

*The Fighting 36<sup>th</sup>*  
HISTORICAL  
Quarterly



After bombing, the gutted abbey, which Germans had not garrisoned, was used for defense against ground attack.

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**Monte Cassino:**  
**Smithsonian** *By Otto Friedrich*

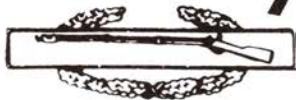
**Vol. IX , No. 1 - Spring 1989**

Published by  
36th DIVISION ASSOCIATION

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# The Fighting 36<sup>th</sup>



HISTORICAL QUARTERLY



Volume IX

Number 1

**TEXAS**

*36th Division  
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• Spring 1989

# The Fighting 36<sup>th</sup>

HISTORICAL  QUARTERLY



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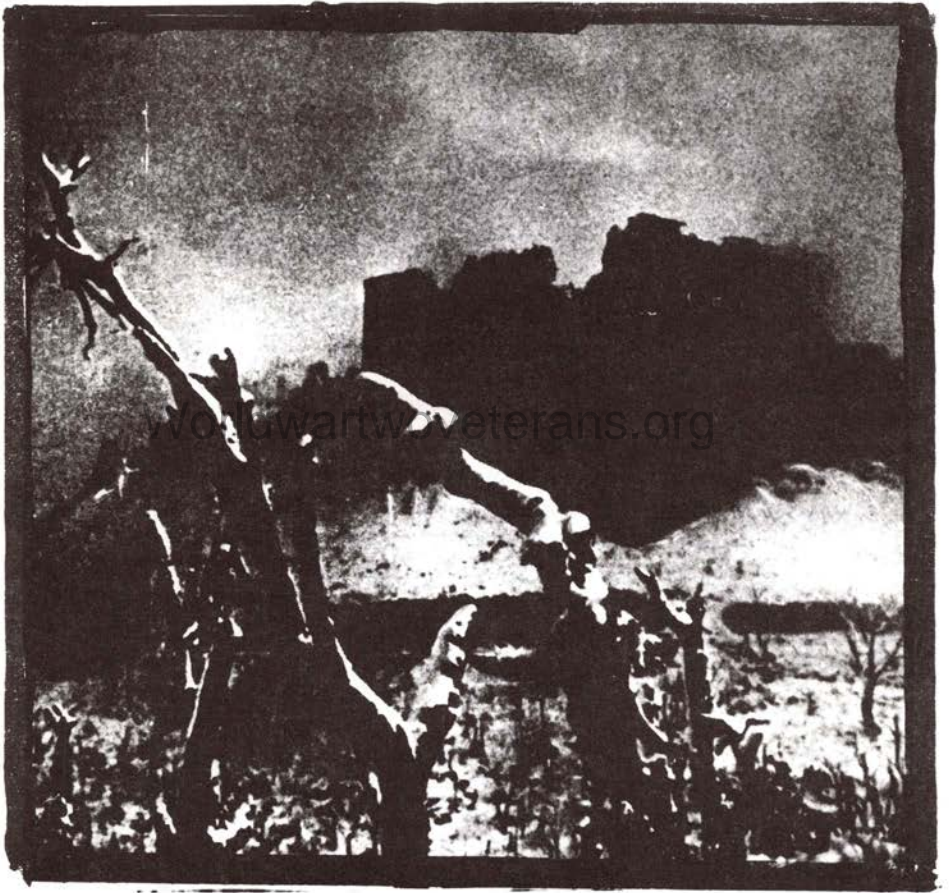
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In February 1944, clouds and fog billow around ruined Monte Cassino abbey after bombs had fallen.

*By Otto Friedrich*

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# Monte Cassino

*In 1944, through miscalculation of war and sheer mischance, the Benedictines' famous abbey was blasted into rubble*

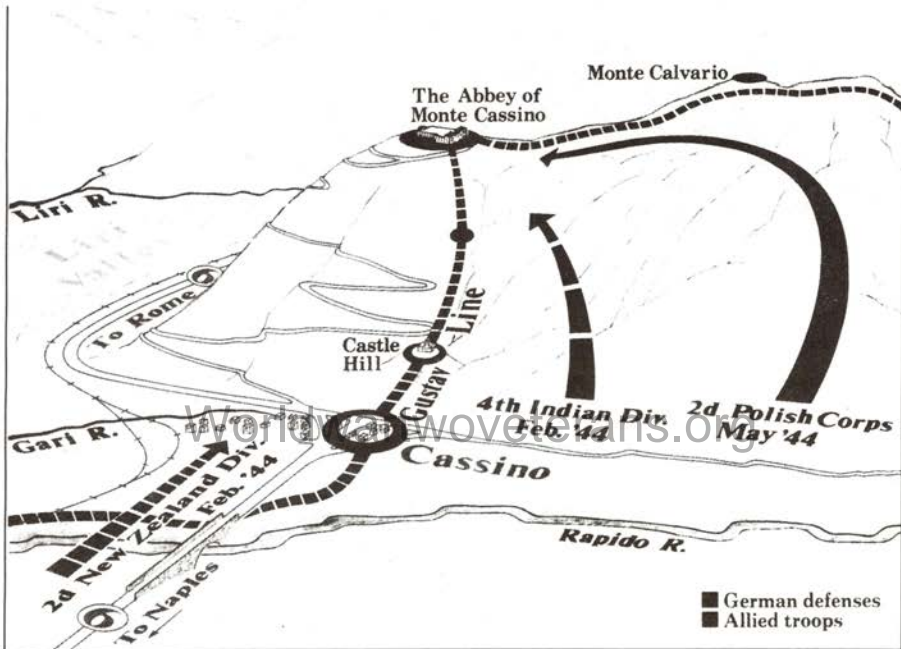


# COVER STORY

## Monte Cassino: A Story of Death and Ressurrection

by *Otto Friedrich*

*MONTE CASSINO* copyright 1987 by *Otto Friedrich*. Article originally published in *Smithsonian Magazine*, April, 1987. It is being published next August, 1989 as part of a collection of articles by the author by *Holt Co.* entitled *The Grave of Alice B. Toklas and Other Reports from the Past*. Permission to reprint this article in the 36th Division Historical Quarterly granted by *Smithsonian Magazine* and the author.



Battle site shown from behind advancing Allies; the Germans were concentrated along Gustav Line, in town and on mountaintop.



*In 1944, through miscalculation of war  
and sheer mischance, the Benedictines'  
famous abbey was blasted into rubble*



Theater commander Harold Alexander  
(with Ike) finally took responsibility.

“Like a lion it crouched,” the young American lieutenant thought as he looked up toward the great abbey on top of the mountain, “dominating all approaches, watching every move made by the armies down below.” This was Monte Cassino, the mother of all Western monasticism in Europe, created by St. Benedict himself more than 14 centuries ago. Now it stood blocking the U.S. Fifth Army’s march on Nazi occupied Rome, just 80 miles to the northwest. It would have to be destroyed.

The Lieutenant, Harold L. Bond, was surprised by both the grandeur and the serenity of the doomed monastery. “Its stone walls were yellow and unexpectedly warm on that cold January day,” he wrote. “The sun reflected from some of the glass in the windows and the great towers and dome were nobly outlined against the sky. Some soldiers in the yard told me that the Germans were using it for an observation, and that was the reason why they had been able to fire with such deadly accuracy on all of our positions.”

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Bond and his men had clawed their way up that mountain, struggling through snow and rain and frozen mud, short of food and even ammunition. The American attackers finally captured a ridge within 1,000 yards of the monastery's wall, but could go no farther. Though they took 80 percent casualties, every attack was beaten back by the German defenders. When the shattered American force had to be replaced by New Zealanders for what was hoped to be the final assault, the monastery still stood there, still watchful as a lion.

"Oh, it was malignant," said an English sergeant serving with the New Zealanders. "It was evil somehow. I don't know how a monastery can be evil, but it was looking at you. It was all-devouring if you like—a sun bleached color, grim. It had a terrible hold on all soldiers...It had to be destroyed."

And so, at 9:28 on the sunny and nearly cloudless morning of February 15, 1944, a flight of 142 B-17 Flying Fortresses unloaded 287 tons of explosive bombs on the undefended monastery, along with 66 tons of incendiary bombs. Great clouds of smoke rose to cover the top of the mountain. Later that day, 87 medium bombers returned with a second round of devastation. The total: 493 tons of bombs, the heaviest attack ever launched against a single building.

Through a series of military miscalculations, the raids were staged at the wrong time and on the wrong day. The troops involved were not ready to begin their assault, and when the attack belatedly got under way, it failed. The bombing that was supposed to shorten the Allied march to Rome probably lengthened it. All that the bombing accomplished was to reduce St. Benedict's monastery, which once had preserved the relics of civilization through the long centuries of the Dark Ages, to smoking rubble.

I was driving through that region not long ago, on the superhighway from Rome to Naples, and I had made a mental note to watch for some sign of the ruins of Monte Cassino, perhaps some roadside plaques marking the spot where the monastery had once stood. But the bone-white gleam of the stone walls caught my eye from miles away, that jagged wall outlined against the brownish green of the surrounding mountains and the serene blue of the Italian sky. Driving closer, I saw that the whole monastery was still there. Americans had not been the first to destroy Monte Cassino—Lombards and Saracens had destroyed it, too—and the monastery had taken as its motto the words *Succisa Virescit*, meaning "struck down, it will live again."

So it has all been rebuilt, stone by stone, just exactly as it once was. And over the one entrance through the ten-foot thick walls into the domain of S. Benedict, there is a message printed in large and blood-red letters. It says in its scarlet letters just one word: PAX.



St. Benedict would approve, one likes to think, but perhaps not. He was a combative man, after all, and much convinced of the rightness of his cause. When he first came here, in A.D. 529, he found many of the inhabitants still loyal to the long-outlawed worship of the Gods of Olympus. On top of the mountain, as Pope Gregory I wrote about Benedict in his *Dialogues*, "stood a very old temple, in which the ignorant country people still worshipped Apollo as their pagan ancestors had done, and went on offering superstitious and idolatrous sacrifices in groves dedicated to various demons." Benedict's reaction was forceful. He destroyed the revered statue of Apollo, overturned the altar and cut down the sacred groves.

Gregory's *Dialogues*, written in about 594, some fifty years after Benedict's death, is the only real source of fairly sparse biographical information about the saint. Nobody knew exactly when St. Benedict was born, probably about 480. In any case, Rome was still flourishing when young Benedict first arrived there, and he was shocked by its flagrant ways. "When he saw many of his fellow students falling headlong into vice," Gregory writes, he "gave up home and inheritance and resolved to embrace the religious life." He lived for years in a cave near the ruins of Nero's villa at Subiaco, and gradually the word of his sanctity spread. He attracted converts and disciples not only by what Gregory calls his "zealous preaching" but also by performing miracles. These were of the traditional sort, retrieving lost objects or mending broken ones, healing the sick with a touch of his hand. But he was always the organizer, the commander. Benedict founded 12 monasteries, then moved on to his destined headquarters at Monte Cassino.

Cassino, the town, at the foot of the mountains that define the Liri Valley, has been fortified since time immemorial. Cassinum was its Roman name, and it sat astride the Via Casilina, now known as Route 6, still one of the main roads south to Naples. Hannibal occupied Casinum during his ill-fated attempt to overthrow Rome in 211 B.C. Entirely within the walls of the ancient fort, some 1700 feet above the town, Benedict build his ultimate monastery and here he wrote the *Regula*, or *Rule*, which for 14 centuries has served as a guide and manual for the monastic life.

"My words are meant for you, whoever you are, who, laying aside your own will, take up the all-powerful and righteous arms of obedience to fight under the true King, the Lord Jesus Christ." So begins The Rule and one hears again that Benedictine note of spiritual combat. But Benedict was an eminently practical man. One reason for the triumph of his Rule was its Rule advice on how to organize a communal life amid the confusions of the sixth century, how to arrange a compromise between the ascetic ideals of the Eastern hermits and the demands of peasant life. The monks were to rise and pray at regular intervals between midnight

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and dawn, but then went out to work in the fields, raising crops and harvesting them. *Laborare est orare*. The monks were to avoid eating meat, but Benedict was not averse to their drinking a modest amount of wine along with their bread and fresh vegetables. "Though we read that wine is not at all suitable for monks," he wrote with characteristic pragmatism, "in our day it is not possible to persuade the monks of this truth."

Nearing death, Benedict told a disciple that God had warned him that "this entire monastery shall fall into the hands of the barbarians." And so it happened that when the invading Lombards sacked and destroyed Monte Cassino in 568, the forwarned monks all escaped into the night and fled to Rome. They brought with them only the manuscript of Benedict's *Regula*, their official measuring cups for bread and wine, and their motto that what had been struck down would live again. As refugees in Rome, they brought to Pope Gregory not only a skillfully organized system of communal life but a vocation to serve that Pope who had given them shelter. When in 597 Gregory decided to send an envoy to the pagan shores of Britain to undertake the conversion of King Ethelbert of Kent, it was natural for him to turn to the Benedictine Augustine, who went and established the first Christian church at Canterbury.

Meanwhile, the plundered shrine at Monte Cassino was still in ruins. Not until the year 718, more than a century after the Lombard attack, did Pope Gregory II send a monk named Petronax of Brescia to begin a rebuilding that eventually resulted in a three-nave basilica. Saracen marauders sacked it in 843. The monks fled once again. Another century passed before Abbot Aligernus led the monks back to Monte Cassino and once again rebuilt the ruins, this time noler than ever.

It was in the 11th century that Monte Cassino reached the height of its grandeur. Its control of the surrounding fields and vineyards extended for miles. Three monks from Monte Cassino became popes (Stephen IX, Victor III and Gelasius II; there have been 24 Benedictine popes in all). The only event needed to complete this new cycle of rebirth and revival was a new moment of destruction. In 1349, an earthquake cracked open the wall of the monastery and brought the great towers tumbling to the ground.

The Baroque palace that eventually arose on top of the mountain seemed far removed from the humble establishment that St. Benedict had once created. A rough rectangle of carved stone, it stood about 200 yards long and 150 wide, its basilica walls covered by murals by Luca Giordano, its library filled with 100,000 volumes.

When Lt. Gen. Mark Clark first saw Monte Cassino, from a jeep parked in the snowy hills on the far side of the Liri Valley, he saw only the prospect of misery and suffering for his men. "When I think back on



the weeks and finally months of searing struggle," he later wrote, "the biting cold, the torrents of rain and snow, the lakes of mud that sucked down machines and men, and, most of all, the deeply dug fortifications in which the Germans waited for us in the hills, it seems to me that no soldiers in history were ever given a more difficult assignment than the Fifth Army in that winter of 1944."

The man who gave them that assignment was Mark Clark himself, an ambitious man all too new to the hardships of combat. Son of a career officer, Clark had graduated from West Point in 1917 just in time to see a few days of actual fighting in World War I. Early in the second war his chief role had been as a planner of military training, an assignment in which he impressed Chief of Staff George Marshall and made a friend of Marshall's protegee, Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower had asked for him to help plan the North African invasions of 1942, and now, at 46, Clark was the youngest lieutenant general in the U.S. Army. This was not necessarily the best recommendation for the officer assigned to command the U.S. Fifth Army on its march to the capture of Rome. The Fifth Army included not only veteran British and Canadian troops but Gurkhas from the Minalayas, Moroccan and Algerian soldiers under French command, and some remnants of the Polish army.

Facing these polyglot invaders stood about 40,000 of the best troops in the German army, organized in the three divisions of the XIV Panzer Korps under the command of General Frido von Senger und Etterlin. A professional soldier of 53, Senger had served with distinction in both the victory over France and later at Stalingrad. He was also a Rhodes Scholar, a devout Catholic and a lay member of the Order of St. Benedict, and one of those who believed it is a soldier's duty to fight as well as possible even in a doomed and disgraced cause. "According to the creed of Thomas Aquinas," Senger wrote, "no man can be blamed for the crimes of others insofar as he has no influence over them. However, the power is not in the hands of the generals but of Hitler and the German people who have voted him into power..."

One of the major powers in Hitler's hands was the authority to decide whether we were to make a defense against the Allied invasion. The Italians had signed an armistice on September 3, 1943, shortly after the conquest of Sicily. Following that, the British Eighth Army crossed the Straits of Messina unopposed. Hitler drew a line—the so-called Gustav Line—that would enable the Wehrmacht to organize a defense south of Rome. The Gustav Line, to be reinforced by mines, pillboxes, machine-gun nest and barbed wire, extended all across the mountainous Italian peninsula and through the center of Cassino.

Not only was the monastery itself one of the great art treasures of the world, but its library was filled with priceless medieval manuscripts. Indeed, the Italian authorities in Rome, who still lived under the illusion that the monastery would remain safe from attack, had shipped other art

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there for safekeeping in underground vaults. From the Naples Museum came 11 Titians, including the gorgeous Danae, Bruegel's Parable of the Blind and the only two Goyas in Italy. And more: 30 crates of things unearthed at Pompeii, a crate of ancient coins from Syracuse, two boxes of Keats and Shelley manuscripts from the Keats house in Rome.

In their book, *Monte Cassino*, the most detailed and interesting account of these events, David Hapgood and David Richardson note that the obvious vulnerability of this hoard was at first realized only by a Dr. Maximilian Becker, who had been an archaeology student before the war and now served as a medic in the Hermann Goering Division. When Becker heard what had been stored at Monte Cassino, he made a private visit to persuade the abbot, Gregorio Diamere, to let the Germans remove his treasures for safekeeping in the north. The abbot, a small, plump man of 79, at first declined. He lacked authority, he said; besides, God's will would be done. But when the advancing Americans were only 50 miles away, and the town of Cassino had already been hit by the first Allied air raids, the abbot gave in. The Germans loaded up truckload after truckload of art and carted them away to their supply depot at Spoleto. Only then did Becker, having pledged his personal honor to the abbot for the safety of the treasures, learn that Col. Julius Schlegel, the division's ambitious transport officer, was now currying favor with Reichsmarschall Goering by offering him the pick of the Monte Cassino pictures. (After the war the Allies retrieved Goering's loot from Nazi hiding places in Austria.)

What the Germans called "clearing" the abbey also meant clearing out its inhabitants. Abbot Diamere, who had ruled over Monte Cassino for 34 years, refused to leave his post in the face of the coming attack, but the Germans forcibly removed all but ten of the monks and more than a hundred refugees who had already taken shelter there after nearby German positions were heavily shelled. More hungry refugees soon began to gather outside the walls, swarms of them. A small group of terrified women finally pounded on the gate, crying to be let in. They were refused. The women threatened to set the gate afire. After that the abbot gave way. The gate was opened. Eventually about 800 peasants came seeking safety in the abbey.

One of the monks kept a diary:

"Jan. 20: Around seven o'clock hellish firing started on the plain, which looked as if it were erupting all over; an awful noise shook the whole monastery...This was the first great battle for Casino.

"Jan. 21:...during the night, an Anglo-American shell had penetrated the basilica...A cloud of dust covered everything; the confessionals were smashed and so were some marbles.

"Jan. 24:...Hellish firing started at around 9:30 and continued intense until about 11:30. Several shells fell on the monastery...Fragments flew all over the place."



Mark Clark had launched the great offensive by ordering the Texas 36th Division to cross the Rapido River just east of Cassino on the night of January 20, but the attack was beaten back with heavy casualties. French and Moroccan troops finally led the way across the Rapido, much farther upstream, and then Clark sent his 34th Division to climb the heights 1,700 feet above Cassino and seize the monastery. The attackers succeeded in scaling the heights, but then came deadlock. By the time the New Zealanders crept up to relieve the Americans at the end of a week's hard fighting, they found the hillside strewn with frozen corpses. Fifty Americans still guarding the uppermost ridge were so exhausted they could not even stand and had to be carried down the mountainside on stretchers. And the snow kept falling.

On February 12, the New Zealand commander, Lt. Gen. Bernard Freyberg, called up Clark's headquarters requesting that the monastery be bombed before his 4th Indian Division attacked it. "The monastery is not on the list of targets," said Clark's chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Alfred Gruenther. "It is on my list of targets..." Freyberg retorted. "I want it bombed."

Just a month earlier General Eisenhower had tried to create guidelines about destruction of historic monuments but those guidelines remained ambiguous. "If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our lives count infinitely more and the buildings must go," Eisenhower declared. "But the phrase 'military necessity' is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even of personal convenience..."

What, then, is "military necessity," except what some general says it is? When the Americans were leading the advance toward Cassino, none of their generals had demanded the destruction of the monastery. Now here was General Freyberg of New Zealand arguing "military necessity." But Freyberg was not just another general. As Clark would tell David Richardson in an interview later, his own superior, Sir Harold Alexander, British commander of the Allied Armies in Italy, had told him "Freyberg is a big man in New Zealand, a big man in the Commonwealth. We treat him with kid gloves and you must do the same."

Freyberg was indeed a big man—tall, rugged, overwhelmingly gung ho—and his nation's leading hero in two wars. Wounded four times in France during World War I, he was now 50 years old, but since 1940 he had led his New Zealand Corps through arduous combat in the Egyptian desert, Crete, North Africa and Italy. (One division lost 18,500 of 43,500 men.)

"As brave as a lion," according to one of his fellow officers, "but no planner of battles..." Freyberg, in the present circumstances, was a man exceedingly hard for Clark to handle. One problem was that the New Zealanders were free to go home (as the Australians had done) anytime

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their leaders decided that these troops were needed for defense against the Japanese. (The previous spring the New Zealand Government had seriously considered doing so.) Another difficulty for Clark lay in the shaky situation of the new Allied beachhead at Anzio, about 50 miles up the coast, behind the Gustav Line. Originally, Clark had pressed the disastrous crossing of the Rapido on January 20 to divert German attention from the prospective Anzio landing on January 22; now, when the Allies found themselves pinned down on the Anzio beachhead, they needed new pressure against Cassino or they risked defeat in both places.

So when Gruenther had to respond to Freyberg's demand for bombing the monastery, he had to deal with commanders much concerned about other things. Alexander's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Sir John Harding, called Gruenther later that day with a secondhand version of the commander's verdict. "General Alexander has decided that the monastery should be bombed if General Freyberg considers it a military necessity. He regrets that the building should be destroyed, but he has faith in Freyberg's judgment." Considering the explicitness of that decision, Gruenther sounded almost insubordinate in his defense of his own commander's view. "General Clark does not think that the building should be bombed," he said, according to his own recollection of the argument. "He believes it will endanger the lives of many civilian refugees in the building and that a bombing will not destroy its value as a fortification for the enemy." General Hardin was icy. "General Alexander has made his position quite clear on this point," he said to Gruenther. "If General Clark desires to talk personally to General Alexander about the subject, I'm sure that General Alexander will be pleased to discuss it with him."

Top American leaders may have been keenly aware of Italian and Catholic sensibilities back home in the Presidential election year of 1944; they were also aware of the American press' noisy commitment to the welfare of the ordinary G.I. Any signs of favoritism brought trouble. "CALRD ORDER PROHIBITS 5TH ARMY FROM ATTACKING CHURCH PROPERTY," one of the critical headlines in the New York Times announced over a dispatch from C. L. Sulzberger on the fighting at Monte Cassino. "There seems little doubt," Sulzberger's file went on, "that [the Germans] are employing it as an artillery observation post...The Fifth Army's abstention from shelling Monte Cassino Abbey...hampered our advance greatly since the whole hillside beneath it is defended...Many lives may be lost."

Ironically enough, one of the most powerful voices that determined such an assault came not from the highest ranking officer involved but from the lowest ranking one, not from a man who wanted to bomb the monastery but from a man who didn't want to attack it at all. His voice was so powerful because he was the one who had been assigned to lead



the actual attack. Tucker was his name, Maj. Gen. Francis Tucker, commander of the 4th Indian Division, a unit attached to the New Zealand Corps that was one-third British, two-thirds Indian and Gurkha. A waspish professional soldier (also an artist and a poet), Tucker was one of the few generals on the scene who actually had experience in mountain warfare—on the Northwest Frontier of India. He had a low opinion of most of the officers who now outranked him in the battle for Monte Cassino. General Alexander impressed him as “indolent” and General Clark as “a flashy ignoramus.”

It was typical of Tucker, when he heard nothing from any intelligence officials on how the monastery was actually built, that he sent an aide hunting through the used-book stores of liberated Naples to find some prewar tourist guidebooks. “After considerable trouble...” he tartly reported to Freyberg, “I have at last found a book, dated 1879, which gives certain details of the construction of the Monte Cassino Monastery.” Specifically, the old guide disclosed that the monastery’s walls were 10 to 15 feet thick, and that there was only one gate built out of “large stone blocks 9 to 10 meters long.” How in God’s name was an infantry unit supposed to break in? As Tucker had consistently argued, the only answer was to reduce the place to rubble. “If we were to be forced to attack directly,” he informed Freyberg, “then it would have to be a matter of obliterating the whole Monte Cassino...”

As Tucker implied with that preliminary “if,” he thought such an onslaught unnecessary and undesirable. He had all along insisted that, instead, the monastery should be outflanked and isolated. “I went through hell on earth during the early days urging desperately that no attack on Monte Cassino should be contemplated,” Tucker said later. “I could never understand why the U.S. Fifth Army decided to batter its head again and again against this most powerful position, held by some of the finest troops in the German Army in heavily wired and mined and fixed entrenchments.”

But Rome had to be conquered as soon as possible, before the D-Day landings now planned for only four months in the future. Americans were getting irritated, moreover, by what they saw as repeated British suggestions for delaying and diversionary actions on every front. They were beginning to think, to put it bluntly, that the British were afraid to risk heavy casualties. That was not fear but common sense, the British might have answered, for in the war thus far they had suffered heavier losses than the Americans. “I always told Freyberg quite clearly,” Tucker said later, “that nothing would induce me to attack this feature directly unless the garrison was reduced to helpless lunacy by sheer unending pounding for days and nights by air artillery...”

Tucker tried to reduce Freyberg and Clark to helpless lunacy by the pounding of his snappish memoranda, but he was suddenly silenced by a crippling attack of rheumatoid arthritis. That put the 4th Indian Division

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under the command of a more pliable brigadier named Harry Dimoline; and on February 11, Dimoline formally requested that the U.S. Army bomb the monastery. General Alexander therefore ordered Clark to bomb. Gruenther arranged the details. When the weather cleared, the bombers would strike on February 13.

But once ordered, the raid had to be canceled. Freyberg's troops had not had time to move back from their exposed positions near Monte Cassino. Next day, there was heavy snow. The 4th Indian Division finally sent back word from the mountain that it could be ready to attack on the night of February 16-17. Then Freyberg got a call from the Americans saying the raid would have to be staged the very next morning, February 15. There were reports of rainstorms, and all available bombers would be needed at Anzio. The troops on the mountain said they could not evacuate their positions by the following morning. Freyberg said they would have to do the best they could. Next morning when the first bombers arrived over Monte Cassino, an officer of the 4th Indian Division on the mountain shouted into a field telephone that the men weren't ready. "Even as I spoke," he recalled, "the roar drowned my voice as the first shower of eggs came down."

President Roosevelt called a press conference later that day to explain the raid. "The reason it was shelled [sic] was because it was being used by the Germans to shell us," Roosevelt said. "It was a German strong-point—had artillery and everything up there in the abbey." Since there were actually no Germans in the abbey—no "garrison" of the kind that Tucker wanted to pound into "helpless lunacy"—the only people killed were between 150 and 250 of the Italian peasants hiding in the cellar. Stray bombs also wounded 24 of the Indian troops on the hill nearest the Germans because they had not been informed exactly when the raid was coming. When it was all over, Abbot Diamare, carrying a large wooden crucifix, led a procession of monks down the mountainside. According to one account, the German paratroopers and gunners in their trenches removed their helmets as the group passed. Some of the monks and peasants were badly wounded. One woman had lost both her feet and was carried on a ladder. She died on the way down.

When the Indians finally attacked they were beaten back. The same thing happened on the next night. Their third and final attack, on February 17 by the light of a waning moon, was supposed to be the last and fiercest, irresistible. Two companies of Gurhas were destroyed within 15 minutes. Even badly wounded, some of them fought their way through briars, wire, antipersonnel mines and machine-gun fire, to use their kukri knives on the Germans. Some were captured and never seen again. But the corpses of others were dangling among the thorns the next morning.



The obstinate Freyberg wanted to resume the attack next day, but after the 4th Indian Division lost 530 men in that third night alone, Dimoline persuaded him to give it up. Two days later, the Germans finally took advantage of the lull to move up inside the monastery walls and establish stronger defensive positions among the heaps of rubble. And the snow kept falling.

The next month, the now scarred and numbed Indians were replaced, like the Americans before them, this time by Gen. Wladyslaw Anders' Polish Corps. These were some 50,000 men who had been captured by the Soviets during that month-long nightmare in September 1939, in which both Hitler and Stalin attacked Poland from opposite sides. Only after Hitler invaded Russia in 1941 did Stalin agree to release his Polish captive from their Siberian prison camps to go and join the British forces in Iran. From there, they were shipped to the Italian front and the snow-covered ridges of Monte Cassino. Here they, too, attacked and they, too, were beaten back until finally, on the morning of May 18, a patrol by the 12th Podolski Lancers met no resistance. The German 1st Parachute Division had quietly pulled out during the night. The Poles raised their red-and-white banner over the ruins.

After the fighting, of course, there were the people to be cared for, the 10,000 or so survivors of what had once been the industrious town of Cassino at the foot of the mountain. The actual fighting, week after week, had been fiercest not around the walls of the monastery but down here in the town. Now the survivors had to live on in the rat-infested rubble, without food, without fresh water.

Three months after the Polish capture of the monastery, Mayor Gaetano di Biasio wrote a letter to President Roosevelt, appealing for help for what he called his "martyred town." This had received only a cool reply from the U.S. Embassy in Rome. Meanwhile, in the shell of the monastery, about 35 monks and about 100 workmen began slowly clearing away the debris. Though the main bell had been destroyed, like almost everything else, the monks strung up a shell casing on which to sound the hours for prayer. As they sifted the wreckage, they followed a basic rule that the new abbot, Hdefonso Rea, laid down: everything should be reestablished "dov'era, com'era," of "where it was, as it was."

But all this would take ages. "It goes very slowly," said Dom Francesco Vignanelli as he sat in a shack and catalogued fragments of stone. "Still, we've rebuilt six statues." Another monk, Dom Orderisco Graziosi, offered a comparison with the thousands of olive trees that once bloomed on the mountainside. "It takes an olive tree 30 years to bear fruit," he said. "For us it will be decades, perhaps centuries. But that day will come..."

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Visitors mourn at the grave of one of more than 1,000 men killed when the Polish army captured the abbey at last.



It seemed beyond possibility that the rebuilding could be finished in this century, but the Italian government, and not the Vatican, which had officially owned Monte Cassino since all monasteries were nationalized



# a story of death and resurrection



Lt. Gen. Mark Clark was against the bombing, yielded to command pressure.



Tuker's boss, General Freyberg, insisted frontal assault required the bombing.

as part of the Risorgimento in 1868, managed to provide nearly \$4 million over the years, some of it donated by Americans. In 1950, \$4 million could be stretched a long way toward the rebuilding of an Italian monastery. The Benedictines, who number about 12,000 around the world, one-quarter of them in the United States, also managed without a great deal of noise to raise a substantial sum. In 1964, Monte Cassino was ready to be reconsecrated by Pope Paul VI. There is still some work going on today—is any church ever really finished?—but Monte Cassino is once again there, alive.

The view out over the unchanging Liri Valley includes one sight that was not here in time past. It is a large cross formed out of cypresses that stands watch over the graves of more than 1,000 Poles who died here. The graves are identical, row on row of them, and from many of them a string of plastic rosary beads dangles. Nearby stands a large and defiant Polish eagle. These men died in exile, hoping that they would earn some honored place in Poland after the war. The Communist government of

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Poland pays their graves little attention or respect. Accordingly, the men buried here are still heroes to Solidarity, the Polish resistance movement. The busloads of Poles who come here now bring the emblems of Solidarity along with their red and white carnations. They stand together in the cool mountain breeze and sing Polish songs. Their voices are thin but determined, determined even in their thinness, not hopeful but enduring. "We Polish soldiers, for our freedom and yours," says a nearby plaque, "have given our souls to God, our bodies to the soil of Italy and our hearts to Poland."

The British are buried in a separate cemetery down at the foot of the mountain, the British and the Canadians and the New Zealanders and the Gurkhas. In contrast to almost any other spot in Italy, the grass grows thick and green here, as thick and green as an English lawn, and on every third or fourth grave a red rose blooms. The Italians have provided a plaque in honor of these "valorosi Britanni" who fell "per la causa della giustizia e della liberta..." The graves themselves each bear a name and two dates, birth and death, the dates usually separated by only 20 years or so, and then one of those historical regimental names that labeled and identified each youth at the moment of his death: The Leicestershire Regiment, the Saskatoon Light Infantry, the Royal Wiltshire Yeomen. On some graves, the parents or wives added a few lines of their own. Of Royal Artillery Gunner G. T. Smith, who died in 1944 at the age of 28, somebody wrote "We who loved you will never forget."

The American dead were all gathered up and taken to the cemetery at Anzio, but the Germans, too, lie not far from here, on the outer edge of Cassino, not only those killed here but those who died all over southern Italy, 20,000 of them in all, lying under the pines and the ivy.

There is a quiet statue of two grieving parents there and a mosaic of a dove and a plaque which states only that these soldiers lie "zum letzten Ruhe." They are packed closely together in these graves, three names on each stone cross, and they too were very young, born in 1922 or '23, dead in 1944. Pax.

Worldwartwoveterans.org

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### Death and resurrection at Monte Cassino

It was bombed at the wrong time on the wrong day,  
and probably delayed the Allied march on Rome  
By Otto Friedrich

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# HISTORY

## BROWNWOOD

First — Post-WWII Reunion

## 1946

Jan. 19-21

HOTEL BROWNWOOD — Site of the first Post-War Reunion. This hotel was a familiar place for all who had served at Camp Bowie (weekends, etc).

This was a unique gathering of the clan. A new charter had been drawn up in Oct. 1945 in Austin and signed by these men:

H. Miller Ainsworth, Wm. H. Martin, Fred L. Walker, Carl L. Phinney, August Waskow, Richard Dunbar and Claude V. Birkhead.

The patriotic citizens of Brownwood were proud of the 36th great record in WWII. So, it was only appropriate, the initial meeting should be at home base — Brownwood!



Miller Ainsworth\*

Newspaper headlines around the state — “36th Demands Rapido Probe.” The fat was in the fire. All the great generals of our division, both WWI and WWII were in attendance. Probably no other event, since had created so much publicity.

Former commanders in WWII — Walker and Dahlquist, Birkhead and dozens of other great officials attended this Saturday - Monday reunion. Registration started at 10 AM Sat. Jan. 19th. Mayor of Brownwood, Wendell Mayes gave the official welcome at the first business session. A giant parade was held at Memorial Hall at 3:30.

And two, not one Dance was held — Roof ballroom of Hotel Brownwood and Officers Club at Camp Bowie. Open Houses were held by the American Legion and VFW.

Memorial Service was held at 10 AM Sunday, and at 3:00 PM, Gov. Coke Stevenson dedicated the 36th Division State Park. The reunion was concluded after two business meetings on Mon. Jan. 21st.

Association President, H. Miller Ainsworth announced that FORT WORTH would host a giant reunion, in observance of our date of the SALERNO landing in Italy . . . . Sept. 9th. This would set the pattern of all future reunions.

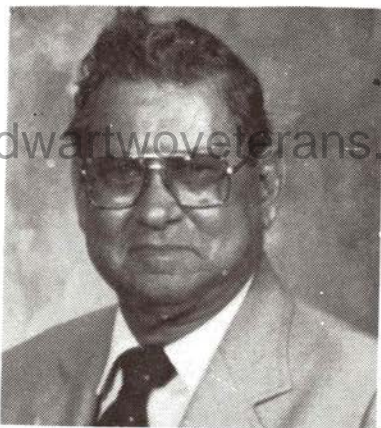
Footnote: The dates of this reunion — were selected to match the date of the RAPIDO CROSSING — Jan. 20, 1944. News coverage on this reunion was so great, that the Dallas Morning News, printed a special booklet, listing names and addresses of all who attended, and mailed one to each delegate. (Those were the good ole days).



# The Misplaced Heroes

by *LeRoy R. Houston*

*Co. "D" 143rd Inf.*



For over a thousand years, Roman conquerors returning from the wars enjoyed the honors of a triumph with a tumultuous parade. In the procession came trumpeters, musicians and strange animals from conquered territories, together with carts laden with treasures and captured ornaments. The Conqueror rode in a triumphal chariot with the days prisoners walking in chains before him. Sometimes his children, robed in white, stood with him in the chariot or rode the trace horses. A slave stood behind the Conqueror holding a golden crown and whispering in his ear a warning, "That All Glory Is Fleeting."

The preceding words were spoken by George C. Scott in the last scene of the movie "Patton" as General Patton is walking off in the distance leading his ugly English dog.

On page 38 of Vol. IV No. 3 of the 36th Division Historical Quarterly there is a picture of a train load of "High Point" men of the 36th returning home from Germany. An "Ed Note" at the bottom of this page states that these men were the highest point men of the Division. Their high points being due to their being married.

In the book "The Fighting 36th a Pictorial History of the Texas Division in Combat", on the next to the last page before the "Roster" sec-

tion, there is a statement as follows: "Six days after V-E Day, a happy five hundred high pointers left the Division, flying home on the famous *Green Project*." As the Politicians say "Let me set the record straight." *First:* The men on that train were not the highest point men of the Division and marriage was not a predominant factor in determining points. Some of the high point men who were first to leave the Division were not married. *Second:* The men on that train reached the separation center at Ft. Sam Houston and most were discharged before the real "HIGH POINTERS" ever reached San Antonio. *Third:* The Fighting 36th Pictorial History seems to imply that the first men to leave the Division and come home were a part of this "Green Project." *Fourth:* The following is a true story of the return trip of the "Real High Point Heroes." This is an account of what transpired between the dates of May 8, 1945 and June 29, 1945. Some of the dates and happenings may be altered a little because of the lapse of 41 years in trying to recall specifics, but the dates of May 8, May 11, June 16, and June 29 are all a matter of record.



*Oran Africa harbor, May, 1945*

On May 8, 1945 when the war officially ended, my unit was occupying part of Bad Tolz, Germany. Bad Tolz is in a beautiful part of Germany close to the Alps Mountains. It was spring time with warm days and cold nights and we had witnessed the last snow that came down out of the



mountains on May 1. The company had taken over a group of houses on the outskirts of the town next to a wooded area and some cleared rolling hills. The men were busy searching the area for German army stragglers, arms and weapons. Orders had been issued from Supreme Headquarters in England that Fraternization with the Germans was a NO-NO, especially with the young female type. This was very hard for some of the single younger men in the outfit to comply with. Especially since the young German girls would come to those open areas close to our living quarters and disrobe and take nude sun baths in full view of everyone. As a result all the Non-Coms were placed on quart duty patrolling the wooded areas to see that no hanky-panky took place. During the days that followed May 8, rumors flew thick and fast concerning where we would go next and who was going to go home first. Since I had been reduced in grade to private on one occasion and been called the most unmilitary S.O.B. in the Army, I had made no plans to be awarded an early trip back to the good old U.S. of A.

On May 10 I was working trying to get the company records in shape for the inspection that I knew would be forthcoming. We had already finished our evening meal when the Company runner came in and said the Captain wanted to see me. I reported to the orderly room and found that Pvt.'s Eddie Ford and Presley Foyt were already there. The Captain said "you three are the highest point men in the Company and you are going to fly home so you will only be allowed 16 lbs. of luggage. Regiment will have trucks here at 0600 tomorrow to pick you up and take you



*Liberty Ship in Marseilles harbor, 1945*

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to Division Headquarters." He went on to say "For your information the Army arrived at the point system by giving points for length of service before and during WWII, length of overseas service, rank, decorations, and at the bottom of the list was marriage and the number of offspring."

I cannot begin to describe how I felt, except that I wasn't too much in favor of flying. I am a one foot on the ground person. I went back to the supply room and instructed my assistant on what to tell my replacement. Then I tried to decide what I was going to take with me to meet that 16 lb. limit. Ford and Foyt came in and wanted to know what I was going to take and I said "Hell I don't trust the Army any farther than I can throw a Bull Elephant by the tail. I will believe that flying business when I get on the plane and it leaves the ground. I am going to take all that I can carry in this barracks bag and if I have to get rid of some of it I will sell it to some rear echelon meathead." I loaded my bag with a Lugar pistol, a P-38 pistol, a Baretta 25 Cal. pistol, 100 rounds of 9mm Ammo., 4 pairs of German binoculars, 12 cartons of cigarettes, 2 changes of underwear and socks, canteen and cup, mess kit, helmet and liner, and a pile lined field jacket with a lined hood.

### Day 1 Friday, May 11:

I slept very little the night before. My thoughts were about home and wondering how long it was going to be before I would see my wife and 2½ year old son. The truck that was to take us to Division arrived pretty much on time and we arrived at Division Headquarters in Munich in a short time. We detrucked in front of an impressive looking building that had a lot of steps from the street level up to the entrance (I never did find out what that building was). We were greeted by a Division Staff Officer who gave us a welcome speech. We were told that the Army decided to take 500 High Point Officers and men from each Division, that had served in Europe, and fly them to New York. Upon arrival we would be issued dress uniforms and then take part in a big VE day parade in New York City on Saturday May 19. He told us not to wander off as we would be leaving as soon as enough trucks arrived. Well it came time for lunch and still no trucks or food. About 2:00 PM a truck showed up with some lunch. They set up a water bag and we dug out our canteen cups and mess kits. It turned out that we didn't need the mess kits as the meal was the Army type "Jam Sandwich" (two pieces of bread jammed together).

When the afternoon had passed and still no trucks it was evident that we were playing the old Army game of "Hurry up and wait". It was a pretty boring day except for those who could find some shade and take a nap. When dinner time came we were served a gourmet meal of "K" rations. It was well after dark when the trucks finally arrived. They were 2½ Ton GMC's with no tops. Now in May in the foothills of the Alps



mountains when the sun goes down it gets cold as a well diggers rear end. Most of the men only brought their light field jackets as a wrap and I knew they were getting cold even before we got started. I fished out my pile lined jacket. We traveled most of the night in those open trucks and froze our tails. Even with my heavy jacket I was cold.

*Day 2—Saturday May 12:*

We reached our destination of a Replacement Depot in Worms, Germany around 3:00 AM and were told to find a cot in one of the tents on the left side of the camp. The tents were the long Hospital type with canvas cots and one blanket. Anyone who has ever slept on a canvas cot in cold weather knows that it is like trying to sleep on a 300 lb. block of ice. Some of the men found some old newspapers to spread on top of their cots to help insulate them, but the rest of us folded up our cots and slept on the ground. At 6:00 AM some Meat Headed S.O.B. came into the tent waking everyone for Reveille and breakfast. Someone told him that if he didn't get the Hell out of there he would wind up with a fat lip. So off he went to report us to the Camp Commander. The Officer in charge of our group was a Colonel, I don't remember his name but he was one of us. The Camp Commander, who was a re-classified Major, lost on time in waking the Colonel to report us. The Colomel didn't really care that much about being awakened at that time of the morning after the day and night that we had just been through. He advised the Major to instruct his men to leave us alone and to keep the kitchen open at all times so that they could feed us anytime we wanted to eat. After we finally got up and ate breakfast, I went to the Supply to see if we could get another blanket and a mattress cover. I also ask where we could get some straw for the mattress covers. The Supply Officer said that he would need a requisition from the Officer in charge of our group. This proved to be no problem and we got our bedding.

*Day 6—Wednesday May 16:*

We had not been told why we were still waiting in this camp. After lunch some of the men were setting on a fence that ran along a street that separated the camp area from the Headquarters buildings. They were passing the time and watching the traffic go by. Most of the traffic was bicycles and when a nice looking young female would come by with her skirt flying, the cat calls and whistles filled the air. The Camp Commander heard the noise and stormed over and chewed everyone out and threatened to send the whole group to the Pacific. He ordered everyone to stay off the fence and back away from the street. Some one in our group reported the incident to the Colonel and he in turn gave the Major a dressing down. We spent the rest of our time in that camp playing baseball and volleyball and at night watching movies. Of course there was the usual poker and crap games. We also found some reading material. The food at this Camp was so bad that we wished we could find some "C" or "K" rations.

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### *Day 9—Saturday May 19:*

We were told to go to the Supply and draw some new equipment. To our surprise we were issued an Eisenhower jacket; Barracks bag; blanket; shelter halves; tent pole and pins; raincoat, entrenching tool; gas mask; and a complete set of Impregnated protective clothing which included a wool shirt, wool trousers, wool underwear, and wool sox. We were supplied with paint and brushes in order to put our names and serial number on the barracks bag. Even after this there were still some who believed that we were going to fly home.

### *Day 10—Sunday May 20:*

After breakfast we were told to get our things together as we were moving out. We loaded up and rode to a railroad yards. There we de-trucked and walked to a line of trains, mostly freight cars. There was one that had our name on it. It consisted of an engine, a baggage car, a couple of passenger cars and a bunch of French box cars. These box cars were the most dilapidated things that I have ever seen. They were completely shot up. It looked as if both sides had used them for target practice. I am not kidding, one person could stand on one side and see everything that took place on the other side. All French box cars are labeled "8 horses or 40 men", of course it is in French and the only French that I remember is "Pardon mwa mamsell volley voo prominade a veck mwa a sue mazone". You can believe that those cars will hold 40 men. Of course if you want any sleep you have to lay crosswise in the car and smell the next mans feet all night. Since there was no sanitary facilities in these box cars, each car was supplied two 5 gallon cans of water and two rolls of toilet paper. Someone yelled out "These box cars don't have any Latrines. What am I going to do if I have to take a s--t?". Someone else answered back "If you don't have a helmet you got a problem". It wasn't until after we made our first stop that we found out what the baggage car was for. It was the Kitchen. At each meal time the train would pull off on a siding and the kitchen crew would set up the garbage cans and heat water to wash our mess kits. As soon as the water was hot we would eat. This procedure took about 2 hours. Along with this loss of travel time we spent a lot of time on sidings waiting for other trains to pass.

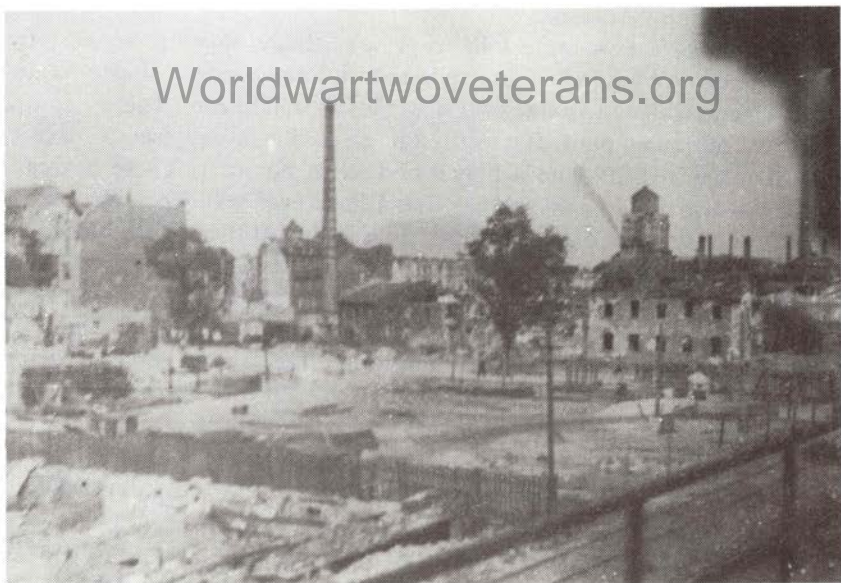
### *Day 11—Monday May 21:*

We had not traveled very far from Worms when we came to a large German city that had been devastated by Allied bombers. I managed to get a few pictures. That night it rained and there was no place that you could get to avoid the dripping water. We were glad we had raincoats and shelter halves. We did not have to worry about water standing inside the box car, as there were almost as many holes in the floor as in the roof.



*Day 13 or 14—Wednesday or Thursday May 23 or 24:*

We arrived in Lyon, France and were put on a siding in a big railroad yard. It was noon time and we began to make preparations for lunch. The tracks that we were on was at a lower level than the main tracks. While we were eating a French high speed passenger train went by on the main tracks. That train must have been traveling in excess of 60 MPH and people were hanging all over that thing. Some were holding on to bicycles and baby carriages. Some had packages and some luggage. I'll bet the railroad crew spent a lot of time going up and down the tracks picking up the dead, injured and trash.



*Bombed out German city, May, 1945*

*Day 17—Sunday May 27:*

We finally arrived in Marseille, France. We thought that the food was bad in the camp at Worms but it was worse on that train ride. The Army has a standing operating procedure (S.O.P. for short). Never deliver the men so that they can unload right at their destination. There always has to be a period of formation marching with everything that you can carry on your back. We detrained and it seemed like we walked forever to a warehouse area where some trucks were waiting. The trucks could have driven right up to the side of the train. The Trucks were driven by Frenchmen and you have not lived until you have ridden in a GI truck driven by a Frenchman. The French don't believe in brakes and they don't believe in stopping at intersections. They think a car horn will get them a

clear path and the right of way. We were taken to a replacement center camp some place not too far from the main part of the city. The camp had wood tent frames for pyramidal tents that were supposed to hold 8 men on cots, but these were equipped with double deck bunks so that each tent could hold 16 men. The bunk beds had 2 inch Triangular strips fastened to the bottom of each bed on about 6 inch centers running crosswise of the bed. No one could sleep on anything like that. I still have not figured out the reasoning for those strips, except maybe to provide a place for the lice and crabs to run and play. We were told by a camp Non-Com to pick a place and stow our bags and go to the supply and draw a mattress cover and blanket. He also showed us where to get straw to fill our mattress covers. After we filled our mattress covers and tried to lay on our bunks we decided we would be better off on the floor, so we threw all of the bunk beds out of the tents. Now the camp personnel didn't like this and they almost had a s--t hemorrhage. We were told to move the beds back into the tents. We made it clear that the only way we would sleep on those beds would be after those triangular strips were removed. We were furnished tools to remove the strips.

*Day 18—Monday May 28:*

Food at this camp was just about as bad as any I had experienced anywhere in the Army except maybe British chow. We asked about getting



*Bombed City, Germany, 1945*



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some summer uniforms and were told that they did not have any but they would exchange our dirty clothes for clean ones. After lunch we were told that all who wanted to could have a pass to go to town, but they must be back by reveille because we were moving out right after breakfast the next day. There was a number of us who did not go as we were looking forward to getting home and we did not want to jeopardize our chances. It must have been one "Hell" of a party that they got into because the MP's spent the night bringing them back to camp.

### *Day 19—Tuesday May 29:*

After breakfast and when we had turned in our bedding, we were assembled and told that if we had any contraband equipment such as automatic weapons or ammunition to dispose of it as there would be metal detectors on board the ship and each bag would be checked. At the mention of the word "Ship", I think everyone was finally convinced that we were not going to fly home. I got the ammo out of my bag and left it in the tent. It turned out that there was no metal detectors on the ship. In fact no-one ever examined our bags. We could have brought a Tiger Tank home. We boarded the trucks, again with French drivers, and had another wild ride to the dock area. When we arrived we were expecting a passenger liner or a troop ship, but the only boat that we saw was a Liberty ship that was being unloaded. You guessed it. This was to be our transportation back to the States. We got on board and were assigned sleeping areas. Our quarters were cargo holes converted to troop quarters with stacked bunks so close that every one had to turn at the same time. The cargo that was being unloaded from the ship was "C" and "K" rations. As hungry as we were this looked like steak, gravy and pan fried potatoes. Immediately a detail formed and went over the side and started passing rations back onto the ship. It was only few minutes before one of the ships officers came down and convinced us that we would be getting good meals and that the ship was fully stocked. So we put the rations back, reserving some just in case they were not telling the truth. We learned a little later that we would have to provide our own mess personnel including Mess Sgt., cooks and KP's. For the entire boat trip we had good chow. Our ship pulled out of Marseille harbor and headed south.

### *Day 21—Thursday May 31:*

Sometime before dark we arrived and anchored in the harbor at Oran, Africa and were told that we would not dock but would wait out in the harbor to join a convoy that was leaving the next morning.

### *Day 22—Friday June 1:*

The convoy moved out early and we were finally on our way. This ship that we were on was a war casualty and had one drive shaft out of line due to a Bomb near miss. This limited it's speed to *Ultra Slow*. In fact at the end of the first hour the other ships of the convoy were just specks on

the horizon and before we got to Gibraltar we were the only ship on the ocean. This ship was so slow that a one arm man in a row boat could out run it. In fact we were put on alert watch out for whales that might try to mate with our boat. For the 18½ days that we were on this ship there wasn't much to do except gamble, sleep, police the area, or read. There wasn't a lot of reading materials and some of it was reread many times. There were plenty of poker and crap games. The crap games would finally wind up as one game with two men holding all of the money, then they would roll high dice for the entire amount. Then the winner would start loaning the money and they would start the games all over again. I don't know if they ever tried to collect on those debts. One member of the group had a pair of matched nickel plated Lugar pistols with changeable .22 cal. barrels, all in a fancy velvet lined case. They raffled those guns at least twice a day during that boat trip. Some one on that boat must have had a good market for German souvenirs as almost everyone lost something out of his barracks bag. The only things that were safe was what you could carry on your person.

A number of us spent a lot of time top side as it got real stuffy down in that hole. We found that being in a horizontal position in the fresh air was better than standing or sitting with the boat rocking and causing you to decorate the deck with your last meal. One day during the trip we ran into a big storm and I believe that the boat dipped water on all sides. There were times when the masts were in the water. Every time that the props would come out of the water, the boat would shake and rattle so bad that we thought we were going to break apart. We thought that this would be a Hell of a way to end up after all that combat by being drowned in a crumbie old dilapidated boat.

*Day 37—Saturday June 16:*

Sometime after lunch we pulled into Newport News, Virginia. The tugs were pushing us sideways toward the docks when someone spotted a bunch of Red Cross women lined up to greet us. Of course everyone rushed to that side and made the boat list at a dangerous angle. We were told to move to the center of the boat. What had really caused the stampede to that side was a deck hand pulling a loaded dolly that had something protruding out the side nearest the Red Cross women and he caught the smock of one of them. The smock buttoned all down the front and it ripped wide open. Well there she stood with bra and panties showing and then she walked down the dock as if nothing had happened. After we got off the boat we were served refreshments by the Red Cross. By the way the Red Cross was our only welcoming committee when we landed. No Bands or speeches, just line up in the hot June sun and wait. The refreshments were coffee and doughnuts. The doughnuts were so old and hard that you could kill an elephant at 100 paces. It wasn't long until a train backed up to the dock area and we boarded. This seemed to be a short haul commuter train since the cars had bench seats like a school



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bus. Our ride wasn't very far until we arrived at Camp Patrick Henry. It appeared to be a very nice area in front of a theater building. We were instructed to leave our bags and go into the theater and a guard would be provided to watch our belongings.

When we were seated, a group of Officers entered onto the stage and one of them introduced the main speaker. This turned out to be a former Officer in the Division and a former Texas Railroad Commissioner. At that time he was in the Transportation Department in Washington, D.C. I think this was the crowning glory of his military and political life. I think it was his best speech, made in the typical political, prevaricating, forked tongue style. He tried to pump up our egos, calling us Heroes and saying that we were the first to return from Europe after VE day and that the whole country was proud of us. He also told us that we would be provided with the best quarters and the best transportation that the country had to offer. He said that as soon as they could get a train to the camp we would travel by the shortest route to San Antonio and be turned back to civilians. When he finished his speech another officer told us what barracks and mess hall to use. We were instructed to go to the QM and draw bedding and after we were settled in the barracks to go back to the QM and draw summer uniforms.

The barracks were some that had been de-activated at least six months before. The dust and dirt was about 2 inches thick and cobwebs were everywhere. We spent a good part of the afternoon cleaning up the barracks and ourselves. When we went back to the QM we were issued second hand uniforms that were mended and patched. During the early part of the afternoon we learned that we would again have to provide personnel for the mess hall. I will have to give them credit, the food was real good at this camp.

We were told that facilities had been set up so that we could call our folks long distance, free of charge, and those who could not make calls could send telegrams. That turned out to be a very busy place that night and the next morning.

*Day 39—Monday June 18:*

We were advised to be prepared to move out right after breakfast. We were assembled and marched to the railroad tracks in the warehouse area and *there was our Triumphant Chariot waiting to carry the returning conquering Heroes home.* The first car was an antique baggage car converted to a mobile kitchen. The next three cars were of the same vintage except two were pullman and one was a dining car. These were for the Officers. The rest of the cars were passenger cars from the Jessie James period. Now for those that don't know, a Jessie James coach is built of wood with half for passengers and half for baggage. The baggage section had a sliding door on each side and one small round fixed window in each door. These were provided so that the mail clerks could see if rob-

bers or Indians were about to attack. The doors on this train were sealed shut. The passenger section had windows that could be opened with some effort and both sections were provided with wooden bench seats. Trying to sleep on those wooden benches was sheer torture. Also the passenger section had a pot belly stove for heat. Someone swore that arrows were sticking out the sides of his coach. At the end of the passenger section was a small rest room. It was so small that when you set on the throne your knees pushed against the door. This one holer was all that was provided for 60 or 70 men who were drinking everything that they could get their hands on. Before we left camp, everyone who wanted to, stocked up on his favorite beverage. I think some of them thought that we were going to take a months trip across the desert.

We loaded up and finally we were on our way. Our first engine was electric and we moved at a fair rate of speed with no pollution. It was in June and hot as Hell in that baggage section and we could not get the sliding doors open, so we broke out those small look-out windows. This didn't help much, so at the first stop we made, someone came up with a tool to pry those doors open. Later that day we changed engines and got a coal burner and the soot and black smoke fogged in on us. By the time we got to San Antonio we were so black that they started to deny us entry into the separation center.

*Day 40—Tuesday June 19:*

We had made many siding stops yesterday and today to let freight and passenger trains pass, but it wasn't until we pulled into the depot at Huntington W.Va. that we got our biggest surprise. We were told that we could go into the depot and relax and purchase whatever they had for sale, with limitation. We were warned not to leave the depot area as we were going to lay over for a few hours and anyone that was not present when we pulled out would be court martialed. After a period of time a train with modern pullman cars went by, it was loaded with German POW's. Before we pulled out of Huntington there was at least five or six pullman trains loaded with POW's that went by. Now I am convinced that if the officers had not been with us and if we still had our M-1's, we would have hi-jacked one of those pullman trains and put the POW's and their guards on our train.

When we pulled out of Huntington some of the men were missing, so at the next stop we picked up a group of MP's to guard us to see that no-one got off the train except at meal time. The rest of our trip was one siding stop after another to let passenger trains, freight trains and work crews on hand cars go by.

As well as I remember, our route of travel from June 18 to late in the evening of June 21 was as follows: Camp Patrick Henry, Va. to Hunting W.Va. to Cincinnati, Ohio, to Louisville, Ky. to Poducah, Ky, to Memphis, Tenn. the down the east side of the Mississippi River to New Orleans, La. I was surprised that we didn't go by the way of Los Angeles or San Francisco.



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### *Day 42—Thursday June 21:*

When we reached New Orleans we were told that there would be a few hours lay over so that we could pick up some cars with men going to San Antonio. When we finally got moving again some of the men from the new group came forward to see what those old coaches looked like. It turned out that these were men from the 36th that were part of the 10th group to leave after we did. One of the men in this group was from my company, when he saw us he said "Where in the Hell have you Misplaced Heroes been? A lot of guys have left the Company since you-all left." I told him that he wouldn't believe us if we told him.

### *Day 43—Friday June 22:*

We arrived at Ft. Sam Houston during the early part of the morning and were bussed to the separation center at the old Dodd Field. We were assigned barracks and told to take our barracks bags to the supply building and turn in all that junk that we were loaded down with in Worms, Germany. Some of the men had disposed of their equipment along the way. We asked about getting some clean clothing and were told none were available, but we could send our dirty clothes to the laundry and get them back in a week or send them to the cleaners and get them back in two days. Since we had only one summer uniform, we asked if the camp Commander would O.K. a Nude or a Underwear uniform. We were told that we might buy some uniforms at one of the stores in San Antonio. We found the shower facilities and cleaned up. We put on our winter uniforms and took a chance on being picked up by the MP's.

Before lunch we were assembled and told that roll call would be held twice a day, after breakfast and after lunch, and the first time your name was called processing of your discharge would begin and the second time your name was called you would receive your final separation papers. In between roll call formations we were free to do or go where we wanted to. After lunch when our names were not called, some of us went to town to get some clothes. The only thing that we could find was some cheap Khaki work clothes. We bought some and sent our uniforms to the cleaners. That night we went back to town and got a good meal.

### *Day 44—Saturday June 23:*

They held two roll calls today but my name was not called. After the afternoon formation I got a pass and went to Temple with some of the men from my Company for the weekend.

### *Day 46—Monday June 25:*

Two more roll calls today. There is not much to do except wait.

### *Day 48—Wednesday June 27:*

My name was finally called during the afternoon formation. I spent the rest of the day taking physical examinations. The Dentist wanted me to stay in the service another six months and get my teeth fixed. I declined his offer.

*Day 49—Thursday June 28:*

I spent most of the day being interviewed and examined. I think they were trying to find some way to keep me in the Army. Evidently they had not studied my service record very well. One Lieutenant who interviewed me said "The Army needs men with your training and I have the authority to retain men with your "C" number." I told him that I had no desire to stay in the Army and if he did decide to retain men, the Army would soon learn that they had made a bad decision.

Late that afternoon one of the men who lived in Henderson, near where my wife was staying, looked me up and asked if I would like to ride with him. He had just bought a car and didn't want to make the trip alone. I told him yes but I would pay him. He was scheduled to be discharged on Friday morning and he said that he would wait for me.

*Day 50—Friday June 29:*

I received my discharge and pay around 4:30 PM and we left out for home. There was no formation, no parade, no band playing or rolling of the drums. Just "here are your papers and pay, get the Hell out of here and get home the best way that you can." When I received my papers I asked about medals and decorations and was told that they would be forwarded to me later (This is another story).

I don't know the feelings or thoughts of most of the others who traveled on this 43 day journey from Munich, Germany to San Antonio, Texas but I would be willing to wager that there are some ill feelings toward the Army and that there are a lot of questions that they would like to have answered. I, for one, would like to have someone explain:

1. Why were we kept waiting so long in Munich?
2. Why were trucks provided without tops for that cold night ride from Munich to Worms?
3. Why were we detained so long in Worms and why such an abrupt change in plans?
4. Why were we provided junk cars for transportation from Worms, Germany to Marseille, France when French and German railroad systems seemed to have plenty of passenger cars rolling stock to transport civilians and displaced persons?
5. Why was it necessary to take so long to travel from Worms to Marseille?
6. With all the floating stock available in the European Theater, why were we put on board a crippled ship that could barely propell itself through the water?
7. Our arrival in Virginia was no surprise since the welcome committee from Washington was already there, then why was it necessary for us to re-activate a portion of the camp that had been closed down for a long period?



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8. Why were we provided with such antiquated and dilapidated bunch of railroad cars to travel from Virginia to San Antonio when there was plenty of first class pullman accomodations available to transport German POW's?

9. Why did it take so long to travel from Virginia to San Antonio and why such a round about route?

I seriously doubt that I will ever know the answers to any of these questions, but perhaps sometime in the future some inquisitive historian will probe the military records and find some plausible explanation that will be of interest to my great great grandchildren.

In all due respects to the Military and our Civilian leaders and disregarding Pearl Harbor and the Rapido River, I believe this must have been the biggest screw up of WWII. Anytime you would talk to a British officer he would say "If you Yanks did not have superior numbers of men and equipment, you would never win any battles." I think that every man who took part in this fiasco should be awarded the "Distinguished Service Medal" with three Oak Leaf Clusters and the medals be presented in Military formation in Washington, D.C. by the President of the U.S. With all transportation and expenses to be provided out of the Military Budget.

Since I started writing this I have learned that the Air Force had embarked on a project, after this group had left the Division, to fly the high point men home and it was called the "Green Project."

I believe our project should have been called the "RED PROJECT." That is "RED" for "RED ASS."



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Staff Sgt. Houston  
Co. D,  
143rd Infantry

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### LEROY R. HOUSTON



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LeRoy R. Houston was born March 2, 1915 in Clinton, OK but moved with his family to Temple, TX in 1924.

Like many others at the time, LeRoy joined the TNG by enlisting in Co. D 143rd Inf. on November 5, 1934 but was discharged August 27, 1935 so that he could enlist in the 1st Cavalry Division at Fort Clark, TX. He was discharged from the 1st Cav. on June 16, 1937 due to a dependency situation.

Upon returning to Temple, he again enlisted in Co. D 143rd Inf. on July 12, 1937 and was mobilized with the unit on November 25, 1940 as the unit Supply Sergeant. Many do not realize what a hard and demanding job this can be involving many long hours of physical activity daily plus many skills as a record keeper and accountant and ability as a trader or barterer. **LeRoy was very good at the task and faithfully served his unit well until he was rotated home on May 14, 1945.**

he was discharged from the Army of the U.S. on June 29, 1945 and from the 36th Division (TNG) on October 3rd of that year.

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After leaving the service in 1945, he entered the Air Conditioning business and retired in 1980 from Carrier-Book Co. at Dallas, TX. **He held the position of Office Engineer and Chief Estimator at the time.**

After several years of severe incapacitating illness, his wife Geneva died in mid-summer of 1988.

**A Life Member of both the 36th Division Assn. and the Dallas Metro Chapter, LeRoy made the tour of Italy for the September 9th dedication of the Monument at Paestum.** He has many warm memories and a very large photograph album to remind him of the event.

**He is currently the Executive Vice President of the Dallas Metro Chapter.**



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# Memories of LST 282 And Green Beach

by Hicks A. Turner



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*August 15, 1945. Invasion of South France bombed by German aircraft L.S.T. burned and drifted onto rocks.*

Combat engineers seldom knew their next assignment more than two hours before their destination was reached. Embarking onto the LST's and LCI's from Naples on August 11, gave us a couple of days to contemplate before the Division learned of its destination. We sunned ourselves when permitted on deck or lay in canvas bunks listening to the waves break against the side of the vessel. The LCI on which my unit found itself was highly uncomfortable, but no complaints.

H-hour had been set at 0800 on August 15. We didn't get too much substantial information in the unit concerning the Infantry's success or lack of success on the beaches throughout the day. Orders were to stand-by for debarkation. At approximately 1500 hours we were informed that

our vessel would go in on Green Beach. By the time we were on shore the infantry had secured the area and thousands of troops were being put ashore along with guns, equipment, heavy artillery, tanks and tank destroyer units, signal and quartermaster.

Capt. Thomas B. Goutier, later killed by a mine, ordered our unit to get off the beach and he led us up onto the cliffs into a residential area that had been severely damaged by artillery fire. He selected a couple of villas and told us to secure ourselves as well as possible. Guards were designated and we broke out C-rations for the evening and a few of us began a search for a safe, comfortable place to sleep. I located a sofa that appeared to be comfortable and threw my belongings onto it to denote possession. Artillery fire could be heard nearby and we felt secure, knowing the infantry was even further inland than the artillery.

#### ANVIL - DRAGOON

Near nightfall, four Dornier-217 planes, the type equipped to carry radio-controlled armor piercing and glider bombs, approached the Camel area from overland at an altitude of 15,000 feet, later dropping to 8,000 for the attack. Since Salerno, when initial attacks with these weapons had been so successful for the enemy, much had been learned about countering them by jamming the radio control wave. About 22 ships equipped with jammers were scattered through the attack forces, but none of these, owing to the overland approach, were between the attackers and their targets. The Bayfield was near-missed by several bombs, and one glider bomb struck the LST 282, waiting off Camel Green to land a large detachment of the Thirty-Sixth Division Artillery. The ship was set afire and casualties were heavy. Although beached, the ship and its cargo were destroyed.

As a result of the days operations, 60,150 troops, 6,737 vehicles and probably about 50,000 tons of stores were safely ashore. Naval losses had been, in addition to LST 282, four ship-carried small landing craft sunk by gunfire or bomb; six LCTs damaged by shell fire; two LCTs, five LCIs, one British motor launch, and five small landing craft damaged by mines; one LCT and three LCIs damaged by underwater obstacles; and one sub-chaser put out of action by a runaway drone.

*From* Vol. III No. 4 Winter 1983

Down on Green Beach the heavy artillery, ammunition and troops continued pouring ashore. At dusk, German planes came over the cliffs and the Navy fired many rounds but did not seem to find their target. One of the planes, however, fired a glider bomb that went right down the smokestack of LST 282 which was loaded with division guns, equipment



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and ammunition. The planes were of the Dormier 217 type, equipped to carry radio-controlled armor-piercing bombs. This type of attack had been successful for the Germans at Salerno but much had been learned about countering them by jamming the radio control wave. Some twenty ships equipped with jammers were scattered through the attack force, but more of these, owing to the overland approach, were between the attackers and their targets. LST 282 burst into flames and casualties were heavy. From the view of the cliffs we could see men diving into the sea. Pieces of flaming equipment filled the air, falling into the sea all around the men. Violent explosions erupted from the LST and as dark approached the ship drifted toward the rocks of the beach. Yells and screams of injured and frightened men added to the confusion of the night.

Capt. Goutier, a quiet spoken South Carolinian, called a group of available engineers from Hq. Company to join him in rescue efforts. Joining him was Capt. Edward Parker, Oklahoma, of the Medical Detachment; Capt. Henry A. Gill, Hillsboro, Texas of the Medical Detachment; Rufus L. Floyd, technician, Medical Detachment; Byron C. Woodward, Main, Medical Detachment; John R. Keppler, of New Jersey, Medical Detachment; Marvin W. Braune, of Gonzales, Texas, Medical Detachment: Engineers joining in the rescue efforts were: Hicks A. Turner, Technical Sergeant of Clyde, Texas; Daniel E. Junnell, Staff Sergeant of Sulphur Springs, Texas; Vernon W. Mason, Staff Sergeant of Gonzales, Texas; Bertie E. Brock of Kansas; Salvador Massara, Port Arthur, Texas; Allen A. Geismar, New Jersey and John G. Meyers, Groves, Texas.

Two or three rubber rafts were found and inflated, and though we did not have life preservers, we rolled a blanket in a shelter-half, very tight and placed these into a back pack for floats and with this equipment started working our way through the rocks and water toward the burning LST. The Medical Detachment carried first aid equipment and as troops could be helped ashore began giving aid. Many of those who made it ashore were cut, burned and bruised, as well as half-drowned.

We swam alongside the vessel and encouraged those who were reluctant to jump into the water to do so. Many did and then were placed onto the rafts and pushed ashore. The water was relatively shallow and the ship continued to drift closer and closer to shore. A group on board the vessel tied a rope to a crane on the bow of the ship and a number of men scrambled down this rope into the water. Eventually, five black troops started down the rope toward the water and evidently fear of the water overcame them and they froze on the rope, unable to descend further. Capt. Goutier and myself brought a raft near the end of the rope and talked the fellows into sliding on down to us. Sgt. Cox and Allen Geismar paddled the raft to shore.

This rescue operation continued for hours. The explosions aboard the LST continued. As the ship drifted ever closer to shore, concussion from the explosions aboard would drive us into the water, while red hot pieces of metal rained down about us. Sometime near midnight the screams for help ceased and Capt. Parker, Capt. Gill and the medics continued aid to the injured soldiers throughout the night. It has been estimated that we brought 75-100 of the injured to shore.

On October 3, 1944, Gen. John E. Dahlquist awarded the fifteen engineers and medics that participated in the rescue efforts, the Soldier's Medal.

As daylight and a bright sun brought a more cheerful day on August 16, I found my 110 Camera and snapped the remains of LST 282 as it rested on the rocks of Green Beach.

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## KRIEGIE

Food for survival has for centuries been a big item, that sometimes takes-down an Army, the Nazis kept the good stuff for their own bellies.



### Memorandum: Rations

1. Many officers have requested clarification on certain points which I shall try to give, impartially, so all may have a clear understanding.

2. The German ration furnished prisoners-of-war is fixed in kind and quantity by the German High Command. It is definitely inferior to that given their third class, or non-fighting troops.

3. Fresh cabbage and other fresh or green vegetables are prescribed in the German ration but in lieu thereof, The High Command prescribes turnips, which are called "cow turnips" in America, for prisoners-of-war.

4. P. O. W's are allowed 1/6 to 1/7 loaf of bread per day while the German soldiers at this Oflag receive 1/3 loaf daily.

5. The amount of meat prescribed for P. O. W's amounts to slightly over 8 ounces per week, at least one-fourth of the weight must be bone. As a matter of fact it principally consists of the more undesirable parts of the hog carcass, never omitting those choice morsels of eyeballs and ears.

6. The dried vegetables furnished on the ration alternate with dried cabbage, peas, noodles and barley. The noodles are never enough in quantity except to flavor the soup, they can't be saved as nothing is issued in lieu thereof for that day's soup.

7. The Kommandant of this Oflag, in carrying out that part of the International Agreement which prescribes officers may buy food stuffs in the market for their mess, have made it possible to buy fresh cabbage, carrots and beets from time to time.



## Memories of My 36th Division Days

by Frank J. Miller



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*Some thoughts and recollections of my days with the 36th Division always return when I read the many stories in the Historical Quarterlies. Perhaps the most interesting story was by my former C Company buddy, Evan E. Voss, who did the cover story in the Fall 1987 issue. In his search to find some of his former buddies, he touched on some times we all shared together, and it made me want to put some of my experiences down on paper too. So, here's mv...*

Fresh out of basic training at Fort McCellan, Alabama, I sailed to Italy in March of 1944, and joined C Company, 142nd Regiment of the 36th Division, amid the olive groves at Maddalona. There among veterans of Salerno and the Rapido River battles, I got my first taste of being away from home in a strange land.

My first casualty came in the form of GI's (diarrhea), and all that training in mountain maneuvers night and day took a toll on my ankles and feet. Running problems up and down those hillsides, plus the practice of British Battle Dress in the olive groves, left my feet and ankles a couple of sore extremities. I thought I should be given the Purple Heart for that condition.

The best thing that happened to me with the 36th in Maddalona was the excellent food we had. Being a Carolina country boy, I was used to home-cooking, I had almost starved with the mess they threw at us in basic training. At Company C, our food was prepared by a gentleman known as "Big Sarge." He and his crew deserved a medal for their work. Someone told me that Big Sarge liked to play poker, and would use his winnings to buy fresh vegetables for us. My fondest recollection of Big Sarge was the day I saw him up to his elbows in flour, making jelly rolls.

Late in May of 1944, the 36th Division moved up to Anzio. While other units tried to knock out the town of Velletri, the 142nd was in

Regimental Reserve. I vividly remember chasing around the Anzio landscape at night, trying to remain undetected by a huge German artillery. They always seemed to know where we were at times, and often shelled our vacated position the day after we moved. On May 30, we moved over to the right of Velletri. That was the night we were to implement General Fred Walker's plan to infiltrate up on Mt. Artemisio, and then swing left along the ridge behind Velletri. An excellent move that opened the way to Rome.

Somewhere into the night, as we moved upward, our progress stopped for some reason, and we found ourselves confronting a huge ravine. Pvt. Fred Storek, of California, (WIA), was the 1st Scout, and I was behind him. I remember Captain George C. Fugate (KIA), our C Company Commander, came over to us and said, "Battalion has got us kinda lost, and we need to get up under cover of those woods before dawn breaks out." He sent a patrol of us to find a way to cross the ravine, and we soon found a trail slanting down one side, and up the other. Several men went back to bring the Company up, and we made it to cover just as daylight was "graying out." We were the first ones up there the morning of May 31st, and not a shot was fired the whole night.

After cutting across a road, and continuing on up the trail, we found Italian families coming downhill with some of their belongings. We also found a German machine gun crew in a cave along the trail. They were still asleep, and they looked like teenagers.

We advanced to a high point on Mt. Artemisio behind Velletri that looked down on a curve of Highway 7. By that time, other units were attacking below, the Germans knew we were at their backs, and they began to escape along Highway 7 toward Rome. Atop our vantage point, S/Sgt. Carl Lawhorne of Pennsylvania, set up his 30-caliber machine gun, and we all were blasting them off the road as they rounded the curve below. S/Sgt. Lawhorne was the finest machine gunner I ever saw. His accurate fire scattered them every which way.

After fighting through the Alban Hills north of Velletri, we were ready for Rome. One of my biggest memories came on June 5th, when we rode through that Eternal city on trucks. Going by the famed Coliseum, the Roman Forum, and many other well-known landmarks, amid thousands of cheering people, made it an unforgettable day.

North of Rome around June 24th, Pvt. Fred Storek got hit in the knee by a sniper. He was evacuated, and I moved up to 1st Scout. We soon were relieved, and sent back to some grassy hills near Rome. Around the first of July, 1944, we got passes for a four-day leave to the city. Our finance section had not kept up with us and we had no money to spend. Captain Fugate said he would get us some money some way, and he did. When we picked up our passes, he gave each of us two cartons of American cigarettes, and said, "that will get you some spending



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money." Cigarettes were selling for about twenty-five or thirty dollars a carton at that time.

In Rome that first day, PFC Johnnie Courvisier, a Ballinger, Texas buddy and I were getting our boots shined in the big Arcade. An old well-dressed Italian gentleman spied a carton of Camels he had, and said he had been in America many years ago, and those were the first Camels he had seen since. He gave Courvisier fifty bucks for them.

Some of us got rooms at the Flavia Hotel there in Rome, and proceeded to enjoy our Roman holiday. We saw everything, including a full day at Vatican City, and St. Peter's Cathedral. Courvisier and I had some fun with our other buddies everytime we returned to our hotel. We would always take a different route back, confusing them, and they were always bitching we had them lost. Usually, we were only a block or two from the hotel, but those jokers would have gotten lost in a supermarket by themselves.

Back at Paestrum, we shifted gears, and moved from the Fifth Army to the Seventh. We changed leadership, and went from mountain training, to the amphibious type. It was something new for us "Johnny-Come-Lately's" who were not in the Salerno invasion, but our "veteran Salerno buddies" told us about beach landing, and helped us prepare for Southern France.

The 142nd will always be indebted to that Navy Admiral who made the decision to put us ashore on Green Beach. It had been taken earlier on August 15th, and our scheduled assault on Red Beach might have been pretty murderous. We sure spent a lot of anxious moments circling around out there in those little assault boats.

Once ashore, we dropped our beach demolitions and headed inland. Very little resistance greeted us, but we found Germans here and there hiding in the fields and woods. They seemed to be just waiting to surrender. One large group we encountered already had their helmets off and they said they were Polish people that had been forced to fight.

The first day ashore I almost shot my squad leader, S/Sgt. Evan Voss. We were sweeping inland along a road, our infantry fanned out in the fields and woods, and tanks and jeeps were moving along the road. Our rifles were on our hips, ready to fire. As I stepped out of some brushy scrub-growth into a dry stream bed, I heard a noise to my right. I swung my rifle to fire, and just managed to pull the muzzle up before plugging that "old Wisconsin Kraut buddy of mine." A similar moment like that happened later up in Southern France, when S/Sgt. Voss almost shot me too.

We were along a road in some heavy woods near a disabled Sherman tank. We heard a German Tiger Tank coming down toward us, and we were ordered to pull back through the woods a ways. The Sherman crew being disabled went along also. We heard the Tiger come in, put a shell in

the Sherman, and then it pulled back out. As we prepared to move back up, S/Sgt. Voss was cocking a German Luger pistol he had and it fired into the ground behind me. Surprised, I turned around to see what happened, and Voss said, "Say something Miller. Did I hit you?" He hadn't, but it was close. I always accused him of trying to get even with me for that earlier episode.

As we were returning to our former position up the road, Captain Fugate and I saw a dead German officer in a little car. Looking from opposite sides, we spied a camera on the back seat. We both grabbed for it, but Captain Fugate was quicker. I said, "Dangit Captain, I'd like to have that camera." He just laughed and said, "Well, you didn't get it, Miller, I did." I kept heckling him about it, and he finally said, "Tell you what. When I get killed or wounded, you can have it." The only trouble with that idea was when he got killed, I wasn't looking for a camera. I was trying to save my hide.

It happened up in Southern France when we walked into a trap that Evan Voss wrote about with his cover story in the Fall 1987 issue of the Historical Quarterly.

The Germans let us walk across some open fields that day, and just waited until we reached a patch of scrubby woods. They had the spot zeroed in and dropped everything they had right down on top of us. Mortars, tank fire, and small arms, all blasted our position the rest of the day.

We were running around in there like stampeding cattle, looking for cover. I saw Captain Fugate lying on the ground, his brains coming out of a hole in his head. PFC. Johnnie Courvisier was ahead of me, and another shell exploded nearby. It got him in the neck, and it also knocked me out for a minute or two. When I came too, I was lying flat on my chest with my nose and chin stuck in the dirt. Another shell landed nearby, and I heard a little singing sound. A tiny piece of shrapnel smacked into the ground about six inches from my face. It was about the size of my thumbnail, but it scared the devil out of me.

I got up looking for cover, and saw Lieutenant Francis McCann (KIA) of Maine. I told him Captain Fugate was dead, and he took charge and got us sort of organized. We found cover in some shell holes, and spent the rest of the day ducking incoming fire. We were almost wiped out, only a handful of us were left. Someone mentioned we had lost 40 men in the first 8 minutes. Maybe Lt. McCann said that. I later heard that some of the men broke back across that open ground in the excitement, but how many made it, I don't know. I do know that PVT John Buffalo of Chicago did. He only got wounded in the rump for his effort. I later had a reunion with him and PFC Marvin Cohen of our squad in Chicago during the 1950's.

At nightfall that day, the Germans ceased firing, and later in the night, those of us who were left, moved back across the open fields, carrying



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some of the wounded on packboards. Back at Battalion, they took us into some woods, told us to dig in, and get some rest.

I remember I didn't dig in, I just fell flat on my back, totally worn out. I lay there for a long time thinking about Captain Fugate, before I finally went to sleep.

Early next morning, I woke up still thinking about losing our Commander. Captain Fugate and I were both southern men. He was from Mississippi, and I hailed from North Carolina. He had also spent some time in Charlotte, a city near my home town of Hickory. It had given us something to talk about, and we had a sort of rapport. I remember a time when we were on bivouac between fighting. PFC George Welteroth (KIA) of Pennsylvania and I were always verbally fighting the Civil War. We'd get into it hot and heavy every time we could. Some officers were visiting Captain Fugate one day, and heard our ranting at each other. One of them said, "Captain, when you get back up to combat, you should separate those two. They might shoot each other." Captain Fugate just smiled and said, "I don't have to worry about those two. They're the best of friends. All their yakking just keeps them sane in this crazy war."

There was always a lot of camaraderie among infantrymen. Our lives depended on each other. In less serious times, we kidded and joked a lot. PFC John Matsko of Pennsylvania was always running off at the mouth about something. He always called S/Sgt. Evan Voss, that old Kraut, and he said those two Infantry Scouts, Miller and Devins, were still alive because, "Miller's so thin, the Krauts miss him and Devins is so short, they shoot over his head." PFC Gerald Devins was from New York State, and he went all the way with C Company. He ended up with the rank of Staff Sergeant.

At times up in Southern France, we found German resistance spotty, and they just seemed to have disappeared. We would sweep out across the countrysides, searching for them, fight them when they stopped to delay us, and would then return to our jumping off place the same day. Infantrymen riding on Tank Destroyers, a Jeep or two, comprised what they called a Tank and Infantry Task Force.

One day on such a mission, we went into a French village where the FFI had run the Germans out earlier. The Germans came back and counter-attacked, left some dead and wounded, destroyed buildings, and then pulled out. Some distance beyond the village we had a brief encounter with them, but they evidently didn't cotton to our TD's and left. The other TD group did capture one German in the fracas, and someone said he was an SS Trooper. They made him ride astride their gun barrel all the way back.

Coming back through the French village later in the day, the residents came out, giving us all sorts of food. Bread and wine, some chunks of

meat, and a French lady wanted me to take some eggs. I didn't know how to carry them, but decided to put some straw in my helmet to keep them from breaking. I climbed up on the TD, helmet and eggs swinging, a grabbed the TD light guard for support. Just as we were pulling out, a lady ran out and gave Lt. McCann a large wrapped package. It was a big chunk of butter.

Back in the town we had left that morning, we found the streets lined with GI's and cheering townspeople. Someone suggested we parade the SS Trooper down the street. The infantrymen on the other TD chose their smallest soldier for that chore. They called him "Shorty", and that pint-sized GI walked the Kraut through the throng of people, hollering, "git along you old Superman, git along." Every few steps, Shorty would reach up and kick the Kraut in the rear, and the crowd would just roar with laughter. You could see the hatred in the Kraut's eyes, and he was fairly seething inside. That evening we dined on French bread and wine, those chunks of meat, and we scrambled our eggs in butter.

I still chuckle, even today, about a little incident that happened when we were riding those TD's up near Luxueil, France. The lead TD was about to enter an intersection, when someone shouted that a Kraut bus was coming down the road. It was packed to the gills with Krauts, and some were riding outside. One Kraut on the hood actually signaled the TD to stop and let them have the right of way. Guess he thought it was a German tank. Just after the bus cleared the intersection, the TD turned and lobbed a shell point blank into it.

While all this hullabaloo was going on, I was down beside the other TD, cleaning my rifle. Someone had stepped across it when we jumped off our TD, and red mud was forced into the receiver. About the time I got it cleaned out, someone hollered that some German motorcycles were coming down the road from behind us. I jammed my rifle back together, and we all started shooting. As it turned out, there was only one motorcycle. We riddled a German officer on it, but a little Kraut private fell off of it into prone position across the road. He was going to take us all on. PFC Marvin Cohen, who was over there, jumped up and kicked his rifle away. He grabbed him by the collar and dragged him, kicking and struggling down the road. I had never seen Marvin so mad before.

German resistance increased up above Luxueil, and near Remiremont. It was getting into late September, and we found ourselves fighting in more heavily-wooded terrain. It's not hard to recall what happened one of those days. I was blasted by automatic weapons three times, and my closest call of being wounded. C Company was sweeping on the left flank, through the forests along a valley road below. Our squad, with Lt. McCann, S/Sgt. Voss, PFC Gerald Devins, and I, were moving up along a narrow wooded forest road.

A fire fight developed down in the valley, but nothing was happening up where we were. It was soon over down there, and we began to move



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out again. Immediately, I spotted a German in a hole at the bottom of a large oak tree. I pointed my rifle his way, and told him to come out. He raised his hands, threw off his helmet, and we sent him back towards the rear. He could have easily picked me off, if he had wanted to.

Starting forward again, I saw a tree across the road about 35 feet away. At the same moment, I noticed someone running behind it. I started firing, and about the time the third bullet left my MI, a burp pistol opened up right in my face. I hit the dirt, and those burp bullets were cutting grass blades off around my face. I quickly rolled off the road down into the woods.

Later on, advancing further up the road, another automatic weapon sprayed some limbs and leaves off around my head, I hit the dirt again. Down below there was more firing, but we never saw anyone up our way. Word came up the line that PVT Mike Francis of Ohio had been killed by a Kraut he was taking prisoner. Mike had just joined us in July, but had become a well-liked member of our unit.

After the firing ceased again, we swung down into the woods, and began advancing further. Devins and Voss, and others were behind me, and as I stepped out into an open spot between some huge pine trees, a machine gun cut loose at me again. I slammed my body down into what looked like a shell hole. Immediately, I was aware I was exposed, and scrambled over behind a tree trunk. I looked around the tree, caught a glimpse of a machine gunner down the road. He opened fire, and then something with a great force struck me in the right neck, knocking me backwards. I hid behind the tree again, and put my left hand up where my neck was hurting. It came away bloody, and I just knew I had been hit. Back in the woods, I heard S/Sgt. Voss call for a medic. Evidently he had seen my bloody hand too.

I fumbled around for my first aid packet, and then felt my neck again with my right hand. A finger went through a hole in my shirt collar, and rubbing my hurting neck, I didn't feel a wound, or find any more blood. I wasn't hit after all. The blood on my left hand came from a small slit wound inside my little finger. It must have been cut when I fell down in that shell hole. I then yelled to S/Sgt. Voss that I didn't need a medic. By that time, the firing had ceased again, and Lt. McCann came up to where we were. He looked at me and said, "Miller, you look a little shaky. Bring up the rear the rest of the day, and let Devins do the scouting."

Some days later came the time that I left C Company, and the front lines. We were advancing up a hill through some heavy woods, and ran into a hornet's nest of Kraut fire. Bullets were coming at us from every direction, above us, below us, and from all sides. It was too hot to handle, and we all began running back downhill. At the bottom, I remember Major James Minor shouted, "Let's dig in down here, and build a line." The next moment I remember, I was in pajamas in a hospital bed back in Besancon, and they told me it was six days later.

What happened to me is a little sketchy, but after Major Minor said to dig in, evidently I "blacked out", and kept running. I was told that somewhere back through the woods, I jumped out on a road, and leveled my rifle at a Jeep load of artillerymen, calling them "Germans." Somehow they managed to talk me out of that notion, got my rifle away from me, took me to an aid station nearby, and from there, to the hospital at Besancon.

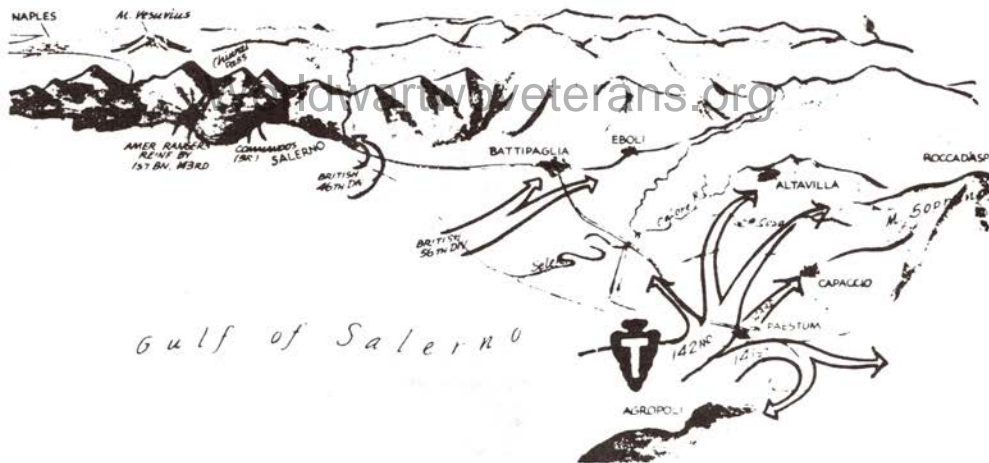
After I returned to my normal self, six days later, I was greatly concerned about what had happened to me. My doctor, a Major, assured me that I need not worry about it effecting my future life. He said I had just reached a point of fatigue that had snapped my normal concentration, and that a lot of rest would put me back into tip top shape. Some days later, on October 3, 1944, I was given limited assignment, shipped back to Naples, Italy, via Marseille, and ended up working in several hospitals until the war ended. On November 13, 1945, I was discharged.

I was never too happy I "blacked out" up there in France, but slowly accepted it, and learned to live with that fact. Back in Italy, I always tried to follow the progress of the 36th until the war ended.

I will always remember my buddies of C Company, and the times I spent with the 36th Infantry Division in Italy and Southern France.



# 9-9-'43





Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

# Medics and Miracle

by Julian H. "Duney" Phillips



Most of you readers have enjoyed, from time to time, the T.V. series, M.A.S.H.—4077th, a front line hospital during the Korean War.

We members of the 36th Division who served in WWII also saw front line hospitals. They were not called M.A.S.H. hospitals as in the T.V. series, ours were known as Evacuation Hospitals. They were located just behind our front lines and many times came under shell fire from the Germans.

The evacuation hospitals of WWII never received the publicity or notoriety that the M.A.S.H. Hospitals received but were some of the best to be found. The ones in Italy during 1943-44, that took care of the wounded men from the 3rd, 34th, 45th and 36th Divisions had the reputation of being the best in any country's Army.

There was never enough credit given to the Army Medics, Front Line Aid Men, Doctors and Nurses. They went about doing their jobs day after day, with little time off and always trying to save a limb or an eye. Their gratification came when they saved lives and watched their patients walk out of the hospital.

It was in late December 1943, while the 36th Division was off the line that I took a jeep across the valley to visit Captain James Wharton, from Baltimore, Md. He had been wounded earlier in the month and I had carried him down the mountain in my arms.

We were in the mountains of Italy in November and December of 1943. They were miserable months, with snow, sleet, rain, dust and sometimes in mud knee deep to a soldier. The men who fought in those mountains will never forget that winter.

As I approached the Evacuation Hospital the wind was blowing across the Lire Valley, making driving very dangerous.

I entered the Admissions Tent and asked where the Officer's Ward was located. The Sergeant on duty gave me the directions to the officer's ward and bed number where I could find Captain Wharton. I gave him his mail from home and asked how he was doing. He glanced at the letters and started asking me questions about the company and the men that he had left when he was wounded.

Co. G had only 23 men left when it was pulled off the line, on 24 Dec. 1943. One Hundred Seventy-Five had gone into the line during the middle of November 1943.

I had been at the hospital more than an hour when I told Captain Wharton that I had to leave and return to the Company. Just as I was leaving a Medical Major entered the ward. Captain Wharton raised his voice, and began to speak to the wounded officers, saying, "May I have your attention, please." Everyone stopped talking as the Captain spoke. "I would like to introduce the man I owe my life to. This is Lt. Julian Philips who carried me down the mountain north of San Pietro. If it wasn't for him I would not be here tonight."

The ward broke into applause with a few officers, who could walk, coming over to shake my hand. Men in beds with serious wounds would extend their hands and I went from bed to bed greeting them and wishing them a safe trip home.

I returned to Captain Wharton's bed with my hand outstretched, saying, "Captain, you are fortunate, your wounds will take you back to the states. You have done your part. I'm sorry we couldn't have served together longer."

James spoke, "Duney, be careful and take care of yourself. Maybe someday after the war is over, our paths will cross again."

When I left the ward all the officers called after me. "Be careful, take care of yourself and keep your head down." All giving me advice to help myself.

I was out of the ward before I realized the Medical Doctor had followed me. He put his hand on my shoulder and asked me if I would like a drink. He said he was going to the club and asked me to join him. I answered, "Major, I don't drink but would love to have a Coca-cola." He led the way to the club.

There was quite a bit of small talk and later I said, "Major I would like to thank you and the other doctors here at the Evacuation Hospital for doing so much for men from the front line. We send them to you completely torn to pieces and somehow, somehow you take these broken, twisted bodies and put them together again. Many of them didn't have a chance in the world of living but with your knowledge and skill you performed miracles. We men in the infantry could never repay you and your colleagues for the job you are doing here in Italy." The Major spoke. "We do get our share of torn bodies, more in one month here than doctors would get to see in his practice stateside in one year. Last month after a big push, casualties started arriving around 1500 hours. All the doctors were checking to see who needed to get to the operating room first. As I checked the wounded I came across a German soldier who had been hit with shrapnel all over his body. When I checked his pulse I felt he would be dead in the next few minutes. I asked the aid-men to move him to the end of the line, for I felt he was too badly wounded to live much longer."



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"My body ached and I had been awake over twenty-four hours and had been operating for at least sixteen of those hours, but felt I had to help this young man. So, I scrubbed once again and entered the operating room for one last soldier who was near death. I moved up to the German and saw his wounds all opened and exposed. The nurse gave me his pulse beat and I still had doubts that I could save him. I started closing his wounds without removing the shrapnel or cleaning the wounds as I had been trained to do. I finished after daylight and asked the aid-man to move him into the ward and I headed for my bunk.

"Around eleven o'clock, I woke to a beautiful sunny Italian day. After shaving and showering I headed for the Mess Hall. After breakfast I went directly to the tents that housed my patients.

"When I entered the second tent I saw the German soldier in the second bed still alive. I spoke to the nurse. "I didn't do a very good job on this soldier last night, have him taken back to the operating room. I expect him to die, but I want to make him as comfortable as possible." I opened his wounds and removed the schrapnel, reclosed them and had him placed back in the ward. Four days later, as I was making my rounds, I came across the German again. He was still hanging on to life and his vital signs were good.

"I turned to the nurse and said, "I've worked on this man twice and neither time was I proud of the job that I did. Have him taken back into the operating room, I want to give him a first class job." When I closed the last wound I was pleased and felt he might make it in spite of all he had been through.

"Lt., two weeks ago I was making my rounds and found the German soldier sitting up in bed with a big smile on his face. As I approached his bed, I said, "Soldier, two weeks ago when the ambulance dropped you off at this hospital, you were more dead than alive. St. Peter just wouldn't let you through the pearly gates." The Major continued, "In my time I've seen my share of wounded and dying men, but you take the cake. It's a miracle you are still here."

"The broad smile left the German soldier's lips as he spoke. "Major you are the second doctor who has told me that. When I was on the Eastern Front fighting the Russians, I was hit by a rifle bullet through my heart. I wasn't given much hope of survival until a famous German Surgeon, who was inspecting hospitals on the Russian front, heard about my condition. He came to the hospital where I was waiting for death and operated on me. A few days later the surgeon was making his rounds and stopped by my bed. He stepped forward and started removing the dressing that covered the operation. I was conscious and well on the way to recovery. I felt I would get to go home when I was well enough to travel."

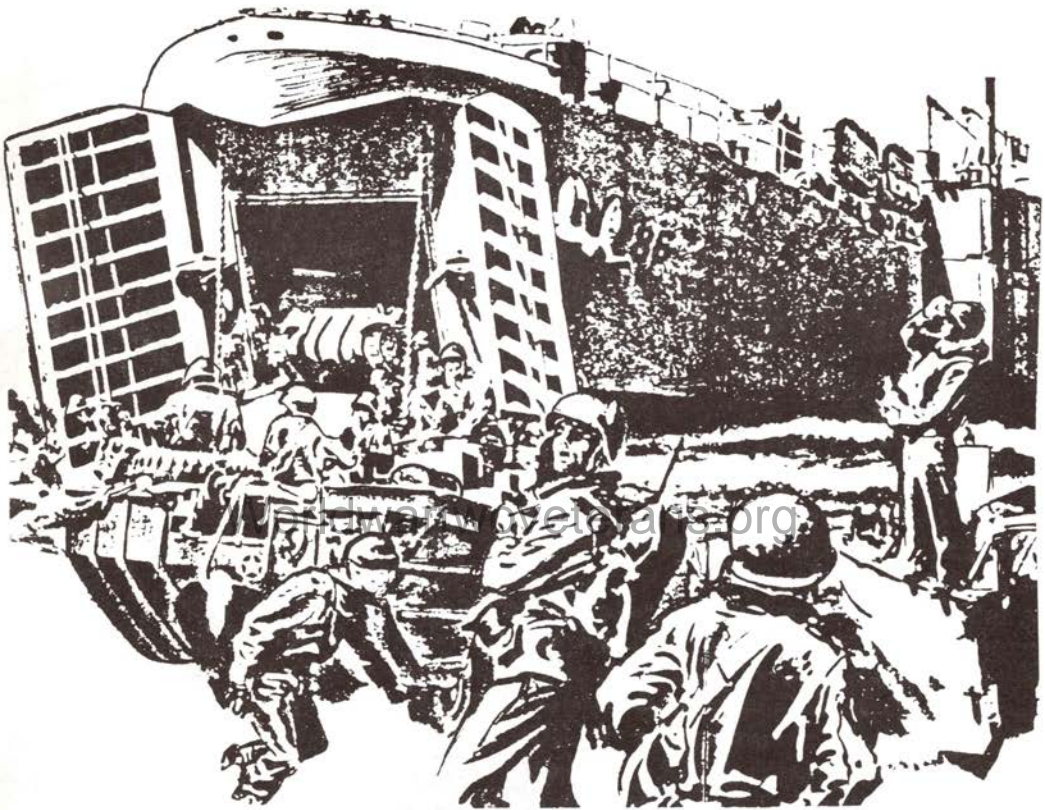
“The surgeon lay the bandages aside as he faced me and said, “Soldier you were hit through your heart and should have died, but it just wasn’t your time to go. It’s a miracle you are still here.”

We finished our drinks and I left the club heading for the admissions tent. I thanked the Major for the drink and said, “Major, keep taking care of our men. I feel better knowing you and your staff are here.”

*Footnote: Not enough has been written or said about the United States Medics, Aid-Men, Doctors and Nurses that performed miracle after miracle in saving lives during WWII. Without their knowledge, skill and tireless devotion to their profession, we would have lost many more men.*

*To this branch of service, “The United State Medical Corps,” I salute you and say thanks a million for a job well done!*

Worldwartwoveterans.org







## KERRIGAN'S KORNER

A Few Fractured  
Foxhole Fables

By George (Wrong Way) Kerrigan

# Kerrigan Kills Krowd

*Jim Minor had a great sense of humor and appreciated the "roast" given him at the 49th Reunion of the 36th Division, held in Dallas, Texas on Labor Day weekend in 1974.*

*George Kerrigan, the very funny man from Chicago, formerly with Co. A 142nd was the roaster during one of his entertainment sessions and later wrote Jim this letter of apology and included a copy of his original "The Quiet Man." "Everyone said you were a very patient man for not grabbing the nearest musket and shooting that Damn Yankee. But thank God you have that God Given Gift of being able to laugh at yourself."*

### THE QUIET MAN

I was raised in the South (South Brooklyn) and never acquired a Southern Drawl. We came from a poor family, only one father and one mother, my mother had three children, one of each. Before I entered the service I worked for the Dept. of Sanitation, we were known as the Fruit Salad Boys, we got \$100 a week, and all we could eat, our Motto was "At Your Disposal." I was called a Play Boy, because I followed the horses (with a broom and shovel). I worked at Tree Thoity Tree Thoity Thoid St. in the Greenpoint section known as the Garden Spot of the Woild. I was a Gopher man, Gopher this and Gopher that.

I tried the fight game for awhile and was called *Kid Candle* one blow and I was out, I had a perfect record as a fighter, 127 fights and I lost

every one. My best fight was against *Armless Joe* he never laid a glove on me, still he kicked Hell out of me. Fighting was against my religion (I am a devout coward). When I joined the Army, I refused a Commission, it was only 5%, my family said to me, Son don't go to Taxes ("Texas") as it will go up to 130 in the shade, I said don't worry I'll stay out of the shade. They said you could be up to your neck in mud, and still get dust in your eyes, even the ducks fly backwoods to keep the dust out of their eyes. People asked if Taxes is really Big, well the folks down in Brownwood think the Amorilla people are Eskimos, and compared to those Long Horn Steers in Taxes, we have the Kerry Cows in Ireland that are so small we had to put them up on the table to milk them.

After Basic Training in Taxes I was shipped to North Africa as a "Garatrooper", that's a guy that's too far forward to wear a tie and too far back to get combat pay. They put me on an Ack-Ack Gun at Bizertie Airport, and before long I had shot down 27 planes and never got a medal, they said 17 were American and 10 were British, and boy were they mad.

As a result I was shipped to the Salerno Beach Head as a replacement for "A" Company 142nd Reg. 36th Div. Lt. Minor Commanding, by the way I took the Infantry by choice, it was either that or get six years in jail. As I waited for orders, someone yelled Attention! all officers cent and fronted, the Lt. Minor stepped forward and said "When I blow this whistle I want to see a cloud of dust and when that disappears I want to see just four pair of ears, four pair of arms, and four pair of legs, I want to hear the eye balls click, and if I point my finger at you all I want to hear is your name, rank and telephone number."

He yelled at me "Hey Yankee you are supposed to be standing at Attention," I said "I am at Attention but my uniform is at ease;" it was four sizes too large. Then and there I was made a Pilot, Pilot here and Pilot there, then as we were fast becoming Buddies, he said "I guess you can handle a musket?" So I said "Coitainly, I used to shoot boids on the coib," he said they weren't boids, so I said they sure choiped like boids.

Minor then said "you have a big mouth, see if you can drill the troops," at last my big chance! I said, "All right you bums line up in a squallem of cards," then I gave them squads a right two times around and then gave them Gonorrhoea March. That was the foist-time I saw a grown man cry, and the foist time I hoid Yankee Go Home. Minor said "Don't you know the Kings English?" I said, "Coitanly, so is his wife." I guess he thought I was ignorant, or something. I would up on K.P., I asked what K.P. meant and Minor said "Keep Peeling." He swears that I was attached to "A" Company for rations only, and getting me to fight was like flogging a dead horse. That's how they talk when you have no seniority. A friendly looking guy came along and I said Ho Ya doing Buddy? And he roared at me "Who in Hell are you calling Buddy, do you know what this star on my shoulder means?" I said, "Sure, ya got a



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son in the soivce," later on they told me in the God House that he was a Jiggadeer Brindle or something, I should have stood in bed!

Minor was different from other Skippers, we had a change of underwear every day, we changed with the guy in the next fox hole, he gave us our choice of food, take it or leave it, and he kept us on our toes, he raised the urinals 18 inches.

I met a beautiful girl in Naples and I told Lt. Minor we wanted to get married, he told me that if the Army wanted me to have a wife, that they would have issued me one. I let him know my feelings, he said, you are so smart you should be a Major! But I told him that I would never make it because the Army knew that I could read and write, so I put another nail in my coffin.

When we were off the front, resting? we were kept happy with the British Battle Drill, on a given command we would run out in all directions, one day seven men ran into the woods and we haven't seen them since. We had great cooks (bellyrobbers), they couldn't heat up (C) Rations, but they ran beautiful Acey Ducey Games and set up lovely Dice Tables.

Now take our Medics (Shanker mechanics) they gave us pills for headaches we had to take them two hours BEFORE we felt the pain come on. To prevent Malaria we were given atterbrine tablets which everyone threw away, so we had to line up and open our mouth, no trouble as mine was never closed, then the Lts. would throw in two tablets and make sure we swallowed them. I used to gag all the time, because when they got to me they left them in the bottle.

A few of our Non Coms looked odd to me, one day a Sergeant took me aside and said looka here Yankee, I want to tell you a secret, you don't know this but there is a fairy in our outfit, I said who is it. The sergeant said give me a kiss and I'll tell you.

Our supply Sgt. Bolen only had two sizes, too big and too small. If you asked for a rifle he would ask what size? I asked for a tie one day and again what size? I told him I didn't know, he then asked what was my hat size and said 7-1/8, he said you take a size 22 tie and sure enough it fit me perfectly. That was the only thing I ever got in the Army that fit me right.

Here are a few of Minors Commandos:

Happy Adams and Shorty Loughran, they won a dance contest on the boat going overseas, Happy looked like Fred Astaire and Shorty resembled Shirley Temple, he was the only man in the U.S. Army that got both Overseas and Underseas pay at the same time, (the British Navy dropped him off the landing Barge a mile short of Salerno Beach, D-Day, and he couldn't swim). Shorty was known as the Worlds Tallest Midget, when his mother heard about him dancing with Happy Adams she took the star out of the window.

Single Wing Eppie, his theme song was "Have You Ever Seen Mary Make Water." He received five decorations (all from the Nazis) he claimed he couldn't walk due to very painful feet, but when the Medics said his feet were O.K. he settled for a hernia operation, and spent the rest of the war in Sunny North Africa. He got his biggest thrill when he was overseas two years, his wife wrote to let him know she was pregnant, the only shots he ever heard fired were in a John Wayne movie.

We also had Werbeck, an Underground Farmer (coal miner) from Pennsylvania. He drank so much wine they all thought he was a Blue Baby, he carried a rifle, pack, a 6 ft. shovel, a full size bicycle with pump, along with 1,000 tins of "C" Ration coffee, he was always too busy making coffee to fire a shot.

Now we come to Rip Cord Davis he will tell you all in one breath that he was born in Oregon, raised in Washington, went to school in Colorado, was married in Oklahoma, divorced in Tennessee, jailed in Montana, and drafted in Utah, he claims he was in a plane that was shot down over Anzio, he bailed out and then saw the pilot and co-pilot coming down without parachutes on. He grabbed both as they were going past and landed safely with only a sprained ankle. We got medals for Gunnery but Rip Cord got them for Gonorrhoea. After the war he joined the Navy and was made a Tail Gunner on a Submarine.

Now my old friend and admirer (what was that?) James Minor was transferred, by mistake, to the Regimental Band when he got promoted to Major, Major Minor a Musician? He refused to play Yankee Doodle Dandy and he was sent back to his Brooklyn Constituents in the 1st Battalion. By this time he had risen to the Rank of Colonel, and at the end of the war he was seriously thinking about going into the Scrap Iron business due to the fact that he was wounded so many times, and thanks to the German Marksmanship he put on about 75 pounds since Salerno.



GEORGE KERRIGAN, 8008 Talman, Chicago, Ill. 60652 attended his first reunion in 1971 in Houston at the royal Coach Inn. Apparently he had a good time, and became one of our great boosters. He did a replay in Dallas in '72, and was in-like-Gangbusters at the Astroworld in '73.

George, a great Irishman who grew up in New York, served with Co. A. 142nd, ended up in the Windy City after the war.

Saturday night after the reunion Dance which closed at 1:00 AM, Kerrigan and his good buddy Steve Kujawa ended up in the Spec. Tips. CP which has been noted for operating "after hours". Somehow, Kerrigan started a few impromptu short funnies that

had the dozen or so T-Patchers in a series of belly-laffs. This was about 2:30 AM. Everyone howled, and George kept on. He told one after another . . . each one funnier than the one before. His informal routine would make a famous stand-up comic like Henny Youngman hang his head in shame. This went on and on. The troops kept laughing, and George kept his steady staccato of gags going. Laughter rang thru the now darkened hall of the Parlors, and finally at 5:40 AM (according to someone semisober) said it was time to give up, and a fabulous THREE HOUR monolog came to an end.



# 25 November 1944 Just Another Routine Recon Patrol!

*by David Arvizu*



Late on the night of November 24, 1944, Co. B 143rd Infantry Regiment stopped in the hills just east of Le Chipal in the Vosges Mountains of the Alsace Region of France. The 1st platoon of Co. B took shelter for the night in a house at the edge of a ridge. During the march to this location there were rumors that our battalion commander, Lt. Colonel David M. Frazier, was being transferred to Regimental Headquarters. Like all frontline infantrymen we speculated as to why he was leaving the battalion. Most of the time we had the highest admiration for Col. Frazier, and then there were the times when we wished he commanded some other battalion, since he could be a hard driver. However, at this time most of us were of the opinion that the reason he was going to Regimental staff was that he had objected strongly to the long marches, never ending attacks without relief for his men who were at the limit of physical and mental endurance. On this we all agreed. We had been constantly on the move, the weather was miserable and the terrain extremely rugged.

At the break of dawn on the morning of 25 November, I was awakened after a short nap and told to select men from my 1st squad for a routine recon patrol to the ridge on our right front. Like all infantry squad leaders, I groaned and griped about "Why my squad?" Nevertheless, orders were orders, and I selected the men trying to pick those that had not been on patrol recently. At this time my squad consisted of seven men including myself. The mission of the patrol was to find out if there were any small isolated enemy units in the area to our right front. I picked out two riflemen and the squad's BAR man for the patrol. The two riflemen were good men, and the BAR man was a solid dependable soldier. The weather was overcast, and a cold drizzle was falling as we went past the outposts and began to work our way towards the objective

about 800 yards away. The going was slow because we were going uphill along the edge of the ridge and there were large rocks and thick low shrubs on the way up.

After climbing up about 400 yards we came to the crest of the ridge and on to a small footpath that went off to the right. I took the lead and led the patrol toward the right using the small footpath. After seventy yards we stopped to observe the terrain under cover of a large group of rocks. The rocks in front were about five feet high and behind these was a large rock at least 12 feet high. The terrain in front of the rocks sloped downhill and at a distance of fifty yards or so there were some large pine trees grouped together. We did not notice any enemy activity and after a few moments we moved forward on the path. Up to this point all conditions had been ideal for a recon patrol. The drizzle had soaked the ground, pine needles and small twigs, so that we made no noise as we moved along. After moving along for another fifty yards we stopped again to observe and saw no activity, but noticed that the terrain to the left sloped down gently and was more open. I led off again and the rest of the patrol followed at a five yard interval between each man. After following the path for another seventy five yards I motioned for the patrol to move off the path about five yards and take a prone position. The drizzle had lessened but there was a heavy mist in the air.

The terrain to our front was shaped like an elongated bowl with only a few trees here and there and stretched for about 500 yards directly in front of us. We had been observing for a few minutes and I was about to give the signal to continue forward when I saw some movement at the extreme end of the elongated bowl about 500 yards away. I motioned for the patrol to stay down and pointed in the direction of the movement. I could see a group of at least eight enemy soldiers. They stopped for a moment then moved forward a short distance. Then behind them came another 4-6 enemy soldiers into view carrying what appeared to be a heavy machine gun into position. I was concentrating so intently on the enemy activity that I became careless and did not pay attention to any other activity near me. Suddenly the BAR man called out to me, "LOOK OUT ZUI!" I glanced over my left shoulder and there stood a German soldier on the footpath wearing a large poncho. Apparently he had his rifle slung over his shoulder muzzle down. He leveled his rifle at me and pulled the trigger, BUT THE WEAPON DID NOT FIRE! It is strange how the human mind and body react at times like this. My immediate thought was not to give the enemy soldier another chance to shoot at me, and at the same time I did not want to make any noise that would give our position away to the Germans setting up the machine gun. Then the enemy soldier that had tried to shoot me ran off to the right downhill from the footpath. At the same time one of my riflemen was on his knee and leveled his rifle at the fleeing German. I motioned for my rifleman



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not to fire realizing it would immediately give away our position but it was too late, he fired one shot and missed the fleeing German. I took a quick look at the German machine gun position and saw a flurry of activity and could tell they had seen us.

We immediately took off retracing the route we had come upon. My mind was racing-about what we had seen, what had happened and what to do next. On the one hand we were on a recon patrol and all that was necessary was to return immediately and report what had happened. On the other hand I had a strong suspicion that the Germans were going to come after us perhaps thinking we were an isolated patrol or even lost. The thought came to me that if we rushed back to our unit, our outposts and the 1st platoon and the company would be completely unprepared and might suffer casualties. As we came to the large rocks we had passed previously I made the decision to send the two riflemen to report everything that had happened and get help. The BAR man and I would attempt to hold off, at least temporarily any German patrol that would come after us.

The rocks provided an excellent defensive position. We had a clear view to the front and sides for at least fifty yards. The apparent approach the enemy would take was a small draw that ended in a clump of 3-4 large pine trees almost directly in front of our position. Even though we were on a recon patrol we were all carrying plenty of ammunition. I had two bandoliers plus a full cartridge belt and the clip in my M-1. The BAR man had a full load of magazines in his harness plus the magazine in his weapon. We whispered to each other back and forth as to how we were going to defend our position. At this time I thought about my BAR man, he was a tall muscular man in his late twenties and I recalled that he came into the Army from Ironwood, Michigan. I admired him for the fact that he had not questioned or objected to what I had decided to do, and he appeared ready for whatever would happen.

My suspicions as to what the Germans would do were confirmed when moments later we saw one of them looking cautiously from behind a tree in the prone position. We held our fire and soon saw three more behind the other trees looking toward our direction. Apparently they had not seen us and got up and started to move forward. I fired the first shot and hit the one on the left. He went down but crawled behind the tree for cover. Then the others began firing at us. I saw the BAR man out of the corner of my eye level his weapon and pull the trigger—THE BAR DID NOT FIRE! He immediately applied remedial action to his weapon smoothly, methodically, like it is done in training in proper sequence—AMAZING! Then he fired a short burst and he hit another German.

At this time I thought that perhaps the Germans had sent only a small patrol and that they would leave after having two of them wounded. Instead, I saw more activity behind the trees where the first four enemy had

appeared. Moments later the small arms fire on our position increased. Fortunately for us we had an excellent defensive position and they were hitting the rocks mostly over our heads. Every time they attempted to rush our position we would fire back and pin them down. This situation continued for about ten minutes. Then the enemy small arms fire became more intense and suddenly we were hit with a blast of air and the accompanying noise of a loud explosion. We then realized that we were being fired upon by a German bazooka.

Surprisingly the enemy did not rush our position, and by the time they decided to assault we had recovered from the blast and began firing to keep them pinned down. For the next ten minutes or so we were fired on by the bazooka at least five times and each time we were able to repulse any assault attempt. The bazooka was firing at us from a spot between two large trees at ground level making it difficult for us to get a hit on it. At times the bazooka rounds hitting the large rock directly behind us would almost knock the helmets off our heads, the concussion was really powerful. During this period we hit four more enemy soldiers including one who appeared to be the leader.

Then to our relief we heard the sound of a friendly mortar round hitting behind the enemy position. Then a short time later several friendly mortar rounds hit some of the trees above the enemy position and they stopped firing at us. Then a short while later a salvo of friendly mortar rounds fell in the vicinity of where we had first sighted the enemy machine gun position. To our immense relief our company's assault elements came through our position. By this time the enemy had fled taking their casualties with them. Without realizing it I had used up all my ammunition with the exception of two clips. The BAR man was down to the last magazine in his weapon.

As soon as the lead friendly units went through our position, I got up from behind the rocks and walked to a flat rock a few yards away. I sat on the flat rock and then the emotional reaction of what we had been through set in. I started to shake, and as hard as I tried I could not stop.

So from what was supposed to be just another routine recon patrol we survived an experience that will be remembered for a lifetime.

DAVID ARVIZU. Entered the Army as a draftee from the state of Michigan on October 10, 1943. Took basic training at Ft. McClellan, Alabama for 17 weeks. Arrived in Italy and joined Co. B 143rd Infantry Regiment in March, 1944. Remained with Co. B until the end of the war and rotated home in September 1945. Was awarded the Silver Star for the action on this recon patrol. Curiously, he was given, officially, his American Citizenship Certificate in January 1946 while living at that time in San Antonio, Texas. He enlisted in the Regular Army in November 1945 and remained on active duty until retirement for length of service on 31 October 1973.





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# WWII Diary of an Engineer

by: *Warren Taney*



Worldwartwoveterans.org

## April 1

Left states April 1st, arrived at Oran the 13th. Boat (Henry Gibbons) went to Mengenta. Stayed there six weeks, then rode on train to Robot, four hundred and fifty miles (four days). Stayed there two months and had plenty of passes. Gave demonstrations to the French at Port Lyautey. Went back to Oran. Left there to invade Italy. Boat (Funston) left Africa September 5th and landed in Italy September 9th. Airplane landed near boat when we were landing. Pilot was saved by landing barge, then went to underwater proofing area, got shelled by 88's and then went north two miles to a town of Paestum. Got in tank battle at 1 p.m. when they were knocked out by our artillery and large navy guns. All of us (1 squad) were sure flirting with death. We laid mines ahead of the infantry two different nights. Put up barb wire obstacles several times by Sele River, before they left the area. Our worst fighting was near that river and at the small hamlet of Altavilla. Many lives were lost on both sides, jerry the most. We were the only division that landed except with special troops for mines, many of them just after the enemy had left the area. Altavilla was almost flattened like many of the villages were. On the fourth day, we were put on the front to stop a tank battle (to assist in stopping one). We dug in (couldn't go deep enough) we saw everything that a person had ever learned and read about (made one tremble.) We lost our weapons. Sgt. Couch (swell fellow) was our weapons sgt. (very well educated). We were relieved by the 45, 34, and the 3rd divisions. We kept on repairing roads and bridges, being engineers we were seldom idle. October 1st we entered Naples (1st troops to enter outside of paratroopers, who were posting guards at various places.) We started to work at once on the docks. Ships were coming in on the second day. We got praises for our fine and quick work, unloading ships, taking extra food in particular. Two and a half weeks had a few passes. Could buy most anything for a song, but prices went up steadily. The people were grateful to see us come and treated us well.

The city itself was a terrible wreck from bombs and demolitions from the jerry. Could see Mt. Vesuvius (volcanic mountain) Pompeii at the bottom of the mountain partly covered up from the overflow of lava.

#### **November 15**

We left Naples and started to move toward the front. November 15th (last Biv. area before moving up was near Capua on the Volturno River.) November 15th put up our pup tent in the rain and mud eight miles from front. (Rumble of artillery fire going and coming, most of it going.) Went out after supper to build bypass for quartermaster (cold and raining.) Came in at eleven bells. I was sent back to get medicos. (We relieved the 3rd Inf. division after 59 days of action.) There was a truck off the road and three men were hurt, but not seriously.

#### **November 16**

November 16th Artillery shells were really flying over our heads all night, not much sleep. Still raining on and off all day. Laid in our tents but we did go out to repair roads and put out guides for the artillery who were moving up. Got in at 12 o'clock.

#### **November 17**

November 17 Still raining, worked all day building a bypass around a bridge that had been blown out. Just ahead was mountain where our inf. had jerries surrounded. Shells were flying and could hear the rattle of machine guns. Worked until seven, took us five hours to get in. The roads were bad and trucks were in ditches. We were hungry and cold, sure miserable to stay out with no dry place to go to. The air was full of bursts of our artillery shells.

#### **November 18**

Sun came out a few hours but started to rain before night came on. Off today cleaning up our guns and equipment. Still fighting on that hill. Roar of our bombers (B52's) flying overhead. Fighters patrolling all day. Seems like every hill is full of artillery weapons.

#### **November 19**

Sun shining first time in five days. Worked until 3 p.m. on bypass. Sure is muddy. Moved in some more artillery, not much sleep tonight.

#### **November 20**

Started to rain again, repairing roads. Still haven't taken hill. Jerry is sure deep in all divisions waiting on our 142nd Inf. to take hill.

#### **November 21**

Weather a little better. Didn't do much of anything. Aired out all of the blankets. Went in a litte town next to us. Six MP's were shot up at Venafro.

#### **November 22**

Sun shining for a change, worked all day on roads. A boy out of A Company got killed from booby trap in a cave. We could see shells falling on the jerry positions. Jerry Stuka strafed a road along side of us, sure made us hit the ground fast, no damage done.



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### November 23

Raining hard out, still working on roads. Concusion from our big 155 long toms, sure shakes our tent. (Can't sleep, took second decent bath since I have been in Italy this evening. No change on front.) A lot of jerry shells are duds, but they scare the life out of us anyway.

### November 24

Raining, hauled rock and gravel all day till after dark. Was taken up in a ravine where a bridge had been blown out. Still shelling it from miles back. Our artillery still giving jerry no risk shooting from 1 to 20 miles and it sure lays some terrible barrages down, makes the whole earth tremble.

### November 25

Raining, sure miserable. Last year was on furlough at this time. (Thanksgiving). About all I can be thankful for is I'm still alive and well. Had turkey for supper, sure tasted good for a change, (ate in a downpour of rain.) Our positions are about the same, too much mud to expect much. Went out after dark. Worked and guided 18th Art. brigade along narrow places in roads where craters had been blown, got in a 2:30 a.m.

### November 26

Raining, had a rest, no work day or night, wrote some letters, front unchanged. Saw some B-25 bombers go over (24).

### November 27

Misty in morning but cleared off before noon. Worked hard on bridge fill in. Corduroyed it first then dumped rock and gravel on it. Worked until 9 p.m. We had got up that morning at 4 a.m. so to get at bypass before daylight (real dangerous in daylight on account of jerry shells.)

### November 28

Sun shine, swell day. Company went out, I stayed in, worked on platoon tools. Company working on same bridge. Jerries laid down a barrage of shells just below here. Sure shook the ground, don't know if anyone was killed or wounded. Looked bad from here.

### November 29

Weather fair, lull in the fighting, we laid around for further orders. Have been in this one area for 15 days now. Casualties are few at front, mostly shell victims. Village next to us, Presezono, odd place, built on huge hill side, no streets for cars, etc. mostly steps, real old places.

### November 30

Raining here and there. Pay day. No place to spend it here. Going to work at a bypass near the front tonight, too dangerous in daytime, loaded all the trucks with medium sized rock (10 of them). Left area at 8 p.m. Road blocked from truck which went over bank, one fellow was killed. Then we ran into a covnoy of tanks going up. I was left as a guide to

direct our trucks to bypass one-half mile from front, pretty scary. Could hear machine gun fire, plenty of mortars and shells falling, also see them. Got in a 3 a.m.

#### **December 1**

Raining. Most of the fellows are sleeping, rangers tried to take city ahead, got surrounded but broke out. Lost sixteen men. One squad from this Co. went with them to sweep roads for mines. All returned safe. We witnessed one of the biggest air and artillery barrages yet this afternoon. Over one hundred planes could be seen at a time dropping bombs and then diving down on the jerries and strafing them. No word, but hell could describe it for the artillery shells light up the sky most of the night, looked like New York. Tents shook, couldn't sleep. I was Cpl. of the guard two hours on and four hours off. (twenty-four hours).

#### **December 2**

Sun out, clear and real cool. Counted eighty-four bombers in the forenoon go over besides those A36's (sure some planes). They carry both light bombs and machine guns to strafe troops called dive bombers. So Hitler is in for another bad day. In the afternoon I counted over one-hundred-twenty-five more bombers, probably missed some. I don't see how jerries keep going. Tonight an artillery barrage was laid down ahead of our Infantry—hundreds of big guns were blazing all night, biggest barrage that ever was given an enemy in any battle yet. Continuous roar of 203 and 155 rifles. One gun just below us fired 60 shells (20 lbs. each). The mountain that they were on looks like a big fire. Our troops are pushing ahead.

#### **December 3**

Rain again. Troops are pushing forward. Cut small trees all day for corduroy of roads. No planes around today for the weather is too bad. I know jerry is glad of it. I'll bet there were some gruesome scenes up ahead. One can't explain that artillery barrage that our guns laid down last night. Sure glad that I am on this end of them. Some of the fellows are out working all night with bulldozers moving up artillery guns to the front. We heard that there were 3200 artillery pieces firing last night.

#### **December 4**

Raining hard. Hauled rock for fill in all day. Stayed in all night. Continuous rain, advancing slowly.

#### **December 5**

Sun, cloudy but not raining. Our company started to build two Bailey Bridges (English). First platoon got their eye but we were shelled hard by jerry. One fellow was wounded, then two duds landed within a few feet of us. If they hadn't been duds, we would have all been killed or wounded. Then we left only to come back after dark, everything went good until midnight. Shells started to land near us. Not hearing them come, we were all standing but by a miracle nobody was hit. Then several more



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came, but we were down. We left the area in forty directions—disregarding mines. We arrived safely in camp but one fellow, who was wounded pretty bad in the left arm. We were all scared to death. (Fifteen shells in all!) Two of which landed in A Company's area where they had just moved into. Two badly wounded, one may die. (He did.)

### December 6

Raining some but quit around noon. All shakey yet from last night. Unloaded six semi's full of bridge down at H&S. Stayed in all night, gave up bridge till they get that outpost in the mountains out, who is directing the jerry artillery on that bridge and the village of Venofro.

### December 7

Cloudy. Didn't do much. Cleaned and sharpened all our tools. Turned in our clothes for salvage. Bridge still too hot to build.

### December 8

Cloudy. Showers, still not doing anything. Trying to get jerry pushed farther away so we can build that bridge. Italians are going to the front (mountain troops). They (jerries) went out and got our rifles which we left at the bridge site the other night, unsafe to go back. I grabbed mine and one more before I took off that night, sure took a chance. (But I took one rifle.) Of course, we wouldn't have to pay for any equipment lost in combat. Fifth Army advancing.

### December 9

Cloudy. Showers. Loaded ten more trucks of Bailey Bridge to take out to bridge site tonight. We have orders it must be built regardless. You can imagine how we feel. We just hope it is safe. Arrived at bridge at midnight, started at once. Worked hard, all heavy steel sections, no shell fire, sure glad of that. They did put some in after day break. Closest ones were fifty yards away. Not too safe but it had to be put in. We completed it at 11 a.m. Sure tired and hungry. (Moonlight but it was raining off and on.) Slept until 3 o'clock, artillery guns were really firing, too much noise. (Couldn't sleep.)

### December 10

Sure tired and stiff. Second platoon is building one tonight, makes three bridges on the same short piece of road. Tanks etc. were moving over ours by noon. Thankful that it is done. Building bridges under shell fire is no picnic. Went to bed early. Try to catch up on some sleep.

### December 11

Cloudy. Showers. Finished putting runway on second platoon bridge. Was in air attack. Twelve jerry M-109's none of us were hit. Troops near were hit, killing two, injuring many. Fifth Army advancing slowly. Loaded up spare parts of bridges and brought them in to engineer dump.

### December 12

Cloudy, but no rain. Cut poles for corduroying of bypasses, etc. Happened to see Tom Merrell outfit, so looked him up in afternoon. He was

glad to see me. He is in 755 Tank Bn. Co. C. Ate supper with him then hitched a ride back. (Six miles). He looked same as ever. He unloaded just south of Naples.

#### **December 13**

Clear. Got orders to move. Left area at 2:30 p.m. (28 days in same area). Only company to move. May go back. We are now one-half mile northwest of Venafro, good area but plenty of shell fire. Can see mountains where jerries are. Can see white phosphorous shells (about as bad as gas) landing up in mountain peaks. Also shell bursts (shell explodes just above the ground and the shrapnel comes down on the troops. Tough stuff, fox holes don't help much. Can hear the jerry machine guns also in the distance. Just went through an air attack but our guns kept them off. Good thing I had my fox hole dug. (Gravel to dig in.) We are right near our bridges that we just put up. The airplanes are trying to get them also. Many artillery guns are all around us.

#### **December 14**

Clear and cool. First thing I did was dig my fox hole deeper, never can tell, plenty hot here. Lots of mules are coming into the mountain troops. They have to drop food and ammunition by airplane in some spots to our troops. There is a mountain near which they call the million dollar mountain, which answers for itself. Bombs and artillery guns have shelled and dropped that many dollars worth of bombs, etc. on it. We are having many casualties in our infantry regiments. The 34th Division got relieved by a division of French troops.

#### **December 15**

Clear and cool. Stayed around for the alert to move. Big push started this morning before daybreak. Our divebombers were diving at the jerries all day. Strafe on the way down and then dropped bombs on them. Airplanes could be seen all day. We even had two airraids from the jerries, but were driven off by our anti-craft guns. They dive bombed the area we had just left two days ago, lucky we were here. Germans tried to counter attack on a hill just above us. We had a ring side seat, and must say, we were in our own fox holes, don't see how anybody could live up there. Lasted two hours before jerries were driven off. Troops advanced. One of the men got hurt from a falling tree. Broke his shoulder and two ribs. (R. A. Hughes.)

#### **December 16**

Clear and cool. Still fighting hard on mountains. Hear lots of mortar and machine gun fire. Many of our B-25 bombers were blasting them this morning. Our paratroopers are using jerries' own machine guns on the jerries. Our airplanes dropped pamphlets on the jerry lines. Jerry planes were overheard, but never came down.

#### **December 17**

Clear and cool. Nothing doing for us. Just on the alert. San Pietro finally fell late this afternoon. We know our work will start soon. Our bombers and artillery blasted them out.



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### December 18

Clear and cool. No rain for near a week now. Getting some dryer. Our old bivouac area was bombed again. Started to sweep for mines near San Pietro, many S-mines and teller mines also found some booby traps. Village itself is flattened, not a building left standing. Saw our first real glance of the aftermath of a battle, sure gruesome. Many American buddies lay dead here and there. Seven tanks knocked out blocking the road. Rangers killed two jerries trying to blow up a bridge. One bridge we won't have to build.

### December 19

Clear, still sweeping roads for mines. Many bombers flying over B-25's. Can see our A-36 dive bombers go down after jerries. Our luck was broken one officer and a private got killed when jerry plane bombed and machine gunned them. Eight were wounded, one had his arm taken off. Couldn't find cover quick enough. All swell fellows. Lt. Evens and Brv. Felix Guss. T/5 Yeager with arm off below elbow—also shot in legs. O Bar Second Platoon fellow shot down one of the airplanes with his rifle—believe it or not, but we can all testify to that. Plane crashed three miles down the road. Took shower—first one in a month.

### December 20

Clear and cool. Got up at 2 a.m. Went to front to sweep a road to C.P. (Command Post). Had forty MP's as protection from snipers. Mountain very steep. Jerry is at top of mountain. No casualties but very tired. Got in at 5 p.m. Ate only one K ration (cheese and cookies). Yesterday we all had our pictures taken by A.P. and war correspondents. First troops to enter San Pietro. Fifth Army advancing. Inf. all bypassed it. Our 141st Inf. (2nd Battalion had 174 men left after the attack. Started with 700).

### December 21

Cloudy, showers. Troops advancing slowly—many casualties. Thirty-five men of the 16th engineers are attached to our company. (First armored.) Mine sweepers made recommence for bypass. Found big mine field. All S-mines. No work today. Rest of company moved up. All safe now, except for airraids. Mountain cleared of jerries.

### December 22

Cloudy, showers. Company idle. Wrote letters all day. Drew combat suit from supply—sure glad to get it waterproof and windproof—all set for winter now. Troop fighting hard to get St. Vittore and Cassino—gateway to the Lira Valley.

### December 23

Cloudy and showers. Wrote a few letters. Tightened clamps and made other repairs on our last bridge we built. Too much traffic, steady going and coming. Saw some of our 143rd Inf. come off the front. Sure a pitiful looking bunch of men. Met a long mule train loaded with rations and food going up into the mountains, all led by Italians (200 in all). We

are losing a great deal of men. Still see them laying here and there. Mines are thick as grass—S-mines. Just a little pressure and they jump up and blow the person to pieces. Even find mines and booby traps in trees. Jerry has really got all places covered by machine gun fire. Ditches, all banks and if he can't, he has them mined. His fox holes and gun emplacements are four to ten feet in the ground. So you can see what our Inf. is up against.

#### **December 24**

Cloudy and showers. Hauled pals for corduroying of road to water point. Some of the Inf. is back for rest period and are getting replacements. Some companies are down to as low as 20 men. Fifth Army advances—but our troops are meeting bitter fighting. General Eisenhower goes to England.

#### **December 25**

Xmas—Cloudy and cool. Worked until noon on road. Had afternoon off. Took a bath. Nothing to do. Had turkey for supper—really tasted swell. Had cranberry sauce that we had from the dock of Naples. (Our 40th day on front.) Don't know how Italians celebrate Christmas, all too scared. Our troops are fighting hard to get St. Vittore and Cassino, gaining some high ground. Weather too cloudy for airplanes. Artillery keeps on shelling all jerry positions. We got two new men in our squad. (13 to company). We can see snow falling on the mountain peaks next to us. Clark tell his troops that we will be home by next Christmas—sure hope he is right. (I am ready right now to go home).

#### **December 26**

Sun. Cloudy and real cold. Some showers. Finished work on road to water point. Hauled gravel most of day.

#### **December 27**

Cloudy and cool. Drained ditches along roads toward San Pietro. Gaining slowly on front.

#### **December 28**

Cold. Thirty-sixth Division moving back for rest period and replacements for the division. We left at 11:30. Moved back about thirty-five miles but mostly east behind the Eighth Army lines (British). We were relieved by the 34th Division, we are taking their rest camp. Will line in large tents we were on the front 43 days in terms of miles the Fifth Army didn't gain many while we were up there mostly on account of the weather and jerry positions were entrenched deeply causing our troops no end of trouble, but we did get deep in their winter line. Our losses in men were in large numbers, Inf. were the heaviest. Engrs. not many I think—five in the Bn. We all had many wild experiences and in some cases are lucky to be alive. Now we are back for a rest, maybe some new training. Hope to go back to Naples (60 miles). We are in good area. Have pictures down the road about six miles at the town of Piedmont.



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We were back nineteen days getting replacements. We didn't do much in the way of training. We gave demonstrations to the Inf. Pioneer Companies. Mine schools demonstrations, flame thrower. We had a few passes to Pridmonte but most of us were going to Cerserta and St. Marie, forty miles from where we were. We had plenty of stage and picture shows, band concerts. Saw Humphrey Bogart in person at Alrife, a few got to go to Naples on a five day pass, but were given up for some reason, too much typhoid, I guess. We had two awful wind storms, on New Years Eve that lasted throughout New Years day. Blew down almost all the tents, including the kitchen and officers tents. We men ate until 3 o'clock New Years day. Had turkey but it was raining hard so we ate in the barn with the mules, pigs and chickens. Not very appetizing but it was dry. We had a good area near Alrife. Could hear guns from the front—we were only about twenty miles from it. We did have a chance to relax and think about something else for a change. Lots of French from Africa across the road from us.

### January 16

Back on front. Clear and cool. Got in area at one o'clock p.m. and put up our tents. Are just off highway six. Cassino twelve miles ahead. Big guns all around us. Just across the valley we can see the million dollar mountain, which we built a bypass the last time we were up here. We are a little different front, further west. Venfro is to our right. They haven't advanced very far in the way of miles since we left nineteen days ago but have had some terrible fighting. Had air raid first thing but missed this area.

### January 17

Clear and cold. Not much doing. Dug garbage holes. Had charge of the detail. Then went back to old area and continued giving mine and demonstrations to the 142nd Inf.

### January 18

Clear and cold. Freezing, but was real warm by noon. Went on front. (One mile behind). Worked on road until noon, filling in ruts. Hauled some rock. Road was used for jeep and ambulances coming out with wounded. Laid around in afternoon. I was picked to go on patrol and mine sweeping detail down by Rapido River, carried rifles, Tomie guns, was plenty close to jerry (no mans land). We swept areas for a tank Bn to move in that night who were going to support the Inf. when they start the push across the river. We walked back five miles and were tired completely out from falling and ducking shells. One thing that saved us, we could hear the jerry gun fire then we would hit the ground.

### January 19

Engrs. had many wounded hauling in bridge material to river. 48th Engineers were driven off trying to gravel bypass, also extending the ex-

press highway further beyond. We got in at two bells. The ride in we almost froze to death. Didn't get warm until morning (thrills and more thrills). Cold. Platoon went to bypass and road which we were working on, while we all went to cut poles for corduroying of roads.

**January 20**

Cold and clear. Hauled gravel all day on road leading to river (same one). Many wounded and killed, our Infs. are really in fierce battles trying to cross river. Engrs. (19th) building foot bridges, they can't get their Inf. support bridge across, too many shells, 16th Engrs. standing by to build bailey bridge. All dug in waiting their chance. We worked until dark. Ate and then went out and worked until two bells. OT in bed at three. Our artillery is blasting them from every angle, but they still won't give any ground.

**January 21 & 22**

Cold. Still working on the same road. Maintaining it, hauling in crushed rock and large rock. Our losses in men is frightful. Hundreds and hundreds dead and wounded. Sure a pity, they haven't a chance those poor infantry men. They get across the river once only to fall back, some drowning, etc. Jerries rising that infernal (screaming meemies) sounds horrible, shoots 6 mortars in rapid order and in flight the shells make a horrible sound. 141st Inf. are across the river in their sector. May put bridge up down there, too costly where we are. Saw one of our P-38's crash one-half mile from us, got hit from Jerry artillery attack. Pilot jumped to safety. French and 34th Inf. are closing in on Cassino on our right flank, but we have the severest fighting and as usual the 143rd Inf. is getting the worst of it, don't think there are any original men left. We worked late both nights.

Our 3rd Inf. and 45th Divisions with British landed south of Rome (Angie) this morning not much resistance but will get plenty hot when they are contacted. Hope they make good, will drive them out of here.

**January 23**

Cold and cloudy. Still maintaining road. Our troops withdrew from across the river. Waiting for jerries to make move, see whether they will pull out or make one last stand. Our new front has threatened them from the rear. Ninth Division is trapped.

**January 24**

Cold and cloudy. Light rain but quit before noon. Still holding at Rapido River. Fifth new beachhead is increasing in depth and width rapidly. Artillery light. Can hear screaming meemies once in a while. We are still maintaining road. Sure have hauled a lot of gravel in the past few days.

**January 25**

Cloudy and warmer. Still on road our troops are holding, not much activity from either side. Jerries are still over there but don't know if he has moved any of his troops out yet. Our guns fired pamphlets over to



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them (30,000 of them) telling them they better give up that they are trapped or face destruction. Flat lands are filled with smoke from smoke pots and bombs, concealing our positions and movements of equipment. (Changed squad leaders, was Carter now Sgt. Joe D. Warren).

### January 26

Cool and cloudy. Company all back to area again. We were all scattered out on different details, but the bridge crossing was a failure. We are still not on the other side. We lost hundreds of men. The bloodiest battle of this company so far. Both sides asked for a truce and was granted for two hours to pick up wounded and the dead. One of the most horrible scenes yet. Our troops didn't have a chance, and jerries lost just as heavy. Our artillery fired 30,000 rounds before they first attempted to cross. We're having to maintain the roads to the river was not so bad, although we were always in easy range of artillery fire which was coming in. I didn't go out today. Go on guard in company area, so will have a couple of days off.

### January 27

Cloudy and cold but warmed up by noon. Lots of bombers flying overhead. Could see our dive bombers go in to dive and bomb and strafe jerry. They are starting to bring back the bodies of our men from the river, coming out by trucks and jeeps. (2700 men lost). Troops are advancing up on the new front. Came off guard duty at five bells.

### January 28

Clear and cold. Shoveled gravel off from express highway is formerly the old railroad bed. Jerry busted every tie and with explosions blew all the rails in two. The 48 engineers have maintained it so far. So it goes by the Highway number of 48. We ate K-rations for dinner.

### January 29

Cloudy and cool, hazy and smoky. Not much doing today. Our platoon stayed in, cleaned up our equipment. Went to shower this afternoon. Artillery shelling all day same as usual. Airplanes out on strafing missions. A-36's also P-40 and Spitfires they are using the P-47 Thunderbolt here now too. Don't see very many P-38's. They go over every afternoon, just skimming the trees going over here and further on to give jerries the works. Sure a beautiful plane. These were the planes which saved our necks on the invasion.

### January 30

Cloudy and cool. Put in two culverts across the road we are maintaining that leads to the front, supporting our Inf.

### January 31

Clear and cold. Warmed up by noon. Loaded rock until noon. Used all the rock from the buildings that are blown down from artillery fire and demolition. Most all the houses and buildings where we are fighting now are flat. Seems funny to haul buildings away in pieces to fill in ruts on roads. We got paid this afternoon. Stayed in the rest of day. Carl Shadler went to rest camp at Cerserta, four days.

### **February 1**

Cold. Cleaned up tools and ordinance. Our rest day, other platoons out. Our troops are still standing on the defense. We have mine details going out every night cleaning away mines from the river banks. They found a 30 acre field full of mines and booby traps, trip wires galore. They had to crawl on their bellies to keep from being seen by the Germans, who were just across the Rapido River. Flares were over their heads also rifle fire most all the time. Let one of them, Sgt. Cleek, take my 45 pistol. I traded Italian Beretra for it. Cost me only four dollars.

### **February 2 & 3**

Cloudy and cold. Worked hard, shoveled small rock off the railroad, hard shoveling. Saw twelve jerry planes. Our ack ack drove them off. Could hear shells falling all day, also that screaming meemie sounds like an earthquake. Awful noise, shoots around six to eight shells one after another. Jerry calls it the nibblwerfer (rocket gun). The horrible sounds come when the gun muzzle shoots about a one hundred pound shell and is fired from a deep fox hole, fifteen feet back and to the side of the gun. Always liable to explode, charges are fired by pulling a cord. All electrically operated.

### **February 4**

Cloudy and slight mist. Off day for platoon. May move closer to front. Our 142 with the 34th Div. and French troops are closing in on Cassino, a big push is shaping up. We will support the 143rd. Jerry captured three of our tanks yesterday, crew and all and now are using them against us. our infantry got pinned down, tanks didn't know it, were out in jerry territory without support, went to show this afternoon.

### **February 5**

Cold. Packed all our equipment and tools, moved up within four miles of front. Battalion got orders mixed up, was supposed to move to different area, will move again tomorrow morning. Had our tents all put up. Three men got hurt from one of our shells from an air raid which failed to explode in the air. None hurt seriously.

### **February 6**

Cold and clear. Moved first thing in morning. They brought breakfast to us. All but our platoon and Hq. moved last night. Sure moved into a hot spot. The jerries have direct observation on us. 636 and 805 tank destroyers are all around us. Also several batteries of 155 hz. We can look down into Cassino, one mile in the distance, see our shells land, city and hills surrounding it is smoking from shell hits and fires. Can hear machine guns and rifle fire also. We have a ring side seat when we look through field glasses. Can see the Rapido River also.

### **February 7**

Cold. We are digging in. We are in danger of shells anytime. Can hear the shells go over both ways. Didn't sleep much, too much noise. Not a minute all night that one can't hear a shell or an explosion. Looked



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through glasses most of afternoon. Must be terrible for our troops in parts of the town. Shells are landing all over, house to house, street to street fighting.

#### February 8

Cold. The fighting of Cassino continues, awful lot of explosions, too smoky to see through glasses. 48 bombers dropped bombs in the morning. Could hear the bombs explode. Also dive bombers go into a dive and drop small bombs and machine gun troops and gun positions. Three fellows got hurt last night down at the river. We were building bridges and damming up the river banks. Jerries had blown holes in it to flood the surrounding area. One fellow had his foot blown off from a mine. Cpl. Bunkers. Cpl. Roberts sprained his ankle badly. Sgt. Mainard had a bad cut under his eye. We have changed sectors, New Zealand troops took over our sector. We are now near the 34th Division (Iowa). Lots of our dead buddies (Inf.) were laying beside the river. Sure makes one feel hollow. The battle for Cassino and the abby is still raging. What a seat we have—can see most everything.

#### February 9

Filled sand bags all day for the river. Also for officers tents. Most everybody has dug in to sleep in a fox hole to jump into which is covered up. This area is the most dangerous one we have been in, too much artillery around us. That is jerry's downfall. He is really after that. Some savage fighting going on. We can see shells of all descriptions falling all around the city and in it. Every building looks completely wrecked. The monestery on the abbey looks unharmed yet. It is believed that 3,000 people from Cassino are seeking shelter in it. It is an old ancient building, very large. We watched our A-36's go straight over Cassino and just beyond the city, dive down and strafe and drop bombs all the way up the mountain. The best example of air-ground support we have seen yet. Our Inf. deserve all the help they can get. Lot of our troops are up to the right of Cassino on the mountain Cairo 5360 foot peak (snow covered). First platoon were out all night working on river banks and doing road work.

#### February 10

Cloudy and raining some. Loaded rocks and filled sand bags all day. Can hardly work. Pleurisy, chest all taped up. Our area was shelled hard by a jerry attack tank which snuck in our lines so I spent most of the afternoon in my foxhole. Shrapnel was flying all around our heads. Nobody was hurt in our area. Cervaro was also shelled hard. Fourteen were killed that we hear of—ten Italians and four Americans, (soldiers).

Had an air raid this morning, but our ack ack (aircraft) drove them off. Second Platoon going out tonight to spread rocks and work on road. We are gaining parts of Cassino and Abbey hill.

### **February 11**

Raining and cold. I didn't work today. The pain in my chest was bothering me. The rest of the company loaded rock. Our platoon is going out to work on road and dam that leads up to the Rapido River, Cassino just a mile beyond. Our troops have Abbey hill surrounded. Our artillery laid down a barrage of shells that lasted for three hours. All around the Abbey. We stood here on the edge of the cliff and watched all the shells land until the smoke got so thick that we couldn't see the hill. Our tanks and jerry tanks got into a battle on the streets of Cassino after dinner. Don't know the outcome so we know that jerry is still in town. We got shelled here in area at ten p.m. Boy, what a scare! I found a dugout and stayed there the rest of the night. Platoon got in at three a.m.

### **February 12**

Cold, still laid up with pleurisy. Stayed in dug out most all day, jerry is sure laying in a lot of shells, some too close for comfort. The shelling of Cassino continues. Monastery or abbey above city is the thorn in our advancing. They have made a fortress out of it, five stories high and covers around three blocks.

### **February 13**

Cloudy and cold. Jerry is still throwing in shells, stayed in dugout again. All day as well as last night, plenty of shrapnel flying through the trees. Our lines are unchanged.

### **February 14**

Cold. Side still bothers me and I am still sleeping in a dugout we dug in a bank. Looks like we will have to shell the jerry out of that monastery, it has cost the lives of hundreds of our buddies by not shelling it. There was a truce on it but Germans have not obeyed the order. 34th Div. was relieved by Indians from India (Gerhki) knife fighters. Artillery shells coming and going all day.

### **February 15**

Cold and clear. Slept all night in the hills with an Italian family. They could speak some American, lived in Brooklyn for 10 years. We are off all day. It happened this morning what we hated to do. 140 B-17 flying fortress dropped big bombs and on incenderies the monastery and territory around it. We all stood here on the cliff and watched the bombs explode with terrible emotions. Anybody close to it are dead or wounded. Most destructive thing we have seen yet. Just can't put the picture of what we saw into writing. Bombs were all hitting their targets in all around. Two hundred and fifty planes took part on the raid. Really some sight. We had a ring side seat.

### **February 16**

Clear and windy. Nothing doing all day. Spread gravel on road near Cassino. Italians did the loading for us. Shells knocked a couple of fellows off their feet. One Italian was wounded. P-40 Warhawks dive bombed and strafed the monastery for over an hour at suppertime. We watched them dive and drop their bombs.



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### February 17

Cloudy and cold. Wind still pretty strong. Rested all day. Worked until three a.m. last night. Watched P-40's again bomb the monastery and jerry positions around the hill. Monastery sure is destroyed. Just a big pile of rubble. Walls were ten feet thick. Gun positions at every window.

### February 18

Cold. About the coldest morning yet. Went on guard, so will get a little rest and a chance to write letters, if not too cold. Jerry is still shelling our area. Shells land too close for comfort. British, Italians have about surrounded Cassino. Jerry is fighting a terrible fight to escape. Guns roared all night and all day. Couldn't sleep.

### February 19-23

Went on pass to rest. Got all clean clothes, good bed quilt for a change, first time out of gun range for three months. We have lots of shows, a canteen, Red Cross, and some recreation. Two other fellows and myself went to Naples, really cleaned up now from the time we were there before. Looking prosperous. People getting more to eat than before we came. This rest camp is put up in the Kings Palace, lots of big buildings and yards. All buildings as anywhere are all made out of rock. Pitiful to watch the Inf. coming into camp. All dirty and the hair and beards are long. All look like they are unable to stand themselves, just wish the people back home could see them. They would realize a lot of things and see what these fellows go through. Just seems so inhuman to suffer and go through the harrasment that some of us can go through.

### February 24 & 25

Nothing doing, getting ready to move off the line. B-co moved today, A-co moved a week ago. Second platoon went down by Cassino and pulled out an ambulance that was off the road on our bypass. We went out one night (25) blew holes for machine gun for the 141st Inf. to the right of Cassino on Mt. Cairo. The shelling of Cassino still continues no gain. Shells are dropping in our area again, my nerves are getting bad and so is most everybody else's. Constant strain.

### February 26

Raining. Moved back off front, relieved by troops from India. Moved to same area we were in the rest we had near Piedmonte. Our gains this time to the front was measured in yards, but we lost hundreds of men on the Rapido River and on Mt. Cairo and Cassino. Our Div. put on a big push and by doing so drew down many German troops from the north and made the Anzio beachhead easier. Our main work was maintaining roads and cleaning minefields. Lost one fellow from a mine, others got wounded. Quite a number have purple hearts. My buddies and bed partner for a longtime since we left Camp Blanding got transferred to PBS. CPL. William J Vanderlug. May come back if he gets his citizenship papers. We moved into big tents, built ourselves a bed each and made a stove out of a five gallon oil can. Hauled gravel and made ourselves a sidewalk, even tables to eat off of.

**May 21**

We arrived at Anzio the next morning. Was a little sea sick, rode on an L.S.T. We drove to our division area to the south of Anzio. We stayed there several days, in the mean time the Fifth and Eighth Armies opened a drive which started the Twelfth, while I was at rest camp. Our troops are smashing hard in the Gustav line. American divisions are both new ones the 85th and 88th. After a few days of bitter fighting which many casualties on both sides were inflicted and the flow of prisoners is getting bigger by the hour. Now the attack is getting stronger and gaining speed. They have smashed the Gustav line and are now hitting the Hitler line which lies in the Lira Valley. Cassino finally has fallen after months of bitter fighting where many American lives were lost and many wounded.

My buddy, Bill Vanderlugt, is with the 85th Div. looks like the beginning of the end of Hitler. His 14th Army is in our sector and sure taking a beating, prisoners are coming in by the thousands. Our Air Force is doing a wonderful job of supporting our ground troops, smashing gun emplacements, strafing troops and convoys of supply trucks. Our Division is moving toward the front line to the north near Cisternia, a strong point. We haven't done anything since we landed here except sweat out an air raid every night and the (Anzio Express) a big railroad gun, 280mm shoots a projectile of 550 lbs. Sure sends chills up ones spine, but these air raids are of the worst nature. They fly over your area all night dropping a few flares and those flares hang in the sky for many minutes. They light the whole area and you could just about read a newspaper. You just lay in a fox hole or where ever you are and hope they don't drop anything on you. What a horrible sound those bombs make when they come down and also those anti-personnel bombs, which cover quite a large area. The ones that come down and get you in a fox hole and when all our anti air craft guns start opening up a lot of the shells don't explode until they come back down. We have to watch out, in fact it is more dangerous because there are thousands of shells in the air. Fellows near us have been killed and wounded by falling flaks. What we thought was almost impossible or was beginning to look that way has been realized—we have joined forces between the beachhead and the southern forces 26th. Makes our supply lines a lot easier to gives a lot more troops to extend the push to the utmost. The 45th, 3rd, 34th and S.S.F. have started to push on the beachhead. (Cisterna was flat after bombing and shelling) and have pushed forward on all sides. We are following up behind the 3rd which is fighting toward Cisternia and beyond. When the front gets wider we will go in. The first armored is fanning out fast around Cisternia and are racing toward Veletrie. One of the most horrible sights I have yet seen. Jerry has taken a chance with tanks. Have seen dozens of dead Germans, Caves with dead in them, disbanded equipment. First Armored has around 600 tanks so you can see what it means



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when they start going forward and that is not counting other attached units. The 26th, our Division, advanced to Veletrie and are waiting the word to move forward. If we can get this strong point, we will be on our road to Rome. Our infantry has surrounded the town now and regiments in reserve came through and captured the city. We were in town soon after cleaning rubble off streets and cleaning up.

Equipment which has just been shoved off by our bulldozers, our trucks, tanks and jeeps blown up by three mines. Our chaplain was along with us picking up the dead. It sure hurts when you see our American buddies laying there. First thing I always think of is their loved ones back home. We ran into our first real artillery scare late in the afternoon where we were sweeping the main highway behind the infantry for mines. We could hear those rat guns and machine pistols just around the corner. A cave is all that saved a lot of us from getting hit. At night we still get the life scared out of us. So much moonlight out that the planes dive down and strafe areas and highways. Two got caught one night while on guard. There were anti-personnel bombs bursting all over above my head, really makes ones hair stand on end. our Infantry has taken a lot more of high points beyond Velettris, we worked one day till late filling in a crater in the road that had been blown up by German Demolitions 25 feet deep. When they have some time, they sure can raise havoc with roads and bridges.

### June 5

Our Infantry along with 1st Armored, broke through the Rome line and are racing toward Rome. Roads are filled with burning Jerry equipment and a few dead. We stayed tonight just outside Rome on Highway 7. Things sure have happened fast. Our reconnaissance have been able to contact Jerry. Looks like he has taken off. We have captured around 30,000 prisoners so far, we see truck load after truck load go by. We went through another bad night. Jerry planes were strafing and bombing highways all around us. A reception we received, people were glad to see us. They lined the streets for miles, waving and cheering us. Some streets were almost impassable on account of so many people. They were kissing each other, some were throwing flowers at us. We were all amazed at the beautiful buildings and girls. Seemed more like our cities than any we have been in since we left the U.S. Not being bombed or shelled, the streets were clean and the people looked none the worse for the price of war, like most of the cities and hamlets that we had gone through. They were short of food but were getting along fairly good. We can all see the difference of the people as we go further north. Better education and better all around ways of living (cleaner). Some of the fellows would jump on our trucks, some had American flags out, then some would greet us with talking American. In their schools which they had been attending, some had been to America, too. My buddy and I were invited into a swell

home (beautiful girl). Her name was Anna. She had been taking lessons too. They just couldn't do enough for us. Outside before we went in, one lady brought us a towel and soap where we were washing we were so awful dirty. Another lady gave us some cake. A lot of the fellows were offered drinks of the best that could be had. We came through part of Vatican, saw the old coliseum. Some saw the pope give his address to a large audience of Italian and American G.I.s. We were advancing behind the Infantry as they moved, so did we. About two in the afternoon, we went a little too far. (On the edge of Rome). Shells started coming in, we all ran for a huge building which looked safe. Two fellows were killed out of another outfit near us, our headquarter company had three wounded. We went back into the city again and stayed in the woods or park like in the middle of town. The next morning our artillery observation planes were landing in a small field around us. Many people came to see us. Almost all of us had our clothes washed by girls who begged us to wash them. They wouldn't take any money. So we gave them gum and candy. We hadn't changed our clothes for three weeks. Here we learned that France had been invaded that morning, we were all so glad. Rome was ours and our other American buddies were hitting France. We knew from our experiences what they were faced with. We are starting to see the end of Germany and we all feel so good after what we have been going through gaining ground was so slow it was beginning to look like a long time before we can go back home.

#### **June 7**

We left Rome and headed north where Jerry was really on the run. Our Infantry was advancing fast, some on foot and some by truck. We were gaining about 24 Km a day or about 15 miles to us, and this was going on day after day never in one area more than one night and most always we wouldn't be in an area for only a few hours. The roads were strewn with hundreds of Jerry trucks, horses. Our bulldozers advanced with us shoving them off the road. Our Air Force sure raised havoc with Jerry convoys and horse drawn artillery. (horses in groups of 3). When we got north as far as Civitavecchia, we swung toward the coast and started along it, never outside of it. At this date we are advancing fast. We are now 100 miles north of Rome and 70 miles from Florence. We are at the town of Grosseto (Quite a large port.) Our Division is the only one fighting now. We have 1 right out of the 91st Division with us. One paratroop regiment 517 Infantry. Our work had been cleaning roads of mines, repairing roads, building bypass, built one footbridge across one river.

Our planes have all the bridges blown out. Craters in roads to fill. In 10 days we have gone 100 miles. Pretty good, a plane came over night before last and dropped a load of big and small bombs, landing only 200 yards off. Shrapnel and rocks were flying all around us. Sure made us hug the ground for awhile. One night we went out (1 sqd. near Grosseto).



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We had a tough fight just beyond Grosseto, pretty hilly terrain was the main reason. We are still advancing. German resistance is spotty and not many troops. They are fighting a delaying action so they can set up their main line just above Florence (Gothic line). Our losses are small. Germans hardly have vehicles. They are using bicycles, riding horses. (Have captured a lot of both.) The roads are still covered with trucks, guns, dead horses, tanks and other vehicles they have stolen trucks and cars off Italians to make their getaway. We ran into areas where they left food and clothing, most everything they had with them. Several times we have been ahead of anybody sweeping roads and putting in fills where culvery have been blown. Now we are advancing fast, 15 to 20 miles a day. We have had to build several bypasses around where bridges were out. Our Division went beyond the Port of Piombano about 50 miles north of Grosseto. We were relieved by the 34th Division. We were about 35 miles from Leghorn. We wanted to go ahead but our infantry was all worn out. Not that they had many casualties but they walked so much and lost so much sleep and food was not so always plentiful.

#### June 26

We came off. Our squad stayed up there for two days to tear down a shower point. We were the last to leave the front. We came to an area just outside of Rome, where every man in the Division was turned loose and all day passes which we made the most of. We visited most of the important places such as Vatican City, St. Peters Cathedral, the Coliseum Royal Opera House Square and building where Mussolini gave his speeches. We surely had a fine time. Went back to the peoples home where we were the first day we entered Rome. They gave us (5 of us) a wonderful meal. One of their friends who was there could speak English so we really got along okay. They showed us a lot of sights. Rome is a beautiful city. People are clean, well educated and well dressed. They are some short of food, but are getting flour and other American products now. We left this area and went by convoy to our new area south of Salerno just about the same place we landed last September 9. We are going to take to TC (invasion training). So looks like we are in for another landing. We are in the 7th Army 6 Corp no more 5 Army. So we are looking ahead for our next operation with not too much jest, because we know what hell it is.

I found Jim Gardner again near the front and found out the sorrowful news about Rodney Curtis. I had gone to see him and found out. His buddies thought a lot of him.

Our Division went 240 miles, took 5000 prisoners in 30 days of fighting. Sure some record and the taking of Velletru was a great undertaking smartly maneuvered by our General Walker who now has left us to return to the States and camp in Fort Benning, Ga., as attendant.



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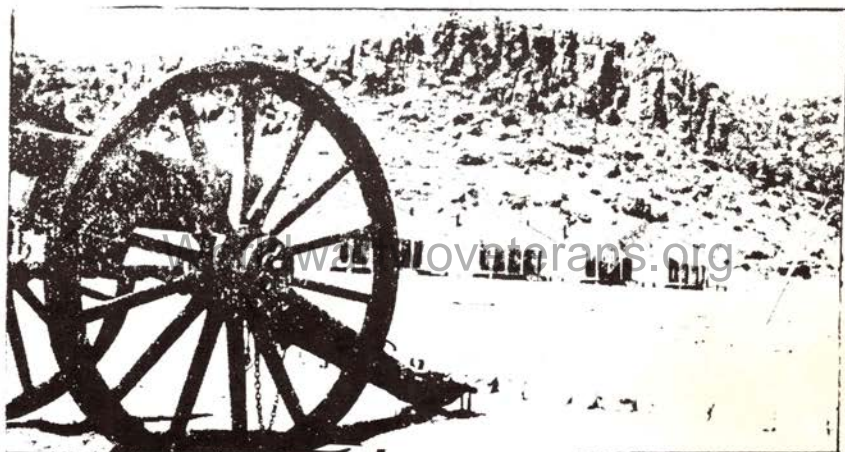
## Fort Davis VFW Post Named to Honor Former 36th One-Man War Hero

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FORT DAVIS — The VFW Post in Fort Davis is called Manuel Gonzales Post 7867 in honor of Fort Davis' one-man war Tech-Sergeant who served with extreme bravery in the 36th "Texas" Infantry Division.

Gonzales, then 27, was among the first troops to reach the beach at Salerno on Sept. 9, 1943. Due to his action against machine gun nests, his company was able to advance. Wounded in the back and arm, Gonzales did not report his injuries and drove inland with the Division.

At Cassino, he won the Silver Star and his second Purple Heart. Earlier he has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest award that the U.S. offers.



*The Fighting 36<sup>th</sup>*  
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