The next day the two of them set off as soon as there was light enough to see by, before the fog was up. The stonework of Antwerp receded behind them in the thin winter dawn as the Jeep passed through the successive belts of anti-aircraft gun pits, the ack-ack suburbs, and then out onto the main road in company with the around-the-clock line of trucks from the port. Squeezed in between the big six-wheeled cargo carriers, Maurice steered with the patience of a man whose reward was coming. "There are farm roads once we’re out a way--those will swing us around Brussels and this clot of lorries." He patted the plasticine map case atop his briefcase. "You’re the navigator."
Before long Ben spotted the first of the rural roads and they turned off into a landscape white and quiet. Low ruined houses and sheds stood skeletal every little distance, and even the few farms that the war had not savaged sat empty in a spectral way. Wrapped in his horseblanket overcoat and glad of it, Ben blew on his writing hand whenever he jotted in his notepad. As the stark farmyards went by, he noticed there were no animals in the fields and then caught up with why—all had been eaten during Belgium’s starving years of Nazi occupation, including the horses.

The graying snow on the farmyards and fields like a tablecloth on an abandoned empty table, they drove on into the flat midland of Belgium. In that world with all the noise smothered out of it, he and Maurice could talk comfortably. Moxie had told him they were goofy for going out on this. “You haven’t seen enough battlefields to last you for one lifetime, Rhine King?” Not enough ones gone quiet. “I don’t know if these are the same roads Wellington and Napoleon had,” Ben remarked as he pointed out the next turnoff, “but you’re sure as hell making better time than they did.” Maurice handled the Jeep as if captaining a yacht, swinging wide on the curves and making up for it with unfurled speed on the straight stretches.
“Ah, well,” the figure presiding at the wheel said loftily, “one likes to get there in timely fashion, forth and back.”

“Is that a Southern Hemisphere way of looking at things, like the bathtub draining the opposite direction?”

“Hmm? Not at all, it’s simple logic. One cannot, Ben, go back before one goes forth, therefore--

Ben pursed a smile. “Spoken like a professor of argumentation.”

“We shall see how I am as a battlefield muse.” Maurice patted the attache case between them. “The Trekker’s Guidebook to the Historic Battle at Waterloo. Gift from my father, right off, when he learned I’d been posted to Belgium.”

“He sounds about like mine,” Ben mused. “Spends his nights in history up to his ears.”

“Up to his rifle shoulder, in my father’s case,” came the response to that. Ben glanced over, sensing why it was put that way. Maurice stayed staring straight ahead over the steering wheel as he spoke, the words suddenly less clipped.

“Reads all the military history he can, says he’s going to keep on until he finds the one that gets it right. He was at Gallipoli, in the first big go. Caught fragments from a Turk grenade in that shoulder, invalidated home by Christmas of 1915. He
never afterward could lift that arm enough to comb his hair. Mum has combed it for him for thirty years.” A light of remembering, distant and wintry, had come into his eyes. “Even so, he counted himself one of the lucky ones. Some ten thousand New Zealanders and Australians did not make it home from that beachhead, ever.” He paused. “My British colleagues can cite chapter and verse about their ‘lost generation’ in the trenches here, but they shrug off Gallipoli. As though there were a different set of numbers for those of us in the colonies.”

Breaking his spell of recital, Maurice sent a considerate look to Ben. “But why am I carrying on to you about unjust numbers? Sorry about that.”

They drove on in silence, in the white iron winter over the northern half of the world.

The squadron lined up.

Sometimes he was his old carnie self. Then there were the other days.

“Della, half step right. M.C., half step left. That’s Beryl’s spot between you.”

She wondered if there would have been a ceremony at all if the general hadn’t felt compelled to read out the letter of commendation from the Senator.
Rising from his chair like a gallant of old, the Senator came around the table and delivered a forehead kiss to his wife as she settled in her seat. "Good morning, Sadie, light of my life." He stayed standing, looking out the lead-paned windows of the breakfast nook at most of a week's worth of lazy flakes still descending on Washington like tired confetti. "Isn't this town the damnedest place? It doesn't even know how to have a proper blizzard."

His wife helped herself to what little coffee he had left for her in the pot. "I hope, Luther, you aren't going to put yourself in charge of the weather next."

"Not hardly," he drawled, bemused. "The Pentagon no doubt will be enough of a snow job, as our daughter the sailor would say." Despite his words, his wife knew he was relishing this lame-duck session of Congress, inasmuch as he was preeminently of the opposite species. The war having spawned so many military bases in the western states, the region at last was in line to seat a formidable old cuss of its own in the main chair of the committee that held the purse-strings in such matters, now that the venerable chairman had retired to his peach farm. With his whopping re-election, the Senator fit the bill and he intended to fill it. His plateside reading these mornings was a tome titled *Bureaucracies and Their Foibles*.

Her busy day of holiday chores on her mind with Christmas coming fast, his wife somewhat absently waited for him to pull out his dollar watch, his signal of leaving for the Capitol. Today he made a show of consulting its Roman numerals, but a governing instinct of a murkier sort had taken hold of him as it sometimes did. "First thing, I need to futz around in the mail room a little." His wife made a face as he left the table; she didn't like *futz*.

Nor the mail room, for that matter. She never set foot into the alcove library where he felt most at home in the otherwise womanized house. And the Negro maid was not let in the room, not since the time she tidied by stacking everything
together. With the satisfaction of familiarity the Senator again gazed around at the musty bookshelves, the favorite framed *Chicago Tribune* political cartoon showing him as a bowlegged wrangler roping a runaway bull with the head and face of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and last and most comforting of all, the outmoded military trestle-tables waiting with seven batches of newspapers, eight to a pile. The weeklies from all fifty-six Montana counties, right here in the Potomac swampland ready for his perusal whenever the spirit moved him. Of all the senatorial perquisites there were, this one especially tickled him. He knew his staff drew straws to see which of them, at the dawn of each week, would have to take a taxi down from the Hill with the bulging mailbag of newspapers and lay them out in prescribed order, and the fact that they despised the chore only made him snort to himself in amusement. Montana was big as hell and just as tricky to represent, and he long since had figured out that having the local view of things fetched into this room for him beat trying to chase down the moods of constituents across a six-hundred-mile swath of earth.

Actually, there was more to it than that. In dismal bunkhouses and drafty line cabins when the century and he were unconquerably young, this gaunt old bone-sprung prairie Caesar had read his way up in the world via weekly compilations of community happenings just such as these; somehow even then he savvied more than was on the page, and the Faustian skills of small-town editors—recording angel one paragraph, gossipmonger the next—he had been careful to reckon with ever since. If nothing else, it appealed to him as cheap insurance for a man in his position. He could see no sign in the insane modern world that the pen was mightier than the sword, but it was damn sure stronger than most campaign speeches.

As he worked through this day’s stack of newsprint about livestock prices and the latest run of bad weather, he checked his watch again. The new power that
was coming to him with the gavel of the committee needed judicious exercise in the halls of the Senate and he had to allow time for that. He at last was in a position to do something about alphabet-soup wartime projects that did not point straight to victory and he was not going to waste--

The bold line of type caught his eye as he was paging through the *Gros Ventre Gleaner*.

**THOSE WHO GAVE ALL.**

At these words something occurred, like a catch of breath but much deeper, in the hardened Senator. He blinked and looked again. He had not seen that heading since World War One. His kid brother had been one of those listed then, mortally wounded in a barrage at Chateau-Thierry in 1918.

Staring, he bent closer over the column of names of young ones grown to military age in the quarter-century since.

*Adamic, Stefan, killed in action in New Guinea.*

*Baker, Raymond, died in military hospital of wounds suffered in the Anzio invasion.*

*Cooper, Samuel, sailor on the USS Yorktown, missing in action.*

*Copenhaver, Theodore, killed in plane crash during training at Sweetwater, Texas.*

*Crosby, Vern, killed in action at Leyte...*

With a chill he ran his finger on down and down the alphabet of death.

*Christ, that many? In one county?* A county--and an editor--he thought he knew like the back of his hand. In their span of political alliances of convenience he considered Bill Reinking a bit soft on Roosevelt, but rock-solid other than that. The list broke at the bottom of the newspaper column, and started anew at top of the next.
McCaskill, Alex, killed in strafing attack in Tunisia.

Peterson, Morton, died as prisoner-of-war in Bataan death march.

Petrie, Laura Ann, Army nurse, killed by artillery barrage behind the lines at the battle for Avranches.

Quigg, James, shot down over Germany, missing in action.

Rennie, Victor, died in England during a bombing raid...

He felt as if he was reading something direly biblical. Old family names of the Two Medicine country, the soul of the state. Heavy loss in more ways than one, and the Gleaner editor must have been driven to do this by its unavoidable weight.

The Senator rubbed his long jaw and rapidly rifled through the rest of the weeklies in that stack. The Choteau Acantha also listed its war dead, as did the Lewistown Argus. He hesitated, then started going through the next batch of newspapers from the eastern part of the state. Lists of the war dead showed up in several of the papers from there too, so whatever Bill Reinking had caught was still breaking out elsewhere.

Something else, too. Like father, like son. The Senator went back and counted. Of the sixteen weeklies in the two batches, nearly all had run Ben Reinking’s story on the last flight of the Supreme Team’s ninth man, Lieutenant Jacob Eisman.

The Senator stalked out to the telephone on the hallway stand and dialed as if incising the numbers.

“Mullen, get me the goddamn figures on how many Montana soldiers have been killed in this war. And then for all the other states.”

The women mechanics on the wings of all the planes. Someone started the
clapping, the metallic applause filled the hangar.

The hill, white and pyramidal and alone of its kind in the spongy Belgian countryside ahead, sent a chill through Ben as the Jeep wheeled through the village of Waterloo to the actual battlefield. When he hastily checked, Maurice's guidebook described the area as gentle farmland when the armies of Europe massed there on a midsummer day in 1815, and the out-of-place hill, so artificially perfect in contour, as a mound of earth built to honor one of Wellington's Dutch generals, the Prince of Orange, wounded in the battle but of the kind he could gallantly write home about it that night. Ben already was jotting--the Butte du Lion, name piled on it as sod was heaped in homage to a royal wound--when Maurice proposed as if on cue: "What do you say we take the high ground, Ben? If glory does not await us there, luncheon does."

From up there, the winter rumple of the land for a few miles around was hard to read as somewhere history was written in blood, Ben found. Not much had been made of the battlefield. A modest museum across the road from the mound, not yet back in business since the Germans left. A plaque there on the hilltop diagramming the battle, and a colossal cast-iron lion on a pedestal, supposedly
emblematic of the Prince’s courage, gazing implacably over the sleeping landscape.

Otherwise, the mildly rolling plain of Waterloo looked unaltered since the sea gave it to the land. Yet down at the bottom of the manufactured hill lay the otherwise insignificant low ridge, Wellington’s high ground, where Napoleon’s legions battered themselves to death in charge after charge. Ben measured off a mile with his eye, then another, then a third; incongruous as it seemed, that bit of countryside scarcely big enough to pasture a restless band of sheep had held the army of France, Britain’s and armies of other nations scared stiff of Napoleon remaking the map of Europe, and thirty thousand cavalry horses. The only surly aspect at the moment was the weather, low-rolling clouds starting to spit snowflakes, and the forest near Waterloo village that had stood out dark against the snow when they arrived now was gowned in fog. Maurice had brought a thermos of hot drink--it was actually identifiable as tea--and they munched twists of bully beef and squares of chocolate along with it as they deciphered the battle site from the Trekker’s guide. Then Ben began to write in the notepad and Maurice circled the tight top of the mound clicking photographs to send home to New Zealand.

When the chill began to get to both of them, Maurice at the other end of the lion’s parapet sent Ben a look that politely inquired whether he about had enough
for his TPWP piece. He did. The notepad held nugget phrases he could refine in
the typewriter tonight. Belgium as the unwilling crossroads marched over by
contending armies so many times, Waterloo as the sole crossroads in Belgium that
counted on a reddened day four generations of soldiers ago. A high-ranking officer
on Wellington’s general staff who had a mania for resorting to rockets, buzz bombs
of the day, although that would have to be said between the lines. The nearly
permanent battlefield dateline, *Somewhere in Europe*, in 1815 here amid fields of
Flemish corn and rye, at the moment in the forest and genuine uplands of the
Ardennes on the border of Germany. That was part of the hell of war, you could
so easily trace it from the past to now in an undiminished bloodline. “I’ve had
enough if you have,” he called across the mound top to Maurice and they descended
the hundred and fifty or so stairsteps to begin the journey back to Antwerp.

They were back on the road along the foggy forest when the Jeep popped
around a corner near where a telephone line crossed, and on the roadside just ahead
were three American G.I.s, surprise all over them, arrayed at the closest pole. The
pair in pole-climbing gear were about halfway up while the third one, carrying a
rifle, stood guard. “Minions of your Alexander Graham Bell at Waterloo,” Maurice
remarked, "what next?" He and Ben saw the guard call up to the others, then wave urgently for the Jeep to stop.

As they pulled to a halt, the G.I. on guard stepped in close to the vehicle. His uniform spotted with the grime of duty, his tone carried customary soldierly complaint. "Sure glad to see you, sir and sir, isn't this weather crappy? They"--the universal infantryman's code for those in charge--"dropped us here to fix the line. Can you give us a lift, to catch up with the other fellows?"

"Willingly," said Maurice, elegantly courteous beyond what the soldier seemed to have expected. Ben looked at the reddened hands clutching the rifle. He chipped in some down-to-earth sympathy over standing around in the snow guarding Signal Corps handymen. "They've got you riding shotgun on the spool crew, have they. That can't be fun. Who's going to be around here except tourists like us?"

The soldier, no youngster, glanced around nervously. "Sir, looking out for infiltrators. Strict instructions, sir."

Maurice lifted an eyebrow skeptically. "This far from the front? That would be ambitious of the Huns." Overhead, Ben could see the pair of linemen feverishly squirreling into work position at the top of the pole, apparently eager for
the Jeep ride. The one leaning back in his climbing belt at the top said something to the lower one, who fumbled in tool bag at his waist to hand up a set of wire pliers.

It occurred to Ben, under the circumstances, to make conversation with the soldier at the side of the Jeep. “What did you think of the Army-Navy game?”

“Army beat them good, hah?” the G.I. responded appreciatively. “Twenty-three to seven, right, sir?”

“Navy never stood a chance against guys who can run the ball like Pilchard and Travis,” Ben offered his analysis. Drumming his fingers on the steering wheel during this football talk, Maurice looked over at him curiously. Ben breezed on, “I didn’t get to hear the game, so I missed out on the details--who got the touchdowns?”

The soldier worked at remembering. “Pilchard and Travis had one each, I think, sir.”

Ben reached casually to his side and pulled out the .45 pistol. “It’s Blanchard and Davis, kamerad.” Then shot the man in the shoulder before he could yank the rifle up into action.

With that one crying out in German as he writhed on the ground, Ben for good measure fired a couple of shots up at the phone line saboteurs. One hurled the
tool bag and hit the hood of the Jeep as Maurice jammed into reverse, while the
other sought the skinny shelter of the pole as he tried to pull a pistol from the
unfamiliar American holster with a flap. The Jeep careening backward was well out
of range down the road, when Maurice swung it around and tromped on the
accelerator.

As the Jeep roared its way back to the main road, they could already see a
confusion of military traffic ahead, tanker trucks and armored vehicles streaming
toward the Ardennes front and ambulances forcing through in the opposite
direction. It was mid-December, and the moving wall of oblivion that Allied troops
would call the Battle of the Bulge was set into motion.
German armored columns pierced the Allied lines in a surprise counterattack Saturday along the Ardennes front. The German offensive, spearheaded by Panzer tanks, took advantage of a ghostly infiltration by English-speaking Germans in U.S. Army uniforms who cut phone lines and changed road signs, sowing confusion behind the lines from the Ardennes forest to Antwerp.

Royal Air Force Lieutenant Maurice Overby and I witnessed this dark art of sabotage at a place haunted with history’s bloody joust of armies, the battlefield of Waterloo. Our Jeep was hailed by a rifle-carrying soldier, his G.I. uniform appropriately grimy and a footslogger’s usual complaints ready on his lips....
Ben apprehensively watched Maurice read the piece as if chewing every word and letting it digest. The wire clerk, bored, took off his glasses, polished them, held them up to the light, polished them some more.

Finally Maurice issued with a polite but firm frown: “Sorry, Ben, but this simply cannot be let pass.”

No, no, goddamn it, Maurice, oh please. My biggest story of the war and you’re going to sit on it. Why couldn’t you tell me that before I busted my butt writing it? Anguished words building in him for what he knew would be a futile protest, he was stopped by the censorious finger significantly tapping the first sheet of copy paper. “Flattering as it would be to have my name entered in posterity in this fashion,” Maurice was holding forth, “you must strike it. Regulations.” He handed Ben the full set of pages.

“That’s it? That’s all?”

“Right.” Unmoving as a crate, Maurice stood watching Ben’s pencil slash out his name and dab in substitute wording. He nodded and walked off as Ben thrust the pages to the waiting wire clerk.

[New lede--byline Reinking]
Allied forces are trying to regroup along a shattered Ardennes front, where German tank columns shadowed by Wehrmacht foot soldiers in snow-colored camouflage uniforms have advanced nearly a quarter of the way to Antwerp. The surprise breakout was aided by German infiltrators who snarled communication lines before the armored attack. [Pick up previous piece as follows.]

A Royal Air Force officer and I witnessed this dark art of sabotage at a place haunted with history's bloody joust of armies, the battlefield of Waterloo....

As transmissions of combat reports filtered in to the wildly clattering wire room, Ben pieced together the picture and updated his story time and again. He eyed Maurice warily each time he handed him a new first page, but invariably it was handed back with that benign nod.

All that night and into next day--Ben had lost track of time--as the German attack careened through surprised Allied forces, the only interruption to his flow of story was the periodic message from Tepee Weepy: GREAT STUFF, KEEP SENDING.

[6th new lede--byline Reinking]

The bulge in the line of fierce fighting along the Ardennes front has grown hour by hour, as Allied forces fall back from the brunt of the desperate German
counterattack. Smoke arose outside abandoned command posts as Christmas mail not yet distributed to American troops was burned to keep it from falling into German hands. Communications among Allied forces still suffer from the snipped phone lines and misdirected road signs inflicted by infiltrators. [Pick up previous piece as follows.]

A Royal Air Force officer and I witnessed this dark art of sabotage at a place haunted with...

"That's it, I must tell you, Ben." Maurice was just back from the command bunker. "HQ has had orders from Supreme Headquarters to halt all news reports except official releases. Which is to say, no news."

"Take a break," Ben blearily told the slumped-over wire clerk and saw him off to the beverage urn. He turned around to Maurice, rubbing his eyes and trying to work the kink out of his neck from all the hours bent over teletype machines.

"Just between you and me and the red pencil that didn't come out of your pocket, why did they let me get away with what I sent?"

"Interesting situation," Maurice responded as blandly as if it was a problem in chess. "Our general was quite firm about making it known to the world this
German breakthrough is a nasty business for us. What is the American term, to set up a howl?” His tone turned solemn. “All the combat reports indicate the bulge, so-called, is aimed directly here, to retake Antwerp. Shut down the port, cut our forces in two at the same time,” he made a sweeping gesture to illustrate the extent of the strategy, “it makes quite good sense from the Hun point of view, doesn’t it. Therefore HQ here thought wise to put the word out--your words, actually--before Supreme Headquarters clamped down on the embarrassing news that the Germans caught them with their pants very much down.”

Practically dead on his feet, Ben moved off from the TPWP teletype, clapping Maurice on the shoulder as he passed. “Tepee Weepy and me, always glad to be of service.”

Moxie was taking the Battle of the Bulge personally. “Those sneaky German SOBs. They’re going for broke.” It was the best analysis Ben had heard yet. “Are they still going to get us out of here?

“So they say. They have to get the USO bunch out. Maurice keeps checking--the Luftwaffe isn’t so much in this, it’s more a hell of a ground attack.”
“What do you hear about about the Germans busting out?”

“I hunted up our ack-ack intelligence officer, we go back a long ways together. They figure when Supreme Headquarters gets its head out of its butt, they’ll get the Germans stopped about halfway here. Ten days or two weeks. It’s going to get worse before it gets better.”

A nod from Ben. “That squares with what I picked up in the wire room.”

“I need some chow and some sleep.”

He was forking down scrambled powdered eggs and sausages that tasted like sawdust when the wire clerk came looking for him.

“Sir, the Hollywood colonel wants to see you.”

“The which?”

“The rec officer, they call him that who handles the USO troupes. This one just pulled in. He wants to see you in the Wonder Bar.”

He passed the golden-haired singer famous for choosing fuzz-cheeked soldier to sprinkle delousing powder down her back. Band members...and the comedian whose humor started with how skinny he was. The Wonder Bar had been transformed with a folding stage across one end. It was unreal, entertainment