

# “Chappie”

by Carrie Cosby-McCoy

*This article was written by: Carrie Cosby-McCoy, daughter of Joseph H. Cosby, 397-E.*

Today was a day to remember for me. On June 11, 2007, I finally was able to make contact with Bonner Teeter, my dad’s Chaplain from the 397th Infantry, Company E. He was dad’s confidante, friend, and sanity during World War II. As dad said, “If it hadn’t been for Bonner Teeter, I think a lot of us would have lost our minds.” I got the feeling today from Bonner that the feeling was very much mutual between the two. (I should mention that my dad is Joe Cosby from the 397th, Company E).

I had pretty much given up the cause of getting a hold of “Chappie,” knowing that one day we would be able to talk, but it wouldn’t probably be on this side of heaven. He’s about 6 or 7 years older than daddy and dad just turned 81.

Then I got this idea to get his phone number at the Retirement Center, from his Methodist Headquarters. It was a breakthrough. I think I had called every Teeter there is in Texas, since dad spoke of him this past February, to no avail. When I read dad’s letters home and they had Chaplain Teeter’s name on about every other one, it became my mission to get a hold of him. And I did today! He was alive and very much kicking . . . not so much physically, but emotionally and mentally I found him to be quite sharp.

The following are some of the vignettes Chaplain Bonner Teeter shared from his memory bank. I am truly the richer for it!

It seems that “attitude was and still is everything” for those survivors from World War II. I realized this, when all the stories that “Chappie” spoke of were positive. He shared first of food, shelter, and lastly, but not the least importantly, faith.

He spoke of finding some onions in one of the cellars of one of the barns in Rimling. He described how a person could really spruce up the K-Rations if a little onion was added. He spoke of sleeping above the cows in a hayloft. It was one of those barns that he also remembers another special friend, Carl Harrington, refusing to withdraw from giving aid to fallen soldiers. It was in a barn that Carl lost his life, trying to save others. He said that he still kept Carl’s harmonica in his bureau drawer. Carl was going to be a “minister of music,” but stated that if something should happen to him he wanted “Chappie” to keep his harmonica and kept it he has, since Carl lost his life in that barn in Rimling.

He described what was a warm and very personal relationship he had with my dad, Joe Cosby. He described my dad as one of his most special and closest buddies, always smiling and trying to offer a fellow soldier some sort of positive outlook on situations.

He remembers his assistant chaplain, Francis Gregory, and dad putting a program on the “Pirates of Pinzant” and how fun that was sometime in February, when there was little action on “the front”.

Dad said in one of his letters that it was “Chappie’s” idea because the U.S.O. entertainment wouldn’t come so far up in the front to entertain, as they felt it was too dangerous.

He remembered the cake that dad and Gregory had made on his birthday, February 12, 1945; he said he’d try to find the picture to send to me.

He shared three German church experiences that have served his memory well.

One, in which, just the four chaplains and their assistants went to the church, where Martin Luther had been. He remembered that Chaplain Frazier carried a .45 on his hip, even though he wasn’t supposed to, but that he didn’t judge him for that, it seemed to me.

He remembered going into a German church in the dark to set up communion for a sunrise service. “It was just across the Maginot Line, when we broke through and were on our way to Berlin. When the sun rose, under the stained glass windows, were swastikas with about 70 to 80 German soldiers names, who had lost their lives for the “Nazi cause.” He described it as a “rare and empowering” experience to be worshipping freely.

He followed this story up by another endearing memory, where the Chaplain pumped the organ, while my daddy played and Assistant Chaplain Gregory sang “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” The townspeople came and he thinks there were about 40 to 50 people who came and prayed at the altar. They were under strict non-fraternization rules, but the Chaplain remembers a gray-haired German reached out his hand and said in German, “*Mein Brutter*,” which translates into English as “my brother.”

He shared of the baptism he performed in the Neckar River, before they made it to Heilbronn, toward the end of the war. I don’t think, as a Methodist, this form of baptism was common in his experience, but I imagine that if it seemed important to the soldier, so it would be important to the Chaplain. This is just the impression that I have, from some of the conversations dad had with Bonner in his letters home.

He described his role as comforter, as he held a soldier who was hit coming out of a basement, crying out for his mother, as he died in the chaplain's arms.

He thinks he remembers daddy functioning as a medic, when John Kline (a medic) went down in Heilbronn and then afterward in Oberheinriet, Germany, where he used his jeep to evacuate the wounded. This answered my question of when and where daddy began and ended his service, as a medic. I knew it wasn't a long time, as most of his letters indicate that he was a rifleman. I know daddy ended his role as medic in late April. It was then that he became Chaplain Frazier's assistant, as he describes "hanging up his shingle" to help Chaplain Frazier. I hadn't realized his role as medic or chaplain's assistant up to this point.

He ended by saying, "Thank you so much, sweetie, for calling. When you have finished your father's memoirs, would you send them to me? I guess I am surprised that I will be mentioned so much in them. I guess that Joe felt for me what I, too, felt for him. Joe was just like a brother to me."

As I write these, I find myself shedding tears, knowing that God was truly faithful to give these men each other and was faithful in hearing my prayer to one day "this side of heaven" converse with such a special man, Chaplain Bonner Teeter. He has given me yet another window of understanding of the great man, who is my father, Joe Cosby.

I hope you enjoyed these notes, Daddy, on this Father's Day.

We are SO very blessed that God chose you to come home safely from the War and be our dad! It's hard to understand, but there is a plan and Someone, we are certain, can turn what tastes BITTER into something that is BETTER. I know you don't see yourself as a VICTOR, but I certainly do. Thank you for being you!

Happy Father's Day!

Love,  
Carrie Ann

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