

## LOVE COMPANY

### TRENCH FOOT

Many men were going on sick call because of trench foot, which is a form of frostbite. This can result from not taking off combat boots, letting the feet dry in the air, and changing into dry socks. So many soldiers were getting trench foot that we heard that the big brass in the rear echelons threatened to court-martial soldiers who went on sick call with trench foot. They must have thought that that was a brilliant idea, but who would be left to man the front lines? Certainly, a sick and miserable GI at the front could use a court-martial to ease his suffering. If he was a private, what could he lose in rank and pay? How unhappy would he be in a stockade, miles from the front and served hot food and given a clean bed and a roof over his head? It would have been almost as welcome as a million-dollar wound.

In reality, no one was even threatened with a court-martial, because it was extremely difficult to prevent trench foot when you were always on the move with the enemy just a few hundred yards in front of you. Seldom did you take off your boots and change your socks if you even had a dry pair, because you never knew when you had to move out. It snowed and rained, and nothing you wore was dry. If you took off your boots, you could not easily get them back on because your feet were swollen. At night, you slept a few hours at a time in your foxhole with your boots on and with your weapon at your side. If nature called and you had to climb out of the foxhole to dig a cat-hole and relieve yourself, the time and effort you needed to put on your three pairs of socks and boots could result in an "accident." It happened that some men who had taken their boots off did not bother to put them on to go to the "latrine." They ran through the snow in stockinged feet. At least one soldier had to leave his boots behind when the Germans attacked during the night and we had to retreat.

Finally, after a week or ten days of not being able to take off my boots, I removed them and found that my feet were swollen, but I did not think it was a major problem. I felt okay otherwise, and it was nothing to be worried about. For a few days, as I walked, it seemed that there were pebbles in my shoes and I did not want to step very hard on my feet. I told one of my officers about it, and he said I must go to a doctor in the medical battalion. For the first time, I went to see the medics. When I took off my

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boots and socks, the soles of my feet were thick, deeply wrinkled, deathly white, and covered with red spots. I thought they could use a little talcum powder and would be okay, but the doctor said I had trench foot and I had to go to the hospital.

I had mixed feelings about this, because I did not think I needed to go to the hospital and I did not want to leave my buddies. I thought trench foot meant that your feet turned black and your toes had to be amputated. Besides, on the way to the hospital, I saw others who had wounds and ailments that were much worse than mine. I could walk while some men were on stretchers. I looked fine, while others had bandages. I could talk, while others mumbled incoherently. I was just too healthy.

When we arrived at the hospital, a sergeant called out the name of each man in the group, alphabetically, and told them to enter. I found myself standing all alone when he got to the end of the list and had not called my name. He came over to me and said, "Pfc. Khoury, do you have relatives in Detroit?" I said, "Yes, on my mother's side, but I don't know them." He replied, "I think we're cousins. My family is Naimy. How are you doing? Trench foot? That's not bad. Take care of yourself. Good luck." With a handshake and a hug, we went our separate ways.

The hospital was in the town of Vittel that is famous for its mineral water. On the entrance to the hospital there is a plaque commemorating its service as a U.S. Army hospital during World War I. Again, this was a repetition of history with new actors filling the roles of those actors who had retired from the stage of mortal combat.

In the hospital, I found other men from Love Company who had been there for some time. Some were about to be discharged and sent back to the front, and they were not very happy. Others were in very serious condition and were scheduled to go to England or the States. Every day there was a list of new arrivals, and I asked anyone from the company about the latest news. I read the Army newspaper "Stars and Stripes" but all the reports covered the First, Third, and Ninth Army actions. For the Seventh Army, the story was always the same: "Some patrol activity on the Seventh Army front." Apparently, the newspaper did not think there was anything of importance to report in our part of the world. That was strange because the hospital was filled with so many of our guys and more came in every day.

Red Cross girls came around to each soldier to offer a toiletry kit of a razor, shaving cream and brush, toothpaste and brush, and comb. All of this was from U.S. Army supplies. They brought around a selection of

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reading materials, such as the Stars and Stripes, the magazine "Yank", condensed versions of civilian periodicals, and paperback books. They also supplied stationery in the form of postcards, writing paper and envelopes that had "Red Cross" printed on it. They offered to help those who could not write or who needed help writing letters to their folks and loved ones at home. The Red Cross girls were helpful in giving time to converse, listen and build up morale among the soldiers.

The Army nurses had the difficult work of treating the sick and wounded. They did all the really vital work of giving penicillin shots, changing bandages, taking readings of temperature and blood pressure, attending in operating rooms, cleaning the dirt-caked bodies and wounds of new arrivals, and so much more. They worked long hours and saved so many lives that the doctors owed much of their success to these women. The men also knew that it was the Army nurses who were always there when they needed them. Whenever someone says the Red Cross girls did so much for our wounded soldiers, I must explain that they were not nurses. It was only the Army nurses who were part of the medical team that cared for the wounded and sick soldiers.

For the first time in military history, more soldiers died of wounds than from infection and sickness. In past wars, a wound, however slight, would become infected and usually the soldier would die. He was left where he fell, often to bleed to death. Most often, however, he died of dysentery, fever, pneumonia, malaria, or other diseases caused by bad food or bad weather conditions. Napoleon's Grande Armee was defeated more by the Russian winter and lack of supplies than by the Russian army.

Not until Florence Nightingale set up hospitals and gave medical treatment during the Crimean War was anything done for the soldiers in battle. Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross during the Civil War to help treat the soldiers in combat. Nevertheless, it was not until World War II that penicillin and highly trained and dedicated nurses and doctors of the U.S. Army saved so many soldiers' lives from sickness and disease. They were heroic in their prompt treatment of everyone, including enemy soldiers.

The hospital stay was a beautiful vacation from the front line. The best of everything was available: food, bed, shelter, and tender loving care. There were no Army routines: uniforms, weapons, saluting, formations, inspections, etc. It was just taking it easy while you recuperated. Of course, those who were seriously sick or wounded were fighting for their lives. Fortunately, most of them survived after they reached the hospital.

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On the home front, the American Red Cross notified my family that I was in a hospital in France. The delegate said that it would be a nice gesture for my father to make a donation to support their organization. He promptly gave \$25.00 to the delegate, who suggested that he should increase it to \$50.00. Instead of \$50.00 he gave \$100.00!

A few days later, he received my letter from the hospital telling him not to give a cent to the American Red Cross! In my opinion, their contribution in World War II was far less than they claimed.

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### L COMPANY REVITALIZED

While I was in the hospital L Company was moving constantly, as the Morning Reports indicated:

*12 Jan 45 Left Enchenberg Fr by motor at 1030 Arrived at Glassenberg Fr 1100 Distance motored 3 miles.*

*14 Jan 45 Left Glassenberg Fr 1900 by foot Arrived at Lambach Fr 1920 Distance marched 3/4 miles.*

*18 Jan 45 Left Lambach Fr 1800 by motor Arrived at Siersthal Fr 1810 distance motored 1 mile.*

*6 Feb 45 left Siersthal Fr at 1730 by foot and arrived at Lambach Fr 1750 distance marched 1 1/4 miles.*

The company spent more than two weeks in Siersthal, from 18 January to 6 February 1945. Prior to that move, there were 110 men assigned to the company but 9 were on sick leave. So there were only 101 men, including cooks, clerks and officers, against the assigned number of 186 men and 6 officers.

There was a turnover of officers in a very short period of time. On 19 January, Capt. Travis V. Hopkins took over as company commander from Capt. William E. Hallman, who had replaced First Lt. Allen T. Sykes, who had replaced Capt. Carl D. Alfonso who was the original company commander until 2 January 1945. 2nd Lt. Bennett D. Taylor was transferred to I Company and 2nd Lt. Thomas E. Plante was transferred to A Company of the 399th Infantry Regiment during this time. 2nd Lt. William H. Hankling, from M Company, 399th, was the new weapons platoon leader and 1st Lt. Lawrence L. Kirton, from Anti-Tank Company, 399th, was assigned as a new rifle platoon leader.

T. Sgt. Alfred W. Coursey and S. Sgt. John S. Rode were given battlefield commissions and promoted to 2nd Lieutenants on 16 January 1945. They had been platoon sergeants that had been in combat and knew their assignments well.

The missing ingredient in the company finally arrived on 23 January 1945 in the form of 10 replacements, all privates and all riflemen. The following day, 30 more green riflemen arrived. Some brass hat in the upper echelon of the Army did not like to use the word "replacement" because the implication was that a wounded or dead soldier was being re-

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placed by a healthy one. It was suggested that "reinforcement" was a better name. The idea was to hide the fact that soldiers, particularly infantrymen, get sick, wounded and killed in war. Perhaps the word "war" should have been changed to "altercation" for the sake of mothers who worried about their teen-aged sons in the infantry.

Soldiers who were wounded or sick were evacuated to medical facilities in the rear. Many of them returned to the company but most were assigned to other non-combat units. At the end of January, Love Company had a roster of 151 men but 9 were absent because of sickness or other assignment. On 6 February, there were 158 men assigned to the company when it moved out of Siersthal. Among those left behind was Pvt. William H. Kemp who came as replacement on 24 January and had a non-battle connected, self-inflicted gun shot wound of his right hand on 30 January. He did not return to the company.

Pvt. Dominick A. DeAngelo was assigned to the company on 6 October 1944, when we embarked from New York. He was with the company from the first day of combat. Then he was SIA (sick in action?) 4 January and rejoined the company on 10 January. He had a non-battle connected, self-inflicted gun shot wound of the left hand on 3 February. Though he did not leave Siersthal with the company, he did join it about a month later.