

**An Alabamian of the Greatest Generation:  
I. D. Walker**

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## Abstract

Americans who served in World War II received the appellation "The Greatest Generation," a title well deserved, but it conceals a dark underside of psychic wounds. In the seventy-four years that have passed since these men and women began their heroic sacrifices, much has been written, but many stories have yet to be discovered and told. As they pass into history, it is imperative that every effort is made to preserve the stories of this generation, a generation that was particularly resistant to tell theirs after they returned. This thesis seeks to convey the experience of a somewhat atypical member of that generation, I. D. Walker of Covington County, Alabama.

This is the story of an ordinary man caught up in extraordinary times and circumstances. His experience points to how the war's harsh disruption of his life shaped his wartime experience and his remaining years. This thesis proposes to study the life of a gentle farmer with a sixth grade education who was forced to trade his idyllic home life and family's welfare for tremendous hardship, and especially his participation in what became the largest

battle fought by the United States in World War II. This thesis examines the life of I. D. Walker, his childhood, young adulthood during the Depression years, his wartime experiences, and his post-war life.

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I am thankful to my brother, James Walker, for sharing his memories and for giving me his support.

I thank you Mike for believing in me and for never allowing me to give up.

Most of all, I am grateful to my Uncle I. D. and to my parents for allowing me to have an idyllic childhood, a sense of place that few ever have, and the great gift of growing up knowing what it means to be truly loved.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the life and wartime experiences of I. D. Walker of Covington County, Alabama. During the past few decades, against a backdrop of disillusioning wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, a narrative emerged of World War II as the "good war," in the words of Studs Terkel, fought by the "greatest generation" as framed by Tom Brokaw. The implication of both phrases is that World War II had a moral clarity and purpose lacking in subsequent wars and that therefore most of those who fought in it were able to return to normal peacetime lives and participate in the prosperity of the post-war years.

The story of I. D. Walker has a different arc. He was a reluctant soldier drafted into service at an older age. His shattering experience in the Battle of the Bulge transformed him, leaving him ill-equipped to resume his life after the war. He returned to his modest family farm and, unlike his brothers, never married, instead living in an almost co-dependent relationship with his mother until her death in 1961. Allowed by his siblings to keep his

mother's home, I. D. continued to live there in close proximity to his brother, Elza Lee, and his family until his death in 1999.

This thesis offers a perspective different from the "good war" and the "greatest generation" narrative. It offers a portrait of a man irreversibly damaged by the horrors of war who came home a shadow of the person who left. I. D.'s life took a tragic turn, understood only by those who had seen war as he had.

Although warm and gentle, he was also clearly damaged, a fact that no one who knew him ever articulated. Conversations with I. D. were never lengthy but were instead limited to a few short sentences – always to the point and never rambling or reflective. He sang the same five-syllable ditty any time he was outside working on the farm. All who knew him knew the familiar, mournful tune, "Aye lie lay low lay." No one ever asked him what it meant or why he sang it and no one else would sing it – only the very young would try. There were other more subtle changes, but most obvious was his inability to let go of his pre-war life, choosing instead to keep things on the farm as they were when he left for war in December, 1942.

The narrative of his life is vastly different from those presented in many of the books written about World

War II veterans. Recently, attempts by writers to shed light on the harsh realities of both the European and Pacific theaters have appeared, including an account written by a veteran's son who sought to find the source of his father's postwar behavior and rage. He correctly assumed that it was rooted in his wartime experience at the Battle of Okinawa.<sup>1</sup> I. D. Walker did not experience rage but no one could have considered his a "normal" life following his return.

This thesis seeks to present I. D. Walker's life and the reasons that it took the course it did. On the surface, he was an unremarkable man, but his service contributed critically to the outcome of the largest battle fought by American forces during World War II. His participation in this desperate battle – his introduction to combat – permanently altered him. Although his behavior was not entirely consistent with what has since been recognized as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, there can be little doubt that the Battle of the Bulge, in which the gains of the previous six months on the Western front hung in the balance, exacted a severe psychic toll.

The noticeable difference in his personality and behavior was something that no one close to him or around

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<sup>1</sup>. Dale Maharidge, *Bringing Mulligan Home: The Other Side of the Good War* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013).

him wished to acknowledge or address and no action was required because he was functional – a contented farmer and a loving uncle to his nephews and niece. At the same time, his participation in “the good war” as a member of “the greatest generation” left him a different man than the one wrenched from his rural existence upon conscription during 1942. It is a story less frequently heard but this thesis attempts to present it.

This thesis seeks to present I. D. Walker’s life and the reasons it took the course it did. On the surface, he was an unremarkable man, but his service contributed critically to the outcome of the largest battle fought by American forces during World War II.

I. D. Walker’s unassuming post-war life belied his status as a member of the “greatest generation,” but the modest status was a direct participation in the “good war.” It is a story less frequently heard but this thesis seeks to present it.

## CHAPTER I

### THE EARLY YEARS

I. D. Walker was born on January 4, 1910, in Covington County, Alabama. Although most would consider him an unremarkable man, he possessed an extraordinary generosity of spirit and a principled inner life, a humble man – a man without pretension, he spoke ill of no one and asked little for himself. He was a gentle man whose kindness extended to many, especially children. When the school year opened, for example, he made sure that children whose parents could not afford to buy them had a pair of shoes to wear, even if buying them meant he would have to trace the outlines of each child's feet onto brown paper. He purchased candy and cookies for children who lived on his farm, he gave them coins for making purchases from the rolling store during its weekly stops, and at Christmas, he made it possible for their parents to buy presents for them.

I. D.'s father, Elzy Walker, was an ambitious, hard-working farmer who did well despite difficult economic times. His mother, Lizzie Mancil Walker, was a demure, but sturdy woman whose devotion to her husband and children was unwavering. The couple married in 1896, the year they first

met, and together, they built one of the largest farms in Covington County, reared eight children, and employed many others whose help they enlisted during the process. Elzy, a highly motivated, keen-sensed businessman, achieved his goals without wasting time or allowing sentiment to stand in his way. Although he did help many, his generosity was incidental to his desire to become an important community figure.

No one will ever really know what led I. D.'s father to leave his South Carolina home in 1896.<sup>2</sup> Elzy and his brother, Avery, mounted their horses in Wagener, pointed them south, and never looked back. The adventurous duo likely believed that Southeast Alabama far outweighed anything they could look forward to in South Carolina. Elzy was born in 1872 during Reconstruction, a time of bitterness, hardship, and poverty, and although he may have wanted to stay, good crop-producing land would have been beyond his reach, and that which was affordable was hardly worth possessing. Even if he had had land, Elzy would have lacked the workforce that made Aiken County agriculture a promising enterprise.

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<sup>2</sup>. The United States of America, State of Alabama, County of Montgomery, Homestead Certificate 17788, Application 29762, Recorded April 25, 1901, V. 497, P. 248, William McKinley, President of the United States.



The realization that there was little future in Wagener, and the desire to be free from an alcoholic, ne'er-do-well father, Lawson Walker, whose nightly antics had long ceased to amuse them, were sufficient to convince the two young men that their best option was to go elsewhere. The prospect of greater opportunity offset the anguish they must have felt by leaving their mother behind, and although perhaps theirs was a romantic notion, beginning life anew in an unfamiliar place with affordable fertile land was an enticement the two chose not to ignore.

Although the Black Belt of Alabama boasted some of the state's finest cotton producing land, others had claimed the best of it. Land in the south-central counties, however, was largely undeveloped and available for a small fee through the Homestead Act of 1862. The only requirements were that claimants settle it and make improvements over a five-year period.<sup>3</sup> Elzy and Avery also had ties to members of their mother's family who had previously settled in the area.

Little is known of Elzy's mother, Caroline Hutto Walker, except that she died in 1927 and was buried somewhere near Baker, Florida. No one living knows whether

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<sup>3</sup> Congress, House, Homestead Act of 1862, *Congressional Record* [20 May 1862], 392-393.

her sons sent for her, whether she accompanied their father when, much to their disappointment, he joined them within less than a month of their departure, or if she came of her own volition sometime later. Divorce was difficult to obtain in South Carolina in 1896, so it may be that their mother came to Alabama to free herself from their father. Lawson Walker remarried in 1907 and his sons buried him beside his second wife in 1928.

During the spring of 1896 the long journey from Aiken County, South Carolina led the brothers along difficult roads and trails through Georgia and then southwest across Alabama to Searight. Train tracks ended there, making it the chief supply center for much of the south-central region of the state.<sup>4</sup> The railroad operated a number of stores where settlers could purchase supplies, tools, and implements. There were livestock merchants, blacksmiths, livery stables, and markets for agricultural products.<sup>5</sup> According to family lore, the brothers stopped there to purchase provisions and the wagon that took them on the last leg of their journey, two days travel time away.

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<sup>4</sup>. Sidney Waits, *The Halls of Montezuma* (Cullman: Gregath Publishing, 1991), 26.

<sup>5</sup>. In an article published on October 18, 1973 in the *Opp News* special edition *Covington County: A History: 1821-1973*, v. 53, n. 12, 11-A.

E. J. Mancil and his sons operated a rest station just south of the town of Andalusia, where they provided travelers with food, lodging, a barber, and a livery for stabling their horses. With darkness falling and the knowledge that their destination was still ten miles away, the brothers decided to stop there for the night. Elzy would return many times, not for respite, but because he caught the eye of the girl he would wed that same year. Lizzie, the twenty-three-year-old daughter of Mancil, an Alabama Legislator from 1869 to 1875,<sup>6</sup> left her home and began her life anew with her husband in a one-room rough-hewn lumber house on December 8, 1896.<sup>7</sup> Elzy found in her the qualities he held in highest esteem; she was deferential, a hard worker, and a good cook. The following year, on September 22, 1897, the couple welcomed a daughter, the first of their nine children, eight of whom survived infancy.

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<sup>6</sup> Gus J. Bryan and Ruby R. Bryan, *Covington County History: 1821-1976*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Walker family Bible

Illustration 1.



Elzy and Lizzie Walker  
Circa 1905

Eager to provide for his young family, Elzy toiled feverishly to clear his land, earning a reputation as one of the hardest-working men in the county.<sup>8</sup> The task that lay ahead of him was a daunting one that he could not do without help, so in the beginning, he enlisted the aid of others he paid with the limited capital he had saved and brought from South Carolina. The first years were the hardest, a time when he worked from daylight until dark six days a week. From virgin long leaf pines, Elzy collected rosin in in clay pots, transferred it to barrels, and sold it at a nearby turpentine still. He cut logs for building cribs and split rails for fences, he made his own roofing shingles with crude tools, and he sold the timber he did not use himself to neighbors or buyers who cut and hauled the logs to mills located along the Conecuh River.

Settlers, the majority of whom arrived from South Carolina, called their community Carolina. The population quickly increased, providing the much-needed workforce required for clearing and farming the densely wooded land. Elzy and hired hands cleared stumps using teams of oxen, and with mules, they plowed and planted the newly cleared land.

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<sup>8</sup>. Elzy Walker Obituary, *Andalusia Star-News*, November 5, 1943.

During the mandatory five-year waiting period<sup>9</sup> prior to receiving his homestead deed, Elzy established himself not only as a farmer, but also as a businessman. He became a lender of money, and whenever mortgagees could not pay their loans, he foreclosed and kept the collateral they offered him. Sometimes he took their land and other times, animals or whatever possessions they had. He bought and sold land, lent money, and provided supplies for other farmers and workers on credit.

Altogether, Elzy and Lizzie reared five daughters and three sons, but ten years passed before marriage yielded Elzy's long-desired male offspring and the end to the disappointment of having no sons. Girls could offer little assistance with fieldwork, but they helped their mother with household chores and yardwork. They picked fruits vegetables for canning, shucked and shelled corn for grinding meal, gathered pecans, milked cows and churned butter, helped with cooking, and assisted with the care of their younger siblings.

Elzy built the family's first house upon brick pillars

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<sup>9</sup>. Congress, House, Homestead Act of 1862.

that rose two feet from the ground. Hurriedly built, it began with one room. Marriage and the arrival of children required several additions, including a separate kitchen. Doors and windows were originally fashioned from boards, but in later additions, Elzy incorporated glass, which many considered a luxury. Pecan and walnut trees surrounded the structure, a few of which still stand today. The stable, enclosed by rail fencing, was adjacent to the house and nearby were the well, woodpile, and smokehouse.

Eventually, Elzy built a schoolhouse that stood a hundred yards from the house. Although working took precedence over attending school, Elzy Walker believed in the value of education and was determined that his children, as well as others living nearby, both white and African-American, would have schools. In 1909, Elzy assisted an African-American farmer, Richard Kitchen, with the sale of a small parcel of land to a newly organized religious group whose intention was to build a church that would also serve as a school and a Masonic lodge.<sup>10</sup> In 1911, the Walker School for white children opened for its first session, offering classes from the first through sixth

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<sup>10</sup>. Warranty Deed, State of Alabama, Covington County, R. L. Kitchen to Will James, et.al, November 27, 1909, b. 71, p. 57, H. J. Brogden, Judge of Probate.

grades.<sup>11</sup> Elzy erected the one-room building on two acres of land he donated to the state and outfitted it with a wood heater, a teacher's desk, two-partner desks for the children, and a blackboard. Providing spellers, readers, arithmetic and geography books, slates, and chalk was the responsibility of parents who often bought them from Elzy on credit.

Elzy financed the land purchase for the African American church and school, a small sum of \$12.50<sup>12</sup> that the parishioners never repaid. He claimed the land for himself, and in 1926, resold it to another group of organizers, financing not only the land purchase but also the materials for a one-room structure known as Beulah Baptist Church. Records indicate that the building was completed and furnished that year at a cost of \$538,<sup>13</sup> and although parishioners attempted to pay back the loan, their efforts ceased when the church burned, some believed intentionally, done by disgruntled white men who wanted to wrest the land from its African-American owners. As was his practice, Elzy foreclosed and later resold the property, extending yet another mortgage. Remains of the church included a baby's

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<sup>11</sup>. *History Covington County Schools*, Andalusia, Alabama: Covington Historical Society, 2003, n.p.

<sup>12</sup>. Elzy Walker personal ledger entry.

<sup>13</sup>. *Ibid.*



grave, plowed over long ago by the new white owner who chose to ignore rather than to preserve it.

Prior to 1915, the school year had a split schedule to accommodate farmers, but by the time I. D. entered school, a single term ran from mid-fall to late winter,<sup>14</sup> a short session, lasting from October through February.

Schoolteachers assigned to the Walker School boarded with I. D.'s family, and although three of the four daughters had married between 1915 and 1917,<sup>15</sup> there was little room to spare. The incremental addition of three rooms did little to alleviate the overcrowding, but each teacher, nonetheless, enjoyed the comfort, such as it was, of his own space.

Mr. John Owens, whose motto was "Able and Willing," served as the first teacher during the 1911-1912 school year<sup>16</sup>. Thomas W. Capps, whose stern approach branded him as a harsh taskmaster, replaced Owens, serving as teacher for many years.<sup>17</sup> Capps, irreverently referred to by his students as "T. W. Tom Cat," ruled with an iron fist and a

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<sup>14</sup>. *History Covington County Schools*, Andalusia, Alabama: Covington Historical Society, 2003, n.p

<sup>15</sup>. Walker family Bible

<sup>16</sup>. *Souvenir Card*, Walker School, District 55, Session 1911-1912.

<sup>17</sup>. *History Covington County Schools*, Covington County, Alabama, 2003, n. a., n. p..

keen switch, both of which he readily unleashed on any student who crossed him. He arrived at the school carrying his meager possessions in a cardboard suitcase, and shortly thereafter, settled at the Walker's house, where he lived throughout his tenure. The modest furnishings of his room included his bed, a dresser, and a pitcher and bowl for bathing. He pressed his pants nightly by placing them between his mattresses and had his clothes washed by an African-American laundress who ironed and mended them as well. He took meals with the family, except on those Saturdays on which he could catch a ride into town. It was on one of those days that I. D. and his little brother, Elza Lee, decided it would be fun to kick the suitcase back and forth while jumping up and down on his bed. The two mischief-makers had great fun until they kicked a hole through the suitcase, rendering it useless and setting them up for a thrashing by their father and ill will from Capps. The boys did not easily forget their disdain for T. W Capps nor their desire to make his life equally as miserable as he made theirs, a sentiment shared by other boys who were victims of his wrath.

The Walker school operated for almost two decades and provided the venue from which I. D. received his six-year education. There, he developed a love for reading that

lasted throughout his life. After school, when his chores were completed and suppertime had ended, I. D. would spend his evenings reading beside a kerosene lantern that only dimly lighted the room. Unlike his younger brother and sister, he never continued his studies because there were no secondary schools close by until around 1926, when the Walker School and other nearby schools were combined and relocated in the newly built Carolina School.<sup>18</sup> I. D., sixteen by that time, was not encouraged by his father to continue his education, nor did he have any desire to do so. Instead, he worked on the farm and learned whatever he could from reading the books his brother and sister brought home from school. According to family members, Elzy often bragged that his son had a good head for figures, although I. D.'s knowledge of arithmetic was limited to basic cyphering.

During the 1920s, Elzy's three sons came of age and found their places among the hired hands who toiled in the fields. Before this point, however, the brothers, close in age, enjoyed carefree days, and even when passing seasons brought hard work, time remained for rest and play. During

Illustration 2.

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<sup>18</sup>. *History Covington County Schools*, n. p.



I. D. Walker  
Circa 1922

their youth, school provided breaks from fieldwork, along with friendships and memories of fun-filled days. Until they were ready for fieldwork, Elzy gave his sons menial tasks, primarily helping their mother. The "lot," as the barnyard was called, was the playground for the three boys. They passed days hanging from barn beams, jumping on piles of stored cotton, and riding the horses that shared the stable with their father's mules. Five Runs Creek formed the eastern border of their father's land and supplied an ideal spot for fishing and swimming - a place where local boys gathered in summer during the middle or "heat" of the day before returning to fields where they pulled weeds and hoed.

I. D. and his brothers lived much the same as the other boys with whom they grew up, and although their father could have afforded extravagances, he provided very few. There were cats, dogs, horses, mules, and goats for play and sport, but Elzy usually left them to their own devices when it came to such items as toys. The slingshots they fashioned from white oak, discarded rubber, and scraps of shoe leather were rarely missing from their pockets. They constructed noisemakers that were pulled along the road as they ran by punching holes into the lids and

Illustration 3.



Elza Lee and I. D. Walker  
Riding  
Mule, Wendell and Horse, Perc  
Circa 1922

bottoms of syrup cans, threading wire through, filling them with rocks, and replacing the lids. They made stilts from sapling trees, swings from jute rope, and whirligigs from thread and buttons. The boys celebrated holidays with the help of their father's homemade fireworks - wadded rags tied with strings he soaked in kerosene, set afire and threw into the sky. In the schoolyard and in pastures, local boys gathered to play town ball, an activity similar to softball and one of the few that required an outlay of cash, with a ball being the most essential purchase.

Beginning in his teens, and continuing throughout his life, a day seldom went by without I. D. walking five or ten miles across fields, through the woods to the creek, or simply up and down the roadsides. He knew every inch of every acre of the farm and little happened that caught him unaware. The cool weather of fall provided the opportunity for hunting and a chance to hone his skills, gaining him a reputation as an excellent shooter and the admiration of his peers.

I. D. had a strong sense of belonging and place that few experience - feelings that survived for his entire lifetime. Hundreds of acres of virgin long leaf pines that provided a canopy for wildlife and cattle that roamed freely beneath it enhanced the beauty of the farm. Planted

fields, a clear cool creek, cypress ponds, and streams added to the land's physical beauty and reinforced I. D.'s sense of pride in ownership. He was in awe of the tenacity and determination that enabled his father to tame the virtual wilderness, qualities he admired, and reverence that empowered him with a feeling of superiority, well hidden, but basked in just the same.

Church attendance was important to Elzy and although I. D. shared that sentiment, he did not become an actual member of a congregation until 1948.<sup>19</sup> Elzy was a God fearing man who believed in providing his children with Christian upbringing with the hope of instilling values and decency – qualities he looked for in others. He read his Bible and held fast to his Christian faith, always willing to lend a hand to those less fortunate who were willing to work and make an effort to provide for themselves and their families. A private man, Elzy disapproved of public displays of religiosity, until on Sundays, when he, Lizzie, and the children would climb into the wagon for the two-mile trip to Carolina Baptist Church. I. D.'s brothers preferred staying behind to keep an eye on things around the place, but misadventures usually landed the two boys in

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<sup>19</sup>. Walker family Bible



trouble, always leading to their return to church, at least for a while.

During the fourteen years prior to I. D.'s birth, his father acquired 506 acres of land,<sup>20</sup> some of which he sold in order to finance his farming operation. At the time I. D. was born in 1910, 256 acres remained in Elzy's possession, eighty-five under cultivation, and 167, undeveloped. By 1922, the total number of acres had grown to 1,416, 425 of which were under cultivation.<sup>21</sup>

Cotton was Elzy's chief cash crop, but with the arrival of the boll weevil around 1911,<sup>22</sup> he expanded his crop production to include oats, peanuts, corn, and velvet beans. Despite drops in yields, Elzy never gave up on cotton and, with the introduction of pesticides, it continued to be a leading cash crop. The labor-intensive preparation for planting began during late winter with cutting prior-year cotton stalks and plowing. Early each spring when oak leaves were just beginning to form, workers planted corn and later, during April, they planted cotton.

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<sup>20</sup>. Covington County Alabama, Beat 21, 1909 Tax Return List – Real and Personal Property, W. R. Jordan, Tax Assessor.

<sup>21</sup>. Ibid., 1922.

<sup>22</sup>. R. H. Smith. *History of the Boll Weevil in Alabama, 1910 to 2007*, Bulletin 670, Dec. 2007, Auburn Extension Service. <http://www.aaes.auburn.edu/comm/pubs/bulletins/bull670.pdf> (accessed April 16, 2014).

Summers brought blistering sun and heat along with grueling fieldwork that seemed as though it would never be over. Throughout summer and early fall, farm workers picked cotton, pulled corn, and stacked peanut hay.

Sharecroppers and tenant farmers who lived on the farm used Elzy's mules for plowing, but he stabled the animals nightly in his own barnyard where they were watered and fed. Alongside the stable were additional cribs that held implements, supplies, and gathered crops, as well as a shelter with troughs for feeding dairy cows brought there morning and evening for milking, a chore most often carried out by the women.

Tom Gantt, an African-American who occupied one of the tenant houses, came every morning to build fires in Lizzie's stove, as well as in the one that heated the school. He taught I. D. the art of chopping wood into uniform blocks – a lesson that served him well once the responsibility was entirely his. Tom became one of Elzy's most dependable workers and a trusted friend of I. D., his brothers, and others in the community who admired him.

Numerous laborers lived in the farm's tenant houses, some who sharecropped and others who worked for wages. Cotton and peanut crops required the efforts of workers for many months each year. With its animal stock, gardens, and

cultivated acres,<sup>23</sup> the Walker farm provided not only a steady flow of cash, but also sustenance for an ever-growing workforce. The farm produced garden vegetables, fruit, corn, sugar cane, milk, butter, meat, lard, and eggs.

At least once every month, Elzy Walker made the ten-mile trip to Andalusia where he purchased farm and household supplies, as well as items requested by farm workers and neighbors. He meticulously recorded each debtor's charges in ledgers, many with accounts that continued for decades. Occasionally, when Elzy allowed his children to go along on the trips, he gave them pocket change for the movie theater and buying treats, but often they amused themselves by simply wandering about the town. Elzy broke up the two-day trips with overnight stays with Lizzie's family, trying encounters with her father and brothers who enjoyed drinking and spending far too much time involved in what he considered unworthy pursuits.

With cold weather came hog killing season, a time everyone looked forward to because of the abundance of fresh and cured meat. It also meant that the children would not have to attend school for at least two days because

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<sup>23</sup>. 1920s tax returns – real and personal property.

they were expected to help. Elzy gave the boys the task of preparing the smokehouse floor for receiving the hams and shoulders that he would smoke. The boys spread white sand scooped from the creek bank onto the smokehouse floor and covered with green pine branches to make a clean resting place for smoking the salted shoulders, hams, and sides. I. D. and his brothers completed the job a day or two before the adults butchered, for on that day, they focused their efforts on bigger things. Workers neatly arranged the meat on the pine-covered floor and, from hickory poles that extended the length of the room, they hung sides of bacon alongside sausage that they smoked continually, day and night for around two weeks. I. D. and his brothers helped by tending the smoldering hickory fires and by turning the meat from side to side.

During the 1920s, after Lizzie demanded a new home, the family moved up the hill to a new six-room wooden house that featured glass windows and porches across the front and back. Elzy planted a pecan orchard and he built a new lot with a bigger stable and four cribs. The new two-sided outhouse, a considerable advance over others in the community and a source of family pride, stood across the road, obscured behind a clump of trees. A new tool shed and smokehouse were located near the house.

These were difficult financial times for farmers – times when many struggled to provide for their families and the lure of jobs in cotton mills and apparel industries in Andalusia and Opp drew away Elzy's much-needed workforce. Many who had been loyal workers found the security of a weekly wage preferable to the uncertainty of sharecropper or tenant earnings. Elzy expected I. D. and his older brother, Kay, to assume the tasks formerly undertaken by wage laborers, and although farming came naturally to I. D., Kay did not share his enthusiasm or his desire to spend his life under his father's control.

I. D. lacked his father's hard edge, and although he aspired to be as successful, its absence proved to be an impediment to achieving his goal. He lived in his father's shadow, working tirelessly to preserve and keep all that Elzy had accumulated. He was a proud son to whom no sacrifice was too great.

More and more Elzy turned to lending money and other business rather than cultivating land. Individuals who were unable to obtain loans from banks looked to him in desperation. He earned a steady income from the interest paid on mortgages that he extended, and from the sale of collateral seized during foreclosures. Elzy collected eight

percent interest<sup>24</sup> from his mortgagees - a habit that began as early as 1914.<sup>25</sup> He had no compunction about charging those who borrowed from him, and equally as exacting was his insistence upon pledges of collateral to back his investments. For loans that ranged from as low as twelve dollars to as high as several hundred, he was offered farm animals, automobiles, land, and once, the staple merchandise from a store owner in Andalusia.<sup>26</sup> Although many respected him, others who had the misfortune of crossing him harbored resentment. Lending money was risky business that carried with it the burden of worry and stress, and adding to it was the fact that farming was not without its own problems, circumstances that led to the development of stomach ulcers - the condition that ultimately caused Elzy's death.

I. D.'s older sister, Jodie, married in 1926,<sup>27</sup> leaving only the three brothers and their baby sister, Mary, at home. The marriage did not last, however, and she soon returned to the farm with her young son. Ruth, the third daughter, also returned with her older, ailing husband and

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<sup>24</sup>. Mortgages executed by Elzy Walker.

<sup>25</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>. Ibid, O. W. Everage, June 10, 1936.

<sup>27</sup>. Walker family Bible

two young daughters. I. D. developed a strong dislike for Ruth, in part because she showed contempt for her husband, who, dying of congestive heart failure, was unable to provide for her and their children. The difficulty of his predicament was complicated further by the lack of privacy and the absence of electricity and indoor plumbing. Ruth refused to help her husband, leaving the responsibility to I. D. who came to respect the dying man, primarily because he did not complain despite the unspeakable agony he endured. I. D. sat at his bedside often, listening as he quietly recalled his experiences as a soldier at the Presidio during the San Francisco earthquake. I. D. recalled watching as the doctor inserted needles to extract fluid from the dying man's lungs - fluid that was slowly drowning him.

Elzy purchased a Model "A" Ford in 1930, a welcome replacement for the horse and buggy he and his family had relied upon before. After he learned to drive, frequent trips to town allowed I. D. a social life that included new friendships, movies, and girls. His sister, Jodie, was able to take a job at the sewing factory in town, and his brother, Elza Lee, attended Andalusia High School, an improvement over the county school he could have attended.

The Depression brought dark days for most Americans, but agriculture cushioned its blow for the Walkers who were more fortunate than many in the community who lacked even the basic necessities. From his farm stores, Elzy Walker issued food and supplies on credit to anyone willing to work. The loss of much of his capital at the beginning of the Depression did not dampen his enthusiasm for lending money. Determined to replace the assets he had lost, Elzy continued business in earnest. In addition, he financed sharecroppers and tenant farmers who repaid him from the income they received from farming his land. He supplied their seeds, fertilizers, food, clothing, medicine, and whatever else they needed on credit.

In 1933, Kay married<sup>28</sup> and took a job in town as a carpenter, and in 1935, Elza Lee left to attend the New York Diesel Institution in Albany.<sup>29</sup> For the first time in his life, I. D. found himself without the help of his brothers. During December 1937 and January 1938, I. D. followed their lead and left home briefly to work in an orange grove near Orlando, Florida, where he earned enough to replace the money he had spent for the down payment on a

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<sup>28</sup>. Walker family Bible

<sup>29</sup>. New York Diesel Institute, *Letter of Recommendation*, October 23, 1936, H. E. Kuehn, Director.



1936 Chevrolet sedan before returning to the farm, just in time to begin preparations for spring planting.<sup>30</sup>

With the exception of his youngest sister, Mary, everyone had left the farm. Ruth and Jodie were living in town and his married sisters had families and farms of their own. In 1938, at the age of twenty-four, Mary left home to attend Alabama College in Montevallo, now the University of Montevallo.<sup>31</sup> I. D. was alone with his parents and because his father's health continued to decline, the responsibility for managing the family farm fell squarely on his shoulders.

Elza Lee had moved from New York to Baltimore<sup>32</sup> and indicated that he would ever return to the farm. He enjoyed life in the city and considered the adventure his only chance for autonomy. Meanwhile, Mary left Montevallo, and after her marriage, moved to Montgomery where she remained for the duration of her life.

By 1940, I. D. had become accustomed to the responsibilities he had assumed and he resigned himself to staying on the farm. In the years that followed,

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<sup>30</sup>. Florida motor vehicle registration 1937.

<sup>31</sup>. Alabama College, Montevallo, Alabama, *Letter of Admission*, August 23, 1938, Virginia Henderson, Registrar.

<sup>32</sup>. Elza Lee Walker in letters written to Lizzie Walker, February 12, 1942 and March 1, 1942.

technological developments changed the way farmers were operating. Mechanization provided the opportunity to increase production with a smaller workforce, but Elzy resisted I. D.'s encouragement to invest in modern equipment, relying instead on the same labor-intensive practices. The shortage of farm workers required Elzy to spend more time laboring himself, and even while suffering with debilitating stomach ulcers, he tried to keep up the pace he had once handled with ease. Time and hard work took their toll, leaving him weakened and in constant, agonizing pain. Although no one acknowledged it, everyone knew that it was only a matter of time before he would die. For a while, he continued with business as usual, lending money, farming, selling timber, and even leasing oil rights to a drilling company.<sup>33</sup>

With her daughters all gone, Lizzie depended on hired hands to do her housework, but she did all of the cooking herself. I. D was always available to help her, patiently accepting her constant reliance upon him and her domineering nature. He devoted much of his life to pleasing his beloved "mammy," even at the cost of giving up any possibility of having a wife and family of his own. During his early thirties, when asked why he never married,

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<sup>33</sup>. Oil Lease Contract

I. D. explained that he would not expect any woman to live with his mother and that she would not live without him.

I. D. went about life as usual, but he worried about his father's health, and he wondered how he would handle the responsibility of managing the farm after his death. He realized that none of his siblings would offer to help him care for their mother and that the responsibility would almost certainly fall to him. The thought of running the place did not worry him as much as the fear of its division, a certainty confirmed by family conversations about how the farm would be broken up and sold, with the heirs dividing the proceeds among themselves. Although he wanted to, I. D. lacked the funds he would need to purchase the others' shares. Elzy did not consider the possibility that he would die and he did nothing to prepare his wife for a future without him. He had written no will, even though he was aware that dying without one could lead to a contentious estate settlement, and to the displacement of his most loyal child, I. D.

With the exceptions of weekly trips to town and attending church on Sundays, the increasing burden of farm work left little personal time for I. D. until around 1940, when during a church social, a mutual friend introduced him to a young schoolteacher and the two began a courtship that

lasted for several years. It was generally understood that the relationship was serious and that it would likely lead to marriage, but the prospect of losing her son did not appeal to Lizzie, who did everything possible to prevent a wedding. The two were determined to see each other and, despite Lizzie's protests, I. D. and the schoolteacher continued spending time together and making plans for the future.

The outbreak of World War II in late 1941 interrupted I. D.'s plans and brought changes that not even Elzy Walker could control. Men from eighteen to thirty-five were required to register for the draft<sup>34</sup> and his sons were not exempt. I. D. received his notice to report to the Selective Service Headquarters in Montgomery in late December, 1941,<sup>35</sup> just days before his thirty-second birthday. Reluctant to leave the farm, he had previously applied for and received the classification 1-H, meaning that his age prevented him from serving,<sup>36</sup> but Pearl Harbor and the country's entry into war changed the situation. Faced with the realization that his country was forcing him

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<sup>34</sup>. 76<sup>th</sup> United States Congress, *Selective Training and Service Act of 1940*, 54 S. 885, Ch. 720, September 16, 1940.

<sup>35</sup>. United States War Department, *Notice of Classification, Case Reopening*, Order 1270, December 30, 1941.

<sup>36</sup>. United States War Department deferment classification notice.

to abandon his parents, leaving no one behind to help them, he filed his first request for deferment. The Board of Appeals reopened his case in January 1942 and reconsidered his requests on a monthly basis, each time issuing the classification II-A, "men necessary in their civilian activity."<sup>37</sup>

I. D. was aware that if the War Department drafted him, he would likely never see his father alive again. He also feared what would happen when his mother was alone overseeing the operation of the farm, and in all likelihood, its demise. Finally, after exhausting every possibility for deferment, I. D. received his notice to report for active duty at Fort McClellan, located near Anniston, Alabama. I. D. faced an uncertain future, and like most others in his situation, he feared that it would not end well. In early December, I. D.'s father and mother watched as he boarded the train that would take him on the first leg of his journey. From there, he could only guess where he would be going or what his fate would be, but one thing he knew for certain, he did not want to go. I. D. felt an attachment to the land and an obligation to the farm. Moreover, he felt a responsibility to his parents that overrode any other considerations. However, the

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<sup>37</sup>. United States War Department deferment classification notice.

desperate situation of the United States in 1942 required the creation of a massive military force – one that would eventually total over 12,000,000.<sup>38</sup> Whatever compelling personal reasons I. D. may have had to remain on the family property, the demands of the federal government ultimately prevailed.

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<sup>38</sup>. The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, *By the Numbers: The U. S. Military* (<http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/ww2-by-the-numbers/us-military.html>) (accessed August 14, 2014)

## CHAPTER II

### THE RELUCTANT SOLDIER

By December, 1942, Allied leaders determined to win victory in Europe issued a call to arms that demanded sacrifices and for most, making them was the honorable choice. Unlike others, however, I. D. Walker felt the price he would pay for leaving his home far outweighed any benefit he might provide on a battlefield. The rapid buildup of troops necessary to confront the Axis Powers had finally claimed him and he had no choice – he had to yield to the demands of his country. He knew his unwillingness to go to war would be an embarrassment for his father, a burden greater than keeping the farm going without him.

During the first week of December, 1942, I. D. and his parents waited together to meet the train at the depot in Andalusia, a point of departure for inductees as they wound their way north to the Army Reception Center at Fort McLellan, Alabama. I. D. surely knew, just as his parents must have, that it might be the last time they would ever see each other. Years later, I. D. recalled that his mother

embraced him one last time and handed him an Indian Head nickel, a talisman that she had sewn into a small pouch attached to a long cotton string. She asked him to wear it around his waist for good luck.<sup>39</sup> Undoubtedly filled with apprehension, I. D. boarded the train to begin the long journey that would eventually place him deep inside Belgium's Ardennes Forest.

During the twenty-five years that had passed since the end of World War I, I. D.'s generation had given little consideration to the possibility that someday their country would call upon them to return to Europe to fight as the preceding generation had. They had only read about war in history books, or heard about it from veterans who had endured battle in the trenches during World War I. One such storyteller was Ivey Powell, a neighbor and friend of I. D.'s father, who still wore the breeches and puttees that the army issued to him when he served in France. He spoke of the horror of the trenches, the terror he underwent, and his fear of not returning home. In a small blue notepad tucked inside his coat pocket, I. D. recorded some of the things Mr. Powell told him, "Lewisite smells

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<sup>39</sup>. Conversation between I. D. Walker and the author of this thesis.



like geraniums, phosgene smells like fresh cut corn, mustard gas smells like garlic."<sup>40</sup>

The train normally took only a few hours to reach North Alabama, but because of the many stops along the way, the trip to Anniston probably dragged on much longer. Each depot was likely the same – everywhere, men with similar stories and expressions waiting anxiously for the train to arrive. Finally, when I. D. reached Fort McLellan, the Army inducted him into military service, swore him in, and assigned his serial number. A day later, Private I. D. Walker, serial number 34583784, boarded a train that took him to the Reception Center at Fort McPherson, Georgia for processing. During the three days he remained in Georgia, I. D. completed a process comprised of the initiation of records, physical profile, blood typing, immunizations, issuance of clothing and equipment, insurance application, training films, and lectures.<sup>41</sup>

Upon receiving his military assignment, I. D. boarded a train bound for Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi, the site where the Army activated the newly formed 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry

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<sup>40</sup>. I. D. Walker, as recorded in "Read Write" blue note pad, 1942.

<sup>41</sup>. *War Department Technical Manual, Reception Center Operations*, December 20, 1944, <https://ia801504.us.archive.org/7/items/TM12-223/TM12-223.pdf> (accessed September 29, 2014).

Division.<sup>42</sup> Camp Van Dorn's construction had begun that summer, but workers had not yet completed it when the first troops arrived. The facility was comprised of a series of one-story tarpaper shacks built on a 42,000-acre, red-clay parcel that the Department of the Army had purchased near Centreville, a town of 1,500.<sup>43</sup> There was one movie theater for 20,000 men, and the only two service clubs in the camp burned down shortly after the troops arrived.<sup>44</sup> Leaving the camp for a little rest and relaxation was a virtual impossibility, and even if one could have wangled a pass, there were no places to go and very little to do because the nearest town with a population of more than 2,000 was fifty miles away. There were no taxis or buses available and the army did not permit the men to hitch rides along the highway. There was one train in and one train out of the camp each day but, because of its frequent stops, it took six hours to travel a distance of 100 miles.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>.. Robert E. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War: The 99<sup>th</sup> Division in World War II* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 24.

<sup>43</sup>. William C. C. Cavanagh, Richard H. Bryers and Jeffrey E. Phillips. *Dauntless: A History of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division* (Dallas: Taylor Publishers, 1994), 15.

<sup>44</sup>. Orientation Branch, Information and Education Division, ETOUSA. "Battle Babies: The Story of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division." Lone Sentry, [http://www.lonesentry.com/gi\\_stories\\_booklets/99thinfantry/index.html](http://www.lonesentry.com/gi_stories_booklets/99thinfantry/index.html) (accessed August 12, 2014), 2.

<sup>45</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillips, *Dauntless*, 15.

The Army required new recruits to make many adjustments, among them were showering together and relieving themselves in open stalls or, when outside, in open trenches.<sup>46</sup> The absence of privacy and the resulting embarrassment inevitably compounded the misery of camp life. In a letter to his mother, I. D. wrote, "I try not to worry much,"<sup>47</sup> an expression intended to allay his mother's anxiety over his circumstances, but one that suggests he was doing exactly that.

Food was plentiful if not tasty, a consolation for those who had enjoyed far less during the Depression. Few complained about the eggs, meat, beans, and potatoes they filled up on each day, although the absence of fresh milk was duly noted. On Christmas day, the entire camp enjoyed dining on turkey and dressing, potatoes, gravy, corn, beans, tomatoes, lettuce, celery, grapes, nuts, apples, and oranges, followed up with cigars and cigarettes,<sup>48</sup> but for I.D. it could not have compared to sitting down to a home-cooked meal with family.

Basic training began on January 4, 1943, I. D.'s thirty-third birthday. Enlisted men quickly learned how to

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<sup>46</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 16.

<sup>47</sup>. I. D. Walker in a letter to Lizzie Walker, March 25, 1943.

<sup>48</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillips. *Dauntless*, 15.

be soldiers – they marched, hiked, did calisthenics, bivouacked, read maps, practiced rifle firing, listened to lectures,<sup>49</sup> and above all, obeyed their commanders. Every Monday, units made five-mile marches and, on Fridays, twenty-five-mile marches, while carrying full packs. The men scrubbed floors, policed grounds, worked in kitchens, and saluted officers.<sup>50</sup>

Heavy rains, extreme heat, and bitter cold made the training experience difficult to bear. During summer, chiggers and mosquitos plagued the training sites, and even worse, the fear of poisonous snakes was ever-present. Their schedule ran seven days a week from daylight until dark until April 3, when the division review marked the end of basic training.<sup>51</sup>

Much-anticipated furloughs began on April 5, and during the final week of May, I. D. at last made his first trip home since his December, 1942 departure. His long-awaited reunion with his family lasted two weeks – the word

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<sup>49</sup>. Major General Walter E. Lauer. *Battle Babies: The Story of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in World War II* (Indiana, PA: A. G. Halldin Publishing Company, 1967), 92.

<sup>50</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 11.

<sup>51</sup>. Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 94.

of which spread quickly after *The Covington News* printed a front-page announcement of his visit.<sup>52</sup>

In spite of the shortage of help on the farm, life there was much the same as when I.D. had left, except that his sister, Ruth, and her two daughters, both now full-grown, were again living at home. His younger brother, Elza Lee, was a military policeman at Camp Perry, Ohio, but he had applied for a discharge and everyone was hopeful that the Army would grant it. Elzy's health had declined to the point he was no longer able to hide his condition. Family members recalled the many nights that he laid on the floor, holding his abdomen while groaning pathetically from the agony caused by bleeding ulcers. He could no longer eat normally, surviving instead on a diet that consisted primarily of soft food and milk.<sup>53</sup>

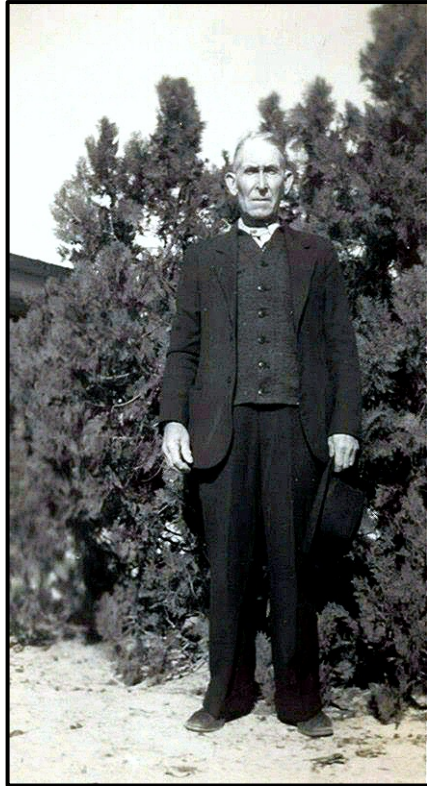
Although frail, with the help of Tom Gantt, Elzy managed to plant the usual row crops as well as a garden for Lizzie. I. D. spent most of his time at home working on the farm, trying to help as much as he could before he returned to Camp Van Dorn. Although he pleaded with his

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<sup>52</sup>. Article, *Covington News*, June 3, 1943.

<sup>53</sup>. Physician-prescribed diet

Illustration 4.



Elzy Walker  
Circa 1940

father to stop working and hire laborers, Elzy refused to listen. Just before returning to Camp Van Dorn, I. D. told family members that he knew this was the last time he would see his father alive.

On August 2, 1943, Brigadier General Walter E. Lauer, considered by many to be humorless, abrasive, and arrogant,<sup>54</sup> became Commander of the new 99<sup>th</sup> Division. Just days after his arrival, the men of Camp Van Dorn traveled by truck to the Desoto National Forest near Camp Shelby for "D" series Maneuvers.<sup>55</sup> The Division endured 100-degree temperatures and high humidity while wading through swamps, fighting insects, and poisonous snakes. On September 9, the division returned to camp to begin preparations for two months of training in the woods and swamps of Fort Polk, Louisiana. During the punishing experience, units engaged in mock warfare against each other,<sup>56</sup> made their way through dense forests, and once hiked sixty miles in thirty-six hours with full packs.<sup>57</sup>

Those who had worked as laborers found army training far easier than did the better educated who had lived

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<sup>54</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 25.

<sup>55</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillips, *Dauntless*, 32.

<sup>56</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 25.

<sup>57</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillips, *Dauntless*, 37.

less physically demanding lives. This was the case for I. D., although younger members of the Division underestimated his stamina and referred to him as "grandpa." I. D. recalled years later how once he aided a young soldier who had succumbed to the soaring summer temperatures and how, with pack in place, he carried him to safety - an act of kindness that earned him the respect of those who had questioned his strength and ability to stay the course.

During the Louisiana maneuvers, I. D. received the anticipated but sad news from home that his father had died. According to family members, Elzy worked all day digging holes for fence posts, and shortly after nightfall on November 4, 1943, hemorrhaged to death from a perforated ulcer. I. D. received an emergency leave and returned to the farm for the funeral. As was the custom of the day, Lizzie brought Elzy's body home where it remained until the funeral. The night before the burial, I. D. sat beside his father's casket, never leaving his side. Ruth and her children were no longer living at home, but Elza Lee had received his discharge in August and returned to the farm. Even though he would have liked to trade places with his



Illustration 5.



Elzy Walker  
Born, September 10, 1872  
Died, November 4, 1943

brother, I. D. must have felt some consolation in knowing his mother would not be alone.

I. D. rejoined his division during the final exercise of the Louisiana maneuvers just before crossing the Sabine River and boarding awaiting vehicles that transported the men more than 200 miles to Camp Maxey, Texas.<sup>58</sup> The camp that originated in 1942 on a seventy-thousand-acre parcel near Paris, Texas, was a sight to behold for the weary men of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division – men who had spent the last year living in substandard barracks, deep woods, and swamps. The first sight, rows of white two-story buildings with green tile roofs, seemed too good to be true for the men who had grown accustomed to the tarpaper shanties of Camp Van Dorn. Reality set in when the transport stopped at a fenced compound resembling a concentration camp with row after row of olive green wooden shacks, originally built to house Japanese prisoners. Referred to as “Jap Traps,”<sup>59</sup> the buildings were home to the 99<sup>th</sup> for the next ten months. While the facility was an improvement, trainees slept on short, canvas cots with straw-filled mattresses, and they

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<sup>58</sup>Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 26.

<sup>59</sup>. Ibid, 11.

relieved themselves in galvanized garbage cans that substituted for urinals, or in foul-smelling outhouses.<sup>60</sup> The camp itself featured paved streets and more than 1700 buildings, including service clubs, medical facilities, movie theaters, chapels, and a post exchange.<sup>61</sup>

I. D. returned to Andalusia in mid-July 1944, for what was to be his last visit prior to leaving for Europe. While at home, he had a Power of Attorney drawn up and made plans for what should happen in the event he did not return.

I. D. was in the best physical shape of his life, muscular and thirty pounds heavier than before he entered the Army. Mentally, however, he was not in good condition – he was more homesick than ever, a feeling made worse by the knowledge that the Army would likely soon send the 99th overseas. After returning to camp in August, I. D. wrote to his mother, "If I go across the water I don't want you to worry a bit about it for just think of how many more they [sic] are there. All anybody minds about it is they won't let the soldiers go ahead and get it over – turn them loose an [sic] it won't last long."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 11.

<sup>61</sup>. *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>62</sup>. I. D. Walker in a letter to Lizzie Walker, August 21, 1944.

The officers at Camp Maxey continued to train the men of the 99th by engaging them in bayonet practice, close-order drilling, running obstacle courses, field exercises, hiking, and simulated warfare in artificial German villages<sup>63</sup> until the first week of September when General Lauer alerted them that they would soon be leaving. As a precautionary measure, during the few days that followed prior to their departure from Camp Maxey, Headquarters confined the men to the base and prevented unauthorized personnel from entering. General Lauer ordered the men to remove the "Checkerboard" insignia from their uniforms to avoid identification and the Army started censoring all mail – an activity that continued until the end of the war.<sup>64</sup>

On September 10, 1944, the 14,253 men<sup>65</sup> of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division began boarding the trains that carried them to their port of debarkation. Without any knowledge of where the Army was sending them, many believed it would be west. As it turned out, the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, with which the 99th had previously trained, did deploy to the Pacific.

#### Illustration 6.

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<sup>63</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillips, *Dauntless*, 41.

<sup>64</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 45.

<sup>65</sup>. Neil, *Infantry Soldier*, 42.



I. D. Walker, Jack Cairns,  
and Ralph Hannah  
Camp Maxey, Texas, 1944

The men were certain that their training in the intense heat and humidity of Texas was to prepare them for jungle warfare, but most were relieved when the trains headed north, taking three alternate routes that delivered them to Camp Miles Standish near Boston.<sup>66</sup> The move required eight trains per regiment and continued day and night for a week.<sup>67</sup> When asked about the morale of his troops, General Lauer replied, "The urge to see strange places and real combat is getting stronger. Surely the war would not end before they [his men] could get into it."<sup>68</sup> It was the consensus of those listening that his musings reflected his own feelings and not necessarily those of his men – most certainly not those of I. D. Walker.

I. D. and fellow members of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion left Camp Maxey, Texas, on September 16, 1944 at 2:00 a.m., arriving at Camp Miles Standish on September 18, around 7 p.m. The following day, men drew new uniforms, gas protective clothing, and a

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<sup>66.</sup> Alex Kershaw, *The Longest Winter: The Battle of the Bulge and the Epic Story of WWII's Most Decorated Platoon* (Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>67.</sup> Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 46.

<sup>68.</sup> Neil, *Infantry Soldier*, 42.

new type of gas mask.<sup>69</sup> For two weeks after their arrival in Boston, the 99<sup>th</sup> continued to prepare by drilling, performing calisthenics, listening to lectures, undergoing inspections, and receiving vaccinations.<sup>70</sup> Following a day of instruction on topics that included chemical warfare, how to abandon ship, how to stay clean, and how to build latrines once they arrived in Europe, troops heard their final orientation lecture.<sup>71</sup>

At long last, on September 29, 1944, with full gear and rifles, the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, deemed combat-ready, boarded six troop ships. The men of Battery "C" embarked aboard the S. S. Argentina at 9:45 p. m.,<sup>72</sup> leaving Boston Harbor to join a convoy of forty ships about to set sail for Europe.<sup>73</sup> The convoy, a mix of liberty ships, passenger liners, ex-freighters, and army transports,<sup>74</sup> was home to the 99<sup>th</sup> for the next eleven days. Accommodations for

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<sup>69</sup>. Carl C. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*. Carlisle, PA: Repository: U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Box 8-T/5.

<sup>70</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillips, *Dauntless*, 47.

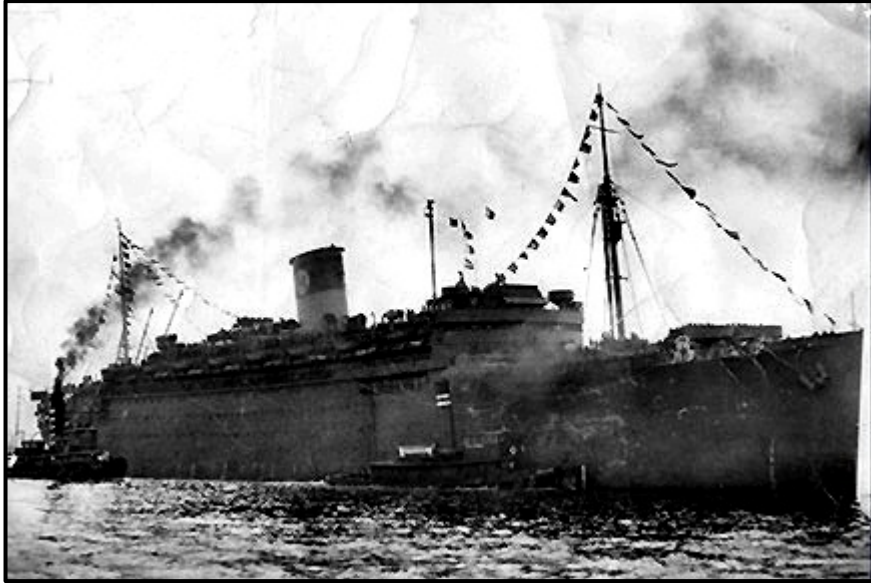
<sup>71</sup>. Kershaw, *The Longest Winter*, 24.

<sup>72</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

<sup>73</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 49.

<sup>74</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillips, *Dauntless*, 48.

Illustration 7.



S. S. Argentina  
Troop Ship  
1944



enlisted men included canvas bunks, five or six high, on racks placed twenty-four inches apart, well below the waterline. The men ate two ghastly meals each day, served from feeding lines that never ended. They spent as much time on deck as possible because the stench from vomit, urine, sweat, diesel fumes, spoiled milk, and tobacco smoke below deck was so vile that it alone induced sickness. Floors and stairwells were slippery because urinals, clogged with vomit, overflowed and poured onto the floors. Adding to the discomfort, only cold seawater showers were available to enlisted men.<sup>75</sup> The voyage was a harrowing experience with high waves, some of them twenty feet or more,<sup>76</sup> that frightened many soldiers and gave them a greater appreciation for the hazards of Navy service.

After eleven days at sea, the S. S. Argentina arrived in Southampton, England, on October 9, 1944. The men remained on board until two days later when they debarked and transferred to Camp D-5 near Broadmayne, Dorchester.<sup>77</sup> There, the men of the 99<sup>th</sup> were told their final destination would be a "quiet, static sector where nothing would

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<sup>75</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War War*, 50-51.

<sup>76</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillip, *Dauntless*, 49.

<sup>77</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

happen, if at all, until spring.”<sup>78</sup> While waiting for final orders, I. D. wrote home to his mother, “It made me pretty sick on the ship but never lasted long ... not doing much – I would sure like to be where I could help you. Everything here is so different. I think the English people will treat you nice but they have certainly been through something. I am not in much danger here just don’t take it to [sic] hard about me being across – you have to think of everyone in the Army.”<sup>79</sup>

The 370<sup>th</sup>’s arrival in Le Havre, France on November 4 was the battery’s first encounter with the aftermath of intense fighting. Allied bombing had left the town’s buildings in ruin, the harbor littered with half-sunken ships, and the docks flattened. The men climbed down rope ladders and made their way to shore in landing craft.

Orders arrived instructing the 99<sup>th</sup> to advance toward Belgium as quickly as possible, leaving them little time in Le Havre. Officers assembled the men and equipment in an open-field camp near Forges, France before ordering anyone who could drive a truck or jeep to leave immediately. The caravan of untried 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division “Checkerboard”

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<sup>78</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 58.

<sup>79</sup>. Letter from I. D. Walker to Lizzie Walker, October 12, 1944.

troops traveled 285 miles across northwest France to southern Belgium before arriving at Aubel.<sup>80</sup>

Three days after their departure from Le Havre, Commanders issued instructions requiring the men to deploy opposite the Siegfried Line; a network of concrete teeth and bunkers the Germans had built to defend their border with Belgium.<sup>81</sup> On November 10, the 99<sup>th</sup> arrived at Krinkelt, Belgium, and by November 12, all elements of the division were in a forward sector.<sup>82</sup> The Army evacuated the civilian population, with the exception of a few men left behind to care for cattle.<sup>83</sup>

The first snow fell in Krinkelt on November 13, and a day later, headquarters assigned the 99<sup>th</sup> Division to the First United States Army, 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, attached to V Corps. The following day, on November 15, over a foot of snow fell and I. D.'s battery experienced its first casualty when enemy fire injured a fellow member.<sup>84</sup>

Overshoes, needed to protect the men from suffering trench

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<sup>80</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 56.

<sup>81</sup>. Ibid, 58.

<sup>82</sup>. Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 109-110.

<sup>83</sup>. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Box 459. *After Action Report*, December 31, 1944.

<sup>84</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

foot, finally arrived on November 17, too late for many already hospitalized due to exposure. Unfortunately, the overshoes were all size nine,<sup>85</sup> but luckily, they were the size that I. D. needed.

On November 16, the German 277<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division penetrated the area occupied by the American 347<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, causing it to withdraw. Germans, taken prisoner by American troops, reported that morale was low and that many would surrender except for the danger involved. The forces were made up of enlisted men from German satellites – most of questionable loyalty.<sup>86</sup>

Enemy emplacements were scattered all along the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division front line. The structures, called pillboxes because of their shape, were made of steel reinforced concrete, and contained at least one machine gun. Outposts were located in front of the pillboxes, along with concrete dragon teeth, mine fields, booby traps, tank traps, tank ditches, and roadblocks.<sup>87</sup> Although the 99<sup>th</sup> fought no battles in November, from the tenth to the

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<sup>85</sup>. Sam Loeb, "Saved by Shrapnel," *America in World War II Magazine*, June, 2010, <http://222.americainwii.com/articles/saved-by-shrapnel/> (accessed August 10, 2014).

<sup>86</sup>. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Box 459. *After Action Report*, December 31, 1944.

<sup>87</sup>. *Ibid.*

twelfth, the enemy killed thirty-five members of the division with occasional artillery shelling and sniper fire. Wounds, pneumonia, frostbite, and trench foot also took 900 men off the line.<sup>88</sup>

On December 6, I. D. wrote in a letter to his mother, "It getting near Christmas, I would sure love to send you something but all I can do is hope to be where I can be with you the next one after this one. It [sic] pretty cold here but I am making it all right. If you can't get no labor to work your place sell all that stock for I think cattle will go to nothing after this war but it [sic] long ways from being over. I think we are lucky here at this place. Wishing all a Merry Christmas."<sup>89</sup> The letter revealed I. D.'s concern about his mother's ability to manage the farm, and while he had no way of knowing what the future held, he must have considered the possibility that over-production, a consequence of supplying the demands of the war effort, would ensure a drop in the price of cattle once it ended. The tone of his letter indicated that he was concerned more with what was happening back home than with his own situation.

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<sup>88</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 78.

<sup>89</sup>. Letter from I. D. Walker to Lizzie Walker dated December 6, 1944.

When early efforts to gain control of the Roer River Dams during the Battle of Hürtgen Forest failed, General Courtney Hodges issued the order for three regiments of the 99<sup>th</sup> to assist the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in an effort to capture them. On December 13, troops encountered heavy German mortar and artillery fire in what became a virtual bloodbath. There were no foxholes for protection, leaving men in the open without camouflage, and under intense fire. Three days into the offensive, the men began to hear the sound of heavy artillery in the distance, but unaware of the impending German counteroffensive in the Ardennes, General Hodges continued the Hürtgen Offensive, leaving even fewer men to face Hitler's Army during the initial attack that launched the Battle of the Bulge.<sup>90</sup>

Unknown to the Allies, on November 10, Adolf Hitler had signed the final orders for a German counteroffensive on the Western Front.<sup>91</sup> In July, 1944, he had revealed the plan he believed would decide the fate of the war when he told an assemblage of his most trusted senior officers, "I have made a momentous decision, I am taking the offensive –

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<sup>90</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 78-80.

<sup>91</sup>. Stanley Weintraub. *Eleven Days in December: Christmas at the Bulge, 1944* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 15.

out of the Ardennes, across the Meuse and to Antwerp."<sup>92</sup> Hitler targeted Antwerp because supplies for fifty Allied divisions, almost half the Allied army in the West, went through it.<sup>93</sup> He knew the Allied leaders were confident that the war would be over by Christmas, and he suspected that they had overextended their supply lines in the Ardennes.<sup>94</sup> By fall, Hitler found a weak spot where American divisions thinly held seventy miles facing the Siegfried Line.<sup>95</sup> Hitler's staff had devised an attack plan by October 11, its success hinging on total surprise and bad weather. Plans required that the German Army cross the Meuse River within forty-eight hours and reach Antwerp within one week to achieve victory before the Allies could rally or counterattack.<sup>96</sup> The attack date required that planners carefully choose a time when bad weather and fog would neutralize Allied air superiority.<sup>97</sup> On October 22, 1944, Adolph Hitler sent the plans for the operation, known as

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<sup>92</sup>. Stanley Weintraub. *Eleven Days in December*, 15.

<sup>93</sup>. Walt Malinowski, *More Decisive than Bastogne, Hitler's "Bulge" Dream of Dunkirk II Exploded* (Indiana, Pa.: A. G. Haldin, 1994), 5.

<sup>94</sup>. Kershaw, *The Longest Winter*, 30-31.

<sup>95</sup>. Malinowski, *More Decisive than Bastogne*, 5.

<sup>96</sup>. Kershaw, *The Longest Winter*, 31.

<sup>97</sup>. Neill, *Infantry Soldier*, 43.

"Watch on the Rhine," to Field Marshals Walter Model and F. M. Gerd von Runstedt. Both men questioned the Führer's plan as too ambitious, but knew that it was useless to argue with him. Reluctantly, they agreed to carry out his plan.<sup>98</sup> During the six weeks required to prepare for the offensive, the German Army assembled twenty-five new divisions with 200,000 troops that included tens of thousands of Hitler Youth, some only fifteen years old, along with middle-aged industrial workers and Navy and Luftwaffe personnel. Included among them, Otto Skorzeny had the task of assembling an elite team of men who would wreak havoc and create fear while impersonating Americans behind enemy lines.<sup>99</sup>

Secrecy and concealment were the most difficult aspects of the offensive that began after nightfall on December 7, when trains loaded with German troops, equipment, and supplies made their way along tracks that ran one way. By early morning the trains were unloaded and headed back to the Rhine where the operation was repeated,

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<sup>98</sup>. Eric Ethier, "New Hope for Hitler," in "Battle of the Bulge: Winter War," special issue, *Bulge Magazine*, Fall, 2014, 24.

<sup>99</sup>. Kershaw, *The Longest Winter*, 31.



again and again.<sup>100</sup> The move required 1,502 troop trains and 500 supply trains operating under complete radio silence.<sup>101</sup> By December 11, the Fifth and Sixth Panzer Armies sat ready, unnoticed in a thick forest across the lines of the American First Army. Twenty panzer tank divisions, two parachute divisions, twelve artillery corps, fourteen Army artillery battalions, seven rocket brigades, and thirteen anti-tank battalions were in place, ready to attack.<sup>102</sup> The assemblage included hundreds of Panzer and Tiger tanks and thousands of self-propelled artillery pieces,<sup>103</sup> both of which played critical roles in German success in the blitzkrieg operations early in the war. According to John S. D. Eisenhower, after Normandy [June 1944], the counter-offensive in the Ardennes was the only time Hitler was able to take the overall initiative on the Western Front.<sup>104</sup>

Hitler anticipated correctly that the Americans held the Ardennes lightly. Convinced Germany could not launch a major attack there, Allied commanders had stretched out

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<sup>100</sup>. John Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge* (New York: Random House, 1959), 15.

<sup>101</sup>. Neil, *Infantry Soldier*, 187.

<sup>102</sup>. Robert E. Merriam. *The Battle of the Bulge* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1947), 10.

<sup>103</sup>. Kershaw, *The Longest Winter*, 33.

<sup>104</sup>. John S. D. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods: The Battle of the Bulge* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 457.

four and one half divisions along the seventy-mile line – five times less than the usual number specified by regulations. The untried 99<sup>th</sup> and 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, the veteran, but the tired 28<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, and a small number of men from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armored Divisions occupied the line from north to south,<sup>105</sup> with the 99<sup>th</sup> alone covering a front that extended twenty-two miles.<sup>106</sup>

At 5:30 a. m. on December 16, 1944, the men of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division awakened to a barrage of mortar, artillery and rocket fire that exploded along the entire length of its front lines.<sup>107</sup> The surprise attack was determined and aggressive, resulting in total chaos and confusion. Conditions worsened when incoming fire destroyed communications lines, thereby preventing Headquarters from making contact with officers and leaving divisions blindsided without instructions or preparation for their defense. Despite the warm reception the Americans received from locals, it was believed that much of the enemy's

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<sup>105</sup>. Malinowski, *More Decisive than Bastogne*, 5-6.

<sup>106</sup>. William L. Mancaster, "Battle of the Bulge The North Shoulder" *Officer Review Magazine* 49, no. 10 (June 2010): 6-8. *Academic Search Premier*, Ebscohost (accessed October 12, 2014), 6.

<sup>107</sup>. William C. C. Cavanagh. *The Battle East of Elsenborn* (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword), 29.

knowledge of their locations and installations was obtained from civilian sources.<sup>108</sup> The attack, the heaviest ever delivered in World War II on the Western Front, was made in four drives led by panzers and followed by infantry.<sup>109</sup> Simultaneously, the Luftwaffe dropped parachutists wearing American uniforms into rear areas of the Allied lines.<sup>110</sup>

The enemy had considerably more troops than the American Army - troops that were well trained and well equipped; a surprise because intelligence reports indicated that only second rate troops opposed them.<sup>111</sup> Following the initial barrage, troops of the 277<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier Division advanced and overran the 99<sup>th</sup> Division's 393<sup>rd</sup> Regiment's 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Battalions. Scattered and in small groups, isolated, and receiving no orders to withdraw, the men inflicted heavy German losses before being killed themselves, wounded, or captured. Rapidly moving tanks crushed many Americans in their foxholes, while others crawled close to them, discharging bazookas. Others dragged daisy-chains in front of the German tanks and threw mortar shells against

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<sup>108</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Box 459. *After Action Report*, December 31, 1944.

<sup>109</sup>. Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 11-12.

<sup>110</sup>. *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>111</sup>. Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Box 459. *After Action Report*, December 31, 1944.

their sides.<sup>112</sup> Those who survived withdrew a short distance and, with artillery support from Cannon Company and I. D.'s 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, stopped the German advance.<sup>113</sup> All of the field artillery battalions of the 99<sup>th</sup> positioned northeast of Rocherath-Krinkelt came under intense enemy fire, while at the same time, German tanks and infantry were attacking the 394<sup>th</sup>.<sup>114</sup> The attack into the Siegfried Line had placed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and the 99<sup>th</sup> Division's artillery, Combat Team 305, and entire 324<sup>th</sup> Engineering Battalion inside a pocket with only one road out - a road they had to keep open if they were to have any chance for survival.<sup>115</sup> While recounting the events of December 16, New York Times writer Hanson W. Baldwin wrote, "The First Army, known as the "workhorse" and veteran of all the American armies, fought the fight of its life."<sup>116</sup>

By nightfall on December 16, the enemy had penetrated between V and VIII Corps, leaving the VIII Corps front in shambles. Without the benefit of intelligence, General

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<sup>112</sup> Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 17.

<sup>113</sup> Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 88-89.

<sup>114</sup> Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 18.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>116</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin. "Our Greatest Battle: The Full Drama," *New York Times*, December 15, 1946, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, n.p.

Lauer ordered six battalions of the 99<sup>th</sup>, already fighting alongside two 2<sup>nd</sup> Division regiments, to "Hold at all Costs."<sup>117</sup> Although outnumbered ten to one, the men followed through with the order, defending the flanks and the rear while suffering heavy casualties.<sup>118</sup> The chaos and potential for catastrophe were worsened by the fact that the front lines extended too far into the forest, making it impossible to resupply the men.<sup>119</sup> Commanding Major General Leonard T. Gerow made the decision to withdraw six miles to Elsenborn Ridge by falling back through Rocherath-Krinkelt.<sup>120</sup> General Hodges, 1<sup>st</sup> Army Commander, released the 1<sup>st</sup> U. S. Infantry Division to General Gerow, who, in turn, ordered one unit to report to General Lauer, assigning them the mission of blocking the main road leading west from Bullingen.<sup>121</sup>

Early on December 17, General Gerow attached the entire 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to the 2<sup>nd</sup>. He designated Major General Walter M. Robertson as Commander of the combined

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<sup>117</sup>. Malinowski, *More Decisive than Bastogne*, 13.

<sup>118</sup>. Baldwin. "Our Greatest Battle," n.p.

<sup>119</sup>. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*, 221.

<sup>120</sup>. Malinowski, *More Decisive than Bastogne*, 17-18.

<sup>121</sup>. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*, 221.

force and made General Lauer his deputy.<sup>122</sup> General Robertson, temporarily in command of the 99<sup>th</sup> and his own 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, undertook the risky and complicated maneuver of withdrawing the untried troops, withering under heavy enemy fire, to Elsenborn Ridge.<sup>123</sup> Robertson, an experienced and respected commander executed what many consider the most complex maneuver of World War II.<sup>124</sup> Within twenty miles, Robertson controlled eighteen infantry battalions, his own division under heavy attack and the main road to his rear cut off by Kampfgruppen Joachim Peiper's troops.<sup>125</sup> The 393<sup>rd</sup>, 394<sup>th</sup>, and 395<sup>th</sup> regiments of the 99<sup>th</sup> Division

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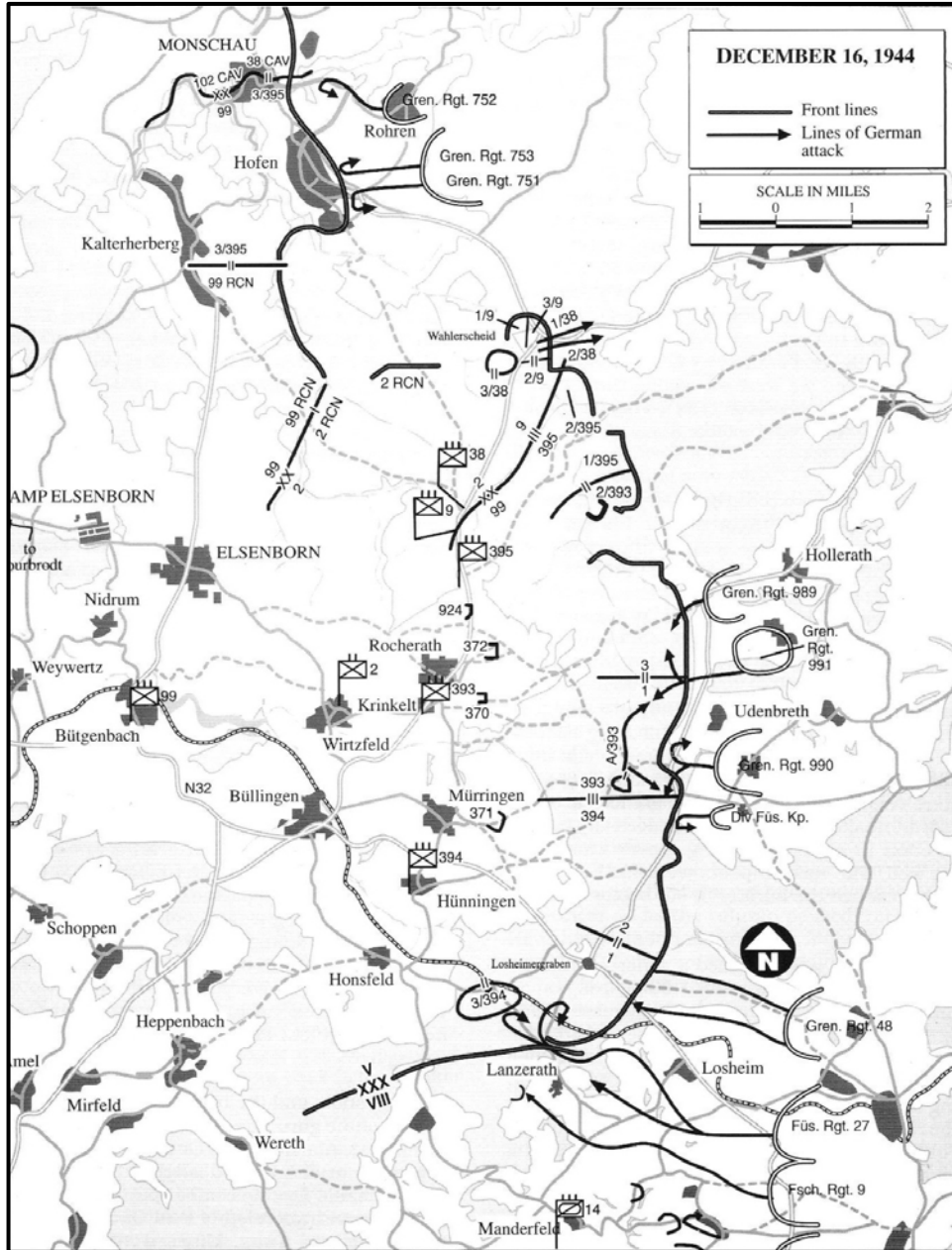
<sup>122</sup>. Harold R. Winton. *Corps Commanders of the Bulge: Six American Generals and Victory in the Ardennes* (Wichita: University Press of Kansas, 2007): p. 129.

<sup>123</sup>. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*, 222.

<sup>124</sup>. Ibid, 223.

<sup>125</sup>. Ibid.

Illustration 8.



Map Locating Position of the 370<sup>th</sup> Field  
 Artillery Battalion  
 Rokerath-Krinkel, December 16, 1944  
 "Dauntless"





protected the withdrawal of Robertson's two attacking regiments while the 9<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Infantries protected and held Rocherath-Krinkelt. The men of the 99<sup>th</sup> held on, protecting the withdrawal of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> regiments, and afterward, passed through the rear themselves.<sup>126</sup> While fending off enemy shelling and sniper fire, I. D.'s battery continued firing its 105 mm Howitzers in response to continual enemy shelling until 5 p. m., when they received the order to move out. The battery passed through Krinkelt where it came under heavy fire, and later, tank crossfire on the Krinkelt-Butenbach road.<sup>127</sup> After a seven-hour trip that should have taken only one, the battery arrived at Elsenborn just after midnight, dug in, and fired a hundred rounds.<sup>128</sup>

The following morning, with no rest and little to eat, the divisions frantically fortified their positions. Just as the men finished preparing an observation post, the Germans launched a massive attack. Two dozen artillery batteries, including the 1<sup>st</sup> Artillery Division and several corps units, repulsed attacks by the enemy and held the

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<sup>126.</sup> *The Bitter Woods*, 223.

<sup>127.</sup> Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 41.

<sup>128.</sup> Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

line until the effectiveness of German artillery was reduced fifty to sixty percent.<sup>129</sup> American divisions held against repeated attacks of the 277<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier, the 12<sup>th</sup> Volksgrenadier, the 12th SS Panzer Division, and the 6<sup>th</sup> SS Army. Success achieved by the American troops against the German offensive is illustrated by the fact that only one German battle group managed to break through, rendering a critical blow to Hitler's plan to reach Antwerp by the shortest route.<sup>130</sup> Complicating matters, German paratroopers posing as American soldiers infiltrated the area, enemy artillery knocked out wire communication, German intercept jammed radios, and snow reduced visibility to near zero.<sup>131</sup> Writer Alex Kershaw describes the encounters at Elsenborn Ridge as "the fiercest artillery engagement between Germans and Americans in World War II."<sup>132</sup>

On the 17<sup>th</sup>, the 370<sup>th</sup> lost its first member, Francis Brennan.<sup>133</sup> Brennan, whose body was never recovered following

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<sup>129</sup>. Winton, *Corps Commanders*, 213.

<sup>130</sup>. Stephen M. Rusiecki. *The Key to the Bulge: The Battle for Losheimergraben* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1996), 14.

<sup>131</sup>. Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 47.

<sup>132</sup>. Kershaw, *The Longest Winter*, 138.

<sup>133</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

<sup>134</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillips, *Dauntless*, 393.

a direct hit from an enemy artillery shell, is listed on the Wall of the Missing in Neuville.<sup>134</sup> Although I. D. rarely spoke of his wartime experiences, he did recount the tragic loss of a friend, blown to pieces by enemy artillery fire while standing only a few feet away from him. I. D.'s brother, Elza Lee, said that he described the spray of blood, guts, and feces that covered him when the enemy artillery shell hit him, an experience made even more unnerving because he could not bathe or change his clothing.<sup>135</sup>

The greatest fear felt by infantrymen during World War II was having shellfire hit them because helmets and armor could not protect against its power. Many soldiers, missing in action, had been blown to bits during shelling, some leaving behind a few discernable body parts, while others, virtually vaporized, left no trace for recovery. Trees hit by shells splintered into thousands of knifelike pieces that inflicted wounds as horrible and deadly as any military shrapnel.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>. Conversation between Elza Lee Walker and his son, James Walker.

<sup>136</sup>. Aphra Behn, "PTSD and the Myth of WWII: Playing Politics with History," *The DailyKos*, March 12, 2007.

General Gerow chose Elsenborn Ridge as the fallback position because the elevation was ideal for artillery divisions that would be the first line of defense for infantry, tanks, tank destroyers, and engineers.<sup>137</sup> Prior to the events of December 16, the 99<sup>th</sup> had prepared for the inevitability of battle when, shortly after their arrival at Aubel in November, General Lauer issued orders for the men of the 99<sup>th</sup> to dig individual foxholes all along their front and rear lines. He instructed them to dig deep holes, line and floor them with bundles of wood, and top them with seven-inch diameter trees and sandbags. He was specific about their placement – not too close to trees, crossroads, or isolated buildings. He told them to build command posts, first aid stations, machine gun nests, and mortar dugouts – preparations that prevented countless American casualties.

Snow continued to fall as temperatures during the day hovered around twenty degrees Fahrenheit, and at night, around ten degrees, the worst weather conditions in decades. Winter wear – an olive-colored uniform, wool underclothing, wool knit cap, wool sweater vest, field jacket, wool gloves, two pairs of socks, an overcoat, and sometimes, a poncho, was grossly inadequate for the extreme

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<sup>137</sup>. Winton, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, p.129.

Illustration 9.



Unknown Member, Battery C, 370<sup>th</sup> Field  
Artillery Battalion  
Elsenborn Ridge  
December, 1944

cold.<sup>138</sup> The wool overcoats absorbed water and froze, making them heavy and difficult to wear.<sup>139</sup> Estimates revealed that seventy percent of non-battle casualties were the result of trench foot or frostbite, a number made higher because when they removed their shoes, men had no idea that they would never be able to get them back on.<sup>140</sup> The key to avoiding trench foot was wearing dry socks – impossible while living in freezing, wet foxholes. Some had sleeping bags and blankets, but many tried to keep warm by setting fire to gasoline poured into rock-filled cans. Infantryman Seymour Reitman wrote, "When we came out of the hole to move out, all you could see was our eyes and teeth because of the soot."<sup>141</sup> When asked about the weather at the "Bulge," I. D. replied that it was not that bad, just a little snow and wind. He explained that noise was worse for him, and that he worried that he would be deaf before the war ended.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>. Loeb, "Saved by Shrapnel," *America in World War II Magazine*, June, 2010.

<sup>139</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 110.

<sup>140</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>. Michael Collins and Martin King. *Voices of the Bulge: Untold Stories from Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge* (Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2011), p. 207.

<sup>142</sup>. Conversation between I. D. Walker and the author of this thesis.

The men on the front lines rarely received enough food to eat, let alone hot meals. During the main thrust of the attack at Elsenborn, those on the front were down to eating "D" bars, described by John Toland as "a sickening concoction of concentrated chocolate sometimes called 'Hitler's Secret Weapon.'"<sup>143</sup> Water was hard to get – many of the troops resorted to melting snow from tree branches to make coffee and for cleaning mess gear. The shortage meant that washing faces, shaving, and brushing teeth were impossible. When the offensive ended, many had not bathed or brushed their teeth for two months.<sup>144</sup>

The fog lifted on December 23, clearing the way for Allied bombers to attack enemy targets. The sky, filled with hundreds of planes, was probably the greatest Christmas gift the men had ever received. More good news for the 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion came in the form of reinforcements from the 372<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, when they received thirteen bags of mail and packages, and when the mess attendants delivered turkey dinners – frozen, but morale-building. Men were eager for news from home, but even more, they wanted food, especially sweets. The men shared treats

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<sup>143</sup>. Toland, *Battle: The Story of the Bulge*, 5.

<sup>144</sup>. Humphrey, *Once Upon a Time in War*, 117.

Illustration 10.

1 Jan 9. 1945

Dear mother & am just  
fine hope you the same  
everything about the  
same way one more  
now & been back to nice  
town here in Belgium  
& wish you could hear  
them try to talk to you  
they all speak french  
the children looks very  
well as can speak  
little english being  
around so many  
soldiers they pick  
up our english  
just to look at this  
country & have got  
something to be  
proud of but that

2

being an American  
& guess so. but will  
move to mobile if he  
lets his home go  
I dont know what  
to think about ever  
body selling their  
home if I was out of  
here try to keep our  
home & want you to  
sell as do as you please  
with ever thing for  
there no telling when  
this war will stop  
if it ever breaks & think  
& can get out pretty quick  
ever one nearly has  
lost their head that out  
of the Army till you

3

cant do nothing with  
them & guess muller  
has moved  
& sure hope you can  
get some labor as not  
have to do away with  
your stock  
& have got to write  
moms tell her & havent  
forgot her & just cant  
think of nothing to  
write your mail gets  
here pretty good much  
better than mine yes  
will write you often  
love to all I.D. Walker



Letter Written by I. D. Walker to His  
Mother, Lizzie Walker  
Elsenborn, Belgium, January 9, 1945



sent from home and shook their heads over items like soap, razors, and cameras with no film, well-intentioned but useless gifts from family members who had no way of knowing the conditions at Elsenborn. Squadron leaders even opened and consumed the contents of parcels intended for those reported dead and missing.<sup>145</sup> Even on Christmas Day, I. D.'s battery disabled two enemy tanks and fired 289 rounds,<sup>146</sup> a quiet time when compared to others more recent, but likely, disappointing, because even during the most scared of holidays, the Germans did not ease up their attacks.

Soon after the holiday, the weather in the Ardennes turned bitterly cold and overcast. I. D.'s battery received heavy enemy shelling at the end of December, but for the most part, the German offensive was over. Even after the shelling tapered off during the days that followed, the men could not relax for fear that the enemy was lurking nearby. Fear and bad weather restricted the men to their foxholes for long periods, resulting in low morale and fatigue.<sup>147</sup>

In a letter dated January 9, 1945, I. D. wrote to his mother, "Everything about the same way only more snow and

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<sup>145</sup>. Cavanagh, *Dauntless*, 186.

<sup>146</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

<sup>147</sup>. *Ibid.*

been back to nice town in Belgium [a lie to his mother – he had not left the line since he arrived]. Just to look at this country I have got something to be proud of and that – being an American.”<sup>148</sup> Despite the fact that I. D. tried desperately to avoid military service, he was obviously proud of his contributions, fighting to preserve the things that he held dearest – his home and his country. Perhaps by that point, he had realized that his sacrifice was for the greater good.

The Bulge closed on January 27, 1945 after fifty-three days of battle. Extreme weather conditions, untried infantrymen and officers, ammunition shortages and poor communications did not prevent the 99<sup>th</sup> from carrying through with the Command order to “Hold at All Costs.”<sup>149</sup>

For three days, beginning December 16, 1944, the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division bore the full force of the entire German attack along a twenty-two mile front, with some of its units losing eighty percent of their combat strength.<sup>150</sup> Despite five German divisions hitting them in eight days,

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<sup>148</sup>. Letter from I. D. Walker to Lizzie Walker dated January 9, 1945.

<sup>149</sup>. Ralph E. Hersko, Jr. “Battle of the Bulge: U. S. Troops at Elsenborn Ridge,” historynet.com (June 12, 2006), <http://www.historynet.com/battle/of-the-bulge-us-troops-fight-at-elsenborn-ridge.htm> (accessed August 2, 2014).

<sup>150</sup>. Ibid.

the 99<sup>th</sup> never allowed the enemy to gain control of the roads that led to Antwerp.<sup>151</sup>

Historian Hugh Cole records in his comprehensive account of the activities in the Ardennes that the 99<sup>th</sup> suffered in four days: fourteen officers and 119 men killed in action, fifty-three officers and 1,341 men missing in action, fifty-one officers and 864 men wounded in action, and approximately 600 non-combat casualties.<sup>152</sup>

The Battle of the Bulge was the largest battle ever fought by the U. S. Army.<sup>153</sup> Six hundred thousand Americans were involved in the fighting in twenty-nine divisions, six mechanized cavalry groups, and troops whose numbers were equivalent to those of three separate regiments. There were 81,000 American casualties, including 15,000 captured and 19,000 killed. The Germans amassed an army of 500,000 men in twenty divisions and three brigades, suffering over 100,000 killed, wounded, or captured. Both sides incurred heavy equipment losses but, unlike the Americans who could replace their losses in only weeks, Germany was not capable

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<sup>151.</sup> William L. Mancaster, "Battle of the Bulge the North Shoulder," 3.

<sup>152.</sup> Hugh Cole, *The United States in World War II, The European Theater of Operations, The Ardennes: The Battle of the Bulge* (Columbia: Konecky and Konecky, n.d.), 123.

<sup>153.</sup> John S. D. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*, 5.

of producing replacement materials.<sup>154</sup> John S. D. Eisenhower writes, "The battle constituted the climax of the Allied invasion of Western Europe – it practically finished the German Wehrmacht as an organized fighting force."<sup>155</sup>

American Divisions participated in five major defenses during the German Counteroffensive in the Ardennes. From north to south, first, the northern shoulder along the Elsenborn Ridge, second, St. Vith, third, Bastogne, fourth, the southern shoulder of the Echternach, and fifth, Marche. While most consider Bastogne the most important and decisive, the sentiment arises in part because of media attention and the popularity of Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe who coined the term "Nuts" in response to the German commander who suggested that he surrender the town of Bastogne. According to John S. D. Eisenhower, "The north and southern shoulders were given less notice because they were defensive actions where the lines buckled, where

#### Illustration 11.

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<sup>154</sup> Charles B. A. McDonald, *Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 618.

<sup>155</sup> Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*, 36.



cooks, bakers, and clerks were thrown into battle, where men fought for dear life, but where lines generally held."<sup>156</sup> It is Eisenhower's conclusion, as well as many other historians, that holding the Elsenborn Ridge and the southern shoulder near Echternach were equally as vital as St. Vith, Bastogne, and Marche.<sup>157</sup>

February began with orders for the 99<sup>th</sup> to retrieve equipment and supplies that divisions had left behind during the initial attack. For the first time, the men of Battery "C" saw the carnage left by both armies – their own and the enemy's dead, towns destroyed, cattle killed in barns and fields, abandoned equipment, displaced civilians, and the aftermath of atrocities committed by the Germans. Carl Storey, battery clerk for the 370<sup>th</sup>, described a horrendous scene in which a group of people, including an Army medic, were shot by German troops while standing in a row with their hands above their heads.<sup>158</sup>

For ten days, the battery moved from town to town, sleeping in dugouts, withstanding continual rain and cold. Finally, on February 12, the men arrived at Wirtzfeld and

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<sup>156</sup>. Eisenhower, *The Bitter Woods*, 462-463.

<sup>157</sup>. Ibid, 463.

<sup>158</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

set up in houses. The 69th Division relieved the men of the 99<sup>th</sup> and, after continuous action for ninety-four days, the men were off the line at last. The battery spent a week in Wirtzfeld, where the men cleaned up, drilled, and underwent a number of inspections. Afterward, they traveled to Plombiers for a week of rest and, while occupying houses, had a chance to wash clothing, write letters, read, and drink beer.<sup>159</sup>

On February 25, Headquarters released the 99<sup>th</sup> from V Corps and transferred the division to VII Corps. A few days later, on March 1, 1945, General Lauer issued Field Order No. 8, sending the 99<sup>th</sup> to the front of the advance with the objective of taking a section of the Cologne Plain that connected the Erft Canal with the Rhine River.<sup>160</sup> I. D.'s battery crossed the Belgian-German border, crossed the Roer River, dug in at the town of Oberdorf, and three days later, crossed the Erft Canal. Within six days, Field Order No. 8 was completed, a pace so rapid that the 370<sup>th</sup> did not have time to set up its guns.<sup>161</sup>

General Lauer's next objective was crossing the Rhine River to set up a bridgehead to hold back retreating German

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<sup>159</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

<sup>160</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>. Ibid.

troops whose plans were to destroy the Ludendorff Bridge. On March 9, I. D.'s battery departed for Remagen after receiving the order that they were to cross the Rhine as rapidly as possible.

A year prior to the beginning of World War II, German troops rigged the bridge for detonation, but because its destruction would cut off German units and force them to surrender, commanders delayed the action until fighting was eight kilometers away.<sup>162</sup> Just as American troops neared the bridge, the enemy detonated the charge, severely damaging, but not destroying the bridge.<sup>163</sup> Hitler issued an order to bombard the bridge with V-2 ballistic missiles - eleven of which were unsuccessful. Efforts made by the Luftwaffe also failed, as did attempts by Gamm frogmen deployed by Otto Skorzeny to blow up the bridge.<sup>164</sup>

German artillery continually pounded the area during what both veteran and replacement troops considered some of the most serious shelling they had experienced.<sup>165</sup> Artillery

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<sup>162.</sup> Charles B. McDonald, U. S. Army in World War II, "The Last Offensive: A Rhine Bridge at Remagen," <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USA/USA-E-Last/USA-E-Last-11.html> (accessed 9/21/2010).

<sup>163.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164.</sup> Brian John Murphy, America in World War II, "VE!," <http://www.americainwii.com/articles/ve/> (accessed September 21, 2015).

<sup>165.</sup> Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 163.



fire that exploded at the rate of one shell every few seconds, resulted in a tremendous death toll, but it did not stop the American advance. While medics continually cared for the wounded, soldiers stacked the bodies of the dead into piles for burial later.<sup>166</sup>

On the morning of March 12, I. D.'s battery crossed the Rhine on a recently erected pontoon bridge.<sup>167</sup> Just a day before the arrival of I. D.'s battery on March 11, the men of the 394<sup>th</sup> faced heavy fire from German anti-aircraft guns, tanks, tank destroyers, and artillery units assembled on the ridge above the bridge.<sup>168</sup> General Lauer issued orders for the men to cross the Rhine to establish the bridgehead and, despite the constant barrage of enemy fire and fear of falling through gaping holes left by artillery shells, infantrymen made the long, dark, and dangerous trek while stepping over the dead bodies of their comrades.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>. Ibid., 185.

<sup>167</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

<sup>168</sup>. Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 185.

<sup>169</sup>. Ibid, 186-87.

<sup>170</sup>. Cavanagh, Bryers and Phillip, *Dauntless*, 285.

<sup>171</sup>. Ibid., 303.

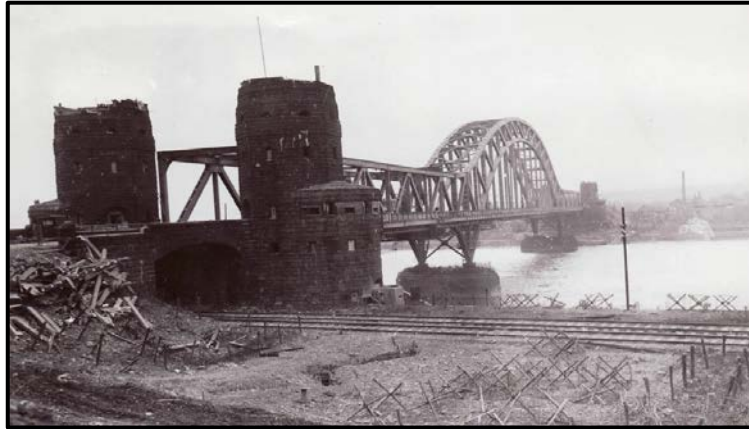
The 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was the first complete division to cross the Rhine during World War II.<sup>170</sup> On March 17, after repeated attacks beginning as early as 1940, the Ludendorff Bridge collapsed, killing twenty-eight of the two hundred Army engineers who were working on it at the time.<sup>171</sup>

The division moved on to Linz, crossed the Wied River and traveled west on the Koln-Frankfurt highway where it encountered light shelling while crossing the Dill River, and forged ahead to take the town of Giesen on March 29. The day before, while passing through Wetzlar, the men of the 370<sup>th</sup> saw a liberated Prisoner of War camp. Although the battery members were not its liberators, the men held there by the Germans treated them as though they were. Seeing the starving, nearly frozen prisoners likely strengthened the resolve of the Americans to defeat the enemy. Carl Storey wrote in the Battery History, "We enjoyed the thrill of having ourselves considered liberators."<sup>172</sup> I. D. remembered the liberated prisoners as pitiful, grown men crying like

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<sup>172</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

Illustration 12.



Ludendorff Bridge  
Remagen - Erpel



Plaque Recognizing  
the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division  
First Complete Division to  
Cross The Rhine.

little children, half-clothed, and starving.<sup>173</sup>

The division faced heavy enemy fire on April 5, when it attacked the southeast sector of the Ruhr Pocket, but by April 17, after continual fighting over rough ground and mountains, General Lauer issued a "Cease Fire" order, ending the Battle of the Ruhr Pocket.<sup>174</sup> Within four days, the Division processed 36,453 German prisoners of war, including three Lieutenant Generals, eight Major Generals, and a land-locked Rear Admiral, taken by the 370<sup>th</sup> itself.<sup>175</sup>

Headquarters transferred the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to General George S. Patton's Third Army on April 17. Following a five-day rest, the last drive began on April 23, when the men crossed the Ludwig Canal under heavy enemy fire. They established a bridgehead over the Atmuhl River and crossed the Danube on April 27. By April 29, the Division reached a German prisoner of war camp in Moosburg where, along with the 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, it set free

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<sup>173</sup>. Conversation between I. D. Walker and his brother, Elza Lee Walker

<sup>174</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

<sup>175</sup>. Orientation Branch, Information and Education Division, ETOUSA. Lone Sentry, "Battle Babies: The Story of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division," 8. [http://www.lonesentry.com/gi\\_stories\\_booklets/99thinfantry/index.html](http://www.lonesentry.com/gi_stories_booklets/99thinfantry/index.html) (accessed August 12, 2014).

thousands of Allied prisoners of war – among them, members of the 99<sup>th</sup> Division, captured by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge.<sup>176</sup> General Lauer wrote of the liberation, "The tales of these freed men were not pleasant ones. There were stories of eighty men, clad only in wool undershirts and winter drawers, crammed into a boxcar where they were shivering for two weeks without food or water and using the car for a latrine as well as a sleeping quarter."<sup>177</sup> The division crossed the Isar and pushed on to the Inn River – the farthest east any Allied unit had been.<sup>178</sup> At 11:30 a.m. on May 2, the 99<sup>th</sup> received the order to "Halt in Place."<sup>179</sup> While waiting, ready to move forward to the Bavarian Alps, the news came of the unconditional surrender of Germany. On May 8, 1945, the Allies declared Victory in Europe.

Upon receiving the word "spit and polish from now on,"<sup>180</sup> Battery "C" of the 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion spent the remainder of its stay at Eltmann, Germany, where

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<sup>176</sup>. Lauer, *Battle Babies*, 308.

<sup>177</sup>. Ibid, 317.

<sup>178</sup>. Ibid, 318.

<sup>179</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

<sup>180</sup>. Ibid.

it began the process of breaking down on June 13, 1945.<sup>181</sup> Three days later, fourteen members of the battery were transferred to the 6<sup>th</sup> Division, and on June 16, I. D. and thirty-four remaining battery members transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>182</sup> The Army attached I. D. to Battery "A" of the 15th Field Artillery Battalion, located near Plzeň in Western Czechoslovakia. The battery remained there briefly before making its way 500 miles by train and vehicles to an area near Rheims, France, arriving four days later. On July 5, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division began preparing for its voyage home.<sup>183</sup>

I. D. found himself among strangers, the comradery he had shared with members of the 99<sup>th</sup> no longer there to comfort him. Although faces were unfamiliar, every man shared the scars of battle and bittersweet memories that only they would ever understand – jubilant in victory, but saddened by the toll that war had taken.

Because of his resistance to enter military service, unlike many infantrymen who were proud of their roles in the campaigns their division took part in, I. D. likely

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<sup>181</sup>. Storey, *99<sup>th</sup> Division, Battery "C" 370<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Unit History*.

<sup>182</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division History, Military Car Club Plzeň. <http://www.militarycarclub.cz/en/history/2nd-infantry-division> (accessed September 22, 2015).

found little honor in the fulsome praise heaped upon them by their commanding generals. As the 15th boarded the U.S.S. General W. P. Richardson at LeHavre, France, on July 12, 1945,<sup>184</sup> I. D. probably felt the honor belonged to the men who would never be returning home. He almost certainly thought about Francis Brennan and wondered what his own mother would have done if it had been him and not Francis who had been blown to bits at the "Bulge" that terrible, cold December day.

I. D. arrived in the United States at Boston Harbor, on July 19, 1945.<sup>185</sup> From there, the army transferred the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to Camp Shift in Texas, where training began for possible deployment to the Pacific Theater. Fate intervened when on August 15, Japan's Showa Emperor announced his intention to surrender to the Allies unconditionally. I. D. returned to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana where the Army honorably discharged him on October 11, 1945.<sup>186</sup>

Bearing the burdensome memories of the horror he had experienced, battle-worn, broken, and exhausted, I. D. made his way home. With him, he carried a \$100 installment of


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<sup>184</sup>. Shayne E. Wallesch and Wendy J. Hochnadel, "World War II Troop Ship Crossings."

<sup>185</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>186</sup>. U. S. Army Enlisted Record and Report of Separation-Honorable Discharge.

Illustration 13.



**Army of the United States**

**SEPARATION QUALIFICATION RECORD**

SAVE THIS FORM. IT WILL NOT BE REPLACED IF LOST

This record of job assignments and special training received in the Army is furnished to the soldier when he leaves the service. In its preparation, information is taken from available Army records and supplemented by personal interview. The information about civilian education and work experience is based on the individual's own statements. The veteran may present this document to former employers, prospective employers, representatives of schools or colleges, or use it in any other way that may prove beneficial to him.

1. LAST NAME—FIRST NAME—MIDDLE INITIAL			MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS		
WALKER I D			10. MONTHS	11. GRADE	12. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY
2. ARMY SERIAL NO.	3. GRADE	4. SOCIAL SECURITY NO.	8	Pvt	Basic-Field Artillery 521
34583784	Pvt	No Number	15	Pfc	Cook's Helper 060
5. PERMANENT MAILING ADDRESS (Street, City, County, State)			16	Pfc	Cannoneer 844
Rt #6 Andalusia, Covington Co, Alabama					
6. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE	7. DATE OF SEPARATION	8. DATE OF BIRTH			
5 Dec 1942	11 Oct 1945	4 Jan 1910			
9. PLACE OF SEPARATION					
Camp Claiborne, Louisiana					
SUMMARY OF MILITARY OCCUPATIONS					
13. TITLE—DESCRIPTION—RELATED CIVILIAN OCCUPATION					
<u>CANNONEER</u>					
Acted as a member of a crew on a 105 Howitzer. Helped to load and fire the weapon. Assisted in moving the weapon and digging emplacements. Also handled Carbine. Performed this type of duty overseas for ten months in France, Belgium and Germany.					

WD AGO FORM 1 JUL 1945 100
This form supersedes WD AGO Form 100, 15 July 1944, which will not be used.
Permit Issued

I. D. Walker  
U. S. Army Separation Qualification Record -  
October 11, 1945



his \$300 separation pay and a green duffle bag that held the remnants of his Army experience. Inside the bag were his uniforms, his Battle Stars ribbon, Victory medal, Good Conduct medal, 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Checkerboard insignia patches, 2nd Infantry Division Indian Head patches, his dog tags, a Checkerboard insignia ring and lapel pin, a gas mask flap, an army sewing kit, a New Testament he had received from the USO when he boarded the S.S. Argentina, a German medal and leather pouch he had taken from a dead soldier, a map of Central Europe, a few photographs, a souvenir Belgian calendar, and a blue notepad. I. D. still wore the string that held a small, dirty cotton pouch with the "lucky" Indian Head nickel his mother had given him the day he left home in 1942. There were memories too – memories of events that forever changed him.

The men of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, known as "Battle Babies" because of their relatively young ages and lack of combat experience, distinguished themselves as one of the most decorated divisions of World War II. In the simple but eloquent words of Stanley Weintraub, "Many ordinary men did extraordinary things, and many extraordinary things happened to ordinary men."<sup>187</sup>

Illustration 14.

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<sup>187</sup> Weintraub, *Eleven Days in December*, XIV.



Items in I. D. Walker's Possession  
Upon his Return from World War II

## CHAPTER III

### HOME AGAIN

The surrender of Japan was welcome news for I. D. Walker and many others who were about to be deployed in the Pacific. The end of the war was a time of jubilation, but sorrow for fallen comrades, the irreplaceable theft of time, and the end of friendships and brotherhood that had seen them through the worst of days, diminished the joy they might have otherwise felt. For most, World War II would be a defining experience and, despite its tragic toll, one not equaled by any other during their lifetimes.

I. D. arrived home in mid-October, 1945, to vastly different circumstances than those at the time of his departure during August, 1944. The death of his father had created a void that nothing could fill, although his mother and brother, Elza Lee, had done their best to keep things going. The changes were more obvious to him, in part because of his long absence, but primarily because he was not prepared, mentally or physically, to face the daunting

challenge of returning the once-enviable farming operation to its pre-war status.

Most obvious to I. D. was the absence of farm laborers, once prominent figures upon the landscape. Jobs created during the war effort transformed the local economy, providing workers once dependent upon low-wage farm incomes with better jobs in factories and shipyards. All but two of the tenant houses were empty, most of the mules had been sold, and the cattle and swine reduced in number.<sup>188</sup> Elza Lee managed to find workers, but most were old men and inexperienced young boys, making it impossible to keep up the pre-war output.

Conspicuously missing from the farm ledger were the pages devoted to Tom Gantt. The last entry from the year 1943, "Christmas [sic] money," meant the sad news to I. D. that Tom was no longer there. No one living can say whether Tom had died or simply returned to the Gantt family farm where he had lived as a child, the son of a former slave. During the month that followed Tom's departure, the name Sonny Boy Gantt appeared in the ledger along with the words, "Due Break [sic] Gantt," an indication that the Gantt family sent him to the Walker farm as a temporary replacement for Tom.

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<sup>188</sup>. Family records

The heirs to Elzy Walker's estate had finally signed documents that lawyers had drafted before I. D.'s departure in mid-July, 1944, giving their mother a life estate for as long as she remained a single woman. The agreement also stipulated that she could not make financial investments for amounts greater than a child's share of the estate, and in turn, Lizzie gave each of her children a cash payment of \$500.<sup>189</sup> Just as I. D. had anticipated, the settlement was a contentious one, made worse by his sisters, Ruth and Obie, and his brother, Kay, who wanted the farm divided equally and sold.

The emotional toll of living without her husband was debilitating for Lizzie, as were the months of worry and anxiety she experienced while I. D. was fighting in Europe. This gave her a much older appearance than her seventy-two years.<sup>190</sup> The added responsibility of managing the farm left her vulnerable, especially to her brothers who attempted to manipulate and undermine her. Not even the presence of her son, Elza Lee, prevented them from taking advantage of her good nature and willingness to lend them assistance with their farming operations. Among other things, she purchased a tractor for them and gave them livestock from her herd.

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<sup>189</sup>. Cancelled checks

<sup>190</sup>. Photographs

Once, while Elza Lee was away for a weekend, she gave her brothers a brood of pigs he had bought for himself and fattened. Before he could reclaim the animals, his uncles sold them, keeping the money that should have been his. Unfortunately, for her, his animosity resulted in unforeseen consequences when he threatened to leave her alone on the farm.

The cotton and peanut harvests were already over by the time I. D. arrived, with the gathering done for the most part by temporary laborers brought in just for the season. The fall was an easy time of year, a time when the worst of the year's labor was over and days grew cooler, providing relief from the sweltering heat of summer. Although weary, I. D. wasted no time getting back into his old routine, waking at dawn and busying himself until dusk. He resumed his farm duties, going about his days as though he had never left home. He chopped stove and firewood for his mother, tended the animals as he always had before, and returned to his habit of walking many miles each day, always within the perimeter of the farm.

I. D. was thin and haggard, but he exhibited none of the outward signs of battle fatigue – no trembling, nightmares, or uncontrollable outbursts – but to those who knew him, he was a very different man. His family and

friends recognized changes in his personality, but never publicly acknowledged them. I. D. spoke of his wartime experiences only if questioned, but even then, he recalled only enough to satisfy the curiosities of those who would rather hear a heroic tale than the ugly truth he knew they would never understand. He spent most of his time at home, venturing out only to drive his mother to town and to attend church services on Sundays. He was noticeably introverted, spoke only in brief sentences, and repeated phrases over and again. He sang the same five-syllable tune any time he was outside on the farm – a strange and mournful chant, "Aye lie lay lo lay." His voice, heard throughout the day, was familiar to all those who came within range. "Like at ner all" [like that and all], prefaced, or followed, nearly every response he made. Colloquialisms defined his persona, branding him as eccentric rather than damaged, acceptable to his family because honor and pride likely prevented them from acknowledging the mental wounds I. D. experienced during battle. Those who returned from the war were idolized heroes whose gallantry had propelled the nation to victory and no one wanted to admit these men could be vulnerable, or that the experiences of war often were, as in his case, emotionally crippling.

Lizzie Walker remained head of her family, treating her sons very much as she did when they were boys. When Elza Lee could no longer indulge her demands, he found work as a welder in shipyards on the Gulf Coast. In his absence, I. D. hired Oscar Burgess, an African-American farmworker with a wife, Inita, and four children. Known as Nita, his wife, worked in the house, cooking and cleaning for Lizzie, and the children helped when they could in the fields. A year later, I. D. hired Utsey Carthen, a laborer who would remain on the farm for two decades. Soon after the death of Mr. Burgess, Utsey married Nita, and they reared seven sons of their own. Nita's older children remained on the farm until the early 1960s when they moved north to Ohio.

Elza Lee moved back and forth many times during the first three years of I. D.'s homecoming, but in 1948, he married and returned to the farm, promising to stay and partner with his brother. Recognizing the obvious advantages of mechanization, he convinced I. D. to purchase a tractor and modern implements. Queen, I. D.'s beloved mule was semi-retired and used only for gardening and odd



Illustration 15.



Elza Lee and Sarah Walker  
Circa 1948

jobs. The farm's first tractor, a red Ford 8N, a four-cylinder, gas operated utility model, was a disappointment to Elza Lee who realized its inadequate power would cripple their ability to increase production to an acceptable level. After a few years of scraping by, Elza Lee moved, along with his wife and young son, to the coast where he worked in shipyards stretching from Port St. Joe, Florida to Pascagoula, Mississippi. Lizzie was adamant that he would return to the farm, not because she admitted she needed Elza Lee's help, but because she wanted to control the upbringing of her toddler grandson. Coupled with Elza Lee's wife's longing to be home, Lizzie's insistence resulted in another attempt at a farming partnership that would last until 1952, when Elza Lee departed for the shipyard in Mobile, his wife and young son in tow. The final return came in 1954, following the birth of a second son - a son who would eventually become a third partner in the farming operation.

Beginning shortly after his return from the war, I. D.'s sisters began a relentless campaign for their mother to build a new house, a dwelling that neither she nor I. D. wanted. They argued that running water, an indoor toilet, electric lights, and a new stove would make life much easier for their aging mother, conveniences Lizzie was

Illustration 16.



Lizzie Walker with Elza Lee's Son  
1962

reluctant to consider. Perhaps she resisted the idea of abandoning the home that her husband had built because she associated it with the past, a time of life that both she and I. D. preferred, evidenced by their refusal to adapt to post-war change and innovation. Mary, Lizzie's youngest daughter, encouraged her mother to consider different building plans; instead, I. D. stood in the yard with a carpenter and drew the plan for their future home into the sand with a stick. Construction began in the late 1940s, finally ending around 1953 with the completion of a bathroom – a tiny closet-like room with barely enough room for one occupant. Lizzie wrote in a letter to her daughter, Jodie, dated November 29, 1953, "The bathroom is finished but I wish I was back in my old house,"<sup>191</sup> an understandable reaction because, despite the addition of electricity and indoor plumbing, the new house provided little improvement.

I. D. insisted on keeping the outhouse in the back yard, preferring to forego the convenience of relieving himself indoors, opting instead to continue using the outside facility, and often, the woods. Behind the house, a woodpile emerged, and beside it, he built a smokehouse for curing meat. Absent was an electric stove – replacing her wood burning stove was never Lizzie's intention, and

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<sup>191</sup>. Letter from Lizzie Walker to her daughter, Josephine Wilson

despite having electrical wiring, thirty-five years passed before I. D. relented and allowed his sister, Jodie, to install one.

I. D. awakened with the dawn, always beginning his day by firing up the stove, and during winter, building a fire in his mother's bedroom. There were no heaters in the house, so the stove and fireplaces were the sole sources of heat. On cold nights, temperatures inside the house dropped unbearably low – so low, in fact, that visitors were rarely a bother. For example, Jodie's son, Harry, swore that a glass of water he placed on a bedside table froze solid during the night. Despite the availability of propane and space heaters, I. D. refused to have them in the house, and even though he and his mother would have benefitted greatly from the addition, they regarded them as extravagant and unnecessary.

I. D. never used the bathtub, opting instead to bathe once a week, always on Saturday, while standing on the back porch in front of an old oak washstand. An electric pump provided water, but instead of filling the nice new tub, he chose to use an enamel pan. After his bath, he would change into one of his few casual outfits for the evening, and on Sunday morning, his only suit for church services. In the meantime, the work clothes he would wear until the

following Saturday were washed, pressed, patched when necessary, and laid upon his bed. I. D. always wore the same style of denim dungarees, matched with blue chambray shirts, topped off with wide-brimmed straw hats. He wore brogan shoes, vented during summer months by slitting the leather with his pocketknife – an attempt to keep his feet dry, undoubtedly a lesson he learned during the war.

I. D. became a member of the Carolina Baptist Church on August 14, 1949,<sup>192</sup> after which the church elders made him a deacon. His tenure in the position, albeit brief, was a high point of his life. The excuse given for his dismissal from the exalted post was that he was a single man, but a more likely explanation is the elders' realization that he was socially inept. He did not allow the rejection to dampen his enthusiasm for the church however, and continued to attend services every Sunday morning and evening. Although living through the Depression left him rather parsimonious, he showed with his contributions to the church a generosity seldom displayed in his everyday life.

Elza Lee's responsibility as breadwinner for his family made it necessary to increase farm production. Even though I. D. had purchased another small Ferguson tractor during his absence, Elza Lee also invested in a much larger

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<sup>192</sup>. Walker family Bible

John Deere diesel tractor. It was after that purchase that I. D. coined an expression he used with great frequency throughout the remainder of his life, "foolishness, foolishness." The brothers, aided by Utsey, doubled the acreage under cultivation, despite the many elements of pre-war farming that persisted. Summers were spent hoeing peanuts, pulling weeds, and chopping cotton, tasks made less difficult by plowing with tractors, but necessary just the same. The corn harvest occurred during late summer, at first, picked by hand and placed in baskets woven by the brothers, but later using a mechanical picker hired from a neighboring farmer. During late August and September, neighbors and migrant workers helped to hand pick cotton and harvest peanuts that were plowed up with tractors, but still required hand-stacking on polls.

The brothers often kept cattle in the woods, feeding them during winter with peanut hay baled with wire. Hogs roamed freely, kept from others' land by primitive fencing built by Elzy decades before. Each morning and afternoon, I. D. shouldered bags of feed pellets and headed down the hill to the troughs where the hogs fed, and during

Illustration 17.



I. D. Feeding His Stock  
Circa 1990



droughts, drank water he drew for them in buckets from an old well, singing all the while he worked. I. D. fed Queen in the barnyard across the road from the new house – she too had a trough and a well. Installing additional electric pumps was not a consideration for I. D. who bragged often that water from their wells was the best he had ever tasted. Elza Lee, realizing the futility of arguing, gave in to him, a pattern of behavior that largely defined their relationship for the remainder of their days.

During 1956, Elza Lee's daughter was born and Jodie returned to the farm from Miami to help care for the baby and her aged mother. Although I. D. was perfectly happy with things the way they were, his sister's presence provided him with a sense of freedom he had not known for several years. He developed the habit of leaving the farm every Saturday evening around dusk, always returning by eight or nine. Some said he made the trips because he was desperate to get away from his sister, a neurotic complainer who gave him little peace, while others suspected that he was having a clandestine affair. The destination of these trips remained a mystery until a friend of Elza Lee's told him that I. D. frequented a bar forty miles away in Laurel Hill, Florida, where he would

drink two cans of beer and leave, a habit that continued for many years.

I. D. never rekindled his relationship with the schoolteacher he had known before the war. Many blamed his bachelor lifestyle on his mother, an accusation that had merit, but it was not the only reason he chose to remain unattached. In fact, I. D. had admirers; he simply had no interest in establishing a relationship with any of them. One of the more tenacious was a never-married mobile home park manager named Addie Leigh White. Addie Leigh, an acquaintance from before the war, frequented the farm on Sunday afternoons, always with the pretense of visiting with Lizzie and Jodie. Addie Leigh, who aspired to be wealthy, was encouraged by rumors that I. D. was a well-to-do bachelor. She considered herself fashionable and had a penchant for large Chrysler automobiles, qualities that in no way endeared her to I. D. Addie Leigh was unaware of his daily grooming habits, always arriving just as he was returning from church, clean, and nicely dressed in his suit. He tolerated her presence until he devised a foolproof method for dodging her – he donned his work clothes and fled. There were other admirers too, but according to those who were around to witness it, none as persistent.

During the year 1956, Elza Lee built a home for his family a hundred yards down the hill from his mother's, a decision that ended any hope he may have had of starting over on his own elsewhere. I. D. set great store in his niece and nephews, taking time each weekday evening to play with them, and often to escort them to the creek for swimming during summer days. The children were the recipients of Lizzie's old dough roller, the handles of which they grasped while I. D. held their feet and rolled them around their house, a favorite amusement for all. He made them toys from corn stalks – tiny troughs and animals for make-believe barnyards, and he made them toys like those he had played with himself as a boy. During harvest time, he gave them pocket change for jumping on cotton stored in barns, telling them they were helping him by packing it tighter. Unc, as they lovingly called him, was like a second father to the children who were replacements for those he would never have himself. Unc, the kind and gentle man, was happiest when they were by his side.

I. D. never became a true sportsman, caring nothing about shooting guns, although before the war, he had often hunted small game. Elza Lee and Kay, on the other hand, enjoyed shooting and fishing, taking advantage of any opportunity to go – habits I. D. also referred to as

foolishness. On winter days when his brothers were in the woods, I. D. parked his vehicle in the warm sun and read Western novels and detective magazines he borrowed from a farm laborer who lived near him. Every evening after supper, he walked down the hill to watch television with the children, an amusement he enjoyed but never afforded for his own household. He stayed for an hour or so, but was always home in time to help his mother into bed before he retired himself by 8:30.

On March 12, 1961, Lizzie Walker fell and broke her hip while attempting to rise from her chair. Just over two weeks later, on March 27, she died at age 88. New fears gripped I. D. as he prepared to bring his mother home for the last time. Just as he had with his father, I. D. sat beside her casket all through the night. Elza Lee once said that when his mother died, it was the first time he could ever remember seeing his grown brother cry. Lizzie died intestate, but out of respect for I. D.'s relationship with their mother, the other heirs agreed to allow him to control the settlement of her estate. On the morning of Lizzie's funeral, her daughter, Ruth, began the day by demanding her share, and although they showed more delicacy in their timing, I. D.'s siblings, Farrist, Obie, and Kay, urged on by their children, joined forces with Ruth in an

attempt to gain control of their shares of the Walker estate. On October 7, 1961, Lizzie's children received equal portions of the \$47,011.71<sup>193</sup> that remained in the estate, but dividing the land would not be as simple and painless.

Elza Lee urged I. D. to join him in offering the others a fair price for their acreage, but when their eldest sister refused their offer, the others followed her lead and demanded more money. Angered by their greed, I. D. refused to make a counter offer and instead, brokered a deal to pay each heir a rental fee for the annual use of the property, pending its appraisal. Dividing the money was a relief to I. D., but the uncertainty of the future of his father's homestead was another matter altogether. He refused to acknowledge that his siblings deserved a land settlement, citing their lack of interest and abandonment as reasons to deny them their presumed birthrights. Although legally he had no grounds for his argument, the heirs deferred to him for many years, always appeased by the pittance they received in rent.

With the arrival of spring 1962, Jodie made the decision to move to Montgomery to live with her baby sister, Mary. For the first time in his life, I. D. was

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<sup>193</sup>. Bank statement and cancelled checks

free to live as he pleased, an eccentric, unquestionably peculiar lifestyle, but one that he was most comfortable living. He had no one to cook his meals, wash his clothing, or clean his house, a house his brothers and sisters had graciously allowed him to keep. Her services no longer required after Jodie's return to the farm in 1956, Nita had taken a job elsewhere as a housekeeper, leaving I. D. to fend for himself. Ill equipped for domesticity, he washed his clothing by hand, refusing to use the Maytag wringer washing machine his mother purchased when she moved into the new house. He swept the floor occasionally, but the bulk of the cleaning, and soon the laundry, would become the responsibility of Elza Lee's wife, Sarah. With the exception of breakfast, he ate every noon meal with Elza Lee and his family and many times his evening meals - a service for which I. D. never contributed a dime or supplied a morsel of food. He was always present for Sunday luncheon and on every occasion, he occupied the chair reserved for the head of the household. Never did he leave the table without eating everything served to him, sopping his plate with bread, leaving it as clean as if he had washed it, no matter whether he found the food enjoyable, or even palatable.

I. D. enjoyed smoking cigars every evening and an occasional sip of whiskey, but he was intolerant of excess. In contrast, Elza Lee, his two nephews, and several of Sarah's cousins, all had a penchant for over-imbibing. Drinking was an old habit for Elza Lee, one he had adopted in his youth, and one he relished his entire life. In exchange for I. D.'s tolerance of his indiscretions, Elza Lee assumed a subordinate role, always deferring to his brother regarding business decisions, although unquestionably he was far more qualified to make them. I. D.'s nephews, Louis and Harry [Obie and Jodie's sons, respectively] were the bane of his existence, always bragging, driving big cars they could not afford, frequently intoxicated, and always with their hands extended, hoping for handouts. I. D. compared his nephews to dirt daubers, often remarking, "They get their load, and they leave,"<sup>194</sup> though unfortunately, never with great speed. Sarah's cousins, both of whom were World War II veterans receiving pensions, insinuated themselves by occupying a cot in a storage house built for tools, the Maytag, and Elzy's old safe. The building became a flophouse, where monthly, after their checks arrived, the cousins would take turns recovering from alcoholic binges. I. D. tolerated

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<sup>194</sup>. Remark heard often by family members

them because for the remainder of the month they labored on the farm. The nephews, however, he regarded merely as nuisances.

Utsey and Nita lived in one of the tenant houses with their seven boys. Utsey was the only remaining farm laborer, who, despite living in poverty, showed devotion and expressed fondness for the brothers. Elza Lee taught Utsey to operate his John Deere tractor and gave him added responsibilities that instilled in him a sense of ownership and place, although the circumstances in which he and his family lived were far from desirable. The walls of their old Shanty house were heart pine boards, nailed side by side without batten to cover the seams. During winter, cardboard boxes were broken down and nailed to the walls as insulation against cold air that streamed in through the cracks. The house had no glass or screens, but only wooden shutter-like doors that covered the windows. There was a small living room, two tiny bedrooms, and a narrow kitchen that extended the width of the back wall of the house. There was one fireplace and a wood stove for heating and cooking, no indoor plumbing, and for many years, no electricity.



Illustration 18.



Only Remaining Tenant House Built by  
Elzy Walker, Circa 1920  
Photo, 1975

Time went by and the Carthon boys came of age, a wild and raucous bunch, their antics grew tiresome to I. D. who had little tolerance for drinking, fighting, and irresponsible parenting. Utsey, despite his good qualities, was a heavy drinker who continually beat his wife and allowed his sons to run roughshod over her. Each weekend, the boys sped up and down the road in junk cars, drank to excess, and incurred the wrath of neighbors who insisted that I. D. and Elza Lee evict them.

The farm continued to be a small operation, barely providing incomes for the brothers, and although it could have been a very prosperous enterprise, I. D. refused to consider options that would have made it possible. They were unable to pay Utsey an income equal to one offered him elsewhere, so in desperation, he took the higher paying job, commuting for a while, but eventually leaving altogether to settle down with another woman, abandoning his family and the responsibility of providing for them.

Although he was aware of community sentiment, I. D. ignored it, opting to allow the family to remain. His attitude changed however when one summer day, the three youngest boys rode his beloved Queen to her death. The old mule, a remarkable thirty-five years-old, fell dead of a heart attack, unnoticed until the afternoon, when I. D.

attempted to feed her and found her stall empty. For the second time in his life, Elza Lee saw his brother cry, and although overcome by grief, he dragged away Queen's body with his tractor to a cool, shady place, dug a grave with a shovel, and buried her.

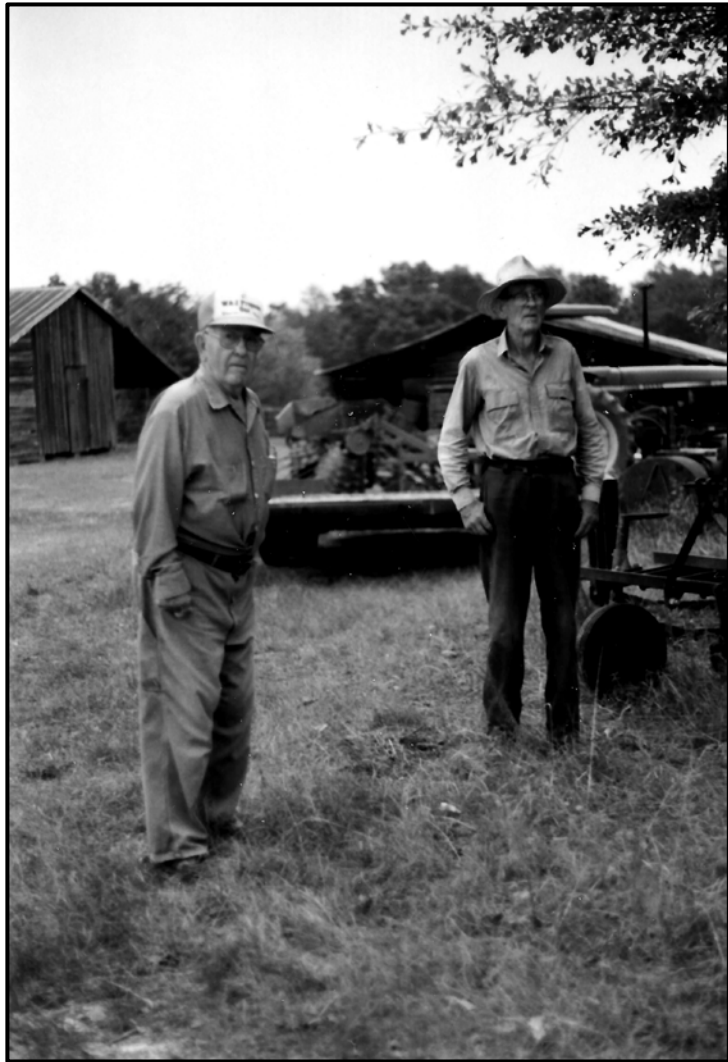
Nita's mentally challenged, eldest son from her previous marriage, Willie B., came to live on the farm, in part because she needed his welfare check, but also because he needed her. One weekend, Nita and her boys left Willie B. alone, and in their absence, he intentionally set fire to the house, burning it to the ground. Despite her pleas, I. D. refused to build another house for Nita, so she and her sons moved to Andalusia, never to return. From that time forward, I. D. and Elza Lee operated the farm without hands to assist them, although they did employ seasonal laborers to help during harvest time.

During the late 1960s, the high cost and low profit margin for producing cotton forced the brothers to grow soybeans instead. The crop required less spraying and was more resilient than cotton, which was vulnerable to pests. Peanuts became the main cash crop, but because of quotas set by the government, production was limited. Elza Lee purchased a larger John Deere tractor that reduced his workload considerably, but it was not large enough to make

their farming competitive with others who had significantly increased the size of their operations. The small farmer was a dying breed, but I. D. was satisfied with things as they were – he had few worries regarding money because there were very few things he cared to purchase. Frugal with the use of electricity, his utility bills were never much higher than the minimum and he rarely spent more than ten or fifteen dollars a week for groceries and personal items. Although his expenses were a fraction of Elza Lee's, the brothers shared the profits earned by farming equally, and I. D. banked the largest part of his earnings.

As Elza Lee's children grew older, the cost of providing for them became more than he could handle with only the profits from farming. Sarah took a job in town when their oldest son entered high school, and with two incomes, Elza Lee was able to continue farming as usual. While I. D. could have easily helped them financially, he was concerned with saving money and became increasingly stingy and eccentric. He cared less and less about his appearance, wearing his work clothes until they were tattered so badly that patching them was not possible. Although he complained and told her not to, Sarah continued to clean the house and wash his clothing because if she had not, the tasks would have remained undone.

Illustration 19.



Elza Lee and I. D. Walker  
1992

By the mid-1970s, Elza Lee's children had all left home, but the brothers, then retirement age, never considered giving up their roles as active farmers. Elzy and Lizzie's children were all still living, but the estate continued unsettled, despite their urging that it should be. Neither of them wanted to force a sale for division, realizing the effect it might have on their brother, a gentle soul who lived in the past, devoting himself to preserving their father's legacy.

The brothers continued to pay rent and to farm, even though the physical challenges were great. I. D. became ill with polycythemia, a bone marrow disease that led to an abnormal increase in the number of red blood cells. By the time his doctors discovered it, he had begun to have fainting spells, fatigue, and numerous other symptoms. The remedy was to have several pints of blood removed, a process that continued throughout the remainder of his life. Despite his near brush with death, he felt no urgency to divide the land, but instead grew even more adamantly against it, dismissing any attempt by others to convince him otherwise.

In 1979, Elza Lee's second son, James, returned to the farm and joined them as a third partner. In the beginning, he offered ideas to modernize the operation and, possibly

return the farm to the status of its glory days, as it was during Elzy's heyday. He bought a large John Deere tractor and a used combine for harvesting soybeans, but he wasted enthusiasm on his uncle I. D., who made no contribution toward the purchase of the equipment, but still insisted they divide profits equally. That same year, Elza Lee's daughter returned to the farm briefly, and although I. D. doted on her, not even she could convince him to retire, or to make any business and lifestyle changes.

During the decade that followed, the Walker family lost four sisters and gained eleven heirs, all eager for their shares of the estate – a property division that was becoming more complicated by the day. Toward the end of the 1980s, following the death of her son, Jodie left Mobile and returned to the farm. She had moved to Mobile to live with him just before Mary's death, but her daughter-in-law no longer welcomed her after becoming a widow herself. With nowhere else to go, I. D. allowed her to live with him once again, an arrangement to which he had difficulty adjusting. She immediately insisted on purchasing a propane gas tank, a high capacity heater, window air conditioners, a new gas stove, a washing machine, and a television. Despite the addition of modern conveniences, I. D.'s habits changed little – his only concession was to take baths inside

rather than on the back porch. He continued to use the outhouse, and to bathe and change his work clothes once each week, habits that grew even more intolerable due to his inability to avoid spilling tractor fuel and chemicals for spraying crops all over himself.

Shortly after Jodie's return, Sarah retired from her job because of health reasons and Elza Lee began to exhibit signs of dementia that forced his retirement. A few years later, their brother, Kay, died, and soon nephews and nieces began to die as well, their children adding to the rapidly increasing number of heirs to the estate. Complicating matters further, a mentally incompetent Elza Lee had no Power of Attorney, meaning that to settle the estate, the Court would have to appoint a Guardian ad Litem to represent him – a painful concession his children refused to make.

Sometime around 1993, I. D. began to exhibit signs of Alzheimer's disease, increasing the level of his eccentricity, but not diminishing his desire to keep up his work routine. Realizing the danger presented by his using farm machinery, his nephew removed the key to his tractor, an action that angered him and left him distraught. He started wandering away from the farm, only to have concerned neighbors who found him miles away return him to



his home. He had recurring hallucinations of mules in the field where the old house used to stand, and he imagined that his sister's car was ablaze and repeatedly carried buckets filled with water to douse the flames, leaving large puddles beneath its bumper each day. Fearing what could happen, his nephew built a fence around his house to contain him and keep him safe, an imprisonment he tried endlessly to escape. Soon he ceased to bathe altogether, doing so only when forced to by his niece and nephew.

Sarah died on the last day of January, 1995, and Elza Lee followed her two years later on March 23, 1997. I. D. would survive him by two years, dying a week before Christmas, 1999, the fifty-fifth anniversary of his baptism of fire during the Battle of the Bulge.

His niece and nephew had honored I. D.'s wish to live out his life at home on the farm, until six weeks before his death when his condition became so grave that they could no longer care for him. The farm he had loved so much during his lifetime had remained his to keep, with the settlement still pending at the time of his death. The following year, after Jodie died, the heirs finally settled the estate when Elza Lee's son and daughter sued the remaining thirty-eight heirs, forcing the farm's sale for

division. The two were able to keep a portion of the property, including Lizzie's house and the barnyard. I. D.'s home for five decades still stands, its contents the same as the day he died, kept up, and unchanged. The lot, Queen's stable, the barns and sheds, the well, the outhouse, the old tractors, and even Elzy's wagon are still there, remnants of a rich family history and traditions honored.

I. D. Walker did not exhibit the symptoms commonly associated with those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, but there is no doubt that his combat experience during World War II greatly affected him. Every individual deals with stress in his own way, but I. D.'s method was more unusual than most, choosing to live as much as possible in the past, recalling the life he had known during pre-war years. No one can stop time or call it back once it has passed, but he made a life for himself that closely mirrored that of his youth - a time long gone, an uncomplicated, familiar existence that few understood, but that everyone who knew him accepted. I. D. was a well-respected farmer and member of his community, although his extreme eccentricity made it impossible for him to escape the criticism and irreverence of those who were not aware

of his sacrifices during the war, or of how the unsolicited experience had changed him.

During the final years, many in the community voiced their opinions that I. D. should be institutionalized or confined to a nursing facility – suggestions his family rejected until near the end of his life, when his niece and nephew reached a point when they could no longer provide the level of medical care that their uncle required. When they asked for assistance in getting him admitted to a nursing facility for veterans, the Department of Veteran's Affairs turned them away. I. D.'s nephew, James, said that upon examining his military records, the local Veterans Affairs director, Francis McGowin, dismissively told him, "He was just a cannon cocker."<sup>195</sup>

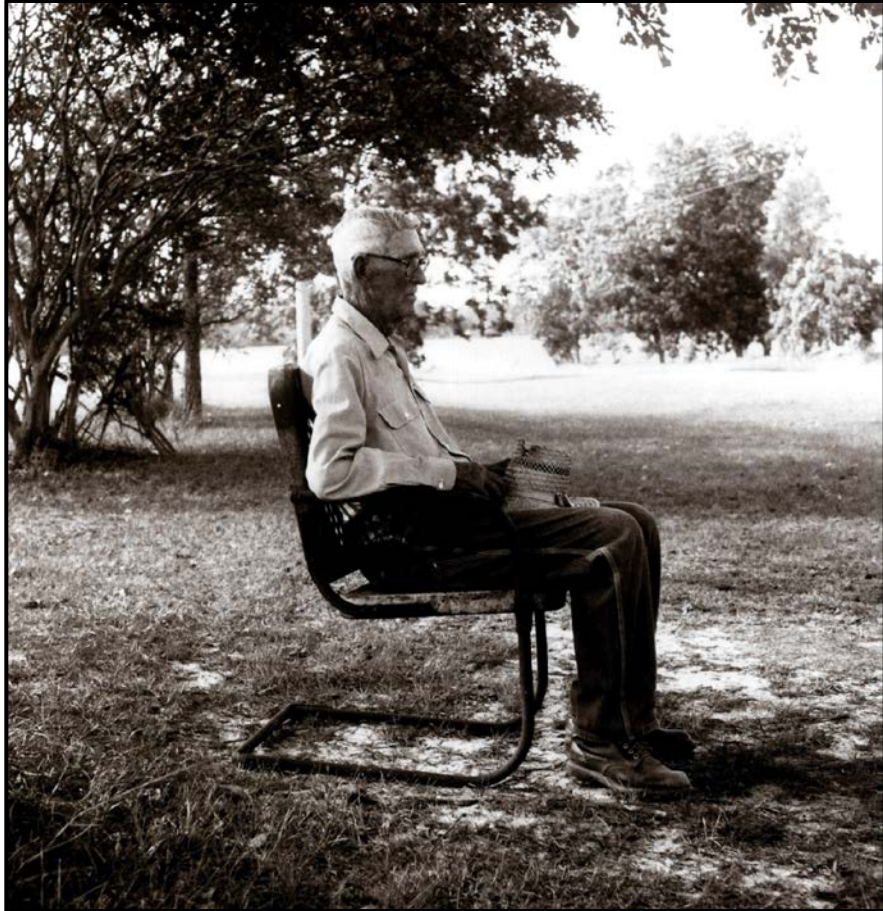
McGowin's patronizing comment notwithstanding, I. D. Walker returned from the greatest war in history after serving in three major campaigns. His battery alone fired 322 tons of projectiles, or around 19,527 rounds during his tour. He traveled 1,367 miles and witnessed untold horror during his days as a member of the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.

Most men who fought during World War II were not charismatic, remarkable, or even well remembered, but there

Illustration 20.

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<sup>195</sup> Conversation between James E. Walker and Francis McGowin, 1996



I. D. Walker  
1997

is no mistaking the significance of the contributions they made. While we have come to accept its image as a "Good War," the description is hardly accurate or unquestioned by those who experienced it and understand that World War II, or any other, was not, is not, nor ever will be, good.

## CONCLUSION

The idyllic life of I. D. Walker on his beloved farm in Covington County, Alabama, was rudely interrupted by the intrusion of war and its demands following the attack on Pearl Harbor that brought the United States into World War II. After his induction into the armed services in December, 1943, I. D. Walker's life would never be the same. The demands of war wrenched him from the only world he had ever known and threw him into a training regimen that would take him to three different camps in what was his first extended absence from Alabama.

His arrival in Europe during the autumn of 1944, would ultimately elevate his sense of dislocation to one of trauma. The 99<sup>th</sup> Division deployed initially to Elsenborn, believed to be an inactive area where the men could acclimate before entering the cauldron of war. Suddenly and brutally, however, the German attack in what became known as the Battle of the Bulge, transformed the situation altogether. Not only finding itself in a desperate battle, the 99<sup>th</sup> Division, in fact, found itself in one of the key sectors of the battle. Far from having an adjustment

period, the men of the 99<sup>th</sup> were involved in some of the most brutal fighting of the war. Although the division acquitted itself well, I. D. Walker, and undoubtedly many of his comrades, were transformed by it. Nothing could have prepared him for the experience of seeing his closest friend in his battery blown apart by an artillery shell, or for the rigors of an enormous and desperate battle. The triumph of victory could not efface all that he had experienced, and in addition, his return to Covington County was made more difficult by the fact that during his time away, his father had died, and his mother had struggled to maintain the farm, making it less stable than when he had gone into the Army. Although he threw himself into the task of reinvigorating the farm enterprise, seeking perhaps to restore the world he had known, the effects of the war never left him. His eccentric behavior particularly expressed itself in the recitation of a ditty sung in a mournful tone as if it were an incantation that could restore tranquility to his life, providing him peace and solace. To the end of his life, within his family, he was a beloved figure, but to outsiders, he was an eccentric, the source of which was unknown. Nevertheless, I. D. reinvigorated the farm and made it a profitable enterprise in the post-war years. He was a loving uncle to

his nephews and niece and lived as fulfilling a life as he could have after the horrors he had experienced. Providing his life with unusual and remarkable symmetry, he died on December 19, 1999, the fifty-fifth anniversary of the battle that had permanently affected his life. His humility and modesty masked the magnitude of the enterprise of which he had been a part – one member of what many have called “the greatest generation” but also carrying damage from what has been euphemistically termed “the good war.”



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## Appendix

