

NECESSARY WAR

III

Ken Burns kaleidoscope (anything that constantly changes in color and pattern)-The War, an intimate history, 1941-1945-finishes with an episode depicting, 'No more war'. A war that changed all of us in some ways, forever. I came home, landing in New York on 1 January, 1946, the lights of that great city twinkling at us and we were ecstatic and overcome.

Retrospectively, many did not make it as the last year and half was an exercise in carnage, destruction and death. Pas de Calais, the feint, and Normandy the target on 6 June, 1944 where four American divisions, British and Canadians and an assault unit by the Free French came ashore, preceded by the US 101st and 82nd Airborne and the 6th British Airborne during the night. Omaha Beach where the US First Division, 29th Division met with disaster... and 8600 were killed or wounded. Bob Capa of Life Magazine captured a lone soldier in the surf moving through the jungle of debris. Was it Matthew Arnold who depicted 'ignorant armies' clashing at night in his 'Dover Beach'?

Inland our Cavalry unit watched the panorama at St Lo. We had earlier struck the town leaving men and machines behind among others also discouraged by enemy paratroopers. B-17s in tandem came over our town of St Jean de Daye and bombed the St Lo environs (we learned, 4X4 kilometers.) and destroyed Panzer Lehr, initiating breakout of Normandy.

Victory Europe came after tough battles from small unit to armies conceivably seen as 'compression strategies' as the Soviets pushed from the east and we squeezed from the west. The former moved consolidated, then moved again as the German deployed in defensive enclaves. Our thrust included a

'broad-front' deployment of US/British/Canadian units causing the liberation of France/Belgium and Holland, halted by fierce defense on the Siegfried Line. Turning movements using airborne forces and armor thrusts failed in Holland, and Winter set in to be disturbed by a renewed German attack in the Ardennes, the Battle of the Bulge. 80,000 US casualties resulted with 26,000 deaths, but this was a last gasp and compression of Allied forces met on the Elbe River while the Soviets captured Berlin.

Roosevelt died in mid-April of 1945 and we all shed a tear as our 'father 'left us. Hitler entourage died in their Berlin bunker wondering perhaps, why?

Meanwhile, Pacific battles included the fight for Iwo Jima and Okinawa, needed as 'land areas' close to Japan for continued bombing. Cost was approximately 75,000 deaths and many wounded. Plans to invade Japan assumed the need for a half-million troops and the calculations many would die. Napalm bombing of the flimsy Japanese homes and buildings cost mass destruction and deaths. Decision to use the atom bombs was approved when the Japanese chose to fight on. Combined the civilian deaths neared 200 000. The war unofficially ended in August of 1945, and officially in September. Many of us were programmed for the Pacific theater .

When Ken Burns and his team decided to aim at four typical American towns and roughly 40 or so individuals who had lived the great tragedy of WWII he knew he must hurry as many of the era were already gone. Only recently we have learned of the death of Tom Leopold, infantryman turned medic of Waterbury. Marine Sledge, Sidney Phillips friend in Mobile, inspiration for selection by Burns because of

his book: "Old Breed returns to Guadalcanal" has left his legacy. Senator Dan Inouye, erstwhile rifle company commander in the 100th Bn, 442nd still as feisty as ever and recalls his blood transfusions by black soldiers of the 92nd that saved his life. Inouye lost an arm and was awarded the DSC, changed by Congress to the Congressional Medal of Honor. Others remembered: Paul Fussell of the Infantry and soldier, Dwain Luce. Tom Galloway of the 28th infantry, captured during the Bulge, from Sacramento. Ray Pittman and Katherine Phillips of Mobile. I had the pleasure to reminisce with the Phillips' and Glenn Frazier and paid my respects.

In retrospect, I remember a war with many scenarios and sketches. We break out of Normandy, we are surrounded, we escape, we again take up the chase. We glorify in the liberation of others and reap the benefits of their wait; the flowers, the foodstuffs, the wine and the kisses. We become oblivious to fear and take on the aura, not as conquerors but of concerned warriors who aid others, sharing our bounty. We face reality, again. The German stops, consolidates and begins his last fight for fatherland and honor. We attack, we flounder, we lose our leaders and tanks and we taste momentary defeat. Recovering we join the armada against a faltering German who beset from all sides, gives in and comes apart. We reach the Elbe, so near Berlin and we sense it is over. We meet the Russians and it is. No longer a teenager I am proud, thankful and humble. To serve this great crusade is a defining moment of my life.

God seems to favor the bold and strong of heart!