

1,271

Days a Soldier

The Diaries and Letters of
Colonel H.E. Gardiner
as an Armor Officer in
World War II

Edited by Dominic J. Caraccilo

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Published by:
University of North Georgia Press
Dahlonega, Georgia

Printing Support by:
Lightning Source Inc.
La Vergne, Tennessee

Cover and book design by Corey Parson.

ISBN: 978-1-940771-82-3

Printed in the United States of America

For more information, please visit: <http://ung.edu/university-press>
Or e-mail: ungpress@ung.edu

Publisher's Note: UNG Press respects the editor's transparency in publishing Gardiner's letters as he wrote them, noting but not correcting spelling and word choice errors and not identifying but correcting only punctuation errors. That transparency extends to cultural, social, racial, and gender attitudes current in this era, attitudes that to our current era may seem erroneous but from which we may still learn.



For Karen: My Wife, My Life
and
to the soldiers of the 1st Armored Division

Acknowledgements

Especially helpful in this endeavor were the Special Collections Section of the U.S. Military Academy Cadet Library, which initially located the manuscript for me. *1,271 Days a Soldier* has been a quarter century-long endeavor, and many have touched, encountered, and inspired its completion along the way.

A special thanks goes to the late Dr. Martin Blumenson, American military scholar and historian who authored, among several other classics, *Anzio: The Gamble that Failed* (1978), *Kasserine Pass* (2000), *The Patton Papers* (2009), and *Salerno to Cassino* (2015). Dr. Blumenson served as a historical officer with the Third and Seventh Armies in World War II and inspired me to study World War II history and sent me a letter on May 19, 2002, urging me finish and offering his pen as a lead. It is my great misfortune that he passed before this work could come to fruition.

Finally, a thank you to Colonel Gardiner's niece, Mrs. Patricia Issel from Lexington, Kentucky. Pat's assistance has been invaluable as she provided insight, original documents such as photographs and articles from Gardiner's collection, and the excitement and friendship any author would cherish taking on such an insurmountable endeavor.

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Foreword

In his seminal work, *The Face of Battle*, John Keegan studied three battles that occurred in the same geographic area but were separated in time across five centuries. Although Keegan identified changes in technology and tactics that occurred over time, his study revealed one striking continuity:

What battles have in common is human: the behavior of men struggling to reconcile their instinct for self-preservation, their sense of honor and the achievement of some aim over which other men are ready to kill them. The study of battle is therefore always a study of fear and usually of courage, always of leadership, usually of obedience; always of compulsion, sometimes of insubordination; always of anxiety, sometimes of elation or catharsis; always of uncertainty and doubt, misinformation and misapprehension, usually also of faith and sometimes of vision; always of violence, sometimes also of cruelty, self-sacrifice, compassion; above all, it is always a study of solidarity and usually also of disintegration for it is toward the disintegration of human groups that battle is directed.¹

In *1,271 Days a Soldier*, Colonel H. E. Gardiner's experience reveals a human and personal perspective on the most destructive war in history. The editor, Dominic J. Caraccilo, has transformed Colonel Gardiner's

1 John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, (London: Viking Press, 1977), 83.

journal articles and personal letters into an invaluable resource for researchers and a compelling story for those who want to understand better the trials, tribulations, emotions, sacrifices, and rewards associated with service across four years of war from the United States to Ireland to Africa to Continental Europe.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, America mobilized. The U.S. Army grew 44-fold, from 190,000 soldiers to almost 8.5 million. Virtually every American had a family member in harm's way and made a deep emotional investment in the Army. During World War II, the U.S. military sustained almost 300,000 battle deaths and about 100,000 deaths from other causes. Those who returned from the war after experiencing tough, harrowing fighting rarely spoke of their experiences. That is why Colonel Gardiner's personal account has proven invaluable in understanding at least one officer's odyssey. Now this edited collection makes his story accessible to general readers as well as researchers and historians. As the World War II generation fades into the twilight, Caraccilo has given Americans an opportunity to understand better how brave soldiers and officers like Colonel Gardiner helped save the free world from Nazi Fascism.

Gardiner's account remains relevant beyond its contribution to historical understanding. His story helps us understand the Army as a living historical community. *1,271 Days a Soldier* sheds light and understanding on the character, commitment, and ethos of American soldiers today. At a time when few Americans are directly connected to our professional military, Colonel Gardiner's story may help American citizens understand better the warriors who fight in their name.

H. R. McMaster

Lieutenant General, U.S. Army (Retired)

26th National Security Advisor to the President of the United States

Preface

In the mid-to-late 1990s, I served as an Assistant Professor for Systems Engineering at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. During my tenure on a campus rife with history, I came across the boxed diaries, letters, and papers belonging to Colonel Henry Edward (H. E.) Gardiner in the Cadet Library Archives. What led me to peruse the top floor archives, tucked away in the centuries-old historical repository, was a parallel effort to edit and publish *Surviving Bataan and Beyond: Colonel Irvin Alexander's Odyssey as a Japanese Prisoner of War* (Stackpole, 1999). Much like the effort I put into editing Alexander's story, capturing Colonel Gardiner's notes, diaries, letters, and manuscripts was, while daunting, an intriguing prospect for a book. In fact, *1,271 Days* was slowly coming to realization in draft form when, in 2001, the War on Terrorism shifted my attention to fighting a war and subsequently penning works associated with strategy and combat. As a result, this work was put into abeyance until now.

My original interest in transforming a historical set of disparate notes and diaries came from a colleague in the late 1990s: then-Major Thomas T. Smith, who edited *A Dose of Frontier Soldiering: The Memoirs of Corporal E.A. Bode, Frontier Regular Infantry 1877—1882* (University of Nebraska Press, 1994). Smith told me that if I wanted to succeed in providing a quality edited version of these types of volumes, I would have to become an expert on the topic. This proved true with the Bataan book

and, in similar fashion, with the Gardiner story. Whether I have become an expert or not, I will leave to the reader.

I learned from my work on *Surviving Bataan and Beyond* that—despite having written my own combat memoir and infusing my own experiences in other works during my three decades of writing about strategy, operational art, and my own military service—editing someone else’s experiences is far more difficult than my own. After spending nearly two decades on this manuscript, I can affirm that compiling a text to make up *1,271 Days* was no small task.

While it is important that the reader understands the daily entries coupled with a paralleling operational and strategic history of World War II, this book is more than just a historical chronology of a U.S. Army colonel’s war tenure. It is about the perseverance of an army officer determined to capture his experiences every day for nearly four years. While other WWII accounts exist, few cover a mid-level officer’s daily experiences in multiple theaters.

In the late 1990s, I was given the opportunity to provide “50 years ago this month” World War II additions to the *VFW Magazine*. Readers’ interest in those accounts eventually led to a two-set volume titled *The Faces of Victory* (Addax Pub Group Inc., 1995) which recounted the salient battles in the Pacific region and on the African and European continents. While there was great interest in the war’s Golden Anniversary, one can expect that interest in the Diamond Anniversary will be just as great, if not more.

The ranks of veterans who served in World War II are quickly diminishing, a loss which draws an added interest to their historical legacy. According to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs statistics, 496,777 of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II were alive in 2018 and their number was decreasing by almost 400 a day.² One can expect a similar peak of interest in stories that involve this vanishing population.

2 Hollis, John D. “Honor our WWII veterans while they are still among us,” retrieved on October 17, 2019, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/05/26/honor-our-wwii-veterans-while-they-are-still-among-us/>

The diaries kept by World War II soldiers are very rare, given that keeping a chronological journal was generally forbidden due to the danger of its falling into enemy hands. Gardiner's work is one of the few that made it through the war intact.

Dominic J. Caraccilo
Editor

Introduction

This work is the definitive account of Colonel H. E. Gardiner's World War II service. Coupling the chronology provided with daily entries, it offers a paralleling perspective of Gardiner's combat and personal experiences in line with the events of the Second World War. This edited version, complete with the editor's extensive footnotes, places Gardiner in step with the famous, and sometime infamous, personalities and events of the war.

1,271 Days a Soldier: The Diaries and Letters of Colonel H.E. Gardiner as an Armor Officer in World War II is a selection of journal entries and personal letters neatly summing up Colonel H. E. Gardiner's experiences during the Second World War. His recollection of his duty in the United States, Ireland, Africa, and on the European continent is unique in many respects, not the least being the intriguing first-hand experiences of an operational level ranking officer in multiple theaters over the span of three and a half years during the Second World War.

In its rawest form, the Gardiner odyssey is a commonly used reference and resource for scholars, historians, and laymen. References accredited to the Gardiner diaries and letters frequently find their way into military history manuscripts and as supporting evidence for larger volumes of work. Indeed, one can find Gardiner's experiences cited in countless volumes, most notably about the notorious actions at the Kasserine Pass.

From the shock of the initial volley of violence registered by Gardiner during the Day of Infamy radio broadcast to the final days of the war while

operating on the “soft underbelly” of Hitler’s Europe, these diaries and letters cover the prelude to and the fighting in the African and European theaters. The historical perspective makes this work interesting, but the human perspective of a midlevel officer makes *1,271 Days* a rare find. The diary entries and letters are written with all the emotion of someone who endured nearly four years of high-intensity conflict, coupled with long periods of boredom and interjected with periods of frivolity.

Much research and cross-referencing were needed to fully identify who the various individuals in the diaries and letters are; to explain what the strategic, operational, and tactical strategy of the war or battle was at any given time; and to clarify any other ideas that left the reader begging for more information. Detailed footnotes, photographs and captions, and maps put each journal entry in context so the reader may gain a better appreciation of the full spectrum of war that was unfolding at any given time in the work. The footnotes provide encouragement for the reader to study the readily-accessible referenced citations while reading the book to attain a better understanding of what took place, when, and by whom.

As per the original manuscript, entries with a date to the left indicate a dairy entry, while letters are indicated by a date Gardiner justified right. Unless there was a salutation, the letter was written to Gardiner’s mother.

Henry Edward (H. E.) Gardiner

Henry Edward (H. E.) Gardiner was born in Montana on June 30, 1905. He was raised on a ranch near Anaconda, attending a country grade school and the Anaconda High School. In 1928, he graduated from Montana State College where he took the required two years in infantry ROTC. That same year, he entered Cornell University, from which he received a law degree in 1931, and became a member of the Chicago Bar Association. Prior to moving Chicago in 1934 to serve as council for the Anaconda Wire and Cable Co., Gardiner had been

employed in the legal department of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company in Butte, Montana.



Figure 1: Lieutenant Colonel Henry E. Gardiner bivouacking during pre-deployment training during the Louisiana Maneuvers (Photograph from the Patricia Issel Collection)

Gardiner enlisted in Troop C (popularly known as The Chicago Black Horse Troop) on November 25, 1935, and was serving his second enlistment as a sergeant when he was commissioned as a second lieutenant on June 11, 1940.³ He was promoted to a First Lieutenant on August 23, 1940.

3 Elting, John R. (1988). *Military Uniforms in America: The Modern Era from 1868*. Presidio Press. p. 92.

At the time of Pearl Harbor, Gardiner was a First Lieutenant commanding a troop in the horse squadron of the 106th Cavalry (Horse-Mechanized) stationed at Camp Livingston, Louisiana.⁴ He was called to active duty on November 25, 1940, when Troop “C” of the 106th Cavalry, an Illinois National Guard unit from Chicago, was inducted into Federal Service.⁵

In January 1941, the 106th Cavalry, which comprised a horse squadron from Chicago and a mechanized squadron from downstate Illinois, moved to Louisiana to train. During the summer of that year, Gardiner attended the Cavalry School at Fort Riley, Kansas, as a student taking the basic course. Upon graduation, he was promoted to captain on December 13, 1941.

At the outbreak of the war, he was assigned to the Fifth Corps Headquarters, and, in May 1942, he was deployed overseas with the 13th Armored Division. Gardiner was promoted to major on October 21, 1942, and then lieutenant colonel on January 27, 1943. He served as a battalion commander and regimental executive officer until his discharge at the rank of colonel in October 1945.⁶

In February 1943, then-Lieutenant Colonel Gardiner was awarded the nation’s second highest combat award, the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC), for actions as a Lieutenant Colonel in command of a squadron in North Africa (see Figure 2 below).⁷

4 Camp Livingston, Louisiana, located about twelve miles north of Alexandria, Louisiana, was created in 1940. First known as Camp Tioga, it was renamed Camp Livingston in honor of Chancellor Robert R. Livingston, negotiator of the Louisiana Purchase. The camp formed part of a larger complex of military bases in Central Louisiana that included Camps Claiborne, Polk, and Beauregard, as well as Esler Field, retrieved on October 30, 2019, from [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Camp_Livingston_\(detention_facility\)/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Camp_Livingston_(detention_facility)/)

5 Before World War II, the 106th Cavalry was a National Guard unit based in Chicago, Illinois. Prior to World War I and the Spanish American War, it had been known as the 1st Illinois Volunteer Cavalry. The 106th underwent several different reorganizations until September 1, 1940, when it was re-designated the 1st Squadron, 106th Cavalry (Horse-Mechanized). The 106th was inducted into federal service on November 25, 1940 in Chicago. The Regiment moved to Camp Livingston, Louisiana, on January 3, 1941, under command of V Corps. *Armor: The Cavalry Journal* 48: 93 (1939), retrieved on October 30, 2019.

6 Favager, D. J. *The History of the Gardiners of Whitchurch, Liverpool and Wallasey: Volume 2: Liverpool*. (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2019), location 3756 of the Kindle Edition.

7 For more on the actions taken to earn such a distinguished award, refer to Gardiner’s diary input dated February 4, 1943, retrieved on October 31, 2019, from <http://valor.militarytimes.com/recipient.php?recipientid=31043>

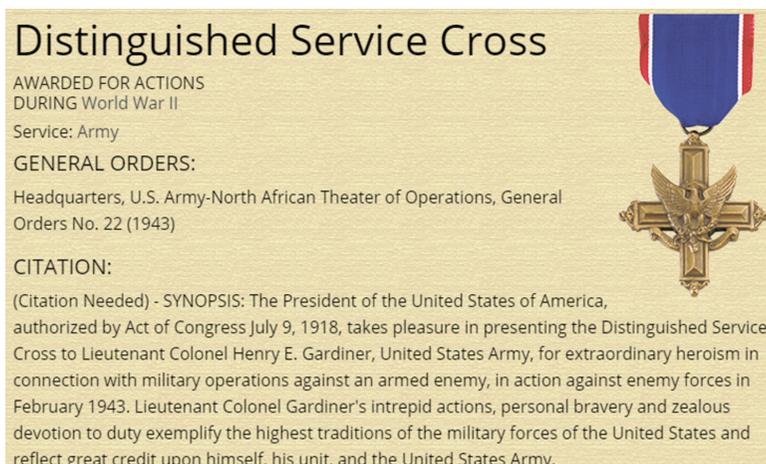


Figure 2: Distinguished Service Cross citation for then-LTC Henry E. Gardiner

Starting with his college days, Henry kept a diary. During the war, this practice was followed where permitted and when conditions would allow. Infrequently, there were breaks in the continuity of this diary-keeping due to the conditions of combat, a need to move hastily, and his convalescing after being wounded. At times where an entry was attempted, by his own admission, the contents were “very sketchy” and Gardiner filled any noticeable gap in entries with extracts from letters he received and wrote to family and friends throughout the war. Perhaps Gardiner got his passion (or least a keen interest) in journal keeping from his paternal grandmother who did the same during her trip “up the Missouri” with Gardiner’s paternal grandfather in 1879, when the family migrated from Fort Benton, Montana, some 200 miles north into Bozeman, Montana.⁸

The following are extracts from the countless letters and diary inserts transposed from by Colonel Gardiner’s office secretary upon his return from the European Continent in 1945. In discussions with various acquaintances, the name of the secretary remains unknown. I can only assume that her work in transcribing the letters and diaries resulted in

⁸ Gardiner, Henry E. “Interview with the Montana Historical Society with Michael Malone,” Montana State University and Bill Lang, Montana Historical Society. (Bozeman, MT: November 10, 1987), 1.

a transposition of the documents without edit. As in any manuscript, there are errors in spelling, word choice, and punctuation. In this edition, I address word errors with corrected versions in square brackets. For punctuation errors, I correct them throughout without the need to identify each. The reader will note that, in some letters and entries, Gardiner writes about “peeps” when referencing what we know as ¼-ton trucks or “jeeps.” This is not a typo. World War II soldiers did in fact call their vehicles peeps.⁹ I will clarify in more detail such references as these as they reveal themselves in the manuscript.

By his own admission, Gardiner decided not to include portions of his documents that were intimate, personal, or (what he claims) inappropriate as part of the original transcribed manuscript. One can surmise what was not included, and I would venture to say that, after reading the entire manuscript, the reader would agree that it was minimal or, in any case, insignificant.

I intend not to publish here every letter and written entry into a body of work but to provide a manuscript rife with history identifying Gardiner’s odyssey. What follows are salient entries of Gardiner’s diaries and letters that I chose to tether together chronologically, providing the reader a sense of what it was like for Gardiner during his 1,271 days as a soldier.

9 Many soldiers referred to what is commonly known today as a Jeep (¼-ton truck or M151) as a “peep” since the vehicle was considered to be a reconnaissance car, as in “peeping” on the enemy. Larger ½-ton or ¾-ton Command Reconnaissance cars were often called “beeps” for “big Jeeps.” A May 2, 1942, *Colliers* magazine features an article called “Our Fighting Men” and is about vehicle names and a need to standardize such. This article claims that a survey was done asking soldiers to write in and vote for names for vehicles, and the results were reportedly as such:

- Peep, name for the ¼-ton Bantam, GP (General Purpose)
- Jeep, name for the ½-ton reconnaissance command car
- Weapons Carrier, name for the ½-ton open cab Dodge
- Pickup, name for the ½-ton closed cab Dodge
- Carryall, name for the ¾-ton Dodge ambulance