

to seek the solace of what yesterday was but a pagan barrier to our progress. We go forth with traps and guns, with rods and creels, even with baskets and shovels, as though we were trying to bottle up this thing called nature and take it home with us. We tread its enchanted paths, demanding our share of such a heritage.

Why is it that we react in such a way? It is because in nature we find a beauty unsurpassed, the living vision of a beauty vanquished from the steel and concrete; a beauty, elusive as the wind among the branches, whose taunting whisper comes from the prehistoric layers of our minds. A winding path we follow . . . obscure amidst the shadows, and we are back where the cool breath of the forest soothes our restless blood, where yawning woodland pools reflect the physical conformations of tranquility, mocking our discontent, healing our tribulations, calling us friend. How can we help but love such beauty, when we know that it is God? What truer token could man ask to nourish his faith?

Waiting for the "Princess"

Hans Steilberger

THE bright, warm sun which beamed benignly from an absolutely blue October sky seemed to presage a perfect holiday for us as we alighted from the still throbbing Army truck which had just rumbled to a halt over a pair of railroad tracks protruding from the aging pavement. We had arrived at the Port of Naples. Joking, laughing, shouting we sauntered to Pier D where we were to board the "Princess"—more precisely, *La Principessa*—the compact, dirty-white excursion steamer which had been chartered by Army Special Services to take us, the semi-weekly quota of 30 enlisted men, to the Isle of Capri for a luxurious week's rest and relaxation. We had been designated the recipients of this privilege by our various organizations and had traveled to Naples on the "Eighty-eight," the Army-operated express train which connected Naples and Trieste for the convenience of Army personnel and civilian VIP's only. The truck from which we had just disentangled ourselves had been awaiting our arrival at Garibaldi Station to whisk us over narrow, cobbled streets to the port, where we were now milling about in excited anticipation.

With a feeling somewhat akin to panic we suddenly discovered that Pier D, a narrow, concrete wharf which jutted about 70 feet into the slightly rippling, scummy gray water, was completely devoid of anything even slightly resembling a sea-going vessel. All three berths were empty. However, our first excited speculations were soon in-

errupted by a wizened, toothless dockhand who came shuffling out of a nearby wooden shack. Dressed in nondescript, baggy trousers and a black wool sweater which reeked of weeks of hard labor, and wearing the ever present dark stocking cap, he observed our group for a moment while we stared back. Finally singling me out—possibly because of the three stripes I was wearing—he began emitting a series of garlic-laden sounds. With my knowledge of “kitchen-Italian” taxed to its limits, I managed to gather that *La Principessa* was on her way from Torre Annunziata, a Naples Bay hamlet about 18 kilometers distant, and was not due to arrive before “Due e mezz’”—half past two. Having maneuvered upwind to escape some of the carbidic fumes he was pouring forth, I thanked him for the information and pressed a cigarette into his outstretched, grimy, lined palm. Muttering a few words of thanks, he stuck the Camel behind his ear and dragged himself back to his shack.

It was one o'clock at the time, and we realized that we had once more fallen prey to the “hurry-up-and-wait” phase of the old Army game. With so much time to kill, we decided to disperse, look around and stroll about until the boat was due. Accordingly, we soon scattered in all directions.

This was my first chance to take a good look at the port. How different it seemed from that rainy April day some 18 months before, when I was one of 4,000 troops marching off the *Champouillon's* gang plank after a short but choppy crossing from Oran. There was little sight-seeing then as we double-timed through the deluge onto waiting trucks which slithered shakily through the mud and towards a replacement depot.

But there was no cloud today, and while the air was filled with the whines of motors and cranes and diesel locomotives, the crashing and bumping of switching railroad cars, and the laughter and cursing of sweating stevedores, an aura of tranquility appeared to hang over the port. Across the water and clearly discernible rose Mt. Vesuvius, the narrow pathway leading to its gaping crater standing out darkly against the greenish reflecting slopes. Even the thin, gray haze which usually surrounds its apex was missing today. It was difficult to imagine how so peaceful a mountain could ever have deluged an entire city with death and destruction.

Farther out, at the southernmost tip of the bay, the high shore suddenly dipped sharply into the water. There lay, I knew, Sorrento, and I made up my mind to visit this celebrated resort some day before I left the country. I realized my wish the following year, discovering even more scenic beauty than I had ever thought possible.

Somehow, it was hard to believe that bitter battles had been waged here in Naples Bay during the war, but the tops of smoke stacks and masts of still submerged ships which lined the harbor floor, plainly visible from where I stood on the pier, more than gave evidence of

the struggle which had taken place here. Additions to this evidence were all around me. To my left, on nearby Pier F, the rusty hull of an erstwhile Italian luxury liner lay firmly chained to the quay, a gaping crack outlining the place where a bomb blast had ripped it in two. And to my right lay the gleaming American cruiser *U. S. S. Providence*, anchored at Pier C. However, it was not the same Pier C which had been there before the war. That had been bombed out completely. Unfortunately, an Italian cruiser had been berthed there while the bombardment was in progress and, during the course of the battle, it had been hit. As it went down, it settled on its side and embedded itself firmly in the harbor mud. When the Allies had won the battle, they laid a board walk across the cruiser's side, and now this former pride of the Italian navy was designated Pier C and berth of its American adversary.

I turned to walk back towards the main gate, through which our truck had entered the port. Only then did I become aware of the many activities whose sounds were permeating the air. Trucks, loaded and empty, weaving in countless directions made me marvel at the small number of accidents and the avoidance of seemingly unavoidable head-on collisions. Many of these vehicles were manned by German prisoners of war, and they were generally employed to shuttle inbound or outbound cargo from ships to storage depots in the vicinity of Naples, or from depots to ships. I stopped to talk to a few of them who were standing near their vehicles while the trucks were being loaded. These prisoners were amiable and talkative, not the silent stoics of the Afrika Korps and the SS troops whom I had to interrogate, usually with great difficulty, during the war. They liked their treatment at the hands of the Americans and, despite their comparative freedom, had not the least thought of escaping. A number of them were still driving their clumsy, battered, diesel-powered trucks which were covered with drably colored camouflage markings. These trucks were taken from the German army, along with prisoners, and were now being put to good use, helping to overcome a shortage of vehicles. These drivers were aching for the chance to drive an American six-by-six, and those lucky ones who were assigned to a GMC truck held their heads extra high and were the envy of their compatriots.

I strolled on, deftly dodging the jeeps which were whizzing past me as if each chauffeur were on a mission of life or death. I paused briefly to look more closely at the *Providence*, because I had never seen a cruiser so close at hand. The decks were immaculately scrubbed, and the bristling guns were covered with spotless gray canvas. I wanted to walk up the pier to get a closer look at the ship's catapult sea planes, both of which were apparently hanging from giant hooks near the ship's stern, but a Navy sentry began eyeing me with suspicion, so I backed off and resumed my stroll.

The main gate, manned by three big but good natured MP's, opened onto the appropriately named Via Del Porto—Port Street. I stood there for a moment, watching as trucks left and entered through it. The MP's would check each load and trip ticket briefly and send the driver on his way. This did not amuse me very long, and I turned towards Pier A, which extends into the water just behind the main gate. This pier was apparently the largest in the port. At one time it had provided the berths for the big passenger ships and housed the administration building. However, a few direct hits had reduced the once impressive concrete structure to a rubble heap, and as I passed, six liberty ships lay at anchor in their berths. Four of them were being unloaded by slowly moving, noisy longshoremen who paused frequently in their tasks to carry on loud, vociferous arguments, flailing their arms in wild gesticulations to emphasize their points. Upon a few admonitions by their American overseers, they would resume their tasks, stacking their cargoes in various piles according to materials and destinations.

I watched this work for more than an hour, receiving repeated warnings to get out of the way or else. At last I decided I had better play it safe and not wait for the alternative to occur, so I began to remove myself slowly from this beehive of exertion. Occasionally I cast a glance back, as I was returning to the *Principessa's* berth, to watch the fascinating spectacle of a cargo net being lowered over the side, very gently until it was approximately a yard above the ground, whereupon the winch operator, as if on signal, would release the cable suddenly and bring the net to the ground with a crash, strewing boxes all over the area. It may have been a game, but I have often wondered in what condition the recipients used to find their goods.

Winding my way slowly between uncoupled gondola and flat cars, deftly sidestepping those infernal jeeps which were still speeding all over creation, I made my way back to the pier where the Princess had just arrived. A Special Services officer checked off my name as I stepped on board, and I made my way to the bow, where plenty of seats were still available. Straight ahead, the Isle of Capri appeared deceptively close in its goat-shaped outline, belying the necessity of a two-hour boat ride. Nevertheless, it took that long, but the wonderful vacation was well worth the time it took to travel. Not only that, but it also made the wait for the Princess an insignificantly short moment.