ON a Sunday afternoon you could jeep up the back road to Pisa, and avoid the rushing military traffic on the Fifth Army Highway and the shell holes in the road around Marina di Pisa. The back road led through dense forests of bushy headed Roman pines with clumps of mistletoe clinging to the lower untrimmed boughs. The blistering May sun did not dispel the cool shadows there along the sleepy old Medici canal. It flowed, and the pines stood sentinal, come war, come Germans, come Americans. Those few green miles were a welcome sanctuary from the ubiquitous offal of war that littered the face of Italy.

In brown, bomb-shattered old Pisa nothing was left untouched save the Baptistery, the Cathedral, and the Campanile. Even the Campo Santo had been burned and crushed, and the violated graves were literally scooped out into the air of a century more savage by far than had been known by the occupants of any of those disembowed tombs. Anumber colored dust settled on the streets, the buildings, and the people. Not one bridge was left to span the river, and the green-edgy Arno, gathering body and speed on its way to the sea, washed quietly over the rubble of stone and brick which had gracefully linked one bank to the other from medieval times. Pisa was like a giant carcass, long dead and now only mould and dust, but with a few bones and strips of skin to help trace out the original lines of the form. Only the Arno seemed alive.

You could drive back toward the southwest along the river road if you wanted to see the ultimate in the waste and wreckage of war, for there was the American camp for German prisoners of war, said to contain approximately 100,000 men. Pisa and many other Italian towns and cities were in ruins, and that was a waste. Hundreds of acres of new, even uncrated, American made trucks, tanks, half-tracks, and other vehicles of war were sinking deeper and deeper into the black Tuscan mud across the road from the Fifth Army Food and Ammunition Dump, and that, surely, was a waste of war. But the essence of decay was in the faces of the men in the PW camp. There they were, in the sun scorched, treeless fields, the pup tents stretching as far as the eye could see in the camp along the banks of the river. Save for the gusts of dust and the smoke from the slow burning fires in the garbage dumps, it was like a great still picture, so little activity there was. Thin, sallow-cheeked boys from 14 to 18 years of age, apathetic men who should have been in the prime of life, and other men who were perhaps 60 years of age or more, stood dumbly with empty hands, staring sullenly through the heavy barbed wire. Others sprawled carelessly on the caked hard earth, motionless, perhaps thoughtless. None wore shoes; few wore more than underwear shorts; none appeared emaciated; none appeared plump, either. All were burned brown by the constant exposure to sun, wind, and dust. They looked neutral, very neutral, and the no-expression of the dull faces gave no hint of the proud, well-dressed, well-fed, arrogant and victorious men who were seen in the news reels goose-stepping before their ranting Führer. Were these the
men we should hate for all the waste and misery so many others had suffered, and which they, too, were suffering? Were they yet whipped, or was theirs yet a doctrine of brutality? How far should our charity extend? We thought of Dachau and Buchenwald, but we could not find a ready answer.

Turning home, the evening moisture brought with it the odors of the green fields and rich earth of Tuscany. Old women sat in their doorways braiding straw. Young men and women cut grain with hand sickles in the cool of the evening. Old men stood pensively in the long shadows in silent contemplation of the rubble of their little mountain village. VE Day had arrived and passed, but there was no magic change in the face of Italy. One does not rebuild one's cottage nor fill one's stomach with a mere proclamation of peace.