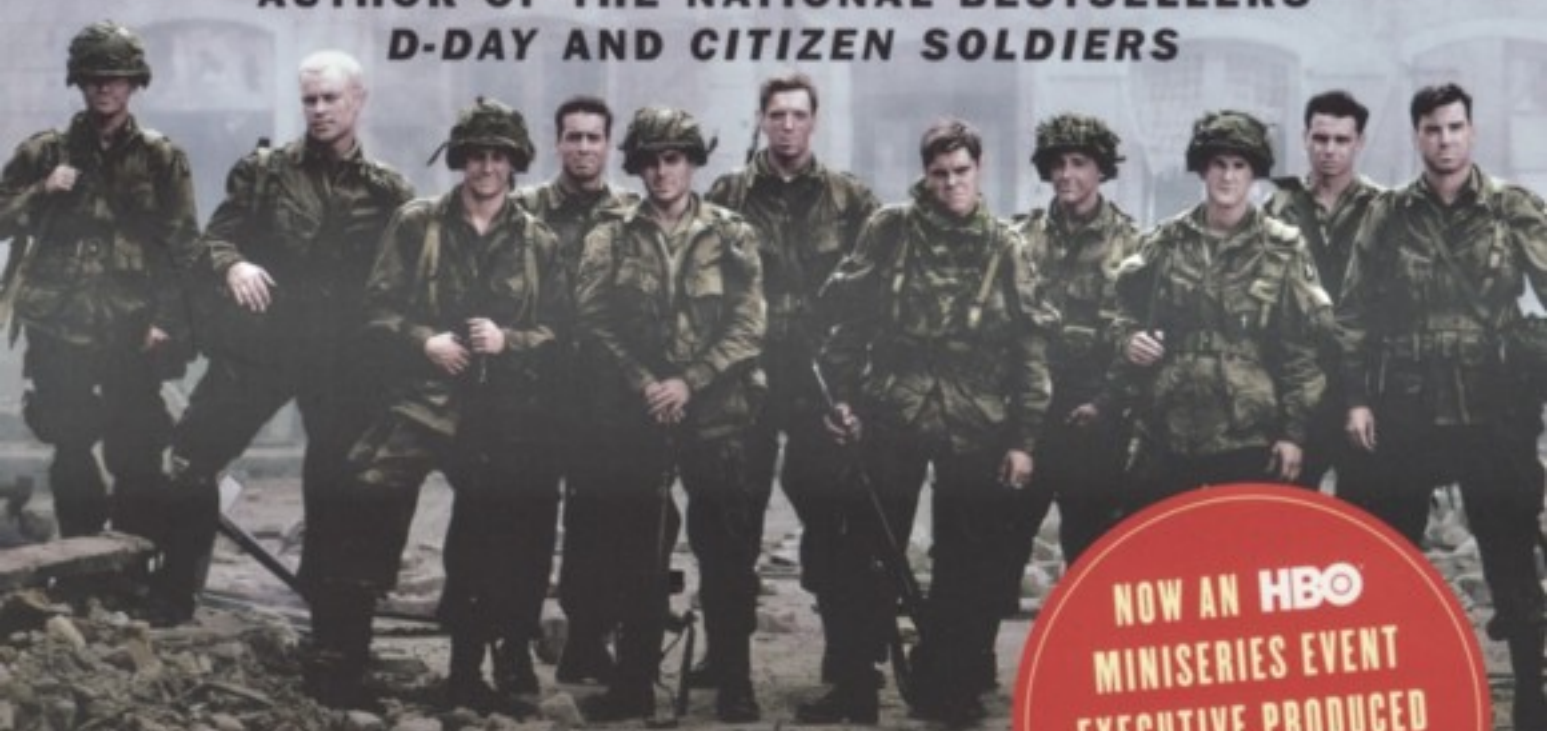
THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

STEPHEN E. AMBROSE

AUTHOR OF THE NATIONAL BESTSELLERS
D-DAY AND *CITIZEN SOLDIERS*



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WITH A NEW FOREWORD BY THE AUTHOR

BAND OF BROTHERS

E COMPANY, 506TH REGIMENT, 101ST AIRBORNE
FROM NORMANDY TO HITLER'S EAGLE'S NEST

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"We Wanted Those Wings"

CAMP TOCCOA

July–December 1942

THE MEN OF EASY COMPANY, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, U.S. Army, came from different backgrounds, different parts of the country. They were farmers and coal miners, mountain men and sons of the Deep South. Some were desperately poor, others from the middle class. One came from Harvard, one from Yale, a couple from UCLA. Only one was from the Old Army, only a few came from the National Guard or Reserves. They were citizen soldiers.

They came together in the summer of 1942, by which time the Europeans had been at war for three years. By the late spring of 1944, they had become an elite company of airborne light infantry. Early on the morning of D-Day, in its first combat action, Easy captured and put out of action a German battery of four 105 mm cannon that were looking down on Utah Beach. The company led the way into Carentan, fought in Holland, held the perimeter at Bastogne, led the counteroffensive in the Battle of the Bulge, fought in the Rhineland campaign, and took Hitler's Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden. It had taken almost 150 percent casualties. At the peak of its effectiveness, in Holland in October

1944 and in the Ardennes in January 1945, it was as good a rifle company as there was in the world.

The job completed, the company disbanded, the men went home.

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Each of the 140 men and seven officers who formed the original company followed a different route to its birthplace, Camp Toccoa, Georgia, but they had some things in common. They were young, born since the Great War. They were white, because the U.S. Army in World War II was segregated. With three exceptions, they were unmarried. Most had been hunters and athletes in high school.

They were special in their values. They put a premium on physical well-being, hierarchical authority, and being part of an elite unit. They were idealists, eager to merge themselves into a group fighting for a cause, actively seeking an outfit with which they could identify, join, be a part of, relate to as a family.

They volunteered for the paratroopers, they said, for the thrill, the honor, and the $50 (for enlisted men) or $100 (for officers) monthly bonus paratroopers received. But they really volunteered to jump out of airplanes for two profound, personal reasons. First, in Robert Rader's words, "The desire to be better than the other guy took hold." Each man in his own way had gone through what Richard Winters experienced: a realization that doing his best was a better way of getting through the Army than hanging around with the sad excuses for soldiers they met in the recruiting depots or basic training. They wanted to make their Army time positive, a learning and maturing and challenging experience.

Second, they knew they were going into combat, and they did not want to go in with poorly trained, poorly conditioned, poorly motivated draftees on either side of them. As to choosing between being a paratrooper spearheading the offensive and an ordinary infantryman who could not trust the guy next to him, they decided the greater risk was with the infantry. When the shooting started, they wanted to look up to the guy beside them, not down.

They had been kicked around by the Depression, had the scars to show for it. They had grown up, many of them, without enough to eat, with holes in the soles of their shoes, with ragged sweaters and no car and often not a radio. Their educations had been cut short, either by the Depression or by the war.

"Yet, with this background, I had and still have a great love for my

country," Harry Welsh declared forty-eight years later. Whatever their legitimate complaints about how life had treated them, they had not soured on it or on their country.

They came out of the Depression with many other positive features. They were self-reliant, accustomed to hard work and to taking orders. Through sports or hunting or both, they had gained a sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

They knew they were going into great danger. They knew they would be doing more than their part. They resented having to sacrifice years of their youth to a war they never made. They wanted to throw baseballs, not grenades, shoot a .22 rifle, not an M-1. But having been caught up in the war, they decided to be as positive as possible in their Army careers.

Not that they knew much about airborne, except that it was new and all-volunteer. They had been told that the physical training was tougher than anything they had ever seen, or that any other unit in the Army would undergo, but these young lions were eager for that. They expected that, when they were finished with their training, they would be bigger, stronger, tougher than when they started, and they would have gone through the training with the guys who would be fighting beside them.

"The Depression was over," Carwood Lipton recalled of that summer of 1942, "and I was beginning a new life that would change me profoundly." It would all of them.

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First Lt. Herbert Sobel of Chicago was the initial member of E Company, and its C.O. His executive officer (X.O.) was 2d Lt. Clarence Hester, from northern California. Sobel was Jewish, urban, with a commission from the National Guard. Hester had started as a private, then earned his commission from Officer Candidate's School (OCS). Most of the platoon and assistant platoon leaders were newly commissioned graduates of OCS, including 2d Lts. Dick Winters from Pennsylvania, Walter Moore from California's racetracks, and Lewis Nixon from New York City and Yale. S. L. Matheson was an ROTC graduate from UCLA. At twenty-eight years of age, Sobel was the old man in the group; the others were twenty-four or younger.

The company, along with Dog, Fox, and Battalion HQ Companies, made up the 2d Battalion of the 506th PIR. The battalion commander

"A first-class explanation of what crack infantry troops are like . . . Addicts of military history will relish its finely detailed account. . . . Stephen Ambrose's thorough research and clear organization have produced a highly readable account of the heroic service of this 'band of brothers' he so unstintingly admires."
—San Francisco Chronicle

As good a rifle company as any in the world, Easy Company, 101st Airborne Division, U.S. Army, kept getting the tough assignments—responsible for everything from parachuting into France early D-Day morning to the capture of Hitler's Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden. In *Band of Brothers,* Ambrose tells of the men in this brave unit who fought, went hungry, froze, and died, a company that took 150 percent casualties and considered the Purple Heart a badge of office. Drawing on hours of interviews with survivors as well as the soldiers' journals and letters, Stephen Ambrose recounts the stories, often in the men's own words, of these American heroes.

"As a member of just such a unit . . . I am impressed by how well Mr. Ambrose has captured the true essence of a combat rifle company."
—The New York Times Book Review

"A valuable and fascinating record . . . In these pages, the reader can vicariously walk with the men of E Company, suffer and laugh with them."
—The Times-Picayune

"This is a terrific read for WWII action buffs."
—Publishers Weekly

STEPHEN E. AMBROSE is the author of *Citizen Soldiers, Undaunted Courage, Comrades, The Wild Blue,* and *D-Day,* as well as biographies of Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon. He is founder of the Eisenhower Center and president of the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans. He lives in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, and Helena, Montana.

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