

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Thomas L. Rockwell** 508 P.I.R. 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Div. K.I.A. December 24, 1944

## A Mother's Love

In December 1944 during the opening phase of the "Battle of the Bulge," 82nd Airborne Paratrooper Lt. Thomas L. Rockwell gave his life while attempting to halt the overwhelming German offensive in Belgium.

In 1946, 17 months following the loss of her only son, Mildred Rockwell traveled from Pennsylvania to ravaged and war torn Belgium to visit the place where her beloved son fought and died.\*

Her son Thomas now rests Honored in Glory in Belgium. He is buried in the American Military Cemetery at Henri Chapelle with 7,988 other American sons.

While on this pilgrimage to Belgium, Mrs. Rockwell also visited the Warlet family who had adopted Thomas' grave site. This voluntary gesture by many Belgian families was made to pay tribute to the sacrifice made by the United States of America to free their small nation from nearly five years of German occupation.

<sup>\*</sup>Quite an undertaking in 1946.

### Contents

- Memorandum by Lt. George Lamm
   Describing Combat actions on December 24<sup>th</sup> 1944 during which Lt. Thomas Rockwell was fatally wounded
- 4. U.S. War Department Statement concerning investigation of actions resulting in Thomas Rockwell's death
- 5. Photographs: Warlet family and Mrs. Rockwell
- 6. Photograph taken in 1946 by Mrs. Rockwell of 9-year-old Nicole Warlet at Thomas' grave site
- 7. Letter from Henri Rogister, Belgian historian, to David Ford regarding 1996 search for Nicole Warlet
- 8. 1996 newspaper article/photo used to locate Nicole Warlet
- 9. Search is successful! Letter from Nicole to Henri agreeing to meeting and interview
- 10. Music sheet and song "The Hill of Henri Chapelle"
- 11. Poem: "Christmas Eve 1944" Belgium
- 12. "Visiting Tommy" then and now 50 years
- 13. Research credits and Publishing credits

MEMORANDUM OF STATEMENTS MADE BY LT. GEORGE LAMM AT THE HOTFL COMMODORE, NEW YORK CITY ON SUNDAY, MARCH 11, 1945.

"Thomas Lloyd Rockwell arrived on the continent from England on December 16, 1944 and went into action immediately. He was assigned to Company "B" of the 508th Parachute Infantry and I saw him at various times between December 17, 1944 and December 24, 1944.

"On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1944 at about 10:00 P.M. he came to my platoon. We were near the Town of Vielsahm, a little south of that town. Our regiment had been ordered to retreat about eight miles and establish a new line. I think it was the entire 82nd Airborne Division that was to establish this line. The First Battelion of the 508th Parachute Infantry had picked one platoon from "A" Company and one platoon from "B" Company to hold the line. It was a rear guard action. One platoon from "C" Company was immediately in our rear, in reserve. I had one officer with me and 39 men. Lt. Rockwell was on my left, about 300 yeards. We had a very thin line. He had one officer with him, a Lieutenant whose name begins with C, but I can't remember his full name. There was a Sergeant named Call with him. The line was thin because we did not have snough men to hold a good line. Our men were scattered along the front in small groups. We knew the Germans were going to attack and all our artillery and large machine guns had been taken away from us and removed to the rear so the Germans could not capture them. We were left with small machine guns, rifles, and that's about all. orders were to hold the line and not leave the line until 3:00 A.M., December 25, 1944.

"At about 10:00 P.M. on December 24, 1944, Lt. Rockwell came to see me and told me that he had found som German Champagns and he was going to bring some over right after midnight and we would celebrate Christmas by opening a bottle. He wanted me to take him out in front, to my outpost, so that he could "get himself some Jerries." We could hear the Germans working in the valley below us. It sounded as though they were building a bridge across a small stream there. We did not expect them to attack until daylight. I thought it very foolish for Lt. Rockwell to desire to go out to the outpost and do some shooting. But he said he had a new tommy gun and wanted to try it out. I took him out to my outpost and told my men out there to point out to him where the Germans were so that he could do some shooting. It was goggy out in front and not much of anything could be seen but we could hear the Germans plainly.

"After we returned to my Company headquarters, Lt. Rockwell left me and went back to his company on my left.

"At midnight, the Germans attacked, unexpectedly. It was a bitter battle. We fought hard and held them back but they came at us in droves, screaming and shouting. Lt. Rockwell had a B.A.R. gun. There was no moon that night, but the stars shone very brightly, the ground was covered with snow, and I could see across to Lt. Rockwell's position. At one time I saw a man crawl out from the B.A.R. gun position and pull German bodies out from in front of the G.A.R. gun. German bodies were piled up so that they could not fire the gun anymore. They had to clear the bodies away. If anything, the fighting in front of "B" Company was more severe than it was in front of my company, "A" Company.

"Shortly after 12:00 o'clock it became apparent to me that we were going to be wiped out unless we could get some help. I sent my other Lieutenant and a runner back to Battalion Headquarters with the request for permission to withdraw of for more help. I told my Lieutenant to tell the Battelion Commander that there would be nothing left of us by 3:00 A.M. My Eleutenant hever reached Battalion Headquarters, neither did the runner. I never saw either of them again. Actually Battalion Headquarters sent word up to us to withdraw but we never received the message. I stayed there until 3:00 A.M. and then started buck to the rendevouz point which had been previously agreed The Cermens had filtered through and had gotten around behind us. When we reached the rendevouz point it was held by the Germans and we could not rendevouz at that point. ere marching through the little village which was our rendevouz point, in a column of squads, and we could throw hand grenades from a high point right down into their rands and we killed a lot of them, right at the rendevouz point. It is my recollection that Lt. Rockwell and his men swayed at their positions until 3:00 A.L. They were still firing when I withdrew. I was the only officer left with my company and i had only ten men left out of thirty nine. All the rest were killed or wounded.

"Lt. Rockwell's Company Commander was Capt. Woodrow Wilson Wilsaps who hails from Atlanta, Georgia. Capt. Milsaps had gone back to the rear with the main body of Company "B". He had left Lt. Rockwell in command of the platoon which was holding the line in the rear guard action described.

"We got a write-up in the Division history, in the nature of a citation, for Company "B" and Company "A", entitled "Rear Guard Action at Vielsahm on December 24 and December 25." It appears in the official report for the Division. I believe the real title is "Rear Guard Action at Mensheux" and the whole story is about the rear guard platoon, Mockwell's platoen and my platoon, which conducted this action.

"I remember one other officer, Lt. McInerney. I think he was with "C" Company of the 508th Farachute infantry. He was killed that night. The rendevous point being occupied by the Germans, and he not knowing it, he walked right into a machine gun. The next morning I saw men from Mcckwell's platoon. They told me mockwell had been killed the night before. I saw Lt. C., he was crying like a child, and was terribly unnerved because or the slaughter. I couldn't get much out of him. He did not tell me that he saw Hockwell killed or that he knew positively that Rockwell was killed, neither did any of the men in Hockwell's platoon tell me positively that they saw him killed. They simply understood that he was killed.

The Germans kept coming through, we were driven back and back and we did not reorganize and come back to the position we occupied Christmas Eve until nine or tan days later. When we got back there I searched and searched for my men so that I could identify them and report. I found some of them but I never found the body of my Lieutenant and I did not find the bodies of eight of my men. The Germans had occupied this territory, had buried some of our dead, I even opened graves and found men in graves, in Farachute Infantry uniforms of the 508t. Farachute Infantry, the uniforms apparently new, men who were not on the Regimental Roster and who were unknown at Regimental needs, uarters. It was a very strange thing and the only thing I know is that the Jermans had some of their own men dressed up in our uniforms.

were searching for the bodies, I tried, with Lapt. Woodrow wilson be being to find Lt. Rockwell's body. We could not find any trace of him. Later, however, I heard that Capt. Milsaps or someone has found Lt. Rockwell's body in a building in the Town of Renshaux which is just across the river from Vielsahm. Indications were that Lt. Rockwell had received medical aid from the Germans. The story I heard was that his wody was there, he was dead, there was evidence that he had had medical aid. I never saw the body, I don't remember who told me this story, I don't know who buried the body or where it is buried.

"The report you have heard that Lt. Rockwell was a part of the Office of Strategic Services, G-2 is news to me. I never heard of it before and I am astounded. It explains Lt. Rockwell's peculiar actions that night. He may have been trying to get through German lines. He did not confide in me. I don't know what to think about it. This information leaves ground for hope in my opinion."

#### WAR DEPARTMENT

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE

IN REPLY REFER TO:

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

AGPC-G 201 Rockwell, Thomas L. (10 Apr 45) 143002 01325618

29 May 1945

Mr. Emory B. Rockwell 21 Nichols Street Wellsboro, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Rockwell:

I am writing to you concerning your son, Second Lieutenant Thomas L. Rockwell, who has been reported killed in action in Belgium.

The loss you have suffered in the death of your valiant son is great and I fully appreciate your added distress occasioned by the absence of the details and the conflicting information you have received regarding the date. Mr. Hugh A. Kerwin of the Veterans Employment Service addressed to Colonel J. Bryan Hobbs of my office, on 31 March 1945, a communication requesting, in your behalf, information concerning the death of your son. He was advised in my reply of 10 April 1945, that an inquiry had been dispatched to the Commanding General of the European Theater of Operations for verification of the date of Lieutenant Rockwell's death and a report of all the available information regarding the attending circumstances.

The report received in the War Department states that, on 24 December 1944, Lieutenant Rockwell, as assistant platoon leader, advanced to investigate peculiar noise, unknown to his troops, in the vicinity of Rencheux, Belgium, and detected an enemy patrol attempting to infiltrate our position. During the ensuing skirmish in which grenades were thrown and rifle shots fired, your son was wounded, losing consciousness immediately, and was removed to the command post where he was given medical attention and placed on a stretcher in a jeep for evacuation, at which time his death occurred. Before Lieutenant Rockwell's remains could be removed, the enemy launched a full scale attack and the covering forces were compelled to withdraw hastily. On 8 January 1945, when our forces recaptured Rencheux, your son's remains were recovered and identified.

The Quartermaster General of this city, has jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to the burial of our military personnel who die overseas and any inquiries you may have concerning the location of Lieutenant Rockwell's grave or his burial should be addressed to that official.

You, and the other members of the family, have my heartfelt sympathy in your bereavement and I trust that, in the days to come, the knowledge of your son's heroic sacrifice may be a comfort to you in your sorrow.

Sincerely yours,

J. A. ULIO

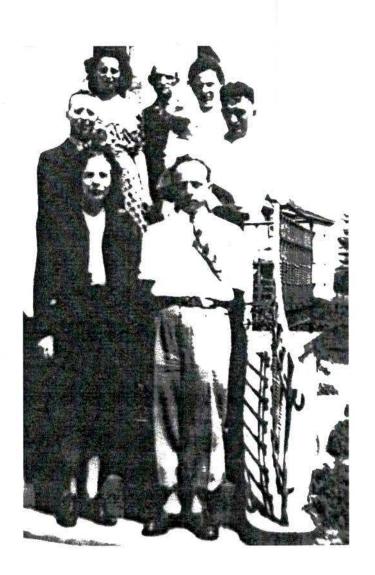
Major General

The Addutant General of the Army

1946 Mrs. Rockwell and Warlet Family Members.

Photographs taken during a visit to Warlet Family home.

Photographs provided by the Warlet Family.





Mrs. Rockwell and Nicole



Warlet sisters and Mrs. Rockwell

Copy of photograph taken by Mrs. Rockwell in 1946 of 9-year-old

### Nicole Warlet

kneeling at Thomas' original wooden grave marker.

Markers are now marble.



This photograph with an article were placed in a newspaper in the Liege-Verviers-Luxembourg area of Belgium.

This is a French speaking area of Belgium.

ROGISTER Henri 22 Rue du Progrès B-4032 LIEGE BELGIUM

Liège, le 17 juin 1996

Dear David,

As I promised you in my previous letter, I have been trying to find one or two tracks in order to learn if Nicole Warlet was still alive so as to locate her. Unfortunately, as I explained in my preceding letter, the answers were negative.

On 10 June, I then decided to ask my friend Jean-Marie Fosty (Albert's brother) to have a "Wanted" advice published in a newspaper of the Liège - Verviers - Luxembourg area and with which he was working a few months ago, with the hope that some readers could locate Nicole Warlet.

This research notice (see annexe) was published on Tuesday 11 June and early evening my wife received two pieces of information that corresponded very well with Nicole Warlet.

As I was still on my way with some veterans from the 505<sup>th</sup> and 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne in the Grand-Halleux and Vielsalm areas, I could not cheek the information on the very day.

But you may well think that Wednesday 12 June was a very busy morning. Following on the info obtained, I called the telephone number that had been given to me on two occasions and guess what a joy that was when hearing at the other and Nicole Warlet's voice!

We talked for about twenty minutes and the following is the story of that the photograph taken in Henri-Chapelle in April 1946.

The Warlet family living then in Verviers, had adopted three graves at the American Military Cemetery of Henri Chapelle and one of these graves was Thomas Rockwell's. Having received at this time the address of the family in the United States the Warlet family wrote the Rockwell family probably to let them know that their son's grave had been adopted by the family.

In 1946, Mrs Rockwell arrived in Belgium and was welcomed by Warlet family. Altogether they went to the Vielsalm - Rencheux area in order to locate the place where Thomas had been killed and so it was that Warlet family went to Henri-Chapelle Cemetery and that the photograph was taken.

During a conversation between Mrs Rockwell and Warlet family, Mrs Rockwell said: "I would give ten years of my life to stay an hour with my son".

Nicole told me she had about 15 photographs of that period and her elder sister still possessed another score of letters exchanged with Rockwell family. I also learned during that telephone conversation that Warlet family had four daughters and onr of them lives in Liège. It is the elder sister who, being able to speak English, would write the letters to Rockwell family.

Nicole Warlet was born on December 1937. She married in 1962 François Berg and has three children and five grand'children. A girl was born in 1962, a son in 1965 and a girl in 1978. After this long conversation, I asked if I might meet Nicole Warlet and we fixed an appointment for friday 14 June in Ensival, a locality where Nicole Warlet is living now.

On 13 June. I received a letter from Nicole Warlet and this letter was the confirmation of her invitation to meet me. Two other letters arrived at the same time, the first came from a childhood memory friend of Nicole's who is now living in Angleur, a commune of Liege located about two kilometers from my house, but who was living in Verviers before. They got to know each other at school.

The second letter came from an administrative office in Verviers and gave me the same information I had received the previous day on the phone from two other people. This is a good proof that, when the story is of interest, the gouvernment service can elude a low and give you information that may be useful.

On 14 June, I received a letter from Nicole's elder sister. In the afternoon I went to Ensival and met Nicole, her husband and the young daughter. We talked for three hours and she showed me the photographs she had. Nicole would be so pleased if she could receive some news from Prescilla. I hope you can convince her to write to Nicole.

Mrs Nicole Berg - Warlet Rue Moreau 53 B 4800 ENSIVAL

George Naylor call me last Saturday et ask me to send you this information.

During a visit from the 87th Infantry Division to Belgium on 8, 12 and 13 June, we were pleased, Jacques Rummens, Albert Fosty and I to meet Mrs Dorothy Davis who is "Executive officer Battle of the Bulge Historical Foundation, Fort George Meade, Maryland.

Learning that we would probably go to Maryland, she proposed to make us visit that place, asking us to let her know the day of our arrival in advance so that she would be in a position to organize that visit. Of course we spoke to her about you, Jim, and George Navlor and you are also invited to that visit.

If we have an appointement in Maryland with you, could you please, if this is possible, take an arrangement with Dorothy Davis so that we could visit that Foundation.

Please find below the information concerning Doraothy Davis:

Dorothy S. Davis, R.N. Nurse 57th Field Hospital P.O. Box 2516, Kensingthon, MD 20895-0818 Tél: (301) 881-0356 Fax: (301) 942-0049

You might also get in touch with her at her homme but I do not know her telephone number. 6900 Tilden Lane, Rockeville, MD 20852

We thank you for what you could do for us and we keep talking more and more about this trip to the United States.

Kind Regards and so long!

H. Rogister (Hercule Poirot)

GEORGE NAYLOR 1-804-487-2483 3245 OLD MILL RD CHESAPEAKE, VA.

23323-1826



# H Rogistu,

Je vous écris suite à l'avis du souvenir que vous lanciez dans la Meuse son 11.06-96. vous y lanciez un avis de recenche concernant Nicole Warlet agée de gans à l'époque or je suis Nicole Warlet.

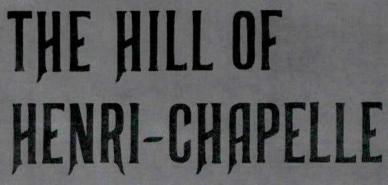
Rorsque reme Rockwell nous a rendu visite, nous habitions we de la chapelle nº13 à verviers. Elle voulait se rendu sur la tombe de son fils défunt, et sur les lieux où il a été tué.

Vous houses rentrer en contact avec nous. Voici mon adusse: Nicole Warlet-Berg

TEL: 087/310007

Au plaisie de vous rencontrer.

orbun Berg. Warlet



Whene "our" Sons slups Your friend Gutrude Sedam

Lyrics and Music by BILL H. POST

> This composition was commissioned by a mother from California who also had a son buried at Henri Chapelle. Mrs. Rockwell and this woman

Mrs. Rockwell and this woman became acquainted due to their common loss. They maintained that friendship throughout their remaining years.

Post and Postel

Rubbishing Company

5409 Santa Monica Blvd. Los Angeles 27, California

## The Hill Of Henri-Chapelle



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## We The People March Again







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Los Angeles 27, Calif.

#### CHRISTMAS EVE, 1944

#### BELGIUM

Snow, I consider you on these Ardennes hills
And imagine I'm home in the hills of Pennsylvania
Dad and I tracked deer through crisp, cold snow like this,
Saw the stories of countless animals recorded there,
Tiny field mice, cottontail rabbits, and once in a while, a bear,
Their footprints clearly caught in the white earth-cover.

Here there is no time to look at animal tracks. Here, with frigid hearts, we are tracking men.

It is Christmas Eve. Ethereal snow reflects
The warm glow of Christmas lights at home in Pennsylvania.
Pure white snow descends on the Nativity in the town square.
Through the frosty air church bells chime.
For the young, frolicking in the flurries, skiing, sledding,
There waits a warm fire to take the sting from their feet.

But families, though cozy by the fireplace, Face an empty chair.

Snow is falling in Belgium, too.

Here on the battlefield it is bitter.

There are no crackling fires to warm us,

No warm glow of Christmas to thaw our hearts.

Cold snow pierces the very soul and turns us all to icicles.

I can no longer hear my heart;

I can no longer feel my hands and feet.

But I hold my machine-gun And I keep firing until-

Snow, fall on me gently.
Put out the cruel fire in my chest;
Numb all my worldly pain.
Cover my black hair with hoarfrost
For these moments are the span of my old age,
Twenty-one years the extent of my existence.
Snow, my pale cold shroud, be a merciful blanket.
Fall on me gently.

Written in loving memory of THOMAS L. ROCKWELL 2nd. Lt. 82nd. Airborne Born May 14, 1923 - Died Dec. 24, 1944

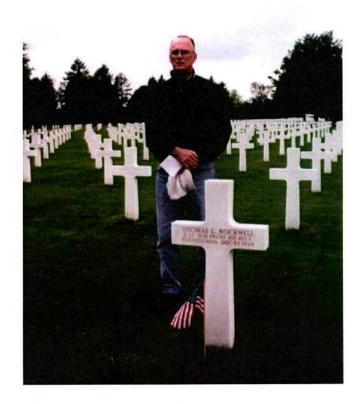
By - Priscilla Rockwell Sherman - Sister



Nicole Warlet 1946

— Not Forgotten —

David Ford 1996



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'accusé à ses aveux, en passant MARD = Photos: É. Destiné

# SOUVENIR



Vous reconnaissezvous sur cette photo? dennes et des combats dans la région de Rencheux (Vielsalm), le lieutenant Thomas Rockwell fut tué. Il avait été désigné, avec son peloton, pour effectuer une action de retardement afin que son unité, le 508 Régiment Parachutiste de la 82 Division aéroportée, puisse faire retraite d'environ 10 kilomètres et dresser une nouvelle ligne de front vers les villages de Basse-Bodeux, d'Erria et de Vilettes.

Dans la nuit du 24 au 25 décembre, les Allemands attaquèrent et c'est durant ces combats que le lieute-nant Rockwell fut grièvement blessé. Des soins lui furent donnés, mais au moment de son évacuation vers l'arrière, il devait décéder. Son corps fut laissé à l'intérieur de la caserne de Rencheux.

Le 8 janvier 1945, lors de la reprise de ce secteur par cette même unité, plusieurs corps furent retrouvés et identifiés: parmi ces corps, se trouvait celul du lieutenant Thomas Rockwell.

Une lettre adressée à M. Emory B. Rockwell, datée du 29 mai 1945, provenant du War Department, informait la famille de la mort de Thomas.

En avril 1946, la maman de Thomas Rockwell effectualt un voyage en Belgique afin de retrouver le site où son fils avait été tué, et se recueillir sur sa tombe, qui se trouve au Cimetière américain d'Henri-Chapelle.

Lors de sa visite à Henri-Chapelle, M™ Rockwell prit la photo d'une jeune fille agenouillée devant la tembe de sa fille. Cette jeune fille s'appelait Nicole Warlet et sa famille était originaire de Verviers.

En 1949, la sœur de Thomas Rockwell, Priscilla Rockwell Sherman, venait à son tour à Henri-Chapelle et passa quelque temps avec la famille Warlet.

Enfin, en avril de cette année 1996, Jim Mileski et David Ford, habitant Baltimore (Maryland), étaient en visite en Belgique et demandaient à Henri Rogister de les accompagner afin de retrouver ces mêmes endroits, photographiés cinquante ans plus tôt par la maman de Thomas Rockwell. Les photos en question ont été prêtées à Jim et David par Priscilla Rockwell afin de faciliter les recherches.

Parmi les photos de cet album se trouvait la photo de Nicole Warlet, agenouillée devant la croix de Thomas Rockwell, le 28 avril 1946.

Jim Mileski et David Ford ont demandé à Henri Rogister de retrouver Nicole Warlet afin de pouvoir renouer les contacts avec Priscilla Rockwell.

Pour toutes informations, on peut écrire à Henri Rogister, rue du Progrès, 22, à 4032 Chênée.