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PRESENT
The Shadow of His Wings
A GRAPHIC BIOGRAPHY OF FR. GEREON GOLDMANN
# Table of Contents

**THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS**
Graphic Biography
7

**EPILOGUE**
After the War
65

**PHOTOGRAPHS**
The Life of Father Goldmann
81

**A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR**
By Max Temenscu
113

**THE MAKING OF THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS**
Script & Sketches
117
Hill 444. As I remember, it was the middle of 1943; our troops had been ordered into Sicily to protect the retreat of the badly beaten remnant of the German army.

The hill was called 444 because it was 444 meters high. The enemy was dug in. We were commanded to take the heights from them. It was a foolish, stupid order, considering our lack of troop strength and our sorry equipment.

The night before the assault, some companies were still without officers. I got Company 10.
Though we were fresh troops, few were experienced soldiers. Except my ambulance driver Faulborn and me, Company 10 was made up of young students taken straight from school and drafted.

The greater number of them were under twenty years of age; some were only sixteen or seventeen. These had been the Hitler Youth.

These boys, in all good faith, were fired up with enthusiasm for the German cause.

Have you seen anyone die?

I’m sorry, what?

Have you seen anyone die?
That same night, this young lieutenant arrived to relieve me, fresh from school.

He was supposed to lead the company in the attack. We had already explained the situation to him.

He had told us that he was active among the Lutheran youth. Before the war, he was even studying to become a pastor.

And we are going to scale that mountain?

Naturally.

But that is suicide. The English are sitting on top, with their big guns.

Yes. But we will overcome th-

CRKK!

The command came.

How do they die?

Badly.

Yes, very many.

Yes.

But we will overcome th-

“Get ready.”
It was a damp and chilly morning.

At first, not a shot fell from above. Regardless, our young Lieutenant continued to question me all morning.

Is it true, one does not fall in the first attack?

This was not a good sign. The men needed a true leader.
NO, NO, I CANNOT FALL. GOD COULD NOT WANT ME TO DIE NOW, NOT NOW!

LOOK, YOU'VE STUDIED THE BIBLE. SURELY YOU MUST KNOW SOMETHING OF TRUST IN GOD. FOLLOW ME AND DO EXACTLY AS I DO. MAKE NO MOVE WITHOUT ME.

ONLY SHORT LEAPS WERE POSSIBLE.

I CANNOT FALL.