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CONQUERORS' *Road*

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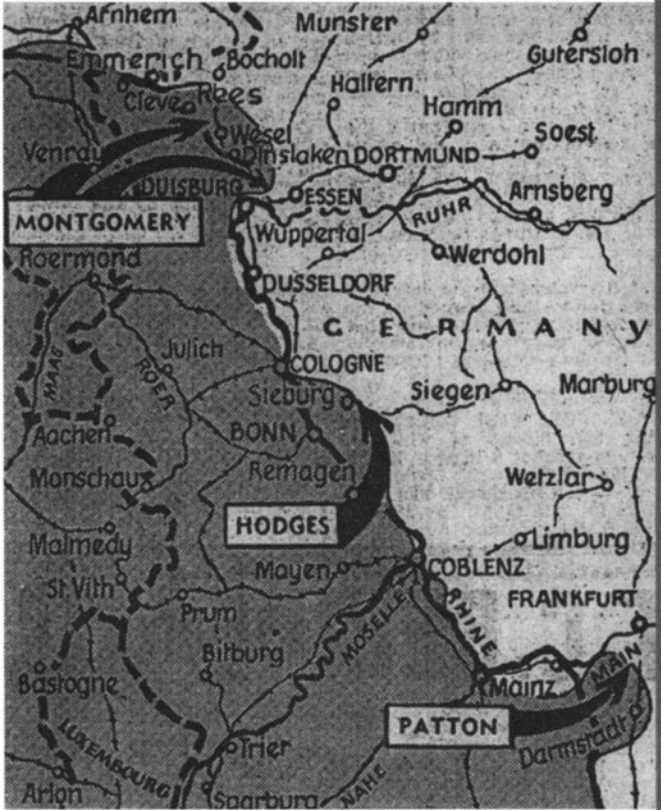
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For Jeremy, Pierz and Randal

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'Arrows show where Allied armies are thrusting deeply beyond the Rhine. Shaded area indicates the depth of the latest advances.'
 Map accompanying one of White's dispatches, 1945

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When the armor turned ~~west~~^{west} along the ~~western~~^{western} outfall
 from Hersfeld someone said; "Well, this is the concentra-
 camp country." True.

Weimar fall. A woman who claimed to have an Ameri-
 mother interpreted for the burgomaster when he was being
~~interviewed~~^{interviewed} after ~~the~~^{the} surrender. Later she answered quest-
 for the Press. In a shrill, superior voice she ~~harked~~^{harked}
~~about~~^{about} the little city's great cultural tradition, ~~and~~^{and} it
 claim to special consideration. ~~as~~^{as} the home of Go-
 Schiller and Liszt.

"Of course," she ~~said~~^{complained}, "your bombers always ~~managed~~
 managed to hit some cultural edifice!"

My billet was in a rich home near the park where Li-
 garden cottage stands. It was full of solid, comfortab-
 furniture. It had well stocked bookshelves, a garden
~~lovingly tended~~^{lovingly tended}. It seemed to have belonged
 an educated and reflective man -- a ~~stodgy~~^{stodgy} ~~man~~^{man} per-
 but one who used life's good things with decent moderat-

Over the bed in my room was a colored print of

Page from White's original manuscript

Editors' Note

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EDITORS' NOTE

At the end of *Green Armour*, his classic account of his experiences during the New Guinea Campaign, Osmar White describes how a 500-pound bomb struck the tank-landing ship on which he was leaving Rendova Harbour in the central Solomons. The four men standing beside him in the wheel-house were killed. 'Why these four men should have died and I live and walk, I do not know,' White wrote. 'But I know this. The living have the cause of the dead in trust. The cause of the dead was the defence of what they believed to be truth, justice and decency.'

White's words were not mere rhetoric. He believed wholeheartedly in the Allied cause in the Second World War. But he did not gloss over the failings of his own side. Despite tight military censorship, his dispatches from New Guinea exposed the Australians' inadequate training in jungle warfare. With ABC broadcaster Chester Wilmot and Department of Information cameraman Damien Parer he campaigned to get the army to adopt green uniforms. It was on his and Parer's advice that the US Army decided to camouflage its uniforms by dyeing them a mottled green. Yet when he ventured a strong opinion, it was based always on what he had observed as a reporter in the field, as both *Green Armour* and *Conquerors' Road* amply demonstrate.

Green Armour was written in Australia in late 1943 while White regained the use of his legs, shattered by the Japanese bomb. Clearly his days of jungle warfare were over but his boss at the *Herald & Weekly Times*, Sir Keith Murdoch, wanted him back in the field. By August 1944, White was in New York; in September he was in England, investigating British industry and the morale of the British people. By the first week in November, he had reached Paris and was sending dispatches from Supreme Allied Command in the liberated French capital.

Late in February 1945, he joined the United States Twelfth Army Group — which included the Third Army under George Patton — on the Western Front. He remained attached to the Third Army as it swept north and east through Germany.

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CONQUERORS' Road

Conquerors' Road is based on the notes and articles White wrote while covering those final months of war and the first months of the Allied occupation of Germany. Many of his European dispatches were picked up by British and American papers and enhanced his international reputation, a reputation largely based on the success of *Green Armour*, which had been enthusiastically received in both Britain and the United States.

As White explains in his 1983 introduction, *Conquerors' Road* too was at first well received by his British and American publishers. They listed it for publication in the northern spring of 1946 but then mysteriously cancelled publication without explanation. Consequently when he unearthed the manuscript in the early 1980s it was unedited. So, like any good professional, White revised and polished his work.

These revisions, however, posed some problems for his editors. Was he influenced in his assessments by the voluminous literature on the war and its aftermath that had appeared since the Armistice? After a careful examination of the original copy, the answer is 'no'.

White was able to retain the original tenor of *Conquerors' Road* so effortlessly because, unlike those who have continued to research and write about the period, he put the war behind him. Although he made his name as a war correspondent, he never defined himself as such. As a result, he absorbed very little of the post-war histories and memoirs. He read his friend Chester Wilmot's *The Struggle for Europe* but not much else.

With one exception, the revisions are based firmly on the 1945 manuscript. Most are the kind of minor changes that would have occurred had the manuscript gone through a normal pre-publication revision. Sometimes White compressed his text severely. More rarely he added minor background detail to help a generation of readers who had not recently lived through the war. Only the moving conclusion did not appear in the original manuscript; it is, however, completely in the spirit of the original.

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White also cut original material where he felt it was holding up the narrative. Some of these passages proved so interesting as historical source material that they appear in the appendices along with the original introduction and conclusion. We have also incorporated, as appendices, examples of White's dispatches as they appeared in Australian newspapers. The story of the return of the Sudeten Germans covers events largely ignored by historians, while his emotional dispatch on Buchenwald makes a fascinating contrast with his description of the same events in the book.

White's other main revision was to restructure the order of the chapters. Since the content remains virtually the same in both texts, there seems little point in spelling out the original structure.

Even though *Conquerors' Road* is surprisingly frank for a book written in 1945, White does exclude some information. He may have known about General Patton's practice of clearing battlefields of the American dead but leaving the rotting German corpses to be seen by the fresh US troops although he does not refer to it, perhaps because at the time he was unable to verify the practice to his professional satisfaction. Some idea of White's reaction to Patton's style, however, is contained in the passages expressing disgust at the general's 'preoccupation with corpses' during press conferences.

Similarly White's account of Colonel Charles Keegan's failure to implement the de-Nazification program in Bavaria does not explain its implications for General Patton. In fact, this was one of a series of incidents that ultimately led to Patton's removal as Military Governor of Bavaria. It is probable that White was unable to pursue the story personally as he had left Germany before Eisenhower decided to fire Patton. These minor limitations notwithstanding, *Conquerors' Road* contains much that will be new to modern readers and historians of post-war Europe.

The book brings to life some of the most significant events of this century in the vivid prose of a master of reportage.

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CONQUERORS' Road

What is not so clear from the text, however, is the profound effect that White's experiences in the shattered Germany had on him. Once, when asked why as a senior writer for the Melbourne *Herald* he had pursued a long and emotionally exhausting campaign to reform child welfare and mental health provisions in Victoria in the early 1950s, White replied:

'I was walking down Collins Street soon after I came back from Europe and I looked at all the ordinary faces. Ordinary people had allowed the obscenity of Nazism to develop and they pleaded ignorance when faced with the results of their actions or lack of action. I realised then we were as capable as they had been of appalling acts if we pleaded ignorance of the seemingly small injustices all around us. Ignorance allows small injustices to grow into inhumanity.'

In New Guinea, White had seen the nobility of ordinary men fighting in almost unbearable and primitive conditions. In Germany, he saw the results of the depravity of ordinary people. For nearly two decades after the war, he spent much of his time in Papua New Guinea as the *Herald's* special correspondent in the region. He never returned to Germany.

Sally A. White
Neil McDonald
February 1996

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Osmar White, December 1944
Photographer: unknown

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Although this book deals with the invasion and occupation of Nazi Germany by the armies of the Western Allies in 1945, it does not purport to be war history in the accepted sense of the term. Nor is it a considered critique of performance by military governments set up to control the defeated nation after its unconditional surrender in May that year. It is merely a record of the personal observations and reflections of one man who was privileged as a civilian war correspondent to witness historical events rather than reconstruct them from documentary and other sources at a later date. It does not depend on recollection, but on facts and impressions set down in writing at the time of their happening.

Most of the text was drafted between January and November 1945 while I was working in the field as a reporter for a syndicate of Australian and British newspapers. The material was an expansion and elaboration of diary notes and incorporated press dispatches which had suffered at the hands of military censors.

When mandatory censorship was lifted at the end of the war, I collated and edited what I had written to conform to a theme covered by the title *Conquerors' Road* and sent it to the London and New York publishing houses which had earlier that year published the hardcover editions of *Green Armour*, my book about the early campaigns against the Japanese in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Both firms had invited me to submit for consideration any similar work I might produce about my experience in Europe.

Conquerors' Road still lacked its final chapters, but the reaction of the British publishers, Unwin Hyman, was enthusiastic. They advised me that, as the subject matter was so topical, they proposed to expedite publication and asked me to complete the manuscript urgently as the chapters already to hand had been typeset. An advance against royalties had been approved and a contract awaited my signature in London.

At this time, however, my Australian employers had arranged for me to return to Melbourne by air and my stopover in London was too brief for me to do more than

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check galley proofs of material in type and provide a synopsis of what I had yet to write.

In January I finished the job and mailed the text to London and the American publishers, W. W. Norton. About six weeks later the senior editor at Norton's wrote to inform me that 'after long consideration management has decided with deep regret that *Conquerors' Road* is not suitable for publication in the United States at the present time'.

Shortly afterwards Unwin Hyman wrote that they also had decided against proceeding with publication, adding the somewhat cryptic comment: 'It is a great pity that this fine book has missed the market.'

Preoccupied with problems of adjusting myself to routine journalism after four years writing almost exclusively about war, and with the unpleasant prospect of undergoing corrective surgery for a wound I had received in the Solomons, I did not ask for detailed reasons for the belated rejections.

Green Armour had been held up for six months by General Douglas MacArthur's censors because it was sharply critical of the training and equipment of both Australian and American troops committed to jungle warfare in the Pacific, so I assumed that some form of political pressure had been exerted on the publishers to discourage them from marketing another book which would irritate the military establishment by premature discussion of sensitive issues. *Conquerors' Road* dealt candidly with the behaviour of Allied troops in Germany, emphasised the alarming, grassroots hostility that existed between the Americans and Russians, questioned the wisdom of some military government policies, and expressed nonconformist views on German war guilt and the legitimacy of the Nuremberg trials of Nazis accused of major crimes against humanity.

By now well aware that truth is the first casualty in war and resigned to the realisation that victory over the Axis Powers had not brought peace to a world that was still bitterly divided on matters of political morality, I consigned the untimely manuscript to my collection of non-

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starters, with the vague intention of digging it out and dusting it off when the passage of time had anaesthetised tender consciences.

As things were to turn out, I did not exhume and reread the text for nearly forty years — years in which a torrent of Second World War literature flooded from the printing presses. Official and unofficial histories, the memoirs, diaries and correspondence of statesmen and their advisers, service commanders and their aides, spymasters, propagandists and the inventors of nuclear weaponry, filled whole sections of reference libraries. Tales — sometimes fact, sometimes fiction or forgery — of high adventure, intrigue, brutality and treachery sold in millions all over the world.

Then, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the flood subsided. Interest in books about the war in Europe was supplanted by interest in books about the conflict between East and West in Korea, South-East Asia and Indochina. However, when the embargo on public examination of classified documents in government archives was lifted after thirty years, a rich field of fresh source material became available to a new generation of historians; and the approach of the fortieth anniversary of the German surrender at Rheims encouraged publication of yet another spate of memoirs by those who, in one capacity or another, took part in the greatest blood-letting in human history.

Strangely enough, in all this vast accumulation of testimony about the execution of Hitler's Germany, the evidence of the spectator as distinct from the participant was seldom included.

When I resurrected the manuscript of *Conquerors' Road* and examined it with the kind of detachment that could only come from so long a preoccupation with different subject matter, I realised that it was a book written by a bystander who by choice looked out over the killing fields at ground level. It was straight reporting and straight commentary without benefit of hindsight — a contemporary chronicle by a licensed observer of a great triumph and a great tragedy.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Perhaps it throws some fresh light on the origins of the balance of terror which, political strategists claim, prevents the outbreak of a Third World War. Perhaps not.

That is for the reader to decide.

O. E. W.
Melbourne 1983

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Germany, 1945
Photograph: Osmar White

Part I