread, imagining that he was seeing his own
name on the sheet. He put a check by SSB. That would satisfy the
lieutenant, he thought.

The lieutenant spoke to the potential recruits in flat,
expressionless tones. “How many of you have belonged to one of these
organizations aforementioned, listed, or named? Raise your hand,
please.”

Biegle’s hand shot up. He looked around, and, seeing that he
was alone in his response, was very proud. Certainly his army career
was assured.

“You wait here. The rest of you can write in this here square
the word No or Not to my knowledge. Do it now.” To Biegle he said,
when the others had left the room, “What organization aforementioned,
listed, or named is it that you belong to, belonged to, or plan to belong
to?”

“This one,” said Biegle, pointing with pride to SSB.
“Are you sure?”
“Yes, absolutely.”
“When were you born?”
“My pa says I was born May nineteenth, but my ma says it was
the seventeenth.”
“No! I mean, how old are you?”
“Nineteen.”
“Boy, you sure were a promiscuous baby. There hasn’t been
any SSB for nineteen years and six months. At least, that’s the time
Our Leader took the traitors in hand and suppressed the organization
aforesaid.”

Biegle stared directly but blankly at the lieutenant. “Doesn’t it
say, isn’t my name Biegle, B-i-e-g-l-e?”
“You ought to know, buddy.”
“When I see my name on a list, don’t you think I should speak
up?”
“Hell, no, I don’t think so at all. You’d better write No in the
square if you think Our Leader is going to want you. He doesn’t like
traitors in the army.”
“How do you spell it?”
“N-o, you numbskull.”
“Maybe you better write it for me.” Biegle was panicked.
The lieutenant quickly wrote Not to my knowledge in the blank
space, and ordered Biegle to come with him. Our young hero was
ushered into another room, a large room with a large portrait of Our
Leader looking down larger than life from the wall. Here Biegle was told that once more he would need to sign his name to papers of enlistment. He took the pen in his hand, stabbed the paper with it, and after two strokes broke the point.

“Don’t you have a pencil?” Biegle asked.
“You got to use ink,” the lieutenant said, beginning to shout.
In large letters Biegle signed his name at the bottom of each of three sheets:

```
Rut Biegle Beigle
```

“Watch this one,” said the faceless lieutenant with the expressionless voice. “He’s got traitorous leanings. I can see it in his eyes. They’re shifty. And did you see his foot?”

As the volunteer soldiers were being marched to the basement of the Induction Center, Biegle hobbled along at the end of the line, his left foot still bare and swollen. An orderly dodged out from behind a partition, swore at them, and ordered them to strip off their clothing, except for their shorts. Biegle, ashamed of his dirty woolen long underwear, peeled off all his clothes.

“Get your shorts on,” the orderly shouted.
“I don’t have any,” Biegle shouted in return.
They were all standing in a line with their heels against a yellow line on the floor. The doctor walked down the line, cast his eyes over the young men, and picked some of them for more thorough examination. “You,” he said to Biegle, poking him with his flashlight, “get the works. Our Leader has got to be certain that he gets the best men to fight in his army. It’s our duty to ferret out the best physiques in the country for the front line.” The lecture which followed was on the subject of patriotism, with choice definitions of the term taken from the dictionary of Dr. Johnson, the eighteenth-century lexicographer.

“It’s a small price to pay,” the doctor said, “to serve your country in its armed forces. We believe in doing our best for the land that brought us forth, for the land into which our bodies will be buried when we die, hopefully as heroes and martyrs attempting to protect it. Even if we’re medical men, doctors, our first duty is to help Our Leader in his war effort. If we’re at the front, we do our duty by assisting wounded
soldiers first, so we can get them patched up and fighting again, and then if we have any time left we can give a little first aid to the friendly natives that always seem to turn up at our hospitals. I know. I was out there where the fighting was last time, on the islands. I’ve volunteered for the front again. Maybe we’ll meet there. You men are the greatest the world has ever produced, for you are responding to Our Leader’s call to arms, and your blood will fill the trenches and foxholes so that our lives and our glorious way of life might be preserved forever and ever and ever.” It was a stirring speech, very passionate.

Biegle, being chosen for a more thorough physical examination, had his hearing checked. “Can you hear me now,” the orderly shouted. “Yes,” Biegle whispered in reply. Then there was the eye examination. “Can you see the chart?” “What chart?” asked Biegle, genuinely puzzled. The orderly wrote “20–20” on the sheet which Biegle had handed to him. Someone took some blood from his arm with a needle, and his face turned white. Then the doctor looked down his throat, and he coughed in the doctor’s face. At last, at the end of the thorough examination, the doctor told Biegle that he had flat feet, which would make him ineligible for combat service.

“But I want to fight,” Biegle protested. “Does that mean the army doesn’t want me?”

“No, it just means they won’t send you to the front line. But you can do a great deal for the war effort anyway, wherever they happen to put you. The army needs men to back up its front line troops, you know.”

“But I want to fight. Please don’t say I have flat feet. It’s been my ambition in life. I just wouldn’t feel right if I had to leave the killing to others. Those bastards. . . .”

The doctor stood back in admiration. “What a fine fighting spirit,” he said, with wonderment in his voice.

“Can’t I fight? Are you going to keep me from fighting?”

“You’re not supposed to, if you have flat feet.”

“Please, write down on my papers that I want to fight anyway. Please.”

“Well, if you want it that way. I can be talked into not putting that down on your record.” The doctor winked and held out his hand.

“Please! I’ll give you anything, only. . . .”

“All right, you win. My fee is ten francs.”

“Ten francs! But I never had that kind of money! A security man took everything I had, and it was only seventy-seven centimes.
Please, mister doctor, you don’t mean it.” Biegle was completely broken.

“Well, if you don’t have anything, I guess you can’t squeeze blood out of a turnip. Don’t worry, son; we’ll fix it up so it’s all right. You can send me ten francs out of your first paycheck.” He had noticed that this young man had been recruited by Sergeant Mephostophilis, and he had no desire to disappoint any of Mephostophilis’s boys, especially when they were so anxious to serve Our Leader.

As Biegle was mounting the stairs, the doctor called him back. “I can even do better,” he said, “to assure you a place on the front line. I’ll excuse you from the intelligence test, and enter a score of 75 for you. That’s the best score for a fighting man to have, all the experts say. Now the only thing you must do is to send me an extra five francs from your second paycheck.”

Biegle was elated. What a friend he had found! “Mister doctor,” he said, “you’re the best friend I ever had. Our Leader bless you! When I come back from the war as a hero, I’ll give the credit to you, and maybe Our Leader will let you share my medals.”

With a show of modesty, the doctor said, “Oh, it’s a very small thing to do for the war effort. I must insist on looking forward only to two rewards: seeing that I am able to do service to Atlantis, and receiving the twenty francs, in two installments, remember.”

“Oh, thank you more than words can tell,” Biegle said. “There is one thing yet that you must do, but I assure you no danger is involved. I’ve got to send you to the psychiatrist, but remember that, whatever he says or does, he’s on our side. He’s my boy.”

Others were also waiting to see the psychiatrist. The waiting room was crowded, with men standing around the walls and sitting on the floor. Only two chairs were available, and these were taken by two men who were re-enlisting in the service, for they had occupied them by right of their rank. (Both of the re-enlistees were corporals.) Biegle sat in the corner farthest away from the entrance to the psychiatrist’s office. From there he watched the door open and close, open and close, open and close, as the men were taken into the presence of the wise man. In the center of the floor there was a flag standing, brilliant with its great yellow star which shone as a beacon of patriotism to the recruits who were waiting in the waiting room. At long last Biegle’s name was called, and he was admitted into a vestibule that in turn led into the psychiatrist’s office.
The psychiatrist, in a white coat and smoking a strangely curved pipe, was sitting before a great desk of polished oak. No papers were on the desk, and in every way the office was an example of utmost neatness. On the wall was a portrait of Harry the Hare.

“Sit down,” he ordered Biegle. “I must finish this chapter.” He reached into the top drawer of his desk and drew out a book. He’s studying, Biegle thought; it must be very hard work to keep up in one’s speciality when one is an army psychiatrist.

Dr. Diomedes was reading *Oedipal Dreams: A Beginner’s Manual*, by M. Kammerhoff. When he finished reading the chapter, he turned to Biegle and asked for his papers, which the recruit was holding in his hands. The psychiatrist glanced up and down Biegle’s figure from his uncombed hair to his naked and scabbed foot. “Now,” he said, “if you were on a desert island with nobody but your mother and sister, whom would you sleep with.”

“I don’t have a sister,” Biegle insisted.
“Well, say you did.”
“But I don’t.”
“Well, then, do you have a brother?”
“No.”
“What about your mother? If you were alone on a desert island with her, and there was nobody else there, nobody around, understand... Wouldn’t you sleep with her?”
“I always used to sleep with my mom when I was little, but then when I was five she told me I was too big.”

The psychiatrist laughed and said, “You’ve got a great deal to learn, don’t you?”
“Well, I suppose I do, if I’m going to learn to fight against those bastards over there.”
“But have you ever slept with a woman? I don’t mean when you were a little brat, but now, now that you’re all grown up and mature physically. Have you ever...”
“Uh, yes,” Biegle interrupted. “Night before last. That what you mean by sleep with a woman?”
“Yes, now you are talking.”
“Yes.”
“You know, then, precisely what I mean.”
“Yes.”
“In the light of this terminology which you now are able to comprehend with exactitude, what answer do you wish to give to
the first question that I asked you upon your entrance into this room?"

“What question?”
“I said, if you were alone on a desert island. . . .”
“What’s a desert island?”
“You don’t know?”
“No. Is it like ice cream?”
“An island is a small piece of land projected from the sea which completely surrounds it. If it is a desert island, the climate is hot and dry, so it’s best not to wear any clothes there. Unless there are flies and mosquitoes. Or if you have to fight a war there, like Our Leader did before the invasion.”
“Oh.”
“Now, don’t interrupt. If you were on a desert island, would you sleep with your mother?”
“No.”
“Why, you idiot, nobody would be looking.”
“She wouldn’t let me. She’d say I was too big and grown up.”
“But,” a note of exasperation creeping into his voice, “nobody would know about it.”

“Look here,” Biegle exclaimed, “why do you want me to sleep with my mother anyway?”

“Our Leader bless you!” Dr. Diomedes exclaimed. “That’s exactly the answer that’s given in the book. I’ll put down the very best recommendation for you, my lad, and I wish you the best of luck as you go forth to defend our country on the Continent. Let me shake your hand. I am proud to have had the honor of examining you.”

Dr. Diomedes squeezed Biegle’s hand very hard, then personally ushered him into the vestibule and through the door which opened upon a marked path leading across a patio to another entrance. Engraved over this entrance were the words “RECEIVE THE HEROIC HOPE, ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE.” Inside, a lady volunteer was penning carnations on the breasts of all the volunteer soldiers who were about to make a pact with their government.

The oath of allegiance was explicated by the same lieutenant who had previously also explained the List of Subversive Organizations. “The oath which you are about to take is a very serious thing, for after you have taken this step you will be in the army officially and legally. Once you have taken the step, you will be subject to military law and military discipline, both of which have their source
in Our Leader and descend right down the Chain of Command to you. The oath will be administered by Captain Charon, so when he gets here you will line up on the yellow lines and stand at attention.”

They waited. Waited. Perhaps it was about an hour later when Captain Charon entered to administer the oath. He was a white-haired man who called out, as soon as he entered the room, “All hail, recruits, I have come to give you the oath which will transform you into soldiers in the service of your country. Hold up your left hand, everyone.”

Everyone raised his left hand. Biegle’s arm became tired, but he held it up heroically while he repeated the oath after the captain. Then his name was called out, and he made one step forward, left foot first. The sergeant stopped, looked at Biegle, and said, “You’re in the army now, Private Biegle.”

When all the recruits except one recalcitrant draftee had stepped forward, Captain Charon said, “Congratulations, men. Well, now that you’re in the army, how does it feel?”

Biegle shouted with a great shout of joy, and the others, all but one, joined their shout with his. They had responded to their Leader’s call to duty, and they were on their way to defend the high ideals of their blessed country. Now, what do you suppose happened to the recalcitrant man? He was led into a back room by a man in an SOS uniform, and you can guess the rest.

Our hero, Biegle, however, has now taken his place in the ranks of Our Leader’s army whose task it is to defend the borders of Atlantis against all incursions or subversions by the enemy. He has been assigned a serial number F 00131313: he is now Private Biegle, a soldier who marches forth out of the Induction Center toward a NEW LIFE.

That night Biegle and the other newly inducted soldiers slept at the posh Acheron Hotel, located at the side of the river of the same name; then, the next day they were herded into a bus for the long trip down to Camp Inferno. Biegle, who previously had never been more than a hundred miles from home, was riding on a bus which was descending, descending toward the camp where he would receive his training in preparation for battle. He was excited. “I’ve never had so much fun,” he confided to the young man sitting beside him. The day, which had begun with the sun rising in a cool blue sky, began to be oppressive. The bus hurtled along the two-lane highway through two or three showers, always coming out of the rain into a muggy and
unpleasant afternoon.

“It’s going to be a hot summer for us,” someone observed.

“The hot summer will be training ground for you, the bus driver confirmed, grinning as he wiped the sweat from his brow with his hand.

Training ground. Yes! Biegle knew it would be training ground in preparation for the infested jungle warfare which lay ahead. How heroic everything would be! Army life, he knew, was heroic, a great life which always culminated in medals, fun, and honor.

The bus at last drove through the gates of the basic infantry training camp, and stopped at the Reception Center where everyone disembarked. Biegle had been sleeping, but when awakened he shouted, “We’re here! Horra-a-ay!” The time was precisely midnight.

There were the checking-in exercises, which lasted until three in the morning, and then the recruits were allowed to find their way to bunks without sheets where they slept until they were awakened, at 5 a.m.

Private Biegle, proudly arrayed in new army clothing, spent two days taking tests at the Reception Center. On his record card, after the code for each examination, was stamped “UNSAT.” At the end of the second day of tests and dinner in the consolidated mess hall, the recruits were lined up in ranks in front of the shipping office. A sergeant spoke to the men: “Tomorrow you’re going to be shipped out of here. Most of you are going up the hill. A few of you are going to knucklehead school soon’s we can get rid of you, you clowns. But right now I need two volunteers.”

Private Biegle shouted, “Right here!” He was waving his arm.

When the sergeant had procured the other volunteer, he told the two men that they must find a pick and shovel in the supply room. “For the love of Our Leader, get them and start digging by the door. I want a drainage ditch from there all the way to the mess hall. Let’s go, fellows, you clowns.”

Private Biegle and his somewhat less enthusiastic helper checked the tools out from the supply room, then began working, digging in the hard, dry earth. With the spectacle before their eyes of Biegle and his companion sweating in the warm evening air, the other recruits hardly dared to move as they stood at attention.

“You there,” the sergeant barked, pointing to a recruit in the back row; “you there, why do you look so sad, fellow?”

The recruit squirmed, glumly shook his head, unwilling to
admit he was mentally and physically exhausted.

“All of you look at him. There’s a lesson for you. *Laugh and the world laughs with you.* Laugh...”

The victim tried very feebly to smile, then even tried to laugh.

“Now what’s the matter?” the sergeant demanded. “You laughing at me, you clown? I don’t like to be laughed at. Don’t forget it... Come here!”

Breaking ranks, the recruit stepped forward.

“Naw, I don’t want you. You’re too weak and puny.” Instead, he brought forward a tall, handsome fellow from the front row and took him to the steps of the shipping office.

“Where you from?”

“I’m from Eden,” he answered.

“Eden? That’s a hell of a place for a clown like you to be from. I’ll bet your daddy made you behave like as if you were supposed to be perfect. No booze, no girls. Well, you’re in the army now, private. What’re you here for, handsome? You want to fight?”

“Well, I want to fight...”


“I couldn’t,” came the polite reply. “It would be disrespectful.”

“You damn right it would. I’d see that you got your ass court-martialed if you did. Do you see this brush?”

“Yes.”

“You can scrub the area with it. All this space here by the shipping office. Go and get soap and water, and get to work. The rest of you are dismissed. Go get drunk.”

The handsome soldier was scrubbing the tarred surface of the area by the shipping office, while Biegle and the other soldier worked, sweating, to dig the drainage ditch. When the sergeant returned, the clock inside the building indicated that the time was approximately 9:30 p.m., precision not being that time-instrument’s specialty. First, the sergeant ordered the young man to stop scrubbing the area. Then he stood for a while, lit a cigarette, and watched the progress that Biegle and his friend were making. “And how are you doing, do you think?” he mumbled.

“Real good,” Biegle said, “only thirty feet left.”

“Yah, that’s good enough. You can start filling it in now.”

“Fill it in?” Biegle asked.

“You’re not supposed to ask questions. Hurry up or I’ll have
you digging all night. You want somebody to fall over this and break their leg?"

The next morning the recruits were given haircuts. Each recruit paid one franc to have his head shaved. Private Biegle was standing next in the line, waiting for the barber, when the sergeant walked up to him and ran his fingers through his unwashed, greasy, wind-blown hair. “Geez, ain’t you pretty,” he said, “just like the nicest little girl.”

Private Biegle, who knew that his long hair was unmilitary, was nevertheless offended. “My pa didn’t happen to give me a haircut before I came. Anyway, it’s all coming off in a few minutes.”

“Oh, a daddy’s little girl, eh? Ay, boys, better watch this one; she’s joining the women’s corps, isn’t she?”

That same afternoon Biegle was taken to the knucklehead school, which was designed to help those otherwise unfit for army service to make themselves useful to their country. The whole program was very radical and was entirely the brainchild of Our Leader, who always described himself as the friend of the poor and downtrodden. Bright young men like Biegle who had never had ideal educational or cultural opportunities were taken in and were taught the skills necessary for the soldier in a modern mechanized army. According to Our Leader, everyone ought to have equal opportunity to serve the country on the battlefield.

Sergeant Farinata, with nineteen years of experience in the army, believed that one should start from the beginning. “This,” he said, “is how you make your bunk.”

Biegle attended his first class at the Deficiency Rectifying Center (DRC). Each of the students was assigned a seat, and Sergeant Farinata watched them until the moment when their teacher entered the room, at which time everyone stood up and saluted the officer.

“From now on,” the teacher insisted, “I will not tolerate one single bit of nonsense from you crapheads. You’re here for one purpose, and that purpose alone, which is to learn to read and write. Remember this: you’ve got to pass those entrance examinations if you are going to stay in the army. Our Leader likes knuckleheads, but he wants them to shape up, because that’s what’s needed if we’re going to win this war. Everybody must shape up, whether you crapheads like it or not.”

A hand was raised already. “Very good. That’s the kind of enthusiasm I like to see,” he said. “What’s your question.”

“Excuse me, but what’s your name?”

27
“Impertinent craphead! We aren’t having you come here just to learn how to name things, or me either. Okay, so you want to know. I am the producer of this dog and pony show. I am Captain Cavalcante.”

The lesson began. “I usually start by testing your knowledge of a few simple things,” the captain said. “First, who was our first Leader in this great land of Atlantis?”

No one volunteered.

“What do you think?” he asked a student in the front row.

“I don’t know.”

“Think hard now.”

“Was it Harley St. John.”

“No, a good try, but wrong, wrong, wrong. What do you think?” a second student was asked.

After a long and embarrassing pause, he tried, “Ian Jay Westnedge?”

Biegle’s hand shot into the air. “That’s not right!” he shouted.

“That’s wrong!”

“Okay,” the teacher nodded, “but who do you think it was?”

Proudly answering, Biegle spoke. “Leon P. Trotsky.”

A queer look crossed the captain’s face. “Have you had a security check?” he asked.

“No,” said Biegle, pulling out his wallet. “This is the first money I ever got from the government, and I got paid in cash, not a check.”

“What?”

“I mean, I don’t understand what you are talking about, sir. I say that the first Leader...”

“Shut up, you craphead,” the teacher demanded, turning to the class again. “Who was the first Leader of Atlantis?”

Biegle raised his hand again, and did not wait for recognition by the teacher before speaking. “Don’t you have a short memory?” Everyone laughed, except Captain Cavalcante. “You don’t remember who it was?”

“I know, but you don’t.”

“But I told you who it was. Don’t you believe me?”

“No,” he said in exasperation. “I don’t believe you.”

“If you don’t believe us, how can we be expected to believe what you say?”

“Because I’ve got the authority, craphead. If I say black is
white, you better believe that this blackboard is white, do you hear? The cover of this book is white, do you hear? You got no damn reason to think in this army, and you sure as hell better not start that nonsense now. If I tell you that you’re sitting in an airship circling the earth at eighteen hundred miles an hour, where are you now?”

“In an airship, circling the earth at eighteen hundred miles an hour,” they all chimed.

“That’s better. We don’t want any of this individual stuff here. When you’re in the army, you learn to obey orders no questions asked. Class dismissed.”

The students made tremendous progress under their teacher, who had only recently received the honor of a commendation from Our Leader, followed by a promotion, to major. Major Cavalcante was very pleased when, one day, he saw Biegle reading a paperback copy of *Oedipal Dreams*.

The time for examinations approached, and the eager young men were concentrating on a review of all they had learned. With an almost kindly look on his face, Major Cavalcante turned to Biegle and said, “I know that you think you know who was the first Leader of our wonderful land, but tomorrow I am ordering you to answer as I say. When they ask you who was the first Leader of Atlantis, you’ve got to answer *Windsor George III*. Have you got that?”

“Yes, sir. Windsor George III. Right, I have it, sir.”

The teacher was inspired with new confidence in his pupil, and even now he suspected that the young lad might achieve greatness in his lifetime.

They sat at their desks puzzling over the questions. The examinations were very difficult, but the future of all those who had enrolled at the DRC was assured. Biegle and his classmates knew that their destiny was taking them in hand, leading them into the heroic future. They marked the answers on the sheets provided for that purpose with their stubby little pencils, and when they had finished all of them radiated confidence. Biegle shyly looked up at the picture of Our Leader on the wall between the windows, and he smiled.

The very next day the students were standing in ranks in front of their barracks. The name of each student was called out, and a slip of paper was handed to him.

“Biegle!”

“Right here!” he answered.

As he returned to his place in the ranks, he looked down at the
Graduation was, indeed, part of a long tradition at the DRC, or so the pupils at the school were told. Major Cavalcante, who believed so passionately in the doctrine of equal opportunity, was determined that there should be no failures at his school. After all, Our Leader had himself personally inspected the site of the school, and had written a glowing letter of commendation for Cavalcante. Our Leader is one who likes to get results, and is especially proud of programs that bring instant results and have one-hundred percent success rates. He was especially impressed by Major Cavalcante and his work with those members of the military that otherwise would not be able to live up to their potential in the service of their country. Major Cavalcante took all of this quite seriously, of course, and at graduation time was to be seen in his office, laboring quite late into the night to enter passing grades on all examinations for all his students. It was a matter of personal pride as well as military honor. There could be no failures. Unsatisfactory scores were miraculously transformed into passing grades by the simple process which the major called “upward adjustment.” There could be no failures.

Sergeant Farinata marched the graduates up the hill to enroll them in the basic infantry training course. The company clerk took
Biegle’s name, then sent him out to join the trainees who were seated in the dust around a lecture stand. The company commander, Captain Bertrand de Born, was addressing the men: “You have shown a good spirit,” he said. “Keep it up. If you do a thing, do it right. Then I know that we will get along very well.”

“Attention!” a sergeant shouted.

The men scrambled to their feet, and stood at stiff attention until the captain was out of their sight. The company executive office stepped to the lecture stand. “At ease,” he snapped.

The sergeant charged in. “Sit down!” he screamed, and the recruits fell into the dirt.

“You fellows haven’t shown me anything,” Lieutenant Vitalianus said. He waited for a moment while this momentous statement penetrated the minds of the listeners. “You think you’re so damn civilized and all that. Them barracks were like a pigsty this morning. Look, you don’t have your mothers to wipe your noses out here. Sacrement!” he swore. “You’re in the army, buddy, and what I say goes. If I say, Clean up them barracks, you better believe what I say. If I say, Eat dirt, you pick it up and eat it. Come on, you heard what I said, Eat dirt. That’s better. Now you know what I mean. If things aren’t shaping up tomorrow, I’ll have your ass. I’ll have every man jack of you scrubbing all night. By the forehead of Our Leader, I’ll make your life so miserable that you won’t want to live. You’ll curse the day you were born. Do you hear that? Oh, so you think I’m a son of a bitch, and the company commander is a swell guy, but you better remember that when I say something, I’m god.”

The field first sergeant, Mosca, called the men to attention and continued the lecture. “You heard what the lieutenant said. You get back in them barracks and clean them up. I don’t want to see one man going to the PX tonight, and if’n I do, by Lucifer and Satan, I’ll have him on KP and every detail I can think of.”

When the company was dismissed, a shout went up: it was the sound of animals released from their cages into a larger captivity.

“Biegle,” said Sergeant Mosca, “that there barracks is yours. Get your duffel bag and get up there to the second floor. Your platoon sergeant is Corporal Guerra. You’ll find he’s a great hand at whipping new recruits like you into shape.”

“Thanks, sarge,” Biegle said. “You know, I’m really anxious for the training to start. Does it really start tomorrow?”

“That’s right, boy. Let’s see. Your name starts with a B,
Biegle. I’ll bet that puts you in the first squad. Your squad leader will be Private Belial. Get in there and report now before I count ten, or I’ll have you do seventy-five push-ups. One, two, three, four . . . .”

As he crashed into the barracks, Biegle’s body struck another soldier, who fell across the unmade bunk by the doorway. “Look here,” the voice said, “you better watch out, and I won’t take any truck like that again. What’s your name?”

“Biegle.”

“That means you’re assigned to my squad. Set down your bag right there and show me how well you can do a hundred push-ups. Hurry up.”

Biegle, who was given no opportunity to protest, was forced down upon the rough wooden barracks floor where he began doing the push-ups. After forty-nine, he began to weaken, but he felt a spiked boot nudge him. With renewed energy, he labored through another twenty-three, and his arms failed him. The boot struck him squarely in the groin. He shouted in pain.

“Carry this baby up to his bunk,” squad leader Private Belial said. “The bastard should be court-martialed for disobeying orders. Next time, you hear me, you bastard, you better obey what I tell you, no questions asked.”

“Next time, kick him once for me too,” Corporal Guerra chimed. “And if he doesn’t get up in time to pick up his rifle, I’ll rifle him.”

Later, Biegle, resting on his bunk, was just beginning a conversation with the man assigned to the next bunk. “We get real guns this afternoon.”

“Sure,” said Private Slink. “Look, you won’t be so happy to get that son of a bitching thing. You can’t hardly clean them things. You get one spot of rust on the son of a bitching barrel, and you’ve had it.”

“How soon do you think they’ll let us really shoot it?”

“Too damn soon, ’cause when you shoot it you got to clean it every day for three son of a bitching days. And don’t let them ever catch you calling it a gun, because it ain’t a gun, it’s a piece.”

“It isn’t a gun?”

“It’s a piece, a rifle.”

“Oh.”

A whistle blew, calling everyone from the barracks into a formation in ranks. Someone pushed Biegle into the right platoon and the right squad, but he was unable to snap to attention with sufficient
speed. “Hey, you half-assed trooper, snap it up there,” the voice of
Sergeant Mosca thundered.

“Who, me?” said Biegle, at once realizing that he should not
have spoken.

“Yah, you dumb son of a bitch. When you come to attention,
next time don’t slouch like a civilian, hear?”

Then two straggling soldiers came running from the barracks.
“What the hell makes you so damn slow?” Sergeant Mosca demanded.
“Everyone get back into those barracks, and when I blow the whistle
let’s see how fast you can get out here.”

The whistle blew again, the soldiers ran from the barracks, and
the sergeant once again complained that their movements were too
slow. But he allowed them to stand in ranks this time, at attention, for
nearly twenty minutes in the hot, damp afternoon. The sun was not
shining. They had not seen the sun since early that morning. Nor would
they see the sun until weeks later. But the humidity was oppressive,
and their uniforms were quickly wet with sweat.

The first platoon was receiving its rifles while the others
continued to stand at attention in their formation. Their rifles in hand,
the first squad of the first platoon gathered at the side of the supply
room.

“Biegle,” said Private Slink, “I got to go to the latrine. Would
you hold my piece for me while I’m gone?” He shoved the gun into
Biegle’s hand.

Proudly Biegle stood, in each hand a rifle resting at order arms
on the ground. He was a soldier standing majestically with weapons.

Captain de Born was skirting the group on one of his walks,
and a recruit called, “Attention!” Everyone snapped to attention;
everyone except Biegle saluted. The captain marched up to Biegle. “Is
your arm broken?” he asked.

“No, sir,” said Biegle, “but I got both my hands full.”

“Then why didn’t you salute?”

“I don’t know, sir. I suppose because I had both my hands
full.”

“You’d better shape up, soldier. What’s your name?”

“Biegle, sir.”

“Tomorrow you report for KP. Maybe you will learn to salute
when you see an officer of Our Leader’s army.” As he turned away, he
slapped his stick across Biegle’s hand. A short distance away, he
stopped to talk with his executive officer. The soldiers saw them
talking and laughing and pointing toward Biegle, then Lieutenant Vitalianus walked away, circling about and finally approaching the group of soldiers.

“Attention!” Biegle called, automatically lifting his right hand in salute; simultaneously one of the guns fell to the ground.

“You!” the lieutenant called. “Come here.”

Biegle picked up the rifle and marched to where the lieutenant stood. “Who told you to salute when both your hands were full?”

“The captain, sir.”

“That’s a lie. Did he tell you it was okay to drop a rifle? Did he?”

“No, sir.”

“Do you know if you drop a rifle it’s a court-martial offense?”

“No, sir.”

“You’ll bust the damn thing, that’s why. You don’t think too fast, do you?”

“No, sir.”

“Okay, but we’ll sharpen you up a bit. You report to the mess hall in the morning.”

“Yes, sir.”

Private Slink returned, took his rifle without bothering to say “thank you,” and exclaimed, “This son of a bitching place.”

“I don’t want to do anything wrong,” said Biegle. “I joined so I could help defend our country, and I mean to do so. I mean to do everything as well as I possibly can.”

Private Slink laughed and spit on the ground.

Early the next morning Biegle was awakened by the CQ, who rudely tipped over his bunk and informed him that he was late for KP. Therefore when Biegle arrived at the mess hall, he was given the least desirable job of all, washing pots and pans. A great heap of them awaited him, and they were encrusted, burned, and rusty. The callouses on his hands came off; his skin became wrinkled and red from the harsh soap used in the water.

“All right, Mrs. Biegle, get to work,” the mess sergeant said. “We ain’t got all day.”

For Biegle, there was no break for breakfast, because he had come to the mess hall too late to dine with the other KPs. Naturally, he was voraciously hungry, and the platter of fruit sorely tempted him from the counter where it was ready for the officers who stopped in for coffee in the mess hall every morning. Impelled by hunger, Biegle
reached toward the counter and plucked one of the grapes from one of
the bunches on the platter. He plunged the grape into his mouth. The
cook spotted him.

“Hey!” roared the cook.

Biegle retreated to his pots and pans.

Standing over him, the cook asked, “What’re you trying to do?
Steal food? Yah, I’ll teach you to steal food in my mess hall. Yah, you
bet. You bloody right.”

“I didn’t mean it,” Biegle wimpered.

“You didn’t mean to do it? When why you do it? You know
stealing is a court martial offense? Stealing from the government! I
catch you stealing again, I’ll have your ass. Did you hear that, I’ll have
your ass.”

The men were filing into the mess hall for their noon meal.
Biegle was given the task of handing them their silverware as they
entered; however, after two or three men had stepped up to the line, the
cook ordered him to return to his pots and pans. “You get going, get
down to your tables,” he told them men. “You don’t need no knives and
forks to eat with. What you got hands for? You eat with them hands.
Oh, you think you want to play civilized, eh? You ain’t supposed to be
civilized here, man. You’re a soldier, and you got hands. What do you
think the cave men did? And what about dogs and cats and cows? Do
you see them eating with knives and forks? We’ll teach you, we’ll
teach you.”

Three of the recruits walked away, turned around the corner,
and entered the orderly room where the company commander was
standing in conversation with Sergeant Mosca. The sergeant spoke up
first. “What do you want? Get in there and eat; we will be back at the
training ground in half an hour.”

“Sergeant,” said Private Shadow, “they’re not giving us any
forks and knives to eat with. It just isn’t decent.”

“What’d I say? You get in there. You think you’re kings or
Prince Charming or Emily Post or something? Soldiers are fighting
animals, that’s what they are, and I want you to act like animals. You
see,” he said, turned to the company commander, “what we’ve got to
put up with? Men who still think they’re civilized. I reckon we’ll need
to order a carload of dog food for these three, eh?”

In silence they returned to the mess hall, arriving at the
moment when the others were being castigated for the carelessness
with which they were eating.
The army, of course, places a premium on neatness and cleanliness, both virtues praised most highly by Our Leader. “Biegle,” said Sergeant Mosca, “is an offender. He has not had a haircut for two weeks, he has not taken a shower since he came up the hill, he has not properly taken care of his clothing. You, Acting Jack Belial, have the task of bringing him into line, and I will give you just three hours to do it.”

Private Belial immediately encountered Biegle with orders to repent: his vices were too evident. With the voice of justice issuing from his mouth, Belial thundered, “When did you last take a shower?”

“A shower?”

“A shower, damn it. You know bloody well what the hell I mean.”

“I don’t know,” Biegle answered vaguely. For a moment Belial stopped, then he whipped the bayonet from its case. “You don’t know?” he mocked.

“No, sir.”

“Why not?” He was bringing the bayonet closer and closer to Biegle’s throat.

“Sir, I don’t like going out in the rain and getting wet. Is that a court-martial offense too?”

“Cut the crap. You get right in there,” he said, pointing and forcing Biegle along before him into the shower room. The young recruit tripped at the doorway, and the knife slashed, lightly cutting through the flesh on Biegle’s cheek. Then he shoved Biegle downward, and kicked him in the chest with his spiked boot. When the body of Biegle seemed inert, he turned the cold shower on him and left him to awaken later. “That will teach you, you stupid son of a bitch,” he muttered as he walked away.

Through the strenuous routine of basic infantry training, Biegle’s spirits never flagged. Every morning he arose from his bunk with eagerness, anticipating the heroic activities of that day. Even when his hands became inflamed and swollen from KP, he did not complain but stoically went through the motions which were demanded of him. While others were lamenting their military condition, Biegle was the perfect example of fortitude and all the other army virtues. Yet his hands did give him difficulty, and at last he was forced to admit defeat. He had not slept in the night; his groans had awakened all the others in his platoon. “Why don’t you go on sick call?” a sleepy voice mumbled in the night.
“It isn’t a very brave thing to do,” he answered. I want to do the very best that I can for my country and for Our Leader. Besides, I really like the army. It’s the most exciting part of my life till now. Of course, I expect that it will be even more exciting once I get to the front, but I sure don’t want to miss any training that would reduce my combat effectiveness when they let me loose at those enemy troops, the bastards, over there.” All the members of Biegle’s platoon noted something grand about his patriotic response to the useful training that he was receiving at Camp Inferno.

He waiting in line at the dispensary.

“Have you ever been on sick call before?” the sergeant barked.

“No!”

The sergeant rolled a form into his manual typewriter, and, hunt and peck, he typed Biegle’s name and serial number from the sick slip. “Age?” he asked.

“Nineteen.”

“Have a seat there, soldier. The captain will be here around eight o’clock, and he’ll call you into the treatment room. When you go in there, have your hands sticking out in front of you, so he can see what’s wrong with you.”

The sergeant warned everyone: “The captain doesn’t like waiting around, so when you go in there you have the part ready for him to see. If you got a sore foot, have your boot off. If it’s your penis, you know what you’ve got to do.”

Biegle waited, finally falling into a light sleep. He dreamed about horses, about Our Leader whose voice spoke to him in tones of patriotism, and about the woman who had talked to him near the gate a few days ago. She had a curious lisp, and something in him had burned when he looked into her eyes. He felt the same burning as, still half sleeping, he was being ushered into the treatment room.

“Well,” said the captain, glancing at Biegle’s hands, “so we have a case of festered hands, housewife’s hands. Well, I’ll have to put you on quarters for a day or two. Here, you just take one of these pills every four hours. They’re aspirin, the best pain killer the army has in its arsenal. And if you have any more trouble with those hands, you just come hopping back.”

“I don’t hop any more,” Biegle protested; “my foot is perfectly well and sound now.”

“Who asked for your diagnosis?” the doctor said. “I say, take these aspirins, one every four hours, and come back in a week or two.
if you have any trouble.”

“Thank you, sir,” Biegle responded.

On his way back to the barracks, Biegle noted that the clouds were hanging lower in the sky than he had ever seen before. The heat was also even more oppressive, and perspiration ran from his forehead over his eyes. He could hardly see well enough to find his way back to the company. From a distance, General Mammon observed a recruit weaving down the sidewalk and commented, “Send someone out to see that that damn recruit straightens up. There’s nothing I hate to see more than a sloppy soldier.”

The next Sunday was Biegle’s first free day since he had arrived up on the hill. It was also the first day that the recruits were allowed to have passes to go to town. The barracks were deserted. There was no one with whom to talk. Alone. Alone, sitting on the steps in front of the barracks, he made his decision. In town, he knew, there were girls, for the chaplain had said so. What was it that the chaplain had said? “Save your money.” There was something else, however. He could not remember, but it was something about the girls in town. Never mind, he thought, there were girls. He wiped the sweat from his face with a towel, and pulled on his dress uniform in preparation for demanding a pass to town.

The CQ in the orderly room was Corporal Guerra. “You want to go to town, eh?” he said.

“Yes.”

“You better shape up a bit then. What the hell do you want to go to town for?”

“Nobody’s around.”

“You go back to your barracks, shine your brass, and polish your shoes, and I’ll see that you get a pass,” he promised.

Biegle returned to the barracks and did as he was ordered. When he returned, the corporal said, “You want to go to town, eh?”

“Sure do.”

“Who’s the commanding general of this post?”

“I don’t know, I guess it’s General Mammon.”

“Who’s the army Chief-of-Staff?”

“General Tutivillus, sir.”

“Name your first general order.”

“General what?”

“You better find out right bloody quick. Company policy says that no man gets a pass unless he knows his general orders. Do you
“I guess you don’t want me to go to town.”

“If’n you don’t learn your general orders, you’ll never get a pass. You better learn those damn things if you want a pass next week or any week. Right now, I need my latrine cleaned. You take that rag there and get in there and clean it. Hurry up!”

Biegle went to work to clean the latrine for the corporal. Even if he hadn’t got a pass to town, he was able to be useful. Maybe, he resolved, he would go to the chapel; the chaplain might talk about girls again.

The chapel service was not at all what Biegle expected. A different chaplain was officiating at the offertory. “Come before the altar of the Lord,” he was saying, “and give all that you have. Give everything to God who said, Store not up treasures on earth. Give your money to the collection today, and go home to your barracks with happiness and peace of mind in your hearts.”

The organ was electronic, of course, and was an instrument dominated by the swell pedal and characterized by tonal distortion. As the collection plates went up and down, back and forth, the instrument bellowed forth organ transcriptions of gospel songs such as Hallelujah, I am Saved and Don’t Hide Your Light Under a Bushel. Over the music rose the voice of the chaplain again, calling upon his parishioners to give everything to the work of the Chaplain’s Service. “Don’t let me hear anything jingle in the collection,” he said. “Try paper, it won’t jingle in the collection. Five-franc notes are fine, how we all love to give five-franc notes.”

The chaplain then played a solo on the vibraphone.

The title of the sermon was This Is Worse, and took as its text “What shall I do to be saved?”

**THIS IS WORSE**

*When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they ate of an apple that God had told them was off limits to them. They thought they were very smart and grown-up when they ate the apple, but God came to them and said, “You have disobeyed me and my commandments; therefore you must leave this wonderful garden and go out into the desert, where you must plow the sand and grow your food by the sweat of your brow.” So Adam and Eve went out, and they found that the desert was much worse than the garden. Then the time*
came that the souls of Adam and Eve died, and they went down to hell, where Satan had ready for them a smoking and steaming cauldron of boiling pitch.

Adam discovered, and we also will discover, what a terrible thing it is to disobey the will of God. When God speaks to you and tells you that you must do or refrain from doing such-and-such a thing, you must not be disobedient children. You must be good soldiers, because the apostle Paul told us that we must “fight the good fight” while wearing the “whole armor of God.” When your superior officers say to you, “Do that,” or “Do that,” you know it is God speaking to you. In this Christian nation, we know that we are fighting for everything good and decent against Satan and his angels. “It is a small price to pay,” Our Leader said, when you give your life for your country, for God is on the side of this country. God has called you to fight the good fight against the forces of Armageddon and hell.

But you must not forget that your fighting should come out of a heart that is right with God. When you go forth to kill the enemy and its devilish forces, you must go forth with a mind obedient and with a clear conscience, for when soldiers asked Jesus, “What shall we do to be saved?” he told them to obey their masters and fight the good fight of Christian warfare, Luke 3:14. If you are going to be a good soldier you must be born again, saved, in the obedience of Adam before his fall. If you fail, if you fall into sin, you will be plunged into hell with Satan standing over you and torturing you at all times so that you will want to scream and shout, “No, no take me away from here, save me from this horrible place where I am tortured all the time.” It will be too late for obedience then, when you are in hell.

Hell, my friends, is a very real place. It is where the soul goes after it dies and the body is lowered into the grave. There are devils with big pitchforks and spears, and they will be stabbing the ones who were disobedient in this life on earth. There will be the traitor to his country, and the soldier who didn’t really want to attack the ungodly enemy. The cowardly peace-lover will be there, and the draft dodger, as well as the malingerer and the welfare chiseler. In the lowest and hottest part will be the enemy, the soldiers of Satan in the world. They will be placed in burning foxholes filled with pitch, and Satan will stand there pouring molten lead over their heads. This, then, is the place prepared for you, if you don’t repent of your sins and dedicate your lives to his service. Our Leader wants men to fight in his forces.

It therefore behooves us to examine ourselves to see if we have
been truly obedient to Our Leader in heaven, if we have done those things which have been asked of us by Our Leader on earth. I know you haven’t devoted your whole lives, your whole selves, one hundred percent to the cause of true peace and justice, which involves the stamping out of evil in this world. I know some of you have failed to throw all your heart into every task that has been given to you. Have you felt, when on KP or doing pushups, that you would rather be doing something else? That, my friend, is a sin. Even if you think it is no crime to rebell privately against the will of the powers that be, God knows it is a crime. You all have come short of the obedience of God. You all are wicked insofar as you have fallen short of perfect obedience.

You are all sinful men. If you do not change yourselves into willing servants, you are going to the fiery pit. You will be roasted like hotdogs over the sulphur-smelling fire. You will go to hell.

What else do you think the Lord means when he says, “The wages of sin is death”? You will go to hell. Let me give you an example. There was a man, Private Paolo, who came here to this very camp last year. He was a man given much to sin, who had been raised in a family where Sin lived as a member of the family. Now Private Paolo took none of the cadre’s advice to heart, and lived as if he weren’t chosen to be a Christian soldier defending his country’s values and his country’s honor. What do you think? This man, this miserable man, ended up by sneaking away from his company and running away to town. And where do you think they found him? They found that AWOL sinner in bed with a whore. Without thinking for a moment, they shot them both, they were so enraged at the open, palpable, gross sight of sin, black sin. Now do you know where that man is? He is in hell. And you will be in hell if you live as he did, for the wages of sin is death.

If you can imagine now the last trumpet blowing and the souls of all the human race rising up from the graves to be reunited with their bodies! Now you come up before the Judgment Seat, and God says to you, “Private So-and-So, I don’t find your name written in this book. You did not fight my battles, you did not slay my enemies. You accursed, depart from me into everlating hell fire.” Then to his chosen soldiers he will say, “You did not avoid my army, but you fought unto martyrdom for your country’s sake. You wore your Leader’s seal in your foreheads, and now I must take you to the glorious halls of music where we will sing forever the songs of triumph over the enemy.”
Oh, my friends, where will you be on that day, when the trumpet blows and the souls arise from over the four corners of the map? Will you, like a misplaced artillery shell, fall into the sulphuric pit of disobedience? I say to you, you must be born again, obeying your leaders in all manner of things. You must come to the Lord now in forgiveness, and pledge yourself at this altar. Come, one and all, confess your sins at this altar. All those who know that their present path leads to hell, come now and dedicate yourselves, your whole selves, to becoming good soldiers of the cross. Kneel at the altar now, and I will show you the way to perfect peace and contentment.

Many, many soldiers came forward to kneel, and Biegle was among those who confessed the sinfulness of their previous lives. He, who had come seeking to hear more about profane women, now stayed to hear the message of perfect obedience. A man who came to kneel beside him uncovered the way to perfection for him. He would be saved from the heavy wrath of God that hovered over him like a cloud.

“I’m saved!” somebody in the congregation shouted.

“I’m saved!” Biegle echoed in a loud voice.

“Blessed is this day, intoned the chaplain. “Six hundred and twenty-six francs have been given to the Chaplains’ Service, and thirty-nine souls have been saved. Praise the authorities which we worship. Let us close with that great hymn of faith from the Army Hymnal, Kill an Enemy Soldier for Christ Today.”

Rapt in solemn meditation, Biegle traced his steps back to the barracks. All evil thoughts were banished from his mind, and as he saw the company commander out of the corner of his eye, he imagined that he was encircled with a mandorla. Then he thought of hell, that deep and awful place where unclean spirits lashed and battered at the cursed souls of damned men. Yet he knew that he was a weak follower of authority, so he prayed that he would have the strength to resist temptation when it might come, whether it be in the form of a nasty word, the image of a naked woman, or his natural sloth. He would declare war, he decided, against all evil within himself so that he might give himself to the perfection of military obedience.

To keep his mind from unclean things, he picked up a book that he saw lying on one of the bunks. Perhaps it was Shadow who had left it. The book was a religious tract, but it was one that had been smuggled into the country without the permission of Our Leader. Biegle began reading:
The fifth exercise is to see through the eyes of imagination the wholeness of hell, in its depth, breadth, and length. To perceive the great fires which surround the souls in pain. To perceive the odor of the sulphurous smoke, the excrement, and the corruption of the place. To perceive the taste of tears and the bitterness of a lost eternity. To perceive the actual pain of those fires which touch and burn the lost souls. Then obediently let us imagine a discussion with the Lord about those who are lost, and the reasons for their tragedy. . . .

For mark, my little one, how hell is the nurse of death, the heat of all fire, the shadow of heaven and earth, the oblivion of all goodness, the unspeakable pains, the unremovable grief, the dwelling of devils, dragons, spiders, toads, bats, crocodiles, and all manner of venomous creatures, the puddle of sin, the stinking fog ascending from the filthy lake and the unclean river, burning sand, boiling pitch, the everlasting and unquenchable fire. And here will be those who have deserted Christ, who then will desert them. He will turn to them, and say, “You who have neglected to do the Seven Merciful Acts, enter ye now the fiery pit. For I was hungry, and ye fed me not; I was thirsty, and ye gave me not to drink; I was in prison, and ye visited me not; I was sick, and ye did not comfort me; I was poor, and ye did not succor me. . . .”

Biegle put the book down, and thought about these things. Surely the book was false, for the chaplain had given a different account of the Last Judgment. Christ really would ask about one’s soldiership, wouldn’t he? The song echoed in his mind:

*Kill an enemy soldier for Christ today,*
*Then kneel right down and pray*  
*That God give the power and strength*  
*To overcome the devil at length.*

Oh, our wonderful Leader! Biegle lay on the bunk, sinking deeper and deeper into resignation, into the thought that he was part of a divine plan for Atlantis, the nation called of God to do wondrous things.

From force of habit, he turned the knob on the radio, and shortly, when its vacuum tubes had warmed up, the sound filled the barracks. He floated on the sound. He was no longer lying on a bunk, but was resting on the pure, white vibrations of the air around him. He was resting on the way of life which Atlantis had forged out of its past.
and which its national honor had been called upon to defend. An announcer began with a commercial for an automatic hand dishwasher for only four francs and ninety-eight centimes. “Get your automatic hand dishwasher today,” the voice said from the radio. “If you ain’t one hundred percent satisfied, send us back the dishwasher, and we’ll refund your money in full. Send today! Don’t wait! This offer is good for a limited time only. Send your money to Dishwasher, that’s Dishwasher, in care of station KWAR.

“Now for another song hit, The Cow That Went Away. Listen to that nice slow rock beat.”

*The cow went away, ’cause she wouldn’t come back;*  
*Thought she was a-comin’ but the cow went away.*  
*Moo moo moo moo.*

“Ain’t that pretty? That was the Countrie Laddies singing, and I just love that song because it’s simply my favorite. It makes me feel like I belong: don’t you feel that way too? Oh, those wonderful Countrie Laddies, they’re the most inspiring group on the whole globe of ours. I hear they’s been invited to dinner by Our Leader for their wonderful participation in the war effort, building morale and making the troops feel just like they’re home.”

At four o’clock the next morning the men were awakened; they were rushed into reveille formation, long before the rest of the camp was awakened by the sound of cannon and bugle. At 5:45 a.m. they were ready, packs on their backs, to march to the rifle range. Rain was falling lightly as they set forth, marching over the natural stone bridges that cross the foul and muddy river. They marched down through the valley, where they stopped briefly to adjust their ponchos, and trudged onward as the thunder and lightning crashed and flashed overhead.

They were beginning to tire. “You softies,” Corporal Guerra taunted his platoon. “Let’s see you do some double-time.” And he gave the order for them to run, loaded down with rifle and pack while he juggled free at their side. “Get in step, Private Slink,” he ordered. “*Get in step.*” He ran beside him, hitting him with his fist at every step. “Left. Left. Left. Left,” he called. “Biegle, you too: get in step.”

They turned a corner in the road and came through some heavy trees into an open area. “Stay awake,” warned Corporal Guerra. “Right flank, march! Left flank, march! Right flank, march! Left flank, march!” At the second left flank, the ranks seemed to break apart, and
confusion appeared to have made its masterpiece. Corporal Guerra cursed, using the serviceman’s favorite word profusely. The platoon stumbled together in the rain, clashed, fell, and shouted in panic. Only a small remnant was able to pull itself together to keep up the pace which had been set by their leader. Biegle and most of the others ran behind, stumbling along the road after their corporal.

Finally, Corporal Guerra halted, waiting for his stray troops as well as for the other platoons in the company. He stood by a tree, angry and dissatisfied with his green men. Then he ordered the platoon assembled again, and they marched proudly onward with their rifles over their shoulders until they arrived at the rifle range.

Biegle was placed in the pit. It was no longer raining, but the air was hot and humid. The soldiers breathed with difficulty. Biegle’s job was to raise the target so that someone on the firing line could shoot at it; then he was to mark the target with little black discs. “Targets up!” Biegle lifted his target toward the sky. The bullets cracked into the paper-covered cloth of the target above him. A stray piece of lead clanged onto his helmet. He was excited, for the flying lead above him made him think of the battle which he would experience in the future against the enemy. His destiny throbbed in his veins.

Later, Biegle was replaced and sent to the target house to supervise the repair of the targets that were in need of being re-covered with the paper markings. As it turned out, there was little to do except sit there, waiting for work and retaining one’s urine. This was no joke, for the men had not been given time to go to the latrine since five o’clock that morning when the barracks were made off-limits in preparation for inspection. Along the embankment was an outhouse. Biegle looked longingly at it, and hoped that he could wait until the firing stopped so that he might administer to the needs of nature. But the firing did not stop, and he could not wait any longer. The outhouse was only twenty yards away. He jumped from the end of the pit and ran. Bullets whistled over him. He yanked open the outhouse door.

He dashed back to the pit and arrived under cover again safely, despite a certain embarrassment, the sign of his almost successful heroics. A cadreman accosted him. “I had to, I couldn’t wait,” Biegle explained.

“You damn well better know,” said the cadreman, “if you get shot we got to stop everything until the ambulance arrives out here. And I suppose you think everyone won’t be pissing mad if you get
them late for chow. You better wake the blank up, trooper.” But the word was not “blank”; it was the serviceman’s favorite word.

The practice firing extended over three days, and on the fourth they were eager for the opportunity to score for their credit. Biegle’s left eye was black from the recoil of his rifle, and his determination was very great as he lay in the sand under the softly falling rain in order to make his record as a marksman. Yet our hero had not, in the three days of preliminary firing, scored very well. Many of his shots missed the target altogether, and he had never yet struck a single bulls-eye.

Nevertheless, when the fourth day came, Biegle, full of enthusiasm, was confident as he loaded shells into his rifle. His very first shot was a bulls-eye. He was determined to set a record. Actually, he did not break any record, but he did achieve the highest score of any recorded on the fourth day of firing with 237 points out of a possible 250 points.

Biegle received an engraved cigarette lighter as an award for his excellent performance on the rifle range. Only later did he discover that Shadow had surreptitiously aimed several rounds at his target. When there is determination, Biegle said to himself, there always comes aid from above.

However, Biegle’s accomplishments on the rifle range were not entirely glorious, since a disaster soon struck our hero’s fortunes. For Biegle, this occurred on the evening of the fourth day. Those who had achieved qualifying scores on the range were cleaning their rifles, and the other, less fortunate soldiers were policing the range, picking up dropped and discarded rounds of ammunition. Biegle sat on a log alone, working the pieces of his weapon apart and carefully placing them beside him. He wiped each part and placed it on the rag which he had spread out on the ground. Then he opened the can of bore cleaner and poured it down the barrel, which he carefully laid on ground behind him. He picked up each piece of the weapon and inspected it meticulously before assembling it. Finally he reached for the barrel. It was not there. No one had come near him, he believed. He searched about frantically, lifting the log and crawling through the wet sand and grass and feeling with his hands for the lost barrel. The lost was lost. There was nothing he could do but join the ranks, where he stood with his rifle-minus-barrel over his shoulder.

“What the hell happened to your weapon, soldier,” Corporal Guerra demanded.

Biegle explained that the barrel had disappeared almost from
Under his eyes, that it was nowhere to be found. Corporal Guerra and all the platoon searched for the rifle barrel, but the lost could not be found. Captain de Born sauntered into the center of the area which they were scrutinizing. “What seems to be the trouble?” he asked.

“Biegle’s lost his son of a bitching barrel,” Corporal Guerra sneered.

“All man,” the captain stated with deliberation, “who loses a rifle barrel should be court-martialed and sent to the stockade. It is inexcusable.” He turned sharply and, swinging the stick in his hand, walked away.

“But somebody took it,” Biegle insisted. “And it was only the barrel.” He paused. “I didn’t even hear anyone.”

“If you lost it, it’s your fault, and you got to pay the consequences,” Corporal Guerra asserted. “It makes no difference that you didn’t hear anyone behind you.”

The next day Sergeant Mosca pulled Biegle from the ranks. “This man,” he said, “lost his piece. Any man that loses his piece is no damn soldier. You know what we used to do in the old army, not the chicken-shit army of today. In the old army we tied the son of a bitch to a tree, and set ants on him, the kind that bite, and if he hollered we hit him with a rifle butt. That’s what we did. This man lost his piece, but we’re going to be more humane with him. He’s getting company punishment. He’s not going anywhere, he’s not leaving the company area, he’s not going to the PX, he’s not going to run away to the chapel, he’s staying right there, and the old man’s got some real dirty jobs for you. If a toilet plugs up, you’ll be the one to fix it, if a soldier gets drunk and pukes, you’ll clean it up. This will be for one whole week, then after that you better watch your step. You’re bloody lucky the old man didn’t have you court-martialed. You damn well better not goof up after that. You don’t want to go to the stockade, do you?” He seemed to wait for an answer.

“I didn’t mean to lose it, and I still can’t understand what happened to it,” Biegle said.

“Who asked you anything, you son of a slut?” Sergeant Mosca ranted. “You know you’re paying for the blank thing, don’t you? Well, don’t you? It’s coming out of your pay. Understand?”

“I guess it’s only right,” Biegle responded. “After all, it was assigned to me, and I really do want to do my part in the army. I know that Our Leader would not want me to shirk on my duty.”

“By Lucifer and all the devils in hell, you’ll do your part
during the next week! See that pile of bricks? You get yourself a pick from the supply room after chow, and knock all the cement from off them bricks. You damn well better not bust any of them, or you’ll pay for them, ten centimes a brick right out of your pay.”

That night, after chow, the men saw Biegle standing alone with his pick before the pile of bricks. It was an impossible task. The bricks had come from a dismantled chimney, and thus were joined in inseparable union with the cement which clung to them. The bricks broke. At the end of the week, only a pile of rubble remained. But Biegle had never fallen into despair, for he knew that if he did his best with willing soul and mind, he was fulfilling the conditions of obedience.

In the orderly room, while Biegle was working at the futile work to which he was assigned, Captain de Born was reading a treatise on military discipline by General Blotsven, a soldier of the old school who advocated the occasional sacrifice of human life to preserve the tranquility and order of the company or platoon. The captain’s eye caught one sentence: “The soldier must above all things be receptive to discipline.” Yes, the man with the right attitude goes the farthest in the army, he thought. Little did he realize that his thoughts were in fact prophetic, since Biegle, whose attitude approximated the army’s ideal, was destined to be one of the really great heroes of his time.

On the same day that Biegle was taken off company punishment, Corporal Guerra informed his men that a major inspection would be held the very next day. “Them boots will be spit shined,” he chanted, “and those foot lockers will stand up bright and shining.”

There was no sleep that night as the men prepared for the inspection.

Lieutenant Vitalianus was inspecting. Biegle stood stiffly at attention as the lieutenant was approaching his bunk. Inwardly he smiled as the executive officer was going through his tantrum in front of every recruit. He came before Biegle. “Boots not shined,” said the lieutenant. “Bunk not properly made. Soldier’s Guide off center by two inches. Dust on wall locker. Blood on razor. Clothing hangers in wall locker not evenly spaced. Write down those gigs, sergeant. Hum-m-m, needs a haircut too. See if you can shape this soldier up, corporal.”

As the officer moved on to go through the same list of complaints by the next bunk, Sergeant Mosca said to Biegle, “One more gig and we’d have hung you. Soon as the lieutenant gets out of here, you get out there and run to the PX and bring me back a pack of
cigarette papers. I’ll give you five minutes.”

The distance between the barracks and the PX was about half a mile. Biegle ran, then stood in line to purchase the cigarette papers, pulled out his wallet to pay for them, and trotted back to the orderly room. He handed the cigarette papers to Sergeant Mosca, who put them into his pocket without a comment. Nor did he offer to pay for them.

The training schedule said:

TRAINING IN CHEMICAL WARFARE,
GASMASK PRACTICE

And a lecturer was explaining to the men the various kinds of gases which might be used in war either by the enemy or friendly forces. “Nerve gas,” he said, “is especially dangerous. You can’t see or hear anything before it gets to you. then you start out by having a splitting headache, like you’ve never had before. Then you vomit and are so sick you feel like to die, and then you can’t hold your water or feces. Then you die, if you’re lucky. It is a wonderful and effective weapon, but you got to watch out for it.”

Privates Slink and Biegle began to giggle, both of them remembering the way Biegle had run through gunfire to the latrine at the firing range. Biegle then burst out in a great guffaw at the same time that a small spot of moisture appeared on his trousers. “What’s the matter with you two?” the lecturer demanded.

Biegle leaped from his chair and dashed to the latrine.

At that moment someone called, “Attention!” Our Leader himself appeared in his bright uniform on the platform beside the instructor. Everyone saluted and chanted, “Long live Atlantis! Long live Our Leader!”

“I just wanted to drop down to see how things are going,” Our Leader explained, “in one of the most important areas of training for our campaign on the Continent. The battle for freedom against collectivism goes on every day, and I know our boys are willing to use every means at their disposal to achieve victory. Our scientists have labored at our great state university to bring forth a new nerve gas which will be more effective than any that has been available before, and it also has the advantage that it cannot be detected by the enemy troops. At the same time, it is perfectly safe for our own forces. This gas is such a subtle weapon that the enemy will never even know we are using it against them.
“Well, it has been very pleasant talking with you today, and I just want you to know how much I really care for our country’s soldiers. . . .”

Biegle emerged from the latrine. He immediately saw the figure of Our Leader standing before the troops of his company and addressing them. He saluted and marched sharply back to his place among his mates as Our Leader paused in the middle of his speech.

“. . . also I want to say hello to you from my wife, who has not been able to accompany me on this trip. My blessings on all of you!”


As Our Leader’s long black automobile drove back again to General Mammon’s headquarters, the men were being prepared to enter the gas chamber, both with and without gas masks. The exercise was to be realistic, with chlorine gas being used. Biegle and four others entered the chamber without masks, then were told through a loud speaker to hold their breath, and finally to fix their gas masks on their faces. Biegle found that he couldn’t hold his breath any longer, and out of a spirit of heroism refused to compromise: he waited to place his mask onto his face until the order came. The order came too late, after his lungs had filled with the treacherous gas. He burst forth from the gas chamber, coughing behind his mask. Onto the ground he fell, crawling and clutching the earth because it was turning around, around, around. He was sick, deathly sick. His lungs burned. He coughed like a dog barking.

A sergeant from the Chemical-Biological Warfare section was lecturing calmly as Biegle lay coughing on the ground. “I had,” he said, “an old hound dog at home that sounded exactly like that. If he doesn’t sound exactly like my old hound dog! He was a fine dog, but he got old, and I had to shoot him. I really felt bad about that. He was absolutely my favorite hound dog.”

The ambulance came for Biegle. They raised him onto the stretcher and lifted him into the vehicle. The other members of his company saw them drive away toward the post hospital, where they would treat him for burns in his lungs. But, when he had recovered a little, they returned him to his company to continue training, and it was the very next day.

The end of the basic infantry training course was in sight for Biegle and his friends as they set out for a two-week period during which they would bivouac in the field. The company commander had
told them that as soon as the course was completed, some of them would be eligible for the war zone. Morale, therefore, was very high, for the men looked forward to the service they might be rendering for their country in the very near future. Biegle was elated, for he could not see that Fate had planned for him another interlude before the final one. Yet this too would be a time of triumph, though he would not actually become a hero until the final act of the drama.

The area chosen for the camp was rocky, but the men nevertheless set about digging their foxholes and setting up their tents. The cloud which had hung over the camp during the entire time they had been in training now looked more ominous than ever, and shortly rain began to pour down in torrents. Water was running down the hill into the valley where they were attempting to camp, filing the foxholes and washing through the tents. Biegle’s blankets were wet. They wore their raincoats to dinner, but the rain fell so fast into their meat cans that the food was spoiled. Biegle took his bread and meat into his hands, squeezed out the water, and ate it, giving thanks to Our Leader whom he had recently been privileged to see and hear as he returned from the latrine. A few little sacrifices were of no account when one is destined to do great services for the Leader of his country.

Back at the tent which he shared with Private Slink, Biegle said, “This is great. It’s real training for the time when we’ll face the enemy face to face. Now we see as through a glass darkly, but then we will meet them face to face. That’s what the chaplain said last Sunday, comrade. You know, you really ought to go to church on Sunday. We sing the greatest hymns and songs. I still think my favorite is *Kill an Enemy Soldier for Christ Today*. It’s the chaplain’s favorite song too.”

O, the wind and the rain! It was very wet that night in the tent indeed!

The middle of the night was enveloped in total darkness. Biegle, awakened by a sense of urgency, at first grasped his steel helmet, then thought better of it, for he was a conscientious soldier. So he pulled on his wet clothing and forced his feet into his dripping boots. When he unbuttoned the end of the tent, a sheet of rain poured in upon the sleeping body of Private Slink and upon the already wet blankets.

Somewhere, out in the night, there was a guard posted, rifle in hand. There was also a line of engineer tape which led from the company area to the latrine. Biegle peered into the darkness and saw
darkness. Moving across the hill, his feet slipped on the rocks, and the roots of the trees grasped at him. Bushes scratched his face. Once he fell into someone’s tent. The tent-pole broke, and curses greeted him as he hurried onward in his desperation.

At last he found the latrine. He felt something like a thread breaking, and a fierce pain. His scream was deadened by the falling rain. “If you get bit by a Black Widow Spider,” Sergeant Mosca had said, “it won’t hurt you. You think you’re gonna die, but it won’t hurt you.”

Six days later Biegle was sitting on the side of the bed in the hospital ward. His arms and hands were still swollen from the bite of the spider, but he was smoking a cigarette. A nurse with lieutenant’s bars came with an order for Biegle to scrub the floor of the ward. He did, and then he was sick again, lying feverishly in his bed until the next day when, after cleaning the ward once more, he felt somewhat improved. “Exercise will do you good,” the nurse said. “Take these rags down and wash them up for me. Be sure that you get all the stains out.”

He scrubbed conscientiously and ungrudging. After hours of work, and hours of waiting for the rags to dry, he carried them back up the stairs to present them to the nurse. “Take them out,” she commanded, “and burn them.”

Outside the sun was now shining; the pleasant weather for a time stood in complete contrast to the clouds, storms, and rain of the past weeks. Yes, the future is bright, Biegle thought, for we will win this war, the world will be made safe for freedom, and I will be a hero. “Yes,” he gasped, totally absorbed in a feeling of affirmation.

The cloud gathered over the camp again as Biegle was being transferred back to his company. Rain poured down while he waited alone in the barracks, for the men were to return from bivouac that
evening. When they arrived, marching in their fatigues, the clock indicated that it was somewhat past midnight. Dirty, torn, and bleeding they came from the night combat lesson.

“You should have been there, Biegle,” Private Slink said. “It was great. The machine gun was blazing overhead, and we crawled underneath it past simulated shells going off and land mines exploding.” The soldiers laughed, and held up their bleeding arms. “Cut our arms to hell crawling over the son of a bitching rocks.”

The final inspections were held the next week, and faces of recruits radiated confidence as they approached the end of what they had endured.

“We have made a hell for you here in this camp,” General Mammon proclaimed in a speech prepared for their graduation. (It was the same speech which he had delivered at every other graduation ceremony.) “We want you to know that war is hell; therefore, the training for war must be hell. As you have been descending the various stages of your infantry course, I have been watching the progress of all the companies arrayed before me this day. I have been very much heartened to see the wonderful response of the recruits to the world which we have prepared for you here. The world of Camp Inferno is like the great world, only some of you won’t be able to recognize it as such until you reach a level of maturity beyond your present age. I know you will all continue to improve your skills in the manner prescribed.” The general looked down at the ground when he had finished the speech.

The band played Atlantis Will Conquer Forever, and then the general disappeared from the balcony on the headquarters building. The companies marched off, one by one returning to their quarters. Biegle heard the band, in the distance, playing Render unto Caesar, a new march that was an especial favorite at the camp headquarters. He had been invited to guard the barracks while the others had participated in the ceremony which initiated them into regular army duty, fully prepared for whatever tasks that would be required in their army careers.

Biegle’s company stood for the last time before the weather-beaten wooden barracks where they had lived together for a time which now seemed an eternity. One by one, and by groups, as their names were called out by Sergeant Mosca, the men stepped forward to receive their orders. They then disappeared into the barracks to gather their gear before leaving for their new assignments. At last Biegle was
standing alone.

“Biegle,” said Sergeant Mosca, “your orders didn’t come yet. Maybe they don’t know what to do with you.”

With a downcast face Biegle also found his way into the barracks, silently weeping. He was ashamed because, while his friends were preparing for front-line duty, he had been passed over. He was a reject, he feared.

But on the next day Biegle’s orders did come. The other recruits had now all left, when Corporal Guerra came to find him and to bring him to the orderly room. Biegle took the piece of paper into his hands:

1. The following named personnel will report to Camp Western Rock for training as special soldier. Leave Camp Inferno 18 Nov, arrive Camp Western Rock before 2400 hours 20 Nov. Private transport not authorized.
   Pvt Winfred Scott Biegle
   F 00131313

With his duffel bag in hand, Biegle set forth from the barracks. He was somewhat disappointed because he had hoped to do immediate service at the front, but he was resigned to this temporary delay since he knew that when he did arrive at the front he would be a better soldier in the service of his country. He came to a gentle stream that trickles down the slope by camp headquarters, and he followed the narrow walk along its side until he came to the steps which led upward to the railroad station. As he arrived at the ticket window, he looked upward through the skylight at the cloudless sky.
III

THE CAMP CELEBRITY

“With bugle to bent-felde he buskez.”—Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Camp Western Rock was situated at the base of a rock formation that jutted out of the plain. Approximately one-third of the distance from the bottom of the rock formation was the location of the old fortress, which had held out through six months of siege in the war against the natives in the sixteenth century. The fortress was still officially part of the camp and was still used for training. Yet the most fascinating spot on the mountain was, strangely, not the fortress but rather the huge stone gate which stood five hundred feet above it. According to the recent official history of Camp Western Rock, written by Colonel Seyton, the gate, which was called Saint Peter’s Gate in other accounts, was a natural stone formation. However, an archaeological team that visited that area in 1936 uncovered indisputable evidence that Saint Peter’s Gate was hewn from solid rock in the first century B.C.E. by natives who used the location for worship. A monograph, St. Peter’s Gate as a First-Century Indian Stonehenge by team member Alexis Fortwright, had provided the key to the picture writing still preserved on the huge stone tablets set in a circle around the arch, although three of those tablets have since been seriously damaged by practice artillery shelling from the camp below. As Dr. Fortwright demonstrates, the entire mountain and the land which surrounded it were considered holy, being dedicated to “the unknown God who is above all gods.” The military establishment of Atlantis, however, had never felt comfortable about the older history of the mountain, for when the army built its fortress on Western Rock in 1558–61 C.E. it had encountered the most fierce attacks from enraged natives. At the time, the commanding general of the fortress issued a statement denying the sacredness of the place, and in a sense the war with the natives of 1587–91 also was fought to prove that the mountain was by no means a sacred or holy location.

Now, after centuries of civil peace, the army had moved its
camp down the mountain to the plain. Each morning the bugler, Corporal Casella, rose from his bunk under the shadow of the mountain to blow welcome to the new day. Each morning the troops gathered in their ranks, ready for the challenges of a new day. The camp’s tradition was for them to march again up Western Rock, up the steps carved in deep antiquity along the face of the rock to the fortress of gray stone covered with green moss. The descent into the modern world followed a footpath downward from Saint Peter’s Gate, through the medieval fortress, and on to the clean, square lines of the barracks and the headquarters building. The bugle sounded again as the flag of Atlantis burst open to show its brilliant yellow star over the plain. This was the day, and this the happy morn when Biegle would arrive at Camp Western Rock.

The past and the present suddenly came together. The soldiers, wearing the red and green wool uniforms of the early centuries at the fort, took their place among the tan-suited soldiers of the present time on morning dress parade. The words, contemporary usage and archaic dialects from the beginning of the modern era, mixed in the morning air. And even sounds of a yet earlier age drifted among them on that miraculous day.

“The natives will attack not, for our povver hath spoken to them, and thei see that the Imperiall repelleth theyr saluagerie.”
“For flag and country!”
“Swab and reload!”
“Attention!”
“Cavalry, forward!”

Syr Lancelot sayde to hys squyre, who was lighten Bieg’l, “Stond thee bi yonder dore, yf anie mon com to thys doore, cri wyth al thi lunges. Thee sal gret thys mon wyth thi spere, and sey to thys man, ‘In nomen of sir Launcelott, halt, thu sal no furder go’.”
“Yea, syr Launcelot,” quod Bieg’l, “in the gardyn I wayt anon.”

“In the name of Our Leader, forward march!”
“Good Lord, his chest is crushed.”
“Our camp is a camp of hope, for from Camp Western Rock have come soldiers at the forefront of every fight for freedom. Our men have died on all continents, fighting for ideals which our forefathers secured and passed on to us.”
“Right flank, march! Left flank, march!”
“Quene Guinyvere, sal we thus wast away the tyme of nyght?”
Saw the tardy? Thi fragrant bedde ys reddy, and fortuna telleth us that we
mighten nicht tary. Come, mi luv, y\'e nyght taryeth for no mon. I lai
doun mi shild and spere with that I pressed toward the hali sangreal."

"At ease!"
A golden trumpet sounded, answered by Casella’s bugle.
"Bieg’l watcheth. Al ys safe and ioyous."

"The enemy cannot conquer, for our determination is so strong.
Atlantis will conquer forever!"
"Out with your ramrods!"
"Aim at the horses!"
"Mi honnyd qwene, thi hyghest wyssh wyll I graunt, yif yt
costeth me mine lyf."

"It is a small price to pay to preserve the freedom which we
now have. It is a small price to pay. . . ."
"Welcome to Camp Western Rock, Private Biegle,” the
sergeant said. “You’ll find this is a great place.”

"Well, I really wanted to go right to the front, but I guess they
want me to get some more training first, though I hope it won’t be long
before I see action."

"You’ll get some historical perspective first, my friend,” the
sergeant promised, pointing out to him the temporary barracks where
he would stay until assigned to a unit. As Biegle entered the building,
he saw that it was an old wooden structure with sagging floors and that
it was heated by two coal stoves. The air inside was acrid with the
fumes from the coal fires. He set down his duffle bag, and dropped
onto the bunk. Out of his pocket he took the copy of Colonel Seyton’s
History of Camp Western Rock which the sergeant had issued to him.

Not until the next day was Biegle called for his pre-assignment
interviews. “What would you like to do?” asked the personnel clerk.
He answered without hesitation. “Go to the front.”
"I mean, what would you like to do here, while you’re here?"
"It’s my duty, I know, to prepare myself to do war against the
enemy bastards.”

The personnel clerk wrote it down. Then he began questioning
Biegle about his work experience and his interests.

“What sports do you play, do you like to play?”
"War,” quipped Biegle.
"I mean, how about football, baseball, pool, tennis, ping pong,
like that.”
"Since I joined the army, I haven’t had time for that stuff.” He
paused a moment, then added, “I like to draw, though.”

When the personnel officer talked to Biegle, he said, “So you say that you like to draw?”

“Yes.”

“Did you study drawing in school?”

“Sure, I used to draw every day.”

“Hmm. Have you seen this?” The officer handed Biegle a copy of the Western Rock Bugle, the post newspaper.

“No, I haven’t seen it.”

“Well, would you like to take it and look at it?”

Biegle examined the paper carefully.

“Do you think you could draw for that?”

“Gee,” he said, “I’d sure like that.”

The officer placed Biegle behind a desk. “You practice your art,” he said, “while I make out your orders. I think you will enjoy this work which, you realize, is to be in addition to your secret training in military intelligence. Of course, you knew that, didn’t you?”

“I thought so,” Biegle responded, “but I wasn’t exactly sure.”

Later the officer looked at Biegle’s drawings. “I can draw better than that,” he complained.

“Why don’t you take the job yourself?” Biegle asked.

“Oh, too busy, too busy. We here in personnel have so much on our hands. If it weren’t for us, the army would simply collapse. You know, there isn’t a more important job in the whole army. I do think that you ought to be able to draw just a bit better for that job on The Bugle, but I’ve cut your orders, so you’ve got to do the best that you can. You want to do the best that you can, for Our Leader’s sake, don’t you?”

“Yes, sir. I don’t mind a bit sacrificing for Our Leader, if it would help out.”

So Biegle was assigned to The Bugle, and was sent to Corporal Lightborn, the editor, for training. Lightborn, who was short of staff members, immediately put Biegle to work writing stories and creating cartoons.

During the first week, Biegle turned out a vast quantity of stories and cartoons, which the editor really couldn’t understand, so they were printed on the back pages of the Western Rock Bugle where they appeared under the author’s by-line. Thus Biegle’s name appeared in the columns of The Bugle for the first time. His first story dealt with
a plea to the soldiers to re-enlist, a theme which his readers found very novel and original indeed.

RE-ENLIST NOW
FOR THE RAGE,
ALSO BENEFITS

By Pvt Winfred Scott Biegle

Menne with intelligence and brains are re-enlisting for the benefits of our arm of the service. New recruits are coming every day for what we give them in the army. It is great to be a soldier!

Join now for the benefits! Our Leader needs good young men for his protection against the enemy for our freedom is at stake. We don’t want to lose the war, it is terrible to have to fight, but we must fight if freedom is not to die. If we lose we all will be killed. Our mothers will have to suffer cause we didn’t do our duty.

We don’t want to see our flag desecrated with mud. The flag is very holy, and we want to see the yellow star flying proudly everywhere in the world. (Anyone who would stoop to burn the flag with the wonderful yellow star is a traitor, and the jellobellied bastard should be burnt at the stake.)

Join now. Yes, defend the country! Remember that wonderful hymn, Kill an Enemy Soldier for Christ Today.

Join now!!!!!! You don’t want to be a bad son to your mother. Get the training that the army offers, cause you can’t just take a gun and go out. Everyone is doing it, and it benefits both them and the country that we love.

Remember, join now so you can kill an enemy soldier for Christ today.

The story was accompanied by a cartoon.
On Friday, the men picked up their copies of *The Bugle* to read about some very exciting news, also illustrated by a cartoon in Biegle’s inimitable style.

**COLLECTIVIST DOCTOR**

**PUT WHERE HE BELONGS**

By Pvt Winfred S. Biegle

Yesterday the army court martialed Dr. Patrick Henry, a captain at the post hospital, for making collectivist statements around the barracks and the hospital as well as for refusing to teach men how to use poison gas against the ungodly enemy. For a long time we knew what a terrible thing Captain Dr. P. Henry was guilty of and how he ought to be punished at the maximum. Now, praise be to the Lord that he is brought to justice which he deserves all the way.
We all know that real heros love Our Leader very much and hate everyone who castes aspirations on his character in any way. What is more hateful than those guys who (I wont call them men) start sympathizing with the enemy and criticizing the way things are being done? I remember when I was in training at Camp Inferno and there was someone who said to me, “Soldiers are not paid to think, that’s for those whose politics are pink.”

When Dr. Henry is hung, we will all be very glad. The sooner these guys is cleared out of the army the better. We are here to fight, and any one who wont follow orders to fight as hard as he can should be choked to death with out any trail, he’s a traitor and doesn’t deserve one.

Our country is a great country, lets keep it that way. Finally I want to say, IT’S ARMY ALL THE WAY TODAY AND EVERYDAY.
Then, there was that startling discovery which unveiled the deepest secrets that the enemy had attempted to conceal.

SECRETS OF COLLECTIVISM
REVEALED FOR ALL TO SEE

By Pvt Winfred Scott Biegle

Two weeks ago in our training here at Camp Western Rock my sergeant handed me a copy of The Unheeded Teachings of the Apostle Basilius, a book which goes into great detail about a religion in eastern Europe, Asia, and America that is getting many converts here in Atlantis too and is a threat to our country where they are getting much help from dangerous and subversive financial organizations controlled by people with foreign surnames, you have got to watch out for them. Then I met one of these guys who are members of this religion, and he gave me some insight into the whole world situation which no one has ever seen correctly before.

In the bible it tells that the Lord who will come again and wait with 144,000 followers who have not defiled themselves, Rev. 14:1–4, with women. Our enemies have now declared themselves to be followers of this religion, at least their leaders. In order for the members of this religion to be sure they will not defile themselves, they have made themselves into eunuchs. This was an old Chinese practice, for they knew that their ministers could not found dynasties if this happened to them.

The leaders of the devilish collectivist state have now said publicly to me that they are Stropskites, and they point to all their leaders for the last forty years ever since their revolution as faithful members of this religion of their own.

The founder of the religion was Silevanoff in 1771, who was in favor of building up the 144,000 castrated ones immediately or as soon as possible, a
process that still goes on today.

They say that the 144,000 number will be reached in 1993 or 1994, and at that time collectivism will take over the world either without force or through its armies. Then it will be the second coming, and every thing will be fine in heaven on earth that is made up of eunucks living in communism.

We know they would not be happy if they do not have freedom, but the real danger is to our country if the enemy is a fanaticall folower of this religion which strikes at the roots of all our ideals and values which are so wonderfull.

All of us must pray for strenth to resist the terible power of the enemy, whose commander is Sayton and his angles. Surely no one would fail to re-enlist now at this critical time, if he does he is a traitor and should be put in jail at least.

It was the considered opinion of the officers in the Intelligence Training Unit (ITU) that a soldier’s life ought to be sacrificed by himself if there is a danger that he might fall into enemy hands. “Surrender is an impossible alternative,” Major Lye asserted, “especially when one’s life given for one’s country is such a small price to pay for the preservation of freedom.” Biegle listened intently, sketching a cartoon at the desk.
Biegle was receiving training from ITU every morning from seven to nine, with supplementary lectures on three evenings each week throughout the thirty-five week course. The training and the lectures were held in secrecy at the old fort up the mountain; therefore, each morning Biegle would report to camp headquarters, where he would be ushered into an underground cable car that would secretly take him up to the historic site.

One thing stressed more than anything else by Biegle’s instructors was the fact that, “as intelligence agents, you might find yourselves in the position of taking the rap. You must be lifted up by your patriotism, for there will be times when some of you will need to sacrifice yourselves or your reputations for Our Leader and our country. Some of the things that you will be asked to do might offend the laws of foreign and enemy powers, and maybe (technically) even of our own country. You must not worry about these matters, but if you are patriots and the time comes for you to refuse to blame your intelligence unit, you may even be called upon to go to jail for Atlantis in order that it may conquer forever.”

“Do you mean that we are supposed to commit crimes from time to time?” asked a worried student.

“I don’t mean that you are supposed to commit crimes, because nothing that is done to help your country can ever be a crime. But sometimes you must do things because the country needs to have those things done. Let me give you an example. There was a man, just back from the Continent, who said some things about the way we handle things over there. It was before the invasion, and he came back predicting that we would cause all the people on the Continent to enter the war. Now we could not allow such things to be said, and because nobody would give him time on the radio or television, he was walking across the country and talking to everybody that he met and giving speeches. We had to take care of him.”

“What did you do?” the worried student asked.

“Guess,” the major teased.

“It was the right thing to do,” Biegle chimed. “We got too many of these Chopsies in this country already. They all ought to be shot for failing to support Our Leader in his patriotic fight against the devilish forces of the enemy.”

“The major,” said the major, “I want to appoint you in charge of the second platoon of trainees here at ITU for the rest of the training period. You have a wonderful spirit, and I think that you are one of our
most promising students. Of course, I can say that here, but down at the
camp I cannot show you any favors, and might even sometimes see
what I can arrange to test your determination.”

“Thank you, sir, I appreciate everything that you are doing for
me and for my esteemed classmates.”

“Tonight you will learn how to crack safes and strongboxes.
And tomorrow you will learn how to use the new scentless poison gas
that recently has proved so effective on the battlefield.”

“I’m sure that I’ll feel all right about this in the morning,” the
worried student said. “I’ll go home and pray about it. But I know how
important it is to serve Holy Mother the State, and I guess if we are
going to serve, we ought not to have our hands tied behind our backs.”

“That’s right,” said Major Lye. “We’ve got a job to do, and we
simply must do the very best that we possibly can. Our Leader
understands our problems very well, and he makes us know that we are
appreciated. I know that he has written to General Purge to tell him
that, without the intelligence service, he would not have been able to
raise himself up to the grand exalted position of Our Leader. It was
very high praise indeed from the man who epitomizes in his own
person what you just now referred to, Private Scruple, when you
referred to Holy Mother the State.”

“I guess it was wrong of me to question the wisdom. . . .”

“Yes, of course it was wrong, but it was quite natural that some
men should for a time need to think through the facts about our program.
Do not worry about it, for nothing will go down in your record. But do
not forget that the serviceman’s prime virtue is obedience without
questioning.”

“The chaplain gave a good sermon on that subject when I was
in basic infantry training,” Biegle interjected. “He was just great, the
most patriotic soul I have ever seen, standing up in his pulpit saying all
the things that should be said in the name of the honor and the glory.”

“Our chaplains are a fine lot,” the major said. “I just love to
hear Chaplain Garnet Wordman, whose sermons could convince even
the die-hard collectivist, I’m certain. And what a wonderfully warm
man he is! Besides, he’s so sympathetic toward what we are doing. If
we needed to blow up Parliament building at our capital city with all
the MPs in it, I know he would approve. He recognizes that those
things which must be done are things which must be done.”

Early one morning, as Biegle was lying in bed awake and
contemplating a story he planned to write that day for the newspaper,
the first sergeant of his company dashed into the room to shout: “This is an alert! Get your clothes on and get to the supply room to draw your weapon!”

Biegle was sent to the camp’s main gate, where he met Corporal Lightborn. They stood on the inside of the fence with their rifles drawn, for their purpose was to give extra aid and comfort to the military policemen already on duty. They fixed their bayonets. Road markers were set up at the exact locations where barricades would have been assembled, had the alert really signaled an enemy attack. This alert, as everyone knew, was for practice.

Back at headquarters, Colonel Richard was sitting behind his desk where he was studying the plan for the alert which he had received a few minutes before from Georgetown, the nation’s capital.

“Send Captain Falso in here,” ordered the colonel.

Captain Falso entered, wearing a steel helmet with civilian clothing.

“What the hell are you wearing?” asked the colonel.

“Well, you know I am moving to a new house.”

The captain, overweight and cross-eyed, marched up and down the colonel’s office while his commanding officer recited to him the details of the alert which was now underway. “Enemy marching on Camp Western Rock, and artillery stop advance approximately two kilometers west in order to give cover to the still-advancing infantry. Rumor is that they have nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear weapons, but will not use them. Six hundred civilians milling around the east gate. Gate guards threatening mob when signs of disturbance occur.”

“Who’s guarding that gate?” the captain demanded.

“Captain Falso, we have Corporal Lightborn in charge, and Private Biegle.”

“Tremendous. Those two are the most reliable soldiers I’ve got. Tremendous spirit, especially that Biegle. Writes great stuff in The Bugle too. That guy’s great for morale.”

Biegle told the story of the alert in The Bugle on the next day.

**ALERT IS A BIG SUCCESS**

By Private W. S. Biegle

Yesterday the camp was given the chance to
show what it would do in an emergency. The Head Commander sent down word that an Alert should be held, and it started suddenly about 4 a.m. hours when the plane came from Georgetown.

First, the camp was barricaded off to prevent the enemy which was marching toward Camp Western Rock, which succeeded. I myself was helping to guard the main gate against 6,000,000 civilians milling around and wanting to get in. We wouldn't let them in, of course, because if they wouldn't join the army, they could look for safety wherever they might find it. Let that be a lesson to any civilians who are so slow they wouldn't enlist right now when Our Leader asks them!

Then we cut loose with the big guns, which went bang, bang all morning until the enemy artillery was completely smashed. Then our infantry went out and killed the infantry soldiers that were marching toward our camp.

By eleven o'clock in the morning, we had them licked. Every enemy soldier was dead as a door nail, and the remarkable thing was that not one of our soldiers was dead or even wounded, except Corporal Gellobell, who stepped on a nail in the road. It is certain that the nail was put there by a sabbature, and it went right through his foot, though it is not known yet exactly who the traitor was.

The alert was a big success.

I'm sorry I didn't have time to do an illustration to go with this story, because I didn't have time. I will give you a rain check. You will receive your cartoon later, after I have time to finish it and get it printed in these august columns.

As Biegle worked on his cartoon, he was puffing on a cigarette. His ashtray before him was filled with half-smoked cigarette butts.

"Biegle," complained Corporal Lightborn, "never has any cigarettes. He's always borrowing them from me, and from anyone else that comes along, even the colonel. The fellow is too afflicted with sloth to go and buy his own. And I guess you can't blame him; he
usually gets what he needs. A real snob, though. I remember seeing Captain Falso offering him a cigarette, and Biegle had the nerve to ask, ‘This all you got?’ It wasn’t his brand.”

Nervous was Biegle as he was marched to the guardhouse by the corporal of the guard. His name had been selected, and that night he would have the honor of helping to stand guard over significant areas in Camp Western Rock. Sabotage had been reported, and the men were prepared to do their duty in order to protect the nation’s property.

The officer of the guard inspected the men in the ranks. He stopped in front of Biegle, who dutifully held out his rifle. The officer snatched it, worked the bolt back and forth, and looked down the barrel, which was nearly plugged with dirt. “When did you last clean this weapon?” he demanded.

“Just finished cleaning it, sir.”

“What is your third general order as a member of the guard?”

Biegle recited it, and the officer tossed the rifle back at him. Luckily, he caught it by the barrel as it was falling. “Better wake the hell up, soldier,” said the officer.

In the midst of the night, as he was lying in the bunk, Biegle was awakened from a most frightening dream. “You got ten minutes,” the corporal of the guard said.

When Biegle was alone, left to guard a deserted building, he slipped a clip of ammunition into his rifle. The order given by the officer had been to keep the cartridges in his cartridge belt until needed. The fact is that the memory of the dream stirred fear within him. The shadows moved. The settling building creaked now and then. What was inside the blackened windows? He knew, from his secret intelligence course, that enemy spies were working in this area, posing as night watchmen and tourists. Were there spies in that building? He thought he heard them moving about on the wooden floors, which creaked under their heavy feet. Oh, horrors, that he should be guarding a building in which spies were now moving about! The dream came back to him. He was marching along a seacoast, waving a rifle at the friendly ships sailing the bay. All the sailors were standing at the rail waving at him in return. Flags were gaily streaming from the masts and from the stacks of the ships. Then the flags disappeared, as if they were all struck simultaneously, and the sailors ceased to wave at him. The ships sailed away into the distance, leaving him alone on a coast that he did not recognize. What part of the world was this? He looked at the vegetation, but the trees, conifers with long, hanging branches, were of
a kind he had never seen before. Then he swung around, as if expecting some monster to have crept up behind him. Indeed, there was someone behind him: there was a man, an enemy soldier, presumably, and he was holding a rifle that had been aimed at his back. The soldier fired the rifle. An arrow slowly emerged from the barrel, picked up speed as it sped through the air, and at last pierced his breast as it came to rest. Biegle choked for air. Let them try to escape while he was on guard! He released the safety catch on his rifle.

The moon flashed like a signal lantern between the clouds. On the prairie, a wolf perhaps howled, and Biegle shivered like a dog afraid of lightning in the midst of a storm. The wind rose, rattling the windows in the warehouse, and he continued his fearful, lonely walking around and around and around the building. Then a shadow moved under the tree which stood against the north side of the building. “Halt!” shouted Biegle. The shadow moved again, rippling across the grass by the light of the moon. Biegle fired three shots before his rifle jammed.

The shadow still moved. He had also exhausted his ammo. He threw himself into the bushes, and waited.

The corporal of the guard was not pleased when he heard the shots. Nor was the sergeant of the guard, nor was the officer of the guard, who insisted that Biegle be sent back to his company indefinitely.

“But I saw something move, I called halt and it kept on running,” Biegle protested.

“But you didn’t hit it,” the officer snarled. “Next time, either hit it or don’t shoot.”

The officer of the guard pressed for court-martial proceedings against Biegle, and Major Lye agreed to the action because he believed that this would be good training for the man he felt was destined to become one of the greatest heroes of the war. Two days later he was led into the court room, where he was fined ten francs and reprimanded for wasting army property.

The court-martial proceedings prevented Biegle from working on The Bugle for three days, although he was allowed to continue his intelligence training in the morning and in the evening. There were, naturally, complaints from his fans among the troops, who regarded him as a celebrity. The Bugle received a number of letters to the editor. The following is a sample:
Dear Editor:
What happen to all the intresting storys this weak? Beagl is my favrite, he is the commanders favrite. It is a skandel that you dont have nothing funy in the papper any mor.
    I dont even thing it is even patriotick.

Patriotickally yours,
Private Billy Daniels

Other complaints were made directly to the commanding general and to the inspector general. Ultimately, it was decided to drop charges against the lieutenant who had brought charges against Biegle, though the general noted in his letter that he had done terrible damage to the morale of the troops and to the army’s image by his actions.

Corporal Lightborn, unaware of the developments at high levels in regard to Biegle’s case, was moved out of envy to attempt to have Biegle removed from The Bugle. Deliberately he wrote a story which suggested that Camp Western Rock was poorly defended, on account of the bad management of certain officers whose names started with L, R, and F. He signed Biegle’s name to this immoral fabrication, published it in The Bugle, and waited. At first nothing happened, and the corporal-editor was literally burning with anger and envious thoughts. In his dreams he saw his tongue issue from his mouth in the form of a snake which hissed violently before striking back at his forehead. In the thoughts which possessed him by day, he did not know Biegle’s secret training was nearly completed. The time had almost come for some full-time operations which would involve him so thoroughly that he would no longer in any case have the opportunity to work on the newspaper. Major Ly e and Colonel Richard understood this, while Captain Falso had not bothered to read the accusations in the first place. Had it not been for a late development, Corporal Lightborn’s nasty little plot would have been entirely abortive.

Nevertheless, a letter from the commanding officer arrived at the personnel office: it contained orders which specified that Biegle should be relieved of his duties at The Bugle at once. Curiously, no attention was given in the letter to his celebrity status or to his
reputation as a popular cartoonist and writer.

1. Whereas, Pvt Winfred Scott Biegle F 00131313 has perpetrated gross errors of fact concerning the preparedness of Camp Western Rock;
2. Whereas, Pvt. Biegle has written material which substantially lowers the morale of the troops at Camp Western Rock;
3. Whereas, Pvt Biegle has often and maliciously committed errors in spelling, contrary to regulations GBC 456-78 (Army Newspaper Code);
4. Therefore, it is my absolute recommendation that Pvt Biegle be stripped of his duties as reporter for The Bugle within 24 hours or within as immediate a date as possible.

(Signed) D. D. Purge, General Commanding

Of course, it was all very unfair, but Biegle was nevertheless called to the personnel office within two hours after the general’s directive had been received. “You are no longer needed on The Bugle,” the personnel officer pontificated.

“No,” the officer answered, “the general doesn’t like the way you spell.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, but I did the best I could.”
“And, I take it, he didn’t like your last story either.”
“Which one, the one I didn’t write?”
“That’s right, soldier . . . What?”
“I didn’t write the last one,” Biegle said, smiling modestly.
“You didn’t?”
“No.”
“Look here, you can’t fool me. See, look at this.” He pointed to the general’s letter lying open before him. “The general wants you off the paper, off The Bugle now!”
“You mean I can’t even draw any more?”
“That’s right, you stupid dolt. What the hell’s the idea, offending the general that way? You know, that last story was a bomb. You get hurt by a thing like that, don’t you know that, you fool?”
“But I didn’t write it, if you mean the story about L, R, and F. It was a mistake or something. I didn’t write it.”
“You damn liar! You intelligence people are all the same. I can’t believe any of you. How do you expect me to do my work in a way that benefits the army of Our Leader if everyone is going to lie and tell tales and do everything to pull down the truth on our heads? How do you, you idiot? Answer me, or I’ll assign you to permanent KP, at least until the end of your course!”
“I joined the army to fight, to help my country and Our Leader against the bastards, the enemy. I didn’t really mean any harm.”
“Didn’t mean any harm!” he exploded.
“I’m sorry.”
“Don’t interrupt, you son of a bitch. Biegle, do you realize the importance of my rank. I am an officer. Do you know how to act in front of an officer?”
“Yes, sir.”
“Like hell you do. If you knew you wouldn’t act like you do.”
“I’m sorry.”
“Let me read you something.” He took his copy of the Soldier’s Guide from the bookcase and turned to the section on “Conduct.” He asked, “Do you know what this volume is?”
“I got one in my footlocker, sir.”
“Let me read to you. Are you listening?”
“Yes, I’m listening.”
“The soldier will always respect the superiors which have been ordained to be in positions of command and/or power over him. He will carry out all orders to the best of his ability. His respect for all officers of the armed forces will be expressed in his speech by the use of ‘sir’ every time he opens his mouth to speak to an officer. His salute is a token of the highest respect, and the officer is bound by army regulations to return the salute. Do you understand this?”
“I guess so.”
“Biegle, do you want me to begin again, reading it over to you once more?” he thundered.
“No, sir, I understand.”
“Biegle, I will personally see to it that you are assigned to the
front line as soon as your secret training is completed. In the meantime, I will assign you to training full time so that you will be able to complete your course here as quickly as possible. Now, what do you have to say for yourself?"

"Sir," Biegle beamed, "I’m delighted at the prospect of going to the front, which is what I wanted to do when I enlisted. I think I can best serve Our Leader where the action is."

"I hope you get killed!" the personnel officer shouted.

"Thank you, sir. If it would best serve the interests of our wonderful country, it would please me too. Our Leader bless you, sir."

It was several weeks prior to the time when Biegle was relieved of his duties as a reporter for The Bugle. He was covering a Troop Information and Education festival, and was planning to write a feature story on the event. A guest lecturer from an allied country was at the lecture stand. "Let me tell you some stories," he said. "Now, a new one that I heard when I was in the theater in Rome in about the fifth century. I have bought this horse, yes, it is a fine horse which I grow to love. I teach the horse many tricks, and also I show him the trick of learning to get along without hay. I am sorry, the horse does very well getting along without hay, but just as I have him trained to get along without hay the horse dies!"

Everyone laughed except Major Lye, who was sitting in the back row as an observer.

"Now you see the moral of this story, which is that you can teach an old horse many new tricks, but you must give him plenty to eat if he is to be healthy, wealthy, and wise. Just like the armed forces. Every army must be well treated by the people if it is to do the tricks that people want to see done. An army that is not well equipped cannot protect the people. The army must be prepared for the war effort at all times. Now, another story. You know, maybe, how the little five-year-old got his mother pregnant?"

Again, there were guffaws among the members of the audience.

"Ha! ha! maybe you like to know the answer? No? the boy, you want to know the answer? I don’t know, I think he let the chickens peck holes in her diaphragm."

The laughter was spontaneous.

"That just goes to show you, that preparedness is the key to peace in the whole world."
Biegle laughed very hard.

Major Lye rose up, interrupting the speech. “Excuse me,” he said, feigning an apologetic tone, “I’d like to have a few words with Private Biegle outside the theater.”

“Why, certainly, major, whatever is in the best interest of the fatherland and its allies, you are welcome,” the speaker said.

Major Lye took Biegle outside along the north wall of the theater and asked him the reason for his laughter.

“He told about a boy . . . .”

“That’s no reason . . . .”

“And a horse that he trained to get along without eating. Ha! ha! ha!”

“Stop laughing, you fool.”

“Ha! ha! ha! I can’t, ha!! ha! I can’t stop laughing.”

“Stop it, I said, or I’ll kill you.” Major Lye had a bayonet in his hand.

“I’m sorry, sir. Ha, ha!”

“Don’t you know how to speak with an officer? Don’t you remember your training in the secret business of intelligence work? Now, stop it.” He gave Biegle a little jab with the bayonet. “Run your eyes up that slope. See, up there is the fortress, and beyond it Saint Peter’s Gate, and there is the peak of the mountain. Look, Biegle, and don’t laugh, or I’ll disembowel you. That top, that mountain top, is your aspiration. You must climb the highest slopes to be the best spy that your country ever has had. You’re going to be sent out into enemy territory, and you’ve got to come back with the information which will mean defeat or victory for our armies.”

“Yes, sir, I’m looking through Saint Peter’s Gate.”

“Oh, what the hell’s the use. You stupid ass, you can’t keep from having a court-martial, you can’t keep out of trouble. I’ll teach you. You bet, here I am down on the plain; I’m not up at the fortress now, and you can jolly well learn that I can be a son of a bitch. I’ll teach you to shape up. Sacrement! I’ll teach you to shape up or I’ll have you put in the stockade forever and ever.” He struck Biegle across the face with the palm of his left hand.

“My intentions were of the best.”

“You silly fish-face, I’ll make you so sorry that you won’t want to live, and if you don’t report to your commanding officer and tell him that you are a damn fool with horseshit for brains, I’ll, I’ll. . . .”

“Yes?”
“Get out of here! I can’t stand this! Go tell your company commander, go!”

Biegle walked up to his commanding officer, saluted, and said, “Sir, Private Biegle reporting to Captain Falso.”

Captain Falso smiled because he had only finished reading a letter of commendation from Colonel Richard. “What is it, boy?” he said.

“I really don’t understand,” he said, “but Major Lye sent me to tell you that I was some sort of fool with horse manure for brains because I laughed at a joke or two.”

“All right, I’ll tell him you were here to see me. You go back to work, now. Working on another cartoon for the paper, I suppose?”

“I was doing a story, till the major interrupted me.”

“You just forget about that story and go do a cartoon.”

“Okay,” Biegle responded, “but what about the major? Is it going to be all right? I want to fight, you know . . .”

“Fight?”

“Yes, sir, that’s what I’ve always wanted.”

“Now, look here, you can’t do that. You raise your hand against an officer, and we’ll give you a court-martial. Hear?”

“Oh, sir, I didn’t mean that. I mean I enlisted to go to the front line and fight against the enemy bastards. Long live Our Leader!”

“Yes, long live Our Leader!”

“I hope when I finish my training that I will be sent to where the action is.”

“Good night, yes, of course. Get back to the barracks and go to sleep. I’ve got to think all of this out.”

Of course Captain Falso forgot entirely about Biegle as soon as he could induce forgetfulness, but he was reminded of the incident later that day in the bar of the Officers’ Club.

“Just testing him,” said Major Lye. “You know we got to get these intelligence people shaped up before they get shipped out of here.”

“That’s exactly what I thought,” said the captain. “Tremendous fellow, Biegle. Really writes like a professional, though he does misspell a word now and then. I sure wish I could write that well,” he commented sorrowfully.

“You sentimental bastard,” said Major Lye. “I’m glad we don’t have you in the Intelligence Corps. We need the hardhearted kind there. After all this, I need a drink, alone, by myself. Goodbye. Goodbye, I
They saluted, and parted, each going his way along his own primrose path.

Biegle walked onto the stage in the empty theater and began to speak. “Ladies and gentlemen, and all of you who hear my voice, I speak to you a word of warning: Enlisted men like me should not laugh in the presence of officers who might possibly be offended. Such is the moral of our story. The military endeavor is a serious matter which must not be mocked. Indeed, all life is serious at its center, while laughter distorts and twists the perfect shape which is man’s thought. Let the heathen mock and the Saracens pour scorn upon us, but we will march forth in sacred and holy formations to defend the country against its enemy which is laughter and against the laughter of the enemy.”

The theater echoed with Biegle’s words, and the dark seats seemed to nod in assent.

While Biegle was talking with Captain Falso, Corporal Lightfoot received a call at The Bugle office. “Do you take shorthand?” the voice asked.

“No, sir,” said the corporal.

“Well, prepare to write this down. I want this in the paper.”

“Go ahead, sir.”

“Lost, L-o-s-t, one angora CAT. If found, please return to owner, Mrs. Major Lye, Mrs. Lye.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Got it?”

“Yes, sir, go ahead.”

“That’s all. Read it back.”

The corporal read it back.

“That’ll do,” said the major. “Corporal, I want you to know that the cat will be found. Do you hear?”

Corporal Lightfoot suppressed a laugh, but went out to join the others who were searching for the lost animal.

Lo! The cat was found. Dead. Over it a dog stood guard. Was this the culprit that had committed the crime?

Then there were the funeral rites to which all the men of the camp were invited, for Major Lye’s wife insisted upon burying the body of her beloved creature on a selected plot of land in front of camp headquarters with full military honors. The Reverend Garnet Wordman officiated, adapting the requiem to the dumb beast which had died so heroically.
“Absolve,” he intoned, “Domine animas omnium catorum defunctorum ab omni vinculo delictorum.”

The chapel choir of Camp Western Rock sang the sequence, the Dies Irae, and all stood with contrite hearts on the field before the headquarters building.

“In paradisum catorum deducant te Angeli. . . .”

“Et lux perpetua luceat ei.”

They lowered the gilt casket into the earth, with the military guard standing by. Then the troops marched away, and the ground was replaced over the glittering metal box. The sod was carefully unrolled so that the grave was covered by the redemptive green of the grass. Shortly workmen came to place a white picket fence around it, and the colonel ordered that a brass marker be made to mark the grave forever.

Later in the week there was also to be a Protestant memorial service.

The obituary appeared, printed in gold leaf through a grant from the War Department, on page 1 of The Bugle. The Protestant minister was scheduled to repeat Father Wordman’s kind words about the cat, for everyone was agreed that we, the citizens of Atlantis, need to honor the animal nature.

Biegle, when he was no longer a member of The Bugle staff, was walking in contemplation beside the picket fence which surrounded the grave. Major Lye stepped up beside him. “Stop and see me tomorrow when you’re up at the fortress for training,” the major commanded.

“Biegle,” the major said, sitting back in the reclining chair behind his walnut and steel desk, “this will be your first assignment off post. We’ll call it Operation Saint Peter’s Gate. I think they’re collectivist sympathizers, and I want to know the answer to where they do stand politically. It will be your job to sift them and to report back to me. Our intelligence tells us that they will meet tonight at the Black Pig tavern. Now it is up to you, and if you succeed, there may be a promotion waiting for you.”

Pretending to be depressed by his recent reversal of fortune on The Bugle, Biegle took to the street. “I’m going to town and get drunk,” he told his mates. “They can’t treat me like that, for I can’t stand it. What did that general want to stick his nose into my business for? And all because I don’t always spell correctly. I’m getting drunk.” Tears seemed to stand in Biegle’s eyes, proof of the psychic pain from which
he was suffering, or so he wanted them to believe.

When Biegle arrived at the Black Pig, no one else was yet there. Then they began to arrive, all dressed in civilian clothes, all laughing gaily. Biegle sat apart for a time, then introduced himself to the crowd. “I’m Biegle,” he said, bowing low.

“So you’re Biegle!” There was wonderment in the speaker’s voice. “You’re a legend, you know. Let me shake your hand, friend.”

All the men in the bar, including the bartender and the barmaid, lined up to shake Biegle’s hand.

“One of the men, who seemed to be their leader, stepped up to the bar to conduct the singing.

“Get the rhythm right, Comrade Garri!” the bartender called.

When we come to the chorus, let’s really cut loose,” Comrade Garri ordered.

Baritones:
She was a broad who’d besmirched the sod,
And left her country dead.
Sitting at the bar there
She cried and said,
“For seven long years
I haven’t slept alone in my bed.”

Chorus (bitonal, for tenors and basses):
Her name was O’Brady,
Her business was shady,
But O! she was good to the men.

“A collectivist song,” Biegle noted mentally.

Then they sang other songs, some of them blatantly collectivist, in Biegle’s opinion. There was “Heave ho, the capstan, all ye comrades round” and “We gather together.”

Garri came over to Biegle and said to him, “I hope you’ll become one of us. We are a non-political group that gets together every Wednesday night and just have a good time drinking beer and singing. Of course, we have some mutual interests.”

“Like hating the army?” Biegle asked, trying to probe as slyly as possible.
“Oh, of course we hate the army, but we’re stuck in it. Draftees, you know, most of us. We just don’t care about all this military crap.”

“We must pretend that we do, of course,” said Biegle. “It’s a crime to admit we hate the army, so we must keep it secret, you know. Makes a hypocrite of you, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s really sad what the army does to men. But we can’t think about such gloomy things. Let’s have another song. Barmaid Brown! Sing us the song you sang last Wednesday night, the song about the colonel who spit in the urinal.

She sang the song, and Biegle could see that she was a particularly dangerous character in this setting. He vowed that he would track down her political associations even at risk to his own reputation as a punctual and reliable soldier.

With money which Major Lye had provided, he lavishly bought drinks for everyone, including the barmaid. Suddenly they saw him as their great hero, and shouted approval of their new friend. He shouted back his approval of them. “Down with Our Leader!” he cried.

“Down with our son of a bitching Leader!” they responded.

“Long live collectivism!”

“Long live collectivism!” they echoed, a little sheepishly.

He bought more drinks, whiskey this time, for everyone, and asked the bartender to make them double-strength. “Bravo!” the men cried. He took the barmaid by the arm, and then patted her on the buttocks. She smiled at him. He lifted his glass drunkenly to her and chanted, “Come with me and be my love.” Everyone was now thoroughly drunk and talking freely about his hatred for the army. Biegle, supporting himself by embracing the barmaid, was listening eagerly to the treasonous talk and was inwardly glad when he thought of the accusations that he would now be in a position to make when he stepped forth in court. Then he blacked out, falling backward from his barstool. The barmaid, infatuated with her new hero, helped him to ascend the stairs to her room on the top floor of the building. “Barmaid Brown, that’s me, won’t let you down,” she said, assisting him into the bed.

As he lay in the bed, swooning off into sleep, Biegle waited for Barmaid Brown to come up to him and expectantly let his mind run over the consummation of his activities as a spy among the collectivist sympathizers at the Black Pig. In the morning he awakened to find Barmaid Brown snoring in the bed beside him.
On the second day that he was absent without leave, he approached Barmaid Brown with the demand that she should tell everything she knew about the happenings at the Black Pig to an army court-martial. She was astounded and angry.

“If you won’t do it,” Biegle said, “I’ll tell what we did together.”

“So what,” she said.

Biegle halted, frantically attempting to remember what Major Lye had said to do in case a girl would not respond normally to be compromised. He could not remember, so he had to improvise his tactics.

“Besides,” he promised, “I’ll denounce you in court as a spy, a traitor to Our Leader.”

“You little son of a bitch. And to think how you worked yourself into everyone’s favor! And you got my maidenhead too! The next time somebody gets my maidenhead, I’ll make certain he’s not an intelligence kook like you.”

“Then you’ll answer the questions in court?”

“I’ll do nothing of the kind.”

Biegle sat down to call Major Lye on the phone. He dialed the number. “Hello, Major Lye? This is Private Biegle.”

Barmaid Brown, her face black with anger, tackled him, and the phone fell to the floor before Biegle could speak his next sentence. For a little while they struggled, and then the husky private threw her down, kicked her in the face several times, and, as she lay inert, picked up the receiver again. “Major Lye,” he said, “yes, everything’s all set for the court-martial of Private Garri and his friends. I’ve got Barmaid Brown here on the floor, and she’ll answer all the questions that you wish to ask in order to get the damned collectivists where they belong, which is in jail. Now, sir, if you’ll send an armored car to the Black Pig, I’ll hold your star witness until it arrives.”

Major Lye gasped. It was all so dramatic, almost like a scene out of an American movie. No, he could not send an armored car, but maybe a disguised army automobile would do? Yes, a squad of military policemen would come along to receive the witness, who would be kept under lock and key until the trial began.

When Biegle returned to the camp, he was told to report immediately to the company commander.

“Where the hell have you been, Private AWOL, for the last two days?”
“At the Black Pig.”
“At the Black Pig? That place closes at three o’clock in the morning. You’re lying.”
“No, sir.”
“Then, where the deuce were you when the place closed? After three in the morning?”
“At the Black. . . .”
“Shut up! I know you weren’t there after 3:00. Now, tell me where you were. You know damn well that when you’re in the army, you’re government property, and the government better have the right to know where the hell its property is. Where were you?”

For reasons of national security, Biegle could not tell his company commander the details, but he could not think of anything to say. “I don’t know,” he mumbled, more to himself than to Captain Falso.

“You never know, do you? I’ll teach you to know something for a change. Do you see that chair? Sit down in it till I get back from lunch. You damn well better not move. If you got to go to the latrine, that’s too bad. You better not move. If anyone calls, you take the message. You better not foul up, or I’ll have them give you another court-martial, and you won’t get off so easy this time.”

There was only one phone call, and Biegle answered with perfect correctness: “Private Biegle speaking, sir.”
Major Lye did not identify himself. “Let me speak with Lieutenant Westcox,” he said.
“He’s not here,” Biegle responded.
“Why the hell isn’t he? By Lucifer and all the Powers of Hell, you get that traitor on the phone, or . . . .”
“Sir,” Biegle interrupted, “I think. . . .”
“Yours is not to reason why, private.”
“But Lieutenant Westcox went overseas two months ago,” Biegle blurted out.
“I am well aware of that,” snapped Major Lye. The phone clicked as the officer slammed the receiver onto the hook.
“The next time you take off without leave,” stormed the captain, leaping into the room, “you’re getting a court-martial, and they’ll stockade you, sure as shit. This time it’s company punishment for you. You can clean the latrines in your spare time for the next two weeks. That’ll teach you! I’ll order the men to mess them up good so you’ll have plenty to do. You got to make the punishment fit the crime,
and going AWOL is a filthy crime. You stupid ass, salute!”
“Thank you, sir,” said Biegle.
“Besides, I want you to paint out the dirty words and slogans on the latrine walls.”

They went on a tour of inspection, examining all the nasty words and collectivist slogans inscribed on the walls of the latrines and in the stalls. The graffiti included some very dirty words, Biegle noted, but he was particularly enraged by the collectivist slogans. “LOVE YOUR ENEMIES,” someone had written above the urinals, and the words “PEACE IN OUR TIME” had even been scratched under one of the toilet seats. “I will consider it my patriotic duty to wipe out these collectivist slogans and traitorous words, and feel honored to be called to this duty in the service of Our Leader and our country,” Biegle said.

Biegle was dutifully gazing into a urinal when Major Lye came for him. “Comrade Garri is on trial today,” he said. “You want to come to see how things work out?”
“Sure, I’d like to come. Let me finish cleaning this urinal first.”
“No, get right in and change into your dress uniform. We’re going to have that bastard Garri behind bars for the next five years, we’ve decided.”
“You want me to give evidence?”
“No. Intelligence men get others to do their dirty work, and in this case you have the barmaid lined up nicely. We got enough on Garri to give him five years. Anyway, we got your report in our secret file. But we thought you would like to see the proceedings.”

Biegle was very pleased with himself when he heard the verdict: “Guilty!” And he was likewise pleased with the sentence, which indeed was five years at the Camp Sibernia prison. He was only slightly upset when Barmaid Brown, her eyes full of reproach, glanced in his direction. Everyone else in the courtroom applauded the decision of the court, and jumped up when Major Lye shouted, “Long live Our Leader.”

“Long live Our Leader!” everyone shouted, except the convicted criminal. Private Garri sat very still in the midst of all the cheering. Even Barmaid Brown felt she had to join in.
“You see,” Biegle whispered to her as they were leaving the courtroom, “I’ve made you into a national heroine. Isn’t it really great to do whatever little things one is able to do in the service of his country?”

Barmaid Brown would not answer him.
“I’ll be up to see you again, one of these nights,” Biegle promised.

She wept.

“Weep not, gentle maiden, for Our Leader is kind,” he whispered.

“Is there no love in heaven?” she wailed. As people began to look toward them, Biegle turned his eyes carefully away. He stared vigorously at the cigarette lighter which Captain Falso was holding in his hand, and then turned to examine the great yellow star in the flag which was hanging overhead. Finally, when they were alone, Biegle took her reluctant hand and announced to her that “All things work together for good for those who love Our Leader.”

“Goodbye, traitor,” she snapped, then turned her weeping eyes away.

“No more of that, or I’ll have you in court too. Remember, I’ll stop in to see you soon.”

“Don’t,” she gasped.

Biegle graduated from the course in intelligence with honors, with a special letter of commendation being placed in his file to praise him for his effort in entrapping the collectivist sympathizers, who included the notorious Gari now serving a prison term at the notorious Camp Sibernia prison. The graduation exercise itself was secret, being held at the fortress up the mountain. There was much pomp and ceremony, with a recording of martial music accompanying the graduates as they marched in their heavy boots up the steps to the banqueting hall on the third floor of the main building. As they marched, they carried candles in their left hands, and bare bayonets in their right hands.

“You have shown your ability to help keep the light of freedom glowing,” said Major Lyce as he introduced the main speaker for the event, “at the same time that you have demonstrated your resolve to use the means which are available to you in order to preserve that freedom.”

“Thank you for those bright and idealistic words,” said the commencement speaker, one of the under-secretaries in Our Leader’s service. “It is our responsibility to prevent any further flow of land into the clutches of the collectivists. I know that Our Leader has pledged that not one further foot of land will be given to the enemy, and I want you to know that he is depending upon you for your help in the great struggle of our time so that the world might remain free from the
terrible taint of collectivism.”

When the speaker had finished, a recording of *Atlantis Will Conquer Forever* was played, and the graduates marched back out of the chamber and down the steps to serve their country. The entire ceremony was tremendously impressive.

Biegle prepared to leave for the front lines, where he had requested duty and where he would be a great hero in the service of Our Leader. His clearance papers in hand, he arrived at the dispensary for a medical check-up, which was required for all men being sent overseas. After the examination was completed, he handed his papers to the man at the medical officer’s desk. The officer looked at him, laughed, and said, “I guess we’ll have you with us for a few days.”

“What?!” Biegle exploded with impatience. “But I’m on my way to the front. You can’t do this to me!”

“You just go get your bags and bring them here. We’ll start the treatment in the morning, so we want you here as soon as you can get your things together.”

“You mean you’re putting me in the hospital?”

“Well, just the dispensary ward.”

“What for? I’m on my way to the front. I’ll bet you’re a traitor who doesn’t want me to serve my country. We’ll see about this.” Biegle turned to go.

“Not so hot,” the officer said. “You had better believe we’re putting you in here for your own good.”

“I don’t see it that way at all.”

“Now, don’t kid us. You knew you had it.”

“Had what?”

“The clap, you idiot. Don’t tell me you’ve never heard of the clap. And you’ve got it, brother.”

“I don’t believe it, sir. What kind of nonsense is this, anyway. I’ll send a telegram to Our Leader.”

“Settle down. Do you want me to repeat it? Brother, you’ve got the clap.”

“Come on, that’s a joke. There isn’t any such thing.”

“You won’t think it’s a joke by the time you get out of here.”

“That damned barmaid,” Biegle muttered. “I’ll denounce the bitch for what she is. She’s the only one, I’ll bet, who is promoting the clap among the soldiers at this base, and I fell for her nonsense about her maidenhead. Bah!”

“Go tell your company commander what’s up, and pack your
bags. You know, if I had my way, I would see that you get a court-
martial for this. You know that you’re harming government property when you get infected with the clap.”

“I still don’t believe it,” Biegle complained. “It still sounds like a plot.”

“Look, you don’t need to believe it. All you got to do is to follow orders. We don’t need you up at the front spreading any more of that stuff among the native girls, who probably have it already.”

Therefore Biegle was delayed for a week while the medical officer treated him for venereal disease, but then he was sent forth once again with clearance papers and orders in his hand. “At long last,” the company clerk told him, “they’re going to let you fight.”

“I look forward to the future with great expectancy,” Biegle said.

The camp inspector general asked Biegle some questions.

**Inspector General:** How did you like your stay at Camp Western Rock?

**Biegle:** Real fine, sir. I know I learned many things that will be very useful when I finally get to fight the enemy at the front line. I’m really looking forward to fighting, and hope that I actually will be able to kill an enemy soldier every single day for Our Leader.

**Inspector General:** What work did you do while here at the camp, in addition to your training?

**Biegle:** Well, I worked on *The Bugle*, drawing cartoons and writing stories to cheer up the men and to build up their morale. Then, the past few weeks or so, I’ve been cleaning and painting latrines. Of course, all of this was over and above my spy work.

**Inspector General:** Of course. Did you like your duty here?

**Biegle:** Couldn’t have been better, sir.

**Inspector General:** Do you have any gripes?

**Biegle:** No, not really. Except that they don’t make the men go to chapel like they should. If they were made to go to chapel they would learn how important it is to obey and fight for Our Leader. There are too many collectivist sympathizers round here, and I think that religion, if it isn’t infiltrated by collectivist sympathizers too, would help them to think normal thoughts again. Then they’d know how important it all was to fight against the sinister designs of the atheists and enemy bastards that are trying to destroy our wonderful way of life.

**Inspector General:** That’s very well said. I hope you have a
good tour of duty at the front. I wish I were going there myself.

Biegle: Well, come along.

Inspector General: No, Biegle, the army’s not run that way. You’ve got to follow orders and do what you’re told. Never question, never ever question what you are told to do, because you know that it is always for the good of your country. I know that you will do well at the front, Private Biegle, and I want to extend my hand to you. I know you will come home a hero.

Biegle: Thank you, sir. I know you’re right. I can feel it in my bones. I know I am destined to be a hero, dying a martyr for our great country. Thank you, sir.

Inspector General: The honor is all mine. Long live Our Leader!

The Inspector General lifted a bottle of ink from his desk as he would have lifted a toast. “Long live Our Leader,” Biegle responded. The Inspector set down the ink, filled his pen from it, and signed Biegle’s papers.

Biegle’s friends went as a group with him to the railroad station where he was to catch his train to the port city of Angelus, from which he would sail off into the setting sun to fight in the service of his country. His friends, classmates in the intelligence school at the fortress up on the mountain as well as regular inmates of the camp, respected him for his great potential as a fighter for freedom. They remembered his fine cartoons and stories in The Bugle, and they knew they would remain loyal to his memory until his dying day.

“Speech! Speech!” they cried, in imitation of scenes they had seen on television.

Our hero responded by climbing to the top of a ten-foot-high fire hydrant outside the station. “Friends,” he said, “lend me your ears. Time passes, but does not stand still.”

There was a furious burst of applause.

“I go,” he continued, speaking to the rising applause, “I go to fight the enemy and help win the war! It is our duty to support the fight against the enemy and to protect our mothers and to keep our flag from being polluted.”

The applause was thunderous.

“My friends!” he shouted, “for you are my friends. You know that only my whole life is dedicated to fighting in the service of the fatherland. They sent me here, friends, to receive training that will
benefit the army and our country, but I don’t expect any personal glory at this point in my career. They are sending me to the front to defend Our Leader, Our glorious Leader whose handsome face looks down from that giant billboard over the railroad station. Fellow soldiers, I go!”

“We’re going too! We’re going too” the crowd chanted. The military police moved in to rope off the entrance to the station so that the demonstrators would not interfere with the normal operation of the railway. They stood behind the rope, shoving a little at times and chanting, “We’re going too!” We’re going too! We’re going too!”

The train came, ringing its bell and blowing its whistle as it drew to a stop at the station. Then, as the train was pulling away from his friends who were wildly cheering from behind the roped-off section, Biegle stood on the platform of the rear car. He waved as he had seen Our Leader wave. He heard, sinking in the distance, his friends shouting, “Goodbye, Biegle. Goodbye, old friend! Goodbye, our hero! Goodbye! Good. . . .”

Thus, very fittingly, Biegle departed from Camp Western Rock for combat duty with the Army of Atlantis against the enemy. The mountain with its antique fortress and Saint Peter’s Gate receded in the distance as the smoke from the engine’s smokestack swept off in the opposite direction onto the plain. Biegle’s hopes were now about to be fulfilled, for he would see the face of combat.
IV

GETTING THERE

“Go, Michael, of Celestial Armies Prince”—Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Biegle disembarked from the train, and found that he had a whole eighteen hours before he must report to his ship at Pier 7 for overseas shipment. The sun was hanging in the western sky like a ball of red flame, sinking toward the ocean which he would soon cross. After he had eaten a meal of six hamburgers, the street lights were already turned on, casting their glare onto the strange streets. He walked down unknown ways past blackened alleys like missing teeth between the buildings. Women walked here and there in high-heel shoes and bright clothing. Biegle marched onward, stopping occasionally to stare upward at immense buildings which were bigger than any he had previously seen. A flaming red skirt flickered past him; he heard someone say, quite deliberatively, “Excuse me.” He saw that she was standing there, holding out her hand to him. He looked away at a neon sign which stretched upward for three stories along a brick wall, and he heard the high heels clicking away from him.

Then the glare was no longer so shimmering, nor were the buildings so neat and tall. The men on the streets were now dressed in unpressed, dirty clothing, and the darkness closed in on Biegle as he walked onward. Two forms approached him out of the yawning back of an alley. “How about a cigarette?” said one of the men. They stood very close to Biegle as he held out the pack of cigarettes. “Light?” they asked, speaking in unison. As he was replacing the engraved cigarette lighter into his pocket, he felt something, a pressure, something moving in his hip pocket. Quickly his hand flashed back, and clasped an arm with a hand holding his wallet.

“Give it back,” Biegle ordered.
“Why?”
“I need it. It’s all the money I’ve got,” Biegle said.

The man pulled his arm free and waved the wallet in the air.

“Hum! You think we don’t need it? We got needs you never heard of.
If we had a little more time, we might tell you our story, and then you’d give us your wallet, or at least the cash that’s in it.”

“Give it back!” Biegle lunged at the hand which was still waving the wallet through the air. An arm belonging to the other man crashed down upon him.

“We know you don’t mind. We really do need it.”

Biegle kicked hard with his foot.

“Oh, tough guy, eh? I got it now. Who’s going to stop me from keeping it?”

“It’s mine,” Biegle shouted.

“Don’t bother to yell,” the second man said, “because we’ve got it, and we’re going to keep it. The money’s ours. Quit kicking, and we’ll let you have your wallet back.”

The man removed the money and started to count it. Biegle now lay on the sidewalk, alternately cursing them and begging for the return of his money.

“What do you say, Jack, should we leave him ten or twenty? Let’s see, that’s one-fifty for us, and twenty for him. Fair enough?”

“That’s fair and square,” the second man said, turning to Biegle. “Fellow, we’re going to be real generous. We don’t ordinarily do this, but we can see that you’re not an ordinary person. We’re going to leave you a whole twenty francs, and that’s right out of the generosity of our hearts because we’ll bet money you’re going out to the front, yeah?”

“That’s right,” Biegle said, his pride exhibited in his face.

“Well, we want to do our part to preserve our way of life and to help defend our country and Our Leader,” the first man said, “so we’re giving you twenty smackers and your wallet back, on condition that you are grateful for the kindness we are extending to you.”

“Geez, thanks,” Biegle responded, receiving from them the gift of his wallet and the money.

“Would you like to have a drink with us? We’ll be glad to treat you to a beer,” they said, enthusiastically. But Biegle declined, saying that he would ordinarily have been delighted, and yet now his destiny was calling him onward. He must follow the yellow star waving on the national ensign, he said. The hero’s life beckoned.

So he followed his dream, and he followed it until it led him to the blinking neon letters which spelled *Eunoe Tavern*. Inside, there was a crowded row of men sitting at the bar. It was a small place, with no tables, no juke box, no space for dancing. No space was left for the
playing of human passion, for this was the place of forgetfulness. As he sat alone at the end of the bar, Biegle knew that he was being tempted, however, and yet at the same time he felt he must endure in order that he might be made worthy to ascend to the heroism which would be demanded of him at the front line. He sat, sipping a beer and listening to a dark, sinister man with black hair and deep rings under his eyes, while he felt his old blundering nature being washed in the reviving and fresh water of his imagination. He felt as though he were a new being.

The short, dark man was talking to a pale, thin youth in tennis shoes. “I was sitting here,” he was saying, “and I was watching this dame. She was pouring drinks into this guy. Sure, she was drinking a great deal herself, but, well, she kept him going faster and faster. He was getting pretty damned drunk. Well, she goes to the can, I was watching her. When she’s gone, I says to the guy, ‘Watch out for this dame. I think she’s working for the house. Why not say you’re going somewhere else and if she goes with you she’s okay. If she won’t go, then you know damned well she’s working for the house.’ So when the babe comes back, he says, ‘Let’s go over to Joe’s,’ or some place like that. She says, ‘No, I got to stay here.’ Then she says, ‘What you want to leave here for? Aren’t you having a good time?’ Well, the guy gets up and somehow gets out the door. I don’t know how the hell he manages to drive home.

“I sit there, quiet and drinking my Scotch-on-the-rocks. After a while, she comes over to me and sits by me. I start talking to her. She’s working for the house, I find out, all right. Her old man, that’s Louie, runs the joint. So I tell her who I am. Turns out she has her old man fix me up a drink. Just to make good feelings, see, I buy a round for everybody. Well, after a while Louie says it’s time to close up. He shuts the lights off, and we sit there drinking.”

At this point Biegle lost the sense of what the dark man was saying since he had stepped into the men’s room, but as he returned to the bar he heard the voice continuing.

“I sit in the hotel room waiting for her, see. Matilda comes in after a while. ‘I told my old man I was going for a steam bath,’ she says. That was logical, see, because she had been drinking all night. So she gets down on the bed. I talk to her and at the same time I am playing with her boobs, see. Then she says she’s got to go to the can, says she’ll be right back. I lay on the bed waiting for her and I go to sleep. I don’t know how I slept, but when I wake up she still ain’t back.
After a while I go to sleep again. I never see her again.

“I can’t figure out that dame. She tells me to get the room, comes up there, then she leaves without saying she’s going.” The speaker spat into the sawdust on the floor. “And I go back to Louie’s, here, too. Never see that babe again. How do you like that?”

“Stupendous,” answered the youth in tennis shoes.

“I can’t figure her out. Then last night I dream I see her, standing across the river, picking wildflowers and throwing them across at me.” He paused, “See, it’s my turn to buy.”

Yes, the lady was there, pulsating in the vision as she reached toward the ground to pick the flowerets which she tossed into the river and into the sounding seas. Biegle was absorbed into the strange sight which the man’s speech had inspired, and as he watched a chariot bedecked with wonderful flowers emerged in his imagination. In the chariot was another lady, far more wonderful than the other who was continuing to pick flowers by the side of the river. The lady in the chariot spoke to him. “My friend eternal, you have met me before in manifestations of femininity, for I have taught you the art of love. For me you have labored with your pen. You have learned of me how to make love and how to show your love for your country’s flag. Now I will lead you further, into the path that will take you to the land of milk and honey prepared for heroes who die in the service of their country and their God. There giant maidens will fulfill your desires, and you will rest forever under the vine of Jonah. Be resolute, my Christian soldier, and do your duty. Keep to the path that will lead you to the hero’s grave, and I will love you forever.” She smiled at him, and her eyes glittered with an unearthly light as she stood upright in the chariot. The other lady had turned away, but was still picking flowers by the side of the river. He knew that she, this second lady, was the one who would lead him to the pier.

Yet the vision had passed, at least for the time being. Biegle set forth from the Eunoe Tavern, turned down the darkened streets in quest of the ship. He was not sober.

A gaggle of gang members, all juveniles, set upon him; suddenly they had appeared out of a doorway. For a second time he was assaulted and robbed. Now he was beaten as well, and all his goods were stolen. Just as one might not enter heaven with all his possessions, so now Biegle found that he would not be allowed to set sail for his martial paradise with any worldly goods. Though they beat him and tore off his coat, he did not actually feel any resentment, for
he knew that they could not prevent his destiny.

His vision of the lady in the chariot returned and led him onward, toward the seventh pier where the ship lay waiting. The streets became very narrow as he approached the docks, with scarcely room for an auto to pass the man walking. Windows were broken and were patched with cardboard, and he could smell the odor of rats in the night. Then the street was no longer paved, and, walking in the mud, he followed the lady, who was strewing flowers in his path. He followed her down an alley to the brink of an open ditch. She beckoned to him with her hand. He felt himself slipping into the water, into the open sewer ditch. Her hand held his, pulling him through the filthy water toward her. Then she lifted him, dripping with slime, to the other bank. “Come with me,” she said, “and I will lead you to your ship.”

As she passed under a very dim streetlight, Biegle saw that she had two faces, and that she was looking toward him with her smiling mouth. And she was blind, her bandaged eyes hidden from view, for it was no longer the lady who was leading him by the band, but the goddess Fortuna herself. Thus he was guided infallibly toward the pier, which was actually within the gates of the navy yard. At her shout, the gates had opened miraculously, and Biegle was walking toward the ship which was to take him to the sphere where he could exercise his heroism. He came like a beautiful flower to the gangplank: he was a nosegay for a rear admiral.

Biegle heard a band playing the national anthem as he walked up the gangplank to the ship. He stood at the rail to which he had ascended, and spoke: “I have come through the holy waters, and I have been born anew, renewed like the trees in the spring of the year as they burst forth in newly green foliage; thus I have come, pure of heart and ready to leap upward to the very stardom of heroism.”

The good ship Saint Michael, bearing troops to the war zone, had received him.

The Saint Michael was a converted freighter. Its great iron plates were covered with rust, and its pumps worked even in port to remove the water which leaked into the bilge. Biegle, commanded to remain on deck until his clothes and body could be hosed down with the fire hose, wandered to the bow where he stood in admiration before the great figurehead. The angel Michael, a pair of scales in one hand, was lifting his sword against the dragon writhing about his feet. Aha, thought Biegle, that’s a Christian soldier doing his duty by killing the collectivist dragon, and that’s what we all will be doing when we get
to the front lines.

A column of water from the water hose hit him where he was standing, and flattened him against the bulwark. A sailor laughed.

“Thank you,” Biegle muttered. The laughter was renewed.

The large compartment where he was told to hang his hammock was directly above the bilge. He could hear the water sloshing about under him as he lay there. He slept while the other enlisted men filed onto the ship and came down to hang their hammocks around him. At last the officers arrived, checking into the private cabins which had once been elaborately decorated for the passenger trade. Thus the ship was divided into splendid and heavenly hierarchies, with the officers at the highest level, the privates at the lowest, and the noncommissioned officers between.

When Biegle awakened, he was aware that the ship was now pitching in the waves in the open harbor. All about him were men in their hammocks, sleeping or resting in preparation for the coming voyage. Then they were awakened by a sergeant they had never seen before. “I need a crew,” he said, “so ten of you get your boots on and get up on the deck right away. In five minutes, you better be on the son of a bitching deck topside, or you can swim to our destination.”

The power windlass had failed, and the men were attempting to assist the sailors in drawing the anchor from the harbor. The cable was attached to the emergency windlass. Admittedly most of the soldiers and sailors were half-hearted about their task. Nothing happened. The cable did not move.

“A bunch of damned babies, that’s what you bloody soldiers are,” an old sailor shouted, then cursed the straining soldiers in turn. “By the hierarchies of heaven and hell, you better break your damn backs, or I’ll kick the crap out of you.”

The words of the old sailor inspired the men to heave harder. The cable began slowly to move. But then it stopped. “I said, heave, damn it!” the old sailor cried, planting a kick directly in Biegle’s groin. The effect was instantaneous, for seamen and privates again began to draw the anchor upward until it eventually broke through the surface of the water. Biegle, who had fallen under the kick, rose to heave harder than any of the others. He grunted as he threw himself against the windlass. “That’s right!” shouted the sailor. “Heave till ye burst your guts.”

The Saint Michael’s engines began to grind under the decks, and she began to turn herself toward the mouth of the harbor. Smoke
and soot poured from the stack as the steam engines trembled in her, deep in the hold. The land began slowly to slip away on both sides as she steamed through the entrance to the harbor and out upon the open seas. Biegle, seeing his homeland disappearing behind him, felt a great sorrow in his stomach, for he loved that land above all other things. He was going forth to fight its far-away battles, and he would go to war out of the love which he bore for his home and Our Leader. Meanwhile, the Saint Michael was carrying the hero toward his destiny where he would be weighed in the scales and found worthy of great honors.

The salt sea breeze blew the remnants of the odor of the decadence from Biegle, and, as the wind rose, he looked up at the stars shining through the cloudless night. Lady Fortuna, continue by my side, Biegle prayed.

“We are sailing to the soldiers’ paradise,” someone said beside him.

Biegle began to sing the opening bars of *Kill an Enemy Soldier for Christ Today*.

During the night as he lay awake in his hammock, as Biegle was thinking patriotic thoughts, he felt the cross wind strike the vessel. The Saint Michael began to lurch in the seas; the decks snapped and banged above and beneath the soldiers. Then he felt the gorge rise in his throat, and he heard the sounds of others retching.

The next day the stench became unbearable. Biegle decided to ascend the ladder to the light of day, but found that the light was hidden from him in darkness that was like night. An occasional flash of sunlight, however, did suddenly break through the clouds, which were hanging only a little above the mast of the vessel. As the light pierced through, it seemed to swirl about in the mist which strangled it and clutched it in its arms. And the wind blew and the waves were dashed upward over the decks themselves. A sailor came to him and shouted, but he saw him only dimly through the wind and the rain. Then another shaft of sunlight burst through; again it pierced through the heavy clouds and illumined the sailor as he stood on the deck. In that fleeting moment Biegle finally saw that the sailor was shouting something, but he still heard no sound. At last he took Biegle’s arm with his left hand, and pointed with the other to the hatchway which led down to that other hell immediately above the bilge. Biegle did not move; the sailor went on his way. A great wave towered over the ship, then dashed down onto the deck with thunder. Biegle looked for the sailor, who was no longer there.
Nor did the ship stop to search for its castaway. Biegle returned to the hold now, and was sick among his comrades. A frightful mess was everywhere. The old ship began to leak more profusely under the strains and stresses of the storm, and, when she rolled, bilge water foamed up through the steel deck. Pieces of food, cigarette butts, and dirty clothing floated about in the slimy water.

Yet, as Biegle lay in his hammock, he dreamed. Lady Fortuna again was taking him by the hand and was leading him upward, up steel ladders through hatchways, and then through the other hatchways and up steel ladders to a deck high above all decks. As he had almost reached their highest deck, his foot slipped on the greasy rungs of the ladder, and he began to fall. Still clutching Lady Fortuna’s hand, he fell downward, downward, downward. He cried out in his sleep. “Be comforted,” she said, and he was no longer falling. He was now suspended in the middle of the air, halfway between earth and the heavens. She lifted him upward. He rose without effort. Then he was standing with the lady on the high deck. The stars were much closer, brightly beaming through the black sky like a thousand suns.

“Behold the heavens,” said the lady, “for this is where you will live forever. This is the land which the pagans called Valhallar, the Hall of the Slain, but which in actuality is the heavenly kingdom reserved for those who do service in honor of your Leader and your country. Here are many mansions prepared for you and for those who fight beside you against the wickedness of sin and damnation.”

Biegle saw that the streets were paved with gold. Soldiers dressed in military garb of centuries past and new styles from the present were coming in and out of palaces. He heard the sounds of singing, and in the background there was the King’s own military band. Above the chief of the palaces he saw the yellow star unfurled, and the band broke into strains of *Atlantis Will Conquer Forever*. He knew that no collectivist soldiers should be welcome in paradise, and that another place had been prepared for the enemy.

Having somehow survived the storm, the Saint Michael sailed at the speed of seven knots into a less violent climate. The first task was to pump the water from her leaking hold, and then the soldiers rallied together to clean up the mess left by the storm and sea-sickness. Finally, the enlisted men were put to work chipping paint and repairing, both inside the ship and outside. A scaffold was lowered over the side, and Biegle joined six of his mates in the work of chipping at the rusty side of the ancient hull. Sergeants watched from overhead, and
occasionally a captain or lieutenant would walk along the rail while pretending to overlook the undertaking. Biegle sat, his feet nearly touching the water. He hammered, chipped, and scraped at the old paint and the old rust, then took paint brush in hand to renew the Saint Michael’s tired sides.

One day, as they sat, chipping paint at the waters edge, a squall appeared over the horizon. “All peons on board!” shouted the sergeants in a chorus, but Biegle was so intent upon his work that he didn’t hear the warning until it was too late. The first gust of wind that struck the Saint Michael heeled her over so that she shipped water onto her decks. “Start the pumps!” the skipper yelled. Biegle was washed from the scaffold into the ocean. He offered his soul to the god of Paradise, and gasped a prayer for the holy warfare in which his country was engaged.

But a stray rope from the demolished scaffolding caught itself around his leg. It held, yet he found himself struggling to stay afloat as he was being towed along beside the vessel. He felt the water entering his lungs as he attempted to breathe.

When the privates dragged the wreckage of the scaffold onto the deck, they discovered the almost inert body of Biegle trailing in the sea. They pulled him in and lifted him tenderly onto the deck, then with artificial respiration they revived him.

A few hours later Biegle was back on the scaffold, which had been repaired and lowered once more along the side of the ship. He was again hammering, chipping, and scraping paint.

The ship had entered the war zone. The first real indication of this was a submarine alert one morning. The men were told to dress themselves in their field gear, and after they had been issued their rifles, they waited. They stood on the steel deck above the bilge. No one was permitted to talk, nor was smoking allowed. The alert had already lasted more than two hours when the ship’s single gun unexpectedly fired. A few of the soldiers felt sick again. Then they waited until evening. During most of the day, they had not eaten; now they were told to open field rations. Biegle, opening a can of his rations, slashed his finger on the torn metal. “That,” someone inevitably quipped, “should call for a medal, for being wounded in action.”

The next day the ship sailed through a mine field which was blocking the entrance to the presumably friendly port of Paradise City to attack by enemy ships and submarines. The skipper stood on the bridge, where he held a map of the minefield in his hand. The Saint
Michael moved slowly, sometimes almost stopping as it wove its crooked way through the hidden mines that the navy had installed across the waters. Suddenly, astern of the vessel and on the port side, there were two great blasts, one immediately after the other. First one column of water arose, and then another. From the Saint Michael observers saw fragments of metal flying skyward, and afterward some of the men said they saw large sinking objects dropping into the sea. Oil slicks appeared on the surface. This was the war zone.

Biegle was having his fondest wish granted, for he was now to be allowed to fight against the terrible enemies of his country, and he was near to arriving where the fighting was taking place. The shoreline loomed ahead of them; they saw the lights of the city as the ship steamed into the harbor. They had arrived in Paradise City, the gateway to the mystic East.
V

THE VALLEY OF DEATH

“Then every soldier kill his prisoners”—Shakespeare, Henry V

The harbor was crowded with naval ships, troop carriers, square riggers, sampans, and cargo vessels. There was no room at the dock. The soldiers, lining the rails as they looked across at the land where they would fight and die, were told that they would be taken by motor launch to the pier which formerly had belonged to the yacht club in what was once a rich colonial land. They cheered as the launch drew alongside the Saint Michael, and the first group of warriors set out for the shore. Biegle ran his eye along the strange wharves and across the buildings rising upward in the city, then smiled.

At the same moment that Biegle began to smile, the presses began to roll at his hometown of Eden. When his father opened his newspaper the next morning, he saw the headline at the top of page 7:

Local Youth Arrives
At War Zone Today

Then he started reading the story that accompanied the headline:

Private Winfred Scott Biegle arrived today in the war zone where he will participate in the present campaign to free the captive peoples from the domination of the collectivist enemy.

Presently private Biegle, who is assigned to the company of Lt. Gabriel, is scheduled to see combat duty very shortly.

Biegle enlisted in the Army last year and has recently completed secret training in preparation for special duty at the front. While undergoing training at Camp Western Rock, he was also an artist for the camp newspaper. He took his basic infantry training at
Camp Inferno before his assignment to Camp Western Rock.

A native of rural Eden, his parents (Mr. and Mrs. William S. Biegle) are owners of a farm there.

“Bless me,” Biegle’s father called, “but the boy’s arrived. It really makes me want to get on my old uniform and go join him. I’m really glad I encouraged him to go when I did, and I know that Our Leader is overjoyed too.”

“Oh, I just hope he will come home a martyr for his country,” Mrs. Biegle sighed. “It’s so wonderful what these young heroes are doing for our country, giving their lives and all. I’m going to go right out and put up our flag on the front porch. I love to see that great yellow star flying in the breeze.”

“Let me help you,” Mr. Biegle offered, putting down his martini glass.

Together they raised the flag with the great yellow star.

The flag of Atlantis, flying over the Saint Michael, displayed its great yellow star as a symbol of hope to all the people of Paradise City. Biegle crossed to the shore on the launch which, crowded with soldiers, swayed back and forth in the wake of a giant Navy aircraft carrier. He looked back at the Saint Michael and saw another launch already at her side with the bodies of wounded and dead soldiers being returned from the front line and the fighting. For the last time he saw the place near her bow where he had been working when he was almost swept away into the sea. A sudden feeling of nostalgia came over him, and the thought of the Saint Michael’s rusting hull and leaking condition made him wonder if she would ever find her way back to these troubled waters. He saw her sailing back to Angelus, or attempting to return through another storm. In his imagination she was sinking, the skipper standing on the bridge and calling out orders as the old ship began her plunge beneath the waters. No, there would be a time when she would never reach her home again but, like a true heroine, would die in the service of her country.

“Where’s the bugler?” Lieutenant Gabriel was shouting as Biegle stepped onto the shore. “Can anyone else play the bugle?” But at last, as Biegle and the others waited on the shore, the bugler was found, and the trumpet was sounded that called them to arise and to go forth to their camping ground, which was immediately outside Paradise City.
City on the side of a hill overlooking the bright lights and the gay music of the entertainment sector. This hardly seemed to be a city at war, Biegle reflected.

Biegle and his army tent-mate, Private Luna, began to dig their foxhole and to set up their tent. Despite the hot and muggy tropical heat, they had completed their preparations before the chow time bugle called them from their work. The sun had been shining in all its glory, and the wet, soggy ground had given forth a mist which rose upward. But now, the sun having disappeared behind the hill, the men shivered as they ate their chipped beef on toast. Later, when they were tucked beneath their blankets in their tents, they felt the cold penetrating through their damp clothing and covering. Biegle, awakened by the cold, tugged with his hand on his mate’s blanket, then settled down in the warmth of the extra blanket to sleep until morning. Private Luna, however, awakened in intense discomfort, trembling with cold; sneezing, he announced that he must go on sick call to have his head cold treated.

The morning also revealed a carpet of candy bar wrappers and empty beer cans about the tents. Lieutenant Gabriel was infuriated, shouting and cursing his displeasure when he made his daily tour of inspection. “And those fighting holes got to be deeper, with the tunnel off at the side in case a grenade gets thrown in by some enemy bastard who happens to be walking by,” he added. “This is no training camp but a real fighting area. You don’t have to go all the way to the front before you can run into real trouble. You got to learn how to protect yourselves, because the bastards are going to come over here and show you how.”

In the simmering morning heat they moved, enlarging their foxholes and perfecting the camouflage of their position. The earth which they tossed from their foxholes was like jelly, and as they worked deeper into the ground, water seeped in to cover the bottom of their holes. Before they were finished, the lieutenant came dashing back into the area. “Get down in them holes,” he raged. “I want to see how they fit.” Everyone obeyed, crouching in the wet earth and water fearfully until the officer commanded them to continue their work. Then suddenly an airplane screamed overhead, and all the soldiers dropped into the fighting holes once more. Biegle, seeing that it was not a friendly aircraft and that an enemy pilot was sitting in the cockpit, leaped up alone, aiming his rifle at the receding plane. A sergeant shouted a warning at him: “Don’t shoot, or he’ll be back.” When it was
over, Biegle knew that it had been a very frightening experience. He returned to Private Luna, whom he found kneeling at the bottom of the foxhole in the water where he was coughing and sneezing in anguish.

Then the bombardment started. The shells, screaming in among the screaming and inexperienced men, crashed all about them. For fifteen minutes the bombardment continued, then stopped as mysteriously as it had begun. The dead and injured were lying all about on the ground where they were being tended by medics. Ambulances were already arriving to receive the bodies of the wounded and the dead. Biegle, fortunately, was unhurt, but Private Luna had been struck by a piece of shrapnel in his arm. The medic examined it, pronounced the wound to be not serious, bandaged it, and sent him back to continue working at his fortifications.

As they lay wrapped in their blankets that night, Biegle and Luna were discussing the day’s events.

“I was scared,” said Luna. “I couldn’t help it. I prayed, but it didn’t do any good, and then after I fainted, I woke up and something hit me. I felt like I was drowning in the mud.”

“Hell,” said Biegle, “that was nothing. It was just a little prelude to the real fighting that we’re going to find when we get up to the front line. Anyway, you’re real lucky. You could have been killed.”

“But you weren’t scared at all,” said Luna in wonderment. “You were right here in the same foxhole, and I looked up at your face: there was something like a ring of light around it. I don’t see how you could be so brave.”

“Well,” Biegle drawled, “I always wanted to fight, and when Our Leader made his call to arms last year, I knew what I had to do. When you are determined to live or die for your country, fear really doesn’t grip you the way it otherwise would. You know that if you died, it would be in the service of your land. I know my mother would be very proud of me if I was killed in combat.”

“I would have run, but I was too scared,” Luna admitted.

“It’s just the way you look at it. If you are scared, you don’t have the right attitude yet. But you will get the right attitude when you’ve been over here a little while longer. You’ll be as brave as anybody else, because that’s just the way a soldier must be. A soldier knows that he can’t be afraid and that he must fight because if he doesn’t the cowardly bastards will get him before he gets them.”

“Huh?” Said Private Luna.

“I mean, you got to get the bastards before they shoot you.”
“I’d rather go home.”

“Aw, it won’t be so bad. You’ll get used to it, and it will be
great sport to fight in the army of Our Leader against the collectivist
bastards. Just wait.”

“I can’t understand it, Biegle. You and I are in the same
foxhole, and you don’t show one sign of fear and come out safe. Me?
I get shot in the arm, and the medic and the lieutenant both give me hell
for getting myself wounded.”

“Those officers don’t like anything,” Biegle philosophized.

Biegle yawned, belched, and slipped into a deep sleep while
private Luna tossed and turned, sleepless because of the pain in his
arm. During the night heavy rain began to fall, and water poured
through the slash which a piece of shrapnel had torn in Biegle’s tent.
But Biegle did not awaken. Luna, looking up toward the moonless sky,
moaned beneath the wet blankets and listened to the sound of the rain
falling. Plunk, plink, plunk, plink, plunk, plink, plunk, plink, plink
plunk plink plink plink plink plink plunk plink plink plink plinkk
plinkkk ppplllink ppplliinkkk pppllllliiinnnnnnnnnk.

When the bugle called the men from their sleep in the morning,
the rain was still coming down in torrents. These were not drops, but
chunks of water. Lieutenant Gabriel, however, decided that the men
should eat their breakfast in open areas without taking shelter under
trees. Everyone among the enlisted men must fish his soft-boiled eggs
out of the water in his mess pan. Returning to their tents, they found
that the pegs which held them fastened to the ground were becoming
loosened. The tents were being washed down the hillside. “Tents,
tents,” Biegle muttered, as he wondered what might be done to save the
camp from utter disaster. Beside him, a private slipped into a foxhole
which was full of water. As Biegle helped him to extricate himself
from the hole, they heard the laughing of officers in the distance.

The large officers’ tent, which had been most carefully located
on a dry and high piece of ground, stood securely dry in the storm. In
the doorway the officers were standing, bent over with laughter at the
plight of the enlisted men. The men who were standing about quickly
nominated Biegle to be their representative, and they sent him to their
commanding officer to complain about the disaster which had
overtaken their smaller tents.

“What do you want?” asked the lieutenant when Biegle
reported to him.

“Our tents, sir,” Biegle gasped, weary from walking through
the mud which was now knee-deep in places. “We’ve got no place... They’re gone.”

“You’re all wet, eh?” Lieutenant Gabriel doubled over with laughter. “You better go and ha! ha! ha! You tell those ha! ha! You tell those men that they better not lose any of that damned equipment.” Biegle waited for him to say more. “What the hell are you waiting for?” the officer screamed. Still, Biegle did not move. “Get the blank out of here!” he screeched, bursting into laughter again.

“I’m sorry that I offended you,” Biegle said, “but I wonder if you’re doing the right thing, sir. I don’t know if Our Leader would approve your action in refusing to do all that you can to assist his soldiers from physical harm. My buddy, for example, has a very bad cold, and I wouldn’t like to see it turn into pneumonia, especially since he also has a shrapnel wound that may be mortal.”

“You fool, this is all arranged as part of your training to get you ready for the front line. And besides, it’s very funny, ha! ha! ha! Remember, war isn’t supposed to be heaven.”

“However, sir,” Biegle quipped, “as the chaplain explained, war is the way to heaven, and we must love our soldiers as we love ourselves. You’ve got to show love for your soldiers, sir.”

“I don’t got to nothing, boy. Now get the hell out of here. I know my Patriotism Manual, and I won’t have any pip-squeak private tell me how I ought to act.” He was no longer laughing.

There seemed to be nothing that Biegle could do or say to change the attitude of the officers, so he and the other enlisted men did what they could to salvage the tents and to make fast their position. The rain did not abate, but kept pouring down at the same steady rate.

In the morning Biegle arose from his tent, stood surveying the devastated area, and called back to Private Luna to awaken, for breakfast was about to be served. There was no answer. He called again, but there was no answer. Private Luna had died in the night from wounds which were much more serious than the medics had realized. When Biegle lifted back the blanket from about his body, he saw that the tropical vermin had already attacked the dead flesh. Horrified, he ran to tell the first sergeant that his tent-mate had died. Tears were in his eyes.

Despite the continuing rain, the men were being called into the officers’ tent one by one, and each was showing what equipment remained in his possession. For everything that was lost or missing someone signed a statement of charges. Lieutenant Gabriel himself was
calling out the names. “Private Luna! Sacrement! Speak up! Damn it, Private Luna!”

“He’s dead,” said Biegle, sorrowfully.

“By Saint Moloche, he’s lucky, or I’d have his ass for not sounding off,” said the officer.

There was a lull in the storm at exactly that moment, and the sound of reveling drifted up to them from the city below. Music and laughter came up the slope, then were lost in the wind and the rain.

“How the hell do you think we’re going to win this war,” stormed the lieutenant, “if the troops keep dying off on us?”

Other companies, they knew, had been allowed to go on leave into Paradise City itself. Biegle had already talked to them as they had passed by toward their encampment on the hill beyond, and he remembered their stories of the fabulous and gay and exotic city: the dance halls, the music, the women offering themselves, especially the latter.

“Biegle!” Lieutenant Gabriel shouted.

He found himself signing the statement of charges for items which he had never received. Prodding his mind was his training in intelligence work. What had happened to the equipment? What was the motive, if there was a motive, behind the dishonesty which seemed to be present in his company? Was the company commander selling our country’s goods to the black market? Or to the enemy? He thought of all the newspaper stories he had read back home about profiteering in such ways, but he had been given to understand that all the dishonesty was to be found among the allies, who were generally not to be trusted.

As soon as the troops of Lieutenant Gabriel’s company had dried out after the storm, he gave the order to prepare to move out of camp. No reason was given, nor were they told where they were going.

“I hope this means we go to the front line,” Biegle said. With all their gear on their backs, they set forth, marching down to the beach again among wharves loaded with military goods being shipped to the Continent. Their boots, white with mildew, sloshed in the mud as they marched. After each hour of marching, they were allowed to stop for rest. They sat on the muddy ground and drank from their canteens. The officers shouted to them that they must not talk, for thus they would give away their position to enemy snipers. They marched onward, slogging along the beach north of Paradise City with the clanking of equipment and rifles. They did not question where they were going, for they knew that information of this kind had to be kept secret in a war
such as this. But they carried hope in their hearts.

They left the gay lights and music of Paradise City behind them, and they longed for the lost opportunity which had been denied them by a company commander who would not allow them to leave to go to the city. But they knew that their destiny lay in a higher region, for they must defend their country against aggression. They were to protect their land against aggression by defending this weak foreign country against likely massive intervention from across its borders. They were to be the agents of heroic action in the war to protect freedom.

Some distance beyond the harbor there was a small cove where they saw the troop carriers waiting to take them north to the front. The men were marched onto the carriers in ranks, and were packed in shoulder-to-shoulder. They stood there, sleeping until the boats put out to sea. As the boats began to move, Biegle shouted, “Hooray!” The other troops joined in the shout, for they knew that they would soon be wherever they were going. Then the seasickness set in again. The troop carriers, picking their paths across the mine fields, wove their way through the rough waters. Finally, each boat pushed its nose into the muddy bank in another cove far to the north, a hundred miles or more from Paradise City. The soldiers staggered onto the mainland.

They marched inland, tramping through the forest along a well-worn path. The sun rose gloriously in the sky, but revealed a jungle full of snakes and strange-appearing vegetation. The pathway began to steam with moisture, and the men perspired profusely. Mosquitoes buzzed about the men’s heads and hands. Their boots tramped along the narrow road. “This area has been reclaimed for liberty and freedom from the aggressors,” said the lieutenant, “but you got to watch out for snipers, land mines, and grenades.” It was one of the latter that fell into their midst about nine in the morning.

The grenade was tossed onto the road from a very short distance away. The men scattered, falling beside the road and behind trees as the grenade exploded with a roar. The casualties were left beside the road for the medical patrol which traveled back and forth three times each day to pick up the wounded. Also, a six-man squad was left to hunt for the “bastard who threw the grenade, the coward,” while the rest of the company marched on once more toward the permanent camp near a well-entrenched regimental headquarters in the jungle. From that camp, men would be chosen as immediate replacements for companies fighting on the front line of action.
In the meantime, while the troops of the company were waiting hopefully for action at the front, select soldiers were pleasantly surprised at being picked for duty on helicopter patrols over enemy-held territory. Biegle was one of the lucky ones. He mounted to the helicopter with pride and took his place behind the great machine gun which he was to fire.

“Biegle,” said the officer, Captain Marsh, “all you got to do is to line up those sites on your target. We’ll do the spotting together, and you’ll hold your fire till we agree on what we ought to hit. The general rule is, if you see someone running down there and trying to hide, he’s an enemy, and you shoot the son of a bitch. If he waves at us, he’s friendly. If he neither waves nor runs, we got to make up our minds what to do. I usually shoot. Got it? Ready? We take off in five minutes.”

Captain Marsh was an expert pilot who flew his helicopter right in among the trees to observe enemy positions and to deliver whatever firepower he was able to muster. On this trip, he coasted along the road which led northward toward the river which the enemy had crossed at the time of the great invasion, and then struck off toward the village of Wewok, which was reputed to have an encampment of enemy soldiers. The helicopter was hanging above the village. “If they shoot at us,” said the captain, “we open fire without waiting.” But there was no fire from the village. “Try throwing out a grenade,” suggested the captain, dropping his helicopter down almost to the rooftops.

“Maybe there isn’t any encampment here after all,” Biegle suggested.

“Drop it anyway,” the captain ordered.

The grenade fell on the ground before one of the houses, and exploded as a woman and child were attempting to run from the building. Biegle saw the body of the infant tossed skyward by the blast. “Ha! We hit the bastards!” The captain shouted. A lone sniper’s bullet whizzed past the helicopter, and Captain Marsh ordered, “Shoot at everything that moves.” Biegle’s heart throbbed with excitement as he pressed down the trigger on the machine gun. An old man with one leg was hopping across the road toward cover when Biegle cut him down. “Hooray!” he shouted, pulling the trigger again as his bullets flashed into the houses.

“That damn village has got to go,” the captain muttered as he worked with his radio; he was preparing to call in a bombing strike, but was unable to make contact at first with the Air Force radio operator.
In the meantime, he pointed to the propaganda pamphlets lying in the corner beside Biegle, and said to his machine gunner: “When we fly over the road, toss those things out. Sure, the bastards can’t read them anyway. Not in their language. What the hell? When that’s done, we can go back to the base. Want to come along tomorrow and see what’s left of the village? I’m not kidding you, there isn’t going to be any Wewok when we fly over tomorrow.”

“I’ll bet they all go up in a blaze of glory when the bombers get here,” said Biegle, tossing the pamphlets from the helicopter.

“You bet. If they won’t respect the Army of Atlantis, they can fry for it. Those that can get out in time, good luck. We’ll pick up some of them, of course. We’ll turn them over to the friendlies, who can do what they want with them. Anything is okay with me as long as they get their heads straightened out and they decide they want to throw in their hats on the side of freedom instead of tyranny.”

“Gee, that’s great. We’re really winning them over. Hey, look at those poor bastards running over there.”

“Get ’em!”

Biegle pressed the trigger, and the bullets scattered toward the ground where the three men were running across a rice field. Behind them they left the water buffalo, which Biegle promptly dispatched with precise aim from the helicopter. “Hey, this is great fun,” said Biegle with enthusiasm. “I always wanted to fight, but I never dreamed how much fun it would be.”

When they flew over Wewok the next day, there was indeed no longer any village there, but only a charred ruin of the ancient hamlet. “Brother,” Biegle exclaimed, “it really doesn’t pay to get on the wrong side of Our Leader! I never before was so proud to serve him and our wonderful country. By all that is beautiful, I’d like to catch every one of those bastards and teach him our national anthem. That would straighten them out!”

“It’s a great war, in spite of our reverses when the enemy first crossed the river,” Captain Marsh observed. “We’re really giving those collectivists some of their own medicine. Imagine them shooting at our helicopter like that yesterday! Well, we fixed their cans!”

Biegle began to hum his favorite song, Kill an Enemy Soldier for Christ Today.

“We should be able to annihilate the atheistic bastards in six months, if we can find an excuse to use our atomic bomb,” the captain observed.
“That would be really and truly great, would solve the problem once and for all.”

“In fact, we would have won six months ago, if the new gas had worked properly and we had been allowed to march across the river and cut off the invaders.”

They were hovering over the tops of the green trees as Captain Marsh was preparing to return to the base with photographs of what had been a village that had previously existed for seven hundred years.

“You see that plane over there?” the Captain asked.

“You bet. The one with the smoke coming out of it? Looks like the enemy got one of ours.”

“That’s not smoke, that’s poison gas, kills everything. Those trees will be dead in three weeks. When we wipe out an enemy stronghold, we annihilate it.”

“That includes the enemy,” Biegle intoned. “I like this job, and I wish I could do this for the rest of the war, but I guess they’re cutting my orders today. I go to the front.”

“That’s the place to be. Our Leader says that the best men are always on the front line. Hey, look at the clump of trees there. Give them a couple of bursts.”

Biegle turned the machine gun and fixed his aim on the green trees. Then he pressed the trigger.

Lieutenant Gabriel’s present company was being broken up as men were being picked to serve in different capacities as replacements among the various hierarchies of the military organization in the jungle campaign. He ordered that the men of his company be lined up and in a neat formation. The men stood at attention in precise rows. The noise of artillery came to them over the hills from the distance, but no incidents occurred that morning in the camp. A sniper who had infiltrated the camp spotted the lieutenant’s formation, but he was not able to fire because of the presence of an armored car near his position.

“When I call out your name, I want you to sound off with Here, Sir! and then move out to see that your pack is made up and ready for moving out. Biegle!”

“Right here, Sir!”

“Fall out and get your pack ready.”

Six men packed their equipment and waited that day. At sundown they were still waiting. Biegle, destined to join an old infantry unit that had been heroically fighting since the beginning of the war,
placed his feet on the stump of a tree and lit a cigarette with his engraved cigarette lighter. “Let’s see,” he said. “These orders say I am to join the 593rd Company of the Third Infantry Regiment. Isn’t that the regiment that held the line recently against all attacks of the famous Battle of the Bunkers after the enemy crossed the river? Weren’t they finally evacuated to fight again heroically in the South until we could drive the enemy back to the present front?” Colonel Cadaveri, who had commanded the regiment during that famous siege, was back once again to be the regimental commander.

The five other soldiers had been loaded into the armored troop carriers and had been spirited away into the jungle long before the half-track stopped at the camp for Biegle. Through the night and the undergrowth the vehicle roared without lights. “So the bastards can’t spot us,” the driver, an army private, explained.

“I can’t see anything,” Biegle complained.

“Oh, crap, all you got to do is to keep your eyes on the road.”

“What road?”

“What the hell! It’s almost like daylight out there tonight. You should have been aboard last night when it was really dark. Oh, Sacrement! There’re even stars out tonight.”

Indeed, there were a few stars shining above them in the vicinity of the Great Dipper, but Biegle could not see the road which apparently lay ahead of them.

“Just wait,” the private promised, “because they’ll show you how to see in the dark. It’s one of the things they teach you in the army. You get pretty good at it, after a while.”

“The harder I try, the less I see.”

“Sure, that’s the way it is. In this business, you can’t look at anything straight. It just doesn’t work. Don’t stare. You got to see things slantwise. Move your eyes around all the time. It’s easy. Try it.”

The half-track almost missed the next curve in the road, slid into a ditch and groaned with difficulty onto the hard surface again.

“I can’t see anything,” Biegle lamented only a moment before an explosion illuminated the entire countryside ahead of them.

“This is infested territory, semi-pacified, like Caesar’s Gaul when the natives tended to act up. You can’t always teach the principles of freedom and free enterprise at once as soon as you liberate the territory,” the private explained.

Bullets clanged as they struck the side of the vehicle. “Hoo-ray!” Shouted Biegle, shooting wildly into the trees from behind the
armor plate.

The armored vehicle broke down at the edge of the camp, and Biegle had to enter on foot while a private attempted to fix a punctured tire on a front wheel. As our hero entered, he thought of the long journey that he had made from his home east of Eden, down to the training centers at Camp Inferno and over to Camp Western Rock, then finally to the realm of battle. “And there was war in heaven,” he repeated. His whole life, he realized, was a journey from his humble and insignificant beginnings to the area of battle where the most profound events were taking place. Events of cosmic significance. Indeed, he was here at the front to help shape the course of history itself. “Our Leader bless me,” he chanted as he stepped forth before the company commander’s tent.

“So this is Biegle,” Captain Powers said. “Biegle. That’s almost a dog’s name for this dog-eaten company.”

“Sir, I resent that,” Biegle objected. “No company in the service of Our Leader can be called a dog-eaten company.”

“I beg your pardon, my boy, but I kid you not: they are all dogs. Spaniels, terriers, bulldogs, and now beagles. Dogs, all of the whole crew. How’s your jaw, my boy?”

Biegle’s jaw jutted out like a true hero’s. He pulled back his lips so that the captain could see his flashing teeth.

“The bastards shot Tom Beckett, the best fighting man on the whole crew. And I get you. Do you see this dampness gathering on my forehead?”

“Yes, sir.”

“This is not sweat. It’s plasma. They tell me new men, raw men, green men, troops just over the water, are the ones that fight best in this war. And, yea, whom do they send me? Convicts, insane men, fanatics, alcoholics, and the feeble minded. The bastards will kill us all,” he moaned, throwing himself onto the ground and rolling back and forth, hugging himself with his trembling arms.”I can’t stand it!” He screamed, beating with his fists against his head. “I’ve got a company of nuts. They’re crazy all of them. Crazy! Do you hear, Biegle? Crazy, I say.” He was now pulling his hair from his head and waving at it back and forth in his clenched fists.

“Crazy? Nuts! Damn, I’m hungry. As a matter of fact, I haven’t had anything to eat since breakfast,” Biegle calmly announced.

“Eat and sleep. That’s all they do. And drink. It’s awful. I don’t see how I can feel responsible to Our Leader when I have a company
of bloody nuts.” He buried his face in his hands and kicked with his feet against the table upon which were maps, books, and soggy potato chips. “Get out of here, you dog!” he trumpeted, and then barked, “Arf, arf, arf.”

Biegle slipped down to the ground before the officers’ tent, covered himself with half a pup tent, and slept through the remainder of the night with his mind resting in the knowledge that he had arrived in the sphere of heroic action. Despite a brief shower in the early hours before dawn, he awakened with pleasure, grasping the rifle which he had so carefully laid beside him under the canvas the evening before. He had seen some action from the helicopter, and now was prepared for the serious business of doing the deeds of heroism.

Despite the high humidity, the day began in tremendous splendor. Biegle was roused, and he waited with the other troops from his company under a tall tropical palm tree which waved gracefully back and forth in the breeze. In the muggy air, mosquitoes swarmed to harass the men who were sitting on the muddy ground and awaiting the approach of Captain Powers.

“Well, men,” said the captain, “we must move out. We’re spearheading an attack against the enemy bastards on Hill 777. We move in two hours, and by Our Leader you better have your gear in order before we march or you’ll march without it.”

Private Francis sat down behind the tree. “We’re not moving,” he said.

Nor did anyone else in that war-battered company move to obey the order.

“You see,” wept the captain, “what a screwball company this is. Dogs, all dogs. How can Our Leader give me such men and expect me to win battles?”

“Holy smoke,” Private Bonaventura swore. “None of us wants to get his ass shot off.”

“The orders aren’t mine,” the captain explained. “They come from the colonel, who gets them from the general, who gets them from Our Leader. Won’t you please do what Our Leader wants us to do in defense of our country?”

“No,” said Private Bonaventura.

“We are not moving,” Private Francis reiterated.

All the troops squatted on the ground and began to tell filthy stories. Captain Powers was bewildered and frightened at the insurrection. “Go right ahead! You stay here, and leave a gap in the
line, and the bastards can pour right through and swoop down on this position and kill every one of you idiots. Go right ahead! Don’t move. Get killed.”

Biegle’s eyes brightened as he recognized the implications of what his superior officer had said. At last he spoke. “I’m going to fight,” said Biegle.

The others looked up, their faces full of pity for him.

“I’m going to fight. You guys can stay here and get killed if you want to.”

“We aren’t moving,” Privates Francis and Bonaventura repeated.

“What kind of way is this to serve Our Leader?” Biegle charged. “Do you want to lose your lives and the war and have the bastard enemy flocking all over our country back home and raping our mothers and sisters? We got a job given to us to do, and that job is to kill an enemy soldier every day. Do you want to go to hell for your mutiny? Come on, let’s fight on the side of justice and right for our country and our country’s deity!”

Biegle had said the right words, for the men slowly began to rise to their feet, sheepishly to walk away toward their tents, and then to prepare for the battle. In the end, only privates Bonaventura and Francis were sitting under the palm tree telling filthy stories to each other. Biegle ran up to them with a pointed stick which he had found along the path. Prodding Francis with the stick, he yelled encouragement to them as they too reluctantly turned their faces toward their tents.

Shouting patriotic slogans, the soldiers marched toward the front. During the march two or three men, targets for snipers who picked them out of the neat formation, were left beside the road to nurse their wounds while waiting for the first aid patrol. Francis and Bonaventura, always a troublesome pair, tried to insist that they should be allowed to assist their wounded mates, but the first sergeant curtly ordered them to march onward. The captain wrote down the names of the wounded in a little black book that he kept in his pocket.

They halted. This was the point on the map where Captain Powers’ orders indicated that he should break the company up into squads, which were to move ahead into the defoliated jungle in proper formations as determined by the wisdom of the company commander. Biegle’s squad, led by Corporal Mercury, struck out in as-skirmishers formation, tramping among the dead and dying trees which had once
given cover to the enemy. Beside him on his left side were Francis and Bonaventura and Biegle; on his right were Privates Dominic, Godfrey, Roland, and William. Godfrey held up his arm, still showing signs of the steel armbands that he had worn when he was an inmate in the Angelus Reform School with his mates Roland and William. The squad stopped, then dropped to the ground. Corporal Mercury ran ahead with a grenade in his hand, and with a great cry threw the explosive into a hole which opened in the ground. Bits of earth fell back upon them as they lay behind cover, and then all was still. They rose up and made their way forward. It was then that the squad leader realized he was separated from the remainder of his company.

The attack was to be a surprise. The enemy, well established in positions that had been held for several weeks, was shooting round after round of ammunition into the woods around them, but no one in Captain Powers’ company was to fire a rifle until the word was given over the radio. The orders came from above. The colonel expected the enemy to be totally unprepared for the assault, and indeed all was quiet on the western part of the front where the colonel himself was overseeing the action. All was to be quiet on the front line, and the enemy holding the hill was to be mopped up effectively and quickly.

Biegle glanced at Francis. “I’m not going through with it,” the reluctant private announced.

Corporal Mercury, hearing Francis’ words, in quick anger shouted toward him: “By Moloch and all the powers and Our Leader’s balls, you’re going to fight like it’s the end of the world.”

The men were inspired, and prepared themselves for the order to attack. They ran forward toward the enemy’s lines in a mad search for the other squads from their company. Biegle ran ahead of them all; he was shouting. “Sacrement! We’re going to fight and kill those bastards. Come and kill! Come and kill the pinkie cowards!”

Corporal Mercury, infuriated, was running behind Biegle and was shouting, “Shut up, damn it! This is a surprise attack!” A bullet from an enemy rifle struck the corporal’s helmet and was deflected to the ground. He stooped over and picked the piece of lead out of the ground with his hand. Biegle, whom he could see in the distance, was still running toward the enemy lines. Four other members of the squad were close behind Biegle, who turned to them and began to give orders. “Stay here,” he told them, “while I go forward to see what I can see.”

Biegle had run only a short distance into the dark and dying jungle when he saw a group of enemy soldiers standing around an
artillery piece. He knew that he had succeeded in penetrating the enemy lines. “Hey, fellows!” he shouted to his mates, “forward march!” Then he started shooting, and with glee and patriotic pride he had shot and killed three of the enemy before they could scatter. “Bastards!” he shouted, pulling the pin on a grenade and throwing it at the artillery piece. He dropped to the ground; the grenade exploded as the other members of the squad came upon the scene. Dominic and Godfrey and William were full of admiration as they saw the havoc that Biegle had wrought. Then they saw him dash up the hill into enemy territory.

A flare flashed overhead. The others fell to the ground and were still, but Biegle rushed upward toward the enemy fortifications on the hill. Another flare illuminated the sky with glorious incandescence. A dozen enemy riflemen emptied their rifles at him as he rushed onward and upward. Lady Fortuna was at his side again, once more encouraging him to press forward. He fixed his bayonet, and tumbled over a fortification. Shooting to the right and to the left, he then stabbed three enemy soldiers before he broke his bayonet against a machine gun barrel. He shot six rounds into the leafless jungle where he had seen the shadows of the enemy soldiers escaping. “In the name of Our Leader, halt!” he shouted, and then ran after them. He shot round after round into the echoing jungle.

Biegle did not see when Lady Fortuna deserted him, nor did he realize that in his zeal to pursue the enemy he had lost his bearings. He was penetrating his own lines again, and was shooting dangerously ahead with his rifle. Suddenly a man jumped up before him with his hands raised high in the air. “What the hell are you doing, Biegle?” The voice belonged to Corporal Mercury, whose face was red with anger. “Where did you come from?” asked Biegle, his heart sinking in fear.

“One thing you got to learn,” said the corporal, “is to get your directions straight. And the best way to do that, is to stick with me. I’m supposed to be your squad leader, damn it, and you’re not supposed to do anything I don’t tell you to do.”

“I’m sorry,” said Biegle, as they approached the company commander, who was issuing a barrage of orders from an entrenchment immediately to the rear of the fighting.

“Pretty careless with your weapons, he?” said Captain Powers to Biegle.

“I really want to do my best against the heathen enemy
“bastards,” he responded.

“So I hear. Your willingness to fight, my boy, was the only thing that gave away our position to the enemy. You alone were responsible for spoiling the effectiveness of our surprise attack. Do you realize that we almost lost the battle on account of you?”

“I fought as hard as I could,” said Biegle.

“Sure, sure. You just about killed everybody. On both sides. Do you realize you almost killed your squad leader?”

“I thought he was an enemy soldier. I’m sorry. It was after I bayoneted six or seven, and shot a whole dozen or two. I guess I was happy and excited.” Biegle held up the rifle with its broken bayonet attached to the barrel.

“Usually gung-ho guys like you get killed off right away, you dog.”

A shell, screaming into the bushes beyond them, exploded.

“And,” snapped the captain, “next time you point a gun—I mean, a piece, a rifle—make certain where it is that you’re aiming it.” He turned to his radio set, and shouted into the microphone: “Lily of the Valley, Lily of the Valley, come in!”

“This is Lily of the Valley,” the loudspeaker boomed.

“Give me some artillery rounds on Position B on Hill 777.”

“Who is this speaking, please?”

“This is Mustardseed calling for an artillery strike on Position B.”

“Lily of the Valley will provide the artillery strike on Position B in five minutes. Is the area free from friendly troops?”

“Mustardseed does not know if the area is free from friendly troops, but you’ve got to drop in those shells if you don’t want our base position here overrun by the bastards. I’ll do what I can to draw friendly forces back before the strike time.”

“Lily of the Valley will proceed with artillery strike at 1608 hours.”

The battle raged at the hill until at last Captain Powers and Private Biegle looked up to see the flag with the great yellow star being raised on the top by Atlantis Army troops. The fighting was over for the time being, the enemy lines had broken, and Biegle’s company was being moved back to the camp which they had previously occupied in pacified territory.

But in spite of the victory over the enemy and the penetration of the enemy’s lines, the days passed, then the weeks as the men waited
for further orders to move back up to confront the opposing army. Reports of fighting trickled in, but they did not actually discover that the high command believed the resistance of the enemy to have been broken after the battle on Hill 777. All the enemy’s supply channels had been cut off, and Colonel Cadaveri believed that the end would now only be a matter of time.

On the other hand, there was a real danger that the enemy’s allies to the west might counterattack once again or that a new wave of troops might pour over the river to the north. Across the border to the west they were amassing a great army, and enemy ships were standing by in the harbor of Chensing, which was only two hundred miles up the coast. Eventually, therefore, Captain Powers was ordered to take his company to a new camp on the western border. The months again passed. Even Biegle was disillusioned by the waiting, for he was able to achieve no glory when he was sitting in camp. He had hoped too for intelligence work, but in this also he was feeling frustrated.

On watch in his foxhole, he held one hand ready on his rifle, and with the other he held a comic book. His favorites were, of course, war comics, and he especially like a series called “Longshot John, Rifleman,” which had been issued by the Troop Information and Entertainment Office (TI&E). He and the other members of the squad read each volume in the series, and then re-read them all. At one time, Biegle could quote page after page of the sayings of Longshot John. He even considered the possibility of making a collection of these sayings to be issued in book form, imagined in imitation leather binding with a great yellow star on the cover. He repeated the most pithy sayings in his mind:

“WAR IS OPPORTUNITY for advancement.”
“Kill when you can.”
“Let’s have ENEMY STEW.”
“Traitors are for TARGET PRACTICE.”
“Re-enlist for the FUN of it.”
“Don’t ask questions: KILL THE PRISONERS.”
“OUR LEADER IS NEVER WRONG.”
“Aim for the BELLY BUTTON.”

Everyone wanted to imitate Longshot John, and everyone desired to be lifted up into the same cloud of glory which encircled their fictional hero. Why else would so large a budget for Longshot John comics have
been authorized by the officer corps of the TI&E unit?

Through the boredom and the mud, Biegle waited, read the maxims of Longshot John, and dreamed of the time when he would see action again. Oh, that he might do greater deeds of heroism than Longshot John himself! Oh, that opportunity might present itself again, and that Lady Fortuna might again take him by the hand to lead him along the paths of glory!

“Biegle!” shouted Captain Powers, “I need a pitcher of water for the colonel!”

Biegle came running, deserting his dreams to act out the desires of his commanding officer. He ran to the water tank, grasped the pitcher in both hands, and filled it. Then he slipped his hand inside through the neck of the pitcher, closed his fist, and ran toward the officers’ tent. “A new way to carry water in a pitcher without spilling any. Longshot John did it this way.” Biegle explained to the curious enlisted men who ran long beside him. He placed the pitcher on the table before the amazed colonel, unclenched his fist, saluted, and walked out.

“Have some cool water. Nice cool water,” the captain said. “Good for what ails you.”

“No the hell told those idiots they were permitted to read about Longshot John?” demanded the colonel. “Those are reserved for non-commissioned officers.”

“Our sergeants read books like this,” said Captain Powers, holding up an 827-page book entitled Principles of the Free Enterprise System.”

“Hey, that is my favorite book,” the colonel responded. “Have your men also been reading The Road to Serfdom?”

“Our sergeants know what they are fighting for in this war,” Captain Powers said, speaking somewhat belligerently. “The Road to Serfdom they read in the Readers’ Digest when it came out.”

“Hmm. At least your men in the lower ranks could show up in their fatigues. What makes you think that you can allow them to wear civilian clothes when the enemy might attack from across the river at any moment?”

“But I never noticed it until you mentioned it. They don’t wear fatigues, do they?”

“And what do you think they’re doing with their fatigues? I’ll tell you. They’re selling them to the natives, who in turn are trading them or giving them to the enemy. Do you hear? This must stop at
once, or I’ll give the whole company a suicide mission next week, or whenever we are able to provoke the next enemy attack.”

“I’ll take care of that, sir,” Captain Powers promised.

Each day Biegle and his friends had been walking the mile and a half to Goköping, a pleasant little hamlet with rather muddy streets and houses with thatched roofs. The women of the village were very eager for trade with the visiting soldiers, and indeed had established a very good business with the men. The trade was especially encouraged by the man acting as the village chief and his aides, who were the only men to be seen in the village during the day. They were unusually eager for military garb of all kinds, for ammunition, and for cigarettes. In return, they were able to provide rice wine, native foods, and entertainment in the ladies’ homes.

Private Bonaventura was particularly interested in the rice wine, which he pronounced to be the best in the world. Francis preferred large dinners of rice, water chestnuts, and what he claimed was the roasted flesh of the enemy, which he provided himself from last campaign at Hill 777, all topped off with grated coconut. Biegle chose entertainment, having been led to a most beautiful and virtuous lady named Fatafifi. Every morning when they were able to find their way from the camp, the men packed up a pair of fatigue trousers or a tee shirt and trekked to Goköping. Ah, those were gay times. Bonaventura sang his favorite songs as he sipped his rice wine. His voice was a true countertenor, and rose freely on the notes of the tune of *The Wreck of the Old ’97*, *The Rovin’ Moonshiner*, or *The Letter*. It was the last of these that he sang most often.

I sent a letter to the jailhouse
When my uncle was there,
And all that came back
Was a wig of human hair.
They hung him alive
For the crimes he had done
And then proclaimed that
It was all done in fun.

Then, as the music was slowly drifting through the sleepy hamlet in the afternoon, Biegle went his own way, down the village street to a certain hut where lived the gentle Fatafifi.

The master of the hut which Biegle frequented was an old man,
a former aide to the former chief. Fatafifi was his granddaughter. She
was not particularly attractive by native standards, for she was rather
tall, standing perhaps a head above most of the men who had formerly
lived in the hamlet before they either were drafted into the government
army or, more commonly, had joined the insurgents. Biegle, however,
found her ravishing, despite her five children from her marriage to a
man who, she said, had left home to join the forces of the enemy.
Biegle remembered the first time he saw her. He had walked to the
town for the first time, and he had looked up along the muddy road
which constituted the hamlet’s main street. Fatafifi was riding in a two-
wheeled cart which resembled a chariot but which was pulled by water
buffalo. At first he was not able to see her face, but then, as she came
closer, she smiled at him. The triumph was hers.

He came to her hut as the meal was being prepared, and took
the bowl of rice in his hand. With the other hand, he reached into the
bowl, then lifted the food to his mouth. After he had tasted the rice, he
bowed to the old man who was head of the household. The old man
grunted his approval as Biegle kissed Fatafifi on the mouth. They ate.
The wild and the tame fowl about the house clattered for attention. The
children, naked, ran about the building with hands full of rice which
they scattered in all the corners. At last the children became tired,
napping on the floor of the hut, and Biegle began to caress Fatafifi
while the old man looked on with curious, senile eyes. They

************************************
************************************
************************************
************************************
Before the sun went down in the evening, Fatafifi awakened Biegle to send him back to his camp, for by night the hamlet was then dangerous for soldiers of the Army of Atlantis.

It was now four months since the company had moved into the position near Goköping. Fatafifi announced to Biegle that she was with child, and smiled upon her warrior knight from the greatest country in the world. Back in camp, he bought a box of cigars, passing them around to the members of his company. "What’s the occasion?" asked Captain Powers, but Biegle could not explain.

Still the company remained camped near Goköping. The captain called Biegle to his tent. "Biegle," he said, "I’m sorry I misjudged you when you first came to the company. I know now that dog is not the right word for you. I should have read your papers first, or I know I would never have said anything like that to someone who is a graduate of the Intelligence School. But I was just kidding, you know. Ha! ha! Biegle, I’ve got a job for you. I suppose you are aware that the enemy infiltrates Goköping by night, despite the efforts of our men by day. I have my spies too, and I am fully cognizant of the great confidence that you have stirred in the people in that hamlet. I am assigning you to take with you Bonaventura, your buddy, and also Francis to the village and stay overnight. You got to pretend that you are deserting, and ask them to take you away to a place that is safe where we can’t capture you back. Do you understand your orders?"

"Yes, sir," said Biegle. "This is the moment that I have been waiting for. Only . . . do you think we can trust Bonaventura and Francis?"

"No."
"How’re we going to get them in on this, then?"
"Don’t tell them what you’re staying overnight for."
"That’s a great idea! I’ll bet you were a Phi Beta Kappa."
"Thanks for the compliment. I wish it were true."
"Aw, you don’t need to pretend to be so modest, captain."
"Anyway, don’t tell them what your assignment is. Just explain that they are not to say anything and that they are supposed to obey you at every step of the way. I’m making you an acting corporal for this undertaking. Anyway, that’s what you can tell them."
"I’m acting corporal, and you better believe it," Biegle said. "You two got to shut up. Don’t say a word unless I tell you what to say. We got important orders, but it’s a secret so I can’t let you in on the
dope.”

“You mean you’re going to tell us what to do?” Francis complained. “And we’ve been in the army three son of a bitching weeks longer than you have? Doesn’t seniority count for anything?”

“No, because I got a temporary acting promotion. If I say ‘Eat your shirt,’ you got to eat your shirt. And no complaining, neither.”

They stood before the chief’s hut in the late afternoon. “We are here,” said Biegle, “because we love the people of this Continent, and we are tired of fighting the people we love. Please help us.”

“I am very apprehensive,” the chief said. “But you three are my friends. I will protect you. Come, we shall have a party in your honor this evening, and I will order a performance of the Gököping Philharmonic for eight o’clock.”

That evening everyone was seated around the chief as the sun settled toward the horizon. The musicians arrived, and several men who were on leave from the enemy army came with them in various capacities. “Who is conducting tonight?” asked Biegle.

At that moment the concertmaster walked out on the stage with what he considered to be the finest instrument of them all, an army bugle which the women of the village had given to him. It had been as a gift to them by the satisfied men of the 593rd, its loss of course causing consternation in the company when the theft was discovered.

The overture began, quietly at first, with the strings and woodwinds playing gently cascading quarter notes, then building up to a fortissimo as the men’s palms beat against tambourines while cymbals and gongs crashed. But the effect was incredibly sophisticated, not a trace of the primitivism of much Atlantan popular music. Biegle found the effect strange and eerie, sending chills up and down his spine. Francis started to say something, but the acting corporal stared at him. The dancers entered the circle; the onlookers shouted. Male and female dancers were dressed in exotic clothing, fabulously furnished with gold and silver lace. The shadow puppets behind a screen were acting out the drama, Biegle discovered, which portrayed the eventual defeat of the army from Atlantis that had come to free them from the enemy. The word treason ran through Biegle’s mind as he considered the villagers whom he had believed to be friends. Longshot John’s slogan ran through his mind: “Traitors are for TARGET PRACTICE.” His hand itched for a hand grenade.

After the concert, Fatafifi took his hand in hers, and said, “I want you to meet my husband.” Curiously, her husband was the
director of the orchestra.

“How do you do,” said Biegle, his face red with anger and jealousy. “And these are my good friends, Francis and Bonaventura. You think as I do, don’t you, my friends?”

“Yes,” they said, “we think the same as you do.”

“We are angry at our country,” Biegle said, “because we have found new friends here, and we do not want to fight our friends.”

“I am happy that you are one of us,” said the conductor, whose name was Lu Che, “and I want you to come to my hut to stay and hide until the victory which will come to my people soon.”

So, Biegle thought, he’s really one of the enemy bastards, and I have smoked him out. What luck!

“Thank you,” said Biegle, “but I would feel better hiding in the jungle away from the camp. They’ll look for me in the village tomorrow. You must have some hiding places.”

“I will take you to them,” Lu Che promised.

As they set forth to the jungle hideaway, Fatafifi kissed Biegle, even before the eyes of her husband, who then took the three men through the underground tunnels to an underground headquarters.

“From this point,” Lu Che said, “I have command of an entire division of troops right here on this side of the front line. We know every move that the enemy makes.”

“It’s wonderful to be among friends, and to be safe, also,” Biegle said. “A very nice place you have here, although it must be lonely for you. You have such a nice wife. What’s her name?”

“Fatafifi. She is the apple of my eye. We have five wonderful children, too. We look forward to the time when the occupying enemy will leave so that our family can be reunited again. We are tired of having our women raped and our children killed by the invading devils.”

“The time will come, and soon,” Biegle said. “The morale of the troops is very low, and when you attack, I know they will not be able to withstand your forces. Besides, everyone knows that the people back home in Atlantis do not support the war effort but want to have peace. Do not fret, my friend, for victory is in sight for us against the armies of the Leader who thinks he is never wrong.”

“Only Our Leader is never wrong,” said Lu Che. “We will never compromise. The pink-faced devils must leave our land.”

“I give you my heart and soul,” Biegle promised. “And so do these two soldiers who have come with me. Don’t you, my friends?”
“Why, yes. That’s true,” they said, antiphonally.
The manner of their answer suddenly alarmed Lu Che, but he hid his anxiety under an impassive face. “You are very welcome here,” he asserted, “for we are always glad to receive new friends.” He turned his back to Biegle and the two other pretenders.

Biegle leaped into action, swinging at Lu Che’s head with a revolver which he had whipped out from under his coat. But Lu Che was expecting treachery and hence was prepared to dodge the heavy blow. Biegle was thrown off balance, dropped his gun, and nearly fell to the floor. His comrades, however, had in the meantime taken their weapons from their coats and were aiming them at Lu Che.

“Paleface devils!” roared Lu Che.

“We are going to kill you for two reasons,” Biegle announced. “We are doing it for the love of country, our great and rich country, which will annihilate your two-bit poverty-ridden land if your people do not submit to freedom. Also, I want you personally to know that I am in love with Fatafifi and that she is in love with me, and that’s the second reason.”

“Paleface devils!” shouted Lu Che.

“Be quiet. One more shout like that, and we shoot to kill. We will not tolerate any nonsense because, after all, we are in the service of Our Leader who is superior to all other leaders. Ha! ha! Maybe you know the hymn which we sing at church all the time: Kill an Enemy Soldier for Christ Today. Do you really think that good Christian soldiers ought to allow your filthy atheistic, pagan collectivist religion or what-have-you to control our country?”

“But I am a Catholic,” gasped Lu Chi.

“That’s a lie,” snapped Biegle. “Clunk him on the head with your revolver once, Francis,” he ordered.

Francis did as he was ordered.

“I’d like to shoot the bastard now,” Bonaventura offered. “Wouldn’t it mean stars in my crown to destroy such a cesspool of filth?”

“Okay,” said Biegle, who was very weary by this time. “Go ahead. Kill him now.”

Bonaventura pulled the trigger, and the sound of the shot reverberated through the underground chamber. Another shot pierced the helpless figure, who crumpled as he fell to the floor.

“Let me at him,” said Francis, tugging a knife from his pocket. He opened the blade and neatly sliced the victim’s ears from his head.
“These will look great on my helmet with the others,” he said with pride in his voice.

“Cut him in two in the middle,” suggested Francis, “like we did in the field after the last battle.”

Biegle heard footsteps approaching in the tunnel, and quickly ordered his men to follow his commands precisely. He disarmed them, and held his revolver in his hand as he turned their faces to the wall. The chamber filled with enemy soldiers. “These are the culprits,” Biegle charged. “I thought they were sincere, but they were obviously only intelligence agents. I hope you will torture them thoroughly for what they have done to dishonor the sacred memory of Lu Che.”

“Traitors!” they screamed as they saw the broken and mutilated body of their commander. “The soldier’s pole is fallen, and now our hope lies dead,” one of them said with sadness in his voice. They wailed in open grief, tears ran down their cheeks, their faces were contorted in genuine sorrow.

“Lead the prisoners to a secure place,” said Biegle, “and do not expect them to answer any questions without torture, for as good soldiers in their Leader’s service, they will only give their name, rank, and serial number. If they talk further, see that they are telling the truth, for they will give you only lies when they begin to pretend to divulge information.”

Francis opened his mouth to speak, but Biegle ordered, “Take him away. He is a traitor and a murderer of men.”

The soldiers bound and gagged Francis and Bonaventura, then took them to another part of the underground fortifications reserved for military prisoners. Biegle remained, promising to give vital information to the soldiers about the position and condition of the Army of Atlantis.

Inwardly, Biegle was a little unhappy about the sacrifice of his two close friends, but he resolved to rescue them again when he had returned to his company at the end of his mission if possible. There were some events in the life of a spy which are not pleasant to contemplate. One must be as wise as a fox and prudent in one’s dealing with the enemy.

For the next week, Biegle sat in the office of the deputy commander of the enemy regiment during each day. He was giving false information about his company and about all the other companies in the area surrounding, but sensibly he told the truth when the truth was already known through the enemy’s counter-intelligence. At the end of the week, Biegle was not able to ascertain whether the deputy
commander was pleased or displeased with the information he had given. Biegle, however, was very pleased with what he had gleaned from the enemy through his contact with its soldiers. He considered his mission essentially completed, and contemplated ways to return to his commander with the information that he had gathered. Preferably, he thought, the escape should be a daring one, for that would mean good publicity for the war back home in Atlantis. He wished to do a deed of heroism in a war in which heroism was commonplace, according to press reports.

Opportunity came as Biegle was taken to a new and secret part of the underground fortifications where he was shown a vast ammunition dump from which the troops were being supplied to carry on their insurgency behind the allied lines. An open box of hand grenades stood before him. He picked up one of the grenades. “Great invention, the hand grenade,” Biegle said to the deputy commander. Then he turned and ran, removing the pin and tossing the grenade behind him into the ammunition dump. Sure, he believed, this would be more heroic than merely sneaking off again to his company without being detected. Lady Fortuna had turned the deputy commander’s eyes elsewhere and had stopped his ears when the grenade was thrown and when it fell. He was puzzled by Biegle’s running, but ascribed it to fear of the great quantity of ammunition amassed in one place.

Biegle ran through the tunnels. At every moment he expected to hear the explosion which would end his life. No explosion came as he ran through the tunnels more than half a mile from the ammunition dump. The grenade fuse, faultily made, had malfunctioned for the time being. But as the deputy commander at last set out to find Biegle, the explosion occurred. The blast rocked the countryside, and sent earth and armor screeching toward the sky.

Captain Powers heard the blast in the distance and felt the ground shake under him. “Biegle’s mission is a success,” he pronounced. “What shall I do? I can’t stand the dog. If he comes back, I may need to kill myself.”

The hero himself had felt the roof of the tunnel cave in upon him as he was running before he realized that his effort at sabotage had succeeded. For a moment he thought he was suffocating, but then as he struggled his head broke through the earth into the sunshine. “Boy, is Captain Powers going to be glad to see me, he said aloud, working his body loose from the clay and black soil which had fallen upon him.

The trek back to his company was a dangerous one, for he
knew he must avoid any contact with the local people. During the day
he hid, and at night he moved with caution, circling around his
destination. He had been two days without water or food when he at
last hailed the sentry before the camp where his company was located.

“Captain,” said Biegle, “mission accomplished. I will have my
report ready in the morning. In the meantime, you will want to prepare
to attack Area C–5 on the map. If you want to call in a napalm attack,
here’s where the tunnels are located.”

“But where are Francis and Bonaventura?”

“Captured. We got to rescue them.”

“Where are they?”

“I don’t know. Sir, do you expect me to know everything?”

Tears gathered in the commander’s eyes. “We must get them
back,” he said. “I loved those men. They were, all three of you, my
pride and joy.”

“Exactly,” Biegle said.

After the air strike by the Air Force, the mopping up of the
enemy stronghold was a very swift affair. The few enemy soldiers who
were still alive came coughing from their collapsing tunnels when, at
Biegle’s discretion, poisonous gasses were poured into selected
openings. The prisoners were lined up along the edge of a grove and
were stripped of all their clothing, most of which in any case had come
through the black market from Captain Powers’ company. The names
of the original owners were still marked on many of the garments.

“Damned thieves!” shouted Captain Powers as he examined the pile of
clothing which was being returned to the rightful owners.

Captain Powers and Private Biegle inspected the naked
prisoners. “Who is their leader?” asked the captain.

“I can’t really say, since both Lu Che and the deputy
commander are dead.”

One of the prisoners stepped forward. “I am the commander,”
he announced. “I am Lu Che.”

“The hell you are,” said Biegle. “We shot Lu Che.”

“I am Lu Che,” the prisoner asserted.

Biegle stammered as he recognized that the naked man was
indeed Lu Che. His ears were covered with heavy bandages, and he
was in fact the commander of the enemy forces who had been operating
even behind the allied lines.

“You’re dead,” Biegle said.

“Do I look as if I am dead?”

126
“As you wish,” the commander said, stepping back into the line of prisoners.

“Mutilate the whole lot of them,” ordered Captain Powers, “except that luke there.” He pointed toward Lu Che.

“We’ll teach you bastards to be cowardly blankheads,” promised the company’s first sergeant, only the prefix he used was of course not “blank” but the serviceman’s favorite word.

“Okay, Luke, let us know where our boys are. I mean Bonaventura and Francis.”

“I don’t know,” protested Lu Che.

“Look here, bud,” the captain said, “we don’t like to see any of our boys lost or harmed. Either you tell us what we want, or I’ll have Biegle here slice you up.”

“But I have no information.”

“Sit him down and spread his legs out. Okay, now I’ll bet you know.”

Lu Che shook his head.

“Jab him with the knife to show that you mean business.”

“I’m sorry, since I cannot help you with precise information. May I tell you where they might be?” Lu Che volunteered.

“Now, that’s talking.”

“Bring me a map.”

They brought a map from the tent.

“Here, where you have marked Area F, is where we keep the prisoners until they can be transported back to our territory across your lines. If they are alive, you must try to find them here.”

“Oh, hell!” exclaimed Captain Powers. We firebombed that area yesterday and beat the crap out of it with fragmentation bombs this morning. They are dead, I know they are dead.” He turned to Lu Che.

“You’re responsible. You killed those sweet young things.” Tears ran freely from his eyes. “However,” he said, “there is one way that you yourself can be given a chance to live. I will send you to the colonel, and he will ask you for all the information that you are able to provide. If you do as he says, he will give you the gift of life, provided that you desert our enemy forever. Now, you see how generous we are?”

“Do I really need to put my knife away now?” said Biegle, pleading to be allowed to proceed with the operation that he wished to perform.

“Yes, put it away. But I am sending you to Colonel Cadaveri with the luke here. I’ll call for a helicopter.”
“Captain Marsh!” Biegle bellowed as the helicopter landed. “It’s great to see you again.”
“Great to see you too,” responded the captain. “You’re looking super.”
“We got a little cargo to take to the colonel. Captain, this is Lu Che, the Luke who is commander of the enemy forces behind our lines, or at least he was until we captured him.”
“Welcome aboard, you bastard,” said Captain Marsh.
“Get up there, you slow son of a bitch!” Biegle encouraged.
The helicopter whirled into the air.
“Another bastard who won’t talk?” asked the captain.
“Yes, sir, captain. The old man thought the colonel could work him over.”
“The colonel,” said Captain Marsh, “is too much of a gentleman. It takes radical measures to make these sons of bitches talk. Show him how far it is to the ground and tell him how dead he would be if we threw him out from this altitude.”
“Hey, Luke, look out there. See that? Altitude one thousand feet. That’s a hell of a fall, eh? Like to fall one thousand feet? You wouldn’t?”
Lu Chi shook his head with dignity.
“Tell us, then, when do you expect the counter-attack?”
“Maybe next week, maybe next month.”
“That won’t do. You got to be precise,” Biegle demanded.
“Exactly when is the counter-attack scheduled for?”
“It was scheduled for next week.”
“Is it now scheduled for next week? Or has it been changed?”
“I don’t know. The plans might have been changed.”
“Okay, tell me this. How many soldiers do you have in your army positioned behind our lines?”
“One hundred fifty thousand.”
“You fool! The entire population of the region is less than that! How do you expect us to believe such a lie?”
“Push him out,” said Captain Marsh.
“Do you hear that?” asked Biegle.
“I am not afraid to die for my people,” said Lu Che with resignation.
“Don’t you know that we are here fighting for freedom for your country? And this is how you appreciate all our efforts, all that we’re doing for you.”
“I said, push him out,” repeated the captain.
“Are you going to cooperate with the forces of freedom who are in your country to set you free?”
“I will not cooperate, and I pray to the Virgin for the day when we can sleep in our own houses without fear each night.”
“The hell you do. Out you go, bud. Whee! Watch him fall. What a hell of a splash the s.o.b. will make when he hits down there in the rice paddy. Watch. Ker-splash! Ha! ha!”
The captain joined in the laughter.
Suddenly Biegle stopped laughing. “But I was supposed to deliver the luke to the colonel,” he said.
“We delivered him,” answered Captain Marsh.
“It’s hell when those guys don’t cooperate,” Biegle philosophized. “I just hate to see our men get killed, and this bastard is the kind who wants his enemy forces to defeat the army of Our Leader. That’s not very patriotic, is it?”
“Our Leader bless you,” said Captain Marsh. “It has been very much great sport to work with you again, Private Biegle. Perhaps we shall meet again.”
The helicopter was standing on the ground, ready to leave for a new mission in defense of Our Leader. The blades began to turn, and Biegle waved farewell to its pilot.
“So, Biegle, you delivered him, and the information that you got was that the counter attack would be either next week or next month.”
“Yes, sir,” Biegle said to Captain Powers. “I don’t think you can rely on anything the bastards say, but my guess is that they will attack and hit soon.”
“I’ll relay this information to higher headquarters,” the company commander said, “while I put my troops on alert. Is that okay with you, Private Biegle?”
“Yes, sir, that is what I would advise.”
“You may be interested to know that I plan to put in for a promotion for you. But tomorrow show up for KP. It’s your turn.”
“Thank you, sir. I must say that KP doesn’t exactly excite me, but I think it is all work that needs to be done if we are to fight this war so that we can honor Our Leader with a victory. Tomorrow I will go, trailing clouds of glory, to serve on KP in praise of Our Leader.”
“That’s a fine spirit, Biegle. Entirely laudable.”
Over the air waves came the voice of Our Leader, bellowing
through the mess tent where Biegle was working: “I just want you boys out there at the front to know how much I appreciate all you are doing for your country. We understand the sacrifice that you are providing for your country so that it might remain free and independent in a rising ocean of hate. We believe that our values and our way of life are the very best that have ever been achieved in the history of the world, and we want to do our utmost to see that those values are preserved for our children and grandchildren. Be of good cheer, and carry on in the best tradition of your army. Your government is totally and one hundred percent behind you as you fight in the land of rice paddies.” Our Leader’s voice trailed off, and the commercial began. “Buy the liquor that’s quicker. Buy Schenfeld’s,” the nameless speaker urged. A housewife’s voice continued, “I drink Schenfeld’s because it’s so smooth. And a little bit goes a long way, besides showing what good taste you have when you display the bottle of Schenfeld’s to your guests.” The men on KP were wearing their helmets, for the company, as we know, had been placed on alert.

It was the next evening when Biegle was assigned to guard duty, which always made him apprehensive. The first two hours went well, however, for there were no incidents. He was relieved at ten o’clock by the fat soldier, Private Sebastian. At midnight he was roused again to stand guard near the camp on the road which led backward to Paradise City. His loaded rifle in hand, he walked down the path toward the jungle. Oh, he thought, how much nicer would it be to be lying in the arms of Fatafifi, for whom he had been longing since his recent adventures with the enemy. He was tremendously lonesome. “Fatafifi,” he called, and the dying woods and the darkness swallowed up the name. The darkness was dreadful to him. Lost in his own palace of thought which he had created for his queen, he stumbled as he traced his way through the jungle.

Where, indeed, was the path he was to follow? He was lost. Nervously, he wandered back and forth, his heart sinking into a state of fear. A rat ran across his feet. He screamed, then shot into the bushes toward what he perceived as the sound of the escaping rat. Now there were no sounds, until a mosquito moved near his face and touched its feet upon his forehead. Biegle leaned his rifle against a tree and stood at attention. He felt the mosquitoes sting him first on the forehead and then on the nose. He swatted at them, and returned to rigid attention.

Captain Powers had heard the shot in the jungle nearby, and leaped from his cot. “Have the first sergeant alert everyone!” he called.
Men were lying in their foxholes with their guns cocked as Captain Powers went forth to determine the cause of the shooting. He found Biegle standing in a small clearing. “Biegle,” he called, “did you fire your rifle?”

Biegle, still standing at attention, did not answer, for his mind and imagination were with the gentle Fatafifi. He saw her, waving back and forth before him, holding her silk scarf high over her head. She was calling to him to come to her, for they would make love forever without ceasing. Biegle swayed beside the tree in the clearing.

“Biegle,” said the captain again, “did you fire your rifle?”

Once more he did not answer. His commanding officer lifted the rifle and sniffed at the barrel. “Biegle,” he said, taking the man’s left hand, “you have fired your rifle. Tell me, what was the target at which you took aim?”

Startled out of his vision, Biegle said, “Rats. Rats, they were coming after me, running across my feet. I could not kill them. They eluded me.”

“Come with me,” Captain Powers ordered.

For many days Biegle passed his commanding officer in silence, without saluting. Our Hero was plunged into the deepest melancholia. In the meantime, he was now at last able to spend his evenings in Goköping, for following the overthrow of the enemy command post the soldiers from the Army of Atlantis were eventually welcomed — and at other times than during the day. The alert was still in force, but quietly there had been some relaxing of discipline. In the village, Biegle sat down beside Bonaventura, who had not been killed after all (he had walked away from captivity a short time before friendly fire would have meant his end), but his mate refused to drink rice wine with him.

Biegle was emotionally crushed. Dejectedly approaching Captain Powers’ tent, he said, “You are the only one who loves me.” He paused as the captain’s face changed color. “Say you love me, or I’ll cry,” he said. He then wept hysterically.

“Sure, I love you,” Captain Powers finally assured him. He spoke the words between the bursts of Biegle’s weeping.

For some time Biegle continued to weep and beg for Captain Powers’ sympathy, then he remembered Fatafifi, the tall and beautiful girl he loved so much. Feeling ashamed, he rushed out of the officers’ tent and back onto the path leading to Goköping. The captain, somewhat puzzled, walked over to a group of soldiers waiting for
chow. “What you need,” their commanding officer told them, “is *laissez faire.*”

“What in the hell’s that, something to eat?” asked Private Godfrey, chuckling at his own joke.

The war was playing on everyone’s nerves, even Biegle’s. Oh, the tension and boredom of it all!

“Bonaventura has sold his clothing again,” Biegle told Captain Powers.

“The hell you say,” the captain responded, and noted that Private Bonaventura had indeed begun appearing in civilian clothes once more.

Captain Powers spotted Bonaventura walking away from the camp in the hot afternoon sun. The officer ran along the path, at last, though out of breath, tapping the private on the left shoulder. “Bony,” he gasped, “I order you to return to the camp for a clothing inspection.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Private Bonaventura, I am not kidding. What the Gehenna are you doing walking around in civilian clothes near the front line when there’s an alert on?”

“What did you say, man?”

Captain Powers seemed to explode. “Whenever you speak to me, remember that I am an officer. I want no more of that flippant tone of voice. Do you hear? I expect to receive respect as an officer in Our Leader’s army, do you hear?”

“Ya, I hear.” Then he added, reluctantly, “Sir.”

“Okay, then, let’s see you march back in double time and open your foot locker so I can have a clothing check on you.”

Bonaventura marched, in quick step.

They stood before the foot locker which was placed immediately beside the foxhole and in front of the pup tent which he and Biegle had been sharing since his return from captivity and near death experience. Methodically the private was turning his pockets inside out. “I’ve lost the key,” he announced.

“By Moloch and all the powers of hell!” shouted Captain Powers, “you had better find that key at once or I’ll have that locker smashed with a grenade, do you hear?”

Somewhat sheepishly, Private Bonaventura slipped a key ring from underneath his shirt, unlocked the locker, and stepped back. Captain Powers lifted the lid. The locker was empty except for three bottles of rice wine.
“Oh, gentle Fatafī,” Biegle crooned, “when will be our blessed event?”

“Soon, very soon,” she responded. “Oh, yes, we are very glad about everything, for your army has set us free from bondage. Oh my Biegle, my hero, you must be very careful, for these are the times that try men’s souls. These are dangerous days.”

“We must not fear, for we are in the service of Our Leader,” Biegle said. “Though we walk through the valley of death and meet the shadow of evil, we will not fear, for it is Our Leader whom we serve. Toward our country, toward Atlantis and her flag our hearts open up with an unending flow of pure love. In this love are we enveloped and lo! it protects us from harm.”
VI

THE HIGHEST HONOR

“Sweetened with blood”—headline in *Times Literary Supplement*

The enemy at last opened its counter-attack, and it did so under cover of air support at night. Bombs dropped from aircraft, and air raid alerts were radioed to all the units in the country. Captain Powers shortly heard that friendly planes were pursuing the enemy into their territory across the river where there were airfields and cities, which they were bombing. The whole sphere of the war had broadened so that almost a whole third of the Continent was drawn into the conflict. “I wish to hell I knew what to expect,” the captain said.

“This is Lily of the Valley,” the radio crackled. “This is Lily of the Valley calling Mustardseed. A platoon of enemy regulars has penetrated our lines and is now within two kilometers of your position. Over.”

“Let them come,” said Captain Powers. “We are ready for them.” Every man was in his foxhole; with his hand, the captain patted the machine guns which were set up beside him. Flashes of light jumped into the sky as the air attack was renewed.

The hot and tropical evening wore on, but no enemy troops made contact with Captain Powers’ unit. Enemy flares flashed in the darkness, illuminating billions of mosquitoes flying and buzzing around the troops. Rain had been pouring down all day: the men stood up to their knees in water. Biegle and his brave compatriots watched and waited for opportunity to move into battle while they fought with mosquitoes.

When the bombs started hitting nearby, Biegle was afraid. He realized that he might be killed in an air attack by a silly bomb; he knew that he must preserve himself for the heroics for which he was fated. He crawled across the camp to the foxhole where Captain Powers was admiring the machine guns. “I’m scared,” he said. “Are you afraid?”
“Yes, I’m afraid. Now go back to your foxhole and get into it,” the captain threatened, “or I’ll drill you. I’ll make jellobelly stew of you, for supper, you coward.”

But Biegle, instead of returning to his foxhole, crawled around the encampment so that he might take a poll concerning the fear which the men felt at that moment. He asked everyone, “Are you afraid?” Everyone was afraid. “One hundred percent afraid,” he noted with amazement. He slapped at the mosquitoes which had landed on his shoulder, and returned to his own foxhole. He resolved to fear no more, and from his pocket took the dried ear of an enemy soldier. It was his good luck charm.

Toward morning the clouds lifted, and the moon shone down in all its splendor as the dawn approached. Biegle felt no more fear, for he knew that his moment of glory was at hand and that he would be able to achieve the greatness which was to be thrust upon him.

The next day was a day of waiting, but on the following morning the big enemy offensive moved into a new phase. Through the heavy rain came the alert, the warning which proclaimed the proximity of enemy infantry. The sound of aircraft overhead came from the clouds again hanging like a blanket over the jungle. The company waited for the meeting with the enemy soldiers. All through the day and night they heard the sound of planes flying back and forth behind the clouds.

“I want to fight for our flag and Our Leader!” Biegle trumpeted. “This is the moment for which I have waited all my life. I know what it is to be totally alive, submitting yourself absolutely to the needs of our country and Our Leader.” He moved his feet in the water, which was again seeping into his foxhole, and he took the tin can in his hand once more to dip out the slimy liquid. “There is nothing more important than the honor of our country and Our Leader, right or wrong,” Biegle said.

“Prepare to move out,” the captain’s voice said, though no one could see his face now that the dark night had again overtaken the company. They marched toward the nearby stream, a small creek swollen into a river from the rain which had recently fallen. The enemy soldiers, according to reports, had crossed it.

Captain Powers marched his men to the shore of the stream before he made any contact with the enemy, but then someone began to shoot at them from the rear. The captain cursed. “Sacrement!” he shouted, and he swore that the firing was from another unit of the
Army of Atlantis, for the enemy would not have penetrated so far. He ordered his men to set up camp on the bank in the sand, and they began digging their personal foxholes. They lifted the sand easily, and it was not long before they were thoroughly dug in. Behind their fortifications, they found protection from the shooting which was still sporadically coming from the rear. On the stream, small boats were moving back and forth. Biegle did not know if they belonged to the enemy or to the forces of Good. He sat in his foxhole, and placed his weapon across his knees in imitation of Longshot John.

Night fell once more. Suddenly a flare illuminated the whole edge of the jungle. Out of the trees came an unexpectedly heavy barrage of small arms fire. Biegle dropped into his foxhole, his rifle ready for action. This is the confrontation for which he had been waiting all his life. He was not now afraid, but in his heart he felt himself totally lifted up into the task which he was doing. A shell burst in the dark sky above them, and he saw it as a symbolic burst of glory.

Captain Powers, nearby, said, “Damn it, can’t they see who we are? What the hell are they shooting at us for?” He ordered, “Hold your fire!”

Hearing the sound of his commander’s voice, Biegle jumped from his foxhole. “Let’s attack!” he shouted.

“Get your ass down. You want to get shot?”

“Let’s go get ’em,” Biegle said.

They argued about the identity of the attackers. “Biegle,” said the captain, “I don’t need to accept what you say. I am commander of this company, and I want you to know that my orders will be followed. If I say that those are friendly troops over there, you, and your dog’s face better believe what I say.”

“No, sir,” Biegle insisted. “There is the matter of TRUTH, which is what my entire story is about. I can tell, and so could you, if you’d open your eyes, that those are enemy troops attacking, and we’d better nail them before they nail us.”

“You stupid son of a bitch!” the captain shouted. “You just crawl out there now and warn those idiots that they are firing on friendly troops.”

So Biegle crawled, moving on his belly across the sand and green earth. How many times had he seen Longshot John moving on his belly into battle? He crawled, he saw, and he returned to the captain. “Hell,” he told Captain Powers, “those are enemy soldiers. Let’s give ’em hell.”
"Fight for you lives, men!" Captain Powers trumpeted. For the first time the company opened fire on the enemy. The battle of the century was being waged.

Captain Powers’ company was surrounded by the enemy on three sides, while the swollen stream prevented their retreat in that direction. The brave men fought desperately against fantastic odds, as Biegle’s map, drawn while he was preparing his report after the battle, showed. The map was subsequently published in Biegle’s hometown newspaper, but by chance no copies of this issue were saved in the paper’s files although references to it appeared over the next two or three weeks in the same publication.

The enemy incursion had been expected downstream where the Sewong widens into what is called Lake Bell-Mouth. This area had been thoroughly fortified against attack, the beach area there being held by a company under Captain Gabriel, who had just received his promotion a few days before. Colonel Cadaveri had thought of every possibility so long as the enemy played the game correctly, but the fact of the matter was that they had disregarded the rules. They refused to play the same game, and had moved their men up to a point along the front where they could penetrate the allied lines with massive divisions in order to crush the main force of the Army of Atlantis. When Captain Gabriel learned of this predicament, he did not at first believe the report, and after it was confirmed he nevertheless refused to move his troops to the aid of Captain Powers and other commanders in the area under siege. “It’s a mistake,” he shouted to his men as he walked back and forth on the beach which he had fortified. “It’s a mistake. Let them go back home and start over again and do it the way they were supposed to. We deserve the glory which is now being poured on Captain Powers, the old fox. Ha! Ha! Let him bask in his glory alone. We will stay here.”

At the regimental headquarters, Colonel Cadaveri was speechless. With shaking hand he wrote a message to be relayed to General Shushu, the enemy Supreme Commander: “The war atrocities which you have committed will not be tolerated. Cease your attack or we will bomb your cities. Do not expect any part of your land to be a sanctuary for such lawless behavior.”

Handing the message to an aide, the colonel said, “Send it through diplomatic channels, through neutral countries. And have it broadcast over the entire mainland on the Voice of Atlantis. Make speed!” Then the colonel turned to a major who was at his side. “If they
exterminate my favorite company,” the colonel said. “I will see to it that four hundred million people die in reprisal. Just wait. I will see that it happens. If they do not play the game properly, we will exterminate them. It will be just like exterminating rats. Wholesale.”

Captain Powers’ company, cut off from all supplies, was in fact being exterminated. Biegle, entrenched once again in his foxhole, was firing his rifle, aiming at the flashes from the enemy weapons. Now and then the scream of a dying man pierced the heavy air. In a final act of heroism, Bonaventura charged the enemy lines. Hurling a hand grenade that eliminated a machine gun nest, he was cut down. Another soldier, a very fat one, was lying with his face down in the water of the stream, which was red with his blood. Biegle saw both the fat soldier and thin Bonaventura die, but there was no opportunity for tears.

“Make every shot count,” Captain Powers ordered, “because there isn’t much ammo left.”

Not long afterward, some of the squads were left without ammunition. The firing all along the line had become sporadic, and at last it almost stopped. That pious trio, Godfrey, Roland, and William, attempted to surrender. Waving a piece of white cloth, a piece of Godfrey’s white undershorts, they marched from their trench. Enemy soldiers surrounded them and received them as prisoners of war, then escorted them behind the lines where they were shot. Others waited until the enemy soldiers were very close, and then they threw grenades at them. Finally they used their bayonets. Captain Powers stood to give a final order to his desperate patriots, but before he was able to say a word, he clutched his breast and fell backward in death.

Only a few of the soldiers remained to flee from the onrushing enemy, and of those only Biegle was able to reach the edge of the stream safely. The company was exterminated indeed! The next day birds of prey flew about with great bird-cries over the unburied dead men. Lying beside the body of his commander was Corporal Mercury. Lu Chi, the commander reputed to have nine lives and whose leg was still in a cast from his fall from the helicopter, hobbled triumphantly among the scattered bodies of one hundred and forty nine men.

“I am disappointed,” said Lu Che, “that I do not find my old friend Biegle. My mind was filled with delight last evening when I considered the possibility that I might be allowed to mutilate his dead body.”

“Perhaps,” said the other enemy officer who was standing beside him, “he has drowned in the stream.”

138
Lu Che lifted the head of a corpse with his foot. He noticed that a necklace of dried human ears encircled the man’s neck. “Pink-face devils,” he muttered, stamping on the dead man’s head.

Biegle had plunged into the swollen stream. Finding a piece of log floating in the water, he grasped it as he fought to prevent being carried away by the current. For a moment he almost succumbed to the wish to die, but then his mind formed a mental image of Fatafifi: he struggled on. He approached the opposite shore with confidence, but then felt a tug at his leg. He kicked hard with his feet as he worked his way toward the beach, then paused to cling to the log for a few moments. The water was clear, and he looked through it to see a strange flesh-eating fish close its mouth on his left foot. He kicked, but felt the pain as his boot was torn off into the water. Blood was running into the stream, and he thought of the fat soldier who, bleeding into the water, had died in battle. Now his own blood was running into the stream. He saw that two of his toes were missing.

Weak from loss of blood, Biegle retreated through the forest in search of a way to cross the stream to the other side where the remaining part of the Army of Atlantis was encamped. Or perhaps he could find his way to the village of Gököping where he might be nursed back to health by the gentle Fatafifi. She would listen to his tales of heroic exploits, for she was a most sweet lady. Darkness assaulted him.

A squad from Captain Gabriel’s company was on reconnaissance when it discovered an unconscious man dressed in the uniform of the Army of Atlantis. One of the men, who had sailed to the mainland with Biegle on the Saint Michael, immediately recognized the fallen soldier, an identification which was corroborated by his dog tags. They carried him back to the stream, placed him on a rubber lifeboat, and brought him back to the friendly shore a little below Lake Bell-Mouth. They took turns carrying the unconscious hero on their backs, surely itself a heroic enterprise.

“What the hell did you bring me this for?” asked Captain Gabriel.

“We thought. . . .”

“You thought! That’s the trouble with you idiots. You’re not supposed to reason why.”

“Our is but to do and die,” they chimed in.

“That’s better. Who is this son of a bitch?”

“It’s Private Biegle, sir. You know, the one that we came over with on the Saint Michael.”
“That numbskull,” responded the captain. “Wake him up.” The men brought cold water and dashed it into Biegle’s face, but he only groaned. They could not yet awaken him. “Hit him,” the captain ordered. They slapped him on the face several times. Biegle sat upright, groggy but nevertheless conscious. “Deserting your company, eh?” charged the officer. “They’re all dead,” Biegle said, rather weakly. He closed his eyes, and said, “And I only, yes, I . . .” “Slap him again.” They did as they were told. “Maybe you can tell the truth now.” “The company, the 593rd, was exterminated.” “You cretin! Hell, the enemy wasn’t even anywhere near when it penetrated our lines. How the blank do you think you are kidding us? Sure, a few enemy bastards crawled up out of the slime down here by the lake, and I flushed the crap-faces back into the drink. Ha! They haven’t been back since, which was a great victory over the dirty bastards right here. And you, you son of a bitch, you say that Captain Powers’ company is exterminated. Exterminated, my ass!” “But I’m not lying,” Biegle protested. “We fought them until we ran out of ammo, and then we could fight no longer. I only am returned to tell thee what happened.” “That’s a dirty lie!” shouted Captain Gabriel. “Put the filthy liar under guard until I get a vehicle. You can take the lily-livered coward back to the stockade. Sacrement! I hope to hell that they hang him. He’s a damned deserter and a traitor to his country.”

On the captain’s field desk in his tent was a message from the colonel reprimanding him for failing to come to the aid of the 593rd in the previous attack.

Biegle was marched off under guard. A hero is not appreciated among his countrymen.

A helicopter came to take Biegle to the stockade near Paradise City. As the craft lifted itself into the clouds, Biegle saw in the distance for the last time the little village of Goköping receding among the trees. His heart throbbed for Fatafifi whom he would never ever see again.

The stockade reminded him of a great and mystic rose. The fence about the inner compound was painted bright red, but in the rain and sun the color had begun to fade in long streaks. Inside the twenty-foot-high fence, canvas-covered cells were arranged, and here Biegle
was locked up. A ball and chain were attached to his leg. His foot pained him as he thought of Fatafifi and the gay village of Goköping. The other inmates attempted to cheer him by telling him how fortunate he was to be wounded, for the others who were healthy must work at very trying and dangerous tasks. “They are really attempting to kill us before they bring us to trial,” said one man who still wore sergeant’s stripes on his sleeves. “It saves them money that way, prevents government waste.”

“I’m innocent,” Biegle protested.

“Oh, that won’t make any difference here. Half the people here are innocent, but according to army justice, we’ll all receive appropriate punishment. What do they say you’ve done?”

“Deserted. But I didn’t. I was the only man left when the enemy exterminated my company.”

“They’ll never believe that. You’ll hang, my friend, so cheer up and enjoy life while you can. At least they won’t make you work with that wound in your foot.”

But the next day they did take him out of the compound with the others, in spite of his protests. The prisoners were all lined up in a long row, then marched through the fields in a search for land mines which the enemy might have planted. On Biegle’s right, three men were in fact killed when a hidden mine exploded. Nor did they allow Biegle to lag behind on account of his foot. The sergeant in charge had told him that “if anyone drag-asses behind, we’ll shoot you before you can say ‘Jack Robinson’."

A prisoner spoke up. “According to military law,” he said, “you are required to give us three warnings before you can shoot. You must not shoot without warning.”

“And who is going to say the warning was not given? You don’t think that any military court of law would take the word of prisoners, do you?”

All day the prisoners marched in search of mines, nor were they given any food or rest. They drank water from the canteens which they had been issued early in the morning, but they were not allowed to stop marching at any time. In the evening, when they were marched back to the stockade, they were given a garbage can full of scraps from the officers’ mess.

“Why,” asked Biegle, “aren’t we being fed decently?”

“Shut your damn mouth, or I’ll drill you. Don’t you know prisoners aren’t supposed to do no talking?” After a time, the guard
returned to Biegle and said, “You ain’t getting fed no better ’cause there ain’t nothin’ to feed ya. The rations men got drunk an’ smashed the shit out of their truck. You don’t get nothin’ till they gets it fixed. I’m sorry I can’t help ya; it’s against the regulations.”

The next morning Biegle literally could not walk on his foot. After considerable threatening and cursing, they left him in the stockade that day, but no medic was called to treat the injured man. As General Zapp once said in a speech to the Army Medical College, “There is no justifiable reason for wasting government money on men who are guilty in the stockade. The return for investment of funds falls far below the point of profitable investment—a bad business plan, not recommended by our Business School.” The pain in Biegle’s foot was preventing him from resting or sleeping during the day, though occasionally he was troubled by waking dreams. The battle now lost forced itself upon his memory, and he saw once again Fatafifi coming to tell him that she bore the hero’s child within her womb. For her, for his lady, he had fought against the enemy forces to help bring freedom to this land. All the glory that he had won was really hers.

At exactly three o’clock in the afternoon, the stockade chaplain came to see him. “I am Chaplain Wordman,” he said, introducing himself.

“Oh, yes,” said Biegle, “I think I’ve met you before, at Camp Western Rock.”

“No, no, I’m not the same at all. I’m Cartwright Wordman. He’s my twin brother, and he’s a Catholic. Of course, we were both born as Catholics, but I was fortunate enough to be converted and find true religion, which better serves Our Leader in any case.”

“I just remembered. I’m not supposed to speak to anyone.”

“I’m not just anyone, especially not a lawyer! You may speak to me. When you are in the stockade here, you will find that I am your Life Insurance representative.”

“My foot hurts. I can’t sleep.”

“Physical hurt is a mere nothing compared to the evil in your soul. My son, confess your guilt. He will heal your soul. Look at your black heart! Of what sins you must have been guilty, what crimes you must have committed, if they have put you in this den of thieves. Repent! Let your sins be washed away. If I am to be your Life Insurance agent, you must ask for the policy and attach your signature. Confess and sign this pledge card.”

“What are they going to do to me?” Biegle asked, writhing in
“How should I know? But, really, my son, what does it matter if you are ready? If your sins and crimes are washed away, you will have eternal life. For you, death will have lost its sting. You can live forever if you just sign this pledge card.”

“Oh, poor little Fatafifi!”

“You shall be cured. Confess your guilt. Dedicate your life to the Lord whom your Leader worships. Do it for Our Leader’s glory and the glory of your country, and he will lift you up to sit at his left side.”

“I’m thirsty,” Biegle said. “I can hardly speak, for my mouth is so dry.”

“Offer yourself to the Lord in the name of Our Leader. He cares for you, and he cares for the wants of us all, even of criminals from the stockade. He will care even for you so that you will have no more wants.”

“But I am a hero, and I am thirsty,” Biegle moaned. “I fought in Our Leader’s army, and I would like a drink of water.”

“Accept the truth! The truth will give you what you need, will satisfy your hunger, will quench your thirst.”

Biegle was not able to speak again at this time.

“Sign this little pledge,” the chaplain said. “You will thus verify your guilt and thereby ask forgiveness of those whom you have offended.”

As Biegle signed the confession, he felt a great weight lifted from his soul. Now, having received the sacred rites of the religion which he and Our Leader both professed, he could look forward to the eternity in which he would pluck a little, little harp and sing loud songs of praise to the Commander of all Christian soldiers. He was, however, still suffering from earthly thirst. He realized that these things too pass away.

The court-martial proceedings against Biegle were begun after he had spent more than a week in the stockade. He was given crutches so that he might be marched into the court where he was ordered to face the officer who was presiding over the trial. Major M. V. Edward only scowled at the prisoner as he had him sworn in.

On the first day a statement of charges against the hero was read. The charges, put into writing by Captain Gabriel’s clerk, were presented to the court by Corporal Beatitude, the only man the captain felt he could spare from his company that day. The court records preserve the corrected version of the charges (that is, subsequently
altered to make Biegle’s sentence secure in review by higher authority), but of course not the earlier authentic text which the corporal had read in court:

"Whereas Pvt Winfred Scott Biegle F 00131313, hereafter referred to as Pvt Biegle, was found absent without leave from his company, the 593rd Infantry Company, Eugene G. Powers, commanding;

"Whereas Pvt Biegle, in direct violation of Our Leader’s Code for Fighting Men, deserted his unit when in direct combat with the enemy, it is reasonable to assume that he did not fight to the death as he should have, thus violating regulation number 3024-0001;

"Whereas Pvt Biegle was found wounded in the foot, presumably to prevent his being returned to combat, self-inflicted wounds are a violation of regulation number 0127-0001;

"Whereas Pvt Biegle did not report to the nearest company, but was apprehended by a patrol, he must be considered a deserter under regulation 0067-1123;

"Whereas Pvt Biegle, by his deliberate and malicious acts, has the intent of promoting disaffection among Our Leader’s most loyal troops, he should be tried under regulation number 5770-1001;

"Whereas these charges are brought against Pvt Biegle, it is recommended that he be given the maximum punishment for each offense as provided in regulations 3034-6713, 0127-0002, 0067-1124, 5770-1002, and any others that
might apply.

“Submitted to the court by G.
G. Gabriel, Captain”

“The court acknowledges the indictment,” said Major Edward. “Furthermore, the court wishes to thank Corporal Beatitude for his effort in delivering Captain Gabriel’s statement to the court.”

The court was adjourned until the following day.

On the second day of the court-martial, Major Edward seated himself, and Biegle was brought in.

“All right, what do you plead, guilty or not guilty?” demanded the major. A captain sitting at his left elbow whispered something to him, and he scowled. “Does the defendant plead guilty or not guilty? That means you,” he said to Biegle.

“I don’t understand,” said Biegle.

“Damn it, you heard the charges. Did you do what it said you did? I got a confession from the chaplain here that says you did.”

“Yes,” said Biegle, “that’s the paper I signed for the chaplain. My only desire in life was to fight and to serve Our Leader and my country.”

“He pleads guilty,” said the major.

At that point, the officer who was to be Biegle’s defense attorney walked into the room. “How’re things going here?” he asked the major.

“He just pleaded guilty.”

“Well, in that case I’d better request a light sentence for him here.”

“Oh, for the sake of the record, you might as well,” said Major Edward, looking at his watch and noting that dinnertime was nigh.

“I have a report here,” said the defense attorney, “which indicates a substantial record of heroism on the part of Private Biegle here. The report says here that he killed a quantity of enemy soldiers over the months he has been in the war zone, and that he performed some invaluable intelligence work for the regiment. You know how it is, the colonel thinks this fellow here did rather well; maybe he even thinks he is a hero. But if he pleaded guilty here, what can I do here?”

The major, very bored, was not listening. There were so many of these cases. He looked at his watch and said, “The court will adjourn until a sentence is decided upon.”

Again Biegle, struggling along on his crutches, was marched back to the stockade. He had watched the proceedings of the last two
days with uncomprehending wonder. The mysteries of military justice had been revealed to him, awaiting only a final revelation when he would discover the final judgment. But he failed to understand the intricacies of the proceedings.

The days passed again, broken only by one incident. It was a Thursday when Biegle was taken from the stockade and told to shave and shower. He was given a fresh set of clothing and a clean bandage for his foot. A captain whom Biegle had never seen came to him. “Biegle,” he said, “I am proud to present you with this medal, the Order of Our Leader, for heroism beyond the call of duty.” He pinned the golden medal on Biegle’s newly pressed shirt.

“I thank you,” said Biegle, smartly saluting. “You think I deserved it?”

“Our Leader has commanded that you be awarded this medal upon the recommendation of Colonel Cadaveri, and I am pleased also to announce to you that you are, as of now, promoted to the rank of corporal.”

“Thank you very much, sir. Thank you very much.”

“Don’t thank me. But you might write a letter of thanks to the colonel, since he recommended you for these honors. He is very proud to have one of his men receive this Order which is awarded only to the most brave among the bravest men in the world, the soldiers of the Army of Atlantis. I congratulate you upon the honors which have been bestowed upon you.”

After the ceremony, Biegle was taken back to the stockade, where he continued waiting. He was allowed to keep the new clothing, and he sewed his corporal’s stripes on his sleeves. His foot had healed over the decaying flesh and now needed immediate surgery, but because he was still being detained in the stockade no medical care was authorized. This policy with regard to the prisoners was considered a wise business choice. He waited as the days passed.

When the court had made its decision concerning Biegle’s sentence, he was brought into the courtroom once more. He clutched his crutches. On his arm were the corporal’s stripes, and on his chest was pinned the shining gold medal.

Major Edward, arriving from an officers’ party at which he had been watching stag movies, sat down hard in his seat. “Let’s get this damned business out of the way,” he said. “Private Biegle, what, what the hell do you have on your sleeve?”

“He was promoted, sir,” said a captain.
“Well, piss on it, if I haven’t seen everything. A criminal getting a promotion. Biegle! Don’t you know enough to face me?

“Private Biegle, in this court you have heard the charges against you, and you have pleaded guilty. Since you have pleaded guilty, the court’s only jurisdiction is in the area of the punishment to be meted out for your misbehavior in deserting, injuring yourself, promoting disaffection among the troops, and so forth. You admitted these things when you pleaded guilty. Therefore, after careful consideration of all the evidence, there can be only one sentence applicable to such horrible crimes. During wartime, the Military Code requires that the death penalty be administered in every case of desertion, especially at the front lines. For the aforesaid reasons, Private Winfred Scott Biegle is sentenced by this court to die by hanging on November fifth of this year! Court is adjourned!” At the end, the major was shouting loudly as he pounded upon the table.

The spectators in the court seemed to be surprised by the decision.

“I only wanted to fight in the service of my country,” Biegle retorted.

“That remark is out of order!” shouted the major. “Take the prisoner back to the stockade and put him on reduced rations for his insolence.”

Biegle now knew that he must die. Was he really guilty? He no longer knew. The pain had subsided somewhat, but he was still suffering intensely from the wound. His mind was not clear, and he no longer was able to differentiate between reality and the visions which his imagination forced upon him. Desertion? Disaffection? What did these things mean? The form of Fatafifi, posed in readiness for him, thrust itself upon Biegle. Yes, he had deserted her, the gentle Fatafifi who might lead him upward to the mystic rose of heaven. But was he not now enclosed in the mystic rose? Was not the painted wall of the stockade in actuality made up of petals of the rose? He imagined himself looking into the center of the rose, and there he saw three figures together, with Fatafifi standing at their side. Our Leader was there, and a figure kneeling to him. At first he did not recognize the kneeling figure, but eventually he saw that he was the God of Christianity wearing the uniform of the chaplain who had visited him in the stockade. He did not know who the third figure was, nor was he able to see his face before the vision faded altogether.

Then Fatafifi was caressing his foot in the hut in the little
of Gököping. “I love you!” he called to her, but she receded, dropping backward through the wall of the building and disappearing into the distance. In her place stood Lu Che, who was drawing a knife from his pocket and threatening to cut his throat with it. “You are my friend,” Lu Che said, “and I want to show how much I love you.” Biegle felt the knife sever his head from his body, and then he was perfectly free at last. He was able to converse without any effort, and Lu Che’s friendly voice echoed in his ears. “We are the fondest of friends,” Lu Che said as he was mutilating Biegle’s body. It was most strange, for Biegle watched through his own eyes and was not offended, nor did he show any emotion whatsoever as Lu Che slashed the private parts from the body.

He knew that he had not always done what was right and good, and he was penitent in his heart. Prayers were always in his mouth, for he knew that his wish to bury his will in the Will of another, in this case in the Will of Our Leader as the representative of the State, had been but imperfectly realized. Our Leader had issued a call to arms. He had heard, but he had followed sometimes without the utmost enthusiasm. Then he had met the terrifying enemy and yet had not fought with all the savagery becoming to a Christian soldier attacking atheism, infidels, and Satanic ideals.

The visions forced themselves upon him again. Our Leader was personally pinning the golden medal on his chest and at the same time was speaking harsh words about the betrayal of his country. “For your traitorous activities, I am hereby pinning this medal upon your breast as a symbol of your dishonor. You will wear it in heaven and you will wear it in hell. We do not need such treacherous activities as yours, for we have enough trouble defeating the Devil and his angels. My curse I send with you as you traverse the dark places of the earth, running from your crime which is the most black crime that I have ever nowhere Western Rock on the north side of the river was a traitor happening had sex hero without but treason. . . .” In the vision Our Leader’s speech trailed off into incoherence.

Biegle was waiting to die, yet not really expecting to die. Death. Was it like sleep? He looked forward to sleep, the sleep from which he would awaken with all his pain and anguish gone. Toward the end, all the temptations and the visions which he had endured in the past days were lifted from his soul. Even when he thought of Fatafifi, his thoughts of her were on a higher, spiritual level. She became for him the symbol of heavenly love into which he was finally drawn up.
The period of anguish and penance was over; now was the time for contemplating the divine Being into which he would shortly be joined after death. All things were in the Will of God and, therefore, in this earthly sphere the Will of Our Leader. He gave thanks for his religion, for his Leader, for his country. There was no resentment in his heart because of the fate to which he was now to be subjected.

On November 5, they took him out of the stockade before dawn. The hangman introduced himself, offering to shake Biegle’s feverish hand. He was shivering, still wrapped in a wool blanket, though the day was already hot. To the executioner, he appeared almost like a medieval hermit about to be martyred. He was no longer able to walk even with crutches, but was carried along roughly by two strong prison guards. By the time they reached the scaffold, he was unconscious. The executioner examined him for signs of life.

“We’ve been cheated!” shouted the hangman.

“How so?” one of the guards asked.

The hangman whispered, “He’s dead already.”

“I’ll be damned!” exclaimed the second guard.

“Hell, let’s hang the bastard anyway. You lift him up, and I’ll pull the noose down around his neck.”

The rope was not long enough, so they took it down and tied another piece to it, then pulled the noose around the limp neck of the dead man. Sharply the body jerked upward. There was a snap as the neck broke. In the east the sun was rising. During the entire morning the body was swinging back and forth. His medal, received for heroism, glittered in the sun. A strange bird, coming from the sky, plucked out his eyes. Biegle the hero, wearing the Order of Our Leader and his corporal stripes, blinded in death, displayed his honor and his shame to the whole world.

Fatafifi died in childbirth. The child survived, but it was determined that Biegle was not the father.
EPILOGUE

“The werlde sal bryn on ilka syde.”—Stained glass inscription, Fifteen Signs of Doomsday Window, Church of All Saints North Street, York (15th century)

The band was playing the national anthem, Atlantis Will Conquer Forever, as Our Leader stepped to the lecture stand. His voice rose over the breeze on that cold November afternoon.

“Our peace has been broken,” he announced, “by the enemy, who in his cynical lack of concern for the stability of the world has brutally attacked the territory which was held by our army. As we know, our planes were forced to fly deep into enemy airspace to destroy airstrips and nuclear installations which threatened the security of the righteous nation we all love so much. The price is no longer small, but we continue to pay it gladly. The alternative is too horrible to contemplate.

“Our society is still the greatest that the world has ever produced. Our industrial production is the envy of the rest of the world. Nowhere else are ordinary men and women so well-to-do, so richly endowed with the goods which make life worth living. We must protect our way of life, even though the price is not small. We are glad to do those things which are necessary for the preservation of our nation and our way of life.

“Many of our men have already given their lives for the continuance of our way of life. One such man, the finest soldier you can ever imagine, died recently from wounds inflicted when the cowardly enemy again brought their allies into this war. His name was Corporal Winfred Scott Biegle, one of the most devoted and patriotic soldiers that our country has produced in this generation. Corporal Biegle fought valiantly against overwhelming odds in his last battle, and in end was the lone survivor of a very brave company. I have presented Corporal Biegle with the highest honor that I can give; he has received the Order of Our Leader, which my deputy pinned on his shirt shortly before he died. Now I will send his medals and his corporal’s stripes to his parents who live on a little farm east of Eden. I know that they will treasure these precious relics for the rest of their lives.

“Today the crisis is still with us. The way to honor lies open
before us, if we will follow it. Our land still needs the devotion of its young men, upon whom I call to offer yourselves as living sacrifices wholly and fully acceptable to your Leader. Keep always in your hearts the lesson of Corporal Biegle, in whose steps I ask you to follow. If we march after him to the glory which passes all understanding, our land will remain free. But it is necessary that all of us give ourselves to the cause which our nation in pursuing, for it is a just cause.

“Victory has temporarily eluded us, but in the end we shall attain it. Peace will be restored. Some of us, perhaps many, will need to give the supreme sacrifice which must be made if there is to be a future for our land.”

Waving his arm, Our Leader chanted, “Today I have come to announce to you that our air force, our heroic air force, has bombed all the population centers within range in the land of the larger enemy across the river and across the Continent. Atlantis has shown that it will not permit herself to be disgraced by a cowardly enemy nation, especially a two-bit enemy nation of heretics and infidels. Perhaps propagandists in other lands will criticize us sharply for our act, but our country has only been doing what is absolutely necessary under the circumstances. We have vowed never to use nuclear arms unless absolutely necessary, and that time has come. It is unfortunate that many civilians do live in the population centers, but we have not been allowed any other choice. The natives of the Continent have received that for which they have asked.

“In the hours and days and weeks that follow, every Atlantan citizen will now wish to serve his flag by joining the service of his choice or by volunteering for the civil defense unit nearest him. The call to defend our country is a compulsion upon us all, and it is a great price that must be paid if our civilization is to survive.”

At the Biegle farmhouse east of Eden, Mr. William S. Biegle watched the speech on his television set. “I’m really proud of our son,” he told his wife, swallowing the olive from his martini. “I will personally go to Our Leader and receive from him the medal that our boy has earned by his heroism.”

“My heart is always stirred by stories of patriotism and heroism,” admitted Mrs. Biegle, tears flowing from her eyes, “but when your son is a hero, it makes you so happy that you could die.”

“I am going to put on my old uniform,” said Mr. Biegle, “and join the air reserves. Perhaps I can be as good a soldier as my own son,
though that would be a great deal to live up to.”

Neither of them was watching the television screen as the commentator was explaining the serious implications of what Our Leader had said. Over the small speaker on the television set there came a sound which rose to a roar. The commentator turned about to look, and the television cameras were turned toward the windows in the makeshift studio from which they were broadcasting. A gigantic mushroom cloud was rising in the distance. As the soundtrack for the commercial ran on with a pitch for “Blusto detergent” which “gets the diapers clean,” the cloud was spreading outward and upward until the television cameras themselves were engulfed.

“It’s the patriotic thing to do,” said Mr. Biegle, puzzled by the blank screen on his television set.
The Apocalyptic Adventures of Private Winfred Scott Biegle is a satiric novel that has as its focus the military mentality, its authoritarianism and culture of bullying, and the Cold War which was at its height at the time it was written, in the mid-1950s. It needs to be seen in the light of the loss of moral certainty that, in very different form, also informs, for example, the films of Ingmar Bergman of the time or the early novels of John le Carré. In this modernist work, the context is the imaginary army of a fictitious state, here given the name of Atlantis, in which the protagonist is a wildly patriotic recruit. Even before he joins the military, things veer seriously out of touch with reality. Davidson’s book may perhaps be regarded as looking forward to the satire and humor of Stephen Colbert, the television personality. Looking back now on the previous century, it also strikes some familiar themes in the literature of the time, particularly the portrayal of the absurd and the irrationality of existence. Especially it is sensitive to the bending of religious practice to ulterior and spiritually subversive values in service of an out-of-control state apparatus. In relation to war, some of the themes found in the narrative anticipated Joseph Heller’s Catch 22, published in 1961. But the philosophical reach of the book is broader even while the development of character remains radically that of traditional satire found, for example, in Jonathan Swift or, especially, the mock epic as developed by Samuel Butler in his Hudibras and Alexander Pope in the Dunciad.

An important aspect of the narrative involves the location itself, the country led by “Our Leader,” eerily predictive of a dictatorship such as would develop in North Korea but without the iron discipline of a Kim Il Sung or his son, or its robot-like army so often later filmed goose-stepping through the streets of Pyongyang. In the novel the fictitious country was originally called the “Notar Republic,” a rather bad pun without significance in light of the meaning imposed on the work as a whole. The change to Atlantis was therefore a happy one. Atlantis, a large island (“larger than Libya and Asia combined”) outside the Straits of Gibraltar in Critias’s account in Plato’s Timaeus, was said to have to have been governed long ago by “a powerful and
remarkable dynasty of kings” whose rule extended across not only the entire island but also to tracts of North Africa and southern Europe (24–25, trans. H. D. P. Lee). The lands under control of the brutal kings of Atlantis were subjected to slavery, but their efforts to extend and enslave further territory were resisted and reversed. Later, there were earthquakes and violent flooding leading up to the catastrophic natural disaster in which both the invading army and the entire island of Atlantis were “swallowed up by the sea and vanished.”

The political predicament into which Biegle is placed, then, is the totalitarian state, its military existing in a symbiotic and parasitic relationship with the dictator known only as “Our Leader.” In such a nation, a dictator like “Our Leader” (to quote Hegel) “exists only for himself. . . . [H]e is the negative power without qualification” (Phenomenology of Mind, B.IV.a). Recognition is always one sided, permitted only as it is directed to the dictator, whom the subservient one wishes to serve utterly — that is, like a slave totally consumed with a desire to serve his master. Indeed, Biegle may be considered a creature of desire, which, because of his nature, must come to naught at the end since it cannot be reciprocal. On a larger scale, the totalitarianism of Atlantis, like the regimes of Hitler and Stalin, bears within itself the seeds of its own destruction. All subjects of the state are forced to submit to a false ideology of subjection, which makes its ultimate collapse inevitable. In order to create such a situation, the tyrant must be a bully, ultimately devolving into a figure who kills rather than nourishes. The pattern is well delineated in Biegle at the end of the novel as the individual, flawed as he is, will be both hanged and used by Our Leader for the spurious verification of his military achievement. But there is more. A wider destruction, the widest possible, is precipitated as the atomic genie is let out of the proverbial bottle — destruction potentially affecting the fate of the whole world. This may have been a fear that, as in such movies as On the Beach (from the novel by Nevile Shute), was widespread at the time of writing and now has faded, but it must be remembered that nations still to this very day have in their vast nuclear weaponry a capacity to bring nuclear winter upon us and hence perhaps the end of human consciousness.

In a sense, we have in Biegle an example of the will willing nothingness, a concept derived from Friedrich Nietzsche, whose philosophy appears nevertheless to have been an influence on the novel, whether direct or indirect. This emerges explicitly in the final
chapter, when Biegle explains that he constantly engages in prayer, since “he knew that his wish to bury his will in the Will of another, in his case in the Will of Our Leader as the representative of the State, had been imperfectly realized.” Such an effort of the will, then, must be ultimately without meaning, designating a devastating nihilism. For Biegle, the will is intimately connected with desire — the desire, as we have seen, for subordination, essentially for enslavement.

Further, especially for many of the other characters, desire appears in connection with a perverse, sadistic pleasure in torture and bullying. The human delight in cruelty is not a mere abstract philosophical concept but also involves behaviors that have been widely observed and frequently studied in contemporary times. In Biegle many of the examples of cruelty, almost always gratuitously petty, that appear in the narrative were directly derived from history, actual recollections of soldiers, and the personal experiences and observations of the author or his friends in the U.S. military in the 1950s.

Private Biegle’s surname is adapted from an actual soldier of particular ineptitude identified in the author’s memoir, Remembering a Life, only as “Private B,” where he is remembered as a victim of severe bullying. The demise of the major’s wife’s cat is partly a true story, aside of course from the elaborate funeral for it which is entirely fictitious. A few incidents, such as the ejection of an enemy prisoner from a helicopter, will obviously be later additions inserted at the time of the Vietnam War a decade or so after the author was separated from the army. Otherwise, when the book was conceived, in the 1950s, many men still had very vivid memories of the horrors of the Korean War and World War II. Atrocities were committed by both sides in those wars, not just by America’s enemies. The author’s civilian superior, who had been a captain in the army in the Pacific campaign during the earlier conflict, told of having men in the company he commanded who invariably shot their prisoners in spite of repeated warnings by him that such behavior would constitute a war crime.

As a faux-Dionysian hero, Biegle turns upside down a concept of the hero posited by Nietzsche. As a character he is in fact an anti-hero who will remind readers of subsequent twentieth-century developments in drama, fiction, and art. The author had read work by Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre as well as James Joyce’s Ulysses and George Orwell’s 1984. He owned a first edition of Waiting for Godot (1954) as well as Grove Press editions of several prose works by
Samuel Beckett. He was for a long time interested in the paintings and writings of the Surrealists. But more directly we see in Biegle the influence of Franz Kafka’s novels and stories as well as, in particular, Jaroslav Hašek’s *The Good Soldier Schweik*. For example, the sermon by the chaplain in Chapter II bears a certain resonance with the chaplain’s homily in Hašek’s work. To be sure, in contrast to Hašek’s drunken Roman Catholic priest, Father Otto Katz — satire with an anarchistic and anti-papal agenda — Biegle’s chaplain gives a sermon that is an ironic attack by the author directed against the contamination of religious experience by patriotism. The sermon’s title, “This is Worse,” is taken from an engraving by Goya in his *Disasters of War* series. The author intends to convey that this and also such “religious” songs as *Kill an Enemy Soldier for Christ Today* are ultimately deeply blasphemous. The intellectual position of the author is pacifist, but from quite a different perspective than presented in Hašek’s secular novel.

The novel’s narrative form is, like its handling of characterization, distinctly mock-heroic. The immediate model chosen for the form of this modernist work is the epic, very much evident in the allusions to Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*. The protagonist’s journey begins at his father’s farm East of Eden — that is, the land of Nod, to which Cain was exiled in the book of Genesis — as the place of departure deemed appropriate for an anti-hero. His quest to join the military takes him, as if by chance, part of the way in a “boxcar.” This word is allegedly Australian slang for a throw of the dice. Eventually he meets a horned beast, then proceeds to Porta, surrounded by a dark wood and wrapped in darkness. There is no illumination from street lamps or any other source. The induction center has an inscription carved over its doorway that echoes the words at Dante’s mouth of hell, which in fact he symbolically enters as he goes through the process of joining the army of Atlantis. His rite of passage, even the conditions of his loss of virginity, signifies the demonic. His recruiting sergeant is Mephostophilis, whose name appeared initially in late medieval occultist writings where he was identified as one of the evil spirits before he was absorbed into the Faust story — and subsequently into the cultural undercurrent of Satanism. After being inducted, swearing the oath of allegiance with his left hand raised as would a wizard in a witch ceremony, and, following a night in the hotel Acheron, named after the river of pain in hell, Biegle travels by bus along a “descending” route to the south, to Camp Inferno, where he will suffer
from the intense heat of the summer and undergo training. Subsequently, many of the names chosen by the author are indebted to the *Divine Comedy*. These are a continuing presence designed to maintain an undercurrent of meaning in the story as a serious study of the evil of war. Later in life, the author admitted that he only reluctantly had come to admit the failure of pacifism and had arrived at the belief, as enunciated by President Jimmy Carter, that “war is always evil, but sometimes necessary.” In the novel, war is simply “hell.” The mentality that leads to it is infernal and, presumably, inexcusable — a sign of radical moral failure.

An early hand-written manuscript containing a first (and very rough) draft of 1957 and also a later typescript of *The Apocalyptic Adventures of Private Winfred Scott Biegle*, dated 1967, from the papers of Clifford Davidson are extant. The latter was used as the basis for a privately printed edition of twenty-five copies in 1991. A typescript containing initial revisions, which were extensive, made in the mid-1950s is missing. Davidson’s memoir explains that the novel was written while he was a editor of a small army newspaper, *The Graniteer*, and that his desk was immediately around the corner from the colonel’s office in the headquarters building at the Granite City Engineer Depot. There was plenty of spare time, but because he could not openly read a book without seeming to be malingering, he set to work on *Biegle*, setting it down initially on scrap military stationery that otherwise would have been thrown away. The present edition necessarily follows the printed version of 1991 as provided with inked-in corrections by the author, which may be regarded as the best and final text.

Concerning authorship, the survival of the early manuscript demonstrates that Davidson was entirely responsible for the novel’s overarching plan and execution. Nevertheless, as indicated above, many others apparently were involved in suggesting and perhaps in developing the incidents that are narrated, and thus some of these at least may be traced to a coterie of army conscripts like himself in 1956–57. Much in the final section, narrating the war on the “Continent,” however, has reference to stories about the Korean war told by regular army soldiers who had experienced that recent conflict but, as noted above, with subsequent additions reflecting the Vietnam conflict. Also, a number of details in chapters IV and V admittedly reflect and satirize fictional accounts and cinematic depictions of World War II in the Pacific theater.
The additions and changes from the Vietnam period were limited in scope. These date from c.1967 when the extant typescript was prepared, and were inserted to make the book seem more relevant to current events at the time of this unhappy conflict. The episode in which an enemy officer is shoved from a helicopter has been cited above, and so too the well-known ghoulish practice of some soldiers of slicing off Viet Cong fighters’ ears as trophies. Such changes were made with a view toward possible publication. The responses of publishers to whom the work was submitted in the 1960s seem to have been mainly standard form-letters of the sort “While your manuscript has very considerable merit, it does not meet the needs of our present publishing program.” Rescuing Biegle from oblivion has been the purpose of this edition.