

Second Wave, 1944 (with notes)

by David Ackley

Here were men trying their best to kill other men, who in turn were trying their best to kill them, and here were you helping to repair those who'd not quite been killed, some of whom would be put back in working order and sent back on the line to take up the job again.

December 16, 2024

"... people are not really dead until they are felt to be dead. As long as there is some misunderstanding about them they possess a sort of immortality."

December 13, 2024

"Personnel who remained too long on a ward tended to become tired and short tempered. They were confronted with so many deaths, so many maimed men, and so many awful wounds that the best collapsed"

December 11, 2024

Slog a word invented for the infantryman's life.

"Dog soldiers."

Your hands, at work in the craft of repairing bodies.

Waking from the ether, to a missing leg, arm, hands, eyes; and the terror of any American man: dependency.

December 10, 2024

In the Desert

By Stephen Crane

In the desert

I saw a creature, naked, bestial,

Who, squatting upon the ground,

Held his heart in his hands,

And ate of it.

I said, "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;

"But I like it
"Because it is bitter,
"And because it is my heart."

I understand this, a bit, from the last lines especially.
War is history inscribed in the flesh.
December 6, 2024

Next Wave: August 1944

After that, England dissolved into chopped impressions of green treeless fields, studded with grazing sheep, white puffs in the distance; the encampment of the 80th, the same rows of o.d. tents as in the California desert, nomads, making homes anywhere; the narrow roads, where cars rode on the wrong side, and swearing forgetful g.i.s in their jeeps were always swerving to avoid mutual destruction; the little towns, with their ancient but pleasant shops, pubs with wooden hand painted signs, and the cottages with their climbing roses that gave a twinge of home.

But the urgency of training and preparation blurred all that, and there was the unbearable tension leading up to the June invasion, that even though the 80th had been held back vibrated through the whole encampment, where you clustered around the few portable radios, like everyone else, across the world, trying to learn if the army had fought its way off the beaches, or been driven back and forced into its boats like the Brits at Dunkirk.

Then you heard they were ashore and driving inland, and your own turn was coming, and in August, you stepped onto that same beach, and if you'd known where you were, where you really were, among the debris of the June 6th landing, the splotched sand, darkened with blood or oil, cratered, the visible and invisible aftermath of carnage in the wrecked half tracks, half buried in the

sand, bent and twisted steel wheels, ruptured tracks laddered flat, the steel helmet cupped in the sand like the shells of turtles you saw sunning on rocks in the Souhegan River. But from the mouths of landing craft, the division poured , new tanks, half tracks, deuce and a halves, your 3/4 ton ambulance along with the others of your 305th Medical Batallion, the outpouring of replacements a river of them, pouring all the way from the factories, farms and cities of the homeland, including a certain number of the children of Poles and French Canadians and Greeks from Nashua now spreading across Utah Beach. As, a little over twenty years before, your own brother, Eugene, just out of Nashua High, had come ashore on this same coast for that other war supposed to eliminate any others forever after, but here you are too leaving your footprint in the sand, which as his was, will soon be obliterated by the tide or the masses pouring in behind.

All of you if you'd known where you were, where you really were, you might have bent a knee to Mars, that world- breaking god whose workshop this is, this great sweep of dirt Eurasia, where his art has been crafted, refined, and dispersed for millennia--before you too would be bent to his eternal business.

