

*Blood River to Berlin: The World War II Journal of an Army Medic.* By Michael Freeland. Sewanee, TN.: Proctor's Hall Press, 2007.

How many people know anything about Blood River, Tennessee? Here is a chance to learn something about it and Michael Freeland.

Actually Flora Ellen Elmore Freeland, a Huntsville, Alabama native who married Michael Freeland in 1948, introduces the book with her short "Reflections from the Home Front." As a 12 year old she heard radio broadcasters Gabriel Heater and Edward R. Murrow who enlarged her awareness of world events. For her a more immediate reality was cleaning out the chicken house. Her parents owned and ran a general store which was also a social meeting place. Like many others, Ellen aided the war effort by gathering scrap iron and buying savings stamps. She also got much information from the *Nashville Tennessean*. Often she and her three sisters feared their father would be drafted into the military. Similarly she recalled the April 1945 death of President Franklin Roosevelt and the uncertainty many felt about the abilities of Harry Truman.

In the Prologue, Michael Freeland tells about himself. He was born in 1924 in the Blood River community so named from early warfare between Chickasaws and migrants from the Carolina, and the family shortly occupied a log cabin. To him the remote hills and hollows of Henry County, TN, 18 miles from Paris, were heaven. Along the way his father admonished him, "Stay close to your roots." Michael realized that "Family stories ... are the glue binding families together, reminding us, and generations to come, of who we are and where we came from." Fortunately he shared several family and other personal photographs throughout the book.

In May 2005 Freeland was in France for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day. Many memories came to him via early 1940s big band music which "capture[d] the absolute mood, sounds, pain and joy of World War II." They reminded him of basic training at Ft. Knox, KY, and his later getting into radio at Ft. Benning, Georgia, eventually his life work; shortly after his second tour of duty, while working at a Fayetteville, TN, station he met and married Ellen in September 1948.

During that 2005 trip interaction with other veterans and their families caused him to recall his medic times with a hospital train

and then an 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division medical company. He concluded it had been a mistake to not share those memories. His family definitely wanted those recorded as noted in his Acknowledgments. Despite his ambivalence toward the telling of his story, he concluded, "The main asset I can bring to this book is *real* people and *real* stories past and present." His early combat-related stories came from following troops across France after the June 6<sup>th</sup> invasion. He noted the majority of the patients wanted to recover and return to combat. His time as an 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne medic almost did not happen due to a potentially fatal glitch during his first training jump. Fortunately he could devote half the volume to those experiences between February, 1943 and May 8, 1945.

Freeland definitely produced an engaging account.

Review by Dr. Marvin Downing, University of Tennessee at Martin.