

The Fighting 36th

HISTORICAL Quarterly

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CISTERNA, once one of Italy's loveliest resorts, was badly battered in the struggle that ended the four-month-old Anzio beachhead.



COVER STORY

Action at Anzio

By Paul H. Duffey, Co. "C" — 141st Infantry

Vol. XIII, No. 1 - Spring 1993

Published by
36th DIVISION ASSOCIATION

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The Fighting 363



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Action at Anzio

By Paul H. Duffey, Co. "C" — 141st Infantry

Velletri — Late May, 1944

When I left the hospital, I rejoined the company in the Maddaloni area. We took a break from training and cleaning our equipment to parade for the ceremony for medals including, "Commando Kelly — the 1st C.M.H. in Europe."

We trucked to Naples, loaded onto 1st — LCI's (Landing Shiptanks — Landing Craft Infantry) and took a short trip to Anzio. We landed on the beach, moved inland and up to high ground and you guessed it, "dug in." Roy and I scratched a small spot in the stones and "sacked out" for the night, or so it seemed. About 1:00 a.m. a freight train came flying overhead. There was an explosion, and it continued on it's lethal path to the beach, where it exploded once again, only more so. We had been greeted by none other than "Anzio Annie." (Anzio Annie was a German railroad piece (gun)). Everybody was awake and digging. I said to Roy, "If that thing is that big, we couldn't dig a hole deep enough to save our skins!" He agreed, so we lay down and went to sleep to the sound of picks and shovels clicking on the stones as the others dug in deeper. I was told later the explosion overhead was a booster to throw the shell farther????

The next morning we "saddle-up" and moved "cross country" (not by road). During this move, there was little contact with the enemy. One night Roy and I were on outpost when a German plane flew over, dropped some flares to our left about 800 yards. It left and a Stukka came, and with the scream that they are known for, dove and bombed a small power plant. In the morning we were on the move again. I was handed a Stars & Stripes and on the front page was a picture of a Sergeant sitting against a tree with a dead Kraut at his feet. It stated he had just killed the German, and while he had the time and he was hungry, he would eat a K-ration. It went on to say he had a "cast iron stomach."

We had been moving in a column, and knowing we were nearing the enemy, we changed to a skirmish line. Sure enough, we didn't go far until we met small arms fire. We met that head on, but when we heard tanks rumbling on the road, now that makes you sweat. In very little time, a jeep arrived with a half dozen anti-tank mines which were placed on the road. With a few riflemen covering them, the tanks held up. Then, the mortars started coming in. One man was hit across the road. When his buddy tried to carry him clear, he was hit, too. Then Lt. Gold was chopped up pretty badly by a mortar shell. We held and the Krauts backed off.

We moved forward again. There was word spread around that some of us walked through a small mine field. That was the correct time to tell us — after we were out of it. We came to a cart path that crossed our front in late afternoon. The cart path was about even with the field to our front, and the farther you went to the left, the deeper it got until it was about seven feet deep. We stopped and were told to dig in. I had a fighting hole pretty well on the way, when my Sgt. came looking for me. He paired me with Francis Davis from Florida to cover our right flank forward. We just lay flat on the cart path with a small mound of dirt to our front. We took turns rising up on our elbows to look out over the field. It was nearly dark and I was "up" last. Davis said to me, "It's getting too damn hot around here for me." There wasn't much small arm fire, so I was a bit puzzled at the statement. He raised up to look and I heard a thud and he dropped down, dead. The bullet caught him in the chest just below the throat. He couldn't have been seen from more than ten feet which meant it was a chance shot. (I heard no rifle report). If you don't see a target, shoot where one might be — Basic Training. The Lt. came by less than 15 seconds after it happened to check on the situation, and I told him what happened. The Lt. was walking around upright, we were prone, it just was a chance shot, but Davis was still dead.

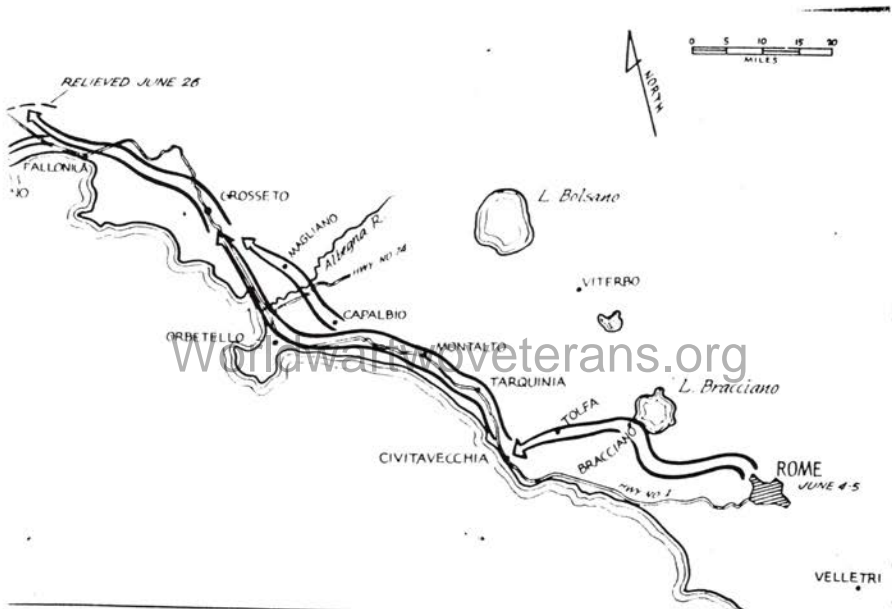
My Sgt. moved me four times that night, and the last was the one I cared for the least, M.G. guard. The M.G. was to the rear of the cart path and was on higher ground. Most of the night our gun and a German M.G. had a running dual. I dug in and stayed in the hole. I dug most all of the hole in the prone position. I was up before daylight, as was the rest of the company. We assembled, if you want to call it that, in the deeper part of the cart path. At the predetermined time, the officers were yelling, "Up and Over!" After several minutes of this, and nobody moving, I said loud enough for two Lts. to hear, "If the officers would lead us instead of driving us like cattle, maybe this show would get started." The one Lt. turned to me and said, "If I go over, will you follow?" I said, "Yes, Sir!" He went over the top, and I had to be the third man behind him. They were ready, but they wanted a leader. The show was on! We moved forward fast staying low as it was "hot and heavy." They were using every piece of small arms they had: M.G., rat pistols, rifles, everything, and it was furious. Someone passed the word to shift to the left and contact "A" Co. Roy and I were on the left, so when we came to a cart path, we started to our left on the near side of the road still running and staying low. A M.G. (enemy) opened up behind us, and as I went down, I looked back to see the slugs hitting the road behind two of our men on the far side of the road. As the gun rose, the slugs hit nearer, and finally I saw the second (trailing) man's shirt "pop," and he went down fast — dead. The lead man was hit in the

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back of the head, and as he fell to his knees, he put his hand to his forehead, yelled, "Medic," and fell flat, dead. I knew him, we joined the company together. Roy and I were up and running, but we got off the cart path fast. We moved forward and the enemy backed off. We secured the area and rejoined our platoon and had a chance to look around. That M. Gunner had done a lot of damage. He killed 1st Sgt. Henley and about five other men beside the ones that I saw get it. Sgt. Henley was a "top rate" man, and I knew no one that disliked him.

We started to move again, but this time on hard road. Our tanks were with us now, and as we passed a few houses; we knew this was Velletri, this was what we were fighting for. I was following Roy on a dirt path on the right side of the road. I was hungry, so I was munching on a "dog biscuit" and a piece of K-ration cheese. There was a dead German laying up ahead with his legs on the path and his upper body in what you might call the gutter. A tank was coming from behind me, and as I stepped over the Kraut's legs, he ran over his head with the tank tread. I don't know if he was angry or if he was trying to upset me, but whatever it was, it didn't bother me. I thought back to the article in the "Stars and Stripes."

We cleared Velletri and moved to higher ground. We were strafed by a few planes and took a few casualties, then took a short break to rest and eat. We were on our way to Rome. We had them running and intended to keep it that way.



ORBITELLA, ITALY

June, 1944

Many of the fire fights, artillery barrages and other incidents were not in a town or village, but near one or on a road or in a field.

Being in the Infantry had its good points — if you stayed alive, you might do something to “win” a medal — you got to see the cities, towns or villages and some of the countryside before it’s complete destruction. It’s only half done by us. The bad points kind of outnumber the good points. Like, everybody wants a part of you. Mines, small arms, airplane, tanks, mortars, and artillery. This story is about only one of these — artillery.

I don’t really recall the weather on this particular day, so it must have been warm and sunny, because if it was rainy, it would have been a little bit more miserable. I say that because going back into the line was never one of my favorite pastimes. The more often you go into the line, the chances of coming back get less and less. (So they say.)

The truck ride up to the front was on hard road until we neared our detrucking area. The trucks slowed down then turned left onto a dirt road, kicking up enough dust that it could be seen for miles. In summer, Italy is a dust bowl; in winter, the dust turns to twice the amount but it is a gumbo mud made by the rainfall that comes. The trucks lurched to a stop, and

AT A TURN IN THE ROAD just outside Rome the Germans hastily set up this block with many A-T guns. A day-long battle wiped it out.



while the dust was settling, one round of ‘88’ fell in the field to our front about 200 yards short of us — the German equivalent of “Welcome to the line!” The drivers were rear echelon quartermaster (way back). Their eyes got big and they’re yelling, “Git off mah trucks!” Some of them grabbed their carbines from the scabbards and acted like they were ready to fight. First off, I don’t really believe any of the weapons would have fired,

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because they were choked with months of dust, and even if any would operate, what would they shoot at? The enemy was a couple of miles away. These drivers were not our Division "Nighthawks." We stood around laughing as the trucks disappeared in a great cloud of dust.

While we were preparing to move out, we watched a crossroad about a half mile away getting air burst after air burst over it. That's where we were heading — that's where the war was. We moved across fields to a point beyond the crossroads and on the far, or right side of the road and dug in. Our Company C.P. was in a 2 or 3 story building on the left side of the road. Roy and I were dug in, in our own separate holes directly across the road from the C.P. and about 10 yards apart. There were trees here and there along the road and one of our men had dug his hole under one. This was a bad thing to do, and it cost him his life. If a shell hits the tree above you, it sprays shrapnel all around, including down into the hole.

Soon after we were dug in, the shelling started, and it was very accurate. They hammered us relentlessly throughout the afternoon. I tried crawling up into my helmet, but my head was in the way. The shells kept coming. I'd lay on my back, then on my belly, then one side, then the other, waiting for the big one — mine. While laying on my back, I could see the C.P. getting hit. That is, the building the C.P. was in. The shells hit one side and the C.P. was on the far side. As I watched, I could "pick up" the shells coming in that would hit the building. They looked like a hornet — just a black dot and then, WHAM! They'd hit the building.

There were a few donkeys grazing near my hole. I thought to myself, "You've lived this long, but you'd better move to a new area or you'll be dead in the a.m.."

The shelling continued. I don't know whether we were waiting for them to run out of ammo or what, but we stayed there all night. During the evening, the man that dug in under tree was killed, and I don't know how many wounded we had to this point, but they were moved to a point near the C.P.

In the a.m., all of the donkeys were dead.

One shell hit nearby, as did many, but this one had a very large piece of shrapnel. It sounded like a propeller coming down. It must have taken 10 seconds to come down. I tried again to crawl under my helmet, but to no avail. That piece landed next to my hole. It was still hot and if it had hit me, I probably would have gone to the hospital. It was maybe 6 inches across and very ragged.

The order came to move back about 300 yards and dig in. I called to Roy and said we had better wait until the crowd thinned out. They were supposed to move back in groups of 2 or 3, but were in bunches of 4 or 5 or more. I guess they had enough of the shelling, and were in a hurry to get out from under it. We waited. Finally, there was nobody in our area, so I yelled, "Let's got" We were up and running full tilt at the same time. We

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didn't run more than 30 yards when we were surrounded by 5 or 6 that I hadn't seen coming from the far side of the road — I woke up about 25 yards from where I had been when the lights went out. My upper body and head was in somebody's fighting hole. I crawled out as the last of the dust was settling. My helmet was another 30 yards away. We never used the chin strap on the helmet. If I had used it, I would have had a broken neck or no head at all. I called to Roy a couple of times. He moaned, then woke up. I asked if he was hit and he answered "No." He asked me the same question and got the same answer. We looked the situation over and saw help coming for the others so we left. I think a few of them were dead and the others "chewed up" a bit.

As we started toward the rear again, I grabbed my helmet on the run.

We arrived in the Co. area and found a big hole already dug, so the two of us jumped in and, as usual, Roy was laughing about the whole incident, while I was thanking the "Man Upstairs."

I think the shell was so close to me that I was thrown by the concussion and Roy had been to my left front with a man between him and the shell. I believe we all could have fit into a 10 yard circle. Roy and I were about 8 yards apart at the time.

The next day, I was sent on outpost duty for 3 or 4 days as an artillery observation unit. There were four of us, and I was in charge. The only thing that happened while there was 14 white Russians turned themselves into us. When we left the outpost (by Jeep) all you could see was a mass of humans moving slowly down the hill. You could not see anything but the wheels of the Jeep. There were 4 of us and the driver and 14 of them. All in one Jeep.

We fought our way farther north the next two weeks and then took up a defensive position on a hillside near a river.

While we held this defensive position, there was only one incident that happened that I recall. I was sitting out of my foxhole leaning against a tree writing a letter to home. I saw a tank pull off the road about 200 yards to my left front and thought nothing of it. A few minutes later, a Jeep with one man in it, a Captain (I believe) pulled along side of the tank and stopped. The tank was on the berm of the road and the Jeep on the road proper. The Captain climbed from his Jeep onto the tank. After talking with the tank men, he jumped down from the tank onto the berm of the road to the rear of the tank. The explosion sent my pen in a straight line to the top of the paper I was writing on. I looked up to see a cloud of dust and pieces flying through the air. He had jumped onto an anti-tank mine which the tank must have straddled when it pulled off the road. His weight and the pressure set it off when he landed on it.

I explained in my letter what caused the pen to go to the top of the paper, but the censor cut it out. All of our mail was censored by our officers.

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Everyone that was over there knows this, but I wrote these stories for people that ordinarily wouldn't know.

Several days later, we were relieved by another unit. We moved south to Rome for a few days and then down to Salerno for amphibious training for the invasion of Southern France.

THE PRISONER TOLL MOUNTED again and dust became thicker. Germans also slaughtered thousands of horses.



TROOPS AT ANZIO pass a knocked out M4 tank and a spot where some of the heaviest fighting had taken place.



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Company "A" 111th Engineers at the Rapido

By: Hicks Turner, Hq. Co. — 111th Engr.



For the invasion of the Italian mainland, each of the lettered companies of the 111th Engineer Combat Battalion were attached to one of the three combat teams of the 36th Infantry Division. Company "A" was attached to the 141st Infantry Combat Team, Company "B" was attached to the 142nd Combat Team and Company "C" was attached to the 143rd Infantry Combat Team. In some instances, the companies were further divided by the attachment of a platoon or smaller unit to one of the Infantry battalions within the combat team. The reason for the disposition of troops in this manner is obvious: in that their duty was the clearing of enemy minefields, the removal of obstacles and the reduction of fortifications.

This article relates some of the action experienced by Company "A" of the 111th Engineers. Information has been taken from the After Action Report of the 111th Engineer Bn. This information was provided to the Commanding General of the 36th Infantry Division by Co. Oran Stovall and the officers of the battalion. As author of the article, I have attempted to extract the more interesting aspects of this action. The names of some personnel have been mentioned several times, but it was impossible to relate the experiences of others. Heroic deeds were performed daily, and it is still hoped that we can obtain many more personal experiences of combat troops of the 36th Infantry Division to be preserved in our own *Historical Quarterly*.

The action related here occurred around the middle of January, 1944, and names of places contained herein will identify the area. At this time plans were being formulated for crossing the Rapido River at two points, one to the north and one to the south of San Angelo. The 111th Engineer's mission was primarily to clear the selected avenues of approach to the river of mines and improve the roads as far forward prior to the operation. The

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coordination of engineer operations and supply of stream crossing equipment was also the function of the Battalion.

13 January, 1944:

MT. PORCHIO had only recently fallen to our forces and little engineer reconnaissance in this vicinity had been made. Highway No. 6 passes along the north side of this hill with a railroad along its south slope. Each of these roads is connected with roads which circumscribe the hill. An extensive road reconnaissance was made of the roads connecting Highway No. 6 and extending along the southeast side of MT. PORCHIO by Company "A." In addition to reconnoitering roads in this region, a mule trail around MT. PORCHIO'S southern slopes was found to be in bad repair.

The First Platoon of Company "A" devoted the day in improving the roads along the south side of MT. PORCHIO which ran between the hill and the railroad. The Second Platoon had completed about seventy-five percent of the work required on secondary roads branching to the west from highway No. 6 about one-half mile east of MT. PORCHIO when it was forced to withdraw due to heavy enemy mortar fire. This work included spreading six loads of gravel along the worst places in the road and laying wire mesh. Forty-five American MIAI mines were removed about one thousand yards northwest of MT. PORCHIO by a detail from the company.

14 January, 1944:

The First Platoon of Company A returned to the west side of MT. PORCHIO to continue the repair of roads in that vicinity. As the work progressed, it was noted that quite a number of trees had been felled across some of the roads by the enemy as an obstacle. None was booby-trapped, and during the course of the work were all removed to permit traffic circulation. Numerous low areas in the roads were filled and the drainage improved before this platoon moved on to the north side of MT. PORCHIO to make a search for enemy land mines. During this search, no mines were detected. While the search for mines was being made, it was noted that the road required repairs before it could be opened for traffic.

On the previous day, the Second Platoon had been forced by enemy mortar fire to withdraw from the roads joining Highway No. 6 about half a mile from MT. PORCHIO before the work was completed. The mission was resumed and completed without incident which included spreading three more loads of gravel as well as constructing about one hundred and fifty feet of corduroy road.

Inasmuch as engineer reconnaissance is vital, and often little is known about the forward areas except what might be interpreted from aerial photographs, it was deemed advisable to send two men on night patrols with the Infantry for the purpose of observing roads, bridges and possible

minefields. For this mission Company A assigned Sergeants Colegrove and White. The patrol began at MT. PORCHIO and extended to the north along the railroad to within three-quarters of a mile south of MT. TROCCHIO. During the course of this patrol, four German patrols were encountered and small arms fire was exchanged. On one such occasion, Sergeant White's Carbine accounted for one of the Germans, while a second German was killed by an Infantryman with a .45 caliber submachine gun and still two more were wounded by hand grenades. It was observed by the patrol that all bridges along the railroad had been demolished, although no anti-personnel mines were noticed.

15 January, 1944:

Further reconnaissance to the north along the railroad from MT. PORCHIO was enabled. Various parties from Company A advanced as far as the SANTA LUCIA vicinity. At several locations along the railroad there appeared evidence of mines, but none was removed. However, the road extending to the west from the railroad in the SANTA LUCIA area we searched for mines as far as the 3rd Battalion 141st Infantry command post by the First Platoon of Company, but no mines were found. Repairs were made to this road at the same time, and upon completion "jeep" traffic could be accommodated. The Second Platoon of Company A improved the road leading to the regimental command post of the 141st Infantry on the south side of MT. PORCHIO where six loads of gravel were used after a bulldozer had filled in the sunken areas. On part of this road wire matting had been laid previously but had become loose, so a job of re-staking it was performed along with the other repairs. The activities of the Third Platoon extended from SPINA on the road adjacent to the railroad as far north as SANTA LUCIA. Fills were made in the road at numerous locations and also a check for mines made, although none was found.

The remainder of the Battalion was notified to be in a state of preparedness to move the following day. This comprised Company B, Company C part of Headquarters and Service Company and the Medical Detachment. It was contemplated that the Battalion Supply dump and the motor pool should remain in the ALIFE area for a day or two after the rest of the battalion had moved. Ordinarily, fifty trucks are required to move the dump which consists of explosives, bridge timber, bridging equipment and various other items required by combat engineers. At the time, the motor pool was exerting every effort to recondition the battalion vehicles and parts such as brake shoes, which had not been previously available, were now obtainable, and therefore, several trucks were deadlined and the motor pool could not be moved until those trucks were repaired.

Company "A" continued maintenance of roads in the vicinity of MT. PORCHIO with the First Platoon using a bulldozer to widen the road to the command post of the 3rd Battalion, 141st Infantry in the S. LUCIA vicinity west of the railroad. After the bulldozer had been employed to the fullest advantage in widening and filling holes along the road, gravel was hauled

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and spread along the route. The Second Platoon's activities were confined to hauling six loads of gravel for the improvement of a road leading to the regimental command post of the 141st Infantry on the south side of MT. PORCHIO while the Third Platoon made a search for mines from SPINA to the north for about three quarters of a mile, then to the west for as far as S. LUCIA. No mines were found along this route, and the road was opened for traffic by 0500 hours.

Four men from Company A accompanied two night patrols from the 141st Infantry for the purpose of obtaining engineer information along the RAPIDO RIVER as well as to assist the patrol across the river. Prior to the patrol leaving, two points had been selected on the river as crossing sites; one at CACCIOLI and the second point about two thousand yards south of S. ANGELO. Reconnaissance boats were taken to effect the crossings but the first patrol was unable to cross at CACCIOLI. Before it reached the river, it was subjected to fire from enemy machine guns placed on the far bank of the river. All approaches to the river along this area were found to be heavily mined. The crossing near S. ANGELO was successful and the patrol advanced some eight hundred yards into the enemy's territory and on it; withdrawal was followed across the river by an enemy patrol. Three reconnaissance boats were lost, and the fight which ensued between these patrols resulted in two Germans being killed and an undetermined number wounded. The river at this location was found to be about forty feet wide with no natural cover along its vertical banks.

17 JANUARY, 1944:

Engineer reconnaissance continued to be made in the area between MT. PORCHIO and MT. TROCCHIO. The roads in the vicinity of FAIO were found by Company "A" to be in need of repair and evidence of mines was noted at numerous places, while another party from the same company failed to find any mines in the vicinity of S. LUCIA when all small roads around that town were searched. A survey of positions for the 155th Field Artillery was conducted to determine the engineer work that would be required to place its batteries into a firing position.

Infantry patrols, to which Company A attached eight men, effected crossing on the RAPIDO RIVER at three places during the night. Crossings were made one and one-half miles southwest of FAIO and one-quarter miles south of S. ANGELO without enemy resistance, but the party crossing one and one-half miles northeast of S. ANGELO were subjected to enemy mortar fire. During the course of this action, Private Frank Calabroso was lightly wounded by shrapnel. The information developed from those patrols indicated the road from FAIO to the RAPIDO RIVER to be a one-way, hard surfaced road in good repair. A mine field was located at a road junction about one mile south of FAIO as well as anti-

assigned to support the 141st Infantry and Company C to support the 143rd Infantry with Company B in Battalion reserve.

During the day Company A continued maintenance of the roads along the southern slope of MT. TROCCHIO in the vicinity of S. LUCIA and also the roads extending toward the RAPIDO RIVER as far as enemy action would permit. Company C repaired and improved the roads to the south of the sector covered by Company A, from the COLLOCIO locality to the west toward the RAPIDO RIVER. Neither company removed any mines during their day's operations. One squad from Company B remained on the maintenance of roads between MT. PORCHIO and MT. TROCCHIO, which work consisted largely of filling shell craters.

As a matter of supplying stream crossing equipment, one hundred Assault Boats M2 and a like number of six-man pneumatic reconnaissance boats were procured. These quantities were in addition to the nineteen Assault Boats and thirteen Reconnaissance Boats normally carried as a basic allowance for the Battalion. An attempt was made to obtain foot-bridge equipment but none was available, although fifty sections of cat-walk were obtained, which could be used in conjunction with assault boats to construct floating footbridges. All the equipment intended for use in river crossing operations was hauled to two dumps near MT. TROCCHIO thereby shortening the distance required to haul it when the need arose. Details from the various companies further augmented the supply of materials by cutting poles to be used in corduroying the roads immediately approaching the river which could not be repaired in advance of the crossings. A portion of these poles were tied into mats twelve feet in length to expedite their being laid as well as increase the stability.

20 JANUARY, 1944:

The lettered companies continued maintenance and minesweeping of roads and areas between MT. TROCCHIO and MT. PORCHIO and the RAPIDO RIVER which were to be used during the night for the river crossing. The barren terrain along the river, under the surveillance of German observations concealed by more favorable terrain on the opposite side of the river, restricted daylight operations. Details from each of the companies also cut and tied poles into mats which were left in the forward dumps.

The "H" hour was set at 2000 hours, and the artillery began its preparatory fires at 1930 hours, which continued for an hour in an endeavor to neutralize enemy strong points near the wet bank of the river. The 141st Infantry and 143rd Infantry were scheduled to cross the river at 2000 hours, crossing respectively the north and south of S. ANGELO with the 2nd Bn. of the 19th Engineer Regiment effecting the crossing of the 141st Infantry and the 1st Bn. of the 19th Engineer Regiment crossing the 143rd infantry.

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personnel mines three hundred and fifty yards in length and one hundred and fifty yards in depth about a quarter of a mile south of S. ANGELO.

18th JANUARY, 1944:

Reconnaissance conducted by Company A in the vicinity of S. ANGELO revealed "S" Mines on both sides of a road junction just northeast of the town. The roads on either side of the railroad along the southern slope of MT. TROCCHI were reconnoitered and it was found that the road paralleling the railroad on the south was in a fair state of repair as far north as CACCIOLI, while trees had been felled and bomb craters dotted the road between the railroad and MT. TROCCHIO. A squad from Company A was given the mission of repairing this latter road, and the trees were removed and the bomb craters were either filled or by-passed. A road was built over the railroad to join these two roads. Throughout the work no mines were found. Company A improved the various road between the southern slope of MT. TROCCHIO and S. ANGELO and north to the vicinity of CACCIOLI, and at the same time the roads were swept for mines.

Twelve men from Company A accompanied three patrols from the 141st Infantry during the night. One of those patrols effected a crossing of the RAPIDO RIVER about one mile south of S. ANGELO. The approach to the river at this point had been mined by the enemy for a depth of about two hundred yards. The river was about forty foot wide at this location and had a current of approximately four miles an hour. The enemy was active throughout the night and the patrol was continuously subjected to mortar fire. Neither of the other two patrols was able to cross the river. They advanced as far as CACCIOLI and ran into a minefield covered by enemy fire.

19 JANUARY, 1944:

Plans were being formulated for crossing the RAPIDO RIVER at two points, one to the north and one to the south of S. ANGELO. Two battalions from the 19th Engineer Regiment, less one company from each, and Companies A and B of the 16th Armored Engineer Battalion had been assigned to the Division to assist the Infantry in making the actual crossing and the 111th Engineer Combat Battalion's mission was primarily to clear the selected avenues of approach to the river of mines and improve the roads as far forward prior to the operation. The coordination of engineer operations and supply of stream crossing equipment was also the function of the Battalion. After a bridgehead could be established and secured, it would be the mission of the Battalion to construct and maintain the bridge approaches, and maintain the roads on the far bank of the river. If operations were successful, it was contemplated that a Class 4 O Bailey bridge might be constructed at each point of crossing. Company A was

Company A, 111th Engineer Combat Battalion, was placed in support of the 141st Infantry and Company C, 111th Engineer Combat Battalion, in support of the 143rd Infantry. The primary mission of those two companies was to remove mines along the river and repair the roads approaching it and after a bridgehead had been secured to clear the far bank of the river of mines and improve the supply roads behind the Infantry as it advanced.

By midnight a bridgehead had not been secured. Only a few footbridges had been built across the river by lashing Bailey bridge catwalk to assault boats, and those were under constant threat of enemy artillery fire. No bridges for vehicular traffic and the enemy stubbornly opposed every attempt to establish a bridgehead by intense and accurate fire from all types of Infantry weapons. Only one injury was sustained during the nights operations. Private Raymond A. Viros, motorcyclist from Company A was slightly injured when the motorcycle which he was riding collided in the darkness near S. ANGELO with another vehicle.

Attempts to establish bridgeheads across the RAPIDO RIVER the previous night failed. The few footbridges that had been built were knocked out by enemy artillery fire and the advance elements which had crossed the river earlier were returning. A large number of the assault boats used in building foot bridges were lost as well as pneumatic reconnaissance boats used by the assault elements.

A second assault of the river defenses began at 1600 hours. The enemy's artillery action was lighter than the previous night, although heavy machine gun, small arms and mortar fire was encountered on the approaches to the river. Assault element crossed the river, but a bridgehead was not secured.

22 JANUARY, 1944:

A second attempt to establish a bridgehead on the RAPIDO RIVER failed. Companies A and C, which had been in support of these operations, continued to improve the various roads as far forward to the river as possible. This improvement consisted almost entirely in hauling and spreading gravel. The Second Platoon of Company swept footpaths leading to the bridge site, and although no mines were found, it underwent a considerable amount of fire from German Nebelweefer guns. Company B continued to improve a lateral road south of MT. PORCHIO during the day.

27 JANUARY 1944:

Early in the morning the two hundred and thirty sheep, which were left near MT. TROCCHIO over the night, were loaded into trucks and hauled as near the RAPIDO RIVER, as the situation would permit. First Lts. James N. Mueller and William Dold, Jr., S/Sgt. Edwin B. Haynes, Sgt. James D. White and T-5 Frank S. Conversano of Company A had borrowed native clothes and wore them for this detail. These individuals, together with the two Italian herders, began to herd the sheep along the river bank near S. ANGELO and worked their way to the north for about

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a mile. Inasmuch as the enemy held the ground on the opposite side of the river, every precaution had to be taken by those herding the sheep to prevent the enemy from becoming suspicious. The enemy's positions could be seen across the river as the sheep were driven along. When the junction of the RAPIDO RIVER and ASCENSIONE CREEK had been reached, the herd was turned back to the south and had proceeded about half way back the distance travelled when they were fired upon and were forced to withdraw. No anti-personnel mines were indicated in the area the sheep had walked through.

Although no anti-personnel mines were ignited by the sheep as they were herded along the river, it was known that a large number of anti-tank mines existed along the river. The First Platoon of Company A began to string a single strand of wire along the main road parallel to the river from a point about three quarters of a mile north of S. ANGELO to the north as far as Highway No. 6. This wire would serve to indicate the beginning of the mined area. The final result of this work was no more than an attempt since the enemy possessed the advantage of observation in this area and it was only a short time until a concentration of small arms and mortar fire was laid down.

A squad from the Third Platoon of Company A attempted to minesweep an approach to the river about a mile north of S. ANGELO. Beginning at the main road parallel to the river, the squad had progressed satisfactorily for about two hundred yards, but then an anti-personnel mine was exploded which seriously wounded Pvt. 1cl Harry Rutzisky in the left leg. While Private Rutzisky was being given first aid, another mine was exploded, killing Private Rutzisky instantly. Sergeant Raymond O. Nichols was seriously wounded on the left side of the face. Private John Rogers was seriously wounded in the face, left arm and left leg. Private Albert Lubin received bruises on the right leg and suffered from concussion; Private Okey L. Edge was slightly wounded in the face and left hand, and Corporal John Tokus was wounded in the right hand and right heel when the second mine exploded. Nine other men of this squad suffered from concussions and shock, and when they began to remove the wounded, the enemy opened up with machine guns.

Two squads from Company A began at as many points to clear mines from proposed foot trails to the RAPIDO RIVER. One squad began its work about a mile north of S. ANGELO and the other squad started near the junction of ASCENSIONE CREEK and the RAPIDO RIVER. No sooner had those squads begun this work, than the enemy opened up with machine guns from the far side of the river. With the fire persisting, the missions could not be completed and the details withdrew. A third squad from the company constructed wire defense positions from the northeast tip of MT. TROCCHIO to ASCENSIONE CREEK.

2 FEBRUARY 1944

The First Platoon of Company A returned after darkness to complete clearing mines from two trails extending from the main road paralleling the river to the RAPIDO RIVER. This mine sweeping mission was begun yesterday, but was interrupted by enemy patrols. Another mine sweeping party from the platoon removed twenty eight Tellermines and two "S" mines on the north side of a road junction about five hundred yards southeast of S. ANGELO. While this latter party was attempting to cross the road fifty yards west of the junction, they were subjected to small arms and machine gun fire. During this action, 2nd Lt. Glendon D. Bowers was slightly wounded, receiving a slight wound from machine gun fire in the left buttock. The Second Platoon's minesweeping party removed twelve German Tellermines and nine box mines from an area north of the road paralleling the RAPIDO RIVER one-half mile southeast of S. ANGELO. A part of those Tellermines did not have fuses, but most of them were buried beneath the box mines.

4 FEBRUARY 1944

Various road and bridge reconnaissances were conducted by Company A, which particularly included reconnoitering a road from its junction with Highway No. 6 to MT. TROCCHIO. At the same time reconnaissance parties were on the lookout for a new bivouac area in the vicinity of CERVARO. Later in the day three loads of gravel were hauled and spread along the road earlier reconnoitered.

Almost without a moment's respite, the enemy continued its artillery barrage over Company B's area through the twenty-four hour period. The company was not assigned a mission during this period, but it could be well said that its employment was steadily improving its foxholes only to leave them later in the evening when it advanced about two miles in face of the barrage. Upon arrival at MT. CASELLONE (Hill 771), about one half mile southwest of CAIRO, the same job of providing shelters was to be renewed. Despite the fierce action of the enemy, only four casualties were sustained. Technician Grade 5 Joseph H. Pohl received a small cut on the back of the neck from shell fragments. Private Charles E. Teramano suffered wounds in the legs from shell fragments and flying stones set in motion by the exploding shells.

The Battalion Command Post together with the operating of the S-1, S-2 and S-3 Sections and a kitchen began moving in the morning to a new area about one and one-half miles West of S. PIETRO. The usual rain accompanying every move was not missing, but a larger part of the tentage had been set up, and the command post put in order before it began. At the same time, a fifteen man mine clearing detail from Company C was searching an adjacent area prior to the company's arrival.

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15 FEBRUARY 1944

The spectacular event of the month occurred during the day. From almost any point in the bivouac occupied by the battalion could be seen the ancient Monastery of MONTE CASSINO overlooking the town of CASSINO. Much bitter fighting had been centered around this point, which was being used as an observation post by the enemy. At 0940 hours the first wave of bombers came over the Monastery and dropped its bombs only to be followed by four more waves in the day. Immediately after each wave of planes had bombed the area, artillery aerial bursts covered the area to hinder the enemy attempting escape.

Activities of the companies were confined to road maintenance, and reconnaissance Company A conducted a reconnaissance of the dam located one mile southwest of S. ELIA on the south side of the RAPIDO RIVER. The First Platoon Company A maintained the mule-trail used by the 141st Infantry about one and one-half miles south of CAIRO. Signs were placed along the road from a point three-quarters of a mile north of M. VILLA to a junction one-quarter of a mile southeast of CAIRO. The sides of this road were also taped and drainage improved. Meanwhile, the Third Platoon continued its work on a road to the south of MT. LA CHIARA by hauling rock to be used as fill. Besides the necessary details necessitated in the company area, Companies B and C remained in bivouac throughout the day...



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Personal Account of the Battle of San Pietro, Italy

by: Alvin Amelunke — Company "M," 143rd Infantry



Worldwartwoveterans.org

December 1943

One of the German Winter defense lines stretched across the mountains of Mt. Camino, Mt. Maggiore, Mt. Lungo, SAN PIETRO and Mt. Sammueno, Hill 1205. San Pietro settled on the slope of Mt. Sammueno down into the valley on a road from Venafro and through San Pietro and then into Hwy. 6 that went north through the Lixa Valley of Cassino and north into Rome.

Breaking through this defence line and taking San Pietro was the task given the 143rd Infantry Regiment of the 36th Division beginning on about December 8, 1943. I was a Staff Sgt. and commanded a platoon of 30 calibre heavy water cooled machine guns and for this attack was attached to "L" Company. I had no officers with my platoon, and "L" Company was commanded by First Lieutenant John C. Morrasey. We were committed on the slope of Mt. Sammuero on the left flank of the 2nd Battalion to protect their flank and advance toward San Pietro down the Venafro road leading into San Pietro. After advancing approximately 600 yards, the initial assault had been stopped dead in our tracks with heavy casualties by mines, automatic cross fire from pill boxes and mortar fire that covered the valley. The Germans still held the high ground and had a clear view of the valley. Other troops on the right and left were being repulsed from the mountain tops. We also had terrible weather to combat such as cold, rain, mud and we were in the olive orchards on terraces. We also had trouble receiving food because the roads in the valley were exposed. Daily attacks were made on the mountains just as we were in the olive orchards along this road, and each attack was met with the same fire as I mentioned, plus the Germans also brought artillery into the fighting. We ended our own artillery to drop in close in front of us, as close as 100 yards of our positions. During one heavy artillery attack, I was in a hole with Sgt. Holland, the first Sgt. of "L" Company. The artillery shell hit a tree directly above us, and

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a piece of shrapnel came down in such force that it went through Sgt. Holland's helmet and killed him instantly. Black powder from the shell was pressured into the top of my hands, but I was not injured. By the grace of God, I was spared just as I have been many times in combat. During these attacks, tanks were sent down the road to assist us in direct fire. However, some of the tanks were knocked out as they came into view of San Pietro by anti-tank guns, and some were knocked out by the mines in the road. Our troops were beginning to be very tired and exhausted due to the terrible weather conditions, lack of proper food and water, lack of sleep, receiving heavy casualties and making very little progress.

At 12:00 o'clock on December 15th, my platoon, still attached to "L" Company, was again ordered to make an all out attack with the other units on the left and right as some of the troops were having some success on the mountains. After dark on the night of Dec. 15th or 16th, we continued with some success along the olive orchards and terraces. Our advance patrol was allowed to penetrate through the German lines, and when the main advanced along the line, we were met with tremendous automatic fire power across the front and down the terraces. Some firing was also coming from our left flank, because it was exposed because they were not able to advance. My communication agent hit the ground beside me and was killed instantly. I hit the ground and rolled to the left and by the grace of God was again spared. I was not hit. I got up and made my way forward and observed where some of the automatic fire was coming from by observing the flashes of fire power. I did get two machine guns set up and silenced a few of their guns, allowing us to back out of the ambush. I did lose some of my machine gun crews, and "L" Company took heavy casualties. Lieutenant Morrisey was shot full of holes, but managed to get back to safety. He was evacuated. We reorganized our forces and again continued on. The fighting strengths of all units were greatly reduced, but all units were now moving forward.

The following day the Germans counter-attacked on all fronts with automatic fire power, mortars, artillery and tanks. Captain Marion Bowder, a former captain of "L" Company and now with Headquarters Company, directed and ordered our mortar and artillery fire to come in and fall 100 yards in front of us. Finally, when the mountains were taken by our troops, we advanced forward, and the Germans had to pull out to fall back on their next winter defense line at Rapido River and Cassino and the mountains there. We required many replacements after this and the valley was nicknamed Purple Heart and Death Valley. Our troops never stopped, and one month later were at the door of the next German defense line along the Rapido River.

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In Memory of Colonel Ausy P. Brown, U.S. Army (retired)

By Norma (Mrs. W.R.) Smith —
"M" Co. 142nd Infantry



*Day is done, gone the sun
from the lake, from the hill, from the sky.
All is well, safely rest. God is nigh.
Thanks and praise for our days
'neath the sun, 'neath the stars, 'neath the sky.
As we go, this we know. God is nigh.*

Colonel Ausy P. Brown was born March 14, 1913, in Newport, Texas. He passed away September 3, 1992, in San Antonio, Texas. He received his schooling at Farmer and Cashion Schools in Anarene, Texas. On September 5, 1932, he married Katie, his sweetheart. Katie passed away in August, 1988.

Ausy Brown enlisted in Headquarters Company, 3rd. Battalion, 142nd. Infantry, 36th. Division National Guard in Wichita Falls, Texas, on March 28, 1930, at the age of 17. He served in this unit until 1938 as Private, Sergeant and Staff Sargent. He transferred to "M" Co. 142nd. Infantry in early 1933 and was commissioned 2nd. Lieutenant April 20, 1938. He served as platoon leader then Executive Office until January 1941 after he had been promoted to 1st. Lieutenant July 20, 1940. He mobilized with "M" Co. November 25, 1940. The troops remained in Wichita Falls until moved by truck to Camp Bowie, Texas. Lieut. Brown was then transferred to "D" Co. as Executive officer.

From July 30, 1941, to October 24, 1941, he attended the "Rifle and Heavy Weapons School" at Ft. Henning, Georgia. He returned to "D" Co.

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at Camp Bowie as Commander until June 22, 1942. He was promoted to Captain February 11, 1942, and mid-February the Division moved to Camp Blanding, Florida. At Camp Blanding, Ausy had been assigned as S-3, 3rd. Battalion. The Division moved out the first week of July, 1942, for maneuvers in North Carolina. During maneuvers he was assigned to "M" Co. 142nd Infantry. Following maneuvers the Division moved to Camp Edwards, Mass., for amphibious training. In early 1943, "M" Co., as part of 142nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team, moved to Virginia for mountain training. After this training, lasting about three weeks, the troops were transferred to A.P. Hill to prepare for movement to staging area at Ft. Dix, N.J. This was in March, 1943. Then the troops left Ft. Dix for New York and set sail for Oran, Africa April 1, 1943.

On arrival in North Africa, April 13, 1943, the 3rd. Battalion, 142nd. Infantry was assigned duty with the "Invasion Training Center" to conduct and supervise "Amphibious Training," "Pill Box Destruction," "Street Fighting" and "Mortar Firing." "M" Co. was involved in training different units including the 1st Division, 45th Division plus units of the 36th Division.

Early September, 1943, "M" Co. 142nd Infantry, with units of the 36th Division, embarked for the invasion of Italy. September 9, 1943, the 3rd. Battalion made the assault landing on the beaches of Paestum, Italy. They were met by heavy enemy resistance. On that ninth day of September, 1943, after being met by heavy rifle, tank and artillery fire, many were killed, wounded and captured. At the same time, Battalion C.O. Colonel McDonald experienced injury to his legs, but continued to move with the troops. Ausy lost his radio man and radio when Glenn Beckett was captured. The second day of the invasion the 3rd Battalion took Abanella. They then dug in to await further orders. Two days later the Battalion was attached to the 143rd Infantry and ordered to recapture Altavilla. The 1st Battalion, 142nd had lost it the prior day. The 3rd Battalion moved in under cover of darkness and attacked at dawn; the town was recaptured. On the same day, Col. McDonald was ordered back to the 143rd Infantry. Brown was placed in charge of the Battalion. After deployment of troops, the Battalion came under fire from tanks and artillery experiencing many casualties. The enemy attacked repeatedly, but the Division was able to hold.

During the battle for Altavilla, Major Ray Irvin, Battalion Executive Officer was captured. Shortly after Major Irvin's capture, Brown was assigned as Battalion Executive Officer. Captain Ed Sullivan took Command of "M" Co. 142nd Infantry. Brown ordered the Battalion until the arrival of Capt. Rush Wells. Brown was reassigned as Executive officer, holding that title until he was wounded on January 23, 1944. He remained in the hospital until March 20, 1944, then was sent back to the 142nd Infantry and assigned as "Regimental Liaison" Officer. He was rotated state side August 1944 and assigned to the 76th Infantry Replacement

Center, Camp Joseph I. Robinson, Arkansas, until mid-September, 1945. A promotion to Major came on May 10, 1945.

On September 21, 1945, Brown was transferred to Ft. Ord, California, to the "AGF Replacement Depot #2" as Battalion Commanding Officer of the 4th Battalion 6th Regiment. On January 10, 1946, orders came for Puerto Rico. On arrival in Puerto Rico on February 6, 1946, Brown was assigned as S-3, 65th Infantry Regiment, at Henry Barracks. On November 5, 1946, he was sent to Ft. Buchanan to open and command the "Antillas Dept. Administration School." This was the first of this type of school in the entire U.S. Army.

On July 14, 1948, Brown was transferred to the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., and assigned to General Staff, G-3, Department of the Army. He was promoted to Lt. Colonel on December 28, 1950. After three and one-half years on General Staff U.S. Army, he was assigned to Korea as Regimental Executive Office, 15th Infantry, 3rd Division. On April 20, 1952, Brown was transferred to 1st. Cav. Division at Camp Crawford, Japan as G-1.

Returning to the United States, he was assigned to Louisiana Military District, New Orleans, La., as Unit Advisor and Senior Army Advisor for the Reserves on August 10, 1953.

On September 25, 1956, he was assigned to Ft. Henning, Georgia, Infantry School and served as Deputy Director and later as Director of Communication Department. This was his last command prior to retirement. Brown was promoted to Colonel U.S.A.R. March 2, 1959, and retired June 30, 1960.

Colonel Brown received two Combat Infantry Badges: the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

Colonel Ausy P. Brown was laid to rest in the Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio, Texas. He leaves behind his wife, Virgie, who he married in December, 1989; a son, Jerry; a granddaughter, two brothers and one sister. Also left to mourn his passing is a number of "M" Co. 142nd Infantry men who served under him in the Texas 36th National Guard in Wichita Falls before mobilization, and many officers and men who joined "M" Co. 142nd. Infantry along the way from Camp Bowie to Italy. These men not only respected Colonel Brown as their commanding Officer, but he was their friend. Colonel Brown was loved by his men and their families, and he will be sorely missed.



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Impressions of the War

by: Robert J. Gans, Company I,
142nd Infantry



Worldwarveterans.org

During my tenure as 1st Lt. with the 36th Division, I Company, 142 Regiment, I made good friends with a young P.F.C. named Harry Probert. Harry was a jolly chap and was a very good soldier. He served under me in Italy and in June 1944 was part of an unusual 5 man patrol that caused a bit of excitement. All of the patrol, including myself, received the Silver Star. Well, after I was wounded in France, I lost touch of Harry. He surfaced in 1987, writing from his home in Virginia. We managed to meet and exchanged a few letters.

Last month I looked over my old correspondence and something Harry wrote caught my eye. He called it "Impressions of the War." Here they are:

"Impressions of the War"

In the meantime some memory flashes of Italy...

- Malaria prevention — nasty tasting atarbring.
- Churches on hilltops.
- Women carrying huge loads on the top of their heads.
- The rapid fire of burp-guns.
- The distant sounds of baying donkeys and ringing church bells.
- Our helmets — we carried water in them, brushed our teeth out of them, washed and shaved out of them, washed our socks out of them, used them as shovels, tried to crawl inside them while under fire and sat on them to watch a movie!
- The stench of dead horses and Jerrys baking in the hot Italian sun.
- Mud, mud and mud.
- Straw tool huts temporarily occupied by prostitutes and the long line of GI's waiting their turn.

- The distant calls of cuckoo-birds. When we heard them we always knew Jerry was "somewhere out there."
- A wild strawberry--patch in a combat zone. We stopped and bunched together to pick strawberries. One shell would have gotten us all. Our squad leader was very upset.
- Our march through Rome.
- Little kids pimping their older sisters.
- Olive groves and vineyards.
- Vino.
- Hot springs in a pasture north of Rome. We took turns sitting in the warm water naked, relaxing and enjoying. This is the same area one of our fighter planes strafed us.
- Sand dunes outside of Rome and daily passes into Rome.
- My harmonica playing.
- Cassino and Anzio.
- Morning calisthenics conducted by our fun loving platoon leader. You would start off the GI way, by the numbers. You would suddenly yell "Alright! This is a follow-me exercise." You would then go into all kinds of contortions and expected us to follow. It was impossible. The platoon would break-up laughing. Remember?
- Hungry little kids with their rusty containers standing by our garbage can begging for leftover scraps of food from our mess kits.
- Our artillery observation plans. We nicknamed it Sad Sack.
- Our pet goose Alexander. We promoted him to Sergeant. He made noises like one. Later we busted him. He messed on the CO's blanket.
- Barrels of vino buried by the farmers. We would find them while digging in. We had to sample it to see if it was fit to drink. We gave it the taste test. After a few canteen cups, who cared? (Our squad leaders, that's who!)
- Willie and Joe — our favorite cartoon characters.
- Bivouacking on lava dust from Mt. Vesuvius.
- Invasion training.
- Our own private war with the Jerrys. We knocked out an artillery piece, destroyed a truck, killed or wounded twelve enemy, captured three more and demoralized a large hostile force and made them beat a hasty retreat!

Last January, 1991, Harry Probert died of a heart attack. His "Impressions" are a memorial to his contributions in "our war."



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Rapido River Patrol

by: Paul H. Duffey
Co. "C," 141st Infantry

I have written and rewritten this particular story because I had forgotten a few things that came to mind later. This time I have not only my account but the accounting of the story by two other men involved, Lt. Netherton the leader, and T/Sgt. Mac Acosta the platoon sergeant. Each person involved could give you another story — their story and what they remember of what they did and saw.

On the evening of the 19th of January, 1944, the third platoon was assembled for a patrol. I understood it to be a reconnaissance patrol, which meant no shooting unless absolutely necessary. It was, I thought, to go through the enemy line, make note of their strength, their positions, cut communications, return and report. At the time, I thought it strange for a recon patrol to be so large, but I was new and that's what we were told.

The chain of command was 1st Lt. Netherton, leader; 2nd Lt. Morehead, Assistant Leader and T/Sgt. Mac Acosta, third in command. The platoon strength was about 30 men.

We left the company area after dark, moving single file down to the road that paralleled the river (Rapido). When we reached the road, we turned right and walked about two hundred yards to a building on the right side of the road. There was all the while artillery and small arms fire up and down the line, but very little in our immediate area. The Lts. were engaged in conversation with someone outside the building about the rubber boat we were to use in crossing the river. A few members of the first squad picked up the boat, and we were on our way again. We were moving first squad, second squad and trailing was the third, of which I was a member. We moved up the road a short distance until we came to the tapes marking the path through the German mine field down to the river. Our engineers had cleared the path earlier. We turned left and started through the mine field. About halfway down, the word was passed back to "look to the right." As I passed it back over my right shoulder, I was automatically looking at about 10 to 15 G.I.s that had gotten caught either by the mines, artillery or small arms or all three. There were a couple of medics among them that looked like they were trying to carry a wounded G.I. out on a litter. This scene really rattled me. I wasn't really scared up to this point (I didn't know any better), but now I saw it wasn't all fun and games.

We arrived at the river, and things were very quiet except for the sporadic fire up and down the line. But again, not in our immediate area.

The two Lts. and T/Sgt. Acosta were working to get the first squad across the river and while that was taking place, the rest of us laid behind a hump of ground about 10 or 15 yards away waiting our turn to be put across.

This next portion is Mac Acosta's story (in part):

“When All Hell Broke Loose”

“I remember seeing German signs on stakes with stenciled outlines of skull and crossbones with the word “Minen.” I thought, ‘How nice of them to tell us.’

By the time we reached the river, it was very dark. Then, very quietly and stealthily we made our way to the river bank. We had one of those large-type rubber rafts the engineers use in building pontoon bridges. The raft had a rope tied to each end and our plan was to ferry the platoon across one squad at a time. We launched the raft and Sgt. Otis Wiley's squad was the first group we shoved off. They had almost made it to the far side, when one of his men fell into the water. The Rapido is not too wide, but it is treacherously deep and swift. The man in full battle gear was drowning and yelling for help. His screams shattered the silence of the night, and that was when ‘all hell broke loose.’ The Germans opened up on us with a slew of machine guns. There were machine guns to the right of us and machine guns to the left and machine guns in front, and we were not Rudyard Kipling's noble five hundred. Machine gun tracers were crisscrossing over the river. The tracers resembled continuous red ribbons of fire bouncing off the water's surface. Our blow holes were sucking wind. I tried to locate the position of the gunners, but in raising one's head, you would swear the tracers were coming straight at you and were going to hit you between the eyes. Everyone laid as flat on the river bank as he could, trying to imitate a pancake. One of our men's combat pack was hit by a tracer, and it went to smoldering; he pulled it off so fast that I think he broke some kind of record.

Since ours was a reconnaissance patrol, we did not return the fire, and after a while, Jerry quit shooting at us except for a sporadic burst or a mortar shell. We then proceeded to get the rest of the men across, but we discovered the raft to be useless. It was full of bullet holes. Lt. Tom Netherton sent 2nd Lt. Robert Morehead with a detail of four men to find another boat so we could complete our mission.”

This is what happened: (P.H.D. (me))

Lt. Morehead detailed four men to go back to the road to try to locate another boat. He did not go with us. The four men were — Chester Hatton, Stan Hays, Roy Hensley and me. We went single file up the path. Hays led,

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then Hatton, me, and Roy brought up the rear. We might have gone 100 yards when a machine gun opened up hitting the ground just behind Hensley. We hit the dirt. Roy yelled, "Go!" We were up and running and about 40 yards later someone yelled, "Down!" Just as I hit the ground, a mortar shell hit behind us — and we were up and running again. This happened a few times until we reached the road; then all was quiet. Hays asked if everyone was okay. Roy said something about digging the dirt out of his butt before he could take a crap. (Those were not his words, but they mean the same thing!) We searched the area for about 20 minutes, but found nothing usable.



JUST 100 YARDS FROM THE TREACHEROUS RAPIDO, INFANTRYMEN TAKE COVER BEHIND ROCK-CONSTRUCTED STABLE.

We returned to the river and reported to a Lt., probably Lt. Netherton. We were not gone more than 45 minutes. There was a man lying behind the small mound of dirt. He had been pulled from the river, so there must have been two men that fell into the river. I remember when we left to return to the Co. area, he had to be helped to his feet and the ice cracked from his coat and pants. They had frozen while he laid there.

Mac Acosta — (In part):

"I had been under the influence of vino. I had imbibed earlier, but the shooting spree left me stone sober. Funny how fear will sober you up. You can't tell me that a person who's "dronk," can't be "afeerd." Man, I was flat scared and sober.

"It was taking Lt. Morehead and his crew a long time to get back with navigable transportation. We laid on the bank for hours waiting."

P.H.D. (me again):

Where Lt. Morehead was, I don't know; he was not with us. Maybe he took another group back to look for a boat, but a little while later you'll read in Mac Acosta's writing that we met Lt. Morehead on the road.

Mac Acosta:

"The sky was beginning to lighten and daybreak would soon be on us. Lt. Netherton said, 'Sgt., it is going to be daylight soon and we can't stay here; otherwise we are going to be sitting ducks for Jerry. Get the men together and let's move back. I asked Netherton what we were going to do about Sgt. Wiley and his squad who were across the river. He said Wiley would have to use his initiative and find a way back on his own. He couldn't jeopardize the rest of the platoon by staying put.

As we trudged down the road toward our rear position, we met Lt. Morehead coming toward us. Lt. Netherton explained his decision to Morehead who showed disappointment in leaving Wiley across the river. He talked about going back for him, but it was practically daylight and the enemy would have full view of our position. A short while later, Sgt. Wiley showed up with his squad, minus one man (the one that drowned). Wiley was furious. He was fighting mad. I thought he was going to whip up on me. I told him I didn't blame him for being angry, and that I would feel the same if I were him. It tried to explain Lt. Netherton's decision. There was no calming him. He said he was going to talk to the Colonel and file charges against all of us for dereliction of duty. I don't know if he ever filed charges, because a few weeks later he was hit in the jaw, and I was shot in both legs on Hill 593. That ended our military careers."

"I don't remember the name of the man that drowned. He was really a boy. He was a replacement we had received about three weeks before. We were getting kids as replacements, many were only eighteen years old."

P.H.D. (me, again):

Mac goes on to say one fellow was crying because the man that drowned was his best friend. Mac said it was strange because he never saw a man cry because his friend was killed. I didn't either. This was a way of life after a few weeks (or less) of war, but being their first time up, as it was mine too, they weren't "numbed" yet by combat. It surely doesn't take long.

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This next part (in part) is Lt. Netherton's writings:

" 'When All Hell Broke Loose' brought back a lot of memories. It happened just about the way you told it, but with one correction. It was not a recon patrol; it was a combat patrol. I remember it clearly as the most illogical, irrational example of military idiocy I encountered in twenty years of professional service.

"I returned from rest camp late on the afternoon of the eighteenth reporting in to Bn., I met the Bn. C.O., Capt. Newman. 'Well, glad to see you back — just sent someone out on your job.' I had a hunch I really didn't want to know anymore about the 'Job,' so I didn't ask; just went on down to the Co. When I arrived, I found I was no longer third platoon leader. Lt. Morehead had come in from the third Bn., I think, and I was now Exec O. Any dreams of an easier life dissipated the next morning when the Bn. Co. O. sent for me. It turned out that an attempt was made the previous night, the 18th, to cross the Rapido — platoon strength. They got shot up and had considerable trouble in disengaging. Anyhow, another try was decided on, and I was to have the honor. Naturally, I chose my old crew — good old third platoon — to share the honor with me.

"Our mission was to cross the river — then move in a generally northwesterly direction approximately 1,500 yards, dig in, and hold until the next night, when 'the whole Division will join you.'

"The rest of the story was as you told it — just a little filling-in needed. When the machine guns cut loose, we couldn't maneuver — we were immobilized. A fire fight at that point would have meant the end of the mission. If it had been a recon, I would have had other options, but the mission demanded that we get another boat and continue. That is why we stayed there so long. As long as there was chance of continuing, I was obligated to wait there. Only when daylight was minutes away could the mission be abandoned, and, of course Wiley and his crew were stuck there with a wet crossing. Wiley did what I expected (and hoped) he would do; he 'hailed' out of there.

"I remember too, how well all the men behaved that night, under very trying conditions. They were steady under fire — they moved quickly and silently, and obeyed orders promptly. Not an operation to be proud of from my viewpoint. I failed to accomplish my mission, and I cannot find any consolation in the fact that the whole Division ran into a blood bath the next night trying the same thing.

"What higher H.Q.s hoped to accomplish by sending a platoon on a job like that on two consecutive nights, I can't imagine, unless it was to feel out the defenses. I know it was thought the main defensive positions were located back across the valley along that line of low hills. It wasn't until the Div. got chopped up on the 20th that it was realized their main battle position was set up with the river as part of it. Think what would have happened to us if our replacement boat had arrived 15 minutes sooner, and

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we crossed. None of us would have lasted until daylight. If we had gotten through their main line, and had managed a running battle for 1,500 yards, we would have spent a day and a night back with their heavy mortar positions. Just imagine what our chances would have been — that was the 15th Panzer Grenadiers out there.

“What you said about replacements mourning the loss of friends, I’ve found to be true. I think once the green replacement loses his civilian outlook on death and comes to accept the possibility — even probability of his own death, he became as calloused as the old soldier. Calloused is not the right word. Numbed is closer, I think. The recruit had to lose his oldest of standards, and not until he could accept living like an animal and under constant fear of immediate and violent death as a normal thing could he put death off to the side and go on functioning ‘normally.’ To us, normal was mud and blood and fatigue and fear. These things had to be lived with, and yet ignored, too.

P.H.D. (me, again):

We got a few hours sleep in the a.m. and in the afternoon; the sun was bright and warm. I really felt good, but there was bad news coming. We had to go up again tonight but this time the whole Div. plus a few more.

That evening (the 20th) the Co. formed and moved out. We took the same route as the night before. We stopped at the building and in groups of about 10 men, we picked up pontoons. (Large wooden boxes, it sticks in my mind, about 2 feet deep, 10 feet long, and 4-1/2 feet wide.) They were heavy, but with about five men on each side they weren’t hard to handle. Our group was either number 11 or 13 boat and we were either the last or next to last in the ‘parade.’ We started up the road and our artillery really unloaded on the far side of the river. I think it was a 15 to 30 minute barrage. (At least it seemed to be!) There was the constant fire fights and artillery up and down the line but none in our immediate area. We had stopped to watch the barrage and the word was, “This is going to be a snap. We’ll just take that piece of real estate across the river, because there won’t be anyone alive over there to fight.” The barrage lifted and we moved out. The word came back, ‘watch your step.’ I was about to relay the word as my right foot stepped on something (ribs), and I slid down into the gooey innards of a carcass. Probably a cow. I hung onto the pontoon and the men in front and behind me kept me from going down all the way. We came to the tape markers and swung left off the road following the pontoon in front of us. We were told once again, ‘stay inside of the tapes.’ About 75 or 100 yards off of the road, we turned 90 degrees left for about 20 yards and then 90 degrees right and were on our way down to the river — one thunderous roar! — and I was flying through the air and I thought, ‘What is it? Dead or alive?’ I hit the ground with a thud. That answered my question. I stung up the back from my knees to my waist and into my right hand and arm. I laid there for a few seconds, then held out my right hand and arm, and with

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my left hand I ran down my right arm. It was still there. Then, I felt my hand — it was still intact; then slowly one finger at a time — they were all there. Good! Then I called to Roy — nothing. So, I called again. He moaned as he came to. Then, I checked Stan Hays behind me and found that he was okay. He was blown back a few yards and got it up the front from his knees up into his face.

The man on the right front of the pontoon had stepped on a mine that was replaced by the enemy during the evening shortly before we arrived. They had seen the tapes during the day and thought they would do us in by replacing a few mines. It worked. He lost a leg. It (the concussion) threw the man on the left front of the pontoon into the mine field. When he awoke, he saw his dilemma and wanted back on the path. We tried to persuade him to stay still until daylight and then work his way out. At daybreak with the front on the ground, you could sometimes see the mines because they were wooden boxes with a charge in them and the frost didn't lay on the wood. He would have no part of it; he wanted back with us. Roy told him he would throw the end of a blanket to him but he would not pull him. The fellow had to crawl out on his own. I don't think he crawled more than 4 or 5 feet until he tripped a mine and was thrown back onto the path — dead.

Our medic had come by and asked if anyone needed help — I told him I could use some but to take care of the others, because I checked myself and had everything — fingers, etc. A short time later he came by and wrapped my hand and arm and gave me a half tube of morphine to hold down the pain. The medics were never given the recognition they should have gotten. We're laying down 'flat out' and they're moving around patching up the wounded. From the time of the explosions until the medic left might have been 15 minutes.

Someone found a ditch, probably a drainage ditch, on the left side of the path and we all got into it. There was about 5 or 6 of us in the ditch when the Krauts started sending the 'Screaming Meemies' (Nebel Werfers) at us (rockets set off electronically — about a 4 inch shell). I thought at the time, 'Good grief, don't we have enough troubles, now they're trying to kill us.' When we heard the shells coming, we would dig our elbows and knees into the sides of the ditch to keep from being bounced out. The concussion was such that it would and did bounce a person out of the ditch. We stayed in the ditch trying not to think of what the Co. got into. It was bad enough where we were, but I'm sure it was worse down at the river. Artillery, mortars, small arms, everything. All up and down the line.

About 5:00 a.m., the Co. came up the path. That is, what was left of it. We fell in line at the rear and went back to the Co. Area. The wounded went to Bn. Aid and then to the Evacuation Hospital and then to the next, which for me was the 17th General in Naples.

While I was in the hospital, Mt. Vesuvius erupted and as the hospital was on top of the hill in Naples, I got a very good look at the volcano.

In March, just after my 19th birthday, I was back in the Co., meeting new replacements and old friends.

Stan Hays, the fellow behind me when the mine blew, had gone back to the hospital with me but sneaked out a day or so later and went back to the Co. Lt. Everett noticed he had trouble seeing and sent him to Bn. Aid. He never returned to the Co. after that. I was lucky I got it up the back. At the 17th General, a nurse asked me if I had any other wounds and when I said "no, held up my pants to look at them. They looked like I had gotten shot at with a shotgun. They had quite a few holes in them, and so did my butt. She let it go at that.

After cleaning our weapons, training, and passing in review for Medal ceremonies, we were ready for our next 'trip," Anzio and onto Rome.

Worldwartwoveterans.org



EDITOR HICKS A. TURNER



FIGHTING 36th HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Our inventory of stories for the Quarterly is getting low at the present time. Every man in the 36th has at least one or two good stories to tell — humorous, tragic, combat situations and others. NOW is the time to tell it. If you are unable to write it on your own, solicit the assistance of a relative or good friend to help you with it. Just be sure to write the story and forward it to the Association.

Most of the Associations mail is sent through Leonard Wilkerson, P.O. Box 2049, Malakoff, TX 75148. He does a very good job in getting the mail he receives to the proper person.

You may, if you wish, forward stories for the Quarterly direct to: Hicks A. Turner, Rt. 2 — Box 238, Clyde, TX 79510.

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My Last Day on the Front

by George Kerrigan — “A” Company, 142nd Infantry



I had been wounded on September 29, 1944, above the town of Tendon, France, in the Vosges Mountains of Alsace Lorraine. I was hit in the right shoulder, and, as most people know, it was a real rough month. So, after a few weeks in the hospital, a call went out to all hospitals to send all men who were in good shape back to their outfits. So, a doctor came to me and asked me how I felt, and I said, “I feel fine, but I can’t raise my arm up.” The doc asked me what weapon I had handled, and I said a rifle. “You shoot a rifle like this?” he said going through the motions, and I told him yes. “You don’t have to raise your arm above your shoulder to fire? You will be fine.” So off I went to join Company “A” 142nd again.

So things were rough as hell, and getting rougher, and all we could do was to try to stay alive.

At the end of November, 1944, we were cleaning out a town near St. Marie and going from house to house. I wound up on the top of a high hill with John Wheatly. After we left a home that was empty, we were hit with a barrage of mortar shells. I was about 50 feet above the house when I was sent flying downhill through the air by the concussion, over a patio and into the house where I was knocked out. At the same time, the Jerries were also firing 20mm. at us from down below. Wheatley was hit in the thigh as he had seen me thrown by the mortars and lying unconscious. He thought I was dead. Finally, I came to and saw John lying on the ground. I called him and asked if he was alright. He said, “No, I’m hit.” I told him not to move, as Jerry was firing elsewhere; they were sure we were goners. About 50 feet above us, was a flat path that lead to the top of the hill, so I asked John if he could make it to the path. He said, “I’ll try, but my leg is getting stiff.” I told him to take off and when he reached the path to lie there, so that when they fired, the 20s would go over his body. After a while, I would go up and check on him. As Jerry was firing elsewhere, I told John to take off, which he did. Then he was spotted, but by the time they swung around and zeroed in, he hit the dirt. I was hoping he was not hit, and then they swung the firing away when they were sure he was dead. After about 10 minutes, I took off, and they spotted me. By the time they fired at me, I reached John and dove on the other side of him, and the 20mm shots went over my back. I could hear John breathing hard, and I asked if he was hit again. “No, but

I don't know if I can go any farther." I said, "You'd better be able, as were going for the last time to get over the top. As soon as I get my breath, you hang on me, and we will go together. They think we are both dead and are firing elsewhere." A few minutes later, I said, "Put your arm over my neck, and let's go for the last dash." Off we went and cleared the top before the firing started again. I'm sure we broke a few Jerries hearts that day, since they couldn't kill us. Now as I assumed, our troops had the town down below, and we made it down (falling most of the way) and found an aid station. The medics took care of John and as I was leaving, asked where I was going. "Back to my outfit," I said. "Lie down," he said. "You're a lot worse than this guy." But, I left anyway. Then, things went blank, and I woke up in a bed. As I looked around, a guy in the next bed said, "Oh, you woke up Kerrigan." I asked him who he was (his head was all wrapped up), and the doctor told me he was Roger _____. I asked where we were, and he said in a french house on the second floor. "They found you lying in the street somewhere," the doctor that treated me said. "These guys are from the same outfit (I told them who you were). Find a house to put them in." They kept me sedated, so I didn't know much until I wound up in a hospital. It was the 7th army hospital, and after about a week, a doctor called me into his office, introduced himself as Dr. Stone and started giving me a wonderful speech.

"Sgt. Kerrigan, on behalf of the U.S. Government, I want to thank you for the terrific job you did and the way you fought for the past 18 months in Italy and France." I said, "Hold on, doc. I appreciate the wonderful hoopla, but you don't know me. I could be the biggest gold bricker in the U.S. army." But he said, "I checked with the men in our hospital who served in your outfit, and they told me of some of the scrapes you were in. I'm not lying to make you feel good. I am going to have you taken out of combat; you did your share." So I said, "Doctor, I thank you for your kind words, and now I know that I will make it through the big scrap alive."

In a few weeks I, with a load of non coms from most of the combat outfits, started a new outfit, the 6069th Infantry training battalion. So instead of bringing new replacements from the States, they figured there were plenty of excess rear echelon men overseas already. Why not give them combat training and save all the trouble of bringing new men from the states? So all the rear echelon outfits were told to send all available men to our camp. But, as much as we were all purple heart men, we thought it was very unfair. True, they had it made while overseas, but still, they were all overseas two and three years and were now going up to fight. To make matters worse, none of the outfits were going to send their good men, so they got rid of their screwballs. But, I personally thought that they had a damn good reason to bitch. But that is another story that I'll tell... and how my platoon of 100 men shaped up like west pointers after they were treated right by me, while other Sgts. were having a hell of a time.

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Reminiscing of An Ex-Serviceman

by: Clarence Wood, Co. "F" 141st Infantry



Hello, my name is Clarence Wood. I am an ex-serviceman. I served during World War 2. I was reminiscing about some of my army experiences, and thought you may like to share in them.

It all started back in August of 1942 when I was inducted into the army. I reported to the induction center at Camp Dodge on the outskirts of Des Moines. I was given my physical exam and a battery of aptitude and I.Q. tests. We were also given a series of shots. After passing our physical exam we were sworn into the United States army as privates. We were then given a 10 day leave before reporting for active duty.

At the end of the 10 day leave we all reported back to Camp Dodge. We were issued all of our clothing and other gear and given orders to be transferred to a basic training unit.

We were loaded on an old passenger coach with an N.C.O. in charge. Those days the passenger coaches were not air conditioned. The windows did have wire screens on them so you could get some fresh air. However, when the window was raised, you were subject to all kinds of dust, smoke and fine cinders from the engine. They were coal burning steam engines in those days. As a result of this, your clothes would get very dirty.

Our coach was put on a siding where we spent several hours in the hot sun before a train came along and picked us up. After about a day and a half of riding in this hot, stuffy coach, we ended up on a spur track that led into Camp Walters, Texas.

I was put in a training company that had fellows from all over. I remember some were from Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Missouri, Colorado, Iowa and Wisconsin, The N.C.O.s that were in charge of the barracks that I was assigned to had been on duty in the South Pacific when Pearl Harbor was attacked. We could tell by the ribbons they wore. Our leader was Sgt. Tomazawich and his Assistant was Corp. Cerenko.

The training company I was in consisted of two parts. The first 6 weeks of basic training was in a Pioneer Company. The Pioneers were a small branch of the Corps of Engineers. We were taught how to build kinds of bridges, from swinging rope bridges to pontoon bridges, and small bridges that used wooden piers. We were taught how to build and repair

roads. Demolition using T.N.T. dynamite and other explosives were also taught.

The next 7 weeks were spent learning about the 1903 Springfield bolt action rifle. (My favorite weapon), bayonet training and close order drill. Sgt. Tomazawich was a superb drill instructor. I learned a lot about close order drill from him and was able to use it later when I became part of a training cadre at Camp Joseph T. Robinson in Arkansas.

We were a bunch of raw recruits when we first landed at Camp Walters. We all had two left feet, didn't know our right from left and walked like we were walking behind a plow. After 13 weeks of basic training we were transformed into a pretty sharp platoon of soldiers.

The 13 weeks of basic training went by fast, and before we knew it, the time had come for us to be shipped out to regular units.

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The First Voyage Destination North Africa

March 31, 1943, was a very busy day for members of the 36th Division, stationed at Camp Edwards, Mass. The day was spent packing clothes and gear ready for a ride on a troop train down the coast line to New York City. Our train ride took place at night. We could not see a thing out of the windows, because they were covered with blackout curtains. Our destination was pier 13 on Staten Island. We arrived there early on the morning of April 1, which was my birthday.

All day long on April 1, the troops of the 36th Division loaded up on troop transport ships. Each Regiment was assigned to a different troop ship. The 141st Regt., of which I was a member of, was loaded up on the U.S.S. Brazil. At one time the Brazil had been a luxury liner. Our quarters were on the very top deck. It had been the promenade deck. It had a covering of wood, metal and canvas to offer protection from the elements.

Our bunks were metal frames with canvas pads stacked 5 high with 20 inches between bunks. There was a 24 inch squeeze through aisle between rows of bunks. I was lucky to get a bunk 2nd up from the floor. The fellows on the bottom bunks were subject to getting splattered on when the fellows above would get sea sick.

About mid morning, on April 2, 1943, our troop ship pulled away from pier 13 and started our journey overseas. The motion of the ship in the water gave me a light-headed feeling. I looked all over to see if I could locate the Statue of Liberty but had no luck. It must have been in a different area. Soon we were out of the harbor and headed for the open sea. A strange feeling came over all of us.

The next morning when we strolled out on to the open deck, we could see a great number of new ships had joined us. We realized then that a large convoy was being put together. There were all kinds of ships: troop ships,

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tankers, supply ships and ships loaded with all kinds of equipment. There were Destroyer Escorts on the outer edge and smaller Corvettes dodging in and out of the line of ships. The convoy was spread out ahead and to our side as far as the eye could see. The troop ships were always kept in the center of the convoy.

About the 3rd day out we were given a book and other literature on the country we were headed for, North Africa. We were all excited about going to Africa, the dark continent. North Africa was different than what we had imagined. It was civilized and not covered with jungle and wild animals.

Each day the convoy would change in size as boats would drop out for one reason or another. We could see the Destroyer escorts and the smaller Corvettes move in and out of the line of ships, always on the alert for enemy submarines. The gun crews of each ship would go through a 10 minute gun drill and fire off a few rounds of ammunition. The sailors were continuously chipping away at rust and old paint.

The smoking lamp was always lit from sun up to sunset. The days were spent sunning ourselves, playing cards and reading our books on North Africa. We had daily band concerts by our regimental band. One of the popular tunes at that time was Brazil. Because our ship was named Brazil, the tune became our theme song.

On April 14, 1943, the Brazil pulled into the port of Oran, Africa. Oran is located on the Mediterranean Ocean and in the province of Algeria. We unloaded from the boat and were taken to another sea port town of Arzew. Arzew would be a place that we would see much of in the future.

We were moved back into the hills away from the coast line and given a lot of training in marching up and down the mountain trails. After several weeks of this kind of training we were ordered to travel by truck convoy to the western coast of Africa to French Morocco. On this trip we traveled through the Atlas Mountains and crossed the Atlas Desert. We traveled through the towns of Sidi Bel Abbass, Oujda, Fez, Meknes and ended up in the cork forest, near Rabat, the Capital of Morocco. We also visited Casablanca.

We bivouacked in the cork forest. This was a very unique forest. The trees were of an oak type but had bark of cork. The natives would harvest this cork by stripping it from the trunk of the tree in places of at least 6 feet long. Pile after pile of the cork that had been harvested could be seen throughout the forest. From this bark many of our cork products are made. I was amazed when I first saw this forest.

After doing guard duty along the coast line between Rabat and Casablanca for several weeks, we were ordered back to Arzew. I mentioned before that Arzew would be a place that we would see much of. The trip back to Arzew was made by rail. We rode in the famous 40 and 8 box

cars. They were supposed to carry 40 men or 8 horses. On top of each box car rode an Arab brakeman. It was his duty to tighten up the hand brakes whenever the engineer gave a signal with the engine whistle. It was quite a ride.

When we arrived at Arzew, we were told that we would be taking intensive amphibious training. For several weeks that is all we did, storm the beaches of Arzew. We used rubber rafts, LCIs and LCVPs. Many accidents happened while on these maneuvers, but the training continued on.

After our training was finished, I was chosen as one of several advance persons to board the Liberty ship James O'hara. This group of advance personnel went aboard ship to learn in detail all of the passage ways, stairs and bunking areas so that we could direct and lead the members of our respective units to them. We were aboard ship for about 7 days, and each day we would go through a routine of leading our units to their proper place. It was an honor for me to be selected for this duty. Our training was not as demanding as it was for the troops back on shore.

Finally the day arrived when the James O'hara was loaded with combat troops and headed for her destination, Italy. We all wondered what would be in store for us.

An Afterthought

I would like to add this to my reminiscings. It is a poem, or a Soldiers Prayer, as it was titled in Tank Magazine early in 1944 during World War II. The caption read as follows. "This Poem or Soldiers Prayer was found on a wadded up piece of paper in an abandoned fox hole near the front lines. Author Unknown."

I do not ask of thee, O Lord
That I might richer be
Nor do I ask for earthly things
That were not meant for me.

For I have learned to take my lot,
And live from day to day
Looking up to seek thy face
For the guiding of my way.

But this I ask of thee, O Lord
To lay thy guiding hand
Upon the hand of those I love
Within my great homeland.

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Guide and comfort and give them peace
While I am far away.
And if by thy will I do not return
Be with them then, O Lord, I pray.

My army buddy Sgt. Joe Kinyon and I recited this poem many times before we would go to sleep. I still recite it occasionally.



Wings As Eagles

by: Ted Venetis, Hq. 1/142nd Infantry



This testimony is written for the honor and glory of my Lord. I will keep glorifying and honoring His Holy Name forever. My Lord has blessed me through all my life. Praise His Holy Name.

I have had quite a few close calls with death in my life as a soldier. Looking back, I can now clearly see that it was my Savior who is my Protector that had spared me in the moments of death so that I would get to know Him better. He desires this for all of us if we will only seek Him and see His protective hand in our lives, buying us time until we notice Him. Thank you, Lord.

In war, there are many trying times both physically and mentally. Many times, I was tested almost beyond measure in both areas. Though forty years has gone by, I can sometimes still hear the sounds of artillery and recall the fear and loneliness we all experienced as the world stumbled through the five year nightmare of World War II.

One night while we were fighting in Italy, I was sent out on a detail with a few other men to provide communications for an advance party (a combat company of men). Their mission was to search out the enemy and call back for instructions. It was dark when we started our advance to find and make contact with the enemy. We found ourselves falling further and further behind the advance team as we were slowed down by the process of laying the communications wire. Not knowing what direction in which they were headed, we had to hope we would eventually re-establish contact somewhere down the road.

As we were laying the wire, we came to a place where we were stopped by a guard. It was very dark and we could not see who we were approaching. A voice rang out in an unfamiliar language. I thought he was probably asking for us to identify ourselves. As I was leading the men forward, I stopped and froze in my tracks, unsure of how to respond to what very well could be the enemy. The voice rang out more harshly than before again demanding information to identify ourselves.

I realized I had to say something so I yelled out that we were Americans. I was ready to hit the ground if their response was to be gunfire. But thanks to the Lord, they were French soldiers. We still moved toward them a bit uneasily, though, because of the reputation the French soldiers carried of shooting first and asking questions later. Thanks to the Lord, we

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moved into their view safely. I asked them the best way I could if they had noticed any other American soldiers in the area. They seemed to understand me as they pointed off into the distance. We headed out in hopes that it was Americans they were directing us toward.

After walking for a distance, we stopped to rest for the night. While we were trying to decide what action we should take, one of our soldiers from the advance company came looking for us. He asked us if we were the wire section. As we informed him we were, he told us the Captain needed us right away. He needed communications wire laid immediately because his company had made contact with the enemy and he needed to call for instructions. (During World War II, the telephone wire was needed to protect any kind of knowledge from reaching the Germans through the use of the radios. The Germans were very adept at listening in on radio contact between American units so the Army was forced to lay cable wires to connect up to one another by phone.)

When the Captain completed his call to the Colonel in Charge, he told the men to fix bayonets and prepare to attack on command. As the Captain yelled, "Attack!" the men let out a scream that sent chills up and down my spine. As they began the attack, I was still laying wire, advancing with them as they fought, trying to dodge the bullets and men fighting hand to hand. The enemy was caught by surprise. Many of them never made it out of their sleeping bags, while others stumbled out just long enough to make a feeble attempt of retaliation and eventual surrender. Only a few escaped into the woods to send out occasional sniper fire.

One experience in the war still lingers tenaciously in my mind. I had heard that the enemy had a hospital located in the mountains we were camped in. I decided to go take a look for myself. I will never forget the horror and realism of the war that I experienced there. As I entered the camp, a strong smell of decay and disease filled my senses. My ears were bombarded with the groans and outcries of men in excruciating pain ... many either close to death or praying for its expeditious end. I found out later that the doctors and medics for the German Army were not able to receive medical supplies because our airplanes and artillery were cutting off all means of contact. Seeing gangrene and the pain it causes even in an enemy's body can make a man's heart soften and realize the hell on earth that war creates for everyone involved. The man may be trained to kill you or me, yet he still cries out in pain for those he loves... he too sees the reflection of hell on earth in my eyes. My heart went out to these enemy soldiers as I realized how far we had all travelled out of the will of God. Was it all really worth the trip? Or could we all, friend and enemy alike, have prevented this horror by being more attentive to the voice of our Lord? I thank the Lord that He sees our stumblings, our attempts at hurting one another, and still keeps His grace available to all who reach for it.

We had very little chance to rest that night; and even if we had, my

mind would not stop replaying what I had seen. In the morning, we started our advance toward Cassino, Italy. On our way, we ran into the enemy again. They had placed themselves on high ground above the fog that kept us hidden from their view. The officer in charge sent us across, one man at a time, hoping we could cross the valley under the protection of the fog without being detected. As luck would have it, the fog lifted as I started across the valley. The Germans started firing at me with rifle grenades. I could feel the pressure of the blast of the grenades at my heels and to my side. Fortunately, I had trained in school for track and put everything I had into moving myself forward through the valley and over a high stone fence without being hurt. But even with my training, I don't know how I made it through the valley so quickly. It had to be the supernatural strength the Lord provides for us in times of acute danger when we turn our thoughts toward Him that pushed me safely through the valley. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (Isaiah 40:31)." Thank you, Lord, for Your protective eye and Your supernatural strength when mine fails me. Teach me, O Lord, to daily wait upon Your strength.

We moved on to the Rapido River. I remember when we were marching along its banks, I looked across the water into the empty foliage on the other side. The trees and bushes somehow felt filled with the eyes of the enemy. We knew the Germans were hidden on the other side of the river, and we could feel their presence in their silence. We were each holding our defensive positions without firing a shot. One day, we received orders to cross the river and attack the enemy at night. The 141st and the 143rd Infantry were sent across the river while we, the 142nd Infantry, held our position on our side of the river. We were to cross over after the two other infantries had taken control of the other side. Then we would all push forward to capture Mt. Cassino. We never did cross over that night because the two regiments failed to gain the other side of the river. The swift river current carried many of the men under the water surface before they could reach the shore. The few men that did reach the other side were so disorganized that the plan was scrapped.

After we regrouped, I received orders that a buddy of mine, John, and I were to go back and make contact with another company of ours. As we were retracing our steps, the enemy spotted us in a small valley and barraged us with artillery fire. As we both flattened out on the ground, I spotted a small mountain ahead that we could use for protection. John followed as I dashed for the cover of the mountain. The enemy saw us trying to make a run for cover and barraged us again just as we leaped

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behind the first hilly section of the mountain. Once behind the hill, we were able to continue on our journey.

As we continued down the road, we spotted a house along the roadway with a well in the yard. We were thirsty by this time and had no water left in our canteens, so we searched the house and well for something to drink. The enemy had used the home for a medic station and had ransacked it, removing all but a small bit of impure water at the bottom of the well. We drew it out by tying old, bloody bandages together and attaching a German gas mask canister to the end of it. We strained the water with the cleanest bandages we could find and prayed it wouldn't do us any harm. Feeling the stress of the day upon our bodies, we spotted a cave and climbed in for the night. Even the fact that it faced directly toward enemy lines did not disturb us in our weariness.

Morning dawned and we continued on down the road. A few American soldiers approached us and warned us that we could not get through to our company. The enemy had cut off all access to them. We could hear the machine gun fire in the background as our men tried to fight their way out. As John and I turned to head back to the company at Mount Abbey, Cassino, John became very ill. Thinking that it was the water that we had the day before, I made camp for us for the night, hoping he would feel better by morning. Morning came but John wasn't getting better. I went out and brought back a medic who assisted me in getting John back to our company. The company men were very surprised as we walked back into the camp after all the gunfire they had heard off in the distance. Our prolonged absence had led them to believe that we were either captured or killed. Not too many men were returning from the fighting.

By the time we got back, the company had established themselves at the foot of Mt. Abbey, Cassino. The enemy had positioned themselves in the monastery at the top of the Mount and had gained control of the area. They were betting on the desire of the American Army to preserve as many religious buildings in Europe as possible. We were ordered to dig in at the foot of the Mount while the Germans' position availed them of the advantage of being able to look directly down our necks and into our foxholes. This left us with less than a secure feeling as we prepared for battle.

The American units were in a precarious position. The lives of all the men at the foot of the Mount were at stake. The decision was handed down to destroy the monastery and the civilians in the area were evacuated immediately. American bomber planes lowered themselves directly over the monastery. Very little was left of it or the enemy when the smoke from the bombs cleared. We were finally able to move safely out of our foxholes.

Even when the gunfire and artillery would cease, there were signs of

war that would haunt me everywhere I walked. Near our camp, the enemy had once stationed a machine gun nest. Our men had knocked it out during the shelling. Every time I walked by the nest, I was haunted by the wide open eyes of the dead German soldiers staring coldly into my eyes. It was almost as if their anger at the world still lived on asking, "Why did we have to die?" We could argue all the justifiable reasons for fighting against fascism in the world, and these are all good and honorable reasons. But how do we answer the dead ... how do we still their cries of, "Why me?" Lord, help us to remember these questions and the men who's souls cried them out to us before we ever commit ourselves to war again. Let us see our sons and grandsons in those eyes before we ever turn from God's way or ever allow a government to turn so far from God's way before we peaceably stop them before war becomes necessary. May God have mercy on our souls and on the souls of the men who died with a question on their lips. We pray that our Lord's peace stilled their restless questioning. Let us seek God's face and trust in His guidance in the coming days.

If the death of an enemy soldier affected each of us, the death of a comrade in arms cut much, much deeper. Soon after I had tried to deal with my feelings about the German soldiers that had died, I learned of the death of a good friend of mine from Wisconsin: Corky. I was told that Corky went into attack with his company (Company A) one morning and never returned. Corky brought joy to all of us even in the middle of war. He always had a smile on his face and something uplifting to say when he saw that our morale was down. I was told that Corky died with a smile on his face ... almost as if he was still urging us on even in the face of death. We all still carry in our hearts the wisdom Corky taught us that joy can lighten even the toughest of situations. Sometimes it takes the worst the world has to throw at us to learn that at the same time, it can throw its best.

One day, as I was walking along a road in the same area, I saw an American soldier approaching me. I heard a shell coming in on us and I hit the dirt. As I looked up, all I could see were fragments of clothing and pieces of the soldier's body rising out of the dust. When the dust settled, there was nothing left on the road except a hole in the ground where the soldier once stood. I was spared, but he was not. God's protective hand was on me wherever I went. Yet, it still leaves a question in my heart why I would walk away when other guys didn't. Praise His Holy Name.

We pushed northward into Germany. Our front lines were trying to fight their way through the German lines, so we made camp in an old dug-out area of the Germans. We bided our time waiting to move forward to set up communications at the front lines. While we were stationed in the area, we set up our switchboard in the main dug-out. Six or seven of us had congregated there to pass the time. Two other sergeants in charge had been

killed in action in our wire section, so by this time I had acquired their position. (War has a way of using the process of elimination too literally when positions are assigned.) I began to feel it was too dangerous for so many men to be in one dug-out, so I told the men to move out into their own holes. My dug-out was only a few yards from the main one. My buddy and I had just settled into our hole when the shelling began to strike. One shell sounded like it had hit only a few yards away. I cautiously crept out of my hole as I saw that the worst of my fears had come true. Most of the men had not yet cleared out of the main dug-out when it received a direct hit from the shelling. A couple of the men staggered out of the hole in a daze. Others were not so fortunate. One man was killed and the rest were wounded. Another buddy of mine, Bruce from California, was calling for help. As I ran to his side, I found him in a state of shock. He had been blinded by the shrapnel imbedded in his eyes. As I led him toward the medic station, my heart began to reach toward the Lord in prayer for Bruce. He was filled with so much fear ... under attack and yet he couldn't even see the ground he was walking on much less the enemy or shells exploding around him. The fear of being left behind in such a state gripped him as he pleaded with me to stay with him. It was only after he felt the assuring hands of the medics working on his eyes that he relaxed and some of the fear left him. I walked away very shaken by the realism of the fear that Bruce experienced.

As I returned to the dug-outs, the officer in charge commanded me to restore the communications that were knocked out when the shelling hit. Another member of my crew and I worked half-dazed to restore communications, trying not to let the continual shelling frighten us away from the task that was before us. I received the Bronze Star for the work the Lord helped me to do that day. It took me by surprise, because I didn't see anything out of the line of duty that I had done. We all did what we had to do to help one another stay alive and to bring the war to a close as swiftly as possible. To this day, I feel it was the Lord that led me to tell the men to clear out of the dug-out just before the shell hit. I thank the Lord for His guidance in a time of need.

Between the German and French border, the Germans had built an anti-tank embankment called the Siegfried Line. The Line was made up of big concrete pointed barriers (called "dragon teeth"), pill boxes and trenches. Even the airplane bombing could not penetrate the immense pill boxes successfully. The enemy had the coordinates of the Line down pat, so whenever we would attempt to scale the dragon teeth, shelling would send us running for the trenches. Shelling began as my regiment attempted to penetrate into Germany through the Line. The trench that I climbed into received a direct hit, sending me up into the air above the trench and then back down again. Miraculously, I was not harmed; but the soldier next to

me did not fair so well. He died instantly from the concussion he received from the impact of the shell. A number of others were wounded in the trenches of the deadly Siegfried Line that day also. But it didn't stop us as we marched through the last strong defensive of the German Army and on into the heartland of the opposition.

In the midst of the daily fighting of combat, we don't always realize how often the Lord saves us from harm. But as we step back and reflect upon the dangerous points in our lives, we realize how strongly the protective arms of our Savior held us and carried us to safety. To Jesus Christ, God the Father and the Holy Spirit, I owe my life... my renewed life in Him. Oriental tradition tells us that when a man saves another's life, the one who's life was saved must dedicate his life to the other. The Lord carried me through the most dangerous times of my life and brought me safely out. As if it wasn't enough to save my physical life, He suffered the pains of the Crucifixion to insure the safety of my eternal life also. If we can dedicate ourselves to other men out of gratitude for such acts, can we do any less for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

Has He carried you through some rough spots? Do you realize He died for you and your eternal life just as He did for mine? Do you owe Him your life ... your dedication to Him? He saved my life not only from the bullets and fires of Italy and Germany, but from the fires of my own sinful nature leading me into hell. I owe Him nothing less than the very life He saved. To Him, I dedicate myself and offer Him any glory and honor that may come my way. Jesus won the battles in our lives that earned us medals -- physical ones or emotional ones. Isn't it about time we turn them over to the rightful Owner? You say you don't know how? Jesus doesn't ask for your words... only your heart. If you are questioning how to dedicate yourself to Him, you have already done it in your heart. He knows the deepest thoughts, the most hidden feelings of our hearts. Now walk in His safety and love. To the Holy Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit go all glory and honor, now and forever. Amen.

Addition to the Testimony of Ted Venetis

After sending out my testimony to different people, I felt compelled to fill in some of the gaps in the original text.

While I was going through this "Valley of Death," (described in my first testimony) Psalm 23:4 kept running through my head: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Before we started the attack that led up to my journey through the Valley, I had contracted hepatitis. But because everything was in a position of advancing, I had to wait until after we had established ourselves again

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before making sick call. When I finally did get to see the doctor, he said that I should go back to the field hospital. He had no medics available to go with me because there were more wounded than they could take care of, so I started out on my own. That's how I ended up walking through the "Valley of Death" alone. I call this the "Valley of Death" because so many of our boys laid there dead from a heavy artillery attack that surprised them. It was a very tragic scene to behold.

I made it back to the hospital with the help of my Precious Lord. The nurse at the hospital kept trying to force me to eat; but even the look of this food made me feel worse. I tried to tell the nurse that I couldn't eat the food, but I guess she didn't believe me because she kept forcing the food at me. She told me that if I did not eat, she would have to get the colonel in charge of the hospital. I agreed with her that getting the colonel might not be such a bad idea.

When the colonel asked me what the problem was I explained to him how I felt. I had an unexplainable desire for pear juice and asked him if I could try some. After listening to me in deep concentration and silence, he finally spoke and told me that he would go along with my idea and let me try the pear juice. He was fascinated with this odd request and decided to keep a close watch on the results.

After taking the pear juice for a few days. I became well enough to eat solid foods without any side effects. In only one week I was ready to leave the hospital and rejoin my Company. As the colonel came in to release me, he expressed his amazement at my quick recovery. He told me that all who had entered the hospital before me with the same sickness stayed there for months. What the colonel did not realize was the healing power of the Holy Spirit. The good and precious Lord was watching over me and guiding me in my own healing through His Hands. Praise His Holy Name!

I was also wounded during my days of combat. We had gone into attack and, meeting very little resistance, had advanced way beyond our designated point. On our left flanks the second battalion was pinned down by the enemy. Our right flank was wide open leaving us with no protection on that side. The enemy moved in behind us from the unprotected right and cut us off. We were told to retreat back to our original starting point. But as we started back we were met with fierce opposition from the enemy coming up behind us. We attempted to fight our way through when we were caught on a road with no protection dodging enemy shell fire. We headed for a ditch on the side of the road. But to our misfortune, a shell hit the top of the tree above us. Four of us were hit by the raining shrapnel. The soldier next to me died instantly. The other two were badly wounded and never returned to our Company. I was hit on my back with some shrapnel causing a severe enough wound to require some time in the hospital.

After I was well enough, I was sent back to rejoin my Company. I found them when they were in the thick of battle. But my Precious Lord stood right beside never forsaking me. Glory be to Him forever.

When the war was over, I was the only one left out of my original Company. All the medals that I received during my years of service to my country in time of need and during combat belong to the invisible soldier who stood as a protectorate by my side, my Jesus. He was the One who carried me through even during the times it looked too impossible for me to make it through. To my Jesus belongs the glory. I will praise and glorify the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit forever Amen.

Even though at times I had forsaken Jesus, He had never forsaken me. He stayed with me always. Because of that, I committed myself and everything I have entirely to Him. I have been blessed ever since, praise His Holy Name.

Jesus loves not only me, but all of us. He died for all of us. He is waiting patiently to take us by the hand and lead us into His Righteousness. He wants us to grasp His outstretched hand now. He wants YOU to simply grab His hand and hang on. He will do the rest. Grasp it before it is too late.

Come onto Him and be blessed the rest of your life. Life with My Jesus is wonderful, beautiful and well-blessed,

I often wonder how I lived the worldly life without Jesus. What a beautiful feeling it is to wake up from darkness and to walk in the precious light of Jesus. Wake up, my brothers and sisters. The light is for everyone who grasps the outstretched hand. Amen.



POWs never



forget war

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The Invasion of France's Southern Coast

by: Paul H. Duffey, Co. "C" — 141st Infantry



WorldwarVeterans.org

After our invasion training was completed, we were given U.S. Flag patches to sew on the right shoulder of our shirts. Usually, we would be told to remove our T-Patch so the enemy wouldn't know who he was up against. The only trouble was the enemy knew where we were going before we did most of the time. We were issued all the regular gear, namely grenades, ammo (belt full and two bandoliers), and this time one more piece — a life belt. These belts, worn around the waist, were two tubes with a CO₂ cartridge in each tube. If you fell into the water, you squeezed a trigger devise to puncture the CO₂ cartridge to inflate the belt.

The Company boarded an L.S.T. (landing ship tank), and when everybody and everything was loaded and ready, the 'armada' moved out. There were a large variety of ships, boats, etc. in the group. Now it was time to relax, because it would be a day or two before we arrived at our destination, which we were now told was France. It was a guessing game to this point, but now we had a booklet with French sentences to learn (if you could) to help you to get along with the new people you would meet. Of course, there were card games and crap games to keep a person's mind off of what was coming. Who needed money — the expense of the trip was on the U.S., and of course, you might not get to spend it anyway. Invasions were generally a bit more dangerous than the everyday warfare.

The ride was smooth as we went along our way. We sailed between Corsica and Sardinia and then toward the southern French coast. This was a relaxing time. Later on, you could get uptight — at the right time — landing. I spent most of the trip topside. Below deck was very stuffy, and it was August. The big day arrives. Most of us were up early — dawn — and then we were called to our stations. We were checked over by our Lieutenants to make sure we were "rigged" properly. Rigged was the long

strap of our helmet which was held in our teeth — our pack, rifle belt and rifle were rigged so that you could slip your right hand under the shoulder strap of your pack and rid yourself of all three articles — open your mouth and the helmet would fall free — if you fell into the sea. All that weight would take you under, and that would be the end of your “career.”

We went over the side 3 or 4 at a time and, as fast as you could safely went down the net into our waiting “taxi,” an L.C.V.P. (landing craft vehicle personnel). The navy men held the net as tight as they could to keep the craft from moving away and also make it easier going down the net and into the bobbing craft. As one L.C.V.P. would be filled, it would pull away and another would move into position to load. I was in the first “boat,” so if there were any mishaps, I didn’t see or hear of it.

The L.C.V.P. left the side of the L.S.T. and joined a group that was circling. We circled until our whole group was complete then moved out following the leader. The ride in one of these craft is no “Cadillac ride,” but at this point, who cared? You could see the coast clearly now with all the pastel-colored houses. We fell into another circle for a short time, then headed toward the shore again. When we were about one mile from shore, we circled again. The naval guns from ships behind us started sending their lethal loads toward the shoreline. This was the big stuff — maybe as large as 6 inches. This would go on for a while, at least until we neared the beach. Some of us thought, “Hey, there will be nobody alive to meet us.” Then you thought back to the Rapido River in Italy and maybe a few other bombardments. They would be there — they always were.

We peeled off and in a straight line headed for the coast. There were several ships with rockets by the thousands behind us that started sending the rockets on their way. When we were about a half mile from the beach, the rockets were coming down from the top of their arch, and with so many in the air at a time, some collided with one another and exploded. The debris rained down on us, but I don’t think anybody was hurt by it.

The beach was becoming clear now as some of us could peek over the ramp of the L.C.V.P. I was near the front, so I got a good look at it. It was not like the beaches we practiced on. It was very small and was like a small lagoon, with land jutting out on both sides of it.

“Here we go! Off the corners!” The ramp went down with a splash, and we were off and running. We hit the beach with 3 L.C.V.P.s abreast. That was all we had room for. I was in the L.C.V.P. on the right. We didn’t go in with dry feet like the navy promised, but it wasn’t too bad. There was a gun emplacement on the right side as we came in, but we weren’t fired on so we ignored it. We cleared the beach, crossed the road and started moving up the slopes to take command of the high ground. As the second wave came in, the gun emplacement opened up on them and the navy men being in a hurry to withdraw, withdrew with the ramp down and a pair of L.C.V.P.s were sunk. The navy men were swimming, and the 20mm gun started shooting at them. We opened fire with rifles, but the thing that did

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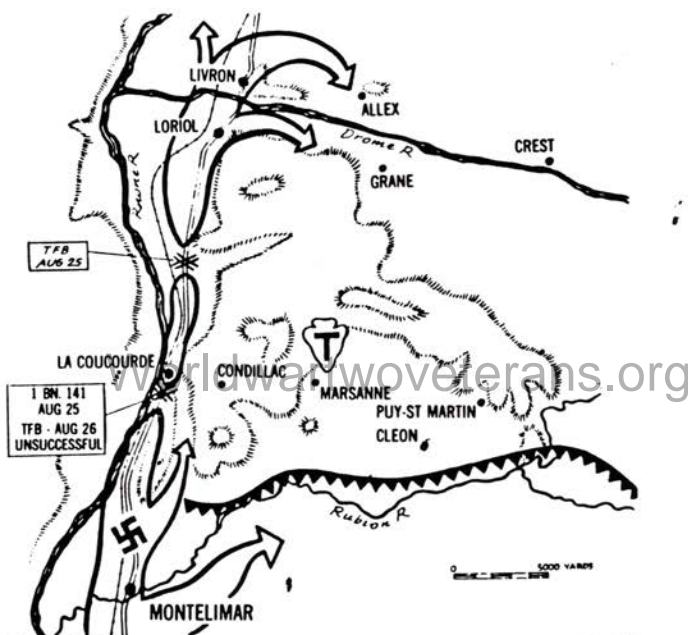
the trick (shutting down the gun) was a mortar man. Taking the mortar tube between his legs while sitting down put a few rounds on the target.

We took the high ground with not too much trouble. It was a pleasant surprise that our casualties were low.

When the Lt. yelled, "Off the corners!" he was just reminding us to do just that. If you went off the middle of the ramp you could be drowned or crushed by the ramp. As the men leave the craft it gets lighter and if a wave pushes the craft from the rear, it could lurch forward, trapping a man under the ramp.

Now that we have the high ground, we could watch some of the other things taking place. Hundreds of C-47s (cargo planes) pulling gliders were flying overhead. This was the airborne going inland to do their job. They would go behind the line to disrupt the rear echelon, then later on we would join them.

We regrouped and received orders to move east, down the coastal road towards Cannes. Company C was leading, and we fought off any opposition we came up against. At dusk, we heard an airplane in the vicinity of the main landing area, and while walking on the side of the road, we saw a flare cooling down. About halfway down, it moved parallel to the ground. This was a 90 degree turn and anyone watching was really wondering what it was. Then, it started straight down again and then disappeared behind trees along the road. There was a big flash and a few seconds later the noise of the explosion. It was a radio controlled bomb, and it didn't miss the target. We lost a boat load of artillery. We dug in for the night. The next morning, we "saddled up" and were on the move again. We came to a turn in the road that was cut around a hill. It went right about 30 yards and then left. The lead platoon had gone around both turns, when Lt. Dorshell was called to the radio. He turned to answer the radio when he was shot in the back by a Kraut rifleman. Then a 20mm gun opened up and several men were hit. They withdrew with the wounded where the medic could take care of them. There were some that were trapped. Meaning, if they moved either way, they could be hit. So they stayed there and waited for help. Our squad was sent forward, but when we got around the bend, the enemy withdrew. Roy and I sat on a small bank on the side of the road with a cliff behind us. This is where the "cut" was. We were waiting to see if we were to move forward or withdraw. We were sitting about two feet apart when I heard something above and behind me. I looked up to see a small concussion grenade coming. It had hit a few twigs of the bushes, etc. that were growing out of the cut. It landed between Roy and me. We both turned our faces and bodies away from it and waited. Nothing happened. After about 8 or 10 seconds, we got up and moved to a different spot. We no sooner got settled, when we were told to move back. We were going to



HIGHWAY 7 was cut temporarily but our blocks were smashed by sheer weight of enemy attacks. Germans threatened encirclement by driving for Allex and Grane.

attack up and over the hill. The man that was outposted on the top of the hill was shot and killed. One of our tanks was on the railroad tracks to the left of the road. He would ride the "rails," and we would go over the hill. One Kraut came in with his hands up, as we neared the top of the hill. We had very little stuff coming our way because we were shooting in windows, behind bushes, any place a person could be. I was near the railroad tracks as we came down the other side of the hill. I knew the tank was there, but I didn't see him swing the turret to the right. He fired and I was knocked down from the blast. The "birds" were chirping and the "bells" ringing for several minutes. About 10 minutes later, all was well and I could hear again. I was about 10 feet to the right of the muzzle of the "piece" and about five feet in front.

We took more prisoners which were sent to the rear. There seemed to be a shortage of Krauts at this point, but there wasn't a shortage of slugs cracking near you.

The Company "held up." We were as far down the road as we were to go. I was up on a small hill with my platoon Lt., two or three other men, and a naval officer directing gun fire from a ship at sea. He gave the coordinates of a building down and across the road from us. He would then hold the phone so we could hear and also told us to look out over the sea.

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We would hear, "Salvo!" — see the gun flashes — then a few seconds later hear the shells coming in. Right on target! From a ship you could not see on a very clear day. In 1944, that to me was amazing.

Later that day, we were to "load up" — we were going to rejoin the rest of the Division.

The Germans had a head start running up the Rhone Valley, and we kept them running. Our next real engagement was 10 days later at Montelimar. We hit small "pockets" of resistance, but Montelimar was something else.

Montelimar, France

This is my story of what I saw, heard and went through. Others in the same battle will probably differ from this account, but each man has his story — for some, their story ended that day.

We arrived in our new area during the late evening, moved onto the hill and dug in on the slope facing our objective. The objective was a crossroad laying about 600 yards to our front. The one road was on our right, because we were strung out covering maybe 200 yards. The road was straight and intersected the other road at a 90° angle. The fields lay flat and maybe 6 feet lower than the road, with a small shallow stream 30 yards to the left of the road. The stream followed the road until it was 20 yards from the intersection, then turned right, went under the same road and then out of our area. The stream was about 8 feet wide and 1 1/2 feet deep. There were weeds and some bushes in the fields but nothing higher than 2 feet.

The next day in the afternoon, we moved down off the slope and headed for the objective in a Co. front. Roy Hensley and I were still together as a team. We were together since the Rapido River in Italy. He was carrying a B.A.R. (Browning Automatic Rifle) and I an M-1. We didn't move far, maybe 100 yards and the Krauts got nervous and started shooting. Their bullets cracked and popped loud near us — not only us but everyone — so we stepped up the pace moving faster and closer. We shot at them as they backed out of the field. Most of them on our left flank. As we got closer, the cracking seemed to get louder. We shot at anything that could conceal the enemy.

When we reached the other road, there was a steep embankment about 10 feet high that we had to crawl up, but as soon as you reached the top you kind of wished you were some place else. The Krauts were dug in in the wooded area just across the road and as your head reached the top of the embankment, it was shot at by more than one rifleman or a M.G. It was a hot time, and we had several wounded on our side of the road. I don't know if anybody ever reached the far side, but I doubt it very much. I looked back from the embankment and saw one of our men crossing the creek at the point where it went under the bridge. He never made it across. He was hit by the enemy on our right flank. There was one of our men laying on our

side of the road that was wounded screaming for a medic. I told him the medic was busy, but to stay still 'til he could get to him. He didn't stay still very long — he stood up and yelled for the medic, and was promptly hit again. This time he stayed down 'til the medic got to him.

The medic was so busy that he asked me to help, so I crawled over the top with my rifle and helped to patch up a guy by the name of Smallwood that was shot in the hip. The reason I remember Smallwood was because he had 2 or 3 rifle grenades dangling by a cord right where he was hit. I often wondered if they would have exploded if the slugs would have hit them. We passed him down the embankment and went on to the next man. When we cleared our area of wounded, we dropped back to the embankment.

There was a Lt. lying half way up the embankment yelling “up and over.” I didn't recognize him, and I still don't know who he was, but I told him in so many words — not nicely — that he could stick his head up and find out what it's all about, because I had been “up and over.” He told me I was in “bad trouble.” His “bad trouble” and the trouble on the road were not in the same category.

Walt Stephans from Brooklyn was laying on the bank looking to our left flank when he was hit by a spent round, probably a 38. It hit his helmet dead center about 5 inches above his eyes and bounced directly back toward where it came. It put a perfect circle in his helmet, like when you put a finger on a blown up balloon. He was out for several minutes and our next Co. commander gave him the okay to send it home as a souvenir.

We kept trying to get over the top without “losing our heads,” but to no avail. They had without a doubt the best of the deal, but after it was all over, we learned differently. The German 19th Army was smashed, at and around Montelimar.

The word was passed around to move back to our previous positions. Retreat, tactical withdrawal, or any other wording is all the same — very dangerous — even worse than just staying put until dark, because as they find out you're leaving, they can show themselves and get better shots at your back as you're pulling out.

Roy and I moved back down the embankment and started back with the remains of the Company. We moved quickly and low to the ground. We were in the creek more often than not. While in the creek, we passed two litter bearers carrying our Commanding Officer. He had been hit, and as they passed a berry bush of some sort he told them to stop while he ate some berries — which they did — but why, I'll never know. The Krauts were still shooting up a storm as the bullets cracked near us. Roy and I left the creek as we came to the company C.P. which was a house off the road on our side. We went to the far side of it away from the enemy and found several of our officers and sgts. that were killed when a mortar shell exploded in their midst. It was not a nice sight, but I had seen others like it, and the longer I lived the more I'd see, until the war's end. We entered the house, and to

our surprise, there were quite a few of our wounded. They were quiet so I surmised they had had a shot of morphine.

Roy opened the door nearest the road and about 10-20 slugs hit above the door. There was a Kraut M.G. covering it. Roy slammed the door, dropped his B.A.R. (Browning Automatic Rifle) — 20 lbs. — 20 rounds — auto or single firing weapon — dropped his belt — grabbed an M-1 and M-1 belt — opened the door and was about to leave when the M.G. chewed the top of the door off. He slammed the door with the same verbal abuse as the first time and then chuckled. He dropped the M-1 and belt — picked up a carbine and pistol belt — kicked open the door and ran like a scared rabbit while the M.G. tore more of the top of the door off. As soon as the burst of M.G. fire stopped, I was out the door at full tilt. We were running up the center of the road as fast as we could. There weren't any other men in sight, we had the whole road to ourselves. I don't know how far I had run when I just couldn't run any more, so I walked and said to myself "if they get me, they get me." I might have walked 8 or 10 steps when a burst of M.G. cracked very loud and very close to me. I think I ran faster than I had ever run before.

When we arrived back at the old positions — I think Roy and I were the last — we had to regroup and get ready for the next job, whatever and whenever that would be. Our company really got mauled in just a couple of hours.

Why Roy and I left the safety (?) of the creek that day I'll never know. I never asked him, and it's too late now. He passed away several years ago in 1983.

The next morning we were on the road to our rear. There was a village on top of a hill to our right. We were to take it and hold it and the high ground. At about 5:00 a.m., we started up the slope toward the village in a company front. Part way up, I smelled a very heavy odor of pine and gunpowder. As it got heavier, I could see the men laying about. This company tried to take the village and got caught in an artillery barrage. Now here we are trying to take the same village. There were officers and E.M. (enlisted men) caught in the barrage. I was waiting for the sound of artillery or mortars coming in, but it was quiet. As we neared the village, I was ready for small arms fire to greet us. Nothing. It seemed, all the action was elsewhere, as you could hear the ripping of the German M.G.s and ours and artillery. So far so good.

We entered the village with not a single shot being fired to find the enemy had left an hour or so earlier. The villagers were pleased to see us, that is, the few that were there. Most had left before the previous battle.

The enemy dead were stacked like cordwood in two outbuildings. Evidently, they didn't have it so good in the battle either. It's not hard to look at their losses, but to see ours... it was rough.

France Aug.-Sept.

It was a nice day, weatherwise, as we moved on the road toward a small village in France. The road was straight and flat with a small wooded area on the left. Between the road and woods was a ditch about 2 feet deep and 3 to 4 feet wide with weeds about 1 1/2 feet high in it. I was on this side of the road. As we neared a crossroad just this side of the village a M.G. opened up on us. The lead was close enough to 'crack' as I, like all the others on this side of the road, dove for the ditch. There was one man in front of me, and all the rest were behind me. The men on the right side of the road were to take care of the gun. Just then a 'doodle bug' (six wheeled recon vehicle) came up the road from our rear to take care of the gun, so the men on the right stayed put. The recon had light armor, enough to deflect the M.G. rounds. As it got close to the gun emplacement, the M.G. started bouncing rounds off it. One round came up the ditch cutting the weeds. I could see the weeds parting, but didn't have time to move. The man behind me let out a yell like a bullmoose. It hit him on his left elbow. I don't recall who he was nor how bad it was, but sometimes when a slug hits a joint it chips or shatters the bone and that generally gets you home.

The 'doodlebug' backed up past us and we were told to move through the woods on our left. As Ray Pena and I scooted from the ditch, the 'incoming mail' arrived. In a woods is no place to be with artillery coming at you, but never the less that's where we were. As the shells hit near us, we hit the ground. One hit almost directly above us and we tried in vain to crawl under our helmets. There was a loud thump and Ray said, "That was close." He didn't realize how close until we got up to run. The piece of shrapnel had cut his rifle stock in two at the pistol grip. He carried it out of the woods and then dropped it when he found one that had belonged to one of our wounded.

There was a warehouse in an opening in the woods and most everybody was on the rear or safe side of the building waiting for orders. There were a hundred or two barrels with burlap stretched over the tops with all kinds of bugs flying around them. Naturally there were a few guys that knew what this was. They cut the burlap and scooped the 'juice,' bugs and all, and started drinking. Some of us went into the building and looked around and found cans of sardines. Anything that wasn't 'K' or 'C' was a delicacy, and we ate a couple cans of them and carried a few for later.

We didn't stay long, maybe 15 minutes, then moved out toward the crossroad. As we passed it, the Kraut gunner was still there, but the 'doodle bug' had done its job.

We had several casualties, mostly from the artillery, but took the village with little else happening.

We stopped on a hill over looking the Moselle River west of Remiremont. The Germans we knew were dug in on the far side. How good? We would find out during the next a.m., early. Our engineers strung

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two ropes across the river for us to hold onto as we moved through the current of the river. I was in Sgt. Raymond Pena's squad and teamed up with Mike Guerrero. We held tight to the rope as we waded the river. After the area was secured, we had time to clean our weapons and get ready to move on. We had a new Automatic Rifleman in the platoon and he did a great job cleaning the BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle). He cleaned the magazines and shells and reloaded them. After he was finished, he put his hand on the muzzle to pull himself up when he noticed the slide was open. Not thinking, he pushed the trigger to close it with the other hand. Three or four rounds went through his hand before he got his hand off the trigger. This was purely an accident, but he was out of it. One slip and you're out.

Later that day, Pena's squad was to move through the wooded hill to make sure the rest of the company would not be hit from the high ground. Someone said they heard someone coming up the path, so we squatted in some "bird grass" in a clearing and waited. On Pena's command we came up fast with our rifles aimed at about 6 or 7 Krauts, and their weapons flew. They did not drop them, they threw them up and away. They were totally surprised. Not a shot was fired, but we had 6 or 7 prisoners to send to the rear. Pena told two of his men to take them back to the first drop off point and come back as soon as they could, which they did.

We joined the rest of the company, reported and then moved up the road toward St. Ame, the next objective. We were harassed by artillery on the move until we were about 200 yards from a crossroad. From the crossroad, we received 20mm gunfire and had to take cover. We remained under cover until 1:00 a.m., and then moved single file up the left side of the road. It was drizzly and overcast, which meant it was dark. About 75 yards from the roadblock we left the road, still single file, and came to a low fence about 3 feet high, and as I went over it I tore a large "V" in my raincoat??? I grousched about it, but to no avail. I looked up and didn't see anybody, so I looked a little harder and saw someone going the same direction that we were going so I followed. We walked between two houses on the crossroad, turned left and walked along the front of the house and stopped. I thought I'd better find out where the Lt. was, as I was the platoon runner at the time, so I tapped the guy in front of me and asked, "Where's the Lt.?" He looked down at me — I was 5' 8", and he was over 6 foot. He asked, "Vas ist das?" I looked as hard as I could to see what kind of bind I was in. There were about 8 Krauts, probably a patrol, that evidently crossed us as we came over the fence, and I was following the tail end of the patrol. I had no grenades and my rifle was slung. I said, "Nuts!" waived my hand, turned and walked back to the corner of the house on very thick clouds. I was waiting with each step to feel a slug penetrating my back. I rounded the corner and came face to face with someone. I squinted my eyes and strained them to make sure what I was seeing. A GI helmet. I asked,

"Who are you?" "Garcia," was the reply. I started to tell him what happened when he and 1st Sgt. Moreno went around the corner of the house. While I was talking to Garcia, John Ferguson, from Tennessee, bumped into the Krauts and had a short talk with them. He also left. In the darkness you didn't know where anybody was until you bumped into them. Well, Garcia asked them, the Krauts, what company they were with, and when they answered in German, he and the 1st Sgt. started shooting. After the one-sided firing stopped, the two of them shuffled their feet along the ground to see how many they got. Moreno's foot bumped one, and when he tried to roll it over with his foot the Kraut came up fast and yelled, "Comrad!" They got one prisoner and some German equipment that the enemy dropped.

We cleared houses the next hour or so by going into a house on our hands and knees and feeling around hoping to find it empty which they were. During this time someone shot flares into the air making everyone jumpy. There was some small arms fire, but as dark as it was, I guess it was just someone who was jittery.

We had the crossroads and Sgt. Garcia had a M.G. set up on the right side of the road leading into St. Ame. There came the sound of hobnails on the road coming toward our position. Garcia gave the M. Gunner orders to open fire, spraying the road, when he yelled, "Gun!" Garcia started down the berm of the road then dropped off and into the field as he got closer to the enemy. When the Kraut was abreast of him, Garcia moved quickly and was face to face with him with his Lugar in his hand. He jammed the Lugar into the man's belly. The German's right hand started up so Garcia pushed the Lugar deeper and fired. The German's hand kept coming and as it got about belt high he fired 3 shots but by this time Garcia was off the side of the road and firing at the Kraut. Garcia was clear so he yelled, "Gun!" and the M.G. sprayed the road with lead.

With little else happening, we moved into the buildings that we had cleared, set out guards and "sacked out" 'til dawn.

The French house had the barn on the end under the same roof. I slept in the kitchen and several found the hay loft to their liking and slept there. At dawn a couple of the men came down from the loft with a Kraut they slept near. The German kept saying something and pointing to the loft. Somebody who understood a little German said there were more Krauts up there. One of the GIs who slept there said, "Nobody else was up there." He was surely surprised when about ten more Krauts came down with a little prodding from the Kraut who came down with the two GIs.

We were on the move toward St. Ame, and as we passed the Kraut who Garcia, an American 45 automatic was taken out of his right hand. There were Germans coming out a window of a house and running toward and into an outhouse (privy), so they set up a machine gun and waited 'til about 4 or 5 got into it, and then opened fire. This was about 200 yards away.

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Then, there would be a few more run into the outhouse, and the M.G. and rifles would open up on them. They should have shot at them on the run, because this was an escape route for the Krauts. There was no bottom in the outhouse, just a ditch that led away from the area. There were no dead Krauts.

As we neared St. Ame, a man who had just gotten out of the hospital returned to the company. He talked to his old buddies and gave out the news from the rear area which was always news to us. We knew what we were doing, but not what the overall picture was. We moved or fought our way into St. Ame when the 88s started to hammer us. We took to the buildings away from the shelling. I was in one room, and the man who had just caught up to us from the hospital was in another when an 88 came through a window and exploded. He was on his way back to the hospital. I don't think he was with us more than two hours.

After we secured the area, I was sent back to pick up replacements, back beyond the crossroads. There were only 6 or 7 but we needed them. We finally took St. Ame late in the afternoon.

Herplemont, France

One cold afternoon in the fall of 1944 we were walking down a rural road toward a village, our objective for the day. We moved single file on each side of the road with five yard intervals between each man and scouts out in front by about 100 yards. Artillery shells were going overhead, but out of our area and pounding somebody else. I had no gloves, so I would keep one hand in a pocket to warm it while the other held the rifle slung on the opposite shoulder. I saw a glove lying off the road 10 or 12 feet ahead, so as I passed it I picked it up and put it on the appropriate hand. Well, one warm hand is better than none. I was pretty well satisfied until I saw another glove. This was my lucky day. It didn't matter if it was a right or left, but as I got closer it looked like the mate to the first glove. I grabbed that glove but I didn't straighten up completely until I dropped it. I took the other glove off and threw it down beside the one I had just dropped. It still had the previous owner of the glove's hand in it. I must have been tired or had a weak moment, but nevertheless I went on with cold hands. Normally, you would take the hand out and be on you way with warm hands.

We took the village with little opposition, but then they shelled us off and on 'til late in the evening. During one of the barrages, several of us went into a house on the side of the road. The shelling slowed so we, one at a time, would run to the other side of the road. There was an embankment there that we could use for protection from the shelling and move back to the rest of the company. The C.O. decided to skirt the village and set up beyond. John Kehoe was next out, and I would follow him. He left and reached the far side as a shell went by us into the field and exploded fifty yards beyond. John yelled and went down. I thought this was no time to be "kidding around." He wasn't. He was hit in the left knee with a small piece

of shrapnel that we later found in his boot. He couldn't get up without help, so I ran over and helped him back to the house. That's when we found the shrapnel as we dressed the wound. It, to me, was just a little nick, but to the doctors back in the hospital it was something else, because they sent him home. So that's what I knew about wounds. Under cover of darkness, we left the house and rejoined the company. John was taken back to Bn. aid. I received a letter from Detroit from John explaining what all he went through and thanking me for the help I had given him.

There was an incident earlier where a fellow from another platoon came by and told me his shoulder stung. This was right after a small fire fight we were in. I took a look and sure enough he had been hit. The slug went through the fleshy part of his shoulder — a very clean wound. I took his first aid kit, put the sulfa powder on the wound, bandaged it, then told him to go to Bn. Aid. He said "just for that?" I said, "Yes, and I'll see you in 5 or 6 weeks." About 6 weeks later this blond haired fellow walked up to me and thanked me. His face was familiar but I didn't remember his face nor what I had done until he told me.


We had men coming and going all the time. Our company used about 840 men and a company carried about 200 men. During combat we never were at full strength. A rifle squad was 12 men — if we had 8 or 9 men we were in great shape.

I talked to John on the phone a few months after I wrote this. There were several more pieces of shrapnel in his knee, and he was discharged later than me.



Worldwartwoveterans.org

Our Bird Doggers . . . 'We gotta
bring 'em back
into the fold'



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Soon after lights out and the tired Sergeant turned in and slid under the blankets, we had a very angry screaming maniac on our pure, innocent hands. I still get a big chuckle out of that one.

Now I am going back a few more months in the same year, about January just before I started my military career which eventually lasted for over twenty years, with travel and assignment to Africa, Italy, Germany, Okinawa, Japan, Korea, Alaska and many stateside assignments in between. Some of us in the neighborhood got wind that a local National Guard Unit was going to have a big picnic with all kinds of food, sodas, beer and everything, but to be invited to this big affair you had to be a member of the Guards. What the heck; it was depression time and we would be paid the whole sum of \$1.00 for every Thursday that we attended drill at the Armory. So about five or six of the neighborhood youths, or hoodlums as some called us, walked down to the Armory and asked for a job. The Company Clerk looked at all of the baby faced youngsters and asked a very tricky question, "How old are you?" All of us were around sixteen years old and one even younger than that, and our honesty above reproach, so we all answered "sixteen sir." Too young, this high ranking Corporal replied. "Seventeen" with a question mark. Too young, he said. So we as a last resort said, "Just joking, General Sir. We are really eighteen." We were in, signed up in about two minutes, learned a few basic drills that same night, received an invitation to the picnic. We were now soldiers. We were thrilled when we were issued our own special uniform which consisted of wrap leggings, campaign hat, riding britches a wool shirt, and best of all a bolt action 30-06 Springfield rifle for our very own. We were of course surprised that we weren't allowed to take these items home and strut our stuff around the neighborhood.

Later on, we found out the Doughboys of World War I had worn these very same uniforms and carried that same rifle in 1918. We thought, "Boy, what luck we should be paying the State of Texas a dollar per night just to look so sharp in that beautiful uniform. The picnic that caused all of this was held at the old Polo Field, Sambrano Addition, east of El Paso. We played softball and had a great time. The soft ball game was unusual because a barrel of beer had been placed at each base and you had to stop at each base, drink a canteen cup of beer (you carried your cup with you) before proceeding to the next base. There weren't many home runs made that day I'm sure, and most of us didn't make it to third. We did play lousy ball that day. When the party broke up, we had some casualties, and one of these was a young recruit who had passed out from too much of that kind of soft ball and we well meaning buddies of his who would not in anyway desert one of our own decided to take him home. A big mistake.

We arrived at what we thought was his house, carried him gently up

The Other Side of the Story

by Ray Wells, Co. "I" — 143rd Infantry

Believe it or not there are times during a military career, and even during the midst of battle, where certain events which occurred have come back to our minds and the memory brings a good chuckle. In fact, there are many funny things that happened to each of us, and these incidents should be written down and published in our Quarterly before these historical moments are lost to those who follow us. If they are not, then those very important historical happenings will never be enjoyed by our children and their children.

I am going to reminisce and share some of the events that I was either a witness to or had a part of. First, I will go all the way back to the year 1939, summer camp at Camp Palacios, Texas, where the 36th Infantry Division had been sent for two weeks of training. It was hot and dusty living in the squad tents, and I believe it was on a Sunday afternoon, and we were given permission to take a dip in the Gulf of Mexico. The beach wasn't very far from our Company area, so several of us walked down to the waters edge and selected what we thought would be a perfect place to take a refreshing dip. "H Company" was from El Paso, and most of us had never seen any thing like this great big body of water. All we had ever experienced was the sleepy, muddy Rio Grande, where the depth of the water never got above the knees and that was when the water was high. The Gulf water felt so good, so cool when we jumped in, but it wasn't long before we were jumping right back out and some of those leaps must of been at least twelve feet or more. We had carefully selected a part of the beach where a school of stinging jelly fish (men-of-war) had set up housekeeping. Everyone of us had welts all over our bodies from the stings.

After the pain had subsided, what to do next, swimming was out, we had all afternoon and young GIs many of us barely sixteen years old have to be doing something all the time. We decided to use our military training and prowess to capture one of the jelly fish and present it to our dear loving Sergeant, the one who was making our life hell trying to teach us to be good soldiers. Of course at that age we came in to the Guards knowing it all. We captured one and it did resemble jelly, and as a surprise to our beloved Sergeant we placed the now dead and stinking mess under the blanket and did our best to make the Sergeants bed up in the approved military fashion.

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the stairs to the front door, stood him and leaned him with his face against the door, rang the door bell and got out of there post haste. The door was opened by two sweet little old ladies, our comrade in arms fell face forward, landed on the floor with a loud, thump. Wrong house. Nice, sweet old ladies screaming, pots and pans and whatever being thrown at our poor, innocent comrade and the rest of us in hasty retreat. Our prostrate bruised companion lived next door. From then on, PLEASE, no favors, he told us many times after that.

Remember those long hot marches with the miserable, uncomfortable, backbreaking infantry packs, which cut off the blood circulation to your arms? I certainly do, and I'm sure the next guy I am going to write about remembered for a long time. He was older than the rest of us, in his early thirties, so we called him the old guy. He was inclined to appreciate his booze, so one night, just before a long twenty-five mile hike was scheduled, the old one was over at the canteen enjoying a case or two of ten cent beer. Someone unrolled his pack, and when it was re-rolled, it contained about twenty pounds of rocks. The next morning the old fellow, now unable to feel much pain, placed his pack on his back and away we went. That night when the hike was over and we pitched our tents, a very exhausted unhappy senior citizen was in our midst. All of us, of course, sympathized with him and told him that if we ever saw those guys who were in our area last night from another Company we would let him know. We never were able to identify the culprits. He of course, was insured that his buddies would never be a party to such a dastardly crime such as this.

This same old soldier made quite a name for himself during a battle in Italy when he made several trips into a mine field to bring the wounded out. He was a good soldier who I was very proud to know and associate with. He died many years ago.

Now, to the night before the Salerno landing. When most of us were celebrating the surrender of Italy and planning on an easy beach landing the next morning, my buddy was having a brisk game of monopoly with some of the other men. I'm not going to mention names because the culprit of this story attends every one of our Division Reunions, but, I can tell you that I have known him since we were about nine years old in El Paso. Even at that early age he never let an opportunity pass him by if he could make a dime. He was very industrious and worked at various jobs while the rest of us were still playing marbles, tops etc. That night on September 8, 1943 when the monopoly game broke up, this same guy placed the play money in his pack. The first time I heard what the play money had been used for was after the battle of Alta Villa when the Mayor of Alta Villa and a group of either Regimental or Divisional Officers came through the area looking for the dastardly criminal who was passing monopoly money to the

unsuspecting Italians as Invasion script. The Italian merchants who he had purchased Dago Red VIno from thought that he had been such a wonderful, generous Americano because he not only paid them whatever price they asked for their day old vino, but always included a large tip. This successful business man would then sell the product to his buddies for any amount they could afford. All profit. With another soldier and myself sitting in the entrance to our pup tent and the villain hiding under a blanket in the rear, he was never apprehended and brought to justice.

Two more incidents that come to mind, then you can get to one of the other stories in the Quarterly. Both of these events happened on the same day at the same place. About two days after the landing, we were dug in on the side of a hill next to a farm house. The sun was out, weather great and the enemy wasn't firing at us at the moment, but they were not far away. I heard a noise of loud laughter and talking a few yards behind my machine gun position. Very unusual for front line activity, so I walked back about twenty-five yards on the other side of a little hill and there sat a group of Italian men, women and children and one American 36th Division GI from "H" Company, 141st Infantry Regiment sitting amongst them. Unbelievable, and yet true, they were having a picnic. They were all sitting around what looked like a table cloth, covered with all kinds of food, wine and jabbering away having a good time. It seems that the Soldier's family had come from this very same area of Italy. He somehow had located his relatives, and they were having a family reunion. At the same time, to make this scene even more ridiculous, there in the background near the farmhouse, I saw another soldier chasing a little white chicken. If he caught it, I don't know, or if he did how could he cook it? Not so difficult I suppose, if picnics were being held on the front lines why not a chicken B-B-Q?

Awhile later, same place, around a curve on the dirt road below my position here came another unbelievable scene. A Sergeant from the famous fighting machine "E Company" also from El Paso, pulling a four wheel surrey carriage. It was fancy with fringes all around the border of the top. I thought at the time that it had to belong to someone important. With the Sergeant pulling the surrey, another soldier riding in back manning a water cooled 30 Caliber machine gun. Later on, the word came down from General Clark ordering whoever had stolen the Mayor's official transportation to return it post haste. To return it six miles to the rear another twelve miles was added to the Sergeant's travel throughout Italy.

There are many, many more stories out there that should become a part of our history. If you don't feel like you can write and tell about your experiences, just put the ideas down on paper the best way you can and submit them to the editor. I bet he can arrange them so that they can show up good in the Quarterly. I hope that all who read this have found some enjoyment.

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Corduroy Road

by: James E. Hodges, Company "F" 111th Engrs.



The dust was stifling and the roar of six-bys was almost deafening. We stood down in the slopes of a swamp and built this road made of timbers cut from the tall Louisiana pine trees. There is more to this story than just a tall pine tree. It all started in the semi clearing of pines and grasses that gave us a place to rest. The 36th Infantry Div. had just completed one of the many 48 hour maneuvers that were so common on the long, hot, steamy Louisiana maneuver of 1941. Everyone was pulled back to Leesville and the surrounding country for a two day rest period. If you remember, we would go like the devil himself for 48 hours with little or no rest, and then stop for a few days of R & R.

Our unit, Company "F" 111th Engineers (C), was just outside of Leesville, La. We pulled in there about 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon of Friday and pitched camp. Our unit commander was new to us. He was a good officer, but was more like a mother hen than a company commander. A meeting of all platoon Sgts and their officers was called. We were told that on Monday a.m. we would pull out very early in the morning for another maneuver that would involve the building of bridges and approaches to them. We were to go to a place as yet unspecified. We would meet up at some time or other with one of the many officers who were the referees that would let us know if we were in the right place and, if so, were we dead, just hit, or completely out of this game.

Just north of Leesville, a small town that was made up of a spot in the road called Kerthwood was to be the destination. Our unit pulled out at 6:00 a.m. on Monday and headed north not knowing what, or if anything would happen. We had been assigned to an infantry regiment. (I do not remember the unit number.) Our company was to be a part of something called a combat team, and we were to support the infantry in any way. Our time was not long in coming. Just ahead on the road was this referee. He pulled us off of the road and called for the captain (Capt. Jungman). After a few minutes of talking and pointing, the captain came back and called the officers and platoon NCOs together. It seems as though the bridge up ahead had been blown.

The Infantry unit that we were attached to was to come through this area some time later in the afternoon or evening and would have to get across the river. A survey was made, and it was decided that a corduroy road would have to be built just to get to the bridge we would have to build. Crews were organized, and in just 20 or 30 minutes, the first signs of this started taking place. My platoon was to cut timbers and dress them for laying in the roadway. I could see other crews working on similar parts of the road. There was a crew for bridge timbers and so on.

The heat was bad, and the humidity was just as bad. It was one of those days that the wind forgot to blow. The exhaust fumes just stayed near the ground back in the woods. Every now and then we would have to stop to get a breath of fresh air out near the road. Our saws and other equipment were air operated so this meant that the air-compressor had to be at a central location with long hoses to our chain saws.

Darkness settled in fast, and we stopped just long enough to eat a sandwich. Captain Jungman came by several times to see how well everyone was doing. The road was taking shape, and at the far end of it was the bridge. (It had to be built on the land side of the river). One thing was for sure, the referee would not let anything by him. He came several times to let us know that at the appointed time, he would be back to check the bridge and road. Someone said he was an engineer officer, and that meant he would be more critical than someone else.

All through the night we worked. Sawing and laying logs for our "corduroy" road. The mosquitoes were getting bad, and the word got out to get some aerosol spray cans and keep working. Lights were not allowed. Many times through the night a jeep or recon-car could go by, and the dust would settle down in the draw where we were working. We were fortunate though, because the moon came up and gave us some much needed light. Finally, about 4:30 a.m., the captain said it looked as though we would get finished before the Infantry got there.

Out of the night, we heard the roar of engines. A column of trucks, six-bys, came by us, and the dust was so bad, that no one could breathe or see. We had to put our handkerchiefs over our mouth and nose to keep the dust out. Was this what we had worked all night for? It was just what we had expected, the Infantry had come by and took their objective. When it got to where we could see, there were several of the troop carrying trucks in the ditch on the other side of the road. Rumor had it that some of the men in those trucks were hurt.

Our referee came by and checked every detail of the road and bridge. We even ran some of our own equipment over it to make sure it was what it was built to be. Lob-lolly was a bad word for dirt and sand that had to much water content. I can truthfully say that if we had had more equipment go over this road than it was designed for, it would have all sunk in the lob-

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lolly ground. Some of our equipment had the misfortune of getting sucked
hub deep in this stuff. It took our cats to pull them out.

Looking aback on this "corduroy" road I can say the experience of
being together as a fighting unit was the catalyst that got the 36th division
through the war. We can all thank our Maker that we had one full year of
unit training before we were called upon to make the sacrifices that took
many a good man and tried them to their limits. We all know that Louisiana
was not like coming into Salerno or Anzio or Southern France. Nor could
it have equaled in anyway the hell of "Rapido" or any of the other battles
so valiantly fought.

To those who fought for those who did not, for those who gave the
ultimate and for those who in many ways are not the same as when they left
camp Bowie, Texas, we all salute you. God bless you all, and thank you
for the many sacrifices made for us.



-the T-Patcher

NEWS



LETTER



FIGHTING 36TH



36TH INF. DIV. ASSN.
BOX 2049 MALAKOFF, TX 75148

Fighting 36th Historical Quarterly

Southern France – North to the Rhine

Reprint from Army Magazine
Sent in By Russell J. Darkes



Worldwarveterans.org

After about ten days of intensive invasion training and preparation, we boarded a British LCI (Landing Craft Infantry). We now became part of the Seventh U. S. Army under the Command of Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch who, I understand, spent some of his boyhood days in Lebanon, Pa. He had a mother, also a General Officer in the Army serving in the Pacific. In Italy we had been part of the American Fifth Army under the Command of Lt. Gen. Mark Clark. We left the shores of Italy on 11 August 1944, headed North and lay over just off the Island of Corsica in the Mediterranean. Sometime during the night of 14 August, we set sail for the beaches of Southern France. "H Hour" was nine o'clock 15 August. We hit the beaches in the vicinity of the town of San Raphael, not far from the French Riviera. There was no opposition on the beach to our Front whatsoever, and a good thing that it wasn't, because we had to climb a rocky bank which appeared like a limestone quarry. We noticed friendly glider troops were landing some ten or fifteen miles ahead of us, as it appeared. We had very little opposition for the first six or seven miles, until we got to the town of Draguignan. We proceeded generally on the east side of the Rhone River Valley with sporadic German resistance, but nothing that slowed us down to any extent. We captured the towns of Avignon, Valence, and Grenoble in that order. In Grenoble, we were given a rest break for several days. While there, we were quartered in former French Army Barracks, and at this point we were not much more than a stone's throw from the Swiss border. We continued to move North along the Rhone Valley. During one night, a movement with the Infantry loaded on tanks, tank destroyers, 2 1/2 ton trucks, jeeps, anything with wheels or tracks, we covered approximately 75 miles. We moved into a forward assembly area and awaited orders to attack. Our orders were to attack down the mountain and to secure a River crossing at a low point of the Rhone River. We were to defend this

River crossing, to be certain the Germans would neither cross to East or West. We were to have several tanks to support us in this operation. The attack was to commence at twelve o'clock noon. Capt. Simmons, our Company Commander, called the Battalion Commander and informed him that our tank support had not yet arrived. For one hour we waited with the Battalion Commander being in constant touch with us. The tanks did not arrive, so we were ordered to attack without them. Resistance was quite light; we captured five or six Germans on our way to the low point in the River. As we got to the flat grounds, some three hundred yards from the location that Capt. Simmons had decided to use as a Company Command Post, we spotted both German and American troops at the farm house we were going to use. This baffled us. At this point we decided to be extremely cautious to see what the situation really is. About that time, American Fighter planes came strafing down the Rhone Valley and, of course, with the confusion that existed at the moment with thousands of German troops heading North ahead of the Americans, naturally the pilots could not distinguish between friendly and enemy troops. Events such as this are experienced in wartime, and all officers and non-commissioned officers had been issued two yellow smoke grenades which we were to use in the event we are strafed by our friendly planes. I'll never forget the "little stone spring house" that I dashed to for cover as we were being strafed. I believe I could locate that "spring house" to this day. I threw my two yellow smoke grenades, as did most of the other officers. Our planes made a wide turn and headed in our direction again, but this time they did not fire a shot. They evidently were familiar with the instructions that yellow smoke means friendly troops. We resumed our approach to the farm house. As the American troops there spotted us, they came running and informed us what had happened. The previous night our own Third Battalion Aid Station had been captured by the Germans. The Germans took them and incorporated them with one of their own Aid Stations. As it turned out, we had no casualties during this operation and had not only re-captured our own Third Battalion Aid Station, but also the German Aid Station. A German doctor, a 1st Lieutenant, started a discussion with me regarding the war. He indicated that the Americans and the Germans should not be fighting each other, but that we should both be fighting Russia. Naturally, he being my enemy, I did not agree with him openly. However, since then, I thought many times how right he might have been. Throughout the course of the war in Italy and France, I was practically the only member of my unit that could talk with and understand the Germans fairly well. With my Pennsylvania Dutch and two years of German in High School, I was quite well qualified.

Capt. Simmons immediately gave his instructions to the platoon leaders to set up their defensive positions for the night. We well knew we were in a precarious situation. The platoon leaders led their platoons to

their areas of defenses, and the 1st Sgt. organized Company Headquarters. Capt. Simmons then requested me, an Executive Officer, to inspect the right portion of our Company Front to ascertain that our machine guns, mortars, and rifle positions take the best possible advantage of the terrain. He personally would inspect the left half of our Company Front. I started my inspection on the extreme right and Capt. Simmons on the extreme left of the Company Front. We had planned to meet somewhere towards the center and then proceed back to the Company Command Post. I was almost through with my inspection when a terrific amount of rifle fire erupted at our Command Post location. Nothing but the worst entered my mind, and I feared that our Company Command Post may have been wiped out. I proceeded cautiously along an irrigation ditch in the general direction of the Command Post. As I approached within one hundred yards or so, I noticed a number of our company headquarters personnel strutting around the area and very much on the alert. I was certain then that they had survived. I rushed back, and the 1st Sgt. came to meet me and explained what had happened. It seemed a platoon of Germans was marching nonchalantly down the dirt road towards this farm house, which was our headquarters, having no idea that the Americans had now captured it. Our guards yelled "halt" and meant to capture the Germans. The Germans did not halt but immediately commenced firing at us, the Americans. After the smoke cleared, five Germans lay dead and a sixth was lying in the garden and moaning. We had no casualties. I asked the 1st Sgt. to cover me with his rifle while I removed the German's pack and saw how badly he was wounded. He was bleeding profusely out of his head and mumbling. I listened very closely to what he might be saying. All I could ascertain was "Lieber Gott" "Lieber Gott," and as I was cutting the pack off of his back with my trench knife, he died. This happened to be their platoon leader, a 1st Lieutenant (Oberloutnant), a German infantry officer.

Capt. Simmons returned to the Command Post shortly thereafter, and I explained to him what had occurred, and he was delighted we had no casualties within our Company. By this time, it was practically dark. The night passed without any interruption, except for one incident. Around midnight we heard tanks approaching our position. We, of course, did not know if they were friendly or enemy tanks. We immediately called the Battalion Commander to inform him and he assured us that they are friendly tanks, twelve hours late, the tanks that were supposed to support us in our attack that afternoon. We did get a few hours of sleep the rest of the night.

The next morning we continued our attack generally along the Rhone River. Throughout my almost a year now, being in constant combat, I had never seen destruction as there in the Rhone River Valley. The German 19th Army was in mass confusion, retreating North through the Valley. Both our Air Corps and Artillery took advantage of the situation and mercilessly pounded the Germans. I saw German Artillery pieces drawn

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by beautiful Belgian draft horses that were killed or crippled by our fire. Being a farmer by birth, it really hurt to use this. It appeared that the Germans were probably running short on petroleum products, gasoline, etc., and used horses instead of motor transportation. Then again, Lt might have been a carry over of World War I. During the next several days, we moved quite rapidly northward. On 2 September 1944, my 25th birthday, we captured the air field just outside the city of Lyon. This had been used by the German Luftwaffe, and evidently they left in a hurry, and we captured thousands of gallons of high octane aviation gasoline. This was immediately reported through channels to Division Headquarters. In very short order, a number of Division Military Police appeared to take over guarding the Air Field, and we continued in the attack. We now proceeded pretty much towards the Northeast, heading for the Belfort Gap and on into Germany. However, there was much fighting to be done before we got there. We captured, or assisted in capturing, numerous towns enroute. Among them were Besancon, Zellenberg, Beblenheim, Mittelwihr, Bennwihr, and Eloyes, among others.

About that time we crossed the Moselle River in a heavily forested area. We were led to the River by a member of the FFI (The Free French Movement) also known as the "French Marquis." Our Battalion I & R platoon (Intelligence and Reconnaissance) had taken a lifeline across the River since the River was very swift even though only three or four feet deep. We waded across the River and established our defensive position for the night in a house and barn combination, very typical of a French residence in the countryside. Our mission for the next day was to capture the town of Eloyes. There were no incidents during the night, but early the next morning, the Germans had evidently discovered our location, and with machine gun fire using tracer bullets set the house and barn combination on fire. Our Headquarters Personnel had to leave in a hurry and move behind a knoll down towards the River. We immediately made preparations to counterattack. For some hours we were fighting our way through a French cemetery on the outskirts of the town. We had excellent cover and concealment behind the tombstones throughout the Cemetery. After battling in the Cemetery for four or five hours with several men killed and a few others wounded, we finally got into the town just before dark, and it appeared the Germans had fled. We immediately surrounded the town and set up our defensive positions for the night. I had instructed the 1st Sgt. to select a suitable place for my Command Post. When I returned from my reconnaissance of our positions, I discovered that the 1st Sgt. had selected a house on the outskirts of town that evidently the Germans had used for their kitchen area and probably had just vacated minutes before. As I entered the house, I smelled this aroma. The 1st Sgt. and I entered the

back room of the house, and here was a huge stainless steel kettle, steaming hot, of brown potato soup. The Sgt. and I discussed the matter whether or not we wanted to eat it. We know that it might have been poisoned by the Germans before they withdrew. On the other hand, not having had a had meal for a number of days, we decided to eat it. After all, there is little difference whether one is killed by German bullets or poisoned soup. For supper that evening, all our Company Headquarters had delicious brown potato soup and dark German bread, prepared by the Germans. That soup tasted exactly like the soup my mother used to make, and was very commonly known to any Pennsylvania Dutchman.

Just prior to our approach to Zellenberg, it was the end of September, and again pay day for the troops. As executive officer, I and the other Executive officers of the Battalion went back to Division Finance to pick up our payroll for the Company. We paid our men, those that had not become casualties, and returned the balance to Division Finance. It was about midnight when we returned to the Company Trains Area (rear Command Post). I was immediately informed that Capt. Simmons had been wounded that afternoon, shot clean through his neck by a German sniper, and was evacuated to an Army Hospital. Being midnight and in complete darkness, I did not move to the front to take command of the Company until daylight the next morning.

When I got up to the Front lines, I called the platoon sergeants and the officers for a brief meeting as to what exactly the situation is. Shortly thereafter, I received a call from the Battalion Commander on our field telephone that we were to continue the attack to capture the town of Zellenberg. A tank destroyer was to be attached to my Company to assist. We took Zellenberg with little opposition, and as we were taking up our defensive positions surrounding the town awaiting further orders, we observed German vehicles moving down the road some six or seven hundred yards to our front. I directed the gunner of the tank destroyer, which, I believe, had a 90 mm gun mounted, to fire upon the Germans. The very next vehicle that came along appeared to be a German half-track. Our tank destroyer fired, and the vehicle seemed to disintegrate, this first shot was "right on." After a day or so in Zellenberg, we were directed to capture the town of Beblenheim, just beyond a knoll, possibly one mile from our present location. We knew the Germans were dug in, in a defensive position on that knoll. We had observed them. I called the Battalion Commander and requested help from Cannon Company to assist in our attack. In short order Capt. Stem, a tall, lanky Texan, Commander of Cannon Company, appeared with his self-propelled 75 mm cannons. We laid quite a barrage on the German positions we had observed on that knoll. Our attack immediately followed the barrage, the Germans withdrew, and

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we entered the town of Beblenheim. As I was placing my men in the defensive positions for the night, we were fired upon by Germans that evidently had not left the town. All night there was sporadic firing. The next morning the opposition increased — it appeared Germans had somehow re-entered the town during the night. It turned out to be a "house to house" battle. At one time one of my sergeants came to me, he was a Mexican-American from Texas, with a grin like the "cat that swallowed the canary." He told me he had killed five Germans as they were coming down an alleyway and turned a corner. That is when he would shoot them. The German following, not realizing that his predecessor was shot, continued on the same route. Finally, they realized that they were being trapped, but not until five of their men were killed. I recommended this Sergeant for the Silver Star. As the day progressed, the situation became more intense. I finally got in touch with the Battalion Commander and pointed out that I needed assistance in order to hold Beblenheim. Since "A" Company was in battalion reserve, he said he would immediately direct them to come to my assistance. With their help and some bitter fighting, we secured Beblenheim by the end of the day.

After several days of rooting and defending the town, we were again ordered to continue the attack to capture Mittelwihr. Again, there was considerable German resistance, but by the end of that day we had possession of the town. Several days later we were ordered to continue the attack on to Bennwihr. It was practically a repeat of Mittelwihr. As we were netting up our defense, I noticed several of my men appeared quite drunk. I immediately ordered the 1st Sgt. to investigate the source of their alcoholic beverages. He located a house just several doors from my Command Post that had a huge wine cellar. That spoke for itself. I immediately ordered a twenty-four hour guard that no one was permitted in that house. You cannot win a battle with a bunch of drunken soldiers.

We were now, of course, well into Eastern France, in the Alsace area. We continued our advance with sporadic fighting. For some time now, we were mostly in mountainous terrain, but entirely different than the mountains in Italy. They were heavily wooded and the slopes a lot more gentle than the mountains of Italy. It was almost a picnic in comparison to the Italian Campaign. It was mid-December, 1944 when the Battle of the Bulge commenced. We were well to the South, of course, and were not particularly affected by that action. However, we were prepared to move to the North at a moment's notice in the event we should be called upon. The weather had been quite miserable with very little sunshine for some weeks. The Air Corps could not fly their missions because of the weather and the fighting in the Bulge reached a precarious stage. After some weeks the sun finally appeared, and the Air Corps pounced on the Germans from

the sky. Their advance was soon halted, and the Bulge was restored to the Americans, and the Germans suffered heavily as a result. That was possibly in mid to late January.

Capt. Simmons again returned to the Company, having fully recovered from his wound by the German sniper as previously stated. He again took Command of the Company. I reverted to Executive Officer. We continued our advance on the forested slopes of Alsace towards the Rhine. I could look across the Rhine and see German territory, but was never able to set foot on German soil.

It was about mid February when I received orders to report to Division Headquarters. There I, and several other officers were instructed that we would be re-assigned to a Training Battalion in the town of Royallieu, just outside of Compiègne about forty-five miles Northeast of Paris. We were to be instructors for "Retreads." These were soldiers that had been assigned to various rear area units and had never seen combat. At that same time, casualties among the Infantry at the Front were still quite heavy and replacements from the United States were not arriving rapidly enough. Within several days we had packed our bags and proceeded to our destination. We received our assignments within the Battalion which was commanded by a colonel and immediately began an intensive two week course of combat training for these "Retreads." We had almost continuous day and night training. I was never able to figure out why I was selected as one of these instructors. It may have been as a reward for eighteen months of almost continuous fighting in the Front Lines, or it may be that the Division Staff felt I was well qualified because of my extensive combat experience. Whatever the reason, I was happy to leave the Front, never to return again. Yet I was maddened to have to leave my beloved "C" Company.

We continued these two week cycles of training for about five or six periods. After each cycle the men would be shipped to the Front as Infantry Replacements. They were not a happy group, but "war is war," and every man has to perform whatever he is directed to do.

It was during this period that we were informed one evening that Gen. Eisenhower might be in the area to observe our training the next day. Sure enough, the next morning about 10:00 o'clock, we saw this army sedan come right by our training area — the Five Star Flag flying on the front end of the sedan, as is customary for any General Officer. I observed General Eisenhower and several other high ranking officers in the sedan as they drove by. That was the second time that I got to see him — once in North Africa, as I previously stated, when he was a Four Star General and now with Five Stars as General of the Armies.

It was 8 May 1945, as I recall, that Germany surrendered, and the war

in Europe was over. Our training immediately ceased. What a celebration in the City of Compiegne that night. The French ladies wanted to dance with every American soldier they could find. All you could hear was a chorus of "Fini La Guare," meaning the "War Is Over." Of course, the Americans as well as the French were happy that the war was over.

Now that the war had ended, I wish to mention an item that I had not felt at ease to speak of previously. It was shortly after our invasion training in north Africa that four of us "C" Company officers, in our tent one evening just prior to bedtime and thinking of what may lay in the future, made a vow to each other. We agreed that any of us who may survive the war would make a deliberate effort to contact the families of any of us who may not survive in order to let them know just what might have happened. The four of us making this vow were Capt. Horton from Pageland, South Carolina; Lt. Greenly, from Milford, Delaware; Lt. Nobles, from Macon, Georgia; and Lt. Russ Darkes, from Lebanon, Pennsylvania. As previously stated in this booklet, but for purposes of this item, I shall say again --- Lt. Greenly was killed in action on 12 September 1943 by German mortar fire on a dusty mountain road outside of the town of Maiori, Italy. Capt. Horton was killed in action in early December, 1943, by German sniper fire on Mt. Sammucro. Lt. Nobles was killed in action on 30 May 1944, in Italy; the vineyards near Velletri, Italy, by German machine gun fire. Russ Darkes, by the Grace of God, was the only survivor of the four of us who made that vow.

In November of 1945 on our honeymoon, which had been postponed for almost three years because of my overseas service, my wife and I decided to visit the families of my three comrades, in fulfillment of the vow I had made. I shall never forget how grateful they were to learn the details of the deaths of their loved ones. As will be noted later, we visited the graves of all three of these officers in the beautiful American Military Cemetery in Nottuno, Italy, in September, 1988.



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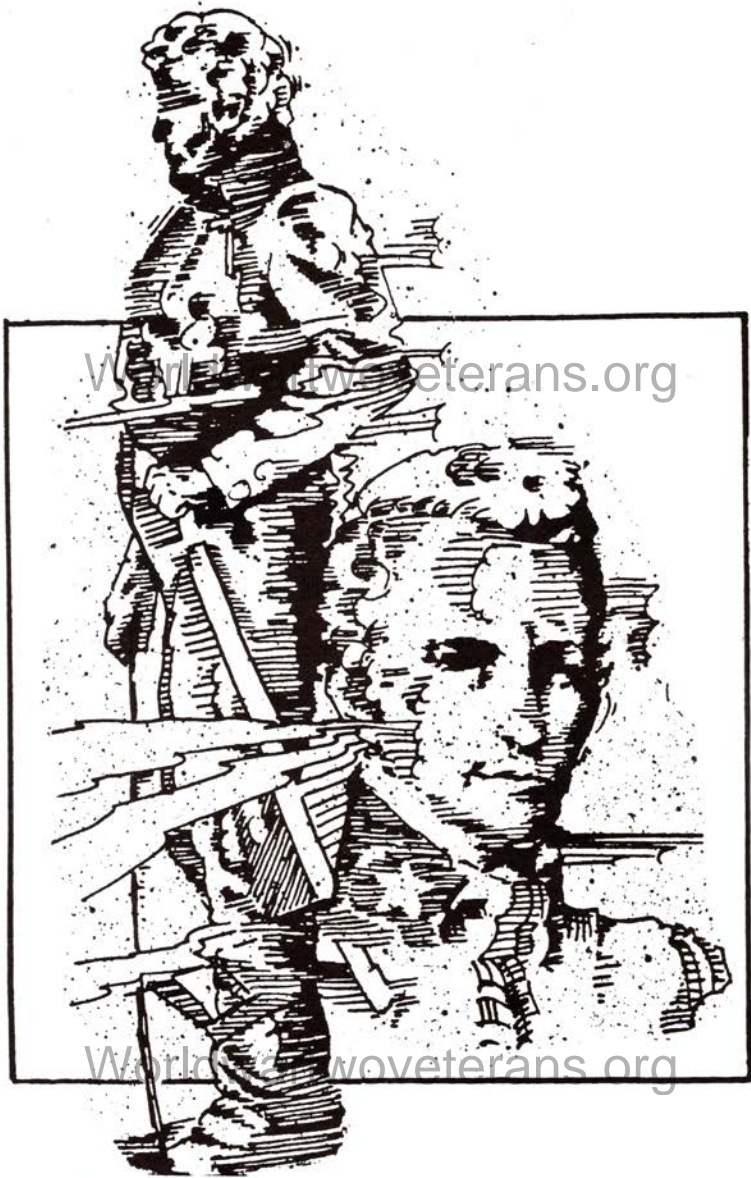
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"Take care of my little boy. If the country should be saved I may make him a splendid fortune. But if this country should be lost and I should perish, he will have nothing but the proud recollection that he is the son of a man who died for his country"

This passage from the second most quoted letter written from the Alamo by William Barret Travis captures the true spirit of the Texas Revolution.