

LOOK OUT BELOW!

(Continued from Page 1)

ing his front lines along the dikes.

Sergeant Stanley Butkovich of Peoria, Illinois, has always attributed to Colonel Johnson the fact that he has two useful though badly scared hands. The poor doctor received no credit at all. Butkovich, a cousin of the famous Butkovichs of Illinois and Purdue, was one of the toughest and best-liked soldiers in the regiment.

His faith and piety and fine example were worth a hundred sermons. A shell fragment went through his leg while he was still in the plane going to Normandy. He jumped in spite of this, gave himself an emphysema dressing, did more than a creditable job as demolition squad leader, and was decorated twice for his extraordinary efforts. If he should happen to read this, he would never forgive me had I used the word "heroism."

Colonel Johnson (we called him Jumpy in private) was still practicing his knife-throwing daily. He used a six-foot plywood board for a target. On one side he had Hitler's life-sized image and on the other side that of Tojo. He would practice for an hour straight and would completely lose himself in this game, snarling and growling as he threw his big bowie knife with a viciousness that sometimes sent it completely through the plywood throat of Adolph.

Then he would yell like a wild bull ape. Sometimes he missed badly; on two occasions the knife, rebounding from the board, cut him rather seriously, once on the hand and once on the leg. As mentioned before, the man had eccentricities, but he had color, lots of it, and the men idolized him.

Two weeks before we were to land in Normandy, Colonel Johnson gave one of his famous speeches to the regiment. The name "Jumpy" was given him, not just because he did sometimes make five or six parachute jumps, but because of the antics he went through when he made a speech.

"Who's the best?" he screamed.

"We're the best!" everyone of the men and officers yelled back at him.

"What are we here for?"

"To fight!" they roared.

"That's right . . . to fight!" Jumpy's eyes were flashing, and he stuck out his jaw in his inimitable manner. "Those slant eyes . . . in the Pacific and those dirty Nazi devils just four thousand miles from here. You know that what you guys are here for. They're on top now. It's been easy for them so far."

"Ya know what they're doin'?" They're poisoning the water in Naples; they're poisoning little kids and wimmin! That little skunk with the moustache knows you're coming; he knows you are out to get him, and he's scared of ya!"

In a rising crescendo of emotion, Jumpy screamed, "In just a few more months I'm going over and get him! DO YOU HEAR ME? I'M GOING OVER AND GET HIM! ARE YOU WITH ME?"

Johnson had actually swayed the men until they were snarling his emotions; they were really visualizing themselves jumping on the Reichstag or on the Eagle's Nest in Berchtesgaden.

With the men solidly behind him, the Colonel would then berate them for the high percentage of AWOLs, for venalities in the regiment, and so forth. Then he finished by telling them about the coming maneuvers and explained that it would be a test of whether they were ready to go overseas. The men were anxious to get overseas, and when Jumpy ended his speech with another strong appeal to their emotions, they went back to their barracks to write letters home to their families and to their girlfriends about their great CO and to confide their imaginary Top Secret informants: "The 501st is the outfit selected by the army brass to capture Hitler. . . . It is still a military secret, though, so don't tell anyone."

"Geronimo" was the regimental mascot, a cadaverous, bleary-eyed, beer-swilling, tobacco-chewing goat. It was the custom of parachute regiments to get a bit of publicity with pictures of their mascots floating down from the sky under a canopy of silk. The Alameda of the 501st had already made a half-dozen jumps.

Colonel Johnson didn't like the idea of another outfit getting more publicity than the 501st; besides, there would be no non-jumpers in his outfit. So, fit a harness, make a chute, call the photographers! Geronimo is going to jump!

But the airborne is a volunteer outfit, and Geronimo had not volunteered. The plane took

eight passes at the field, as each pass found Geronimo fighting a winning battle against four men, each of whom had grasped a leg. They were unable to get him out of the plane. Every time they got him near the door, Geronimo turned into a dynamo of energy.

Those scrawny legs going like pistons threatened the life and limb of everyone in the plane. Colonel Johnson was furious and gave orders to get rid of this unworthy and cowardly mascot.

Because Geronimo wouldn't jump or be pushed out of a plane, the Colonel got a bear cub for a mascot, but the thing was missing before he had it a month. Geronimo was reinstated; the band staged a beer party in his behalf, and the goat guzzled the frothy stuff to his heart's content. Later, when we were overseas, the unit that replaced us at Mackall reported that a large and vicious bear had emerged in early spring from his hibernation under one of the barracks.

One day a young man came to me with a very sad tale. His wife was leaving that evening for home in Michigan. He had been rather cross to her of late and would like to make it up to her by taking her out to dinner and perhaps to a show.

Unfortunately, however, he was caught short. As a matter of fact he was flat broke after buying her train ticket. Would the chaplain be so kind as to lend him about ten dollars? I would.

A couple of hours later I dropped into the noncoms' club as was my custom, and here he was, obviously wrapped around about nine dollars and fifty cents worth of beer. He greeted me with the joyful familiarity of an inebriate. With one hand on my shoulder and the other still holding an empty beer bottle, he spoke about half an inch from my ear. He asked me if he hadn't borrowed some money from me. I assured him that he had.

He said that he wanted to pay it back, and I told him that that made it unanimous, for I also wanted him to pay it back. He then dug into his pocket and drew out a roll of bills as large as my two fists together. He peeled through the bills until he could find such a low denomination as a ten-spot and gave it to me.

When the same young man dropped into my office a week or so later, I was ready for him. He was short again, and would I be so kind as to lend him . . . ? I asked if his wife had left for Michigan. He told me frankly that he wasn't, as a matter of fact, even married. I assured him in an unmarriageable tone of finality that I would not lend him any more money.

Then hesitatingly he drew out a five-dollar bill. Would I mind exchanging it for a five-spot of my own? "Why?" I asked. "Is that one counterfeit?"

It seems that a chaplain's money in a crap game is better than a rabbit's foot and puts just the right "hex" on the dice. (Least anyone draw any in a war is a neat conclusion. I should like to state that I did not bargain for half the "take.")

About the middle of September we were ready to board the troop trains for the Tennessee maneuver area. We were to leave on a Sunday morning, standard operating procedure for the Army. (It seemed we always moved on a Sunday morning.) But I had announced, the Sunday before, that Mass on the day of departure would be at 0430 hours, and that meant that the Catholics would have to get up at least half an hour before the rest of the regiment.

I couldn't have blamed them too much had they overslept



Rugged training in America prepared paratroopers for combat like this. Photo shows "Screaming Eagles" fighting their way through a Holland village Sept. 26, 1944.

farmers were wonderful cooks, and they would receive hungry soldiers into their houses to have a bit of breakfast of pork chops, fried potatoes and gravy, apple sauce, soda biscuits, and so on. When the soldier would ask how much it would be, the lady of the house would blushing suggest, "Is twenty-five cents all right?"

With this sort of meal in mind I approached a farm house, but first happened to look toward the barn. A couple of soldiers with their heads stuck around the end of the barn were motioning me to come. They had two nice chickens roasting above a slow fire. The chickens were about done and smelled wonderful.

Looking back now I cannot recall a single instance of flagrant intentional disrespect on the part of a soldier. I have come to know thousands, some of whom had never seen a priest before they got into the Army but had heard many a strange story about them.

Many young chaplains are harsh in their judgment of soldiers for the first few months in the service. As time goes by, however, they learn to see beneath the smoke-screen of crudeness which men in groups throw up to hide the gentleness and goodness in their characters.

But let's get back to Tennessee. Maneuvers have always bewildered me. I could never figure out the objective, or what the waving of various colored flags could prove, about the accuracy of either side's fire, or what was gained by tagging a man as wounded, putting a splint on his leg, and sending him back to the rear only to have him show up in his company again within the hour.

"Chicken Hill" was a spot that none of us old soldiers will ever forget. We were bivouacked for a few days on the side of a hill just above a small chicken farm.

The ever hungry GIs relieved the poor farmer of just about all of his three or four hundred chickens during the first few nights. Jumpy Johnson made one of his famous speeches then and deducted twelve cents from the pay of every officer and enlisted man to pay for the chickens.

I had missed dinner one day and decided to go foraging for myself. The wives of Tennessee

snatched chicken always tastes better. We each threw in

a dollar, and one of the men went up to the house.

"How much for your chickens?" he asked the farmer.

"Reckon about a dollar apiece."

"Here's three dollars." He handed the farmer the money and started to walk away.

"Wait a minute, young feller, and I'll get you the chickens," the farmer called.

"That's O.K. We've got two of them already. You can eat the other one. Have a chicken dinner on us."

Colonel Johnson was not altogether pleased with the way the regiment was performing, although most of the staff and unit commanders felt that we were scoring well according to the umpires.

One day as Chaplain Engel and I were talking to Major Kinnard at the regimental CP on the edge of "Chicken Hill," Colonel Johnson came up to a screaming halt in his jeep. He jumped out, and the rest of the staff saw that he was mad.

"Kinnard, where is my van?"

"I sent it forward, sir."

"Why?"

"Because I was anticipating your moving the CP forward, sir, as was outlined in last night's briefing."

"Hell, that was Ewell's idea, not mine." Jumpy was furious

and threw his hat on the ground and kicked it, a perfect three-point goal right over Chaplain Engel's head.

"You guys better learn who runs this outfit. I do the thinking around here, all of it!" He grabbed his hat from his driver who had recovered it.

"Chaplain, you come with me." He headed for his jeep; Chaplain Engel and I looked at each other.

Each of us hoped the Colonel was talking to the other. We quickly compromised, and both of us jumped into the back end of his jeep.

"GET OVER!" he screamed at his driver, and Jumpy took the wheel. We pulled out and left the CP literally in a cloud of dust. Jumpy kept talking while driving, more to himself than to us. We kept nodding agreement to what we could hear. "Incompetent . . . stupid. Incompetent staff . . . If it weren't so late in the game, I'd unload all of them . . ."

The jeep was going as fast as it could go over the rocky

terrain.

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Tennessee back road, so Chaplain Engel and I were hanging on to the sides and to each other as best we could.

All of a sudden Jumpy, getting madder and madder, put on the brakes. I landed on top of the enlisted man and Chaplain Engel on top of the Colonel. Jumpy pushed him off disdainfully, leaped out of the jeep, ran across the road and the ditch, pulled out his bowie knife and screamed, "You dirty . . ."

and threw the knife at the telephone pole with a perfect strike. Tojo had died the miserable death he deserved—again.

Colonel Johnson calmer now recovered the knife with a satisfied sneer and got back into the jeep. Chaplain Engel and I sneaked a look at each other. I reached for my rosary, and Chaplain Engel quietly appealed to his Maker.

At first, time passed very rapidly on maneuvers. Each problem lasted five days. Saturday and Sunday afternoons the men were allowed in Tullahoma to take a shower, to see a movie, to watch the local Military Academy play football, to flirt with the local belles, and, in some cases, harass the civilians and police.

But after about six weeks we began to tire of maneuvers; we were tired of training. All of us wanted to get home for a few days and then get overseas to finish up this war business in a hurry. (It just couldn't last long after we got into it!)

When men begin to feel a sense of uselessness, as we were beginning to feel, having had no real part in the war, morale goes down, men become very difficult to control, and they seek relief from their boredom in drink or something worse.

Then strong disciplinary measures become necessary, and finally morale really scrapes bottom. Jumpy's speeches began to feel "soft." The men had matured; they began to resent the pep-rally tactics of the Colonel and were embarrassed by the jibes of other troopers leveled at the famous antics of the CO.

On one occasion when the Colonel sought to rouse the men emotionally, he got no response. When he screamed, "What are we here for?" instead of answering with the customary, "TO FIGHT!" the men roared back at him, "FURLOUGHS!"

Colonel Johnson was desolate, desolate and scared. He was afraid that if the brass in Washington failed to send the outfit overseas soon, the keen edge of the men would be honed by suppress training and

leadership, would be dulled by apathy and indifference.

Short furloughs had been granted as soon as we returned from Tennessee. Before some of the men were back, wires had to be sent ordering them to return at once to Camp Mackall.

Word had finally come! We were to leave almost immediately! Then came the turmoil of packing; personal affairs had to be cleared up; everyone had a thousand and one things to do, some of which were Army duties, others each man's own private concern.

It had come down by the grapevine that New York was the port of embarkation designated for the 501st. When we boarded the troop trains and headed north, we were sure the "big town" was our goal. But the trains didn't even stop in New York, and literally hundreds of wives and sweethearts were left waiting at pre-arranged spots in that city for the men who didn't show up.

Many of the men were furious as they watched the towering skyscrapers recede into the haze of the Manhattan twilight. It turned out that Boston was the port from which we departed upon the great adventure.

How long till we would see these blessed shores again, and how many of us, we wondered as our ship left the famous Boston harbor behind and pushed its way into the inky waters of the Atlantic, would perhaps never live to breathe again the free air of America?

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NEXT WEEK — Yanks in England.

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TEN DOLLARS WILL STILL FEED A REFUGEE FAMILY FOR A WEEK. CAN YOU HELP?

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ARE YOU DRAWING CLOSER TO CHRIST AS LENT MOVES FORWARD? This is a serious question and one to which each one of us should give some thought. One way of drawing closer to Our Lord and helping Him at the same time is to become a member of the Near East Missions. Your contribution will help the Mystical Body and will gain great spiritual benefits for yourself. You may wish to consider it as part of your Lenten sacrifice.

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