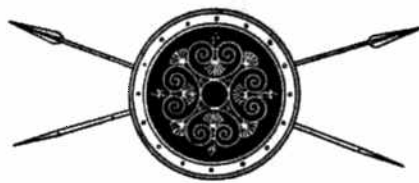


THE WARRIORS

Reflections on Men in Battle by J. Glenn Gray



THE ACHE OF GUILT

The man I interrogated and took to Army proved to be a spy. . . . I went to Army two days later, after he had been "broken" by endless interrogation and considerable beating. . . . It recalled the memory of Scarpellini in Italy, whom I also apprehended and turned over. . . . One thing contents me, that these were not innocent soldiers. They knew what they were facing. The German had been an idealistic Nazi for fifteen years. . . . Am I responsible for their deaths? Both might well have escaped had it not been for me. . . . Certainly they had blood on their hands, and desired to have more. Is their blood on mine? But I am more fortunate than many soldiers who must kill more innocent men. Perhaps the hardest thing of all is that I feel no guilt. (War journal, November 4, 1944)

Nothing revolts the sensitive spirit so much as the bloody and unjust deeds of warfare that leave no trace of guilt in the

doers and are from every human perspective unavenged. If we were not accustomed to evasions of responsibility in ourselves, such behavior would force us into cynicism of the most nihilistic sort or, at the best, to complete bewilderment about human nature. Yet a voice within each of us echoes the sentiments of Hamlet: "Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?"

The fighting man is disinclined to repent his deeds of violence. Men who in private life are scrupulous about conventional justice and right are able to destroy the lives and happiness of others in war without compunction. At least to other eyes they seem to have no regrets. It is understandable, of course, why soldiers in combat would not suffer pangs of conscience when they battle for their lives against others who are trying to kill them. And if the enemy is regarded as a beast or a devil, guilt feelings are not likely to arise if he is slain by your hand. But modern wars are notorious for the destruction of nonparticipants and the razing of properties in lands that are accidentally in the path of combat armies and air forces. In World War II the number of civilians who lost their lives exceeded the number of soldiers killed in combat. At all events, the possibilities of the individual involving himself in guilt are immeasurably wider than specific deeds that he might commit against the armed foe. In the thousand chances of warfare, nearly every combat soldier has failed to support his comrades at a critical moment; through sins of omission or commission, he has been responsible for the death of those he did not intend to kill. Through folly or fear, nearly every officer has exposed his own men to needless destruction at one time or another. Add to this the unnumbered acts of injustice so omnipresent in war, which may not result in death but inevitably bring pain and grief, and the impartial observer may

wonder how the participants in such deeds could ever smile again and be free of care.

The sober fact appears to be that the great majority of veterans, not to speak of those who helped to put the weapons and ammunitions in their hands, are able to free themselves of responsibility with ease after the event, and frequently while they are performing it. Many a pilot or artilleryman who has destroyed untold numbers of terrified noncombatants has never felt any need for repentance or regret. Many a general who has won his laurels at a terrible cost in human life and suffering among friend and foe can endure the review of his career with great inner satisfaction. So are we made, we human creatures! Frequently, we are shocked to discover how little our former enemies regret their deeds and repent their errors. Americans in Germany after World War II, for instance, feel aggrieved that the German populace does not feel more responsibility for having visited Hitler upon the world. The Germans, for their part, resent the fact that few Americans appear to regret the bombing of German cities into rubble and the burning and crushing of helpless women and children. It appears to be symptomatic of a certain modern mentality to marvel at the absence of guilt consciousness in others while accepting its own innocence as a matter of course.

No doubt there are compelling historical reasons why soldiers in earlier times have felt comparatively little regret for their deeds and why modern soldiers in particular are able to evade responsibility so easily. It is wise to assume, I believe, that the soldiers who fight twentieth-century wars are morally little better or worse than their grandfathers or great-grandfathers in previous wars. Nevertheless, there are some novel factors in our time that, taken together with the traditional ways of escape, make it easier for the majority of soldiers to

carry the guilt for the destruction of the innocent in contemporary conflicts. These novel factors lie both in our contemporary interpretation of guilt and in the nature of recent combat.

Our age seems peculiarly confused about the meaning of guilt, as well as its value. With the rise of modern psychology and the predominance of naturalistic philosophers, guilt has come to be understood exclusively in a moral sense. Its older religious and metaphysical dimensions have been increasingly forgotten. Moreover, these naturalistic psychologists have tended to view guilt feelings as a hindrance to the free development of personality and the achievement of a life-affirming outlook. They like to trace guilt to the darker, subconscious levels of the soul and emphasize its backward-looking character as opposed to the future-directed impulses of the natural man. Hence guilt, when reduced to moral terms, has more and more been branded as immoral. To some, it is associated with a species of illness, which must be cured by psychiatric treatment. Though these modern doctors of the soul realize that the uninhibited man is not an attainable ideal, they still strive for the goal of acceptance of oneself and one's nature for what they are. The individual is released as far as possible from regret for past deeds and from the hard duty to improve his character.

Even if these doctrines get modified in actual practice and are seldom read in their deeper meanings, the basic ideas filter into the broadest strata of our population and help to form the dominant mood of our day. Even the simplest soldier suspects that it is unpopular today to be burdened with guilt. Everyone from his pastor to his doctor is likely, if he brings up feelings that oppress him, to urge him to "forget it." Precisely this is what he often longs to hear, and, so, forgetting becomes such a disquieting phenomenon of the modern mind.

In war itself, the most potent quieters of conscience are evidently the presence of others who are doing the same things and the consciousness of acting under the orders of people "higher up" who will answer for one's deeds. So long as the soldier thinks of himself as one among many and identifies himself with his unit, army, and nation, his conscience is unlikely to waken and feel the need to respond. All awareness of guilt presupposes the capacity to respond as an individual to the call of conscience. I am using the term "respond" in its original meaning of answer to a question or a demand made on the self. We respond to conscience only when we can separate ourselves from others and become conscious, often painfully so, of our differentness. Though the call of conscience may seem to be an impersonal voice outside of one, the response is peculiarly within the individual self. Why did *you* do this? Why did *you* not do that? If we hear at all and if we attempt to answer, the response must begin with the first person singular pronoun. I must begin with myself as I was:

My conscience seems to become little by little sooted. . . . If I can soon get out of this war and back on the soil where the clean earth will wash away these stains! I have also other things on my conscience. . . . [A man named H., accused of being the local Gestapo agent in one small town] was an old man of seventy. His wife and he looked frightened and old and miserable. . . . I was quite harsh to him and remember threatening him with an investigation when I put him under house arrest. . . . Day before yesterday word came that he and his wife had committed suicide by taking poison. Fain and I went back and found them dead in their beds, he lying on his back and reminding me, gruesomely enough, of my father, she twisted over on her side with her face concealed. At the bedside was a card on which he had scrawled: "Wir mussten elend zu Grunde gehen. Der Herr Gott verzeihe uns. Wir haben niemandem leid getan." . . . [We must perish miserably.

God forgive us. We have done no one any harm.] The incident affected me strongly and still does. I was directly or indirectly the cause of their death. . . . I hope it will not rest too hard on my conscience, and yet if it does not I shall be disturbed also.

Since conscience normally awakens in guilt in the sense that a troubled conscience is usually our first indication of its existence, it is clear that an important function of guiltiness is to make us aware of our selves. Whatever his response, the person who hears the call of conscience is aware of freedom in the form of a choice. He could have performed differently than he did; an act of his might have been different. The whole realm of the potential in human action is opened to him and with it the fateful recognition that he is in charge of his own course. Conscience is thus in the first instance a form of self-consciousness. It is that form that gives to us an unmistakable sense of free individuality and separates for us the domains of the actual and the ideal. Therewith the life of reflection begins, and the inner history of the individual no longer corresponds to his outer fate.

But the individual need not waken, and, indeed, everything in warfare conspires against such response to the call of freedom. Enemy and ally enclose his little life, and there is little privacy or escape from their presence. Loyalty to his unit is instilled by conscious and unconscious means; the enemy is seeking to destroy that unity and must be prevented from doing so at all costs. He is one with the others in a fraternity of exposure and danger. His consciousness of the others may be vague but is an omnipresent reality; it has much similarity to dream awareness. Directly, he is aware of his pals, the half-dozen or more men he knows relatively well, with a few dozen more who are on the periphery of his consciousness. Beyond them there are thousands who encircle him, whose presence he

senses. There is a vast assemblage of unknown "friends" confronting an equally vast mass of unknown "enemies," and he is in the midst of all of them. Their presence makes his situation endurable, for they help to conquer the loneliness that oppresses him in the face of death, actual or possible. Something within him responds powerfully to the appeal of the communal. The orders that he receives from those in charge of his fate hold him where he is in the midst of disorder. He is compelled and controlled as though by invisible threads through the unseen presence of the others, friend and foe.

In an exposed position on the battlefield during action, his consciousness of being a part of an organism is likely to plunge him into contradictory feelings of power and impotence which succeed one another rapidly. "If I don't hit that guy out there or man this machine gun to the last, my buddies will be killed and I'll be the cause of their death. Everything depends on me." A few minutes later he is likely to ask himself what one rifle or machine gun on one tiny portion of the field can possibly matter to the final outcome. His place in the whole complex is lost to sight, and he is in danger of feeling how absolute is his dependence. All the time, he acts as he feels he must, swept by moods of exultation, despair, loyalty, hate, and many others. Much of the time he is out of himself, acting simply as a representative of the others, as part of a super-personal entity, on orders from elsewhere. He kills or fails to kill, fights courageously or runs away in the service of this unit and unity. Afterward, he hears no voice calling him to account for his actions, or, if he does hear a voice, feels no need to respond.

In less sophisticated natures, this presence of the others is projected also into the weapons and instruments of war. They become personalized, and the soldier becomes attached to them

as an extension of himself. They afford him a vast comfort in difficult positions as a protection and a shield, a second skin. On the one hand, these weapons help to prevent the soldier from feeling responsible for the lives he takes. "I did not kill, my gun or grenade did it" is the subconscious suggestion. On the other hand, guns help to fill the intermediate spaces between him and the others. They help to cement the wall of comradeship that encloses him and ties him to his own side while at the same time preventing the enemy from becoming too real. Unless he is caught up in murderous ecstasy, destroying is easier when done at a little remove. With every foot of distance there is a corresponding decrease in reality. Imagination flags and fails altogether when distances become too great. So it is that much of the mindless cruelty of recent wars has been perpetrated by warriors at a distance, who could not guess what havoc their powerful weapons were occasioning.

Where weapons and comrades are insufficient to dampen self-awareness and personal responsibility, the soldier can often draw aid and comfort from the earth itself. His relation to nature is likely to be quite different from that elemental sense of belonging, which can also arouse in the perceptive person the most poetic and blissful feelings. The combat soldier hugs earth and trees as protection, as "cover" in the expressive military phrase. He does not now think of nature as the source of his life, but as his possible means of preserving it against those who would isolate and destroy him. Nature is part of his situation; it, too, is a presence in the special way that his weapons and his buddies are. If earth becomes dear, for example, the walls of his foxhole, trees, breastworks, clouds, and sun, it is not as part of nature that these things are dear. They are dear as instruments that shield him from the enemy. Everything is there for him, as it were, and yet he is

there only for the others. He makes everything into an instrument, himself included. He is a trigger finger, a tank driver, a bombardier, a scout, and he can take delight in being an instrument. So everything conspires to prevent his coming to himself, and, as often as not, the soldier is a semiconscious accomplice in it as well. Why should he undergo the pain of reflection, the dangerous isolation acute self-awareness can bring with it?

In highly mechanized armies, many a soldier gains a certain fulfillment in serving the machine with which he is entrusted. The automatism of military life has been immeasurably increased by the perfection and intricacy of instruments and weapons, and it is certain that the human beings who serve them are actually influenced by their automatic character. Combat soldiers must adjust themselves to the laws of these mechanisms, and their habits become of necessity more and more mechanized. Individuality is inevitably suppressed when a group of soldiers have to co-ordinate their movements and all their daily activities in the proper functioning of an instrument of war. But the significant thing is that so many take pleasure in it. There is, I suppose, a perverse kind of freedom here, the freedom from reacting in novel and unpredictable ways. Whatever the source, love for the machine—and the more complicated and exacting, often the greater the love—is an important element in modern combat. The hardened German tanker cited earlier who broke down and cried at the loss of his tank is far from an isolated instance. Those thinkers who believe that a new type of man is bound to emerge as a product of our technological development might well study in detail over the last century the varying relation of men to their weapons of war.

In totalitarian countries, this willingness to become a func-

tionary is much further developed because it is consciously pursued by the dictator at the summit. Self-awareness is fought as an enemy of communal enthusiasms. In 1944 and 1945 I had to listen to Fascist and Nazi police and party functionaries exclaim with nauseating regularity when they were captured: "My conscience is clear!" It made no difference how heinous the deeds were in which they had taken part, always the refrain was the same: "I have done nothing wrong. My conscience is clear." Despite early suspicions that these protestations masked real guilt feelings, I became convinced in the end that most of these men knew no genuine regrets for what they had done. As functionaries, guilt was for them, in any case, an empty word. If their consciences had ever awakened, the lack of response had long since silenced the call. The inhumanity that so appalled me about them was more often than not a kind of absence of feeling rather than sadistic perversion. Machines cannot respond; they can only perform, being at the service of something or someone else.

It was peculiarly abhorrent to me that these people expected the same treatment at my hands that they had meted out to their victims. One particularly repulsive officer of the Security Service, nicknamed "Genickschuss" from his reputation for shooting Polish underground fighters and hapless Jews in the back of the neck, hastily wrote a farewell note to his wife and children after I had interrogated him and consigned him to a jail cell. The jailer brought me his letter within the hour, asking me what to do with it. When I had read it, I was puzzled by the references to his imminent death.

"Does he mean to commit suicide?" I asked the German jailer.

He looked incredulous and answered simply, "Not a chance. He expects you to treat him as he treated his prisoners."

In a kind of baffled rage at the thought of his fearful crimes, I cried out, "And if I did what was right, that is just exactly what I should do."

I shall never forget the jailer's quiet reply. "Sir, it is necessary," he said.

For many soldiers, however, a much more conscious escape from responding to conscience is the fact that they are acting "under orders." Their superiors who issue the orders must take the blame and bear the consequences. When one asked, as I did, which superiors would bear responsibility, the answer was usually vague. Pressed far enough, it usually turned out to be the commander in chief who was to carry all the weight of guilt for deeds that, if committed in peacetime, would have brought heavy penalties.

I was amazed how many American civilian soldiers appeared to put great weight on taking the oath of the soldier. Frequently, I heard the remark: "When I raised my right hand and took that oath, I freed myself of the consequences for what I do. I'll do what they tell me and nobody can blame me." Of course, in a legal sense it is and has been customary in military organizations to hold the highest ranking officer responsible for deeds of his men committed under orders. But Anglo-Saxon lands have long since learned to distinguish between legal and moral responsibility, at least in peacetime. It was clear, however, that most of the soldiers who cited the oath felt that the moral responsibility was being shifted as well. The satisfaction in thus sloughing off responsibility was often plainly visible. Becoming a soldier was like escaping from one's own shadow. To commit deeds of violence without the usual consequences that society visits upon the violent seemed at first a bit unnatural but for many not unpleasant. All too quickly it could become a habit.

In a more legalistic nation like Germany, where the distinction between law and right or between state justice and private morality has never been sharply drawn, the abrogation of personal responsibility for one's deeds is even less complicated. It is hard for civilian America to comprehend the mental and moral conversion involved for a professional German soldier to oppose in full consciousness a military command. To most of us, it sounded like an easy excuse when Hitler's officers protested at Nuremberg and elsewhere that they were "carrying out orders" when they committed atrocities. To most of them, however, this was a sufficient explanation and excuse for their deeds. I suspect that the majority of Germans remain unconvinced that any soldier should be legally punished for "doing his duty," regardless of its inhumane character. I hardly need to add that many Americans, both professional military men and others, are also unsuaded.

To be sure, since the Nuremberg trials, Western nations have officially denied the soldier's right to obey orders that involve him in crimes. He must distinguish between legitimate orders and those that are in line with his duty as a soldier. Presumably, the distinction is always clear according to official pronouncements, but in reality under the conditions of total war few things are more difficult to distinguish. Our age is caught in a painful contradiction for which there is no resolution other than the renunciation of wars or at least of the way we have been waging them in this generation. On the other hand, we have come to believe in total victory over the foe, with the use of every means thinkable to effect this goal. Since the opponent's residual strength rests in his industrial potential and civilian labor force, we have found it necessary to disregard the age-old distinction between combatant and non-

combatant. In these wars moral considerations become, as a consequence, increasingly irrelevant while the war is in progress. The longer they last the more nearly do the opposing sides approach that boundary where everything is allowed.

However, once the question of victory is decided, we are shocked beyond measure at such moral license and require stern punishment of the vanquished for violations of the rules of war. When reason gains some ascendancy over passion at the end of a war, nearly everyone can see that to turn over individual rights to desperate men, intent on victory at whatever cost, is to invite moral chaos. It seems that the more we transgress in recent wars upon everything essential to individual dignity, the more convinced we become afterward of the necessity of maintaining individual rights inviolate. Small wonder, however, that the majority of soldiers, dimly conscious of this contradiction, refuse to involve themselves in issues so confused and troubling.

Not at all certain whether they will later be considered by their own people as heroes or as scoundrels, great numbers find it simpler to ignore the moral problems by thinking of them as little as possible. Better to let the conscience sleep, to do as the others are doing and as one is told to do, and the future will bring what it will. Who knows whether there will be a future anyway? Most soldiers in wartime feel caught in the present so completely that they surrender their wills to their superiors and exist in the comforting anonymity of the crowd.

Though the above may be a correct, external description of the response or lack of response on the part of most soldiers to individual guilt in waging war, it nevertheless misses all the subtle ways in which guilt is incurred in conflict and made

present to the conscience of the minority. There are degrees and kinds of guilt, and not merely a formal declaration of simple guilt or innocence by the inner tribunal. Those soldiers who do respond to the call of conscience find themselves involved in the most baffling situations, in which any action they could take is inappropriate. They learn soon that nearly any of the individual's relations to the world about him can involve him in guilt of some kind, particularly in warfare. It is as pervasive in life and reflection as is human freedom itself. Awakened to his personal responsibility in one aspect of combat action, the soldier is not necessarily awakened to finer nuances of guilt. Yet it sometimes happens that the awakening is thorough and absolute in character, demanding of the subject an entirely different set of relations to friend and enemy.

It is a crucial moment in a soldier's life when he is ordered to perform a deed that he finds completely at variance with his own notions of right and good. Probably for the first time, he discovers that an act someone else thinks to be necessary is for him criminal. His whole being rouses itself in protest, and he may well be forced to choose in this moment of awareness of his freedom an act involving his own life or death. He feels himself caught in a situation that he is powerless to change yet cannot himself be part of. The past cannot be undone and the present is inescapable. His only choice is to alter himself, since all external features are unchangeable.

What this means in the midst of battle can only inadequately be imagined by those who have not experienced it themselves. It means to set oneself against others and with one stroke lose their comforting presence. It means to cut oneself free of doing what one's superiors approve, free of being an integral part of the military organism with the expansion of the ego that such belonging brings. Suddenly the soldier feels

himself abandoned and cast off from all security. Conscience has isolated him, and its voice is a warning. If you do this, you will not be at peace with me in the future. You can do it, but you ought not. You must act as a man and not as an instrument of another's will.

I shall always remember the face of a German soldier when he described such a drastic awakening as this. At the time we picked him up for investigation in the Vosges in 1944, he was fighting with the French Maquis against his own people. To my question concerning his motives for deserting to the French Resistance, he responded by describing his earlier involvement in German reprisal raids against the French. On one such raid, his unit was ordered to burn a village and to allow none of the villagers to escape. (Possibly the village was Oradour and the soldier was one of the participants in that grisly atrocity; at that time we knew little of what was happening elsewhere and I did not ask him for names.) As he told how women and children were shot as they fled screaming from the flames of their burning homes, the soldier's face was contorted in painful fashion and he was nearly unable to breathe. It was quite clear that this extreme experience had shocked him into full awareness of his own guilt, a guilt he feared he would never atone. At the moment of that awakening he did not have the courage or resolution to hinder the massacre, but his desertion to the Resistance soon after was evidence of a radically new course. Terrible as was his self-reproach at what now could not be undone, he had won himself through this experience and would never again be available as a functionary.

In the Netherlands, the Dutch tell of a German soldier who was a member of an execution squad ordered to shoot innocent hostages. Suddenly he stepped out of rank and refused to

participate in the execution. On the spot he was charged with treason by the officer in charge and was placed with the hostages, where he was promptly executed by his comrades. In such an act the soldier has abandoned once and for all the security of the group and exposed himself to the ultimate demands of freedom. He responded in the crucial moment to the voice of conscience and was no longer driven by external commands. In this case we can only guess what must have been the influence of his deed on slayers and slain. At all events, it was surely not slight, and his example on those who hear of the episode cannot fail to be inspiring. Were it not for the revelation of nobility in mankind, which again and again appears in time of war, we could scarcely endure reading the literature of combat.

These are, of course, extreme examples and not to be taken as typical. Normally, the awakening of guilt is much more gradual, and the achievement of clarity about duty to one's country and duty to oneself a matter of anguished doubt, sometimes lasting for months or years. But the primary realization is the same in all cases: there is a line that a man dare not cross, deeds he dare not commit, regardless of orders and the hopelessness of the situation, for such deeds would destroy something in him that he values more than life itself. He may decide that his commander, his army, or his people may justly demand his life but may not command him to do what is in violation of his deepest self. However clear he may be about this momentous conclusion in moments of quiet and repose, the soldier is not thereby steeled against anxiety and fear of death. In the melee of conflict he may at times feel as do his unawakened comrades, that life is all he has, after all. Personal resolution is constantly attacked by the strain and disorder of combat life. His body, he discovers, is not always

subject to his will. Impulses and emotions sweep him away, causing him to act again and again contrary to his sense of right. Against his innermost desire, he involves himself in guilt. Conscience within him is a voice long before it is a power; he desires to respond long before he has the required resolution. Though the voice is insistent, more clamorous impulses are able to dominate him in moments of violent action.

Nevertheless, his conscience has established an image of the ideal, a man who will acquit himself in whatever situation with independence and dignity. His inner history henceforth in combat will be the struggle to live up to this ideal. It may be that the soldier is contending against fear that he will involuntarily desert his comrades in a critical moment and be responsible for their death. It may be that he has qualms against killing enemy soldiers. Or he may be utterly persuaded of the justice of his country's cause and of the necessity of destroying lives to realize that cause, yet strongly opposed to this or that means his side is employing. He may be struggling to acquit himself well in a tangle of personal relationships common to military organizations in times of tension and peril. The occasions and situations are manifold in which the soldier who can no longer pass responsibility for his acts to others must struggle to gain full possession of himself. The voice of conscience is forever convicting him of inadequacy and insufficiency, urging him to better efforts. The ideal of acquitting himself like a man comes to appear utopian when he is confronted with certain situations.

Guilt is likely to come upon him in many other ways than as a consequence of natural fear of pain or death. Modern wars are full of border situations where a soldier is forced to choose between evils and where every choice is like leaping into the dark because its consequences are unforeseeable. Rarely will

he find a situation as clearly wrong as the shooting of hostages or the strafing of fleeing civilians. On the contrary, he will often have to choose between helping a wounded comrade to safety or remaining at his post to protect others whom he does not know. Sometimes he will have to choose the welfare of his unit at the expense of other units or the civilian populace. Hunger and cold and animal needs are everywhere in war in the midst of superfluity of food and warmth and delicacies. When he gives up his food or warm room in favor of some pitiful urchin or haggard mother, such charity can hardly comfort him because it is so transient. In the face of the need, his efforts will seem inconsequential to the point of futility. Even though the soldier may become a relatively selfless man in the service of the civil populace and his weaker comrades, he will seldom be at ease with himself. In some degree he will feel guilty of omitting to do what he ought, or doing what he ought not. This is inevitable, of course, for he is an individual who thinks of himself and others as ends in themselves in a situation where human beings are means for superpersonal goals. Men are materials to be expended for national interests, real or imagined. All the awakened soldier can hope to do in such a society is to meliorate the lot of the less fortunate, to act in an inhumane environment as humanely as possible. Opportunities to be humane are ordinarily plentiful enough in combat zones, but his freedom is constricted on all sides. It is like moving on a rack.

Such a soldier is likely to suffer most of all from the commands of military superiors when they are close to the border zone of the forbidden, that is, when they transgress the line that he cannot cross if he is to live with his conscience. The satisfaction that the unawakened conscience takes in making itself an instrument of higher wills is for the awakened con-

science a leading source of its misery. To be required to carry out orders in which he does not believe, given by men who are frequently far removed from the realities with which the orders deal and often motivated by abstract hatred—this is the familiar lot of the combat soldier. The man of conscience can survive morally only by following the letter of such orders and disobeying their intention.

It is a great boon of front-line positions that this disobedience is frequently possible, since supervision is not very exact where danger of death is present. Many a conscientious soldier has discovered he could reinterpret military orders in his own spirit before obeying them. The fortunate ones have escaped difficulties with their commanders; the unfortunate have often ended in disciplinary barracks or even a death cell. At all events, the tension in such a soldier between the voice of conscience and the demands made upon him as a means and instrument of higher authority will rarely relax. The alternatives to this tension are for him either the surrender of his conscience to superiors or open defiance of their orders with fateful consequences to his life and freedom. Both alternatives he will seek to avoid as long as possible.

Here is a personal example. For several months in World War II, I was attached to an infantry division whose divisional intelligence officer, a colonel, was an insensitive military tyrant. He was pleased to have our detachment of six men under his control and at the same time was deeply resentful of our superior educational backgrounds and independence of mind. He liked to meddle with our somewhat specialized job of interrogating the civilian populace in the search for spies and saboteurs the retreating Germans might have left behind or sent over the front. Increasingly, I found myself resenting and resisting his often harsh orders for civilian re-

strictions and prohibitions. As linguists, we were his only means of communication with the civilian populace, who were regarded by him as an infernal nuisance to be tolerated only because they could not be conveniently expelled from combat areas.

When our division entered the first towns of Alsace, we encountered numerous young Alsations in civilian clothes who had deserted from the German armies when on furlough and hidden out at the risk of their lives while awaiting our advance. The Alsations had helped to hide these youths from the ruthless clutches of the Gestapo. Some of them had previously served with the French against the Germans, but when Alsace and Lorraine were incorporated in Germany with the defeat of France in 1940, they had been conscripted into Hitler's armies, only to desert at the first opportunity. There was, of course, much rejoicing now that they could at last leave their hiding places and greet old friends and neighbors publicly once more. Many of them came to us and offered their help in intelligence work. Hard pressed as we were for help (only two in our detachment knew German well enough to be effective), we found much for them to do.

But the colonel had noticed the appearance of young men on the streets here in contrast to France, where male youth had been conspicuously absent. He called our detachment commander by telephone and demanded an explanation. With our briefing, the captain gave him the facts of the situation. The colonel's response was immediate: "Do they have discharge papers from the German Army?" It was explained to him that deserters were never supplied with discharge papers, that being contrary to the usage of the German Army. His conclusion was breath-taking. In that case, these men were prisoners of war, and we were to round them up and ship

them in prisoner trucks through regular channels to the huge camps in France. The colonel insisted on quick action. Our captain, who was sympathetic with us but afraid of the colonel, begged us to arrest the deserters the next day as ordered.

I was fortunate in having as a German-speaking colleague a strong-minded and intelligent young man of Boston Irish descent. He was profane, not overly scrupulous on moral issues, but fair-minded. He and I determined not to obey the order. To obey it would be the one way to alienate completely this friendly and much-mistreated Alsatian people. For parents to see their sons, who had risked their lives escaping from the German Army, loaded on the same trucks with hated German soldiers and transported to prison camps would be to embitter relations with their "liberators" from the beginning. Moreover, the orders were manifestly unjust to these young men, who felt themselves to be allies and wanted in every way to aid our cause. The two of us hoped to avoid the issue by simply ignoring the order and continuing our other work, of which we had more than enough. But the colonel called again and was this time insulting and insistent. Still we ignored him, though our captain begged us to act. The third day, the colonel was threatening us with court-martial and worse for disobeying a direct order.

What were we to do? The two of us talked it over and decided to continue to refuse. It was not so much courage on my part as physical weariness and moral disgust at the injustices of warfare. In the most obscene language, my associate declared that the Army could court-martial him a hundred times and he would not obey such a stupid, senseless command. His mood was one of weary, sullen resistance to the vast stupidity of higher headquarters. He had been much longer in the war than I, having served with distinction in Africa and

Sicily as well as in Italy and France. If his concern with the injustice of the order was not as great as mine, his resoluteness was greater, and fortified me. I had visions of the forbidding disciplinary barracks we had glimpsed in North Africa, of a dishonorable discharge and the disgrace it would bring on my aged father, who would not be able to understand why I had to disobey. Still, I knew that if I did not draw the line here I would be unable to draw it anywhere. If I did not refuse to become a party to the arrest of innocent, wronged men, I could not refuse to do anything that this or any other colonel ordered. I felt myself to be at the end of a tether. This was to be a showdown, and I had little doubt as to the winner. The loneliness and isolation of spirit that swept over me served to teach me how much I had hitherto been sustained by the silent approval of "the others." Even my partner in disobedience could not lift from me the heavy spiritual burden, for he was bitter and cynical about the whole affair.

Fortunately, things turned out in very different fashion from the expected. The colonel decided to call up army headquarters and report our insubordination before taking further action. He chanced to reach an intelligent officer who knew us both slightly, and this officer wanted to know why we persisted in disobeying orders. This the colonel had never stopped to determine, but when he did communicate the cause, Army Intelligence found our reasons good and within a day or two sent through an order that all Alsatian deserters were to be left with their families and in no case to be transported anywhere with German prisoners of war.

We had unexpectedly won the day and drew comfort afterward from the report that where our division had gone through Alsace the population was distinctly more pro-American than in other parts of Alsace-Lorraine. In areas where the deserters

had been arrested, they had been forced to undergo manifold hardships and humiliations in prisoner-of-war camps, ironically enough because they were not in uniform, and were treated by our troops as cowardly and unworthy the respect accorded regular prisoners.

This was only an incident of war, not objectively important except as it influenced sectors of a population for or against the Allied cause. But subjectively it was for me a kind of turning point. As a result of it, I gained no great confidence in my ability to withstand extreme pressures from official authority, yet I had determined that a line could be drawn between personal rights and military demands. Though I knew that sheer good fortune had prevented the normal consequences of disobedience from falling upon me, I felt, nevertheless, immensely strengthened for a possible second refusal. More important, the incident cleared my mind on the vexed question of the relation of the individual to his state. Hard as they were to assert, I now felt convinced that the individual had his absolute rights even in the desperate struggle for survival that is modern war. And survival without integrity of conscience is worse than perishing outright, or so it seemed to me. Nothing had furthered my self-knowledge so much since my encounter with the old man of the mountain in Italy the year before.

I have no doubt that many others have found themselves in much more crucial difficulties in warfare than this example illustrates. Yet, curiously enough, most contemporary war novels deal with nearly every agony of combat except this one. Where matters of conscience are taken up, as in the immensely popular *Caine Mutiny*, there is frequently an ambivalence in the attitude of the author toward the rights of conscience against military organization. In Woolf's novel, for

instance, the reader is left in doubt about the moral justification for "the mutiny," despite the fact that the captain of the *Caine* is portrayed in the worst possible light. He is cowardly, completely neurotic, a pathological liar, and incapable of giving orders that will save his ship from destruction. Yet, the author reminds us, he is a commander in the United States Navy, of long service, and as such an early fighter against the evil enemies of his country. Perhaps he should be obeyed despite his incapacity, since the principles of obedience and discipline count for more in a war of survival than individual conscience and private morality. This is typical of the modern confusion about the spheres of individual right and state authority in the era of total war.

However, the man of awakened conscience actually caught in this dilemma, as contrasted with the author writing a book about it, will usually be clear that duty to himself prohibits him from acting contrary to his voice, regardless of his fears and the personal consequences. He may obey such orders, but at the cost of his moral integrity. The safe observer has no right to blame him, for the sternest self-discipline is demanded. Few men in any age have had the moral stamina of a Socrates, who many centuries ago decided for himself that it was a right and duty to disobey his state and people when he felt they were wrong, but not his right to flee from their punishment for that disobedience. If few young men can be expected to attain the resolution of a mature Socrates, the reflective soldier is nearly certain to share the Socratic trust in the reliability of his conscience when it is in conflict with the group will.

This is particularly true of the conscience that is supported by faith in its divine origin. A secure religious faith has enabled many a soldier to act in defiance of unjust commands or to overcome the temptation to save himself at the cost of

others. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the testimony of those condemned officers and soldiers who struck against Hitler in 1944 is eloquent and instructive evidence of this fact. Judging from their last letters to friends and family members, not all of them had religious support for their consciences. Those who had no religious faith or hope for life after death acted as courageously as the others and faced the end with confidence in the justice of their cause. Nevertheless, their sadness stands in sharp contrast with the tranquillity and even exaltation of those who were believers. Both groups seemed immensely relieved to be freed from the pressure of conformity to a system and a party they had learned to despise. The difference between them was that those of religious faith took leave of their lives as though the physical end was the beginning of something mysterious yet marvelous.

There is a kind of guilt that transcends the personal responsibility of the sensitive conscience and burdens that soldier particularly who retains faith in the cause and the country for which he is fighting. It is the guilt the individual shares as a member of a military unit, a national fighting force, a people at war. We may call it social or political or collective guilt; it is not essentially different for the civilian than for the soldier, and it is inescapable. No matter how self-contained and isolated in spirit the man of conscience may feel, he cannot avoid the realization that he is a participant in a system and an enterprise whose very essence is violence and whose spirit is to win at whatever cost. For the soldier, it is his squad or company or division that performs deeds abhorrent to him. No matter how strongly he abjures personal responsibility for this or that deed, he cannot escape social responsibility. So long as he wears the same uniform as his fellows,

he will be regarded by outsiders as one of them. His fellows, too, treat him as a member of the fraternity of men at arms. The conscience within him may be more and more appalled by the heedlessness of group behavior and the mechanical ruthlessness of an organization whose dedication to violence gives it an unholy character. I was appalled and yet I could not escape it. I wrote in my journal one day at the height of the war:

Yesterday we caught two spies, making our recent total five. We are getting a reputation as a crack detachment. One had to be severely beaten before he confessed. It was pretty horrible, and I kept away from the room where it was done . . . though I could not escape his cries of pain. . . . I lay awake until three o'clock this morning. . . . I thought of the Hamlet line as most appropriate, "Tis bitter cold and I am sick at heart."

A soldier with an awakened conscience who is a member of such a community, coarse, vulgar, heedless, violent, realizes with overpowering clarity the possibility of being alienated from his own kind. This uninformed, machine-like monster, the combat unit, drives him back into himself and repels him utterly. Toward individuals who make it up, he can gain many relationships, but the collectivity itself chokes him without mercy.

Toward his nation as a nation he may well come to experience in his innermost self the same lack of relationship. A state at war reveals itself to the penetrating eye in its clearest light and the spectacle is not beautiful. Nietzsche's likeness of it to a cold snake is, from one perspective, not greatly exaggerated. The awakened conscience will recognize a part of this spirit of the nation in the hate-filled speeches of politician-patriots, in the antipathy toward dissenting opinions about the utter virtue of its cause, in the ruthlessness with which the

individual is sacrificed for real or alleged national advantages. It will despise the fanaticism with which this state makes morally dubious and historically relative ends into absolutes, its perversity in maintaining pride at whatever price in human misery.

At the same time, justice will force this soldier to admit that these are his people, driven by fear and hatred, who are directing this vast mechanism. If he is honest with himself he will admit that he, too, is a violent man on occasion and capable of enjoying the fruits of violence. Legally, and more than legally, he belongs to the community of soldiers and to the state. At some level of his being he can understand why they perform as they do and can find it in his heart to feel sorry for some of the politicians and higher officers. In their place he wonders if he would do any better than they. He is bound to reflect that his nation has given him refuge and sustenance, provided him whatever education and property he calls his own. He belongs and will always belong to it in some sense, no matter where he goes or how hard he seeks to alter his inheritance. The crimes, therefore, that his nation or one of its units commits cannot be indifferent to him. He shares the guilt as he shares the satisfaction in the generous deeds and worthy products of nation or army. Even if he did not consciously will them and was unable to prevent them, he cannot wholly escape responsibility for collective deeds.

He belongs and yet he does not belong. "I did not ask to be born," he is likely to tell himself while struggling with his responsibility for collective deeds, "and I did not choose my nation. Had I been given a choice of places to grow up at various stages in my education I might have chosen other than the nation in which I was accidentally born. I am, of course, a citizen of this nation and am willing to expose my life in its

defense. But in my inner being I belong only to the community that I have freely chosen, my friends, my club, my church, my profession. All other associations of mine are external and accidental, however little I may have realized it earlier. This does not free me from the guilt that this nation is heaping upon itself, so long as I participate in its defense. I shall always be guilty as long as I belong to a nation at all. Yet there is no good life apart from some nation or other."

It is clear to him that his political guilt is of a different sort from the personal, since the latter stems from his freedom in a direct way, the former only in part. The nation was in being long before him and will presumably continue in being after his death. Hence his capacity to change its course is immeasurably limited by its history as well as by his own powers. For the politically conscious soldier, this does not mean, however, that it is negligible. Insofar as his political guilt is in direct relation to his freedom, he will become conscious of what he has done or failed to do to promote or hinder the humanizing of military or political means and objectives. He will be certain at all events that he has not done enough. On this or that occasion he has been silent when he should have spoken out. In his own smaller or larger circle of influence he has not made his whole weight felt. Had he brought forth the civil courage to protest in time, some particular act of injustice might have been avoided. Whatever the level of influence the soldier commands, from the squad or platoon to the command of armies, in some manner he is able to affect the course of group action.

When the nation for which he is fighting has enjoyed a free government and been previously responsive to its citizens' wishes, he will be conscious of greater responsibility than will the soldier whose government is authoritarian or totalitarian.

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The greater the possibility of free action in the communal sphere, the greater the degree of guilt for evil deeds done in the name of everyone. Still, the degrees of guilt are impossible to assess for anyone else, and hardly any two people share an equal burden of communal guilt. The soldier may have been too young as a civilian to have exerted much influence on events or he may have been too poorly informed or confused to know where his political duty lay. As a soldier, he may be in too isolated or insignificant a location to make effective use of his freedom. No citizen of a free land can justly accuse his neighbor, I believe, of political guilt, of not having done as much as he should to prevent the state of war or the commission of this or that state crime. But each can—and the man of conscience will—accuse himself in proportion to the freedom he had to alter the course of events.

The peculiar agony of the combat soldier's situation is that, even more than in his struggle with his own ideal self, he is aware of the puniness of his individual powers to effect a change. War not only narrows the limits of personal freedom, but it likewise constricts the individual's communal liberty, his capacity to make his power felt in significant ways. The sense of impotence will weigh upon him day after day. Though the man of awakened conscience will hardly believe that the war is a natural catastrophe, he will not know how any individual can alter its seemingly inexorable course. Personal guilt can be in some measure atoned and the struggle to improve can be taken up every morning anew. But communal guilt comes upon him in ever increasing measure in any war, and he is likely to feel utterly inadequate either to atone for it or prevent its accumulation.

For instance, when the news of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki came, many an American soldier

felt shocked and ashamed. The combat soldier knew better than did Americans at home what those bombs meant in suffering and injustice. The man of conscience wherever he was realized intuitively that the vast majority of the Japanese in both cities were no more, if no less, guilty of the war than were his own parents, sisters, or brothers. In his shame, he may have said to himself, as some of us did: "The next atomic bomb, dropped in anger, will probably fall on my own country and we will have deserved it." Such a conviction will hardly relieve him of the heavy sense of wrong that his nation committed and the responsibility for which he must now in some measure share. All the arguments used in justification—the shortening of the war by many months and the thousands of American lives presumably saved—cannot alter the fact that his government was the first to use on undefended cities, without any warning, a monstrous new weapon of annihilation.

Worst of all about such deeds is that millions accepted and felt relief. Hearing this near-exultation in the enemy's annihilation, one can only conclude that political guilt has another source than the freedom of the individual to affect group action. It lies in the degree of his identification with the goals and the means of realizing them that his nation adopts. The person who inwardly approves an immoral action of his government or military unit testifies to his own probable decision had he possessed the freedom and opportunity of the actors. Freedom is possible, therefore, not only in the power to do or prevent, but also in inner assent and consent to action by others. With a relative criterion like this it is, of course, impossible to be exact in estimating even one's own guilt. Yet the jubilation in evil deeds allows little room for doubt that inner consent is often forthcoming. So do thou-

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sands of people increase their political guilt in wartime beyond the range of their direct action.

To some extent after World War I and explicitly after World War II, doctrines of collective guilt have become common. The German nation, for example, and particularly the German Army is often said to be guilty for having fought for Hitler in his aggressive wars of conquest and rapine. However innocent the individual soldier may have been of any personal misconduct, the fact that he was a member of a criminal conspiracy to deprive other peoples of their independence by violent means made him guilty. What justice is there in such a claim? To what extent is a German soldier in the last war guilty who kept himself free of personal crimes but was forced to experience, more or less directly, atrocities committed by his fellow soldiers and who was not blind to Hitler's mad ambitions? Is he not in an utterly different position from the soldier of a nation like ours who fought the war defensively to repel aggression?

In terms of what I have previously said, the answer can only be that no outsider has a moral right to make such an accusation about either the soldiery or the people as a whole. For an anti-Nazi soldier to have interfered with some act of injustice carried out by his fellow countrymen would have resulted in his prompt execution, as enough recorded instances prove. Apart from the demands of courage and determination that such an act requires, the question that tormented some soldiers in this situation was: What political purpose will my sacrifice serve? Many a conscientious German soldier might have screwed up his courage to open interference had he seen clearly in what way his death would have helped prevent further crimes. Fortunate soldiers found the right moment and the right deed with which to strike against the system they

despised, and their chance to witness made them content to die. Others fought to the end of the war without such opportunities or without the necessary courage. Only those who sacrificed themselves in similar situations have the right to accuse them, and probably few of them would care to do so, if they were alive and able. For my own deeds I am responsible and can be held accountable, even if I act under the orders of another. For the deeds of my fellow men, specifically my fellow countrymen, my responsibility cannot be a public or legal one, for it is too dependent on my estimate of my ability to hinder criminal acts and of my inner consent to their commission.

Yet if accusations of collective guilt are unjustified, the sensitive German soldier could hardly escape the consciousness of his own political guilt. A burning sense of shame at the deeds of his government and the acts of horror committed by German soldiers and police was the mark of a conscientious German at the close of the war. "I am ashamed to be a German" was a not infrequent remark when friend was speaking to friend as the revelations of what the Third Reich had done became generally known. To be sure, those without conscience considered that they had atoned sufficiently for their political "mistakes" by their suffering during and after the war, and rejected with indignation any imputation of collective guilt. They wanted to hear nothing of their vicarious part in the crimes of their fellow citizens.

The reflective man knows in his heart what rarely crosses his lips, that the sins of his fellows are not so remote from him as he would like. If he is a soldier, he, too, has yielded at times to the temptations of power and the license that violence evokes in all of us. However free he may have kept himself from external participation in evil deeds and however foreign cruelty may be to his better nature, he will be aware that there

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is in nearly all men the capacity for criminal deeds and the obscure yearning for license to act without consequences, hence his recognition of the chains of communal responsibility and his knowledge that atonement in this sphere is largely chimerical. No human power could atone for the injustice, suffering, and degradation of spirit of a single day of warfare. All of us shared the guilt, as I wrote in my journal on two occasions.

I talked yesterday to a young Viennese deserter . . . he had had nothing to eat but potato soup. . . . The picture he gave of the prison was grim enough. . . . One man, suspected of being a spy, was given nothing to eat for six days and was now past hunger. If he talked he would be shot as a spy, if he didn't he would starve—a difficult choice. The youth was strong, courteous. . . . He finally asked me in German, "Do I have to go back to Epinal?" And his whole soul was in the question and in his eyes. I said no, that was all past for him, and his face was suddenly illumined. I felt in a moment the whole stark tragedy of this war. What bitter cruelty all of us exercise! We are guilty and deserve the extreme penalty. Nothing that happens to me in future will I ever feel unjust and unmerited.

This morning was spent in attempting to control the mass of refugees streaming around here, some 2000 in a town whose population hardly exceeds 5000. This fate is pathetic, and more and more this problem of displaced persons becomes tremendous. Germany was really a slave state on a gigantic scale. Almost all of these foreign workers are on the roads, a few hours after their liberation, going they know not where, but away from the front and toward home, they hope, though thousands must know that they have no longer a home. But this afternoon Seitz and I saw something ten times worse. There was a concentration camp not far from here, and last Saturday the German guards loaded the inmates onto freight trains and tried to haul them away. When they discovered that the trains could not proceed, they left them

near a town named Osterburken. We found them there this afternoon, some 880, half-dead, horribly starved people, among them 300 French Maquis, political prisoners. . . . To see these living deaths in their striped suits in rags, dragging their feet, was a sight that I would have done without. To add to its gruesomeness, there was a dead German soldier deserter, who had been hanged and whose body was lying by the road under a tree. Someone had cut him down but the rope was still around his neck and his feet were tied. He had been an attractive youngster, and one could pretty well guess his story. The SS who had hanged him will one day have to pay, and those who were responsible for the unimaginable suffering of these concentration-camp inmates will pay also.

The realization of political guilt is poignantly expressed in a poem by Albrecht Haushofer, one of the determined and long-standing opponents of Hitler, who was imprisoned and finally executed near the end of the war. His little book of poems entitled *Moabiter Sonette*, written in a Berlin prison while his hands were shackled, testifies to political guilt of a man who had already atoned more than is required of most of us. In the sonnet entitled *Schuld* (Guilt), he begins by noting how easy it is for him to carry the guilt that his Nazi court trial wanted to load upon him. To them he was a traitor to his people in the plot against Hitler. Then he concludes in the German version, to which I have added a literal translation:

*Doch schuldig bin ich anders als ihr denkt,
ich musste früher meine Pflicht erkennen
ich musste schärfer Unheil Unheil nennen—
mein Urteil hab ich viel zu lang gelenkt . . .*

*Ich klage mich in meinem Herzen an:
Ich habe mein Gewissen lang betrogen
Ich hab mich selbst und andere belogen—*

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*ich kannte früh des Jammers ganze Bahn—
ich hab gewarnt—nicht hart genug und klar!
Und heute weiss ich, was ich schuldig war . . .*

*Yet I am guilty otherwise than you think.
I should have known my duty earlier
And called evil by its name more sharply—
My judgment I kept flexible too long . . .*

*In my heart I accuse myself of this:
I deceived my conscience long
I lied to myself and others—*

*Early I knew the whole course of this misery—
I warned—but not hard enough or clearly!
Today I know of what I am guilty . . .*

Thus the conscientious German soldier may well feel greater political guilt than a conscientious Allied soldier, depending on the measure of assent he had given to the National Socialist regime and the freedom of action he possessed. But the quality of his political guilt will hardly be different, for the warfare was not carried on by angels against devils, but by soldiers in a relatively just cause fighting soldiers in a relatively unjust cause. If the character of Hitler and his paladins gave to the Allied side a moral justification unusual in warfare, the Western nations have no reason to forget their share of responsibility for Hitler's coming to power or their dubious common cause with the Russian dictator. The reflective soldier on both sides of the conflict will see no escape from political guilt as long as he remains a member of a state. If, in his disillusionment, he is tempted to renounce his nation and pledge his allegiance to the human race alone, this, too, will prove illusory, for mankind collectively is doubtless as predisposed to injustice as nations are.

It is precisely this realization that may lead the soldier to a recognition that personal and political guilt are hardly resolvable on their own levels. They involve a guilt that can only be called metaphysical, because it concerns man's very being and its relations to the rest of the cosmos. The root of the guilt problem lies in human nature itself, in our failure as human beings to live in accordance with our potentialities and our vision of the good. Because we do fail, our spirits are isolated and closed to each other. None of us can be to another as we really desire to be, for we strike against something strange and alien in him. The sympathies of even the most reflective and sensitive do not extend far enough to overcome entirely the antipathy toward his fellows that is in nearly all of us. In some facet of our being we are closed and indifferent, not open to others or concerned with their fate. Though most of us are capable of feeling compassion for the suffering of men, and recognize our common kinship in isolation and loneliness, this recognition is rarely strong enough to influence our action decisively. We cannot love enough either our fellow men or our common mother, the nature from which we originate and to which we return. As human beings, we are in a perpetual state of disequilibrium with the rest of creation, neither humble enough to recognize our dependence nor bold enough to actualize our powers.

If this is capable of oppressing many of us in time of peace, it is easy to imagine with how much greater force it strikes a reflective soldier in combat. Everywhere he experiences himself and his comrades as violators of the earth. The ruthlessness with which organized warriors deal with the order of nature in order to defend their miserable lives will appall him, all the more so in modern times, when the scorched-earth policy has been succeeded by atomic destruction. The crimes

against horses and other animals that men press into the service of their insane passions, the recklessness in destroying human habitations and works of art, full of the dignity and genius of human labor, will rob him forever of any exaggerated hope for the species. When his martial passions are kindled, this pygmy of creation is capable of defying the creative source of all life and flinging away all that he has formerly cherished. Like the ancient Titans of fable, he seems intent on storming the ramparts of heaven and calling down upon himself a novel kind of punishment.

Faced with this presumptuousness of the human creature, his closedness and dearth of love, the awakened soldier will be driven to say in his heart: "I, too, belong to this species. I am ashamed not only of my own deeds, not only of my nation's deeds, but of human deeds as well. I am ashamed to be a man." This is the culmination of a passionate logic which begins in warfare with the questioning of some act the soldier has been ordered to perform contrary to his conscience. Consciousness of failure to act in response to conscience can lead to the greatest revulsion, not only for oneself, but for the human species. How many soldiers have experienced in battle a profound distaste for the human creature! I wrote of my own despair:

It is eleven o'clock at night, and raining. The town is quiet, a fresh breeze, rain-laden, is blowing. I sit alone in my room and ponder my own limitations, wondering why the whole mystery of the universe must be closed, why I must plod on in the path of so many others, subject to the same temptations and weaknesses. Such nights as these have for years beaten in upon me my failures, my blindness, and the impenetrable nature of the world.

The combat soldier who experiences this guilt of the human creature deeply is likely to be caught in a serious inner crisis.

On the one hand, he perceives the degraded and degrading level of human life, as battle experiences can so well teach it. And this degradation does not seem to be a consequence of war conditions so much as war conditions are a consequence of it. His whole being rebels against this condition; his conscience warns him that it ought not to be. Neither he nor the others deserve to be spared. All are such caricatures of what they should be that death appears to be the only fitting resolution. On the other hand, he is plunged into doubt about the possibility of attaining to any other state. Perhaps men are what they are by virtue of some hidden necessity in the nature of things. Is it wise to expect anything else than the spectacle now offered? The despairing soldier seeks for a reason why men are the creatures they show themselves to be in combat, and the reason that has appealed over many generations is the idea of necessity. Freedom may be after all an illusion, and the conscience within me, always protesting, be fatally wrong.

This classic struggle between freedom and necessity often tears the heart of one who has advanced a little in the consciousness of guilt. Perhaps the feeling of necessity is the final refuge of that spirit in us which resists all attempts at self-reproach, that uncivilizable ego which stops at nothing to justify the self in its lowest, most aggressive manifestations. Or it may be simply the hopelessness of the effort to rid oneself of metaphysical guilt that makes belief in necessity so attractive. At any rate, for the soldier in battle, the arguments for necessity look very strong indeed. The voice of conscience can be so easily explained away in terms of childhood indoctrination and religious superstition. It is tempting to attack the validity of the feeling of freedom through its questionable origin.

Some survive this crisis of faith only by yielding up their

belief in the individual's responsibility for his actions. The moral cynics, which modern wars generate in great numbers, testify to a lost hope in mankind. Where cynicism is not mere shallowness and show, it is the cry of men who have not been able to endure the tension between their inner ideal and outer reality. They resolve not to take the world or themselves seriously any longer and give themselves over to enjoyment. But everyone notices that there is a pathos about their gaiety, and their frivolity is hardly contagious.

The soldier who does not succumb to the seductions of a theory of necessity, but attempts, instead, to resolve the conflict through reason finds himself long exposed to indecisive inner doubts. Gradually he may come to realize that neither freedom nor determinism can be established satisfactorily except in an emotional sense. In practice, it is not difficult to convince himself that he is free to change. On reflection, however, the clarity that practice generates searches the past and finds necessity, the other looks to action in present and future and asserts freedom. In serene moments the soldier may be very clear that he is partly free, in projecting himself into the future and striving for an ideal; partly determined, in being limited by what he has done and been. Yet whether his own freedom is not a tiny aspect of some larger necessity will escape his best efforts at analysis. At times he becomes convinced that the two are not opposed at all, but in a mysterious way two sides of the same coin.

The logic of most soldiers with a deep sense of guilt is a logic of passion, and all the subtleties of the problem will normally be lost on them. If at times such a soldier is too tired out or occupied with other cares to feel distressed in any way, the conflict is likely to be driven deeper into his unconscious mind, there to weigh on his spirit and foster melancholy. What

he longs for essentially is a simple piety, an attitude of gratefulness and acceptance for the created. He loses whatever satisfaction he formerly took in the destructive ways of war. Man as *Homo furens* appears now to be a monster to him, for this soldier has learned to cherish solely the human function as preserver and conservator of created things.

Many a soldier in this predicament has found a blessed release in the certainty that there is a higher order of reality where the irresolvable is resolved. It can be—indeed, often is—a rather primitive trust in the ultimate justice and mercy of a heavenly father, in whom justice and mercy are not at odds. In a sense, the surrender here is similar to the satisfaction in believing that necessity is ruler of all. But the difference is apparent in the richness of meaning that religious trust evidently brings. All previous struggles are seen to have been necessary preparation and purification for present assurance. In God all that appears endlessly difficult for human reason is mysteriously purposeful and clear. Apart from the validity of the religious resolution of guilt (and for the nonbeliever it appears to be little more than an escape mechanism), the efficacy of this path is beyond any other that mortal man has found.

If the soldier possesses a primary religious nature, he can derive absolution and exaltation from his capacity for repentance and surrender to the will of the divine. He loses any need for death and sometimes, too, the fear of death as well, for he has gained the great virtue of hope, which is perhaps the strongest hold in life and is that virtue which is peculiar to religion. If it does not free him from the usual troubles of the flesh, religious hope does assure him that there is a realm on the other side of human weakness and guilt. His one desire is to act in accord with his hope in this supreme reality, and,

if he is a Christian, the prayer that will be most often on his lips is: Not my will but Thine be done. Personal and political guilt, which may have weighed upon him unendurably before, are now resolved in this childlike trust in a single interpretation and interpreter.

For the more philosophical temperament, however, there is no immediate solution or resolution to metaphysical guilt. If such a soldier is strong enough, the insight gained through his recognition of this most comprehensive form of guilt may help him gradually win a new relationship to his fellows and to the cosmos. Guilt can teach him, as few things else are able to, how utterly a man can be alienated from the very sources of his being. But the recognition may point the way to a reunion and a reconciliation with the varied forms of the created. In short, he may pass beyond his rejection of the human species and gain a new grasp of his world. Such a soldier will discover his future mission in life to be as far removed as possible from the destructive work of war. He will be absorbed in the reconstructive, the simple, and the truly humane arts. Atonement will become for him not an act of faith or a deed, but a life, a life devoted to strengthening the bonds between men and between man and nature. He will not be in any obvious way a reformer or a social worker or a preacher. But among his friends he will be known as extraordinarily gentle, sane, and wise.

These are some of the outcomes of a metaphysical conviction of guilt. Some it can drive mad; some to the barely covert wish for death. Others are overwhelmed by the belief that all is necessary, and conclude very often that nothing really matters except pleasures of the senses. Still others triumph through religious faith or through a philosophical reconciliation with man and nature, thus using guilt as a means to a firmer and

more enduring hold on life. Metaphysical guilt may well be as prevalent in peace as in war, since all men incur it to greater or lesser extent. Frequently, however, it necessitates an excess of moral and political guilt to force our acceptance of this reality. In this sphere, too, some men require the utter exposure and extreme experiences of combat to come to their true selves.

I find it hard to believe that in the wars of our day any great number of soldiers attain the possibilities that lie in the acceptance of guilt. As I indicated earlier, the reasons appear to lie in a dominant mood of our times and in the different nature of warfare. Yet it is hard to be sure, for few people care to admit the guilt they sometimes feel. Possibly the profound aversion to war that is widespread at the mid-century is not entirely due to the political and economic fruitlessness of recent wars and their unprecedented fury. Many who reveal no outward evidence may be aware at some level of their being that the moral issues of war are hardly resolvable on present capital. They may realize that since wars cannot teach nations repentance and humility, they must be abandoned if we are not to lose our inherited humanistic culture. Cut loose from traditional ties, *Homo furens* is seen to be too exclusively devoted to the devastation of the natural and human soil on which he has hitherto been nourished.

If guilt is not experienced deeply enough to cut into us, our future may well be lost. Possibly more people realize this than I suspect; and veterans who did not show any traces of it as warriors may now be feeling it keenly. At all events, there are some who have made that secret journey within the conscience and are building their lives on principles very different from those they knew as unawakened ones.

The Ache of Guilt

Last night I lay awake and thought of all the inhumanity of it, the beastliness of the war. . . . I remembered all the brutal things I had seen since I came overseas, all the people rotting in jail, some of whom I had helped to put there. . . . I thought of Plato's phrase about the wise man caught in an evil time who refuses to participate in the crimes of his fellow citizens, but hides behind a wall until the storm is past. And this morning when I rose, tired and distraught from bed, I knew that in order to survive this time I must love more. There is no other way. . . . (War journal, December 8, 1944)