

# LOOK OUT BELOW!

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

## War In The Land Of Dykes

To bring you up to date—Father Sampson, chaplain of the 101st Division, U.S. Army paratroop corps, chafed into Normandy on D-Day and later into Holland where Nazis and American G.I.'s faced each other in the closest battle action of World War II. This week's article describes the paratrooper's phase of the Holland campaign.

### CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lieutenant Eli, a fine Catholic officer from Wilkes-Barre, told me an amusing incident he had heard about the Dutch underground.

Two Dutch boys of about seventeen years of age had somehow received word of the coming Allied move into Holland. On the pretext that they knew where there was a big store of liquor, they had enticed German soldiers one at a time at night to the place of this hidden treasure. Once they got a soldier into the basement of the house, they hit him over the head, bound and gagged him, and put him into an escape-proof basement room.

When the division came in, the boys turned their nineteen beaten, hungry, and embarrassed prisoners over to the Americans. I enjoyed the story, but that was the last time I saw Lieutenant Eli alive. He was killed near the Veghel cemetery the next day.

Our casualties were very small so far. The German artillery had been turned loose on the town of Veghel, and while the civilian casualties were heavy, few soldiers were hurt.

Four nuns were killed when an 88 shell landed on the sisters' infirmary. Patients were taken to the basement of the hospital during the heavy barrage on the town. When I visited there, all were saying the rosary in unison.

Veghel was a lovely little city, and its church was really magnificent. It is impossible to describe how clean the Dutch are. Their homes are like doll houses and very modern in style. They are far ahead of England or any place else in Europe.

I would even say that the standard of living for the average person seemed to be above that of the United States. They scrubbed their sidewalks daily, and I would not have hesitated to eat off the brick street in front of the church.

The three Dutch doctors at the hospital were excellent men professionally and socially, and we became very good friends. The youngest of them, Doctor Leo Schrijvers, was to become one of the finest friends I had made since I left the States. Our regimental surgeon, Frank Carel, later told me that Leo was one of the most skillful and talented young doctors he had ever seen.

On one occasion an old man had examined a patient waiting for surgery, listened for a heart beat and heard none, declared the soldier dead, and was leaving him removed when Doctor Schrijvers came up. The young doctor examined the patient again, quickly took a long hypodermic needle from his bag and plunged the needle directly into the soldier's heart. The heart began to beat again, and the young man survived.

One day as I was walking along the tracks at the edge of Veghel, I saw a platoon-sized group of men come through the woods up the dirt road. I sat down and waited for them, thinking that I would attach myself to them for the remainder of the day, for all was quiet in the city and most of the

ation and were offering soldiers sandwiches and milk as they trooped out of town.

When the tanks did get in, we were a couple of miles beyond and had set up road and tank blocks. Then we watched British Typhoons with rockets go to work on the tanks. A plane heading off with those terrifying screaming rockets was an experience for the Germans that I did not envy.

We spent another week about Veghel, and the fighting became intense. In a regiment of two thousand men spread over a considerable area it is difficult for a chaplain to be present at the right places and at the right times when his men need him most. But Providence certainly guided my steps more than ever during these days, for few Catholic men died during this time without my being present to administer the Last Sacraments.

I was carrying the Blessed Sacrament with me wherever I went. When I stopped in at a farm house being used as a battalion CP, a young soldier named Maloney, a battalion runner, wanted to go to confession and to receive Holy Communion.

When we had taken care of this, the CO gave him a message to take to one of the companies. Just as he was about to leave, a stray bullet came through the door and went right through the boy's heart.

His Communion of a few minutes before had become his Viaticum. Just then a soldier came in and said that a tree burst had hit one of the men—a couple of hundred yards away. When I got there, I found that it was the regiment's other Maloney. He was dying. Extreme Unction and Viaticum fortified him for a very holy death.

It was uncanny the way God was providing His greatest gifts and helps at life's crucial moments for His men through the medium of a very bewildered, scared, and unworthy priest.

We now moved up to Nijmegen. I rode a scooter-like bike up there, since my jeep had not yet come in. On the way up I stopped off at Uden to see the famous church. The town had only about nine thousand inhabitants, but the church was almost as large as St. Patrick's in New York and, I thought, just about as beautiful.

The monks at the Crozier monastery invited my driver and me to dinner. One of the first priests I met had been a classmate of mine at The Catholic University of America in 1938. The monastery had been used as a German officers' training school, and the last of them had just left a few days before.

This was the first day the monks had reclaimed the main building, and Father Prior was supervising the removal of Hitler's and Goering's pictures from the dining hall before we set down to eat. Father Foundry and the present Father General's pictures replaced those of the Nazi leaders.

They started to look down from the walls with little smiles of complacency at having been restored to their rightful places of honor. The monks had all sorts of questions to ask about their missions in Minnesota and their high school and junior college in Osnaburg.

The first few days' fighting north of Nijmegen was quite intense, and the casualties were heavy. The still began to realize that the regiment was going to lose more men in this operation.



Father Francis L. Sampson makes his chaplain's rounds on "gillierated" Nazi motorcycle in Holland.

ation that it did in France. One battalion had clashed with an enemy unit at the dyke.

The Germans are masters of the art of camouflage, but they never trouble to lower their voices. Every time a German would say anything, an American would toss a hand grenade over the dyke in that direction and then run, for a German grenade would come back over a few seconds later. This was probably the closest fighting in the war as the opposing sides were not more than thirty feet apart. The Germans, under cover of heavy fog at night, finally pulled back across the Rhine.

At this time while Colonel Johnson was inspecting the position of one of his companies along the dyke, several mortar shells began landing in the field. The other officers and enlisted men immediately hid. The dirt in the book says and as they had learned to do in the hard school of experience.

Jumping just laughed at them and kidded them, little realizing that the next one to come in had his name on it. A fragment penetrated his back. He was immediately evacuated to the division hospital in Nijmegen, but he died enroute.

He lived long enough to give instructions to Colonel Ewell, his executive officer, and his last words were, as mentioned earlier in this book, "Julian, take care of my boys."

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So I told him some of the obligations that would be his as a Catholic and finished with, "We have a lot of weak and bad Catholics . . . more than enough. But we are certainly in the market for anyone who wants to be a good one." I'm afraid that my lack of enthusiasm at that time hurt him, and I have always regretted my words.

He was a man of tireless energy, unflinching ambition, and boundless enthusiasm, with a unique and irresistible, if somewhat trying, personality. Had a priest been with him before he died, I believe that he would have asked for baptism into the Church.

Colonel Julian Ewell took over the regiment, and he will always stand out in my mind as the near-perfect example of an officer and a gentleman. Whenever a company was going to be given a particularly difficult and dangerous mission, he would notify Chaplain Engel and myself so that we could hold our respective services.

He had the keenest drill will that I have ever known.

During his first week as CO, pressure was brought to bear from higher up because of the looting of livestock by the soldiers. Too many cows were ending up as steaks because they didn't know the password. The Dutch had complained to the military authorities.

While Ewell was inspecting one of the battalions, it seemed that all the men were eating big steaks and drinking beer. Chops, hams were hanging up in the trees to dry, and chicken feathers all over the place gave evidence of real variety in the menu. But Colonel Ballard was a "resourceful fellow" and had an excuse for everything. The cattle had been hit by 88 shells, and the chickens had just died, presumably from battle fatigue.

"Better to eat the things than to let them go to waste," Ballard pointed out. Finally, a pig came squealing and running past them, chased by four or five troopers, all firing at it.

"Look, Ballard," Ewell said, "I suppose you're going to tell me now that damn pig is attacking your men."

Somehow or other the news got through to us that Army had just beaten Notre Dame 59 to 0. Had the score been reversed I'm sure that it would have been censored out of our news channels, but I guess the top brass in Washington thought it would be good for the morale of the troops. It was—for the West Pointers—but it most certainly was not much of a morale booster for the Catholic

I remembered he had said the same thing about confession the first time I met him.

I thought that he had hit the nail right on the head, but I didn't want him to think that I was doing the Church a great favor by coming in.

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chaplain of the regiment.

I sent a note to the staff asking that my mail be forwarded to me at the farthest outpost. The beating Notre Dame look from the Army was nothing compared to the shelling I was taking from the West Pointers. Of course, as it was their first victory over Notre Dame in thirteen years, I could afford to be tolerant of their jibes.

One Sunday I went up to the dyke to say Mass for the men on the M.L.R. (main line of resistance). There was a nice little church beside the dyke, and the civilians, having been told by the soldiers that there was to be Mass, came in crowds.

Just then the Germans started an intense barrage in the area. Of course, the battle-weary G.I.s took to their fox holes. The civilians, thinking that shells are only meant to kill soldiers, calmly filed along the top of the dyke and to church.

Maybe it was their faith that saved them. Why a number of this group were not killed by 88s is hard to explain.

Before we left Holland, we were told that we would have a regimental memorial ceremony at the cemetery. It is really shocking when you look upon row after row of white crosses, each one representing a young man you know so well, so full of life before, so anxious to get home to his loved ones and they so anxious to see him again, and now . . . they lie here in Holland.

Chaplain Engel said a short, appropriate prayer; Colonel Ewell called out the names of the deceased, and he spoke a few words of sincere appreciation.

He added that criticism of his views by the Catholic press has not changed his stand.

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