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The true story you are about to read is one of the few books in print today that is written by a Native American about Native American actions in World War II. The depictions of war are not romanticized but instead are presented with straightforward honesty without embellishments. However, the events are given a unique “native” perspective since the people being described are Native Americans.

Native Americans look at this land as home, as their heritage, and could not hold any foreign country as “home.” “Patriotism” isn’t something Native Americans have to “create” or “discover” because Native Americans always have been here. For example, in places such as New York City people of different nationalities who have immigrated to America, such as the Irish, Italians, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Germans, have parades to show their pride in their homelands. Native Americans are always patriotic because this land has always been our only home. We are not “Irish Americans” or “Italian Americans”; we are Native Americans. Our heritage is this land, our land. Our ancestors are buried here, and when Native Americans fight for “this” country, we are protecting the lands of our forefathers, the only lands we call home.

Brummett Echohawk’s description of events during World War II brought back memories as an eyewitness to these events as they happened. It is typical for Native Americans to try to see the humorous side of life, especially when the circumstances are very serious. Brummett describes a serious event, the landing on Italy by American forces, yet gives this monumental event a humorous twist as he relates the escapades of a Native American soldier planting a staff on Italian soil saying, “Columbus, we have arrived.” Just as Columbus “claimed” the Americas for Europe, so the Native American soldier “claimed” Italy for the Native Americans!

His descriptions of Native American traditions, such as the “war whoop,” reinforce the pride tribal people have in their heritage. For example, when attending a powwow, you know exactly which tribe someone is from by his “whoop,” which can sound like a horse’s whinny or a turkey’s gobble. This is a part of tribal identity. This sense of identity gives strength to the Native
American soldiers. Native American boys aspire to become notable respected warriors. This practice did not die with the coming of the “white man” but instead evolved with these modern times as it continues to be dreamed and realized. A Native American boy can endeavor to become a leader within his community, work with the schools to help educate other young Native Americans, or become a soldier willing to fight and possibly give his life for his country’s and his people’s honor. In these ways, a boy can become a “warrior” and in these ways earn the respect and admiration of his people.

Lt. Col. Ernest Childers*
Medal of Honor Recipient
US Army Retired
Coweta, Oklahoma, August 1997

*Born in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, in 1918, Ernest Childers would graduate from the Chilocco Indian Agricultural School and, in 1937, join the Oklahoma Army National Guard. In 1943, during the Allied invasion of Italy, he received a battlefield commission from sergeant to second lieutenant in the 45th Infantry Division. For his meritorious actions near Oliveto, he received the Congressional Medal of Honor, the US military’s highest decoration. Childers reached the rank of lieutenant colonel before retiring from the Army in 1965. He wrote this essay several years before his death in 2005 at the age of eighty-seven. See figures on pages 213–214.
Preface

The following account is a monument to the men of the 45th Infantry Division who fought through the campaigns of Italy during World War II. Considering this, Brummett Echohawk sought to tell this story without embellishment, noting that honor was paramount to portraying his experience. As he put his story on paper, Echohawk thought back to the men he served alongside: Shield Chief, Good Buffalo, Cheyenne, and Last Arrow. There were other American Indians: Two Hatchets, Medicine Man, and Leading Fox. Steeped in the traditions of elders, they all became what the Pawnee people call chaticks-sichaticks—men of men.* Medals meant little to them, and fighting bravely in battle among their peers meant everything. There were other men from all walks of life who fought bravely alongside Brummett Echohawk: cowboys, farmers, roughnecks—all toughened by their coming of age during the Depression years. From Pawnee, Oklahoma, they emerged to be among the first to react to the Axis Powers in Continental Europe. This was B Company of the 179th Regiment.

This story begins on September 16, 1940, the day Major General William S. Keys federalized the 45th Infantry Division in Oklahoma from state control, one of the first National Guard units to be activated into a Regular Army force in the lead-up to World War II. Sensing the oncoming war in Europe, the United States boasted forces that could be ready to fight when the hour arrived. The 45th Infantry Division was one of four National Guard divisions federalized, alongside the 30th, the 41st, and the 44th Divisions. Originally called into active service for a one-year period, the men of the 45th Division were tough and plenty rough. Among its cowboys, hardscrabble farmers, American Indians, and others—drawn from Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma—the 45th had more than a thousand soldiers of Native American ancestry on its rolls. Oklahoma outfits such as the 180th and 179th Infantry Regiments contained the largest number of American Indians, with entire companies composed of young men of tribal heritage in some cases. Units formed at schools like Chilocco Indian Agricultural School and Bacone College produced some

*See Dramatis Personae on page 219 for more information on these men.
of the finest soldiers of the war, including two Medal of Honor recipients. Young men from tribes with strong warring traditions enlisted in great numbers in the 45th Division, aspiring to uphold tribal customs in the way many of their grandfathers had decades earlier on the Great Plains.

Brummett Echohawk was one of these young men. He fought and lived the warring traditions of Pawnee. Born in 1922 in Pawnee, Echohawk came from a family with a long tradition of military service dating back to the Indian Wars of the 1860s. It was then that his grandfather Howard Echohawk served as a famed Pawnee Scout. The tradition of military service continued with Echohawk's father serving in World War I, where Pawnee warriors earned their reputation as soldiers of the highest degree. As a young boy, Echohawk grew up hearing stories from elders who themselves had counted coup on the enemy in battle. Among the Pawnee, being recognized through brave deeds in battle gains a warrior the highest of honors. The Pawnee honor their veterans who return from battle by giving them a song that solidifies their story as a part of tribal history. It was a dream of one day attaining such recognition among their peers that drove young Pawnees to chase down the dream of becoming modern warriors of the twentieth century.

Growing up, Echohawk attended the Pawnee Agency Boarding School, where he first began experimenting with sketching and drawing. It was in these years that he first recognized his ability as an artist to sketch and paint scenes he instilled in his mind after the fact. Upon reaching the age of enlistment, Echohawk joined the Oklahoma National Guard with hopes of earning a steady paycheck while also offering service to his country. Like other young men in 1930s Oklahoma, he joined the 45th Division without any expectation that he might face a forthcoming war, and perhaps with a chance to fight and sketch the conflict as the warrior painted of old.

In 1941 the division began training in earnest, taking part in the noted Louisiana Maneuvers where the military initially evaluated the fighting capacity of some 400,000 Army personnel through mock battles in Louisiana and Texas. In these early days of training, funds to the unit were scarce, with the men training with broomsticks in place of arms, yet they still charged with the zeal of a warrior.

The following story was more than seventy years in the making. It starts at Chilocco Indian Agricultural School near Newkirk, Oklahoma, where my mother, Lucille Rose Johnson-Ellenbarger, spent time as a young woman. Through social circles of Native Americans my mother met a young Brummett Echohawk, with whom she became dear friends. Growing up in West Tulsa, I simply knew Brummett Echohawk as my “Uncle Brummett.” He lived down the street and often visited with his wife, Mary Echohawk, for dinner, when he
would jester me with old Indian jokes and stories about our heritage as Native People. I remember days sitting on the floor in complete silence as he painted with his knife, which, I learned years later, he had carried throughout the war. Growing up, I slowly began to learn more about Uncle Brummett’s service. I knew he suffered wounds and visited exotic places; however, I was unaware of the deliberate documentation he developed of the conflict, where in great detail he offers one of the most unique accounts of any American fighting unit in World War II. Lost to time, his combat sketches completed during the war became a forgotten aspect of his career as an artist.

It was not until the early 1990s that he began to take down notes from his sketches and build them into a written exposé of his wartime experience. After completing chapters, Echohawk delivered his handwritten notes to his close friend Clyda Franks of Pawnee, who meticulously typed the pages of his epic. While Echohawk held an unflinching devotion to finishing this manuscript, his work as an artist demanded critical time and focus; he never gave up, though, and hoped to finish the work in his twilight years.

After suffering a debilitating stroke in 2005, Brummett Echohawk became unable to continue his work on World War II, leaving him shattered from the time he put in to telling the story of the brave men for whom he trained and served alongside, many who never returned home. It was then that he gave me a manuscript and an old intelligence case with instructions to share its contents with the world. The contents of the case included more than forty sketches concealed in wax paper, all completed by Echohawk during the war.

Using information gathered from oral history interviews and personal notes to supplement this manuscript, this work tells in its entirety Brummett Echohawk’s story of World War II as he saw and lived it. The reader will experience Native humor, tribal traditions, and the grief of the actual events witnessed by Echohawk and the men of B Company. The use of Native American language will move you, offering a greater respect for how American Indians used it to baffle the enemy. Readers will get to know the role of a Choctaw Indian medic called “Medicine Man” and a forward scout of Lakota Sioux descent the men called “Cheyenne.” You learn of other men like Phillip “Shield Chief” Gover, who led his men into some of the toughest battles of the war, and William “Last Arrow” Lasley, who fought with the same ferocity as his status—that of a Golden Glove boxer.

I want to thank many individuals who helped make this work a reality. Foremost I want to thank my son Zachary Ellenbarger, who encouraged me to see this project through to completion. I also want to thank Dr. Herman J. Viola with the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian for his
interest and encouragement in publishing the story of Brummett Echohawk. Additionally, I want to thank Flint Whitlock for offering his insight and expertise on the 45th Infantry Division and the history of World War II.

I also want to thank the Language Department of the Pawnee Nation for their assistance in reviewing elements of the manuscript related to Pawnee linguistics. I would also like to recognize Kenny and Clyda Franks for sharing their knowledge and memories of Brummett Echohawk with me. I also want to acknowledge a veteran of B Company, the late Private First Class Robert Jackson, for sharing his memories of his time in World War II; his knowledge proved invaluable. Further thanks are directed to Elaine Childers for her interest and contributions to this work. I also want to thank Lawrence J. Hickey, author and historian, for providing valuable advice when called upon. Additionally, I thank the families of the individuals associated with the men featured in many of Echohawk’s combat sketches and this book. The opportunity to share sketches and memories with these individuals was a special element of this project.

I express my eternal gratitude to Trent Riley for the endless hours of effort he put into this book. His skills as a historian and writer proved priceless during the course of the project.

Although much has been speculated about the “Indian Company” from Pawnee, this work serves the purpose of revealing for the first time what it was like for these young Native Americans serving among other American Indians in the European theater. This story provides an unflinching account of what it was like to be an infantryman of Native American heritage. It is my hope that this work serves to honor Brummett Echohawk and the brave men of the Greatest Generation while also offering a valuable contribution to the literature on the American Indian’s experience in World War II.

Mark R. Ellenbarger
The historical record before you is unprecedented. It carries with it the spirit of a man who spent his life holding to a level of accuracy and perfection for truth in everything he did. This was his legacy, and the thought of embellishment could not and did not enter his mind. These were his “brothers in arms”—men he would watch over and train to the best of his ability to fight and survive, yet knowing many would die. Now this story is shared with great honor, by the quill dipped in the blood of the Thunderbirds.

When I was young, growing up in Pawnee, Oklahoma, I used to listen to old-time Pawnee Indians tell stories of warriors and battles on the Great Plains. When a warrior distinguished himself in battle, the people gave him a name with great ceremony. The name was one of honor. Songs were composed describing his feats of bravery. Kept as history, the songs were handed down to the next generation. The warrior was held in honor all his life because he had defended his people and country. My grandfather had been a great warrior. He died when I was two years old; however, I got to see other old Pawnee warriors. In their twilight years, they still carried themselves proud. Seeing them and respecting them, I wanted very much to be a warrior myself.*

Also in my youth, I drew pictures and attempted to paint. My mother said that this was a gift from *Titawa Uh-tius* (the Supreme Being, Father). I was moved when seeing old-time paintings on buffalo hides and shields. The paintings were done in line and earth colors. They told stories, and the figures bounded with action and life. The unusual thing about the paintings was that they were done by a warrior in battle . . . as he saw it . . . as he lived it.

Now more and more I wanted to become a warrior and artist. Grown up now, I am in a position to record a Pawnee warrior’s story. Instead of eagle

*Pawnee, Oklahoma, is home to the Pawnee Tribe who relocated to this area of north-central Oklahoma between 1873 and 1875.
“The man I am to face in the coming war.” Drawn from Life magazine, Pawnee, Oklahoma, when Brummett Echowhawk enlisted.
feathers, I wear a steel helmet. I carry an M1 rifle instead of a bow and arrows. Instead of drawing on a buffalo hide or shield, I will draw on notebook paper. And, like the warrior-painter of old, I will tell and draw of battle . . . as I live it . . . as I see it.

—Off the southwest coast of Sicily aboard the troop transport ship

USS Leonard Wood, just before H-Hour, July 9, 1943

I am a twenty-one-year-old sergeant. It is July 9, 1943, and a couple of months ago the North African Campaign ended. My outfit is in a convoy on the Mediterranean Sea. This force of Allied battleships, cruisers, destroyers, tankers, and various invasion craft left North Africa a few days ago. The convoy has zig-zagged and changed directions to confuse the enemy. It is announced that we will invade Sicily as we receive pamphlets titled “A Soldier’s Guide to Sicily.”

It is night. The ship is blacked out. Ours is the USS Leonard Wood,* a troopship carrying the First Battalion of the 179th Infantry Regiment, 45th Division. The ship’s loudspeaker calls the officers and noncommissioned officers (or “noncoms”) of the First Wave to the strategy room. We climb from ladders and step through steel doorways manned by sailors. In single file we move through passageways lit with red lights. We wear life belts at all times. In the strategy room is a giant map of Sicily. An intelligence officer stands near with a cue stick. He gives an overall picture of the Allied invasion. Two armies will invade Sicily: the British Eighth Army under General Bernard Montgomery and the American Seventh Army under Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr.† The British will land on the southeastern tip of Sicily. The Americans will land ashore thirty miles west of the British. In the American Seventh Army are II Corps and a New Provisional Corps. We of the 45th Division are in II Corps with the 1st Division. Commanding II Corps is General Omar Bradley. The New Provisional Corps is commanded by General Geoffrey Keyes.

I reach in my shirt pocket for a notepad and pencil to take notes. Crowded, the men of the First Wave stand shoulder to shoulder. All eyes are on the map of Sicily. I do a quick sketch of Sergeant Benning nearby. Out of C Company,

*The US War Department purchased the USS Leonard Wood in 1939 before converting it into an attack transport ship. The Navy decommissioned the ship in March 1946.

†The style used for unit designations helps identify their size. Units of division and smaller size (regiment, brigade, battalion, platoon, squad) are usually expressed with ordinals (45th Division, 179th Regiment). Corps designations are usually expressed with Roman numerals (VI Corps) and field armies written out (Seventh Army). In compiling his memoir Brummett Echohawk refers to Second Squad, Third Platoon, and First Battalion to advance his narrative portrayal of the soldiers’ exchanges on the field. This book honors Brummett Echohawk’s original system, but some passages describing unit operations follow traditional military style.
he had been a cowboy at the Oklahoma City stockyards. Benning is a hard-looking guy with a jutting chin. When addressing his men, he always bellows: “First off . . . I’m the toughest son of a bitch in C Company!” I switch to Sergeant Chauncey Matlock of B Company. Matlock is a Pawnee Indian. There are many Indians in B Company, and most are Pawnees. Except for his burr haircut, Sergeant Matlock resembles the chief on the Indianhead nickel.

I switch back to the map and listen. The 1st Division will land at the seaport town of Gela. On their right will be the 45th. The 45th will hit Scoglitti, a fishing village. The 3rd Division of the New Provisional Corps will land left of the 1st Division at Licata. Paratroops of the 82nd Airborne Division are to drop inland to cut enemy communications lines and block enemy reinforcements to the beach. We will have air cover throughout the landing. The American and British navies will shell the beaches prior to the landings. The officer says the HMS Nelson and the HMS King George, British battleships, will pour in fire with 16-inch guns.

“No, Scoglitti, your objective,” the officer says, raising his voice and pointing to the village on the map with the cue stick. We listen intently.

We can feel the USS Leonard Wood roll slightly. The officer says that the three Regimental Combat Teams (RCTs) that make up the 45th Division will land at Scoglitti. The 180th RCT will be on the left, the 157th RCT on the right. The 1st and 3rd Battalions will land abreast—the 1st on the right and the 3rd on the left, with 2nd Battalion in reserve. The 3rd will take Vittoria eight miles inland. The First Battalion will land, then veer southeast and take the beaches seven miles to Scoglitti. Three miles en route is an enemy garrison,* Point Zafaglione. The First Battalion, the officer stresses, must take this garrison before it can take Scoglitti. On high ground, the garrison protects Scoglitti. We focus on Point Zafaglione. The USS Leonard Wood heaves and creaks. Sapper team leaders are called to a sand table depicting a relief model of the Scoglitti beaches. I am a sapper team leader. The sand table is a work of art, with miniature pillboxes, barbed wire entanglements, and stone walls, painted in natural colors. The First Battalion’s beach is designated Yellow Beach. The officer tells us what to expect. He says three hundred yards inland is a small stone wall. Between here and the water are concrete pillboxes, which cover the beach, and fields of barbed wire. The naval barrage will destroy the entanglements and pillboxes. If any are left, it will be up to the sapper teams to finish them. The sappers will be equipped with the same explosives and hardware we trained with at Cape Cod. All will be loaded ahead of time by navy personnel.

*Garrison: a group of troops assigned to a particular location who are given the task of defending the area.
The officer asks if there are any questions. We study the sand table in silence. No questions. The officer puts aside the cue stick, then nods to staff officers. Some are British. A screen rolls down, covering the map of Sicily. The room darkens. A projector whirs. Projected on the screen are aerial photographs of a gleaming white beach. A British officer takes over in a dry and businesslike manner. He states that the Royal Air Force (RAF) has photographed the beaches three times a day for weeks. Shown now is Yellow Beach, where the First Battalion will land. Now, close-ups. Pillboxes are clear, and so are the barbed wire entanglements and the stone wall. Beyond the wall, inland, is a dark field, which the officer says is believed to be a cane field. He says that there has been no increased enemy activity here but that we should expect resistance. Flashing up now is an overall view of the garrison. The British officer emphasizes that we should “jolly well” expect resistance at Point Zafaglione. He cautions that we should be on the lookout for “Yank” paratroopers in the area.

Then the officer calls attention to the fact that Mussolini’s fascist soldiers wear a similar color of cotton khaki as Yank paratroopers. The British officer, who talks like David Niven, the English movie star, has made a point. The German Afrika Korps wears this color of khaki too. The British summer uniform is cotton khaki. Only the Americans will be wearing woolen olive drab (ODs). It is well to know this because when hitting the beach there will be a lot of cowboys and Indians with buck fever. The officer states that the aerial photographs should help familiarize one with Point Zafaglione and its terrain.

We study the buildings, roads, hills, and trails. Touching the cue stick to various places on the map, he gives the approximate distance from one point to another. The cue stick casts an arrowlike shadow on the bright screen. David Niven continues: “You should expect a fly-ming duel from the Eye-ties as they will be defending their homeland for the first time.” He taps the cue stick against the screen for emphasis, holding it to the beach area. “And mark my word, Jerry will bloody well be there in force.” The Englishman retrieves the cue stick, leaving us to stare at the screen with the same thought and pulse beat.

“Well, chaps. That’s it. . . . Good show!” The projector clicks off. The lights come on. We notice the officer now. A Royal Air Force officer. Thin, medium height. An impressive figure in a starched RAF cotton khaki uniform with silver wings and campaign ribbons. Stepping aside, he nods to the American officer in charge. The American officer comes on like a Fourth of July orator, saying that we will have the honor of being the first Allied troops to set foot on Nazi-held Europe. He states that we will be under the command of General George S. Patton Jr. The officer wrings his hands and eyes us, expecting a reaction. We give none. “H-Hour will be at 0245 hours,” he announces. The officer eyes us again. Then he says with heart, “Good luck, men.”
staff officers echo the same. The RAF officer steps forward: “I wish you Yanks Godspeed.”

The strategy room buzzes. We file out. We’ve come a long way since September 16, 1940. That’s when the 45th Division mobilized into federal service. This National Guard Division was made up of men from Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. The bulk of the 45th is from Oklahoma. Most of us are from small towns. Our B Company is from Pawnee, Oklahoma—an Indian Agency town. We return through the passageways lit with red lights. Sergeant Good Buffalo taps my shoulder. Grinning, he holds up the right hand, palm outward, shakes it, rubs two fingers in a circular motion on the left wrist, then points to me. Indian sign language: “What skin [tribe] are you?” Now, I notice that we Indians appear redder than ever in this red light. We enjoy a private joke. I glance back at the Indian faces in the eerie red light. Yup, Redskins all right . . . wonder what the Geneva Convention says about scalping.*

In the B Company† hold, the company commander addresses the men. In cramped quarters, we stand between steel bunks bulging with equipment and weapons. Beneath our feet, the steel deck of the Leonard Wood shifts and creaks. Captain Glen I. Lee, who mobilized with B Company, makes no pep talk, for the chips are down. Lee takes pains in explaining the situation. To the officers and noncoms, he stresses leadership. Then Captain Lee orders the platoon leaders to brief their platoons and check last-minute details. Ours is Second Platoon, led by Second Lieutenant Stewart Dobbins. Tall, thin, and slightly buck-toothed, Dobbins was assigned to B Company in 1942. An intelligent man, Lieutenant Dobbins is from Ohio. All sergeants in the platoon are full-blood Indians, except Right Guide Sergeant Robert Stone. Stone served in the National Guard prior to 1940. A sunup-to-sundown farmer, he is tough as a post oak and mean as a jersey bull. The First Squad in the platoon is led by Sergeant William “Last Arrow” Lasley. A Potawatomi Indian, he was one of the top boxers in Oklahoma. Though his eyes reveal otherwise, Last Arrow always smiles when the going gets tough, showing two gold teeth in front.

I have the Second Squad and am the youngest of the sergeants. Leading the Third Squad is Sergeant Floyd “Good Buffalo” Rice. This Pawnee is ramrod

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*Although some scholars allege that scalping by Native Americans occurred during the war, no sources exist documenting such actions. Interviews conducted with veterans of B Company recall no incidents related to the scalping of the enemy.

†Sergeant Echohawk led the Second Squad (~9 men) of the Third Platoon (~42 soldiers) in B Company (~62–190 soldiers). The Pawnee Company was assigned to 1st Battalion, 179th Infantry Regiment (Regimental Combat Team), 45th Infantry Division, known as the Thunderbirds. During the invasion of Sicily these units were part of the US Seventh Army.
straight with a barrel chest and slight paunch. He was a college wrestler and football player. The platoon sergeant is Staff Sergeant Phillip “Shield Chief” Gover. At thirty-seven, Shield Chief is the oldest man in the company. Powerfully built, he too had been a college football player. Intelligent and well respected, this Pawnee had been employed by the US Indian Service in his civilian days.

Lieutenant Dobbins briefs the platoon. We go at midnight. The Navy will load our hardware and explosives ahead of time. The platoon will load into the barge as it has done in amphibious training. Last Arrow and I will be forward behind the ramp. He’s left. I’m right. The squads follow, with the Third in the rear. When beaching, the steel ramp will drop like a drawbridge. Leaving, we are to step on the ramp and dash forward. If the barge hangs on a reef, we step past the ramp chain then jump at right angles. No man jumps forward, for a wave could drive the heavy ramp into your back. Time is important. First Wave sappers must move quickly.

Lieutenant Dobbins tells us to double-check explosives when entering the barge. A steel helmet tumbles from a bunk onto the deck as the USS Leonard Wood rises, dips, and sways . . . taking us closer to Sicily. The password is sent down: “George Marshall.” When confronting anyone on the dark beach you challenge “George.” If it is one of our men, he will answer “Marshall.” If not—kill him.

The ship’s loudspeaker calls chow. The First Wave will be served first. That’s us, and this is the last supper. We are served delicious steaks with all the trimmings. We eat standing at chest-high tables. Long tables, they are secured by steel poles, extending from the ceiling to the deck. The ship rolls constantly, causing trays of food to slide. Seasick soldiers sway from the tables, leaving uneaten food. I steady myself and eat, knowing that this will be the last hot meal until the Lord knows when. I take an untouched steak, salt and pepper it, wrap it in a GI hanky, then stuff it in my shirt. Other Indians do the same. Food is energy . . . and tomorrow, we’ll need it. Back in the B Company hold, things pick up.

Ammunition, hand grenades, and K-rations are issued. We get 176 rounds of ammunition, which is a full cartridge belt plus two bandoliers.* Each man, one grenade. As a sapper team leader, I receive twenty-four blocks of TNT, a roll of tape, 25 feet of primer cord, and two automatic fuses, each with a five-second burn. I tape down the safety lever on my grenade. Don’t want it to come loose with all the crawling I expect to do. We load weapons. I pull back the operating rod of my M1, opening the bolt, then press in a new clip. Come daylight . . . I’ll be shooting at a human being . . . and will never walk the path of youth again.

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*A bandolier is a belt with pockets used for holding ammunition issued to infantry soldiers.
I release the operating rod; it clangs forward, sending one round into the chamber. I set the sights for two hundred yards at zero windage. For quick aiming and night shooting, I stick an inch of white tape on top of the barrel and just behind the front sight. I put on my equipment. First, a lightweight gas mask, which is a mask and canister only. The fuses are stuffed into the gas mask carrier. Next, two bandoliers, crisscrossed over the shoulders. TNT is next. In blocks of big “pepper shakers,” painted yellow, they are fastened to a “shingle” in two rows, twelve in a row. The shingle has cords at each corner to tie around the neck and waist. This holds TNT to the chest. I coil the primer cord like a lariat, taping it to hold its shape. After stepping inside the loop, it is pulled up, then adjusted above the life belt.

The combat pack is last. The shoulder straps are hooked to the web cartridge belt, which is heavy with ammunition, two canteens of water, wire cutters, and a first aid kit. The cartridge belt, now held up by the shoulder straps, is left unhooked. In an emergency, all can be discarded in one motion. This would leave the all-important life belt, gas mask, and explosives. On my belt is a Pawnee knife. The nine-inch blade is designed for stabbing, slashing, and throwing. There is no hand guard, allowing the knife to set deep in a Plains Indian sheath. The sheath is set under the belt next to the body. Made for mounted warriors of old, the sheath and knife do not hamper the movement of the body but move in unison with it. And there is no chance of the handle snagging brush. Upon drawing the knife, which rides left-center of the body, it is whipped out in one motion with the right hand, cutting edge up. The handle is straight and wrapped tightly with buckskin. When throwing, the knife is thrown by the handle. This ensures speed, control—and accuracy. Knife throwing is a mental thing. It is not “practice makes perfect” but “perfect practice makes perfect.” I also carry a small knife at the small of my back.

This night, the First Wave men come out with all kinds of fighting knives: the Arkansas toothpick, the Bootleg frog sticker, the Blacksmith special (a dirk made from a heavy file), and the single-edge hunting knife. All of us have black, 15-inch bayonets, whetstoned to razor sharpness. In the combat pack are a raincoat, extra socks, handkerchiefs, soap, towel, toothbrush, salt tablets, and three days’ supply of K-rations, and one mess kit with knife, fork, and spoon. My mess kit contains notepaper, pencils, matches, a Baby Ruth candy bar, a can of shoe polish for waterproofing boots, and a small coil spring, which we full-blood Indians use to pluck our sparse chin whiskers. None of us shave. In the pack too is a mosquito head net, used to protect the face at night from mosquitoes. Attached to the pack is an entrenching tool and scabbard with bayonet. Cradling a tommy-gun with a 20-round clip, Sergeant Shield Chief checks the platoon. He carries no knife, but stuck in his belt is a hatchet, which he calls his tomahawk. The Second Platoon is ready.
We settle. Crowded in the aisles, we lie propped against our packs. Lieutenant Dobbins comes from the officers’ quarters and meets with Shield Chief. They talk in low tones. After a while Dobbins leaves. We try to sleep. Smell gun oil, which we use a lot, for we may end up in seawater. Our weapons must be in top working order. Feel the troopship dip and rise . . . seems to be rolling more. I am wearing new trousers and shirt. Was saving them for combat. My boots are saddle-soaped and shined. Got a fresh burr haircut. On my left shoulder is a new Thunderbird, the insignia of the 45th Division. I adjust my pack, TNT, and primer cord to get comfortable. Dang Germans stole our
Indian swastika. The swastika was the original insignia of the division. When Hitler’s Nazis goose-stepped over the face of Europe, the 45th changed from the swastika to a Thunderbird.

A Thunderbird in gold is featured on a red diamond. The color gold represents sunshine and good luck. Red is for courage. The Thunderbird is a mythical bird of the Southwest. Indians say that thunder is the flapping of its wings and lightning is the flashing of its eyes. Sent by the Great Spirit, the Thunderbird triumphs over evil. All spruced up, I feel good. General Patton had his men in North Africa dress neat with ties, leggings, and insignias . . . wanted to give the men pride. Maybe it did, I don’t know.

I remember Patton in the Louisiana maneuvers and North Carolina maneuvers. He always appeared out of nowhere and cussed a blue streak.* The general did this during our practice landing near Oran last month. It was night. We did everything according to the amphibious training we got at Cape Cod. But the Navy landed the Thunderbirds on the wrong beach. The battle dress rehearsal was a flop. When things go wrong, they really go wrong. Our barge hung on a reef. We lost time. We had to struggle ashore in deep water. We, the First Wave, when reaching the beach, found other waves there. Landing barges, motors gunning, were every which way in the surf. Men were yelling and cussing. Artillery, antitank guns, weapons, trucks, jeeps, ambulances, and bulldozers crowded the beach. Making things worse were curious Arab locals (whom we referred to as “Ay-rabs”) at the beach with carts, camels, donkeys, and a herd of sheep.

General Patton appeared. Knew it was him when catching a glimpse of his pearl-handled guns in the dark. He was mad as a wet hornet. General Patton tore into the men, cussing. Now, General Patton’s voice was high-pitched and weak. The voice did not fit the man. No one knew who he was. Tempers were short. Wresting with equipment and soaked in seawater, a GI exploded, “Who in the gotdamned hell are you?” Then the GI, seeing it was General Patton, gulped: “Oh . . . Sir!” Things got unscrambled fast. Our Indian Platoon landed near a highway.

An “Ay-rab” came by riding a donkey and waving a long stick. He grunted “Uh-dee, uh-dee!” as he whacked the donkey’s rump with the stick. We Pawnees roared laughing. By coincidence, uh-dee is a Pawnee expression that denotes reprimand and disgust. Just then General Patton, still fuming, strode from the beach to his command car. He heard our laughter and lit into us, cussing up a storm. Now, in Indian country there is no bad-mouthing. No cuss words exist in the language of the American Indian. We water-soaked Pawnees look at the general with pearl-handled guns and utter “Uh-dee!”

*The Louisiana and Carolina Maneuvers were war games designed to test the wartime abilities of United States Army personnel.
I hope this Sicily landing comes off better than the practice landing back at North Africa. . . . hope the Brass got all the bugs out. Time drags. I say to myself in Pawnee, *Ti-ku-skipi* (I am sleepy). I close my eyes. *Ti-ku-skipi* . . . *Ti-ku-skipi*. This Friday night, July 9, is a long night. The USS *Leonard Wood* continues to roll, plowing through a restless Mediterranean Sea. A hornlike buzzer sounds: general quarters. We spring to life. The buzzer blares in prolonged bursts. The pulse quickens. Blares like an emergency. Through a forest of steel pipes and rods that secure the tightly spaced bunks, B Company is an activity of arms, elbows, legs, steel helmets, packs, M1s, tommy-guns, Springfield .03s, Browning Automatic Rifles, bazookas, mortars, and light machine guns. The buzzer stops. The loudspeaker tells all hands to stand by for the troops to disembark. I adjust my pack, TNT, primer cord, and life preserver belt.

Sergeant Shield Chief bellows: “Sergeant Last Arrow! Sergeant Echohawk! Sergeant Good Buffalo! Your men ready?”

“Ready!” we answer.

Good Buffalo adds, “Aw-huh!” (Yes) then gives a spirited “yes” in sign language. Other Platoons sound off.

Sergeant Shield Chief turns to Lieutenant Dobbins, who has now joined the platoon. “Second Platoon is ready, Sir!” He snaps a salute. Lieutenant Dobbins returns it. In platoon order, the sergeants are at the head of their squads. I glance back. We are a mass of steel helmets, weapons, and bulging equipment.

We sway in unison with the roll of the ship, and we stand like packhorses, harnessed and ready. Two officers come down the ladder to our hold. They talk to Captain Lee. We wait. And wait. Men fidget with equipment. After a while, we unsling rifles. There are sighs. The old army game—hurry up and wait.

“Now hear this!” blares the loudspeaker. “H-Hour is postponed. H-Hour will be 0345. Now hear this. H-Hour will be 0345 hours. . . .” We uncoil. The hold buzzes. We slide out of our equipment, then lie down again. It is learned that the sea is too rough for landing barges. Might be getting rough for the big ships, too . . . and, we are packed in the hold below the water line. Maybe, I got claustrophobia . . . this makes me nervous. We couldn’t get out of here if something happened . . . remember coming over; German submarines jumped our convoy near the Canary Islands. All ships zigzag routinely in a convoy to avoid being a target for the German U-boats, but now they zigzag more than ever as American destroyers hunt down Nazi submarines. Though the action was miles away, the explosions of American depth charges could be felt against the hull of the *Leonard Wood*. Being in the bowels of a troopship with things happening out there is scary.

I listen to the sounds of the heavily loaded USS *Leonard Wood* churning through the sea. Sounds like we are in a giant boiler room. I look at my watch.
It’s after midnight. A few men talk in low voices. After a while, it is graveyard quiet. Ti-ku-skipi (I am sleepy). I drop off to sleep. The hornlike buzzer: general quarters. We get to our feet and grunt into our packs. Here and there a helmet bangs and rolls on the steel deck. We’re going . . . going for sure this time. Fear grips me.

Over the rustling and shuffling activity comes the voice of Sergeant Shield Chief: “Last Arrow! Echohawk! Good Buffalo! Are you ready?”

“Aho!” we reply, which is an old Indian expression for “agreed.”

Other platoon sergeants sound off. The hold rustles with activity. This time there is no waiting. We ascend an iron ladder in company order: Company Headquarters, First Platoon, Second Platoon, Third Platoon, and Fourth Platoon, which is the machine gun and mortar platoon. In single file, we move through passageways lit with red lights. We step through watertight doorways. Sailors stand by to man the steel doors. Each sailor pipes up, “Good luck.” B Company emerges topside and into the open air. It is dark.

We can hear the sea surge against the hull of the ship, and we feel the moisture. Motors hum. Winches and cables creak. Chains rattle. Metal clanks against metal. Landing barges are swung into position at the railing. Navy personnel guide us to our respective barges. The ship isn’t rolling now, and the fresh air feels good.

The loudspeaker: “All right! First Wave, boat one! First Wave, boat two! First Wave, boat three! First Wave. . . !” Army and naval personnel supervise loading.

Lieutenant Dobbins sounds off: “Second Platoon, load!” At the railing and near our barge is a chaplain. I see the small silver cross on his helmet. He shakes hands with all the men he can, saying, “God bless you and watch over you.”

B Company legs over the side, which is latticed with heavy cargo rope, then clump into a swaying LCP (Landing Craft Personnel). A Company, C Company, and D Company do the same. The noise topside is continuous. We check explosives and hardware. The loudspeaker blares: “Lower away!” The barge jerks, then starts down. Standing shoulder to shoulder, we number about forty. With us is one medical aid man, a Choctaw Indian. He is known in the platoon as “Medicine Man.” We descend along the side of the massive hull of the ship. In the blackness, a swell lifts and drops us. Released from cables, the LCP jerks as its motor fires.

The coxswain guns the motor, getting us under way.

Sergeant Stone hollers: “Take it away, Leon!”* others chime in: “Aw-huh, San Antone!”

Someone adds, “Sani flush!”

*The coxswain is responsible for steering the LCP.
Corporal Leading Fox shouts: “Katie bar the door!” Then he gives a piercing war cry.

Medicine Man yells: “Circle the wagons. Indi’ns are coming!”

As we sputter into the darkness, I look back at the Leonard Wood. She brought the First Battalion of the 179th RCT across the Atlantic from Hampton Roads, Virginia. We left on June 4. I will remember these days on the high seas. This Indian saw porpoises, flying fish, and hammerhead sharks. Some guys saw a whale. Sometimes, at night, a big silver moon appeared over the watery horizon. Sailors said it was silver because the atmosphere was clear at sea. Inland it’s reddish because of dust from the earth. On June 24, we steamed through the Strait of Gibraltar. Saw the Rock of Gibraltar. What a sight!