1LT Warren Earl "Bing" Evans

1918 - 2015

EARLY YEARS

Warren "Bing" Evans was born in Aberdeen, South Dakota, on December 29, 1918 to Earl and Stella Evans. His father died when Warren and his sister, Lorraine, were very young. As a widow with two children to support, their mother worked very hard and carried the same emotional and financial burdens that many Americans felt during the Depression. Their lifestyles involved frequent moves and employment in a variety of jobs, but they managed to stay together. One of the touching stories in the book involved Warren's memory of living in an attic:

> *'The attic was about a block and a half from Mr. Kessler's store, a little corner grocery story. If we got too hungry, I would go over to the store and hang around and swipe a loaf of bread. The bread was in a handy spot. I could squish it and bend it up inside my jacket.'*
>
> *'Years later my wife* [Frances] *and I stopped at the same grocery store to pay Mr. Kessler for the bread I had stolen.'* (Moen and Heinen, p. 52)

Kessler knew about the theft and moved to the other end of the store so that Warren would not know the grocer was watching. He still refused to take any money. Many people mirrored Kessler's example by helping their neighbors, even those unknown to them—for this was the American way.

As Warren aged and grew stronger, he contributed to family funds through his employment—from paper routes to candy salesman. High school days also displayed his initiative as he maintained a high academic average, played all sports and was an all-state football player and an all-state basketball player, each position for two years.

> *'And I sang! I still sing. That's where my nickname comes from. They called me "Bing" for Bing Crosby. The nickname started in high school and then carried over to college and is still my nickname today.'* (Moen and Heinen, p. 61)

Bing's abilities afforded him academic scholarships to several colleges plus one to the New York School of Music, but a baseball accident (broken nose) resulted in his choosing South Dakota State at Brookings where he met his future wife, Frances Wheeler.

Even though his full scholarship covered many expenses and his janitorial services in a bank at night supplemented this income, Bing decided to join

the National Guard in Brookings as a member of B Company of the 109th Engineers, where he received one dollar per drill. This extra $25 per month certainly came in handy for social occasions, like the dance where he met Frances.

Inducted into the Army on 10 February 1941, Warren was told at their weekly Thursday night drill that they were, '*shipping out*' to Louisiana. Driven to the train station by Frances, they declared their engagement with the hope that he would return within a year. While enduring maneuvers at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and spending time together on some weekends, they confirmed their declaration with her ring and their official engagement.

December 7,1941 changed everyone's lives in America—especially those of many young adults. When war was officially declared, Bing knew that he would be assigned overseas. Training intensified as he made PFC, corporal, sergeant and then staff sergeant—the rank he held as the engineers boarded trains for Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Plans were made for Frances to join him there for a small, meaningful wedding, but a serious car accident near Rockford, Illinois, closed their marriage window of opportunity, when Frances was taken to a hospital for treatment and returned home to South Dakota to recuperate.

Unable to be at her side because they were not officially married, they were at least able to connect by phone before his departure, promising to exchange vows when he returned from the war. '*But we never envisioned that it would be for three and a half years.'* (Moen and Heinen, pp. 73 - 79)

Alone on a deck corner of the transport, Warren released to the ocean's depths their shredded marriage license and her wedding band.

DEPLOYMENT

> '*We shipped overseas in January 1942. A staff sergeant now for the 109th Engineers of the 34th Division, I was on my way to fight a war along with hundreds of other young men. I think we were the first United States division overseas. It was dark when we finally pulled away from the dock. I heard laughter and joking behind me. Most of us did not have a clue about what we were getting ourselves into. We just wanted to make our families and country proud. That's all.'* (Moen and Heinen, p. 81)

Ireland became their first landing point.

THE RANGERS CHALLENGE

> '*When the weather began to get a little warmer, I saw a posting that caught my interest. It was a call for volunteers for a British Commando-type outfit—the Rangers. They said it would be very difficult; very few would make it because of how it would be. I thought, Well, that's a challenge. And I was gung-ho! I was never one to resist a good challenge. So, I volunteered for the Rangers along with several hundred others.' (Moen and Heinen, p. 82)*

Bing was interviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Orlando Darby himself, a West Point graduate and serious officer. Evan's physical conditioning (including his 6' 3" height), athletic background and educational endeavors helped to ensure his place in the 500 initially chosen. Ranger training was classified and very intense, as demonstrated by the 20-ton boulder with bronze plaque which marks their birthplace, Carrickfergus, Ireland. Next stop, Achnacarry, a castle in Central Scotland and home of Clan Cameron, the training base for British Commandos.

Speed marches, stamina tests, cliff climbing, repelling, amphibious landings, obstacle courses, live ammunition drills, and reckoning cross-points of rivers in unconventional ways with full packs filled the Rangers' days and nights. Experienced British Commandos conducted the training along with Lt. Col. Darby. He was their leader and their mentor; every man chosen hoped to live up to his expectations.

As the endurance course requirements increased in difficulty, competition grew among the cadres of Brits and Americans. They were professionals and had experienced the war longer, whereas most Americans were civilians first, but the two groups learned to respect one another. During this time period, Bing became Lt. Col. Darby's sergeant major—Battalion Command Sergeant Major, an honor he deserved and treasured all of his life.

Deaths among the Rangers in training were hard to bear, especially when they were close comrades, but the men reminded themselves that death and life are equal parts of war—with more to come in combat. (Moen and Heinen, pp. 85 - 105)

> '*On September 22, 1942, the battalion arrived at Corker Hill near Glasgow, and we became attached to the 1st Infantry Division. After more intense training, we boarded ships and on October 26, set sail for North Africa.'* (Moen and Heinen, p. 105)

NORTH AFRICA CAMPAIGN: ALGERIA

> *'We were sailing for a long time. West of the Straits of Gibraltar we joined a large convoy coming from the States. I believe it was*

the 45th Infantry Division. While on ship, Darby revealed to us the plans for the invasion. Oran, Algeria, the home of a large French naval base, was our ultimate objective.' (Moen and Heinen, p. 107)

While onboard, the Rangers studied and memorized sand table models of beaches and targets—each one a piece of the puzzle in a land they did not know.

Securing the Arzew harbor which allowed for troops and supplies to unload safely was their task while spearheading the invasion. Assigned to capture two gun-type batteries, they docked in a gulley, ascended the mountain, and captured the enemy by surprise. Their first victory. Col. Darby became Mayor of Arzew, and with Bing, set up their headquarters in the city hall.

Oran, their next target was also captured, but with the price of casualties and the death of an officer, Lt. Gordon Klefman. Because of his rank, Warren Evans became *'the first battlefield commission in the European theatre.'* Ironically, since Evans was now a second lieutenant, he could no longer be Darby's sergeant major and became a platoon leader in A Company.

'*We were three months in Arzew, completing more training exercises that increased our skills in night fighting and amphibious night landings.'*

'On 7 February, we flew in transport planes to Tunisia. Using the city of Gafsa as a base, we made many raids on enemy outposts.' (Moen and Heinen, pp. 112 – 113)

'*Previously, North Africa had been controlled by the Germans and General Rommel, the Desert Fox, was probably the most outstanding general on either side. He led the German troops—the Afrika Korps, in the fight against the British in Egypt. He would have succeeded if it had not been for the Americans and the Allied Forces landing when they did. Most British were fighting Rommel on the other front with Montgomery.'*

'*We had begun to get used to fighting in North Africa. We were living in our pup tents, all of us filthy dirty in the desert sand. During a lull in the battle, I remember playing a baseball game in that olive grove with the front going on. While on patrol, my men found an ancient bath. The place was probably a couple thousand years old or more, but the four-foot, swimming size bath was clean, slick as a whistle. Evidently it was still being used—the water clear, clean and warm. Quickly stripping off their dirty uniforms, they just got in. I, of course, joined them. In the water I had no bars on.* (Moen and Heinen, pp. 117 – 118)

SENED STATION RAID

> *One of the major battles of the Tunisian campaign was the Sened Station Raid, a German ammunition supply station; it was heavily guarded with troops in there ready to move up to the front. It was important for the Allies to gain control of the station or at least put it out of operation.* (Moen and Heinen, p. 118)

The Rangers were more than ready for this mission. Departing trucks at a French outpost, they moved quietly across the desert led by Col. Darby with three companies, A, E, and F (about 180 Rangers), their arrival 12 miles behind enemy lines overlooking Sened Station. Reconning through field glasses, they reviewed their plan: on the fourth night, the Rangers completed their preps (stocking caps, loose helmet straps with white tape for ID) and moved three companies abreast across the desert floor—one long front—Evans with A Company. Engaged in hand-to-hand combat, this was a defining moment for many of the Rangers—including Evans who gives credit to his "runner" Tommy Sullivan for saving his life.

> '*We won the battle and left immediately, almost running to avoid being discovered. We were well behind enemy lines and needed to get back to our own lines before daylight. Since we were slowed down by our wounded, our own dead and some prisoners we were bringing back with us, it took three or four hours to return. When our adrenalin was flowing, we did not think about being tired. We were driven by the fact that we did not want to be discovered in the middle of the desert in broad daylight.'*
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> *'The raid was a complete success largely because we surprised them in the dark of night; whenever our surprise was complete, we were successful. Surprise was the element we lived by and the Ranger's chief weapon. Attacking at night was our specialty. The raid is studied to this day in the annals of military history as one of the most successful operations of WWII. This was where we got the second, third, and fourth battlefield commissions in the Rangers—Les Kness, Bill Musegates and Walk Wojcik.*'
>
> *'Fifty years later we had a small ceremony for the dead. I remember Colonel Dammer conducted the ceremony and laid the wreath. Edwin Dean was on his right and I was on his left. Sometime during the ceremony, we atoned as the British do'*
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> '*They do not grow old as we who are left grow old, and time does not weary them nor do the years deny. But from the going down of the sun to the morning, we shall remember them.'* (Moen and Heinen, pp. 118 – 122)

The ceremony was especially memorable to those who attended because their first leader, Colonel William O. Darby, had been killed on April 30, 1945 at

Trento, Italy. Initially buried at Cisterna, his body was reinterred at Ft. Smith National Cemetery, Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

DJEBEL EL ANK

> '*This was another well-planned attack that took place at Djebel El Ank, a mountain pass shaped like a funnel. It was jammed with thousands of enemy troops in well entrenched positions on its step forward slopes. A strategic position, it was heavily fortified by the enemy to keep the Allies, the Americans and Montgomery's British troops from meeting the Desert Fox. This stronghold was located just four miles east of El Guettar and was stopping the forward movement of the Allies. They could take out any passers-by with antitank guns and heavy machine guns. It needed to be dealt with so they called for the Rangers.'*
>
> *'We broke through at the pass. According to my good friend and fellow Ranger, Jim Altieri, from his book, Darby's Rangers, "Leaping from rock to rock, the attacking groups lead their way down the slopes, cleaning out position after position. The first twenty minutes of battle were swift and telling…by 0830 hours all of Djebel El Ank was in Ranger hands."' (Moen and Heinen, pp. 122 – 124)*

Pages 124 - 126 recount the amalgamated changes taking place within forces on both sides of the European theatre in which Americans became *'battle-wise troops and good adversaries.'*

Ranger philosophy applied by Evans:

> '*Ruthlessness is something that can make a good soldier. And with Americans, many times, we could not get ruthless until we got really mad. After the Tunisian campaign, the Army top brass realized that they could not do without us Rangers. We had proven ourselves to be very necessary. Our type of operation was not easily handled by a regular infantry soldier. They were not trained for it. I imagine it would be difficult to get men in the regular infantry to go through the training that we did. They also were not trained to fight at night. Of course, these were the days before night vision goggles. Later when the three battalions became a Ranger force, then Darby became commander of the force and was made a full Colonel.'*

During these personnel shifts and recruiting the right Ranger material, Bing Evans became a first lieutenant.

NEXT STOP, SICILY

This chapter (pp. 129 – 135) recounted the competence and ingenuity of medics, the bravery of those who volunteered for dangerous assignments, and the complications of politics.

> *'My immediate impression was—this is the first officer I have ever run into that gives a damn about me.'* Ed Krise, WWII medic assigned to F Company of the 3rd Battalion Rangers under Lt. Evan's command.

The following is Bing Evans' account:

> **'***We spearheaded Sicily. For the 3rd Ranger Battalion, the campaign officially lasted 38 days. We were on a mountain overlooking Messina...between the Straits of Messina and the Italian mainland, watching Germans cross there. We could not take Messina because the British had to be first in. We could not fire at them or do anything. This was for political reasons. Montgomery was the over-all commander—even over Patton. He wanted to be the first into Messina. The fact that we were there irritated him as he had told us to hold up. A man's ego can be a deplorable thing! Especially in a war! Just let us do our job and move on. To be caught in a political situation is by far not always the best thing for what is going on. We ended up fighting them all in the Italian campaign. We set sail.'*

ITALY

> *'Once again we were to lead the way for the next invasion. On September 7th, we traveled by American LCT's and British Commando boats from Sicily and landed at Maiori, Italy, several miles west of Salerno. On the Salerno Beachhead I felt more apprehension than excitement. I felt we could not be lucky next time. However, our landing was a complete surprise and we were successful, once again. We continued inland for five or six miles, climbing almost straight up the mountain on a narrow road to Chiunzi Pass, dug in on the ridges overlooking the Plains of Naples and the main road leading to southern Italy. Our intense training was the only thing that kept us alive.'*

Issues which confronted the Rangers included multiple attacks from enemy forces, water and ammunition shortages, and the appearance of malaria. [Evans contracted malaria; its effects remained prominent even after his separation from the Army.] Italians who could be trusted were kept close. As natives, they knew the *'lay of the land'* and *'were lovers not fighters.'* Bing remembered on occasion when '*they gave up in droves—about five times more*

of them than us, their captors. We turned them over to someone else. They did not have to be watched as closely as German prisoners.'

> *'Because we took Chiunzi Pass, we were able to direct artillery fire and naval gunfire on the main highway connecting the area to southern Italy. We were probably responsible for the Salerno Beachhead finally opening up. Otherwise, I have no doubt the Allies would have been driven back into the sea.*' (Moen and Heinen, pp. 137-141)

The incident which prompted the Silver Star decoration for Lt. Evans occurred in the mountain of San Pietro, south of Rome on the Volturno River. The Rangers' task was to secure two of the three mountains from the Germans. Completed successfully at night, Evan's company then assisted the Paratroopers whose mission was to secure the middle, a higher one in broad daylight. Casualties occurred as they traversed down the mountain, Evans staying with a smaller group fighting from behind, while moving wounded to the beachhead.

> '*Herman Dammer, commander of the 3rd Battalion at that time, awarded my Silver Star for this action. I never did have it pinned on me. My mother received it while I was in prison camp. I know how proud she must have been. The only thing that tarnishes that Silver Star was the fact that Lt. Earl Parrish died. He gave his life and I got a Silver Star. I would have much rather had him live than any old medal.' (Moen and Heinen, pp. 141 – 144)*

THE TRUCE ENCOUNTER ON HILL 950

> *'If you were to look up in the archives about the 3rd Ranger Battalion, you will find we had some action on a mountain called Hill 950. It was located in the Venafro Valley, north of Naples, which narrows down like a funnel. The Americans controlled the valley, but the Germans still controlled the heights, a chain of high mountains called the Apennines. Early in the fall of 1943, just before we advanced on San Pietro and just before we left for Anzio, we encountered some resistance from a group of Germans on that mountain top—Hill 950. It was here that I met Hans.'*

> *'We were in a bivouac area at the foot of the mountain. In this valley there were olive trees, grape fields and arbors. But no big structures to hide behind. The enemy on top of the mountain was looking down our throats and had a decided advantage. With no trees, they had the luxury of the high ground to overlook our every move. Every time we tried to advance, they would throw their artillery and Air Force at us. So, we were just stopped in our tracks.'*

'Several days passed. It was very quiet. We were waiting, it seemed, for a battle of some kind or another when I was called to Colonel Dammer's tent. "Evans, I want you to take a patrol up that hill and see what they have up there." I was asked to go up the mountain probably because I had been on so many patrols. "Find out what's up there and what it will take to knock them off. Darby wants some answers and we are all getting impatient."'

Choosing a small, experienced patrol of 10 men, including old-timer, George Kopanda, Evans led them up the rough terrain mountain the next night. Once on the hilltop, he stayed in one place so they could find him when they returned from recon. Observing no movement, actions, or men, his patrol returned to the bivouac area and reported to both Dammer and Darby. Darby asked Evans if he could take the top. Evans answered in the affirmative. What he really thought might be happening was that the Germans were observing the Americans by day and descending the other side at night to their camp.

Evans and his expanded patrol of 50 men returned to the hilltop the next night and waited until daylight for the enemy to return. They did appear on a different mountaintop—two peaks on one mountain—the Americans on the front peak and the Germans on the back peak with 50 to 75 yards separated them by a 100-foot canyon. Both groups were surprised to see the other and when Evans sent a patrol to investigate a path, they were fired upon and he called them back. Using his walkie-talkie, he reported his findings and received a 'do-it' call back with Evans' reply that he needed time to learn their strength.

Using his unorthodox ideas, Evans decided to break the silence with a call-out:

'*Can anyone speak English?'*

A voice came back immediately. '*Yes I can.'*

'You know this is some situation. The top of this mountain is not doing you any good with us sitting here. Why don't I stand up over here and you stand up over there and let's talk this situation over. Let's call a brief truce.' Evans' men were used to his ways but the new ones probably thought, *What kind of war is this*?

The call came back, '*Give me five or ten minutes while I alert my men. You had better do the same.'*

Evans asked for an officer to translate and the German replied, *'There is no officer here. I am the non-commissioned officer in charge.'*

They agreed and with some hesitation, Evans stood first, followed by the German, each learning the other's name: Hans and Bing. Several truce talks occurred over the next few days—Evans learning that Hans was from Leipzig,

his parents owned a hotel there, and Hans had studied in the U.S. On the fourth day, some troops engaged in throwing souvenirs back and forth.

> '*At the same time I was making friends, we kept up on our investigation. We waited until night and then I would personally take out a patrol myself. Picture the two tops of the back side of our mountain and then cross over to climb the backside of theirs. So that's what we did. When we reached their top, we just sat there and watched them, unobserved in the dark. The night was so black they did not know it was the enemy moving there with them. A lot of times we just stood quietly and watched them. We got right in amongst them. I do not mean that we sat at the fire with them roasting marshmallows. But we were close enough to hear them. Two men with me understood some German but not enough. We figured out where they had their machine guns and their headquarters. We noted everything. It took about four nights to assess the full situation and plan our strategy.'*

Darby and Dammer remained in the bivouac area for Evans' feedback and on the fourth day, a determined Paratrooper colonel came up to relieve us. Under the cover of darkness, he appeared first followed by his men, the 509th of the 82nd Airborne, and the next day Evans briefed the colonel. Apparently, he was not impressed and stated loudly, *"Lieutenant, there is not a damn thing over there. Why haven't you taken the other side of that mountain?"*

> *'Hans stood up with his burp gun, pointed it at the colonel and said, "You know, he has not been here long, has he Lieutenant?" The colonel was so shocked he fell backwards.'*

That night the Paratroopers came up, relieved Evan's group, and were preparing to make a frontal attack if his plan did not work. Evans' group came up behind and amongst the Germans and attacked—killing many and taking prisoners. He had given orders to take Hans alive if possible, but this was not to be for he had died—pointed out by the Germans who had seen Evans in the days before the attack. Evans stated that he did not expect to feel sadness for one of the enemies, but '*sadness I truly felt.'*

Later, Evans went to Leipzig and located the parents of Hans Schuller. He learned that one of their two sons had been killed in the war and on one of his visits, Han's mother asked him*, 'You know something about our Hans, don't you?*' Evans shared the story and wept as the mother put her arms around him. When he returned to the U.S., he wrote them but never received a reply. (Moen and Heinen, pp. 147 – 157)

Hans on the Mountaintop is unique. In some ways, it resembles other stories concerning enemies communicating for a brief period of time during which some understanding was exchanged. The story in this book concerns Hans,

the German NCO, and Bing, the American Ranger—both committed to their country's mission of war and survival.

THE ITALIAN RETREAT

Bing Evans and James "BB Eyes" Larkin (named for a Dick Tracy character) received a call to report to Colonel Dammer's headquarters. While on their way in a jeep dispatched for them, these two old timers in the 3rd both wondered what this special request meant. A surprise met them.

> '*Gentlemen, there is space available for two officers at an Army retreat. As the most senior officers who have seen the most action, I have chosen you two to take a three-day pass to an Italian resort. I think you two deserve some rest and relaxation. Congratulations, Gentleman.'*

Arriving at the very palatial Excelsior Vittoria, they noted its position on the edge of a cliff which rose 300 feet and offered incredible views of the Mediterranean. Once in their rooms, they were treated to hot water baths and clean uniforms. Their next three days were spent simply enjoying the restful atmosphere with no sounds of war. When he returned 50 years later with Frances to revisit these memories, he was denied entrance. (Moen and Heinen, pp. 158 – 161)

ANZIO AND *CAPTURE OF THE RANGERS AT CISTERNA*

> '*January 22, 1944. The night was black—pitch black, the way we like it. We set anchor in the harbor just outside Anzio, Italy. We could hear the Mediterranean waters lapping against the ship's sides as our LCAs, Landing Craft Assault boats—American-made and metal—were lowered silently into the water. We had completed this exercise a hundred times before and the whole business becoming routine. This was the fourth invasion for my outfit—the United States Army Infantry Rangers. We had orders to spearhead and land on beaches between Anzio and Nettuno. I was 24 years old, a lieutenant and a company commander.'*
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> *'I felt a foreboding but remained focused. Our objective here was to cut the enemy's supply by overcoming the German's beach defenses and clearing the town. Ranger Force for this landing included the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Battalions. We were not at full strength with only 1200 men. Following us in would be the 1st Infantry Division, the 46th Tank Regiment and two Commando battalions. The odds were against us but we went in anyway. The whole beach was alive with Navy bombardment. Engineers*

cleared mines and barbed wire and set up lights to guide the wave of men coming behind us.'

'Little to no resistance. Using signals or head nods we moved further inward. Radio call from Colonel Darby sent me into the hills and two days later we were in the Alban Hills and could see Rome. Headquarters sent us back to the beach where we had little cover—a mistake which would cost many lives.'

'The Germans (reenforced by troops from northern Italy, France, Yugoslavia and Germany) counter-attacked with German planes and artillery. Our backs were to the sea.'

It was during this time period when he heard a child crying, the one he later called "Little Angel". She had probably lost her parents and was alone. Evans took care of her for several days and then radioed the hospital ship located on the beach area for someone to pick her up. A nurse arrived in a jeep, secured her and drove away. Evans watched it until it was out of sight—then returned to the war.

'*On 30 January, the plan was for us to move out that night, with the 1st and 3rd Ranger Battalions infiltrating behind enemy lines under cover of darkness to reach Cisterna around noon the next day, take the town and hold until the Third Texas Division could relieve us—the 4th Ranger Battalion was to hold the road for supplies. Both Les Kness and I told the Colonel that more Germans were present—ready to attack us but his reply was, "Lieutenant, those are my orders and those are your orders." I answered, "Yes, Sir." As Les and I walked out I said to him, "Les this is bad. We are in for it tonight." Both of us had been through enough that we were becoming fatalistic. On the night of January 29th, as we advanced towards Cisterna, Les Kness and I knew that we were on a suicide mission. Sure enough, just a couple of hours later, we ran into a buzz saw. By noon of the next day, we were wiped out!'* (Moen and Heinen, pp. 17 – 27)

Evans called on the battle memory sources of Ranger Gustave Schunemann, 4th Battalion from his book, *Memoirs of a Ranger,* to describe the battle, ending in these paragraphs:

'*The battle raged on until around noon when we noticed a group of Rangers walking up the dirt road toward our position. At first, we thought they were reinforcements that had somehow broken through. As they drew closer, however, we could see that their hands were in the air and they were being escorted by Germans. The Germans were demanding our surrender or the hostages would be killed.'*

'At this point Major Dobson had no choice but to order us to throw down our weapons and come out. Not only were we nearly out of ammunition, but we had already lost half of two Ranger Battalions, killed or wounded. The carnage was tremendous on both sides. I just knew that my life had come to an end. Only through the grace of God did I survive without a scratch.'

'The Germans herded us onto the farm road and marched us, hands raised high, out of the area. We carried some of our wounded on piggy-back, and others just needed someone to hang onto…Much to our surprise and relief, the Germans called for all the wounded to come forward. Some hesitated at first but we convinced them to go for medical help because they had nothing to lose at that point. There was Leroy Kraft, standing there, in complete shock, with half his face blown away. He and maybe a hundred others were loaded onto trucks displaying red crosses and hauled away.'

'At dusk we were loaded onto trucks, packed like sardines so tightly that we could not sit or lie down. We were actually held up by each other. We rode that way all night long, arriving on the outskirts of Rome early in the morning. It was at the Colosseum area that we dismounted and marched through the streets of the city in one huge propaganda extravaganza. The Germans had cameras on every conner.' (Schunemann, pp. 27 - 31)

Evans states this follow-up in the Moen and Heinen book:

'*Schunemann's story collaborates what I remember. However, my memory is sketchy. We were firing away but running low on ammunition. I figured we still had plenty because we had men that had been killed and we could use their bandoliers. There were bodies everywhere—Germans and Americans. The last thing I remember is the Germans marching a few prisoners, our own men, along the road. I gave the order to shoot the German guards.'*

'That's when I earned my Purple Heart. I have been told there was an explosion of some kind. I do not remember the explosion and I have never been able to remember hitting the ground. For years I did not even know whether they had shot the guards—whether it was useless. I have no memory of what happened then and the several weeks that followed.' (Moen and Heinen, pp. 31 - 32)

'Through all the years since the war, I have a reoccurring nightmare. I am falling to the ground but I have not yet hit it. I suppose the day I do, I will die. Ed Krise told me that a mortar

shell or something landed within five or six feet of me, close enough so I received a concussion from the shrapnel that blew out sideways. I was knocked out. I did not even hear the explosion. I have a deep scar on my head and several smaller scars that have become a part of my facial features. They now lend it character. The concussion was my biggest problem. They tell me I was up walking around after that, but I have no memory of it.' (Moen and Heinen, pp. 165 - 166)

Medic Ed Kries added the following notations about Evans and the events he witnessed:

'*He does not have any memory for about three months after we were captured—total amnesia. It is a normal response. There was heavy mortar fire coming in and one landed near him and shook him up. At the same time, we were overrun and taken prisoners simultaneously* [on 30 January 1944]. *Amnesia serves a purpose.'*

'Shortly after the incident, I had several lengthy conversations with him and as far as I could tell, he was perfectly normal. But he has no recall. For instance, a couple of days later they marched us through Rome; he has no recall of that. But I remember it very well.'

'It was one of the defining moments of life. They collected about a thousand of us prisoners in a streetcar barn on the edge of Rome. Mostly Rangers and a few British. They brought us to the Colosseum where we started a march along Rome's main thoroughfare in a three-hour victory parade. For publicity purposes. The Germans walked along with us as they were guarding us. Everyone walked. It was early February and about 60 degrees.'

'Some of us have a video of the parade taken from German newsreels. As we were being marched along, our minds raced. We did not know what was going to happen next. I felt an affinity for the Roman Gladiators, as we had no idea what they were going to do with us. *Perhaps they were going to treat us like the Christians and feed us to the lions.'*

'*So, it was a period of great uncertainty. The people of Rome lined the streets ten deep. Some were cheering for us and throwing us bread and cigarettes and some were not, depending on their affinity for the Germans. It was, of course, a violation of the Geneva Convention to expose prisoners to public ridicule. That only happened twice in WWII. The Russians had paraded German prisoners in Moscow.'* (Moen and Heinen, pp. 166 – 167)

Evans repeated that his memory of the train ride via box cars from Rome to Poland is viewed only through brief flashes. They were taken to Stalag VII-B and stayed two weeks. His attempted escape with Chuck Shunstrom from the camp ended when they split up and the dogs followed Evans. Shunstrom got away. When Evans was returned to the camp, a fellow POW, Ed Krise helped him to survive by talking to him and sharing food. Krise was then taken to Moosburg, Germany and Stalag 7A. They did not see one another again until 1958. *"I admired Bing greatly. So much so that my son carries his name.""* (Moen and Heinen, pp. 172-173)

OFLAG 64: ARRIVAL 21 April 1944

> *'I found myself a prisoner of war at Oflag 64. The first three of my fifteen months of captivity are a blank. Eventually I gained recall of each day in and out, but my memory returned gradually. From the spring of 1944 I can tell you first-hand what happened at Oflag 64. And it is time I was telling somebody. Even if I embellish, I was there. Besides, I am not inclined to embellish. This is what I remember…'*

Evans' description of Oflag 64 matched those from hundreds of other officers who had entered its gates previously. The American Colonel Thomas Drake was in charge during Bing's tenure. He described camp barracks with their cubicles, barbed wire fencing, watch towers, the prison population, camp routines, Little Theatre activities, library, shops and those all-important Red Cross Boxes and YMCA treasured items. Evans received no mail initially because the prisoners were only allowed to write to kinfolk and since his mother had remarried and his fiancée's name was still Wheeler, he was skipped at mail call. Fortunately, he learned from the others to use the name Mrs. Evans when he wrote to Frances and began receiving mail and parcels from her. These raised his spirits tremendously.

Evans also became involved in camp activities and with his athletic abilities, became a popular participant in camp sports. Joining the camp perimeter walkers helped him to improve both his mental and physical conditioning, even when the temperature dropped. Bing was no stranger to cold weather. '*The winters were as cold as any Midwest winter or colder. Poland did not have as much wind as South Dakota, where the wind blew all the time, but it was just as cold and nasty. The cold was always on our minds.'*

All Kriegies shared one feature in common—insufficient food. Evans, who remembered some lean times during his own youth, soon became an observer of the camp menu: heavy bread when it was offered, hot water for breakfast (for coffee or tea), thin barley soup for lunch, and vegetables for dinner, eaten with whatever food they received from home or their Red Cross parcel. On

special holidays like Christmas, the men joined together to make it as joyous as possible and hoped New Years would be the last one spent at Oflag 64.

He looked forward to the BBC news and through it, learned when the Russians were coming close and when the war was turning for the Allies.

Escape was a common subject and Evans took time to learn that a system and requirements were put in place to judge the success or failure of a plan which had to be approved before it could be attempted. He also volunteered to become a tunnel digger—another reason to exercise by spreading tunnel dirt through sown pouches in their trousers, pulling a string which released small amounts around the compound and the vegetable garden. The tunnel at Oflag 64 was terminated because of the tragic consequences which occurred at Stalag Luft 3 where 50 escapees were shot—a savage act ordered by Hitler.

> '*This convinced our escape committee to shut ours down. Cannot say I blame them. However, it was not long after that, we were on "the march".'* (Moen and Heinen, pp. 177 – 197)

THE MARCH FROM OFLAG 64

'The Russians are coming!' Schnell! Schnell!'

This rang in prisoners' ears by the armed guards as they were moved out of the gate in columns. The date was January 30, 1945, the forced march carried out during the worst winter weather recorded in many years. Those who survived it experienced 345 miles and 45 days of hell. Some stayed behind—those too weak or sick or for other reasons unable to attempt the march. Oflag 64 marchers were not the only travelers on the road; these included soldiers and civilians of every description, some pulling carts with belongings and family members, all headed west.

> *'One of the communal barns was big enough to handle a group our size. I remember sleeping in the hay two nights before I escaped. It would have been a nice treat, except by that time, we were crawling with bugs and other insects—even as cold as it was. We were hungry and our feet were in pain. It was not a pleasant experience.'* (Moen and Heinen, p. 202)

> *'While marching, three of us planned our escape. Kenny Kerfoot, from rural Virginia, Tony Liebetore, and myself. On the third day while we were walking through a town, the opportunity presented itself. The three of us stepped out of the fifteen hundred or so marching prisoners and ducked into the safety of a building. The town was pretty deserted and no one paid attention to us. We were on foot headed across country, east*

toward Russia. I am sure we were some of the first ones to get away.' (Moen and Heinen, p. 203)

Caught in a battle between the Germans and the Russians, they quickly searched for a safe place and found a rounded mound with a door, which when opened, revealed a cellar where a Polish family kept their stored potatoes. Cold to the bone and hungry, they ate the raw potatoes and listened to battle sounds around them. Fortune found them in the shape of a boy who had been sent by the family to collect some from their store.

'*He must have gone back to his folks about us because the next thing we knew, the boy brought this wonderful, hot potato soup. After that he brought us whatever they had. He also brought blankets, clothes, and big overcoats to keep us warm which we put over our uniforms.'* (Moen and Heinen, p. 204)

The family's generosity became their final act on Earth because the German SS soldiers decided to use the mound as their command post, found the three Americans and the boy, collected the family members and shot the father, mother, and three children. The Americans were made to watch the whole execution. Bing cried. It was his worst nightmare through the years after the war.

'I was taken away—alone. They had taken Kerfoot and Liebetore off somewhere else. I think they wound up at Luckenwalde. They gave me a military trial. Because it was my second escape and because I was in civilian clothes, they tried me as a spy; they were authorized to do so. My uniform was underneath the civilian clothes, but as far as the Germans were concerned, that did not matter. They furnished me with a lawyer but he seemed unconcerned and did not try to defend me very hard. I felt helpless. I cannot tell you what they said, but when they got through, an interpreter with a British accent told me that I had been sentenced to be shot. My execution was set for the morning of April 22, 1945! (Moen and Heinen, pp. 204 – 205)

Evans was then placed in solitary confinement because they thought he knew information, even though he didn't. Their treatment consisted of keeping him naked in a cell, then using a radiator's heat to make him comfortable, then quizzing him. A good, rich meal followed which caused him to vomit—adding to his misery. After two weeks and three sessions, his tormentors decided that Evans could not add intel, returned his clothes, took him across country to Luckenwalde and placed him with Russian prisoners to await his execution.

'*I was probably there a week when good fortune came my way as Peter Vetcher, a friend of mine and also a Ranger, was captured and joined me in the camp. I made contact with him*

and we quickly planned our escape together. He agreed to go with me. Pete was a definite asset since he could speak German. That was the middle of March.'

'They did not count the Norwegians on the other side, as often as they did us. I do not know why. Maybe once a week. So we got a couple of the Norwegians to agree to stand in our places in line and we smuggled them in. How we ever got them to agree to this, I do not remember. Then Pete and I just walked away. As far as I know, they do not know that we are gone yet'. (Moen and Heinen, pp. 206 – 208)

They traveled by night toward the American lines and were able to mingle in crowds without drawing notice to themselves because of the chaos. Finding the American Army at the blown bridge across the Elbe River, they swam to a part they could hold on to. Hailing some Americans with "Hey, Yanks", they received no immediate assistance because Germans were infiltrating their lines and they were suspicious. Finally, Corporal Hutchison waded out and offered his help by extending his rifle as a handle. Both Evans and Vetcher were pulled to safety and welcomed home! Evans asked Hutchison to write to Frances, telling her that he was safe behind American lines. She still has the letter.

Taken to Leipzig, Germany, to 5th Army Headquarters, they were interrogated and treated to delousing, hot showers and new uniforms. Evans was given his letters and a nice room at the headquarters. He was in Leipzig for about two weeks and heard the Voice of America broadcast the message that the war was over.

'After the war ended it was probably only a week or two later that I was leading caravans and convoys into different camps to bring the prisoners out. Then I was no longer needed and it was time to go home. I was instructed to get to Camp Lucky Strike and then ship home from there. My outfit was no more. The 1st, 3rd, and 4th had been wiped out a long time before. I was on my own.' (Moen and Heinen, pp. 212 – 214)

Truly on his own time with freedom to travel, he hitch-hiked across the European continent, seeing the sights and talking with people who were kind enough to speak English when they discovered that he did not speak theirs. Evans does not know who paid for his train rides as he had no money and was not paid until he returned to the U.S. He slept at a Red Cross Center and ate doughnuts. By chance, he ran across a man he knew from Brookings who gave him $50—to repay when he returned home. He had most of the money when he arrived in the states.

'*From Paris I hopped on a convoy that was going to Le Harve, France. Outside the city was Camp Lucky Strike and my ticket*

home. It contained three camps—Lucky Strike being the largest. The tents housed cots for sleeping and were squad tents, not little. Depending on how fast soldiers moved in and out, we could have from one to eight people in the tent. I do not remember a lot of joviality. Everyone was anxious to get home. Orders for who was to report where were posted at the end of each street with many different outfits going different places; I was amazed they did as well as they did.'

'I finally got orders and they put me on a LST (Landing Ship Tank), an American boat with two hundred enlisted men in the hold and six officers in the upper bunks on topside. They fed us well, three squares a day and we had plenty of room on the ship, but it was not plush—nothing had been up to that time. Our ship traveled the Southern Seas and when the waters were calm, the front was lowered and we could swim in the ocean.' (Moen and Heinen, pp. 214 – 216).

'Then we came into harbor at Norfolk, Virginia. I called Frances from Norfolk as soon as I could. It was nighttime, probably a day after the landing because we were busy getting processed in. I dialed collect from a pay phone and she answered. We laughed and cried. She had suspected that I was on my way home as it had been so quiet on my end.'

'By then I had my orders. I told her I was on my way to Minneapolis by train. She told me that the wedding plans were already made and she would meet me in Minneapolis. She decided on August 5 for the wedding and I went along with it because I was a mess at the time as you can well imagine. Frances's uncle owned a florist shop and was saving flowers for the wedding. All I could think about was that she had waited. She was still there. That was the amazing part.' (Moen and Heinen pp. 214 – 217)

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND CAREERS

Frances had quit her job, moved back to Brookings and arrived in Minneapolis the next day. After Warren met her train, they started planning their future and were married two weeks later.

Returning to civilian life, Warren "Bing" Evans ended his U.S. Army career on January 6, 1946. He used his GI Bill and graduated from college shortly after returning to the U.S. With a friend, they started a bowling alley in Brookings which became successful, but the profit would not sustain two families. Fortunately, an opportunity appeared with the Ralston Purina Company and since his degree was from an agricultural school, Warren was

hired. The family lived in nine different states and eleven cities in the next fifteen years. His record there was excellent and he was in line for a top position, but realized that he was suffering from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), so he and Frances, who was very supportive, worked together and gradually, he got better. Fifty-six years later they were still together. Warren still had nightmares, but they had learned to handle them.

Their three sons, Brad, Mark, and Bruce, wanted to 'stay put', so they chose Huntingburg, Indiana—home for the next 36 years. Later, he worked with Olinger Construction Company as comptroller and retired at age 65. In civilian life, he continued service to others as a Member of the Huntingburg United Methodist Church, Dubois County Masonic Lodge #520 F&AM, and the 33rd Degree of the Scottish Rite.

(Moen and Heinen, pp. 217 – 227)

Frances, his loving and supportive wife, died on November 10, 2009. Warren followed her on July 6, 2015. They are buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Brookings, South Dakota.

A Memorial Service for Warren Earl "Bing" Evans was held in Huntingburg United Methodist Church in Huntingburg, Indiana, on October 10, 2015. The Eulogy was delivered by David Williams, President, Descendants of World War II Rangers, Inc.

Oflag 64 Remembered deeply appreciates Dr. Williams' service toward our shared endeavors concerning the recognition of soldiers like Ranger Evans who truly exhibited the traits of America's Greatest Generation.

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

In addition to his Silver Star and Purple Heart, Lt. Evans was honored with Presidential Unit Citations with Oakleaf Clusters and the Ranger Tab. He relinquished his role as the Honorary Sergeant Major of the 75th Ranger Regiment in January 2008.

WWII Ranger Warren "Bing" Evans was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame in 1996 for his heroic deeds and service to his country. He remained active in the WWII Ranger Battalions Association and was elected its President in 1999, a modest man continuing to do great deeds.

A MEMORABLE TRIBUTE

In 1993, Warren and Frances returned with other Rangers to Italy. While visiting the Anzio area, they sought and paused over the graves of fellow Rangers in the WWII Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and Memorial in Nettuno, Italy (just outside of Anzio).

Taking a solo walk the next morning and having a cappuccino, he noted the statue of a little girl with doves flying around her head. Requesting information from the shop owner, he was told that during the war, a GI had befriended the little one and sent her to safety with an Army nurse. Unfortunately, an artillery shell had hit their jeep and killed both. In tribute to the child, the people of Anzio had built the monument and called it *Angelica of Anzio.* Warren knew immediately that this was the one he had helped, and although it saddened him that she and the nurse had died, the little one would be remembered through the presence of the angel statue and the town's people who would retell her story to coming generations. (Moen and Heinen, pp. 38 – 43)

SOURCES

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