

# Hello Herb

by Joe Woods, 398-M

*Herb “Jake” Chandler, OpLEG “Captain” for his Company M, 398th Infantry Regiment, received a letter from Joe Woods in response to the Captain’s letter he had sent to members of his company. Joe made a contribution to OpLEG in memory of his fallen comrades, 1st Lieutenant Chester Gray and Private First Class Frank Burrola, and gave a compelling description of events.*

Thank you for your letter re. “Operation LEGACY” and “Our Remembrance” of our fallen comrades. Not only do I remember both 1st Lieutenant Chester Gray and PFC Frank Burrola, but they are among my saddest memories as I was beside each soldier when they gallantly gave their lives.

During our battalion’s November 22, 1944, attack on an enemy-held mountain area, Lieutenant Gray was leading the 1st Platoon in single file—with me alongside him as platoon runner—in an attempt to contact and give machine-gun support to the riflemen.

Upon reaching the summit of the mountain, Gray stopped and directed me to go to our right side while he would go to the left. As I turned to go to the right, suddenly a shot rang out. I heard Gray moan and fall. Looking back, I found him lying flat about four yards away. I noticed he had been shot through the helmet as evident by a large hole surrounded with blood, etc. Although I did not see any enemy, I knew the general position and fired two shots into the bush area as I saw gunsmoke there. No return fire came back. I then ran back downhill until I met Sergeant Ted Lederer leading the 1st Platoon in single file up the mountain.

In the ensuing “fire fight” and with Captain Jones aiding the directing of machine-gun fire, several of the enemy were killed and captured. Days later, I led a Graves Registration group back to an area to recover Gray’s body. I explained the situation to Ted and led the group back to the scene.

In the 3rd Battalion’s December 1944 assault on the pillbox fortifications and barbed-wire entrenchment’s at Bitche, France, under heavy 88 and mortar shelling, Frank Burrola and I were blown skyward while our machine-gun unit was attacking a pillbox surrounded by barbed wire. The explosion hurled us both several feet into the air.

On hitting the ground, I saw Frank lying motionless. A closer exam by me showed he was bleeding profusely from his nose, neck, and mouth areas. Al Brunkow and his machine-gun crew were nearby digging in their gun position. No assistance could be spared, so Al Brunkow advised me to carry Frank over and through the barbed-wire entrenchment to the medical station in the just-occupied pillbox.

A tall, lanky medic answered my calls for aid. He was on the other side of the four-to-five-foot-high barbed wire (pillbox side). Frank was semi-conscious and called out in a pleading voice, “Oh God, not on Sunday.” Although weakened from yellow jaundice and bruised from the shared explosion which Frank and I suffered, and the subsequent fall back to the frozen ground, I did succeed in passing Frank’s limp body over and through the barbed wire into the hands of the medic. Frank outweighed me by about 35 pounds. I was subsequently told by our 1st sergeant that Frank died several days later.

I am forwarding a contribution to help the Legacy. Wishing you “Good Fortune” and “Good Health.”  
Joe Woods

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