

MUZZLEBLASTS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE 83RD CHEMICAL MORTAR BATTALION VETERANS ASSOCIATION



83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion soldiers

WW II True Story: Sinking Ship, Leaky Life Vest, Two Men Hanging On!

Dolly Sarrio —



[Editor's Note: Dolly Sarrio, daughter of Carl D. Johnson, writes about her late father's and her friend, Jimmie J. Wheeler, in her

Hibiscus House blog. She has given permission for it to be reprinted in Muzzleblast.]

Sadly, this week Mr. Wheeler was buried with military honors.



Jimmie J. Wheeler and Carl D. Johnson
This is the day they spoke with Patton, or should I say that he spoke to them loudly!

You can imagine how sad we are to lose this man, this hero, this WWII legend! Today I share his personal account of what he and my daddy Carl endured during the sinking of this LST off the coast of Anzio. The story itself, as you may know, is close to my heart and to have it used in his funeral made it all the more touching. Isn't it ironic that this true WWII Hero basically wrote his own Military Eulogy?

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A Message from our president

Sandy Babich



Dear Friends,
Time does pass quickly. My Dad always said the older you get, the faster time passes and I truly realize that now. I hope this note finds all of you well and happy.

It is hard to believe that our last reunion was over one year ago when many of us came to share stories and memories, pictures and scrapbooks. I miss all of you and from the emails I have received, many of you also are missing the time together with dear friends from the 83rd.

We are so blessed that Marsha Goff continues to volunteer her time and talent writing and editing *The MZB*. Marsha's dedication to every issue is our form of communication with each other and she certainly welcomes articles, even articles that you find in your family keepsakes that you wish to share with all of us. Sometimes at the reunions, conversations and pictures have linked stories of our loved ones in incredible ways and I know that the articles that are submitted to Marsha for the *MZB* have done that also.

It is mind-boggling to think that the first reunion of the 83rd was so very long ago and, throughout the years, so many friendships and bonds were made thanks to our family members who served in the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion. My first reunion was in Pittsburgh in the summer of 1970 when I was 16 years old and my Mom and Dad planned it. That is the first time I met Bill Hoover and there

were so many in attendance that it was hard to take the group pictures and finding a ballroom large enough for all of the attendees.

There are so many 83rd family members to thank over the years for their tireless efforts and hours of dedication. Gini Lemoine and Bill Hoover planned successful reunions for as long as many of us can remember. With so many members and families during that time period, planning the reunions was a large undertaking and words cannot convey the gratitude to them for all of their hours of planning.

During this time, Trisha Bridges made sure that we all received the *MZB* and her contributions were greatly appreciated. Our 83rd members contributed so many articles during the years and Lee Steedle is still instrumental in contributing articles. Our thanks goes out to Lee as this year, along with his sons, he made an effort to contact all 83rd soldiers that are still with us. Terry Lowry, our Historian has kept a traveling museum for all of us to share of the 83rd reunions for many countless years and authored *The Bastard Battalion*.

When Gini and Bill decided to retire from their positions, it seemed that the reunions were to come to an end. One evening in the hospitality room where so many of us were gathered, Tom and Marcia Bunker offered to take over the responsibility of planning the reunions in different cities. That was a blessing as we continued to meet and socialize as the "83rd Family." I am so

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454 Americans and 29 British Sailors lost their lives on the night of January 26, 1944. Operation Shingle is what the amphibious landing was named. Anzio beachhead was the location. 0200 was the time of the surprise attack. General Lucas would call it "One of the most complete surprises in history."

The LST 422 which was American Made saw no active service with the US. It was commissioned into the Royal Navy as HM-LST 422. Sunk by a mine off the coast of Anzio.

If you aren't familiar with what an LST or Landing Ship Tank is, they usually carried heavy equipment, tanks, wheeled and tracked vehicles, artillery, construction equipment and much needed military supplies. They served a very important mission with valuable cargo and men.

Some of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalions C and D Companies plus some from HQ Co. were on board that night and most lost their lives. A few of the survivors have come forward over the years and told their stories of what happened that night. This story will be for two of those soldiers, Jimmie J. Wheeler and Carl D. Johnson.

Mr Wheeler's story of how he and my daddy Carl survived will be added to the history of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion of WWII. He stated that this was when they first became such close friends.

Mr. Jim said, "He had 5 trucks over there. "Carl drove a 3/4 ton a lot, along with driving a jeep. Carl would haul officers mostly 1st and 2nd Lieutenants and on rare occasions a Captain. They didn't show their faces up that close to the front much. There was one exception and that

would be Ole Patton, Ole Blood & Guts. He'd come up there, he was scared just like the rest of us but he didn't believe in telling the ole boys to go up there if he wouldn't go too. They changed the generals out 'bout every 6 months. We'd rather had him; he would feed you rations too."

I remember daddy talking about Patton riding in with a crop and that famous pearl handled revolver. He stood like an emperor to hear daddy tell it. They enjoyed seeing him, but at times he got on their nerves. Not on this day they were having way too much fun! More of the story here (well I cleaned up what Patton said but you can imagine). Mr. Wheeler said, "You know I believe we was the only ones that got to talk to Patton in our unit. We went back proud as could be and told them!"

Mr. Wheeler said that they had given my daddy Carl a nickname, "Piccolo," while in Italy and it stuck with him. Mr. Wheeler said with a smile, "Yeah he'd answer to it." He carried that nickname until the end of the war. Daddy was short in stature but was strong and courageous



The Johnson & Johnson Band Aid Kids

as a giant! All who knew him knew this.

I guess he acquired that nickname after the death of another soldier friend with the same last name I was told by another Company C man, William Ramsey. They were called at that time "The Johnson & Johnson Band Aid Kids." Mr. Ramsey said they were the youngest in the unit. If anyone out there recognizes the taller soldier on the right please let me know. We've wondered his name for years. Sadly, daddy saw him killed right next to him.

While visiting and talking with Mr. Wheeler, he knew I would be sharing this information and he was so glad to share his and Carl's experiences in the war. Today I share, in his own words, the sinking of the LST 422.

Surviving The LST 422 Ship Sinking

by Jimmie J. Wheeler

We [Mr. Wheeler and Carl Johnson] of Company C and in the Motor Pool at the time were up on the top deck of this ship. They had sent everybody in the Motor Pool that had trucks; me and Carl had trucks up top. The men who had vehicles were told to go up to unboon (remove) some of the chains from them. We were up there awaiting orders to remove the last chain holding the vehicles when it happened. We were getting ready to dock when high winds knocked that ship into the first mine. The Germans had laid those mines in the water. We had unchained all but the one chain so that they wouldn't slide off if anything should happen like if they hit a mine field, and that was it!

That ship sank fast! It sank like an iron ball! We was on top

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when it hit! Me and Carl jumped off there when it was 18-20 ft. above the water. Bunch of them boys was trying to slide down that anchor chain and here come a wave that pushed them boys up against that boat. We decided we didn't want to get on that.

Then they had to shut that hatch down to those below. (I could tell that hurt them so badly to know that, but it had to be done). They go by a code and have to do that to keep the ship from sinking so fast.

We said, "Jump!" No life jackets, we both came off that boat and we were treading round there in that choppy ocean water. We was scared we wouldn't be able to find each other out there with so much going on. Those waves were so big and current so strong! Explosions, lots of explosions that ship had plenty of ammunition and so we weren't out of danger by any means.

We did find each other and it wasn't long before here came an ole boy face down in the water so we borrowed his jacket. [Dolly: He said this sadly. I said to him, "You mean he was dead? Y'all took his jacket?" Mr. Wheeler, with a half smile said to me, "Well, honey he wasn't gonna need it anymore." (I know a blonde moment)]. It was a Mae West; had to blow it up. One of us stayed in it, it would leak and we'd blow it up for awhile. Other one would hold onto it awhile.

I couldn't remember the times but I believe it was about 2 o'clock until 8 o'clock the next morning. [Dolly: I remember Daddy, (Carl) saying "That water was cold, so cold, and it seemed like we were in it forever!" Both Mr. Wheeler and my daddy said the same thing, that they saw many die that dark night and I guess they did because so few of them survived and

thankfully they were two of them.]

We had finally got out to where you couldn't see nothing but black. People say, "Y'all didn't think about no sharks?"

"Hell," I said, "I thought about a lot of things. I didn't think about sharks, we didn't think about no shark."

Quick, daylight came I was hanging on and Carl was in the vest, a little ole reconnaissance plane came by. Made out of little ducket cottonsack ducket. It came over with a motor that sounded like a lawn mower motor . . . little putt putt putt putt. When it came over my arm went about 15 foot up in the air waving. He went on and we talked about them for a bit!

Wasn't long here come a little ole boat. I was holding onto Carl, they pitched a rope down with knots in it. Boy, I got that rope and wasn't nobody gonna take that rope away from me! I was going to pull myself up but got up just to my shoulders out of the water and that's about as far as I could go.

I had to stay in the hospital a little while and wasn't long Carl was out and up fighting some fierce battles at Anzio. I came along for that fierce fighting later.

Yep, that's where I first met Carl and we became close friends out there hanging on for dear life! Me and him held on to one another to survive. We got all the swimming we wanted that night. I don't swim anymore.

This is the end of Mr. Wheeler's story. The story itself, as you may know, is close to my heart and to have it used in his funeral made it all the more touching. Isn't it ironic that this true WW II Hero basically wrote his own Military Eulogy? The Honor Team had a little smile on their faces when some of this was

read. I think the part with the shark, but that was sweet as well. I'm sure they did so tastefully and couldn't help it the man was a pistol!

I now know the personal story behind the ship sinking involving my daddy. I never knew of this before. Daddy told of the sinking, but with very little detail. Mr. Wheeler has given us a gift and we're truly grateful.

We will miss him truly but are so thankful that we got to meet him to learn about him and Daddy, as well, at that young time of their lives in war.



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thankful in spirit to my Dad and also to my husband Ron and family for planning the last two Pittsburgh reunions and Marsha and Ray Golf for assisting us.

The MZB has been able to continue to be published by Marsha as your donations and your procurement of the raffle tickets last year have funded our treasury. We no longer have the raffles, so your donations are greatly appreciated.

All of us are so thankful for all that our 83rd soldiers sacrificed so that we can all enjoy our freedom. We are all proud of them and all of our military who have served in the past and now in the present.

May God grant you all many blessed, healthy and happy years.

Sandy



Bryan and Darlene Turan visit Fort Stewart

Bryan Turan—



The week before we went to Savannah, I told Darlene I wanted to go by Ft. Stewart and go to the 83rd's headquarters. I also wanted her to see the "War Room" since she didn't go with us to the reunion held there in 2013. Unaware of their procedure for getting on the garrison, I called Sergeant Major Hurte the week before we were to be there to give him a heads up that we were coming. He took my name and number and was to get with the commander and call me back.

He didn't return my call so I consulted two retired officers from the Air Force and told them my dilemma. They advised us to stop at the Visitors Center and get a pass and go on in. We went through the semi-extensive procedure of having a NCIC background check, photographed, and finger printed (left and right index fingers). They gave us a map of Ft. Stewart, the largest Army garrison east of the Mississippi.

After entering the garrison and passing tanks, helicopter and the parade ground, Darlene asked, "How are we going to find them?" I said, "Ask for directions, of course." I should have said, "You're a woman you should know that." As a man, I was supposed to resist and ride around until we had to ask, but that wasn't the case.

At the first red light we saw the Exchange to the right. I got out and asked a young major loading his kids in the car. He looked at my map and knew exactly where

we wanted to go and even drew directions off the printed map. I thanked him for his time and his service and we headed to the 83rd.

When we reached the 83rd Headquarters, I asked a young soldier leaving the building if his command sergeant major was in. He said, "Yes, let me take you to him." He led us into a foyer and told us he would get him. About 20 seconds passed and the sergeant major came out, introduced himself and began apologizing profusely for not calling me back. He told me as soon as the young soldier mentioned my name, it hit him that he had forgotten to call me.

He led us into his office, placed us in two chairs and pulled out a little fold up stool in front of his desk and sat down. He asked me what my connection to the 83rd was. I told him my dad was one of the original soldiers who was lucky enough to make it from Camp Gordon through to the end in Austria.

He became excited and said, "I've got to get my commander." He went out of the office and came back and said, "He will be with us in a minute; he is counseling right now."

I shared some stories my dad had told me and he was getting more excited by the minute. The colonel came in and introduced himself and the sergeant major began telling him what I had told him. He got excited and led us out into the foyer and showed us the paintings by Sam Kweskin that decorated the walls.

After we looked at the paintings the colonel said I've got to show you something. He said we call it the "War Room." I didn't know until we got in the room he

was talking about the display we had seen back in 2013.

The colonel and I went around the room while Darlene and the sergeant major talked. Then at the end the colonel said, "I've got something for you. Come back to my office."

We went back to his office and the sergeant major ducked out to his office and reappeared. The colonel showed me a coin and explained how they had them made up and expressed his desire to give them to any living veteran and or their family members.

The colonel then palmed the coin and gave it to me in a handshake. I knew it was special the way he presented it to me, but not until I got home. My retired Army officer friend told me it was a sign of respect and very special the way the colonel had given me my coin.

He said when Army officers receive their commissions, they are given a silver dollar. The silver dollar is palmed and given to the first enlisted personel who salutes them as a show of respect to the soldier for his salute.

Darlene was also given a coin which was simply handed to her by the sergeant major, not the way the colonel had given me mine.

I told one Korean War veteran that story at a McDonald's one morning. He was on the way to our VA in Biloxi. Something made me approach him and talk to him.

During our conversation, he told me that he was rejected during WW II because of a heart murmur and later accepted during the Korean war. I told him my dad was also rejected at first, but called back and accepted. In our conversation I showed him the coin and told the story of how

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Our French friends honor the 83rd CMB with a plaque

Many of you will remember Fabien Raud and his father who attended an 83rd reunion several years ago. Fabien is a member of Soldiers of Memory, a group of WW II re-enactors who honor the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion.



Fabien with his friend and fellow re-enactor Adrien Soldi

Last June, Fabien contacted 83rd CMB Vice-President Tom Bunker about funding for a plaque to honor the 83rd members of D Company who participated in the glider landings in France. They planned to place the plaque in La Motte during the anniversary celebration of the landing. The plaque was estimated to cost 650 euros (then about \$729). Fabien's group was raising money to pay for the plaque, but needed additional financial assistance.

Tom contacted 83rd CMB veterans and family members of veterans and the group raised \$650. The money was wired to Fabien in August and the 83rd CMB organization paid the \$35 cost to wire it, however, when one wires money internationally,

a healthy cut is taken out of the money on the receiving end, resulting in the group receiving \$528.

Happily, Fabien and his group raised enough additional money to pay for the plaque pictured below.



Soldiers of Memory are looking for a suitable date to have an official ceremony for the installation of the plaque.

Seventy-two years after the glider landing, our French friends remember — and are grateful for — the sacrifices made by soldiers of the 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion. —MHG



Monument in LaMotte, France in remembrance of the 1944 glider landings in Southern France



Fabien with Mr. Beranger, head of the town hall, who was responsible for the ceremony

With Gratitude

The following individuals donated money to Soldiers of Memory for the plaque

*Sandy and Ron Babich
John Beasley
Tom and Marcia Bunker
Marsha and Ray Goff
Ken Hopkins
Carl Klauscher, Jr.
Joel Kveskin
(in honor of his father,
Sam Kveskin)
JT Taunton, Jr.
JT Taunton, Sr.*

*Sandy Babich,
Lee Steedle and
Larry Strickler made
generous donations
to Muzzleblasts.*



DAVIDSON, Edward S., 96, of Manchester, New Jersey died of a broken heart Friday January 3, 2014 at Kimball

Medical Center, Lakewood. He worked as the women's better coat and suit buyer for RH Macy's Dept Store, New York City for 36 years, retiring in 1976. Born in New York, NY he resided in Teaneck for 20 years before moving to Manchester in 1985. He served as a Corporal in Company B of the 83rd CMB during WW II from 1942-1945 and is a Bronze Star recipient. He was predeceased by his wife Hazel in 2010. Burial in Veteran's Cemetery, Arneytown.



WHEELER, Jimmie Joshua, died in Abilene, TX on September 9, 2016. Please see his story

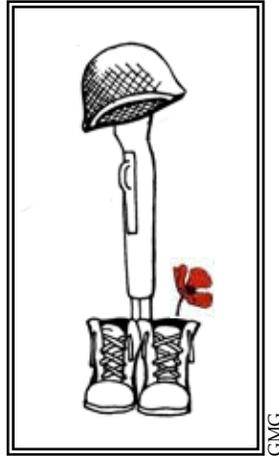
beginning on Page 1.

NOTICE

Personal effects that may belong to Second Lieutenant John L Boyd, C Company, who was MIA at Briancon for several days, have been found in a Doctor's house in France. He died in 2002 and was from Oregon when he entered the service. Does anyone know his family? If so, please contact Marsha at 785-843-2577 or mhgink@netscape.net.

Please help us by notifying us of the deaths of 83rd CMB veterans and their families. You may contact Marsha Henry Goff at mhgink@netscape.net, 785-843-2577 or 1877 N 1000 Rd, Lawrence, KS 66046.

Day is Done



Sleep soldiers! Still in honored rest your truth and valor wearing. The bravest are the tenderest. The loving are the daring.
— Bayard Taylor



I WANT YOUR STORY!

Are you a veteran with a story to tell? It can be dramatic or humorous. We want to hear it.

Are you a wife who can tell about your experiences on the Homefront?

Or the child of a veteran who can relate some of the stories your father told you about the war or your mother related about rationing or air raid drills? (Yes, they had blackouts and air raid drills in the U.S.)

Please send your stories to Marsha at 1877 N 1000 Road Lawrence, KS 66046 or mhgink@netscape.net

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I received it. His reaction was, "Wow that is special." I thanked him for his service and bid him good day, but before I left he said, "You just made my day."

I thought perhaps God led me to the old veteran to give him a ray of sunshine that day. He also shared with me his story of him and his late wife and how they met while he was in the Army.

He had book marks laminated of a newspaper article on one side about how they met and her obituary on the other side. He gave me two and thanked me again as we parted. You never know who you might run into and how you might help them.

Anyway, I told Paul Daly about receiving the coin, He is, a wealth of information and told me how that goes back to the British Army and how they received their medals years ago. An interesting story of which I had no knowledge.

The colonel who was in command when we had our reunion there in 2013 has retired and the 83rd moved to their current location in the garrison about a year ago. I believe they might have been right in the middle of their move when Sandy contacted them last year. I think that they would have loved to have a reunion with us all the next day. They thanked us over and over for stopping by. They are proud of the heritage that they carry on from the original 83rd CMB.

Editor's Note: Bryan said the Colonel indicated that he would love to put something together for Muzzleblasts. I have tried to contact him, but he has not responded to my multiple email messages. Perhaps he, too, has retired.

83rd CMB Veterans Association
c/o Marsha Henry Goff
1877 N 1000 Road
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83rd CMB photos of veterans, families and friends



Sgt. Leonard Turan
Co. C, 83rd CMB



Wyatt and Bryan Turan at the 2013
Fort Stewart 83rd CMB Reunion



Lee Steedle with his daughter Theresa



Lee Steedle with
his son Tom



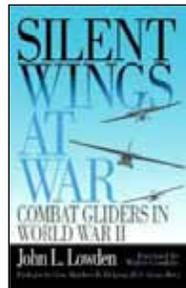
Steve Vukson with
G-Granddaughter
Makenzie



Makenzie (you can't
see them, but she is
wearing camoboots)



Monument in LaMotte,
France in remembrance
of glider landings



Book about glider
landings in WW II



Fabien Raud with his father
at the 2008 CMB Reunion