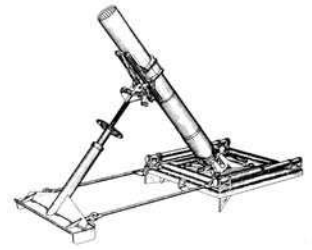


MUZZLEBLASTS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE 83RD CHEMICAL MORTAR BATTALION VETERANS ASSOCIATION

December 2004

We Fought as the Rangers' Artillery

Edward L. Trey —

News accounts of our Sicily invasion in TIME Magazine and much later in VFW Magazine named as the initial assault units Rangers and 509th Parachute Infantry – but failed to mention our 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion. The closest we came to due recognition was VFW Magazine crediting the “83rd Motor Bn.” as Ranger support. Close, but no cigar!

Thinking back, each of us as individuals recall details of our Gela landing. At H-Hour minus 15 minutes a small number of us deployed into an LCVP down rope ladders, from the Task Force flagship Monrovia. As with all of us, the trip to shore was rough, attracting artillery and machinegun fire.

The troops, almost all seasick and complaining about lack of room, found plenty of space in the boat bottom when shells and bullets were finding their range.

Once ashore, during reconnaissance for an OP, we and a Ranger captain found an abandoned Italian 75-mm gun pointing toward the sea. Alongside of it was a stack of shells. We managed to turn it around and expend these rounds inland.

Eventually our OP was established on the top floor of an apartment building, with observation through the raised sash of a bathroom window. While directing fire from our 4.2's, we were fortunate to also provide temporary fire direction for the cruiser Savannah offshore, with devastating effect throughout the first morning.

This operation was the beginning of recognition for the effectiveness of our 4.2 mortars, not from the media, but much more important – from the troops we were supporting throughout the Sicilian and Italian campaigns.



In a magazine article, Command Historian Dr. Burton Wright III, wrote about three battalions of Rangers landing on D-Day at Mairoi, Italy. He cited the critical support given the Rangers by Companies C and D of our 83rd – “the Rangers' Artillery” – as 1,500 Rangers moved inland to seize Chiunzi Pass and Monte St. Angelo.

Wright told about how two peaks commanded the German supply route to the south of Naples, and thus were critical terrain to the Germans. For three weeks the Germans attacked the thinning band of Rangers as they clung to their peaks against infantry attacks and the intense artillery bombardment. He described how in that time, our Companies expended 14,000 mortar rounds, and “directly supported the Rangers with the firepower, and when the Rangers

became thin on the ground, mortarmen from the two companies picked up their weapons and moved up into the line to fight as infantry.”

Grateful credit was given our 83rd by Ranger Commander Colonel Darby who said his unit's ability to hold Chiunzi Pass was “largely due to the chemical mortar battalion attached to the unit.”

So although the folks at home were unaware, we of the 83rd take quiet pride in having supported and fought alongside those legendary Rangers, virtually all of whom chose to die rather than surrender when surrounded at Cisterna on the Anzio Beachhead. Colonel Darby, who cried at the loss of his troops, was himself killed in combat during the last days of fighting in Northern Italy. □

We must never forget!

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83rd Chemical Readies for Future Action



*Lt. Colonel Michael Bolluyt
Commanding Officer of the
83D Chemical Battalion*

Attacks on coalition forces continue on a daily basis in Iraq, both day and night, consisting of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), hand grenades, small arms and mortar fire. Soft skin vehicle convoys are the primary targets and are being ambushed with the initiation of IEDs or rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) followed immediately by small arms fire. The insurgents vary their time and method of attack; surprising the coalition forces. It is no longer only the combat arms units' responsibility to train in conventional tactics and war fighting skills; it's the responsibility of every military specialty to train and fight as an infantryman.

The soldiers of the 83D Chemical Battalion improved their ability to fight in the common operating environment by conducting many training exercises that emphasized protecting the force. These exercises ensured the soldiers are ready to fight, defend and react to any enemy action both overseas and at home. These exercises have included a buddy and room clearing Live Fire Exercise (LFX) in April 2004, a Convoy Certification Lane (Operation Dragon Pride) in July 2004, a Brigade Convoy Live Fire Exercise (CLFX) in August 2004, and a Battalion Defense NBC Readiness Exercise (Operation Dragon Storm) in October 2004. All of these exercises provided the soldiers the opportunity to conduct Military Operations in Urban Terrain and enhanced the soldiers' ability to scan, aim and fire decisively at targets. The soldiers were also able to react to ambushes, IEDs, vehicle recovery under fire, MEDEVAC procedures, and deal with civilians on the battlefield. The 83D Chemical Battalion continues to shape and adapt to the current threats against the coalition forces abroad and prepares for the next time the nation will call. □



Soldiers of the 83D Chemical Battalion during a recent Live Fire Exercise.



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* *Deceased*

From Your Association Officers

No big update for you this time, but we are working together on various projects. Gini continues her search for out-of-touch buddies for our mailing list, and Jean Decky is compiling all the information we requested in the last *Muzzleblasts* — but we still haven't heard from all of you.

This Summer will be the 60th anniversary of the 83rd's disbandment, 60 years since all of you were just a little younger, and some of us younger ones were just a glint in your eye. Come to the next 83rd CMB reunion in Gettysburg. There we will all feel younger. Here are the details:

One day shorter than usual — Thursday, June 16, to Sunday (Father's Day) June 19. The Eisenhower Inn & Conference Center, three miles outside of Gettysburg. Rate: \$106⁵² per night for two people, taxes included. For reservations: 800-776-8349; or 717-334-8121. When you call, tell them that you're with the 83rd CMB and want our special group rate. *We are in their computer now, and they are awaiting your reservations today!*

Remembering Oran

George Barrett —

When we arrived in Oran, Africa, Tony Imperato and I decided to go into town. Suddenly, the whole sky lit up and I said "Great, Tony, they are having a celebration—look at all the fireworks!" I urged Tony "Let's hurry up so we don't miss anything".

All of a sudden all this stuff was falling from the sky. As we trotted along, we asked each other what could this stuff be that was falling all around us? Never having been in an air raid, we didn't recognize that flak was raining down upon us. That was our first air raid, and one that I will never forget.

More buddies found: Over the past few months we have heard from ten old 83rd buddies who hadn't known we were having reunions, or that the *Muzzleblasts* is still being published. Please send us the names of any other buddies who you know are not on our list, so we can keep them in touch with what is going on.

If you ever want another copy of *Muzzleblasts* for a friend or family member, just let your officers know. We'll be happy to send you one, as long as they last. We also have about 20 *Mark Freedom PAID* books too — just \$15⁰⁰ postpaid.

This is the second and last of two *Muzzleblasts* edited by Lee Steedle. As we knew from the start, he's unable to continue because of other commitments. The goal has been to refocus our newsletter on the stories and recollections of our veterans. We (Lee and Bill Steedle, along with Sam Kveskin) have succeeded. Twenty of our 83rd veterans have contributed over two dozen stories and illustrations to these two issues; and the flow of material continues. We have several veterans' stories awaiting publication in the next issue.

Editor's Note: George suffered a bad fall at our Washington reunion, due to an unfinished floor in the hotel's corridor. This resulted in a trip to the hospital and missing our business meeting. As of this writing, George's head and neck are still giving him trouble. He'd like to hear from his old buddies — particularly those who attended our June reunion. George's phone is: 215-334-4247.

Lee Steedle —

Bill Gallagher's Oran story about Arabs selling wine, printed in the last *Muzzleblasts*, brings to mind other Oran experiences with Arabs and wine bottles.

Before joining the 83rd in Pozzuoli I spent eleven months as cadre in the Canastel Replacement Depot just outside Oran, a city where unwary,

Invitation:

If you enjoy working with words, and you would like to advance the spirit of *Muzzleblasts*, I invite one or two of you to consider editing our next issue. To smooth the transition, Lee has agreed to assist by editing and setting into column form a half-dozen stories of your choosing. Please call or write Lee or me to discuss this!

Lastly, I would like to thank Lee and his son Bill for giving their time, talent and energy to creating these last two *Muzzleblasts*. We now need to keep this going. I do hope that YOU will — and you will have help!

That's all for now. We'll be thinking of you! □

— Gini Lemoine, Jean Decky,
and yours truly, Bill Hoover.



unarmed GIs were frequently assaulted. One night making my way back to a Canastel truck and walking down the center of a dark street, I heard footsteps, then a crash a half-block ahead. Running up, I saw a GI bleeding badly from face and head cuts, with a broken wine bottle beside him. Some Arab, seeing him staggering along with the bottle in his hand, had broken it over his head and stolen his wallet. I got him some help, and wondered later what might have happened if I had reached that spot without the other GI being ahead of me.

I was a green, eighteen year old kid at the time, but found a drinking buddy in street-smart S/Sgt. Jack Ross. One late afternoon we'd rolled through several bars drinking muscatel, and emerged from one with

(continued on page 6)

Memories of Tough Mountain Fighting

William C. Ford —

We spent Christmas Day, 1944, fighting in the mountains above Venafro, which is nine miles southeast of Cassino as the crow flies. The weather and the terrain greatly favored the German defenders.

It was cold and blustery, with high winds constantly blowing into our faces. The lack of good visibility created problems for our forward observers, as we were firing at short range in support of attacking Rangers.

It was difficult to get supplies of food and ammunition to our mortar positions high on those rocky slopes. They could be carried by Jeeps only a short distance up the narrow, muddy road, after which they would be transported the rest of the way up to us on the backs of mules.

We had to rely on Italian mule-skinners, because their animals would only respond to commands in that language. The mule train would usually come up to us after dark, and although we were hungry for the chow and mail, this made us uneasy because in spite of the fact that the mules were sure-footed, their hooves clicked loudly on the rocky trail, and might easily be heard by infiltrating German patrols.

Almost every night, the worst trip was back down the mountain, with the mule train carrying the stiff, frozen bodies of soldiers who had been killed during that day.

It saddened me to see those bodies being loaded on mules' backs, but that was the only way we could get them off the mountain. The thought often came to me that it was good their mothers were spared the sight of seeing their sons that way. I wondered, as others in our platoon must have also, whether my turn would come to be strapped onto a mule's back for that sad ride down the mountain.

It was with a great sense of relief for all of us, when our Company was pulled back down from those cold mountains at the end of December.

Robert P. Brimm —

On November 29th the Rangers jumped off, infiltrating and fighting their way through the well-organized enemy positions and mined areas. 83rd's Company B supported the operation from positions to the rear of Mt. Rotondo.

At dawn, an overwhelming enemy attack of regimental strength surrounded the Rangers. Targets were

engaged with heavy concentrations of mortar fire. A daylong smoke screen was maintained as the Rangers fought their way out. The force received considerable casualties, but the next day assembled in the vicinity of Ceppagna.

The plan called for the 3rd Ranger Battalion to gain the commanding ground above San Pietro. 83rd's B Company set up their mortars halfway up the mountain and gave heavy support as the Rangers attacked crest 950, which controlled the ground above San Pietro. The objective was reached, but an intense counter attack forced the Rangers to withdraw. Enemy fire was intense, and one platoon of B Company received over 50% casualties. Concentrated mortar fire was placed on the objective for two days, and the Rangers re-attacked and gained the crest. Counter-attacks were beaten off along the entire sector, and also in the sector of the 1st Ranger force above Venafro. This opened the way for large-scale attacks into San Pietro and on to Cassino.

In late December, the 83rd was relieved and assembled with the Rangers in the vicinity of Pozzuoli. □



We felt like mules hauling our heavy mortar carts up these rocky slopes.

Reports of Two LST-422 Survivors

Dan Miller –

Clark Riddle's description of how he survived the LST-422 ordeal in the last Muzzleblasts, brought back a lot of memories. We boarded the ship in Naples harbor on January 25, 1944.

During the night, enroute to Anzio, all of us members of Company D were below deck, some just shooting the breeze, others reclining or sleeping. We had been issued waist-type life preservers, the kind you squeeze to inflate.

Sometime during the darkness of early morning January 26, I was awakened and startled by a loud explosion. The lights flickered and went off, and there was a strong smell of gasoline fumes and cordite. Everyone below deck started scrambling up the stairs to the deck above to see what was going on. There was chaos everywhere but little panic as I recall.

I grabbed my life preserver, put it around my waist and went up on deck. I could see flames everywhere. White phosphorus and high explosive shells were exploding all over the deck.

I squeezed my life preserver to inflate it, and it came off my waist and fell to my feet. I picked it up and saw that the metal snap on the buckle had broken in two. Without a buckle, I couldn't keep the preserver around my waist, even though it was inflated. Everyone was trying to get off the ship, jumping into the water to get away from the fire and exploding shells. I gave my life preserver to someone who was ready to go into the water, and asked him to hold it for me until I could climb down the ship's anchor chain and get it from him. I thought if I could hold onto the preserver in the water I could stay afloat. I had taken off my shoes ready

to go into the water. After the individual I gave my life preserver to went into the water, I lost track of him because of the rough water and high waves. Since I had no way of getting a life preserver, I had no alternative except to stay on the ship.

There were others who also had not yet gone into the water including two or three British sailors who were crew members. We all got down behind a metal shield surrounding an anti-aircraft gun to protect ourselves from white phosphorus and shrapnel from exploding shells. The British sailors had flashlights and were signaling other ships for help.

By this time I had resigned myself to the fact that I might die, and was just waiting for the ship to blow up in a final explosion and go under. I don't remember specifically, but I think I was also praying for something to somehow save us.

After what seemed an eternity, another ship made its way over to ours and pulled alongside, allowing us to jump from the burning LST. I could see people everywhere in the water being tossed around by the waves. Many were dead, floating face down in the water. Others were struggling.

Some of the sailors on the rescue ship jumped into the water to save several who were too weak and too exhausted to help themselves. Those sailors risked their own lives to save men they had never seen before. It was simply amazing. I don't know if their actions were ever recognized, but few would do what they unhesitatingly did themselves.

For me, the miracle in all this is that if my life preserver buckle had not broken at the time it did, I most surely would have been among those who died in the water that early morning.

Our rescue ship offloaded us at the Anzio dock which immediately came under attack by German dive bombers. We, the rescued, spent the

rest of the day and night taking cover from German planes and shelling.

When we left Anzio to go back to Pozzuoli, we passed the hull of LST-422 bobbing in the water. Only the prow was above the water line.

Rudolph Whitt –

We departed Naples on January 25th. As a member of Company C, I had boarded alphabetically with all the "W's". Coming so near to the end of the line meant that there were no life belts for those of us in this group. The ship was crowded and we settled in, looking for places to sleep. In my exploring, I happened upon a safety belt hanging in a cranny on a hook. Instinctively, I took it and fastened it around my waist.

We were off the coast of Anzio, with the weather deteriorating as I slept. I was abruptly awakened by a loud explosion, and realized the ship was afire. Flames were fueled by all the gasoline and ammunition aboard.

The heat was intense and continued explosions were deafening. My hands were burned. People were shouting, and those around me were jumping overboard. By mouth, I blew up my life belt that I had found earlier (thinking that I might need to save the air cartridge for later), and jumped into the Mediterranean's frigid waters.

I became unconscious at some point from shock and exposure to the cold. I later learned that I had been in the water several hours before being picked up by a minesweeper. My first memory of January 26th was waking up with sailors covering me with warm blankets, and one offering me a drink of whiskey. I was later taken to a hospital in Naples where I spent 21 days recovering.

Upon leaving the hospital, the Red Cross gave me a package of clothing, several sizes too large, which I happily wore until I returned to my Company and was issued a uniform. □

Dog Tags Told of Friend's Loss

Lawrence Powell —

Our Companies "A" and "B" landed on the beach at Anzio at 0200 hours, January 22, 1944. We were happy to have caught the Germans completely by surprise. Encountering almost no resistance, we were quickly able to move several miles inland with the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Ranger Battalions, and the 509th Parachute Battalion, and for a brief while it looked as though we might roll all the way to Rome.

But like an angry swarm of bees, the Germans soon responded strongly and in great force. In the next weeks they nearly succeeded in pushing us off the Beachhead. None of us could have dreamed that we would be pinned down in that tight space for nearly four bloody months.

At dawn on January 27th we learned that Companies "C" and "D" of our 83rd had been aboard LST-422 that sank two miles off Anzio. Some survivors were brought ashore, and I happened to be among those sent back to the beach to help in any way we could.

Walking along the shore, I spotted something glistening in the surf. Wading in a bit, I found two dog tags attached to a chain. Tears filled my eyes when I read the name: Theodore Beley. "Teddy" Beley of Company "C" was a boyhood friend from our hometown of Ambridge, Pennsylvania where we had been in school together. The reality of war came very close to me at that moment.

I remain in touch with the Beley family. His brother John gave me a photo of Teddy; and a few years ago his two sisters visited Anzio, both in tribute and closure. Theodore Beley is officially listed as Missing in Action on January 26, 1944. His body was never found. □

Anzio Memories

Bob Fenton —

The night of January 26, 1944, when LST-422 sank, about forty or fifty survivors were gathered in a field. Major David Meyerson and I, and the weapons carrier driver took off for Nettuno to get blankets from the Quartermasters supply. We loaded them up and were going through Nettuno when a German air raid came over. Jumping out of the truck, we ran into a garage. The house across the street was hit by a bomb, went into the air, and became a pile of rubble.

Getting back into the weapons carrier, we drove about a hundred feet and slid into a fresh bomb crater in the middle of the street. A British DUKW with a winch pulled us out, and we were finally able to deliver the blankets to the chilled survivors.

We had our Battalion CP just east of the overpass. Every once in a while the Germans would lob a shell into that area. I was coming along in my Jeep with a Brit on a motorcycle just ahead of me. A shell came in and hit the bike, throwing the Brit into the field. His body laid there for several days. Life and death at Anzio was a matter of inches, and survival pure luck.

This is a picture of me washing clothes in the "Anzio Maytag" made by the Ammo Company. □



Remembering Oran

(continued from page 3)

a full open bottle. Outside their stone barracks we encountered two Ghoums, the fierce native Algerian troops who fought under the French flag. These were the famous fighters who later terrified Germans at Monte Cassino when, patrolling alone at night, they cut sentries' throats, taking their ears as souvenirs.

When one gestured toward our bottle we cheerfully gave it to them — we'd had more than enough. They offered to show us their sparse quarters — just a bare cement floor, and straw covered cement shelves on which they slept. Outside again, dusk was settling, and the street empty. We were encircled by four or five other Ghoums, smiling because the bottle was being passed around.

Ross sensed trouble before I did. The bottle now empty, the circle tightened around us, and they were no longer smiling. "Stand right beside me." Ross ordered, "Unbutton your shirt, put your right hand inside. Okay, let's go!" We moved to the ring which gave way before us, with several Ghoums muttering something which Ross later insisted meant "knives!"

Were we actually about to be jumped that evening? I'll never know for sure. But as the Germans learned at Cassino, Ghoums play by their own rules. □

Beyond Anzio and Into Rome

Andrew C. Leech —

On the morning of June 5, 1944, our troops poured into the Eternal City. The next morning, we loaded in a motor convoy and started moving through Rome. We got permission to camp inside the Vatican that night. The next day we pulled out in search of the retreating enemy. We were in convoy and as we drove along the highway, we saw many wrecked vehicles and tanks that had been knocked out. Most of the tanks had been immobilized by our bombers which had cleared the way or softened it up for us. We saw many dead along the way and large groups of prisoners coming in. At night we would go into position while under fire, but in the morning the enemy would be out of range again. This kept up day after day as we took town after town.

When we had advanced about ninety or a hundred miles above Rome we were finally relieved along with the 34th Division, the 36th, the 3rd, and 45th. Fresh outfits such as the 88th and 85th took over. We moved back into a rest area not far from Rome and while there, were given passes into the city.

I spent a couple of weekends in Rome. Kimbrough and I got a room in a hotel where the people treated us like we were their boys. We always divided our rations with Mom and Pop as they had very little to eat and in Rome there just wasn't anything you could buy to eat. We found Mom had searched around and found some fish and some spaghetti and a small piece of bread which was rationed each week.

The chief drink at meals is a bottle of vino, so it was placed on the table. We opened our rations and helped Mom fix them, so when we put it all together we had some good meals. □

Visiting Rome By Rail

Kelso "Red" Thompson —

Having joined the 83rd at Pozzuoli, my first combat was on the Minturno front. I was in the Communications Section of Company D, with Sgt. Shirley, Harmon Roberts, John Baer, Martin Maloney, George Schmidt, and Ben Samulski.

I was hit at Anzio with phosphorus. The sergeants from Edgewood Arsenal knew what to do. They used Burma-Shave on my wound.

After we pushed out of the Anzio Beachhead, I was sent over hill and dale to deliver phone lines to the infantry. One of the infantrymen stole my rifle, which was upsetting, because snipers were everywhere. I finally found a gun and felt a little better about it. When I returned to where my Company was, they had forgotten me, but I climbed aboard the last Jeep heading toward Rome. That evening we bivouacked near the Tiber River bridge. And that night an amusing thing happened.

Captain Forrester told us to be sure and not go into Rome, as there were snipers in the city. But some of us found a handcar on the railroad tracks, so you can imagine what happened. We got to playing with the handcar and started towards Rome. When we got to a bomb crater we would lift the handcar around it and keep going.

When we came to the switching station, the man there switched us straight into the city of Rome. None of us had a rifle. There were five of us, and I don't remember who they were.

The Italian people came from everywhere with fried eggs, french fries, and bottles of red wine. We all got drunk. When we decided to head back to our area, I asked "Which track did we come on?" No one knew the answer. By this time Italian fighters

armed with rifles joined us and pushed us off on the handcar.

When we got to the switching station the same man was there, and switched us back on the right track. You should have seen us five drunks moving the handcar around the bomb craters and making enough noise to wake the dead, when we were supposed to be very quiet so Captain Forrester wouldn't know that we had been to Rome.

The next morning at 6:00 a.m., he made us all fall out and line up. He said "I know some of you went to Rome last night, and I want them to step forward!" No one did, but all he would have had to do was smell our breath. His face turned red and he said "Fall out!"

If any of you remember who the other four men were, I would like to know their names. □

Want to Request Missing Medals?

Requests for issuance or replacement of military service records and medals, which are provided at no charge, can be directed to: National Personnel Records Center, Medals Section, (NRPMA-M), 9700 Page Ave., St. Louis, MO 63132; using standard form (SF-180). Family members can also apply. For more information go to this web site: www.archives.gov. The "shortcut links" to go directly to the pages you need are as follows:

Military Awards and Decorations
www.tinyurl.com/mwdf

Military Records
www.tinyurl.com/5orrr

(Note: Be prepared for long delays in filling your request!) □

Join us at the 2005 Reunion!
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The Eisenhower Inn
& Conference Center
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“Round Away!” — *But How Far Away?*

Clark Riddle —

On a sunny day in Italy, 1944, we were back in bivouac, far from the front, when Lt. Woomer decided to take the first platoon on a practice shoot. We loaded our equipment and went out into the country. After locating a gun position we proceeded to set up while Lieutenants Woomer and Lauro went to find an OP.

Some time later, their jeep driver came to the gun position and said “Sergeant, you’re wanted at the OP”. So I got in the jeep and went as ordered.

When I got there I asked what it was all about. Lt. Lauro said they wanted me to take a shot. “Send down the fire commands and take a shot at that mountain over there.” I said I couldn’t do that because from the OP I didn’t know where the gun position was, and I would have to map and calculate the distance, even if I did know.

They said to take a guess, just make sure you shoot far enough so you don’t hit the houses at the base of the mountain. I did exactly as I was told; I made sure I shot far enough!

After sending the fire commands down to the gun position we waited and waited. There was no explosion on the mountainside. Finally we



heard a loud “BOOM” in the distance. Woomer looked at Lauro and said “Let’s get out of here – we don’t know where that thing landed!”

Apparently I had missed the mountain and shot completely over it. I was never invited back to the OP again.

The incident was forgotten until at one of our first 83rd Reunions a group of us were in the hotel room telling stories when Col. McEvoy remarked that he sure would like to know where the shell came from that landed in the motor pool. Nobody answered. He brought it up again at another Reunion. As far as I know, he never found out.

Since McEvoy had a shell he didn’t know where it came from, and we had a shell that we didn’t know where it went, I assume we maybe are talking about the same shell. What I would like to know is what happened in the motor pool when the shell landed. □

Unfond Memories of Screams in the Night



*The Nebelwerfer
“Screaming Meemies”
were terrifying.*

All six barrels fired in rapid succession. We’d hear the howling of these screaming rockets coming straight at us from the time they left their launcher until they arrived – and this seemingly took forever. Platoon Sergeant Woof-Woof Jackson said it very well: “At Rambervillers they’d scare you to death all night long!” □

Southern France Airborne Landing

First Airborne Task Force –

The book *Paratroopers' Odyssey, A History of the 517th Parachute Combat Team*, offers a gripping account of Operation Dragoon – the Southern France landing. It covers both the parachute and the glider landings in which our Company D of the 83rd participated.

This story of the 517th begins in the States with parachute training; and describes the 517th's first combat experiences north of Rome. It offers a thorough account of the parachute and glider landings, along with the first two days of this airborne assault. It describes the horrendous mistakes in dropping paratroopers as much as 25 miles from their intended drop zone, and gliders being released at altitudes of 2500 feet and more, rather than the intended 300 feet.

Relative to Normandy, the Southern France landing was comparatively easy, but the story cites glider crashes, with eleven glider pilots killed. Of the 327 CG-4 gliders participating, most were so badly damaged by their virtually crash landings that only 27 were later salvageable. In the first two days before connecting with seaborne troops, the airborne suffered 9% losses, including 560 killed and missing; plus 283 jump and glider landing casualties.

The account describes the firepower of 4.2 mortars during the crucial fight at Le Muy: "One thousand rounds, including a high proportion of white phosphorous – would be fired in twenty minutes. Those who witnessed it will never forget it. For twenty minutes, fifty 4.2 rounds per minute rained down with awesome effect. Great clouds of smoke arose, punctuated by red-yellow explosive flashes. The vineyard was almost literally blasted from the face of the earth. It was a brutal steamroller, exactly as it had been intended. It is

hard to believe that any living creature could survive."

The account concludes: "Without the airborne assault, it is entirely possible that the Germans could have held off the seaborne assault long enough for reserves to arrive. Dragoon might easily have become another stranded whale like Anzio." □



Going to the Top

John P. McEvoy –

While advancing rapidly up the Rhone Valley with the 36th Division shortly after the Southern France landing, George Shirley, D Company's Communications Sergeant, had an idea. He learned that the Division had just been issued the new 536 hand-held FM radios, which were both lighter and more reliable than the old 609 models we'd been using.

S/Sgt. Shirley wanted the 536's, so armed with an appropriate requisition, he applied at the Division's Signal Office. He was quickly rebuffed, and told that these new radios were a high priority item reserved for only the most important purposes. When he persisted, Shirley was laughingly dismissed and told that only the Commanding General could approve such a request.

That should have ended the matter, but not for Sgt. Shirley. By-passing virtually the entire Division chain of command, Shirley marched himself to the Major General's Command Trailer, and knocked on the door. When the General asked what he wanted, Shirley explained his need, saying that with the 536's, D Company's forward observers could better support the General's infantry with 4.2 mortar fire. The General listened, was impressed, and signed the requisition, telling him to come by again if he needed anything.

Shirley returned triumphantly to the Division Signal Office, whose ribbon clerks could not believe that a lowly Staff Sergeant would have the gumption to go over so many heads, approach the Commanding General, and come away with everything he needed. □

Enjoy reading *Muzzleblasts*?
Send us your stories & photos!

His Tank Destroyer Gave Me Protection

Sam Kweskin —

On a cold November day in the Vosges wine country, our 83rd Headquarters liaison officer, stocky, prematurely grey 1st Lt. Walter Hauser, was on his way to visit some mortar platoons. His Jeep driver Gerardo di Lucchio had me, a 20-year old, 6' 4" Chicagoan, riding "shotgun" in the back seat, even though as the Muzzleblasts illustrator, my most familiar weapon was an inky pen. We came upon a bullet-riddled road sign, with arrows pointing to Riquewihr, Company B's location, on the right, or Company D's Zellenberg to the left.

Hauser suddenly turned to me to ask, "Where do you think we should go, Kweskin?" For a moment I thought the wind had done something to my hearing. But I had heard him correctly. Yet, why would a First Lieutenant ask me to make a suggestion? Finally, I bent forward to say "There are a bunch of Company D guys I know in Zellenberg – let's go there first, okay, Lieutenant?" Hauser gestured his gloved right hand to Jerry, who gunned our jeep to the left. Within a few minutes, we were driving into the ancient village of Zellenberg, with its white-washed walls, gabled roofs and oaken cross-beamed houses. Company D's Second Platoon had set up its mortars in the small, cobblestoned square, and were firing furiously over the rooftops. A lone tank destroyer fired between two buildings, then retreated after each couple of shots.

Hauser jumped from the Jeep, and I followed the Lieutenant up an antique flight of steps to the third floor. There, in what must have been a bedroom at one time, a number of observers stood gazing through cracks in a venetian blind. They gave firing directions to radiomen and telephone men at their sides, while Hauser spoke to the

officer observing for our platoon. I stood away from them, occasionally getting my own view of three villages to the south and east being fired upon — Beblenheim, Mittelwihr, and Bannwihr. I even took a moment to sketch the activity, noticing at one point a firefight going on about a mile from us. The three villages were burning and engulfed by white phosphorous smoke, and German soldiers could be seen leaving cover in front of the towns and racing away from the incessant mortar and tank destroyer fire.

The noise was overwhelming, and the cacophony of the firing from the area behind us was loosening the plaster from the walls of the room. Or so I thought for that brief moment. Suddenly, a soldier appeared at the doorway – "You guys CRAZY? The Jerries missed you by inches! Look!"

He pointed to what must have been an adjoining bedroom at one time, but no longer existed. Indeed, the Germans had wisely guessed someone was using this, the tallest of buildings in the village, as an observation post, and their shell had missed us, well, by about ten feet. Close enough!

We scattered downstairs and I somehow made it to the tank destroyer that had been pounding the Germans. Now it was in one of its frequent withdrawal positions, and I huddled behind this metal monster, hoping it might provide some safety. Hauser shouted at me to jump into the back seat, and we raced away from the incoming mortar rounds, and out of Zellenberg. Hauser decided to shorten our trip and return to our Stambach Headquarters for good reason. He had just learned by radio that Company B had been overrun on an SS graduation exercise, and had lost a handful of men killed, and about a half-dozen taken prisoner.

That evening in Stambach, I sat listening to B Company's Sgt. Earl Rapp, as he described hiding in a

culvert in a freezing stream, as German soldiers ran back and forth on the road above him. Lt. Harlan Reynolds had been killed by machine gun fire before he could get to that culvert, but Bill Heelan had quickly ducked into it with Rapp.

Many years have passed since that frightening afternoon. In 1998, living in Boca Raton, Florida, I volunteered at an art museum, and shared work days with another WWII veteran, Mac Altshul. Mac has been gone now for three years, but I remember giving him the wartime memoir of Lee Steedle, of D Company, to read. That night, after reading it, Mac phoned me saying, "Your friend Lee writes about two incorrigible T.D. soldiers – brothers – named Callahan. Can you find out from Lee where that was? I e-mailed the question to Lee, who said the village was Zellenberg. In turn, I called Mac, who said "Of course! The Callahan brothers were under my command!" I went to my portfolio of drawings, and found written on the sketch I made that day: "Zellenberg". I couldn't believe such a coincidence could exist, with the three of us there that same day.

I told Mac over breakfast the next morning how we had avoided visiting B Company which had been overrun that day; how we escaped from the shelled house; and how I had hidden behind the tank destroyer; and thanked God that I got out of there whole. Mac smiled and said: "You can thank me, too, Sam. That was MY tank destroyer!" □



Fourteen Months to Heal a Wound

William J. Gallagher, Jr. —

Two months before the war ended in May, '45, I was wounded and almost lost my right leg. I was talking with Carlos Trautman when the first 88 shell came in and rained shrapnel all around. The fragments missed us. But a second shell came in quickly and got me in the right leg.

After the medic Neil McCarthy gave me a morphine shot I was taken to the 45th Division Aid Station. I was then evacuated to a Paris hospital where I developed dry gangrene. Good thing we had penicillin.

That Paris hospital had been taken over intact from the Germans. A medic gave us pajama tops with Jerry Swastikas on their pockets.

We were then loaded onto a C47 and it was a hell of a ride across the Channel to England, but we made it in one piece. When the crew in England unloaded us they saw the PJs we were wearing and thought we were German POWs. But when we began to talk they realized we were American GIs.

When mail finally caught up with me in England, Dick Connolly's letter advised me that the 88 shell came from a Tiger Tank that was finally knocked out by an Anti-Tank group of the 45th Division. His letter also stated that the tank crew had all been young boys.

After being in England for over three months, in and out of amputee wards, they decided I would be better off in the USA. I returned in a hospital ship and landed on Staten Island and was transported to Camp Kilmer. There they sorted out the different cases and decided where we would go. I was sent to the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia, that the Army had taken over and renamed Ashford General Hospital. A real swanky place!

They started working on me in June of 1945 and it was hell. They took half of my left leg to save my right one. They joined my two legs together and grew half of the muscle from the left leg into the right one. I stayed in a body cast for forty-seven days. Thank God for plastic surgeons! I was released in May, 1946, almost a full year after the War in Europe had ended.

Carlos and I were discussing this at the last 83rd reunion. He told me that pieces of my leg had been scattered all over the ground. I didn't know it then — the explosion and shock had put me in la-la land.



After discharge, I had to wear a brace for one year, but it did not affect my ability to work. Three weeks after being discharged I went back to work for The E. I. DuPont Company — a great organization to work for. In 1949 I married my loving wife Marge, and had a daughter and son. In turn they both married and had a son and daughter. I retired in 1986 with more than forty-one years of service to DuPont. □

How to Make A Strong Man Cry

Robert J. Bush —

Officers in the 83rd, while overseas, received a liquor ration from the government. When I received the first bottle at Anzio, I concluded that, under no circumstances, would this liquor be available to any man while we were in combat. Then the bright idea occurred to me "I'll save it — this liquor will keep indefinitely and sometime in the future we'll have a platoon party."

I had a heavy, khaki barracks bag that was about two-thirds full of stateside uniforms — dress shirts, pink and green pants, etc. The top of this bag was tightly sealed with a lock, for which only I had the key. My bag, along with all the other officers' bags, was stored in an assigned trailer in the motor pool.

About a year later when I had received another liquor ration, I headed for the motor pool. When I couldn't find the officers' trailer, I asked about its whereabouts, and the Sergeant pointed out a bigger trailer to me.

I had no problem finding my bag, and no, I had not lost the key, if that's what you are thinking. However when I unlocked the bag, the most awful, mind-numbing stench hit me.

In checking, I learned that the bag transfer was done by throwing the bags to the ground, and then tossing them into the larger trailer. The result: every one of the fourteen or fifteen bottles was broken. My clothing, soaked with whiskey, had to be destroyed. Of course, the men in my platoon were never told about the great party they missed in 1945, but all these years later we can finally laugh about it. □

Here's Where to Find Us...



Of the 158 members of the 83rd Veterans Association in our current roster, 118 are men. Virtually all are veterans, although a few may be sons with their veteran father's names; and several are officers of the active 83rd Chemical Battalion. In addition, we

have 40 family members – the widows and children of 83rd veterans.

Our list shows the Companies in which 75 of our veterans served. The greatest number – 24, are shown in Company B; followed by Company A's 19; Company C's 17; while 4 have identified themselves as having served in Company D.

A special member is Jean Pierre Combe, of France, who as a young boy, helped rescue Company C survivors after their position was overrun in Southern France. □

Key: V = Veterans F = Families

Alabama:	.....V-3
Arizona:	.....V-2
California:	.....V-3, F-3
Connecticut:	.....V-3, F-1
Delaware:	.....F-2
Florida:	.....V-9, F-3
Georgia:	.....V-5, F-2
Illinois:	.....V-4, F-1
Indiana:	.....V-2
Maryland:	.....V-4
Massachusetts:	.....V-1, F-1
Minnesota:	.....V-2
Mississippi:	.....V-8, F-4
Missouri:	.....V-1
New Jersey:	.....V-8, F-3
New Mexico:	.....V-1, F-4
New York:	.....V-6, F-3
North Carolina:	.....V-3
Ohio:	.....V-2
Oklahoma:	.....V-1, F-1
Oregon:	.....V-1, F-1
Pennsylvania:	.....V-21, F-6
Rhode Island:	.....V-1, F-1
South Carolina:	.....V-1, F-1
Texas:	.....V-3
Utah:	.....V-1
Virginia:	.....V-12
West Virginia:	.....V-1, F-1
Wisconsin:	.....V-2, F-1



The Golden Years

By Glenn Helsel

My fingers are numb
Can't button my shirt
When I bend over
My back starts to hurt.

Can't read a word
Without a large glass.
A chair gives me dropsy,
got lead in my ass.

Got a good memory
— it's kinder short,
like forgetting my glasses
and things of this sort.

I find it embarrassing
I catch every eye,
when entering a store —
forget to zip up my fly.

Lord I know the alternative,
one I don't choose to make.
If You have it in mind —
I'd rather live with my ache.

Help Preserve Our History

Published author Terry Lowry is progressing with work on his book about our 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion. He will be using material left by his father Charles Lowry, in addition to stories, photos and sketches some of us have been sending him. If you would like to help Terry with this history, please contact him: 237 Kenna Drive, South Charleston, WV 25309; phone 304-768-4216; or TLSnoop@aol.com.

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