



## My Queer War

*James Lord*

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**My Queer War** James Lord

**A POWERFUL STORY OF SEXUAL AWAKENING DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR FROM THE MEMORIST AND CRITIC**

In *My Queer War*, James Lord tells the story of a young man's exposure to the terrors, dislocations, and horrors of armed conflict.

In 1942, a timid, inexperienced twenty-one-year-old Lord reports to Atlantic City, New Jersey, to enlist in the U.S. Army. His career in the armed forces takes him to Nevada and California, to Boston, to England, and eventually to France and Germany, where he witnesses firsthand the ravages of total war on Europe's land and on its people. Along the way he comes to terms with his own sexuality, experiences the thrill of first love and the chill of disillusionment with his fellow man, and in a moment of great rashness makes the acquaintance of the world's most renowned artist, who will show him the way to a new life.

*My Queer War* is a rich and moving record of one man's maturation in the crucible of the greatest war the world has known. If his war is queer, it is because each man's experience is strange in its own way. His is a story of universal significance and appeal, told by a wry and eloquent observer of the world and of himself.

## My Queer War Details

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Author : James Lord

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## From Reader Review My Queer War for online ebook

### Martin says

This a beautifully written and fascinating coming-of-age memoir of a young gay man in World War II. He's an aesthete and an aristocrat, and he vividly describes both the atrocities of the war and the gay underworld that existed at the time, probably not found in many history books. He meets both Picasso and Gertrude Stein (and Alice B. Toklas) in wartime Paris.

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### Sketchbook says

Absolute twaddle. Lord's closest friends say this 'memoir' is a haughty toss-off of his rejected '50s novel. He died before the pub party. Good move.

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### Steve Woods says

This is the story of a young gay man who joins the US Army in a half hearted gesture that sees him through a series of odd circumstances deriving from his homosexuality into the Military Intelligence Service and sent to Europe in the rear guard of the invading armies. The whole affair has a decidedly Catch 22 flavour as the absurdities of the circumstances of his military service unfold. The cast of characters are very reminiscent of Joseph Heller's insane tribe.

The pith of the book is held in the author's scathing observation of the conduct of the second string rear end soldiers who have absolute power over the DPs and POW's in their charge and who exercise that power, with malice, brutality and complete disregard for common decency. There is no sacred son here just petty men corrupted absolutely by that absolute power.

It always seems to be the way with armies and has so been throughout history that those who actually do the killing are far more the repository of human decency than those sadists, bullies, opportunists and self righteous non heroes who follow them.

There are interesting observations of Gertrude Stein and Picasso who this young man had the temerity to front, seeking something greater than the humanity that was the sea in which he found himself forced to swim. He was to be disappointed and in the end he begins to come apart facing the incredibly disgusting display his fellow liberators were capable of. A reading here for anyone draped in the flag of unsullied sentimentality that attaches itself to the picture of the liberating American armies.

There is much here in the internal conflict the author experiences in finding himself immersed in unjustifiable cruelty and corruption that I myself felt when serving in Vietnam surrounded by that same army of which I was apart. Equally corrupt and malicious in its operations in rear areas. This filth is generally not the purvey of most combat soldiers whose lives are reduced to a very basic and clear morality, life and death entwined; where even in killing an enemy they can, if nothing else, hold him in respect as a good soldier. The camp followers effused the antipathy of what we were told we were fighting for. The REMF's were the sordid soul revelling in the psychotic surrealism that became our lives.

In the final analysis war, I guess is war, here the grosser parts of its ugliness are evidenced. No glory here, only deep sadness for those who lay in the myriad fields of white crosses spread across western Europe.

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### **J T says**

I am speechless!

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### **Patrick Carey says**

Although somewhat overwritten, the story is worth the read.

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### **Aleksandr Voinov says**

So far, I'm hating the self-conscious, bloated prose. Faulkner he ain't.

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### **Nick says**

Lord may have purposely written this book as if he were the well-read, pretentious 20-something that he was during the period it covers -- if so, it's an interesting device. (I suspect what happened is that he culled from his journals from the time and the editor didn't really do his part.) But it doesn't make the writing any less insufferable. Lord uses alliterative phrases and archaisms to the point that he's a parody of himself. "Anent" in a regular sentence? Seriously?

I stuck with the book to the end because author has a fascinating story to tell, and the arc of the book is excellent. He's also incredibly honest. Hence the three stars -- otherwise I'd give it one star or wouldn't have even finished.

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### **Jeff says**

James Lord left college and volunteered to join the U.S. Army at the tender age of 19. He soon discovered that the U.S. Army, in a time of war, was not going to be an exciting journey into manhood, but a series of humiliating and exasperating experiences that would force him to grow up, like it or not. That these experiences also include him coming to terms with his sexual attraction to other men renders some of his wartime experiences much more painful, and adds a note of hilarity to others. As an historical document, this is a valuable record of queer sensibility more than two decades before "gay liberation," and for anyone who thinks that "gays in the military" is something we've only had to deal with in recent years - well, guess again, Mary!

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## Jim Coughenour says

With a garish pink triangle stretched across Twin Peaks, it seemed like the right weekend for a queer memoir. Unfortunately this one nearly implodes under its own prose. The clotted syntax almost stopped me before I'd started, but Lord is good storyteller once he gets going. The thwarted, repressed romance of the first few chapters, unfolding in the deserts of Nevada, had me on edge – gay novels of the 40s and 50s usually ended in death and disaster (*The City and the Pillar*; *Quatrefoil*). Lord survives. He was, by his own account, a remarkably incompetent soldier yet, if even half of his tales are true, he had luck, integrity and undaunted charm. This is a young man who not only had handsome officers throwing themselves at him, but as soon as he got to Paris, managed to make friends with Picasso and Gertrude Stein. He sent a fevered letter to Thomas Mann, who answered him, only to have his generous reply published here with a couple inserted [sic]s.

Several of the stories unfold like set pieces in an arc of improbable dialogue and denouement, but the trajectory of Jim Lord's war is basically believable. For my taste, though, it wasn't nearly queer enough.

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## Patrick Santana says

A bit florid and name-droppy. Interesting in parts, but not as interesting as I'd hoped.

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## Leon says

A fascinating read about a world I (as a straight person) would not have imagined existed. This is a very personal story about World War II, and that's made it so interesting. We see Lord interact with a range of characters, all too human characters instead of the one-dimensional heroes that we are ordinarily presented with. Fascinating, too, for how a gay man in an era and milieu frantically hostile to gays and lesbians, and a milieu hostile to somehow artistically sophisticated as Lord, navigates and sometimes even (relatively speaking) thrives over World War II.

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## Canice says

It's not him, it's me.

The fact that Lord merited this\* obituary in the NYT says enough about the author and his achievements. I was curious to read about the experience of being a gay GI during the second World War, and this volume both over and under delivered on the conceit.

While it's an intimate examination of one man's experience in the war --and an angle I'd never read before-- the focus shifts repeatedly, and for a memoir, it lacks much of any emotional punch (save for the story of Hanno). I found it a lot more "telling" than showing.

My biggest problem with the book, though, is how overwritten it is. Gah. How many similes, metaphors, ancient Greek, medieval English, 17th century artist references can be piled into a single paragraph before the reader has wandered off on her own path, suddenly, desperately, seeking Hemingway?

\* <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/28/art...>

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### **Nick Mat says**

If you enjoy reading about gay men in history, you will enjoy James Lord's memoirs spanning his WWII experiences in the US, Great Britain, Normandy, France, and Germany. The first chapters reveal a 20 year old boy's aimlessness, and search for meaning and purpose in life, as an ugly, cruel war rears its ugly head ready to swallow a naive American boy. The slightly pretentious, but ambitious use of language of the first few chapters is forgivable, obviously written by a very talented young man in his green years. But as the story progresses, his writing shows that he transformed into a highly sensitive a perceptive writer, who captures all of the conflicted emotions of a boy at war. The images that he paints with his pen are extremely vivid and will stay with you forever, especially the chapters devoted to the aftermath of D-Day in France and the POW camps in Germany. I don't put links to booksellers, as I would prefer to buy books from independent sellers.

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### **Greg says**

What a sensational premise: while serving in the military, the author is recruited into an intelligence division and trained to "pinpoint the shrewd duplicity of others" while at the same time hiding his own sexuality. All autobiographies present obstacles, but this is a real humdinger, a high-concept fiction thriller film perhaps. About the title: it works beautifully on many levels. And the courageous Lord doesn't let anyone stop him from a number of romances, and a few heartbreaks as a result thereof. The writing itself is glorious, the language intelligent: how often does one come across words like 'disestablishmentarianism'? But at the center of the story, we have a soldier fighting among other soldiers. And to James Lord, who passed into another realm in 2009, thank you for this magnificent, honest, beautifully written book.

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### **Xio says**

Entertaining, he's got an amusing viscerality, sort of Genet-light. Very light. Laden with alliteration. I enjoyed reading it probably because I enjoy reading about gay men describing their lusts. Very marginal on actual war/Air Force info but the parts where he is in Boston are very engaging and may drive me to read more about the underground scenes of New England.

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