

Thursday 2 Sept 43.

I'm still in the field, altho we were supposed to go into camp this afternoon. However we happen to have a crazy colonel who is commanding officer of our combat team, and he thinks that if a little practice is a good thing then a great deal o practice is a wonderful thing, and so, even tho every other combat team went into camp this afternoon ours still remains in the field to run thru the problem once more. This will therefore keep me from going home tonite as I had planned. Of course the problem does happen to be important to the Colonel because we are to run it thru again next week for a group of visiting dignitaries from Brazil and since this will mean that there will be visiting army bigwigs also, the colonel wants it to go off without a hitch. I think he is hoping that it may help him to get the one star that he is working so insanely (I use the word with premeditation) to get. The problem itself is interesting. Our combat team is attacking from the north to clear out the enemy from a pass in the mountains so that two other combat teams can go thru it with the least delay as they come up from the south. When we run this problem thru next week we will be using live ammunition. The field artillery will be firing live shells over our heads (I include mine) so that they land 300 to 400 yards in front of the infantry. The infantry is to advance 100 yards every 4 minutes, and the field artillery drops its shells 100 yards farther in front. To-day, the infantry in its eagerness to take the hill ran instead of walking and did more than 100 yards in 4 minutes. This would have resulted in casualties had they been firing live shells. However, with shells bursting in front of them, I don't think they will repeat this next week.

Camp Coxcomb, our new camp, is not a bad place at all; and except for its inaccessibility is a decided improvement over our last camp. It is situated in the midst of a group of mountains, more or less like being at the bottom of a bowl. Altho these surrounding mountains seem quite close, some of them are more than 18 miles away. We have showers in camp, permanently built, screened in latrines without running water. These are quite deep and I still haven't gotten used to the sound of the splash, so that I half jump up to keep from getting wet. Our tents are quite nice for a camp of this type, with floors covered with asbestos panels. Three officers sleep in each tent on cots of the type used in army hospitals. We have a men's and officer's PX, which to us hardened veterans is a decided luxury. The one big complaint that we have to offer is the rations. We have been placed on B ration. This means that all our foods come in cans - the large cans that feed a large group, rather than the individual cans of the K rations. The only things that don't come in cans are the meats, which are limited to overseas hams and bacon, and potatoes, and onions. It thus is obvious that our meals are very tiresome because of the sameness. Breakfast consists of powdered eggs (terrible!), or pancakes, bacon, and coffee. Lunch - canned beans, beets, cooked or raw onions, and canned vienna sausage. Supper - potatoes, in one form or another, beans or corn, and ham, chili, or corned beef (HORRIBLE!!!). Of course if you don't like a meal there is always some form of jelly and bread. I'm not too choosy about food, but I find myself eating jelly and bread more and more frequently. I must tell you about overseas ham. This comes to us in a wooden box which, when opened, is found to be filled with coarse salt. When this is poured off one sees a large ham completely coated with salt. The cooks start working on this at least a day in advance to try to get some of the salty taste out of it, but despite heroic efforts the stuff is almost too salty to eat when served. If eaten between two slices of bread, as a sandwich, the bread does kill much of the saltiness, and this is about the only way that I can eat it. I imagine that I will lose some of my pot gut during the next few weeks.

I saw an interesting demonstration the other day. Our general wanted to impress us with the power which we will have when in combat, so he had the division march down to the road, one and a half miles away, and we watched a demonstration consisting of 3 parts. Incidentally a division (15,000 men) takes up an awful lot of space even when seated ten deep. The first phase of the demonstration consisted of two flights of 3 P-39's each (airacobras) flying over our heads and blasting away with their machine guns at a group of targets 1000 yards to our front. They came over our heads at a rate of 275 mph and let loose just as they got overhead. It was moderately impressive to see the dust rise from all around the targets. However, they flew by so fast that they could get relatively few shots in. As a part of this demonstration of air support we next were shown an A-20 bomber which flew parallel to us 1000 yards to our front and dropped a few incendiary bombs, or rather high explosive bombs weighing only 25 lbs. each. These are dropped by parachute (small ones of course) to keep the plane from being caught in the blast when flying low. However, much more im-



pressive was the dropping of a 500 lb. 1500 yards in front of us. This is supposed to kill everything within 100 yards of where it falls and throws fragments a distance of 1000 yards. We were a mile away, but the concussion could be felt most strongly. I'd certainly hate to be close to one of those babies when it hits.

Next we watched the fire power of one battalion of infantry. It was really amazing. They fired at the same targets that the airocobras did, this was really an area rather than a target as we ordinarily think of it. Their weapons consisted of the usual Springfield 1903 rifles, Garands, and Browning Automatic rifles, in addition to 37 mm. and 50 mm. machine guns. The din was terrific. In about 2 to 3 minutes they had fired 30,000 rounds from their guns, and 10,000 rounds from their machine guns. All this was live ammunition, and 1 out of every 5 shots was a tracer bullet. It made us medics feel that we would have plenty of protection in combat.

The final demonstration consisted of anti-aircraft fire by 50 mm. machine guns and by a group of 40 cal guns (something new). All the shells in this case were tracers so that each shot could be followed. It was very interesting to see the target at which they shot. This consisted of a rocket shell which was shot off at one end of the field, parallel to us and about 1000 yards in front of us. It starts off at 275 miles an hour and gets up to 400 mph in its flight. It represents a target 1/15th the size of a plane at a much higher altitude. The shells burst all around the rocket and I imagine that if it had been a plane it would have been downed.

Since joining the collecting company I have been out on a combat team problem which as I have told you, was to start Monday afternoon and be over this afternoon, but as I've stated we're still out here and won't get in till noon to-morrow. Life out here is extremely dull. When we first came out we bivouaced in a lake, which of course was dry, but which does have water in it when one of those terrific desert rains come up. The following morning the actual problem started, consisting of a nine mile advance by the infantry on foot. The poor infantrymen had to hike across the sand in single file, carrying full packs plus their guns. There is absolutely no shade, and in order to avoid an epidemic of cases of heat exhaustion they were permitted to walk only one-half hour at a time and then rested for 15 minutes. In addition there was a rest period between 12 and 3 P.M. when no walking was done at all. Take it from me, regardless of all the glamor of the air corps or other units as described in the newspapers, the infantry is the group that deserved all the credit in the world. They have by far, the toughest job of anyone in any of the services. We moved out at 10 AM in order to be close enough to give some medical service, but after driving 6 miles we had to stop because of a traffic tie up in the road ahead of us. We sat there in the sun for 5 hours, during the hottest time of the day. I was riding in a jeep without any top up and therefore no protection whatever from the sun. The metal helmet which I was wearing became too hot to handle. If it weren't for the desert water bag which I have I don't know how I could have kept even slightly comfortable. Finally I became exasperated and decided to find some shade. I took the hint of the various boys in the company, who usually climb down beneath their vehicles whenever there is a stop, and climbed underneath the jeep. It's a good thing that I wore my iron helmet, because these jeeps are low slung, and I must have bumped my head at least a dozen times. However it did produce some shade and was relatively comfortable for a short time. However, the position was too cramped for a long stay. I have learned my lesson and now I ride in a weapons carrier which carries all our station equipment. This has a canvas top and is relatively comfortable all the time.

My day in the field is spent reading, usually detective novels, working cross word puzzles, eating (only half-heartedly), and sleeping. I go to bed with the sunset and arise with the sunrise. There is no particular reason for staying up after dark because no lights can be used since we are tactical.

It's getting too dark to continue typing as I can't see what I'm writing, so I guess I'd better close.

More news later. Love to all of you,

The desert rats.

Lee - Send this to Louise when you're thru. The portable typewriter I now have to use can't make enough legible copies for everyone of the family. Love to Evy. Walt