

LOOK OUT BELOW!

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

To bring you up to date—Father Sampson, chaplain of the 101st Airborne Division, paratroop corps, parachuted into Normandy on D-Day and later into Holland where he was captured by a Nazi patrol, marched to a prisoner of war camp, liberated by vodka drinking Russians and, in this week's chapter, returns to parish duties in Iowa.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Back In Black

Well, it did seem good to get back into the uniform of the Church. I had never realized before how comfortable and practical the black suit and Roman collar were. Besides, I never could tie a decent four-in-hand.

Taking off the army uniform and putting on the clerical garb seemed almost like a ceremony marking the end of one period of life and the beginning of another, something like taking the step forward during the reception of the subdiaconate, "salva reverentia—with all due respect."

Although all the Catholic chaplains had talked since returning from overseas were eager to get out of the service, not one regretted having served in the Army or Air Force or Navy.

Everyone of them felt that combat experience especially had benefited him a great deal. Combat truly was a perfect laboratory for a priest's study and work. There human nature was exposed for dissection and analysis.

All the artificialities and superficialities of civilian life were cut away. There remained nothing but brook character, or sometimes, unfortunately, the almost total lack of character. Family position, social status, money, influence—these were mighty useless assets at the front.

The one factor that did follow the men wherever they went, the one thing that stood by them during the darkest hours and gave them the help and courage they needed was the discipline and training they had received at home. These were the imperishable assets that did not dissipate under the fire of temptation or the fits of enemy bullets.

Yes, I reflected as I was leaving the Army, Christian home training is the greatest endowment parents can give to their children. Of course I had always believed this but had never had it so graphically illustrated in civilian life.

Our religion with its wise emphasis upon inculcating the sense of duty and obligation in children gives them the moral stability that makes for ordered, happy lives, worthy members of Holy Mother Church, and useful citizens of our country.

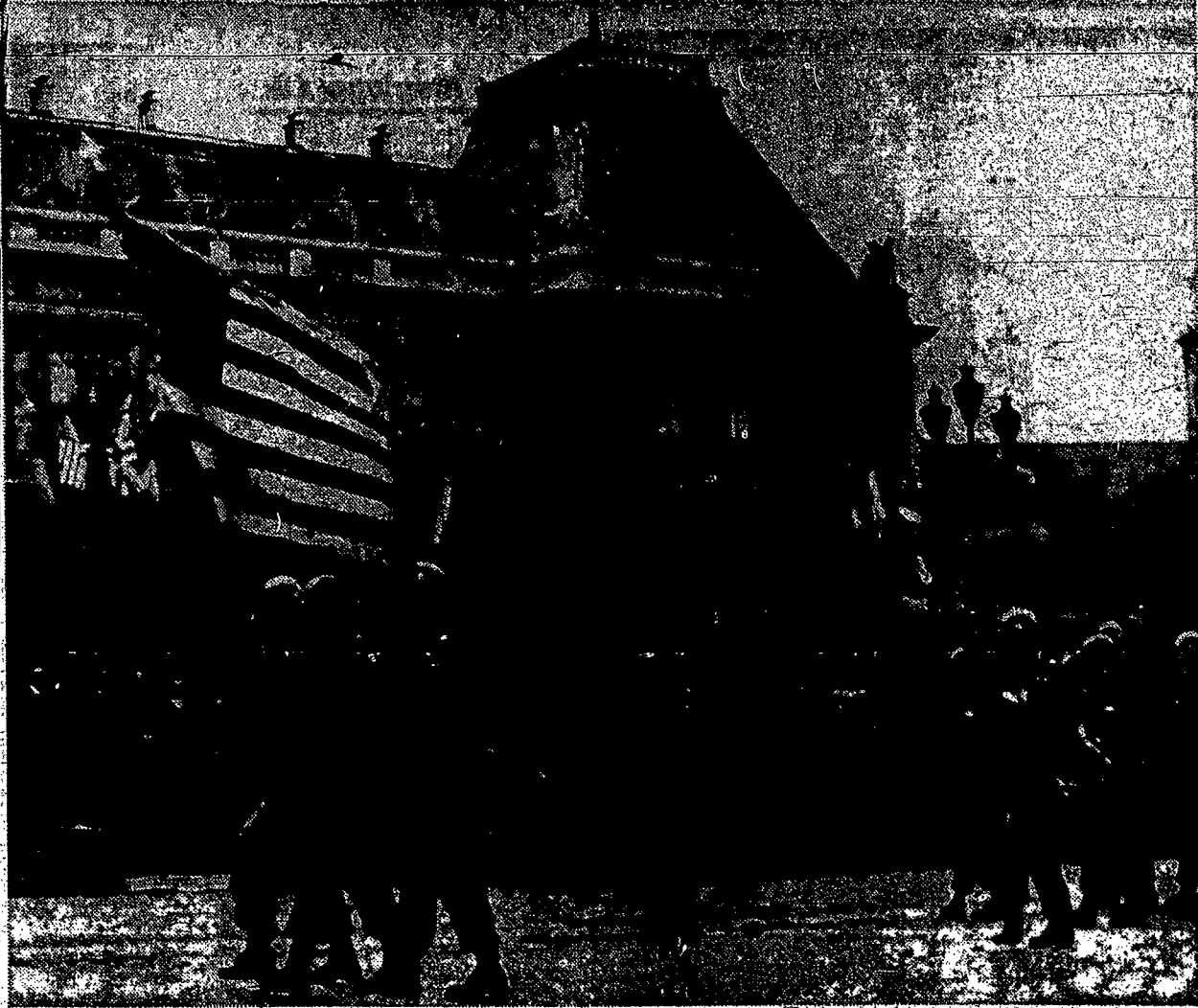
About twelve hundred officers and enlisted men were being separated that day at Fort Sheridan. This was to be our last Sunday in the Army; or so most of us thought.

The chapel was packed for three Masses. This would be the last time I would address the soldiers as a chaplain, or so I thought. As I faced them for the sermon, I couldn't help but feel that I was going to miss my khaki-clad congregations.

Soldiers are something of a paradox. Their faults and their sins are apparent; yet their virtues are many. They swagger and boast; yet they seem to have a depth of humility that reveals itself to a chaplain in so many ways. Their language is often coarse and crude and their humor often disgusting; but their consciences are frank and their purposes of amendment sincere.

The monotony and routine of army life seem to make them hard and sometimes even cruel to one another; but their sense of humor, their kindnesses, and their amazing bursts of generosity to each other more than make up for moments of meanness and pettiness.

It is difficult to leave a group of men like that, men with whom you have lived for several years more intimately than with brothers or a Catholic man has a tendency to glamorize their chaplain way beyond his merits.



Combat veterans of the 101st Airborne Division march in Liberation Day parade at Brussels, Belgium, Sept. 3, 1945.

win out. These weapons, are daily prayer, the rosary, the Stations of the Cross, and most effective of all, frequent confession and Holy Communion.

"These are your machine guns, your tanks, your heavy artillery, your divebombers; they have proved their effectiveness in every battle of life, as all the saints in Heaven and devout Catholics on earth will testify.

"Combat was a spiritual rest period for all of us. When you were lying in a muddy foxhole, miserable and scared, prayer came easy, didn't it?"

"When you were on an outpost at night, and every rustle of the wind in the bushes could injure you in your imagination as an enemy only a few feet away, you weren't planning a drunk brawl for the next week end. When 88s zeroed in on your sector and tree-bursts were throwing shrapnel in every direction, you had no difficulty in banishing impure thoughts and desires.

"The peace and quiet of home and the real values in life were what you longed for, weren't they? You got a lot of comfort out of your rosary when you had a chance to say part of a decade at the front, didn't you? I believe you made a number of promises to God then, didn't you? Have you forgotten those promises? God hasn't."

"Are you as sincere about them now as when you made them? God is. Yes, combat was a spiritual rest period; you felt close to God, and it was a comforting feeling.

"But now you are going back home, and though this was going to be in a REAL battle. The opportunity and the temptation to break your promises to God that you ever made is going to be thrust at you from every side.

"This is the enemy that you are duty-bound to fight. This is the enemy that has never gotten over the crushing defeat it suffered in the first clash of arms with Jesus on the battlefield of Calvary.

"But proper weapons of warfare are necessary in order to win the war against the enemies of your soul. You might as soon expect to stop a Tiger tank with a pocket-knife or shoot down Japanese Zero planes with slingshots as to fight the world, the flesh, and the devil without the proper weapons.

"No matter how well disposed you may be or how strong a will you have or how determined you are; no matter how favorable your home life and environment are or what material advantages you may have; unless you use the weapons our Blessed Lord has given to you and use them according to his instructions, you are doomed to inevitable defeat. Jesus has given you these weapons you need, and as your Commander He guarantees that if you use them properly, you will

the real battles of life have already been fought, not on French soil, or German, or Italian, not in Europe, Asia, or Africa, but in the souls of men like yourself.

"There is one saboteur of your soul more dangerous than all others. It is discouragement. Discouragement can infiltrate and undermine God's grace, if you let it. Discouragement alone can defeat a Catholic.

"You have before you the wonderful example of Jesus Christ, and you have behind you, perhaps, a lifetime of miserable failures. Urging you onward and upward are the teachings of the Church and the examples of the saints and of your own good parents; holding you back and dragging you downward are the consciousness of your own weakness and the sins of the past."

"Yesterday's resolutions gave promise of real progress; today's failures teach you that you are still a pretty weak human being."

"With Saint Paul you feel like crying out, 'The good that I would do, I do not; the evil that I would not, that I do. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' And then Saint Paul's answer to his own question comes ringing down through the ages, as true now as it was then and always will be true for you and for me and for every man, woman, and child on the face of the globe, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord! And you get this grace, men, principally through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and through the sacrament of Penance and Holy Eucharist."

"Stay close to these, and you will always be strong and true soldiers of Christ, worthy to share in His glory on the Day of Victory!"

After separation I drove to Chicago to get a black suit. I went to at least a dozen big clothing stores, and not one of them had a black suit for sale. But still, no matter how small your home town may be or how large the world, the flesh, and the devil will be there welcoming you too, urging you to compromise, to shirk your duties as a soldier of Christ, to shed the uniform of sanctifying grace, to go over to the enemy. This is not a mere figure of speech.

"You must know by now that never forget his welcome when you return home."

It can be said of these people that they truly live their religion from the cradle to the grave.

Education is the second point of the program, and Westphalia has a fine school and a splendid group of Franciscan nuns as teachers. They are the happiest and jolliest group of sisters that I have ever seen; perhaps that is why they do such a superior job of teaching. There are adult study groups, which are surprisingly well attended.

Recreation is one of the main points of the program. There is scarcely an evening that does not have something going on in the school auditorium and gymnasium. . . . basketball games, dramatics, French Club demonstrations, sewing or flower exhibits, school dances or old-fashioned dances, and so on.

Father Duren has built up a splendid school band too. Every child in school learns to play an instrument. I found it really amusing to watch some of the little children blowing on a horn for all they were worth, trying to beat time with a foot that didn't reach the floor, concentrating on the music sheet, and trying to keep up.

The total effect, however, was very good. He had established a club house for the men, too, where they could meet their neighbors, talk about the price of corn or a glass of beer, or play a game of pool or cards.

The cooperative store is the big contribution under Communism. It undercuts by a good deal the prices charged in the nearby towns for the same items. It saves the farmers and townspeople the ten-mile trip to the nearest big town, saves them money on the goods they buy, and returns a dividend to them each year from the store's profits.

The Cooperative Credit and Loan Association formed by Father Duren enables the people to repay at their convenience. The people themselves have invested most of the capital in the store and of course draw interest on the investment.

Westphalia is one little country town that did not lose its

everyone receives Holy Communion weekly.

"When a young couple gets married, the parish throws a big wedding dance in the evening. The profits from this pay for the wedding, and the couple are given a sizable check as a gift from the parishioners.

On All Souls' day everyone attended the three Masses and the procession to the cemetery. Their faith enters into every aspect of the daily life of these people, their joys and their sorrows, their work and their play, their rising and their retiring.

"I am leaving for Atlantic now for Confirmations. Can I drop you off at any place on the way?" he asked.

"Well, Bishop," I said, "I'm just going out to the college for a little while. You go right by there, if you don't mind."

"Sure, come along." As we went to his car out in back of the chancery office, the cathedral carriages carried his bags out and put them in the trunk; then they went back up and were standing on the steps waving.

"Good-bye, Bishop! Have a good trip, Bishop!" they called. "Good-bye, Father! I'll be back in three days," the Bishop responded. Then he turned to me and winked. "They sound real sad to see me go, don't they? Before my car is out of sight, they'll be turning hand-springs in the parlor. They don't fool me a bit." And shaking a finger at me, he added, "So don't you try to fool me either!"

Westphalia is scarcely describable on a state map, but it is a well-known little Iowa town. The entire community is established on a cooperative basis. There are five points to the program: Religion, Education, Recreation, Commerce, and Credit. Father Duren (same name as the chaplain in the hospital in Normandy) formulated the fundamental principle by which these things are coordinated. "Build the Kingdom of God, great, and all these things shall be added unto you."

It sounds very idealistic and, to many, impractical. But Father Duren has made it work. Many communities throughout the country have modeled their cooperative after the Westphalia idea.

The village and the surrounding country are solidly Catholic, and the Church is the center of everyone's life. On Sunday the entire community sings the Gregorian Mass; and a priest

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young men to the cities when they returned from the service. The people also support the church generously and intelligently, in a way that gives them a personal interest in the beauty of the church, the school, and all the parish property. Each farmer, for example, gives to the church one acre of corn for every fifty he has under cultivation. They haul the corn in to the crib behind the school, get together and shell it, sell it, and turn the check over to Father Duren.

As might be surmised, Father Duren is quite a fellow, big as a house and most congenial, with unlimited enthusiasm for the Westphalia plan.

Yes, Westphalia is quite a place. As you enter the village, there is a sign by the road reading, "Where the world is at its best—Westphalia." The boast might sound a bit "corny," but it is true nevertheless. At least, I believe it.

Pleasant as Westphalia was, I missed life in the Army; I missed most of all my soldier congregation. So, when I received a letter from the Military Ordinarie stating that so many priests had asked for discharge that the services were in critical shortage of Catholic chaplains, I began to itch to return to the Army.

Cardinal Spellman asked for the youngest of us to come back in. I approached Bishop Bergan on the subject.

He likewise had received a letter from His Eminence asking that I allow some of his young priests to return to the service. He readily granted me permission.

In this past twelve years I have never regretted that decision. I like the Army, for I believe it offers the greatest apostolate for the Church in America.

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.

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