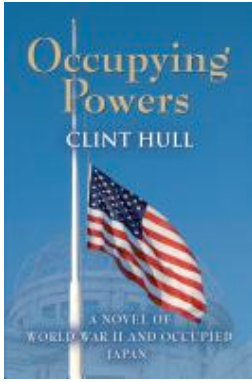




Occupying Powers

CLINT HULL

A NOVEL OF
WORLD WAR II AND OCCUPIED
JAPAN



Drafted into the army at 18 during World War II, Chet Devlin must confront his sexual ambiguity and physical inadequacy. After basic training, he serves as a medic in the Philippines and occupied Japan. He proves himself in combat, and endures the suicide of a buddy who cannot accept the human suffering in Hiroshima. A romantic weekend in Nikko gives him a better understanding of forgiveness and the meaning of war and love.

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AND THE OCCUPATION OF JAPAN**

CLINT HULL

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like Chet Devlin, I served in the army at the end of World War II and in the occupation of Japan. For the chronology and structure of my story I have drawn freely upon my own experience in the military. However, all characters and incidents depicted in the novel are entirely fictitious.

I derived much valuable information on the occupation of Japan from the Pacific edition of *Stars and Stripes*, published in Tokyo. For my descriptions of Hiroshima I am indebted to the author of *Hiroshima Diary: the Journal of a Japanese Physician August 6 - September 30, 1945*, by Michihiko Hachiya, M.D., published by The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1955.

I am grateful to Arliss Ryan for her editorial assistance and her help in fashioning the climactic scene in the Nikko chapter. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Maureen, whose love and support of my writing continue to lend meaning to my daily efforts.

Chapter 1. DRAFTEE

On a Friday morning in November 1944, Chet Devlin reported at the county courthouse in Colyton, Connecticut, to be inducted into the United States Army. He was 18 years 5 months old, 5 feet 9 inches tall, and weighed 148 pounds stripped. The draft had hung like a dark cloud over his life since he graduated from All Hallows Academy, inducing him to put off any plans for further education. Why go to college if he was destined to die in the war?

Twenty-seven young men lounged on the steps of the historic red brick courthouse or on benches in the adjacent park. Chet knew some of them, but had no desire to talk. Seated off by himself, he brooded over his situation. The headlines of an abandoned paper read:

ALLIED 1st NEARS COLOGNE; PATTON DRIVES ON METZ

Chet prayed the war would end before he had to fight anyone. He had voiced that prayer many times since graduation, but the prospects of it being answered now appeared dim. He was on his way to the front lines, either in Europe or on some remote island in the Pacific.

As the clock atop the courthouse struck eight, a man in army uniform emerged from the building. He wore three tiers of ribbons on his chest and an array of stripes on his sleeves. Chet decided he was at least a sergeant. He carried a manila folder under his arm.

“Sing out when I call your name. Raymond Adams.”

“Here!”

The sergeant’s booming voice sounded throughout the park. Chet paid close attention to the roll call, but the D’s passed with no mention

of Devlin. Maybe his records had been lost, or Uncle Sam had no need of him. Maybe he could slip off unnoticed and resume his normal life.

“Arnold Miller.”

“Yo!”

The enthusiasm of the responses made Chet ashamed of his thoughts, and he steeled himself again to serve his country to the best of his ability.

“Alfred Woods.”

“Here!”

The sergeant peered at his list. “We also have a transfer from Milchester, Vermont,” he said. “Chester Devlin.”

“I’m here!” Chet called out, trying to sound resolute.

He knew why his name was last. That spring his father had quit his job and bought seven acres of land in Vermont, where he proposed to fix up the house, grow his own vegetables, fish in the nearby lake, and cut wood for the stove. A printing business would provide for any other needs. Chet had spent the summer helping him fulfill his dream – a dream inspired by the book *Five Acres and Independence*. They painted the house inside and out, replaced the roof and the siding, and dug a cesspool. But they had to carry drinking water from a spring on the property; and lacking electricity, they lit the house with kerosene lanterns. Chet turned eighteen that July. He registered for the draft in Milchester, his new home; but in the fall he asked the draft board to transfer his records to Colyton. He wanted to be drafted with men he knew. He had received his induction notice when the family packed up and moved to Vermont in October.

Work on the house had hardened his muscles, but the thought of hand-to-hand combat scared him. He could never manage a chin-up, yet he could hike for miles without breaking a sweat. His legs might carry him through, but his arms would surely fail him. Courage wasn’t the issue. He lacked the strength and the temperament to be a soldier.

The summer also brought him closer to his father. During the great depression Arthur Devlin broke rocks in a quarry, directed traffic at a construction site, and worked on the WPA historical records survey. With the outbreak of the war he got a job as a laborer in the Colyton

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shipyard. He was college educated, and Chet had never seen him truly happy until those weeks in Vermont. His eyes sparkled, and he sang as he worked. Chet's mother was less enthusiastic about the move. She was reluctant to face an uncertain financial future in a house situated miles from a grocery store, a house with no running water or central heat. Chet had no strong opinions about the move. The Government had effectively taken control of his future.

“Line up on the courthouse steps, facing the park,” the sergeant said. “Shorter men in front. You’re getting your picture in the paper.”

The *Colyton Herald* had printed Chet’s photo just once, when he graduated from All Hallows and won medals for Latin and Christian doctrine. The medals were in a chest at home. He wondered if his picture would appear with his obituary.

A middle-aged unshaven man toting a camera yawned as he snapped two shots. Then the sergeant directed them to a bus parked next to the courthouse. Chet took a seat at the rear. Men outside the bus hugged their parents or kissed their girlfriends good-bye. His parents were many miles distant. He had spent two nights with his grandmother; but she was old and rather infirm, and he dissuaded her from rising early. His friend Marvin was at work filling prescriptions at Harold’s drugstore. As for Helen he couldn’t blame her for not being there to see him off, not after what happened on their date last night. The incident was too fresh in his mind and much too painful to think about. Besides, she wasn’t actually his girlfriend. Were she there to see him off, he wouldn’t have known how to act or what to say to her.

“Where do we go next?” a man asked as the bus got under way.

“First stop is Hartford,” the sergeant said. “After you get another physical, you’ll be sworn in. From there you go to the induction center at Fort Devens.”

At his pre-induction physical Chet had felt exposed and vulnerable. He recalled the lines of naked men, the tests that probed every orifice of his body, the lewd remarks. The man at the exit station told him he was 1-A and would get his draft card in the mail. Asked which branch of the armed forces he preferred, Chet chose the navy. Not that he loved the

sea, but sailors had a warm safe place to sleep and little chance of hand-to-hand combat.

“That quota is full,” was the reply. “You’re in the army.”

He wondered why the man bothered to ask, but said nothing. Why antagonize someone who held the strings of his future? He just swallowed hard and accepted his fate.

Through the bus window he watched Colyton slip away -- the city hall with its golden dome, the Catholic church where he sang in the choir, the public high school of yellow brick where the Protestant kids went. As houses gave way to open fields, he wondered if he would see it again. Despite the recent move to Vermont, he still regarded Colyton as his home town.

Arnold Miller was sitting next to him. They lived in the same neighborhood, but their friendship had waned when Chet went to All Hallows, while Arnold attended the public high school. They spoke now of what lay ahead of them. It took his mind away from Helen.

The physical exam in Hartford lasted less than a minute.

“How do you feel?” the doctor asked him.

“All right,” Chet said.

“Any sickness or injury since your last physical?”

“None that I can think of.”

“Then you’re 1-A. Next.”

Chet joined the other men waiting to be sworn in. The only colorful notes in the drab low-ceilinged room were the American and state flags. An officer entered and stood between the flags. He was in his late twenties and had a pronounced limp. His expression was a mixture of pain and resolve, as if he bore his infirmity with equal amounts of anger and pride.

“Raise your right hand,” he ordered, facing the stars and stripes, “and repeat after me.”

Chet swore to defend the United States and the constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic, yet the thought crossed his mind that, since the oath wasn’t voluntary, it was not binding. But that conclusion was of no benefit to him, nor did it alter his situation.

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“Congratulations and good luck,” the officer said when the brief ceremony was over. His voice carried no conviction or enthusiasm. He obviously knew what was in store for them.

A mechanical problem with the bus delayed for nearly two hours their departure for Fort Devens. No provision had been made for their lunch. The grumbling grew louder as the miles passed, and everyone cheered as the driver pulled in at a diner.

Chet ordered two hot dogs, a slice of pumpkin pie, and a coke. “Do we have to pay for this?” he asked Arnold.

“We’ve been drafted,” Arnold said. “Let the army pay for it.”

The rest of the ride was quiet. Many of the men dozed. Chet shut his eyes and rehearsed what he knew or surmised about his future – a week or two at Devens, seventeen weeks of basic training, followed by a furlough. He was safe until May. If Patton’s army continued to advance, maybe Germany would surrender by then. Japan would follow suit -- or so his father said. Chet hoped he was right.

At Fort Devens they got off the bus and lined up facing the wall of a corrugated metal warehouse. A group of soldiers paused to gawk, their olive drab uniforms in stark contrast with the colorful jackets of the inductees. Inside the warehouse each man received a shaving kit and a raincoat. Chet found these priorities rather amusing – he didn't shave, and the sky was clear. Following the evening meal in a mess hall, they marched in formation to a barracks large enough to swallow up several busloads of recruits.

On each bunk were a pillow, two sheets, and a woolen blanket. The corporal in charge of quarters informed them that his assignment at Devens was temporary and that he was as eager as they were to fight the enemy. He then demonstrated how to make up a tight bunk.

“I said square corners!” he growled on viewing the results of their efforts. “I’ll give you ten minutes to get it right. If any of you fuck up, you’re all invited to a GI party.”

Chet had never used profanity. Though he was prepared for it, the words jarred on him. He set about remaking his bunk. When time was up, two bunks passed inspection; and everyone was set to work scrubbing walls and floors, washing windows, and cleaning the latrine.

Satisfied at last by their efforts and sweat, the corporal relented by answering a few questions.

“How long will we be here at Devens?”

“Until you finish processing. A list is posted every day. Check it.”

“Where do we go next?”

“Basic training in a camp down south. Then you ship out overseas.”

Chet flopped on his bunk. He would shower tomorrow before anyone else was up. This desire for privacy stoked his concern that he was somehow different and would make a poor soldier. He had never really kissed or made love to a woman. Helen’s parting kiss was more promise than fulfillment. He would write to her as she had requested. By pretending she was his girlfriend, he might gain the acceptance of the other men. On that note he slipped into a dreamless sleep.

The showers were in use when he rose at 5:30, so he decided to wait until evening. After roll call and breakfast, they all marched to the warehouse to be issued uniforms. At each station Chet was carefully measured, then handed a size larger. All argument was futile. He accepted whatever came -- shirts, pants, underwear, socks, combat boots – dressing as he went along and emerging from the assembly line in green fatigues and a field jacket. At the final station he was handed a shipping carton. As he filled in the address label and mailed his civilian clothes home, he felt he had severed his last tie to his former life.

Shouldering duffel bags, the men returned to the barracks. Soldiers with a day or two more service taunted them as they passed, calling out, “You’ll be sorry!” and “Wait ‘til you get the hook!” Chet assumed the hook was related to shots, but he didn’t ask. The corporal showed them the approved way to stow uniforms. Freedom of choice had no place in the army.

After lunch they marched in formation to a large hall, where they confronted the Army General Classification Test. Chet would have preferred to take the test in the morning when his mind was fresh. He found the questions challenging but not too difficult. More tests followed. Mechanical aptitude was not his strong suit, but he tried to ace the radio test. He had exchanged messages in Morse code as a boy, and the Signal Corps seemed like a safe assignment.

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Sunday was a free day. Most of the men slept late and skipped breakfast. Chet had the showers all to himself. At mass in the chapel he prayed that he would pass as a good soldier and return home safe and sound. While relaxing on his bunk after the noon meal, he was tapped for a work detail in the warehouse. His task was to issue new uniforms to soldiers returning from overseas duty. Some of these veterans were missing a limb and awaiting discharge. Most were in their early twenties, but their demeanor and vacant stares made them appear older. They had little to say as they went from one station to the next. Chet wondered if they were proud of what they had accomplished, or just glad to be back home in the States. Did those who were wounded see themselves as heroes or as victims? It struck him that he might be looking at his own future.

“Army life isn’t so bad,” he wrote to his parents that evening. “I think I got a high score on the AGCT. It’s an IQ test, so it may help me later on. Work details are a pain; but everyone is in the same boat, so we make the best of it. I learned an important lesson today: when you’re not on duty, get out of the barracks. All my love, Chet.”

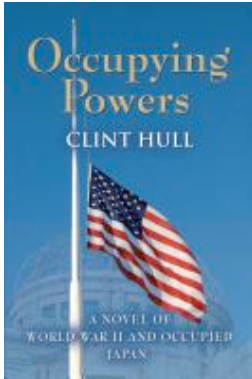
Monday morning they all got typhoid shots, but Chet saw no sign of a hook. A personal interview followed. He inquired about Officer Candidate School. Not that he wanted to become a 90-day wonder, but OCS meant three additional months of training stateside.

“You can apply during basic training,” was the response.

“What are my chances of being accepted?”

“It depends on how your scored on the AGCT, your record in basic, and your carriage as a soldier.”

The last item was aimed at him. An officer must look the part. No one would take his orders or follow him into battle. It all seemed hopeless.



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