

# World War II—1939–1945

## Aristocrats: “I Think I Am Becoming a God”

The noble horse with courage in his eye,  
clean in the bone, looks up at a shellburst:  
away fly the images of the shires  
but he puts the pipe back in his mouth.  
Peter was unfortunately killed by an 88;  
it took his leg away, he died in the ambulance.  
I saw him crawling on the sand, he said  
It's most unfair, they've shot my foot off.

How can I live among this gentle  
obsolescent breed of heroes, and not weep?  
Unicorns, almost,  
for they are fading into two legends  
in which their stupidity and chivalry  
are celebrated. Each, fool and hero, will be  
an immortal.

These plains were their cricket pitch  
and in the mountains the tremendous drop fences  
brought down some of the runners. Here then  
under the stones and earth they dispose themselves,  
I think with their famous unconcern.  
It is not gunfire I hear, but a hunting horn.



—Keith Douglas, Tunisia, 1943

Oxford-trained writer Keith C. Douglas served as a British soldier during World War II. He was a tank commander in North Africa fighting against German forces. He was later killed on 9 June 1944 during a reconnaissance mission in Caen, France, following the Normandy landings of 6 June.