

In Memory of Army Nurse Eleanor Frew

On December 1943, with around fifty days combat, I was wounded at San-Pietro. Now upon arriving at the hospital, I was met by a hospital medic, who checked us both out, and asked a few questions? We were very dirty, wet, cold, and hungry. He could see, without asking, where we got hit. My right wrist had a small hole on the inside of my hand. My friend had a butt wound, so the medic cleaned us both up.

By that time the Doctor came in and looked me over. I remember the Dr. helping me get up on a small operating table. I think he gave me a shot of morphine. He told me to start counting back from a hundred. I believe I had gone off to dreamland in a few numbers. I don't think I was out very long, when the Dr. came back and looked at my wrist, the hole that was in my wrist had been opened up and sewed back together. I asked why and he said less chance of infection. He said that this was the million dollar hit that the G.I.s hoped for. My hand should be perfect after a few weeks rehab.

Now this is where I get the biggest surprise of my first few months of combat. The same Doctor was asking me questions of where I was from the states. He told me that this whole group of Doctors and Nurses, were from the Buffalo General Hospital, of Western N.Y.

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I was very interested in what he was about to tell me. The Doctor said to me, I think there is someone here that is from near where you live back in the States. I am still a bit woozy, but as I turn my head I am facing an Army Nurse. She is wearing the Army uniform, but also a silver name plate with her name. {Lt.Eleanor Frew} Even though I didn't know her personally, I knew her family. They had a dairy farm four miles from where I lived all my eighteen years. This was my first meeting with Nurse Eleanor Frew. But what a morale booster she was to me. She asked where I was fighting. What Division I was with, and when I had seen my first combat. WE talked a bit about her folks on their farm. I had met her father and mother at their dairy farm. Her brother Bob was farming with them at that time. She said that Bob had a farm deferment. We talked about combat and she asked how we could stand such fighting, and seeing our comrades get killed or wounded. I told her that as I see the G.I.s you are helping in this hospital, you have already seen more torn bodies then I have. I am the lucky one, with what we G.I.s call the milliondollar hit, walking wounded. A sergeant is calling out a few names, to take us for showers and clean clothes.

As Lt.Eleanor Frew came up to me, she gave me a kiss on the cheek, and said, Ben Palmer, May God bless you and may we meet again. This was a great moment for us both, great for our morale. God knows our Army Doctors

and Nurses were the best in the world. I have seen many soldiers that they had put back together, the sorrow on their faces when they lost a soldier.

Later that week, we would be loaded on a cargo plane at Foggia Airport, Italy. Now we land in Palermo Sicily, stay overnight, then fly to Algiers North Africa. It is a couple days before Christmas. So looks like they moved us to save beds for the most severe wounded back at the Naples hospital.

I would leave Algiers and go back to combat just after the Rapido River fiasco by Mark Clark. Then go on to fight in all the battles in Italy. That began at Cassino, the bombing of the Abby, Anzio, Rome, where so much was asked of this Infantry Division in a very hostile environment.

Now you think I should end this story here, not so. My combat was only starting over again. Anzio was our new order of combat, with two Regiments of the 36 Th.Divison in an all night infiltration behind German lines. This was on the last day of May 1944. We were pushing the Germans, north of Rome, two days before the Normandy Inv. What a great time to be a survivor after all the combat in Southern Italy.

We are told we are in the Seventh Army. Most of us cheered the good news, as Clark had lost respect of at least the 36th.Division. We got new replacements to bring our platoon up to near strength. We invade Southern

France on 8/15/44. I would fight in France from San Raphael to the Lower Vosges Mts. we were still in combat since the Invasion, and here it is the last few days of 1944. After one hundred thirty three days of consecutive days of combat. This is a world war two record, but I was still alive.

The war is going badly at Bastogne, and the German winter Offensive was on. Things are real bad all over the Allied front. Germans are mounting the toughest offensive yet. We of the seventh Army, are having some real battles, the weather was worse than we had in the Mts.of Italy. We were moved to the Ganbsheim Pocket above Strasbourg. The thick forest of the Vosges Mts. never ended. Patrols to capture Germans seemed to never end, it was “VERY DANGEROUS WORK.”

On this afternoon, the Germans are shelling us, when a shell came crashing into the first platoon area. These tree burst were so deadly, it knocked me down by our foxhole. My second in command was hit a few feet from where we both stood. My rifle was just inside our foxhole, and I could see it had been blown apart. I had been knocked down, and was struggling to get up.

By then, I could see my Sgt. wasn't moving. Doc Everest said that he had been killed by concussion. Hupman said “Palmer you have lucked out again”. I really couldn't remember much for the next few days.

Getting to the hospital was a trip I can't recall, as I was in severe shell shock. Upon arrival at this hospital

the doctors questioned me and never left me alone. Talked about combat, and where I was when this happened. I couldn't remember much, only asked where my Sgt. was. They had tagged me when I left the lines, to help the Medics with my line history. Dog tags were always checked for blood type etc. In a couple days I was getting irritated with the doctors, they kept asking the same questions, days combat, where did you get hit.

So now I will get the surprise again of meeting Eleanor Frew in this no name hospital. It will be fifty-six years later when a Veteran Tom Dunne, put me in touch with this Captain, Dr. Warren Montgomery who still lives in Amherst, at Buffalo N.Y. He had been with the Regimental Aid station of our 142 regiment. I telephoned him to tell him who I was, and the reason for calling. First he was so excited to talk to a veteran of the 36th. Div. After all these years I hadn't known what city in France that I was in for the severe concussion, that I had suffered, in early January 1945. Now I meet Nurse Eleanor Frew, for the second time, in the war. So I ask Dr Warren Montgomery if knew Eleanor Frew. Of course I knew her he said, I know the hospital she was at It was in Vittel France.

What a great surprise, for me, you see on my transcript of my Military Medical Records, there is no record of my being in the hospital in Vittel France. The only record I did receive was when I was wounded in Italy,

where I met Eleanor Frew the first time. I have letters that I had written home to my parents telling them that I had met Eleanor Frew in France the second time, but due to censors we could not tell the city we were hospitalized in. So after all these years, and a search at St Louis Archives for my hospital records, the word came back that my records had burnt some years back. But due to some great friends I hadn't known until now, I have at least established my record, mostly due to a nurse, a neighbor, and my need to thank, the Doctors, and Nurses under the Hell they worked to save a G.I.s life in the war. I, Ben Palmer thank God for sparing my life, and to give thanks to a great Army Nurse Lt. Eleanor Frew. What a great story, to be able to catch up the history of lost records, from fifty-eight years later. To talk with the living survivors, of nurse Eleanor Frews Daughter and a Son, and the great Dr. Warren Montgomery, who I have met personally, and have kept in touch with to this day.

Find a copy of {THE HUNTER and THE HUNTED a Combat Soldier's Story of WW11. By author Bennett J. Palmer. But again the history of this connection after sixty years, is such a great story, written buy myself a survivor. In the summer of 2002, we three survivors would meet at Bill Frawleys home in West Seneca. We veterans of our 36Th. Div. Ben from Holland N.Y. Thomas Dunne from Jamaica N.Y. We had called the Doctor, that we three would be meeting him at his residence. For me,

it was such a great time, to present him my book, and talk over some of our own history from a very ugly war. We arrived in the early afternoon and Dr. Warren Montgomery was waiting in the beautiful landscaped lawns and flowers, at his residence. We all talked for a couple hours, each of us with our own history of where we fought in the very long war. We all took pictures for our now bulging scrapbooks.

This great history will not die yet. I have talked with the Archivist for the Buffalo General Hospital I mailed him, news clippings from the Buffalo News with pictures of some 58 Doctors and some of the Nurses. They were all sent overseas on the very large troop ship THE EMPRESS of SCOTLAND. Upon talking with the Dr. I find out I had crossed on the same ship together, and landed in Casablanca North Africa on 8/6/43. Yes, DR. Montgomery confirms, and I agree as I and several thousand G.I.kids had all landed together. Of course I asked the good Dr. what his rank was. He paused a minute and said that he was a Captain. Of course, this was some of the information I learned in our new acquaintances. All this new history, and photos, of Nurse Frew, have been sent to Buff. General. This also explains why we G.I.s called it the 23 Gen. Hospital.

Zen Ervin, the archivist at the Buffalo General is so happy that they now have a live combat Soldier. I am that Soldier. I was cared for twice by the 23 General

Hospital I was wounded in San Pietro Italy, where I had met nurse Eleanor Frew, the first time. I would meet Nurse Frew again at the 23 General Hospital in Vittel France. My book and several letters that I have written on the new knowledge of names, places and added history that I have passed on to the Buffalo General Hospital, in care of Zen Irvin the archivist. We are hoping to get together the, few remaining survivors. Nurse Frew and her husband have passed away some years ago. Being a survivor of this very long war I wrote *The Hunter and The Hunted*. A personal record as a G.I. in WW11. My kids will read this history of their father, and his story will be given as a memorial to all the young G.I.s who are buried in cemeteries all over the world. God BLESS THEM ALL.

Bennett J. Palmer

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