

Company L Goes to War

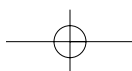
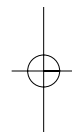
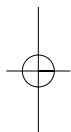
George F. Tyson, Jr.
with
Robert V. Hamer, Sr.



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*To the Great Men of Company L, 399th
Infantry Regiment of the 100th Division
who fought so valiantly to preserve
Freedom for our Country.
Some gave their lives, some were battle
weary, and many were wounded.
THEY DID THEIR BEST*

Foreword

The first part of this book was written in 1952 from memory and reading "love letters" I had sent home to my girlfriend, and also from scanning books covering that period.

I was unemployed during that time and had only covered the period up to February 1945 when I became employed again. Unfortunately, I stopped writing and the notes were filed away.

At a 100th Division reunion, Bob Hamer and Jim Paine insisted they be published. Bob was given the job of transcribing the handwritten notes onto a computer. We had then gotten that far.

I was then convinced to finish the Company L story.

Melville MacDonald was very familiar with the area to be covered and helped a lot with Part II. With Jim Paine in Georgia and MacDonald in North Carolina doing the pre-editing and me doing the final edit along with the research of rosters, we felt it was complete.

Part II was written 46 years after the war, so it was very difficult to expand any of the facts and many names of friends had faded away.

MacDonald remained in the Regular Army and retired as a lieutenant colonel.

Paine retired from the Public Health Service with the permanent rank of colonel.

Hamer retired from the National Guard and Reserves as a captain.

*George F. Tyson, Jr.
Colonel, USAR (Retired)*



Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge all those who contributed to this book. Someone is going to be left out, but that will be purely unintentional.

Thanks go to all who sent in their personal stories, which helped this book to be about everyone.

Thanks to *The Story of the Century* publication, without which we would have a lot fewer pictures.

Thanks also to *The World's Great Artillery* by Hans Halberstadt, where the wonderful picture of the German 88 was found.

A great deal of thanks go to Jim Paine who took the trouble to gather and send a great many photos he had either taken or collected during his period with the 100th Division in Europe. Al Lapa also gave us some photos that were used.

Most of all, I, Bob Hamer, want to thank George Tyson for believing in my ability and asking me to undertake this task. I want to say with all humbleness that it was a pleasure for me to try to live through the pain and torture of that war. Many do not know that my memories of the period between the first part of December on to the hospital were—and some still are—nonexistent. George, this has been a work of such honor as there is no way I could ever have regained some of the memories as has happened during this work.

When we worked on the first publication some ten or twelve years ago, my mind was not yet ready to cope with those memories. Now, by the grace of the Good Lord, I can live with them peacefully.

*Robert V. (Bob) Hamer
Captain, Artillery, USAR Retired*

First Platoon Roster

Upon arrival in the European Theater of Operations

Platoon Leader	2nd Lt. I. N. Markfield	WIA
Platoon Sergeant	Tech Sgt. Argil H. Pop Warner	KIA
Medic	George Demopoulos	WIA
Platoon Guide	Liberato DiBattista	WIA

First Squad

George P. Ford, Squad Leader	WIA
Francis J. Touri	KIA
Melvin Sohns	DS
Russell Hackett	SK
John Hudec	WIA
Billy Roberts	KIA
George Sebilian	WIA
Walter Ragan	SK
Lloyd Lamirand	WIA
John C. Wilson	SK
Orland Gabriel	WIA
George Cambgue	KIA
Frank Froio, Asst.	

Second Squad

George F. Tyson, Squad Leader	WIA
Harry St. A. O'Neill	WIA
Miguel Rodriguez	WIA
Franklin Saathoff	SK
Albert DeSanctis	WIA
Robert V. Hamer	SK
Lee Tafoya	WIA
Dominic DeAngelo	AWOL
George Rex	KIA
Arthur Worth	WIA
Clyde Beatty, Asst.	KIA
Daniel Downey, 2nd Asst.	

Third Squad

Harold Ulrich, Squad Ldr.	WIA
Donald Pillion	WIA
Walter Zimmerman	KIA
Adam Breuer	WIA
William Zilliox	KIA
Willard Skelton	DS
Harold Weickel	WIA
William Spruit	WIA
Raymond Stehlik	TRFD
Earl Cotton	TRFD
Eugene Greenbaum	KIA
Willie J. Tucker, Asst.	TRFD

KIA—Killed in Action; WIA—Wounded in Action; SK—Sickness; DS—Detached Service; TRFD—Transferred

The Beginning

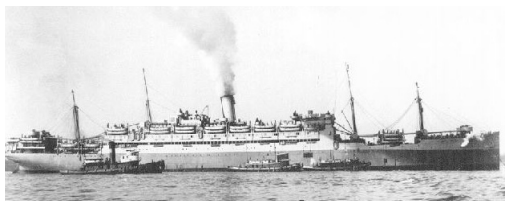
Early one bleak cool morning on 6 October 1944, the *USAT George Washington* pulled out of New York harbor.

This ship was a former luxury liner that had been captured during World War I and converted to a troopship. We were just getting up from a first night's sleep aboard when we heard some men yelling that we were on the move. We had orders to stay well out of sight until we were quite a way out in the harbor. There was a mad scramble for the side rails for a last glance at our wonderful native land as we were members of the 100th Division that was heading to where we thought was the European Theater of Operations. At least that is what we had heard through the grapevine.

I am George F. Tyson, a ruddy-complexioned, tall staff sergeant. I was a squad leader of the Second Squad, 1st Platoon, of Company L (Love Company), one of the rifle companies of the 399th Infantry Regiment.

It was a lonely time leaving our families and going to a foreign country and to war. We all had big lumps in our throats. The thought of overseas duty and actual combat I expect, was somewhat worse for me because I had left my mother in critical condition in a hospital in Fayetteville, North Carolina, just a short trip from Fort Bragg.

On top of all this, we had received word from the War Department just a few weeks before that my only brother



USAT George
Washington

was missing in action. He was a navigator on a B19 that had been shot down near Paris, France. All of this added to why I was reluctant to leave at that time. Not that I had much choice in the matter.

After some time we were on the high seas with not a sign of land. The tugs had gone back to port and we were part of a large convoy. We were the flagship of the convoy because the commanding general of the division was aboard our ship.

The ship was indeed a large one. We had some 10,000 troops aboard. It was really overcrowded; our company was quartered on the open deck on both the starboard and port sides. This suited all of us at that time because we could have plenty of fresh air, which was instrumental in helping curb seasickness. We also had a good view of the ocean and what was going on around us. Our "bunks" were our blankets and shelter halves laid on the deck with our heads against the bulkheads (walls) and our feet about two feet from the scuppers, or water run off troughs (gutters).

On our port side was a Victory ship that was much smaller than ours. Rumor had it that it was loaded with women—WACs and nurses. Most of the men wished that they were on our ship so we could talk to them.

An aircraft carrier was on our starboard side. This made us all feel a little safer. At least we knew we had aircraft that could be launched to intercept any enemy aircraft in our vicinity. At first the convoy used the zigzag courses that were so popular in wartime ship movements. The weather was fairly good the first few days out. The winds blew up a few squalls, but they soon calmed down.

"Chow," the army term for food, was a big problem with the number of troops we had on board. It was not uncommon to stand in chow line for at least an hour or two before we wound down the many steps and corridors into the

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large dining hall. It had been the ballroom and the floors and staircases were made of marble. Now, the dance floor was covered with long tables a little over waist high at which we stood to eat. Having to stand in line for so long a time and continually smelling food for so long had a tendency to make many of the GIs seasick. Many of them could not get off their bunks to go to chow.

As time went by it became a greater problem; more and more of them couldn't take those long waits for meals. We only received two meals per day, and that took up a great deal of "training" time. I was never so tired of boiled eggs in all my life. We had them at every meal.

There was a ship's exchange and we gave a list of things that we wanted to buy as only a few went to the exchange to get the various articles. Many ate some of their snacks such as Nabs, candy bars, or cookies to keep from having to go down to the dining hall.

Routine training aboard ship was the regular rifle inspection. All the boys laughed about this "chicken," but it was a must due to the salt air. The rifle would form rust very quickly if there was not a thin film of oil on it at all times. I had never heard of a battalion executive officer holding a rifle inspection for the entire battalion every day, however. Another tiring routine held quite often was boat drill. Everyone was assigned an exact position for this drill. Life preservers were a must aboard ship. They had to be worn every time you left your immediate area and the boat drill was held to prevent panic occurring in the event of an enemy torpedo or aircraft attacking the ship.

There were three different dance bands on board and one of them would give a concert every day. Radio programs and the World Series were also heard on the ship's speakers.

About four or five days out, King Neptune began to cast small hurricanes against us. It was not uncommon to see

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mountains of waves 150 feet high. It was something we had never dreamed of seeing. Our ship was riding the tempest out rather roughly, but still much better than the other ships. During the times that the ship on our flank was in sight, we could see the bow and stern going way under the water level. It would look as though the end was in sight for it, but the bow would come back up to weather out the next wave. One time during the hurricane, our ship was going full speed astern while the ship in front of us was in full speed ahead. They touched each other several times, but not much damage was done.

Our ship had propeller problems one day and we lost almost a day's time before it was repaired. It seemed like we would never get going again. Many of the GIs played cards, sang songs, or just "shot the bull" to while away the lonesome time.

Along about the eighth or ninth day out, the storm became so bad that the water was getting all over the upper deck on which Company L was billeted. We were given orders to move all of our equipment and belongings to the Officer's Club. Two others and myself who had our bunks in one of the corners, decided that we might not get too wet, so we remained on deck. There was a deck above us where the lifeboats were kept so there was an "overhead" (ceiling) that offered some protection. The rails were closed only half way up, but fortunately we didn't get too wet.

After 12 nights of gales, phosphorescent lights caused by chemicals in the ocean, blackouts on all outer decks, the rugged cliffs of Africa appeared. Gibraltar was on our port side with its many lights blinking. Land was in sight from the Atlas Mountains and the Spanish cliffs and moors for quite a while.

We stayed a good distance out, respecting the neutrality limits until we reached Marseilles, France, which soon showed up on the horizon. All along our trip in the

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Mediterranean, the porpoises were swimming all around the ship waiting for the garbage and refuse that was hurled out into the water.



The Rock of Gibraltar