

1LT Clarence Richard Meltesen

1916 ~ 2005

Early Life - 1916 to 1935

Clarence Richard Meltesen was born November 1, 1916, in Kenosha, Wisconsin, the youngest of three children born to Jafe Hans and Karen Marie (Mary) Meltesen. His parents were Danish American. Jafe was born in Wisconsin, after his family immigrated. Mary was born in Denmark and immigrated with her family to the US in 1892.

According to his sister Milly, as a boy "Clary" tried to live on shredded wheat and doughnuts. He "slaved" in his mother's vegetable garden. His family was practicing Lutherans, attending the Danish Lutheran Church, but he sang in the Episcopal Church choir because they paid him to sing. He delivered the *Saturday Evening Post* for years and saved his Kenosha, Wisconsin, Street Trades badge until his death. He earned First Class rank in the Boy Scouts and enjoyed playing basketball, tennis, and swimming. He graduated from Kenosha Senior High School in January 1935. According to the 1935 yearbook, he was active in Hi-Y Club (a social club associated with the YMCA), Student Council, French Club and Spanish Club. He had been awarded a full scholarship to Yale University in Connecticut, but the family story is that it was declined because he had no money to pay for travel. Instead, on March 20, 1935, he applied to join the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Life in the CCC - 1935 to 1937

On April 24, 1935, Clarence was enrolled in the CCC and assigned to Camp Finley in Finley, Wisconsin, for reforestation work. In August he was assigned to a new camp, Camp Peninsular, near Fish Creek, Wisconsin, on the Door Peninsula. He continued to work in reforestation and as a first aider. Summer 1936 he was sent to Isle Royale, Michigan, from August 10 until September 15, to fight the immense forest fire that started in July. Upon his return to Camp Peninsular, he became a full-time First Aide Assistant until his discharge on January 8, 1937, "*to accept employment*".

College Years - 1937 to 1941

The American Brass Company in Kenosha, a factory that employed Clarence's father, hired him as well. He worked there until fall, when he traveled to Moscow, Idaho, where he had been accepted as a student at the University of Idaho. Because of his CCC experiences, he wanted to major in Forestry and join the US Forest Service or the US Parks Service after graduation. However, Forestry required committing to summer forestry camp and he needed a summer job that paid money, so he majored in Botany. While a student he lived in Lindley Hall, a co-op residence hall, and was a contributor to The Idaho Forester, an annual publication of the Department of Forestry.

Meltesen also paid attention to the news of the world and was convinced that there would be war in Europe and that eventually the US would enter that war. He figured he might

as well serve as an officer, so he also enrolled in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at the University. At the end of four years, he graduated with a Second Lieutenant commission.

Clarence's summer job for the next three years was Blister Rust Eradication work in Idaho. This program was an attempt to protect the valuable Western White Pine timber species in Idaho and Eastern Washington by suppressing blister rust fungus host species: wild currants and gooseberries. "Eradication" meant pulling the bushes up. By the end of his three summers, he was an assistant camp director, so perhaps he didn't have to pull up so many bushes. He listed the pay as \$130 per month on his Army Qualification Card, which apparently was enough to pay his college expenses for the next year.

Blister Rust Camp 1939 led to an event of future importance in Clarence's life. He needed to enroll in Advanced ROTC that fall on a specific Saturday, which meant traveling from his remote camp to Moscow, Idaho, by first hiking out to the nearest highway. He had three days allocated for travel, but then it rained and rained hard, for three days. He was unable to travel until the critical Saturday and of course lost his slot in Advanced ROTC for that semester. Upon graduation in June 1941, he had only three-and-one-half of the four years of ROTC required to get his 2Lt commission. But he found a solution.

He spent the summer of 1941 at ROTC Summer Camp in Ft. Lewis, Washington. He had solved his ROTC dilemma by enrolling in a postgraduate Botany program at the University of Iowa in Iowa City. That fall, at a student dance, he met Helena Briggs of Council Bluffs, Iowa, his future wife. If a storm had not upset his Advanced ROTC sequence, he would never have been in Iowa City in the fall of 1941. On December 7, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and the war was on. On January 31, 1942, he completed his semester at the University of Iowa and received his 2Lt commission.

World War II Service – 1942 to 1945

From February through April of 1942, 2Lt Meltesen was in Basic Training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. In May he was able to visit Helena in Iowa City before he went west to join the 137th Infantry Regiment, stationed in Long Beach, California. The job was shore



patrol, guarding the West Coast from Japanese attack. He was promoted to First Lieutenant on September 30, 1942. From February through March 1943, the 137th was briefly relocated to Camp San Luis Obispo, and then sent to Camp Rucker, Alabama, on March 31, 1943. At this time, 1Lt Meltesen was serving as a liaison officer, attached to headquarters. In late April he took five days of leave and traveled to Council Bluffs, Iowa, to marry Helena Briggs on April 26, 1943. After visiting his family in Kenosha, Wisconsin, she traveled as far as Jackson, Mississippi, with her new husband before heading back to Washington DC, where she was working.

1Lt Meltesen returned to Camp Rucker and remained there until September 10, 1943. However, sometime prior to September, he volunteered for the Army Rangers and was accepted. He traveled to Fort Meade, Maryland, in September and stayed there until early October. He and Helena (who was still working in Washington DC) were able to grab one weekend of leave together, which they spent in New York City. On October 4, 1943, he departed the USA for North Africa,

arriving on October 21. His destination was probably Nemours, Algeria (present day Ghazaouet) where the 3rd and 4th Ranger battalions had trained before leaving for Sicily.

By the time 1Lt Meltesen arrived in North Africa, the 3rd Battalion had left Sicily to attack Salerno, on the Italian mainland. In late November 1943 the Rangers were sent to Pozzuoli, Italy, near Naples, for rest and refit. This is where he finally joined the battalion, arriving on December 19, 1943. On January 7, 1944, he was assigned to Company E, 3rd Ranger Battalion, as a Platoon Leader. His specific movements from January 7 through January 29, including the January 22 landing at Anzio, are unknown, but on January 30, 1944, his platoon was creeping up the Pontano ditch toward the town of Cisterna. Superior German forces overwhelmed the Rangers. He was shot in the chest and, eventually, captured.

Once again, specific movements are unknown. 1Lt Meltesen was treated at Regina Coeli Hospital in Rome. Upon release, he spent some time in POW camps in Italy and Moosburg, Germany. Ultimately, the Germans transported him to Oflag 64 in present day Szubin, Poland. By his own account, he arrived at Oflag 64 on April 21, 1944.

Meanwhile, back in the USA, Helena received a telegram from the War Department on March 11, 1944, telling her that her husband had been missing in action since January 30, 1944. On May 8, 1944, a second telegram told her that he was a German POW. On June 5, 1944, the Army Service Forces sent her a message, a transcription of a radio message by 1Lt Clarence R. Meltesen. "*Arrived here safely at officer's camp. Will write later. Love, Clarence*". Helena's response to her husband's capture was to quit her job and join the Women's Army Corps (WAC). She was assigned to the Army Air Corps.

Clarence Meltesen, as well as many others, have written extensively about their experiences as German POWs. Therefore, relevant details in this bio will be brief. From April 21, 1944 until January 20, 1945, 1Lt Meltesen was imprisoned at Oflag 64. He never talked about his POW experiences and his wife was equally discrete about whatever he shared with her. Daughter Anne has a couple of memories, which may have occurred at the same time. Her father was away, probably at ROTC summer camp, and her mother announced that she was making a New England boiled dinner. This involved ham, potatoes, and cooked cabbage. She explained that she couldn't make this when her husband was around, because after his wartime POW experience, he could not stand cooked cabbage. This was probably when she showed the kids a tiny pocket diary that their father had carried during the war. It was full of menus and entries about food. Helena explained that the POWs were very hungry and this was how they coped, by writing down favorite menus and foods.

On January 21, 1945, with the Russian Army approaching, Oflag 64 was evacuated. 1Lt Meltesen and many others were marched back into the German homeland, ending at Stalag 7A near Moosburg. He kept track of the route in pocket diary, writing down the names of the villages and towns. The route was circuitous. First northwestward from Szubin to Csaplinek, southwest to Suliszewo, then north to the Baltic Sea where they took a ferry over the Oder River into Germany. Once in Germany, the route was a more direct southwestward march, ending at Parchim on March 6, 1945. The POWs had walked 570 km. At Parchim, the POWs were loaded on railcars for travel to Oflag 13B, near Hammelburg, arriving March 9, 1945.

Oflag 13B was almost liberated on March 27. A small task force of Allied troops crashed the fence but did not have the manpower to hold the Oflag. Many of the POWs, including 1Lt Meltesen, took off to try and reach the US Army lines. Most, again including Meltesen, were recaptured and returned to Oflag 13B. The Germans were on the verge of evacuating Oflag 13B and heading eastward when interrupted by the Allied attack. Once they regained control of the Oflag, evacuation proceeded. On March 30, 1Lt Meltesen again found himself on a railcar making a slow southeastward journey to Stalag 7A near Moosburg, arriving on April 6, 1945.

At Moosburg, the waiting game began. Liberation was inexorably coming and finally arrived on April 29, 1945. 1Lt Meltesen and his comrades were now RAMPS (Recovered American Military Personnel). The military wheels began to turn and food and replacement clothing arrived. Actual removal from Stalag 7A took longer. On May 6, his barracks was loaded on trucks and delivered to an airfield. He was finally loaded on a plane the morning of May 9, 1945, and flown to Camp Lucky Strike, near Le Havre, France, to wait for transport back to the USA. While there he got in touch with his brother, Laurence, who was recuperating in England from injuries received in the Battle of the Bulge. On May 19, 1945, he sailed for New York City aboard the *USS John Ericsson*, an ocean liner converted to a troopship. The exact date of arrival in New York was not recorded, but it was a weekend, because Helena's family had come to visit her at her post in St. Joseph, Missouri, and she was the first person he called.

Helena joined her husband at his family home in Kenosha, Wisconsin. They both had 60 days leave. Clarence needed to report back to Camp Rucker, Alabama, on August 21 and Helena was stationed at Rosecrans Field, St. Joseph, Missouri. Before their leave was up, the atomic bombs were exploded at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Japan surrendered. World War II was over.

Military Service - 1945 to 1964

Decisions now needed to be made. Helena decided to leave the WAC as soon as possible. She first managed to transfer to an ATC (Air Transport Command) base in South Carolina in September. In November she was discharged at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and joined her husband at Fort Benning, Georgia.

Clarence, however, had decided to make a career of the Army. As of September 12, 1945, he was stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia, in an eight-week refresher course at the Infantry School. On November 3, 1945, he was promoted to Captain, Army of the United States, and in December he became an instructor at the Infantry School. All proceeded smoothly in the infantry until early 1947. In 1947, he left the infantry and joined the Military Police (MP).

Daughter Anne remembers her father saying that he became an MP so he could stay in the Army. What was going on? On July 28, 1947, President Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947, which took effect on September 18, 1947. This act abolished the War Department and ultimately created the Department of Defense, as we know it today. As this bill moved through Congress, all the Armed Forces must have been trying to figure out their future under this new organizational plan. Reduction in infantry forces was probably high on the list.

On February 10, 1947, Clarence was demoted to Flt, but he was now a 1Lt, RA (Regular Army). All his previous promotions were AUS (Army of the United States), or temporary promotions. He swore a new Oath of Office. At some unknown point after this event he made the move from infantry to MP. He spent 12 weeks in MP Training School. On August 5, 1947 he became Commanding Officer of Company B, Internal Security, at Fort Benning. He remained in this position until he left Fort Benning in August 1948.

1Lt Meltesen's next assignment was Assistant Military Attaché at an embassy, which required moving to Washington DC and spending 12 weeks in intelligence training. Thanks to his wife, we know the original assignment was the US Embassy in Budapest, Hungary. Expanding Russian control ended that plan, and he was given a choice of the same job in either Greece or China. He chose Greece. As of December 10, 1948, he was assigned as Assistant Military Attaché to the US Embassy in Athens, Greece. In reality, he did not reach Greece until early February 1949. The family belongings were put into storage and the Christmas holidays were spent visiting family members in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois. Transport to Greece was on a commercial ocean liner and Athens seems to have been the last stop. Meanwhile, on January 2, 1949 he was again promoted to Captain, this time RA!

The entire family, which now included Anne and Gayle, born at Fort Benning, enjoyed living in sunny Greece. Unfortunately, an embassy staff reduction resulted in CPT Meltesen being reassigned to the 382nd MP Battalion, serving in Bremerhaven, Germany, effective December 15, 1949. He commanded Company A there for the next year, was promoted to Major on November 16, 1950, and became acting Provost Marshall on December 16, 1950. In May 1951 the 382nd was sent to southern Germany. Major Meltesen left Company A and was assigned to the Headquarters Detachment at Sullivan Barracks in Mannheim, Germany. The family, which now included Lynne, joined him in Mannheim in August 1951. He finished his three years of service overseas as Battalion Commander of the Headquarters Company of the 382nd MP Battalion.

Major Meltesen's new duty station was Camp (now Fort) Gordon near Augusta, Georgia. The Army Military Police Training School was located there. His assignment began February 2, 1952. They bought a house and brother Jay joined the family. After two and one-half years at the MP training school, he was assigned to Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey. For the next three years he was Assistant Professor of Military Science and Tactics. Helena and Clarence managed this transfer by moving the family to Newark, New Jersey, as soon as school ended in Georgia in May 1954. Then he returned to Camp Gordon for the summer for ROTC summer camp, a duty he continued to perform for the next three summers at various locations.

Big excitement in 1954! On November 19 Major Meltesen was notified that he had been awarded a Bronze Star "*for exemplary conduct in ground combat ...during the Anzio Campaign*". On October 12, 1956, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. During the years at Seton Hall he acquired a dress blue uniform, which the family thought was very impressive, especially the gold "scrambled eggs" on the hat!



After three years at Seton Hall, LTC Meltesen became a student again at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from August 28, 1957 to June 1958. Next assignment was South Korea. First the family moved to Oakland, California, to wait out his Korea assignment. Moving now meant packing the family of six into a sturdy, blue 1953 Ford sedan, trunk and roof rack full of luggage, including family cat, Flower, and driving a route that included every relative and site of historical interest that could be crammed into the time allowed. Breakfast and lunch were usually picnics along the road. When the family stopped at a motel, dinner was at a restaurant.

LTC Meltesen reported to 7th Infantry Division headquarters in South Korea on August 8, 1958. His actual duty assignment was Provost Marshall of Camp Casey, near the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea. He got a week of R&R in Japan, where he bought gifts for all the family. He came home in August 1959 with two promises to fulfill: visit Yosemite (for Helena) and visit Disneyland (for the kids). As the new school year began, he took off in the old, blue Ford for Washington DC, his next assignment. The new job began October 1, 1959, and for the next 21 months he was a planner for the Office of the Provost Marshall General, working out of a "T" building near the Washington Monument. He found a house for the family in Arlington, Virginia, and they joined him at the end of October. This time, the family flew! They made this journey shortly before transcontinental jet service began in the US. It was a long flight on a propeller driven plane.

In early 1961, LTC Meltesen had served 20 years in the Army. College was beginning to loom for the kids. Clarence and Helena were impressed by the California college system from the year spent in Oakland, California. They also liked the climate. The kids thus were only a little surprised to find out, in spring 1961, that they were moving back to California. He had scored an assignment to the 6th US Army Headquarters, Presidio of San Francisco, as a planning officer. No plane on this trip. They were back in the car as soon as the Arlington schools ended for the year.

He took up his new assignment on July 12, 1961, working in the Office of the Provost Marshall, 6th US Army. He believed this would be his last duty assignment before retirement, but the Army had other plans. In the spring of 1963, Helena and Clarence were closeted in the kitchen, door closed, and something was being discussed. At dinner, they broke the news that he had received orders for Germany. However, the family would not be going with him. They planned to buy a home in San Francisco before he left, where the rest of the family would live. Anne was entering UC Berkeley the next fall, Gayle would be a high school senior, and Lynne and Jay were in junior high school. He was up for promotion to Colonel next year and was going to Germany until the promotion decision was made. It was clear that if he were not promoted, he would retire. The family hoped it would be a short separation.

LTC Meltesen's assignment with the Provost Marshall Section at Headquarters 7th Army began June 20, 1963. He attended Anne's high school graduation, then left for Germany. His new home was Patch Barracks near Stuttgart, Germany, where he lived in the

Bachelor Officer Quarters. The Army decided not to promote him, and on May 25, 1964 he was enroute to the USA. His official retirement date was July 31, 1964.

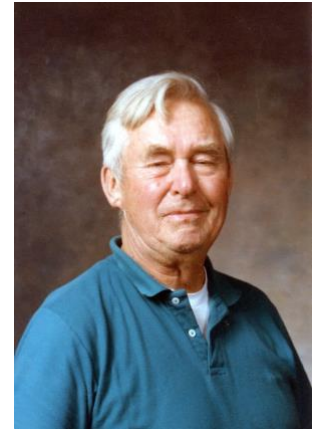
Life After the Army - 1964 to 1983

After returning home to San Francisco, Clarence investigated the job market. The main jobs available involved security work. He chose instead to use his ROTC training and teaching experience and became a post-graduate student at San Francisco State College, where he earned a California teaching credential in the next year. He was certified for life sciences, thanks to the Botany major, and turned his years of administrative experience in the Army into a certification in business subjects. In the fall of 1965, he worked for the Oakland Unified School District as a biology teacher at Skyline High School. In the fall of 1966, he was hired by San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) to teach biology at Polytechnic High School. He worked at Poly until the school was closed in 1973. He then became a bit of a gypsy, working first at AP Giannini Junior High and then at Abraham Lincoln Senior High. By the time he reached Lincoln he was teaching both applied Science and business subjects: typing, bookkeeping, office procedures. The SFUSD was suffering from declining enrollment and there were no openings for a biology teacher. In fact, SFUSD really needed to shed teachers.

In the mid 1970s SFUSD cooked up a scheme to persuade older teacher to retire. In exchange for agreeing to work half time, basically four months per year, for five years, the district would credit the teacher with a five full years in the retirement system. At the end of the five years, the teacher would retire. Clarence qualified for the scheme and took the deal. A year or two later, his wife accepted a similar deal. Now he never made a secret of the fact that he was not a big fan of San Francisco's foggy, cool weather. With all the kids out of the house, they decided to move. They settled on Santa Barbara, California, and moved there in August 1977. The new home was close to the ocean and had a big yard where he planned to do some serious gardening. For the next four to five years, they spent eight months in Santa Barbara and four months in San Francisco, fulfilling their commitment to the SFUSD.

All the kids would agree that the Santa Barbara house was a great vacation spot. Despite that, in August 1983, Clarence and Helena moved back to San Francisco. She said Santa Barbara had too many "grey panthers". He said they were able to travel more than he expected and the big yard was a handicap to travel. It was also true that Jay and his wife Susan were living in San Francisco and expecting their first child. Anne and her husband Wally, plus grandkids Debby and Ben, were living in Santa Rosa. The airplane connections to visit Gayle and Lynne out of state were far better in San Francisco. In addition, the military resources and connections for Clarence were far better in the San Francisco Bay Area. This was important because he was beginning the research work that would culminate in the first edition of **Roads to Liberation from Oflag 64**, published in 1987.

They settled into an apartment in Park Merced in the southwest corner of San Francisco. Clarence soon turned one end of the spacious master bedroom into an office. He acquired and learned to use a dedicated word processor. The space acquired bookshelves and filing cabinets over the years. **Roads to Liberation** became his new job. He also was regularly attending various military reunions where he made connections with other Kriegies and collected information for his book. He had finally hooked up with the Oflag 64 group and in May 1985, he and Helena traveled to Poland and Sweden with that group. Meeting again the Swedish man who had been their Red Cross liaison at Oflag 64 particularly moved him.



Clarence took **Roads to Liberation** through three editions before his death. With every edition, more Kriegies contacted him with their memories and diaries. Editions two and three were hardbound. He depended on word of mouth and publications such as the **AXPOW Bulletin** to market the book. But he did not spend all his hours writing. He learned to bake pies (mince pie was his favorite) and an oatmeal cookie creation that he thought was the perfect accompaniment to an afternoon cup of tea. He was active in the movement to get PTSD recognized as both a medical condition and a disabling service-connected injury. He was very proud when the law changed and, in his case, recharacterized over 50% of his pension as a disability pension. He also received treatment for his own PTSD by attending a therapy group offered by the Veterans Affairs Health System in San Francisco. He helped a group of SF bay area Philippine veterans establish the Luz-Vi-Minda Chapter of the American Ex-Prisoners of War (AXPOW). A contingent from the chapter spoke at his memorial service.

“Asking nothing, revealing naught

But minting his words from a fund of thought”

From **The Joys of the Road: A Little Anthology in Praise of Walking**

By Waldo Ralph Browne

Clarence chose the quote above to accompany his graduation photo in the Kenosha High School Year Book as he looked toward his future and the man he would become. He became a thoughtful man, a man of courage, character and conviction. He tried to work up to his potential and supported and encouraged his family to do the same.

Clarence Richard Meltesen died early in the morning on May 7, 2005. His memorial service was held on June 26, 2005, in the Chapel on the Presidio of San Francisco. He was inurned at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors on June 28, 2005.



Military Awards

Purple Heart

European American Middle Eastern Campaign Medal

American Campaign Medal

World War II Victory Medal

Army of Occupation Medal

Combat Infantryman Badge

National Defense Service Medal

Bronze Star Medal

Text written by Clarence's daughter Anne Meltesen Trujillo (Kriegy Research Group writer) with contributions by her siblings Gayle Meltesen, Lynne Meltesen, and Jay Meltesen

(A detailed map of the march path follows.)

