

MODERN HISTORY

by

Marvin Green

When I was inducted at Fort Dix in 1942, the psychiatrist—a Colonel Rohmer if I'm remembering correctly—asked me, "Are you a virgin?" I muttered something about waiting for marriage, and he said, "That'll change."

In Brussels in 1945, Peter (at the time I didn't know his last name) used to hang around the caserne, where the American noncoms who worked at the Shell office building were billeted. I'd glimpsed him once or twice. He was a stocky British army captain. He seemed lonesome, and indeed I'd been cautioned that "the captain wants companionship." A nice enough looking guy, with some freckles and sandy, wavy hair, I remember him that way even today.

I was barefoot and naked except for my undershorts when there was a knock, and I opened the door. I knew right off who it was. Given in those days to grand gestures, I bowed and swept him in, raced to the one chair to remove my foot-and-a-half pile of khaki shirts, handkerchiefs, socks, trousers and underwear, and then seated myself on the bed.

He was hunting his jacket for a smoke, so I proffered a Lucky Strike, which I could buy at the PX for the Belgian franc equivalent of only a nickel a pack. I didn't smoke but apparently was known all over Brussels for freely handing out American cigarettes to my Belgian friends. Hence my popularity at various taverns. I also carried a Zippo lighter, which I flicked on and extended to him. As he attempted some smoke rings, I knew I was in for it now, because of the lousy ventilation, if any, in my tiny room.

Peter had that upper-upper erudite British accent and introduced himself simply as Peter. In a paper sack he'd brought a bottle of Remy-Martin cognac. He took it out, waved it around to display the label for due credit, produced two snifters from the breast pockets of his jacket and poured each of us a good three-finger shot. "I'm informed," he said, "that you're the American economics prodigy. You're from your University of Chicago and I assume you're an integral part of that whole laissez faire crew over there. We have our weekly Tuesday economics seminar and would very much like you to come over tomorrow evening to present your Chicago point of view."

"Sure," I said.

Colonel Rohmer was right. I was interested in girls. I was not interested in economics.

"Yes."

"Afraid of girls?"

"I guess I'm waiting for marriage."

"That'll change."

All I knew about economics was that there are supply and demand curves. Although somewhat intrigued that one might be able to use calculus to manipulate the data in those curves, I was interested only in the hard sciences, namely mathematics and physics.

Economics was a soft science, and so was Psychology. and would give examples from my own ideas, really to test them out. I was actually thinking of going back to Chicago to study economics whenever the Army would finally discharge me.

I admit I was just a glib kid. I was said to be a popular teacher and wasn't surprised that phony rumors had spread. One fellow teacher resented the high evaluations I always got. He got drunk and cornered me one day and grabbed my throat. As he

vomited all over me, he said, "Asshole, you hold forth as if you know what you're talking about."

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In the summer of 1946, when the bathroom plumbing failed at our fraternity house at the University of Chicago, we'd slip across University Avenue to take our showers in Bartlett Gym. Most of us were World War II veterans.

I mention this because H.H., my future law partner, had vivid vertical scars up and down the left side of his chest.

"Jesus, H.H.," I said. "What the hell?"

"Battle of the Bulge," he answered.

Canadian troops had liberated the French port of Le Havre in September, 1944. My Army Harbor Craft Company then moved in and operated the port. We had tug boats, barges, marine cranes and the 26-foot J-boats that delivered mail and supplies and that sometimes we used for gutsy recreational excursions into the English Channel.

It turned out that H.H. was one of the 1,500 guys a Nazi E-boat torpedoed as they approached Le Havre one afternoon. I went out on a J-boat that made maybe 20 trips, bucking 5-foot waves and hauling in those poor SOBs. At the tavern that night, everybody wanted to know the details of the rescue, and I must have embellished my efforts just a bit. I mean I don't know how I got back to my unit. All I remember is that everybody was toasting me and buying me drinks.

Over 4,000,000 U.S. soldiers disembarked onto the European continent at Le Havre. Whether you walked off your ship or were fished out of the Channel, chances are our company put you onto a truck and shipped you to one of the cigarette camps—Camp Lucky Strike, Camp Philip Morris, Camp Old Gold, Camp 20 Grand.

The cigarette camps were replacement depots—we called them “repple depples.” Interesting how the cigarette motif was so prevalent everywhere during the war. In those Hollywood movies we saw, if a soldier was dying, his buddy or his medic always lit a cigarette for him.

OK, here's what happened to lots of those 4,000,000 guys during World War II. If you're one of them, such as H.H. was, you're 18 years old; you've already had 13 weeks of infantry basic training; you've been put onto a troop ship; to your relief you've crossed the Atlantic safely; and now you get a rifle and combat equipment at one of the camps. In just two or three days more, you find yourself scared shitless in the front lines. Somebody's actually shooting at you. In fact that asshole's using live ammunition, and you realize you're replacing somebody—some other human target—who'd been killed or else badly wounded. It's all a horrible mistake.

H.H. told me he was at Philip Morris. When he went on his first five or six patrols, his squad leader didn't even know his name.

The Battle of the Bulge was around Christmas time in the Ardennes Forest in Belgium.

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Mindful as I am about the dozens of my relatives who died in the concentration camps, I loved World War II. I personally knew just two of the relatives. My cousin Paul lived with us for six months in 1929 when I was four years old. My cousin Anush visited us before the war. I was 14 then. Her visa ran out, and she set sail back to Europe. It was August 31, 1939. It was the very next day that the Nazis marched into Poland.

A few years ago I went to the Holocaust Museum in Washington and tried to see if I could spot Anush in the photographs in the

Hungarian section. All of the women were naked. Their heads were shaved. I'd often imagined Anush naked, but I'd never actually seen her naked.

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What is history? Julius Caesar is dead. Paul is dead. Anush is dead. H.H. is dead. I didn't go to his funeral. Clive of India is dead. When I was ten years old, I saw a movie in which 123 out of 146 persons supposedly died in the Black Hole of Calcutta in 1756. Probably the Black Hole never really happened, but I remain scared and, in fact, claustrophobic. As Columbia University Professor Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism* in 1978, once something is said often enough, it becomes true.

I've looked up major natural disasters in the almanacs, and I've consulted the disaster data base that's available on the internet. It says that worldwide 20,000,000 died in 1917 from an epidemic. One of them was one of my father's sister Mathilda. Another was the father of my cousin George, whom I met in Tunbridge Wells, an English city in what was known as "buzz-bomb alley" during World War II.

The Nazi Holocaust was a human—not a natural—disaster, but supposedly 6,000,000 persons died, including Anush, but nowadays there are "deniers," who say the Holocaust never happened. They're just applying Professor Said's principle: the Holocaust has become true.

Holocaust or no Holocaust, I loved World War II. I mean, if I don't weep for Caesar, why should I weep for the uncles and aunts and cousins and the 6,000,000 others I never met.

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Captain Peter came back to my mind in 1951 when British officials Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean defected to Russia. He'd graduated from Cambridge, and Burgess and Maclean were part

of the "Cambridge Comintern." In 1963 their Cambridge colleague Kim Philby also defected.

Back in Brussels, Captain Peter took me to his weekly Tuesday economics seminar. He and some other British soldiers, mostly Cambridge buddies, I believe, had rented an apartment, stocked it with a mimeograph machine, and used it as the headquarters for their seminars and also to print and distribute their political pamphlets.

He'd brought a box of cigars and passed it around. I took one and said, "I smoke these to try to look older."

"My God, man," a tall, skinny guy said, "it's incongruous. You're the youngest Yank I've ever seen. You shouldn't even be in the bloody military."

"I'm 20—old enough, I dare say, to pitch in and help you chaps make the world safe for democracy. That's what we accomplished, isn't it?"

"Amazing baby features," the man said. "I'd judge 13 or 14 at the most. If I were your mother, you wouldn't be smoking."

Peter said, "I was stunned, too. But he's got his degree, hasn't he? And he's an economist—if you can call it economics that they do out there in Al Capone land. Let's hear him out."

It was liquor that saved me that difficult Tuesday night. I was pacing myself whereas everybody else was guzzling too much cognac and probably was also oxygen-deprived from the cigar and cigarette smoke. At least 10 times Peter cried out such things as, "You still haven't answered my charge. America led the world—yes, the entire world—into the 1929 depression."

Another of Peter's dismal crew, not the tall, skinny guy, said, "I can prove to you that your Federal Reserve System is completely inadequate to cope with the business cycle. As I understand it, your Professor Henry Simons wants to monetize your

National Debt. I demand that you explain how monetary manipulations can possibly put people back to work in a depression."

I'd picked up some of the evening's jargon and was able to counterattack. "I come not to bury laissez faire," I said, "or to praise it, but to figure out what you guys are crowing about. Go easy on me now. Only one of you—please don't everybody jump me all at once—one of you, step by step, using the King's English, explain to me exactly how you'll put people back to work."

Above the instantaneous clamor of voices, Peter cried out, "The entire world!"

I wasn't able to escape until about 3:00 a.m., but I'd gotten away with it. I'd remained sober and pulled off what felt like an intellectual coup. Those guys had studied under John Maynard Keynes, and they knew what they were talking about. So, totally smug, though I'd missed the last tram, I trudged five miles back to the caserne.

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H.H. was a member of the Communist Party, but I had to find that out from two FBI agents.

When we became partners, he did all the work, and I brought in all the business. With an unusual joint academic residency in the economics department and the Law School, I'd picked up a PhD and a JD. One of the major Chicago banks hired me and quickly discovered my specialty. They put me to work making speeches to invited big business executives. Triple damage anti-trust lawsuits were the hot thing back then.

I steered hundreds of thousands of business to H.H., so that, within six months, he quit his firm and opened up his own.

By putting my name first, he persuaded me to quit the bank and partner with him.

FBI agents tended to interview in pairs, so that they could corroborate each other about what a witness told them. I forget the names of the two guys who came to see me at home one night. I started calling them Heckle and Jeckle. Since H.H. and I had been doing a lot of work with the US Justice Department on our anti-trust litigation, I assumed at first that Heckle and Jeckle were doing routine background checks. They never said otherwise.

On the other hand, I had an intuition, because the cold war with Russia was going full blast. Senator Joseph McCarthy and the Rosenbergs and Judith Coplon and Alger Hiss were hitting the daily news, along with Burgess, Maclean and Klaus Fuchs and eventually Kim Philby. When I asked Heckle and Jeckle point blank, "Does this have to do with espionage?", the bastards lied to me.