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## Rapido River and the Limits of Congressional Military Oversight

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Fine: Rapido River and the Limits of Congressional Military Oversight  
RAPIDO RIVER AND THE LIMITS OF CONGRESSIONAL  
MILITARY OVERSIGHT

BY  
DAVID FINE

*David Fine is a senior studying twentieth century American history at Columbia University. He wrote this paper for a seminar on World War II history with Professor Carol C. Gluck at Columbia. David thanks her for both her guidance and editing, and to both his grandfathers for their admirable service to America during World War II.*

It was meant to be a happy day for Seymour Fine. His son, Jeffrey, had just married, and Seymour stood at the reception basking in the presence of his friends and distant relatives. Seymour, who had served as a technical sergeant in the 36th (U.S.) Infantry Division during World War II and earned a Bronze Star for leading his men across Italy's Rapido River and back to the Allied bank not once but twice, was not known to be an ill-tempered or fighting man. Yet Jeffrey found Seymour almost in fisticuffs with a distant cousin at the reception with whom he had struck up a conversation and was swapping war stories. When Seymour discovered that the cousin served in the same division that he did, he asked the man if he had been at the Rapido. The other said yes; he had been an engineer. Immediately incensed, Seymour's otherwise placid demeanor broke, and it took his son's intervention to calm him. Even on the happiest of days, there was one memory that haunted the men of the 36th throughout their lives—Rapido.<sup>1</sup>

The Rapido River, which flows through Southern Italy in the Monte Cassino region, was the site of one of the bloodiest small-scale battles of World War II. Of the assault forces who participated in the Allied attempt to penetrate the bulwark of a fortified Nazi line, more than 2,900 men were reported dead, wounded, or missing, all from the 36th Infantry Division. The surviving men's efforts to find justice and reason when they returned from the war, however, proved disheartening, and it illustrates the limits of congressional oversight into military decisions made in the battlefield during World War II.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Fine, Emily Fine, and Mitchell Fine, interviewed by author, March and April 2011.

## **The Battle**

In early January 1944, Lieutenant General Mark Clark, commander of the Fifth Army, ordered Major General Geoffrey Keyes, commander of the II Corps, to send troops across the Rapido River to attack a heavily fortified German position on the Gustav Line. This German defensive line prevented Allied progress toward Rome, and the order to cross the Rapido intended to break through it. The Rapido mission was also designed as a diversion to split German attention and resources between defending the Rapido River and the Anzio beachhead, where Allied forces planned to land and march on to Rome.

Whatever the intention, the Battle of Rapido River proved a futile engagement from its start on the night of January 20, 1944 to its end two days later. Over the objections of the 36th's commanding officer, Major General Fred L. Walker, who favored a crossing at a point further north, Clark chose to cross at the river's s-bend near the town of St. Angelo. Walker contended that at that point, the fast-flowing river was un-fordable and its banks too muddy for American tanks to provide the necessary support against entrenched machinegun and artillery positions. Clark disagreed and the battle culminated with American and German forces holding the same positions as when they started, on opposite sides of the river, and with minimal damage to the German side. In anticipation of the attack, German forces prepared a killing field on both sides of the river, as recounted by one U.S. veteran who served as a second lieutenant during the battle:

Our patrols had been out and we could see—we determined right away that they had cleared all of the vegetation on both sides of the river for several hundred yards on each side and it sloped down on each side so, you couldn't see exactly what was going on. Those fields were all mined, on the opposite side of the river there was barbed wire and mines and then behind that where the Germans were entrenched, they had their machine gun positions all coordinated so they could give cross fire defensive fire, plus this was January—winter and in winter it rains more than it snows in Italy. The Rapido River was at flood stage, the ground on both sides of the river was very soggy and you couldn't get any

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wheeled vehicles down there so, it was up to the man with the rifle to do the job.<sup>2</sup>

American forces' challenges became apparent from the first phase of the operation. A breakdown in the 36<sup>th</sup>'s communications and planning between the engineering units and infantry before and during the battle left the wooden boats crucial to the river crossing two miles from the beachhead, a point of contention that explains Seymour Fine's outburst at the wedding. Division engineers failed to anticipate the poor tractability on the banks of the river and left the boats for the infantry to transport by hand. Seymour would later contend that cowardice caused the engineers to leave the boats outside of German firing range, leaving the boats and those who carried them exposed to German bullets. Boats that made it to the riverbank were pocked with bullet holes and sank. Many of the soldiers weighed down by tactical gear drowned. Rubber bridges, susceptible to machine gun fire, proved unusable for crossing. Some men resorted to swimming. Seymour, who had never learned to swim, later told his children that he had crossed the Rapido in a boat and could not remember how he returned, though he thought that he must have swam.<sup>3</sup>

Soldiers who made it across the river were met with entrenched machine gun positions and heavy artillery fire uncontested by American tanks which were stuck in the mud two miles from the riverbank, just as Walker predicted. Companies beat disordered retreats back across the Rapido, and many left without commanding officers or substantial amounts of men. Some men surrendered. Others were caught in the melee before they could. When the full force retreated early in the morning, a temporary cease-fire was declared for both sides to retrieve their dead. American forces attempted a second landing later that day with the same tragic results. C.L. Sulzberger, a correspondent for the *New York Times*, described part of the scene:

As they attacked and attacked again, more men slumped through the field, hunched under the weight of their boats suddenly cascading upward as mines exploded. They stumbled in the

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Boring, Society of Michigan Military Preservation, and Carl Strom, "Strom, Carl J. (Interview Transcript and Video)," Grand Valley State University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives, Allendale, Mich., 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Wojdakowski, *A Battalion Staff Prepared for War: The Key to Combined Arms Success on the Modern Tactical Battlefield* (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: Scholl of Advanced Military Studies, 1988), 10-19.

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water, scratching up the steep four-foot banks. Just beside the Rapido, four men lay in a communications post, praying.<sup>4</sup>

Another crossing was ordered the following day, but suspended because of protests from Walker. The Battle of Rapido River spanned only two days and ended in utter defeat for the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Seymour later recalled that after the battle he passed an officer's tent and heard laughter coming from inside. He entered the tent, ready to berate the officers on behalf of the many enlisted men who had lost their lives. Inside, instead of merriment, he saw a few officers and grew quiet. The sound of what he thought was laughter had been the officers' hysterical cries at seeing so few of their men returned from the battlefield.

The War Department, in a report drafted two years after Rapido, recorded the casualties as 187 killed, 1,141 wounded, and 927 missing in action—a total of 2,255 casualties.<sup>5</sup> Veterans of the battle reported the casualties to be higher at over 2,900 men.<sup>6</sup> Colonel Fred L. Walker, Jr., Walker's son, wrote in a 1986 polemic attacking Clark that the total casualties tallied “1,681 dead, wounded, and missing in action out of approximately 3,000 men in the assault units which had crossed the river.”<sup>7</sup> Whatever the true number, approximately two regiments-worth of men from the 36th were eliminated from battle capacity by the time the smoke cleared. The 36th Division saw fierce fighting before the Rapido at the landing of Salerno and would see more in the time that followed as they spanned the European continent from the frozen mountains of Italy to France and then Germany. According to Sid Feder, a war correspondent attached to the 36th throughout the war, “In nearly two years of war, some 400 days of line combat, the 36th's roughest show, of course, was the Rapido deal.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> C.L. Sulzberger, "Americans Swim Rapido River to Escape Crossfire of Germans," *New York Times*, January 25, 1944.

<sup>5</sup> Hearings on the Rapido River Crossing, Committee on Military Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, Seventy-Ninth Congress, Second Session, February 20 and March 18, 1946, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Various veterans quoted to press reports during the hearings.

<sup>7</sup> Fred Walker, *Mission Impossible at Cassino : The First Assault across the Rapido River near Cassino in World War II, January 1944* (Unpublished, 1986), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Sid Feder, "They'll Never Forget Mark Clark," *Saturday Evening Post* 218, no. 46 (1946): 21. For a general narrative of the battle culled from reports, see Martin Blumenson, *Bloody River; the Real Tragedy of the Rapido* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970); Robert L. Wagner, *The Texas Army : A History of the 36th Division in the Italian Campaign* (Austin, Tex.: State House Press, 1991); Walker, *Mission Impossible at Cassino*; and Wojdakowski, *A Battalion Staff Prepared for War*.

**Texas Pressure—“And so it has been for a century, ever since Texans stood and died for their liberties at the Alamo.”<sup>9</sup>**

Kenneth Claiborne Royall, a Brigadier General in 1944 and future secretary of war, recalled in an oral history that a few months after the Battle of Rapido River, when the troops were resting behind the lines, he had conducted a “confidential inspection and report on the 36th Division.”<sup>10</sup> Characterizing the 36th as “the Texas National Guard Division, with whom General Clark had had trouble,” Royall dismissed the complaints of the 36th about Clark.<sup>11</sup> He observed that, “Apparently this Texas National Guard was quite a political organization.”<sup>12</sup> Royall found that Texan politicians protested the amount of life lost at the battle. Royall’s derisive observation proved true when the 36th returned home and flexed its political muscle in the Lone Star State.

Texas and Oklahoma national guardsmen, commissioned into the United States Infantry at the start of the war, made up most of the division’s men. The 36th Division’s iconography bore a distinctive regional flavor. Known as the “Texas Division” or the “T-Patchers,” the division’s insignia was a bold “T” framed by an arrowhead.<sup>13</sup> According to Feder, when the 36th participated in the Allied landing at Salerno, the first of the troops to land on the European mainland brought a Texas flag emblazoned with a famous Alamo war cry: “I shall never surrender or retreat. Victory or Death!”<sup>14</sup> Texas newspapers followed the division’s movements with a thoroughness and prominence unseen in the national papers. Certain members of the division were so dedicated to their Texan heritage that they celebrated Texas Independence Day on March 2, even in lands distant from home. It was at one such commemoration in 1944 that the effort to investigate Clark for his battle-time decision to cross the Rapido.

By March 2, 1944, less than three months after Rapido, the 36th Division was enjoying a much needed respite from the front lines in Italy. As recounted by numerous sources, twenty-five officers, alumni of the University of Texas, gathered in a barn to commemorate Texas

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<sup>9</sup> “Well Done, T-Patchers,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 20 1946.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth C. Royall, William T. Ingersoll, and Frank W. Rounds, “Reminiscences of Kenneth Claiborne Royall: Oral History,” (1963), 51.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Insignia of the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collections, <[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media\\_ph.php?ModuleId=10006165&MediaId=3797](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_ph.php?ModuleId=10006165&MediaId=3797)>.

<sup>14</sup> Feder, “They’ll Never Forget Mark Clark,” 21.

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Independence Day. There, they vowed when the war was over to push for a full investigation of Clark's decision to cross the Rapido River.<sup>15</sup> Their efforts met success less than two years later on January 19, 1946, at the first meeting of the 36th Division Association. Much happened in the interim between the barnyard oath and the first reunion. The 36th had fought in fierce battles across different countries and suffered heavy casualties. As Feder noted, "An outfit can take only one of those [like the Rapido] in a war. But the T-patchers were forced to take things the hard way all along the route."<sup>16</sup> Despite this, the reunion's primary concentration was what they called "Rapido River fiasco."<sup>17</sup>

The association passed a nearly unanimous (with one dissent) resolution calling for "the Congress of the United States, to investigate the Rapido River fiasco and take the necessary steps to correct a military system that will permit an inefficient and inexperienced officer, such as Gen. Mark W. Clark, in a high command to destroy the young manhood of this country and to prevent future soldiers being sacrificed wastefully and uselessly."<sup>18</sup> Calling the battle a "holocaust," the resolution emphasized its futility relative to the number of casualties. "Every man connected with this undertaking knew it was doomed to failure because it was an impossible situation."<sup>19</sup> The underlying premise of the resolution was not that many men were killed. It was that they were killed without any perceived reason.

The reunion was held on the eve of Rapido's anniversary and the organizers took steps to gain as much publicity as possible. It was held in Brownwood, Texas, where local newspapers could be counted on to cover the event sympathetically. Most of the major Texas newspapers delivered, publishing editorials and sympathetic stories supporting the push for an investigation into Clark's decision. A formidable state-wide political machine went into action, working to right a perceived wrong against "their" division. An unsigned editorial note, which appeared as part of the *Dallas Morning News*' extensive Rapido River coverage on January 20, 1946, encapsulates Texan feelings about the 36th at the time:

Texas glories in the 36th Division not solely because it is Texas' own, though that would be good reason for pardonable pride . . . Texas' pride is in the T-patch record, a record of gallantry almost

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<sup>15</sup> Blumenson, *Bloody River; the Real Tragedy of the Rapido*, 129.

<sup>16</sup> Feder, "They'll Never Forget Mark Clark," 21.

<sup>17</sup> Hearings on the Rapido River Crossing, Committee on Military Affairs, 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

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unparalleled in American warfare. Five campaigns, 400 days of combat, two major amphibious operations—its battles were bathed in blood. And so it has been for a century, ever since Texans stood and died for their liberties at the Alamo.<sup>20</sup>

Two days after the association passed the resolution the Texas State Senate passed a “Senate Resolution Relative Rapido River Disaster.” The resolution stated that the senate “wholly endorses and approves” the association’s resolution and called for a congressional investigation.<sup>21</sup> The resolutions and newspaper coverage demonstrate the intense emotion felt by substantial parts of the Lone Star State at the perceived needless death of so many of its favored sons.

**Congressional Complications—  
“What this country needs is a look into the future.”<sup>22</sup>**

The pressure exerted from Texas launched the issue onto the national stage. Texans in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate helped by making speeches in their respective legislative bodies in support of the two resolutions. On January 23, 1946, Senator W. Lee O’Daniel from Texas submitted the veterans’ resolution into the record of the Senate and attempted to pass a resolution calling for an investigation of Clark, but was thwarted by other senators.<sup>23</sup> Not all the speeches given in Congress sympathized with the veterans’ efforts. Congressman and future Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson made a speech on the floor of the House on January 21, defending General Clark. In his speech Jackson expressed a point of view that would eventually prove fatal to the investigation. He stated, “I feel that a board appointed by the Secretary of War and consisting of trained military men would be better fitted than a congressional committee to investigate this situation.”<sup>24</sup>

Congressmen also expressed their opinions to the press. In an article published the day after the resolution was passed by the 36th Division Association, John Rankin, a Democratic congressman from Mississippi, told the Associated Press that the “horrible disaster must be thoroughly investigated . . . even if it has to be done by the committee on

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<sup>20</sup> “Well Done, T-Patchers,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 20 1946.

<sup>21</sup> Hearings on the Rapido River Crossing, Committee on Military Affairs, 18.

<sup>22</sup> “Senators Take Dim View of Rapido Probe,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 21 1946.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Senate, “92 Cong. Rec. 240,” 1946.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, “92 Cong. Rec. 164,” 1946, 170.



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un-American activities.” The article quoted two members of the Senate military affairs committee who exhibited reluctance to dive into an investigation and noted that, “Members . . . who had anything at all to say showed a disposition to go slowly.” Senator Chapman Revercomb, a Republican, “said in response to an inquiry that he would like more information as to ‘what was behind the passage of [the Texan] resolution.’” Senator James O’Mahoney, a Democrat, told the reporter that, “We have spent months on an utterly futile investigation of what happened at Pearl Harbor, trying to look into the past . . . What this country needs is a look into the future.”<sup>25</sup>

It is unclear if party affiliation determined support or opposition for investigation. Both the Senate and House had strong Democrat majorities. The Texan delegation was fully Democrat and opposed fellow Democrats Jackson and O’Mahoney, among others, in calling for an investigation. Revercomb, a Republican, echoed the latter’s reluctant position. Rankin, a Democrat, supported the Texas effort. The sentiment felt toward the investigation of the Pearl Harbor attack that O’Mahoney referenced provides an important context. One presidential and two military commissions conducted investigations into Pearl Harbor before a joint congressional committee were formed and held hearings between November 11, 1945, and May 31, 1946. However, many members of congress felt weary of the joint congressional committee. Some Democrats thought the investigations politically targeted President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration. Once the hearings started, some Republicans claimed that the committee did not investigate Roosevelt’s administration aggressively enough. Historian H. Lew Wallace notes that:

In theory, congressional investigations proceed in an atmosphere of calm, reason, detachment, and impartiality toward their “informing function.” In practice they proceed in the buffeting winds of fears and fancies, the ethnic, religious, and political pressures that mark a society at a particular time. Too often they reflect opinion rather than present information necessary for the legislative process. Too often they are clearly vulnerable to partisan exploitation.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Senators Take Dim View of Rapido Probe," *Dallas Morning News*, January 21 1946.

<sup>26</sup> H. Lew Wallace, *The McCarthy Era 1954, 1792-1974*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and Roger Bruns, eds., 1975, quoted in Lance Cole, "Special National Investigative Commissions: Essential Powers and Procedures (Some Lessons from the Pearl Harbor, Warren Commission, and 9/11 Commission Investigations)," *McGeorge Law Review* 41, no. 1: 3.

Many members of Congress seemed cognizant of that fact and wearily approached another investigation into military decision-making.

The most substantive question aroused by the investigation was the burgeoning conflict between enlisted men and what was called the “caste system” of the professional military. On January 27, 1946, *The New York Times* published an editorial in support of Clark, terming the veterans’ efforts “ill-considered” and observing that “Similar protests against high-ranking officers were made by various veteran groups after the last war. They attracted momentary attention and then were largely forgotten.”<sup>27</sup> *The Washington Post*, in an editorial a day later, supported Clark but expressed more sympathy to the perceived plight of the enlisted men: “The feeling of the survivors of the Rapido is, however, quite natural and understandable. It is too much to expect that men who have seen their comrades slaughtered to no apparent purpose will realize that such things are merely moves in a complicated game of tactics.”<sup>28</sup>

In the battle between the “expert” judgment of West Point-trained commanders and the “simplistic” understanding of the enlisted men on the stage of national politics, the former appeared the victor. Yet things were not that simple. Various local newspapers reported Walker’s criticism of Clark’s decision to cross the river. A weathered veteran by the time he served in World War II, Walker had even served with a younger Mark Clark on a general staff at an American army post between 1937 and 1940.<sup>29</sup> Walker, still in active duty in 1946, declared his military opinion at the outset of the investigation effort. He later testified during the congressional hearings that:

North of Cassino, the Rapido River is shallow and easily fordable by tanks and guns. That was the area where I recommended to General Clark and General Keyes that the attack across the Rapido be made. On one occasion General Clark stated to me when I expressed my feelings in the matter, “You do not have to worry about the Thirty-sixth Division crossing the Rapido at St. Angelo. The crossing will be made to the north.” I do not know why he changed his mind. It may have been that he felt that a crossing near St. Angelo was necessary to pave the way for exploitation

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<sup>27</sup> “Back to the Rapido,” *The New York Times*, January 27 1946.

<sup>28</sup> “The Rapido Tragedy,” *The Washington Post*, January 28 1946.

<sup>29</sup> Blumenson, *Bloody River; the Real Tragedy of the Rapido*, 16.

later by armored troops. If so, then all the more he should have used good judgment to insure the initial success of the crossing.<sup>30</sup>

Both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* presented a generous amount of expert military opinion on either side of the Rapido issue, although their editorials suggest a dearth of military expertise on the side of the investigation campaign. What made these two papers and other press outlets decide in Clark's favor with such quick certitude? The answer lies in a force that exerted great political power despite its stated apoliticism—the military.

### **Military Might**

The War Department and General Clark sought to suppress the investigation effort from the first. A Scripps-Howard newspaper article set to be published in concurrence with the veterans meeting on January 19, 1946 found its way to the War Department on January 3 two weeks earlier. The article featured quotations by Walker questioning Clark's tactical decision-making in ordering the Rapido crossing. At the time, Clark was serving as High Commissioner for Austria and General Dwight D. Eisenhower was Army Chief of Staff. Eisenhower and Clark remained close friends throughout and after the war. In an oral history interview conducted as part of the Eisenhower Project at Columbia University, Clark recalled vacationing with Eisenhower after the war and bunking with him throughout the war.<sup>31</sup>

When the War Department received the Texas article about Rapido, Eisenhower's staff wired Clark in Austria warning him about it. In conjunction with Clark, who sent several anxious wires the following months, Eisenhower's staff developed a two-pronged approach to inhibit the prospect of an investigation. First, an effort was made to pressure Walker to recant his tactical observation. Walker, a distinguished veteran of both World War I and II and who was serving as head of the army's infantry training school at the time, refused. Though he disclaimed any part in the investigation campaign, his tactical opinion, aired in newspaper reports and at the congressional hearings, lent the effort military legitimacy.

The second strategy proved more successful. Eisenhower's staff persuaded the War Department to draft an investigatory report of its own

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<sup>30</sup> Hearings on the Rapido River Crossing, Committee on Military Affairs, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Mark W. Clark and John Luter, "Reminiscences of Mark Wayne Clark : Oral History," 1970.

regarding Clark's decision to order the Rapido crossing. Secretary of War Robert Patterson released that report to the House of Representatives Committee on Military Affairs on February 13, before the first scheduled hearings about the Rapido River crossing on February 20. The report exonerated Clark, concluding that he was following orders when he sent the men across the Rapido and that the attempted crossing succeeded in its tactical mission of drawing German forces away from the Anzio beachhead landings. The latter conclusion would be contested in the subsequent years, but the department's report suggested military certainty. In his letter of submittal to the chairman, Patterson wrote that the report was instigated "in response to your letter of January 29, 1946."<sup>32</sup>

Eisenhower's staff's efforts as early as January 11 show that the War Department was already under pressure to issue a refutation of the forthcoming charges from the veterans, and avert any potential criticism of Clark. In a letter dated January 23, Major General Alfred M. Gruenther, Eisenhower's deputy, assured Clark that he was exerting political pressure on Capitol Hill to forestall an investigation. The letter came a day after Congressman Jackson's speech defending Clark in the House.<sup>33</sup> Sensing an attack on both a personal favorite of the military establishment and on the authority of the establishment to govern itself, the military exerted its political clout to ensure that the investigation movement failed.

### **Congressional Inaction**

By the time the Military Affairs Committee met to consider whether or not to investigate General Clark, the congressmen on the committee had already established entrenched positions on the topic. Three representatives from the investigation movement were invited to speak to the committee on March 18, 1946, after the committee had met once in a closed hearing on February 20. Colonel Miller Ainsworth, President of the 36th Division Association, Colonel William H. Martin, Colonel Carl Phinney, and General Walker all provided testimony that carried a tone of sadness at the loss of so many men in a single battle. All except for Walker called for a direct investigation of Clark in an effort that balanced the inevitable toll of death during war and the perceived needless deaths at the Battle of Rapido. Colonel Ainsworth provided perhaps the most polemical testimony. Since he did not fight at the Battle of Rapido River, his testimony's value lay not in his factual account of the battle, but

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<sup>32</sup> Hearings on the Rapido River Crossing, Committee on Military Affairs.

<sup>33</sup> Letters and other archival correspondence were found through Wagner, *The Texas Army*, 217-34.

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rather in his impassioned defense of the reasons for the Division Association's calls for investigation:

Gentlemen, I stand here today, testifying to you, that if bringing true facts before a committee in Congress, exposing a caste system that would do credit to a totalitarian power, a system that places its own glorification and ambition ahead of the lives of our sons—if exposing these conditions will bring discredit to our division and to our State then we are in error. Until the facts have been considered, and Mark Clark and the report of the War Department—as erroneous as we think it is, have been disproven or substantiated—until that time, we ask that you reserve judgment as to whether or not we are justified in our demand for this investigation.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Ainsworth's impassioned pleas for an investigation, the lack of witnesses in support of Clark at the hearings suggests that the committee already knew what its conclusion would be. For if the threat of investigation ever had been serious, a more thorough and balanced witness list would have been called. In the end, the hearing amounted to an airing of grievances, and an informal compromise between the pro-investigation movement and the pro-Clark forces. On the day the hearings were held, Secretary Patterson announced the formation of a commission to investigate the military caste system, which was unrelated to the inquiry, and was formed to head off public criticism of the committee's decision not to investigate Clark. The *New York Times* published the article about the commission on page seven above a smaller piece about the hearing that noted, "While their plea had the support of Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker, who was in direct command of the attack, indications mounted after the hearing that the requested Congressional inquiry would be rejected."<sup>35</sup> Little came of the commission, which issued its twenty-seven page report to Secretary Patterson on May 27, 1946. The commission entitled the report "Officer-Enlisted Man Relationships" and contained nothing about the Rapido River incident.<sup>36</sup> The investigation campaign that began with so

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<sup>34</sup> United States. Congress. House. Committee on Military, *Rapido River Crossing [Electronic Resource] : Hearings before the United States House Committee on Military Affairs, Seventy-Ninth Congress, Second Session, on Feb. 20, Mar. 18, 1946*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Sidney Shalett, "Patterson Order Army 'Caste' Sifted," *New York Times*, March 19 1946.

<sup>36</sup> Elbert Duncan Democrat Thomas, U. S. War Department. Board on Officer-Enlisted Man Relationships, and U. S. Senate, "Officer-Enlisted Man

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much verve and momentum in the heart of Texas subsided to a whimper in the face of the national stage and military intervention.

Texan politicians, however, remained stubborn in their grudge against Clark. Royall recounts that Clark was the natural successor for Omar Bradley as Chief of Staff of the Army when Bradley left to become the first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However,

the President pointed out that it was almost impossible politically to name him. There were two reasons. One was that he was said to be part Jewish, as I understood . . . And the President seemed to think that should not make any difference, but it may have done so somewhere along the line. The second reason was that Clark had mortally offended the Texas politicians in the case of the 36th Division.<sup>37</sup>

Religious issues aside, the specter of Texas political power followed Clark throughout his career. Any position that required political approval ensured that one Texan politician or another would bring up the Battle of Rapido River. As Royall noted, “the fact was that Texas was against Clark—and stayed that way. And Texas played a big part in Washington.”<sup>38</sup> Though that part was not big enough to galvanize a full investigation of Clark, it sufficed to put a stop to Clark’s nomination by President Harry Truman to be the United States’ first emissary to the Holy See. Texan Senator Tom Connally, chairman of the Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee, led the effort against Clark’s nomination when it came up for Senate review in 1951 and 1952. Eventually, Clark withdrew his name for consideration and asked Truman not to be nominated again.<sup>39</sup>

Clark went on to serve as supreme commander of the armed forces in Korea during the Korean War and was remembered as a distinguished commander. He appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* three times after the Battle of Rapido River, one of which appeared not long after the congressional hearing. None of the cover stories mentioned Rapido River or the 36th Division.

Relationships. Report of the Secretary of War’s Board on Officer-Enlisted Man Relationships to Hon. Robert P. Patterson the Secretary of War May 27, 1946. May 31 (Legislative Day, March 5), 1946. -- Ordered to Be Printed," 1946.

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<sup>37</sup> Royall, Ingersoll, and Rounds, "Reminiscences of Kenneth Claiborne Royall : Oral History," 299.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>39</sup> "Clark Withdraws as Vatican Choice; Another Planned," *The New York Times*, January 14, 1952.

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## Conclusion

Discrete issues like the military “caste” system, General Mark Clark’s personal relationships, and the Pearl Harbor investigation are not to be disentangled from the broader question of congressional military oversight. It is imprecise to conclude that the investigation campaign failed on the national stage because of any one of these elements. Rather, many factors came together to create a systemic disinterest. The War Department’s support of Clark provided reasonable military cover for congressmen who felt weary of investigating military decision-making. Congressman Jackson’s feeling “that a board appointed by the Secretary of War and consisting of trained military men would be better fitted than a congressional committee to investigate this situation” won the day.<sup>40</sup> Pearl Harbor presented a unique situation because it was considered a national calamity.<sup>41</sup> Rapido River was not.

For Seymour, Rapido River and the horrors he witnessed throughout the war would remain a personal calamity. He spoke little about his experience when he first returned home to Brooklyn after the war. Small triggers revealed the inner demons he struggled with, as his outburst at his son’s wedding shows. On another occasion, Seymour’s wife found him shaking under a table after a truck backfired outside of a Laundromat. Some of the only times he would talk to his children about the war were when they saw a fictional depiction of it on television. He ensured them that it was much worse than the heroic images they saw. Sometimes he awoke sweaty, screaming as his subconscious forced him to relive the worst experiences of his life. Despite this trauma, Seymour chose not to linger on General Clark’s decision and refused to follow the investigation campaign. According to his wife, Seymour was “not that type of man.”<sup>42</sup> Those who did seek closure by pursuing justice through congressional oversight found little added solace.

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<sup>40</sup> U.S. Senate, “92 Cong. Rec. 240.”

<sup>41</sup> See Cole, “Special National Investigative Commissions” for an overview of Pearl Harbor’s special “calamitous” status on the national stage.

<sup>42</sup> Emily Fine, interviewed by author, April 2011.