

CLARENCE R. HUEBNER: AN AMERICAN MILITARY STORY OF ACHIEVEMENT

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In the eyes of the American public excellence is often overshadowed by brilliance of personality. This is particularly true in the portrayal of many of the country's military leaders in World War II. A prime example of this phenomenon is Douglas MacArthur, whose larger than life persona made him a newspaper fixture during the war despite a series of strategic and tactical blunders that would have led to the sacking of a less visible (and publicly popular) leader. At the level of divisional commanders, this triumph of brilliance over excellence is best exemplified by the two primary leaders of the country's 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, Terry de la Mesa Allen and Clarence R. Huebner. One was a hard-drinking, swashbuckling leader who led by almost the sheer force of his personality; the other, a plain spoken, demanding officer who believed that organization, planning and attention to detail were the keys to superior battlefield performance.

The leadership differences between Allen and Huebner have been documented in multiple publications. What has not been documented is the life of the truly overshadowed general – Huebner. Huebner's transition to the leadership of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division (1<sup>st</sup> ID) constitute only a small period in a military career that spans almost fifty years and two world wars. Huebner's story is cyclic in that throughout his life, his actions regularly complete a full circle with a return to key organizations, areas or relationships from where they started. In many respects, Huebner's story parallels the 20th century biography of the army itself. His is an American military story.

This thesis is focused on Huebner's life in the years prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> ID's landing at Omaha Beach.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the eyes of the American public excellence is often overshadowed by brilliance of personality. This is particularly true in the portrayal of many of the country's military leaders in World War II. A prime example of this phenomenon is Douglas MacArthur, whose larger than life persona made him a newspaper fixture during the war despite a series of strategic and tactical blunders that would have led to the sacking of a less visible (and publicly popular) leader. At the level of divisional commanders, this triumph of brilliance over excellence is best exemplified by the two primary leaders of the country's 1st Infantry Division, Terry de la Mesa Allen and Clarence R. Huebner. One was a hard-drinking, swashbuckling leader who led by almost the sheer force of his personality, the other, a plain spoken, demanding officer who believed that organization, planning and attention to detail were the keys to superior battlefield performance.

In Allen, a product of West Point, the press had an irreverent, informal, profane, and most importantly, accessible, commander. Everything about him from his name to his disdain for rules and the love of his men made him a general that not even a Hollywood casting department could have produced. Huebner, on the other hand, was the literal antithesis of the man whom he would succeed in command. He was short and balding, a strict disciplinarian whose penchant for the development of training manuals and instructions during the interwar years earned him the nickname of "Coach." Where Allen was gregarious, Huebner was taciturn. Allen's loose style of discipline could not have been further from Huebner's "by the book" approach. Allen commanded immediate

attention when he entered a room; Huebner was unprepossessing and gladly left the limelight to others.

The leadership differences between Allen and Huebner have been documented in multiple publications. What has not been documented is the life of the truly overshadowed general—Huebner. Huebner's transition to the leadership of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division (1<sup>st</sup> ID) constitute only a small period in a military career that spans almost fifty years and two world wars. Huebner's story is cyclic in that throughout his life his actions regularly complete a full circle with a return to key organizations, areas or relationships from where they started. For example, he enters World War I as a lieutenant in the infant 1<sup>st</sup> ID, and returns to it as its leader at Omaha Beach on D-Day. The life of Clarence R. Huebner is marked by ambition and accomplishment, of trial under fire, and a work ethic cultivated on the Midwestern plains and honed throughout his career. Born and raised in a small town in central Kansas, Huebner enlisted in the Army as a private in 1910 and served in a variety of military capacities that would culminate in a corps commander's position by the end of the Second World War. In many respects, Huebner's story parallels the 20<sup>th</sup> century biography of the Army itself. His is an American military story.

In writing this thesis I will be focusing on Huebner's life in the years prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> ID's landing at Omaha Beach. In my dissertation I will complete this full length biography with the inclusion of the campaigns of World War II and the post-war period of his life.

The writing of this thesis could not have been done without the great deal of help and assistance I received at both the U.S. 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division Museum located in

Wheaton, Illinois and at the Eisenhower Presidential Museum at Abilene, Kansas. At both locations I was able to experience the dream of a true historian and personally examine the documents from men such as Eisenhower, Patton, Marshall, Roosevelt and others who helped shape both the United States and the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The archives of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Museum comprise the source of much of the background on the division and its structure throughout the course of World War I. Since General Huebner was among the men of the multiple units that would become galvanized as the very first division of the American Expeditionary Force in the great war, the records and information made available by Andrew Woods and his staff were invaluable in both documenting Huebner's personal growth and advancement and that of the entire 1<sup>st</sup> ID as well.

The information pertaining to the Allied planning and preparation in both North Africa and Sicily was gathered largely from the files of Eisenhower, General Beedle Smith, Sir Harold Alexander, and Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery located at the Eisenhower Library in Abilene. These documents proved particularly interesting as they characterize the early trials of the British and U.S. allies and their efforts to forge a singular strategy for defeating both the Germans, primarily, and the Japanese. In reviewing many of the missives and requests for clarification and detail, it was interesting to envision men like Huebner who would be responsible for implementing whatever decisions were agreed upon and the need to put aside their own personal prejudices and views to work together to bring about final victory in 1945.

## CHAPTER 2

### FROM STUTTGART TO KANSAS

Captain Clarence Huebner shivered in the early morning cold. Daybreak was still a little over two hours away, but for Huebner and the rest of the men of the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the United States' 1<sup>st</sup> Division, the rising sun would do very little to alleviate the chill that gnawed deep in their bones. Protected by the cloak of darkness, Huebner raised himself and peered cautiously over the top of the trench. As his eyes slowly acclimated themselves he was able to make out the barbed wire that slashed across the relatively flat terrain and would soon welcome a number of his fellow doughboys in a death embrace. Continuing his visual reconnaissance, he noted the shattered remains of what had once been trees that punctuated the battlefield. Finally, he was able to identify the shadowy outline of the American Expeditionary Force's (AEF) objective—the tiny French town of Cantigny.

Like many of the of his fellow Americans hunkered in trenches throughout the scarred countryside of France, Clarence Ralph Huebner's family roots were not far removed from the continent on which they stood prepared to fight. The familial odyssey that had now reached almost full circle with a son of a small town in Kansas fighting against the country of his ancestors began in the German city of Stuttgart.<sup>1</sup> Born in 1830, Clarence's grandfather, Gottfried Huebner, was the son of working class parents.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clarence Huebner, interview by Ray Huebner, Washington D.C., 1 April, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Huebner Genealogical Tree, compiled by Arthur Huebner, San Diego, CA, 23 December, 2003.



Young Gottfried grew up in what could be considered “middle class” circumstances. Like other young men of his social standing, he attended the city’s public schools but demonstrated only a minimal interest in his studies. Strong willed and fiercely independent, Gottfried rejected of a scholastic-based profession, which caused no end of consternation to his father. However, in seeking to reign in his willful son, the elder Huebner ultimately realized that he had met his match and acceded to his desire to serve as an apprentice to a local blacksmith.<sup>3</sup>

The Germany of Gottfried’s early adulthood was characterized by turbulence and political upheaval. Beginning in the southwestern city of Baden, the German Revolution of 1848 soon spread to the other German states.<sup>4</sup> By spring 1848 the towns of southern Germany were rife with demonstrations and written demands were presented to local governments. The primary thrust of these demands were the establishment of a free press, trial by jury, and constitutional systems of government in all states, and the forming of a German parliament.<sup>5</sup> This movement to transform Germany into a constitutional democratic state found a particularly willing audience within the confederation’s youth—including the young blacksmith’s apprentice from Stuttgart.

Swept up in the whirlwind of revolutionary thought and action that engulfed his homeland, Gottfried’s rebellion extended into all areas of his life. Initially, this rebellion focused on his turning away from the family’s moderate Protestant faith to become a practitioner of the Baptist religion.<sup>6</sup> As his spirit of unrest grew, Gottfried ultimately became a vocal critic of the German government’s policies of conscription and the

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<sup>3</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview.

<sup>4</sup> Donat von Artz, “The Revolution of March 1848 in Germany”, *German News—The Magazine*, April, 1998, available at [www.germanembassy-india.org/news/98apr/gn05.htm](http://www.germanembassy-india.org/news/98apr/gn05.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview

corresponding “rental” of its soldiers as mercenaries.<sup>7</sup> With his cousin, Abe, he regularly gave voice to his anti-monarchal rhetoric at rallies throughout Stuttgart and its surrounding environs. Paradoxically, Gottfried Huebner’s protestations against the military policies of the German monarchy would soon place him on a path that would result in his grandson’s fight against another, yet no less martial, German government.

As the Revolution of March, 1848, built to a climax, the verbal sparring between the defenders of the monarchy and the proponents of governmental reform elevated to a higher level. The tensions within the city of Stuttgart reflected the tone of the nation. Civil discourse was often punctuated by violent street clashes. This escalated level of violence would ultimately force Gottfried Huebner to flee his hometown and his country, although not by his choosing. According to family lore, one evening after attending a meeting of fellow reformists, Gottfried and his cousin, Abe, found themselves the victims of an attack and beating at the hands of a group of loyalist sympathizers. After the beating the cousins were to be hung and only avoided their premature demise by escaping from their captors and swimming across the Rhine River to the town of Baden-Baden.<sup>8</sup> While the veracity of the story may be debatable, after his departure, Gottfried Huebner never returned to his native Germany.

Little is known of Gottfried’s activities over the next nine years other than that after leaving his homeland, he traveled first to Holland and eventually made his way to England. Once there, he worked a variety of jobs until he had saved enough to obtain passage on a ship bound for New York. On May 19, 1857, Gottfried Huebner stepped off of the ship, “Premier”, and began yet another journey that would ultimately end in the

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<sup>7</sup> Huebner genealogical tree, Arthur Huebner

<sup>8</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview

heartland of his new country.<sup>9</sup> Despite his arrival in an unfamiliar land, or maybe because of it, Gottfried's wanderlust soon led him to Illinois. In 1858, he settled in a community of fellow German expatriates near what is now suburban Evanston outside of Chicago where he would remain for the next twenty-six years.<sup>10</sup>

In March 1860, Gottfried married a fellow German immigrant named Elizabeth Mercher and over the course of the next six years the family would swell through the addition of two sons, Samuel and David, and a daughter, Anna.<sup>11</sup> During the family's tenure in Illinois, Gottfried supported them through his ownership of a small blacksmith's shop. He further supplemented the family's needs by cultivating the small farm that the family had settled on. Some biographers of Clarence Huebner attribute the move of the family from Illinois to Kansas as the result of Gottfried's homestead eligibility gained through his service in an Illinois regiment during the Civil War. No evidence of his service exists and a more plausible explanation for the family's move west was their desire, like so many other Americans at the time, to carve out a larger place for themselves on the country's plains due to the largesse of the federal government. Whether he was collecting his due from military service or purely seeking new opportunity, Gottfried and his family left Illinois for Kansas in two covered wagons in early 1884.<sup>12</sup>

The town of Bushton is located in the northwest corner of Rice County in central Kansas. Like most of the state, the area surrounding the town is relatively treeless and affords the visitor views of unchanging level terrain and acres of farmland. In many

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<sup>9</sup> Huebner family genealogy, compiled by Billie J. Stillman Britt, Irvine, CA, 19 December, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Huebner genealogical tree, Arthur Huebner

<sup>11</sup> Huebner family genealogy, Billie J. Stillman Britt

<sup>12</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview

respects, the town and its surrounding areas are little changed from the first time that Gottfried Huebner and his progeny deemed the area as capable of meeting his desire to be able to see all four corners of his land from a single spot.<sup>13</sup> On May 15, 1884, Gottfried's long journey at last reached its endpoint with the issuance of Homestead Certificate number 7313, which designated him the owner of 160 acres just half a mile from the Bushton city limits.<sup>14</sup>

In staking his claim, Gottfried envisioned building a homestead that would house his family for generations. Despite the fact that it would require them to brave the heat of Kansas summers and bear the brunt of the unencumbered winds that whipped across the flatlands in the winter months from within their Conestoga wagons for over two years, Huebner and his oldest son, Sam, did not move the family into permanent lodgings until they had completed two houses just one hundred yards apart.<sup>15</sup> Brutally functional in their design, each of the two hand-built homes could be considered standard "Prairie Frame" houses featuring two rooms downstairs and a single upstairs bedroom with a "lean-to" kitchen on the side.<sup>16</sup> Gottfried and Elizabeth and their younger children lived in one of the homes and Sam took up residence in the other. Despite the family's decision to move to the more agrarian confines of Kansas, the Huebner farm was used primarily to support the needs of the family rather than as its main source of income. While Gottfried tended to his blacksmith shop in town, the responsibility for the day to day operations of the farm fell on the shoulders of Sam and Dave.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview

<sup>14</sup> Huebner family genealogy, Billie J. Stillman Britt

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Huebner, letter to author, 23 December, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Life for the Huebner family, like their few neighbors, revolved around the seasonal cycles of their agricultural existence. Even Gottfried's income from his blacksmith business closely corresponded to the needs of neighboring farmers to prepare their draft animals for the rigors of planting and harvesting. As in many small communities, social life revolved around the church. Regular attendance at Sunday services and church sponsored events provided the Huebners with their rare opportunities to escape their arduous lifestyle. Naturally, it was at a Sunday service in early spring 1885 that Sam and Dave Huebner would come to meet Martha and Abbie Rishel.<sup>18</sup>

The oldest daughter of a local farmer, Martha Rishel, affectionately known as Della to her family, had been born in Pennsylvania but had grown up on the Kansas frontier and well understood the hardships and sacrifices required to build a life on the country's central prairie. In Samuel Huebner she found a willing partner who shared her love of family, piousness, and a predisposition for hard work. On February 24, 1886, eighteen year-old Della Rishel joined her husband, Sam, in the house on the Huebner family homestead that she would live and raise six children in over the next forty years.<sup>19</sup> Two years later, David would complete the union of Huebner brothers with the Rishel sisters by marrying Abbie.<sup>20</sup>

After the death at birth of their first child, Violet, Samuel and Della Huebner welcomed their son Clarence into the world on November 24, 1888. Known to his family throughout his life as "Ralph" Clarence would be followed by five siblings; Edna, Arthur, Minnie, Anna, and Esther over the course of the next twenty years. Although Clarence

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<sup>18</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview.

<sup>19</sup> Huebner family genealogy, Billie J. Stillman Britt.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

would find that Bushton would remain a lightly populated outpost throughout his youth, he would never lack for companionship as the combined offspring of Samuel and David Huebner and their Rishel sister brides would result in a final population of twenty “double cousins” on the Huebner homestead.<sup>21</sup>

In many respects, the life of young “Ralph” Huebner was that of a typical mid-western farm boy. Depending on the season, his complement of daily chores revolved around planting, cultivating and harvesting the family’s wheat and vegetable crops. As the oldest son, he was also regularly drafted to serve as his father’s less than willing assistant in the performance of all manner of household and farm-related repairs and to watch over his five younger siblings. In his oversight of the ever expanding Huebner brood, young Ralph often subjected them to a variety of pranks which led his sisters to remember him as a “great tease.”<sup>22</sup>

For the men who would eventually serve under him and wonder where their commander’s insistence on achieving the highest levels of marksmanship proficiency came from, the answer to their question could be found on the grassy plains of central Kansas. While growing up in what would be considered comfortable circumstances for the times, young Ralph’s recreational activities also served a practical purpose. Despite his fondness for driving horses, especially the family’s white Arabian, Daisy, Ralph’s true passions were shooting and hunting. Samuel Huebner gave his eldest son his first rifle for his ninth birthday. The .22 caliber rifle quickly became Ralph’s most prized possession, and the instrument for the delivery of a rabbit or other small game to the Huebner family dinner table. Many a fall afternoon would find both of the Huebner boys

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<sup>21</sup> Huebner family genealogy, Billie J. Stillman Britt.

<sup>22</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview.

hunting ducks at the marshy lake at Cheyenne Bottoms near the family farm.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Ralph's regular need to replenish his ammunition supply led him to develop his own unique barter system in which he prowled the nearby flatlands for old buffalo bones; "when I got a wagonload full, I bartered them for 100 rounds of .22 shorts ammunition."<sup>24</sup>

Few men can successfully predict their future occupation but for Ralph Huebner his desire to become a soldier began in early boyhood. Captivated by the stories regularly recounted by the area's Civil War veterans during the community's infrequent social gatherings, young Ralph dreamed of the honor and glory and the ability to offer his service to his country found on distant battlefields. Unfortunately, perhaps reinforcing the earlier anti-military sentiments of Grandfather Gottfried, Huebner's parents greeted their young son's choice for a vocation with a less than an enthusiastic response. Certainly they shared their son's ambition to seek a life far away from the family farm, but their vision of the gentrified lifestyle of a well-to-do businessman contrasted sharply to that of their headstrong son.<sup>25</sup>

However divergent their views on a future vocation may have been, the Huebner's insisted that all of their children get the best education available. Ralph spent the first eight years of his academic career in the one room school house of District 69 in Bushton.<sup>26</sup> Although the school's student body was drawn from the children of the farms surrounding Bushton, the overwhelming number of Huebner offspring meant that school was just an extended family activity for Ralph and his siblings and cousins.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Blumenson and James L. Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1975), p.164.

Industrious and conscientious in his studies, Ralph proved to be especially adept at grammar and mathematics. Perhaps more importantly, as the eldest of the Huebner clan, Ralph was the undeniable leader of the school's student body. In this role, he regularly organized a variety of games and activities, and also maintained a strict alliance of the Huebner cousins which provided insurance against the aggressive tactics of many a potential schoolyard bully.<sup>27</sup>

Upon entering the local high school, Ralph continued in his position as the unrivaled leader of the Huebner clan, and as a result, the de facto head of the remainder of the student population. While he maintained a high level of performance in his studies, young Ralph continually sought outlets away from the routine life he found on the family farm. Not unlike later contemporaries like Eisenhower and Patton, Huebner channeled this restless energy into sports. Despite carrying less than one hundred and fifty pounds across a five foot seven inch frame, the teenage Ralph Huebner was an ardent, though somewhat less than proficient, member of the school's baseball, football, and basketball teams, and also tried his hand as a pole vaulter on the track squad.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps to humor Samuel and Della, or more likely because he had not reached the minimum age of twenty-one for enlistment in the army, Ralph chose to leave Bushton to attend Grand Island Business College in Grand Island, Nebraska in 1905.<sup>29</sup> Founded by German settlers from Davenport, Iowa, in 1857, Grand Island soon became a major railhead when the Union Pacific Railroad built through the area in the 1860s.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 164.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.164.

<sup>30</sup> "History of Grand Island Business College", May, 1993. available at [www.grand-island.com/history.htm](http://www.grand-island.com/history.htm).



Although far from a sprawling metropolis, Grand Island's railroad driven business community did offer a more diverse environment to the native Bushtonian. Founded in 1885 to support the growing needs of the railroad and the supporting businesses of the community, Grand Island Business College offered its students a two-year curriculum highly oriented toward the burgeoning clerical needs of the surrounding area. Despite his indifference to the curriculum, and a perfunctory attitude towards attendance, young Huebner proved to be a skilled accountant, stenographer, and most importantly, typist—a skill that would prove to be invaluable in his early military career.<sup>31</sup>

Like many of his fellow graduates, Clarence Huebner found his first employer in the railroad industry. Based on his demonstrated skill as a stenographer and typist, the twenty-year old Kansas native accepted a position as a stenographer for the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad in 1908.<sup>32</sup> While his skills were a good match for the job, Huebner found little in it to satisfy his restless personality. Like many young people, Clarence Huebner found that the gulf between the life that his parents had envisioned for him and his own dreams was a chasm that could not be closed. As a result, in 1910, the now twenty-one year old Clarence Ralph Huebner elected to follow his own vision and enlisted in the United States Army.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 164.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>33</sup> Huebner, Ray, interview.

## CHAPTER 3

### “I CAN COOK BEANS BETTER THAN THAT.”

Founded in 1887, and built on a site just outside of Denver selected by Civil War cavalry hero Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan, Colorado's Fort Logan became the first of many stops in Clarence Huebner's military career.<sup>34</sup> In many ways, his vocational choice could only be described as the whimsical folly of an unworldly young man. In turning his back on the business career advocated by his parents, Huebner was sacrificing the very real possibility for further professional growth and economic opportunity. The U.S. Army of 1910 was the antithesis of the path to the comfortable life available to a young and ambitious railroad stenographer. Reflecting the country's historical distrust of a large standing military, as a new enlistee Huebner was one of less than 200,000 soldiers within the senior service's ranks. In this peacetime military the opportunity for advancement was virtually non-existent and less the result of merit than tenure. Intervals in excess of a decade were common between promotions for members of the officer corps and the meager pay for all servicemen made making ends meet a constant challenge.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the less than optimistic prognosis for his future, Huebner immediately felt at home within the regimen of military life. The ordered nature of basic training was not dissimilar to the daily structure of a Kansas farm boy, and certainly no more physically

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<sup>34</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 165.

<sup>35</sup> Carlo D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, (New York: Harper Collins), 1995, p. 112.

demanding than the regular chores that had ruled his life for the balance of his twenty-one years. Ironically, he also found that his business education provided the first instance of distinction in his career. After volunteering to aid the company sergeant with some administrative tasks, his skill as a typist soon made him a valuable commodity—so much so that the sergeant vainly tried to keep him on after he had completed his basic training.<sup>36</sup>

For a young man who had joined the army with dreams of seeing locations far more exotic than a Kansas wheat farm, Clarence Huebner was to find his early years in the military to be far less glamorous than he had imagined. In fact, his early postings were to locations not too dissimilar from the rural community he had left behind. After completing his basic training, Huebner, now a newly minted member of the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry was assigned to Fort McKenzie in Wyoming for infantry training. Located in southeastern Wyoming, Fort McKenzie offered little in the way of diversions for its collection of officers and enlisted men. For those from the rural areas of the country this lack of “creature comforts” was not viewed as negatively as it was by their urban counterparts. For Private Huebner the Wyoming countryside offered more than ample opportunity to take part in his two favorite activities, hunting and shooting. While spare time was at a premium, his love of the outdoors would serve him well by reinforcing the key skills he would need as a combat soldier.

The path of achievement is rarely a straight line, and for Clarence Huebner his initial duties in the service of his country would hardly foreshadow the substantial achievements that would ultimately characterize his military career. Although no formal

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<sup>36</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 165.

studies have been made, it is not unreasonable to assume that few if any of the nation's military leaders began their careers within the mess hall. In Huebner's case, the initiative that he would display throughout his career, and that initially thrust him into a cook's apron, began when he overheard a captain complaining about the poor preparation of the beans at the camp mess hall, to which he replied; "Why I can cook beans better than that."<sup>37</sup> Whether Huebner's response was a knee jerk boast is not recorded but with the captain's reply of "you're elected" he was provided with the first hand opportunity to validate Napoleon's adage that an army "traveled on its stomach." In order to fulfill the obligations of his new found area of "specialization" Huebner purchased a book of recipes that he studied religiously in order to prepare meals both with and without beans. While no critiques of his culinary efforts are available, this episode does demonstrate a sense of drive and purpose that would characterize his military career. As his wife, Florence, once recounted Huebner firmly believed that hard work and effort were the cornerstones of reward, "Once he told me that he had to make up his mind to be a good soldier or a weak one," she explained, "He made up his mind. Everything he has gotten has been on merit".<sup>38</sup>

After spending the next five years serving as a company clerk, mess sergeant, and supply sergeant in postings throughout the southwest, including San Antonio and Galveston, Huebner would have his first taste of combat against the rebels led by Pancho Villa along the Mexico-Arizona border. In early 1916, Villa led two deadly raids into U.S. territory in an effort to provoke a war with the United States and thereby discredit the existing Mexican government of Venustiano Carranza. In response,

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<sup>37</sup> "Huebner Advanced From Cook to General's Post in 34 Years", *Washington Post*, 16 March, 1945.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

President Woodrow Wilson ordered General John J. Pershing to lead a force of over 6600 men in an effort to capture the Mexican rebel.<sup>39</sup>

Sitting astride the Mexican-Arizona border, the town of Douglas was the victim of multiple Villa raids, and a logical location for U.S. troops to use as a base of operation in their search for the Mexican rebel and his legions. As the quartermaster for I Company of the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Huebner largely spent his days occupied with attempting to maintain a base of supply in an area so remote and desolate that many of his fellow soldiers were inclined to wonder if they should just give it back to Mexico and be done with it. Although Pershing's efforts to locate and neutralize Villa's rebel army would ultimately prove to be an exercise in futility and boredom, for Huebner one of the unit's infrequent clashes with the enemy would result in his gaining a first hand understanding of the thin line that often separates the living from the dead in combat; "I was handing a canteen of water to a friend when a .37 millimeter cannon round hit him right in the armpit. If the cannon had been an inch or so to the right, it would have blown me to bits."<sup>40</sup>

Fiercely ambitious, Huebner's rise through the largely peacetime army was relatively rapid. In obtaining the rank of sergeant in just six years the twenty-seven year old Kansan had been identified as a "comer" by the military establishment and his superior performance led one commanding officer to assert that "young Huebner is destined to go far. I don't see anything to stop him—except possibly a bullet."<sup>41</sup> Having literally "dodged a bullet" along the Mexican border Huebner, upon the recommendation of a number of officers, including Pershing, was asked to take the test for an officer's

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<sup>39</sup> *The American Heritage Encyclopedia of American History*, John Mack Faragher, editor, (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), p. 585.

<sup>40</sup> *The Holyrod Gazette*, 10 March, 1971.

<sup>41</sup> *Kansas City Times*, 19 May, 1949.

commission. In true Huebner fashion, he studied compulsively in preparation for the examination and was rewarded with his promotion to second lieutenant in summer 1916. After a brief visit back to Bushton, Lieutenant Huebner's next posting kept him within the confines of his native state as he was sent to the Army's Infantry Service School at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.<sup>42</sup> As he completed his training in April 1917, Huebner probably could not have helped but wonder if he and his fellow graduates would soon be swept into the maelstrom that had raged across the lands of many of their ancestors for almost three years.

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<sup>42</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 165.

## CHAPTER 4

### OFF TO WAR

The cold wet spray of the Atlantic offered a small bit of relief to a seasick Lieutenant Huebner on his voyage to France in June 1917. As he leaned over the side of the ship's railing trying desperately to achieve some type of armistice with his unsettled stomach, Huebner, like many of his compatriots along the rail, wondered if combat could be any worse than the journey to shores of France. While the chill of the biting wind stung his face he knew that the crowded and malodorous troop berths below decks offered him no relief. Shoveled into a transport with over 3000 members of the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the newly formed 1<sup>st</sup> Division (1<sup>st</sup>); Huebner knew that the crowded and overheated conditions of the ship's bunk area were suitable only for catching a few hours of fitful sleep. As he fought back yet another missive from his rebellious stomach he found himself conflicted between his feelings of apprehension over what awaited him on French soil and his urgent desire to get there.<sup>43</sup>

At the time that Congress ratified President Wilson's call to arms the U.S. Army consisted of less than 200,000 men. Although highly sought and fought over by the manpower challenged British and French armies, this collection of regular soldiers and ill-trained National Guard troops were emblematic of the country's historical de-emphasis on the military during peacetime periods. Due to the slow rate of advancement those officers who had remained in the service were often old and complacent. The task of building the American Expeditionary Force from such a fragile foundation fell to Huebner's anti-Villa campaign commander, John J. Pershing.

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<sup>43</sup> Gary Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, (New York, 2002) p. 143.

Pershing's task was monumental. Manpower, with the aid of the hurried passage of the Selective Service Act in May 1917, was not a problem.<sup>44</sup> Training and equipping them, however, was. Due to shortages in just about every area it was not uncommon for future artillery men to drill with wooden cannon, and many an infantryman's initial introduction to a rifle left them marveling over its distinct similarity to a broomstick. Even the men themselves realized that their training was woefully inadequate, leading one 1<sup>st</sup> captain to note in his diary, "It is too bad that our troops will have to train before going into the fight for so long a time. They can hardly be ready even the first of them before January 1918. But the great expansion we are undergoing is the cause of it all. These first troops have 2/3 recruits and 1/2 the co. comdrs. have less than six years service. The NCOs 60% of them were left in the States training to be officers. So soon we will hear demands for action and will not be ready."<sup>45</sup>

As part of the country's rush to war, one of Pershing's first moves in constructing the AEF was his momentous decision to combine the 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, and Huebner's 28<sup>th</sup> Regiments with the 6<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery to create the now legendary 1<sup>st</sup> Division.<sup>46</sup> Major General William J. Sibert was Pershing's choice to be the division's first commander. Commonly referred to as the "Big Red One" for the unit symbol of the eponymous single digit, the 1<sup>st</sup> has served in every major U.S. conflict since its inception including, WWII, Korea, Viet Nam and both Gulf Wars. For the student of military history it must be noted that the structure of the 1<sup>st</sup> in World War I, as well as for all divisions during the period, differed widely from the "Triangular" structure used in World War II and its even "lighter"

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<sup>44</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 70- Over 2.8 million men were inducted into the armed services during the course of the war.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>46</sup> John S.D. Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, (New York, 2001) p. 31.



versions now used by today's military. In the triangle configuration a division typically consists of 15-20,000 men (both infantry and support personnel) made up of three or more brigades with each brigade consisting of approximately 3,000 men broken into two or more battalions.<sup>47</sup> As the nation prepared to enter the battlefields of France, the divisional structure was an issue that was studied in great depth. Pershing's personal feeling was that the German defensive strategy of "defense in depth" in which trench after trench would need to be bypassed to capture an objective made a "square configuration" imperative. His assessment was supported in a pre-war study conducted by Lt. Colonel Hugh Drum: "In some cases the enemy's deployment may be so dense that the old shoulder to shoulder function will be required. In a war of masses and protected flanks, the offensive produces success by surprise blows whose power is insured by greater depth".<sup>48</sup> The result of this analysis was the adoption of a divisional structure that featured two brigades (the first and second) made up of two 8,000 man regiments each.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the square divisional structure that characterized Huebner's 1<sup>st</sup> and all of the other 42 divisions that fought in Europe from 1917-1918 numbered up to 25,000 men and was 20-25 percent larger than the fighting formations that the country would use in future conflicts.

As the division formed it had one significant advantage over all its followers in that it had the pick of all the available lieutenants. As Gary Mead points out in his book, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, the role of the lieutenant in combat

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<sup>47</sup> Williamson Murray and Allan R. Willet, *A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 580.

<sup>48</sup> James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I", *Parameters: The Journal of the US Army War College*, vol. xiii, no.3.

<sup>49</sup> "Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War", vol. 2, in *American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions*, *Center of Military History*, United States Army, Washington D.C., 1988, p. 97.

is inestimable as they are the “commissioned officer closest to the rank-and-file and upon whose shoulders rested the traditionally more testing task of leadership, that of getting scared, poorly concentrated, exhausted and grousing men to give every last bit of themselves in combat.”<sup>50</sup> From over 2500 available lieutenants, the First’s selections were considered the best that the Army had to offer. Clarence R. Huebner was one of those selected in May 1917.

The next two months were a period of frenzied activity for Huebner. After another brief return home to Bushton, he returned to Ft. Leavenworth to make his final preparations and pack the few belongings that he had accumulated in his seven-year military career. In early May, as the colors of green and gold began to return and flourish on the Kansas plain, he boarded a train for McAllen, Texas, wondering if he would ever see his native state again.<sup>51</sup> During the regiment’s time in McAllen, it was almost 100 percent re-outfitted with the exception of machine guns, and 706 men from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Infantries.<sup>52</sup> On the afternoon of June 3, 1917, Huebner and the rest of the men of 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment (28<sup>th</sup>) boarded a train bound for Hoboken, New Jersey, and their eventual departure for France.<sup>53</sup>

After their arrival in Hoboken, the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> division were sent immediately to New York where Huebner continued to live the harried life of a doughboy bound for duty on a continent that most of his compatriots had never seen before and that for many would be the last that they would ever see. As he pushed through the crowded streets surrounding New York Harbor, Huebner was overwhelmed by the crush of both

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<sup>50</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 106.

<sup>51</sup> *Operations Report*, “Brief Report of the Operation of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1917 to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1918”.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

humanity and activity. A young soldier was viewed as easy prey for a variety of “street merchants” willing to supply him with everything that Uncle Sam did not. From the docks he was serenaded by a cacophony of sounds as men and machine struggled to load material for their voyage across the Atlantic. For a young man who had spent his life living in the somewhat cloistered surroundings of the family farm and a succession of military bases, Huebner’s lack of worldliness allowed him to appreciate the differences and magnitude of his surroundings. However, as a serious young officer on the verge of shipping off to war, the sights and sounds of the city were quickly relegated to the status of so much background noise.<sup>54</sup>

At 4 a.m. on June 14, 1917, Huebner and 25,000 other members of the infant 1<sup>st</sup> division embarked on their two-week journey to the aid of their beleaguered allies. As his ship began to move slowly from the confines of New York Harbor, Huebner was able to make out the outlines of the other two transports, three destroyers and the cruiser *Charleston* that made up the first trans-Atlantic transport group of the war.<sup>55</sup> The accommodations for the journey were the model of Army efficiency, which meant the maximum amount of men and supplies within the minimum amount of space; “the carpenters made bunks four high. The bottom man was almost on the floor while the top man was practically against the ceiling.”<sup>56</sup> For Huebner and many of his fellow soldiers this was their first time aboard a ship, and their passage was punctuated by the inevitable bouts of sea sickness that often had each one swearing that this inaugural

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<sup>54</sup> Huebner, Arthur, letter.

<sup>55</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 104.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

voyage would be their last. Mercifully, on the morning of June 26, Huebner awoke to a welcome site—the French port of St. Nazaire.<sup>57</sup>

On the docks of St. Nazaire, confusion reigned. Lieutenant Huebner worked to assemble the men under his command into an orderly rabble. Although they had had almost two weeks to prepare for this moment, men scrambled to locate the misplaced rifle, mess kit, or letter from a sweetheart that already was beginning to fray from repeated readings. As a young officer, Huebner shared the enthusiasm of his men and was ready to move immediately into combat. However, he would soon learn just how unready he and his men were to enter a world for which all of their drilling had left them ill prepared. As General Robert Bullard, who later commanded the 1<sup>st</sup>, would recall after the war, the men who landed that morning at St. Nazaire were nowhere near ready to assume their place in the cold and squalid trenches that cleaved across the French countryside;

The troops, both officers and men, still knew little of the real purpose for their appearing in France. Most of them expected to join in the fighting at the front without delay. So little real comprehension had any of us of the conditions we were facing! It was to be months before any of us would see the front. We had not upon landing, we later found out to our chagrin, anything but a willingness to fight. We lacked not only the training, but the organization; and even for the infantry, the body of the army, we lacked the kind of arms with which we were later to face the enemy.<sup>58</sup>

Despite their enthusiasm, for Huebner and the rest of the 1<sup>st</sup> division their time at the front would be months in the offing. Although Pershing and French General Henri Petain had agreed that the Americans would ultimately occupy a sector in Lorraine to the east of the Argonne forest, extensive training at the hands of the British and the

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<sup>57</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> Lieutenant General Robert Lee Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War*, (New York, 1925) p. 38.

French would first have to be completed.<sup>59</sup> As a result, Huebner and his men moved directly from their transport to a train of forty-eight boxcars that would take them to their training area in eastern France.<sup>60</sup>

The smell of sweat and moldering woolen uniforms, intermingled with the lingering essence of livestock stung Huebner's nostrils as the train that ferried he and the other 25,000 members of the 1<sup>st</sup> division slowly came to a stop in the small French town of Gondrecourt-le-Chateau.<sup>61</sup> Located some sixty miles south of Verdun, Gondrecourt would be Huebner's home for the next six months as the 1<sup>st</sup> was temporarily assigned to the French 5<sup>th</sup> Army for training. In comparison to his stateside duty assignments that had led him to criss-cross the country's central plains and the remote outposts of the southwest, Gondrecourt was unlike any military encampment that the young lieutenant had ever experienced.

Despite the regular echoes of artillery and sporadic small arms fire, the rolling countryside punctuated by vineyards and fruit orchards was a stark contrast to the treeless farmland of his youth. Unlike the rough-hewn barracks that housed America's soldiers stateside, Huebner and his men often found themselves billeted in the barns of the many farms that dotted the countryside. For senior officers life was somewhat better as they typically lived in the home of the barn's owner.<sup>62</sup>

As a raw lieutenant, Huebner was initially impressed by the precision and professionalism of the 47<sup>th</sup> French Chasseurs Alpines who oversaw the training of the

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<sup>59</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 53.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

American troops.<sup>63</sup> Despite their recent return from the front, the French troops clad in their impeccable uniforms and with their officers astride beautifully maintained horses seemed to project an air of undefeatable confidence. However, in the weeks that followed Huebner and other American officers came to view the image of superiority and invincibility that surrounded their French military tutors as little more than a hollow shell. The grinding toll of trench warfare and the stalemate that followed the massive slaughters of Verdun and the Somme had shorn many of the allied troops of any hope of victory and replaced it with the individual desire simply to survive. As Bullard was to observe “The French count on nothing else than purely trench warfare. Plainly they show that they consider their part of the offensive of this war as done. Without saying, they seem to feel that they have done their part, and expect others to carry on the war when any carrying on is to be done.”<sup>64</sup>

Through the seemingly endless months of training Huebner could not help avoid noticing the similarities and differences between his country’s two major allies. The members of both services that he encountered had long since shed themselves of any romantic illusions that they had harbored as young men going off to war. An air of fatalism had replaced that of nationalistic pride in all but the newest recruits and after three years of battle both the British and French had fewer and fewer of those. King and country had given way to each man’s individual struggle to return home the same man he was when he left. With little prodding, the French and British officers and soldiers that he spoke with would grimly recite the grisly tales of comrades who would forever be shattered remnants of themselves and those whose lives ebbed away on forgotten

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<sup>63</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 107.

<sup>64</sup> Bullard, *Personalities*, vol. I, pp. 51-53.

battlefields while they called out in vain for the arms of their mothers or a sweetheart. Although he had seen combat, unlike many of the men under his command, the young American realized that the idea of invincibility that armies for centuries had relied on as they thrust the finest men of their generations into the insatiable maw of battle was inevitably replaced by a level of primal fear and savagery that allowed them to withstand an environment that their families and friends at home would never understand.

To Huebner, the differences between the allied troops that he would soon fight along side were best exemplified by their approaches to training. Although both countries' forces had experienced a level of carnage unequalled in history up to that time, their areas of training focus clearly reflected their perceptions of what was required to bring an end to a war that daily sapped both of their economic and human resources. From the French, Huebner and the other men of the AEF learned the skills deemed essential for an army that sought nothing more than a negotiated peace to end the conflict that had badly scarred and exhausted the land of Napoleon. Like a boxer huddled in a corner attempting to survive his opponent's onslaught, the French trained their American counterparts on the defensive elements of trench warfare. Fortifications and communications comprised a good deal of the French training agenda. Combined with an emphasis on artillery, the French army viewed the war as a test of endurance in which the long range, impersonal mode of dealing in death reflected the sentiments of its beleaguered infantry corps.<sup>65</sup> To Huebner this emphasis on the defensive stood in stark opposition to the offensive doctrine of the infant American Army. This difference was particularly noteworthy in the French disdain for rifle training. To the Americans this was a ridiculous conclusion. For a farm boy from Kansas who had grown up with a rifle

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<sup>65</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 62.

in his hand, this aversion to using the standard issue 1906 .30 caliber Springfield rifle as the primary tool of the infantryman bordered on the nonsensical.<sup>66</sup> In assessing his ally's seeming lack of confidence in the weapon, General Bullard best summarized the feelings of Huebner and the rest of the American troops:

In the American Army the rifle has always been the essential weapon. The infantry of the 1<sup>st</sup> division, in its training area at Gondrecourt, concerned itself at once with the rifle ranges for practice in individual shooting. The fine 47th French Chasseurs beside us began to talk to us about the use of the hand grenade and the digging of trenches and accustoming ourselves to the use of the gas mask, asserting in substance that there was little use in warfare for the individual rifle or pistol; that the artillery would do all the shooting for the infantry; the infantryman would advance with his gun slung over his shoulder and use grenades against machine-gun nests. Without gainsaying our very agreeable and tactful instructors, we adhered to our individual rifle shooting and learned all their grenade throwing and gas work also. This had to be done very tactfully.<sup>67</sup>

Unlike the French forces whose country had served as the primary battlefield of the war, the British troops viewed a decisive victory as their only hope of returning to their island home. Although they shared their ally's level of war weariness, the offensive elements of battle were their area of focus. From "the Tommies" Huebner and the other American troops received an education in the fine art of killing. Intensive bayonet training and hand to hand combat reflected both the necessities of trench warfare, as well as the British high command's reluctance to totally embrace the reality of the anachronism that the threat of "cold steel" had become in the day of the machine gun. The British syllabus for their American "students" also focused intensely on the coordinated offensive uses of the mortar and the machine gun as the proper tools to aid their men in moving from their own into the trenches of their enemies.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Joseph Dorst Patch, *A Soldier's War: The First Infantry Division AEF (1917-1918)*, (Corpus Christi, 1966) p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Bullard, *Personalities*, vol. 1, pp. 102-3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.



The AEF's initial location in the front lines had been agreed upon by Pershing and Petain shortly after Huebner and the remainder of the 1<sup>st</sup> had docked at St. Nazaire. Located in Lorraine to the east of the Argonne Forest at the far southern end of the Western front the Americans would be near the St. Mihiel salient—a German stronghold since 1914.<sup>69</sup> Generally regarded as a relatively “quiet” area in terms of the fighting, the French and Germans each regularly used it to rest divisions after long periods of extended combat, both the French and American commanders felt that this was the best location to ease the young American troops into the war.<sup>70</sup> For Lieutenant Huebner and the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, their first opportunity to look across a “no man’s land” into the eyes of the enemy came in November at Luneville, just south of the French town of Nancy.<sup>71</sup>

Lieutenant Huebner removed his helmet and vigorously scratched his scalp. While briefly providing him some relief, he knew that it was destined to be short lived as he and his men had been louse-ridden seemingly from the first day that they had taken their place in the trenches of Luneville. Although he had not believed the stories of piles of discarded uniforms that literally moved due to their amount of lice infestation, the small red sores on his body and the patches of skin rubbed almost raw from scratching were a constant reminder to Huebner that the descriptions of trench life from the French and British soldiers he had met had underestimated the constant level of misery and boredom. As they had moved through the labyrinth of earth and wood to take their place in the line, he and his men were first struck by the increasing level of stench and filth that marked their progress to the front. Discarded food cans, spent shells and assorted

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<sup>69</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 102.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>71</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 166.

equipment lay strewn about the plank-covered floor of their defensive position and offered a fertile playground for the rats they shared it with. Stagnant pools of filthy water broke up the monotony of the thick viscous mud that regularly engulfed Huebner's boots and made one think twice about the need to move about the trench for all but the most essential of tasks. The November French weather was cold and wet and left the American's woolen uniforms in a regular state ranging from damp to drenched.<sup>72</sup>

Although their sector had been selected based on its relative lack of activity, Huebner and his men soon found that they were not immune to clashes with the enemy. Long periods of boredom were sporadically punctuated by German artillery barrages. Huebner took pride in the fact that he had quickly learned to gauge the proximity of an incoming shell based on its sound. This was a welcome bit of education as the first few weeks in the trenches found he and his men regularly diving for cover the moment the Germans unlimbered their guns. Now it was only the high pitched whine of an incoming shell that led him to get as low to the earth as possible to escape the shards of hot metal that cut through a man like a scythe.<sup>73</sup>

During their time at Luneville, Huebner and the other men of the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment received their indoctrination in the modes of trench warfare. In many respects the tactics differed little from those that had been used by both sides for the bulk of the conflict. Despite its vast industrial base, the United States paid for its lack of military preparedness by having to depend on its allies for many of its basic battlefield supplies and support. From the standpoint of a young lieutenant leading his men through open terrain in the face of withering machine gun fire, this lack of appropriate equipment

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<sup>72</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 192.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

translated into no armored support. By the time of America's entry into the war both sides had adopted the tank as an effective mode of providing infantry support. Although still new and prone to battlefield breakdowns, the firepower of units like the French Renaults offered cover for troops advancing from trench line to trench line.

Unfortunately for Huebner and the bulk of the American forces, French armor was reserved for more "experienced" units in more strategic locations thereby forcing the men of the 28<sup>th</sup> to limit the majority of their activity to nocturnal probing and wire cutting missions with small groups of men moving from shell hole to shell hole to reach their objectives under the cover of darkness. Even in this limited capacity, however, Huebner had learned that massed firepower was typically the only way to conquer an objective despite its horrific cost in human carnage. The tactics of fire and maneuver that his men would put into practice almost twenty five years later on the same soil were still a distant antecedent to the practice of using a rolling artillery barrage to traverse the battlefield in small timed increments. In his role of company commander the farm boy from central Kansas quickly learned that the attainment of an ordered objective along the Western Front was typically a bloody and arduous process due to the fierce resistance of the well-seasoned German Army.<sup>74</sup>

In March of 1918, Huebner and the men of the 28<sup>th</sup> boarded a train that would take them to the Beaumont sector in northeastern France, just north of the city of Toul.<sup>75</sup> There Clarence Huebner would have a second, and closer, brush with death. While leading his men on a nighttime reconnaissance mission to mark gaps in the barbed wire labyrinth that they would have to navigate during a planned raid on a German position

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<sup>74</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 325.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.

the next morning, his patrol came under fire from a well-hidden enemy machine gun position. Almost immediately the air was alight with the tracers of the German gun crew, forcing Huebner's small scouting squad to scramble for cover. Relentlessly, the enemy gunners raked the American position as United States' mortar fire quickly thundered down in response. As he and his men began their hurried retreat, a bullet pierced the rim of the lieutenant's down turned helmet to hit him directly between the eyes. The force of the shot's impact cracked his skull, crushed his sinuses, and left him in such critical condition that an overzealous doctor at the aid station he was evacuated to took it upon himself to save some clerk the trouble of completing a form and listed Huebner as Killed in Action. Although he would be plagued throughout the remainder of his life by headaches and recurring sinus infections, for Huebner this was a welcome bargain; "Not many men survive a shot between the eyes I'll bet you. Only my helmet saved me—slowed the bullet down a little bit."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *The Holyrod Gazette*, 10, 1971.

## CHAPTER 5

### CANTIGNY

Despite the severity of his injury, Huebner's recovery proceeded with no real complications. Awakening in a field hospital with his head swathed in bandages that covered his skull and eyes had prompted the expected level of initial panic but when he was assured that he had suffered no loss of vision, Huebner settled into a mind-numbingly boring period of convalescence. For the AEF and the 1<sup>st</sup> division (1<sup>st</sup>), however, the period of the young captain's recovery was anything but boring with a series of events taking place that would culminate in the US's first independent assignment.

During the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment's (28<sup>th</sup>) time in Luneville and Toul, the structure and mission of the AEF and the First Division continued to evolve. In December 1917, General Sibert was replaced as commander of the Division by Major General Robert Lee Bullard, a move that was soon followed by the 1<sup>st</sup>'s integration into the U.S. I Corps in early January. More importantly for Lieutenant Huebner and his men of the 28<sup>th</sup>'s second battalion, the plans for the American's first offensive as an independent force had been decided upon by Pershing and the commander of the Allied Armies, Marshall Ferdinand Foch.

Due to the depleted state of both the British and French armies at the time of the American entry into the war, both sides sought desperately to lay claim to the one commodity that their new ally could definitely provide—manpower. Initially both allied partners proposed integrating American troops directly into their respective armies as replacements, a proposal bitterly combated by Pershing. Under direct orders from

President Wilson, Pershing's duties were not limited solely to building an American fighting force, but also ensuring that the AEF fought as an equal partner with her new allies and not a subordinate force. In March 1918, Pershing's efforts were ultimately rewarded with the AEF's first offensive mission—the capture of the town of Cantigny.<sup>77</sup>

Reduced to little more than a skeletal remnant after three years of fighting, Cantigny was the key to the AEF's overall objective, which was to eliminate the German salient that plunged three miles into the allied lines at Montdidier. Although in retrospect the capture of the once pretty little French town provided little strategic or tactical significance, it was to serve as the proving ground for an American fighting force that was virtually non-existent just twelve months prior to the engagement. To accomplish this task Pershing turned to the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> division. Clarence Huebner would be among those asked to demonstrate to both the enemy and skeptical senior allies that the AEF had become a formidable fighting force.

In the planning for Cantigny it was decided that the AEF would focus on a narrow front. Although Pershing lobbied heavily for a larger objective, he was finally forced to settle on a single front just barely large enough for a single regiment to assault. Huebner's participation in the assault was assured when Pershing selected the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment to spearhead the attack.<sup>78</sup> The 28<sup>th</sup> was commanded by Colonel Hanson E. Ely a man who Huebner deeply respected, and like the majority of the other junior officers, silently feared. One of the very first football players for the U.S. Military Academy, Hanson Ely stood six feet-two and enjoyed a fearsome reputation: "If Ely asked his mess attendant for a cup of coffee, the request had the tone of a battalion fire

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<sup>77</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 125.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

chief ordering a hoseman back into a burning building. When he was silent, which was not very often, he continually worked the leathery muscle at the corner of his jaw, as if banking the fires that smoldered in his rasping vocal chords.”<sup>79</sup>

In mid-May, Bullard ordered Huebner and the remainder of the 28<sup>th</sup> to be removed from the line to begin their training for the upcoming assault. Using classical American military doctrine, Ely’s strategy was a simple one that was dependent on overwhelming firepower and surprise. As a company commander Huebner was responsible for training his men to follow a rolling artillery barrage. The AEF’s almost constant issues of supply forced Huebner to teach his charges to move forward at a pace of 100 yards every four minutes, using men carrying tree branches to represent falling artillery shells.<sup>80</sup> On their final day of training, Ely had Huebner and the other company commanders add flamethrowers to their tutorials so that the men would be familiar with how to use them when they made their assault on the enemy trenches.

Slightly more than 700 yards separated the French and American lines from the village limits of Cantigny, with every angle of approach covered by German flanking machine gun fire.<sup>81</sup> From captured German prisoners, AEF intelligence had discerned that the American troops would be facing the German 271<sup>st</sup> and 272<sup>nd</sup> regiments who, although undermanned, were still both considered above average in quality.<sup>82</sup> To overcome the advantages of the German defensive positions, the French had agreed to

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<sup>79</sup> Lawrence Stallings, *The Doughboys*, (New York, 1963), p. 58.

<sup>80</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 126.

<sup>81</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 228.

<sup>82</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 126.

support Ely's advance with 250 artillery pieces, as well as 12 tanks, a platoon of flame-throwers and an aviation unit.<sup>83</sup>

Scheduled to begin in the pre-dawn hours of May 28<sup>th</sup>, Ely's well thought out offensive soon fell victim to events outside of his control. Early on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> German Commander Erich Von Ludendorff began the third of his "Great Offensives" of 1918. Launched in the southwestern portion of the western front from Chemin Des Dames, Ludendorff's ground troops' initial objective was the Marne with Paris being their ultimate goal. The German's gambit immediately forced Petain's hand, resulting in the Frenchman's decision to consolidate his forces to meet the rising enemy threat. Unfortunately for Ely, the French Marshall's decision to muster his forces to alleviate the threat on his country's capital resulted in the American colonel's access to 250 artillery pieces being limited only to his initial offensive. For Huebner and the other members of the 28<sup>th</sup> this meant that if they were successful in capturing Cantigny, they would be forced to withstand any and all enemy counter attacks with only the firepower that they could generate from within their earthen fortifications.<sup>84</sup>

Captain Clarence Huebner shivered in the early morning hours of May 28<sup>th</sup>. Around him each of his fellow soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion (2<sup>nd</sup>) of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment prepared for their first full scale engagement with the enemy in their own individual way. The sounds of snoring from those lucky enough to be able to sleep blended with the jingling of the metal buckles on the belts and packs that were being checked over for the countless time. By the dim glow of a lantern that he had cloaked in an old blanket Huebner re-read the message that Pershing had had distributed to his men: "You are

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>84</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 127.



now to go against a victorious enemy under new and harder conditions. All our allies will be watching to see how you conduct yourselves. I am confident that you will meet their best hope.”<sup>85</sup>

Slowly he refolded the paper and absentmindedly slipped it into his breast pocket. He went over the mission in his mind once again. The plan was not terribly detailed: follow the barrage, move into the city and take up the defensive position necessary to hold it. After that phase it was a matter of holding on regardless of the number of enemy counterattacks. News of Petain’s decision to pull out all of the artillery after the initial assault had been relayed to each of Ely’s officers. The message was passed in the form of a formal order but the message was simple—do not call for help because none is available.

With his men charged with attacking on a front only 1500 yards wide, Ely’s plan, although more involved than in Huebner’s simplified version, was not overly elaborate. In order to achieve maximum firepower the 28<sup>th</sup> would attack with all three of its battalions advancing abreast at a rapid clip. Each battalion commander was instructed to deploy three of their companies in a shoulder to shoulder formation with the fourth company held in reserve. Only Lt. Colonel Robert Maxey’s 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion (including Huebener) would actually enter the town. The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion (3<sup>rd</sup>), stationed on the left flank and the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion (1<sup>st</sup>), on the right, would both bypass the Cantigny to reach their objectives along the ridge that ran 500 yards beyond the town limits.<sup>86</sup> The attack

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<sup>85</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 122.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

itself would head due east in conjunction with the movements of the French 45<sup>th</sup> division to the left of the 28<sup>th</sup> and the U.S. 26<sup>th</sup> infantry on their right.<sup>87</sup>

Huebner leaned back with his pack pressed against the rear wall of the trench and rotated his shoulders to relieve the pressure of the straps that pulled uncomfortably against his shoulders. He laughed silently to himself at the thought of the term “rapid advance” in the orders that had been relayed to the men of the 28<sup>th</sup>. Each doughboy would enter the battle with a minimum of 220 rounds of ammunition, three sandbags, two grenades, one rifle grenade, two water canteens, two iron rations, one shelter half, two cakes of chocolate, one lemon and wads of chewing gum to serve as thirst quenchers.<sup>88</sup> For a man who had grown up on a prairie farm, rapid advance could best be equated with the lumbering gait that one used when carrying a hay bale on his back. However, as he noted to himself, no one was shooting at him back in Bushton. At approximately 4:45 a.m., Huebner was shaken from his silent reflection by the roar of the French artillery as 220, 240, and 280 millimeter howitzers and heavy trench mortars began to rain down upon the enemy positions. Also, 75 and 155 millimeters howitzers pounded the German trenches, machine gun positions, and roads.<sup>89</sup> Although he knew that this was just the preliminary phase of the bombardment, during which the gunnery crews would calibrate their weapons to ensure maximum destruction, he still pressed himself tight against the wall of wood and mud out of reflex. Blinding flashes of light pierced the night sky at regular intervals and the ground rumbled below his feet as the allied shells began to find their range on enemy locations. By 5:45, the full scale phase

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>88</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 233.

<sup>89</sup> Joseph Dorst Patch, *A Soldier's War: The First Infantry Division AEF (1917-1918)*, p. 94.

of the barrage began to rain down upon the German troops. Huebner could no longer discern any regular interval of fire as the 250 French guns hurled shells that were passed by those of their rivals in flight. The sporadic flashes of fire that had begun only an hour before had now been replaced by a raging sky streaked with brilliant bursts of oranges and yellows, and the sound of individual explosions had been replaced by a deafening cacophony.

The heavy bombardment stopped as scheduled at 6:40. The dense smoke from the American and German shells veiled the battlefield and burned in Huebner's chest. Anxiously, he waited for the "walking barrage" to begin and the shrill whistle blast that would send him and the other men of the 28<sup>th</sup> over the trench wall and onward toward Cantigny. At exactly 6:45, Huebner's wait ended and he scrambled over the trench wall as the first French shells hit the ground. In response to the Americans' emergence German machine guns belched ribbons of flame and with each yard covered in their advance the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment of the 1<sup>st</sup> division left their own dead and wounded in their wake.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the fact that the Germans had pre-sighted the field, the U.S. troops advanced rapidly toward their objectives. In annihilating German gun positions the Americans gained a new found appreciation for the flame thrower. As Huebner later noted, each time they were used on a German pillbox any escaping enemy combatants emerged in flames and ran "just as I had seen rabbits in Kansas come out of burning strawstacks."<sup>91</sup> Aided by both the support delivered by the French artillery and their use of their flamethrowers, Huebner led the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion into Cantigny as their counterparts

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<sup>90</sup> *Memo to Commanding Officer of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from Commanding Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry, "Report on Operations in Vicinity of Cantigny May 26 to 31, 1918".*

<sup>91</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 130.

of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions raced on their way to their final positions along the ridgeline outside of town. By 7:20 Huebner's battalion had reached their initial objective, a house near the outskirts of town identified on the AEF's battle maps as position 21.15.

Although the initial assault had proceeded according to plan, the officers and men of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment knew that they had just completed the easy part of their mission. With the withdrawal of the French artillery, the most difficult part of their assignment, holding their ground, was about to begin. Their wait for the inevitable German counterattack was a short one. At 7:30 the German artillery began the first of their multiple attempts to bludgeon the American forces into submission. Concentrating on both the AEF positions on the outskirts of town and to its rear to prevent reinforcements, the enemy shells soon began to find their range. Shell fragments mixed with brick and mortar from the buildings that they tore through filled the air. From their position in the town the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion sought cover wherever they could find it. An overturned cart or a recessed doorway were but a few of the sanctuaries sought by the American troops. As he turned to direct a few of his men to a more secure location Huebner saw the Battalion Commander, Lt. Colonel Maxey, recoil from a shell burst just a few feet from where he was standing. Although his wound was initially reported back to AEF headquarters as "not believed serious," Maxey would die from his injuries the next day and was incapacitated for the remainder of the first day's battle.<sup>92</sup> Just as the German troops mounted their second offensive at approximately 9:00 am, AEF headquarters received a second report from the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion informing them that:

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<sup>92</sup> *Operations Report First Infantry Division, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment*, "Report on Operations Against Cantigny", May 28, 1918.

“Maxey (is) seriously wounded. I have assumed command. Am constructing a reduit at 21.15. One strand around entire place.”<sup>93</sup> The message was from Captain Clarence Ralph Huebner.

With Maxey mortally wounded, Huebner’s first job was to coordinate the efforts of his men to fortify their defensive position. Although a single strand of barbed wire offered only a small measure of protection from an enemy ground assault, completing this activity under unrelenting German artillery and machine gun fire was a heroic task.<sup>94</sup> Huebner moved throughout the battalion’s position, repeatedly exposing himself to enemy fire to ensure that the men and materiel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion were in the most advantageous position possible to ward off the repeated counterattacks that were to follow.<sup>95</sup>

By noon, the second German counteroffensive had diminished to sporadic sniper fire, although they maintained a steady rate of shelling across all of the American positions. During this time Huebner took stock of his situation and determined that his command post and position at 21.15 would be difficult, if not impossible, to hold if the enemy chose to make it the focus of a concentrated assault. The devastated architecture of Cantigny offered little in the way of “natural” protection, and the rubble strewn streets would make any large scale movements of battalion personnel a treacherous adventure. In assessing his situation, Huebner’s first action was to deploy a scouting mission to identify a more fortified location to house the battalion’s command post (CP). After making a short reconnaissance, the men of the patrol reported that a

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> *Memo to Commanding Officer of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from Commanding Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry*, “Report on Operations in Vicinity of Cantigny May 26 to 31, 1918”.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

nearby café bar offered a “cellar not used by the enemy for some time, possibly since the last French attack.”<sup>96</sup> Based on this intelligence, Huebner made the decision to move his CP in spite of an increase in German artillery fire.

In retrospect the battle for Cantigny is now considered significant only as the AEF’s proving ground. In fact, General George Marshall, then a member of Pershing’s staff concluded; “the losses we suffered were not justified by the importance of the position itself.” The German Army fought viciously to reclaim it from its American captors.<sup>97</sup> As Huebner moved amongst his men for the remainder of the first day of battle, the enemy’s unrelenting artillery assault was augmented by two additional counterattacks that were repelled before the sun had set on the battlefield. For him and the other battalion commanders, their mission was simple and straightforward—hold their positions until further notice. In light of the intense German bombardment General Bullard refused to relieve the 28<sup>th</sup>, so despite an extensive loss in manpower (one of Huebner’s companies had lost all of its officers) Huebner’s and the rest of Ely’s subordinates’ plans for maintaining their gains in Cantigny would include neither artillery nor manpower support.<sup>98</sup>

In assessing Huebner’s efforts at the close of the first day of battle, it is difficult to view them as anything less than exemplary. Although he had been a company commander in a front line unit for almost seven months, this was the first major offensive for both him and his troops. With no American artillery support and commanding men whose training up to this time had been limited by a lack of proper

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<sup>96</sup> *Memo from Intelligence Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry to Commanding Officer, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry*, “Report on Conditions and Material in Captured Area of Cantigny”, June 2, 1918.

<sup>97</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 132.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

equipment, Huebner was faced with a true test of his leadership capabilities. Commanding men under fire is the true test of any officer, especially in their maiden engagement, and as a first time test Cantigny would have been a worthy baptism for any company commander. But as General Bullard stated in his assessment of Huebner's actions when one considers that Huebner's scope of command escalated from a company to an entire battalion within the first sixty minutes of the engagement his efforts become all the more impressive; "Commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion after the death of Lt. Colonel Maxey, in early part of the engagement, changed his CP under intense bombardment when his second had become untenable, exercised great coolness and determination and made correct and most important tactical decisions at critical moments and saw that same were carried out".<sup>99</sup> Although perhaps somewhat melodramatic in his praise, Major General Joseph Dorst Patch's assessment of Huebner's efforts in his book, *A Soldier's War: The 1<sup>st</sup> ID AEF (1917-1918)*, provides an accurate portrayal of his emergence as a battlefield commander:

There were times during this period when it looked as if the Germans might retake the town, as the lines were wavering and some men definitely pointed in the wrong direction (the rear). It was then that an officer rose to the occasion by his personal example of courage he pointed the retreating men in the right direction and held them there. He exposed himself to enemy fire and why he was not killed is a miracle. His name is Ralph Huebner.<sup>100</sup>

The night brought no respite for Huebner and his men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion. The German guns continued the relentless pounding of the American positions, and sporadic sniper fire kept American heads low as they worked throughout the evening to fortify their positions against the inevitable counterattacks that the morning would bring.

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<sup>99</sup> *General Order Number 26, June 15, 1918, Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> Division, AEF* by command of Major General Bullard.

<sup>100</sup> Joseph Dorst Patch, *A Soldier's War: The First Infantry Division AEF (1917-1918)*, p. 95.

In his basement command post Huebner took note of the substantial casualty figures (in all, 200 officers and men were killed or missing at Cantigny and another 669 wounded<sup>101</sup>) and issued a stream of orders for the men who either remained or had assumed command of the 2<sup>nd</sup>'s companies that specified the gun and troop locations required to fend off the coming German onslaught. Between frequent cups of coffee that an aide prepared in the cellar fireplace, Huebner sent runners back to Ely's headquarters to advise the Colonel of the preparations that he made to ensure that a German attack on the town from any direction would be repulsed due the interlocking fields of machine gun and rifle fire delivered from the battalion's newly refortified gun positions. For any commander in his position, sleep would have been an almost unattainable goal—for Huebner this would be one objective that he would not achieve.

With the dawn of May 29 came the first of three furious German assaults on the already devastated town of Cantigny. Following their own form of a rolling barrage, the enemy troops advanced across the entire front of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment. From their positions along the outer border of the town, Huebner's 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion met the German charge with an unsparing "wall of steel." Buckets of water hauled from nearby wells were poured over the barrels of American machine guns to keep them from overheating as the American's fire ravaged the on-rushing grey-clad aggressors. Within this maelstrom Huebner moved from position to position exhorting frightened men to return fire and hold their ground at all costs. As shell fragments and bullets turned the air about him into a hornet's nest of lethal metal, the onetime enlistee from the plains of Kansas

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<sup>101</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 132.



provided the leadership necessary to ensure that the center of the AEF's position would serve as its anchor and not its weakest link.<sup>102</sup>

The Germans would attempt to dislodge the American forces two more times on the second day of the battle and would follow with one last futile, and easily repulsed, attack in the pre-dawn hours of the 30<sup>th</sup> before conceding the town to the American troops. By mid-day, the first members of the 16<sup>th</sup> regiment began arriving to execute Bullard's relief order for the 28<sup>th</sup>.<sup>103</sup> For Huebner, his "battlefield promotion" left him both exhausted and exhilarated. He had led men into combat and rallied them against repeated attacks. If he had entered the engagement with any doubts as to how he would perform under the rigors of battlefield action, they were eliminated by this extraordinary test of both his skill and reserve. His efforts did not go unnoticed as he was recommended for, and awarded, the county's second highest award for valor, the Distinguished Service Cross, for his efforts at Cantigny: "For three days...He withstood German assaults under intense bombardment," the recitation read, "heroically exposing himself to fire constantly in order to command his battalion effectively, and although his command lost half its officers and 30% of its men, he held the position and prevented a break in the line at that point".<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Joseph Dorst Patch, *A Soldier's War: The First Infantry Division AEF (1917-1918)*, p. 92.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>104</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 166.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOISSONS

Despite the heavy toll that the fight for Cantigny had taken on the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion (2<sup>nd</sup>), Huebner's actions during the three-day battle provided him with both recognition and reward. Ely had forwarded his recommendation for the Distinguished Service Cross on to AEF headquarters and in early June Huebner exchanged his Captain's bars for a Major's Oak Leaf. With the death of Lt. Colonel Maxey, he officially became the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion's commander. However, as much as Huebner took pride in both the notice of his meritorious service and his promotion, he, like the other men of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment (28<sup>th</sup>), found that the thing he appreciated most in the aftermath of the first major AEF offensive was the respite provided by the regiment's reassignment to a quiet sector near the town of Rocquencourt.<sup>105</sup>

While the 28<sup>th</sup> took on replacements and the tasks of integrating them into the remnants of existing companies and platoons, plans were already underway among the Allied high command for the next mission for the now battle-tested U.S. forces. Although it had proven to be ultimately unsuccessful, German General Erich von Ludendorff's third major offensive had driven a long narrow salient into the Allied lines that ran from Soissons to Reims.<sup>106</sup> Although they had twice tried unsuccessfully to break through it, the German forces had only been able to extend its thrust deeper into their enemy's territory and, as an unwanted consequence, overextend their supply lines. For French

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<sup>105</sup> *Operations Report*, "Brief Report of the Operation of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from 27 May to 11 November 1918."

<sup>106</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 255.

commander Foch, the key to thwarting the German incursion was to attack it at its hinge point—Soissons.

Foch's plan for the recapture of Soissons was massive in its scope. To achieve his objective the French commander would make use of 1200 pieces of artillery, 500 tanks, 1100 aircraft and over 24 divisions.<sup>107</sup> For the newly promoted Huebner and the remainder of the 1<sup>st</sup> division, the attack on Soissons would be made as part of the French XX Corps along with the US 2<sup>nd</sup> division, the 1<sup>st</sup> Moroccan Colonial Division and both the French 58<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup> divisions.<sup>108</sup> On the evening of July 8, Huebner's 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion and the remainder of the 28<sup>th</sup> began their march to the battlefield.<sup>109</sup>

A cold rain pummeled the American troops as they made their way to the debarkation point of Breteuil. The rain, combined with the constant passage of men and materiel, ground the dirt roads into a quagmire that seemed to cling desperately to each man's legs in a vain attempt to protect him from a predetermined fate. The exhausting march was exacerbated by the French mud on each passing caisson and motorized transport as men were regularly detailed to help extricate trapped draft animals and artillery pieces. As reported by the 28<sup>th</sup>'s Regimental Surgeon, Dr. James Bunch, the road to Soissons was especially grueling for Huebner as he was wracked by a severe intestinal virus: "After several days of cold, wet weather and no rest except possibly an hour or so bivouac at night and very little food and under fire several times...Huebner could scarcely make it."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 255.

<sup>108</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 166.

<sup>109</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 255.

<sup>110</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

From Breteuc, the exhausted and nauseated Huebner and his men boarded trucks to their designated staging area near the town of Plailly and once there “went into rest billets for a much needed rest.”<sup>111</sup>

For Huebner, the time spent in Plailly was all too brief. While his health had improved somewhat, the order for the American troops to move out came only 48 hours after their arrival. By 3:30 a.m. on July 15, though still queasy he and the rest of the 1<sup>st</sup> division boarded a fleet of French trucks to an unspecified destination. The sheer size of Foch’s operation necessitated a high level of secrecy and even battalion leaders like Huebner were not informed of all of the operational details. Soissons was the key to the allied plan as its capture would enable the vital artery of the Soissons-Thierry Highway to be severed, thereby thwarting any further effort by Ludendorff to drive toward Paris.<sup>112</sup>

On board the French transport trucks, Huebner passed his time whittling. Having learned the skill from his father, the Kansan had become an expert at turning any scrap of wood into a whistle, an intricate set of interlocking rings or some other piece of interesting craftsmanship. While it helped pass the time, and often allowed him a temporary respite from the rigors of battle and command, for the newly commissioned major moving toward an as yet unnamed location deep in the French countryside aboard an overloaded and rough riding transport, his old hobby played a more important role than usual—it helped divert the cravings of a newly reformed smoker. By 6 a.m. on the morning of July 16, the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> division stumbled from their motorized caravan and set up an encampment in an overgrown portion of the Champigny

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<sup>111</sup> *Operations Report*, “Brief Report of the Operation of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1918”.

<sup>112</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 168.

Forest.<sup>113</sup> Their stay here was brief with a night march on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> taking them to Morefontain, where with another day's rest they finally moved into the line west of Soissons.<sup>114</sup>

From the position west of Soissons, the 1<sup>st</sup> division was located at the northern end of the allied lines. For the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment specifically, this location offered a relatively flat terrain to traverse for the first four miles towards the ultimate objective of the Soissons-Chateau-Thierry Highway. Unfortunately, this position also entailed crossing the Missy-Aux-Bois ravine. Ely's plan for the 28<sup>th</sup> had Huebner's 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion operating as the primary assault force, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion (3<sup>rd</sup>) serving as their support force. As a result, the Major and his men would be the first to have to traverse the ravine—a geographical anomaly that offered superior positioning for the defending German troops. Approximately one kilometer wide, the Missy-Aux-Bois gouged into the earth with each of its steep side slopes extending upward at a sixty degree angle.<sup>115</sup> With the German artillery occupying the high ground, the mission of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment would have been daunting enough, but the ravine offered an additional topographic feature that left the task on the verge of the suicidal. A marshy swamp almost 600 yards wide ran through the middle of the ravine. On this swamp the Germans had focused a deadly consortium of artillery including one battery of 150 mm howitzers, a battery of six 77mm guns located on the eastern slope, and another 77mm battery at the head of the ravine.<sup>116</sup> Thus, Huebner's forces would be funneled into a narrow gauntlet that would

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<sup>113</sup> *Operations Report*, "Brief Report of the Operation of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1918".

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *After Action Report*, "28<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Aisne-Marne Offensive, July 18-21, 1918".

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

require them to survive concentrated small arms and machine gun fire, as well as highly concentrated artillery shelling to reach their objective.

All commanders realize that men must die in battle if objectives are to be obtained. Although every plan is drawn up with the expectation to minimize casualties, perhaps the true measure of a battlefield commander is to demonstrate courage and leadership for his troops even when he knows that the chances for his own survival are slim. This was Huebner's challenge at Soissons. Proven under fire, the eager young recruit of eight years before had grown into a hard, flinty leader who had learned to mask his own fears behind a stoic exterior and who exhorted his men into battle from the front of the line never seeking the shelter of a rear command post. For Huebner, to lead men into battle meant exactly that, and when H-hour arrived for Soissons he would be one of the first men forward even if it meant being one of the first to fall.

At 4:35 on the morning of July 18, the 1<sup>st</sup> division of the AEF along with the components of the French XX Corps began their assault to destroy the Aisne-Marne salient. As Huebner and the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion moved forward into the rain and mist that covered the battlefield, they were led by an uncharacteristically small amount of artillery support. Although poor weather normally favors the attacking forces in an engagement, in this instance it acted as two-fold shield for both sets of combatants. While it offered the allied assault forces a "cloak of invisibility" it also masked the positions of the defending German 10<sup>th</sup> Army, thereby ensuring that the combined American and French troops would ultimately be greeted by a nearly full concentration of enemy firepower.<sup>117</sup>

The allied troops moved swiftly and by 8 a.m. the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment and the other elements of the division had broken through the initial German line of defense to

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<sup>117</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 168.

achieve a three mile deep penetration into enemy territory. Following their allotted convoy of five French Renault tanks, Huebner's 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion with the supporting element of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion moved forward with minimal casualties. The poor visibility afforded by the wind and rain that blanketed the French countryside had enabled the Americans to move quickly to overwhelm token enemy resistance. Unfortunately, for Huebner and the other members of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment, their rapid advance had led them to the precipice of their enemy's most lethal killing field. The Missy-Aux-Bois ravine beckoned them into its deadly vortex.

Recognizing the superiority of the German defensive position, Huebner chose to begin his attack on the ravine with a tentative two company thrust. The German response was a violent storm of machine gun and rifle fire that quickly devastated the U.S. troops and halted their advance after only 100 meters.<sup>118</sup> Coupled with the enemy's repulsion of his initial attack, Huebner saw his supporting deployment of tanks annihilated along the ravine's western edge in a hail of German artillery fire. In less than five minutes, the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion's assault on the Missy-Aux-Bois ravine had been rendered impotent. With no tanks, and his troops scrambling for cover from both German artillery and machine gun fire, Huebner's hopes for relief by covering fire from allied artillery were dashed due to the steepness of the ravine's western slope which provided a natural shelter for the entrenched German troops.<sup>119</sup>

With his advance halted, Huebner reviewed his situation and determined that the enemy positions located in and around the French town of Bruel made any attempt to cross the Missy-Aux-Bois an exercise in suicidal futility. As corpsmen shuttled the

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<sup>118</sup> *After Action Report*, "28<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Aisne-Marne Offensive, July 18-21, 1918".

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

maimed and lifeless bodies of the men who had taken part in the initial assault past his command position, Huebner ordered two companies forward with the their objective being the neutralization of the town and surrounding area. As in the case of the initial assault on the ravine, Bruel proved to be equally impregnable with Huebner's forces' drive toward the town ending after only 300 yards in a barrage of German rifle, machine gun and artillery fire.<sup>120</sup>

Having now made two unsuccessful attempts to open a path across the ravine, Huebner's advance which had begun so successfully was now in danger of withering in the face of unrelenting enemy resistance. The defensive positions afforded the troops of the German 10th Army by the natural contours of the Missy-Aux-Bois had enabled them to pound the men of the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment's 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions with a steady barrage of artillery and small arms fire. In assessing his situation, Huebner found few positives on his side of the ledger. By the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup>, over 50 percent of the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> had been killed or injured, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> had lost its commanding officer and almost a quarter of its troops. Ely ordered the remaining men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> to be temporarily combined under Huebner's command. The officer corps of both battalions had been devastated, leaving him with only three second lieutenants to guide his shell-shocked forces.<sup>121</sup>

Despite the failure to neutralize the German positions in Bruel during the first attack, Huebner remained convinced that only by taking the town could he outflank the enemy gun positions on the ravine's eastern rim that made any further progress toward the Soissons-Chateau Thierry Highway impossible. Due to his lack of manpower, any

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<sup>120</sup> *After Action Report*, "28<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Aisne-Marne Offensive, July 18-21, 1918".

<sup>121</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.



frontal assault on Bruel was not feasible. To overcome this situation, Huebner formulated a two-stage attack plan that required his forces first to capture the less fortified town of LeMont De Arty and use it as the hinge from which they would swing right to launch a flanking assault on Bruel from the heights located just to the south of the town. For the increasingly desperate German forces, holding their positions at Bruel and the Missy-Aux-Bois was critical if they were to maintain any hope of offensive leverage against their allied opponents by continuing to threaten Paris. If they could keep the allied forces pre-occupied with maintaining a defense of the French capital, Ludendorff and the remainder of the German high command could attempt to wreak havoc on their opponents via another major offensive. As a result of each side's heightened rationale for achieving its own specific objectives, the fight for Bruel, and ultimately the effort to gain passage through the ravine, reached a level of savagery and ferocity that can only be achieved when truly desperate men meet upon the battlefield. As Huebner was to later recall, "The fighting was of a very severe nature, our men waded the mud and water up to their hips and the enemy defended his positions very strongly in fact to the last as no prisoners were taken."<sup>122</sup>

The battle for Bruel and the eastern edge of the Missy-Aux-Bois ravine began with the quick capture of LeMont De Arty early on the morning of July 19<sup>th</sup>. Using the newly secured town as his anchor, Huebner's troops then swung right for yet another assault on the seemingly impregnable Bruel. The battle raged on for the better part of the remainder of the day with the thin line of Huebner's combined battalions securing the ravine late in the afternoon. At one point during the assault, the Americans discovered that German troops were emerging from a well-hidden cave to attack them

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<sup>122</sup> *After Action Report, "28<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Aisne-Marne Offensive, July 18-21, 1918".*

from the rear. Huebner ordered two platoons to drive them back into the cave. After a period of intense fighting, the 22 enemy officers and over 500 of their men eventually surrendered.<sup>123</sup> As the afternoon sun began to move further westward on the horizon, Huebner and his men readied themselves for their next objective—the town of Ploissy.<sup>124</sup>

Occupying a commanding position along the heights to the west of the Soissons-Chateau Thierry Highway, Ploissy was an essential objective if the allies were to sever the German's ability to drive into the heart of Paris. Although his forces were exhausted and battered, Huebner's orders were to link up with the 28<sup>th</sup>'s 1<sup>st</sup> battalion to launch a coordinated assault on Ploissy while daylight was still available on the 19<sup>th</sup>. While his troops used the time before the next offensive to catch a brief bit of rest and to recheck equipment, Huebner, now hoarse voiced from shouting orders above the din of the fighting in the Missy-Aux-Bois, mapped out the path of the upcoming incursion with his "field promoted" staff of sergeants.<sup>125</sup>

At 5:30 p.m. the attack for Ploissy began. Huebner's force, made up of the remnants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions, moved in concert with the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> division's effort to take the town. Almost immediately they were met with ferocious mortar and machine gun fire. As the German onslaught tore into their ranks, the combined forces of the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment were mauled unmercifully. Huebner's participation in the battle was cut short as he joined the balance of his officer corps when he was severely wounded in action. As recounted by Lt. Colonel Samuel Parker,

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<sup>123</sup> *After Action Report*, "28<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Aisne-Marne Offensive, July 18-21, 1918".

<sup>124</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

Huebner was wounded while leading his men toward the heights near Ploissy that were just to the west of the coveted Soissons-Chateau Thierry Highway:

I heard a soldier yell, the Major is hit. I looked around and a short distance to the rear I saw Major Huebner on his back on the ground. His face was covered in blood and there was a hole above his right eye. His eyes were closed. My thought was that a machine gun bullet has shattered his brain. He opened his eyes, recognized me and said, 'Take my maps and carry on'. His eyes then closed. I thought he was dead. You can imagine my surprise a few weeks later after the Soissons battle was all over when I met Major Huebner. He was out of the hospital and back on the job.<sup>126</sup>

Fortunately, for the young major, Parker's initial assessment proved to be incorrect. A piece of shell, rather than a bullet, had lacerated his forehead and hit him with enough force to give him a concussion. In comparison to both his battalion and the division in general, he had been lucky. The fight for Soissons would last another five days before the American troops were able to advance the seven miles required to capture the town of Berzy la Sec and sever the Soissons-Chateau Thierry Highway to eliminate the German's path to Paris.<sup>127</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> division had taken over 6900 casualties (more casualties than would be suffered on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944) in completing its mission. For his efforts, Major Clarence Huebner was cited for gallantry:

This officer commanded the front line battalion on the attack and got it in position after an exhausting march. During the advance to the first and second objectives all the officers of this battalion were killed or wounded. Reorganizing his battalion, he continued his advance and captured the second objective. He displayed skill and courage in handling his battalion and remained with it at the very front until wounded on July 20.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

<sup>127</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 168.

<sup>128</sup> *General Order #2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Headquarters*, 2 August, 1918- The citation incorrectly notes that Huebner was wounded on July 20 rather than the actual date of July 19.

## CHAPTER 7

### ST. MIHIEL

Despite the growing influx of troops from the U.S., Huebner and the rest of the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> division (1<sup>st</sup>) had seen a disproportionate share of combat.<sup>129</sup> Due to manpower shortages faced by both the French and British armies upon their arrival, and the “catch 22” nature of their enhanced level of combat readiness due to their efforts at Cantigny and Soissons, Huebner and his compatriots would earn no immunity from the battles awaiting the allies in fall 1918. In fact, throughout the war the 1<sup>st</sup> division and a few select regiments actually served as exceptions to Pershing’s rule against amalgamation. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> were often placed under French or British command, as they would be at St. Mihiel, as they were the most ready-trained and combat tested troops the Americans had to offer and therefore coveted by the leaders of the other allied forces. Although Ludendorff’s three grand offensives had resulted in no substantial territorial acquisitions and had further thinned an already depleted army of experienced troops, the Germans remained entrenched behind their substantial fortifications and demonstrated no inclination to submit to the will of their attackers. In accessing the situation on the ground, Foch’s next assignment for the AEF was the elimination of the St. Mihiel salient.

A dagger into French territory since almost the start of the war, the town of St. Mihiel had originally been captured by German troops in 1914.<sup>130</sup> Due to its proximity to Verdun, the occupation of St. Mihiel enabled the Germans to cut all rail communications with this key French population center. In order to relieve this situation, Foch had

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<sup>129</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 284. By September of 1918 over 1.3 million men and 61,000 officers made up the AEF in Europe.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

directed Pershing to reduce the salient in the latter part of July, and after approximately a month of planning the AEF commander was prepared to launch an early September offensive. Despite its detailed planning process and the experience of its troops, the AEF would be attacking a well-defended enemy stronghold.<sup>131</sup>

After almost four years of occupation, the Germans had established two defensive lines to protect their strategic holdings in and around St. Mihiel. The forward line of their fortifications, designated the “Wilhelm Defense Zone,” included the town of St. Mihiel and extended for over forty miles. Anchored at the town of Pont-a-Mousson on the east, in the north along the heights of the Meuse River, the Wilhelm “line” stood five miles deep and was manned by seven battered divisions consisting of just 23,000 troops with two equally understaffed divisions standing in reserve.<sup>132</sup> The second line of the enemy defenses, the Michel Line, was actually a fortified portion of the Hindenburg Line and was more heavily fortified than its counterpart.<sup>133</sup>

In developing his battle plan Pershing decided to focus entirely on the weaker Wilhelm Line. Spearheading the offensive would be his newly formed IV Corps consisting of Huebner and the remainder of the 1<sup>st</sup> division, and the U.S. 42<sup>nd</sup> (national guard) and 89<sup>th</sup> (national army) divisions as well<sup>134</sup>, who would deliver a hammer blow to the left of the German line.<sup>135</sup> For the 1<sup>st</sup> division, their jump off point would be from

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<sup>131</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 285. Foch had given this direction to Pershing on July 24, 1918.

<sup>132</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 191.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>134</sup> “Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War”, vol. 2, in *American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions, Center of Military History*, United States Army, Washington D.C., 1988 p. 444. Although by the end of the war all troops were recognized under the heading of U.S. Army, manpower initially came from three “unique” sources. The “regular army” was made of career military like Huebner and the remainder of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, “national guard” divisions were mobilized from their respective states and the “national army” was the term used to denote troops raised through the draft.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

the town of Seicheprey located in the center of the AEF lines with the city of Vigneulles to be their ultimate objective. Based on the battle plan timetable, Vigneulles was to be taken in two days to enable the 1<sup>st</sup> to then link up with 26<sup>th</sup> division (26<sup>th</sup>) of the AEF's V Corps.<sup>136</sup>

As Huebner drew up the order of battle for his 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, he noted that the terrain between Seicheprey and Vigneulles was relatively flat with no natural obstacles that would require special consideration. Four years of bombing and fighting had left the area largely denuded of any forestation leaving the high ground of Montsec as the only position from which the German observers would be able to survey the battlefield to direct artillery fire.<sup>137</sup> As the overall plan for the 1<sup>st</sup> was to bypass Montsec and use a corresponding smoke barrage to cover their movements, his primary directive was straightforward—reach Vigneulles as rapidly as possible.<sup>138</sup>

On the morning of September 11, 1918, Huebner awoke to greet a frequent companion during his time in France—rain. As he and his men relieved the remaining elements of the 89<sup>th</sup> division near Bois Des Nauginsard, they slogged their way through the boot sucking mud that seemed to be the consistent feature of any location to which they were deployed. The meetings at Regimental headquarters reconfirmed what Huebner already knew. The 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion under his direction would be the first to advance with the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion in support and the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion in reserve.<sup>139</sup> This task would not be an easy one. The devastating effects of Soissons had necessitated the

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<sup>136</sup> "Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War", vol. 2, in *American Expeditionary Forces: Divisions, Center of Military History*, p. 191.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>138</sup> *Operations Report*, "Brief Report of the Operation of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1918".

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

complete replacement of his staff of platoon leaders with men of far less battlefield experience than their predecessors. The difficulties of this situation were exacerbated by his own convalescence, which had further limited the amount of training time available to him and his newly formed command staff.

At one a.m. on the morning of September 12, 1918 the first of more than 3 million artillery rounds arched across the battlefield to wreak death and destruction on the German troop entrenchments.<sup>140</sup> As the ground moved beneath his feet and the lights overlooking the maps that lay across the table alternated between brilliance and darkness, Huebner completed his last briefing with his command team. As he stepped into the night to observe the bombardment, his thoughts turned toward the new troops under his leadership. The trench action of the war which would cost both France and Britain a devastating percentage of a generation's worth of young men, now beckoned an ever increasing number of Americans. Although he and many other men of the 1<sup>st</sup> division had seen a significant amount of action during their time in France, their battle hardness had been gained in a matter of months not years. As the bombardment continued he could easily place himself inside the minds of the new men in his battalion who mustered their courage behind the belief that no living thing could survive the intensity of the Allied barrage. As their commander he could wish that they would find their hopes to be true, but as a twice-wounded infantryman he knew that their enemy would be there waiting to dash their illusions in a hail of rifle and machine gun fire.

The AEF's rolling barrage began just as the night's blackness began to give way to the first rays of sunlight. Moving at the now accustomed rate of 100 yards every four

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<sup>140</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 285.

minutes Huebner's 2nd battalion advanced rapidly meeting extremely light resistance.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps reflective of their enemy's sagging fortunes, his troops found even the barbed wire that lay across the field had become old and rusty and offered no impediment to the AEF assault.<sup>142</sup> His troops' attack was briefly halted by German machine gun fire near Quart en Reserve, but by 9:37 they had taken the objective.<sup>143</sup>

Communicating with his mobile troops largely through runners, Huebner found no reason to alter his plans for the advance, which by 5:00 p.m. found his men over half way to their ultimate objective of Vigneulles. While his men briefly rested, Huebner received orders from divisional headquarters that the next objective for the division would be to cut the Vigneulles-St. Benoit Road. At 5:45 his forces, along with the balance of the 1<sup>st</sup> division, launched their attack in force on the Vigneulles-St. Benoit junction with the 2<sup>nd</sup> division in support. In this renewed assault they once again met only token German resistance and by nightfall had effectively cut off their enemy's access to Vigneulles from the North.<sup>144</sup>

For Huebner's 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion the battle of the St. Mihiel salient would effectively end on the morning of September 13. From his position to the north of Vigneulles, Huebner was ordered to capture and secure the cross roads to the east, southeast, and the south of town and hold them until relieved. Ordering reconnaissance patrols to probe the German positions, he learned that none of the three was heavily fortified. Based on what projected as little more than token resistance, he ordered direct platoon

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<sup>141</sup> *Operations Report*, "Brief Report of the Operation of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1918".

<sup>142</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 191.

<sup>143</sup> *Operations Report*, "Brief Report of the Operation of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1918".

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*



level assaults on each of the targeted intersections.<sup>145</sup> The simultaneous offensives began at 3:15 a.m. and each position was secured by shortly after sunrise. Although they would fend off sporadic half-hearted German counterattacks over the next few days, for Huebner and his men combat action at St. Mihiel was over by mid-September, and they spent the remainder of the month occupying their captured positions until they boarded trucks bound for Neuvilly on the first day of October.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> *Operations Report*, "Brief Report of the Operation of 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1918".

## CHAPTER 8

### ARMISTICE AND HOME

As September bled into October, the beleaguered German forces remained a determined, if reeling, opponent. With the securing of the St. Mihiel salient, Pershing began redeploying troops to the Meuse-Argonne area. Included in this force of eighteen AEF divisions was the 1<sup>st</sup> division, and their newest Regimental Commander, Major Clarence R. Huebner.<sup>147</sup> In the span of less than twelve months the scope of his battlefield leadership had advanced from the tactically oriented duties of a lieutenant to the more strategic focus of battalion and regimental command. This “on the job” training stood in stark contrast to what Huebner could have expected in the peacetime Army that characterized the U.S. military in the years prior to its entrance into the European conflict. His “War College” exercises were not being played out on a classroom sand table, but on real battlefields with each decision he made carrying enormous human costs as opposed to the removal of molded pieces from a modeled terrain. For Huebner, and many of his contemporaries, these lessons would serve them well when they returned to the shores of France to fight another war less than thirty years in the future.

As the convoy of trucks containing the men of the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment (28<sup>th</sup>) and their new commander moved toward their destination of Foret de Hesse, each man anxiously awaited the time when they could disembark and once again get back to their more

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<sup>147</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 299.

usual, and less jarring, mode of transportation—walking.<sup>148</sup> Upon reaching their destination and camping for the evening each man got his wish as their moved into position on a hill 200 meters north of the town of Very.<sup>149</sup>

For the 1<sup>st</sup> division, the Meuse-Argonne offensive would take place across a front four kilometers wide against the German 5<sup>th</sup> Guard and 52<sup>nd</sup> Divisions.<sup>150</sup> As part of the division's assault, Huebner's 28<sup>th</sup> regiment would have two objectives that needed to be achieved during the initial attack. The first objective was take control of the area south of the Charpentry-Eclisfontaine Road, with the second being to secure the area southwest of the town of Serieux.<sup>151</sup> As had become commonplace, the assault was scheduled to begin at first light (5:25 am) on the morning of October 4. For the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment the Meuse-Argonne campaign had a successful beginning with Huebner's men capturing their first objective in less than 90 minutes. Per his orders, Huebner immediately ordered his troops on to their second objective. As they began their move toward Serieux, the intensity of enemy resistance escalated dramatically. The sloping east-west terrain provided the German troops with the high ground along the Apremont-Fleville Road which ran parallel to the battlefield, while also providing them with the ability to utilize the natural defenses of the Argonne Forest itself to deliver raking fire on the U.S. troops.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *After Action Report*, "Report on Operations of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from September 29, 1918 to October 13, 1918".

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 231.

<sup>151</sup> *After Action Report*, "Report on Operations of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from September 29, 1918 to October 13, 1918".

<sup>152</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 231.

In an effort to provide cover for his advancing troops, Huebner called for tank support to suppress the fire coming in on his left flank. With over 189 French tanks assigned to support the Allied offensive, his request was granted but with little resulting success. The superior position of the German artillery made it difficult for the lightly armored Renaults to fire accurately upon the enemy gun emplacements while also exposing them to lethal counter fire. Of all the tank casualties incurred on the first day of the offensive, those assigned to the 28<sup>th</sup> regiment would absorb 84 percent of them.<sup>153</sup> With his advance stalled (the 28<sup>th</sup> would only move forward one mile for the day) at Serieux, Huebner's men dug in for the evening.

The next day would offer no respite from the furious German methodology of defense in depth in which wave after wave of enemy troops would place the Americans under constant, withering fire. Although Huebner's plan to use the woods to the northwest of Hill 244 as a screen proved successful in capturing that position, little else went right for the his 28<sup>th</sup> regiment or for the AEF forces in general.<sup>154</sup> The enemy resistance was relentless across the entire front with the campaign essentially devolving into the same level of trench warfare that had characterized the conflict almost from its beginning. For Huebner, this stalemate resulted in a regular series of small unit probing actions that seemed to meet regularly with "terrific machine gun fire and direct artillery fire."<sup>155</sup> With the advance of his troops and those of the AEF effectively at a standstill, the month of October moved inevitably toward November with only his promotion

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<sup>153</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 234.

<sup>154</sup> *After Action Report*, "Report on Operations of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry from September 29, 1918 to October 13, 1918".

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

(temporary) to lieutenant colonel punctuating the mounting sense of futility felt by Huebner and his contemporaries within the AEF command.<sup>156</sup>

World War I ended in the same manner that it had started on November 11, 1918. Futile trench charges were still being launched by both sides right up until the agreed upon armistice time of 11:00 a.m.<sup>157</sup> Over 50 million men had participated in the conflict and nine million never returned home.<sup>158</sup> For the three main antagonists (Britain, France and Germany) the war had sapped them of a large measure on their finest young men. Although historians still debate what finally prompted Germany to ask for terms which would culminate in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, many believe that the seemingly endless supply of American troops and the corresponding prospect of further battles in the trenches of France and on the German border provided the final blow to the German high command's plans to continue fighting.<sup>159</sup>

For Clarence Huebner the end of the war came without the thrill of a decisive battle. In this feeling he was not alone as the final AEF offensive had ground to a halt in the fields of France rather than delivering a fatal thrust into the heartland of the enemy. The war had been concluded in exhaustion and would leave issues unsettled that would set the stage for a larger conflict just a quarter century into the future. For the new lieutenant colonel, the martial portion of his war may have been over but his administrative duties were just beginning. For Huebner and the other men of the 1<sup>st</sup> division their time overseas would last well into 1919. Assigned to the sector

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<sup>156</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

<sup>157</sup> Joseph Persico, *Eleventh Month, Eleventh Day, Eleventh Hour: Armistice Day, 1918*, (New York: Random House, 2004) p. 7.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

surrounding the Coblenz bridgehead in Germany, Huebner spent his days overseeing the initial rebuilding activities of the citizenry.<sup>160</sup>

Although he had returned to the homeland of his Grandfather Gottfried, Huebner had little interest in exploring the land that had given birth to his lineage. Like many doughboys his primary desire was to return home. Although he expected to lose his field rank upon his return to the States, the war had only reinforced his decision to make the military a career. He had seen combat and led men into battle and that would be an asset for him even in a peacetime army. He had served his country with great distinction and would return home with a chest full of decorations including, his Distinguished Service Cross with Oak Leaf cluster, a Silver Star, two Purple Hearts, the French Legion of Honor and Croix de Guerre, and the Italian war cross.<sup>161</sup> The men he had met and served with like George Marshall and another lieutenant colonel named Patton would ultimately come to serve as important benefactors later in his career. But that was in a future unforeseeable by a young Kansan ready to return to his home country.

For the members of the 1<sup>st</sup> division the distinction of being the first to fight on French soil was far outweighed by their less desirable “honor” of being the last division to return to the United States. Their orders to return home were not issued until July 1919. For most of the men in the division this would mercifully be their last experience in a military uniform. For others, however, they would have the next quarter century to internalize the lessons that had been learned along the western front for use when they returned to drive another invading army from the towns and fields of France. Among these men was Clarence Huebner.

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<sup>160</sup> Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, p. 403.

<sup>161</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 165.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE INTERWAR YEARS

For a returning Army regular, the glory and adulation that embraced him on his return to American soil quickly gave way to the regimentation and routine of military life on outposts that only the government thought worthy of human habitation. For Huebner, his stateside return was quickly followed by orders to proceed to Camp Merrit, New Jersey followed by an almost immediate transfer to Camp Meade, Maryland in September 1919.<sup>162</sup> His whirlwind odyssey quickly continued with his return to the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry at Camp Taylor, Kentucky.<sup>163</sup>

Although assignment to three separate bases in slightly over thirty days was somewhat atypical, the United States was in the process of rapidly divesting itself of its armed forces, a historical trait that has characterized the country since the time of the Continental Army under Washington, and Huebner was just one of the many officers who led an almost “gypsy-like“ existence at the end of the Great War. This rapid divestiture of troops would prove to have important consequences less than a quarter century later as World War II would once again find the country under-manned and lacking in the coordinated doctrine necessary to step up to its responsibilities as a world power. Upon his arrival at Camp Taylor, a sprawling infantry base located in central Kentucky, Huebner took up his duties as the battalion commander.<sup>164</sup> In this role he began the long process that would consume a great deal of his own time, along with

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<sup>162</sup> “Clarence Huebner Biography,” U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information, 1950, First Infantry Division Museum, Wheaton, IL, Box 392.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

that of many of his contemporaries, digesting and processing the lessons learned on the battlefields of France.<sup>165</sup>

Although he was an infantryman to the core, Huebner had witnessed firsthand the nascent abilities of both armored and air support to deliver a decisive advantage to ground assault troops. Perhaps more importantly, he had survived to understand the futility of “infantry only” assaults against highly fortified enemy positions. Like many of his contemporaries, including Patton and Marshall, Huebner understood that the tactics and doctrines of the combatants in World War I had been rendered obsolete by the advances in technology and weaponry that had emerged upon the battle scarred face of the European landscape.<sup>166</sup>

During his time at Camp Taylor, Huebner began the process of applying the knowledge gained through his leadership of troops in Europe and transforming it into practical combat applications. The reliance on large scale assaults had given way to an understanding of the basic importance of small unit tactics and operations. For Huebner, this meant an increased reliance on the rifle company as the basic combat unit. The ability of forces of company size and smaller to deliver concentrated firepower on a position allowed them to overrun or hold an enemy force in place while freeing other units to move quickly into key battlefield positions. This basic construct of coordinated “fire and movement” lent itself to the more mobile and fast-paced mode of assault that men like himself envisioned would characterize the country’s next armed conflict. While his views on this emerging tactical methodology remained in an infant stage, he modified the training operations of the battalion to reflect this shift in combat

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<sup>165</sup> Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I*, p. 292.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.



philosophy. During his time in Kentucky, Huebner drilled his men relentlessly in the areas of marksmanship and tactical exercise to enhance the ability of his troops to operate effectively in small unit operations and to clarify his own theories of infantry strategy and tactics.<sup>167</sup>

In many ways, Huebner found the world of the Army that he had left behind for France had changed little from when he left. As military funding dropped almost immediately from its wartime peaks to pre-war levels, the rapid advancement that had vaulted him from a captain to a Lt. Colonel in under a year evaporated almost overnight and by the end of the year he was returned to his pre-war rank.<sup>168</sup> While the achievement of a battalion command position with only a captain's rank certainly burnished the sheen on his rising star, the return to a force of less than 200,000 troops worldwide meant that future promotions would move at a glacial pace. As a single officer, the barracks of the battalion staff that Huebner shared with its other members had changed little since the base's initial construction in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only married officers were afforded the "luxury" of separate on-base housing. However, upon visiting many of the homes of his married peers and superiors, the Kansan could not help but view his family's two bedroom house in Bushton as palatial in comparison. Although better than a water-logged, rat-infested trench, Huebner's own wooden quarters offered only the most basic protection from unpredictable elements of the camp's central Kentucky climate. However, after spending most of the previous eighteen months living and sleeping as a guest of the French countryside, Huebner found the spartan accommodations of Camp Taylor to be more than acceptable.

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<sup>167</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

<sup>168</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 167.

The evolution of his own personal thoughts on infantry tactics and strategies were not the only thing that occupied Huebner during his time in Kentucky. The thirty-two year old captain found his grip on bachelorhood became a tenuous proposition upon his introduction to Florence Barrett. Although no documentation exists to pinpoint how they met, the raven-haired Florence, the daughter of a Louisville merchant, and the intensely focused young battalion commander proved to be a productive “military match.”<sup>169</sup>

The life of a military spouse is unlike any found within a “conventional” marriage. Frequent movement, coupled with long periods of solitude while a husband is away training or on combat deployment can produce incredible strains within a marriage. Neither Huebner nor Florence left any of their correspondence regarding their marriage. From all appearances, theirs was a happy marriage in which Florence provided her husband with unwavering support and devotion; “I live for him alone. That’s the way it has always been.”<sup>170</sup>

Whatever the state of Huebner’s relationship with his future wife, absence would soon intervene. In August, he received the first of his multiple postings to Fort Benning. Located in southern Georgia near Savannah, Fort Benning has long served as the Army’s primary location for advanced infantry training. Within its sprawling confines new modes of infantry tactics have been evaluated and taught to a regular stream of officers and enlisted men. However, at the time of Huebner’s arrival, the base was only two years old. The establishment of the Columbus, Georgia area as the home for its infantry school was the direct result of the rapid expansion of the Army during World War I and

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<sup>169</sup> *Washington Post*, 16 March, 1945.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

the service's realization that a separate camp for training its foot soldiers was required. Originally slated to be established in Fayetteville, North Carolina, the fort was established when it was decided that Fayetteville would be used for artillery training instead.<sup>171</sup> In fall 1918, the first troops began arriving at Benning from Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, the school's temporary home. Due to its infant state, the camp was a veritable "tent city" with few completed structures when Huebner arrived to serve as an instructor in the Department of Tactics.<sup>172</sup>

As an instructor at the Army's leading infantry training center, Huebner was responsible for training a regular stream of officers in the service's evolving doctrine of combined operations. The lessons of WWI were still being digested and healthy debate surrounded a number of the war's components. For example, although it had seen extensive action on the battlefields of France, the tank was still garnered a good deal of skepticism in many corners of the military establishment. Due to its relative newness as a battlefield component, the tank could be described at the end of the action in Europe as meeting with "mixed reviews." The early products of British and French manufacturers suffered frequent breakdowns in the almost perpetual sea of mud that characterized the war's battlefields, and weak muzzle velocities limited their firepower. Offsetting these limitations, the addition of armor to the battlefield had proven effective in instances where it had been used in combined operations with ground troops rather than as a stand-alone method of attack. Thus, the period immediately following the war was one of reflection and heated debate regarding the use of infantry and ancillary tools of support. In fact, early American proponents of tank operations such as Patton

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<sup>171</sup> "Home of the Infantry", 2004, available at [www.benning.army.mil](http://www.benning.army.mil).

<sup>172</sup> "Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

regularly were forced to defend their theories against a multitude of detractors supporting the continued use of mounted cavalry!

Huebner's initial tenure at Fort Benning was relatively uneventful. As the various factions within the Army debated and fought over the use of the tank in combined operations, Huebner spent his days presenting the less theoretical aspects of infantry doctrine to his peers within the officer corps. As the mode of instruction at Benning consisted primarily of a Socratic presentation of various battlefield scenarios and then analyzing the responses presented by his students, Huebner was not only exposed to a broad spectrum of opinion and reasoning but also had ample opportunity to hone his own mastery of combat tactics and maneuver. He further enhanced his expertise in September 1922 with his participation in the Army's Advanced Infantry Course.<sup>173</sup>

Upon his graduation in May 1923, Huebner and Florence, whom he had married in 1921, took the first steps in their life together as military nomads with their return to Kentucky and his assignment to Camp Knox.<sup>174</sup> For Florence, the return to her native state was a welcome reprise from southern Georgia. However, any thoughts she may have had at establishing a permanent household were quickly quashed with her husband's assignment as the Plans and Training Officer of the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry at Fort Benjamin Harrison in rural Indiana. For Huebner this was a relatively unexciting period in his career. The return to a staff assignment performing similar functions to those he had been responsible for at Fort Benning offered him little challenge, and the reversion to a peacetime Army so dramatically slowed the rate of advancement that it would be years before he could hope to reach even his wartime rank of lieutenant colonel.

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<sup>173</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

Fortunately, the static nature of Huebner's situation was short-lived and he was soon to embark on the next major path of his career.<sup>175</sup>

The Army's Command and General Staff School (CGSS) located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, represents a major step in the progression of a rising officer. From its inception its mission has been the same as it was when Huebner entered as a student in August 1924: cultivate and identify those officers with the potential to achieve command at the highest level of the country's senior-most service. Through its use of practical exercises, students demonstrate their ability to solve complex tactical and operational problems. As summarized by General J. Lawton Collins, the lessons that Huebner and a number of other officers who would obtain divisional and corps commands during World War II learned around the "sand tables" at Ft. Leavenworth would prove to be more practical than they realized at the time in preparation for their experiences in WWII.<sup>176</sup> Huebner's performance at the CGSS further established him as an officer on the rise as he graduated sixth in his class of 256.<sup>177</sup>

Upon his graduation from CGSS, Huebner's career took another fortuitous turn with his reassignment to Ft. Benning as an instructor at the Infantry School.<sup>178</sup> Although he was once again an instructor of infantry tactics, he had the good fortune to serve during the tenure of George C. Marshall as the school's commandant. The future World War II Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was an astute judge of talent and regularly looked out for officers that might be of service to him as he moved forward in his own

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<sup>175</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

<sup>176</sup> Robert H. Berlin, "United States Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography", *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 53, no. 2, April, 1989. Among Huebner's classmates were future WWII Corps Commanders, Anderson, Cook, Crittenberger, Griswold, Haislip, Hall, Patch, and Sibert.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

career. So precise and driven was Marshall that from his earliest days in the military he compiled and maintained a list of promising officers he met and served with throughout his career. Marshall's famous "list" would come to include men like Eisenhower, Patton and Bradley and serve as the primary source for virtually all of the commanders above the divisional level during WWII.<sup>179</sup>

For Marshall, the attributes of a strong commander were rare commodities that needed to be ruthlessly recognized and fostered—even at the expense of the careers of more senior officers. Perhaps the most succinct summary of Marshall's views on the qualifications of a strong commander is documented in a 1942 memo that he sent to General Leslie McNair: "Vital qualifications for a general officer are leadership, force and vigor. Ordinary training, experience and education cannot compensate for these and the officers who possess them must be singled out and advanced regardless of other considerations."<sup>180</sup>

In Huebner, Marshall found the embodiment of his command requirements. Although his tenure overlapped Marshall's by only seven months, his ability to cultivate a high level of performance from his students through his rapt attention to detail and demand for excellence made a strong impression on his talent hungry commandant. As an instructor, Huebner developed his beliefs on the attributes that defined an effective fighting unit; strict discipline, superior marksmanship, and precise planning and coordination. Failure to perform at a high level in any one of these areas would be scored by the number of casualties that a unit would experience in combat. These

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<sup>179</sup> Michael Lee Lanning, *The Military 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Military Leaders of All Time*, (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1996), p. 65.

<sup>180</sup> Robert H. Berlin, "United States Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography", *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 53, no. 2, April, 1989.

qualities would serve him as well when he returned to fight on European soil as they did as an instructor under the direction of Marshall at Fort Benning. When he left Georgia in early summer 1928 Huebner could not have known that he had dramatically altered the course of his military career. The name of Huebner has been added to the roll of officers to be watched on Marshall's list.<sup>181</sup>

Huebner's tenure at Fort Benning was also memorable for two other reasons: the birth of his daughter, Mary Juliette, in 1926, and his promotion to major in October 1927. For the Huebner's, Juliette would be their only child, and like many children of the military, the bulk of her childhood would be spent moving from one military base to another. Thus, by the end of Huebner's tenure at Fort Benning, the size of the family was set but their nomadic life was only to continue.

From Fort Benning, Huebner's career continued along its slow, upward, projection with his attendance at the Army War College in Washington, D.C.<sup>182</sup> For an officer who ultimately desires to obtain a general command, attendance at the War College is essential. As a student, Huebner was exposed to a curriculum highly oriented toward strategic planning and the related issues that must be addressed when leading American troops in combat abroad. For Florence, Huebner's tenure at the War College provided her with her first exposure to what would become the family's ultimate home base. Although their first posting to the nation's capital lasted for only a year, Florence and her husband quickly embraced the cosmopolitan nature of the capital city. For Huebner, Washington was the antithesis of the small town environment in which he had been raised. Unlike her husband, Florence had grown up in an urban environment, and

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<sup>181</sup> Robert H. Berlin, "United States Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography", *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 53, no. 2, April, 1989.

<sup>182</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

the Washington of the late 20's was still very much a "southern" city and was reminiscent of the Louisville where she had grown up. However, like their tenure in Kentucky, the family's sojourn in Washington was over all too quickly and in August 1929 they returned to Huebner's native Kansas with his assignment as an instructor at the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth.<sup>183</sup>

The world of the Army has always been small despite its far flung operations, and Huebner's tenure as an instructor at the CGSS is a prime example of this incestuous structure. As officers like Huebner moved and progressed up the ranks of command they routinely served as underlings and instructors for each other. For example, of the thirty-four WWII Corps Commanders who attended the CGSS, fourteen would return as instructors prior to the war.<sup>184</sup> During his almost four years at Ft. Leavenworth, Huebner served as the classroom mentor for a number his future peers, and even superiors including Omar Bradley, J. Lawton Collins, and Manton Eddy.<sup>185</sup>

For Huebner, these stints as an instructor at locations like the CGSS and the Infantry School served a number of valuable purposes. Perhaps the most important element of these postings was his ability to retain his visibility at the highest echelons of the Army officer corps. Although skill and hard work are essential to any officer's success, the inter-war Army was no more or less political than any large organization. Exceptional performance in high profile assignments, along with relationships with influential members of the military hierarchy, were as essential for advancement in Huebner's day as they are in today's military or any large corporation. In terms of

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<sup>183</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

<sup>184</sup> Robert H. Berlin, "United States Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography", *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 53, no. 2, April, 1989.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*



political acumen, it may be inferred from various events in his life and the opinions of his superiors that Huebner could not be described as a “political animal.” He was often blunt and did not suffer fools gladly. Based on this self-styled aversion to political chicanery, his rise through the officer ranks was undoubtedly the end product of superior performance and his ability to live out the culture of the Army.

Service as an instructor also provided Huebner with regular insight into the evolution of the military doctrine that would govern U.S. operations in WWII. By the time he returned to Fort Leavenworth in 1929, the advocates of the combined operation of armor and infantry had begun to see some initial success in demonstrating that the use of the tank in concert with infantry delivered an incalculable increase in firepower and maneuverability to the Army’s ground forces. Thus, although the strategic and tactical considerations of effectively combining armored and infantry forces were still in an extended period of transformation, Huebner was able to remain on the forefront of these discussions to help shape their overall direction and formulate his own thoughts for their battlefield applications. Wellington may have believed that battles like Waterloo were won on the “playing fields of Eton,” but for Huebner, and many of his contemporaries, the battlefield and command issues that they would face on European soil were dissected on the sand tables and training grounds at locations like Forts Leavenworth and Benning.<sup>186</sup>

The frequent movement of a rising officer helps to mold his philosophies of command and leadership both consciously and unconsciously. Although his natural disposition plays a large measure in developing an officer’s tenets of command, for

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<sup>186</sup> Robert H. Berlin, “United States Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography”, *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 53, no. 2, April, 1989.

example, an easy going and personable individual will rarely evolve into a “by the book” commander. For Huebner, his drive and natural sense of order grew heightened with each new position and scope of responsibility. Through his service as everything from a cook and a clerk to a leader of men under fire, he gained the experience and knowledge of all of the operational functions within a military unit. This breadth of experience helped instill a level of self-confidence in the decisions he would make, as he was often to rely on his own first hand knowledge of what would be required of the men who would be responsible for exercising these orders. This intimate understanding of the duties and views of even the lowliest rifle carrying private provided him with a unique insight that was often not available to many of his contemporaries. Unlike many within the officer corps of the U.S. Army both in peacetime and during World War II, Huebner had literally risen from the ranks of an enlisted man rather than having emerged as a second lieutenant straight from West Point or a college campus and Officer’s Training School. As a result of his own experiences, he cultivated a leadership philosophy that emphasized focus on preparation and detail combined with strict adherence to the Army’s rules of discipline. For him, a fighting unit was like a finely tuned engine that achieved peak performance only when all of its cylinders were operating at their optimal level.

After a brief return to Georgia and Fort Benning, Huebner and his young family once again returned to their adoptive home of Washington, D.C., in July 1934 with his posting to the Office of the Chief of the Infantry. For the next four years, as he served as the Assistant Chief of the Personnel Section for Arms, Equipment and Finance, Huebner was able to spend the time with his family that would soon come to be an

increasingly precious commodity<sup>187</sup>. The Huebner household can clearly be described as “patriarchal.” His schedule dictated the daily flow of activities. For example, his penchant for long hours meant many meals shared only by Florence and Juliette. In many respects, Huebner could be described as a loving but distant husband and father. He spent virtually every waking moment in the company of men who revered service to their country and loved the Army and its importance to the security of the nation. Life with his wife and young daughter was a radical departure from the unique camaraderie and structure that only the military could offer. Even his hobbies of carpentry and shooting were outside the “female purview” of the Huebner household.<sup>188</sup> This dichotomy was perhaps more pronounced in his relationship with his daughter than Florence. Although Juliette shared her father’s strong will and outspokenness, her interests were vastly different than those of a man who had grown up on a midwestern farm and spent the bulk of his adult life as a military officer. Artistic with a particular love of music, Juliette and her father had little in common. Coupled with frequent absences dictated by the demands of his career, Huebner’s relationship with his daughter was never to be a close one.<sup>189</sup>

Promoted to lieutenant colonel in early 1938, Huebner would spend the next four and a half years moving from Schofield Barracks in Hawaii to Washington, then South Carolina, and finally Washington again<sup>190</sup>. As the events in Europe continued to escalate and draw the country inexorably once again toward war, much of Huebner’s time would be spent in establishing the training programs that would be used to prepare

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<sup>187</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 167.

<sup>188</sup> *Washington Post*, 16 March, 1945.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

the citizen soldiers of the United States from mill hands, teachers, and accountants to a potent force that would fight and die in foreign locations ranging from the deserts of Africa to the beaches of far away islands that were virtually invisible on a map but whose names would become synonymous with gallantry and bravery. This would also be a period of rapid advancement, for Huebner personally as he was to receive three promotions within three years to reach the rank of major general in March 1943.<sup>191</sup> This rapid level of advance was now not uncommon for men of Huebner's rank and seniority as the country's rush to war had left it with a dearth of senior level commanders.

As Chief of the Training Branch of the Office of the War Department General Staff<sup>192</sup> from the summer of 1940 to early 1942 Huebner's task was to help implement the formation, organization, and training of the armored units that he and others had envisioned in the years immediately following WWI. Upon his return to Washington in March 1942, after a brief stint as the Commandant of the Infantry Replacement Training Center at Camp Croft, South Carolina, Huebner in the role as the Director of Training in the Operations and Training Division of the War Department's General Staff was tasked with developing the processes and procedures required to meet the demands necessitated by the country's rapid mobilization from an international spectator to full-fledged fighting ally.<sup>193</sup>

Although Huebner recognized the importance of his efforts in developing the training methodologies that would dictate the success or failure of the Army's troops on the battlefield, a role that earned him a Legion of Merit, like all general officer's he

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<sup>191</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information.*

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

yearned for a battlefield command.<sup>194</sup> By March 1943, the Army was fighting in both North Africa and the Pacific. Although the build-up of forces had been dramatic since the attack on Pearl Harbor, the newly minted major general still found himself behind a desk in Washington. Men he had served with and under like Patton and Mark Clark were already leading armies, corps and divisions. Although his wait to “join the war” seemed interminable, Huebner would quickly get his wish.

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<sup>194</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 167. Huebner’s citation reads; “By his outstanding ability and devotion to duty he contributed materially to the solution of the complex training problems of the U.S. Army”.

## CHAPTER 10

### SICILY

For the United States' armed forces, the road to Berlin initially began in North Africa. Despite fierce resistance by the U.S. high command who favored an invasion across the English Channel at the earliest possible date, English Prime Minister Winston Churchill was able to convince President Roosevelt that the —Mediterranean“ strategy proposed by the British was the most expedient course of action based on the situation facing the allies in mid-1942.<sup>195</sup> The first phase of this strategy was eradicating the Nazi's grip on the North African countries of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. From there the plan would ultimately call for the capture of the island of Sicily which would serve as the launching point for an assault on the Italian mainland.<sup>196</sup>

Although lasting for only seven months and ending in an allied victory the North African campaign foreshadowed the contentious nature of the relationship between the British and American allies. In his book, *An Army at Dawn, The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, Rick Atkinson asserts that; “North Africa established the patterns and motifs of the next two years, including the tension between coalition unity and disunity.”<sup>197</sup> As the next phase of the allied march toward Italy, the battle for Sicily would further exacerbate the tensions between the British and American high commands. Marked by poor leadership and abysmal planning, the Sicilian campaign degenerated into a “turf” war between the U.S. and British Armies and had a direct impact on Huebner's involvement in the war.

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<sup>195</sup> Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 2002, p. 11.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Sir Harold Alexander was both Eisenhower's and Churchill's favorite general in World War II.<sup>198</sup> Suffice it to say that as the battle for Sicily progressed Huebner would not be able to make the same claim. As Alexander's Deputy Chief of Staff for the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group, Huebner would quickly find himself at odds with his commander in an environment that served as a microcosm for the tense relationship between the more experienced British commanders and their American allies.<sup>199</sup>

From a professional perspective, both Alexander and Huebner shared similar backgrounds. Both men had served in WWI and had advanced rapidly based on their battlefield exploits. Much like his American deputy, Alexander had begun the war as a platoon leader and within a year risen to become one of the youngest lieutenant colonels in the British Army. Unfortunately, the similarities between the two men ended there. Unlike the prairie-raised American whose work ethic had been honed from an early age through a rigorous daily regimen of chores and responsibilities, Alexander was the privileged product of upper English society. As described by his biographer, Nigel Nicolson, Alexander was, "an English country gentleman, almost uneducated, who never read a book or had any interest in the arts at all....He had no politics. He wasn't interested in the causes of the war, or the cause of that particular war in which he was fighting."<sup>200</sup>

Despite his status as the Allied Commander of the Mediterranean Theater, Alexander was loath to impose his will on his subordinate commanders. His command guidance was often vague and difficult to understand. Due to his predisposition towards vacillation, in most any disagreement that Alexander was forced to arbitrate the stronger

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<sup>198</sup> Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 2002, p. 411.

<sup>199</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

<sup>200</sup> D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, p. 412.

personality usually won out, or as noted by Major General John P. Lucas, “The last man who sees him will, I am afraid, get a yes.”<sup>201</sup> These deficiencies were particularly evident in the Sicily campaign in which he was forced to deal with perhaps the two strongest willed leaders of the war, Patton and Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery. Within his own staff, dissent was typically overridden by a collective “groupthink”, in which strong opinions were subordinated to maintain a congenial atmosphere within the ranks. For the blunt and plain-spoken Huebner this was an environment almost guaranteed to lead to a contentious relationship with his British commander. In Alexander’s headquarters strong egos and opinions were regularly suppressed, Huebner quickly became the de facto leader of Alexander’s direct subordinates.<sup>202</sup>

A moment must be taken to answer the obvious question as to how Alexander was able to attain and maintain such a high position of command. Historians and contemporaries have long struggled with this question. In his book, *Bitter Victory, The Battle for Sicily, 1943*, military historian Carlo D’Este describes Alexander as the “Great Enigma”.<sup>203</sup> Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery, who considered Alexander a friend, was even more critical of Alexander’s generalship; “Alexander has acquired a false reputation as a great commander in the field, and a great strategist”.<sup>204</sup> In determining why Alexander was able to endear himself to his superiors and progress in command the answer lies more with what he wasn’t rather than was. Unlike many of his peers on both the American and British sides Alexander did not crave the limelight. Per

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<sup>201</sup> D’Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier’s Life*, p. 413.

<sup>202</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 168.

<sup>203</sup> Carlo D’Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*, (New York: E.P. Dutton), 1988, p. 334.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.



D'Este, he was "...a modest, unassuming commander who was far more content to remain in the shadows rather than bask in the limelight of publicity..." Even Montgomery, a bull who carried his own china shop with him, recognized Alexander's ability to avoid controversy; "he has all the fine qualities that I lack myself".<sup>205</sup> As a commander his lack of strategic planning capability made him more than willing not to question directives from above, and he was reluctant to impose his will on subordinates which often gave them free reign to operate as they saw fit.<sup>206</sup> In short, in a period marked by clashes of supreme egos, Alexander shone through via his pliability and affability.

The tensions that would come to grow between Alexander's aides, and specifically between he and Huebner, were especially exacerbated by his condescending attitude toward the fighting abilities of the U.S. forces under his command. In his defense, his perceptions of the abilities of his American troops were not altogether unwarranted. Prior to 1939, the United States Army ranked seventeenth in the world, just behind Romania, in terms of its size and combat power and was described by Field Marshall Sir John Dill, Churchill's chief military representative in Washington as, "more unready for war than it is possible to imagine".<sup>207</sup> The country's rapid mobilization after Pearl Harbor had delivered manpower, but the rush to put men into uniform far outstripped the nation's ability to secure the tools needed to train them. In many units broom handles served as guns and stovepipes acted as mortar tubes,

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<sup>205</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*, p. 334.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>207</sup> Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, p. 8.

and even as the earliest enlistees overran recruiting stations, the Army had less than 14,000 officers to oversee this geometric expansion.<sup>208</sup>

Even at the highest levels of command the United States suffered from a distinct lack of combat preparedness. A lieutenant colonel with no combat experience less than eighteen months before Pearl Harbor, Dwight Eisenhower became the Commander of the Allied Forces in North Africa, the initial theater of war, only after a contentious debate in which British desires overcame a U.S. push for an immediate cross-channel invasion. In deference to Britain's position at the time as the "senior partner" in this new alliance, each of Eisenhower's major aides was drawn from the highest echelons of the English military with the naval forces under the direction of Sir Arthur Cunningham, the Air Forces operating under the domain of Trafford Leigh-Mallory, and all ground troops reporting to Alexander.<sup>209</sup> Due to the inherent differences in experience, military doctrine, and nationalistic self-image the degree of tension that arose from this structure was to become a regular characteristic of allied military operations not only in North Africa but throughout the remainder of the war.<sup>210</sup> Finally, the early performances of American troops in the North African campaigns of Operation Torch were often less than stellar. The "greenness" of both U.S. soldiers and their commanders, particularly at the brigade and platoon levels, manifested itself in poorly coordinated offensives and high levels of casualties. The performance of Britain's junior ally ultimately reached its

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<sup>208</sup> Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, p. 8.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>210</sup> Adrian R. Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 33. In his book, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory*, Professor Adrian Lewis, for example makes a strong argument that the tensions between the allied camps in the area of military doctrine specifically, placed a razor thin margin on the invading American troops ability to succeed in achieving their objectives on June 6, 1944.

nadir with a humiliating defeat at Kasserine Pass.<sup>211</sup> What many of the British officer corps, Alexander included, failed to realize—or only slowly allowed themselves to realize, was that the American forces were literally learning the art of this new highly mechanized form of war “on the job.” The lessons learned on the hot, arid terrain of the deserts of North Africa would help craft the effective fighting capabilities that would soon be on display across the European continent. Unfortunately for Huebner, Alexander’s prejudiced perception of American fighting capability which had been born in North Africa would carry over on to the subsequent fight for the island of Sicily known as Operation Husky.<sup>212</sup>

A lack of clear direction and ambiguity plagued Husky almost from the very beginning. Without control of the island the German air force would retain air superiority in the Mediterranean and wreak havoc on allied troop movements from the North African coast to the Italian boot.<sup>213</sup> When Huebner arrived at Alexander’s headquarters in Tunis in late May, he found the planning for Husky to be more an exercise in velocity than direction. While the target date for the operation was early July, Alexander’s forces, including those under the direction of General Montgomery, were still embroiled in subduing the enemy in Tunisia. As these battles dragged on longer than originally planned, Alexander’s staff was in the unenviable position of trying to coordinate the planning and administration for Husky while also managing full scale operations along the North African coast. This situation was further exacerbated by the fact that there

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<sup>211</sup> D’Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier’s Life*, p. 412. Marshall felt that Alexander’s attitude toward American troops became especially patronizing after the battle of Kasserine Pass.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 412.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* p. 412

were no less than five planning centers for almost the entire preparatory period for the invasion: Washington, London, Algiers, Malta, and of course Tunisia.<sup>214</sup>

Perhaps due to the fractious nature of the planning process, the plans for Husky were in almost a constant state of flux. The first plan that was offered up for example, called for piecemeal landings across a 600 mile front of the Sicilian coastline which Montgomery was quick to condemn as a “dog’s breakfast” (meaning a mix match of scraps).<sup>215</sup> Unfortunately, much to Huebner’s dismay, Alexander’s penchant for ambiguous direction and his inability to grasp the broad term strategic objectives for the invasion of the island further handicapped the planning process. As a precursor to the attack on the Italian boot, the conquest of Sicily was imperative for two reasons, first, the capture of the island’s air fields would provide the allies with air superiority to support the amphibious landings that would be required to pierce the Italian coastline and second, the German troops headquartered on the island would be neutralized.

As evidenced by a cable that Eisenhower sent to Patton to summarize the invasion planning to that point, Alexander certainly understood the first objective (military) for Husky but failed to understand, or even conceive of, the strategic importance of eliminating the ability of the German troops on Sicily to reinforce their brethren on the Italian mainland. “(The) most important points in connection with Husky” Eisenhower wrote, “are the airfields in the southeast corner of the island and the ports. Once we have a firm grip on these we move on the rest of the island....”<sup>216</sup> To achieve the second objective Alexander failed to realize that the capture of Messina, located at

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<sup>214</sup> D’Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier’s Life*, p. 412.

<sup>215</sup> Carlo D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, (New York: Harper Collins), 1995, p. 429.

<sup>216</sup> Cable from Eisenhower to Patton, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Pre-Presidential Papers 1916-1952*, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, box 91.

the northeast corner of the island, was imperative if he was to eliminate any chance for the Germans to evacuate the troops back to the mainland. This failure to identify the capture of Messina as the second primary objective of the campaign would come back to later haunt the allies.<sup>217</sup>

The final plan for the Sicilian invasion was fraught with miscommunications and lacking in clear direction and coordination. Certainly Alexander shoulders a heavy degree of responsibility for this less than precise effort, but the American representatives who were tasked with aiding in the development of Operation Husky also must take their own measure of blame. For example, although all parties agreed that the seizure of the airfields at the southern end of the island was the first objective of the mission, the contribution of the U.S. Air Corps to the process was almost non-existent. In his after action report on Husky, U.S. Admiral Kent Hewitt felt that this was the largest failure of the entire planning process. "The weakest link" Hewitt contended, "in the joint planning of the U.S. forces was the almost complete lack of participation by the air corps."<sup>218</sup> Although Hewitt singled out the air corps as the primary culprit in the lack of a coordinated plan of action, both the Navy and the Army let inter-service squabbles, particularly in the areas related to troop command during the initial beach landing phases, act as impediments to the realization of a fully coordinated amphibious attack. As Major General Alfred Wedemeyer later explained, "A notable lack of joint planning

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<sup>217</sup> Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*, p. 76.

<sup>218</sup> "Operation Husky, Action Report of the Western Naval Task Force (July-August 1943)", prepared by Vice-Admiral Kent Hewitt, *Walter Bedell Smith: Collection of WWII Documents, 1941-1945*, box 40, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

existed among the Army and Navy and Air Force headquarters participating in Husky.”<sup>219</sup>

As the highest ranking U.S. officer on Alexander’s staff, Huebner may seem to be a likely source for blame for this lack of coordination, but his rank of major general did not afford him anywhere near the level of influence necessary to repair the fractures of the Sicily invasion planning process. As just one of a group of a senior commanders he must surely have realized that the failure of each of the competing services to communicate was resulting in gaps in the effectiveness of the invasion plan but his position left him all but impotent in his ability to take the initiative to bring all sides to the table to ensure that all outstanding issues were put to rest. This is particularly true when one factors in Alexander’s reluctance to impose his will on any plan which had reached a level of consensus. Huebner’s inability to take proactive action becomes all the more gnawing when one factors in Alexander’s condescension and mistrust toward the abilities of the American forces under his command. While Huebner was definitely a vocal defender and advocate of his countryman’s fighting abilities, his position on Alexander’s staff placed him in the tantalizing position of being able to recognize key issues but powerless to resolve them.

The end result of the chaotic planning process of Husky was an operational plan that many of the Americans involved, including Huebner and Patton, felt was heavily weighted toward the British and their field commander, Montgomery. The assault on Sicily was to feature two Army groups. The 8<sup>th</sup> Army (8<sup>th</sup>) commanded by Montgomery was to land along a fifty mile front in the southeastern portion of the island which

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<sup>219</sup> Memo from Brigadier General Albert C. Wedemeyer to Eisenhower, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Pre-Presidential Papers, 1916-1952*.

included the area from Syracuse to the Pachino peninsula. Montgomery would then drive northward to split the island in two and then finally move eastward toward Messina. Patton's 7<sup>th</sup> Army (7<sup>th</sup>) was to land along the southern coast of Gela and link up with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 45<sup>th</sup> divisions of Bradley's II corps.<sup>220</sup> Major General Lucien Truscott's 3<sup>rd</sup> division would land at Licata to protect the American left flank.<sup>221</sup> For the volatile Patton, the plan for the Sicilian invasion was only little short of an insult. From his perspective, a view shared by Huebner, the action plan for Sicily relegated U.S. forces to serving as little more than the guardian's of Montgomery's left flank and caused him to note in his own personal diary that "the U.S. is getting gypped."<sup>222</sup>

For Huebner, the situation inside Alexander's headquarters was deteriorating rapidly and the final plan for Husky helped to fan a smoldering dislike between the two men into a full-fledged conflagration. Although he did not hesitate to voice his disagreement with the role of the American troops in the invasion, Huebner could only carry his level of dissatisfaction so far because of Alexander's status as his superior officer. From Alexander's perspective, his outspoken American subordinate was proving to be a "round peg in a square hole."<sup>223</sup> The performance of the American units during the initial landings on the Sicilian coast would not help improve this situation.

Although Husky began as specified on July 10, for the U.S. forces this would be about the only part of the initial invasion that proceeded as planned. While landings of Montgomery's 8<sup>th</sup> Army largely went well and met with little resistance, the same could not be said for the Americans. Reflecting the lack of inter-service cooperation that

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<sup>220</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*, p. 588.

<sup>221</sup> D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, p. 413.

<sup>222</sup> D'Este, *Patton: A Genius for War*, p.494.

<sup>223</sup> D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, p. 75.

defined the preparatory process, the situation on many of the U.S. landing beaches was one of “controlled confusion.” As Wedemeyer would describe to Eisenhower in his report on Husky, “the discipline on the beaches was of low order.”<sup>224</sup> This situation was particularly pronounced on among the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> infantry division (1<sup>st</sup> ID) on the beaches of Gela;

...at the western end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division beach.... (I) found considerable confusion. Men were digging in and vehicles were bunched up....there were members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division staff....present, but they did not seem greatly concerned....During my observations prior to the Husky operation, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division had shown itself to be the poorest disciplined of all those I noted. Their mediocre work on D-Day reflected that lack of discipline.<sup>225</sup>

In their defense, the 1<sup>st</sup> ID would meet the stiffest opposition of all the units who landed on D-Day. Unlike many of the other U.S. and British divisions who met only half-hearted resistance from German-hating Italian troops who proved eager to surrender, the 1<sup>st</sup> ID was opposed by members of the elite Herman Göring division.<sup>226</sup> Counter attacked at 9 a.m. on D-Day, the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID would be pushed to within 1000 yards of beach before finally driving off their attackers, with the aid of heavy naval gun support, by 10:30 am of the following day.<sup>227</sup>

Following the initial landings, the fortunes of the American and British troops were reversed with the Americans quickly obtaining their objectives, including the air fields on the westernmost portion of the island, and the men of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army facing much stiffer resistance on their move eastward. This reversal of fortune set the

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<sup>224</sup> Memo from Brigadier General Albert C. Wedemeyer to Eisenhower, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Pre-Presidential Papers, 1916-1952*.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> “Report of the Commander in Chief Mediterranean on the Invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky), January 1, 1944” prepared by Admiral Alfred Cunningham, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Pre-Presidential Papers*, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

<sup>227</sup> “Operation Husky, Action Report of the Western Naval Task Force (July-August 1943)”, prepared by Vice-Admiral Kent Hewitt, *Walter Bedell Smith: Collection of WWII Documents, 1941-1945*, box 40, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.



stage for a strategic decision that would hasten the end of Huebner's tenure with Alexander's 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group. As the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's attack bogged down, Montgomery met with Alexander to discuss a new plan in which his troops would take the lead in driving up the center of the island to cut it in half. In acceding to his countryman's request, Alexander obliterated the geographic boundary between the American and British forces, and specifically the advance route of Bradley's 45<sup>th</sup> division (45<sup>th</sup>). This sudden shift in tactics further inflamed the resentments of the U.S. operational high command when the full measure of its impact was realized, and Bradley was also forced to hand over the Viggini-Cathagione Highway to his British counterparts (a move that required the 45<sup>th</sup> to retrace their steps back to Gela before once again heading north).<sup>228</sup>

Whether Alexander agreed to Montgomery's plan because he believed it to be the most strategically advantageous option available is debatable. What is not in question is that his edict met with a furious response from his American subordinates. His action was viewed as slighting the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Army, and precipitated a hasty meeting at his headquarters with Huebner, Patton and Wedemeyer. During the course of the session both Huebner and Patton expressed outrage at being left outside of the decision making process and argued vehemently against the decision by pointing out that by forcing the 45<sup>th</sup> to relinquish the road Alexander himself had halted a decisive American drive into the interior. Although Alexander did admit to making the decision without the knowledge of the Americans he insisted that the order would not be changed and this decision drew no censure from Eisenhower.<sup>229</sup> Patton's response to Alexander's decision was to begin an obsessive drive to reach Messina before his

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<sup>228</sup> D'Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life*, p. 435.

<sup>229</sup> Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters in the Art of Command*, p. 169.

British counterpart—a goal that he would achieve. Unfortunately for Huebner, he had no such opportunity to offer any response at all to his commander’s capricious decision as Alexander relieved him only fifteen days after the commencement of Husky. Unknown to him at the time, Alexander’s decision to relieve his staff of his most vocal opponent would prove to be a fortunate turn of events for the newly unemployed Huebner.<sup>230</sup>

In his book, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*, Carlo D’Este argues that; “It is difficult to fault Alexander who considered Huebner ill-suited for his assignment. Huebner was never comfortable in a role that demanded diplomacy over emotion. He was a great soldier who never should have been placed in an assignment where tact is a pre-requisite.”<sup>231</sup>

In this instance it is difficult to refute D’Este’s postulation. If we are to leave the issue of tact aside for a moment and focus on the personalities of the two protagonists, it is not difficult to see that Alexander and Huebner were destined to clash. Where Alexander was disorganized and prone to vacillation, Huebner believed in order and discipline and practiced precision in his commands and orders. In terms of the experience in the war to that point, Alexander had been fighting his German opponent for four years in both Europe and Africa and had overseen a “mixed” performance by American troops in North Africa in the months leading up to Husky. While it can be argued that his somewhat disparaging view of the capabilities of U.S. forces was antithetical to the needs of the allies at that point and predicated on his observations of their efforts in their infancy, as a commander responsible for a strategic invasion he cannot be faulted for using a “known quantity” (the 8<sup>th</sup> Army) as the focal point for the

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<sup>230</sup> Adrian Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory*, p. 264.

<sup>231</sup> Carlo D’Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*, p. 435

operation. As the leading American officer thrust into the fractured process that defined the planning for Husky, Huebner was in an unenviable position. While attempting to fulfill the role of any subordinate in relation to his boss, he was forced to serve as the main proponent of his nation's military during a time that they were just emerging as a potent fighting force. Thus, he was often torn between "biting his lip" and serving as the advocate for the troops of the U.S. Army based on projected, rather than demonstrated, achievement.

Diplomacy and tactfulness were certainly two weapons lacking from Huebner's personal arsenal, but these were not the only reasons why he was not well-suited to his supporting role as Alexander's Deputy Chief of Staff. Huebner's attitudes toward his British allies, even in the years following the war, were no more favorable than those of his former boss. Describing Churchill as "arrogant, and supercilious" and Montgomery as "an obnoxious bastard, who never did accept Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander", Huebner held views that proved to be not atypical of those held by many of the leading commanders on both sides of the Atlantic who felt that the war could not have been won without the efforts of their own country's military.<sup>232</sup> In many respects Huebner found himself in a position, albeit at a lower level, not unlike Eisenhower in which the maintenance and assuaging of egos and temperaments was almost as important as a sound military mind. This was not a position that reflected his strengths and capabilities, a disparity that manifested itself in his performance.

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<sup>232</sup> *The Holyrod Gazette*, 10 March, 1971.

## CHAPTER 11

### FROM ALLEN TO HUEBNER

Leadership is an intangible quality that every successful military officer must possess. It varies in style from individual to individual. For the military, identifying and cultivating new leaders is the foundational requirement for its continued success. Perhaps one of the most reviewed studies in leadership by Army personnel is the transition in the command of the 1<sup>st</sup> infantry division (1<sup>st</sup> ID) from Terry Allen to Clarence Huebner.

In a war marked by its high population of charismatic military commanders, Major General Terry de la Mesa Allen more than held his own. The son of a West Point graduate, whose mother was the daughter of a Civil War officer, Terry Allen literally grew up with the Army as his family moved from post to post throughout his childhood.<sup>233</sup> Like his father before him, Terry entered West Point. The young plebe was now part of the class of 1911. Unfortunately, the younger Allen found little interest in the rigorous coursework required of all cadets and was twice dismissed from the Academy for deficiencies in his studies. After his second, and final, expulsion from the nation's pre-eminent military institution he enrolled at Catholic University where he graduated in 1912.<sup>234</sup>

Despite his poor performance at West Point, Allen desired a military career and joined the Army as a newly minted 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in November, 1912. From there his career progressed largely on schedule as he distinguished himself as a popular officer with his men who cared little for the mundane tasks that defined life within a peacetime

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<sup>233</sup> Colonel Bryce F. Denno, "Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command", Army Magazine, June, 1984.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

military. Never a stickler for order or the rules, Allen was a soldier made for combat and during his service in WWI he “established himself as a natural leader in battle, courageous to the point of recklessness, resourceful, aggressive and unorthodox”.<sup>235</sup> During the period following the war Allen’s career progressed through a series of cavalry assignments where he was also able to exercise his expertise in polo. Like Huebner, he attended the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Unlike his future successor who finished sixth in his class, Allen proved to be a less than diligent student and graduated 221<sup>st</sup> out of a class of 241.<sup>236</sup> During the 1930’s he served with the famed Seventh Cavalry Regiment at Fort Riley, Kansas.<sup>237</sup>

Allen assumed command of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID at Camp Blakely, Florida in the winter of 1942.<sup>238</sup> For this assignment he had been hand picked by Marshall who had observed him during his tenure as a student at the Infantry School at Ft. Benning. In Marshall’s assessment, Allen had a “dubious future in peacetime but should be entrusted with a division in time or war.”<sup>239</sup> Upon taking command of the division he chose to retain its entire staff, and immediately began to put his own personal stamp on its men and its operations. For Allen, the duty and mission of an infantry division was to fight and to win. In order to achieve that goal every man from its commanders to its rifle toting privates had to feel a communal bond. This type of relationship could only be forged by success on the battlefield and by a leader who understood the needs of his men. Allen viewed formal military discipline and regulation as an impediment to his ability to

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<sup>235</sup> Colonel Bryce F. Denno, “Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command”, *Army Magazine*, June, 1984.

<sup>236</sup> Robert John Rogers, “A Study of Leadership in the First Infantry Division in WWII”, Masters Thesis for Military Art and Science, U.S. Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 1965.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Colonel Bryce F. Denno, “Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command”, *Army Magazine*, June, 1984.

achieve the respect and obedience that were required to get his troops to perform as a unit under fire. In his mind, the way to obtain these objectives was to create almost a nurturing environment in which he was viewed as “one of the boys.” For example, when he stumbled upon a dice game being played among a group of soldiers one evening in North Africa, he turned to his chief of staff and said, “Dutch, give me a dollar so that I can break this game up.”<sup>240</sup>

As the leader of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID Allen was more a “force of personality” for whom anything that did not contribute to the combat effectiveness of the unit was an unnecessary distraction. In his assessment of Allen during the early days of Husky, Wedemeyer wrote that “He impressed me as the most colorful and courageous leader of the U.S. contingent. He is not unintelligent, but gives me that impression on occasion because he is disinterested in the details of planning. If provided with an effective assistant Division commander and staff, Allen would, in my opinion, emerge as one of our most successful commanders.”<sup>241</sup>

Unfortunately, for the Mediterranean theater’s most colorful leader after Patton, Allen’s direct superior was the rigid, sanctimonious, and self righteous, Omar Bradley. Although celebrated by famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle as “the soldier’s General,” Bradley’s personality was far from the empathetic and charismatic leader portrayed in the press. A perfectionist with little tolerance for leaders who strayed from his narrow path of right and wrong, Bradley found Allen to be a less than average divisional commander and wrote,

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<sup>240</sup> Colonel Bryce F. Denno, “Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command”, *Army Magazine*, June, 1984.

<sup>241</sup> Memo from Brigadier General Albert C. Wedemeyer to Eisenhower, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Pre-Presidential Papers, 1916-1952*.

“Despite their normal talents as combat leaders, neither Terry Allen nor Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, the Assistant Divisional Commander, possessed the instincts of a good disciplinarian. They looked upon discipline as an unwelcome crutch to be used by less able and personable commanders.”<sup>242</sup>

Despite his limitations as a disciplinarian, Allen melded the 1<sup>st</sup> ID into perhaps the Army’s strongest, and surely its most seasoned, fighting division. Throughout the campaigns of North Africa including El Guettar, Oran, and particularly in the battles that defined the protracted fight for Tunisia culminating at Bizerte, the division had performed valiantly and admirably.<sup>243</sup> Had the measure of his leadership been based solely on his men’s battlefield heroics, Allen may well have retained his command. However, the glory that the 1<sup>st</sup> ID had garnered as part of the Allied conquest of North Africa set the stage for his undoing when they were relieved for rest and recuperation to the Tunisian city of Oran.

Although all men in uniform are aligned in their ultimate goal to defeat the enemy, once a man has seen combat he has joined a select fraternity that is unavailable to those who have not passed its demanding rights of initiation. In a sense this differentiation between combat and supporting troops can serve as the breeding ground for tensions to emerge and overflow into open confrontations. It is at these times that a commander must be especially vigilant in his efforts to ensure the orderly behavior of his troops. Allen’s oversight of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID upon their return to Oran from the front lines of Tunisia was far from this standard. Upon discovering that many of the more “entertainment oriented” establishments of the city were off limits to them, the conduct

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<sup>242</sup> Omar Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1951) p.110.

<sup>243</sup> Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, p. 517.

of many of the division's troops soon regressed to that of a vengeance-driven mob with open rioting taking place with other bands of soldiers.<sup>244</sup> Described by veterans of the division as the "Second Battle of Oran," the uniform lack of discipline led many to believe that both Allen and Roosevelt not only sympathized with, but tacitly encouraged, their men's behavior.<sup>245</sup> In his report, Wedemeyer described the actions of the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID as "...disgraceful and certainly were not a credit to American Armies."<sup>246</sup>

After the events of Oran, Allen's status as the Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID was tenuous at best and when coupled with the division's poor and disorganized performance in the early days of the Sicily invasion, it was only a matter of time before he would be relieved. The question as to who made the decision to relieve Allen and replace him with Huebner, however, remains a subject of debate. As his immediate commander Bradley would have been the logical person to generate the request for Allen's replacement. In his book, *A Soldier's Story*, he described his reasoning for making this request:

...Under Allen, the 1<sup>st</sup> division had become increasingly temperamental, disdainful of both regulations and senior commanders. It thought itself exempted from the need of discipline by virtue of its months on the line. And it believed itself to be the only division carrying its share of the war....The Division had already been selected for the Normandy campaign. If it was to fight well there at the side of inexperienced divisions—under the command of an inexperienced corps, the division desperately needed a change in its perspective.<sup>247</sup>

Despite Bradley's contention that the decision to replace Allen was his alone, in a letter to Eisenhower dated July 26, 1943, Patton clearly demonstrated that this was a joint decision for which the rationale varied depending on the individual commander.

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<sup>244</sup> Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, p. 517

<sup>245</sup> Colonel Bryce F. Denno, "Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command", *Army Magazine*, June, 1984.

<sup>246</sup> Memo from Brigadier General Albert C. Wedemeyer to Eisenhower, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Pre-Presidential Papers, 1916-1952*.

<sup>247</sup> Robert John Rogers, "A Study of Leadership in the First Infantry Division in WWII", p. 50.



“I have talked the relief of General Allen and General Roosevelt over with General Lucas, General Bradley, and General Keyes”, Patton wrote, “and I feel that these two officers should be relieved without prejudice on the grounds that their experience will of great value at home and that they are now battle weary. As relief for them I request Generals Huebner and (Norman) Cota be their replacements.”<sup>248</sup>

For the newly unemployed Huebner, the decision to relieve Terry Allen provided the opportunity for the combat command that he had long coveted. However, replacing such a popular officer presented him with a unique and daunting challenge. Despite his past history as a charter member of the division, he was now an outsider to be viewed with suspicion and no small amount of contempt. On August 7, 1943, he began the task of remaking the United States Army’s 1<sup>st</sup> ID in his own image.<sup>249</sup>

In terms of personality and philosophy no two men could have been more different than Allen and Huebner. Where Allen was described as “a maverick, stubborn, independent, skillful, adept and aggressive”, Huebner was “an austere and no-nonsense disciplinarian. He was a latter day Friedrich Von Stueben, a teacher as well as a leader.”<sup>250</sup> Allen was a “back-slapping” commander who maintained close, personal relationships with his staff and the men under his command. Huebner maintained a “formal military relationship with subordinates. He was a strict disciplinarian and believed that a well-disciplined unit would function more efficiently in combat with fewer casualties.”<sup>251</sup> For his men, the days of laxness and informality were

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<sup>248</sup> Letter from Patton to Eisenhower, July 26, 1943, *Dwight D. Eisenhower Pre-Presidential Papers, 1916-1952*, Box 91, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>249</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

<sup>250</sup> Colonel Bryce F. Denno, “Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command”, *Army Magazine*, June, 1984.

<sup>251</sup> Robert John Rogers, “A Study of Leadership in the First Infantry Division in WWII”, p. 5.

about to come to an abrupt and rude ending--courtesy of their new commanding officer, Major General Clarence R. Huebner.

Leadership style is a function of a number of elements, not the least of which is the personal philosophy on human nature of the individual in question. Allen believed that camaraderie was the key to developing a successful fighting unit. In his eyes, men would fight better if they believed themselves to be part of a close-knit and cohesive team. Thus, he believed the essence of discipline to be the “self monitoring” that arose from effective teamwork and cooperation.<sup>252</sup> Huebner did not share his predecessor’s faith in the synergies that arise from the communal spirit created by large scale male bonding. He distrusted the individualism that defined the American soldier and believed that only through the implementation of rigid discipline could he ensure that each man under his command would make the correct decision in the face of enemy fire. He articulated this belief system in a 1951 address to the graduating class of the Army War College “One of the things to remember is that the American soldier is essentially a civilian. He is stubborn and individualistic, and no matter what he indicates he feels sure that he can find a better way to do than anyone else. Even if he can’t he still prefers to do it his own way”.<sup>253</sup> As a result of his wariness of the spirit of individualism that defined U.S. servicemen, Huebner’s brand of discipline was “keyed to military courtesy, prompt obedience, rigid inspections, and performance by the book in all staff and line functions.”<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> “Leadership and Command at Senior Levels”, *Army Training Manual FM-22-999*, February, 1987.

<sup>253</sup> Clarence R. Huebner, Address to the 1950-51 Graduating Class of the Army War College, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, June 29, 1951.

<sup>254</sup> “Leadership and Command at Senior Levels”, *Army Training Manual FM-22-999*.

Rather than choosing to assume command of the division and take time to become familiar with its men and then begin implementing his plans and programs, Huebner realized that he could not wait to make his presence felt within his new command. As described by Colonel Edwin V. Sutherland, the task before him was formidable: "The general took over a division in Sicily which was a superb fighting division with a morale and way of doing its thing which bore the unique trademarks of Terry Allen and Roosevelt. Thus, Huebner very justly saw that part of his task was to put his imprint on it in no unmistakable way".<sup>255</sup> He could not succeed by attempting to utilize the same easy going style of Allen. Certainly it would seem phony to his men, but more important it was a role that would have been in polar opposition to his own personality and beliefs. He also believed, as did his superiors, that the division was deficient in many areas. For him, achieving the respect of his troops would not be found along the path of popularity that Allen had followed. His focus was on the basic functions performed by an infantry division and ensuring that they were performed at a consistent level of excellence.

As his inherited chief of staff, Colonel Stanhope Mason soon found out while returning to divisional headquarters from a brief trip, his new commander would take a very personal interest in the all areas of divisional performance including its transportation practices. Mason recalled that "about a mile from Cerani, Lt. Max Conover, from one of our MP units flagged me down to tell me the new commander was raising hell about traffic, speeding drivers, and gaps between vehicles. 'Better slow

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<sup>255</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

down, Colonel', he told me. "The general and his aide are carrying a pocketful of traffic tickets and are personally handing them out all over the sector."<sup>256</sup>

Rather than immediately bringing in his own staff, Huebner chose to provide the holdovers from Allen with the opportunity to prove their abilities. For many, being relieved may have been a more desirable option. This was particularly evident during the dinner hour. During Allen's tenure, the staff's evening meal was a relaxed and informal affair with a high level of conversation punctuated with extended periods of laughter. Under their new commander the evening meal became perhaps the most dreaded period of the day. According to Mason, "The new general used the dinner hour to express his displeasure and unhappiness with the performance of the staff, the status of discipline and training of officers and men throughout the division. No one was immune from his censure. Frequently he threatened to have his victim shot."<sup>257</sup>

Each meal was also punctuated by Huebner's pointed questioning which seemed to be more an inquisition than a simple inquiry. No idea or plan was routinely accepted. He was pointed and often confrontational in his reviews of his men. For Mason, and the other members of his staff, each day was punctuated by a steady diatribe documenting the division's shortcomings and need for immediate improvement culminating in a dinner time ritual that came to resemble a death march: "Our evening meal had become a silent misery. A pattern had been established. Upon completing the meal, General Huebner would tell me to bring someone, usually a staff member, to his office. His first

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<sup>256</sup> Major General Stanhope Mason, "Reminiscences and Anecdotes of WWII", 1<sup>st</sup> Division Museum, Wheaton, Illinois.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

blast of displeasure fell on me, then on the other culprit, then back to me. Sometimes several officers were summoned in the same evening.”<sup>258</sup>

For the remainder of the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID, life under their new leader was little better than that of the men who shared his dinner table. Huebner was demanding and uncompromising. To many, his focus on “little” things seemed capricious and petty, and certainly did not win him favorable comparisons to Allen. As Huebner himself recalled, “I got the reputation for being an unreasonable and mean old bastard.”<sup>259</sup> As he unsobly exercised his authority in the early days following his assuming command, Huebner even found himself celebrated in a verse that made its rounds through the men of the division;

Under Terry and Teddy,  
the going was plenty tough.  
But now it's take me out, coach.  
I think I've had enough.<sup>260</sup>

Much has been written about the “fog of war”, the chaotic state of combat in which very little is clearly defined and the chance of things to going wrong is often greater than that of them proceeding correctly. Huebner’s firsthand experiences in battle had helped him formulate his personal belief that only through strict discipline and attention to detail could the scale of battlefield confusion be placed into balance. In his mind battles were won through constant drill and attention to detail. A man who has been repetitively trained to perform and respond in specific situations is less likely to make the type of costly mistake under fire that will result in the loss of his own life or

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<sup>258</sup> Major General Stanhope Mason, “Reminiscences and Anecdotes of WWII”.

<sup>259</sup> Robert John Rogers, “A Study of Leadership in the First Infantry Division in WWII”, p. 63.

<sup>260</sup> Colonel Bryce F. Denno, “Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command”, *Army Magazine*, June, 1984.

those of his comrades. To illustrate his philosophy of the importance of having each individual soldier performing all tasks to a demanding military standard, he chose to focus on two areas; one routine and mundane, the other reflecting the core requirement of an infantryman—saluting and shooting.<sup>261</sup>

As a result of his own personal observations of the division, in the days after he assumed command Huebner found his new troops to be characterized by a casual attitude that manifested itself in poor execution in many operational areas. The problem he faced was complex. The 1<sup>st</sup> ID had adopted an attitude that its battlefield performance was all that mattered and all other areas of military regulation not directly related to combat were superfluous. This mindset permeated every area of divisional operations and was almost equally reflected in both officers and foot soldiers. To rectify this widespread situation, Huebner chose as his implement of change the most routine of all military responsibilities—the salute. By insisting that each man in the division not only observe the formal courtesy of both giving and acknowledging a salute but also performing it correctly, Huebner had identified a vehicle in which he could impart upon his men an example of the standard of behavior and performance to which each would be held. Huebner’s execution of his “saluting campaign” reflected a comprehensive strategy to achieve his desired end as Colonel Edwin Sutherland explained, “One of the first things he did was to institute the practice of having *every* 1<sup>st</sup> division person, soldier, or regimental commander visiting the Divisional command post...take a saluting test and if he didn’t pass it get instruction right then. Even though it seemed to us at the

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<sup>261</sup> Major General Stanhope Mason, “Reminiscences and Anecdotes of WWII”.

time a bit eccentric way to run the railroad, it exemplified the General's determination that in details, as well as in free and easy campaigning, we were to be numero uno."<sup>262</sup>

While Huebner's saluting "campaign" was designed to reinforce basic military discipline, the programs he instituted to teach men to shoot correctly were basic lessons in combat survival. For a Kansas prairie boy who had learned to fire a rifle before he was ten and was counted on to deliver game to the family dinner table, the ability to shoot was almost second nature. In combat it was essential, "A soldier may do everything else well", Huebner wrote," but if he shoots and doesn't kill the enemy, then his whole training isn't worth a couple of empty C ration cans".<sup>263</sup>

As the Sicilian campaign wound down Huebner began to suspect that his men had become over reliant on the excellent artillery support provided by Artillery Commander Brigadier General Clifton Andrus. His suspicions were confirmed after performing an analysis of the division's ammunition expenditures. In his assessment, this underperformance on the part of his rifle companies was due to a lack of confidence in their marksmanship abilities. A comprehensive records check also confirmed this postulation as he found that more than 2,000 men had not qualified with a rifle!<sup>264</sup> To rectify this situation the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID were about to undertake a very rigorous course of instruction on marksmanship under the personal direction of their commanding general.

When the Division returned to Gela for what many thought was a well deserved rest they found that Huebner had had a firing range constructed and that any man who

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<sup>262</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

<sup>263</sup> *Washington Post*, 30 June, 1944.

<sup>264</sup> Robert John Rogers, "A Study of Leadership in the First Infantry Division in WWII", p. 60.

could not qualify with his rifle could no longer serve in a rifle company.<sup>265</sup> As each man went about the business of shooting they were constantly under the discerning eye of their commander. No detail of a man's firing position seemed to escape his notice. If he found a flaw he would ask the man's squad leader what it was; if the squad leader didn't know, he would ask the platoon leader all the way up to the company commander if necessary. By using this methodology, Huebner made certain that every man understood the importance of marksmanship to troops in battle. He made sure that the men under his command realized that the ability to kill more of the enemy was their best insurance of returning home alive.<sup>266</sup>

Following a popular leader in any line of endeavor is always a difficult task. The difficulty of this situation is heightened in the military where the relationship between the men in a combat unit and their commander often becomes paternalistic in nature. In succeeding Terry Allen, Huebner's task was especially difficult. Although the division's men had performed well on the battlefield under Allen's command, they had cultivated an air of superiority and disdain that was counterproductive to their ability to fight effectively in the large scale operations that lay in the future. This "air of superiority" was a particular problem when one must consider that a division is the largest organization in the Army that is trained to fight as a team. Thus, in itself a division may be a formidable fighting force, but if it is unable to coordinate with its counterparts in larger scale operations it dramatically reduces its effectiveness in battle. More importantly, it can place the entire campaign objective into jeopardy. In order to facilitate the needed changes, Huebner was forced to take a hard line approach that was virtually guaranteed

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<sup>265</sup> Robert John Rogers, "A Study of Leadership in the First Infantry Division in WWII", p. 60.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 60.



to make him a pariah to his troops. As he once noted to Major General Ben Sternberg: his choice of adopting a hard persona was a practical necessity; “Ben, remember when you take over a command you can start off being an SOB and later become a good guy...but you can never start off being a good guy and later become an SOB!”<sup>267</sup>

Perhaps the greatest strength that Huebner brought with him when he assumed command of the 1<sup>st</sup> ID was his personal knowledge of all of the various components that comprised the unit. Although he often seemed harsh and uncompromising he knew the limits of performance for men with responsibilities ranging from a cook to an infantryman in a rifle company. He had held these positions and understood the likes and dislikes of each. Because of his familiarity with the roles of his men, he inherently realized the limits of empathy and knew when to push them and when to ease the pressure. In his eyes, the duty of a combat leader to his men was not to be loved but to do everything in his power to deliver them home to the people who truly cared about them. To fulfill this obligation often meant giving the outward appearance of being uncaring and unfeeling—a man apart from his troops. As described by press reporter Dan Whitehead, this was the mantle that Huebner assumed:

I found that Huebner had a great love for his 1<sup>st</sup> division in that he knew the job of every man in his division as well or better than these men knew their jobs—because he had once held those jobs. The General wanted his division to be the best in the entire Army. It wasn't entirely a matter of personal pride because Huebner knew that the toughest, straightest shooting division wins its objectives with the least loss of life. And if he was stern in his discipline, it was because battle casualties have direct relationship to discipline.<sup>268</sup>

As the division prepared to leave Sicily for England to begin their training for the European invasion that would come to be known as Overlord, much work still lay ahead

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<sup>267</sup> Robert John Rogers, “A Study of Leadership in the First Infantry Division in WWII”, p. 75.

<sup>268</sup> Colonel Bryce F. Denno, “Allen and Huebner: Contrast in Command”, *Army Magazine*, June, 1984

for Huebner but, as Mason would note, the demands that he had placed on his staff and troops had begun to take root;

“Now the changes were complete. We were a team working together. Nobody had been fired, nobody shot...Gone were the days of meals eaten in silence”.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Major General Stanhope Mason, “Reminiscences and Anecdotes of WWII”.

## CHAPTER 12

### EPILOGUE

Clarence Huebner's rise from a Kansas farm boy continued throughout the remainder of WWII. His return to the 1<sup>st</sup> infantry division (1<sup>st</sup> ID) would include leading them from Omaha Beach on D-Day through a steady northward drive that included the battles of Mons, Aachen, and the Hurtgen Forest.<sup>270</sup> In January 1945, he was promoted to command the V Corps and led them on their final advance into Germany and ultimately, Czechoslovakia.

After a brief return to the United States at the conclusion of the war, Huebner returned to Germany in August 1946 as the Chief of Staff of the U.S. forces in the European theater.<sup>271</sup> Huebner remained in Germany for the next four years overseeing the operations of the U.S. ground forces, serving his final three months as the acting commander in chief of the European command. This was the final position he would hold in his forty year military career as he retired in August 1950.<sup>272</sup>

In the years following the war, Huebner became active in the "Cold War fueled" area of civil defense. A frequent speaker on the dangers of nuclear war, he served as the Civil Defense Director for the state of New York for over ten years prior to his retirement in 1960.<sup>273</sup> After retiring, Huebner returned to perhaps his first love, the 1<sup>st</sup> ID by helping to start the 1st Infantry Division Society and served as their president for over ten years. In this position he approached the trustees of former 1<sup>st</sup> ID colonel and *Chicago Tribune* publisher, Robert McCormick with an idea for a museum that

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<sup>270</sup> Clarence Huebner Biography, *U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Public Information*.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

culminated in the opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division museum in Wheaton, Illinois, in 1968.

Clarence Huebner died on September 23, 1972 having lived a life that began on a small farm in Kansas and would ultimately take him to the land of his ancestors and back again.<sup>274</sup> While certainly his rise within the military coincided with the United States' growth as a military power, his success is not an example of opportunism, but rather, a belief in the underlying value of meritocracy that rewarded hard work and talent. In each instance that he was asked, either through promotion or battlefield necessity, to assume the additional responsibilities and duties of the levels above him he performed them with vigor and distinction. His story is uniquely one of American military achievement.

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<sup>274</sup> *The Bridgehead Sentinel*, Spring 1973.

APPENDIX  
COMPOSITION OF THE 1<sup>st</sup> DIVISION (WWI)

1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade

16<sup>th</sup> Infantry

18<sup>th</sup> Infantry

2<sup>nd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion

2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade

26<sup>th</sup> Infantry

28<sup>th</sup> Infantry

3<sup>rd</sup> Machine Gun Battalion

1<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Brigade

5<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery (155)

6<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery (75)

7<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery (75)

1<sup>st</sup> Trench Mortar Battery

Division Troops

1<sup>st</sup> Machine Gun Battalion

1<sup>st</sup> Engineers

2<sup>nd</sup> Field Signal Battalion

Headquarters Troop

Trains

1<sup>st</sup> Train Headquarters and Military Police

1<sup>st</sup> Ammunition Train

1<sup>st</sup> Supply Train

1<sup>st</sup> Sanitary Train (Ambulance Companies and Field Hospitals 2, 3, 12, 13)

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