

Sam Tyler, Chaplain

by Gerald Weber, 398-HQ, 3d Battalion

November 7, 1944, in the rear of a 2½-ton, 6-x-6 truck, on the way to the front line, we wondered who would win the presidential election back home. We didn't know where we were going or in what group we would be replacements. That night I was assigned to HQ Company, 3rd Battalion, 398th. It was their first day of combat.

In a few more days I was laying telephone wire to rifle companies on the front line in the area of Rambervillers, France. A burst of incoming shells caused me to drop the wire and seek shelter in a rifleman's partly-dug foxhole. Before the shells had stopped I heard a Jeep go by towards the rear. I peeked out to see who was the nut to be so foolish. The chaplain and his aide had a wounded man on a stretcher heading for the aid station. The wounded man had shrapnel through his helmet sticking into his head. I learned later he died in the aid station.

I had not met the chaplain yet, so inquired who this was to be so brave that he would try to help in such a dangerous time. It was Sam Tyler and his aide. This was my first, but not the last, time seeing them work.

Further into France, we liberated a wine cellar. So many men helped themselves that an order came down to close it because too many were getting drunk. Chaplain Sam and his assistant drove up, informed the poor Frenchman that he was an officer, showed him his captain's bars and said the officers had their liquor rations from the States and the enlisted men didn't. He and his aide proceeded to load up the Jeep and went off into the night to spread good cheer to the "Dog Faces." He did all he could to keep up the morale. When I became aware of the opportunity, I, too, tried to take advantage of the situation, and I didn't even drink until then. I picked up two bottles of something and left. Later my buddy and I drank part of one bottle and shared the rest with the switchboard operator. I saved the other bottle for a later time. I don't know what it was, but it was very pleasant and did not faze me at all. Must not have been alcohol!

Another time, the "Krauts" counterattacked and we had to withdraw and consolidate. This time I was riding a vehicle with telephone equipment—always catching a ride when possible. This was the main road for most to leave by. A little way down the road we saw a Jeep over in the ditch. Next to it was Chaplain Sam, holding his hat in his hand and cussing up a storm that the Jeep would not stay on the road. This time he was the one that had a little too much to drink! He could really put it away.

Before we reached Bitche, France, I was carrying wire up to the battalion commander, Major Ernest. We were attacking and taking a lot of tree bursts. The major was calling both flanks to check on the progress. During a lull, Chaplain Sam came up to the major and asked if he could go back, get his Jeep, come up the road so that he'd be there in case someone were to be wounded. Major Ernest said that his troops were on both sides of the road, but it hadn't been swept for mines. Sam said "to hell with them. Let the mines take care of themselves. If someone gets hurt I want to be there." Given permission, off he went, and soon was driving up the road.

During the battle for Bitche, he and his assistant were really busy because casualties were all over. After the town proper was taken, he held church service in the barracks at Bitche. We were gathered around the remains of an old latrine. As I got up to leave, my foot slipped and was partially submerged into a semi-liquid human manure. I cleaned the best I could but had to move on. I'm sure I attended other services with Chaplain Sam as minister, but this is the only one that sticks in my mind.

I met a lot of chaplains during my years, but Sam is the only one I got to know. He preached many sermons and those best learned were those he preached by doing. He was always there to help if someone needed it, no matter how much flack was flying, or how many shells were bursting. It seemed he had nerves of steel or no nerves at all. I never learned which.

We were pulled off the line near Waiblingen, Germany, and Sam became ill and was taken to a hospital. Before he returned, I was hurt and off to another hospital. After that I lost track of him, but I never forgot.

Many years later I learned he returned to civilian life and was the minister for the “Old North Church” in Boston, Mass., the one made famous by the ride of Paul Revere. He has since passed away.

Over the years of working with Boy Scouts and others, I have told “war stories” and of the chaplain I had known. Sam Tyler will live in a lot of memories.

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