

For immediate release

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Crossing Borders/Expanding Boundaries: A White Soldier's Experience of the WWII Segregated Army explores the journey of one soldier from the violence of the segregated American South to the horrors of the yard at Dachau.

Unlike many World War II histories focused on battles and military strategy, *Crossing Borders/Expanding Boundaries: A White Soldier's Experience of the WWII Segregated Army* builds on the story of Irwin Hurley to explore the way military service challenges a soldier to broaden their worldview. Hurley, who grew up in Northern Kentucky was repeatedly challenged to expand beyond the limitations his middle class, suburban, Catholic upbringing.

Crossing European national boundaries in 1944 and '45 triggered a host of challenging issues. But the most important boundary Hurley crossed was in the United States—the boundary between the Upper South of Northern Kentucky and the Deep South where he helped organize and train a Quartermaster Truck Company made up of 130 African American enlisted men from Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia headed by five white officers, and led by Sherman Horowitz, a Jewish Captain. That experience brought Irv face to face with the harsh of American segregation and racism.

Hurley hated his first year and a half in the Army and only “regained a little bit of self-respect” when assigned in January 1944 to the newly formed 3659th Quartermaster Truck Company at Fort Butner near Durham, North Carolina. For the first time Irv had to learn to relate to African Americans and grapple with the long-term implications of Jim Crow segregation. That struggle came to a head on July 8, 1944, when Booker T. Spicely, an African American in uniform and a member of Hurley's battalion was shot and killed because he sat in the “wrong” seat on a Durham City bus. That incident elicited a sharp response from Lt. Hurley: “If I ever get out of the South, I never want to see it again. We ought to take about 5,000,000 men and just wipe the South off the face of the map before we even start in Europe. Democracy, they don't even know what the word means down here.”

Once the company reached the European Theater, they plunged into the vital, but largely unappreciated, logistics work of the Quartermaster Corps. Assigned in early 1945 to support the 12th Armored Division of Patton's army, they invaded Germany and drove south through Bavaria. Lt. Hurley commented multiple times on the irony that captured Nazi troops were guarded by “American colored boys” in a unit commanded by a Jewish Captain.

At the close of fighting in Europe, the 3659th reached Munich and joined the effort to liberate the nearby Dachau Concentration Camp. *Crossing Borders* places that on-the-ground experience in the larger context of what United States political leader, European Theater commanders, and ordinary soldiers understood about the Nazi Concentration camps. After his first trip inside the

camp, Hurley wrote a powerful letter that has been used for over a decade in the educational programs of the Nancy and David Wolf Holocaust and Humanity Center in Cincinnati. Rather than just commenting on the horrors of Dachau, he posed a challenging and haunting question to his wife. “Ponder for a minute if you and I would have been reared in that atmosphere, never had the opportunity of knowing anything else, if we would have been any different—maybe. I hope so, but not so sure.”

Crossing Borders is grounded in over 720 letters, two diaries and an extensive scrapbook of photos and documents written by Irwin Hurley and saved by his wife, Margie. Written by Cincinnati public historian Dan Hurley, *Crossing Borders* locates the experience of his father in the broader context of contemporary World War II historical literature, including the writings of Stephen Ambrose, Matthew Demont, and David Nasaw.

Crossing Borders/Expanding Boundaries is published by Orange Frazer Press and is available from the publisher (<https://www.orangefrazer.com/store/history>), on Amazon Books (<https://www.amazon>), and local bookstores including at Joseph Beth Bookstore.

