



On the Road to Innsbruck and Back: A 103rd Division Infantryman's World War II Memoir

William B. Bache

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Merriam Press Military Monograph 58. Third Edition (February 2012). "On the Road to Innsbruck and Back" is a product of the author's long obsession with serving in Europe during World War II as a member of the 103rd Infantry Division. He has always known that he would have to write about that time. And it seemed useful to put his overseas experience into the context of his Army years, from his enlistment in October 1942 to his discharge from an Army hospital in March 1946. His professional career as a Shakespeare critic was a matter of diligence applied; his imposed career as a soldier was a matter of mindless endurance. He was not a successful soldier: He was the last private in his regiment to be promoted to pfc. But then somebody must have thought the author was more reliable than he was. Too often he was given a responsibility that he neither deserved nor desired. But then he was in an Intelligence and Reconnaissance platoon, at the service of a regimental headquarters. "On the Road" is authentic. He has made every effort to be faithful to the facts, as he remembers them. But he also believes that the best way to give form and direction to the reality of his experience was through a series of sixteen short stories, presented more or less chronologically. Experience teaches through insights, epiphanies, encounters. Ideally, a poem or a short story is an idea at the moment of dawning. Each of his sixteen stories has its theme, its ironies, its surprises. The realities of combat are simple and stark, but circumstances change. In his stories the events and incidents in one story are meant to echo and mirror the events and incidents in other stories. If the stories are read sequentially, as intended, certain metaphors and notions are emphasized and thus have a cumulative effect: the road as a metaphor for living; the Army as a metaphor for prison; animal references; clothing imagery; despair; resignation. The stories are meant to be considered, not for their individual merit, but for their collected value. The chief model for *On the Road* is Stephen Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage," the best short novel about war that he knows. Like Crane, he wanted, above all, to demonstrate the moral cost of some months in combat upon a not-insensitive young man. Contents: Preface; Poem: "Dog Tags"; Living with Violence: The Making of an American Soldier; Losing It; Under Fire; Dogfaces and Dogrobbers; Collaborating; Undercover; Delivering the Goods; The Hero Syndrome; Gathering Intelligence; Off Limits and Out of Control; Winding Down; On the Road to Innsbruck and Back; On the Way Back; Double Solitaire on the Home Front; Crime and Punishment; Period of Adjustment; The Author; 2 B&W photos. The Author: William Bache's great-grandfather was a Methodist minister; his father owned two grocery stores and ten farms. Bill was born in the coal mining town of Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, in 1922. Bill is now widowed and has one daughter. After getting a Ph.D. in English Literature from Penn State in 1952 and then teaching there for a year, Bill joined the Purdue English Department in 1953. Except for a summer in Maine and one in Montana and except for two sabbaticals in Oxford, Bill spent his entire career at Purdue. He has received a large number of teaching awards. Bill retired in 1992. Bill's specialties are Shakespeare and lyric poetry. He published "Measure for Measure as Dialectical Art" in 1969; "Design and Closure in Shakespeare's Major Plays" in 1992; "Shakespeare's Deliberate Art" in 1996. Review by Paul Fussell, veteran and author: I've just finished reading with intense pleasure and admiration... your excellent book. Your having been in the pathetic 103rd Division where I was was just a small part of the pleasure. Most delight was in your clear critical intelligence, as well as your sensitivity and wisdom.



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