



MY MILITARY CAREER

(SOME REMEMBRANCES OF SERVICE IN WORLD WAR II)

by William J. Newman

As recalled in September 1994

WAR IS HECK

Right after Thanksgiving the weather turned cold and rainy. Also our infantry was pushing into the forts around Metz, taking heavy casualties.

The only way our trucks could move off the road was to put chains on the wheels. Sometimes the trucks had to be winched out of mud holes even when they had chains on. Because the front was now stationery, we moved our howitzers into a water-logged field with foxholes full of water. After all of the constant moving, it was good to settle down for a few days.

I didn't realize that I was going to pay a price for being wet, cold and most of the time in a cramped posture in a truck or under a shelter half (a half of a pup tent placed over a shallow hole in the ground).

With the guns in place I was given an area to patrol at night a little out from the howitzers. My first night out I watched our guns fire and listened to the constant thunder as our shells and the enemy's exploded at the front just 2 miles from us.

It was raining. I had been wet through and through for 3 or 4 days. I then topped it off by stepping into a 5 foot deep foxhole full of water. When I went off patrol, I slipped under my shelter half, took off my shoes and socks and tried to sleep. Sometime during the night my feet felt like they had caught fire. I can only explain the pain by saying that it felt like someone had taken a hot poker and was grinding it into my toes.

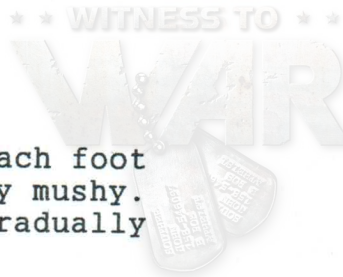
I remember moaning for the rest of the night. By morning I was just about crippled. I could barely put my boots and socks on. Each step sent pain up my legs. I had no idea what was going on. I decided I had better go to the aid station for some medical help.

As I approached the aid station I realized what had happened at the front the night before with all the fireworks I had seen and heard. There were wounded GI's all over the ground outside the aid tent. There was one doctor and a couple of medics giving various treatments to prepare the wounded to be sent back to hospitals for more complete treatment.

I hobbled over to one of the medics and told him about my foot problem. He said I probably had trench foot. I asked if he had something for the pain. He said, "See these guys bleeding. They have real pain. We can't do anything for you. You'll either heal or you will get worse. If you get worse, maybe then we'll do something for you. Go back to your outfit. Put on dry clothes, especially dry socks and boots."

I had no dry clothes or boots but we had been told to try to carry a pair of dry socks in our combat jacket. Unfortunately my dry socks got soaked the night before when I fell into the foxhole. So I wrung out my extra pair of socks, stuffed them between my underwear and my body and got them reasonably dry in a couple of hours.





When I changed socks, I looked at my feet. 2 or 3 toes on each foot were weirdly discolored and the flesh at the joints was very mushy. The pain had eased up a bit. I went back to my duties and gradually the pain went away.

It was months before the softened flesh firmed up but to this day I have the scars of what was to be my worst war injury.