

# When I Trapped My General

by Fred Lyons, Division Headquarters

*From the start of the war to the end, Staff Sergeant Fred Lyons was the secretary to the Division commander, Major General Withers A. Burress.*

Starting in April 1943, upon completion of our basic training, we in 100th Infantry Division Headquarters were required, in our second phase of training, to leave garrison life at Fort Jackson, S.C., and spend one week a month in the field—in bivouac. At first, this only consisted of getting used to living in the woods—eating out of mess kits, sleeping in pup tents, and fulfilling our new office duties in pyramidal tents, which we then learned how to erect. Then, as time went on, one of our regiments would become the Red Forces and another the Blue Forces in simulated maneuvers against one another. Frequent movements were thus called for, and the CP (Command Post) of Division Headquarters would at times unexpectedly (according to the fortunes of war) have to move at night (as well as daytime), which involved truck and jeep movements under blackout conditions to another CP position chosen by our Headquarters Commandant.

Due to the large number of high-ranking and other officers in the Division CP, and the necessity of their being set up quickly in new areas after our Signal Company had installed field telephones, we GIs were responsible upon each move, after erecting such pyramidal tents and moving in the necessary equipment, to take turns being on duty therein with our officers on an around-the-clock basis. Fred

Lyons, then a T/4, was in the office of the Chief of Staff, along with two other sergeants, although he was the only one who was the secretary to the CG (Commanding General), taking notes and messages from him, as well as stenographically covering meetings of the high-ranking officers, when requested. Those of us who went off-duty would be setting up our own pup tents, sleeping, or sharing guard duty.

An added requirement was that each of the GIs was responsible on each move for digging two slit trenches (in Division HQ, the emphasis was always on slit trenches, rather than on infantry foxholes) one for himself, and the other for an officer, who would by then be engaged in his own duties. Those slit trenches would then have to be filled in again by the same GI whenever Headquarters moved its CP out to another location. So it was that Fred Lyons recorded, in the latter part of August 1943, a move from one location of the CP near Chester, SC, to another one near Blackstock, SC, stating that in the last six days he had been out of garrison, the Headquarters had moved exactly six times, four of them at night. It was during one of these moves that Fred almost became responsible for our Commanding General, Major General Withers A. Burress, becoming disabled to the extent that he might never have been able to lead our Division into combat in Germany.

We had moved our office equipment into the Chief of Staff's (C/S) tent, with its wooden floor and wood-burning stove, while Walter Yee, the General's orderly, was nearby setting up the General's personal tent and, incidentally, a pup tent to share with Fred, as Walter knew how busy Fred would be with his other duties. Fred's immediate responsibility at this particular time became to dig his two slit trenches. It was not yet nighttime, but getting dark, and at the time it was unclear to him where the pyramidal tents of G-1, G-2, G-3, and G-4 were being set up. So, Fred duly dug two commodious slit trenches, at a distance from one another, and then proceeded to camouflage them, in accordance with a new directive, so that they couldn't be observed by reconnaissance planes. (Jeeps nearby were also camouflaged by their drivers.) Neither the digging of the trenches nor the camouflaging, presented any great problem for Fred, as the red soil in the Carolinas was much easier to penetrate than what later confronted him in the hills of Tennessee, and there was plenty of brush for cover purposes. What he did not realize, however, was that the location of one of his trenches was right in the main foot corridor between the CG's personal tent and the G-3 tent. G-3 was the hub of most all activity, being in constant contact with the Blue Forces, and with G-2 in and out of G-3, keeping them informed as to the activities of the Red Forces.

So it came to be that at about 10:00 p.m.—plenty dark by then—General Burress was leaving the G-3 tent and approaching his own personal tent, located not too far from the office of his Chief of Staff. Fred was by then on duty in the C/S tent, manning the phone, when all of a sudden he heard quite a commotion nearby. He went outside to investigate, and to his horror found General Burress, the leader of us all, prostrate face down in Fred's slit trench. All sorts of thoughts went through his mind: Could our beloved

General have broken his leg, or arm, or suffered internal injuries, due solely to Fred's unfortunate choice of location, right in the midst of what Fred should have figured would be a well-traveled road? Could it be that our General, who had been a captain in World War I and whose career was to peak in leading a whole division of 15,000 men into combat against the Germans in World War II, had now become totally incapacitated and would have to "sit this one out" in the States?

Fred dashed out to assist the General, only to find that by then he was rising and edging his way out of the coffin-sized trench. Under the circumstances, a First or Second Lieu tenant would probably have berated Lyons loudly, but General Burress made nothing of it, continued on to his tent, and never alluded to the experience.

We all learn from our mistakes, and after that occurrence, whether it be on Army problems or Division maneuvers, Fred was very careful in choosing the sites of his slit trenches. Later, overseas in France and Germany, Fred was not faced with that problem, as Division Headquarters was always billeted in Alsatian or German homes (the occupants of the latter having been requested to depart). He has never forgotten, however, the horrible possibility of his having rendered his General, whom he served and idolized, hors de combat!

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