

# LOOK OUT BELOW!

By REV. (Lt. Col.) FRANCIS L. SAMPSON

To bring you up to date—Father Sampson, chaplain of the 101st Division U.S. Army paratroop corps, has completed his "stateside" training for combat duty in World War II. This week's chapter describes the final days before D-Day.

## D-Day Tomorrow

CHAPTER SIX

I had just finished visiting our sick men in the hospital one afternoon when a call came through requesting a priest. Two badly burned young men were being brought in an ambulance from the scene of an accident. It seemed that their gasoline truck had blown up, and they had both asked for a priest.

When they arrived I could see at once that one of them had not long to live; the other was not in too serious a condition. I asked the seriously burned man if he wanted to go to confession.

"No, Father," he said, "I went Saturday, and everything is O.K." He made an act of contrition, and I gave him absolution, then anointed him and said the prayers for the dying. As the doctor and nurses covered his body with oil, the boy kept saying over and over again well-practiced aspirations, "My Jesus, have mercy on me. Mary, help me. Saint Joseph, pray for me."

When the doctor left, one student nurse remained to drop a little water now and then on her patient's parched tongue.

"Son," I said, "you may die. We all have to die some day, and I only hope when my time comes that I will be as ready as you are now. Shall we say the acts of faith, hope, and charity together?"

He said these prayers without hesitation or help from me, and as he continued to repeat them, the nurse, a very young girl with probably little experience, began to cry. The dying boy noticed her crying, looked up at me, winked, and with just a trace of a smile on his face, he closed his eyes and died.

Since the regiment was split up into two different areas several miles apart, I arranged to have the Catholics transported by truck each Sunday to Mass in Newbury. They liked to have Mass in a church for a change, and I was happy to have the opportunity of singing a High Mass each Sunday, a rare privilege for the average army chaplain.

Canon Green, a venerable eighty-year-old gentleman, was the pastor, and he dearly loved to preach to American GIs—our gallant American allies—as he called us.

My evenings were kept pretty well occupied by instructors. Many men were becoming very interested in the Church, not just because they had any premonition of disunion, their principal reason being that they live together for long periods of time, they get to speaking their inmost thoughts, their secret desires, their fears, their anxieties. Their unanswerable questions about religion, their sense of confusion about life's meaning and its basic problems.

Here and there a Catholic man had given a fine example and had been articulate enough to some buddy of his to convey the idea that the Catholic Church had the right answers. Instructions were streamlined to three par weeks for a period of two months. The correspondence course of the Confraternity Home Study Service was a great help.

When I had finished the instructions and was morally sure that the catechumens were sincere and intended to live good, devout, Catholic lives, I would take them up to Saint Gabriel's for baptism.

After the baptism, I celebrated Mass, and the newly baptized and their godfathers received Communion. There were usually six to ten in a baptism group, and the sisters always had a festive dinner for them after Mass.

Then the kids would put on their show. Even if there were only two or three, the performance had to take place. The children insisted on it, and the soldiers loved it.

Confirmations were also held at St. Gabriel's for the American soldiers in the area by the bishop of the local diocese. He was a very kindly man, and was always highly amused by the antics, jokes, and jargon of these American extroverts.

I would frequently take a group of men up to the orphanage on Sunday afternoons. It is difficult to say whether the soldiers enjoyed the kids more than the kids enjoyed the soldiers, but these excursions were mighty popular affairs. Each child adopted a couple of soldiers and promised to pray for them when they would be in battle.

Later, when we were in Normandy and Holland, letters, some of them just a child's scribbling and drawing, from their little friends in Coldash brought grins of pleasure to their faces and a warm glow to the hearts of these hard-boiled paratroopers.

"Mouse" Rapp, a medic, had had quite a career for a little fellow who had just turned twenty-one. He had quit high school in his sophomore year and had become an acrobat in a carnival. He then switched to a tumbling act on the Pantages circuit, became master of ceremonies in a Chicago burlesque, and finally gave that up to work in a pet hospital for the man who practically adopted him.

Aside from being an excellent medic and later doing a wonderful job in combat, he seemed to be fearless, his greatest contribution to the regiment was as a natural comic.

Mouse was what is commonly known as a "screwball," and he did more for the outfit's morale than all the high-salaried and often snooty professional entertainers who were sent to us.

One evening Mouse and I were going to the cinema in Newbury and were queued up in line to buy our tickets. A very attractive English girl was standing directly in front of Mouse, and he kept making remarks to me about her cute hat. The girl had given him several icy but ineffective looks before she turned to me.

"Does that belong to you?" she asked with a contemptuous nod toward my companion. That was all that Mouse needed.

"Father," he said, "you wouldn't want to sit next to me in the movie. I munch popcorn and crack my knuckles during the exciting parts. But now, if this young lady would just let me buy her ticket and sit next to her, I'd be as quiet as a mouse, I betcha."

The girl's native reserve broke a bit, and she smiled. That smile altered those two lives.

Today Henry Rapp and Mary, his lovely English wife, are liv-



Paratroopers of the 101st Division march to the loading area on D-Day-Plus-One, Sept. 13, 1944.

ing in Wayzata, Minnesota. If your travels ever take you by that beautiful little suburb of Minneapolis, stop by at Deep Haven Kennels and ask to see the manager. . . everyone calls him Mouse.

He and Mary will be glad to see you, and you will be glad you stopped to meet them; everyone likes Mouse and Mary.

Like the Colonel, Sergeant Valant was also called Jumpy. He was later to be captured at Bastogne, and when he refused to give the Germans any information, they knocked most of his teeth out, but he still refused to talk. He was a natural soldier and highly respected by all his men.

But the chaplains always had to watch him, for a church call he would call out every man and threaten him (in language not usually associated with church services) if he didn't go to chapel. We always liked cooperation in getting men to services, but not quite so extreme as Valant offered. "These so-and-so characters need some religion," he would say.

Jumpy is a first sergeant now, still in the airborne in Germany, and still has to be watched by the chaplains for coaxing men to church.

The Benedictines had a tremendous monastery about fifteen miles north of Newbury and opened a splendid boys' school there. American chaplains were always welcome, and frequently we brought out groups of our men to enjoy the very pleasant atmosphere of American soldiers and airmen, about two hundred local Eng-

lish Catholics attended. Father Fitzgerald, S.C.C., preached the finest sermon on motherhood that I have ever heard.

After the Mass I took the choir boys to the officers' mess for a big chicken dinner. I was glad to see that they could be as loud and boisterous as American boys of the same age, and with appetites just as big.

Toward the end of May, England was getting tense. The big day couldn't be very far away. The war room at division headquarters was under double guard; airfields were beehives of activity; long convoys of trucks were heading for the southern ports of the Isle.

We had the most realistic dry run yet, traveling to the airfields in trains, loading the planes, and boarding them fully equipped. Humors were flying around, fast, and "Stars and Stripes" carried the story of a major general who had been demoted to lieutenant colonel because he had hazarded a guess in public as to when D-Day would be (it so happened he hit it right on the nose).

But the sure sign, in the minds of the soldiers, that the real thing was not far away was the buddy-buddy attitude of the officers toward their men. Censorship of mail became stricter than ever, and the GIs' letters became longer and more serious. Mass was bitter attended, and some long-liners were getting back to the sacraments.

The men had been well trained; they were in superb physical condition, and they had con-

fidence in the regiment's leadership as well as in their own abilities. We were ready . . . as ready, we felt, as we ever would be.

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NEXT WEEK — D-Day, Normandy!

## Retread' Parents Thwart Vocations

Covington, Ky. — (NC) — "Retread parents" were among the types listed here by a guidance expert as being responsible for thwarting a child's normal growth and choice of vocation.

In an address to the annual Parents Institute on Vocations, Dr. James J. Cribbin, head of New York University's guidance department, delineated factors in the home that detract from a child's normal development.

Among the types of parents who hinder a child's progress, he listed the following:

• "Retread parent: one who tries to live his life over again through his child by forcing him into an occupation of the parent's own choice.

• "Hitler parent: a domestic dictator who crushes out of his child every semblance of initiative and makes him a fearful nonentity.

• "Smothering parent: an oversolicitous parent who strangles the child in her apron strings and so robs him of his God-given right to grow in independence.

In explaining the functions which a parent can take to aid his child in planning a vocation, Dr. Cribbin suggested the following:

"Try, by example, to keep his values straight. Prestige is good; prayer is better. A space helmet is good; a halo is better.

"Help him to choose the proper state in life. This is his vocation.

"Encourage him to plan big, but practical, things for the world and Christ.

"Above all try to convince him that his vocation and occupation will have a tremendous bearing, not only on his own salvation, but on all who will depend on him in the future."

## First Lady To Receive Law Degree

Emmitsburg — (NC) — Mrs.

Dwight D. Eisenhower will be honored here on March 14 at an academic convocation commemorating the 150th anniversary of the founding of St. Joseph College, college authorities have announced.

Mrs. Eisenhower will be awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree by the college, founded by Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton in 1803.

Miss Alice R. May, assistant director of Catholic Charities, Baltimore, will be awarded the St. Louise de Marillac Medal for dedicated personal effort in the social service field. Miss May is national president of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae.

## Catholic Births

Total 61 Per Cent

Hartford — (NC) — About 61.1 per cent of the 55,333 babies born during 1958 in Connecticut were baptized as Catholics. According to figures compiled by the Hartford archdiocese and the Diocese of Bridgeport and Norwich, 33,852 infant baptisms were performed last year.

Also, 8,698—51.2 per cent—of the 16,977 marriages in the state were Catholic ceremonies.

Happy shoes for Easter . . . and all Spring long! In Patent

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AAA - 5 - 9  
AA - 4 1/2 - 9  
A - 4 - 9

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