We Killed Some, We Loved Some

M. R. HUNTZINGER

She certainly didn't look like the German women whom we had read about before the war. She was tiny and slim, gray and wrinkled, about five feet two inches tall and weighed about a hundred pounds. Her sparkling eyes were sharp and expressive, and she was quick, scarcely stooped and very spry for a woman of such age. Her name was Betsy Holtzendoner. She was seventy-five years old, a widow and the mother of five children.

Betsy, or Granny as I remember her, had two sons. Both had been German pilots. The youngest, Kile, had died after being shot down during the Normandy invasion, and Donard, the other, was a Russian prisoner of war.

During the week of Thanksgiving, in November of 1944, our regiment was withdrawn from the front for a five-day rest. A rest camp had been constructed for our use in Berg, Belgium. That is how I met Granny Holtzendoner and her daughter.

Every house in the little village was prepared to house a few of us. We were told that the residents were peaceful and that they had been instructed concerning our arrival.

Five of us shouldered our equipment and headed for the house with number fourteen, which had been assigned us. We splashed up a muddy little path until we saw the number tacked on the pine-knotted door. Sam, our squad leader, knocked lightly and surveyed the old house attentively. We waited, and the door slowly creaked open.

There she stood, a black shawl draped around her narrow shoulders, smiling broadly, with deep dimples sinking into her ruddy cheeks. We stood fast. Foolishly agog, we gazed at her as if she were a ghost. She spoke softly and motioned for us to come in.

In spite of fighting through France, Belgium and part of Germany, we had never stood face to face with a German civilian before. Of course we had seen them moving about, but we had always been instructed to regard them as dangerous enemies. Somehow this had flashed through my mind when the little old lady first appeared before me.

Nevertheless, it didn't take long for us to become well acquainted. She reminded us so much of our own grandmothers that we called her “Granny” from our first introduction. Shorty Himelrich, a little Dutchman from Germantown, Pennsylvania, quickly put us all at ease by formally introducing each of us in his broken Dutch. The little lady was greatly pleased that she had some one that she could talk to.

On arriving at Granny's we were dirty, unshaven, wet and tired. I know we must have smelled of filth, but neither she nor her daughter let it bother them. Worn and repulsive looking, we felt terribly inferior, but they were very understanding.

She heated water for us to shave, got us each a dry pair of stockings, fired the little kitchen stove to a cherry glow, and then ushered us to the upstairs bedroom. It was small, with only one wooden bed, but it was neatly made with clean linen and patched blankets. When she found that three of us were going to sleep on it, she coolly scratched her head, smiled inquisitively and descended the stairs. Three of us slept crossways on the bed, and two men slept on the floor.
We put our weapons, ammunition, extra equipment and soiled blankets in one corner and piled odds and ends in the others. The room looked like a hobo heaven when we were finally settled. Granny must have been amazed by this but she never mentioned it.

A kitchen had been arranged by the rest-camp cooks to furnish us two meals a day. That night we enjoyed the first warm meal that we had eaten in two months. After chow, we all went back to Granny's and this was when we really got to know and love her.

It was almost dark when we returned to the house and she had the kitchen fire going full blast. She lighted a small kerosene lamp, placed it on the table and went about finishing her work. We started a poker game and played steadily for about two hours. Granny watched timidly and finally we dealt her in. She caught on fast, but when we quit playing she owed us everything but the clothes on her back. She was frightened after she learned this and we threatened to take her cows, chickens and tame rabbits for reparation of her debts. Finally she saw we were joking, but she never played poker with us again.

Our days were spent in writing letters, playing cards, reading, sleeping and doing a few details that were sent down from the C.O. However, the memorable things were the words and doing of Granny.

On our second night we bathed, gave each other haircuts and went to bed early. Granny collected our dirty clothing and she and her daughter, Lena, washed, dried and ironed it for us before morning.

The next night, through Shorty's interpreting, we learned all about Germany and the little rural village. In the fifty years that she had lived in Berg, the little village had been forced by German boarder military officials to surrender its rights as a Belgian village and serve Germany. She related that various boarder conflicts had caused this to happen several times. When the war broke out between Germany and Russia, the little village once again had to give up its rights as a Belgian possession and serve Germany. When asked about her feelings toward Hitler's Nazi rule, she said, in effect, that Hitler had had their respect for many years, but after they saw the war brewing from the result of his greed for power, they looked upon him as treacherous and immoral.

One night after one of our long and interesting fireside conversations, Granny carried her spinning wheel into the kitchen, placed her antique spectacles loosely on her nose and prepared to spin. It was the first time any of us had had an opportunity to see this.

We gathered around closely, moved the lamp so that she could see and had the pleasure of watching the community's oldest and most efficient spinning artist. Laying the bag of loose wool at her feet, she grasped a small tuft of it, pulled a few strands between her thumbs and fingers, hooked it over a small nail on an apparatus of the spinning wheel and pumped the floor pedal rhythmically with her right foot. As the wheel turned, she continued stretching and twisting the strands of wool between her thumbs and forefingers. Once her task was started, she never looked at the wheel, but looked around at us, or talked or even read her prayer book to break the whirling monotony of the wooden wheel. Her daughter darned and knitted the spun yarn into stockings and other needed garments almost as fast as Granny could spin it.

Every morning Granny would get up for five o'clock mass, milk her cows, feed her chickens and rabbits and then get breakfast. Lena did the fuel gathering, the shopping, house cleaning and most of the laundering and scrubbing. She was very quiet and spent most of her time
sewing, reading and cooking. She wasn’t pretty but she was clean, robust and extremely handy at everything. At first she acted like she was uneasy in our presence. However, she quickly became interested in our different manners and humorous acts. Although it seemed to embarrass her, she often would burst out laughing at us because of them. The thing that struck her funny was Shorty’s imitation of “Snafu The Detective.” Placing his helmet sideways on his head, he would tip-toe into the room, make a gesture for everyone to be very quiet, sneak by the windows, crawl under chairs and furniture, spy through the keyholes, rummage through all the cabinets and drawers, look behind pictures and calendars and then stop and act very puzzled. After doing this a couple of times he would prepare to make his exit. Silently sneaking between chairs and other furniture, he would creep toward the door, reach for the knob and stumble over a rug. His fall would actually jar the house, much to Lena’s hilarious amusement. He could also give various bird calls, blow enormous smoke rings, crack his knuckles, wiggle his ears, look cross-eyed, make his tongue disappear, do card tricks and change his facial expression into a dozen different types. All of these things pleased Lena and Granny very much and Shorty always had something to do that would make them laugh.

It rained practically all the time we stayed at Granny’s. It was cold and muddy, and we had feverish colds. She mixed some herbs, extracts, spices and wine into one of the best cough remedies that I ever tasted. We took it as she prescribed before going to bed. The next morning she had us take the same dose again. It worked wonders for us without the bad effects of a “hangover.”

The day before Thanksgiving, several of the fellows received Christmas packages from home. They opened and displayed their contents with nervous hands, strewn the wrappings and cords over the floor like children. They offered Granny everything from sewing kits to candy sticks, but she lowered her head in her chaffed hands and wept chokingly. In spite of her courage and usual cheerfulness, she was like all mothers. The packages brought back sad memories of both her dead son and her captured one. She had written and sent Donard many packages, but she was afraid he had never received them. Even knowing of the Germans and their mad efforts, I couldn’t help being sorry for her and her son.

Thanksgiving Day proved to be the most memorable day of all. Granny had returned from mass and was stirring around the kitchen when we arose. She was humming and seemed very happy and cheerful. Shorty was putting wood on the fire, carrying out ashes; he looked as if he had been up for an hour or so. He was whistling and also acted extra excited about something. As soon as the coffee began to perk, we knew what was coming off. Then Lena took a large white cake from the cabinet and Granny placed two lovely pumpkin pies in the oven. We were not guessing now. It was very plain. One night while Shorty was on guard duty he had stolen some sugar and other supplies from the rest-camp mess tent and hid them in our room. He and Granny were the only ones who knew about this until Thanksgiving Day. With the stolen goods, food from our packages and her own contribution of dairy products, Granny prepared one of the finest meals I have ever eaten. We gathered around the little warped table, bowed our heads; and after making the sign of the cross, she said a short prayer. We ate like starved men, loosening our belts to the last notch.

That afternoon we left for the front lines again. We dreaded to leave. Granny
stood at the door with tears streaming down her cheeks. I wanted to grab her in my arms and hug her, but instead I swallowed the dry lump in my throat, smiled and started splashing down the path. As soon as we heard the door close, Shorty spoke. "Ain't it hell" he said, "we kill some, we love some." "Yeah" the squad leader answered, "God never meant it this way."

Hollywoodism

FRANK SLUPESKY

(The reader is asked to imagine himself living in another part of the world in the year 9,948 A.D. reading a book about the history of civilization. Please bear also in mind that this is not meant in all respects to be a definition of the American motion picture as we know it, but rather a definition which could be inferred from a few archeological facts which the people living on earth 8,000 years hence might uncover.)

Due to recent excavations of our archeologists in the area which was known to the Americans as Southern California, we have every reason to believe that one city in this area was quite similar in materialistic splendor to the city of Babylon, which just a few thousand years before flourished in Asia Minor. Our excavators agree that this city, called Hollywood, was the center of the curious craft of motion picture making. This is a significant fact since the motion picture, rather than any other phase in American life, epitomizes the shallowness to which American culture had degenerated by the end of the second millennium A.D.

It seems that these films were made in Hollywood and then distributed to all parts of the country so that not one American was too distant from a theatre or temple to see his favorite performers reflected on a screen. Perhaps for many Americans, this devotion to motion pictures was a substitute for religious fervor. A poll taken shortly before the terrible catastrophe befell the North Americans shows that about one-half of the population were members of some branch of the Christian belief, but only a small portion of that one-half actively participated in their religion. That the motion pictures were somewhat of a substitute for religious devotion is shown by the spectators who, upon seeing a favorite on the screen, would sometimes scream or swoon. The sight of a movie celebrity in person caused an even increased furor. On more than one occasion actors by the names of Sinatra and Johnson were thoroughly mauled due to the ecstatic outbursts of movie fans who had the great honor of seeing in person these revered individuals. As a result most dignitaries travelled incognito.

The leaders of this cult of Hollywoodists led lives not entirely unlike that of the Greek gods and goddesses. Certainly, they were equally as promiscuous. A celebrity seldom lived more than a year or two with the same mate. They made marriage vows, the same as did the rest of the Americans, but it seems that these vows could be invalidated at the slightest provocation. These celebrities were given by their patrons fabulous riches. In the year 1947, for instance, seven out of the ten largest salaries...