

Transition

IN A stunned silence we huddled around the makeshift receiver as the Honolulu reporter continued, “. . . Marianas-based reconnaissance planes returned from the scene with reports that a huge tower of smoke and dust still hovers some 40,000 feet over the Japanese City. Military and civilian spokesman estimate a 5-square-mile area in the heart of the key industrial city has been completely leveled by the blast and the number of inhabitants killed is expected to exceed 45,000. . . .” Almost numb with disbelief, we settled back to consider the cold, brutal facts.

Bob Duggan led off the round of comments. Duggan, 6’2” and 210, a rugged Irishman from the big timber country of the Pacific Northwest, an advocate of highly organized labor, married, had never seen his son, who was born after he left the states, planned to return to the timber industry after the war. “They’re going too far when they mess with that stuff, Hell, everything’s valueless. What’s the use of living with something like that held over your head? . . .”

The round-table continued. Joe Purtell, Boston, well-educated, a walking encyclopedia, formerly a certified public accountant in a large New England bank, never pronounced an “r.” “Shuh-ly, if these repohts ah not exaggerated, they must have equally effective counteh meashuhs. . . .”

Walt Prorok spoke up. A top machinist from Cleveland, Polish, could build or repair anything with scant material and few tools, the ‘slickest thief’ in the Corps. “I’d sure like to see the way they’re built. That really must be a sweet piece of machinery.”

Jim Hogan, the youngest in the bunch, cut in. Enlisted at 16, two purple hearts, worked in West Virginia coal mines after he quit school, happy-go-lucky but tough as nails. “By damn, looks like I’m not supposed to get home. . . .”

Jack Polack, the old-timer, picked up his cue. Hometown, Detroit, knew the automobile business from A to Z, a true leader of men in combat, at work, or on liberty. “That’s mighty hard to believe. If it’s straight dope then this old war is about ready to fold. . . .”

A kid from Chicago took over. Myron Newmann, one of eleven kids, worked since he was six, at 24 owned half interest

in a produce business, quiet, not too well-liked, but level-headed and dependable. "Destruction on such a large scale is bound to change living standards and affect people the world over. But they'll always need food, so I guess I'm set. . . ."

I was the sixth man in the tent but I didn't feel inclined to speak. I had already seen what I considered 100 per cent effective destruction of man and machines *by* men and machines. I settled back and listened to their predictions and reactions concerning the atom bomb.

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Recently I became curious. Had the lives of these five typical Americans from all walks of life been changed as they expected? To each I sent a similarly-worded letter asking for complete details of their work and their lives, as well as their opinions on world affairs.

. . . From Vancouver, Washington, came Duggan's report. He had changed his mind about highly unionized labor and refused to become a cog in such a machine. With a friend and a G.I. loan, he'd started a transportation company. Competition was keen at the start, but by the end of the first year they were using the black side of the ledger.

. . . The Boston postmark and the return address, "Mr. and Mrs.," told me Purtell had experienced few reconversion problems. On rich, bond letterhead, he informed me he was now a vice-president in the world of finance.

. . . Police Department, Cleveland, Ohio. Was Prorok in jail? No, he had merely become fed-up with the complicated chain of command in the machine shop and was now a rookie flatfoot with a beat of his own. And he used to cuss the Shore Patrol!

. . . A letter from South America told me Hogan had left the mines. That was understandable; his father and brother lost their lives in a cave-in. Jimmy had "looked around" for a while, then he'd re-enlisted in the Marines, for guard duty at the American Embassy in Rio.

. . . I wasn't surprised that Polack was now a department foreman for Chrysler. Under his capable leadership, production figures were bound to soar.

. . . Newmann was still a hustler. With steady demand and adequate supply plus his shrewd managing, his produce terminal

was rapidly and solidly expanding.

But what had happened to all their predictions? Did they no longer worry about an atomic war? Were they satisfied with the United Nations Security Council? The Marshall Plan—would it work? How can Communism be checked?

Not a comment. Yes, people have undergone a change—a transition.

—Lawrence Meoska, A. H., Fr.



Ode to an Engineering College and the Atom

In the fertile fields of mind,
The clay men play with facts lightly,
Play as children piling sand on the shadow
To stay the sun.

But the shadow,
Unfettered,
Glides swiftly onward,
Growing longer.

—Dick Ellis, E. E., Jr.

