

Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy... Study Guide

Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy... by Stephen Ambrose

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Plot Summary

Band of Brothers is a non-fiction historical account of the U.S. Army's Easy Company during World War II. A part of the elite 101st Airborne Division, Easy Company participated in the Normandy D-Day invasion and was the first group of Allied troops to reach Hitler's Eagle's Nest retreat in Germany as the German troops surrendered.

Easy Company was formed by volunteer soldiers. The men were from different part of the U.S. with varying socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. The majority of men had no military experience and had never traveled outside of the U.S. The original members of Easy Company began basic training at Camp Toccoa, Georgia. Easy Company's original commanding officer, Captain Herbert Sobel, was demanding and trained the men harder than any other company in the regiment. However, he was also arrogant and unlikable.

The men of Easy Company began to bond under Sobel's tyrannical command. The soldiers looked up to 2nd lieutenant, Richard "Dick" Winters. Winters was humble, fair and likable. Unlike Sobel, Winters demonstrated excellent leadership potential. The men completed basic training in outstanding physical shape. Easy Company continued to parachute jump training. Sobel continued to infuriate the men during training exercises due to Sobel's inadequacies in the field. Sobel struggled to even read a map correctly. Eventually, Sobel was replaced as Easy Company's commanding officer after a group of non-commissioned officers threatened mutiny.

Easy Company began its campaign by participating in the Allied invasion into Normandy, known as D-Day. In France, Easy Company flourished under Winters's leadership. First, Winters led a successful attack again a German battery of four heavy machine guns with only twelve men. Then, Winters inspired Easy Company to move into the town of Carentan while under enemy machine gunfire and usurp the occupying German troops. Due to Winters's excellence on the battlefield, he was quickly promoted to Captain. The soldiers of Easy Company received a short reprieve before entering Holland for Operation Market-Garden, an attempt to capitalize on the German army's weakened condition after the D-Day invasion. The Allied operation proved unsuccessful, and Easy Company endured many casualties. The men continued to fight in Holland, then again in France. A siege in Bastogne, France found Easy Company surrounded by German soldiers. For twelve days, Easy Company slept in foxholes, suffering in the extreme winter elements with no cold weather gear. At the same time, the men were inundated with deadly artillery attacks. Eventually, the U.S. Army broke through the lines to rescue Easy Company. The men insisted that no rescue was necessary. Easy Company gained elite status in the American public as heroes for the siege which was heavily promoted in the media.

Easy Company continued to fight on the front lines through France. Eventually, the company entered Germany. Surprisingly, the American soldiers liked the German people. The war was nearing an end, but Easy Company remained cautiously optimistic. As the company traveled into Germany, the men encountered scores of

surrendering German troops. Easy Company was involved in a few minor skirmishes, but encountered relatively little resistance. The men encountered their first concentration in the foothills of the Alps. Continuing on, Easy Company trekked to Berchtesgaden, where Hitler had a luxurious mountaintop retreat. As the first company at Hitler's Eagle's Nest, Easy took the liberty of looting Hitler's old refuge and nearby Nazi homes.

After the war in Germany ended, the men lived in luxury in Austria. However, the soldiers became bored without combat and were anxious to return home. There was frustration with the way the Army handled choosing who would be discharged. The Army initiated a point system based on medals conferred and time in combat. The soldiers were frustrated with the bureaucracy. Also, the boredom and relief led to heavy drinking. Accidents and altercations occurred due to drunk driving and public drunkenness. Easy Company was slowly broken up as men were discharged. Nearly three years after its inception, Easy Company was officially inactivated.



We Wanted Those Wings: Camp Toccoa: July-December 1942

We Wanted Those Wings: Camp Toccoa: July-December 1942 Summary and Analysis

The first chapter introduces the inception of Easy Company, its training regiment and the volunteers who passed the rigorous physical and mental challenges to become members of the elite group. Never before had troops endured basic training at the same time as parachute jump training. Each member volunteered to join the unit for the thrill, honor, recognition and monthly bonus pay. Basic training took place at Camp Toccoa, Georgia. Commanding officers wanted only the cream of the crop for its regiment. Due to the strict standards set by army commanders, the unit had a high drop-out and rejection rate.

Easy company ran up Mount Currahee, which had an elevation of 1,000 feet, on a regular basis. On one occasion, the company was given respite from its daily run. The men were served a large spaghetti meal for lunch. After the meal, the men were told that were changed and to run up Currahee. Ambulances followed the company while men vomited spaghetti during the exercise. Those who rode back with the ambulances were shipped out of the unit immediately.

Easy company's commanding officer, or C.O., Captain Herbert Sobel, was universally disliked by members of the unit. This, coupled with the intense physical and mental training the men endured together, united the unit beyond normal military bonds. The men knew each other so intimately that a man could recognize his comrade by the shape of his silhouette at night. Sobel wanted to have the best company in the regiment. He demanded more physical training than any other C.O. in the regiment. Sobel was described as cruel and arrogant. If a man displeased him, he would find any excuse to mark him down or punish him. He would order a man to dig a pit after a full day of training. Once complete, he would order the man to fill it up.

However, the men of Easy Company respected 2nd Lieutenant Dick Winters. Colonel Sink promoted Winters to 1st lieutenant in the first few weeks of basic training. Sobel resented Winters, ordering him to do the least pleasant assignments, including latrine inspections. While Winters objected to Sobel's training methods and lack of judgment in the field, he felt that Sobel's desire for Easy company to be the best had merit. The battalion completed basic training by the end of November 1942. The men left Toccoa with proper battlefield skills, advanced physical stamina and confidence in their abilities.

The first chapter introduces Easy company as an elite, advanced group of soldiers. The theme of brotherhood begins from the beginning, at basic training. The chapter foreshadows the heroics and successful battles due to the close ties that slowly develop among the men. Easy Company is extraordinary because of the soldiers' hard work and

ability to endure both physical and mental abuse, but also because of the strong bonds the men share.

Winters is introduced as C.O. Sobel's character foil, or opposite. Sobel leads the men by way of fear and admonition. Sobel's character is petty, arrogant and he seeks personal accolades by having the best-trained company. The men follow Sobel simply because his rank demands it. Sobel's vendetta against Winters demonstrates Sobel's lack of self-confidence and fear of competition for command.

Winters, on the other hand, earned the men's respect. Easy company followed Winters because the men find him trustworthy and likable. He is portrayed as a humble man, firm but fair. His promotion in the first week of training foreshadows Winters rising quickly among military ranks. The first chapter suggests that Winters will play a prominent leadership role in Easy company.



Stand Up and Hook Up: Benning, Mackall, Bragg, Shanks: December 1942-September 1943

Stand Up and Hook Up: Benning, Mackall, Bragg, Shanks: December 1942-September 1943 Summary and Analysis

Easy Company continued its road toward the coveted silver wings with parachute training at Fort Benning. The company was in such outstanding physical condition that its men embarrassed the lead sergeants during daily exercises. Easy Company was excused from the physical training portion of parachute training. After three weeks of parachute training, the men made their first jump from a C-47 airplane. When ordered, each soldier stood up and hooked his parachute line to an anchor line that ran down the plane's interior. The men were excited, rather than terrified of jumping. Ninety-four percent of the regiment completed the first jump, setting a military record. Men who completed five successful jumps received a certificate and silver wings, proclaiming the men certified parachutists.

Although an elite group, the regiment was not exempt from military rules and regulations. Colonel Sink publicly stripped the wings from ten men who returned late from furlough. Then he relegated them to the infantry unit. In January, Easy Company and its regiment moved to the Alabama side of Fort Benning. The accommodations and food were superb compared to what they were accustomed to. By March, the regiment moved to Camp Mackall, North Carolina. At Mackall, training intensified. Sobel became the victim of several training exercise pranks that made him appear incompetent, such as lost compasses and maps. Then, Sobel embarrassed himself by stealing rifles from sleeping Fox Company men, intending to reprimand Easy Company for falling asleep during night exercises. Sobel further incensed the men of Easy Company by conducting a raid on the men's personal belongings. Nearly everyone had an item confiscated. None of the items were returned. The soldiers took the invasion personally, and many talked about going so far as to shoot Sobel.

Easy Company men were renowned not just for superior physical endurance, but by garnering promotions within the battalion. Every officer vacancy in the 2nd Battalion was filled by a man from Easy Company. In May, Easy Company and its battalion boarded a train for Sturgis, Kentucky for combat training maneuvers. The arduous training included night marches, jumps and combat maneuvers against other companies. June 10th marked the date that the 506th parachute infantry regiment officially joined the 101st Airborne Division. Combat maneuver training ended in late July, and the men of Easy Company moved to hospitable Camp Beckinridge, Kentucky. The relatively luxurious accommodations were short-lived, however, and the men were quickly transferred to



military staging area Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In mid-August, the division headed to New York City. The men boarded a converted transport liner built to carry 1,000 passengers. Five thousand men walked the gangplank. For many men, it was their first trip outside of the United States. Some became wistful for the days of basic training and Currahee.

Chapter two follows the second half of Easy Company's training, parachute jumping. The men's elite reputation, although untested in combat, was solidified. The men were well aware of their superiority, giving them exceptional self-confidence. First, the regiment's physical prowess exceeded the parachute trainers' expectations. The men mocked their instructors and quickly advanced to the next portion of training. At jump training, most of the soldiers were exhilarated, rather than terrified, of jumping from an airplane. Again, the regiment exceeded expectations by setting a record of ninety-four percent qualification for the first parachute jump.

Conflict with Sobel continued, but the soldiers' confidence level was higher than at basic training. They began fighting back with pranks. On one occasion, Private Robert Wynn served as Sobel's night runner during a night training operation. He pretended to get lost and slept instead of working with Sobel. When Sobel confronted Wynn about his desertion, the private quipped that he couldn't see in the dark. Numerous promotions within Easy Company confirmed the soldiers' superior status. However, some men were not humble than others about their elite standing. The paratroopers would frequent local bars and instigate fights with infantry men and glider troops, whom the paratroopers felt were lower caliber soldier.



Duties of the Latrine Orderly: Aldbourne: September 1943-March 1944

Duties of the Latrine Orderly: Aldbourne: September 1943-March 1944 Summary and Analysis

The trip to England was cramped and difficult. Due to the tight quarters, conditions were dirty and foul-smelling. In September, the ship arrived at Liverpool. The men of Easy Company traveled to Aldbourne, about eighty miles west of London. Occupying a small English village, the men were received training on local customs and how to interact with the local people. The men were used to being isolated with other soldiers, but quickly caught on when instructed how to integrate with the English people.

The regiment continued its combat training in preparation for invading Europe. Intense exercises included specialized instruction on traps, mine removal, chemical warfare and German weaponry. Physical limits were tested with training on how to live in the field for stretches of time without losing effectiveness. Tension escalated as the men listened to combat stories from soldiers in other regiments. Sobel became more unbearable as the pressure mounted. The men continued their pranks. During combat training with live ammunition, Sobel was nearly hit on many occasions. The men found it amusing. Growing dissatisfaction with Sobel's lack of tactical skill made some officers consider approaching Colonel Sink about the problem, a mutinous action in the military.

The soldiers were given weekend passes to help relieve the tension. The paratroopers received a bonus in addition to regular pay, and they spent the excess on an abundance of alcohol and women. It was like a London vacation. The soldiers were young, in their early twenties, and away from home. At the end of October, Sobel assigned Winters to latrine inspection duty at 1000 hours. Winters first completed an assignment ordered by Colonel Sink but arrived on time to Sobel's latrine inspection. Sobel officially reprimanded Winters by claiming that Sobel ordered a change to the inspection time and Winters arrived late. Sobel gave Winters the choice of punishment. Sobel would either revoke Winters's weekend pass or be subject to a court martial.

Winters chose punishment by court martial. Battalion officers stepped in and found a way to close the case without submitting Winters to a court martial. However, Sobel continued to send Winters reprimands. Major Strayer ended the feud by transferring Winters out of Easy Company as the battalion mess officer. Winters was insulted.

The men of Easy Company were incensed. Company officers decided to give Major Strayer an ultimatum. The men would quit if Sobel wasn't replaced. The officers consulted with Winters, who advised the men to stand down. Colonel Sink became aware of situation and verbally reprimanded the company for considering mutiny. Then, he transferred Sobel to run a new parachute jumping school. Lieutenant Thomas Meehan replaced Sobel as C.O. of Easy Company. Then, Sink brought Winters back to



the company and assigned him leadership of the 1st platoon. The men of Easy Company found Meehan to be strict, fair, and competent.

In the third chapter, Easy Company became aware that combat was imminent. The men dealt with the increasing stress by reveling in London bars. The soldiers drank beer and socialized with the local women. Youth, extra money and the possibility of death in combat made the men aware of the necessity to enjoy what could be their final days. The continuing conflict between Sobel and Winters was finally resolved. Winters reached his breaking point when Sobel presented Winters with an unmerited reprimand. As a display of principle, Winters chose the harsher punishment by court marshal. When Sobel continued to attack Winters with unfounded reprimands, Winters did not fight back. Instead, he disagreed but respected Sobel's authority as commanding officer and submitted to Sobel's higher rank. Strayer attempted to diffuse the situation by transferring Winters to the insulting position of mess officer.

Winters continued to display honorable characteristics by not leveraging his popularity with the men to oust Sobel. In fact, Winters convinced the men to abandon their plan of approaching Major Strayer with an ultimatum to remove Sobel from command. In the end, Winters received justice by receiving command of the 1st platoon and seeing Sobel transferred out of Easy Company.



Look Out Hitler! Here We Come!: Slapton Sands, Upottery: April 1-June 5, 1944

Look Out Hitler! Here We Come!: Slapton Sands, Upottery: April 1-June 5, 1944 Summary and Analysis

Easy Company was part of the mission to take Utah beach on D-Day, the Allied invasion of Europe. Due to the massive amount of manpower necessary for the operation, the Army planned a practice operation on a stretch of English coastline that mimics the Utah beach topography. The operation, dubbed Exercise Tiger, suffered from a German attack. Unknown to Easy Company at the time, German torpedo boats sank two ships and over nine hundred men drowned during the exercise. The incident was covered up by the military for more than forty years. In early May, the 101st Airborne division conducted practice jumps in preparation for D-Day. The heavy amount of gear the soldiers carried made movement cumbersome. Each man required assistance onto the C-47 airplane. Easy Company completed its parachute jump successfully. However, other companies encountered a German air raid. Several planes dropped men miles away from the designated drop zone, while others did not attempt to jump at all.

An intelligence briefing prior to D-Day emphasized the importance of each company's mission. The Germans relied more on its counterattack rather than its coastal defenses. With Easy Company and the other paratroopers jumping behind enemy lines, it was imperative that they hold back any counterattack for as long as possible. On June 4th, the men were treated to an exceptional meal prior to shipping out. However, poor weather conditions delayed the operation for the night. The next evening, the paratroopers prepared to fly out. The soldiers were given airsickness pills for the first time. Also, the British introduced the idea of leg bags. The paratroopers attached large bags with extra gear to their leg. It was meant to separate from the leg and fall where the paratrooper would land. During the flight, the planes' V-formation broke off due to a large cloud bank. This was done to prevent in-air collision. However, the planes lost sight of the lead aircraft meant to lead them to the drop zone. The planes came under attack, frightening the pilots. Instead of slowing down for the troopers to jump, the pilots sped up. Not knowing where they were, the pilots initiated the green light, informing the troopers to jump.

The paratroopers began jumping into the night sky while under attack. One plane became so unsteady that men were thrown to the floor. The plane carrying Easy Company's new C.O., Meehan, was hit with bullets and exploded during its landing attempt.

Chapter four details the days leading up to Easy Company's assault on Utah beach. There is less emphasis on the men's self-confidence, as detailed in earlier chapters. Instead, the focus is the tension of a risky and massive military operation. As D-Day approaches, the men became anxious to fight. When the men marched toward the



airline hangar, the mood is somber. This is in contrast to the previous sentiment of self-confidence and elitism. In the face of their first battle, the men were humbled. A few quickly wrote notes to wives and loved ones. Other prayed.

One man, Gordon Carson, spied the vast number of ships and boats in the invading fleet and became awestruck. He realized that he was a part of something greater than his own life. The ships and fleet are a metaphor for the men themselves. Banded together, they were stronger than if standing alone. On D-Day, the drop does not go as planned, and is riddled with problems. The men jump from planes traveling at high speed with no inclination of where the correct drop zone was. This foreshadows future conflicts during the war. Regardless of the amount of military intelligence, training and practice the men have, they must quickly adapt to new situations in combat.



Follow Me: Normandy, June 6, 1944

Follow Me: Normandy, June 6, 1944 Summary and Analysis

Easy Company jumped from the aircraft in the midst of confusion. The leg bag idea failed. The bags quickly plummeted to the ground and the men could not locate them. The Germans shot at the paratroopers as they fell from the sky. On the ground, the men scrambled to find one another. The troops were scattered over a distance of twenty kilometers. Behind enemy lines and not knowing where they were, the paratroopers engaged in close combat with German soldiers. Having landed in such disarray, the men joined troops from other units as they fought to find their own company members.

When Winters landed, he lost his leg bag but quickly found Sergeant Lipton. Winters gathered several men landing in the area, including men from outside of his unit. The group successfully ambushed a German patrol. Over the course of the evening, Winters's group joined forces with over eighty men and headed toward Ste. Marie-du-Mont, the rally point. Winters was ordered to terminate a battery of German machine guns near Ste. Marie-du-Mont. Winters ordered his men to attack from the front with American machine gun fire covering their position from two directions. The men worked as a team, synchronizing their maneuvers. Winters led the frontal assault while the machine gunners provided support. The Germans at the first gun post quickly fled. The American pursued, killing as many Germans as they could.

Winters and his men continued their siege and took control of the second German gun. Later, Lieutenant Ronald Speirs of D Company arrived with five men. Speirs led the final assault on the third and final German gun in the battery. The operation of eliminating the German battery contributed to the success of the beach invasion, as the location looked directly down upon Utah beach. Winters later received the Silver Star for his action, and other members of his group received commendations.

The men were victorious and proud. Winters took his first drink of alcohol, shocking his comrades. American Sherman tanks arrived at Easy Company's location. With assistance from the Sherman tanks, the Americans secured Brecourt Manor. The Germans fled Ste Marie-du-Mont. Easy Company and the battalion took control, and the company rested in the village. That evening, the men reflected on the day's events. The men were gratified and thankful. Winters went on patrol and came dangerously close to encountering a squad of German troops. Winters promised to live on a quiet farm in peace if he survived the war.

In chapter five, Winters comes to the forefront of the story as a natural leader. As soon as he landed on the ground, he demonstrated his command by ordering a nearby trooper to follow him. He also took it upon himself to gather as many men as possible. Later, he quickly devised a plan to assault a heavily-armed German battery with few lives lost. Winters once again showed humility by crediting the military for its training for



his success. The chapter also details how the men reacted in their first combat situation. The circumstances were far from ideal, with the men scattered and intermixed with other units, and no knowledge of where they were located. Some men, such as Lipton and Guarnere, reflect that some of their actions were rash and they would not have taken those same risks as seasoned soldiers. The men entered the battlefield well-trained, but also gained valuable combat experience in the field.

The theme of perseverance reveals itself in the fifth chapter as the men fight not only to stay alive, but to complete the mission at hand. Private Tom Burgess was shot through the cheek and out of his neck, and the blood nearly choked him to death. He recalled later that his desire to live kept him calm, as he was trained.



Move Out!: Carentan: July 7-July 12, 1944

Move Out!: Carentan: July 7-July 12, 1944 Summary and Analysis

After securing Ste. Marie-du-Mont, the military ordered Easy Company to lead the battalion toward Carentan, through Vierville. Carentan was the rally point for American forces coming from both Utah Beach and Omaha Beach. The forces met some resistance, but pushed forward. Later, Easy Company moved to reserve status and was tasked with defending regimental headquarters. The men relaxed somewhat, but had difficulty sleeping due to occasional attack. Many men took advantage of the vast amounts of liquor in the villages they encountered. Others scavenged from the belongings of soldiers killed in action, looking for memorabilia.

The 101st Airborne division, including Easy Company, was then ordered to break through the German line at Carentan. The men moved into position at night. Due to its intense night training, Easy Company moved easily in the dark. The men positioned themselves in ditches near the road leading to Carentan. Then the troops were ordered to attack. Lieutenant Welsh ran down the road and six men followed, but the remainder stayed in the ditch. Winters ordered the rest of the men to follow, but they were frightened of the German machine gun. Finally, Winters screamed at the men. The troops finally advanced as one unit.

Easy Company secured the road and intersection leading to Carentan. With the help of joining American forces, the troops secured Carentan. After a brief respite and tending to the wounded, the men prepared for the German counterattack. Winters led Easy Company to another victory even as supporting troops from Fox Company and Dog Company fell back from the front lines. Easy Company had a brief reprieve from fighting with a full night of rest before being sent to defend Carentan from the south. One soldier, Fritz Niland, was sent home when the military realized that all three of his brothers were killed in action. The rest of the company dug foxholes and continued to defend Carentan. Two weeks later, the men were relieved from the front lines. Lieutenant Winters and ten other men received the Distinguished Service Cross citation. Winters was promoted to captain. Easy Company's division pulled back to Utah Beach and embarked on a voyage back to Aldbourne.

The theme of brotherhood bonds and courage in military action continues in the sixth chapter. In the second major conflict led by Winters, the men of Easy Company worked as a team to secure Carentan, an important staging area for American troops. The men had witnessed enough war at this point to fear death. Their mission was to take over a machine gun by running directly into the line of fire. At first, the men were frozen in the ditch as bullets sprayed above their heads. But Winters motivated them to carry out the plan. Most importantly, the men overcame their fears. The soldiers moved out together

and successfully overtook the German machine gun. German soldiers began shooting mortar shells in defense.

Easy Company troops engaged the enemy while assisting injured comrades. Those who were injured wanted to keep fighting, even with broken legs and head wounds. The soldiers had tight bonds of trust and would rather continue fighting alongside their brothers in arms than return to England. Another example of trust and courage among the men occurred when a German tank approached Easy Company during a German counterattack. Two other companies fell back and abandoned Easy Company. Easy Company held its ground, even under mortar attack. Welsh and Private John McGrath ran onto an open field at great danger to themselves and used a bazooka to incapacitate the tank. Winters continued to lead Easy Company with success. He accepted accolades for his success but inquired about medals for his men. Winters did not seek medals out of conceit, but felt that the men under his command should also be recognized.



Healing Wounds and Scrubbed Missions: Aldbourne: July 13-September 16, 1944

Healing Wounds and Scrubbed Missions: Aldbourne: July 13-September 16, 1944 Summary and Analysis

The men returned to Aldbourne from Normandy and were immediately rewarded with new gear, pay and one week passes. Many of the troops traveled to London. The men were greeted with free beer and meals from the locals. The welcome was short-lived, however. The troops began drinking and fighting in excess, causing property damage. Later, men such as Gordon and Sergeant Talbert returned to Easy Company. Some men, such as Lipton, worried that his injuries would cause permanent damage. Private David Kenyon Webster returned to Easy Company hoping for more action. Webster, like many men, sought revenge for Americans killed by German troops. Men within Easy Company continued to be promoted. Replacement troops just out of jump school joined the Normandy veterans.

The men continued intensive training to keep the company in shape and integrate the replacement troops into the company. Winters brought live ammunition to the training maneuvers, again military regulation. Winters wanted the training to be as close to real battle as possible. Away from combat, Easy Company had recreational time available. Some went to musical shows, listened to the radio, watched movies and gambled. With the spare time, the soldiers began to reflect on their experiences in Normandy. The veterans began to dread returning to war. The men were grateful to be in Aldbourne.

On several occasions, Easy Company was ordered to make parachute into various European locations. The new recruits were anxious and excited. However, all of the jumps were canceled, as ground armies quickly advanced through France and Belgium. Eventually, Easy Company was assigned to a risky and vital operation in Belgium, code-named Market-Garden. With three divisions jumping, the daylight jump was anticipated to be the largest airborne landing in history.

In chapter seven, the attitude in Easy Company began to change. There were mixed emotions about battle. Instead of anxious excitement, there was a dull dread at the thought of combat. Their experiences were beginning to harden and wear on their psyche. The addition of eager replacement soldiers caused the veteran members anxiety, since the casualty rate for a new recruit was a high. Still, their relationship with fellow company members remained stronger than ever. Injured soldiers hurried to return to Easy Company, rather than fight at a later date with a strange unit. The men wanted to fight with their brotherly comrades. Chapter seven also clarifies that, while the paratroopers may have been heroes on the battlefield, the men were human and not

saints. The soldiers succumbed to the drinking and raucous partying of military life. After all, the men needed recreation after the stress of battle.



Hell's Highway: Holland: September 17-October 1, 1944

Hell's Highway: Holland: September 17-October 1, 1944 Summary and Analysis

Easy Company encountered its first major setback during its Holland operation, named Market-Garden. The objective of Market-Garden was to take control of a major road and its bridges, where supply convoys could travel. The operation began as planned. In fact, the paratroopers completed their most successful landing to date. Market-Garden caught the Germans by surprise. American troops marched south, to a village called Son. The Dutch people welcomed the soldiers. Easy Company continued and led the march to Neunen, with little resistance. When the company reached Neunen, the Germans had organized its counterattack. German tanks eradicated Easy Company's supporting British tanks, forcing the company to fall back and retreat to a nearby village for the night. The Germans pushed forward, intent on moving past Neunen to cut off the major road, dubbed Hell's Highway by American troops. American soldiers moved into Neunen once German troops moved past the village.

A few days later, the men were ordered to defend Uden, a village on Hell's Highway. Easy Company and three British tanks made up the advance party. The group passed Veghel and arrived at Uden with no resistance. German troops surrounded Easy Company at Uden with tanks and patrol units. The commanding officer ordered Winters to defend the village. Winters quickly complied. For reasons unknown, the Germans changed its target to Veghel, where several Easy Company men and other division troops were located. The men in Veghel dug fox holes and endured the artillery fire through the night. British tanks and planes fought off the Germans the following day. Easy Company was reunited at Uden.

The Germans did not capitulate. German troops drove through and managed to cut the road with another counterattack. Commanding officers ordered the battalion to eliminate the German troops that located south of Veghel. It was a long, treacherous firefight. Eventually, the Germans retreated and the American paratroopers advanced to take back the road. Overall, the Market-Garden campaign ended as a failure. Nearly 8,000 of just over 10,000 troops were killed, captured or wounded during the operation.

Easy Company, with their elite training, tough attitude and continued success on the battlefield, did not make the men infallible. Operation Market-Garden in Holland was proof of that. While Easy Company performed to high standards, the optimistic planning by the Army was not enough to garner success. The Allied forces were overconfident in their superior status at Normandy and underestimated the German's toughness and resiliency. While the parachute jump and landing in Holland was a success, the Market-Garden debacle was the first time that Easy Company was forced to retreat from its

position. The operation took heavy casualty losses, which was an eye-opener for both the Allied forces and Easy Company. The war would not be won with ease.



The Island: Holland: September 17-October 1, 1944

The Island: Holland: September 17-October 1, 1944 Summary and Analysis

Easy Company continued its service on the front lines of in Holland. First, the company entrenched itself, World War I style, on an area nicknamed the Island. The Island area sat below sea level, bordered by tall embankments for flood control. The regiment relieved troops near Zetten, an area that was being held by an entire division. Winters sent men to patrol an outpost building. That evening, the patrol encountered a company of enemy soldiers. Unknown to Easy Company, a company of enemy soldiers had already infiltrated the line. The patrol informed Winters, who immediately activated the rest of the company.

The men encountered an enemy machine gun and eradicated it. Winters then led the men across a field, up to the road. On the opposite side of the road, over one hundred German troops were sitting to rest. The German soldiers were facing away from Winters. Winters and his platoon fired on the unprepared German soldiers. The Germans fled. Easy Company pursued, and discovered the second German company that had already penetrated the front line. Easy Company continued to fight, but the Germans had to pass Easy Company's line to escape. The German soldiers fought desperately, and Winters ordered his men to fall back. The platoon of thirty-five men pushed back two companies of about three hundred Germans. Winters rationalized that the Germans were ill-prepared and his men were superior in infantry tactics and physical fitness.

Ambrose gave credit to Winters' excellent decision-making skills. Colonel Sink recognized Winters' contributions and promoted Winters to Executive Officer (X.O.) of 2nd Battalion, just three months after Sink promoted Winters to captain. After Winters' promotion, a string of incompetent officers attempted to take command of Easy Company. One officer was suspected of shooting himself through the hand so he could be evacuated. Eventually, 1st Lieutenant Fred Heyliger took control of Easy Company. Winters and the men of Easy liked him. However, Winters was bored with the administrative duties of his new position, and longed to return to combat.

One evening, Winters and Heyliger met to inspect outposts along the front line. A nervous soldier accidentally shot Heyliger that night. Heyliger survived, but Easy Company needed a new commanding officer. The company received 1st Lieutenant Norman S. Dike, Jr. After two months on the front line at the Island, Easy Company turned the front line position over to Canadian soldiers and departed for France.

In chapter nine, it is appropriate that Easy Company was assigned to fight on the Island. The Island is a metaphor for both Easy Company and each of the men who fought in



the company. Although surrounded by his comrades, each man essentially fought and died alone. The company as a group was an island because its skill in battle and camaraderie among the men was unlike any other.

Winters continued to advance among the ranks and demonstrated excellent decision-making skills in the field. Winters and the company's excellence was further established when a suitable commanding officer replacement was difficult to find. Only a truly outstanding commander could lead the elite members of Easy Company. Partly due to Winters' close bond with Easy Company, Winters found it difficult to trade leadership in the field for bureaucratic paper pushing. The role did not suit Winters. He was a man of action.

The company spent additional time on the front lines in this chapter, which wore on their physical and mental psyches. However, successfully fighting the elite German unit was a temporary morale-booster. The stress and emotional toll was begin to wear down the men. Some were frightened about the notion of death, but pushed the thoughts aside in order to complete the mission. One primary reason that the men persevered was the thought that the soldier could not let down his fellow comrades. It kept the men from running and retreating. It made the men of Easy Company better soldiers.



Resting, Recovering, and Refitting: Mourmelon-le-Grand: November 26- December 18, 1944

Resting, Recovering, and Refitting: Mourmelon-le-Grand: November 26-December 18, 1944 Summary and Analysis

In chapter ten, the Company was able to rest at Camp Mourmelon in France. Simple luxuries such as showers and mail helped to boost morale. To relieve stress, the paratroopers drank and brawled while in town. The men played sports and gambled. Many received weekend passes to visit Paris. Replacement soldiers fresh from jump school were assigned to Easy Company. Easy Company was changing due to the constant promotions, deaths and woundings. Easy Company men continued to advance up the military ranks. Men in the hospital, such as Liebgott and Webster requested early discharge to return to Easy Company. Overall, Easy Company was in high spirits, expecting Christmas in Mourmelon.

In mid-December, the company ordered to Bastogne. The Allied forces were overconfident and misjudged Hitler. The German troops had reorganized after D-Day and were beginning to advance again. Upon arriving at Bastogne, the men had little food, ammunition and no winter clothing. American soldiers were running away from the front lines. Easy Company and the 101st marched toward the fight and dug in to defend Bastogne. The company had no artillery or air support.

The scene at Bastogne was the definitive moment for Easy Company. While other soldiers fled the battlefield in fear, Easy Company marched forward to take its position. The men were looking forward to a quiet Christmas in Mourmelon, but that dream would not come to fruition. Instead, they marched in the cold with little ammunition and no weather gear to a place where other trained soldiers panicked and retreated. The scene of Easy Company striding forward where others would not dare is a primary example of Easy Company's bravery and heroism.



They Got Us Surrounded-the Poor Bastards: Bastogne: December 19-31, 1944

They Got Us Surrounded-the Poor Bastards: Bastogne: December 19-31, 1944 Summary and Analysis

The military set up a ring of defense around the city of Bastogne. Easy Company's position was in a woody area across from a field. The men were spread in such a way that friendly and enemy positions were difficult to navigate. On more than one occasion, troops from both sides accidentally found themselves behind enemy lines. Easy Company endured regular artillery and mortar shell attacks. Due to the lack of proper winter gear and snowy wet weather, all of the soldiers came down with trench foot. With limited ammunition, gear and food, the situation was dire. German troops surrounded the ring of soldiers protecting Bastogne, making evacuating the injured impossible. Also, the men were cut off from receiving additional supplies. The poor weather prevented planes from flying overhead to drop supplies.

The situation was tense for Easy Company. The dark made it difficult to recognize fellow Americans. The men slept every night in excruciatingly cold and uncomfortable foxholes. Fires were forbidden, because the smoke and light gave away the men's position. With little else to pass the time, the soldiers talked or sang in their foxholes. On December 21st, platoon leader Lieutenant Peacock gathered his men for a combat patrol to collect information and secure a German prisoner for interrogation. The platoon ended up losing one man and failed to bring back a prisoner.

Corporal Gordon was shot in the neck by a German soldier and paralyzed when the opposing line attempted to break through. Easy Company held the troops back with the assistance of artillery and mortar fire. The soldiers spent Christmas on the front lines of Bastogne. While General McAuliffe attempted to keep the men's spirits high, morale was low due to the dreadful conditions. The day after Christmas, though, General Patton and his battalion broke through the German lines, providing much-needed food, supplies and support. The siege between the surrounded 101st Airborne Division and German troops became famous. The press relayed the saga to back to the U.S., making the men legends.

Easy Company expected to receive relief from the front line, but the Army ordered the soldiers to remain where they were. The men received supplies such as cold weather gear, but it was still cold and uncomfortable. German troops tested Easy Company on a daily basis with artillery and light infantry attacks.



The siege at Bastogne would prove to be a true test of will for Easy Company. The harsh conditions and constant assignment to the front lines made the men weary and susceptible to breaking under the stress. Still, the soldiers persevered. When surrounded by enemy troops and cut off from supplies, the men did not sink into despair, give up and surrender. Instead, Easy Company literally dug in for the fight. Huddled together in foxholes for warmth, the men supported one another physically and emotionally. If a man was injured, the medic would rush to the soldier's aid, and his friends would assist the injured soldier the best they could. Easy Company's bonds of brotherhood solidified on the icy battlefield in Bastogne. It was, by far, their most arduous fight.



The Breaking Point: Bastogne: January 1-13, 1945

The Breaking Point: Bastogne: January 1-13, 1945 Summary and Analysis

With the Bastogne siege over, the men of Easy Company prepared to attack and take the nearby village of Foy. Winters gave the command for the advance. The line was spread so thinly that the soldiers had trouble keeping contact with each other. The poor visibility also made it difficult for the German troops to fire upon the Americans. The advancing line in Easy Company's sector received relatively minimal resistance. That night, though, heavy German artillery fired upon Easy Company, resulting in heavy casualties. Lieutenant Dike, Easy Company's new commanding officer, retreated and left the company on its own. Lipton took command. The next morning, after the attack, Dike returned. The men began to bend under the heavy pressure of constant battle. Lieutenant Buck Compton, a Normandy and Holland veteran broke under the pressure of seeing two of his closest friends were seriously injured by heavy artillery at Bastogne. At this point, Easy Company spent a total of 116 days on the front lines. Then, the company was pulled off of the front lines to reserve status. However, during a clearing operation near Foy, the company suffered additional casualties during another artillery attack. Easy Company dug in.

The men were ordered to attack Foy. Winters selected Easy Company for the task. During the advance, commanding officer Dike stopped the line of advance, a decision that put the operation in jeopardy and could have resulted in the death of many men. Winters, incensed, ordered 1st lieutenant Ronald C. Speirs to take command. Speirs successfully completed the objective. Easy Company continued its advance and overtook Foy. Winters relieved Dike of his command and placed Speirs at the command of Easy Company.

After an extensive search for the ideal Easy Company commander, a blatant mistake by a skittish Lieutenant Dike led to Speirs' reappointment to Easy Company. The fit was ideal, as Speirs was a tough and brave soldier. Appointing Speirs marked a turning point for Easy Company. In Bastogne, the men were clearly battered by the long days of heavy fighting. The soldiers endured watching so many friends die or become seriously injured. Easy Company endured horrendous conditions while under the constant strain of death. Morale was low. Bastogne was the climax of the war for Easy Company, in terms of stress. It was the greatest test. However, successfully taking Foy under Speirs' command marked a positive turn for the men. Easy Company finally had a commanding officer who was not afraid to lead them.

Attack: Noville: January 14-17, 1945

Attack: Noville: January 14-17, 1945 Summary and Analysis

In chapter thirteen, Easy Company was ordered to lead the attack on Noville. Winters was unhappy with the plan, but followed orders. First and 2nd Battalion participated in the attack. After a heavy firefight, Easy Company and the 2nd Battalion held Noville. To the men's dismay, Easy Company did not receive relief on the front lines after the difficult fight. Instead, General Taylor ordered the battalion north, to a village called Rachamps. The American troops advanced steadily under moderate resistance, but most of the Germans fled when the Americans reached the village.

At Rachamps, the men stayed inside of a building for the first time in a month. Finally, the 101st division was ordered off of the front line. Easy Company maintained heavy losses during the Bastogne siege. The survivors recounted the mental scars they suffered during the arduous battle. The soldiers felt that a combination of training, leadership and strong bonds with fellow soldiers carried them through to complete the mission at hand.

Chapter thirteen describes the end of intense fighting in the Bastogne area for Easy Company. Although unhappy about another mission to take Rachamps, the battle was not disheartening and morale steadied. In comparison to the Bastogne siege, the resistance was minimal. After being pulled from the front lines, the men had an opportunity to recover and reflect on the experience. The suffering Easy Company went through when the soldiers were surrounded by enemy troops bonded the unlikely friends to a level even deeper than brotherhood.



The Patrol: Haguenau: January 18-February 23, 1945

The Patrol: Haguenau: January 18-February 23, 1945 Summary and Analysis

Easy Company trucked to Alsace in treacherous snowy weather. The company moved into the front line at the city of Haguenau. The soldiers were grateful to stay in buildings rather than foxholes. The men spent most of their time eating and patrolling the German line. To the company's dismay, the Army assigned additional replacement soldiers to their group. Captain Nixon ordered Winters to send a patrol across the river and behind German lines to procure prisoners for interrogation. Winters chose Easy Company for the task.

The mission was a risky proposal. The patrol would travel across the river on four boats under the cover of night. Three made it across the river. The fourth capsized. Easy Company succeeded in bringing back two prisoners. The prisoner count would have been three, but one of the German soldiers sustained injury. The Americans decided to leave the enemy soldier on the German riverbank, where he eventually succumbed to his wounds. Easy Company lost one man, Private Jackson, from a grenade fragment in his skull. Colonel Sink was so pleased with Easy Company's success that he ordered another patrol the following night. Winters ordered the men to stand down and report to Colonel Sink that the mission was unsuccessful. When Easy Company moved off the front lines, Winters received a promotion to major.

Winters continued to trust and favor Easy Company to complete mission objectives, as illustrated in chapter fourteen. Winters' close bond with the men was demonstrated by the act of risking his career, lying to a commanding officer and failing to obey a direct order. Instead of putting Easy Company through a risky, unnecessary patrol, Winters ordered the men to submit a fake report about an unsuccessful mission. This selfless act demonstrated Winters' leadership style of "officers go first." Winters had already overseen a successful operation the previous night, so he was not against ordering the men into danger when it was warranted. However, Winters did not appreciate the fact that the Army wanted to risk additional lives when the risk exceeded the rewards.



The Best Feeling in the World: Mourmelon: February 25-April 2, 1945

The Best Feeling in the World: Mourmelon: February 25-April 2, 1945 Summary and Analysis

Easy Company rode a train through France, back to Mourmelon. The men showered for the first time in ten weeks and received fresh uniforms. Winters ordered rigorous training to help the new replacement soldiers integrate into the company. Colonel Sink began making temporary assignments official. Nixon was demoted from regimental to battalion staff due to his excessive drinking. Major Winters was assigned 2nd Battalion C.O. Captain. On one occasion, Winters encountered Captain Sobel. Sobel pretended not to see Winters as he walked past. Winters called out to Sobel, and Sobel was obligated to salute Winters.

Easy Company continued to have high regard for Captain Speirs. Some of the men disagreed with Speirs for killing an insubordinate American soldier in Normandy, but men such as Webster felt that Speirs was an effective leader in battle. In March, the division held a parade that top Army leaders, including General Eisenhower, attended. The men were given furlough time to travel Europe, but training continued. The men waited for orders to depart on a daylight parachute jump mission near Berlin. However, Eisenhower decided to use the 17th Airborne division instead of the 101st. The replacement troops were disappointed at not having the opportunity to participate in a live combat jump. Veteran soldiers felt mixed emotions about being left behind. At this point, the Allied forces felt confident that the war was nearing an end. Easy Company veterans were hopeful about making it home safely. Replacement soldiers were eager to prove themselves in battle. The men advanced into Germany by truck, not plane.

Despite Sobel's best attempts, Winters was successful in outranking Captain Sobel and gleaned pleasure when Winters had an opportunity show off his ranking status to Sobel. Winters' pointed remark to Sobel could be construed as slightly immature, but understandable based on Sobel's past regressions against Winters. Chapter fifteen marked a turning point for the men. Easy Company was given a reprieve from the constant front line assignments. The soldiers were furnished with off-duty passes to travel Europe. Also, Speirs had proved to be an excellent choice to lead a company as elite and tough as Easy. Instead of marching into battle, the soldiers marched in a parade. Then, after expecting orders to parachute into combat again, another division was given the job. Surprisingly, the paratroopers felt slightly disheartened while watching other men depart for the mission. While Easy Company was relieved at the opportunity to remain out of combat after fighting extensively in France and Holland, they maintained a certain pride that Easy Company and the 101st Airborne division were the toughest soldiers in the Army. In some ways, it felt wrong for them not to fight.



Chapter fifteen also introduced the notion of replacement soldiers. Easy Company was taking heavy casualties, and additional soldiers were needed to fill in the gaps. Veteran soldiers of Normandy and Holland were disappointed that the Army would assign new, unseasoned recruits to a unit that maintained such high casualty rates. The veterans knew that the life expectancy of a newly recruited replacement soldier was short, so the veterans decided not to waste time getting to know the replacements. With the introduction of replacement soldiers, the growth and experience of the original Taccoa company members from training camp to France and Holland is heavily illustrated. The replacement troops were mirrors of the veterans' past selves, with the same excitement and hunger to fight that the veterans had in Normandy. At this point in the book, the veterans were grizzled and battle worn. The veterans had moved past the idealistic and romanticized notion of war, and simply wanted to make it home alive.



Getting to Know the Enemy: Germany: April 2-30, 1945

Getting to Know the Enemy: Germany: April 2-30, 1945 Summary and Analysis

In chapter sixteen, Easy Company traveled into Germany as an occupation force rather than combative action. Surprisingly, most of the soldiers found the German people likable and similar to Americans. The Germans were clean, hard-working and disciplined in the soldiers' eyes. This was in contrast to the impressions war propaganda instilled in them. The Army enforced a strict non-fraternization policy between the soldiers and German people. Easy Company occupied an area on the Rhine, near Dusseldorf. There, the men were ordered to patrol the area. The majority of patrols were uneventful, except for a few sporadic incidents with a few German riflemen. One eager staff officer made a fatal mistake by leading a night patrol across the river without informing the Army. The officer and his men were shot by friendly forces believing that the men were enemy troops.

Due to the lack of combative action, the men of Easy Company looked for ways to fill their time. They played sports and explored the secure German areas. In April, 325,000 German soldiers surrendered to American troops. Easy Company liberated the people of a Displaced Persons' camp, where European people were imprisoned by the Nazis. The displaced people (DP) worked and fraternized with the American troops. Webster was disgusted by the camps and blamed the German people for the atrocities. In April, Easy Company and its division moved further into Germany toward the Alps. The objective was to take over Hitler's Eagle's Nest. The Eagle's Nest was Hitler's mountaintop retreat. Easy Company embarked on the trip by train, then by hybrid amphibious vehicle. The men found the German countryside breathtaking and idyllic. The soldiers, in wartime tradition, seized personal property and souvenirs when passing through German towns. Upon arrival at a German town, the soldiers evacuated the residents for the duration of the soldiers' stay.

While the men did not destroy the homes, the soldiers took what they pleased. As Easy Company continued into Germany, they came across more and more German troops surrendering. Nearing the Alps, Easy Company encountered its first concentration work camp. General Taylor declared martial law and ordered the German townspeople to clean up the camp and bury bodies.

In chapter sixteen, the tone is hopeful due to the absence of fierce enemy battle. Easy Company was tentatively optimistic about making it home from the war alive. Besides a few skirmishes, the soldiers essentially entered Germany as a conquering force. The men slowly came to realize that the end of the war was imminent, with the countless surrendering German soldiers they spotted on their journey. There was no need to take unnecessary risks, but needless deaths still occurred due to accidents or general lack of



thought. While the American troops, such as Webster, were surprised by how similar the German people were to Americans, the discovery of a workers' prison camp reminded them why their siege was so important. The battle of good versus evil is a metaphor for the entire war. While the Americans could relate to the German people when it came to work ethic and cleanliness, the juxtaposition of injustice that occurred in the German country was a flaw that the Americans could not identify with.

Easy Company's looting was, on one hand, for personal gain and viewed as reparations for the horrible experiences they endured. On another hand, it was punishment to the German people for allowing the actions of the Nazi party to continue, requiring the Army to intervene in the first place. Easy Company took advantage of the opportunity to reside in well-appointed German homes during their travels. The inhabitants were shut out of their homes for the night, which may seem cruel to some. However, after experiencing the discomfort and pain of battle and sleeping in foxholes for nearly three years, it was an understandable practice.



Drinking Hitler's Champagne: Berchtesgaden: May 1-8, 1945

Drinking Hitler's Champagne: Berchtesgaden: May 1-8, 1945 Summary and Analysis

In chapter seventeen, Easy Company continued to approach Berchtesgaden, the village of high-ranking Nazi leaders, which led to Hitler's Eagle's Nest. The Allied countries were in a race to Hitler's famous residence. The Army occupied the grandiose Nazi homes while the German troops continued to surrender. American soldiers, as conquerors, looted the town and confiscated valuable personal effects from surrendering German soldiers. Easy Company was the first to reach Hitler's Eagle's Nest. The American military promptly ransacked the residence. Winters discovered a gigantic cellar filled with liquor and wine from across the globe. Winters shared his findings with his friend and alcohol connoisseur, Captain Nixon.

The soldiers had luxurious homes to stay in, opportunities for looting and a seemingly unending supply of alcohol. The men began to celebrate the end of the war and their survival. A few men encountered German people in surrounding rural areas. The German residents and troops toasted the war's end together.

By scaling Hitler's Eagle's Nest, the men of Easy Company had come full circle. While training at Toccoa, the symbol of achievement was running up Mount Currahee. At the end of the company's three year tour, the men scaled the ultimate mountain, which was the top of Hitler's Eagle's Nest. This achievement symbolizes the end of the war and Easy Company's European campaign. With Easy Company as the first troops to occupy the Eagle's Nest, the feat also symbolizes the American's triumph over the evils of the Nazi party.



The Soldier's Dream Life: Austria: May 8-July 31, 1945

The Soldier's Dream Life: Austria: May 8-July 31, 1945 Summary and Analysis

Chapter eighteen details Easy Company's activities after Germany surrendered to Allied troops. While Easy Company journeyed to Austria, the celebration continued. The troops arrived at Zell am See, Austria with dirty uniforms and unshaven faces. The American troops contrasted sharply with the pristinely groomed German soldiers. Winters accepted the formal surrender from a decorated German colonel. The German troops were cooperative and followed Winters' orders beyond his expectations. Captain Speirs gathered information about a possible Nazi slave labor camp leader hiding in the mountains. Speirs ordered three of his men to locate and kill the man. The soldiers found the alleged Nazi camp leader and shot him to death. With no enemy to fight, the troops passed the time by playing sports, travelling, hunting, skiing, drinking and fraternizing with the local women.

However, the soldiers were anxious to return home. A man needed a certain number of points to earn discharge papers and trip home. Points were awarded based on medals, amount of time in active duty and whether the soldier was married. The point system caused anger and frustration among the troops. Many Normandy veterans were disgruntled about falling short of necessary points. Any positive sentiments the soldiers held about the Army disappeared. The combined point system frustration, excessive drinking and lack of enemy to fight had negative consequences. Road accidents were frequent. On one occasion, a drunken soldier shot Sergeant "Chuck" Grant in the head. Easy Company located the man, a replacement soldier from a different company. Easy Company kicked and beat him. Private Hack Hansen, Grant's close friend, attempted to shoot the perpetrator. Hansen's pistol backfired. A German surgeon operated on Grant and saved his life. Over time, Easy Company was slowly disbanded. Most of the Normandy veterans returned home. The remaining troops expected to continue fighting in the Pacific. However, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, ending the need for additional fighting in Japan. The Army deactivated Easy Company on November 30, 1945.

In chapter eighteen, the end of the war did not mean the end of violence. Certainly, the men were celebratory about no longer being ordered to fight. But the constant drinking, boredom and lack of enemy led to heartbreaking accidents and internal Army fighting. Sergeant Grant nearly died by the hands of another American soldier. Still, Easy Company did not exact revenge on Grant's attacker. Even Speirs, who was rumored to kill for far less an infraction, stayed his weapon. The author believes that the soldiers were tired of the death and killing. Despite the leisurely time, the soldiers were anxious to return home.



The theme of military bureaucracy is found in chapter eighteen. Webster was already disillusioned by the Army at this point of the war, and although he earned the proper number of points for discharge, he could not convince the Army of his eligibility until after most of his comrades had already returned home. The point system itself caused a lot of discord among the men. The system was based on medals and time on the battlefield. However, it did not weight equally among the men, and several veterans were disgruntled. General Taylor tried to help by conferring additional medals to the men, but the bureaucracy continued and it took weeks before the awards were processed. Also, the men's feelings toward the German soldiers became more humanized. Previously, the Germans were regarded as animals. At the end of the war, the soldiers started seeing the Germans as people. The Americans and Germans co-existed with civility.



Postwar Careers: 1945-1991

Postwar Careers: 1945-1991 Summary and Analysis

The final chapter of the book follows the postwar lives of several men who served with Easy Company. Overall, the group was a successful bunch. The author credits at least part of that success to WWII experiences with the Army. The soldiers grew up during the Depression era and most worked hard to build a successful and happy life. Most of the men raised families and gained success in the workforce. Several became builders and engineers. Even those who were injured and disabled, such as corporal Walter Gordon, sergeant Joe Toye, sergeant Bill Guarnere and sergeant Chuck Grant, persevered. Gordon earned a law degree. Toye worked in a textile and steel mill despite losing his right leg. Guarnere also lost a leg and worked as a printer, salesman, clerk and carpenter. Grant became an entrepreneur as the owner of a small store.

Not all of the men carried the burdens of war memories well. Sergeant Floyd Talbert became overwhelmed with emotional scars and drifted in life. Captain Sobel never recovered from his disappointment of losing Easy Company. He spent the rest of his life blaming Easy Company for his life's ills. Sergeant Skinny Sisk could not get over the wartime killing until his niece told Sisk that God still loved him. Sisk later became an ordained minister. Other men continued on as a career soldiers with the Army. A few, such as John Martin, Don Moone and Carwood Lipton, became rich businessmen. Many Easy Company veterans entered the construction and building trade. Winters fulfilled his D-Day promise and purchased a small farm to live in peace.

More of an epilogue than a final chapter, the author details the postwar lives of several Easy Company veterans. The theme of overcoming adversity is a prevalent theme in the final chapter. Some men were able to overcome the trauma they experienced. Those who became physically disabled continued on with life as family men. Overall, the group was a successful bunch because their experiences in the war helped them to appreciate life and freedom. The men were thankful for surviving the horrible circumstances of the war. Also, the Army taught the men essential skills, such as perseverance, hard work and the ability to work well with others. Still, the emotional scars remained. Talbert lost perspective of his life and drifted aimlessly, overcome with the emotional toll of his memories. He was unable to forgive himself and move on from the wartime experiences. Sobel is another example of a soldier's inability to move on. His blame for Easy Company consumed him, resulting in an attempted suicide. The chapter also reinforces just how closely Easy Company bonded during its three-year engagement. Decades after the war and living in separate parts of the country, the men continued keep in touch with one another.



Characters

Richard Winters

Dick Winters is the primary character of the book. At Easy Company's inception, Winters began as 2nd Lieutenant. When the company made its initial parachute jump into Normandy, Winters became Easy's de facto commanding officer. Eventually, he was appointed as the official commanding officer of the company, but was quickly promoted. By the end of Easy Company's three-year tour, Winters was promoted to the rank of Major.

Winters' primary adversary in the book was Easy's first commanding officer, Captain Herbert Sobel. Unlike Sobel, Winters was universally liked by the men. Winters was not arrogant and did not seek medals. Unlike many military men, he did not gamble or drink alcohol. Winters was described as being worshiped and held in high regard due to his kind nature, high expectations and leadership skills when leading the men into combat. Winters demonstrated his uncanny ability to make decisions in the field from Easy Company's first jump into Normandy. Although the men landed outside of their planned landing zone, Winters collected the men he could find and led them toward the designated rally point. Winters was then ordered to lead twelve men into a German garrison and disarm four enemy machine guns. Winters was successful. Subsequent success on the battle field led to several military promotions. When he was no longer Easy Company's direct commander, he took special interest in the company by closely following its engagements during the war. At the end of the campaign, Winters was with Easy Company when the men invaded Hitler's Eagle's Nest. After the war, Winters continued to stay in touch with the men of Easy Company.

Herbert Sobel

Captain Sobel was Easy Company's first commanding officer. The men loathed his demanding, tyrannical and arrogant nature. Sobel was described as ungainly, uncoordinated and lacked the proper decision-making skills to lead the men. Captain Sobel bordered on the verge of cruelty when disciplining the men. Sobel felt threatened by Winters early on at basic training and later attempted to court martial Winters for an unjust infraction. When Winters was transferred out of Easy Company, several non-commissioned officers banded together and attempted to overthrow Sobel. The battalion commanders later transferred Sobel out of Easy Company to run a parachute jump training school.

While Sobel had an unpleasant disposition, the author acknowledged that his extreme training measures and high expectations for Easy Company to exceed its peers resulted in a group of highly trained men. Major Winters enjoyed one passing encounter with Captain Sobel when Sobel attempted to avoid Winters' gaze. Winters called out to Sobel, reminding Sobel that he was to salute a ranking officer. After the war, Sobel was



described as bitter toward Easy Company. Sobel was unhappy and blamed Easy Company for his life's ills. He attempted to kill himself, but failed. He passed away in September 1988.

Ronald C. Speirs

Speirs was a tough, handsome soldier. On D-Day, Speirs successfully led the attack on the final German gun that Winters was ordered to disarm. Speirs had a reputation among the men for being aggressive and brave. He was awarded the Silver Star for his service in Normandy during a bayonet attack. In addition to being a tough soldier, he was the subject of several rumors. One rumor alleged that Speirs killed a member of his drunken platoon after giving an order to cease drinking. Another rumor suggested that Speirs was responsible for gunning down a group of ten German prisoners of war after offering each of them a final cigarette. Still, Speirs exhibited heroism on the battlefield, showing virtually no fear, even while under direct fire. Speirs eventually became the commanding officer of Easy Company.

David Kenyon Webster

Webster was a Harvard English major who found it difficult to adjust to the raucousness of military life. Webster's was an intellectual and observer. He did not seek medals or promotion. Webster's written diaries, notes and letters left an excellent record of his time in Easy Company, and the book's author frequently referenced his writings. Private Webster trained with the original Easy Company men, but was wounded a few days after the D-Day jump. Upon his recovery, Webster requested to return to Easy Company. He craved action and had a strong desire to fight. Webster continued to fight with Easy in Austria and Germany, surviving to see the end of the war. But toward the end of his military career, Webster became disillusioned with the Army's bureaucracy. After the war, continued his writing career in California.

Bill Guarnere

One of the original members of Easy Company, Guarnere was promoted from sergeant to private within one year of beginning basic training. A few days before D-Day, Guarnere learned that his brother was killed in action. The anger Guarnere felt motivated him to exact vengeance on as many German troops as possible. He was awarded a Silver Star for his service in Normandy on D-Day, as a member of the twelve soldiers who disarmed a garrison of enemy machine guns. He was injured during the siege in Bastogne, losing his leg in an artillery attack. After the war, Guarnere was incredibly active in Easy Company reunions.



Don Malarkey

Private Malarkey of Astoria, Oregon was one of the original Taccoa men in Easy Company. He received a bronze star for his efforts at D-Day to destroy a battery of German machine guns. One of Malarkey's most memorable experiences during the war was a brief conversation with Allied commander Dwight D. Eisenhower and Prime Minister Winston Churchill during a regimental inspection.

Carwood Lipton

Carwood Lipton was one of the four first privates in Easy Company. He was promoted to sergeant within a year. At Carentan, Lipton was hit by shell fragments, one narrowly missing his groin and hitting his leg. Another fragment injured his hand. Lipton was sensitive after wounding his hand, fearing that it would affect his ability to play college football. In Haguenau, Lipton was wounded again by mortar shell fragment to his cheek. The next day, Winters presented Lipton with a battlefield commission as 2nd lieutenant. After the war, Lipton majored in engineering and raised a family. After a successful career in manufacturing, he retired to North Carolina.

Joseph Liebgott

Private Liebgott was one of the only Jewish members in the regiment. Like other soldiers, he enjoyed collecting souvenirs from the bodies of dead German troops. Liebgott bragged about one particular souvenir, a finger he cut from a lifeless German body. He also had a reputation for being rough on German prisoners. After Easy Company captured eleven German troops, Winters ordered Liebgott to escort the prisoners to battalion headquarters. Realizing that Liebgott was zealous for the assignment, Winters ordered Liebgott to carry only one round of ammunition in his rifle to ensure that the prisoners arrived at headquarters alive.

Harry Welsh

Harry Welsh was a spirited Irishman and described as a "reluctant officer." Welsh was assigned to Easy Company as 2nd lieutenant during the company's parachute school training. Welsh was promoted to sergeant three times before receiving officer status. He was a tough soldier who was constantly demoted for fighting. Welsh and Winters quickly became friends due to their similar leadership style. Welsh jumped with Easy Company into Normandy, narrowly escaped injury and possible death when his plane was hit by enemy fire. By the time Easy Company occupied Holland, Welsh was serving as the company's executive officer as the "oldest serving officer in the company." Yet, he was not one of the original company members at Taccoa.



Robert Rader

Rader was one of the original members of Easy Company, starting as a private and quickly becoming promoted to sergeant. He was described as a conscientious soldier who cared for the men under his command. During the Bastogne siege, Rader and his friend Corporal Don Hoobler manned the outpost station on Christmas Eve to allow the other men rest on the holiday night. After the war, Rader spent more than thirty years teaching handicapped high school students in California.

Robert Sink

Colonel Sink was the regimental commander of the 506th Parachute Infantry, of which Easy Company was a part of. A West Point Graduate, Sink promoted Winters to 1st lieutenant in the first few weeks of basic training at Camp Toccoa. Colonel Sink also reassigned Captain Sobel to run a parachute jumping school rather than command Easy Company. At the end of the war, Sink was promoted to assistant division commander.



Objects/Places

Camp Taccoa

Camp Taccoa was the birthplace of Easy Company. Located in George, Taccoa is where the original company was formed and conducted basic military training.

Mount Currahee

"Currahee!" became a battle cry for Easy Company men who trained and bonded at Camp Taccoa. The mountain, or hill, rose one thousand feet above Taccoa. Easy Company trained constantly by running up and down Currahee.

Fort Benning

Fort Benning is where the men of Easy Company learned to become paratroopers. The jump school training school took place at Benning, and was where the successful candidates earned their wings.

Aldbourne

Easy Company's first overseas location was Aldbourne. It was a small, English village where the men lived alongside the local people rather than in isolation on a military base. Aldbourne was the rally point for the military to prepare for its invasion of Europe.

Carentan

Carentan was where Winters led his second major maneuver after landing in Normandy. He successfully led Easy Company to overtake the German-occupied village.

D-Day

D-Day took place on June 6, 1944 and marked the European invasion by Allied troops during World War II. The invasion was staged in Normandy, France.

Bastogne

Bastogne is a town in Belgium where Easy Company was surrounded by German forces while lacking supplies and equipment. The men endured sleeping outdoors in foxholes while enduring mortar attacks and severe cold weather.



Market-Garden

Market-Garden was the code name for a risky and unsuccessful Allied military attack against the Germans that took place in Holland.

Eagle's Nest

The Eagle's Nest was Hitler's opulent home and retreat in Bavaria. The Allied invasion of Hitler's Eagle's Nest represented the end of Easy Company's German campaign.

Screaming Eagles

The Screaming Eagles referred to the men of the 101st Airborne infantry. The men of this elite group, including Easy Company, wore the screaming eagle insignia patch.

Themes

Brothers in Arms

The primary theme in the book revolves around the profound, psychological bond that grew between the men. Beginning with their deep hatred of Captain Sobel during the company's training period, Easy Company had a shared enemy before the first war battle began. Sobel ordered harsh and extreme reprimands, such as ordering a man to dig a 6-foot by 6-foot hole with entrenching tools, then demanding that the soldier refill the hole upon completion. If the soldier was not a favorite, Sobel would find any excuse to mark him down or deny a weekend pass. It was the final straw when Sobel attempted to unjustly court martial Winters. Both the author and Easy Company veterans agreed that the collective abhorrence for Sobel's leadership style led to the company's initial closeness.

The true bonds of brotherhood, however, were solidified on the battlefield. The men who were once strangers from different backgrounds were suddenly thrust into the violence of war. The shared atrocities the soldiers experienced, such as the constant killing and watching friends die, deepened the closeness the men felt for each other. The veterans in the book described the bond as closer than brothers, or even lovers. The men of Easy Company were willing to kill and be killed for their fellow soldier. Easy Company's ability to band together and stay sane during the siege at Bastogne was directly credited to the men's close kinship. No man in Easy Company wanted to disappoint their comrades. This is the reason so many men, including Private Webster, fled the confines of the hospital ward and requested to rejoin Easy Company.

Heroism

The theme of heroism infuses the book. The paratroopers in Easy Company were certainly not perfect or pure. Raucous and proud, the men of Easy were regularly inebriated, gambled often and engaged in fist fights with other soldiers. The British civilians were astonished by Easy Company's wild, unruly behavior when the soldiers were given a weekend pass from military duties. In addition, Easy Company constantly looted the homes of private citizens during their tour of duty in Europe.

But on the battlefield, the men were heroes. According to the author, the man who exhibited the ideal traits of honor and heroism was Major Winters. The soldiers respected Winters and trusted his leadership. Winters did not like to sit back and bark orders. Instead, Winters led his men into battle, fighting alongside them. As a leader, Winters was humble and fair. As a group, the men of Easy Company endured more stress at the front lines than can be imagined. The soldiers were volunteers, and the men fought bravely for their country in a company with more than a 150 percent casualty rate. At Bastogne, when other soldiers fled, Easy Company raced forward to



continue the fight. During the siege at Bastogne, the soldiers of Easy Company prevailed over an enemy that had access to superior equipment.

Death and Mortality in Wartime

As the soldiers engaged in violent battles, the men were inundated with death and faced their own mortality. In Normandy, the paratroopers were excited to join the fight. As time wore on, though, and as the casualty rate climbed, the men became understandably hesitant to rush into a battle. As the bonds between Easy Company soldiers continued to grow, the fighting became less about the politics of war and more about the man who stood beside him. Death was always imminent, commonplace, and it was unknown when the killing would end. The soldiers slowly became calloused toward death and their own mortality.

Private Webster wrote a letter informing his parents that death was a commonplace occurrence in war and generally accepted when fighting on the front lines. Major Winters admitted that, as the war raged on, he came to terms with the fact that he may not make it out of the war alive. Also, as replacement soldiers were assigned to Easy Company, the veteran soldiers were reluctant to befriend them. In the veterans' eyes, the rookie soldiers would quickly become killed, making friendly interaction pointless. In many ways, the callousness toward death helped the men overcome disabling fear during a violent firefight. Instead of stopping to mourn a lost friend in the heat of battle, the soldier could continue with his task to support the remaining company members. The constant death also gave perspective to the veterans who survived the war. Winters made a promise to live in peace on a small farm if he survived. After the war, he had a family and settled down on a small farm. During an interview with the author, Winters was horrified when Ambrose suggested that Winters shoot an injured goose. Apparently, Winters had had enough of death and killing.

Style

Perspective

The historical book has a point of view from both the third and first person. The point of view is reliably based on several first-hand accounts from Easy Company members. The author and historian, Stephen Ambrose, narrates the story as a third person omniscient based on interviews and written records of the men, as well as military historical records. On rare occasion, the author jumps outside of the historical viewpoint as a third person omniscient and narrates the story in first person in the present tense, such as when the author describes an interview session with Major Winters. Ambrose admits that, based on elapsed time since the war and memory variances of the interviewees, it is not possible to ensure that each scene and description is one hundred percent accurate. However, the story is crafted by combining each cumulative man's experiences to create the most accurate account available.

The story is told in mostly chronological order, beginning with Easy Company's inception and ending with its disbandment and post-war follow-up. The chronological narrative provides structure to the story, which can become confusing due to the story's numerous training field and battlefield locations. Each chapter breaks up Easy Company's exploits based on time and location. Also, the narrative is littered with direct, first-person quotes from the soldiers, providing a personalized viewpoint and enforcing the story's reliability. The first person narrative also assists with character development, helping the reader focus on each character's emotions and experiences. However, the vast number of soldiers that Ambrose references makes the story difficult to follow. In addition, the narrative jumps from soldier to soldier, which causes another challenge and some confusion when reading the text.

Tone

The language of the book is relaxed and accessible. Sentences are constructed in a straightforward fashion with no overly descriptive or flowery verbiage. The straightforward style makes the narrative relatively easy to follow. Being an historical book, scenes are described in the past tense. As a military historian, the author uses a variety of military acronyms and vocabulary with truncated or lacking explanation. The result could make it difficult for a civilian audience to follow certain areas of the story and requires the reader to reference back to earlier sections of the narrative.

The language used is reflective of the culture during World War II, particularly the jocular male military culture. A large portion of the book references direct character quotes through interviews and written accounts. The language regularly switches between the style of an impartial third person observer and casually friendly dialogue. Both the author's commentary and direct quotes from interviewees contain some profanity in the text. The use of casual prose, rather than stiff textbook language, places



the reader alongside soldiers during battle scenes, making it easier for the reader to relate to the characters and remember that the stories are real, not fictional. The author strikes a careful balance between the historical and political background that takes place during each chapter while concentrating on the major theme of the story, which is the relationship of the men who fought on the front lines.

Structure

The book includes nineteen chapters, each approximately fifteen to twenty pages in length. Each chapter indicates the dates and locations of the individual narrative. In addition, each chapter is titled with a quote or reference that foreshadows a major theme or event that occurs. The chapters are moderate in length and broken down into sub-scenes for multiple incidents within the chapter's titled time period.

The plot of the story involves a large number of sub-plots. Within the storyline, the abundant number of characters can be confusing. Overall, the story follows a group of men who enter World War II and fight for their country until the German enemy is defeated. Under that umbrella, the story follows individual men with distinct experiences, emotions and backgrounds. However, the men of Easy Company have shared experiences on the battlefield. The author swings between individual character plots and the character's shared experiences, such as during basic training and overseas battles. The final chapter ends with individual post-war follow-up for many of the characters.

The story moves quickly from the training ground at Camp Taccoa to Easy Company's first combat mission. The author continues the brisk pace throughout Easy Company's European campaign. Each chapter provides the right combination of historical and tactical background before describing a battle scene. In addition, the author connects each scene with the emotions and thoughts of the men who experienced it. The result is a compelling yet historically educational book.



Quotes

"We know how to win wars. We must learn now how to win peace."
p. 66

"You had to be a little bit awed that you were part of a thing that was so much greater than you."
p. 67

"And he made a promise to himself: if he lived through the war, he was going to find an isolated farm somewhere and spend the remainder of his life in peace and quiet."
p. 88

"They hadn't come here to fear. They hadn't come here to die. They had come to win."
p. 88

"If we lost half the barracks in one goddamn little maneuver in Normandy [...] forget it, we'll never get home."
p. 110

"I wish I could persuade you to regard death as casually as we do over here. In the heat of battle you expect casualties, you expect somebody to be killed and you are not surprised when a friend is machine-gunned in the face."
p.111

"[T]he boys aren't as enthusiastic or anxious to get it over with as they were before Normandy. Nobody wants to fight anymore."
p. 117

"He provided not only brains but personal leadership. 'Follow me' was his code. He personally killed more Germans and took more risks than anyone else."
p. 153

"They say that shock is largely physical, but it seems to me that one's mental attitude has a lot to do with it."
p. 157

"You look first to the left, then the right, at your buddies also preparing. You feel confident with Bill over there. You know you can depend on him."
p. 178

"They've got us surrounded—the poor bastards."
p. 182

"They knew fear together. Not only the fear of death or wound, but the fear that all this was for nothing."
p. 221



"[W]e wondered if the people would ever know what it cost the soldiers in terror, bloodshed, and hideous, agonizing deaths to win the war."
p. 233

"The result of sharing all that stress throughout training and combat has created a bond between the men of E Company that will last forever."
p. 291

"Grandpa, were you a hero in the war?"
"No," I answered, "but I served in a company of heroes."
p. 307



Topics for Discussion

On multiple occasions throughout the text, the author credits Captain Sobel as one of the primary reasons that Easy Company had such a tightly knit bond. Do you agree with the author's assessment? Why or why not? Cite specific examples in the text that support your contention.

Discuss ethics and morality during wartime. For example, the soldiers began looting the personal property of enemy homes. Was the motive for looting purely for personal gain? Was it justified? Why or why not?

Describe a relational bond you have with someone in your life. Examples can be a friend, sibling, parent or teammate. Compare and contrast your relational bond with those in the book. Did your bond form from a mutual adversary or a through a positive experience? How do you maintain your bond? What benefits do you gain?

Compare and contrast Major Winters's leadership style to Captain Sobel's. In what ways was Winters a superior commanding officer? The men of Easy Company vilified Sobel. Did Sobel have any redeeming qualities? Cite specific examples from the text.

Discuss the soldiers' feelings about death in combat. Was there a change in sentiment between the Camp Taccoa basic training period and the taking of Hitler's Eagle's Nest? Which soldiers experienced a change, if any? Was there another change after the war ended? If so, explain how and why the change occurred.

Joining the paratrooper division during wartime was a risky and dangerous commitment. Yet, the men of Easy Company all volunteered for the assignment. What was their motivation? How were the men similar? How were they different? What caused the men of Easy Company to cultivate a personal bond that was closer than other military units?

The men of Easy Company were fond of the German people, despite the propaganda and preconceptions of the time that the entire country was evil. Why did their opinions change? What qualities about the Germans did the Americans admire? Discuss and cite examples.