



May, 1946

CALL ME "DOC"

The General Hahn plowed through the rough waters of the Pacific ocean supposedly bringing about two thousand of us soldiers to southern California to be discharged from the army, but were they really taking us home? For the past few days, the weather had become more and more frigid, and now a strong blustery wind made it virtually impossible to walk on deck. We were encountering waves twenty-five feet high, and the ship rocked back and forth frantically. One of my buddies had a small pocket compass. It showed we were heading northeast. What was going on?

We had been at sea for twenty-seven days. A lot of fellows had become seasick, but I was feeling well enough to entertain the others who were feeling okay, with magic and hypnosis shows on the deck of the ship, using the hatch as a stage. I had pared down enough of my magic equipment to fit into a small box, actually an ammunition chest, about a foot square and six inches deep. I could present a half hour show or more with what I had.

My hypnosis demonstrations could fill an hour or more. The fellows really enjoyed what I did, and I never had trouble getting volunteers. I generally hypnotized twenty-four people at a time and kept them doing crazy things throughout the program. But I never had them do anything embarrassing.

During those long days at sea I probably entertained most of the soldiers plus the crew of the ship. Yet there was plenty of time to be bored. Luckily, early in the voyage I met a fellow who became a lifelong friend, Mel Meilach, a handsome guy, intelligent, and good natured. Aside from the fact that we were two Jews among a big majority of Christians on the ship, we found we had many common interests and opinions. During the long days and weeks of the trip, Mel and I shared ideas and even secrets that one ordinarily shares only with the closest of friends. That may be why our relationship has lasted so long. On that trip, my friendship with Mel brought with it important advantages. He was the ship's dentist whose office was in the hospital ward where there were empty hospital beds. That's where Mel and I slept most of the time we were on board the General Hahn. However, I kept a few belongings on my bunk below decks



where the other soldiers slept, so they would know I hadn't abandoned them.

I, of course, was anxious to get back to Toledo where my wife, Marian and our six-month-son were waiting for me, and Mel was eager to get to his home in California where he would marry his fiancé, Dona. As soldiers in close quarters with each other day and night for a month, the two of us got to know each other as if we had been friends for years. Although Mel and Dona lived in California, we kept in constant touch with them, and visited back and forth until very recently, when Dona, a talented author of over eighty-five books, passed away. Mel is almost blind now, but seems to manage quite well. We speak on the phone often.

In foul weather, we had to stay below decks, and there wasn't much to do. Most of our fellow soldiers didn't pay much attention to the weather, although we were now having a heck of a time staying on our feet. There were some severe cases of sea-sickness, and these guys rolled back and forth on their bunks. I truly felt sorry for the poor fellows, but I would have liked to be in the fresh air and away from the acrid smell of vomit.

When Mel and I realized that our ship was headed northeast instead of southeast, we started asking questions. Evidently, the ship's officers didn't think it was necessary to keep their passengers aware of any change in plans, but we finally learned that another ship was in trouble in the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska, and we were on our way to give assistance. Fine! But *we* had been fighting a war in the tropics, and we all wore lightweight clothing. None of us had so much as a jacket.

During the transfer of the officers and crew from the stricken ship onto the General Hahn, we were ordered to stay below decks. So, although we were chilled to the bone, at least we were out of the raw wind that whistled down the stairways and through the corridors.

About five days later, we landed in California and within a few more days, I boarded a troop train headed for Camp Atteberry, Indiana, where I was to be discharged from the service. There were about two hundred men on my train and I, a lowly first lieutenant, was the senior officer, which meant I was in charge. I think they saved the oldest train cars, in the worst condition for use in moving troops. It would take at least five days to get to Camp Atteberry because the purpose of our trip was not considered high priority. Therefore we were often put on sidings for hours to allow other trains to go through. After three days, with no washing or



shower facilities for two hundred men, the air was not exactly fragrant.

Also, by the time we boarded the train, most of the men were suffering the effects of the cold weather in the Aleutians, and were complaining of sore throats and colds. Thankfully, I remembered a little about medicine and first aid from the days when, as a child, I helped Dr. Marcus in his office occasionally. I sent a sergeant to look through the cars for any medical equipment and supplies. He came back reporting he had found a car with five five-gallon drums of codeine, some iodine, swabs, dixie cups, and tongue depressors.

I had the men announce “sick call” at 0-800 the next morning. The following morning, not wanting my “patients” to know I wasn’t a doctor, I took off my shirt with the first lieutenant bars and infantry insignia on it, leaving only my white T-shirt, trousers and my hat which signified I was an officer. I assigned one man to use the tongue depressor, swab the patients’ throats with iodine, and another soldier to fill the cups with codeine, giving one cup to each man. and off they went. We used up all the codeine that day, and I had to wire ahead for more. Little did I realize that a whole cup of codeine give a man a wonderful feeling of euphoria , so as a result, for days afterward men asked me, “Hey Doc, you got anymore of that there cold medicine?”

By the time we reached Camp Atteberry the men were all fine. It had helped them feel no pain. No pain at all.