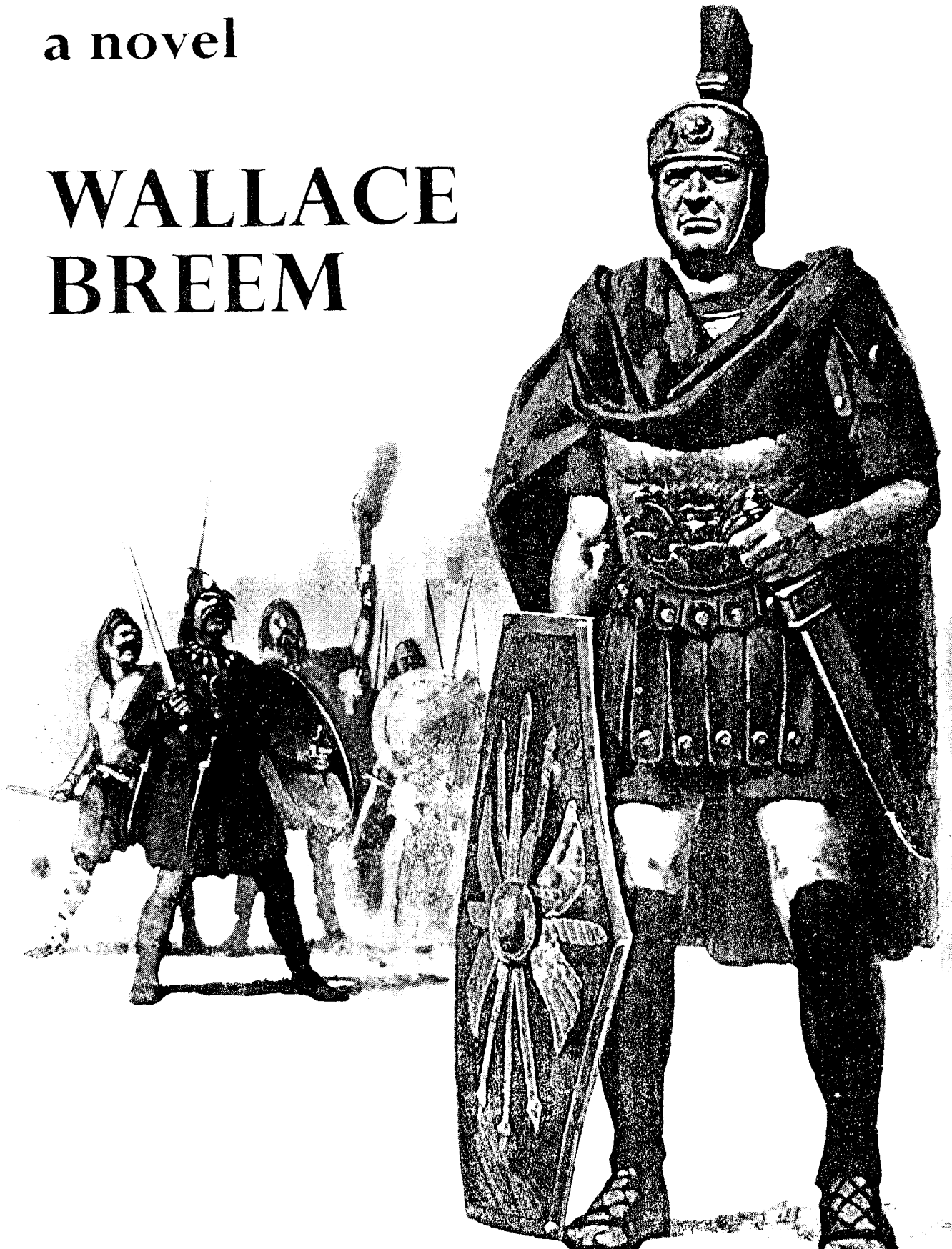


EAGLE IN THE SNOW

a novel

WALLACE
BREEM



Some comments on *Eagle in the Snow*

JOHN TERRAINE:

‘It has tremendous style, assurance and maturity. In the best tradition of modern historical novels it is devoid of sentimentality and mush; it really does have—for me—the feel of a crumbling frontier world, and a Roman world at that. The collapse of a civilisation is a terrible but majestic theme, a severe test of a writer’s quality. Mr Breem’s enthusiasm, sincerity and understanding have turned the test into a triumph.’

ROSEMARY SUTCLIFF:

‘I found it *most* compelling, and painfully moving, a book of great integrity which impressed me from the first page with its feeling of complete authenticity. I felt that I really was reading a general’s memoirs (considerably more enjoyable than most generals’ memoirs!). A book very much after my own heart!’

PHYLLIS BENTLEY:

‘A fine grim tale. Surely no one knows more about the workings of a Roman legion than Wallace Breem. The concealed hatreds between the General and his friend and enemy lend a strong thread of bitter passion to the story.’

R. C. SHERRIFF:

‘I found it fascinating. Although so little is known of this calamitous period in Roman history, I never felt for a moment that the story was laboriously invented. It springs to life on the first page and never falters. A fine, exciting story.’

In the year 406 a single Roman legion—the XXth—stood desperate guard on the Empire's Rhine frontier: six thousand men where in the old days eighty thousand had been deployed. Rome was on the defensive everywhere, and Stilicho, the General of the West, hard-pressed on many fronts, could spare no more men for the Rhine. He hoped against hope that the XXth would hold, for he knew he could never send the reinforcements he had promised. Maximus, the legion's commander, did all that could humanly be done: he built strategic fortifications; he made diversionary sorties; he intrigued with the rival chieftains, winning a dubious ally here, sowing dissension there.

Maximus is the story's narrator and its central figure, and it is his character which charges the book with its emotional power. This is a soldier speaking, an intelligent but not a subtle man: his are the Roman virtues. He is at all times firm, steadfast, unyielding; hard on his men and on himself; and for most of his career just rather than merciful, though in the last months, when he can see the end ahead, he finds in himself a deeper humanity, against the grain of his Roman training.

His world is one of camps, not courts; his companions are soldiers like himself; his allies and adversaries are barbarians. Yet he has to be a politician too, to cope with many difficulties on his own side of the Rhine. And he has his temptations: several times he is urged to proclaim himself emperor—a favourite pastime of Roman generals of the period—but he stands by his concept of his duty.

He held the frontier for longer than seemed possible. But then chance played a cruel trick: during an abnormally severe winter the Rhine froze, solidly enough for a vast barbarian army to cross....

This makes a tremendous story. It is

[please turn to back flap

finely told, in the spare, straightforward prose which a soldier would use, and it builds up to a climax that is almost unbearably gripping.

The author, Wallace Breem, intended to make his career in the Indian Army, but he left the Army upon partition in 1947, British service having no attraction for him. He then held a variety of jobs which included unskilled labour in a tannery, assisting a veterinary surgeon, and rent-collecting in the East End. He eventually became a law librarian at the Inns of Court where he has been ever since. *Eagle in the Snow* is his first novel.

Jacket by
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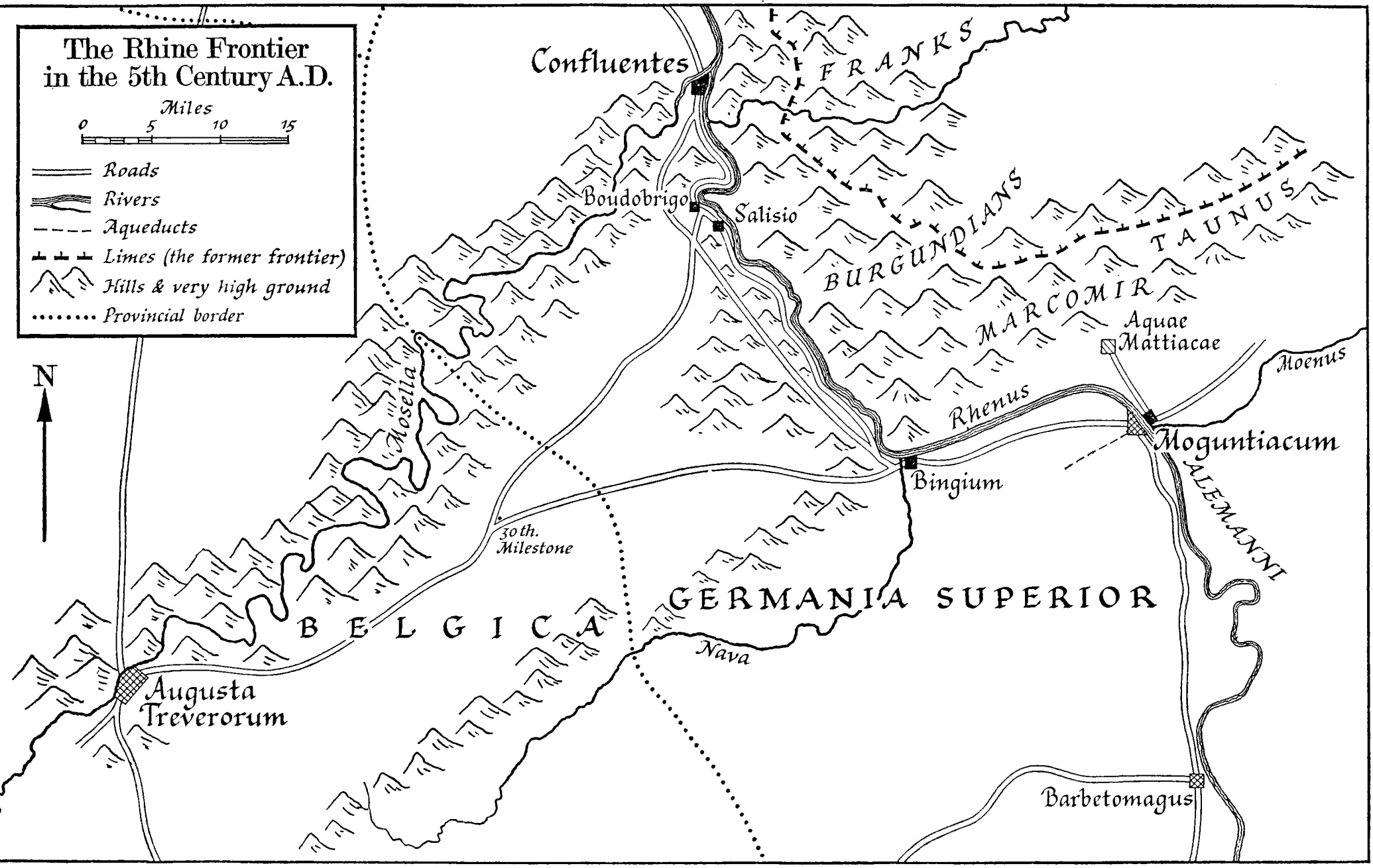
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The Rhine Frontier in the 5th Century A.D.



- Roads
- Rivers
- - - Aqueducts
- + + + Limes (the former frontier)
- ▲ Hills & very high ground
- Provincial border



Maximus bent down and then straightened up, the sword resting in the crook of his arm. He raised his head and turned his eyes upwards to the sun. He said, "What is the end of it all? Smoke and ashes, a handful of bones, and a legend. Perhaps not even a legend."

They watched him go through the broken gate, heard his feet, heavy on the flint strewn path. "He is going to his temple in the woods," said the tall man. "Listen."

There was a long silence, and then a deep voice cried, "Mithras!" and the cry echoed back across the hill. And after that the silence went on for ever.

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