A Soldier's Story: The Life of Bob ToeWater

Karen Regina

Three boxes that are part of a manuscript collection in The Cincinnati Historical Society library contain the records and correspondence of a Cincinnati family named ToeWater. Sorting through the impersonal black boxes, the author uncovered an intriguing array of letters, memorabilia, documents, and photographs pertaining to the life of the ToeWater son, Frederick Robert. Gradually these fragments from the past fell into place, like pieces of a puzzle, to reveal the fascinating story of a young man whose life began with great hope and promise but ended tragically and prematurely in the cataclysm of World War II.

Handling these family records with their intimate revelations into life and death proved to be a moving experience. The story of Bob ToeWater is about family, idealism, patriotism, valor, loss, and disillusion and is a story worth telling. For Cincinnatians who lived during those extraordinary years, Bob ToeWater's tale is likely to evoke powerful memories of World War II and the sacrifices it required. For those born in postwar years, it can provide insights into the hearts and minds of a generation for whom the line between good and evil seemed more clearly drawn and war was an endeavor to set the world right.

World War II was a devastating war. Seventeen million members of armed forces around the world perished, and millions more civilians died. Josef Stalin, dictator of the Soviet Union during the war, said that a single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic. In trying to fathom the horror of war, the human mind can perhaps comprehend the loss of a single individual, a Bob ToeWater, better than it can the millions. The fiftieth anniversary of the United States' entrance into World War II seems an appropriate time to reflect upon what the loss of Bob ToeWater, and millions of others like him around the world, meant to family and nation.

The reconstruction of the life of Frederick Robert ToeWater that follows is based largely upon materials in the collection turned over to the Society upon the death of Charlotte Shipley ToeWater, his mother, in 1962. The Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, which Bob attended, also loaned materials, including yearbooks and documents from ToeWater's student records, and James A.D. Geier, Bob's childhood friend, provided insights into his youthful character.

On May 1, 1926, Charlotte Shipley ToeWater delivered her first child, a son, at Christ Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio. She and her husband, George Myers ToeWater, a local investment counselor, named their son Frederick Robert after his paternal grandfather, who bore the given name of a long line of relatives dating back to fifteenth-century Holland. Born into a Cincinnati family of wealth and prominence, the announcement of Bobby's birth warranted several paragraphs in a local newspaper, along with this prediction: "... surrounded by every luxury, already crowned with tributes of flowers and gifts, Master Frederick Robert ToeWater . . . has made so sturdy a start in life that if these first few days are any augury, he has a future in store for him well worth following."

At the time of Bobby's birth, the ToeWaters lived at 3983 Parker Place, but by 1933 the family had moved to a large home surrounded by trees at 5 Garden Place in East Walnut Hills where Bobby spent his childhood and adolescent years. The home was classic in style, with dark woodwork, high ceilings, and heavy wooden doors. For a time, three generations of ToeWaters lived in the house, until 1936 when Bobby's namesake, grandfather Frederick Robert ToeWater, died.

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Frederick Robert ToeWater was born on May 1, 1926, to Charlotte and George ToeWater.
George and Charlotte ToeWater clearly adored their only child, and Bobby returned that affection. On Easter, Valentine’s Day, Christmas, and anniversaries, young Bobby sent greeting cards to his parents, who lovingly saved them for posterity. Often he made the cards by hand and signed them with his nickname, “Bubs.” On more than one card or gift tag, Bobby wrote that his mother was “the best mother in the whole world” and “my best girl.”

One Christmas, young Bobby penned a letter to Santa Claus in his childhood scrawl. Given the family’s economic situation, Bobby’s requests were rather simple. “Dear Santa Claus, Please bring me a cowboy suit and high top boots, and some stamps. And I would like my big Christmas tree. I would like a long pointed ornament for the top of my Christmas tree or a star. I would be glad to get anything you wanted to give me. With love, Robert ToeWater” Soon Bobby received a reply from Santa Claus at the North Pole in the form of a Western Union holiday telegram composed by his parents. “I shall come Christmas Eve by airship, or sleigh, but be much too busy to make a long stay=bringing some of the presents you wanted, good boy,=so look in your stocking, you may find a toy. There also will be a yule tide tree tall=and here’s Merry Christmas to you and to all. Santa Claus”

According to a medical history kept by his mother, Bobby suffered the usual childhood ills, including mumps, measles, chicken pox, influenza, and strep throat, and underwent a tonsillectomy in 1931 at the age of four-and-a-half and an appendectomy in 1938. Over the years, various doctors inoculated him against small pox, diphtheria, typhoid, tetanus, and whooping cough, or pertussis; he tested negative for tuberculosis in 1942.

Bobby attended nearby Hyde Park Elementary School, where he was an excellent student. His sixth grade report card, from the school year 1937-1938, reveals straight A’s in English, social studies, arithmetic, science, music, and physical education, and B’s in handwriting and industrial arts; his lowest grades were two C’s in art. The attendance record shows that Bobby missed fifteen days of school in the spring term, far more days than he missed in earlier quarters, a fact that can probably be attributed to his appendectomy in May.

During boyhood and adolescence, young ToeWater spent several summers with his mother at Avon Lodge, a resort near Ludington, Michigan. Bob reveled in the usual summer camp sports — baseball, tennis, golf, swimming, and fishing — and enjoyed dances, steak fries, and boat rides. George ToeWater usually stayed in Cincinnati, so Bob wrote his father frequently. These letters marked the beginning of a voluminous correspondence between son and parents that continued when Bob went off to prep school and into military service during World War II. Characteristically, Bob’s letters included detailed accounts of his recent activities and ended with expressions of affection. “Dear Daddy, Friday morning, Mother and I played golf.... Then I beat Mother 2 out of 3 in shuffleboard. We had lunch and then ... I went in swimming and had dinner. I went to two plays ... and they were pretty good. . . . This morning I fixed your sand and it took 45 wagon loads of sand and 15 shovelfuls in each wagonload. Quite a job. Lots of love and oodles and oodles of kisses, Your devoted son, ‘Bubby’.”

A childhood friend, James Geier, remembers Bob as a bright and thoughtful but quiet boy. ToeWater and Geier counted Robert Pogue among their best friends, and the trio spent many an afternoon playing and getting into boyish mischief. According to Geier, Bob was usually not bold
enough to initiate the mischief himself but was more than willing to follow the lead of the other boys.

In the fall of 1938, Bob entered the seventh grade of Walnut Hills High School, Cincinnati's stately college preparatory school on Victory Parkway. During the four years Bob spent at Walnut Hills, he was elected as freshman class president and sophomore class treasurer, joined Hi-Y, sang in the choir and glee club, and served on Student Council, in addition to winning awards for his scholastic abilities.

ToeWater frequently mentions church-related activities in correspondence and documents that date to his youth. In letters from Avon Lodge, Bob writes about attending church on Sunday and vespers during the week, a pattern of attendance that continued later when he was away at school and in the military. In 1939 Bob was confirmed in The Church of the Redeemer, an Episcopalian church on Edwards Road in Hyde Park where the ToeWaters were members. From the time of his confirmation until he left to complete his schooling in the East, Bob was a capable and enthusiastic member of the Acolytes' Guild. At first his mother was uncertain about the interest he would take because of his devotion to baseball. But according to the church newsletter, "Bob quickly mastered the services of the church and by the force of his personality exerted a powerful influence for good over the other boys."

Soon after he turned sixteen, Bob earned his driver's license, which offers one of the few physical descriptions of him. His Ohio license notes that he had blonde hair and grey eyes, weighed 143 pounds, and stood 5'10" tall.

In September 1942, Bob went east to finish his final two years of high school at The Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, a reputable private prep school for boys, most of whom went on to prestigious Ivy League colleges. Initially, Bob
found his studies at Lawrenceville more challenging than at Walnut Hills. "Physics . . . is very difficult and takes a lot of time to prepare. Math is a snap . . . So far I'll be lucky if I pass English. The French translations are very difficult . . . ."

"About the only night that you can get any sleep around here is Sunday night, the rest of the time you work until the lights go off, and then undress in the dark . . . ." Bob's worries about his studies seemed to be for naught, as he managed to earn positive reports from his House Master the first year. "His scholastic interest, effort, and performance are creditable." During his years at Lawrenceville, Bob dutifully and regularly wrote his parents, and in his letters commented on various aspects of school life. "The food here is much better than I expected it to be . . . ."

"About athletics, I am of course out for the house (football) team. It's going to be 'not too good' for the simple reason that only eleven fellahs are out for the team, and most of these boys are very light . . . ."

"I haven't taken any paper like the New York Times because I don't have any time to read it."
Some of Bob's letter revealed a touch of homesickness, as when Charlotte ToeWater visited Lawrenceville on the school's Mother's Day. Afterwards, Bob wrote to his father, “I have just said goodbye to mother. It sure was good to see her, but gosh, did it make me homesick . . . . I came up here and had a good cry . . . . Now that I have cried and gotten over it, I'll be all right. I sure do miss you both.”

To ease their son's homesickness, George ToeWater mailed Bob clippings about Walnut Hills athletic teams and forwarded Cincinnati Enquirer sports pages so that he could follow the Reds' fortunes, while Charlotte ToeWater shipped him packages of cookies and filled his occasional requests for items like medicine or clothing from home.

Lawrenceville students lived in large residences presided over by House Masters. Bob roomed in Griswold House, an ivy-covered, gable-roofed edifice, complete with second-story porches and a bay window. Despite the sedate exterior, the teenaged boys inside got a bit rowdy sometimes, and Bob was no mere bystander in the shenanigans. “Last night, we were all feeling pretty gay so one fellow put a bunch of ice in Moose Foster's bed. Moose found it and put it in the other fellow's bed. A friendly fight ensued, during which I slipped the ice in Moose's bed. Moose again found the ice and put it in my bed. I then decided for all concerned it would be better if I got rid of it . . . . A great time was had by all.”

By the time Bob arrived at Lawrenceville in the fall of 1942, the United States had been fighting in World War II for nearly a year, and school life was increasingly affected by the realities of wartime. The school yearbook noted that with the lowering of the draft age in November from twenty-
one to eighteen, “the war entered the gates of Lawrenceville.” The Head Master accepted the resignations of a number of faculty members who left Lawrenceville to join the service and summed up the school’s experience during the 1942-1943 term by reporting that: “Everything we have done here this year has been done in the daily consciousness of war and in the atmosphere with which war has surrounded us.”

ToeWater kept up with the war in part by corresponding with his father, who often expressed his views on a variety of war-related topics and in one letter described his wariness of Communist Russia. Subsequently in English class, Bob borrowed many of his father’s ideas to write a theme in which he questioned the wisdom of opening a second battle front in Europe to alleviate the pressure on Russia. “Before the war, the American people abhorred Fascism and Communism... Let us not forget that Russia is not fighting for democracy. She is fighting for her own existence and for the existence of that for which she stands, Communism. Why, then, should we open a second front to help Russia?” The composition earned Bob a grade of eighty-two and an invitation from the teacher, who was disturbed by Bob’s views, to discuss the matter.

In New Jersey, as elsewhere across the nation, government officials helped anxious citizens allay their fears of enemy attack by establishing a civil defense system and staging practice blackout drills and air raids. One October day in 1942, Bob and his housemates found their evening routine disrupted by such preparations. “... we came back to the house and studied for about 45 minutes, when the blackout signal was heard. This was a practice blackout for the whole state of New Jersey. All of us rushed downstairs to the reading room and put up the blackout curtains. Of course we turned out all the lights... Thus the only light we had, was from four candles. Frank... and myself translated some French together amidst the blaring of Tommy Dorsey’s swing band on the radio and the general talking of everyone. After some time had passed, the ‘all clear’ was heard and the lights were turned on. By this time it was 10:30 and all that I had accomplished was a rough draft of a theme about whether lads of 18 should be drafted or not.”

During his two years at Lawrenceville, Bob served on student council, played varsity soccer and baseball and house tennis, was vice-president of the school’s history club, and sang in the choir and glee club.

In the spring of 1944, his senior year, Bob went through the motions of applying to Princeton University. In its referral to Princeton, Lawrenceville officials described Bob as “a very substantial boy, good background, excellent habits, ... a good brain. He is one of our best. He has made a great record in his two years with us—is widely known and

Lawrenceville students lived in large residences and ToeWater roomed in Griswold House, an ivy-covered, gable-roofed edifice. (Picture courtesy The Lawrenceville School)
respected. Has leadership possibilities." But college plans competed with the exigencies of war, and spring found Bob registering for both the SAT and the draft. With military service a more likely probability than college, Bob on his father's advice applied to the Navy's Officer Training Corps.

Much to the astonishment and dismay of father and son, the physical examination revealed that Bob was colorblind and thus ineligible for naval officer's training. The setback was particularly disturbing to George ToeWater, who believed that his son's education and personality established him as officer material. Thwarted by the Navy, Mr. ToeWater urged his son to consider the Army, where limited color blindness was not regarded as a disqualifying handicap. "I still think the administration of the Army is both arbitrary and stupid and completely outclassed by the Navy. However, if there should be even a slight possibility of your securing any opportunity in the Army to qualify as an officer, I would urge you to take it since it would be much more desirable, I feel, than entering the Army as a plain draftee." 

But military matters were briefly put aside as graduation took center stage. On June 10, 1944, in the campus chapel, Bob ToeWater graduated from The Lawrenceville School and then made a post-graduation trip to Washington, D.C., where he visited the House of Representatives and Senate.

No sooner had Bob arrived back home in Cincinnati than he received an order from the government to report for his preinduction military physical. On July 6, he reported to Local Board #4 at 1740 Brewster Avenue, where this time the military found no reason to reject him. Instead, the commander marked Bob's form, "physically fit, acceptable for general military service." Princeton would have to wait.

On the morning of September 4, 1944, Bob was transported to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio, for actual induction into the United States Army. "22 of us had a private coach up to Columbus and got to the fort around noon.... Had a quick physical checkup and then had our papers typed and were sworn in. Had lunch about 12:15 and dinner at 5:00. Then got to station again on our way, bound for Camp Atterbury."

The new draftee spent about a week at Camp Atterbury, an army reception center in Indiana, where he underwent more processing and was issued temporary military clothing. Bob discovered the clothes had previously been worn by others, a condition about which he seemed neither surprised or concerned. "All we did this morning was get our uniforms... My coat used to belong to a buck sergeant and shows where the stripes were on the sleeves.... My coat is a good fit although I don't like the idea of the impression of sergeant stripes being left on them. All my other stuff is new as far as I can make out.

FREDERICK ROBERT TOEWATER

"Bob" "Toe" "Flitwater" "Fit"

"He begs at them that borrowed of him."

3 Garden Place, Cincinnati, Ohio.
Born at Cincinnati, Ohio, May 1, 1926.
Varsity Soccer Team (Major L) '43; Fifth Form Council '44; Student Council '42; All-House Baseball Team '43; Griswold House Championship Tennis Team '43; Chairman of Lower School Study Hall Supervisors; Vice-President Herodotus Club; Choir '42-'44; Glee Club '42-'44; Leader '43-'44; Varsity Baseball Team '44.

One Hundred Twenty-seven
ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION

The President of the United States,

To FREDERICK ROBERT TOEWATER

(First name) (Middle name) (Last name)

Order No. 11388

GREETING:

Having submitted yourself to a local board composed of your neighbors for the purpose of determining your availability for training and service in the land or naval forces of the United States, you are hereby notified that you have now been selected for training and service therein.

You will, therefore, report to the local board named above at 1740 Brewster Ave., Cin. 7, Ohio.

at 7:30 A.m., on the 4th day of September, 1944

This local board will furnish transportation to an induction station. You will then be examined, and, if accepted for training and service, you will then be inducted into the land or naval forces. Persons reporting to the induction station in some instances may be rejected for physical or other reasons. It is well to keep this in mind in arranging your affairs, to prevent any undue hardship if you are rejected at the induction station. If you are employed, you should advise your employer of this notice and of the possibility that you may not be accepted at the induction station. Your employer can then be prepared to replace you if you are accepted, or to continue your employment if you are rejected.

Willful failure to report promptly to this local board at the hour and on the day named in this notice is a violation of the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, as amended, and subjects the violator to fine and imprisonment.

If you are so far removed from your own local board that reporting in compliance with this order will be a serious hardship and you desire to report to a local board in the area of which you are now located, go immediately to that local board and make written request for transfer of your delivery for induction, taking this order with you.

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1940 O - 3520

In August 1944, Frederick Robert ToeWater received his order to report for induction.
They gave me a pair of shoes that I was afraid were a little too snug. So I argued about it knowing how my feet feel about such things, and got 2 other pair of shoes. . . . They have evidently been worn before, have been broken in and aren't too stiff, in fact, feel pretty good.20

At Camp Atterbury, Bob had his first experience with KP duty. "Today I really became quite proficient in the art of cleaning garbage cans . . . . I happened to just have finished my chore and (was) resting on one foot when the cook yelled, 'Hey, you, shine that can, I want to put flour in it.' It was the garbage can into which the remnants of each and every GI's breakfast had been thrown. Well, I set to work and fixed it so I could see my face in the bottom. And in the afternoon, darned if the cook didn't fill it with flour."21

In mid-September, Bob was transferred to Camp Wolters, Texas, to begin seventeen weeks of basic training. Compared to Camp Atterbury, Bob reported that Camp Wolters was clean and well-run, with beautiful scenery and marvelous food. Between 20,000 and 25,000 men were stationed there. "There is a real system at this camp. No hacking around as seems characteristic of the Army."22

Over the next few months, Bob adjusted to military life with few complaints, except for the foul language used by the soldiers, which he found offensive. A typical day at the start of his training consisted of one half-hour of calisthenics, one-half hour of drill, two hours of movies on military subjects, two hours of first aid, and one hour on chemical warfare. Basic training taught Bob to make a bed, clean the barracks, and shine his shoes the GI way. When he was not attending classes in first aid, poison gases, camouflage, map reading, and booby traps, he was learning how to pitch a tent, adjust his gas mask, and load a Browning automatic rifle. In the few free hours he had left, Bob wrote letters, stood in line to make a telephone call home, or watched movies at the recreation center, if he was not too exhausted.

Still pursuing his dream of becoming a military officer, Bob applied to the Army's Officer Candidate School in November 1944. His battalion commander approved Bob's application, but the review board rejected him, citing his lack of personal force, command ability, and practical experience. Bob dejectedly wrote his father, "I messed up . . . on two questions which required thought. Instead of speaking my thoughts, I considered what I was thinking before I said anything, hence I was more deliberate and I guess they thought I lacked 'personal force' in manner of speech. They asked all others to give commands, as for example to a platoon of men, but not me so I don't see how they could tell about my 'command voice.' . . .

"I won't get another chance at OCS I don't think. I really think they looked over my record and saw I was 18 and good cannon fodder and really too young to command a platoon which I am."23

As Bob's basic training entered its final weeks, the war in Europe took a nasty turn. In mid-December 1944, German leader Adolph Hitler launched one last counteroffensive in the Ardennes forest of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The German attack, which came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge, was Hitler's last desperate bid to break the Allies, and it caught them by surprise. Fierce fighting erupted and lasted for weeks, with both sides suffering heavy casualties. By the end of the year, the U.S. Army desperately needed reinforcements at the front lines, and the call went out to bases back in the states for troops to fill the void.

As a result, Bob learned that his basic training would end at fifteen weeks, instead of the expected seventeen, and he would then be shipped overseas. At Christmas, Bob wrote to let his parents know about the change. "... a rather ominous shadow is hovering over . . . our battalion . . . . As you know, the war isn't progressing too well on the western front . . . one night, the 22nd to be exact, the company was called together . . . and the first sergeant read us the news. It was then that we first heard of the 25 miles that the Germans had pushed back the allies . . . it came quite as a surprise to all, and not a pleasant one . . . . Those three words so often used 'This is it' will hold true in my case at a very much earlier date than any of us had previously thought. It is quite obvious that from home we'll go to our P.O.E. from where, within about ten days time, we'll go across. The non-coms also tell us that we should be in combat within a month following our arrival overseas. So, the picture isn't too rosy."24

Happily for the ToeWaters, Bob was able to spend a few days in Cincinnati before going overseas. He arrived home in time to celebrate New Year's Eve with a date and his parents at the Cincinnati Country Club. Then he was off to Fort Meade, Maryland, to prepare for shipping out to Europe. Just before his ship left in mid-January 1945, Bob wrote an eloquent letter to his parents, voicing his feelings about the grave mission upon which he was embarking. "We all know what I'm facing, and the outlook . . . is anything but bright. Whether I return or not, none of us know, however, I shall perform my duty to the best of my ability and do whatever it is in my opinion right to do. I have an obligation to fulfill and may have to come to a decision that may call for a great sacrifice. However, I know that you'd want me to make the right decision, no matter what chance I take, for that's the way you've taught me. After all, I feel I'm merely
that, among other things, is what I'm fighting for, the ones I love most dearly, to keep and protect them and what is theirs, and to keep this country as it is so that in the future, I and mine may live in the continued happiness in which I've dwelt.

"I . . . wanted to write this letter before I left on the so-far greatest undertaking of my life—and I hope the censor has time to pass this on before we leave." 25

The ship carrying Private Frederick Robert ToeWater landed along the coast of France on January 31, 1945, just as the Battle of the Bulge was finally ending. The Allies had at last managed to halt the German advance. ToeWater and thousands of young and inexperienced soldiers like him were rushed to the western front to relieve American troops decimated by casualties and exhausted after the strenuous efforts at the Bulge. 26 On February 5 in Luxembourg, Private ToeWater joined an infantry unit in the 80th Division of General George Patton's Third Army, which had played a major role in the victory against Germany.

The Allies were ready to launch the final offensive that would bring the defeat of Germany. Within a few days of Bob's arrival, Patton began to move his Third Army toward the German frontier and its heavily fortified Siegfried Line. On February 9, eighteen-year-old Bob ToeWater, who had been in Europe little more than a week, went into combat for the first time.

Back in Cincinnati, George and Charlotte ToeWater read the newspapers to keep abreast of the war's progress and waited anxiously for Bob's letters. But instead of letters, a telegram arrived at the ToeWater home one day in late February. "Regret to inform you your son Private Frederick R ToeWater was seriously wounded in action nine February in Germany. Mail address follows direct from hospital with details." 27 Alarmed, the ToeWaters waited for days but heard nothing from the government. Desperate to find out what had happened to their son, the family contacted various government officials. George ToeWater wrote to Charles Sawyer, the American ambassador in Belgium and to Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio asking for help in locating the hospital to which Bob had been taken.

At last the ToeWaters heard from Bob himself, when a letter dictated by him to a Red Cross nurse at a field hospital in Luxembourg arrived. For the first time, the ToeWaters learned what had happened to their son. "It seems that our assignment was to take a pill box. About 11:30, before we had actually started on our assignment, I got hit. Shrapnel was falling all around us and we had to get across the river to gain our objective.

"I didn't think my injury was too bad and so
continued with my squad in a boat, dragging it down the hill, encountering barbed wire and having to cut some on the way to the shore. A couple of shells fell quite close to us, but we made it across.

"On the other side of the river I got separated from my squad, but finally found them again. That night was slowly spent working our way up the hill toward our objective in the drizzling cold rain. In the morning we chased the Germans out of a trench and held it as long as our ammunition held out.

"A lot of Germans, after firing all their ammunition, surrendered. We staved off a couple of attacks successfully. However our ammunition began to run low and we had to begin to look around for a means of withdrawal as we couldn't expect reinforcements. I was firing the B.A.R. and having the most firepower was the last to leave. We finally withdrew along a route picked by our lieutenant, which was very good.

"After getting to safety I just lay there for awhile, but too long, for a sniper let me have one through the stomach. Fortunately, I was only a short distance from the medic and had to crawl about seventy-five yards through some of the deepest mud I've ever been in. I got into the pill box where the medic was. He . . . administered first aid and I spent the next forty-eight hours in the depths of an American-captured German pill box. After that I was moved to this hospital and have been here ever since."

The skirmish in which Private Toewater had been wounded was just one of many that occurred as Patton's Third Army blasted across the German frontier. As Bob lay wounded in the hospital, Third Army units continued pushing into Germany. Within weeks, Allied troops crossed the Rhine River and began to close in on Berlin.

Just after the ToeWaters received Bob's letter
from the hospital, another telegram was delivered. "The Secretary of War asks that I assure you of his deep sympathy in the loss of your son Private Frederick R. ToeWater. Report received states he died one March in France as the result of wounds received in action." A month later, the government awarded the Purple Heart posthumously to Private Frederick R. ToeWater.

George ToeWater was filled with grief at the loss of his only child, but he was also angry, believing that a lack of sufficient military training had contributed to Bob's death in his initial combat encounter. ToeWater fired off a letter of protest to Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell of the Army, concluding that "I do not believe the people of this country are so selfish or so cowardly that they desire to shove these fine youngsters into the front lines of attack without some training period during which they can become accustomed to the sights and sounds of battle . . . ."

Stilwell replied that the requirements of war precluded lengthy training behind the lines. "If our enemies would give us time by waiting for our replacements to be trained, say, for at least a full year, then I would say, 'By all means, train them for at least a whole year.' But wars are not fought that way . . . ."

"You may be sure . . . . that everything is being done to give our soldiers the best training possible, and that experience shows that they join their units well qualified to play their part."

Unsatisfied, ToeWater also wrote to Senator Taft, who agreed that soldiers needed more adjustment time behind the front lines. "I am indignant . . . regarding the policy of the War Department sending insufficiently trained men to join their units in the front lines. It is obvious to me that they ought to have several months with their units behind the lines to learn what their place is . . . . I understand that even the officers at the front feel they would rather have no one than a group of men without adequate training."

A letter from Ohio Congressman William E. Hess promised ToeWater that "our fight for proper training of the 18 year old draftees will continue. The extension of the Selective Service Act was reported by the House Military Committee unanimously . . . . an attempt will be made on the Senate floor to write a provision in the Bill, guaranteeing at least six months training before boys are put into combat service."

When an amended National Service Act passed Congress in late April 1945, George ToeWater thanked Taft for his efforts in securing the legislation.

In the meantime, friends from all over the nation sent condolences to the ToeWaters. Bob appeared to have been loved by virtually all who knew him. "You can always be proud to have had a son with so fine a character as Bob's. His courtesy, his cheerfulness, his good sportsmanship and his courage have always made us, his friends, admire him and look forward to being with him. We know that he never lost those qualities. Bob's death is not only a loss to us who knew and loved him, but also to the world in which there are needed more boys like him." The Head Master of Lawrenceville wrote, "Every day . . . we have thought of Bob, of his fineness and cleanness and of the great hope for the future, which he so fully represented. Many of our Laurentians have made the great sacrifice but the passing of none of them has seemed quite so tragic as Bob's."

The Church of the Redeemer held a vesper service in remembrance of Bob ToeWater on March 23, 1945, and passed a resolution urging that "we hear his call to nobler living and, for his sake and the sake of all his comrades who have likewise given their lives for the good of others, dedicate ourselves anew to the promotion of justice and good will and peace among men . . . ." As a lasting memorial to their son, Bob dictated a letter for his parents to J. Skidmore, a Red Cross worker from a field hospital in Luxembourg.
the ToeWaters presented an altar to The Lawrenceville School chapel from which Bob had graduated less than a year before his death. Later they donated all of Bob's boyhood possessions to the Children's Home in Cincinnati.

Some weeks after Bob had died, Charlotte ToeWater received two letters from the American Red Cross nurse, Jo Skidmore, who had helped care for Bob at the field hospital in Luxembourg. Her letters shed more light on Bob's final days. “The best I can do is assure you that he had the best of surgery, nursing care and medical attention that can be had. We have some of the best surgeons in this entire war theater . . . He was a very sick boy when he reached us . . . Complications had arisen that were the outgrowth of that long delay in the pill box when it was impossible to get an ambulance to him; complications that could in no way be avoided, although they were feared from the first . . . . Once when the boys in the ward were in a talkative mood, they got started on their experiences. One of them asked young Bob how long he lay out in the field after he was hit. Said he: ‘Oh, I was lucky. They got me in an hour.’ And never once mentioned that long wait before it was possible to bring him back to the hospital. One of the nurses asked him what he did during all that time and he told her that one of the boys had a Reader's Digest in his pocket and he'd read that . . . .

“I often think of all the Bob ToeWaters who gave their lives at that river crossing into the Siegfried line that cost us so many. I think they must be sleeping more peacefully because their sacrifice opened the gateway that has brought the end in sight . . . . I know he must be proud that others were able to build so well on the foundation he helped lay, at the cost of his own life.”37 In response to Charlotte ToeWater's query, Skidmore's second letter indicated that Bob had been transferred for medical reasons from the field hospital to one near Luxembourg City, but she was at a loss.
The Church of The Redeemer

The Rev. Maxwell B. Long, D.D., Rector

Vesper Service

in remembrance of

Robert Toe Water

May 1, 1926 — March 1, 1945

Friday, March 23, 1945 — AT 5:00 P.M.

Ye are the light of the world.
For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.
The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

(Miss Grace Chapman at the organ)

The Church of The Redeemer

held a vespers service in
remembrance of Bob Toe-
Water on March 23, 1945.

Queen City Heritage

learned that “one of the Luxembourg ladies who was with me put some beautiful dahlias with my white plant and wondered if you’d mind if she adopts Bob’s. I hope you don’t mind my saying that you would appreciate it a lot — for she’s a very kind person, goes out there every week, and wants you to visit her when you come to Luxembourg. It was so overcast yesterday and today I could take no pictures for you, but this lady is having the photographer come out on the first sunny day and I’ve given her your address and she’s to send them to you at once.”

Eventually the ToeWaters received photographs of Bob’s grave only to discover that an unfortunate mistake had been made, as George ToeWater explained in a letter to General Dwight Eisenhower. “The attached snapshot of the grave of my son... plainly shows the incorrect stenciling of his name on the cross marking his grave.

“In itself, this is perhaps an insignificant matter to bring to your attention, but I am doing so, partly in the hope that you will order a prompt correction, and partly because I feel this incident is typical of many thousands of others that have occurred during these war years, in which the same kind of indifferent work and ‘inefficient’ supervision has been evident.

“To have the power to demand the most meticulous and sometimes arbitrary observance of standards and regulations, while at the same time exhibiting plain and unmistakable evidence of carelessness, inefficiency or indifference, necessarily arouses resentment...”

“For whatever attention you may be able to give to the correction of this mistake, I shall be exceedingly grateful.” Eisenhower promptly replied that “immediate steps will be taken to correct the regrettable error... Thanks for bringing this error to my attention. It is in no sense an insignificant matter to me or to anyone else in the War Department.”

Several years after World War II ended, the United States government disinterred the bodies of American soldiers buried at Hamm and sent the remains home to their families for final disposition. In July 1948, George and Charlotte ToeWater welcomed their son home for the last time and laid him to rest in Spring Grove Cemetery.

More than 407,000 Americans died in combat or from other causes in World War II. Frederick Robert ToeWater was among the 92,000 Cincinnatians who served in the war, and one of the 2,300 local men and women who died in the conflict. Just two months after Bob ToeWater’s death on March 1, the war in Europe ended when Germany surrendered to the Allies on May 7.

to explain why the War Department notice reported that Bob died in France.

Private Frederick Robert ToeWater was buried in a United States military cemetery at Hamm, Luxembourg. Nurse Skidmore assured the ToeWaters that it was a beautiful location surrounded by a forest of pine trees. “In the winter time, the snow makes the scenery breathtaking and in the spring, the scenery has warmth and friendliness. I think your son and his comrades will find peace there.”

Nearly 8,000 American soldiers from World War II were buried at Hamm. Many nearby villagers, especially children, adopted graves of the American soldiers who had fought and died to protect them, and they regularly placed flowers at the graves. In a letter from a family friend who visited Bob’s grave in November 1945, the ToeWaters
1. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 9, 1926. All citations, except as noted, are from the ToeWater and Shipley manuscript collection in the library archives of The Cincinnati Historical Society.
2. Miscellaneous cards and tags, n.d.
3. Frederick Robert ToeWater to Santa Claus, c. 1933.
4. Telegram to Frederick Robert ToeWater, c. 1933.
7. Frederick Robert ToeWater to parents, September 28, 1942.
11. Frederick Robert ToeWater to parents, October 5, 1942.
13. Ibid.

Village children adopted graves of the American soldiers and regularly placed flowers on the graves.

Private Frederick Robert ToeWater was buried in a United States military cemetery at Hamm, Luxembourg.
14. Frederick Robert ToeWater to George Myers ToeWater, October 12, 1942.
15. Frederick Robert ToeWater to parents, October 5, 1942.
16. Miscellaneous record from The Lawrenceville School, Box 6125, Lawrenceville, New Jersey 08648.
17. George Myers ToeWater to Frederick Robert ToeWater, April 16, 1944.
20. Frederick Robert ToeWater to parents, September 6, 1944.
22. Frederick Robert ToeWater to parents, September 14, 1944.
23. Frederick Robert ToeWater to parents, December 11, 1944.
24. Frederick Robert ToeWater to parents, Christmas 1944.
26. Nearly 77,000 Americans were killed at the Battle of the Bulge, in America at War: World War I and World War II, Douglas Waitley, p. 271.
33. Congressman William E. Hess to George Myers ToeWater, April 7, 1945.
34. Unidentified quote, n.d.
35. Allan V. Heely to George Myers ToeWater, March 13, 1945, records of The Lawrenceville School, Box 6125, Lawrenceville, New Jersey 08648.
36. Resolution passed by The Church of the Redeemer, April 18, 1945, Cincinnati, Ohio.
37. Jo Skidmore to Charlotte Shipley ToeWater, April 21, 1945, from 60th field hospital.
40. George Myers ToeWater to General Dwight Eisenhower, June 5, 1946.
41. Dwight Eisenhower to George Myers ToeWater, June 8, 1946.

The ToeWaters presented an altar to The Lawrenceville School chapel as a lasting memorial to their son.