CECI L’S SOLDIERS:
STORIES FROM THE
WORLD WAR II GENERATION

By Jenifer Grindle Dolde
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In the quieter days before World War II, the pace of life in small towns and on farms in Cecil County continued much as it had since the turn of the century. For the boys and girls who were born or came of age during the 1920s and 1930s, the Great Depression affected them in ordinary and profound ways. Families cut back, pitched in, and worked hard to maintain their simple way of life, but this was nothing new.

What the young people of Cecil County did not anticipate is that the challenges they faced during the Depression would prepare them for a time of national crisis. War gave every citizen a new and even more challenging role. They responded reluctantly, bravely, eagerly, fearfully, and patriotically. Little did they know how much their lives and their home would be changed.
QUIET COMMUNITIES

“I always say about the Depression, if you never had it bad, how do you know when you’ve got it good,” mused Wes Pusey. “We got along. We didn’t really notice it was bad, because everybody else had it bad.” Pusey recalled that even though everyone kept to their own community in the 1930s, those communities were close-knit. At that time the town of Colora, a few miles from the Pusey home, had a canning house, two grocery stores and a warehouse. If the family could not find what they needed there, Rising Sun was not too far away. Pusey even found part-time work in the local canning house, until he went to work at the Holtwood Dam when he was 20 years old.

The town of North East, was a “bedroom community” before World War II, Nick Demond remembered. Many people worked in Wilmington, Aberdeen or Elkton; his father worked for the Veterans Administration at Perry Point. Nevertheless, the town provided for most of its residents’ needs. From one end to the other, Main Street had a service station and car dealer, a bank, a movie theater, a barber-shop, Cramer’s Department Store, the firehouse, a snack shop, a drugstore, a bar and pool room, the Hotel Cecil, W Ingate’s Hardware store, a shoe shop, the post office and numerous grocery and dry goods stores. North East was able to support all of these businesses and more. “I don’t know [how] they managed to survive,” Demond reflected. “It’s amazing, but then everything was handy for us. I mean you would walk and they would also deliver groceries.”

Otis Ferguson grew up in a section of North East called “Frog Town,” where his parents and their four children lived together with his four cousins and their parents, who had fallen on hard times. Otis’s father worked at the basket factory and for Walter I. Smith at his warehouse and coal yard. The three Ferguson boys all found jobs as teenagers. At 16, Otis quit school, lied about his age, and went to work as part of a maintenance crew for the Pennsylvania Railroad. The job only paid 25 ½ cents an hour, so he found other part-time work delivering papers. In the fall, he was laid off for the entire winter. After several years at the railroad, Otis began to look for more regular work. He also joined the National Guard at the Armory in Elkton.

RAILROAD TOWN

“Perryville got hit hard [by the Depression], it was a very active railroad town,” Joseph Lofthouse recalled. His father had a job working on steam engines and was laid off, along with many other railroad men. On what the locals called “Boxcar Avenue,” there were twelve sets of track leading into a roundhouse with a turntable, where the freight trains switched tracks. A few the railroad cut back its workforce, men took any job they
could find. "My father laid brick in the Perryville High School...when they built it, for a dollar and a quarter a day — nothing." Lofthouse's father sometimes walked across the bridge to Havre de Grace, where he labored for a contractor. The hub of downtown Perryville was several blocks lined with grocery stores, a barber shop, the newsstand, a shoe store, a drycleaners, the Methodist Church and a three-story boarding house. Front Street, where the Lofthouse family lived, was a "beautiful little street lined with big trees," but the unpaved, dirt streets had to be sprayed with oil in the hot, dry days of summer to keep the dust down. "I know now why Mom was always on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor," said Lofthouse. The oldest of ten children, he did his part to help the family from the time he was 13. "We were poor, most people were. It was tough. If you had fried potatoes and onions to eat, [you] considered yourself lucky," Lofthouse observed. "I had to hustle personally for every nickel I had. If I made a dollar, Mom got 90 cents of it." A young man, he earned money in any way possible, cutting grass, shoveling snow, hauling garbage, delivering bread, collecting coal and carrying special delivery letters. Every nickel counted when a loaf of bread was 10 cents and a can of beans or tomato soup was five cents. "So, for 30 cents you could feed a family at one meal, it's a fact." Lofthouse left school after 10th grade, and eventually went to work at the hosiery mill in Elkton in 1938. The next year, he signed up with the National Guard so he could earn $13 every three months. Lofthouse fondly remembered his childhood in Perryville and his friends, the "Boxcar Gang." Beginning in April and through the warm days of summer, the boys found time to jump off the cement wharf in their old, cut-off pants for a swim in the Susquehanna River. They roamed the streets of Perryville on scooters made out of shoe roller skates attached to the bottom of an orange crate and played marbles in the dirt. In winter, when the Susquehanna froze solid and thick, the boys would skate on the River, using a piece of cardboard as a sail to push them out to the middle of the river, underneath the railroad bridges. The railroad was their playground, and the Boxcar Gang climbed into and on top of the cars, sometimes running the full length of the train before jumping off to evade the two town policemen. "We were the last of the Huckleberry Finns," Lofthouse said wistfully.
FARM BOYS

By the time the stock market crashed in 1929, falling crop prices, mortgage debt and a shortage of cash had already made times tough for farm families in Cecil County. Ned Lucas's family moved from Virginia in 1925 to rent a farm near Rising Sun. "Back in those days they called it sharecropping. It was a fifty-fifty proposition and they furnished the feed and the fertilizer and the seeds and stuff like that and we did all the work. And they divided [the profits] half and half." The Lucases grew wheat and field corn, along with sweet corn and tomatoes to sell to the local cannery. The only other cash came from marketing the milk from their dairy herd.

Ned Lucas's mother saved money by making clothing from patterned cotton feed sacks and cutting the children's hair herself. Every child had a job on the farm: milking, doing dishes or helping out in the fields. Until the war came, the farmhouse did not even have telephone service or electricity. Ned traveled to school by horse and buggy. Thinking back, Ned did not feel it was a hardship. "Well, we really didn't think anything about it because we had plenty to eat and we always had a big garden. Mother used to can stuff. I mean the basement would be full of canned stuff. We were poor, but we didn't know."

James McCauley's family owned their farm near Leeds, where they raised grain crops using horse-drawn implements. Most of their livelihood came from produce— strawberries, sweet corn, cantaloupe, watermelons and sweet potatoes— which they sold from door to door, first in a wagon and then in a 1925 Ford touring car. "We raised what we needed I guess as kids on the farm, and always had chickens and in those days you could take eggs to the store for groceries." The family seemed to get by, until tragedy struck. Jim's father died in 1931, and then his mother in 1937. The two young men managed on their own. Jim worked on the construction of Route 40 at North East and then at Triumph Industries, while his brother worked at the Marley Paper Mill in Childs. In 1940, they sold the farm and moved to Elkton. "We were there until such time as Uncle [Sam] said come visit me on a permanent basis."

BUSY MAIN STREET

When the Depression hit, Edgar Startt's father lost his farm near Chesapeake City. The family moved to Main Street in Elkton, a bustling commercial and residential section of town. On side streets and right along Main Street, families lived in double houses and in single-family homes, within easy walking distance of shops, restaurants and entertainment. Downtown Elkton boasted the usual neighborhood grocery stores but there was also the Elk Restaurant, the New Central Hotel and Theater, the Ritz Hotel, a movie theater, a gas company, and even a Packard car sales lot. For many families, the benefit of living in town was that everything was close by. "I never had a car in my life, my family never had a car," Jack Deibert noted.

The Deibert family lived on North Street until they rerouted the railroad right through their lot. They moved to a house on Landing Lane, and then to a double house next to the Methodist Church on East Main Street. At one time his father worked as assistant clerk of the court, but in the 1930s he struggled to find...
work. "When the crash hit he was at one time selling men's socks," Deibert recalled. But with grandparents close by, the family managed. "Back in those days you went to Grandmom and Grandpop's every Sunday...and had dinner. Everybody used to do that back in my day."

Ralph Rothwell lived on West Main Street in Elkton, and for his family, the Depression was "really, really tough." His father, a carpenter, was out of work. "We had a rough time. Of course, everybody did." While Rothwell's father kept busy around the house, his mother took in washing and did ironing for extra money. His brother graduated from high school at 17 and went right into the Navy. Rothwell worked as a clerk at the A&P grocery store on weekends, within easy walking distance of home. Ralph McCool, who grew up on West High Street, also found a conveniently-located weekend job as a soda jerk at the Elk Restaurant on Main Street.

Edgar Startt worked the most lucrative Elkton job: chasing wedding couples. Elkton's location by road and by rail, combined with no waiting period for marriage licenses or blood tests, made the town the "Marriage Capital of the East" by the 1920s. Marrying ministers such as the Reverend Edward Minor hired enterprising young men like Startt to corral young couples and direct them toward his Main Street storefront. Startt staffed a shack on Route 40 at the Maryland-Delaware line bearing the sign "Marriage License Information Given," catching customers traveling by car. "When I was chasing wedding couples I'd do it after school and during the summer. I used to make at least $100 dollars a week." During a time when money was scarce, Startt "paid the rent, light bills and all of that."

**A BIG TIME IN TOWN**
“Friday night and Saturday night, it used to be a big time in town,” Joe Lothouse recalled of Elkton. “We’d line up along that old wall there on the street, sit there like a bunch of crows talking, have a big time, no fights or anything, we were all local people. Friends would come by, little girls could walk by, they’d be safe because we knew them all.” The movie theater in Elkton was a popular spot, but there were theaters in Perryville, North East, Port Deposit and Rising Sun also. “I used to go to the movies all the time,” remarked Ralph Rothwell. “Of course it was only 15 cents. Saw all the shows.” As the young men grew older, the Armory off of High Street became the center of activity. Ralph McCool remembered: “The motto was, ‘Join the National Guard and make the Armory your clubhouse.’” There was a bowling alley in the basement with two lanes, a lounge room where the Guardsmen gathered to play cards and socialize, and it “had a little canteen downstairs [where] they would sell the sodas and candy bars and that sort of thing.” Rothwell commented, “In the wintertime, they always had basketball going on and they always used to have big dances, they had name bands come down there.” Admission to the dances at the Elkton Armory was $1.50 a couple, but free for members of the National Guard. Nationally-known bands such as those led by Guy Lombardo and Paul Whiting played there about six times a year. “The dances down there were terrific,” declared McCool. “I spent a lot of time at that Armory, a lot of time.”

With shopping, work and entertainment close by, there was no reason to travel far. “People didn’t go any place, you know. They really didn’t. Everybody stayed within their community,” McCool said. Joining the National Guard was an easy way to earn a dollar a week, to get cheap entertainment, and to spend time with old and new friends. Those who joined the Guard in the 1930s never expected to be soldiers.
JOINING UP

Some Cecil County boys joined Company E of the National Guard for the camaraderie, like Ralph Rothwell. “It was more like a fraternity then. Everybody knew everybody.” His friends’ encouragement led Rothwell to join in 1937, right after high school. The obligations were not too demanding: drill every Monday night at the Armory and spend two weeks each summer at a camp such as Fort Ritchie in western Maryland or Fort Drum, New York. Ralph McCool even fibbed about his age when he joined at 17 years old in 1935. Initially, Joe Lofthouse joined the Guard for practical reasons. “That $13 [every three months] is pretty handy in 1939 for a young man and most of my young buddies had joined E Company.” Jack Deibert had practically grown up in the Guard. “My father was a member of Company E...and he would go away to summer camp...he took me along as the mascot, which I loved.” In 1935, at age 18, Jack joined up himself. He took his discharge in 1937, but reenlisted in October 1940. “I don’t know why,” he confessed. “Well, all my friends belonged anyway.”

As the war continued in Europe, young men began to expect that they would have to serve in the military. Many considered joining up with their friends and serving their time, rather than be drafted. For Edgar Startt, the decision was almost a whim: “I had the car all packed and ready to go to Florida on vacation and I met all the boys downtown, talking about going away for a year...So I said, ‘I’ll walk over’ and I went over to the Armory and signed up...that night.” Facing the draft and the unknown led more than one Cecil County boy to the Armory in Elkton. When the draft started in 1940, Ned Lucas had just turned 21. “I was just at the proper age, so I got a draft card, draft notice and I went and was examined and I was told I would probably go in April of ’41.” Word soon spread that the National Guard unit in Elkton was about to be inducted into federal service. “I was about to be drafted and my friend’s number came up and my number came up at the same time...We wanted to go together...so I enlisted in the National Guard,” recalled

29, LET’S GO!

By Joseph H. Ewing.
Wes Pusey. “Quite a few enlisted at that same time.” For Ned Lucas, it came down to the wire: “On February the 2nd 1941 my brother Harry and a boy from the next farm we were discussing this and that about the service. So he said, Why don’t we go down to Elkton and sign up. We have to sign up for three years but only one year of it is active duty.” The group drove down to Elkton from Rising Sun and signed up. When they reported back on the morning of February 3rd, there was a flag-changing ceremony signaling that Company E had become part of the 2nd Battalion of the 115th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division, United States Army.

BECOMING SOLDIERS

“We never planned on being soldiers,” Joe Lofthouse stated. Remembering his own decision to join in 1938, Jim McCauley had the same viewpoint: “None of us had any idea we were going into war either, ask kids you don’t think about that.” The younger men formed the core of the company, since other members were either too old or unfit for the Regular Army. “Our company lost I’d say 50, 60 men at Elkton Armory that didn’t pass the examination,” noted Otis Ferguson, a Guard member beginning in 1938. “So we had to rebuild again.”

The new recruits were immediately issued uniforms and began to learn basic soldiering. Ned Lucas’s uniform fit so badly that his mother worked until 2 o’clock in the morning to alter it. His brother was issued a World War I uniform. They returned to the Elkton Armory in these unfamiliar clothes, and “the rest of the day we spent learning how to walk.” For a couple of weeks, Company E drilled all day at the Armory, and the fledgling soldiers returned home each night to sleep in their own beds. At the end of February 1941, all units of the 29th Division were ordered to report to their new headquarters at Fort Meade in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

The men arrived to cold winds and freezing temperatures. “That was one of the biggest surprises in the whole war, as far as I’m concerned,” remembered Ned Lucas. “The barracks wasn’t anyways near complete…They didn’t have any actual siding on them…quite a few nights before you’d go to sleep you’d have to take a broom and sweep the snow off the blankets…We pretty near froze to death.” At Fort Meade, the boys of Company E participated in a 13-week Mobilization Training Program. This infantry training focused on marching, using a rifle and learning hand-to-hand combat. “We used to say [that in] the infantry, you got the dirty end of the stick. We’re the men up front, we’re carrying the fight…You got to learn to protect yourself, you got to learn your weapons,” remarked Joe Lofthouse.

From Fort Meade, various units traveled to other military bases for additional training, much of it using dummy equipment. This was nothing new to men like Lofthouse who had been in the Guard for several years. “I [had] seen an old 1934 Army truck with a sign on it, ‘Light Tank,’ You had a mortar section out there in a given spot. And what it was, was a damned piece of a rain spout, simulated 60 mortar. You had a clothes prop up on two little twigs: light machine gun. I’m serious about this. We had absolutely nothing and the German Army at that time had I thought one of the best equipped, best armies in the world.”

In August 1941, the Division was
sent to Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia and then to Fort Bragg, North Carolina for maneuvers, in which the Army divisions responded to tactical problems. Although the transition to the Regular Army was complete, most of the men believed what the popular song by Mitchell Ayres said: “Goodbye Dear, I’ll Be Back in a Year.”

PEARL HARBOR

Maneuvers abruptly came to an end in December of 1941. Company E was traveling north in trucks and had reached lower Virginia. Jim McCauley set the scene: “We were just coming back from maneuvers in Carolina, December 7th. And the bus drivers I think had gotten tired, they’d been driving quite a while and they pulled off. Boys come running out of there with newspapers.” Ned Lucas continued the story: “I remember the Colonel pulled alongside us. He said, ‘Boys...it don’t look like you’re going to go home for a while.’ And somebody mouthed off and said, ‘Why not?’...And the Colonel said, ‘The Japanese are attacking Pearl Harbor.’”

The men were immediately struck by the knowledge that their lives were about to change. For some, their year was almost up and they thought their active duty was over. “Everybody was looking down. Why what is going to happen to us now?” Lucas remembered. That night, Jack Deibert recollected, the men gathered around portable radios and heard the details of the attack. After the United States declared war, the message to soldiers came through loud and clear, according to Joe Lofthouse: “They put the clamps on us. You’re in for the duration plus six months. So none of us got out.”

“We got back to Fort Meade the next day. Here are all the parents and wives and girlfriends and all, weeping and gnashing teeth,” said Deibert. The men received a short leave, but had to remain within 100 miles of Fort Meade so they could return at a moment’s notice. When the leave was over, Company E reported to the train station in Elkton. They were sent down through southern Maryland to Virginia, where “they loaded us on an old barge and tug and took us over to Norfolk.” Their mission was to guard strategic points along the coast at Norfolk and Virginia Beach, and to watch for German submarines, which “they were afraid...would go in and get into the Navy yard there at Norfolk,” Lucas noted. Ralph Rothwell’s section was assigned to guard an electric plant on the beach in winter weather. “We used to walk up and down the beach, we didn’t have anything else to do.”

In the spring, the Division moved out by foot and by truck to Fort A.P. Hill in preparation for “Carolina maneuvers,” which began in early July. Training intensified as the commanding officers attempted to make the war games as close to combat as possible. This time there were no base camps, fewer rest periods and the men tackled complicated maneuvers such as river crossings. In August, the men were sent to Camp Blanding, Florida. Lucas thought the worst of it was over: “They took all those dirty fatigue clothes that we'd had all through the Carolinas...and gave us all new suntan, summer uniforms...So we thought we were in high heaven then, the thing they told us is that we're going to be a training division so that really suited us.”

SHIPPING OVERSEAS

“Pack up, we're moving out” the men were ordered on the morning of September 6, 1942. The boys of Company E loaded onto a train with no idea of where they were going. “All the towns had already taken the town signs down off the water towers and everything...so we didn't know where we were at,” Ned Lucas recalled. Finally, the boys saw some familiar landmarks in Washington, DC and Baltimore. Jack Deibert declared, “My God, we're going to go through Elkton!” A site train passed through Cecil County, a boy sitting by Lucas exclaimed at the sight of his house, “So close and so far away. And it don't look like it's going to stop for me.”

A site became obvious the train was taking them to be shipped overseas. Jack Deibert became determined to get word to his wife, Jean. He knew they would be sent to one of two camps in New Jersey, Fort Dix or Camp Kilmer, but he had no way of knowing which one. Although he knew their destination was being kept secret for a reason and that he might be court-martialed if caught, Deibert devised a plan to throw a note to his wife from the train. “We didn't go through Elkton, we took the North Baltimore line which went through Childs...but second we hit Newark...When we went through the station there was one man on the station platform and I threw it at him and saw that he got it.” A sluek would have it, the man was from Elkton and knew Jack and Jean. He got word to Jean’s parents. A few days later, Deibert’s wife and some of the other men's girlfriends arrived at Camp Kilmer and snuck into the barracks after night fell for a final goodbye.

At Camp Kilmer, the 29th Division was inspected and processed through the New York Port of Embarkation. The men spent a ridiculous amount of time organizing and packing their two barracks bags. On September 26th, they were finally loaded on a train to Jersey City and then carried by ferry across the Hudson River. “I guess we were on the water maybe a half, three-quarters of an hour and then I saw the biggest ship I'll ever see in my life,” recalled Lucas. The members of Company E would ship out to Europe on the ocean liner, Queen Elizabeth. The men lined up on the dock, gave their name to the officer when their turn came, and were escorted to their crowded quarters. On October 5, 1942, Queen Elizabeth pulled out of port and began its evasive zigzag course across the ocean. The vessel carried over 20,000 soldiers, and many would not see home again for over three years. Some would never come home.
INVASION TRAINING

Queen Elizabeth anchored in the Firth of Clyde near Greenock, Scotland on October 11, 1942. Then, “they loaded us on barges, they loaded us on fishing boats, they loaded us on canoes and they took us ashore,” Ned Lucas remembered. “Everything that they had they brought out to unload us.” From Scotland, the 29th Division traveled by train and ultimately arrived at Tidworth Barracks near Salisbury, England, where their initial training began. For men in the infantry, that meant endless marching. “We would do 20 miles Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and on Saturdays we did a 10-mile speed march. That was a run for the 10 miles with equipment,” remarked Lucas. By the end of March 1943, every man in the Division was expected to be able to complete a 25-mile hike with full pack. Those who could not were transferred out. “We [were] getting a terrible turnover in the men on account of the feet and legs breaking down,” Otis Ferguson noted.

In May 1943, the 115th Infantry moved to Launceston near the Bodmin moors, which would be the site of their next phase of training. “It was rain, rain, rain,” Lucas recalled. “We would go out on Monday morning and come back in Friday evening wet, everything was wet.” Units were divided up across the moors to practice survival and concealment in the bleak, damp environment. At one point, Company E lost its way and accidentally marched across a grass-covered bog, and was fortunate the men did not all sink into the mire.

By the fall, the Division prepared to move into yet another phase of training. “Everybody was in pretty good shape after a year in England,” Wes Pusey thought. “If the climate didn’t kill them.” From the moors, the Division moved to Slapton Sands for amphibious assault training. For three weeks, each combat team practiced loading small craft from larger ships, firing and landing on the beach and scaling sea walls. Further inland, the battalions battled each other using live ammunition to assault “German” pillboxes. Ferguson was one of six soldiers selected to receive three months of training with a British
commando unit on the Isle of Wright. When he returned, he taught his own outfit what he had learned. More than a few men were killed during this rigorous training. Three weeks before the invasion, Ned Lucas was leading his machine gun squads in an “attack” on a group of riflemen at the bottom of a hill. “So I was laying there on my stomach...and I heard this one went by and I said, ‘Gosh that thing is close.’ So I think it might have been...maybe 10 seconds, my foot started stinging like a bee had stung me. I was hesitant to move too much because they were still shooting at us and I looked...and blood was spurting out of the top of my right shoe.” The wound in his foot would take two months to heal. Lucas was out for the invasion.

Wes Pusey summed up Company E’s year and a half of preparation: “Training wasn’t too pleasant...The large units were training, but it was like a checkerboard, the checkers don’t have much to do with it. We were the checkers.” The ordinary soldier could not have known the scale of what was planned for the invasion on D-day. A plan two years in the making, Operation Overlord was an offensive campaign designed to retake Nazi-occupied Europe using some 175,000 Allied troops, 11,000 airplanes, and 5,333 ships. Success on D-day depended on keeping the location and timing of the landing in France a surprise.
D-DAY

On D-Day, the 29th Division and other U.S. infantry divisions were to advance on the beaches of Normandy, France code-named Omaha and Utah, the British to overtake Gold, Juno and Sword. Then, they were to secure the port at Caen and move on to the port at Brest, establishing a position from which the Allied Forces could take back France and move into Germany. The men of the 29th Division were in a staging area before they knew where they would make the invasion. Jack Deibert, who had been promoted to Service Company, was responsible for loading the men onto the ships. Once aboard, the soldiers who would make the invasion spent nearly a week in the English Channel, waiting for the battle to begin. On June 5, 1944, six-foot high seas delayed the landing yet another day. Finally, about four hours after the first assault wave landed at Omaha Beach on the morning of June 6th, the Landing Ship Infantry vessel hit a reef and the troops were ordered off some 30 feet from shore. The sound of artillery fire rang off the sides of the steel boat as the ramp came down, and soldiers were immediately hit. Some of the men were so seasick, they could hardly keep their feet under them. As Otis Ferguson led his platoon into the water, the 80-pound pack began to drag one of the shorter men down into a ditch or “tank trap.” “So I grabbed him by the pack and held him until his feet touched bottom,” Ferguson said. Jim McCauley also struggled to climb out of the tank...

For Nick Demond, the time he spent in Europe was “not necessarily [under] the best circumstances,” but he “visited towns that you’d never hear about...it broadened my view.” After Paris was liberated, some soldiers had leave to go to the Riviera and into Paris. Others took the opportunity without permission. “My God, when they went through Paris they lost damn near half the 29th Division,” recalled Deibert. One Cecil County boy had the nerve to go AWOL and disappeared into the city. When the soldier returned, Deibert could not resist teasing him: “I said they’re raising hell and they’re going to court-martial him, scared him to death.” Finally, Deibert let him know the violator had been pardoned and sent him back to his unit.

On a 10-day pass to Copenhagen, Demond was able to enjoy the city’s restaurants and amusement park, which had been left intact during the occupation. Many towns throughout Europe did not escape the devastation of war. During training, Jack Deibert had enjoyed a 72-hour pass in the seaside town of Bourne-mouth, England. When he returned just before the invasion on D-Day, the hotel where he once stayed had been destroyed by buzzbombs. “It no longer existed. I thought, ‘Oh my God, I’m a lucky man.’”

Joe Lofthouse spent his final days in Europe in Germany near the Austrian border, and enjoyed the view of the Bavarian countryside from Hitler’s Eagle’s Nest. “The little village of Berchtesgaden looked like a Christmas [card], beautiful country.” Lofthouse had come a long way from Perryville to Hitler’s mountaintop retreat...
One of the engineers stuck his rifle out and I caught the stock and he pulled me over to shore and then clambered up out of there.

Wes Pusey's platoon waded through the water and heard only small arms fire behind them. "But as I looked back, shells were landing in boats we had gotten off of." When they reached the beach, one of Pusey's squad leaders stepped on a mine, which blew off his foot. The beach was littered with bodies, the water bloody from the dead and wounded washed out by high water. "You didn't know what was dead and what was alive," remarked McCauley. Flags marked the tenuous path through the minefield, but the men followed their Battalion Commander, Lt. Colonel William E. Warfield. "The Lieutenant and the Colonel...they went shoulder to shoulder and they moved us right across that open beach," McCauley said.

As Company E made its way up the hill, their company commander was hit.

NAVIGATOR OVER NORMANDY

Ralph McCool was on Carolina Maneuvers with Company E in 1942, when he was ordered to go to communications school. From the outset, McCool did not want the assignment, and so he took his chance to get out and volunteered for the airborne. Paratroop training had barely begun when McCool jumped off a training tower, turned an ankle and was rejected. A fellow officer encouraged him to apply for the air force instead of becoming an officer for a group of replacements. McCool ended up going to navigation school, and shipped out to England in May of 1944 as part of the 445th Bombing group of the Eighth Air Force.

"D-Day was my sixth mission. A nd we had an awful time getting in formation." At about 6:30 in the morning, McCool's group dropped their bombs in advance of the first assault wave on the beaches of Normandy.

"We were supposed to soften the beach for the ground forces," McCool remarked. "Heavy bombers were never intended to be support units for ground forces, they just weren't...I'd say it wasn't effective at all." Part of the problem was the overwhelming number of planes.

"There were so many planes up there that I believe you could have walked across that channel on wings." No plane was to fire a smoke gun unless a collision was imminent, but so many were going off that McCool's pilot sent a panicked message over the intercom: "You've got to get me the hell out of here." They circled below the other planes, looking for their group's formation. Eventually, they tacked on with another group and dropped their bombs.

"It was never intended to send bombers up there and get them in formation in darkness, it just was never intended," McCool declared. "That was as scary a ride as I've ever had."
“In fact, we had three company commanders the first day,” noted McCauley. “They [were] expendable.” A sthe men scrambled for protection, they slowly advanced to the beachhead and paused to get organized.

Pusey was looking over a fence and trying to get a handle on the platoon's next move. A sergeant came over and called him away from the fence.

“A bout the same time an 88 went through. He says, 'You want to finish the day, stay away from that fence.'” Slowly, the group began to make their way toward St. Laurent, where they met some enemy fire. By evening, they withdrew and rejoined the rest of the 115th Infantry at the other end of the town.

PERRYVILLE'S PARATROOPER

Not long after Company E first reported to Fort Meade in 1941, Joe Lofthouse learned that men who volunteered for paratroop training received an extra $50 a month. Even though he had never been in an airplane, Lofthouse said goodbye to his Company E friends and shipped out to Fort Benning, Georgia. He survived four weeks of leaping from 195-foot towers, jumping in a suspended shock harness and climbing a 40-foot maze of physical challenges called the "plumbers nightmare" to become a paratrooper in the 502nd Infantry of the 101st Airborne Division.

In 1943, the elite men of the 101st Airborne moved to England to prepare for D-Day, which would be their first combat jump. The mission was the culmination of three years of intensive training as one of the Army's first airborne infantry regiments. “We were ready for the mission, I guess,” Lofthouse mused. “There's a payoff day and this is it...But you [weren't] being brave, you're going to do the job you're taught to do now and you may get killed.” A week before the scheduled invasion, the airborne forces were taken to the coast of England and put behind barbed-wire enclosures for security. There, they were briefed on their mission using sand tables, maps of the Normandy beaches and surrounding areas. Their objective was to take out German coastal guns and secure the causeways from the beach for troops landing by water.

At 11 o'clock at night on June 5, 1944, Joe Lofthouse had been lulled to sleep by the roar of the airplane motors and the air sickness pills handed out to his stick of men. His buddy nudged him, “Lofty, Lofty, wake up.” Emerging from a
CROSSROADS AT LE CARREFOUR

For several days, the men continued to advance inland, away from the beach. “So the first three days I guess maybe you got an hour sleep just before dawn and that was it,” Jim McCauley recalled. On June 9th, McCauley’s platoon was sent out on a patrol across the flooded area to the German-held town of Colombieres. Led by Lieutenant Kermit Miller, the men waded and crawled through sticky mud for several hours, then rowed across a fast-moving steam in a boat they found. They reached the village undetected, and the French locals directed them toward the German headquarters. A car loaded with Germans speeded toward them. “The Lieutenant with a bazooka, just got right down in the middle of the road... He fired,” McCauley remembered with amazement. A firefight ensued in and around the headquarters.

If they were lucky, the airborne men who reached the ground alive had a chance to get on their feet and put their rifles together before encountering the enemy. Two bullet stores through Lothhouse’s parachute as he quickly descended into a field from 400 feet. He heard men screaming as they were hit in the air. Once on the ground, he crawled on his hands and knees to avoid machine-gun fire, coming face to face with two of his dead buddies. Spread all over the drop-zone, the airborne troops gathered together in makeshift groups and managed to take some of the original objectives before the first assault wave landed on the beaches the morning of June 6th.
three miles ahead of the rest of the battalion. A s Ferguson's platoon moved back toward the crossroads at Le Carrefour, they heard the sounds of equipment and tanks moving in the distance. W hen they rejoined the battalion they told W arfield and their company commander, C aptain C li ft, "that things weren't right, didn't sound right, didn't look right." L t. C olonel W arfield directed them to take the rear position. "I'll go on up front and see what's wrong."

The 2nd Battalion marched forward toward the crossroads. "W e were dead tired," W es P usey recollected, "we jumped off at 5 o'clock or earlier in the morning, we'd gone through a swamp for I don't know how long...and we fought our way through two little towns" They continued on down the road with no resistance. A t 1 a.m. on J une 10th, when the companies received the order to halt and rest, the men began to file into a field and flopped down against the hedgerows. C ompany E was the last unit in line. "I guess we went too far," mused Pusey. "W e were at the gate going into the field and all of a sudden,..." P usey observed.  

"Scene in a field," a soldier's portrayal of Le Carrefour.  
From 29 Let's Go! by Joseph H. Ewing.

The Germans closed in on the disorganized soldiers, took C olonel W arfield, Lieutenant M iller and others prisoner, and demanded the battalion's surrender. "Surrender hell!" W arfield was reported to have said. Soon after, he and M iller were killed by their German captors. O tis Ferguson was among those captured, along with a man from his platoon named
D'Eugenio. After two hours, Ferguson decided to make a move. "They took everything I had, so they didn't do anything, they didn't keep a close eye on me so I thought, 'Now, by golly, I'll just get out of here.'" With only his hands as weapons, Ferguson attacked the German guard, beating his head against the ground until he was dead. He considered taking D'Eugenio with him, but he had been wounded and Ferguson decided they would not be able to make it together. D'Eugenio would be a prisoner of the Germans until the end of the war. Ferguson received a battlefield commission as a result of his actions.

Edgar Startt had been transferred to the 115th Infantry's Company C, but Company E was never far away. At the time of the attack at Le Carrefour, Startt's unit was about a half a mile down the road. He decided he would walk up and try to catch up with his friends. "So I was walking up the road and I heard all this shooting...a Frenchmen was there and he's shouting to me." Unable to understand what the man was saying, Startt got out his G.I.-issued French dictionary and fig-

WITNESSES TO WAR

Once the ships carrying the 29th Division were loaded in preparation for D-Day, Jack Deibert and Service Company moved out to Bournemouth, carrying the service records of 3,000 men. "They put us in a big field with pup tents and there really wasn't anything to do for the time being until they finally broke the news to us," Deibert recalled of his wait to hear whether any of his Company E friends had been killed.

"There was none that left here to begin with who were actually killed on the beach." That would soon change. Four men who left the Elkton Armory in February 1941 would be killed within a month of the 29th Division's arrival in France.

Otis Ferguson vividly remembered the death of his platoon's guide, Charles Creighton. "I went to school with him, I ran around with him, I worked on the railroad with him and we were what you call real buddies." On D-Day, plus-5, the 2nd Battalion of the 115th was near St. Claire on the Elle River. Ferguson was peering over a hedgerow, planning the platoon's next move, when "Horsey" Creighton came alongside him. They spotted some Germans down ahead of them and began shooting.

Ferguson related what happened next: "Well, a bullet hit my rifle and I turned around and looked and here's Charles Creighton had a gash here on his cheek and he was falling backwards. Never made a sound, just two or three gulps and that was it. Killed him right out." There was no time to stop and mourn; Ferguson ordered his men over the hedgerow. Two more Cecil County men—Donnie Preston and Johnny Bouchelle—would be seriously wounded that day. "At that particular time it didn't get to me too bad, because we were just out there fighting. But Horsey Creighton, God, after I got back to the rest area...like right
ured out that the Germans were close by. "So I turned around and come back and the next morning I heard that the 2nd Battalion had pretty near all got killed."

In the panicked hours after the firefight at Le Carrefour, many soldiers believed the battalion had been wiped out. For McCauley, the men's level of exhaustion as they entered the field was nearly indescribable: "We'd been going for three or four days...men would just collapse in the road and you [had a] hard time getting them up." Pusey hesitated to place the blame either. "You don't know who to put your finger on because that happened. But we were really too tired, everybody, to do anything." Since D-Day, the Division had been pushing and fighting hard, with little time to eat and only an hour or two of rest each day. The 2nd Battalion's casualties totaled 139 soldiers and eleven officers, including the Company E's Lt. Miller—a hero only a day earlier—and Battalion Commander William Warfield, who had so bravely led his men through the minefield on Omaha Beach.

now, when I talk about it, it really gets me." Preston Dean was the second Cecil County man killed in France.

By August of 1944, the long battle to take St. Lo was over and the 29th Division was moving toward the town of St. Germaine. Ned Lucas and a young soldier named Lunz had set up a machine gun on some railroad tracks. "Let's keep an eye on those woods, because there might be some Germans over there," Lucas instructed Lunz. Not much was happening, when Lucas received a call from his friend Wes Pusey. Their friend in the mortar section, Roland Lusby, had just been hit and Pusey had sent the medics out to get him. Lucas decided to move back to the rear to check on his friend. "I got up and started walking and I saw this G.I. laying there. So I took him and rolled him over and there's a boy I went to school with here at Calvert." The soldier was Joe McDowell of North East. Lucas was taking off one of McDowell's dog tags when a German suddenly emerged from the bushes, his rifle over his head. "Comrade! Comrade!" Soon after Lucas disarmed his prisoner, Pusey radioed again: "Lusby, he's dead." "Joe McDowell, he's been killed," Lucas replied. "He's right here...I've got a prisoner." Pusey said he would send guards to pick up the German. The anger and despair at losing two friends in one day overwhelmed Ned Lucas. "Don't bother, I'm going to shoot the son-of-a-bitch right here." Pusey talked him down: "No, you can't do that...If you do, I'm going to have you court-martialed." His friend's tough rationale calmed Lucas in the face of the loss. "The idea that my buddy, the best buddy I ever had...was killed and this other guy I went to school with. I lost it, really. I just lost it." Lucas would go on to serve valiantly through Brest, receiving a battlefield commission, until he was wounded in the drive for Kirchberg, Germany.
REST AND REGROUP

After Le Carrefour, the 2nd Battalion of the 115th Regiment marched back up the same road where their ranks had been devastated the day before and went into a bivouac area to prepare for the drive across the Elle River. Jim McCauley and his two buddies were exhausted, their nerves shot. They found cover in a large ditch and decided to take turns keeping watch. McCauley continued his story:

"Well, I woke up, it was just breaking daylight and they were sound asleep. And sitting above us was a German."

A sense of imminent danger overwhelmed McCauley, remembering the firefight the unit had just experienced. But when he moved closer to check out the enemy soldier, McCauley discovered he was wounded. They left him there.

By the time Ned Lucas returned to Company E after recovering from the wound he received during invasion training, it was mid-July and the company was in a rest area to receive replacements. The first sergeant greeted Lucas warmly, "Ned, I'm glad to see you back." But the news he had for Lucas was not good. "You won't recognize the company at all. All the officers are gone and most of the men...you won't recognize hardly anybody."

The sergeant could not even list all of the officers and men who had been killed. At the time of the battle to take St. Lo, Wes Pusey estimated that the company strength was down from 160 to about 25.

"The awkward thing about it, back in headquarters some place we were still a company," Pusey explained. "We weren't even a platoon!"
REPLACEMENT

In February 1943, about the time the boys of Company E were marching all over the English countryside, 19-year old Nick Demond of North East received a notice from his "friends and neighbors" at the local draft board. He reported first to Elkton and then to the Fifth Regiment Armory in Baltimore for physical examinations and then was sent to Fort Meade. At Fort Jackson, South Carolina, he became part of the new 106th Infantry Division. On May 30, 1944, Demond arrived in England and moved to a Replacement Depot, where he would be assigned to a new unit.

The men had no inkling that the invasion of Normandy was about to begin when they arrived at their barbed-wire enclosed encampment at Yoddill, England. On D-Day, "they put us out on a hillside and said this is what's happening and...the troops had landed," Demond remembered. Two weeks later, they disembarked onto the beaches of Normandy from the same kind of landing craft used on D-Day. "I didn't arrive to the sound of gunfire because they weren't firing on the beach," Demond noted. The replacements walked up the beach, up the hill the men of the 29th had fought to climb, and spent the night in a field on the beachhead. None of them knew where they would be sent, but the front lines were not far away.

The next morning, someone from the 29th Division found Demond and asked him if he would serve at Division Headquarters, where a position had just opened up. His record had revealed that he had attended business school and knew shorthand and typing. "So I went and it saved my butt," exclaimed Demond. At 29th Division headquarters, Demond and his fellow clerks in the "War Room" were responsible for taking down all messages that came in and typing them into a journal for the commanding general, Charles Gerhardt. "He was a real son of a bitch," asserted Demond. Gerhardt had a reputation for chewing out soldiers and officers of all ranks. "He would shoot from the hip an awful lot."

Division Headquarters moved frequently, whenever the front lines changed. Typically, they were kept well back from the shelling in a secure location, but on several occasions they were bombed by artillery and once by a dive bomber. Demond, however, recognized that his assignment to the War Room was a fortunate one. "I thought it was a good job, particularly when I didn't have to sleep in the mud...it probably saved me from getting shot up because I know I would have been a riflemen...because that's what my training was."

Although Lucas had missed the invasion, he had received extensive training and knew the members of Company E well. The same could not be said for the ordinary replacement. "It was a terrible thing for replacements," reflected Pusey. "Because we didn't know them, they didn't know us. We didn't know what they could do and they didn't have any confidence in us because they...were just out of basic training almost." If they survived a few weeks, the replacements found their place in the company. But, Pusey remarked, "I don't think we even learned some of their names before they were wounded and gone."
THE DRIVE FOR ST. LO

When the 29th Division began its advance toward St. Lo, the most formidable barrier proved to be the hedgerows—walls of earth topped by a heavy growth of brush. Every hedgerow was potentially an enemy position. "Hedgerow fighting wasn't much fun," Wes Pusey observed. "The Germans were so well emplaced and so persistent that they crawled through the hedgerows and they'd come up and fight on the one side and back through the other side where you couldn't get a hold of them." With emplacements and outposts to defend, the unit faced action all day and got only a couple of hours of sleep at night. Overall, the Division had lost more men in the fight to take one city than it had on D-Day.

By mid-July of 1944, several offensive maneuvers had failed and the Division still had not reached St. Lo. On July 17th, another maneuver began. By that evening, Company E and the rest of the 2nd Battalion of the 115th had reached a ridge outside of the city and pushed forward behind the German position by the end of the day. The next morning, they reached the outskirts of St. Lo and cut off the eastern road exiting the city. With victory at hand, "See you in St. Lo" became the saying on the final days of the drive. On July 19th, the 2nd Battalion took over the front line, but by the end of the day most of the 29th Division moved to the rear. They had been in nearly constant combat for 45 days.

On the afternoon of July 25th, the fighter-bombers of the U.S. Eighth and Ninth Air Force attacked the area around St. Lo, dropping some 3,400 tons of bombs. Although the men of Company E were miles away from the line, they witnessed the waves of bombers attacking the German lines. "From ten miles you could actually see the ground trembling," Ned Lucas remembered. "The said the Germans, they saw some of them were bleeding in the eyes, the ears, nose, rectum, just from the concussions." In a tragic turn of events, smoke and debris obscured the American lines and some 600 Americans became casualties, including the Commander of Army Ground Forces, Lt. General Lesley McNair, who was killed. Otis Ferguson recalled the scene: "So when they moved up here come our airplanes and—oh man—they just strafed and killed our men just like nobody's business and...we had to display pink flags to get them to pull off."

Following the front line troops as part of the 29th Division's Service Company, Jack Deibert witnessed the death and destruction throughout Normandy. "I saw the Germans and Americans piled like logs, deceased and terrible sights. Then..."
you’d go through towns and cities that were completely destroyed.” As Service Company made its way through St. Lo, Deibert took pictures “right after it was blown all to hell. You can see the damage to a huge city in France.”

**ST. GERMAINE**

For the next several weeks, the 29th and the 28th Divisions pushed the Germans southeast through Percy and Vire, and then toward the town of St. Germaine. “We were on one side of the railroad track and I think the 28th Division was on the other side—we were having it rough, but not too bad,” recalled Ned Lucas. On August 6, 1945, the same day that two of Lucas’s Cecil County friends were killed, he and his young machine gunner were pinned down alongside some railroad tracks by a group of Germans in the woods. “Man, there was bullets flashing all around, bouncing off ties and everything.” Lucas raised his helmet up on his knife and another barrage of bullets came in their direction. “Then things quieted down and I guess they figured they killed us.” Lucas decided to take the opportunity to get out and the two ran for it. “So he grabbed the machine gun and I grabbed the tripod and the ammunition and he made about four or five steps over the side of the rail and down he went.”

After seeing Lunz’s head wound, Lucas thought for sure he was dead. “And he’d only been with me a couple days”

Lucas was now alone as the group of Germans advanced. He radioed his Lieutenant and asked, “How about if I open fire with the machine gun?” The Lieutenant warned him that if he did, he better get out of the way quickly or he would be in trouble. “So I made a full belt of ammunition and... I took the traverse rod from the machine gun so I could handle it any way I wanted it. And I pulled back on that trigger and I never let go until I shot that whole box of ammunition, 250 rounds.” After that, Lucas was able to get out safely. That evening, just before dark, a patrol from Company E found that section of railroad track lined with German bodies.

August 8th found the 2nd Battalion on a night maneuver through the German line, walking in columns in the ditches along the highway near St. Germaine. Company E was in the lead. “We were going down this little blacktop road and we heard these tanks coming,” Lucas recounted. “Everybody thought they were our tanks but when they got right up amongst us, they were three German tanks. But it was dark and we were laying down in the ditch so there wasn’t a shot fired.” The company had escaped a potential disaster.

The battalion entered St. Germaine the next morning through concentrations of German artillery and mortar, but remained undetected, “because we were five miles behind the line.” When a unit of Germans approached the edge of town, the Americans opened up with machine guns, forcing the enemy’s retreat. The GIs dug foxholes in an apple orchard next to a chateau, and prepared to defend themselves. “That afternoon the Germans counterattacked with about four to one to us. I mean, we were outnumbered and it looked like... we were going to be killed or captured,” Lucas said.

Finally, the 110th Artillery Battalion began to shell the area from eight miles back, while the 2nd Battalion took cover. “Now all those shells were hitting in those apple trees and stuff and just break-
ing and shrapnel [went everywhere]. So the Germans, they got enough of it and they turned and run," said Lucas. Two days later, the 2nd Battalion was under attack again, cut off from the rest of the Division with communication lines down. Wes Pusey was hit by a rocket mortar fire, and was carried out to a field hospital. Finally, the 175th Regiment arrived to relieve the beleaguered 115th. As of August 11, 1944, only four of E Company's original D-Day members had never been wounded.

**BREST**

In late August, the 29th Division moved to theBrittany Peninsula toward the port of Brest, where the Germans had a submarine base defended by 20,000 German paratroopers. If captured for the Allies, Brest could become a supply port for the Allies. Ned Lucas traveled as part of the advance party toward Brest, his section's machine guns mounted on the top of the truck cabs. The night of August 24, 1944, the 115th and 116th Regiments began an all-out frontal attack on the town and forts near Brest. Their progress was slow. Lucas remembered that they would "go forward, maybe move a hundred yards one day and maybe they'd back you up the next day and they just kept withdrawing. It was a hard battle."

On September 6th, the XIX Tactical Air Corps bombed the German positions, and the enemy pulled back. The objective of Lucas's weapons platoon was to take out one of many German gun emplacements located around the city. Tank destroyers shot at the pillboxes over and over again, killing the German gunner inside, but a replacement would soon be sent up through a network of tunnels. The British sent in flame throwing tanks to attack the pillboxes. "They were tough nuts," Lucas admitted. Finally, "once the air force bombed the area then I had a guy from engineering [with].a satchel of dynamite and he threw it in one of the holes there and just blew up everything on the inside." The bombing had collapsed the tunnels, and the Germans could no longer send out replacements.

On the morning of September 18th, Lucas was checking to see whether the rounds he had ordered his mortars to fire had found their targets, when he heard a message that there were Germans coming toward their position with white flags. Convinced it was a trick, Lucas went back to his machine gunners to make sure they stayed on their weapons. There was no deception. The four German officers appeared before Company E's Commanding
Officer, Lt. Roderick Persch, asking to be taken back to headquarters so they could surrender. The battle for Brest was over. Most of the 29th Division's units moved back to a rest area for the next week, and the men anticipated seven-day furloughs to England. But on September 24th, they loaded on World War I-era “40 and 8 boxcars” to be sent as reinforcements in Germany. They slowly journeyed through France and Paris into Belgium, and finally to their new position near the border of Holland and Germany. The 115th Regiment began to patrol the area and “clean up a lot of the little towns,” keeping constant pressure on the enemy. On October 30th, the 102nd Division took over the 29th Division's position and the 2nd Battalion of the 115th was moved 10 miles back into reserve.

Three days later, Lucas's company commander told him, “They want you back at regimental headquarters.” Lucas had no idea why he was wanted, but changed into clean clothes and caught a mail jeep back to headquarters. “Ned, I've got some good news and I've got some bad news,” a colonel told him. “Well, we're going to discharge you.” “Stop right there,” Lucas replied. “No, you've got to hear the rest too...Tomorrow we're going to sign you back up again,” the colonel continued. “We're promoting you to second lieutenant.” Lucas had not answered to another officer since his friend Roland Lusby died and he took over Lusby's mortar squad. Now he was a full-fledged officer.

HOLLAND AND THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

After D-Day, Joe Lofthouse and the paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division struggled to reorganize themselves, joining with other troops in firefights at various farms along French roads. On June 11th, they were ordered to take the town of Carentan, held by German parachute troops. Lofthouse's unit fought all night to take three bridges. The next morning, Lofthouse recollected, “we got strafed by two...dive bombers that came down and strafed and bombed us. I lost a lot of men there [but] I survived that.” There was an eerie lull in the fire. “I took off my helmet to wipe my forehead,” said Lofthouse, “and all hell broke loose.” A shrapnel from a high mortar fire began to come in, pinning the soldiers down in a field.

Battalion Commander Cole ordered a smoke screen and planned a bayonet charge across a field. “When you...hear my whistle, I want every one of you...jayhawks right on my ass.” The paratroopers rallied, and those that made it across the field went on to take Carentan. Soon after, they were relieved and sent back to England to prepare for their next mission, which would not come for three months. “We were called to the airfields twice during the summer of '44 for other missions,” Lofthouse recalled, “but at that time Patton was going crazy, he took our objectives.” As Patton made his way toward Germany, the 29th Division was called to protect his left flank.

In September, the 101st Airborne jumped 30 miles behind enemy lines in Holland as part of Operation Market-Garden. “We were to lay what they...
The afternoon of November 16, 1944, the 29th Division began its offensive maneuver to push through numerous German towns toward the town of Julich. “What we were trying to do is get all the Germans west of the Roer River, to get them out of there,” noted Ned Lucas. The 2nd Battalion of the 115th began its drive on Kirchberg on November 27th. A Company E took its position on the left side of the town, Lucas got his machine guns into place and went back to the edge of town to wait for the mortar section. “And while I was there waiting…a couple shells came pretty close,” Lucas recalled. “And all at once I remember a cloud of dust, didn’t hear anything.” Both Lucas and the young soldier with him were hit by shrapnel in their legs and neither could walk. 

As the shelling continued, they dragged themselves into a nearby house and down the steps into the cellar. After a couple of hours, they were able to call to a group of GIs, who got them to an aid station. For Lucas, the war was over.

The 29th Division battled hard to drive the Germans from their last toeholds on the banks of the Roer River and by December 9th, the river was all that remained between the Division and Julich. Plans for a river-crossing were cancelled, however, as the Battle of the Bulge began to the south in Bastogne, Belgium. After two long, cold months of waiting, the entire Ninth Army began its assault on Julich, but met only moderate opposition.

Some 30 miles north, the 29th Division was put on alert, Jack Deibert remembered, “to be prepared if necessary when the Germans got to us.” Clerks and cooks were ordered to dig foxholes and serve on guard duty. “They were saying they hoped the Germans wouldn’t get to us. Luckily they didn’t.”

The Allied troops endured constant artillery fire for weeks in December, holding out in foxholes in the bitterly cold forests of Bastogne. Finally, in early January, General George S. Patton’s forces broke through. The men of the 101st Airborne marched from Luxembourg through Germany to Austria. Lofthouse witnessed soldiers surrendering after the German army conceded defeat. “I’ve never seen that many, thousands of them coming in bunches,” reflected Lofthouse. “It was an awful queer feeling at the time after being shot at all those days.”

(Continued from page 27)
They drove on toward München-Gladbach, where they remained for a month, until they were dispatched to clear opposition from the area west of the Elbe River.

By April 24th, the American forces had reached the banks of the Elbe. On May 8th, the day the Allies declared victory in Europe, the 29th Division already had received its assignment to be an occupational force near the cities of Bremen and Bremerhaven. "They called it the Bremen Enclave," Nick Demond observed, "and the area we were occupying was the port, and that's where all the American supplies came in." Task Force Bremen remained in place until December 1945. The lucky ones, like Jack Deibert, had earned enough points to be sent home before that. The remainder of the 29th Division sailed for the United States on Christmas Day, 1945 and was officially demobilized after their arrival at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey in January 1946.

"A GOOD BUNCH OF BOYS"

The boys from Cecil County who fought and died in World War II were ordinary young men, citizen soldiers, draftees and volunteers, not professionals. "I had my hard knocks when I was a kid, I think that's the case of most of us at that time," remarked Joe Lothhouse. "That's the kind of men I fought with, I'd die for." The bond soldiers forged with men they trained and fought with was strong and lifelong. "If you were with a unit you became very close to people. In fact, I would say in combat you get to the point where you're even closer in some ways than you are as man and wife," Jim McCauley mused.

Those from Company E who left the Elkton Armory together in February 1941 became particularly close, and distinguished themselves as soldiers. "There was a saying training here in the States that if you wanted to be a non-com, you had to be from Elkton," Wes Pusey noted. While other companies seemed to experience moments of conflict, "E Company got along pretty decent." Even those who left the Company and went on to other units looked after their old friends, or tried to keep abreast of how they fared. "I made some wonderful friendships," concluded Pusey. "The service was quite an experience."

Under the extraordinary circumstances of war, this "good bunch of boys" performed brave acts none of them thought possible. Otis Ferguson recalled...
his men’s appreciation when he put his life on the line for them. “O tie, we could see them bullets coming by your ears,” they told him. Ferguson felt the same way about the men he led: “O h, I had the best. And they knew it, that they were all pretty good.” Those who survived the war considered themselves blessed. “I’m glad I made it,” Edgar Startt said, “but I wouldn’t want to do it again.” As young men going into war, none of them could have known what they would face: rigorous, endless training; a fearsome enemy; overwhelming barrages of artillery; the wounding and deaths of friends; their own mortality. The war changed them forever, but not one regretted the experience.
WOUNDED ON THE FRONT LINES

After his platoon's daring assault on a German headquarters and the attack on his battalion at Le Carrefour on June 11, 1944, Jim McCauley was completely exhausted. The only noncommissioned officer stationed on the outpost line of the 2nd Battalion's bivouac area for two days, McCauley became concerned that no one was coming out to check on them. A young lieutenant pulled him off the line and decided to check the outpost himself. When the Germans began to shell the bivouac area, McCauley and the others took cover in slit trenches. A shell hit a tree above the trenches and shrapnel went everywhere. “I didn’t have any pain when I was hit, it was like being hit with a sledge hammer. I was numb,” McCauley remembered.

Another soldier got him out of the trench, and loaded him onto a jeep. “The last thing I remember...the top sergeant in the medical detachment had picked up my rifle and said, ‘You won’t be needing this anymore.’” McCauley had a lung injury and his ankle was nearly obliterated. He spent months in hospitals in England and back in the States; ultimately, he had almost a dozen surgeries. The severity of his injuries made him eligible for a unique watchmaker’s training program sponsored by the Bulova Watch Company and he spent the rest of his working career in that profession. Overall, he felt fortunate. “Blessed is the word,” McCauley declared. He had been wounded seriously enough that he did not have to go back into combat, and he had survived.

Otis Ferguson had to return to combat twice after being wounded. At the end of June 1944, he was hit in his right leg and foot. He spent several weeks in a field hospital, but returned in time for the battle to take St. Lo. “We finally...took St. Lo, moved on through, and headed towards Brest. And on the way into Brest I got wounded again.” Shrapnel from a tree hit by a shell had penetrated his right shoulder. “I stayed there that time and my own medicos patched up my back.” The final time Ferguson was wounded, Company E was moving into Brest. “A shell landed alongside me and hurt that same foot and leg,” Ferguson remembered. His foot wasn’t hurt too badly, although “it knocked me clear out of my boot and didn’t even untie it,” but his eardrum was cracked and his hip was badly injured. This time, Ferguson had earned his ticket home.

On August 11, 1944, Wes Pusey and the rest of the 2nd Battalion of the 115th
were in the midst of the battle for the little town of St. Germaine when they became cut off from the rest of the Division. While they waited for reinforcements to arrive, the battalion received a pounding from the German artillery. "It took a while to get our tank guns up and get things going," Pusey recalled. "And in the meantime, why we were getting some shell fire. A rocket mortar exploded nearby, sending over 70 pieces of shrapnel into Pusey's body. The shock wave hit the brunt of the explosion, the force of which drove pieces of cloth into his back and legs. He also had an arm injury which was more serious than anyone realized. Pusey could not be transported out to the field hospital immediately. "The situation wasn't that anybody could get out. So I guess it was...overnight that I was in the aid station."

The medical personnel at the aid station bandaged him up and sent him on to the field hospital, where they took out most of the shrapnel. "Be sure to tell them about that arm when you get to England," the doctor told Pusey, but the nerve damage proved to be permanent. The next day, he was flown back to an American hospital in England. His voyage back home to the States in October aboard the hospital ship Charles A. Stafford took 14 days. After six months in hospitals in the United States, the war ended. Pusey took his discharge and returned to his old job at the Holtwood Dam. There was still shrapnel in his body, but he was alive.

**COMBAT DOCTOR**

As a combat doctor with the 88th Infantry Division in Italy, Klaus Huebner was the first physician to examine casual-

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**FROM BAVARIA TO CECIL COUNTY**

Klaus Huebner came to Philadelphia in 1926 from a small town in Bavaria, Germany located in the shadow of the Austrian mountains. His father, a chemist, had taken a job for a division of the DuPont Company several years earlier and had decided to move the family to the United States permanently. Huebner completed all of his education in Philadelphia, and had begun college at the University of Pennsylvania when he received a notice from Berlin to report for two years of military duty in the German Army. "I'm not going to be a draft dodger," Huebner decided. His father quickly took out his own citizenship, allowing Klaus to claim it as well.

Several years later, after Huebner had begun medical school, a recruiting officer from the National Guard came to the University of Pennsylvania and made an offer: "If you fellows join now to the National Guard, we [will] pay you four dollars a month...and once you're finished four years of training, should war ever break out, you will probably be used as a cadre to teach others." The promise of no combat service was familiar. "That sounded pretty good to us," Huebner remembered. In May 1943, Huebner graduated from medical school. In the meantime, his father had taken a job as chief chemist in charge of heavy explosives at Triumph Industries in Elkton. Huebner decided to come to Elkton until he was called for military duty, and found...
ties from the battlefield. In March and April 1944, when the Division first was sent onto the front lines, most of the men Huebner treated were wounded during nighttime firefights or patrols, and by German artillery. By May 1944, the Division began to maneuver through enemy lines at Minturno and Cassino, and proceeded toward Rome from the south. At the same time, American troops at Anzio were moving toward Rome from the east. Once the Division was on the move to take a mountain, “two thousand casualties was nothing,” Huebner noted. During those chaotic times, “you got so intent in your work you forgot all about what was going on outside.”

The medical group followed at the rear of the last column marching into a combat situation. When fighting occurred, Huebner would ask the commander of the battalion Headquarters Company, “Where do you want me to put my aid station?” All of the equipment litter bearers carrying wounded soldier

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a temporary job working with the doctor in charge of Triumph’s hospital.

Two months later, he was sent for basic training at Carlisle Field Service School and then went to Texas to join the 88th Infantry Division, which was about to be shipped overseas. “So I knew that from now on we would be in the infantry which meant in those days you walked behind the troops.” The 88th Division shipped out and arrived in Casablanca in northern Africa on Christmas Day of 1943. A fter receiving specialized mountain training, the Division was sent into Italy.

Huebner had only been in combat for five days when he thought to himself, “This is quite an experience. I’m going to start keeping a diary.” While most soldiers were instructed not to keep pencil and paper or to write down any important information in case they were captured, doctors needed a pencil to fill out emergency medical tags. “The reverse side of the tag was blank,” Huebner noted. “So here was a hunk of paper.” Huebner began to record notes about his experiences, often writing in German. He sent detailed letters to his mother that left out information about the units involved or the location. “By the time the campaign was over, I had a stack of medical tags.”

Huebner returned to Cecil County after the war and began a private medical practice. During his first four or five months home, Huebner took the notes he had stashed in his barracks bag and his letter to his mother, and compiled them into a memoir. In 1986, Texas A & M University published, *The Long Walk Through War: A Combat Doctor’s Diary*. 
necessary to set up the station was contained in two large chests, which were transported by jeeps. "The trouble was it was nice to have a jeep but you seldom used it because of the mountains." Instead, they often had to repack the equipment into large bags and carry them on mules. Every time the division moved, the medical detachment had to load up all of its supplies and then set them up again at the new location.

The company aid men and litter bearers retrieved the wounded from the scene of combat, and brought them to the aid station. "I think we did a lot of good, really," Huebner remarked, "because we gave a lot of plasma. And you would think that's almost impossible but the plasma came in little packs. So you could give plasma while shooting was going on." Locating the aid station close to the front lines was key, although that placed the medical personnel within the range of mortars and artillery. "A farmhouse or a barn or a nice cave or even behind a big stone wall... was very convenient," said Huebner. Often, however, there was no shelter available and "you had no time to put up tents."

When the Division was on the move, they had to treat casualties quickly: "write out a medical tag, put a tag on them, put a rifle in the ground, put the helmet on top and get going." If the medical detachment fell too far behind, they lost their outfit. "In the middle of the

ONWARD FROM AFRICA

Ralph Rothwell stayed with the Company E and the 29th Division until August 1942, when he began to look at other options. "I wanted to get out of the infantry and I wanted to get into tanks," he recalled. Thinking he was simply applying for the armored force, his application instead resulted in his acceptance into Officer Candidate School. Rothwell spent four months at Fort Knox, Kentucky, learning to drive "every vehicle the Army had, every tank, jeeps and motorcycles, everything." Eventually, Rothwell's specialized training focused on every aspect of tank operation. Following six more months of training at Fort Pope, Louisiana, Rothwell was sent overseas to Africa.

Rothwell spent his first six weeks on MP duty in Algiers, and then was assigned to the 2nd Armored Division, which had just come out of action in Tunisia, in June 1943. The Division went into training and was sent to Italy that November. Rothwell was made platoon leader in a light tank battalion, responsible for five tanks and the men who operated them. In Italy, the Division's assignment was to move on to the city of Anzio, drawing the Germans away from the center of the country. "They were going up Italy and they didn't even know we were coming in," Rothwell recalled. "We weren't there very long before they started bombing us." For four and a half months, the two sides were stalemated and the Division could not move. Rothwell's platoon kept busy laying mines and going on patrol duty.

Finally, the Americans broke through and began pushing the Germans toward Switzerland. When the unit was held up near one town at the top of a hill, Rothwell moved his tank platoon around

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night on a mountain, how are you going to find them?” Huebner reflected. Eventually, they were able to locate the battalion, but their first priority had to be caring for the casualties. Most of the wounds Huebner remembered treating were from mortar and shrapnel, rather than from small arms fire. “Shoe mines were a big problem, because the Germans before their chief line of defense always had mine fields and you lost a lot of extremities, feet mostly and legs.”

Despite the harrowing conditions the soldiers experienced during the war, Huebner witnessed few cases of genuine combat fatigue. “They were really remarkable. I was quite proud of them. They didn’t whimper, they didn’t holler medic.” The 88th Infantry Division was the first all Selective Service unit to serve in combat during World War II, and in three years they suffered one hundred percent casualties. Huebner regretted that he had no time to follow up on his patients to see if they survived. “I always wondered, ‘Now how did this guy do?’”

Even doctors were not immune from the esprit de corps between soldiers. “Of course, everybody likes the division that he was in…if you were in the infantry, you were proud of your outfit.” Huebner also felt anger against the enemy. “Some guy would pick a guy off in your column one by one. You got rather agitated about it. You’d say to yourself, ‘I hope they catch that bastard and really torture him.’

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The next morning, a group of American infantry soldiers discovered that the aggressive action of Rothwell’s group had driven the rest of the Germans from the town. Rothwell received a Silver Star for his actions. The 1st Armored Division and the rest of the American forces pursued the retreating Germans all the way up to the Swiss border. When the war ended, Rothwell witnessed Italian citizens pouring back over the border to their home country. One day, a large group of German soldiers surrendered. “Their uniforms looked like they were brand new, pressed, shoes shined and they were in perfect step. And they marched past me right to the PW camp.” Not long after, Rothwell was sent home.
him." At the same time, he was a doctor with a duty to treat casualties, including German prisoners. After treating two such patients, he said to them in his native German, "Well, have a good night's sleep. For you the war is over." Reflecting back on his service, Huebner pronounced: "I think it was one hell of a good adventure, even though it was dangerous. And I'm certainly happy that I made it."

From aid stations like Huebner's, patients were transported from a collecting company to a division clearing company, "where they had beds and a big tent." Those who needed further treatment went to a field hospital, located close behind the division but away from the front lines. Margie Nuber, who met Klaus Huebner late in the war and married him soon after, was a surgical nurse at a field hospital behind the 88th Division. Patients sent to her hospital were so severely injured that "most of them would go home." Before soldiers spent time at a hospital back in England or Wales, where doctors and nurses stabilized them before they were shipped back to the States.

ARMY NURSE

Almost all the patients who arrived at the 129th General Hospital in Wales, where Evelyn Kerns worked as a nurse, were finished with combat for good. They had lost limbs, had severely broken bones or had serious arm and shoulder wounds. During her 12-hour shifts, Evelyn cared for soldiers on a 44-bed ward where the more seriously injured were housed, and a 30-bed tent where men who could walk stayed. "I had corpsmen who worked under me who usually saw about the baths and changing beds," Evelyn noted. Some of the workers on her ward were German prisoners.

The living quarters for the Army Nurse Corps were very basic: small Quonset huts for 6 to 8 women, with a separate hut where the bathroom and showers were located. "And the stove that we had [in the hut] at the 129th was horrible," recalled Evelyn. "We had a terrible time to keep it going." Air raids were an ever-present threat when she was stationed in England. On outings to the movies in London, she remembered hearing the warning of an air raid. "You just sat there and after a while they would say 'all clear.'" During air raid drills, all of the nurses were expected to report to their wards as they would during a real emergency. Evelyn refused to go and stood near the back door to the barracks: "You don't go out there in the open when they're bombing." There would be no one to care for the patients if the nurses were killed.

The job was demanding. "Usually there were two nurses, myself and another nurse, on the ward. We did all the dressings and gave out all the medications," said Evelyn. Each patient received penicillin every four hours. The antibiotic "was a Godsend," but the job of mixing and administering the drug took up a great deal of the nurses' time. "But if it hadn't been for that we would have had a lot more deaths," Evelyn observed. She remembered receiving many patients during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, more than after the invasion on D-day when many of the men were killed outright.

Although few of the patients Evelyn treated died, the more challenging cases were the most memorable. One soldier had lost his leg, and repeatedly refused
her offer to read letters from home; he eventually died. The medical staff cared for another young man in a private room while trying to save his leg. "They finally had to amputate and then...he went out with the other patients," she recalled. One sergeant had been beaten up by his own men. "He was not a very nice person," Evelyn noted. "I really felt sorry for him, but he didn't make it."

Some of the soldiers suffered from combat fatigue, or simply had a difficult time dealing with their injuries. "We had some that were really depressed...They didn't have any medication or anything like that for depression." Every once in a while they discovered a patient with a self-inflicted wound. Typically, though, the mood on the ward was pleasant. "Usually you had one person on the ward who was like a comedian," remembered Evelyn. "And he would keep the rest of them...kind of upbeat...and we had our own radio station which played music.

The nurses did what they could to make the soldiers comfortable. At Christmas in 1944, "we saved all our candy rations and cigarette rations...and then we would wrap them up so that we could give them to patients...so that they would have a little bit of Christmas." Despite the hardships and the lost time with her husband, Evelyn felt good about her time with the Army Nurse Corps. "I was very glad...I felt I did my part and think it was all worthwhile."

WARTIME ROMANCE

Evelyn Best was working the night shift at a Wilmington hospital when a friend came in one day and told her, "The Japanese just bombed Pearl Harbor." "Where's Pearl Harbor?" she replied. "And so of course that was the beginning." Soon after, Evelyn began receiving letters from the government saying, "you know your fellow citizens are dying on the battlefield." Next, she received a card demanding if she "will or...will not join the Armed Forces of the United States. If not, why not?" The government left her with little choice. "I didn't have a why not, so that's when I signed up," Evelyn remembered.

Ever since she was about five years old, Evelyn had wanted to be a nurse. Her family moved to Rising Sun from western Pennsylvania when she was a baby, and Evelyn attended local schools. As soon as she graduated from high school in 1938, she went into nurse's training. When she completed her training in 1941, "it was at the right time." Evelyn's first orders were to report to Fort DuPont, Delaware in October 1942. Two weeks later, she was sent to Moore General Hospital near Asheville, North Carolina.

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In late November, she had a blind date with an x-ray technician at the hospital named Jim Kerns. Ten days later, on December 1, 1942, they were married. They kept the marriage a secret for six months—it was against regulations for married personnel to work together—then Evelyn was transferred to another hospital at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. For the next two and a half years, Evelyn and Jim Kerns struggled to see each other whenever possible, but Army life made it difficult. The head nurse at Camp Mackall was so tough on Evelyn that she put in for a transfer. As a result, she was sent to the New York Port of Embarkation to be sent overseas. Jim had been assigned to a hospital ship, Jarrett M. Huddleston, and was close by at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. Just before Evelyn left for England aboard the Queen Mary, she and Jim managed to see each other one last time before shipping out. For months after Evelyn arrived in London in December 1943, her husband had no idea where she was stationed.

Evelyn was at the 129th General Hospital in Wales during the summer of 1944 when she received word that Jim's ship had come into the port at Avonmouth, England. She hoped to catch a train leaving at 9 a.m. and arriving at 3 p.m., which would give her three hours to spend with Jim. "Well, 9 o'clock came and left and so I didn't get the train," Evelyn recalled. One of her patients who was a pilot suggested someone might fly her there, and the officer in charge approved. Evelyn traveled by plane and then by bus, arriving two hours before the train to spend the afternoon with her husband. She and Jim stole a few hours together every so often in this way, although always by train rather than her own personal airplane. Sometimes "you were 24, 36 hours without sleep but it didn't make any difference," Evelyn reflected.

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PILOT IN THE PACIFIC

When Robert Bean and his parents moved to the country outside of Elkton from their home in Wilmington, Delaware in 1939, they had to get used to the dirt roads and lack of electricity. "We wanted more space, wanted to go to an area where there's open fields," Bean's father worked as an electrical engineer, and had flown bi-planes in France during World War I. "He didn't want me to have to go to war," Bean recalled, but "I wanted to do what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a military pilot." Bean had just begun the two years of college required for pilots training at the University of Alabama when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The Army Air Corps needed pilots immediately and he passed the entrance test.

In July 1942, Bean reported to Fort Bragg, North Carolina for training and then to San Antonio, Texas for pre-flight training. Bean remembered that 60% of his classmates washed out in primary flying school. "You had to learn fast and you just had to work at it." Those that made it went on to basic and then advanced flying school and graduated in May 1943. After a short leave, Bean was sent to Hawaii to become a fighter pilot in the Pacific theater, but was transferred to a B-24 bomb group after he arrived. The day before he was to fly his first combat mission, Bean fell off a weapons carrier on the way to see a movie and broke his wrist. The injury extended his stay in Hawaii for another 6 months.

Finally, Bean integrated with a B-24 crew in the 98th Bomb Squadron and began to fly missions over the Pacific Ocean in 1944. "They were long, long missions all over water, no fighter cover for us. We had to defend ourselves with other aircraft flying in formation," Bean noted. He recounted one mission to bomb the island of Pohnpei, when their navigator told them to change course. Only an hour and a half from their base at Guam, the crew became concerned that the change might leave them stranded over the ocean without enough fuel to get back. The navigator turned out to be right. "Sure enough, there..."
was a Japanese sub on the other side of the island giving false radio signals."

If the navigator had not used star shots to determine the bomber’s actual position, they might have had to ditch the bomber in the middle of the Pacific. “I just used to treat my parachute with complete disregard,” Bean declared, “because I would never bail out in the Pacific [with] sharks, sun.” On any mission, there was the possibility the plane would not make it back. Bean’s squadron was escorting a group of Navy B24s doing reconnaissance over the island of Saipan in June 1944, when another Army plane had engine trouble. A plane flown by a pilot named Stoddard dropped back to cover it and was shot down by a Japanese fighter plane. Seven of the ten crew members never made it to the life raft alive. “But Stoddard and the two other men got in the rafts and in a period of three days they drifted back into Saipan,” Bean recounted. “[Stoddard] was a prisoner for maybe 2 years or so and he was tortured.”

Bean considered it lucky that he never had to bail out during the war. “In the Pacific, if you’re down you’re done,” he concluded. Bean flew 28 missions with the 98th Bomb Squadron, targeting airfields and shipping. When the squadron left Hawaii, Bean still had 12 more missions to fly because of his wrist injury. He completed his missions in early 1945 and arrived back home in February. For two years, he went to college but returned to the Air Force in 1948 and made flying his career for another 17 years.

B24 NAVIGATOR

Following D-Day, Ralph McCool flew as navigator on 29 more B24 missions over France and Germany. Most of the bombing targets were German industrial areas, supply lines and emplacements. In July 1944, McCool flew seven days in a row, four more than the typical mission limit. After the fifth straight mission, he felt compelled to complain. "When you get back from this mission," his squadron commander told him, "if you get back...you can pick up a pass and go to London for three or four days." The dangers the bombers faced during missions were very real. "When we flew, we were either opposed by fighters or by flack and the flack was terrible...it wasn't unusual for a flack shell to explode and some of the shrapnel to penetrate the plane," McCool related. On one mission to Hamburg, Germany, "the flack was so thick up there that planes were really almost disappearing going into the flack. I thought never in this world am I going to get through that mess. Fortunately, I did."

A plane that made it through a box barrage from 88 millimeter cannons might come back with over 50 holes in it. During a mission to Tours, France, a shell cut the hydraulic system of McCool's...
plane in half, severing all of the control cables. By the time the automatic pilot was engaged, the B24 had fallen 5,000 feet below formation. “That was one day that I thought I was going to bail out of that thing,” McCool confessed. McCool and the engineer spliced the cables together with wire, and hooked parachutes to the frames that held the plane’s machine guns to slow the plane down on landing. They landed safely, but the guns tore out of the bulkhead. Their commanding officer demanded an explanation. “Well, I can only say one thing, Colonel,” McCool said, “I know that airplane’s expendable… and I don’t think I am.” The CO did not agree: “You pull any more tricks like that… you’ll find out what expendable is.”

After 25 missions, Ralph McCool received the Distinguished Flying Cross, but he still was not eligible for discharge. “When I got over there, the requirement was 25 missions, before I got to 25 they changed it to 30, before I got to 30 they changed it to 35. And it didn’t make any difference where you were when they changed it, if you hadn’t completed it, you were stuck with it.” By the summer of 1945, McCool was back in the States, navigating transport planes at Kellogg Field in Michigan, hauling troops to “some little island out in the Pacific someplace.” He fully anticipated the possibility that he might be sent to the Pacific. Fortunately, the Japanese surrendered in August; by September 1945, McCool received his discharge.

**SIX YEARS AT SEA**

From the time he was a boy in the Elk Mills area, George Reynolds worked hard for everything he wanted. After his parents divorced when he was 11, George went to work on a series of farms because his mother had little means to support him. “I just worked wherever I could get somebody to feed me and clothe me,” remembered Reynolds. When he was 16, the farmer he worked for insisted he quit school to work on the farm full-time. Reynolds stayed on the farm a while, then found another full-time job, but the impending war preoccupied him. “It was obvious to anybody [who] would look in the newspaper and [it was] just a matter of time before we got sucked into it,” he reflected.

In July 1941, Reynolds joined the Navy and went on
to enroll in every trade school he could, including submarine and diving school. After 11 months of schooling, an officer at the submarine base where he was stationed called him in: “What the hell you trying to do? Get out of sea duty? ... You’re not getting any more schools, you’re bottom’s going to sea.” In October of 1942, Reynolds was stationed aboard the USS Beaver in the North Atlantic, which headed toward Nova Scotia to pick up a convoy of over 50 vessels. German submarines began to attack the convoy at night. “They sunk seventeen in four nights. And every night in a row they got the ship right next to us on the port side,” Reynolds noted.

On the fourth night, a torpedo hit a converted British whaling vessel next to the Beaver. On duty topside, Reynolds could only watch and listen to the men screaming as they jumped into the sub-freezing water. A sthe Beaver separated from the convoy to avoid being hit by the U-boat, Reynolds saw an enemy sub break the surface. “Submarine! Submarine!” Reynolds hollered to the skipper. One of their British escort ships spread depth charges, and the sub did not reappear. The battle was over, but Reynolds was shaken by his first combat experience.

He looked out over the ocean, which was ablaze from the fuel of the sinking whaling vessel, and observed the ship’s mast, “setting right on the horizon... a perfect white hot cross.” Formerly agnostic, Reynolds had a conversion experience on the North Atlantic. He would eventually become an ordained minister.

The USS Beaver’s next assignment was to be the mother ship carrying supplies, food and medical personnel for a squadron of submarines sent in advance of the African invasion in November 1942. For two weeks, their objective was to map the minefield along the coast, and then to sink any enemy vessels that emerged once the invasion began. Following that mission, Reynolds’s ship was sent to Norway and then back to the States to be readied for service in the Pacific. Much of the time, the Beaver was out in the open ocean, trying to “get them worried that we were going to have an invasion of Japan.”

As the fleet made its way toward Okinawa, Japan, it became the target of kamikaze planes.

Reynolds recalled the situation: “We had to man our guns 24 hours a day because you never knew when they were coming. They’d come in low and come in on top of us, and a whole plane would dive right into the ship and kill us.” Reynolds and the machine gunners on the other ships fired at the incoming planes. “It looked worse than the 4th of July because every ship in the area was firing up at the sky.” By the end of the war, combat fatigue and a bleeding ulcer affected Reynolds deeply. “When it’s all over with and everything is quieting down, then all of a sudden your stomach starts churning and you start realizing how close you came.”

The USS Beaver remained near Okinawa when the atomic bombs were dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.
and when the Japanese unconditionally surrendered in September. Days later, the fleet was hit by a typhoon and over seventy vessels were lost. I became extremely distressed,” Reynolds reflected. “I made it, the war is over with and damn it, I’m gonna get killed here.” But the USS Beaver made it through the storm and the ship moved on to Japan. There, Reynolds witnessed the devastation at Hiroshima. “It actually shook me, it actually shook my soul,” he remarked. “But we saved a couple million lives on both sides by doing that.” Reynolds remained in the Navy until 1947—he had to sign up for six years to get the training he wanted—and served in China before being sent back to the States.

SUBMARINE SAILOR

Jack Logan grew up in North East, and as a young man worked for his grandfather, who operated a grocery store. In 1938, Logan’s father started an appliance and refrigeration business. Although the business became very successful, it had been a risk in the beginning and the father counted on his son to help out. It was 1941 when Logan graduated from high school, and the imminent entrance of the United States into the war led him to a decision. He did not want to join the Army, to meet the enemy in battle face-to-face, so he decided to join the Navy. Years later, Logan wrote about his wartime experiences in a memoir he called “Twin Dolphins” after the submarine service’s insignia. “I’ll be drafted soon, and I’d rather choose my branch of the service,” Logan reflected. His father disapproved of his decision, but gave his permission anyway.

In 1942, Logan was sworn in for duty in Elkton and then traveled by train to the Great Lakes Training Center. He was one of the fortunate few to be admitted to a school for special training. When Logan completed electrician’s training, he decided to apply for the submarine service, and was the only one of 22 volunteers who made it in. Logan graduated second in his class from submarine school, and was sent to San Francisco where he shipped out to the submarine base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. For weeks, Logan’s duty was to prepare other submarines for service. As word came of the Normandy invasion, he longed for a combat assignment. In August 1944, Logan finally went to sea as part of the crew of the submarine USS Becuna.

The Becuna arrived in the Pacific and received orders to patrol part of the ocean east of the Philippines. Early in the patrol, an enemy destroyer dropped explosive depth charges in an attempt to sink the submarine. A board the Becuna, the sounds of approaching danger occupied the green sailor. “He heard the high-speed screws of the approaching destroyer,” Logan wrote in the third-person. “Somewhere beyond the hull, he heard a soft clicking, then something exploded. There was a tremendous explosion and the sound of rushing water against the hull.” Logan prayed, fully expecting a wall of water to suddenly rush at him. The Becuna survived the depth charges that day and on many occasions after that, but few submarine sailors became totally immune to the fear they caused.

After its first patrol, the Becuna docked for a time in Australia. As they headed out for their next patrol, word came that six submarines had been lost during the recent patrol. It was news that would come time and time again during the war, but always affected Logan
deeply. Sometimes, he knew men on board or had worked on the sub himself, and he knew that he too faced certain death if his sub was hit. Later in the war, he remembered hearing of the loss of the USS Trigger, and would learn years later that his future wife’s brother was aboard that submarine.

In the late fall of 1944, the USS Becuna was on patrol in the South China Sea off the coast of Vietnam when another sub torpedoed a Japanese tanker and then came under attack. The Becuna’s captain took the sub closer in to shore and ordered three torpedoes fired at one of the remaining vessels. Blind to what was happening on the surface, Logan and other sailors waited. “Suddenly, there was a tremendous explosion, and the sub’s hull vibrated like a plucked guitar string...then came the mighty roar of a gut-wrenching explosion that sent the sub’s bow down and backward.” The torpedo blew the tanker in half, but the enemy destroyer nearby prepared to drop depth charges on the Becuna.

The captain took the sub onto the bottom, shut down the engines and ordered the men to talk only in whispers. As the depth charges fell, the crew waited quietly for several hours. Temperatures inside the sub hovered at 110 degrees. “Most of the men wore only shorts and sandals, their bodies streaming with perspiration,” Logan wrote. Seven hours into the attack, another destroyer arrived and began to target the Becuna with its depth charges. At 16 hours, the men’s “breathing was difficult and unnatural” and “the crew felt dopey and dim-witted.” Finally, after over 21 hours the captain brought the sub up to radar depth and discovered they had out-waited the enemy.

Through March 1945, the Becuna patrolled the South China Sea, but enemy ships became increasingly scarce. The submarine was sent to the Philippines, where Logan received the news that he was to be transferred to another sub bound for the States. He felt despondent that he had to say goodbye to his friends, but happy to get one last patrol on the USS Bergal. Their mission was to navigate a mine field in the Sea of Japan and attack enemy shipping there. Logan described the obstacles in their way: “The hull-shattering mines would be near the surface, with steel cables snaking down to anchor them to the bottom and keep them in position. That meant the sub would pass through the cables.”

Whenever they neared a mine, the FM radar equipment made a gong-like ringing. At one point, the Bergal came so close to a mine that a cable scraped against the hull, but made it through the field. The Bergal sank a Japanese submarine and two freighters, and managed to evade enemy depth charges one last time before its final patrol ended. The sub was ordered back to the States. Logan arrived home in July 1945, “stepping down from a Greyhound bus in North East at nine-o’clock on a warm summer’s night.”
TRIUMPH ON THE HOME FRONT

WOWS: WOMAN ORDNANCE WORKERS

After Pearl Harbor, the entire country shifted its focus to supporting the war effort and the fighting forces abroad. Elkton's Triumph Industries produced fireworks, and had been a major employer in Cecil County through the Depression years. After Edgar Startt's family lost their farm, his older brother got a job at Triumph and Edgar went to work there after high school; once the war came, their father found a job at Triumph too. Jim McCauley had worked in the machine shop at Triumph for just a few months when "Uncle [Sam] came along and said it's time to go to Meade." When he left Triumph, the owner, J. Ben Decker, "gave us…a week's pay. That was a nice bonus."

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A good work ethic usually resulted in a less dangerous, better paying job. Jacqueline Perdue McGuirk left Bluefield, Virginia during the summer of 1942, and found a job at Triumph painting the inside of primers that went into the shells. A foreman soon noticed her hard work and moved her up to working on a machine that put the primer into the shell. From there, she moved up to a job as an inspector in the scale department. Although Beulah Rambo had worked in the office at Triumph for years, she took a job tipping fusees during the war. Somebody'd bring you in a whole box of fusees that had to be wrapped and...you had a big bunch of thin, red paper...you'd just take your hand a certain way and if you did it right you could paste them all at once. The job suited Beulah: "I made quite a bit more money and so I didn't mind it." Eventually, she received a promotion and became a government inspector.

Triumph Explosives reminded workers of their important contribution to the war effort in their magazine, TNT: Triumph News Topics and in pamphlets. "Here at Triumph you have a wonderful opportunity to play an important part in America's all-out effort to save the world from Axis tyranny," one pamphlet read. It wasn't just propaganda. Beulah Rambo confirmed that most of the women took pride in their job: "They tried to do first-rate work...and were interested in doing a good job for their country, for themselves and for the safety of their loved ones." Jacqueline McGuirk remembered: "I had a boyfriend in the Marines at that time, and I really felt like it was helping the cause." A headline in TNT in July 1943 read, "If we don't make 'em—they can't shoot 'em." One writer advised her co-workers: "a woman should approach her war work at Triumph Explosives with...the feeling that she is helping to bring about a permanent world solution.

Every issue of *TNT* magazine stressed the importance of safety in order to avoid costly and deadly accidents: "Victory first, Safety always." Time and again, articles urged workers to keep up production, to show up for work and to work safely. Nonetheless, mishaps occurred on a regular basis, with four explosions, 31 injuries and five deaths between 1940 and early 1943. Working with volatile materials always had been dangerous, even before the war. In 1938, Edgar Startt was working with phosphorus when the building next to him blew up and caught his building on fire; he and four others were badly burned. "The day I caught on fire I couldn't get out of the building...My brother, he kicked the door in and tore my clothes off of me and I went over and jumped that high fence and ran down there in the field." Startt spent weeks in the hospital recovering, after which he found a job at Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Triumph had its own hospital where the medical staff treated workers injured on the job. "It was a nice little hospital, had six emergency beds. It had a wonderful accident room, three registered nurses on duty all day," recalled Klaus Hubeon, who worked there for about three months before he reported for duty as a doctor with the 88th Infantry Division. Many of those treated had amputated fingertips or burns requiring skin grafts. "TNT was a problem because there were people who...eventually developed some liver problems because they became jaundiced and we'd have to take them off the job." Dr. Hubeon also performed physical examinations on the young women who came by the busloads to work at Triumph.

Helen McKinney's first job involved weighing explosive powder to make 40 millimeter shells. "Many times those things went off and [blew] people's fingers off and that's what scared me out of there." She recalls attending regular safety lectures in the plant cafeteria, but some workers seemed to pay no attention. One day, as Helen went outside to dump the volatile powder into a water barrel, her shoes sparked an explosion of powder where some of her co-workers carelessly had dumped it on the ground. She was lucky: "If it hadn't been for those safety shoes, I'd have lost my feet...I refused to work in there anymore because people weren't doing their job properly." Such accidents could easily become deadly.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, May 4th, 1943, two explosions rocked the Triumph plant, sending plumes of smoke into the sky.
the air and rattling buildings up to 10 miles away. Jacqueline McGuirk was working that day in Final Rounds. "We felt this terrible blast and you could see the smoke and everything down below and we knew something bad had happened." The first explosion had been in detonators. "Detonators were a terrible area to work, very scary, risky," Jacqueline notes. Working up the hill from the factory area, Beulah Rambo heard the sound of the blast and the ensuing sirens. "It was pretty harrowing, just like being in the war," she remembers. She watched as trucks full of injured workers were brought past and fire units and ambulances rushed onto the scene. "One man walked up [the hill] and I don't think he knew what he was doing. His clothes were about burned off of him but he was still walking."

By the time emergency workers brought the situation under control, five buildings had been destroyed. Over one hundred workers were injured and fifteen were killed, tripling Triumph's previous casualty totals. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, President Benjamin Pepper issued the following statement, "All employees of Triumph expect to return to work and their regular posts of duty at 8 a.m., Wednesday morning, ready to continue 'passing the ammunition.'" Many workers stayed on, but for some the risks seemed too great. Helen Fields McKinney's friends "went right back home after that explosion and they tried to get me to go," but she had no desire to return to West Virginia. In fact, she never would return there to live.

TRIUMPH TRANSFORMS CECIL

Most of the defense workers initially lived in boarding houses, company dormitories, and hundreds of private homes throughout the Cecil County area. Thirty buses from Ross Transport, Inc. formed a bus line just for Triumph employees. "Every place was running over with people," Beulah

BAINBRIDGE BRINGS SAILORS AND JOBS

In 1941, the United States Navy took over the grounds of the former Tome School for Boys, located in Port Deposit. Bainbridge Naval Training Center became the Navy's main training center on the east coast for seamen recruited for wartime service and brought an influx of people and activity to the area. In addition to Navy men, Bainbridge employed numerous civilians from the local area. Ned Lucas's father found a job as the foreman of a carpentry crew and Evelyn Best Kerns' father worked in supply. Barracks, classrooms, training areas and mess halls were built on the 1000-acre property for the 35,000 recruits it housed at one time. More than half a million service people trained at Bainbridge by the time the war ended in 1945.

The young sailors at Bainbridge found plenty to keep them occupied during their free time, with thousands of girls working at Triumph Industries, the munitions plant in Elkton. The Training Center, along with nearby Aberdeen Proving Grounds (Continued on page 49)
Gorrell recalled, “Elkton, building little houses and people were boarding people, just a lot of people.” Helen Fields McKinney boarded at Sandy Cove on the North East River, run by two unmarried women who had firm rules of proper conduct for the young women who stayed there. The North East house of Mrs. Ritenhouse became Jacqueline McGuirk’s home, and the girls took the bus to work each day.

In 1942, dormitories and houses were put on the fast-track to construction by the War Manpower Commission and the Federal Housing Authority. In Cecil County, these included the communities of Hollingsworth Manor and Singerly Village, along with the George Reed Village in Newark. Both Village in Elkton was constructed for Triumph’s black workers. Eventually, thousands of units were constructed to house war laborers, transforming the County’s landscape along with its population. Joe Lofthouse noticed the change when he returned home after serving overseas: “A lot of strangers here, you know, that worked at Triumph. I found the streets were full of people I didn’t know.”

Recruiters did not list finding a husband as one of the perks in newspaper advertisements or on the flyers dropped from airplanes over rural West Virginia. In fact, there were rules against co-workers marrying and married girls living in company housing. Nevertheless, more than a few girls who came to Elkton for a war-time job met their future husbands, and stayed on to begin a family. In their small amount of free time, some female ordnance workers went to the movies or visited the USO in Elkton. Helen McKinney and the women at Sandy Cove kept more to themselves, playing games together, swimming in the river and occasionally exploring the shops on the streets of North East. Because they had no car and gas was rationed, Jacqueline McGuirk and her friends rarely went to the USO either. On Sundays, “We walked up to what was called the Madison House and had dinner, that was our (Continued from page 48)
treat for the week," she recalled.

A year after Helen Fields came to work at Triumph, she met Dick McKinney, a foreman in final rounds. Her supervisor insisted Helen come to work earlier and stay later, but that would mean she would miss the bus to Sandy Cove. "She can ride with me," Dick McKinney spoke up. "I'll see to it she gets here and take her home later." A romance developed soon after, and they married in January 1944. Five months later, Dick went into the service, but after the war he and Helen raised a family and built a business in Cecil County.

Jacqueline Perdue hoped for a little money and a little diversion when she began working at Triumph. When she was promoted, she never expected to fall in love with her new supervisor, Arthur McGuirk. A short time later, the two slipped away for the weekend and were secretly married. When the company found them out a few months later, Jacqueline was expecting their first child. She was ready to stop working so she could begin her new life in Cecil County. Compared to some, however, these were not whirlwind romances, as Helen Fields McKinney remembered:

"There was one man that met a woman and knew her three days and married her."

Triumph's WOWs continued to risk their personal safety for the fighting men overseas through 1945. Newsreels at the movies provided some information on the progress of the war, along with the local newspapers, but "it was gloom and despair." Helen remembered the girls' conversations about the war: "We talked about it. When it was going to end and was it ever going to end." When the war in Europe finally ended in May 1945, Helen was living in Wilmington with her husband's sister. She recalled V-E Day: "Oh my goodness, everybody went on the street and the horns blowed for hours." As the war drew to a close, women workers everywhere were encouraged to give up their jobs to the "boys" coming home. Some women were content to return to their lives as mothers and homemakers, while others found satisfaction in earning their own wages and looked for other work. Some, like Helen McKinney and Jacqueline McGuirk, chose not to return to their childhood homes and remained in Cecil County for a lifetime.