



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 12, 2011

Maj. Dick Winters, Resquiescat In Pace

When he jumped into Normandy on June 6, 1944 with the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division, Easy Company's Lt. Dick Winters landed with one weapon: his jump knife. As happened to many of his fellow paratroopers, the blast of air on exiting the plane blew away his M-1 Garand and the famous leg bag, concocted by the British to carry more gear.



Yet despite the confusion of D-Day, with paratroopers across Normandy, Winters gathered nearby men and made tracks for his objective at [Sainte-Marie-du-Mont](#). His role in liberating Europe thus began. It ended at Hitler's Eagle's Nest, in Berchtesgaden, high in the Austrian Alps. That was 1945, 66 years ago. On January 2, Winters died.

Winters was not a career soldier. His life was not one in which he was involved, like many American heroes, in two or three different wars and dozens of battles. The defining year, or rather months, of Dick Winters' life, the year that eventually made him a hero to millions of Americans, was June 1944 to May 1945.

"Follow me!" was his command. With those words, [he led 12 men](#) in an attack on Brecourt Manor, just off the Normandy beach and the site of a German artillery battery raining shells on the Allied invaders storming Utah Beach. [That action](#), which saved lives of countless men destined for Utah in the D-Day Invasion, was just the beginning of Winters' illustrious career. The attack on Brecourt was a classic example of a fire-and-manuever attack on a fixed position. He and his dozen men attacked a force of some 50 Germans. For it, he received the [Distinguished Service Cross](#).

After Brecourt, he and his stalwarts [captured Carentan](#), then jumped into Holland for an ill-conceived and ill-fated plan called [Operation Market Garden](#). During Market Garden, Winters [charged ahead](#) of his men in a bayonet attack against a company of Germans, as is seen in the stirring episode "Crossroads," which is part of the 10-part series called "Band of Brothers," produced by Stephen Spielberg and Tom Hanks.

In mid-December, 1944, Easy was trucked to the Bois Jacques woods outside [Bastogne](#) in Belgium to protect the town from what became the last major German offensive of the war — [an attack](#) through the Ardennes that involved nearly a half-million American fighting men called "[The Battle of the Bulge](#)." Easy held firm through January, then pressed forward [to attack](#) the village of Foy. By Spring, Winters and his men were celebrating the end of their war at the [Kehlsteinhaus](#), Adolf Hitler's mountain retreat above Berchtesgaden.



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Despite his heroic record, Winters and the men of Easy were relatively unknown except to war buffs and military historians. Historian Stephen Ambrose gave them a measure of fame with the publication of "[Band of Brothers](#)," his remarkable account of their many exploits. And [then came](#) Spielberg, Hanks and HBO. Now their names — "[Will Bill](#)" [Guarnere](#), [Don Malarkey](#) and [Carwood Lipton](#), to name three — are as familiar in our mouths as household words, to quote [Henry V's speech](#) before the Battle of Agincourt, a line from Shakespeare that gave Ambrose the title for his book.

With the film, Americans for the first time met these amazing heroes: Dick Winters. [Guarnere](#). [Bull Randleman](#). And [Buck Compton](#), the man [who prosecuted Sirhan Sirhan](#). They are heroes to us all, and Winters was a hero to them.

"When he said 'Let's go,' he was right in the front," said [Guarnere](#), who received the [Silver Star](#) for his action at Brecourt and lost a leg during the the siege at Bastogne. "He was never in the back. A leader personified."

Said Easy veteran Babe Heffron, "He was one hell of a guy, one of the greatest soldiers I was ever under. He was a wonderful officer, a wonderful leader. He had what you needed, guts and brains. He took care of his men, that's very important."

Like most warriors, however, Winters wanted peace. After his first day of action, [he promised](#) God that if he made it through the war, he would find a small farm and live in peace. That is what Winters did, becoming a farmer, businessman and entrepreneur. Throughout the years, he never forgot his men, or their place in history.

He opened his memoir of the war, "[Beyond Band of Brothers](#)," with the touching and soft-spoken words so familiar to those who saw his interviews in the film, then rewatched time and again:

I am still haunted by the names and faces of young men, young airborne troopers who never had the opportunity to return home after the war and begin their lives anew. Like most veterans who have shared the hardship of combat, I live with flashbacks — distant memories of an attack on a battery of German artillery on D-Day, an assault on Carentan, a bayonet attack on a dike in Holland, the cold of Bastogne. ... If you had a man who was killed, you looked at him and hoped that he had found peace in death. I'm not sure whether they were fortunate or unfortunate to get out of the war so early. So many men died so that others could live. No one understands why.

To find a quiet peace is the dream of every soldier. For some it takes longer than others. In my own experience, I have discovered that it is far easier to find quiet than to find peace. True peace must come from within oneself. As my wartime buddies join their fallen comrades at an alarming rate, distant memories resurface. The hard times fade and the flashbacks go back to friendly times, to buddies with whom I shared a unique bond, to men who are my brothers in every sense of the word. I live with these men every day.

When Germany surrendered, a German commander turned over his pistol to Dick Winters. In an interview at the close of the television series, Winters discloses that it had never been fired. He then shows us what peace means to the combat soldier. "This pistol has never been fired," [Winters says](#). "There was no blood on it. That's the way all wars should end. With an agreement with no blood on it. And I assure you this pistol has never, never been fired since I've had it. And it will not be fired."

On Sunday, Jan. 2, Dick Winters joined his fallen comrades. He joined those who died in war. And he joined those who died after returning home safely. These latter, with Winters, lived the lives of peace of which they so desperately dreamed during the violent year they fought across Europe.



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The world may be a little less better off for having lost [this kind, gentle soul](#). But it is better for having known him.

*Réquiem ætérnam dona ei Dómine; et lux perpétua lúceat ei. Requiéscat in pace. Amen**

*Eternal rest, grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.

Photo: Maj. Richard "Dick" Winters is seen in Sept. 22, 2002 file photo: AP Images



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