

22 JUN 98

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T/5 Peter Muto
Btry. B, 382 F.A.B.
APO # 470
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Luke Martin
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Dear Comrade:

I enclose three little stories of events that occurred 54 years ago. Please add these to your collection!

My stories are in the format of ~~a~~ letters to my granddaughter. She is a typist. I am not!

The persons referred to are:

~~1st~~ 1LT Cyril Crimmins, Forward Observer; SSG John Ragland, of Texas. (He was promoted to 2LT a few months later); CPL Roy Pittman, also, of Texas; CPT Roger Craddock of Co. G, 409TH Inf. The wounded officer was CPT White of Co. F, 409TH Inf. I remember, also, 1LT Edwards of Co. F. Our F.O. Team was from Btry B, 382 F.A. Bn.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Muto



PETER MUTO
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"I write now about one day in W.W.II; the date was on 19 DEC 44. I was a PVT. (Private-the lowest rank in the army). I was in the Cactus Division-a group of 14,000 soldiers who wore a patch of yellow, green, and blue on the left upper-arm. I was in the field artillery (cannons) of Battery B, in support of Company G (Rifles, hand grenades, machine guns, and mortars-very tiny cannons). We passed through Wissemborg in the North-East corner of France and had hiked into Germany. We had taken a line of German trenches that they had established long before the war began in 1939. Company was very short of men (Casualties!) A four-man team was sent to "work" with Company G from Battery B. We had a Lieutenant, a Sergeant, a Corporal, and Me; Our Lieutenant had the job of seeing the Germans and giving the order for firing of shells to places he directed. The firing commands were transmitted by voice radio, by the Corporal. I carried the 24 pound battery pack for the radio. He carried 26 pounds (12 kg) of radio set.

After we had arrived at this trench line; (It was called "Siegfried Line" in English or "Westwall" in German). (It had concrete fortresses aligned laterally from the boundary with Switzerland, all the way North and West to the Atlantic Ocean, passing along boundaries with Luxembourg and Belgium). We stopped for the day. The Corporal and I went back (into France and extended a telephone line forward to the lieutenant's observation tower inside a concrete fortress, where we installed a telephone for his use. He remained awake all night listening for sounds of German activity-at which he would direct artillery fire. The Sergeant and I were no longer needed for communications work, so we helped as riflemen. I was given a salient in the trench line to defend. Our trench line ran at an oblique angle with our front.

There I stood, all night long, with a fellow American (whom I had just met at dark-about 10 paces to my left-the same arrangement existed to my right-Now! The man to the East of me was German and had a psychological need to kill me!)? This thought ran through my mind all night long! I was cold, well fed, tired, but wide awake! I was fearful of making any sound that would inspire a German soldier to fire bullets in my direction. There I stood all night long. At day break one-half of us were taken into tunnels (very wide) connected to the trenches, where we were allowed to sleep for a few hours. Thus ended the night of 19 DEC 44. The next day, 20 DEC 44, brought a psychological blow that hurt me more than that fear of 19 DEC 44. The day, 20 DEC 44, becomes a part of my next letter to you."

Well, Grandpa, I am going to type your next story now:

"In my last letter, I wrote of a long fearful night. Now it is morning. I went into the concrete fortress to report to my Lieutenant. He told me to remain with in sound of his voice and wait. Then and there I learned how hard it is to wait! Soon the Germans began to attack Company G. I was "safe" inside the concrete pillbox, but every time a mortar shell exploded nearby; I flinched. I was a "scaredy cat"! This fear passed abruptly as a soldier ran into our shelter and yelled to the Captain, "Stop our artillery fire!" "Howard and (I forgot the name) are dead; and SGT. Eisely is dying!" Immediately my Lieutenant yelled, "Muto, our telephone wire is out." So I went out from the pillbox and inspected the wire that my Corporal and I had laid previously. Soon I came upon three American corpses laying upon my wire. The wire, covered with blood, was broken. I quickly repaired the wire and reported back to my Lieutenant. I told him that our artillery fire had killed three of our own soldiers. My Lieutenant came down from his perch in the observation post and discussed this disaster with the captain. Their voices were pained, on the verge of cracking into sobs. I felt their pain for the next forty five years.

"Fast Forward" to 25 AUG. 90. We were at Cherry Hill, NJ for a reunion of the Cactus Division. There I met SGT. Eisely, whom I assumed had died in that tragic event. The fatal artillery shell landed only a meter or so from SGT. Eisely. There was his machine gun between him and the shell burst. His buddy on the other side of the gun was killed. The gun was mangled, and the SGT. had a multitude of superficial wounds from bits of brass and fragments of rock. He stated that only two artillery shells fell short. The other shells had landed far away among the Germans. I concluded that only one gun crew had set improper values on the gun sight's reading at the cannon and that the shells were fired in two volleys. The source of the tragedy was not in Company G, but back, four or five miles, at a gun crew!!

*SGT Eisely was removed from the scene only a few minutes before I arrived. He told me that the third corpse was killed the night before. His comrades had placed the Dead Americans on the forwarded edge of the trench to prevent the enemy from seeing our helmets bobbing along as we moved in the trenches. The trenches were (to) shallow."

^ Too ^

"This is a report on the memorable events of 23 April 1945, as I write them down 53 years later.

We were in Southern Germany, near the village of Hulben. Our forward observer team, consisting of our lieutenant, the corporal, and me, (was in support of Company F). The company was advancing southward from Hulben through a large meadow. As we departed the town, there were machine gunners up on balconies of several houses. They warned us that some German Soldiers were in the tree line about a kilometer ahead of us. We saw numerous civilians coming toward us. They carried white flags. We waved them on to our rear and told them to go to Hulben. As we hiked along, our Lieutenant kept himself near the company commander, a captain; who in turn, hiked well to the front of the advancing formation.

Suddenly a small group of Germans, started firing at us from the tree line. They may have had a machine gun crew and 10 riflemen with them. Their fire was intense enough to cause the company to hit the dirt (one platoon of Company F was advancing on our flank through a forest; so they could not be of help to us. The Lieutenant shouted for us to bring the radio to him. Our Corporal had been well dispersed behind the Lieutenant; so we had to jump up and run toward him in the face of enemy fire. Upon arriving near the Lieutenant; I joined the cable between the battery pack and the receiver-transmitter. Then I erected a telescopic antenna, about three meters tall, and mounted that on the radio set. Meanwhile our lieutenant observed the enemy with his binoculars and oriented the enemy on his map. (Do you remember when you studied Cartesian Coordinates in Ninth grade algebra? That was the language we spoke over the radio net to tell the fire direction center (about five kilometers to the rear)-where the enemy was located). Our Lieutenant was very brave (as always); just like the infantry officers; they were all with heads and shoulders up, observing, the enemy. This was high-risk behavior, because within a few minutes the captain was hit by a few enemy bullets. My lieutenant told me to crawl to the captain and try to help him. When I arrived at his side; the captain said "Carry on with your duties, soldier! The Medics will take care of me!" Sure enough, whenever a soldier was wounded, a comrade would yell, "Medic!" and a medically trained soldier would come running to give first aid. Another comrade shouted, "Lieutenant, Captain is wounded!" This meant that the Senior Lieutenant must become the leader of the company. A few long moments later our artillery shells began exploding among the Germans. The brand new Company commander shouted, "Our artillery is striking the Germans. Let's charge them!" Immediately, all of the soldiers who had been pinned down by

the German machine gun and rifle fire; jumped to their feet and marched toward the enemy, firing their rifles as they went.

The Germans were inspired to retreat not only by the exploding shells and the rifle fire of the advancing infantry, but the machine guns (I believe they were a part of Company H.) back on the balconies in Hulben; began to fire on the Germans when they noticed that Company F was pinned down.

We, of the forward observer team had to remain at our radio until the artillery fire was halted to prevent our shells from harming our comrades in the infantry. So the skirmish ended.

Later, in a moment of rest and calm; I felt proud of our infantry. They "lived" in dangerous places and participated in hazardous skirmishes continuously. I was proud of our medics; they ran about the battle field bravely protected by the Red Cross on their arms and on their steel helmets; so, the enemy would not aim at them. However, mortar shells and artillery fired by soldiers who could not see the battle field; put the medics in harms way. I was extremely proud of our officers who were setting the good examples, always. Hey, I was there! (In good company!)"

Memories of the 103rd Division in World War II
DIARRHEA ON THE BATTLEFIELD

We see few reports of this subject in histories of the war; yet very likely a few thousand of our comrades can recall events very similar to those I describe here. I shall refer to three persons here who suffered the ultimate embarrassment while serving in combat.

I shall take my case first. While serving "up front" with our Forward Observer Team (this was an ad hoc unit composed of five soldiers: an officer, a senior sergeant, a scout corporal, a radio-telephone operator and a vehicle driver). We chose a loft of a barn as our sleeping quarters for a night. We led very vigorous lives, so we slept soundly. I awoke from a deep sleep feeling a urgent need to go to the toilet, which was a privy outside in the barnyard. Unfortunately, I could not hold my bowels, because my excrement was mainly liquids. I was wearing G.I. underwear, boxer shorts. I used the soiled underwear to clean myself and discarded those garments in the toilet. I pulled my trousers on over my bare skin until I could get into my canvas musette bag for fresh underwear. I consider myself very lucky that I was not a rifleman in the infantry occupying a foxhole under observation by the Germans. To be caught in a foxhole with a "potty accident" must be the ultimate in human misery. Yet there must be many of our soldiers who remained at their post of duty in this health crisis. This leads into our next story.

This victim was 1st Lt. Richard. He was second-in-command of our battery of 100 soldiers. He was in charge of our four cannons. He had to give the firing verbally. Once we received a fire mission, he had to be on the scene. Well, it happened to him right in the middle of the fire mission. He did his duty (forgive the pun!). It was a most undignified performance for an officer.

My final case involves a bit of humor. Radio Operator Douglas Regenbrecht had an attack in the middle of the night while sleeping in the hayloft of a barn. He avoided soiling himself by reaching for a helmet in the dark. Later, in the light of day, we discovered he had used the helmet of his supervisor, Sergeant Strong. This gave new meaning to an old army saying, "he crapped in his own mess kit."

Respectfully submitted
by T/5 Peter Muto
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103rd (Cactus) Division

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