

## **2LT Richard Herman Kellahan**

### **1923 to 2014**

Richard “Dick” Herman Kellahan was a native of Kingstree, South Carolina. He lived there almost all his life except for two major absences: college and World War II.

He was born on April 6, 1923, the second child of Richard Melvin and Minnie Strong Kellahan. His father farmed and ran a country store, a cotton gin, and a saw mill. He attended public schools in Kingstree, graduating from Kingstree High School in 1940. In September 1940 he enrolled in the Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina, located in Charleston, South Carolina. He was now a member of the class of 1944. How did Dick make the decision to attend the Citadel?

*‘I don’t think I made it. I think it was made for me. My parents, my grandfather, principally my grandfather, he furnished the money.’ (Bass Interview p. 2)*

Dick was a member of the Corps of Cadets, on a dual program of education, majoring in business, and military training, participating in Reserve Officer Training. He enjoyed his time at the Citadel and made many friends. And on Sunday, December 7, 1941, he was in his room listening to the radio and heard that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

*‘I knew where it was, but we’d been keeping up with the war as it went along but I knew where it was and I was tipsy, just so surprised. We could envision all kinds of things, where we were going to be – in not too long of a time we’d be somewhere. A lot of the boys were dropping out and enlisting. Some of them went to Canada. Some of them went to England, volunteering for some service somewhere.’ (Bass Interview, pp. 3-4)*

However, Dick stayed at the Citadel, continuing his studies, until the spring of 1943, when the class of 1944 was told one day, in the mess hall, that they were called to active service. On May 2, 1943, the class was taken by train to Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina, and formally inducted into the armed services. They were returned to the Citadel and finished their junior year. And, upon recommendation by the Citadel class of 1943, the class of 1944 were awarded their class rings early. His class did not know it yet, but they would become known as “the class that never was”.

After a two-week furlough, the group spent 13 weeks in basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. Dick related the following story:

*‘There were a lot of raw recruits which came in along with us, and the non-coms and all the folks there, instead of them getting out in the heat and drilling these draftees, they saw we could do it so*

*they'd let us do it. And they sat up in the shade.'* (Bass Interview, p. 4)

Basic training was followed by 17 weeks of Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia and a Second Lieutenant commission. 2LT Kellahan was assigned to the 84<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the Railsplitters, 335<sup>th</sup> Regiment, at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, in May of 1944, for final training before shipping out from Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, on a converted British ocean liner. Dick arrived in England in October, 1944, where he took up his duties as a platoon leader.

*Per the United States Army Division Chronicle (Army Divisions):*

*'The 84th Infantry Division arrived in England, 1 October 1944, and trained. It landed on Omaha Beach, 1-4 November 1944, and moved to the vicinity of Gulpen, Holland, 5-12 November. The Division entered combat, 18 November, with an attack on Geilenkirchen, Germany, as part of the larger offensive in the Roer Valley, north of Aachen. Taking Geilenkirchen, 19 November, the Division pushed forward to take Beeck and Lindern in the face of heavy enemy resistance, 29 November.'*

In his own words, here is what 2LT Kellahan experienced on November 29, 1944:

*'My Citadel classmate Creswell Garlington and I led two platoons from ["I" Company] 3rd Battalion of the 335th Regiment on the morning of November 29, 1944, for a daylight attack on a small village called Lindern. We tried to lead our troops one mile in pitch black darkness, pass through the existing front line and hit the village at daybreak with the element of surprise as the key to our success. Our timing was slightly late because visibility was good enough so that we could see the enemy and they could see us. Lt. Garlington led the platoon ahead of mine, and his timing was a bit better. His platoon aroused the enemy so that we were met with blistering fire from small arms and three tanks camouflaged as haystacks. Our left flank was exposed in an open sugar beet field. Our platoon suffered heavy casualties and was pinned down by heavy machine gunfire. I desperately called for our artillery to fire on the enemy in front of us but to no avail. My 536 walkie-talkie was not working, and I could not make contact with Lt. Garlington or Battalion Headquarters or anybody. (After the war I learned that the Battalion's radio antennae had been shot off and never worked at all.) We fought until about 20:00 when our ammunition was exhausted and the enemy overran us. The Germans captured us November 29, 1944.'* (POW Experience, p.1)

Dick was grouped up with other Prisoners of War. He was relieved that the German soldiers did not take his watch or his Citadel ring. Officers were sorted from enlisted men and then, by train and by truck, he was transported to Oflag 64 in Szubin, Poland, and arrived December 24, 1944, with Citadel

classmate 1LT William D. Warthen and his company commander, 1LT George Kiley. One of his memories of his short time in the Oflag involved sharing of food:

*'What you've got to realize is that you've got an allotment of bread at certain times, and they'll divide that between maybe seven people. And you slice that up – it got so tight that when you made a slice ...we'd balance the scale so that nobody got more than anybody else ...the person who sliced the bread got the last choice, so if he cheated anybody he got cheated.'* (Bass Interview, p. 23)

He had been at Oflag 64 less than a month when the long march began. Here is how he described the experience:

*'From Christmas Day until January 21, 1945, we rested and even grew bored. But the Russians broke through German forces from Warsaw, Poland, and we could hear their gunfire. The guards made us carry our own provisions from left-over Red Cross parcels and marched us north toward the Baltic Sea. This forced march was the most challenging and horrible part of our POW experience because the temperature went down to - 20 degrees in blizzard conditions, preventing any escape. By the third night the Russians were so close that our guards abandoned us, but they returned the next morning. We walked an average of 15-20 kilometers per day through the snow, spending nights in empty hay barns or churches with little or no food. What we had, we had scrounged from cellars.'*

*'After walking 175 kilometers, my CO and I pretended to be sick and joined 40 other POW's in a boxcar. We traveled in this closed boxcar for a week without food or water in terribly unsanitary conditions. Finally, we arrived in Luckenwalde, a POW camp outside Potsdam.'* (POW Experience, p. 2)

2LT Kellahan's train arrived at Stalag IIIA outside Luckenwalde on February 1, 1945. His journey was "*was unusual both for slowness and for lack of food*" according to Clarence R. Meltesen in Roads to Liberation, p. 229. Conditions improved slightly inside the camp.

*'They gave us one meal, usually soup and a piece of bread, each day in ordinary POW barracks. From the yard we observed the bombing of Berlin by the Allies. The Russians came up from Dresden on April 21, 1945. They knocked down the wire enclosure but left us with no food. We scrounged around for food but did not venture far from camp because fighting continued all around us.'* (POW Experience, p. 2)

Repatriation for the Americans was complicated by the fact that Stalag IIIA was liberated by the Russian Army. Negotiations began. On May 20, the remaining American POWs were taken by truck to the Elbe River crossing.

Before that day, like many others, Dick Kellahan had found and seized an opportunity to leave the Stalag.

*'One day someone told us that a number of trucks were stopped in a nearby field. About 25 of us went to the field and boarded the trucks. After an argument between a Russian officer and the American driver, they agreed that only those with American uniforms would ride in his truck. I quickly discarded my Yugoslavian overcoat to stay on board. The truck took us to an airbase near Wittenberg. We traveled by plane and train to the coast of France where people were cheering in the streets on May 7, 1945, because the war had ended. VE Day was celebrated on May 8, 1945, but the war actually ended on the 7th.'* (POW Experience, p. 2)

Dick Kellahan arrived at Camp Lucky Strike, near Calais, France. There he learned that he was now a First Lieutenant, promoted while he was a POW. He rested and recuperated and waited for transport back to the United States.

*'While we waited to be shipped back home, trucks with pitifully emaciated enlisted men came to the camp. We realized that their experiences in the POW work camps must have been much more terrible than ours had been. And of course, since our return to the States, we have learned how much longer and more severely others had suffered for our country.'* (POW Experience, p. 2)

1LT Kellahan shipped out from Le Havre, France, to New York City. He traveled to Fort Bragg in North Carolina. He was released on leave and returned home to Kingtree, South Carolina, on Wednesday, June 6, 1945. He then returned to active duty and served until March 1946. Years later, looking back on his POW experience, Dick had this to say about the ordeal of the long march:

*'You had your blankets and you're frozen, but you have your blankets wrapped around you, just your nose and face out – walking with twelve hundred other guys. It was just misery – just complete misery – cold, hungry – not knowing anything about what was going to be next or tomorrow or whatever. But we didn't worry about it too badly. We took one day at a time. If there was a fire at night you try to get warm and try to find some potatoes... And snow for water. You'd cook the potatoes and that was about the only hot food we could get.'* (Bass Interview, pp. 28-29)

Although Dick Kellahan had the opportunity to return to the Citadel, all expenses paid, and finish his senior year, he chose not to complete his degree. Like many young men after the war, he married. Sadly, his wife, Addie Estelle McIntosh, died in childbirth November 28, 1946, together with their infant son. Several years later he met Helen Reid Barker, of Lumberton, North Carolina. They married on September 14, 1948. They had four sons, three of whom graduated from the Citadel. He was a farmer and a merchant for many years in Kingtree.

In 1961 Dick was involved in the formation of a community bank, which became the Williamsburg First National Bank. He was a stockholder and employee of the bank from 1961 until 1995, serving as a director, chairman of the board, and bank president. He was an active community member serving in many organizations over the years, including the following, listed in his obituary:

*'He also served as a director at the Kingstree Federal Savings and Loan, Williamsburg Regional Hospital, Williamsburg Academy, and Darlington Land Bank. Mr. Kellahan also joined the Kingstree Kiwanis Club and the Masonic Lodge. In addition, he served as a deacon and elder at the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church, and then became a charter member of the Kingstree Presbyterian Church where he also served as elder and elder emeritus.'*

In May 2008, the Citadel honored the Class of 1944, "the class that never was", at the graduation ceremony. Richard H. Kellahan, along with other class survivors, was awarded a Citadel diploma.

Richard Herman Kellahan died January 12, 2014, at home in Kingstree, South Carolina.

## **Sources**

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Biography written by Kriegy Research Group writer Anne M. Trujillo