

A Fortunate Alternate Use For Toilet Paper

by Orland Gabriel, 399-L

We had been snow-bound in the winter line for a number of days with good foxholes, light action, and blessedly not suffering the “GIs.” I had saved a nice supply of tissue, which I stored at the ready above the webbing in my helmet liner. It was a very convenient place to keep it dry, clean and handy when needed.

We were positioned in the “Splinter Factory,” so-called because the trees had been decimated by German mortar and artillery fire—mostly mortar, for the entire area had been zeroed in and mortar shells would drop in unannounced.

I was the platoon runner in the platoon CP foxhole with Lt. Roy Simmons, Sgt. George Tyson, and George Demopoulos, the platoon medic.

I was standing outside, sorting K-rations to be delivered to the rest of the platoon when I felt a sledgehammer blow to my head—at least a 10-pound sledgehammer. Then I heard the explosion as shrapnel and wood splinters rained all around. A piece of metal went through my helmet liner and the toilet paper and made a fair dent in the top of my skull. I consider that the inch of tissue cushioned it enough to prevent it from penetrating my hard head.

Demopoulos told my wife many years later that when I picked myself up off the ground and crawled into the hole with blood streaming down my face that he thought I was dying. Thanks to the toilet paper, I wasn't. It did afford me a couple of weeks in a hospital back in Paris.

The medics there said that it was a rare thing for a head wound patient to “walk in.” George Demopoulos was an outstanding medic and we all treasured him. He was awarded the Silver Star and two Bronze Stars—even though he shot at Lt. Simmons and I one night. But that is another story.

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