



**Author's Afterword**  
***Our Desperate Hour***

I have made every effort to portray the historical events in this novel with as much accuracy as possible. I take full responsibility for any factual errors. Some are deliberate for the sake of the story.

Ab Johnson, Arthur Beck, Lyle McCormack, and Carl Larsen are all figments of my imagination. Nearly all of the other characters are real, though their conversations are fictional. The hardship experienced by Marine riflemen is well described in Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat* and John W. Thomason's *Fix Bayonets and Other Stories*. Both of those authors were veterans of Belleau Wood. Jeff Shaara's *To the Last Man* is a more recent novel taking the perspective of the Marine rifleman in WWI and included Belleau Wood. I did not read Shaara's novel until after mine was complete. My goal was to look at the battle with different perspectives than these writers—to tell a father's story, to view the battle, in part, through a medical lens, and to show readers real unsung and now-forgotten heroes.

Fiction allows the author to use imagination to fill in gaps that inevitably occur in the historical record. Major Richard Derby probably didn't pull any family connections to make things happen, but he could have. The idea of Ab Johnson's motorcycle was inspired by Derby, who barreled around the battlefield in a motorcycle sidecar. No such motorcycle was used to ferry supplies to Turrill's men in the battle for Hill 142, however. The character of Lt. Colonel Walt Garrett was based on an Army staff officer who I choose to not name. It was impossible for this Marine father to read his analysis regarding the relief of the 4th Brigade and not feel my blood boil a century after the fact. I don't portray General Bundy in a good light, but I saw nothing in the record to convince me that he was an effective division commander. The fact that he had no combat command after Belleau Wood and received no American award for his command, probably indicates what General Pershing thought of Bundy's performance.

I changed Henry Lenert's story a bit by adding Carl to it. Lenert knew where his lines were, didn't stop in Lucy on his way to the Brigade HQ, and was alone when he captured the better part of a German company. I made up the part about the Lugers, which were coveted battlefield souvenirs.

The matter of what happened to battlefield commanders like Wise and Hughes is an interesting question since both were experienced and highly trained commanders. In Hughes' case, I suspect fog of war was the problem, since the maps he and the other battalion commanders had were terrible, and June 10th was the first time he had been in the woods. I speculate that Wise suffered from a combination of what we now call acute combat fatigue syndrome along with an element of traumatic brain injury. He knew how to read a map and communicate. Yet, during the actions between June 11-15, he misinterpreted communications, maps, and directions. He, like his men, was starved, sleep deprived, subjected to an unknown amount of low-level toxin exposure, and was pummeled by repeated shock waves from artillery shelling.

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The effects on the short- and long-term brain function of humans subjected to artillery barrages is a subject that has received little formal study for understandable reasons. Much of the recent work on blast-related brain injury relates to singular events, some repeated, but not the effects of sustained bombardment. Wise and his men were on the receiving end of intense bombardment on multiple occasions. Harbord's memoirs paint a picture of a man who was, as we would say today, "not quite right in the head". It is dreadful to think of what the survivors of Belleau Wood might have experienced in the aftermath.

The long-term complications of gas injuries are clear, however. Dr. Orlando Petty tried to rejoin the Navy after the war but was denied because of his physical limitations due to the gas exposure that led to his Medal of Honor. After the war he suffered from "ill health" until his suicide in 1932. He was a brilliant endocrinologist who played a significant role in diabetes care at a time when insulin first came into use.

I could not find the exact wounds and circumstances that led to Captain Lloyd Williams death. I was therefore left to speculate and tried to fill in the blanks as well as I could. I hope the Williams and Petty families will forgive any inaccuracy on my part.

My descriptions of the real people in this novel is as accurate as I was able with limited resources. The black and white photographs that exist of the people involved, when available, helped, but I had to invent physical details like height, weight, build, eye color where I could not find accurate information about those attributes. I didn't attempt to find their service records if they still exist. Aside from Catlin, heights and weights, eye and hair color are my best guesses. Whether they cussed or smoked is unknown to me. I toned down the salty language significantly, I suspect. If I have offended any of their descendants, I hope they understand I didn't intend to do so.

I am hard on the French Army in this novel. I wrote this from the perspective of the Americans who fought in Belleau Wood. Available memoirs don't have many positives to say about the French commanders or some of the troops. The movement of the 2nd Division to Chateau-Thierry was probably even more chaotic than I portray it. The scene where General Pershing arrived to find his division on the move without his knowledge is not recorded in his memoir of the war but was found in a memoir about Navy Lt. Joel Boone who had no reason to not tell the truth. Many accounts document that the French command kept plans secret from their American allies until the last moment for security reasons.

As Marines first arrived in the Chateau-Thierry sector, they saw French soldiers looting farms that had been evacuated hours before. They were treated with disdain by French officers and returned the lack of respect on the spot. However, the Marines had respect for the hardship the French *poilu* had suffered, as well as their courage and skill as soldiers. Various Marine memoirs reflect a great deal of compassion for the French civilians displaced by the war, the subject of my novel *Fleeing the War*.

One historical inaccuracy uncovered in the research for this novel is the spelling of Lieutenant Junior Grade Weeden Osborne's first name. He spelled it Weeden. Every document he signed and all communication between those who knew him, like his sister, used that spelling. Some US Navy documents use that spelling, but others misspell it "Weedon". One US Army document spelled it "Weldon". Since the early 1920s his name has been misspelled; the spelling

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“Weedon” is the common one now used on the internet as well as the US Navy Osborne award. His headstone at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery, however, is correct.