Ewing Ray "Pete" McClelland

589th Field Artillery
106th Infantry Division

Ewing Ray "Pete" McClelland was born on September 9, 1915 in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. He attended a civilian training camp at sixteen, receiving a certificate and being recommended for advanced training. Pete worked in the Western Pennsylvania coal mines to pay for two years of college at Berkeley, California. . On December 15, 1940, Pete eloped with Marianna Wright to be married at Hurricane, West Virginia. In 1941, when the war began raging in Europe, he left college and enlisted in the Army well before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He was commissioned second lieutenant and trained in Camp Lee, Virginia, Camp Pickett, Virginia, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In February of 1942, they had a son and in October of 1943, a set of twins, a boy and a girl. Leaving for overseas in October, 1944, with the 589th Field Artillery Battalion, 106th Division, the 28-year-old officer saw action briefly in France, Belgium, and Germany before getting caught in the stunning capture of two whole battalions at the Battle of the Bulge on December 17th. He and his fellow soldiers marched several miles along muddy roads to the already overcrowded Stalag 12A at Limburg, Germany. A War Department Battle Casualty Report cited his place of death as Stalag 12A, due to an Allied air attack on December 23rd, 1944. Along with thousands of American dead, he was quickly buried in Diez, Germany. Later their remains were disinterred and placed in the American Cemetery in The Netherlands, near where they had fallen.
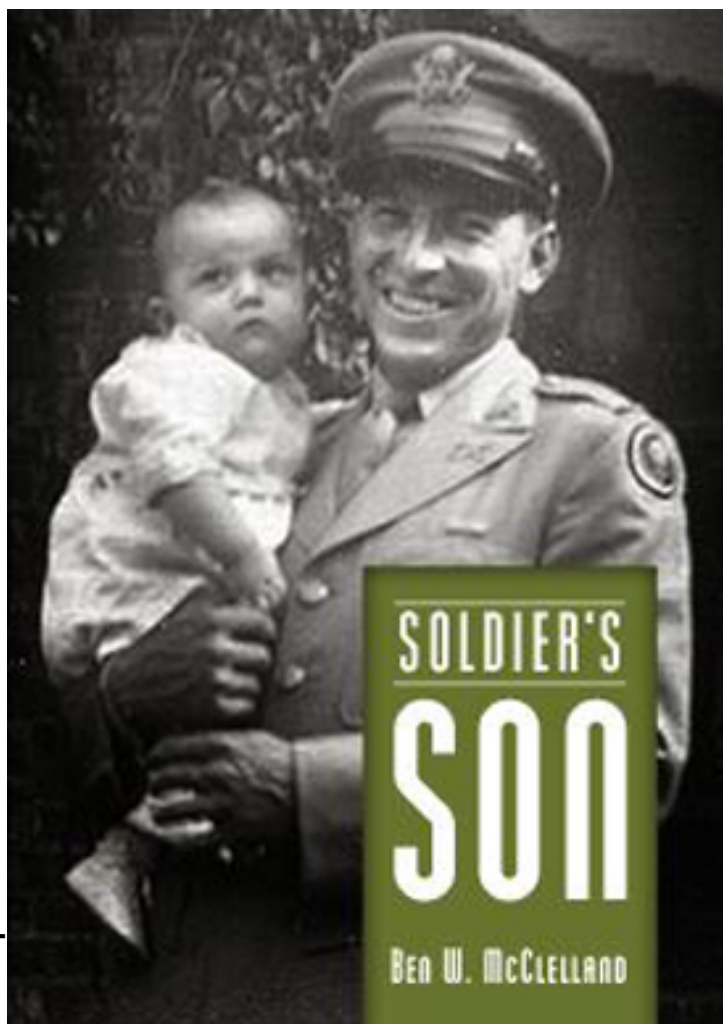
To commemorate my father and to explain my journey of learning about his life and death, I have written a memoir entitled *Soldier's Son*, published by the University Press of Mississippi.

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A memoir in which a son imagines and resurrects the life of his deceased soldier father

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In December 1944 First Lieutenant Ewing R. "Pete" McClelland was captured in the Battle of the Bulge. Soon afterwards in an Allied air attack on the German POW camp where he was held, he was killed. Back home in Pennsylvania, his young widow and three small children survived him.

Too young to have lasting recollections, Ben McClelland, the soldier's son who was just beyond infancy, became one of the war's fatherless innocents for whom the memories of others would form the paternal image. As the boy evolved into manhood, he reflected on how strange it was to grow up without this parent. In this narrative, a work of analysis as well as an odyssey into family heritage, the son undertakes a compelling search to find this man he could not remember. Through sentiment and nostalgia he depicts the innocence of childhood and recalls the many people who furnished impressions of his father. Old photographs, intimate letters, and interviews with the memory keepers and the storytellers in his extended family were resources from which the author recreated a time and a place and a person. This reconstruction resurrects a father vital in life and passion, a man chronicled in humorous family tales, realized among vivid small-town characters, and seen against the contrast of social changes of the l960s. The search for his father consumed most of a lifetime. As Ben McClelland was approaching the age of sixty, he had recovered this lost, never-before-realized identity. But to complete the circle of his quest, he undertook one thing more, the emotional pilgrimage to his father's grave in Europe. Although many other memoirs detail the experience of the soldier on the fronts of battle, this one brings an understanding of his sacrifice in wartime, of the resounding meaning of his death for his country and for his family, and of a son's profound yearning for answers that fulfill.

Ben W. McClelland is a professor of English and holder of the Schillig Chair of English Composition at the University of Mississippi.

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