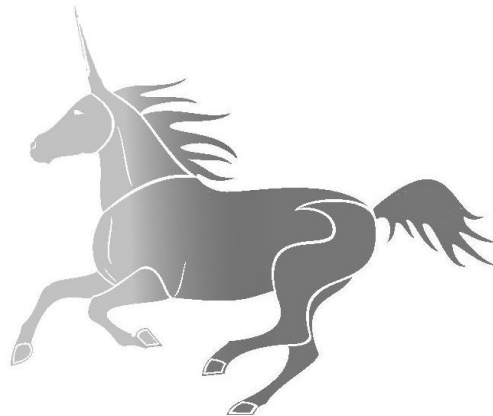


# INFINITY WANDERERS

#2

EDITED BY GREY WOLF



*SELORNIA*

**Infinity Wanderers issue 2**  
**Edited by Grey Wolf**  
**Cover Art by Violet Dragonlady**

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# INFINITY WANDERERS

## ISSUE 2



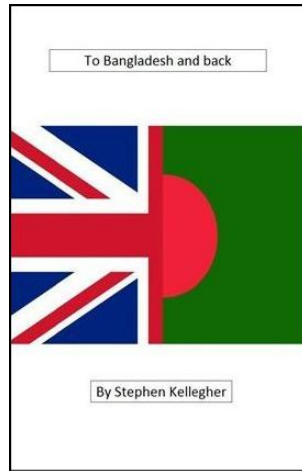
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**IN MEMORY OF  
STEPHEN KELLEGER**

**(JOE)**

**Author of To Bangladesh And Back**



**Died July 2022**

# **World's End**

**Geoff Nelder**

You would have laughed, anyone would. They certainly did. The black lycra shorts; the primary colours in the close fitted shirt; the polycarbonate helmet that when it rained wet his hair in stripes. The laugh was that he was pushing his Dawes tourer instead of riding it, in spite of twenty-four gears.

The rush of air passing him wasn't a sudden veer in the southwesterly wind but a peloton of the local cycling club. Yes they nodded and called monosyllabic encouragements as they ought but Bryan could feel rather than hear their derision. He was sufficiently embarrassed to remount as soon as the incline decreased. He was out of condition, too lazy, too heavy and ashamed.

A lone ragged hawthorn framed the mist-capped Cyn-y-Brain mountain, the view giving Bryan the excuse to dismount again. The lane wound round the tree and then down towards a hairpin bend known as World's End. He saw the yellow splash of the riders whipping round another bend a mile away. As the epitome of strength and endurance disappeared, Bryan swallowed two mouthfuls of isotonic sports drink. The label promised him an instant boost of glycogen to his muscles. His legs should go like egg-beaters but he was taking no chances: the rest of his journey was downhill.

His hands gripped the drop handlebars. There was a fine balance between the psychological need for speed with head down and preparation for disaster with open-fingered gloves ready on the brakes.

On the way up, the effort of climbing the steep lanes made him wonder why he bothered. On the way down, the freewheeling and rush of wind in his face told him why.

Another lean into a bend. A few stones fly sideways squeezed by high pressure tyres humming on the grey tarmac. He couldn't hear the slosh of the remaining drink in its bottle.

He would lift his head now and then, automatically memorise important detail such as imminent potholes and bends. A weasel stopped mid-scurry and dived for the sanctuary of the heather as Bryan called a "Hi."

This was it. What it was all about: clean air, being higher than your house and high on exhilaration. The lane meandered round another moorland bend and became narrower.

The potholes increased in frequency and the surface changed from tarmac to compacted gravel forcing him to slow down. He didn't remember the road being like this. The whole road from Minera to Llangollen was narrow but properly surfaced. He must have followed his wheel's inclination to take the path of least resistance and went straight on when the proper road bent to the right. Navigation was sometimes a casualty of downhill head-down flight. He dismounted near a large rock. He stood on the stone to look back. He could see the familiar purple-heathered morphology of the moors, Cyrn-y-Brain topping the other side of the valley to the west but not the lane. You could be a hundred miles from anywhere up here. It was another reason why he liked it so much. There was unpretentiousness in the austere beauty. Of course humans had influenced the landscape but it was as close to nature as it could get.

"Ah well, backtrack it is boys," he said to himself. He remounted but the path was rougher than it seemed a few minutes before and he frowned.

"If I wanted to go off-road I would've brought my mountain bike."

He pushed the bike over the rough path fully expecting to find the smoother lane any moment. It didn't happen. The path became a track and petered out altogether.

"What's wrong with me?" He rarely made sober navigational errors. He stretched up looking west. The skyline was as he remembered. By pushing and carrying his bike towards the distinctive peak of Cyn-y-Brain he should intercept the road.

After ten minutes he leant his bike against a boulder then bog-hopped across tufts of cotton-grass and bright green sphagnum moss. His nose twitched with the wet earthy aroma. He tripped and dived headlong down the convex slope.

"This is ridiculous," he cried out loud, frightening off a Golden Plover warbling its koo-eeing as it took flight warning other inhabitants of the approach of a madman. Bryan stopped to admire the plumage and take stock. If he continued down this awkward slope he would get bogged down in the tributaries to the Eglwyseg River. He must have missed the lane. Maybe the track he wrongly took was to the right of the main lane and not the left as he supposed. In which case he had to backtrack up hill and head east.

He clambered on top of another large rock to look southwest. Ever since he first cycled on this route over twenty years ago, the rusty remains of a car decayed in the valley bottom. He'd often looked at it from the road as it contoured above, wondering what had happened. Perhaps it was just a dumped wreck but maybe it was full of revellers who, like him, took a wrong turning. He couldn't see it. It might have been removed or he was not quite in the right place. Shaking his head he trudged back up the moorland slope.

His Shimano cycling trainers were now soaked and pungent mud splashed up his legs to match the colour of his shorts. Luckily, the bike was not too heavy. He was expecting to have

lunch in Llangollen and be home before dusk. Even so it was a labour made worse by the thought of the downhill all the way to tea and chips if only he hadn't gone wrong. But where? Again he stopped to survey the landscape, losing some of its magnificence as worry crept in. He could see no sign of a road or even of any track.

He knew he had to come across the road by continuing up the hill even if he had to go all the way to the summit of Esclusham Mountain. It was only another mile at the most. He returned to the rock with his bike and patted the saddle.

“I’ll be back.”

He frowned all the way picking his way in between gorse, blackthorn, cotton-grass and emerald bog-moss.

He knew he'd reached the top because he'd started descending. Where was the concrete trig point? It used to mark the summit. He shielded his eyes from the sun to take comfort from seeing signs of civilisation to the east and north. He should be able to see Minera village only a mile away, even Wrexham was only three or four. Nothing. There was an obscuring haze so that was probably why. No evidence that Nature had been tamed, trampled on or converted. He shook his head again. The summit to this hill is a bit of a ridge and he must have hit the wrong end to find the cairn.

He was relieved to see his bike taking a breather by the boulder. “Come with me,” he told it as he shouldered it to go cross-country downhill due south towards the sun. He had to hit the little dead-end limestone gorge of World's End and Eglwyseg.

All the way, getting wetter, muddier and more tired he mocked himself since the lane must be just a few hundred yards to his right - or left. He was not going to be distracted by

trying to find it though and lolloped on. As he entered the tree-line the way became steeper and more treacherous making him wonder more. The lane should hug the limestone escarpment around where he was. The road engineers centuries before had to level part of the slope but he couldn't find it. He was sure he should have met fences but there was none.

He fell into a boulder-strewn stream. He laughed as he thought he recognised it. Although the hydrological dynamics of erosion meant the stream was constantly changing, the type of rocks, its size, the incredibly clear water added up to the World's End stream. All he had to do was follow it. It should be forded by the road at World's End and bridged farther downstream. He was very fond of the cul-de-sac gorge so swapping the bike from his sore right shoulder to the left he stomped and splashed upstream.

Twenty minutes later he was in no doubt of two facts. He was definitely sitting down on a limestone scree-slope at World's End and he must have lost his marbles. He walked around where the road should be and waved his arms around where a stout wooden fence and stile should have stopped him.

"I've got it. I've gone back in time!" he shouted, defying anyone to contradict him. "But how far back?"

He knew the lead-ore was worked for centuries in the area and that the caves at World's End were worked in early medieval days, maybe Roman. Yes, the caves were there and what might have been grown-over spoil heaps. He was troubled by the lack of any artefacts. He'd hoped to see rails or timber supports. These workings could just as well have been natural limestone caves. Did that mean he was back before the Romans? Was he going to find that



racing-cycling group equally bewildered carrying their bikes through the trees? Maybe their collective exuberance activated a time-warp.

He sat where the stile should have been and finished off his energy drink. He refilled the bottle from the stream.

"I could go back to Minera and hopefully travel through the time gate or whatever," he said to the pied wagtail on the other side of the stream. "But it would be mostly downhill to Llangollen either alongside the stream or contouring the escarpment. I know a great footpath along there. Or I did." The bird wagged its tail.

"Oh come on. One wag for yes and two for no. Right, shall I follow the stream? No. I agree. It could get difficult access. Tell you what, bird. Will you look after my bike while I go to Llangollen and make some sense of all this? You will? Great."

He opened the pannier and took a packet of trailmix he always carried for emergencies.

"Bye then. Hope I don't come across Romans: they'd think I look really odd. On the other hand, imagine having modern knowledge back in Roman times – I'm going to make a fortune! I know how to make whisky and ice-cream."

As he climbed up the slope to the scree that should take him to Llangollen, the bird took off to follow. It hadn't been perched on a stone. It was a dusty can of Cola. If Bryan had been more observant he would have read,

"Best before 5:10:3034"

## Geoff Nelder



Geoff Nelder is an earth scientist who became nuts after teaching in England for 40 years. He has a physicist wife and “normal” kids with kids of their own. He’s had 11 novels published: mostly science fiction, some thrillers and historical fantasy. He gets his kicks from writing shorts of which over 100 have been published in such anthologies as *Extreme Planets*; ezines such as *The Horrorzine* and in *Fiction4All*.

Geoff was an editor of *Escape Velocity* SF magazine and for 11 years an educational IT magazine. He’s gets off on being a judge of fiction competitions including the Helen Whittaker Prize and a Chinese-organised novel competition, which returned him with more income than all his books combined.

His *ARIA Trilogy* – a scifi / thriller / post-apocalypse series is based on the original premise of infectious amnesia and won him first place in the Preditors & Editors Readers Poll for best science fiction of 2012. He is crazy enough to have been a vegan decades before it was fashionable yet waited until recently to pen a science fiction series of novellas set on a vegan planet in *Flying Crooked* series opening with *SUPPOSE WE*.

Website <https://geoffnelder.com>

Twitter [@geoffnelder](https://twitter.com/geoffnelder)

## Author Interview

**Vivienne Tuffnell**



I blog at: <https://zenandtheartoftightropewalking.wordpress.com/>

Facebook author page: <https://www.facebook.com/VivienneTuffnellAuthor> (like the page to get updates)

Twitter: [@guineapig66](https://twitter.com/guineapig66)

UK Amazon page: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Vivienne-Tuffnell/>

## **How long have you been writing?**

Since before I could actually write. Silly as it sounds, as a very small child I used to use my father's typewriter, bashing out strings of letters and hoping that it would magically transform into the story I had in my head. I completed my first novel when I was ten. A couple of years later I burned it in an upturned dustbin lid because my brother's criticism of it was so harsh.

## **What is the earliest work of yours that you have published or intend to publish?**

That's a curious one. Apart from a mocked-up newspaper for ants and other insects I did when I was ten (using the photocopier belonging to a friend's father who was an architect and worked from a home office, and who very kindly allowed us to print ten copies to sell for charity) the earliest work is something I wrote at 17. It was a longer short story called "The Hedgeway" which I rewrote as a novella and published some years ago. One day I may publish an edition that has the original in as well but as that involves actually transcribing from old fashioned typescript to a proper digital document it may be way down on my list of priorities.

## **Who were the earliest authors to be an inspiration for your writing? Which other authors do you consider to be an inspiration and for what reason?**

As a child and then a teenager, I grew up in the era before the concept of Young Adult fiction had really got going, so there came a point where around the age of 9, I was too old for children's books but not really mature enough for adult fiction. People now don't realise the paucity of new books (or indeed how expensive books were) growing up in a provincial town in the 70s; the library bought in the most requested new books and they were usually genres I have never enjoyed. I read "A Wizard of Earthsea" by Ursula le Guin but wasn't able to get hold of

the next two for some years; I adored Madeleine L'Engle's "A Wrinkle in Time" but didn't know until about ten years ago that she wrote many more. Both authors took themes of young people somehow at odds with their surroundings and almost at war with themselves, and they appealed to me enormously as that was how I felt. I was diagnosed as autistic a few years ago, in my early 50s, which makes sense of how disconnected and alone I felt as a child and young adult (and indeed still do).

In recent years, I've been exploring the ideas and the works of Jung, and many of the core group of first generation Jungians, such as Marie-Louise von Franz. I would have loved to have had the funds and the opportunity to have studied formally and become a Jungian analyst. Jung's ideas and his exploration of the self and also of the phenomenon of alchemy as an integral part of psycho-spiritual growth, really speak to me. Von Franz's work on the deeper meanings of fairy-tales is inspiring and sometimes mind-blowing.

## **Which was the first book you published?**

"Strangers and Pilgrims" was first published by someone else on my behalf in 2010, but when that friendship failed, I took it back, and republished it in 2011, unfortunately with the same set of typos as the former friend had assured me it was totally free of any errors! It took a couple of years for me to have the energy and time to rectify that. The self-publishing phenomenon that people now take for granted was a huge shift in consciousness. People like me who had spent years on the edge of getting publishing deals with many "Close but no cigar" and "We like it but don't love it" kinds of near misses, being asked in rejection letters to send them the next thing I wrote, found it terrifying, challenging and revolutionary. The technical processes at the time were clunkier, less intuitive and often baffling. These days, UK authors can do their US tax declaration using their NI number but back then, getting the relevant code initially meant going to the US Embassy in London for an appointment. Then they changed it so you could telephone the IRS to get that code. I'd never made a transatlantic call in my life to that point and was shaking when the call went through. Almost everything was new territory for all of us; the industry was creating itself as we all worked. At the time, I had a health condition (undiagnosed

for some years still) that meant that I was struggling more than I might have otherwise, hence taking longer to clean that manuscript of typos.

### **Other than authors, who are your heroes?**

The people, usually never given credit or recompense, who get on and do the difficult and dangerous jobs. I live next door to a fire station, and the firefighters just get on with their jobs day and night. People like that who seldom get any credit or recognition.

### **If you could go back in time to learn the truth about one historical mystery or disputed event, what would it be?**

That's a difficult one. When I was 13, my history teacher thought I'd managed to solve the mystery of the princes in the tower. The skeletal remains found in the tower during the reign of Charles II had been examined by forensic experts of the day in the 1930s, and one of the things the report had mentioned was it being impossible to tell the sex of the remains because the children had died before puberty so the changes to the pelvic bones had not begun. I suggested that were the remains those of girls rather than boys their ribcages would have shown signs of wearing tight stays from early childhood (it might have but now I am not so sure). Alas the relevant bones were absent from those examined at the time. Nowadays a quick DNA test would change everything but the Crown will not give permission for those tombs to be opened for samples to be extracted.

I considered all the famous historical mysteries (almost all of which TV documentaries have covered) like the fate of the princes in the tower, but honestly, nearly all of these would only satisfy intellectual curiosity. In the end, locating the remains of murder victims (such as those of the Moors Murderers) where the killer has been caught but refuses to reveal where the bodies are, would bring closure to surviving family and friends and that for me would be a compassionate act.

**Do you have any names or surnames that tend to crop up and repeat themselves throughout your stories, without the intention being there to make them related in any way? How have your life experiences informed your writing?**

I'm hopeless when it comes to finding names for characters and tend to find them on the spines of books or sometimes graveyards. I try to avoid unusual first names because that carries complications for the character. Most of the novels do have connecting characters, ones who appear in several books; there's also links between families (so for example, Dr Meadows who appears in "The Bet" is actually brother-in-law to Verity in "Little Gidding Girl"). I firmly believe anyway that, as various Native American tribes have said, "We are all related."

I think my own experiences of life run through everything I write. I only began my discovery journey of autism because I started to realise that Chloe from "Square Peg" was definitely autistic and that since her character was most heavily drawn on mine (and indeed, some of her experiences) it was a hefty clue that I needed to look into it further. An autistic friend pointed out that Antony Ashurst (the main character in "The Bet") is what has been termed a high functioning autistic man, and once he'd said it, I realised he was right.



## **What are you currently working on?**

I'm working (but very slowly) on a number of things. I have probably 5 or 6 unfinished novels that I have for various reasons had to shelve, some which are only in handwritten form. Many are still viable if I can just find the right threads to pick up and start working on again. One project is a collection of short stories and vignettes inspired by perfumes (a sort of exploration of the effects synaesthesia has on my mind). Another is a poetic venture, called *The Peacock Key*, which is a journey through the experience of menopause as an alchemical process. I've been chipping away at a sequel to "Strangers and Pilgrims" for some years, but a combination of health challenges, bereavements and so on has caused that too to stall. A couple of years ago I began what was intended to be a comedy horror short story for Halloween, but which decided it wanted to be a novel. It's not far off completion but finding the energy and impetus to write the last (and most complicated!) 20k words is proving more difficult than I'd hoped. It's a bit of a roller-coaster of a novel, featuring an African grey parrot, a Hollywood actress, a death metal band who drew inspiration too heavily from the ancient gods of Egypt, a neolithic hill fort with a terrible reputation and history, and the hapless pet-sitter Ben who finds himself caught up in the strange and frightening events that are unleashed after a flood brings an unwelcome reminder that the past has not gone away... "On Hob Hill" is a mixed-up sort of book, combining elements of both humour and horror in what I hope is an unforgettable whole. There are also about 6 more finished novels on my hard drive that need to be tidied up, given nice covers and shoved blinking into the light of day but that takes effort and energy and I'm short of the oomph needed.



# **A Memory of Greatness**

## **L. G. Parker**

### **Camp Fortitude**

### **Hanging Dog, New Carolina**

**2119 AD / 29 AC**

If you are reading this the light of civilization has not been utterly extinguished. Perhaps it has even grown and spread. I put pen to paper in the hope that at some point, someone will find a brief history of this period instructive; a cautionary tale that will enable them to avoid the mistakes made during what was known as the post modern world.

In the final years of the Republic, the seeds of its destruction were sown. Ruin began innocuously enough. Under the banner of progress, in the country formerly known as the United States of America, public schools turned out thousands of politically correct graduates annually with no knowledge of or respect for their nation's history, values or traditions, much less any practice at or appreciation of rational discourse, independent thought or critical analysis and, to the detriment of themselves and the nation, absolutely no practical skills. Indeed they were inculcated with a disdain for hands on, blue collar work. What they did have, in abundance, was a pent up rage against the status quo which they saw as oppressive, a longing for some vague idealistic utopia, a propensity for violence, and no anchor in reality. They were rebels looking for a cause; what the Bolsheviks of long ago called "useful idiots." Many of these students went on to colleges and universities where they were further indoctrinated in the philosophical sophistry of moral relativism and social justice. In such an environment, linked as it was with promises of universal healthcare, free education, guaranteed basic income and so on, the utopian ideals of the legislation known as the GREEN NEW DEAL, were wildly popular and spread, as my grandfather opined, "Like previously vanquished diseases through the progeny of idealists who decline to vaccinate their children." Despite its astronomical price tag which would quintuple the national debt, destroy the nation's economic base and sunder the very fabric of the country the legislation passed, and implementation began. As predicted, but ignored, the consequences of literally tilting at windmills were disastrous.

Politicians at that time were highly proficient at using greed and exploiting differences to garner votes. They were much less adroit at providing leadership. As might be expected therefore, America's Representatives wrung their hands, issued meaningless proclamations and

did nothing. In the hallowed halls of the capitol the august body of Senators, more concerned with preserving their own wealth and power than the long-term well being of the nation, pontificated and did nothing. A figurehead President whose grasp on reality was tenuous at best exacerbated the difficulties the nation faced. His administration was evenly divided between incompetents whose sole talent was turning small problems into major crises and ideologues determined to first punish and then reform what they termed an evil culture. As America struggled with these self-inflicted wounds her enemies bought out her now defunct oil and steel industries, established spheres of influence in strategic parts of the third world, subverted the economy of the United States with cheap goods and utilizing the consequent trade surplus, invested heavily in their military. The implicit threat of those actions never materialized however.

The Adaptive Ohm Converter, abbreviated to AOC, a tortured acronym contrived to honor the author of the GREEN NEW DEAL, reversed the process of disruption and decline. By exponentially reducing the resistance in electrical devices it vastly increased the output of electric generating equipment and vastly decreased power consumption in electrical machinery. Practically overnight, the GREEN NEW DEAL fantasy became feasible. Solar panels and wind turbine farms were actually able to provide more energy than the now proscribed coal fired and nuclear power plants had previously. Output from hydroelectric and geothermal sources also increased dramatically. Based on this remarkable technological breakthrough the United States underwent an industrial, material and social renaissance. Practical electric cars, trains and even planes were developed. Oil and natural gas production ceased as wells were capped. Refineries were closed, demolished and the reclaimed land turned to other uses, more often than not, solar panel or wind turbine farms. The GDP and standard of living soared to unprecedented heights. Eager to reap the benefits of virtually unlimited cheap energy, other nations quickly adopted AOC technology, joining this remarkable industrial revolution without suffering the trials and tribulations that America had gone through. A new, enlightened age dawned throughout the globe.

Without warning nature and the law of unintended consequences tragically intervened. A series of eruptions along the Pacific Ring of Fire belched billions of tons of carbon dioxide and corrosive ash into the atmosphere, far exceeding the total carbon footprint of mankind since Homo Sapiens seared the first woolly mammoth steak. As the earth warmed, millions of cubic feet of additional carbon dioxide were released from the previously frozen tundra of Siberia precipitating a fifty year nuclear winter. The soaring pinnacle of achievement to which mankind had climbed thanks to AOC technology proved to be a sheer precipice upon which we teetered. The golden promise of clean energy proved to be a chimera. With the sun hidden by near constant cloud cover the ubiquitous fields of solar panels stood in silent mockery of mankind's hubris. Frozen lakes and rivers, of course, produced nothing but despair. As corrosive ash and coarse grit circulated worldwide on the jet stream, wind turbines ground to a halt. Consequently the house of cards built upon unlimited clean energy provided by AOC technology collapsed as quickly and as completely as it had risen.

The cloud cover was not total. Some crops could have been cultivated had the solar powered tractors and combines functioned but they did not. Some goods could have been manufactured had power been available but it was not. Some products could have been transported to urban areas were the battery powered trucks and trains operable but they were not. Viable alternatives had vanished when the government, in its dubious wisdom, banished the internal combustion engine. With the thin veneer of civilization so suddenly and completely stripped away, the panic and consequent rioting and looting brought civilization to the brink of extinction. Once the shelves were empty in urban areas bands of brigands swarmed from the cities seeking sustenance wherever they could find and steal it. And once those sources were gone they turned upon each other in an orgy of violence. The anarchy and chaos unleashed during the pandemic and civil unrest of 2020 through 2023 paled in comparison to the urban wars and plagues of 2068 through 2074. An estimated ninety per cent of the earth's population died within a few short years, if not by murder, then by the disease and starvation that followed.

Like a great fire however, that initial wave of chaos quickly died out. Those few souls who survived and had the guts to continue quickly discarded the trappings of the 21st century panacea and reverted to the essentials of the 19th. Here in Hanging Dog we were fortunate in many ways. For one thing, we were a rural area where people still lived close to the land - farming, raising cattle, hunting, fishing - strong, independent folk, used to hard work and making do. For another we were located well over one hundred miles from the nearest major city. That previously trivial distance became a considerable trek not taken by many. The small number who made the journey found the few roads into the area strongly barricaded and stoutly defended by men familiar with guns and willing to use them. Patrols by the remnants of the Sheriffs and Police Departments and a hastily organized militia put to grief any Reavers who attempted to enter the area cross country. Providentially, the local Folk Arts School had preserved the once quaint but now essential skills of spinning, weaving, woodworking and blacksmithing. We were also blessed with plentiful clean water, timber, rock and game. And we cheated. Given a healthy distrust of the federal government dating back to at least the era of Prohibition and perhaps even before, when the call came to voluntarily turn in our cars and trucks, we ignored it. And when it came to confiscation we allowed our coupes to be taken but hid our utility vehicles along with large stocks of fuel. This foresight gave us time to adapt to the post AOC conditions - to modify our homes or build new ones, to fabricate plows, and so on.

It was not easy by any means; nor was it impossible. We improvised, we adapted, we struggled, we did those hard things that were necessary, we overcame and we survived. Things are reasonably settled now. An elected council provides what little government we need and the fear of God and angry citizens keeps it honest. Children go to school again; the older ones being tasked to comb the archives that survived the years of chaos seeking anything that might ease the journey forward, to collect books and instruction manuals, to scavenge places such as abandoned shops and barns looking for tools and equipment that might be useful and, perhaps most importantly, to talk to their elders, to codify their wisdom and catalogue their skills even if

they do not currently pertain. That knowledge must be preserved and passed down. We may not need a pilot now but someday, who knows?

Adversity is a great teacher. We have set aside our differences and learned to work together for a shared goal. We have rediscovered the bonds of community. We explore and we trade. We know for a fact that some sanctuaries of common sense, like ours, have begun to mine coal again because we barter with them, coal being far more efficient than wood for iron work and coal oil good for lamps. Rumor has it that other oases of sanity have begun to drill for oil again. Granted the derricks look like something from a two hundred year old history book and refining is a long way off but it is progress. The atmosphere begins to clear. We see the sun more frequently and for longer periods. Crops are more abundant. We are working on machinery that will hasten that process for we have a memory of greatness and dream of its return. We also have a motto of sorts, the source of which I do not recall, that keeps us focused, "It will be a long, tough slog."

It will be a long, tough slog but we are guardedly optimistic, for those of us who have survived are well grounded in reality and will not be easily deceived again. To those of you who will follow - fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith - Godspeed.

## L. G. Parker



L. G. Parker is a retired Naval Surface Warfare Officer and Senior Naval Science Instructor with a lifelong interest in Science Fiction and history; especially the "What If" scenarios where Science Fiction and History merge; that intriguing place where events balance precariously on the fulcrum of human interaction and the smallest details can tip the outcome of those events one way or another; the fascinating realm of alternate history. When he is not reading, researching and writing he spends his days kayaking and hiking to waterfalls in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina with his wife of forty-seven years.

More of his work can be found at:

<https://fromsmallcausesgreatevents.org>

<https://WH40KMalleusMaleficarum.com>

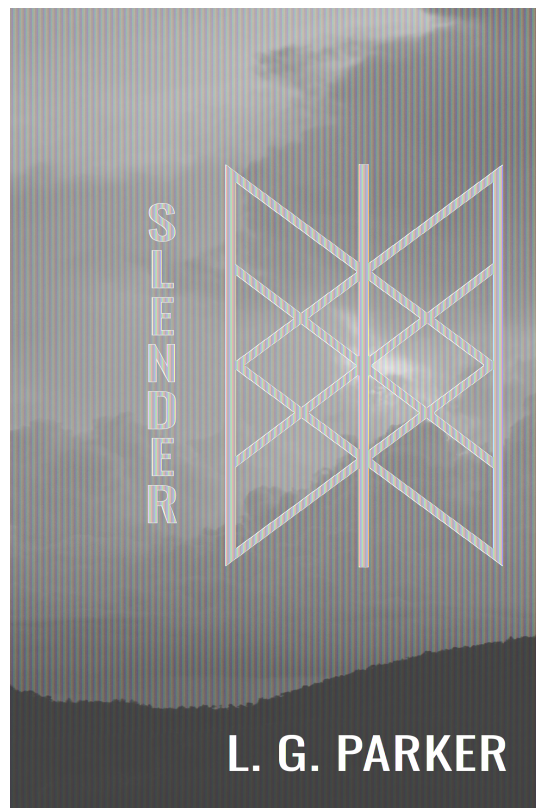
## **Slender Threads by L.G. Parker**

History is an intricately woven tapestry hanging in space and time. Remove one thread, replace it with another, and the entire picture changes.

Slender Threads by L G Parker includes One Stay Bullet - a different Battle of Shiloh and The Story Behind One Stray Bullet, including subsequent what-ifs, and how the battle defined the lives and future direction of such as Lew Wallace, James Garfield, Henry Morton Stanley and George Erasmus Dixon, inventor of the submersible CSS Hunley.

What if Winston Churchill had died at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898, or after being knocked down in the street in New York in 1931? Slender Threads looks in detail at subjects such as Lee's Triumph in an alternate history of the Battle of Evelington Heights during the American Civil War, or the Leyte Gulf plans of the Imperial Japanese Navy in World War Two.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1910718300>



## Family History Short

### Three Sisters - Tales of the 20th Century





Mabel with daughters Doris (standing), Muriel (sitting) and Olga (on the stool) – circa 1918

Three daughters were born to Edward (Eddie) Phillips (1883-1943) and his wife Mabel (1890 - 1970). These sisters were:-

- 1) Doris Mabel Phillips, born 27th March 1908
- 2) Muriel Gwendoline Phillips, born 9th April 1910
- 3) Olga Phillips, born 19th August 1914

I do not know if the name Olga was particularly fashionable in Wales, or the UK, in 1914, or if she was named for the eldest daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, who at the time of her birth would have been a valued ally in the newly-begun First World War.





Above, circa 1916, with Muriel (born 1910), Doris (born 1908) and Olga (born 1914)





Muriel, Olga, and Doris – circa 1920

1) Doris would marry Gwilym Davies on 3rd June 1933, Gwilym being from the same Neath/Briton Ferry area as she was, but having moved to London to take up a job in the Metropolitan Police. They would have two children, Brian born in 1933 and Colin born in 1936. Returning to teaching, Doris would rise to the position of deputy head, before her retirement, whilst Gwilym became a detective in the Met. Upon retiring, they moved to Spain in the mid 1960s, and stayed there until the later 1970s when they returned to the UK and set up home in Oundle. Gwilym died of lung cancer in April 1982, and Doris died in January 1994, having moved to Croydon after his death.

2) Muriel married Wilfred Rees (born January 1908) in Briton Ferry, apparently also on the 3rd June 1933. They would have one child, Joan. In the 1960s they accompanied Doris and Gwilym to Spain, looking also to buy a property there, but decided not to. Muriel died on 3rd June 1965, whilst Wilfred died in March 1999.

3) Olga married Cecil Tristram Ashbourne (born 1907) in Summer 1940 . She succeeded her mother as Postmistress of Giant's Grave, Briton Ferry, a position she held until her death on 7th January 1977. They had three children, spread over the course of twenty years. Cecil died on 1st December 1988, aged 81.



This still, probably from an early 1960s cinefilm, shows Doris on the left, Mabel centre, Muriel next and Muriel's daughter Joan on the right.

## Poetry

Gerard Sarnat

### Moscow March Madness

Funny things happened  
On Russian soldiers way  
Fulfilling stated mission  
As peacekeepers—task  
To capture Ukraine Nazis.

Why do they shoot at us?  
And why are my relatives  
Texting me to please stop  
At every A.T.M. that I find  
To withdraw cash in Euros?

Sister complains Apple Pay  
Plus credit cards won't work.  
But don't worry, the 40 mile  
Convoy well as cluster bombs  
Oy'll very soon fuck-up Kyiv.

Remember Vlady says, to use  
Amerikan phrase, We're still in  
Top of 1st inning, nyet begun to  
Install our puppet government:  
Their future's hell NOTENTIAL.

**“Gee-whiz it all magically began in Holland’s blizzard of ‘43 during the Nazi occupation.”**

For sixty-five years -- at very start living  
across Maple Drive from each other --  
I have had this dear friend-relative,  
arguably even our wizard of sorts

who on special occasion of his bride’s  
diamond birthday party, created  
(complex processes remind me  
of what F. Dostoyevsky called

administrative ecstasy), scripted, co-stars  
in labor of love tribute videos where  
of course he now plays that role of  
leading man lizard lounge wizard.

### **Bonus 1: Back In Her Arms**

Bad dad gone to war  
alone with nurturing mom,  
I could go anywhere  
now safe in our little town.

### **Bonus 2-3: FINALE haiku [2]**

Just now learning how  
to open up your heart -- first  
move is to myself.

Only religion  
was kindness: to have been known  
as a decent sort.

## Blur Of Neo Nazi Pit Bull Rage

For two nights after Frani's funeral,  
gathered family/friends sit modern  
Jewish *shivah* that compresses  
many millennia traditions of  
a full seven days to fewer.

As we now rise then turn East to bow  
and pray in a very strange tongue,  
distancing me from those rituals  
I'm habitually conflicted about,  
it occurs why they still hate us.

## **Capture The Flag Crazytown Kyiv Invasion tanka**

Now isolated,  
No wisdom of crowds, Putin  
Accuses Ukraine  
Of Nazi resurgence – though  
Their President is Jewish.

## Neo-Nazis *Und Ein Neologismus*

To: fellow travelers Sue Benson, Jon Markell, Peter Rosenwald on BHHS' maiden Summer '62 Abroad to Austria

*In Memoriam:* Harrison Frank, Marilyn Goodman, Adrienne Jampolis

"Occupying the entire northern bay of Lake Traunsee, Gmunden offers everything you expect from a proper Salzkammergut town: Pretty castles, churches and lakefronts with promenades, as well as 19<sup>th</sup> century villas with wooden porches and balconies. No wonder that Gmunden is popular both with tourists and domestic visitors from Austria."

-- from *Tour My Country Culture and Travel Guide*

Oh, but wait, there's more!

Our parents and high school staff didn't know/ inform us that it was also prime vacationland for the SS only a few short years before -- plus this paranoid-self suspected bastion of underground New Nazis, including our on-sight teachers.

Still, being exposed to Vienna's music, Saint Stephens' *Kirche* plus *Apfelstrudel* were unmitigated treats.

Which I was reminded of last night stumbling on PBS's fabulous *Great Performances* about Franz Schubert.

What first caught my attention was the word "high nest," which when Captioned, turned out to be "Hydnesque."

A student of Salieri's (portrayed as Mozart's nemesis in the movie *Amadeus*, but evidently actually a nice guy), though Franz wrote 600 *lieder* ("art songs" setting his poetry to melodies), his oeuvre's Hydnesque jokes and funny turns and grace notes didn't attract much attention.

Intimidated by Herr Beethoven, he looked away when passing on *die Straße*.

Broke, Franz slept on friends' couches.

Shubert died (syphilis) at the age of 31, largely unrecognized as a composer.

Thirty years later, Robert Schumann "rediscovered" his works, which he introduced to Liszt and Brahms.



They served as transition from Enlightenment's Classical era to Romantic engagement with themes of love, death, nature.

Maybe Sue, Jonny and Peter can set me straight what I got wrong, add their own two cents.

And Laurence will embellish vis-a-vis *die Musik*..

## **Would-be ~~Emperor~~ Czar Has No ~~Clothes~~-Tolstoy Shirt**

Born eleven days after WII ended,  
Never imagined I would witness  
Early eerily similar stages of  
Another European tragedy.

Day 17, aggression grinds on: so far  
It appears Vlad's infantry, armor  
As well as artillery have run into  
A seasoned Ukrainian buzzsaw.

Committed homeland defenders've  
Learned how to fight over years  
Since Crimea, whereas Ruskis  
Are short-term conscripts.

The Kremlin's once-feared 900,000  
Strong army up to now, turned out  
To be weak, having exhausted  
50% of actual combat forces.

Corruption seemingly didn't get what  
Paid for, plus doesn't have US secret  
Sauce: sergeants down in ranks to  
Enforce discipline, service tanks.

Quick blitzkrieg to install puppet  
In Kyiv failed, but now pulverization  
Will likely prevail, though long-term  
Outcome clearly remains foggy.

Can NATO resupplies scale of Berlin  
Airlift offset already cup-a-day of  
Cereal rations, patriots devolving  
To attack each other for food?

Much closer to beginning than end,  
KGB-sick man, sick mind's appetite  
May grow with the eating, gorging  
On babushka bake sale bad cookies.

Might *diversanty* pro-Russian agent  
Provocateurs sabotage “UkroNazi”  
Resistance — mete out injustice —  
To save Putin’s neck if not face?

Is this distasteful disaster destined  
To go on for years reenacting WWI  
Trench warfare with mothers asking  
About unreturned sons, or if lucky

Doctored topsy turvy Orwellian  
Media — Vladimir in Wonderland’s  
Peacekeepers rather than air strikes —  
Concludes in quick ironic redux Bay of Pigs?

## Gerard Sarnat

Gerard Sarnat has been nominated for the pending 2022 Science Fiction Poetry Association Dwarf Star Award, won San Francisco Poetry's 2020 Contest, the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize, and has been nominated for handfults of 2021 and previous Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards. Gerry is widely published including in 2022 Awakenings Review, 2022 Arts & Cultural Council of Bucks County Celebration, 2022 Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival Anthology, Washington Square/NYU Review, The Deronda Review, Jewish Writing Project, Hong Kong Review, Tokyo Poetry Journal, Buddhist Poetry Review, Gargoyle, Main Street Rag, New Delta Review, Arkansas Review, Hamilton-Stone Review, Northampton Review, New Haven Poetry Institute, Texas Review, Vonnegut Journal, Brooklyn Review, San Francisco Magazine, Monterey Poetry Review, The Los Angeles Review, and The New York Times as well as by Harvard, Stanford, Dartmouth, Penn, Columbia, North Dakota, McMaster and University of Chicago presses. He's authored the collections Homeless Chronicles, Disputes, 17s, Melting the Ice King. Gerry is a Harvard College and Medical School-trained physician who's built and staffed clinics for the marginalized as well as a Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. Currently he is devoting energy/ resources to deal with climate justice, and serves on Climate Action Now's board. Gerry's been married since 1969 with three kids plus six grandsons, and is looking forward to potential future granddaughters.

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**1912, 1932, and 1951**

**D. C. Diamondopolous**

**1912**

“Women and children first! Women and children first!”

A brandy snifter in one hand, a cigar in the other, I am alone as I watch people rush about on deck from the comfort of my leather chair in the first-class smoking room. It's past midnight, the lights flicker, but I am ruthlessly serene, for I did not overcome my childhood in the slums of the East End to drown in the freezing Atlantic water.

Second-class is where I belong, but who's to care now? When faced with death, we're all in the same boat.

Perhaps you've heard of me, Julian Grey, or seen my name on music hall marquees from Belfast to London.

I've made an enviable living as a comic, mimic, dancer, and acrobat. But what has brought me my greatest fame, and why I set sail on the Titanic to New York at the request of vaudeville manager, William Hammerstein, is my unfathomable ability to juggle five balls with my feet.

I put my cigar into an ashtray and set down the glass. Twisting the ends of my mustache, I am resolved about what I'm to do next, for I've never been one to pass up an opportunity.

I rise. The ship lurches. Poker chips, chess pieces, and tumblers fall on the floor. With my walking stick, I whack them away and stagger toward the door.

The ship creaks, a slow back and forth. The vessel tilts. I balance myself between the

doorway.

The corridor is empty.

I open the door to a first-class suite. What finery, such elegance. There's a diamond stickpin and a ruby ring on the mahogany dresser. Did I mention that I am also a thief? I drop the stickpin and ruby ring into my coat pocket. I open the armoire and glide my hand over the dresses until I choose one.

If costumed in one lady's attire, I might draw attention, so I open the door to the next cabin.

"Excuse me, Sir," I say. A man holds a whiskey bottle in one hand and a Bible in the other.

"Aren't you going on deck?"

"Leave me be young man."

I shut the door.

The next room is charming, even as the furniture slides to the wall, with peacock patterns on overturned chairs, an electric fireplace, a vanity fit for Sarah Bernhardt. Stumbling, I open a chest of drawers grab undergarments and a scarf.

What I need is a warm coat, ladies' boots, and a hat. The lights go off, then on. I must hurry.

I enter a suite across the hall.

The room is in shambles. The dresser is on its side, a chair on its back. I throw the clothes on the bed and go to the trunk and take out a winter coat, lace-up boots, and a hat with a feather.

What I am about to do may seem shameful.

I sit on the edge of the bed next to the heap of clothes and remove my coat, then my tie and collar. My brother, may he rest in peace, comes to mind as I unbutton my shirt.

The binding is tight around my chest, and I begin to unfasten. Charles, was more than a brother, a father, he was (I continue to unwind) to me, a motherless devil-rat, five years to his twelve. The bandage is off. My breasts are revealed.

I remove my trousers and drawers and pull the padding from between my legs. At a young age, Charles dressed me as a boy — “You’ll be safer, and we can make a shilling or two.” We performed on street corners and in taverns, and as I grew and girls liked me, I liked them back. I am not an impersonator like the popular music hall drags. I am a man, and I’ve made the best of my oddity.

Naked, I dress.

Perfumes from the clothes make my eyes water. I put my wallet, cuff links, and stolen jewelry into the pocket of the woolen coat and squeeze my feet into the boots.

There is a strangeness to it, and I feel an utter distaste, the way the undergarments rustle and swish. Above the dresser is a mirror. I put on the hat and cover my short hair but leave a fringe that falls over my forehead. The mustache, I peel off and put in my pocket.

Pinching my cheeks, the way I’ve seen my lovers do, I leave the way I came and go onto the deck.

Such chaos and panic. A man says good-bye to his wife and son as a lifeboat is lowered. Their cries provoke pity.

“Is there room?” I ask in a feminine voice.

“No, Miss,” a crew member shouts. “Might be on the other side.”

My unease mounts. I hurry among the crowd. My air of detachment collapses as I shove aside men and go around the stern. A lifeboat hangs from the davits.

“Women and children first!”

It’s mayhem. Men implore their families to board, promising everything will be all right. From their shabby clothes, it’s easy to see they’re from steerage.

“What do we have here?” a shipmate yells. He removes a shawl and a scarf from the head of a man trying to board. “Josser.”

A woman has the vapors and faints in her husband’s arms.

A crowd gathers by a lifeboat hanging from the derricks. Men step aside as I make my way through.

Before me is a woman and her three daughters. Their tattered clothes arouse my sympathy. I slip the ruby ring into the woman’s coat pocket.

“Come on, Miss,” a deckhand says. He takes my arm and helps me into the boat.

Other than the two in command of rowing, I am the only man.

I dismiss any charge that I am a coward. Be that as it may, it will forever be a blessing, an irony indeed, that what saved me was the hand I was dealt.



## 1932

Pa decided to join the Bonus Expeditionary Force. After dropping Ma and the youngsters off at Uncle Vernon's, he let me ride the rails with him from our home in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, all the way to the Washington Freight Yard.

Pa and thousands of other veterans were demanding their bonus pay—the money they could have earned if they hadn't gone off to fight for their country in the Great War. No man wanted to wait until 1945 to get paid, not while his family was starving. That's why we came to Anacostia Flats, a swampy, muddy area along the Anacostia River across from the Capitol where we could see the dome. Ankle-deep in mud, Pa and I built our shanty along with forty-three thousand, counting wives and children—the biggest Hooverville ever, named after the president who no one seemed to like.

When the bank people came to take our farm, Pa rushed out of the house with a shotgun and fired over their heads, scaring me and Joey. Ma cried. The twins howled and clung to her flour-sack dress. Pa cursed the politicians, said they were just bumping gums when it came to veterans' bonus pay.

We made our shack out of materials from the nearby dump site—old lumber, packing boxes, and scrap tin. Pa and I worked shoulder to shoulder. He started calling me Tom instead of Tommy.

Other veterans were scattered around Washington in deserted billets, but Camp Marks was the heartland. We built a real city with streets, latrines, a barber shop, a lending library where I spent most of my time, and a boxing ring, where Pa liked to spar.

For breakfast and dinner, everyone ate a stew made of potatoes, onions, and hotdogs. We lived on Pennsylvania Road, a place I called home.

Next door was a colored man from Harrisburg and his son Cornelius.

Pa said two things made a man equal—fighting for your country and taking care of your family—so it appeared, ‘cause everyone got along. Pa said the newspapers lied, wanting to cause trouble, saying the races couldn’t mix, and that communists were infiltrating the camp. How could that be when everyone had to show their service certificate?

One day, Pa and I walked to the top of the bluff where we looked over the entire encampment. From poles and shanties, hundreds of American flags rippled in the breeze, showing how much we loved our country.

That night we took our meal back to our shack. Pa gulped his down and said, “War makes rich men richer. Remember that, son, before you go off to be a pawn in a rich man’s game.” I didn’t eat much after that. Pa’s anger and bitterness filled my belly instead.

A few days after we settled in, we walked to the Capitol where the House of Representatives took a vote on the Bonus Bill. Pa and I wore white shirts and bib overalls, wool caps—hot for June, but that’s what we had, being farmers and all. Other men dressed in wrinkled suits and worn fedoras. The tall columns dwarfed the people on the steps. Veterans sang, “America,” the air itself charged with hope.

When the organizer, Mr. Waters, came out and said the House passed the bill, I never heard such whooping and hollering. Tears ran down Pa’s cheeks. Hats twirled in the air, cheering going on for near half an hour. We had money and could go home.

But when we headed back, Pa said, “Son, this is just one hurdle, the Senate has to pass the

bill and that'll be harder."

"Why?"

"More Republicans in the Senate."

What seemed whacky to me was how something so sensible, like paying people their due, had to be voted on in the first place.

That night sleep came in jerks.

Two days after the House passed the bill, we went to the Capitol for the Senate vote. Veterans held signs reading, *No Pay We Stay, Give Us Our Bonus Or Give Us A Job*.

Pa's fists stretched the holes in the pockets of his overalls, his jaw working back and forth. I could feel him wanting to get into the ring while we waited. He took off his cap and looked to the heavens.

Pa's bonus money went down in the Senate. He said it was like the crash of '29 all over again.

I was too old to take his hand, but I let him take mine.

"We're staying on son, until justice is done."

Some folks left. But many stayed, with more coming from out west to join in the protest.

Toward the end of July, Hoover demanded that all veterans go home, but most had no home to go to.

On July 28, thousands of us walked to the Capitol. Food was becoming scarce at Camp Marks, so everyone looked gaunt, but we were righteous in our cause, and that gave us strength.

Police walloped the protesters with their billyclubs. We broke through their line and ran. Gun shots fired. Women screamed. It turned into a riot, and then I saw the U.S. Army marching

toward us.

There was infantry, soldiers on horseback, tanks. They were coming to rescue us. Overjoyed, I cheered along with Pa and everyone else. The army aimed their rifles. Sunlight glinted off the tips of their bayonets. But then—

. . . *they were charging at us!*

Bile roared in my stomach. They hurled gas grenades. People scattered.

I hacked, snot poured from my nose. I experienced Pa's pain from being gassed in the war.

Veterans threw rocks at the army.

I shuddered, knowing my father could be killed by his own.

We ran toward the flats.

But what we were running to suddenly rose up in flames—the shanties, the library, all of Anacostia Flats.

Pa put his arm around my shoulder while we watched our city burn. I held back tears, wanting to be strong for my father.

**1951**

Charlie didn't have the guts to rob the drugstore in Visalia. The woman behind the counter reminded him of his mother—what a chump. His truck needed gas, oil, a new carburetor. No sweat. Now he could buy a brand-new Cadillac.

Charlie nodded at the man in the Air Force uniform. The goon thought himself important in his creased pants, pressed shirt, and two rows of medals on his chest. Charlie believed Roswell was a hoax, until now. Sure, he agreed. What crashed must have been a weather balloon.

“Take anything?” the goon asked.

“Nope.”

“Touch anything?”

“Nope.”

“How long you been here?”

Charlie shrugged. “A couple minutes,” he said, glancing at his truck.

“Your truck?”

“Yeah. Can I go?”

“In a few minutes. Stay here.” The goon walked off.

Charlie had been driving to the Paradise Motel when he saw an oblong craft zigzag across the sky. It cartwheeled over the flatlands of Bakersfield, then bam, a boom so loud the wheels on his truck wobbled. He parked. Ran to the crash. Fear smacked him to his knees. A huge gash in the ship exposed four bodies. They had webbed hands and their skin was scaly, like a snake. Two were embedded in the control panel, the other two twisted in the wreckage. They oozed an

orange slime and reeked of rotten hamburger. Charlie pitched forward. Vomit gushed from his mouth. He wiped his face. Stood. Shaking. Walked backwards—staring. Halfway to his truck, it registered, he'd hit the jackpot!

He jammed his pockets with debris strewn across the field—trophies from the crash—elastic metals, a tube with symbols, a dial with knobs around it. The largest piece was a weightless inlaid screen. He could live on the story for months, maybe years—no more jail time. Gladys would take him back. Charlie was gonna be rich.

He had gone to his truck, wrapped his loot in rags, and crammed them under the seat next to his gun. He started over again until he heard sirens. In the distance, he saw flashing lights, heard helicopters overhead. Too far from his truck to split, he dropped the goods and ran.

The military goons suited up in white jumpsuits, masks, and gloves. Oh, shit, contamination. He hadn't thought of that. He looked at his hands, his bare arms, ran his fingers over his stubble—nah, nothing to worry about.

The cops arrived and then the press with their cameras. The military ordered everyone off the land. Charlie liked seeing the cops get the shaft for a change.

Leaning against the fence post, he pulled a match and a cigarette butt out of the sleeve of his rolled-up T-shirt. He gazed at the crash site. Man, where the hell did they come from? It was no flying saucer, and no little men with giant heads. These things were like reptiles. Did they have families? Would anyone miss them? Charlie blew smoke into the dry summer air. Damn. He was starting to feel sorry for them.

The whole crazy scene made him look to the skies. It made him think. He tried to grasp something, but it was beyond his understanding—beyond where to get his next lay or his next

buck. The wonder of it all made him curious and scared all tangled into something bigger than himself.

The same goon walked toward him. “Come here, Charlie.”

The guy put his arm around him. Charlie tried to shrug him, off but the goon stuck his claw into his shoulder.

They walked parallel to the site, the man’s hand clamped around him.

“Turned out to be a gag. Kid’s prank,” the goon said. “We don’t want rumors. You know. Scare people—have everyone panic.” He released Charlie. “You understand?”

“Sure I do.”

The guy handed him three twenties.

Charlie hadn’t seen that much dough since he knocked off a hardware store in Fresno a year ago. He grabbed the hush money and stuffed it in his pocket.

“You can go.”

Charlie headed toward his truck. He saw a convoy of jeeps and vans on the highway coming toward them. A lot of fuss for a joke. The big shots thought they could bribe him.

He opened the door and climbed into the Chevy. Charlie stuck his hand under the seat and felt for the stash. It was there. So was the gun. He switched on the ignition. It wouldn’t turn over. He tried it again—and again.

“Something wrong?” the goon asked.

“My truck’s dead. You got cables?”

“No. Where’s the nearest filling station?”

“A few miles west of here,” Charlie said, feeling the jitters.

“Any diners around?”

“Yeah.”

“My driver will take us.”

Damn truck was always breaking down. With the sixty bucks he could have it towed and fixed, then sell the heap of junk.

A jeep crawled up beside him.

“Get in. I don’t have all day,” the goon said from the back seat of the car.

Charlie locked his truck and climbed into the jeep.

“Got a cigarette?” he asked the driver.

“Yeah.”

Charlie cupped his trembling fingers around the flame. He stared at the crash site. What will they do with them? Images of those poor bastards would live with him till he died. He shot one last glance at his truck with the goldmine inside.

“Don’t worry about your truck,” the goon said. “It’s not going anywhere.”

“Who said I was worried.” He stubbed his cigarette and tossed it out the window.

The stretch of land was one long road out in nowheresville. Purple sage, sycamore trees, tumbleweeds, the mountains in the distance—if he could live anywhere he’d still choose the San Joaquin Valley. He heard rustling behind him. Then the barrel of a gun pressed into—what did Gladys call it, his sweet spot. They were gonna kill him all along.

Charlie took a deep breath and looked at the wide-open skies and wondered if anyone would miss him.



## **D. C. Diamondopolous**

DC Diamondopolous is an award-winning short story, and flash fiction writer with over 300 stories published internationally in print and online magazines, literary journals, and anthologies. DC's stories have appeared in: The Penmen Review, Progenitor, 34th Parallel, So It Goes: The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library, Lunch Ticket, and others. DC was nominated for the Pushcart Prize twice in 2020 and also for Best of the Net Anthology in 2020 and 2017. DC's short story collection *Stepping Up* is published by Impspired. She lives on the California central coast with her wife and animals.

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## **The Pilgrim Road to Compostela (1998)**

### **Brian G. Davies**

Having talked about it for some years, and taken heart from Club members encouraging us to "give it a go", we at last set out on our Motorhome journey of a lifetime. At first we thought that our 'van (a Swift Kon-Tiki 600 of 1989 vintage) - and perhaps ourselves too - were too old for such a trip, but eventually took out the relevant insurances, booked the ferry with the Motorhome Ticket Club, packed our Kontiki with winter clothing, food and reading matter, and set off in search of Dover. Being at the west end of the country we cover a fair few miles before La Manche ever hoves in sight.

As a holiday journey, that through France will be little different to those of many other club members. But how many of you have lost your 'van before even landing in France? By the time we discovered the correct deck, poor Connie was at the rear end, in splendid isolation and the return vehicles had already commenced loading. Still, once off we aimed at Abbeville where we were to visit the grave of Maureen's grandfather, killed in 1916 on the Somme. The cemetery is very well tended, with a Book of Remembrance including such personal details as are known on all buried there.

From here we visited Vendome and the nearby troglodyte caves at La Roque l'Eveque (some of these have now been adapted for mushroom growing, so dark are they), and passed by the castles of the Loire. We stayed two days on the very good-value municipal site at Montmorillon which, unusually, had a dryer as well as a washing machine, and on leaving visited the castle of Tours de Langest. This nowadays is a farmyard where we had to befriend the dog before being allowed to turn around and depart.



Troglodyte caves

After Perigueux, we diverted along the Dordogne valley to the hill village of Beynac, with its exceedingly steep streets, and then headed for our overnight stop at Fumel.



Hill village of Beynac

After two nights at Camping du Loup in Lourdes (near enough to town to be able to walk in and visit the Basilica) we set off for St Jean-Pied-de-Port, the acknowledged starting point on this route for crossing into Spain. Little did we know then of the club's experiences in the "puddles of Peterborough" - the floods there actually made headline news on French TV.

When driving in France there is much for us Brits to take notice of; they drive on the right (don't forget to do the same), petrol is cheaper, roads seem wider/longer, many roadside notices are not in our dictionary, and in April many campsites are closed or semi-functioning. Rarely if ever is one offered a discount... "if we had to reduce prices we wouldn't be open at all" seems to be the common refrain. But those that are open are usually above reproach, clean and well-maintained and with "chaud douches" included in the price. Our only gripe - those continental loos still exist in places.

Oh yes. Where were we going to? Well, in 1994 we came across a book dealing with "Walking the pilgrim route to Santiago", so we thought we'd track it (but in more comfort of course). The Camino runs from the French side of the Pyrenees to Pamplona, and then west to Santiago (named after Saint James the Apostle, brother of John). Pilgrims, cycling or walking, have first to negotiate that small hindrance... the Pyrenees. We, agreeably surprised by Connie's performance, sailed up and into the summit's snows, then down through the Roncevalles Pass to Pamplona, passing plodding pilgrims on the way. It's not done, we understood, to offer them a lift; defeats the object of their attempt.

Once in Spain the weather dried but became very cold. Our campsite there at Navarette (with its fantastic marble toilet blocks) saw blue skies and distant snowy mountains - and hundreds of Spanish campers. It was Good Friday and they were well and truly in residence. Each pitch consisted of caravan, awning, kitchen tent (fully plumbed in and with electric) and car parking space. Just like home - some even have gardens, and they chatter till two in the morning. Still, it was their holiday; we were just passing through, which we did the next day.



Pass over the Pyrenees



Camino de Santiago



Have you noticed how, on approaching Spanish cities, the nearer you get the less you see of the older parts? Instead, they are now surrounded by new high-rise apartments, five or six blocks deep, like massive guardians, and very intimidating. Once through though, it's worth the effort to see Logrono, Burgos and Leon, with graceful tree-lined avenues and steeped in history. However, after going down a one-way street in the wrong direction and having to make a 3-point turn (how did I do that... desperation!) we tried to stick to smaller places. Like Carrion - find the site if you can; like L'Hospital Orbiga, once a pilgrim hospital on the Camino, and with a magnificent 20-arched cobbled bridge; like Sahagun, with its ancient monastery and massive town gateway, and Pontferrada, with its huge storks hovering over their nests on the castle, like prehistoric birds of prey.



Arco de San Benito, Sahagun

Near to Castlejeriz we met and talked with a group of young French pilgrims from Montpellier, displaying the pilgrim emblem of a cockleshell, and carrying and reciting from religious texts. By having their passports stamped at intervals along the way, they are entitled to free overnight stays at refugious, and by day walk between 25-35 kilometres. The trek from St. Pied-de-Porte takes them about two weeks to cover the 400 odd miles to Santiago.

Our own experience of that city was depressing. Truly, to travel was proving for us better than to arrive. Firstly, we couldn't find the campsite (the Michelin Guide said near the Airport) so eventually we wild-camped on a spur overlooking the city. Up early next morning in pouring rain, we found that the site was signposted 100 yards further on, near to another sign displaying "No wild camping in the city". Tough, though technically we hadn't. It was too wet to park and walk any distance to the Cathedral so we innocently drove into the old city, waved "hello/goodbye" to the resting place of Saint James, and sought for our exit. Narrow street, tight

corners, morning rush hour.... and still raining stair rods. Were we glad to get out again. Found a bank for changing travellers cheques, so parked on a bus stop and dashed in. Twenty minutes later and mucho yappo with head office and "Sorry, we can't change Thomas Cook travellers cheques." Must be a first. So we gladly shook the rain from our tyres and headed north towards the Galician capital of La Coruna, once home to the Spanish Armada. This old city of Roman origin is today a busy international port, and is renowned for its miradores (glazed galleries on houses fronting the main street), the lighthouse Tower of Hercules, and the castle/fortress of San Anton.

The north coast of Spain is known as the "Green coast" and we soon discovered why. In general if it wasn't raining, it just had been. To add to this, campsites in that north-western corner are few, with even fewer open out of season. Another bash at wild-camping, this time outside a closed campsite (Spanish law permits this). We stuck to the coast road and were rewarded by majestic scenery of cliffs, beaches, tree-covered slopes and, of course, tortuous winding though well-surfaced roads. It was in this area that we noticed many men with umbrellas, cows with coats on, and those most indigenous of Asturian sights - the borreos, or grain barns. The small port of Riberdero nearly saw an end to our journey. It being market day, we decided to exit via a minor road towards the harbour. Passing two amazed Guardia on the narrow descent, we were unable to negotiate in one a tight turn near the bottom. I stopped and selected reverse... nothing doing. She just wouldn't go in, and the more I panicked the worse things got, edging us nearer and nearer to the wall, and the drop beyond. It was only after some four or five minutes of sweat and prayers (and some unrepeatables, no doubt), with a bemused but fortunately patient Spaniard behind me, that she eventually slotted in, and we were able to continue our descent. Another inch, and it would have required a tow from behind to extricate us.

After all this, it was a relief to leave the coast and head up the very impressive gorge towards Potes in the Picos de Europa. Extra care is needed here but the result is rewarding. The small mountain town is surrounded by snowy peaks, and we can recommend the campsite of La Viorna (again boasting a washing machine and a dryer). We stayed two nights, taking the opportunity in incessant rain to shop and dine in the town. The next day in brilliant sunshine we ventured to the road's end at Funte De, where snow was abundant, and from where a funicular ascends to a nearby peak. A snowplough had recently been in action, and the roads here were clear. Back on the coast, we made for Guernica (site of the infamous Fascist air attack of the Spanish Civil War) and round past Bilbao and San Sebastian, from where a new motorway crosses the mountains and down to Pamplona. We found the Spanish roads fascinating. Well-surfaced, often new or newly aligned, across viaducts and through several tunnels (and with petrol - and wine - even cheaper than in France); EEC money has certainly been spent to the benefit of the local economy and tourist traffic alike. But have a care; where roads are dug up, both sides are involved and long stretches of gravel, dust or mud may have to be negotiated in

both directions. Still, perhaps the job gets done quicker - or more cheaply - this way, but it isn't good for a motorhome's suspension. The road (N260) between Sabinanigo and Pont de Suert, our next evening's stop, is as varied a scenario as it is possible to get.



Deserted village in the Pyrenees

Imagine a steep ascent followed by a tunnel to the Puerto de Cotefablo; a long descent to the plain, where we came across several deserted and ruined villages, through a moonlike landscape of weather-carved strata and hilltop villages; and a very narrow and winding gorge dropping down again to a friendly and well-equipped site at Alta Ribagorga (the owner runs a bar across the road) a few miles before the town. Enquiring there about the deserted villages, which we had put down to pestilence or to brigand activity, we were told it was nothing more exciting than the old dying off, the young moving off, and the markets for their produce dropping off. Seemed a terrible waste of resources.

We were stopped, twice by custom officials. Faced with "have you got any cigarettes, alcohol or drugs?" what would you say? So, NO to ciggies and drugs - no mention of the gallons of drinkies out of sight under the seats. After a quick passport check we were allowed to proceed; I wonder why they don't ask these questions of you at the border any more, but sneak them at you on the open road. Though after France, Spain and Andorra what do you expect? And anyway, I'm a compulsive shopper in foreign supermercados, much to Maureen's apprehension, and bottles appear in the trolley all the time. At Pas de la Casa we were even given a bottle of wine for being such good customers. We exited Andorra via the Col de Puymorens, leaving the last of the snows to the skiers, and dropped into France for the run up to Perpignan. This valley is notable for its fortress villages of Mount Louis and Villefranche, and for the "little yellow train"

which clings to cliff faces and spans gorges on impressive viaducts... a fabulous piece of engineering. Later on we became embroiled in a local version of the "Tour de France".



The Cathdral at Elne

Everything gets out of the way of these cyclists, and the towns and villages along the way are lined with cheering crowds. What a welcome, we thought, until the support car let us have their horns full blast. That told us! Now in Catalonia (French side) we diverted briefly to visit the cathedral at Elne, Vauban's immense fortress at Collioure, and the rugged coastline around Banyuls-s-Mer and Cerbère, hard by the Spanish border.



Cap Cerbère Lighthouse



Then north again via Argeles, the great salt lake at Bacarès, and the historic cities of Narbonne and Beziers. Near to this latter we had our first trouble; trying to reverse in a small village square I sideswiped a tree (swear it just jumped out at me). The front bumper cover became dislodged but fortunately looked worse than it was. Staying with friends soon after for a short break we had it repositioned.



Brian and Maureen staying with friends, with their friends' dog

Then, once again well and truly in the mountains pushed on past Puy to the walled town of Langeac. Here, the campsite adjoined the river, and contained dire warnings of flooding, with diagrams of how to escape should the waters rise. Fortunately, that night they didn't, and next day we took advantage for a while of the quite pleasant (and free) A75 towards Clermont-Ferrand. Again, we were unimpressed by a large, busy and advert-cluttered approach so we pressed on via Vichy and Nevers, both well worth a visit. That evening we descended towards the then (to us) little-known city of Auxerre, with its well-equipped campsite opposite the football stadium (how the World Cup has educated us since).

Our final day in France - a Sunday - and the contact between the ignition and the starter motor broke down. A call to the French RAC eventually got us limping on to Calais, for a night on the dockside. By 8am next morning we were aboard and, some 400 miles later and considerable palaver to make contact manually every time we had to re-start were at last safely home. However, if those were the only problems in over 4500 miles of continental driving, we counted ourselves lucky.

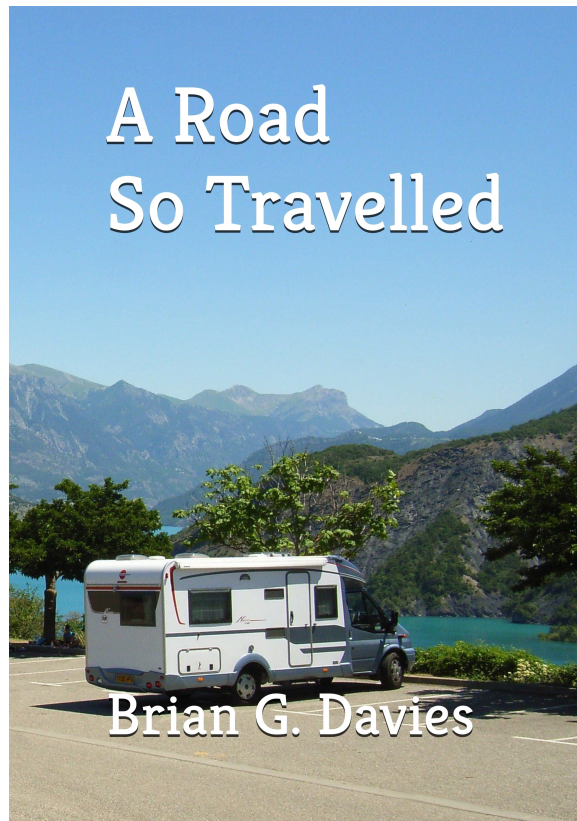


Despite our initial fears, it had been a great trip, and a wonderful experience, and our thanks to those members of the club who encouraged us to get on with it. Had we not done so now, who knows... would we have done it in the future? After all, both I and Connie are getting on a bit. Now, though, we are all looking for new lands to visit, new sights to see, but we shall never forget the thrills of this journey and the many places we were able to touch upon. There is indeed, nothing like Motorcaravanning.

## **A Road So Travelled by Brian G. Davies**

A Road So Travelled is an entrancing mixture of autobiography and travel articles, fully illustrated with photographs, and covering 9 decades of the 20th and 21st centuries. This autobiographical book includes the authors memoirs of his childhood as an evacuee with family in South Wales, and later boarding at King's School, Ely, and many travel articles from later life, including to Singapore, across Canada in a motorhome convoy, a coach tour of Italy from top to toe, a visit to Turkey, including the site of Troy, taking the Pilgrim Route to Compostela, and visiting Eastern Germany.

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/191071819X>



Brian Gwilym Davies, formerly of Knighton, Powys, lately residing in Swansea, passed away at Morriston Hospital, Swansea on Wednesday 19th January 2022 aged 88 years. Beloved husband of the late Maureen, loving Dad to Jon and Beth, devoted Grandad to Imogen, Bryony and Ceridwen, loving brother of Colin. His funeral service took place on Wednesday 9th February 2022 at 11am at Knighton Methodist Chapel, with burial at Knighton New Cemetery.

Donations in his memory to Cancer Research UK remain welcome.

# **Time Traveler's Tale For Today**

## **Clinton Siegle**

Being a closed time curved loop traveler was not my expected outcome of life.

Let me be honest. In my world Hillary Clinton's statement that Abe Lincoln was a senator was real.

That my world had 51 states in March 2016. Puerto Rico voted 52 percent to become the 51st of the United States, which means Obama visiting 57 out of 58 states of the United States, most probably truthful in some reality too.

The sadness of being a time traveler in this case is that all the souls I knew when growing up have been dead for billions of years now.

Meaning? You can find some of my journals online. Documenting my travels from Sagittarius, which Neal Tyson believed he was on Orion's arm, Orion's spur, and now on Orion Nebula. My journey has been absurd. Believe me. If I knew I was going to live 4.5 billion years to date, I would have been more adventurous.

Meaning? Well, on Sagittarius, I documented the earth was 6.5 billion years old. The next galaxy was to hit there in 365,000 years. And here on this mirror reality of earth the next galaxy is to hit in 4.5 billion years. Means I am a bit old.

The reality of the question is, which is real or what reality is real? My latest discovery here? According to your very own scientist, you have traveled back in time, some 52 million years since 2019. How so? Speed, time, and distance meaning? Earth for several decades was 27,300 light years away from the center of the galaxy. And now? 25,000 light years away. Meaning? According to distance, time, and speed, you have moved a significant distance in time. Some people claim bull. It is just a new estimate of where the earth is located. I would concur. However, an estimate of 1 light year is 6000,000,000,000 that is 6 trillion 12 zeros. While 2300 light years is 15 zeros. The difference in location of earth is significant, yet no one seems to care.

For more insight on an average, 66 years earth is supposedly moved 0.2 light years. What am I telling you? Well, you might be a time traveler too. Or not. There are many realities being played out these days.

Thus

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Thus, I welcome you to the time of tribulation per the bible. What I did not expect was to be involved in fighting Cylons or World War III.

Being a time traveler does not have the perks I would have expected. No major income increase. In fact, those experiencing this experience have come up with the Mandela effect. To relive a dead person's life in the past.

In the past?

Yes, for if I lived where I said I lived. You were or died some billions of years ago. And I? I am just passing through a reanimated world for today. And your past? Someone has already seen and watched and written much like the bible and other works of writing on history about elsewhere. Some say the book of Enoch or something like that.

The reality of the question? Can humanity stop the coming thermonuclear war? I somehow doubt it. However, as a time traveler, I will attempt to yell a bit. Maybe someone somewhere will stop the death of humanity. I doubt it. However, if they do. Congratulations on not killing yourselves.

Fictional history or truth in a tale by a time traveler watching the death of humanity? Ask yourself before you walk through the doorway of eternity. Did you do everything you could to stop evil from winning? Or did you let corporate fascism win at the end of the beginning of the system of things?

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<https://greythoughts.info/club-members/12345-7zflr-7sz9f>



# **The Estate**

## **Grey Wolf**

Dark outside, the windows would be useless for surveillance, but junior Guard Commander Samson Delaney relied not upon his eyes, but upon the rows of video recording devices, their output sourced from every hundredth of the royal estate. Hefting a gargantuan mug of coffee towards his mouth, he let his eyes scan over a dozen screens at a time, alert instantly to any incongruities, any difference however slight a deviation it might be.

"Check in" the voice crackled over the intercom, "4-1 clear, 4-2 clear, 4-3 clear"

"Affirmative" Samson spent a full second looking at each of the monitors, "Proceed to section 5"

"Confirmed"

He brought a biscuit towards his mouth, one of the chocolate and cream concoctions his daughter had had to make for an examination at the Royal Academy. His brain already savouring the taste in anticipation, he hardly noticed that his hand froze short of his mouth, "12-2" he said without thinking, knowing instinctively which screen his eyes were passing over, "Anomaly within the domain"

"Scrambled Alpha" a voice responded, "Information please"

He recognised the voice as belonging to Strike Commander Valence, a twenty-year veteran who had signed on for a second period of service and found himself here, guarding the royal estate.

"Shadow movement at corner of the monitor, organising full sweep"

"Moving out. Keep me informed"

Samson was already working on it. He had taken manual control of the monitor and was swinging it about, utilising its radial to the full. Nothing.

"Hmm" he finally bit down on the biscuit, and switched to the two adjacent monitors, taking the full biscuit in his mouth, and manipulating one monitor with his left hand, and the other with his right, whilst his eyes homed in on the screen. Nothing....no, something!

"12-3 sector 16...heading...oh shit"

"12-3 16" Valence's voice came back, "Heading please"

"Up"

"Up?"

"Some sort of vertical lift mechanism"

"Sector 16...that's directly beneath the Opal Tower"

"Affirmative"



Samson was already keying his security code into a stand-alone device, sleek and metallic black, clean and shiny in its relative isolation. It crackled into life

"Quaestor Athena" a female voice growled at him

"Intruder Alert" he began

"Negative" she cut him off, "No intruder present"

"He is coming up from 12-3 sector 16"

"One moment, I will check the window"

There was silence, and then more silence. He waited, but she did not reconnect.

"Valence?" he keyed into the voice channel of the Strike Commander.

There was no reply there either. Sweating now, the biscuit but crumbs upon his tunic, he rubbed his eyes and tried to consider his options. There were no options. He did what he had never thought seriously to have to do outside of a drill.

Stabbing the red button, he intoned

"General Alert! All units take battle positions! All mobile defence to the Opal Tower. We are under attack!"

The system was set up so that the visual alarms and coded system alerts would be followed by ten seconds of silence in which the giver of the alarm could make his verbal report. After that all hell broke loose, and the entire cacophony of alarms, sirens and klaxons blasted out around the royal estate.

\* \* \* \* \*

Aneurin Hall was a five-year man, but barely into the second twelve-month of that period, a fact which made him just seventeen years of age as he had signed up straight after completing grade school. Like all soldiers within the royal estate he had trained in the drills and simulations, and he knew what the blaring siren above his bed meant, but it was one thing to practice in an exercise when you knew it was going to be tough, it was another entirely when the General Alert woke you from a dream of home and your body tumbled to the floor before your mind was even fully registering the fact.

The others in his room were already grabbing weapons and running for the door, even as he stumbled into his boots, and opened the locker. Goddamn Harker! The bastard had taken his rifle, and left the decrepit Mark III that they shared between them as the only alternative. Harker's own weapon was, as usual, in pieces beneath his bed, ready for his early morning reassembly discipline.

Aneurin snatched up the Mark III, slid back the bolt and began to prime the plasma charge. As a training weapon it served, but the 100 seconds between charges made it a liability as a combat weapon. But it was all he had, and it was definitely better than nothing. Fastening his helmet, he clutched the thing to him and ran out into the corridor, after the others.

Gunfire crackled somewhere ahead, initially registering in his dimly-awake sub-conscious as a battle sign, before he understood the greater significance. They were based in the heart of the palace - gunfire straight ahead meant that the enemy had already penetrated to here.

"Fuck" he gasped, running in a strobing shadow of red and black as the lights blinked on and off, the main light flickering then disappearing in a tortured gasp.

He paused at the stairwell, and listened. A confusion of sounds came from above, but by now the main lighting had completely failed. Not only were the enemy here already, but they were taking down the core systems. A scream echoed down the stairwell, and then a head, still in its helmet, rolled into the dry red light, rocking before coming to rest at his feet.

"Harker?" he addressed the corpse-less head in slow shock.

An explosion above snapped him out of it, and he turned his back on the stairway. Clearly, the enemy had the exit pinned down, and sprinting up there would do nothing but add to a useless bottleneck. He turned and ran to a corridor sloping down into the gloom, swore at the absence of light, and plunged ahead. He knew this passage from walking it every day, and hoped that nobody had seen fit to park a serving trolley or janitor's cart in the way, as they very occasionally did, until admonished by the Castellan to stop.

Nothing impeded his progress and he burst into the kitchen, the huge table and darkened ranges dimly lit by the Moon and stars whose feeble light streamed in from head-high windows on one side.

"Aghhh!" it was Molly, one of the younger maids, and the one who clearly had had the unenviable task of sleeping by the great fire that night, the better to rake it out first thing before the full staff was awake.

"Its me, Aneurin" he snapped, heading towards her cowering figure.

"Are we under attack?" she demanded, stepping forward, hands on hips and looking down her snub little nose at him.

"Guess" he snapped, looking around in agitation, "Where is the keyboard?"

"If we're under attack why are you down here?" she made the accusation sting, and he was reminded again of her haughty rejection of him the only time he had tried it on.

"Because they are killing everyone who goes up the stairs" he growled, "Keys?"

She moved, a sylph in the moonlight that shone upon her filmy nightgown, showing him by shadows that she wore nothing underneath,

"Keys" she jerked them down off the board, "What do you want?"

"The interconnecting door"

She fumbled and slid one off, handing it to him

"Why?"

"Because I can't think of any other way of getting there."

He took the key and sprinted out of the kitchen, yanking open a wooden door and bounding up a short stairway until he was within the servants wing, their own sleeping quarters, now filled

with wandering figures, half-dressed and crying out as all lights had failed and only the intermittent red lights were strobing the corridor.

A man stepped out of a room, night shirt clearly soiled and wavered unsteadily in front of him "You are not allowed up here!" he protested.

Aneurin floored him with a punch to the jaw and sprinted along until he reached the double-barred iron-studded oaken door. A young woman, clearly heavy with child, watched him as he began to heave the bars aside.

"Are we winning?" she asked, holding herself protectively.

"I don't think so", he had the second bar off, and paused to rest it upon the floor, "I wouldn't be doing this if we were."

"No", she said, and sat down heavily upon a chest or trunk he could hardly see in the crimson haze.

"It is my duty to remain in the fight", he told her, taking the key that Molly had given him and setting it into the lock, "I would head down to the kitchen if I were you" he said, "It could get dangerous here"

"Yes", she watched him as he opened the door, "Thank you - yes"

He ran now, passing doors splintered by gunfire, bodies sprawled as they had fallen, the dormitories this side of the divide being those of court officials, all of whom had died before they could run, or hide. Leaping over the blue and gold of a sprawled equerry, he butted a door with his rifle, and leapt through, sweeping the room and gasping as he saw another body, this one cut completely in half, part lying still within an arm chair, part slid down upon the floor.

"What the fuck", he recognised the body as being that of Prince Gormand, brother of the late king, and a man known to be insomniac, or as others would say dipsomaniac.

Nobody else was present, but the window was broken, and scorch marks upon another of the walls told where a gunfight had happened. He ran a finger down a groove, finding the soot warm but not hot.

"Five minutes" he thought, which would place it around the time of the initial alarm. It had only been that long.

He paused at the great doors leading deeper into the royal wing, but there were no sounds. Somehow that seemed more ominous than if he had heard the throes of a battle still in progress. He paused and breathed deeply. Okay, this was it, this was what he had signed on for, to do his duty by King and country, by empire and by the citizens of the empire.

\* \* \* \* \*

The ground assault vehicle hovered above the palace, its commander looking out in shock at the flashes, flames and eruptions happening below.

"Confirm position" he snapped

"Position aye", the communications officer was a grizzled veteran of sixty, serving out a six month furlough on the royal estate before being reassigned to another frontline flashpoint, "Correspond 12-3, unable to raise ground forces, and security is offline."

"How?" Commander Alain Burton half-hung, half-braced himself against the engine outlet, as he leaned out over the scene below, goggles and integral part of his flight helm, tactile gloves helping to keep him in place.

"I would say ground forces are down, security is being jammed."

"No point landing in the garden", Burton sighed then waved, "Take us down there!"

"You sure?" flight officer Alexia Henry stared at him dubiously.

"Do it!"

A minute later, the vehicle had settled precariously upon the roof of the Opal Tower, its half dozen troopers spilling out and taking defensive positions, as Burton completed briefing the flight crew.

"Open that door", he said, turning back to his men

A woman, dark-skinned with her long dark hair tied in a fierce pony tail tossed a grenade at the door. It exploded inwards.

"Take point!" he yelled and two more of his men dashed forward.

"Clear!"

"Next!"

Two more, including the woman rushed past him

"Clear!" her voice called up

"Next!"

This time he accompanied the remaining two troopers, dashing down the stairway past the others, and crashing into the wall at the bottom,

"Clear!" he yelled up, "Stand by"

One of the troopers with him, set the charge and they all cowered down. A moment later a blinding flash lifted the door clean free and through it inwards into a store room.

"Spread out" he yelled, but they were already doing this, standard procedure.

"Anything?" he spoke into his neck communicator, a short-wave device connecting him with the vehicle above.

"A lot of interference", the communications officer's voice came down slightly distorted but clear enough, "We're not picking up any traffic between defending units"

"Shit", that was not in the book, "Hostiles?"

"Something", Burton could hear the old-timer shrug, "It's in code and in short bursts. I can't see how it can help you."

"But it's coming from inside?"

"Most of it - I can't be sure all of it is."

"Something outside?"

"I said I can't be sure", the old timer relented, "Maybe," he said, "Probably something"

"Any sign of reinforcements?"

"Ours? Nothing"

"Shit", that wasn't in the book either.

Burton looked around at the half dozen troopers and took a deep breath,

"It looks like most defenders are down, and no more of us are coming." he might as well spell it out for them, "We could be all that stands between the empire and disaster. I cannot ask you to do any more than you would do anyway, but I stand here with you as we go to do it."

There was silence and then the woman spoke

"Amen to that, commander"

"Good", he nodded at her, "Let's go"

\* \* \* \* \*

Aneurin crouched behind a ruined bookcase and watched as the two shadows advanced up the grand stairway, just beyond the door, and towards where a desultory fire was still being kept up by whatever defenders remained in this section. Uncertain of where exactly he was - normal service did not include running around the royal apartments - he nevertheless knew that if the defenders had made a stand, then either there was nowhere for them to run, or they were guarding something vital which could not run.

As the two figures crawled up onto the landing outside, and raised their weapons to fire, he dashed into the doorway, sighted and let loose a shot. It hit one of the shadows in the centre, exploding his guts and rolling him over, already dead. The other turned to fire back at him, but was felled by one of the defenders in the doorway opposite.

Aneurin raised a hand to the man, and looked back at the grand staircase, just as a flash grenade exploded, knocking him back and momentarily blinding him. He scrabbled behind a sofa as he felt and heard men storm the landing, men who fired a barrage at the doorway opposite, and drove on through. By the time his ears had stopped ringing, and the light before his eyes had cleared enough to allow him to make out objects they were gone, and all that remained of the defenders were bodies lying across the doorway that the enemy had passed through.

Cursing he raced across the landing, leaping over the man his rifle had blasted apart, then over the corpses of those of his own side, hunkering down inside a room that looked like a classroom, books in smouldering piles, maps upon the soot-charred walls. Two doors led out, one of which was open to a blazing fire, the other which led to a similar room, and beyond it the sound of gunfire.

Checking that he had recharged the plasma, he made his way slowly through the latter door, and picked his way between static desks towards the door at the far end.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Position?" he demanded

Nothing came over the short wave communicator, except static, so he looked to the trooper ahead, standing weapon aimed at the door before them, "Where are we?" he demanded.

"Commander" the man nodded, recognising the validity of the question, "By my calculations we have passed out of the Opal Tower into the main section of the royal apartments."

"On what level?"

"I calculate we are still in the storage level above the actual apartments"

"So if the enemy are here, they are beneath us?"

"That seems logical"

"Good"

He made his way across to a window that was little more than a narrow slit overlooking a small garden, far down below.

"Can we get any kind of bearing?"

The woman came over and looked out as he stood back

"That way" she said, pointing both at the door before them, and obliquely off to the left beyond it

"That is their target?" he asked, looking as if to see beyond the walls and floor at where she pointed

"Does it not seem logical?"

He sighed and turned around

"We are going to go at speed" he told them, "Through that door, across the storage rooms, and then down through the ceiling"

"Sir", it was one of the younger troopers, a man whose first operational mission this was with Burton as his commander, "Why are we doing that?"

"Because we all swore an oath", he said, then leant back upon the wall, "Because of what that oath means in the life of an innocent"

There were nods and a few clearing of weapons locks.

"Then let's go!" he snapped.

The trooper by the door kicked it open and dashed through

"Clear!" he called, and was immediately passed by two more running on beyond

"Clear!" they called, and the rest of them passed on through the doorway and sprinted for the room beyond.

\* \* \* \* \*

Aneurin shot the man. He fell, his throat a ragged hole, hands briefly heading there before life pumped out of him and he sagged to the floor already dead. Nobody could survive a direct hit from a plasma rifle.

He waited for retaliatory fire, but there was nothing, and then waited a moment more while the plasma charge on his rifle completed, before rushing the final distance, across the ornate little hallway, and jumping both the blasted barricade and the fallen enemy in one go.

"Princess!?!!" he called out urgently, and then froze.

The nursery was a ruined mess. The paintings upon the wall were charred and blackened. The small-scale furniture was broken and blasted, that which had not formed part of the barricade itself. A small fire raged in one corner where a stray shot from an energy weapon had ignited a pile of paper. And bodies lay strewn across the floor, no longer a carpet of bright green, but one blackened by fire and darkened by the spreading pools of blood.

Three of the bodies belonged to members of the royal household, two of whom were clearly staffers who had armed themselves and fought to the last, the other a guardsman, helm blasted clear by the shot which had bored through his chest, a helm gold and red in colour, bearing the phoenix on the front of the ridge, the helm of one of the Protection Detail, a man who would have fought for his princess until the last.

Aneurin forced himself to look at the other body in the room, blasted in two at the waist, young legs in a heap behind an upturned desk, torso flung beside the window, her head thrown back, blond hair draped like a halo around her bloodied face.

Knowing that he had to, he knelt beside her and took her hand, cold and lifeless, and raised it up to the Moonlight streaming in from the window. The ring glinted silver, a delicate filigree, a tiny sapphire at its apex, the mark of the blood royal.

He rocked back on his haunches and took his head in his hands.

The ceiling exploded, a rain of plaster and wood showering down upon him as a half dozen troopers leapt down, weapons at the ready, taking position all around him. As he raised his reddened eyes, another man descended, slower and more careful, a rifle slung across his shoulders. He nodded to the troopers then turned towards the man sitting upon the floor.

"Report" he growled.

Aneurin blinked the tears from his eyes and struggled to his feet

"Aneurin Hall, Fifth Platoon, I fought my way here...but it was too late"

He gestured to the young body, and the newcomer knelt before it, lifting the hand as Aneurin had done, examining the filigree as he too had examined it.

"Specialist!" he called.

One of the troopers detached himself, shouldering his weapon and drawing a small medical kit out from behind his armoured vest. He hesitated and looked at his commander

"Proceed" Burton snapped.

The man nodded and severed the finger of the dead girl, stripping it of the ring, and immersing the finger in a vial containing a blue fluid. For a moment nothing happened, then the liquid flared red, or orange, before returning to its original blue.

"What the fuck?" Aneurin muttered, appalled.

"Indeed", the Commander rose from kneeling beside his man, "Alain Burton" he introduced himself to the other, "and that is not the princess."

"Not the princess...?" Aneurin managed to find the words, although his brain was still reeling.

"Her double" the trooper replied, standing and pocketing his kit, "Complete with the R-234 signature"

"That bottle?" Aneurin asked, stumbling over his words.

"A simple test" Burton told him, "That is not the princess."

"Then..." Aneurin looked from one to the other, "Where is the princess?"

"Ah", Burton nodded and turned to look out of the window, "There is only one answer to that."

"What is it?"

There was silence for a moment, then the Commander drew himself up

"The enemy have her."

"They have the princess?" Aneurin was still hoping for something, anything else to hit his ears.

"They have the princess" Burton affirmed, "And may God help her..."



## Grey Wolf

Grey Wolf is an author and poet, resident for over a dozen years in South Wales, where he has family roots. He enjoys writing in the genres of alternate history, science fiction and fantasy, though believes that the boundaries of such often cross over each other.



# Museum

## Aaron Sargon

*Museum Tours* the sign had read.

Rendisca had always loved history, and she could not resist a visit to the newly opened museum. The ticket had been expensive, but it seemed to be well worth it. The Guide was very informative as he took them to each of the exhibits, explaining their history with the skill of a good storyteller. She was only slightly distracted by the man next to her who seemed to be taking less notice of the exhibits than he was of her. She didn't mind, she was used to it. Many had complemented her on her fine beauty. Long, shiny black hair cascaded over her shoulders and down half her back, usually tied in a ponytail, but today flowing loose as she relaxed on this tour. Dark, almond shaped eyes shimmered wisely in a face that was golden-brown, and tinged by a look of curiosity as she perused the museum catalogue which had transferred to her Infosense neurally embedded in her long, delicate fingers. No, she didn't mind. Just another typical leering male, she thought before dismissing him from her mind as she focused her full attention on the tour.

The Guide was talking again. " - and here we see some relics from the Semvin Federation whose culture flourished about 7000 years ago. Their empire was vast and very well organized, based as it was on an efficient hierarchical structure - ", He pointed to a holographic map which had materialized beside him. "Powerful as they were, their civilization was finally subjugated a few centuries later by a most extraordinary people. The Semvin had survived many attempts to overthrow their culture, but their conquerors went on to become the most powerful race in this area.". Again he gestured towards the holomap which zoomed in onto a detailed representation of the extent of the Semvin empire. The map then proceeded to show how over a period of time the Semvin Federation had been fragmented and absorbed by their conquerors.

Rendisca gazed mesmerized at the display. The Semvin had built a huge empire made up of states federated together. Its military might had been enormous, the entire Federation welded together by a huge army and navy which ruled not through fear, but by providing protection from foreign invasions. The empire had stood for millennia, yet even its power had not been enough to fend off its eventual conquerors. Rendisca was astonished. The Conquerors must have possessed unimaginable power to have defeated the Semvin. *Who were they*, she wondered. She looked eagerly towards the Guide and his holomap hoping that he would soon provide the answer.

The Guide swept his hand towards the great artefacts that were on view, and Rendisca caught her breath at the majesty of them, and the damage they had sustained from the Conquerors. All the time, she listened attentively to the Guide as he continued his tale of the Conquerors.

"Those who overthrew the Semvin were incredibly powerful, and aggressive they were too. Witness the damage they caused. It appears to be the work of unfeeling barbarians, which

indeed was what their military was mostly composed of. However, it would be a mistake to assume all of them were so bent on conquest. The Conquerors were a highly intelligent people, and could be capable of great acts of nobility and sacrifice."

Rendisca was enthralled enough not to notice the man next to her observing her even more closely than before. She watched as the Guide's fingers danced in the air as they manipulated Infosense and announced what Rendisca had been hoping to hear.

"I will now show you the exhibits of the Conquerors' civilization.". The holomap faded, and the place turned dark. A while later the Guide spoke again.

"On the holomap you will see a representation of one of the Conquerors' Outer Domains. Note its size and complexity, but most especially note its extraordinary grace and beauty."

Rendisca turned her eyes towards the now reactivated holomap which depicted a vast and wonderful city constructed of white material.

"This is a reconstruction of one of their provincial capitals. This particular one was destroyed by a Semvin revenge attack during the Conquest - now, if you could turn your attention to the viewing area please."

To Rendisca's sides, and directly in front of her, the viewing area flickered into life. This time it showed not the huge artefacts of the Semvin, but colossal ones of the Conquerors. An entire city was spread out around her, but not the beautiful one she had seen on the holomap.

"These are the remains of the provincial capital previously viewed on the holographic representation.", the Guide supplied as he interacted with another array of gestures, and the city slowly rotated around them. "Note the state of the city. The Semvin proved that they could not only equal but exceed the Conquerors in destruction and cruelty. This is what was left after their surprise attack on a civilian capital."

Rendisca stared in morbid fascination at the shattered city which flashed in front of her. No graceful white buildings here, but a blackened and smashed wasteland, dotted with crumbling buildings. A once magnificent city reduced to rubble by the vengeful Semvin. *Millions of people must have died here* she thought, as she gazed at what could have been a mighty tenement block.

The Guide spoke in a quieter voice now, the enthusiastic tone he had previously used dampened somewhat. "Harsh as the Conquerors were to those who resisted their empire, even they did not destroy civilian centres of population. The previous artefacts you viewed were Semvin military outposts. The Conquerors destroyed the Semvin ability to fight, their logistics, not their cities. That is how they subjugated the entire Semvin Federation. The Semvin fought back in desperation, hoping to demoralize their attackers, but only succeeded in strengthening their resolve. The Conquerors instituted a harsh rule after they had captured the Semvin empire, hardly surprising when you consider that over 340 million of their civilians were killed here in one attack."

Everyone was silent as the ruined city continued to pass by them, everybody gazing at the terrible view, lost in their own thoughts, except of course the man next to Rendisca.

The Guide had noticed the silence of his party, and after allowing them sufficient time to gather together their thoughts, spoke again. "I will now show you something that should astound you.". Again the lights dimmed and the viewing area darkened. The Guide turned his

attention towards his Infosense once more, and everyone waited again for the next stage of the tour.

Yet again the Guide spoke as his holomap obediently reappeared. This time he was explaining the extent of the Conquerors' empire which was faithfully illustrated in a myriad of colours by the holomap. Rendisca was fascinated by the vista which seemed to be working in perfect symbiosis with the Guide, seemingly more so than standard Infosense would. She briefly considered this was most probably just her imagination as she was caught up in the atmosphere of it all.

"Now we will see the heart of the Conquerors' empire, the place from which the reigns of its Imperial government were held, and where its great Emperors and Empresses resided. Please turn your attention to the viewscreen once again my friends.". The Guide paused, allowing the anticipation to build up in his party, and activated the viewing area again.

This time a sight so majestic, so magnificent appeared there was an audible gasp from the audience. Stretched around them, for as far as the eye could see was a city. In many ways it resembled the one created by the holomap. but this was larger, more beautiful, and unlike the one which had appeared in the viewing area earlier, this one was complete. A brilliant white vista of graceful buildings, transport systems and open spaces fanned out from the viewing area. Truly, Rendisca thought, a city fit for Emperors! A city of dreams. But something was wrong. Despite the perfect orderliness of the Imperial Capital, despite the green parks periodically breaking up the white sea of buildings, something was not quite right.

Rendisca could not contain her curiosity any longer, and was about to ask her neighbour if he could place what was wrong until suddenly, she noticed it. The streets of the capital were littered with black dots. Surely no-one would design a city of brilliant white, and then cover its streets with black patches. She decided to pluck up her courage and ask the Guide about the patches. Usually a contemplative person, and under normal circumstances, she would rarely do such a thing, but her curiosity was unstoppable, and she couldn't wait for the Guide to explain.

"What are those dark patches?", she blurted out before she could stop herself. The man next to her raised an eyebrow.

At the sound of the question, the Guide turned in her direction, and said quietly, "I wondered who would ask that question first. It is not often we have somebody so observant on these tours.". The Guide regarded her approvingly, and everybody else looked at her too. "It is a sad and tragic story," he continued, and then, in almost a whisper, "but one that should warn us all of the dangers of progress too fast, too soon.".

Everyone had now turned their attention back to the Guide who now answered Rendisca's question. "A terrible accident occurred. The entire population was destroyed. Those dark patches are all that remain of the citizens of this city.". Stunned silence greeted him. Not a gasp, not a murmur. Nothing.

The silence seemed to last forever, until someone queried, "The population of this city? All destroyed? How? Didn't anyone come to help them?".

Another period of silence until the Guide answered. "Nobody could help them because there was nobody left to help. All the people were killed, yes, but not just in this city. Almost the entire empire was wiped out within hours. There were few survivors, and those that survived were all in one area, and this only because some of them had the foresight to see the

danger coming. As for how, it would be better to view the instrument of their destruction. It will be easier to comprehend the scale of the disaster with a visual reference. Please stand by." At this, the place darkened, but the viewing area remained active, and as Rendisca watched it, the city receded into the distance, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Soon the city was a white patch, and the edges of a continent came into view. Even this grew smaller until all that was left was a blue-green disc speckled by swirling clouds which glowed jewel-like in the blackness of space.

\* \* \*

The ship sped forward, until it was in a distant orbit around a planet. A blue-green world with a single moon. There were other planets in the system. A small red one, a huge gas giant, and another large one with beautiful rings. Near the blue-green world a huge device hovered, over a thousand miles across, enveloped in a shimmering spectrum of colours. The ship had come to a stop between the two, not in a direct line between them, rather somewhat off to one side.

\* \* \*

The Guide waited for his audience to settle down, and then explained to them the reasons for the Conquerors' demise.

"To your right, you see the throneworld of the Conquerors. To your left you see what caused their untimely end." A pause, then he went on, "Their empire had grown so vast and difficult to maintain not just in terms of travel, communication economic, social, political, and administrative terms, they needed a new efficient method of linking it together. Their old system was no longer sufficient for the task, so they created a revolutionary new one. This device was part of a mighty network designed to carry communications and power throughout the empire, as well as provide transport gateways to all areas of their domain and therefore maintain links across such vast distances and huge numbers of settlements, outposts and worlds. This represents just one such device, many identical examples were scattered all over their empire in huge numbers. Their technology and knowledge was great for their time, but they were advancing too fast. They were dealing with concepts they barely understood. Since their empire spanned significant parts of this entire galaxy, it was only logical they developed such a system on a galactic scale."

To the side of the Guide, the holomap sprang into life again, and showed a representation of the galactic power, communications and transport network. It actually connected every part of the empire and was so huge it was simply impossible to render it in anything other than a more basic view which could be comprehended by the human eye, even massively detailed as it was. Rendisca was astounded at the complexity of the network, but she was not so lost to its fascination to stop listening to the Guide.

"They used the galactic core to supply its energy, and therein lay their mistake. Nobody at that time understood fully the workings of the core as we do now. When the entire network was made operational about 2300 years ago, there was a massive power feedback at the molecular level. Since the network linked every world in the empire, the feedback was transmitted across the galaxy and virtually the entire population was wiped out by the resulting power waves of radiation which erupted from the network gateways."

Rendisca, like everybody else was dumbfounded by the scale of the disaster. The population of an entire galaxy eradicated in the blink of an eye. But wait - the Guide had said "virtually the entire population" had been destroyed, and he had mentioned there had been survivors. Once again she decided to speak out.

"There were survivors, weren't there?", she ventured.

"Yes, those who foresaw the danger of the project, and who protected themselves.", replied the Guide.

"How could they protect themselves? You said they did not understand the nature of the core.", Rendisca stated almost accusingly.

"What I said was true to a point. A few prominent scientists understood more about the core, enough to theorise about the possible danger. They presented their findings to the Imperial Scientific Council, but were dismissed as heretics and obstacles to progress. They decided to work on a solution to the danger once they saw there was no stopping the project. They had the support of various members of the Imperial family whose political power was limited. The Emperor, being merely a figurehead, could do little to halt the project. Although devoid of real power, the Imperial family was fabulously wealthy, and they supported the clandestine research of the rebel scientists. Eventually, the scientists thought they had found a solution. By reversing the process that was to be initiated at the galactic core on a much smaller scale, they hoped to create an inverse field which would protect them. The planet you see outside our ship was called 'Earth' or 'Terra' by the Conquerors. It was divided into different national provinces, a relic of old geographical and political divisions. Several of the provinces in the Eastern Hemisphere broke with the planetary senate, probably due to the Emperor's influence, and banded together to create a protection field enveloping their region. At the last moment, the scientists created a media scare, and people flocked to the Eastern Hemisphere in the hope the shield would work, and they would survive. Still, a substantial amount of those in other areas of the planet, indeed across the Empire, ignored the warnings, seeing them as just another crackpot apocalypse scare by a bunch of lunatics. When the network became operational, they paid for their ignorance. Only those who had fled or were located mainly in the Eastern Hemisphere of this planet Earth survived. They were the sole survivors of a galactic empire."

The effects of his long speech were not lost to the Guide. He saw the faces of his audience and knew what was coming next.

"What happened to the survivors?". Again, it was Rendisca.

"The survivors saw the results of the power surge, and they decided to leave their planet. Their regional shield required huge amounts of energy to operate, and it could not be sustained indefinitely. Their fear of another power surge from the still operational network made them evacuate rapidly. For some reason, the power surge had only killed animal life, it did not destroy flora or constructs, but they did not wish to stay. The Emperor and his family had joined with the survivors before the cataclysm. Using every vessel they could find and escorted by larger vessels carrying a mobile version of the field albeit constructed on a much smaller scale, yet sufficient to protect them whilst in transit long enough for them to use their intergalactic drive technology, they left the planet. Most went with their Emperor. A few million did not because the navigation systems of their craft were erroneous. All we know of

the Emperor is that he led his ships out of the galaxy to find a new home, to start again. The others became split up, and their fates are not certain, but it is thought some were spread throughout the universe in small isolated communities. Whether they still survive is unknown."

The audience were quiet. The story was so tragic it had stunned them into silence. Except for the man next to Rendisca. He seemed unimpressed by the story and was still looking at Rendisca, but this time appeared to be interacting with his Infosense data.

The Guide decided it was time to end the tour. "My friends," he said, "it is now time to return home. We'll set course for the Outer Territories Main Cultural Terminal, and you can telebeam home to your respective places from there. Those residing in Galactic MoLitwa 26 may be delayed due to a technical difficulty on their telebeam network. On behalf of Universe Historical Tours, may I thank you for visiting our latest Galactic Museum. I think you will agree that it is amongst the most popular of our museums, although at 80,000 light years across it is not one of our largest. If you wish to come on this tour again, there will be a ship leaving in eight Standard Days from the Main Cultural Terminal. You may also visit our onboard souvenir boutique after our voidfold. Please help yourselves to the refreshments currently being provided opposite the boutique. We will be commencing fold in ten Standard Minutes. Thank you."

As people rushed off to get something to eat and drink, Rendisca looked back at the tour in her mind, and also out of the viewing area which was really an advanced type of transparent titanium. A real view to the stars, and to the folly of an impatient people.

The man next to her had paused his interaction with Infosense, and was again observing Rendisca. At last she decided to deal with him.

"Look, what is it with you anyway?", she snapped at him. "You've been staring at me for the entire tour. That's made me feel uncomfortable and is not acceptable behaviour. I've a good mind to make a complaint."

"My apologies, however you remind me of someone," he replied, "someone of great interest in fact."

At this, Rendisca was not happy at all. "Typical! Couldn't you think of something more original to say? No? I suppose not! I shall surely be filing a complaint!". Feeling she had chastised the irritating figure enough, she stalked off in the direction of the cafeteria, determined to recover her normally calm composure. Why did she *feel* superior to everyone else? Except for the Guide - now he *was* interesting. "I must find him.", she said to herself, not even bothering to look back at the man who had made her so exasperated.

The man was alone, and he utilised his Infosense once more which was not showing a museum tour catalogue, but a personal information and scanning system linked to the government network. The tour had not interested him, since he already knew about the Conquerors and their planet. He was doing his job. And he had replied truly in a fashion to Rendisca, but of course had necessarily omitted certain details given he was a government agent, one of a special division detailed to investigate certain people.

He gestured and read the information he had been working on and the notations presented:

*Subject: Rendisca Komi Entara, Female, age 21, Student of Xenolinguistics & History. Residence in Galaxy Szent 11; Quadrant Beta, Dekseearge Cluster, Merris System, Planet Merris IV, Ekkon Province, Q'zon City, Okalu Ward, Block 32, Lot 116.15.79. Information as follows; Classified archaeological records show Merris IV to have been unpopulated 2300 years before present. Planet did not join Intergalactic Republic until 787 years ago. Scan of subject reveals genetic structure similar to that found on drifting starship 15 days ago. Starship was refugee ship from the Conquerors' Galaxy. Full records on that ship were translated and stored in government archives. Scan of subject matches genetic data & information on ship. Analysis as follows; Subject is descendant of the Conquerors. Genetic scan makes it possible to ascertain place of origin and conjectural history. Subject's descendants arrived at Merris IV 2300 years ago, escaping Conquerors' Galaxy. Subject's descendants from Eastern Hemisphere of Planet Earth, from nation provinces termed Da Chonghuo and Nippon\*. Additional; Drifting vessel was Imperial Household Craft. Not all of Imperial family went with Emperor. Subject is descended from Planet Earth's last Imperial Dynasty, originating from nation provinces together making up Eastern Hemispheric Governate. Conclusion: Merris IV is one of the lost colonies of the Conquerors. Inhabitants not aware of the fact due to possibility that founders of colony tried to eradicate all evidence relating to this. The Republican Council has ordered an in-depth investigation into the affair. Meanwhile, all residents of Merris IV are to be observed on excursions outside their system. The past aggressiveness of the Conquerors is known. They could be a potential danger in the future with the opening of the new Galactic Museum, and the evidence it holds. Chief Curator Mempep has been cautioned to restrict their tours of the facility. Evaluation ends.*

*Special Agent Emus Tok Rakm ceased interacting with Infosense. I knew it, he said to himself, there is something different about her. She was not aloof in manner. He rubbed his eyes. Mind you, she was most interesting to observe. Must be careful next time. Can't afford to be noticed like that again. Lucky she didn't guess who I really was. He turned and looked out of the viewing area at the monument to the Conquerors' dead empire. Planet Earth rested there, serene and devoid of human life.*

*The Tourship turned about and blasted into hyperspace.*

*\* China and Japan. For story purposes rendered somewhat differently as compared to present.*



## Reverend Fleming Gough (c1757 – 1835)

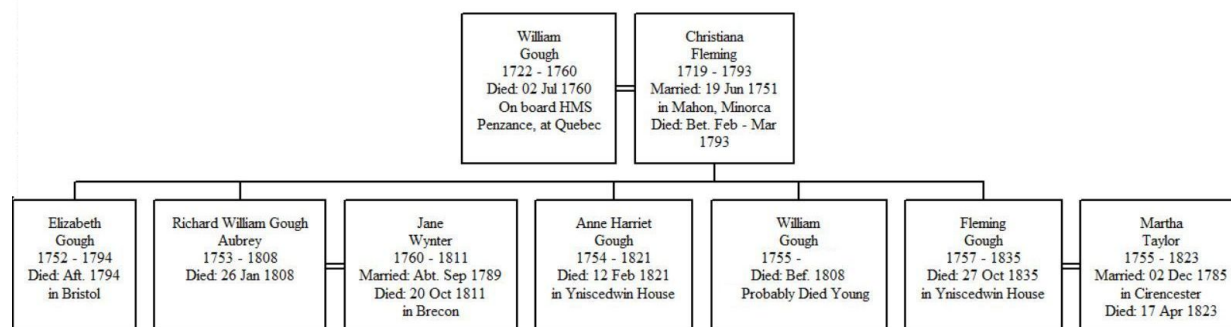
### Rector of Ystradgynlais & Squire of Ynyscedwyn

**Jon N. Davies**

Fleming Gough was the youngest of three sons, and five children, of his father William Gough and his mother Christiana, née Fleming. He was conceived in early 1757, when William was in England for the trial of Admiral Byng. Fleming was baptised at Saint Briavels church, Gloucestershire on 11th January 1758, implying a probable date of birth in December 1757. He would only have been a young child of three and a half when his father, Captain of the 44-gun 5th rate ship *Penzance* since August 1758, died aboard her at Quebec in July 1760.

Fleming Gough's older brothers were Richard, born in 1752, and William born in 1755. Richard would in time inherit Ynyscedwyn estate, changing his name to Richard Gough Aubrey in doing so. William died young, but the details of this are so far unknown. He had two sisters, Elizabeth, who certainly remained unmarried by 1794 and probably died so, at an as yet unknown date, and Ann Harriet (baptised Anne Henrietta) who was born in 1754 and would die unmarried in 1821.

#### *Descendants of William Gough*



The family of William Gough (junior) and his wife Christiana née Fleming

Fleming Gough certainly seems to have remained on the family's Gloucestershire estates for most of his first decades. At this time his surviving paternal uncle, James Gough Aubrey would

have held Ynyscedwyn estate, and become Rector of Ystradgynlais from around 1780, confirmed in 1781. 1780 is the same year that Fleming Gough is ordained to the diaconate of Saint Briavels church. In 1782 he is appointed as a priest to Steeple Ashton, though perhaps in the role of curate rather than as vicar.

In 1785 Fleming Gough married Martha Taylor in Cirencester. She was born in 1755 and was the daughter of William Taylor (or Taylour) of Chalford in Gloucestershire.

By the time of the birth of their first children, Fleming Gough is living in South Wales. There is a Masonry certificate (Free Masons) admitting him to Gnoll Lodge, Neath in 1787, a year after his brother Richard. Fleming and Martha's eldest child, Harriet was baptised at Margam church in August 1788, Fleming's name being recorded for some reason as 'Phlomon'. Their next child Susannah was also baptised at Margam, on 14th June 1790, Fleming again being apparently recorded as 'Phlomon'.

Note – It has been suggested that what looked like 'Ph' is actually a very extravagant 'F' and that he is being recorded as Flemon, or Flemen.

The Gnoll Lodge of the Freemasons met at The Ship and Castle inn, Neath, which is now the Castle Hotel.



DD YC 1208-3, Fleming Gough's masonry certificate, with thanks to West Glamorgan Archive Service for their kind permission to reproduce the image

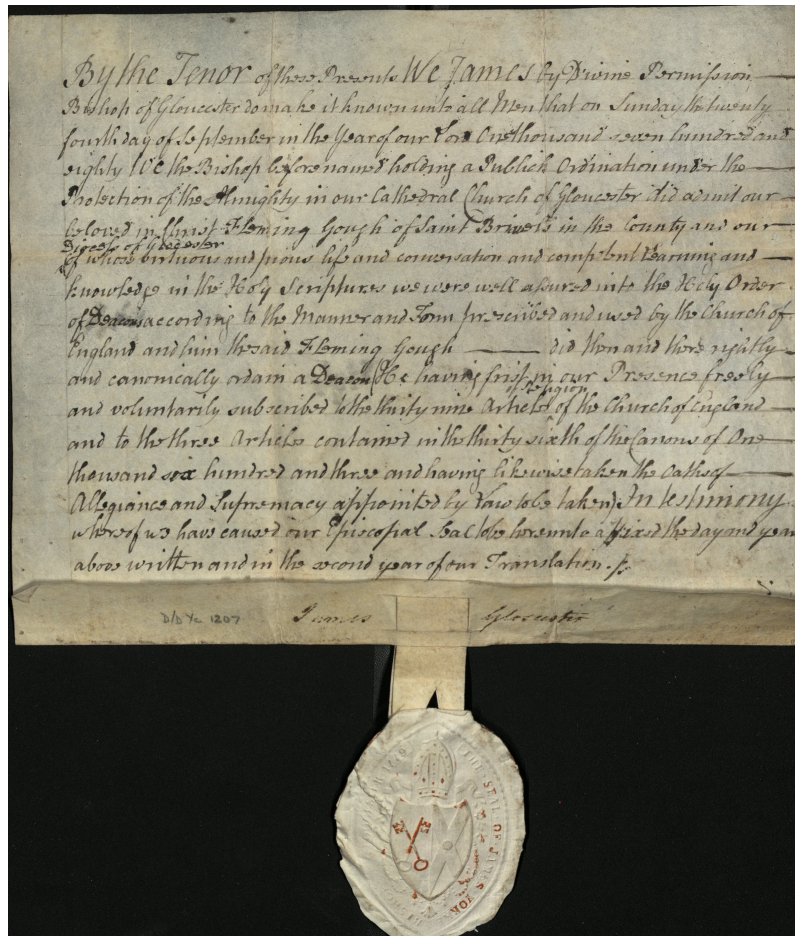
By the time of the birth of their third child, William Fleming Gough in June 1792, Fleming Gough is residing in Briton Ferry, and might indeed have been curate there at the church of Saint Mary. A fourth child, Richard, is recorded as born on 31st December 1797 and baptised on January 29th 1798 at Briton Ferry.

By this date, Fleming Gough had become Rector of Ystradgynlais (with Coelbren) and Rector of Cilybebyll in succession to his uncle James Gough Aubrey, who died in September 1796. The advowson of Ystradgynlais, the right to appoint the Rector, would have been in the hands of his elder brother, Richard Gough Aubrey.

## Church Career

### Ordained 1780, Died 1835

Fleming Gough was ordained to the diaconate of Saint Briavels Church in Gloucestershire on Sunday 24th September 1780, as evidenced in Ynyscedwyn estate paper D/D Yc 1207.



DD YC 1207 Fleming Gough's certificate of admission to the diaconate, with thanks to West Glamorgan Archive Service for their kind permission to reproduce the image

National Archives record D/1/14/1/18 are ordination papers from 1780 and 1782, including for the latter year "Fleming Gough, Steeple Ashton (priest)", Steeple Ashton being a parish in Wiltshire near to Trowbridge. The Clergy of the Church of England database (see sources)



records an F. Gough as Curate in the Liber Cleri of July 1783, this being a return to the Bishop of Salisbury listing extant clergy at a location in what is basically a snapshot of staffing.

There is no information on how long he was there, or if there was a progression, but other evidence shows that he was in South Wales by 1797 - his admission to Gnoll Lodge, Neath (Ynyscedwyn estate paper D/D Yc 1208/1-3) in the Free Masons. The following year his eldest daughter is baptised at Margam.

Whether Fleming Gough had any position in a local church at this time is unknown, but by the time of the birth of his son, William Fleming Gough, in 1792 he is apparently Curate of Briton Ferry church, now Saint Mary's.



Saint Mary's Church, Briton Ferry, in 2021. Only the tower remains of the smaller building that was there in Reverend Fleming Gough;s time

In September 1796, Fleming's uncle, the Reverend James Gough Aubrey, Rector of Ystradgynlais-with-Coelbren and of Cilybebyll died. The Reverend Fleming Gough was appointed to both of these rectorships. The advowson of Ystradgynlais was now in the hands of his brother, Richard Gough Aubrey, who inherited the Ynyscedwyn estate at the death of their uncle.

Richard Gough Aubrey, squire of Ynyscedwyn, died in 1808, without any children, and the Reverend Fleming Gough acceded to the estates. He would have been fifty-one at the time.

Reverend Fleming Gough vacated the Rectorship of Cilybebyll in 1815 by resignation, dated as 5th October 1815, the same date as given for the appointment of his successor there, Rev. Watkin Price, who had been appointed Stipendiary Curate there several months previously, 4th April 1815.



Cilybebyll Church, April 2021, the tower being the main part remaining of the church that Fleming Gough knew in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

The situation with regards to Coelbren Chapel, a subsidiary of Ystradgynlais is confusing. John Morgan appears to have initially been appointed Perpetual Curate there in 1797 upon the death of James Gough Aubrey, with Rev Fleming Gough first appearing in the records for Coelbren in 1804 as such - BUT the 1804 record is a Liber Cleri, which is a return to the bishop listing all clergy at a place, and is thus a snapshot and not an introductory date. It might be the case that

BOTH John Morgan and Fleming Gough served as perpetual curates there, and that in 1820 when John Morgan died and was replaced by Robert Wynter, Rev Fleming Gough continued to also hold the position.

Reverend Fleming Gough continued to hold the Rectorship of Ystradgynlais until his death on 27th October 1835. Reverend Timothy Davies, who had been curate at Ystradgynlais since 1825, probably took over immediately, but was confirmed officially to the position in 1836.

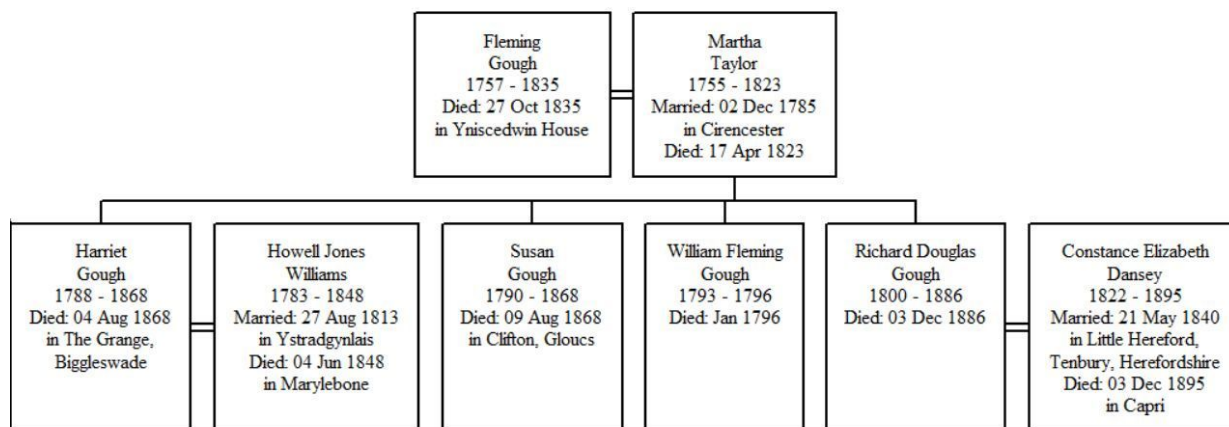


## Fleming Gough's Family

### Fleming Gough born 1757, died 1835

In 1785 Fleming Gough married Martha Taylor, who was born in 1755 and was the daughter of William Taylor (or Taylour) of Chalford in Gloucestershire. The wedding took place at Cirencester, Gloucs, on 2nd December 1785.

### *Descendants of Fleming Gough*



The family of Fleming Gough and Martha née Taylor

Their eldest child was Harriet, baptised at Margam church on 9th August 1788, implying a date of birth up to a couple of months prior to this. The record of the baptism records Harriet as being "Dtr of Phlomon Gough by Martha his wife". An insertion has been made between 'of' and 'Phlomon' which says "the" and a word I cannot read.

Harriet Gough married Howell Jones Williams on 27th August 1813, when she was 25. They would have four sons and four daughters, the eldest son being Walter Jones Williams (1814-1866) who would later become the Rector of Ystradgynlais from 1846 to 1856, the second son being Fleming Gough Wiliams, born April 1817 and died December 1817 aged 8 months, the third son being Fleming Gough Howell Games Williams, born in 1826 and who would rise



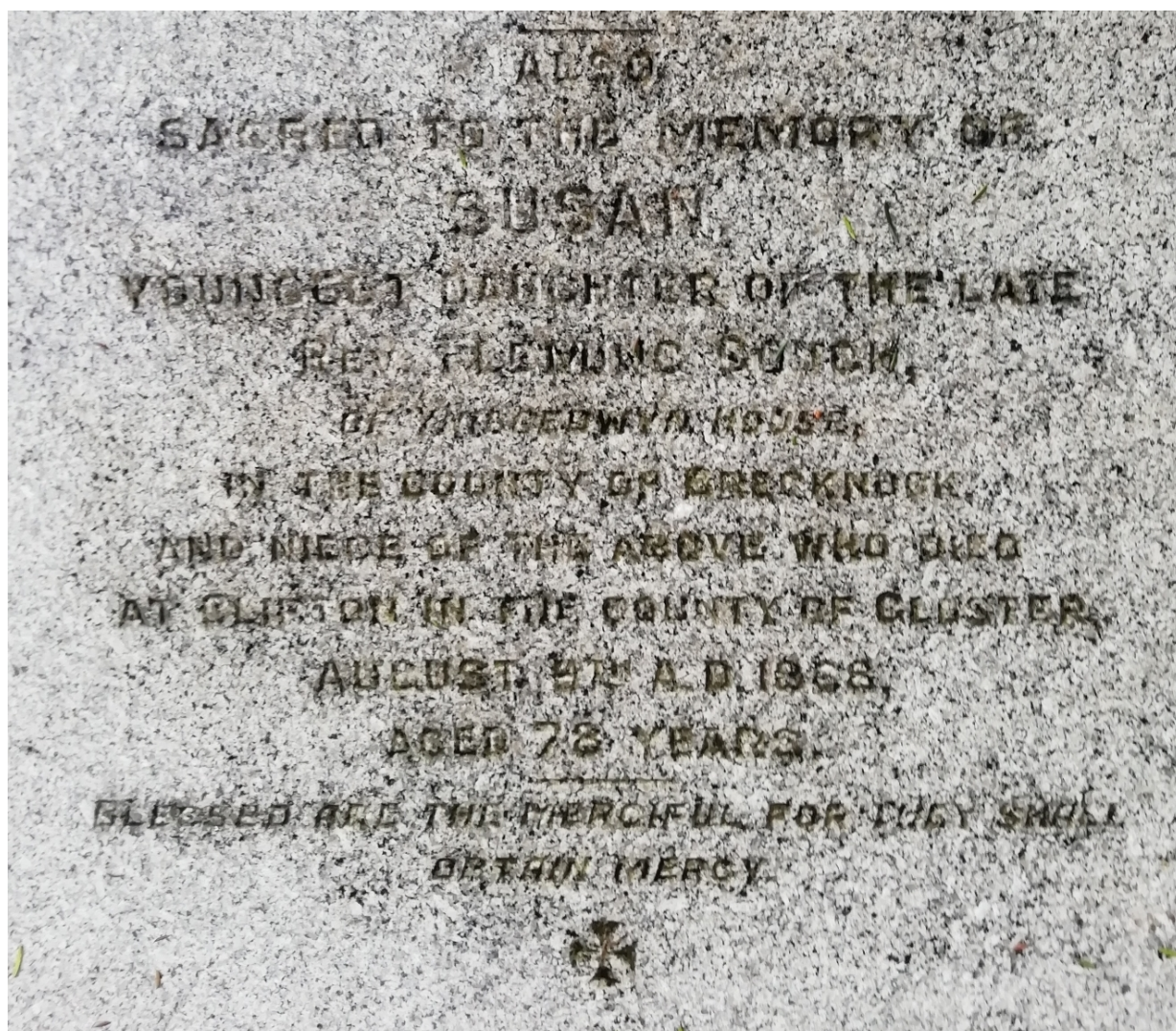
quickly in the military before his death in April 1851, and the younger son being John Wilkins Williams, born in August 1832, when Harriet was 42. The daughters were Anne Harriet, born in November 1815 (and who would marry pioneering Welsh photographer Calvert Richard Jones in 1837), Susan Beata born 1820, Mary Martha Gough Williams born 1821 and Gladys Games Portrey Williams, born in early 1829.

The abundance of family names is noticeable, as is the fact that the two eldest children were baptised, presumably for a second time, by Reverend Fleming Gough himself in January 1819, and the five younger children christened in ystradgynlais in 1834 by the curate, Timothy Davies, after being baptised elsewhere soon after birth. Given that Harriet's only brother, and Reverend Fleming Gough's only son, Richard Douglas Gough did not marry until 1840, 5 years after his father's death, it is quite possible that Fleming Gough was looking to an eventual prospective succession to his lands by Harriet's family in this period. Harriet's husband, Howell Jones Williams, died in 1848. She died on 4th August 1868 at The Grange, Biggleswade, aged 80.

Fleming and Martha's second child was Susannah Gough, baptised at Margam on 14th June 1790, implying a date of birth up to a couple of months prior to then. Again Fleming Gough's name is rendered as Phlomon - presumably either an attempted Latinisation, or a simple rendering of 'Fleming' which may have been pronounced in a Gloucestershire accent, in as phonetic a way possible.

Susannah, known as Susan, never married and would live until 9th August 1868, dying at Clifton, Gloucs only 5 days after her elder sister passed away. She is represented in the Ynysecedwyn estate papers in several locations. In D/D Yc 567-569, a lease of mining rights to some of the family estates the duration is listed as being "for lives of Elinor (wife of lessor), Barbara Ann Lucas of Swansea, spinster, and Susan (daughter of Rev. Fleming Gough of Briton Ferry, clerk)" implying an attempt to provide some revenue for the women of the family across 3 generations.

When Susan died, her will and probate mentioned a "Messuage called Newton Villa; in Oystermouth. Cottage and garden at Craig Vawr; in Briton Ferry" (D/D Yc 747/1-12). The Gough graves in Saint Cynog's churchyard, Ystradgynlais, has an engraving saying "Sacred to the memory of Susan Gough", and she was indeed buried there, in a service overseen by Rev. Thomas Walters on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1868, her body having been brought from Clifton, where she had died, aged 78.



Grave remembering Susan Gough in the cemetery of Saint Cynog's Church, Ystradgynlais; she died in Clifton (now Bristol) and is probably buried there

The third child of Fleming Gough and Martha was their first-born son, William Fleming Gough. He was born on 22nd June 1792 and baptised at Briton Ferry on 20th September 1792, a record which spells Fleming's name correctly, and gives his occupation as Clerk, the term for a man holding church office. It certainly appears that the record is signed by F Gough, Curate and the same hand that wrote that seems to have written the baptism entry for William Fleming, implying the possibility that Fleming Gough was Curate at Briton Ferry by this date and baptised his own son.



Sadly, William Fleming Gough died aged 3 years (3 and a half) and was buried on 27th January 1796 at Briton Ferry. The cause of death is given as "malignant fever".



The gravelled area at the front of Saint Mary's Church, Briton Ferry where, a few years ago, gravestones which had become illegible were laid flat as a base for the gravel. These gravestones included those for Christiana Gough, the mother of Fleming Gough, and William Fleming Gough, W.F. Gough on his grave, though incorrectly rendered W.T. Gough in an old handbook

Briton Ferry church records the birth of a Richard Gough, son of Fleming and Martha Gough on December 31st 1797, baptised on 28th January 1798. This poses a conundrum. The sole surviving son and eventual heir of Fleming Gough is Richard Douglas Gough, who died on 3rd December 1886, listed either as being "aged 86" or "in his 87th year", either of which implies he was born in 1800, or possibly late December 1799. This date of course does not accord with a date of birth of December 31st 1797. Either the Richard born in 1797 is not Richard Douglas Gough, and may be an interim child who died an infant, and the name was reused in 1799/1800 for a later child, or (seemingly bizarrely to us looking back on things) Richard Douglas Gough's exact age was somehow later forgotten.

Richard Douglas Gough married Constance Elizabeth Dansey on 21 May 1840 at Little Hereford, Tenbury, Herefordshire, which was the home of the Dansey family; she was 18 and he was at least 40. Together they would have seven daughters, two of whom died in infancy, and one son born last, on 31st October 1855 and given the name Fleming Richard Dansey Aubrey Gough, a fair representation of family names!

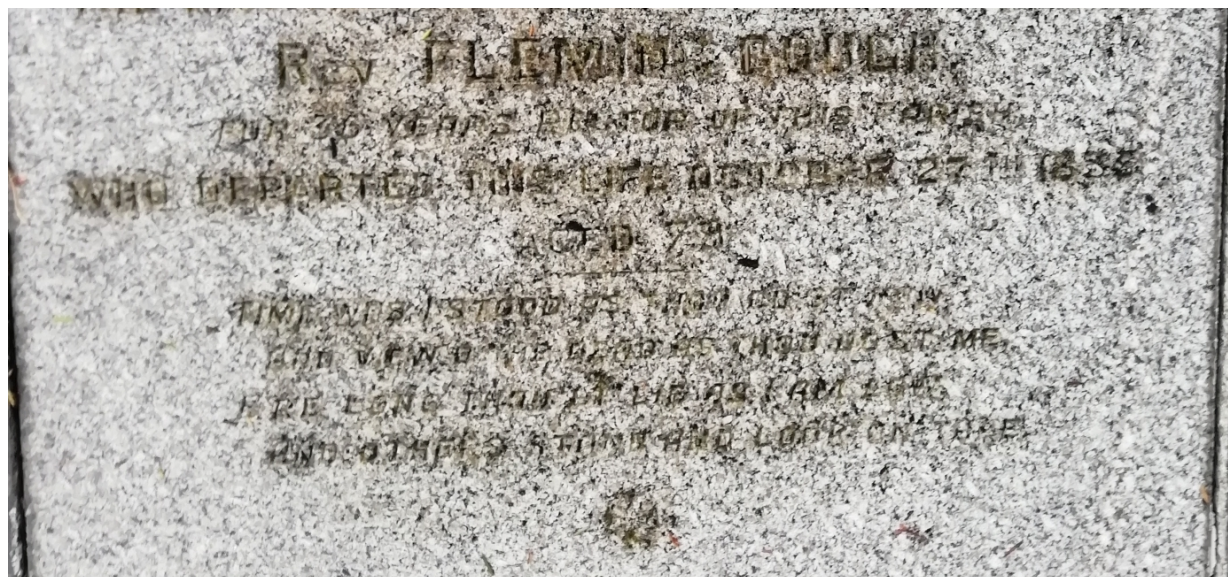
Martha, the wife of Reverend Fleming Gough died on April 17th 1823, aged 68 Years and was buried in Saint Cynog's churchyard, Ystradgynlais.



Grave of Martha Gough, in Saint Cynog's cemetery, Ystradgynlais



Reverend Fleming Gough died on October 27th 1835, his age on the grave in Saint Cynog's given as 79. Given that we have a baptismal record for him from 11th January 1758, implying a date of birth in late 1757, or just possibly early January 1758, it is impossible to come up with the age of 79 for him. If we go with the earliest possible date of birth, October 1757, then he would have been just 78. More likely he was 77, coming up to his 78th birthday. It is just about possible that he was born in early October 1757, meaning he was 78 and now in his 79th year, with almost 12 months till his 79th birthday.



The grave of Reverend Fleming Gough in Saint Cynog's cemetery, Ystradgynnlais

Rev Fleming Gough

For 36 years Rector of this Parish

Who departed this life October 27th 1835

Aged 79

Time was I stood as thou dost now

And viewed the dead as thou dost me

Ere long you lie as low as I

And others stand and look on thee

# Property and Inheritance

## Willsbury

By a family compact the Gough inheritance at Willsbury, Saint Briavels. Gloucestershire should have eventually descended to the sons of William Gough junior (1722-1760). This Deed of Limitation of 31 May 1758 (D/D Yc 541 in the Ynyscedwyn Archive of the West Glamorgan Archive Service) is William Gough, senior, settling Willsbury first onto his third son William Gough, junior, then to his wife Christiana, her brother Hezekiah Fleming and one William Jones for 21 years in a trust for the children of William and Christiana, and then to Richard Gough (their eldest son) and heirs in tail.

It can be noted that at this time William junior was the only one of the sons of William Gough senior to have married and begat a family. The eldest son, Richard Gough Aubrey (1<sup>st</sup> of that name) had inherited Ynyscedwyn from his maternal Portrey uncle in 1752 but remained unmarried, and was to die so in 1759. The younger brothers Charles and George had died young, and while John is attested to in a mid 1750s application of the family to the House of Lords to sell or mortgage parts of Ynyscedwyn, he is never seen again. James, the next brother between Richard and William, had joined the clergy and was unmarried in 1758.

Due to reasons that I have not definitively ascertained, Willsbury did not devolve on the sons of William Gough, junior. It can be noted that James Gough Aubrey, as he was now after his brother Richard's death, wed Elinor Williams of Aberpergwm in 1761 and would certainly have had hopes of having children from his 21 year old bride, though in fact none occurred.

On 20 April 1775, James Gough Aubrey leased out the entirety of the Willsbury estate to Archibald Drummond (D/D Yc 542). His father, William Gough, senior, had died in December 1773 and may well have been living at Willsbury until his death. But the trust referred to above should still have been in effect for 21 years after the death of William Gough, junior, which would have taken it to 1781. Had James got himself placed on the trust, had the trust deferred to him, had it been wound up somehow, or was he simply able to ignore it?

Ynyscedwyn estate paper D/D Yc 544, of February 1791, appears to be the one in which James Gough Aubrey sells Willsbury to Thomas Evans, although the language used in it makes it unclear that this is what is happening.

However it happened, neither of William Gough junior's sons, Richard Gough Aubrey (2<sup>nd</sup> of that name) and the Reverend Fleming Gough were ever to inherit Willsbury, which was now totally alienated from the Gough family. There is some indication in James Gough Aubrey's

will of severe bad feeling between Richard and himself, though whether this is over Willsbury or with regard to events at Ynyscedwyn is unclear.

## **Ynyscedwyn**

The Ynyscedwyn estate at Ystradgynlais had come into the ownership of the Gough family following the marriage of William senior (1693-1773, Fleming Gough's grandfather) to Catherine Portrey (1698-1733), sister of the last Portrey squire of Ynyscedwyn, Christopher who died in 1752. The property had first gone to William and Catherine's eldest son, Richard, who had been living with his maternal uncle in Ystradgynlais since the mid 1740s.

Richard had had to take the additional surname of Aubrey (the previous owners of Ynyscedwyn before the Portreys inherited) in order to accede to the estate. Upon his death in 1759, his brother James also added Aubrey to his name, becoming the Reverend James Gough Aubrey. James married Elinor Williams of Aberpergwm in 1761 and at some point moved his residence from Ynyscedwyn to the house of his wife, coming to manage the Aberpergwm estate, whilst leasing out Ynyscedwyn.

The sons of James's younger brother, William Gough junior (died 1760) were next in line to inherit Ynyscedwyn, and James' will, as mentioned above, makes reference to bad blood between him and his nephew Richard over issues of property and inheritance. There is an indication in a House of Lords case, and in a legal agreement between Richard and Elinor, James' widow, that James attempted to leave Ynyscedwyn to his wife, rather than to his nephews.

Richard won his case, and Elinor signed an agreement saying that on pain of a huge fine if she reneged on it, she would abandon all claims to Ynyscedwyn. Upon inheriting, Richard took the additional Aubrey surname, becoming Richard Gough Aubrey (2<sup>nd</sup> of that name) and one of his first acts was to carry out a major renovation of the manor house.

Upon Richard's death in 1808, his younger brother the Reverend Fleming Gough inherited the Ynyscedwyn estate. Fleming would bring his family there from Briton Ferry, and would reside there as his principle, possibly only, residence.

## Inheritances

Lieutenant General (as he was eventually) Hezekiah Fleming (c1720-1783) was the sister of Fleming Gough's mother, Christiana (c1719-1793), and thus his maternal uncle. Although Hezekiah married Lady Ann Hope in 1749, they had no children, although there is an indication that he had an illegitimate son in Wiltshire several years before the marriage. This latter, however, does not appear in Hezekiah's will where he makes bequests to his Gough nieces and nephew, and his Forester nieces and nephews (children of his other sister Charlotta, who married Richard Forrester and died in 1767).

The Gough nephew mentioned is Fleming Gough, his elder brother Richard not being included in bequests, perhaps because he was assumed to have the whole Gough inheritance coming his way, whilst Fleming, as the younger brother, might not be expected to inherit anything.

Hezekiah's will states:-

*"I give devise and bequeath to Fleming Gough All my Freehold Messuages, Lands and Premises in the Parish of Landenny in the County of Monmouth To hold to him and the Heirs Male of his Body lawfully to be begotten and for want of such Heirs I give and devise the said Freehold Premises to my Niece Harriot Gough and her Heirs for ever..."*

So far I have yet to identify what these lands etc in Llandenny parish were. It is to be noted that both Hezekiah and Lady Ann Hope Fleming were buried in Monmouth parish church.

What Fleming Gough did with such inheritance, I also have not yet discovered. If he kept them on, then it is quite likely that they were bequeathed in turn to Fleming's only surviving son, Richard Douglas Gough, and that their eventual fate would be found amongst his papers.

## Purchases

Newton Villa in Oystermouth had been built in the early 1820s by William Hammerton, on land he had leased from Thomas Gordon for this purpose. In 1833 the leasehold was bought by Reverend Fleming Gough for £650, though for what purpose, other than rental revenue, is not clear. He rented it out to a Nathaniel Worsley. Upon Fleming Gough's death the leasehold was bequeathed jointly to his daughters Harriet Williams, and Susan Gough, though in 1855 Harriet sold her share to Susan who became the sole leaseholder and in 1857 made some substantial improvements to it. After this building work, Susan leased it to a Colonel Clark, then to Anne Strick. Susan Gough died in 1868 and left Newton Villa to her sister Harriet Williams, with



reversion with reversion to their brother Richard Douglas Gough, who would indeed have inherited. In 1879 the Gough leasehold expired and the land reverted to the Gordon family.

Thank you to Wendy Cope for the history of the house at:-

**<https://m.sites.google.com/site/ahistoryofmumbles/author-collections/articles-by-wendy-cope/newton-villa-in-the-19-th-century-by-wendy-cope>**

## Reverend Fleming Gough's Will

Accessible at the National Archives Discovery website, Fleming Gough's will has the reference, upon download, of PROB/1860/268. Wills written up to 1858 for Southern England and most of Wales, where the deceased held property in more than one county, had to be proved by the Perogative Court of Canterbury. The Reverend Fleming Gough's will was proved at London on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1836 before the Judge by the Oath of Susan Gough, Spinster, the daughter and the sole Executrix.

On the surface, this looks strange, since his son, Richard Douglas Gough, was alive and one of the main inheritors. But the text of the will makes it quite clear why Reverend Fleming Gough chose his daughter to be executor (executrix as the female version of the word)

- - - - -

In the Name of Almighty God and in the hope of his mercy through the merits and mediation of my Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ, I Fleming Gough of Yniscedwin, Rector of Ystradgynlais, being of sound mind but infirm in body from age do make this my last Will and Testament, written with my own hand.

My Real Property and estate of Yniscedwin will of course descend to my Son and legal heir Richard Douglas Gough but as I have much reason to fear that his propensity to horseracing and gambling (a species of insanity) may devote that property to sudden destruction I have no choice left but to give and bequeath to my dear daughters Harriet Williams and Susan Gough the whole of my Personal Property of every sort and kind whatsoever, save and except such silver plate as may be in my possession at my death having armorial bearings of any kind engraved thereon, which are to descend to him the said R D Gough as heir looms.

I give and bequeath to my Grandson Walter J Williams all my Books, manuscripts and mechanical and philosophical instruments and implements save and except twenty volumes to be selected by my said daughter Susan Gough for her own use from the Books so devised.

That my intentions may not be mistaken or misconstrued be it clearly understood that as the Yniscedwin Estate will descend to my Son R D Gough. I leave him accountable to God and his Country for the management and disposal of it, only observing that if the truly Royal income of the late Duke of York was dissipated in horseracing and gambling, leaving him at last a lamentable bankrupt, what can a private Gentleman expect from indulging in such ruinous Propensities.

All my Personal property consisting of money due to me deposited in Banks arising from sale of valuation of live and dead stock and of every kind and denomination that can come under the description of title of personal property, except as before excepted, I give and bequeath to my daughters Harriet Williams and Susan Gough to be equally divided between them for their own separate use or the money arising from the same being sold to be so divided on a just and fair estimate by a competent sworn appraiser by them jointly appointed or otherwise by agreement for the estimated produce of such a Sale entered into by joint concurrence between them and their Brother R D Gough, who as my heir is to pay my debts and funeral expences which I will to be as moderate as consists with decency.

And I hereby constitute and appoint my daughter Susan Gough sole Executor of this my last Will and Testament In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this twenty third day of August 1831 F Gough (LS) Signed declared and published as and for his last Will and Testament in the presence of us - William Rice - John Lewis - Samuel Hal

(Additional punctuation by the Editor, to make easier sense for the reader)

## **Sources and Useful Information**

### **Online Resources for Historians & Genealogists**

Ynyscedwyn Estate Papers (held at West Glamorgan Archive Service)

**<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/95dd982a-7943-30b7-83bc-e615e82f6ba5>**

Clergy of the Church of England Database (Up to 1835)

**<https://theclergydatabase.org.uk/>**

Forest of Dean Family History Trust (Free Registration)

**<https://forest-of-dean.net>**

Dictionary of Welsh Biography

**<https://biography.wales/>**

Ancestry (Requires Subscription, available monthly)

**<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/>**

Free BMD - Births, Deaths and Marriages (from 1837 onwards)

**<https://www.freebmd.org.uk/>**

Welsh Newspaper Archive (1804-1919)

**<https://newspapers.library.wales/home>**

British Newspaper Archive, from the British Library (subscription necessary):-  
**<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>**

National Archives Discovery website:-

**<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>**

Aberpergwm papers in the West Glamorgan Archive Service

**<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/e80af07b-7508-340f-9278-ab5abbbe8169>**

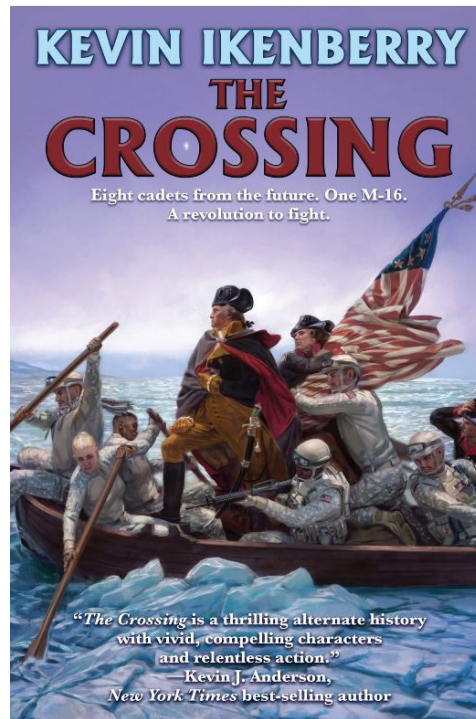
Aberpergwm papers at the National Library of Wales

**<https://archives.library.wales/index.php/aberpergwm-estate-records>**

**Thanks to Dave Annal (@Dave\_Lifelines) and Graham Aston for help  
transcribing various wills and other documents for this article**

## Book Review

### The Crossing by Kevin Ikenberry



The title of *The Crossing* by Kevin Ikenberry serves the dual purpose of highlighting the time travel experience of the cadets, crossing into the past, and the importance of crossing the river, and of ferries and bridges in General Washington's assault on Trenton in the year of 1776.

This is a book in the same base universe as Eric Flint's 1632 books, based as in the "present" where places such as Grantville have been time-stormed into the past, thereafter creating divergent parallel universes there. There is a little confusion as to whether this is common knowledge, or something top secret hidden behind the idea of "terrorism" from the public. I probably lack sufficient knowledge of the other books that comprise the larger series to understand how this seeming dichotomy comes about.

*The Crossing*, though, is a very strong story and can easily be read as a stand-alone novel, with the Grantville and associated elements simply taken as given from their mentions in the text. A group of cadets in training end up in the 18th century, soon coming to blows with Hessian soldiers, in the service of the British crown during the American War of Independence.

There is sufficient tension around this realisation, with attempts made to re-enter the present of 2008 and arguments among the cadets as to at what point to declare that they will not, at least for now, be able to get back. Once this realisation kicks in, the novel takes off on what might be seen as a more traditional time-travel alternate history direction.

There are twists however to the usual questions of - do we interfere, how much do we interfere, how can we make a difference, will we just end up dead? By accident they realise that they could inadvertently give the enemy (the British and their allies) an advantage, and even if there is victory they realise that by changing things they may simply change Britain's response to be a stronger and more determined one. This is a good mental application of the butterfly effect.

Kevin Ikenberry has provided us with a good cast of characters, all of which he attempts to flesh out to make into believable figures. Mason, the black squad commander from Pennsylvania has a lot to do, partly because people of 1776 assume he is a freed slave, and partly because his authority is an unproven one. These were cadets in training, on an exercise, and what comradeship they have is nascent at best.

The men, and occasional women, of 1776 that we meet are well fleshed out, from poor Cornwallis who just wants to go home to his lovely but ailing wife, to Colonel Rall in charge of the Hessians who is all too fond of wine and cards, to George Washington, bowing under the demands of leadership, both military and where the machinations of politics in a new-born country are concerned, and Captain Sutton, commander of dragoons, who has his own interests, ambitions and beliefs.

The gunsmith Daniels and his daughter Emily provide a useful alternative focus, both in providing characters with an "ordinary" view of events, and providing a geographical location which constantly proves important in the story.

The action sequences are well written, with sufficient but not too much detail, so that the average reader will not get bogged down and confused. When things move quickly, they read quickly. This is an important skill in a writer, so that the reader keeps pace with events on the page, and does not get mired in unnecessarily complex minutiae about a battle.

I found myself wanting to read the sequel by the time I got to the end, always the sign of an excellent and gripping read. How will the butterflies react? Will their actions in one direction work simply in that one direction, or have they brought more powerful and more immediate retribution down upon everybody's heads?

## Kevin Ikenberry

Kevin's head has been in the clouds since he was old enough to read. Ask him and he'll tell you that he still wants to be an astronaut. With over twenty five years of experience in space science education, including managing the U.S. Space Camp program and serving as an executive of two Challenger Learning Centers, Kevin continues to work with space every day. A retired Army space operations officer, Kevin lives in Colorado with his family. His home is seldom a boring place.

Kevin is the international bestselling author of The Protocol War series featuring Colorado Book Award finalist Sleeper Protocol, which Publisher's Weekly called "an emotionally powerful debut," and the sequel Vendetta Protocol. Kevin is also the author of nine bestselling Peacemaker novels in the Four Horsemen Universe as well as the military science fiction novel Runs In The Family and the thriller Super-Sync. Kevin has also contributed to the Nebula-award nominated Caine Riordan series by Charles E. Gannon and his alternate history novel, The Crossing, written with Eric Flint debuts in 2022. His short fiction has appeared internationally across various publications and anthologies. He regularly teaches classes for aspiring writers.

From his website:-

**<https://kevinikenberry.com/>**

Preview of The Crossing:-

**<https://kevinikenberry.com/book/the-crossing/>**

The Crossing released August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022



## Small Causes - Part 1

L. G. Parker

In his treatise, *Bellum Gallicum*, no less a history maker than Julius Caesar observed, "In Bello Parvis Momentis Magni Casus Intercedunt." (In war great events are the results of small causes.) Caesar had the truth of it. Relatively minor actions, snap decisions, capricious weather and other random events can change the course of battle. Relatively minor battles can change the course of wars. Relatively minor wars can change the course of history. For example muddy fields led to French disasters at Agincourt and Waterloo leading to the rise of England and the downfall of Napoleon. Italy's intervention in Albania brought the vainglorious Mussolini into proximity with Greece. As a neutral nation Greece was no threat to the Axis; indeed it served as a strategic buffer state but Mussolini could not control his appetite for empire. Jealous of the military success of his fascist ally he launched an ill advised invasion of Hellas. When the Italian army failed and a Greek counter-offensive drove deep into Albania, German resources were required to rectify the situation and protect the oil fields of Ploesti. The campaigns in Yugoslavia and Greece to secure the Axis Southern flank delayed the initial battles of Operation Barbarossa for five weeks. The loss of precious time, wear and tear on men and equipment, poor operational decisions by the Führer and the early onset of a historically brutal winter, doomed Barbarossa. Hitler's panzers arrived at the outskirts of Moscow in December 1941 rather than October or November; too little, too late. Stymied in Russia and now at war with the United States the strategic balance of power in Europe had drastically changed.

Two years prior to the events in Greece a small, relatively unknown battle on the border of Mongolia and Russia in 1939 determined the course of World War II in the Pacific. Soundly defeated by a rising military star, Georgi Zhukov, Japan fatally altered its strategic war plans. Initially remarkably victorious, a vicious fight in the jungles of New Guinea determined the limits of the Japanese advance in the South Pacific just as a mismatched fleet action between the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) and the United States Navy (USN) not only determined the limits of their advance in the central Pacific but also reversed the balance of power between Japan and America. The Battle for Okinawa, the largest invasion in the history of modern warfare and the final battle of the Pacific war, influenced far more than the immediate conflict. It sent ripples through time that affected the fifty year Cold War that followed. This series of historical articles will examine the *Small Causes* of battles, events and people both great and not so great that shaped the course of history as we know it. They are a treasure trove of "what if" scenarios that serve as a reminder of the fragility of that edifice we call history.

# PART I

## Nomonhan and Okinawa:

### The First and Final Battles of the Pacific War

#### Introduction:

All man's activities impact not only the present but also the future (1), none more so than war. As Winston Churchill remarked, "Great battles change the entire course of events, create new standards of values, new moods, in armies and in nations." War sends major and minor shock waves through time affecting distant generations in ways unimaginable in the present. These influences may be as trivial as shorter hemlines to conserve fabric or steel pennies in place of copper or as significant as an 'Iron Curtain' separating former allies and heralding a fifty-year Cold War. On a grand scale, empires may rise or fall with a single battle. More immediately, wars dramatically impact families, continuing some lines, brutally ending others. As Herodotus observed, "In war, fathers bury sons rather than sons fathers."

This section *Small Causes* examines the confrontations at Nomonhan and Okinawa, the first and final battles of the Pacific War, appraising not only the immediate consequences of these encounters but also their long-term effects.

#### Nomonhan:

Background. An editorial in the 20 July 1939 *New York Times* described the conflict between the Soviet Union and Japan on the border of Outer Mongolia and the puppet state of Manchukuo as "A strange war raging in a thoroughly out-of-the-way corner of the world where it cannot attract attention." Indeed, geography, the compulsive secrecy second nature to both combatants and the subsequent outbreak of World War II in Europe combined to overshadow this little known but nonetheless critical, battle. Boasting the most extensive use of tanks and aircraft since World War I, Nomonhan or Khalkin Gol, as it was called by the Soviets, impacted World War II in areas far beyond the immediate scope of the battlefield.

Nomonhan was the culmination of nearly fifty years of Russo – Japanese rivalry in the Far East. The Russo – Japanese War of 1905 followed Japan's occupation of Korea. Japan then antagonized the new Soviet state when she intervened in Siberia during the Russian Civil War. Japan's seizure of Manchuria, renamed Manchukuo, in 1931 created a 3000-mile border between two suspicious, hostile, diametrically opposed ideologies. The Changkufeng / Lake Khasan incident of 1938 was but a dress rehearsal for further hostilities. Consequently, what began as a minor clash between Soviet sponsored Mongolian cavalry and Japanese supported

Manchukuoan cavalry on the Halha River rapidly escalated into a major campaign with far reaching consequences.

Description. In May 1939 Soviet units crossing the Halha River into disputed territory were driven back by Japanese forces but immediately returned the following day in greater strength. Reacting to this affront the Kwantung Army dispatched the Yamagata Detachment with orders to drive the invaders out and seal the border. In the ensuing battle one regiment was encircled and destroyed, the remaining troops routed and driven from the field. Acting against direct orders from Tokyo the Kwantung Army unilaterally decided to retaliate sending the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division augmented by two tank regiments plus significant artillery and air support to settle the issue.

Phase two of the offensive began in early July with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Division crossing the upper reaches of the Halha while mechanized elements struck directly at Soviet forces on the right bank of the river. After making some initial gains the Japanese attack stalled. When the Soviets counterattacked, the Japanese found their lightly armored and under gunned tanks hopelessly outclassed by Soviet BT models. The Japanese rushed additional infantry, armor, aircraft and heavy artillery to the front, renewing the offensive in late July. Stopped cold, the Japanese now dug in and waited.

The Soviets also pushed strong reinforcements, many of them veterans of the Spanish Civil War, to the region and their logistics system proved remarkably adept considering the distances involved. On 20 August they launched a two pronged mass attack. In a pattern that would become all too familiar to the Wehrmacht, mechanized units, heavily supported by artillery and aircraft, spearheaded the assault. Japanese lines crumbled. Threatened with encirclement, her shattered forces fell back. Only the German invasion of Poland prevented their complete destruction and further Soviet exploitation. Recognizing Hitler as the greater danger and anxious to avoid a two front conflict the Soviets offered a cease-fire in mid September, which the battered Japanese eagerly accepted.

Consequences. At the battles peak the Japanese fielded approximately 75,000 men, the Soviets perhaps 100,000. While the Russians claimed 50,000 enemy casualties the Japanese acknowledged losses of 8,400 killed and 8,766 wounded. The Soviets conceded 9,284 casualties. A relatively minor engagement by World War II standards, why is Nomonhan significant?

- The Kwantung Army demonstrated it was a law unto itself making policy decisions rightfully the purview of the government. Its continued obsession with China and independent actions there eventually destroyed Imperial Japan (2).
- Nomonhan launched the career of General Georgi Konstantinovich Zhukov (3), future Marshal of the Soviet Union, savior of Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad, and architect of the crushing Soviet counteroffensive that began at Kursk and ended in Berlin.

- Zhukov's methods – elaborate defense in depth; intricate deceptive measures; mass artillery, aircraft and armor; battles of encirclement and methodical destruction; complete disregard for human cost – became the stock and trade of the Red Army.
- Observing Soviet actions in Finland rather than Nomonhan, Hitler drew erroneous and ultimately disastrous conclusions regarding the Red Army's capability and resilience. Stalin's purges decimated the Red Army Officer Corps. Consequently inexperience, inadequate training and pure fear of Stalin's displeasure resulted in a prodigious waste of manpower. When capably led by an experienced general such as Zhukov, who escaped Stalin's paranoid cleansing of all possible rivals, the Red Army was still a credible force.
- Nomonhan revealed critical weaknesses in Japanese arms, armor, tactics, doctrine and especially logistics. The lessons learned led to the creation of triangular (heavy) divisions designed and equipped to meet the Soviets on equal terms and pentagonal (light) divisions organized to fight the Nationalist Chinese and for counter insurgency operations.
- Until Nomonhan the Japanese favored a Northern or Army strategy of continued expansion in China and eventual war with the Soviet Union. This shocking defeat convinced the Japanese to adopt a Southern or Naval strategy centered on the vital resources of Southeast Asia even at the cost of bringing the United States into the war. In so doing Imperial Japan turned away from possible victory (a coordinated Axis attack on Russia in 1941) to certain defeat (war with America).

## **Okinawa:**

Background. Okinawa is the largest and most important island of the Ryukyu group. Located just 400 miles south of the four main islands of Japan, Okinawa was the linchpin of Japan's inner defensive perimeter. If the Empire was to survive, the Americans must be stopped at Okinawa. Equally vital to Allied strategic goals, the planned invasion of Okinawa was the culmination of a two pronged drive that began in the Central and Southwest Pacific after Midway. With Okinawa in its possession the Allies could tighten the blockade of Japan, intensify the bombing campaign against her industry and stage the men and materials necessary for an invasion of Kyushu. Given its strategic importance, ample time to prepare and the enormous resources allocated by both sides Okinawa earned the dubious distinction as the largest amphibious invasion, last major campaign and bloodiest battle of the Pacific War. As with Nomonhan however, other actions overshadowed the battle and its significance was lost in the rush of events following the death of President Roosevelt 12 April, the surrender of Germany 08 May and the detonation of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

Japanese Plans. Under the initial Tei-Go plan formulated by Imperial Japanese Army Headquarters (IJA HQ) the Ryukyus and Formosa were to form an impenetrable zone of mutually supporting air bases, each with a cluster of airfields. While planes were abundant, by 1945 experienced pilots were not. In addition aggressive American submarine patrols made it

impossible to deliver sufficient quantities of fuel, ammunition, anti-aircraft artillery, construction equipment, building materials and supplies to carry out such an ambitious operation. Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima, commander of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army, charged with the defense of Okinawa, possessed a more pragmatic appreciation of strategic and tactical realities. Thirty years of established doctrine (4) dictated an offensive response to any American invasion. Ushijima took a more reasonable approach however. Realizing the beaches would be untenable due to overwhelming American firepower Ushijima decided to abandon them as well as the northern portion of Okinawa. Instead he resolved to dig deep, contest the chosen ground foot by foot and counterattack selectively. In choosing an area strategically critical to the capture and control of Nakagusuku Bay and Naha Harbor yet favorable to defense and thoroughly preparing it Ushijima was able to maneuver offensively but fight defensively.

The Citadel. Concentrating his forces in the highly defensible and strategically critical southern portion of the island, his men constructed a defensive citadel of fantastic proportions. Realizing survival depended upon their own initiative the men of 32<sup>nd</sup> Army threw themselves into the work. Working almost entirely by hand they created an intricate defensive complex of pillboxes and gun emplacements 3 – 12 miles wide by 16 miles long. Sixty miles of tunnels honeycombed the complex with defensive positions above and below ground. Ushijima chose his battleground well. The hilly and irregular terrain of southern Okinawa provided numerous interlocking, mutually supporting fields of fire. Natural caves were expanded and connected to shelter the entire army. These caves functioned like warships with engineering, command, weapons and crew spaces. Vast quantities of food and ammunition were laid up for a prolonged siege. Okinawa began to resemble Iwo Jima on a much greater scale, dug into solid earth and stone rather than soft lava rock. One flaw marred Japanese preparations. Since each unit was responsible for fortifying its own assigned area with little inter-unit coordination the various sections were not well interconnected. Once battle began the units suffered from poor communications especially in calls for artillery support.

Japanese Order of Battle (OOB). Ushijima mustered an impressive force on Okinawa – 67,000 regular army combat and support troops augmented by 9,000 naval personnel, 24,000 militia (Boeitai or Home Guard) and 15,000 laborers. During the course of the Pacific conflict a great deal of war materiel had been shipped to Okinawa destined for outlying areas. As American submarine actions reduced Japanese shipping capacity many of these stores were stranded on Okinawa. Ironically the same submarine patrols that reduced the effectiveness of other island garrisons ensured 32<sup>nd</sup> Army was well supplied. The following chart provides an overview of the Japanese Order of Battle (OOB).

Unit	Strength	Subtotal
32 <sup>nd</sup> Army HQ	7,055	
24 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division	14,360	
62 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division	11,623	
44 <sup>th</sup> Independent Mixed Brigade	4,485	
21 <sup>st</sup> AAA Command	3,131	
27 <sup>th</sup> Tank Regiment	750	
19 <sup>th</sup> Air Sector Command	4,303	
66 <sup>th</sup> Engineering Unit	1,085	
215 & 259 Motor Transport CO	363	
49 <sup>th</sup> Communications Unit	2,641	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Independent Anti-tank BN	1,262	
3 <sup>rd</sup> Independent Machinegun BN	1,349	
11 <sup>th</sup> Shipping Group	9,112	
5 <sup>th</sup> Artillery Command	5,098	66,617 (Army)
Imperial Japanese Naval Forces	8,825	75,442
Boeitai (Home Guard)	23,350	98,792
Impressed Labor Forces	15,000	113,792

Let us now consider some of the major units in greater detail:

- Drawing upon previous experience the Kwantung Army organized the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry as a triangular division with three companies per battalion, three battalions per regiment and three regiments per division. Designed to fight the Soviets on equal terms the 24<sup>th</sup> also enjoyed abundant combat support units with artillery, engineers, transport, anti-tank and reconnaissance elements organic to each regiment.
- In contrast the 62<sup>nd</sup> Infantry was a pentagonal division comprised of five companies per battalion, five battalions per brigade and two brigades per division. Organized by the China Expeditionary Army to fight against other light infantry forces and for counter insurgency operations the 62<sup>nd</sup> enjoyed some engineering, medical, signal and artillery elements at Division level but possessed little heavy firepower or mechanized transport.
- The 44<sup>th</sup> Independent Mixed Brigade (IMB) was another heavy unit composed of two triangular regiments.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> Artillery Command boasted four regiments of 150-mm howitzers and cannons. The 21<sup>st</sup> Anti-aircraft artillery command, 3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-tank Battalion and divisional artillery added one hundred-seventy 75-mm artillery pieces, seventy-two 75-mm anti-aircraft guns, twenty-four 320-mm Spigot mortars and ninety-six 81-mm mortars as well as numerous smaller caliber weapons to the mix. Each weapon was strategically sited and carefully emplaced for maximum effectiveness.

- The 27<sup>th</sup> Tank Regiment consisted of one heavy company of 14 tanks, one light company of 13 tanks, an artillery battalion, an infantry company, a maintenance company and an engineering platoon.
- 9,000 naval personnel were stationed at Oroku Naval Air Base. Arming themselves with excess army weapons and machine guns cannibalized from disabled aircraft these men were converted to light infantry forces and proved rather effective. 17,500 men in various sea raiding squadrons, airfield battalions, service and support units were also reorganized and converted into light infantry.
- On 01 January 1945 the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army Staff ordered total mobilization of all Okinawan males over the age of 18. Of the 39,000 men drafted 24,000 were formed as Boeitai or Home Guard. Another 15,000 labored on the vast defensive complex under construction.

Allied Forces. Well aware of Okinawa's strategic importance to Japan and hoping to avoid a repeat of Iwo Jima the Allies assembled a vast armada for Operation Iceberg.

Allied Order of Battle		
5 <sup>th</sup> Fleet	Spruance	Overall Command
Task Force 57	Rawlins	Air Defense & Support Ops
Task Force 58	Mitscher	Air Defense & Support Ops
Landing Force	Turner	Naval Gunfire, Amphibious & Supply Support
10 <sup>th</sup> Army	Buckner	Overall Command
XXIV Corps	Hodge	7 <sup>th</sup> , 27 <sup>th</sup> , 77 <sup>th</sup> & 96 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions
III Amphibious Corps	Geiger	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> & 6 <sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions

Looking at some of the major units in greater detail reveals the extent of Allied preparations:

- TF57, under Vice Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlins, Royal Navy, consisted of four carriers with armored decks (an innovation the Americans would soon envy and later copy), two battleships, five cruisers and fifteen destroyers.
- Ten battleships, nine cruisers, twenty-three destroyers and 117 rocket gunboats comprised the bombardment group. On D-Day they unleashed a 'storm of steel' or *Tetsu no bow* of 44,825 rounds five inch or greater, 33,000 rockets and 22,500 mortar shells. Unfortunately for the infantry and marines about to go ashore Japanese redoubts proved impervious even to sixteen-inch shells.
- Designated as 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, Admiral Spruance commanded forty carriers, eighteen battleships, 200 destroyers, 365 amphibious vessels and hundreds of support ships and landing craft – 1,300 vessels in all.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Army mustered no less than 183,000 soldiers and marines 60,000 of whom landed on the Hagushi Beaches on the first day.

The Battle. The battle for Okinawa may be divided into four phases:

1. Advance from the Hagushi Beaches to the East Coast bisecting the island 1 – 4 April
2. Clearing the Northern portion of Okinawa 15 – 18 April
3. Capture of the outlying islands 10 April – 26 June
4. Reduction of the Southern citadel 6 April – 21 June
  - a. Assaulting the Shuri Line
  - b. 04 May counterattack
  - c. Withdrawal to Kiyamu Peninsula
  - d. Gyokusai

According to plan, the Japanese did not contest the beaches of Okinawa. Consequently, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Divisions along with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 96<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions landed virtually unopposed on 01 April 1945 and immediately pushed inland, securing Yontan and Kadena Airfields and establishing a solid beachhead fifteen miles long and 3 – 10 miles deep on the first day. By 4 April American forces reached Chimu Bay on the East Coast bisecting the island. As some elements turned north, major forces pushed south. The easy advance ended and the bloodbath (5) began on 8 April when American forces reached the Shuri line.

Terrain and Ushijima's careful preparations forced the Americans to fight a thousand small firefights in isolated pockets rather than one large battle in the open where their vastly superior firepower would prevail. Paying a heavy price in killed and wounded initially, the soldiers and marines of 10<sup>th</sup> Army learned to take advantage of small gaps in arcs of fire to isolate and destroy Japanese positions one by one. In a relatively even contest between American tank / infantry teams and Japanese pillbox / infantry teams casualties mounted. The mobile warfare and flanking movements of Europe were impossible. Movement stagnated and, reminiscent of World War I, progress was measured in yards. Monsoon rains began at the end of May turning the battlefield into a putrid morass, part garbage dump and part graveyard. As conditions deteriorated, sanitation problems increased and disease ravaged both armies.

From beginning to end a personal battle raged between Ushijima's subordinates. The more doctrinaire Chief of Staff, General Isamu Cho, urged an immediate counterattack while the more pragmatic Senior Operations Officer, Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, urged prolonged defense. The stalemate between the opposing forces and on the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army staff continued until 04 May. At the insistence of Cho and IJA HQ Ushijima acquiesced to a major counterattack. The four-day battle was a disaster. By abandoning their protective caves and tunnels and coming out into the open the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army lost most of its artillery and first rate combat troops. Without sufficient men to hold the Shuri line Ushijima now had no choice but to retreat to the Kiyam Peninsula, reform and fight on. Movement began on 23 May while rearguard actions held the Americans in place until the operation was complete. So skillful was the withdrawal that US forces were caught totally unaware. When the Americans followed on 01 June the remnants of the 24<sup>th</sup> Division held the right flank of a new line anchored on Mount Yoko Dake. The 44<sup>th</sup> IMB held the left wing with the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division protecting the coast and acting as a



reserve. The best Japanese troops had been squandered however. All that remained were Headquarters, service, support and construction units. Most telling was the loss of light and heavy weapons.

Realizing their mistake and capitalizing on the weakened condition of the enemy 10<sup>th</sup> Army redoubled its efforts. Tanks, anti-aircraft artillery, anti-tank guns, any type of direct fire, flat trajectory weapon that could be brought to bear and flame-throwers were used to drive the Japanese from the mouths of caves. This allowed infantry to approach and either clear or destroy the position. When airshafts were found GI's poured gasoline down them followed by phosphorus grenades while their buddies covered the exits. Some caves were simply sealed and bypassed. An estimated 20,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians were entombed in this manner.

By 19 June organized resistance remained only at Mabuni, final position of the 32<sup>nd</sup>, 62<sup>nd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> Headquarters and Medeira, final location of the 24<sup>th</sup> HQ. On 22 June Ushijima issued his "Stand to die in order" directive. In a Gyokusai (6) or 'Honorable Death Attack' each unit made final Banzai charges. His duty complete and honor preserved Ushijima wrote an elaborate letter of apology to the emperor and committed Seppuku (7) long with most of his senior officers. Still the ordeal was not over. Isolated units continued to resist and so-called mopping up operations (23 –29 June) resulted in an additional 9,000 Japanese killed and 3,800 captured.

Casualties. 76,000 Japanese soldiers and sailors augmented by 39,000 Boeitai militiamen and conscripted laborers confronted US forces on 01 April 1945. Out of a total force of 115,000 only 7400 surrendered. Of these, most were recently conscripted Home Guard or impressed laborers. The remainder died for the Emperor after extracting a heavy toll from the enemy. Estimates of civilian casualties during the campaign range from 50,000 to 150,000. Taking the median figure approximately 200,000 Japanese citizens perished on Okinawa.

Allied forces paid an equally heavy price for the conquest of Okinawa as detailed below:

	Army	Marines	Navy	Total
KIA	4,582	2,938	4,907	12,427
MIA	93	0	0	93
WIA	18,000	13,708	4,824	36,532
Non-battle	15,613	10,598	0	26,211
Total	38,288	27,244	9,731	75,263

In exchange for 76,000 combat troops the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army inflicted almost the same number of Allied casualties. To put these numbers into perspective, from 01 April – 02 July, 2,500 men, women and children perished every day for 82 days.

Kamikazes. While the battle raged on land an equally fierce life and death struggle took place at sea. Determined to inflict maximum casualties on the Americans in order to discourage any invasion of the homeland during the course of the campaign the Japanese staged 896 air

raids on the Allied fleet flying from bases in Japan, China and Formosa. At a cost of 7,830 aircraft, approximately half of which were kamikazes the Japanese inflicted 9,731 casualties upon the sailors supporting Operation Iceberg. In addition to the human cost 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet suffered 34 ships and craft sunk, another 368 severely damaged many beyond repair and 763 aircraft destroyed. Okinawa was the most costly single battle in US naval history.

Survivors Stories. Numbers present the big picture but the survivor's stories reveal the true horror of Okinawa. Junko Isa is such a survivor. When her village was bombed she and her family fled. All were killed except herself, her younger sister and ten-month-old brother. She writes, "I remember glancing over once to see an arm hanging from a tree branch. Just below that was a decapitated body. There were body parts absolutely everywhere. I think I became sort of numb to the sight. My father always warned me not to be captured by the Americans. They will do with you as they please he used to tell me. When I was eventually discovered, they took me to a field hospital up North where they fixed my ankle and fed me. I couldn't speak or understand English, so I had to tell them with hand gestures that I couldn't walk. They nodded and prepared two bamboo baskets, one for carrying me, and the other for my baby brother."

Okinawa rivaled the worst of the Somme or Verdun. E. B. Sledge, a 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division veteran, wrote in *With the Old Breed*, "The mud was knee deep in some places, probably deeper in others if one dared to venture there. For several feet around every corpse, maggots crawled about in the muck and then were washed away by the runoff of the rain. There wasn't a tree or bush left. All was open country. Shells had torn up the turf so completely that ground cover was nonexistent. The rain poured down on us as evening approached. The scene was nothing but mud; shellfire; flooded crater with their silent, pathetic, rotting occupants; knocked-out tanks and amtracs; and discarded equipment – utter desolation.... We were in the depths of the abyss, the ultimate horror of war.... In the mud and driving rain before Shuri, we were surrounded by maggots and decay. Men struggled and fought in an environment so degrading I believed we had been flung into hell's own cesspool."

The official history of Okinawa describes a gruesome scene discovered by army troops in a small valley, "In the morning they found a small valley littered with more than 150 dead and dying Japanese, most of them civilians. Fathers had systematically throttled each member of their families and then disemboweled themselves with knives and hand grenades. Under one blanket lay a father, two small children, a grandfather, and a grandmother, all strangled by cloth ropes. Soldiers and medics did what they could. The natives, who had been told that the invading "barbarians" would kill and rape, watched in amazement and the Americans provided food and medical care; an old man who had killed his daughter wept in bitter remorse."

Commander Frederick J Becton, USN, Commanding Officer of the destroyer USS *Laffey* (DD-724), describes one kamikaze attack, "The action had lasted an hour and twenty minutes. We had been attacked by 22 planes, nine of which we had shot down unassisted, eight planes had struck the ship, seven of them with suicidal intent. Five of these did really heavy

material damage and killed a lot of our personnel. The fires were still out of control and we were slowly flooding aft. We had lost 33 men, killed or missing, about 60 others had been wounded and approximately 30 of these seriously wounded.” Miraculously *Laffey* survived and is now part of the memorial at Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum in Mount Pleasant, SC.

Aftermath. Ushijima intended to make the battle for Okinawa so costly to the Americans that they dare not repeat the ordeal on the mainland. In a note to 32<sup>nd</sup> Army he spelled out his objective – “One Plane for One Warship; One Boat for One Warship; One Man for Ten of the Enemy or One Tank.” Japanese losses were closer to 10:1 than 1:1 never the less the battle gave the Allies pause. What were the immediate and long-term consequences?

- Even as the battle raged Army Engineers and Navy Construction Battalions (CB’s) transformed Okinawa into a major air and naval base in preparation for the invasion of Japan. By 04 July four heavy and five medium bomber groups were operating out of Okinawa. By late July the first of twelve planned B-29 groups began arriving. So costly was the battle on land and at sea however that President Truman and his advisors began to seriously consider alternatives, i.e. – the atomic bomb.
- Casualty projections for Operation Downfall (8), both Allied and Japanese, based on the fighting at Okinawa ran in the millions lending weight to the decision to use the atomic bombs. Considering what 100,000 Japanese soldiers accomplished on Okinawa the prospect of fighting an estimated 2 million regular army soldiers plus 30 million militia troops was truly daunting.
- As terrible as the atomic bombs were the alternative was worse. General Curtis LeMay intended to assemble a fleet of 5,000 B-29’s augmented by 5,000 B-24’s and B-17’s plus 1,000 British Lancaster bombers to carpet bomb and totally incinerate Japan prior to any American landing.
- In the final analysis the bloody resistance of 32<sup>nd</sup> Army on land and the terrible Kamikaze attacks at sea both succeeded and failed. The planned invasion of Japan was thwarted but in so doing Imperial Headquarters brought unparalleled destruction upon their land and their people.
- In some respects by insisting upon “Unconditional Surrender” the United States won the war but lost the peace. Rather than ending war the atom bomb precipitated the Cold War. The subsequent arms race gave rise to war by proxy with the Soviet Union fomenting insurrection throughout the world. It is no exaggeration to state global terrorism has its roots in the guerrilla wars of the recent past.
- The cave system of Okinawa proved an excellent counter to American firepower and mobility surpassing even the trench systems of World War I. When it constructed the tunnel system of Chu Chi, the North Vietnamese Army demonstrated it learned the lessons of Okinawa well.
- The battle of Okinawa degenerated into a matter of “body count” rather than maneuver and conquest. Young officers and NCO’s took that mindset and the stereotypes of warfare in Asia with them to Korea and Vietnam.

- The lessons of the Kamikazes are a double-edged sword. In the mind of a terrorist, a minimum of technology, when combined with ideological fanaticism or religious zeal is seen as a way to achieve military parity even with the greatest super power. This equation is the basis of asymmetric warfare giving hope to any militarily backward or technically inferior foe as long as they command blind obedience. Although the kamikazes ultimately failed, the western world will continue to pay a heavy price for their actions for the foreseeable future.
- Ironically one of the stated intentions of the Greater Southeast Asia Co-prosperity Sphere has come to past – the end of colonial empires. And China, once victim to all countries with imperial ambitions is now a major power in her own right.

Conclusion. Few people know of Nomonhan. Far more recall Iwo Jima than Okinawa. Although both were pivotal events, each battle was overshadowed by subsequent actions and essentially lost to history. Yet Nomonhan influenced the outcome of World War II and the repercussions of Okinawa can be traced to 11 September 2001, Iraq and Afghanistan. As the United States searches for answers in the new millennium our leaders would be well advised to heed the counsel of Heraclitus, “War is the father, the king of us all.” As it has in the past what happens today on the battlefields of the Ukraine will send major and minor shock waves through time affecting distant generations in ways unimaginable in the present.

## ENDNOTES

- (1) Consider asbestos, miracle product of the forties and fifties, bane of the eighties and nineties.
- (2) China was to Japan what Russia was to Germany – a bottomless pit into which she poured the majority of her troops and resources even as the British and Americans closed in.
- (3) Born in 1894 the son of a shoemaker Zhukov was apprenticed to his uncle, a furrier, after graduation from school. There he might have remained but historic events revealed other talents. Drafted in 1913 Zhukov served with distinction in the cavalry and was selected for NCO training in 1916. One year later he joined the fledgling Red Army where his audacity and intelligence earned him a commission in 1920. During the Russian Civil War Zhukov served with such future notables as A. I. Yermenko and K. K. Rokossovsky. Assigned to Frunze Academy from 1929 – 1930 excerpts from his fitness reports highlighted character traits that would lead him to the top of the Red Army – “Commander of strong will and decisiveness” - “Wealth of initiative” - “Loves military matters and constantly improves himself” During his long career Zhukov earned a well deserved reputation as a tough, no nonsense commander. Envied for his success and feared for his popularity Zhukov was banished in 1946 by Stalin and again in 1957 by Khrushchev.
- (4) Conceived of as a superior light infantry force the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) relied upon rapid maneuver, bold attack and close combat to prevail. An excellent doctrine against Chinese and colonial armies these qualities were completely inappropriate when confronted by the irresistible firepower and tremendous logistic capability of US forces on restricted terrain.

(5) General Geiger urged an invasion of the southern coast to ‘open a second front’; stretch the Japanese thin and prevent reserve units from reinforcing the Shuri line. Lt. Gen. Buckner has been roundly criticized for not doing so. Certainly the manpower and amphibious capability was at hand. Instead he followed what has been termed ‘a slugfest, an unimaginative, direct, frontal assault.’ In his defense logistics over the southern beaches was limited and the troops that would have been used were needed to relieve battered units on line.

(6) Literally “Smashing the Imperial Jewel”

(7) Seppuku – ritual disembowelment / Hara-kiri – belly slicing

(8) Operation Olympic, the invasion of Kyushu, was scheduled for November 1945. Operation Coronet, the conquest of Honshu, was planned for the spring of 1946.

## **22 Years To Sarajevo**

**Mark Arvid White**

“It has been a long time since we were in Sarajevo, Franz.”

“Yes, and for good reason, Sophie,”

The exchange from the middle-row seats of the Gräf & Stift limo did not escape my attention, even as I fumbled to reattach the strap to my Leica. We had left the Imperial Highway far behind, and the continual bumpiness of the current road to the capital of Croatia made me nervous about losing my camera. I leaned around in my chair some and looked over my shoulder.

Far to the back of the limo sat Alija Rakić, Secretary for Cultural Affairs for the Empire of Austria-Hungary and the United Balkan States, and his wife, Sara. Seated in front of them were the Austrian Emperor Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie. Both wore civilian attire, as was increasingly common for the emperor.

“Would that be the 1914 incident, your Majesties?” I addressed both royals, but the emperor only scowled somewhat and looked out the window.

“Yes, Mr. Cunningham,” said the Empress Sophie, tilting her head and smiling slightly. “A very distasteful affair with those Black Hand people.”

“Of course,” I said, nodding my head. “I am very happy that both of you survived their efforts.”

“They didn’t,” said the emperor gruffly, still looking out the window. “Look very hard across the continent. You won’t find anyone who claims to have ever been with the Black Hand.”

“The land is pretty here,” said the Empress, as if to divert any further questioning on the topic.

I followed her gaze out the right side of the car, where the Bosna River now ran beside the road. The hills were lush with green leaves at this moment in late June. Now and then we passed a small boat on the river, or a peasant loaded down by a bundle of this or that. I could see one such old man coughing violently as we passed, most likely from the dust kicked up by our seven-car motorcade loaded with dignitaries and soldiers. I turned my attention back to the empress and found her watching me.

“Have you enjoyed your time in the Balkan States, Mr. Cunningham?” said the Empress. She had recently turned sixty-eight years old, but the many lines in her face did not distract from the beauty and attentiveness in her eyes, or her enigmatic half-smile.

“Yes,” I said, for a moment at a loss for words, but I quickly recovered. “It is a fascinating land, and the people are hearty and have welcomed me into their homes. I am so fortunate to have a German grandfather and a Serbian mother, so that I know some of the language here. But there are many I do not know. I have visited only Austria and Carniola, I’m afraid. Until now, that is, with this drive through Croatia.”

“I have not spent enough time in the Galicias,” said the empress, “though I have visited all fourteen states.” She leaned a little closer, speaking more softly. “Please, do ask more questions of Franz. He has been looking forward to this interview with you and seeing his picture in the pages of your Life Magazine. Some subjects, though, might be best avoided.”

“Thank you, your Majesty,” I said, turning to face the front again.

I wondered about the emperor’s reticence to discuss the Sarajevo incident of 1914. I knew that he had gone to the area to review troops, and Sophie had insisted on going along. A bomb was thrown at their motorcade and civilians were killed. Ferdinand left the area quickly. There followed a massive manhunt, and the rounding up of a conspiracy of assassination. Already on this drive, we had talked about other subjects that were personal, such as his many relatives’ disapproval of his marriage to Sophie, or the strange suicides of Rudolf, the Crown Prince of Austria, and his teenage lover. He was frank and forthcoming, in all matters. But about the plot in Sarajevo he remained silent.

“We are nearing Sarajevo, your Majesty,” said the car’s driver.

There had been a steady increase in the number of houses and other buildings as we approached this city of well over one hundred thousand people. I had learned that the population had increased when Sarajevo was made the capital of the newly formed State of Croatia, incorporating the areas of Croatia-Slavonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Dalmatia. I could guess at the heights of some of the city’s surrounding mountains but was more interested at the approaching towers and minarets of the largely Moslem population. Suddenly I felt a tap upon my shoulder. I turned to see the emperor leaning close.

“We have several more minutes, Mr. Cunningham,” said the emperor. “If you have more questions, I would be pleased to try and answer them.”

“Oh, of course, your Majesty,” I said, shifting some in my seat. “Yes, I do have more questions.”

The emperor smiled briefly and sat back in his seat. Like his wife, Franz Ferdinand’s face was lined with age, and his hair was white. He had turned seventy-six in December. His right hand shook somewhat, the result of a horse-riding accident that occurred in the 1920s. He was

slow in walking and never went far without a cane. Despite these infirmities he was still solidly built and stared at me with piercing blue eyes.

“You have achieved many things as emperor,” I began, quickly pulling up my pen and paper, “such as giving more voice to slavs, serbs, and others within your empire; the formation of the United Balkan States; a thriving economy. What do you see as your greatest accomplishment?”

“I kept the empire out of war,” he said, without hesitation.

“Ah, yes, the great Russo-Germanic War of 1916-19. Didn’t some in the empire clamor for war? And, forgive me, but didn’t some in Germany see Austria’s refusal to go to war as a betrayal?”

“Yes,” said the emperor, his jaw clenching, “to both questions.” He paused, taking out a cigar from his jacket pocket. Noticing this, Secretary Rakić leaned forward with a match and lit the cigar. The emperor nodded his thanks and held the cigar between forefinger and thumb, leaning forward some in his seat. “I became emperor in 1915, with the death of Franz Joseph. There were many tensions in the world: Germany and Britain over naval arms; Germany and Russia over the future of Poland; Austria and Russia over the Slavs. Everyone wanted to go to war. There were skirmishes here and there, saber-rattling, even in the empire, but no general war broke out. That is until 1916.”

“Over the state of Poland,” I said, quickly scribbling down his reply.

“Over the state of Poland,” said the emperor. “Britain and Japan and a few minor nations got involved, but it was mostly Germans and Russians killing each other to allow or prevent Polish self-determination. Three years and six million deaths later, and what was accomplished? Germany suffered a great depression, and Russia gave way to Bolshevism. They were both economically shattered.”

“It wasn’t pretty,” I said. “And the claims of betrayal?”

“Perhaps justified,” said the emperor, taking a long draw on his cigar and then exhaling, rolling down the window to let most of the smoke billow out of the car. “If you are Germany. Willy tried to get me to join his crusade. But I was not about to lose a million of the empire’s soldiers for Poland.”

I watched the emperor as he pressed his cigar tip against the outside of the car, breaking away some of the ashes. Franz Ferdinand had spent years trying to get people to accept his Sophie, only to face rejection again and again. When he became emperor, there was a shift. He did what he wanted, disregarding the opinions of others. Despite claims of betrayal, the emperor was right in saying that no soldiers of the empire were lost in the brutal Russo-German War of 1916. The mothers and wives of the empire were no doubt pleased with his decision.

“Sarajevo,” said the driver. “We have left the Bosna behind us and are driving on the Alipašina road into the city.”



“Are we to go directly to the cemetery?” The speaker was Sara Rakić, wife of the cultural secretary.

“Yes,” said the driver. “It is along Appel Quay, it parallels the Miljacka River.”

“Appel Quay?” said the secretary’s wife. “Isn’t that where the bombing happened in 1914?” She craned her neck, looking out the window ahead, as if she would see remaining smoke for an explosion that happened twenty-two years ago. She was young and may have heard none of the conversations that had taken place earlier in the car, felt none of the tension. I immediately looked at the emperor again, who was staring ahead. I could only see half of his unreadable face. I did notice the empress putting her arm around his.

As we proceeded along the Alipašina, I marvelled at the people who were lining the way to catch a glimpse of their emperor. Well-dressed gentlemen in hats stood beside their more colorfully clad ladies; peasants mingled with shopkeepers and butchers, and children stood clinging to their mothers, or poked here and there between legs and parked automobiles to see the passing motorcade.

I picked up my camera again and adjusted settings, raised it to my eye to frame the royal couple and snap a couple of pictures. Our car turned to the left, following the lead car full of soldiers onto Appel Quay. I snapped one more shot out of the window, at the very spot where the bomb had burst so long ago, but I turned my gaze once again to the emperor. His eyes were closed, and he had placed his hand over Sophie’s arm, his fingers gripping there. Her other hand was placed over his.

We passed the spot where the bomb had gone off, at the turn to the Cumurja Bridge. The motorcade proceeded along Appel Quay, the Miljacka River flowing to our right. People were scattered along both sides of the street, likely all the way down to our first destination at Alifakovac Cemetery where the emperor was to give a speech and honor a couple of Serb dignitaries who had died earlier in the year. People were smiling and waving. It was a testament to the popularity of Franz Ferdinand as emperor. I had no doubt that even more people would be waiting for him at the cemetery.

As the lead car passed the turn to the Latin Bridge, I could see that the emperor’s eyes were open, and he was no longer gripping Sophie’s arm so fiercely. Both of them had started waving back to the crowds, and I could see a smile on his face. It was then that I heard someone yelling. The emperor’s window was still rolled down and the sound was coming from ahead. I quickly looked to the front of the car and saw a man running towards the driver’s side, shouting something in German. He had something in his hand, and he hurled it at us. Our driver saw him too and swerved the car hard to his right and accelerated into the opposite empty lane, clipping the man who had thrown the device, who spun around twice and fell to the street. The device hurled struck the car just past the emperor’s door and bounced away. A few seconds later there was a powerful blast, and a spout of water shot high into the air and tumbled back towards the river.

The entire motorcade screeched to a stop. People on both sides of the street were screaming and running in all directions. Every door on most of the cars swung open and soldiers poured out, leveling their guns and shouting orders. A few of them immediately ran to the fallen man in the street who was struggling to rise. He had a pistol in one hand, but two soldiers were upon him before he could fire, quickly disarming him.

“Is everyone ok?” said the driver, turning in his seat to look behind.

“Yes,” I said quickly, following the driver’s gaze. The empress was half turned and seemingly assisting Secretary Rakić in comforting his wife, who was looking very scared. To my astonishment, the emperor was not in his seat, and the door on his side of the car was wide open. I grabbed my Leica and opened my car door, rushing around the vehicle to the emperor’s side. I immediately started snapping pictures.

Two of the soldiers had grabbed the assailant by the arms and jerked him up into a standing position, though he seemed unable to place any weight upon his left leg. He was about middle age, and of average height, dressed as a common shopkeeper. He had a short mustache, and his straight black hair was of shoulder length, partly concealing his left eye. As I circled around to get a bit closer, I noticed a scar upon his right cheek. Strangely, it appeared not to be a natural wound or even a simple stroke with an edged weapon now healed over, but a series of right-angle slash marks forming some sort of twisting cross. He glared in hatred at those around him. The emperor limped closer, aided by his cane, as several of the other soldiers aimed their weapons at the captive.

“Who are you?” said the emperor with unconcealed scorn and anger. “There are innocent people, women and children here.”

“I am the sword of the German people,” said the captive, pulling his chin up and trying to stand as steady as possible. “No one is innocent that betrays the blood and soil.”

“Blood and ... what are you on about?” said the emperor, lifting the tip of his cane from the ground. I circled even closer, taking shot after shot.

“You are not the leader of the German people!” shouted the captive, his face turning red in rising anger. “You are a lackey of the Jews! Your foul footsteps will be pur—”

The captive did not finish his words. The emperor’s cane had lashed out, striking him full on the face, and he began to reel under successive blows about the face, head and neck, soon sinking to his knees, head bowed and nearing unconsciousness.

“Take this beast away,” said the emperor. “We will try him. He will rot.”

I watched as several soldiers half-dragged the captive to one of the cars and shoved him in. The car left the motorcade and turned back the way we had come. I knew I only had a few pictures left on this roll of film, so I slowly walked a few paces away, framing more of the cars into my picture. I glanced at our car, seeing the emperor now leaning through the door, talking with the occupants. In another moment he was walking back to me.

“Mr. Cunningham,” said the emperor, “I am sorry you had to witness that. There are still roaches, sometimes, in the woodwork.”

“Your majesty,” I said. “I am just happy that no one was killed.”

“As am I,” said the emperor, looking up and down the street. I followed his gaze. Local police had now arrived, and people were being spoken to. The emperor began fumbling in his pocket and pulled free another cigar. He set it to his lip and looked at me questioningly.

“Oh!” I said quickly searching through my own pockets. “I apologize, but I’m afraid I have no matches.”

The emperor chuckled and put the cigar back in his pocket. “My wife tells me I shouldn’t smoke these anyways. She says they are stinky.” He smiled and reached out his arm for me to

take hold of and we began to walk slowly along the path beside the river, several of the soldiers moving with us but keeping their distance. Every now and then some local peasant would come closer and bow and offer his blessings. The emperor would smile and pat a shoulder and send them on their way. I noticed that the motorcade had begun to follow at our pace.

“Twenty-two years ago,” said the emperor after a long silence, “death lay in waiting for my Sophie and me. It failed to claim us. But from that time on I felt as if maybe it should have. It’s hard to explain, young man, but sometimes I think that history changed on that day, Sophie and I cheated death, and death would once again come looking for us ...”

“In Sarajevo, your Majesty?”

“In Sarajevo,” he said, pulling us to a stop. He looked at me for several moments, as if carefully weighing his words. “I came here today to face my fears. Part of me thought that if I ever returned to Sarajevo, history would catch up to me, and I would perish. Sophie too.”

“But here you are. Sarajevo has failed to kill you, twice!”

A smile spread over the emperor’s face. “You may be right, Mr. Cunningham.”

“I think, your Majesty,” I said, again taking the emperor’s arm as we headed toward his waiting car, “that history made up its mind, and that the man who could reform a dying empire was given the reigns of state. Just think what could have happened had you died and someone like that bomb-throwing fellow was put in charge of the course of Europe.”

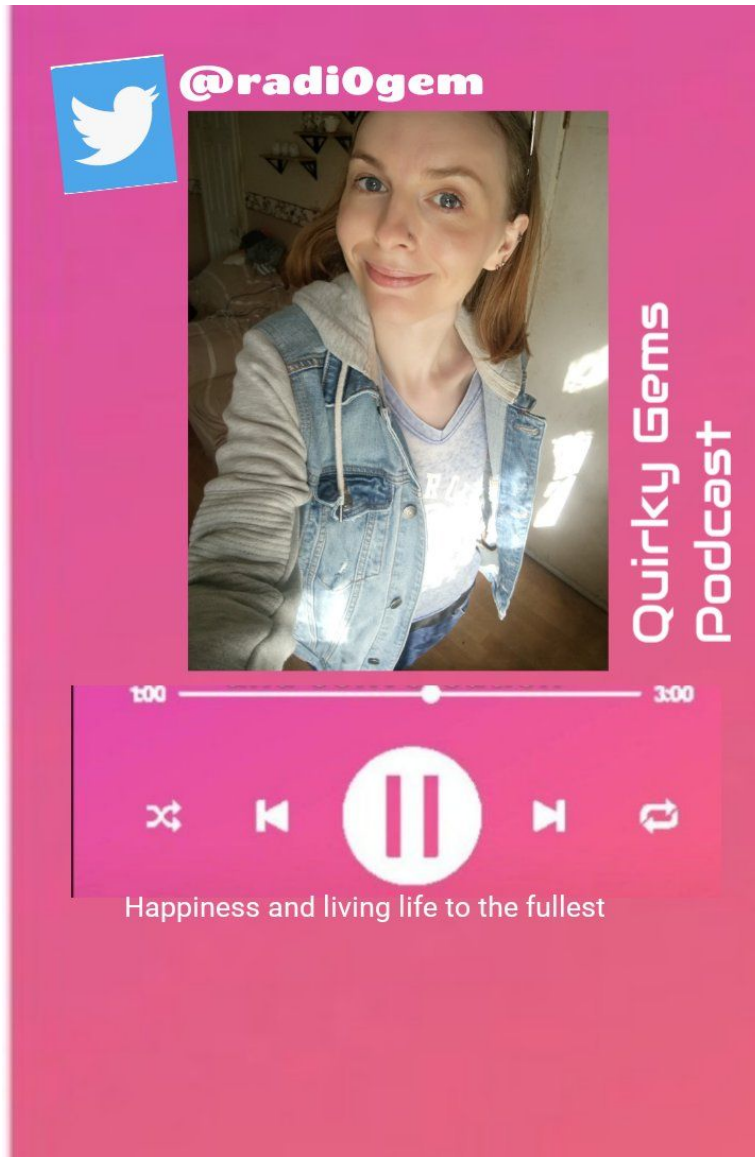
“Bah,” said the emperor with a scowl. “If someone like that madman was guiding the fate of Europe, then God help us all.”

## **Mark Arvid White**

Mark Arvid White lives and writes in Alaska, and has had his stories, poetry, articles, and reviews, appear in such publications as New Myths, The First Line, Modern Haiku, AlienSkin, Wild Violet, and many others in pixel or in print.

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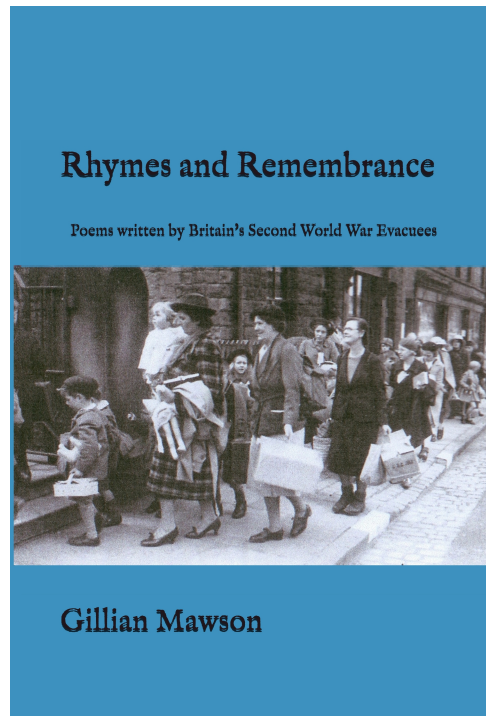


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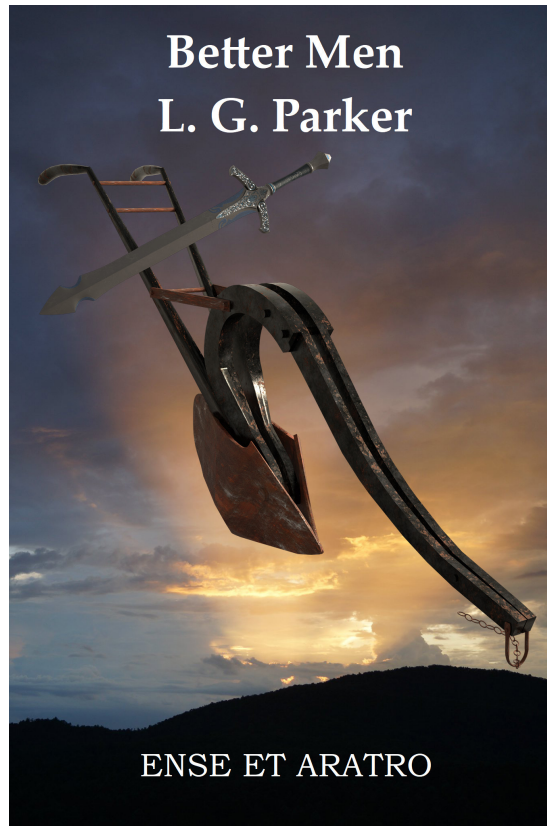


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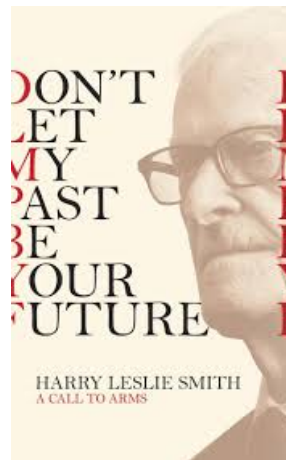
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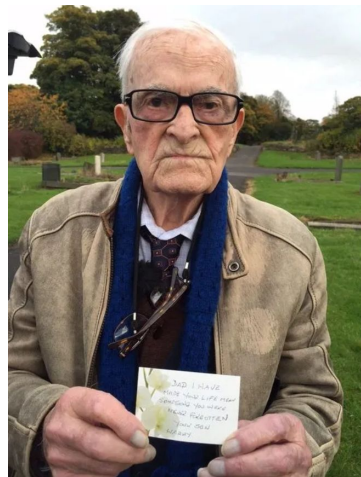
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L

Fin.



Harry Leslie Smith  
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