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I recently finished
The Eleventh Man and
enjoyed it. Along with interesting
characters, your story personalized
World War II for me.

It would be great to do an
excerpt again from your next book.
I'm not sure what your timeline
is on that project.

Butch Larcombe

May 21, 2008

Butch Larcombe
Montana Magazine
2222 Washington St.
Helena, MT 59602

Dear Butch,

This letter, when signed in full, will serve as agreement between Ivan Doig ("Author") c/o Michele Mortimer, Darhansoff, Verrill, Feldman Literary Agents, and *Montana Magazine* ("Publisher") in regard to an excerpt ("Work") of approximately 2500 words from Chapter 4 (Ben finds Dex at Seeley Lake) from the novel, *The Eleventh Man*, to be published by Harcourt, Inc. in October 2008.

Publisher has accepted Excerpt and will pay seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$750.00) upon signature for the rights set forth below. If Publisher has not published Excerpt by October 1, 2008, all rights will revert to Author without prejudice to monies paid. Publisher will not further edit Excerpt without Author approval not to be unreasonably withheld.

Publisher shall have:

1. The exclusive first serial rights to publish Excerpt in North America, exclusivity to last until October 1, 2008, by which rights will revert as part of preexisting agreement for *The Eleventh Man* with Harcourt, Inc. During term of exclusivity, Author will not sell serial rights to *The Eleventh Man* to any Montana-oriented print publications other than *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, with which there is a preexisting rights agreement.
2. The nonexclusive, perpetual rights to reproduce and distribute Excerpt as part of issue in which it was originally published (September 2008) for archival, retrieval, and internal purposes.
3. The right to use the Author's name and provided or approved likeness, and the right to use the Excerpt with author approval not to be unreasonably withheld, in publishing, promoting, advertising, and publicizing the publication in which the Excerpt appears.

All rights not granted herein are reserved by the Author for his own use and dispensation.

Ivan,
Copies of both
countersigned contracts
for your records.

Very best,
Michele

Author represents and warrants that he has the right and authority to convey the rights granted herein and that the Excerpt has not previously been published in whole or in part. The Excerpt will not infringe any copyright, and will not constitute a defamation or invasion of the right of privacy or publicity, or an infringement of any other right of any other kind, of any third party.

The Author hereby irrevocably designates Darhansoff, Verrill, Feldman, Literary Agents, 236 W. 26th St. Suite 802 New York, NY 10001 (Tax Identification # 13-3694820) as the sole and exclusive agent in connection with this agreement and in connection with any matters arising hereunder, and any written communications with such agent shall be deemed binding upon the Author. All statements, payments and other communications shall be sent to such agent, whose receipt shall be deemed receipt by the Author. Payments shall be made payable to and in the name of such agent.

Contributor:

By Michele Mortimer aaf Juan Diaz

Name: Michele Mortimer

Date: 2 June 2008

Publisher:

By: James E. Loranbe

Name: James E. "Butch" Loranbe

Date: 5/23/08

May 19, 2008

Molly Holz
Montana The Magazine of Western History
Montana Historical Society
P.O. Box 201201
Helena, MT 59620-1201

Dear Molly,

This letter, when signed in full, will serve as agreement between Ivan Doig ("Author") c/o Michele Mortimer, Darhansoff, Verrill, Feldman Literary Agents, and *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* ("Publisher") in regard to an excerpt of Chapter 1 ("Excerpt") of *The Eleventh Man*, to be published by Harcourt, Inc. in October 2008.

Publisher has accepted Excerpt and will pay five hundred dollars (\$500.00) upon signature for the rights set forth below. If Publisher has not published Excerpt by October 1, 2008, all rights will revert to Author without prejudice to monies paid. Publisher will not further edit Excerpt without Author approval not to be unreasonably withheld.

Publisher shall have:

1. The exclusive first serial rights to publish Excerpt in North America, exclusivity to last until October 1, 2008, by which rights will revert as part of preexisting agreement for *The Eleventh Man* with Harcourt, Inc.
2. The nonexclusive, perpetual rights to reproduce and distribute Excerpt as part of issue in which it was originally published (Summer 2008) for archival, retrieval, and internal purposes.
3. The right to use the Author's name and provided or approved likeness, and the right to use the Excerpt with author approval not to be unreasonably withheld, in publishing, promoting, advertising, and publicizing the publication in which the Excerpt appears.

All rights not granted herein are reserved by the Author for his own use and dispensation.

Author represents and warrants that he has the right and authority to convey the rights granted herein and that the Excerpt has not previously been published in whole or in part. The Excerpt will not infringe any copyright, and will not constitute a defamation or invasion of the right of privacy or publicity, or an infringement of any other right of any other kind, of any third party.

The Author hereby irrevocably designates Darhansoff, Verrill, Feldman, Literary Agents, 236 W. 26th St. Suite 802 New York, NY 10001 (Tax Identification # 13-3694820) as the sole and exclusive agent in connection with this agreement and in connection with any matters arising hereunder, and any written communications with such agent shall be deemed binding upon the Author. All statements, payments and other communications shall be sent to such agent, whose receipt shall be deemed receipt by the Author. Payments shall be made payable to and in the name of such agent.

Contributor:

By: Michele Mortimer and Juan Deig

Name: Michele Mortimer

Date: 2 June 08

Publisher:

By: Molly Holz - Montam Historical Socy

Name: Molly Holz

Date: 5/23/08

p. 31, caption, change underlined. My reading of the WAFs and WASPs is that they were considered to be in the military, i.e. more than “civilians attached.” We’d be on safer ground, I think, to omit that and just say it this way:

The U.S. Army recruited experienced women pilots to transport planes within the U.S. More than one thousand women flew for the Army Air Force...

p. 35, caption: the plane pictured is two-engined and so cannot be a P-63, the single-engine fighter plane; also, the P-63 has four blades on the propeller, not the three shown here. The photocopy you sent me pre-layout says in the caption “Large crew processing a C-47...” That may be right, although it’s hard to tell from the angle the photo was shot from, so I think even using that original caption designation has some risk of nit-picking from readers. How about just avoiding the issue this way, changes underlined:

Women on the ground also contributed to the war effort. Above a female maintenance crew works on engines and fuselage in the final processing hangar at the Great Falls base in June 1945.

p. 38, the all photo page: in the overline, World War I is referenced rather than World War II. Why not just drop that, and simply make the *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* quote read:

“Montana contributed more than its share of military manpower--roughly forty thousand men by 1942--and the state’s death rate in the war was exceeded only by New Mexico’s.” (end quote mark is missing in the layout version)

p. 40, caption, changes underlined.

So starts Ivan Doig’s saga of eleven Montana teammates whose lives are caught in the vortex of World War II. The author is shown at Logan Pass in Glacier National Park in 1977 during one of the research trips that led first to *This House of Sky* and then his Montana trilogy, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, *English Creek*, and *Ride with Me, Mariah Montana*.

p. 6 (?), the endnotes: a small style glitch in #2, italicize *Ride with Me, Mariah Montana*.

I only checked the text against the corrections we made on the proofs, and those were all nicely made. You’re working a minor miracle with the turnaround on all this--thanks again, Molly, for the high professionalism you and your staff have shown. I’m much looking forward to the actual magazine, and no doubt will see you at least to say hi when Carol and I hit the Society library in early June. Until then,

all best,



Wed., May 21, 2008

Dear Ivan,

I'm rushing out the door on my way to Bozeman and want to jot down a few notes about the layout.

As you'll see, I've added the introduction based on the text you sent. Please edit as needed. There is the question of the announcement of the book's publication. As it is, that announcement comes at the end of the article, and I would be happy to rework to emphasize it if you think needed. I would really like to not have the book's publication announcement in the first paragraph, both because I would like the article to have the usual weight as a piece of original research and writing (readers and the editorial board are sometimes touchy about the use of excerpts) and because I don't want the story to seem like an advertisement for the book from the git-go. We can talk about this on the phone.

Consulting with the designer about layout strategies resulted in a reordering of the images and captions. Please rework as needed to make the story flow in its newest form.

We sent the captions to Curt Shannon at the Malmstrom AFB Museum for review. He pointed out that the terms "Soviet Union" and "Soviet" wasn't applicable until after the war. We changed to "Russia" and "Russian" in three instances. Please confirm that this is okay.

*Ivan -
Never mind -
Curt must have
had his wars
mixed up.
Glen*

Michele sent the contract today. I'll take a look on Friday and finish it up.

We're planning that the layout arrives by Fed Ex Friday. If your changes are relatively minor, I can make note of them over the phone. If they are more extensive, please Fed Ex the pages back. Monday is Memorial Day, and so Tues. is likely the first day to return the pages. We plan give the whole book to the proofreader Friday night. The turnaround is tight, but I think it can be done.

That's everything I can think of for the moment. I hope you like the layout, etc. Thank you again.

Sincerely,





MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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May 12, 2008

Ivan Doig
17277 15th Avenue NW
Shoreline, WA 98177

Dear Ivan,

Please find enclosed the galleys of the story, notes, and captions as well as photocopies of the planned illustrations. The story and the sidebar have been checked and double-checked against the master, and I feel confident they're in good shape. There is one query about changing "god-damned" or a milder oath—whatever you think best.

The notes have been edited to our house style, and there may be a query or two; please answer these as best you can and correct any mistakes I inadvertently introduced. The Cascade County Historical Society/High Plains Heritage Center recently moved to The History Museum. Glenda emailed to find out how to cite.

And then there are the captions—we welcome any and all suggestions. I'm sending a printout of the Word document to allow more space for correction/comment and a computer disk if it is easiest for you to make your changes electronically. You'll have one more chance to tweak them once we everything comes together in layout.

The plan is to have the magazine to the printer by the last day in May. If you can turn these galleys around before your trip next weekend, we'll try to Fed Ex a layout by the middle of the following week.

One thing: I haven't heard back from Michele at Darhansoff, Verrill, and Feldman about the contract. If you talk her, please put "a bug in her ear." I'll call her if I haven't heard from her by next week.

Thank you again for making this opportunity possible.

Sincerely,

Ivan,

Read with much interest the first chapter of your next book.

However, I thought I should mention that on page 38 in the "Montana, The Magazine of Western History," Summer 2008 issue there is a small error in the description of the landing barge with the soldiers wading toward shore.

That is not an LST. Believe me, as I have served on an LST among other amphibious craft in New Guinea.

The photo of the craft was taken from at least a quarter of a mile away and at an angle so that I cannot make out the superstructure to identify the model of the craft for sure. I would bet my last \$100 that it is a LCT (landing craft tank). The LCT is only 105 feet long. The LST is much longer, taller and wider. The LST has two decks. One, the tank deck at the bottom and a top deck some 15 feet above. The LST has two bow doors that open to let the ramp down.

I didn't know if these were your pictures for the book or if they were the MHS photos.

Anyway the sample makes it sound like a good interesting book.

Sincerely,



Jack Hayne

Dupuyer, Montana

59432-0209

PO Box 209

21 July 2008

Dear Jack--

Good to hear from you as always. As you likely know, Mary has been in touch with me, and as a result, Carol and I proudly have a "cork board" hanging on the wall.

Wouldn't you know, you're the first reader I've heard from and right away you catch the magazine in a caption error. All the photos were rounded up by the Historical Society staff--there are none in the book--and while I combed over the captions having to do with aircraft and saved them a few errors there, I skimmed right past the landing craft one, which was a late addition after I told the editor I didn't think the original choice--a soldier smiling under a palm tree--really did justice to the Montanans in the New Guinea theatre of combat. Now we'll see how many more of you vets spotted that. I took a quick look into my book and was relieved to see that I've been firmly chicken-hearted and just called such things "the landing craft" without getting into initials. I hewed pretty closely to Alvin Josephy's description of going ashore as a Marine combat correspondent, if you know his book *A Walk Toward Oregon*.

Anyway, I'm glad the excerpt read okay to you. This is quite a different book from my last one, *The Whistling Season*, but I thought the story of Montanans in World War II deserved as strong a try as I could make. First couple of reviews have been just fine, I've been booked on a National Public Radio show (the Diane Rehm interview show in Washington, D.C.) on Oct. 9, and some other good things seem to be happening for the book. As I keep saying, maybe the writing life turns out to be a living.

Carol and I were in Montana a bit last month, although not in your neck of the woods. While we did research at the Historical Society--my next book is going to be set in Butte in 1919--we stayed with Dave Walter's wife Marcella. She's still sorting the aftermath of Dave's death, his immense personal library among other things, but just has taken the good firm step of shedding the house and buying a handy condominium. We prize her as we prized Dave, good people, good friends. Thanks for being in touch, regards to all the family.

Sincerely,

14 May '08

Molly, hi--

A hasty follow-up on our phone conversation earlier:

--Going through the text, I noted your flagging of "goddamned" and watered it down to "damned" and "damn".

--I take it the text pages are only roughs, but noted the bottom running head (if that's what it is) saying "Gordon Morris Bakken".

--If we don't get to talk on the phone before I go off to my speech, my phone message question to you about some kind of subhead or other intro is directed at letting the readers know this is the opening chapter of a novel--i.e., it's not a short story complete in itself. I'm attaching a copy of Harcourt's catalogue copy for the book in case it's any help.

--In the sidebar, it occurred to me that my reference to "regulars" could be taken to mean professional military men rather than saloon regulars, so I tacked on "patrons".

And we very much want Carol's 3 pics back when you're done with 'em. All for now--will look forward to the layout.

Best wishes,

28 April '08

Dear Molly--

Hastily done, but here I hope it all is:

- the corrected proofs of ch. 1
- a set of footnotes (I red-penciled in where they might go in the text, but you guys are the experts)
- the sidebar you wanted

Other stuff:

--We need to be really, really careful with that MSC football pic and its caption. As you'll find in the MHS file Dave Walter provided me and added to on his own, there's considerable confusion about who the starters on the '40 team were, some of the names, on and on. Try to caption it as generally as you can, maybe quoting my sidebar line that I saw in the lore "the storyline for a novel." I'm sending along something Dave provided and maybe you can extract from the Internet (I gave it a bit of a try and decided it wasn't worth my time), a citation of a NY newspaper article that probably, again, conveys the lore about the team.

--In the pics, if you use the one of the fighter plane over Gt Falls that was used in the Winter '98 issue, that's not a P-39 but the successor model, the P-63: differences are subtle, but the P-39 had three blades on its propellor, the P-63 four, and the P-63's tail is more straight-angled. Am sending photocopied pertinent pics showing the difference, please return 'em when you're done.

--In footnote 6, I don't have the book's publication info to fit your footnote style, so I left it TK for To Come and you'll need to Google it. I used the book from the U. of Washington library, it'll be in their on-line catalogue if nothing else.

So, does that cover it? I'll be glad to look over the galleys. And how about four copies of the issue when we commit this daring act of fiction in history's own house, okay?

Best,

The Story Inside the History

Putting on the uniform of your country and submitting your life to a war's blind chances of who lives and who dies is one of the most powerful experiences a person can have. I grew up around men, and a few women, of World War II in Meagher county, Montana; by the count of the weekly newspaper there, 273 served in that war, out of a population of 2,237 in the 1940 census. One of my uncles had been a torpedoman on a destroyer in the Pacific, another was in the Montana National Guard contingent sent to New Guinea, and in the saloons where my father did the hiring for his ranch crews were regulars who had been in the thick of the war; and of course, there were the gaps in families and the community left by those killed in the war. So, even then there was a hovering sense of the war's great toll on Montana.

When my turn came, my own military service as Sergeant Doig was not in combat, but at the edge of war's dice-throw: as an Air Force reservist on active duty during the Cuban missile crisis, and later narrowly missing assignment to Vietnam. The military version of fate, then, has been part of my own life and naturally works its powers in my writing. In my Montana trilogy, characters go to both world wars and Vietnam as a matter of course, and it was probably when I was gathering material for my book about my own family's World War II experience, *Heart Earth*, that I lucked onto some mention of a Montana college football team that had all gone into the war, with terrible loss. I saw in that the storyline for a novel: what if you were the eleventh man, trying to dodge as fate closed in on that team, one by one?

As ever, in this book I generate my fiction from historical set points--in this case, the pivotal war years 1943-44--while making up my plot and people. Thus, within the wilder boundaries of my imagination I still abide by historical laws of gravity, researching events and details to the best of my Ph.D.-in-history ability. But delving into oral history accounts, memoirs, military unit histories and the like is just that, delving. The constant is the crafting of the language, the telling of a story in a way no one has ever heard told before. "Fiction lives by the energy of its prose," the novelist Thomas Flanagan boiled it down to. I couldn't agree more.--*Ivan Doig*

The Eleventh Man excerpt footnotes

1. The fictional northern Montana town of Gros Ventre first appeared in the author's Montana Trilogy, *English Creek*, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, and *Ride With Me, Mariah Montana*. He explained its imaginative and actual origins in *English Creek* (New York, 1984), 335: "...English Creek, the Two Medicine National Forest, and the town of Gros Ventre exist only within these pages. Some of their geography is real--the area of Dupuyer Creek and the Rocky Mountain Front, west of the town of Dupuyer, Montana....

[A]nything within what I've stretched geography to call the 'Two Medicine' country I have felt free to change or invent.¹¹¹ A detailed account of the invented town can be found earlier in *English Creek*, 134-140.

2. The U.S. Office of War Information from 1942 until 1945 had various sections involved in war news for domestic consumption, but the Threshold Press War Project, "Tepee Weepy," is a product of the author's imagination.

3. The author situated non-existent Treasure State University on about the site of C.M. Russell High School in Great Falls, and the Letter Hill in back of it. Hill 57, which did exist and is another setting in *The Eleventh Man*, is across an imaginary coulee west of the TSU Letter Hill.

4. The history of the Air Transport Command's 7th Ferrying Group, which ultimately piloted Lend-Lease fighters, bombers, and cargo planes north to Alaska and Soviet Union aircrews waiting there--the total is listed as 7,926 aircraft--is concisely told in the the Cascade County Historical Society's collection catalogue. The collection at the CCHS's High Plains Heritage Center in Great Falls includes archives, photographs, and artifacts of the 7th Ferrying Group.

5. East Base was the informal name of the Great Falls Army Air Base, renamed Malmstrom Air Force Base in 1955.

6. In World War Two, 1,074 women completed flight training to become Women Air Force Service pilots, under the acronym WASPs. Jean Haskell Cole, *Women Pilots of World War II* (TK) ix-xvii. Many of those delivered factory-fresh aircraft, especially fighter planes such as the P-39 Airacobra, to U.S. air bases. By the time the WASPs were “inactivated” in December 1944, thirty-eight women military pilots had lost their lives in the course of duty. The presence of Captain Cass Standish’s “flying women” at East Base, on the Seattle route, and ultimately on the route to Edmonton, Alberta, is the author’s creation.
7. The toll on Montana in World War Two is summed up by Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana, A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle, 1988), 309: “As in World War I, Montana contributed more than its share of military manpower--roughly forty thousand men by 1942--and the state’s death rate in the war was exceeded only by New Mexico’s.”
8. Robert E. Sherwood, playwright and speechwriter for President Franklin D. Roosevelt; Elmer Davis, Columbia Broadcasting System newsman who became director of the U.S. Office of War Information.

MHS

P-63



Return to
Ivan

P-63

7th Ferrying Group plane (probably a P-39) flying over Great Falls
ACM + stack in background

The star + bar
markings match
that on US planes
in Stan Cohen's WWII
book, pp. 288 & 405

used Winter 1998
Montana Magazine

Permission granted for one time
use only. Cascade County
Historical Society, 9/27/27
Great Falls



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

225 No. Roberts ♦ PO Box 201201 ♦ Helena, MT 59620-1201 ♦ (406) 444-2694 ♦ (406) 444-2696

www.montanahistoricalsociety.org

May 2, 2008

Dear Ivan,

I am returning your photocopies before they become hopelessly lost with mine. Thanks for the correction on the P-63.

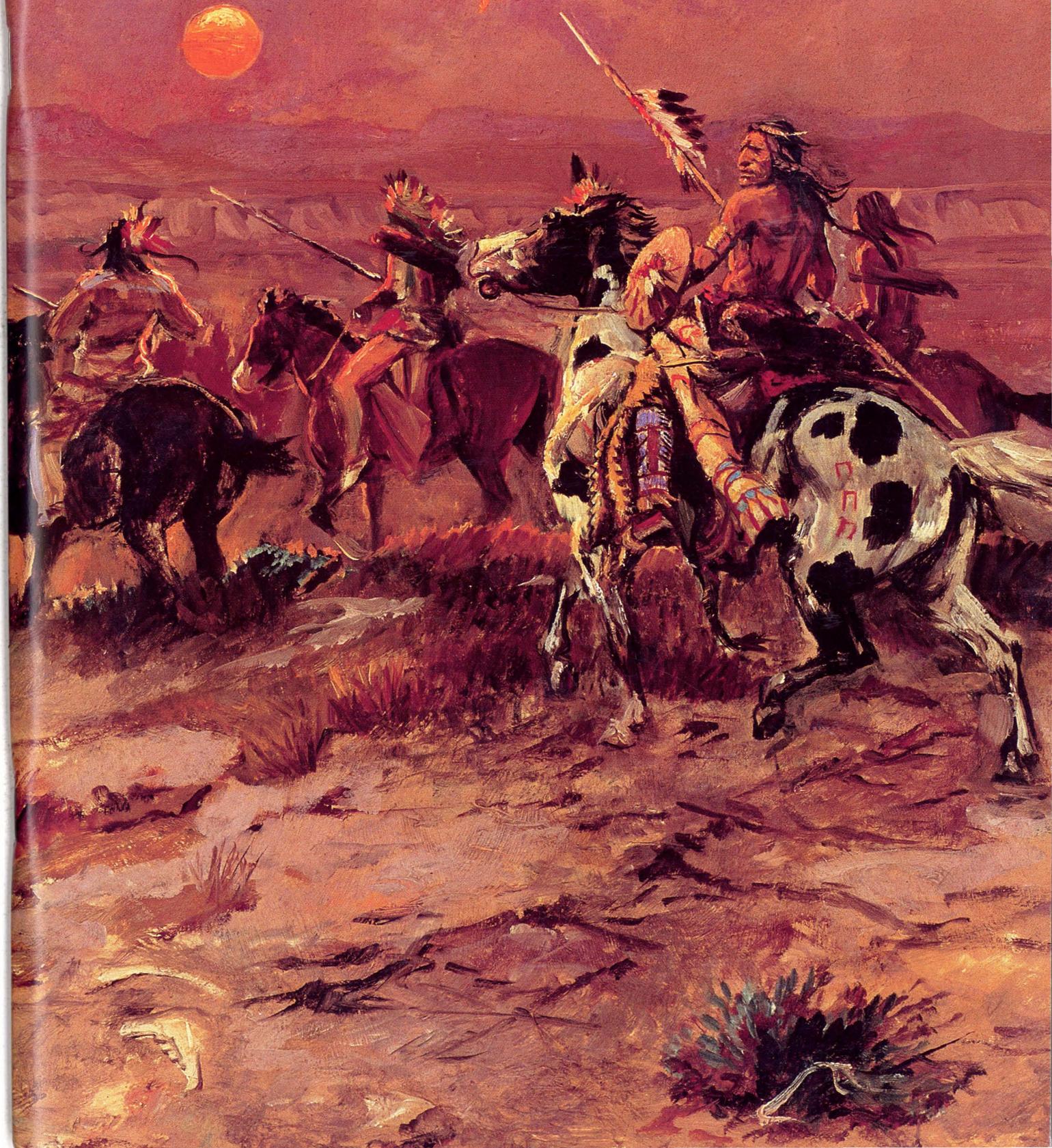
Photos are coming together. Among others, a lovely photo of WASP (or WAFT) Betty Gilles in coveralls and another of Nancy Batson Crews in a Great Falls hotel room modeling her winter flight gear. OK - you've got to see them - also enclosed.

Best regards,
Glendon

Summer 2008

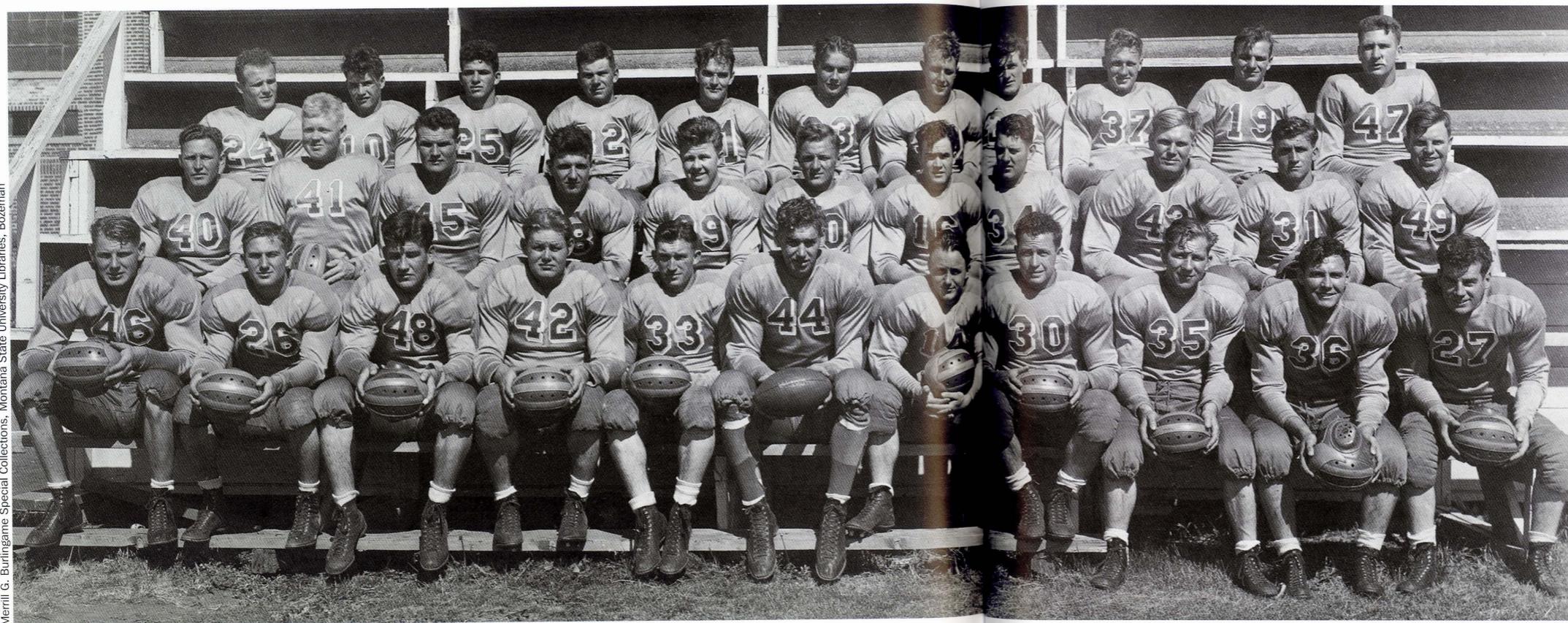
MONTANA

The Magazine of Western History



The Eleventh Man

by Ivan Doig



Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Libraries, Bozeman

In fictionally crafting *The Eleventh Man*, Doig took as a historical point of departure Bozeman's 1940–41 Montana State College football team whose eleven starting players were killed in action in World War II. Placing his team at a fictional state university in Great Falls, he created characters that shared a common Montana background and a plot that linked their fates throughout the war.

Written by a master of Montana fiction, the episode that follows, the first chapter of Ivan Doig's new book, *The Eleventh Man*, captures the look and feel of Montana during World War II. Though it is a work of fiction, the story's illustrations and captions help explain the historical reality of the people, places, and events described; endnotes clarify divergences from historical fact.

The Eleventh Man follows the wartime adventures of Ben Reinking, who grew up in the fictional town of Gros Ventre, Montana, where his father edits the local newspaper. In 1941, Ben played on the college football team that charged through the season undefeated and became a legend in Montana football history. Two years later, the

"Supreme Team" is caught up in World War II. Ten of Ben's teammates, including Vic Rennie, are scattered around the globe in the war's various theaters. The eleventh man, Ben, has been plucked from pilot training by a military propaganda machine hungry for heroes. He is to chronicle the experiences of his teammates man by man for consumption in small-town newspapers across the country. Wishing for combat, Ben chafes at his temporary duty assignment at the Great Falls Army Air Base, the home of the U.S. Army Air Force's Seventh Ferrying Command, which

transports airplanes to Alaska as part of the Lend-Lease program supplying aircraft to the Soviet Union.¹ The assignment does, however, have one advantage—proximity to the woman with whom he is madly in love, Cass Standish, a pilot ferrying Lend-Lease P-39s into Great Falls as part of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). Meanwhile, around the globe, the law of averages that holds that all but one of Ben's former teammates should come through the conflict unscathed is being put to the test.

Never much of a town for showing off, Gros Ventre waited around one last bend in the road, supertime lights coming on here and there beneath its roof of trees. As the bus headed up the quiet main street toward the hotel, where the lobby served as depot, Ben Reinking saw the single lighted storefront on the block with the bank and the beauty shop. Of course. Thursday night. His father putting the newspaper to bed after this week's press run.

"Here will do," he called to the driver.

The bus driver jammed on the brakes and heaved himself around to take a better look at this final passenger. Using all the breath he could summon, the man let out slowly: "I'll be damned. You're him. Awful sorry, Lieutenant, I didn't—"

"I'll live." Most civilians could not read the obscure shoulder patch on his flight jacket, and any camouflage he could get anytime suited Ben.

Right there in the middle of the street, the driver laboriously dragged out the duffel bag from the luggage bay and presented it to him. The man looked tempted to salute. Ben murmured his thanks and turned away toward the premises of the *Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner*. Well, he told himself as he swung along under the burden of his duffel, now to see whether his father had picked up any news about the repeal of the law of averages, as it apparently had been.

Habit dies hard, even the military variety that never came natural to him; he caught himself surveying these most familiar surroundings in terms of ambush and booby trap, and with a shake of his head sought to change over to observation of a more civil sort. Storefront by dozing storefront, the town still looked as if the world of war had nothing to do with it, yet he knew better. It was simply that buildings don't read casualty lists. He tried to put that thought away and just come to terms with being home. Gros Ventre, he'd learned growing up here, was the same age as the tree rings in the mature cottonwood colonnade along its streets, and altered itself as slowly. Only the season had changed appreciably since the last time he had to do this, early evening unrolling a frosty carpet of light from the front of the *Gleaner* building now as he approached.²

He stopped to read the window as he always did. Posted beneath the gilt lettering on the plate glass were handbills announcing a war bonds box supper and a farm machinery auction on lower English Creek. Both were set in the familiar exclamatory typeface his father called Visual Braille. Fooling around as a printer paid for the indulgence of being a small-town editor, Bill Reinking liked to say. Just this moment, Ben spotted him there at the back of the office in the job shop, running the addressograph himself. As ever, his father looked like a schoolmaster out of place, peering foggily through his bifocals while he fed the dog tag-sized subscription plates



Both photographs, The History Museum, Great Falls, Montana

On the homefront, people supported war efforts by conserving food, fuel, tires, and other materials; buying war bonds; and displaying posters and patriotic symbols. The Strain Brothers Department Store (above) and the Kress 10¢ Store (right) in Great Falls participated with window displays.

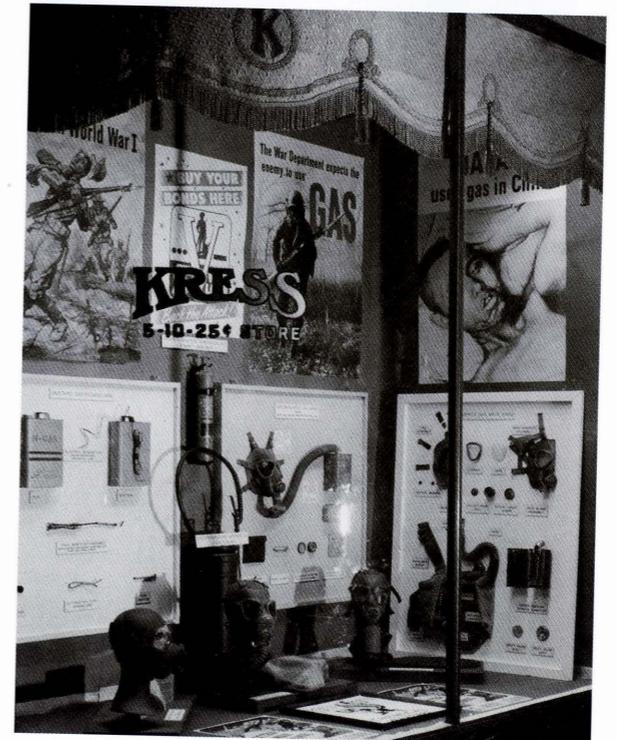
into the small machine for it to stamp those names and addresses onto the out-of-town mail wrappers. Ben remembered now: the office help, Janie, had moved to Arizona, where her husband's tank corps was in training.

Past his own reflection in the glass of the door, Ben watched his father at his lonesome chore until it started to hurt. *This part doesn't get any easier either, does it. Two bylines under one roof. At least we both write with the pointed end, he taught me that.*

With that he stepped inside to the subtle smell of ink fresh on newsprint, calling out as cheerfully as he could manage: "All the news that fits, again this week?"

"Ben!" The addressograph made empty thumping sounds onto wrappers until his father could shut it down. "Surprise the living daylights out of a man, why don't you. We weren't expecting you until the weekend."

"Well, guess what, the Air Transport Command turns out to be full of surprises. It's only a forty-eight-hour leave, not the seventy-two I put in for." He tried



to cover the next with a shrug. "And there's something I have to do out of town tomorrow. Other than that, I'm the perfect guest."

"Better enjoy you in a hurry, hadn't I," his father said in his dry way as they shook hands. His face alight, the older man gazed at the younger as if storing up on him. He was dying to ask what was behind this trip home, Ben could tell, but doing his best to be a father first and a newspaperman second. That was



The protagonist Ben's fictional hometown of Gros Ventre shares street characteristics with the real Rocky Mountain front community of Choteau, pictured above in the 1940s. Choteau is about thirty miles south of Dupuyer, the author's setting for Gros Ventre.



The Boeing B-17, flown by the U.S. Army Air Corps throughout World War II, could carry a three-ton bombload on a two-thousand-mile flight and was heavily armed with machine guns mounted in clear turrets. Called the Flying Fortress, the bomber was legendary for staying in the air after taking a brutal pounding, sometimes limping back to base missing chunks of fuselage. In this episode, Ben recalls being under antiaircraft fire in a B-17 over the islands of Palau, five hundred miles southeast of the Philippines.

fortunate, because Ben himself did not have the right words anywhere near ready. In the strange labyrinth of TDYs—temporary duty assignments—that Ben Reinking’s war somehow had turned into, this one was the hardest yet to talk about.

Bill Reinking could see most of this. Not wanting to prompt, he ventured only: “You’ve seen a lot of the world lately.”

More than enough. England, bombed stiff by the Luftwaffe. New Guinea, beachheads backed against Japanese-held mountains two miles high. The close call from ack-ack over Palau on the B-17 ride; the even closer one no one was being told about. Not exactly pleasant conversation, any of it. Ben got rid of it for

now in mock-heroic fashion: “It was hell out in those there islands.”

His father laughed uncertainly. After a moment, the bifocals tilted up in appraisal. “Nice addition to your uniform, by the way. The Ernies”—Pyle and Hemingway preeminently, but newsman slang for war correspondents as a species—“don’t have that.”

“This?” Self-consciously Ben rubbed the new silver bar of a full lieutenant on the tab of his shirt collar. Another hole in the law of averages. The promotion had caught him by surprise almost as much as the blindsides that landed him back at East Base yet again. He lacked the time in grade, base commanders were never glad to see him coming, and for its own

murky reasons the Threshold Press War Project did not bother with fitness reports—*So why boost me from shavetail all of a sudden? What do the bastards have in mind for me next?* For his father’s sake, he forced a grin. “It doesn’t amount to that much, Dad, to outrank civilians.”³

All during this each looked the other over to see how he was holding up since last time. Bill Reinking was bald to the back of his head, but his ginger mustache still matched the color of Ben’s hair. His strong glasses schooled a square-cut face on a chunky man into the most eager kind of lookout—the newsdigger’s close curiosity that he had passed on to his son. That and the ginger follicles and not much else. Ben had the Hollywood lineaments of his mother’s people—the bodily poise, the expressive hands. Those and that unbuyable mark of character: a deeply longitudinal face, neighbored with latitudes of experience—a surprising amount for a twenty-three-year-old—evident in the steady sea-blue of the gaze. The difference in stature between the two men was long-standing. Tall enough that he just skimmed under the Army Air Corps height limit, Ben had an altitude advantage over his father in a number of ways, although he usually tried not to press it. Even so, the college education, the football fame, the TPWP cor-

respondent patch, the bylines and datelines from his stopovers in the world’s many combat zones, those all came home with him every time, and both men stood back from it a bit.

“How was the trip up here?” Bill Reinking asked, to be asking something.

“Like *Gone with the Wind* without somebody to neck with,” his son said and laughed in a way he did not recognize. “Long.”

Wondering how many more times this could happen in one lifetime, early that afternoon he had stepped out into the familiar blowy weather of Great Falls and pointed himself toward the same old tired bus that again and again had taken him to college and from college, to the war and from the war.

This time around, a person could tell there was a war on from the melancholy wheeze of the bus driver. On easier journeys home, he had been accustomed to forking over his fare to this narrow-shouldered fatherly man—an asthma sufferer, from the sound of it—in the drowsy waiting room of the Rocky Mountain Stageline depot. Now there was a sallow woman in that job who issued “God bless you real good, sonny,” along with the ticket, and the ex-ticket agent was puffing around out in the loading area, dragging



Ben is on temporary duty assignment at the Great Falls Army Air Base, called East Base by locals. During World War II, pilots of the Seventh Ferrying Command flew airplanes from Great Falls to Ladd Field, Alaska, as part of the Lend-Lease program that supplied aircraft to the Soviet Union. Above, planes processed for transport to Alaska stand on the ready line at East Base, June 1945.

mail bags and the civilians' suitcases toward the belly of the bus. The war effort, preached on posters everywhere you turned these past two years since Pearl Harbor: it wore on people, without doubt, although that did not seem what the sloganeers intended to convey. Ben tried to slip his duffel into the bus and the seat next to him so he could lean against it and possibly nap during the familiar trip, but the hunched driver grabbed it away and insisted on stowing it for him. "Save your strength for the enemy, Lieutenant," he panted.

Which one?

Keeping that to himself at all costs, Ben boarded. He never liked being last at anything, but the half dozen other passengers, farm people with their city shopping clutched in their laps, long since had claimed specific seats and were giving him the gauging looks that young men in fleece-lined flight jackets tended to draw. *If they only knew.* Swiftly nodding in everyone's general direction the way he imagined someone who looked like a hotshot pilot was counted on to do, he deposited himself nearest the door as always, the coat leather crackling as he folded his considerable height into the worn confines of the

seat. In his travels through the world of war, he had learned never to shed the fleece jacket on any means of transport, whether it was plane, train, ship, jeep, or bus, until he had proof the heater worked.

In this case it did not, at least to any noticeable degree, and by the time the bus lumbered away from the depot and rumbled west onto the bridge across the Missouri, he had turned up the coat collar for the full effect of the wool. In more ways than one, he had never really warmed to Great Falls. Scrunched in the perpetual bus seat he felt less comfortable than ever with the thought that this smokestack-marked city—the Anaconda Copper stack there above the Black Eagle smelter dominated the sky of centermost Montana with a constant plume of smoke—seemed to have some kind of unquenchable claim on him.

Three times in a little over a year. How the hell is it possible? How's this for a scene, Mr. Zanuck:

"What did you do in the war, my boy?"

"It's highly classified, but since you asked so nicely—I set the record for making hardship trips home."

There. He had managed to laugh at himself, if nervous laughter counted; maybe he wasn't utterly losing his grip on who and what he was. It still amounted



The History Museum, Great Falls, Montana



The History Museum, Great Falls, Montana

The army established headquarters for the Seventh Ferrying Command at Ladd Field (opposite) in Fairbanks, Alaska, where Lieutenant Smirnov and interpreter Elaina Markova (left) inspect the underbelly of a Douglas A-20. Under the Lend-Lease program, the Seventh Ferrying Command adapted U.S. aircraft to Soviet standards and shuttled them to Alaska. From Alaska, Russian pilots flew the planes to the Russian front. The painter (below) is adding the Soviet red star to a C-47 military plane in the East Base shop.

to too much hardship, though. *Compassionate leave. Vic wouldn't have had any trouble laughing over that, poor buddy—I get the leave and he's stuck with the compassion and a folded flag in what's left of his lap.*

"Can't ever get used to the size of that stadium," he heard come his way, the wheeze in that observation alerting him to its source. Always wary of this sort of thing, he kept on staring out his side of the bus, as if the remark was an announcement the bus driver routinely offered up at this point on the route.

"Big old sister, ain't she," the driver persisted. "They don't build 'em like that anymore."

For a few seconds longer, Ben carried on pretending that the remark had been addressed to everyone on the bus, or for that matter, to passengers immortal. Then, as he had known he would, he pulled his gaze away from the dominating smokestack and turned it to a very different landmark coming up, the mammoth Treasure State University stadium. The other Great Falls industry, football.⁴

He felt his throat dry out. If the pair of years since were any evidence, he was in danger of unwanted conversation about TSU's fabled 1941 team until his last day on earth. But this time, thanks be, he lucked out. The bus driver had given up on him. Better than that, evidently had not recognized him.

Alert all the way to his fingertips now, Ben leaned forward and studied the big stadium and its Romanesque hauteur almost as if he had never played there. The art deco golden eagles, wingtip to wingtip up there around the entire edifice. The colosseum



Malmstrom Air Force Base Museum, Great Falls, Montana

archways that funneled in the biggest crowds in the state's history, to watch the unbeatable '41 team. The perimeter of flagpoles around the entire top of the stadium, like unlit candles on a giant birthday cake. Not for the first time he took in each morsel of detail in writerly fashion, digesting them for the script. *If I can ever get the damned thing written at all.* It had been, what, half a year since he last did this, but he was finding that all of it gripped him as tenaciously as ever. The team's story, his, Jake's, Dexter's, the rest of the unique starting eleven. More than ever now, Vic's story; Quick Vic, most slippery runner in the conference, leaving after practice every afternoon to walk back to the Indian shacktown on Hill 57 over there. Bruno's story, everlasting bastard as football coach; and Loudon's, ruthless bastard as sports-writer. Under and over all the others, Merle Purcell's story, the most famous substitute who never played

a game: the twelfth man's story. The story coded somehow there in the white alphabet, those painted rocks arranged into the huge letters TSU, stairstep-style, high on the side of the butte that loomed over the stadium; the Letter Hill. The mental camera in Ben moved across it all with deliberation, panning the scene for the screen, until at last the bus reached the highway and veered northward.

He patted the typewriter case on the seat beside him, which he had refused to yield to the bus driver. Maybe in these next few days he would be able to steal a bit of time in his father's office to work on the script. Although even there, the world of war was always in the way. It was in the way of everything.

Bill Reinking had missed out on war—younger than wanted in the first worldwide one, old enough to be ignored in this one—but he knew the caliber of a war story when he saw one.

"Quite the piece you did on those pilots," he was saying with professional gruffness. "It should have people all over the country burning their tongues on their coffee in the morning." He plucked a *Gleaner* off the top of the mailing pile and pitched it to his son. "I gave it three columns of page five. More than I gave myself, I'll have you know."

"I was hoping that'd be in. Christ, they held it long enough." Ben rattled the newspaper open, and the headline his father had put on the piece all but hit him in the face: RAINBOW OF PLANES FROM MONTANA TO RUSSIA.⁵

Hastily he read his lead to make sure it had survived—*The pulse of war can be felt the minute you step onto East Base, a former buffalo prairie on the sunrise edge of Great Falls, where the ground vibrates under you not from eternal stampede but modern 12-piston fighter plane engines*—and skimmed on down, holding his breath. Of all the perplexities that went with a TPWP byline, the most constant was the red pencil of the invisible copy officer back in Washington. Censor, really. Inimical to logic. After a year and a half of this, Ben was as mystified as ever by the inner workings of the Threshold Press War Project, what was let past and what wasn't. He full well understood that the name was meant to invoke the doorstep homefront, the breadbasket America served by mid-size dailies and small-town weeklies such as his father's; the vital breakfast table readership, with its sons and daugh-

ters in the war. But it never left his mind for long that a threshold also was where people wiped their feet on something.

Not this time. The cherished name, the bit about the ringless hands at the P-39 controls, all that was still in there. *Foxed the bastard. Can't every time, but—*

His father had been watching in surprise. It wasn't like Ben to nuzzle his own prose. "Maybe I had better go through that piece again myself. What did you sneak in there, an invitation to neck on the bus?"

"Bad business, giving away a trade secret to an editor," Ben intoned, his expression saying he couldn't wait to. "My minder back at Tepee Weepy went for a decoy. I threw in a graf about Red stars over Montana, and he cut that clean as a whistle." He described to his father the East Base paint shop where the giant red stars of the Soviet Union were sprayed on the wings and fuselages of new bombers and fighter planes before they were delivered north. "No way they'd ever let that graf stand, I figured, and maybe I'd get away with the rest of the piece. It worked out."⁶

"Shame on you," said his father, reaching for a pencil and paper. "I don't suppose you'd remember that particular paragraph?"

Ben recited it as his father jotted. When he was done, the older man sighed. "I'll need to be a little careful with this. Probably half the county thinks there's a Red star on me, I wrote so many editorials in favor of Lend-Lease."

"You and Franklin D. got it, you clever devils," Ben's voice imitated newsreel pomposity. "Two hundred planes to our noble Soviet allies last month. Three hundred a month by the end of the year, if East Base doesn't freeze up solid."

Bill Reinking cocked his head. "Should you be telling me all this, Lieutenant?"

Ben wasn't listening. Eyes down into a certain section of the newspaper piece, he was back in the world of pilots.

The sparse crossroads called Vaughn Junction was only the first stop, barely out of sight of Great Falls, but he had piled off right behind the bus driver anyway. This was the one part of the journey home he had been looking forward to.

While the mailbag was being dealt with, he



U.S. Air Force

The U.S. Army recruited experienced women pilots to transport planes within the U.S. More than one thousand women flew for the Army Air Force in two women's aviator units that quickly merged into a single group, the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). Some of these women, like the character Cass Standish, ferried planes to Great Falls. Among them was Betty Gillies (left), the first woman to qualify for the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), which became part of WASP.

stretched his legs in the parking lot by the roadhouse. A slow little conciliatory smile worked its way onto his extensive face as he thought about the other times here, with her. A laugh helplessly followed the smile. At least there was one thing new about this trip: Cass, coming out of the blue to him.

Checking his wristwatch, he kept scanning the sky to the west. First snow had only brushed the tops of the Rockies yet; a bit of hope there, maybe, that the weather would hold off during his leave. He moved around restlessly, his shadow in lengthened antics behind him as he faced into the afternoon sun. The air was good, out here in the grassland beyond the reach of the smelter stack, and he savored it while he watched the sky and waited. Whether it was football or what, he had always greatly loved these blue-and-tan days of the crisp end of October.

Something else he greatly loved became just visible over the mountains now—at least one military saying turned out to be right, it took a pilot's eyes to see other pilots. Here they came, right on the button. The four specks in the sky, factory-new fighter planes incoming on the hop from Seattle. The unmistakable dart-nosed silhouette of P-39s; Airacobras, in the virulent military method of naming aircraft types.

Ben felt his heart race; another expression that was validated now that he had met Cass. In the month since his fresh set of orders landed him at East Base and the Air Transport Command, he had seen this half a dozen times now, Cass and her WASP squadron ferrying in the sleek gray fighters. Planes poured into East Base from three directions for the Lend-Lease transit onward to Alaska and Russia, but the run from Seattle was all Cass's.

Again this time, he watched hungrily as the Cobras cut through the clear sky, high overhead. From what she had told him, when the flying weather was good this last leg of the route was a snap, the turbulent peaks of the Rockies abruptly dropping behind past the Continental Divide and unmistakable guideposts abundant on the prairie ahead—the Sun River, the grand Missouri, and for that matter, the Black Eagle smokestack. His imagination soared up there with her, her cat-quick hands on the controls, her confident wiry body in the tight-fit cockpit of the lead P-39.

She had not told him this part yet, but by asking around the air base he'd learned Cass Standish also had a reputation for bringing in her flights safely no matter what the weather or visibility. ("She can navigate in zero visibility like a wild-ass Eskimo," a crusty tower officer had provided the apt quote, although Ben had to clean it up.) He stirred up inside just thinking of it. For the life of him, he could not see why the Women Air Force Service Pilots were not allowed to deliver the P-39s, and for that matter the B-17 bombers and anything else that flew, onward north to the waiting Russian pilots in Alaska. In a saner world, where his TPWP minder in Washington wondrously would not exist, his piece about the flying women of East Base would outright say that. Getting something like that across between the lines was becoming a specialty of his.⁷

Still mesmerized, he stood in the parking lot with his hands in the pockets of his flight jacket and yearned up at the fighter planes as only a grounded pilot can. Beyond that, much beyond that, he yearned for Cass. How many kinds of lust were there? The night before last, the two of them had been in a cabin in back of that roadhouse over there, uniforms cast off and forgotten, romantic maniacs renting by the hour. The whispered prattle of love talk, after: "So it's true what they say about redheads." "I'm wrongly accused. It's ginger, not red." "Ginger? That's a spice.

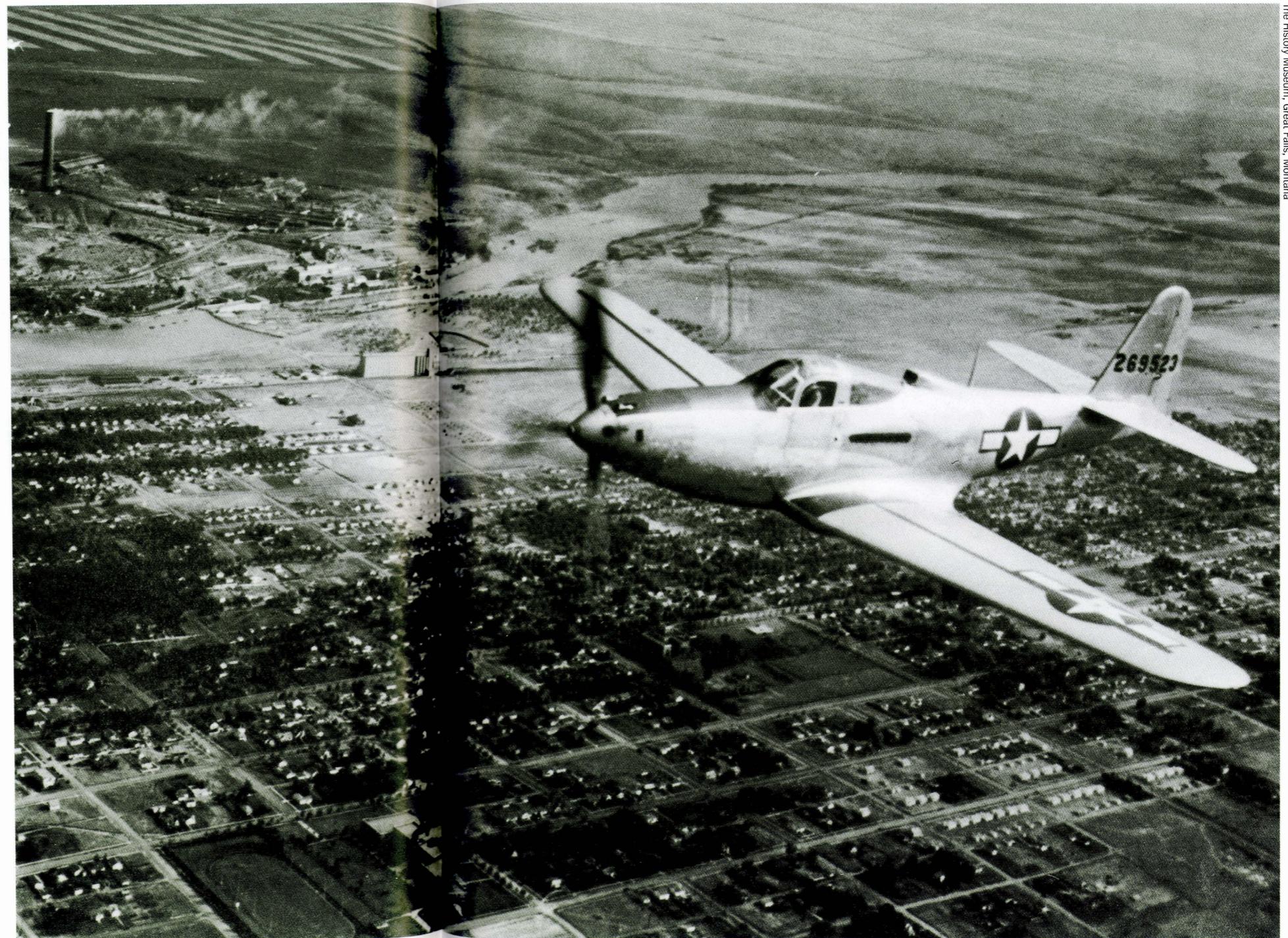
Right, one of the Seventh Ferrying Command's P-63 Kingcobras flies over Great Falls with the Missouri River and the Black Eagle smelter's smokestack in the background. The P-39 Airacobra flown in the story was redesigned by the manufacturer Bell Aircraft Corporation as the P-63 to address shortcomings of the earlier model.

No wonder." Now, for one wild instant he wished Cass would peel off out of the formation and buzz the roadhouse and him at an airspeed of four hundred miles an hour in tribute to that night and its delirious lovemaking.

That was hoping for too much. The flight swept over with a roar, the P-39s as perfectly spaced as spots on a playing card. Watching them glint in the sun as they diminished away toward East Base, Ben jammed

his fists deeper into his pockets. As quickly as the planes were gone, frustration filled him again. He drew a harsh breath. He knew perfectly well he was thinking about these matters more than was healthy, but it stuck with him day and night anymore, the overriding hunch that for him the war's next couple of years—and, who knew, the next couple after that, and after that—might go on and on as his first two years of so-called service had, yanking him away on

noncombatant assignment to some shot-up corner of the world and then depositing him back here for this kind of thing, time after time. And, worst part, Cass always out of reach. At this rate, he could foresee with excruciating clarity, her letters to him would add up to a string-tied packet in the bottom of his duffel bag. Somewhere in New Guinea there would be a similar packet, wherever her soldier husband chose to tuck them.



The History Museum, Great Falls, Montana



Only male pilots flew the Montana-Alaska leg taking Lend-Lease planes to the Russians, but women brought many of the planes into Great Falls from U.S. factories and other air bases. Nancy Batson Crews, seen here modeling winter flight gear in her billet at a Great Falls hotel, was another WASP whose service brought her to Montana.

and sometimes he didn't, but either way he dreamed of Cass and more Cass.

"Don't let me interrupt your enjoyment of great literature," the imperative note in his father's voice snapped him out of his absorption in the version of her he had put into newsprint. "But I have to get back at it." Bill Reinking indicated toward the job shop and the table where the addressograph waited. "Had any supper? There's some macaroni salad and fried chicken left."

Ben looked at the bucket supper from the Lunchery down the street, then back at his father.

"Your mother is in Valier," came the explanation. "Play rehearsal. They're doing *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and she couldn't pass up Lady Bracknell, could she?"

"Can't imagine it," Ben conceded in the same deliberately casual tone his father had used. "Let me get some chicken in me, then I'll take over on the addresser, how about?"

"No, that's fine," his father spoke hastily, "I'm used to this by now. You can help wrap when I get to that." Turning away, he started up the addressograph again and, a sound his son had grown up on, the name-and-address plates began clattering through like metal poker chips as each alphabetical stack of half a dozen was fed in. Ben left him to it and moved toward the other end of the worktable to put together a semblance of supper. He still felt off-balance about being back amid the comfortable inky clutter of the newspaper office after so much military life. Food would be a good idea, even the Lunchery's.

He was reaching into the meal bucket when he heard a lapse in the addressing machine's rhythmic slap-slap on the wrappers. Out the corner of his eye he watched his father quickly palm a subscription plate off the stack he was working with and slip it into his pants pocket. Ben frowned. His father always chucked aside any discards into a coffee can, there by

Lovesick. Try as he would, he could not clear away the relentless feeling. Whoever stuck those two words together was a hell of a diagnostician. An incurable case of Cassia Standish he was definitely suffering from, its symptoms rapture and queasiness simultaneously. *Vic would think I've gone off my rocker.* Getting himself involved with someone married. Not just married: married to khaki. No surer way to risk loss of rank and beyond that, dishonorable discharge, the Section Eight "deemed unfit to serve" bad piece of paper, him and her both. *Sometimes I think I've gone off my rocker.* "My, my," Cass had kidded him, reaching out naked from bed the other night to stroke that new silver bar on his uniform and meanwhile leering at him as effectively as Hedy Lamarr ever did at a leading man. "What's next, a Good Conduct medal?" *Not hardly.*

"Ready to hit the road if you are, Lieutenant." The bus driver had come up behind him, sounding curious about what kept a man standing in a roadhouse parking lot watching planes go over. Ben clambered back on and reclaimed his seat. He leaned against the window and shut his eyes to wait out all the road miles yet before home. Sometimes he dozed

the addressograph for that purpose, until there were enough to be dumped into the linotype melt pot.

"Hey," Ben called softly. "I saw that." He held out his hand for the discard. "Gimme, gimme, my name is Jimmy."

His father stood frozen there with his hand still in his pocket.

"Dad? What's up?"

A stricken expression came over the older man. "I—I didn't want you to come across this one in the wrappers. Ben, I'm sorry if—"

He handed the flat little piece of metal to his son as if it were a rare coin. Flipping it over to the raised side, Ben instantly spelled out the inverted letters of type. Reading backward was a skill that came with growing up in a newspaper office, and right then he wished he didn't have it.

VICTOR RENNIE CPL. SERIAL #20929246
C Co., 26TH REGIMENT, 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION
c/o U.S. ARMY OVERSEAS POST OFFICE
NEW YORK, N. Y.

Confounded, he stared at his father. "How'd you already know it's Vic? They sit on the names until I—" He gestured futilely.

"I didn't, really." Bill Reinking's face was at odds with his words. "If it turned out to be some other reason you're here, I was going to hand-address this one at the post office."

Ben swallowed hard. Tonelessly he told his father what had happened to Vic Rennie in the minefield in the Sicilian countryside.

Bill Reinking blanched; two years of hardening from handling war news didn't help with this. It had to be asked:

"Everybody else—?"

"All accounted for, Dad, relax. I checked this morning." As he did every morning. Day by day he knew exactly where each one of them was, in the world of war. It was his job to know.

Carl Friessen in New Guinea.

Jake Eisman piloting at East Base.

Animal Angelides on a Marine troop ship.



Malmstrom Air Force Base Museum, Great Falls, Montana

Women on the ground also contributed to the war effort. Above, a female maintenance crew works on engines and fuselage in the final processing hangar at the Great Falls base in June 1945.

Sig Prokosch patrolling a shore in the Coast Guard.

Moxie Stamper bossing an anti-aircraft gun pit in England.

Nick Danzer on the destroyer U.S.S. *McCorkle* in the Pacific.

Dexter Cariston at the camp that was not supposed to be mentioned.

Stanislaus Havel and Kenny O'Fallon in graves under military crosses.

And Vic, whose chapter of the war had to be put to rest with this journey.

Every soldier, in the course of time, exists only in the breath of written words. The gods that govern saga have always known that. There were times Bill Reinking stood stock-still in this newspaper office, hardly daring to breathe, as he tore open the week's Threshold Press War Project packet and pawed through the drab handouts until he spotted the words *The "Supreme Team" on the Field of Battle . . . by Lt. Ben Reinking*. It awed him each time, Ben's unfolding epic of them, impeccably told. Taken together, they amounted to an odd number—eleven—whose combined destiny began one afternoon in 1941 on a wind-blown football field, and from there swirled away into the fortunes of war. Montana boys, all, grown into something more than gridiron heroes. One by one, the Treasure State teammates—the much-heralded entire varsity now enlisted one way or another—were individuals rehearsing for history, in newsprint across America. The one with the TPWP patch on his shoulder, with the mandate from somewhere on high to write of them all, now pocketed away the dog tag-sized piece of metal cold in his fingers, as his father wordlessly watched.⁸

The leaden arithmetic was not anything Ben could put away. "Two dead and Vic a cripple, how's that for being a 'chosen' team? If this keeps on, we can play six-man."

Instantly he wanted that choice of words back. *That's what gave us Purcell. Does it all start there?* Not a one of the '41 starters came up out of six-man football, but Merle Purcell had, the newcomer from nowhere who met his doom in eleven-man. Two years hadn't made any of it less raw on the nerves. Fast and skittery as an antelope, Purcell materialized from some tiny high school out in the sagebrush where they played six-man, which was pretty much

a cross between football and hundred-yard dash, and given a chance on the scrub team he ran circles around the Treasure State varsity in practice until he would poop out. And subsequently ran himself to death on the Letter Hill trying to toughen up enough for the TSU merciless steamroller brand of football. To this day Purcell was there in Ben's mind's eye, in the script ingredients, struggling up the giant slope to the white rocks after practice and even on his own on weekends; strange jinxed kid who by the miracle of modern sports mongering had been made to live on as the inspirational "twelfth man" of the perfect season. Ben knew it wasn't fair, he had barely known Purcell, but the interior truth was that he would not have traded a dozen of him, or any like him, for Vic Rennie.

"Son." Bill Reinking did not use that word much in the presence of the tall man in uniform across the table from him. "I know you're having it rough, the whole bunch of you, but—"

"Never mind." He looked over at his father, the shielding eyeglasses, the oblique composure. *This won't do. We skimp past this every time.* "This is getting to me, Dad," he huskily spoke the necessary. "You have anything to do with it?"

"I wouldn't be much of a newspaper editor if I didn't point out that's an indefinite pronoun."

"Don't hand me that, you know as well as I do what I mean. This haywire assignment they've got me on. Anybody you happen to know happen to be behind it, just for instance?"

His father's tone turned dry again. "I assume you mean the Senator. Just because I throw the awesome weight of the *Gleaner* behind him every six years doesn't mean we're in bed together. I would remind you, the Senator didn't want anything to do with this war—the only side he wanted us on is Switzerland's."

"Then is it Mother's doing?" The words exploded from Ben with a force that shook both men. The level of his voice came down but his vehemence did not. "Did she talk some old family friend in Beverly Hills into picking up the phone and calling Robert Sherwood or Elmer Davis or Jesus D. Christ in the White House himself and say, 'Guess what, there's somebody I'd like to see grounded and stay glued to a typewriter for the next dozen years or the end of the war, whichever comes first.' Well? Did she?"⁹

"Ben, will you kindly quit? Unlike you, your mother and I are a bit grateful you're not stationed somewhere getting shot to pieces." His father took off his glasses and polished the lenses clean with the page of a torn *Gleaner*; only window-washers and newspapermen knew that stunt. "To answer you for once and all, though—we know better than to pull strings for you, even if we had any. You made that clear to us long ago." Bill Reinking went on in a milder tone. "I hate to bring up a remote possibility, but just maybe you were picked out for this because you're the natural person for it."

"You don't know how the military works," Ben scoffed. But there was no future in arguing his TPWP servitude with his father, not tonight. "Speaking of that." He reeled off what he needed for his trip out of town in the morning.

"I wish we'd known," dismay took over his father's voice. "Your mother has been putting on the miles, these rehearsals—"

"Never mind. Dad, don't look like that, it's all right. I know where I can always get it."

His father sighed. "We both know that. Why don't you go tend to it before he closes for the night? Then you can give me a lift home so I can ride in style for a change."

Ben walked briskly two blocks up the street and stepped into the Medicine Lodge. The saloon was as quiet as if empty, but it was never empty at this time of night. Inert as doorstops, at the far end of the bar sat a bleary pair of shepherders he recognized—Pat Hoy from the Withrow ranch, and the other had a nickname with a quantity of geography attached. Canada Dan, that was it. Puffy with drink but not falling-down drunk, the two evidently were winding down a usual spree after the lambs were shipped, when there was half a year's wages to blow. Ever conscious of his uniform, Ben had a flash of thought that except for polar explorers, these befogged old herders off alone in their sheep wagons somewhere would have been about the last people to hear of the war, back in December of 1941. It did not seem to be foremost on their minds now, either, as they and a third occupant in the saloon expectantly looked down the bar in Ben's direction like connoisseurs of the tints of money.

"Damn, look who's here," Tom Harry spoke from behind the bar. Ben was beginning to wonder why the sight of him made people mention damnation. "You're back again, huh? I thought you'd be up in an aereoplane someplace winning the war single-handed, Reinking."

"Nice to see you again too, Tom." With a ghost of a smile, Ben patted his way along the rich polished wood of the bar as if touching it for luck. The Medicine Lodge was not much changed since his high school Saturdays of wrestling beer kegs and emptying spittoons and swamping the place out with broom and mop. "Saturday night buys the rest of the week, kid," Tom Harry would always say as he paid Ben his dollar or so of wages. Hundreds of such nights produced a saloon that by now had a crust of decor as rigorous as a museum's. Stuffed animal heads punctuated every wall; the one-eyed buffalo in particular was past its prime. The long mirror in back of the bar possessed perhaps a few more age spots of tarnish than when Ben had been in charge of wiping it down, and the immense and intricate oaken breakfront that framed it and legions of whiskey bottles definitely had more dust. Still pasted to the mirror on either side of the cash register were the only bits of notice taken of the twentieth century: a photo of Tom Harry's prior enterprise, the Blue Eagle saloon in one of the Fort Peck Dam project's hard-drinking boomtowns, and a 1940 campaign poster picturing President Roosevelt so cheerily resolute for a third term that it would have made any Republican cringe.

Taking all this in, for the narrowest of moments Ben could almost feel he had never been away from it. Illusions had to be watched out for. He got down to business, which meant Tom Harry. "Do you still sell beverages in this joint or just stand around insulting the customers?"

The sole proprietor and entire staff of the Medicine Lodge glanced to the far end where the raggedy shepherders were gaping hopefully in Ben's direction. "Hard to do, on some of them. What can I get you?"

"Whatever's on tap," Ben said before it registered on him that he was home now, he didn't need to nurse away the evening on beer. "No, wait, something with a nip to it—an old-fashioned, how about." *Still in the mood, Cass.* The other night in the roadhouse when they were priming themselves by playing coma

In *The Eleventh Man*, Ben's gridiron teammates served all over the globe, as did thousands of Montanans. According to *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, "Montana contributed more than its share of military manpower—roughly forty thousand men by 1942—and the state's death rate in the war was exceeded only by New Mexico's."



USS Enterprise photographer, National Archives and Records Administration

Several real Montana sailors fought aboard the battleship USS *Indiana* seen at left en route to the Marshall Islands, between Hawai'i and the Philippines, on January 28, 1944. Montana's 163rd Regiment of the 41st Infantry saw fierce combat in the jungles of New Guinea. Here a LST (Landing Ship, Tank) drops soldiers of the 163rd ashore on the "Little island 400 yds from Wakde—[Netherlands] Dutch, N.G., in background." The photographer also noted, "Our own artillery got 17 of our men with tree bursts this night."



Courtesy Stan Cohen, Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, Missoula

MHS Photograph Archives, Pac 85-63 7111

Hubert "Hub" Zemke (above left) of Missoula became an ace pilot in the skies over Europe.



Roy Wenger, photographer, permission courtesy Lillian Wenger, photograph courtesy Mark Matthews

At Camp Paxson on Seeley Lake, conscientious objectors trained as smoke jumpers to do their war service fighting forest fires.

cola roulette—each buying the other some unlikely concoction off the mixed drinks list before adjourning to the cabin for the night—she'd wickedly ordered him up one of these, saying it might put him in the mood for an old-fashioned pilot like her. Now he dug into his wallet. "Give the choirboys a round. Catch yourself, too."

"Thanks, I'll take mine in the register. Save you the tip." Schooners of beer flew down the bar, the whiskey and paradoxical bitters and sugar were magically mixed, Ben watching fascinated as ever at the skill in those hands. Tom Harry could never be cast as a bartender, he decided. He overfilled the part. The slicked-back black hair, the blinding white shirt, the constant towel that swabbed the bar to a gleam. The peerless saloonkeeper scowled now in the direction of the sheepherders, which seemed to make them remember their manners. In one voice they quavered a toast to Ben: "Here's at you."

With that tended to, the man behind the bar put his towel to work on the trail of the glass after he slid it to Ben. "Just get in?"

"Hour ago."

"Been places, I hear."

"They ship me around, some."

"Gonna be anybody left on the face of the earth when this war gets done?"

During this the sheepherders conferred in mumbles. Celebrating their largesse of beer, the two were counting out their pooled small change, pushing the coins together with shaky forefingers. "Barkeep?" Canada Dan cleared his throat importantly. "You got any of them jellied eggs?"

"Jesus, gourmets," Tom Harry muttered, carrying the briny crock of preserved boiled eggs down the length of the bar along with his disgust. While the egg transaction dragged on, Ben quietly sipped and gazed past the reflections in the plate glass window to downtown Gros Ventre at night. The civil old trees. His father's newspaper office, still alight down the street, another timeless pillar of the town. On the next block beyond the *Gleaner*, the Odeon theater where teenaged Ben Reinking every Saturday night of his life stayed on through the second show—the "owl show" at nine that repeated the feature movie for a tardy gathering of drunks, late-arriving lovers, and insomniacs—to dissect how the makers of movies made them. Centralities of his growing up here,

those, along with the one where he sat now. He knew there was no denying the influence of bloodline, but by quite a number of the readings he could take on his life so far, Gros Ventre and the Two Medicine country, out there in the dark, served as a kind of parentage too. Whatever he amounted to, this was where it came from.

The keeper of the bar returned, still wagging his head over the jellied egg binge. Ben twirled his glass indicatively on the dark wood. "Any more of this in the well?"

"The war must be teaching you bad habits," Tom Harry grumbled as he mixed the refill.

"Speaking of those." Ben watched for a reaction, but could see none. Standing there lightly swishing the towel, the saloonman showed no sign he had ever been acquainted with practices such as providing working quarters for prostitutes, bootlegging, and, now with the war, operating in at least gray margins of the black market. "Here's what it is. I need a car and a bible of gas coupons."

"Where you think you're gonna drive to with those—Paris, France, to get laid?"

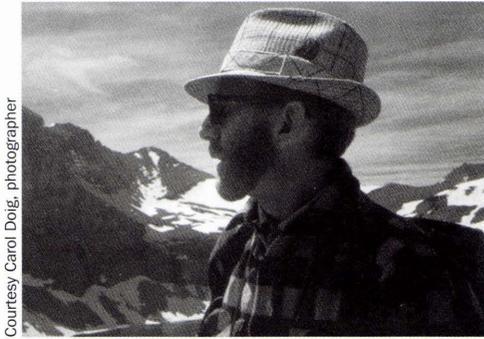
"You ought to know. Probably all over hell, but I'll start at the Two Medicine."

The uncomprehending look on his listener was a reminder that not all of the world knew about Vic, at least yet. He again told what the minefield had done.

"What a hell of a thing to go through life like that." Eyes reflective, Tom Harry wiped slowly at the bar wood after Ben told him. "Knew that kid since he was a pup." He flicked a look at Ben. "Weren't you here for funerals the last couple of times?"

Ben gulped more of his drink than he'd intended, unsteadied by having something like that attached to him. O'Fallon's and Havel's, those were. The mouthy mick left guard and the taciturn baby-faced center. Tepee Weepy wanted every drop of drama from the Supreme Team; it had sent the Pulitzer judges his piece about the Butte slum wake held for O'Fallon. He hadn't even liked O'Fallon.

How much does history rehearse? he had to wonder. The first funeral of all was Purcell's. The entire team in that tumbleweed hometown cemetery. Coach Bruno piously delivering the eulogy into the radio microphone at graveside. Didn't it set the pattern, the team's every movement on the airwaves and in the headlines from then until—



Courtesy Carol Doig, photographer

So starts Ivan Doig's saga of eleven Montana teammates whose lives are caught in the vortex of the Second World War. The author is shown at Logan Pass in Glacier National Park in 1977 during one of the research trips that led first to *This House of Sky* and then his Montana trilogy, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, *English Creek*, and *Ride with Me, Mariah Montana*.

All at once he realized Tom Harry still was eyeing him speculatively.

"There's a war on," he managed to say evenly. "Things happen to people."

"Must get kind of old, is all I'm saying." The bartender slung the towel aside. "Drink up. The Packard is out back."

The long black car, its grandeur a bit faded from ten years of imaginative use, seemed to fill half the alley behind the saloon. Ben circled the streamlined old thing as Tom Harry stood by, proprietorially. "How are the tires?"

"What do you think?" the Packard's beset guardian barked. "Thin as condom skin. Here, throw these in the trunk." He rummaged in the shed room piled high with amazing items that Medicine Lodge customers with more thirst than cash had put up as collateral, and rolled two spare tires toward Ben.

"Reinking." Tom Harry tossed him the keys to the car, then the packet of gas ration coupons. "Tell Toussaint for me I'm sorry his grandkid got it that way. If you can find the old coyote."

Ivan Doig was born in Montana in 1939 and grew up along the Rocky Mountain front. He is the author of eleven books, including *Prairie Nocturne*, *The Whistling Season*, and *This House of Sky*. He lives in Seattle. *The Eleventh Man* will be released by Harcourt Books in October 2008. Copyright © 2008 by Ivan Doig.

The Story inside the History

PUTTING ON THE UNIFORM of your country and submitting your life to a war's blind chances of who lives and who dies is one of the most powerful experiences a person can have. I grew up around men, and a few women, of World War II in Meagher County, Montana; by the count of the weekly newspaper there, 273 served in that war, out of a population of 2,237 in the 1940 census. One of my uncles had been a torpedo man on a destroyer in the Pacific, another was among the Montana National Guard contingent sent to New Guinea, and in the saloons where my father did the hiring for his ranch crews were regular patrons who had been in the thick of the war; and of course there were the gaps in families and the community left by those killed in the war. So, even then there was a hovering sense of the war's great toll on Montana.

When my turn came, my own military service as Sergeant Doig was not in combat, but at the edge of war's dice throw: as a U.S. Air Force reservist on active duty during the Cuban missile crisis, and later narrowly missing assignment to Vietnam. The military version of fate, then, has been part of my own life and naturally works its powers in my writing. In my Montana trilogy, characters go to both world wars and Vietnam as a matter of course, and it was probably when I was gathering material for my book about my own family's World War II experience, *Heart Earth*, that I lucked onto some mention of a Montana college football team that had all gone into the war, with terrible loss. I saw in that the storyline for a novel: what if you were the eleventh man, trying to dodge as fate closed in on that team, one by one?

As ever, in this book I generate my fiction from historical set points—in this case the pivotal war years 1943–44—while making up my plot and people. Thus, within the wilder boundaries of my imagination I still abide by historical laws of gravity, researching events and details to the best of my Ph.D.-in-history ability. But delving into oral history accounts, memoirs, military unit histories, and the like is just that, delving. The constant is the crafting of the language, the telling of a story in a way no one has ever heard told before. "Fiction lives by the energy of its prose," the novelist Thomas Flanagan boiled it down to. I couldn't agree more.

—IVAN DOIG

NEW FICTION: Ivan Doig's 'The Eleventh Man'

MONTANA

MAGAZINE

September | October 2008

DISAPPEARING ACT

PARK'S NAMESAKE GLACIERS
ARE RAPIDLY VANISHING

Mike Van Diest Creates Carroll College Football Dynasty

The Artful Carver: Lincoln's Rick Rowley

An Autumn Float Down the Yellowstone River



The Eleventh Man

BY IVAN DOIG

INTRODUCTION BY BUTCH LARCOMBE



Photos courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service

Ivan Doig lives in Seattle. But it's pretty clear that the writer has Montana on his mind much of the time.

Born in White Sulphur Springs, Doig grew up along Montana's wild and spectacular Rocky Mountain Front. Life along the Front inspired the characters and storylines for *English Creek* and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, the first two of Doig's fictional Two Medicine trilogy. Those novels, coupled with the nonfiction *This House of Sky*, helped Doig carve a reputation as one of Montana's best-known writers.

What follows is an excerpt from his newest novel, *The Eleventh Man*, set for release in October. The story is set at East Base in Great Falls during World War II, where Ben Reinking is stationed as part of his military service with the Threshold Press War Project. Along with becoming involved with a female pilot helping to ferry U.S.-built aircraft to Russia, Reinking has been assigned to chronicle the war experiences of his football teammates from Treasure State University.

This slice of the story takes Reinking to Seeley Lake, where he finds teammate Dexter Cariston stationed at a camp for conscientious objectors training to be smokejumpers.



The pods of parachutes opened prettily, one blossom of silk after another, cloudflowers against the blue field of sky overtopping Seeley Lake and the Mission Mountains beyond. Ben had just joined the large circle of jumpsuited men craning their necks upward; even so, his uniform and flight jacket drew slanted looks from corners of eyes. He knew he had to hold his temper against the automatic hostility here; guys in the situation of these had plenty to watch out for. A groan went through the group as a billow of dust whirled across the landing strip, where strips of canvas were crisscrossed—tent-pegged down so as not to blow away, Ben could not help but notice—into a prominent X. Carrying its mischief higher, the gusty ▶

wind caught the dozen chutes, dancing the dangling men sideways across the air as if they were dandelion seeds. The first jumper managed to land with a neat tuck and roll, which could not disguise the fact that he had missed the X by fifty yards. The chutists after him, sawing desperately at their lines, landed progressively farther and farther off the mark, until the last few were blown into the chokecherry bushes at the far end of the airstrip.

"God damn it," the grizzled foreman of the parachutist squad hollered at the windstrewn legion, "if you can't come any closer to the God damned target than that, you might as well have stayed in the God damned airplane!"

Wincing at the language, the camp director made his way through the canvas-clad younger men and steered Ben off to one side.

"Tough way to get to a spot," Ben spoke the measure of sympathy he felt for the jumpers. More than once on New Guinea he had seen fliers bail out of flaming planes and be swept behind Japanese lines by tropical easterlies. It seemed to him an unfair fate even for war.

The camp director smiled thinly. Solemnly hatted, with

silver showing at his temples and everlasting wrinkles in his thrush-brown suit, he looked like a parson. As Ben knew he was, of some kind.

"The U.S. Forest Service prefers to believe it can prevail over wind," there was a bit of pulpit in the voice. "Not to mention fire and terrain." The man was gazing at Ben as though he could see into him if he only were given time enough. "Their belief and ours have been made to coincide here, as we tell all our visitors."

Ben looked around. The Seeley Lake smokejumper camp was a mix, right enough, old Civilian Conservation Corps buildings together with fresh woodframe ones that somehow appeared more ecclesiastical than governmental. An obstacle course at one end of the layout was balanced off by a restful chapel at the other. The whole place did have the feel of discipline, but not the military kind. Here, he was uncomfortably aware, a war correspondent was the odd man out. Every man at this camp—aside from profane exceptions like the parachutist foreman in a forest ranger hat—was a conscientious objector. "Enlistees in alternative service" by official

jargon; "conchies" by rougher account. Somewhere in their number, conscientiously aloof from the fate-willed military brotherhood of the rest of the TSU football team, was Dexter Cariston.

Remember that hunting trip, Dex? I'd be ashamed to tell you, but I've thought many times how that could have come out different, and then this would have. If your rifle had gone off while we were climbing around up there in the rocks, the kind of thing that happens. Shot yourself in the foot—hell, just one toe—that would have done it. You'd have been safely out of the war and on into med school with nothing said, and I wouldn't be here trying to figure out how to lie about you in a couple of thousand newspapers.

The truth itself, in what he was seeing around him here, was strange enough. A pacifist camp born of wartime needs. Whoever ordained it, here the paradoxical project was in the tall woods of Montana, where the historic peace churches—Quakers, Mennonites, Church of the Brethren—were providing their able-bodied young men in place of other able-bodied young men conscripted for combat. And still were belittled for their pacifism; he regularly heard these rigorous noncombatants with parachute packs on their backs sneered at as draft-dodging yellow-bellies, notwithstanding that they were volunteering to tumble out of airplanes into worst mountain country to fight forest fires.

But where was the familiar husky form of Dex, in any of this? Up there in the jump plane doing wind calculations? Or hiding out when he saw the jeep with the stenciled U.S. ARMY AIR CORPS/EAST BASE pull in?

Ben's silent perusal of the camp was brought to a brisk end by the director. "What can I do for you, officer? I don't mean to be inhospitable, but the military is supposed to leave us alone."

"Preacher"—Ben had no idea on earth how to address a minister of these plain-collared denominations—"nothing would make me happier. I'm the palest imitation of 'military' you're ever apt to see, though. Only a pencil-pusher, sent around to write up several of my college buddies doing what they think their duty is. One of them thinks his is here with your bunch." I will now lead thee into temptation, parson. "You wouldn't mind seeing his standpoint splashed across most of this country's newspapers, would you?"

"Mysterious are the ways," the camp director granted, again smiling marginally. "Which member of our 'bunch' is this?"

Ben spoke the name, still searching the faces of the 60 or so smokejumpers arrayed on the airstrip as if Dex's familiar one had to be there.

"Ah, our Dexter," the ministerial timbre resounded. "He's in the boneyard, of course."

Everything within Ben, body and soul, turned over. Dex, dead, here in conchie Valhalla? How? There weren't odds steep enough to cover such a thing. The war killed O'Fallon and Havel a predictable way, on

Ben looked around. The Seeley Lake smokejumper camp was a mix, right enough, old Civilian Conservation Corps buildings together with fresh woodframe ones that somehow appeared more ecclesiastical than governmental ... The whole place did have the feel of discipline, but not the military kind ... Every man at this camp—aside from profane exceptions like the parachutist foreman in a forest ranger hat—was a conscientious objector. "Enlistees in alternative service" by official jargon; "conchies" by rougher account.



the battlefield, and claimed Vic Rennie's leg in the casual accounting on the margin of combat. But this lightning strike straight through any reasonable order of life onto Dexter Cariston in these peaceable woods—through the shock Ben tried in vain to make his voice work.

Nothing marred the camp director's. "You probably ought to hustle across there," he pleasantly indicated to the other side of the airstrip. "His shift is about over."

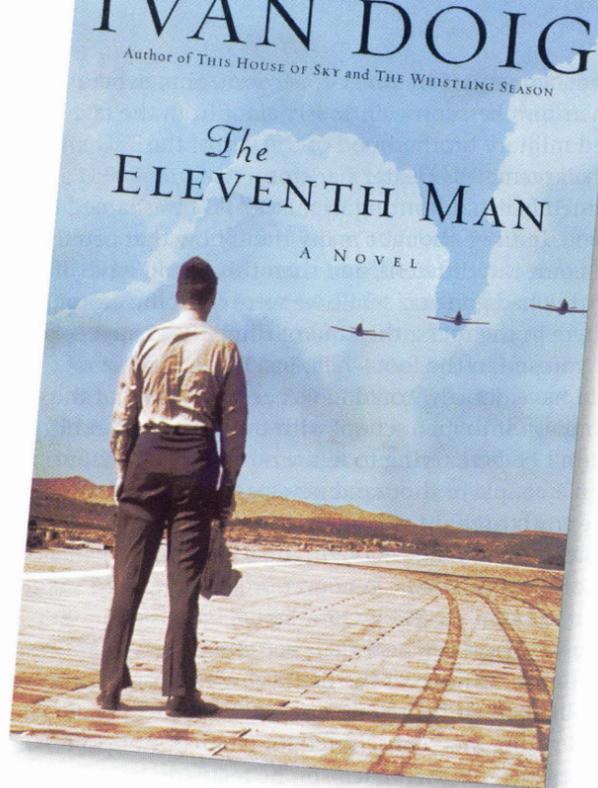
Then Ben saw it beyond the clustered smokejumpers, the low businesslike building with the mandatory red of a first-aid cross painted on its eave: the "boneyard," right. Broken ankles from hard landings, busted fingers and hands from banging into trees on the way down, those doubtless were the constants of an infirmary at a place like this. Relief pumped through him. Why didn't I guess, Dex? Follow the trail of bandages toward anything medical and there you'll be.

Taking quick leave of the director, Ben climbed back into the ragtop jeep Jones had requisitioned. He still felt somewhat guilty about dropping Jones outside Helena, all by his lonesome, to do the dreary photo shoot on

'Take your time, Dex, it's looking like a long war.'
Dex's twiddling of the microscope ceased for a bare instant, but his head did not budge from the eyepiece.
'They all are, Ben.'

military sled dogs and their earnest trainers, but not overly. Jones and everyone else had to be left out of this. The last thing in the world Tepee Weepy wanted made known was that one of its "Supreme Team" heroes was sitting out the war at a pacifist camp. For that matter, it was the last thing the others on the team, up to their necks in the armed struggle, would want to find out. As he drove around the end of the airstrip and pulled up to the infirmary, Ben found himself half hoping Dexter Cariston, marked down from dead, was in there on crutches with a fractured something-or-other; Injured in Training Camp was a story he could fiddle around with and not have to say just what kind of camp.

A cow bell clattered above the door as he stepped into the infirmary. Medical clutter was everywhere, shelves and tables of it. Over by a rack of crutches a single shabby desk sat unoccupied. Through a doorway toward the back, however, a sandy-haired figure could be seen bent over a microscope. "Be with you in a jiffy," came the glossed voice, as incongruous here as it was in a football huddle, "quick as I dispose of this strep culture."



"Take your time, Dex, it's looking like a long war."

Dex's twiddling of the microscope ceased for a bare instant, but his head did not budge from the eyepiece. "They all are, Ben."

Ben watched him deal with the glass slide beneath the lens, step out to the sink and soap up and wash as exquisitely as a surgeon—Dex had only to come into a room and the air grew rarefied—then with just a hairbreadth of hesitation arrive across the board floor with right hand extended. Handshakes are the last to go, Ben thought as their palms met. "Something tells me you're not here to fish famous Seeley Lake," Dex was saying in his easy way. Next, though, a held-in expression twitched across his sturdy Scotch face. "Hated to hear that about Vic. Always has had more than his share of hard luck, hasn't he."

The roar of engines drowned out anything Ben might have had to say about how luck was distributed. Landing briskly, a Ford Tri-Motor blasted up dust as it trundled along the airstrip toward the next set of parachute trainees. Dex moved to the window to watch as if it were his sworn duty, leaving Ben to join him or not. After a moment, he went over. What do I know about how they run this preachy outfit, maybe this is some kind of rite—they all worship the Tin Goose every takeoff. Whatever the foreman was hollering now at the chutists ducking aboard was lost in the plane's racket, but Ben would have bet significant money these next practice jumps would be closer to the mark. He turned and asked:

"I'm curious—how come you're not out there leaping into thin air with the rest of the smokies?"

"Don't think I didn't," Dex answered tightly, eyes still glued to the shuddering aircraft filling with jumpsuited men. "Twice. Both times I threw up in the face mask. Ever

try to steer a parachute into a forest of 100-foot Ponderosa pines with a faceful of vomit, Ben?" Consciously or not, Dex rubbed his mouth with the back of his thumb before managing to say: "They washed me out of jumper training. All the years of football and Bruno and his Letter Hill, and five minutes of bumpy air does me in. Isn't that a corker?"

That needed no affirmation. Dex had been the team's best natural athlete, elastic as a circus performer, comfortable on the field as a cavalier at a lawn party. And here he was, handing out crutches without even earning one. Ben glanced around the infirmary. "You're it, here? Doesn't this kind of setup need a medical staff?"

"The Rochester doctor I didn't get to be, you mean." They both laughed in their old way, briefly.

As if remembering his manners, Dex sobered and spoke as he turned from the window. "The way things are, doctors can't even begin to be everywhere they're needed. Not in the war, not here either. I'm the equivalent of a medic. I can splint a man up, shoot some morphine in him, until we can get him to the hospital in Missoula. If it's something besides bones and bruises," he shrugged, "there's a registered nurse here in town, comes in twice a week. Don't grin at me like that, Reinking. She's married."

Ben's grin went out like a light. He looked away, across postcard-perfect Seeley Lake to the summer cabins and rowboat docks spaced the distance of a flycast apart. The maintained forest along the shoreline stood sumptuous as fur trim, and even the hackles of brush looked scenic.

Peaceful sonofabitching place. Skipped over by the clock of war. Cass with a dozen red-hot pistons gobbling combustible aviation fuel at the back of her neck this very minute. Jake Eisman freezing his bodacious butt at the controls of a B-17 while wishing the Alaskan caribou far below were Germans in his bombsights. Carl Friessen in the utmost swamp of Hell that was New Guinea, dug in for another night in a stench-filled foxhole that he didn't dare leave even to take a crap. Every one of the team members in the actual war, those who were left, ticked through Ben's mind like split seconds on a stopwatch. He realized he was breathing harder than he should and tried to steady down, the antiseptic air of the infirmary not helping. What bugged him so much? Conscience wasn't priced by the pound, Dexter Cariston could have found simpler ways to stay the warless one of them all—the purr of money in his family could have taken care of that. Even so. "This does it for you?" the question shot out before he had time to tame it any. "Watching guys hop out of planes into trees? I'm really asking, Dex."

"I'm doing what I can to keep blood in people," the words came clipped, "instead of letting it out of them."

The superior tinge in that answer did it. Anguish went through Ben like a convulsion. There's more to know about blood than shows up in a microscope, you medical Jesus conchie! He stood there unsteady, momentarily mindblind, wondering whether he had screamed that in the frozen face of Dexter Cariston. **M**

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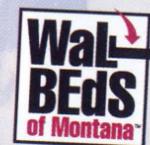


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