From the Normandy Invasion to the Battle of the Bulge

One Soldier's Story of War

by

George Marlow

of Manchester, Connecticut

interviewed by

Dr. Linda Bayer

Spring, 1999

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Best Wishes
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THIS MONOGRAPH is dedicated to all of George Marlow's children, grandchildren, and their children, in turn, who will be able to read about their grandfather's experience in World War II — the successful struggle to defeat Nazi Germany, rescue the remnant of European Jewry, and protect democracy around the world. George was a decorated platoon leader who was honored with all the battle stars of Europe, a bronze star for bravery, and a Purple Heart for wounds sustained in combat. Lieutenant Marlow participated in the D-Day invasion of Europe in Normandy and — after being told he might "never walk again" — requested that he be allowed to return to his unit, where he participated in the Battle of the Bulge. In the Third Armored Division, which was part of Task Force Richardson, George Marlow fought with General Maurice Rose (the Jewish commander of the Third Armored Division) among other military leaders like General George Patton. General Rose was killed in combat. As a lawyer educated at Harvard University and the University of Connecticut, Marlow also worked as a battlefield Army prosecutor. As a retailer, he was called upon to help procure supplies for U. S. troops. During the occupation, Marlow's foreign language skills assisted in his management of the civilian population in defeated Germany. George Marlow also served as a historian for his unit.

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1 *In Training*

George: I was introduced to the Third Armored Division as the first and only combat unit I belonged to in the Mohave Desert. This was a training area, and I was greeted by my battalion commander with words to the effect that: "You're an ex-retailer. I don't know to what use we can put your services — for combat. Maybe we'll work out something."

I joined the outfit and was made liaison officer for my battalion. The nature of this job was to remain in touch with different units of the battalion and different divisions. My vehicle was not a tank but a jeep with little fire power. This was an assignment. I really didn't have any choice and accepted it. One of the problems was that it got up to 145 degrees in the shade. I inherited a sleeping sickness from my mother and had a terrific need to go to sleep, which I did — under the tank!

I found an empty tank on the premises in the desert. After I fell asleep, a general came by who wasn't from our own division and wasn't gentle with me. He said, "What's the status of your battalion?"

I looked at my watch. I had been asleep for about an hour. "I don't think very much has happened, General."

"Lieutenant, your battalion was wiped out, and you didn't know it because you were asleep!"

This incident literally changed history for me. I lost the job as liaison officer because the battalion commander was informed by the general. Then I was made a platoon leader. I didn't really know much about either job. We were in training. Fortunately, at the time when I was platoon leader we were assembling the division, and I had the opportunity to pick my own men. I was not interested in seeing the men before selection. I only cared about their Fort Knox test scores. A man had to have a certain standard on the exam before I would even consider meeting with him. My five sergeants were all offered battlefield promotions to lieutenant.

Unfortunately, before we left for France, the platoon sergeant became intoxicated while on duty and took a truck. The commander immediately reduced him to private."

Linda: Before we move on, let me ask a few questions. Were you drafted?

George: Oh yes, in New Haven, Connecticut on January 1, 1941. Actually, I was drafted on March 21, but I still had to take the bar exam before reporting for duty. I took the bar and actually passed it in December, 1941. By '42, I was a member of the Third Armored Division, Third Battalion, 32nd Armored Regiment.

Linda: You didn't want to go to Fort Knox?

George: I wanted to go to Fort Cheyenne in Wyoming, which had training for Quartermaster. I felt I was better qualified for that job. However, I was given no choice. I made such an impression in New Haven that the medical officer said: "As long as you're

accepted into the Army by May, you can help me with the examinations, with X-rays of the GI's, and with all the various outfits." All I did was push the button!

Linda: What kind of training did you get in Fort Knox?

George: O.C.S. (Officer Candidate School). I made Second Lieutenant.

Linda: What was it like at Fort Knox?

George: They trained some 70,000 troops. Training in tanks.

Linda: Did everyone get that training?

George: Virtually everyone. A general would come around at some of the firing of five hundred rounds and say: "Only a hundred rounds today? Fire another hundred rounds." A lot of time went by in the intervals. Training at Knox as an enlisted man covered weapons other than tanks. As a graduate of the Officer Candidate School program, I did tanks.

Linda: So, you got to select the men for your platoon?

George: Yes.

Linda: How many?

George: Everyone for the platoon: Ninth Division. Sergeants did some of the paperwork. I had no trouble because my men were little in size (more room for tanks). Everyone else wanted the brawny men.

Linda: But you wanted intelligence.

George: So, when I was relieved of the position as liaison officer, I had a platoon of thirty-six men. In those days, they put six men in a tank — a little bit crowded. I went on maneuvers.

Linda: Did you drive the tank?

George: No. I was in the turret of the tank. I had very minimal training. My job was leadership and shooting. I might add that the best shot during training was a fellow who hit everything he shot at when we went to target practice. In combat, he had a camera in his tank.

Linda: What kind of gun did you shoot?

George: An automatic seventy-five millimeter weapon plus a fifty caliber machine gun. Well, I was a platoon commander, so I led the men to shoot for the whole unit. I didn't shoot. I relied on brain-power to survive. They put this fellow in charge of the library at Fort Knox. So we did training by battalion, platoons, companies. My platoon really won every time. There were informal prizes given.

Linda: When did you go overseas?

George: The next move was to go to the East Coast for further training — to Pennsylvania and then to the area where they assembled the division. The skills that I had as a retailer helped me out. One of the problems the men had coming across the country was dysentery or stomach diseases they had acquired traveling on the train. Someone called in: "I have a job as a retailer that you can perform." They needed 37,000 paper plates and cups, etc., for sanitary purposes on the trains. This took a few weeks. I was not allowed to go any farther than Palm Springs. I was almost at a dead-end until the driver and I were eating our evening meal and waiting for it to be put out on the counter. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the pie-man delivering on paper plates! We had a forty mile-per-hour truck and went lickety-split down the road past Palm Springs and caught up with him when he had a customer stop. We interrogated him.

"Lieutenant, you didn't realize that there is a paper distributor on the outskirts of Palm Springs about twenty-five miles away. In an hour we got there, and he said it was an impossibility but he'd do his best."

"Lieutenant, I have your paper plates." We were the only outfit that had paper plates and cups.

Linda: How long until you went overseas?

George: Fourteen days to go back to the East Coast. We were in Indiantown, Pennsylvania for a couple of months. From there we went to an assembly area near Fort Dix. We rode civilian ships that used to be deluxe passenger vessels. Oddly enough, the Catholic Padre said: "Lieutenant, I have something to offer you. You're having High Holidays, and you may not know that I can conduct the services."

"You came to the right person. I'm not one to conduct the service, but we will accept your offer."

They gave us the stateroom of a general who didn't show up where we could celebrate the High Holidays.

Linda: How many Jews were there?

George: I don't remember, but we had a minyan.

2 *The Invasion*

Linda: Did you know where you were going?

George: It was top secret, but obviously England.

Linda: Was this before the invasion of Normandy?

George: Yes. We trained in England for about a year by the Druid Castle area. We trained, drove tanks, and shot. Another group was also training, and we'd shoot at them in error!

We never knew exactly when the invasion was going to happen, but it could start any day. We had to be ready. We had significant successes since I knew military law. For instance, my platoon sergeant got drunk and was reduced to a private when we were going across the channel. He didn't know I could demote him, but I did. I really wanted to shock him. But I didn't reduce his power.

Linda: Which beach did you invade?

George: I think it was Omaha Red. I was on an LST (amphibious ship) to land the tanks. We were given more information on the ship.

Linda: Was the beach under fire?

George: Oh yes! Artillery fire. The initial beachhead had been well taken care of. We were on the security. We were waterproof. We had a regimental surgeon who was a captain from Hartford and he had a driver. The driver was upset with his vehicle, which got pulled down into a bomb-hole filled with water. The bomb-hole didn't stop us.

Linda: How did you get on the beach?

George: With ten feet, we could maneuver the tank.

Linda: Did you drive?

George: No, I was the tank commander. In addition to being the platoon commander, I was the tank's leader. We had four hundred tanks and lost a total of eight hundred during combat. We drove inland and reassembled and prepared for the first battle. German troops had not retreated. We had a thousand planes overhead. Sometimes, they bombed us by accident. It could be a massacre.

Linda: When you landed, what was it like? Were your people afraid?

George: There was no one without bowel movements in his pants! But we got used to it. We were conditioned in our vehicle. We were told what to expect. I didn't like training in England. We took a two-week course in an English college at Oxford. The professors and wives found out I was from Connecticut. Since their children were refugees there, they had tons of questions.

Linda: How much did you know about the Holocaust in those days?

George: We didn't really encounter any signs of it until we crossed the Rhine River in a place called Nordhausen deep in Germany. All I can say is that I can still smell the burning flesh. There was nothing really left to liberate.

Linda: Were there any survivors? Did you stay there?

George: We were fighting a war and could not stop. We were getting ready for the next place. We made a brief stop, and the odor was unbelievable. War is unbelievable.

Linda: Let's go back to the invasion. After coming ashore, where did you go?

George: Well, not everyone sat in on the briefings. We went along as if we had been informed. Within a short while we were in combat — within hours. I had an unusual experience in training. We had six tanks. Shortly after landing in France, we received supplies. I found the initiating place and targeted the enemy. I was in the front tank and saved two of the six tanks by telling them to change their direction. They were pointing backwards at our own troops! This was our first time in actual combat.

3 Combat

Linda: What kind of weapons did you use?

George: My tanks were used as artillery weapons, but I prevented tragedy by insisting on checking where the tanks were firing. We didn't actually see where they hit, usually.

Linda: Where was this? Argon? Where in France?

George: A town in Normandy.

Linda: Where did you stay at night?

George: In the tanks. Two men had to stay up to guard. We never wanted to be found asleep by either the Americans or the Germans.

Once I was out on a major highway. Two tanks were in my platoon, and the others were in columns. There was dead silence. The crew inside the four tanks in the platoon ahead were asleep. (Not my platoon.)

Linda: Did you have a radio?

George: Yes, but we didn't often use it. It would be a breach of security.

Linda: What did you do?

George: Often I had to go ahead. The leadership came to a crossroads and didn't know what to do since the American tanks had gotten so far ahead.

Linda: In the early days of the war, what kind of food did you have?

George: The military had devised a food unit called the "five-in-one." It was designed especially for tanks. I also got cigarettes (which I didn't smoke). I wanted my French-speaking sergeant to get some fresh eggs. We traded the cigarettes and hard-boiled the eggs so that none would be lost.

Linda: Tell the story about how Patton took your gas.

George: When two armies crossed each other's paths, one would have to give way. Patton wouldn't allow our tanks to go through, and he stole our gas. This prevented us from driving ahead fast to secure victory long before the winter. As a result, we were stalemated.

Linda: He was in the Third Army, and you were in the First Army, right? What general were you under?

George: A Jewish general — Rose. He was a private in WWII and was selected to go to West Point. He became the commanding officer of our unit, and he was fearless, confident, young. Now he's buried in a cemetery in France.

Linda: Did Patton steal the gas?

George: Well, he didn't "steal" it. He outranked everyone in the area. He just moved so fast that he got all of it. There was no argument.

Linda: Did you meet him?

George: I think in England we did. But competition between commanding officers, between tank groups, was fierce — and Patton was no exception. Some leaders had no concern for our lives, but there were others who thought things out.

Linda: What were the first few weeks of combat like?

George: As soon as we hit Normandy, we were in fear for our lives. For example, the Germans had a weapon that could shoot about forty-one miles. And they had this targeted in on predetermined targets where we were.

Linda: Were you always on the move?

George: No. There was some similarity between one of our vehicles and the enemies', so we had to be careful not to shoot one of our own kind — which was difficult considering that many of our men were trigger-happy.

Linda: How far away was the enemy? Could you see the troops?

George: The infantry was very helpful to us. They rode on the backs of the tanks and would direct the fire, generally speaking. But usually you had to move fast in order to get off the rounds before they got you. (Unfortunately, in the present conflict in Serbia and the Balkans, the infantry was not properly or sufficiently used.)

Linda: How did you cope with fear?

George: A little guesswork. One fellow used to cheat at the drawing of broken matches so he could go first with his tank company! He won numerous medals, which were well-deserved.

Linda: You used to draw lots? And he'd always cheat to go first?

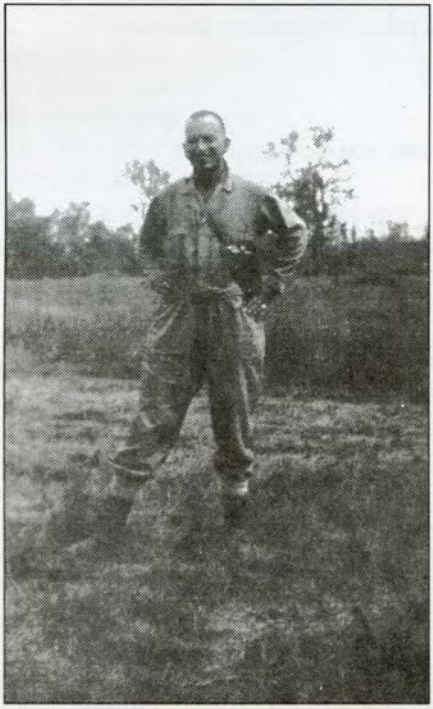
George: Yes.

Linda: Psychologically, how did you cope with fear?

George: You're not only worried about getting wounded or hit but where your next meal is going to come from. We had a mess sergeant who did cater to us, but that wasn't always guaranteed because he could have gotten lost or eliminated.

Linda: Were the soldiers hungry?

George: There was always a need for food. But each tank had a five-in-one kit and was equipped with the capability to cook for five men, but it later turned out to be six.



4 *Wounded in Battle*

Linda: How long after you entered combat were you wounded?

George: I made the landing, and then we had the breakthrough at St. Lo made possible by General Patton. We were in position and would have penetrated the victory line in Germany, but we were lacking the necessary supplies and men.

In the fighting at Normandy, the crucial area was called the "Breakthrough at St. Lo," which is parallel with Paris. We were going to make a turn and go to Paris and then Belgium. However, the fighting was very fierce there because the Germans did not want us to have it. We had a man, an accountant, who was second in command. We had fifty-two tanks and spread them out so as not to expose them. This man was nice but not practical. There was a spotter in a church tower who had access to German artillery and a machine gun. I couldn't alert everyone over the radio. I told everyone to "get the hell out of here!" This spotter saw me and fired. I was hit in the flank, right next to the spine, as I was running. They were very prompt in getting me to medical help. They took me to a helicopter landing spot where they soon transported me back to England.

Linda: How long, at this point, had you been in Europe?

George: Two weeks.

Linda: Were you awake after you were wounded?

George: Oh yes, I was on the ground. I was very conscious. But here's a funny story: when I was in England on the stretcher, the doctors said there was a chance that I might not walk again. A dental officer came up to me and said: "Lieutenant, we have to do something with your teeth."

I said, "Sir, before you do anything with my teeth, I would like you to check out ...." He thought I was there for dental reasons! He filed a report on me.

Linda: How long were you in the hospital?

George: I'd say about ....

Linda: Were you in the hospital weeks or months?

George: Oh, weeks.

George: At the fighting in the Battle of the Bulge, I was with my outfit — of course — and things weren't going very well. There was a town called Spa in Belgium, which was on the way to the coast. And the Americans originally had it, but lost it to the Germans

when they came back. So, we were observers since I had only two tanks at this point with my battalion falling ahead with two out of fifty-two.

As I was explaining to you, one can't worry about surviving in combat. You can't worry about your life. Well, you can lose it. There are many ways in which you can lose it. For example, the biggest fight our armored division (the Third Armored Division) had was with the Second Armored Division, and they had more casualties.

Linda: In other words, you were shooting at each other?

George: Yes, sometimes there would be shooting at each other early in the morning. The signal for enemy attack was the quick firing of three rounds of ammo (whether machine gun, rifle, etc.), and often there was much confusion, much friendly fire.

Linda: Did you lose any people you knew in friendly fire?

George: I'd say I lost the same amount of casualties that any platoon leader had — except in a rare situation with this sergeant who got medal after medal. His tank was called "In the Mood." He was quite a leader. His name was LaFayette Poole. He always insisted on having the short match in order to decide who would go first.

Linda: Did your tank have a name?

George: No, that wasn't really my thing.

Linda: Who were the men that were in your tank?

George: They weren't officers. They were all privates first class, except for my platoon sergeant..

Linda: Did they survive the war?

George: I'd say we had the same need for replacement as the other platoons — and certainly for us. But there was no numerical procedure.

Linda: Was your tank ever hit?

George: Not while I was in it. Generally speaking, if a tank was hit, there would be at least one casualty. The German tanks had three inches of metal plating on the front while ours were only one inch thick.

Linda: How come they didn't make it safer?

George: I guess they were in such a hurry to get the tanks out that they overlooked these

features. These were early tanks.

Linda: Now, you told something to Lev about the Germans not having as much equipment as the Americans.

George: That's a very important point. People often ask me about this issue, but I don't go around giving speeches on the topic of war. We succeeded because we had more. When you have more, you don't necessarily need to have the best. If one of our tanks was knocked out — under normal circumstances —before five in the afternoon, it was very likely that we could have another one by 5:30 with a new crew the following morning.

Linda: You said yesterday that there were enough armored vehicles to stretch from Connecticut to New York.

George: Yes. We had over ninety-two miles of armored vehicles in our division — actually, ninety-two miles of armored vehicles, not just tanks. A platoon is made up of five tanks.

Linda: Not Sherman tanks, right?

George: No, we had all Shermans. This was the most popular, but we didn't train in those tanks because they were badly needed for the front.

General Rose showed up at our division for the fighting in Normandy. We first had generals who were not suited for the job. A general has to be forthright. I didn't realize that they had changed commanders. General Rose showed up at the front of the outpost of our battalion. I was wearing some fatigues that happened to resemble the Germans'. I was at the outpost that guards the entry to the battalion. Normally, I recognized every high-brass officer but since he was new, I didn't know him — especially since he was now wearing the commanding stars for the Third Division. He asked me why I was in these particular fatigues, and I pointed over to the tree where my armored division uniform was drying. He said that these fatigues were no longer to be worn — I guess because that was one issue under the old general whom he had replaced.

Linda: When were you supposed to wear the fatigues?

George: When doing maintenance on the tanks. You know, we were in and out of combat. We were the steamroller part of the group.

5 *Prisoners of War*

Linda: Did you take prisoners?

George: Of course. However, sometimes when we couldn't handle them properly, we would send them back marching with their hands behind their heads with other units.

Linda: Were they then shipped back to prison camps in the U. S.?

George: They had prison camps in Europe.

Linda: Were these prisoners ever killed? (I ask because Saul Berenbaum told me that whenever he took prisoners during WWII, they would show him pictures of their children and beg for their lives. Then Saul said he routinely told his men to kill the prisoners because "taking care of prisoners of war was too much trouble.") Did you ever hear of prisoners of war being killed?

George: I would say yes. Oddly enough, I would have had something to do with court-martials. This was classified under a general court-martial. I had to administer over 250 regular court-martials.

Linda: Were American soldiers ever ordered to shoot prisoners? Would someone be court-martialed if he killed a prisoner?

George: Generally yes. I wouldn't say that GI's didn't ever take it into their personal hands to counter a prisoner who was acting up. A German civilian convicted of rape was sent to jail for six months while an American soldier could be sent before a firing squad. I never had to experience watching this. However, there was one Jewish officer in our battalion who took it upon himself to get German women and made quite a commotion. He was organizing American soldiers to rape German women. He was tried for murder after the war.

I never gave an order to kill a German prisoner. However, some Americans would so that they wouldn't have to deal with the prisoners. In the heat of battle, though, there were cases of accidental shooting of your own troops. The signal was the burst of three rounds of anything. As soon as that happened, little battles would erupt.

After we crossed the Rhine, the German armies collapsed. My job was to destroy the communications of the town so that they couldn't alert the military. Once, I was given the order to take care of four thousand prisoners with only thirty-six men of my own! Since I outranked the sergeant of the military police, I told him to take charge of the prisoners. He said, "You want me to take charge of this many?" Luckily, nothing happened. Many of the Germans wanted to fight no longer. This was late in the war. Germany was collapsing. The next time I went down to division headquarters, the guy in charge of the military police recognized me and wouldn't even salute in retaliation!

6 *A Tale of Two Recoveries: the "K Affair"*

Linda: How long were you in the hospital?

George: They were very fast with the whole procedure. It took about twenty-four hours total to get me into the hospital in England. It wasn't too long before I was mobile. I was in the paraplegic ward. The game Monopoly helped us get through. The players were so noisy that they moved the monopoly game about a mile away! The military would transport us over to the Monopoly game! I was lucky that the guy missed my vitals when he was shooting at me.

I think everyone is basically a coward in combat. However, we had an officer — let's call him K — in our battalion who was so good that they put a camera in his tank. Every time he began shooting, the camera would film. The government now has the footage stowed away in the archives. K was quite a hero. When we crossed the river, K was wounded. He was in my battalion but not my company. Suddenly, K disappeared. We received no word from him. This was long after I came back to my unit. I was made personnel officer for the officers. Sergeant Laganna was in charge. I said, "Sarge, I'm concerned" — but there was nothing more I could do about it. The Pentagon had no paperwork on the matter. We were deep in Germany, and I was still in touch with my divisional headquarters. The sergeant told me that everyone (Washington, K's parents, his fiancee!) wanted to know where K was. I told the sergeant I'd keep the matter under consideration. I was sent back to Paris in a freight car on a four-day leave.

After twenty-nine days of recovery in an American military hospital, I was informed that they wanted to send me to Paris, but I refused to spend the rest of my time doing paperwork. I wanted to go back to the front.

Linda: Could you walk?

George: Oh yes! They kept me on medication until they were sure I could walk. It was a "million-dollar wound." But all this developed after they initially told me I'd never walk again.

After twenty-nine days of recovery, I made travel arrangements.

Linda: How did you get there, by hitchhiking?

George: Yes, by hitchhiking. After thirty-four days of military hitchhiking, I rejoined my outfit. The Third Armored Division was near the Sigfried Line getting ready to make a breakthrough. Since the military knows everything, they were able to locate me back in the proper camps. When I returned, my battalion officer informed me that my replacement had been injured and I was needed back in the platoon.

Linda: When did you go back to your unit, and when did the Battle of the Bulge start?

George: I got back on the 14th of November, 1944, and the Battle of the Bulge started on December 18. The platoon always had casualties, but we had one extra man to make a full complement for my tank. We had thirty-six men, six men to a tank. The fighting started all over again; however, this time I wasn't wounded.

Linda: Let's finish the K story.

George: Lieutenant K was such a good shot, and he was also responsible for his own platoon. You can't keep someone listed as "missing in action" indefinitely. My first sergeant at battalion headquarters said, "We've got to do something about K."

I said, "What for?"

Well, the Pentagon was looking for him. I told the sergeant I wouldn't do anything about it until I got to Paris to visit my cousin for a few days. As I was walking near the Arch de Triumphe, I saw this guy who looked and sounded just like K. And it was K. But the man denied being K! He was having too good a time in Paris.

I confronted him and said, "Lieutenant K, everyone is looking for you." He said, "You have the wrong officer, Lieutenant." But he finally admitted the truth. I reported the incident, but I don't know what else happened.

I was in the hospital for twenty-nine days. Afterward, for all intents and purposes, I was fine. When I was discharged from the hospital, I was completely mobile. I wanted to go back to my outfit, which was just inside Germany. The assigning officer said that my outfit was stalemated at this point. They didn't have transportation, so I said I'd hitchhike. I hitchhiked via military transport through the Black Forest, which happened to be the place to which the Germans would come back a week or so later. I went back to the regimental headquarters to do the paperwork. I didn't report back to the battalion commanding officer because I didn't want to have anything more to do with combat. But on the first day of the Battle of the Bulge, my replacement was wounded and I was sent back to my platoon. They were pretty intact at the time. I found that the military situation was such that I really hadn't been missed much.

Linda: What had they done?

George: There hadn't been much fighting in the meantime because the Allies were waiting for the Germans to make a decision. We waited along our three thousand-mile front — the Siegfried Line. Finally, it happened. On the 18th of December, the Germans penetrated. I forget what the weather was exactly, but it was very cold and there might have been some snow on the ground. War under any conditions is not a joyful experience.

Linda: When you decided to go back, didn't you expect some fighting on the Siegfried Line?

George: Oh yes, we were aware of the fact that the Germans were going to penetrate

somewhere. They had the element of surprise. But with tanks, we had much more flexibility.

Linda: You decided to go somewhere that wasn't safe, right?

George: Originally, I was just sent to do paperwork — you know, court-martials, etc. I had no real decision in the matter.

7 *The Battle of the Bulge*

Linda: At what time of day did the battle start?

George: Actually, the first flight was at five in the morning. Our situation was fighting a defensive war. We did all we were supposed to do, but it wasn't long before I was down to two tanks, and my battalion was down to twelve out of fifty-two tanks. We weren't fighting a very successful war.

The Belgian town of Spa had first been captured by the Americans. It was primarily a summer resort town, but strategically it was located on the coast. The First and the Third Armies were to defend this town. The strange thing was that they were fighting over a town without much meaning — it was a place where Americans had made Coca-Cola. Two years after the war, I discovered the meaning of Spa's importance: its location. But they also wanted to recapture the Coke factory! This is one of the more comical sides of the war.

We were starting to get replacements. The weather was quite miserable. It was a rough winter. If there's anything you learn about tanks, it is that they're hot in the summer and cold in the winter.

Linda: They had no heating or cooling?

George: No. They had air-cooled engines, but it didn't really help much. We later got five Ford engines in line, versus the aircraft engines that were faster.

Linda: What did you wear?

George: One thing about the supplies is that they were always provided — although delivery might not be convenient. Basically, we were fighting a war, and the rear echelon tried to do its job well. Remember, we had more material than the enemy.

Linda: So, they sent in replacements?

George: Yes. The problem with the Battle of the Bulge was that we didn't know where the Germans would attack. Like I said, the front was three thousand miles long. Oddly enough, there was a place on the front where I hitchhiked. This was the Huertigen Forest — the Black Forest of Germany. I found myself in a rather uncommon residential facility — a tent with a wooden floor that had a six by nine-foot foxhole filled with water (this was in November). I was only there for a couple of nights. The Germans were shelling the forest on a regular basis although I was never in danger. Still, the shelling was kind of rough.

Linda: How long did it take you to hitchhike?

George: About thirty-four days.

Linda: Where did you sleep?

George: In various military places along the way. I was hitchhiking and had to go out of my way.

Linda: Did you walk?

George: No, they always had military transportation.

Linda: In the Battle of the Bulge, could you see what you were shooting at, or was it out of visual range?

George: In tank warfare, usually you try to hide yourself from the enemy and then zero in unbeknownst to them when they become exposed. It was rare that you hit your target on the first round. We did what was called "bracketing": we'd shoot in front, then to the rear, until we could pinpoint the target exactly.

Linda: Could you see the German tanks coming?

George: Either that, or you could see where they were resting or sleeping that night. The front itself was not a small spot. Like us, the Germans were lacking adequate equipment to cover the whole situation. The element of surprise, however, was a key to success. We relied on scouts as much as possible. We had to surprise the enemy in daylight.

Linda: Now, where were you physically: inside or outside the tank?

George: There were two forms of radio communication. I had communication with my battalion headquarters and also with each tank of the platoon. We had code-names that we used with each other.

Linda: How many tanks were in your division?

George: Four hundred, but we lost eight hundred in combat — including the replacements. I did most of my training in a Sherman. The Sherman tank had five engines: Ford truck engines working in tandem for propulsion power. We did have additional tanks in our division other than the Sherman, such as light tanks and other armored vehicles. There weren't too many armored divisions in WWII. We were one of the principal ones. Eight hundred were lost.

Linda: Were you inside or outside of the tank?

George: Usually, in the turret (inside). The problem with tanks in the winter was that the tank tracks were made partially of rubber and therefore slippery. They had metal rods to counter this effect. The weight of the tank during normal conditions would suffer slippage. We had not only the enemy to contend with but the weather as well. During the Battle of the Bulge, I had a round of ammo that got stuck frozen in the breech block, and the Army had regulations as to how you were supposed to get rid of it: remove all the personnel from the tank, take a lanyard (a rope) of about fifty to a hundred feet, then clear the whole area, point the gun in the direction where it can shoot the farthest, and pull the rope to discharge the round.

Linda: Did you do that?

George: We did, and it worked perfectly. We did it according to Army regulations. Now, this was in the heat of combat, so we had other factors to contend with.

Linda: What else do you remember about the Battle of the Bulge?

George: Well, as I've already emphasized, we were not only dealing with the enemy but the terrain and the weather. Eating facilities were not all available in the tank.

Linda: Did you live in the tank at this time?

George: No, we always sought housing for shelter while two men would remain in the tank to guard it, and the rest of the crew was in the house. I had a fellow from Philadelphia who was my radio operator; he did all the talking to the battalion commander and my company commander.

Linda: Where were you usually?

George: Usually in the turret of the tank — sometimes, just with my head sticking out, sometimes more of the body. Sometimes, though, we had to leave the tank on foot.

Linda: How long was the Battle of the Bulge?

George: Several months. In other words, it included not only containing Germany but also moving forward and going on the offensive.

Linda: At the end, where were you? Where did your group end up?

George: At the end, we broke out of the area of the Siegfried Line and started to penetrate; we started to move. Towards spring, the fighting had reached Cologne, Germany. This town not only had historical significance but also a bridge across the river, which the Germans consequently blew up before we got there. We went down to an area called

Remagen where we crossed the bridge. Temporarily, the fighting was quite heavy because the Germans held the high ground. We were sitting ducks. However, by this time we also had aircraft overhead, and the Americans did more bombing. We crossed the river on a pontoon bridge because they had blown up the regular bridge. Cologne had another source of significance for the Americans: a big supply of alcohol in the cathedral basement, which the Americans wanted to liberate!

When we crossed the river, I had a special job. The communications telephone system for each town was located in the post office. My battalion commander suggested that I go ahead on a special mission and destroy the communications systems. Then the order came from American headquarters: "Stop that clown from destroying the communications systems." The Americans were using the telephones themselves!

It became more or less a road march until we arrived at a place called Paderborn. Then, one day before V-day was declared, our general — Maurice Rose, the Jewish general who had married a Gentile — was killed.

8 *The Occupation of Germany*

We were in charge of mopping up. We occupied the sectors we had captured.

Linda: What was that like?

George: In civilian populations, tanks are very good for control after a war. No civilian would mess with a tank unless under the cover of darkness.

We got word that President Harry Truman, as commander-in-chief, was coming over to Germany to inspect the condition of the troops. By the way, there are a lot of people who think that Truman was our best president. He was a decent man.

Linda: Do you think Truman was the best president we ever had?

George: By all means. He is the favorite president of over two hundred people whom I've questioned.

Linda: Why?

George: Well, for example, I had a customer who lived in Independence, Missouri for two and-a-half years before Truman first became president. When Truman was running for office, he wasn't anything but a common man. After he made the decision to drop the atomic bomb, many people criticized him because a lot of lives were lost. However, I feel that his decision saved lives.

When Truman came overseas, he was going to inspect the four hundred tanks of our division — two hundred on each side of the Autobahn. We received the order to clean those damn tanks! So, picture five hundred men out on their hands and knees scrubbing the insides and outsides of the tanks — even using toothbrushes! (The men should have used the toothbrushes to clean their teeth.) Truman came on the appointed day, but I'm sure he had no choice in the matter. He came down the Autobahn going sixty miles per hour. These tanks were all shining in the sunlight, but Truman couldn't appreciate the scene because his motorcade was traveling so fast. He did not stop to inspect at all.

After the fighting in Europe was over, the order came for the transfer of Allied forces to the Far East. This news was not well-received because many of the experienced men had been serving anywhere from two and-a-half to four years.

Linda: How long had you been serving at that point?

George: Four and-a-half years.

Linda: Now, where were you then? Where did you end up in Europe?

George: Paderborn. That's where we met up with the Russians.

Linda: When they declared V-day, what did your group do?

George: Well, we were there so they immediately assigned us to do occupation. We patrolled during the daytime and night. We had a full compliment of soldiers.

Linda: What was your particular assignment?

George: I was an officer of a platoon and had platoon duties although it was sometimes my responsibility to be a duty officer — not only to patrol but to take charge. It was not a fun job, but it kept us occupied. Even after the Third Armored Division was rebuilt, I was still doing police work.

Linda: What was "not fun" about it?

George: Well, for one thing, there were a lot of civilians who didn't know that the war was over. They took it upon themselves to interfere with the patrol — particularly at night. It was then that I employed my German language skills by saying things like "schliesse das fenster" ("close the window") or "schliesse die tur" ("close the door"). By using such phrases, I insured that the Germans knew I understood what they were saying.

9 *Homecoming*

We worked in this way until September. By then, the military had acquired enough shifts to be able to send us home. The North Atlantic is very stormy — especially in wintertime. The ships they used to bring us home were not "liberty ships" but "victory ships." They were smaller than civilian ships. They had hinges in the middle so the ship wouldn't split in two when one end was straining the other.

Linda: How long did this process take?

George: After we started out, they changed the date of embarkation. We were supposed to go to New York, but then we went to Norfolk instead. They sent us New Englanders via train to Hartford, Connecticut. In Hartford, the train stayed there for over an hour under armed guard while they were waiting for an open track. I and this other fellow were only nine miles from home!

When we got to Fort Devens, a female major said to me: "Lieutenant, you're the only person in your outfit who didn't sign up for the Reserves."

I said, "Ma'am, haven't you heard that tanks are hot in the summer and cold in the winter?"

So we got to Fort Devens, and it took three hours to discharge us. I met my fiancee, Billie, at East Hartford Boulevard. I got to Hartford by bus. Billie took me to Manchester, and two weeks later we were married.

Linda: Did you think you'd be sent to the Far East?

George: No, that was a trick. Had that been attempted, there would have been a riot. As a matter of fact, the Third Division was later sent to do police work in the Orient. In the meantime, the Third Armored Division had troops that were more recent.

Linda: So, you were discharged?

George: I was discharged as soon as I got to Fort Devens.

Linda: When you were drafted, was it for a certain amount of time?

George: It was for the duration of the war.

Linda: Did the war take less time or more than you originally thought?

George: War seems to go on forever. You're unclean, dirty; your hours are irregular. I had a little more responsibility than a platoon sergeant. Of course, I was also a prosecutor. When we were fighting at Paderborn, I had to lead my platoon because six GI's were

accused of rape in a German town about thirty miles away. I was not the general court-martial officer, but I was chosen to lead the investigation. This town was still under bombardment by the Americans. Seven civilian women went to the center of town where there was a place with a basement stocked with alcohol and sausages. So did the six GI's. They all chose to have a party. When I went there, I couldn't take an interpreter because these were sergeants. However, I did have a sergeant who spoke German, but I didn't have him with me when I first got there. The burgermeister's (mayor's) secretary spoke English, and she agreed to interpret. However, from my own understanding of German I could tell she was putting words in the mouths of the seven women. When I came back to town, she had fled because we were going to come back and do something to her.

One of the greatest things I did in my life, though, was going to a DP camp (formerly a slave labor camp) — a Polish one — that was being liberated. Now, these camps had a ringleader who more or less controlled the inner operations while the Germans controlled the outside. I went to the ringleader, who was a very active man. When I found him, I made him the mayor of the town! It was a small town. As I wrote the report, I simply wrote that this was the best house in town with all the best food, etc., and that the American GI's were simply having a party and got drunk. I'm not so sure that sexual acts weren't performed, but they were not objected to.

Linda: What was the camp that you went to? What was it like? What was its name?

George: It was typical of many camps. I think I told you about Nordhausen. This was a slave labor camp. When I left town, I wrote up the report. I'm sure that they were not prosecuted. Not to mention that the punishment for rape by German law was only six months imprisonment while Americans were sent to a firing squad. I don't know of any Americans who were executed (with the exception of the Jewish officer who got in trouble). They were usually sent back to the States. The Jewish officer made the German women satisfy the sexual needs of the men in his platoon. His lawyer later contacted me in Manchester. I don't think he was ever executed, but he may very well have been punished. I did the investigation for his case, too.

Linda: When you look back, what was the most difficult part of your experience? When you were wounded?

George: Well, I would say that to kill or be killed is always a difficult thing. With all respect to historical differences, the Germans were doing the same thing we were: fighting reluctantly. They had a weapon that could shoot thirty miles away, and they had aircraft that would notify them of our position. (We had the same type of weaponry.)

Linda: How did you know that they were fighting reluctantly?

George: For one thing, it was an unusual war — one where we had control. Many Germans were brainwashed. They believed they were fighting for their civilization.

Civilians would take up guns in order to fight for their own lives and their civilization.

Linda: Did you keep in touch with any of your fellow troops after the war?

George: Yes, I had a fellow officer in my battalion with whom I kept in touch. His name was John Goodin. He was very active in the reunions. He used to call me and beg me to come down to the reunions, but I could never make them. They were always before Christmas. He kept in touch with me until he died. I admit, I wasn't the perfect correspondent. He was a very nice fellow; a lawyer down in Tennessee. We had a lot in common — not just because of the Third Division but also intellectually. He knew that I was the legal officer of my outfit. He died in 1999.

10 *Readjustment to Civilian Life*

Linda: How was your adjustment to civilian life after the military?

George: The only problem was the reluctance of people to realize and appreciate what we had done. We had held weapons in our hands with an aim to kill. And this was not our cup of tea. Many Americans also had to fight in rough terrain and all types of weather.

Linda: Did you have nightmares after the war?

George: Well, for one thing I wasn't exposed to gunfire at home. I've never been excited about going to war movies. I went to a few, but I didn't feel comfortable there. Unfortunately, I never had occasion to see every one — with the exception of Saving Private Ryan, which was an exaggeration.

Linda: What was wrong with the film Saving Private Ryan?

George: Well, for one thing the depiction of the invasion. We had more of everything than was indicated. The Germans had no planes in the air. We had more. There wasn't an inch of ground that didn't have something on it. We didn't have enough real-estate to do our jobs properly. In the movie, an infantry platoon is shown taking on a company of Germans, including tanks. They had support, but not much. They had plenty of artillery. You can say that we had a lot, but we weren't as effective due to space limitation. In other words, we weren't unloading tanks from landing ships with no opposition. There was a lot of opposition, and we didn't know what was what.

Linda: Did you write home during the war?

George: Of course.

Linda: Did you get letters?

George: Yes. But the problem with my letters was that no one could read my handwriting. We weren't able to disclose any secrets. One of my jobs as an officer was to censor the mail.

Linda: What did you censor?

George: What we were doing.

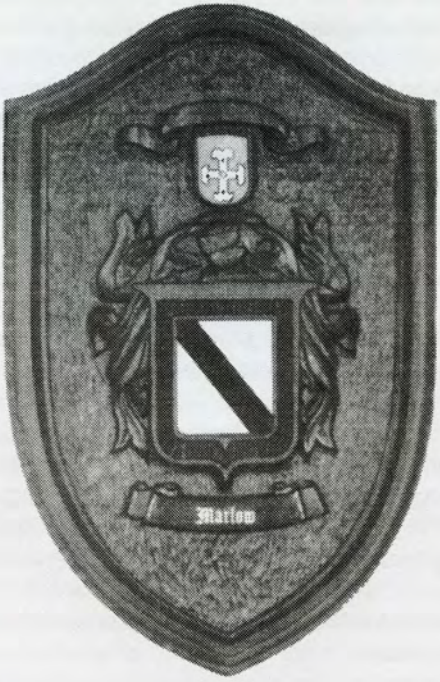
Linda: So, you took out the names of places?

George: Well, there would be identification on the envelope. There weren't many problems with it, though.

The biggest difficulty for the average American soldier is learning to kill.

Linda: How did you do that?

George: Kill or be killed. The person who pulls the trigger. It wasn't all shooting. We ran into situations where German civilians wanted to surrender, and we were put in charge of taking prisoners.



11 *In Retrospect*

Linda: How did the war change you personally?

George: At first it took me a long time to kill, but then it took me a while to learn that American civilians were not the enemy — like those who were not subjected to the draft or not involved in anything but making profit from the war. I think the average GI came out a better citizen after the war.

Linda: In what way?

George: He learned to accept the true nature of war: what it stood for. He learned that he wasn't impregnable as a human being. He learned that the enemy was also human. We always wondered how soon we were going to get out. It was tough. We returned to America on a civilian ship. GI's who were running the ship — who had become civilians — turned around and sold sandwiches to us for a dollar a piece. They took the food that was allocated for us and sold it to us. This type of corruption constituted the kind of welcome with which we were greeted at our home-coming.

Linda: When you came back to Manchester, was there any kind of welcome?

George: My parents hung a sign from one end of the store to the other, which read: "Welcome home, George."

Linda: How long did the sign stay up?

George: Quite a while.

Linda: Did your parents write to you during the war?

George: Yes. So did Billie, my bride-to-be. She could never understand why I didn't want to get married before the war. What she didn't realize was that the life-expectancy of a tank commander was eight seconds in combat.

Linda: She wanted to get married, but you didn't?

George: Well, I made excuses in various forms. I just said that I didn't want to get married and put the blame on me.

Linda: What was the truth?

George: The truth was that a lot of GI's got married before going overseas.

Linda: How long had you been going with Billie when you left for the war?

George: A substantial length of time. I don't remember exactly. We were engaged to be married. And then I came home, and the rabbi got the full fee for performing the wedding. I never forgave him.

Linda: Who was your rabbi?

George: I don't remember. He was from Hartford. It was Billie's choice.

Linda: Did you think you were going to survive?

George: Chances of survival were very limited. One day you could be alive, and the next day you could be dead. Our division lost eight hundred tanks. If a tank with a five-man crew was hit, usually four men would be dead.

Linda: So, you lost approximately half the soldiers?

George: I'd say that I was very lucky. I was always looking for trouble because that was my job. I haven't told this story in enough detail. For example, during heavy fighting we crossed an intersection in Belgium many times. That was the point where my battalion got down to twelve tanks, and I was down to two tanks. Since my superior no longer had a battalion, he left to help out another one. That was the kind of man he was. Before leaving, he said — in his high, squeaky voice — "Lieutenant Marlow, I'm saying goodbye to you, but I'm sending you to help an infantry commander in the general area. There's a company commander from our division who will meet with you."

I get up to this area, and this guy had twenty-five cooks with weapons. He had two paratroopers from the 101st Airborne. They were like an army by themselves. The position was being attacked by two German tanks. I had a consultation with the airborne and company commander of the cooks and bakers. We decided that we'd let the German tanks come into a position where we could hit them successfully — which was nine hundred yards away. They could reach us from three thousand yards. As I told you, I had a brilliant crew. These fellows, under the cover of darkness, put our two tanks in the only two houses — as a disguise. The only things sticking out were the guns. Everything else was covered by shrubbery. When daylight came, we could see the German tanks within our nine hundred-yard range. They hadn't moved. We knew we had a fighting chance. However, we couldn't eliminate them from their front. We'd have to wait to get them from where their tracks were. Every time a German tank retriever would come around and try to move these tanks or fix them, we could shoot the tanks since they were already zeroed in and would just keep dropping rounds until this position was no longer viable.

In the meantime, the place that I left — the central place — had no real defense. It had been overrun. I wouldn't call it a disgrace but one of the debacles of the fighting. We

really got plastered there. I was maybe three miles down the road, and there was no attempt to hold that position. This infantry commander called for help, and my battalion commander selected me because I had more tanks than anyone else.

Linda: So, you think that the determining factor was that the Germans had better technology but we had more?

George: No, I don't know if you realize the resourcefulness of the American soldier. He was resourceful as hell. I mean, I was not in the tank when they were shooting. I had a gun loader and did not want to expose anyone else. We were able to observe, and we did a job on those two German tanks — for whatever that was worth. My battalion commander was there, and my two crews were intact and went on to the next project. We couldn't have done it without the help of the airborne troops.

Linda: Were there any men who couldn't psychologically handle the battle?

George: I'd say there were a lot, but conditions allowed you to face reality. Particularly in my platoon — the men were so intelligent. They reacted to every situation. As far as combat is concerned, they were far brighter than I. But I had my platoon sergeant for the entire war. He would have been given a commission, but he had gotten drunk in England and been demoted to private. When we crossed the channel, I had all the authority. One of the great things about the military is that if you know all the regulations, you can do things you can't achieve otherwise — like in the case of that sergeant. I had the authority to elevate him to staff sergeant without the commanding officer's permission..

Linda: At the end of the war, what was your rank?

George: I started as private. Then went to OCS. I got a battlefield promotion to First Lieutenant in Europe, which wasn't that uncommon. I don't think I should single myself out. I owe all the glory to my crew.

Linda: What medals did you receive?

George: All kinds of medals. I got all the battle stars of Europe. I got a bronze star for the episode at the Battle of the Bulge — the breakthrough at St. Lo — for heroic achievement. I also got a Purple Heart.