



ROBERT MCKELLOGG  
THUNDERBIRD IN WW II





ROBERT MCKELLOGG

Our Liberator

*Thunderbird in WW II*

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*First edition*

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*For Robert McKellogg's grandchildren, so they may better know  
their Grandpa Bob's heroism.*



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# Foreword

Robert McKellogg had eleven children, and I was number eight. I am sure each of us possesses different recollections of our dad. I remember how he loved to cook burgers every Saturday. Sometimes Dad would dance across the living room floor imitating Jackie Gleason, saying, “How sweet it is!” I watched Dad daily as he smoothed his Brylcreem through his wavy hair; I waited for the familiar response as he looked back at me from the mirror- “I’m a good lookin’ devil.” In the early morning hours, he listened to talk radio in the kitchen. When I woke up early to complete Sister Sharon’s chemistry homework, Dad would make me a fire and a little something to eat. I knew Dad didn’t like crowds, parties or socializing. I knew he never wanted to camp, but that was about the only time I heard our dad mention war and sleeping in foxholes. I remember Dad to be a sweet, modest, quiet man who often retreated from the chaos that was our home.

It was not until I grew older that I began to understand our dad and the war experiences that would forever change him. Growing up, I had no idea about the emotional wounds Dad carried home. I want to thank my husband, Dave, for helping me understand. It was through his conversations with Dad that I began to learn. Sometimes driving home from Fullerton, Dave would ask, “Do you know what your dad did in WWII?” I would have to plead ignorance, and Dave would begin to paint

a picture that helped me see.

Now, more than twenty years after Dad's death, Dave and our brother, Richard, embarked on this book project to peel back the layers of Dad's war experiences and write his story, so his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren may truly know this special man-Robert McKellogg-our liberator. I want to thank my husband, Dave, who has spent countless hours researching Dad's war history, locating documents, and reading over 200 letters Dad wrote to Mom while he was gone serving his country so long ago. In collaboration with Richard and talking with other family members, Dave has woven together many disparate parts to write Dad's story, so we may better understand and remember.

Marilyn Forrest

# Preface

Robert McKellogg was one of the heroic US soldiers who helped defeat the Nazis during World War II. Like countless in the Greatest Generation, he was not one to brag or tell war stories. Bob and his Thunderbird soldiers from the Army's 45th Infantry Division fought fiercely in Italy, France, and Germany. At home, Claire worried, scouring the newspapers and watching the newsreels for any information about her sweetheart's fate. As he fought in Europe, thoughts of Claire sustained Bob.

Join us in reading excerpts from Bob's extraordinary correspondence to his fiancé. He wrote over 220 letters to Claire, 60 of them while fighting in Europe. At the start of the journey, you'll meet a carefree Ohio University student writing about fraternity antics, basketball games, and homecoming dances. His innocence begins to erode in the heat of Texas where he describes basic training, long hikes with heavy packs, and learning to duck live ammunition. He will take you on his voyage across the Atlantic to "somewhere in Italy", where you can read his first V-mails to Claire and his parents. His dispatches recount fighting Nazis in the villages of France. Go with Bob across the Rhine into the belly of the beast, Germany, where he chronicles how the Thunderbirds fought house by house. Join him in the ferocious battle for Nuremberg, and trudge with him into hell, Dachau.

## Our Liberator Timeline

### 1941

- July 13 - Bob asks Claire to dance at Vermilion Beach on Lake Erie, Ohio.
- December 7 - Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

### 1942

- Bob attends University of Ohio in Athens, Ohio.
- July 30 - Bob assigned to Army Reserves on the University of Ohio Campus.
- Fall - Claire starts Seton Hill College in Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

### 1943

- June - Bob begins basic training at Fort Wolters, Texas.
- July 10 - Allies invade Sicily, Italy.

### 1944

- March 13 - Bob proposes to Claire while on furlough in Cleveland, Ohio.
- June 3 - Rome falls to Allies.
- June 6 - The Allies invade Normandy beaches in France, known as D-Day.
- July 28 - Bob ships out to Europe on USS Sea Owl.
- August 11 - Bob arrives in Naples, Italy to receive demolitions training.

- October 5 - Bob lands in Marseilles, France and joins the Thunderbirds near Epinal.
- Fall and Winter - Bob fights German army in France, known as the Rhineland Campaign.
- December - Bob evacuates to a French hospital in Vittel for leg infection.

## 1945

- March - Bob returns to combat, and he and his L Company cross into Germany.
- April 20 - Bob fights to capture Nuremberg.
- April 29 - Bob helps liberate Dachau concentration camp.
- May 8 - V-E Day (Victory in Europe).
- August 14 - V-J Day (Victory over Japan).
- September 14 - Bob arrives home to US.
- November 14 - Bob is discharged from the Army.

## 1946

- January - Bob returns to Ohio University.
- June - Claire graduates from Seton Hill.
- June 20 - Bob and Claire marry in Cleveland, Ohio.

## The Early Years

**R**obert Dowell McKellogg (1920-1999) was born October 15, 1920 in Ashland, Ohio. His father, Clifford Browning McKellogg (1890-1952), and his mother, Beatrice Elizabeth Dowell (1891-1971), both hailed from a long line of Ohioans. Robert was a direct descendant of Rufus Putnam (1738-1824), Revolutionary War general and Ohio founder. This celebrated American was his 4th great grandfather. The McKelloggs had two boys. Robert's older brother was Charles B. McKellogg (1917-1980). Robert's mom affectionately called him Buddy. Many knew him as Bob McKellogg. We simply called him Dad or Grandpa Bob.

The 1930 Census lists the ten-year-old Robert living with his family in Shelby, Ohio. During the 1930's the McKelloggs moved to Lorain, Ohio. The family lived on 157 E. Erie Ave. Although the McKelloggs had ties to Ohio's founding father, they were not rich and were hit hard during the Great Depression.



*1938 Lorain High School yearbook photo*

Robert attended Lorain High School and then later Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Bob's ancestor, Rufus Putnam, helped found the campus in Athens, Ohio's first institution of higher education. In college, he earned the nickname "Boxcar Bob" for his ability to box out his basketball opponents. He majored in Industrial Arts. However, WWII abruptly interrupted Bob's university experience.

\* \* \*

While in college, Robert McKellogg met Claire FitzGerald. In the summer of 1941, between her junior and senior year of high school, Claire and her friends rented a summer cottage along the shores of Lake Erie. The first night Claire attended a dance

at the lake. In a recent interview, Claire explained how she met Bob, “A young man asked me to dance. He wasn’t a very good dancer. He was very nice, and I liked him. And I really never expected to see him again.”<sup>1</sup> During World War II, Bob sent a letter to Claire commemorating their dance on July 13th, 1941 at Vermilion Beach on Lake Erie.

No doubt Claire made an impression. Bob contacted Claire’s girlfriend, Mary Ellen, who passed along Claire’s number. The following week Claire says, “I had a phone call from Lorain, and it was Bob. He wanted to know if I would go out.”<sup>2</sup> Claire agreed, and Bob followed up his phone call with a letter proposing a plan. He wrote from his home in Lorain asking for a Friday date:

*Dear Claire,*

*I imagine you will wonder why I am writing you this letter so here goes. If it meets with your approval I would be more than pleased to have a date with you this coming Friday evening; that is providing you haven’t made any future plans... Write me a card and let me know if you can find your way free to go — here’s hoping you can,*

*Yours truly*

*Bob McKellogg*

*157 East Erie Ave.*

*P.S. You set the time and think of some nice place to go.*

Bob traveled to Cleveland several more times for summer rendezvous with Claire. In August of 1941, for example, Bob sent a card to Claire proposing a moonlight cruise. He also asked if his best friend, Keith McFarland, could join them with his date.



Brain, Ohio  
Monday 7 P.M.

Dear Claire,

I imagine that you will wonder what I am writing you with your approval. If it meets with your approval I would be more than pleased to have a date with you this coming Friday evening. Dick and you haven't made any future plans. Dick and I were in Cleveland last Sunday evening and it seems that we got lost. You probably have heard all about it by now. Dick called Rose Marie and he is staying here this Friday so have a favor to ask. We will know if you can find your way free to go - Here's hoping you can.

Yours truly  
Bob Mc Kellogg  
157 East Erie Ave.

↓  
over

Letter from Bob asking Claire for a date after he met her at a dance

At the end of the summer, Bob returned to college in Athens, Ohio. Claire remained on his mind, and he continued regular correspondence with her. His letters, written on Ohio University stationary, shared news of his academic and social activities:

homecoming, term papers, football games, and the hit parade:

*Athens, Ohio*

*Nov 2, 41*

*Dear Claire,*

*.... I know how busy a person can get when they are in school so keep on the beam and study hard. This week was homecoming down here and we had quite a big time. I was up until 2 AM every night studying and getting our float ready for the parade but now I can take it easy. How are all your sorority sisters and by the way are you still president? I have two term papers to do and a speech to give within the next two weeks so outside of that I am taking it in stride... Our football team has been on the upgrade since the season opened, but as yet have a tough game coming up with McFarland's team you can bet on O.U to win. My song is still No "1" on the hit parade ...*



*Photo notation - "Change-About Dance" - Ohio University, 1943.*

*Bob is far right.*

\* \* \*

Soon, Bob's lighthearted world as a university student would take a terrible turn, as would the lives of all Americans. On December 7th, 1941, the Japanese launched a surprise attack on the US Naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The next day Franklin Roosevelt declared war on Japan. Three days later, in response to the German declaration of war against the US, we were at war with Germany as well.

## Our Thunderbird

With the entrance of the United States into World War II, Bob McKellogg sought to serve his country. He still attended the University of Ohio. However, he wanted to join the Navy with his best friend, Keith McFarland, but he didn't pass the vision test.

Bob registered for the draft February 16, 1942, just three months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He was twenty-one. His draft registration card lists him as 5 ft. 9 inches, 180 pounds, with blue eyes and brown hair. Bob was particularly interested in the Air Force which at that time was part of the Army. In a July 20, 1942 letter he told Claire he had taken his Army physical and written to Washington, requesting entrance into the Air Cadet program.

Instead, Bob was assigned to the Army Reserve on campus. On July 30th, 1942 he received his identification card for the Army Enlisted Reserve Corp. He reported to the Recruit Officer Training Corp (ROTC) at Ohio University. Bob continued with his university classes, but he also participated in ROTC drills.

OUR LIBERATOR

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)			
SERIAL NUMBER T <b>26</b>	1. NAME (Print) <b>Robert Dowell McKellogg</b>		ORDER NUMBER T <b>102884</b>
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) <b>157 E. Erie Ave Lorain Lorain OHIO</b>			
(THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL)			
3. MAILING ADDRESS <b>(Same) 101 GROSVENOR ST ATHENS OH</b>			
(If other address than place indicated on line 2. If none insert word none)			
4. TELEPHONE <b>Athens 22463</b> <b>rain 8-3302</b>	5. AGE IN YEARS <b>21</b>	6. PLACE OF BIRTH <b>Ashland OHIO</b>	
DATE OF BIRTH <b>10 15 20</b>			
(Exchange) (Day) (Mo) (Yr) (Town) (County) (State)			
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS <b>Mr C. B. McKellogg Same Address.</b>			
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS <b>Student - OHIO University Athens OHIO</b>			
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS <b>Athens OHIO</b>			
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
D. S. S. FORM 1 (Revised 1-1-42)	(over)	☆ GPO 16-21630-2	<b>Robert McKellogg</b> (Registrant's signature)

Draft Registration Card

He described his ROTC class to Claire in an October letter:

*All of the boys are required to to take a course in physical fitness. So three times a week the little junior commando from Lorain runs the Army obstacle course. The course consists of climbing fences, ditches, logs, ropes etc. plus hand-to-hand combat and the like.*

During the school year, Bob wrote Claire regularly. He reported on his Phi Delta Theta fraternity brothers and their antics. He kept her updated on Ohio University football team. Many lines of his letters were devoted to trying to schedule dates with Claire. Along with the normal boyfriend banter, his letters also contained references to the war: buying bonds, the home front, the draft, and gas rationing. He wrote:

*This business of gas rationing will surely keep the family car in the garage. I still run my V-8 but half way through the week I need another coupon.*

Bob's letters to Claire showed a persistent effort to woo his sweetheart. He was always polite and complimentary. He often encouraged Claire in her studies. His correspondence usually had a corny joke and occasionally included a poem. He signed off each letter with, *Much Love, Bob*, written in big block letters. Each letter was created by x's, symbolizing kisses. We don't have Claire's letters to Bob. However, a sure sign of her affection for her admirer was that she kept each of his letters, which numbered in the hundreds by the end of the war.

In the fall of 1942 Claire began her first year of college at Seton Hill. She was very focused on her studies. In a 1958 Alumnae publication for her college Claire wrote:

*Marriage as a career seemed a distant possibility when I entered Seton Hill in the fall of 1942. I was intrigued with studying psychology and wondered in which fascinating field of the science I would find myself working following graduation. All along the way I pondered over the opportunities in personnel work, child guidance, teaching, and social work — only to find myself, three weeks after graduation, happily married and looking to a career in homemaking.*

\* \* \*

Bob's letters from college increasingly showed his impending military service was on his mind. In a January 26, 1943 letter Bob explained to Claire:

*My new semester started today but it appears as the army isn't going to let me finish it. I hope to be in the service in the two weeks or a month. The members of my Reserve got their preliminary notice today and that doesn't sound too good. As the situation now stands I will remain in school until called, and for once in my college career, I would rather be in the army than go to school under such a set up.*

Bob knew his time at college was short, and he wanted to show his commitment to Claire. On April 3, 1943 Bob gave Claire his fraternity pin, a symbol of going steady. Bob didn't enter active military service until May, 24 1943. The week before he was scheduled to report, he wrote to Claire who had invited him to visit her at college:

*I am very sorry I won't be able to see you before going to the army but with less than a week to go, and the dentist desiring a glance at my molars it looks as though I won't be able to make it. I want to sincerely thank you for the invitation to visit you at old Seton Hill and I might add that on my first furlough I'll see you even if I only have a day...*

*Most of my time in college was really enjoyable and I didn't begin to miss a place so much in my life until I cleaned out all my scrap and shipped it home. My last week in school I actually believe I saw more people saying goodbye's than were really leaving.*

\* \* \*

Bob's next letter to Claire was sent from the induction center in Fort Hayes, Columbus Ohio, dated May 25, 1943. His stationary letterhead, once from the University Ohio, now read United States Army. Bob wrote he had his physical, and took an I.Q.

and mechanical aptitude test. He still hoped to be assigned to the Air Corp; he didn't want to be an Army engineer. He also reported that he had been marked for non-combatant duty because of an operation on his right leg two years prior. A week later, Bob wrote about his very special bunk mate, Lin Houston, a football player from Ohio State. As it turned out, Houston (1921- 1995) played eight seasons as a guard in the All-American Football Conference and in the National Football League with the Cleveland Browns.

In a postcard sent to Claire, dated June 9, 1943, Bob announced where he would do basic training:

*Just a line to let you know where I have landed. I am taking my basic training in the heart of Texas, Camp Wolters is located about 40 miles from Fort Worth and about 4 miles from Mineral Wells. From what they tell me it is really 13 weeks of tough training. The camp itself is about 2 years old and one of the cleanest in the country.*

It was also one of the hottest! Bob reported the heat in Camp Wolters in June was 110 degrees F. and would get even hotter in July. In a letter to Claire on June 27, 1943 he described the types of training he and his fellow soldiers received, and he made a request, too:

*Some of the fun this week centered around the "tear gas" chamber, grenade throwing, bayonet drill etc. if you can call it fun... Claire there is something I'd like to have you do for me if it isn't too much trouble. Please send me a small picture of yourself and help me keep up the morale. If you have one I'd really appreciate it... the photograph doesn't have to be elaborate since you look well at all*



*times. (Gee that surely ought to get a picture) ...*

Bob's request was rewarded. In a July 7th letter to Claire he wrote:

*Thanks for the picture. It's just what I wanted and I feel like a new man already. Of course I think of you all twenty hours of the day that I'm conscious and the four hours I sleep I dream of you so you see Claire you monopolize all my time and I love it ...*

Bob was creative in his communication with Claire. He made a recording at a nearby drug store and sent it to her. The 78 record arrived in a brown envelope inscribed, "Gem Blades Bring you the Recorded Voice of Bob McKellogg". An announcer introduced the recording "for Claire Fitzgerald of Shaker Heights". Then Bob, ever the humorist, chimed in:

*We are in Camp Wolters deep in the solid south. I am spending one of those rare moments a soldier calls spare time. Today is a typical cool Texas day with the temperature 100 Farenheit and cruising.*

*You really don't appreciate Ohio or Lake Erie in particular until you examine Texas. Camp Wolters is a lovely place with wonderful facilities if you desire a sun tan or a trim waistline. Just join the Army and forget Texas.*

*Army life is basically double time, at ease and as you were. In fact, I can even breath in cadence now.*

*The mechanized Army must have bypassed the panhandle. Since I have been here the only machine I've driven is a 2 cylinder affair which runs exclusively on sole leather.*

*The trees here are like those which in Ohio you'd cut down but I assure you we appreciate them during a 10 minute break.*

OUR THUNDERBIRD

*Well, that's all for summing up Texas. Give my regards to your family and all the kids I know. Goodbye for now.*



*78 Record Bob sent Claire from basic training.*

Several days later Bob sent a letter describing more of his basic training routines to Claire:

*We are firing the US M-1 Garand rifle which means we are up at 4 AM to hike to the range and stay all day ... The first day you get down behind the target and observe 8 hours of fire over your head; the*

*second day you accommodate your buddies from a different company with the same pleasure. Then about 6 PM you madly dash back to camp to clean your rifle, take a shower, and then crawl (if you are able) into bed.*

By September, Bob reported that ten mile daily hikes became twenty mile slogs, carrying sixty pounds of equipment. The Texas heat came as promised, and Bob said many recruits escaped the hot barracks at night, sleeping outside in the cooler grass. The culmination of basic training was two weeks of field maneuvers, living under battle conditions. In a letter in early October, Bob revealed he was chosen as honorary squad leader and chronicled his platoon's accomplishments:

*1st - we marched an average of 10 miles each day. 2nd - we used live combat ammunition on all tactical problems. 3rd — had dynamite going off within 3 feet of me while live machine gun fire 18 inches over my "lovely wave", meanwhile we were crawling under barb wire. 4th - our platoon set the highest camp record on tactical problems.*

\* \* \*

Bob officially completed his basic training on October 19th, 1943. His new assignment was as a map and compass instructor for the next batch of recruits entering Camp Wolters. He spent three weeks in a nearby Army school, taking classes for his new post. Bob was promoted to corporal. When he returned from school he bedded down in his own room, now in the charge of 60 rookie recruits in the barracks.



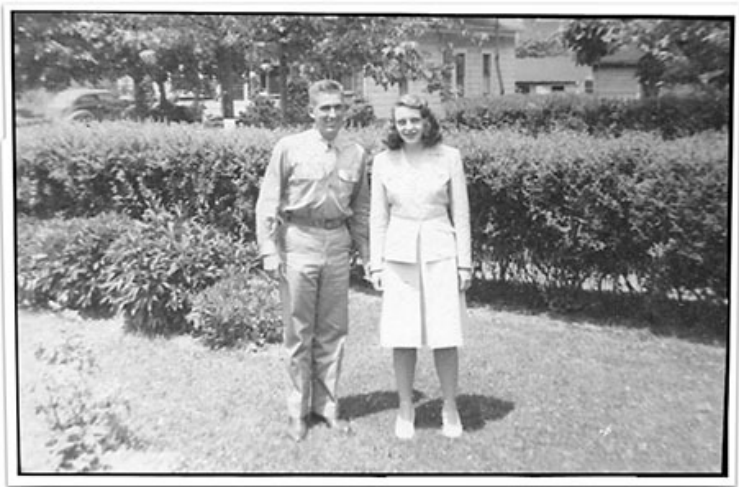
*Bob's Thunderbird patch. Insignia of the 45th Infantry Division.*

Bob was assigned to the 45th Infantry Division of the US Army, also known as the Thunderbirds. Initially, the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division formed out of the Oklahoma National Guard, and its first symbol was a Native American swastika. However, in 1938 as Hitler's Nazis menaced Europe, a new Thunderbird insignia replaced the previous one. Their geometric Thunderbird patch contained four sides, representing the four states from which the Division originally drew its recruits: Oklahoma, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. In time the Thunderbird Division expanded its recruitment to other states. Each Army division had approximately 15,000 soldiers, and was further divided into regiments, companies, and platoons. Bob McKellogg served in the 2nd Platoon of L Company, part of the 180<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 45th Infantry Division.

Bob was not able to return home in December of 1943 to celebrate Christmas in Ohio. He spent the holiday at Fort Wolters. One letter thanked Claire for sending him a Christmas gift, a billfold. Bob was finally able to get his furlough for mid-March of 1944. It had been nine months since he had left Ohio, and he had one thing on his mind. On March 13th, Bob successfully proposed to Claire with Mr. FitzGerald's blessing.

Bob returned to Camp Wolters a happy man, and he wanted everyone to know he was engaged. He wrote to Claire:

*I want more than anything in the world to be home and help you pick out the ring, and most of all "Claire baby" I want to give it to you in person.*



*Wedding engagement photo - June 1944*

That spring Bob awaited Army orders regarding his combat assignment in Europe. In June he was transferred from Fort Wolters to Fort Meade, near Baltimore. His June 14th letter to Claire explained:

*I received my orders and since for reasons of military security it is dangerous to speculate as to when or where I'm headed; thats about all I can safely say. I'll write you as often as I can...*

While Bob waited for orders, he saw the sites in Washington D.C. He let Claire know he was attending Catholic Mass. The couple managed two short in-person visits before Bob shipped out to Europe. Claire traveled to Baltimore to meet him on June 18th and 19th. In addition, Bob was able to visit his parents in Lorain on July 2nd. Claire was there, too. He told Claire, *It was swell to get home and give you your ring, it is beautiful.*

Bob also shared his hopes for life after the war:

*I want to get married as soon as I come back even it means taking my wife to college with me my last year, that's the way I feel about it dear. Let me know what you think about the idea.*

Bob wrote Claire about setting up a joint bank account, which he referred to as their "boat fund". On July 10th, Bob wrote a letter to Claire about his dreams for their lives after the war,

*I look forward Darling to that day when we can start that future. I want that sail boat, a swell little home, and those other things that go with it. Most of all at the present I want you and that is my morale builder. What we give up now Dear I'm sure will make our future*

*more beautiful.*

By mid-July, Bob could no longer report his location to Claire, even though he was in the US. Still he wrote her letters. In one, he told Claire he wanted a future occupation in construction or selling pre-fabricated homes after he graduated from college. In another, he asked Claire if she had picked a name for their future sailboat.

Bob left Fort Meade for Fort Patrick Henry located in Hampton Roads, Virginia. On July 26, 1944, Bob sent Claire his final letter from the US before shipping out, signing it, "Loads of Love and Kisses Too, Bob." Two days later, on July 28th at 9 am, Bob walked aboard the *USS Sea Owl*, heading for war in Europe. His first stop, Italy.

OUR THUNDERBIRD



*Our Thunderbird*



## Into Italy

**M**any Americans are familiar with D-Day, the Allied landing on Normandy beaches in June of 1944. In this campaign, the Allies fought the Nazis, liberating Paris and marching east toward Germany. On the Eastern Front, the Soviet Red Army stopped Hitler's advance at the Battle of Stalingrad (1942-1943), and then pushed the German Army west, back through Eastern Europe. Less well known in the popular imagination is the third front against Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, where the Allies invaded southern Italy, fighting north through France and into Germany.

In the introduction to his podcast entitled, "The Untold Story WW II's 45th Infantry Division," host, Brett McCay, writes, "When many people think of the American involvement in WWII, they likely bring to mind the 101st Airborne Division (aka the Band of Brothers) and their heroics at Normandy. But, there was another American infantry division that took part in the largest amphibious assault in world history (no, it wasn't D-Day) and then fought a year in Europe before the 101st

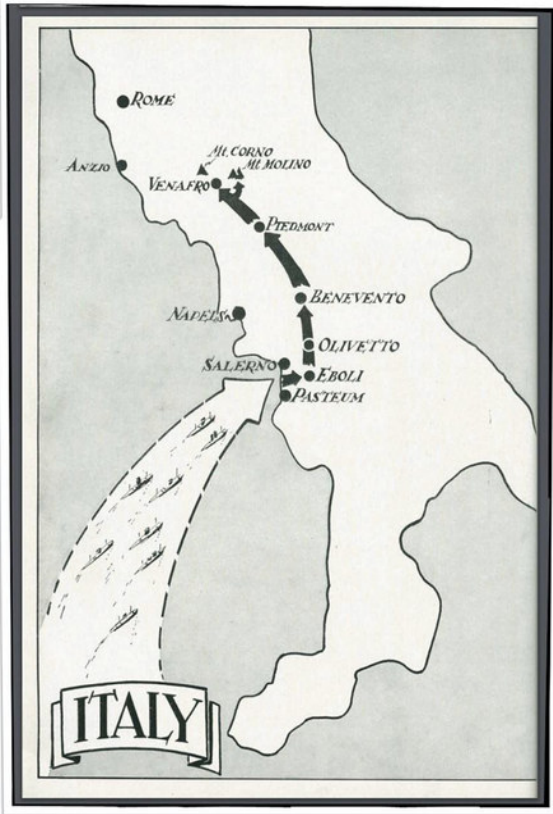
even showed up. All in all, this division saw over 500 days of combat. They were the Thunderbirds of the 45th infantry division and my guest, [Alex Kershaw], today has written a captivating history of this oft forgotten group of soldiers.”<sup>3</sup>

Almost a year before Allied forces landed on the French coast, the British and the Americans stormed the beaches of Sicily. The battle for Italy lasted almost a year. The Thunderbirds were in the middle of the fight that would eventually take Rome. It was a successful but costly endeavor. 20,000 Americans died, with 100,000 US soldiers wounded.

Robert McKellogg was not part of the early Thunderbird campaigns in southern Italy. He arrived in the summer of 1944 after Rome fell to the Allies. The very first Thunderbirds departed for war on June 3, 1943. They embarked from Virginia aboard the *Charles Carroll*. Their first stop was Oran in French Algeria. In late June, these Thunderbirds practiced and drilled in northern Africa before their invasion of the Italian Island of Sicily in early July.

July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1943 the Allies invaded Sicily with 200,000 soldiers and seaman on over 2000 ships. Braced for the invasion were their enemies, 235,000 Italian troops, supported by 60,000 German soldiers. The Thunderbirds fought their way onto the beaches where German Panzer tanks shelled their positions.

The toughest fighting for the 45<sup>th</sup> Division came ten days later at the Battle of Bloody Ridge. The Germans were in retreat, as the 45<sup>th</sup> Division moved toward taking Messina, the closest port to mainland Italy. “The Thunderbirds now became the front runners in the race for American glory in Sicily,” wrote Alex Kershaw in his book *The Liberator*.<sup>4</sup>



*In 1943 the Thunderbirds entered Italy*

The Americans and their British Allies captured Sicily. Bill Barrett, reporting for the *45th Division News*, wrote the Thunderbirds had "... a record we could be proud of... in 22 days of fighting we captured 11, 266 Germans and Italians." <sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

The toughest German forces were able to retreat to the mainland of Italy. When the 45th went ashore in Salerno, the Germans controlled the higher ground. Barrett wrote, "The operation called Salerno lasted five days — five days of bloody fighting as the Germans made an all-out effort to drive between our forces and destroy the beach head. In the Calore-Sele sector we hit the line harder than ever before. We reached and held our objective and Salerno was ours." <sup>6</sup>

The 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had a bloody slog up the mountainous spine of Italy. They fought in the freezing fall and winter rains. One Thunderbird quipped, "Dry feet were something we dreamed about when we weren't too damned cold to dream." <sup>7</sup>

The Thunderbirds also made a beachhead at Anzio, Italy. They hunkered down in wet, rat infested trenches, like the soldiers of WW 1. They went over the top, crossing a "no-mans-land" strewn with German mines. They hid from bombardments in caves. Despite high casualties, they fought their way through the mountains.

In late July of 1943, the Italian government removed Mussolini from power and began negotiations with the Allies. In September 1943, the Italian government surrendered, but the Germans fought on in Italy. Finally, on June 3, 1944, almost a year after they landed in Sicily, the British and the American forces entered Rome. Barrett described the Thunderbird's Rome-Arno Campaign, "From Salerno to Rome in eight months, we had spent 249 days pushing Kesselring's forces toward the Italian Alps. We had captured 3,035 prisoners and the Germans we'd killed and wounded were unnumbered."<sup>8</sup>

On the outskirts of Rome, the Thunderbirds earned some rest. General George Patton praised them, saying, "The Forty-fifth Infantry Division is one of the best, if not the best that the

American Army has ever produced.” The summer rest and recreation in Italy was short-lived for several Thunderbird units. They prepared for Operation Dragoon, an August invasion of the beaches in southern France.



*Thunderbirds fighting in Italy during the Rome-Arno Campaign*

\* \* \*

Bob McKellogg traveled from the east coast across the Atlantic, arriving in Naples, Italy on August 11, 1944. Upon his arrival he wrote a letter to Claire describing his voyage as uneventful. He saw dog sharks but no whales. On the ship the GIs kept busy with boxing, movies, and bingo. Bob even played his clarinet with a pick up band. He told Claire how much he treasured the snapshots from his visit to Cleveland in March. On August 17th, he sent Claire his first V-mail, short for Victory Mail. He

quipped about the facilities, *You really should hear all about our shower system here, it's similar to running through a rain to catch a bus.*

From Naples, Bob traveled to a replacement camp located on the Volturno River near Caserta, Italy. He deemed the Italian weather “beautiful”. In one letter Bob told Claire he had been attending church services in the outdoors. In another, he wrote his detailed thoughts about pre-fabricated homes. In September he announced that he was attending engineering school, where he was learning all about demolitions. He wrote, *While at school we learned all about mines, booby traps, demolitions, and that sort of thing.*

He also sent a September V-mail to his parents in Lorain, humorously writing:

*September 4, 1944*

*Somewhere in Italy*

*Dear Folks,*

*... I've been attending school for Engineers and we have been doing demolitions, mines, and the usual run of explosive stuff. Tell Dad, I am getting quite a “bang” out of it. I'm sure I'd never make a good safe cracker, no doubt I'd lose the money in the explosion. That phrase ‘playing with dynamite’ is very fitting. Well, that's all for now – don't be worried and write often. I love to hear all the news.*

*Love to All,*

*Bud.*

\* \* \*

At home, Claire nervously waited for letters from Bob. She explained in a recent interview, "It was during the Second World War that I was in college... and Bob went off to war. I used to wait every day, hoping I'd get a letter from him that he was still alive. But, he was in a division that was involved in battle many times, that were on the air or in the newspaper. But I'd wait and wait. Finally, I'd get a letter from him that he was all right."

<sup>9</sup> The biggest scare for Claire came one day at college when a letter arrived from a priest, Chap. (Capt.) George E. Sherry. She feared the worst and had her roommate open the note. The letter began:

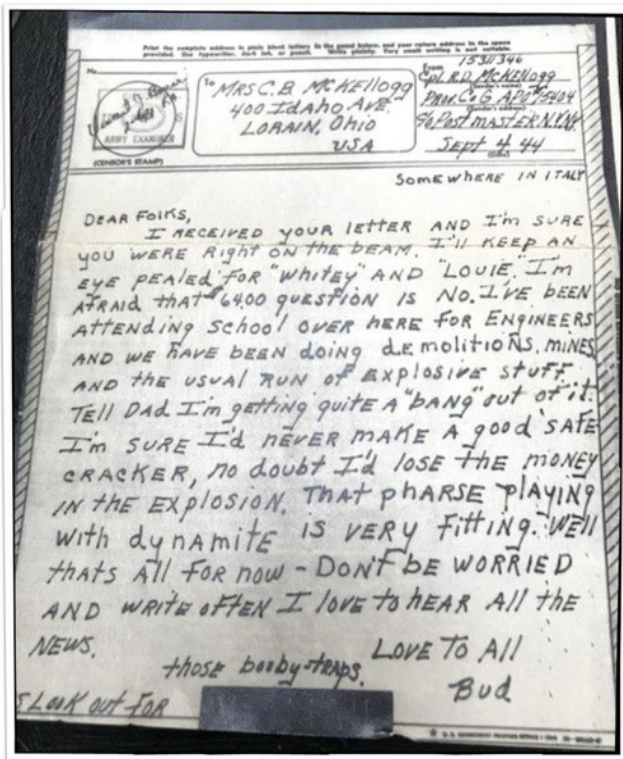
*3 October 1944*

*Dear Claire,*

*Good news! Your fiancé Robert McKellogg has been taking instructions preparatory to embracing Catholicism. By now you know that last Saturday Robert was Baptized and in a few days will make his first Communion. I'm sure this news will make you happy...*

Claire was relieved! However, the next letters from Bob came from France, where he faced some of the fiercest fighting of his tour in the Rhineland Campaign.

INTO ITALY



V-mail from Bob "Somewhere in Italy" to his parents - September 4, 1944



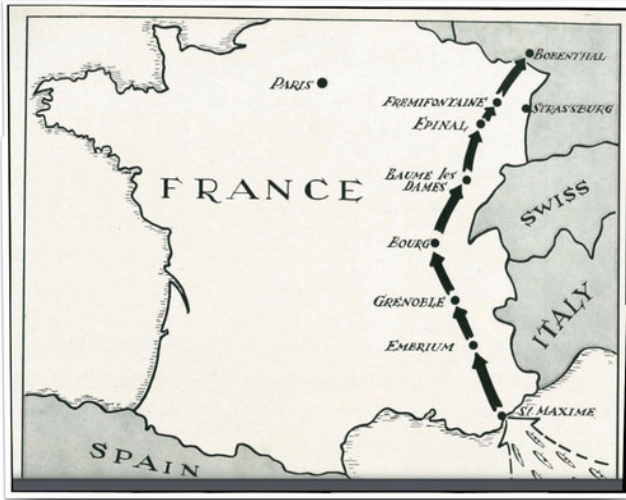
## France: The Rhineland Campaign

**H**itler was on the defensive as a result of the successful Allied invasion of the Normandy beaches in June of 1944 and the retreat of German soldiers on the Eastern Front in the face of the Soviet Red Army's offensive.

While Robert McKellogg was in Italy, one group of Thunderbirds landed on the beaches at San Raphael and St. Maxime, France on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944. They were met with only slight resistance compared with their arrival on the Italian coast. Many French citizens greeted them as liberators. They were joined by French Partisans and the French First Army. The 45th Infantry Regiment marched north through the river valleys of France in what would be dubbed the Champagne Campaign.

On October 5, Bob boarded a tank landing ship (LST) headed for France. He disembarked in Marseilles, France and joined the 45 Infantry Division near Epinal.

FRANCE: THE RHINELAND CAMPAIGN



*The Thunderbirds landed at St. Maxime, marching north to fight the Nazis in France*

Bob shared his first impressions of the locals in an October 18th letter to Claire:

*The French are a very wonderful people... All the fellows save their candy rations for children and what a time we have passing it around, the French word for it is "bon bons".*

And his Nov. 3 letter is the first to describe fighting with the German soldiers, referred to as "Jerry",

*If you haven't already guessed it I've been meeting "Jerry" personally for some time now and he isn't any superman but he is mighty tough. Stubborn better describes the situation and by all means he is quite clever...*

*I've never been closer to God these last few months....*

*I bought you a few presents over here sometime ago but it seems I lost everything diving in a foxhole.*

At the end of November, the 29th, Bob's letter describes sleeping conditions during battle,

*I'm sure I've forgotten how a bed would feel... our outfit has slept in some of the better haymows of continental Europe.*

No wonder the McKellogg kids reported that their dad was never a big fan of camping, having slept in haystacks and foxholes in the mud and rain of Europe during the war.

Bob was an army engineer. As a demolitions expert his job was to dynamite bridges, set mine fields and booby traps. "The engineers had a field day." Barrett says, praising the effectiveness of the demolition specialists in the Rhineland campaign against the German Army. <sup>10</sup>

As the Thunderbirds marched through the Vosges Mountains close to the German border, the fighting became much harder. In the densely-forested regions, often draped in fog, they faced a determined German enemy with rocket launchers and snipers. Barrett wrote, "Winter caught up with us in the Vosges mountains. Wind and rain and snow made movement slow and difficult as we took Rambervillers, St. Gorgon, Grandvillers, Fremifontaine, Bouvelieres." <sup>11</sup>



*Thunderbird soldiers fighting in Vosges Mountains of France.*

\* \* \*

During December Bob was evacuated to a hospital in Vittel, France to have a growth on his leg removed. In addition, he contracted a secondary infection above his heel on the lower leg. After he returned home, Bob admitted in a letter to Claire he almost lost his limb. He spent the winter convalescing. In a January 16th letter to Claire, he reported on his recuperation, which included resting, reading, and even gaining weight in the hospital. Bob gave hints of what it was like to be on the frontlines in the fight against the Germans in a Jan. 18, 1945 letter sent to Claire:

*I guess it isn't easy to understand things about how the army functions when on line. I can't tell you anything about combat as one who has never been wouldn't understand. When we are on line there is no one ahead of us but "Jerry". That applies to infantry only and we are first always...*

While in the hospital, Bob wrote a letter to Claire Feb. 6, 1945, describing the role his infantry played in the fighting the Germans in French villages. He also included some lighter moments in the midst of warfare:

*... As most people don't know, when a town is taken the first to arrive there are the infantry, and then follow the so called supporting arms, tanks, etc. During our brief stay and after cleaning out the town of Jerries, we often have time to stay for a quiet-K ration [daily combat food ration], and here is where our story begins.*

*Most of the towns we take have a certain amount of live stock about, and often the civilians have been in cellars, evacuated, or taken off as it were, leaving the stock in tact slightly underfed. Whenever possible even with Jerry in the other end of the town, you'll see some farm kid, watering the stock or feeding them.*

*On another occasion our platoon took over a bicycle shop and for several hours, the whole platoon rode around on bicycles. It isn't unusual to see a G. I. riding in a Jerry car, or investigating anything that catches his eye. (Of course we are always booby-trap conscious.) In one town several G.I.'s rode on horses to chow, while the majority of front line like Joes are becoming good cooks of a sort. I've often found meals waiting with no one about. The final observation so common is that nearly all trucks have adopted a dog of some kind...*

In a March 5th letter, Bob fondly reminisced about the couples'

March 13th engagement the previous year. It had been two months since he had received letters from the US, and he was thinking of home.

He asked Claire to send him a calendar with important dates. On March 8th he wrote a letter listing their memorable moments together:

*This is the way I remember all those little dates Dear. July 13, '41 I met you. (You were wearing I believe a yellow or green dress with light dots in it) it was around 7:30 in the evening, the place Vermilion. July 16, our first date at Crystal Beach. April 3, 43 I gave you my pin. March 13, of course we were engaged (Gee! I was nervous that evening and it wasn't a bit like I planned it - remember) August 26, and October 15, our birthdays. July 2, 44 Sunday in Lorain and the last time you saw me. June 18, 19 at Baltimore.*

In a third March letter, he described spring in France and shared how the war was changing him:

*March 11 45*

*France*

*Dearest Claire,*

*It's wonderful outside today and I guess spring must be officially here. The landscape in this part of Frances is very much like southern Ohio dotted with spruce and evergreens and in better days many a Frenchman has spent quite some wonderful weekends here. You know Darling I often wonder if things at home change much. I don't suppose they are so much different than when I left, but I'm sure that I'll probably view somethings in a much more critical manner than before. Not about us Darling although we won't seem the same at first but I think I grew mature in the last year than normally it*

*would take five years to reach the same point. One thing I'm certain about Darling and its us. I build my whole future on it Dear and with that fellow upstairs on our side its wonderful. (Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love).*

\* \* \*

The death rates for frontline infantry were very high. Bob illustrated this with his own story. When he returned to the frontlines in March of 1945, he hardly recognized a soldier in his platoon. Many had been killed or wounded in battle. Kershaw explained, "The all-important infantrymen, the only forces who could actually defeat Nazism on the ground, comprised just 14% of the US Army, overseas numbers. But they suffered three quarters of its casualties in Europe."<sup>12</sup>

In one March letter, Bob reported he was in charge of training a platoon as sergeant. The 45th Infantry Division was divided into several regiments of three to five thousand soldiers. Bob fought in the 180th Regiment of the Thunderbirds, whose slogan was, "Ready in Peace or War." The 180th was further divided into companies, consisting of 80-150 soldiers. Bob served in the 2nd Platoon of the "L" Company. Norbert Salpeter and Carl Salter, who wrote a history of the 180th Infantry Regiment, reported that the 2nd Platoon of "L" Company had the distinction of being the very first Thunderbird soldiers to cross the border into the belly of the beast, Germany.<sup>13</sup>

FRANCE: THE RHINELAND CAMPAIGN



*2nd Platoon of "L" Company. Bob seated far left in second row from front.*



## The Final Fight in Germany

Late in 1944, the Allied forces surrounded Hitler's regime. The Red Army pushed the German armies back through Eastern Europe toward Berlin. Patton's Army and the British marched east toward Germany's Siegfried Line, and the Fifth Army, including the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, continued to press northward in France within striking distance of the German border.

Nevertheless, the Nazi regime refused to surrender. Hitler had foiled a coup attempt and killed 10,000 Germans he deemed traitors without trials. His special units shot German soldiers who refused to fight. As Germany became more desperate, twelve and thirteen year olds from the Hitler Youth were pressed into military service. In December of 1944, Hitler ordered a counterattack near the Ardennes Forest, attempting to split the Allied forces and invade France. For American soldiers, the slogan "Home in Forty-Four" had given way to "Stay Alive in Forty-Five."



*The 45th Infantry Regiment entered Germany early in 1945.*

The final German counter offensive and resulting battles became known as the Battle of the Bulge. Several hundred miles to the south, the Thunderbirds spent a cold Christmas near the German border. On January 1, 1945, the Germans attacked the Fifth Army with eight Divisions and 30,000 SS men. The Nazi command sent its most experienced soldiers in mountain warfare. Ten days of frigid fighting ensued. Scores of US soldiers were killed and captured. It was a defeat for the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, which had to retreat through French towns they had secured.

The Thunderbirds regrouped and in February of 1945 were once again on the move toward Germany's Rhine River. Bob was back in the fight, and on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1945, his infantry regiment crossed the Rhine in boats. Kershaw writes, "It was a costly mistake. Men were greeted by intense machine-gun

fire, with the 180<sup>th</sup> losing half the boats in the second and third waves. But there was no stopping the Americans – who made it across the river sprinted for cover, fixed bayonets, and then quickly stormed the German positions.”<sup>14</sup> Bob’s letter to Claire of April 4, ‘45 gives no deadly details but its heading simply says, Across the Rhine. On April 7th he wrote:

*I don't expect Germany to sign any peace or surrender terms but call it what you may, they are being made to understand the meaning of war. I was quite surprised find in the homes over here all the signs of the Catholic Church and yet also the evidence of Nazism. No doubt some of them were forced into it but I often wondered what causes people to get so far off the beam.*

In Germany, the Thunderbirds fought village by village. From houses and rooftops lethal German snipers killed US soldiers. Bob McKellogg described entering one village where a German sniper firing from a nearby church steeple killed several men from his unit. When they finally captured the culprit, Bob’s enraged superior officer ordered the captive executed on the spot rather than taken prisoner. Kershaw explains that this was not uncommon, “Squads had a tendency, if they lost a man, to hunt down the sniper with a vengeance... Not many snipers, recognizable by the bruises on their faces from a rifle’s recoil, were taken alive.”<sup>15</sup>

One of the most terrible battles the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division faced was in the German city of Aschaffenburg. Kershaw writes, “It appeared the Germans were hidden behind every window and door... In some rooms, they were only inches away from Hitler’s last stalwarts, forced to kill or be killed with daggers and pistols.”<sup>16</sup> As the Thunderbirds entered German cities and

towns US soldiers engaged in deadly house to house fighting. In *The Liberator*, Kershaw writes, “Thunderbirds kicked in doors, lobbed in grenades, ran inside to see who was still alive, who wanted to surrender, and who wanted to die. Then they yelled upstairs for other to come down or give up. If nobody answered, they had to creep upstairs to check, hoping there weren’t more Germans waiting with grenades in a bedroom or toilet.”<sup>17</sup>

Bob McKellogg described moments of levity, too, a respite from his terrible slog across Europe. Bob told a funny story that appeared in the book *The Liberator*. In Aschaffenburg, the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry found a huge warehouse of bottles of wine and liquor the Nazis had seized during their occupation of France. Some Thunderbirds wasted no time in getting blind drunk.



*Photo notation - “Logan, Dodd & Waskowitz in German wine cellar  
- 1945”*

\* \* \*

In April of 1945 the Nazi regime faced collapse. The 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division headed for Nuremberg. April 18<sup>th</sup> the Thunderbirds surrounded the city that had once been the site of huge Nazi rallies. It was here that Bob faced some of the fiercest fighting of his tour of duty.

Son-in-law, Ron Woolsey, heard Bob tell his own near death experience in Nuremberg. Ron wrote, "After a Sunday dinner in the late-Eighties, I was able to persuade my father-in law, Robert McKellogg, to discuss his experience in World War II. We went to his "Dad Cave," the converted garage to the bedroom. He showed me his scrapbook and we discussed the war. I asked him when he felt the most in danger. He indicated his unit was involved in door-to-door fighting in Nuremberg, April 1945. Bob poked his head out of a door and a bullet hit the door jam only inches from his head. That was the closest he came to being killed in battle."

A description of the battle appears in Bob's memorabilia, a Battle Honors letter sent to him on November 9, 1945. The Citation of Unit describes the intense fighting, "Company L, 180th Infantry Regiment, is cited for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy on 19 and 20 April 1945 in Nuremberg, Germany. After two infantry companies, attacking a well fortified castle guarding the approaches to the walled "inner City" of Nuremberg had been stopped by fanatical enemy resistance, Company L was committed in an attempt to clear the enemy from the castle. When frontal assaults were repulsed, Company L maneuvered around the left flank of the area in an effort to gain entrance to the castle. Infiltrating into the walled city, company L met a deadly hail of fire emanating

from the museum to the rear. One platoon sent to clear this resistance was twice denied entrance. Doggedly attacking a third time, the platoon seized the building capturing seventy enemy and eliminating the strong point. Using hand grenades, pistols, rifles and submachine guns, the members of Company L then assaulted the castle engaging the enemy of thirty minutes of close combat, killing and capturing the entire garrison of one hundred and twenty six fanatical defenders. Resuming the attack on the following morning, Company L wedged through the enemy ring and continued to advance clearing an area of five hundred square meters, capturing an additional eighty enemy and crushing all remaining resistance. The heroism, combat proficiency and brilliant achievement of Company L paved the way for the eventual reduction of the ancient Nazi shrine and are exemplary of the finest traditions of the Army of the United States. By Command of Brigadier General Meyer — Robert E. Meyers.”

\* \* \*

On April 22nd Bob wrote Claire two letters. The first said that, *Things have been moving so fast*. The second, longer letter, alluded to what he had been through at Nuremberg:

*... Darling sometimes things become pretty sickening... Someday I'll explain what I mean and then we will forget all about it forever. At the present the news looks very good but to me it doesn't as yet mean the Germans are finished fighting. Until we take every bit of ground and hold it our job will still continue. That's why when a large city falls it doesn't mean much to us. I'm looking to the day when every sign of resistance is over...*

*The common conception of a starving Germany has no foundation. These people are well fed and in all the material aspect of living they excel all other people I've seen so far... Why these people continue to hold out is beyond me. I'm afraid we haven't realized how strong an imprint the Nazis have instilled on the minds of these people. The way they hold out is unbelievable —*

By April 20<sup>th</sup> the city was in American hands. The same day, Hitler's birthday, the Red Army began the shelling of Berlin. Barrett writes, "We turned to our old friend, the Autobahn and set out for Munich, cradle of the Nazi creed... The German Army was falling apart on all fronts as we neared our objective."<sup>18</sup> Despite this victory, a week later the Thunderbird soldiers, including Bob McKellogg, would witness one of the greatest horrors of World War II - Dachau.

THE FINAL FIGHT IN GERMANY



*Thunderbird soldiers wave American flags with the fall of  
Nuremberg - April 20, 1945*



## The Liberation of Dachau

**O**n April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the Thunderbirds entered the Dachau concentration camp. “Hell, on earth,” was how Bob McKellogg described the walking skeletons and piles of bodies he witnessed. Ron vividly remembers his father-in-law’s description of Dachau, writing, “Bob told me to never let anyone tell me that the Holocaust never existed... Bob described the piles of snow-covered bodies, smoldering ovens, and crowds of emaciated prisoners. Nearly 30,000 men, women, and children had perished at Dachau, having been subjected to medical experiments, malnutrition, typhoid, and other maladies.”

\* \* \*

Dachau was the oldest of the concentration camps, established in March of 1933, just after Hitler took power. In the twelve years of its operation over 200,000 prisoners passed under its gate. Over 30,000 had died, not only Jews, but Poles, Russians, and other Allied captives as well. In 1945 alone, 13,000

prisoners were murdered or died of disease and starvation. Dachau's crematoria burned up to 150 prisoners per day.

Dachau was not the first concentration camp liberated by the Americans during World War II. American soldiers freed Buchenwald on April 11, 1945. Although the liberation made international news headlines, many Thunderbird soldiers were unaware of Dachau or the horror they would discover when they arrived. In the 1990's, Robert McKellogg explained to his daughter, Caryl, that when his Thunderbirds entered Dachau they did not know what they would find. In many cases, Americans at home watching weekly newsreels knew more about what was happening in the war than the soldiers on the ground.

Just ten miles from Munich, Kershaw writes, "Dachau was as pretty as any other town the Thunderbirds had seen in Bavaria: cobbled streets, skirted by timber-framed houses with brightly painted shutters. There were fresh beds of spring flowers." <sup>19</sup> Nearby was the nauseating stench of death.

The American soldiers first spotted the trains leading into the concentration camp. There were 39 boxcars, containing over 2000 corpses. These were prisoners the SS had recently transported from the Buchenwald concentration camp, so as not to be seen or captured by Allied forces. Kershaw described the shocking scene, "There were bodies on top of bodies, waist-deep, stacked liked cordwood. The corpses were skin and bone. Human excrement all around." <sup>20</sup>



*US Soldiers from the 45th Infantry Division at Dachau*

US Army Lt. Col. Waller Fellenz described entering the concentration camp grounds, “Several hundred yards inside the main gate, we encountered the concentration enclosure, itself. There before us, behind an electrically charged, barbed wire fence, stood a mass of cheering, half-mad men, women and children, waving and shouting with happiness - their liberators had come! The noise was beyond comprehension! Every individual (over 32,000) who could utter a sound, was cheering. Our hearts wept as we saw the tears of happiness fall from their cheeks.”<sup>21</sup> The emaciated prisoners of the barracks saw the green helmets of the Thunderbird soldiers. Realizing their liberation, they surrounded the GI’s, kissing their hands, chanting “America, America.”

\* \* \*

Jewish Survivor, Ann Gilbert, remembers her liberation from Dachau by US soldiers. In her interview with the Shoah Foundation, she says the Nazis planned to dynamite the concentration camp before the Americans arrived, but US soldiers surprised the Nazi guards. She described first seeing the US soldiers, “And then the Americans came, those poor guys, some of them were kids themselves, only 17 or 18 years old, they cried, tears running down their cheeks. And they didn’t know what to do with us because they didn’t expect to see such horrible things: boxcars with dead people with their eyes and their mouths open, skeletons, people burning in the gas chambers, in the crematoriums. It was unbelievable. [...] when we saw the soldiers they told us, “We will help you; we will try to do our best,” they assured us. [...] to my disbelief, I never thought this would happen, [US soldiers] gave us their rations. My constitution was strong enough. [Still] I knew I better not to eat that food.”<sup>22</sup>

\* \* \*

Along with the disbelief and horror, there was anger. Bob said he and his fellow soldiers rounded up German camp guards and people from nearby town, forcing them to dig proper burial plots for the bodies the Nazis had thrown into mass graves. Some concentration camp survivors grabbed sticks, beating the guards who had persecuted them. They also punished the Kapos, prisoners chosen by the SS to help run the camps.

Many of the SS guards escaped the day before the liberation of Dachau. Others tried to hide among the prisoners by wearing

their clothing. When they were discovered, the guards were taken to the camp coal yard. One officer, a Thunderbird from the 157th Regiment, ordered the execution of the German prisoners. A number of guards were shot until another officer from the same unit stopped the reprisals. One estimate is that US soldiers and camp inmates killed up to 122 guards at Dachau. An official US investigation into the incident listed only 17 SS deaths. General Patton investigated the executions, but decided not to pursue a court martial of these US soldiers given the extraordinary circumstances.

\* \* \*

The American liberators from the Fifth Army brought in water, food, and medical supplies for the survivors of Dachau. As Ann Gilbert noted, they had to introduce food slowly to starving inmates, for fear of overwhelming their fragile metabolisms. One US liberator commented that at the day's end was a sleepless night, "I don't think there was a guy who slept that night and I don't think there was a guy who didn't cry openly that night." <sup>23</sup>

The following day the Thunderbirds worked to clean up the camp, provide medical attention to former prisoners. Kershaw confirms what Bob McKellogg reported, "corpses would be buried .... with "forced assistance" of the people of Dachau, who had been indifferent to the suffering just downwind from them for more than twelve years.... They all claimed they didn't know what was going on inside the camp." <sup>24</sup>

The American 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division liberated over 30,000 survivors of the Nazi death camp at Dachau. The Thunderbirds gave new life, hope and freedom to so many, including Ana

Gilbert. She explained, “On the day of liberation I met my husband. He didn’t marry me out of love. We were lonely. We had no one to talk to. And I looked like hell on earth... I looked like a dressed skeleton, blue skin and my head was swollen up. There was nothing to fall in love with, but to help each other... When we got a little free, we were out and we talked, and we left the camp. He was looking for family and I was looking for family and we met.”<sup>25</sup>

\* \* \*

The atrocities of Dachau forever changed Bob and his fellow soldiers. Caryl asked her Dad why he finally chose to share his scrapbook and his own experiences liberating Dachau with his children and grandchildren. He said, “I didn’t know humanity was capable of this; I had to share what happened, so it never happens again.”



*Photo notation - "Dachau - Sign on a displaced persons camp near Munich, Germany - May 1945"*

## War's End

**O**n April 30<sup>th</sup>, a day after the Thunderbirds liberated the Dachau concentration camp, Adolf Hitler committed suicide in his bunker. On May 4 Bob was in Munich. He knew the end of the war was near. In his letter he wrote:

*Dearest Claire,*

*We are still in Munich today and now that I may I'll tell you some things you no doubt have been wanting to know... With the news breaking so rapidly I hope when you receive this letter peace will have been declared. There still remain a few isolated points of resistance here in Germany and we are awaiting orders now in regard to what the future status of our division is to be. I have my fingers crossed Darling I feel those plans of ours may materialize sooner than expected...*

*... the fact that I will be home seems much more a reality now. I don't expect more than a year here at most. These are all conditions based on the hope we will be assigned as occupational troops.*



Bob used the remainder of the letter to reveal once secret details of his odyssey. He finally could give Claire lots of names and locations: he sailed to Europe on the *USS Sea Owl*, landed in Naples, had engineer training school on the Volturno River near Caserta. In France he first landed in Marseilles, joined the 45th near Epinal, and was in the hospital in Vittel. In this letter, he even enclosed a post card where Hitler made one of his first speeches in Munich, explaining that the heart of the city was a mass of rubble.

Four days after Bob sent his letter, the German High Command signed an unconditional surrender to the Allies. May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945, millions across the globe celebrated V-E Day, Victory in Europe. The Thunderbirds fought in Europe for over 500 days. Bill Barrett wrote, "The war had ended. It ended for the 45th in a blaze of glory. Since the Rhine River we had captured more than 60,000 prisoners to bring our German total to more than 70,000 PW's."<sup>26</sup> Although Patton's Army in Europe received much attention from the American press, Kershaw writes, "The Thunderbirds had been the first Americans to enter Germany from the south. No force in history was thought to have freed so many people and marched so far to do so."<sup>27</sup>

WAR'S END



*Photo notation - "The Squad on V-E Day - 1st Squad 2nd Platoon  
Company L - 180th Infantry at Munich After the War" - Bob  
McKellogg far left - May 8, 1945*

\* \* \*

Bob's first letter after V-E Day was sent to Claire from Munich on May 18th. He reported on capturing Munich and reflected on the German attitude toward Dachau and their war crimes.

*Dearest Claire,*

*The stationary is some of France's best. When we captured Munich we found where some of the loot the Nazis had taken was stored. The army has control of all German army stores and from all accounts they will be used to supply American troops assigned occupational status here... I find the Germans themselves didn't have any too ample a living. It seems that a choice few Nazis lived quite well while the majority of the people just lived.*

*... From most of the reports here the majority of the bigger war criminals are in Allied hands and I feel that they justly deserve punishment for their crimes. When one mentions Dachau to these German people they pretend not to be aware of the conditions that existed in there under the Nazis; but at the order of the local SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force] these local citizens were taken through the camps. You know Darling I personally feel that it will take quite a few years to educate the German mind into clear and free channels of thinking. These people have been ordered to obey so long that any other approach isn't understandable to them at first.*

There were three million GI's in Europe on VE Day. It took over a year to demobilize the entire US army. According to his discharge papers, Bob McKellogg didn't leave Europe until September of 1945.

Photos from his scrapbook reveal that he made a visit to the ruins of Berchtesgaden, Hitler's retreat near the Austrian border. He saw the Munich beer hall where Hitler organized his Nazi Party and the graves of Germans executed for plotting against Hitler in 1944.



*Photo notation - "Ruins of Berchtesgaden" - Hitler's hideaway in the German Alps*

\* \* \*

His scrapbook also included post cards from famous sites in France, the Arch de Triumph, Notre Dame, and Eiffel Tower. In a letter, June 23, 1945 Bob wrote Claire about his trip to Paris:

*My Dearest Claire,*

*I've just returned from Paris and although it is a beautiful city the traveling end of the trip didn't appeal to me as it used to. I guess the reason is, since I've been in the army I've been moving all the time. Really "Claire Baby" I'd just like to be a month off and be in one place for a while — with the right person of course. The company is still going along as usual with everyone wondering just what the*

*score is and the army keeping us in the dark again as always.*

*... I learned a bit concerning the history of Notre Dame however Dear. The present Notre Dame was constructed from two churches St. Stevens and another by an unknown architect... It is a swell church and I hope someday you can see it to [too] darling.*

While Bob wished and wondered about when he would be back in the US, his unit was assigned to provide security over a meat packing plant near Dachau. He wrote Claire on June 26, 1945:

*... Recently our battalion took over all security for Dachau Area Command and I ended up in charge of a meat packing plant. Things have gone rather well and I have 14 men to combat two major problems. My biggest problem is to keep the workers from taking all the meat home when they quit work, and the other is to keep the other companies from doing the same thing when the workers go home. Meat is a rather scarce item over here too, and each C.O. tries to buy, borrow or steal anything that cooks like to stock for his outfit. One has to be very diplomatic when battalion C.O's try to issue all kinds of invalid passes but so far I haven't had a bit to worry about. — That Darling is just a sample of how routine life has become.*

Three days later, Bob happily announced in a letter that the 45th Division was going to start sending Thunderbirds back to the US, beginning July 6th. People who fought in Italy would go first. However, all soldiers from the 45th had their duties cancelled, as another division was taking over their responsibilities. Bob didn't know his date of departure, but he was excited to announce to Claire that when he returned home, he would have time off:

*We will all receive a 30 day furlough when that great day arrives and I've a lot to pack into 30 days Dearest. I'll dispatch you a message post-haste.*

On July 2nd, his letter to Claire had the air of excitement as Bob thought of home, *I'll have so much to tell you and talk over and I won't know where to start.*

In his July 9th letter from Munich Bob was quizzical about his new, temporary, assignment:

*One morning the C.O. called me in and quote, "Bob you are the new Mess Sergeant" unquote. As yet I still haven't recovered from the shock. The job is purely administrative as far as that goes; I have all the cooks to do all the work but somehow I wasn't to [too] anxious to withdraw to the mess hall.*

He seemed more upbeat about his prospects of coming home in his July 11 letter. He told Claire:

*... all our weapons and equipment are packed and everyone is awaiting the command to move...*

*Darling I do hope it won't be too long till I'll be coming home. I miss you so very much and I have so much to tell you.*

*... Although I've only been gone over a year it seems so much longer now ...*

In his final letter from Dachau, Germany, Bob told Claire he was going to a staging area in France. He would be home in late August or early September. He reassured her that he had already been approved for his furlough.

\* \* \*

The final three letters from Bob in Europe were from Rheims in northeastern France. In a July 26 letter, Bob told Claire what he was most hoping for upon his return:

*I've put off mentioning what is really on my mind because I think things are too difficult to explain in a letter. I've only hinted what I'm really thinking but I think you know exactly what it is Dearest. Honest "Claire Baby" for once I'm stumped as to the decision possibly because I'm a bit selfish. I'd like to get married when I come home just as I wrote you when I was in the hospital; but I don't know how you feel about it now. I'd be pretty selfish to ask you to postpone your last year in college knowing what it means to you, and yet with another war to win, a year in college to finish for me, and all I feel if we don't get married and keep letting things postpone it — well Darling that's the problem. I wanted to wait and talk it over with you when I got home.*

On August 11, 1945 Bob wrote and sent his final letter from France before returning home to the US in early September. He wrote:

*My Dearest Claire,*

*Everything is in quite a state of confusion right now with everyone hoping this present situation will be the last time we will have to "sweat it out." The announcement of the surrender terms for Japan was received here with more celebration than V-E day because now we all know combat is finished for certain.*

*... It really is a wonderful day Darling. Pardon me if I'm a bit excited. Believe me Dear I've never seen so much excitement in all*

*the time I've spent in this army. The whole division is celebrating and schedules were sort of cancelled today — with a reminder of an inspection tomorrow.*

\* \* \*

There is no hint in this letter of the tragic news that Bob would soon receive about his best friend, Keith McFarland, a sailor aboard the *USS Indianapolis*. On July 30th, 1945, *The USS Indianapolis* was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine, sinking in just 12 minutes. “Of 1,195 crewmen aboard, approximately 300 went down with the ship. The remaining 890 faced exposure, dehydration, saltwater poisoning and shark attacks while stranded in the open ocean with few lifeboats and almost no food or water.”<sup>28</sup> Sadly, Keith McFarland perished. After the war, Bob would honor the memory of his dear friend by naming his first born Robert Keith McKellogg, but he and Claire would call their son Keith.



## Coming Home

**B**ob departed France on September 8th. He arrived home on September 14th, 1945. He was still in the army, but he received the furlough he had been thinking about. Claire was at college at Seton Hill, but came home for a week to see her returning soldier. In October, Bob wrote Claire:

*No doubt you are busy making up for that wonderful week we played hooky together. I hope your profs are the understanding types. ... I feel we have grown to know each other so much better Skip, and the more I know you Darling the more I love you.*

In addition, Bob reported that he enjoyed spending time with Claire's family, especially her Dad. While on leave, he also visited his own parents in Lorain, palled around with old friends Spanky and Chuck, and played a lot of basketball. Bob saw his fraternity brothers at Ohio University and looked into returning to finish college the following year.

\* \* \*

Bob returned to Texas in November where he was discharged from the Army at Camp Bowie on the 14th. On the 16th he wrote Claire, saying, *I'm not sure its true but I'm a civilian again...*

His honorable discharge papers show that Robert McKellogg left the Army a Staff Sargent and Squad Leader. He is credited with fighting in three campaigns: Rome-Arno, Rhineland, and Central Europe. In November of 1944, Bob was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge. This badge was created "during World War II to boost morale and increase the prestige of service in the Infantry. Specifically, it recognizes the inherent sacrifices of all infantrymen, and that they face a greater risk of being wounded or killed in action than any other military occupational specialties." <sup>29</sup>

His discharge papers also list five additional awards including the: World War II Victory Medal, American Theater Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal, EAME Ribbon, and the prestigious Presidential Unit Citation. This citation was "awarded to units of the uniformed services of the United States and those of allied countries, for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy ... The unit must display such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in accomplishing its mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions so as to set it apart from and above other units participating in the same campaign." <sup>30</sup> It is evident that our very modest soldier was proud of this last citation, as he mentioned it in one of his letters to Claire.

OUR LIBERATOR

ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION HONORABLE DISCHARGE					
1. LAST NAME FIRST MIDDLE INITIAL <b>McKellogg Robert D</b>		2. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. <b>15 311 346</b>		3. GRADE OR RATING <b>S Sgt Inf</b>	
4. ORGANIZATION <b>Co L 180th Inf</b>		5. DATE OF SEPARATION <b>13 Nov 45</b>		6. TYPE OF SEPARATION <b>Separation Point Camp Bowie Texas</b>	
7. HOME ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER <b>400 Idaho Ave Lorain (Lorain) Ohio</b>		8. DATE OF BIRTH <b>15 Oct 20</b>		9. PLACE OF BIRTH <b>Ashland Ohio</b>	
10. SERVICE NUMBER <b>See 9</b>		11. COLOR HAIR <b>Blue</b>		12. COLOR EYES <b>Brown</b>	
13. HEIGHT <b>5' 10"</b>		14. WEIGHT <b>180</b>		15. MARKS <b>0</b>	
16. EDUCATION <b>Student College</b>		17. GRADE <b>X-02</b>		18. OTHER DATA <b>X-02</b>	
MILITARY HISTORY					
19. DATE OF ENLISTMENT <b>30 Jul 42</b>		20. DATE OF DISCHARGE <b>24 May 43</b>		21. PLACE OF SERVICE <b>Athens Ohio</b>	
22. SELECTED SERVICE RECORDS <b>None</b>		23. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		24. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
25. MILITARY ORGANIZATION AND TITLE <b>Squad Leader 745</b>		26. NAME OF COMMAND <b>Company Infantryman's Badge 1 Nov 42</b>		27. DATE OF SERVICE <b>8 Jul 43</b>	
28. HOME ADDRESS <b>Rome Arns - Rhineland GO 33 WD 45</b>		29. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		30. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
31. ORGANIZATION <b>Central Europe GO 40 WD 45</b>		32. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		33. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
34. ORGANIZATION <b>World War II Victory Medal American Theater Ribbon</b>		35. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		36. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
37. ORGANIZATION <b>Good Conduct Medal GO 26 Hq 180th Inf 2 Jun 45</b>		38. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		39. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
40. ORGANIZATION <b>Army Ribbon Presidential Unit Citation GO 358 Hq 45 Inf Div 9 Nov 45</b>		41. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		42. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
43. OTHER DATA <b>None</b>					
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464. ORGANIZATION <b>None</b>		465. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		466. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
467. ORGANIZATION <b>None</b>		468. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		469. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
470. ORGANIZATION <b>None</b>		471. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>		472. DATE OF SERVICE <b>None</b>	
473. ORGANIZATION <b>None</b>		474. GRADE OR RATING <b>None</b>			

similar to what he experienced during the war.

\* \* \*

After his discharge from the Army, Bob returned to his family in Ohio. He was impatient to see Claire again. She invited Bob to visit her at college. He arrived at Seton Hill in uniform and by all accounts was given a hero's welcome.

In November the local newspaper ran an article about Claire and her best friend from Seton Hill, Anna Marie Chirico. The article explained, "Claire is one of two seniors at Seton Hill College, Greensburg, Pa. who gave up their graduation present of automobiles and asked their fathers to donate the money to Father Patrick Peyton's Family Rosary Crusade." The article further pointed out, "on the very day she gave her graduation present to Our lady that she got the letter from Bob saying he was out of the Army after many months in the front lines in Europe, and would be home for Thanksgiving. And didn't they eat their turkey and announce that their wedding would be next June? "It was the Rosary that did it," says Claire FitzGerald, "and believe me, the Rosary is going to be part of our married life." The article included a photo of the handsome couple, with a caption, *Sergeant Bob and Graduate Claire.*

It was the wedding in June that was most on Bob's mind. He admitted in several letters that he wanted to be married sooner, but he also respected Claire and her father's wish that she graduate from Seton Hill before the nuptials. In the meantime, Bob enrolled in classes at Ohio University, returning for the new semester in January.

At the end of January of 1946, Bob resumed his education in Athens, Ohio. It had been over two and half years since he

left Ohio University to begin his army basic training in Texas. By his own accounts, he threw himself back into campus life. He moved back into the Phi Delta fraternity house. In addition to classes, Bob was program director of a number of fraternity events and also coordinated plumbing and structural repairs for the house.

In the spring, Bob's letter shows he was excitedly preparing for married life. He invited Claire to visit him in Athens, where they would live after they were married. A May 8th letter told Claire he had located two excellent apartments. He included a hand drawn map of his preferred choice which rented for \$32 per month, illustrating it was only 7 minutes from campus, 4 minutes from the Catholic Church. and 3 minutes from the grocery.

The May letters were filled with planning for the June wedding. Bob announced his Best Man, Dick Tupta. He wrote to Claire that he would arrive in Cleveland a week before the wedding. At that time they would spring into action, completing paperwork for the marriage license and the Catholic Church pre-nuptial investigation. They'd take blood tests and purchase wedding rings.

Bob's April 21st letter to Claire included a poem which best expressed how Bob felt about Claire and his hopes for their married future together. He noted at the bottom that the poem was not "original but appropriate".

We've lived for twenty years, dear Skip  
 And walked together side by side,  
 And you today are just as dear  
 As when you said you'd be my bride.  
 I'll try to make life glad for you,

COMING HOME

One long, sweet honeymoon of joy.  
A dream of marital content,  
without the least alloy.  
And when our matrimonial skiff  
strikes snags in love's meandering stream,  
I'll lift our sailboat from the rocks  
and float as in a placid dream,  
So to you dear Skip may life be sweet,  
Until again we soon shall meet.

\* \* \*

On June 20, 1946, Bob and Claire married just three weeks after Claire's graduation from college. One envelope and card remained among Bob's letters, perhaps given to Claire on their wedding day. The envelope, with no date, is simply addressed, To "Skip" and inside on the card Bob wrote,

*To my sweetest girl on the sweetest day*  
*All My LOVE*  
*Bob*



*Bob and Claire McKellogg married in June 1946*

## Epilogue

In February of 1948, the US Army awarded Robert McKellogg The Bronze Star Medal. The accompanying certificate explained the medal was for “meritorious achievement in ground operations against the enemy in the European Theater of Operations, on or about 1 November 1944.” That month, Bob was in the thick of the fight with the Germans in the Rhineland Campaign. “The Bronze Star Medal is a United States decoration awarded to members of the United States Armed Forces for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone.”<sup>31</sup>

In addition, in 1985 The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the US Army’s Center of Military History worked together to “define, recognize, and honor all the US Army divisions that took part in the liberation of prisoners from Nazi concentration camps and other sites of incarceration.”<sup>32</sup> The 45th Infantry Division was credited with liberating Dachau. Its flag is displayed in the museum, along with all the US units that participated in the liberation of the Nazi camps.

Ron Woolsey wrote in admiration of Bob’s World War II service, “My father-in-law witnessed a great deal of violence and destruction, and I believe that raising a loving family was his way of contributing to a better world in contrast to what he experienced as a young man. He deserves our deepest respect.”



Robert McKellogg was part of the Greatest Generation, named for the hardships they faced in The Great Depression and the sacrifices they made during World War II. How different our world would be if our soldiers had not triumphed over Hitler and the Nazi war machine. We owe our modest heroes, like Grandpa Bob, a great debt for their selfless sacrifice.

Many years later, lovingly surrounded by eleven children and dozens of grandchildren, Bob would joke, "All I ever did was go to a dance." He did a lot more. After his dance with Claire, Robert McKellogg and his fellow Thunderbirds fought through the crucible of Europe, helping defeat Hitler and liberating the prisoners at Dachau.



*Robert McKellogg's Bronze Star Medal awarded in 1948.*

## Acknowledgement

To understand the role of the 45th Infantry Division in World War II, we relied heavily on the excellent book by Alex Kershaw, *The Liberator: One World War II Soldier's 500-Day Odyssey From the Beaches of Sicily to the Gates of Dachau*. And the title, *Our Liberator*, is a tip of the hat to Kershaw's chronicle. In addition, we found the *45th Division News* article, "45th Record: 511 Days of Fighting", by Bill Barrett very helpful. In the age of the Internet, we were able to fill in gaps about the Thunderbirds from online sources including maps, visuals, and archives listed in *Notes* section at the back of the book.

We learned about Robert McKellogg during the war years first and foremost from Bob himself. He wrote over 220 letters to his sweetheart, Claire, between 1941 and 1945. Read them and you'll hear Bob's kind and humorous voice. Dolly McKellogg kept these letters safe, recognizing their importance to her mom and dad's legacy. We learned a lot from Claire, too, beginning with her recollections of meeting Bob. You can listen to these audio clips at the *Grandma Claire's Stories* website. Bob's scrapbook was a gold mine of photos and documents from his service. You can view pieces of his memorabilia in the appendix entitled, *World War II Scrapbook*.

Bob's children passed along various stories about their dad in World War II. We've included these where possible. In addition, Ron Woolsey contributed his written reflections of discussions

with his father-in-law from the 1980's, and Dave Forrest shared his conversations with Bob McKellogg from the early 1990's.

Publishing the book has been a McKellogg family project, too. Richard McKellogg and Dave Forrest did the research and writing. Jack McKellogg sent photos of his father's WW II citations and medals. Bryce Kristensen and Jamie Forrest read a draft, making important suggestions. Caryl Kristensen used her Photoshop skills to improve the photos and visuals in the book. Marilyn Forrest wrote the *Foreward* and made the final edits to this slim volume.

We hope you've enjoyed reading about Grandpa Bob's World War II experiences. We've done our best to stay true to the facts in the telling his story. Let us know if you have more memories to add, and we'll be sure to include them in our second edition.

— Richard McKellogg and Dave Forrest  
December 2020

## Appendix: World War II Scrapbook





Athens, Ohio  
Nov 2, 41

Dear Claire,

I got your letter and though it was somewhat late it was still welcome. In fact I couldn't have answered it within a reasonable time had you written sooner. I know how busy a person can get when they are in school so keep on the beam and study hard. This week was homecoming down here and we had quite a big time I was up until 2 A.M. every night studying and getting our float ready for the parade but now I can take it easy. How are all your sorority sisters and by the way are you still president? I have two term papers to do and a speech to give within the next two weeks so outside of that I am taking it in stride. How did you make out on those grades? all A's or did you get 1 B and the rest A's? Don't be modest now give me the facts. Our football team has been on the up-grade since the season opened; but as yet we have a tough game coming up with MacFarland's team you can bet on O.U. to win. My song is still No. 1 on the hit parade I should be a [song pluggor] what ever that is? Well that's about all for now - be good and beware of those sophomors !!!

Bob

Letter from Bob to Claire from Ohio University - November 2, 1941



*Photo notation - "Homecoming - Ohio University 1942" - Bob is to left of the base drummer, holding his clarinet*

OUR LIBERATOR



Envelope of recorded message Bob sent to Claire from basic training

6/27/43

Dearest Claire,

Sunday has arrived once more and I'm assembling the spare parts to this two-cylinder machine of mine for another week. From the files I have taken it appears that the mechanized army must have bypassed the "cardboard" I have covered more in military training in two weeks here than I did in one year of R.O.T.C. at college. Some of the fun this week was centered around the "tear gas" chamber, grenade throwing, bayonet drill, etc if you can call it fun. Every Friday we get two shots and so far I have been given shots for tetanus, typhoid, yellow fever, (small pox) etc. It is really amazing how rapidly they give them to you. You just place your record slip on the table and before you can pick it up you have received a shot in each arm.

Speaking of that new job of yours just what do you do for four hours? I can't imagine people reading you in the friendly city of Cleveland in four hours. (My my, that isn't nice Bob). I think fathers are way ahead of the board when it comes to mind reading. I'm sure you agree too.

Claire there is something I'd like to have you do for me if it isn't too much trouble. Please send me a small picture of yourself and help me keep up the morale. If you have one I'd really appreciate it. You know me never a bit bashful. I received your letters and I'm glad in fact, happy to hear all the good reports. Believe me when I tell you that mail call is the most important time in the army.

This part of Texas is from what I hear suppose to be rather beautiful but not having any spare time to tour around I can't confirm it. Another feature of the terrain here is that all of the prisoners

Letter from Bob to Claire during basic training at Fort Wolters,  
Texas - June 27, 1943

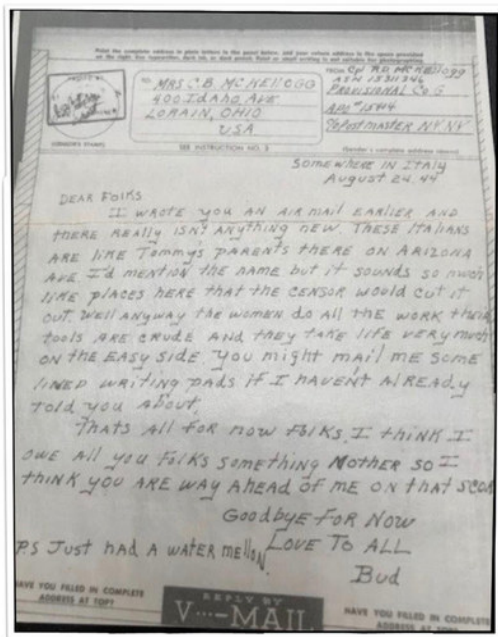


OUR LIBERATOR

<b>CLASS OF SERVICE</b> This W. U. follows Telegram, or Cablegram unless by different character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.	<b>WESTERN UNION</b> A. N. WILLIAMS PRESIDENT	1231	<b>SYMBOLS</b> DL = Day Letter NL = Night Letter LC = Deferred Cable NLT = Cable Night Letter Ship Radiogram
The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.			
HU71 INTLCD SANS ORIGINE VIA RCA (71 74 37)		1944 AUG 18 AM 10 28	
EFM MRS C B MCKELLOGG= 400 IDAHO AVE			
ALL WELL AND SAFE PLEASE DONT WORRY. GREETINGS FROM US ALL= ROBT B MCKELLOGG.			
<i>93810</i> <i>Adm. 12-401</i> <i>File 1030</i> <i>P. H. 11-25-44</i>			
<small>THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE.</small>			

Telegram from Bob telling his parents he arrived safely in Italy - August 18, 1944

APPENDIX: WORLD WAR II SCRAPBOOK



August 24, 1944 V-mail from Bob to his family



Engineer Training School certificate - Italy - September 12, 1944

APPENDIX: WORLD WAR II SCRAPBOOK

481 MADISON AVENUE  
NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

RECORD NO. 59,514

**Military Ordinariate**  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**Certificate of Baptism**

ROBERT DOWELL MC KELLOGG

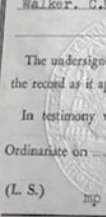
child of Clifford McEllogg and Beatrice Dowell  
born October 15, 1920 was BAPTIZED September 29, 1944  
according to the Rite of the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH  
at Chapel, 1st Regt. Depot, APO 761, N. Y. by the  
Reverend George E. Sherry, Chaplain, U.S. ARMY  
Sponsors: Alfred F. Melo

NOTATIONS IN THE BAPTISMAL RECORD  
(Prescribed by Can. 470, §2)

Contracted marriage with Claire Frances Fitzgerald on June  
20, 1946 at Gesu Church, Cleveland, Ohio before Rev. S. S.  
Walker, C.M. 68,483.

The undersigned hereby attests that the foregoing is a correct transcript derived from  
the record as it appears in the BAPTISMAL REGISTER of the Military Ordinariate.

In testimony whereof I have affixed my signature and the seal of the Military  
Ordinariate on March 20, 1950

(L. S.)  Rw James T. Ryan

Notification of Confirmation, Marriage, Subdiaconate or Solemn Religious  
Profession should be sent to the Military Ordinariate.  
(Can. 470, §2; 576, §2; 1011, and 1103, §2)

Such notification can be made by filling out the  
appropriate form on the reverse side of this certificate.

*Certificate of Baptism for Bob's conversion to Catholicism while in Italy*

OUR LIBERATOR



*Bob was in "L" Company of the 180th Infantry*



*Bob was hospitalized in the winter of 1944 in Vittel, France*

Feb 6. 45  
France

Dearest Claire,

I had intended to send you a picture this time, but the little man tells me, it will take a few days more, so (just like that no picture.) Possibly he doesn't dare face me with the results!

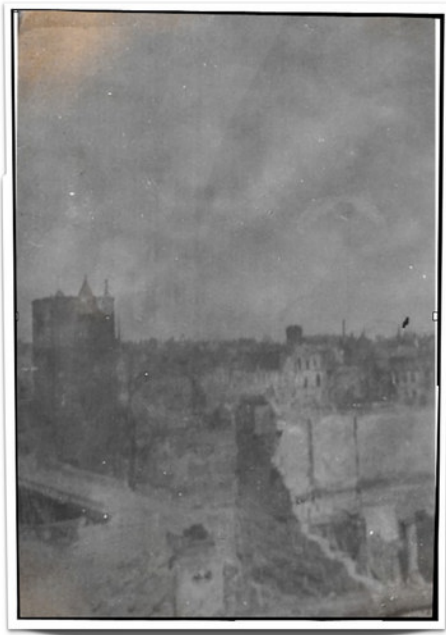
The army seems to break one's holiday spirit as it were, I'm speechless after receiving my latest Christmas cards. Since I did receive several of your letters though. Darling everything is all on the beam again. And speaking of letters - what are these reports I hear about certain people operating raiding patrols on strange kitchens? Incidentally "Claire's baby" I find the bold, aggressive, unassuming method works very well. You know it goes like this: one sort of goes about his business in a most nonchalant manner - knowing it isn't his business. Let me hear how things develop.

Letter from Bob to Claire from France - February 6, 1945



*Bob's 2nd Platoon of "L" Company were the first Thunderbirds into Germany*





*Photo notation - "Ruins in Nuernburg, Germany taken by 45th Div.  
April-1945"*



*Newspaper headline, "Nuremburg is Taken"*

April 22. 45  
Germany

My Dearest Claire,

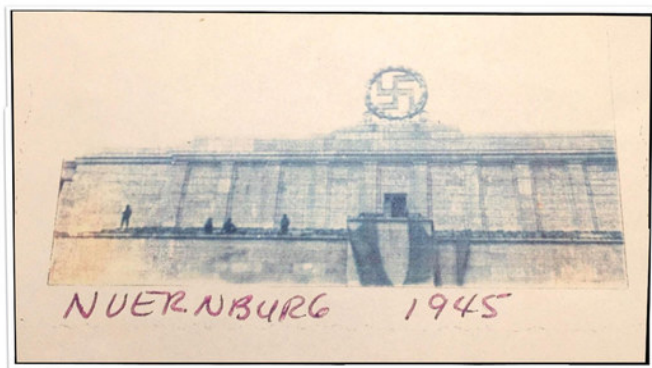
I wrote you a very short letter earlier today and then the situation was altered a bit so I'm writing you again "Claire Baby" to make up for those times I don't have the opportunity to write you. At this point I can't tell you we fought in Bomberg so you will get some idea where the division is located.

Darling sometimes things become pretty sickening and I'm sure that those letters from you and that wonderful future are all that keep me going. Someday I'll explain what I mean and then we will forget about it forever. At the present the news looks very good but to me it doesn't as yet mean the Germans are finished fighting. Until we take every bit of ground and hold it our job will still continue. That's why when a large city falls it doesn't mean much to us. I'm looking forward to the day when every sign of resistance is over.

Keeps me posted Darling on the date your semester ends so I can write you at home I know it's a few months yet but I'll jot it down in my notebook and then I can keep my mail right on schedule.

The common conception of a starving Germany has no foundation these people are well fed and in all the material aspects of living they exceed all other peoples

*Letter from Bob in Germany to Claire - April 22, 1945*

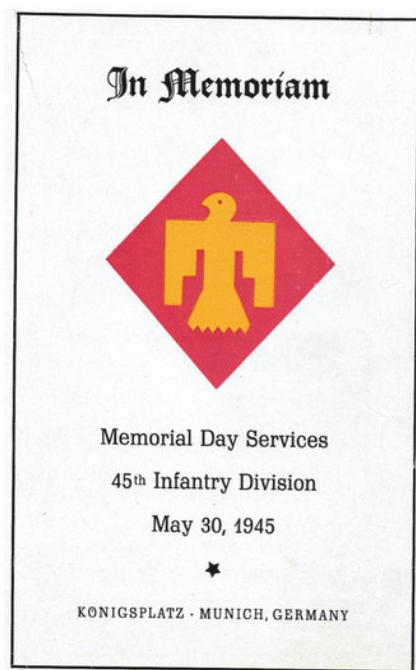


*Photo notation - "Nuremberg Stadium taken by our division the Fighting 45th."*

OUR LIBERATOR



*Photo notation - "Doc Fairclough and Bob McKellogg - Munich, Germany - August, 1945"*

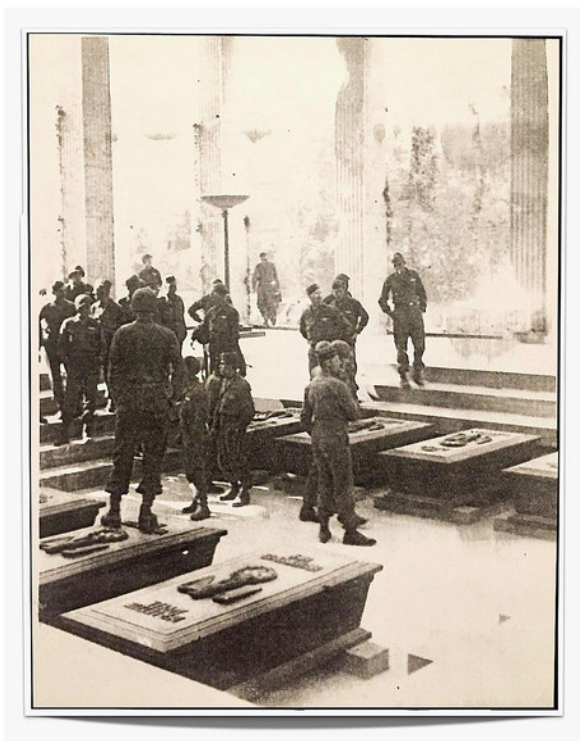


*Memorial Day Services brochure for 45th Infantry Division -  
Germany*

OUR LIBERATOR



*Paris - 1945*



*Photo notation - "Graves of Nazis killed at time of attempt on Hitler's life. Munich - 1945"*



OUR LIBERATOR



*Photo notation - "My Buddy Lefty from New Mexico - Vittel,  
France - 1945"*



*Photo notation - "Some of the supermen captured at Munich en route to the stockade. Munich - May 1945"*

OUR LIBERATOR



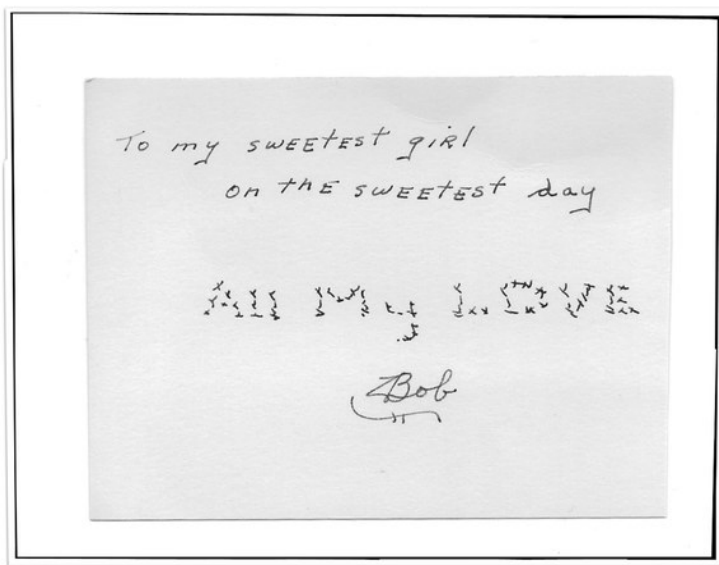
*Photo notation - "Oakie Our German Prisoner working at  
Company kitchen - August 1945"*



*Photo notation - "Moosach - 1st Sgt. Bob McKellogg - Munich,  
Germany - June, 1945"*



*Photo notation - "Full Field inspection prior to leaving Dachau for Rheims and home. Germany, August - 1945"*



*Note from Bob to "Skip"*



*Robert McKellogg's Bronze Star Medal Certificate*



*Jack McKellogg, a Vietnam Vet himself, with his father's photo, Bronze Star Medal and Thunderbird patch from World War II.*



# Notes

## THE EARLY YEARS

- 1 *Grandma Claire's Stories*, <http://daveforrest.net/clairstories>, 2018.
- 2 *Grandma Claire's Stories*, <http://daveforrest.net/clairstories>, 2018.

## INTO ITALY

- 3 McCay, Brett, *The Art of Manliness* podcast, "The Untold Story of WW II 45th Infantry Division," <https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/361-untold-story-wwiis-45th-infantry-division/>, January 4, 2020.
- 4 Kershaw, Alex, *The Liberator: One World War II Soldier's 500-Day Odyssey From the Beaches of Sicily to the Gates of Dachau*, Broadway Books New York, 2012, pg. 43.
- 5 Barrett, Bill, *45th Division News* article, "45th Record: 511 Days of Fighting", Vol. V. No 31, 1945.
- 6 Barrett, Vol. V. No 31.
- 7 Kershaw, pg. 69.
- 8 Barrett, Vol. V. No 31.
- 9 *Grandma Claire's Stories*, <http://daveforrest.net/clairstories>, 2018.

## FRANCE: THE RHINELAND CAMPAIGN

- 10 Barrett, Vol. V. No 31.
- 11 Barrett, Vol. V. No 31.
- 12 Kershaw, pg. 161.
- 13 Salpeter, Norbert; Salter, Carl; and United States Army, "180th Infantry: a regiment of the 45th Infantry Division" (1945). *World War Regimental Histories*. 48. [http://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/ww\\_reg\\_his/48](http://digicom.bpl.lib.me.us/ww_reg_his/48), pp. 164-166.

## THE FINAL FIGHT IN GERMANY

- 14 Kershaw, pg 229.

- 15 Kershaw, pg. 241.
- 16 Kershaw, pg. 239.
- 17 Kershaw, page 241.
- 18 Barrett, Vol. V. No 31.

#### THE LIBERATION OF DACHAU

- 19 Kershaw, pg. 270.
- 20 Kershaw, 272.
- 21 Fellenz, Lt. Col Waller, eyewitness account, <https://www.scrapbookpages.com/DachauScrapbook/DachauLiberation/LiberationDay.html>, 1945.
- 22 “Jewish Survivor Ann Gilbert Remembers Her Liberation from Dachau”, interview by the Shoah Foundation, April 29, 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ljj\\_DZpYofU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ljj_DZpYofU)
- 23 Kershaw, pg. 300.
- 24 Kershaw, pg. 292.
- 25 “Jewish Survivor Ann Gilbert Remembers Her Liberation from Dachau”, April 29, 2015.

#### WAR'S END

- 26 Barrett, Vol. V. No 31.
- 27 Kershaw, pg. 174.
- 28 “The USS Indianapolis (CA 95)“, *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS\\_Indianapolis\\_\(CA-35\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Indianapolis_(CA-35)),

#### COMING HOME

- 29 “Combat Infantry Badge“, *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Combat\\_Infantryman\\_Badge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Combat_Infantryman_Badge)
- 30 “Presidential Unit Citation (US)“, *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential\\_Unit\\_Citation\\_\(United\\_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_Unit_Citation_(United_States)).

#### EPILOGUE

- 31 “Bronze Star Medal“, *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bronze\\_Star\\_Medal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bronze_Star_Medal).
- 32 Holocaust Encyclopedia, “Recognition of US Liberating Army Units, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/us-army-units?parent=en%2F8029>









## Grandma Claire's Stories

Dave has shared more McKellogg family lore on his *Grandma Claire's Stories* website, <http://daveforrest.net/clairestories/>

Visit these pages to hear Claire perfectly recite *Barbara Fritchie*, the poem she memorized in 4th grade. Read Dave's essay about famous and infamous Putnam forefathers, including Rufus Putnam, American Revolutionary general and Ohio founder. Follow the journey of immigrant ancestor Abigail Foley, who escaped the Irish potato famine to start the New York branch of our family. Bob's WWII saga is there, too, including a downloadable pdf version of *Our Liberator*. Enjoy viewing classic and contemporary McKellogg photos galore and more at *Grandma Claire's Stories* below.

 <http://daveforrest.net/clairestories>