

# HISTORICAL CORNER

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## THE 92d CHEMICAL BATTALION AND COBRA

Although the chemical mortar battalion was dissolved during the Korean conflict and, indeed, currently there is talk of changing the caliber of the heavy mortar to 105 millimeters, the activities of the 4.2-inch mortar battalions in two wars have given the Chemical Corps much for which it can be proud.

Recently I had the opportunity to scan a manuscript volume to be published by the Office of the Chief of Military History. This volume included the period of breakthrough, in July 1944, from the constricted area of the Normandy Beachhead with its torturous hedge-row terrain. The exploits of the 92d Chemical Battalion in that operation immediately came to mind.

The code name for the breakthrough was COBRA. In order to get COBRA off on the right foot, planners ordered a massive strike against German frontline positions by heavy, medium, and fighter bombers. The 9th and 30th Division of VII Corps, ready to take advantage of the aerial blow, withdrew an appropriate distance behind the lateral road which formed the bombing line. Companies A and B of the 92d Chemical Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Ronald LeV. Martin, supported the 30th Division.

H Hour for COBRA was 1300 on 24 July. Weather that morning was overcast and the operation, dependent as it was upon a prelude of air bombardment, was postponed. However, word came too late for several of the air elements and 335 aircraft made their runs. Several hundred casualties among our own troops resulted from the bombings. General Bradley ordered the operation to be carried out the following day.

The morning of 25 July was clear and bright, and COBRA struck again. This time 1,500 heavy bombers dropped 3,300 tons of HE; over 380 medium bombers dropped an additional 650 tons; and 559 fighter bombers delivered 200 tons of bombs as well as a bonus of napalm. Unfortunately, some of the bombs again landed on American troops.

The two companies of the 92d, unscathed by the activities of the preceding day, this time were not so lucky. Company B was in the midst of firing a mission when hit by the bombs. Company A's positions, 100 yards away, also were struck. For two hours bombs fell in their areas. Nine of Company's A twelve mortars were destroyed, as was one-half of its ammunition. All vehicles in the area were demolished. Company A was able to salvage eight of its mortars and organized a platoon to fire a screening mission for the reorganization of the badly bombed infantry. This was done in spite of twenty-nine casualties, including six deaths.

Total American losses were 111 dead and 601 wounded. Lt. Gen. Lesley J. McNair, commander of the Army Ground Forces with headquarters in Washington,

D.C., who was visiting the front, was killed while viewing the bombardment from a position just ahead of Company A; a news correspondent died in the Company B area.

Consternation within American lines was mild when compared to the destruction among enemy positions across the road. The VII Corps attack was only temporarily delayed, and infantrymen were quick to take advantage of the German disorganization. As far as the 92d was concerned, uncommitted Company C replaced Company A, less the one platoon mentioned above. Company B continued in support. As soon as Company A was refitted it relieved Company B. Thus did the 92d Chemical Battalion take part in COBRA, an offensive operation which surpassed even the fondest hopes of its planners.



## N. Y. DISTRICT AGAIN IN ROLE OF SANTA CLAUS AT BELLEVUE

The United States Army Chemical Procurement District, New York, carried out its third annual "Operation Santa Claus" last Christmas for the children of Bellevue Hospital. More than a thousand toys were presented by Lt. Colonel John G. Appel, Commanding Officer, and Mr. William Huss, president of the Welfare Council, who are shown in the picture above along with two of the happy patients. A cash donation was also made for the children's outdoor play area. This collection is now a Christmas tradition for the District.

## MEMORIAL DRIVEWAY NAMED FOR CAPT. WILHELM, KILLED IN KOREA

A driveway at Pine Bluff Arsenal, Arkansas, has been named Wilhelm Drive as a memorial to Captain Maurice E. Wilhelm, Chemical Corps, who was killed in action in Korea on November 2, 1950 while commanding Company B, 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion.

Announcement of the action is contained in general orders of the Arsenal issued 8 January 1958 by Colonel Russell W. Dodds, Cml. C., the Arsenal Commander.

Captain Wilhelm enlisted in the Army on 8 January 1943, was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant AUS 1 December 1945, promoted to 1st Lieutenant 14 August 1947 and to Captain 1 November 1950.