

Chapter 12

Army “Intelligence,” 1942-43

Despite any misgivings Hugh had about the conflict with Germany, he knew several years before World War II actually broke out that he would be in the conflict. “I can remember very clearly,” states Hugh’s brother Reid, “one day he had a huge steamer trunk which was filled with shoe boxes which contained his note cards, and he was going through this and either filing or setting them up somehow.” Their mother asked Hugh what he was doing. He answered: “Oh, I’m just getting ready; I’ll be going to war.” Reid remembers that this was in 1938 or 1939, when most Americans were still resolved to stay out of this “European” conflict, “but he had sized that up pretty early.”² While Hugh was not “a wild haired patriot,” as Paul Springer puts it, “the idea of being drafted was very unpleasant to him.” The mood in America was that going to war was at least a manly duty and at most a glorious adventure. “After Pearl Harbor you were a heel if you didn’t want to. The expression was: Break the Nazi line and set the rising sun.”³

So on 28 September 1942, Hugh Nibley was inducted into the U.S. Army at Fort MacArthur, which was situated on the coast just south of Los Angeles. Built in 1914 to defend the Los Angeles harbor, this emplacement was named after Lt. Gen. Arthur MacArthur, Civil War Medal of Honor winner, commanding general in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, and father of General Douglas MacArthur, already well-known for his dramatic retreat in the Far East from the advancing Japanese and equally dramatic vow to return. The fort had served as a training center in World War I, was the center of all army activities in Southern California during the 1920s and 1930s, and became a chief induction center during World War II. The atmosphere at the fort when Hugh reported for conscription was electric. War anxiety was tangible throughout the nation, but particularly in Southern California where several enemy submarines had been sighted off the coast during the early months of 1942. Hundreds of men were being

²Reid Nibley, “Faith of an Observer,” 479, compilation of interviews, ca. 1983-84 for a video documentary of the same name aired in 1985, photocopy of typescript in my possession, pagination added.

³Paul Springer, “Faith of an Observer,” 495-96.