

WENDELL RORIE
JAN. 4, 1996

CHAPTER III

THE WAR YEARS

TREMAN GARNER RORIE (1917-1945)

It all began on a dare on the banks of the West Fork of Ringgold Creek, near the State Line Road. The brother of Treman Rorie, Harmon West Rorie, was working for Miss Ethel Adair, on the old Harry Waldron farm in South Christian for five dollars a week.

After the Great Flood of 1937, my father left the Charles Saunders farm and the Church Hill Community with his family and sparse belongings and headed for greener pastures. Somehow, we were always moving.

It was a steamy, July Sunday in 1938 when Treman, Vernon and Howard came in an old Model-T Ford for an unannounced Sunday visit. I was eight years of age. The Creek at the foot of the hill from our house glistened like ice when the sun's rays penetrated the dense foliage, interrupted occasionally with amassed water-cress, which mingled with the water-borne wild purple iris of late spring.

The sounds of summer vibrated with the ripples of the creek and an occasional croak of a spring frog. Every year, gypsies came through from Bell Station and camped on the West Fork, and it was said that Harry Waldron fell in love with one and married her. West Fork was really a series of crystal-clear springs that united near Noah's Spring four miles westward on its journey to Ringgold Creek.

Miss Ethel's husband had died during the depression in 1931, and the Adair farm consisting of some 300 acres, was farmed by his two sons, Chester and Arvin. Chester, who was seventeen at the time, loved to play in water. The swimming hole was not deep enough to learn to swim without belly crawling and Chester got the bright idea of damming up the West Folk and enlisted my services on my first major construction project. We lugged and tugged cement sacks and mixed concrete. My main assignment was to pick up large rocks up and down the creek and pack them barefooted to the dam site, a job that I relished. A eight year old boy will do anything a seventeen year old tells him. After numerous unsuccessful attempts, one weekend we finally were able to raise the water level about a foot. Then we decided to build a boat from white oak slabs but it leaked badly. Without sealant or pitch, we conceived of using left-over concrete to seal the canoe, but it promptly sank.

That is when Treman and his brothers came. It was sweltering hot and we headed for the creek. We went down by the spring house where my mother kept sweet milk until it clabbered; the spring house was our only source of water, fetched by pail to our house on the hill, half of which would always be sloshed out by the time we would make it home. We paused for a long drink from the fruit jar which was never moved. (The dipper stayed in the house with the water bucket.)

"I dare you," "I double-dare you." Its really not all that cold. "Are there any water moccasins in here?" Daddy said stay out of that creek. Slowly, clothes were shed and toe touching of the icy waters preceded the plunge. Memory does not tell me who made initial

dip but to this day, I recall this as being the coldest water I ever felt. Of course, being the youngest boy present, I was honored to follow my uncles buck-naked into Chester's swimming hole. We were all tall and skinny and the water was really not deep enough for swimming and I remember a little mud-crawling, but most of the afternoon was spent shivering stark naked, with appendages dangling, seeking the rays of sun through the sycamores.

Late in the day, the Rorie uncles, climbed into that old Ford and headed for Indian Mound, Tennessee. I never saw Treman again. Life went on and Chester's dam washed out and all that unhardened cement wound up in Ringgold Creek.

We were in the mist of the depression but we didn't know it. Everyone was poor. Before my family left Big Rock, Tennessee, my father had worked for the Civilian Conservation Camps and the WPA, programs initiated by Franklin Roosevelt whom many considered the greatest person since Jesus Christ.

War clouds were gathering in Europe; Hitler was gathering steam in his march through Poland. The United States was pursuing a policy of isolationism, yet the American economy was in shambles. Jobs were not available and military service was an option available to young men with a sense of adventure, patriotism, and excitement. Treman Garner Rorie (shown as Garnett on the Tennessee Birth Certificate) was born in Woodlawn, Tennessee, on October 29, 1917, one of six children born to Reuben Rorie and Mona Edwards Rorie. Rural births were not routinely recorded by mid-wives or even by physicians and the birth certificate of Treman Garnett Rorie was issued by County Judge

Cunningham, Clarksville, Tennessee, on May 19, 1945, with the notation, " Registrant outside continental limits of U. S. on foreign duty with U. S. Armed Forces." Thus, his birth certificate was issued after his death on March 2, 1945.

Very little is known about my uncles early years and about two years after the swimming hole incident, on July 10, 1940, and one and one-half years before Pearl Harbor, Treman Rorie joined the Army. Corporal Cecil Vernon Rorie entered the U. S. Army on July 11, 1940 and was assigned to Btry A, 28th Field Artillery Battalion and Staff Sergeant Howard C. Rorie joined the Army Air Corps on August 25, 1942. Howard Rorie was wounded in action on August 1, 1944 but returned to duty around Christmas of 1944. Treman G. Rorie enlisted at Fort Oglethrope, Georgia, and was later assigned to Field Artillery, 67th (A). Later, he served at Indiantown Gap Military Reservation in Pennsylvania, prior to the European Campaign. His highest rank is unknown, but all his Army records indicate that he was a private at the time of his death on March 2, 1945. Stewart-Houston Times, May, 1945. One ponders whether or not he was "busted" for drinking or other military infractions. It must be remembered that the constant threat of death upon a young man far away from home in a very real war may have taken its toll.

Records indicate that he was sent to England in August of 1943 in the massive buildup for the European campaign. He entered France with the field artillery of the invasion forces on D-Day on June 6, 1944. Paris fell rather quickly, but heavy fighting began in Holland in September of 1944, followed by the Battle of the Bulge in which both sides suffered massive losses, as the Allied Forces pushed against the west wall of Germany

on their march to Berlin. It was during the bitter cold winter of 1944 that the photograph came to Woodlawn. Treman was riding a captured German motorcycle and rumor had it that Treman had stolen Hitler's motorcycle with a side car. This is the only photograph I have been able to locate of this unknown soldier. On March 1, 1945, the U. S. Army tanks lead thrusts in western Germany in the Glesch-Paffendorf region, across the Prum River and toward Cologne and the Rhine and on March 2, 1945, American forces captured Trier on the Western Front during intense shelling.

Details are sketchy but we do know that Pvt. Rorie was attached to a field artillery unit as a gunner, assigned to a six man detail and that all were killed by enemy fire, with the exception of one soldier who lost his legs. After the War, the survivor came to visit Mona and Reuben Rorie, and repeated efforts to determine the specific circumstances of death have failed. The Veterans Administration, Nashville, Tennessee, provided me with documentation relating to his Application for National Service Life Insurance Company in the sum of \$5,000 on July 1, 1943, with Mona Rorie as primary beneficiary and Ethel "Brian" (his sister) as contingent beneficiary. The quarterly premium was \$3.40. This was during the period of time when he was assigned to Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, Pennsylvania. (Pvt. Treman Garner Rorie, Rcn Co, 703rd TD Battalion). He was 26 years of age and this document reveals the only available document of any kind that Pvt. Treman G. Rorie personally signed.

We lived at the Adair farm only one year and Daddy heard about a job as foreman on the S. R. Ewing farm at Masonville on the Clarksville Pike and in 1939 we again packed

the wagon and headed North some eight miles to the post civil war Mason homeplace, an eight room house with eight fireplaces! It was called the "big" house and Mother's job consisted of cooking for the hands brought in during the summer months to cut and house burley tobacco. Located seven miles south from Hopkinsville and one mile west from Campbell's Grocery at Masonville, near Locust Grove Baptist Church, we lived and worked until the rear section was sold to R. E. Toms and Mr. Ewing built us a new house back of the railroad tracts at Masonville. From the Big House we saw the bellows of smoke on a sultry Sunday afternoon in 1940 and only later learned that Hotel Latham in Hopkinsville had burned to the ground. It was here on the three battery, Wards Airline radio that we heard the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Earlier, I remember stringing bailing wire to a catalpa tree and tuning in "clear channel" WSM for the Grand Ole Opry. The winds of war were blowing and the Nazi continued to goose-step through Europe. The lands of our heritage were being acquired for Camp Campbell. The Adair farm was sold for \$17,000 to the government and my maternal grandfather, Avery Cato, sold his home and farm below Parker's Town to Uncle Sam. A massive building project was underway at Camp Campbell, giving employment to hundreds. The Jesse Foard farm at Bell Station was acquired by the Government and Campbell Army Airfield was born.

With the war effort came rationing-the scarcity of gasoline, tires, sugar and shoes. I remember selling an old McCormick mowing machine for a penny a pound for scrap metal. Men were volunteering and being drafted. The army buses rolled on the Clarksville Pike and occasionally, troop trains would pass on the I. C. near Masonville, mixed in with the

freight cars. Germany attacked Poland in 1939 and launched World War II, and Hitler's war machine appeared to be unstoppable. In June of 1941, Hitler advanced on Russia, only to be stopped by the Russian winter. After the Russians defeated the Germans at Stalingrad, Hitler became more reclusive and the winds of war began to blow in favor of the Allies. Many German prisoners were captured and brought to Camp Campbell. During hay and tobacco harvest, my father would get a load of these prisoners to work for fifty cents a day. Always with an American soldier guard, these blond headed, blue-eyed, fair complected, playful young men caught the eye of everyone, especially my older sisters. We would look at them and they would look at us, each pretending not to be afraid of the other. These were the first Germans we had ever seen, if you leave out Daddy's second cousin, Frank Buelah, who lived down the pike about a mile.

After the invasion at Normandy, heavy fighting began in Holland and continued against the west wall of Germany. Paris was recaptured fairly quickly but the Allies sustained heavy losses of life and injuries. Mothers and wives lived in fear that Officers would come from the War Department or a telegram would come bringing the sad news. Still no word about Treman. No letters, nothing. The caissons kept rolling along on highway 41 and the I. C. Then the gliders came one day on a practice run from Camp Campbell. These soundless birds barely clearing that big catalpa and my bailing wire aerial.

Joe Bill saw them first and when the Army Air Force later used the airspace above the Ewing farm as a staging area for the P-40's, Joe Bill promptly decided he was going

to join the Air Force. Joe Bill Foard was my buddy and he later retired as a pilot. We built model airplanes from balsam wood and airplane glue. Of course, we had wooden guns and helmets, dug foxholes, and played soldiers. When you are twelve years old, in the mist of older young men, war can be glamorous and exciting.

We could hardly wait until Saturdays to go to the Princess or the Alhambra to see the Movietone news of the war and Westerns. One afternoon Joe Bill came out of the theater pretending to be an American Ace that shot down ten Germans. Someplace, he got an old pilot's leather helmet with goggles and paraded around for weeks. We were great pretenders.

The 11th Airborne Division was stationed at Camp Campbell, followed by the 101st Airborne and pumped money into the community. My oldest sister, Ouida, went to work at Lyne's Cafe near Gate Six and the soldiers would go there to drink beer and raise hell. I know, because Daddy would take me with him when he would go to pick her up when she would get off from work. Kids were not allowed inside, and I had to stay in the old Ford pickup until she finished working near midnight. Times were hard. While working at Lynes', Ouida met Bill Davis, a handsome young soldier, from Akron, Ohio. He came to visit us a lot, and Mother started planning a wedding. Ouida went to Akron to visit Bill's parents but, somehow, it was not to be. Denton Foster appeared on the scene, swept her off her feet, and Mother lost her first daughter to matrimony.

After Treman's death on March 2, 1945, evidence was received by the War Department on March 13, 1945, and the Adjutant General's Office reported his death on

March 28, 1945. "Killed in Action, European Area," was the official report to Mrs Mona Rorie, Mother, Rt.#2, Woodlawn, Tennessee, emergency addressee. Word reached Kentucky concerning the death of my uncle about the time Franklin Roosevelt died in Warm Springs, Georgia, on April 12. As the President's funeral train headed north to Washington and Hyde Park, we piled into the back of Daddy's Ford pickup and headed south to Woodlawn to console Grandma. We children could not understand death. Grandma was crying and very upset, and my Grandfather was stone-faced, yet deeply troubled, without a tear. They both looked old. There was a lot of mourning. This silent spring gave us a dose of the illnesses and disappointments that give life its final flavor of death. Why did it have to happen to us, just when the War was about to be over? Victory was almost within our grasp. My mind raced back to happier times when I saw Treman shivering innocently near the crayfish holes on the West Fork of Ringgold Creek.

American bombers continued to pound Berlin and the Russian ground troops closed in. Hitler married his mistress, Eva Braun, who took her life by cyanide poison, and Hitler shot himself in his bunker on April 30, 1945. Victory in Europe finally came on May 8, followed by jubilant celebrations, but our family was still in mourning over the death of Treman. Pvt. Rorie was initially interred at the American temporary Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery, Eupen, Belgium. The American Battle Monuments Commission booklet states that Henri-Chapelle Cemetery is located 2 miles north of the village of Henri-Chapelle which is on the main highway from Liege, Belgium (18 miles) to Aachen, Germany (10 miles.) At this cemetery rest 7,989 of our military dead, most of who gave

their lives during the advance of the U. S. Armed Forces into Germany.

Following the War, Mona and Reuben Rorie requested that Treman's body be brought home to Dover, Tennessee, and the remains of Pvt. Treman C. Rorie, 14005043 were repatriated to the United States and permanently interred in Plot 716, Fort Donalson National Cemetery, Dover, Tennessee, on December 9, 1947.

Four months earlier, at Masonville, Kentucky, on the Ewing farm, on a hot summer night, the last of ten children was born to Ruby and Harmon Rorie. On August 12, 1947, my brother, Gerald Treman Rorie, made his noisy appearance, and remains the sole namesake of Pvt. Treman G. Rorie. Fifty years after the death of Private Rorie, during the spring of 1995, an American Flag was flown over the United States Capitol in his memory and this flag was presented to Gerald Treman Rorie in a Memorial Day Ceremony at Fort Donalson.

From the Government insurance, Mona and Reuben Rorie drew a pension of \$75.00 per month which enabled them to live better than they had previously. They had money to spend and when I graduated from South Christian High School in 1949, Grandma came to Kentucky and we went to Joy's Jewelry Store in Hopkinsville for my graduation present. It was a beautiful, yellow gold Bulova, with an expansion band, costing \$24.95. This watch took me through college and two years of military service but finally, like all things, it got old and stopped running. I still have the watch and time has marched on but this golden Bulova has been retained with my boyhood memories of my swim with Treman in the West Fork of Ringgold Creek.

"In all of the far-flung operations of our own Armed Forces the toughest job has been performed by the average, easy-going, hard-fighting young American who carries the weight of battle on his own young shoulders.

"It is to him that we and all future generations of Americans must pay grateful tribute."

President Franklin D. Roosevelt

by Wendell Harmon Rorie, May, 1995