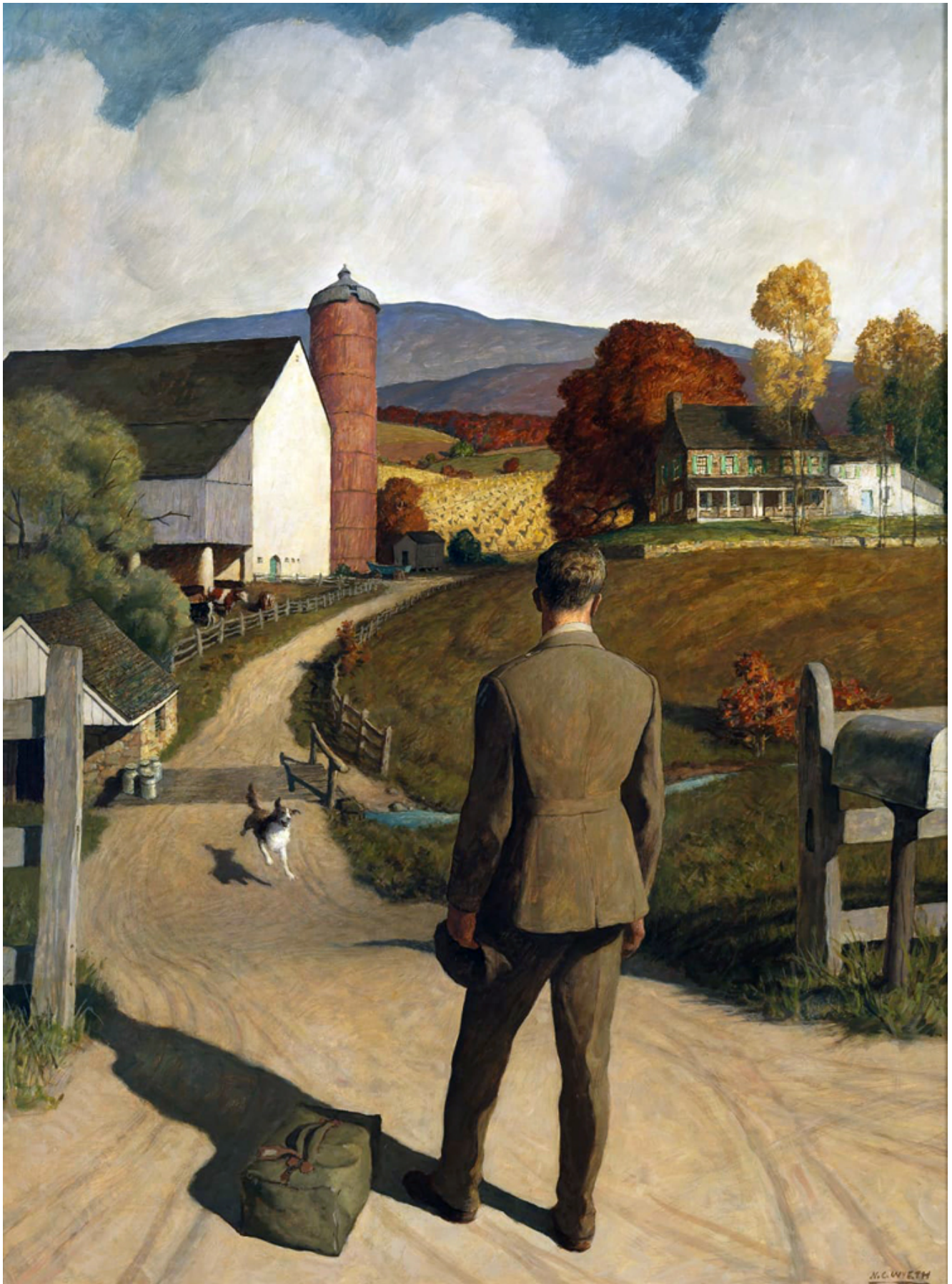


Sounds From The Field

by [Peter Glassman](#) (May 2024)



Homecoming –N.C. Wyeth, 1945

Anesthesiologist Dr. Neil Linus's United 747 arrived at Germany's Frankfurt Airport. He was in his Army dress-green uniform. A US Air Force bus at the Frankfurt Au Main military section picked him up. Linus felt his pulse increase as he asked the Air Force bus driver, "What happened to this terminal? There's fire damage to half the entryway?"

Air Force Corporal Jake Flood replied, "Yessir, a terrorist bomb hit us last week. Don't worry, Sir, so far this is not a problem at Landstuhl ... where you're going, Major."

"How do I rate an Air Force bus? I have US Army orders to Landstuhl Army General Hospital."

Flood smiled, "I get that question all the time, Sir. After War II, Congress allocated funds for the Air Force to build bases at geographically key sites in Europe. The biggest Air Force Base is in Ramstein, Germany. The Army got the medical budget for the biggest military hospital to be in Landstuhl, right next to the air base. It's the main receiving hospital for all service branches in Europe."

Linus sat back in his fiberglass seat, "How long a trip is it to the Hospital?"

"From here it's two hours, Sir. We'll drive by the hospital. I'll give you a tour. All military personnel are billeted at Ramstein. Your orders are for the Bachelor Office Quarters (BOQ), Major."

At the word bachelor, Linus reflected on the phone call he received at his home in Delaware. His wife Barbara had a concerned look as she handed him the phone. "It's a General from your Army Reserve unit."

Linus put a hand on Barbara's shoulder. "Oh-oh, when a General asks a Major for a favor, it has the power of a direct order." He listened and after a few "Yessirs," he hung up. "I have to go to someplace in Germany ... Landstuhl Army Hospital. The

chief of anesthesia there has a domestic emergency and I'm the only one qualified right now to take his place. It'll only be for a few weeks."

The weather was cool and crisp when they arrived at the largest military compound Linus had ever seen. Landstuhl Hospital was a towering structure and relatively new.

The Corporal stopped the bus, "Step out and take a look."

As soon as Linus was outside, his pulse quickened. The skyscraper building seemed to touch the clouds as the sun played hide-and-seek with top floors. "The place where you're going to work is on the fifth floor, the operating room. You don't report until tomorrow, Sir." Flood stared at Linus who had three fingers of his right hand pressing on his left wrist. "What's wrong, Sir?"

Linus was feeling his pulse. It was regular. He looked around and back to the Corporal, "What's that sound? It's like a distant parade. I hear drums."

"Sometimes they have practice parades with the Air Force band ... but not today. I don't hear anything, Sir."

At those words, Linus felt his heart rate elevate even more. It was not in synchronization with the faint but definite drumming rhythm. "Baddaboom Buddaboom Badaboom-boom-boom-boom, buddaboom buddaboom buddaboom boom-boom-boom." The drumming was a distant military cadence, and it was coming from the field adjacent to the one-story wooden buildings to the left of the hospital.

"From over there," Linus pointed.

"Those are the outpatient buildings, Major. Come on, let's get you checked into the B0Q."

His room had a full bed, a small sink next to a small shower, a toilet, a TV, a phone, and a large drapery window. Linus

pulled back the drape and fully viewed Ramstein's active Air Force runways. Two F-4 Phantoms were taking off. He opened the window and a deafening roar of jet engines made him shut it rapidly.

A comely woman knocked on his door and entered with a smile. "Welcome Doctor-Major Linus. I am Hilda, your steward in the BOQ. I have already made up your bed." Her uniform was a green and black Army pantsuit adorned only with a nametag hanging from a silver-beaded chain around her neck. The ID tag was almost stuck between her developed bosom. She spoke with a slight German accent. "All rooms are soundproofed because of the airplane noise." She went to his suitcase and duffle bag, "I will help you unpack."

Linus sat on a dark blue padded chair at a student-size desk opposite the TV. "How far is the hospital from here ... Hilda?"

Her dimpled smile showed perfect white teeth, "It is only two miles. Your driver will pick you up each morning and bring you back whenever you call the number beside your phone." She paused as she checked the status of the bathroom, "Everything is okay in here. What time should you leave for your work, Herr Doctor?"

"I have to be in the operating room at 0600. I can be ready at 0530."

"I will be here the evening before you come back. I will put out your uniform and things for the next morning, Herr Doctor."

Linus stared and stood up, "You don't have to do that, Hilda."

Her dimples appeared again, "Sir, it is my job to do this." She checked the bed again. "I will see you again in the morning. Do you have questions for me?"

"I only have one right now. When I stopped to look at the

hospital, I heard a military drumbeat coming from the field. Do they have a musical band at Landstuhl?"

Hilda's smile was replaced by a serious glare, "Band? Music? Did you hear music?"

"No, just the drums and they seemed distant."

"There is no band on base, Doctor. Perhaps it was the noise of construction. There is always some building being done."

Linus's stare matched hers, "I distinctly heard the sound of drums."

Hilda managed a smile again, "I may see you tonight when I set out your clothes for the next day."

Linus resigned to her words, "Okay, when in Rome, I guess."

"Rome, Herr Doctor, this is Ramstein, Germany."

"I mean I will submit to your duties as a B0Q steward."

"Raus ... Raus ... time to get up Doctor. It's 0500." Hilda shook Linus awake and pulled him to a sitting position. "I have the shower running. Your car will be here in thirty minutes."

An Air Force car ferreted him to the hospital in ten minutes with Corporal Flood as his driver. "You look wide awake and ready for your first day, Sir."

Linus replied, "You would too if a lady disrobed you and threw you into the shower."

Flood laughed, "Oh, you must have Hilda. She takes her job seriously. Things are different in Germany than in the States, Sir. You have to adapt."

Before they could end the conversation, they were at the

Landstuhl Hospital entrance. "Call me when you want a pickup. I'll also be around for transportation around Ramstein. There are four Officers Clubs for meals if you get sick of the Officers Mess in the hospital, Sir."

"Okay, see you later." Linus looked out to the field but heard no drumming.

He was pleased that being Chief of Anesthesiology at Landstuhl was identical to the orderliness and efficiency as when he was Chief at Portsmouth Naval Hospital in New Hampshire five years ago when he was in the Navy. He did feel uneasy that he was the lowest-ranking Chief of any Department. Ramstein's Commanding Office, Air Force General Edmund Collins, however, was overwhelmed with gratitude when Linus gave anesthesia for his first grandchild who was born with a hairlip."

"Major Linus, your professionalism and competence are surely that of a Lieutenant Colonel."

That was all he said and life in the Landstuhl Operating room continued on uneventfully. Uneventful except for his trip back to the BOQ three weeks later. It was a mild sunny evening and Linus decided to walk back to his Quarters. "Take the night off, Corporal. I'll walk back."

Halfway between Landstuhl and Ramstein, the drums began. "Baddaboom Buddaboom Badaboom-boom-boom-boom, buddaboom buddaboom buddaboom boom-boom-boom." They were louder this time and he could also hear the voices of children playing. Intermittent laughter and a happy German dialect were mixed with the background of the drums. Linus looked around. He was alone with an occasional Army or Air Force vehicle passing him. His thoughts were that something was going on outside the military gates. Tomorrow was his day off. He would tour the main town of Landstuhl and find the source.

"I didn't think I'd have you for my driver to downtown Landstuhl, Jake."

"I'll drop you off at the USO building, Sir." Flood raised his eyebrows. "You should've told me last night. I would have recommended not to wear your uniform."

"I walked back last night, remember. Why not wear my dress uniform?"

"I think the civilians here will jack up prices, which is something they don't do for ordinary-dressed tourists ... and..." Flood stopped.

"And ... what?"

"Well, Sir, to understand the German attitude toward us, you'll have to be on your own. I circled several landmarks as a 'must see.' What time shall I pick you up, it's 10 hundred hours now?"

Linus looked at his watch. "I'll check out your choices and get a healthy lunch at a traditional restaurant. I'll be back here at the USO at 1500 hours."

The first landmark was the shell of a bombed-out once-huge Cathedral. A tarnished bronze plaque told any visitor that, "These ruins will forever recall the night of January 12, 1944, when American B-17s released their bombs killing men, women, and children who were using the Cathedral as a shelter."

A middle-aged woman was walking toward him and staring with a grimace of contempt.

"Pardon me ma'am but could you please tell me how far this circled item is from here?" His finger pointed to a statue on his tour guide.

The woman scowled and moved quickly past him.

Linus found the bronze statue of children. The words on the concrete base informed all that "children of war will never be forgotten."

At 1300 hours his hunger directed him to a four-star restaurant. He looked in and could see several available tables. A couple in front of him was seated quickly. He was next.

The Host glared at him, "Yes, Major?"

"Table for one, please."

"I'm sorry, Sir, all tables are reserved."

Linus found this scenario repeated at three other restaurants.

With his stomach growling he finished his tour, which included a beautiful garden, several souvenir shops, and a cuckoo-clock manufacturer outlet. It was 1430 and time to meet with Corporal Flood.

The Air Force car was ready. Flood looked at his package. "A cuckoo-clock? Look, Doc, our Post Exchanges have all the souvenirs at reasonable prices. How was your sojourn by the way?"

Linus sat on the passenger side, "I've never met so many unfriendly people in my life." He looked at his driver.

"Major, the people in Landstuhl are good and kind. However, they remember the war and what the Allies had to do to win it. Your uniform immediately builds a brick wall between the citizens and you. Next time wear your civies. You'll see the exact opposite response."

"Jake, the two things I wanted to see was the marching band practicing—the one I keep hearing. The other thing I wanted to see was the children I hear but don't see. They sounded so happy."

"Major, I can't answer that for you, but I can send you to a person back at the hospital who can."

Linus had only one more week before his Landstuhl assignment was over. He had delayed follow-up on contacting Flood's referral. For the last two days, the children's voices became louder. Their joyful German prattle in speech and song spun around in his head at night. The drum cadence likewise was louder. Fortunately, the sounds were only occurring after his work hours. He made an appointment to see the man per Corporal Flood's advice.

Gunter Pohl was an older civilian working as manager of the Food Services in the Hospital. At sixty-three, he had two more years until retirement and welcomed the opportunity to talk German history with the younger American doctor.

Pohl wore a standard civilian blue shirt, blue pants, black shoes, and a large oval name tag issued to civilian workers in all the military installations. Pohl motioned Linus to a chair opposite his government-issued gray metal desk. "I know Corporal Flood very well. He did not tell me specifically what you want to discuss, Major."

Linus sat in an armless gray metal chair, surrounded by gray metal file cabinets. A large photo of an Air Force F-4 Phantom was the only picture in the windowless office. He explained how he had come to be at Landstuhl Hospital. He began after a large swallow of bottled water. "Herr Pohl, I have a dilemma. It does not involve Ramstein, Landstuhl, or the military." He swallowed more water. "I'm hearing voices from the field opposite the outpatient buildings adjacent to the new Landstuhl Hospital."

Pohl unbridged his folded hands and changed his smile of anticipation to one of concern. "Major Linus, before you tell me any more of this experience, let me offer what you might have been hearing."

Linus shifted in his chair and almost collapsed the soft plastic water bottle in his right hand. "I don't understand.

Did the Corporal tell you the details of this meeting?"

"No, Major, he did not. Please, let me begin with a question. Are you familiar with Landstuhl and what activities occurred here during WW II?"

Linus leaned slightly forward, "Not, exactly, I know of munitions being stored here. I also have seen several memorials throughout the town."

Pohl nodded affirmative, "Okay, Landstuhl was a key Nazi facility for the Germans as a depot for the resupply of troops not only for combat ordinance items but for replacement troop personnel. It was also the main training center for the Hitler Youth. Those old wooden buildings at the field were for them." He ran his right hand through his almost white hair, "I've known a few people who swear they hear children laughing or singing coming from that area. Also, they claimed to hear a military band of adolescents in constant practice. You may have heard their music or drumming." He paused, "Was one of the sounds you heard from a church memorial that of people, including children—of agony and screaming?"

Linus dropped his water bottle spilling the remaining contents on the floor. His jaw dropped open and he found it difficult to form words. "Yes, please ... tell ... me, did someone tell you about my delusions?"

"I believe they're not delusions, Major." Pohl swiveled his chair to extract a time-worn scrapbook from an overstuffed bookshelf. He opened the book at random pages and turned it toward Linus. "What you have heard, others have also heard. Those clippings in this book have one thing in common." He paused to allow Linus some composure. "They were all connected somehow to the night of the Landstuhl Cathedral bombings."

Linus's eyes were glued to the pages in the book, "These people, they experienced everything I have. How and why?"

“Major, I don’t have the answers. The word ‘haunted’ may apply, if you believe in such things, or perhaps a better word is ‘paranormal.’”

Linus searched for the right words. He was a scientist, after all ... a Medical Doctor. “Do you believe in such things? You don’t think there’s anything mentally wrong with me?”

Pohl reached into the open book and flipped pages. “Ah, here it is, Major. Here is a newspaper clipping listing the members of three of the American B-17s responsible for that night’s raid.” Pohl fingered the names and stopped. “Your last name is Linus?”

“But I’m too young for WWII,” he told the older man.

He arrived home with mixed feelings. He’d heard of such auras staying with people and being triggered by things related to original events in their lives. Nowhere could he find verification of such phenomena experienced by people who were not present at such things.

Barbara and the children welcomed him with open arms, hugs, and kisses. The youngest, Tracy, put her face close to his ear, “Okay Dad, what did you bring me?”

Linus felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He was home. Now...today...that was what mattered. He wouldn’t tell Barbara about his auditory hallucinations—not yet. He kissed his daughter and answered, “A genuine German Cuckoo Clock.”

All were thrilled with the memorabilia he delivered from Landstuhl. “Okay, everyone, I have jet lag and have to get up early tomorrow morning. I’m heading for bed.”

Barbara raised her eyebrows. “Tomorrow? Where are you going tomorrow?”

“I have to visit my father at the Veterans Home.”

“Oh dear, that place is so depressing with all those former soldiers spending their elderly years remembering WWII experiences.”

“Believe me it’s important. I’ll explain when I come back.”

She grabbed his sleeve, “Before you head upstairs, this came from the Department of the Army.” She handed him the official-looking envelope, Linus recoiled, “Oh no! I don’t want another assignment. I’m needed here at my civilian practice.” He tore open the envelope and extracted two letter-size documents. “Oh my God!”

Barbara grabbed his arm again. “What is it dear?”

He looked at his staring family, “The first letter is from the CO of Ramstein Air Force Base, General Collins. It’s a letter of commendation and thank you.” Linus waved the second one in the air, “This one is a notice, and congratulations on my promotion from Major to Lieutenant Colonel.”

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