

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

COVER STORY

Worldwartwoveterans.org

**Two Gun Soldier**

**From Co. L - 142nd**

*Earl O. Wascher*



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# Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

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Robert J. Faught (Elizabeth) 141st  
1731 Cheshire Lane  
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247 Hearn Ave.  
San Antonio, TX 78225 (512) 923-1410

**142nd** Marion W. Ferguson (Emmy)  
7065 Blarney  
Beaumont, TX 77706 (409) 866-4374

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Rt. 2, Box 102  
Cleburne, TX 76031 (817) 641-8868

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806 Aransas Dr.  
Euless, TX 76039 (817) 267-7864

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3311 Virginia  
Houston, TX 77098 (713) 523-3197

**Div. Trps** Fred San Roman (Helen)  
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Rt. 2, Box 236  
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### EDITOR, T-PATCHER NEWSLETTER:

Bert D. Carlton (Clara) 144/143  
806 Aransas Dr.  
Euless, TX 76039 (817) 267-7864

# COVER STORY

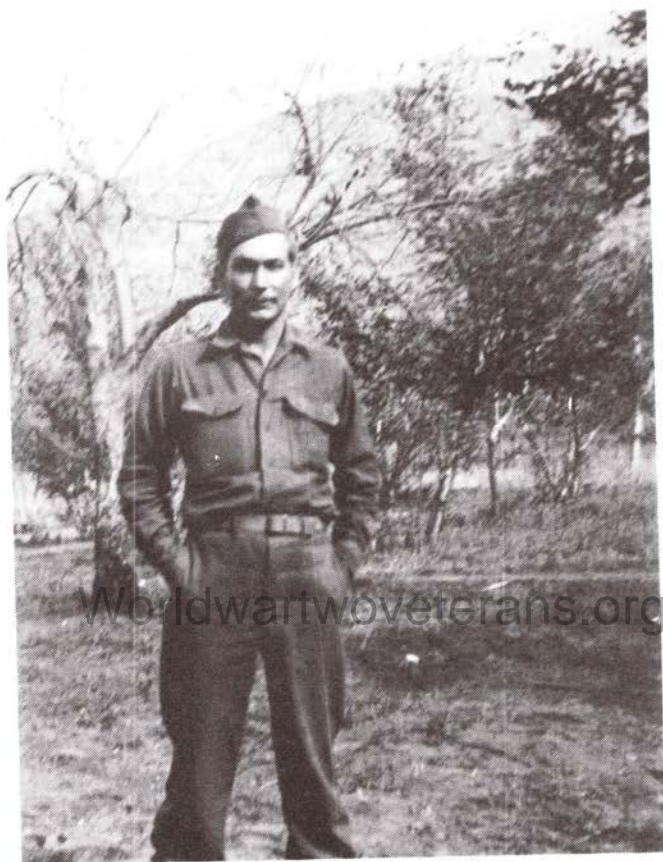
# “Two Gun Soldier”

From Co. L - 142nd Infantry

*by Virgil E. Moore, Jr.  
as told by Buck Sheppard*



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*Earl O. Wascher*

## Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

Sgt. Earl O. Wascher earned two Silver Stars and A Bronze Star Medal while serving with the famed 36th Division during World War II, but combat buddies who served with Wascher say the GI could have earned a bushel barrel full of medals had he been cited for every act of bravery.

Wascher was assigned to the "Texas" Division after entering the army in Chicago, Ill. He joined the 36th Division in training at Camp Bowie and fought alongside fellow members of Company L, 142nd Infantry, 3rd Battalion, through North Africa, Italy and France.

The 36th Division was originally composed of Texas National Guardsmen, but was brought to combat strength with Selective Service trainees from all over the nation, including Wascher.

The division, after being mobilized Nov. 25, 1940 at Camp Bowie, Texas, trained in Louisiana, Florida, the Carolinas, and Camp Edwards, Mass.

Wascher probably didn't know where Salerno was when he and other T-Patchers practiced amphibious operations at Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, but he was to remember that training when his unit established the Salerno beachhead in Italy.

The 36th sailed out of New York April 2, 1942, and arrived in Oran, Algeria 11 days later. For the most part the 36th remained in combat reserve in North Africa, but Wascher and others were involved as school-troops at the Army's Invasion Training Center on the Mediterranean at Arzew. The 36th helped train the 1st and 45th divisions before those units shipped out on the Sicily invasion.

Wascher and other members of his unit didn't have long to wait before they too were in action. The Salerno invasion fleet sailed from Oran Sept. 5, 1943. The 142nd Infantry hit the beaches in the early waves. The unit went in on the Red and Green beaches under the command of Col. John D. Forsythe. The goal: secure the beachhead and advance to high ground around Albanella and Altavilla.

On that hectic first day Earl O. Wascher proved himself to be more than just another private first class.

The 142nd was assigned the job of advancing from the beachhead about 400 yards to a highway. They were then to advance six miles along the highway to a bridge which they were to take and hold.

As members of Company L were advancing along the coastal highway near Paestrum, two enemy machine guns opened fire on the advancing troops and stopped the elading platoon.

Wascher and a comrade moved forward in the face of the intense cross fire. Wascher had a light machine gun but during the movement had become separated from the GI who was carrying the tri-pod for the weapon. Firing the machine gun from his hip he directed fire first on one gun position, then the other, neutralizing them both.

Continuing ahead of their unit, the two soldiers opened fire on another enemy machine gun nest which was strategically placed at a cross road. It too was knocked out. Then the two T-Patchers attacked a convoy of trucks heavily

loaded with Germans. Again Wascher used his hip as a mount for his machine gun and forced the enemy to withdraw with heavy losses.

The heroic action won Wascher the Silver Star. In presenting the citation Major Gen. Fred L. Walker said, "By their quick-thinking and aggressiveness, these fearless men enabled their unit to continue its advance. His gallant action reflects great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States."

During the following days the struggle raged over the Altavilla hills. Wascher was wounded in the fight for Albanella, but remained with his unit.

Fighting continued for Company L members around Albanella and Altavilla from the fourth day after the landing until Day 20. Then the unit was pulled back to an orchard for rest and additional training.

The battle at Salerno was one of the bloodier, most critical operations of the war. 36th Division troops under command of Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker became the first American division to invade the European mainland.

On Nov. 15 the unit started back up Mt. Maggiore--the Million Dollar Mountain--to relieve the 3rd Division.

Buck Sheppard recalls an incident there which made him realize what an outstanding soldier Wascher was. Sheppard was ordered to lead litter barriers to recover five wounded soldiers who had to be left behind when the unit pulled back. He chose Wascher among the 27 men who were to serve as litter bearers.

Sheppard remembers that "the Germans were looking down our throats." He said he felt the only hope was to make the Germans realize the Americans were trying to recover their wounded.

Ordering his men to hold up their litters, Sheppard led his men out. Immediately German artillery zeroed in, firing rounds of smoke. Sheppard said his men kept moving forward and the Germans fired no more rounds.

It took the men all day long to cut a trail to the wounded and get out safely. They brought out Peter Klappar and four other wounded Americans.

"Earl was something else," Sheppard said. "He cut trail, helped carry the wounded and inspired us all."

During November and December 1943, Co. L of the third Battalion had been involved in the harsh uphill battling for Mount Maggiore in the harsh Italian winter. After a 10 day rest the unit was placed in reserve for the Rapido River crossing operation south of Cassino.

Jan. 25 to Feb. 26, 1944, Company L suffered a hellacious month in and around Mount Cairo, Mount Costellone and Mount Sammucro. They endured continuous sleet and snow and 24-hour a day shelling, finally getting pulled back Feb. 26, 1944.

After a two and one half month break the all out Allied offensive opened. After early success on the south front, the 36th Division was shifted to the Anzio beachhead.

The 142nd Infantry on the night of May 30-31 pulled off an infiltration of the entire Regiment deep behind the German line up onto Mount Artemisio,

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the main ridge north of Velletri. In a few days the T-Patchers fought their way across the Alban hills and the Rome plain into the city outskirts of Rome.

The 142nd became the first unit to completely move through Rome. The night of June 4-5 the infantrymen mounted up in an armored and motorized column to ride through the streets of Rome. Five miles beyond the city in the morning they met strong enemy delaying forces.

Almost to Rome, Sgt. Sheppard sent some of his men to a house alongside a highway. He told the men to get water from a well at the house. From the house the men sighted a group of Germans coming across an olive orchard. The German plan obviously was to set up machine guns and ambush the Americans from behind a brick wall. The alarm was sounded and Wascher and other men jumped from the trucks formed a semi-circle and began assault firing. Sixteen of the Germans were killed and another 10 wounded.

West of Rome, Wascher was ordered to clean up German snipers. By this time a sergeant, Wascher advanced his men to a hill in the center of a flat grain field.

Under sniper fire, the assault squad discovered a concealed tank trap in front of them. The trap was 30 feet in depth and filled with barbed wire entanglements. Sgt. Wascher ordered his men to withdraw and the Nazis attacked. Instead of fighting a few snipers, Wascher realized he was facing a strong force of retreating, desperate Germans. Wascher had the mortar section fire one round into the tank trap. A German captain came out waving a white flag. Wascher met with the officer and gave him 15 minutes to go back and convince those under his command to surrender. Forty-three Germans soon marched out and surrendered, including the captain and a lieutenant.

About four or five miles north of Rome, the 1st Platoon contacted a force of enemy soldiers and engaged them in an intense fire fight. When the entire platoon was pinned down by the sweeping hostile fire, the platoon leader shouted an order for Sgt. Wascher to lead his squad in a flanking movement against the enemy.

Although his squad was unable to move, he left his covered position and went from man to man, directing each to the most advantageous firing position on the flank.

Fearlessly exposing himself to the rapid bursts of hostile fire, he succeeded in maneuvering his squad into position on the enemy's flank, thus blocking their only route of escape. During the fight, which lasted four hours, Sgt. Wascher distinguished himself by his exemplary leadership and daring. Largely as a result of his aggressive deeds, the platoon killed one enemy soldier and captured 37 prisoners. The citation awarding him his second Silver Star stated, "His gallant action reflects great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States."

Wascher and his fellow T-Patchers were pulled out of action in Italy June 26 to prepare for the invasion of Southern France.

The 142nd Infantry was assigned to hit Red Beach, located near the resort town of San Raphael. It was considered the most important in the entire Seventh



Army sector because it was necessary for supply and was near an airport.

Rear Admiral Spencer Lewis, in command of the Task Force carrying the 36th Division, and out of touch with the division commander, decided on his own to change the point of assault of the 142nd Infantry. He reached that decision because naval craft nearing the beach for mine-detection were sunk and the beaches remained covered by flanking enemy fire.

Instead, he ordered the 142nd to land at Green Beach. The decision probably saved hundreds of lives and San Raphael and Fraxis were seized from the rear.

Wascher was wounded twice more in France. He served as squad leader, platoon guide and as platoon sergeant.

First Lt. Orville S. Baun recounted this story of the sergeant's actions in France:

"A battered platoon was fighting a Jerry roadblock and was unable to break through. Taking his platoon to their aid, Wascher made a wide flanking move to the left and came up from the Germans' rear in a surprise move."

"Squeezed between the two platoons, a few Krauts managed to escape, badly scarred and disorganized."

"Continuing down the road that led to a small town, which was the company's objective, one platoon was on the left side of the road and Wascher's platoon was on the right."

"A small road block was spotted. Nothing happened as the platoon moved toward it. Suddenly a man turned to Wascher and said he spotted a German. Wascher ordered him to fire."

"Then all hell broke loose. Bullets were cracking all around. Sgt. Wascher was standing in back of a tree looking unconcerned, watching his men, checking their positions, and keeping an eye open for anyone who might need help."

"Turning around, he opened fire on five or six Krauts who tried to cross the road. The firing ceased and everything was quiet."

"The men pushed on until the town was in sight: At the edge of town an outpost was knocked out quickly."

"The small town was not to be taken without a fight. Each building had Germans in it. Open fields and road were the only approaches to the houses."

"When a house was reached, one man threw a few grenades in and followed them in closely. A couple of men rushed to the house, then Wascher made his way to the house. From there he directed the rest of the men how to move, sent men to take the next house and put men in windows overlooking other buildings."

"Then Wascher took three men and started cleaning out the houses ahead. The men had done their job well, and Germans were laying all around."

The enemy counterattack against the town failed, despite a bombardment by 20-millimeter guns.

Wascher is remembered by many of his fellow soldiers as the guy who wore two German lugers in holsters. He said, "You could pick up loads of stuff, but in a week or so you got tired of lugging it around."

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Wascher won two Silver Stars and a Bronze Medal as well as the Legion of Merit.

The citation presented with the Legion of Merit summarizes his war efforts this way:

The award is presented "...for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services in Italy and Southern France from 9 September 1943 to 1 December 1944. During the Allied invasion of Italy and the period of intense mountain fighting which followed, as well as the spectacular drive to and beyond the City of Rome, Tech. Sgt. Wascher, first as machine gunner and later as squad leader, performed his duties with an outstanding display of aggressiveness and personal initiative, which on numerous occasions, in the face of the greatest personal danger, led to capturing and inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy troops.

"Throughout the operations in Southern France and the fighting in the Vosges, he was personally responsible for the destruction of numerous enemy strong points along the route of advance. By his initiative, leadership and courageous devotion to duty, Sgt. Wascher continually distinguished himself, and at all times exemplified the highest traditions of the military service."



PANORAMA OF THE SALERNO BATTLEGROUND, above, shows the beaches, the mountains, and the plains over which soldiers of the Fifth Army fought for 28 days to make good their invasion of western Italy.

# The Invasion That Time Forgot

*Reprint from Midwest Chapter Newsgram, Dec. , 1989*

(Taken from the **Forty and Eighter Mag.**)

(Courtesy Ed Dressel)

What was the most successful invasion by American military forces in World War II?

OPERATION DRAGOON (originally called ANVIL), the invasion of Southern France fills the bill. DRAGOON was not only the most successful but was the second largest invasion of Fortress Europe not only during World War II, but in history! Only OVERLORD (across the English Channel) loomed bigger. DRAGOON was so large that 880 ships and craft were to reach the assault area on their own bottoms. The landing craft transported on the decks of these ships and in davits numbered more than 1,370! In the air, Navy and Army aircraft flew by the hundreds...again and again and again...more than in any previous assault except for OVERLORD/NEPTUNE.

Ironically, in most abbreviated histories of World War II, DRAGOON/ANVIL is brushed off by a single or covered by a mere footnote or two. This, the most successful invasion of the European continent in all of history is hardly remembered!

The main objective of DRAGOON was to land near Sant-Raphael and the Bay of Fregus in the Riviera resort area of Southern France and gain a second road into the heart of France. Napoleon used this route on his return from Elba.

Another objective was to give the Free French forces a hand in freeing their country by capturing Marseilles and Toulon, which would also eliminate the German wolf-packs of U-boats playing havoc with Allied shipping in the Mediterranean.

History tells us that the date of this invasion was August 15, 1944.

However, DRAGOON almost never took place!

Wrangling and discord reigned between the Allied military leaders and their politicians. At the Tehran Conference in 1943 tempers were edgy. The British (Winston Churchill, that is) were not only anti-DRAGOON, but anti-OVERLORD and wanted OVERLORD postponed until 1945.

Do you know that original planning had DRAGOON and OVERLORD being initiated the same day?

The idea was to draw German troops away from the Normandy invasion which was considered the main assault into Europe.

However, the planners eventually realized there were not enough seaworthy vessels to go around for simultaneous invasions. So DRAGOON was postponed to July, 1944. Heated arguments continued because Churchill still wanted the invasion to take place at Trieste, causing D-Day in Southern France

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to be postponed once again from July to August, 1944. This time, tired of the wrangling, General Eisenhower put his foot down and said August 15th was it.

Thank the good Lord we had General Dwight D. Eisenhower as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces! "Ike" stood firm and the most successful invasion of World War II took place.

Most of the ships and landing craft were the same ones that were used in OVERLORD.

On August 14th, American paratroops landed behind German lines, contacted the French Maquis, generally stirred up trouble and captured German troops by the hundreds. Diversionary simulated attacks, including night landings, were up and down the coast by special armed forces. One extremely successful one was that led by Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., a movie star in command of an American corvette near Nice; it was reported that Fairbanks' mission was accomplished to perfection.

Three battle scarred outfits, veterans of North Africa, Sicily, Salerno, Alsnio, the Rapido, Montecassino, and Rome were to lead the Seventh Army under General Patch to the greatest but least publicised victory of WWII. Before the war ended these three Divisions were to suffer more casualties than any other divisions in the European and Pacific Theatres.

By VE Day each division had more than 29,000 casualties. The 3rd Division had the most, followed within a few hundred by the 45th Division, followed with a few hundred less by the 36th.

These troops reflected their Seventh Army Commanding General. Like General Alexander Patch, they were quiet and determined; experienced and courageous; and would get the job done with little fanfare.

Here's the way we lined up!

On the west flank was ALPHA FORCE, Rear Admiral F.J. Lowry commanding the naval units supporting the 3rd Infantry Division commanded by Major General John W. O'Daniel. Objective: Cavalair and pampalonne.

In the center, Rear Admiral B.J. Rogers DELTA FORCE landed the 45th Infantry Division commanded by Major General William W. Eagles. Objective: Baie de Bognon and La Nartelle.

On the east flank, Rear Admiral Spencer S. Lewis' CAMEL FORCE was ready to carry Major General John E. Dahlquist's 36th Infantry Division ashore on to its RED, GREEN, and BLUE beaches.

The 3rd and 45th Divisions landed almost with no resistance and without major mishap and obtained their objectives in the planned times.

Beginning at 1800 hours when the 7th RCT hit the beach, eight successive waves of ALPHA FORCE landed on schedule. Supported by tanks and tank destroyers, both the 7th RCT and 30th RCT moved rapidly inland and then to the west past St. Honore, mopping up isolated enemy groups with the help of French Commandos. On the right flank, the 15th RCT captured the high ground north of St. Tropex and then advanced to the outskirts of the town, there to join American paratroops and FFI forces assaulting the last enemy pocket in the Citadel. By nightfall the entire St. Tropex peninsula was cleared

of enemy troops.

The center of the assault area belonged to the 45th Division (DELTA FORCE). Its mission was to clear its assigned beaches and advance inland to contact American paratroops, to contact ALPHA FORCE in the west and CAMEL FORCE (36th Division) in the east. DELTA FORCE was so successful that on D-Day alone, more than 33,000 troops, (including General Truscott, VI Corps Commander) and 3,000 vehicles crossed the DELTA beaches. All of the 45th's missions were completed before the close of D plus 1.

But what about CAMEL FORCE?

The 36th Division was given an area from pointe des Issambres on the edge of DELTA to the Golfe de la Napoule, facing Cannes. The goal of the 36th: the Golfe of Fregus and the town of Saint-Raphael, overlooking the Gulf. Since this invasion route had been used for 1,500 years, the Germans prepared for it and had a hot reception waiting for us.

CAMEL FORCE was the only one that did not find Operation DRAGOON a pushover. The T-Patchers were given the only part of the target coast that thoroughly mined and strongly defended. The Germans were waiting for any invaders brash enough to attempt a landing on the beaches east of Saint-Raphael. The land was mostly cliffs and the beaches short stretches of galet or shingle. This held true for the BLUE and GREEN beached while RED BEACH with its bathhouses and calm waters intimated a resort area of peaceful restfulness. Actually, the Germans had the biggest guns on any coast of France camouflaged on that RED BEACH.

The 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 141st RCT landed in LCI's and LDT's on the 500 yard long GREEN BEACH the morning of D-Day while the 1st Battalion was taking care of the 80 yard long BLUE BEACH.

RED BEACH, of course was entirely different. The 142nd RCT was scheduled to go in there at 1400 hours. Theoretically, such a late start would give the Allies time to pound the coast defenses (although they were well hidden, intelligence had warned of them) with naval gunfire and bombs Air Corps planes.

The 142nd climbed down rope ladders dangling from the sides of the transport ships and circled around baking in the hot sun. Through the smoke and the burst could occasionally be seen the peaceful Saint-Raphael waterfront bars, kiosks, and bathhouses which in reality were painted camouflage for German Coast artillery guns, cemented in huge blocks, sitting waiting for us...

Then came the miracle of miracles!

Admiral Lewis unsuccessfully tried to get in touch with General Dahlquist and on his own responsibility, ordered the landing to be switched to BEACH GREEN! General Dahlquist shortly afterward contacted Admiral Lewis and praised him for his action.

God Bless Admiral Lewis! If it wasn't for his guts in taking such action, a lot of fellow Texans wouldn't have survived.

The entire 36th Infantry Division (except for the 141st RCT elements on BLUE BEACH) eventually landed on the 500 yard strip of shale and cliffs known as GREEN BEACH, reportedly without a casualty. I guess they ex-

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cluded those who were killed on board ship by enemy bombings.

During D-Day, the 36th used primarily GREEN BEACH. Over this beach on that day more than 2,790 vehicles and 17,390 were debarked despite glider bombs and air attacks. However, it was not until D plus 3 that CAMEL RED BEACH was finally cleared of mines and put into operation. By the close of D plus 2, more than 5,000 vehicles and 30,000 troops had landed on GREEN BEACH and more than 2,800 prisoners and 800 casualties had been evacuated.

*(From an article by Frances S. Quinn)*



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### T-PATCHERS ESCAPE IN MARSEILLES

**George J. "Wrong Way" Kerrigan** of Chicago, IL who served with Co. A 142 Inf. relates the following short story:

"There were a gang of us in a hospital, all wounded. We were given a pass to Marseilles, and no one had a sou. We were told to go to the General Hospital and get ten bucks for a pint of blood, so we did just that.

We had to go around to the back of the hospital. After we gave the blood, we came back around the building and right in front of the main door one of the donors passed out.

They picked him up and I said "**Follow Me**" and headed for the main door. A nurse at the front door opened it and I asked, "Where shall we put him?" She pointed to a couch and said "over there" and asked "what is wrong?" I replied "he needs blood".

"Are you a doctor" she asked? As she gave me the once over, I said "No".

"Then how do you know he needs blood" she asked? I said — "he just gave a pint and couldn't afford it".

At that, we took off for the nearest saloon.

Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

# Rogers Recalls time as POW

by Ginny Shauf, Register Staff Writer

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Sent to Editor by E.E. Alexander  
143rd Infantry, Also P.O.W.

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(© Staff photo by Ginny Shauf)

**LOOKING BACK** — D.L. Rogers (right) and his wife Lillie leaf through letters, photos and memorabilia gathered from days he spent as a POW in Germany.

Time has not dulled the memories of long marches, cold days and nights and near starvation after D.L. Rogers was captured on Sept. 13, 1943, on a battlefield in Italy.

The news of American POWs in Iraq brought up memories of tough times for Rogers, even though the emotions of the situation make it hard for him to talk about it.

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A Walnut Bend resident and former county commissioner, Rogers was captured by Germans in Italy during World War II and was a prisoner of war for almost two years. Times, dates, and images return to his mind like they happened yesterday.

"It was the last thing I ever thought about," Rogers said. "I didn't dream of being captured until about an hour before it happened. At that time I would have rather been killed or wounded than taken in."

Rogers long ordeal began when the U.S. Army infantryman disembarked a barge on the beach of Salerno on Sept. 9, 1943. Rogers said the objective that day of his 36th Division was to join the 45th Regiment in a defense objective. He said the destination was reached about midnight and that he and his fellow infantrymen dug foxholes.

He said the Germans hit about 3 o'clock the next afternoon. Rogers said the U.S. forces lasted until about 8:30 p.m. when they were surrounded by enemy tanks.

"When I was captured the tank was moving towards us. I shot at him with a bazooka. He kept easing towards us. He was afraid of mines and it took three hours to come 200 yards," Rogers said. "He came until I could see the 99 (-millimeter cannon) on his gun. The lieutenant asked me if I had a white rag. I held one up. They were all around me."

He said they marched about 100 men down what he thought was Highway 6. Guards were on both sides. They marched all the next day and were given one loaf of bread for 18 men and 40 men had to share a 2-pound can of limburger cheese. He said they were not given water.

The first march ended at a bivouac area where they stayed for a few days. Rogers said they still were wearing their summer uniforms and the weather was starting to turn cold. He said they stayed there until they gathered up about 1,000 men.

Rogers' journey from Italy to a German stalag lasted a month. Part of this was accomplished by foot and part of it was in a boxcar. His boxcar trip across Brenner Pass and through Austria and Switzerland was cramped and cold. Rogers said 54 men were loaded into boxcars about half the size of modern cars. He said the men were given a little bit of bread and a can of sardines for about 10 men.

"The train ride took five days. The third day we got a piece of cheese a half-inch thick by two inches square. I couldn't stand the smell of the cheese. I could not eat it and I was hungry," Rogers said.

He said he got a drink of water the first day of the train ride from some Italian women who passed water through holes in the boxcar at the station. That was the last drink of water he would get for the next five days.

Not only did Rogers have day-to-day survival to be concerned about, his wife Lillie was expecting their first child when he departed the United States. She gave birth to their first son, Doyle, seven months after he was sent overseas.

D.L.'s wife Lillie had mixed emotions when she learned of her husband being taken prisoner.



“Doyle was two days old when I got word that he was taken. I had no doubt that he wasn’t coming back,” Lillie said, “I felt that he was nearer coming back as a prisoner than he would be on the front lines.”

The first camp Rogers was held in was Stalag IIB in northern Germany where they stayed until they were moved to Stalag IIIIB (near Berlin) on Oct. 15, 1943.

Unlike POWs held in Iraq, Rogers said he wasn’t interrogated. He said he thought this was in part because of the large number of prisoners in the camp. He said there were 3,000 in one camp. He said the Germans just barely abided by the laws of the Geneva Convention.

On Jan. 31, 1945, Rogers said he and other prisoners were moved from Stalag IIIIB to IIIA. The trip on foot took seven days. They were housed in tents. Each prisoner had a space of 6 feet by 2 feet Rogers said.

The marches from stalag to stalag didn’t always go without incident. Rogers recalled one march when one of the men who was captured in Africa “just fell backwards. We let him lay for a few minutes. He started moving. We picked him up and carried him for three or four miles.”



(Photo courtesy D.L. Rogers)

**LOOKING AHEAD** — World War II prisoners of war D.L. Rogers (right) and his friend Eddie Adkins gaze longingly through the barbed wire at Stalag IIIIB in Germany.

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Another incident Rogers tells about on one of the marches was when a prisoner fell behind and the consequences he faced.

"That was a rough march. One boy I knew well fell out to fix his pack. He was shot by the Germans," Rogers said.

The march from Stalag IIB to IIIA lasted eight days.

"There were times you'd almost give up," Rogers said.

In Stalag IIIA Rogers said they were housed in tents. There were 500 men in each tent.

Food shortages were a fact of life in the camps. Boxes from the Red Cross were sent and some parcels but irregularly. Rogers said the food was tightly rationed and some days went without the prisoners eating anything.

Rogers laughed as his son Richard reminded him of a story he told of what soup contained that had been given to the prisoners. Rogers said they received their food for the day and night. This particular night they were given some type of soup but since it was dark couldn't see what was in it. He said his friend Eddie Adkins saved some of his to eat the next morning. When he looked at the soup in the light it was full of weevils.

Rogers also told of how terrible the small amount of cheese given to them tasted. He said one day he gave his bit of cheese to his buddy Eddie. He said Eddie made a terrible face as he ate it and tears rolled down his face.

Adequate bedding was also at a premium. Rogers said the first year he slept in his clothes with a blanket that covered from his toes to his waist.

Hygiene was not attended to in the camps. Roger said baths were few and far between. At one time he said one of the prisoners picked up body lice that spread throughout the camp. He said everyone was bathed and deloused but the lice had spread everywhere in the barracks.

One of the things the POW looked forward to the most were letters and parcels from home and boxes the International Red Cross sent periodically. The boxes contained food and cigarettes. Most of his time was spent just sitting around. He said he read a lot.

Rogers said the prisoners were able to trade items from the Red Cross box for a radio. He said they dug a small space under the cement floor of one of the barracks and one of the prisoners listened to news of the war, translated it and read it to the rest. There was also a newspaper that the prisoners had access to that kept them informed.

The guards in the camp were not all hostile, according to Rogers and accounts by his friend Eddie Adkins. From time to time "shakedowns" would take place where prisoners were roused from their sleep and sent outside while guards inspected the barracks.

Rogers said there was one guard who would tip them off when he knew a shakedown would take place. Certain items were then hid and the prisoners would be prepared to stand outside, often in freezing temperatures.

On April 23, 1945, about 20 months after his capture, Rogers and his fellow POWs was liberated by Russian troops.

Rogers said the POWs knew the end of the war was near. The day before he said one of the prisoners woke up about 6 a.m. and all of the German guards were gone.

"The day before the liberation, we could hear fire. We hadn't got any recent news," Rogers said.

The liberation took the form of about 10 Russian tanks and some infantrymen.

"We were happy, of course," Rogers said. "We felt relief."

Rogers said some of the men departed while others stayed at the base. He said their physical condition was poor but that at that point soup with peas, barley and a little beef was given to them.

He said his belief in God and the American people helped him survive his endless days in the camps.

His son Richard said he thought having a son Rogers had never seen and wanted to desperately was a big factor in his ability to cope. Son Doyle said his father's faith and strong family ties made a difference.

Rogers made the long journey to the U.S. on a boat. After arriving in the states a train took them on the final leg to Fort Sam Houston. At a stop in St. Louis, Rogers asked a woman factory worker through a fence to send a telegram to Lillie letting her know he would be coming through and persuaded the conductor to stop briefly in Sherman.

Lillie and Rogers' sister Sue bought some chicken, fried it and met the train, along with the son D.L. had never seen.

Rogers was thrilled to see his wife and meet his 20-month old son Doyle. He commented that the chicken was the best meal he ever ate.

His experience as a POW is one that Rogers said he hasn't been able to talk about until the past several years. His sons confirmed that it has only been recently that their dad has come out with the accounts of his hardships in the stalags.

In a journal Rogers kept, he mentioned his distaste for the Germans. Now, he said, he has many German-American friends who he thinks the world of and time has healed some of the ill feelings toward the people who held him.

Rogers and some of the men who were captured and liberated with him have started holding yearly reunions.

It's just one of many freedoms that he enjoys.

*Editor's Note: Here are excerpts from the journal compiled by POW D.L. Rogers during his captivity:*

Stalag IIIB Germany: Jan. 1, 1945—This is a New Year and me 6,000 miles away from home. I wonder that is happening at home; if the folks are well and had a good Christmas and a happy New Year. As for me, my morale is pretty low. I went through all of my letters today trying to make heads and tails out of them. Didn't make much headway. Can't tell anything about what has been censored out. Heard about my dear cousin being killed last week. Wish I knew where. I know how Aunt Neon must have felt about it. Sometimes I wonder if we all wouldn't be just as well off. I mean the boys in here. Nothing to do or where to go. Not half enough to eat. I hope and pray to God that my son will never have to go through what I have for the last two years.

Sue a card today. Slept almost all of the morning. We get Red Cross boxes tomorrow, one for 6 men. The men will have high morale for a day or two.

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A typical Red Cross box consisted of:

1 can powdered milk—1 lb.

1 can coffee—2 or 4 oz.

1 can corned beef—12 oz.

1 can Prem—12 oz.

1 can liver paster—6 oz.

1 can salmon—8 oz.

1 can orange—4½ oz.

1 box cheese—8 oz.

1 box prunes—15 oz.

2 “D” bars—8 oz.

1 box sugar cubes

2 bars soap

1 can oleomargarine

5 packs cigarettes

1 box “C” biscuits—7½ oz.

Jan. 14—Wrote a letter to Lillie today. Had two air raids last night. I am still sitting here now wishing for something to do. Never was so tired in all my life of sitting around doing nothing. Wish I could express myself better where you could get what I feel. All a fellow has to do is sit around and pine; from 6 a.m. to 6 a.m. When I step out of the barrick all I see is barbed wire. If half of the men are not lunatics before we hit home, I will be fooled.

Jan. 22—Three car loads of Red Cross boxes came in yesterday. That means we eat two more weeks.

Jan. 24—Wish we could find out what is happening. We hear that the Germans have stopped all news. Maybe they are in a more critical condition than we think. I hope so. Rumors sure have been floating around. They said the Russians have started their winter attack and haven't stopped yet. I hope they liberate this camp, even though we are so deep in Germany.

Luckenwalde Germany

Feb. 1—It looks like we evacuated 3B. We are now 120 KM west by southwest from Furstenburg at Stalag 3A located at Luckenwalde. We left 3B Wed. Jan 31, on a two-hour notice. Didn't have time to fix any packs to carry our food and clothing in. Jim, Roy, Eddie and myself started out with a sled, as the ground was covered with snow and ice. We left camp about 6:30 p.m. and traveled all night. Some of the boys would fall out on the snow and lay there as if they were dead. It was awfully strenuous on all of us as we hadn't done any marching since we arrived at 3B. As I say we marched on all night, and were expecting a rest next morning. Instead, we were driven like dogs. We discarded our sled about 10:30 p.m. on the first day of February and made packs out of woolen undershirts and continued on. A German guard was riding a horse keeping the stragglers up. I saw him run his horse over some of the boys when they were almost exhausted. He would hit some of them with his pistol and threatened to shoot all of us. We finally pulled in to stay all night after 24 hours of the hardest marching I have ever done.

Feb. 2—We left the barn next morning about 7:30 without a bit to eat from the Germans. About 10:30 one of our buddies fell out to fix his pack and was shot and killed instantly. I knew him well: Karl Johnson.

Feb. 3—We left out again without anything to eat. Marched a few miles and got a ration of bread, five men on a loaf. Marched all day. Stayed in a little village in a barn again. No chow.

Feb. 7—Started out at the usual time about 8 a.m., got bread a few miles out. Got in to 3A about 3 p.m. They put us in tents, 400 men to a tent. I have never seen a bunch of men look as bad as these did when we got in here.

Feb. 12—Four years ago today, I had plenty to eat. I was a civilian. Made two trips to Fort Worth with hogs to sell. I hope the life we are living now doesn't last long. It is the most miserable time I have ever spent. We will all always remember it. We got bread again today.

Feb. 16—The Protecting Power was here today. Doesn't look like he did much good as they cut our rations tonight. We got soup at noon, half-cup per man. Bread, seven-and-a-half men to a loaf, just about two slices per man. It looks awful dark for us. I hope we live through it. Sometimes I wonder. Guess it depends on how long the war continues. Oh how I would like to be at home to eat some of the food I have thrown away.

Feb. 23—We thought that we were having a hard time at IIIB but how we long to be back there. Would that half of a Red Cross box look good now. I never thought that German black bread would taste so good. We have just been issued bread and butter. I have already eaten half of mine. Don't get any more until tomorrow at this time. It wouldn't be so bad if we knew how long we will have to put up with this. I wish I had control over Germany after the war. I would get Revenge!

March 6—We cooked up a few potatoes and a half of a can of spam today. Was it delicious. Still have half of a can left. Did we hear an air raid last night. Pretty close to us. We hear from two to four almost every 24 hours. Boy will I ever be glad to get home. Out of this awful place.

All of us have lice and no way to get rid of them. The Germans take about 100 men down once or twice a week to get deloused—that is out of 2,800 men.

March 9—Had mail call again today. Boy did I hit. Received 12 letters from Lillie and one from Susie. One from Lillie Oct. 3, the others in Nov. and the first of Dec. Not any as late as Dec. 15, what I received in Stalag 3B. I just pray that our luck will continue. Would I like to see my wife and baby; after reading her letters he must be a fine boy.

March 11—The weather this morning was lots warmer but started raining about 1 p.m. Our water line sure was rushed today. Everyone was trying to wash. I stayed in line over an hour trying to fill up our canteens. We are still hearing good rumors. Sure hope some of them are true. A Jerry guard said the Americans had crossed the Rhine. I am still hungry as I have been afraid of eating too much since we got boxes as we were so near starved when we received them.

March 22—I went over for a delousing and shower this morning. Did I enjoy the shower as it had been so long since I had one. Received three letters

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from Lillie today. Sure wish I was home with her. I know she was awfully lonely when she wrote one of them Dec. 18.

March 31—How well I remember two years ago today, as that was the last time I saw Lillie. Higgins, Meyer and I got a four-hour pass and went home. I don't think it will be too long until I can be with Lillie and Doyle for always. I hope to be with them by the 4th of July.

April 13—Since I have started on detail I haven't had too much time to write as we don't have any lights. Eddie went to the hospital yesterday. Had a fever of 103.2. This is the first time we have been separated since Oct. of 1943. I have been sick today. Sure hope I feel better tomorrow. This is my wedding anniversary. I thought last fall we would be home by now. I received two letters from Lillie yesterday. It doesn't look like it will be long until we are on our way home. I hope not.

April 16—We received Red Cross parcels today. One per man. They are to last two weeks. We sure will have to do some tall rationing.

April 21—We have just heard that the allies have taken over the camp. That is the German have pulled out. We have been hearing artillery all day. I wish they would start marching us out. I would be willing to march 48 hours straight to get out of here. We don't know yet when we will be put on American ration. Hope it is soon. Just have German rations for today. We have orders not to leave camp as it will cause confusion. Boy I am so happy if we can just get out of here. I can't realize we are free.

April 22—Officially liberated. It has been awful hot around here today. The Russians came in this morning about 10:00. They drove right down through camp. Boy were we a happy bunch of men. The Russian POWs were all turned loose. Some of them were so happy they were crying. I almost felt the same way. We are ordered to stay in camp until the Yanks get here after us. Don't know just how long that will be as they say the Russians and Americans haven't linked up yet. We are not getting too much food as the Germans took everything when they left. Haven't got bread for a couple of days.

April 29—The Russians are bringing in most anything we want including radios. I heard the news last night for the first time since I was captured.

May 1—Eddie moved out to the German garrison today. It is about 4 miles south of Luchenwalde. They are to clean the camp up for us. Looks like we will stay here for a while. I wish they would start moving us home.

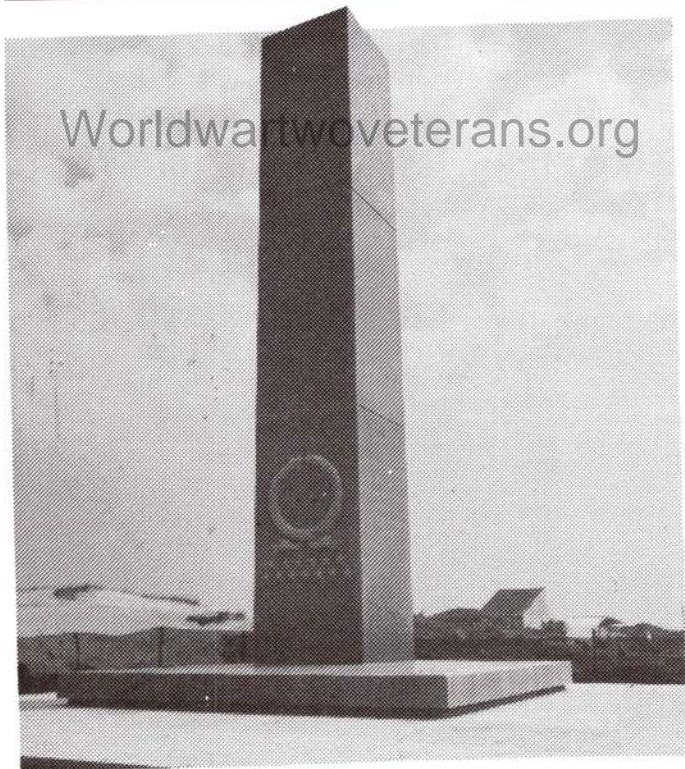
May 3—More good news today. The surrender of the German troops in Italy and the fall of Berlin. Eddie and the bunch that moved came back to camp. The order to move out there has been called off. I hope that it means we are moving out in a few days.

May 5—Some of the boys left out today. Twenty-three ambulances came in after the sick and wounded. We are supposed to go tomorrow. We sure are sweating it out. Seems like we will never leave.

LIBERATION DAY—Sunday, May 6—We left 3A today. Traveled about 60 miles. We saw several villages that had been through this cruel war. Some them were completely demolished. There are a lot of rumors around here. Some say we will fly home. I hope so as the fastest way to go is too slow.

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# *Texas T Patchers honored with memorials*



THE MASSIVE SALERNO MONUMENT.

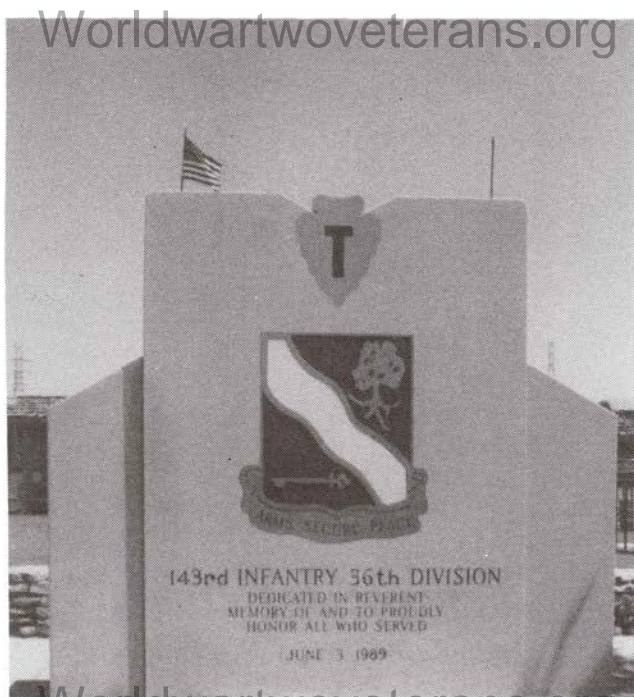
COMPANY M 142 INFANTRY MONUMENT

DEDICATED

The Company M 142 Infantry Memorial Monument was dedicated in Wichita Falls, TX at 9:30 AM, Saturday - Nov. 10, 1990. The monument, on the South side of the Wichita County Court House, is inscribed with the names of all called to duty with the unit on Nov. 25, 1940.

## Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly MONUMENT DEDICATION

*Thanks to the efforts of many T-Patchers and friends, the 36th has been honored with numerous monument dedications. We have placed monuments where we fought and some died and we have been honored in a great many cities from which we came. Here are a few of those honors bestowed upon us.*



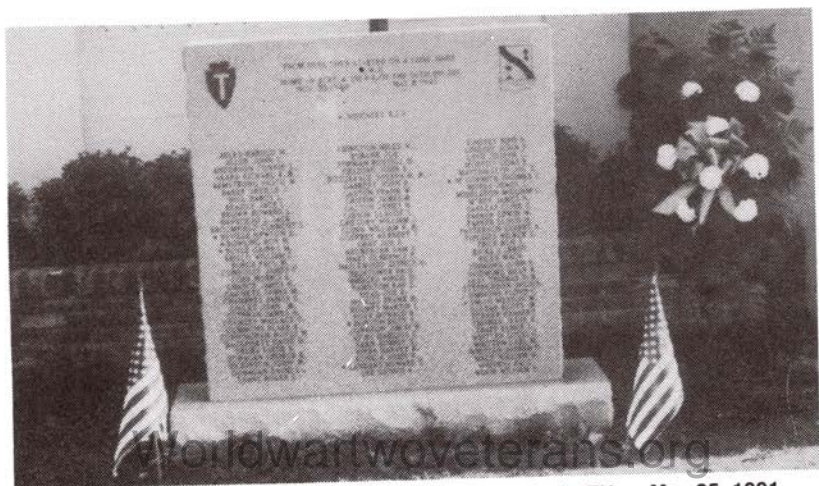
Worldwartwoveterans.org

143rd Infantry, Waco, Texas

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





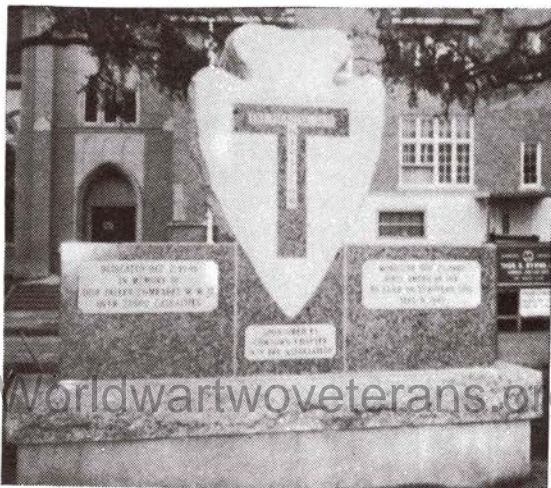


Monument of Battery A 132 FA Bn. dedicated at Paris, TX on May 25, 1991.



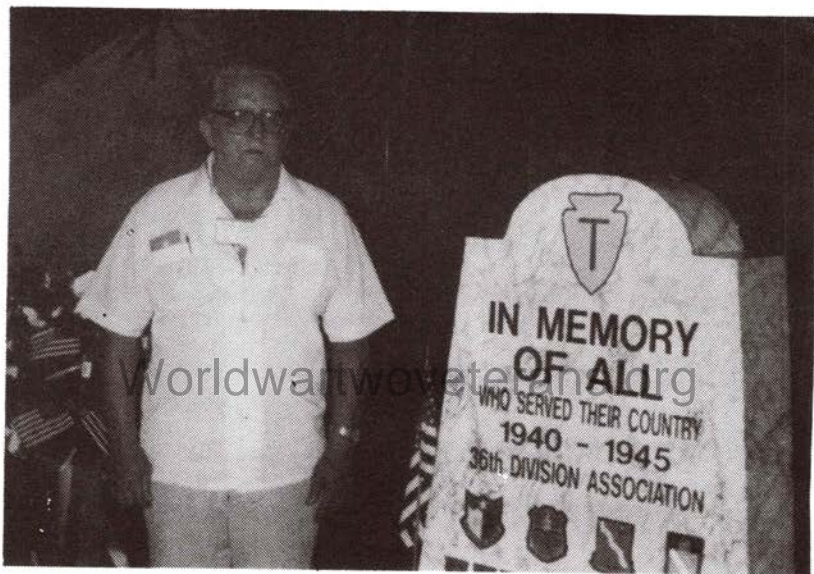
...The Monument at ALTAVILLA, a bloody battle site for the 36th. Decoration on the monument is from a church celebration on the day before. Foto from Richard Burrage.

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The thick concrete base of the monument is to permit later construction of a small, attractive, permanent stage area with the monument near its West edge.

### COWTOWN CHAPTER DEDICATES A MONUMENT



"First Timer" - Albert Zoellick, 49 E. Slade St., Pallatine, IL 60067, who served in Co. H 142 Inf. at his first reunion in Fort Worth 1990.



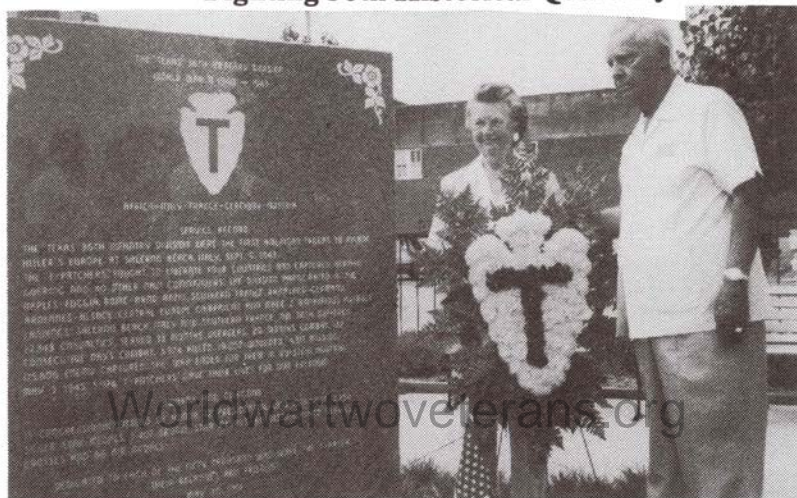
Worldwar2veterans.org

Stone selected for monument to be dedicated 21 Sept. 1991 near ELOYES, FRANCE.

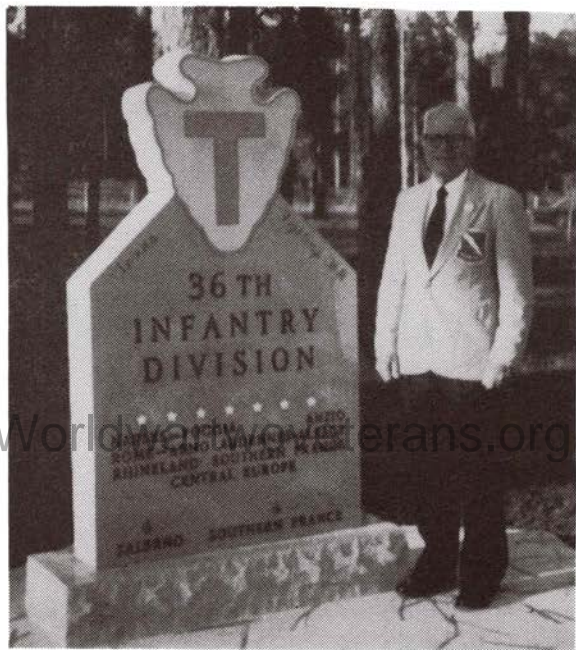


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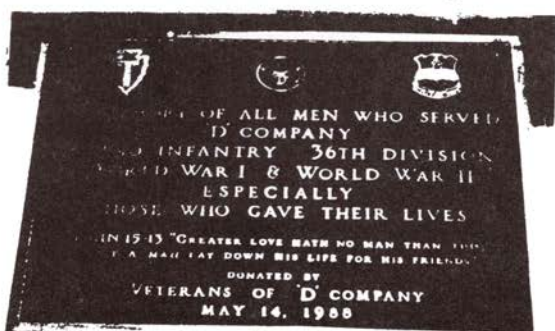


Katie and L. M. "Buddy" Sinclair beside the front of the monument they donated to Sulphur Springs.



36th Division Monument in Memorial Park at Camp Blanding, FL with Julian Quarles of Co. F 143 Inf. Note the seven battle stars and two Amphibious Landing Arrowheads.

The Pride of Stephenville,  
Co D 142nd Gets Bronze Plaque



The inscription reads:  
**IN MEMORY OF ALL MEN WHO SERVED  
 "D" COMPANY 142nd INFANTRY  
 REGIMENT 36th DIVISION, WORLD  
 WAR I & WORLD WAR II ESPECIALLY  
 THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES  
 JOHN 15:13 "GREATER LOVE HATH NO  
 MAN THAN THIS, THAT A MAN LAY  
 DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS."  
 DONATED BY VETERANS OF "D" COMPANY**



Brownwood, Texas



An order was placed locally on Monday, April 29th for the Signal Co. monument



The cross shown here, on the front row carries the name of a fallen T-Patch-JAMES H. JERSTAD, Co D 141st, reports Barca. The Draguignan (Var) Le Cimetiere militaire is resting place for men of 36th, 45th, 3rd Division and U.S. Navy (below).

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# From Paestum to Cassino

*Submitted by Earl Mansee*

**36th MP Company**

Reprint from 36th MP Company Newsletter, **Cross Pistols**



Worldwartwoveterans.org



Worldwartwoveterans.org

Paestum, Italy - Sept. 1943  
Old Roman ruins that over-  
look the beaches at Salerno.

This M.P. remembers the day of the invasion of Italy after some forty-two years. The news that the Italians had surrendered, and we had hopes that it wouldn't be quite as difficult for us. Oh, were we in for a **BIG SURPRISE!** We were given orders to disembark in the afternoon of September 9, 1943. Just before leaving the ship, U.S.S. FRED FUNGSTON, I saw one of the

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first casualties being returned to the ship. The man's insides were exposed as he was lying on the stretcher. As we disembarked from the landing craft, the 88s were landing close. We didn't waste too much time on the beach but headed inland, following a ravine for awhile. There wasn't much sleep for this soldier! The concentrated chocolate bar tasted good at first, but it soon became too rich and I was unable to eat all of it. On September 10th, I was at the intersection of the road, leading to the Tobacco Warehouse. (The date stuck well with me, it was my birthday). Just a short distance from where I was stationed, were four (4) German tanks that had been knocked out the day before. The Tobacco Warehouse served as our C.P. for the 36th Division. Nearby the Grave Registration crew were working full time. I can still remember the dead Germans who lay there and didn't get buried until our own men were buried. The smell was sickening! Nothing smells as bad as a human corpse. Near us was a barn, with hay in it, which some of the men used. I remember the mites crawling all over us! It was several weeks before we had an opportunity to bathe in a lake nearby. What a relief! While we were staying in the barn we received a rumor that the Germans were using gas and so we started wearing our gas masks, until the rumor was proven false.

The 101st Parachute troops were going over during the dark of the night - the planes were so low that we had not trouble seeing them, even in the dark. While on duty at the Warehouse Junction, I saw load after load of 6 x 6 Army Ducks bringing matting wire for the Airport being built across the road from Division Hqtrs. They were loads of fifty-five (55) gallon drums of aviation gas. The airport was being built on the second day of the invasion. Our sister division, the forty-fifth, was beginning to move in by now. It made us feel much better to know we were not in this thing alone!! It wasn't long until the P40s were beginning to land and reload for another mission. The planes were raising their landing gears and sliding their canopy tops closed as they flew over our heads. One of Jerry's planes got into the circle as our planes were trying to land, when our men saw what was happening, they let him have it!

It wasn't too long after this that I was moved down the road to Altvilla, where I was standing near a Crucifix. The Italians kept doing a cross-their-heart as they walked into town. Not being a Catholic, I began to wonder why they did this as they passed by me. I finally questioned one of my Buddies and he told me that I was standing in front of a cross and this was done when they passed the cross!

It was at Altvilla where the town was so destroyed. The roof of many buildings were blown off. I questioned the Italians in a very crude way, not being able to speak their language, was it airplanes that had done this? They replied, no, it was the Navy shells that had reached that far inland. There were shallow graves all along the road where bodies had fallen. The stench was terrible and the people were wearing rags over their nose. It was also here that I was trying to heat something to eat and I had some gas in a "C Ration Can," with it burning. I thought I could smother the fire after I had finished by stepping on it with the heel of my shoe. The can's edge was very sharp and cut into my rubber heel and it stuck to my shoe. I became nervous and



tried to shake it off and the gas splashed upon my leggins, catching on fire, one of the other M.P.'s had to roll me on the ground to smother the fire out. I never tried that trick again!

Speaking of food, I have never forgotten the beautiful crops of tomatoes and bell peppers that we saw. Lots of the crops had been gathered and were in baskets, spilled out on the ground, as if the pickers were rushed out of the fields.

Winter was getting close by now. Italy, I am sure, had been a beautiful place but war brings out the worse. I was living in a pup tent with R.L. Mayhew and during a storm the lightening was really playing havoc. The lightening struck a tree in the area and one soldier was killed. This made us realize we had better move out from under the tree. It was about this time of the year again, when I was sleeping, and in a dream the words came to me, "THOUGH YOU WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF DEATH, I WILL BE NEAR YOU." I know now that God was telling me I would make it! I had a compact Bible which I had carried in my left shirt pocket all this time. I have always been very thankful for the assurance I received from that dream!

At one time when we were on top of a hill, the name of the town I do not remember as this has been so long ago, the British troops were stationed near us. The hill was called the "MILLION DOLLAR HILL." This was the hill we were taking. The British were pounding away with their "16" Pounders. The hill had a very long muddy incline. An American jeep was coming up the hill and messed up his rear differential, was having to pull strictly by the front end. A British soldier was the jeep slipping and sliding by the front wheels but still making it, remarked, "You Americans." The British were not too good with vehicles. The Italians had decided to help with the war effort at this time also, and they were using a four wheel drive vehicle, single tires, no duels. They also steared by the front and back axles. Having only black-out lights and moving in the dark, it did give me the creeps.

On another occasion we were staying in a house, overlooking the LIRI VALLEY. We were using an empty five gallon bucket, that we had put charcoal in, using this to toast bread. The floor of the house was concrete. The charcoal can get things pretty hot. Suddenly we heard what we thought was a shall exploding, the charcoal flew up into the air and was landing on our blankets where we slept. One coal landed on George Blanton's neck. Boy, did he do a flip over to get this hot coal out of his shirt. It was fun to everyone but George...It was from this hill we could see the flying Fortresses drop bombs on the ABBEY. Even after the bombing, I later saw tracker bullets coming from out of the ruins. The building was indeed a Fortress!

Our Division was pulled out of action shortly after this. It was here that I left the Division. The heavy concussion was so severe in my ears that I was deaf in one ear. I had been offered a transfer while in Africa but turned it down as I wanted to remain with my outfit, the 36th Division.

The invasion of Southern France was being readied as I sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar. I saw a great Armada of ships getting ready! It was great to be sailing for the good ole' U.S.A.!!

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# Russian In K Company

by John D. Goode  
K Company, 141st Infantry



WorldWarVeterans.org

On January 19, 1944, I was sent to Third Battalion Headquarters and reported for First Lt. Shona K. Aldridge, S-2, from Banner Elk, N.C. I was ordered to take a dozen men from K Company across the Rapido River that night and take a prisoner. If a prisoner could not be taken alive, I was to kill a "Jerry," remove his pay book, and bring it back. I argued that "a dozen men" were too many. If we were going to take a prisoner, we weren't going to overpower him with firepower, but might take him by silence and stealth. I was ordered to take the dozen men. I did.

During the rest of the day, I studied the terrain on the German side of the river from a vantage point on our side. I spoke to one of our Platoon Leaders who had led an unsuccessful patrol across the river the previous night. I asked if anyone in K Company spoke German. A man was produced who did. He was a Ukrainian from Odessa. He had worked in a German auto plant on his way to the States. He was Pvt. Rodrigo A. Klavin from Boston, Massachusetts.

We blacked out our faces and hands with soot and ashes from the fireplace in the house where the company CP was located. We reversed our zippered field jackets so the inside O.D. was on the outside. No helmets, only that silly wool-knit cap worn inside the helmet. No leggings to scrape on twigs. Sgt. Richard A. Polasek of Shriner, Texas, was the senior NCO of this detail from our Third Platoon.

It took several trips in an inflated boat for the Engineers to move us across the Rapido. We set off on the west bank and proceeded up stream to investigate a barbed wire fence at right angles to the river which had been described to me by our patrol of the previous night. It was supposed to have a slit trench located at the point where it intersected the river. We found the fence and the slit trench empty and proceeded a very short distance further upstream when we saw a one inch rope stretched across the river. Several nights before, a German patrol had penetrated K Company's position and when learning they were among us had fired a burst of sub-machine gun fire, thrown a grenade,

and fled. I wondered if that rope wasn't how they were crossing. I didn't know whether they might have people coming back from our side of the river or coming down from their positions to cross with the rope. Also, here was the chance to trim the detail down in numbers. I kept Pvt. Klavin and Sgt. John H. Gabel, from Newark, N.J. with me and deployed the rest of the patrol under Sgt. Polasek in a semi-circle around the German end of the rope. I told them we would return from up-river, and to shoot anyone coming from any other direction!

Klavin, Gable, and I started west towards the likely German positions. I hadn't the slightest idea what I was going to do next. We hadn't gone five yards when we heard a sound as if someone had lightly kicked an empty water can. We hit the ground and started to crawl and come in behind the sound. Our progress was so slow that we got up and turned back towards the river. Klavin plodded ahead. We came to a drainage ditch, which in the dark I imagined might have been a communication trench. I sent Gabel into the trench to stop anyone coming down. About this time, I heard Klavin speaking German...softly! Then, there in the dark were two Germans, standing with their hands up, their rifles at their feet. I stuck my .45 pistol in the back of the closest German. I asked Klavin what he had said. He replied, "We have you surrounded. You will consider yourselves our prisoners." They did. Then, one Jerry spoke to the other, softly. I froze, thinking this was the point where some other Germans, unseen, threw a grenade or fired a burst of MG fire while my prisoners hit the ground and crawled away in the confusion. I asked Klavin again what they had said. He replied, "We were inducted together, trained together, served together, and now we shall be P.W.s together!"

I was so excited and relieved by our extraordinary luck that I immediately made two mistakes. I had forgotten Gabel in the trench, and moved back to Sgt. Polasek's detail from the inland rather than the up-river direction. The area in which this action had occurred was so small that Gabel and the detail at the rope had watched it all. When I said, "God!...I forgot Gabel," I found him right behind me.

We headed back toward our rubber boat, and ran into patrol from another unit of the 36th Division. Again lady luck was with us-nobody fired a shot. We brought the prisoners back to the Third Battalion C.P. Lt. Aldridge and Major Mehaffey were delighted with how things had turned out. Major Mehaffey said I had done a good job and was going to put me in for the Silver Star. At that time, a Silver Star didn't seem particularly useful. I did point out that I had been a 2nd Lt. since I joined the 36th in October at Salerno. I said that promotion to 1st. Lt. would be nice. He said that recommendation had gone in.

I said that if anyone deserved a medal it was Pvt. Klavin. I didn't mention what might have happened if someone had not kicked something in the dark, if I had bumped into the Jerries first and spoken to them in English. I didn't mention coming into our own people from the wrong direction or bumping into our other patrol.

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Sgt. Gabel and Lt. Aldridge were killed two days later at the Rapido and Major Mehaffey was severely wounded. Pvt. Klavin and Sgt. Polasek were killed in the breakout from Anzio the following spring. God rest the souls of these good men.

Forty-seven years later, I learned Pvt. Klavin's name from Henry L. Ford, Rt. 5, Box 1402, Northlakes, Hickory, N.C. 28601. He served in K Company, 141st Infantry, from Salerno, well into France. He went from Pvt. to 2nd Lt. through a "field commission." He was wounded three times.



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# ...into a boat

by Donna Darovich

Star-Telegram Writer

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Al Newell's G.I. diary recounts Sept. 8, 1943 quite simple: "ate an extra helping of ice cream, a couple of chocolate bars and hit the hay...slept fine."

Sept. 9 the yellowing pages in the 34-year-old book tell a different story: "To the bridge...heavy firing, flashes landward and the expectation of what our naval guns would do to Jerry (the Germans) left you a little tight with excitement and the thought of what Jerry might do just left you tight."

It was D-Day, "condition four," "0130 hours," as Newell wrote it, and "Operation Avalanche" was under way.

The diary entry is a prologue to the historic landing of America's 36th Division on the beach at Salerno, Italy, the first invasion of Hitler's European fortress by U.S. troops in World War II.

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\* \* \*

**AND WHEN MEMBERS** of the 36th get together to share war stories about the landing and ensuing campaign, Newell, who was a captain then, has the details of those stories down on paper—written as they happened.

The Arlingtonite's journal details his trek with the 36th across Europe, almost in step with writer-correspondent Ernie Pyle and just one step behind the Axis forces.

Writing in ship berth and foxhole or shattered village, Newell found time to chronicle his observations of the battles, the skirmishes and the soldiers from PCFs to generals, that he came to know.

There was Hermann Goering, the Third Reich's number two man whom

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## Photos of the 36th's Capture of HERMAN GOERING Are Rare —

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THE CAPTURE of the No. 2 Nazi by the 36th is one of the great stories of the war. We've used many, especially the one by Gen. Stack's own version is an earlier edition of the T-Patcher. Here's "The Fat One" with Maj. Gen. Dahlquist (officer on left unknown),

---

the 36th captured. "A sloppy pig" is how young Newell described him. And Col. Bill Darby of the heralded Darby's Rangers was critiqued by Newell as "the best soldier I've ever seen."

Newell even described the "dry run" prior to the invasion.

Given the code name Cowpuncher, the run was "about as well executed from the standpoint of military operations as an incomplete pass," according to Newell's at-the-scene account in his diary.

He also cited "mass confusion on board" his ship prior to the dry run as 280 enlisted men were inadvertently sent to compartments for 490 men and the 490 were wedged into the compartments for the 280.

"For almost 12 hours after boarding ship, the men dragged their equipment from hold to hold until they were worn thin enough to fit anywhere," Newell wrote, "and this was a prelude to combat."

\* \* \*

**OFFICERS' CRITIQUE** of the run was "excellent," although Newell's diary points out "we landed on the wrong beach one hour ahead of the assault battalions."

He also noted that Gen. Mark Clark, observing the operation, said they would "never make it."

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Newell wrote, "About all we gained from the experience was sweat," adding that during Cowpuncher a brigadier general "floated around in an LCVP (landing craft) for six hours" before he was found.

But when the actual landing time came, there was little to joke about.

"Strange to say, despite talk on intelligence measure," Newell wrote, "practically everyone knows where we are going."

Newell's ship, the Samuel Chase, was "loaded with Division headquarters and all special staffs. Looks like this ship will be far back—or will it?" Newell wrote, considering the valuable passengers.

"Plowing out to sea with boats in streaming lines to the left and to the right and the rear...other transports, low-plowing cruisers, the Philadelphia and the Savannah, famous for its fine gunnery at Gela, Sicily and fleet destroyers swing around all flanks, looking like horse and rider swaying at a run—and you feel pretty secure."

The last two nights out, he wrote, provided "quite a show" with all the air raids. "Tracers lighting up the sky like a giant Christmas show. You stand charmed on the bridge and it is hard to realize there is danger in the beauty of the night skies.

"Fast-stepping destroyers weave back and forth, spreading a smoke screen... the 'ack-ack' (anti-aircraft guns) throb like a giant mechanical heart and the sea seems to be pounding with the vibrations."

About 1 a.m. the day of the invasion, Newell noted he had received word a decision had been made to not shell the landing beach.

\* \* \*

"**THE "NAVY" GUNNERS**, junior officers, coxswains, can't understand, but then hadn't Italy surrendered the night before? Yeah, only word hadn't gotten down to all the troops—Axis troops" he wrote.

"Sweating out debarkation time as Flashes lit the beaches and reddened the sky and still the great guns that made gunnery history at Gela were silent.

"We were standing in the misty dusk...minutes of observatio, recapulation and you know there is only one way now—inland.

"Other boats pitching in the surf, ships huddled as far as you could see...into a boat go 25 (men) of the first wave, swing up, over the side, the smack of the sea and you're cut loose.

"Around and around we go with other boats...as the smoke and dust vie with the approaching dawn for visibility.

"Finally, someone decides everything is 'set' and so in we go. Our boat begins to lose ground — or water — and the coxswain decides there's too much weight in front so everyone crowds back. I get back with the crew and then our boat wallows in the surf and the wave commander decides the clutch is slipping (and not a mechanic in the boat — fine time for a breakdown). There is nothing much we can do. We're getting close in.

"Machine gun fire falls on the water like rice in a wash pan and artillery shells plump in the water...the boats begin to circle around liek stupid geese until finally the PA system bellows 'all clear on red beach!'"

\* \* \*

“**WITH ENGINES** roaring, we start inland. Quite a sight. Boats coming in, going back, boats grounded, all swinging high in a surging surf, ducks (an amphibious truck) plowing their way ashore with artillery pieces and offshore, like mother hens, as the transports, destroyers, cruisers, and then, off our starboard, a “duck” goes under and the crew sputters and bobs around.”

“But not to forget the air in all this spray. There have been several of our planes overhead with several hit and run swoops by Jerry. Navy ‘ack-ack’ shoots at all of them just to be sure.

“Suddenly, a crippled fighter comes in low, wagging his wings for recognition—even we rookies can tell it’s a Spitfire but a trigger-happy gunner opens up, then all guns cut loose.

“He falls on the sand about 100 yards to port. The pilot hops out. The boat (that shot at him) then grounds and the coxswain calls out good luck to him. Fine thing. The whole affair is backgrounded by constant 88 and other artillery shelling the beach.

“Then all hell broke loose.

“We start up the sand dunes toward the low shore line...up and down, up and down, push-ups as we hit the sand at every whine of a shell, then up and in (farther inland).

“One can hardly describe the mixed feelings and emotions that exist going across a hostile beach. You see the surging mass of boats, the ships standing by, the circling aircraft, the sounds of ‘ack-ack’ and small arms fire. You seem to wash ashore as your boat hits and every screaming artillery shell seems coming right to you.

“You find new speed, new endurance, more alertness.”

“The beach wasn’t rough from the standpoint of wire and demolition as expected but the assault waves caught plenty of machine gun and artillery fire.”

\* \* \*

**EVENTUALLY NEWELL** and his fellow troops “straggled inland to the vicinity of Paestum,” a scattered mass of ruins surrounded by mountains.

“Confusion was thick at division headquarters,” Newell wrote, “and men were detailed to assist in digging graves for our dead when it was decreed that German prisoners would not be used for such labor.”

Newell’s diary goes on to detail accounts of a soldier “proudly exhibiting a turban-like bandage on his head covering a “ghastly” 88 wound which was actually “a nick in the scalp hardly requiring iodine” and the “sickening sight of a few men, afraid, cowering in their fox holes, white lips trembling.”

But Newell also knew the heroes.

When sent as part of a special task force to reinforce Darby’s Rangers at Maori, Newell got his first look at Bill Darby.

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“He impresses one as a real soldier and you say why not more like him, truly a leader of men, the best soldier I have ever seen.”

Later, at Hill 1205 near Summacro, he met Capt. Henry Waskow, the soldier whom writer Ernie Pyle immortalized as G.I. Joe.

Newell also recalled his friend from Fort Worth, Joe K. Emerson, who served with him but who was captured just after the Salerno landing. Emerson went ahead of the troops in a jeep, was captured and spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner.

The diary also included a “note to taxpayers:”

“Our ship moved from Castellamare to Naples (during Operation Anvil—Italy to France) at a cost of 1600 for the sole purpose of picking up the general” who later called his aide, complaining of a headache because he had no dental floss. A search ensued for the “tooth string on the near-eye of invasion.”

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\* \* \*

**NEWELL SAID HE** kept the diary for his wife and children as a personal account but also sent home literally hundreds of rolls of snapshots and 8mm movie film, including one of the famous Salerno landing.

“Of course they all had to go through the Chief Base Censor,” Newell said, “and any aircraft, tanks or other such things shown in them had to be edited out.”

The 36th, which was primarily made up of Texans, made history every step of its way across Europe.

It was also the first military unit in all of history to ever march into Rome from the south.

German Field Marshall Albert Kesselring called them the finest he had ever faced.

The most decorated soldier of World War II, Texas Audie Murphy, as a member of the 36th.

\* \* \*

**THE DIVISION** had 15 members win the Medal of Honor. It received 10 Presidential unit citations and captured more than 175,000 prisoners.

The division also captured, in addition to Goering, Generals Von Rundstedt and Sepp Dietrich, commander of the 6th Panzer Division.

As the years pass and the accomplishments of the 36th Division dim in its members' memories, Al Newell can thumb through the pages of his journal and recapture the essence of another time, a time he lived through and wrote of, a time when his friends died and a Division gained its place in history.





Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

# A World War II Story

by Al Dietrick

From the **T-Bone** - Dec., 1989  
San Antonio Chapter, 36th Division



Worldwarveterans.org

The following story is dedicated in the memory of Tom Evridge who served with me in B Co. 141. It is told to the best of my knowledge and recollection.

T'was the week before Xmas  
in Nineteen Forty-three,  
On top of Mt. Sammucro  
stood you and me.

-By Al Dietrick

We'd come off the front at Mt. Retondo about 2 weeks ago. We were bivouaced near the village of Ceppagno, Italy on about the 20th of December, 1943 at the foot of Mt. Sammucro (hill 1205).

My name is Alfred Dietrick, Platoon Sgt., B Co., 141 Inf.

Chow call sounded and while we were eating, our C.O. announced our next mission. We were to carry food, ammo and water to the 504 Parachute Battalion who were fighting the Jerrys on top of Mt. Sammucro. This seemed easy enough. Take them what they needed then back to our area for more sack time.

We moved thru the village of Cappagno about 5:30 p.m. I remember chickens, pigs and grape vines as we moved thru people's back yards. There was still enough daylight to get a good look at the slope we had to climb. It didn't look easy, about 1,205 ft. high and steep.

A guide was there to lead us as we started the climb. In about an hour we reached a plateau. Here would pick our load of rations. I picked a 5 gal. can of water. (I never was too smart.) The moon was bright and the evening fall chill began to set in. In the moonlight I noticed dead paratroopers on the ground. I realized this must be a collection point for everything going up or down. I always wondered why dog tags had a notch on them. Each dead soldier had a dog tag propping his mouth open and the notch between the teeth. A gruesome sight in the moonlight.

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As we started our difficult climb a cloud settled over the mountain and the moonlight disappeared. The footing was slippery. Three steps forward, one backward. We reached the top about 1:30 a.m., unloaded and rested awhile.

We started our trip down. You had to be careful in the dark. We reached bottom at break of day. Another mile and we'd be back to our bivouac area and rest. We'd been going from sunset to sunrise.

On our arrival breakfast was being served. Some ate, others sacked out with fatigue. I ate cause I remember oatmeal.

Noon and lunch came around quickly. The C.O. gave us our new orders. He said, "We're going to the top of Mt. Sammucro to relieve the 504 Parachute Battalion. Full combat uniform. Be ready to move out at 3:00 p.m."

It didn't make sense to me. If we were to relieve the 504 why didn't we just stay up there? Then I remembered, we didn't have our weapons. Then again 'ours is not to reason why but to do or die.'

Next morning found us on top of Mt. Sammucro. The 1st Battalion was to engage the Germans. B Co. with elements of D Co. would be the attacking force.

Mt. Sammucro was like the back of a dinosaur. It has a long ridge with none too gentle slopes on each side.

A corporal was nearest me as we moved forward. Our orders were to locate the enemy. Move forward until we draw their fire. Our platoon was on the right slope, the other platoon on the left slope moving forward.

After about an hour of moving cautiously, the corporal says, "Sarge, looka here." A dead German in a kneeling position, lay in 1 ft. deep of empty shells. Machine gun was gone. He'd gone down fighting. He'd built a rock mound around him about 3 ft. high. Shot thru the head.

The corporal pulled him back by the shoulder before I could stop him. He could have been booby trapped. It was a perfect setup cause he had a camera around his neck and this is what the corporal saw and wanted. We both lucked out and he got himself a good souvenir.

We continued our advance for another hour or so. Then some small arms fire rang out. We all hit the ground and strained our eyes to see where it was coming from. Shortly a runner came over the ridge to say that the other platoon had been fired on. I asked if there were any casualties and he said that Pvt. \_\_\_\_\_ had been killed.

Pvt. \_\_\_\_\_ had hounded me for a P-38 Luger I'd acquired D-Day at Salerno. I finally gave in to him and he was tickled pink. I hated parting with it because I'd become accustomed to having it on me at the front. It came with a black holster and an extra clip. The British .38 ammo was interchangeable with it.

At this point I wondered if Pvt. \_\_\_\_\_ had the gun on his person. The runner told me exactly where he was laying. I told my second in command I'd be right back. I found Pvt. \_\_\_\_\_ but no sign of a gun. Maybe he didn't bring it with him. It was a cold thing to do. Search a comrade for a souvenir, but war does funny things to you. I guess we have to become cold otherwise our combat effectiveness would not measure up to expectancy.

I thought later, if Pvt. \_\_\_\_\_ had been killed on the spot I found him then I could have been shot just as well. I was just lucky cause Jerry wasn't looking.

The Company moved into defensive positions for the night.

Next day in the afternoon I was called to the Company CP. Other platoon leaders were there. I don't remember why my platoon didn't have a platoon leader. Certainly the presence of one would've taken a load off my back.

Our orders were to attack and take Hill 730, about 4:00 a.m. preceded by an artillery barrage on the German positions. Two platoons would attack, one in reserve. But here was the clincher. We would attack with fixed bayonets. Don't fire a shot. Wow, here was a first for us.

I couldn't understand it. For years in training, we'd been told what superior firepower our M-1's were over the German Mauser. Now they say attack with fixed bayonets and don't fire a shot. Well orders are orders. I relayed the orders to my squad leaders, but I did emphasize, use your bayonet or fire at your own discretion.

That night I didn't sleep. I moved the platoon into a jump off position. We would now await the artillery barrage that would come in about 3:30 a.m.

About 2:00 a.m. a runner from the Co. CP came looking for me. He had someone with him. It was a Lt. with instructions to take over the platoon. Of course I felt relieved. A big load had been taken off my shoulders.

Later I thought, what a terrible situation for anyone to assume. Here was a young officer, 1st time in combat (I guess) taking over in the dark, doesn't know anyone much less no idea of what lay ahead and had to go into an attack in about an hour. I would have to stay close to him.

At 3:30 a.m. the artillery didn't come. We waited. Here it comes about 4:00 a.m. The half hour delay would prove crucial. It seemed on target. It lasted 10 or 15 minutes. Satisfied that it was over we moved forward.

I knew it wouldn't be long before Jerry would hear us. Thirty men going up a loose rock slope can't go undetected for long. Two machine guns opened up. One directly in front of us, another some 50 or 60 ft. to our right. We hit the ground. They fired about 3 ft. above the ground, it seemed like 3 inches. I watched the tracers of the gun firing in front of me. It stopped. I was silhouetted against the sky a rock mound, like the one the dead German we found earlier. Too far for hand grenades, besides I don't remember having any. A rifle grenade would do the job. I called for the man with the grenade launcher. He was reluctant to use it because it would give our position away. I didn't bother to argue with him. I took the 03 rifle and fired a grenade into the mound in front of me. Couldn't have been more than 50 ft. I must've hit it right for the German screamed in pain. Our man was right, it did give our position away. A rain of grenades came down on us. The 03 had spewed a flame about 4 ft. long that showed them exactly where we were. But to top it off a flare burst above us lighting up the slope we were on. We had to remain even so still. It burned out and one of my GI's, with a fighting heart I envied, leaped forward and hollered "Let's get them M \_\_\_\_\_

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F \_\_\_\_\_. With that move an undetected machine gun opened up from the flank. Almost got him. Another flare lit up the slope. Time was passing, us pinned down and dawn not far away, realizing this, the Lt. ordered the platoon to withdraw. I didn't argue with him. Luckily we came off without any casualties.

At the blinking of an eye, dawn appeared. The platoon reassembled by squads and returned to its former defensive positions.

I looked for the rock mound I'd built the day before. Instead I found a shell hole. Our acting CO had set up an OP about 10 yards from my rock mound. He was killed along with the Artillery Officer and his Sgt., our Communications Sgt. and his runner. Artillery got them. It was rumored later that our own artillery did it. Who knows.

That day at dusk, a unit of Special Forces came into our area. They were to launch an attack on the German positions. We would support them. They numbered about 115 men. Our Co. about 90. The attack would take place the following morning at dawn.

I talked with one of their Sgt's. I'd never heard of the Special Forces. (After this I would never forget them.) He told me they were all convicts with life sentences but would be granted their freedom if they would fight for it. They were Americans and Canadians. They wore a red arrowhead on their shoulders with the words USA and CANADA printed in white. Their force had dwindled down to 115 men from some 1,200. This would be their last combat mission. All survivors would be free.

The next morning at dawn a whistle blew. The Special Forces plus B Co. went over the ridge. I must give credit where credit is due. The Special Forces took the brunt of the attack. Machine guns roared for awhile then silence. Small arms then silence. It was over. Most of the Germans must've seen the determination in the eyes of these men and took off down the slope. The others died with their boots on or were captured. Hill 730 had been secured.

The first German machine gun burst took 5 SF troops. The Sgt. I'd talked with got a slug in his calf. I administered first aid with his kit. Within the hour they'd disappeared from the scene. Shock troops of first quality they were.

We spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day on Hill 730 overlooking the Lire Valley. Beautiful but deadly.

The next day, 26 of December 1943, we came off the mountain, tired, weary, exhausted but thankful.

Every Christmas since then I think of Mt. Sammucro and of those brave men who didn't come down. Some might say, "Why do you want to remember?" or "Why do you even want to think about it?" I have no choice. It's imprinted on my brain. It can't be erased.

I want to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and good health.

Al Dietrick-Editor



Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

# Mule Train

by Gordon Rose

K-Co. 143rd Infantry



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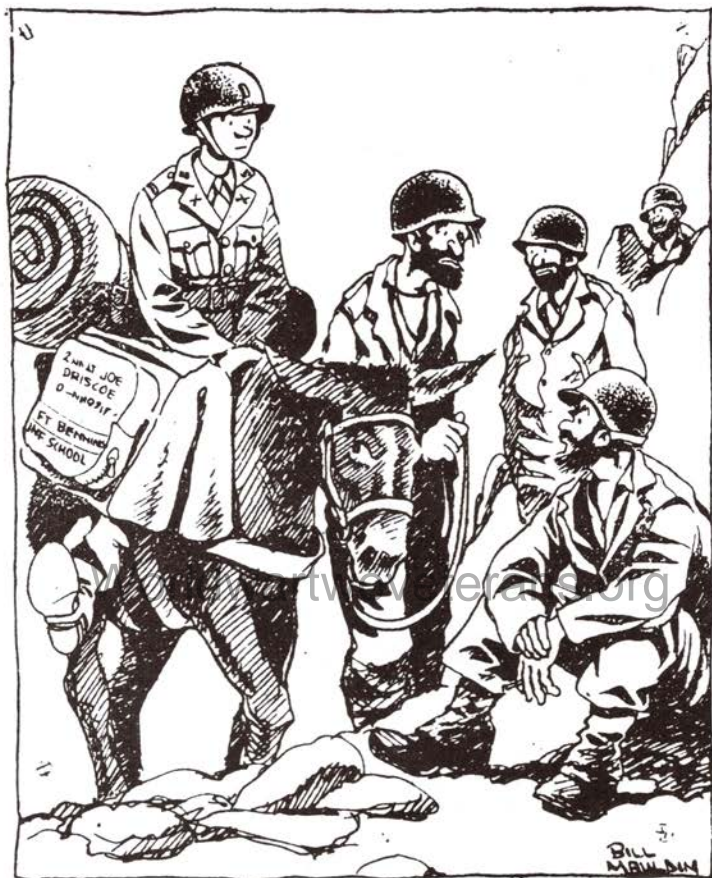
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After our battalion was brought back for R&R, I was "the" noncom selected from our battalion to help develop the first mule train in Italy.

With the help of a short gutsy sergeant of WWI service and 5th Army Hqrs. a large area was scoured for mules, horses, blacksmiths, horseshoes, harnesses, etc. Most of the mule shoes gathered were so worn as to be unacceptable or in short supply that other resolutions had to be developed. The center rod securing the three-shell cluster of artillery ammunition was an answer. Native blacksmiths hammered them into mule shoes acceptable for climbing muddy and rocky mountains.

Finally the mule train became operational. We were ordered by 36th Division Headquarters to set up camp at the termination of a "road" leading from the front lines to the valley below. The location served as a gathering depot of incoming supplies connecting us to the quartermaster companies in the rear.

Weather was a critical factor. "Mud, Mules and Mountains" almost described our situation: human "Misery" should be added, if not otherwise implied.



*"Dammit, ya promised to bring rations this trip."*

Our job was to take up ammo, rations, dry socks and mail and then to return with outgoing mail and bodies for identification and burial.

The camp was located in the center of a complex of large stacks of supplies and a row of artillery pieces. The artillery outfit seemed to be busy all the time. It fired virtually every day, and sporadically it would be fired upon.

We would leave before light (there was no sun to see) and slog up flowing lava mud trails to the troops on the front. On one occasion, in a driving rain, I ordered a soldier off the trail. As I passed him, I recognized Col. William Martin, my regimental commander. Grabbing my reins, I saluted, ducked my head, and moved on up the mountain. Knowing I was feeling "out of order," the colonel just said, "Keep on going, soldier."

We had just returned from one of our daily trips and were watering our mules when an intense artillery barrage hit the camp. I huddled up against my mule, having no cover close by. The concussion nearly knocked us both down. Recovering somewhat, I looked around and saw one of my crew wandering all over the place and crying. I yelled for him to take cover, but he was just too "out of it" to either hear or respond. He just stood there. I ran and tackled him. Then, with the barrage still exploding around us, I half-carried and forcibly dragged him to a stone house nearby where medics took care of the whimpering kid. His war was over.

After the shelling stopped, I assessed the damage to our supplies and checked the mules and our men.

Still standing, the mule whose body had saved me was bleeding from 15 or 20 shrapnel wounds. An officer (I don't recall his name) said he thought the mule should be disposed of. The mule was hurt badly, but I didn't think his wounds were life-threatening.

An Italian farmer (who could have owned the mule before the Army confiscated it) was standing by with a caring and distressful expression, pleading with the officer to release the animal to him. He gestured he would nurse it back to health. Ignoring his pleas, the officer asked others how best to put the mule "out of his misery." I recall someone saying that the surest way to kill him would be to draw a cross on his forehead-left ear to right eye, right ear to left eye-and fire a bullet where the lines crossed. The decision was made.

The officer ordered a large pit be dug so that when the animal was shot, it would immediately be tumbled into his grave.

While I had the guts to run through artillery fire to save the life of a young soldier an hour before, I didn't seem to have the guts to watch the execution of my mule whose body caught shrapnel which otherwise would have been lodged in my own.

Sick to my stomach, I left the immediate area but not so far as to not hear a .45 caliber pistol shot nor the anguished wailing of the Italian farmer. I can still hear it.

In a short and intense moment I understood more fully bonding under stress in that intense moment with a dead mule in the Italian mountains about 45 years ago.

# 12 commanders have led during 20th century



MG John Grebble



MG W.R. 'Billy' Smith

The following is a chronological listing of the commanders of the 36th Infantry Division since its organization:

■ Maj. Gen. John Grebble, commander from Aug. 23, 1917, through Nov. 6, 1917, and then from Dec. 6, 1917, through Aug. 2, 1918. He served in France during this break.

■ Brig. Gen. George Blakely, commander from Nov. 18, 1917, through Dec. 5, 1917, during the absence of Gen. Grebble.

■ Maj. Gen. William 'Billy' R. Smith, from Aug. 3, 1918, through June 18, 1919. He was commander during World War I combat and until demobilization.

■ Maj. Gen. John A. Hulcn, from May 2, 1923, through Sept.





**MG John A. Hulén**



**MG George R. Rains**

9, 1935, the division's first commander after World War I.

■ Maj. Gen. George R. Rains, from Sept. 10, 1935, through Oct. 12, 1936.

■ Maj. Gen. Claude V. Birkhead, from Oct. 13, 1936, through Sept. 12, 1941, commanding during the mobilization prior to World War II.

■ Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker,

from Sept. 13, 1941, through July 7, 1944, commanding while the division was in Africa and Italy.

■ Maj. Gen. John Dahlquist, from July 8, 1944, through Dec. 15, 1945, commanding while the division was in France, Germany and Austria.

■ Maj. Gen. Preston Weathered, from April 29, 1946, through July 7, 1948, first com-

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**MG Claude V. Birkhead**



**MG Fred L. Walker**

mander after World War II.

■ Maj. Gen. H. Miller Ainsworth, from July 8, 1948, through March 1, 1953.

■ Maj. Gen. Carl L. Phinney, from March 2, 1953, through Sept. 21, 1961.

■ Maj. Gen. Everett S. Simpson, from Sept. 22, 1961, through Jan. 15, 1968, commanding upon "stand-down."



**MG John Dahlquist**



**MG Preston Weathered**



**MG H. Miller Ainsworth**



**MG Carl L. Phinney**



**MG Everett S. Simpson**

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# Soldier 'Close-Call' Tales Rest On Strange Bullet With No One's 'Number'

By Sgt. James E. Farmer

(The following was written by Army Correspondent James E. Farmer in the Spring of 1944.)



WITH THE 36TH INFANTRY DIVISION IN ITALY -- A strange type of German shell or bullet which bears no certain soldier's "number" has been described here in a grim jesting by infantrymen of the 36th (Texas) Division. This kind of missile bears a number which is either one digit above or one digit below "your number."

The shells and bullets are those mentioned in the narrow-escape stories of combat veterans. Some sound like tall tales, but they're all true.

Probably the "Prince of Close Calls" is a Texas Irishman called "Old Folks" by his buddies. He affirms that he has foiled German attempts to do him in with concussion grenades, artillery shells and land mines. And all he has had to show for the experiences have been a few bruises and a hole in his helmet.

Here is Old Folks' story:

"Our platoon was pinned down behind a ridge by a machinegun. I was sent forward to locate it and knock it out. The moon was so bright you could read a newspaper by it. I crawled over the ridge and up a small incline toward a wall-like structure at the town's edge.

"All was quiet, strangely quiet. I quit crawling and decided to lay flat, to locate the machinegun's crew by sound -- by waiting and listening. Then I heard something plop at my side. It was an egg-shaped object, a German concussion grenade. I knocked it out of my range with my hand and then it exploded. Another plopped at my side and I knocked it away, too.

"I knew there must be a German looking down on me from above, carefully tossing grenades at me like he was throwing cards into a hat. The third grenade plopped farther from my side. I picked it up and tossed it in the direction of the German. A fourth grenade landed out of reach. I ducked my head in a shell hole and waited for the explosion.

“There was a ‘bang’ and I felt something hit my leg. It seemed like my leg was partially torn off. I dared not move it. I was afraid it might not be there at all. But when I did feel it, I discovered it was completely whole and only bruised -- not even any blood! I aimed where I thought the German was peering over at me and fired. All was quiet again. Then I was ordered to re-join my platoon.”

Old Folks’ story goes on with him in position on the flat top of a knoll where four German artillery shells hit within a 400-square foot area. Luckily, they were all duds. Said Old Folks, “I’ve heard of two duds falling in succession. And maybe now and then three duds, one after the other. But that was the first time four ever fell like that.”

His platoon was crossing an open field when a buddy in front of him stepped on a mine. Somehow by instinct Old Folks dropped his head forward as the mine exploded. A fragment hit the front of his helmet, penetrated the steel and inner liner and then stopped just short of entering his forehead.

Another infantryman owes his life to a small Bible he was carrying in his shirt pocket over his heart. A German bullet spent itself in the book’s pages. Similarly, a map saved a signal wireman who had driven through an intense shelling. He stopped his jeep to refer to a map in his hip pocket. Lodged in the folds of the map was a piece of shell fragment.

A shell hit inches away from one “double foxhole” in which two soldiers were lying. It burrowed into the ground under their hold, threw them into the air and then peeked its nose out on the other side of the hole. The shell was a dud. The two shaken GIs offered their thanks to what one called “a worker in the Czechoslovakian ammunition factory.”

Another dud landed between the legs of an artilleryman who was crawling up a mountain slope to his observation post. The shell came so close it bruised both legs.

By what they called “instinct or just plain luck,” two doughboys told how they were at the right place at the right time. They’d been lying in their front-line foxholes for many hours under many shellings. They decided they’d give their bodies a stretch by crawling a few yards behind them to a building. Another shelling opened up after they reached the building. When they returned to their holes a few minutes later, they discovered a shell had made a direct hit on one hole and that a tree had fallen into the other.

Many soldiers here have marvelled at the luck of Sergeant Charles (Commando) Kelly, the Congressional Medal of Honor winner, who went through more than 70 days of the fiercest combat with no more than a scratch on his nose. Kelly’s complete lack of fear meant he was “sticking out his chin” at the Germans more often than most soldiers, they rationalized. Once when the Pittsburgh hero was out on a patrol -- and closer to the enemy than the buddy who shared a foxhole with him -- the pal was killed by a direct shell hit on the hole. At one time his company encountered such deadly resistance, the casualties narrowed down its non-commissioned officer personnel to only Kelly.

Most of the narrow-escape survivors make the same observation as Old Folks: “I don’t know how I could be so near ‘my number’ and yet be so far from it. I really believe a sort of Divine guidance has brought me through.”

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# The Berbers--- Those Tough Nightfighters (Moroccans from the Atlas Mountains)

The Sand-Witch (Vol. IV, Issue #7)

by James Q. Townley, Editor

Worldwar2veterans.org



What was so special about this particular night in Budd Stringfellow's life? Let's listen to him tell about it.

"While squatting dead-still in my foxhole, protected from a surprise attack by enemy assailants with dried corn stalks surrounding my dugout...husks sensitive to even a breath of air, to warn me of an intruder! The atmosphere was so tense it almost twanged!

"Suddenly, without the least rustling of the husks surrounding me, I was grabbed from behind in a throttling necklock with a powerful hand covering my mouth and nose...and another equally strong hand feeling for my throat.

"A swift review of those past sins of commission and omission had only started, when it was mercifully interrupted. My Berber assailant almost instantly released me and simply vanished into the night without a sound!

"I remember wearing a week-old, smelly sweat-soaked army wool khaki shirt with a big safety pin on each collar lapel...which identified me as a GI. That's what saved my throat from being slit! And my ears!

"In spite of being warned, several GI's asked to see the Berbers' knives...and suffered pricked fingers as a punishment. The Berber code was, 'Don't draw your knife unless it draws blood!' It was little wonder that the German soldiers were terrified of these nightfighters...who collected ears instead of prisoners!"

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# Prisoner of War: "Lost Battalion"

"E" Bat. 131st E.A. Bn.

*Submitted by: James E. Hodges, 111th Engineer*



James & Shrimp Hodges,

*The following information is submitted to the 36th Infantry Division Historical Quarterly by James E. Hodges, Division Historian, after a lengthy interview and video taping on August 2, 1991.*

This is the testimony and experiences of James Woodrow Farrar, ASN-38050623, Bat. "E", 131st E.A., 2nd Battalion, of the 36th Infantry Division (Texas National Guard) which was called into federal service November 1940, and stationed at Camp Bowie, Texas just outside of Brownwood, Texas.

I, James Woodrow Farrar, ASN-38050623, was captured by the Japanese during WWII and these are the happenings before, during, and after my interment in several of the Japanese prison camps.

To begin, I was a student of John H. Reagan Sr. High School in Houston, Texas where I played football, and had a very enjoyable tenure there. It was a trying time for many of us, because of the great depression of the 1930's.

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I graduated in 1936 and started to work shortly thereafter at the Mission Manufacturing Co. for forty cents an hour and was not paid any premium wages for any overtime which I may have put in. I got along fairly well on what I made and I might add that it was my lot to care for my widowed mother who passed away in 1938.

On the sixteenth day of January 1941, I joined the United States Army because at that time they were asking men to volunteer for one year and then be discharged. It was thought that by doing this, we would be trained to some extent and if by chance there was a war, we would have had some training.

We were sent to a reception center at Camp Bowie, Texas, which was just outside of Brownwood, Texas. We were not allowed to move unless the sergeant said so, and lights out came very early in the evening. It was in the middle of winter and very cold.

In just a few days we were assigned to our units. My assignment was to be the 131st field artillery. There was much training going on at the time. We would get up very early in the morning and have reveille and then eat breakfast. It would not be long before we would be in the field training.

The war in Europe was heating up and we were sure it would not be long till we would be drawn into it. After ten months of training, the whole division was sent on one of the largest peace time maneuvers ever. There would be a half million men from all over the army taking part in it. We were to go to Louisiana and train there for over two months.

The training was rigouous and we would be without sleep for several days while we went through various parts of the maneuvers. Some of the training was at night and we just knew that our trucks would run into something in the dark since we were not able to use the headlights of the trucks.

It was late September before we returned to Camp Bowie. Everyone was glad to get out of backwoods and swamps of Louisiana. We no sooner got back than we were ordered to leave again, I believe it was in about three weeks that the order came down. There were all kinds of rumors, and one of them was called "Operation Plum." We later learned that this was a code name for an army operation or expedition.

Some of us were transferred from "B" battery to "E" battery of the 131st FA. so that it would have a full complement of men. We did not know it at the time but we would be on our way by train to Angels Island, California, which was just out of San Francisco. We arrived at Angel Island and was there getting some equipment and clothing, etc. There was no time for further training.

Ten days after arriving at Angels Island, we boarded an army transport and set sail for "Operation Plum," wherever that was to be. We were in a convoy and had some 13,000 troops. After many long days at sea, and I say many long days, because there was little to do and the ship was only going about 9 knots forward speed (about 11 mph). The ship which we were on was the U.S.S. Army Transport Republic. It had been used in WWI.

Land was sighted one day, and we all crowded to see it. Some said it was



the Hawaiian Islands. Landing at Honolulu and given shore leave, we had no money. Most of us were dead broke because we had not been paid for two months. My pay at that time was just \$21 a month as a private. We were only in Honolulu for one day.

The following day the ship set out to sea again. The captain read the orders to us over the loud speaker. We were to go to the Philippine Islands as replacement troops for some that may be moving. Being at sea again caused many of the men to get seasick. After about six days we felt the propellers stop and we were dead in the water. Everyone wondered why we had stopped. Before long we were told to put our uniforms on and life gear, and to report up on deck. Everyone gathered on the weather deck and waited.

The cruiser Pennsicola came along side and shot a line over to us. The captain of our ship took the note and read it aloud to all of us. Pearl Harbor had been bombed. We were all stunned. We were ordered to stand by for further orders. It was not long till the President, Mr. Roosevelt came over the radio and announced that we were in a state of war with Germany, Japan and the other axis countries.

This changed our orders, and we were then ordered to Australia. We were to go via the Fiji Islands and that we would be named "Task Force #1." The convoy proceeded to the Fiji Islands and took on provisions at Suva, Fiji but were not allowed to go ashore. I felt that those of us on the "Republic" were geared for war with what fire power and equipment we had. We were to stand watch 24 hours a day.

Leaving Suva, Fiji, we made way to Brisbane, Australia and were given a welcome by the people. Many of us were invited to their homes and were given very good hospitality. It was not long till we were eating Christmas dinner and it was quite a change because it was summer time there. At home it is winter time. Rumors were that we would be a permanent party there in Brisbane.

That was a short term rumor, because we were given a partial payment. This allowed us to buy some things and to have a good time. The money was different than U.S. currency. We were there just four days before boarding the Dutch ship, "The Blume Fountain," which left for the port of Soerbaja, Java, a Dutch province of East Indies.

After landing, we debarked and was put on a small train and after riding 70 miles, we arrived at Malong, a Dutch garrison and airfield. We were to stay there for about 2 and a half months. Our stay was enjoyable until the Japs began to bomb and staff us. This brought a reality that we were in war with Japan.

The Japs really poured it on us. To retaliate we fired our French 75MM and fifty caliber machine guns at them but with little effect. We worked at the airfield gassing up the B-17's that had gotten out of the Philipines. It was a bad time and we tried very hard to hide the planes by camouflaging them, but it didn't work, they found them and destroyed them. Most of them could not get off the ground in time. Those that did get out were sent to Australia.

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I want to add that to our sorrow, some of the men volunteered to act as gunners on the B-17's, two of them were from "E" battery and they were killed.

We were left in Java by ourselves. There was no hope of being evacuated. It was a terrible time for all of us. Orders were given to us to proceed to Soerabaja, Java to take on the Japs. There was every expectation that the Japs would try to land very soon. We only had to wait a week before it happened.

All of us fought as best we could. The air belonged to the Japs and there was precious little we could do about it. There were so few of us against so many Japs. A Dutch officer came one day and told us to get a boat and go over to the small island of Madoera, just off the coast of Java. It was hoped that from there we might find a boat and try to get to Australia.

We did get to the island Madoera, and got a small train to take us to the port there. It was a forlorn thought. All the boats had been sunk in the harbor by the Japs, or the Dutch who did not want to leave anything of value and used the scorched earth policy.

Finding no way to get out, we loaded back on the small train and headed back to Soefabaja, Java intending to stand and fight. It was not to be. The Dutch ordered us to surrender all of our arms. One of our battery officers gave us a speech in which he said if we wanted to keep our arms and fight, we could. He also told us that the situation was next to being hopeless, and that if we decided to stand and fight, we would all be killed.

This was a hard decision. It was decided to stack our arms and proceed back to Soerabaja. We did not get into the town, before surrendering to our enemies. Believe you me, I fully expected to be shot on the spot. It was very hard to know what to do. I looked at my buddie who was as pale as a ghost, and I said, "Roy it looks like this is it," and he looked back at me, and said, "Yep, I guess so."

I couldn't believe it, the Japs did not know what to do with us. They were sort of surprised to find so many Americans so far from home. They imprisoned us inside a fenced area, and we were pretty much left to ourselves. This was not to last very long, as you will hear later.

About a month later we were loaded on a boat, and went to Soerabaja, Java, where we were imprisoned in a bombed out warehouse with barbed wire all around the area. We were beginning to feel what it was like to be a P.O.W. Our group, "E" battery became separated from the rest of the battalion. They were sent on to Batavia, Java without us.

We were now the lost battery of the "Lost Battalion." The Japs put us in work details. We were cleaning up the debris and filling in the bomb holes in the streets, buildings, etc. The building in which we were imprisoned was an old warehouse. The floor was concrete and there were no beds or other things there, just empty except for us. Even if we found some wood to build a bed, the bugs took over and made it miserable.

Five months went by, and the Japs moved us to an old school building. This is the place I will not soon forget. Here is where the Japs gave me my first beating. We were sitting down playing cards and this Jap guard came over

and said something. I didn't understand, and he started beating me. They would make you stand up at attention, and then beat you. I got mine for not bowing to this Jap guard.

Our next move was to Batavia, the capitol of Java. It was just up the coast. We were not here long. The Japs loaded us on a ship that I will call the "Hell" ship. When I say "Hell Ship," that is exactly what it was. This ship was bound for Singapore. They loaded us into a hold that had been used for rice and there were small grains of it all over.

The weather was extremely hot and when they loaded us into the hold on the ship, there was about 2 square feet for any one person. No one could lay down, and moving was almost impossible. After awhile it nearly became intolerable. If anyone tried to lay down, it was a hardship on the others. Sitting was about the only thing that could be done. Your behind was sore from setting on the deck of the hold and those small kernels of rice didn't help any.

The Japs would not let us on deck to get fresh air. It was stifling below decks. We forgot what it was like to breathe fresh air for six days. There was pitifully little food during those six days. I remember some of the guys would try to get up on deck and the Japs would kick them back down in the hold. When we got water, it was watered down tea, without the tea.

We finally arrived in Singapore. Most of us were sick from the heat and lack of food and water. I was very sick, and could not stand up. They were unloading us onto the dock and I remember laying down, and when the Japs came over to where I was, they motioned for me to get up. I was too sick and told them, "Go ahead and shoot me." One of the men of "E" battery helped me up and onto a truck. If he had not done this, I would not be telling this story now.

The Japs took us into Singapore to a camp and placed in a large area with a fence around it. The treatment was similar to being in Madoera, we were left alone. This was something I liked. There were other men here in this P.O.W. camp. I met and talked with some of the sailers from the original "Cruiser Houston." It was so good to see them. We did not think any of them survived during the sinking of the Houston in the battle of the Java Sea. There were only a few of the battalion there. Most were sent to Burma-India. They were left because they were too sick to go.

You would think that when you got to a more stable area, the food would get better. It was almost non-existent. Five weeks went by and we were headed for Japan. They loaded us onto a ship called the Maru something or other. While we were under way, it turned cold and we almost froze before winter clothing was given to us. The Japs must have captured some clothing of the U.S. and the British because this is what was given to us to wear.

Arriving in Nagasaki, Japan on about the 7th of Dec., 1942, it was cold and raining. There was mud everywhere and when we didn't keep up, the guards would hollar at us and many of the guys were kicked and beaten. We must have marched 2 or 3 miles from where we unloaded from the ship. This was to be our home for the next two to three years.

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The Japs assigned us to various jobs in the shipyard. The men were mistreated many times. If you didn't move fast enough, you were beaten. I got into a scrap with a Jap conscript laborer. Just as I hit him, a Jap naval guard came by. The guard beat me for thirty minutes and made me stand at rigid attention while this went on. Strangely enough he didn't knock me down. I felt like just falling to the ground so it would stop, but I was afraid he would stomp me if I did. I was taken back into camp, and beaten some more. They threw me into solitary.

The confinement to solitary was in an old one hole toilet. They had sealed the hole with a 1" by 4" board, and I didn't have room to sit up or lay down. At the time I had two carbunkles, one on each shoulder. And it was misery. Several days later, they came and got me. I went before a kind of kangaroo court where I pleaded my own case. I really did think this would be for my life. They handed me a piece of paper and told me to draw on the paper what happened. I was never good at drawing, but I can tell you that I tried to do it this time.

My punishment was better than I thought, I believe to this day that this is what saved my life. All this time in solitary, I received half rations of rice only and was in solitary for 13 days. I thank God for my release.

The time was drawing near for the close of the war. We could hear the B-29's coming over to bomb Japan, and had to go to the air raid shelters several times and were packed like rats in a hole.

The Japs moved us about 70 miles up the island to the coal mines in Orio. Some of the guys were made to work in the mines under terrible conditions and frequent beatings. I was assigned to digging an air raid shelter. There was a typhoon and it nearly blew us all away. Several buildings including the mess hall and kitchen were destroyed. This caused us to get even less food.

The patient waiting, beatings, lack of food and shelter, medicine, etc. came to an end. An American recovery team came to our camp in August of 1945 and ran up Old Glory. What a beautiful site. It was then that I thanked God for my freedom and my life.

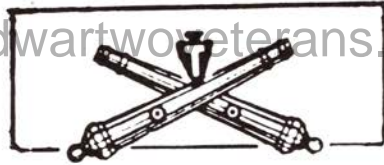
**James Woodrow Farrar, U.S. Army, Battery "E,"  
131st FA, 2nd Battalion, 36th Infantry Division, The Lost Battalion.**



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# A Battery Executive Dream Came True In Italy

by Lt. Col. (Ret.) Harold I. Owens  
133rd FA Br.



An Artillery Battery Executive's dream is to give the order "Fire-At-Will" and it happened to me in June 1944, in the Italian campaign. "Some are getting away, fire as fast as you can," yelled the forward observer (FO) over our gun position radio, I instantly changed the method of fire to "Fire-At-Will," and all four gun sections went into a rapid-fire mode. Capt. Richard C. Clack, Commanding, B Btry., 133rd FA Bn, recalls the well-trained and experienced gun crews, firing the guns at 778 miles elevation, maximum range, could have three or four rounds of the 33-pound projectiles in the air before the first round exploded on hitting the target. He said, "It was amazing how fast they fired the guns."

This "rapid fire" mission occurred on June 12, 1944 when B Btry. was detached from the Bn and assigned to support the 171st Reconnaissance Group, during a special mission near Grosseto, Italy. The 36th Division was moving up the west coast of Italy, reducing road blocks and fighting German rear guard action.

Civilians coming in from the mountains, on our right flank, said a German Calvary Division was in the mountains. Capt. Slack reported to the Recon. GP. Commander (CO). The Recon. CO explained his tactics were to send his troops, in-line abreast, up into the mountains, and since it was a reconnaissance they would be spread on a broad front, in scout cars and jeeps.

Capt. Slack explained that his Btry. could not support all three troops at one time. Capt. Slack suggested we support the center troop and follow it, the Recon. CO agreed. On the second day as we proceeded up the roads, some hardly qualified as a road.

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Capt. Slack rode at the head of the Btry. Column, sometimes he went ahead with the Recon. Troop. I stayed at the head of the firing btry. I received radio commands to move forward. We were moving on the road, in daylight, as a "fire mission" was received, by radio, from Lt. James Madison, our FO with the Recon. Troop. Quickly the six by six primeover trucks, with 105mm Howitzers in-tow, were turned into a nearby open field. Although the men were tired from being in the line since pushing out of Anzio, we had heard we would get some rest soon, but their adrenalin started flowing as soon as they heard the command "Prepare-For-Action." As this was a rapid occupation of position the guns were placed in firing position, in a straight line, like at "training camp, for cannoneers hop" about 100 yard Btry. front. In a rapid occupation of position and operating separately the Btry. had to perform location by map inspection. The Btry. survey members, the recorder, and I computed elevations, angles of site, and deflections for the settings on the guns. The guns were laid for direction by compass, we constructed the firing chart and set the firing tables on the slide rule. This was a departure from the usual procedure because these measurements, calculations, and firing data computations were normally done by Bn. survey section and fire direction center, and then transmitted to me.

The FO described the target as horse mounted troops near a road. Initial firing with #1 gun was made to enable the FO to make adjustments to hit the target, a bend in the road. In order to reach the "bend in the road" it was necessary to elevate the guns to 778 mils, shooting maximum range of 12,500 yards, with all seven powder charges propelling the shell. Madison requested "fire-for-effect"; in turn I gave the command, "Btry. four rounds." When this firing was complete, Madison yelled over the radio, "Some are getting away, fire as fast as you can," which was a little unique for an FO fire request. I promptly transferred the fire request and commanded the firing battery to "FIRE-AT-WILL 778," causing the gun crews to go into a rapid fire mode, firing the guns as fast as possible.

The empty 105 mm shell cases piled up behind each of the four guns. This was the only case that I ordered the Btry. to "Fire-At-Will" during a year as Btry. Executive in combat; the guns became quite hot and they could have received damage.

Cpl. Daniel H. Brown, member of #1 gun crew, recalls, "realizing the severity of this fire mission, and the fact of using charge seven, we foresake all personal safety precautions." Other U.S. troops nearby noticed that the B Btry. gun crews were becoming exhausted, reloading and firing the guns, as soon as the gun tubes returned to battery. They came over and helped our men uncase ammunition, according to Brown and Cpl. Peter J. Constant, FO party member, at the gun position during the rapid firing.

The diary entry on June 12, 1944 of Cpl. Robert C. Barlow, gun crew member, reads, "We shot up a bunch of recon, cars and calvary." On June 13 his diary read, "Saw a btry. of 88's knocked out."

1st. Sgt. Doyle H. Allen, recalls, after completion of the rapid-fire mission, he rode in a jeep up to see the damage. "There were horses, dead and crippled, artillery pieces that they had tried to hook up and move out, dead Germans were left and local people were searching them."

Before the fire mission Capt. Slack and his advance party had picked up a group of German soldiers who had run out of the woods, unarmed, and with their arms raised in surrender. He recalls never seeing German soldiers quite like these, although, they were in German uniform. They were dressed in cavalry boots and leather seated britches. They had dark and very swarthy skin and short of stature, obviously mongolian. We understood they had been recruited into the German army, they didn't like the Russian regime, so they joined the German army. "Obviously they were sent to the western front rather than the Russian," said Capt. Slack, now Col. (Ret.)

B Btry. fired 396 rounds of 105 mm ammunition during June 11 and 12, 1944, according to the Bn. ammunition report.



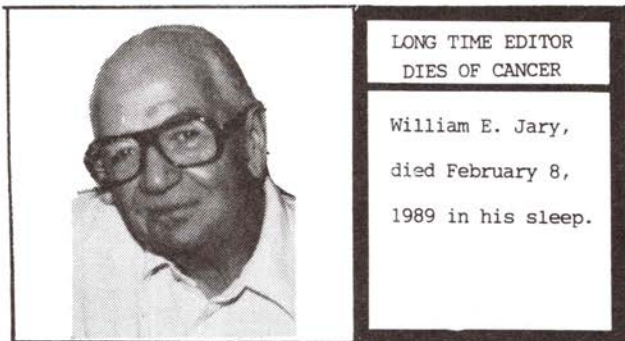
Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

# The Battle Story of Texas 36th Division

By Bill Jary (World War II Editor of  
36th Division Newspaper, the T-Patch)

Worldwartwoveterans.org

Since June 1971, William E. Jary  
Edited and Produced the T Patcher  
Newsletter for over seventeen and  
a half years to November 1988 -  
A total of 70 issues.



Worldwartwoveterans.org

This article by Bill Jary was printed in T-Patcher twenty years past. Your editor discovered copies of it in Bill's files. This part concerns Italy and if he wrote the story of Southern France I've not located it. If located it will be published in the Quarterly. Your editor.



## CHAPTER I



After 500 days of combat, two amphibious invasions, and five major campaigns, men of the 36th Division—the “Texas” Division—can look back upon its achievements with pride and satisfaction in recalling the story of combat that began on the red-letter day of September 9, 1943... Bloody Salerno.

In a planning tent near Arzew, Africa, staff officers of the 36th Division bent over a huge table-top replica of the beaches at Salerno and studied the possibilities that loomed before them. This was to be known as “Operation Avalanche.”

The 36th had been readied to make the first invasion of Hitler’s Festung Europa. As the spearhead for the newly-organized Fifth Army, the men were members of the first United States Army of World War II activated abroad. Theirs was distinctly a United States Army.

### Before Them The Battlefields

Behind the men of the 36th lay months and years of training. Before them lay unnamed battlefields of Hitler’s mighty European fortress. For the trials ahead the men reviewed the lessons learned at Camp Bowie, where the Texas National Guard was activated Nov. 25, 1940. They recalled the Louisiana maneuvers, the training under the hot Florida sun at Camp Blanding, the North Carolina maneuvers, and the cold New England weather at Camp Edwards.

They remembered the thirteen days it took to travel from New York to Oran over a calm Atlantic Ocean. The sight of land, if only a huge mountain mass in the distance swelled their pride. The day was April 13, 1943.

Algeria and French Morocco had been fairly pleasant. The North African nights cool, the days work-filled with various training, Oran, Rabat, Casablanca and Mostaganem—all had been cities good to the men from Texas, and passes had come often.

As time drew near for their debut as fighting men, the 36th were confident, ready. Then on Sept. 3 from the port which they had first glimpsed, the Doughboys turned their backs on Africa and once more steamed out into the blue Mediterranean.

D-Day began for the men long before a full moon came out of the smooth Tyrrhenian Sea to land like a searchlight over the beaches. At one minute past midnight of Sept. 9—loud speakers on the transport called the first boat teams to their stations.

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### **Tension Before the Landing**

The men were destined to be the first American troops on European soil were lowered into the landing crafts. These men from Texarkana and Brownwood, from Dallas and Houston, Jersey and New York were tense now. Their eyes strained toward the towering Mount Soprano behind the beaches of ancient Paestum searching expectantly the starlighted Italian skies.

The calm sea was soon alive with snub-nosed craft circling to reach their proper positions. In the darkness some of the coxswains failed to locate their leaders. Lanes had been previously swept through the mine fields, but occasionally mines broke free and drifted into the paths which the boats were trying to follow. Spray drenched the men and their equipment. Many became seasick. At length, the first assault waves, turned east behind the guide boats toward the rendezvous deployment line, 6,000 yards from the beaches of Paestum.

The 141st and 142nd Regimental Combat Teams of the 36th Division, under orders from Gen. Mark Clark, the VI Corps, and in turn, the 36th Division Commander Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker were to land as assault forces, in six waves, advance to the railroad station about 2,500 yards inland, reorganize, then move on to their objectives—the hills 10 miles distant.

The beaches of Paestum were dark and silent. The first wave grated all four designated beaches exactly at H-Hour 0330. Flares went up immediately—and enemy guns opened fire. Into a flaming inferno of death and destruction, men of the 36th stumbled out of LCI's. On the hills behind the beaches were German 88's, below them enemy machine guns thickly sprinkled. The landing at Salerno had been no surprise to the Germans.

### **Baptism of Blood**

Shells screaming overhead, started falling among boats fighting to surge closer to the sandy beaches. Fires from burning craft began to send streaking glows out over the water. The noise of the attack grew into bedlam.

Men of the 42nd, creeping, crawling, and running, worked their way through barbed wire and around enemy machine guns. Behind them shells continued to form geysers in the water and equipment from stricken craft floated offshore.

The 36th stood and fought there on the beaches of Paestum until the waters of the bay were turned into a crimson foam. They fought against German Panzer units, heavy steel monsters who had neared the water's edge in an attempt to drive the T-men back into the sea. Despite the red-hot steel of the Wehrmacht which tore gaps in the wall of the Texas line, the 36th fought on until the Mark IV's retreated into the hills. The Doughboys were not to be driven into the sea. Men in combat less than half a day became veterans; their acts of bravery and heroism became routine.

James Logan, of Luling, Texas, won the Congressional Medal of Honor for single-handedly destroying the machine gun nests and sniper positions that held up a battalion, then volunteered for the most dangerous of reconnaissance missions.

Manuel (Ugly) Gonzales discovered an 88mm gun firing from the dunes toward our landing craft. Machine gun tracers set fire to his pack but he wiggled out of it and crawled on past exploding grenades toward the gun. He threw his own grenades, killed the crew and blew up their ammo. For this he received the DSC award.

### **One Yank Crew vs. 13 Tanks**

Lt. John W. Whitaker with his gun crew of a cannon company, slugged it out with 13 German tanks, knocked out five and captured eleven prisoners, staving off a serious counterattack.

To consider the beachhead secure, the high ground on the small mountain-side villages of Altavilla and Albanella had to be taken. Resistance was quickly overcome at Albanella, but a different story was recorded at Altavilla. For six days the battle for Altavilla raged back and forth.

It was here that Tech. Sgt. Charles E. (Commando) Kelly became the first in the European theater to receive the nation's highest award...the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Lt. William Bjorklund destroyed two machine gun nests with a German rifle, and Pvt. William Crawford grenaded a series of machine gun nests until he was captured, both received the Medal of Honor for their extraordinary heroism.

### **Black Monday...Our Darkest Day**

German reinforcements were gathered in the mountains to the east. Savage counter-attacks were coming. The 36th pulled back to establish defensive positions. Monday, Sept. 12, became the darkest day in the division's battle for a foothold on the peninsula of Italy.

The division's engineers feverishly went to work laying 7,000 mines and two belts of barbed wire spread over the 5-mile defense area along La Cost Creek, four kilometers from Altavilla. The dreaded German attack failed and the next day the engineers removed their defenses in advance of a new drive, that finally drove the Hun out of the hilltop town.

The beachhead now secure and their mission accomplished, the 36th Division was relieved and taken out of the line for reinforcements and rest. Those twelve bloody days on the beach had been costly. More than 2,000 casualties were suffered.

What lay ahead...no one knew, but history tells of many more struggles...like San Pietro, Cassino, Rapido River, the breakout from Anzio, Velletri, Rome, the invasion of Southern France, winter fighting in the Vosges Mountains, the Siegfried Line and final victory in Germany.

## **Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly** **Rapido River San Pietro and Cassino** **CHAPTER II**

The Italian winter with its wind, rain, slush, snow, and mud was compared with the fighting during the days of the American Revolution. Said Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker, division commander, "The suffering at Valley Force does not even compare with the privations the men of the 36th faced in Italy."

### **Mud, Mountains and Mules**

After nearly two months of reinforcing, and rest since the 12 bloody days at Salerno, doughboys of the 36th again took up battle positions on November 14, 1943, when the T-Patchers relieved the 3rd Division in the Mignano sector, 10 miles south of Cassino.

So began one of the most trying periods of the division in combat.

The mountain passes that lay ahead on the rocky road to Rome were occupied by fanatic Germans with defensive positions deeply embedded in rock. The Nazis literally sat on the hills and just booted the GI's in the face in every assault.

### **San Pietro's "Death Valley"**

In all the fighting from the beaches of Salerno, San Pietro was one of the bloodiest, most bitter and toughest battles of World War II, just 100 days after the invasion.

Men of the 143rd Infantry Regiment of the 36th Division called it "Death Valley" because they were on a rampage for 48 hours as they stormed this enemy fortress ringed by fortifications, dug into the terraced slopes commanding the Liri Valley.

Before the Fifth Army could advance along the road to Rome, this fortress had to be taken.

The battle began when the 143rd attacked at mid-day behind a heavy artillery barrage. Casualties were heavy and some companies lost all their officers, either killed or wounded.

While one group worked its way slowly along the slopes from the east in face of heavy fire, another attacked from the south out of the valley. Both ran into murderous fire from Nazi machine guns and mortars hidden in the caves and rubbles of the battered little town on the slopes of Mount Sammucro.

One company, led by Capt. Charles Beacham, San Antonio, reached the edge of the town and had to turn back in face of direct fire.

### **Seven Riflemen Left**

After two company commanders were killed, Lt. Eden C. Bergman, Clifton, Texas, took over command and reorganized the troops and led them

back into the fight. He took his men deep into the German lines but had to withdraw when he had only seven riflemen left.

Battered by artillery fire and mortar fire, hammered by repeated attacks by the T-Patchers, and unable to pierce the American lines—the German pulled back from the San Pietro defenses toward San Vittore and the Rapido River line below the town of Cassino.

Out of all this mud and cold of those ragged mountains, comes the inspiration for the now famous Mauldin Cartoons, whose Willie and Joe exemplified the GI who fought and bled during the winter fighting in Italy.

Most notable example was the story written by the late Ernie Pyle, when he immortalized a man who was so beloved by the men who fought with him. That man was Capt. Henry T. Waskow of Belton, Texas, a company commander of the 143rd Infantry Regiment. Those who saw the Ernie Pyle movie, "GI Joe" will immediately recognize Capt. Waskow as the captain whose body was brought down the mountain lying belly-down on the back of a mule.

### **They Remember Rapido River**

Following the fall of San Pietro, doughboys of the 36th Division had many bloody battles yet to come. The name "Rapido River" is engraved in the memory of those men who fought across this icy stream that runs in front of Cassino.

Between San Pietro and Cassino stood another small Italian village, San Vittore. The Germans had made the town another fortress along the road to Rome.

San Vittore died beneath terrible crashing explosions of American artillery. Men of the Texas Division moved on to Rapido.

Fighting during January 1944, men of the 36th found days and nights of mud, cold rain and snow, very little sleep in water-logged foxholes and ditches with the constant noise of their own batteries and the more dangerous counterpoint of German guns, eating nothing but cold rations for days on end, and seeing their own units thinned out and their best friends disappear.

On the night of January 20-21, which was to coincide with the Anzio beachhead invasion, Texans of the 36th launched a drive to cross the Rapido River.

This treacherous stream, about 40 feet wide, 20 to 30 feet deep was swift and icy cold. The Germans had cleared all the trees and brush and literally laced it with machine guns. Preceding the crossing, some 39,000 rounds of artillery were pumped into the Germans on the opposite side of the river.

### **Both Sides Mined**

Both sides of the river had been mined by the Germans and they had strewn barbed wire across the far side. Almost every rubber assault boat used in the crossing was punctured and sunk. Men tossed into the freezing waters, struggled

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to reach shore, but many were swished downstream never to be seen again.

German artillery had zeroed in on spots where engineers had tried eight times to build foot bridges, but still they came only to find themselves under a murderous crossfire of numerous machine guns, and mortar fire.

By dawn the first attack was known to have failed and remnants of 141st and 143rd Regiments were hastily gathered together and on January 21 we tried again.

The second crossing was attempted, but again the incessant death chatter of enemy guns was met with courage that will hardly know an equal.

By night, the last remnants of two proud regiments gathered together in the shadow of loaf-shaped Mount Trachio, prepared again for a third attack.

### Third Try Cancelled

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At the last minute, the third try was cancelled, and the Rapido River remained as a monument to those who died or, failing death had been made prisoners, or who had been carried torn and bleeding to the merciful hands of the medicos.

Tacticians say the distraction to this crossing made possible the ease with which the original assault at Anzio was carried out, and doing so served a purpose.

They were called "Men of Texas," but these heroes were listed from every State in the Union and two of the Territories. To them Rapido River, with almost 2,000 casualties in 48 hours, spelled an incident unequalled in the chronicles of the 36th Division.

But still tenacious, the division moved on February 1, to the Mount Castellone sector east of Cassino, to protect the vital flank of a series of attacks on "The Abbey Hill."

Men of the 36th continued to kill Germans until the division was relieved on February 24th. Artillery units of the 36th, however, remained in the lines for weeks, continued to duel with German howitzers emplaced behind the Monastery Hill.

And so the end of the winter fighting came to the 36th. Of the men who had fought valiently through the Liri Valley from San Pietro to Monastery Hill, the division commander has been quoted as saying: "I know of no greater exhibition of mass heroism, nor do I ever expect to learn of another."

## Velletri...The Key to Rome CHAPTER III

Spring in Italy had been a pleasant contrast with the winter fighting men of the 36th Division had experienced in the four-month struggle through the Liri Valley hammering the Germans' mountain defenses, from San Pietro to Cassino.

Needing rest and rejuvenation, the Division moved into a rest and training

area near Maddaloni, east of Naples. Passes to Pompei were frequent and entertainment was the order of the day, and all told it was a pleasant spring. To add to this, Mount Vesuvius, visible from the area, put on the biggest eruption show in fifty years.

The training was varied, but early in May 1944 the Division artillery units were alerted to return to action. Last out of the line in the winter, they were to be first back into action.

Dummy guns were set up in the Qualiano (15 miles northwest of Naples) and the artillery moved to the Minturno sector in support of the 85th Division. At 2300 on May 11, complete surprise was achieved with the opening of a new offensive that was to break the Gustav Line. Their job finished by May 17, 36th artillery units rejoined the Division bivouacked at Qualiano.

### WorldWarTwoVeterans.org Breakout from Anzio Beachhead

Completely refitted and rested, the 36th Division embarked from Naples and sped on its way to the stagnant Anzio beachhead. The Germans had managed to confine the American troops within a 10-mile perimeter since January 22, but now the time had come for the breakout.

Life on the beachhead consisted mostly of intricate dugouts and entrenchments, nightly air raids and the ominous sounds of the Nazis' big railroad gun... "Anzio Express." The drive for Rome had thrown the 36th Division in front of the fortress town of Velletri. This was the Germans' main defensive position.

Was this to be another frontal attack like Rapido River? Time was running out and Rome was still 20 miles away. The Division Commander, Major General Fred L. Walker, laid his plan for Velletri on the higher headquarters table.

This time it was basically the old Stonewall Jackson strategy...circle and strike from the flanks and the rear. It was a spectacular scheme. If it failed at least a regiment would be trapped behind the German lines.

Two hours before time to move up on the night of Memorial Day, 1944 they scrapped the other plan of frontal assault and General Walker's plan was given the green light.

Headed by the 2nd Battalion, the 142nd Infantry Regiment slipped through the lines at the right of Velletri that night without firing a shot. Others followed and noon next day strong elements of other regiments of the Division were in the Alban Hills, three miles or more behind Velletri and the German lines. They circled the hills and captured the town. Other units poured through the gap ...and the race to Rome was on.

General Walker received for his brilliant maneuver at Velletri, an Oak Leaf Cluster to the Distinguished Service Cross. Wrote Eric Sevareid: "The action...turned the key to the City of Rome and handed it to Mark Clark." For outstanding heroism T. Sgt. Logan of Luling, Texas (president address Kilgore,

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Texas), wearer of the Congressional Medal of Honor, again distinguished himself during the Velletri action by single-handedly charging a German counter-attack from his defensive position in a vineyard, killing 25 Germans and capturing 15. For this he received the DSC.

### **Fall of the Eternal City**

As the attack pushed on beyond Velletri, tanks advancing to seize a vital road junction were held up by ingeniously placed German self-propelled guns. General Walker reconnoitered this position, and despite heavy hostile shelling, led his infantrymen in smashing a vicious obstacle.

Mounting one of the lead tanks ahead of his infantry, General Walker quickly organized a mobile armored force from his available tanks and tank destroyers. With infantry mounted on the sides of the vehicles, units of the 36th Division rushed onward toward the Eternal City. Then Rome fell, in a wild spontaneous Italian fervor.

Many units were attacking Rome from all directions, but men of the Texas Division were among the first to arrive in Rome. The sniper-infested city was soon cleared and the race up the peninsula began. Hot on the heels of the demoralized enemy, the men of the 36th pressed their attacks along Highway No. 1.

Four days after the fall of Rome, men of the 36th had taken the port city of Civita Vecchia, some 30 miles to the west. Battered, burned and twisted skeletons of German vehicles lined both sides of the highway as the men pressed their flushed enemy. As the chase continued, every type of vehicle was utilized, and many captured German trucks were put into use. Additional trucks from Base Quartermaster units in Naples were ordered to transport infantrymen. Supply lines suddenly became over-extended. Gasoline and rations were being shuttled from bases at Anzio, and even Naples, now over 100 miles in the rear. The chase went on.

Tarquinia, Montalto di Castro, Orbetello, and Grosseto fell to the men of the 36th in rapid succession. Then after taking Piombino and the hills overlooking Pisa, the men were relieved from combat and returned to a rest area within the shadow of Rome.

To these men who helped take the Eternal City, it was only fitting and proper that they should get to see this ancient town they had liberated. Visits to the Vatican, Coliseum, Pantheon and the Roman ruins were enjoyed by the Texans. But this vacation was short-lived.

### **Back to Salerno Again**

After less than a week near Rome, the Division was moved by truck to an area so well known to the men who had fought to spearhead the invasion of Italy...Salerno.



Now came the time to say goodbye to a great commander, General Walker had been called to command the Infantry School at Fort Benning. In a farewell review, the General spoke to the men of the 36th. His voice was husky when he stepped up to the public address system. He told them they were great fighting men and crisply cited chapter and verse to prove their achievements in Italy were unparalleled in history. He asked them to join him in a moment of silence to honor the thousands of their friends who had fallen since the Division splashed ashore some 10 months before. For that moment there was not a single motion in all that mass of olive drab.

## **Beachhead Number 2**

During the hot month of July under clear Italian sky, these infantrymen were receiving amphibious training on a hallowed ground. This kind of training was not new to these men, for it was only a year before that they had gone through the same kind of maneuvers at Arzew, Algeria, on the other side of the Mediterranean. What was next? Rumors ran high. Bets were placed on Yugoslavia, movement to England as reinforcements to the Normandy beachhead. Some speculated it could be another beachhead behind the lines above Pisa.

The most logical conclusion however, was Southern France, possibly the Riviera, or maybe Marseille or Toulon.

Nevertheless, the planning staff of the 36th Division, along with other old comrades of the 6th Corps, the 3rd and the 45th Divisions...were busily working on details of the proposed invasion at the Block House in Naples.

A second beachhead! Those who had landed with the Division at Salerno remembered what all this meant, yet it is not recorded with what emotion the men left Italy. Very few had ever liked the place particularly, for their association had not been with the pseudo-prosperous cities, but rather with the numbered hills and blood-soaked valleys, the shell-raked fields and stinking rubble towns.

There was waiting that night before the departure, before the long convoys rolled and jerked down to the dock and the men got to their ship and waited some more. The whole Division was afloat in the Naples Harbor on August 11th. Four days later the men would know their destination.

The huge convoy carrying the 36th, 3rd and 45th Divisions sailed out into the Blue Mediterranean.

## **They Storm Beachhead in Southern France** **CHAPTER IV**

Men who fought for Naples, had spent their rest periods and pay there, were leaving Italy through the same city. Now its liberators were going, as they had come, by sea, to strike a second blow.

The atmosphere aboard ship had been unwarlike; the men sat around and

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joked and played cards. Most of them had tried to act normal, but even veteran troops are nervous before attempting the unknown. They sat around by their packs, rifles and gas masks and did the same routine things they had done twenty times before and would do twenty times again.

### **D-Day and H-Hour**

On August 13, the following message was flashed to Maj. Gen. John E. Dahlquist, the new division commander in his ward room aboard the command ship: "D-Day, 15 August 1944; H-Hour, 0800."

There were three division beaches, identified only as Red, Green and Blue. Reconnaissance had shown the presence of many underwater obstacles, a shore line encrusted with casements, and an ingenious defense mesh calculated to intercept a landing at its most vulnerable point.

Red Beach, sandy and admirably situated in the San Raphael Bay, was a potential trap, flanked by an abrupt cliff and stone retaining wall on the left, a jutting barren rock formation on the right.

Blue Beach was a little more than a deeply-indented cove, behind which rose Rasetl D'Agay, razor-edged and formidable, a precipitous formation which commanded the entire division landing area.

### **German Troops Good**

The 141st Infantry Regiment landed on beaches Blue and Green. The Germans, good troops with a leavening of second-rate forces, possessed excellent defensive positions. Not all of them had been knocked out by the preliminary naval and air bombardments, and those left fought tenaciously, making full use of their advantageous positions. There was bitter fighting through the streets of the small French town and up the exposed slopes to route out the well-entrenched enemy.

### **On the Beach Goes the 143rd**

The 143rd followed the first assault waves onto Green Beach, disregarding the battle raging not 500 yards away, and swung to the west to the pastel-colored summer resort towns on the road to San Raphael.

The 142nd never landed on Red Beach. The demolition boats were unable to force a passage through the underwater obstacles that lined the bay. Green Beach became the only division landing site. In less than 10 hours, 20,000 troops were finally put ashore there, over a boulder-strewn area less than 800 yards long and 50 yards deep.

It was a magnificent accomplishment. On this one beach rested the success of the division's invasion of the Riviera. Across it were put every vehicle, every gun, every piece of necessary equipment, and all the tons of supplies.

There were casualties. With the landings so confined, the Germans were able to mass their forces, but the Riviera landing was not the debacle of Saler-

no, where the 36th received its baptism under fire almost a year before. Nine hours after the initial landings, the beaches were secure.

### **45th Division Was On Left**

On August 16, Red Beach was reported open for clearing parties; Frejus was taken; the 143rd cleared a road block at Boursouis after a stiff fight with infantry and tanks. Contact was made with 45th Division beachhead on the left flank. On the right flank, the 141st pressed eastward to make contact with a force of French commandos operating in the Cannes area.

More than 1,900 German prisoners had been taken by noon Aug. 17, and, as the lines extended, growing numbers were brought into the division cages.

The Seventh Army beachhead firmly consolidated along its entire span, sprang into violent life when "Task Force Butler" pounded north toward Lyons. Hastily organized on D-plus-three, Task Force Butler was made up largely of 36th Division components.

The 36th charged after it, carrying the right flank of the army around like a hinge to block the only German escape route to the northeast. An advance guard for the division drove parallel to the Rhone Valley—cleared Digne, pressed through the mountains to Sisteron, reeling off 90 miles in 14 hours.

### **Attack a Gamble**

This was a dangerous gambling attack. In one day the division had increased its lines of supply and communication by 100 miles, and it continued to press its advantage by shashing at the German rear areas with speed and vigor.

By August 22 elements of the 143rd had occupied the college town of Grenoble without resistance. But the 36th Division left Grenoble as rapidly as it had come. A build-up of enemy forces was reported in the vicinity of Montelimar. The division was already in contact with the enemy at three widely-separated points, near Grenoble, near Digne, and at Gap. It had less than 60 percent of its organic transport, and neither corps nor army had supply or transportation elements available. The first decisive battle of the campaign was beginning. On Aug. 23 the Texas Division began to move its forces to meet the army.

### **They Kill a German Army**

Two hundred and fifty miles from the Riviera beaches, eight days after the first assault waves had charged ashore, the German 19th Army was pushed into the gun-studded lap of the 36th Division.

Here was a chance for a brilliant plan. To make the kill required eight days of fighting. Simplicity itself was the plan. To block the roads and so trap the Germans, then wipe them out. Complexity itself was the struggle. Surrounding forces were in turn surrounded, attacking forces fired over a greater arc than did the besieged army; the battle was in reality a maelstrom of assault and counter-assault.

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On Aug. 25, the 141st, reinforced with elements of the 143rd, attacked and cut Route 7, several miles north of Montelimar, beating back determined enemy infantry and armor. During the eight days of battle, the field artillery fired well over 37,000 rounds at the desperately confined, retreating 19th German Army. Supporting fire from attached battalions brought the total of rounds expended to more than 75,000. The German losses were prodigious. Long convoys were destroyed, and the entire zone was literally covered with a mass of vehicles, trains, equipment, dead men and dead animals.

But while the artillery brought the German rear areas crashing down on their east, the outnumbered infantry slugged it out with his tanks and foot troops. A trapped man is most dangerous of all, and the GI Joe with the M-1, the BAR and the Bazookas had to stop him. They stopped him.

This was a struggle whose proportions knew no bounds. There were 11,000 enemy casualties. He had lost 4,000 vehicles, 1,500 horses were destroyed and all of the artillery pieces of two divisions. He had lost six 380mm railroad guns, the potent long-range weapons familiar to those who had waded onto the Anzio Beachhead. Yet with such terrible destruction, he fought to the last man.

### Lyons Next to Fall

When the German resistance in the Montelimar pocket crumbled, the 36th Division turned north towards Lyons, third largest city of France. Reconnaissance elements led the regiments to the east of the city, instructions limiting entrance only to parties of contact Maqui.

While the division made its way to establish roadblocks, north and northeast of Lyons, bridge recon parties of the 111th Engineer Battalion of the 36th entered the city. They were engaged in one skirmish. All bridges had been destroyed except one. The factories fringing the city were burning. There was fighting in the industrial area between the Maqui and the Milice (Vichy police whom the French despised as much as the Germans), but across the river liaison patrols were greeted with great cheering crowds of happy civilians. Pretty mademoiselles threw flowers; kids climbed on vehicle hoods and sat there, proud; FFI could not control their emotions. It was a spontaneous, very French welcome.

### There Were Parties Galore

For two days there were celebrations and all sorts of parties honoring the American liberators. Private homes threw open their doors, and soldiers were welcomed in the most generous fashion. The city was theirs for the asking.

Pursuit of the enemy continued, past Louhans, heavily marked by some vandal Teutonic inspirations; past Arbois, home of fine wines, through the ancient citadel city of Besancon on the Doubs River, and on to Vesols to meet an enemy delaying force of some strength. Vesoul was the first town in the path of the 36th Division where the Germans selected to make a stand.

The enemy was met and beaten down. That was Sept. 12, 1944. Long, hard fighting lay ahead for men of the 36th. The Moselle River was to be crossed, and beyond—the invincible Vosges Mountains. Another cold and wet winter loomed ahead.

### **Winter Fighting in the Vosges, Breakthrough of Siegfried Line CHAPTER V**

Troops of the 36th Division continued to drive towards the Moselle River line. German resistance now grew stronger since Vesoul was taken, and every town had to be cleared of enemy troops.

The retreating Germans threw up roadblocks at strategic points, but these were quickly overcome. The 1st Battalion of the 141st Infantry Regiment ran headlong into one on September 14, 1944, costing the enemy 50 killed, 100 prisoners, and eleven vehicles.

On September 16, armored units attached to the 36th entered Luxueil-les-Bains, last large, defended town before Remiremont and the Moselle River defense line.

#### **Moselle River Crossing**

The cracking of the Moselle River line was a great victory. The Germans had promised they would hold out all winter behind this water barrier, and while the 36th fought into Plombiers and toward Remiremont, they brought up reinforcements and sent for more.

The Nazis had a lot of troops along the Moselle River; units salvaged from Montelimar, special defense battalions sent from the Third Reich to man the defenses, crack Luftwaffe ground forces employed as infantry.

The fall rains had already begun. In a fortnight, there would be a ravaging flood across the entire valley. The Moselle was rising steadily. The swift advance from the Riviera had stripped the division of its supporting trains, there was no bridging material available. Soon the river would be unbridgeable. Meanwhile the enemy was growing stronger.

Three battalions were committed in the fight to take Remiremont as the 142nd struggled against heavy resistance on the west bank of the Moselle. Until the 141st made its way into positions behind the bridge and road leading to Remiremont, the Germans continued to wage a punishing war; then they broke contact, blew the only bridge and withdrew across the Moselle. The 142nd entered Remiremont and the entire weight of the division was brought into play along the still-narrow bridgehead.

#### **Cold, Rainy Weather**

The bridgehead was less than a mile deep, and progress was slow against stubborn enemy resistance in heavily-wooded, hilly, roadless terrain. The cold,

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rainy weather caught the troops without winter equipment. The situation was not favorable.

There were no available reinforcements. The 3rd Division, in the south, was heavily engaged and unable to move. Advancing toward Epinal, the 45th Division was committed in full strength.

It was up to the 36th, and the Division reacted with vigor, shifting its drive to the north and toward Docelles and Bruyeres, deploying on a front 25 kilometers wide and 11 kilometers deep. There was no left flank. It was completely open, but the change in the direction of the attack in some measure protected it, forcing, as it did, the Germans to move in from the north and northeast into the front and a strong flank of the line. To prevent the enemy from discovering the nature of the 36th Division situation, Maj. Gen. John E. Dahlquist, division commander, did a difficult thing—he pressed his tired regiments to the attack.

The 141st drove overland into Sainte Amedee, the 142nd seized the high ground south of Tendon, and 143rd captured Cocelles.

Then on September 25, the Germans counter-attacked. For three days they beat furiously against the 36th Division line, but the aggressive moves of the Division had frustrated them. The Texans had penetrated too deeply to be shaken from their bridgehead.

Through their speed and durability, their performance under hardships, despite heavy casualties and limited reserves, the 36th had cracked the line behind which the Germans had hoped to rest all winter, and led Gen. Patch's 7th Army to the Vosges Mountains.

### On to the Vosges

The 36th Division was allowed no rest. It continued to fight, although its ranks were seriously depleted, equipment was largely same as used in Italy. Newer divisions had come overseas with newer equipment, but the 36th continued the fight with what they had.

The men slogged forward through the seasonal rains, cold and soaked. There was no let-up. The Germans fought harder, the terrain grew rougher, and the weather turned colder.

Severe as the Italian winter fighting had been, the Vosges campaign was its equal. There was seemingly nothing ahead but mud and deep minefields, the Nazis and the mountains. There was nothing across the next barrier but another barrier.

Savage battle followed savage battle. The men fought on, fighting on guts, and with the unconscious skill that had become a part of them. Every yard of the Vosges—not merely the roads, not just the towns—had to be wrenched from the obstinate enemy who possessed every advantage. Tall pine trees, rushing streams and rock crags are picturesque, but all this beauty provided untold agony for the fighting doughfoot who had to figure out a method to push through these forests.

## A Fearsome Forest

Nerving patrol warfare followed assaults. The hills were crowned with aging growth, so thick that the night was 24 hours long, crowded with fiber-tearing silence of a forest. It was a fearsome forest. Every bush, every leaf his a mine. Every knoll concealed a machine gun.

The Germans and the forest seemed to be allied. Enemy artillery bursts in the tree-tops rained searing shrapnel on the unsheltered patrols.

The first phase of the Vosges campaign ended with the capture of Bruyeres. But Bruyeres was not captured in a blaze of flower-throwing, champagne-drinking celebration, like Louhans and Arbois or a hundred other little town in Southern France. With cold, methodical fury, house by house, block by block, Germans and Americans fought it out for Bruyeres.

## Lost Battalion Tasted Hell

The 141st Infantry Regiment sent its First Battalion forward to take the high ridge and ground overlooking La Houssiere. That night a coded message came to regimental headquarters: "No rations, no water, no communications with headquarters...four litter cases."

On a bald-top hill, not far away, 275 men of the First Battalion were spread out in an area 300 by 350 yards, digging deep foxholes, using knives to whittle down trees to use for cover, folding blankets around the trees so they knew they were a "lost battalion."

They had already had their taste of the hell to come. Not only was their CP overrun, but the Nazis had thrown in two full companies at them, plus heavy shelling, intense small-arms fire, concentrated counter-attacks that they had somehow managed to beat off.

Headquarters understood the full significance. Alternate plans were being made, different battalions were pulling into the line. Headquarters was figuring out just how much strength was needed to punch a hole and make the junction. To the 275 lonely men on the hilltop they radioed: "Hold on...heavy force coming to relieve you."

## Rescue Plans Fall

The first attempted break-through was thrown back. On the hill the men tightened their belts, crowded together to keep warm, to talk. They starved for five full days. A 35-man patrol was sent out. Five weary men came back. Everyone kept wondering: "How much longer..who's next...?"

Back at headquarters they tried to use artillery to shoot shells loaded with D-Rations and aid-packets. The first attempts didn't do so well. The precious packets buried too deep in the soggy ground or shells burst in the tree tops scattering the supplies.

## Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

Then they tried P-47 fighter-bombers to drop the supplies from the air. On the fifth day, the food-loaded shells, and belly tanks of supplies began hitting the target at the same time. They could loosen their belts, but they couldn't relax. They were still completely cut off.

On the afternoon of the sixth day, a man on outpost duty saw someone. He strained his eyes looking, then raced down the hill like crazy, yelling and laughing and grabbing the soldier and hugging him. Pfc. Mutt Sakumoto of the 442nd Combat Team (Japanese-American) whose unit made the breakthrough, just looked at him with a lump in his throat and the first thing he could think of to say was: "Do you guys need any cigarettes?"

### They Batter Through

It was a wearing war of attrition from the Moselle until the doughfeet of the 36th broke out into the Alsatian plain after having crossed the swollen Meurthe River and forced the Sainte-Marie Passes to Seletat and Ribeauville.

Even after 92 consecutive days of combat in France, they battered their way through the passes, in an assault on the considered-impregnable Vosges Mountains.

The 3rd Division began the relief of the 36th in the Colmar section on December 19, and the 141st moved to Strasbourg to take over part of the quiet Rhine River line. It was soon followed by the remainder of the division.

The capital of Alsace, Strasbourg, was just across the Rhine from the Germans, yet peaceful compared to the rest of German-bordering France. The people roamed the streets. There was beer and wine aplenty, and Strasbourg was a thoroughly civilized city, and not a bad place to spend Christmas.

On Christmas Eve, the division was relieved from combat after setting a new endurance record of 132 consecutive days of combat that had begun August 15 when the 36th invaded the Riviera.

The division remained in Strasbourg five days, and then on December 26, moved to a rest area near Sarrenbourg.

The rest period was short-lived. Grim battles in Alsace lay ahead.





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



## HISTORICAL Quarterly

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### THE FIGHTING 36<sup>th</sup> HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Think of it as a            In Four  
320 Page Book –    Installments

Each member of the Division has at least two or more good stories that would be of interest to others. They can range from humorous to sad or tragic involving either training periods or combat situations. If you are unable to write it yourself, enlist the help of a family member or good friend. **BUT DO WRITE IT** — you will feel good about it and proud to see it in print.

Stories for the Historical Quarterly should be forwarded to: **HICKS A. TURNER, Editor, Rt. 2 Box 236, Clyde, TX 79510.**

#### EDITOR HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Hicks A. Turner (Jamie)  
111th Engr. Bn  
Rt. 2 Box 236  
Clyde, TX 79510 (915) 529-3579

Worldwar2veterans.org

#### EDITOR T PATCHER NEWSLETTER

Bert D. Carlton (Clara) 144 & 143rd  
806 Aransas Dr  
Eules, TX 76039 (817) 267-7864  
806 Aransas Dr  
Eules, TX 76039 (817) 267-7864

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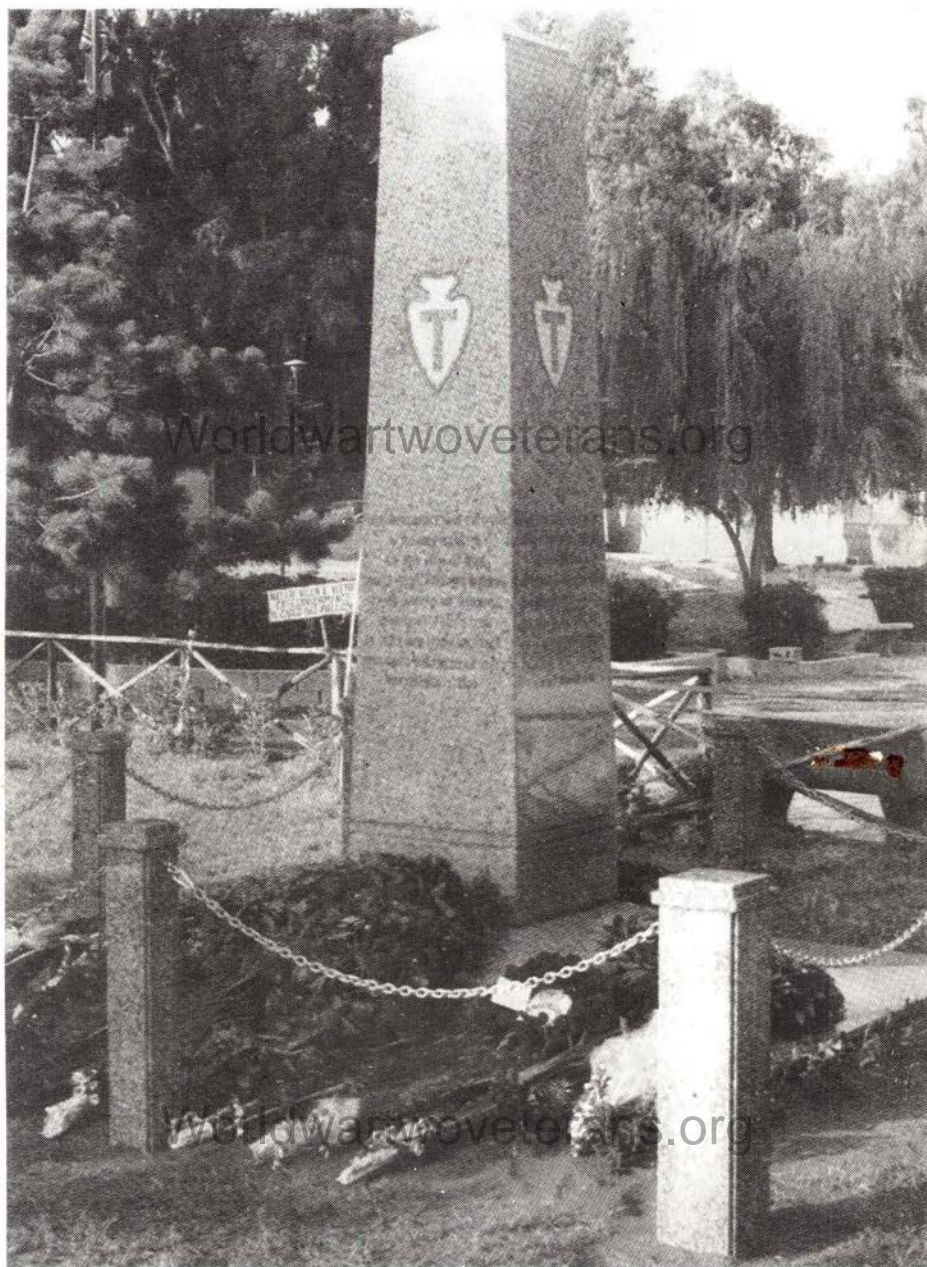
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*Inscription On Monument*

“This Monument was erected in humble Tribute to the men of the 36th Infantry Division, United States of America, who lost their lives on these beaches September 9, 1943.”