

## Ben Payne, In European Hospital, Writes Interesting Letter About Fighting In France

The following letter which Mrs. Ben Payne recently received from her husband, Sgt. Ben L. Payne, written in a hospital in France, is the most realistic report we have yet seen of what our boys are going through in the European battle. The letter came through without censorship eradications and the Sentinel is grateful to Mrs. Payne for allowing us to publish it. The "Steve" he mentions is their son:

January 30, 1945  
In Hospital in France  
Dearest Wife and Son:

Betty, I'll try and tell you in this letter about my fighting. In southern France, it wasn't so rough. I led my platoon for over three months and in my squad had several wounded but none were killed. We lost in an ambush one day, five at once out of the whole platoon in the mountains; as yet, none of my boys. After 96 days of fighting and constant patrol work, we were relieved and sent up near Paris for a long rest. But what happened then? The Germans made the Belgian bulge and all the paratroopers were thrown in to stop it and the 551st. (of course), went in, too.

I was running a platoon then and had 33 souls in my command. Well, you've read what hell we ran into and it was sure rough. We paratroopers continually attacked and charged against superior forces and tanks. We stopped the Germans finally and started driving them back.

My men were magnificent and would follow "Daddy," (they always called me that) anywhere. By this time I had several wounded but as yet none of my boys were dead. The weather was icy cold never was there anything hot—just attack and kill. I've killed dozens with a machine-gun myself after my boys were wounded.

Finally we started an attack and for six days we kept driving. I did not sleep, except for minutes at a time, during those six days. My platoon lieutenant was killed the first day and from then on it was mine. Capt. Quinn was wounded but kept on fighting and would call me and take my hand and say, "Ben, here's where I want your platoon to attack." We kept on and on.

Artillery wiped out all but two men in my old first squad so I just had two squads left. Attack after attack and men kept dropping and the fifth day I looked around and my radio operator and myself were the only ones not killed or wounded. God—it was hell.

Capt. Quinn had been wounded again and taken back and Lt. Sand was company commander. Only two officers and me left in the company and still the order came down, "Attack!" So Lt. Sand gave the other officer and me each twelve men and we carried on. The whole battalion was shot up.

The morning of the sixth day, my platoon (12 men) attacked over forty Jerries in a little woods on a road intersection and we killed all but two. Our Colonel was killed that morning. Gosh, he was swell. He had told me about his baby girl just the night before.

After we took the road intersection we prepared to hold. It and I was out organizing our defenses and the Germans started shelling us with big stuff. One shell lit right between me and "Chris" (radio operator) and hit him in the belly. All he said was (real quiet-like) "Of all places, right in the belly," and then he sort of grinned and died. He had been my buddy for over six months in combat.

The next shell tore my leg about off and I was finished for a while. I got the radio working and called for our artillery to fire on the German gun and that silenced it and then the other Lieutenant came over and took over and I bandaged my leg and started to crawl back to where I'd get picked up. I'd killed a lot of those Jerries and will never regret it.

If, after I get well, I end up in another outfit, you'll know that the 551st was so shot up that there was none left to rejoin. I sure hope not. It was the best outfit in the world.

Be sure and tell Bessie (sister) that I came across Kenneth Craig in Belgium but that he was dead. We never had time to bury anybody.

I had enough German lugsers for all the boys at home but I left them out there as I had to crawl over half a mile up hill in the snow to where I could be taken care of. Be sure and let Dad read this and I'll tell you all about it some day.

My leg is sure coming along fine and my precious wife and little son, I love you both more today than I did yesterday and today not as much as tomorrow. Goodnite, my darling, love—Ben.

All my best buddies are dead and I'll never forget. There must be a

very special sort of heaven for soldiers. They were such boys and did look to "Daddy" for everything and I didn't have time even to bury them. It'll be a long time before my hate ceases.

If I had my way, I'd exterminate the whole German race. I never took but one prisoner; that was right after I jumped—I was soft then. The Germans always tortured American paratroopers. They sure hate and fear us. If I last long enough—we will finish them all.

The war may end before I get well. It looks good now but never trust any but a dead German. If we don't crush them completely, why our "Steve" will be doing it next time and, Betty, that would be too much for Daddy. I'll gladly go back into it and take the rap if it will mean peace and security for the two I love most.

In the Belgian Bulge battles over 75,000 American boys were killed, mostly infantry and paratroopers. Truth will out some day. It's a tough war.

In the Belgian Bulge battle, the Germans knew that they were facing the 82nd Airborne Division and Paratroopers. They hate us and fear us. They threw three and four times our number against us but we'd drive them back. Of course, in time we were all worn down, killed or wounded, but we stopped the Von Rundstedt's push and then counter-attacked and drove them back.

We had no tanks and time after time attacked tanks on foot and knocked them out. When my men got killed, I'd just take the ammo off them and mutter "aw, hell" and then we'd move forward. Sometimes I wouldn't find but a leg or an arm. I was terrible to be so alone. I always wondered where the rest of the Army was!

Just heard over the radio that my 82nd Airborne Division was attacking again in Germany. The Paratroopers are sure living and dying up to their reputation. On one moonlight night our whole battalion infiltrated through German lines and reformed and pulled a commando raid four miles behind their main defense line. We caught two companies all sleeping and wiped them out, also a number of tanks and vehicles we burned. Then we started fighting our way back to our own lines and made it, too.

The Germans massed a lot of armor and men the next day and started to attack us and our air corps caught them out in the open and decimated them. Dad, I'm telling you, it's been a hard old row at times but when they killed my own boys—I took me down. I've cried many a lonely night since I've been in the hospital. I sure loved my boys. Just kids, they were, you know.

One day I went, during a lull to find Kenneth Craig (as his outfit was fighting on our right). I found him dead but not buried yet. He'd been killed the day before. He was a brave man and a fierce fighter. His Captain told me that Ken's examples of fearlessness were exceptional. God, sometimes I wonder where it will all end.

One thing I always noticed on my boys' faces (when I could still recognize them), after they were killed, was the look of peace on their faces. They had always been so tired and hungry and would ask me the darndest questions. It was hard to be strong at times but I never let them down. The guns and ammo always are so heavy and there was no chow and no water but snow. One must go through it to understand, at all. The cold and snow are hell, alone.

### Another Incident

At one time my platoon (what was left of us) were crossing an area over 300 yards across. I had one machine gun on one flank firing across the front and an automatic rifle on the other flank, making cross-bands of bullets in front of us. My own command post hole was in the center where I could keep control. Along about three a. m. the Jerries attacked. We could see them plainly in the moonlight against the white snow. My B.A.R. man and machine-gunner opened up and then the machine-gun quit. So I crawled over to their hole and two of my boys were badly wounded. I pulled them away from the gun and reloaded and swung her around. Steadily and continually I fired till dawn. We broke the attack—my little band—and when the sun came up I counted over a hundred dead Krauts out in front of our positions. Good hunting, Dad, but two more of my boys were dead.

This was no extraordinary feat or anything. It is done by unsung and unhonored heroes every day, countless times. The nights were hell,

though with the cold and wet. May be this letter will help you at home to understand what war is. If you pay attention to lots of articles, one would think all we do is drink and chase women and such but in the infantry, it's mud-sloughin', fighting, dying and hell.

But I'm not complaining and my wound let's me sleep pretty well; just so we know the ones we love understand. May be some day Steve will read and understand this.

It is good that the mind does not retain vividness. I'll never forget how my boys would always ask, "What next, Daddy?" and fix their bayonets. Dad, no one ever had a better bunch to lead. All of them are dead now or sorely wounded. Again I say there must be a very special heaven for soldiers.

Our officers were wonderful but most of them got killed. Good officers always get killed or wounded. Infantrymen always catch hell.

## Coos Boy In A.A.F. Disagrees With Lans

Writing to the Sentinel from his post at Las Vegas, Nev., a Coos county boy, Bruce A. Bishop, nephew of Wm. Ferbrache of Coquille, who receives the Sentinel regularly and has noted the recently published controversy about Japanese-American citizens, addresses the following letter to Lans Leneve:

Dear Lans: First let me say, that I have been in the Army Air Forces approximately two years, during which time I have made a definite attempt to keep my mind open and liberal. I doubt if I could have done so, had I remained "holed up," in an area comprising two counties for the last 45 or 50 years.

I was stationed at Minneapolis, Minnesota, as an Aviation Cadet for six months in 1943. Minneapolis is located just 11 miles from Camp Savage, the Infantry Training Center for Japanese-Americans, whom you seem to dislike rather violently. This camp has turned out several thousand of the very best Infantrymen in the world. These men made up the Purple Heart Battalion (100th Bn.) and many other 100 per cent fighting American outfits too numerous to mention here. While there I had the privilege (and I do consider it a privilege) of meeting several of these men. Those with whom I became acquainted were all good Christians, with better than average educations, and from good homes.

One technical sergeant, in particular, was quite a singer and had a build on him that was excellent; I would much rather have him as a friend than a foe if for no other reason. I am very sorry that you couldn't meet some of them. I believe you would change your mind. These boys don't stand by and gripe about buying bonds nor grumble about the way the war is being run nor about the choice of the people for president; "they pitch in and soldier!"

I talked to one of their officers, an Anglo-Saxon like us, who stated that he was proud to be a member of their outfit and would bet on their ability to stack up alongside any soldier in the world. Now a compliment like that doesn't come very often in the Army so it means something when an officer says it. The German Army in Italy would have given a lot if those boys hadn't have been in the fight. They are more afraid of them than they are of us. General Mark Clark, commanding officer of the fighting fifth told them, "I'm proud of you men and I'm proud to be able to fight by your side. . . . America will forever be indebted to you."

One of those men from Camp Savage I know pretty well. We used to visit the sights of Minneapolis together before he was suddenly shipped out on secret orders. I heard from him recently and he says he is still working for G-2. (Army Intelligence). His job is to decode Japanese code and teach the Japanese language. In other words he is entrusted with far weightier secrets and codes than most other men. Still in the eyes of some, he is just a dirty Jap fit only for deportation. He was prevented from seeing his wife in Hawaii last February when their baby died because the Army considered him too valuable a man to entrust to the mercy of our poor, overworked, and abused, civilian population in the state of California.

Well, that's enough for now, Lans, I hope to be able to argue and squabble with you again. Please write an answer and I'll pick it to pieces in the next issue.

By the way you know Bill Ferbrache and R. W. Bishop, don't you? I'm Bill's nephew and Mr. Bishop's eldest son. Perhaps we'll meet personally some day.

Hoping you won't back down from a good argument or fight, (verbally, you understand), because I'm afraid it wouldn't be becoming otherwise, I am, yours sincerely, Bruce A. Bishop.

## Arthur Wilberger Has Been Over Seas For 14 Months

1 March 45

"Somewhere in France"  
Dear Editor:—In glancing at the paper of the good old home town, I've noticed all of my buddies' names so thought I'd drop a little note to let all my friends know what has happened to me since I last walked the good old streets of Coquille. I graduated from high school there with the class of '43.

I'm now somewhere in France and have been here for a considerable period now. I like France very much, it is a beautiful country. I'm learning how to parley the French a little; it's quite interesting.

I left Coquille in July '43 and started overseas on New Year's Eve; what a wonderful way to start the New Year! I spent quite some time in England and while there I was awarded the Good Conduct Medal. Since leaving "Jolly Old England" behind I've spent the rest of the time in France. I've visited Paris quite a few times; it's really quite a city. While there I attended the famous Folies Bergere. While I have been in France I've been promoted to Private First Class and have been awarded the Bronze Star for participation in a campaign here in France a few months prior to this time.

I receive the Sentinel regularly and sure am glad to have—just the same as "a letter from home." There are lots of fellows from Coquille here but as yet I haven't been "lucky enough to run into them, although while in England I did see Merrill Tozier and Don Ross. Sure swell to see someone from the old home town and shoot the breeze about the old times as peace-loving citizens. I might add at this point that I wasn't born to be a soldier and I can hardly wait to get on my old peacetime uniform once again. I would surely appreciate some addresses of home town boys who are here. I could probably get a chance to look them up so see what you can do, will you? So long, folks, I hope to be seeing you all very soon. My present address is

Pfc. Arthur L. Wilberger  
ASN 39 334 092  
Hq. 9th Repl. Depot  
APO 545 U. S. Army  
%Postmaster, New York, N. Y.  
Old papers 6c a bunch.

## NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned, on March 2, 1945, filed in the County Court for Coos County, Oregon, her final account as executrix of the last will and testament of George W. Bryant, deceased; and that said Court has made an order fixing Tuesday, April 10, 1945, at 10:00 o'clock A. M., at the County Court room in Coquille, Oregon, as the time and place for hearing objections thereto, and for the final settlement of said estate.

Dated and published first time March 8, 1945.

Leona G. Bryant, Executrix

## Pimples Disappeared Over Night

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