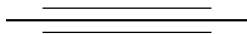


WHATEVER IT TOOK



AN AMERICAN PARATROOPER'S EXTRAORDINARY
MEMOIR OF ESCAPE, SURVIVAL, AND HEROISM
IN THE LAST DAYS OF WORLD WAR II

HENRY LANGREHR
AND JIM DEFELICE

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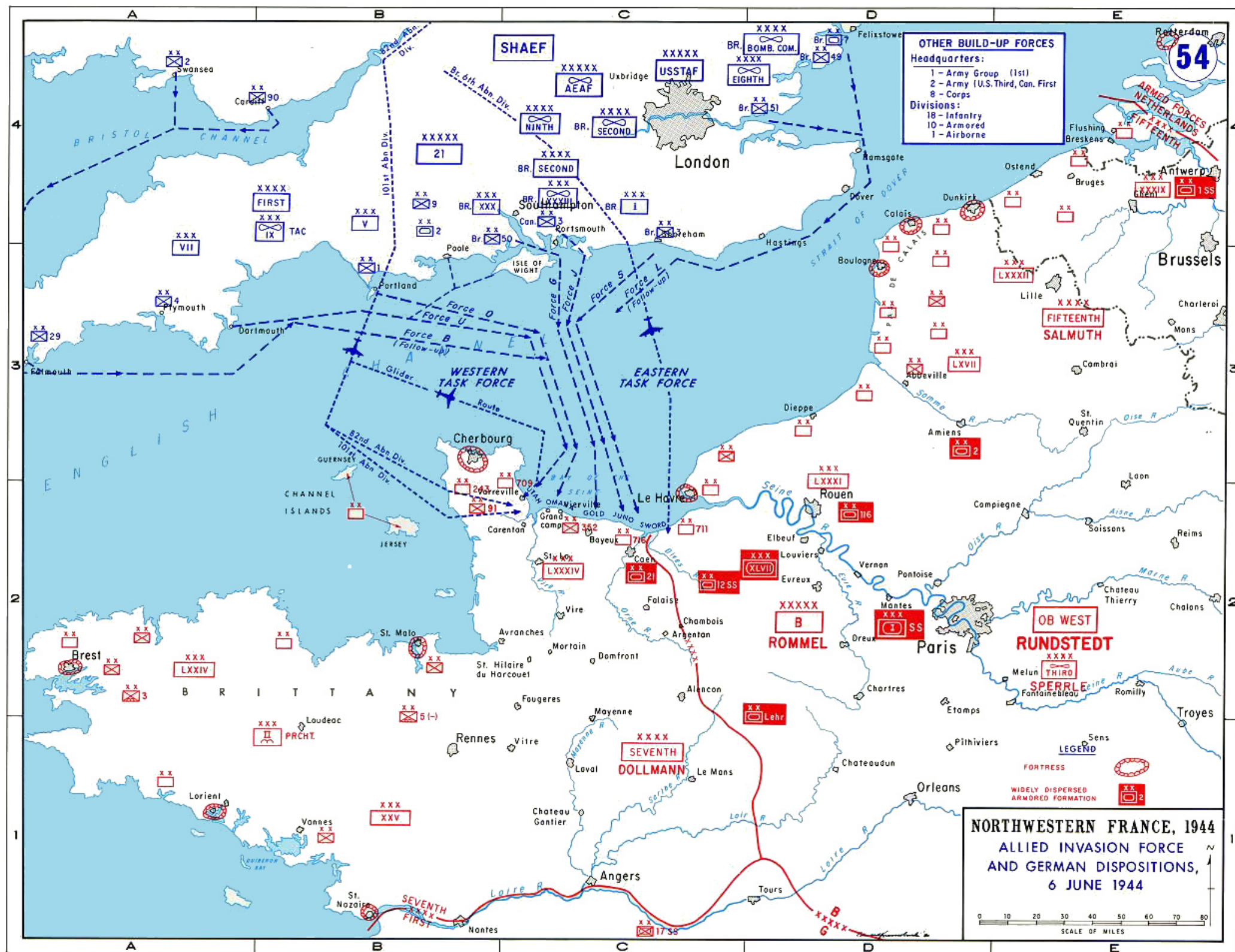
FIRST EDITION

Map by the US Army

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-0-06-302742-8

20 21 22 23 24 DIX/LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Appendix A:

Timeline

MAJOR EVENTS IN WORLD WAR II THAT AFFECTED HENRY

1939

September—Germany invades Poland; Great Britain and France declare war

1940

April—Germany invades Norway and Denmark

May—Germany invades Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, then attacks France

May—Churchill becomes prime minister of Great Britain

June—Italy joins Germany, invading southern France

June—France surrenders to Germany

July—Germany begins regular bombing of England, initiating the air war known as the Battle of Britain

September—Jews in Germany are ordered to wear yellow stars on their clothes, making it easier to persecute them

Appendix A

September—The United States initiates the draft, part of a general mobilization

1941

February—German troops join Italian forces fighting the British in northern Africa

March—Roosevelt's plan to aid Britain, "Lend-Lease," is signed into law

May—German paratroopers assault Crete

June—Germany invades the Soviet Union

June—Mass executions of Jews in the occupied territories has begun

August—The United States and Great Britain announce the Atlantic Charter, summarizing goals for peace following the war

September—Though technically neutral, the United States escorts convoys across the Atlantic

December—Japan attacks Pearl Harbor

December—The United States declares war on Japan; Germany and Italy declare war on the United States

1942

January—German U-boats step up attacks on ships off the Atlantic seaboard

January—American troops arrive in Great Britain

April—German U-boats attack shipping in the Gulf Coast region

May—The last American troops in the Philippines surrender to Japan

Appendix A

June—The United States wins a major victory at Midway over the Japanese fleet

June—The Manhattan Project begins, working on an atomic bomb

August—U.S. Army Rangers see action at Dieppe, France

September—The battle for Stalingrad begins in Russia, a major turning point in the war on the Eastern Front

November—American troops land in Africa as part of Operation Torch

1943

February—Shoe rationing begins in the United States

March—Losses by American troops in Africa lead to a change in command, thrusting Patton and Bradley into key roles

April—While still a high school senior, Henry enlists in the Army as a paratrooper

May—The Allies secure North Africa

July—Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily, begins; paratroopers from the 82nd play a key role in the battle

August—Allied troops take control of Sicily

August—The 82nd Airborne is readied for a secret mission to land in Rome in conjunction with an Italian surrender. The Italians surrender, but the mission is never put into action.

September—The Allies invade Italy; the 82nd joins the fight, by air and sea

September—The Pathfinder Concept, using highly skilled paratroopers to guide mass jumps, is conceived and used for the first time

Fall—early winter—Henry is trained as a paratrooper and demolitions expert

December—Most of the 82nd Airborne is moved to England to rest and restock. One regiment remains in Italy.

1944

January—Eisenhower arrives in England and begins planning the Normandy invasion

January—American troops land in Anzio, Italy

January—Henry completes airborne training

February—Henry ships out for Great Britain; he begins training for D-Day as soon as he arrives

April—Several hundred Allied troops training for D-Day die off Slapton Sands when their unarmed landing craft are attacked by German E-boats

June 4—Allied troops enter Rome

June 5/6—The 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions jump into Normandy ahead of the seaborne D-Day forces

June 6—“D-Day”—the invasion of France—begins

June 7—After securing the beachheads, Allied forces begin to advance inland. The 82nd Airborne helps cut off the Cotentin Peninsula from the rest of France. Troops face the hedgerows for the first time.

June 19—Severe weather covers the Normandy area, hampering the Allied offensive and destroying one of the Mulberry artificial ports

June 26—Cherbourg is declared liberated, though a few small pockets of resistance remain

June 29—Henry is captured in a German counterattack in the bocage south of Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte

July—Critically wounded, Henry is taken to a hospital in

Paris. When he recovers, he is shipped eastward in a boxcar with other prisoners.

July—American forces break through the German lines near Saint-Lô in Operation Cobra

August—The American First and Third Armies race across France

August—Traveling mostly at night, Henry arrives outside a Nazi death camp. Though he and the other prisoners are convinced they will be killed there, they are eventually shipped to another camp.

August—Paris is liberated

September—Sometime this month, Henry begins working in a mine with other prisoners

September—The Allies reach Belgium and the Low Countries

October—The U.S. First Army occupies Aachen, the first sizable German city taken by the Americans

December—The Germans launch an offensive in the Ardennes, throwing Americans back in the Battle of the Bulge

1945

January—The American armies in the Bulge have regained the lost territory and renew their offensive toward Germany

March—Allied armies cross the Rhine

March—Henry escapes from the mines while being escorted back to the prison camp

April—Patton's Third Army drives across southern Germany

Early April—Henry meets a member of the U.S. Third Army, ending his ordeal

End of April/Early May—Henry returns home

Appendix A

May 8—VE Day: the war in Europe ends with a cease-fire at 00:01.
Organized German resistance has ended.

July—Henry and his prewar sweetheart are married

August—America drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively ending the war

August 15—VJ Day—the war is declared over, as the Allies accept Japan's unconditional surrender

September 2—The Japanese surrender documents are signed

Appendix H:

The Toll

Estimates of the total number of people killed in World War II vary, ranging as high as 85 million, counting civilians and those killed in the Holocaust.

The American military lost more than 400,000, mostly men, during the war, the vast majority to enemy action.

According to the National Archives, just over one hundred of Henry's friends and neighbors in Clinton County, Iowa, were killed during the war. This is the official list:

Clinton County, Iowa, List of WWII Soldiers

Claud Adamson, PFC

Maurice B. Allender, S. SG

Victor G. Anderson, Tec4

Louis H. Baker, PVT

William R. Barber, PVT

Allen J. Bark, PVT

Alvin L. Berding, SGT

Melvin C. Bitker, PVT

Appendix H

Laurence L. Boekeloo, CPL
Jack C. Boysen, Tec5
Marcus S. Brough, PVT
Donald J. Brown, PFC
Edward Bruggenwirth, PFC
Clyde C. Bunce, PFC
Donald T. Burke, 2 LT
John E. Burke, 2 LT
Lavern P. Busch, 2 LT
David W. Byers, PFC
George E. Carr, PVT
Theodore F. Chase, TEC5
John W. Clark, PVT
Marvin A. Clark, PVT
Reynold J. Connole, PFC
William F. Cooper, PVT
France T. Dolan, TEC5
Leroy L. Dreyer, PFC
Roy A. Dunmore, PVT
Irvin F. Ehlers, PFC
Harvey R. Fatchett, PVT
Wilber Finkboner, PVT
Lyle E. Fromang, PVT
Albert C. Fugate, PFC
Dean E. Fuller, PFC
Norbert J. Grandick, S SG
Cyril H. Gustavison, PFC
Leon T. Hanson, PFC
Cyril G. Heineman, S SG

Appendix H

Louis V. Heienman, PFC
Louis W. Heineman, PFC
Robert L. Hendricks, TEC4
Edward W. Holle, Jr., PFC
Robert J. Holliday, TEC5
Robert L. Janica, PVT
Aaron A. Kenyon, 1 LT
Herbert A. Koch, PVT
Robert F. Krayenhagen, PFC
Lee B. Lampe, PVT
Vernon E. Laschankzy, 2 LT
Donald W. Lass, PVT
Raymond H. Lenson, T SG
Dale R. Leonard, PVT
Ray W. Magin, S SG
Henry E. Mangelsen, PFC
Daniel Manley, CAPT
Elmer T. McClain, PFC
Laurence P. McKenna, T SG
John R. Meader, Jr., 2 LT
Darwin F. Michaelson, 2 LT
Frank Milota, Jr., PVT
Roger M. Mull, T SG
Marvin H. Munson, PFC
Laurence R. Naeve, PVT
William A. Nelson, PVT
Harold H. Otto, PVT
Roy E. Paulsen, Jr., PVT
Gilbert C. Penzkofer, PFC

James B. Piatt, SGT
Louis L. Pool, PFC
Henry Raap, SGT
Philip L. Ray, CPL
Raymond H. Rehr, PFC
Herbert L. Reisinger, PVT
Hampton E. Rich, 1 LT
Elmer J. Roe, PVT
Robert B. Ryner, S SG
George E. Sander, PVT
Earl E. Schmidt, 1 LT
Roy P. Schmidt, PFC
Aubrey C. Serfling, CAPT
Louis H. Simpson, S SG
Frank J. Sirvid, S SG
Kenneth C. Sivertsen, SGT
William L. Slowie, PVT
James A. Soesbe, 2 LT
Elmer W. Stahl, PFC
Ernie E. Stamp, S SG
Urban P. Stodden, PFC
Herbert O. Stoecker, SGT
Gerald F. Stoltenberg TEC5
Albert L. Strohn, 2 LT
Frank A. Swanson, CAPT
Donald D. Thess, PFC
Cleo E. Thomas, T SG
Frederick A. Thompson, SGT
Mearl L. Toerber, PFC
James F. Torpey, PFC

Appendix H

Francis E. Web, PVT

Virgil H. White, M SG

Clarence A. Wright, 1 LT

Robert T. Yegge, PVT

Gerald M. Zimmerman, SGT

Appendix J:

Further Reading

When we began working on this book, we'd heard there were less than a thousand men still alive who had fought on D-Day and in the Normandy battles. That number has surely dwindled. Part of our goal therefore has been to keep the memory of those men as well as the war alive; toward that end, we hope and trust that readers will want to seek out more information in other venues.

There is no substitute for actually visiting the beaches and surrounding area, including Sainte-Mère-Église and the invasion beaches in France. D-Day and World War II are very much alive there, in countless museums, historical monuments, and plaques. American visitors are often overcome with emotion at the respect and gratitude the French still show toward the soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice freeing them more than seventy-five years ago.

In the United States, the National World War II Museum in New Orleans has artifacts, information, and programs on all aspects of the war; it's especially deep in the area of D-Day. The website: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/>.

The National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Virginia, is an inspiring memorial to the soldiers who fought on the beaches and often features programs with surviving World War II veterans. Bedford and the surrounding area was the home of many of the members of the 116th Infantry Regiment, a National Guard unit that was part of the 29th Infantry, which landed at Omaha, and much of the information at the memorial is related to the 29th, but the displays and memorial are universal. The website: <https://www.dday.org/>.

Immediately following the war, the U.S. Army produced an official history of operations; currently available online, it remains an accessible and informative introduction for general readers. A general readers' guide to these volumes and others associated with World War II can be found at <https://history.army.mil/books/wwii/11-9/11-9c.htm>.

There are countless books, movies, and videos on the war and D-Day in particular. Here are a few that are accessible to readers without a deep background in the war's history. Rick Atkinson's best-selling Liberation Trilogy follows the American army through the European Theater. The first book, *An Army at Dawn*, details the North Africa campaign. *The Day of Battle* details Sicily and the fight in Italy. *The Guns at Last Light* take the reader through Normandy, France, and into the end of the war in Germany. *Mighty Endeavor* by Charles B. MacDonald is an older book that covers the same ground in one volume. Andrew Roberts's *The Storm of War* is a one-volume history of the entire war.

Among the multitude of books about D-Day, Stephen Ambrose's *D Day: June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II*; *Overlord* by Max Hastings; and the longer *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* by Antony Beevor stand out.

Though older than the others, *The Longest Day* by Cornelius Ryan is another great one-volume read. A 1957 film version is considered one of the greatest war films of all time. The more recent *Saving Private Ryan*, while fictional, includes scenes of the D-Day landing at Utah Beach that many veterans consider highly realistic.

For readers interested in a thorough history of the 82nd Division's action in the war, there is no substitute for Phil Nordyke's two-volume set, *All American, All the Way*.

A fine account of the role of Pathfinders during Normandy and beyond is included in *First to Jump* by Jerome Preisler.

Notes

CHAPTER 1: MIDDLE AMERICA

Some of the information about Clinton and its history comes from *Images of America: Clinton, Iowa*, by the Clinton County Historical Society.

While Merchant Marine sailors could earn more than soldiers and sailors in the armed forces, they did not receive the benefits servicemen were entitled to. They were paid only for the time they were working—which meant that if their ship went down, the time they spent in the lifeboat, if they were lucky enough to get to one, was unpaid. Their income could also be taxed; service income could not.

According to a study done by the War Shipping Administration, a seaman first class in the Navy made only \$11 less after taxes per year than the equivalent in the Merchant Marine; a Navy petty officer second class made about \$176 a year more. The value of insurance against disability and injuries tipped the salary balance far in favor of service members, even before the introduction of the GI Bill and its benefits in 1944. Some details of the study are available on the U.S. merchant marine site at <http://www.usmm.org/salary.html>.

There is some disagreement between historians about the actual number of casualties, but it is generally believed that more than seven hundred merchant ships were sunk during the war, with over 8,000 sailors losing their lives in the service. Other casualties, including men captured as POWs, are thought to have topped 13,000. Nonetheless, during and after the war the sailors were often looked down upon by the population at large.

Data on industrial and trade production come from statistics kept by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, known colloquially as “Fred”; see for example the Index of Industrial Production and Trade for United States (M1204CUSM363SNBR).

CHAPTER 2: TRAINING UP

Some of the information on the *Queen Elizabeth*’s background comes from John Shepherd’s history at liverpoolships.org: http://www.liverpoolships.org/the_cunard_white_star_liner_queen_elizabeth.html.

And the WWII Database entry by Alan Chanter: https://ww2db.com/other.php?other_id=44.

Estimates of the number of passengers carried by the *Queen Elizabeth* during the war vary. According to Shepherd, *Elizabeth* made thirty-five trips from April 1941 to March 1945, carrying over 800,000 passengers. Her sister ship, the *Queen Mary*, is said to have held the record for the number of passengers taken on a single voyage at 16,683, topping *Elizabeth*’s best of 15,932 by nearly a thousand. The summer trips typically carried more men.

While Henry wrote home to his parents and Arlene often, only two letters seem to have survived; both are reproduced in this chapter. The letters here have been lightly edited.

Population numbers come from the census; the numbers of service people come from the National World War II Museum.

CHAPTER 3: JUNE 1944

Before Roosevelt, exactly three Democratic presidential candidates had carried Iowa since it had won statehood: Cass in 1848, Pierce in 1852, and Woodrow Wilson in 1912. Both Pierce and Wilson were elected.

The quote “full of menace” comes from J. M. Stagg, *Forecast for Overlord*. Group Captain Stagg was an RAF meteorologist tasked with advising Eisenhower. He was assisted by both American and British meteorologists, who did not always agree.

The quote from Gavin’s speech, which was delivered to the 508th, comes from an account by paratrooper Edward Boccafoglio, archived at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

Some sources indicate that C-53s were used in the air assault by the 82nd Airborne. Essentially an improved model of the C-47, the aircraft differed from its sister ship in only a few significant ways, including the lack of a large door for loading and offloading cargo. A little under four hundred were produced—a sizable number to be sure, but relatively small compared to the output of the C-47, which was considered more versatile because of its cargo door and other factors.

Henry's memory is that his plane and those around him were all C-47s, which agrees with the records we have at hand.

CHAPTER 4: DROP ZONE

Though not on the same scale as the invasion of Crete, the Germans considered the airborne operations in Holland their first massed use of airborne troops.

The battles the first night and days afterward were extremely confusing for both sides, something that is reflected in the firsthand accounts and after-battle reports. As a baseline for sorting them, we have relied on *Four Stars of Valor*, by Phil Nordyke, which seems the best-organized overall account.

Four soldiers from the 82nd received the Congressional Medal of Honor in World War II: Private John R. Towle, Private First Class Charles N. DeGlopper, First Sergeant Leonard A. Funk, Jr., and Private Joe Gandara. Two other soldiers, Lieutenant Colonel Emory J. Pike and Corporal Alvin C. York, received the medal for action in World War I. Staff Sergeant Félix Modesto Conde Falcón was accorded the honor during the Vietnam War.

In *The Longest Day*, Cornelius Ryan mentions an officer saying that he had heard of a Canadian paratrooper coming through a greenhouse roof in their sector. The incident was highly fictionalized in the movie based on the book.

Regarding the battle at La Fièvre: some historians contend that the Germans regained full control of the bridge after June 6, a point bitterly contended by some of the veterans of the fight. Henry was not an eyewitness to the frontline fighting, but his recollection is that the Germans did not succeed in pushing the Americans back once they had

a foothold. The fact that he and the men he was with were not called up to the line would seem to back the contention of the veterans of the fight.

While to this day Henry marvels over his brief encounter with General Gavin and what he said, a number of other GIs reported similar encounters.

CHAPTER 5: HEDGEROWS

In terms of bomb tonnage and even casualties, the V-1 attacks were relatively insignificant compared to the damage done in the earlier Blitz, to say nothing of American and British bombing missions on German cities. A good portion of Allied bombs fell inadvertently on civilians, and there were also raids that deliberately targeted civilian areas, such as (most famously) Dresden.

However, the psychological effect of the V-1 attacks was significant. Some estimates say that a million people left the London area because of the attacks, damaging the war effort by depriving the city of workers.

The Pyle quote is from *Brave Men*. It is also quoted and discussed in depth by James Holland in *Normandy '44: D-Day and the Epic 77-Day Battle for France*.

CHAPTER 6: PRISONER

As explained in the text, Henry was told that the death camp where he was kept was Auschwitz. This is plausible. The rail lines to Poland were still open and American prisoners were being kept in Poland in the summer of 1944. It's possible that the Germans intended to inter him at a Polish camp, but changed plans for some reason. But we could find no documentation to show the basis for that statement.

Henry's description of the train yard and the bombing attack would not fit in with the main camp at Auschwitz, and we believe based on that and other research that it is far more likely that the death camp was in Germany, closer to the mines where he was put to work. However, we cannot rule out Auschwitz, and the lack of documentation does not prove anything one way or the other.

Henry's prisoner of war records at the National Archive erroneously

indicate that he was captured on June 6, 1944, and that he was interned at Stalag 13B in Welden, Bavaria; a notation indicates that the information on the camp came from an outside source, rather than the U.S. Army.

The general description of Stalag 13 matches Henry's memory, as do some of the circumstances, such as the proximity of the mines and the presence of Russian prisoners.

Henry believes that he was sent to a Stalag 12, based on his recollection of seeing a sign with that designation, Stalag XII, upon entering the camp, and what he was told by Army personnel later. That is the only designation he was aware of, until we started working on this book. The designation would place the camp in Saxony, a good distance from Welden, and in an area where there were also a large number of work camps. Stalag 12A was used as a processing center for enlisted personnel, which would also align with his memories.

Based on our research and Henry's memory, we believe that it is likely he was at 12A, processed, and then sent to a work camp and mine. That possibly was 13B, but it would seem more likely that it was a Buchenwald concentration camp satellite administered by the SS, and that the camp notation is simply incorrect. It is also possible that his memory is faulty, or the notations are related to an administrative arrangement by the Germans that obscured the fact that he was at a concentration camp.

The German system of designating prison camps can be confusing. Patton's son-in-law, Lieutenant Colonel John Waters, was imprisoned at Oflag XIII-B in February 1945 after being held in Poland. Though the designation makes it seem as if it was related to Henry's, it was located 120 miles to the north, near Hammelburg. "Oflag" indicated that it was a camp for officers, who were usually housed in a different camp than enlisted personnel. The Germans had different camps for different nationalities as well as enlisted and officers. Captured airmen were usually held in camps run by the Luftwaffe, separately from ground soldiers.

CHAPTER 7: THE MINES

The Geneva Convention is available online at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/INTRO/305?OpenDocument>.

CHAPTER 8: THE WAR OUTSIDE THE FENCE

Statistics on the number of MIAs and POWs are taken from the paper “Former American Prisoners Of War (POWs),” Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning, and Preparedness (OPP&P), by Robert E. Klein, Ph.D., Office of the Actuary, OPP&P, Michael R. Wells, M.S., Office of Data Management and Analysis, OPP&P, and Janet Somers, B.A., Office of Data Management and Analysis, OPP&P, published in April 2005.

The battles at the Falaise Pocket—and especially the Allies’ failure to close the gap at the east—have been a matter for great debate among historians, armchair and otherwise. Whether the Allied commanders were ultimately prudent or overly cautious, the fact remains that a large portion of the German army was killed or lost its heavy equipment as they left the pocket.

Bradley’s sentiments about bombing German cities along the way were included in the contemporaneous journal kept by his aide Chet Hansen. While not necessarily out of character, they were unusually direct in addressing civilian targets. For the most part, Hansen’s notes don’t show Bradley directly referring to collateral damage or what amount to acts of revenge.

Most historians blame the failure of the MarketGarden operation on two factors: first, and overwhelmingly, the air plan was insufficient; not enough forces and supplies could be mustered to take Arnhem, or to hold the areas in general. Second, the failure to quickly take Nijmegen meant that the British could not be reinforced or resupplied from the ground. It also made it much easier for the Germans to defend Arnhem and the bridge there.

CHAPTER 10: WHAT HAD TO BE DONE

After all these years, there is no way to independently research and verify the events Henry describes in Chapter 10. He is convinced that he killed the individuals mentioned in the narrative, and admits struggling with his conscience over the incidents.

CHAPTER 11: HOME

The Patton letter is reprinted on page 660 of *The Patton Papers*, edited by Martin Blumenson, first DaCapo edition, 1996.

APPENDICES

Much of the information about Simone Renaud is drawn from the book *Mother of Normandy*, by Jeff Stoffer, a companion to the documentary of the same name. Additional information is from the book *Sainte-Mère-Église D-Day, June 6th 1944*, by Alexandre Renaud, her son.

The information on Waters's diet comes from Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, which cites Waters's handwritten log.

As noted in the text, much of the information about the prisoners at Berga Two comes from books by Roger Cohen and Flint Whitlock. Cohen especially argues that the two men prosecuted for crimes at Berga Two were treated with leniency because of geopolitical considerations.

Some of the information on MIS-X comes from Lloyd R. Shoemaker's book *The Escape Factory*. The book is one of the few secondary sources detailing MIS-X's efforts. The bulk of the agency's original records are said to have been destroyed immediately after the war.

Some of the information on the Engineers comes from Peter Turnbull, "*I Maintain the Right*"—*The 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion in WWII*, and Alfred M. Beck et al., *The Corps of Engineers*.

The numbers related to war production are quoted from charts in Alan S. Milward's *War, Economy and Society 1939–1945*, a thorough economic analysis of the war at the macroeconomic level.

Acknowledgments

This book could not have been written without the support and efforts of the entire Langrehr family, most especially Henry and Arlene's daughter Kay, who was a tremendous help not only by gathering materials and keeping us on schedule but also by whipping up food at various points to keep energy levels up.

Thanks also to our friends at First Army, who first introduced us.

Debra Scacciaferro provided background research and editorial assistance, as well as helpful suggestions on several aspects of the text.

At William Morrow, Peter Hubbard and Nick "Cadillac" Amphlett provided valuable notes, feedback, and constant encouragement.

The primary sources for this book are a series of interviews and conversations between Henry and Jim beginning in the summer of 2019 and extending to early 2020, including several days' worth of intensive formal interviews conducted at Henry's house in Clin-

Acknowledgments

ton, Iowa, in November 2019, where Arlene joined and provided valuable information and prompts.

Additional family sources and earlier interviews, including a taped speech and a one-hundred-plus-page handwritten reminiscence by Henry in 1994–95, were also critical.

A large number of news organizations have interviewed Henry over the years; those accounts were also valuable as background material.

At times, there were small conflicts between the different accounts Henry has given over the years. If the conflict could not be logically resolved with the help of documentation or outside accounts, more weight was generally given to the earlier version. In cases where we could not immediately verify certain incidents, we have omitted them. Major conflicts and possible errors are noted in the text and notes.

Additional resources and secondary sources included the following:

National Archives

U.S. Army After Action Reports—307th Airborne Engineer Battalion

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