

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, chuted into Normandy on D-Day. He was doing double duty as chaplain and medic at a farm-house "hospital" when orders came to evacuate all able to walk. He chose to stay with those who were left behind.

War's Horrors

CHAPTER EIGHT

Doc Carroll called the aid men together. "One of you is going to stay here with these men and the chaplain." He had a number of straws in his hand. "Here, draw one. The short straw stays." A man by the name of Fisher drew the short one.

As soon as the last of our forces had left, I made a white flag from a sheet and hung it out the door. Darkness came quickly, and I expected the Germans within an hour.

Fisher gave the man with the grenade wounds another unit of plasma while I changed the dressing of the man with the head wound. With the walking wounded gone we had more room in the main part of the house, so I moved all but two men into the main room. Every fifteen minutes I would go out and wave the white flag because I was afraid the Germans, suspecting a trap, would fire hand grenades and mortars into the house before approaching it.

spoke English. I explained that I was a chaplain and knew nothing of military value. I requested to be allowed to stay with my wounded men. The officer permitted this, and my noncom friend took me back.

The Fallschirmjäger had ransacked the house of what food they could find, picked up a few hand grenades that our men had left in the yard, and filled their canteens with wine from the barrel in the shed.

All night long this went on. The boy with the grenade wound died in my arms about four a.m. clutching the crucifix I had taken down from the wall. It was a peaceful and holy death. All the boys joined in prayers for him.

The medic Fisher and myself again changed all the bandages of the men. As I was cooking some hot chocolate, I looked out and saw Germans set up a machine gun in the front yard. I grabbed the white flag and went out. A German jumped at me and stuck a Schmitzer grease gun in my stomach.

I could see by the badges on their breasts that these soldiers were Hitler's Fallschirmjäger (paratroopers). I tried to tell them that the house was full of wounded men, but two of them pushed me toward the road and prodded me with their weapons.

When we had gone about a quarter of a mile, they stopped. One of them pushed me across the road ditch and against the hedgerow. He stepped back and both soldiers pulled the bolts of their weapons. I said a quick act of contrition.

(It later dawned on me that whenever I was in any great danger, instead of the act of contrition which I intended and tried to say, I always said the grace before meals. "Bless us, O Lord, for these and all Thy gifts, which of Thy bounty we are about to receive through Christ Our Lord.")

Just then there were some shots fired a few feet over our heads. It was a German non-com firing to attract the attention of the men I was with. He came running down the road and stopped when he reached us. He was a fine looking, tough soldier of about twenty-five.

He spoke to my two captors and told me in broken English to come with him. I told him I was a Catholic priest and showed him my credentials.

To my real amazement he snapped to attention, saluted me a slight bow, and showed me a religious medal pinned inside his uniform. (A great many German soldiers wear medals or religious badges and carry rosaries and prayer books.)

The noncom took me a little further down the road to a German officer who in turn called an intelligence man who

The Catholic German noncom, in a very friendly way, told me to stay with my "contingent" (it was so glad of the universality of the Church). He said that a German doctor would come in a day or so. I had to show him the wounds of all the men and practically every square inch of the house and grounds in the adjoining fields.

The wounded men had been very badly frightened. One German had put a gun to one man's head and pulled back the bolt; all the others had turned their heads away. Another had fired above their heads and into the ceiling. The men were weak from fear, as I was, but they were all quite calm.

Fisher and I spent the next few hours changing bandages and giving plasma. We fixed a bit of hot chocolate and what few nations had escaped the Germans' notice. They were constantly running around outside the house and apparently were planning to stay permanently.

The men gradually fell asleep, and about ten p.m. I did so too. Just about midnight, shells began to fall. A good part of the village seemed to be disintegrating under the heavy barrage. Fortunately most of the French people had deserted Adayville the day before.

The artillery became intense, and the whole house literally bounced and shook for four hours. One of the men said it must be our own artillery trying to root the Germans out of this strategic high ground. One ceiling beam cracked and looked ready to give way.

The plaster was dropping all over the place. Window glass sprayed the room. As eleven of the most seriously wounded were in the big room, I put three of them under the beds for protection. The two men with broken legs were in the kitchen. Meanwhile Fisher was made direct hits on the house one after the other. Half the house collapsed on the two men in the kitchen. I heard one of them call out, "Father Sampson!" Just as I got to the door,



Paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division on patrol somewhere in Normandy in June, 1944.

the rest of the ceiling came down on the boy. I held his head in my arm and cleared away debris till I could touch his chest. His heart pumped very hard for about one minute and then stopped. I dug in the debris until I found the other soldier. He was dead. The roof of the kitchen and the entire wall were blown out although the wall had been at least two feet thick. The wall between the kitchen and the main room had been pushed in, and some of the stones had fallen on the other men but had not hurt any of them seriously.

The entire house was so filled with dust that I could scarcely find my way from one man to another to see if each was all right. I went to the barn to inquire about Fisher and his patient. Fisher said that the soldier was either asleep or unconscious; he hadn't made a move during the entire shelling. Examining him we found nothing seriously wrong, but he didn't wake up despite the noise.

As the shelling continued, I had the men take turns in leading the others in the Lord's Prayer.

Of all the times and places for a religious argument! When one of the men finished with, "... for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, now and forever," one of the Catholic men said that it didn't belong there. The Protestant men insisted that it did. The other Catholic men joined in to insist it didn't belong.

I was grateful for the argument, for it distracted them somewhat from the danger of our situation. I told them each to stay in whatever way he had learned it.

Scared as I was, this argument struck me so funny at the time I almost became hysterical. I was happy to notice that in spite of their differences, praying together seemed to calm the men.

A flashlight had been blown out of the house and somehow turned on. It seemed to flood the remainder of the house in light and was used to draw continued fire both from our artillery and from the enemy small arms. Just as I stepped out to turn it off, a German soldier brushed past me running for all he was worth, and as I reached to turn out the flashlight, I saw another German soldier in the creek a few feet away. He moved a bit and groaned, and then I lifted him up, he died.

After giving him a quick absolution, I turned around to go back into the house. There, leaning against the house, with a light machine gun across his back, was a German facing in my direction. I said what was supposed to be an act of contrition (grace before meals again, I'm afraid) and ran into the house. The next morning the German was still there in the same position. He was dead and apparently had been all the time.

How we survived that night I shall never know, except that the calm, fervent prayers of those wounded men didn't leave God any choice in the matter but to answer them. The artillery let up just before 6:00 hours, and the snarl of fire increased. A tracer bullet came through the window, just grazed my leg, and set my pants on fire.

As the first rays of light

fields and in the roads and in the ditches, and blasted cows and mules were lying on their backs with legs sticking grotesquely in the air. All this made me realize how fortunate we were to have survived the last 12 hours.

One of the men saw a lieutenant sneaking up on our building with hand grenades and called out to him, "Americans in here!" The lieutenant turned out to be Blackmon, an All-American end for Alabama, who had taken over command of Company B after Captain Bogart was killed. I ran out and stopped him, yelling for all I was worth. He said that he thought there were Germans in there.

The Germans who had remained and were lying on their backs with legs sticking grotesquely in the air. All this made me realize how fortunate we were to have survived the last 12 hours.

The wounded men were quickly evacuated to the division hospital. The hospital was set up in an enormous French chateau. A war correspondent and his adjoining buildings made it look like a fortress.

Between two and three hundred wounded were lying on the lawn. There were about the same number in the main building.

The hospital chaplain, Father Durren, looked completely washed out. He had had scarcely any sleep since his hospital unit had come in with the second wave after D-Day. I told him to go to bed, that I would take over. He did so but made me promise to wake him at 0200 hours.

It was then seven p.m. Father Durren had tagged the men he had annotated and indicated on the medical tags of the other men those whose confessions he had heard. The wounded were coming in steadily—both American and German wounded.

I had picked up enough German to be able to ask if they were Catholic or Protestant and to tell them that I was a priest. About sixty per cent of these Germans were Catholic, and

Army Honors Priest Author

Fort Monroe, Va.—(NC)—Father (Lt. Col.) Francis L. Sampson, deputy chaplain of the U.S. Continental Army Command, was honored here for meritorious service in Normandy, Germany.

He is the author of the "Look Out Below," a book of his experiences as a priest in the 101st Airborne Division. He was awarded the Commendation Ribbon with Medal of Merit at ceremonies here in the office of Col. Luther W. Evans, GAC Chief of Chaplains.

They always make the Sign of the Cross when I took out the stole. They made acts of contrition and received Viaticum reverently as well-instructed and good Catholics.

These, I later learned, were mostly from Newark. Many of them were in their early teens; some had not even begun to shave.

As I was going from one to another hearing confessions, anointing, and helping the priest and Jewish men to say a prayer and make an act of contrition, a wrenching incident occurred.

I had noticed a German boy who was horribly wounded; his abdomen had been ripped open, and his intestines and other organs had bulged out and hung down. An American with a serious head wound lay on a stretcher about twenty feet away.

A medic had tucked a folded blanket under the head of the American, but the blanket had slipped from his litter. He was groaning because of the painful position of his head. The German soldier had crawled off his litter and along the floor on his back to the side of the blanket under his head again, and crawled back to his own litter. The German soldier, only a youngster, died within the hour.

I remained at the hospital until noon the following day, sleeping from three to six a.m. I did not wake up Father Durren until seven a.m. as he had been completely exhausted, and

during the morning hours the wounded were coming only in small numbers. Front-line duty is not nearly as tiring, I think, as hospital duty, especially when the wounded keep pouring in as they did those first few days.

Lieutenant Sheridan of headquarters company arrived at the hospital with a couple of wounded men and told me that the regiment was assembling at a nearby town. His drive was there in his jeep. I reported in and went to find a place to sleep, for I could scarcely move by this time.

Bulfovich and two or three other men from the demolition platoon dug a deep, comfortable foxhole for me and bedded it down with a parachute.

Just as I was about to lie down, a German medium bomber, coming over at about twelve hundred feet, throttled down its motor and dropped three small bombs. The regimental staff came running out of the buildings at the approach of the plane, and didn't stop for permission to use any foxholes. It gave the men quite a laugh to see the brass taking running dives for the nearest holes.

The bombs landed right in the middle of the field we were in, but the only casualties were three cows.

The only exposed person during this small raid was a French woman in the middle of the field busy milking one of the herd. I don't think she missed a stroke when the bombs fell, and she went right on milking after it was over... c'est la guerre.

If the whole German Luftwaffe came over then, it couldn't have kept me from going to sleep. I slept twenty-four hours straight through.

The recently printed book "Look Out Below" is published with permission of the Catholic University of America Press, Washington. All photos illustrating this series in the Courier-Journal are official U.S. Army photos.

NEXT WEEK
Mission Accomplished

easter GREETINGS



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