

FOREWORD TO THE 2021 EDITION

Everything about Texas is big: its geography, its resources, its pride, and especially its history. No state in the Union has a grander military heritage than Texas. The battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto were fought on Texas soil. As a republic it once had its own Navy, and some of the country's most famous military organizations hail from the Lone Star State. The commanders who led Texans into battle during the nineteenth century are just as notable as the units they led. Sam Houston, William Barrett Travis, Jim Bowie, Davy Crockett, Ben McCulloch, Jack Hays, John S. "Rip" Ford, John Bell Hood and Hiram Granbury are just a few among the many names that inhabit the Valhalla of Texas military heroes.

The industrial scale of warfare in the twentieth century offered less room for personalities to win fame while commanding anything smaller than an army or a fleet. During World War II, however, one name in particular was added to the list of Texas' military greats from earlier times: Major General Fred L. Walker. General Walker commanded the 36th Infantry Division, a Texas National Guard outfit, from September 1941 until July 1944. He led a division longer than any other American officer during the Second World War. The 36th earned a formidable reputation—and paid a high price for that distinction. Only five divisions in the entire U.S. Army suffered more casualties than the 36th during the course of the war.

No unit in the United States Army saw heavier combat or endured it longer under the worst possible circumstances than did the 36th Infantry Division.

Sporting their distinctive “T-patch,” the men of that famed organization were the first Americans to land on the mainland of Europe where, alongside British units, they spearheaded the invasion of Mussolini’s Italy at the Gulf of Salerno on September 9, 1943. After a brutal battle for the beachhead, the division helped capture Naples before slogging its way northward, often yard by bloody yard, in the horrific battle up the boot of Italy toward Rome.

After briefly serving in the Ohio National Guard, Walker became a career officer in the Regular Army and earned distinction in the First World War before being appointed (to his surprise) commander of the 36th Infantry Division in September 1941. The 36th had endured a little less than a month of combat during World War I and emerged with a good record. But like all National Guard units, it was held in low esteem by many Regular officers. Guardsmen resented this “second class” status and responded with their own negative views of the Regulars. Walker accepted his new assignment with some trepidation, but also with a determination not to pre-judge those under his command.

While treating his men with respect and dignity, he also demanded competence and set high standards for his division. His World War I experience meant Walker well understood the reality for which he was training his troops. Though his methods were rigorous, the general never lost sight of the humanity of his soldiers. He cared about their well-being and constantly strove to take care of them to the best of his capabilities. During the harsh winter months of the Italian Campaign, Walker fretted over the conditions in which his men were forced to live and remained acutely aware of their sufferings. Caught up in a strategy that required sustained offensive action—even though the terrain offered a tenacious and well-trained enemy every advantage—Walker tried to plan his battles in a way that promised the best chance of success with the least cost. He quietly fumed when poor decisions by corps and army headquarters forced him to throw his men into action without proper rest, reinforcements, or preparation.

It took a very special kind of leadership to maintain a division’s ability to fight as a cohesive unit, while retaining the trust, respect and admiration of the common soldiers who did the suffering and bleeding in ill-starred offensives at San Pietro, the Rapido River and Monte Cassino. Walker had that kind of leadership. After the 36th Division was nearly wrecked in the disastrous effort to cross the Rapido River in January 1944, a mission General Walker believed was ill-conceived and poorly supported, Walker rebuilt his shattered command prior to the 36th being sent to reinforce the Anzio beachhead just four months later.

It was Walker’s keen and thorough generalship that discovered the one weak point (Monte Artemisio) in the German defenses surrounding the tenuous Allied

lodgment on the Italian coast. More importantly, it was his insistence on attacking that weak point and his willingness to shoulder the entire responsibility for the success or failure of the attack that convinced his superiors to allow the “Texas Army,” as the 36th was called, to launch the strike that broke the enemy siege of Anzio and opened the door to Rome. Walker’s Anzio attack is considered by many historians to be *the only* stroke of brilliant generalship in the entire Italian Campaign.

In the wee hours of June 4, the 36th Infantry Division became the first Allied unit to enter Rome. There was no parade to welcome the T-Patchers, however, for they raced through the Italian capital in the dead of night in pursuit of a fleeing German foe. As was true of the entire campaign, the glory of their achievements was appropriated by the 5th Army and its commander, Lieutenant General Mark Clark. A little more than a month later, Clark replaced Walker as leader of the 36th Division and sent him home to take charge of the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. The move shocked and dismayed the men of the “Texas Army,” who were heart-broken to lose their general—the man who had trained them and the only combat commander they had ever known. Walker took leave of his beloved division on July 7, 1944, in an emotional ceremony that made it obvious he was as reluctant to leave his troops as they were for him to leave. Perhaps nothing so clearly reveals the kind of leader and man Fred Walker was than the grief exhibited by his men upon his departure.

Walker kept a journal throughout his command of the 36th Infantry Division. When he privately published his remarkable journal under the title “*From Texas to Rome*,” Walker’s book became an instant classic. Although only a limited number were printed, it stands apart from most works produced by Allied generals who served in World War II. Based on journal entries, letters, and reports created while the war was in progress, it is remarkably honest and straight forward. There is no attempt to settle scores or justify actions. More importantly there is no use of hindsight. Walker’s book is a remarkable window into what it was like to command a United States Army infantry division in both peacetime and during war, and its insights on the Italian Campaign and many of the personalities who served there are invaluable. Well-written, clear, and forceful, Walker’s memoir feels as fresh at the dawn of the 21st Century as it did midway through the 20th.

As director of the Texas Military Forces Museum (the official museum of the Texas Army and Air National Guard) I can attest to the fact that Fred Walker’s memory is still revered in today’s 36th Infantry Division of the Texas Army National Guard—which he commanded as adjutant general in the immediate aftermath of World War II. An inductee into the Texas Military Forces Hall of Honor, Walker is held up as an example of real leadership for today’s soldiers and

an inspiration for today's officers. His book, long out of print, is much sought after by members of the force and cherished by those lucky enough to get a copy. Historians of World War II likewise highly esteem Walker's work and understand that it is essential reading for any serious student of the Italian Campaign.

In 2009, our museum hosted a symposium on the history of the 36th Infantry Division in World War II. Among the many wonderful speakers was Colonel Fred Walker, Jr. who had served as the chief of operations for the division (and his father) during the battle for the Rapido River. The colonel's entire family attended to hear his incredible talk on that tragic fight. While having lunch with the Walkers, I mentioned my ambition to see the general's book back in print. The family readily agreed that it ought to be available to the general public again, and graciously extended me permission to pursue that goal, with whatever proceeds might ensue benefitting the Texas Military Forces Museum. It took a while, but finally Theodore P. "Ted" Savas, the managing director of Savas Beatie LLC and Savas Publishing Company, with whom I had worked on other projects, enthusiastically agreed to bring Walker's remarkable book back to life.

Now, at last, one of the best accounts by a general officer regarding what World War II really looked like while it was being fought—and a virtual textbook for today's military officer on how to lead men in both peace and war—will become permanently available to students of history and soldiers alike. I am sure Major General Walker would be proud to know the accomplishments of the Texas Army will become more widely known as a result, and that his division will get the proper credit for all that it did and suffered to defeat Axis tyranny.

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