

MUZZLEBLASTS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE 83RD CHEMICAL MORTAR BATTALION VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Special Commemorative Edition • September, 2004

WWII Memorial Visit Stirs Old Memories

"A reunion highlight was our group visit to the World War II Memorial."



83rd Officers in Transition

A Message from Gini Lemoine —

As those of you know who attended our June Washington reunion, I decided to step down as your Association's President in order to give more time to my family. I am happy to report that Bill Hoover was then elected President, and will also remain as Treasurer. I took Alice's Hartley's place as Vice President; and all of us are pleased that Jean Decky has been reelected Secretary. I am certain that Bill will be a great President — he is always thinking of ways to do things that will benefit our organization.

A reunion highlight was our group visit to the World War II Memorial. Congressman Mike Castle of Delaware met our buses there and gave us a brief speech of appreciation. Bill Hoover secured permission for our veterans to place a Memorial

wreath under the Atlantic Arch, where the former 83rd Commanding Officer, Lt. Colonel Les Smith met with us. We particularly appreciated this when we learned he had walked over two miles from the Pentagon, with the temperature in the high 90's.

On Thursday night, many of us were fortunate to attend a performance of the National Symphony Orchestra Pops Concert with Marvin Hamlisch as Conductor.

It was with deep regret that we had to report the loss of six of our veterans during the past year: Frank Papaccoli, Ray Meek, Jim Lauro, Clair Strickler, W.L. Holmes, and Fred Linamen.

Twenty WWII veterans attended our June reunion: George Barrett, Walt Bielski, John Butler, Lawrence Ertzberger, Bob Fenton, Bill Gallagher, Pop Hoover, Earl Kann, Ed Krebs, Sam Kweskin, Loy Marshall, John McEvoy, Larry Powell, Perry Rice, Clark Riddle, Lee Steedle, Ed Trey, Carlos Troutman, Stephen Vuckson and Rudolph Whitt. Two veterans' widows attended: Abigail Jack and Fran Borkhuis and surviving

children, Marcia Bunker, Dr. Beasley, Jean Decky, Terry Lowery and Terry Strickler along with too many loving and supportive family members to mention.

Over eighty people attended our banquet, where we were honored by the attendance of the 83rd Chemical Battalion's present and former Commanding Officers: Lt. Col. Michael Bolluyt; Colonel Ray Van Pelt and Mrs. Van Pelt; and Lt. Col. Les Smith, who offered grace, with Mrs. Smith. We were also fortunate to

(continued on page 8)

Issue Highlights

Active 83rd	2
Commanding Officer's Tribute	4
Wine & Trouble	6
Anzio Forward OP	7
Two Who Escaped	9
G.I. Health Hazards	10



Today's 83rd in Action

Since October 2001, the 83rd Chemical Battalion has executed fourteen separate deployments for platoon and company size elements. These deployments ranged from support of Operation Noble Eagle in the Military District of Washington, to Uzbekistan, Qatar, Kuwait, Korea (for World Cup support) and Afghanistan.

On 22 December 2002, the Battalion received orders to deploy to Kuwait. The main body began to arrive in theater on 7 February 2003. The Battalion's planning assumed the Iraqi regime would attempt preemptive strikes against coalition forces in order to disrupt the troop build-up in Kuwait. The Battalion arrayed its forces throughout Kuwait. The 83rd Chemical Battalion supported the following units at platoon and company level: the 377th Theatre Support Command, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, 101st Airborne Division, 173rd Airborne Brigade, and the 3rd Infantry Division.

Operation Iraqi Freedom began on 20 March 2003. By the next day, both the 3rd ID and the I MEF had attacked deep into Iraq with their supporting chemical units. The 83rd Chemical Battalion and attached units from Fort Hood and Fort Drum led the U.S.

Army attack with the scouts of the 3rd Infantry Division through the Karbala Gap in front of the tanks and Bradleys. Female soldiers of the 83rd Chemical Battalion FOX reconnaissance crews were the first to ever fight in the front lines. On 22 March 2003, the Battalion suffered its first combat casualty (WIA) when a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) struck a FOX reconnaissance vehicle supporting the 3rd ID.

Through extreme bravery and dedication, the soldiers of the 83rd Chemical Battalion were a mobile and vital asset to numerous military organizations in the fight of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Our skilled soldiers who spanned the entire theatre of operations enabled coalition forces the flexibility to maneuver freely without the threat of encountering weapons of mass destruction. □



CSM Johnny Baldwin,
Lt. Colonel Michael Bolluyt



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A Moving Experience Visiting the World War II National Memorial



Commanding Officer Cites Heavy Price That Was Paid



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

We were privileged to have the current Commanding Officer of the 83rd Chemical Battalion, Lt. Colonel Michael Bolluyt give the keynote address at our annual banquet. Here are a few highlights from his stirring speech:

On behalf of my Command Sergeant Major, CSM John Baldwin, it is an honor for us both to be here with you this evening. I think it is fitting that I take the opportunity to speak to you about how much your generation means to those who serve our nation today.

You grew up during the depression... millions unemployed, business failures... the severest blow of all was dealt by World War II. For the men, life changed completely — they were going off to war.

What was it like to leave everything you have for an uncertain and dangerous future? You were departing on an open-ended deployment. There was no one-year rotation plan... you were in it until the war was over. Did you think that you might never come home alive?

You were the men who would die on a Mediterranean Beach off Sicily or die on a sinking LST during an amphibious assault. You were the men who sat in the wet foxhole in the bitter winter of France. You were the men who celebrated Christmas Eve

Mass in a war-damaged church. It was this Battalion that earned 876 Purple Hearts — 876!

The memories are brutal. What courage kept you going? What drive was within you to face death time and time again?

The cost suffered by our WWII generation of Americans is beyond my comprehension. The sacrifice is impossible for me to truly understand. We have had a generation grow up since the Vietnam War who never really knew war casualties. We grieve for the over 800 killed in Iraq — and we should grieve for them. Many WWII battles saw 800 casualties in a matter of minutes. The WWII generation of Americans... fought the bloodiest war in history, and those who survived came home changed forever. You know what is important in life. You built a new life on a strong foundation. Veterans of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion — we owe you so much. You saved our way of life — we could have lost it, but your generation would not allow this to happen.

The Army of today remembers the sacrifices of the past. Our battalion headquarters is adorned with 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion history. We still display the names of those battalion members killed and missing in action at the entry to headquarters. We still display a 4.2 deuce mortar outside the headquarters. The Command Sergeant Major requires that soldiers answer questions about the battalion's lineage and honors during promotion boards. Soldiers salute officers and say "Confront Any Mission." The officers respond with "Rounds Away!" We draw strength from you veterans.

Your formations are growing thin now, yet you still gather every year to remember the courage it took to take

the fight to the enemy for over two years; to remember the great pride of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion. I am honored today to be your guest speaker and to join the ranks of this awesome battalion.

*CONFRONT ANY MISSION.
ROUNDS AWAY! □*

Tough Day in Riquewhir

by Ed "Stan" Davidson

Sam Kweskin mentions and illustrates Earl Rapp hiding from the Germans in a Riquewhir culvert on page 122 of *Mark Freedom PAID*. It was a bad time for five of us. Jerry opened up with his machine gun killing Lt. Harlan Reynolds before he could get to that culvert, but Bill Heelan quickly ducked into it with Rapp.

Then Malone and I crawled into a vineyard next to the road running over that culvert. When we finally crept close to a "B" Company house a couple of our own men thought we were Jerries and began firing at us by mistake. We stayed among those vines and kept shouting at them for a long time. Finally we took a chance, stood up straight, and they recognized us.

Bill Heelan and I saw Earl Rapp on a better day in '51. We visited him in his New York Giants dressing room after a game, and then the three of us made an uninvited call on Marty Feerick in his Manhattan apartment. I'm not so sure Marty's wife enjoyed our surprise visit and all those war stories we told, but we had a good mini-reunion.

In later years, I was a buyer for Macy's and visited some of those countries where we'd dug all those holes. I got to visit Innsbruck where the war ended for us. □

Nostalgic Moments with Friends at Reunion Banquet



A Little Wine and Lots of Trouble

By Bill Gallagher

As we were landing in Oran from the USS Monticello, one hell of an air raid was taking place. The anti-aircraft fire was terrific. One of the guys in the group said "Oh boy — look at all the fireworks, I guess the war is over." I said I guess the burning of a tanker and supply ships was accidental due to the fireworks. We soon found out the war was very much alive. After moving into a safe area in a few days we started training for Sicily, in a town near the beach called Zeraldo. After a few weeks we moved into an Arab town pronounced "OSI BEN OK BA". I'm not sure of the spelling but it should be close.

The town lay down in a valley and we were camped up on a hill. It was off-limits but we learned from guys in the Big Red 1 First Division that there was a French village about a half-mile down the road. They told us it had a big well inside a barn that had ice cold wine. George Tyma, I and two other guys wandered down the hill and found that the First Division guys were correct. The wine was great. The French Moroccan owners did not want any money but they did want food. So we told them we would be back the next night with food. We told the cooks about our trip and the fact that we could get good wine, plenty of it, in exchange for food. We loaded up a mattress cover with some goodies from the kitchen and sneaked back down the hill. We gave the owners the food and were given eight bottles of good wine. We stayed for awhile and were feeling no pain when we left.

When we were heading back to our camp, upon approaching the Arab area we noticed some figures in the moonlight. They were town Arabs trying to sell us wine. I wanted to keep moving but George said let's buy a bottle of wine. I agreed, but said let's then get the hell out of here.

We bought the wine and walked a few feet. George said let's taste the wine. We did, and it turned out to be water. George said he wanted to get his money back. I said it wasn't worth it, those guys looked bad. But he insisted and we went back. I felt a little relaxed when I saw the Arab open his robe to give us the money back. But he whipped out a saber knife that looked like a sickle that you cut grass with. No need to tell you we sobered up pretty fast. We turned and rushed up the hill. George was first up the hill. But in the process we dropped the good wine we had gotten from the Frenchmen.

When we told our kitchen people what happened they were very upset with us. For a while when we were in the chow line our portions were smaller than those of the rest of the Company. Now when I see anyone using a sickle on the lawn I get a little nervous. □



Murphy's Laws of Combat Operations

Anonymous

1. Friendly fire — isn't.
2. Never draw fire — it irritates everyone around you.
3. Incoming fire has the right of way.
4. Mines are equal opportunity weapons.
5. The easy way is always mined.
6. If the enemy is in range, so are you.
7. Military intelligence is an oxymoron.
8. Never share a foxhole with someone braver than you.
9. Never forget that your weapon was made by the lowest bidder.
10. The Cavalry doesn't always come to the rescue.
11. As soon as hot chow comes up, it rains.
12. No combat-ready unit ever passed inspection.
13. No inspection-ready unit ever passed combat.
14. There is no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole.
15. The only thing more accurate than incoming fire is incoming friendly fire.
16. Tracers work both ways.
17. Don't ever be first, don't ever be last, and don't ever volunteer.
18. Suppressive fire — won't.
19. Anything you do can get you killed, including nothing.

*We'll welcome
YOUR story
for our next issue!*

Anzio Forward O.P. Was Upstairs at Gun Positions

By Perry Rice

When the Anzio fighting settled into static front lines between March and late May, '44, all infantry action on both sides was fought at night by combat patrols across the quarter-mile of minefields separating our forces. No soldier on either side left his foxhole in daylight.

Our Company "D" platoon occupied two heavily shelled houses a short distance apart from each other. As I recall, these two houses were those closest to the front that had not been totally reduced to rubble by Jerry shellfire.

Two squads had set their guns behind each house to shield flashes from our night firing. Our men lived in heavily built dugouts made from railroad ties and sandbags within rear rooms. If armor-piercing shells had collapsed a rear wall, our squads might still have survived.

A big enemy dud shell was lodged high in the left corner of our house, its nose cone plainly visible to our gun crews below. We prayed every day that concussion from our firing would not cause that dud to explode and wipe out a squad.

Jerry Woomer was platoon commander and I was platoon exec. This may have been one of the few

times during the entire war that we "forward" observers worked less than forty feet in front of our guns. We observed our fire from the back part of an upstairs room facing the front. The glass and frame of one window had been blown away. Because we directed our fire standing at least ten feet back, we felt pretty sure the Jerries would be unable to see us and spot light reflections from our binoculars.

One of our principal targets was a typical above ground Anzio cemetery, where the marshy land made in-ground internment impossible. The Jerries had removed bones and utilized the high tiers of narrow crypts for observation. Their heavy machine guns swept the flat of no-man's land at ground level, while their artillery and mortar observers peered at us from holes they'd made in upper crypts.

Woomer and I sometimes found ourselves in forward observer duels. When kraut rounds came close to our houses, we'd blanket the cemetery in w.p. smoke and h.e. fire. By the time of the May 22 jump-off our shelling had mostly reduced that cemetery to a pile of stone rubble, with only a small portion of its walls remaining. Even during that tough time with death all around, we regretted the desecration of those old graves, but we felt sure our frequent mortar fire directed at that cemetery had helped the men in our two shell-damaged houses to survive. □

Funny How the Photographers Just Happened to be There

by John P. McEvoy

A day or two after the landing on 10 July '43 at Gela, Sicily, I'd gone down to the beach where we had landed, to recover any mortar carts that might have been dropped into the deep water between the sandbar and the beach. The LCI's had struck the sandbar mistaking it in the dark for the beach, and had dropped our landing ramps. A few mortar carts had rushed down the ramps before the mistake was recognized.

After a futile search, we took a break in the warm sand between fishing boats pulled up on the shore. It was a beautiful day. Army gear was being unloaded, birds were singing, not a sound of war could be heard.

Two LCVP's were just offshore. When they landed, a crowd of photographers and reporters started to set up cameras and tripods. One of the LCVP's backed off the beach, circled, and pulled up just short of the shore, dropping its ramp into the water. A portly figure in shining helmet stepped off the ramp into the shallow water.

While he waved a riding crop the cameras went into action. Obviously it was George Patton, resplendent with his pearl-handled revolvers and loads of stars on shoulders and helmet.

Six weeks later we received a stateside newspaper with his picture on the front page, riding crop on high. The caption read: "Patton Lands in Midst of Fierce Counterattack — Rallies his Troops and Leads them to Victory." □

WWII Memorial Registry

By Marcia Bunker

Go to this web site to register vets for posterity: <http://tinyurl.com/6v6tw> or http://www.wwiimemorial.com/registry/edit/donor_nameaddr.asp

They will be entered into the archives for the memorial. I have registered my Dad and it would be terrific if all of "our men" were registered. A family member can also add a vets name. Even though some of the members may not have a computer at home, they can access the site through their local library. We have received e-mails from librarians helping our 83rd members. □

Join us at the 2005 Reunion!
June 16 – 19, 2005
(Thursday through Sunday)
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

83rd Officers in Transition

(continued from page 1)

have the presence of the battalion's Commanding Sergeant Major John Baldwin; and also C.S.M. Dan Russell, accompanied by Mrs. Russell. Lt. Col. Bolluyt, our keynote speaker, led our Pledge of Allegiance.

Kathy Rice, Perry Rice's daughter announced during our banquet that she had ordered commemorative coffee mugs and caps two months previously from the WWII Memorial Office, for veterans attending the reunion. Somehow a bureaucratic snafu intruded and they didn't arrive on time. However they will still be mailed eventually to our veteran attendees, as appreciation gifts from Kathy.

I hope to see you at our next reunion. God bless and keep you!

And from our new president, Bill Hoover —

I know you all share with me a great appreciation for Gini Lemoine's inspirational leadership of our organization during these past several years. It's comforting to me that her contributions will be continuing as she works in her Vice Presidential role; which began by spending time at the hospital during the reunion with one of our Vets. He's fine he just decided to test the carpet by missing the steps. I am also happy that Jean Decky has re-upped as well and on behalf of the 83rd I would like to thank Alice Hartley for her years as Vice President.

There are several good things to report to you now. Thanks to the 83rd Chemical Battalion's continuing purchases of *Mark Freedom PAID*, which is required reading for new recruits, we presently have over 40 Third Printing copies remaining for our own use. If you would like copies for friends or relatives, I can send them to you for only \$15, postage and handling prepaid. This is apparently a

bargain, because on-line booksellers are currently offering used copies of your book for individual prices ranging between \$17 and \$40.

Our traditional raffle of contributed gifts; and the auction of Sam Kweskin's combat sketches were again successful. We added a total of \$1,075 to our Treasury which will cover the cost of the bus to the memorial. Speaking of the bus, in Gini's note above, she mentioned buses that went to the Memorial — well it was to be two buses, but one left us sitting at the hotel door. Several more "thank you's" to Bob Bunker, Pat Russell (driving Melissa Haigh's van), and Jean Decky who all stepped forward to drive their own, or



Bill Hoover and Gini Lemoine

another's vehicle in the DC traffic. They all deserve hazardous duty pay! Thank you also to some great friends of the 83rd, Ronnie Cirks and her friend Dan. Between the two of them they were the ones to get Congressman Mike Castle of Delaware to our dedication. Alas, one last thank you to the past Commanders of the current 83rd for your continued commitment to this unit and to Lt. Col. Bolluyt and CSM Baldwin. We're all glad you and your Soldiers are proud to continue the legacy of this unit and are very pleased that you will be keeping us up to date with the activities of the 83rd.

We are always deeply saddened to learn of losing one of our WWII veterans. But I was delighted to

learn that an 83rd veteran, Dan Miller of Company D, because of his daughter, has discovered the existence of our Association, and has joined us as a member. Do you know of an old buddy living somewhere near you who may not be aware of our organization? If so, please give me his name and I will be happy to send him a letter and a *Muzzleblasts*.

During our business meeting, there was serious discussion of whether we should continue to have annual reunions, because of the steadily declining attendance. But virtually all of the veterans present felt strongly that we definitely should continue.

Nominations were made for various locations for the next reunion. When the vote was taken, Gettysburg was decided upon for June, 2005. At the business meeting Bonnie Dunkin volunteered to stop by Gettysburg on her way home to check out hotels for next year. So thank you Bonnie and family! I immediately took Bonnie's recommendations and can now report having negotiated a rate of \$ 106.82 including all taxes for double bedrooms for a shortened reunion — Thursday, June 16 to Sunday, June 19, 2005 — Fathers Day Weekend, at The Eisenhower Inn & Conference Center three miles outside of Gettysburg. More details will follow. Because of Gettysburg's historic military importance and that it will be 60 years since you were all discharged, we are hopeful that, God willing, we may have even more veterans attending next year.

I invite you to contact me at any time. Please note the attached list of names and contact information for all 83rds and friends, including my new address and phone number. By the way if you see anything wrong on your address line or we don't have your phone number, Company, when you joined, etc., please send us the information and/or changes so we might serve and communicate better with all of you! □

Two Who Escaped When Company “C” Was Overrun

We’ve read in *Mark Freedom PAID* about the privations suffered as POW’s by Dale Blank, Lloyd Fiscus and Robert Thorpe who were forced to surrender at a medieval fort near Briançon, France, after exhausting the last of their small-arms ammunition.

Here are the personal stories of two Company “C” men who managed to elude capture that day:

Loy Marshall —

In September 1944, we were in heavy fighting at Fort de Trois Tetes in Briançon. We had established .50 caliber machine gun and mortar positions up on the side of the mountain, but German troops of battalion strength had somehow managed to maneuver above and behind us and were going to overrun our positions or be able to pick us off one man at a time.

We were given orders to get out of there and take only our small arms and leave the heavy weapons, but try to break them so the Germans couldn’t get them and use them on us.

I was able to damage and disable our .50 by kicking it, filling the barrel with dirt, and hitting the firing mechanism with a rock.

We had to make our way down the side of the mountain using the steep paths which zig-zagged through the rough terrain and rocks. Several times we had to crawl over stone walls or embankments that the Germans were strafing with machine gun fire.

We were able to crawl over the walls a few men at a time by watching the dirt fly on the wall and timing the length of time it took for them to shoot from one end of the wall to the other. Sometimes there was quite a drop on the other side of a wall, but we knew we had to get out of there or be captured or killed.

Mario Ricci —

In Southern France we advanced northward rapidly with little enemy resistance until Briançon. There we suffered heavy losses to Mongols (Mongolian volunteers in the German army, who had surrendered to the

Germans on the Russian Front and volunteered to fight for the Germans on the Western Front.)

I was a forward observer radio operator, and was one of the seven men who escaped capture. Actually I had left Briançon some two hours before the surprise attack. I was in a flat, clear area some ten miles east of the city waiting for a Piper Cub which was to deliver the following seven days’ radio call letters to me.

I had communicated with Corps Headquarters by encoded International Morse Code the previous evening, and had been ordered to wait for the plane.

After our Company was overrun, I met up with the other six who had escaped. We were stranded behind the lines for eleven hungry days in the mountains, successfully eluding German patrols, until we finally met up with a Company from the French Army which had participated with us in the landing. □

You Can Never Tell How They’ll Grow Up

A Few Quotes from Charlie Dial’s Diary

You may have read Sophia Loren’s autobiography describing the help our Company “D” gave her family, and how along with her sister Maria and other little kids she showed up at our Pozzuoli chowline hoping for leftovers.

You’ll find other insights into her lice-ridden, hungry childhood in *SOPHIA Living and Loving*, by A.E. Hotchner. The book mentions a half-dozen of our men — Codega, Jackson, Lauro, Yakubisin, Bell, Borkhuis, and Dial — and tells about Mess Sergeant George Borkhuis sending food to her family.

The book offers excerpts from the diary of Company Clerk Charlie Dial. In it he describes Loren’s mother Romilda as a “truly beautiful blond” but says of Sophia “Unfortunately, she’ll never have her mother’s looks.” Loren says of herself “At ten, I was still stunted in growth, terribly thin, and quite ugly.” Added to all this, little Sophia Loren had a disfiguring scar on her chin.

Charlie’s diary says “I took them over to the medics to see what they could do about the little girl’s chin scar.” And Sophia later comments: “...even though it was against the rules, a doctor performed a minor operation on the shrapnel scar on my chin and succeeded in making it virtually disappear.”

Who could have guessed that the skinny little kid at the end of our chowline would evolve into a glamorous movie star?

But one thing that never did change was our G.I. thirst. Charlie wrote how Sophia’s mother sold vino for 100 lire a bottle, and describes one of his frequent visits to her home:

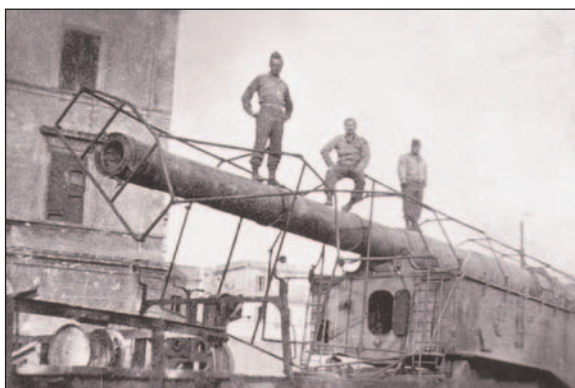
“Today we went to Pozzuoli to take a bath ...right next to the place with the blond. Jackson and I went in, and the whole shower truck followed along. We had a bit of cherry brandy. I don’t think she was too happy with me for bringing in the entire Company at once.” Salud! □

G.I. Health Hazards



S-Mine: waiting ...waiting. It didn't always wait long. On a rainy night in March '44 near Minturno we had moved into a new position and a brand-new replacement in D Company's Second Platoon took a wrong step. After we'd carried him back in a blanket, we realized we'd hardly learned his name. He hadn't seen daylight in combat.

Shells from Anzio Annie, the massive railway gun could find us wherever we were on the Beachhead. They sounded as though they had booster charges as these huge shells roared past us, mainly into the harbor. One landed in our Company rear area, fortunately not exploding until it was many feet underground.



Lt. Fred Rand could scarcely find words when radioing to report whatever it was that zoomed past his O.P. — what could it be? No propeller! It made a screaming whoosh, racing by at unbelievable speed. Fortunately these German jets were too late. They no longer had airfields and used autobahns for landing strips.

Picture Credits:

Railway gun; German jet plane: Clair Strickler.

S-Mine: D-Day Museum, New Orleans.

Excerpts From the WWII Journal of Lawrence Ertzberger

September, 1944 — We were in a small town in France, (Mersuay) where we slept in a barn. A blonde girl lived there and she baked us a pie every day. Three of us went down to the next town two miles away. No other soldiers in the town. An old lady came by, she was glad to see us so she came, caught me, hugged and kissed me on the cheek. We met a young girl that could speak English. She told us that this lady had been telling everyone that she was going to hug and kiss the first American soldier she saw, and I was the one.

December, 1944 — During a fire mission by the second section, I was at the aiming stake with a small light for Kirchner to check the sight. They had a leaky white phosphorus shell, and I was sprayed with fine mist on my clothes, but none on my skin. So they laughed and called me a walking Christmas tree.

January, 1945 — One night during the week between Christmas and New Years, I had a bad dream. Thought we were called up about 5 a.m. to fire the mortars and the Germans were coming and taking us prisoners. Then New Years Eve we went up and relieved C company. It was snowing a little that day, and just before daylight, they called us out to fire the mortars. We had been shooting a mile or two, and the number of powder rings tells how far; usually 15–20. This time was five powder rings so that was just over a little patch of woods. Then our planes were coming over that morning and diving down at German tanks. (So I thought my dream was about to come true!) That afternoon we left and went back to a little town about two miles away. That night a lot of new infantry men marched by us eager to fight, and some of them had just gotten over there. Lots were soon killed. □

Surviving in a Wintery Sea

By Clark Riddle

On January 25, 1944 we went down to the docks in Naples and loaded aboard the LST422 for our trip to Anzio. Early morning, January 26th, we were anchored about three miles off Anzio because of the high seas. A mine floated into the ship blowing a hole in the side and starting fires among the ammo trucks lashed on deck. As the fire reached the ammo, the trucks began to explode. Our squad was below deck in the sleeping quarters, which were three or four bunks high. The initial explosion blew the bunks free and we all ended up in a tangled mass on the floor. All the lights went out and I yelled "Don't panic, get a flashlight." Someone located one and we untangled ourselves and put on our life belts. Some inflated and some of them didn't. Only one tube of mine inflated.

Sgt. Guinness was at the stairwell leading on deck directing things. We all filed out without anyone panicking. I told Sgt. Guinness I had two men in the hold on guard duty. He replied that his orders were to keep the bulkhead closed. With a tommy gun pointed at me, it stayed closed. I lost my first two men. We proceeded to go on deck. One of my men panicked because his belt wouldn't inflate and dove overboard.

The rest of us stood behind the stairwell housing for a little protection from the blasts and discussed the situation. Still no panic among the crew. The housing wasn't too much protection since Sgt. Burkett had his men behind it also. It was decided that each man would make up his own mind to stay on board or go over the side. I decided to go over even though one side of my belt wouldn't inflate.

After hitting the water I looked around for anything that was floating and found a life belt and a bedroll.

With one under each arm I felt pretty good. As I looked around a flaming ammo truck broke loose, came over the side and into the sea convincing me to get as far away from the ship as possible. Looking back I saw a man walking up the anchor chain. That man turned

out to be Benny Leiberman climbing back on deck. As far as I know he was the only one to do so.

A man came floating by with only his head above water. He asked if he could hold on, his life belt had gone down. He was very calm so I swam over to him and gave him my bedroll. We talked and he introduced himself as Haggerty. He wasn't concerned about himself, just his wife Loretta. We floated around for some time until I realized my legs were getting numb. I told Haggerty we had better start moving or we were going to die. He said, "Do you mind if I pray?" I told him while he was at it to say one for me. I wasn't very good at praying.

About this time I looked up at the sky and there were the faces of my mother and my girlfriend, now my wife Betty, looking down at me. I laughed thinking about how my mother was going to have a ball with my insurance money... she loved to shop! We then swam over to a life raft. One man was on it begging those in the water not to try to get on. It was a small raft and they were about three deep around it. That was no place for us. We left and headed out to sea where we could see any ships. I don't know when I lost Haggerty.

The last thing I remember was seeing a PC boat going past and I said "God, help me" and from somewhere came a life raft, though I don't recall seeing



one. I was told that I had my elbows hooked over the side of the raft when they found me. A sailor, by the name of Salvatore, from Boston, said he jumped overboard and got me. He told me they were having a contest to see who could pull in the most stripes and since he could see I had three he figured I was worth saving. That was his story, not mine. I forgot to ask how much an officer was worth.

When I awoke I was in the captain's berth on a PC boat. Lt. Al Crenshaw was standing there looking at me along with Lt. Jim Lauro and several others. They asked how I felt and I told them I was cold. A sailor asked if I wanted some hot coffee and got me a pot, which I quickly drank and asked for another. He told me I was going to get sick. At that time I didn't care as long as I got warm. After the second pot the coffee began to work with the salt water that was still in me so I grabbed a blanket and ran for the head. After that I felt pretty good.

The PC boat took us back to Naples to the hospital where I stayed for several weeks before returning to the 83rd in Pazzouli to help train a new batch of replacements before returning to Anzio. This is how I remember it. Each survivor probably has his own story to tell. □



An 83rd G.I. Who Understood What Italians Were Suffering

by Mario Ricci

I joined Company "C" of the 83rd in February, 1944 as a replacement radio operator. My first combat was at Minturno, on the left flank of the Cassino front. I was born just ten miles north of the city of Cassino, in the mountainous city of Arce, where my relatives and Arce itself suffered heavily during the six-month battle of Cassino. The Monte Cassino monastery, where I had attended Easter Masses as a young boy, was bombed and destroyed during the battle. It has since been completely restored.

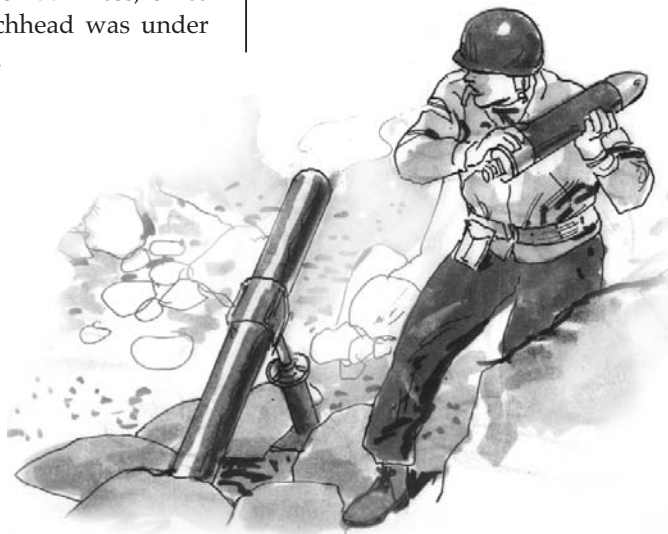
In March, Company "C" was transferred to the Anzio Beachhead. I was instructed — no radio transmissions! Enemy detection finders locked in on the sources of radio signals, and their artillery targeted the area with deadly accuracy. All communication between the various positions would be by phone or messengers.

I soon began the endless job of laying phone lines and maintaining them. These lines were frequently severed, either by enemy shellfire, or by their patrols which infiltrated our positions. The work could only be done under cover of darkness, since our entire flat beachhead was under enemy observation.

There was no "safe" area out of reach of enemy artillery. Clean clothes and showers were a rarity; our steel helmets served as our only wash basins. Would I wish my experience on the Beachhead on anyone? Certainly not. Would I exchange that experience with any other experience during my lifetime? Absolutely not!

Footnote: I returned to Anzio-Nettuno 50 years later, invited there by Mr. Simone Frezza, President of Pia Unione for the city of Lanuvio, to participate in the 50th anniversary of the "sfollamento", the evacuation of that historic city. There the retreating enemy had briefly established a new line of defense south of Rome after their defeat at the Beachhead. I was honored to be a speaker at the very moving event in the Maria SS. Delle Grazie church whose steeple we had used as a reference marker when shelling enemy positions in May, 1944.

The only physical reminders of the bloody battles are the Museum of the Allied Landing, now at Nettuno, and the sprawling cemetery where thousands of GI's, including some of our buddies were laid to their final rest. □



Young Soldiers, Old Soldiers

by Lee Steedle

Americans replied strongly
to that surprise attack.
Filled with patriotism,
emotions afire —
offering ourselves
to avenge those wrongs.
First wound —
a forewarning
of fragile mortality.
Fighting through mud, snow,
death of friends
— WHY did we?
For buddies, for platoon.
Couldn't let them down.
We fought only
to live unashamed.
Nightly, now
I see those others —
young fighters we faced.
Half-century to understand
they yearned as we —
for family, for home.
Dark nights I see their faces
— faces we destroyed.
Shadows of friends,
shadows of enemies
sleeping eternally,
watching us now.
Have all been told —
why THEY?
Do they understand?
Young soldiers, old soldiers.
Resting.
Awaiting.
At this very long last —
can we — FORGIVE?

Enjoy reading
Muzzleblasts?

Now send us
your
stories & photos!