‘Nothing To Write Home About’ by Pete Byrne

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Sample Chapters

USS General Randall

Looking up at the U.S.S. Randall, the Navy troopship that was to take us to Germany, I was impressed. From the edge of the cavernous pier at the Brooklyn Army Terminal the towering gray ship blocked out the light of the morning sun. In my mind, the hustle and hubbub of a large ship being made ready to sail morphed into another of those old movie vignettes, one where a luxury liner is being readied for a festive departure. But this scene had none of the elegant clothes or streamers, and there was no music and no confetti.

I had reported two days earlier to Fort Hamilton, also in Brooklyn, where we waited, killing time. There were guys who signed in and then disappeared into Manhattan via the many openings in the post’s fencing. One kid I knew, a radio operator, never made it back for embarkation. It was August, and it was as oppressively hot and humid as a mid-Atlantic summer offers. Escaping the stifling transient barracks, a gang of us spent most of our several Brooklyn nights outside, drinking beer on a broad sweep of lawn above the Belt Parkway. We hid out where we could during duty hours, spending hours in the crowded, but air-conditioned snack bar, drinking sodas while a jukebox played among other things, Fats Domino’s “Blueberry Hill.” On the morning before sailing, Sergeant Leatham, the motor pool section chief, caught me in the mess hall. After giving me some shit about his not having been able to find me, he told me

that Norris Walker and I were to report to the orderly room at 1 p.m for a work detail.

Two weapons carriers were idling in front of the orderly room and a dozen or so of our guys were standing around smoking. Ordered into the trucks, we were given no word on where we were going or what were going to be doing. Fifteen minutes later we were out of the truck and inside the Brooklyn Army Terminal, alongside the the General Randall. A string of busy gangways and open hatches connected the ship to the dock, and adjacent to where we stood was an immense pile of luggage, a solid clue of how we were going to spend our afternoon. The luggage belonged to officers and non-coms traveling with their families. Even standing still, sweat ran down my neck, and my hair under my fatigue cap was already wet. We should have been told to wear our web belts with full canteens, but we hadn't been. We began carrying suitcases up gangways and up several steel ladders to a stateroom deck, dumping the bags and going back for another load. After just one such loop my fatigue shirt was dark with sweat. In a rational world, we would have stripped to our t-shirts, but this was the army and the uniform of the day was fatigues, boots and field caps. After a couple of runs, we'd barely made a dent in the luggage piles. Willie Borton, a kid from the survey section, went to the NCO supervising our detail, a good guy, a buck sergeant named Cruz. Borton let him know that if water wasn't forthcoming, people were going to start dropping. The cavalry, or rather the infantry, arrived while Cruz was off in search of water. Two truckloads of guys from the 13th Infantry Regiment had arrived on the pier. Two of that regiment's three battalions would be our shipmates for the trip overseas. Cruz came back with a five-gallon water can and a stack of paper cups. He pow-wowed with the infantry NCO and we were split into three teams that could be platooned for as long as it took to get the luggage where it belonged. Among

ourselves we decided that five luggage trips followed by a ten-trip break was enough. In less than two hours the luggage was gone and we were back in the trucks, sweat-soaked and exhausted, but done for the day.

I returned to the terminal the next morning, but this time in buses and everybody came. No Class "A" dress uniforms dignified our farewell. We were in fatigues, and in addition to our duffel bags we wore full web equipment complete with bayonets. And we were carrying our personal weapons. The rifles, carbines, M-3s and BARs that we thought we'd left in Colorado, were reissued before we boarded the buses. Led by Army Transportation Corps NCOs, we went into the ship through a dock-level hatch. The heat and humidity had not abated and our troop bay was closely packed, almost a hundred of us in each compartment. It was like being inside a wet sardine can in a slow oven. The bunks were four-high, steel pipe-frames with taut canvas tied to the frames. My rack was on the third highest of four, and I had to make room for my rifle. The minimal space between levels meant that I couldn't roll over without hitting the bottom of the canvas stretched above me. This would be home for the next eleven days.

Departure was delayed for undisclosed reasons and conditions in the hot, airless troop holds were awful. On deck, exposed to the sun, they were worse. The few shaded on-deck spaces were jam-packed with people. As the day wore on and the sun began sinking, everyone who could find a place was up on deck. In addition to us, there were the two battalions of the 13th Infantry, bringing the number of troops on board to almost two thousand. Much of the deck space had been allocated to the officers and NCOs and their families, making most of the ship off-limits to us. One happy surprise came with lunch. Navy food by comparison to army chow was better by multiples, and considering that on a

troopship the Navy wasn't feeding its own, the quality of the meals was all that more remarkable.

The ship's horn sounded just after dark and we began to move out into New York harbor. The decks were packed and space along the rails was at a premium. Moving slowly toward the Narrows, it was still three years before the start of construction on the Verranzanno Bridge, we quietly slid past the brightly lit Statue of Liberty and headed out into the dark North Atlantic. The sea began to roll and the heat quickly dissipated in the steady breeze of being underway. About an hour past sight of land and just after passing the Ambrose Light Ship we came to a stop. Darkness had turned the ocean to a monochromatic spectrum, serious blacks to white-flecked grays, and dense swells had begun rolling into the side of the ship. From the rail I could see the running lights of a smaller ship overtaking us. A Coast Guard patrol boat pulled alongside, jockeying itself next to an open and brilliantly lit hatch just above our ship's surging waterline. Swaying cables linked the two vessels as they rose and fell on the dark swells. Floodlights from the ship homed in on the smaller boat as a metal-framed basket was shuttled off on the lines from our ship. Even I understood that the unfolding scene was not a drill or a game. We would learn that the blanketed figure strapped to the stretcher was a kid from one of the rifle companies who had fallen from a between-decks ladder, splitting his head open. Further emergencies beyond this point would be addressed by whatever medical staff was onboard. Just after ten the sky clouded over and rain showers began, clearing the decks. I was among the last to stay out and didn't go below until a steady rain brought a sharp drop in the on-deck temperatures. My first night on the stiff canvas rack was fitful. I remember noting an increase in the ship's rolling before drifting off to sleep.

The Navy breakfast was varied, ample and delicious, but already a significant number of my fellow passengers had lost interest in eating. Out on deck in the crisp, clear early light, I played at bracing myself as one side of the ship's deck tilted over, raising the far rail up into the sky. Then the high side would plunge down frighteningly close to the roiling, churning waves. I was told that the ship was rolling. Pitching was different and would occur when we were proceeding directly into the waves. The bow would climb steeply and then plummet downward, raising the stern and lifting the propellers out of the water. Every time the stern came out of the water I worried that the shuddering vibrations might loosen whatever was holding the ship together. My fears of our ending up on the bottom of the ocean marked the extent of my interest in marine engineering.

I never tired of looking at the ocean itself, and like most adrenaline junkies it never got too rough for me. Four days out, there was a storm. With Lee Brown along, I found an unsecured upper-deck hatchway, one well above where seawater was washing over the lower decks. We watched the waves breaking over the front of the ship until a lone sailor in a life jacket and harnessed to a safety cable, spotted us from below. He signaled us in emphatic terms to get back inside. As a kid I'd been taken on excursion steamers for daytrips to an old amusement park on the Delaware River. I had loved every minute of those two-hour boat trips on the river, and now I was in the middle of a roaring North Atlantic storm and I thought it all just grand.

At 9 a.m., each morning at sea, the ship's PA system would blare out the order. "Sweepers! Sweepers! Man your brooms. A clean sweep fore and aft." The motor pool section, minus Sgt. Leatham and Pop March, would man mops and brooms to clean a normally off-limits, upper-level boat-deck. It was less

than a half-hour of make-work that I suspect was designed to keep as many of us as possible occupied for as long as possible. Later, on dry land in Germany, at the onset of any kind of a cleanup job around the motor pool, somebody, or everybody, would begin by chanting a chorus of the Navy's "Sweepers! Sweepers, man your brooms..."

If Dante Alighieri had ever found himself in the latrine, or as the Navy called it, the head, of a crowded troop transport during a mid-ocean storm, he could have grabbed another fitting metaphor for at least one of his circles of Hell. Even in calm weather, some seasickness was a given on a troop ship, but when the seas got rough, it became general. Other than in spontaneous emergencies, puking over the rails into the ocean was verboten. It would make a mess of the deck areas, and if the wind were blowing the wrong way, the debris as often as not would end up back on board and on innocent bystanders. To enter into one of the troop-deck heads when the weather was kicking up was to be assaulted by unforgettable scenes, smells and sounds, and by floors sloshed in disgusting human misery. I don't know who was charged with cleaning the heads, but I think I would have risked a court martial had I been detailed to do so. Following my first entry onto such a scene, I backed away, postponing my taking a shower for several days until I got reliable information that the heads had been cleaned and restored to some semblance of decency. There were functions unlike showering that could not be deferred, and only my discovery of a small out-of-the-way head, adjacent to the mess deck, allowed me to sneak off and find relief. There seems a human propensity to assume agency in things over which we have little or no control, things like presumptions to an inherent disposition to virtue, or to never getting seasick. While I was to weather my two storm-tossed Atlantic crossings, several decades later on a relatively

uneventful ferry passage between Nova Scotia and Maine, I was abruptly and violently disabused of my pretentions to having anything like sea legs.

Several beautiful, sunny August days crossing the Atlantic were spent, in between brief work details, on deck and at my leisure. While there were no lounge chairs and no stewards offering broth or tea, we could lie on the hatch covers smoking, reading or just talking and looking out upon the wonders of the ocean. I had drawn the attentions of a mentor, an older guy, a former Polish merchant seaman who had jumped ship in Amsterdam in 1948 and who now was in his third year of the five-year enlistment that would earn him his American citizenship. Despite my cultivating a wise-guy, juvenile delinquent image to mask things like my barely finishing high school, I had been raised in a home where I'd been exposed to, among other things, lots of opera and classical music. Cpl. Viadislav Foltyn had been bunked down the hall from me at Fort Carson and walking past his open door one night, I acknowledged that the LP record he was playing was Puccini's Tosca. It took a second musical identification, the Bartok Concerto for Orchestra, for Cpl. Foltyn to decide that I was, if not a diamond in the rough, then at least someone he could talk to. He was an interesting guy and I enjoyed being taken even a little bit seriously. We talked music, books, history and for the first time in my life, food. He went on and on about mushrooms, something I had yet to have eaten, and about venison, and bread and sauces. He even tried explaining existentialism to me. Within days of our arriving in Germany he disappeared. It was rumored because of his language skills he'd been transferred to a Seventh Army intelligence unit. Over the years as my education and experience evolved, he was one of the guys I wished I'd had more time to talk with.

One of the shipboard work details I was assigned to involved my joining a group of two-man teams hauling large metal cans of garbage from the mess deck to the fantail. We would upend the cans into a metal frame on the rail and then kill time watching the gulls trying to retrieve the edible refuse from the ship's wake. If manhandling the cans up the ladders to the fantail deck wasn't enough of a chore, there was the occasional *mal de mer* victim along our way who'd stop us to retch into our can. The ship reportedly had a huge garbage-grinder/disposal that would have saved us from our drudgery, but the galley staff, from experience, didn't trust the G.I. s to clean it properly. The machinery remained idle and pristine for as long as the Navy had access to a limitless labor supply from among the steerage passengers. But our garbage cans were our passports to the ship's otherwise off-limits fantail, where there was always a sailor standing watch, wearing a lifejacket, safety harness and a telephone-headset. We'd stare out the ship's churning wake and chat up the sailor on watch. It was a relief to get away even for a few minutes from the cattle pen congestion of the troop areas. I could see myself a sailor standing watch on that fantail, and more than once thought that maybe I should have joined the Navy instead of the Army.

Spotting two guys ahead of me in the chow line, it took me a couple of seconds to figure out that they were not GIs. Their fatigues were cut differently and their caps looked almost like those of railroad engineers. They were Marines. There were a dozen or so Marines onboard among more than two thousand Army people, and surrounded by so many GIs, they maintained an understandably low profile. I asked one of our NCOs what was going on but got no explanation. The mystery wasn't cleared up until late on our ninth day at sea when we docked at Southampton. A voice on the ship's PA system announced the departure of the Marines for embassy duty in cities all across

Europe; London, Paris, Madrid and Berlin. Generally, life in the Marine Corps was considered to be tougher than Army duty, but an embassy posting certainly sounded a lot softer than being in an infantry division in Seventh Army. We hung over the rail watching the Marines unload and several of our guys began bantering with the English dock workers, one of whom asked if the Yanks were coming back again to save them from the "Jerries," and if so "why had they sent children this time." "Fat Sam" Poulton shot back that we had come back to get another crack at their women. The tone of the interaction took a quick and a decidedly undiplomatic turn, but the gangway was being pulled in and the ship's horn drowned out the rising obscenities.

A day and a half later we awoke with the ship tied to a pier in Bremerhaven, a port city on the Weser River in northern West Germany. Just over a year later I would make my return trip on the same U.S. Navy troopship. My crossings were in no way remarkable. There were no enemy submarines, no icebergs and no perfect storms. But long after my exposure to Conrad and Melville, and after a raft of books on naval warfare, my measure for the authenticity of depictions of life at sea has to pass the test of my long ago trips across the North Atlantic aboard the U.S.S. General Randall.

Fasching

Almost a week into another cold, muddy field problem, Sgt. Charlie Wheeler, our section chief, told me to get myself up to the CP tent. The general's sedan was acting up and had to be taken to the 7th Corps Ordinance Depot motor pool for repairs. The look of incomprehension on my face led him to explain. The general's car had to go to Nuremburg, and SOP for sending a general's car anywhere without a general in it, was to send two guys. And since, all I was doing was lugging around gas cans to and from the fuel dump, I was the expendable man.

As the motor pool's dispatcher, I had outfoxed myself with my self-taught vehicle dispatching system. I had no idea of the procedures governing how vehicles were re-dispatched once we were in the field on an extended tactical situation, and I didn't want to show my ignorance by asking. It was another nearly perfect example of the double binds that marked my youth and early adulthood. I probably could have gone to any of the dispatchers in any of the motor pools surrounding ours, but I didn't. I improvised. When we went into the field, I issued each driver a trip ticket stamped in red ink, "Valid Until Completion of Mission." I had had the stamp made myself. I kept two complete batches of trip tickets made out for every vehicle assigned to our battery, holding them ready for speedy issuance when alerts were sounded. It got so that many drivers simply bypassed the motor pool dispatch office when trying to quickly clear post during an alert. I would catch up with them in the field and give them their trip tickets. Almost a year into my stay in Germany our unit underwent an Inspector General's Audit. The 7th Army master sergeant charged with surveying our motor pool had his head in his hands after

reviewing my dispatching records. As a lowly PFC, I copped to never having been trained as a dispatcher, a plea that the inspecting NCO didn't know how to deal with. I had made up my own system to regulate and to account for our unit's mileage, vehicle use and fuel consumption. Apparently, the numbers had come out reasonably close and until a qualified dispatcher could be found to replace me, my jury-rigged system would have to do. The recommendation that came down was that I be trained, or that I be relieved and replaced. By the time any of that made its way through the bureaucratic labyrinth of 7th Army, I would be a civilian again.

Once we got into the field, many if not most of the routines of garrison life ceased, and my trip ticket stamp of "Valid Until..." meant I had little to do. From the time of our arrival in Germany in September, until a brief field exercise in early November, my surplus of leisure in the field went unnoticed. The then motor sergeant, the elusive Henry P. Leatham, was another creature in hiding and had failed to, or chose not to, note my invisibility or my desultory pitching-in when caught out in the open. And I was useful and in demand as a spare driver for whatever came up. I got to carry stuff and people all over the division's operating area, one that comprised a large section of southwestern Germany. It was almost like being a tourist. Leatham's replacement, the more canny Charlie Wheeler, quickly got wise to me, and by the big field training exercise in November, I was put to work assisting Tommy Nicholas. Tommy was one of the mechanics and a good guy. We'd go around the bivouac area that made up the DivArty perimeter collecting empty five-gallon gas cans, loading them onto the motor pool's five-ton wrecker and with either Tommy or me at the wheel, we'd go in search of the assigned fuel dump where we would exchange the empties for full cans, return to our command post area and distribute the full cans in the order that we'd picked up the empties. A dirty job,

but with its open-ended opportunities to goof off, it wasn't all that bad. It wasn't like digging latrines or KP, but nor was it anywhere as good as hiding in the back of a truck trying to read War and Peace.

At the CP tent, the general's driver, a supercilious, spit-and-polished RA corporal named Volker, was waiting. I threw my gear into the trunk of the olive drab 53' Chevy four-door sedan, and with Volker driving we headed out of the rainy woods and down the Autobahn toward Nuremburg. While Volker would not have been my choice of company, riding down the highway smoking and listening to the Armed Forces radio station certainly beat the shit out of manhandling five-gallon gas cans. I knew that the fastidious Volker found my disheveled and unwashed presence in his pristine sedan offensive. I hadn't showered since leaving Cooke Barracks a week ago, a fact that even the pronounced smell of gasoline on my clothes couldn't cover. As a general's driver and unofficial orderly, Volker, even in the field, had access to amenities and perks unknown to motor pool nobodies like myself.

I tried to be amiable but Volker's idea of conversation was all "the general this and the general that," a litany of sycophancy that put me in a contentious frame of mind. We found the 7th Corps ordinance depot in Nuremburg and after Volker took care of the paperwork, we checked in at the base's replacement company. In out of the weather for the first time in nearly a week, I had a hot shower, changed into clean fatigues and sat down to dinner at a mess hall table. Volker's company didn't seem like such a high price for this deal after all. We'd been told that we'd be back on the road the next day. After morning chow, Volker was told that parts had to be ordered and that the car would be tied up for at least another three days. What now? We hung out getting progressively more bored and more restless. Late in the day we met the

occupants of the room next door, both were PFCs, vehicle mechanics from our own division's 28th Infantry Regiment stationed in Ulm, temporarily assigned to the Nuremburg Ordinance Depot on a vehicle inspection program. Our new friends told us that it being a Tuesday evening in March and the next day being Ash Wednesday, the pre-Lenten carnival, a Mardi Gras known in Germany as *Fasching,* was about to peak. The one guy lamented that because of his duty schedule he wouldn't be able to attend, but his buddy indicated that he was raring to go. The first guy was about the same size as both Volker and I, and he offered the loan of his Class "A" uniform to whichever of us wanted to attend the festivities. Volker's immediate response was that we couldn't because we didn't have passes. I took that to mean that I was going to a party.

Just after dark, in the company of my new buddy, a heavyset, smiley kid from Taos, New Mexico named Mark Thompkins, I was walking through the festive, crowded streets of Nuremburg, resplendent in my costume as a member of the 28th Infantry Regiment, enameled crests on my epaulets, blue infantry braid on my cap, a blue infantry rope on one shoulder and a red-and-green *fourragere*, a WW I regimental award, on the other shoulder. Regardless of the risk, being part of the Fasching scene topped being out in the cold, wet woods, forty kilometers to the southeast, or back in the replacement company barracks listening to Volker go on about himself and his general. There was one moment of mild panic when I braced myself to stride boldly past the MPs patrolling the city center. My other concern was my having less than ten bucks in military scrip in my pocket. I figured, let's wait and see what happens.

The center of the city's Fasching celebration was a gigantic cavern of a beer hall, a room more on the scale of a major metro railroad station. The rows and rows of long, crowded tables served by waitresses, some of with long blond

braids and more than a few spilling over the tops of their dirndls. There was noise, singing and the continuous "ompaahings" of a large, costumed brass band. Lederhosen were everywhere. There were just enough GIs in the crowd that we didn't feel out of place. There were wursts with mustard and tankards of beer, toasts and laughter. We found seats between a group of middle-aged German couples and a gang of already tipsy GI's, some in civvies and a few wearing 3rd Armored Division patches, a unit that would soon earn fame when a draftee named Presley joined its ranks. Thompkins and I ate and we drank; we sang and we flirted with the waitresses. As usual the beer proved much stronger than I had expected or could handle. Feeling wobbly, I told Thompkins that I was out of dough and was going to walk home. He demanded I sit back down, announcing that the 28th Infantry "took care of their own." The night ended with me rising unsteadily to my feet and being helped into a cab by my new buddy.

Volker and I killed time the next day, staying out of each other's way. I entertained the possibility that when we got back, he might rat me out. I spent the afternoon in the library. After chow Mark Thompkins and I went to the post theater and saw the very first of Stanley Kubrick's movies, the "The Killing," a low budget, noir classic. Sleeping-in past chow the next morning, Volker shook me awake me to say that the CQ runner had just been at the door. We were wanted at the motor pool. The sergeant on the counter told Volker that they had been looking for him since early yesterday. The parts had come in sooner than they expected, the repairs had not taken as long as they had estimated, and in short, the sedan had been ready to go since the day after we'd left it. And the guy told Volker that when they couldn't find him, they had called our unit trying to locate him.

During the nearly two-hour drive between Nuremburg and our division's maneuver area, Volker's mood swings ran from "oh well, it'll all work out" to suicidal states of despair. I had much less to lose. What were they going to do, make me haul smelly, leaky gasoline cans all day and into the night? At one point in his thrashing around, Volker even tried implying that the whole business had somehow been my fault. "It was me, wasn't it, who had left the post without authorization, wasn't it? That certainly couldn't be his fault, could it?" But he knew better. He knew that if I was going to go down over this, I hadn't as far to fall as he did.

The first sergeant was in front of the CP tent when we pulled into the bivouac area. He waited a minute or so before lighting into Volker. He never said a word to me. Volker was a corporal, an NCO, the ranking man, and that, according to military protocols meant that the responsibility for all things under his command was his. As a humble PFC, I was no more than a cipher. Volker was busted on the spot to PFC. I hadn't wished him any harm but I didn't feel bad or guilty.

Between the day Volker was demoted and the end of the month, the battery had a turnover in command. When we returned from the field to Cooke Barracks, our new CO found he had an unexpected stripe, Volker's, in circulation. Captain Bennett, the new CO, knew that if he left the slot open into the next pay period, the stripe would go to another unit in Division Artillery. Less than three weeks from the day Volker was busted, his E-4 grade was awarded to the battery's PFC with the longest time in grade, and that PFC just happened to be me. Every morning after I'd had the new Spec-3 patches sewn onto my sleeves, PFC Volker would come into the dispatch office for his trip ticket. It was all strictly business. Neither of us said a word to each other about Nuremburg.

After all, I now technically outranked him, for a while anyway. Life being what it is, PFC Volker, at the behest of his patron, DivArty commander, Brigadier General F. T. Cordell, had corporal's stripes back on his sleeves within weeks of my own promotion.

The Big Parade

When Bill Nolan got his early-out and went home to college, his replacement in the motor pool's parts room was a guy from one of the gun battalions. Strange dude. Low key, just a bit wary and defensive, Lou Scudari, a draftee from San Francisco, was the first Beatnik I was to encounter. To me, the Beat movement was just another media creation, something you read about in magazines. Three or four years later watching the Bob Denver character, "Maynard G. Krebs" on TV's "The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis," I thought, "Hey! That's Scudari."

Scudari was a natural clown, able to turn anything at hand into a prop and almost any situation into a vehicle for low comedy. His heavy-lidded preludes of "hey man" usually opened onto something so creatively weird that I found myself actively seeking out his company. While he could be a hoot, he shrouded himself in a fog of privacy, particularly about his free time. He was off-post, out on pass, at every opportunity, so much so that one night after he left for town again, as always, in civvies, even Larry Wilkinson wondered aloud, "Where's he go all the time, all by himself ? I'll bet he's got a girl in yown." But Lou Scudari had been in the unit less than four weeks, and he'd been going out every night since he got here. Fat Sam added, "What a fucking weirdo!"

Scudari's parts room was next door to my dispatch office, and with neither job being all that demanding, we spent a lot of time goofing-off, talking about jazz, about painters, about writers, all that kind of stuff. Our conversations always seemed to end up with him trying to tell me about life revolving around the

idea of “getting to where it’s at.” I couldn’t figure out what “it” was he was talking about, much less where it was “at.”

Scudari’s early entry into the battery’s hall-of-fame came after we’d returned to post from a dawn alert. About a dozen of us were headed back to the battery area to turn in our weapons, shambling along rag-tag. We knew better. There were rules. Parties of our size when under arms were to march in formation, not straggle along like raggedy-ass civilians. Scudari, the least military among us, suddenly stopped and commanded that we form a column of fours, which all but two or three of us laughingly did. He then demonstrated what he said was the Red Army parade form, A low goose-step with his rifle at the hip and extended. When he was satisfied that we had gotten the idea, he commanded us to “Fix Bayonets.” Slinging his own rifle, he drew his bayonet and raising it on high like a Soviet officer’s sword, he shouted, “Comrades, Forward March.” Strutting alongside us he began to chant the melody of “Meadowlands,” the Russian national anthem. Larry Wilkinson and I both knew the piece and our added voices were enough to create a credible soundtrack. “Da-da da da-da. Da-da da-da da-da da da...” What a great time! It being early on a warm August morning with doors and windows open, our approach was heard by many of the scores of German civilians working in the maintenance buildings, the post laundry and the warehouses that lined the road. Hearing our singing, dozens of laughing, applauding Germans came outside of the to urge us on. Unfortunately a jeep pulled alongside, and a dour looking Lt. Colonel in the passenger seat ordered us to a halt. Demanding that the ranking man step forward, he took Larry’s Wilkinson’s name and that of our unit. After telling the rest of us that we were a disgrace to our uniforms, he ordered Larry to form us into a column of twos with slung weapons, and to march, he repeated the word, “march our sorry asses” out of there. Later that afternoon Larry got his summons to the

orderly room where First Sergeant Bonner asked him how a guy reputed to be so smart could be "so fucking dumb." Wilkinson was smart enough not to respond to that same question in the way he had to Sgt. Evans back in Colorado. That was it, no getting busted, no Article Fifteen, nothing, and Scudari's name never came up.

A dozen or more years later with the counterculture in full bloom, curiosity led me to take the plunge, a shallow plunge, appropriate for a married man with a family, a mortgage and a decade into a low-level corporate job. I didn't run off to follow the Dead, didn't join a commune and I didn't become a radical activist, just a little dabbling in soft hallucinogens. At some point, probably while cutting my toenails or putting out the trash, a light bulb went on over my head and I thought, "Holy shit! Scudari was trying to turn me on." What I came to believe was that our strange and secretive colleague had more than likely been stoned for most of the time I'd known him.

In the late 1950s, the West German economic miracle and its attendant "*Gasarbeiter,*" or "Guest Worker" program were well underway, ultimately attracting millions of southern European, Turkish and North African workers to take temporary menial jobs in Germany. I don't think it's too great a leap to conjecture that my friend, the intensely secretive San Francisco Beatnik, would have had little trouble scoring some weed, or more probably, lumps of hashish, whenever he wanted. To put things into a reasonable context, this was in an army where regularly getting shit-faced drunk appeared to be the recreational activity of choice. Scudari did his job competently and never caused any problems. He's now probably well past eighty-years-old, but on those occasions when he turns up in my mind, I grin and think to myself, "Scudari, you sly dog you."