

MUZZLEBLASTS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE 83RD CHEMICAL MORTAR BATTALION VETERANS ASSOCIATION

April 2005

Rekindled Memories



Illustration by Sam Kweskin

Dan Miller —

As one of the original members of Company D, 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, who arrived at Camp Gordon, GA in the fall of 1942, I have thought often of those long ago days. After recently discovering the 83rd CMB Veterans Association, reading items in *Muzzleblasts* has rekindled my memories.

Recollections that stand out are the landings at Gela, Sicily; how dicey things became at Vietri-sul-Mare during the Salerno landings when German counterattacks threatened to push the British Commandoes and the supporting 83rd back to the sea, as well as a civilian telling us that some Germans wanted to surrender, and Lt. Beasley and Lt. Miller being killed as they lead a squad to take them prisoner. I remember that PFC Gulley, a BAR man, was killed when a German shell landed in a mortar position near him, and the tears shed by Capt. Pike when he told us. I recall the German machine gunner who fired on anyone trying to cross the bridge that

Company D needed to cross to get to Chiunzi Pass to join other companies of the 83rd who were supporting Darby's Rangers in operations there. Who could forget Venefro; the rain, mud and cold? My most vivid memories are of surviving the sinking of LST 422, and my account was published in the December issue.

I was detached from the 83rd in late November '44 at Epinal, France and reassigned to the Missing and Deceased Section of Command Headquarters in Paris where I spent the remainder of the war. In my new job I handled correspondence dealing with battle casualties. Two reports stay with me: the recovery of the bodies of two Company D members. One was Barclay off the coast of Anzio. The other, whose name I have forgotten, off the Island of Sardinia. However, I can still see his face as he and I drank some wine together at a house in Pozzuoli only a few days before we boarded LST 422 for Anzio. □

Nobody Knows — Except Jerry

Submitted by Alfred Green —

Following are excerpts from an article written by Sgt. Milton Lehman with the Seventh Army that appeared in Stars and Stripes on Oct. 11, 1944.

It's rather late in the day to introduce the 4.2 chemical mortar and the men who fire it. The American infantry already knows about it and has sung its praises. The German infantry, on the receiving end, also knows about it.

The 4.2 has made itself felt; it helped drive the Germans north to Palermo and east to Messina in the Sicilian campaign; it helped punch the Germans out of Salerno; it pounded at Cassino and at Anzio.

The 4.2 was designed originally to throw chemical gases at the enemy, but was also fitted out so it could throw high explosive shells heavier than any other mortar.

"She's got everything, including a rifled barrel, which gives us pinpoint accuracy," explained Sgt. Ritacco of Mt. Vernon, N.Y and Sgt. Arthur Masse, Danvers, Mass. "The range runs up to 4400 yards, and we can bring it to within 25 yards of our own position. Our job is usually to hit the German supply lines leading up to their infantry. The shell weighs 25 pounds and has seven and one-half pounds of TNT. It's fast and we've learned a little trick with the fuse to make her scream better than a Nebelwerfer," they said.

To prove it, a demonstration was arranged. The mortar fuse was filed, the sight adjusted to that morning's target, the shell was slid into the tube and it quickly and accurately shipped the 4.2 round to the German-held quarry. As predicted, the shell screamed magnificently. □

Prepared to Defend Our Nation



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

Lt. Col. Michael Bolluyt —

The 83rd Chemical Battalion continues to prepare its soldiers to fight in today's urban combat environment while maintaining motivation and pride. In December 2004, the Battalion conducted a live fire exercise which included room clearing and individual movement techniques, thereby improving the acuity of all soldiers. The Battalion also participated in the Warrior Brigade Boxing Smoker, defeated the staunchest boxers in the Brigade and won the competition decisively.

To maintain the Mission Essential Task List proficiency in the unit, the Battalion conducted a platoon roll-out program in January 2005. Each platoon was alerted and inspected to ensure that it was prepared to deploy on a moment's notice. After thorough inspections of all personnel and equipment, each platoon's leadership was issued an Operation Order which it then executed.



The platoons encounter either an improvised explosive device or a rocket propelled grenade attack as they conducted their tactical road march to their forward operating base (attacks which happen typically in Iraq). Upon reaching their FOB and establishing a defensive position, the platoons received fragmentary orders to conduct Chemical Reconnaissance and Biological Surveillance missions after effectively defeating all opposition forces. These exercises enabled the Battalion to evaluate its deployment status and each unit's proficiency in their areas of expertise.

The Battalion will soon conduct convoy live fire exercises to ensure all soldiers remain proficient and that new soldiers learn the new threats and how to react. This training assures that the Battalion remains prepared to defend our nation at a moment's notice. "Confront any Mission, Rounds Away!" □



*Soldiers of the 83D Chemical Battalion
are prepared to fight in rural as well
as urban combat environments.*



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From Your President



Bill Hoover —

As you read this edition of *Muzzleblasts*, as edited by our new Editor Trisha Bridges with layout by Bill Steedle (thank you both), it is

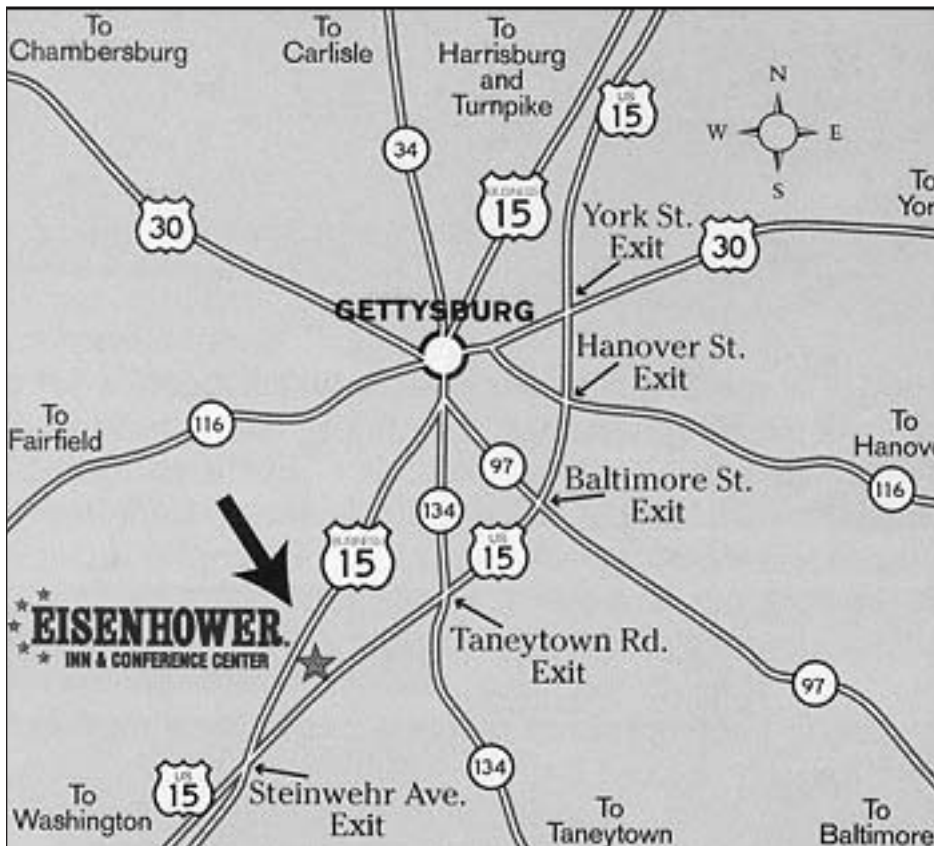
hard to believe that we are about 90 days away from the 60th anniversary of the disbandment from active duty of the 83rd in World War II. How great that we can come together at the Reunion scheduled for June 16–19 to commemorate this event. I have heard from a few 83rdrs that have never been to a reunion that are hoping to make it to Gettysburg. If you were an original 83rdr, a replacement, widow or other relative, we would love to see you there. And, as always, we expect to see the smiling faces of you regulars as well.

The Reunion will be at The Eisenhower Hotel and Conference

Center in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Make RESERVATIONS by calling 1-800-776-8349 and asking for the 83rd CMB discount room rate of \$106.82 per night, including all taxes, for up to two people. Or contact them on the web at www.eisenhower.com. The deadline to receive this special rate is May 15. If you need a roommate to help defray the costs, please contact Gini, Jean, or me for assistance. Ten rooms have already been reserved; so don't delay making that call!

The closest airport is Harrisburg, but Gettysburg is also within a few hours driving time from Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C.

The banquet will be held on Saturday night. Please complete the enclosed form and mail with your check. Lastly, please remember to bring your door prize! □



Please Note: There are actually **two** area roads marked "Route 15." One is Business 15, otherwise known as "Old 15" the other is Interstate 15, or US-15. Depending on your point of origin, of course, it is recommended that you take **Interstate 15** to save time and many traffic lights! The Steinwehr Road exit is the last exit on US-15 before reaching the Pennsylvania / Maryland border.

From the Editor

Trisha Bridges —

Hello. As the new Editor of Muzzleblasts, I assume these responsibilities with awe and humility. Those before me have set high standards for which I will aspire, and I salute them for their dedication.

I hope that you will enjoy the items selected for this issue and that you will hold a special place in your heart for our fallen brothers. A new feature, On the Home Front, will spotlight the wartime activities of the "Ladies of the 83rd".

Read. Reflect. Remember.

On the Home Front



On the Home Front will be a regular feature. This space is lovingly dedicated to the “Ladies” of the 83rd who, I am sure you will agree, have much to share.

So ladies, think about what you went through and help us see the war years through your eyes. Our first contributor is Bessie Whitt, wife of Rudolph Whitt.

Love at First Sight

Bessie Whitt —

On a visit to my married sister’s home at the age of ten, I met Rudolph Whitt, the boy next door. For several years we communicated through cards and letters. When we got a little older, we dated.

In 1942, while I was a senior in high school, my heart was broken when Rudolph was called to serve his country. At Camp Gordon he had only one furlough before being shipped out. We wrote letters while he was in training and while he was overseas. The uncertainty of his safe return was almost unbearable.

I went to work at C. E. Goodwin Woolen Mill. Normally they wove beautiful coverlets, but the plant had been converted into a defense plant to produce army blankets. I was very proud to think that I was doing something to contribute to the war effort and as the blankets were packed and shipped, I often wondered if somewhere my soldier might be sleeping under one of these blankets.

After three years of overseas duty with the 83rd CMB, and exchanging hundreds of letters between us, Rudolph returned home safely on October 1, 1945 and we were married just 15 days later.

As we approach our 60th wedding anniversary, we are thankful for our many years of happiness together. We have been richly blessed with good health, a loving daughter Rita and her husband, three grandchildren, and three great-grands. We both agree that it was love at first sight. □



Poster images from the National Archives and Records Administration

Say It With Song

William J. “Bill” Gallagher —

After being retired for a while, I started to get restless. My wife Marge joined a Senior Center and once when I went to pick her up someone there asked me to sing a song, and I quickly got drafted as a member of the choir.

In 1927, when I was six years old, my two aunts took me to see “The Jazz Singer.” It was then that the Al Jolson bug bit me, and I’ve been a huge fan of his ever since. Jolson was with a USO troupe in Italy, but our outfit never got to see him. I was wounded in March ’44 and spent three months in hospitals in France and England. I was finally sent to Ashford General Hospital in West Virginia and learned that only three weeks before I arrived that Al Jolson had entertained the patients there ...just missed him again!

I now belong to the International Jolson Society. Sam Kweskin put me in touch with someone in Florida who sent me some great Jolson stuff. Our choir has performed at retirement homes, civic clubs, churches, and even at the Philadelphia International Airport. The choir doesn’t go out as much now, but the next time we get together, I will make a tape... especially of my solos! □

Ed Note: Bill suffered a bout of pneumonia recently and we hope his lungs will be sufficiently recovered enough that he can share a song with us at the next Reunion.

Point & Click

Muzzleblasts is now available in PDF format at www.4point2.org/83cmb.htm.

Let your family and friends know they can access complete versions of the current and previous two issues, including pictures and drawings. The e-newsletter was developed to make stories, information, and updates about our veterans and their families readily accessible. □

He Had Been a Soldier



Loy Marshall

Trisha Marshall Bridges —

He had been a soldier in WWII. In the 1950's after church and Sunday dinner, he would watch "The Big Story" on television. These were brilliant programs that used actual battlefield film and expert narration. But his young daughter cared little for soldiers, weapons, or war. She did not understand that less than ten years earlier he had been in the heat of such battles. She and her little sister only knew about dolls and tea parties.

Years later, the daughter did a school report on the Holocaust, but did not discuss this topic with her father. Thus, did not know that he was with a group that had helped liberate a concentration camp and had seen with his own eyes the atrocities she wrote about.

She grew up and had a family of her own. But, who had time to sit and talk about a long ago war when there was a war of her generation raging?

When the daddy retired, he often went to his city's Memorial Day and Veterans Day services and would march across the parade field with the other veterans of other wars, but she was too busy to attend.

When he was in his 70's, the state issued a Purple Heart license plate, and she helped him get one, but did

not truly realize the significance of the term "wounded veteran" and its associated sacrifice.

In his 80th year, she decided to ask her father about his military experiences. He told of his buddies, his training, his battles and invasions, his injuries and close calls, his duty. His memory was clear on so many details, but somewhat faded on others. He could see the faces, but could not always recall names and places—how much better if she had done this ten, twenty, thirty years earlier.

In searching for information about his old Army unit, she found the 83rd CMB's Veterans Association. How wonderful that she, her father, and mother could attend the reunions and meet this group of exceptional people: veterans, wives, widows, and children!

Now the daughter sits and listens not only to her father's stories but also to those from the other veterans and marvels at the bravery of these old soldiers.

In this way, I honor my father. Finally. □

*Ed Note: Dedicated to my dad,
Loy Marshall.*



Illustration by Mario Ricci

A Small World

Lawrence Ertzberger —

Maurice Wiley and I went to work at Coats & Clark mill in July 1939. We got our notices to go to Atlanta and were both sworn into the Army on September 24, 1942. Maurice was sent to the 30th Infantry Division, and I was assigned to the 83rd CMB. My sister and Maurice's wife both worked for the same company, so we heard about each other through their letters.

When the war ended three years later, the 83rd members were sent to the 103rd Division for discharge. The 103rd was made up of members of many outfits, including the 30th I.D.

At Camp Lucky Strike, a large tent city, near Le Havre, France, our mail caught up to us. A letter I received from my sister said Maurice was in Company L. I was in Company H, so I walked over and found him at mail call. A letter from his wife told him where to find me!

We left Le Havre on September 11 and arrived at Boston on September 19. Two days later, we boarded a train for Camp Gordon and got our discharges on September 30, 1945 in the same group. □

Supreme Sacrifice

Glenn Helsel —

No more will the bugle awaken him
From his dreams and sleep.
The Lord has taken him
To a land where there's Peace.
No more will he hear it sounding
Reveille or Retreat.
He paid the price of freedom
He paid it with his life.
Let's pray we don't forget
His supreme sacrifice. □

Victory at Last



Illustration by Sam Kweskin

Mario Ricci —

After the collapse of the German defenses at Cassino and at the Anzio Beachhead, we went through Rome and were relieved and transferred to a mountainous location where we re-supplied and trained for the amphibious landing at St. Maxime on the French Riviera.

We headed north through the Vosges Mountains where enemy resistance was greater and targets were many. We spent a miserably cold winter in the Alsace.

We crossed the Rhine at Mannheim, and raced through the Schwartzwald. There on Good Friday, I killed a deer which the Battalion cook, Gum Q. Lee, prepared for our Easter dinner.

At Berchtesgaden, we paused for

several days in early May while terms of surrender were negotiated with an entire Hungarian division. We watched in amazement as thousands of Hungarian soldiers marched into the city's square, piled their arms and walked to waiting US Army trucks.

It was here that I first learned from a German woman that President Franklin Roosevelt had died on April 12. Here I also saw hundreds of emaciated men, survivors of a nearby concentration camp, walking around aimlessly in their striped prison pajamas. We soon learned the terrible truth about their suffering.

When hostilities ended on May 8, 1945, I was in Terfens, a farm village about 10 miles from Innsbruck, Austria. □

Now's Your Chance

Want your name and war experiences to go down in posterity? Terry Lowry will soon conclude his research on the membership of the 83rd CMB and their participation in the battles in the European Theatre during World War II. With your assistance and inclusion, this could be the premier dossier on the activities of the 83rd which would give it its rightful place in history. Terry will be at Gettysburg, so bring your old war photos, journals, diaries, or other artifacts for him to see. Only *you* can make sure that the true story of the 83rd is told. There will be a computer and scanner at the reunion, so any treasured photos or artifacts you bring can be carefully scanned while still in your scrapbook, and gently handed right back to you!

Contact him at:
Terry Lowry
237 Kenna Drive
South Charleston, WV 25309
or TLSnoop@aol.com. □



This complete, 16-page laminated issue of *The Stars and Stripes*, dated May 27, 1944, has been donated for auction at our Gettysburg reunion.

The lead story: Allies Drive To Point 20 Miles From Rome. "American troops fought hard and captured Cisterna, the road and rail junction that had been the backbone of the Nazi ring of steel around the beachhead." Our 83rd fought in support of the gallant Darby's Rangers who, surrounded at Cisterna, chose to fight and die rather than surrender when they were surrounded just after the Anzio landing. Never forget! □

In Praise of Our Platoon Medic

Lee Steedle —

Four days of fighting in Zellenberg, in the Colmar pocket, cost our platoon eleven casualties including our platoon sergeant Clark Riddle.

Our crews would be out on the guns in the small, cobbled town square when suddenly kraut mortar shells would drop right in on top of us. You couldn't hear the soft fluffing of their tailfins until just before they landed. Then they'd blast and vomit their shrapnel all around that tight, little square. You were rocked by concussion as your body pressed to the cobblestones.

We couldn't dig foxholes. Instead, we'd dash for a doorway or flatten out next to our guns and ammo racks. All we could think about was, please God, don't let them hit the white-phosphorous — let them miss us and the w.p. too! If one of our w.p. shells were to erupt in a blindingly white blast of sticky flame, the crew, the ammo, and maybe half the platoon would be gone.

It was decided — no full crews on the square. Gunners would align our mortars, each set for a different target, and from then on, squad leaders would drop the shells down. The crews would keep a few rounds ahead of us, and then dash out to our racks with the shells. We wanted a minimum of men and ammo exposed. I found myself shaking constantly now while out in the square. It was almost more than nerves could endure, to have to stand up even momentarily to drop rounds down the barrel.

During one period of receiving counter-fire, the radio kept calling for rounds from my mortar, yet I found I couldn't force myself beyond an outer door, with the whump and smoke of



Illustration by Sam Kveskin

explosions filling the square. I'd move out only a few feet, and then dash back indoors.

"Get out there now!" There was urgency in Doc Tucker's voice, "They need your fire quick!" He'd seen by my eyes that I was stopped. And then he performed one of the gutsiest acts I'd ever seen. "You get out there. I'll stand right here in the doorway. I'll watch and bring you in myself if you're hit." At my gun, I could see Doc Tucker standing squarely there in the middle of the open doorway, a six-foot target for the ricocheting shrapnel, assuring me by his stance that if I was down he'd come get me. For those long minutes I could see him, only a dozen yards from me, standing straight, watching my moves, with shrapnel flying all around.

I'd only been able to get out there because he'd helped me face a squad leader's duty, but Doc stood there voluntarily. He had already earned a Bronze Star and Purple Heart in Italy, and here was his calm courage again. A very thin line divides men's characters at moments like that, and you never know in advance what side you'll come down on.

Doc helped save my character that terrible day. Thank you. Doc Tucker, wherever you are! □

Liberation of Italy 60th Anniversary Ceremonies

You are invited to participate in ceremonies to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Italy by the Allies.

Pelham, New York Post No. 50 of the American Legion has organized a trip to Italy in early May 2005 to honor the sacrifices made by the forces of freedom in the Battle for Italy. Ceremonies will be held at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery and at the Florence American Cemetery and Memorial to pay special tribute to those who fought, died, or are listed as Missing in Action in these important but often overlooked campaigns of World War II.

For further information contact the two official tour operators at:

Rich Worldwide Tours
1-800-431-1130 ext. 134
or Stephen Ambrose Historical Tours
at 1-888-903-3329. □

Old Mortar men Have Fuzzy Ears

**Three of our 83rd vets
overheard at the reunion:**

First one:

"Windy, isn't it?"

Second one:

"No, it's Thursday!"

Third one:

"So am I. Let's have another beer!"

Heard in a hospitality room:

"Just bought a new hearing aid. Cost four thousand... state-of-the-art!"

"Really? What kind is it?"

"Eight-thirty!"

“Vino” The Mascot Dog of Company D Motor Pool



*“Vino” the mascot dog of the
Company D motor pool.*

Terry Lowry —

My father, Charlie Lowry, was part of the original cadre of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion from its formation at Edgewood Arsenal and remained with the organization as a mechanic in the Motor Pool of Company D (later Company A) throughout the war. After his passing in 1981 of colon cancer, I often perused his photo album of the war and noticed that a dog named “Vino” (Italian for wine) kept popping up in many of the pictures, from Sicily to the Brenner Pass and on.

My dad rode “shotgun” in the truck with James Marion Lester. After having located Lester in Minnesota, and with the assistance of his wife Iris and daughter Sally, the story of the



Charlie Lowry holding “Vino”

lovable animal came together. According to Lester, while driving through Sicily, they noticed two puppies by the side of the road and suspected that they had been dumped. Willie R. Tanner picked up the one that became known as Vino. Lester later heard that another company had picked up the other, although my father has a photo of Vino and another dog sitting on the hood of the truck of Nevin “Spanky” Glossner, who would later die on LST-422.

Reportedly everyone in the company loved Vino and looked after him. In a V-Mail from Charlie Lowry to his future wife Ruth Sutton dated April 4, 1944 from Minturno, Italy, he says: “One of our pets (a lizard) just came in. We have another (a mouse), but they don’t get much rest from Vino. That’s our dog.” Indeed, Vino was photographed with nearly everyone in the company and in a group photo taken at Teferns, Austria in 1945, he is held by Tanner. Lester claimed that Tanner vowed to bring the dog home with him, and it certainly would be interesting to know Vino’s fate. □



Can You Identify This Gunner?

This photo appeared in the February, 1999 issue of World War II magazine. The photo was taken in Italy.

Day is Done

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of these beloved friends. Please refer to the membership list for addresses to send condolences. Your notes and cards are treasured and much appreciated by family members.

Glenn Helsel, March 2005

W. Gwin Miller, January 2005

Henry Edge, April 2004

Audie Pierce, April 2004

Laurence Censato, 2004

Melvin Bishop, 2004

Fred Rand, July 2004

James F. Dougherty, 1999

Seeking Information

Bryan Turan is seeking information about his father, Sgt. Leonard W. Turan, who served for three years with the 83rd and passed away in 1994. Contact him at P.O. Box 308, Saucier, MS 39574-0308 or B2ran@aol.com.

Susannah Powell is looking for anyone who knew her uncle, Richard H. “Dick” Griffin of Company B, who was killed Dec. 12, 1944 in Riquewihr, France. Contact her at 34 Margaret Drive, Fletcher, NC 28732 or powll@bellsouth.net.

The sister of Pvt. Joseph Kozicki is seeking information. He died on January 26, 1944, possibly on LST-422. If you knew him, please send info to jpc@rayconnnect.com.

The stepson of Anthony Kowalec of Company C, from Wilkes-Barre, PA, would like to hear from you if you knew his dad. Send your response to CESned@aol.com. □