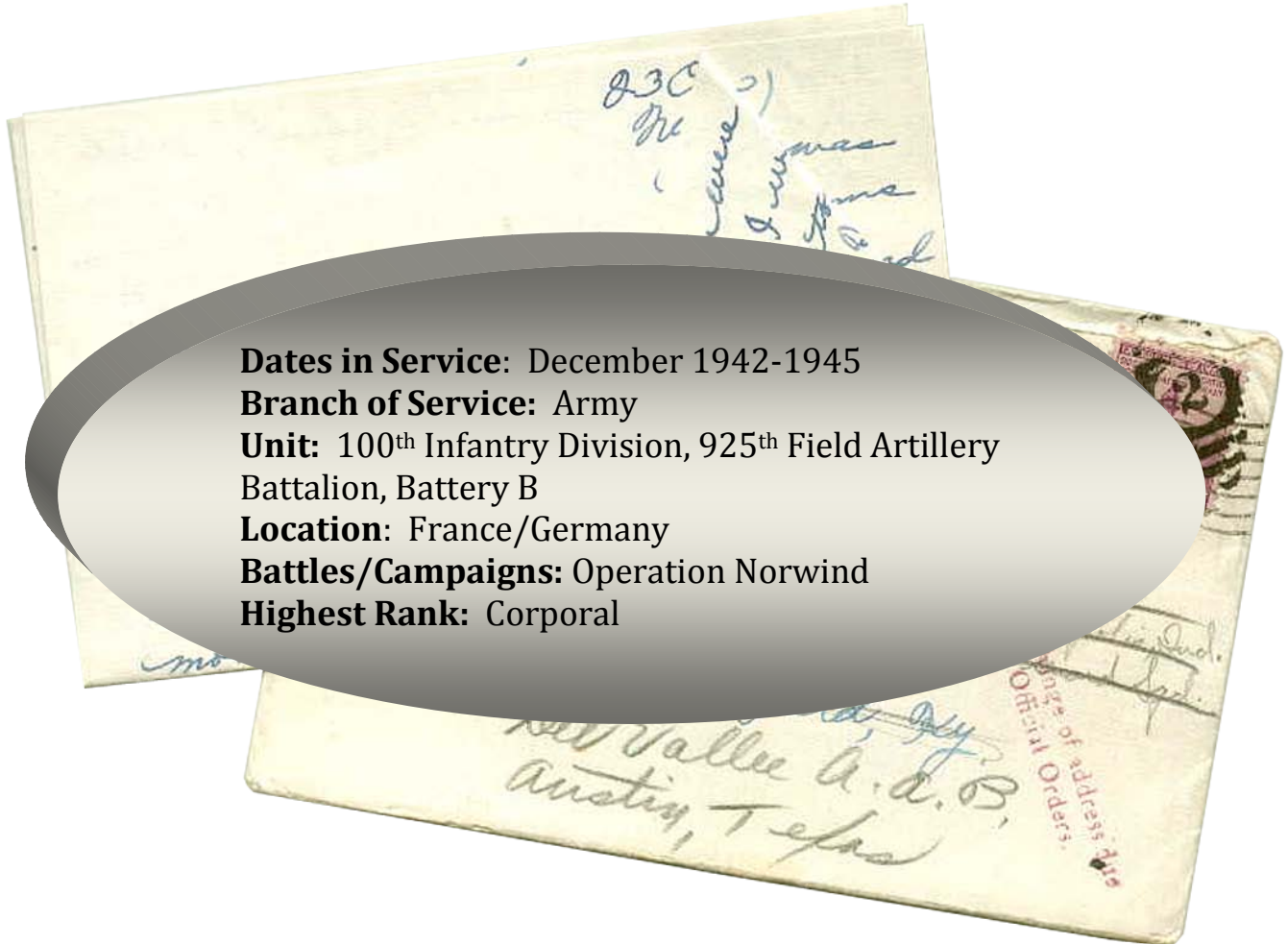


The combat stories of **PETER LIKANCHUK**



Peter Likanchuk, the son of a Russian father and a Ukranian mother, recalls moving through small towns in the German countryside in a dangerous position as a forward observer.

These stories were compiled by an interviewer, who prefers to remain anonymous, and goes by the nickname 'Kilroy Was Here.' These stories are posted through a partnership between 'Kilroy Was Here' and the Witness to War Foundation. Permission to use any of these materials must be granted by 'Kilroy Was Here,' which can be obtained through the Witness to War Foundation.



Peter Likanchuk was a first generation American whose dad was a white Russian and whose mother came from the Ukraine. Both came to the United States in the late 1890s looking for a better life. Peter was born in 1922 in Chester, Pennsylvania and was drafted in 1942. When asked if he was worried about being captured by the Germans and what could happen to him, having a Russian background, he says he had heard about it but never thought much about it.

After finishing training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, we packed our gear and loaded on the back of trucks for our trip to an area near Lebanon, Tennessee for what were called the “Tennessee Maneuvers.” Here we paired up and lived in our two man tents. It was also here that we had what we called a top kick (first sergeant) by the name of Gibbs. Sergeant Gibbs was a large older man and it took two ammo belts connected together to go around him. Each morning he would make his way down the line of tents waking us up in his own loving way. As he made his way down the line of tents, you could hear the guys behind him saying, “Coming dumbo.” (Years later at a reunion I was sitting in a room with some of the guys talking and as we sat there, I noticed this guy who walked past the doorway a number of times and looked as if he was lost. As he walked pass once again and, thinking it was Sergeant Gibbs, I called out “Coming dumbo.” It turned out to be



old sergeant Sackett who had been forward observer with us.)

I made the trip overseas on the USS General Gordon, and as I was walking around on the top deck one day, I came across my good friend Jack Crowley who grew up down the street from my house and who was attached to the 398th. Jack was just sitting there sucking on a lemon drop for his seasickness. I asked, “Is that you Jack?” and as he looked up at me, his face said it all.

We landed at the port of Marseille, France and spent a week unloading our gear and equipment. On November the first we moved into the vicinity of Houssaras. On the front lines I worked with the Forward Observers post laying the lines from the CP battery to the forward post. Most of the time there were three of us, along with lieutenant Phillips who lived in a small dugout covered with limbs for days at a time. Lieutenant Phillips was a tall thin guy from Ohio with sandy hair and was well liked by all of us who served under him. He was one of those officers you could talk to. The other two enlisted guys were Tony Maffei, who was from Long Island, New York and was killed on December the ninth; the other was Otis Jefferson who was from Pennsylvania and was killed on November fourteenth. On the day that Otis was killed, I had gone back to the aid station to have my ingrown toe nail removed and didn't receive the news about Otis until I return back to the post.



However, our first casualty was Lieutenant Tison, who was wounded on November the tenth, and I don't recall him returning to our unit but do remember running into him while I was in England.

All the guys had an ongoing joke, which was, if you are looking for Peter, just look up and it was from then on that they called me ape. To cut back repairs on the lines, I would hang a lot of the lines up in the trees so the tanks wouldn't be running over them. I also had a mouth harp I carried and used to entertain myself with, but my biggest request from the guys was always "Knock IT OFF," a tune I never learned.

One day as we were sitting on the side a road just outside of this small town, the Lieutenant told me and this other boy to stay with the jeep and radio while he and his aid checked out the woods outside of town. With that, the two of them made their way across the field and on up into the woods. After sitting there for some time and thinking they should have returned by now, we drove the jeep on into the town thinking maybe we would find the Lieutenant there. As we came into the town, two GI's stopped me and asked where I was heading. After explaining to them we were looking for our Lieutenant, who was checking out the woods, I pointed out that I was advised that Germans covered the woods. As we sat there on the side of the street waiting, two girls came walking by and as they passed by us one of them said something in Polish. Hearing them, I



replied in Polish and as I did, they both stopped and looked at me, shocked to hear a GI speak their language. Later that day we ran into the Lieutenant and his aid.

I had two close calls as a forward observer. Our post was always in view of the front lines, and one day we had set up in this old French garrison, which was also the same day Captain Eddie wanted to come up front and direct fire himself. If I hadn't looked back and seen him and signaled for him to take cover, he would have gotten hit. The closest time for me came the day we had set up in a stable, calling in German troop movements. Just as I stepped away from the window a mortar round came in and hit right in front of it.

One day we were going down this road that ran alongside a stream looking for a place to cross. Finding a place that looked good, we started across and as we got about half way across, the Germans opened up on us from the other side. In no time, the driver had the jeep in reverse heading back for cover. We had heard the rumor that the Germans had broken through to the north of us.

In the early morning of January the first (1945), I was down in the basement of a farmhouse trying to get some sleep with a number of our infantry guys when all at once all hell broke loose. Shells were falling all around the house and as it started, someone at the top of the stairs yelled down to us "Get up here we're falling back!" The basement was dark and everyone was running around grabbing things and that's when I



noticed some SOB had run off with my white field jacket, leaving me their muddy one. As I made my way to the door, a Lieutenant was outside trying to get the infantry boys grouped up; from the darkness in front of me I could see flashes coming from German small arms fire. The three of us jumped into our jeep, and by daybreak we had fallen back to the vicinity outside of Bitche where we took up a defensive position. That afternoon and night I recall hearing all of our guns firing as I hugged the ground for all it was worth trying to keep from being hit by friendly fire.

Every once in a while we would be sent back for three days to the rear for R and R to clean up, a change of clothes and a hot meal. Out on the lines you hoped each morning the kitchen jeep would show up with a hot meal, but here again that was hopeful thinking for the most part. As far as seeing a Red Cross doughnut wagon goes, I only recall seeing one or two, and as far as a USO show, I remember one that was set up out in a field with Bob Hope and the Andrew sisters. At that show was also Max's Bear who was a big time boxer back then.

As we made our way through the small towns and villages, you knew which house was the mayor's by the pile of manure in front of it. He always had the largest pile.