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The National D-Day Museum as mystory praxis

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THE NATIONAL D-DAY MUSEUM AS MYSTORY PRAXIS

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by
David A. Pye
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ABSTRACT

Museums in general are shrines of collected memory and cultural values. The National D-Day Museum, in particular, presents the memory of World War II as a good and just action taken by the Allied forces against the evil of the Axis powers. In contrast with later wars, which might be seen as morally ambiguous or futile, World War II was and is thought of as "the good war." In this study, I explore and express how The National D-Day Museum encourages exploration and expression on the part of the visitor, using Gregory Ulmer's concept and practice of mystory to analyze the museum as a mystory and also as encouraging mystory praxis on the part of the visitor. While the purpose for encouraging such a process may be to conserve the stated values of the museum and while that indeed may occur, it is my theory that the process functions in a more significant way than simply realizing the pre-determined intent. In brief, a heuristic experience becomes more important than a hermeneutic one. In this way, the museum prompts performative agency on the part of the visitors.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the National D-Day Museum performs the histories it represents. Specifically, I am interested in how the exhibits encourage visitors to interact with knowledge and meaning. As a result of the interaction, the visitors not only consume predetermined meanings but they also produce meanings of their own.

In the current chapter, I describe the museum briefly and explain the method of analysis I use for the study, namely, Gregory Ulmer's concept and practice of "mystory." In Chapter Two, I use Ulmer's theory to analyze the museum as a mystory and also as encouraging mystory praxis on the part of the visitor. In Chapter Three of the study, I offer the results of my own meaning-making process at the museum. That is, I offer my mystory. The ramifications and significance of the study are discussed in the final chapter. Generally, I focus on the complex, perhaps problematic, relationship between the master narrative of World War II (i.e., as "the good war"), which the museum does proffer, and the experience of exploration and

expression it also prompts. I also compare and contrast the histories I write in Chapters Two and Three, after which I theorize as to the benefits and drawbacks of Ulmer's mystory method as an analytical perspective and as a performative research practice.

Subject of Study

The National D-Day Museum is located in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was founded by Dr. Stephen Ambrose, and opened on June 6, 2000. On September 25, 2003, the museum was designated by Congress as "America's National World War II Museum" ("Congress Approves"). The museum then began work on an expansion plan that will allow the portrayal of all World War II theaters.

Currently, the museum is housed in a renovated nineteenth century warehouse. Adjoining the warehouse is a glass-fronted pavilion built especially for the museum. Officially called the Louisiana Memorial Pavilion, it contains a ticket and information booth and also houses various vehicles used during World War II. Of particular interest is a replica of an LCVP or Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel. Such landing craft were used to carry soldiers to shore during the major amphibious assaults of World War II. They were designed and largely built by Higgins

Industries in New Orleans, and hence the significance of the museum's location.

The renovated section of the first floor contains the Malcolm Forbes Theater, the Museum Store, and a PJ's Coffee Shop. The theater shows documentary films produced for the museum and the store sells a variety of items, such as copies of the films, tee shirts, maps, compact disks, models, and books.

The fourth floor of the museum is not accessible to the public. It contains the administrative offices and conference rooms. The bulk of the museum's permanent displays are located on the second and third floors. The displays are housed in four labyrinthine galleries titled "The Home Front," "Planning for D-Day," "The D-Day Beaches," and "The D-Day Invasions in the Pacific." Each of the galleries is divided into sections that present information according to topic and largely sequenced in chronological order. "The Home Front," for example, contains sections titled "Prelude to War," "The Road to War," "America Goes to War," "The Home Front," and "New Orleans: Home of the Higgins Boats." As an example of the material contained in the exhibits, "Prelude to War" contains a backlit display of the flags of Nazi Germany,

Imperial Japan, and the United States, in front of which are placed rows of plastic toy soldiers representing the relative numbers of troops in each country's military at the beginning of the war. The exhibit mentions the United States' rapid mobilization upon entering the war, and a sign compares the size of the United States' military forces at the beginning and height of the war with those of the Axis powers.

In addition to providing quantifiable facts and figures related to the war, the museum also presents the visitor with popular culture and personal materials that highlight the experiences of home front and military individuals alike. These materials vary in terms of their public and private origin and intended audience. For this reason and because they now are on public display, it is difficult to divide the materials into discrete categories. Materials meant for personal consumption gain public importance when they are exposed to a larger audience and popular culture materials can have deeply personal meanings for an individual consumer. For the purposes of the study, I have categorized the materials according to the breadth of their intended audience when they first were produced. Personal materials are those intended for a limited

audience of family, friends, close colleagues, or the individual himself while popular culture materials are those produced for consumption by a substantially larger audience or public.

Popular culture materials on display in the museum include photographs taken by journalists and military photographers, oral histories recorded for the museum, popular art and propaganda posters supporting the war effort, items in popular newspapers and magazines, and family artifacts such as window service banners, which were used to indicate the number of family members who were in military service. Such material artifacts are accompanied often by captions, quotes, or stories that explain the use and purpose of the item. Throughout the exhibits, there are enclosed booths in which visitors listen to taped reminiscences of particular wartime individuals while viewing their photographs. At the Museum Store, visitors can purchase recordings of music popular during the war and replicas of wartime posters, magazines, and other popular culture artifacts.

Personal materials include personal photographs, letters written to family members, friends, and other loved ones, and personal effects and mementos such as uniforms,

food ration books, and a "cricket" signaling device used by US paratroopers to identify each other during the early morning hours of the D-Day invasion. As with the popular culture materials, explanatory stories and quotes typically accompany these items. Replicas of many of the exhibited personal materials also are available for purchase at the Museum Store, allowing a visitor to carry a bit of wartime "everyday life" home with her. Thus, a replica of a wartime memento may become a visitor's memento of a visit to the museum.

Museums in general are shrines of collected memory and cultural values. The National D-Day Museum, in particular, presents the memory of World War II as a good and just action taken by the Allied forces against the evil of the Axis powers. In contrast with later wars, which might be seen as morally ambiguous or futile, World War II was and is "the good war." The museum acts as a document of the sacrifices made by US soldiers and civilians in their victory over evil. As the mission statement of the museum explains, the museum

interprets the American Experience during the World War II years and celebrates the American spirit, the teamwork, optimism, courage and sacrifice of the men and women who won World War

II and [it] promotes the exploration and expression of those values by future generations. ("Mission Statement")

In this study, I "explore and express" how the National D-Day Museum encourages just such an activity of "exploration and expression" on the part of the visitor. While the purpose for encouraging such a process may be to conserve the stated values of the museum and while that indeed may occur, it is my theory that the process functions in a more significant way than simply realizing the pre-determined intent. In brief, a heuristic experience becomes more important than a hermeneutic one. The visitor creates meaning more so than she or he reproduces meaning already made. In this way, the museum prompts performative agency on the part of the visitors. They bring about meanings by means of their doing; by means of their exploration and expression in the physical space of the museum, in the abstract space of recall or memory, and in research documents such as this study.

My understanding of how the exploration and expression process functions in the National D-Day Museum is informed by Gregory Ulmer's concept and practice of the mystory. As a heuristic "doing" of history, mystery, and one's own story, the mystory method is a research process that

privileges exploration and expression over interpretative mastery and, for this reason, it offers a theoretical and practical perspective that helps me articulate this aspect of the National D-Day Museum.

In the remainder of the chapter, I discuss the theoretical tenets of Ulmer's mystory method. To help explicate the ideas, I offer brief examples from the museum and thereby anticipate my analysis, in Chapter Two, of the museum as a mystory. I then concentrate on the particulars of mystory practice and offer one set of guidelines a researcher might follow to write a mystory. The guidelines are common to mystory practice and, as I will argue in Chapter Two, common to the practicing of history at the National D-Day Museum. To conclude the chapter, I anticipate the significance of the study by briefly discussing the points I mentioned above.

Method of Study

An analysis of the complex process of visitor exploration and expression at the National D-Day Museum requires a method that can account for the multiple materials on display at the museum and their inter-relationship. The method of analysis also must be able to account for the metatext that is experienced and created

heuristically. Such a research tool may be found in the concept and practice of mystory.

In Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video, Gregory Ulmer describes mystory as "a translation (or transduction) process researching the equivalencies among the discourses of science, popular culture, everyday life, and private experience" (vii). Whereas more traditional forms of analytical discourse privilege the thought of professionals who work to isolate and discover the inherent meaning of the subjects they examine, mystory practice recognizes that interpretation does not take place at a remove from other discourses that surround us. It composites these alternative discourses, popular culture and personal experience, with professional or expert discourse on the subject. It then relies on resultant juxtaposition of discourses to generate meaning.

The compositing of mystory discourses occurs throughout the National D-Day Museum. In "The Home Front" gallery, for example, professional discourse is evident in the display containing plastic soldiers representing troop numbers in each country's military at the beginning of the war. Popular discourse is used in a series of displays containing US war propaganda posters. A reproduction of

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's hand-corrected typescript for his famous "day that will live in infamy" speech evidences personal as well as popular discourse. For this particular artifact, the typescript and corrections were meant for personal use while the speech itself achieved popular renown. The combination of these items might inspire any of numerous thoughts for the museum visitor. They might be seen as emphasizing the unfavorable odds that the United States faced upon entering the war, and the courageous patriotism of those who led the nation into battle. They also might be seen as highlighting the role of plucky propaganda in the Allied victory. Of course, the visitor brings his own personal discourse to the museum as well. Prior knowledge of historical events, religious beliefs, cultural preferences, family memories, and personal experiences all stand to color his experience at the museum, spurring the creation of additional ideas and meanings for the objects on display. In this way, the visitor creates meaning through the exploration and expression of multiple discourses.

As the above example suggests, the juxtaposition of discourses at the museum creates an environment in which "the whole" potentially produces more meaning than "the sum

of its parts." The power of mystory research lies in the equitable consideration of the oft-overlooked personal and popular as well as professional discourses. Understood as legitimate research sources, the personal and popular introduce fresh ideologies and thereby generate meaning. As Ulmer states, "it is not a question of eliminating or bracketing this ideology from thought, but of learning how to exploit it for the benefit of learning and discovery" (22). The use of personal and popular discourses creates a nexus of "private and public dimensions of knowledge" that adds the elements of "invention and justification" to the process of understanding (Ulmer 39).

It should be noted, however, that the devaluation of hermeneutic research is not the intent of mystory practice. Rather, the mystory process seeks to provide an alternative to a purely interpretive investigation, which benefits our relationship to and understanding of a subject (cf., Ulmer 15-16). As a process of invention, mystory practice replaces attempts at direct interpretation and reproduction with an ever-shifting individualized understanding of the subject. In other words, mystory practice recognizes the researcher's inability to understand a subject completely while it also celebrates the unique contributions of the

researcher. A mystery, therefore, is always partial and incomplete. In fact, it exploits its own partiality for the purpose of encouraging further invention. For Ulmer, this continuing challenge to create is one of the most important aspects of mystery practice. "A mystery is always specific to its composer, constituting a kind of personal periodic table of cognitive elements, representing one individual's intensive reserve," he says. "The best response to reading a mystery would be a desire to compose another one, for myself" (vii).

The process of continuous invention and reinvention is evident at the National D-Day Museum. Visitors react to the items on display as individuals, drawing on their own ideas and experiences to lend unique meaning to what they see and hear. With additional personal experience and repeated viewing, the meanings will change over time. Most salient to me have been the meanings I have discovered as I share my museum experiences with others who have or have not attended the museum. Visitors interweave all of these various sense-making experiences to create an incomplete understanding of the museum. The partiality of this understanding invites further exploration and expression, resulting in the creation of still more meanings. While

never complete, every step of the invention process allows for a more in-depth understanding of the museum and the complexity of objects and ideas it houses.

Aside from the inclusion of the three most common genres of discourse described by Ulmer (i.e., the professional, popular, and personal), the most important aspect linking the many possible permutations of mystery practice is the arrangement or patterning of the discourses in a piece. In "Performing the Mystery: A Textshop in Autoperformance," Michael Bowman and Ruth Laurion Bowman describe the arrangement as a "fragmented, impressionistic, collage-like style of composition" (168). The collage pattern serves much the same function in a written mystery as does the juxtaposition of various items in the displays at the National D-Day Museum. The interwoven discourses prompt active engagement on the part of the reader or visitor precisely because meanings are not prescribed outside the pattern. The reader or visitor makes sense by means of the associations he discovers within and between the items, numbers, quotes, captions, speeches, and stories on display.

As a practical method of research, mystery practice consists of collecting, producing, and interweaving

materials that represent the three genres of discourse. Apart from the interweaving of discourses, the creation of a mystory requires only the researcher's interest and imagination—a willingness to explore and express. For this study, I use the mystory process articulated by Bowman and Bowman in their effort to apply Ulmer's mystory concept and practice in the performance classroom. I outline this process below ("Performing the Mystory" 164-170; see also Bowman and Bowman, "On the Bias").

The researcher begins by selecting a topic. The topic should be a subject of interest for the researcher. She also might combine multiple interests, creating a compound topic of disparate subject matter.

The second step in creating a mystory involves researching the topic and collecting materials. The researcher tracks down and collects professional, popular, and personal materials that she deems important to understanding the topic. These external materials may include writings from any genre, visual images, arts and crafts, and acoustic and oral expressions such as songs, stories, interviews, and gossip. Rather than censor her collection in terms of a uniform theme, the researcher is

encouraged to collect whatever she finds interesting or meaningful.

The researcher also creates her own personal materials. To do so, she might adapt, imitate, or transform some of the materials she has already collected. She also might write her own pieces, drawing on her personal experiences, thoughts and feelings to explore and express further her relationship to the topic. Another possibility is a "ground-zero narrative," a story of how the topic first seized her attention and interest.

After the materials have been collected and created, the researcher reflects upon them. She identifies a piece, a part of a piece, a pattern, an image, a theme, or an idea that she feels especially drawn to at this time. She uses this selected bit as a trope, model, or pose for composing her mystory. In Ulmer's terms, it serves as a "relay" for selecting and interweaving the materials that the researcher has collected.

The researcher then composes her mystory. Using the aforementioned bit as a guide, she decides which of her materials to use and which to leave out. She also allows the guide to suggest an order for her materials. Since the assemblage of materials reflects the researcher's process

of exploration and expression, she may rearrange, add, edit, combine, or alter the materials until she is satisfied with the assemblage she has created.

In Chapter Two of the study I draw on the basic instructions for mystory practice to examine the mystory that the National D-Day Museum seems to create and prompt in its visitors. In particular, I describe and analyze the entanglement of professional, popular, and personal discourses at the museum. In Chapter Three, I offer the results of my use of the same basic instructions for creating a mystory, the subject of intrigue being the National D-Day Museum.

Significance of Study

The use of mystory practice as a research method for examining the National D-Day Museum presents the chance to understand more fully the exploration and expression process that the museum itself expresses as one of its aims. An analysis of the museum as a mystory places the myriad meanings prompted there at the forefront of the examination, allowing us to gain insight into how the museum functions on a rhetorical level. If we accept that the museum functions as a mystory, it seems likely that the museum will be found to pose more questions than it is

capable of answering. This is not meant to suggest that the museum fails in its hermeneutic mission, but rather that the process of "exploration and expression" has the potential to prompt many more interpretations or meanings—both intended and unintended—than does a process designed to prescribe meanings for the museum's materials. In short, a mystorical analysis of the museum reveals a subject that invites commentary on the interpretation that it extends, the objects that it presents, and on the visitor who develops the commentary. To the extent that the artifacts presented at the museum might be seen as unremarkable in the absence of the personal meanings we ascribe to them, the museum might stand to tell the visitor more about him or herself than about the events of World War II (cf., Jackson 276).

The museum's prompting of "process" over finite interpretation also calls into question the traditional construction of history as a complete product that presents factual representations of past events. In discussing her research on the historical artifacts of Chicago's Hull-House Labor Museum, Shannon Jackson writes:

My sense that the stuff from which historical data are gleaned has an absurdly mystical function rather than a solidly empirical one in

turn provokes an uncomfortable feeling that the historiographical operation is less like fact accumulation and more like ghost-busting. (268)

The "mystical function" Jackson references might be thought of as the manifestation of the personal and popular discourses that mystorical research freely incorporates, but that are largely ignored or refashioned as expert discourse in interpretive historiography. However, the fact that Jackson senses this "mystical function" hints that although traditional historiography might eschew alternative discourses, they are present nevertheless and they invite comment in a similar manner to that of mystoriography.

CHAPTER TWO

A VISIT TO THE NATIONAL D-DAY MUSEUM

Yes, the building is indeed a museum. Or at least, it is an attraction. From my usual approach from the west, the giant wall of glass fronting Andrew Higgins Drive is an undeniable landmark. If specific markers of function were removed, leaving only the bare physical plant of the museum, the building's exterior might be mistaken for the lobby of a large modern hotel or, perhaps, an unfinished urban aquarium or the shell of a department store. Still, the tan color and boxy shape of the building lend it a certain utilitarian air. On the side of the building, a large green logo with military-stencil lettering is hard to miss. Approaching from the east, a visitor would have quite a different view: An older and much more ornate building, painted in the same tan and trimmed in brown. From this perspective, the museum resembles a hotel dating from the mid-1800s. The same stencil lettering logo appears here, near the top of the building. This building, a building that combines the showmanship of a tourist mecca with the low-key practicality of a metal ammunition box, houses the National D-Day Museum.

Upon closer inspection, the structure actually consists of two buildings joined together: An older four-story renovated building and the recently built glass-fronted Louisiana Memorial Pavilion. As I approach the entrance to the museum, I walk across a surface made of bricks inscribed with the names of museum donors and veterans. I look through the glass and see a full-size replica of an LCVP, or Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel, what turn out to be real Spitfire and Avenger airplanes suspended from the ceiling, and several other military vehicles. History buffs, mourners, nostalgia savorers, tourists, veterans, the merely curious: It looks like you've come to the right place. In the course of my own visits to the museum I have filled all of these roles and more, if only in my own imaginative discourse.

Inside the pavilion, the fusion of military utilitarianism and modern tourist attraction is continued. Visitors are greeted with bare yet sealed and shiny concrete floors, and exposed ductwork and lighting. The support beams in the walls and ceiling are exposed and neatly painted. Museum membership and ticket counters near the entrance are staffed by volunteers, although viewing the items on display in the pavilion does not require the

purchase of a ticket. The pavilion is quite large. It is four very generous stories tall and wide enough to hold several hundred visitors. The glass wall allows a sweeping view of the street and sky outside and adds to the feeling of spaciousness. The military vehicles are placed along one wall, leaving a large open area in the center of the pavilion. An elevator at the rear of the pavilion transports visitors to a third floor observation deck, which allows a closer view of the airplanes that hang from the ceiling.

The period artifacts on display are not the only aspect of the pavilion that puts me in mind of World War II. The appearance and arrangement of the space reflect a blend of associations with the war that I have derived from a variety of sources, including books, conversations, family heirlooms, and the museum itself. The muted tan, grey, and green colors used throughout the space evoke the style of military camouflage without precisely matching it. The minimalistic features, such as the exposed ductwork, beams and lighting, and the efficiently arranged exhibit summon thoughts of a military aircraft hangar. The design is eminently functional, both in terms of creating a vague yet effective military ambience and in terms of keeping the

pavilion accessible and comfortable for large numbers of visitors.

In the pavilion, people stand in front of the velvet ropes that separate them from the machinery of war, posing for pictures that will become proof of their visit. The most accessible of the machines in the pavilion is the LCVP replica, which is nearest the museum's entrance and is not completely cordoned off. A velvet rope prevents the curious from climbing up the open bow ramp and into the LCVP, but visitors are otherwise free to touch and explore the craft. I watch as a young girl puts her hand on the port bow and traces her way around the replica. Her parents are standing in front of the rope, looking into the cargo area. The landing craft is recognizable to many as the vehicle used in the opening scenes of Saving Private Ryan. People sometimes seem to lapse into a daydream as they gaze into the cargo area. Perhaps they are re-imagining the D-Day landing at Omaha Beach portrayed in the movie, as I have on several occasions.

Elsewhere in the pavilion another family stands near a jeep, reading the placard that describes the origin and use of the vehicle. A few yards from the family a group of young adults is discussing what it might be like to tackle

rush hour traffic in the museum's armored personnel carrier. I smile as I imagine this. It is a thought borne of G.I. Joe cartoons, a playful thought that ignores the actual consequences of doing such a thing. Nearby, in the large central area of the pavilion, children run and laugh, sometimes taking a break from the excitement of visiting a new place to stand with their parents at the velvet ropes. As I watch the visitors mill about, a veteran who has volunteered his time to answer questions approaches me to ask if there's anything I would like to know about the museum.

On my many visits, I have spoken often with veterans about their feelings regarding the museum. Many have expressed a personal interest in the museum's future. I ask the man about the expansion plans for the museum, since renovations at the annexed building across the street seem to be near completion. "A joke," he says sharply. "It's for kids. They're going to let them pretend to fly around in fighter planes like at Disneyland. Anything to bring the parents in, I guess." I tell him that I see why the museum chose to make "Discovery Hall" the next step in the expansion, but that I also am disappointed that I will have to wait to see the many stored artifacts that the current

museum cannot display due to lack of space. The veteran thanks me profusely for agreeing with his position. "I don't think it ought to be a playground here," he tells me. "I think people ought to see that this was a war."

At the rear of the pavilion behind retractable tape stanchions are two German sentry boxes made of concrete. Once part of Hitler's Atlantic Wall defenses, they are small (just tall and wide enough to accommodate one standing soldier), cylindrical, and quite thick, with narrow slots molded into them at eye level, and iron gates extended across the narrow entrance. Despite my multiple visits, I always am drawn to the sentry boxes, and I am not sure why. They are like vertical coffins, heavy and drab and solemn. I look at them, think about spending hours on guard duty in them, and then I walk back across the pavilion toward the museum's main galleries.

Inside and out, the pavilion provides an introduction to the museum that provokes exploration and expression. Professional discourse—perhaps the most expected of Ulmer's discourses in a museum setting—appears only on small placards that identify the various items and briefly detail their use and history. Personal discourse occurs throughout the pavilion as visitors use their own memories

and beliefs to make sense of the various elements of the space. Without a concept of military aesthetics gathered from other sources prior to my visit, the colors and architectural elements of the pavilion would likely not hold the same meaning for me. Popular discourse becomes part of this process of meaning making as well. The LCVP, for instance, is embedded with imagery from popular films, such as Saving Private Ryan, that helps the visitor imagine its use in the context of battle.

When I reach the ticket counter, I show my membership card to a volunteer and enter the atrium of the building that houses the main galleries. Bricks commemorating veterans and museum donors line the floor of the atrium, echoing the bricks on the sidewalk outside. I head for the coffee shop at the rear of the atrium and order some iced tea. Inside the shop, the atmosphere is similar to that of a hotel lobby. It is a transitional space that is neither the street outside nor the galleries. I take a seat at one of the small tables. The customers at the tables around me carry on conversations while I drink my tea. Some make plans for the remainder of the day, others talk about souvenirs they have purchased in the adjacent Museum Store, and still others discuss what they have seen in the

galleries. The coffee shop is a communal family room where people exchange their thoughts before and after their exploration of the museum. When I am done with my tea, I decide to check the store to see what new products have arrived since my last visit.

The Museum Store sells a full line of the usual tourist knickknacks, such as key chains, caps, shirts, jewelry, and pens, all imprinted with the museum logo. However, the store also sells a large selection of items with more historical interest, such as books and films about World War II, models of military vehicles, maps, World War II action figures, and recordings of radio newscasts and music from the war years. I peruse a shelf of DVDs at the front of the store and decide to buy a copy of "The National D-Day Museum: Triumph of the Spirit," an episode of the PBS series Great Museums. Other customers wander the store's narrow aisles, reading the back covers of military history books, deciding which war propaganda poster reproduction would make the best conversation piece, or choosing a set of National D-Day Museum coasters to purchase as a gift for a relative. I join the line of customers at the busy cash registers.

The purpose of the Museum Store is to gain profits for the museum, but to accomplish this goal it also must fulfill the purchasing desires of museum visitors. The store makes money by prompting customers to purchase material representations of the meanings they have produced during their visit, as well as mementoes of the visit itself. I own reminders of my visits to the museum in the form of a cap and shirt, and a refrigerator magnet I received when I became a member. For me, however, the most meaningful items I have purchased at the store reflect specific thoughts, feelings, and memories I have developed during visits to the museum. A reproduction of the metal signaling "cricket" used by paratroopers in the early hours of D-Day typifies the technological simplicity of the operation and reminds me of the dangers faced by the men as they tried to locate each other behind enemy lines. Copies of the documentaries shown in the museum's theater remind me of the emotions I have felt while watching the films with an audience of veterans. The episode of Great Museums I am purchasing on this visit will allow me to compare my own collection of museum memories with those of the series' producers. When the sale is completed, I head across the atrium to the theater.

The Malcolm Forbes Theater screens two documentary films, each once a day. D-Day Remembered combines archival film footage and photographs with the remembrances of veterans and others who participated in the invasion of Normandy. In a similar manner, Price for Peace documents events that occurred in the Pacific Theater throughout the war. Although I own copies of both films, I have viewed them more often at the museum with others than I have at home alone. In the case of these histories of World War II, I have always preferred a shared experience to a solitary one. In the museum's theater, I have watched veterans begin to cry and leave the screening early. I have overheard theatergoers clarify parts of the film for a spouse or a grandchild. Children have squirmed in their seats or watched with rapt attention and their parents have done the same. On a couple of occasions, I have seen veterans stand at attention during the credits, then file silently out of the theater as the lights are raised.

My preference for viewing the films at the museum's theater may be due to my desire to corroborate and share with others the complex feelings provoked by the films. Viewing the films communally creates a shared sense of history and memory, a public ritual that memorializes the

war. The reactions of viewers represent a communion of thoughts and feelings that help to create an inclusive experience shaped and shared by all participants.

As documentary films that use archival and newsreel footage and interviews with event participants, D-Day Remembered and Price for Peace tell stories grounded in professional, popular, and personal discourses that anticipate a like mix of materials in the museum galleries. The films prepare visitors to experience World War II as a collage of information and viewpoints, rather than as a story with a single narrative perspective and plot line.

After my visit to the theater, I head up the atrium stairs to the main galleries. The arrangement of the galleries lends them a labyrinthine feel. The four main galleries are situated on two floors of the museum. Gallery one is on the southern side of the second floor and gallery four is on the northern side. Gallery three is on the third floor above gallery one and gallery two is situated above gallery four. At the end of the first gallery, a visitor must climb a flight of stairs to arrive at the second. Galleries two and three are separated by a sky bridge that crosses the atrium, and moving from gallery three to gallery four involves descending a flight of

stairs. The first three galleries, which cover the D-Day invasion of Normandy, are arranged so that the general travel path through the exhibits is angular. In the fourth gallery, which covers the D-Day invasions in the Pacific, the path swoops and twists around curved walls and semi-circular displays. Throughout the galleries, the windowless walls are painted in black or a muted color for the most part, and the flooring is deep grey. Pools of halogen lighting surround the various displays. Although events and artifacts are presented in roughly chronological order, the captions that accompany them are not composed to provide a single, unified narrative. Rather, like the arrangement of the galleries, the narrative is more labyrinthine.

As I walk through the galleries, the main path that I follow is clear, but the many twists and turns reveal new items and displays around every corner. I often lose a sense of time and absolute direction while exploring here. I feel as though I am traveling into a story or stories rather than through a physical space. The twisting path both encourages and mirrors my own pattern of exploration in the galleries. As I move through them, I choose the items I focus on, and my interests and my mood guide me

along my own labyrinthine path. I pass over items that do not hold immediate interest and at times I retrace my steps to examine such items more closely.

I enter the first gallery. Compared to other Monday visits I have made, it is busy today. The narrow corridor I walk along opens into a chamber where a dozen other visitors mill about. The title of this portion of the gallery is "America Goes to War." Warm halogen light spills across a deep yellow wall lined with US recruitment and wartime propaganda posters. "Food is a Weapon—Don't Waste It!" urges one poster. A US Marines recruitment poster displays an image of a sturdy looking fellow with the slogan, "Ready: Land. Sea. Air." splashed across it in bright lettering. A similar poster for the US Navy urges, "Dish It Out With The Navy! Choose Now While You Can!" Large black-and-white photographs of lines at military recruitment offices and workers in wartime factories are interspersed with the posters. A section of the chamber devoted to the home front workforce highlights the service of women in the war effort. The well-known image of "Rosie the Riveter" is placed next to a poster announcing "Women in the War: We Can't Win Without Them," along with photographs of female welders and a male riveter.

The popular images are interspersed with other wartime artifacts. A war ration book (an icon popular enough to be reproduced as a notepad in the museum's store) becomes a personalized item when I read the signature of the Louisiana resident to whom it was issued, Ruth McMahon Sherman. The former owner shares my paternal grandmother's first name and seeing the small book causes me to think back to the ration books that I found in an old trunk at my grandparent's house when I was a child. Across the chamber a convincing reproduction of the typescript of President Roosevelt's famous war address to Congress hangs on the wall. The single page looks creased and worn, the typed letters slightly blurred. At the top of the page, Roosevelt has used a pencil to alter the phrase "a date which will live in world history" so that it reads "a date which will live in infamy." I notice that the pencil he used wasn't very sharp, but the cursive lettering is firm and easily legible. Roosevelt's handwriting reminds me of my grandfather's, a cursive style that seems common in documents from the World War II era. I think back to my cursive penmanship training in elementary school and wonder how different the teaching method was when my grandparents were growing up.

Just as the popular iconography of the war ration book gained personal meaning when I connected my own experiences to it, Roosevelt's typescript gains meaning through the interaction of discourses it prompts. The document does more than provide insight into Roosevelt's speechwriting method. It reveals Roosevelt as a careful crafter of words, and it causes me to think about the importance of style in making the speech as famous as it has become. It activates memories of the speech as I have heard it delivered in recordings, and it causes me to remember my grandfather's handwriting. I smile at the thought, despite the serious implications of the speech. As I move further into the gallery, I am thinking of my grandparents and of all who faced the prospect of involvement in a full-scale worldwide war in their lifetimes.

In a small room to the side of the main chamber, a short film called "The Road to War" describes the events that led to the involvement of the United States in World War II. I sit on a bench with seven others and listen to Ed Bradley recall the rise of Adolph Hitler, the pacifism of the United States at the outset of war, and the effect of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The film provides a historical context for the items on display and

summarizes the popular sentiments of US citizens concerning the events it covers. It uses the narration of a well-known journalist reading an authoritative script to suggest an expert's point of view. The film is both interesting and informative, but by this point in my visit the viewpoint of history experts is but one consideration as I think about what I have seen in the gallery. My own thoughts seem just as necessary to my understanding of the war as the thoughts of others, including professional journalists and historians.

Professional discourse also is present in the form of informational placards placed throughout the chamber. One such placard near the photographs of the female welders discusses the effect of war on the US workforce and on women and African Americans in particular. Nearby are free-standing replica pallets of items mass-produced by home front workers, such as canteens, penicillin, shell casings, and tires. Another placard, titled "At War with Jim Crow," discusses racial segregation in the US military during World War II, stating "The world's greatest democracy fought the world's greatest racist with a segregated military. . . . Yet, with few exceptions, segregation remained the rule in America's military. Even

the blood in Red Cross blood banks was segregated by race." This placard is placed near other placards discussing wartime issues of race and ethnicity in the United States. Next to the placards is a wall of framed recruitment posters and a video monitor that displays photographic images of recruitment offices and lines of men waiting for their pre-enlistment physical examinations.

The museum's juxtaposition of image and commentary causes me to explore my own feelings concerning the wartime segregation of the US military. I think about the irony of fighting racial supremacists with a segregated military. I consider the bitterness that such policies surely caused, and I am all the more appreciative of non-whites who supported the war effort willingly despite these injustices.

Leaving this area of the museum behind, I climb the stairs to enter the second gallery, "Planning for D-Day." This gallery explores the tools and methods used by the US military in planning for their invasion of occupied Europe. The displays contain examples of the weapons, photographs, diaries, and other artifacts that document the soldiers' preparations in Britain. The gallery also explores the strength of Hitler's Atlantic Wall fortifications. A

section titled "Fortress Europe" contains a model of the German "pillboxes" or concrete bunkers that were placed along Normandy's coast and a diorama that allows me to imagine what it would have been like to be inside a pillbox, scanning the English Channel for signs of the long-expected Allied invasion force. The gallery concludes with a film that examines General Eisenhower's "Decision to Go" and several displays that explore the early stages of the D-Day invasion. This final section of the gallery contains the largest of several dioramas at the museum, titled "Nightdrop into Normandy." It has become my favorite part of the second gallery, and I follow the gallery's long path around many turns until I reach it.

The "Nightdrop into Normandy" diorama is a full-scale recreation of a crash site of a wooden glider in Normandy early on D-Day morning. I turn a sharp corner in the gallery's path and enter the diorama's chamber. The lights are dim. I can hear the sounds of crickets and other nocturnal animals blend into the distant shouting and gunfire of combat. Lifelike vegetation and a dark, indistinct background add to the realism. The wreckage of the glider is silent and motionless in the darkness of the field, its hinged nose open to reveal a jeep inside. I

imagine myself in the role of a gliderborne infantryman, among the first of the Allied forces to enter occupied France on D-Day, behind enemy lines in the early morning darkness. The atmosphere in the chamber makes it easy to imagine the disorientation and fear that such soldiers must have experienced. For me, though, the scene also evokes a pastoral calm that might seem odd given the sounds of fighting in the background. I like being outdoors at night and, whatever may be happening beyond the confines of the field depicted in the diorama, the field itself seems serene, a still life painting of a silent broken glider in the nighttime countryside.

The primary purpose of the diorama seems to be to invoke personal discourse on the part of the visitor. The scene provides sensory details, but leaves the creation of a narrative explanation to those who view it. The crash of the glider, the surrounding countryside, and the accompanying sounds of a nighttime battle tug at my memory, encouraging me to use past experiences to create a story for the scene.

A few twists in the path beyond the diorama chamber, I cross the sky bridge to the southern portion of the building and enter the museum's third gallery, which is

titled "The D-Day Beaches." For me, this gallery contains some of the most moving displays in the museum. For the most part, the exhibits focus on the individual experiences of D-Day combatants. Enlargements of photographs taken on D-Day and shortly thereafter line the dark walls. One sequence of photographs taken seconds apart shows a determined-looking lieutenant dragging other soldiers from a landing craft and helping them to the beach. Another photograph shows wounded men being ferried by a landing craft to a hospital ship waiting offshore. I can see pain and exhaustion and determination in the eyes of the men in the photographs. Throughout the gallery, free-standing signboards that remind me of memorial obelisks contain descriptive accounts of the invasion. One such signboard, titled "Omaha Beach: Visitors to Hell," contains a private's brief personal description of his landing on Omaha Beach followed by a short discussion of the unexpected difficulties faced by all of the troops who landed there on the morning of D-Day.

Artifacts donated to the museum by combatants are placed throughout the third gallery's winding corridors. Descriptions of the items and the personal story of the person to whom it belonged are included. One such artifact

is a map of the Easy Red sector of Omaha Beach drawn with a red crayon. The accompanying placard states that the map was carried by Lieutenant John A. Bruck of the 741st Tank Battalion. Lieutenant Bruck survived the war while his brother Louis, who also participated in the D-Day invasion of Normandy, was killed in action approximately two months after D-Day.

"The D-Day Beaches" also contains one of several "personal accounts stations" situated throughout the museum. The stations are small booths in which the visitor is able to listen to the audio-taped stories of D-Day participants. I enter one of the stations and take a seat on the small bench inside. Backlit photographs of five soldiers are displayed on the wall beneath the video monitor in front of me. I press the button under the photograph of a young soldier labeled "Pvt. Felix Branham." The light behind the other photographs dims, and the voice of the now elderly Private Branham is played over a speaker while the video monitor displays black-and-white photographs of Omaha Beach on the morning of the invasion:

. . . Blood was all over the place, in spite of the Channel. They would come in floating with their face down. If they got hit, there wasn't a whole lot left of them. You'd see arms or legs or heads or things like that. The majority of

them got wiped out before they ever got ashore. There was chaos; nothing but a stream of blood red water, that was all. You had to walk [so as] not to step on bodies and the wounded too.

Once again, I find I draw on my own memories to make sense of what I see. I know the feeling of working through exhaustion, but I feel deeply thankful that I have never needed to do so while fearing for my life or while killing other men. Books I have read describe a feeling of numbness that overtakes those involved in military combat. This idea makes sense to me but the feeling itself remains largely incomprehensible.

In the gallery, then, the personal artifacts and recollections of soldiers and the commentary on the placards are informative in terms of the actual events of D-Day, but they seem unable to portray the mental toll that must have been exacted by such an experience. Many of the photographs on display allow me to glimpse the psychological effects of the D-Day invasion, but they bring me no closer to an understanding that I can share or verbalize effectively. The photographs provoke identification with the soldiers while simultaneously emphasizing my isolation from their experience. My own experiences of pain, anguish, and fatigue generate feelings

of empathy when I look at the photographs, but I have never been a soldier in combat. I realize that I simply cannot fully imagine what the experience of combat was like for the men whose experiences are enshrined in the gallery.

As I continue through the gallery, different materials tell the story of the aftermath of the D-Day invasion, the push of the Allied forces to Berlin, and the surrender of Germany. I stop at one display containing handwritten case notes from a surgeon who came ashore at Omaha Beach. His descriptions reveal part of the human cost of the invasion. I think about the soldiers who suffered and died in the fighting that day. While I remain grateful for their sacrifice, such widespread suffering and death seems almost nonsensical. A quote from Sergeant Bruce Egger on a nearby signboard seems to affirm my thoughts on the senselessness of the war:

A wounded man kept crying, "Mother, Mother! Help me!" as he struggled to rise. Another burst from the machine gun silenced him. That beseeching plea on that clear, cold Christmas night will remain with me for the rest of my life.

Near the end of the gallery's path, reproductions of the front pages of US newspapers record a mixture of jubilation and grim determination to continue the fight in the Pacific after the surrender of Germany. A large color

photograph of the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial uses the well-recognized image of the cemetery's rows of white marble crosses and Stars of David to summarize the cost of the war in Europe. The placard accompanying the photograph uses a quote and commentary to provide a review of the war's outcome:

"The route you have traveled . . . is marked by the graves of former comrades. Each of the fallen died as a member of the team to which you belong, bound together by a common love of liberty. . . ."

-General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Victory Message to Allied troops in Europe

On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. The war in Europe, a conflict that had lasted over six years and cost millions of lives, was over. The world that emerged from this violent struggle was not free from danger. But humanity had been spared from a terrible fate.

The United States played a major role in this victory. The Americans who fought in Europe came to the Continent not as conquerors but as liberators. They came and they fought because they had to. Often what held them together was not country and flag, but unit cohesion—loyalty to those who served beside them. Still, most also believed that this was a war that had to be waged. So they fought, and many of them died. They joined millions of others from scores of nations who perished in the bloodiest war in history. Their sacrifice was the most profound any person can offer. Their legacy is a safer, more humane world. And for this, we must be forever grateful.

For me, the display produces a sobering finale to the main galleries' treatment of World War II in Europe. So many died and so much destruction was wrought to produce the Allied victory that I feel the only valid response is to wish that the war had never happened. I compare the museum's review of the war's outcome to present day events. The result only emphasizes the ironic nature of war. The sacrifice and the destruction continue, yet the world seems neither safer nor more humane.

The final gallery covers "The D-Day Invasions in the Pacific" and offers displays that both echo and depart from those contained in the preceding galleries. The "Pacific Wing," as it is called, opens with a high-definition electronic map that covers a large wall. As a voiceover summarizes the amphibious landings of the US troops who fought in the Pacific Theater, corresponding sites on the map light up. Although larger in size and a bit more dynamic in its portrayal of events, this map is similar to other animated maps on display in the museum that use images and narration rooted in professional discourse to summarize events such as troop movements and invasion plans. The technology in these animated displays lends

additional legitimacy to the expert commentary they provide.

Other Pacific Wing exhibits focus on the cultural and military history of World War II in the Pacific. Following the winding path through the gallery, I arrive at a display titled "Race and War in the Pacific." This display covers one side of the curving walls, and combines the popular discourses of US and Japanese war propaganda with explanations and commentary that encourage visitors to question the racist rhetoric of stereotypes and demonization that both the Allied and Axis powers used during World War II.

Elsewhere in the gallery, a serpentine wall provides a chronological timeline of the major amphibious landings of the war in the Pacific. Multimedia displays combine professional, popular, and personal texts to focus on various aspects of the war. One display shows wartime cartoons and other filmed propaganda, while another offers detailed statistics on each Allied landing when the visitor presses a button labeled with the name of the invaded area. Still other displays use video footage, audio recordings, photographs, and artifacts to relate the stories of men who fought in the Pacific Theater.

When the serpentine wall of the gallery comes to an end, I turn to head down a narrow corridor containing a display titled "The Final Assault of the Japanese Home Islands." This somber display begins with photographs depicting the near complete devastation of Japanese cities bombed by US aircraft and ends with a mural map of Japan that pairs bombed Japanese cities with US cities of similar size in 1945. The mural also lists the percent of each Japanese city destroyed by the bombing. The US cities are presented as empathetic surrogates for the bombed Japanese cities, allowing US visitors to the museum to link more closely the degree of destruction to their own experiences.

As in the galleries that treat the war in Europe, I find I am most affected emotionally by the portion of the Pacific Wing that deals with the final stages of the campaign. The display titled "The Atomic Bomb" contains few items compared to the others at the museum. The sparsity seems to hint at all that cannot be made present through material artifacts or explanatory captions. Rather, absence or loss is evoked through the minimal representation of discourses on the weapon of mass destruction. Photographs, including the iconic image of the mushroom cloud formed by the testing of the first

atomic bomb near Alamogordo, New Mexico, are accompanied by a timeline of notable events in the development of the atomic bomb. A reproduction of President Truman's handwritten note approving the use of the atomic bomb against Japan also is included in the timeline display. The exhibit concludes with a silent film that uses archival footage to document the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the aftermath of the bombing. "The Atomic Bomb" is the only exhibit in the museum to use ambient music as part of the presentation. Although the contemplative instrumental music can be heard at every point in the small exhibit, it seems to me that it is meant to accompany the deeply-felt yet inexpressible thoughts conjured by the silent film's images.

After viewing the film, the visitor proceeds down a narrow corridor to the main galleries' exit. Along this corridor is an exhibit that presents the Allied victory against Japan using methods similar to those in the European victory exhibit. Personal quotes are blended with photographs, artifacts, and professional discourses that tally the cost of the war and document the relief and joy at its conclusion. Popular discourse is represented by newspaper photographs of large celebrations, and the front

page of the V-J Day edition of The New York Times. I head down this final corridor, comparing the momentous events of World War II with pivotal events during my own lifetime. As I leave the galleries and exit the museum, I consider, not for the first time, the amazing cost of World War II and the tremendous cultural changes that were part of its legacy. The war changed the way US citizens viewed themselves, their country, and the world. It altered traditional societal roles, especially for women and minorities, and it altered the political role of the nation itself, establishing the US as a dominant political and military power. The war tested and cemented the personal and cultural values celebrated by the museum. In turn, these values have been tested, altered, and sometimes abandoned in later wars fought by the US. I think of the conflicts the US is currently involved in, in Iraq and Afghanistan. I do not know yet the outcome of these conflicts, but their costs and the changes they bring will inevitably be measured against those of World War II, as all wars since have been.

The blending and juxtaposition of discourses enacted at the museum encourage visitors to create personal meaning for the items on display based on their individual

responses to the items and information that are presented. Whether the materials on display are familiar to the visitor or whether they represent a fresh discovery, exploration here allows the creation of meaning. Visitors interact with the displays, compare items, place them in context, accept or reject meanings that might be suggested by their placement, revise beliefs or attitudes based on what they witness, determine the personal worth or meaning of what they experience, and express these meanings through their continued interaction with the museum or with others, immediately following and long after their visit.

CHAPTER THREE

GATHERING AWARENESS: A MYSTORY

D-Day Minus Twenty-One Years

One might suppose that playing "doctor" with one's cousin at the age of four or five would have nothing at all to do with D-Day or World War II. Of course, one would be largely correct in that supposition.

Under the house (which like many homes here is on concrete pilings that raise it about five feet off of the ground, and which belongs to an aunt and uncle on my mother's side), there are bits of wire attached to blocks of old Styrofoam at one end. At the other, the wires are wrapped around my toes. I am the victim of some dire yet vague medical disaster and my cousin the doctor will not only use the wires to heal me, but to give me super powers.

Unfortunately, the powers that have been bestowed upon me cannot stop or even slow the monsoonal rainfall of a summer afternoon in coastal Louisiana. Inside, the house feels old to me. The pictures, the furniture, the clocks on the wall, the old board games on a small shelf in the dining room, all of these things give me a feeling that I'm in a place that has been lived in for far longer than I've been around. It's not just some vague sense of pre-me

history, this feeling. It's a very specific sense of a past, but not entirely passed, period in time. I couldn't name this period then, and I'm not much closer to being able to name it now. It's the period of faded Technicolor photographs in old albums, the ones where my aunts all had cat-eye glasses and my uncles all looked vaguely gawky with their sideburns, sitting in lawn chairs near the Gulf, drinking beer and eating crawfish. It should have been the late sixties or early seventies, but . . . wait. There's the problem. This is the period before there were periods. I don't mean style or fashion—I remember "avocado" and "harvest wheat" refrigerators, and I'm grateful that Garanimals weren't around before the seventies or we'd be missing out on plenty of dignified-looking sepia and black-and-white relatives. This is the period before people changed. Looking out from Morgan City, the world is still huge. Yeah, that's a cliché. But what else can you do when a cliché is the largest chunk of the truth?

As the efficacy of nostalgia's narrative lies in what it erases from memory as much as in what it retains, the idealized and selective vision of "apple dowdy and mulled cider" substitutes for the "the colonial days," representing only that which induces longing in the visitor. (Jackson 280)

Of course, what seems "old" to a six year old may not be old to someone else. But I'm more tempted to be impressed that at six I felt a real sense of the distinctive flavor of an era that was not entirely my own than I am tempted to nitpick about the relativity of time. Speaking of which, Peanut and I are bored after ten minutes inside. Even if it stops raining, it's going to be too wet to play outside again, so we have a choice: Using more wire to connect flashlight bulbs to batteries in his room or the old board games in the dining room.

Scrabble. Nahhhhh. To this day, I just don't see the fascination. There's Risk and there's Battleship. They sure looked old to me then, though I probably remember them as even older than they were. Both had paintings on the box top, no photographs to ruin the nostalgia. Risk was intriguing. The map on the game board fascinated me, but we probably couldn't figure out how to play it and it was still a few years before I would discover a series of European maps in a book at the school library that made me want to find out what happened to the country called "Prussia" on one map, and why another showed Czechoslovakia as a part of Germany. So Battleship it is.

Not long after this rainy afternoon spent playing Battleship, I am at my paternal grandmother's house. In an old cedar chifferobe, I find a Nazi officer's hat. My grandmother tells me that my great uncle Buster was in the war. I don't know what "in the war" means, and I don't ask. In retrospect, the reason for my lack of knowledge seems clear: The Vietnam War did not exist for my paternal relatives. At least, it was never mentioned in my presence. The Korean War is lumped in with World War II, as both of them happened long ago, though whether this aggregation is a product of my own understanding or that of my relatives, I do not know. I do know that I have no real understanding of the hat that I'm holding in my hands. My grandmother urges me away from the chifferobe; the floors in the old house are uneven, and the heavy piece of furniture once fell forward with crash that would be certain to make me one with the floor's contours.

Take a long, deep breath. In through your mouth goes the air, deep, deep into your body. Bend your toes, squeezing and scrunching every muscle in your feet together, as tight and as hard as you can. Hold it. Now exhale, letting the tension in your feet drain from your body as you release the air. Relax and breathe in the

sunshine. Feel the soft grass beneath your body. Take another deep breath and listen to the muffled sounds of the room. Quiet, quiet, you can hear the low, soft static of air hitting your eardrum. The paper covering the exam table is smooth and clean, and the rustle of chart papers tells you that the doctor will be stepping in shortly. Take a long, deep breath. Notice how cold and smooth the stethoscope is as it slides across your back. Now stick out your tongue as far as you can. Hold it . . . and notice the taste of the tongue depressor. Like a popsicle stick without the popsicle residue. Close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly. When you open them, no one is home. When the air conditioner stops running, all you hear is the low, soft whoosh of air hitting your eardrum. You are beginning to feel very sleepy. Now turn onto your side and watch as the sunlight shining through a tree outside is filtered through the tiny spaces between the slats of the closed window blind. Notice the sparkling pattern created by the sunlight as it dances across the woven colonial-style rug. Breathe deeply, slowly, and hear your breath as it moves in and out. With your eyes half-closed, find a particle of dust floating through the sunlight and follow it. Close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly.

D-Day Minus Sixteen Years

In fourth grade at Holy Cross Elementary School, Mrs. Nan Wall is reading Uncle Remus stories to us. We all love the way she changes accents for the different characters. I am doodling in my notebook. I start off with a simple cross. Then I add a few smaller lines and end up with a shape commonly known as a swastika. Though I've seen the Nazi officer's hat, I do not make a connection between the shape I've drawn and the symbol on the hat. To me, the swastika looks like a squared version of the hurricane symbol used by the weatherman on television. I like the way it looks, and so I use my pencil to cover an entire notebook page with swastikas while Mrs. Wall tells us what Uncle Remus has to say about Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear.

Mrs. Wall often gets up from her desk while she's reading to us, to walk around the classroom as she acts out the tale. She doesn't mind if we doodle while she reads to us and so I continue drawing swastikas in my notebook as she moves up and down the aisles. "David!" she exclaims, her Uncle Remus accent suddenly gone, "Why are you drawing that?" I'm surprised, not because it's okay to doodle while Mrs. Wall reads, but because there is something in the tone of her voice that I've never heard before. "I

dunno. I just made it up," I tell her. It's the Truth. I like Mrs. Wall a lot, and I've told her so. And I know she likes me. She once kept me in for a minute during recess to give me a rosary she'd made for me and to tell me that she enjoyed having me in her class. There is consternation in her voice and everyone in the class is looking at me to see if I'm in trouble. Mrs. Wall looks at me also, very closely. I am dumbfounded. As if she's telling me a secret, she leans over and whispers quietly that what I've drawn is something very bad and that I should never ever draw it again. Then she asks for the swastika-covered page. I give it to her, and she tears it up into small pieces and throws it away. Not unkindly. She continues the story, but I can no longer concentrate on Brer Bear because I've done something that Mrs. Wall doesn't like and I don't even know what or why. At recess, Mrs. Wall tells me about the Nazis. I don't remember what she told me, exactly, but I'm sure that whatever it was it lacked detail in a G-rated fourth-grade sort of way.

pink oleander

in the depression glass vase

at my grandma's house

i brought more today

because though they wilt quickly
they make her happy

D-Day Minus Fourteen Years

A succession of library books with maps, my dad watching The World at War on PBS, occasional black and white pictures of relatives in uniform. The histories of World War II are a vague blur. In the meantime, I move from the Hardy Boys and Peggy Parrish and Judy Blume to The Lord of the Rings. Occasionally "Normandy" or "Omaha Beach" pops up and I wonder about them a bit. Seeds planted, but infrequently watered.

D-Day Minus Twelve Years

Why didn't the human drama of war catch my interest sooner? The methods and machinery of war bored me, and I had assumed that troop movements and tanks and guns and planes constituted the whole of what there is to know about war. But, at Boy Scout Camp one summer, I participate in a flag retirement ceremony. At the ceremony, I begin to think about war in a different way, human instead of tactical. Belief and loss and bravery and cowardice and probably most of the rest of the adjectives in the English language. It is human, and it can't be understood. Maybe that's why I'm beginning to be fascinated by it.

A Flag Retiring Ceremony

1. Display the old flag. A member of the assembly gives its history, if known. Then the assembly recites the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. A member of the Color Guard reads aloud "I Am Old Glory."

I am old glory. For more than nine score years I have been the banner of hope and freedom for generation after generation of Americans. Born amid the first flames of America's fight for freedom, I am the symbol of a country that has grown from a little group of thirteen colonies to a united nation of fifty sovereign states. Planted firmly on the high pinnacle of American Faith, my gently fluttering folds have proved an inspiration to untold millions. Men have followed me into battle with unwavering courage. They have looked upon me as a symbol of national unity. They have prayed that they and their fellow citizens might continue to enjoy the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, which have been granted to every American as the heritage of free men. So long as men love liberty more than life itself, so long as they treasure the priceless privileges bought with the

blood of our forefathers, so long as the principles of truth, justice and charity for all remain deeply rooted in human hearts, I shall continue to be the enduring banner of the United States of America.

3. Procedure for flag burning. A pair of scissors should be on hand:
 - a. COMPLETE SILENCE THROUGHOUT. The Color Guard unfolds the flag. They place the stars, from the audience's perspective, in the upper left hand corner.
 - b. The Color Guard cuts the blue field of stars from the flag, with solemnity and quiet. Have one person hold the blue field in her arms until the end of the ceremony because this is the last part of the flag to be burned.
 - c. Now the Color Guard cuts one stripe off at a time. Burn it in the fire by laying it across the flames, not in a lump. Burn each stripe thoroughly before cutting off the next stripe to be burned.
 - d. After all the stripes have been burned, then the blue field of stars may be burned. Before it is spread across the fire, the person holding the

blue field throughout the ceremony should kiss it.

- e. The portion then is laid across the fire as in its entirety. All is quiet until the last speck of the blue field turns to ash.
- f. With meaning, the Color Guard says, "OUR FLAG REST IN PEACE."
- g. A member of the Color Guard reads aloud "Color of the Flag."

Remember as you look at your flag, which is the symbol of our nation, that it is red because of human sacrifice. It is blue because of the true blue loyalty of its defenders. It is white to symbolize liberty, our land of the free. The stars are symbols of the united efforts and hope in the hearts of many people striving for a greater nobler America.
- h. The assembly sings "The Star Spangled Banner."
- i. The end of the ceremony should be followed by a silent dismissal.
- j. Nothing should ever be added to the ceremonial fire after the flag has been burned.

k. The next morning the Color Guard gather the ashes to be burned.

l. A hole is dug, the dirt placed carefully beside it and the ashes are placed into the hole by handfuls. Fill the hole back up with dirt. A marker may then be placed at the burial site (cf., "Three Flag").

D-Day Minus Ten Years

Whenever a member of the lodge moved, the sound was like sleigh bells. This, combined with the crackle and glow of the fire in the middle of the clearing, produced an effect that managed to carve a middle ground between primal howling and deep hypnosis. Next to the fire, one member pulled an arrow from his quiver and read the name on it. It was my name. Before I could stand up, two guides closed their hands around my arms and carried me forward. They set me down directly in front of the chief, who stared at me sternly. He leaned over and whispered in my ear. I nodded once, unsure of what was going to happen next.

After a long consideration, the chief raised both of his hands above his head and brought them down on my shoulders with force enough to buckle my knees. The sound of sleigh bells approached from behind and I was once again

lifted by my arms. Carried outside the circle of firelight and into the forest, I was made to stand while one of the guides blindfolded me and placed my hand on his shoulder. In this manner, I was led through the forest for what seemed like more than an hour.

When the trek came to an end and the blindfold was removed, the guide motioned for me to lie down. Once I had done so, he turned and left. For many minutes, I listened to the bells he wore as they faded into the distance. The ground was covered with dry pine straw and looking up through the trees I could see stars in the sky. Orion's belt. The night sounds of the forest seemed to grow louder and then fade into my dreams as I fell asleep.

D-Day Minus Six Years

When A Midnight Clear is released, I sit in an empty theater and watch. German soldiers were not all Nazis. I know this already, but the movie makes it clear. The thought, of course, makes war—even "the good war"—even more confusing. I am tempted to appreciate the sacrifice and ignore the ambiguity. Enculturation is messy.

D-Day Minus Four Years

At a bookstore, I flip through Stephen Ambrose's D-Day: June 6, 1944: The Climatic Battle of World War II. For the first time, I get a clear sense of D-Day in Normandy, some of the "whats" and "whys" fall into place. I have a context for my emerging understanding of war as a mystery borne of human emotion. The more I know, the more respect I gain for the people who had to do the invasion of Europe. But I put the book back on the shelf.

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, which you have done your best to avoid these many long years. The eyes of your family, friends, and co-workers are upon you. Your hopes and prayers will keep you marching forth. In company with others, with whom you will seem to have little in common, you will earn money for the purchase of a vehicle, learn that you are capable of more than you suspected, and eventually gain the freedom to return to school.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped, and battle hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1995! Much has happened since the bleak despair of 1994. You have gained wisdom,

allowing you to come to grips with the inevitable. The tide will turn!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking (cf., Eisenhower, qtd. in Ambrose, D-Day: June 6, 1944 171).

D-Day Minus Two Years

"Tie that buoy down! Tie the damn thing down!" A swell, chest-high, washes over the deck as the boat leans hard to port. I grab on to the headache rack with one arm and keep pulling rope with the other. The mate has the boat angled side seas and every time we slide down a swell I am standing on the gunwale. There is no consideration of how or why. Afterward, we make our way up the deck and into the galley. I dog down the watertight door, take off my boots, and head below with the rest of the rigging crew. In my bunk, I fall asleep, thinking of what will need to be done in three hours when the anchor cable has been winched in. There is no consideration of how or why.

Follow me, don't follow me
I've got my spine, I've got my orange crush
Collar me, don't collar me

I've got my spine, I've got my orange crush
We are agents of the free
I've had my fun and now its time to
Serve your conscience overseas
(over me, not over me)
Coming in fast, over me

High on the roof,
Thin the blood,
Another one on the waves tonight,
Comin' in, you're home

We'd circle and we'd circle
and we'd circle to stop and consider
and centered on the pavement
stacked up all the trucks
jacked up and our wheels in slush and orange
crush
in pocket and all this here country
Hell any country it's just like heaven here
And I was remembering
And I was just in a different country
And all then this whirlybird
That I headed for I had my goggles
pulled off I knew it all
I knew every back road and every truck stop

Follow me, don't follow me
I've got my spine, I've got my orange crush
Collar me, don't collar me
I've got my spine, I've got my orange crush
We are agents of the free
I've had my fun and now its time to
Serve your conscience overseas
(over me, not over me)
Coming in fast, over me

High on the roof,
Thin the blood,
Another one on the waves tonight,
Comin' in, you're home (R.E.M., "Orange Crush")

D-Day

When Saving Private Ryan is released, I sit in a packed theater and watch. My reaction to the movie's depiction of the D-Day battle on Omaha Beach is visceral. The rest of the audience seems similarly stunned. During quiet segments, I hear several people weeping. When the movie is over, the audience sits quietly until the credits finish rolling. An elderly couple, veterans maybe, walks down the aisle past my seat. Two rows behind me, a group of people decide what to eat for supper. "Tell me I've lived a good life." (Saving Private Ryan).

I drive home in silence. What else can you do when an event becomes so heavy that it solidifies into a granite statue? What else can you do when you try to comprehend an event that killed tens of millions, changed reality immeasurably for hundreds of millions more, and that might have a legitimate claim on having saved the world? What else can you do when a war to save the world destroys a fairly large portion of it? What else can you do when you are faced with a sacrifice that demands profound awe and respect? What else can you do when you try to resist dehumanizing the players in an event that dehumanized everyone involved in it? In my apartment, lights out, I

lie down on the floor and cry. What else can you do when a cliché is the largest chunk of the truth?

My grandfather, who is a 72-year-old naval veteran of WW II, never really talked about his experience during the war. At the age of 17, he left a poverty-stricken home and set out to join the Navy because he felt like it was his only way out and, more importantly, his duty. During rare moments, he would talk about his life in the Navy and what it brought to him.

It wasn't until I was almost 17 years old that he began to open up about the things he saw and how they made him feel. After he realized that we would listen, it was like a dam had broken. He talked for hours one Sunday afternoon, and what he told us made our lives seem so very easy, to say the least. The horrors he suffered all the long months he served have made him a harder human being. The lessons he learned have made him wise beyond his years. And the friendships he formed and lost have made him care more about those who are important to him and make it harder for him to let go.

Last weekend, we saw Saving Private Ryan together, the whole family. His face wore a look of indifference and doubt. But in the end, he cried. I have never seen my grandfather cry, but on that day he did. We left the movie theater and walked in the rain to our cars and the tears still fell. He had only one comment, "Now you know how it really was for me. . . ."

He has yet to say anything more. The wounds are finally healing for him after holding the hurt in for so many years. With time, he may be able to move on, but letting go of our past means we let go of what makes us who we are. I realize that there may be so many others out there who feel the same way as my grandfather. Thank you for what you did and the manner in which you did it. Words cannot express the grateful thanks that so many Americans feel. And Grandpa, thank you for opening up and sharing that moment of

your life. . . . May you remember only good and let the bad slip away . . . then again, so might you all. (Kornbluth and Sunshine 15)

D-Day Plus One Year

It is a solemn duty, an expression of patriotism. It is a public display of support for Our Troops and a heartfelt expression of dearly-held American values. On the day Saving Private Ryan is released to the home video market, hundreds of thousands of us make the long journey to a suburban Wal-Mart and purchase the right to hold forth for hours, expounding on the hardships and horrors of Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944.

I admit it: Part of me watches this, watches me, with unforgiving cynicism. For years, World War II was Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington, Audie Murphy, Henry Fonda, and John Wayne. Now, with a swipe of a bank card, we purchase a brand new World War II. This World War II happened almost entirely on a beach in Normandy. Well, actually it happened on a beach in Ireland, but we'll overlook that fact for now. The new World War II is unspeakably sad, a black pit of hellacious sacrifice. But there's a small toy at the bottom of this box of nasty-tasting, vitamin-enriched, whole-grain cereal. We dig down to the bottom of

the box, retrieve the toy, and rip the shrink wrap off of the toy while we're still in the Wal-Mart's parking lot.

Yup. I cry. Not here in the Wal-Mart parking lot, but every single time I watch the movie. Vindication! See?? I really do understand courage and honor and sacrifice. Hell, I might have been on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944 in a past life. My friends in the military have nothing on me in this competition. I mean, let's face it, when we're all grasping for words to convey the profundity of the World War II experience, I come up with the biggest ones. Eruditely loquacious. Yup. I win. Ha!

Hey you nitpickers . . . back off! The guys in SPR are all Rangers, an elite outfit—not dragass, beatup, dogface Infantrymen. Rangers don't have to worry about piddly things like shutting up on patrol, or scuffing the (sniper-bait) rank insignia from the front of their helmets. And if you can't believe the Army risking eight guys to save one, remember this is Allegory---just like in "Combat!" where the Squad defies ol' Sarge to bring in an orphaned baby despite the fact one of them buys it in a minefield and they learn that the kid's folks were a Kraut and a collaborator.

And if that flag-waving finish gets to you, what would you rather have—some Robert Altman-type ending, with a wounded GI out of his skull with shock and pain hauling around a dead German and claiming it's his brother? That would only have confused folks, and made them uneasy just thinking about all the "brothers" on both sides that got wasted. SPR is an old-fashioned WWII movie with graphic bits---So, lighten up!!!
(Alvin)

D-Day Plus Four Years

I am looking for a certain emotion at the D-Day museum, but I haven't brought it with me. Others have. In the museum's theater, I watch a documentary called D-Day Remembered. The film reduces a veteran to tears and he shuffles out of the theater, clinging to his wife. In the upstairs galleries, an elderly woman tells her son that she wants to go home, the museum is depressing. I think it ought to be in some ways, but who am I to judge someone who's been around so much longer than I have? Most people here seem interested, curious tourists at a solemn attraction. I wonder what others are thinking. Probably what I'm thinking. It's hard to take it all in. I want to talk to them, want to say . . . something. And I want to hear what they have to say in return. But every so often there's a picture or an item that demands silence, and ebb and flow with strangers is too difficult.

At dawn, I awoke, and what I now saw all around me were numerous objects I'd miraculously not tripped over in the dark. These were dozens of dead German boys in greenish gray uniforms, killed a day or two before by the company we were replacing. If darkness had mercifully hidden them from us, dawn disclosed them with staring open eyes and greenish white faces and hands like marble, still clutching their rifles and machine pistols in their seventeen-year-old hands. One body was only a foot or so away from me, and I

found myself fascinated by the stubble of his beard, which would have earned him a rebuke on a parade ground but not here, not anymore. Michelangelo could have made something beautiful out of these forms, in the tradition of the Dying Gaul, and I was astonished to find that in a way I couldn't understand, at first they struck me as awful but beautiful. But after a moment, no feeling but horror. My boyish illusions, largely intact to that moment of awakening, fell away all at once, and suddenly I knew that I was not and would never be in a world that was reasonable or just. To transform silly conscripts into cold marble after passing them through unbearable humiliation and fear seemed to do them an interesting injustice. I decided to ponder these things. . . .

Until that moment in the woods, the only dead people I'd seen had been Mother's parents, placid, dignified, cosmeticized, and decently on display in their expensive caskets at Turner and Stevens Mortuary in Pasadena. Unlike these ill-treated youths, they had been gathered full of years, cooperative participants in the inexorable process by which the universe deals with its superannuated organisms. These boys were different. They had been not fulfilled but cheated. But worse was to come almost immediately. The captain called for me, and as I ran toward him down a forest path, I met a sight even more devastating. The dead I'd seen were boys. Now I saw dead children, rigged out as soldiers. On the path lay two youngsters not older than fourteen. Each had taken a bullet in the head. The brains of one extruded from a one-inch hole in his forehead, pushing aside his woolen visor cap so like a schoolboy's. The brains of the other were coming out of his nostrils.

At this sight, I couldn't do what I wanted, go off by myself and cry. I had to pretend to be, if not actually gratified, at least undisturbed by this spectacle of our side victorious. Such murders, after all, were precisely what my platoon and I were there for. Here for the first

time I practiced a defense against visible signs of emotion. I utilized it often during the coming months. I compressed my lips very tightly and kept them that way for some time. This ritual tightening-up constituted my sole defense against all my natural impulses to weep, scream, or run away. (Fussell 104-06)

D-Day Plus Five Years

At the end of the galleries in the Pacific Wing of the National D-Day Museum, I stand with a small group to watch a short film on the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The film is silent, but sweet, sad music emanates from a speaker set in the ceiling. First one bomb, then the other: Loading the planes, flying to the target, the explosion as seen from the air, and the destructive after effects.

The image of a frail old Japanese woman crawling through rubble moves me to tears. Next to me, a woman's cell phone rings and she proceeds to converse with someone about getting her car fixed, her plans for the evening, and who will baby sit the kids. Several of us give her incredulous looks. She doesn't seem to notice. When she leaves, no one shrugs or sighs. Instead, we turn back to the looping film and continue the silent conversation.

D-Day Plus Six Years

Psssssst. Memes don't exist. Pass it on.

I realize that it just isn't possible to grasp the meaning of an idea or a thing or an action that changes every time I bother to think about it. The stuff I saw and the way I felt last time colors the experience I've had this time, and thinking about it just rearranges everything and combines it with the way I'm feeling now. After many, many visits, is it possible to sum up my feelings about the National D-Day Museum? No more easy than it is to summarize my feelings about World War II itself. Still, lest I forget:

It is cold and institutional.

You know. First of all, it's that smell. Nobody's home smells like metal and plastic and glue, and massive climate control. Handwritten letters. Stained clothing. Rifles that were held and fired by real people. All behind glass, categorized and explained on plastic placards in neat Helvetica. Swarms of people standing around looking at what once was.

This is our attempt to create a fossil. Nature does it better: A fly and some pollen grains in a chunk of amber can be beautiful, and has a sense of enduring reality that

this place lacks. Imagine buying a ticket to see a forest. Oh wait, we've done that too. Imagine buying a ticket to see a graveyard. Check. Imagine buying a ticket to sit in a dark theater that smells of the cleaning solution used on the floor yesterday and listening to an old man tell you all about the nonsensical dream that woke him up at 3:47 this morning. He couldn't go back to sleep, so he went outside to drink his coffee while the sun rose.

The sun is real, I think. But I haven't touched it either.

It is dark, dreamlike, and ephemeral.

The distant sounds of Germans shouting and occasional gunfire fail to interrupt the restful feel of the diorama. Then again, I have a gizmo at home that makes cricket chirping sounds just like the ones here. I use it to put me to sleep. When I've been here before, it was easy to imagine my heart pounding. That was an imaginary trip through the air, into enemy territory just before dawn. Not knowing where I am, not knowing where the only people I can trust are. Scary, I remember thinking. But, would it really have been scary if I had been trained? Just how much of an automaton would I have been if becoming one really suited me at the time? Although I recall such

thoughts, I think differently this time. It was raining when we arrived and this is a cool, restful place to sleep. All the pastoral comforts of the French countryside on a summer night, with none of the insects. Strange how your thoughts can change by the minute. Even more strange is how you can access thoughts from the past, understanding how you felt when you had them, yet not be able to reproduce the emotions that accompanied the thoughts.

When I'm at home, I always think of this space as dimly lit. When I'm here, I always realize that I was wrong about the light level, for the most part.

It is dark, dreamlike, and ephemeral.

I wish I could hide until the museum closed, then have the place all to myself. I wouldn't do much. After a bit of wandering around, I'd probably return to the glider diorama and go to sleep.

It is a place of learning.

I suspect that a lot of people don't know much about World War II. I suppose that's why I'm happy that so many people seem to recommend the D-Day Museum to others, once they've visited it themselves. A book might provide a more coherent narrative, but the museum provides evidence that

the war actually happened. But what did happen? Really, what was World War II?

Expectations come into play here. It's busy, but I haven't heard a single comment in forty minutes of wandering through the exhibits. People do talk, but the conversations are muted and quickly had. Several months ago, I overheard a teenage boy tell his friend that the stuff here is boring. He asked where the guns were. What do I think? Well, I think the prop shop was probably dismantled when European location filming ended in 1945. Maybe a couple of the sets are still standing on a backlot in France or something. And I hear there's a couple of good World War II games for the Playstation.

Most people are not bored. Nor, for that matter, are they overcome with emotion. They're making it up as they go along, creating an experience to take home with them.

It is a good place to people-watch.

Yes, it's true: Occasionally you see someone crying. But really, who's rude enough to just stand around and watch someone cry?

What you can do is watch people watching each other. That's fine. And if you do, you'll find that they are . . .

.

The kind of people who go to the D-Day Museum.

It's somewhat more efficient than staring at yourself in a mirror, and a good bit easier to do.

It is a way to demonstrate reverence.

We are taught to honor fallen soldiers, grieve for the innocent dead, and to abhor the goals of the enemy. And Americans do so, often for the same reason that makes so many of us claim an affiliation with organized religion when we do not regularly attend any church.

The need for social approval is powerful. And the sacrifice of the troops who fought was real. It has been pointed out many times that war brings out the absolute best and the absolute worst in people. I think that that must be true. I don't see how it cannot be. But when I think of reverence here, I think of something that feels even more elemental than fundamental behaviors that war provokes.

I have read about the use of tanks and troops to install communist governments in countries outside of the former Soviet Union.

I have watched films about the use of tanks and troops to install fascist governments in countries outside of Germany.

I have watched newscasts about the use of tanks and troops to install democratic governments in countries outside of the United States.

Remembering war and thinking about its meaning is a way to understand the relationship between justice and peace. It is a way of wishing.

It is a monument to death and sacrifice.

Gravestones abbreviate the story, a dash between the beginning and the end, and maybe a quote, and that is all. Was it worth it? I suppose that only the men and women directly involved could answer that question. For my part, I am grateful for what they did. But I also am grateful that there isn't much navel-gazing when it comes to this matter, even at the museum. Tens of millions were lost; in some ways, a partial story of how is enough.

"When I say lost, I mean killed" (Wharton 12).

It is a shrine to courage.

The visitor is going to see how ill prepared America was in 1939 when we had an army that ranked sixteenth in the world, right behind Romania. And we're going to show America gearing up for the war, and then . . . the landing of the airborne [troops] and the gliders that initiated D-Day right after midnight on June 6, and then the vast armada coming in. And visitors are going to be able to . . . be inside a German bunker, and look out through the aperture out at [the] sea, and they're going to be able to see

this fleet coming right at them—five thousand armed ships coming right at them, and overhead, more than six thousand airplanes coming right at them. Overall, what we want to show is that Hitler was wrong. When he declared war on the United States, he made a bet . . . that his young men, brought up in the Nazi Youth, would always out-fight those soft sons of democracy brought up in the Boy Scouts. And Hitler was wrong, and he lost that bet. The Boy Scouts proved to be far more capable of making war than the Nazi Youth. (Ambrose, "D-Day")

We'd all like to think that we have courage, the fable of courage anyway: Some deep, shining quality that makes us willing to do or say or think something that frightens us. I think that courage does exist this way sometimes, dredged up from the center of our souls, a visceral reaction to what we know is wrong.

But I also have a secret unspoken belief about courage. Or maybe it's a suspicion. I think that courage often arrives unbidden and it does its work before a person can make a conscious decision about it. Then, just as quickly as it came, it departs. I do not say this flippantly. I arrived at this belief by observing myself. And so I wonder, when is courage deserving of praise? Perhaps this is an empty, pointless question. Perhaps many acts of courage and altruism are instinctual or even selfish, but deserving of recognition nonetheless.

Perhaps we need to point out the brighter, kinder aspects of our nature lest we end up dwelling on and glorifying our most terrible abilities by default.

Perhaps courage is just a small reminder that we might be meant for more than mere procreation.

It is a marketing tool for an American ideal.

American values. The Boy Scouts versus the Nazis. Courage, honor, sacrifice, optimism, protecting the weak, defending market capitalism and baseball. Free speech. The Flag. Home.

The myth is huge, a swarming, ever-expanding whirlwind of culture. Maybe, at bottom, the museum argues for the existence of the absolute. On the other hand, the museum allows and even encourages the fragmentation of postmodernism. How could it not?

To my mind, the presentation is admirably restrained, considering the ethnocentric tendencies that always arise when nationalism is discussed. A giant Darth Vader in the lobby with a Nazi armband would likely get cheers from some crowds. Luckily, cooler heads set the meditative tone here. And so instead, we get Mom, apple pie, sadness, and victory.

"It's a museum that's going to help remind the American people—indeed, all travelers to the United States—of the sacrifice and heroism of our World War II veterans," says Defense Secretary William Cohen, explaining his department's strong support and his decision to attend the festivities. "I think someone once said that you ring the bell of the future with the ropes of the past. That's what we hope to celebrate by the opening of this museum. . . ."

"I think it's long overdue," says newsman Tom Brokaw—author of the best-selling The Greatest Generation—who will host an assemblage of veterans Tuesday at the New Orleans Arena. He plans to anchor NBC's Nightly News from here Monday and Tuesday. (Zoroya A1)

It is a business.

Yes, it's got to make money to stay open, though it's a nonprofit corporation if that makes you feel better. And say, wouldn't a nice embroidered sweatshirt be a great way to commemorate the result of a whole lotta blood and guts that saved the world?

It is quiet and comforting.

The atmosphere is one of contemplation. I feel like I've drifted through the whole place. It was a nice day outside, but once I entered the galleries, the day felt rainy and cool. I've felt this cozy melancholy before, and I don't think it has anything to do with the content of the museum. It's the air conditioning, lighting, and

architecture. It feels . . . like a clean, quiet cave, a hermitage in plastic and concrete and matte-finished metal.

Over time, it has become one of my spaces. I have altered it and it has worn to fit me. Like a baseball glove or an old pair of jeans. It is the book I read last year and that I am reading again now by the light of my bedside lamp just before I slip into sleep.

It is a tourist destination.

I was in New Orleans (which, by the way, is French for "smells like urine"). . . . My week long conference was being held in August and during a break I heard someone mention the museum. Turns out it was a pretty far from our hotel but, being young and stupid, my wife and I decided to save a few bux and walk. Quite a long walk in 100+ heat but well worth the effort.

The museum had just recently opened and didn't have all the displays yet but there's one sticks in my brain. It was a exhibit of a French field just before sunrise as if you had just parachuted in. It was cold, dark and smelled of grass and dirt. In the background you could hear some shouting in German and some small weapons fire. Seemed very realistic to me and it made the hair on my neck stand on end.

They also have the original hand-written speech that FDR gave to congress announcing the war complete with corrections. Outstanding.

I have no use for the city of New Orleans. It's dirty, smelly, and over crowded but that day at the museum sure put a lot of things into perspective for me. (Meezer Man)

It is a factory and repository of memory.

CHAPTER FOUR

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE STUDY

For me, the first question that arises from my study of the National D-Day Museum is "What history does the museum tell?" While the term "D-day" is actually a generic term for any day on which a military operation is to be launched, in the popular imagination of the US the term is associated with the start of the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944 (Ambrose, D-Day: June 6, 1944 491). However, the museum covers, at least in part, the amphibious landings of World War II in both the European and Pacific Theaters of operation. Initially, the museum's broad focus was confusing to me, but it made more sense once I understood that the subject matter treated by the museum is loosely connected by several common themes. Foremost is the use of landing craft produced by Higgins Industries in New Orleans, Louisiana. The "Higgins Boats" include LCVPs similar to the one on display in the Louisiana Memorial Pavilion, which were used by the Allies in the amphibious landings covered by the museum. The display of the LCVP links the contents of the museum to the (hi)stories of the amphibious landings and the Louisianians who built many of the boats. The material artifact implies

a backdrop of local history that enables the connections visitors make to the international history of World War II. The use of the landing craft also provides a foundation for the museum's examination of the war through the eyes of individual participants. Several Louisianians, all former Higgins Industries workers, contributed written and audio-taped accounts of their wartime labor to an exhibit titled "New Orleans: Home of the Higgins Boats" in the museum's first gallery.

Other common themes at the museum are broad enough to justify its recent designation by Congress as "America's National World War II Museum." These themes include war strategy, values and beliefs demonstrated by war participants, the psychological and social cost of the war, and the social and political value of the war.

The National D-Day Museum tells its story from a decidedly "American" point of view. The museum is suffused with images and objects that evoke US ideals of patriotism, courage, honor, sacrifice, and a work ethic. The many enlarged photographs in the museum emphasize these qualities. US troops are shown surveying the damage of a battle with grim but determined faces, spoon feeding hungry Japanese children, or providing aid to wounded fellow

soldiers. In other photographs, stateside war industry laborers do their part to contribute to the effort with smiling confidence. Generally, material objects and photographs are accompanied by the personal remembrances of the individuals who provided them. The stars-and-stripes pennant of a US naval ship that was sunk by a Japanese kamikaze pilot is on display along with an excerpt of an interview with the sailor who rescued it as the ship was sinking. The gear of a paratrooper is accompanied by his description of the intense training that preceded the D-Day invasion. The personal stories and artifacts at the museum typify US depictions of World War II as "the good war," a necessary evil in which US ideals contributed to securing peace and justice for millions (cf., Fussell 154).

When viewed through the lens of mystory practice, it is evident that the museum encourages the "exploration and expression" of the history, and also the ideals, the museum presents ("Mission Statement"). Because the museum mystory acknowledges the involvement of multiple texts and materials in the creation of meaning, it enables visitors to consider ideas and questions that arise from the interaction of their (hi)stories with those of the museum. As has been my experience, I suspect many of the "external

texts" visitors bring with them to the museum challenge the intentions that the museum curators advance in their mission statement and displays. For example, since World War II, many people have changed their view of war, who fights it, how, and why. Wars in Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East have increased the complexity of popular US thought in terms of war, and many people now hold conflicting views concerning the morality and even the necessity of armed conflict. While the museum's stated purpose does not include the "exploration and expression" of issues such as these, its historical functioning indicates that such examinations may be accommodated. Visitors view and understand the museum's offerings through their own individual lenses certainly, but also through social historical perspectives and a social psyche, if you will, that is different from those shared by the public in the 1930s and '40s. The result is a mosaic of meanings that is different for each visitor.

For me, exploring the museum's offerings resulted in the creation of a multitude of meanings, some supporting and others conflicting with the idea of World War II as "the good war." Like all visitors to the museum, I carry many ideas, experiences, and memories with me, my own

assemblage of professional, popular, and personal viewpoints. The assemblage includes the small quantity of knowledge I have gleaned from history classes and personal reading; beliefs about the nature of war that I have gained by watching films, reading books, and talking to others; my experiences as a Boy Scout, an offshore worker, and a friend and relative of several people who have served in the military; my own brand of social activism, including a belief in the inherent dignity and value of all human beings; my beliefs concerning the nature of just and unjust military action; and innumerable other thoughts, feelings, and informing sources. In sum, I bring myself, complex and unfinished, to the museum. There, I draw on this complex assemblage to develop my own understanding of the museum's offerings, thereby creating meanings and beliefs to add to those I have already accumulated.

Combining the texts and materials presented by the museum with my own assemblage of ideas, I have gained an appreciation for the courage and ingenuity necessary to carry out World War II along with a belief that the scope and complexity of the war renders it impossible to comprehend as a whole. I am amazed, for instance, at the valor and perseverance of the soldiers who mounted the

assault on Omaha Beach, and I am bewildered and saddened by the thought of what took place there on that late spring day in 1944.

In my visits to the museum, occasionally I have perceived omissions or contradictions in the information presented. As a result, questions have arisen that prompt me to explore further the meanings of the war. Perhaps the most prominent question is whether, in fact, World War II was "the good war" that so many understand it to be. For me, a thorough consideration of this question reveals numerous philosophical and other issues that can never be answered in a finite manner. World War II did put an end to the specter of fascist tyranny by the Axis powers. The museum portrays the Allied victory over fascism in its presentation of the defeat of Germany and Japan. However, the war did not result in universal liberty and prosperity. A placard near the end of "The D-Day Beaches" gallery acknowledges the imperfect result of the Allied victory when it states that "the world that emerged from this violent struggle was not free from danger. But humanity had been spared from a terrible fate." The war, I have concluded for now, was a "good war" for the US in that it was provoked by the Axis powers and had freedom and justice

as its goals. At the same time, I do not believe that the war was entirely good. I cannot discount the death and destruction wrought by the Allies, even in pursuit of a noble goal, and even given the initiatory belligerence of the Axis powers. For the US, the war was a noble but blemished effort that led to a largely desirable but very imperfect conclusion. The inherent contradictions I find in the term "good war" remain with me, but my exploration of the museum has allowed me to express the reasons for my conflicting views of war more fully.

While exploring the contradictions implicit to a "good war" I find I question how worthwhile World War II (as presented by the museum) actually was. While the war did spare humanity from the rule of Axis fascists, it also caused great physical destruction, social and political upheaval, and death. President Truman's decision to use atomic bombs against Japan resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians and marked the beginning of a continuing era of uncertainty in which humanity possesses the ability to annihilate itself with ease. The liberation of Nazi-run concentration camps at the end of the war spared the remaining European Jews and

many other prisoners of the Nazis from almost certain death (O'Neill 157-60), but the creation of the state of Israel after the war brought about numerous regional conflicts in the Middle East, resulting in instability and animosity that remain in the present ("Israel"). The war resulted in somewhat expanded societal roles for women and some minorities in the United States, but it also resulted in widespread distrust and internment of Japanese Americans, and it did not put an end to racial segregation or ethnocentrism in the United States (O'Neill 1-6, 198-200, 397-403).

My museum based exploration of the merit of World War II also allows me to articulate more fully the uneasiness I feel toward popular portrayals of the nature of the war. The museum aims to demonstrate how the ideals of ordinary US citizens contributed to the defeat of the Axis powers. Yet I find that in portraying the methods and the results of the Allied victory, the museum also suggests that conducting a war undermines or even corrupts these ideals. As depicted in "The D-Day Invasions in the Pacific" gallery, patriotism can be turned toward an ethnocentric hatred, and the courageous can forget their honor and become cruel. Likewise, as depicted in "The D-Day Beaches"

gallery, sacrifice and hard work in service of the noble cause of human freedom can result in the deaths of tens of thousands. Again, I cannot fully resolve these contradictions for myself. However, the process of exploration I have participated in at the museum enables me to express more concretely the reasons for my dis-ease with "the good war."

After numerous visits to the museum, it is apparent that the physical presentation of information at the museum contributes to its mystorical function. Visitors guide themselves through the labyrinthine galleries. Since they lack a single, unified narrative to follow, they improvise the order in which they examine the displays. They move through the galleries as slowly or as quickly as they choose, and are able to pay more or less attention to displays according to personal interests. Thus, the museum curators' design choices promote exploration and expression on the part of the visitor. The choices made by the museum curators are not beyond question, however. Or, more accurately perhaps, the mystorical process encourages a visitor to question the curators' design choices because it juxtaposes the expert discourse of the curators with the

notions of popular culture and with the personal experiences of the visitor.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, I have pondered the curators' reasons for designing a display on the development and use of the atomic bomb that is small in scale and fairly concise compared to the scale and breadth of other displays. A cynical viewer might understand the brevity to be an attempt on the museum's part to deflect attention from the single most destructive act committed by the US during the war. While the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrates the US desire for an efficient end to World War II and a desire to spare the lives of the US troops slated to invade Japan, it also demonstrates a troubling willingness to end the lives of innocent people in service of that goal. For me, however, the small size and the concision of the exhibit reflect the fact that US participation in the event was limited to President Truman and the military leaders who decided to drop the bombs, to those who designed and built the bombs, and also to those who carried out the mission (O'Neill 24-26, 371-73). Outside of these participants, there are few stories of US involvement in the events for the museum to tell.

The brevity of the exhibit also represents the futility of trying to make sense of the result of the bombings. The destruction wrought on Japan is simply greater than I can comprehend. While a more exhaustive examination of the subject might be useful or interesting for some, I am doubtful that a more comprehensive display would have as great an emotional impact as the display already at the museum. For me, the minimal exhibit succeeds in emphasizing the awesome force and horrific results of the bombings precisely because it is concise. In fact, I think that the exhibit acts as a powerful metonym for all of the destructive effects of war. Additional information, artifacts, and captions would sidetrack focus from the metonymy by attempting to impose meaning on a senseless event. Even with the mystery episteme at hand, I find that the profound sadness I feel and my comprehension of incomprehensibility are the only meanings I can make of the event.

I also have wondered about the museum's relative lack of coverage of the Holocaust. Regardless of the museum's US perspective, more could be said concerning the subject. The possible reasons for the limited address are numerous. Perhaps the topic is slated to be covered more fully in the

planned additions to the museum. Perhaps the curators believed that the topic was not central to achieving the museum's mission statement. Perhaps they chose to leave the exploration of this well covered topic to other museums, venues, and mediums. Or, perhaps, the curators' beliefs regarding the topic were similar to my own beliefs concerning the atomic bomb exhibit; that is, they felt that the topic is so terrible and so incomprehensible that just a few images achieve a metonymic effect that makes elaboration unnecessary or unwelcome.

For me, the intended reason for the museum's limited address of the Holocaust is much less important than the fact that the ideas and memories I carry with me made me aware of the limited address. My own thoughts concerning the Holocaust caused me to notice the small amount of space allotted to it and in turn caused me to think more about the significance of the work of Allied soldiers in light of Hitler's plan of genocide.

As I point out above, the ideas, experiences, and memories that visitors bring with them to the museum provide a basis for the creation of meaning when they are combined with the texts and materials presented by the museum. They also provide a foundation for critique of the

museum's aims, supporting materials, and physical design. The creation of meaning as a result of co-productive interaction between the museum and visitor lies at the center of the mystory process. In the final section of this chapter, I explore this interaction by comparing and contrasting the museum's mystory as I discussed it in Chapter Two with the "my story" in Chapter Three.

Mystory practice is used by all of us to make meaning on a daily basis, if only informally. That is to say, we constantly combine elements that correspond to Ulmer's professional, popular, and personal discourses to make sense of what we experience in the world, and to allow us to use these experiences in the service of innovation. In that sense, then, mystory practice is very much a part of human experience and communication: We compare, contrast, and process information to create our reality.

A comparison of Chapter Two and Chapter Three demonstrates that one of the differences between the "mystory process" as it occurs in ordinary life and at the museum is that the museum presents a series of texts that are more coordinated than those we typically construct. In everyday life, we compose our own mystories from information that covers an array of disparate subjects and

serves multiple agendas. The mystery offered by the museum, on the other hand, presents visitors with information selected by the museum's curators to conserve the values listed in the museum's mission statement: "[T]he American spirit, the teamwork, optimism, courage and sacrifice of the men and women who won World War II" ("Mission Statement"). To realize this mission, the museum's curators chose the LCVP as a prominent relay for selecting and organizing the museum materials. As the largest item on display in the entrance pavilion, the replica LCVP lands visitors on the shores of the museum's collection as actual LCVPs once landed soldiers on the D-Day beaches of World War II. In "New Orleans: Home of the Higgins Boats," the relay is continued in celebrations of the innovation, hard work, and team effort that allowed Higgins Industries to produce the craft. In the Pacific Wing, the undulations of the serpentine wall recall the waves that the LCVPs were designed to speed over during amphibious landings. The production, design, and use of World War II LCVPs reflects the values listed in the museum's mission statement. As a relay, the LCVP aids the museum's curators in accomplishing their goal of conserving these values.

However, while the displays were developed to encourage the exploration and expression of the museum's stated values, the visitor's processing of information is also affected by "counter relays" that prompt the generation of other meanings. For example, the simplicity of the paratrooper's signaling cricket (originally manufactured as a toy for children) or the wired field telephone contrasts sharply with the complexity of modern mobile telephones. The difference may prompt a visitor to examine what and how communication technologies were used in the war as compared to those of our present day. Such counter relays do not undermine necessarily the conservation of values in the mission statement; rather, they function as supplements, additions and/or substitutions, that result in the creation of alternate meanings.

In my own mystery, I express my inability to fully make sense of certain aspects of the war, for instance, the violence of the battle for Normandy on D-Day. For me, this view of the battle is the product of many experiences during the course of my lifetime, from the naïveté I was allowed as a child to the respect for the stated values of the museum I learned as a Boy Scout. These past

experiences provide relays that inform the meanings I create when I visit the museum. Consequently, exploring "The D-Day Beaches" gallery at the museum results in more than a reinforcement of the museum's stated values of teamwork, optimism, courage, and sacrifice. My exploration also undermines expression of the values, in that it prompts feelings of fear, sorrow, and pessimism. Additionally, exploring "The D-Day Beaches" prompts my exploration and expression of ideas that lie outside of the framework created by the museum's stated values. The empathy and alienation I feel when viewing the photographs of D-Day combatants, for instance, encourage me to examine the origin and extent of my understanding of the psychological toll of combat.

Given the large number of potential relays and counter relays available to the visitor, the museum may be understood as a site that prompts performative agency. That is, to make meaning, the visitor must activate his or her own discursive agency as the "doing" act of the museum. The (hi)stories of World War II are made by the visitor. Given the discourses that the visitor uses, a replication of World War II as "the good war" may result, or a

restoration with a difference, or some combination of the two.

Insofar as the museum's mystorical process of exploration and expression prompts the creation of meaning rather than suggesting a finite interpretation of World War II, it poses more questions concerning its stated values than it is capable of answering. Even while the museum conserves its values, it invites visitors to interrogate both the values and themselves. Because the mystorical process depends on the addition of the visitor's personal discourse, however, the ultimate agency that is in play is his own. When Ulmer states that "the best response to reading a mystery would be a desire to compose another one, for myself" (vii), he understates the power of his own theory. In many ways, we cannot choose to forego the creation of our own mystery in response to one, since we must add our own ideas and create our own meanings in order to achieve understanding of any subject. The exhibits at the National D-Day Museum represent the D-Day mystery of the museum's creators, but the visitor's exploration and expression result in the creation of another mystery. It is the continuous interchange and evolution of action and

meaning that makes Ulmer's mystory method a useful research practice for generating fresh insight into a subject.

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