"When is Daddy coming home?"

An American Family during World War II

By Richard Carlton Haney

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My mother was preparing our supper late that afternoon, Friday, April 6, 1945, when two of her friends paid an unexpected visit. I was four years old. One visitor was Marcia Mills, who was the director of the pre-kindergarten school where Mom taught and which I attended. Marcia's daughter was an army nurse who had recently been liberated from three years as a Japanese prisoner of war in the Philippines. Mary Kamps, whose husband had died after World War I as a result of a German poison gas attack he had suffered while fighting in France, was executive director of the Rock County Red Cross.

Slipping her arm around my mom, Mary Kamps said that she had some bad news. My mother's instant thought was that perhaps my father, who was a combat soldier in the U.S. Army's 17th Airborne Division fighting in Europe, had lost an arm or leg or even his eyesight. In her mind, none of those things would matter. Then, Marcia Mills and Mary Kamps told her, "Clyde was called home. He was called to his heavenly home." Mom just broke down, covering her face with her apron.

I needed to know why my mother was crying, so to get her alone I insisted that she come with me to the bathroom. When I asked why she was crying, she told me, "Sometimes we have tears because we're happy. Sometimes we have tears because we're sad." She then said that although she was sad because my father was not coming home to us, we could be happy that he would be in his heavenly home.

Thirteen days had elapsed since my father's death on March 24. Everett "Pud" Harper, the Janesville Post Office special delivery messenger who assumed the heart-rending and burdensome job of delivering War and Navy Department telegrams to next-of-kin, was a personal friend of my dad. Two months earlier, he had handed my mom a telegram announcing that my dad had been wounded in the Battle of the Bulge. Harper was so devastated by the telegram announcing my dad's death that he called upon Marcia Mills and Mary Kamps for help. He had received the telegram early that morning, and many in Janesville knew of the contents by late afternoon. While Marcia Mills and Mary Kamps delivered the news to my mother, Pud Harper waited in his car on the street and wept.

My father was drafted into the U.S. Army in February 1944. Were it not for a number of unfortunate circumstances, he would not have been drafted at all. First, at thirty-one he was old to be a soldier. Second, as a pre–Pearl Harbor father he was in an exempt category until

the Selective Service eliminated the 3-A classification for pre–Pearl Harbor fathers in October 1943. And two weeks after he received his draft notice, the Selective Service again stopped drafting this category. Additionally, my parents had mutually decided not to attract the attention that would have resulted if he had transferred his draft registration from Dane County, where he grew up, to Rock County, where he lived. That decision may have been their downfall. Individual draft boards possessed considerable powers of discretion in assigning classifications to individuals. Because of his fund-raising for the Rock County Red Cross and his help in coordinating war bond drives in Rock County, it is not likely that the Rock County Draft Board would have drafted Dad into military service. But to the Dane County Draft Board, Clyde Haney was just another name on a list. As Mom later said, "They were scraping the bottom of the barrel at that time."[1] So he was drafted.

Dad was ordered to report to the railroad depot in Madison on a damp and chilly February morning at dawn. Mom accompanied him, while I remained with my grandparents at their Madison home. Several train cars full of draftees rode from Madison to Fort Sheridan, Illinois, near Chicago, where they were inducted into the army. From Fort Sheridan, Dad wrote to Mom:

Well, Darlin, I'm in the Army now. . . . We are only allowed to wear fatigues. Had picture taken of whole gang that came from Madison and Milwaukee. We are all in the same Barrack. We sure look like a gang of convicts. . . . We have double-decker bunks here (I grabbed a lower).[2]

During the week at Fort Sheridan, my dad experienced the usual army induction routine. He received his service number, filled out forms providing the army with his employment and educational backgrounds, and took an intelligence test. Next came a brief physical examination, fingerprinting, and a G.I. haircut. He learned how to salute and to march in formation. He stood in a long line to receive shots for a wide variety of horrible-sounding diseases. An anonymous Fort Sheridan army sergeant even thought that he taught my father, who had been self-sufficient as a youth and was a thirty-one-year-old married family man, how to make a bunk bed. Finally came the army's standard lectures to recruits on morals and on the articles of war. After a week at Fort Sheridan's induction center, my dad learned how to become a sardine by being packed into the back of an army truck for the short ride to a Chicago-area railroad station. Truckloads of men then boarded a train that would take them to a destination that the army felt no need to disclose to the new soldiers until their arrival.

Dad rode a crowded troop train to distant Camp Blanding, Florida, where he would endure a grueling seventeen weeks of basic training. The train, of course, was powered by a big black coal-fed steam engine. The trip took sixty hours because "they routed us crazy" and "we could not even get off to stretch." Besides, he said, it was a "funny feeling getting aboard a train and not knowing where you're going. . . . I sure miss you and Butch" (his nickname for me).

Upon arriving at Camp Blanding, any uncertainty the new troops might have had as to the purpose of their training or the gravity of the situation quickly vanished. The camp handbook made the goals of training quite clear: "Our enemies are tough, cruel, and highly trained. Their defeat is essential before this world can become a decent place in which to live. . . . Learn your lessons well during your training period and avoid having your mistakes marked by a cross on the battle field."[3]

At Camp Blanding my dad was placed in an advanced Intelligence Reconnaissance unit. The officers, he said, were a nice bunch, but the sergeants were "tough as nails."[4] He was physically able to withstand the Intelligence Reconnaissance training, which was more rigorous and intense than that given to regular infantry units. The usual seventeen weeks of physical training was crowded into the first six weeks, fol-

Clyde Haney at Camp Blanding, Florida, in spring 1944, wearing his dress khakis.

lowed by nine weeks of advanced classroom work and finally two weeks on field maneuvers. Intelligence Reconnaissance training included learning to penetrate enemy lines, gather assigned information, and get the information back to headquarters. It involved practice in stringing telephone wires, reading and drawing terrain maps, and coordinating map grids. Because Dad was color blind, he had the advantage of being able to see through military camouflage. Recruits not only practiced how to drive jeeps and light trucks, but also learned how to mechanically maintain and repair them. By the end of the seventeen weeks, my dad would be among the elite 60 to 70 percent who completed the Intelligence Reconnaissance training. The rest were weeded out and sent back to ordinary infantry rifle companies.[5]

Training camp was what the army intended it to be: a tiring and grueling regimen designed to prepare men for World War II combat against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Camp Blanding was hot and humid in the summer, and the men's wool uniforms compounded that challenge. Even socks were woolen, because "they are the only ones that protect your feet against these heavy shoes." Wake-up was at 5:30 a.m. daily, bedtime at 9:30 p.m., and lights out at 11:00 p.m., until firing range exercises began at 4:30 a.m. with a six-mile speed-march to the range. Dad wrote to Mom that the saying around Camp Blanding was, "[F]rom 12 midnight until 4 in the morning is your own time."[6]

Physical training consisted initially of workouts, followed by double-timing while carrying packs and rifles. The men attended two-hour classes on two evenings each week. The next phase was learning to dig foxholes and belly crawl: "Boy is it ever tough to cradle that rifle so not to get dirt in it and pull yourself forward on your elbows with the rest of you flat on the ground." The rifle firing range, grenade and bazooka practice, and hand-to-hand combat were part of the routine. After dark one evening, Dad's training company went out to a large open field for a lesson in distinguishing various sounds at night. An exercise followed to demonstrate how easy it was to see people moving in the dark and how difficult it was to see people when they stood motionless.[7]

My father learned what every soldier is taught in basic training: Rifles are a soldier's best friend, and they will be cleaned every night. The rifle was a standard .30 caliber M-1 weighing about nine pounds, plus a one-pound bayonet and an ammunition belt carrying forty rounds. Dad commented that it was hard "to keep that rifle clean around here with all this sand. It takes about an hour to clean that every night and that's done on our own time." One grain of sand on a rifle during daily inspection got the offender placed on "special detail."[8] Surprise "breakdown" inspections required all men in the company to take every piece of their rifles apart, clean them, lay them out for inspection, and reassemble them. Once, when about half of Dad's company failed to have completely sand-free rifles, "they restricted the whole company to the barracks for a day." The sand was so prevalent at Camp Blanding that "you sink about three inches wherever you step." Less inviting than the sand, however, were the swamps, where the men were "supposed to get two or three days in before we leave. Coral snakes too."[9]

In his letters, it was obvious how much my father missed his family. He frequently asked "if Butch has missed me a lot since I left again" and "How much has he grown since I left?" When my mother sent him this photo of me, he wrote back, "I noticed it when I got his pictures in the sailor suit. I was comparing him in those pictures with those that we took when I was home on furlough and there was quite a difference just in that short time."

Dad was clearly homesick throughout training camp. He wrote, "I sure miss the kitchen table and my honey's. How is Butch? Does he miss me? What questions does he ask and what do you tell him?" In another letter, he said, "I miss my boy. Are you being good to mommy?" My grandfather, Chauncey Wolferman, wrote to my dad that I had learned to sip soda "through a straw" for the first time. Dad told my mom to "Give Butch a bunch of hugs and kisses for me and tell him he's supposed to give you lots of them for me." He wondered if Mom had measured me on the kitchen door and how much taller I had grown "since daddy went to the Army." After being away for six weeks, he asked, "Does Butch still look and ask for me? I sure miss you both." Mail from home was clearly the highlight of the day at Camp Blanding.[10]

My father missed his family and would much rather have been home than in the army. But like everyone, he made the best of it. Nevertheless, as the weeks wore on at Camp Blanding, he was clearly not enamored with his army training. He wrote to Mom:

Toots, this is the nuts. Yesterday morning we went out to a training area and had to start from a certain point by 4's and go through a wooded area and swamps using a compass and supposed to come out at a certain place one-and-a-half miles away. . . . Then last night we did the same thing in the dark. We never changed clothes from the morning and we were in water up to our thighs. Sopping wet . . . . Up this morning and the first hour was spent in hand to hand fighting. Throwing each other around.[11]

During basic training my father was offered the opportunity to attend Officer Candidate School. Army officials saw a thirty-one-year-old with managerial and business experience who had hired and supervised employees for the Fox Entertainment Corporation, and they concluded that he would be an ideal officer. He declined, however, "because he did not want the responsibility of giving orders to twenty-five men and risking his neck every time he stuck his head out of a foxhole."[12] In retrospect, had he gone to Officer Candidate School, it would at the very least have delayed his being sent into overseas combat. Even more likely, as an officer he probably would have been stationed in the United States if the war was not over by the time he finished OCS.

Two weeks of field maneuvers, or "bivouac" as it was called, culminated the seventeen-week training camp. By then, the troops were able to speed-march four miles in thirty-eight minutes carrying rifles and full field packs. Many soldiers, my father among them, had never developed a civilian-life appreciation for camping. They viewed living in the field for two weeks of bivouac as something considerably less than an enjoyable country outing. In advance of bivouac, my dad wisely began to stockpile chocolate bars to supplement the unattractive C rations that would be the only food available.[13]

One evening in the field, Dad wrote a letter to Mom and remarked, "It's getting awfully dark and I can hardly see to write and there are no lights out here (except moonlight but then I haven't got you here)." Less romantically, he revealed that it had been raining all day and they had been walking through a swamp, all the time hoping to avoid encounters with alligators or coral snakes. They were soaked. A steady diet of C rations had made everyone hungry. The men were required to remain in their wet camouflaged clothes and sleep in wet blankets. Except for four days of respite, it rained continuously every day of the two-week bivouac.[14]

Throughout training camp, my dad was concerned that he would be shipped to the South Pacific rather than to England or someplace in the United States. Troops from the preceding training cycle from Camp Blanding had been sent to the Pacific via Fort Ord, California. Assignment to combat in the Pacific involved the potential for encountering tropical disease, fighting in unaccustomed heat, and other dangers that Europe did not pose, and Dad's hometown of Janesville had more unpleasant associations with the Pacific war than with Europe because of the local people who had been taken prisoner on Bataan. Additionally, troops shipped to Europe usually had a period of respite in England before entering combat on the continent. When he was appointed squad leader with the temporary rank of corporal, however, Dad thought that he might be held over at Camp Blanding to become a training camp instructor. He was hopeful that there would be truth in one training camp rumor that reported that pre–Pearl Harbor fathers and eighteen-year-olds would not be shipped overseas. He did know that only those who were to be shipped overseas would be given two-week furloughs to visit home. Troops to be stationed in the United States would have to wait six months before getting a furlough. When his orders from Camp Blanding gave him a two-week "delay-en-route" to visit home on his way to an undisclosed port of embarkation, Dad knew that he would be going overseas.[15]

Notes

1 Vera Haney Piddington quoted in *Janesville (Wisconsin) Gazette,* December 25, 1994; Selective Service, "As the Tide of War Turns: The 3rd War Report of the Director of Selective Service, 1943–44" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office); Selective Service and Victory: "The 4th Report of the Director of Selective Service" (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1948).
2 Clyde Haney to Vera Haney, February 18, 1944.
3 *Infantry Replacement Training Center Handbook* (Special Service, Infantry Replacement Training Center, Camp Blanding, Florida, 1944), p. 3–4, 14–15.
4 Clyde Haney to Vera Haney, February 23 and 25, 1944; Clyde Haney to Mae Haney, March 7 and 27, 1944.
5 Clyde Haney to Mae Haney, March 7, 1944; Clyde Haney to Vera Haney, March 12, April 8, and May 6, 1944.
6 Clyde Haney to Vera Haney, March 1 and 6 and April 11, 1944.
7 Clyde Haney to Vera Haney, March 1, 6, 7, 12, and 23, 1944.
8 Ibid., March 1, 6, and 7, 1944.
9 Ibid., April 8 and 10, 1944; Clyde Haney to Mae Haney, March 7, 1944.
10 Clyde Haney to Vera Haney, February 27, March 6, 12, 21, and April 8, 1944. I sure did look and ask for my dad{m}constantly.
11 Ibid., March 17, 1944.
12 Vera Haney Piddington quoted in *Janesville (Wisconsin) Gazette,* December 25, 1994.
13 Clyde Haney to Vera Haney, May 6 and 15, 1944.
14 Ibid., June 9, 1944.
15 Clyde Haney to Mae Haney, March 7 and 27, 1944; Clyde Haney to Vera Haney, May 15, 1944; Clyde Haney to Carl Bunce, a Janesville friend, May 7, 1944.

About the Author

Richard Carlton Haney earned his Ph.D. in history from the University of Wisconsin in Madison and later graduated from West Point's post–Ph.D. military history program and the army's National Security Seminar at Carlisle Barracks. He is a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, where he teaches courses in twentieth century U.S. history, American military history, and Wisconsin history. The UW–Whitewater organization Students for an Accessible Society has twice presented him with its teaching excellence award.