I brought it,” Sal said. “Is it certified?”

“You brought the check?”

His face was still expressionless. “It’s a bank check, good as cash.”

“Put it on the table,” Maitland said coldly.

Sal wanted to make a speech, say something that would make him understand what he was feeling, but his emotion was bigger than his vocabulary. He reached into his pocket, found the check, and placed it carefully on the edge of the table near the old man.

Then he turned to Leah’s father. The old man didn’t take it. His features were stone. He pulled aside the blanket on his lap, and there was a shotgun gripped firmly in his hands. The smile was still on Salvatore Ross’s face when the old man pulled the trigger and killed him, without hesitation, without mercy, without compassion.

When 300 years had passed without a war, they woke the frozen army to discharge it, convinced that never again would there be need of men skilled in the arts of war.

FINAL MUSTER

by Rick Rubin

COMING OUT OF STATIS IS A PECULIAR SENSATION. Life returns first to your brain, and for a second you are aware that the rest of you is dead—not just asleep but actually without life. You are standing there in your stasis cubicle, heavily loaded with equipment, and your body is dead. But you don’t fall down and the juice returns to the big muscles of your legs and arms and chest, then to all of the minor muscles and blood to veins and arteries and finally to every tiny capillary. Then you are awake and you step out into the world.

The sun was half way up the east side of the sky, and across the parade ground I could see the barracks and ordinance buildings and mess halls and other structures of Fort Morris shimmering in the rising heat waves. Lieutenant Rolf Baker, my platoon leader, was standing in front of the bank of cubicules that held myself and three other sergeants. I threw him a salute.

“Good morning, Sergeant Osowski,” he said.

“Good morning, sir,” I said. “They woke us late this time.”

“Later than you think, Sergeant. Three hundred years late. It’s 2516.”

“You don’t say! Three hundred years without a war. Who finally upset the applecart, sir?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know. I don’t even know what we’re fighting.”

“It’s pretty unusual for them not to tell us right off.”

“There’s supposed to be a formation in an hour, Osowski. We’ll find out then. Better go wake your men.”

To my left the other three sergeants were coming out of their stasis cubicules. Around us the whole Regimental Combat Team was coming to life, 5000 officers
and men stepping out of deep-freeze, ready and able to fight anybody's war. We mobilize down through the ranks—Colonel Moss our C.O. is unfrozen by the civilian authorities, he wakes four L.t. Colonels, they wake four more each, and so on down through Majors to Captains to Lieutenants to squad leaders like myself, who wake their squads. We come out of our static cubicles fully armed and in prime condition, ready to be fed, briefed and move in less than an hour if necessary.

In the old Greek myth the man planted dragon's teeth and fighting men sprang up out of the ground. I can never quite get the analogy out of my mind, seeing the regiment come out of their static cubicles. The difference is that in the myth the soldiers fell to fighting among themselves, while the 45th Regimental Combat Team comes out a disciplined unit.

Unfreezing consists of throwing just one switch per man. I went down the row that held my squad throwing the switches, then sat down in front and started checking over my tommygun. Of course it wasn't actually a tommygun, the old 20th century weapon. More properly it was a rapid fire blaster, Model 2079—a cross between a flame thrower and a junior-size atomic cannon with a minitarized back pack for power and a rifle shaped nozzle—but somehow calling it a tommygun makes it more personal to me.

My squad started to step out and form up. I let them stretch and yawn and make their tired old jokes. At the far end I noted that two new men had replaced Miller and Chavez, killed at the tag end of the Afro-Asian war 300 years before. I made a note to see if either of the replacements had come in lately. They might throw some light of those 300 long years of apparent peace when we'd stood cold and dead in our static cubicles without a war to fight.

Those inexplicable 300 years faintly disturbed me. At least something disturbed me, for this muster day felt somehow different from the ones in the past. The time before there had been 75 years between wars, by far the longest period of peace since the founding of the static army, but the war we had come out to fight had been the roughest too. The armies of the Western Hemisphere had fought all of Afro-Asia for three bloody years. It was during the Afro-Asian thing that I got my third stripe and rocker and a squad of my own. Seventy-five years before that, as a corporal, I'd fought Brazutina, the four country block of southern South America. And before that the intervals had been shorter yet, fifteen years, seven years, twenty years, ten years.

So something must have changed out there in the civilian world, or else they must have found another way to fight their wars. In the bright sun of this 300 year late muster day it would have been nice to know what had happened. But why should a soldier care? A war is a war. You die as dead from anyone's weapon and one war is pretty much like another.

That typical soldier's attitude, I suppose, was why they began to store us away between wars. Soldiers make lousy citizens in peace-time. And a good peace-time soldier is likely as not to make a lousy war-time one. So they perfected the system of statics and we volunteered to wait out the between-war intervals in our steel and plastic cubicles, each man with name and service record on his cubicle door, waiting for the bands to begin to play.

My squad formed up rapidly, standing sharp in a ramrod straight row. I walked to one end and passed in front of them, making a casual sort of inspection.

"Good morning, Staff-Sergeant Oskowski," Filipi the rocket and missile man said, "Did you enjoy your beauty rest?"

"Yes thank you Private First-Class Filipi," I said. "I've slept ever so much better since I moved out of range of your snoring."

"Hallo, Serge," Orozco said. He was the flame thrower, a broad faced boy of Mexican descent, quiet and shy but efficient.

"Hello Orozco," I said. "How's your cigarette lighter?"

"Hey, Sarge," Corporal Ryan the demolition man said. "What's with the music?"

The funny thing was that I hadn't until Ryan mentioned it even noticed the music. For the P.A. system was screening us with sounds of violins and muted horns, soft chamber orchestra music instead of the marches and war songs we customarily woke to.

"I don't know, Ryan," I said. "And that's not all I don't know. It's a strange muster day, that's for sure."

"What else?" Yamamoto our vehicle and engineering man said. "I don't know who we're supposed to be fighting," I said. "All I know is what year it is."

They waited to hear. I walked down the rest of the line, past Johnson, the other tommyguner, and the two new men, Bill Chesnut, a Sioux Indian and the new squad sniper, and Charles LaBonte, a thin faced, black haired man, older than most recruits, assigned to us as a corporan.

"It's 2516," I said finally, "You boys have had a nice 300 year nap."

I got the effect I was aiming for. They gasped, almost in unison. Then they started to buzz, guessing among themselves what was up, until I told them to knock it off. Around us other squads were forming up, and platoons, and
companies, and battalions, and
finally, if you could see it all as one
unit, the entire Regimental Combat Team. Dust rose into the mid-
morning air and orders were
barked and men scratched and
belched and shuffled into lines.
The Lieutenant came over.

"Any news, sir?" I said.

"Nothing, Sergeant," he said.

"Your squad all right?"

"All present and accounted for.
Nobody skipped town last night I guess."

We both chuckled at the hairy
old joke about the soldier slipping
out after stasis check and coming
back a doddering old man the next
morning. He would have been a
hell of an old man this time, after
300 years.

The Lieutenant inspected my
squad, then sent us off to the mess
hall for breakfast. I double-timed
the boys over, getting the kinks
out, and we filed in and went
through the line.

The cooks were civilians. A
soldier’s job, after all, is to fight. Not
to cook or clean up or any of the
other menial jobs they used to have
soldiers do, but to stick to his
trade. Civilians do those things.

Civilians—We don’t like them and we don’t love them.
They’re another kind of people.
Peace lovers, family men, busi-
nessmen. Day-to-day people, who
live life in any dull boring way
that it comes. They aren’t inter-
ested in excitement, in proving
themselves under fire and learning
the final truth that you can only
learn in combat. They just want to
live. In a way they’re sane and
we’re crazy. But we are what we are.

So we fight their wars. After
the war is over we have a big party
and celebrate. And that time the
civilians start being glad that
we’re going back into stasis soon.
We’re not particularly delicate
about our pleasures. We take wom-
en where we find them and of
course they’re often somebody
else’s woman. We get drunk and
we raise hell and then the civilians
hate our guts and they’re glad
when we go back into deep-freeze.
But a few minor indignities are
worth the service we perform of
fighting their wars for them.

By the next time they’ve forgot-
ten how much they hated us, or
else they are a whole new bunch of
civilians. They’re glad we’re com-
ning back out to fight their wars.
They feed us a real good breakfast
that first muster day morning out
of deep-freeze.

This is as good a time as any to
mention that of course it’s not
really deep freeze. It’s a combina-
tion of temperature and electricity
and intervenous drugs and radia-
tion, all wrapped into one pack-
age. Which doesn’t matter in the
least. You stand in the cubicle and
it feels like going to sleep very
fast, and when you wake up, no
matter how much later. It’s like
tomorrow. But in another way it’s
not like tomorrow. You’re vaguely
aware, in stasis, of the time going
by. Not bored, not restless, just
vaguely aware. The years roll by
and the world changes around
you. They keep you dusted and
they keep all of the buildings in
vacuum and the world changes
around you. Then someone flips
Colonel Moss’ switch and we come
out to fight their wars. To fight be-
cause it’s our job and because that’s
the only thing that we all love, we
slightly crazy soldiers who could
never adjust to humdrum peace-
time lives.

During that fine civilian-cooked
breakfast, eggs and ham and flap-
jacks and preserves and juice and
and toasted muffins and coffee, I
talked to the two new men.

From Bill Chesnut, the sniper, I
could learn little. He’d come in to
the outfit only a couple of years
after we went back into stasis in
2198. He had a pretty typical
story. He was a wild kid, always
getting into trouble and when he
was 19 he killed a man in a street
fight. It wasn’t particularly Ches-
nut’s fault, or the other man’s
either for that matter, but he was
tried and sentenced to 30 years in
the penitentary. Then they offered
him to let him join the army instead.
He jumped at the chance.

A lot of the men come in that
way and in the army it’s never
held against them. The army,
nowadays, is about the only re-
maining place for a man with a
combative nature.

Anyway, Chesnut enlisted and
went through basic training, a year
of being taught the tricks of the
trade by veterans too old to be
worth cold storage. Chesnut even
liked training, which is no snap,
better than he liked civilian life.
That’s the best sign of the making
of a soldier and I knew that I had a
man who would pull his weight.

Charles LaBonte, the new corps-
man, was a different matter. His
trouble was restlessness rather
than wanting to fight, but it made
him unfit for civilian life no less.
Born in 2291 he’d found the
world a dull place. Adventure was
dead, the world was calm and un-
eventful. From the time that he
got out of school until he was 30
he wandered around, trying to
find a place where he fitted in.
In 2322 he enlisted in the army, fig-
uring it as the only place where
there might be some excitement.

"It was a stainless steel world
out there," he said. "Everything
was worked out and nothing ever
happened. No wars, no revolu-
tions, no big changes. Ever since
the Afro-Asian war the people
kept anything interesting from
happening."

"Sounds pretty bad," I said.

"It was. One year after another,
everything the same. People just
moved along on the same level,
never sad, never happy, never ex-
cited.\"
"Well, they must not be getting along so well now," I said. "If they were they wouldn't have called us out."

"That's right. Besides, it's been nearly 200 years since I came in. Lord, think of that! Two hundred years. Everybody I knew is dead. My family is long gone. I feel alone in the world."

"We're your family now," I said. I could remember when I felt the same way, after the first time in stasis, just a kid of 20 and suddenly 23 years younger than my old friends. Even so, my friends had at least still been alive. LaBonie was dust by now.

The bugle blew assembly and we came out of the mess hall and walked back to the parade ground and formed up with the rest of Able Company. The regiment drew up in a long line, like on parade, facing a platform that had been set up near the center of the field. On the platform were Colonel Moss the C.O., a couple of Generals probably down from division or corps, two or three Light Colonels and four civilians dressed in limp grey and brown and pastel colored clothes that I took to be the current civilian style.

Colonel Moss introduced one of the civilians to us, Mr. Karonopolis, the mayor of the nearby city of Linkhorn. From Colonel Moss' first words I detected a tension of some sort. He made the introduction in almost insultingly few words, biting off each syllable as if it were bitter flavored. Then he stepped back, very stiff and soldiery, and stood in a ramrod sort of parade rest.

Mr. Karonopolis took over the microphone.

"Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen," he said. Nobody moved of course.

"On behalf of the local and federal government, the civil population, and of myself I wish to make you welcome to the year 2316," he said. "We of the 26th century feel that we know you men, even though you do not yet know us. In school we have studied your brave exploits of the past."

So he continued. It was all very kind and pleasant, but we had heard the same things, or variations of them, every time we had come out of stasis. He didn't say anything we didn't know until he began to describe the events since we went into cold-storage.

He told of a world of social, scientific and philosophic progress, of cultural and intellectual advances and international accord. The world he described ran smooth. Nations were at peace with nations, individuals with other individuals. It was a world that had no need for an army, even a stasis one.

He was leading up all through the speech to what he said next, and yet the idea was so difficult to grasp that when he finally said it in plain words it was as though he had dropped a bomb on us.

He told us that we were to be decommissioned and returned to civilian status.

I think he expected us to cheer. He was a civilian and had no understanding of soldiers minds.

A murmuring grew in the ranks, and I was a part of the murmuring, arguing to myself the impossibility of returning to a civilian world, a strange and incomprehensible civilian world 300 years more advanced than the last one I had seen, returning from war and excitement and the only trade I knew or wanted to know to a humdrum civilian world made of foam rubber and stainless steel.

The Colonel stood on the platform in the blazing sun, his face a mask. The music tried to soothe us, soft and calm. And the murmuring grew louder.

A soldier stood out of the ranks in the next company, a Tommygunner like myself, waving his weapon in the air. "Like hell!" he shouted. "Like hell I'll become a civilian. What do you think I am? You're crazy!"

His Sergeant ordered the Tommygunner back into ranks but the order lacked the conviction that any order needs. So the man stood and shouted at the civilian and the murmuring grew, like angry bees. "Who do you think you're talking to?" a voice shouted.

"Damn fool civilian," another roared.

"You can't do away with war," my Lieutenant said, half to himself. "There'll always be wars. It's human nature."

On the platform the civilians registered first surprise and then dismay. In their lifetimes none of them had ever met a soldier. How could they be expected to understand them? And probably they had never heard any of the soldierly language that was pouring at them now.

They put their heads together in a conference and then Mr. Karonopolis stepped over to the Colonel and spoke to him. The Old Man stood at his rigid parade rest and only shook his head negative. The Mayor spoke again, more strongly it seemed to me. This time the Colonel ignored him entirely.

They tried whatever they had tried on Colonel Moss on the two Generals from higher headquarters but got no better response. Then another of the civilians stepped to the microphone.

"Gentlemen, please," he said. "There is no value in this. What is the good of an army without wars? Surely you don't want to remain in stasis forever, waiting for a war that will never come?"

The murmurs grew to a roar.

"We don't intend to thrust you naked into a hostile world," he said. "You will be retrained into
any field you want. Or you can simply live, not work at all. You can have homes and wives and cars. You can enjoy life now, you've earned enjoyment."

Then his voice was blotted out by the angry buzzing of the men. Even the men of my own squad were shouting. "We're soldiers, we don't want to be anything else," Ryan yelled. "You can't abolish war!" Filippi screamed. "Go to hell!" "Shut up you bastard!"

And standing there at attention I tried to picture myself as a civilian, living out the rest of my life, 40 or 50 years probably, for I was only 28, living a humdrum day-to-day existence with no excitement or danger but only the routine of a civilian's soft life.

And yet the civilians were right. What use was there for an army if there were to be no more wars? Could they really have abolished wars?

The civilians on the platform huddled together in conference again and then the Mayor approached the Colonel and this time the Colonel nodded his head to whatever the Mayor said.

I will say this for the civilians—they were facing soldiers for the first time in their lives and they were obviously surprised by the reaction they'd gotten but through all of the shouting and swearing they had shown no sign of fear. Perhaps it was the bravery of men facing something that they don't know is dangerous. In any case, after the Colonel had agreed to whatever they had asked they left the platform and climbed into a ground car, a smooth skinned bug with no wheels or visible motor and drove away.

The Colonel approached the microphone and the rear dropped to complete silence in a second and we could hear the soothing music again.

"Fall the troops into the barracks," the Colonel said. "Set up for garrison duty."

So we marched across the parade grounds to the barracks, 5000 strong. Somewhere up the line someone started cadence count and the entire Regiment joined in, 5000 bass voices drown out the music of the P.A. system. And somehow it did not sound like the last time we would march.

The barracks were just as we had left them, not even dusty after 300 years in a vacuum. I had the men break out their barracks bags and set up their gear. By the time that was done the word came down to choose three men for overnight pass. I let Filippi and Ryan and Orozco go, while the rest of us settled down to spend the afternoon at poker and talk.

After a while Johnson and Chestnut and I went over to the P.X., which the civilians had opened, and joined the beer drinkers in the slop chute. The main topic of conversation, naturally, centered around what the civilians had said and what was going to happen.

"They're nuts if they think they've done away with wars," Sergeant Mangini from Charlie Company said. "Wars are human nature. You can't change that."

"They say there haven't been any in 300 years," I reminded him.

"So what? There've been other times when there weren't any wars for a long time. But they always ended. They'll need us again."

"Maybe we'll have to start our own war," Sergeant Olivier from H.Q. Company said. "If these civilians have gotten so soft, maybe we'll have to wake them up a little. For the good of the species, you know?"

"You're damn right," Chestnut said. "We'll just have to start our own war."

"You're getting pretty salty for a guy just out of Basic," I said.

"Look Sarge, if they send us back to civilian life you know where I'll be? In prison. They'll make me serve out my sentence."

"We'll all be in prison soon enough," Mangini said. "We're not suited for civilian life, not one of us. We'll be too wild and violent for them, and they'll end by putting us all behind bars."

"They said they'd re-educate us," I defended.

"They can't re-educate us any more than they can teach civilians how to be soldiers," Mangini said.

"A man's a soldier, he dies a soldier. He just can't be taught to live like a civilian."

After a while I drifted back to the barracks. I found orders from the Captain saying that Tuesday (I have no idea what day it actually was—we always call muster day Monday) we were to start regular training schedule.

After supper I came back to the barracks and lay on my bunk trying to think the thing through. All over the barracks the men were talking about the demobilization, and soon they had something new to talk about. Long before any self-respecting soldier would have come in off of an overnight pass the men who had been in town started drifting in. Everyone started talking about what they'd seen that had driven them back so early.

At ten Filippi and Orozco came into the barracks.

"C'mere, Filippi," I said.

He ambled over and sat on the side of my bunk.

"It's a hell of a world out there," Sergeant, he said.

"Let's hear about it," I said.

"It's not that it looks so very different. Their cars and choppers and airplanes are about the same, a little smoother and quieter but you can still tell which is which. Mostly the whole thing is just quieter. And the city seems smaller. More parks, more trees, every-
thing moving slow and easy like in a small town.”

“What about the people?”

“They’ve changed. They’re relaxed and easygoing. They don’t seem to ever hurry and they don’t have a care in the world. Everyone just walks around talking and taking it easy. And you can’t get them mad or start a fight to save yourself.”

“You tried to start a fight?”

“Sure. All of us tried. But no one could get the civilians riled up. Say something to them and they’d smile and pat you on the back and talk about it like it was a specimen under a microscope. And if a soldier just walked up and took a swing, a couple of civilians would hold him and talk to him until he didn’t want to fight any more.”

“Maybe they’re just a bunch of cowards. That doesn’t prove anything.”

“Well, the women are different too, Sarge. That ought to prove something. You try to pick one up and she doesn’t get mad or scared. She just smiles and says she’d rather not. Or if she’s willing it’s nothing like you expect. If she feels like making love she does it and then says thank you and just goes away. No trauma, no love, no crying and wailing about virtue.”

Filippi went off to tell the rest of the men about what he’d seen in Linkhorn and I lay on my sack and thought about what he’d said. I’d been brought up to believe that people don’t change, but if what Filippi had said was true it looked like maybe I was taught wrong. I made up my mind to take a pass into town Tuesday night and see for myself.

The next morning we woke to the same soothing music, but we breakfasted and started training, trying to drown out the music with our shouts. We marched and practiced squad tactics and ran the infiltration and obstacle courses and fired our weapons. About three in the afternoon we knocked off and another three men from each squad were allowed to go on pass. I put on my Class A summer uniform, still well pressed and dapper from 300 years earlier, and took the bus into Linkhorn.

As Filippi had said, the city seemed to have shrunk. Not in area exactly, and perhaps not even in population, but the buildings were less tall and there were more trees and grass and parks. The machines were less noticeable. Not that there weren’t any, but you just didn’t notice them. The cars were sleek and mild colored, moving smoothly along without wheels or motor sounds, the copters rose on silent rotors, everything seemed muted. The moving sidewalks, the pride of Linkhorn the last time I’d been there, were gone and the citizens seemed to actually enjoy walking, strolling arm in arm talking and laughing together. The town was so peaceful that it made me nervous.

Of course I had to try to start a fight. I walked into a civilian going full tilt and knocked him to the pavement.

“Why the hell don’t you watch where you’re going?” I said.

He picked himself up and dusted himself off. “Come now,” he said, “We’re both aware that you can into me on purpose.”

“You want to make something of it?”

“On the contrary. But tell me, you’re a Sergeant, aren’t you? I’m rather unfamiliar with the rating system. I haven’t had a chance to talk to one of you men yet.”

“I’m a Staff-Sergeant.”

“How interesting. That’s a position of some authority, isn’t it?”

“Yeh, I command a squad.”

“A squad? Oh yes, the basic small unit of a military force.”

“That’s right, eight men.”

“That must be challenging. Tell me, how much of the decision making function do you exercise in the field?”

I was starting to answer when I caught on to what he was trying to do, but he seemed so sincerely interested in me that it was hard not to go along with him. “Quit trying to change the subject,” I said.

“Yes certainly, if you wish. But I really am interested.”

“I think I’ll knock your teeth down your throat.”

“I hope you won’t,” he said.

“And after all, it wouldn’t prove much. I quite agree that you’re a better fighter than I am.”

“What’dya mean by that?” I said. I kept looking for fear in his face, or anger even, but there was none. He spoke slowly and evenly and seemed really more interested in what I was saying than in saving his skin.

“I’m a fairly decent athlete,” he said, “But quite untrained as a fighter.”

“You’re a coward,” I said.

“I suppose that in your frame of reference I do seem a coward. I don’t want to fight and I won’t be angered. But from my standpoint, Sergeant, I’m not a coward at all. I’m simply not disturbed by what you’ve said. I know myself too well, my faults, my weaknesses, my strengths, and your accusations haven’t added any new perceptions about myself. And if they had I would be more likely to thank you than fight you.”

I wasn’t getting anywhere and my heart wasn’t in it any more anyway. Somehow, although he wasn’t more than a few years older than me, he managed to remind me of my father, or of how my father should have been. I moved on. I had to try a girl to satisfy myself about what Filippi had said about them.

It was twilight by then and I
was walking through one of the rolling green parks that dotted the city. The girl was small and slim with long brown hair worn straight down her back, her face young and pert.

"Hiya, babe, let's you and me go off somewhere and make it," I said.

She laughed a tinkling sort of laugh and said "My name is Jodi."

"I'm Kenny Oskowsky," I said. "Want to try a real man for a change?"

"I would like to know you better, if that's what you mean."

"Sure, babe. Let's find a hôtel and get acquainted."

"I'd rather go for a walk. It's an awfully nice evening. Wouldn't you just as soon go for a walk?"

"Okay, we'll walk," I said. "I'm in no hurry."

We walked. We had a milkshake together. (Me—a milkshake! But somehow I didn't need whiskey with her, though she wouldn't have minded if I'd wanted one.) We went bowling and walked some more and ended by sitting on a bench holding hands and listening to a band concert in the park.

At 10:30 I walked her home and she was like my little sister instead of the pickup I'd tried for. I walked her to her door, feeling warm and kind and hoping for a single chaste good-night kiss.

"Would you like to stay all night with me, Kenny?" she said.

"I didn't think you were that kind of girl, Jodi," I said.

"What kind of girl? I like you. I enjoy your company."

"But what about love?"

"I suppose that is love. Love isn't something you can pin down."

"Do you want to get married?"

"No, why? I like you now, or maybe love you, but that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with living with you for the rest of my life."

So in the end we made love and I stayed with her all night, but gently and pleasantly, for its own sake and for our own. And in the morning I went back to the army, feeling as I had never felt before after an overnight; ass, happy and at peace with the world, without a hangover or a sense of guilt or any bawdy stories to tell the troops.

And at Fort Morris I found the soldiers still talking war. Demanding that a war be made for them or that Colonel Moss lead them against the civilians.

We trained all that day, more firing range, more squad tactics, more physical conditioning. In the afternoon all of the men who had not had their passes yet were given them and sent into Linthorn.

They came straggling back bitter and angry and frustrated, most of them before ten o'clock, having been unable to start any fights or cause any trouble. In the barracks they joined in little groups to talk of what they had seen and what they wanted to do to the civilians.

"Man, they're dull," Sergeant Olivier said. "Nicest thing we can do for them is to shoot them up a little and wake them up."

"You can't even start a fist fight with one of them," I said. "How the hell do you expect to start a war?"

"Close up we have to talk to them," he said. "You don't have to talk to start a war. You just go in shooting."

"But why do you want to start a war? What have they done to you?"

"When did you start being a peace lover?" Olivier said.

"Maybe last night. It seems a pretty happy world out there. Why should we destroy it?"

"Because it's our job. You think a society like that one can last? Hell no. They'll fall apart from sheer inertia."

"I doubt it. But anyway, why should you care?"

"I'm a soldier."

"Not any more. You're going to be a civilian now, Sergeant Olivier."

"You think I could stand to live like that? Day after day without any excitement? I'm a soldier and I've got to fight."

"There aren't any more wars."

"There will be. If not now, eventually. Without us this fool country will be defenseless. It's our duty to wake them up."

Olivier spoke for all of them. Their faith in the future of wars was unshakable. War could no more be outgrown than sex.

"I see it this way," Filippi said, "Colonel Moss will get fed up with waiting and move us against the city. After the city, the state. We'll join up with the rest of the army and get this world back into the old groove."

I quit arguing with them. I suddenly saw that I was the only one who didn't think that it was our duty to destroy the society outside. And as Olivier and Filippi and the others talked of their plans for starting a war I realized that I was going to be fighting against them if they did. I retreated to my bunk to think.

Down the room I saw LaBonte, the new corporal, doing the same. After a while I got up and walked down and sat on his bunk.

"What do you think?" I said.

"Think about what, Sarge? I was just resting."

"No, LaBonte, you were thinking. You're not a soldier like those guys. You came in for excitement, not blood. You're thinking the same as I am."

"How's that, Sarge? How are you thinking?"

I looked around the room carefully. Speaking my mind was dangerous in a barracks full of soldiers looking for a fight. But no one was near and I felt pretty sure of LaBonte.
"I'm thinking that if these guys move on the civilians I'll have to be on the civilian side," I said.

"You're crazy," he said.

"I don't know if I could stand living like they do, but this society looks pretty sane and honest to me. I think they really have outgrown war. I'm going in to town tonight and warn the civilians. And if worse comes to worse I'm going to help them defend themselves."

"That's treason," LaBonte said.

"Don't talk treason to me."

"I thought you might want to come along."

"All right, maybe I do feel like you do, Sarge. But if we went in there and the army started a war, they'd gun us down on sight as traitors."

"You're probably right. But I'm going anyway. I've got to try to help." "Not me."

"I'm going tonight. Are you going to report me?"

"No. I won't do that. Not until tomorrow at least."

"All right. But if you tell, I'll kill you for it."

"I won't tell."

I walked back to my bunk and lay there working over my plan and thinking and waiting for lights out. Across the room the buzz of war talk continued. Taps blew at 11 and the men began to sack out and slowly the talk died and the barracks became still. I lay and waited and stared at the ceiling until two, waiting for the last whisper to die out and the last man to fall asleep. Then I got up and dressed silently. I took my tommygun and Filippi's rocket launcher and some of Ryan's demolition equipment, fuses and explosives, and tiptoed out of the barracks, watching LaBonte as I passed to see if he would make an alarm. But he lay still.

There were two guards on duty at the gate, lazing around with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths.

"Where ya heading with all that stuff, Sarge?" one of them asked. I recognized him as Don Carpenter from Charlie Company, a balding, overaged corporal, back down to private for about the tenth time since the last war.

"Going into town to stir up a little excitement, Carp," I said.

"Going to get the jump on the rest of the boys, huh?"

"That's right. Start a little war of my own before the real one."

"Aw, Sarge, you know there ain't going to be any more wars. The civilians told us so."

"That's right. I forgot."

"I ought to check your pass, Sarge. And I ought to make you leave that hardware here."

"You ought to, but you won't."

"Nope. It's too quiet for me. If you can stir up some action, I'm for it."

So I passed out through the gate and marched down the road under the cool midnight sky, staring under the tools of war.

I was almost to the center of Linkhorn before I saw anyone. Then it was what looked like policemen, two of them in a city car, but they carried no weapons that I could see and they didn't talk like cops.

"Hello, soldier," one of them said. "Nice night."

"Take me to whoever runs this town, will you?" I said.

"We'll be happy to. But what's the rush, Sergeant? Let us buy you a cup of coffee or a drink. We'd like to hear about the army."

"Look," I said, "this is pretty urgent."

"I'm sure it is," the cop said.

"You wouldn't be walking into the city this late at night with all that equipment unless you had a pretty important reason. Why not tell me about it? Perhaps I can help you."

"Turn off the psychology," I said. "I'm on your side, you don't have to soothe me down. I came to warn you that the army is likely to attack you. I want to help you defend yourself."

"Why that's certainly kind of you, but I wouldn't imagine that the army will do anything this late at night. Come on and have a drink and rest."

I turned my tommygun toward him. "Goddamn it," I said, "Take me to whoever runs this place and quit psychoanalyzing me or I'll start the war right here and now."

"He just sat there and grinned at me, cool and brave and yet friendly. After a minute I lowered the tommygun and grinned back.

"You were taking a hell of a chance," I said.

"I don't think so. You came in to help us. If you'd come looking for a fight I would have reacted differently."

"Have it your own way. But remember that I do want to help. And that army isn't going to sit out there forever, waiting for a war."

I climbed in the patrol car and they drove me to an all-night restaurant. We sat for a while shooting the breeze. Once again, like the man I'd talked to, they seemed genuinely interested in me personally. After an hour they drove me to a hotel and got me a complimentary room. No one made any attempt to relieve me of my weapons and before the cop left he promised that a city official would be by to talk to me in the morning.

I didn't even try to sleep. I lay on the hotel bed and thought about what I'd done and what was likely to follow until the horizon showed rose and pink and the sky got blue and things began to move in the city around me. The sun was well up before the city official called for me. He in-
introduced himself as Stephen French, a short man in his middle forties, well built, grey at the temples and mild mannered. The city council, he told me, was sitting in session, considering the army situation. He would conduct me to them so that I could tell them what I knew. In a few words he made me feel very important.

We stopped downstairs for breakfast in the hotel dining room and over bacon and eggs Mr. French told me what he knew of the situation.

The army was not fully unfrozen all over the country. About a third of the units had been taken out of stasis to be decommissioned. The civilians had wanted to do it slowly in order to prevent the sudden influx of men from unbalanced society.

The plan to decommission the army had been brewing for some years, but they had waited to make sure that war was actually no longer a threat. That the soldiers would not want to become civilians (and all over the country it was the same) had been something they hadn’t foreseen. A gap in their logic Mr. French admitted with a wry smile. So now, all over the country they were faced with angry rebellious soldiers.

"What sort of weapons do you have, sir?" I asked.

"None. We gave up using weapons years ago. Even the police don’t use weapons any more. But then we haven’t a crime problem any more. About all the police do is help cats out of trees and look for stray children.”

"You must have some sort of weapons. Or at least machines to make them.”

"Yes, probably we could produce them. But even with weapons, we’re not soldiers. We couldn’t stand up against the army.”

"Couldn’t you produce one big bomb and wipe them out?”

He gave me a strange look. “No, I don’t think we’ll do that. That isn’t our way.”

"You won’t have any way if you don’t. They’ll wipe you out. What about a defensive weapon? Something to stop tanks from running and guns from shooting?”

"Yes, I believe we could produce something like that. But it wouldn’t solve anything. Your soldiers could wipe us out in hand to hand combat.”

I gave up on the weapon angle. “Society has certainly changed since the last war,” I said. “What happened?”

What he told me was too complicated to put down here. Basically, after the West had defeated the Afro-Asians, the Estonians had turned away from machinery and returned to an emphasis on meditation, the mind and philosophy. And, then, from the defeated, these things had swept the world, creating a worldwide society that used machines but was not very concerned with them. The important things became thought, self analysis and meditation, integrated with the Western behavioral sciences.

The change had grown from within rather than by law. Finally the time had come when everyone was concerned with improving himself, with dominating his own ego and seeking individual perfection rather than dominating others. Everyone could look back on a happy childhood, where formerly bad childhoods had always bred the dangerous people. Competition for gain and power died away and what remained was competition for the pleasure of measuring yourself against others, rather than to feed your ego.

Emotions were as highly respected as the intellect as long as they did not hurt others. People grew beyond the need for constant external entertainment. They found their pleasures in learning and creating. Of course psychology and the other behavioral sciences advanced tremendously. What the soldiers had run into when they tried to pick fights were competent lay-psychoanalysts.

"But that won’t save you from the army," I told Mr. French. "You can’t talk to an army.”

"We realize that now," he said. "We aren’t underestimating the danger of the situation we’ve gotten ourselves into.”

We came to the city hall, a modest stone and glass building set in the center of a park, and Mr. French led me in. It was all very casual. He took me to a man sitting at a desk by a tall set of doors and said: "I’ve brought the soldier who came in from the Fort last night.”

"Take him right in,” the man at the desk said. There were no guards or messengers or feverish conferences, and I was still carrying my weapons when we walked through the doors and found ourselves in the council chambers, a wide room with lots of windows and a large round table in the middle around which sat a group of simply dressed men and women.

"Welcome,” the man at the head of the table said. I recognized him as Mr. Karanopolis, the Mayor. "We appreciate your having come to help us.”

"I want to do anything I can,” I said.

"Please sit down,” he said. "We would like to ask a few questions.” I sat. Mr. Karanopolis introduced me to the other members of the council and then they began to question me.

"What do you think are the feelings of most of the soldiers?” They’re angry,” I said. "They want to remain soldiers, to fight. They’re afraid that you’ll force them to be civilians."

"But why is it that they don’t want to become civilians?”
"It's just not their life. They're soldiers. They look down on civilian life as dull and boring and insignificant."

"But you feel differently?"

"No, not really. I just don't think the army has a right to destroy this society. I don't want to live in it, but it seems too good to destroy."

"Would the other soldiers be willing to destroy it?"

"Yes sir, I think so."

A murmur ran through the chamber. "How do their officers feel?"

"I don't really know, but I think they pretty much agree."

"Do you think they will decide to attack?"

"That's up to Colonel Moss. The Regiment moves when the Colonel tells it to. Until he decides they'll just stew."

"And if the Colonel decides not to move?"

"They'll do only what he tells them. They're soldiers. They lost interest in me after that and began to talk among themselves."

"May I say something?" I said. "Certainly, Sergeant Oskowski," the Mayor said."

"Don't you want me to tell you about troop disposition and firepower and that sort of thing?"

"No, I don't think that would help us much," the Mayor said. "I'm glad you don't, of course. I wouldn't like to have to tell you."

"I'd feel even more like a traitor. But it seems to me that you aren't taking the right line of defense. All you're interested in is how the soldiers feel. And I can tell you that they feel like starting a war."

"You've got to figure out a defense. I brought in a few weapons. You should be able to improvise more. But you'll be facing 5000 trained soldiers with every kind of modern weapon. You'll never beat them in the open."

"The way I see it the best thing is to attack them before they attack you. Send out a few carloads of booze and let them get themselves drunk, then go out there in the middle of the night with knives and clubs, picking up their weapons as you kill them."

"I don't know if it will work, but it's the only way to save your society. I can teach you how to use your weapons and tell you how the camp is laid out. I feel like a traitor but I'll do it anyway. Because if you don't attack first, your society is finished."

I stood there, after my speech, waiting for applause I suppose. The council members smiled at me, softly and sadly, and finally Mayor Karampolis said: "Thank you very much for your expression of loyalty, Sergeant Oskowski. But I am afraid that we can't do any of the things you suggest. You say that we have to defend our society or they will destroy it. But you see, if we do what you suggest, we will have destroyed it ourselves."

I sat down, feeling at the same time like a complete fool and the only sane man in the room. The discussion moved back and forth, mostly concerning itself with whether and how soon the Regiment would attack. Occasionally one of the councilmen would ask me a question, but mostly they spoke to each other. Like scientists rather than politicians, illustrating their points with case histories from other societies dating back to before the Greeks."

I sat down, feeling at the same time like a complete fool and the only sane man in the room. The discussion moved back and forth, mostly concerning itself with whether and how soon the Regiment would attack. Occasionally one of the councilmen would ask me a question, but mostly they spoke to each other. Like scientists rather than politicians, illustrating their points with case histories from other societies dating back to before the Greeks."

Finally it was decided to send another delegation to see the Colonel alone this time and feel out his attitude.

Mr. French, the man who had brought me to the council, told me that I was free to do as I wished, but that he would be happy to show me around the city if I wanted. I accepted his offer and he got a car out of the pool."

He showed me manufacturing plants and colleges and private homes and museums, and yet somehow the tour was less interesting than I had expected. Most of the changes since last I'd seen the city had been inside of the people. The machines were there of course, doing all of the arduous work, and the new buildings and new products. But the people considered only necessary, not important. The buildings, in fact the entire style of architecture, was designed to emphasize people rather than the buildings themselves."

Passing an athletic field Mr. French and I started talking about track records and I got a shock. I'd looked upon the civilians as relatively soft and weak, misunderstanding their pacifism as weakness. But I discovered that the current record for the mile was 2 minutes, 3.8 seconds, and the hundred yard dash was run in 6 seconds flat. Schoolboys polevaulled over 16 feet. They had given up distance javelin throwing when the throws had become so long that the wind was more of a factor than the thrower. Now they threw flat, at targets 250 feet away, almost as far as the record distance when I was young. And nearly everyone participated in one sport or another. Mr. French said that they attributed the fantastic records to control of the mind, for the people weren't any larger or heavier muscled than before. But excellent physical condition was the rule rather than the exception, and the people in general were actually in better shape than my fellow soldiers."

As for the colleges, they no longer issued degrees. People studied for knowledge and took courses on and off during their lives. Classes had become lecture series and the newspapers printed lists of which lectures were starting and who was speaking."

Late in the afternoon Mr.
"We can try waking them one at a time in the future," he said.
"Yes sir. But they still won't choose civilian life."
And so the next day I rode a helicopter out and watched the Regiment muster on the parade grounds and march back to their cubicles. It was too far to see who was marching my squad. Corporal Ryan I suppose. They marched back and disbanded, not into civilian life but into perpetual stasis.

Of myself during the years since then there isn't much to tell. I wandered around the country, studied a little at a couple of colleges and tried to find a place and an interest for myself. But there wasn't any, for I was still a soldier. I was restless and lonely and not very adjustable, an old soldier at 30 without a war to fight. That's why I came back here to Fort Morris and took over maintaining the Fort. Not that a man is needed, for the machines do the work, but it seems more personal for me to care for my old comrades in arms. I check the vacuums of the barracks and ordnance buildings and other buildings and I see it that the cubicles of my former comrades are dusted and clean, as though they might want to look out of their plastic and steel cubicles.

And sometimes I stop to look into the cubicle marked Staff Sergeant Kenneth Oskowski, Squad Leader, 2nd Platoon, Able Company, 3rd Battalion, 45th Regimental Combat Team.

The vacant cubicle.

**In this issue ... Coming next month ...**

A note just received from Doctor Isaac Asimov: "I've done it again and the letters from the Gentle Readers are Gently flowing. Would you please stick a note in the next issue as follows. In "The Imaginary That Isn't" (F&SF, March 1961) I end with a casual statement that 200 yards northeast is equivalent to 200 + 200i yards. In so doing I casually repealed the Pythagorean Theorem, and, if you don't mind, I would like to reinstate it. What 200 miles northeast is equivalent to is about 1411/2 + 1411/2 i yards, or 100 √2 + 100 √2 i yards, if you want it more exactly. ... Well, at least it shows that the readers read me, and that's something, isn't it?"

Last year, Kingsley Amis took a long look at science fiction in his book NEW MAPS OF HELL; next month, we bring you fresh from England an Amis science fiction story, called "Something Strange." There will also be a novelet by Cordwainer Smith, and other good things.