

Charlie Took High Ground For His War

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sisted of a can of Sego, the liquid diet food.

There were several cans of Sego in Charles' well-stocked foot-locker which police brought down from his tower bastion.

At any rate, going back to known facts, Charles wrote in the 12:30 a.m. note his mother was dead.

Sometime before 3 a.m. Charles J. Whitman took a knife — very probably one of the daggers he had in his foot-locker — and stabbed his wife, Katherine Leissner Whitman to death.

She apparently was killed in bed while she slept. She was either sleeping in the nude or Charles removed her bloody night clothes and disposed of them.

Kathy must have died almost instantly. There was no sign of a struggle. She suffered one gaping wound below her left breast — probably severe enough to bring immediate death. If she gave an outcry it was not heard, but that is not unexpected at that hour.

Monday morning would soon be dawning. Charles was being pressed for time — or was he? Had he already loaded the foot-locker to the brim with his astonishing cache of food, water, ammunition, guns and all the rest?

Or did he then go and pack it up?

At any rate, it seems a good guess that he placed the heavily laden foot locker and the small bluish dolly he would use to haul it on in his car before the dawn hours. He was seen during daylight at his home during Monday morning but was not observed loading the car.

Charles had another duty to perform in the pre-dawn hours. At 5:45 a.m. he placed a call to the telephone office knowing that supervisory personnel are on duty 24 hours a day.

Mrs. F. Hawkins came on the line, and Charles with just the right amount of concern and apology in his voice said that his wife would not be able to report for work at 8:30 a.m.

"He said she was suffering from diarrhea and vomiting," the report read, and that "he was sorry."

Daylight came shortly afterwards with the promise of another hot day.

It was the first day of August, the day Charlie Whitman had an evil date with destiny.

There were a few high, puffy clouds, but the hot sun soon chased most of them away.

As the morning wore on, another of the strange quirks so pertinent to this story developed.

Then sometime around 9:30 a.m. Whitman appeared at the counter of the sporting goods department at Sears, Roebuck and Co. in Hancock Center.

It was only a few hundred yards from where his mother would not be reporting for work at her cash register in Wyatt's Cafeteria in the same shopping center.

At Sears, Whitman purchased on credit a 12-gauge shotgun. It cost \$137.65 but that was no problem because his credit rating was excellent.

Perhaps, as he stood before the gun counter a moment of concern flashed through the darkened corridors of his mind.

But the concern was not for what he had done or was about to do but rather if he was properly equipped to do it.

He asked how much a box of shells for a .30-caliber carbine cost. But the store was sold out of carbine shells so he left without further comment.

Next, Whitman, now coolly launched and thoroughly committed to his battle plan, drove back to his home at 905 Jewell. The quickest route would have been by the freeway and across the river.

That would have taken him right by the Austin Police Station at the corner of 7th St. In less than two hours every officer on that force would be aware of his existence, of his actions if not his name.

When he arrived back at 905 Jewell St. a neighbor woman happened to notice him get out

of the car with "two rifles" (one was undoubtedly the shotgun.)

She didn't see if he went in the house, but did notice that he went to a door at the rear of the garage, still carrying the two guns.

Inside, he must have sawed off the stock and barrel of the newly purchased weapon.

Whether he laid it in the top of the footlocker already in the car or if he put it in the locker and then loaded the entire arsenal into the car is not known.

Later, Mrs. D. W. Nowotny, whose daughter often rode with Charles to school and whose young son, Mark, played in the Whitman yard, breathed a fervent thanks.

"This boy here," she said, indicating her own son, was in bed and his friend had gone downtown. If those boys had been out and seen Charles get out of the car with those guns they would have run down there to see them, and he might have just started shooting right here . . .

"I just thank God," she said. The Nowotny youth and others in the neighborhood were always playing in the Whitman yard. He put a rope up in a tall oak tree and taught them to climb it hand-over-hand Marine style just as he did to keep in shape.

Mrs. Nowotny said the neighbors were never invited to look inside Whitman's garage, but her son said he had been in there.

"He just had a whole bunch of Army stuff," said the youth. It was that "Army stuff" which Whitman now had placed in the footlocker and with which he was to proceed to the university tower.

Perhaps he paused to pat the family dog, Scotia, which is Japanese for small. Perhaps he didn't. The little long-haired dog was depicted later in a snapshot displayed at the police station lying at his master's feet on a couch.

In the picture Whitman appears to be sleeping, but there's a hint of a smile indicating he might be playing possum. It brings to mind the old Viking funeral as described by P. C. Wren in his novel "Beau Geste" where the warrior is buried with a dog at his feet and his weapons beside him. Only Whitman had no visible weapons.

Sometime around 11 a.m., Whitman gathered his weapons, left his dog and drove to the University of Texas campus. Nobody will ever know the route he took.

He said he was a workman with a delivery. Nobody saw him leave his house, but apparently he already had donned the summer Air Force flight coveralls to give him a workman's appearance.

He wrestled the footlocker on the dolly, took it up the cement steps to the base of the tower.

Inside were the cans of Sego, cans of spiced meat, a can of fruit cocktail, cans of sliced pineapple, a couple of cans of Vienna sausage, peanuts, beef ravioli, a thermos of coffee, several boxes of raisins.

There were two containers, white plastic for water, red plastic for gasoline. There was spray deodorant, a can of charcoal light, a roll of toilet paper, a wild game bag, ear plugs, a flashlight, strands of nylon parachute cord, electric wiring, a Stilson wrench, two pair of gloves, a canteen and an Army knapsack — which he was wearing when the body was found later.

There were vitamin tablets and many other items — and there were his firearms and ammunition.

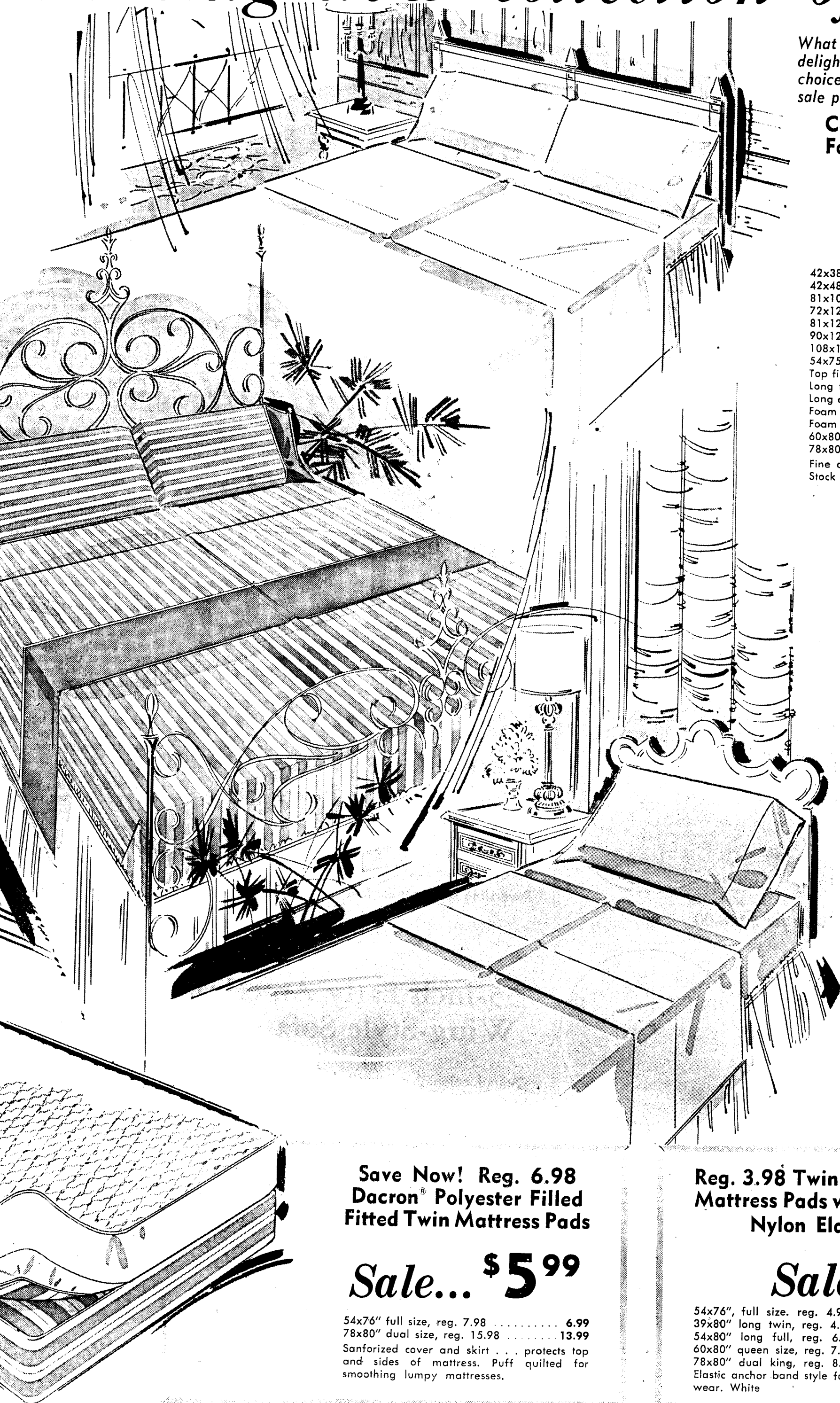
Perhaps as much as 700 rounds of ammunition from which he was later to fire more than 100 rounds. He was a well-equipped infantryman ready for battle.

There's an old soldier's saying that you fight best from the high ground.

Perhaps, as Charles J. Whitman punched the elevator button and waited, his strange, sickened spirit soared. He was on his way to the "high ground" from which he would wage his war on humanity.

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