



The Journal of America's Military Past

Formerly *PERIODICAL*



General George Washington pictured at the Battle of Princeton in a portrait by Charles Wilson Peale (*Wikipedia*). "Was General Washington Only Brilliant at Trenton and Princeton?" by David Price looks at different decisions Washington made during the course of the war that helped the Americans to victory.

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The Journal of America's Military Past

Military History - Historic Preservation

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Editor's Note:

Welcome to issue 159 of JAMP! We offer three interesting articles and books galore for the holidays.

The first article is "Was General Washington Only Brilliant at Trenton and Princeton?" by David Price. David has published several books on the American Revolution as well as being an interpreter at the Washington's Crossing and Princeton battlefields. One of his books is reviewed in this issue. His article looks at seven different decisions Washington made over the course of the war that impacted the American victory.

"The National Guard Was Here First, And Here We Intend to Stay" Re-Establishing the Post-World War II Army National Guard' is by Paul J. Cook, PhD. Paul is a former army officer who has written about the efforts to rebuild the national guard after the Second World War and the need to make sure it is prepared in the world of modern warfare.

The third article, "The Colonel, the Writer and the Houffalize Bridge: Buck Lanham, Ernest Hemingway and the Good Citizens of a Belgian Village" is by Eileen Martin and Greer Rising. Eileen and Greer are a husband and wife team who are writing a book on the relationship between Buck Lanham and Ernest Hemingway during World War II. The Bridge at Houffalize is just one example of that interaction.

As usual, we have a bonanza of book reviews for you to peruse. Unfortunately, this is the last book review that Nick Reynolds will be involved with. Fortunately, we now have James McIntyre on board as our book review editor. Jim received his Bachelor's Degree in History from Temple University in 1996, and his Master's from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1999. He has published several books and a number of articles on various topics in eighteenth century warfare. He teaches History at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, Illinois, and serves as a Fleet Professor in the College of Distance Education for the United States Naval War College. In addition, he edits the Journal of Seven Years' War Association. He makes his home in Illinois with his wife and their three children.

Finally, the Council on America's Military Past Board of Directors is excited to remind you that, CAMP sponsors a series of MILITARY MOMENTS webinars as one-hour Zoom presentations. Please look on the CAMP website for upcoming presentations when they are announced.

Till next time,
Vincent W. Rospond

The Colonel, the Writer and the Houffalize Bridge: Buck Lanham, Ernest Hemingway and the Good Citizens of a Belgian Village

By Eileen Martin and Greer Rising

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Eileen Martin and Greer Rising are working on a book about the friendship between Ernest Hemingway and General Buck Lanham, inspired by a collection of private letters. The Lanhams were Greer's father's godparents and the families maintained ties for most of the twentieth century. The book will demonstrate how much of Lanham's life Hemingway borrowed for his fiction. More at RisingMartinAuthors.com.

A small bridge in Belgium critical to the Allied advance but dynamited by the Germans plays a leading role in a World War II vignette featuring an American infantry colonel whose name is cited on the bridge's plaque, a mistaken identity for the writer Ernest Hemingway, skilled repair work by local townspeople, communist protests and calls for peace, a nostalgic visit back six years after the war, and a missed opportunity. In mid-August 1944, the Houffalize Bridge, located about 37 miles southeast of Liège, Belgium, was destroyed by the Germans just before the U.S. Army's 22nd Infantry Regiment was about to cross on their press eastward toward Germany's Siegfried Line. The Regiment was led by Col. Charles T. "Buck" Lanham, a wiry, hard-charging commander, hell-bent against ceding ground to the "chickenspitter" Germans and headed toward their Western defenses.¹ By this point in the war, Lanham had developed a brothers-in-arms friendship with Hemingway and



Col. Charles T. "Buck" Lanham on the bridge in Belgium. Photo from author's collection.

welcomed the charismatic writer to accompany his men.

According to Hemingway's official biographer Carlos Baker, when the 22nd approached the bridge, Lanham's engineers were far to the rear of the advancing column, but the appreciative local citizens set to work at once to repair the bridge. Drawing on material provided by Lanham, Baker wrote that the artisans of Houffalize were "digging out the debris, snaking timbers, building buttresses, hauling and nailing planks, and making a bridge capable of carrying all vehicles up to heavy tanks," and within an hour had constructed a new bridge.²

Meanwhile, Hemingway had taken a different route to the village, but met up with Lanham, and the two friends perched on a fence overlooking the Ourthe River to watch the construction progress. Bystanders appreciating Hemingway's tremendous physique assumed he was a general. Hemingway deployed one of his signature moves with curious interlocutors: pulling their leg. The 45-year-old Hemingway said *quel dommage*, but he was only a captain. *Comment c'est possible* at his age? Because he never learned to read or write, said Hemingway with another yank. Lanham's unpublished *Memoirs* describe how the colonel and the accomplished writer nearly fell into the river below, seized with laughter over this prank.³ Through the 17 years of their epistolary friendship, which lasted until Hemingway's death in 1961, the two men shared humorous exchanges, with Hemingway's expression often laugh-out-loud funny while Lanham's was more prone to knickers-in-a-twist self-mockery. Their letters shared chuckles using wit, satire, sarcasm, quips and other high- and low-brow anecdotes set down to amuse each other.

Several previously unpublished accounts from Lanham's personal letters and his official reports provide real-time snapshots of the 22nd's movements just before and just after crossing the Houffalize Bridge, and mention Hemingway. On 7 August 1944, Lanham wrote his wife, Mary "Pete" Lanham, that he is doing well and "still full of fight."⁴ His unit is being recommended for a citation, and he is proud as hell of them and dying to tell her of the role they played; meanwhile she

should look for the details to be reported in the *Washington Star* and the *Washington Post*. Lanham wrote he ran into Hemingway in a hot spot, and six German SS members had just surrendered to him. This is a rare instance documenting Hemingway's active participation in the battle action. As at the Houffalize Bridge, some local French people mistook Hemingway for a "high mucky-muck," wrote Lanham, and presented him with two bottles of fine champagne, which he shared with Lanham. Lanham tells his wife "We are really socking it to these bastards right now but there is a price for everything" and he must sign off as things are popping.⁵

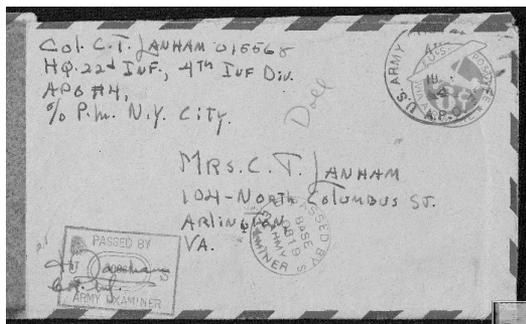


Photo of the letter from Col. Lanham to Mrs. Lanham. Photo courtesy of Princeton University

Then, on 14 August 1944, from France and still mindful of censorship, Lanham wrote to Helen Rising, the author's grandmother, that he is proud of his regiment and has been awarded a Purple Heart: "We continue to fight and we continue to make excellent progress. My outfit has made history with a

capital H but the story has not yet been released. Someday before long I'll be able to tell you all about it. In the meantime, suffice it to say that I am plenty proud of the Double Deucers."⁶

On 7 September 1944, Lanham wrote Rising that he has been fighting steadily and covering enormous distances and is a stranger to sleep. Following the liberation of Paris several weeks earlier, Lanham reports the Germans are in heavy disarray and "we have struck him some terrible blows. Three days ago I trapped one of his regiments by a double envelopment and by getting part of my heavy armor across a river 25 minutes after he had blown the bridge under my nose. I destroyed that regiment 100 %. It was a fearful shambles for I called in my air support to finish the job. I have seen a lot of terrible things here but nothing quite as terrible as that. I took some 1,500 survivors' prisoner."⁷ Lanham is probably referring to the Houffalize Bridge crossing, given the date of his letter and the timely repair of the bridge. Lanham is proud of his great combat team's accomplishments, noting "the gang really did their stuff," leaving a swath of distinction in their wake.⁸ They have taken thousands of prisoners and largely turned them over to the French Forces of the Interior (FFI).

by the heaviest vehicles of the combat team. The report also contains the following entry: "Ernest Hemingway, the noted writer, who had been with the Combat Team at HOUFFALIZE on 10 September, joined the Combat Team again at SCHWEILER, 13 September, and stayed there while the Combat Team was at BUCHET. He visited the Combat Team many times to interview the Commanding Officer and the men who participated in the cracking of the SIEGFRIED LINE. The information he secured for a series of magazine articles and contemplated books would prove conclusively, he said, that Combat Team 22 had been the first American unit into Germany."¹¹

Hemingway's reporting aimed to do just that. The opening paragraph of Hemingway's article "War in the Siegfried Line" for the 18 November 1944 issue of *Collier's* magazine addresses which American forces broke the line. Wishing to get his article into print without being held up by government censors, Hemingway wrote that a lot of people will talk about breaking the line and being first into Germany, and a lot of them will be wrong. So up front his article states it will make no claims. But in paragraph two he wrote: "The infantry cracked the Siegfried Line."¹² Hemingway writes in first person, describing the forested terrain, the dust and yellow smoke from artillery weapons, the gale-force rain and wind, the traces of the enemy's forces they were following in what he called the "rat race," the two-fold German defenses, the first they encountered not being the real line, and finally: "the dark forest wall of the Schnee Eifel range where the dragon lived." From here Hemingway turned his story over to the 22nd Infantry's Operations Officer Captain Howard Blazzard, through whose blow-by-blow account the reader would learn what happens in combat. In his article, Hemingway used a dual point of view device to set the scene based on his interviews with Lanham and his men, and then ceded the narrative to Blazzard.

Blazzard's soldier-speak description of the ten days of fighting covered the units, movements, terrain, weaponry, attacks, and casualties involved in the breach, culminating in many German dead and more prisoners than they could guard. Hemingway agreed with Blazzard's view that the story is probably worthy of screen treatment, and quoted Lanham as saying he often felt like he was in a Grade B picture, envisioning where he would enter the scene. Hemingway thought the film's producers would have difficulty portraying the gruesome deaths of the German SS troops. His sad, understated conclusion was it would have been better for Germany "not to have started this war in the first place."¹³

Lanham had referenced himself appearing in a Grade B movie: in a 15 September 1944 letter to Rising, he wrote "yesterday was the

toughest day of my life - & today is no cinch. Yesterday in a very bad situation I had to act like a Hollywood movie Colonel in a Grade B movie and personally lead a battalion in a charge up a terribly endless hill against formidable permanent fortification."¹⁴ One of Lanham's runners was shot point-blank from a port-hole in a camouflaged bunker, and his team was charged by five SS men who emerged from an underground bunker, leading to a firefight culminating in Lanham's men blowing off the steel door and taking out 37 SS fighters still alive. Later that afternoon, Lanham wrote that his tank destroyers took out four more bunkers and captured more prisoners. Lanham finds his personal luck is unbelievable, for snipers have shot at him many times but he has escaped with only a few bullet holes through his clothes. In the same letter, Lanham tells Rising that Hemingway is writing him up for *Collier's*: "He seems to think I am a pretty good soldier, which pleases me, for he is without question the bravest man I have ever seen."¹⁵

The Houffalize Bridge spans several World War II motifs, including destruction and rebuilding, a path forward for the Allied advance, solidarity between the American troops and the resourceful Belgian villagers, and a demonstration of only-in-wartime levity between a regimental commander and his famous writer friend. The stone bridge stands today as a flower-bedecked monument with plaques expressing Lanham's gratitude toward the town's skilled artisans who built a new bridge in 45 minutes.

In 1950, Lanham was posted to Brussels as Chief of the Military Assistance Group for Belgium and Luxembourg, and that autumn



Collier's Magazine reported on the action at Houffalize Bridge. Photo from authors' collection

he took his daughter, his secretary, and an aide on a trip to some of his war haunts. In October 1950, his daughter Shirley Lanham wrote to family friend Helen Rising about their trip, describing war scars that remained at a site of one of its deadliest battles: "Came back to Brussels three days later by way of Hürtgen Forest and Grosshau so that Dad could show us the terrain he fought over. Helen, they're still pulling the bodies of Germans and Americans out of Hürtgen Forest... and the German recovery workers are getting blown up every day there by the countless unexploded mines. The forest is nothing but a mass of splintered poles. They can't even cut them down because so much metal is imbedded in them that it dulls the axes and saws."¹⁶ As of mid-2025, soldiers' remains from Hürtgen Forest were still being identified and returned home by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.¹⁷

Shirley continued her letter, noting that "from Luxemburg we drove back to Belgium by way of the Ardennes and Bastogne. The Belgians have built a magnificent star-shaped memorial on a hill at Bastogne in memory of the Americans who fought there. On it are carved the names of all 48 states and an inscription runs around the walls, telling of the battle. Went next to Houffalize, Belgium, where Dad fought and where the new bridge has been built in honor of Dad, with inscriptions of what he wrote to the mayor put up in English and French in bronze plaques on either side."¹⁸

Lanham did not claim the bridge was dedicated to him, but in his *Memoirs* described his surprise at learning about the bridge opening ceremony and his name on the plaque, observing the strange coincidence that he was serving so nearby, unbeknownst to the Belgian government. "On our way back to Brussels we spent one night in a



The Houffalize Bridge as it appears today. *Photo courtesy of Julien Woestyn*

small hotel in the grand Duchy of Luxembourg. At breakfast the next morning I picked up a Belgian newspaper and to my astonishment saw the picture of a bridge on the front page under the caption 'Houffalize.'

¹⁹ Lanham learned that on the preceding day, Houffalize had formally dedicated and opened a new bridge, which Lanham thought

was a handsome structure for a town so small. “The picture showed two fairly large bronze tablets on the bridge — one on each side, about midway. One was in French, the other in English. The inscription was a sentence from the letter that I had written to the mayor of Houffalize seven (sic) years before. I’m quite certain that had the good burgers of Houffalize realized that I was stationed in Brussels, they would have invited me to the ceremony.”²⁰

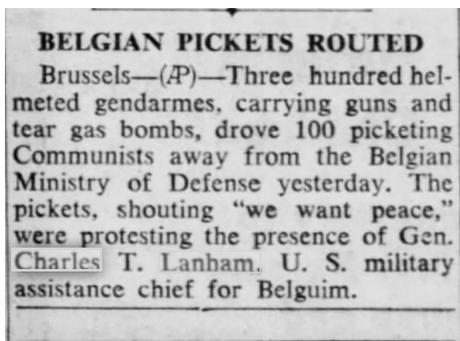


The plaque on bridge dedicated to the action in 1944. Photo courtesy of Julien Woestyn

the borders of the fatherland. Hemingway was at his gayest and wittiest.” Lanham said both he and Hemingway remembered this “little segment of time with a fond nostalgia.”²² Hemingway’s short story “The Monument” featuring the Houffalize bridge and Lanham was published in 2019, 58 years after the writer’s death. Hemingway narrates the story, describing the bridge-building, with a horse-drawn boat carrying a load of stones down the river to the site. They would fill gasoline drums from the garages in town with stones, which would form the foundation of the bridge, while other horse-drawn carts tracked in logs from the sawmill to span the overpass. Everyone in sight not clearing the road was building the bridge. In the story, Hemingway characterizes his friendship with Lanham as good as that between two men can be, so close one knew what the other was thinking without speaking. Hemingway asks the colonel if he wants him to see how the bridge was coming along, and quotes Lanham wryly saying “No. Do you want me to wave my arms and say, ‘Faster! Faster!’”²³ At the end of the story, Hemingway says Buck wrote to him about the monument on the bridge, but sorrowfully notes that the town of Houffalize was destroyed that December, his friends from the war are dead, missing, or in jail, and the only son he has who would go to the monument and “tell you what it says true” works in Portland, Oregon.²⁴

Some who did not feel nostalgic for the heady war days were the

Lanham sent a copy of the *Le Soir* press article to Hemingway in Cuba and recalled that the writer was “oddly moved by the story of our bridge.”²¹ Reminiscing about the day they crossed the Houffalize bridge, Lanham wrote, “This was a happy period for all of us. It was full of laughter and heady with victory. After all, we were standing virtually on



A news clipping from the Associated Press reporting on gendarmes defending the bridge from protesters after the war. *Image from the Associated Press.*

Belgian communists, about 100 of whom picketed the Belgian Ministry of Defense in February 1950, protesting Lanham's presence and shouting "We want peace."²⁵ In a March 1950 letter to Dr. William Menninger, with whom he had served when Dr. Menninger was chief Army psychiatrist, Lanham teased his friend for not reading the papers and noted U.S. military aid program was a billion and a half

dollars destined for eight nations of the North Atlantic Treaty. In his work heading up the Army, Navy, and Air programs for Belgium and Luxembourg, Lanham said the plan was to rearm Western Europe "against commie aggression," and the job was rough and delicate.²⁶ For its part, the Belgian government valued Lanham's support to their country, awarding him three decorations: the Belgian Order of Leopold in the degree of Officer, the Belgian Croix de Guerre with palm, and the Belgian Fourragère.

In July 1945, Lanham found himself with some down time in Czechoslovakia while his unit was recuperating. He told Hemingway about re-reading the Spanish Civil War novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and pondering the book's metaphor of a destroyed bridge. We all have our bridges, Lanham wrote, little ones, big ones, necessary and unnecessary ones, stupid and smart ones. Hemingway had gone back to Cuba, and he and Lanham missed each other's company and the mission-driven camaraderie they had both felt during the war. Lanham enthused to Hemingway about the novel: "God, how are you are in the book! You live and breathe in every line of it. Over and over again nostalgia would hit me in a phrase, a sentence, a thought." Lanham fondly recalled time spent in his tiny mobile command trailer with Hemingway during the Hürtgen Forest battles and gives Hemingway's work his highest compliments: "as a soldier of swords it turned my very guts over inside and probed the dark places of my heart with needles of light. Only a soldier could've written that book, only a man who has fought. And surely only a soldier can truly understand it."²⁷ This praise would have been meaningful for Hemingway, an authority on war who considered himself a citizen-soldier and was proud of his adoption by Lanham's unit. *For Whom*

the Bell Tolls was published in 1940, and in the eight decades since, readers have been analyzing the symbolism of the dynamited bridge, with power, connection, destruction, futility, dilemmas, and duty only some of the possible meanings.

Modern-day searches for terms including Hemingway and bridge reveal a different bridge story. The "Hemingway Bridge" is named for Hemingway's technique of concluding his writing for the day only after he knew what was coming next.²⁸ Hemingway maintained an up-at-first-light writing regimen, working at his stand-up bedroom desk while others slept, and his discipline and purposeful daily word counting long have been studied by aspiring writers. Perhaps this story will serve as a small bridge for current students of history and Hemingway to learn some of what has gone before, even though we may not know what is coming next.

ENDNOTES

1. Ernest Hemingway, "War in the Siegfried Line," *Collier's Magazine*, November 18, 1944, p.70.
2. Carlos Baker. *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969, p. 423.
3. Charles T. Lanham, Unpublished Memoirs, 10. Bernice Kert Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.
4. Letter from Lanham to Mrs. Mary "Pete" Lanham, August 7, 1944. Charles T. Lanham Papers, Princeton University Library.
5. Ibid.
6. Letter from Lanham to Mrs. Helen Rising, August 14, 1944. Authors' collection.
7. Letter from Lanham to Rising, September 7, 1944. Authors' collection.
8. Ibid.
9. Headquarters 22nd Infantry Daily Operations Report, September 9, 1944, 1-2. National Archives and Records Administration.
10. Ibid.
11. Headquarters 22nd Infantry Action Against Enemy, Reports After/ After Action Report for September 1944, pp. 1-3. National Archives and Records Administration.
12. Hemingway, "War in the Siegfried Line," p. 18.
13. Hemingway, "War in the Siegfried Line," p. 73.
14. Letter from Lanham to Rising, September 15, 1944. Authors' collection.
15. Ibid

16. Letter from Shirley Lanham to Rising, October 8, 1950.
17. Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency press release, September 10, 2025 reporting that the remains of Pvt. Alfred T. Langevin of East Weymouth, Massachusetts had been accounted for on July 30, 2025. Langevin was reported missing in action on November 6, 1944 during intense combat in Germany's Hürtgen Forest.
18. Letter from Shirley Lanham to Rising, October 8, 1950.
19. Lanham *Memoirs*, p. 11.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid, p. 12
22. Ibid.
23. Ernest Hemingway, "The Monument," published as Appendix IV in Ernest Hemingway *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, The Hemingway Library Edition. Scribner: New York July 2020, p. 541.
24. Hemingway, "The Monument," pp. 542-543.
25. Associated Press, "Belgian Pickets Routed," *Rochester, NY Democrat and Chronicle*, 24 February 1950.
26. Letter from Lanham to Dr. William Menninger, March 25, 1950. Kansas Historical Society, Topeka Kansas.
27. Letter from Lanham to Hemingway, July 1, 1945. Ernest Hemingway Personal Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.
28. Multiple internet articles on writing productivity refer to the Hemingway bridge method