

MUZZLEBLASTS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE 83RD CHEMICAL MORTAR BATTALION VETERANS ASSOCIATION

Fall 2005

Veterans of the 83rd Meet in Gettysburg



*Front: Fountain, Krebs, Powell, Thompson, Steedle, Miller, Butler;
Middle: Fenton, Vukson, Canetti, Hoover, Fiscus, Riddle, Rice, Troutman, Bolluyt;
Back: Russell, McEvoy, Whitt, Kann, Gallagher, Hajdinyak, Barrett, Trey, Plassmann, Garsson.*

Still in One Piece

Lloyd Fiscus —

I took basic training in artillery at Fort Bragg, NC on the old single trail 155 mm Howitzer. After we finished training, we were told a new style 155 was replacing the old-style ones.

I was eventually shipped to Africa in the Replacement Pool and from there went to Italy and joined the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion assigned to Company "C" to replace the casualties lost in the ship sinking during the Anzio invasion.

Soon I was in Anzio doing my duty on our 4.2's. Later on, I heard that there was an Artillery Battery near our company that had the new split-trails 155mm Howitzers. I, along with several others, got permission to go to the artillery battery and see them. As we were being shown the placements and the new style, we came under a sudden and severe German artillery bombardment. We scattered, found cover, and waited it out.

When it ended, we all found ourselves still in one piece. We then ran like hell and got back to our own position. It was no safer, but at least we were "home." □



Many of our 83rd CMB Veterans and their families stopped to remember the fallen soldiers of the horrific Battle of Gettysburg.

83rd Welcomes New Commander



*LTC Eric Brigham
Commanding Officer of the
83D Chemical Battalion*

First, I am very excited and honored to take command of a great and tested unit with such an impressive history. LTC Bolluyt trained and prepared a fantastic unit, and I look forward to continuing the great things he started. His professionalism and hard work are evident in every aspect of the command.

I come to 83d Chemical Battalion with my wife Vicki and our two daughters, Ashley and Nicole. We spent the last five years in Hawaii where I served as the 25th ID (L) G3 Exercise Chief, a Brigade S3, a Battalion XO, the Division Chemical Officer, and the Chief of Plans for the



*LTC Brigham receiving the Guidon
as he takes Command of the 83rd.
CSM Fountain (l); LTC Brigham (c);
COL Moore (r).*

US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. I was informed of my selection as the commander of 83rd Chemical Battalion while deployed to Afghanistan. Following that notification, LTC Bolluyt was in constant contact with me, and his pride in this great unit was staggering.

One of the first things LTC Bolluyt told me about the Battalion was the unique connection we have with the 83RD Chemical Mortar Battalion Veteran's Association. I look forward to continuing to support that relationship, and I look forward to meeting everyone at next year's reunion. Again, it is a tremendous honor to take command of this great unit, and I look forward to the many challenges ahead.

— *LTC Eric Brigham*

Editor's Note:

We wish LTC Bolluyt much success in his new assignment and give a hearty welcome to LTC Brigham as he takes command of the 83rd. We also welcome Command Sergeant Major Jackeline Fountain. □



*The current soldiers of the 83rd
Chemical BN are proud of their
lineage and legacy. They honor the
original 83rd CMB by wearing its patch.*



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Lloyd Fiscus
Bill Hoover
Earl Kann
Sam Kweskin *
Loy Marshall
Betty Riddle

* Deceased

From Your President



Bill Hoover —

The 2005 Reunion of the 83rd CMB held at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania was a great success. There were 24 veterans in attendance with four first timers, the most since Fort Bragg: Joe Garsson, John Hajdinyak, Dan Miller, and Kelso "Red" Thompson were recognized at the Business Session. It was good to see so many familiar faces: George Barrett, Walter Bielski, John Butler, Joseph Cannetti, Robert Fenton, Lloyd Fiscus, Bill Gallagher, Raymond "Pop" Hoover, Earl Kahn, Ed Krebs, John McEvoy, Gene Plassmann, Lawrence Powell, Perry Rice, Clark Riddle, Lee Steedle, Carlos Trautman, Ed Trey, Stephen Vukson, and Rudolph Whitt. With their wives, the widows of veterans, and other family members, attendance was well over 100.

Terry Lowry set up an extraordinary display of photos and WWII memorabilia from his extensive collection. Viewing this display brought back a lot of memories to the veterans and gave everyone an opportunity to see some rare artifacts. Terry expressed his appreciation to those who have shared with him their stories, photos, and journals in his quest to write a comprehensive book about the experiences of the 83rd.

At the Business Session of Saturday morning there were the readings of the 2004 Minutes by Jean Decky and the Treasurer's Report. There was a moment of silence for those lost during the last year. The group voted

to hold its 2006 Reunion on June 8-10 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and to increase the Association Dues to \$15 per year.

Trisha Bridges was introduced as the new Editor of *Muzzleblasts* and Bill Steedle as its Art Director. Lee Steedle and Sam Kweskin were also acknowledged for their efforts with the September and December 2004 issues of *Muzzleblasts*.

At the Banquet on Saturday evening, LTC Mike Bolluyt presented an interesting and informative slide show on the survival training required of all members of the 83rd, including soldiers traditionally classified as support personnel. A video representing a typical day in the life of a soldier at Fort Polk was also shown. Newly appointed Command Sergeant Major Jackeline Fountain was introduced. LTC Bolluyt informed us that he would be moving to a new assignment in July and handed out a laminated poster to the veterans present which showed the patches of almost all the U.S. units to whom the 83rd CMB gave support in WWII. COL John McEvoy followed with some heartfelt comments about the original 83rd.

Many thanks go out those who assisted me with Reunion activities: Jean Decky for a poster of all past reunions; Bill Steedle for scanning and photography; Trisha Bridges for name badges and organizing a letter-writing campaign to current 83rd soldiers; Gini Lemoine for selling door prize tickets and handling the drawing with such efficiency; those of you who donated door prizes; and, of course, Brian Decky & Nathaniel Hoover for helping wherever needed. By the way, those 1945 Cards with Sachet on the banquet tables came from the 83rd.

I will close on a sad note. We lost a lot of buddies over the past year, and we appreciate each and every Vet. All are

precious. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Sam Kweskin. At the Reunion we were informed that Sam was in Intensive Care. Sadly, Sam passed away on June 23. Sam was a gifted and caring individual who enabled this group, by donating his art, to print *Mark Freedom Paid* a third time. We will miss him and all of those who are no longer with us. □

Association Dues

This is just a friendly reminder that your 2006 83rd CMB Association Dues will be coming up in January so be sure to include this item in your budget for next year. Membership dues are now \$15 per year. Dues are primarily used to ensure that *Muzzleblasts* can continue to be published and disseminated and to help defray costs associated with the annual Reunion since there are no registration fees. Also, if you just had an "Uh Oh" moment regarding your \$10 dues for 2005, and realized that you forgot to send them in, make check payable to 83rd CMB and send to Bill Hoover, 53 Camp Avenue, Darien, CT 06820. Donations of any amount will be gladly accepted and appreciated at any time. □

2006 Reunion Set

The 83rd CMB Veterans Association Reunion for 2006 is set for June 8-10 at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, "the Heart of Pennsylvania Dutch Country." An 82-acre farm in Lancaster County was the locale for the movie "Witness" featuring Harrison Ford, which introduced Amish culture to a worldwide audience. Mark your calendar and start making plans to attend. Contact the Convention Bureau at 501 Greenfield Road, Lancaster, PA 17601, or www.padutchcountry.com. Hotel information and other details will be available in a future issue. □

On the Home Front

This space features relevant personal stories by the "Ladies" of the 83rd.



Poster image from the National Archives and Records Administration

He Was Worth Waiting For

Betty C. Riddle —

I met Clark H. Riddle when I was 15 years old. When I turned 16, we started to date. Clark always called me "Kid" since he was four years older than me.

He was called into the Army in September 1942 and went off to Camp Gordon, GA. We knew at that time that we loved one another. I wrote to him every night while he was in the service. During the war, I lived with my parents and worked at a candy counter. Candy was hard to get because sugar was rationed, as was butter, coffee, and meat.

In December 1944, Clark got hit and was sent to Walter Reed Army

Hospital for treatment and to recover from his wounds. When I saw him, I knew that I loved him more than ever.

We got married on December 11, 1945, and he was discharged in 1946. We had three children and will be celebrating our 60th Wedding Anniversary this year. I would do it all over again. □



Betty and Clark Riddle with daughter Nancy Basile at the 2005 Reunion



These lovely wives and widows attended the 2005 Reunion in Gettysburg

I Stayed With It by Hanging On

Earl Kann —

Prior to joining the Army, I worked at McCann's, a company that made winches for ships. I enlisted on October 5, 1942 and received basic training at Camp Gordon, GA. I was assigned to Company "D," and was shipped overseas in the Spring of 1943 on the USS Monticello to Oran-Algiers, North Africa to get ready for the invasion of Sicily. The first night in North Africa we slept on rocks. During our time in Oran, some Arabs stole clothes from the Company. Five of us chased them, but failed to get the clothes back. However, we did manage to lift a bottle of anisette from them.

We practiced the Invasion of Sicily on the Flagship St. Lo. During our second day at Gela, Sicily, I was hit in my foot, leg, and back by shrapnel from German artillery fire. I was shipped back to North Africa to recuperate and received a Purple Heart. I was returned to the Company just before the Invasion of Italy.

At Vietri-sul-Mare, we fought along with the British Commandos. After Naples fell, we were relieved and went to Venafro close to Cassino where the Abbey of Montecassino was located. This Abbey was eventually bombed. I spent Thanksgiving of 1943 on the front lines in Italy and Christmas in Pozzuoli.

I arrived at Anzio on January 25, 1944 aboard the LST carrying Companies C and D. I slept in my clothes down in the hold next to the Cargo Hold. I did not hear the explosion when the ship hit the mine in the early morning of the 26th. Someone telling us that the ship was on fire awakened us. We started out of the hold without life jackets. I told my friend, Frances

Mosaris from Exeter, PA, that I was going back for the life jacket. He said "You probably won't even need it," but I went back anyway. Mosaris was 15 years old when he enlisted; he had lied about his age. He died that night.

All trucks for the battalion were on that LST, and they were all loaded with mortar shells. On the top deck, we saw fire and shells exploding from the trucks. A lot of guys had gone to sleep on the trucks and were killed when the shells exploded. We then went to the bow of the ship and jumped off. At some point, I had been hit in the leg with white phosphorus from the exploding shells. I don't remember how long I was in the water, but I was by myself and it



Sam Kwestin

"It was a long time until daylight"

seemed like a long time until daylight. Strangely, I don't remember the water being cold. A long time after daylight, I came upon a float of some kind with about six guys on it. I stayed with it by hanging on. I believe that the Cook of Company "D", Sgt. Frazier, was on that float and he had a broken leg. Not long after this a minesweeper or sub chaser picked us up. My next memory is of standing on deck with Company "D" Commander Crenshaw and Sgt. Yacubisin, when Germans started

bombing the harbor at Anzio. I left that night to return to Naples. Two nights later, I was back in Pozzuoli at the Bivouac Center. I received a Purple Heart for my leg wound. After this I was eligible to go home and was assigned back to the States. □

83rd Supports The British Royal Engineers

Loy Marshall —

In a small village in Italy that we had occupied, one of our soldiers thought he saw something in a pile of sand. He started kicking around and found a big ham and other food. Some of the townspeople came out and begged us not to take it. They had hidden the food there to keep the Germans from taking it. It was the only food they had so we let them gather it up and keep it.

This was just before we got to the Volturno River in support of the British Royal Engineers, who were attempting to build a pontoon bridge so the tanks, troops, and supplies would have a way to cross the river. Heavy rains had set in making the job more difficult. The Germans had set up a strong defense line and were pounding our side of the river with continuous large artillery. We set up a smoke screen for the Engineers for over 16 hours so they could finish that bridge and continued the barrage as the tanks rolled across.

One thing I remember about the British troops is that around 4:00 p.m. every day they would stop for Tea Time. I'm a Georgia boy with a Southern drawl, but remembering the way the Brits said "Tea Time" makes me laugh. □

A Special Birthday...

Raymond Hoover celebrated his 95th Birthday on August 30. "Pop" you are an inspiration to all of us! □

Tribute to Sam Kweskin



As Sam was packing for the Reunion in Gettysburg, he was stricken ill, hospitalized, and sadly, passed away on June 23, 2005.

In 1944, while serving with the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion, his talents as an artist and illustrator were recognized by HQ, and he co-developed *Muzzleblasts*, the official newsletter of the 83rd, which helped build morale within the troops and featured his combat artwork on a regular basis. Sam continued his military art in the battalion history, *Rounds Away*, published at Innsbruck, Austria in 1945, and in *Mark Freedom PAID*, with over 60 sketches.

Sam was an authority on the history of the 83rd CMB and attended nearly every reunion of the battalion since the first one in 1954 and, in effect, contributed thousands of dollars over the years, to the 83rd by donating artwork auctioned at our reunions. Sam continued to share his talents with the newsletter through these intervening years.

Who among us can forget his mellifluous voice and his robust laugh? Sam submitted the following story and, as you read it, try to imagine it as only he could tell it. □

Buon Giorno! Buon Giorno!

Sam Kweskin —

It was a sweltering summer's day in June 1944, near Isola Farnese, a village north of Rome, where our company found a tree-lined meadow that we might rest.

The vale before us was a beautiful, bright summer green about two hundred feet wide. There was, however, one ugly scar in the center of the meadow—it was our six-foot long, and one foot wide latrine. Alongside it, of course, was a pail of lime and a short military shovel. And at the head of the trench, was a mandatory wooden sign with the date the trench was dug; underneath was space left for the closing date.

Nature called, and I proceeded to undo my trousers and hunched over the pit. I looked at the tree line ahead of me and saw, much to my consternation, a line of black-dressed women from neighboring farms, accompanied by their young daughters... and they were walking in my direction! I was unable to raise myself encumbered as I was, and they kept coming closer and closer.

I hid my head as deeply as possible inside my olive drab shirt, yet clearly I could hear the greetings of the feminine voices, first from the matrons, then from the paisane: "Buon giorno! Buon giorno!" I answered "Buon giorno," from my lips hidden in my collar, my eyes closed tightly!

Adding to my shame was the now distant giggles of young girls whose voices, bell-like, tinkled back to me as they walked into the distance "Buon giorno. Buon giorno."

The story could end there, but didn't. A day later, as I sat under the trees writing a V-mail home, I looked down the hill and saw a long line of Italian women, dressed—as seemed the style—in black. They looked different from those I had seen during that moment of the previous day. In the interim, the latrine had been covered with a hill of dirt.

The women were carrying flowers and, stopping at the dirt mound, which they took to be a grave, reverently placed the flowers on the site. I was too stunned to run down the hill and correct their gesture. After all, they felt they were honoring an Allied soldier who had evidently been buried. I could only move my head in wonder. And suddenly a deep love and respect for these people engulfed me, and any shame I harbored was one that soon made me smile in self-depreciation. □

Editor's Note: When submitting this story, Sam added a postscript.

It said: "As for illustrating it—aha! THERE I draw the line!"

Farewell dear friend.



A Plan of Action

James O. Beasley —



Sam Kweskin

Sicily, August 8, 1943

Dearest Elizabeth,

I am in with the 4th wave of landing boats. A few rifle shots were fired at the boat and just as we got away from the beach the artillery started shelling it...

Early the second day, I followed forward to find where we could be used but, by the time the men were assembled, the road I intended for them to go up was under heavy artillery fire so they were not sent up. I went forward to find another route and found that the Infantry had been forced to withdraw.

I went to the beach to get our jeeps and the trucks. About 30 German bombers came over to bomb the ships and supply dumps. They did little damage because barrage balloons and anti-aircraft fire kept them pretty high. On the way back, the artillery started shelling the road and all the drivers could think to do was stop—my profanity is better than most people would give me credit for...

When I reached the platoon they were instructed to follow, and I went on ahead with a driver and a lineman in a jeep. We were supposed to turn off the paved road just before we crossed a bridge, but I did not tell the driver in time and he stopped on the bridge. It was then that a machine gun opened

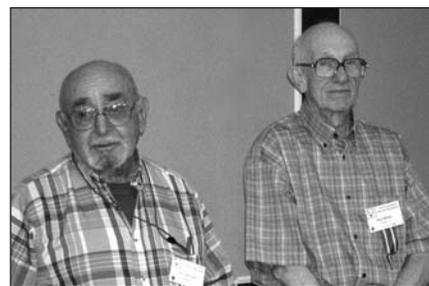
up on us. I made an estimate of the situation, drew up a plan of action and issued orders. All this took considerably less than a second. The estimate of the situation was that the bridge was no place to be with a machine gun firing at you. My plan of action was a STRATEGIC retreat. The orders were “get to Hell out of here.” We had just been mistaken for Germans and it was an American machine gun. It was a few minutes later that someone noticed and called my attention to the [bullet] hole in my rifle stock.

We went on to the gun position that was under artillery fire and were soon firing ourselves. I spend the next day in an observation post and fired some, but in general it was just a grandstand seat to watch the artillery and naval fire. At one time we were completely cut off by tanks but they were soon knocked out by artillery. Late in the afternoon I saw four German planes shot down in less than four minutes

There is an epidemic in the company of men trying to learn to play accordions. They have two and they are making noise from sun up until midnight... □

Love, Jim

Editor's Note: These excerpts are from a letter written by First Lieutenant James “Jim” O. Beasley of Company “D” to his wife Elizabeth, shortly before he was killed in action in Italy. Jim and Elizabeth were married in September 1940 and their son, John was born on April 20, 1942. Subsequently, Elizabeth married Sheldon C. Reed, a graduate school friend of Jim's, and they had two children, Catherine and William. Elizabeth passed away in 1996. John graciously shared this treasured letter with us.



Joe Garsson and Dan Miller (pictured), John Hajdinyak, and Kelso “Red” Thompson, attended the reunion for the first time this year.

Overheard at the Reunion

(You Said It. Really!)

Eighty years ago,
when I was in the first grade...

Huh? What? Say again.
Damn batteries.

I used to have nice wavy hair;
now it's just waving goodbye.

All I want for my birthday is to
not be reminded of my age.

It takes me twice as long –
to look half as good.

You should see my other scooter!

I gave up all my bad habits
and still don't feel good.

I'm taking a nap, honey.
Wake me up when I get hungry.

Shooting dice. Playing cards.
Maybe that's where my money went.

I had a bad night and woke up looking
like my driver's license picture.

It takes me longer to rest
than it does to get tired. □



Eugene Plassman and sons share a few laughs with John McEvoy

Reminiscence

Jean Pierre Combe —

I became an American soldier on August 28-29, 1944 at Fort Dauphin near Briançon where so many men of Company C were captured or killed. Lieutenant Andre Laus was killed there by machine gun fire. In 1946, Mrs. Laus brought her son, Jacques, to see the place her husband and his father lost his life. Lieutenant Laus is buried at the National Cemetery in Draguignan, France.

On Christmas Day 1944, I was up on the frontline, near Bitche in Moselle area, on the German Border. We nearly froze. The temperature was less 15 or 20 degrees centigrade (0 to -5 degrees Fahrenheit). On Easter Day 1945 at 11:00 a.m., Company C crossed the Rhine on a float bridge near Mannheim.

In our last combat near Ulm, on the Neckar River, we stayed and fought for almost two weeks. Afterward, we moved to Innsbruck, Austria and got up to the Brenner pass, where we made contact with the Fifth Army. Eight days after that was the Armistice. □



Cpl. L. V. Jean (l) from Cordova, AL with Jean Pierre Combe (r) of Manosque, France, with their 4.2 in Austria

No Fraternalization Policy

Robert “Bob” Bundy —

I’m sure that everyone in the battalion will remember 2nd Lt. Don Herr from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He worked for Dr. (Captain) Hulcher. As I recall it, Don received a battlefield commission as a second lieutenant.

Immediately after the war, there was a strict non-fraternalization policy in effect. However, one afternoon I was to meet Don in Innsbruck. I arrived, but no Don. After some delay, I noticed a large group of citizens assembled in the center of town. They were all dressed in their traditional garb, and the band was whooping it up. It was then that I noticed that one of those happy citizens was none other than Don Herr wearing the typical Austrian lederhosen and Tyrolean hat.

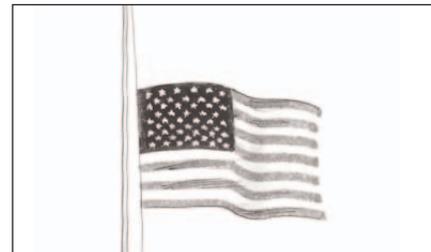
Of course, he was wearing a broad smile while holding on to the stub of a cigar. He never missed a step as he raised a mug of beer to greet me. □



Jean Pierre Combe with Jacques Laus with the Italian border in background

Veterans Benefits

The Department of Veterans Affairs provides a broad spectrum of services to eligible veterans including medical and drug, surgical, rehabilitative care, domiciliary care, and State War Veterans Homes as well as burial and memorial benefits. The Veterans Health Administration provides no-cost benefits for many Former POWs and Purple Heart Medal Recipients. Additionally, if you do not wish to provide financial information you might still be covered if you agree to some small co-payments. To find out the benefits for which you are entitled, contact your regional VA office or go to www.va.gov for more information. With the rising cost of housing and the cost of drugs and medical treatment skyrocketing, it is imperative that you contact the VA soon. □



Day is Done

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

Ralph T. Way January 29, 2005
Lawrence W. Crone, Jr. . . . Feb. 4, 2005
Nicholas P. Bash March 29, 2005
Leonard Socolowski April 1, 2005
John Mossali April 9, 2005
Raymond Knapp. April 24, 2005
William Ford May 6, 2005
Robert D. Danfield. May 17, 2005
Sam Kweskin June 23, 2005
George Tyma. August 18, 2005

Write to a Soldier — The address for the Reconnaissance Company that will deploy to Iraq this Fall is: Commander, 51st Chemical Company, 83rd Chemical Battalion, Building #2255D, Fort Polk, LA 71459. The overseas address should be available by the next issue. Please share this address with your church, school, social and civic clubs, and ask them to write notes of encouragement to these brave soldiers.