

FROM CHU LAI TO SAIGON

The Vietnam Journey of
Brig. Gen. Wallace L. Clement

Edited By SEAN M. HEUVEL
& ERIC W. SVENDSEN



Hellgate Press

Ashland, Oregon

FROM CHU LAI TO SAIGON

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Published by Hellgate Press
(An imprint of L&R Publishing, LLC)
Hellgate Press
PO Box 3531
Ashland, OR 97520
email: sales@hellgatepress.com

Cover & Interior Design: L. Redding

ISBN: 978-1-954163-00-3

Printed and bound in the United States of America

First edition 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Martha Mansfield Clement – Thank you for saving all of these letters.

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INTRODUCTION

AS A YOUNG TEENAGER growing up in Williamsburg, Virginia, I lived down the street from an interesting man who I knew at the time as “Mr. Clement.” Mr. Clement was an active retiree who enjoyed among other pastimes working part-time as a historic interpreter for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. As I recall, my parents first met him and his wife Joan at a neighborhood function—sometime around the mid-1990s. A short time later, a school assignment pertaining to World War II history prompted my mother to recommend my getting in touch with Mr. Clement, as she knew that he was a veteran of that conflict. A friendship quickly ensued between us, and he was most gracious in offering guidance, comradery, and wisdom to an impressionable and naïve young man.

I recall spending many afternoons in the Clements’ den immersed in conversation with Mr. Clement. I would talk about my post-high school plans and professional aspirations while he would talk about his children, grandchildren and some of his own life experiences. However, most of the time our conversations centered on our mutual love for history—particularly military history. A master storyteller, Mr. Clement often regaled me with accounts of his time spent in North Africa and Italy during World War II. I in turn was fascinated to hear these stories directly from someone who was there, and especially someone who was in the presence of such World War II luminaries as Generals George S. Patton and Mark Clark. Interestingly, while Mr. Clement spoke in great detail about certain aspects of his service in World War II and later conflicts, he never discussed his rank nor any awards or honors that he earned. I therefore came to believe that he likely served in an honorable yet uneventful manner during the course of his Army service. Boy was I wrong!

One can imagine my shock when I one day asked Mr. Clement what rank he held when he retired from the Army in 1970. I fully expected him to say that he retired as a sergeant or something. Instead, he mentioned in a most unassuming manner, “Oh, I retired as a brigadier general. I was an assistant division commander in Vietnam and had my own staff, my own command helicopter, etc.” All these years later, I still remember my jaw hitting the ground when I heard Mr. Clement say that. Moreover, it was not until years after his passing when I had direct access to his military records that I began to understand the full picture concerning GENERAL Clement’s military service. He was a West Point graduate who saw extensive combat in not just one but THREE wars—World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Further, General Clement had earned every major U.S. Army combat decoration short of the Medal of Honor. These included the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and a host of others. I was further surprised to discover that General Clement had been a POW during the final stages of World War II and had survived the experience. He had mentioned none of this to me during our many conversations. Today, it reminds me of the famous Margaret Thatcher quote, “Being powerful is like being a lady—if you have to say you are; you aren’t.” General Clement knew who he was and felt no need to advertise his many accolades to others. In his mind, he had just been doing his duty as a West Point-trained U.S. Army officer—nothing more. This presented me with a powerful lesson in humility and leadership that I carry with me to this day.

A few years later in 2000, I learned of General Clement’s passing when I was a sophomore in college, and while our conversations ceased, his guidance and example always remained in the back of my mind. As the years passed, I graduated from college, earned two master’s degrees and a doctorate, and became an academic while starting my own family. While pursuing various book projects on U.S. military history, I began to think increasingly about General Clement and the vague recollections I had about his writing memoirs and letters that explored his own Army experiences. Wouldn’t it be neat, I thought, if I could help finish the literary journey that he began and make those reflections available to the public at large? I therefore began to reach out to General Clement’s

widow Joan, his children, and his step-children—a full 15 years after his passing—and they responded with an outpouring of interest and enthusiasm. They were also most kind in sharing with me all of General Clement's writings, wartime photos, service records, and other related materials. The next few years were therefore spent immersed in examining this large collection.

One day while doing research at the home of General Clement's eldest daughter, Sarah, I came across a large box full of old letters—upwards of 300 of them. Up to that point, I had been focused primarily in researching General Clement's World War II service and had not noticed the letters, which did not seem to belong with the 1940's era materials I was studying. I quickly inquired with Sarah as to what the letters were, and she said that they were all the letters that her father wrote home while he was serving in Vietnam. I was taken aback because General Clement had never really discussed his Vietnam War service with me. He generally preferred to talk about his experiences in World War II, only occasionally referring to Vietnam as “that strange war.” Therefore, it was quite remarkable that I now had this resource that could tell the story of his Vietnam War service.

I remember being in total awe of the historical value of those letters and immediately surmised that there could be enormous potential with them for a possible book. For instance, after some precursory research I discovered that there were not many—if any—examples of published letter collections written by American flag rank officers during the Vietnam War. I therefore concluded that this Clement letter collection could be a real contribution to the study of United States involvement in Vietnam. However, I knew that I could not take the project on alone as it would involve a significant amount of transcription and research. Consequently, I put the project on the back burner for a time as I strived to finish up some other writing projects in which I was engaged. Luckily, I later found the co-editor whom I so desperately needed in the form of one of my star students, Eric Svendsen. At the time, Eric was a top Army ROTC cadet at my university and had a passion for military history. Like me, he grew fascinated by this collection of Vietnam War-era letters and happily signed on to help me with the project. While Eric never knew General Clement personally, he came to respect his leadership and char-

acter—revealed through General Clement’s letters and audio recordings—immensely, especially since Eric was an aspiring U.S. Army officer.

Thus, Eric and I began the journey to transform General Clement’s Vietnam War-era letters into a book. As editors, our task was to organize and annotate all his original writings into a comprehensive and readable manuscript. As we studied his letters and audio recordings, Eric and I discovered that General Clement produced them between 1968 and 1970 over a span of two tours in Vietnam—first as an assistant division commander with the Americal Division and second as director of training for the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (better known as MACV) in Saigon. We therefore transcribed and organized these hundreds of letters into a single manuscript and endeavored to use General Clement’s original words as much as possible. We then added introductory sections for context as well as footnotes to help readers better understand the people, places, and events that were central to General Clement’s experience in Vietnam. Eric and I also included a wide range of photographs, maps, and other images—many of which were from General Clement’s original papers—to help provide greater depth to his story.

As readers will note, the chapters unfold in a chronological manner. Chapter One explores General Clement’s life and army career before Vietnam and is based largely upon his own original writings. It also provides a contextual overview of what was happening in Vietnam prior to General Clement’s arrival in December 1968. Chapters Two and Three contain letters that General Clement wrote home to his family when he was an assistant division commander with the Americal Division between December 1968 and September 1969. As General Clement understandably did not write much in these letters about the combat operations in which he was engaged, Chapter Four provides a look into his combat experiences through his medal citations as well as from the postwar reflections of his helicopter pilot and his aide. Chapters Five and Six then consist of letters that General Clement wrote home when he was director of training for MACV in Saigon from October 1969 to May 1970. The book then closes with an Epilogue that examines General Clement’s life after Vietnam and how the war impacted him. It also explores how General Clement eventually found contentment and closure following his Vietnam War experience.

Editing and annotating wartime letters is not a simple endeavor, and it takes a significant number of people to help bring the task to a successful conclusion. Eric and I were fortunate to have the able assistance of several individuals in completing this book. First, we must thank the late Martha Mansfield Clement—General Clement’s wife during the Vietnam War—for saving these letters for posterity. This book would not have been possible without her. Second, we thank General Clement’s widow, Joan Clement, for making his body of World War II-related memoirs available for research and publication purposes. In a similar vein, we are grateful to General Clement’s daughter, Sarah Clement, for allowing us access to the vast array of his military records—most notably his records from the Vietnam War period. Her enthusiasm and support for this project was also invaluable. We are also grateful to General Clement’s other four children—Ellen, Anne, Doug, and David, for their support. Anne and Doug offered much-appreciated encouragement while Ellen and David provided some of the early materials and leads necessary to get this project off the ground. General Clement’s two step-children, Michael and Cindy, were also crucial supporters and helped to keep us motivated and on-track. Further, Eric and I were extraordinarily grateful to have the involvement and support of two individuals who served right alongside General Clement in Vietnam—Roger Loomis and Bruce Draudt. Their reflections and guidance were invaluable to this project. We are also grateful to Roger and Bruce—along with Bruce’s wife, Nancy—for providing several of the images that appear in this book. Further, we wish to thank Kim Khuê Kathleen Nguyễn for offering her memories and insights about General Clement’s life after the war.

We are also indebted to the members of the Americal Division Veterans Association, who provided us with crucial information and leads at the outset of this project. The faculty and staff at the United States Military Academy at West Point were also very supportive of this venture and they have our profound thanks. We are also most grateful to my wife Katey and our two children, S.J. and Emma—and to Eric’s family for their patience and inspiration as we saw this project through. We also wish to thank my father, J.J. Heuvel Jr., who assisted with photo layout and editing. Finally, Eric and I are eternally grateful to Harley Patrick and the rest of the team at Hellgate Press for their support. As someone

who knew and learned from General Clement as a young man, it was an honor to help put his fascinating Vietnam War-era letters into print. And as someone who spent an extensive amount of time reading and transcribing those letters, Eric feels that same sense of gratitude. We hope that these letters can inform, inspire, and instruct future generations of historians, military personnel, and leadership practitioners in the same manner that they have impacted us.

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CHAPTER ONE

LIFE BEFORE VIETNAM

Before examining General Clement's Vietnam War experience through his letters home, it is important to explore his life and military career before Vietnam. By learning about his childhood in New England, his West Point education, and his service in World War II, Korea, and beyond, one can develop a greater understanding about how those factors influenced his personality, beliefs, and leadership style. The following is adapted from a series of autobiographical sketches written by General Clement in the 1990s. In many cases, separate pieces of writing written over the span of several years have been merged and edited to create one central text. A few transition sections—written by the editors—have also been included to ensure readability. These reflections will hopefully allow readers to better understand the man from Cambridge, Massachusetts who first arrived for duty in Vietnam in December 1968.

WALLACE L. CLEMENT WAS born at Cambridge City Hospital, Cambridge, Massachusetts, on July 22, 1918, which also happened to be his mother's 28th birthday. While his mother came from Boston Irish immigrant stock, his father, Arthur J. Clement, descended from English immigrants. His family came from Montreal, Canada to the Boston area about 1895. Arthur went on to become a businessman, working for the famed Leavitt & Peirce's Tobacco Shop on Harvard Square before opening his own store sometime later. Wally was the second of three boys—between Arthur J. Clement (born in 1916)

and Lawrence Clement (born in 1921). They spent their early years in relative comfort as the family prospered and even managed to take several trips throughout New England.

Sadly, those happy times soon came to an end. The turbulent Depression years and Arthur's resulting loss of income prompted several family moves during Wally's childhood as they struggled to make ends meet. Prior to the Stock Market crash, it had been understood that all three of the Clement boys would go to college—Harvard of course—as day students. However, the Depression prompted Arthur to eventually declare bankruptcy and obtain a lower-paying job at a clothing store on Harvard Square. While Wally's parents did their best to remain optimistic about the future, he certainly was not. Although the family managed to scrape the funds together to send older brother Arthur to Harvard, college seemed like an increasingly impossible dream for Wally. The Depression years had a lasting impact on him, and he never had a great urge to follow his father into business following this Depression experience.

It was later decided that Wally would go to Boston Latin School, the oldest public school in the country, founded in 1635. He graduated in 1935 and was admitted to Harvard but could not attend because of the tuition. Instead, his chance for college finally came when he learned of upcoming appointments to the United States Naval Academy. Congressman Richard M. Russell¹ was to hold competitive examinations for two appointments. First came the preliminary physical examination at the Boston Navy Yard. This was the first complete physical that Wally had ever taken. He did well except for the eye exam. His vision was fine, but he was slightly red-green blind and could not pick numbers out of colored dots patterns. Consequently, Wally was really shaken and again wondered about his future. He was then told by the examiners that the Army was not as demanding on color and that it could therefore be a better fit for him. While Wally felt that it would be a waste of time, his parents felt otherwise and urged him to press on with the application.

¹ U.S. Rep. Richard M. Russell (1891-1977) represented the 9th Congressional District of Massachusetts between 1935 and 1937 and was also a mayor of Cambridge. He was the son of Massachusetts Gov. William Russell (1857-1896), who served in that office between 1891 and 1894.

At the time, two West Point competitive appointments were available. It all seemed so implausible to Wally—the idea of getting an appointment to either Academy. With faint heart he took the Army route. The Congressman’s exam was on January 4, 1936, a date that Wally would always remember. He took the Army preliminary physical at the Boston Army Base. Everything went well and Wally was able to pass the Army’s more reasonable vision test.

A few weeks later, when Wally came home from work his French-Canadian grandmother met him at the door saying in her broken English; “Warnie, Warnie I sing (sign) for telegram.” She then handed it to him. The telegram announced that he had been appointed to West Point and would take the entrance exam on March 4th at the now familiar Army Base. He was stunned and deliriously happy. Wally grabbed his grandmother and then danced around the room shouting that she had brought him luck and that it would not have happened without her. She was excited and laughing, too, and the rest of the family was quickly informed. The March 4th exam was anticlimactic, but also quite difficult. Wally thought that he had passed but was not really sure. He finally got word and was instructed to report to West Point on July 1, 1936 with only essential belongings. Wally was on his way!

The West Point curriculum and lifestyle was rigorous yet appealing to Wally. At the time, cadets took a basic engineering course in order to eventually earn their BS degrees. Foreign languages included two years of French and one of Spanish. Wally’s favorite course was military history—taken in his first class year—covering such topics as Napoleon, the Civil War, and World War I. Overall, Wally was an average student but a better than average athlete. He played baseball for four years and also won the intercollegiate boxing championship in 1940. Wally enjoyed his cadet days and knew from the start that he wanted an Army career. His roommate accurately described him in West Point’s yearbook, *The Howitzer*:

The whole of a quantity is, in personalities as in mathematics, equal to the sum of all its parts. Outcroppings of Clem’s character included the glee with which he precipitated hallway riots by some outrageous word or act and his preoccupation with bad fiction and good military

history. Included too were his graceful finished competence on the hockey rink, in the boxing ring, and on the baseball diamond. Moreover, he managed to combine unfailing consideration with high-spirited swagger.

Following his West Point graduation in June 1940, Wally was assigned with the troopers of the 11th Cavalry on the Mexican border in Southern California. This experience made an indelible impression on Wally, as he never forgot those formative years under the tutelage of the “Old Army” noncoms, which were even then a vanishing breed. What also made a powerful impression on him were the incredible horses with which he worked. Wally had always liked horses even though he was born and bred a city boy. That undoubtedly had something to do with his choosing the cavalry as his service branch at graduation. At any rate, before joining the 11th Cavalry, Wally’s first assignment was to the Cavalry School, Fort Riley, Kansas in August 1940. About 30 or 40 of his classmates were also assigned there with a contingent of others recently commissioned in the Regular Army from the Reserve Corps. While at Fort Riley, they all took the First Basic Horse and Mechanized Course. Following its completion in November, Wally drove on to the West Coast to report to his regiment, the 11th Cavalry, stationed at the Presidio of Monterey, California. Upon reporting for duty, Wally’s first assignment as a U.S. Army officer was to supervise loading the troop box car—Troop E—in preparation for the regiment’s move down to the Mexican border.

The regiment moved south to the Mexican border in November, shortly after Wally joined. His squadron, the 2nd, was located near a crossroads called Campo, California,² about five miles from the Mexican border town of Tecate. Following a memorable tenure with this regiment, it was with mixed feelings that he left the horses on April 1, 1942. However, with war broken out he felt the irony of guarding the Mexican border with his horse platoon while tanks were overrunning Europe. At Wally’s request, he was assigned to the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion as commander of Company A. The battalion was located at La Mesa,

² Campo, California is located in the Mountain Empire area of southeastern San Diego County.

near San Diego and about 50 miles down the highway from Camp Lockett, which his old cavalry regiment had built from scratch.

The 804th was quickly moved to the Desert Training Center³ near Brawley, California for a month's intensive training and then on to La Mesa, California for two months training and coastal patrol. Here the Reconnaissance Company of the battalion was organized. The newly organized Tank Destroyer Center at Camp Hood,⁴ Texas, was the next stopping place for the battalion, and two months were spent there training as a combat organization. Construction had just been started on the camp at this time, and the battalion moved into tents in the vicinity of Copperas Cove. There were five battalions there total at that time—the first group to train at the camp.

On July 29, 1942, the 804th boarded the train to Gatesville, Texas. Its ultimate destination was Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, which was a major staging area.⁵ At Indiantown Gap all records for staging were probably broken—36 hours after arriving, the battalion was entrained again and started en route for the New York Port of Embarkation. Formations were so fast and furious at Indiantown that one man was injected for typhus three times before he could get out of the line. August 6th found the unit on the Army transport *Thomas H. Barry*, with half of the men below decks and half above. Every six hours there was a complete changeover. The ship hit some bad weather while en route to add to the discomfort of all. On the 17th of August they dropped anchor at Belfast, Ireland. Here the battalion debarked and entrained for Camber, County Down—famous for its Irish whiskey.

The next four months were spent in an intensive review of basic training, with a great amount of dismounted work. Equipment was not yet available for training with the battalion's primary weapon—the 75 mm gun mounted on the half-track. They had only a few jeeps and 37 mm

³ The Desert Training Center (DTC) was a World War II-era training facility established in the Mojave Desert and Sonoran Desert, encompassing land in both southern California and western Arizona. Opened in 1942, it was a key training facility for units engaged in the 1942-1943 North African Campaign. While in operation, it was the largest military training ground in the history of military maneuvers. The DTC later closed in July 1944.

⁴ Camp Hood was re-named Fort Hood in 1950.

⁵ Established in 1931, Fort Indiantown Gap is a U.S. Army post located in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. During World War II, it was one of the nation's most important Army training camps and served as a staging area for the New York Port of Embarkation.

guns on Fargo mounts, though they got a maximum amount of use from those vehicles. In November 1942, Wally and the rest of the 804th were shipped off to England, where they encamped at Stoke-on-Trent near Newcastle-under-Lynn. Following additional training there, an advanced detail from the 804th accompanied the 34th Division advance detail to Africa to prepare for the later arrival of the battalion. Then, in January 1943 the battalion set sail for Oran, Africa, arriving on the 1st of February. While there, the battalion was under then-Maj. Gen. George S. Patton's command and held in reserve for replacements in the operation taking place there at Kasserine Pass in central Tunisia. The battalion was also involved in some fringe action—mostly night sentry duty—where they guarded captured German prisoners and their equipment. The battalion was later attached to the 1st Tank Destroyer Group, bivouacking with the 813th and 894th Tank Destroyer Battalions. After a few weeks there, they moved to Chanzy, Algeria, which was one of the top training areas in the region. After a month at Chanzy, the 804th moved further south to Seb-dou, Algeria. Fifth Army was establishing a Tank Destroyer Training Center there, and the 804th was the first unit to attend. Meanwhile, several officers and enlisted men left for an observation tour with units engaged in the fighting in Tunisia. Wally was likely part of that group. They later returned and regaled the battalion with tales of the early fighting in Tunisia, in which they had taken part. Then came the wind-up of the Tunisian campaign and with it, thousands of Axis prisoners. For Wally and the rest of the 804th, this resulted in prisoner guard detail, and trips to England and back to the States, for much of the rest of the year.

In January 1944, the battalion was attached to the 88th Infantry Division commanded by Maj. Gen. John E. Sloan,⁶ and embarked at Oran, Africa on February 1st, arriving at Naples, Italy a week later. Wally was still a captain commanding Company A. They went into an initial tent camp bivouac area north of Naples. Meanwhile, the enemy was dug in along the foothills of the Aurunci Mountains⁷ and the Solacciano Ridge to Santa Maria Infante. Between their positions was a narrow valley less

⁶ South Carolina native Maj. Gen. John E. Sloan (1887-1972) was a Class of 1910 U.S. Naval Academy graduate who commanded the 88th Infantry Division from July 1942 to September 1944.

⁷ The Aurunci Mountains are located in the southern part of the Lazio Region of Italy.

than half a mile wide. At that time the front-line extended from Minturno⁸ on the west coast to Ortona⁹ on the east coast, 100 miles. The 804th's bivouac area was an olive grove with a farmhouse nearby. Wally and some of his colleagues visited the family nightly, bringing rations in exchange for wine. They were happy to see the Americans and they would all gather in the kitchen by the big fireplace and attempt to learn basic Italian. "*Dove Tedeschi*" meant "Where are the Germans?" Wally and the others were quick to learn; "*Via, via*" meant "They Were Gone." One of the family, a little 10-year old girl had a beautiful voice and she introduced Wally to some of their songs; Pavarotti sings them today, including *Mama, Angelina, Non Ti Scordar di Me* (Wally's favorite) and others. For example, she sang *Lili Marlene*, a German song, in Italian, and *J'Attendrai*, the French song, also. There was generally a guitar accompaniment and an accordion as well. Of course, Wally and the other Americans introduced the Italians to their songs as well. Deep in the Heart of Texas was a favorite.

It was all a pleasant interlude prior to the 804th's moving up to a forward assembly area at Carinola,¹⁰ five miles from the front on March 5th. Here for the first time Wally could hear artillery fire in the distance. The Germans had limited air power meaning that air raids were possible. Blackout, foxholes, and cover positions were standard. The 804th underwent no attack there, but occasionally at night there was antiaircraft fire in the distance and the sound of a bomb or two. Limited training and inspection continued. General Sloan insured that there would be no let down in the combat zone. He had already indoctrinated the 804th in Africa and they kept their areas clean, policed, and in good order. Daily maintenance on equipment was standard, to include ammunition and signal gear. Reconnaissance Company meanwhile departed for Mondragone¹¹ to act as beach patrol and to guard Minturno Bridge over the

⁸ Minturno is also located in the southern part of Italy's Lazio Region.

⁹ Ortona is a coastal town in the Province of Chieti in Italy's Abruzzo Region. During World War II, it was the site of fierce fighting between German and Canadian forces. The ferocity of the battle led it to be later known as "Little Stalingrad." This Battle of Ortona lasted from December 20 to December 28, 1943.

¹⁰ Carinola is located in Italy's Caserta Province.

¹¹ Mondragone is also located in Italy's Caserta Province, located about 28 miles northwest of Naples.

Garigliano.¹² By March 9th, A, B, and C Companies were in firing positions; A near Cello, B on the south bank of the Garigliano near its mouth, and C near Fasani. The following day C Company fired several rounds for registration and then threw 60 rounds of HE¹³ at the enemy in a night harassing program. The battalion was in action!

Meanwhile, the 88th Division began relief of the British 5th Division on March 5th. The German Gustav Line¹⁴ extended north of the Garigliano River just beyond Minturno¹⁵ on the west flank; the port of Gaeta, held by the enemy, could be seen across the gulf nine miles away. Their main line of resistance (MLR) was 3000 yards deep with dominating terrain features providing excellent observation of the coastal plain and Minturno area. The line swung north along the river to Cassino 15 miles away on the Rapido River and then on finally to Ortona on the east coast 100 miles away. The Hitler Line¹⁶ was 15 to 20 miles away with its west flank at Fondi on the Appian Way (Highway 7) directly on the line of advance. The division went in with three regiments abreast on a 10,000-yard front. The 350th Regiment was on the coast; the 351st in the center; and the 349th on the right. Critical terrain features held by the enemy included Santa Maria Infante on high ground opposite the 351st; the Ausente River Valley running north-south two miles to the east of Santa Maria; Mt. Daminao, a dominating feature on the right of the valley; and Castelforte,¹⁷ a beat-up town to the east of Damiano. The enemy positions on the Gustav Line were three to five miles deep in our sector. The battalion was committed with Company A supporting the 349th

¹² The 25-mile-long Garigliano River marks the boundary between the Italian Regions of Lazio and Campania.

¹³ High explosive.

¹⁴ The Gustav Line was a heavily fortified German position that was built under the supervision of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. The line was important strategically to the Allies because it had to be broken before Rome could be liberated.

¹⁵ Minturno is a city in the southern part of Italy's Lazio region. Situated on the German Gustav Line during World War II, it suffered from heavy Allied bombing.

¹⁶ The Hitler Line was a fallback position in case the Gustav Line was penetrated. It was later renamed the Senger Line after General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, who was one of the German generals commanding forces in the area. This was reportedly done at Hitler's insistence, in order to minimize any propaganda significance in case the line was penetrated.

¹⁷ As part of the Gustav Line, Castelforte was also heavily damaged by Allied bombing during the Battles of Cassino between January and May 1944.

on the right, Company C with the 351st in the center, and Company B with the artillery on the coast. By March 9th, all units were in position. Mt. Damiano and Castelforte absorbed a lot of Company A's fire, it being integrated with the artillery—some direct and some indirect.

Throughout the rest of March, April, and part of May 1944, the big guns of the 804th threw thousands of rounds of HE at the enemy positions, disrupting lines of communication, knocking out their fortifications, and harassing them by day and night. Meanwhile Reconnaissance Company was busy patrolling the beaches and clearing mine fields. Headquarters Company, of course, had to attend to the needs of the battalion as a whole, supplying food, ammunition and fuel to the other companies within the battalion. The enemy was also busy, for several men were killed and wounded by the counter-battery dropped into the various company positions during this period. For Wally, May 1, 1944 brought his first executive officer assignment with Lt. Col. Fred Rowell¹⁸ taking command of the battalion. He vowed that any company need or complaint would be met. Ah youth, as Wally would later reflect, quoting one of his favorite authors, Joseph Conrad.¹⁹ As a company commander, Wally had felt that no one at battalion level seemed to be listening. And years later as a seasoned veteran, he would reflect on how consistently soldiers seemed to wonder how the boss ever made it. Nevertheless, Wally did his best—he listened, took notes and followed up. He also became adept at visiting the companies where the action was, ensuring that they were carrying out assigned missions and also being supported properly.

On May 11th at 2300 hours, a great artillery barrage began and the 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion joined in with the Long Toms, the 240mm Howitzers, 105s and 75s, pouring tens of thousands of rounds of HE at the enemy position—the long-awaited attack had begun! As the infantry regiments moved forward under the protective covering of the barrage, the firing companies of the battalion quickly moved up for

¹⁸ Fred G. Rowell (1912-1958) was a Pine Bluff, Arkansas native who resided for much of his life in Roswell, New Mexico, where he operated a jewelry store. He was active in the New Mexico National Guard before and after World War II and eventually reached the rank of brigadier general.

¹⁹ That quote appeared in Joseph Conrad's (1857-1924) autobiographical short story, *Youth*, which was written in 1898.

direct fire support of the infantry regiments to which they had been attached—Company A supporting the attack of the 349th Infantry Regiment, Company B for indirect firing missions, attached to the 338th FA Battalion, Company C supporting the attack of the 351st Infantry Regiment with one platoon alerted to repel a possible hostile armored attack. Meanwhile Reconnaissance Company, with the exception of one platoon, was sent forward with the firing companies for reconnaissance and liaison work. The 3rd platoon of Reconnaissance Company, with three 81mm mortars, was attached to the 350th Infantry Regiment for support. Once the attack had begun there would be no let up. The attack was controlled by a series of objectives designed to penetrate the Gustav Line, and by well-defined terrain features serving as unit flank boundaries. Initial objectives were followed by subsequent ones for penetration to the enemy rear echelon and headed north to Rome. These objectives were critical terrain features; hill masses, road junctions, villages, and even cemeteries with their walls affording cover. Objectives were defended in strength on the main line of resistance (MLR) and less so between subsequent lines. The Germans had constructed the Hitler Line 20 miles away, running through Fondi on Highway 7. Typically, they would leave a third or less of their force to conduct delaying action while the main body continued on. Movement in the forwarded areas was at night in deference to our air superiority.

The 804th continued supporting the regiments but it was not good armor terrain. The highway provided access to side roads into the hills. Supply was difficult, with Highway 7 used as the base from which company vehicles operated. Battalion headquarters was on the highway near Itri.²⁰ Here Wally experienced his second air attack. He and others were bunked down in a barn, with cots and mosquito netting, the latter together with atabrine²¹ tablets being their main defense against malaria. They heard bombs in the vicinity—coming closer. The barn offered some protection and they stayed put and prayed. Following a few tense moments, the attack was over.

²⁰ Itri is a small city in Italy's Latina Province. During World War II, Allied bombing destroyed 75 percent of the city's edifices.

²¹ Atabrine (also known as Mepacrine) was used extensively by the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II as an antimalarial drug.

The Anzio landings had occurred on January 22, 1944 with VI Corps, 60 miles beyond the Gustav Line. VI Corps established a bridgehead 10 miles deep, short of Cisterna,²² under enemy observation and fire; but no further progress had been made after the landing. A link-up with II Corps was eagerly looked for. The VI corps commander, Maj. Gen. Lucian Truscott²³ ordered an attack on May 23, with II Corps elements 18 miles away. Two British divisions plus the 45th, 3rd, and 1st Armored Divisions led the attack, with the 34th and 36th coming in later. Key objectives, Cisterna and Cori were taken in two days and a link-up occurred. Meanwhile the 88th Division continued the attack beyond the Gustav Line, in the hill masses overlooking the coast and Highway 7. The battalion supported the advance: with the 349th to Mt. Passigano east of Fondi;²⁴ with the 350th through Fondi and then northwest to Mt. Cassarcio; with the 351st meeting heavy resistance back at Itri. The attack continued northwest to the hill towns of Rotonondo (349th) and Rocassecia (350th). These little country villages were situated in the sparse road network through the hill country and were natural delaying positions for the withdrawing Germans. They were also prime targets for our three-inch guns pointed out by the advancing infantry. The 28th of May found lead elements of the 88th at the Amaseno River line, headed toward Highway 6. The enemy was routed, leaving delaying forces and heading for the Gothic Line²⁵ defenses about 100 miles away. The terrain favored his rear-guard action, with a limited road network through hilly and mountainous country.

June 2nd found VI Corps on Highway 7 approaching Rome through the Alban hills. On the right was II Corps, Lt. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes²⁶

²² During the Battle of Cisterna in January/February 1944, roughly 96% of the city's buildings were destroyed. The city was largely rebuilt in the 1970s.

²³ Gen. Lucian K. Truscott Jr. (1895-1965) successively commanded the 3rd Infantry Division, VI Corps, U.S. Fifteenth Army and U.S. Fifth Army during World War II. He was, therefore, the only American officer to command a division, a corps, and a field army on active service during the war.

²⁴ Located in Italy's Latina Province, Fondi is situated roughly halfway between Rome and Naples.

²⁵ Built under the supervision of Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, the Gothic Line was the last major German line of defense along the summits of the northern part of the Apennine Mountains during their fighting retreat from the Allies. As with the Hitler Line, Hitler demanded that it be renamed to minimize propaganda significance in case the line was breached. It was therefore later renamed the Green Line.

²⁶ Lt. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes (1888-1967) commanded the U.S. Army's II Corps during the Italian Campaign in World War II.

commanding, heading for Highway 6 and then to Rome. The battalion was with the 88th Division, with the 85th on the left and the 3rd on its right, 10 miles from Rome in the Alban hills. Rome had been declared an open city, but resistance remained on the outskirts. In fact, the Alban hills formed a part of the Caesar Line²⁷ defenses. It became increasingly evident now that the enemy would not be able to offer more than delaying action between our positions and Rome. The 351st was south of Valmontone²⁸ on Highway 6 on May 31st. The going had been slow with no roads for tracked vehicles. The highway provided good going and we got on it to link up later with the 88th. Task Force Howze from the 1st Armored Division was leading the II Corps advance into Rome. Progress on the highway was held up by enemy armor and air. Wally was with Company B following the task force but still attached to the 88th Division. Colonel Howze²⁹ requested flank protection against German armor in order to move on. Wally said he would give it, figuring that the 88th would not fault his unit's effort to speed the advance. It worked out and Wally continued on with Company B, picking out a command post at Pallarium, a few miles east of Rome and on the highway. Rome was in sight and they all felt elated.

The battalion started moving rapidly up Highway 2 towards Rome and on the June 4, 1944, its leading elements entered the Eternal City! Orders from the 88th were to join the 351st at three bridges over the Tiber at dawn. This would ensure an advance in pursuit of the retreating enemy. The bridges included the Ponte Milvio³⁰ and the Ponte Puca, and Wally felt that he could find them with the help of a good map that he had. The Company B commander was all for trying to find the bridges

²⁷ The Caesar Line was the last German line of defense before Rome during the Italian Campaign in World War II.

²⁸ Located in Italy's Rome Province, Valmontone is located approximately 28 miles southeast of Rome.

²⁹ Hamilton H. Howze (1908-1998) was the son of Medal of Honor recipient and West Point Commandant Maj. Gen. Robert L. Howze. He graduated from West Point in 1930 and commanded the 1st Armored Division in Italy between 1944 and 1945. Howze was later a developer and advocate of helicopter-borne air mobility warfare. He retired from the U.S. Army at the rank of general in 1965 and was later an executive with Bell Helicopter in Fort Worth, Texas.

³⁰ The Milvian Bridge (Ponte Milvio in Italian) is a bridge over the Tiber River in northern Rome. It was an economically and strategically important bridge in the era of the Roman Empire and was the site of the famous Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD.

at dawn. Meanwhile, Wally felt that they should get moving and not waste time since it was getting dark. Fred Rowell agreed, and Wally volunteered to lead the column, determined to be with the infantry at dawn.

The map was good, and the route followed main avenues without many detours. It was now dark with sporadic shooting in the city but no real resistance. Wally and his driver led the 12 TDs, the lead vehicle with that big gun almost overhead. They wound their way through the historic city finally arriving at their objective after midnight. Wally went forward to find the infantry commander and he was glad to have their guns on hand. There had been a firefight at a bridge earlier, friendly fire. A detachment of the 1st Special Service Force had crossed the bridge earlier, unbeknownst to the approaching infantry who took them under fire; a lack of communication, but finally straightened out. Company B was now in good shape ready to continue on with the 351st, the latter riding the TDs in some cases.

The taking of Rome meant headlines in the Army's overseas paper, Stars and Stripes. However, the Normandy landings two days later put them on the back page from then on. Nevertheless, the advance continued north on Highway 52 and then Highway 3. Wally picked his first command post just north of the city; the Villa Climenti, a one-night stay; a huge villa beautifully situated with a huge master bedroom. Wally slept there briefly, boots and all. Then off at dawn. By June 5th, a bridgehead had been established about five miles north of Rome. The 88th was to advance with three regiments abreast, using a secondary road network and slow progress. Some of the forward units were truck and tank mounted. Wally's battalion was attached to the Ellis Task Force with a tank battalion and a reconnaissance squadron, trying to advance rapidly after the fleeing enemy. This was not good armor country and the force was road bound—about three miles long. The general mission was to screen the 88th Division as it advanced. Highway 3, which ran north-south along the Tiber, was now saturated with armor.

The next major German delaying position would be about 55 miles north of Rome, from Nunziatelle on the west coast to Viterbo,³¹ Lake

³¹ Located in Italy's Lazio region, Viterbo is approximately 50 miles north of Rome.

Bracciano,³² and Orte³³ on the Tiber. The towns were choke points on the advance and were heavily defended. Resistance was slight between towns. By June 8, 1944, Wally was with the lead elements entering Orte. There was a narrow road leading down to the town, under enemy observation and fire. Infantry units had slipped to the right and entered the town on the far side. The 804th would be supporting them. As Wally came up a discussion was being held by tank and TD platoon commanders as to who should lead. Wally solved it very practically by flipping a coin. The order of march had tanks and TDs alternating down this narrow trail; Wally followed the lead in his jeep. The column took some fire but made it without incident. The tactical decision in this case was up to the supported infantry who were not in the vicinity. Wally and his forces fanned out on a road on the edge of town. He was about to start through the town to contact the infantry when a German machine gun opened up from a farmhouse about 50 yards away. Wally hit the ground and a TD swung its big gun around and fired point blank through the window; end of engagement.

On June 23rd, the battalion moved to Follinica³⁴ on the coast, 10 miles from the front, and attached to the 34th Division veterans of the African campaign. The enemy was holding the Lake Trasimeno Line, 50 miles from the Arno River and the historic city of Florence. The port of Piombino³⁵ had been taken and the major port of Livorno (Leghorn) was 40 miles up the coast. The line had advanced 30 to 40 miles from June 10 when the battalion had been relieved. The enemy had offered resistance all the way. Wally's 804th Tank Destroyer Battalion had Companies A, B, and C with the 168th, 135th, and 133rd Regiments of the 34th. June 30th found the 133rd and Company C at heavily defended

³² Lake Bracciano is a lake of volcanic origin located approximately 20 miles northwest of Rome.

³³ Located in Italy's Viterbo Province, Orte is approximately 37 miles north of Rome and 15 miles east of Viterbo.

³⁴ Follinica is located about 25 miles northwest of the city of Grosseto in Italy's Tuscany region.

³⁵ Piombino is a small town in Italy's Tuscany region.