

SOLDIER'S
SON

BEN W. McCLELLAND

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF MISSISSIPPI
Jackson

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"DAD, IT'S BENNY"

*The American Military Cemetery
at Margraten, The Netherlands
August 2000*

More than fifty-five years after Mom received that second telegram, here I stand. Across acres of grass, white marble crosses fan out in curved rows, looking from above like so many gull wings arcing silently over the sea. In the center of these 8,302 crosses stands one. I turn into Plot J, step deliberately to the middle of Row 3, stop and peer intently at Grave 8. It hits hard now. Trembling, I look through tears—and through the

memory of a gold star, of mothballs, and of parentheses—to a single cross: Dad's.

EWING R. MC CLELLAND

1LT 589 FA BN 106 DIV

PENNSYLVANIA DEC 23 1944.

Finally, with this pilgrimage, I am here, face-to-face with the fact of my dad's death. Even at age fifty-six, I feel like the child he left so long ago. In my mind I say, "Dad, it's Benny."

I can now count myself among those for whom he died. But what circuitous journey of half a century has brought me to this point, to this place of understanding? How has growing up without him—and with a war hero ghost, instead—affected who I am? In what ways has his death—and the way my family treated it—influenced my identity?