

# Bridging The Years

Ranney Was A Medical Man Who Also Worked On Bridges During WWII

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Like many Americans, Dr. Brooks Ranney was an isolationist leading up to U.S. involvement in World War II, but the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor changed that outlook.

"All of the United States was isolationist, essentially," said Ranney, 98. "It might even have stayed that way if it wasn't for Pearl Harbor. That changed the opinions of an awful lot of people."

It was apparent to him that the advice of founding father George Washington to generally avoid entanglements in foreign affairs could not be followed.

"In 1927, an airplane (piloted by Charles Lindbergh) had flown across the Atlantic Ocean, followed by a lot of others," Ranney said. "The place you could stay in the corner by yourself was getting smaller and smaller."

**"It was obvious to me that militarism in Japan and Germany wasn't healthy, and my generation was going to have to do something about it."**

**BROOKS RANNEY**

did a one-year internship at Wesley Memorial Hospital in Chicago before starting a obstetrics/gynecology residency at Chicago Lying-In Hospital in 1941.

Ranney's application for a commission in the Army Medical Corps was approved, and he was told to report on July 25, 1941, to the 108th Medical Regiment of the 33rd Division (Illinois National Guard) at Camp Forrest, Tenn. A short time later, he was transferred to the 108th Engineer Regiment (Combat) as a battalion surgeon for its 2nd Battalion.

Ranney became a lieutenant and served as the battalion surgeon for the 181st Engineer Heavy Pontoon Battalion. During World War II, the battalion built heavy pontoon bridges across the Seine, Oise, Meuse, Rhine and Weser rivers in Europe. It earned five Battle Stars during the conflict.

In 1987, Ranney authored a book called "To Cross the River Barriers" that serves as a biography of his experience during World War II, as well as a history of the 181st Engineer Heavy Pontoon Battalion.

"It was apparent to me that there were a few of us who had perspective on the war," he said. "I had in my files the necessary references. I had been medical officer with the 181st Engineer Heavy Pontoon Battalion during its entire life with the Army. I decided I would write the history."

The memories of his four years in military service are still fresh, Ranney said.

"Those memories stay with you," he stated. "For instance, we put two bridges across the Rhine River at Remagen, Germany. You aren't supposed to be able to bridge a river that's running faster than 8 mph. We did rivers at 15 or 16 mph. You don't forget those things."

As the battalion surgeon, Ranney was tasked with keeping the troops as healthy as possible. He dealt with everything from combat injuries to venereal diseases.

"I was providing regular medical care, plus repairing bruises, cuts and so forth," Ranney said. "I would take in people who were injured badly for X-rays to make sure they weren't all broken up."

"I think we did well providing medical care," he added. "We were trained well."

Ranney oversaw a small group of medical personnel.

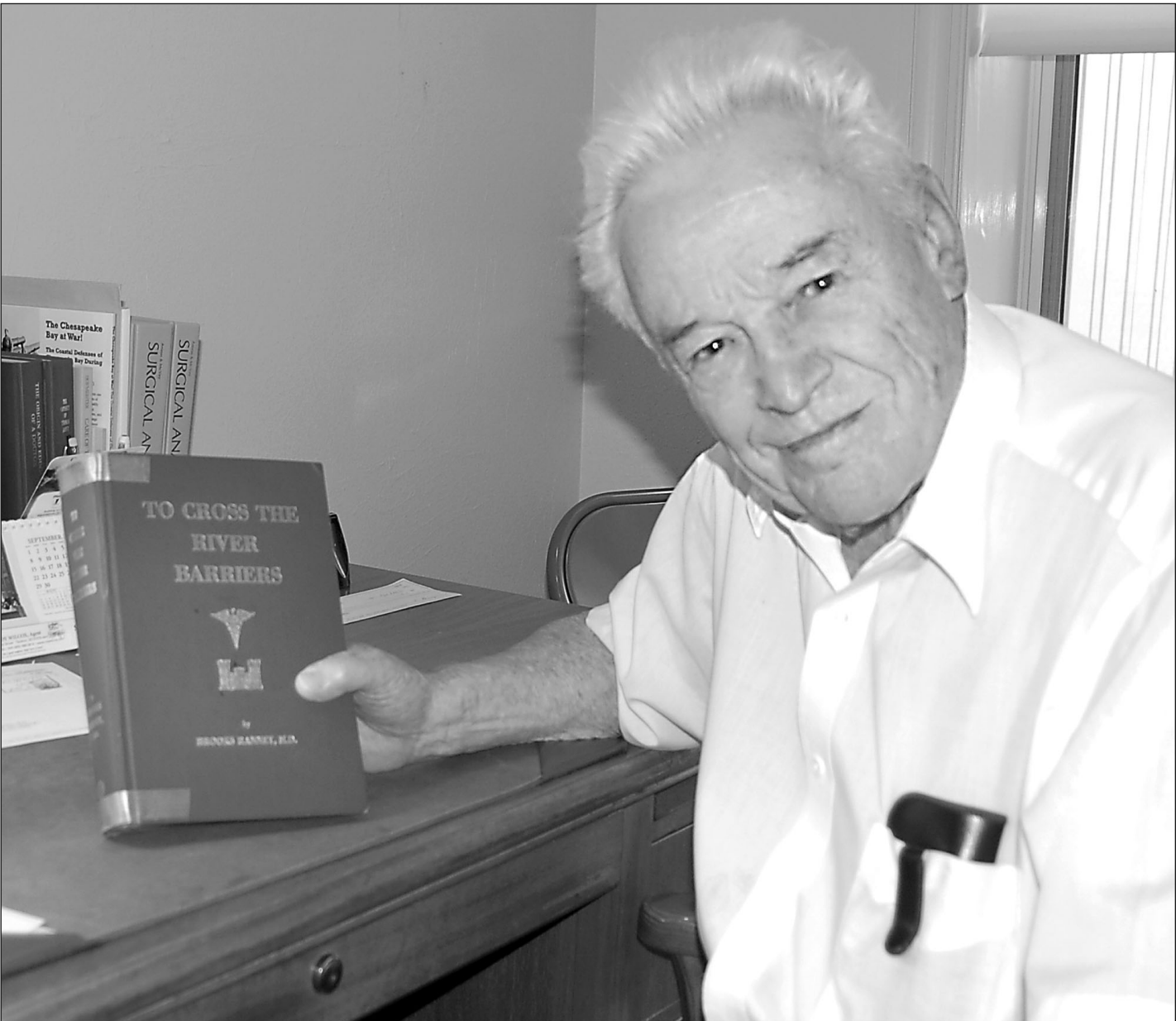
In addition to an aid tent, he had a truck at his disposal that had approximately 10,000 miles put on it during the war.

Ranney went on to be a major in the Reserve Medical Corps of the Army after he came back from the European theater in September 1945. The battalion had left the United States in December 1943.

"During the past 50 months, I had served

"It was obvious to me that militarism in Japan and Germany wasn't healthy, and my generation was going to have to do something about it," he continued.

Ranney had worked his way through Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago between 1936-39. He then



Dr. Duane Ranney displays a copy of his book "To Cross The River Barriers," detailing his experiences during World War II. BELOW: Ranney also used his medical skills during the war. He is shown here (far right) in this January 1942 photo, at which time he was a battalion surgeon as part of the medical detachment for the 108th Engineers Regiment.



COURTESY PHOTO

my country — as had most American youths," Ranney wrote in "To Cross the River Barriers." "Now the military emergencies had ended, but the world's diplomatic problems were continuing. Nature was healing the scars of battle in the European and Asiatic landscapes much more rapidly than many soldiers and displaced persons could heal their physical and psychological scars."

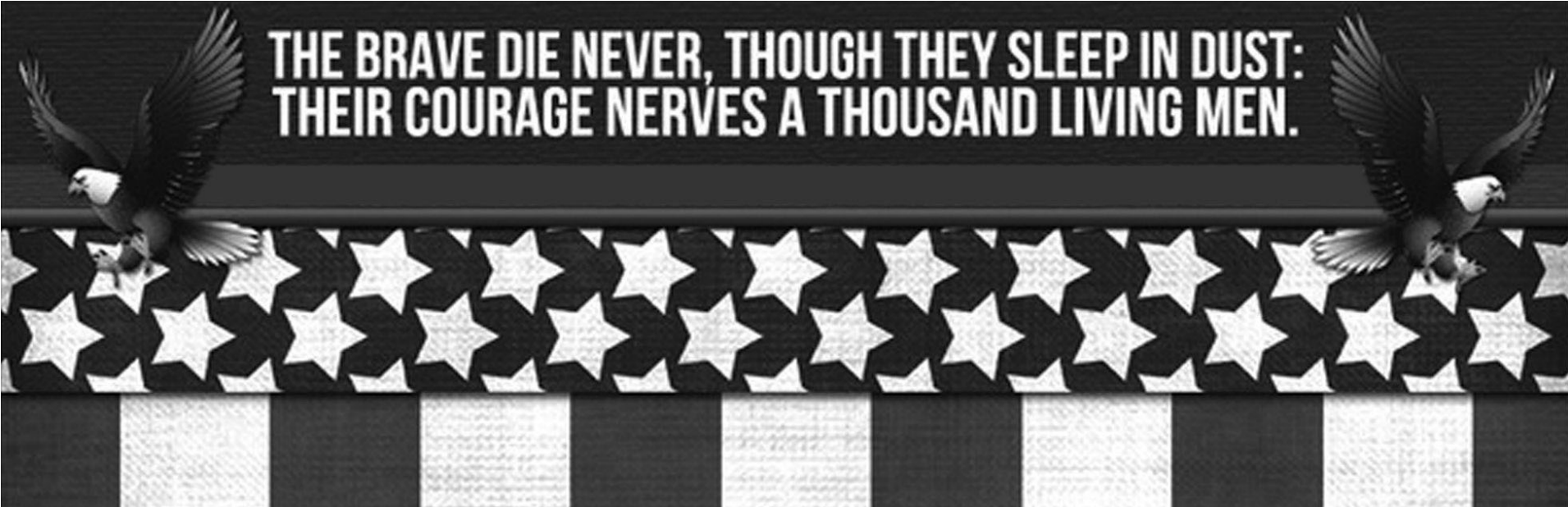
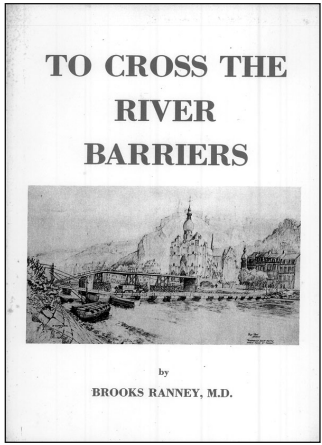
"Trained as a physician, I had been permitted to practice the healing profession in the Armed Services. Assigned to an engineer battalion, I had enjoyed the comradeship of fellow professionals, and had learned much engineering lore from them. Now, my Army responsibilities completed, I was returning home to continue my education and training

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## Profile

Published by Pine Hill Press, Freeman, a quarter century ago, Dr. Brooks Ranney's "To Cross The River Barriers" chronicles the exploits of the 181st Engineer Heavy Pontoon Battalion during World War II. Dr. Ranney notes in the foreword that "This book is both historical and biographical." It's an outstanding account of the role that this unit played in the re-taking of Fortress Europe and Dr. Ranney's part in that monumental undertaking. The book is available at the Yankton Community Library.

DOUG SALL



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