

# Soldier's Home Pt. 2

*by* David Ackley

Bath water steaming hot from the faucet, sink into it, the water darkening with the grime of France, Luxembourg, Germany with never time or hot water or soap enough to completely scrub from the pores. Except the hands, held up dripping to look at: still clean, white, soft; all that scrubbing up for their blood-soaked work.

A wonder now to have heated water pour directly from a faucet, as it does every day from faucets everywhere in the city, in all the homes rich and poor. Your own father's doing to keep the pure water flowing all over the city. The idea and the feel of flow as it was back there, large in the flow of armies, those millions of men, on foot, in trucks and tanks and half-tracks flooding the countryside, then the displaced flowing back; blood flowing through its tributaries in bodies, water thickened and salty and colored sometimes leaking life away try as you might to route it back in. Water that precious hard-won commodity, trucked along behind as the 80th fought its way across Europe, in tanker trucks laboring through the mud, to be lugged from them in jerry cans to the surgical tents, then heated on butane burners, always too slowly, as everything seemed when the wounded were lining up on stretchers and everything: hands, scalpels, forceps, wounds themselves needed to be sluiced; all depended on water. How easy it was here, how little marked for the miracle it was. One might be torn between appreciating this and resenting all those who automatically filled their tubs with it and yelled at their wives when it wasn't hot enough. Not their fault if everyone wished to ignore or forget that other side of things, to put off the war, the way you understood after a week or so, that no-one really cared to see you downtown in your uniform, wishing to mothball all those bad memories along with all the winter woolen greens that would be migrate from closet to a forgotten trunk in the attic. Maybe like the others, in due time, you'd be lucky enough to put it all away.

