

THE OFFICER

Captain, Armored Infantry, U.S.A.

Thomas C. Marks, Jr.*

Howard Oleck's military career in the Second World War consisted, as I understand it, of two phases that probably overlapped to some extent. The fighting part of Howard's career was with armored infantry units of the Third Army. Its commander in the European Campaign was General George S. Patton, Jr., "Old Blood and Guts." To make this tribute to Howard more interesting, I decided to illustrate it with a few of journalist Bill Mauldin's famous cartoons. Like Howard, Mauldin was a soldier who was "there."

Howard was one of Patton's officers. What was the Third Army really like? Although the following cartoon is a bit of an overstatement, it illustrates Patton's strongly held view that soldiers fought better when they looked like soldiers. I'm sure Howard agreed.

\$sscartoon\$ss¹

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1. BILL MAULDIN, THE BRASS RING 277 (W.W. Norton & Co. 1971).

Howard's only recorded near brush with G.S.P., Jr., occurred when Howard's jeep had been driven off the road and deep into a ditch in a strafing run by the Germans' new jet fighter plane, the ME 262. From this vantage point, in what tankers call "hull defilade," Howard and his driver watched as Patton chewed out another junior officer whose jeep had also been run off the road by the German jet. As I recall Howard telling the story, Patton was screaming at the other officer for taking cover rather than shooting back at the jet with the .30-caliber machine gun mounted on the jeep. Bill Mauldin never drew this one, so my somewhat lesser talent will have to do.

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2. Thomas Marks, Drawing on file with *Stetson Law Review* (1997).

Howard and his driver watch Patton's tirade from the safety of hull defilade.

I have no doubt that Howard was a soldier's soldier and took care of the troops. I can easily imagine Howard being the officer in the next two cartoons.

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3. BILL MAULDIN, UP FRONT 79 (Aeonian Press 1978) (1945).

§§cartoon§§⁴

Howard was an armored infantry officer. The word may call up visions of massed tanks and half-track borne infantry charging across a plain like cavalry of old. The reality is that it was dirty and

4. *Id.* at 86.

dangerous. Its essence is illustrated by the following two cartoons.

\$\$cartoon\$\$⁵
\$\$cartoon\$\$⁶

5. *Id.* at 15.

6. *Id.* at 101.

The second phase of Howard's military career was as a combat historian. This involved, among other things, interrogating German prisoners of war, but not usually enlisted men as shown in the following cartoon. Instead, Howard interviewed senior officers up to, as I understand it, the rank of field marshal. Incidentally, an "88" was probably the best dual purpose antiaircraft-antitank gun used by any army in the Second World War. Also serving as the main armament of German heavy tanks, it was a weapon both feared and respected.

Howard's commanding officer during this phase of his military career was the well-known military historian S.L.A. Marshall. Another of his duties as combat historian was to observe units in combat and compile reports so that Supreme Headquarters Allied Forces Europe could have a clearer picture of what was happening. After V.E. Day, he was tasked first with the job of assembling important records and then was asked to write the history of the planning of Operation Overlord, the cross-Channel invasion. He wrote three volumes!

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7. *Id.* at 94.

So good was Howard as a combat historian that he was offered the post of historian at West Point. However, Congress had to create the post and it was months before he had word. As his wife, Helen, put it, "We were happily ensconced in Cleveland at Cleveland Marshall Law School and I refused to move home and family back to New York!"

Helen also said that they "never knew if it was the right decision." The profession of law would say that it clearly was!