

*We stand on the backs of their sacrifice. Their history is our tradition, as long as there are Americans to remember...*

My name is Clinton Howard Greene. My family calls me Howard. I grew up in Ennis and went to war for my country. This is my story.

When I was growing up, my family didn't have a lot. In fact, some people would have said that we were poor. I was the youngest of six children, and the only son of Junius and Ada Greene. I've been told that my sisters doted on me. I reckon that's so.

We lived at 210 West Belknap Street and attended the Tabernacle Baptist Church. My daddy sharecropped and hauled freight, but in his spare time he liked to write poetry. He made sure that I was well mannered and that I made my grades.

My best friend was Jack Hinton. In our overalls, we would sit on the street curb at night talking for hours, planning and dreaming about our future. We knew what it was like to do without those things that many other kids took for granted. Times were hard, but Jack and I had plans to make things better.

In high school, I was elected as the president of my Junior and Senior classes. I also acted in the Junior and Senior class plays and played football for the Lions. I really enjoyed athletics and the teamwork aspect of it. We won our district in '35. My number was 27.

After graduation, I didn't have the money to go to college, so I got a job at the Ennis Tag & Salesbook Company. Sometimes there was regret about not going to college, but I could not see giving up my job for the uncertainty of the unknown. After all, I was making good money, for the times.

I guess you could say that I was popular with the girls, but there was this one girl that I really loved. She lived in another town not far from home. We were pretty serious about each other, but her mother had other plans for her. Seems like I didn't fit the requirements.

Later on, I moved to Wichita Falls and took a job there with an oil company. When the war came, I joined the Army Air Force there at Sheppard Field, figuring that I needed to be part of all this war effort. My primary pilot

training was at Jones Field in Bonham. Man, I really enjoyed flying and felt as though this was going to be my chance to make something of myself.

I took my basic training at Randolph Field in San Antonio and completed advanced training at Kelly Field. Then it was on to more training at Sedalia, Missouri, Westover, Massachusetts, Fort Benning, Georgia, and North Carolina. Once while training in Westover, Massachusetts, I was grounded for buzzing Smith College. I did an 85-degree bank over the school at 200 feet. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but looking back, not too smart.

I was the pilot of a C-47 troop transport plane. My job was to deliver paratroopers to their drop-zone behind enemy lines. This was the most responsibility that anyone had ever placed on my shoulders. A lot of the other pilots sort of looked up to me as a father figure or something, because I was older and had more life experience than most of them. Some of them were just kids.

Back home most everyone called me Howard. In the military, my official name was Clinton H. Greene, so my new friends in the Army started calling me Clint. I liked that name. It had a nice ring to it.

There were times when I was in the lead of 100 planes flying in formation and I was responsible for a whole regiment of paratroopers. I felt as though I was really earning my money and I didn't seem to be satisfied with anything other than the work. Someday, I hope they make this group my baby.

The training was intense. We flew those planes hard, and there were plenty of things that went wrong. I even saw a paratrooper killed when he was hit by another plane. We flew lots of maneuvers, daylight drops, night drops, flying formation and glider towing. We practiced everything over again and again, until we all got it right.

Finally, we were ready. We were the 32<sup>nd</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron of the 314<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group. We had trained hard for what seemed like a long time and in the judgment of the Colonel, my squadron was the best. Flying is really getting fine for me.

To pass the time, we played a lot of poker, blackjack and craps. Sometimes I was up in cash, sometimes down, sometimes even. Before we shipped overseas, we had a chance to go to a big band show. There were moments

when the orchestra started playing that made me wish for the old dances back home. It made me think of the girl somewhere that is very beautiful. Somewhere, somehow, I hope to meet her someday.

On May 7, 1943 we flew to Morrison Field in West Palm Beach, Florida. There we got last minute instructions for our trip to North Africa. This was it! Now I was really going to war. We left the states three days later and flew to Puerto Rico. On the way we flew over a convoy of eight ships and also flew over Cuba. We saw some beautiful coral beds, showing through the shallow water, colored in many shades of green and blue, even some schools of fish were visible. I remember thinking that this was such a pretty spot and someday I'd like to bring my future wife here.

After stopping over in Puerto Rico for one night, we flew on past the Grenada Islands and on to Trinidad, flying through some instrument weather along the way. We stayed the night at Trinidad, where they treated us to some ice cream and cake. Man, it was good! But I can't figure how people live in a place like this – a mountain sticking out of the sea.

The next day it was on to Brazil. We had to fly instruments through a rainstorm, and we passed near to Devil's Island. Flying over the mouth of the Amazon took us nearly an hour. We saw lots of wild animals and the river was awfully muddy. This place is practically all one big jungle. I've read books about this place but never figured that I'd ever see it for myself.

The quarters and food there at Bellum, Brazil were not bad at all. I had to do my letter writing in bed with my flashlight. Our beds were draped with mosquito nets, tropical style, out of necessity.

From there it was on east over the Atlantic toward Ascension Island. We passed over two warships, a light cruiser and a destroyer. Those fighting ships were going the same way we were, going in harm's way. The guy in the lead of our formation was just real poor. He messed the whole formation up and was not in position for the entire trip. I wish that they would put me in charge of this group.

Fifteen hundred miles and 9½ hours later we finally made it, Ascension Island, a volcanic rock in the middle of the ocean. The runway was literally carved through a mountain. We learned of an A-20 pilot that had just come

in on one engine and had to crash land in the water. He had cheated death only to be caught and swept out to sea by an undertow while swimming in.

This place, I found to be almost unlivable. We slept five guys to a tent. The highest mountain was 750 feet, on which grew a lonely looking scrubby tree. The waves seemed quiet enough, only rollers until they dashed themselves against the rocks, trying madly to destroy the only bit of land for over a thousand miles. What a lonely spot this was. One night they treated us to a movie in which a guy kissed a girl, and the boys almost went wild.

From there we flew on eastward to Decar, North Africa, another nine hours of flying. Flew in at 10,000 feet to stay on top of the dust-filled atmosphere. When we landed, I ran into some friends that I had trained with back at Kelly Field in San Antonio. Awfully hazy and nasty weather here. It was plenty hot and there was a 45 mile-per-hour wind blowing, cutting particles of sand.

The next day we flew on further east and landed near an Arab village in the middle of the desert. North Africa, what a place! Our barracks were deserted hovels of the French Foreign Legion situated on a hill overlooking an oasis. We had cloth cots, and everything was OK, I reckon, considering there's a war on. I'll bet that these C.C.C. blankets never were expected to see service in an African desert.

The natives begged us for gum and cigarettes. There were shots fired in the air when some of them tried stealing our equipment. That night I lost \$35 in a poker game, and that about evens me up in gambling so far. The stars are very bright with a lovely moon, plus a 50 mile-per-hour sandy wind. All in all, I would have to say that North Africa is a very nice place from which to appreciate the U.S.A.

A story of some obscure adventure novel suddenly became reality for me. The change from Ennis, Texas to a town like Marrakech. This place is beyond imagination! Only seeing is believing. The meat markets are overcast with flies, no ice, nothing but filth. The choice buy of the day was camel guts, goat guts, slices of tail, hoofs and other crap that they make glue out of back home. I can't see how humans can live as these people do... I'll sure be glad to get back home.

*(To be continued)*

## **Part Two**

*We stand on the backs of their sacrifice. Their history is our tradition, as long as there are Americans to remember...*

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> we left Oujda, Morocco and flew further east, having to leave two planes behind due to hydraulic trouble. We flew on to Berguent. One heckuva place, our new base - one runway north and south, no plumbing, no buildings, no tents, no trees, no nothing. We pitched our tent under the wing of our plane. At night we took turns walking guard duty around the plane, mine was from 1:45 to 3 o'clock. Blowing sand, hot wind, strange noises, man you never knew what was out there in the dark in this place.

We spent the next several days flying back and forth for supplies and lumber. Had to tear down glider crates for the wood and load as much onto our planes as possible. I know we flew overloaded sometimes, but we had to. We worked hard during the day and slept on the ground at night. No cots here. But I was so tired, I didn't mind anymore.

On May 25-28, we took a series of trips to Orion, Casablanca, and Oujda hauling freight, men and towing gliders. Casablanca was the best town that I'd seen in North Africa, a little bit of civilization in the middle of nowhere. On the 28<sup>th</sup> I got my first letter in four weeks. I tried to write back, but it was too hot to even swat the flies away.

When I got back from Casablanca, I was sick with tonsillitis and the Doc took me off flying for a few days. What a poor mode of living. Hot – Sand – Flies – Bugs – and to have a splitting headache and tonsillitis at the same time. Hardly any decent drinking water – Eating in the blazing sun – Lousy food. I'm just biding my time until we get a combat mission. Tomorrow would be payday back at home... I spend more and more time thinking about home now.

For the next several weeks we had practice missions, paratrooper drops and glider towing. They took away my co-pilot and gave me a younger more inexperienced pilot. His name was Cryer. He is from Clarkwood, Texas down on the gulf coast. Seems they wanted all these younger guys to fly with a more experienced pilot, as we get closer to combat. This guy Cryer

turned out to be a real card, he was always doing something that made us laugh.

Anyway, we got a lot of time together flying practice missions. Our group showed up the best with a superior rating from the paratroopers. Sometimes on these practice missions, the crew and me stayed overnight sleeping in the plane. Once I bought eggs from a local and we boiled them for breakfast. The four of us spent so much time together that we became fairly tight.

Things started to move pretty fast. We made 10 trips from Berguent to Kairouan, a distance of 680 miles, hauling more supplies, men and gliders. One time we were towing gliders when we ran into some real bad weather. Three of us had to set down on the muddy landing strip of another squadron because we were almost out of gas. That was a close call. The field was so muddy that we had to wait two days for it to clear up.

One really bad accident happened during glider practice. Two fellows from the airborne infantry were killed, run over by a glider as it landed. It was the glider that I had been towing. I felt bad, but it was just one of those things, you have to shake it off and go on. We came here to do a job, and it was going to cost us a price, I figured.

Some days were terribly hot, the temperature got up to 132 degrees, which melted all our candles. We passed the time by working on our slit trenches, working on our beds and building a makeshift shower made from a pipe and tin cans. It all made me realize how very rich my family was back home. I really enjoyed my letters from back home, but they sure seemed scarce. I'd like to be in love with a girl back home and return to her someday, but I reckon there's time for that after the war... It was 12 o'clock back at home, and I wondered who was dating the girls that I knew.

Sometimes morale in our squadron was low, maybe because we haven't proven ourselves as yet in this war effort. As I wrote my Dad in a letter, I feel that this is really the war to end all wars. We, the soldiers, will not be content to just come home and relax after a day's work. It's more than that. This time I guess we're just damn tired of seeing something pop up every so often. I hope that history will make a definite change when this is all over.

When I was flying my plane, I felt closer to God. I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down on the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot

figure how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God. I just love it up there in amongst the clouds. It's so clear and beautiful, with just you and God up there.

On July the 4<sup>th</sup>, we were making coffee when a formation of 68 B-17 Fortress bombers flew over. It was like a sign of providence. What an awesome and beautiful sight! I knew that the invasion of southern Europe was coming soon, and I knew that we were ready to go. We were trained, and we were ready.

A few days later they managed for our squadron to have ice cream and beer. Our planes were to be ready by 8 o'clock, with a briefing to follow. Looks as though tonight may be the big night or the start of it... And later, nope! It wasn't, so I took 12 of our pilots up to get them acquainted with the locality at night. There wasn't much time now and I did everything that I could think of to have the guys ready. We came in that night and had hard-boiled eggs and bacon. There wasn't much talking.

While sleeping on my lumpy straw mattress that night, I dreamed of that beautiful girl; a girl that loved me, someone that I could go home to. I'm sorry that I never met a girl like that.

In the morning, the G.I.'s got me up. General Patton was invading Sicily tonight. He wants us to drop the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne behind enemy lines near Gela to help his Seventh Army's advance inland. A little nervous, I went to the plane to demonstrate the use of the life raft to the paratroopers. These boys from the 82<sup>nd</sup> were fresh off months of fighting in Algeria and Tunisia. Now the Nazis in Sicily were in for it... This was it!

I came back and loafed around waiting for the briefing. Paced back and forth for a while. Reckon the big push is tonight for sure. I've spent 18 months training for this and I'm ready. There is no doubt of our success and I'm confident of the paratrooper drop. The chance is inevitable, but the thought doesn't enter my mind that we won't get back, so I'm not preparing a pretty speech for it would sound foolish.

For some reason, I don't know, I decided to leave my dog-tags along with my diary. This simple record of my daily experiences and thoughts had given me pleasure in the writing of it. If for any reason I didn't come back,

there were instructions in my belongings to mail the diary to my mother. Maybe one day somebody will get some good from it.

Our mission was to drop the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne just before midnight, four miles inland in front of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's beachhead. The "Big Red One" was depending on us. I walked out of the mission briefing knowing that the entire invasion might depend on us getting this right. This was no time for me to get nervous. I've got to do my part; there are a lot of fellows depending on me.

That evening the weather conditions began to deteriorate as a strong wind began to blow. A war wind was blowing. One hundred and forty-four C-47's towing the gliders took off before us. They carried the British paratroopers. We took off one hour later carrying the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in two hundred and twenty-six C-47's. It was quite a sight to see so many planes with so many men flying off into harm's way.

Down below, the Allied armada steamed toward the island in a fierce 40-mile-per-hour gale. The sea was so whipped up that it endangered some of the smaller craft. The situation with us in the air grew even worse, but there was no turning back.

There was a scant quarter moon that hung low in the summer sky. Such little light as the moon did provide didn't help a lot. There was radio silence, so we had to fly by visual checkpoints and try and hold the formation together. The wind began to blow much harder. This along with the difficult route and almost total darkness caused some of the group to become disoriented. Some of the group missed the Malta checkpoint. Some of our planes began to straggle after one another in mixed formations as we all desperately tried to stay on course.

This wasn't working out as I had hoped. Things were starting to go wrong. I was worried. Not for myself... I did not want to mess this up. I didn't want to let down any of the guys. Everybody and everything were depending on us.

As we approached our drop zone, we came upon a surreal scene. There was a heavy pall of smoke over the water and over the land. Earlier missions by our heavy bombers had started fires and smoke that obscured the drop zones. Tracer bullets began to climb up through the dark sky. After those first shots, the heavens erupted with explosions and gunfire.

We were right on course, right where we were supposed to be. “Red light!” Get the paratroopers ready, was my primary concern... “Stand Up! Hook Up! Equipment Check!” My plane started taking hits. Bullets were walking across the wings. My heart pounded as we struggled with the controls.

Almost there, we forged ahead into the firestorm. I could see some of our other planes on fire and going down. We took more hits. You could hear the bullets tearing through our plane. Then suddenly there was a fire. I thought she was about to break up. We were losing control. “Green light! Green light! Get the troopers out!” We have to get the troopers out!

Cryer and I fought to save the plane. We got the troopers out, all except one. He must have been wounded... But for us, the crew, there was no time. No time for us to get out. We rode the plane down, never giving up! Fighting to regain control all the way, the four of us that had trained together, lived together, and laughed together, we rode it down together. Rode it right into the ground.

It was a Saturday morning, the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, and I was 24 years old.

That future that I had planned for, I gave it all up for you.

Remember us. We were soldiers once, and young.