Carl Foreman's

THE VICTORS

MILTON SHULMAN

By ALEXANDER BARON

The story, based on a work by the highly praised novelist Alexander Baron, follows the bitter-sweet, sometimes cruel, but fascinating love stories, between the women of Europe and the soldiers they meet. Since the armies have moved from country to country with each change in the fortunes of war, it follows that the relationships between the troops and their girls can never be permanent. The ironies of the affaires, the tragedies in the lives of the main characters, who are the luckless victims of world conflict, build up as the novel progresses, creating a powerful impression of the empty fate of a conquering hero.

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based on
the human kind
by
ALEXANDER BARON

A PANTHER BOOK

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First published in Great Britain
in Panther Books October 1963
Reprinted December 1963, June 1964

This book is based on *The Human Kind* by Alexander Baron, which was first published in Great Britain by Jonathan Cape Ltd. 1953

Printed in Great Britain by Cox and Wyman Ltd., London, Reading and Fakenham, and published by Hamilton & Co. (Stafford), Ltd., 108 Brompton Road, London, S.W.3

THE VICTORS

ONE

ON a fine summer night in the year 1942, two soldiers stood on sentry duty outside a stores depot in an English seaport. The soldiers, like the stores in the depot, were American. Their names were Theodore Trower and Frank Chase. Both were young men, in their early twenties.

Their uniforms were neat and new, as was to be expected in a regiment that had only landed at Liverpool eight weeks before. With the butts of their rifles placed correctly at their shoes, both men stood formally in the "at ease" position.

Their drill-book postures, their stillness, a touch of self-conscious vanity in the lift of their chins, were not strictly necessary at this moment, for an air raid was at its height. The entrance of a dugout shelter was close to them, and the young men's orders clearly stated that they could take shelter when bombers were overhead.

The bombers were, without doubt, overhead now. The dark vault of sky, so empty to the eyes except for the red wink of bursting shells, echoed with the savage, uneven roar of Heinkel engines. Within the immense night calm the distant whistle and whisper of falling bombs became the most ordinary of noises. The thud of explosions smote from every direction and from time to time all

other sounds were engulfed by the clifflike fall, prolonged and awe-inspiring, of some large building.

The houses that faced the sentries were thrown into relief by the glow of distant fires, sometimes faint, sometimes waxing into a bright, enormous glare. Anti-aircraft batteries ripped and slammed. One group of guns, dug in a few streets away, shook the night with a deafening outburst each time the bombers passed overhead.

The reason why the two young Americans did not take shelter was simple. Frank Chase did not move because Ted Trower did not move. And Private Trower stood firmly at his post in order to match Private Chase who, a few yards away, might have been some brave military statue.

Private Trower had been taught by fiction (for he was a reader of the kind of novels that his high-school teachers had called good) that he would have to suppress fear when he first heard the roar of the guns. Well, here he was, with the whole orchestra of bomb and artillery muffling his ears for the first time in his life, and he was undeniably enjoying the experience.

Perhaps it was a release after the dull, fatiguing months at Fort Riley and those strange, other-worldly days among the crap-shooting crowds on the troopship. Perhaps he felt at last in presence of the drama of war; for it had been a terrible anti-climax, after writing the first letter to his parents from the European Theatre of Operations (name reeking of battle smoke) to find himself in an England of innumerable, uneventful streets and shabbily-dressed people who simply did not notice one more G.I. on the pavement; not at all the embattled, blazing fortress of the Quentin Reynolds broadcasts that had enthralled him back in '40. Perhaps, simply, being young, he knew nothing about death. To stand under fire at last was for him both a relief and a test to be honourably faced.

He had followed the war for two years the way his friends followed the baseball scores. In the cinema of his mind he had identified passionately with the heroic actors, first the British, later the Russians. In any quarters Trower's bunk could always be located; pinned close by on the wall was a map of the Russian front with red- and green-headed pins marking the battle lines.

Just now in the cinema of his mind the hero was neither British nor Russian, but at last in truth himself. He was simultaneously composing a letter to his father about tonight's epic (omitting to mention that the depot he guarded with such valour was filled mainly with boots and woollen underwear) and seeing on the screen his father, in the family drug-store, reading it aloud to the kids hunched over their banana-splits. Home—Phoenix, Arizona—was more immediate to him as he dreamed than his surroundings.

The shrilling of ambulance bells aroused him. He glanced at his companion. Chase was eyeing him with a small, ironic grin, telling him that his heroics were seen through. Trower mouthed back, "Nuts". He felt very good, very close to the other man, sharing something big.

The rumbling had died away. In the silence a faint distant engine-beat muttered. Within seconds it grew louder, a threatening rise and fall of sound that was met by the thud of distant batteries, then by the outburst of nearer guns. A new wave of bombers was coming in from the sea. The war of guns and engines filled the sky again. The engines were overhead now, shouting, beating, beating down through the frenzy of noise. Trower was hypnotized; neither exultant nor frightened; simply hypnotized by the shouting engines of his enemies directly overhead.

Out of the tumult his instincts plucked one noise, a whistle, more shrill and more prolonged than the others, a projectile of sound coming straight at him, a crescendo,

screaming. In a common animal impulse the two men hurled themselves for the dugout entrance.

Trower did not feel himself hit the floor, nor Chase's body colliding with him. He huddled against the sandbags. A terrible white light filled his eyes. The dugout rocked and an immense detonation pressed down upon him. Amid the ringing, remote echoes that filled his eardrums he heard the crack and tinkle of blasted windows. He opened his eyes. Dust was settling around him like a thinning fog.

There was no more pride in Trower, no dreams in his head. Like a child, he was aware only of bodily discomfiture, the rapid, sickening beat of his heart, a sickness rising into his throat and strange dislodgements in his bowels.

Chase lay beside him, hands clamped to his ears. Chase moved his hands away, looked up at him. Trower was able to look back at him, sane again. They grinned foolishly, and peered out into the red night. Now that the dreadful whistle, aimed at them, had ended, the din meant nothing to them.

Trower heard a stranger's voice. It took him a second to realize that it belonged to Chase.

"And you volunteered!"

He heard himself answering, humble, self-excusing, "It was the day after Pearl Harbour."

"Hero!"

Himself, lamely, "Well, we have to teach those bastards —."

He broke off. Silence for a moment.

Chase's voice again, "Boy, I fell right on top of you." Chase sighed, "Why couldn't you have been a dame?"

Trower said, "Right now I could use a woman," with all the heartiness of (it was his secret) a virgin. Chase often talked about his women. Ted Trower envied him.

From their shelter they watched the roadway. Neither

of them moved. Trower could speak again, but he could not move. He had tasted fear for the first time; he was weak and he cowered in his hole.

Down the street, on the opposite pavement, a solitary figure came into sight. The steady step, the slow, deliberate approach fascinated Ted Trower. At his side Chase was staring, too. Somewhere beyond buildings a bomb fell, and a great white glare suffused the sky. On the opposite pavement, in the waning glare, they could see the solitary walker in the night: an English policeman, patrolling his precinct.

He wore a steel helmet, but otherwise he might have been whiling away a weary spell of duty on a peaceful summer night. He was an ageing man, bulky round the waist, with the face of a mild ox: an ordinary bobby, never to be promoted. He walked with the slow, heavy, everlasting step of all English policemen.

Trower looked at Chase. Chase looked at Trower, then nodded. In silence the two young men picked up their rifles, clambered out of the shelter and took up their posts at the gate.

They heard a fire-engine race by. The guns were thudding farther away now. The policeman trod towards them. As he came abreast of them, across the road, he saw them, and he waved at them. They waved back, and when he had turned the corner they grinned at each other.

Everything was going on. Bombs reverberated. Great buildings crashed into rubble. Fires burned against the night. But the firm tread of life could not be halted, and the sentries stood at their posts.

TWO

ALLIES INVADE SICILY!

July 10, 1943

Coliseum News brings the world to your doorstep . . . In the greatest Allied offensive to date, U.S., British and Canadian forces land on Sicily, stepping-stone to Italy, itself!

General Montgomery's famous Eighth Army, striking from the east, overcomes heavy Axis resistance, and sweeps onward.

The American landings, begun in darkness, continue till dawn, on the south Sicilian coast near Gela. The great combined operation has come to a success. Fighting in this area was bitter before the Americans finally broke through to swing far to the north and west, driving not only heart-sick Italians but crack German troops before them.

General Patton, accompanied by his famous pearl-handled .45 goes over the side of his ship to take personal command of repulsing Axis counter-attacks.

The invasion is off to a successful start!

Town after town, boasting allegiance to Il Duce, Benito Mussolini, falls to the invaders.

Under Eisenhower and Alexander, with the valiant Canadians and the indomitable British Eighth Army as comrades in invasion, U.S. troops have met their most crucial test in this war, and have scored their greatest success!

Rompers

CHORUS GIRLS TELL IT TO THE MARINES

These famous precision dancers from Radio City's Music Hall pay a visit to the Marine Corps base at Quantico . . .

These lovely ladies, with an esprit de corps all their own, get a personally conducted tour around the obstacle course.

The Marines show them the ropes, and the girls show a thing or two in return!

The obstacle course is no obstacle to them, as one can see by their smiling faces—and the motto of these long-stemmed roses seems to be: come on in, fellers, it's great to be a Marine!

The Victors

Special

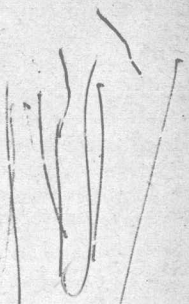
FRONT LINE FIGHTING IN SICILY

Combat cameramen capture typical battle action in Sicily! These official pictures show what happened when an American infantry squad, detailed to reconnoitre a supposedly abandoned village, find it held by German rear-guard detachments. Pinned down at first by machine-gun and mortar nests, but there are still the snipers to contend with.

In this brief but deadly engagement, the final score: one American dead against twelve enemy killed and two captured!

After the battle, rest for the weary. Here are the men who are fighting for us in Sicily: Sergeant Joseph R. Craig, Scranton, Pennsylvania; Private Albert Greenberg, Chicago; Private Walter Knofke, Denver; Private George Baker, New York City; Corporal Frank Chase, Los Angeles; Private Theodore Trower, Phoenix, Arizona; Private Robert Grogan, Joplin, Missouri . . . And their prisoners, two not so masterful members of the master race!

Their conquering days are over. A study in contrasts, the vanquished—and the victors!



THE platoon straddled the hot, white Sicilian road like two moving black lines of ants. Each man cast beside him a shadow as gnarled and twisted as the trees that looked down on this bare valley. Ahead lay the scooped-out hills, faint blue in the sunglare. At the foot of the hills a town nestled, a tantalizing cluster of white dolls' houses.

Sergeant Joseph Craig was not taken in by the illusion. He had walked a lot of miles through Africa and Sicily, seen a lot of towns and buried a lot of dead.

He paused on the slope to look down at his squad, assessing the degree of their fatigue from their silence, the hunch of their shoulders under shirts splotched black with sweat, and their lethargic, monotonous step. He had no illusions about the village, but professionally—he looked a professional—he judged that he would find there the shade, rest and water that his men needed.

He moved into the lead again. Professionally, he checked how his newer men were doing. He never hoped for anything from replacements, only to have reasonable, ordinary guys who did their jobs and kept putting one foot in front of the other till they were hit. Baker, now, the New Yorker—there was a nice, ordinary guy. He was

polite and quiet, and never complained. Give the squad ten and he was squatting there with a pad on his knee, writing home to his wife. Grogan, Greenberg, Trower and the others—he still had to wipe their noses and their arses for them occasionally, but those of them who lived long enough would learn. Chase was the smartest of the bunch. He'd made corporal and he'd be a good one if he stopped being too sure of himself.

Corporal Chase, trudging along, looking at the sergeant's back, did not look self-assured at the moment. He was as tired as any man. His face was drained empty. His eyes looked outward, trained in a few weeks by the lash of bullets always to watch; but his thoughts looked inward, going over what had happened last night.

They had been stuck in that slit trench for forty-eight hours, himself, Baker and O'Toole. Across the broad, bare plain that faced them was the enemy, invisible but deadly to any man who tried to move forward.

O'Toole had dysentery. He sat huddled at one end of the trench with his eyes shut, his head lolling on one side, breathing heavily. He was too weak to crawl to a latrine when his spasms came; with the snipers active, the risk was too great. He kept a biscuit tin beside him and from time to time either Baker or Chase would empty it for him. His trousers were soaked with blood and slime. The tin made the pocket of close, overheated air smell terrible. It attracted flies in buzzing, black swarms that had to be brushed off every scrap of food they tried to eat.

Baker had been kidding Chase about his stripes. He'd got them only a few days before when Corporal Schwab had stepped on a land mine. The talk had made O'Toole open his eyes and Chase helped him drink some water from his canteen.

For no reason at all, they were suddenly arguing about jazz. O'Toole, who had played a saxophone in small